

CHAPTER 1

MISS MOUSE GOES SHOPPING : THE SOCIAL ROOTS OF PROLETARIAN CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE CHALLENGE TO ESTABLISHED AUTHORITY

Proletarian Visions of City Life

During the time when Africans were moving into Cato Manor Farm, an invigorating ideology, the feeling of and desire for a 'New Africa', was gaining widespread popularity in Durban. Many of the notions encompassed in this belief found their initial expression in Durban during the 1920s with the growth of the I C U vase Natal. However by the late 1940s, with the growth of a larger militant proletariat, which felt a significant degree of distance from the already established educated elite and frustrations with the structures of the local economy, the feeling for 'New Africa' assumed a new and more vital dimension.

The term 'New Africa' is partly a rubric employed to refer to the proletarian consciousness of the later 1940's. Nevertheless various commentators of the time do refer to the newly proletarianized African as the "New African".¹ The term is also used in co-operative societies, and various informants do remember the militancy of the later 1940s by referring to the 'New Africa'. In 1945 H I E Dhlomo defined 'New African':

This class consists mostly of organized urban workers who are awakening to the issues at stake ... knows where he belongs and what belongs to him; where he is going and how; what he wants and the methods to obtain it... Put briefly and bluntly, he wants a social order in which race, colour or creed will be a badge neither of **privilege** nor of discrimination...²

Of course for Dhlomo and other Youth Leaguers, both aware of the increasing evidence of proletarian assertiveness and anguishing over their own place in the city, it was vital to believe that this 'New African' was "awakening ... to the power of organized intelligently led ... progressive thinking African intellectuals and leaders".³ While the relationship between the proletariat and such leaders was considerably more ambiguous than Dhlomo and others might have desired, it is clear that younger educated and militant Africans had both identified a new force in the proletariat and were referring to this consciousness in terms remarkably similar to those understood and used by the African proletariat.

For Durban's African proletariat the later 1940s was a period full of an optimism created through proletarian struggles to gain increased material and political power. Thomas Shabalala recalls that "That was

1. O Walker Kaffirs are Lively (London, 1949) pp.174-175.

2. T Couzens The New African : A Study of the Life and Work of H I E Dhlomo (Johannesburg, 1985) pp 32-34.

3. Ibid, p 33. Couzens' superb account of trends among young African intellectuals does recognize that their rather more sophisticated but literate perspectives occurred within a vortex of class change but never really analyses similar attitudes that developed in the proletariat.

when we woke up. The war was finished and gone and now we were fighting".⁴ Fighting for what? Charles Khumalo says the proletariat "wanted to tell Champion that we would live in the City Hall! That was what we wanted".⁵

The ideology of the 'New Africa' was created in the factories and the African residential areas.⁶ While it was unable to provide a real stimulus to greater organisation, it was to provide various people with a vitalising new consciousness. In the shantytowns of Cato Manor Farm aspects of the vision of 'New Africa' came to be the dominant legitimising force.⁷ Using language common to many city officials, the Assistant Manager of the Native Administrative Department remarked in 1952:

Two years ago, quite apart from the effects or after effects of the 1949 Riots, Cato Manor established a time bomb in which the mechanism had already started ticking. Officially Cato Manor was a virtual no-mans land. Socially it was a hotbed of prostitution, the sale of liquor and every imaginable vice or illicit undertaking, with only a small number of private welfare bodies to stem the tide.

Administratively it was a nightmare, and perhaps for that reason little, if any, attempt at administration had been made. Politically it was a melting pot for any number of agitators, self-appointed leaders, grafters, cliques and factions.⁸

For many Africans in Durban and elsewhere Mkhumbane was 'New Africa'.⁹

Born and moulded in the proletarian experience in Durban, 'New Africa' was to offer sustenance to people while never attaining the status of a well-developed, literate and coherent ideology. The vision thrived on verbal communication within the proletariat, the vast majority of whom were illiterate. While never solely related to or belonging exclusively to the lower classes, when aspects of the vision appeared in writing they were always incomplete and lacking in the vigour associated with the more verbal images. To many, these literate expressions appeared otiose, quaint or, more importantly, hesitant. The structures of writing both revealed the glaring contradictions in the ideology, and the permanence of the written work failed to express the correct tempo of the vision's attractiveness. Acting within a society undergoing rapid transitions, the African proletariat saw in the verbal essence of the ideology an enduring strength. The ideology thrived on change, and change and redefinition became self-justifying.¹⁰

4. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 28 July 1985.

5. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 26 July 1985.

6. For analysis of the relationship between class and ideology see Lud A. "The historiography of everyday life : the personal and the political" in Samuel, R and Stedman Jones, G (eds), Culture, Ideology and Politics (London, 1982).

7. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 July 1983. Mtolo does not, however, use the words 'New Africa'.

8. MNAD; H2-CM, vol. 1, Manager, MNAD - Town Clerk, 31 January 1952.

9. Interview with Mr B Nxasana, 7 May 1986.

10. This aspect of 'New Africa' has been generally ignored. For example, Couzens' work tends to focus too much on the intellectual and literate perceptions and expressions.

Any attempt to encapsulate the vision of 'New Africa' which became such a material force in Africans' lives in the late 1940s should encompass the following points. Firstly, a celebration of the dignity, health and moral standing of the ordinary African family. Africans began to gain a confidence in the legitimacy of their social relations, which became coupled with an awareness of the reasons for their living in dirty and unsatisfactory situations and a polemical attack on the way in which the dominant ideology pervading the city vilified Africans for their general uncleanness. Secondly, the proletariat's drive both to educate itself and allow for the growth of a new proletarian leadership having a notion of political struggle which would be broader and more representative of the ideas of the African proletariat than were the attitudes and tactics of the then established African elite. Thirdly, while militancy continued at the factory floor level, the proletariat became attracted to the intrinsic competitiveness of the market and exchange relations. Africans saw that success in market ventures would allow them to gain increased influence over the city as a whole. Fourthly, the growth of widespread opposition to local and central state structures. Fifthly, a notion of ethnic unity. Finally, a belligerent, vibrant concept of revenge. Revenge was to play a vital role in an ideology that endeavoured to create new institutions and levels of consciousness that would enable Africans to transform their marginalised status in the city.¹¹

During the late 1940s, newspapers aimed at an African readership contained numerous articles which specifically dealt with the need for Africans to develop a feeling of dignity as an initial step towards establishing their own rightful position in Durban. One such story was an allegorical tale about an African woman whom the writer called "Miss Mouse".¹²

Of a quiet but assured disposition, "Miss Mouse" enters a departmental store in the centre of Durban. Desiring to purchase an article, she approaches the White female counter-assistant, smiling in anticipation. Conscious of the implications of such an approach the counter-assistant curtly remarks: "Yes Annie, what do you want?" Acting innocent "Miss Mouse" looks over her shoulder, but sees nobody. She turns again to the counter-assistant and "managed to look surprised". Sensing that the situation was now becoming even more complex, the counter-assistant attempts to regain the initiative: "You! I mean you, Annie!" This strategy backfires as a short "hot" exchange of words takes place. The counter-assistant backs down somewhat, explaining, no doubt in slow intonation, that she did not know the person's real name. Rather than accept this explanation, "Miss Mouse" replies firmly that she wishes only to be served and not to reveal her name or engage in friendly chatter. Furthermore, she continues, she had been christened soon after birth and her name was not "Annie".

