

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF COMMUNITY POLITICS: THE AFRICAN PETTY BOURGEOISIE AND THE NEW BRIGHTON ADVISORY BOARD, c. 1937–1952*

BY GARY BAINES

Rhodes University

CURRENT writing on urban African politics in South Africa has begun to recognize the significance of civic or vigilance associations and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the struggle against apartheid. Given the suppression of labour and political organizations by the state, they fulfilled a key role through the establishment of community structures which enabled mobilization to continue. But in the absence of representative political institutions, the state created its own bodies for urban African communities. These community councils or, before them, Advisory Boards have been widely perceived as 'institutions of the oppressor', and those serving on them condemned as 'collaborators' or 'sell-outs'. But when we go beyond the rhetoric and examine the many contradictions of township politics, simple answers to the following questions are hard to find: Were people who served on such institutions necessarily co-opted by the authorities? Did they articulate the interests of their own class, the petty bourgeoisie, or were they representative of a wider constituency? Is it feasible that an institution with questionable legitimacy could be used to galvanize a community into action? Is it possible to capture such institutions to further strategic political objectives or should they be boycotted as a matter of principle?

Such questions have as much historical as contemporary relevance. They have certainly elicited some questionable responses in the historiography which to date has addressed the role of Advisory Boards in community politics. Bloch and Wilkinson, for instance, state quite unequivocally that the Advisory Boards were dominated by the 'most reactionary elements' of the African petty bourgeoisie, and 'generally became the vehicles for the often narrow grievances and aspirations of a disconnected petty bourgeoisie'.¹ Stadler's appraisal is rather more ambivalent. He states at one point that

Because of their lack of power, the limited forms of African representation in local bodies [such as Advisory Boards]...seldom generated any substantial political support in urban African communities.

Yet, at another point, he reckons that Advisory Boards 'provided a locus for African political activity, and some significant community leaders used them

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¹ R. Bloch and P. Wilkinson, 'Urban control and the popular struggle: a survey of state urban policy 1920–1970', *Africa Perspective*, xx (1982), 18.

as a power base'.² This apparent contradiction can be partly resolved by an appreciation of the structurally ambiguous position of the African petty bourgeoisie and the changing nature of the Advisory Board through time.

A recent study by Cobley has gone some way towards providing a more nuanced and diachronic treatment of the petty bourgeoisie and of their role in community politics.³ But Cobley's notion of a 'great awakening' of Advisory Boards, which he ascribes to their widening role in terms of the 1936 Natives' Representative Act (NRA), is problematical. The conversion of boards into electoral colleges for urban areas under the Act may have galvanised politics in the northern provinces; but not in the Cape where Africans still participated – albeit in attenuated form – in wider (white) electoral politics. Secondly, Cobley associates this 'great awakening' of the boards with the participation of political organizations. But as he himself shows and others before him have done,⁴ members of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) stood for Advisory Boards before the passage of the NRA. Moreover, Cobley fails to distinguish between those with known political affiliations contesting elections in their private capacities and those who stood for an organization *per se*. After the collapse of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), and with the African National Congress (ANC) moribund by the early 1930s, former officials of both these organizations elected to Advisory Boards were accountable only to local constituencies – or, in the case of nominees, to the local authority. Participation by the ANC and the CPSA in Advisory Boards during the 1940s and 1950s became more widespread⁵ because these organizations determined to capture any forum capable of drawing diverse groups into their ranks.

Despite Cobley's contribution, the significance of the role of Advisory Boards in community politics has still to be thoroughly assessed. We lack case studies of Advisory Boards which cover an extended period in any depth.⁶ As far as Port Elizabeth is concerned, a study has been made of the

² A. Stadler, *The Political Economy of Modern South Africa* (Cape Town, 1987), 112, 116.

