

# **Contexts, Resistance Crowds and Mass Mobilisation**

A Comparative Analysis of Anti-Apartheid Politics in  
Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s and the 1980s

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
of the Degree of **Master of Arts** in the  
Department of Historical Studies,  
University of Natal,  
Pietermaritzburg

1998

*The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development, (HSRC, South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development.*

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines crowds and resistance politics in Pietermaritzburg, focusing particularly on the 1950s and the 1980s. These two decades were characterised by heightened anti-apartheid political activity in South Africa. It is against that background that this thesis explores mass mobilisation and resistance in Pietermaritzburg. The 1960s and the 1970s have not been ignored, however, in this comparative analysis. It appears that there was not so much overt mass mobilisation that was taking place in South Africa during this period, on the same scale as that of the 1950s and the 1980s. This thesis analyses selected case studies of events such as protest marches, popular riots and stayaways. It examines the similarities and differences in the socio-economic and political contexts in which such events occurred.

The key aspect is that of resistance crowds. This thesis examines how, when and why resistance crowds formed in Pietermaritzburg during the two periods. It begins with a literature survey, which sets out the framework for comparison. Aspects such as the kinds of constituencies, the roles of political organisations, trade unions, church groups, youth organisations, government policies and the nature of the campaigns are raised in the literature. Drawing from that framework this study explores the socio-economic contexts in which the selected case studies took place. The way in which the changes in the socio-economic and political contexts influenced mass mobilisation forms a central theme of this dissertation. The four case studies explore crowd events in anti-apartheid politics in Pietermaritzburg. The thesis concludes with a comparative evaluation of the case studies of resistance crowds in their differing contexts.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have pleasure in acknowledging the constructive criticism and help given to me by my supervisor, Dr T. A. Nuttall; without whose guidance this essay would have remained an insurmountable task. He provided invaluable guidance and support and has, through his outstanding leadership, nurtured my research capabilities since my Honours year in 1995.

My sincere appreciation goes to the staff of the Department of Historical Studies for their constructive comments and suggestions during the MA seminars. The financial contributions of the departmental research bursary and the *South African National Historical Society* are hereby acknowledged. A special word of thanks goes to Professor Laband who was always with me during difficult times when this thesis was at its embryonic stage and who ensured that I remain a student of this university. I also pass my appreciation to coordinators of *The Natal History Workshop* and the *History and African Studies Seminars* for offering me an opportunity to present some parts of this dissertation.

A word of thanks goes to the staff of the following libraries and archives: the Natal Museum Library, the University of Natal Library, the Natal Society Library, the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA) and the Alan Paton Centre. I am grateful to all my interviewees who gave me invaluable information without which this thesis would not have taken its present shape. I am indebted to Ruth Lundie and Joiceyn Leslie-Smith of the Alan Paton Centre, without whose help I would not be able to interview some people.

I express my sincere gratitude to Jabulani Sithole who followed this project from the beginning to its conclusion. I would also like to thank my friends Portia Ngubane, Luthando Maphasa as well as Nompu and Mokhethi Matobako, with whom I had informal discussions about this project. A word of thanks also goes to my colleague Xolelwa Mangcotywa who patiently and meticulously transcribed my interviews. I am grateful also for the support rendered by my colleagues at the Natal Museum, particularly Dr Aron Mazel and Mr Frans Prins. The support and all forms of encouragement offered to me by Ms Mabongi Mtshali, Mrs J. J. Bhengu and Mr A. T. Mkhize deserve my whole-hearted gratitude.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Tholi and Skhumbuzo Mpofo for their moral support, and to my siblings Phezisile, Nelisiwe, Zakhele and Hlengiwe, and to my son Thembelani Mkhize. It is to them that I dedicate this work.

Despite all the assistance from others, I am responsible for this thesis, and declare that it is my own work and that I accept responsibility for any errors contained therein.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
ANCWL	African National Congress Women's League
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth League
APC	Alan Paton Centre
APDUSA	African People's Democratic Union of South Africa
AWA	African Women's Association
AYO	Ashdown Youth Organisation
BAD	Bantu Administration Department
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BNC	Bantu National Congress
BTR	British Tyre and Rubber
CGARC	Combined Group Areas Resistance Committee
CIIR	Catholic Institute for International Research
CNC	Chief Native Commissioner
COD	Congress of Democrats
COP	Congress of the People
COPC	Congress of the People's Committee
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DBA	Department of Bantu Affairs
DDWL	Durban and Districts Women's League

DP	Democratic Party
DSRG	Development Studies Research Group
EDEYO	Edendale Youth Organisation
FAWU	Food and Allied Workers Union
FEDSEM	Federal Theological Seminary
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
FEDSAW	Federation of South African Women
GAA	Group Areas Act
GAAB	Group Areas Act Board
GADB	Group Areas Development Board
GARC	Group Areas Resistance Committee
GNP	Gross National Product
HRWU	Howick Rubber Workers Union
IDAF	International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa
IEJC	Indo-European Joint Council
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
IVA	Isolomuzi Vigilant Association
IYO	Imbali Youth Organisation
KLA	KwaZulu Legislative Assembly
KZT	KwaZulu Transport
LMG	Labour Monitoring Group
LP	Liberal Party
MAWU	Metal and Allied Workers Union

MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
MK	uMkhonto weSizwe
NACTU	National Azanian Council of Trade Unions
NAC	Native Administration Committee
NAD ( <i>in text</i> )	Native Administration Department
NAD ( <i>in footnotes</i> )	Natal Archives Depot
NEUM	Non-European Unity Movement
NF	National Forum
NIC	Natal Indian Congress
NP	National Party
NUMSA	National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
PACSA	Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness
PCI	Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Industries
PFP	Progressive Federal Party
PPWAWU	Paper Printing Wood and Allied Workers Union
PWV	Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging
RMC	Release Mandela Campaign
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACPO	South African Coloured People's Organisation
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions

SALB	South African Labour Bulletin
SAYCO	South African Youth Congress
SFT	Standing for the Truth Campaign
SOYO	Sobantu Youth Organisation
SRA	Sobantu Residents Association
SVAB	Sobantu Village Advisory Board
TC	Town Clerk
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
UDF	United Democratic Front
UWUSA	United Workers Union of South Africa

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## Preface

'Perhaps no historical phenomenon has been so thoroughly neglected by historians as the crowd. Few would deny that the crowd has, in a rich variety of guises, played a significant part in history. Yet it has, over many years, been considered a subject to be studied by the psychologist or the sociologist rather than by the historian.' (G. Rude', *The Crowd in History, 1730-1848: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1981), p. 3).<sup>1</sup>

The main focus of this dissertation will be to explore and compare the mobilisation of anti-apartheid resistance crowds in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s and the 1980s, two decades that have attracted particular attention in South African resistance historiography. This study is not intended to be a general history of resistance in Pietermaritzburg, although aspects of this history do shape my particular interest in crowd events. The events that are studied in this research include public demonstrations, riots, stayaways and protest marches. The focus will be on African resistance politics but cases where there was multi-racial co-operation will also feature. The bias towards Africans does not imply that other racial groups did not participate, but Africans were worst hit by apartheid and many of the events of mass mobilisation studied in this dissertation involved Africans and occurred in African residential areas.

The comparative framework will evaluate similarities and differences in resistance politics during the two periods, and will investigate the sizes of crowds, the nature of organisations, crowd behaviour, the composition of the crowds, types of leadership, and the targets which were mobilised against. In examining these aspects the socio-economic and political contexts in which those events occurred will be analysed as well. One of the aims is to find out if Pietermaritzburg experienced intense mass mobilisation during the 1950s like other major

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<sup>1</sup> Besides Rude' others are D. Crummey, *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* (London, Currey, 1986); M. Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835* (Cambridge, Cambridge University press, 1988); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester, Manchester university Press, 1978); J. H. Kaye (ed), *The Face of the Crowd: Studies in Revolution Ideology and Popular Protest* (New York, Harvester, 1988).

urban centres. And if not, why not? The issue of why mass mobilisation heightened in Pietermaritzburg during the 1980s will also be investigated.

The problem with the study of resistance crowds is that it is very difficult to explain what one means by resistance crowds. This study regards resistance crowds as groups of people who were mobilised for political purposes and who viewed each other as having a collective identity in struggling against apartheid laws and policies. Another issue is that of numbers. At what point does a crowd become big enough to justify the term 'mass mobilisation'? The answer depends partly on context. In very repressive or difficult circumstances of mobilisation, a crowd of one or two hundred people could be called a 'mass crowd'. In this study, crowds of differing sizes are studied. In certain circumstances what is significant is not so much the size of the crowd, but its formation in public places such as streets and city squares. This study pays more attention to how and why crowds formed rather than to the sizes of crowds, although one should point out that the issue of the size of the crowd is also important in understanding changes in contexts.

The history of anti-apartheid crowd resistance in Pietermaritzburg has not received much scholarly attention. Different researchers have paid a lot of attention to political violence, which has been a feature of Pietermaritzburg during 1980s and early 1990s. Furthermore, published writing about resistance in South Africa tends to focus on cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pretoria, Durban, Port Elizabeth and East London. I decided to do something different and to look at how people were mobilised to resist apartheid in Pietermaritzburg. I do so by examining selected events of crowd mobilisation during the two main eras covered in this thesis. The chosen events were different in nature and required different tactics of organisation. The events are analysed as strategies of resistance to apartheid and they are viewed against the

socio-economic and political contexts in which they occurred. Those that involved violence are not just relegated to the status of mob riots but analysed against their historical contexts. As Crummey puts it:

‘We believe that popular violence needs to be seen in the light of other kinds of popular protest and politics. It especially needs to be seen in the context of other state structures, for popular violence arises in situations where states claim a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence and direct it against the people.’<sup>2</sup>

A variety of sources have been used in order to gather the data for this study. Use was made of archival records, published books, newspapers, manuscripts, theses, journal articles and oral accounts. Some sources were useful in all sections of the thesis while others were helpful only in certain sections. In some sections I had to rely heavily on newspapers, as books and oral accounts were less helpful. The issue of sources in studying crowd events is a tricky one because in many cases the history of the crowd is the history of other people’s perception of that crowd. Harrison pointed out that ‘since the crowd existed through the eyes of commentaries that were rarely crowd members themselves, and who frequently occupied advantaged social positions, its existence functioned largely to reflect the beliefs of the commentaries.’<sup>3</sup> Interviews are a vital source of information when one is studying crowd events. Rude pointed out that ‘official records and sources will rarely tell us much about the identity of either the rioters or the victims and remarkably little (as a rule) about the more detailed pattern of events, or about the motives or behaviour of those most actively involved.’<sup>4</sup> It is in such cases that oral accounts become more important for they provide information that goes beyond simple and obvious facts that are printed in newspapers and archival sources. In my interviews I heard accounts of people who participated in the crowd events and of those who observed the events. The interpretations and views of people about these events, however,

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<sup>2</sup> Crummey, *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Rude, *The Crowd in History*, p. 12.

change over time and are influenced by their backgrounds. There were cases where interviews proved unhelpful, even when the interviewees had participated in some of the events. For basic information and dates one had to rely on newspapers, as they were contemporary sources. The newspapers remain, in most cases, the only documentary source of crowd events and they provide both the 'supposed facts' relating to the crowd, and the opinions of the reporter.<sup>5</sup> The weaknesses of different sources that were used in this study were taken into consideration.

One should also say a few more words about my interviews. The oral data leans quite heavily on the ANC-UDF-SACP-COSATU side. That is because it was people in these organisations that were active in anti-apartheid mass mobilisation, particularly the events that I have selected as case studies. The history of how those that were opposed to these crowd events viewed them then and now could be a separate study on its own. However, in cases where those views were accessible, I incorporated them as part of the argument in different chapters.

The thesis consists of seven main chapters and a comparative conclusion. Chapter One is a short survey of selected literature that compares, explicitly and implicitly, anti-apartheid resistance during the 1950s and the 1980s. Chapter Two explores the socio-economic and political context in Pietermaritzburg during the period from 1950 to 1961. This chapter sets the scene for the two case studies of that decade. Chapter Three is a case study of the first set of significant events of anti-apartheid crowd mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg, occurring in November 1956 and January 1957, and involving mostly women. These demonstrations were part of a nationwide anti-pass campaign. The fourth chapter is the second case study and it examines the beerhall demonstrations and the Sobantu Village revolt of August 1959. The events are placed within the context of other demonstrations and riots that were taking place at

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<sup>5</sup> Harrison, *Crowds and History*, p. 39.

that time in other urban and rural centres of Natal. Chapter Five provides an overview of socio-economic and political contexts in Pietermaritzburg from the early 1960s to the early 1980s and addresses the question of why anti-apartheid resistance crowds did not develop during this period. Chapter Six is the third case study of the thesis and the first case study of the 1980s: it examines the stayaway of July 1985 in Pietermaritzburg. It looks at the impact that stayaway had on mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg. Chapter Seven is the second case study of the 1980s and it explores the Defiance Campaign march which took place in Pietermaritzburg in September 1989. The conclusion returns to the comparative framework of the 1950s and 1980s, and draws together the main findings of the dissertation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The 1950s and the 1980s: An Overview of Literature on Resistance Politics

It is noticeable how some academics and political activists, when writing or talking about the 1980s, like to draw comparisons between the politics of the 1980s and that of the 1950s. Some commentators, such as Lodge and Carrim, have explicitly compared the 1950s and the 1980s while others have done this implicitly by pointing to the significance of the struggles of the 1950s as a mobilising reference point and as a basis for the struggles of the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Within the literature on such themes there is a common emphasis on differences as well as similarities in strategies and tactics of mass mobilisation during the two periods. These writers acknowledge that the events of mass mobilisation took place in different contexts socially, politically and economically. But a common thread that weaves through their analysis is the argument that the popular struggles of the 1980s were related to, and influenced by, the earlier phases of mass resistance.

In order to have a more nuanced analysis, the insights and propositions of different authors will inform my comparative framework for anti-apartheid mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg. This chapter presents an outline of these perspectives. Various authors commonly view the resistance of the 1950s as a forerunner of the popular struggles of the late 1970s and 1980s. Writing in the 1980s, Suttner and Cronin argued that 'the 1950s were the last period when the development of mass

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<sup>1</sup> T. Lodge and B. Nasson, *All, Here and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991), pp. 28-30, 39 and 61; Y. Carrim, 'The Defiance Campaign: Protest Politics on the March', in *Indicator South Africa*, Volume 6, Number 4, (1989), pp. 51-52; N. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), p. 136; International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, *Apartheid: The Facts* (London, IDAF, 1991), p. 101; R.V. Lambert, 'Trade Unions and National Liberation in South Africa: Past Perspectives and Current Strategies', paper delivered at Conference on Southern African Economy after Apartheid, at the Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York, 29 September - 02 October 1986, pp. 1-26; J. Baskin, *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1991), pp.16-17 and 316; Y. Muthien, 'Protest and Resistance in Cape Town, 1939-1965', in R. Cohen, Y. Muthien and A. Zegeye (eds), *Repression and Resistance: Insider Accounts of Apartheid* (London, Hans Zell, 1990), p. 84; A. Jeffery, *Forum on Mass Mobilisation* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1991).

organisation was possible in our country'.<sup>2</sup> Associated with this kind of view, the mid-1960s to the late 1970s is portrayed as a period when overt anti-apartheid resistance was relatively muted.<sup>3</sup> The relative quiescence is attributed to state repression, economic stability and internal ideological problems within black political organisations.<sup>4</sup>

The key focal points of my analysis in this dissertation will be incidents of crowd mobilisation in resistance politics during the 1950s and the 1980s. The 1950s saw many events of mass mobilisation, ranging from strikes, the defiance campaign of 1952, the Congress of the People campaign, the anti-Bantu education campaign, anti-pass campaigns, the potato boycotts, protest marches, stay-at-homes and the generalised urban and rural militancy of 1959-1960. These events were part of the African National Congress Youth League's (ANCYL) Programme of Action and of the campaigns of the Congress Alliance, which was an alliance of anti-apartheid organisations. The last incident of mass mobilisation during the 1950s phase was the stay-at-home of May 1961.

The 1980s were also characterised by relatively intense mass mobilisation and heightened political consciousness. Suttner and Cronin view this as a period when mass democratic struggles were again emerging.<sup>5</sup> Political radicalism during the 1980s was reflected in protest marches, strikes, election boycotts, consumer boycotts, school boycotts, stayaways and political instability.<sup>6</sup> Lodge argues that the scale of political awakening helped make the 1980s the climax of a century of black protest in which blacks had tried petitions, civil disobedience, labour stayaways and guerrilla warfare in an

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<sup>2</sup> R. Suttner and J. Cronin, *30 Years of the Freedom Charter* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1986), p. 249.

<sup>3</sup> Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. pp. 113-119; Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp. 16-17; Lodge, *All, Here and Now*, p. 30; International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, *Apartheid: The Facts*, pp. 103-106; P. O. Tichmann, 'African Worker Action in Durban, 1940-1960', Unpublished MA Thesis, Durban, University of Natal, 1983, pp. 56-57; Suttner and Cronin, *30 Years of the Freedom Charter*, p. x. argue that during this period the whole process of political mobilisation ground to a halt.

<sup>5</sup> Suttner and Cronin, *30 Years of the Freedom Charter*, p. x.

<sup>6</sup> Lodge, *All, Here and Now*, p. 3; IDAF, *Apartheid: The facts*, p. 109.

effort to obtain their rights.<sup>7</sup> In addition to political organisations, trade unions, civics and youth and church groups were active during the mass struggles of the 1980s.<sup>8</sup>

### Shaping the Comparative Framework

The views of different writers have shaped my framework of comparing and contrasting incidents of anti-apartheid resistance. Y. Carrim, a Pietermaritzburg political activist and academic, compares and contrasts the defiance campaigns of 1952 and 1989.<sup>9</sup> My comparative framework has been shaped by his focus on similarities and differences in the nature of anti-apartheid opposition, strategies, objectives of the campaigns, constituencies and followings, and the impacts of differing political environments. Carrim's arguments help set the scene for my investigation of why the defiance campaign of 1952 did not develop momentum in Pietermaritzburg while the 1989 campaign was well supported.

Tom Lodge explicitly compares the 1980s with the 1950s and highlights aspects such as the differences in constituencies, the roles of the youth, trade unions and church groups, the nature of organisational leadership, choices of strategies of resistance and the impact of state repression.<sup>10</sup> He points out that:

‘In the 1980s the UDF vented popular anger at inequality and oppression as the ANC had done in the 1950s, but the constituencies that fuelled the anger had changed. By the 1980s black workers had become the dominant force in manufacturing; in the 1950s they were confined largely to unskilled drudgery... Expanding educational opportunities helped produce a highly politicised generation of black students... "Amandla Ngawethu!" (Power is Ours!) was a slogan inherited from the 1950s. Then it voiced an aspiration; in the 1980s, it became an assertion.’<sup>11</sup>

These are the important kinds of issues to address in comparing the events of the 1950s and the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> IDAF, *Apartheid: The Facts*, p. 109; M. Swilling, ‘The United Democratic Front and the Township Revolt’, in W. Cobbett and R. Cohen (eds), *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (London, James Currey, 1988), pp. 93 and 102-103.

<sup>9</sup> Carrim, ‘The Defiance Campaign’, pp. 51-52.

<sup>10</sup> Lodge, *All, Here and Now*, p. 112.

1980s. On the theme of the kinds of organisations that mobilised people, Lodge points out that

‘Although the UDF’s style seemed to echo the mass mobilisation led by the ANC thirty years before, with songs, slogans and speeches which extolled Mandela and other ANC heroes, the movement was different in significant ways.’<sup>12</sup>

Suttner and Cronin, both members of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) alliance, wrote a book on the thirtieth anniversary of the Freedom Charter (in 1985), and stressed the relationships and links between the struggles of the 1950s and those of the 1980s. In their foreword, in connecting the 1980s with the 1950s, they point out that

‘There is another significant similarity between the period of 1955 and today. The Congress of the People Campaign was initiated after the successful Defiance Campaign. The campaign to defy unjust laws represented a fundamental challenge to the apartheid regime. The Congress of the People sought to take this crucial, though essentially negative campaign further. While continuing to reject racist laws, the campaign to create the Freedom Charter raised the positive vision of an alternative, apartheid-free South Africa. In 1985 the oppressed and democratic people of South Africa have recently emerged from successful campaigns to boycott black local authority and tri-cameral elections. Thousands continue to boycott Bantu education and the pass laws are rejected as unequivocally as ever. But, as in 1955 the people are taking this process further. They are again asserting the vision of a South Africa free from oppression and exploitation, the South Africa of the Freedom Charter.’<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, these authors also stressed the links and continuities by showing that many of the leaders of the 1950s were also active in the struggles of the 1980s and could be found in the leadership of the United Democratic Front (UDF).<sup>14</sup> From the mid-1980s there was wide-scale mobilisation around symbols and campaigns of the 1950s and the early 1960s.

It is vital also to analyse the socio-economic and political contexts in which crowd mobilisation occurred. The contexts shaped the nature of anti-apartheid struggles and the choice of strategies. Studies by Lodge and Sapire on East London and Brakpan respectively during the 1950s have shown that such socio-economic factors as the rate of industrialisation, urbanisation, population size,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp. 61-62.

<sup>13</sup> Suttner and Cronin, *30 Years* p. x.

municipal policies and political aspects such as political leadership, youth militancy and the tradition of resistance politics influence the nature of political mobilisation.<sup>15</sup> Studies of the local politics of relatively small towns by Lodge and Sapire have influenced my decision to research the history of political mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg. Local studies enable one to investigate specific characteristics rather than to generalise on a nation-wide basis. Local conditions were vital to an explanation of why Pietermaritzburg was relatively quiet in the 1950s whereas, in the 1980s, it became a site of radical anti-apartheid resistance. This does not, however, mean that the national context should not be taken into consideration.

It is also imperative to compare the targets and objectives of mass mobilisation during the two phases. The effectiveness of local and national campaigns in mobilising people is a vital issue to explore. This will be significant for the comparative framework because the case studies that I have selected consist of both local and national campaigns. One will have to grapple with issues such as: Did people respond in large numbers to calls for national boycotts, such as those that protested the white-only elections during the 1950s? Did the call for action against local grievances receive larger support than did the national campaign issues? Did the differences between national and local campaigns shape and influence mass mobilisation during the 1980s as well?

In her study of protest and resistance in Cape Town from 1939-1965, Yvonne Muthien grapples with the above issues. She argues that most of the campaigns of the 1950s were relatively ineffective because they focused on broader national political issues and paid little attention to local

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp. 26-50.

<sup>15</sup> T. Lodge, 'Political Mobilisation during the 1950s: An East London Case Study', in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century South Africa* (London, Longman, 1987), pp. 318-330; H. Sapire, 'African Political Mobilization in Brakpan in the 1950s', in R. Hill, M. Trump and M. Muller (eds), *African Studies Forum*, Volume 2, (Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, 1993), pp. 89-105.

grievances and building grassroots organisations.<sup>16</sup> She, however, points out that mobilising for national issues is important in the sense that 'In many cases mobilising around national campaigns helped transcend the limited appeal of parochial issues and the geographic separation of the oppressed communities.'<sup>17</sup> Nkosinathi Gwala has supported Muthien and argues that 'national campaigns should have local resonance in order to translate easily into political action.'<sup>18</sup> Drawing from the ideas of the above authors I will be able to analyse the popular response to local and national campaigns in my case studies. During the 1980s the struggle for national liberation became interwoven with the everyday local struggles of people, more so than occurred during the 1950s.

Rob Lambert explores the role of trade unions in national liberation and he compares the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions's (COSATU) roles in mass mobilisation, and their different contexts. This analysis of the relationship between trade unions and political organisations during the two phases of mass mobilisation will be significant for my comparison. During the 1980s political organisations and trade unions openly formed alliances and combined their forces to resist apartheid.<sup>19</sup> The merger of political and community grievances with shop-floor issues resulted in a formidable and sustained anti-apartheid mobilisation. Lambert's study of trade unions and national liberation has shown that workers were an important pillar of anti-apartheid resistance during the 1950s.<sup>20</sup> He points out that anti-populism, which challenged SACTU's populist position in the 1950s, continued to have an impact during the years of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and COSATU during the late

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<sup>16</sup> Muthien, 'Protest and Resistance in Cape Town', p. 73.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> N. Gwala, 'Inkatha, Political Violence and the Struggle for Control in Pietermaritzburg', paper to *Workshop on Regionalism and Restructuring in Natal*, Durban, University of Natal, 28-31 January 1988, p. 18. (Nkosinathi Gwala was a pseudonym of Dr Blade Nzimande)

<sup>19</sup> S. Mkhize, 'Mass Mobilisation and Resistance: a Study of Selected Stayaways and Protest Marches in Pietermaritzburg, 1985-1989', Unpublished BA Honours Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1995, pp. 9-23.

<sup>20</sup> Lambert, 'Trade Unions and National Liberation', pp. 4-23.

1970s and the mid-1980s.<sup>21</sup> However, Lambert argues that political unionism was not the main cause of SACTU's demise, and that COSATU could benefit from 'the lessons of the 1950s'.<sup>22</sup> But he acknowledges the fact that the federations were mobilising under different socio-economic and political conditions. Lambert has been supported by J. Baskin, a COSATU official, who argues that:

'SACTU's involvement in politics did not divert it from the union tasks but instead helped to influence anti-apartheid politics. As the union movement re-emerged during the 1970s and 1980s the influence of SACTU was often felt. Some held it up as a model to be emulated while others saw in its history mistakes to be avoided. It was no accident however, that sections from the preamble of SACTU's constitution were incorporated into the preamble of the COSATU constitution and its guiding motto – 'an injury to one is an injury to all' - would become the new federation's slogan.'<sup>23</sup>

The significant point to highlight is that the contexts of the two periods gave rise to different kinds of working class and workers, and this influenced the formations of mass mobilisation.

Nigel Worden addresses the question of leadership in mass mobilisation. He argues that most of the campaigns of the 1950s failed because of the lack of determined leadership and also because of political and ideological differences among the leaders. He examines the nature of the political leadership that was responsible for mobilising crowds for political ends during the two phases. He points out that:

'One of the reasons for the failure of the popular struggles of the 1950s, much debated by historians, was the nature of the relationship between mass mobilisation and the leadership of the national organisations... Clearly the ANC failed to mobilise and co-ordinate widespread unified protest, as much because of its limited financial and administrative resources and heightened state repression as because of the conscious alienation of its leaders from popular or working class interests. Case studies have shown that particular local circumstances need to be considered when assessing the effectiveness of campaigns and of national leadership. The opposition movements not only faced difficulties of tactics and popular mobilisation, they were also increasingly divided in terms of ideology.'<sup>24</sup>

It can be argued that during the 1980s a new generation of anti-apartheid leaders was mobilising people under a different context. That leadership was a product of the socio-economic and political

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-21.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-19.

<sup>23</sup> Baskin, *Striking Back*, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, pp. 102-103 and 104.

conditions of the mid-1960s and 1970s.<sup>25</sup>

Some of the authors I have read also dealt with the issue of the impact of different state policies on mass mobilisation. The government's attitudes towards extra-parliamentary opposition during the two decades were different. The 1950s were a period of the implementation of apartheid. The State had not crystallised its security machinery. It is even pointed out that the police at that time were lenient and treated political prisoners humanely.<sup>26</sup> The 1980s, on the other hand, saw the state's determination to crush anti-apartheid politics. There were no possibilities of holding protest marches as was the case during the 1950s. However, as Worden argues, 'in the course of the late 1970s and the 1980s, the rigid Verwoerdian model developed during the heyday of apartheid began to break down. The National Party government experimented with a number of reforms designed to adjust apartheid to changing economic and social circumstances while still maintaining a monopoly of political power.'<sup>27</sup> The government began to introduce limited reforms and coercion (manifested in the State of Emergency and security force brutality) in an attempt to diffuse the political crisis. The government's strategy of limited reform led to a combination of expectations and frustrations. As Carrim puts it in his comparison of the Defiance Campaigns:

'The 1950s campaign took place in the context of a government relentlessly implementing racial policies and a state that was becoming increasingly powerful. The campaign was in a sense defensive, seeking to prevent the further encroachment of racial policies on the whole society. The present campaign occurs at the time when the government is moving away from rigid racial policies and the state is somewhat more fractured and indecisive. The MDM is on the offensive as part of the overall thrust to transform society.'<sup>28</sup>

One can argue that the views of the writers I have examined so far were influenced by the context in which they wrote. The perspectives of some of these commentators were probably

<sup>25</sup> J. Seekings, *Heroes or Villains: Youth Politics in the 1980s* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Author's interview with A. S. Chetty, 12 November 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, p. 121.

<sup>28</sup> Carrim, 'The Defiance Campaign', pp. 51-52.

shaped by their political and ideological preoccupations. They wrote during the 1980s and the early 1990s, which were characterised by confrontationalist anti-apartheid resistance and mass action. To provide evidence of the continuity of struggles and to look for inspiration, some analysts looked back at the 1950s, which were commonly seen as a 'decade of defiance'. The protest marches, particularly those that began from 1989, apart from being useful weapons of mass action in a changing environment, were also significant in connecting the 1950s with a later era of political confrontation and intense mass mobilisation.

## Conclusion

This chapter sought to survey the views of academics and political activists who have written explicitly, as well as those who have drawn comparisons implicitly, of the anti-apartheid struggles of the 1950s and the 1980s. The literature I have read consists of attempts to provide portrayals of both nation-wide and local case studies. The writers on the campaigns of both the 1950s and the 1980s assess their effectiveness by generalising from studies of big cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria. While aspects of the dramatic and violent politics of the mid-1980s in Pietermaritzburg and the Natal Midlands in general has attracted a great deal of scholarly analysis, the anti-apartheid politics of the 1950s remain virtually unexplored.<sup>29</sup> Against the backdrop of a variety of views, both political and academic, which draw the 1950s and the 1980s together in comparison, I evaluate patterns of how resistance crowds formed, or did not form, in Pietermaritzburg's specific and changing context during these two decades.

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<sup>29</sup> M. Kentridge, *An Unofficial War: Inside the Conflict in Pietermaritzburg* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1990); J. Aitchison, 'Numbering the Dead: The Course and Pattern of Political Violence in the Natal Midlands, 1987-1989', Unpublished MA Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1993; A. J. Jeffery, *The Natal Story: 16 Years of Conflict* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1997).

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Socio-Economic Contexts and Anti-Apartheid Resistance in Pietermaritzburg, from the 1950s to the early 1960s: A Brief Outline**

The main purpose of this chapter is to explore the socio-economic and political contexts of Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s, in order to set the scene for the two case studies of anti-apartheid political mobilisation which follow. It has been argued that events of political mobilisation take place within a particular context and this shapes specific types of responses.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, local studies of political mobilisation by Tom Lodge, on East London, and Hilary Sapire, on Brakpan, have shown that local circumstances were important influences in anti-apartheid politics.<sup>2</sup> Large cities with many industries usually experience an increased rate of urbanisation. This, in turn creates a potential constituency for political mobilisation. However, that does not assume that mass mobilisation can only happen when there is a large industrial working class. After sketching in some economic and social features, I will provide an overview of incidents of anti-apartheid crowd mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s and the early 1960s. This will include incidents that occurred nationally. This outline will help set the scene for my case studies. The national political context will be useful in showing that some local incidents were influenced by what was taking place at the broader national political level. The fact that African people in Pietermaritzburg did not participate in national campaigns in the same way as in other towns is interesting and necessitates local studies of political mobilisation.

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<sup>1</sup> N. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> T. Lodge, 'Political Mobilisation during the 1950s: An East London Case Study', in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Class, Race and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London, Longman, 1987), pp. 310-331; H. Sapire, 'African Political Mobilisation in Brakpan in the 1950s', in R. Hill, M. Trump and M. Muller (eds), *African Studies Forum*, Volume 2, (Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, 1993), pp. 89-105.

### Economic developments to the 1950s in Pietermaritzburg

Pietermaritzburg developed from 1838 as a Voortrekker town and was later, from 1842, annexed by the British and used as the administrative capital of the colony of Natal.<sup>3</sup> The city maintained its status and character as a political capital of Natal throughout the nineteenth century. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it acted as a market base for the nearby *amakholwa* of Edendale and Mpumuza communities and for the surrounding areas in the Natal Midlands.<sup>4</sup> Pietermaritzburg did not become a significant industrial centre but during the late 1800s it was connected through railway lines to the other major economic centres such as Durban and Johannesburg.<sup>5</sup> It has also been argued that the existence of a military garrison at Fort Napier also shaped the nature of the city's social and cultural character and that the garrison's presence for many years boosted the city economically.<sup>6</sup> During the early twentieth century Pietermaritzburg's character was enhanced when the University of Natal was established in 1910. During this time there was little interest in industrialisation and it appears that the authorities were content with Pietermaritzburg being the agricultural, political, educational and administrative capital of Natal. It was only during the 1930s that the city authorities began to move towards industrialisation.<sup>7</sup> There were, however, some within the City Council who were opposed to industrialisation. The change of attitude to industrialisation occurred after the Second World War.

The years after the Second World War, it has been argued, represented a period of economic

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<sup>3</sup> J. Benyon, 'Colonial Capital', in J. Laband and R. Haswell (eds), *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988: A New Portrait of an African City* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1988), p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> J. Lambert, 'The Pietermaritzburg Market and the Transformations of the Natal Midlands in the Colonial Period', in Laband and Haswell (eds) *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988*, pp. 130-134.

<sup>5</sup> B. Guest, 'Economic Development of the Capital City, 1838-1910', in Laband and Haswell (eds) *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988*, pp. 120-128.

<sup>6</sup> G. A. Dominy, 'The Imperial Garrison in Natal with Special Reference to Fort Napier, 1843-1914: Its Social, Cultural and Economic Impact', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> C. Torino, 'Industrialisation, 1838-1987' in Laband and Haswell (eds), *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988*, p. 145.

prosperity. Many towns and cities in South Africa had new industries opened.<sup>8</sup> Owing to a number of reasons, Pietermaritzburg lagged behind some other cities in industrial development. A combination of factors such as the City Council's lethargic attitude to industrial development, the high prices of industrial sites, the belief that Pietermaritzburg would most likely achieve success as an agricultural, education and residential centre, and the City Council's selective policy regarding the types of industry it wished to attract, were responsible for this.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the shortage of housing, and the higher price of electrical power, relative to Durban, were deterrents to industrial growth.<sup>10</sup>

The Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Industries (PCI) became influential in fostering industrial development in the city and it worked in collaboration with the City Council. However, there were still some problems regarding the industrial development potential of the city. Seethal points out that: 'Although Pietermaritzburg experienced a rapid spurt of new industries from 1950-1954 (when ten new plants were established) this development was not resumed till 1964. Most of the city's industrial development during the 1950s resulted from the expansion of the previously established factories rather than from the establishment of new plants'.<sup>11</sup> In February 1957 the President of the PCI, D. G. Sutherland, Councillor R. M. Maud and the Mayor, C. B. Downes, expressed their concern about the lagging behind of the city in industrial development.<sup>12</sup> The Chairman of the Pietermaritzburg Publicity Association, Harvey-Williams, supported that view by arguing that:

'Maritzburg cannot go on with its lethargic attitude towards industry. Other cities are going ahead and are benefiting financially as a result of industries they attract. In this respect

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., C. E. P. Seethal, 'Civic Organisations and the Local State in South Africa 1979-1993', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Iowa, 1993, pp. 37-39; *The Natal Witness*, 18 and 23 February 1957.

<sup>10</sup> Seethal, 'Civic Organisations', p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> 'Maritzburg lags behind in industrial expansion', *The Natal Witness*, 18 February 1957.

Maritzburg is left behind... Modern industry is clean and does not spoil the countryside or affect the cultural aspects of a city, and the development of industry in Maritzburg would tend to keep our young people from having to go to other centres to obtain work experience'.<sup>13</sup>

This situation continued while the City Council and the PCI were trying to devise ways of attracting industries to the city. In October 1958 the PCI submitted a memorandum to the Council regarding industrial facilities and attraction of industries to Pietermaritzburg. In accordance with this pro-industrial mood the City Council approved some areas in addition to Mkhondeni as industrial loci, such as the Fitzsimons Road, the Mountain Rise industrial area, the Edendale Road industrial area and the Woods Drive area.<sup>14</sup> Aitchison pointed out that Pietermaritzburg's industrialisation was delayed because it had a liberal administration and that the central government punished Pietermaritzburg for that.<sup>15</sup> Pietermaritzburg's industrial development only got a major boost after it was proclaimed as one of the border industry areas during the early 1960s.

The economic developments in Pietermaritzburg are pivotal when one investigates the issue of political mobilisation. Tom Lodge's study has shown that factors such as industrialisation, urbanisation, unemployment, rural connections and the nature of the urban municipal policies shaped the nature of African responses to political mobilisation in East London.<sup>16</sup> East London, like Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s, had negligible industrialisation and there was no adequate housing for Africans who, similarly, were subjected to oppressive measures such as influx control. However, as we shall see, people of the two towns responded differently to calls for anti-apartheid resistance. In her study of political mobilisation in Brakpan in the 1950s, Sapire has also shown that

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<sup>13</sup> 'Industry should be welcome in city', *The Natal Witness*, 23 February 1957; Seethal, 'Civic Organisations', p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> NAD, TC Files, Housing Committee Minute Book, Minutes of the Housing Committee, 27 March 1958 and 13 October 1958.

<sup>15</sup> Author's interview with J. Aitchison, Centre for Adult Education, 5 November 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Lodge, 'Political Mobilisation during the 1950s', pp. 319-320.

the lack of a solid industrial base and workforce profile had some important consequences for political mobilisation. It meant that ‘as in the smaller platteland towns, African cleaners, servants, messengers, watchmen, shop assistants and municipal labourers far outnumbered factory workers. As a result, trade unionism was to have a negligible impact on the political culture of the local African population’.<sup>17</sup> However, it should be pointed out that existence of a large working class is not the only factor that precipitates mass mobilisation. There can be mass mobilisation even in areas where there is not a substantial, unionised, working class.

It would seem that the situation in Pietermaritzburg was similar to that in Brakpan in terms of the profile of the workforce because there was opposition within the City Council to the establishment of large industries despite the pressure exerted by different interest groups. The estimates of the Census Report of 1960 for the metropolitan area of Pietermaritzburg offers an insight into the level of industrialisation and the occupational profiles of the workforce in Pietermaritzburg.<sup>18</sup> By 1960 the population of Pietermaritzburg was estimated to be 128 446, with 55 990 Africans.<sup>19</sup> There were 8 796 people recorded in the manufacturing industry and about 3 270 of those were Africans. Indians were also significantly represented in the manufacturing industry numbering about 2 526. The sectors in which most people worked in were food, footwear, metal, and transport equipment industries. African people also worked in significant numbers in the wholesale and retail industry, with Indians also well represented. Out of a total of 6 541 employed in commerce and finance, there was about 2 145 Africans, with whites being dominant in this sector. The census categories in which a large number of Africans were recorded were in the government, recreation, and personal services. About

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<sup>17</sup> Sapire, ‘African Political Mobilisation’, p. 91.

<sup>18</sup> *Population Census 1960*, Volume 2 No.6, Report on the Metropolitan area of Pietermaritzburg (Pretoria, Bureau of Statistics, 1966), pp. 1-9 and 133 – 154.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

1 546 people were in the government service, 1 404 were in the health and medical services, 1 017 in accommodation and 9 281 in domestic employment.<sup>20</sup> The domestic service sector was dominated by Africans, both males 3 674 and females 5 607. There was obviously a significant imbalance between the domestic and the manufacturing sectors. Furthermore, the small numbers of people in the manufacturing sector meant that Pietermaritzburg was not an industrialised city, at least before the beginning of the 1960s. Government employment and the domestic sector attracted many people. The census also suggests that the majority of African labourers in Pietermaritzburg resided in the formal townships and in the Edendale area rather than in the municipal and industrial compounds. That meant that by the late 1950s the African labour force was becoming more stable and permanent and the unions could potentially mobilise people to see the city as more than just a workplace and to have a stake in the social and political life as well.

The rate of urbanisation was far ahead of the level of industrialisation. Torino pointed out that from the mid-1940s to the 1950s there was ‘a wave of black peri-urban population growth in the Edendale-Vulindlela area to the west of the city. The City Council was forced to acknowledge that genuine grievances such as unemployment and overcrowding did exist.’<sup>21</sup> The next section seeks to explore aspects relating to housing and population growth for Africans in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s.

### **Accommodation and population changes during the 1950s**

This section seeks to examine social factors such as housing and the population of Pietermaritzburg in order to locate anti-apartheid resistance within that context. The first part will investigate

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>21</sup> Torino, ‘Industrialisation’, p. 147.

demographic factors during the 1950s in order to establish whether there was a numerical constituency for mass mobilisation. The demographic patterns were vital in that they were related to the level of industrialisation. The issue of housing is pivotal, and it was shaped by municipal policy towards housing for Africans. The accommodation factors were also related to influx control, because providing houses for Africans meant acknowledging their permanent residence in the cities. In investigating the housing problems for Africans in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s, I will also examine how the Group Areas Act and the attitude of municipal administrators shaped these. There will be a focus on the African population. However, the problems that affected other racial groups, such as Indians and Coloureds, will be part of the discussion as well. The focus on Africans does not assume that it was only Africans who suffered or participated in the politics of resistance. The discussion below will show that people of different racial groups used to collaborate in the struggle and the focus on Africans is not meant to undermine that. Africans, however, seem to have been most severely affected by apartheid and they were the majority of the inhabitants of Pietermaritzburg.

In 1951 the African urban population of Pietermaritzburg numbered at approximately 36 609 while that of Durban was 136 520.<sup>22</sup> To a certain extent this helps to explain why most of the events that involved significantly large crowds during this period in Natal took place in Durban. According to municipal population estimates for the year ending June 1952, Pietermaritzburg consisted of 30 740 Whites, 20 943 Africans, 3 439 Coloureds and 17 321 Asiatics.<sup>23</sup> These municipal figures for Africans did not, however, include Edendale, which was excluded from the Pietermaritzburg boundary. At that time the African population of Edendale was estimated at 12 912. The reasons for Edendale's exclusion from the Pietermaritzburg boundary will be discussed in detail in another

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<sup>22</sup> *Population Census, 1951*, Volume 1, Geographical Distribution of the Population of the Union of South Africa, pp. 16-27 and pp. 28-29.

section below. The City Engineer reported that, the ‘native’ population, to use the term of that time, was growing at rate of 3% annually.<sup>24</sup> In 1955 the local Native Administration Department published its population estimates of Africans who were domiciled within the borough boundaries. According to these estimates the African population in the urban area was 22 780. Approximately 4 960 of these people stayed in Sobantu Village and 17 820 were housed in European areas.<sup>25</sup> These population estimates were produced in order to assess the need for African accommodation within the boundaries of the borough of Pietermaritzburg.

In the *Race Relations Survey* of 1956-1957 Pietermaritzburg’s population was listed alongside the following estimates.<sup>26</sup>

#### Major Towns

	<u>Whites</u>	<u>Coloured</u>	<u>Asians</u>	<u>Africans</u>	<u>Total</u>
Johannesburg	393 300	46 400	28 700	561 600	1,030 200
Durban	177 000	24 900	214 400	196 500	612 800
<b>Pietermaritzburg</b>	<b>37 600</b>	<b>3 800</b>	<b>21 200</b>	<b>25 600</b>	<b>88 200</b>
East London	48 700	6 800	1 900	48 700	106 100
Port Elizabeth	95 200	52 300	5 200	86 900	239 600
Pretoria	176 000	7 600	7 200	144 500	335 300
Bloemfontein	67 400	5 700		73 500	141 600

In the case of Africans these estimates should be viewed with caution. Some people might not have been counted because they did not have relevant permits to stay in the urban areas, and also because Edendale, an area that was populated by many Africans, was excluded from the boundaries of the Pietermaritzburg borough.

