

# ALEXANDRA TOWNSHIP:

## 'uplift' or co-optation?

ON 7th May 1979, the deputy minister of Co-operation and Development, Mr Vosloo, announced in Parliament that Alexandra township had been granted a reprieve. He said that plans for the development of Alexandra into a hostel town for single migrant workers had been shelved and that his department was planning a renewal programme based on high density family housing.

This change in policy with respect to Alexandra must be seen in the context of the general change in state policy with respect to urban black areas. This change is conditioned by the attempt of the state to restructure social relations in order to cope with the changing needs of capital. South African capital is becoming dominated by the monopoly sector which is at present

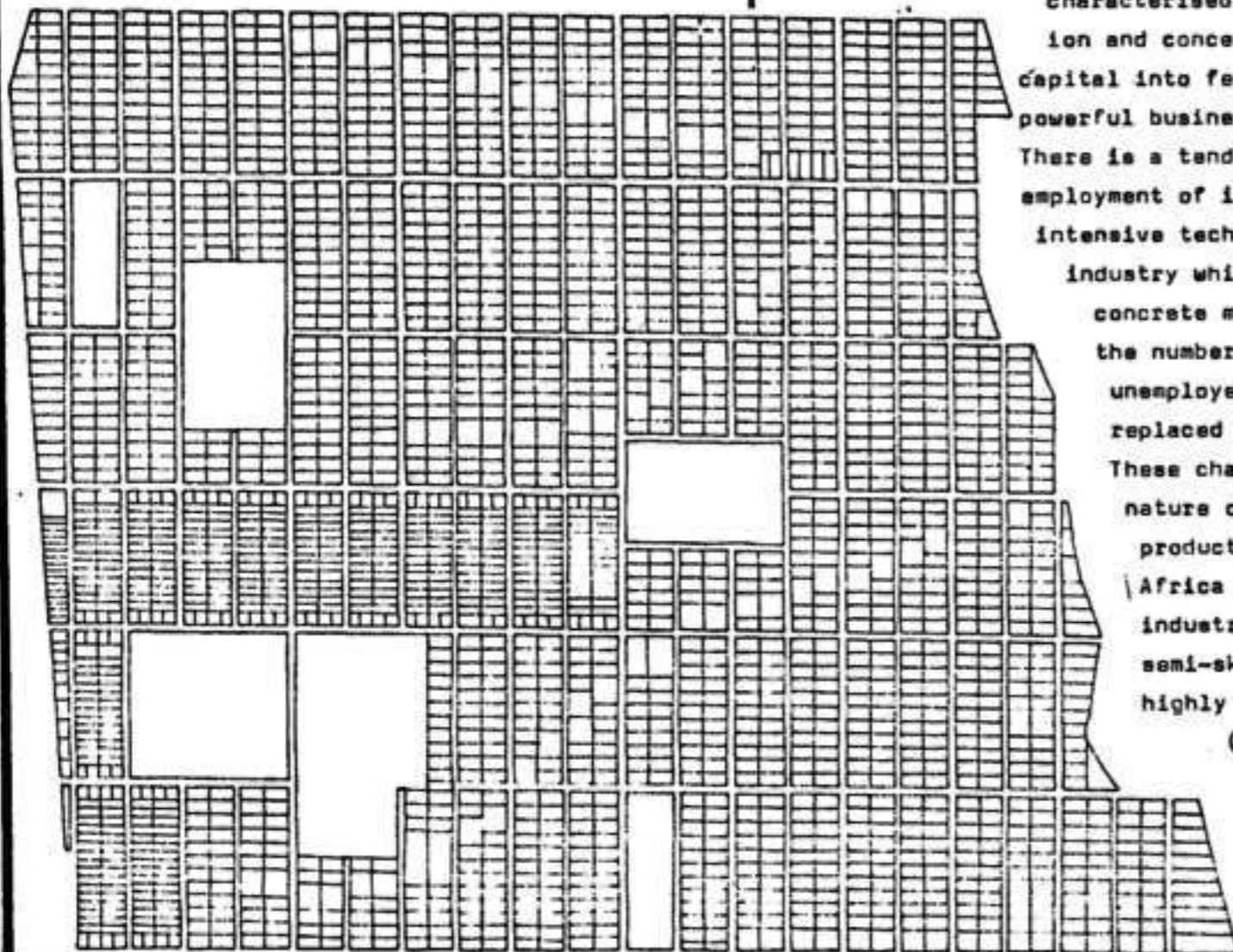
characterised by centralisation and concentration of capital into fewer, larger, more powerful business organisations. There is a tendency towards the employment of increased capital intensive technology in industry which has its concrete manifestation in the number of workers unemployed as they get replaced by machinery. These changes in the nature of capitalist production in South Africa mean that industry needs both semi-skilled and highly skilled workers.