³ A. G. Cobley, *Class and Consciousness: The Black Petty Bourgeoisie in South Africa, 1924 to 1950* (Westport, 1990), draws (as does this article) on a substantial literature which includes: L. Kuper, *An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa* (New Haven, 1965); P. Bonner, 'The Transvaal Native Congress 1917–1920: the radicalisation of the black petty bourgeoisie on the Rand', in S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (London, 1982); and H. Bradford, 'Mass movements and the petty bourgeoisie: the social origins of the ICU leadership 1924–29', *J. Afr. Hist.*, xxv (1984), 295–310. Another important recent contribution is C. Charney, 'Janus in Blackface? The African petite bourgeoisie in South Africa', *Con-Text*, 1 (1988), 5–44.

⁴ Cobley, *Class and Consciousness*, 207–8; J. and R. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850–1950* (London, 1961), 484; P. Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (London, 1970), 364.

⁵ For example, T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg, 1983), 78; D. Fortescue, 'The Communist Party and the African working class in the 1940s', *Int. J. Afr. Hist. Studies*, xxiv (1991), 489; D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid 1948–1960: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford, 1991), 37.

⁶ R. Bloch, '"Using the institutions of the oppressor": African Advisory Boards 1923 to 1948' (unpublished paper, University of Cape Town, 1978), includes a brief case study of the Ndabeni Advisory Board in the early 1930s. The following unpublished theses provided more than passing reference to particular boards: P. la Hausse, 'The struggle

operation of the Board's successors – community councils – in the townships during the 1970s. It sought to evaluate the behaviour of individual members with significant personal followings. These 'notables' built up systems of patronage based on a network of clients, linked by a web of social relations resting on kinship and ethnic ties, business interests and membership of political, church and sports organizations.⁷ This approach provides a point of departure for this article which will examine, *inter alia*, the changing structural position of the petty bourgeoisie in New Brighton, as well as the social backgrounds of prominent Advisory Board members; the political culture of New Brighton and the significance of the Advisory Board's role therein; popular consciousness and something of the dynamics of community life; and finally, the broader context in which the character of community politics changed from the mid-1940s.

STATE POLICY TOWARDS URBAN AFRICANS AND THE FUNCTIONING OF THE NEW BRIGHTON ADVISORY BOARD

Advisory Boards pre-dated the enactment of South Africa's first national legislation for urban Africans, the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act. The functioning of these boards was not prescribed by the Act, which was enabling legislation.⁸ However, the Native Affairs Department issued 'model' regulations which served as a guide for local authorities.⁹ Advisory Boards had a dual function: to serve as a link between urban Africans and local authorities, and to provide a means of effecting social control. Urban Africans who qualified to vote for members of the Board or serve thereon, were supposed to learn the duties and responsibilities of (limited) citizenship.¹⁰ The Urban Areas Act envisaged that location residents should be consulted by municipalities on all matters which concerned them. Because many local authorities either failed to establish Advisory Boards or ignored them where they existed, amendments to the Act in 1944 and 1945 compelled the former to set up an Advisory Board and defined more precisely its obligations to the latter.¹¹ But the Boards were not accorded statutory powers as this would have implied recognition of the permanency of Africans in the cities and the possibility of full citizenship rights in the future. Similarly, the suggestion that local authorities implement a system of direct municipal

for the city: alcohol, the *ematsheni* and popular culture in Durban, 1902–1936' (M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984), 205–16; L. Torr, 'The social history of an urban African community: Lamont, c. 1930–1960' (M.A. thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1985), 127–43, and H. Sapire, 'African urbanisation and struggles against municipal control in Brakpan, 1920–1958' (Ph.D. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988), 187–93, 341–4.

⁷ M. de Jongh, 'Interaction and transition: a study of conciliar behaviour in a Black South African township' (Ph.D. thesis, Rhodes University, 1979), *passim*.

⁸ J. D. Rheinallt Jones, 'Native urban administration: the functions of Native Advisory Boards', *Race Relations*, xii (1946), 53.

⁹ L. Reyburn, *The Urban African in Local Government: A Study of the Advisory Board System and its Operation* (Johannesburg, 1960), 4.

¹⁰ Cobley, *Class and Consciousness*, 206.