<sup>23</sup> *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbooks*, 1951-1952, p. 72.

<sup>24</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/74 Ref. 140/1, Pietermaritzburg Native Housing Scheme, City Engineer, 16 September 1957.

<sup>25</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/74 Ref. 140/1, Pietermaritzburg Native Administration Department, 29 March 1955.

<sup>26</sup> ‘The Population and Measures for its Registration and Control’, in *A Survey of Race Relations in*

Where did the African people stay? The administrative capital of Natal consisted of areas demarcated for different racial groups even before racial segregation was legalised by the Group Areas Act of 1950<sup>27</sup>. However, there were places where people of different racial groups stayed in close proximity to each other.<sup>28</sup> Aitchison mentions the case of areas such as New Scotland Road, Pentrich, New England Road and Hay Paddock (present-day Hayfields), which were inhabited by people of different racial groups.<sup>29</sup> These areas were later declared 'white' areas in accordance with the Group Areas Act. During the 1950s most whites in Pietermaritzburg stayed in the suburbs that were in close proximity to the city's central business area. The Indians and Coloureds were found on the eastern side of the city while Africans, with the exception of those at Sobantu Village, resided on the southwestern side of the city in areas such as Edendale, Ashdown and Vulindlela. Edendale and Vulindlela were not formal townships, like Ashdown, and they were outside the borough boundaries (see Map1). During this period there were many Indians living in Edendale, until they were resettled under the Group Areas Act.<sup>30</sup> Names of some of the shops and bus stops remain as proof of the multi-cultural nature of Edendale's past.

Edendale was established in 1851 and was the oldest area of urban African settlement in Pietermaritzburg. It was a place where Africans had freehold land rights and where the owners usually rented plots to tenants, who in turn had their own sub-tenants.<sup>31</sup> Its extension consisted of

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*South Africa, 1956-1957* (Johannesburg, South African institute of Race Relations, 1957), p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/288 Ref. 138/2, Proposed scheme for housing of Coloured community at Dorpspruit (1940-1945); Ref. 139/3, Economic housing Schemes: barracks for Indians (1940-1944); Ref. 139/4, Suggested sub-economic housing for Indians (1940-1944); Ref. 140/1, Housing of Natives: General (1941-1946); Ref.140/2/40, Additional houses at Native Village: sub-economic houses and recreational halls.

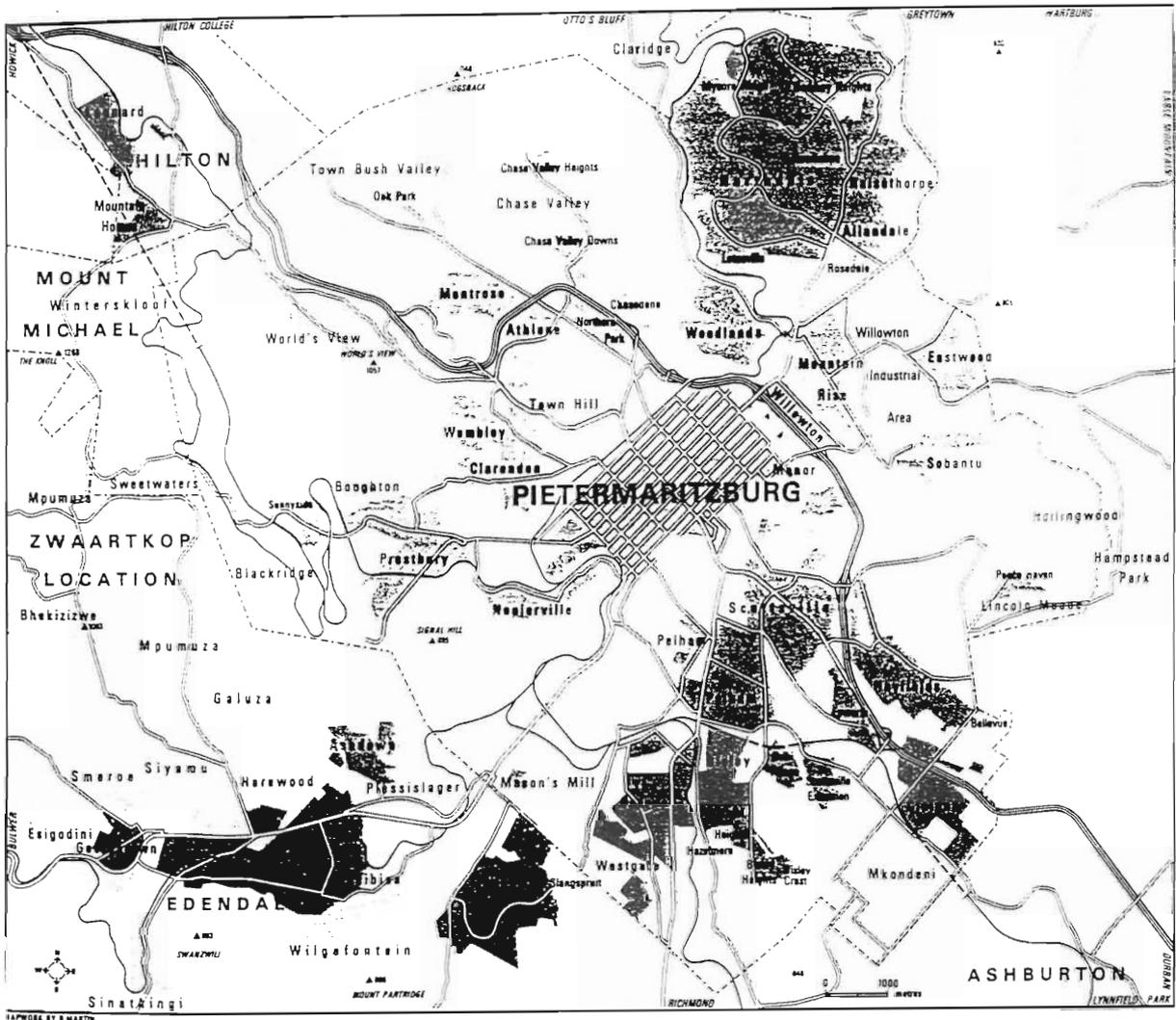
<sup>28</sup> P. Brown and J. Aitchison, 'Opposing Apartheid in the Pietermaritzburg region', in J. Laband and R. Haswell (eds), *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988*, pp. 111-112; N. Gwala, 'Inkatha, Political Violence and the Struggle for Control in Pietermaritzburg', paper to *Workshop on Regionalism and Restructuring in Natal*, Durban, University of Natal, 28-31 January, 1988, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Author's interview with John Aitchison, 5 November 1997.

<sup>30</sup> Gwala, 'Inkatha, Political Violence', p. 3; Author's interview with Walter Msimang, Edendale, 16 January 1997.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. pp.6-7; Department of Economics, *Experiment at Edendale: A Study of a Non-European*

Map 1. Pietermaritzburg and surrounding areas (Adapted from Laband and Haswell, Pietermaritzburg, 1838-1988, 1988)



areas such as Machibisa, Dambuza, Siyamu, Wilgefontein and Mount Partridge. Edendale was excluded from the Pietermaritzburg boundaries even though it was less than 20 kilometres from the city. Perhaps this was due to it having a substantial number of the African population, which the municipality viewed as an administrative burden. From the mid-1920s onwards the majority of African people who migrated to Pietermaritzburg ended up staying at Edendale. The population of Edendale grew rapidly. As a result of these factors such as unorganised settlement and especially the mushrooming of shacks and the growth of the African population, the Pietermaritzburg municipality felt reluctant to incorporate Edendale into its borough.

During the mid-1930s a Provincial Committee had been set up to investigate the question of Edendale's insanitary conditions, uncontrolled settlement and its relationship with Pietermaritzburg. This Committee rejected the incorporation of Edendale into Pietermaritzburg as a solution on the grounds that 'It was doubtful whether Pietermaritzburg could deal expeditiously with the problems involved; that the financial burden would be too heavy; that the rateable value of Edendale was low and that neither the City nor the Edendale inhabitants desired incorporation'.<sup>32</sup> In 1941 Edendale was put under the control of the Local Health Commission (LHC) in accordance with the recommendations of the Thornton Report, which had been looking at the issue of Edendale's incorporation into Pietermaritzburg.<sup>33</sup>

In 1928 the city authorities had decided to build Sobantu Village for Africans on the southeastern

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*Settlement with Special Reference to Food Expenditure and Nutrition* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1951), p. 1-12; For another detailed history of Edendale see S. Meintjes, 'Edendale 1851-1930: Farmers to Townspeople, Market to Labour Reserve', in J. Laband and R. Haswell (eds), *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988*, pp. 66-69.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> R. Gordon, *The Place of the Elephant: A History of Pietermaritzburg* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1981), p. 134.

side of the city, adjacent to European areas.<sup>34</sup> However, it was small and could not cope with the influx of people who needed accommodation. I will return to the story of Sobantu later on in this section. Ashdown was a township that was built next to Edendale during the 1940s. Apart from Edendale, Sobantu and Ashdown, Africans were accommodated in their employers' backyards, while others were housed in hostels in town, such as the East Street Native Men's hostel, the Ohrtmann Road hostel and the Berg Street Hostel for African women.<sup>35</sup>

Sobantu, owing to the disapproval of the nearby white property owners and the Minister of Native Affairs, Dr H.F. Verwoerd<sup>36</sup>, could no longer be extended to accommodate more people and the City Council had to look for a suitable place. The last houses were finished in 1957 and by this time Sobantu had approximately 1091 dwellings. The City Council resolved to look for a suitable new site in the Slangspruit area<sup>37</sup> It took many years for the Department of Bantu Affairs to approve the area in which the City Council wanted the new township of approximately 7000 houses to be built. The new township known as Imbali was only built during the early 1960s.

One can conclude this section by pointing out that Pietermaritzburg was still a developing town both socially and economically. In the economic sphere there were few initiatives by the city authorities in an attempt to industrialise the city. The workforce profile has shown that many

<sup>34</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/74 Ref. 140/1, Native Administration Department: Native Housing, pp. 1-3; R. Gordon, *The Place of the Elephant*, pp. 136-137. For a more detailed account on Sobantu Village see H. Peel, 'Sobantu Village: An Administrative History of a Pietermaritzburg Township, 1924-1959', Unpublished BA Honours Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1987.

<sup>35</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/340 Ref. 200/19, Bang's memo to TC; Vol. 4/4/2/342 Ref. 200/14, Bang's memo to TC, 9 October 1940, and Ref. 200/11/40, Bang's memo to TC.

<sup>36</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/74 Refs. 140/1 and 140/110, Sobantu Village: Proposed Removal of Inhabitants, Letter from Town Clerk to Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 6 November, 1956; Ref. 140/1, Chief Native Commissioner's Memo 28/12E Second Location for Pietermaritzburg: Points for discussion on 30 July 1957; 'Native Housing and the Future of Sobantu Village' *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook* 1955-1956, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/74 Ref. 140/1, Native Housing at Edendale, Joint Confidential Publication of the City Council and the Local Health Commission.

many people were still working in domestic service and there were very few big industries. The population figures also show that there were few people compared to other cities. However, what the estimates show is that the population was growing. There was also the problem of housing for the African section of the population. It was during this time that the City Council recommended that a new township be built for Africans but that only came about during the early 1960s. The aim of the above section has not been to provide a detailed history of Pietermaritzburg, but to give a broad idea of the certain features of the city up to the 1950s. In the light of the contexts investigated above I will now shift my focus to the aspects of resistance. The section below will sketch in some aspects of crowd events and politics of resistance in Pietermaritzburg from the 1950s to the early 1960s. It is in no way intended to become a detailed history of resistance in Pietermaritzburg, but to set the scene for the case studies of succeeding chapters.

### **Resistance and political mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg: 1950-1961**

The purpose of this section is to make a broad overview of incidents of anti-apartheid mobilisation that took place at both the local and the national levels. The sketching of the national scene will help in locating the events in Pietermaritzburg in a wider context of resistance. The politics of anti-apartheid resistance in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s occurred within the context of countrywide protests of that period.<sup>38</sup> The people in Pietermaritzburg took part in some actions of political resistance. It also appears that the scale of anti-apartheid mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg was small. After discussing national resistance politics, I will explore local aspects such as the multi-racial mobilisation against the Group Areas Act in Pietermaritzburg, and other forms of protest that were waged largely by the African middle class against the municipality in places like Sobantu. The

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<sup>38</sup> Author's interviews with Archie Gumede, Clermont, 2 October 1997 and Anton Xaba, 28 October

investigation of the formation of resistance crowds, or the lack of such crowds, in Pietermaritzburg during the campaigns of the 1950s to the early 1960s will also be conducted with a view to understanding how the local context shaped the patterns of anti-apartheid resistance. Furthermore, the municipal attitude towards local Africans amidst this context of resistance and municipal perceptions of the politicisation of Africans will also feature in the discussion.

Anti-apartheid political mobilisation took a rather different dimension from 1950 onwards, with the spate of struggles such as those waged by the workers and by African women against the carrying of passes.<sup>39</sup> During this decade of turbulent political activity, up to 1960, the emphasis of all the campaigns was on peaceful protest and on non-violent methods of struggle.<sup>40</sup> It was a decade of relatively intense mass mobilisation in both urban and rural areas of South Africa. There were campaigns such as the national strikes of 1950 and 1951, the celebrated Defiance Campaign of 1952, the anti-Bantu Education Campaign of 1955, the Congress of the People campaign of 1955, the women's anti-pass campaigns of 1956 to 1958, the women's militancy of 1958 and 1959, the potato boycott and the pound-a-day campaigns. There were also the stay-at-homes of 1957, 1958, 1960 and 1961. These were organised by different political organisations and by the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). These campaigns occurred amidst the implementation of a host of apartheid laws by the government. It has been argued that:

‘The year 1950 was a turning point in the political history of the African people of this country. It was marked by a number of events that took place from the beginning of the year. These events indicated a new political outlook on the part of the African people. The events showed clearly that the conditions under which the African people lived have become intolerable and that the masses are marching far ahead of the leadership.’<sup>41</sup>

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1997.

<sup>39</sup> D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1991), p. 221.

<sup>40</sup> H. Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears: Women in Apartheid South Africa* (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1985), p. 84.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Draft Report of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress to the Annual Conference, December 15-17, 1950’, in T. Karis and G. Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge: A*

This resistance took place in an atmosphere which was being systematically engineered by the government to be hostile to any form of opposition. It has been pointed out that 'the period between 1950 and 1960 saw a tightening up of influx control regulations, an intensification of the pass laws and of liquor raids by police.'<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Worden points out that:

'The 1950s saw an unprecedented upsurge of popular protest. In some ways this was a logical development from the trends seen in the 1940s, notably the doubling of the urban African population, employment in the secondary industry and the growth of trade unionism in industry. But it was given a new impetus by the imposition of apartheid laws and the social engineering of the Nationalist government.'<sup>43</sup>

During the late 1940s the leadership of the African National Congress (ANC), under the influence of the Indian passive resistance campaigns of the mid-1940s, had decided to embrace a strategy based on mass action: the strikes, boycotts and civil disobedience entailed in the Programme of Action which was adopted in Bloemfontein in 1949.<sup>44</sup>

Against this background of widespread nationwide resistance, this section seeks to explore protest politics in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s. One can also point out that it is not adequate to stop at 1960 when one analyses the resistance politics of the 1950s. Anti-apartheid resistance continued, under difficult conditions, and gained increased momentum up to 1961, when the last stay-at-home was organised by SACTU and the ANC.<sup>45</sup> In Pietermaritzburg, particularly, there was resistance

*Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964*, Volume 2, (Stanford, Hoover, 1973), p. 452.

<sup>42</sup> P.O. Tichmann, 'African Worker Action in Durban, 1940-1960', Unpublished MA Thesis, Durban, University of Natal, 1983, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> Worden, *The Making of Apartheid*, p. 99.

<sup>44</sup> T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1983), p. 33.

<sup>45</sup> D. Bonnin, 'Class Consciousness and Conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940-1987: The case of the BTR Sarmcol workers', Unpublished M Soc Sc Thesis, Durban, University of Natal, 1987, pp. 164-165; J. Baskin, *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1991), pp. 14; T. Karis, G. Carter and G. M. Gerhart (eds), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964*, Volume 3, (Stanford, Hoover, 1977), pp. 358-364; Lodge, *Black Politics*, p. 196; International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 'Repression and Resistance', *Apartheid: The Facts* (London, IDAF, 1991), p. 102; D. McShane, M. Plaut and D. Ward, *Power! Black Workers, Their Unions and the*

against many issues and this was led by the local ANC and the Natal Indian Congress (NIC).<sup>46</sup> According to Anton Xaba ‘the 1950s were the years of defiance. I was very active in Pietermaritzburg during the potato boycott campaigns of the 1950s’.<sup>47</sup> However, according to Kader Hassim, the ANC was not strong in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s.<sup>48</sup> These differences reflect the struggles of interpretation and they show how people from different political backgrounds interpret historical events.

Struggles, in various forms, had been happening in Pietermaritzburg long before the 1950s. In Sobantu, there was the Sobantu Village Advisory Board, elected in accordance with NAD regulations and whose members used to stay in office for a long time.<sup>49</sup> There was an opposition group to this, known as the Sobantu Residents Association (or Isolomuzi Vigilant Association).<sup>50</sup> Numerous letters were written to the City Council by the Association, complaining about the Advisory Board, which they claimed was not a legitimate and representative body. In a circular written in 1952 by G. F. Khumalo, chairman of the Isolomuzi, one can discern a sense of alignment with anti-apartheid politics when he concluded with slogans:

<i>Nkosi busisa i Afrika!</i>	(God bless Africa!)
<i>UZulu makakhulume!</i>	(The Zulu nation must speak)
<i>Lelizwe ngelethu!</i>	(This land is ours!)
<i>Lomuzi ngowethu!</i>	(This village is ours!) <sup>51</sup>

In another letter written by the Association to the City Council, there was a sense of preparedness to work with the local authorities and not to participate in the broader resistance politics of that year. The letter written in October 1952 by the Isolomuzi’s secretary, Mr Amos Mntaka, to the

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*Struggle for Liberation in South Africa* (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1984), p. 32.

<sup>46</sup> Author’s interview with Archie Gumede, Clermont, 2 October 1997.

<sup>47</sup> Author’s interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>48</sup> Author’s interview with Kader Hassim, 4 November 1997.

<sup>49</sup> Author’s interview with V. Sikhosana, 07 October 1997.

<sup>50</sup> NAD, TC Vol. 4/4/2/340 Ref. 198/2.

<sup>51</sup> NAD, TC Vol. 4/4/2/570 Ref. 199/101, 5 August 1952.

Town Clerk captured the feeling of that time by saying that:

‘Sir, there is the defiance campaign of civil disobedience. We wish to avoid trouble with the local authorities. Please allow us to hold our meetings in order that we may get on with the work we intended doing at the beginning of the year: - viz "Our 1952 socio-economic development programme". If the city Council refuses us permission we shall be forced into the hands of the defiance campaign. Sir, we believe in direct representation, goodwill in negotiation and co-operation of races in the solving of South Africa's burning problems. Please give us a chance to show you what we are. Believing in misrepresentation by evil sources hidden in the Municipal Native Administration will certainly lead to trouble.’<sup>52</sup>

This reflects the ambiguities of resistance politics in some organisations of the time. The role of Khumalo and the Association in the history of Sobantu will be dealt with later in Chapter 4.

Besides these kinds of actions, which were pursued by individuals and community organisations, there were also other actions of anti-apartheid resistance. Owing to a variety of reasons Pietermaritzburg did not provide volunteers during the Defiance Campaign of 1952.<sup>53</sup> Probably this lack of participation in Pietermaritzburg was related to the riots that occurred in Durban in 1949, where there was fierce conflict between Africans and Indians.<sup>54</sup> However, Kader Hassim, who was observing political events during this time, argued that:

‘It was not the 1949 riots that caused the lack of participation. The ANC itself was inactive in Pietermaritzburg during the early 1950s. There was also the problem that Indians in Natal had seen the harshness of the National Party government during the 1946 passive resistance campaign. Furthermore, we in the NEUM, launched an anti-defiance campaign in Natal and one of the key people there was Dr Motala who later became active in the NIC and the ANC’.<sup>55</sup>

Another reason might have been problems within the ANC in Natal.<sup>56</sup> The leadership struggle which led to the defeat of George Champion by Luthuli in 1951, and the subsequent resignation of Selby Msimang in 1952, were likely to be reasons for low participation in Natal and

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Letter from Amos Mntaka to Town Clerk, 2 October 1952.

<sup>53</sup> Brown and Aitchison, ‘Opposing Apartheid in Pietermaritzburg’, p. 211.

<sup>54</sup> Author's conversation with Ruth Lundie, 21 August 1996; Tichmann, ‘African Worker Action’, p. 53; Lodge, *Black Politics*, p. 60; Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, p. 420.

<sup>55</sup> Author's interviews with Kader Hassim, 4 November 1997 and 26 November 1997.

<sup>56</sup> Tichmann, ‘African Worker Action’, p. 53.

Pietermaritzburg particularly.<sup>57</sup> A. S. Chetty argued that Pietermaritzburg's level of political development had not reached the stages of other cities. He pointed out that they were not ready for the Defiance Campaign in Pietermaritzburg and that some volunteers from Pietermaritzburg, including his mother, went down to join the campaign in Durban.<sup>58</sup> Benson argues that 'By December 1951 all the provincial congresses of the ANC were ready and had read the blueprint of non-violent action. It was only Natal, where Champion, who had received the plans just before his defeat, had kept them to himself. Luthuli only learnt of the proposed campaign as he set off for the ANC's annual conference. All he could do was discuss with other Natal delegates as they drove to Bloemfontein'.<sup>59</sup> A former organiser and secretary of the ANC in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s, Archie Gumede, confirmed that it was problems within the leadership of the ANC that led to the lack of participation. According to him Champion's attitude made people uncertain about the campaign and he is reputed to have said that the Defiance Campaign was like 'trying to hold the sun with hands' (*Ukubamba ilanga ngezandla*).<sup>60</sup> Probably Champion saw the campaign as too advanced and inappropriate an action for that period. Leo Kuper argued that:

'The reasons for regional differences are not at all clear. The level of participation in Natal was exceedingly low, when compared with the extent of Indian resistance in the 1946 campaign. This is all the more remarkable, since Indian life in Natal is seriously threatened by the Group Areas Act. The explanation is possibly that the Indian Congress, as junior partner in the campaign, did not wish to take the lead, that the Natal branch of the African National Congress was poorly organised, and that strong nationalist and anti-Indian sentiment dampened African enthusiasm for the campaign. Yet Africans participated fully and in great numbers in the resistance meetings.'<sup>61</sup>

Kuper refers to meetings that took place later in the year when Durban joined in the campaign.

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<sup>57</sup> Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, p. 413; Tichmann 'African Worker Action', p. 53; M. Swanson, 'Changing the Guard: Champion-Msimang-Luthuli, the ANC in Natal, 1945-1951', in *The Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Volume 16, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 1990, pp. 50-56; M. Benson, *South Africa: The Struggle for a Birthright* (International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1985), pp. 127 - 139.

<sup>58</sup> Author's interview with A. S. Chetty, 12 November 1997.

<sup>59</sup> Benson, *South Africa: The Struggle for a Birthright*, p. 138.

<sup>60</sup> Author's interview with Archie Gumede, Clermont, 28 July 1997.

Even then there was no spillover of the Defiance campaign in Pietermaritzburg. The extent to which S. S. Bhengu's Bantu National Congress's (BNC) campaign against the ANC contributed to this lack of participation is not clear.<sup>62</sup> Bhengu led the BNC, which was an organisation in Natal that propagated racial separation among Africans and Indians.

It is not enough, however, to say that Pietermaritzburg did not participate in the Defiance Campaign because of its size. Other relatively small towns like East London and Brakpan participated remarkably. Writing about the Defiance Campaign in the Eastern Cape, Kuper has argued that 'In any event, whatever the explanation, the large and small towns of the Eastern Cape were the cores of the resistance movement.'<sup>63</sup>

There was no evidence from either the Pietermaritzburg's municipal records or from the local newspaper, of any march or 'disturbance' which took place in 1952. Instead, in his 1952 annual report, the Manager of the Native Administration Department, D. N. Bang wrote:

'I am happy to be in a position to be able again report that the behaviour of the Natives of Pietermaritzburg has been exemplary in spite of the racial tension in other parts of the Union. There have been no riots, and the few meetings held by the so-called "agitators" were so poorly attended that it was evident that the Pietermaritzburg natives constituted on the whole a contented community. The Council has continued to give its full support to sport to entertain the natives in their leisure hours, and so keep them from drifting to political meetings.'<sup>64</sup>

The existence of the so-called "agitators" implies that there was political mobilisation that was going on in Pietermaritzburg. The interesting thing is that the City Council used sports and other forms of entertainment for political purposes, that is, to divert the attention of Africans from anti-apartheid politics. The annual reports of the Manager of the Native Administration Department

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<sup>61</sup> L. Kuper, *Passive Resistance in South Africa* (London, Jonathan, 1956), p. 123.

<sup>62</sup> P. La Hausse, 'So who was Elias Khuzwayo?: Nationalism, Collaboration and the Picaresque in Natal', in P. Bonner, P. Delius and R. Posel (eds), *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935-1962* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1993), pp. 213-214.

<sup>63</sup> Kuper, *Passive Resistance*, p. 124.

used to mention how enthusiastic ‘Natives’ were about sports, films and other forms of ‘entertainment’. According to Anton Xaba ‘The young people in Sobantu decided to boycott the bioscope which was shown at the Sobantu Hall. The municipality did not want us to use the hall for our meetings but wanted us to only come for the bioscopes where we paid our tickies.’<sup>65</sup>

In contrast to the Defiance Campaign, organisations in Pietermaritzburg participated in the Congress of the People Campaign of 1954-1955. There was the Congress of the People Committee, which was composed of Dr M. M. Motala, Archie Gumede, Mr. Mungal and Moses Mabhida.<sup>66</sup> A. S. Chetty, a local politician, who was active in mobilisation for the campaign, pointed out that there was a vigorous campaign when volunteers were making house-to-house visits even in the rural areas.<sup>67</sup> This drew the attention of the Native Affairs Department. Mr Bang wrote in his 1956 report that:

‘Although the behaviour of the Natives in the City has been excellent, one can sense a strained atmosphere, particularly among the educated and semi-educated groups of Natives who have taken to reading both European and Native papers avidly. However, taking everything into account the Native people of this city are to be commended for their good behaviour. While the Council continues to show its goodwill to its Native people by listening sympathetically to reasonable representations, I feel sure that the natives will reciprocate by refraining from rash examples of their brothers in some of the other towns. On the other hand the European employer is also contributing his share towards this harmonious relationship, as there has been marked tendency to treat native employees better.’<sup>68</sup>

Bang's statement reflects the attitude of the officials in his department, who were patronising Africans, and also the idea of pretending as if Africans were satisfied with their plight. He saw himself as an ‘expert’ on issues relating to Africans, an attitude that was typical of most incumbents

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<sup>64</sup> *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1951-1952, p. 92.

<sup>65</sup> Author's interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>66</sup> Brown and Aitchison, ‘Opposing Apartheid in the Pietermaritzburg Region’, p. 211; This was confirmed during my interview with Archie Gumede, 02 October 1997.

<sup>67</sup> R. Suttner and J. Cronin (eds), *30 Years of the Freedom Charter* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1986), pp. 46-50. This was also confirmed during author's interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>68</sup> *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1955-1956, p. 74.

of his similar position in other areas, who always confirmed that they were in control of the situation. John Aitchison, who knew him personally, argued that Bang was a sympathetic person and pointed out that he allowed night schools to continue in Pietermaritzburg at the time when the government had closed them all over the country.<sup>69</sup> At that time there were no schools for Africans that went up to matric in Pietermaritzburg, and the only way in which Africans could finish secondary school education was through night schools.<sup>70</sup>

There were some local initiatives in the resistance politics that were going on in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s. There was an ANC branch in Pietermaritzburg and it used the East Street Men's Hostel as a base for meetings. Archie Gumede was secretary and Moses Mabhida was his assistant.<sup>71</sup> During this period the ANC and the NIC used to organise joint meetings at the Lotus Hall.<sup>72</sup> One of my informants pointed out that there was a building in Retief Street, which was used for clandestine meetings where they held meetings in the dark with all the lights switched off and only one candle for the speaker.<sup>73</sup> In May 1954 D. N. Bang wrote a letter commenting about an anonymous letter, which he had in his possession, coming from the *Cheesa-Cheesa Army*. This was an undated typed circular and it appealed to Africans to revolt against the oppressors.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps the fact that this circular was found in Sobantu shows that underground anti-apartheid kinds of resistance were taking place in Pietermaritzburg, though not on a large scale. Archie Gumede and Anton Xaba pointed that the ANC had a significant and an active membership in Sobantu. One of my interviewees, however, pointed out that only a few selected families in Sobantu were politically

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<sup>69</sup> Author's interview with John Aitchison, 5 November 1997.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Author's interview with Archie Gumede, 2 October 1997; The importance of the area in downtown Pietermaritzburg in the struggle was confirmed during author's interviews with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997 and Kader Hassim, 4 November 1997.

<sup>72</sup> Points made by Ruth Lundie during interview with Archie Gumede, 2 October 1997.

<sup>73</sup> Author's interview with V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>74</sup> NAD, TC Vol. 4/4/2/570 Ref. 199/101. Undated Circular from the *Cheesa-Cheesa Army*.

active.<sup>75</sup> Some people were still reluctant to participate openly as there was the threat of being evicted from the township. According to Xaba:

‘People were still afraid of participating in politics. If you mention politics they think of the jail, particularly if you mention the name ANC. People were afraid of leaving their families and their luxury houses and go to jail. I had the same problem with my mother who was always worried about my participation in politics.’<sup>76</sup>

There were also worker struggles during the 1950s. Harry Gwala and Moses Mabhida were active in the mobilisation of the workers. According to Kader Hassim, SACTU was more active than the ANC in Pietermaritzburg. He points out that it was people who were aligned to the SACP, such as Gwala and Mabhida, who actively mobilised in Pietermaritzburg. Anton Xaba said:

‘We worked hard with Gwala in the unions. I was active in mobilising workers in Pietermaritzburg, which was a very conservative place. Pietermaritzburg was a small developing town at the time. We managed to mobilise workers in factories such as Scottish Cables. We distributed newspapers such as *New Age* and the *Fighting Talk* to workers during lunchtime. We were volunteers and we used money from our pockets to travel around Pietermaritzburg.’<sup>77</sup>

It seems that the politicisation of the workers in Pietermaritzburg was very slow and there were few large industries in Pietermaritzburg at the time. Both A. S. Chetty and Kader Hassim pointed out that the Howick Rubber Workers Union at Sarmcol was highly organised and politically active.<sup>78</sup> The main trade unions that existed in Pietermaritzburg were in the leather industries and these were not keen on involving workers in political issues.<sup>79</sup> Chetty argued that one of his early political activities was mobilisation in the leather industries. It should be remembered also that during this time African workers were not ‘legally’ allowed to join the unions.

In 1956 and 1957 there were two protest marches in the city by African women who were

<sup>75</sup> Author’s interview with V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>76</sup> Author’s interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>77</sup> Author’s interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>78</sup> Author’s interviews with A. S. Chetty, 12 November 1997 and Kader Hassim, 26 November 1997.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

complaining about the extension of passes to African women.<sup>80</sup> Bonnin argued that people in the Natal Midlands, including Pietermaritzburg, were involved in other campaigns of the late 1950s such as the pound-a-day campaign and the potato boycott organised by SACTU.<sup>81</sup> In August 1959, African women from areas surrounding Pietermaritzburg demonstrated in the city against a variety of grievances and demands, and in Sobantu a revolt erupted against municipal exploitation.<sup>82</sup> This incident, which involved the destruction of property and loss of life, shocked the city authorities and it changed the way they viewed the behaviour of African inhabitants of the city. The women's anti-pass protests and the 1959 riots will be subjects of a more detailed investigation in chapters 3 and 4 below.

The late 1950s were characterised by the radicalisation of anti-apartheid resistance in South Africa. Pietermaritzburg could not escape that wave of radicalism. In his letter to the Town Clerk, the Director of the Bantu Administration Department, D. N. Bang, wrote on the subject of 'Bantu unrest',

'On the afternoon of the 29th January, 1960 the African National Congress Women's League held two meetings on an open piece of ground in Boom Street - one at 2 p.m. and the other at 5.30 p.m. Speaking through loudspeakers, the leaders denounced discriminate legislation such as influx control, reference books for women, and lower wages for the Bantu. They also complained about the increase in taxation, the Corporation beerhalls and "Boer" buses. On the latter point they did not reach a decision, but on the other points they decided to take action, firstly by organising a boycott of Corporation beer and secondly by organising for the display of suitable placards on the occasion of Mr Macmillan's visit to Durban'.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1956-1957*, p. 71; *Contact*, December 1956 and February 1957; *The Natal Witness*, 29 November 1956 and 31 January 1957.

<sup>81</sup> Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness and Conflict', pp. 153-162; This was also supported by Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>82</sup> For further accounts of these events see H. Peel, 'Sobantu Village', pp. 120-143; J. Yawitch, 'Natal 1959: The Women's Protests', paper to Conference on the *History of Opposition in Southern Africa*, University of Witwatersrand, 1978; Lodge, *Black Politics*, pp. 139-150; Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, pp. 281-291; K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, *Organise or Starve! The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), pp. 297-308; C. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London, Onyx, 1982), pp. 230-235.

<sup>83</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/570. Ref. 199/101, 'Bantu Unrest', Letter from Bang to Town Clerk, 12

This was a significant step by local women because even though they had organised events of mass mobilisation during the middle and the late 1950s they were not organisationally strong. It has been pointed out that the ANC Women's League in Pietermaritzburg was not widely influential and that it was mostly women from outside Pietermaritzburg and wives of prominent local ANC members who were mobilising women.<sup>84</sup> According to one of my informants the Women's League in Pietermaritzburg got off the ground during the Treason Trial (1956-1961), when people began to be serious about establishing political structures.<sup>85</sup>

The controversial Group Areas Act of 1950 caused confusion in Pietermaritzburg as well. There was a vigorous opposition campaign in the city from the early 1950s by Africans, Indians and some Whites who were members of the Liberal Party. One of the organisations that fought against this form of residential segregation was the Group Areas Resistance Committee, which was led by Dr M. M. Motala.<sup>86</sup> It appears that the City Council was uncomfortable or ambivalent with the way the Group Areas Act was implemented from the top down. During the meeting of 5 June 1961, in sympathy with Indians and Coloureds, the Council distanced themselves from the actions of the Group Areas Act Board.<sup>87</sup> In 1958 the Estates Manager had expressed his concern about the impending proclamation of Group Areas in Pietermaritzburg which 'was bound to lead to a similar state of affairs as existed in Durban at the present time, i.e. confusion and unrest, particularly amongst the Indian and Coloured groups'.<sup>88</sup> Probably the Municipal attitude to the Group Areas Act influenced the nature of opposition to it. The Council purported to be concerned with

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February 1960.

<sup>84</sup> Author's interviews with Archie Gumede, 2 October 1997 and Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>85</sup> Author's interview with Archie Gumede, 2 October 1997.

<sup>86</sup> NAD, TC Files, Housing Committee Minute Book, Meeting of the Housing Committee, 10 May 1961.

<sup>87</sup> NAD, TC Files, Minutes of the Housing Committee Meeting, 5 June 1961.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

maintaining harmonious race relations and its attitude residential segregation could be viewed against that preoccupation. However, it has been pointed out that the residential segregation was ultimately implemented in Pietermaritzburg and the establishment of Imbali Township rather than the expansion of Sobantu Village was one example.<sup>89</sup>

An important historical event took place in Edendale, Pietermaritzburg, in early 1961. In March the leaders of the liberation movements organised an "All-in Africa" Conference.<sup>90</sup> This was an attempt to find solutions to South Africa's problems following the Sharpeville massacre of March 1960 and the subsequent banning of the liberation movements. Although the ANC's speakers dominated this mass meeting, with Congress songs and slogans, other organisations were also represented and the large numbers of participants came from both the rural and the urban areas of Natal.<sup>91</sup> This conference suffered harassment by the state security branch, when it was discovered that recording devices had been installed in the public hall at Edendale. Consequently, candidates had to walk two miles in a drizzling rain to a Hindu hall (Arya Samaj), where the meeting continued.<sup>92</sup> According to one of the local organisers of the conference, they were able to get the Hindu Temple at Plessislaer because of their good relations with the NIC and the Indian community in Pietermaritzburg.<sup>93</sup> Another informant, who took part in the conference, pointed out that they sang and chanted slogans all the way from Edendale to the Arya Samaj Hall.<sup>94</sup> This hall is now fenced inside the Zibukezulu High School near the entrance to Imbali Township.<sup>95</sup> Two highlights, which made this event significant were, firstly, the appearance of Nelson Mandela, a national ANC leader, who had been restricted and had not spoken on a public platform since 1952, and, secondly, the fact that an

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<sup>89</sup> Wills, 'The Segregated City', p. 41.

<sup>90</sup> Brown and Aitchison, 'Opposing apartheid', p. 211; *The Natal Witness*, 27 March 1961

<sup>91</sup> Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, Volume 3, p. 357; Lodge, *Black Politics*, p. 232.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 358; Author's interview with Archie Gumede, 28 July 1997.

<sup>93</sup> Author's interview with Archie Gumede, 28 July 1997.

<sup>94</sup> Author's interview with Mrs V. Skhosana, 7 October 1997.

important decision to stage one of the last national events of mass mobilisation followed this conference. The presence of a disguised Mandela added flavour to the conference and one participant recalls that his speech was inspiring and that after the conference, they sang and chanted slogans to the delight of one black policeman who stopped taking notes and started dancing.<sup>96</sup>

In 1961 the ANC and SACTU called for a three-day stay-at-home to protest against the proclamation of South Africa as a Republic. The official impression was that the whole event was a failure. The stay-at-home took place on the 29th to 31st of May 1961. In his memo to the Town Clerk, Bang pointed out that:

‘The strike did not only fail to materialise but there were also no incidents...One minor incident took place at 9.30 p.m. on the 25th May when an intruder was intercepted while trying to climb over the wall of the headquarters’ offices. The specially engaged guard, who was in a secluded spot nearby, grabbed the culprit and hurled him to the ground. While endeavouring to put the handcuffs on the offender the latter drew a knife. The guard lost his grip and the culprit escaped leaving his stick. A European, responding to the whistle, gave the guard a lift, but the culprit disappeared in a side street off Pietermaritz Street.’<sup>97</sup>

It is not clear whether this incident was related to the call for a strike. However, the fact that the Director drew connections shows the way in which anti-apartheid politics was intruding into the agenda of the city administrators. This memo gives an insight into the organisation of this stay-at-home. He wrote:

‘The workers were bombarded with leaflets from all sides. The more intensive campaign came from the organisers of the strike. On the 15th and 16th it is understood that the police distributed pamphlets to counter the campaign. Again on the 18th and 19th anti-strike pamphlets purporting to be issued by the banned Pan Africanist Congress, made their appearance. In a van equipped with public address equipment the police gave talks wherever there were groups of Bantu. These addresses were tactfully worded and were well received by the Bantu. The walls of buildings in the lower part of the city, and village streets and buildings were plastered with stickers or painted slogans such as "One man one

<sup>95</sup> ‘Tracing the Route to Freedom’ *The Natal Witness*, 10 January 1997.

<sup>96</sup> Author’s interview with V. Skhosana, 7 October 1997. Mrs Skhosana said Mandela had disguised himself with a long beard and a black mask on his face. She said she was surprised when she saw him in 1990 that he does not wear a long beard and was light in complexion.

<sup>97</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/570 Ref. 199/101, ‘Strike tension and unrest among the Bantu workers’, Director, BAD to TC, 3 June 1961.

vote", "Mayibuye", "General Strike" and "No school 29-31 May", "victory is ours" etc.<sup>98</sup>

The report shows the strategies of political mobilisation of that time. This shows mobilisation and counter-mobilisation at work. These pamphlets were also distributed in some schools as one of my informants, Mrs Sikhosana, recalled that the city authorities and the local education officers accused them of distributing pamphlets. What this event signalled was that mass mobilisation had entered the scene in Pietermaritzburg in a way that the authorities found difficult to comprehend. This event had been preceded by two kinds of crowd events, which involved the taking of people to the streets. These two incidents will be the case studies for the next two chapters. After these incidents, especially the 1959 riots, Africans in Pietermaritzburg were no longer "the good and exemplary Natives", until then a dominant perception in the Bantu Administration Department for many years.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter sought to sketch in some aspects of the socio-economic and political situation in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s. Political mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg should be understood against the background, which has been provided in this chapter. During the 1950s Pietermaritzburg was still maintaining its character as the main agricultural and educational centre of Natal. There was very little development in the industrial sector even though the City Council and the Chamber of Industries were promoting industrialisation. There were few African people working in the manufacturing sector. The majority of Africans were employed as domestic workers and it is likely that that impacted on the difficulties of forming a unionised working class. There were also other problems relating to housing. In the case of Africans the city authorities decided to solve that problem by allocating land in Slangspruit for a new township.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

Owing to a number of reasons, Pietermaritzburg was not counted among the main centres of resistance during the 1950s. However, there was resistance on a local scale against the Group Areas Act. The African National Congress and the Natal Indian Congress were responsible for political conscientisation and mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg at a low level. Resistance politics in Pietermaritzburg was undergoing changes during the 1950s. There were a few incidents of crowd resistance, such as the anti-pass campaign marches of 1956 and 1957 and the Sobantu riots of 1959. The last significant incident of resistance, which took place in Pietermaritzburg during this period, was the All-in Conference of March 1961 and the stay-at-home of May 1961. This also does not seem to have led to any significant mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg although it should be noted that the context in which occurred had changed. Against the background provided in this chapter, the next one will analyse the protest marches that took place in Pietermaritzburg in 1956 and 1957 as part of the anti-pass campaigns by women.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The Women's Anti-Pass Demonstrations in Pietermaritzburg, 1956 – 1957.**

"Whether you call it a reference book, an identity book or any other name, to us it is a pass and it means that homes will be broken up when women are arrested under the pass laws" (Memorandum from women to the Chief Native Commissioner, Pietermaritzburg, January 1957, Alan Paten Centre. Liberal Party Papers, PC 2/4/61-5 'Anti-Pass Campaigns')

In November 1956 and January 1957 crowds of women marched in the centre of Pietermaritzburg. They were marching in order to express their anger against the passes that were being extended to them. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse these two protest marches. These two incidents took place in a context of nation-wide protests by women against passes. Passes fuelled the anger of African women who had already been subjected to many sorts of oppression for a long time. During the mid-1950s women in Pietermaritzburg took to the streets to protest about the added oppression that they foresaw was going to accompany their subjection to pass laws. These protest marches which took place in Pietermaritzburg were about more than simply passes. They were part of the broader popular struggles that were spearheaded by various political and women's organisations to resist apartheid, as the discussion below will show. In line with the anti-apartheid marches in other areas, women of all races led these two protest marches, although the majority of the participants were Africans. This was understandable considering the fact that passes were aimed particularly at African women.

As the overall focus of my research is on mass mobilisation and resistance, this chapter seeks to explore these incidents in that light. These marches, which mainly involved women, will be analysed against the background of intense anti-apartheid mobilisation that was taking place nationally. My objective is to present a vivid picture of these marches and their significance in the broader struggle against apartheid. In addition, crowd behaviour and mobilisation in these marches will be important

to understand, particularly when one compares these events with the others which took place in the city in the later years. Before plunging into the case studies, I will sketch in some aspects relating to passes, women and the broader resistance context of the 1950s.