(For a more detailed discussion of these issues,

see the article on 'Total Strategy' in Work In Progress 11, February 1980, especially pages 3 - 5).

The uprisings in 1976-77 highlighted the need for a stable and contented labour force. The state's response to changes within capital, and increased worker militancy, is articulated in the reports of the Wiehahn and Riskert Commissions, and in the total strategy initiatives being formulated by the state and its apparatuses. These reports advocate increased control over the working class and attempt to create a labour aristocracy and black petty bourgeoisie. The Riskert Commission attempts to locate blacks in jobs at higher levels within the production process through increased training programmes. It also attempts to relocate the unemployed by exporting them to the rural areas. This is an attempt to make urban areas safe from the potential threat of the unemployed. It also advocates the creation of a privileged section of the working class in the sense that they have protected rights to employment. The flow of migrant workers into the city will be tightly controlled.

Relating to the provision of housing in black urban areas, the Commission recommended that even with the necessary services should be allocated to blacks in their residential areas on a leasehold basis. The Commission recommended that influx control be linked to the availability of work and of approved housing.



The Commission further recommended the creation of a stable black middle class pacified with better housing and conditions of employment. Restrictions in respect of black businessmen are to be lifted.

Although the report of the Riekert Commission was published some months after the reprieve for Alexandra was announced, it should be seen in terms of the overall change in state policy, the conditions for which already existed.

The recommendations of the Riekert Commission should be seen as linked to the 'total strategy' concept formulated by the state and its apparatuses in order to 'defend South Africa'. Certain changes are being made to give blacks a material stake giving them cause to 'defend South Africa'. These attempts by capital and the state aim at extending political and ideological control through the granting of material concessions.

The establishment of the Urban Foundation after the uprisings in 1976 aims to improve the quality of life in black urban areas through training schemes, house betterment and urban renewal schemes. The Urban Foundation manifests capital's attempt to maintain the existing process of capital accumulation. This point was made clear recently by Mr Justice Jan Steyn, executive director of the Urban Foundation, when addressing Rotary International's 55th annual conference of District 925 in Nelspruit. There he said

"If people want the free enterprise system to continue, they are going to have to get off their butts and make contributions towards housing." (2)

He went on to warn that the lull in township protests should not be regarded as 'breathing space'.

It has clearly been the impetus of monopoly capitalist interests which have articulated the above strategy; this aims at containing township resistance by the employment of schemes to improve the material conditions of sections of the working class through organisations like the Urban Foundation. Members of the Urban Foundation have acknowledged that certain reforms are necessary in order to maintain social stability and continuous capitalist production.

Between 1st March 1977 and 3rd August 1979, the Urban Foundation undertook a total of 268 projects throughout South Africa. 9 of these projects were national projects and 28 were research or feasibility studies. The projects undertaken were in the area of housing, education and training, community facilities and health services. The funds approved for these projects amounted to R13,06-million. (3)

It can be seen that an attempt is being made to buy off a section of the working class. This section gain their access to these privileges by qualifying for urban rights under sections 10 (1) (a) and (b).

In presenting the annual report of the Department of Community Development to Parliament on 27th March 1980, the secretary of the department warned against disruptions in the state's housing programme through the lack of funds. He added that any attempt to curtail state participation in housing provision would play into the hands of 'South Africa's enemies'. (4)

So it can clearly be seen that the state and capital are involved in a desperate attempt to buy off a section of the working class. Coupled with this is the attempt to strictly control the people who do not qualify for incorporation, namely the landless and unemployed who will be relocated in the rural areas under the control of the various 'homeland' administrations whose responsibility they have become.

The reprieves granted to Crossroads and Alexandra and the subsequent plans for redevelopment are, I believe, the first involvement of the state in 'betterment schemes' aimed at improving the 'quality of life' in existing black townships. The state is now following the initiatives undertaken by capital. It should, of course, not be forgotten that the state has given its approval to programmes undertaken by the Urban Foundation.

The redevelopment is being planned by the planning section of the Department of Co-operation and Development in conjunction with WRAB, the Department of Community Development, the Alexandra Liaison Committee and the Sandton City Council. (6) The intention is to turn Alexandra into a model township (7) that will be the pride of every South African. It is to have flats and maisonettes, reconditioned houses, green belts, tarred roads and full services. An attempt is at present being made to acquire more land on the east side of the Jukekei River to make into an elite area. (8)

Piet Koornhof has also promised publically to request Parliament to grant

full municipal status to Alexandra. (9)

Alexandra has a history of freehold rights. To date there are still 432 freeholders. Despite this, the basis of land tenure in the redeveloped Alexandra will be 99-year leasehold. The 99-year leasehold tenure system is intended to promote urban black home ownership. These regulations were gazetted in December 1978 and represent a response by the state to the demands of organised capital as a means of creating a black middle class. This leasehold scheme means that blacks can for the first time take out building society loans. Previously, building societies did not consider the 30-year leasehold under the 1968 regulations as adequate security. (10) Under this scheme only those with urban rights qualify for home ownership.