¹¹ T. R. H. Davenport, 'African self-government: the first abortive phase' (unpublished paper presented to the Cape Town History Workshop, University of Cape Town, 1981), 9–10.

representation for urban Africans, was not seriously entertained because it was contrary to the precepts of 'Stallardism' which had been largely responsible for shaping government policy towards urban Africans.¹²

During the 1940s, reforms to this policy contemplated by the government served to highlight the contradictions. Davenport holds that after the 1946 miners' strike and the adjournment *sine die* of the Natives Representative Council (NRC) in the same year, the government attempted to democratise the Advisory Board system downwards, so as to make it more representative without making it more powerful.¹³ A scheme for reconstituting the Advisory Boards, drawn up by the Johannesburg Joint Council,¹⁴ probably influenced the thinking of the then-Secretary for Native Affairs, D. L. Smit. Evidence in Smit's private papers reveals a far-reaching proposal for the conferment of self-government upon urban Africans, by linking all local Advisory Boards to an Advisory Boards Congress and granting them representation in the NRC, which would exercise executive and administrative authority in respect of African locations and townships.¹⁵ And the Native Laws (Fagan) Commission, which considered according urbanised Africans permanent status in the cities, recommended the upgrading of Advisory Boards into urban councils or some other form of self-government.¹⁶ However, nearly all the municipalities that submitted evidence to the Commission expressed opposition to extending decision-making powers to Advisory Boards,¹⁷ so that the ideological consensus of the ruling classes enabled the government to press ahead with its policy of urban segregation/apartheid.

New Brighton was one of two locations – the other being Ndabeni in Cape Town – established under the Cape's Native Reserve Location Act of 1902. Regulations for the establishment of Advisory Boards had been promulgated in 1908 in an amendment to the Act. It would appear that the working of the New Brighton Advisory Board (NBAB) invited favourable comparisons with other centres.¹⁸ And the regulations remained in force after the Port Elizabeth City Council (PECC) assumed control of the location in 1923

¹² *Report of the Native Affairs Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Working of the Provisions of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act Relating to the Use and Supply of Kaffir Beer*, G.P.-S. 4620 (Pretoria, 1942), para. 62. 'Stallardism' refers to the doctrine proposed by the Transvaal Local Government Commission of 1921 (chaired by Colonel C. F. Stallard) that urban Africans were sojourners in the 'white man's cities' for only as long as their labour was required.

¹³ T. R. H. Davenport, 'The triumph of Colonel Stallard: the transformation of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act between 1923 and 1937', *South African Hist. J.*, 1 (1970), 89; 'Historical background of the apartheid city to 1948', in M. Swilling *et al.*, *Apartheid City in Transition* (Johannesburg, 1991), 15.

¹⁴ University of the Witwatersrand, Ballinger Papers, A410 F1.3.3, 'Draft scheme for reconstituting the Advisory Boards', 5 Jan. 1944.

¹⁵ Albany Museum, D. L. Smit Papers, GM 69/35D 16/47, 'A progressive programme for Native administration, Apr. 1947'; GM 69/35D 24/47, minutes of meeting between Smuts and NRC members, Cape Town, 8 May 1947; M. Roth, 'The Natives Representative Council, 1937-1951' (Ph.D. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987), 487-8.

¹⁶ *Report of the Native Laws (Fagan) Commission*, U.G. 28-1948, para. 32, cited in Reyburn, 'The urban African in local government', 34.

¹⁷ D. Welsh, 'The growth of towns', in L. Thompson and M. Wilson (eds.), *The Oxford History of South Africa* (Oxford, 1975), ii, 229, citing *Fagan Commission*, para. 29.

¹⁸ *Report of the Native Affairs Department for the Years 1913 to 1918*, U.G. 7-19, 17.

because the Urban Areas Act was applied only a decade later. The new regulations promulgated in 1933 did not differ much from previous ones, and the Board, which was by then a well-established institution in the life of the New Brighton community, continued to perform the functions envisaged by the authorities more successfully than most.