### **Why women versus passes? Background to the anti-pass campaigns of the 1950s.**

The pass campaigns of the 1950s were not the first ever to take place. In 1913 women in Bloemfontein resisted carrying the documents whose purpose was more or less similar to that of passes. As a result the struggle against passes remained a prime objective and proved effective in drawing mass support.<sup>1</sup> According to Julia Wells, there were two main events of resistance by African women to passes before the 1950s. The first event occurred in Bloemfontein in 1913 and the second one took place in Potchefstroom in 1930.<sup>2</sup> One noticeable thing about the loci of these campaigns was that they occurred in areas that had a strong Afrikaner character.

What were the passes and why were they resisted by those to whom they applied? Passes, in different forms, can be traced back to the early nineteenth century when they were used by the British in the Cape to control the movement of people and to co-ordinate the labour supply, particularly among the Khoisan.<sup>3</sup> Passes were not applied in a stringent way until the discovery of mining centres and the growth of urban areas. Hindson argues that passes served different purposes at different points in time.<sup>4</sup> According to him the pass system was used, at specific times, for the

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<sup>1</sup> H. Bernstein, *For their Triumphs and their Tears: Women in Apartheid South Africa* (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1985), p.85.

<sup>2</sup> J. C. Wells, *We Now Demand!: The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1993), pp. 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5; D. Hindson, *Pass Controls and the Urban African Proletariat* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), pp. 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

reasons of differentiating the labour power of Africans.<sup>5</sup> The pass controls functioned as mechanisms to limit the growth of the African urban population and to exclude those who were unemployed from the urban areas.

It was for these reasons that passes became the most hated documents in the lives of Africans. By the 1950s pass laws applied to African men, most of who formed part of migrant labour in the towns. There were, however, cases of informal controls on women in towns before the pass laws became a national policy during the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Many women, although supposed to be in the rural areas in order to supplement their husbands' meagre wages, had migrated to the towns during the urbanisation of the 1940s. During these years there had been an increase in urbanisation of African women due to the state's leniency towards the process, and to the collapse of subsistence life in the so-called reserves.

Even though women were not subjected to stringent pass controls they suffered degradation at seeing their menfolk being humiliated and it was still difficult for them to manoeuvre.<sup>7</sup> From the late 1940s to early 1950s their presence in the towns became an antithesis of the state's policy of rooting out African urbanisation as their stay meant permanence of African families.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand the state was in a relatively awkward position because it had not devised an effective tool of regulating the lives of women as was the case with men.

What were the causes of the increase in African urbanisation during the 1940s? There are a plethora of reasons, but the common one is that there were a combination of poverty in the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. x-xi.

<sup>6</sup> Information supplied by Tim Nuttall, 7 January 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs*, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> C. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London, Onyx, 1982), p.

reserves and the availability of opportunities in the urban areas during and after the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> During this time the ability of the reserves to continue functioning as a reproductive base for the migrant labour system had been almost depleted.<sup>10</sup> This coupled with severe land shortage in the rural areas led to the increase in the urban African population, as the requirements of the manufacturing industry induced growing numbers of women to leave the reserves for the towns.<sup>11</sup>

The demand for African labour was increasing in the towns, and many manufacturing industries preferred a stable urban proletariat to a migrant labour force.<sup>12</sup> However, this did not go unnoticed by the agricultural sector, which showed dissatisfaction with what the government was doing by allowing African labour a free-flow to the towns leaving them without an adequate labour supply.<sup>13</sup> This resulted in the reintroduction of passes in 1945. Despite their increase in numbers in towns, women formed an insignificant percentage in the manufacturing industry before the 1960s. This situation compounded women's economic and political vulnerability, as their exclusion from the mainstream industry meant they could not build workplace solidarity as their male counterparts could do.<sup>14</sup> The condition of women in both the rural and urban areas was exacerbated by the victory of the National Party in 1948.

After its election victory in 1948, the Nationalist Party decided to take some drastic steps in solving the problems of unregulated movement and labour, not only of women but also of Africans generally.<sup>15</sup> Lodge points out that the above situation was altered when, 'In 1948, with

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<sup>9</sup> Wells, *We Now Demand*, p. 8; Hindson, *Pass Controls*, pp. 53-55.

<sup>10</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, pp. 69 and 128.

<sup>11</sup> Hindson, *Pass Controls*, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p. 124.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124; Wells, *We Now Demand*, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Bernstein, *For their Triumphs*, pp. 16, 85 and 86.

<sup>15</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p. 73.

the advent of the Nationalist administration there were fresh compulsions to control the mobility of African women.<sup>16</sup> When the first move was made to introduce passes to women in 1950 it met with rebuff, and a groundswell of discontent by women led to many demonstrations in some towns.<sup>17</sup> Struggles against passes became a powerful rallying point for African women and for the broader militant African opposition. The government continued, however, with its policy of extending the pass system.

In 1952 the Natives (Abolition of Passes and the Co-ordination of Documents) Act was passed.<sup>18</sup> This law consolidated the existing pass laws and introduced a uniform passbook for Africans.<sup>19</sup> To strengthen the above-mentioned law, the government passed the Native Laws Amendment Act in the same year and made amendments to the Urban Areas Act thus providing definitions of who was allowed (and not allowed) to live and work in the urban areas.<sup>20</sup> As the new 'reference books' were extended to the entire African population, black women were now directly subject to these new restrictions.

In 1955 the Minister of Native Affairs, Hendrik Verwoerd, announced that from January 1956 African women were to be issued with passes.<sup>21</sup> This announcement was greeted by a wave of demonstrations by African women and one relatively big march took place in October 1955 in Pretoria. The campaign against passes intensified in 1956 when the government began issuing passes to sections of women that were least likely to protest, such as those in the rural areas,

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<sup>16</sup> Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1983), p. 140.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; Lodge, *Black Politics*, p. 140; *A Survey of Race Relations 1955-1956* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1956), p. 85; Hindson, *Pass Controls*, p. 61.

<sup>19</sup> Hindson, *Pass Controls*, p. 61.

<sup>20</sup> Wells, *We Now Demand*, p. 8; Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, *Organize or Starve! The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), p. 301; Bernstein, *For their Triumphs*, p. 87.

farm workers and government employees. Protest escalated throughout the country and in many towns women gathered together to burn their passes, their 'badges of slavery'.<sup>22</sup> These mass demonstrations by women culminated in a march that involved approximately 20 000 women from all over South Africa in Pretoria at the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956.<sup>23</sup> This march, organised jointly by the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) and the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), became the source of inspiration and a major celebrated event of resistance by South African women.<sup>24</sup>

Having sketched in some contextual aspects relating to the 1950s, we can now move to the Pietermaritzburg case studies. Although the above discussion was about the national context, its significance for the local situation cannot be downplayed. It appears that municipalities had some degree of flexibility in terms of the implementation of pass controls. For instance, by the 1950s, Pietermaritzburg and Durban had decided to introduce some controls on a voluntary basis.<sup>25</sup> In order to be able to gain access to certain services women had to be in possession of documents, which were regarded as permits. In Durban the permits were referred to as "letters of privilege". Pietermaritzburg had an indirect enforcement policy because even though permits were not compulsory, women were still required to produce the document as proof that they had the right to be in the urban area when they were applying for municipal housing or wanting help in finding employment.<sup>26</sup> The fact that documents were voluntary for women does not mean harsh legislation did not apply to Africans in Pietermaritzburg. It was amidst that situation that women

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 302; Lodge, *Black Politics*, p. 143; *A Survey of Race Relations*, p. 86.

<sup>23</sup> F. Meli, *A History of the ANC: South Africa Belongs to Us* (London, James Currey, 1988), p. 132; Wells, *We Now Demand*, p. 112; Lodge, *Black Politics*, p. 144; Walker, *Women and Resistance*, pp. 194-195; Bernstein, *For their Triumphs*, pp. 88-90.

<sup>24</sup> Meli, *A History of the ANC*, p. 129-132; *A Survey of Race Relations*, p. 86; Lodge, *Black Politics*, p. 144; Luckhardt and Wall, *Organise or Starve!*, pp. 301-302; Wells, *We Now Demand*, pp. 105-117; Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p. 189.

<sup>25</sup> *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1955-1956*, p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

staged two protest marches in the Pietermaritzburg city centre, in November 1956 and in January 1957.

### **The first protest march: November 1956**

This section seeks to investigate a public demonstration by women which took place in the Pietermaritzburg city centre in November 1956. Despite the fact that there is not yet adequate source material that can provide us with information relating to some of the specificities of the march, available evidence can give some insights as to what, how and why it happened. Newspapers do not give any insights into how the march was planned. However, the oral sources too were not very helpful in giving precise information regarding how the march was organised. Information as to how women were mobilised for the protest march was not easy to gather. My interviewees still remember that the marches took place and they were organised by different organisations, but the specific details about behind-the-scenes mobilisation are lacking.<sup>27</sup> Unlike in other areas where there was evidence of a strong local Women's League, which took over the role of mobilisation, in Pietermaritzburg it appears that this was not the case. My interviewees indicate that in many cases prominent women from outside Pietermaritzburg were invited to lead the marches. Archie Gumede said he remembers that it was mostly the wives of prominent ANC members who were responsible for mobilising local women.<sup>28</sup> Another interviewee also pointed out that during this time there was not a strong Women's League and that very few women were politically prominent in Pietermaritzburg.<sup>29</sup> According to Anton Xaba, it was not necessarily women who had to mobilise for passes, the local ANC men also participated in mobilising for the

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<sup>27</sup> Author's interviews with Ruth Lundie, August 1996, Archie Gumede, 2 October 1997 and Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>28</sup> Author's interview with Archie Gumede, 2 October 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Author's interview with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

anti-pass campaigns.<sup>30</sup> With information from both oral and written sources I will give a picture of the protest march which took place in Pietermaritzburg in 1956.

At about 1:45 p.m. on 28 November 1956, approximately 620 women marched in Pietermaritzburg.<sup>31</sup> They had assembled at Market Square before they proceeded up Longmarket Street. The leaders of this march were drawn from a wide range of organisations such as the ANCWL, the African Women's Association (AWA), the Durban and District Women's League (DDWL), the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), the Liberal Party (LP) and the Congress of Democrats (COD).<sup>32</sup> The spokesperson for the women was Viola Junod of the Liberal Party. This broad alliance shows that this demonstration was not a spontaneous march, but an event that was well co-ordinated by a conglomeration of anti-apartheid organisations. This was the trend during the 1950s, to have these organisations participating collectively in campaigns. Archie Gumede said he remembers that Chief Luthuli, who was President of the ANC from 1953, used to come to Pietermaritzburg to address NIC and Liberal Party meetings.<sup>33</sup>

The women formed a procession carrying banners and flags with slogans such as: "No Passbooks for women" and "Away with pass laws".<sup>34</sup> They also carried hundreds of copies of printed protests, signed by approximately 800 people, which they intended to deliver to the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) at his office at Braemer House.<sup>35</sup> Printed protests were also carried by the women during their famous march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in August.<sup>36</sup> On their way up Longmarket Street the Pietermaritzburg women were singing "*Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika*" and

<sup>30</sup> Author's interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>31</sup> *The Natal Daily News*, 29 November 1956; *The Natal Witness*, 29 November 1956; *Contact*, December 1956.

<sup>32</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 29 November 1956.

<sup>33</sup> Author's interview with Archie Gumede, 2 October 1997.

<sup>34</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 29 November 1956; *The Natal Daily News*, 29 November 1956.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

giving the thumbs-up sign.<sup>37</sup> According to the *Natal Daily News*, shortly after the procession had moved into Longmarket Street, a municipal traffic officer warned the leaders that they were contravening a by-law by marching in a procession without permission.<sup>38</sup> The procession immediately moved off the road onto the pavement and continued without interruption to the corner of Longmarket and Chapel Streets, where the office of the Chief Native Commissioner was located (see Map 2). The absence of permission seems to imply that when the march was organised the leaders adhered to the principles of defiance that were prevailing during that decade. Similarly, by moving off the road, the marchers were clinging on to the philosophy of peaceful protests because they did not want to disturb the traffic and cause unnecessary commotion. It has also been pointed out that along the route, the procession was followed by cars with plainclothes policemen and a police photographer who occasionally went out of the car and took photographs of the marchers.<sup>39</sup>

The march proceeded until the women reached Braemer House. There they stopped and formed up on the pavement. At this stage, and before any move could be made to enter the building, uniformed policemen under the command of Major K. C. van der Merwe appeared.<sup>40</sup> It has been argued that some of the police had come from Durban.<sup>41</sup> He asked Junod, who was at the head of the procession, whether the organisers had permission to march in Pietermaritzburg. She replied that they had considered the permission unnecessary as they had informed the Chief Native Commissioner about the procession. Van der Merwe then ordered his police to take up positions in order to flank the procession at intervals, while on the other hand Junod told the

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<sup>36</sup> Information supplied by Tim Nuttall, November 1997.

<sup>37</sup> *Natal Witness*, 29 November 1956.

<sup>38</sup> *Daily News*, 29 November 1956.

<sup>39</sup> *Natal Witness*, 29 November 1956.

<sup>40</sup> *The Natal Daily News*, 29 November 1956; *The Natal Witness*, 29 November 1956.

<sup>41</sup> Author's interview with Archie Gumede, 2 October 1997. The same point was confirmed by Ruth

women to be quiet as they were now under arrest.<sup>42</sup> Then a police-orchestrated procession started when the women marched towards the police station at Loop Street. The crowd of women who were singing and chanting and giving the thumbs-up signal marched off down Chapel Street and into Loop Street, to the police station.

At the police station the women were taken to a shed on the rear side of the building which acted as the courthouse (this shed was at the corner of Loop Street and Club Lane, where there is now a telephone exchange building). The next three hours were spent summoning court officials and lawyers.<sup>43</sup> The special court was eventually held at dusk at about 5.30 p.m. Among the accused were about eight Europeans, 30 Indians, five Coloureds, and the rest were Africans.<sup>44</sup> All were represented by lawyers and it was reported that one of them had dashed from Durban to represent his clients. The newspapers gave descriptions of what was happening in the courtroom even though they were ordered out shortly before court proceedings started. *The Daily News* reported:

'While the court sat, babies cried in their mothers arms and the soft murmur of voices made the whole proceedings inaudible beyond the first one or two rows. It was raining outside and the only light in the gloomy garage was provided by the lamps of a motor car which had been driven up to the entrance.'<sup>45</sup>

To add to the drama, an ordinary office table was used as a Bench which the Acting Chief Magistrate, Mr A. J. Serfontein, utilised. The accused sat among the parked police vehicles, which took up a great deal of space in the body of the court. The women continued to sing that afternoon and chanted slogans which echoed through the surrounding streets. Outside the police station there were groups of Africans who collected there to watch. The prosecutor, Mr C. J.

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Lundie during the same interview.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 29 November 1956.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> *Daily News*, 29 November 1956; *The Natal Witness*, 29 November 1956; This was also confirmed by Ruth Lundie.

Wilson, had made a draft charge, but he argued it was not ready to be put to the accused.<sup>46</sup> This prompted Mr Nathan, one of the lawyers, to ask on behalf of the defence team for an adjournment to 19 December. He further asked that the accused be released without bail as 'they were well-known members of six organisations' and would come to their trial.<sup>47</sup> According to one informant 'The magistrate realised that the net was too small and could not hold the big catch. That was why he decided to set them free'.<sup>48</sup> At 5.45 p.m. the hearing was adjourned and the accused were released.

The whole proceeding took approximately 10 minutes. The women had not accomplished their mission of handing in their printed protests to the authorities. Nevertheless the police had helped them by giving them attention and their event more publicity. The significance of this protest march does not only lie in the fact that it was, as the *Witness* reported, 'the first of its kind in Natal',<sup>49</sup> but also in that it was probably the first anti-apartheid event to take place during the 1950s which involved public demonstrations of mostly African people in the streets of Pietermaritzburg. There are no reports of large, mainly African, protesting crowds being formed in the city during the Defiance Campaign of 1952.

The presence of African women with their children shows that they were determined to show their anger and to suffer if need be. Perhaps taking their babies with them to the march was meant to show the authorities they not only came as protestors but also as mothers whose position was being jeopardised by the pass laws. Most probably they envisaged that being imprisoned with their babies would have elicited a huge outcry and sympathy for their cause. The reaction of the police

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<sup>46</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 29 November 1956; *The Natal Daily News*, 29 November 1956.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Author's interview with Archie Gumede, 2 October 1997.

<sup>49</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 29 November 1956.

is also notable in the sense that they did not baton-charge or shoot at the marchers but arrested them. It can be argued that baton-charging the crowd would have created more chaos and pandemonium in the city centre in view of the number of the demonstrators. It is unlikely that police would have reacted in that manner had the crowd consisted of males or not had white women in it. The presence of white women in the march is likely to have influenced the police response.<sup>50</sup> In this case it seems that the nature of the crowd influenced the response of the police. Having been unable to meet with the Chief Native Commissioner the women were not discouraged. The court did not sit again for the women's case on the scheduled date on 19 December because it was discovered that the women had been arrested under an obsolete municipal by-law, which applied only to Durban.<sup>51</sup> The women decided to stage another protest march in January.

### **The Second Protest March, January 1957**

On 29 January 1957, *The Natal Witness* reported that hundreds of women were going to stage a protest march in Pietermaritzburg against the issuing of pass books for African women.<sup>52</sup> They were going to follow the same route as the previous march, leaving Market Square at 8 a.m. and proceeding up Longmarket Street to the office of the Chief Native Commissioner at Braemer House. (see Map 2). There they would hand over their protest petition. About 200 women were expected to arrive by bus from Durban.<sup>53</sup> The total number that the organisers hoped to draw was

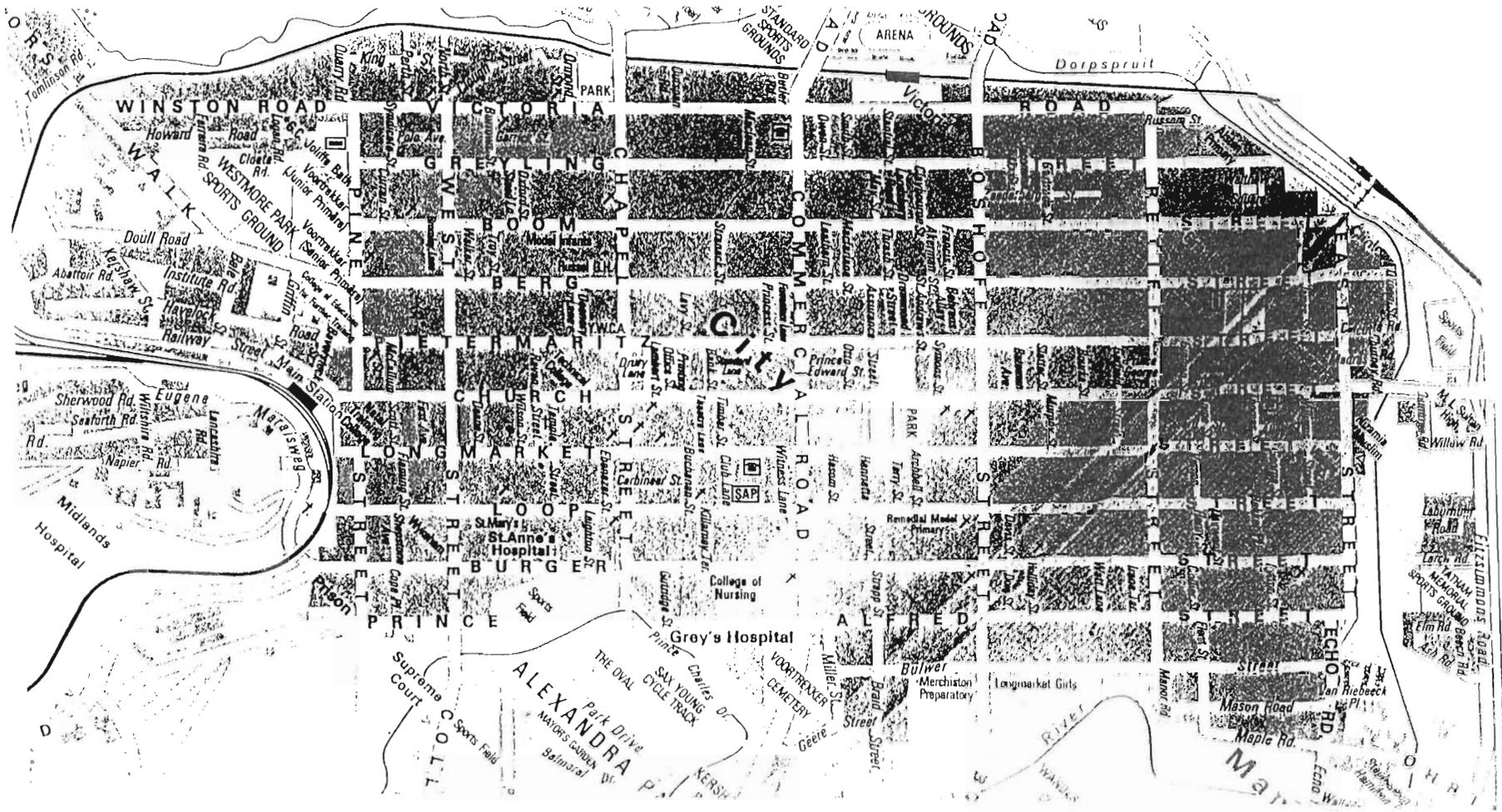
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<sup>50</sup> In his autobiography Joe Slovo (*Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography* (Randburg, Ravan, 1995) spells out clearly that during this period, white and black activists were not getting the same treatment. African activists could not expect any mercy from the authorities when they are imprisoned whereas their white counterparts were treated decently. Harassment by the security police, accommodation and food in jail and treatment in courts were determined by colour. White activists enjoyed many privileges that were denied to black activists.

<sup>51</sup> Author's interview with Ruth Lundie, 21 August 1996; Author's interview with Archie Gumede, 28 July 1997.

<sup>52</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 31 January 1957.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*



Map 2 Pietermaritzburg central business district (Adapted from R. Gordon)

about 600.<sup>54</sup> The arrangement was that a deputation of 12 women would present the Native Commissioner, Mr Turton, with a petition, which he had agreed to receive. About 8 European women were expected to take place in the parade, which had been sponsored by the LP, ANC, NIC, and COD. A meeting was planned to take place in Red Square in Retief Street after the delegation had returned from the Native Commissioner. The organisers had been granted permission for both the march and the meeting.<sup>55</sup> It seems from this petition that women were concerned about their position in the African family system that was in danger of being destroyed by the pass system. Their traditional roles as mothers and as central figures in families, when men were being constantly forced to become migrant labourers were also in jeopardy.

Again it has not been possible to get the exact details of the organisation of this second march. Some people, who were active during the 1950s, do not remember quite clearly how mobilisation happened. Even a person who said she participated in the march does not remember quite how the march was planned and organised.<sup>56</sup> The dearth of that kind of information makes it difficult to get a picture of how the people were mobilised. However, with the sources available one can put together a narrative of the protest march.

On 30 January a protest march took place in the streets of Pietermaritzburg.<sup>57</sup> At 8.30 am about 100 women marched from the Market Square carrying banners reading "Away with pass laws" and "No passes".<sup>58</sup> However, *Ilanga*, a Zulu-language newspaper, estimated the crowd to be more than 200.<sup>59</sup> It seems that there had been an agreement that the majority of the protestors should go down to Retief Street for a meeting. On their way to Braemer House, the marching

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> *UmAfrika*, 09 February 1957; *The Natal Witness*, 31 January 1957.

<sup>56</sup> Author's interview with V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>57</sup> *Contact*, February 1957.

protestors were singing Congress songs and there was the occasional chanting of the Congress slogan, "*Mayibuye i Afrika*".<sup>60</sup> Traffic police escorted the protestors in order to make sure that cars and onlookers did not disturb them. 'From the balconies and windows of the buildings along Longmarket Street black and white workers came out to watch and some of them had no idea what was happening'.<sup>61</sup>

The marchers reached Braemer House at 9 a.m. where a deputation of 12 left the main group and proceeded to Mr. Turton's office.<sup>62</sup> At the same time two men of the special branch kept a watch on the marchers. The same policemen later attended the protest meeting that was organised in Retief Street.<sup>63</sup> Except for the traffic officers and these two security men there was no strong police presence, as was the case with the first march. The memorandum that was submitted to Turton had been signed jointly by the representatives of the ANCWL, the NIC, SACPO, the LP and the COD, who, it was reported, represented African, Indian, coloured and white women.<sup>64</sup> What emanates from the press reports is that there was still a pre-occupation with racial categorisation, as these women were not seen as representing their organisations but their racial groups instead. This is understandable in the sense that during this period people in South Africa were being psychologically programmed to think in racial terms. Even the anti-apartheid organisations were still classified in racial terms even though some, such as the banned-South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Liberal Party, were moving towards non-racialism. However, Anton Xaba, who was active in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s argued that 'people

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<sup>58</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 31 January 1957.

<sup>59</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 02 February 1957.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 31 January 1957; *UmAfrika*, 09 February 1957.

<sup>63</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 31 January 1957.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

in racial or organisational terms. They saw themselves as one'.<sup>65</sup>

Part of the memorandum that was submitted to Turton read "We call upon the Minister of Native Affairs, Dr. H.F. Verwoerd, and through him the Nationalist Party Government, to rescind the decision to extend the system of passes to African women."<sup>66</sup> Reasons given for this request were that 'the passes discriminated against the Native section of the South African community and that passes for women would attack the foundation of Native society, the family'.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore the memorandum quoted speeches by Dr Verwoerd claiming that it was not the intention to proceed with the practical application for pass laws for African women. The first to speak to Burton was I. Shange, who was representing the ANC Women's League and who, according to the *Ilanga* reporter, said "We the women of South Africa are here to complain about the law which makes women carry passes. We represent thousands of women who were unable to come here today. We are saying away with the pass because it humiliates and breaks up families..."<sup>68</sup> She further explained that: "Families will be destroyed, children will be left uncared for when a women who is head of the household is imprisoned for a pass. Women will be humiliated by being stopped in the streets by police demanding passes. Women will be hindered by passes from travelling freely in our country of birth..."<sup>69</sup> She was followed by Viola Junod who began by complaining about the treatment they got during the previous march, and then went on to support the sentiments of the ANC as espoused in Shange's speech.<sup>70</sup> Next was H. van Doren of SACPO, who said that some Coloureds were being forced to carry passes in areas like Johannesburg because they were seen as not white enough. Then came R. Singh representing the NIC, who pointed out that a pass was not good even for men and was undesirable. The last to speak was V. Ponen of the COP, who

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<sup>65</sup> Author's interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>66</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 31 January 1957.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ilanga*, 02 February 1957.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*; *UmAfrika*, 9 February 1957.

concluded by saying, "A nation that enslaves another one cannot progress."<sup>71</sup> After listening to them, Mr Turton promised to send their petition to the Secretary for Native Affairs in Pretoria.<sup>72</sup> The deputation then left the Chief Native Commissioner's office and marched down Longmarket Street to the meeting that was taking place in Retief Street where a crowd of almost 500 people waited for them to report back.<sup>73</sup> (See Map 2)

At the meeting venue in Retief Street the back of a truck was used as a podium for the speakers to stand on. From there a militant woman, Mrs Ostrich, was delivering a firing speech. She spoke so furiously that the interpreter refused to translate some words, which, it was later said, were about white people's private parts.<sup>74</sup> Mrs F. Meer, who presided at the meeting, told the crowd that the significance of the protest was that European, Coloureds, Indians and Natives were standing together to form a united front against the pass laws.<sup>75</sup> Thereafter Viola Junod reported on the discussion with Turton. She argued 'The pass laws were used for political reasons. They were not used for identification purposes, but to control and regulate the community and to get at elements of the community who have committed no crime other than to protest against oppression.'<sup>76</sup> She went further to say "We gave Mr Turton, as an example, the case of the bus boycott in the Transvaal. In order to weaken the force of the boycotters, policemen are being stationed in locations at street corners, stopping all boycotters and asking them for their passes."<sup>77</sup>

There are no reports of any activities that happened except the reportbacks. It seems that it was those speeches by women that concluded the campaign of that day. One should point out that the

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<sup>71</sup> *Ilanga*, 2 February 1957.

<sup>72</sup> *Natal Witness*, 31 January 1957; *Ilanga*, 2 February 1957; *UmAfrika*, 9 February 1957.

<sup>73</sup> *Ilanga*, 2 February 1957; *Natal Witness*, 31 January 1957.

<sup>74</sup> Ruth Lundie's comments during an interview with Archie Gumede, 2 October 1997. Archie Gumede said Mrs Ostrich came from Cape Town to address women on that day.

<sup>75</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 31 January 1957

<sup>76</sup> *Natal Witness*, 31 January 1957.

January protest march and meeting by women received a different response from the police when compared to the first one. The conspicuous absence of the police showed that the police were not anticipating any trouble and trusted the organisers. However, it seems that this was the current trend in other areas as well. Wells argues that: ‘During the 1950s, the virtual absence of the police action against women protestors in the early stages only served to boost the women's morale and confidence.’<sup>78</sup> In Pietermaritzburg it seems also that the context had become different because now there was no talk of contravening a by-law and the request for permission was unnecessary. Staging a march and holding a meeting inside the city was now legal. However, it should be highlighted that Retief Street was on the edges of the town and not in the city centre. This southeastern part of the city that was the main locus of anti-apartheid mobilisation during the 1950s.<sup>79</sup> The crowds at both the protest march and the meeting were remarkably non-violent. In contrast to the first march, the women accomplished their mission of having an interview with the Chief Native Commissioner.

Although it was reported that some women had come from Durban, the majority of women were local. Women from other areas came not just to add to numbers, but because Pietermaritzburg, as a legislative capital of Natal, was the seat of the Chief Native Commissioner, whose office was given the task of ensuring that the issuing of passes was going smoothly. Women in Pietermaritzburg joined with the others in other centres in South Africa by marching against the passes that they perceived as a ploy by the government to tear the fabric of the African family system into shreds. Obviously the government saw the place of African women to be in rural production rather than in the productive sphere of the urban areas.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Wells, *We Now Demand*, p. 134.

<sup>79</sup> During author's interview with Anton Xaba he pointed out that some buildings in the vicinity of the Retief – Berg Street – East Street area are still standing and should be declared national monuments.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter sought to examine two protest marches by women that occurred in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s. These two case studies of protest marches were analysed as anti-apartheid events. To set the scene for the protest marches a section provided the context in which the marches took place and the position of women vis-à-vis passes. This section intended to provide background information in order to understand why women were protesting against the extension of passes. Although women were not subjected to pass controls before the 1950s, there were measures that were used to regulate their movement. The change of government in 1948 ushered in a new administration that was not prepared to tolerate the little freedom African women had. During the 1950s the Nationalist Party government gradually extended passes to African women. This led to countrywide protests, as African women perceived passes as attacking the lifeblood of African family life which women represented. These were not feminist protests but reactions to the destruction of the women's traditional roles as mothers and as wives.

The Pietermaritzburg marches occurred in that context of resistance to apartheid. Passes symbolised apartheid oppression and it was due to this that political organisations such as the ANC became involved in these marches. The wide range of anti-apartheid organisations that participated in the Pietermaritzburg women's marches shows that they were carefully planned and that they adhered to the principles of defiance and resistance. Crowds of women took resistance to the streets of Pietermaritzburg to challenge the authorities, for the first time during the 1950s. African women, including the Pietermaritzburg protestors, saw the extension of passes as a direct attack on the nucleus of African families where women had assumed key positions. The women

succeeded in taking crowds on to the streets of Pietermaritzburg, something that the Defiance Campaign of 1952 was unable to accomplish. The success of these marches probably influenced the staging of similar demonstrations in Pietermaritzburg in 1959. Women's militancy in the 1959 incidents, crowd behaviour, police reactions and the multiplicity of grievances and the subsequent riots at Sobantu showed that the socio-economic and political context had changed in both Pietermaritzburg and nationally since the mid-1950s.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **"A setback to the harmonious race relations in this charming city of scented flowers"<sup>1</sup>: The Pietermaritzburg riots of August 1959.**

In 1959 a series of popular revolts erupted in Natal, starting in Cato Manor in Durban and spreading out to other urban centres and rural areas. Relatively large protesting crowds were involved in these incidents. This chapter seeks to investigate one of these events, which took place in Pietermaritzburg in the context of countrywide disturbances. There was a demonstration by women followed by riots which occurred at Sobantu on the weekend of 14-16 August 1959. These events will be analysed against the background of national anti-apartheid political mobilisation. I will explore the issues that sparked off this crowd event in Pietermaritzburg, the kinds of organisation and crowd behaviour which occurred, and the protagonists in the conflict. Furthermore, I will examine the significance of these events in the politics of local anti-apartheid resistance. I will begin by exploring briefly the wider background to the demonstrations and the riots of 1959.

#### **Background to the Pietermaritzburg riots**

In June 1959 there were widespread riots and disturbances in the Durban African shantytown of Cato Manor. The fundamental causes were socio-economic; arising from such factors as poor living conditions and widespread poverty. But it was the exhaustive beer raids on illegal stills that provided the flashpoint. In areas that were controlled by the municipality it was illegal for Africans to brew their own beer. Instead they were obliged to purchase it from the municipal beerhalls. Proceeds from the beerhalls were then supposedly used for the development and administration of African township facilities in what was known as the Native Revenue Account.<sup>2</sup> There were, however, complex issues

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<sup>1</sup> Natal Archives Depot, Town Clerk Files, Vol. 4/4/2/340, Ref. 197/21, Letter from G. F. Khumalo to Town Clerk, 19 August 1959.

<sup>2</sup> J. Yawitch, 'Natal 1959: The Women's Protests', paper to *Conference on the History of Opposition in South Africa*, University of Witwatersrand, 1978. p. 206; L. K. Ladlau, 'The Cato Manor Riots, 1959-1960',

that precipitated the riots in Cato Manor and it was not just the question of beer brewing. The riots were also related to forced removals from the area.<sup>3</sup>

The Cato Manor incident was echoed in similar events in many towns and rural areas of Natal, with women being at the forefront. In the towns the municipal monopoly over the brewing of traditional beer (*utshwala*), police raids, influx control, low wages and unemployment appeared to be the main reasons for riots. Women accused their menfolk of spending their meagre incomes in beerhalls. In the rural areas discontent centred around land shortages, betterment schemes, cattle culling, cattle dipping, influx control and poverty which was perceived to be caused by the government's policies.<sup>4</sup> African women played an active role in the protests of the 1950s, and were vociferous in opposing their proposed subjection to the pass laws and the curtailment of informal sector activity.<sup>5</sup> Although the oppression was hard on both men and women there were differences in the way men and women were oppressed under apartheid laws.

The social positions of African women in both rural and urban areas explains why it was women who took the lead in confronting the government, even if this involved violence. Many African women in towns did not work in industry. For them involvement with urban industrial society was neither as humiliating nor as brutal as that experienced by their menfolk, and this may have conditioned their

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Unpublished MA Thesis, Durban University of Natal, 1975, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the Cato Manor story see I. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane our Home: African Shantytown Society in Cato Manor Farm, 1946-1960', Unpublished PhD Thesis, Durban, University of Natal, 1989; I. Edwards, 'Cato Manor, June 1959: Men, Women, Crowds, Violence, Politics and History', in P. Maylam and I. Edwards (eds), *The People's City: African life in Twentieth Century Durban* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1996), pp. 128-136.

<sup>4</sup> T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1983), p. 149; K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, *Organize or Starve: The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), p. 304; L. Kuper, 'Rights and Riots in Natal', *Africa South*, Volume 4, Number 2, January - March 1960, p. 21; *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1958-1959* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1959), pp. 142-144.

<sup>5</sup> P. O. Tichmann, 'African Worker Action in Durban, 1940-1960', Unpublished MA Thesis, Durban,

attitude to authority.<sup>6</sup> C. Walker pointed out that:

‘Women in the towns in South Africa during the 1950s were frustrated by the state of flux and uncertainty that surrounded the urban family, the position of women was often contradictory, their status confused. On the one hand, women tended to gain independence and authority. In many cases they were holding the strongest part in holding their families together, an important factor in explaining why the opposition of African women to the pass laws was always so deeply felt. On the other hand women's new position was not always sanctioned by society. In the eyes of the law they were still subordinate to men, while their right of residence in town was increasingly insecure, especially after 1952 when the tighter influx control measures were introduced.’<sup>7</sup>

About women in the rural areas she argued:

‘By the 1950s African women's reproductive function within the reserves was strained to near breaking point. By then it had become manifestly clear that the reserves were no longer functioning as viable subsistence bases for migrant workers.’<sup>8</sup>

It was this complex set of forces that led to the Natal riots of 1959. Following the Cato Manor incident there was a wave of urban and rural militancy from August 1959. Some of the towns and rural areas that were affected were Estcourt, Mooi River, kwa Dweshula in Port Shepstone, Harding, Ixopo, Camperdown and New Hanover.<sup>9</sup> While beerhalls seemed to have been the main targets in the urban areas, in the rural areas dipping tanks, land shortages, and stock culling were the main targets.

Karis and Carter argued:

‘In the impoverished rural areas where cattle culling was needed to reduce overstocking, the purpose of the scheme was not only misunderstood but also deeply resented because of the traditional importance of cattle and the historic shortage of land. Women resented a new policy in some areas of demanding rather than paying for their services in the community dipping of their cattle (to remove parasites). In the urban areas they objected to the prohibition on the traditional home brewing of beer, which was a source for many families, and demonstrated to force the closing of municipal beerhalls which drained their husbands incomes.’<sup>10</sup>

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University of Natal, 1983, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1983), p. 141.

<sup>7</sup> C. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London, Onyx, 1982), p. 149.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 146.

<sup>9</sup> Lodge, *Black Politics*, p. 195; *Race Relations Survey 1958-1959*, pp. 140-141; *The Natal Witness*, 17 August 1959; *The Daily News*, 17 August 1959; *UmAfrika*, 22 August 1959; *Ilanga lase Natal*, 22 August 1959.

<sup>10</sup> T. Karis, G. Carter and G. M. Gerhart (eds), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964*, Volume 3, (Stanford, Hoover, 1977), pp. 290-291.

Underlying all these grievances were low wages, unemployment and increasing taxation. In this hardship it seemed to have come to the women's perception that men were powerless to bring an end to this bondage. Therefore this militancy by women could be seen against the background of the men's vacillation in confronting apartheid. One can also argue that there was a perception that the reaction of the government to mass protest action by women would not be harsh as would have been the case with men. The other possibility is that most men were working and there was always the threat of dismissal, so the people who had the time to organise were often women.

The main cause of anger and frustration with the beerhalls was the fact that they were owned by the municipalities and that meant the banning of private home brewing, which the women in the urban areas saw as means of livelihood, more than a component of tradition. Beerhalls were seen as a threat to women's survival. Most women in towns were unemployed and they earned their income by brewing traditional beer and other illicit and more potent concoctions such as *shimiyane* and *gavine*, as well as spirits which became integral to the urban culture of the time.<sup>11</sup> The municipal monopoly of the brewing of what was known as 'kaffir beer' was legally sanctioned by the Native Beer Act of 1908.<sup>12</sup> One of the ridiculous aspects of the municipal monopoly of beer brewing was that

'Permits were given to the residents to brew a limited amount of beer, but that proved to be traps, because relatives, even a son, with whom a resident enjoyed his drink were arrested and charged a fine ranging from 2 to 10s. And since it is not Zulu custom for men to drink on their own, they go to the beerhalls, which take part of their very small earnings. On the way home they are picked up by the police and the little money they are bringing back for the children goes in fines.'<sup>13</sup>

Municipalities relied on profit from beer sales for the provision of services to Africans. Municipal Bantu Revenue Accounts were used to finance urban African housing, recreational facilities, and to

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<sup>11</sup> Ladlau, 'The Cato Manor Riots', pp. 34-36; Tichmann, 'African Worker Action', p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Tichmann, 'African Worker Action in Durban', p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> Kuper, 'Rights and Riots in Natal', p. 22.

subsidise welfare activities in the townships such as feeding schemes and milk funds.<sup>14</sup> This explains why municipalities regarded the sale of African beer (*utshwala*) as important.

The raids by police did not deter women from brewing, either for domestic consumption or for sale. African women continued to defy the law, brewing liquor at home to sell in order to earn a few pennies more and retain a traditional form of hospitality. Because of the meagre wages their men brought home, the women deeply resented the money they drank away in the beerhalls.<sup>15</sup> The municipal monopoly over the brewing and sale of beer was seen as not only restricting the cultural expression of the African working class it was also viewed as exacerbating the economic deprivations of African workers.<sup>16</sup> It was against this background of discontent about beer brewing, liquor raids removals, poverty, unemployment and influx control that African women revolted in Natal in 1959. Two months after the Cato Manor riots, Pietermaritzburg experienced what were officially referred to as "Native Disturbances". These events shared some of the features that had taken place in Durban's shantytown of Cato Manor.

These protest activities by women have been subject of scholarly analysis. Terms such as "Natal Disturbances", "Natal Riots", and the most common "Beerhall Riots" have been widely used to refer to the wave of protest by women in Natal. In my analysis I will attempt to go beyond just seeing them as disturbances or mere riots and will portray them as events of political mobilisation amidst the intensification of state repression on anti-apartheid opposition. Seeing the incidents as just "beerhall riots" conceals some important dynamics concerning the positions of African women and African communities during the late 1950s. The issue of liquor brewing and dipping tanks was important to a certain extent and helped to galvanise African women's opposition to the European administrators.

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<sup>14</sup> Ladlau, 'The Cato Manor Riots', p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, *Organize or Starve!*, p. 303.

<sup>16</sup> Tichmann, 'African Worker Action', p. 49.

### Women's demonstrations in Pietermaritzburg

Pietermaritzburg was not immune from the political turbulence that was taking place in Natal. African people in Pietermaritzburg were experiencing forms of oppression such as influx control, pass laws, unemployment, housing shortage and poverty. As was the case in Durban, the Pietermaritzburg municipality maintained the beer-brewing monopoly. The Native Administration Department purported to be concerned with improving race relations in Pietermaritzburg. In his annual reports, D. N. Bang, who was Manager<sup>17</sup> of the department, always commended the city for its excellent record on race relations. The disturbances of 1959 came as a shock to him and he reported:

‘In the middle of August, the city’s long and excellent record of harmonious race relations received a setback when large groups of women carried out demonstration at the Sutherland Police Station, outside the Bantu Men’s Hostel and the beer halls. Parties wielding sticks raided the beerhalls and then left pickets.’<sup>18</sup>

On 8 August 1959, at approximately 11 o'clock, a crowd of African women from Raisethorpe demonstrated at the Otto Street offices of the Bantu Administration Department.<sup>19</sup> Bang reported that they had been noisy at first but had calmed down when he had given them a hearing. The grievances included the lack of employment, low wages and influx control, and they demanded that the authorities reintroduce domestic brewing.<sup>20</sup> In view of the fact that the main grievance for women was the withdrawal of a previous facility for domestic brewing, he consulted the Bantu Affairs Commissioner and the Police who ‘had no objection to the old system of domestic brewing being reintroduced as an administrative arrangement’.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the meeting resolved that the system

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<sup>17</sup> The designation of the Native Administration Departments was changed to Bantu Administration Department early in the 1950s. The title of Manager was changed to Director. The dropping of the word ‘Native’ was on the basis that this word was unfavourable to its bearers and that the word ‘Bantu’ was ‘more acceptable to that group of non-white races’. However, the NAD in Pietermaritzburg seemed to have only effected these changes in 1959 because it is only from then that the new words were used in the files.

<sup>18</sup> *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1959-1960, p. 139.

<sup>19</sup> NAD, TC Files, Minute Book 25, NAC Minutes, 11 August 1959.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

of domestic brewing in Raisethorpe be reintroduced.