This story reveals certain important details about the spirit of the 'New Africa'. The woman is stressing her right as a customer to enter that part of the city which was then the virtual sole domain of

11. S Jacoby, *Wild Justice: the Evolution of Revenge*, (London, 1983). While there have recently been numerous valuable attempts to revise the conceptual issues which surround the notions of race, class and politics, there have been so few attempts to see in apparently racist strategies a crucial element of revenge which the actors themselves believed to be a progressive force in the growth of nationalism.

12. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 29 November 1947.

Whites.¹³ The woman is objecting to the 'White city Black city' dichotomy so entrenched in South African urban space. It is important to stress that "Miss Mouse" was not shopping in those areas of the city where Indian-owned trading ventures proliferated, areas where Africans suffered regular abuse of various kinds.¹⁴ The woman's basic belief was in her own dignity. Her strategy, which is the really central focus of the article, is composed of three inter-related themes. Firstly, the militancy is expressed in a polite and assertive fashion with careful note being made of her Christian upbringing. Second, in the confrontation she requires both humour and an intimate empathy with the attitudes and strategies of her opponent, who is in this story a White racist counter-assistant. Third, in the developing situation she has to be both "hot" and decline any offer of apparent peace without having made her point. Here was a "Miss Mouse" who did not scurry into dirty holes at the first sign of danger.

The story alludes to certain themes central to 'New Africa'. The woman is confronting the White city, not that part of the city in which Africans would usually do business. Our hero is a woman, a representative of the city's African women who, as a group, were even more marginalised than were African men. It is also significant that the reader, whether deliberately or unconsciously, is never told anything about "Miss Mouse's" background and social standing. Finally, it is clear that the focus of the article is concerned with purchasing power. However, among the many omissions and silences in the story perhaps the most glaring is the fact that we are never told whether "Miss Mouse" ever succeeded in purchasing her sought after article.

The power of 'New Africa' developed out of the manner in which people in Durban raised and commented upon certain specific grievances in a broad context. In analysing this broad context it is significant that three particular issues were continually discussed. Firstly, Africans' realised that their enthusiastic support for the Allied cause in the Second World War, the so-called 'fight against fascism', had not resulted in any improvement in Africans' general position in South African society.¹⁵ During the war itself many people, including officials of the Communist Party of South Africa,¹⁶ had encouraged Africans to support the war effort, and held out the promise of a post-war South Africa into which Africans would be more completely accepted. By the late 1940s Africans countrywide realised that this expected liberalisation had failed to materialise. While there were many critics of intellectuals who propounded the belief in "the glimmerings of a new dawn for South Africa" as "liberals" clutching at straws,¹⁷ to Africans who supported the war effort the turn of events was a bitter blow.¹⁸

13. Up till that time and indeed even in the 1950s few Africans ever traded in the central city area.

14. Ilanga lase Natal, *passim*.

15. P Walshe, The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, (Berkeley, 1970) p.279-281.

16. T Lodge, "Class Conflict, Communal Struggle and Patriotic Unity: the Communist Party of South Africa during the Second World War", University of the Witwatersrand, African Studies Institute seminar, 7 October 1985.

17. E Roux, Time Longer than Rope, (Madison, 1978) p.306.

18. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 21 June 1985.

Secondly during the late 1940s Africans in Durban endeavoured to sustain the internationalist vision they had developed during the war itself. During the war African workers "could feel the pulse of a new spirit and an involvement in things broader than their own lives".¹⁹ Africans became involved in trade unions and flocked to public meetings thereby developing a "new found vibrance" in the local branch of the Communist Party of South Africa.²⁰ At such meetings the general tone was festive, strong and internationalised, with banners reading "Air Raid Shelters for All", "Death to Fascist Invaders", "Down with Colour Bar", "For a Hundred Percent Trade Unionism", and "Skilled Training for All".²¹

After the war the Communist Party endeavoured to sustain this internationalism, calling for the fight against fascism to continue in the country,²² and focussing on the issue of independence for India. For Africans in Durban the former call was not internationalism at all, but rather a restatement of their long-standing position in society.²³ While there were those who saw in the latter call a protest against colonialism in general,²⁴ the majority of Africans saw the problems of supporting Indian nationalism as only vaguely relevant to their own lives.²⁵

The focus of a new consciousness was centred on an official communication network within the factories, beerhalls, buses and residential areas. Groups either drinking beer, eating lunch or queuing for beer, buses or passes, would talk excitedly about their ideas on events and issues occurring outside the country.²⁶ Apart from local newspapers such information was gleaned from two immediate sources. Firstly, the many African volunteers who had served in the war. Many of these people were only demobilised some years after the war had formally ended, and they entered a local environment eager to listen to any recollections however brief or anecdotal.²⁷ One such story, which is still recounted to this day concerns the harshness of segregation in the Allied armies, and the manner in which Africans captured by the Italians and Germans were settled in the same prisoner-of-war camps as their White captured 'brethren'. One such prisoner-of-war recounts: "It was

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19. I L Edwards, "Recollections : the Communist Party and worker militancy in Durban, early 1940s", South African Labour Bulletin vol 11, (No 4, February-March 1986).
 20. Ibid.
 21. Ibid.
 22. R Simons, and J Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa (London, 1984) p.584.
 23. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983 and Ilanga lase Natal, 5 June 1948, where it was reported that the election victory of the Nationalists threw 'African issues in Durban' into 'the melting pot again'.
 24. Interview with Mr R Arenstein, 24 July 1985.
 25. Ilanga lase Natal, passim.
 26. While the significance of such locales and issues within African City life have never been in doubt an analysis of them has been too highly focussed around the issue of space and the local political economy. Furthermore the 'shebeen culture' was only one aspect of social expression in this network. See I Edwards, "Shebeen Queens, Illicit Liquor and the Social Structure of Drinking Dens in Cato Manor", Agenda, 3 (1988) pp.95-6.
 27. Interview with Mr J Mzimela, 28 April 1985.