The Location Superintendent (or Manager of Native Affairs from 1945) in charge of the administration of the location played a pivotal role because he was the liaison between New Brighton residents and the PECC. From 1926 the PECC had a separate standing committee for Native Affairs, known as the Native Affairs Committee (NAC). The Location Superintendent served as chairman of the New Brighton Advisory Board and submitted a monthly report along with the minutes to the Native Affairs Committee. Copies of the Native Affairs Committee's minutes were, in turn, attached to the agenda circulated to City Councillors. The Superintendent reported back to the NBAB on the recommendations of the Native Affairs Committee and the resolutions of the Council. He was also responsible for the selection of the PECC's nominees to the NBAB, who numbered half of the Board members for most of the period under discussion.¹⁹

J. P. ('Paddy') McNamee had been appointed to the position of Location Superintendent in 1926. Having previously been employed in the same capacity in Grahamstown and being fluent in Xhosa, he was regarded as something of an 'expert' on Africans. He was nicknamed *uGilifatyi* (literally 'he who destroys barrels') on account of a vigorous campaign to rid New Brighton of illegal brewers. McNamee and his family resided in an enclave in the New Brighton location along with a few other white officials. According to his son's memoirs, he tempered his authority with genuine affection for and interest in the welfare of residents under his charge.²⁰ He was, by all accounts, a paternalist who administered the location as if it were a private estate. He prided himself in his familiarity with the residents, who numbered over 25,000 by the time he retired in 1945.

McNamee's position as chairman of the Advisory Board augmented his personal influence in New Brighton enormously. He claimed to have the necessary qualities to act as an impartial overseer of the Board's activities.²¹ The Native Affairs Committee evidently concurred, for it ignored the recommendations of at least two government commissions that the Location Superintendent should not hold this office.²² And when NBAB members proposed that a City Councillor act as Chairman of the Advisory Board, it respectfully suggested that this should not be construed as a personal attack on McNamee, but that an important principle was at stake. In their view, a councillor was not an employee of the PECC, like the Superintendent, and his independence would in their view safeguard the status of the Advisory

¹⁹ In terms of the regulations under the Urban Areas Act the Board consisted of three elected and three nominated members. In 1940 it was enlarged to eight members of whom half were nominated, and in 1949 further enlarged to 12 members of whom eight were elected.

²⁰ J. P. McNamee, jnr., unpublished memoirs (1988), 3-4.

²¹ Cape Archives Depot [CAD], Port Elizabeth Town Clerk's Files, 3/PEZ 1/1280, Memo of Supt. NBL re. Native Economic Commission Report, 5 Aug. 1932.

²² *Report of the Native Economic Commission 1930-32*, U.G. 22-1932, paras. 14-16; *Report of the Conference between Municipalities and the Native Affairs Department in 1937*, U.G. 56-1937, 20.

Board as trustee of the Location residents.²³ The only concession made by the Native Affairs Committee was that it would meet regularly with the Board in the absence of the Location Superintendent, to enable grievances to be aired without fear of recrimination.²⁴ It was not until 1948, by which time C. T. Boast was Manager of Native Affairs, that the Native Affairs Committee agreed to amend the regulations so as to permit its appointee to act as Chairman of the Advisory Board. Accordingly, he no longer served as the primary interlocutor with the PECC.

CLIQUE AND CLIENTELISM IN NEW BRIGHTON IN THE 1930S

Port Elizabeth owed its 'progressive' image to not having implemented influx controls and labour registration. Robinson has shown the PECC's policy in this regard was pragmatic rather than principled, aiming to attract investment in the local economy by offering employers a ready pool of labour.²⁵ Yet, the city's industrial development during the 1930s created few employment opportunities for Africans as factories, and especially the motor vehicle assembly plants, were the preserve of white labour. For women, formal employment opportunities were confined largely to domestic work; and the strictly regimented system of domestic beer brewing, which was confined to a portion of the location, did not provide women with much scope to supplement family incomes. The vast majority of African workers was unskilled and their minimum wage of 4s. per day, set in 1930, was well below the national average.²⁶ Rents were considerably higher and defaulters more numerous in the new brick buildings erected in the late 1920s than the old ('Red') Location. There was extensive overcrowding, with as many as two out of every three principal occupants of houses taking in lodgers to help meet the cost of rents. A more extensive sub-economic housing scheme, known as McNamee Village, was commenced in 1938 to rehouse Africans relocated from Korsten, a slum closer to the city centre.