It can be argued that this incident was related to the Cato Manor riots in Durban when women were complaining about the prohibition of domestic brewing. Furthermore, the nature of their grievances seems to suggest that the beer issue was interwoven with other problems which affected African people generally in the urban areas, and not only women. The response of the Bantu Administration Department implies that they were trying hard to avoid the simmering confrontation and get rid of anything which might tarnish the department's image in the eyes of the African population. However, even this promising gesture was too late to avoid the popular resistance which took the form of a protest march and a revolt on the weekend of 14-16 August 1959.

On Friday 14 August, after the demonstration by women from Raisethorpe, a crowd of African women estimated at between 250 and 300 congregated in Pietermaritzburg to see the Chief Native Commissioner. However, before going to the Chief Native Commissioner's office they started by staging a protest at the Sutherlands Police Station in Plessislaer, Edendale, where about 30 of their colleagues were being detained, allegedly for carrying dangerous weapons.<sup>22</sup> The weapons that the women were carrying were clubs and sticks. Though both oral and written sources do not provide a clear picture as to how this event was organised, and its pattern, it seems that women from Pietermaritzburg and the surrounding areas and from Durban had planned to send their grievances to the Chief Native Commissioner on that day. Pietermaritzburg was the appropriate meeting place for these women because, as the administrative capital of Natal, it was where the office of the Chief Native Commissioner was situated.

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<sup>22</sup> *Natal Witness*, 15 August 1959; *Daily News* 15 August 1959; *UmAfrika*, 22 August 1959; *Ilanga*, 22 August 1959; D. R. Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness and Conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940-1987: The case of

The crowd at Edendale involved women from both urban and rural areas around the city. Some came from as far as Durban and Camperdown. It was reported in one newspaper that before this incident 'the Natives of Pietermaritzburg were whispering of trouble looming ahead'.<sup>23</sup> According to newspaper reports the whole saga began during the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, when a busload of women arrived at Edendale from Table Mountain to meet the local women and to march together to the Chief Native Commissioner's office. On their way, about 30 of them were arrested for carrying dangerous weapons. The other 200 waited for them at the Sutherlands Police Station. The *Natal Daily News* reported that 'when the two busloads of women drove past the Ohrtmann Road beehall on their way to Edendale, the men rushed outside and cheered them on. At East Street the women commandeered an Indian bus and ordered the driver to take them to Edendale. They threatened to burn the bus and he complied.'<sup>24</sup> The *Ilanga lase Natal*, a Zulu-medium newspaper, said:

'The story began when women from Mkhambathini (Table Mountain) approached the East Street Men's Hostel. Those who were drinking at the Berg Street beerhall said "*Nakho phela sebefikile omame!*" (Look, there come the women!). Then they started running away. Seeing that women were not coming to the beerhall they resumed their drinking.'<sup>25</sup>

While one group of women was waiting at the police station in Edendale, five busloads of women arrived near Sobantu Village, bringing reinforcements. About 30 members of this crowd were estimated to have come from Durban.<sup>26</sup>

The women filtered into town, finally coming together at the Retief Street beerhall.<sup>27</sup> However, the *Natal Witness* does not mention that there were five buses that arrived.<sup>28</sup> In his report Bang pointed out that:

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the BTR Sarmcol workers', Unpublished M SocSc Thesis, Durban, University of Natal, 1987, p. 160.

<sup>23</sup> *Daily News*, 17 August 1959.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily News*, 15 August 1959.

<sup>25</sup> *Ilanga*, 29 August 1959. (author's translation).

<sup>26</sup> *Daily News*, 15 August 1959.

<sup>27</sup> *Daily News*, 15 August 1959; *UmAfrika*, 22 August 1959.

'The trouble started at 8.30 on the morning of Friday 14th August, when a busload of angry women congregated outside the East Street Native Men's Hostel. They were first addressed by a high-ranking African National Congress official, Archibald Gumede, who appeared to be able to calm down the shouting women. An unknown bearded European of small stature also addressed the women by saying they must drop their sticks before coming to consult him. After they had gone, a junior A. N. C. official, Kunene, who lives at the hostel, worked the women up to frenzy by his shouting. They then left for Edendale.'<sup>29</sup>

It appears that the ANC was involved in the organisation of this demonstration by women. The picture about the ANC's role is not very clear because even Archie Gumede, who is said to have addressed women on this day, does not now remember doing that.<sup>30</sup> However, Mrs Linah Mabhida, a participant in one of the attacks on beerhalls, asserts that Archie Gumede did indeed address them.<sup>31</sup>

The women who had been addressed by ANC officials went to the Sutherlands Police Station to join the others who were already there. (see Maps 1 and 2) At the police station, where the women were waiting, they sat quietly and waited for the representative of the Bantu Affairs Department to speak to them. Heavily armed police under Major O. Kjelvei, surrounded them.<sup>32</sup> The Additional Native Commissioner, Mr Otte, went to Sutherlands Police Station to listen to women's grievances. He asked them to elect representatives to meet with the Native Commissioner and present their problems. However, the women were sullen and uncompromising. Their main grievance was that their husbands were not giving them enough money. Other grievances stated were the enfeeblement of their husbands by the government, poverty, influx control, unemployment, and increased taxation. The Zulu word they used for enfeeblement or emasculation was *ukuthenwa*, which can be translated literally as meaning castration.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the women saw themselves as taking over from the men, who had been rendered powerless. The word *ukuthenwa* has a symbolic importance because it is

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<sup>28</sup> *Natal Witness*, 15 August 1959.

<sup>29</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Bang's confidential report to TC, 20 August 1959.

<sup>30</sup> Author's interview with Archie Gumede, Clermont, 2 October 1997.

<sup>31</sup> Author's interview with Mrs Linah Mabhida, Slangspruit, 20 November 1997.

<sup>32</sup> *Natal Witness*, 15 August 1959; *Ilanga*, 22 August 1959; *UmAfrika*, 22 August 1959.

<sup>33</sup> *Ilanga*, 29 August 1959.

commonly believed that a man's private parts, especially testicles, are his source of power. A woman from New Hanover, who acted as their spokesperson was told "you have come from an area where a number of dipping tanks have been destroyed. Why do you have to come here to stir up the people?"<sup>34</sup> This statement reflects the official viewpoint of the local authorities of the time that local 'natives' were quiet and that it was the agitators who were responsible for unrest. The other dimension that one can discern from the women's action is that this was not just an urban affair, but it embraced resistance against problems that affected both urban and rural communities. There were close links in daily and family experiences between the urban and rural communities.

After speaking to Mr Otte at Sutherlands, the women boarded buses to town with the intention of speaking directly with the Chief Native Commissioner. Wielding sticks, women gathered at an open space next to the Ematsheni beerhall in Retief Street to await others that were still due to arrive by bus. (see Map 2) Their meeting point was going to be the taxi rank next to Matsheni beerhall and Native Market in Retief Street.<sup>35</sup> When one police officer asked the women why they were carrying sticks they told him that they had agreed that they would recognise each other in that way.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile women poured into the paddock where others were already waiting.<sup>37</sup> A call for police assistance came from the beerhall and 56 policemen arrived, led by the District Commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel B. C. Geldenhuys. In the paddock the women danced and sang in a circle.<sup>38</sup> Suddenly they rushed straight towards the police who were stationed between them and the beerhall. The police charged and the screaming women scattered in all directions. Basing its report on what it claimed to be eyewitness sources, an *Ilanga* reporter wrote:

<sup>34</sup> *Natal Witness*, 25 August 1959.

<sup>35</sup> *Ilanga*, 29 August 1959; *Daily News*, 15 August 1959; *Natal Witness*, 15 August 1959; *UmAfrika*, 22 August 1959.

<sup>36</sup> *Ilanga*, 29 August 1959.

<sup>37</sup> It has not been possible to find the exact estimate of the number of women who gathered in Retief Street, but the size of the police presence suggests it was a large crowd.

‘While women were still waiting for others at a park in Retief Street so that they could go and see the Native Commissioner [*Ndabazabantu*] in Pietermaritz Street the police arrived. When their Commandant arrived he blew the whistle without even speaking to women to hear why they were there. At that time the baton charge began. The police were beating indiscriminately, including the onlookers. Women, men and children were scattered.’<sup>39</sup> During that melee two women were injured. Phylis Mkhize of Ashdown location was hurt when she ran into a wire fence, while Victoria Xaba was beaten on the hand with a butt of a gun.<sup>40</sup> Nine policemen were stoned and three African men were slightly injured.<sup>41</sup> According to Anton Xaba:

‘It was not only women who were in these demonstrations. We as men went there as well. We were dressing like women. We attacked the beerhalls and those drinking in there used to say that they were shocked that the women could use sticks in that way. In the rural areas we went around filling the dipping tanks with stones at night. During the day women would come and demonstrate and do more damage’.<sup>42</sup>

Mrs Linah Mabhida, who was active in women’s politics in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s, corroborated this. She is the wife of the late Moses Mabhida, who was working together with Archie Gumede and Harry Gwala to mobilise the people in Pietermaritzburg. Describing one incident of beerhall attacks Mrs Mabhida said:

‘We had been having meetings to talk about the beerhalls. Women had been saying that men should not go and drink their money in the beerhalls. Instead they must bring the money home. If they want *utshwala*, they must buy *imithombo* (maize and sorghum ingredients) so that their wives would prepare *utshwala* for them. One Friday we had a meeting and it was agreed that beerhalls should be boycotted. The following day we went to town with women from Durban and other areas. We met with Archie Gumede who told us we should not attack the beerhall in East Street as the police were watching on us. Women went to stand in the open space next to Dr Motala’s surgery. Myself, Mrs Cebekhulu and three other women from Machibise, decided to stay behind. We went into the beerhall and pretended to be hungry and wanting to buy food. We hid our sticks so that people inside the beerhall could not see. The beerhall was full. One woman from Machibise kicked the door and we entered the bar. We saw some young men who were standing leaning on the wall. One of them was Anton Xaba and others whom we knew. Seeing them gave us courage and we started beating the men inside in the beerhall. There were loud cries and Anton and his friends helped also. They too had their sticks, which they had hidden. We started to beat the men and they all ran out. We beat them with sticks and with beer pots, which were on of the tables. One old man died during that stampede. When the police came after hearing the commotion,

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<sup>38</sup> *Daily News*, 15 August 1959; *UmAfrika*, 22 August 1959.

<sup>39</sup> *Ilanga*, 29 August 1959.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Daily News*, 15 August 1959.

<sup>42</sup> Author’s interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

Anton and his friends pretended to be crying and injured. They hid their sticks. We then went out quietly with our clothes dirty with beer. We went straight to Archie Gumede who was shocked with what we had done. He told us to take off our clothes and they gave us new ones. He told me to leave immediately because I was known to the police. Mrs Cebekhulu and I then left using the small lanes. We did not use the bus and we went straight eastward until we reached Prince Alfred Street. We walked up Prince Alfred and then joined College Road. Then we took Topham Road until we reached Slangspruit.<sup>43</sup>

Even the use of force by the police did not diminish the women's determination as they congregated again after being baton-charged. Lieutenant-Colonel Geldenhuys said that there were about 75 women in the precincts of the beerhall and the rest were chanting on a vacant plot nearby. After the initial baton-charge the streets were cleared of 'Native onlookers'. Women went into the beerhall from the rear and upset some of the tables with beer mugs on them.<sup>44</sup> After the baton-charge, according to Bang,

'The women were apparently dispersed but they had actually only infiltrated into the crowd of bystanders. Patrons returned to the beerhall, but just before 5 p.m. women stormed the beerhall from the unguarded side entrance, turned the tables over and in a few seconds had dispersed the patrons and disappeared into the crowds. The beerhall was then closed and the police warned for possible arson'.<sup>45</sup>

While the police were regrouping in the road after dispersing the women, they were pelted with stones and bottles through the window of one of the buildings where the police stood.<sup>46</sup> Reinforcements were quickly sent to the beerhall and the streets were cleared again. Subsequently two people were arrested; one Indian male who was alleged to have been involved in stoning the police and an African male who was arrested for obstruction.<sup>47</sup>

The demonstration continued until the evening when women started to board buses back home. In the

<sup>43</sup> Author's interview with Mrs Linah Mabhida, 20 November 1997.

<sup>44</sup> *Natal Witness* 15 August 1959.

<sup>45</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Confidential report from Bang to TC, 20 August 1959; Peel, 'Sobantu Village', p. 134.

<sup>46</sup> *UmAfrika*, 22 August 1959; Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness', p. 160.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

evening, according to one newspaper report, 'the last busload of women returned to their homes in Durban and the country districts and the city settled down to a quiet night'.<sup>48</sup> However, it seems that the situation was not as quiet as the report claims because on the same evening, just before 8 p.m. J. J. Roestaf was seriously injured when a half brick hit him on the head while he was walking past the Retief Street beerhall, which had been the main scene of the day's conflict.<sup>49</sup>

On the following day, Saturday 15 August, the situation was still tense and the Retief Street beerhall was closed. The atmosphere was still volatile at the Berg Street beerhall when an obviously hostile group of men and women assembled outside the entrances.<sup>50</sup> Apparently, would-be patrons were intimidated by this action. Business continued at other beerhalls in Ohrtmann and Havelock roads. However, in the case of the Havelock Road beerhall, Bang received a telephone call at 1.45 p.m. He reported:

'Before I got there I saw women wielding sticks making their way from the beerhall. The police then arrived but they were too late. The women had cleared the beer hall and had thrown away their sticks. The hall was then closed, and the Police briefed to watch entrances and be on the look out in case of any attempts being made to burn property.'<sup>51</sup>

How then can this set of events be explained? These can be seen as an important moments of resistance by women against government policies. The Saturday incidents at beerhalls were surely a continuation of the Friday's protest demonstrations. It appears that there was some co-ordination; these were not just spontaneous outbreaks. This demonstration by women was an incident of mass mobilisation, which involved relatively large crowds. The extent of the women's participation was remarkable as well as their determination to speak for themselves. Protesting at beer halls was consistent with the trend in other areas such as Cato Manor where beerhalls had been attacked.

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<sup>48</sup> *Daily News*, 15 August 1959.

<sup>49</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 17 August 1959.

<sup>50</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214 Bang to TC, 20 August 1959.

Beerhalls came to symbolise the whole structure of municipal control.<sup>52</sup> Apparently, the issue of beer brewing was just one of several problems. Women were frustrated by influx control and the pass laws that had began to bear heavily on them. In the insecurity of town life, and as a result of the migrant labour system, the stable core of the family was the mother and her children.<sup>53</sup>

One can also see these events as contributing to the emerging militancy of the broader struggle for liberation and to assertions of the position of women in the struggle against apartheid. One significant aspect of this was that the crowds went to the city centre rather than being confined to the African residential areas. The women used the space available next to the beer halls as their venue of mass mobilisation. The proximity of the taxi rank to both the vacant plots of land and the beerhall helped women find a place where crowds could easily amass. Co-incidentally, what they viewed as the main source of their suffering was just in front of them.

Pietermaritzburg provided a convenient meeting place for both rural and urban women, as it was where the Chief Native Commissioner was situated. There was a strong likelihood that this action of protest and defiance had an influence on what occurred at Sobantu Village the following day. The Sobantu revolt was different in that it involved both men and women and, unlike the women's demonstrations elsewhere, this event involved a small community from the same township and was related to local problems that the residents experienced. The Sobantu incident also differed from the women's demonstrations in the targets identified by the crowd and in the amount of damage caused.

Before plunging into an examination of the Sobantu incident, I will begin by outlining Sobantu's

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.; See also Peel, 'Sobantu Village', p. 134.

<sup>52</sup> Peel, 'Sobantu Village', p. 135; See also P. du Plooy, 'African Reaction to the Beerhalls', in J. Laband and R. Haswell (eds), *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>53</sup> Kuper, 'Rights and Riots', p. 25.

economic and socio-political context before and during the 1950s. The intention is not to present a detailed history of Sobantu Village, but to highlight some of the important aspects that might have led to the eruption of violence on the weekend of 14-16 August 1959.

### **Sobantu: A “Model Village”**

Sobantu Village was built in 1928 in order to accommodate Africans, particularly lower middle class Africans, who had clerical jobs in town.<sup>54</sup> The village was situated on the southeastern side of Pietermaritzburg and was the first municipal housing provided for Africans in the city of Pietermaritzburg.<sup>55</sup> (see Map 3) Interestingly, it was around this time that the Durban City Council built Lamontville Township in order to ‘offer differential accommodation in order to co-opt Durban’s African petty bourgeoisie and to raise this class above the ranks of the working class. From the outset, the municipal officials made it clear that all applications for residing in the township would be “carefully scrutinised” to ensure that the “right type of native” was selected, and occupancy was “subject to proper behaviour”.<sup>56</sup> It was also hoped that the establishment of Sobantu would offer a solution to the problem of unorganised settlement around the edges and in the backyards of Pietermaritzburg.<sup>57</sup> From its establishment the place had been referred to as the Native Village, but in

<sup>54</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/74, Ref. 140/1, Native Housing, pp. 1-3; For a detailed account on the history of Sobantu Village see H. Peel, ‘Sobantu Village: An Administrative History of a Pietermaritzburg Township, 1924-1959’, Unpublished BA Honours Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1987; A Xaba’s address to the students of the School of Environment and Development, University of Natal, at Sobantu hall, 15 July 1997.

<sup>55</sup> R. Gordon, *The Place of the Elephant: A History of Pietermaritzburg* (Shuter and Shooter, 1981), p. 136.

<sup>56</sup> L. Torr, ‘Lamontville – Durban’s “Model Village”: The Realities of Township Life, 1931-1960’, in *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, Volume X, 1987, pp. 103 and 107.

<sup>57</sup> Author’s interview with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997; ‘The Environmental and Development Challenges of Sobantu Village’, Introduction prepared by the University of Natal’s School of Environment and Development for Coursework examinations, a component of which was a project on Sobantu.

1947 it was renamed Sobantu to honour Bishop W. Colenso, on whose farm it was built.<sup>58</sup> However, one resident of Sobantu claimed that there was a beautiful princess who was the daughter of the chief of Mpumuza, a section of the Zondi chiefdom, whose name was Sobantu, and it is likely that the name was in her honour.<sup>59</sup>

Sobantu Village was situated within a short walking distance from the white residential area of Bishopstowe and from the city's central business district (see Map 3). The first houses that were built were in appalling conditions, and according to one resident:

‘The houses were very bad and small. I wonder how whites thought about us that they could put us in such houses. They were also small. Perhaps it is because they thought we were used to living in beehive huts (*emaqhugwaneni*). However, those huts were neat.’<sup>60</sup>

R. Gordon points out that originally the facilities were meagre.<sup>61</sup> The women fetched water from stand taps in the streets and sewerage was collected through a bucket system. The first houses had floors smeared with cow dung, and the washing facilities were in a communal bathroom. Residents were allowed to brew four gallons of beer per week on a permit system.<sup>62</sup> Sobantu grew rapidly and more houses were built after the original 100 houses were finished. In 1954, however, the expansion of Sobantu was halted. By this time there were about 3000 people living in 545 houses, with more already under construction.<sup>63</sup> The last houses were completed in 1957, bringing Sobantu's final complement to 1091.<sup>64</sup> The halting of expansion worsened the housing crisis as the community of

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<sup>58</sup> S. W. Kirkpatrick, ‘Sobantu Planning Initiative’ (Final Draft) Prepared for KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Administration (May 1994), p. 11; Peel, ‘Sobantu Village’, in J. Laband and R. Haswell (eds), *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988: A new portrait of an African City* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1988), p. 82; A. Xaba and E. Ntshangase's talks during the field examination for Masters students of the School of Environment and Development at the Sobantu Community Hall, 15 July 1997.

<sup>59</sup> Anton Xaba's address to the students of the School of Environment and Development, 15 July 1997.

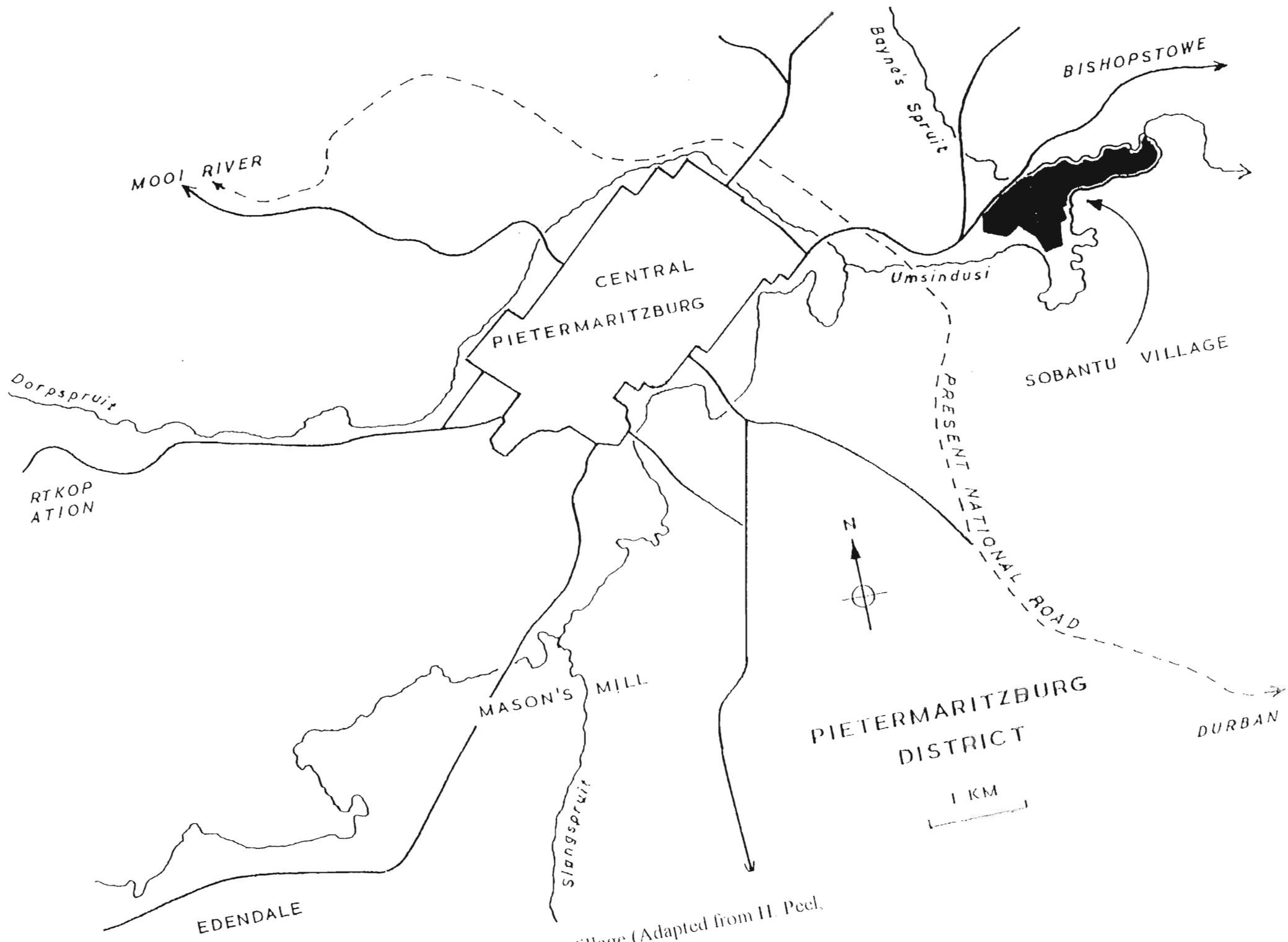
<sup>60</sup> Author's interview with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>61</sup> Gordon, *The Place of the Elephant*, p. 137.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Seethal, ‘Civic Organisations’, p. 203.

<sup>64</sup> Peel, ‘Sobantu Village’, p. 128.



Map 3. Pietermaritzburg district highlighting Sobantu Village (Adapted from H. Peel,

Sobantu was growing.

For many years Sobantu was the only formal African residential area within the Pietermaritzburg borough and, as such, it was controlled by the City Council.<sup>65</sup> As it was pointed out in Chapter 2, Edendale was not included within the boundary of the Pietermaritzburg municipality. In 1954 the Minister of Native Affairs, Dr H. F. Verwoerd, earmarked Sobantu Village for removal, as it was not sited in accordance with the Group Areas Act.<sup>66</sup> It was not only the minister's disapproval that cast a dark shadow over Sobantu's future; the nearby white property owners of Bishopstowe also opposed Sobantu's existence. Ironically, it was the ratepayers from the same area who had originally voted for the establishment of Sobantu at the Bishopstowe site instead of the one at Mason's Mill.<sup>67</sup> It should be pointed out that during the 1950s the control of African townships was increasingly centralised by the Department of Bantu Affairs in Pretoria. The threat of removal came during the mid-1950s and made it impossible for any expansion to take place. The future of Sobantu Village looked bleak and in 1956 the Pietermaritzburg City Council reported:

‘The City Council is faced with the problem of finding suitable land to establish its future Native location arising from the refusal of the Minister of Native Affairs to allow the extension of the existing Sobantu Native Village.’<sup>68</sup>

The proposal to remove Sobantu was opposed by the City Council as well as the Liberal party and the African National Congress.<sup>69</sup> Sobantu was regarded as a “model village” and was held in high esteem by the Pietermaritzburg municipality and by different local organisations.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 82.

<sup>66</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/74, Refs. 140/1 and 140/110, Sobantu Village: Proposed removal of inhabitants, Letter from Town Clerk to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 6 November 1956; Ref. 140/1, Chief Native Commissioner's Memo 28/12E, Second Location for Pietermaritzburg: Points for discussion on 30.07.57; Native Housing and the future of Sobantu Village', *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook* 1955-1956, p. 32.

<sup>67</sup> Peel, 'Sobantu Village'

<sup>68</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/74, Ref. 140/1, Native Housing at Edendale, Joint Confidential Publication of the City Council and the Local Health Commission.

<sup>69</sup> Peel, 'Sobantu Village', pp. 113-114.

The Pietermaritzburg City Council was responsible for the administration of Sobantu Village. Two officials were responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the township, and these were the superintendent and his assistant. This was the usual phenomenon in other townships. According to Torr 'The concept of a "model village" or township implies more than a placated and self-contained community with a permanent stake in an urban area. Control and repression of political activity were central to the administration of the model township.'<sup>70</sup> Rex argued:

'In these "locations", a location superintendent responsible for the local authority ruled with absolute authority aided by his specially recruited municipal police force concerned with implementing dozens of laws which in his everyday life the migrant, his wife and his children might break. In the location a continuous programme of pass raids, liquor raids and other forms of harassment creates a total insecurity which effectively prevents any but completely clandestine political organisation.'<sup>71</sup>

The superintendents of Sobantu Village during the 1950s were Mr T. W. McAllister and from 1958, his former assistant, Mr S. W. D. St. John Ward, took over. Ward had been a policeman before and like other 'location superintendents, he had his municipal police force'. His assistant was R. V. Taylor. These white officials lived with their families in Sobantu. It has been argued that the relationship of the villagers with the municipality as a whole depended largely on the degree of rapport between the residents and the superintendent, as he was the official with whom they were in direct and daily contact.<sup>72</sup> The residents of Sobantu used to complain about Ward's attitude.

According to one resident:

'The municipal police were very active and coercive during his time. They used to raid houses at night looking for people without permits. He also victimised many widows in Sobantu by ordering them to be evicted from Sobantu or forcing them to register their houses under their eldest sons. Many women suffered as a result of his actions. He tried to do the same thing to me after the death of my husband but he failed. He had a personal vendetta against my husband because he used to challenge him at meetings. He was also responsible for the taking of many unemployed young men to work in the potato farms. His

<sup>70</sup> L. Torr, 'Lamontville – Durban's "model village"' p. 105.

<sup>71</sup> J. Rex, "The Compound, in the Reserve and the Urban Location", quoted from Torr, 'Lamontville – Durban's "model village"', p. 105; (The Zulu word by which the superintendents were known was *Nsumpa*)

<sup>72</sup> Peel, 'Sobantu Village', p. 132.

limited knowledge of Zulu made him utter words which were insulting and derogatory, such as “*azihambe ziyogana*”, meaning widows must get married to local men if they want to remain in Sobantu. If you were summoned to his office you knew that you were going to be humiliated. He made people sit in a row and disclosed a person’s private affairs in front of the others.<sup>73</sup>

It is clear that Ward was a typical superintendent of the time. His duty was to implement municipal policies and he did that with vigour and without consideration of the feelings of the people.

According to Xaba, ‘Ward was a very cruel person. The residents of Sobantu used to call him “*Ngqavini*”, after there was a man who was hanged after killing many women and scaring the whole of Natal during the 1950s. Because of his cruelty the people of Sobantu named him after that killer’.<sup>74</sup>

Although Ward was effective in reducing large arrears in rentals, his method of calling tenants to account at 4 a.m. could not have improved his popularity or that of the City Council.<sup>75</sup>

The body that represented the residents of Sobantu was the Sobantu Advisory Board, but it is questionable if its members enjoyed the support of the residents. During the late 1950s the Board members were S. T. Khumalo, T. J. Mkhize, J. M. Sikhosana, S. S. Zondi, P. J. Ngcobo and L. B. Msimang.<sup>76</sup> According to one resident, members of the Board were sincere about representation and some of them were very active in the African National Congress.<sup>77</sup> Regrettably the Advisory Board files in the State Archives do not give biographical information about its members, as this would have helped in understanding the profiles of the Board members. Mr L. B. Msimang is said to have come from to Sobantu during the 1950s. He was a senior clerk in the Bantu Administration Department. He was originally from Edendale and within a year of his stay in Sobantu, he was made a member of the

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<sup>73</sup> Author’s interview with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997. The *zi* in Ward’s statements was derogatory because he should have used *aba*. In this case *zi* could refer to animals. He occasionally used *zi* when referring to people instead of *aba*.

<sup>74</sup> Author’s interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>75</sup> Peel, ‘Sobantu Village’, p. 133.

<sup>76</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/340, Ref. 198/3, Minutes of the Sobantu Advisory Board Meetings.

<sup>77</sup> Author’s interview with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997. (She is the wife of the late Mr J. M. Sikhosana, a Board member during the 1950s.)

Board and that made the people of Sobantu very uncomfortable.<sup>78</sup> Members of the Board used to stay in office for a long time. It has been argued that this was due to the fact that very few residents took an interest in choosing their official representatives.<sup>79</sup>

An opposition group known as the Sobantu Residents Association or Isolomuzi Vigilant Association had been formed during the 1940s. It consisted of people such as G. Khumalo, A. Mngadi, L. Mtshali, K. Tlale and H. Dladla. This group accused the Advisory Board of being unaccountable to the residents. This situation continued during the 1950s and numerous letters were written by the Association to the City Council complaining about the Advisory Board, which they accused of being an illegitimate and unrepresentative structure. The prominent figure in the Isolomuzi was Godfrey Khumalo, who used to write letters to the Town Clerk and the Chief Native Commissioner in which he complained about poor municipal administration in Sobantu and he saw himself as the “chief” of Sobantu.<sup>80</sup> He is said to have gone to meetings that were called by the Board at Sobantu Hall to stage a one-man opposition.<sup>81</sup> One resident said he remembers “Malan” (Khumalo’s nickname) who used to stand for the people of Sobantu and fight the corporation.<sup>82</sup> To him Khumalo was a hero who was voicing the concerns of the people of Sobantu Village. Paul la Hausse, in his analysis of people such as Elias Khuzwayo, H. C. Sibisi, S. S. Bhengu and V. D. Maillie, included Khumalo as an example of a picaresque figure, who unscrupulously used missionary education and trickery to manoeuvre within the apartheid structures.<sup>83</sup> Khumalo’s actions should be viewed against the background of his

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Peel, ‘Sobantu Village’, pp. 123.

<sup>80</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/340, Refs. 197/21, 197/21(40), 198/02. In one of his letters he even asked why the Bantu Authorities Act was not applicable to Sobantu Village.

<sup>81</sup> Author’s interview with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>82</sup> Mr E. Ntshangase’s address to the students of the School of Environment and Development, Sobantu Hall, 15 July 1997.

<sup>83</sup> P. la Hausse, ‘So Who was Elias Khuzwayo?: Nationalism, Collaboration and the Picaresque in Natal’, in P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel (eds), *Apartheid’s Genesis 1935-1962* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1993), pp. 211-217.

vendetta with the Advisory Board from which he had been expelled. Khumalo had been a teacher for many years. He was also active in the formation of development schemes in Sobantu, some of which were the Bantu Co-operative Union in 1937, the Bantu Social Services in 1939, the Bantu Workers Club in 1943 and the Community Sunday services in 1944.<sup>84</sup> In 1946 he was accused of being unscrupulous after it was found that that he had embezzled some funds for the Ikhwezi Committee of the Village.<sup>85</sup> He was a gifted organiser, a musician and a good public speaker. In 1949 he was charged with the failure to pay rent, and that led to his ultimate expulsion from Sobantu Village, but he continued writing letters from Edendale.<sup>86</sup>

In 1956 Bang reported that there was 'a strained atmosphere, particularly among the educated and the semi-educated group of Natives who had taken to reading both European and Native papers avidly'.<sup>87</sup> This atmosphere was related to the material hardships that most young people in Sobantu were experiencing. These young people found themselves unemployed in an urban area in which they enjoyed preferential rights of employment. There was also a tendency by Ward to make young people to pay a rent for staying at their parents' homes. They had to pay rent or risk being evicted even though their parents were paying the rent.<sup>88</sup> To worsen the crisis, which was caused by the shortage of housing and by unemployment, economic rents for houses were introduced in December 1956.<sup>89</sup> This was a directive from the central government and it forced residents with an income of more than fifteen pounds per month to pay economic rentals. This measure resulted in rental increases of up to

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<sup>84</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/340, Ref. 197/21, G. F. Khumalo's correspondences to the Chief Native Commissioner and Town Clerk.

<sup>85</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/340, Ref. 197/21, Letter from Mr W. Chiliza to Town clerk, February 1946.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. Letter from the Secretary for Native Affairs to the Chief Native Commissioner, 4 November 1952.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Peel, 'Sobantu Village', p. 126.

<sup>88</sup> Author's interview with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>89</sup> Peel, 'Sobantu Village', p. 128; Seethal, 'Civic Organisations', p. 205.

100% in some cases.<sup>90</sup>

While the residents were still astonished by the news of rent increases, the City council announced that there was going to be a possible increase from 2/- to 8/6d per month on electricity charges.<sup>91</sup> The electricity tariff was just one of their numerous problems. Besides the economic rentals, since January 1959 the residents had been facing an increase in the Bantu General Tax.<sup>92</sup> To add to these pressures the Department of Bantu Education recommended that a levy of 2/- per family be paid for buildings to cover the rent for the school buildings.<sup>93</sup> Bang was, however, reluctant to implement this measure as the relatively high tension and unemployment in the Village was unsettling him. He argued that this levy was going to constitute an added burden and recommended that its introduction be delayed.<sup>94</sup>

These increased financial demands were proving to be too heavy for a community that was already facing overcrowding and unemployment. It would appear that the local Bantu Administration Department was sensitive to this tension, for early in August 1959 Bang recommended to the City Council that the electricity tariffs and school levy be suspended for another year on the ground that 'unemployment is rife and for other reasons there is a feeling of tension. The introduction of additional charges at this moment is therefore inadvisable'.<sup>95</sup> To this motion the Council concurred, but these news did not reach the Sobantu residents early enough to avert the riots which occurred in the middle of August. According to Seethal 'it was these increases, in conjunction with other grievances and events, which precipitated a riot in Sobantu from 14-16 August 1959, with damage

<sup>90</sup> Seethal, 'Civic Organisations', p. 205.

<sup>91</sup> Peel, 'Sobantu Village', p. 130; NAD, TC Files, NAC Minutes, Minute Book 25, 11 August 1959.

<sup>92</sup> Peel, 'Sobantu Village', p. 130.

<sup>93</sup> NAD, TC Files, NAC Minutes, Minute Book 25, 11 August 1959; Peel, 'Sobantu Village', p. 131.

<sup>94</sup> NAD, TC Files, Minute Book 25, 11 August 1959.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

estimated at 23 000 pounds'.<sup>96</sup>

**“A distressing shock to all of us”<sup>97</sup>**

On Saturday 15 August an outbreak of violence occurred at Sobantu Village. The riots in Sobantu occurred a day after the women's demonstrations in the city's Retief Street beerhall on Friday. Although these riots were related to the tense atmosphere, which had prevailed in Pietermaritzburg since the women's demonstrations on the previous day, they had some distinctive features. The issue of how and why the riots took place at Sobantu will be explored. Aspects such as the targets identified by the crowd are also worthy of analysis. The question arises whether this was a spontaneous event or a carefully planned political action. The behaviour of the crowd during the incident showed that the event was influenced by what was taking place in others places such as Cato Manor. The composition of the participants in this incident also makes it different from the previous protest actions in the city in which crowds were predominantly composed of women from different areas.

It has been difficult to put together a comprehensive narrative about how the riots in Sobantu were organised. It seems it was something that was organised by a group of young people of Sobantu. One interviewee pointed out that she does not know how the whole thing was organised but that it seemed to have been well planned.<sup>98</sup> Anton Xaba, who argued that he was mobilising the youth at Sobantu at the time, pointed out that meetings had been taking place at Sobantu where young 'militant' people were voicing their dissatisfaction and frustrations. He pointed out that there was a significant ANC membership in Sobantu during the 1950s. According to him 'There was been a meeting on Saturday

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<sup>96</sup> Seethal, 'Civic Organisations', p. 205.

<sup>97</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Letter from the Pietermaritzburg Bantu Urban School Board to Town Clerk, 26 August 1959.

<sup>98</sup> Author's interview with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

15 August at which the youth resolved to boycott municipal facilities. The municipality had prohibited the youth of Sobantu from using the community hall for their meetings but opened it for the films'.<sup>99</sup> The situation was tense during the day. Youngsters from Sobantu were at a soccer match at Fitzsimons ground. The police came and it seemed they were looking for someone but they left without saying anything. On the same afternoon the riots erupted in Sobantu.<sup>100</sup> Xaba pointed out that he did not participate in the riot activities but he stood as an observer. He pointed out that he was later imprisoned because the police suspected that he was involved in the riots.<sup>101</sup> The story of what happened is complicated and I have made use of oral accounts, newspapers and archival records in order to attempt to tell this story.

It was reported that on Saturday afternoon the overseer at the Ohrtmann Road beer hall, which was adjacent to Sobantu, was assaulted by 'a band of armed people', when he refused to let them in with their weapons.<sup>102</sup> N. H. Nicholson was later taken to hospital with lacerations to his scalp and chin. This incident was related to the Sobantu revolt because, according to Anton Xaba, 'The police who came to the playing ground were looking for the man who had beaten the old white man who used to sell admission tickets at the beerhall. That person was Emanuel Kunene and his nickname was *uMahlomb'ohlanya* (the madman's shoulders)'.<sup>103</sup> The carrying of sticks can be viewed as an intention to attack, but the carrying of sticks was also part of what African men, particularly in the rural areas, did. However, the beating of Nicholson reflected the atmosphere that was prevalent at the time. This relatively minor incident was likely to be related to the attack on the beerhalls. Bang viewed this event as mere robbery because the attackers took some of the money when it was spilt on the

<sup>99</sup> Author's interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> *Natal Witness*, 17 August 1959; *Ilanga*, 22 August 1959; NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Bang's report to TC.

<sup>103</sup> Author's interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

floor.<sup>104</sup> However, this was not an isolated incident in view of what occurred subsequently.

Bang was concerned about the turbulent atmosphere, which had surfaced in Pietermaritzburg. Suspecting that corporation institutions such as beerhalls were in danger of being attacked, he spent the whole day patrolling them. To add to his anxiety, when he was driving past the bus terminus at Sobantu Village at 6 p.m., he

‘Noticed a crowd of young people assembled there. As I drove past they shouted "*Afrika! Mayibuye iAfrika! Asinifuni!* (Come Back Africa! We don't want you!) and gave the thumbs up signal of the ANC. I then warned the superintendent that the atmosphere was unwholesome and also reported to the police’.<sup>105</sup>

The incident shows that there was an advanced level of political consciousness in the village. The chanting of slogans suggests that the spirit of resistance had found fertile ground among the local youth. It has been argued that there was a general dissatisfaction among the young people of Sobantu with Bantu Education.<sup>106</sup> The unemployed youths were also becoming the victims of municipal regulations.

The drama that ensued after Bang had seen the young people shocked the administrators and other interested groups who viewed Sobantu as a ‘model village’. According to Anton Xaba it began when the youth stoned a municipal bus. He points out that ‘I was walking up to the northern part of the township after the meeting where we resolved to boycott municipal facilities when I heard the noise. There was a municipal bus, which was coming to Sobantu. When it entered the township crowds of youths started stoning it. The driver turned the bus and he drove back to town. There was a long queue of people wanting to go to their respective areas having been to Sobantu to visit during the

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<sup>104</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214 Bang to TC.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Author's interview with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

day.’<sup>107</sup> The official report from Bang and the newspapers’ reports do not mention the stoning of a bus. Bang points out that trouble started when Constable de Kock's police van was stoned at the bus stop at 6.30 p.m., after he had come to the village allegedly to make an arrest despite being warned of the intensity of the situation. Ward, the village Superintendent, arrived with his township police when he heard commotion. He approached from the eastern side of the Sobantu hall, only to be met by a hail of stones. Ward was forced to retreat to the offices and by then Constable de Kock had got to the Superintendent's house. According to Bang's report, De Kock warned Ward to evacuate the European women and children but, ‘as stones were falling on the roof and driveway, it was necessary to fire two shots into the air in order to get his car.’<sup>108</sup> It was not only Ward's family that had to be evacuated, there was also the family of R. V. Taylor, who was Assistant Superintendent at Sobantu.

According to Bang's account:

‘Mr Taylor came to take over while Mr Ward took the families away. He then took some men with him and proceeded towards the mob, which listened to him for awhile, but resumed stone throwing so he and his men were obliged to retreat. The police then came in and took over.’<sup>109</sup>

Meanwhile the road near the Ohrtmann Road beer hall was barricaded and cars passing there were pelted with stones. The Village shopping centre was then attacked by a group of Africans, and police reinforcements arrived.<sup>110</sup> This was what allegedly provoked the police, who were led by Major O. Kjelvei, to use their revolvers to defend themselves. They allegedly fired at the feet of the advancing mob, aiming at leaders who were at the front.<sup>111</sup> It should be taken into consideration that Bang was not an eyewitness, but reported what he had been told by the police and by Ward, as he had left Sobantu before the flare-up of violence. The crowd used sticks, stones and bricks to fight the police.

<sup>107</sup> Author's interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>108</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Bang to TC.

<sup>109</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Bang to TC.

<sup>110</sup> Peel, ‘Sobantu Village’, p. 136.

<sup>111</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Bang's report to TC.

The official sources estimated the crowd to be about 300 men and a few women. During this pandemonium two Africans were shot dead. It was reported in the *Witness* that the two men who were killed were ‘well-known agitators’ and that they led the crowd, which was stoning the police and the Village officials.<sup>112</sup> The use of the word ‘agitators’ implies that people were just stirred up to revolt and they did not share the sentiments of the leaders of the crowd. There were conflicting opinions about who actually killed these two people. Africans argued that Ward fired the two fatal shots. One interviewee pointed out that ‘The young people wanted to kill Ward and he ran to his house and began to shoot. I did not see him but I was told that he was the one who was shooting at the crowd. He climbed on the wall adjacent to his house and fired from there.’<sup>113</sup> The gist of the matter was that two Africans, George Radebe and Gordon Ndlovu, died of gunshot wounds.<sup>114</sup> They were allegedly not the ‘agitators’ as officials argued. One of my informants argued:

‘They were not even part of the rioting crowd. Mr Ndlovu was a teacher and he used to be always drunk during weekends. On that day he wanted to go and buy cigarettes. He was told that the situation was tense but he did not listen and that was how he got killed while walking up the road. The other one was mentally retarded and I think either Ward or the police were shooting indiscriminately’.<sup>115</sup>

Surely these two did not fit the agitator description of the authorities and the police. It is interesting how sources from different backgrounds viewed and interpreted this tragic incident.