only in prison that we were together. We were now living with the Europeans who had the guns...The Germans treated us all the same - they were always shits."²⁸

The second source of information was the harbour itself. Workers in the vicinity of the harbour were constantly providing the community at large with gossip about which ships were in the harbour, where they came from and what the sailors were talking about. This information not only provided Africans who sought casual employment with firms specialising in maintaining and repairing ships with vital clues as to possible employment,²⁹ but also allowed others to sustain contact with international issues. One such story which is still fondly recalled probably epitomises the type of information that was available. The main elements of this story, which has over time been much embellished but which is almost certainly based on fact is recounted as follows:

This American ship was tied up at 'A' shed. That was where the nongoma dance was.³⁰ It was called the Liberty.³¹ That ship had Negroes - Black people but from America as sailors. Also others - the Europeans called them something funny but they were really Indians.³² Now you see when they went to Durban they would not go to town but come here to Cato Manor. They said that we were brothers. This pleased us and you would entertain these people like kings.³³

The third broad contextual issue which emerged in Durban during the late 1940s was an awareness of the power and force of ethnic and national mobilisation. This often ambiguous awareness was not only the result of the growth of anti-colonialist African nationalist movements elsewhere in Africa,³⁴ and the all too evident indications of Afrikaner nationalism,³⁵ but was also the result of the way in which Durban's White society had altered through the arrival of many post-war immigrants originating from Britain, Italy, Greece and Portugal.³⁶ Africans became struck by the manner in which these people declined to become integrated into White society³⁷ and yet added a vociferous new element to the general level of White racist consciousness.³⁸

28. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 21 June 1985.

29. Interview with Mr C S Ndlovu, 2 February 1985.

30. By this time the City Council had set aside a fenced off portion of land adjoining 'A' shed where Nongoma dance teams would entertain travellers alighting from the ships.

31. While the ship was clearly one of those vessels given the generic name "Liberty ships" it is significant that Africans, while possibly mistaking this for the actual name of the vessel concerned, identified with the notion of freedom espoused through these war-time cargo vessels.

32. Lascars.

33. Interview with Mr J Shabalala, 21 June 1985.

34. See Walshe, *African Nationalism*, p 275.

35. *Ilanga lase Natal*, *passim*.

36. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 7 December 1946. In that week 700 families arrived and "Africans were being shuffled around".

37. Interview with Mr O Kunene, 20 October 1983.

38. Interview with Mrs T Phewa, 12 May 1985.

Many of these new immigrants managed to exploit segregationist legislation to take over minor trading ventures operated by Indians, while at the same time conducting their business along the same extended family and co-operative lines as did the previous Indian entrepreneur.³⁹ The moral was clear. Here were people who had a concept of ethnic unity and lived out a somewhat ambivalent relationship to the established 'European' community while at the same time being able both to make the dominant racist ideology more vociferous and gain access to a significant degree of economic wealth.

Many of these immigrants settled in the newly opened suburb of Durban North. In the process of entrenching themselves in this area, they managed to convince the City Council to pass a bye-law which restricted African access to the suburb to those who were employed in the area as domestic servants.⁴⁰ This by-law was enforced by the South African Police and the 'cafe owner' at 'Robina Stores bus-stop'.⁴¹ This bus stop was the first bus stop across the Umgeni River in Durban North. All those Africans who did not have letters from employers indicating that they were employed in the area were turned back, often after been given a "hiding".⁴² The residents later altered this arrangement to one where wives, husbands, children and girlfriends of African employees were also given letters of permission.⁴³ The system allowed for a host of iniquitous practices and was regarded with outrage by Africans all over Durban:

It was no bloody good. The madam would give you a letter so you come to visit. If you had that letter then you could stay in the kia over the weekend. But if your girlfriend had not been good, then when you came on Friday afternoon the madam takes the letter from you. "O.K. yes you can stay this weekend, Mary has been good!" You would get some food that night and Saturday night. On Saturday afternoon you would cut the hedge and on Sunday morning you would wash the bosses car nicely. You could only have one boyfriend and the madam chose you. It was hated.⁴⁴

Africans had for long both resented and rejected the highly oppressive nature of urban segregation.⁴⁵ During the later 1940s these feelings developed within the far broader notion of 'New Africa'. Within the images lay the African proletariat's attempts to understand certain key characteristics of city life. This growing reflection on the dominant ideology of the city and a quest for proletarian power came the context of a growing proletarian militancy.

Struggles in the City

In this broad ideological context African workers began to raise a number of particular grievances

39. Interview with Mr R G Wilson, 14 February 1981.

40. Ilanga lase Natal, 27 July 1946.

41. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 14 July 1985.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ilanga lase Natal, 7 December 1946.

and problems : issues that they believed to be indicative of their lowly and impoverished condition. Many of these perceptions may appear to be merely references from a particular period of grievances that have pervaded African life throughout the period of industrialisation and proletarianisation. However, these grievances had a particularly important role in allowing a proletariat suffering increasing economic hardship to relate to issues on levels broader than the merely localised or parochial. Through their vigorous discussions of day-to-day crises, both material and ideological the African proletariat was able to ensure that the vision of a better future be interwoven in their everyday struggles. The process of defining and discussing concrete examples of the way in which the African proletariat lived in the city was to play a vital role in maintaining the level of widespread popular discontent and militancy and in attempting to breach the gap between parochial protest and a wider outlook.

During the war itself the prices of basic foodstuffs had risen dramatically and many Black families were unable to purchase sufficient food.⁴⁶ In 1942, the Smit Committee, which had been appointed to analyse "the social, health and economic conditions of urban natives" referred to a survey concluded amongst African schoolchildren in Durban. This revealed that over 40 per cent of the children were suffering from clinical malnutrition.⁴⁷ After the war the prices of basic foodstuffs rose even more rapidly, the situation being exacerbated by frequent food shortages,⁴⁸ often caused by manufacturers withholding supplies,⁴⁹ and the virtually uncontrolled growth of Black marketeering.⁵⁰ During 1946 there were shortages of tea and rice,⁵¹ while white maize, which was virtually unobtainable, had been supplanted by the inferior yellow maize which was advertised as being a better quality.⁵² The first shipment of white bread flour since 1940 arrived in Durban in 1948.⁵³ While African families had previously preferred to purchase topside cuts of red meat, during the late 1940s such meat was prohibitively expensive with the local abbatoir often being unable to supply any to the general public.⁵⁴ Whale meat made an unpopular entrance into the market⁵⁵ with many Black workers preferring to purchase less meat, usually offal,⁵⁶ and increase their consumption of potatoes or putu.⁵⁷ For