Social conditions of Port Elizabeth's African population during the 1930s were varied enough to cause some stratification. A small middle class consisting of property owners, petty traders and others of independent means faced constant financial ruin. Korsten property owners who derived income from rack-renting were systematically deprived of their means of livelihood through removals. The presence of a group of Jewish traders in the location considerably reduced prospects for African entrepreneurial activities. In fact, opportunities for self-employment and capital accumulation were few and far between. Ministers, teachers, interpreters, clerks and other professionals who constituted an aspirant middle class or petty bourgeoisie received relatively small stipends or salaries without regular increments. The

²³ CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/18, Minutes of the NBAB, 23 Mar. 1944.

²⁴ CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/18, Minutes of meeting between the NAC and NBAB, 13 Oct. 1944.

²⁵ J. Robinson, "'Progressive Port Elizabeth': Liberal politics, local economic development and the territorial basis of racial domination, 1923-1935", *Geojournal*, 22 (1990), 293-303, and 'The power of apartheid: territoriality and state power in South African cities - Port Elizabeth 1923-1972' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1990), 167-77.

²⁶ *Board of Trade and Industries, Report No. 125: Cost of Living Enquiry* (Pretoria, 1931), 28.

propensity for members of this group to identify with working class aspirations in times of social upheaval, such as the early 1920s, has been amply demonstrated for many parts of South Africa, and Port Elizabeth was no exception.²⁷ Although many of the petty bourgeoisie experienced declining living standards, they still enjoyed considerable social status on account of the value attached to education. With the necessary skills and acumen, some became major political brokers through the extensive patron-client networks existing in New Brighton.

The operation of these networks centred on the Advisory Board, and their workings can be illustrated with reference to the lives of a few notables in New Brighton. Profiles of A. F. Pendla, James Limba, P. J. Nikiwe and Rev. G. B. Molefe are provided below. These individuals all became long-serving NBAB members, and even political opponents acknowledged them to be 'men respected by their own people who had rendered very valuable service to the community'.²⁸ The only woman who wielded comparable influence was Sister Dora Nginza, a well-loved and respected matriarchal figure, who earned the praise name *Aa! Nobantu!!* (Mother of the People). Her influence was confined largely to the more traditional segments of New Brighton society. Although married to a *tshawe* (petty chief), she served as the urban representative of Paramount Chief Sandile of the *amaRarabe* after her husband's death. She was involved in civic, church and cultural activities, as well as welfare work and occasional non-party political matters. She was highly respected not only by McNamee but also by a succession of medical officers. But as a nurse in the employ of the administration, Nginza was precluded from serving on the NBAB.²⁹

Perhaps the leading community figure of his generation was Andrew Frank Pendla. He was elected to the Advisory Board in 1925, 1928 and 1930, and served as a nominated member from 1935 until his death in 1944. He enjoyed the confidence of McNamee, who regarded him as 'the most capable board member – nominated or elected – that I have ever worked with'.³⁰ As a senior clerk and interpreter to the attorney, J. H. Spilkin, he was in a position to provide legal advice to the many residents who sought it; or, failing that, could refer people to his employer. Together with his position on the Advisory Board, this enabled Pendla to establish individualised patron-client relations. His aspiration to financial security was never realized, as his ventures in running an eating house and a trading store were unsuccessful. As a *tshawe*, Pendla derived much of his standing from lineage-type authority based on ties of kinship, which still held sway in New Brighton despite its relatively well-established and stable population. He

²⁷ G. Baines, 'From populism to unionism: the emergence and nature of Port Elizabeth's Industrial Commercial Workers' Union, 1918–20', *J. Southern Afr. Studies*, xvii (1991), 679–716.

²⁸ CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/18, Minutes of the NAC, 2 Feb. 1944; *Eastern Province Herald* [EPH], 3 Mar. 1944.