In his report on the events, Bang rejected the idea that Ward shot into the crowd, saying ‘This was not possible as there was a 2,5 metre high wall separating the mob from his house. In any case the two Natives who were killed were shot while he was evacuating Mrs Ward and Mrs Taylor and their families and the police are in possession of the full facts relating to their deaths.’<sup>116</sup> According to the

<sup>112</sup> Peel, ‘Sobantu Village’, p. 136; *The Natal Witness*, 17 August 1959.

<sup>113</sup> Author’s interview with Mrs V. Skhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>114</sup> *UmAfrika*, 22 August 1959.

<sup>115</sup> Author’s interview with Mrs V. Skhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>116</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Bang’s report to TC.

*Natal Witness*,

‘Rocks started landing on the roof of the Ward family as they were getting ready for bed. The rocks came from the direction of the Sobantu Hall. Two South African policemen in a van arrived and advised Mr St John Ward to evacuate his family. He switched off the light in his home and took his wife and children to the front and then went into the yard to fetch his car. He and the two policemen fired shots into the air that caused the mob to disperse. He took out his car and drove his family to Topham Road police station, where they were still staying with sergeant Gafney and his wife yesterday.’<sup>117</sup>

According to newspapers the initial police fire dispersed the crowd, and people ran towards the schools. The police suspected that there was a pre-arranged plan when they saw the crowd using cans of what appeared to be paraffin or petrol to ignite the school buildings.<sup>118</sup> Members of the crowd had wanted to burn Ward’s house. When they failed to do that they turned to other nearby symbols of Bantu Education and municipal oppression.<sup>119</sup> According to *Ilanga* all three schools were set alight. In the Russell Infants School the water tap at the kitchen was left open from Saturday to Monday, and on the wall was written "*Mayibuye iAfrika*".<sup>120</sup> According to Mrs Sikhosana, who was a teacher, her classroom was left untouched and one boy stood on the door and said no one was going to burn Mam’ Sikhosana’s classroom.<sup>121</sup> Even though the Pietermaritzburg Fire Department was called, the apparently tumultuous situation impeded them from continuing with their work, so they ended up watching helplessly as the buildings were razed. The *Witness* reported:

‘At the primary school a school office was fired first, then the staff room, two lobbies and six classrooms. In addition, windows in the buildings were damaged, doors broken a typewriter burnt and crunched underfoot, and books and records hurled in an untidy heap to feed the flames. Blackboards were ripped from the walls and tossed on to the floor. In one classroom the hand-twisted iron roofing is hanging down amid the other debris; in another a film projector is lying still in its case but irreparably damaged.’<sup>122</sup>

To a certain extent this incident of the burning of the school could be seen as a result of people's

<sup>117</sup> *Natal Witness*, 17 August 1959.

<sup>118</sup> *Natal Witness*, 17 August 1959.

<sup>119</sup> Author’s interview with Mrs V. Skhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>120</sup> *Ilanga*, 22 August 1959.

<sup>121</sup> Author’s interview with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>122</sup> *Natal Witness*, 19 August 1959.

frustration with Bantu Education. The schools fell under the Department of Bantu Education, which during the 1950s had centralised the control of African education.<sup>123</sup> It was the same department that had recently proposed a levy of 2/- on the residents of Sobantu. There is a strong likelihood that the destruction of the schools was because of their being perceived as government property.

In a matter of a few hours Sobantu's image as a 'model village' was tarnished. The Sobantu riots erupted unexpectedly and ended quickly and it was left to the authorities and different interested parties to speculate about the reasons for the revolts. The crowds had formed, selected their targets and swiftly executed their plans and then dispersed, to the dismay of the police and the authorities who were totally unprepared for this kind of violence. As the memorandum from the Sobantu Village Advisory Board to the Mayor aptly put it:

'The rioting was swift and unexpected. The South African police were summoned immediately and took over control and all residents were ordered to remain in their houses with lights switched off. Anybody who ignored this directive was in danger of being shot as a rioter. The Advisory Board, & we dare say, all residents of Village were therefore helpless in that situation. It is only a commission of Inquiry which could reveal why the rioters were able to do so much destruction while the Police were in control of the Area.'<sup>124</sup>

The authorities did not have much to do by way of prosecution and after the riots there was a lot of finger pointing. The damage done to the property as a result of the riots became the main concern of the authorities and different organisations.

Bang pointed out that a feature of the rioting at Sobantu Village was that it was carried out almost entirely by youths, many of whom were obviously schoolchildren. Only a few older men and women took part. The preponderance of youngsters in the crowd can be viewed as a legacy of a situation

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<sup>123</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref.199/214, Letter from Town Clerk to the Secretary for Bantu Education, Pretoria, 6 September 1959.

<sup>124</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Memorandum Submitted to the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg by the Sobantu Village Advisory Board.

where those who had just finished schooling were finding themselves joining the ranks of the unemployed.<sup>125</sup> Finding themselves unemployed in a situation where they had to support their families was a cause for bitterness. One study has revealed that political consciousness was high among the youth of the township.<sup>126</sup> Peel mentions the case of a retired teacher she interviewed, who remembered noticing the prevalence of pictures of the Ghanaian nationalist Kwame Nkrumah, and of the African continent, on the exercise books of pupils.<sup>127</sup> Pupils were showing their identification with the liberation struggles that were taking place in Africa, and with the African continent, which was still largely under colonial rule. Nkrumah, the new leader of independent Ghana from 1957, was also significant in the sense that he epitomised Africa's ability to eradicate foreign domination.

The violent incident at Sobantu took place in a community that was under socio-economic stress. As has been pointed out above, the people of Sobantu were uncertain about their position during the 1950s as there was a threat of removal. There was also a serious housing shortage and an increase in rentals. Unlike the other events, which have been studied in this chapter, and which were led predominantly by women, this one did not focus on gender-related issues. In the Sobantu case, young men seemed to have formed a substantial majority. The people of Sobantu were prevented by officials from holding political meetings, but many often went to Edendale to attend ANC meetings on Sundays.<sup>128</sup> Xaba pointed out that he had built a large ANC membership in Sobantu even though some people were still afraid of joining the ANC.<sup>129</sup> Mrs Sikhosana also pointed out that Archie Gumede and Moses Mabhida were very active in political mobilisation in Sobantu. She argued that, however, there were very few people who participated in resistance politics. There were some

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<sup>125</sup> *Corporation Yearbook* 1958-1959, p. 129.

<sup>126</sup> Peel, 'Sobantu Village', pp. 125-126.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* p. 126.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 125 and 126.

<sup>129</sup> Author's interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

families that were active politically and there was no significant ANC membership.<sup>130</sup>

These riots shattered the city administrators' claims to have an excellent record on race relations. The letter from the Town Clerk to the Secretary for Bantu Education illustrates this when he said: 'As race relations have always been so good in Pietermaritzburg it was rather surprising that the disorderly behaviour occurred at Sobantu Village on 15 August 1959.'<sup>131</sup> It was the last thing that the local authorities could have expected to happen in Sobantu. The crowd had focused its attention on Corporation property, breaking anything that was possible to break. Houses belonging to several municipal police were stoned.<sup>132</sup> This destruction was not only directed at properties, but also at individuals who were seen to be associated with the municipality. Lawrence Msimang, a member of the Advisory Board, narrowly escaped when the mob came to attack his house and he only survived by hiding in the kitchen with his wife; having taken the children to his relative after hearing rumours of the attack.<sup>133</sup> One municipal policeman was also hurt.

Different people and organisations expressed their dismay at what had occurred during the weekend. The ANC and the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) issued a press statement in which they denounced the use of violence but pointed out that violence was provoked by the action of the municipal police.<sup>134</sup> Dr Motala and Archie Gumede issued a statement expressing their deep regret about the events of Friday and Saturday. The Liberal Party (LP) also expressed its regret at the destruction which had

<sup>130</sup> Author's interview with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>131</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Letter from Town Clerk to the Secretary for Bantu Education, 6 September 1959.

<sup>132</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Bang to TC; *Corporation Yearbook*, 1959-1960, p. 139.

<sup>133</sup> *UmAfrika*, 22 August 1959; NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Bang's report to TC; Author's interview with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997.

<sup>134</sup> *Natal Witness*, 17 August 1959; See also NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214 Letter from NIC to Mayor, 5 October 1959.

occurred at Sobantu and asked for a commission of enquiry to be set up.<sup>135</sup> However, the commission of inquiry was never instituted. The Mayor, C. B. Downes, also expressed his disappointment at what had happened at Sobantu Village. In line with the official view of the time, he argued that 'it was just a minority of hooligans who were responsible for this not the proper citizens of Sobantu'.<sup>136</sup> Other organisations also sent their letters to the Town Clerk to express their sympathy with the Bantu Administration Department.<sup>137</sup>

The Mayor's view was echoed by some African organisations such as the Urban Bantu School Board, which pointed out that,

'Sobantu Village has for many years enjoyed the reputation of being one of the model Bantu Villages in South Africa. It has been a beautiful, loyal and quiet village. The events of last weekend came as a distressing shock to all of us. We have no doubt that the ruins of the fine buildings, as they now stand, have convinced everyone of the futility of violence and rioting. We feel that such things will not happen again in Sobantu.'<sup>138</sup>

In his report D. N. Bang also echoed the same sentiments when he said,

'It is my opinion that the local native has had little to do with what has taken place. I am firmly of the opinion that the A. N. C. have instigated a few local firebrands to cause trouble, and the sooner the A. N. C. gets banned the better. Unfortunately the masses are in sympathy with any movement which has as its ultimate aim the removal of European control, so one cannot expect much active support from them in suppressing the radical element. Moreover, they are afraid of reprisals. An instance is the case of Mr L. B. Msimang, who, for the sake of his own safety, has resigned from the Village Advisory Board.'<sup>139</sup>

Bang's report seems to suggest that there was substantial ANC support in the village. He even pointed out that when he visited Sobantu on Monday he found that 'Wherever I went those who

<sup>135</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Letter from Liberal Party to Mayor, 24 August 1959.

<sup>136</sup> *Natal Witness*, 17 August 1959; *Ilanga*, 22 August 1959.

<sup>137</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214. Letters from: African Welfare Society to Mayor, 25th August 1959; Natal African Teachers Union to the Mayor, 25th August 1959; Local Health Commission to Mayor, 11 September 1959.

<sup>138</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214, Letter from the Urban Bantu School Board to Town Clerk, 26 August 1959.

<sup>139</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/5/551, Ref. 199/214 Bang to TC.

greeted me gave the ANC's thumb up signal.'<sup>140</sup> The ANC was to a certain extent involved in the Sobantu riots, although official documents newspapers and oral sources cannot provide information to strengthen this point. Oral evidence suggests that the ANC was behind the riots in Sobantu and that dissatisfaction about Ward and the Bantu Education system made the situation more fertile for the revolt.

Godfrey Khumalo, who had been an ardent foe of both the Bantu Administration Department and the Sobantu Advisory Board since the 1940s, also sent his letters with some recommendations about what to do to avert riots in the future. Unlike many others he did not see the Sobantu revolt as the work of a few irresponsible hooligans. He argued that municipal policies were responsible for the riots. In one of his letters he argued that 'The root cause is municipal oppression. The City Council is to blame for allowing it to destroy the children of Africa... The riots are the flowers of seed planted over the last thirty years, through the abuse of the 1927 Native Administration Act by the local authorities.'<sup>141</sup>

The determination to sabotage what was seen as corporation property continued after the Sobantu riots of Saturday 15 August. At Edendale on Sunday an Indian garage owner, Dookran, foiled an attempt to burn bus which belonged to the corporation.<sup>142</sup> On Monday there was an attempt, by what the *Witness* called 'Native trouble makers', to burn the Mthethomusha School, which is also at Edendale. The police who were patrolling nearby saw the fire and they put it down with the help of some members of the public.<sup>143</sup> The news of the events at Sobantu probably spread to the other townships of Pietermaritzburg. Anton Xaba pointed out that that he had started ANC branches in

<sup>140</sup> Peel, 'Sobantu Village', p. 141.

<sup>141</sup> NAD, TC Files, Vol. 4/4/2/340, Ref. 197/21, Letter G. F. Kumalo to Town Clerk, 19 August 1959.

<sup>142</sup> *Natal Witness*, 17 August 1959; *UmAfrika*, 22 August 1959; *Ilanga*, 22 August 1959.

<sup>143</sup> *Natal Witness*, 18 August 1959.

Machibisa and kwaPata.<sup>144</sup> In the afternoon police went to the Havelock Road area when 'native' women linked arms and blocked the roads against the buses travelling to and from the bus stops.<sup>145</sup>

One can argue that these women were doing this because this area was adjacent to the beerhall. A deputation of women claiming to be leaders of the Friday demonstration came to see Bang about their grievances. Their demands included a pound-a-day increase in wages for their menfolk, the relaxation of influx control so that their men could come to the city freely and obtain work, and they also demanded the reduction of rent at Sobantu Village.<sup>146</sup> The same woman who had been a spokesperson at Edendale on Friday led these women. Interestingly, the demand for wage increases was in line with the South African Congress of Trade Union's (SACTU) campaign for a living wage.<sup>147</sup>

Political events such as meetings and other forms of protest continued in the city after the above-mentioned incidents. Bang was becoming perturbed about what was taking place. The Africans that he thought he understood clearly for many years were changing before his eyes. In his annual report for 1959 he argued,

‘It is regretted that the unrest, which occurred at Sobantu during the last corporate year, continued on a modified scale this year. From time to time meetings were held by certain Bantu Organisations and trade union leaders, preceded by the circulation of pamphlets, and these meetings had an unsettling effect on the Bantu population. Beer halls and markets were boycotted and women armed with sticks actually raided the beer halls on certain occasions. A strange phenomenon was noticeable in that the men offered no resistance. They were in fact, so terrified that they fled in a panic and did not return for days.’<sup>148</sup>

The above quotation suggests that trade unions were becoming active in the politics of resistance in Pietermaritzburg. What also seems to have perplexed Bang was the gender dimension involved in

<sup>144</sup> Author's interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>145</sup> *Natal Witness*, 18 August 1959.

<sup>146</sup> *Natal Witness*, 18 August 1959.

<sup>147</sup> Luckhardt and Wall, *Organize or Starve*, p. 244.

beerhall attacks. The fact that men offered no resistance was astonishing for him. Women were taking the men's role of carrying sticks and using them against men. Women were using male symbolism to assert their position in the society.

## Conclusion

This chapter sought to show that the bone of contention during the 1959 riots in Pietermaritzburg was not only the brewing of traditional beer but also a variety of other policies which African people saw as causing their poverty. This study has also shown that there was a merger of urban and rural issues in which women from the rural areas banded together with other local women to fight against government policies which affected them. The Pietermaritzburg incident should be viewed against the background of widespread unrest that was taking place in the urban and rural areas of Natal. During the weekend of the Pietermaritzburg unrest there were also other crowd actions led by women in other areas such as Estcourt, Harding, Ixopo, Mzoi River, Hibberdene, Dweshula and many other areas. The Pietermaritzburg events of both Friday and Saturday seem to have followed a certain pattern. This suggests that there was organisation prior to their occurrence. One can argue that the Friday incident involved mass mobilisation against broader issues of influx control, low wages and the beer brewing. It was not only about issues that affected women only but sometimes women spoke on behalf of their menfolk.

These local incidents should not be seen as separate but as related to each other because it is likely that some of the people who had participated in the Friday incident or had seen it in town, were incited to start a revolt at the village. However, their targets and the kinds of masses or crowds were different. The beerhall crowd incident was largely dominated by women while the Sobantu one

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<sup>148</sup> *Corporation Yearbook*, 1959-1960., p. 32.

consisted of people of different age groups and sexes even though the youth were reported to be in the majority. One can also argue that these events were not just actions of mobs bent on destruction because confrontation and other forms of violence seemed to have been provoked by the way the police reacted to the situation. Resistance crowds came together for a purpose to oppose apartheid policies. They confronted the police who were perceived as the embodiment of apartheid machinery and oppressive policies against African people.

There is a strong probability that there were links between the women's demonstration and the outbreak of violence in Sobantu Village of Saturday 15 August. This violence shocked the Bantu Administration Department, which did not expect such a revolt to occur in the village, which had all along been regarded as a "model village". The City Council and the BAD attributed Sobantu's incident to hooligans. They could not imagine that the residents of Sobantu, who had a reputation for good behaviour, could express their anger and frustration in that manner.

Sobantu was a community under extreme socio-economic stress with such problems as housing shortages, increases in rentals, unemployment and overcrowding. From 1954 there was a threat of removal under the Group Areas Act of 1950. At the same time there was an increase in the rate of unemployment among the youth in the Village. Anti-apartheid resistance was also making its impact in Sobantu, as there was a substantial support for the ANC. It seems that what ignited the revolts in Sobantu were the discontent about Mr Ward, who was the Village superintendent, and among the youth, Bantu Education, which had just been implemented. There were also other locally related reasons, which led to the outbreak of violence in the Village. It seems also that the Saturday incident was carefully planned, as there was a group of youth that shouted resistance slogans. Unlike the women's demonstrations, which were led predominantly by women, the Sobantu crowd was

heterogeneous, although the young males formed a large proportion. The Sobantu incident could therefore be viewed as both a reaction to the local problems, as well as a contribution to the countrywide anti-apartheid popular struggles, which were taking place at the time. Against this background of resistance crowds and the heightening of anti-apartheid politics in Pietermaritzburg, I will move on to the next chapter to investigate briefly the period from the 1960s to the early 1980s.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Pietermaritzburg from the 1960s to the early 1980s: An Overview of Socio-Economic and Political Contexts**

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a broad socio-economic and political overview of Pietermaritzburg from the 1960s to the early 1980s. This will be done in order to set the scene for the two case studies of the 1980s. Although the main focus of the thesis is on the two periods of the 1950s and the 1980s, it is vital to explore the 1960s and the 1970s. Leaving out this period will create a gap and therefore make it difficult to link the eras of struggle. It is important for the purpose of this study to show a transition from the Sobantu riots of 1959 to other struggles that occurred during the 1980s. This periodisation might not be relevant for Pietermaritzburg but it has been adopted against the background of academic and political claims that the 1960s were a period of a lull while mass mobilisation began to re-emerge during the 1970s. The exploration of the 1960s and 1970s will also enable us to discern the changes that occurred in the socio-economic and political contexts, thus laying the basis for the resistance of the 1980s. Some studies have, however, argued that relative quiescence did not mean the absence of resistance but that covert strategies were being utilised.<sup>1</sup> Sambureni argued that there was a lot of resistance activity by the workers during the 1960s, and points out that this decade has been 'for along time, erroneously conceived as an era of silence and defeat'.<sup>2</sup> Despite these claims, which tend to present a trajectory of resistance and mass mobilisation, it seems that during the 1960s and early 1970s there were few possibilities for overt resistance.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Seekings, 'Powerlessness and Politics: Quiescence and Protest in PWV Townships, c 1973-1985', seminar paper in *The Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Volume 16, University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, October 1988 - June 1989, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> N. Sambureni, 'Working in the Apartheid City: Worker Struggles in Durban, 1959-1979',

Furthermore, this chapter seeks to examine the politics of the period after the 1961 stay-at-home and take this overview to the early 1980s, up to the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983. The aim is to make a broad overview without making an in-depth account of any particular event of mass mobilisation, which took place during this period. There will be a broad investigation of the socio-economic and political situation of Pietermaritzburg with the aim of ascertaining how that shaped the context for the popular struggles of the 1980s. The intention is not to write a detailed history of the struggle during the 1960s to the 1970s, but to investigate, using some national incidents of mobilisation, whether there was any mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg during this time. The analysis will be done against the background of the generally low level of political mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg during the so-called 'decade of defiance' in the 1950s. Although emphasis will be on Pietermaritzburg's local and peculiar conditions, these will be put into the broader perspective of the national resistance struggles. The following overview will explore the socio-economic and political context of the 1960s and the 1970s in order to place Pietermaritzburg within a national context.

### **The national socio-economic and political context: 1960s to early 1980s**

The 1960s up to the early 1970s have been generally referred to as an era of economic boom.<sup>3</sup> This economic prosperity resulted in the increase in the demand for black labour in the urban industrialised areas.<sup>4</sup> However, the impact and the nature of that economic growth have been subject to debate. Worden points out that this was a period of unprecedented economic growth for South Africa.<sup>5</sup> He illustrates this by pointing out that the GNP grew by 5% per annum and the

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Unpublished MA Thesis, Durban, University of Natal, 1994), p.6.

<sup>3</sup> L. M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990), p. 221.

<sup>4</sup> CIIR, *South Africa in the 1980s – State of Emergency* (London, Catholic Institute of International Research, 1986), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> N. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid* (Oxford,

levels of black unemployment during the 1960s were relatively low.<sup>6</sup> Baskin, a trade unionist, argues that the economic boom led to the worsening of the conditions of the African people and controls became tighter.<sup>7</sup> The manufacturing sector was expanded as foreign investors began to regain confidence in the South African government: after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960.

The economic stability and state oppression resulted in the comparative lack of oppositional politics during the 1960s. There was no mass mobilisation that could take place due to the fact that ‘with economic boom, people seemed to be satisfied and it was difficult to explain to people the weaknesses of the government.’<sup>8</sup> It has been argued that the lack of overt resistance during the 1960s on the scale of previous years should not be seen as a sign of total quiescence because less visible developments occurred which provided a crucial background to the re-emergence of overt protest in subsequent years.<sup>9</sup>

The 1960s were difficult years for anti-apartheid organisations because the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) had been banned in 1960 after the Sharpeville massacre. Leaders of both organisations were either imprisoned or forced into exile. Both organisations were forced to operate from underground, and the possibility of mobilising the masses was made remote. They could no longer organise any campaigns such as strikes, stayaways and protest marches, which had been the order of the day during the 1950s. These banned organisations embarked on armed struggle. This militarisation of the struggle was going to be a significant feature of South African politics and it was to influence the shape of political

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Blackwell, 1994), p. 114.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> J. Baskin, *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1991), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Author's interview with John Aitchison, 5 November 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, p. 114.

developments up to the early 1990s. As a result both the ANC and the PAC had to be completely reorganised to meet the challenges of underground work and a more brutally repressive state.<sup>10</sup> This repression left a political vacuum in anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa, as there was no longer any internal organisation that could mobilise the masses. The government was now more determined to crush extra-parliamentary political opposition. The Rivonia Trial and the government's clampdown on *uMkhonto weSizwe* (MK) activities was evidence of this.

From the mid-1960s the government vociferously implemented its policy of Bantustans which helped to deflect opposition. The political vacuum, which had been caused by the banning of the ANC and the PAC earlier in the decade, was partially filled by the emergence of a new layer of organisations from the late 1960s. New political and student organisations, which adhered to the philosophy of 'black consciousness', emerged. They made a notable contribution to conscientising black people, particularly the youth, and in encouraging defiance of oppression and denunciation of apartheid institutions even though they did not have the significant mass following that the ANC had at the end of the 1950s.<sup>11</sup> One of the famous leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was Steve Biko, a student at the University of Natal's Medical School, who was to later tragically die at the hands of the security police on 12 September 1977. From the beginning of the 1970s new organisations began to enter the political scene. This period also saw the proliferation of Youth Clubs which were mostly inter-denominational and concentrated on religious and cultural activities such as drama and poetry in order to conscientise black people about oppression.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Y. Muthien, 'Protest and Resistance in Cape Town, 1939-1965', in R. Cohen, Y. Muthien and A. Zegeye (eds), *Repression and Resistance: Insider Accounts of Apartheid* (London, Hans Zell, 1990), p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> IDAF, *Apartheid: The Facts* (London, International Defence and Aid Fund, 1991), p. 103; A. J. Jeffery, *The Natal Story: 16 Years of Conflict* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1997), pp. 26-27.

<sup>12</sup> J. Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?: Youth Politics in the 1980s* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1993), pp. 22-24; A. Brooks and J. Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm: The Origins and Development of the Uprising in*

The early 1970s also saw the intensification of resistance against apartheid. While this political reawakening was going on, the economy, which had been experiencing significant growth during the 1960s, entered into a crisis. The economic boom of the 1960s began to dwindle, as it was followed by a sharp recession during the early 1970s. From the late 1960s there was an alarming rate of unemployment in the towns as more and more people had come in search of jobs.<sup>13</sup> It was no co-incidence that it was around this time that worker militancy increased. The economic growth had its unplanned consequences of creating the conditions for a new wave of worker resistance and student militancy when that growth declined. In January 1973 strikes involving thousands of workers began in Durban and spread to other parts of the country<sup>14</sup>. Socio-economic frustrations were also worsened in black communities by Bantu Education. Another feature of this period was the rising unemployment in the urban areas, which coincided with a rapid increase in the number of Africans in secondary schools, and in the number of matriculants.<sup>15</sup> Increasing numbers of educated people were coming out of school only to find that there was unemployment due to recession and economic problems. In June 1976 a wave of student revolts started in Soweto and spread to other parts of the country, although the pattern of protest and defiance varied from region to region.

Subsequently, mobilisation continued and exiled political organisations were boosted by the Soweto revolts when many youths fled the country to join the banned organisations.<sup>16</sup> The student revolts marked a watershed in South African history. On the labour side new trade unions began to be formed at the same time as student militancy was increasing. According to McShane the

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*Soweto and the Rest of South Africa from June to December 1976*, (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980), p. 80.

<sup>13</sup> CIIR, *South Africa in the 1980s*, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed account of the 1973 strikes see G. P. Mare, *The Durban Strikes, 1973: "Human Beings with Souls"* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> J. Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1978), p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffery, *The Natal Story*, p. 30.

presence of some of the SACTU activists during the 1970s helped in keeping the memory of SACTU alive during the period of the revival of union activity.<sup>17</sup> One example of this was the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1979.

During the late 1970s grassroots organisations mushroomed and these organised successful boycotts, protest marches, and demonstrations, establishing a solid basis for the fierce resistance of the 1980s.<sup>18</sup> Civic, youth and student organisations were formed in communities. With the advantage of hindsight it can be said that by 1980 the building blocks for an unprecedented surge of black political opposition were in place.<sup>19</sup> Between 1979 and 1983, with the growth of community-based organisations, there were widespread, sustained and, in many cases, intense campaigns against specific manifestations of apartheid.

Another noticeable feature of the political mobilisation of the early 1980s was the frequent prominence of women, reflecting their involvement in the underlying grievances of rent and houses.<sup>20</sup> They played an active and often leading role in the community struggles over rents, bus fares, housing and education as well as in the political campaigns. They were closely associated with the emerging civic structures as well as with organising around the issues specifically affecting women in the communities.<sup>21</sup> The identification of the apartheid system as a common cause of the different problems was expressed with increasing clarity, and specific local struggles were

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<sup>17</sup> D. McShane et al, *Power! Black Workers, their Unions and the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa* (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1984), p. 118.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> Lodge and Nasson, *All, Here and Now*, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> J. Seekings, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation in the PWV Townships', in W. Cobbett and R. Cohen (eds), *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (London, James Currey, 1988), p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> IDAF, *Apartheid: The Facts*, p. 105.

integrated into the overall struggle against the apartheid system.<sup>22</sup>

It was in that context of discontents with the government's 'reform measures', part of which was the Tricameral Constitution that, in 1983, civic organisations, church groups, people's associations and a wide range of anti-apartheid organisations met to form the United Democratic Front (UDF). In the same year the pro-Black Consciousness organisations formed the National Forum (NF). Both the UDF and the NF were amorphous bodies bringing together hundreds of small community and other organisations, from church groups and sports clubs to parties and trade unions.<sup>23</sup> Mobilisation, led mainly by the UDF and trade unions, heightened during the mid-1980s and, on 21 July 1985, P. W. Botha declared a State of Emergency, affecting about one-third of the South African population.<sup>24</sup> In the following year, in 1986, the State of Emergency was renewed and, this time, it covered Natal as well.

Against the background of this broad national overview, I will outline selected features of Pietermaritzburg's history. The focus will be on Pietermaritzburg although some parallels will be drawn with other parts of the country.

### **Resistance and Repression in Pietermaritzburg during the 1960s**

Like other cities Pietermaritzburg took part in the mass stay-at-home of May 1961.<sup>25</sup> Thereafter, in the evidence I have examined so far, there is no mention of any stayaway or mass demonstration during the 1960s that had any substantial impact on the political struggles in Pietermaritzburg. The

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> McShane, *Power! Black Workers*, p. 126.

<sup>24</sup> CIIR, *South Africa in the 1980s*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> See chapter 2

May 1961 stay-at-home had been preceded in March by large protest meetings in the city against the Group Areas Act.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, the stay-at-home was part of the resistance strategies that had been approved by the "All-in" Africa Conference, which took place in Pietermaritzburg on 25-26 March 1961.<sup>27</sup> Nationally, this three-day stayaway was dubbed a fiasco and the ANC had to call it off on its second day. Pietermaritzburg was no exception, as newspapers reported that business was normal in most factories except for Sarmcol factory at Howick, which had a 100% worker absence<sup>28</sup>. The failure of the stay-at-home might have been due to state repression, for on 8 May, the local newspaper reported that a meeting called by Africans had been banned and also on May 20 that all meetings had been banned nation-wide<sup>29</sup>.

As regards mass mobilisation, Pietermaritzburg seemed to have experienced a relative quiescence after the stay-at-home. However, one stalwart has argued that the Pietermaritzburg ANC was active during the early 1960s and, in 1962, when ANC leaders were jailed, there was a plan to execute a major MK operation in Pietermaritzburg.<sup>30</sup> The sabotage campaigns were happening all over the country, particularly after the banning of both the ANC and the PAC.

Meanwhile the state was beginning to adopt more brutal and harsh methods of crushing resistance than it did during the 1950s. In order to consolidate its repression of extra-parliamentary opposition

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<sup>26</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 21 and 29 March 1961.

<sup>27</sup> *The Natal Witness*, May-June 1961; 'Tracing the Route to Freedom' *The Natal Witness*, 10 January 1997; T. Karis, G. Carter and G. M. Gerhart (eds), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 3, (Stanford, Hoover, 1977), p. 232; Author's interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997; Jeffrey, *The Natal Story*, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 2 June 1961; D. R. Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness and Conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940-1987: The case of the B T R Sarmcol workers', Unpublished M SocSc Thesis, Durban, University of Natal, 1987, p. 164; During author's interviews with A. S. Chetty, 12 November 1997 and Kader Hassim, 26 November 1997, it came out that the Sarmcol workers were the best organised during this period.

<sup>29</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 8 and 20 May 1961.

<sup>30</sup> Author's interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

the state began to make use of the Suppression of Communism Act and the General Law Amendment (Non-Trial) Act with its infamous 90-day detention clause.<sup>31</sup> During the mid-1960s there is evidence of armed guerrilla activity and acts of sabotage in Natal allegedly carried out by the *Umkhonto weSizwe*. Many of the political trials in Natal took place in Pietermaritzburg, such as that of Dr Pascal Ngakane (Chief Luthuli's son-in-law)<sup>32</sup> and the famous sabotage trial of 1963-1964, where Curnick Ndlovu and Billy Nair and others were involved.<sup>33</sup> There was also the trial of ten ANC members who had been charged with, inter alia, being office bearers and members of a banned organisation, enlisting members, organising, defending, advising and promoting the purposes of a banned organisation.<sup>34</sup> There were other trials, which were taking place in the country during this period such the sabotage and Poqo trials in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.<sup>35</sup>

The security police were active in Pietermaritzburg in their attempt to subdue political mobilisation. In August 1963 a crowd of 250 people protested in Pietermaritzburg for the release of two University of Natal students, George Mbele and Freddy Dube, who had been detained under the 90-day detention clause.<sup>36</sup> In September 1963, six members of the African People's Democratic Union of South Africa (APDUSA) were detained for distributing political pamphlets in Raisethorpe.<sup>37</sup> It appears APDUSA was under security police surveillance as, in August of the

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<sup>31</sup> During author's interviews with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997 and John Aitchison, 5 November 1997, the 90-day detention clause was singled out as the most brutal measure and this shattered any doubts people might have had about the cruelty of the government.

<sup>32</sup> *The Natal Witness*, July - September 1964.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* October 1963 - January 1964.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 5 - 23 November 1963. These ANC members were Elphas Khanyile, Inglishi Ndlovu, Ligwengwe Majola, Alphius Gumede, Sikhumba Gwala, Mncengeni Mbanda, Mbambeni Dladla, Cecilia Dladla, Makelwana Nojiyeza and Dorothy Nyembe.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 13-14 May 1963, 21 May 1963, June 1963, 5 November 1963.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 16 August 1963.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 10 September 1963.

same year, its members Hassan Shaik, Vaid Shaik and Abdool Essack were held and later released.<sup>38</sup> According to Anton Xaba, a local ANC leader who was active during the 1950s and the 1960s, the security police used to follow them wherever they went and, in 1963, he was arrested for MK activities.<sup>39</sup> Aitchison pointed out also that during this time the security branch personnel in Pietermaritzburg was increased.<sup>40</sup> In 1964 a local ANC and SACP stalwart, Harry Gwala, was jailed for eight years for involvement in guerrilla activities and for furthering the aims of the banned ANC. He had been charged for his recruitment of men for military training outside South Africa and for furthering the aims of the ANC's Umkhonto weSizwe.<sup>41</sup> To protest against oppression and particularly the 90-day detention clause, a protest meeting, addressed by Dr Edgar Brookes and Archdeacon A. J. Rowley of the Anglican Church, took place at the Pietermaritzburg City Hall, and it attracted a crowd of approximately 500 people.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile the Liberal Party appeared to have attracted many African people who had suffered because of the banning of their organisations. For a short while until its dissolution in 1968 the Liberal Party seemed to have been the only platform for some black political activists.<sup>43</sup> According to John Aitchison:

‘The Liberal Party’s membership in the rural areas of Natal was quite big and this had been due to the Party’s campaign against forced removals. There was also a phenomenon of dual membership of the ANC and LP in both rural and urban areas, which dated back to the 1950s’.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.; This was also confirmed during author’s interview with Kader Hassim, 4 November 1997.

<sup>39</sup> Author’s interview with Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>40</sup> Author’s interview with John Aitchison, 5 November 1997.

<sup>41</sup> M. Butler, *Natal, Violence and the Elections* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal (CAE), 1994); Ruth Lundie’s private notes on Gwala’s life; *The Natal Witness*, 19 May 1964.

<sup>42</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 5 June 1964.

<sup>43</sup> Ian Mkhize (a one-time member of the Pietermaritzburg ANC branch) quoted from J. Frederikse, *The Unbreakable Thread: Non-racialism in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1990), p. 93; Author’s interviews with Archie Gumede, 2 October 1997 and V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997 and Anton Xaba, 28 October 1997.

<sup>44</sup> Author’s interview with John Aitchison, 5 November 1997.

Apart from a few incidents of detention of people and protest meetings there is no evidence available of any intense mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg during this period. This relative quiescence was not a feature for Pietermaritzburg only, but was a countrywide phenomenon. This was the early phase of the armed struggle to which the state retaliated by employing more repressive and brutal methods in crushing any anti-apartheid resistance. Against this background of political repression of the 1960s, the section below will investigate certain economic and social aspects of Pietermaritzburg during the 1960s.

### **The 'border industries' scheme and the demographic changes in Pietermaritzburg during the 1960s.**

Other studies have shown that economic development was related to the level and capacity for political mobilisation.<sup>45</sup> Economically, Pietermaritzburg received a major boost during the early 1960s due to the border industry scheme. This economic development was a national feature following international investor confidence in the government after the economic crisis subsequent to the Sharpeville massacre of March 1960. The political quiescence of that time could be ascribed to the economic boom. In 1960 the City Council allocated funds for the development of the Willowton industrial area. In 1963 Pietermaritzburg was declared a 'border industry area' by the central government and this provided financial concessions to new industries locating in the city.<sup>46</sup> This programme entailed offering industrial relocation concessions and incentives for the setting up of labour incentive industries in growth points in close proximity to major population

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<sup>45</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>46</sup> C. Torino, 'Industrialisation', in J. Laband and R. Haswell (eds), *Pietermaritzburg, 1838-1988: A New Portrait of an African City* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1988), p. 147; C.E.P. Seethal, 'Civic Organizations and the Local State in South Africa (1979-1993)', Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Aowa, 1993, p. 205.

concentrations on the fringes of the Bantustans.<sup>47</sup> Industrialists, who established themselves in these areas, were offered a variety of inducements such as free removal transportation, financial assistance, a remission of taxes within the first four years, and exemption from some of the provisions of the industrial labour laws - for example, the minimum wage determinations.<sup>48</sup> The idea of the border industries was planned as part of the process of keeping Africans out of the 'white' areas while at the same time making the maximum use of the cheapest labour available.<sup>49</sup>

This proved to be a major boost for industrial development in Pietermaritzburg. The city received many industrial inquiries. Consequently, the local state undertook to ensure that the Woods Drive-Pentrich industrial complex be planned and provided with the necessary services as a matter of urgency in order for the city to secure its share of industries. The local state produced a high quality brochure of the industrial, educational, recreational and residential facilities of the city as part of its promotional drive. In 1964 the city experienced an industrial breakthrough when it was announced that a R1-million food-processing factory (catering for 180 employees) would begin operations by the end of that year.<sup>50</sup> The city launched a vigorous campaign of attracting new industries.<sup>51</sup> However, according to John Aitchison, Pietermaritzburg seemed to be a loser in some lucrative concessions. Hammarsdale was becoming rapidly industrialised. It was only during the late 1960s that industrialisation really got off the ground.<sup>52</sup> In June 1964 it was announced that a new textile factory would be established in the city.<sup>53</sup> By this pro-industry approach Pietermaritzburg was moving away from simply being an administrative, academic, cultural, and agricultural supply

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<sup>47</sup> Seethal, 'Civic Organisations', p. 30.

<sup>48</sup> H. Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears: Women in Apartheid South Africa* (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1985), p. 70.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 49.

<sup>51</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 1 and 19 August 1964.

<sup>52</sup> Author's interview with John Aitchison, 5 November 1997.

centre of Natal.

The setting up of new industries probably heightened people's expectations about employment. This led to more people coming to Pietermaritzburg, which had insufficient accommodation to cater for this influx. During the 1960s a new township, known as Imbali, was constructed.<sup>54</sup> The population of Pietermaritzburg was steadily growing. Edendale was also growing with more and more people coming to settle with the hope that they were going to get jobs in Pietermaritzburg. Meanwhile the border industry scheme was being implemented and it was helping with providing employment. According to Torino, 'By 1970 when the border concessions were withdrawn (when the authorities believed they had achieved the goal of industrialisation), the black population of Pietermaritzburg was nearing an estimated 250 000'.<sup>55</sup> Within two years of the termination of this development there was a decline in industrialisation, and retrenchment and unemployment followed.

Demographic changes in the black population in Pietermaritzburg were related to developments that were taking place in the economic sphere. In socio-economic terms the black population of Pietermaritzburg was changing. A class of industrial workers was emerging because of the industrialisation in the city. There were also plans to increase African housing in Edendale and Slangspruit.<sup>56</sup> The development of a new township known as Imbali from 1963, which was to have 5500 dwellings, was part of that scheme.<sup>57</sup> Imbali was sited in such a way that it could provide labour for the border industries and that the township could in future fall under a homeland

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 25 June 1964.

<sup>54</sup> M. Butler et al, *Imbali: A Centre for Adult Education Study* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> Torino, 'Industrialisation', p. 147.

<sup>56</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 4 April 1963.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

administration, so that it could not be a burden to the city's ratepayers.<sup>58</sup> Edendale too was earmarked for massive housing development so that it could become a regional African township within an African homeland.<sup>59</sup> When Stage 1 of Imbali Township was completed there was a population of 11 000 and by the mid-1970s when Stage 2 was finished it had a total population of 26 000 people.<sup>60</sup>

The authorities were concerned with the increase of unemployment and the point was made that local labour should be used in the construction of Imbali.<sup>61</sup> The construction of Imbali provided local African people with prospects both of getting houses and of alleviating unemployment. Like Sobantu, Imbali was going to fall directly under white local authorities as opposed to Edendale, which was an area where Africans had freehold rights over the land. However, Imbali's administration by the City Council was going to be a short-term plan; the long-term goal was to have it controlled by homeland administration. This direct control by the municipality meant that, in the event of any discontent, the residents were going to face the state directly and not their landlords as the Edendale people were doing. It was in townships such as Sobantu and Imbali that political mobilisation first occurred in Pietermaritzburg during the early 1980s.

Having explored briefly some aspects of the socio-economic context, I will now move to the popular struggles of the 1970s. I will investigate, not in great detail, the two major events of the 1970s, which were the 1973 strikes and the revolts of 1976. This investigation will attempt to establish whether or not Pietermaritzburg experienced the same waves of mobilisation as some other urban centres during this time.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 3 October 1963.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 4 April 1963.

<sup>60</sup> Butler et al. *Imbali*: p. 31.

### Pietermaritzburg and the struggles of the 1970s

The early 1970s began with industrial turbulence in Durban and these strikes spread to other parts of Natal. Despite its close proximity to Durban, Pietermaritzburg was not seriously affected by the 1973 workers' strikes.<sup>62</sup> Pietermaritzburg, like some other urban centres in Natal, was largely unaffected by the Soweto revolts of 1976 in any significant scale. Natal was not as tense and turbulent as other parts of the country in the Cape and the Transvaal. Natal's lagging behind the other regional centres has been ascribed to a variety of factors such as the political influence of Mangosuthu Buthelezi and his Inkatha Movement, which had been formed in 1975, which condemned youth militancy and the student revolts.<sup>63</sup> This relative calm can be attributed to the fact that Afrikaans, which triggered the revolts, was not the main issue in Natal schools. That implied that there was not a conspicuous source of conflict around which people could be mobilised at that time. However, this does not mean that nothing occurred in Natal during these disturbances. It is likely that the revolts had a psychological impact on students and youths in Pietermaritzburg. The impact of both the 1973 strikes and the 1976 revolts on Pietermaritzburg will be explored below.

The Durban worker's strikes of 1973 and the much-celebrated Soweto student revolts of 1976-77 were the two main incidents of mass resistance that took place in South Africa during the 1970s. I will start by examining the impact of the 1973 'Durban strikes' on Pietermaritzburg. Except for one strike by 60 workers at Alex Carriers, Pietermaritzburg seems not to have experienced the industrial strike wave of 1973.<sup>64</sup> This is interesting, considering the close proximity of

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<sup>61</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 30 May 1964.

<sup>62</sup> J. Maree, 'Worker Organisation in Natal in the 1970s', paper to *Workshop on Regionalism and Restructuring in Natal*, Durban, University of Natal, 23-31 January 1988, p. 11.

<sup>63</sup> Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm*, p. 131; J. Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, pp. 17-18. (Kane-Berman attributed the relative peace in Durban particularly to both Buthelezi's influence and police restraint); Jeffery, *The Natal Story*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>64</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 13 February 1973.