46. C Walker, Women and Resistance in South Africa, (London, 1983), p 70.

47. Ibid, p 72.

48. The Guardian, 1 April 1946.

49. Ibid, 26 December 1946.

50. Interview with Mr B Nair, 27 June 1985.

51. Ibid.

52. Ilanga lase Natal, 30 November 1946.

53. Ibid, 30 October 1948.

54. Ibid and KCAV; interview with Mr W S Manyathi, 16 September 1980.

55. Ilanga lase Natal, 5 January 1946.

56. KCAV; interview with Mrs A Afrika, 25 September 1980.

57. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 21 April 1980.

those who were unable to obtain fowls from the various barter markets, fowls were consumed less and less as the price fluctuated around 10s each.⁵⁸

In the light of this evidence it is possible to state that during the late 1940s the dietary and culinary habits of the Black working class had developed to a position where all were purchasing similar food and preparing such food in identical ways.⁵⁹ Indeed there is evidence to suggest that elements of the Indian working class were more impoverished than many African workers. During this period Africans recall that Indian workers would often walk from shack to shack in Mkhumbane selling the "juicy inside leaves of cabbages". One informant recalls :

After work they would be around. Some would have gardens but not many. They were workers and they took the outside leaves for themselves - you know a soup - water and leaves and boil it up with curry. They would offer us the inside for some money or whatever.⁶⁰

With the declining quality and availability of red meat, workers would often purchase large stocks of meat which would then be heavily spiced, dried and stored.⁶¹ In Cato Manor the consumption of spices increased as a "curry factory", Bonzoi Agencies on the corner of Booth and Wiggins Roads, dramatically expanding its scale of operations.⁶²

In this situation many traders operated lucrative Black market enterprises often with the collusion of the manufacturers,⁶³ suppliers or municipal inspectors appointed to curtail such activities.⁶⁴ With bread either unavailable or too costly many workers would purchase bags of mealies from trading ventures such as Harry Thomas & Company, a company that quickly gained infamy for its outrageously high prices.⁶⁵ Many general dealers charged double or more for other basic food. In 1949 it was reported that general dealers often charged 6d for a pound of sugar having a regulated price of 3.5d. Similarly a pound of rice which should have sold for 8.5d would be offered for anything up to 2s.⁶⁶ The prices of soap, tea,⁶⁷ butter⁶⁸ and paraffin⁶⁹ were also extortionate : "we could only buy from these bastards - if you didn't then you could not get".⁷⁰

58. Ilanga lase Natal, 31 August 1946.

59. CKM; reel 3B 2 : XC9 : 30/84; H S Msimang - Provincial Executive, ANC (Natal Branch), 25 January 1946; UG 19/49, Evidence of H Burrows; and interview with Mrs M B Lavoipierre, 30 January 1981.

60. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 31 June 1985.

61. Interview with Mr T Phewa, 21 April 1985.

62. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 23 June 1985.

63. Interview with Mr B Nair, 27 June 1985.

64. The Guardian, 26 December 1946.

65. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 31 June 1985.

66. UG 19/49 ; Evidence of Mr A Ngobesi.

67. Ilanga lase Natal, 15 February 1947.

68. Interview with Mr B Nair, 27 June 1985.

69. The Guardian, 16 May 1946.

70. Interview with Mr B Nair, 27 June 1985.

For Black workers the situation was intolerable. Of the 27 000 African males who were formally employed in commerce and industry in Durban in 1946, 16 000 were employed in either the manufacture or distribution of foodstuffs.⁷¹ Stanford Mtolo, then organizing in the bakeries, offers his recollection: "We were there making food. We could never get it. We had to go elsewhere to find food. People went back to the bundu they were known to receive a thrashing if they were too weak. It was a terrible position".⁷²

Workers also became angered at the manner in which manufacturing concerns reacted to food shortage. A host of patent medicines attempted to attract an African market through the use of adverts like that for 'Feluna Pills', a blood-cleansing medication, which promised to make workers fitter and stronger and thus more acceptable and useful to wives and employers.⁷³ At the same time the two major bakeries were engaged in a publicity war, with Pyott (Natal) Ltd advertising their bread, virtually unobtainable by Africans, by depicting a fully grown lion facing a 'Zulu' warrior armed to the teeth. Their slogan ran "All courageous people eat Pyott's bread - Make sure you have courage".⁷⁴ The use of such ethnic concepts only infuriated.

The City Council acknowledged the grave situation and noted with alarm the way in which both White and Black were becoming increasingly intemperate with the persistent need to stand in long queues waiting for scarce commodities. It was here in these queues that Blacks gained additional first-hand knowledge of White racism and traders' duplicity. When they reached the head of the queue Africans would be ignored until they were willing to pay the Black market price. Charles Khumalo remembers, "They would always say that they had run out of a thing. Then when the madam comes they go to the back and give it to her. So you had to go back and offer double."⁷⁵

White women would often go to the Victoria Street Meat Market where African meat-sellers would eagerly swop "tender steaks" for the "best White bread" leaving Africans "only...the worst". To Black workers who had previously been accustomed to eating good quality meat such practices were iniquitous, particularly as African traders would greet "madam" with "huge smiles" and say "Yes madam!" obsequiously.⁷⁶

Having to sustain themselves in a context that was both degrading and exploitative, many Africans resorted to a form of banditry that turned the whole of the Warwick Avenue, Victoria Street locale into a 'no go' area. Thomas Shabalala recalls:

It was no trouble. There is the madam with her boy in the kitchen suit. Hey they were too scared! You see that was not their area it was ours. But if they caught you on the roads of their houses you were finished. They did not like being seen in the White and red uniforms

71. Ilanga lase Natal, 13 April 1946.

72. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

73. Ilanga lase Natal, 29 June 1946. Significantly, the adverts for the same product appearing in The Guardian were far less offensive.

74. Ibid, 29 June 1946.

75. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 21 April 1985 and Ilanga lase Natal, 5 January 1946.