²⁹ *Report of the Native Affairs Department of the years 1919 to 1921*, U.G. 34-'22, 15; Newspaper House Library File on D. Nginza, Newspaper House, Times Media Ltd, Port Elizabeth; McNamee, 'Memoirs', 16–18; *Weekend Post*, 19 Nov. 1991; Interviews with Dr P. D. Jabkovitz, Rondebosch, 1 Jan. 1990, and G. Pemba, Swartkops Valley, 31 Mar. and 31 July 1992.

³⁰ CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/18, Report of Supt. NBL, 15 Jan. 1944.

posited the idea to the Holloway Commission that urban representatives of the chiefs sit on a separate body from the Advisory Board and meet regularly with the local authority.³¹ However, his own ethnic support base was augmented by a personal following. Although something of an opportunist, whose political career ended with his being axed as President of the Cape African Congress in 1942,³² Pendla was repeatedly elected to key positions on civic bodies by New Brighton residents.³³

In a somewhat different category, but also very influential in New Brighton's affairs, was the self-styled 'Bishop' James Limba, head of the Church of Christ. Limba was elected to the NBAB for three consecutive years from 1931 to 1933 and then, again, in 1936. After standing down for a year, he became a nominated member for ten consecutive years between 1938 and 1947, until he declined further nomination following a constitutional dispute in the Church which amounted to a challenge to his leadership. During his years on the NBAB, Limba availed himself of the opportunity to secure trading licences for a number of commercial ventures, and these were well patronised by his followers, who kept him in fine style. Limba's was the only application for a site in New Brighton by indigenous churches to have been approved during McNamee's term of office. The Location Superintendent reckoned Limba and his followers to be amongst the most law-abiding residents of New Brighton and, obviously, useful allies in effecting social control.³⁴

Nikiwe and Molefe, as educators and clergymen, were accorded standing in the community as members of the 'respectable classes'. Both were undoubtedly co-opted by McNamee. Prince John Nikiwe had been a school principal until his retirement in 1944 and was a Methodist lay preacher. He served as an elected member of the NBAB between 1922 and 1928 and as a nominated member from 1929 for an almost unbroken period of 35 years. He served on the executive committee of the Port Elizabeth District Native Welfare Society (later the Port Elizabeth Joint Council). Nikiwe was also on the executive of both the local and provincial branches of the Cape African Congress at various times between the 1920s and the early 1940s.³⁵ When

³¹ University of Cape Town Manuscripts Collection, BC 630, K. 26, Evidence to the Native Economic Commission, Port Elizabeth, 26 and 27 Mar. 1931, 6006-26, 6030-42.

³² University of the Witwatersrand, Church of the Province Archives, A. B. Xuma Papers, letters from Xuma to Pendla of 31 Dec. 1941 (ABX. 411231a); Pendla to Xuma, 15 Jan. 1942 (ABX. 420115a); Nikiwe to Xuma, 5 Mar. 1942 (ABX. 420305); Xuma to Pendla, 16 Sept. 1942 (ABX. 420916c); Xuma to Nikiwe, 18 Sept. 1942 (ABX. 420918c); and Nikiwe to Xuma, 22 Sept. 1942 (ABX. 420922b); Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa*, 390-1.

³³ Cape Archives, Port Elizabeth [PE] Municipality, Town Clerk's Files, various; *Imvo Zabantsundu*, 8 April 1930; T. D. Mveli Skota, *The African Yearly Register* (Johannesburg, 1931), 237; G. M. Gerhart and T. Karis (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge*, iv: *Political Profiles, 1882-1964* (Stanford, 1977), 126; A. G. Cobley, "'On the shoulders of giants': the black petty bourgeoisie in South Africa" (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1989), 340; interviews with Blanch Matsolo (nee Pendla), Hillside Location, Graaff-Reinet, 1 May 1992, and J. H. Spilkin, Port Elizabeth, 23 Jan. 1990 and 8 Feb. 1992.

³⁴ For further information, see G. Baines 'In the world but not of it: "Bishop" Limba and the Church of Christ in New Brighton, c. 1929-1949', *Kronos*, xix (1992), 102-34.