Pietermaritzburg to Durban, which was the nucleus of the strikes. In Durban workers from different industrial sectors partook in the strikes, primarily over wages. There were Coronation Brick workers, drivers, Dunlop, dairies, corporation workers and those in other business sectors. *The Natal Witness* reported on 3 February that there were approximately 20 000 workers on strike.<sup>65</sup> By the 6<sup>th</sup> the number had swelled to 30 000.<sup>66</sup> Available evidence indicates that Pietermaritzburg did not experience the industrial turbulence that was seriously engulfing Durban. The Pietermaritzburg industrialists attributed the Natal strike wave to low wages, lack of communication and agitators. On 5 February 1973, Mr A. W. Fuller, Director of the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Industries, was quoted in the newspapers saying:

‘Fortunately, we have had no strikes in Pietermaritzburg yet, but we must recognise it as a possibility to which all manufacturers must give careful thought. It is our impression that some firms have been asking for trouble by paying too little and some have not been doing enough to forestall trouble by establishing good lines of communication with their African workers’.<sup>67</sup>

The above statement by Fuller implies that although Pietermaritzburg had not experienced the strikes, they could erupt at any time. It appears that Pietermaritzburg was having the same industrial problems that had led to the eruption of the strikes in Durban. But why were there no widespread strikes in Pietermaritzburg? Why did workers in other factories in Pietermaritzburg not follow the Alex Carriers example? Perhaps it is because the workers at Alex were instantly dismissed without an opportunity of negotiations and that might have frightened the disgruntled workers in other industries. Furthermore, Durban had many industries when compared to Pietermaritzburg. Surely, there must be reasons why Pietermaritzburg was not affected? It was reported in the *Natal Witness* of 14 February that the Pietermaritzburg City Council had agreed for

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<sup>65</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 3 February 1973.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 6 February 1973

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

a big rise in salaries for its African workers excluding white workers.<sup>68</sup>

There is evidence that some mobilisation was taking place in Pietermaritzburg factories during this time. For instance, in his statement, which still adhered to the officialdom's obsession with agitators, Fuller argued that people had been seen "handing out pamphlets to African workers outside factories in Pietermaritzburg - so far without effect".<sup>69</sup> According to Maree 'the effects of the Durban strikes were to heighten African worker militancy and consciousness of the need to organise themselves. Consequently the membership of the Benefit Fund shot up rapidly and six African unions emerged over the next two years in Durban and Pietermaritzburg'.<sup>70</sup> Wage Commissions were set up in both campuses of the University of Natal and this facilitated the process of worker mobilisation during the 1970s.<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, it was during this time that the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), which played a significant role in the popular struggles in Pietermaritzburg during the 1980s, began to negotiate for recognition at BTR Sarmcol, in Howick.

The 1976 students' revolt also left Pietermaritzburg relatively untouched. On 16 June 1976 students in Soweto staged a march to protest against, among other things, the proclamation of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in African secondary schools. The protest ended in bloodshed and students in other parts of South Africa took up the Soweto cause.<sup>72</sup> According to Brooks and Brickhill, by August 'the perspectives of the student movement had broadened from the campaign against Afrikaans and Bantu Education in general into demands for the release of political prisoners

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 14 February 1973.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 6 February 1973.

<sup>70</sup> Maree, 'Worker Organisation in Natal in the 1970s', p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Author's interview with John Aitchison, 5 October 1997.

<sup>72</sup> Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, pp. 1-2; Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm*

and the rejection of the apartheid system'.<sup>73</sup> A detailed analysis of the revolts is not intended here but the aim is to situate Pietermaritzburg's resistance politics within the context of these upheavals.

It has generally been argued that Natal, apart from the solidarity demonstrations by students at the Universities of Durban-Westville and Natal Medical School, and the burning of administration buildings at the University of Zululand, remained relatively quiet<sup>74</sup>. However, there were incidents of student demonstrations and the burning of schools in places such as Ladysmith, Amanzimtoti, Eshowe, Greytown, Empangeni, Kokstad, KwaMashu, Tugela Ferry, Ndwedwe, Weenen and Chatsworth.<sup>75</sup> Most of these incidents took place in July 1976. In another incident, which was presumably related to the prevailing revolts, the Woodlands Primary School in Pietermaritzburg was set alight in September.<sup>76</sup> It was argued that it was only then that the extent of the Natal unrest became apparent and a British newspaper reported:

'Reports from country areas of Natal and KwaZulu discloses that violence has been more widespread than was originally reported. Buildings were set on fire, crops were destroyed and many farms and animals died in the blazes'.<sup>77</sup>

As the report shows there were widespread veld fires in Natal and also in other parts of the country, which were related to the disturbances.

Although one cannot magnify the extent of the revolts in Natal on the basis of the above-mentioned incidents, it seems that the region did experience disturbances, albeit not on the same scale as the Transvaal, the Eastern and the Western Cape. It should also be pointed out that Afrikaans-medium learning was not an issue in Natal. This is interesting in the light of the fact that it has been argued

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<sup>73</sup> Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm*, p. 30.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25; *The Natal Witness*, 19 June 1976 and 11 August 1976.

<sup>75</sup> Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm*, (appendix) pp. 307-343. J. Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm*, p. 333.

that perhaps the young militants of Soweto got expertise and assistance from older militants who had received training outside and had created a network of clandestine armed groups largely in Natal, whose ex-Robben Island veterans had just been released.<sup>78</sup> With all those networks and long experience of the old activists at its disposal Natal did not erupt like other parts of the country. An example of the existence of clandestine networks was the trial of ten *uMkhonto weSizwe* members in Pietermaritzburg in 1976. The accused were alleged to have ‘incited, instigated, commanded, aided, advised, encouraged and/or promised others to undergo military training or political training outside the borders of the Republic in order thereafter to return and assist in the overthrow of the government by violence and forcible means’.<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, two of the accused, Harry Gwala and Anton Xaba, were ex-Robben Island prisoners, and they had just been released after serving between eight and 10 years.

In spite of some isolated incidents of violence that kept cropping up in Natal, Pietermaritzburg did not experience any intense upheavals except for the burning of the primary school in Woodlands. There are no reports of any demonstrations that occurred at any of the local African High Schools in the townships. Perhaps the point made earlier by Aitchison regarding the lack of high schools for Africans during the 1960s can explain why Pietermaritzburg remained calm, as it is likely that during the early 1970s this remained the case.

### **Socio-economic and political conditions in Pietermaritzburg during the early 1980s.**

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<sup>77</sup> *Guardian*, 28 July 1976 quoted from Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm*, p. 311.

<sup>78</sup> Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm*, p. 162.

<sup>79</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 13 July 1976. The ten were Harry Themba Gwala, William Fano Khanyile, John Vusimuzi Nene, Vusimuzi Truman Magubane, Ndoda Anton Xaba, Mathews Makholeka Meyiwa, Azaria Ndebele, Zakhele Elphas Mdlalose, Joseph Ntuliswiwe Nduli and Cleopas Malayiboni Ndlovu (the latter two had been taken from Swaziland and were pleading against the jurisdiction of the court to try them).

Before sketching in some political aspects of the 1980s we can address the question of what kind of a city Pietermaritzburg had become by the 1980s. The Greater Pietermaritzburg area consisted of a city with separate residential areas for whites, Indians, coloureds and Africans. This was typical of South Africa's segregated cities. Geographically it can be said that on the northern and southern sides there were mostly white suburbs while the eastern side of the town was dominated by areas that were demarcated for Indians and coloureds, with only one African township, Sobantu. West of the city and many kilometres away, the black residential areas stretched up the valley, with the rigidly planned African township of Imbali giving way to the more amorphous Edendale.<sup>80</sup> West of the Edendale complex stretched the rural area of Vulindlela, which consisted of districts ruled by chiefs and was commonly called NgaPhezulu (see Map 4). It has been pointed out that more than 70% of the African population in Pietermaritzburg townships lived in mud houses, mainly in Edendale and Vulindlela.<sup>81</sup> In these houses there was neither electricity nor water, and the latter was only available through communal taps, some of them located two kilometres or more from the houses.<sup>82</sup> It was this geography of racial separation that was to shape the nature and the co-ordination of mass mobilisation strategies in the Pietermaritzburg region during the 1980s.

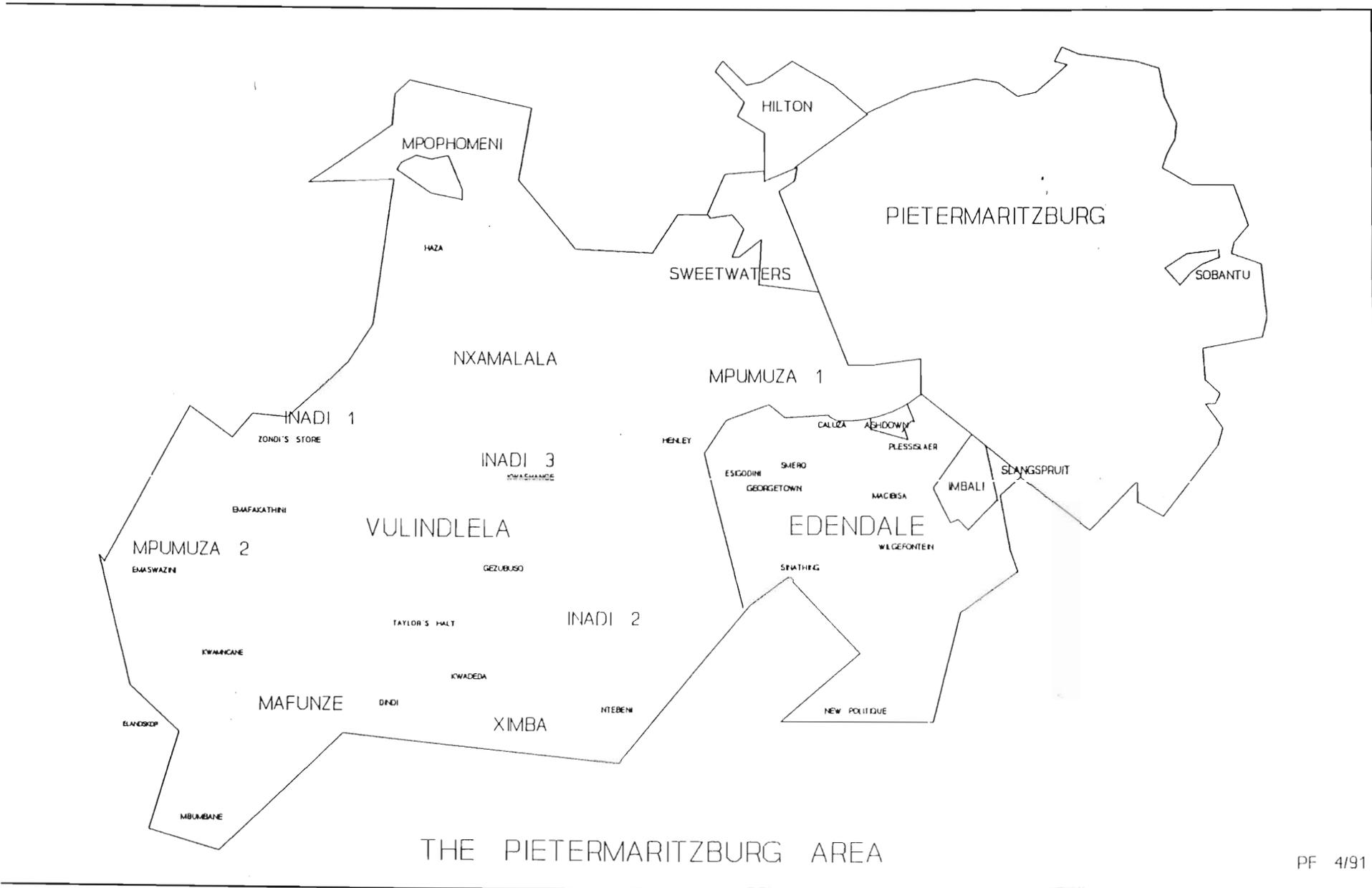
According to the 1985 census figures the racial breakdown of the population of Pietermaritzburg was as follows: 60 161 Whites, 57 006 Indians, 13 771 Coloureds, 61 479 Africans and the overall total was 192 417.<sup>83</sup> Edendale was not included as part of Pietermaritzburg and was grouped with Vulindlela as an area under homeland administration. The number of Africans was therefore significantly underestimated. In 1951 there were 42 052 Africans, in 1960 there were 64 319, in

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<sup>80</sup> T. Wills, 'The Segregated City', in J. Laband and R. Haswell (eds), *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988: A New Portrait of an African City* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1988), p. 33.

<sup>81</sup> Gwala, 'Inkatha, Political Violence', p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



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Map 4. Pietermaritzburg area - less detailed and showing Pietermaritzburg during the 1980s (Adapted from P. Forsyth, Pietermaritzburg Conflict Chronology, 1991)

1970 they were 47 337, in 1980 they numbered at 67 364 and in 1985 there were 61 479 Africans.<sup>84</sup> Gwala, quoting the Development Studies Research Group's (DSRG) 1986 survey, pointed out that Pietermaritzburg had 400 000 people and more than 80% of this population was black (African, Coloured and Indian) thus making the city the second largest in Natal.<sup>85</sup> This was corroborated by Wills, writing in the 1980s, who pointed out that 'over half of the metropolitan population of approaching 500 000 is housed in the African townships and 'peri-urban' areas'.<sup>86</sup> The difference between the population figures of the government's census report and DSRG was due to the fact that they were driven by different motives and agendas.

Economic and social conditions in the Greater Pietermaritzburg region need to be considered as well. There were some industries, situated mostly at Camps Drift, Willowton and Mkhondeni. This was the result of industrial developments that had been taking place in the city since the 1950s. By the 1980s Pietermaritzburg had become, after Durban, the second main centre of commerce and industry in Natal.<sup>87</sup> In 1982 Pietermaritzburg was again declared an industrial "deconcentration point" in accordance with the Government's industrialisation policy.<sup>88</sup> According to the Labour Monitoring Group, three broad sectors dominated Pietermaritzburg's industrial life: firstly, metal, engineering and related factories accounted for approximately 30% of total employment; secondly, the leather and footwear industry employed a further 25%; finally, timber, wood and paper sector employed 20% of the

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<sup>85</sup> Wills, 'The Segregated City', p. 42.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Gwala, 'Inkatha, Political Violence', p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> Wills, 'The Segregated City', p. 33.

<sup>87</sup> Torino, 'Industrialisation', pp. 144-147.

<sup>88</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 2 April 1982; Labour Monitoring Group (Natal), 'Monitoring the Sarmcol Struggle', in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Volume 11, Number 2, October – December 1985, p. 90.

workforce.<sup>89</sup> By 1984 Pietermaritzburg's manufacturing sector employed approximately 20 000 workers.<sup>90</sup> However, despite the growth which was a result of this border industry scheme there was a high level of unemployment, one that varied greatly across population groups, affecting Coloureds and Africans the most.<sup>91</sup> This unemployment was caused by the economic recession and it became a serious issue particularly in the Vulindlela area.<sup>92</sup> Many firms such as Feralloys, Dick Whittington Shoes and Sarmcol started to reduce their workforce between 1982 and 1984 leading to the loss of over 2000 jobs. Writing in 1988, Gwala pointed out that Pietermaritzburg,

'is an area with very high rate of unemployment. The total black unemployment is estimated at 36%, whilst that of whites is just under 5%. However, unemployment is lowest in Sobantu, a township that, together with Imbali, has always enjoyed Section 10 rights that gave them, among other things, first preference on employment.'<sup>93</sup>

About 80% of the unemployed were under 35 years of age; 46% less than 25 years old; and 15% were less than 25 years of age. The 20-24 years age group was highly represented among the unemployed.<sup>94</sup> It is therefore in the age of the unemployed that one begins to appreciate the social basis of political action and why the youth were the most frustrated. That explains why youth formed a large part of the constituency of political mobilisation during the 1980s.

According to Seekings it was during this period that the identity of 'youth' began to become distinct. He argues that:

'The youth re-emerged as a central category in political opposition in the 1980s. The ANC

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<sup>89</sup> Labour Monitoring Group, 'Monitoring the Sarmcol Struggle', p. 90.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> N. Bromberger, 'Unemployment in Pietermaritzburg, 1986', in Laband and Haswell (eds), *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988*, p. 134.

<sup>92</sup> For a detailed study of unemployment in the Vulindlela area see J.F. Hofmeyer, *Labour-market Participation and Unemployment: An Economic Analysis of the Choices made by Black males in a Peri-urban area near Pietermaritzburg* (Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, 1985).

<sup>93</sup> Gwala, 'Inkatha, Political Violence', pp. 2-3.

<sup>94</sup> Seethal, 'Civic Organisations', pp. 205-208.

Youth League had played an important role between the mid-1940s and mid-1950s, but the category of youth remained largely peripheral to political organisation and discourses through the 1960s and most of the 1970s. It was only in the aftermath of the Soweto uprising of 1976-77, and particularly in the years 1980-82, that the youth once again came to constitute a distinct sector of the population in terms of political mobilisation and organisation... From 1982 overtly political youth organisations or youth congresses proliferated across the country. Their concern was with politicisation and political action outside of the school and the workplace. They involved predominantly young people who had completed most, if not all of their secondary schooling, and included students as well as ex-students.<sup>95</sup>

The word youth began to acquire a revolutionary character. According to Johnson it referred to age much as it did to attitude of mind, it connoted the most energetic, volatile and impatient elements of the black communities.<sup>96</sup> Bundy points out that:

‘Members of this generational unit do not merely coexist in time and space: they become a social generation when they participate in the common destiny of that historical and social unit.’<sup>97</sup>

A growing youth consciousness cemented cohesion amongst many people as they experienced social and economic problems that were almost similar. It was the African youth who were particularly instrumental in the stayaways, protest marches and consumer boycotts of the 1980s. The youth represented a category of South African society that was pressured by poor education and economic hardships and was also receptive to radical political ideas. The youth element became instrumental in resistance politics of the 1980s while the ambiguity of who constituted ‘the youth’ continued.

From as early as 1980 the youth were beginning to emerge as a potent political force in the Pietermaritzburg townships. Their struggles can be traced back to the formation of the D. C. O.

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<sup>95</sup> Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*, pp. 20 and 21.

<sup>96</sup> S. Johnson, ‘The Soldiers of Luthuli!: Youth in the Politics of Resistance in South Africa’, in S. Johnson (ed), *South Africa: No Turning Back* (London, Macmillan, 1988), p. 85.

<sup>97</sup> C. Bundy, ‘Action Comrades Action!': The Politics of Youth Resistance in the Western Cape, 1985’, in W.G. James and M. Simons (eds), *The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1989), p. 207.

Matiwane Youth League in 1980. It was named in honour of David Cecil Oxford Matiwane, who lived at Willowfontain, and was known for his commitment to the liberation struggle.<sup>98</sup> Matiwane had been active in Pietermaritzburg's resistance politics for a long time. He was active in the ANC during the 1950s, together with Gwala, Gumede and Mabhida.<sup>99</sup> On anniversaries such as the Sharpeville Massacre on March 21, and the Soweto uprising on June 16, Matiwane used to walk from his home to the Pietermaritzburg city centre carrying a cross and chains to signify the perpetual oppression of black people.<sup>100</sup> The League focused on organising social functions as well as providing forums for political discussions. It attracted members - mostly students - from Pietermaritzburg's other townships, and in 1982 some of its members from Sobantu formed the Sobantu Youth League.<sup>101</sup>

Matiwane died in 1984 and prominent leaders of the newly-formed UDF attended his funeral.<sup>102</sup> After his death the League plunged into chaos due to police harassment. According to Seekings, the League fell apart because the area had very few political activists who could further the League's objectives.<sup>103</sup> Its collapse could also be due to the fact that it concentrated on leadership rather than mobilising the masses. It was viewed as elitist and composed of young people from rich and educated families.<sup>104</sup> In spite of its shortcomings the League helped to plant the seeds for anti-apartheid mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg. It also helped to influence people who were to become important in local popular struggles during the mid-1980s.

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<sup>98</sup> N. Bhebhe's interview with Khaba Mkhize in Bhebhe, 'Mobilization, Conflict and Repression', p. 29.

<sup>99</sup> Author's interviews with Mrs V. Sikhosana, 7 October 1997 and A. S. Chetty, 12 November 1997.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*, p. 41.

<sup>102</sup> Bhebhe's interview with Khaba Mkhize in 'Mobilization, Conflict and Repression', p. 30.

<sup>103</sup> Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*, p. 44.

<sup>104</sup> Author's interview with Sobhuza Dlamini, 18 July 1995.

In some instances the labour movements were also trying to mobilise the communities to support their causes. According to Nkosinathi Gwala (Blade Nzimande) the Hulett Aluminium pensioners' strike of 1981 was one such incident where workers were creating the space for mass mobilisation.<sup>105</sup> He points out that this was due to the importance of Huletts as a "visible employer" and a "dream" workplace for people without Section 10 rights, that was, people from Edendale and the adjacent rural areas.<sup>106</sup> D. Bonnin also regards this strike as laying the basis for the popular struggles that followed in Pietermaritzburg during the mid-1980s.<sup>107</sup> It was no coincidence that the first major event of mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg came out of a workers' struggle in 1985.

Politically, people belonged to organisations across the wider political spectrum of black resistance organisations. In the African residential areas before the mid-1980s no political organisation could claim majority support with confidence.<sup>108</sup> Some localised events of mass mobilisation occurred in Sobantu between 1982 and 1984 when there were rent and bus boycotts as well as demonstrations.<sup>109</sup> In the period between 1982 and 1984 Pietermaritzburg had seen the formation of youth organisations, most of which affiliated to the UDF. Among those organisations were the Sobantu Youth Organisation (SOYO), the Imbali Youth Organisation (IYO), the Edendale Youth Organisation (EDEYO), the Ashdown Youth Organisation (AYO) and the Mpophomeni Youth Organisation.<sup>110</sup> The demarcation of political boundaries and the declaration of organisational strongholds by Inkatha and the UDF were to become a phenomenon only of the late 1980s. As

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<sup>105</sup> N. Gwala, 'Inkatha, Political Violence and the Struggle for Control in Pietermaritzburg', Paper to *Workshop on Regionalism and Restructuring in Natal*, Durban, University of Natal, January 28-31, 1988, p. 19.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> D. Bonnin's comments during the author's presentation at the *History and African Studies Seminar* at the University of Natal, Durban, 15 October 1997.

<sup>108</sup> Gwala, 'Inkatha, Political Violence and the Struggle for Control', p. 18.

<sup>109</sup> Seethal, 'Civic Organisations', pp. 205-211.

<sup>110</sup> Butler, *Imbali*, p. 158.

Gwala has pointed out above, the Hulett strike of 1981 was one such event which showed that trade unions could mobilise with the help of a variety of community organisations. As the case studies of some of the events of mass mobilisation will show, trade unions were a force to be reckoned with in mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg from the mid-1980s onwards.

## **Conclusion**

The above discussion attempted to show that the 1960s to the early 1980s were a period of both isolated incidents of mass mobilisation and of political quiescence in Pietermaritzburg. The socio-economic and political exploration of the national contexts showed that the 1960s to the early 1970s were periods of economic boom, political repression, armed struggle and the resurgence of worker militancy. The 1970s began with the economic recession which was followed by the 1973 strikes and the student revolts of 1976.

Pietermaritzburg was not exceptional when compared with the countrywide situation during the 1960s. There were some economic developments that took place during the 1960s as part of the border industry programme. The population of Pietermaritzburg was increasing and during the same period a new township called Imbali was constructed. At the same time the city administrators were taking measures to improve housing for Africans. In the sphere of struggle Pietermaritzburg experienced political repression as well. Many opponents of apartheid were detained. Some people were also jailed for activities related to military training during both the 1960s and the 1970s. However, there is no evidence of events of crowd resistance that occurred in Pietermaritzburg during this period. Even the 1973 strikes and the 1976 student revolts did not take Pietermaritzburg by storm, as was the case in other parts of South Africa. This therefore, suggests that there was no lull in resistance in Pietermaritzburg during the 1960s and 1970s because even

during the 1950s there was not much mass mobilisation on the scale of other cities such as Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town, East London and Port Elizabeth. The idea of a lull implies that there was intense mass mobilisation that was suppressed and subsided. In the case of Pietermaritzburg it appears that there was no large-scale mobilisation during the 1950s, so one cannot argue that there was a lull during the 1960s and the 1970s.

During the early 1980s it seems that the situation had changed economically, politically and demographically from what it was during the 1950s. Politically conscious groups such as the D. C. O. Matiwane Youth League were formed during the early 1980s. Subsequently, the UDF was also formed which showed that Pietermaritzburg's struggle politics was entering the national resistance scene. What this chapter has shown is that the socio-economic and political situation in Pietermaritzburg during the 1960s and 1970s was changing and laying the basis for the struggles of the 1980s. The next chapter will investigate in detail Pietermaritzburg's struggles during the mid-1980s, using the 1985 Sarmcol workers' demonstration and stayaway as a case study to illustrate the pattern and nature of mass mobilisation.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **From Labour Dispute to Strategy of Mass Mobilisation: The 1985 Sarmcol strikers' Demonstration and Stayaway in Pietermaritzburg**

Striking workers from BTR Sarmcol factory in Howick held a demonstration in Pietermaritzburg at the end of June 1985 and, in the middle of July, a stayaway was called in support of their struggle. The main purpose of this chapter is to investigate why the workers marched, how the subsequent stayaway was organised, and to examine how this action changed the nature and course of mass mobilisation in the Pietermaritzburg region. This Sarmcol case study has been selected because it can be regarded as a key event of mass mobilisation in the Pietermaritzburg region in the mid-1980s, and because it was a precursor of later events. When compared to the earlier struggles in Pietermaritzburg since the 1950s, when there was not much intensified political activity, this stayaway seemed to signal a new era in mass mobilisation and the coming of age of resistance politics in the Pietermaritzburg region. The workers' march and the stayaway left an indelible mark on the memories of people in the Pietermaritzburg region.

The workers' demonstration and the subsequent stayaway will be analysed against the background of events of mass mobilisation and resistance that were taking place in South Africa in the mid-1980s. The actual strike and the reasons for it will be highlighted, but they will not be discussed in great detail because that is not within the scope of this dissertation. Due to the dearth of written sources I have relied heavily on interviews, newspapers and written sources for information. The problems inherent in each source have been taken into consideration. So far there are three research theses that have looked at the Sarmcol struggle although only one of them focused specifically on

its impact on wider Pietermaritzburg politics.<sup>1</sup>

Research and available evidence suggests that the stayaway of 1985 was one of the biggest yet in the history of the city, and what is of analytical interest is its impact on mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg. The workers effectively extended their zone of struggle from the small town of Howick to the much larger city of Pietermaritzburg, thirty kilometres away.

The socio-economic and political contexts of Pietermaritzburg in the early 1980s were very different from those of 1950s. There were now more industries and townships, which meant that there was a larger constituency for political mobilisation. Mass mobilisation took a distinct character and the crucial year was 1985, although there had been earlier signs of youth militancy and heightened political consciousness during the previous two to three years, with school boycotts and rent boycotts. About 1500 young people organised a highly successful public demonstration in Imbali in August 1984 against the inauguration of the new community council by Piet Koornhof, the Minister of Co-operation and Development.<sup>2</sup> The 'youth' were beginning to emerge as a distinct stratum in mass mobilisation and resistance in the area. A relationship began to develop between the radical youth and some unions, and workers started involving the youth in issues such

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<sup>1</sup> D. R. Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness and Conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940-1987: the case of the BTR Sarmcol workers', Unpublished M Soc Sc Thesis, University of Natal Durban, 1987); E. J. Radford, 'The Psychological Effects of Mass Dismissal', Unpublished PhD Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1993; S. M. Mkhize, 'Mass Mobilisation and Resistance: A Study of Selected Stairways and Protest Marches in Pietermaritzburg, 1985-1989', Unpublished BA (Hon) Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> A. J. Jeffrey, *The Natal Story: 16 Years of Conflict* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1997), p. 140; M. Butler et. al., *Imbali: A Centre for Adult Education Study* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1993), pp. 157-158; N. N. Bhebhe, 'Mobilization, Conflict and Repression: The United Democratic Front and Popular Struggles in the Pietermaritzburg Region, 1983-1991', Unpublished MA Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1996, p. 33; Author's interviews with Dumezweni Zimu, 3 August 1995 and Sobhuza Dlamini, 12 July 1995; *The Natal*

as strikes and boycotts.<sup>3</sup> This relationship, which was not without problems, was strengthened from 1985 onwards with the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in December, which came out openly in favour of community struggles.<sup>4</sup>

The socio-economic and political context of Pietermaritzburg during the early 1980s was sketched in the previous chapter and there is no need to elaborate here. By way of orientating the reader, the next section will explore briefly the socio-economic context in the Howick area in order to set the scene for the investigation of the workers' struggle of 1985.

### **Background to the Sarmcol Struggle: BTR Sarmcol, Mpophomeni, KwaMevana and the surrounding areas**

BTR Sarmcol was a factory, situated in Howick, a small town outside the city of Pietermaritzburg. This factory was owned by a multinational company which had its headquarters in the United Kingdom. It was established in 1919 and it specialised in the production of rubber products.<sup>5</sup> In the 1980s the majority of its African workforce came from the nearby two townships of Mpophomeni and kwaMevana. (see Maps 5 and 6) By 1985 about 39.5% of the workforce lived at Mpophomeni, which was 15 km from Howick.<sup>6</sup> The rest came from the nearby rural areas. KwaMevana and Mpophomeni townships had been built during the 1930s and the late 1960s

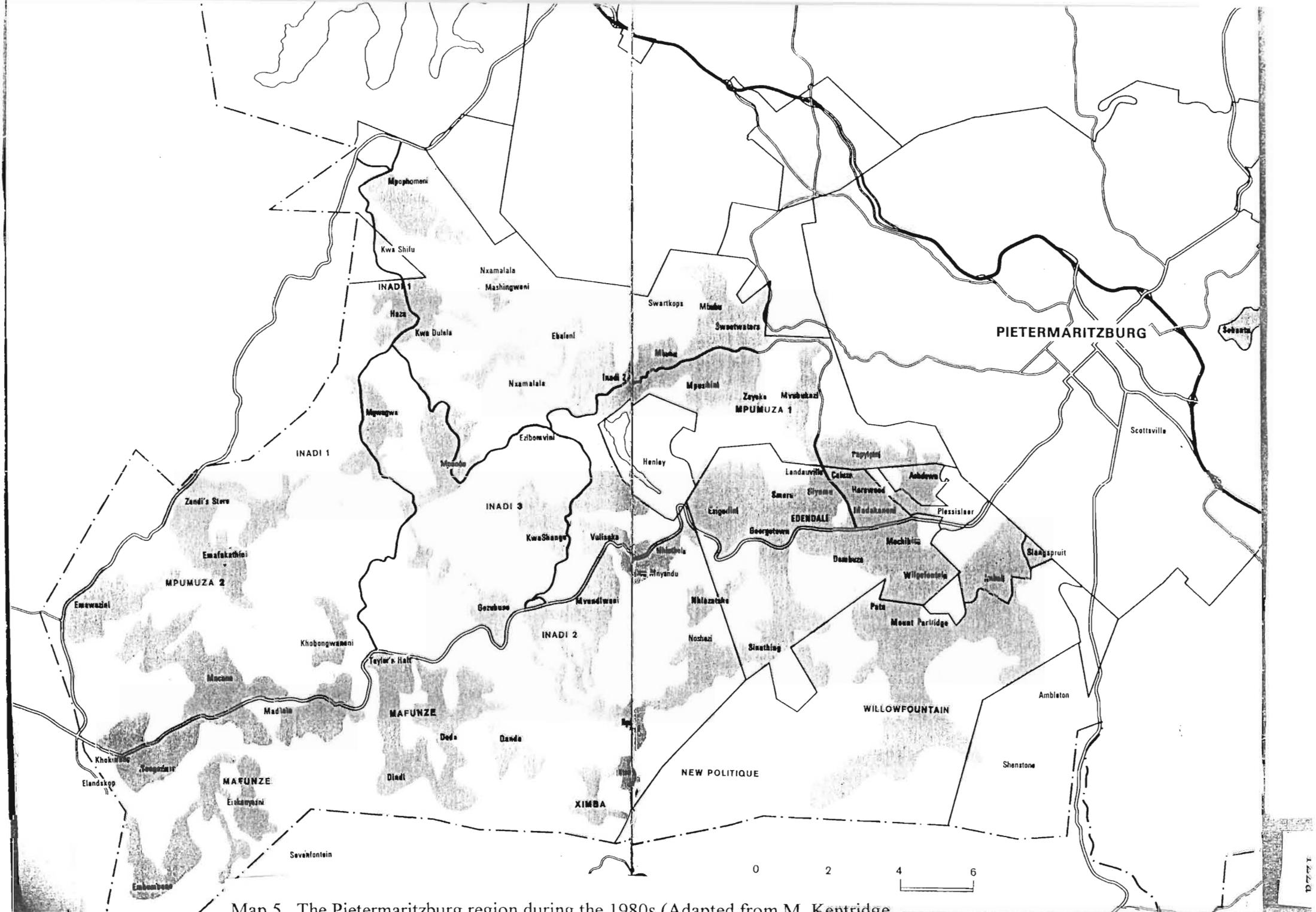
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*Witness*, 24 August 1984.

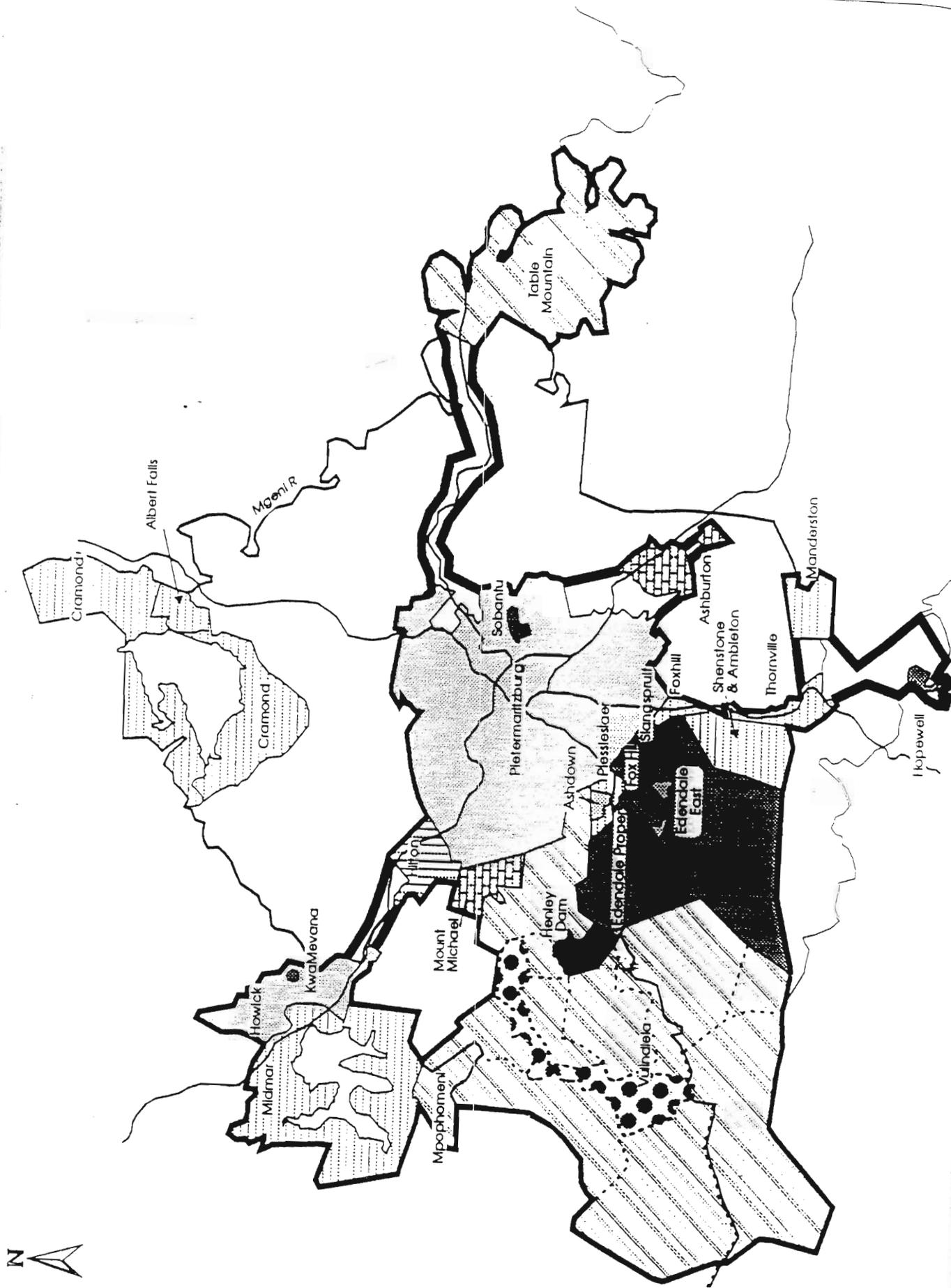
<sup>3</sup> Author's interview with Moses Ndlovu, Pietermaritzburg, 11 July 1995. The same point relating to weak a relationship also came out of the author's interview with Sobhuza Dlamini, 12 July 1995. However, Mthunzi Makhathini, 12 August 1995, argued that there was cohesion between the UDF affiliated organisations and the unions like MAWU in the Pietermaritzburg region.

<sup>4</sup> Author's interviews with Cassius Lubisi, Pietermaritzburg, 20 September 1995 and Moses Ndlovu, 11 July 1995. Philip Dladla of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), however, argued (18 July 1995) that there was no workerism as unions were prepared to work with communities on matters other than those relating to factories.

<sup>5</sup> D. Bonnin and A. Sitas, 'Lessons from the Sarmcol strike', in W. Cobbett and R. Cohen (eds), *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (London, James Currey, 1988), p. 45.



Map 5 The Pietermaritzburg region during the 1980s (Adapted from M. Kentridge,



Map 6. The Pietermaritzburg region showing as far as Howick and kwaMevana (Adapted from Integrated Planning Services, Main Report, Investigation into Metropolitan and Non-Metropolitan Forms of Local Government for the City of Pietermaritzburg, 1994)

respectively, specifically to accommodate the employees of BTR Sarmcol, and for people who were removed from land in the areas around Howick because of the laws of residential segregation.<sup>7</sup> Looking at the geographical distribution of its workforce it is clear that Sarmcol was the major employer in Howick. Sarmcol was what Scottish Cables and Alkan were to the majority of people in Pietermaritzburg. The livelihoods of most people in the townships and in the nearby rural areas depended on Sarmcol.

Since the 1950s BTR Sarmcol had been involved in disagreements with unions, and it all began when Harry Gwala was unionising workers at Sarmcol, so as to improve working conditions. In 1974 the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) came to Sarmcol and by 1983 it had recruited almost 90% of the factory's workers.<sup>8</sup> But the Sarmcol management would not recognise the union and it continued to retrench workers. MAWU organisers were also suffering from constant harassment. In 1976, for example, one of its organisers, Moses Ndlovu, was banned for 5 years and the workers suspected the management of complicity in this. The workers, however, continued with their struggle. In December 1984 they embarked on a strike over wages.<sup>9</sup> In April 1985, after an impasse in negotiations between Sarmcol and MAWU, the union decided to take the matter to the workers, and a ballot of almost 1000 workers voted unanimously to start strike action on 30 April 1985. On the 3rd of May 1985 all the striking workers were dismissed.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness and Conflict', p.191.

<sup>7</sup> J. Radford and W. Leeb, 'On-going Effects of Mass Dismissal on the Community of Mpophomeni', seminar paper to *Workshop on Regionalism and Restructuring in Natal*, Number 33, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 28-31 July, 1988, pp. 1-25; Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness and Conflict', pp. 45-106; For a detailed history of kwaMevana Township see W. Silaule, 'Established at the Edge, Surviving at the Centre: A History of kwaMevana Township in Howick with Particular Reference on its Founding in the 1930s', Unpublished BA Honours Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. pp. 181-188; L Mg G, 'Monitoring the Sarmcol Struggle', pp. 95-96.

<sup>9</sup> P. Dladla in the *South African Labour Bulletin*, Volume 10 Number 8, July – August 1985, p.31-32.

<sup>10</sup> Radford and Leeb, 'On-going Effects of Mass Dismissal', pp.1-3; A. Jeffery, *The Natal Story*, p. 59

Following their dismissal from Sarmcol, workers began a campaign of publicising their plight by holding daily meetings at Mpophomeni Township to discuss the way forward and to explain this situation to community members.<sup>11</sup> After these meetings, which usually took place in the Community Hall, they commonly marched together with other township residents, most of who were relatives of the strikers. One of my informants pointed out that the rationale behind these marches was

‘to make sure that the communities of Mpophomeni and KwaMevana were conscientised about our plight. It was also clear that the dismissal of the strikers was going to have detrimental repercussions in the townships and in the nearby rural areas. We also realised that a worker and a community member were inseparable and that workers need support of the community in their struggles’.<sup>12</sup>

One of these marches, on June 24, ended in a confrontation between police and the marchers; and police were lambasted by the union officials and local church leaders for their behaviour.<sup>13</sup> These daily meetings were psychological boosting mechanisms to keep the strikers' morale high. The campaign of conscientisation and mobilisation was not only confined to Mpophomeni. People were sent to other areas such as Sweetwaters, Pietermaritzburg, Hamarsdale, and to the chiefs in the reserves where the scabs labourers came from.<sup>14</sup>

On 9 May 1985 MAWU, in consultation with community structures in the townships, decided to call for a consumer boycott in Howick.<sup>15</sup> This boycott was going to apply to white-owned

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<sup>11</sup> Bonnin, ‘Class, Consciousness and Conflict’, p. 138; Ruth Lundie’s interview with Ntombela, September 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Author’s interviews with Philip Dladla, Pietermaritzburg, 18 July 1995 and Mthunzi Makhathini, Pietermaritzburg, 12 August 1995.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Mpophomeni march ends in chaos’ *The Natal Witness*, 09 May 1985.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Dladla in *SALB*, Volume 10, Number 8, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> J. Aitchison, ‘Numbering the Dead: the Course and Pattern of Political Violence in the Natal Midlands, 1987-1989’, Unpublished MA Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1993, p 45; Author’s interview with Mthunzi Makhathini, 12 August 1995.

businesses and the main aim was to force the Howick Chamber of Commerce to intervene in the dispute with Sarmcol. The decision to target white businesses was also influenced by the fact that during the 1984 strike local white shopowners had sided with Sarmcol management by refusing to open before 7 a.m. in order to give workers a chance to buy food when they were boycotting the factory canteen.<sup>16</sup> The residents of Mpophomeni, KwaMevana and the surrounding areas supported the boycott.<sup>17</sup> However, the fact that the people heeded the call for a consumer boycott does not mean that no coercive measures were taken to enforce it, as strikers went to town frequently to monitor who was shopping. It is also likely that township youths played a role in organising and monitoring the boycott, and in exercising coercion if necessary. In writing about consumer boycotts in the 1980s, Helliker et al. pointed out that:

‘There is a strong, but not necessarily predominant feeling in the African townships that a limited degree of coercion during boycotts is justified. This does not mean assent to an ‘anything goes policy’. But it does reflect a belief that an illegitimate state has no moral claim to monopoly of the use of coercion, and that if individuals want to do something against the interests and wishes of the majority in the community, they should be prevented from doing so, forcibly if necessary’.<sup>18</sup>

The nature of a boycott is such that it needs monitoring to ensure that people withhold their buying power. The consumer boycott in Howick was an exercise of power by the union as it was competing with Sarmcol and it had to show that it had power to paralyse the economy of the town. One can argue that the consumer boycott in Howick was a tool of mobilisation and organisation in the townships as well as a way of showing the strength of MAWU. Furthermore, this action was not the first that the residents of Mpophomeni had embarked on. By the time of the beginning of the strike a rent boycott had been going on for years. Alongside rent issues, in 1982 the community

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<sup>16</sup> Philip Dladla in *SALB*, Volume 10, Number 8, p.32.

<sup>17</sup> Author's interviews with Mthunzi Makhathini, 12 August 1995 and Philip Dladla, 18 July 1995.

<sup>18</sup> K. Helliker et al., ‘Asithengi! Recent consumer boycotts’, in I. Obery (ed), *South African Review* 4, (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987), p.42.

of Mpophomeni decided to boycott buses and walk 30 kilometres daily after a fare increase of 6c which was introduced without consultation.<sup>19</sup>

### **“We have built the country by fighting”<sup>20</sup>: Sarmcol strikers march in Pietermaritzburg**

In view of the fact that Howick and Mpophomeni were small urban areas, the union, after consultation with the strikers, decided to organise a march in the far larger centre of Pietermaritzburg. The purpose of the march would be to solicit support and to discourage scab labourers that were being hired by Sarmcol.<sup>21</sup> Many of the scab labourers came from Pietermaritzburg’s African townships. This was not their first march to Pietermaritzburg as they had gone to the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre during May Day of 1985, an event which offered them an opportunity to publicise their plight.