76. Ibid, 23 August 1947.

amongst us. He would be carrying the meat and vegetables while the madam was pushing all over everybody else. And you would go up and grab from him!⁷⁷

There were however other ways of procuring food. Welfare societies operated food kitchens in the African residential areas and on the roadside in the industrial areas of the city. Such operations, particularly those run by the Toc 'H' society were greatly appreciated. At the Toc 'H' food kitchen in Jacobs Store in Booth Road, Cato Manor, people could enjoy a stew made from meat, potatoes, carrots, onions and cabbage for 6d a dish. Army biscuits were handed out free but an additional amount was charged for a portion of rice.⁷⁸

Many Indian traders appear to have been sympathetic to the plight of workers, with some requesting that the Communist Party assist them in distributing basic foodstuffs at regulated prices.⁷⁹ At many stores Africans recall how they could buy 'special food'. For around 5d workers could get a bowl of meat and vegetable soup and a large chunk of bread or putu.⁸⁰ shops were always full and a hive of activity where any notion of queuing was impossible and long since forgotten. During this period many of the shop-owners changed the names of their enterprises: names such as 'The place where Africans eat' or 'Help to Africans' became more common. Chaotic conditions in the shops could often lead to accusations of over-charging or short-changing. These conflicts were inevitable and cannot merely be ascribed to traders' deliberate duplicity. However these incidents did provide further anti-Indian images which permeated important aspects of Africans daily life.⁸¹

This unfortunate result of the food shortage was perhaps exacerbated by a growing general tendency among Indian store-owners to call their shops names like 'Thandabantu', meaning 'We like Africans', or even more injudiciously, considering the broader militancy then gaining momentum, after well-known Zulu regiments such as the Ngobomakhosi.⁸² Furthermore many of the names appear to have implied that the shops were either places of refuge or, as in some cases, homes' for Africans. When arguments occurred the discussion would often be ended by the store-owner shouting with an ominous air of finality "Fuck off, you think this is your father's place! I own it!". While such remarks and the inevitable "impi" of bouncers, who would pursue the disgruntled customer to the pavements and often beyond, would settle the immediate issue, such events were to provide rich detail for embellished discussion among an African population then asserting their right to live their lives in more acceptable institutional structures.⁸³

In 1946, when the basic food shortage assumed critical proportions, the City Council attempted to alleviate the crisis. While they turned down requests from welfare and political bodies for a City Council

77. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 31 June 1985.

78. Ilanga lase Natal, 25 May 1946.

79. The Guardian, 6 July 1946.

80. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 31 June 1985.

81. Interview with Mrs M B Lavoipierre, 31 January 1981.

82. Ilanga lase Natal, 5 January 1946.

83. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 21 April 1985.

subsidy on basic foods and refused to support the general working class call for rationing,⁸⁴ the municipality did operate food canteens along Dalton Road where a meat and vegetable soup and a large slice of bread cost only 3d. These proved extremely popular.⁸⁵ The municipality also operated mobile food vans, the first of which began operating in the Dalton Road area in May 1946.⁸⁶ These outlets would distribute basic goods at controlled prices and appear to have been in operation long before the Union Government's Director of Food Supplies and Distribution, appointed in 1946,⁸⁷ had sanctioned Union Government assistance in the distribution of food.⁸⁸

This municipal concern was based not only on the need to supply basic provisions to the city's labour force but also to compel those Africans who were unemployed and dependants of African male labourers to leave the city. The initial idea was to serve and sell products only at the workplace to registered African labourers.⁸⁹ After an outcry the food supply scheme was extended to residential areas,⁹⁰ and the control requiring the production of a labour registration ticket relaxed to the extent that any African male could queue for food.⁹¹ The attempts of African men to place their whole family in the queues, in order both to procure sufficient food and to save the valuable time of the registered employee, failed. Likewise attempts by African women to participate in the food queues failed.⁹²

Amidst the rising popular anger, which saw the non-racial local Durban Housewives' League becoming increasingly militant and assertive,⁹³ Africans began to raid stores and take any available food products.⁹⁴ Workers' concern over the issue of food both revitalised local community groups in the residential areas and led to an extremely well organised general campaign led by the Communist Party of South Africa and the Anti-Segregation Council.⁹⁵ The overall tone of both the community groups and the more general activity was emphatically non-racial, but overtly against the exploitation of the masses.⁹⁶ At the local level Africans became interested in the idea of establishing co-operative societies where food would be purchased in bulk and

84. The Guardian, 11 April 1946.

85. Ilanga lase Natal, 9 February 1946.

86. Ibid, 4 May 1946.

87. Walker, Women and Resistance, pp 71 - 72.

88. Ilanga lase Natal, 13 July 1946.

89. Ibid, 20 April 1946.

90. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

91. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 30 June 1985.

92. Interview with Mrs T Phewa, 21 April 1985.

93. The Guardian, 16 May 1946.

94. Ibid, 17 April and 23 May 1946.

95. Interview with Mrs M B Lavoipierre, 31 January 1981 and Mrs H Sibisi, 12 July 1985 and Walker, Women and Resistance, pp 73 - 74.

96. Interview with Mr B Nair, 27 June 1985.

then distributed to all members. In May 1946 the Communist Party started organising food raids; which involved entering shops searching for stockpiled products and then promptly redistributing them.⁹⁷ The notion of raiding as a legitimate and justifiable activity gained widespread acceptance.⁹⁸ Forged in the non-racial and egalitarian struggles over food, the tactic would later be the very vehicle through which Africans would express very different emotions.

In the food raids the sturdy small Coke bottle emerged as a potent weapon. With the bottle clutched in one hand, people would warn unsympathetic traders of the fragility of their shop windows.⁹⁹ By January 1949, the real power of the bottle was clearly revealed, with hundreds of shop windows being broken. Billy Nair offers his recollection:

In fact someone - after the riots - in the N.I.C. actually suggested that Coca Cola had distributed the bottles on purpose. When that idea spread, Coca Cola in America actually sent somebody to investigate and threatened to sue anybody who repeated the allegation.¹⁰⁰

During 1946 meetings were held under the auspices of the Anti-Segregation Council in Durban's Red Square. At one such meeting at the centre of the square was a large coffin inscribed with the words "Here lies the grave of the Black marketeer". After this meeting in 1946, which attracted thousands, both Black and White people marched to the traders and took over the stores. Billy Nair recalls the atmosphere:

It was a real peoples' revolt. From the meeting we marched to the Indian Black marketeers. We took their shops over and started food committee. In the shops we would sell at our prices - Party prices. I think that we had all learnt a lesson.¹⁰¹

Many in the Party attempted to develop the food committees into more enduring non-racial worker organisations.¹⁰² However the Party's contact with African communities was too weak; anyway such organisations would probably have been seen by Africans as being in competition with their own grassroots organisations.

With this political activity Africans developed a renewed confidence in their own dignity and power in the city. African women, who already controlled the household budget became centrally involved in many co-operative societies.¹⁰³ The African working class in general became more vociferous in the belief that African

97. Ilanga lase Natal, 18 February 1946.

98. The Guardian, 16 May 1946. This tactic was to spread rapidly to other urban centres, particularly Cape Town. The Guardian, 23 May 1946.