³⁵ PE Municipality, Town Clerk's Files, various; Newspaper House Library File; interviews with G. Soya Mama, New Brighton, 10 Aug. 1989, and J. Graham Young, Port Elizabeth, 23 Aug. 1988.

Rev G. B. Molefe took charge of the New Brighton Presbyterian Mission Church in 1939, he was immediately convinced by McNamee to accept nomination to the NBAB. He was to serve without interruption for almost thirty years. A graduate of the South African Native College (Fort Hare), he boasted an M.A. from Columbia University, New York. He later resigned from the ministry to become principal of the first secondary school in New Brighton.³⁶ The presence of nominees like Nikiwe and Molefe on the NBAB went a long way towards ensuring that it would cooperate with the Location Superintendent and the local authority. They typified the 'cap-in-hand' approach of the 'old guard' leaders who became uneasy with the radicalisation of both local and national politics in the 1940s.

If McNamee had his lackeys, there were some fairly prominent New Brighton residents who gave Advisory Board politics a more confrontational edge. Chief amongst these were Wilson Jabavu and A. Z. Tshiwula. Jabavu was the least-known son of D. D. T. Jabavu, and a journalist and photographer who freelanced for the newspapers *Imvo Zabantsundu* and *Umtateli wa Bantu*. In 1932, he had been nominated as member of the Advisory Board, but subsequently fell out with McNamee over the Superintendent's part in dismissing a headman who apparently took bribes. McNamee also took exception to the manner in which Board proceedings were being reported in the press. Jabavu won election to the NBAB in the years 1937-42 and 1945, and during these years NBAB meetings were punctuated with tensions on account of his antagonism with McNamee. Tshiwula was elected to the NBAB on three occasions (1935, 1939 and 1949), served as Margaret Ballinger's election agent in Port Elizabeth when she became the Native Representative for the Cape Eastern Circle, and was himself nominated as a candidate for the Native Representation Council in 1942. He also became an organizer for the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) in the 1940s, in which capacity he had a rather chequered career.³⁷ The origins of Tshiwula's dispute with McNamee lay in the Superintendent's attempt to disqualify him from the 1939 NBAB elections by branding him an 'agitator' on account of his record of criticizing the administration for malpractices.³⁸

The chief cause of Tshiwula's complaints concerned the favouritism shown by McNamee in the allocation of houses to residents known to him personally or those with the right connections. Able to exercise his own discretion in the matter, McNamee failed to process applications for houses strictly on an impartial and first-come-first-serve basis. Exceptions were invariably made in 'deserving cases', such as ministers, teachers and other members of the 'respectable classes'. But an even more blatant form of patronage was the practice of giving preference to prospective applicants for

³⁶ C. Hunter, 'Some aspects of the African mission policy of the Presbytery of Adelaide/Port Elizabeth, with special reference to the origin and development of the New Brighton Presbyterian Mission Church, 1898-1962' (Ph.D. thesis, Rhodes University, 1983), 288-91; G. B. Molefe, unpublished and incomplete autobiography 'My Life'; interview with Mrs J. Molefe (nee Mbelle), New Brighton, 24 June 1991; *Indaba* (supplement to *Evening Post*), 19 Oct. 1989; Newspaper House Library File.

³⁷ T. D. Mweliso, *African Yearly Register*, 25; Xuma Papers, A. Z. Ximiya to A. B. Xuma, 17 Sept. 1942 (ABX. 420917b). For further details about Tshiwula's activities as a union organiser, see J. Cherry, 'The making of an African working class: Port Elizabeth 1925 to 1963' (M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1992), 73-5, 78-82.