On 29 June 1985 the strikers boarded a convoy of ten buses, and left Mpophomeni Township for Pietermaritzburg. Their destination was the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre where there was going to be a meeting. Rather than taking the route that goes via Sweetwaters, they decided to go through the city centre. (see maps 5 and 6 and picture 1) The strategic importance of passing through the town was that they would get a chance of making their plight known in the central business district. The strikers sought to use a spectacular strategy in order to ensure that the message reached the majority of the people in Pietermaritzburg. After a ‘breaking down’ of one the buses in front of the Pietermaritzburg City Hall, the entire fleet stopped and strikers got a chance to

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<sup>19</sup> LMG, ‘Monitoring the Sarmcol Struggle’, p. 94.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.; Author’s interview with Moses Ndlovu, 11 July 1995.

<sup>21</sup> Author’s interview with Philip Dladla, 18 July 1995.

jump off and hand out stickers and pamphlets to passers-by.<sup>22</sup> Some of the red stickers carried the slogan *Magundane phumani e-Sarmcol* ('Rats get out of Sarmco!').<sup>23</sup> The 'rats' were those who were taking the jobs of the strikers. One of my interviewees pointed out that the bus did not really break down; the stalling of the buses was an orchestrated strategy.<sup>24</sup> One interesting aspect of this demonstration was that the strikers chose Saturday because they knew that many people would be shopping in the city centre. Mthunzi Makhathini, who was one of the strikers, pointed out that:

'We brought the city centre to a standstill not only to get the attention of the people but also the attention of the Sarmcol bosses because we knew that most of them do their shopping in Pietermaritzburg over the weekends'.<sup>25</sup>

This action by the strikers caught the police unaware and they later escorted the strikers along Edendale Road to a mass meeting that was going to take place at the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre. One of my informants pointed out that the treatment they got from the police from the very first Friday of their strike was harsh.<sup>26</sup> While in other instances relating to the strike the police acted harshly, during this protest action in the city, they acted with surprising restraint. On the way to Edendale, the strikers were singing in their buses and one of their main slogans was; '*Wathinta uMAWU udakwe yini!*' (You must be drunk to play with MAWU!)<sup>27</sup>, and in that way they drew people's attention along the road to Edendale.<sup>28</sup>

Members of youth and community organisations also attended the mass meeting at the Lay

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<sup>22</sup> Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness and Conflict', p.218; J. Fairbairn, *Flashes in her Soul- the life of Jabu Ndlovu* (Cape Town, Buchu, 1991), p.49; *The Natal Witness*, 01 July 1985; Author's interview with Alfred Ndlovu, Pietermaritzburg, 23 September 1995.

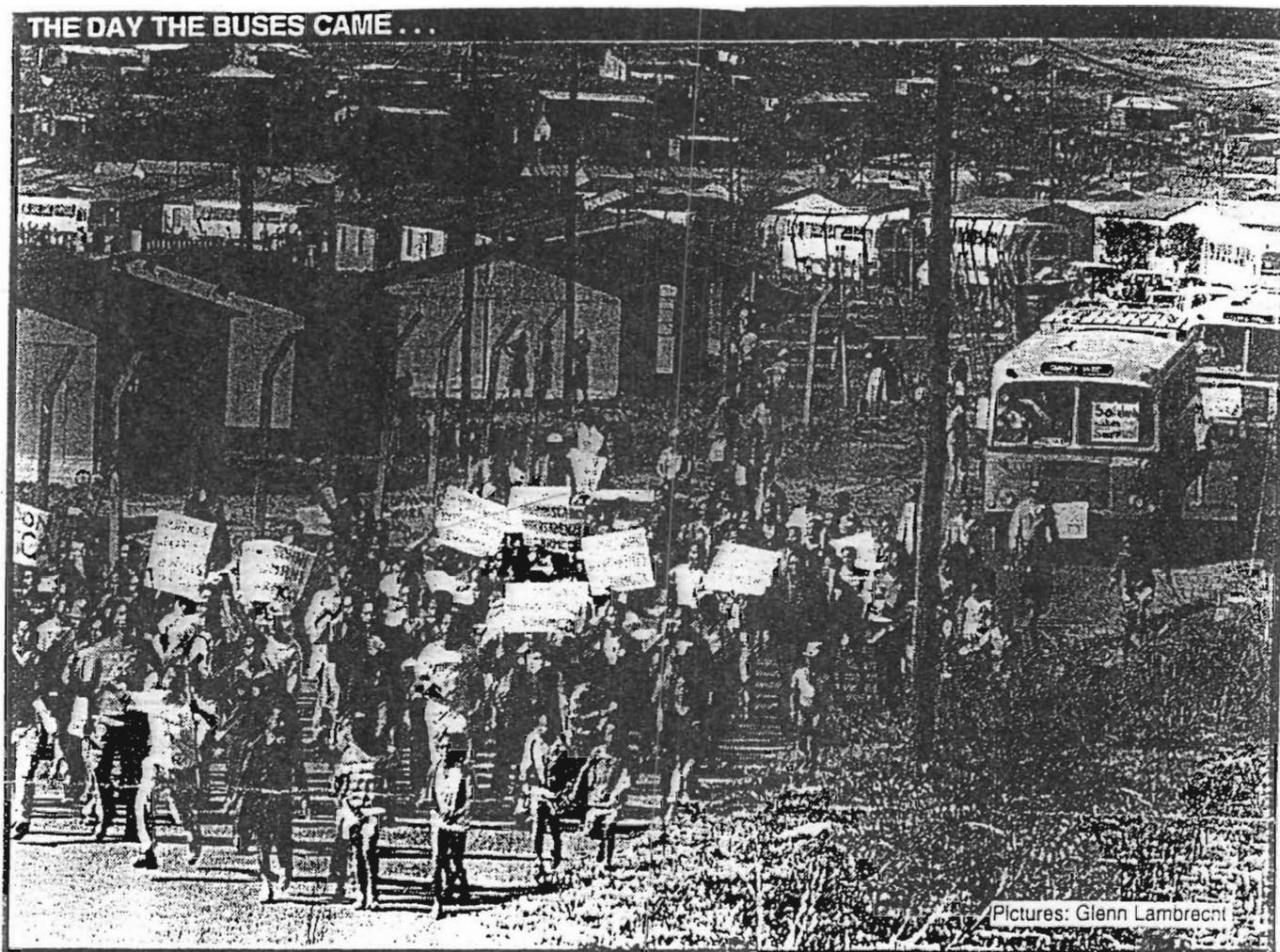
<sup>23</sup> *Weekly Mail*, 5-11 July 1985, p.3.

<sup>24</sup> Author's interviews with Philip Dladla, 18 July 1995, Alfred Ndlovu, 03 September 1995 and Mthunzi Makhathini, 12 August 1995.

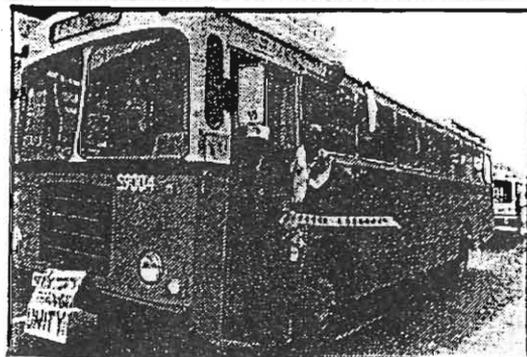
<sup>25</sup> Author's interview with Mthunzi Makhathini, 12 August 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> *Weekly Mail*. 2-11 July 1985.



The Mawu protest procession moves through Imbazi.



The buses in the city centre.

Picture 1 (Adapted from Echo, 04 July 1985)

Ecumenical Centre. They all pledged their support for the Sarmcol workers' struggle. This was the first signal that the Sarmcol conflict was not going to be a mere factory issue. Thulo points out that:

‘Mawu's efforts to win community support succeeded and the Sarmcol workers gained the support of many community organisations ranging from the clergy, civic, youth and labour’.<sup>29</sup>

After that meeting, strikers proceeded to the nearby Imbali Township. They marched in Imbali stages 1 and 2 and held street meetings in order to explain to the residents why they went on strike, and to plea for support. In their demonstration in Imbali they were joined by groups of youths and other residents. Some of the workers' delegates were also sent to other townships such as Sobantu and Ashdown. It was said that workers chose to demonstrate in Edendale and Imbali townships because many of the scab labourers at Sarmcol came from these areas.<sup>30</sup> However, it could also be argued that they chose Imbali due to the fact that the township had gained a name for itself as a place of radical political consciousness, and they needed the support of the recently formed and influential Imbali Youth Organisation. They came to Imbali while there was still that climate of resistance after the anti-Koornhof demonstrations of 1984. Working against the strikers' appeals for solidarity was Pietermaritzburg's high unemployment rate, which meant that there was a large pool of replacement labour for Sarmcol to draw on.

### **The Sarmcol stayaway in Pietermaritzburg: Its course, pattern and political repercussions**

Following solidarity marches in the city centre, Edendale and Imbali, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) decided, at its congress on 30 June 1985, to call for a stayaway

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<sup>28</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 01 July 1985; *Echo*, 04 July 1985; *Weekly Mail*, 2-11 July 1985.

<sup>29</sup> T. Thulo, ‘Violence in Pietermaritzburg’, in F. Meer, *Resistance in the Townships* (Durban, Madiba, 1989), p.197.

<sup>30</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 01 July 1985; *Echo*, 04 July 1985; *Weekly Mail*, 05-11 July 1985.

in support of the dismissed Sarmcol workers. This national conference resolution was to be referred back to the local shopstewards for deliberations and consultation at shopfloor level, and also to community organisations. The federation decided to confine the stayaway to Pietermaritzburg and to build up support activities in the rest of Natal.<sup>31</sup> One could argue that this decision was taken because this was a local and factory-related issue. A stayaway would be easier to monitor and coordinate if it was localised, and for one day only. Pietermaritzburg was also a strategic choice because there were many businesses there that would be hurt by the stayaway.

The stayaway was first discussed with community and youth organisations on July 4, and two days later another mass meeting attended by about 1500 people was held at the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre with different organisations such as the UDF, African People's Democratic Unions of South Africa (APDUSA) members and church leaders represented<sup>32</sup> Further meetings were held with student, civic and political organisations. In areas such as Mpophomeni and KwaMevana, where street and area committees had been formed after the strike, it was easy to let people know about the daily proceedings and resolutions taken at meetings.<sup>33</sup>

The UDF was, however, concerned about the fact that it had not been properly consulted. Many of the activists were members of UDF-affiliated organisations and of trade unions such as MAWU concurrently. The UDF believed that its own relationship to the community demanded an earlier consultation, direct involvement in the planning, and use as the main channel of communication with the township communities.<sup>34</sup> MAWU, on the other hand, viewed the stayaway as representing

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<sup>31</sup> Bonnin and Sitas, 'Lessons from the Sarmcol strike', p.53.

<sup>32</sup> L M G, 'Monitoring the Sarmcol Struggle', p. 100.

<sup>33</sup> Author's interview with Mthunzi Makhathini, Pietermaritzburg, 12 August 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Author's interview with Philip Dladla, 11 July 1995; LMG, 'Monitoring the Sarmcol Struggle', p.

one stage in the unions' struggle against Sarmcol, and felt that the dispute concerned the union fundamentally whilst the place of community groups lay in supporting union-based decisions. The issue was whether the stayaway should be used as an exercise in mobilising and educating people or whether the action should focus on factory-based issues.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the UDF ultimately participated fully in the stayaway. Many of the Front's members, especially youth groups were active in the organisation of the stayaway, and it was agreed that they work together so that the state could not take advantage of their disagreements.<sup>36</sup>

Following these differences amongst organisers it was reported in *The Weekly Mail* that at a meeting attended by almost 2000 people, the idea of a general stayaway was unanimously voted for. It was also reported that MAWU's Geoff Schreiner had telexed the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Industry urging it to intervene, failing which the stayaway was to take place. Not surprisingly, the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Industries (PCI), together with the Chamber of Commerce and the Afrikaanse Sakekamer, issued a joint statement refusing to be enmeshed in the dispute. They also called on workers to ignore calls for a stayaway from work. Their statement read:

'The policy of the three bodies and its members is to impartially serve the interests of all workers and management alike and ask that workers present themselves at their workplaces on Thursday and subsequently'.<sup>37</sup>

This statement was ambiguous, to say the least, in suggesting that the interests of the workers and management were compatible and that the Chambers served worker interests. It also showed how business sought to undermine of the combination of unions and community organisations. That was typical of the attitude of business to matters like stayaways and boycotts.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness and Conflict', p. 219; The same point also came out of the author's interview with Sobhuza Dlamini, 12 July 1995.

The refusal of business to intervene encouraged MAWU to go ahead with the stayaway. After consultation and negotiation it was decided that the day of the stayaway would be the 18th of July 1985. Many of the FOSATU unions and UDF affiliates supported the call by MAWU. Members of MAWU in other centres planned to stage demonstrations in order to show support for the Sarmcol struggle. Inkatha did not support the stayaway call. This expanded the problem to a broader political arena and resulted in strained relations not only between MAWU and Inkatha, but also between the UDF-affiliated organisations and Inkatha in the Greater Pietermaritzburg area.<sup>38</sup> Aitchison has traced the origins of the conflict between Inkatha and UDF in Pietermaritzburg to the Sarmcol campaign.<sup>39</sup>

The stayaway was going to be for one day only. Through union networks, many workers got to know about the stayaway and why they had to stay at home. The message was mostly disseminated by word of mouth, no pamphlets were issued, and it only came to wider public awareness when it was mentioned in the morning newspapers on July 17th when *The Natal Witness* published a full page report.<sup>40</sup> It was also reported in the Zulu-medium newspaper *Ilanga* that the stayaway organisers went to churches to disseminate the message.<sup>41</sup> The youth were active in publicising the stayaway and in telling people not to go to work on that day. In Imbali, members of IYO and other young people spread the word. On Wednesday 17th July, youth boarded buses and travelled around the township shouting to let people know that they should not go to work on the following day. One of my interviewees said:

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<sup>37</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 17 July 1985.

<sup>38</sup> Radford, 'The Psychological Effects of Mass Dismissal', pp. 9-10.

<sup>39</sup> Aitchison, 'Numbering the Dead', p.42.

<sup>40</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 17 July 1985; Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness and Conflict', p.220; Leeb and Radford, 'On-going Effects of Mass Dismissal', p.4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ilanga*, 18-20 July 1985.

'We travelled around the township and told people about the stayaway. We just told them and there was no time to explain and we were not as careful when it came to explanation because we knew that buses and taxis were not going to operate on that day. We also knew that there would be people who were going to wake up and explain to people who would be seen in bus stops or travelling to town on foot'.<sup>42</sup>

In the light of the above quotation one could argue that the stayaway call was going to be heeded even by those who were reluctant to do so. The fact that there was no explanation given implied that people would be scared of going to work as that shouting in itself symbolised coercion of some kind.

Organisers visited shop and factory owners in both Pietermaritzburg and Howick and asked them to support the stayaway. Amidst reports of intimidation of workers some factories and businesses decided to close and advised their black employees not to report to work.<sup>43</sup> Youths in the schools knew about the stayaway and as they were already politicised it was unlikely that they were going to report for classes on that day. The city of Pietermaritzburg was being geared up for the stayaway. Painted slogans appeared in various townships early on Wednesday morning calling for workers not to go to work.

Many bus drivers were members of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and they were sympathetic to the cause of the strikers and supported the stayaway call.<sup>44</sup> Some factories negotiated with their workers to sleep on their premises. One of those was BTR Sarmcol, which reported that production was going to continue as it had its entire staff. This was also the case with

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<sup>42</sup> Author's interview with S. Dlamini from Imbali, 12 July 1985.; P. Dladla, 18 July 1995, pointed out that their worker education process helped in ensuring that people stayed away. He also pointed out that there were people who were going to monitor the stayaway and it was also their duty to explain to those who were standing in bus stops.

<sup>43</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 18 July 1985.

Hullett Aluminium, one of the big factories along the Edendale Road, most of whose African workforce resided in the townships and in the Vulindlela area.<sup>45</sup> Major Pieter Kitching explained that police would give protection to buses and people who wished to go to work.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the Natal Divisional Commissioner of the South African Police, Brigadier Mulder van Eyck, issued a statement on 17 July saying

‘As from today on a 24-hour basis for as long as is necessary, police patrol units will patrol all bus routes in Edendale, Imbali and Mpophomeni and all black townships in and around greater Pietermaritzburg to render protection and keep peace’.<sup>47</sup>

Police statements showed how serious the issue was, revealing perceptions that the stayaway would be widespread and that it needed to be countered.

On the morning of 18 July 1985, roads in the townships in the Greater Pietermaritzburg area were full of police and army vehicles. There was no passenger transport on the main Edendale Road to the city. No bread and milk deliveries were made to the townships. It was reported that thirty municipal buses were stoned in Imbali and Sobantu on the eve of the stayaway.<sup>48</sup> Thousands of school children heeded the stayaway call in areas such as Imbali, Edendale, Ashdown, Sobantu and Mpophomeni. It was expected that schoolchildren would heed the stayaway as there was already a culture of boycotts in schools, and there was a widely accepted perception that they had nothing to lose, as their education was poor. Unlike many of the workers, to whom one day of staying away carried serious financial implications, young activists clamoured for the prolonging of the stayaway and they were excited about it.

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<sup>44</sup> Author’s interview with Alfred Ndlovu, 23 September 1995.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Mass stayaway has capital at standstill’ *The Daily News*, 19 July 1985.

<sup>46</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 17 July 1985; *The Daily News*, 18 July 1985.

<sup>47</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 18 July 1985.

<sup>48</sup> Butler et al., *Imbali*, p.162.

The day started quietly in many townships with most people remaining indoors. Barricades were put up to block many of the townships' main roads. Probably these had been put up at night in order to prevent people from going to work and also to hinder police and army vehicles. Fierce confrontations between the police and crowds of youths which had flocked to the streets in order to show their political strength and support for the stayaway were reported later in the day. Police fired teargas and rubber bullets to disperse these crowds. Interestingly, crowds moved out into the streets to fight the police rather than remaining indoors. Thousands of youths took to the streets, singing freedom songs that ridiculed and denigrated President P. W. Botha and apartheid, and others that praised and extolled the banned African National Congress (ANC) and its leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo. They were chanting slogans of resistance, some of which were anti-police while others conscientised people about the banned organisations and oppression in South Africa. They referred to the broader political situation in South Africa, not just the Sarmcol issue. Incidents of stone throwing, looting and arson were reported in the townships even though the police were there with their spotter planes.<sup>49</sup> There were conflicting views as to what actually instigated unrest. Imbali clergymen pointed out in their statement that

'For the greater part of the morning all was peaceful. With the appearance of the police in the vans and casspirs more people were drawn to the streets and a noticeable disturbance of the public peace ensued with the police in heavy armour'.<sup>50</sup>

Brigadier van Eyck who contended that the community welcomed the police, denied this.

The stayaway gained a different kind of momentum in the afternoon when crowds in different townships came out in large numbers to loot and destroy a variety of properties including symbols of oppression in the townships, such as beerhalls and administration offices. Police reported that a

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<sup>49</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 19 July 1985.

room in the Ashdown Administration office was burnt out and a section of the Ashdown beerhall was damaged. Some passing vehicles were also stoned. *The Witness* also reported that there was an attack on Chief Mini's "kraal" at Machibise. A crowd set alight the furnishings of a beerhall at Machibise. The KwaDaya store in Edendale was looted. In Imbali two beerhalls were gutted by fire and the house of the local Inkatha leader Abdul Awetha was petrol-bombed.<sup>51</sup> In Sobantu a large crowd of youth gathered to demand the release of four members of the Sobantu Youth Organisation (SOYO) who had been arrested following a demonstration in the township on the previous day.(see Maps 4 and 5)

At Mpophomeni, where most of the strikers resided, roads were barricaded using old cars covered with human excrement from the bucket system.<sup>52</sup> This action can be viewed as either a way of registering protest about the sewerage system or of preventing the police from removing the cars. The beerhall at Mpophomeni was burnt and some of the houses of scab workers were set alight. The Howick Fire Department ran out of water and the problem was exacerbated by the fact that the main water pipe to the township was being repaired. Police struggled as four different groups started fires simultaneously in different parts of the township.<sup>53</sup> One of my informants pointed that the police and the army provoked most of the youth's activities on that day, and that the security forces were regarded as the iron heel of the state's intention to suppress popular mobilisation.<sup>54</sup> The possibility of criminal elements taking advantage of the situation by looting some businesses should

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<sup>50</sup> *Echo*, 25 July 1985.

<sup>51</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 19 July 1985; J.Aitchison, 'Numbering the Dead', p.45;

<sup>52</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 19 August 1985.

<sup>53</sup> Bonnin, 'Class, Consciousness and Conflict', pp.220-221; In my interview with Sobhuza Dlamini from Imbali, 12 July 1995. He pointed out that there appeared to be no co-ordinated action in the burning of beerhalls. He stated that people themselves identified beerhalls with apartheid as they did in the 1930s and 1950s. Referring to the burning of Imbali beerhall he argued that income from it helped to build Imbali Stage Two and that Kruger (township manager) could be seen frequenting the Imbali beerhall.

be taken into consideration when trying to understand what happened in the townships.

Hospital workers were exempted from participating in the stayaway due to the essential nature of their jobs. However, Grey's Hospital, which was in the city, had 99% of its black workforce absent from work.<sup>55</sup> For many African workers to reach Grey's Hospital they had to use public transport, which was not available on that day. Surprisingly, no deaths were reported as a result of the stayaway and there were few injuries. One of the major reasons for the success of the stayaway was the lack of transport. However, even if transport was available the whole climate of that day showed that the day was for resistance against apartheid and not just the Sarmcol issue. The roles played by young people, many of whom were members of UDF-affiliated organisations, in ensuring that many people heeded the stayaway call were significant.

There were mixed reactions to the stayaway as different groups and institutions began to express their views the following day. MAWU regarded it as an outstanding success. The union's spokesperson Geoff Schreiner argued that

‘The almost 100% stayaway by black workers clearly demonstrates the overall support for the workers at Sarmcol and their desire to see that they are immediately reinstated’.<sup>56</sup>

He dismissed the view that intimidators were responsible for the stayaway on Thursday. However, it should be taken into account that Schreiner, as one of the organisers, would like to downplay any kind of coercion that might have taken place. His response, which denied coercion, was shaped by his position and it should not be uncritically accepted. It was not, however, only MAWU's view that the stayaway was well supported; other sources also rated the stayaway between 80 and 100%

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<sup>54</sup> Author's interview with Mthunzi Makhathini, 12 August 1995.

<sup>55</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 19 July 1985.

successful.<sup>57</sup>

The reactions of both the police and the Chambers of Commerce and Industry were very hostile. Both saw the effective stayaway as the work of intimidators. The Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Commerce threatened to take legal action if there was a repeat of the stayaway and advised members of the Chamber who had been affected by the stayaway to lodge protests with the unions. The President of the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Industries, Mr Louis Sennett, said, 'the PCI deplores the actions of MAWU in allowing a single industrial dispute to affect the lives and welfare of thousands of innocent people'.<sup>58</sup> This type of reaction was also expressed by some of the black people who had stayed away when they complained about youths that had stoned buses and set up barricades.<sup>59</sup> This reaction by some people from the townships was a manifestation of the complexities involved in the enforcement of the stayaway, and it also puts into question claims by the organisers that all people willingly stayed away.

## Conclusion

Of more significance than disagreements about the stayaway was its impact on mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg. There had not been an action that had involved both workers and communities on such a large scale before in the Pietermaritzburg region. During the 1950s, which have been hailed as a decade of defiance, Pietermaritzburg did not experience large-scale mass mobilisation. The 1985 stayaway occurred in a city whose townships were beginning to experience revolts that had become prevalent in other areas for many years. This stayaway transformed political

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<sup>56</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 20 July 1985.

<sup>57</sup> Leeb and Radford, 'On-going Effects of Mass Dismissal', p.4; Bonnin and Sitas, 'Lessons from the Sarmcol strike', p.53.

<sup>58</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 20 July 1985.

mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg because the city had not had disturbances during the much-celebrated Soweto revolts of 1976. Furthermore, the 1973 strikes seemed not to have had any significant impact on Pietermaritzburg compared to Durban. Many former activists and trade unions regard the Sarmcol stayaway as a watershed in mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg.<sup>60</sup>

The success of this stayaway laid the foundation for other future actions, as political organisations and trade unions had learnt the lessons from the Sarmcol struggle. The barricades in the streets were not just a show of solidarity for the strikers but a way of confronting the government represented by its security forces. The mobilisation of community support by direct union activity was another major step in mass mobilisation. Furthermore, organising was not left to the leadership but was taken over by ordinary members. What also made the stayaway a vital factor in mass mobilisation was that unlike the other incidents, such as the Sobantu boycotts and demonstrations and the anti-Koornhof demonstrations, here was a common issue that united people from different townships. Hence it has been argued that 'the Sarmcol issue and the workers' campaigns became the lever through which mass mobilisation became feasible in Pietermaritzburg.'<sup>61</sup> Even though the action did not succeed in gaining the reinstatement of sacked workers it became a catalyst for mass mobilisation in the Pietermaritzburg region and charted the course for future struggles. It is likely that the stayaway was a success in terms of anti-apartheid politics, but some will surely see it differently considering the fact that the dismissed workers were not victorious over Sarmcol. Nevertheless, one should point out that mass mobilisation for the subsequent national stayaways in Pietermaritzburg took a cue from the 1985 incident. Between 1985 and 1989 stayaways both

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<sup>59</sup> *Echo*, 25 July 1985.

<sup>60</sup> Author's interviews with Dumezweni Zimu, 03 August 1995, Moses Ndlovu, 11 July 1995 and Alfred Ndlovu, 23 September 1995.

<sup>61</sup> L M G, 'Monitoring the Sarmcol Struggle', p. 109.

national and local, were well supported in Pietermaritzburg. During the second half of 1989 another strategy of mass mobilisation began to be utilised as part of the Defiance Campaign.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **Taking the Resistance Crowd into the City Centre: The Defiance Campaign March in Pietermaritzburg, 1989**

The main focus of this chapter is the analysis of the protest march that took place in the city on 21 September 1989. This event has been selected because it required a different organising strategy from that of a stayaway and because it signalled the beginning of a new kind of mass mobilisation in local politics. There will be an attempt to find out why and how the march was organised, and to offer insights into the nature of crowd behaviour during and after the march. It was the first big march in the city after the relaxation of the Emergency regulations and it symbolised the taking of the struggle from the African townships to the central business district. Before discussing this particular march of September 1989 I will start by giving a brief overview of political mobilisation in the Pietermaritzburg region after the Sarmcol stayaway of 1985.

#### **Background to the 1989 marches**

Since the 1985 Sarmcol stayaway there had been many other stayaways and boycotts, some national and local, which had been well supported in the Pietermaritzburg region. Some schools in Imbali, Edendale, Sobantu and Mpophomeni experienced boycotts for few days during August 1985. Reasons for that school boycott included the continuing State of Emergency, detentions, township violence and the murder of Mrs Victoria Mxenge.<sup>1</sup> About 100 youths began what was described as a spontaneous demonstration and smashed shops in the city centre when they were returning from Mxenge's memorial service.<sup>2</sup> During this period a consumer boycott was organised to protest against the Sarmcol dismissals.

The period beginning from 1986 saw many school boycotts taking place in the Greater

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<sup>1</sup> A. J. Jeffery, *The Natal Story: 16 Years of Conflict* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1997), p. 52.

Pietermaritzburg area. Towards the end of 1985 independent unions had merged to form the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), while the pro-Africanist unions formed the National Azanian Council of Trade Unions (NACTU). From the beginning COSATU worked closely with the UDF and other progressive community organisations. There was a merger of civic and worker issues and workers increasingly felt obliged to support the communities to which they belonged. However, the relationship between the unions and political organisations was not always smooth as some unions were opposed to the involvement of workers in community issues, while others believed that a worker and a community member were inseparable.<sup>3</sup> During the same year the State of Emergency, which had been proclaimed on 21 July 1985, was renewed in June 1986, and this time it was extended to cover Natal.

The State of Emergency severely affected mass mobilisation, as organisations could not hold rallies and other outdoor meetings and their leaders could not be quoted in newspapers. Even though political organisations had flexible strategies that could be adjusted to changing circumstances, the State of Emergency, nevertheless, still posed a formidable challenge. It was through trade unions that political organisations could continue mobilising publicly, although some trade union leaders were victims of police harassment.<sup>4</sup> During 1986, COSATU and the UDF jointly called for nationwide stayaways on May Day and June 16, and in early October, these organisations committed themselves to a joint campaign of National United Action against the State of Emergency.<sup>5</sup>

On May 1, a new trade union federation, the United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA), was launched at Kings Park Stadium in Durban, with Inkatha's Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi as the

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<sup>2</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 10 August 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Author's interviews with Moses Ndlovu, Pietermaritzburg, 11 July 1995 and Sobhuza Dlamini, Pietermaritzburg, 12 July 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Author's interview with Alfred Ndlovu, Pietermaritzburg, 23 September 1995.

<sup>5</sup> M. Swilling, 'The United Democratic Front and the Township Revolt', in R. Cobbett and R. Cohen

main speaker. The formation of UWUSA was seen as Inkatha's answer to COSATU, whose president, Elijah Barayi, had openly declared that Chief Buthelezi should be isolated and ostracised. The launch of this new federation was going to add another dimension to the simmering conflict between Inkatha and the UDF-COSATU alliance. In December 1986, four Sarmcol Workers' Co-operative members were abducted from Mpophomeni and three of them were shot and set alight at Lions River near Howick.<sup>6</sup> It was alleged that Inkatha members were responsible for this, as this happened while Inkatha was having a rally at Mpophomeni Community Hall. It is likely that Sarmcol had a role in exacerbating political polarisation because, early in 1987, the company recognised UWUSA although it had refused to recognise MAWU after a long period of negotiations.<sup>7</sup> There were also frictions between the UDF supporting youths and the Black Consciousness youth. The conflict between the UDF-COSATU alliance and Inkatha began to escalate in 1987, after the anti-whites-only election stayaway of May 5 - 6.<sup>8</sup>

COSATU and the UDF had called for a national stayaway in May 1987. In Pietermaritzburg the organisation for the stayaway went well and it had the support of the bus drivers who belonged to the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU). The Inkatha yeNkululeko yeSizwe came out openly against the call for the stayaway and Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi prorogued the KwaZulu

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(Eds), *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (London, James Currey, 1988), p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> J. Radford and W. Leeb, 'The Sarmcol strike and the Effect of Job loss on the Community of Mpophomeni', paper to Workshop on Regionalism and Restructuring in Natal, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 28-31 July 1988, p. 5; Jeffery, *The Natal Story*, p. 60; Author's interview with Alfred Ndlovu, 23 September 1995. (The victims were Phineas Sibiyi, Simeon Ngubane and Flomena Mnikathi. The fourth, Mika Sibiyi, managed to escape).

<sup>7</sup> J. Radford and W. Leeb, 'Sarmcol strike', p. 3; J. J. W. Aitchison, 'Numbering the Dead: The Course and Pattern of Political Violence in the Natal Midlands, 1987-1989', Unpublished MA Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, university of Natal, 1993, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed analysis of the stayaway in Pietermaritzburg see S. M. Mkhize 'Mass Mobilisation and Resistance: A Study of selected stayaways and protest marches in Pietermaritzburg, 1985-1989', Unpublished BA Honours Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1995, pp. 41-56; Y. Bhamjee, et al., 'The May 5 - 6<sup>th</sup> worker stayaway in Pietermaritzburg, 1987', in *Reality*, (1987) 19:4, pp. 14-15, July; M. Kentridge, *An Unofficial War: Inside the conflict in Pietermaritzburg* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1990).

Legislative Assembly, so that members could go to their 'constituencies' and campaign against the stayaway. He perceived the stayaway as a "declaration of war" and referred to it as a "grossly irresponsible action".<sup>9</sup> However, despite all these counter-mobilisation measures the stayaway was a success in the Pietermaritzburg region. It was soon followed by Inkatha's forced recruitment campaign. It is to these events that many people trace the origins of political violence in the Pietermaritzburg region.<sup>10</sup>

Mass mobilisation against the state after 1987 took place in the context of war in the Pietermaritzburg region and of the tightening of 'law and order'. Many people were dying as a result of political violence, and political polarisation between Inkatha and the UDF-COSATU alliance was continuing. TGWU bus drivers became the main targets of assassinations and these were related to their support for the stayaways. The UDF youth, popularly known as *amaqabane*, were in the forefront of both mass mobilisation and conflict in Pietermaritzburg. It was during this period of intense conflict that areas townships in Edendale were renamed and given names like Moscow, Lusaka, Angola, Tanzania, Maputo and Cuba.<sup>11</sup> From 1988 onwards there were many detentions of prominent political figures. In February 1988, the UDF and 17 other anti-apartheid political organisations were banned. This affected political mobilisation nationally as well as locally. It was left up to the church groups and trade unions to continue with mass mobilisation. However, COSATU was able to organise a three-day stayaway in June to protest against the proposed

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<sup>9</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 5 May 1987; *Ilanga*, 4 May 1987. The Zulu medium newspaper, which had recently been bought by Inkatha, reported that members of the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly (KLA), all of whom were Inkatha, unanimously rejected the stayaway and called on the UDF and COSATU not to use intimidation in order to enforce the stayaway.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this see J. Aitchison, 'Numbering the Dead'; N. N. Bhebhe, 'Mobilization, Conflict and Repression: The United Democratic Front and Political Struggles in the Pietermaritzburg region, 1983-1991', Unpublished MA Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1996; Kentridge, *An Unofficial War*; A. Jeffery, *The Natal Story*.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey, *The Natal Story*, p. 67. (Some of the struggle names are no longer in use but Moscow seems to have stood the test of changes. It is likely that future generations will forget that the area was once called Madakaneni).

Labour Relations Act. The stayaway was well supported in Pietermaritzburg. Even in the context of war, political mobilisation continued and means and ways of working under the constraints of the State of emergency were devised. A local trade unionist had this to say:

‘We continued with mass mobilisation, using different strategies that were appropriate for that particular context. One strategy was to use football games by coming there and taking some of the boys aside, as if we were planning for the match. The other tactic we used was to attend parents’ school meetings or just to hijack the meetings in order to get the older people’.<sup>12</sup>

The political conflict took a step further when people began attacking each other in central Pietermaritzburg. Demarcation of zones of influence by rival organisations, which was a feature in the townships, began to apply to the city streets as well. People had to be careful which streets they traversed, as political demarcations had been transported to the city’s business district.

The same context of conflict continued to haunt Pietermaritzburg during 1989. The year began with changes at government level, and in the broader national political context, as the balance of forces was rapidly moving against the apartheid state. There was also a spiralling of defiant hunger strikes by political prisoners and this marked the beginning of a campaign of disobedience.<sup>13</sup> In June 1989 a stayaway was called in the Pietermaritzburg region against the death of Jabu Ndlovu and the on-going political violence. The aim was not only to mourn Jabu’s death, but also to show the South African government that people could no longer tolerate the violence that was ravaging the Natal Midlands.<sup>14</sup> That stayaway was related to a local issue and was also confined to Pietermaritzburg, as was the case with the Sarmcol stayaway. However, due to a plethora of reasons such as the lack of proper organisation and consultation, the stayaway failed to mobilise many people and it got little

<sup>12</sup> Author’s interview with Moses Ndlovu, 12 July 1995.

<sup>13</sup> IDAF, *Review of 1989: Resistance and Repression in South Africa and Namibia* (London, International Defence and Aid fund for Southern Africa, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Author’s interviews with Philip Dladla, 18 July 1995 and Alfred Ndlovu, 23 September 1995; Interview with Thami Mohlomi of COSATU (Natal) in which he outlined the demands and goals of the stayaway that took place in Pietermaritzburg from 5-7 June 1989, in *South African Labour Bulletin*, (1989), June, 14:2 (1989/90), pp. 67-68.

support as some factories reported a 100% attendance and buses operated as normal.<sup>15</sup> After the stayaway, which consisted of two days of “peaceful protest action” the era of protest marches began, and these marches involved taking resistance crowds into the city centres and these involved very different strategies to those that were aimed at letting people stay at home.

Later in 1989 year the government eased some restrictions on anti-apartheid political activity, while political organisations from both inside and outside the country took advantage of the crisis within the state and accelerated mass mobilisation, adopting new strategies for the situation. The Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), which had been formed early in the year, committed itself to mobilise the masses against the state and it revitalised the strategy of protest marches. For the first time since the 1950s, political organisations could march or hold public demonstrations without fear of being detained. However, there were instances where people were shot during some of these marches. The MDM was a coalition of progressive movements, including the UDF and COSATU, and had the advantage that it was an amorphous mass movement and the police could not break it easily by detaining its leadership or banning it. The MDM’s Defiance Campaign, inspired by the principle of non-violent protest action, ridiculed the government's apartheid policy and the State of Emergency.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Mass Democratic Movement and 1989 Defiance Campaigns: A brief overview**

The year 1989 was an important one in mass mobilisation. From the beginning of the year the mass movement regained the initiative and the close working relationship between COSATU and the UDF took on a more permanent character, and the alliance became known as the MDM.<sup>17</sup> To

<sup>15</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 8 June 1989.

<sup>16</sup> C. Merrett, ‘Introduction’, *The Emergency of the State – A Source Guide to South African Political Issues* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1993), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> IDAF, *Apartheid: The Facts* (London, International Defence and Aid Fund on Southern Africa,

avoid being banned, as had happened to the UDF the previous year; the MDM was not constituted as a formal organisation. The MDM embarked on a campaign of defiance during 1989 during which many organisations were rebuilt and emerged openly.<sup>18</sup> The campaign entailed protest marches, consumer boycotts, hunger strikes by detainees, calls for the release of political detainees and the unbanning of organisations, and civil disobedience to challenge segregated public amenities such as buses, beaches and other government-controlled facilities such as hospitals and schools.<sup>19</sup> Open-air meetings attended by large crowds accompanied the campaign and it involved the taking of thousands of people, acting in largely disciplined and orderly ways, to the streets.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to the confrontations between youths and the police in the streets of the townships, the struggle was taken into the city centres that were perceived as the domains of white authority. This sustained pressure by the MDM forced the authorities to modify their repressive tactics, allowing some mass meetings and demonstrations. This attitude by the authorities signalled a change, as this was different from the official policies that were pursued during that time with regard to extra-parliamentary opposition. During this climate of defiance many organisations and individuals publicly defied restrictions by declaring themselves unbanned.<sup>21</sup>

During the same year there was a dramatic change in governmental politics - P. W. Botha was replaced by F. W. de Klerk as State President of the Republic of South Africa.<sup>22</sup> There were modifications in the government's strategy regarding extra-parliamentary opposition. Coercion and restrictions on protest activities, which had been part of the Botha government strategy, were

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1991), p. 109; T. Lodge and B. Nasson, *All, Here and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991), p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> IDAF, *Apartheid: The Facts*, p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> R. Schrire, *Adapt or Die: The End of White Politics in South Africa* (Ford Foundation and Foreign Policy association, 1991), p. 112; Lodge and Nasson, *All, Here and Now*, p. 111; IDAF, *Apartheid: the Facts*, p. 109; N. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), p. 136.

<sup>20</sup> IDAF, *Apartheid: the Facts*, p. 109.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

relaxed even though most anti-apartheid organisations were still banned and their leaders restricted or detained. For reasons that are still subject to debate the new government committed itself to negotiations with the then banned African National Congress. The MDM emerged in that context and, from August, it unleashed its defiance campaign in the form of protest marches and the symbolic occupation of racially segregated areas.<sup>23</sup>

In July 1989 the MDM announced that it would engage in a defiance campaign which would be organised around 'a peaceful programme of non-violent mass action directed against apartheid laws and addressing the immediate demands of the people'.<sup>24</sup> The MDM wanted to show that

'After three years of emergency rule, the apartheid regime had gained a degree of physical control in which most of South Africa's population lived, but it had clearly not destroyed the structures of organised resistance nor had it made progress in establishing legitimacy for itself or its collaborators'.<sup>25</sup>

The Defiance Campaign marches were aimed at adapting resistance strategies to changing political circumstances, and they were important in taking the struggle from the townships to the city centres in order to draw international attention to the plight of the oppressed people in South Africa. The marches were also a way of conveying to white voters that the struggles of the oppressed people were not simply something they watched on their televisions or read about in the newspapers.<sup>26</sup>

There is some debate as to whose interests these protest marches served. The liberation movements benefited from these marches as strategies of mass mobilisation while, on the other hand, the state

<sup>22</sup> Schrire, *Adapt or Die*, 111-113.

<sup>23</sup> Author's interview with Cassius Lubisi, Pietermaritzburg, 20 September 1995. Cassius pointed out that the idea of a defiance campaign did not emanate from inside the country but from the ANC in exile. He said the ANC came up with the idea when some UDF and COSATU leaders went outside the country to report the situation to the ANC.

<sup>24</sup> 'Non-Government Initiatives and Protest', *Race Relations Survey*, 1989/90, (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1990), p. 222.

<sup>25</sup> IDAF, *Review of 1989, Repression and Resistance in South Africa and Namibia*, Fact Paper on Southern Africa No 18, (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1990), p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Author's interviews with Dumezweni Zimu, Pietermaritzburg, 03 August 1995 and Mthunzi Makhathini, Pietermaritzburg, 12 August 1995.

obtained international credibility for allowing these marches.<sup>27</sup>

The protest march in Pietermaritzburg took place in this context. There had already been protest marches in Cape Town, Pretoria and Johannesburg and these had drawn large crowds. There had also been protest marches against racially segregated amenities such as schools, hospitals and beaches in different parts of the country, including a highly successful ‘occupation’ of Durban's racially segregated beaches.<sup>28</sup> The situation in the Greater Pietermaritzburg area was still volatile and political polarisation had worsened since 1987. The national anti-whites-only election stayaway, which was called by the MDM on 5-6 September 1989, had been well supported in Pietermaritzburg.<sup>29</sup> This was the context in which the mid-September defiance campaign march was planned to take place in the city centre.

### **Organisation of the defiance campaign march in Pietermaritzburg**

Obtaining a detailed picture of strategies that were used to organise the march in Pietermaritzburg relied heavily on interviews, because of the dearth of written documents. This march occurred when many of the key political activists were still detained, while others were under restriction orders and did not participate in the organisation of the march. This left a gap for certain church leaders and trade unions to co-ordinate the organisation of the march. This was also the countrywide trend. The Church as an institution was not openly harassed by the state for fear of tarnishing its own ‘Christian’ image.<sup>30</sup> Trade unions, however, suffered as a result of detentions and restrictions although few of their key officeholders had been detained when compared with township-based

<sup>27</sup> Author's interview with Cassius Lubisi, 20 September 1995.

<sup>28</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 4 September 1989; *Race Relations Survey*, 1989/90, p.223.

<sup>29</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 6 September 1989; ‘Natal bears the brunt of widespread stayaway’ *The Natal Witness*, 7 September 1989; *Echo*, 7 September 1989.