99. Interview with Mrs M B Lavoipierre, 31 January 1981.

100. Interview with Mr B Nair, 27 June 1985.

101. Ibid and The Guardian, 20 June 1946.

102. Interview with Mr C N Shum, 18 July, 1985.

103. Interviews with Ms D Nyembe, 10 July 1985 and Mrs H Sibisi, 12 July 1985.

women occupied a respected position in urban society.¹⁰⁴ The whole situation was to result in Africans becoming more able to attack that element of the dominant ideology which persisted in referring to Africans as dirty and diseased.

To African workers and their families, Whites' universal condemnation of their dirty and diseased state was manifestly cruel. The solution did not lie in 'Feluna Pills'. During this time malnutrition continued to be rife amongst Durban's African children: on average five Africans died of tuberculosis each day.¹⁰⁵ Food was scarce and the accommodation in municipal and employer locations and hostels unsanitary, ill-kept and always overcrowded.¹⁰⁶ Cases of dysentery, measles, bronchitis and sexually transmitted diseases were increasing at an alarming rate.¹⁰⁷ To the African proletariat such a situation required a serious analysis of the very structures under which Africans lived in the city. In Chesterville and Cato Manor people became infuriated at the way in which residents of Westville, the growing White middle class suburb adjacent to Chesterville, would use African residential areas as a refuse dumping ground.¹⁰⁸ The situation was regarded so seriously that African experts were asked by Africans to provide lectures and talks about personal health care.¹⁰⁹

While the municipality operated a free mobile immunisation clinic,¹¹⁰ and wards at King Edward VIII hospital were made available for the increasing cases of tuberculosis,¹¹¹ medical authorities admitted that all the immunisation schemes were merely transitory in their effects¹¹² and the new tuberculosis wards at King Edward VIII were soon congested and diseased.¹¹³

Africans became enraged by the refusal of the City Councillors to accept any responsibility for rectifying this unsatisfactory situation. Councillor K J Clarke gained significant support from other councillors and White citizens for a policy that had as its premise the basic diseased nature of Africans in the city.¹¹⁴ Clarke desired that all Africans seeking work in the city should first submit to a full medical examination which, if failed, would render the applicant liable to endorsement out of the urban area.¹¹⁵

104. KCAV; interview with Mr Z A Ngcobo, 13 September 1980.

105. Ilanga lase Natal, 16 February 1946.

106. Interview with Mrs M B Lavoipierre, 31 January 1981.

107. UG 36/47; Evidence of City Medical Officer of Health.

108. KCAV; interview with Mr Z A Ngcobo, 13 September 1980.

109. Ilanga lase Natal, 30 March 1946.

110. Ibid, 5 October 1946 and MNAD 19L; vol. 1; City Medical Officer of Health - Town Clerk, 26 August 1943.

111. Ilanga lase Natal, 25 May 1946.

112. UG 36/47; Evidence of City Medical Officer of Health.

113. Ilanga lase Natal, 22 February 1947.

114. Ibid, 13 April 1946.

115. Ibid and MNAD; 19L, vol 1; Councillor C J Clarke - Town Clerk, 20 April 1944 and vol. 2; Legal Advisor - Councillor C J Clarke, 20 April 1945.

Medical examinations had long been a central aspect of urban African administration. During the early 1940s the system of medical screenings appears to have been laxly administered. Not only did the municipality lack the resources to control African entry to the city. The municipality was also unable to halt Africans gaining casual employment directly from employers and had neither the resources nor personnel to operate the required health services. Clarke's idea, while gaining massive support from Whites,¹¹⁶ was so vociferously condemned by various political bodies¹¹⁷ and by Africans at large¹¹⁸ that the proposal was dropped and replaced by a weaker measure that required all employers of domestic labour to enter details of their employees' health in the pass book.¹¹⁹ Resistance to health inspections was based on the humiliation suffered by those who were subjected to examination. Charles Khumalo recalls,

It was Kwa Muhle. We were told we had to all go down to Warwick Avenue and also they had a place in Sydney Road. Stand with no clothes on, young men, old men all together, they didn't care. A doctor would come along. "Open your legs!" "Cough". Then he would put a chalk cross on you if you were not good. People were cross and it stopped.¹²⁰

During this period White vigilante groups had been formed in an effort to prevent the ever-increasing incidence of petty theft along the city beachfront.¹²¹ In attacking these developments, which resulted in any African visiting the beach area being considered a potential criminal, Africans, while never condoning thieving, maintained that the problem was one of economic hardship and called for a redistribution of the city's wealth.¹²² Such calls gathered force after two decisions taken by the City Council. One decision allocated additional funds to beachfront improvements while "African women and children sleep on concrete".¹²³ Another decision, taken in 1947, halted the practice of allowing Africans to sit in the back three rows of seats on 'White' buses.¹²⁴ During this period there was also growing pressure on the City Council from White ratepayers for the curfew to be brought forward from 10 pm to 9 pm.¹²⁵ The spatial and political implications of such attitudes produced an angry reaction from Africans. Decrying the Native Revenue Account as "farcical - it actually kept us from the money we helped to make", an increasing number of Africans began to seek ways

116. Interview with Mrs M B Lavoipierre, 31 January 1981.

117. The Guardian, 31 July 1947.

118. Ilanga lase Natal, 3 April 1948 and interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

119. Ilanga lase Natal, 12 July 1948.

120. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 14 July 1985.

121. Ilanga lase Natal, 20 October 1948.

122. Ibid, 2 February 1946. My emphasis.

123. Ibid, 12 October 1946.

124. Walker, Kaffirs, p 208.

125. Ilanga lase Natal, 4 October 1947.

in which the local power structure could be transformed.¹²⁶ Here were ordinary Africans developing a confidence in their own perceptions of society and sustaining a level of opposition to specific municipal policies.

During this time African workers sustained a vigorous campaign against the extremely limited interpretation which the City Council adopted towards the advisory powers of the various Location Advisory Boards. African workers desired that elected African leaders sit with full powers on the City Council,¹²⁷ and consistently condemned as "sell-outs" those Africans who claimed to represent their interests on the Location Advisory Boards.