According to research done by Dr B Boaden, senior lecturer in Quantity Surveying at the University of Witwatersrand, this scheme will not benefit the majority of black urban dwellers who do not have the monthly income to repay a housing loan. He has estimated that the average monthly household income of blacks in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging triangle is R200, of which an estimated R188 is spent on necessary items. This leaves R12 over as the possible repayment on a loan. Furthermore, it is unlikely that these people would be able to pay the estimated R300 in site surveying expenses, or that they would be able to afford the initial costs of taking out a 99-year lease which includes a 20% deposit on the house, connection fees for water, sewage and electricity. By the end of March 1980, 184 people had registered leasehold titles under this scheme. (11)

At the same time as granting the reprieve for Alexandra, Vosloo also announced that a survey would be undertaken by WRAB to establish who would qualify for housing in the redeveloped Alexandra. Presumably the underlying intention of the survey would be to establish who did not qualify to be in the area so that they could be exported to the 'homelands'. This is in keeping with the Riskert Commission recommendations and the new strategy adopted by the state.

A 1979 population census was held in Alexandra and it was estimated that the population was 50 000 of whom 10 000 were estimated to be 'illegals'. (12)

With respect to this issue, the Alexandra Liaison Committee has an ambivalent position. In the first issue of the Alexandra Chronicle, the official bulletin of the Liaison Committee, published by WRAB, Sam Buti, chairman of the Liaison Committee warned 'illegals' that they would not be permitted to remain in the area. In the same issue, it was reported that the administrative sub-committee of the Liaison Committee had investigated the cases of 'illegals' and had found that 2 000 families did in fact qualify for urban rights and so the Liaison Committee had in fact saved the families from eviction. (13)

Under closer analysis, this statement emerges as an attempt to retain their popular facade while at the same time acting as mouthpiece for the state. A recent survey into the socio-economic conditions in Alexandra undertaken by the Sociology Department at the University of South Africa (UNISA) has shown that the average family

size in Alexandra is 5,7. (14) Simple arithmetic shows that the Liaison Committee has thus 'saved' 12 000 people from eviction, when only an estimated 10 000 'illegal' people exist.

The Liaison Committee has also given its support to the idea of Alexandra becoming a totally 99-year leasehold area. Sam Buti is quoted as saying that the 99-year leasehold suits Alexandra better than a freehold system as more houses can be provided. (15)

In the light of the above statements, it seems that the Alexandra Liaison Committee has been co-opted and functions to legitimate the plans the state has for Alexandra. The Liaison Committee has no legal status and very limited powers. All of its actions are subject to the scrutiny and approval of the Department of Co-operation and Development. They do, however, attempt to create the illusion that they have greater powers and claim that the relationship between the Liaison Committee and the Department of Co-operation and Development is one of client and consultant. This is meant to imply that they have powers of veto and do not have to accept whatever the Department presents them with. (16)

Finally, Alexandra cannot be seen as an attempt by the state to cope with the housing problem. It must be seen as an attempt to co-opt a clearly defined and relatively small working class community, which will no doubt feature prominently in local and overseas media as an indication of the progressive nature of the present regime. It must also be seen as an attempt to pacify a section of the working class with material concessions

in order to maintain the process of capitalist production and profit.

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### Uplift in Alex



#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Rand Daily Mail, 79.05.08.
2. Star, 80.04.11.
3. The Urban Foundation - Project Statistics 1 Mar. 77 - 79.08.31.
4. Rand Daily Mail, 80.03.28.
5. Rand Daily Mail, 80.03.28.
6. Star, 79.05.08.
7. Piet Kooznhof, quoted in Sunday Express 79.07.29.
8. These facts emerged from an interview with the town planner.
9. Sunday Express, 79.07.29.
10. Creecy, B. A house for total strategy: the political economy of urban african housing in contemporary South Africa, 1980:70.
11. Star, 80.04.11.
12. Star, 80.03.06.
13. Star, 80.03.06.
14. Preliminary report of a socio-economic survey done in Alexandra. Department of Sociology, UMIISA. This survey was funded by the Urban Foundation.
15. Sunday Post, 79.06.24.
16. This emerges from interviews with the Liaison Committee and from a document setting out their objectives and approaches.

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