<sup>30</sup> Author's interviews with Mthunzi Makhathini, 12 August 1995, Michael Worsnip, 7 September 1995, Rod Bulman, 8 September 1995 and Cassius Lubisi, 20 September 1995; Lodge and Nasson, *All, Here and Now*, p. 113; Schrire, *Adapt or Die*, pp. 84-87.

organisations. This has been attributed to the fact that they were much less vulnerable to immobilisation through the loss of their leaders, since their organisation was much tighter at the rank and file level and that their organising functions took place inside factories.<sup>31</sup>

A common explanation of mobilisation of the marches from the local political activists that I interviewed was that they used the same strategies as they did with stayaways and they argued that people had been mobilised in the previous actions and it was no longer difficult to communicate with the people 'on the ground'.<sup>32</sup> However, with the advantage of hindsight, it can be argued that tactics for the march were different to those for a stayaway. Mobilising for a march needed different tactics from those of a stayaways because these two strategies of mass mobilisation were altogether different. The march required people to go out into the streets; stayaways required people to remain in their homes.

Certain church groups had been involved in mass mobilisation and community struggles in Pietermaritzburg before 1989.<sup>33</sup> From 1988, when anti-apartheid organisations were banned, it was left up to the churches to continue with resistance, seeking to apply the gospel to the lives of oppressed people, and to use biblical symbols and concepts to challenge apartheid.<sup>34</sup> In the Natal Midlands important centres of this activism included the Federal Theological Seminary (FEDSEM) at Imbali, the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA) and the South African Council of Churches (SACC) offices in the city, and the St Joseph's Scholasticate in Cedara. Certain denominations and groups in the region were represented in the MDM by an

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<sup>31</sup> Lodge and Nasson, *All, Here and Now*, p. 112.

<sup>32</sup> Author's interviews with Dumezweni Zimu, 3 August 1995 and Mthunzi Makhathini, 12 August 1995.

<sup>33</sup> Author's interview with Michael Worsnip, 7 September 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Author's interviews with Michael Worsnip, 7 September 1995, Rod Bulman, 8 September 1995 and Cassius Lubisi, 20 September 1995.

organisation called the Standing for the Truth (SFT) Campaign.<sup>35</sup>

It was within the SFT that most of the co-ordination and orchestration of the protest march took place. The idea of staging a protest march in Pietermaritzburg was first mooted after a similar event in Cape Town which had attracted a crowd of 30 000 to 50 000 people.<sup>36</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Alan Boesak and the Mayor, Gordon Oliver, led the march in the streets of Cape Town. On the day of the Cape Town peace march a solidarity service was held at The Cathedral of the Holy Nativity in Pietermaritzburg. Approximately 700 people attended this service.<sup>37</sup> This can be viewed as one of the signals that the city was being geared up for crowd gatherings in the centre of the city itself.

After that service there was a meeting of the Pietermaritzburg clergy and there the issue of a protest march was deliberated in detail. Certain clergy had identified the issues around which they could mobilise the people, and one of the critical issues was the restriction on funerals. Organisations such as the banned UDF and COSATU supported the idea of a march when they were informed about it.<sup>38</sup> It was also decided that churches should be used to disseminate the word about the protest march, and one of my informants pointed out that:

‘The decision was taken that church structures such as *umanyano* and *amadodana* in the case of the Methodists be used. People in the churches were told that they were free to come regardless of their political affiliations, as that was not any political party's march. We told the people that the march was to protest against the abrogation of Christian values and principles of truth and justice’.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the assertions that political organisations were not invited it can be argued that COSATU and organisations affiliated to the UDF had preferential treatment, as they were part of the MDM,

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<sup>35</sup> Author's interviews with Michael Worsnip, 7 September 1995 and Rod Bulman, 8 September 1995.

<sup>36</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 14 September 1989.

<sup>37</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 14 September 1989, p.2

<sup>38</sup> Author's interview with Rod Bulman, 8 September 1995.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

unlike Inkatha, which was not part of the mass movement. Another informant stated that

‘It was agreed that COSATU and UDF should mobilise at a political level in order to ensure that people come to the march. The whole thing had to be done as clandestinely as possible because we knew that the police would try to stop the march. When people asked us about why Inkatha was not invited we told them that there was no formal invitation to either UDF or COSATU’.<sup>40</sup>

After the programme for the march had been finalised it was

‘decided to publicise it through newspapers and radio stations. Following lengthy deliberations among the organisers it was agreed that other religious institutions should be invited to support the march, giving it a multi-faith dimension’.<sup>41</sup>

On 19 September, it was reported in the *Natal Witness* that a protest march was to take place in the city on Thursday 21 September. The march was being planned jointly by the churches' Standing for the Truth Campaign and by community organisations.<sup>42</sup> Bishop Khoza Mgojo of the Methodist church, who was on the SFT Executive, said the march would be held in the nation-wide tradition and was going to start from the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity in Church Street at 12:30 p.m.<sup>43</sup> He pointed out that the march would proceed through the streets of the city centre to the Loop Street Police Station, where a memorandum would be presented to the police. (See Map7) In line with the national pattern of the Defiance Campaign, Bishop Mgojo pointed out that they would not ask for permission to march in the city. The organisers of the march expected it to cut across organisational barriers with people from numerous organisations and all walks of life participating, as the march was open to “all people” opposed to apartheid no matter what their affiliations.<sup>44</sup>

The churches, community organisations, and the media helped in various ways, directly and vicariously, to disseminate the message about the protest march. Through communication networks

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<sup>40</sup> Author's interview with Michael Worsnip, 7 September 1995.

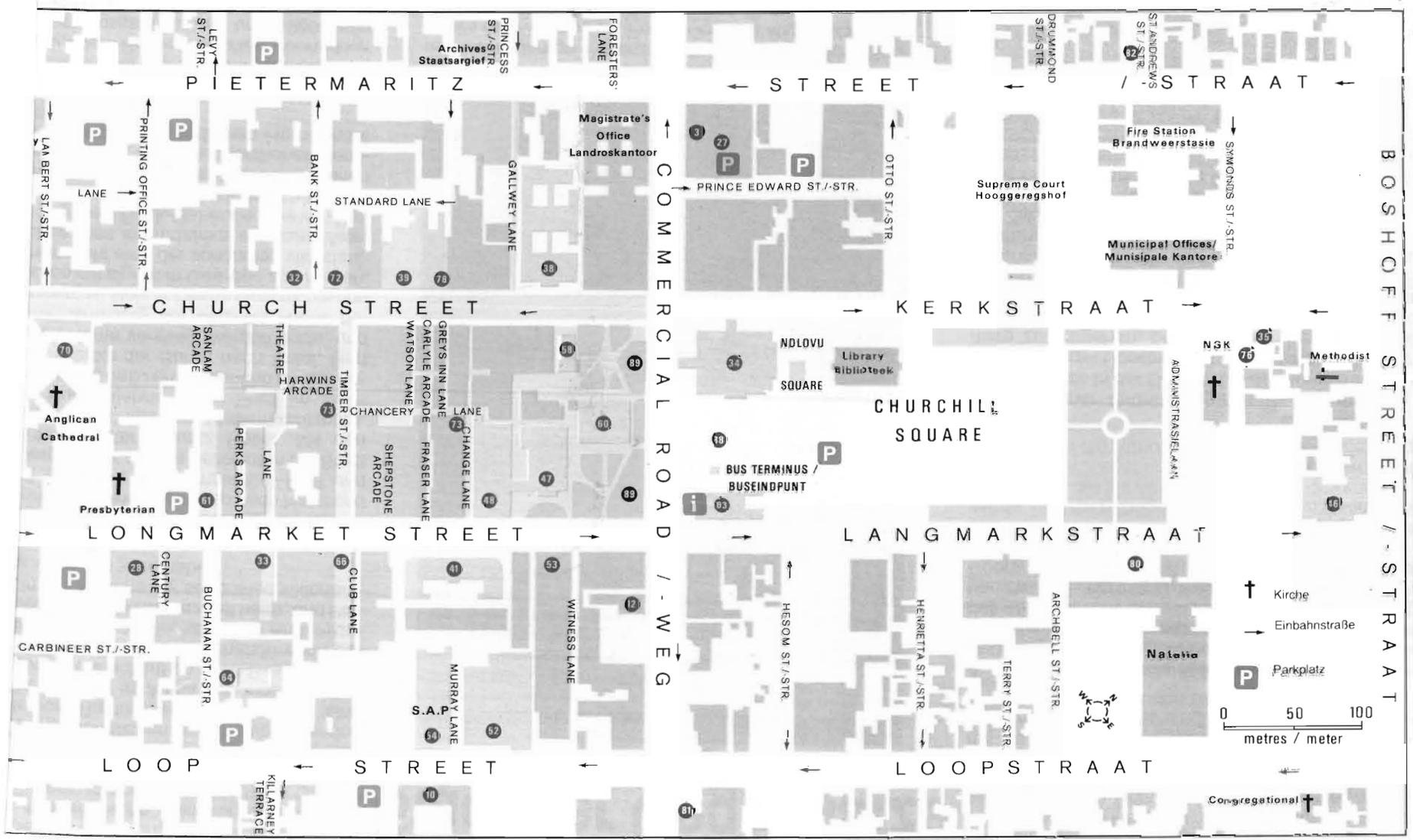
<sup>41</sup> Author's interview with Rod Bulman, 8 September 1995.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Protest march to be held in city’, *The Natal Witness*, 19 September 1989, p.1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Wide range of people expected at march’, *The Natal Witness*, 20 September 1989, p.11.

CENTRAL AREA MAP / SENTRALEGEBIEDSKAART



## Key to Central Area Map

3 – Capital Towers Hotel	58 – Old Presbyterian Church
10 – Imperial Hotel	60 – Tatham Art Gallery
12 – Lionel's Inn	61 – Old YMCA Building
27 – Cinemas	63 – Publicity House
32 – First National Bank	64 – Public Swimming Pool
33 – First National Bank Branch	66 – Reid's Building
34 – City Hall	70 – St. Peter's Church
35 – Voortrekker Museum	72 – Dudgeon's Standard Bank
38 – Colonial Building	73 – Old Stock Exchanges
39 – Edgar's Store	76 – Andries Pretorius' House
41 – Main Post Office	78 – Widow Retief's House
47 – Old Legislative Assembly	80 – NPA Headquarters
48 – Old Legislative Council	88 – Carbineer Gardens
52 – Natal Museum	89 – Supreme Court Gardens
53 – The Natal Witness	
54 – Police HQ	BLUE – Pedestrian Areas

and political structures at grassroots level, people were told that buses would travel around different townships for people who wanted to go to the march.<sup>45</sup> How did the organisers attempt to ensure that a substantial number of people went to the march? What mechanisms were used to draw people out to the streets to come and march, rather than scaring them away from the roads by putting up barricades? The section below seeks to examine the actual march, its course and its aftermath.

### **The crowd and collective action in the streets of Pietermaritzburg**

On 21 September *The Natal Witness* reported that the protest march for the city had been given the go-ahead by the city's chief magistrate, Cecil Dicks, despite the organisers' refusal to apply for permission. Dicks was concerned that there would be confrontation between the police and marchers, as the police had warned the organisers that without permission the march would be deemed illegal. Subsequently, organisers sent facsimiles to the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Law and Order and President F. W. de Klerk informing them that the march would go ahead.<sup>46</sup>

This political wrangling could be viewed from more than one perspective. On the one hand it was a victory for the organisers who knew that in order to attract the masses they should adopt an anti-police and anti-state stance, thus galvanising the prevailing attitudes of defiance in the townships. This action should not be isolated from the context of Pietermaritzburg resistance politics at the time. On the other hand, the fact that the magistrate gave permission could be viewed as a signal that the state was still in control, seeking to bring the march within the confines of law and order.

At midday on Thursday 21 September buses went to the townships to collect people for the march in the city. The crowd gathered at the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity for a short service before the

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<sup>45</sup> Author's interviews with Sobhuza Dlamini, 12 July 1995 and Dumezweni Zimu, 3 August 1995.

march began at 1:15 p.m., instead of the previously announced 12:00 p.m. As the Cathedral could not accommodate all the people, many, mostly youths, had to wait outside. The young people were gathered in rectangles of tight formation.<sup>47</sup> There were feelings of anticipation, enthusiasm and elation. The organisers had not expected such a huge crowd and, with the assistance of marshals, order and discipline were maintained.<sup>48</sup> Apart from Christian groups there were also other religious groups such as the Vheda Dharma Sabha and Muslim bodies represented by Mr S. Satgar and S. Moola respectively. The Natal Indian Congress and COSATU were also represented, with Chris Dlamini, vice-president of COSATU, representing the national MDM. These religious groups and community organisations were going to hand memoranda to the police, outlining their grievances.<sup>49</sup>

After the service the crowd of approximately 7 000 people, led by black and white religious leaders, among them Bishop Mgojo and Reverend Victor Africander, marched into Chapel Street and then turned left into Longmarket Street with the huge banner of the SFT behind the religious leaders. Local university students, who disguised their identity by wearing balaclavas, unfurled the African National Congress (ANC) and South African Communist Party (SACP) banners. They manoeuvred their way to the head of the crowd, positioning themselves next to the religious leaders and in front of the press cameras.<sup>50</sup> There were also other banners, some of which were calling for the resignation of Law and Order Minister, Adriaan Vlok. Others read "Don't, shoot this is a peaceful march".<sup>51</sup> Trade union banners were also prominent (see pictures). There was a jovial and expectant mood, for marching in the central business district was a novel experience for many of the township

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<sup>46</sup> 'Magistrate sanctions march' *The Natal Witness*, 21 September 1989.

<sup>47</sup> Information supplied by Tim Nuttall.

<sup>48</sup> Author's interview with Michael Worsnip, 7 September 1995.

<sup>49</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 22 September 1989.

<sup>50</sup> Author's interviews with Michael Worsnip, 7 September 1995 and Cassius Lubisi, 20 September 1995 and information supplied by Tim Nuttall. Worsnip pointed out that unlike in the Durban march where Christian Bishops felt uncomfortable about the SACP flags and banners, in Pietermaritzburg the press did not make a big fracas about that. He also argued that Mgojo and Africander had no problems with the SACP and the other banned organisations.

dwellers. Writing about the 1989 Defiance Campaign, Yunus Carrim pointed out that the MDM had taken over the main streets of the major cities of the country for the first time ever in the long struggle against apartheid.<sup>52</sup> The singing crowd marched slowly down Longmarket Street. As Carrim puts it,

‘The march in Pietermaritzburg was full of life, colour and energy as were other marches countrywide. The singing, chanting, rhythmic dancing of the toyi-toyi and the waving of banners created a carnival-like atmosphere. A stirring image in the Pietermaritzburg march was of black construction workers smiling triumphantly, reaching to the sky with Amandla! salutes from the top of the building’.<sup>53</sup>

The songs and slogans were important in mass mobilisation, as they provided people with identity and assisted in conscientising people about the plight of the ANC in exile and jailed leaders.<sup>54</sup> However, not only freedom songs were sung, but also church hymns, as people from different congregations were there. Even before that the youths in the townships had a tendency of turning church hymns into freedom songs by changing words but maintaining the rhythm. There was a sense of solemnity, excitement, joy; and people were feeling a taste of liberation as well as pride.<sup>55</sup>

The composition of the marching crowd reflected a mixture of young people and adults, males and females. Young people, many in school uniforms, were in the majority, but there were also large numbers of workers, university students and lecturers, and members of religious congregations. There were clusters of white people in a largely black crowd. Many white office-workers watched the march from buildings overlooking Longmarket Street (see pictures). The organisers did not ‘expect a large number of whites to participate in this march. To most of them marches were not

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<sup>51</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 22 September 1989.

<sup>52</sup> Y. Carrim, ‘The Defiance Campaign: Protest politics on the march’, in *Indicator South Africa*, volume 16, number 4, (1989), p.50.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p.49.

<sup>54</sup> Author's interview with Sobhuza Dlamini who pointed out that some people enjoyed singing freedom songs even if they did not understand their purpose, 12 July 1995. In author's interviews with Meshack Makhathini, 12 August 1995 and Dumezweni Zimu, 3 August 1995 it came out that in fact freedom songs combined easily with African cultural heritage as people expressed their joyful and sad moments in songs.

<sup>55</sup> Author's interviews with Michael Worsnip, 7 September 1995 and Rod Bulman, 8 September 1995.

their ways of registering protests'.<sup>56</sup>

*En route* the marchers were joined by groups of people who had gathered to watch, and at the intersection of Longmarket and Commercial Streets the crowd turned right into Commercial Road. Then the marchers turned right again into Loop Street and congregated in front of the police station. Probably the lengthening of the route of the march was a ploy to ground traffic to a halt, as Longmarket and Commercial streets were always full of traffic. In that way the march organisers were drawing maximum attention to their cause. Furthermore, by lengthening the route, additional bystanders would be able to join the march. There was a sense of being in control of the city as marchers went through four streets before reaching their destination. In fact, the marchers could have taken a short route by just marching straight along Chapel Street and then turning left down Loop Street.

The crowd sat down in front of the police station, while still singing and chanting slogans. The crowd stretched from the police station down Loop Street to the corner of Commercial Road. The whole scene was astonishing and spectacular, with police videotaping the crowd from the top of the nearby museum and the hotel and some police were posted on top of the police building. They were not only videotaping but also strategically positioned in case anything unexpected took place. Some youths taunted the police, but the marshals managed to control the situation and avert confrontation.<sup>57</sup> The police had kept a low profile since the start of the march; there was no major confrontation between the police and the marchers as had been the case with the march in Cape Town on 2 September 1989, when police sprayed purple dye from a casspir in a bid to break up the crowd.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Author's interview with Cassius Lubisi, 20 September 1995.

<sup>57</sup> Author's interview with Rod Bulman, 8 September 1995.

<sup>58</sup> D. Smuts and S. Westcott (eds), *The Purple shall Govern-A South African A to Z of Nonviolent Action*





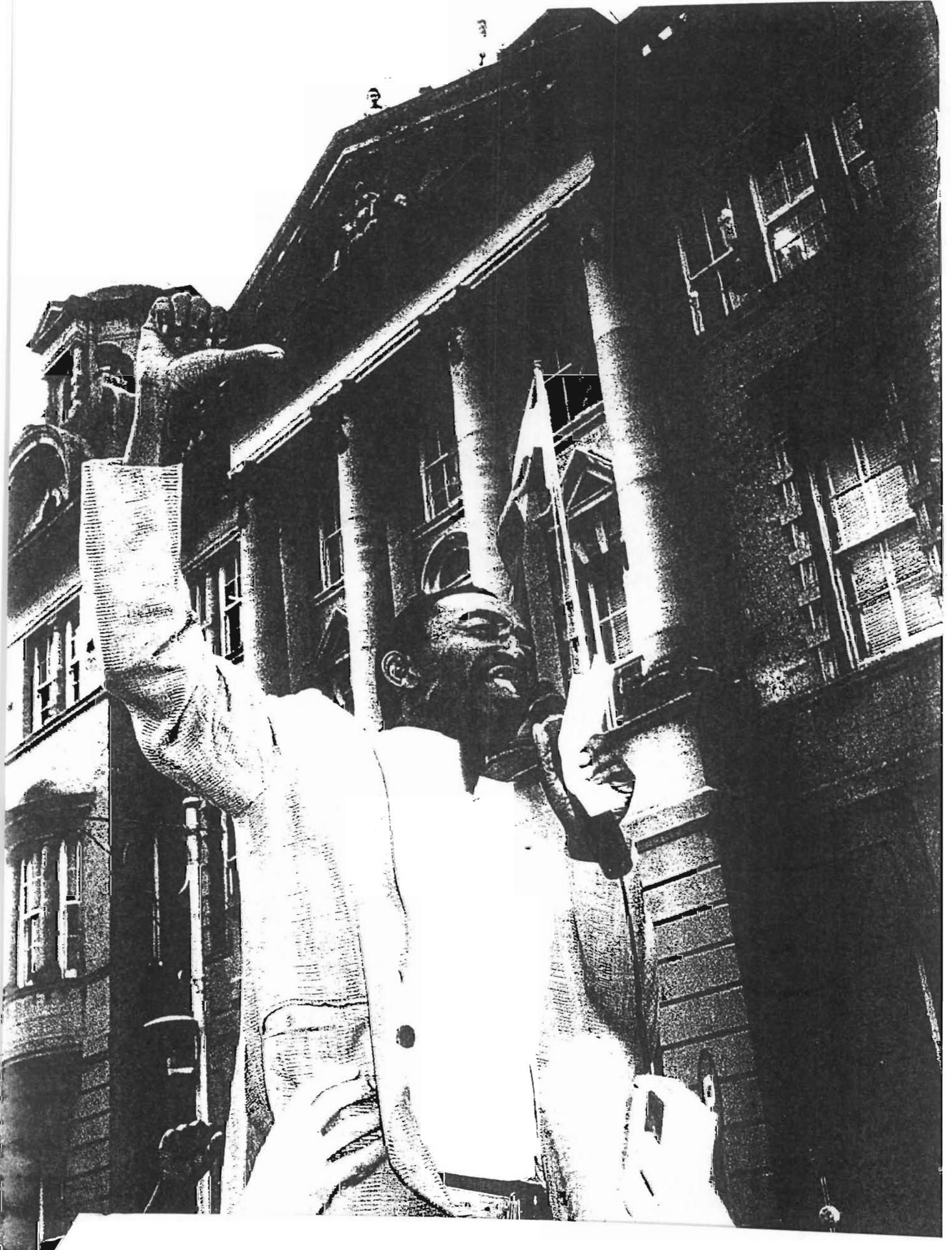
Photograph 3. Religious leaders with a big South African Communist Party banner



Photograph 4. Some of the uniformed schoolchildren in the front with leaders of the march. (Courtesy of Dr Aron Mazel)



Photograph 5. Two large African National Congress and SACP banners being hoisted by youths in front of the leaders. The marchers were now at the intersection of Commercial Road and Longmarket Street. (Courtesy of Dr Aron Mazel)



At the police station Bishop Mgojo, acting on behalf of community, labour and religious organisations in the city, handed two memoranda to Captain Adam Barnard of the South African police. Representatives of the Vherda Dharma Sabha, the Muslim community, and the Natal Indian Congress handed in their separate memoranda. Christian ministers also handed over a memorandum demanding amongst other things an end to funeral restrictions.<sup>59</sup> Most of the memoranda protested against the continuing violence, the police failure to prosecute those responsible for it, the inefficiency of the criminal justice system, the detentions, restrictions and banning orders, and the continuance of the State of Emergency. The stipulations of these memoranda told much about the context in which the protest march took place. Chris Dlamini spoke on behalf of the MDM. He was quoted in the newspaper as having said

‘We want peace where we live, where we work, in our schools, we want peace all over South Africa. We are appealing to the authorities that we have reached the stage where they must listen to the masses, we are saying that, like it or not, change is at hand!’<sup>60</sup>

As part of a nation-wide tradition the crowd sang *‘Nkosi Sikelel’ i Afrika’* before returning to the Cathedral where buses were waiting for the marchers from the townships. Bishop Mgojo then called on marchers to go home peacefully. It appears that up to this point the march was orderly and disciplined and neither the police nor the marchers had provoked each other. Considering the violent and tense political situation in Pietermaritzburg, it was remarkable that the march had proceeded peacefully.<sup>61</sup>

### **The aftermath of the march: contending perspectives**

After the march, there were incidents of the looting of shops in the downtown vicinity of Retief Street, and damage to some vehicles was also reported. A dispute ensued as to whether these

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(Cape Town, O.U.P., 1991), p.11.

<sup>59</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 22 September 1989; *Weekly Mail*, 22-28 September 1989, p.2.

<sup>60</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 22 September 1989.

<sup>61</sup> Author's interview with Rod Bulman, 8 September 1995.

incidents were related to the protest march or not. The police view was that the groups of youths that looted shops and damaged cars were part of the crowd from the protest march. According to Major Pieter Kitching,

‘After the march large groups of youths ‘toy-toyed’ down Church Street toward Boshoff and Retief Streets. When they reached the lower end of the city they robbed a number of Indian shops, broke windows and robbed and broke down fruit stalls of a number of hawkers’,<sup>62</sup>

This was not only a police view, as other sources also emphasised the connection between the march and the looting that took place later. The *Race Relations Survey* pointed out that ‘a march of about 7 500 people in Pietermaritzburg in September 1989 erupted in violence when groups of youth broke away and went on a rampage in the Indian business area.’<sup>63</sup> However, it is also possible to postulate that this publication was based on a newspaper article. Aitchison pointed out that the march was ‘marred by some looting afterwards which may have included a section of the crowd’, while the *Weekly Mail* described it as ‘the only violent incident in a week of march fever’.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly enough Yunus Carrim of the South African Communist Party seemed to suggest that these violent incidents were related to the march. He wrote that, ‘overall the marches were remarkably disciplined and harmonious. But for the looting of a few shops after the Pietermaritzburg march they were altogether free of violent incidents’.<sup>65</sup>

It was in the interest of the organisers to disassociate the violence from the protest march. Bishop Mgojo stressed that the march had ended peacefully and that any violent incidents had been ‘outside the context of the march’. He pointed out that ‘at the end of the march we insisted that people go home peacefully and most went into buses.’<sup>66</sup> However, it was likely

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<sup>62</sup> ‘Youth rampage after peaceful march’, *The Natal Witness*, 22 September 1989, pp.1 & 13; *Weekly Mail*, 22-28 September 1989, p.2.

<sup>63</sup> *Race Relations Survey*, 1989/90, p.226.

<sup>64</sup> Aitchison, ‘Numbering the Dead’, p. 64; *Weekly Mail*, 22-28 September 1989, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Carrim, ‘The Defiance Campaign’, p. 49.

<sup>66</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 22 September 1989, p.13.

that not all the people went into the buses. That was understandable in the sense that there was no mechanism that could be used to ensure that all marchers went back to the townships immediately after the march.

In addition to the above views a third one could be added which investigates the socio-economic and political context in order to understand what happened after the march. Possibly the looting involved both *agent provocateurs* and also some sections of the crowd from the march. One researcher's remark that, 'coupled with weak and fragmented communication within the resistance movement blunders are inevitable' further substantiates this point.<sup>67</sup> Indeed many anti-apartheid political organisations at that time were already infiltrated by the state's secret agents whose intentions were to sabotage mass action.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to investigate how the strategy of protest marches was utilised in Pietermaritzburg for purposes of mass mobilisation. The leaders of the march asserted that the crowd showed discipline while on the other side of the spectrum there were critics who capitalised on looting that took place after the march. Comparing the march with recent stayaways, there was a reduction in confrontation between police and young people, and no injuries and arson reports. The protest march was the first very large anti-apartheid political gathering in the city centre. During the 1950s the few protest marches that occurred in the city centre were tiny by comparison. The socio-political and economic had changed in Pietermaritzburg by the late 1980s. The struggle was now taken to the city and not confined to the townships, as was the case with stayaways.

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<sup>67</sup> M. Khwela, 'Criminalising protest - Media view of political protest', in F. Meer, *Resistance in the townships* (Durban, Madiba, 1989), p.207.

At a national level, the MDM gave direction and leadership to the defiance campaign marches of 1989. The Movement 'showed with panache and an occasional sense of humour, that South Africa under a State of Emergency was anything but a normal society, an idea much touted by the authorities'.<sup>69</sup> Protest marches represented the most visible aspects of the 'new' F. W. de Klerk era and ironically helped to boost the state's image at home and abroad.<sup>70</sup> The marches were part of the peaceful protest action, and their adoption as a tool of resistance did not mean that other strategies such as stayaways and boycotts were going to be abandoned. The Defiance campaigns took the resistance crowds to the central business districts of the cities and symbolically extended the struggle beyond the townships into the cities that were the loci of white power.

One can conclude by arguing that the ecclesiastically led protest march in Pietermaritzburg heralded a new era in mass mobilisation. This march was a strategy of mass mobilisation which required people to be out in the streets and to occupy the city centre. The march was full of defiance rather than confrontation, but it served the same purpose as other strategies such as stayaways. The crowd that participated in the march made it a historical event and it is hard to ignore it when one investigates the history of mass mobilisation in the Pietermaritzburg region. The march was not only important for the size of its crowd but also for the fact that it proceeded peacefully despite the climate of conflict and confrontation in the region. The looting saga, which the media associated with the march, did not dampen the spirit of the Defiance Campaign in the Pietermaritzburg region. The march acted as a precedent for other protest marches that took place in Pietermaritzburg from 1990 onwards. These marches are beyond the scope of this chapter but it would suffice to mention just a few significant ones that took place in Pietermaritzburg such as the anti-Gatting march in February 1990, an Inkatha Freedom Party march in June 1990, the anti-VAT march in September

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<sup>68</sup> Author's interview with Cassius Lubisi, 20 September 1995.

<sup>69</sup> Merrett, *The Emergency of the State*, p.2.

<sup>70</sup> Carrim, 'The Defiance Campaign', p. 52.

1991, Imbali women's marches in 1992, the rolling mass action marches in May-June 1992, the IFP march in June 1993, and the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance march to protest against the killing of Chris Hani in April 1993.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to explore and compare aspects of anti-apartheid mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s and the 1980s. The formation of resistance crowds has been the main focus of this study. This has required exploring the contexts in which these crowds formed, or did not form. As a way of fleshing out the comparative framework, four case studies (two from each decade) were selected. However, in order to contextualise the case studies two chapters dealt specifically with the socio-economic and political contexts of the periods before and during which those selected events occurred. The key organising chapter around which the whole thesis was centred was Chapter One. This offered a survey of the literature that has been written, mostly during the late 1980s and early 1990s, which explicitly or implicitly, compare the resistance politics of the 1980s with that of the 1950s. Drawing from that literature I was able to select the organising themes which were the basis for the comparative analysis.

The historiographical survey showed a tendency, among a wide range of analysts, to compare the 1980s with the 1950s. Many of these authors were writing during the 1980s and it is likely that they were influenced by the political context of South Africa at that time. For political organisations in the 1980s, a trajectory of the struggle was the main thing they needed for inspiration. There was a general assumption among many authors that resistance during the 1950s was intense in all urban centres. The other important thing about the literature is that there is a common assertion that the 1960s and the 1970s were years of extreme repression except for a few uprisings during the 1970s. It is because of these generalisations that I decided to look at the specific case of Pietermaritzburg.

Against the background of this literature survey, I explored Pietermaritzburg's socio-economic and political contexts during the 1950s with the aim being to set the scene for the case studies. The exploration of the context has shown that Pietermaritzburg was a small and developing city during the 1950s. There was still the belief among the city authorities and some residents that Pietermaritzburg should remain an administrative, agricultural and educational capital city. There were also serious accommodation problems for Africans as there were few residential areas for them. By the end of the 1950s there were only two small formal townships, those of Sobantu and Ashdown. The vast majority of the city's Africans lived in informal settlements in Edendale and in the Vulindlela area. Edendale was excluded from the borough boundaries and so was not within the Pietermaritzburg City Council's sphere of influence.

My study has revealed that there was little significant mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s. The African National Congress and the Natal Indian Congress were the main anti-apartheid organisations in Pietermaritzburg at the time. However, there are differences of opinion from people of diverse political persuasions as to the strength of these two organisations. Furthermore, the municipal attitude to Africans shaped the nature of resistance in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s. The local white authorities seemed to have been sympathetic to the problems of Africans and they were also concerned about maintaining good race relations, so as to ensure that local Africans did not participate in the resistance campaigns of the 1950s. However, some incidents of resistance took place in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s to the dismay of the local white authorities.

Two protest marches by women occurred in Pietermaritzburg, one in November 1956 and another in January 1957. This is my first case study of the 1950s and it has shown that this was the first instance of anti-apartheid crowd mobilisation to take place in Pietermaritzburg. The majority of the participants were African women, but it also a significant aspect that women from different

racial groups and political parties attended the demonstrations which were part of the nation-wide anti-pass campaigns. The year 1959 saw further women's demonstrations in Pietermaritzburg during the so-called 'Natal disturbances'. The grievances in the urban areas were about issues such as passes, influx control, wages and beer brewing. There were similar riots in the rural areas, with a focus more on issues such as land shortage and dipping tanks. The 'native disturbances' in Pietermaritzburg reached a high point with the violent revolt which occurred at Sobantu Village on Saturday 15 August 1959. The Sobantu revolt followed a demonstration by women which had not involved the destruction of property and loss of lives. This violent incident involved young people from a small township, which had for many years been regarded as a 'model village'. The Sobantu revolt, which is my second case study, was a significant event and it was more than a mere riot instigated by 'agitators'; it was a carefully planned event of anti-apartheid resistance. Never before had Pietermaritzburg seen a revolt of that nature by African people. There is evidence from oral accounts that many young people in Sobantu were members of the ANC and that youth militancy was beginning to develop during this time.

Against that background of heightened political militancy in some of Pietermaritzburg's African residential areas, I went on to explore the socio-economic and political contexts of Pietermaritzburg from the early 1960s to the early 1980s. Over this period Pietermaritzburg experienced a variety of economic, social and political changes. New firms were being established as part of the border industry scheme. The provision of accommodation for Africans improved after the establishment of Imbali Township during the 1960s. However, on the anti-apartheid political scene there were no major developments during this period. One should point out that this was the nation-wide trend during this time, as the struggle had been militarised after the banning of the ANC and PAC in 1960. There were incidents of the detaining of *uMkhonto weSizwe* cadres in Pietermaritzburg and in the Natal Midlands as a whole. It was also during this

period that the government enacted many repressive laws, which further hindered extra-parliamentary opposition.

Resistance to apartheid began to gain momentum in other parts of South Africa during the early 1970s. My research has shown that Pietermaritzburg was not affected by the worker's strikes of 1973 nor the student revolts of 1976 in any remarkable way. Possible reasons for this have been given in the chapter. However, in conditions of further industrialisation and urban growth, new kinds of anti-apartheid resistance politics began to develop in the early 1980s. Pietermaritzburg became part of the nationwide civil rebellion of the time.

A watershed in the history of mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg came with the Sarmcol stayaway of 1985. This stayaway is my third case study. During this stayaway a factory dispute was transformed into a weapon of anti-government struggle. It is argued that it charted the course for future events of mass mobilisation. Although the event did not lead to the reinstatement of the dismissed workers, it did have an impact on mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg. Rather than stay indoors, crowds took to the streets in the townships to demonstrate not only their support for the Sarmcol strikers, but also to make this event part of the broader anti-apartheid struggle. Never before in the history of the struggle in Pietermaritzburg had there been such a successful stayaway.

In Pietermaritzburg the national stayaways of the later 1980s were well supported. Mass mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg entered into a new scene when organisations had to operate under the State of Emergency and, from 1987, in the context of violence between the UDF-COSATU alliance and the Inkatha. Trade unions and church groups were central in mass mobilisation, especially after the banning of the UDF and other anti-apartheid organisations in February 1988. However, towards the end of the decade there were changes in broader national

politics. The 'newly-formed' Mass Democratic Movement was formed in 1989 to continue with mass mobilisation. During the middle of the year the MDM announced its mass defiance campaign which would involve the occupation of racially segregated amenities and the holding of protest marches in the cities of South Africa. One of those marches took place in Pietermaritzburg and drew a crowd of around 7000 people. This march was the subject of my fourth case study. It was arguably the first very big anti-apartheid march in Pietermaritzburg, particularly when compared to marches in the 1950s. What also made this march significant was that it signalled a departure from the use of stayaways which had become a common resistance strategy. Furthermore, this protest march was an act of taking the struggle to the city centre and away from the townships.

One of the main purposes has been to find out if there was mass mobilisation during the 1950s in Pietermaritzburg, as was the case in other urban centres of South Africa. With the advantage of hindsight, one can say that, contrary to common claims, Pietermaritzburg did not experience heightened mass mobilisation during the 1950s. There were some incidents, which involved protesting crowds, but they were not as intense as was the case with other urban centres. Furthermore, during the 1950s Pietermaritzburg had negligible developments in industry and there were no strong trade unions except for the Howick Rubber Workers Union (HRWU), which mobilised in a town about 25 kilometres from Pietermaritzburg. Despite the women's marches in 1956 and 1957 and the Sobantu incident of 1959, resistance politics in Pietermaritzburg was still not comparable to other centres of resistance in South Africa.

On the contrary the 1980s saw the rise of substantial anti-apartheid resistance in Pietermaritzburg. However, mass mobilisation was not similar to that of the 1950s where political organisations could organise protest marches. During the 1980s resistance occurred in a context where the government had enacted legislation which made it difficult for organisations to mobilise openly

as had been the case during the 1950s. By the 1980s, Pietermaritzburg had changed economically, socially and politically from the town it had been in the 1950s. There were many industries and there were trade unions, some of which proposed the idea of political unionism. There was also the large township of Imbali, which had not existed during the 1950s. Furthermore, during the early 1980s there had been boycotts against community councils, rents and bus fares. The people in Pietermaritzburg were participating in the broader struggles against the manifestations of apartheid. A Youth League was formed in 1980 showing the beginnings of political consciousness and mobilisation. Interestingly, that League was named after a person who had been active in Pietermaritzburg's anti-apartheid politics during the 1950s. It was no longer the case that resistance politics was a domain of the few African middle class families in African areas, as had been the case during the 1950s. In the 1980s, a wide range of people participated, irrespective of classes although the young people were in a majority. So one can say that the events of the 1980s were different from those of the 1950s because they involved different constituencies, different kinds of leadership and different state and municipal policies.

The key incident, which signalled a break with Pietermaritzburg's lacklustre participation in anti-apartheid resistance, was a local issue. Many of the campaigns of the 1950s were broader national campaigns and it is likely that Pietermaritzburg needed a local issue with local resonance in order to change its history of political mobilisation. In addition, during the 1980s there had developed a phenomenon where worker and community grievances were merging, something which was not well developed during the 1950s. For Pietermaritzburg the spark for mass mobilisation only came during the 1980s with mobilisation around the Sarmcol struggle in 1985. The 1989 Defiance Campaign march in the city centre was also significant in signalling a new phase of crowd politics, which became a feature of resistance politics during the early 1990s.

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## **List of Categories**

### **1) Primary Sources**

- i) Manuscripts in State Archives**
- ii) Official Printed Sources**
- iii) Collections of Papers**
- iv) Newspapers and Newsletters**
- v) Interviews**

### **2) Secondary Sources**

- i) Books and Chapters in Books**
- ii) Periodicals**
- iii) Journal Articles**
- iv) Unpublished Papers**
- v) Unpublished Theses**

## 1) PRIMARY SOURCES

### i) Manuscripts in State Archives (Natal Archives Depot , now Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository )

Pietermaritzburg Town Clerk Files (3/ PMB)

#### a) Correspondences

Vols.	Refs.
4/4/2/74	140/1, 140/2, 140/3, 140/110
4/4/2/288	138/2 ,139/3, 139/4, 140/1, 140/2/40
4/4/2/340	197/21, 197/21(40), 198/02, 198/2, 198/3, 200/19
4/4/2/342	198/6/40, 200/4, 200/11/40, 200/14, 200/11/40
4/4/2/568	198/102
4/4/2/569	199/101
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### v) Interviews

#### **Aitchison, John**

John is Director of the Centre for Adult education at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. He was an active in student politics at this campus during the 1960s. He once taught as a volunteer teacher at a night school in Sobantu during the early 1960s. He was a prominent member of the Liberal Party until it was banned in 1968. He has compiled a database of political violence in the Natal midlands during the 1980s and the 1990s.

#### **Hassim, Kader**

He is a key member of the African People's Democratic Union of South Africa (APDUSA). He has been active in resistance politics in Pietermaritzburg since the 1950s. During the late 1960s he was arrested for his political activities and was imprisoned in Robben Island. In 1976 he was struck off the roll of Natal attorneys until he was readmitted in 1997.

#### **Bulman, Rod**

He was a registrar at Federal Theological Seminary at Imbali and was instrumental in the

organisation of the 1989 Defiance Campaign march in Pietermaritzburg. He is Director of the Phelamanga Project.

### **Chetty, A. S.**

Well-known as A.S. he has been involved in the politics of resistance since the 1950s. He was a member of the Natal Indian Congress during the 1950s and during the 1980s he was the local Chairperson of the United Democratic Front. He is now a member of the Pietermaritzburg TLC.

### **Dladla, Philip**

He was one of the Sarmcol strikers who came to march in the Pietermaritzburg townships in June 1985. He is presently working at the National Union of Metal workers of South Africa offices in Pietermaritzburg.

### **Dlamini, Sobhuza**

He was a youth activist in Imbali Township in the 1980s. He was a member of the Imbali Youth Organisation (IYO).

### **Gumede, Archie**

Archie was in his early 80s when he was interviewed. He is the son of Josia Gumede, who was President of the African National Congress during the late 1920s. He was active in the Pietermaritzburg ANC during the 1950s together with the late Harry Gwala and Moses Mabhida. He is a lawyer by profession and, during the 1980s he was the co-President of the UDF. He was among the people who sat-in at the British Embassy in 1985 and was subsequently charged for treason and the trial took place at the College Road Supreme Court in Pietermaritzburg in 1985.

### **Keys, Radley**

He was a violence monitor in the Natal Midlands and a member of the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) during the 1980s. He is a Democratic Party (DP) leader in Pietermaritzburg and is a member of the Pietermaritzburg TLC.

### **Lubisi, Cassius**

He was a member of the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO), which was a youth wing of the UDF, in the Natal Midlands. He was involved in the Defiance Campaign march in Pietermaritzburg in 1989. He was also active in the Release Mandela Campaign (RMC). He is a member of the South African Communist Party (SACP). He is presently a lecturer at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

### **Lundie, Ruth**

Ruth was active in the Liberal Party during the 1950s. She was based in Pietermaritzburg working for the Local Health Commission. She later taught in mission schools in Lesotho and Alice, in Ciskei. She is retired and is one of the interviewers of the Alan Paton Centre's Oral History Project.

### **Mabhida, Linah**

She is the wife of the late Moses Mabhida who was organising for both ANC and SACTU in Pietermaritzburg and Durban during the 1950s. Linah was involved in resistance activities such as

beerhall boycotts during the 1950s. When this interview was conducted she was in her early 70s and has, since the 1970s, gone blind.

**Makhathini, Mthunzi**

He was one of the Sarmcol strikers who marched in Pietermaritzburg in June 1985. He was a member of the civic association at kwaMevana Township in Howick.

**Msimang, Walter**

Walter was 96 years old at the time of the interview. I was interviewing him on the history of Edendale, which was not part of this thesis. I ended up getting some points that were relevant for this study. He was the descendant of *Amakholwa* (Christian converts) who came to reside in Edendale during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. He was a teacher by profession. He passed away in April this year.

**Ndlovu, Alfred**

He was deputy-president of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and also chairman of the Southern Natal region of COSATU. He stayed in Imbali and was working for the KwaZulu Transport Company. He is now a member of the Pietermaritzburg TLC.

**Ndlovu, Moses**

He is a veteran trade unionist and is currently working for the Paper Printing Wood and Allied Workers Union (PPWAWU) in the Natal Midlands.

**Sikhosana, Vierra**

She is a resident of Sobantu Village. She came to live in Sobantu in 1954. Her husband was the late Mr J. M. Sikhosana who was a member of the Sobantu Village Advisory Board. She was a teacher and is now retired but she is involved in adult education.

**Sithole, Jabulani**

He was a UDF activist and was involved in many activities of mass mobilisation. He is currently a lecturer at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg in the Department of Historical Studies.

**Worsnip, Michael**

Mike was a lecturer at FEDSEM and a convenor of the Standing for the Truth Campaign (SFT) in Pietermaritzburg. He was involved in underground activities of mass mobilisation in the 1980s and was instrumental in the organisation of the Defiance Campaign march in Pietermaritzburg in 1989. At the time of this interview he was Director of African Rural Advancement (AFRA).

**Xaba, Anton**

Best-known as "Mfenendala", he is a former Robben Island prisoner and was one of the early Mkhonto weSizwe guerrillas in Pietermaritzburg. He lives in Sobantu and he was active in resistance politics during the 1950s. He is currently chairman of the ANC in the Natal Midlands region.

**Zimu, Dumezweni**

He was a youth activist in Imbali Township in the 1980s. He argued that he did not have a high political profile and he preferred to be interviewed as an ordinary community member who was observing things rather than a person who was directly involved in planning for mass mobilisation.

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