In attempting to extricate themselves from this invidious situation many of the sitting Advisory Board members, including A.W.G. Champion, launched a bitter attack on the City Council. At one point Champion and nine other councillors boycotted Board meetings.¹²⁸ The whole problem, they asserted, was created by the manner in which the City Council and various municipal officials acted as though they knew what was best for the "native".¹²⁹ Champion argued that Africans respected the members of the Advisory Boards, and the City Council should thus best respond by conferring additional power on the Advisory Boards.¹³⁰

African workers were not however to be mollified. Ever aware of the escalating public debate, they continued, on an even more vehement level, to attack those Africans who claimed to be their leaders. Champion and other sitting Board members became ever more reliant on the assistance of the City Council. Wisely the municipality responded by supporting the right and responsibility of educated Africans to engage in political activity.¹³¹

In January 1945 Champion, along with virtually all the sitting Board members Chesterville were defeated in an election that saw African workers choosing new leaders whom they believed would better represent their demands.¹³² Through municipal officials' use of dubious tactics, a similar situation was temporarily averted in the Somtseu Road Male Location election.¹³³ However through the efforts of Pious Mei, trade unionist and Congress Youth League supporter, the issue was taken to court where the election was declared null and void and stringent rules laid down for preventing municipal interference in future elections.¹³⁴ It was reported that through the success of the court case, hundreds of African inmates of Msizini became increasingly militant and began to view the Advisory Board less sceptically.¹³⁵

126. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

127. Ilanga lase Natal, 12 October 1946.

128. CKM; reel 3B 2:XC9:30/84; Minutes of the Native Locations (combined) Advisory Board, 24 April 1946.

129. For further details see M W Swanson (ed), The Views of Mahlati, (Pietermaritzburg, 1983).

130. Ilanga lase Natal, 9 March 1946.

131. Ibid, 30 August 1947.

132. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

133. Ilanga lase Natal, 4 January 1947. This hostel complex was known as Msizini.

134. Ibid, 18 January and 12 April 1947.

135. Ibid, 24 May 1947.

In spite of unsuccessful attempts by the City Council to declare meetings in the Somtseu Road location illegal,¹³⁶ Mei and his close associates and fellow trade unionists, Nkwanyana and Dubazana, held various meetings at which their possible nomination for the new Advisory Board was discussed. Eventually the three agreed to stand, facing opposition from "tame native" employees of the City Council. The election was again rigged in favour of the "tame natives". There followed a massive public outcry demanding the appointment of a judicial Commission of Enquiry.¹³⁷ While the City Council refused to accede to the demand that any investigation be started, new Advisory Board regulations were promulgated preventing any municipal interference in elections and debarring African employees of the municipality from standing for the Advisory Boards.¹³⁸ New elections were held in all the locations and hostels in September 1947.¹³⁹

These elections were fought amidst much "mud slinging and ill-feeling",¹⁴⁰ with both "parties" printing handbills and holding mass meetings.¹⁴¹ In an effort to gain popular support the sitting members of the Joint Locations Advisory Boards endeavoured to co-opt a crucial element of the ideology of 'New Africa': worker demands for a Technical School for Africans in Durban,¹⁴² and press for a reduction in the price of sorghum beer. Both requests were turned down by the City Council.¹⁴³

Significantly enough while the position of sitting African Board members remained as invidious as ever, the attitude of the City Council towards the Advisory Board's requests left many workers disenchanted with any official attempt to alter either the membership or structure of the Advisory Boards. African workers called on fellow workers to boycott the elections, but the boycott was only successful in the Baumannville Location.¹⁴⁴ The elections at Msizini¹⁴⁵ were again rigged with Mei being defeated by the "educated" Africans.¹⁴⁶ In Lamontville, where workers gained a court order to prevent irregularities,¹⁴⁷ a second election resulted in Champion regaining his seat through municipal assistance.¹⁴⁸ In Chesterville the Bantu United Zakhle, led by Champion, R.R.R. Dhlomo and Mwelase, was victorious over the Chesterville Tenants Association nominees, Pitness Simelane, Stanford Mtolo and Oscar Ngwenya.¹⁴⁹

136. Ibid, 31 May 1947.

137. Ibid 28 June 1947.

138. Ibid , 30 August 1947.

139. Ibid, 27 September 1947.

140. Ibid, 4 October 1947.

141. Ibid.

142. Ibid, 12 June 1948.

143. Ibid, 3 July 1948.

144. Ibid, 27 September 1947.

145. Ibid , 22 November 1947.

146. Ibid, 11 January 1948.

147. Ibid, 25 September 1948.

148. Ibid.

149. Ibid.

The Bantu United Zakhle was an established grouping that endeavoured to gain residents' support in condemning the way in which Africans conducted themselves in Mkhumbane, calling for better homes and facilities in Chesterville, and opposing small-scale entrepreneur activity that threatened the position of the established African traders in the area.¹⁵⁰ Led by Champion, who was then president of the African National Congress in Natal, an established trader and fierce opponent of the Congress Youth League, the movement cultivated a fierce parochialism which in part was due to Champion's own rather ruthless control of the area and the residents' extreme enmity to Africans who lived in Mkhumbane.¹⁵¹ Mtolo recalls,

We were faced by such a difficult situation. Even workers in Chesterville were scared and also, well the idea of the Advisory Boards was weak - if look back. Chesterville was always different because Champion had one of his houses there. Pitness, Oscar and myself were Youth Leaguers and stood no chance. And anyway Mkhumbane! - hell that gave us problems. How could you tell them about those - Cato Manor was made. That was their strength but people in Chesterville were too used to being timid and so they felt threatened.¹⁵²

Control of the Advisory Boards remained in the hands of Champion, his cronies and hangers-on. While African workers had at one point aimed at forming a political party and taking control of the Advisory Boards as the first stage in gaining full representation at City Council level, their very failure was to have important results. While remaining militant, workers began to see the futility of this tactic. Voting polls in later Advisory Board elections was dismally low.¹⁵³ With the power of the Advisory Boards as circumscribed as ever, Champion became increasingly dictatorial toward opponents in the Joint Locations Advisory Board sittings; and he was forced to privately collude with the Mayor of Durban in order to achieve his goals.¹⁵⁴

Among Congress Youth Leaguers, workers' lack of faith in the Advisory Boards was acknowledged. As Stanford Mtolo recalls,

There were some of us - Youth Leaguers there. Oscar finally managed to get on. He would always fight - also against S.B. Ngcobo - a real puppet of Champion's - it had started that in 1944. We just had to carry on because Champion was too dangerous. We were lucky because we had the young Dhlomo to write for us. But the workers, well we knew they would stay away - that was accepted.¹⁵⁵

For workers, their brief involvement in the issue of the Advisory Boards provided clear pointers to their need to operate on a completely different political terrain with a leadership drawn from other than the African educated elite, many of whom were shown up to be "sell-outs".

150. *Ibid.*, 4 December 1948 and Kuper, *African Bourgeoisie*, p 285.

151. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

152. *Ibid.*

153. Interview with Mr R G Wilson, 14 February 1981.

154. CKM; reel 3B 2:XC9:30/83, Minutes of the Native Locations (combined) Advisory Board, 17 February 1949 and S B Ngcobo - A W G Champion, 25 February 1949.

155. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

During 1948 a fourth specific issue was raised by African workers. Africans had for long opposed the municipal monopoly over the manufacture, distribution and sale of sorghum beer.¹⁵⁶ During the late 1940s the City Council, despite a critical housing shortage, was engaged in allocating large sums of money from the Native Revenue Account to erect new beerhalls.¹⁵⁷ While the price of sorghum beer and other basic ingredients of the beer had declined drastically since the end of the war¹⁵⁸ the City Council both refused to accede to demands for a reduction in the beer price and in fact raised prices,¹⁵⁹ using some of the lucrative profits to provide new soccer fields for Africans.¹⁶⁰ The price of a large communal container of beer was now 1s 6d. In 1948 a bag of sorghum cost 1.10.0 as opposed to the war-time price of 4.0.0.¹⁶¹ When the Combined Locations Advisory Board raised the matter with the Native Administration Committee, Councillor Nicholson said that the Board had no authority to raise such matters and refused to discuss the issue.¹⁶²

Africans then proceeded to boycott the beerhalls,¹⁶³ and, it appears, during the boycott, Africans presented certain other demands. Prince Pika Zulu, the induna and chief spy¹⁶⁴ of the municipal Native Administration Department, was "threatened".¹⁶⁵ Africans demanded that the treatment of African policemen in the city force be improved, specifically asking that they be provided with boots, and that White beerhall attendants be replaced by Africans.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore Africans desired to relax in "clean pubs" and not sit in dirty overcrowded conditions after having waited in long queues to gain entry.¹⁶⁷

This demand on behalf of policemen is interesting. Africans had for long complained about the rising costs of clothing and footwear produced specifically, as one sympathetic Indian merchant remarked, "for the Native trade".¹⁶⁸ In a period when Africans were emphasising their own dignity and becoming aware of the fashionable attire then being sported by "Jo'burg swanks", their inability to maintain such standards produced a

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- 156. See P La Hausse "Drinking in a Cage: The Durban System and the 1929 Riots", Africa Perspective, no. 20 (1982).
 - 157. Ilanga lase Natal, 21 September 1946 and Mayors Minutes, Report of the Manager of the Municipal Native Administration Department, 1947-1950.
 - 158. Ilanga lase Natal, 26 June 1948.
 - 159. Mayors Minutes, Report of the Manager, M N A D, 1948-1951.
 - 160. Ilanga lase Natal, 26 June 1948.
 - 161. Ibid, 26 June 1948.
 - 162. Minutes of the Native Administration Committee, 3 July 1948 and Ilanga lase Natal, 26 July 1948.
 - 163. The Guardian, 24 June 1948.
 - 164. Interviews with Mr S Bourquin, 6 November 1980 and Mr C Khumalo, 19 July 1980. For a brief description of Prince Pika Zulu see Walker, Kaffirs, p 30.
 - 165. Ilanga lase Natal, 26 July 1948 and interview with Mr D Mc Cullough, 2 April 1982.
 - 166. Ilanga lase Natal, 26 July 1948.
 - 167. Ibid, 17 July 1948.
 - 168. UG 19/49; Evidence of A Moolla and Exhibit 9 : Stephen Fraser (Pty) Ltd - A Moolla, 7 March 1949.

proud explanation best typified in the following response :

Ja those Jo'burgers were always so smart. But here things were different. You would go and buy a nice pair of shoes. The ones with toe caps. But you would soon be seen walking along the road with your shoes tied around your neck. Man its just too hot to be smart in Durban. Only the won't works - the tsotsis - can dress up. You know when Nu Zonic¹⁶⁹ came to play here some people stole their smart clothes and when they were caught it was a big joke!¹⁷⁰

Africans had for long attacked the role of Africans in helping to administer the various objectionable laws while at the same time being humiliated in the South African Police.¹⁷¹ This feeling was almost certainly exacerbated during the beerhall boycott as a result of police attempts to break the boycott through stepping up liquor raids into such place as Mkhumbane.¹⁷² Consequently their calls for African policemen to be given boots was probably more part of an unconscious desire to compel employers to bear a greater portion of the social wage than a move to provide the police with greater mobility.

African actions against their exploitation in beerhalls further typified the growing assertion of Africans that they should be accepted in the city. The African working class was stating clearly its desire for a political claim to an important power. No longer humiliated and passive under a dominant bourgeois ideology that saw Africans as dirty, lazy, insolent and salacious, African workers and their families gained an increasing power.

Conclusion

With the raising of specific issues and the articulation of grievances came indications of a new vision which was to be both an ongoing celebration of African victories and an image of future freedom. As one commentator remarked in 1949,

For those who remember the country as a place of prospectors, hunters...and naked, brown, respectful athletic heathen....New Africa is a mess. But it happens to be a reality - much more than the kind of African the country's law-makers wish to accept. The Black proletariat...have arrived. ...Cities put their locations out of sight. But they want their labourers to be punctual in the morning. The location may fester; but they want their labour to be clean.¹⁷³

The widespread popular unrest in Durban during the late 1940s was a clear indication of how the African proletariat was attempting to overcome their own material and ideological oppression. Africans had in fact

169. This revue band visited Durban in May 1946.

170. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 23 June 1985.

171. See, for example, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 2 March 1946.

172. *Ibid*, 3 July 1948.

173. Walker, *Kaffirs*, p 175.

transformed at least certain areas of the political terrain so successfully that even the municipality was, in spite of its fairly sophisticated network of impimpi in the beerhalls, hostels, and locations,¹⁷⁴ unable to clearly comprehend the precise nature or purpose of the "waves of discontent" that were "sweeping" through Durban.¹⁷⁵ When, in 1946, the City Council requested that a commission of enquiry be urgently appointed to investigate the position of Africans in the city, it was abjectly incapable of supplying any coherent reason for the enquiry. Likewise the Commissioner himself, Mr Justice F.N. Broome was also "unable to obtain a very clear picture of the events leading up to the appointment of the Commission".¹⁷⁶

It was however this sustained and widespread protest which escalated into an ever-increasing belligerency that was to create the conditions in which new movements would develop. 'New Africa' was acquiring an organizational base which was to transform the African political spectrum and provide the basis for a militant, even messianic populism.

174. Interview with Mr D McCullough, 2 April 1982.

175. Ilanga lase Natal, 7 July 1947 and CKM ; reel 3B 2:XC9:30/84; Minutes of meeting of the Executive Committee, ANC (Natal Branch), 1949.

176. UG 39/1947; Report of Commission. See also UG 13/1949; Evidence of A Webb.