³⁸ CAD, 3/PEZ 1/1498, Tshiwula to Chief Magt., 15 Nov. 1937.

houses who were prepared to pay off rent arrears owing by previous tenants. This unscrupulous practice was condoned by the Native Affairs Committee which pressurized McNamee to reduce the levels of outstanding rentals in the Location. But it opened up something of a Pandora's box, when as a result, McNamee became involved in an acrimonious wrangle with Tshiwula and others.³⁹

In 1938, Tshiwula published letters in the press wherein he alleged that the administration had compelled would-be tenants to pay rent owing by previous defaulters who had absconded from the location. He claimed to have been a victim of extortion himself but refused to produce evidence before the NBAB on the grounds that the matter was *sub judice*. McNamee repudiated the allegations and maintained that in cases where such payments had been made, this was done so voluntarily.⁴⁰ Tshiwula renewed his allegations of corruption against the New Brighton administration before the Smit enquiry, which visited Port Elizabeth in 1941. On this occasion he submitted sworn statements to the commissioners to substantiate his claims.⁴¹ McNamee again denied the allegations but promised that the affidavits would be investigated, noting that previous enquiries had found nothing to substantiate irregularities on the part of headmen who were responsible for collecting rent arrears.⁴² But the dismissal of a number of headmen following disclosures of bribery and corruption gave any claims to a clean administration a hollow ring. McNamee evidently resented the fact that the commissioners should have seriously considered what he construed as efforts by Tshiwula's clique to impugn him and the administration.

Every year residents elected a Location Chairman, who was responsible for convening and chairing public meetings, and a Vigilance Committee (or Civic Association, as it became in 1945). As opposed to the NBAB, of which half the members were elected by tenants whose rents were up to date, these bodies were more broadly based, members being elected in public meetings. They have often been portrayed as rivals of the Advisory Boards. The American Board missionary, Ray Phillips, saw their chief purpose as being that of 'an opposition party to check up on the advisory board'. He reckoned that vigilance associations were apt to be more radical than Advisory Boards and lacked reliable leaders with integrity, whereas the latter had the support of level-headed, responsible type of detribalised Africans.⁴³ In New Brighton Pendlu, Tshiwula and Jabavu were frequently elected as Chairmen of the Vigilance Committee. The overlapping membership of the Vigilance Committee and NBAB suggest that it would be inaccurate to see them as representing opposing blocs. Indeed, the relationship was more complementary for they sometimes backed one another as pressure groups. When the Vigilance Committee petitioned the PECC on behalf of residents, the Native Affairs Committee always referred it to the NBAB, which was

³⁹ CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/9, Supt. NBL to Resident Magistrate, Port Elizabeth, 12 July 1935.

⁴⁰ Intermediate Archives Depot [IAD], Port Elizabeth, PE Town Clerk's Files, 25/104 No. 3, Minutes of the NBAB, 28 Feb. 1939.

⁴¹ Central Archives, Pretoria [CeA], Native Affairs [NTS], 4506 585/313, Evidence of A. Z. Tshiwula, Port Elizabeth, 29 Oct. 1941.

⁴² CeA, NTS 4506 585/313, Evidence of J. P. McNamee to Smit Enquiry, Port Elizabeth, 30 Oct. 1941.

⁴³ R. Phillips, *The Bantu in the City* (Johannesburg, 1938), 342.

regarded as the proper channel for such representations. In some instances, the NBAB supported the Vigilance Committee, whilst at other times the latter was forced to bypass the NBAB and seek direct access to the Native Affairs Committee or even the full Council – which was seldom possible. All this goes to suggest that it would be more accurate to speak of competing cliques than opposing moderate and radical blocs. These cliques, however, did to some extent correspond to cleavages between nominated and elected Advisory Board members.

The dispensing of patronage cut two ways. On the one hand, it was used to co-opt New Brighton residents and, more especially, individuals with standing in the community. Many prominent figures accepted nomination to the NBAB year in and year out, and came to rely on the security this implied. McNamee rewarded loyal Advisory Board members with special privileges, including preferential access to accommodation and the grant of licences to trade or become proprietors of eating houses. On the other hand, the system of patronage alienated those individuals who became victims of its abuse or fell foul of the Location Superintendent. McNamee maintained good relationships in an official capacity with certain influential figures, especially those who exercised a moderating influence on the New Brighton community. The price exacted for this was collusion in effecting social control. Not all NBAB members were prepared to pay this price. Thus, co-option by the local authority was not an unqualified success; nor did the patron-client networks established by Board members during the 1930s survive the radicalization of New Brighton politics in the following decade.

THE POLITICIZATION OF THE NEW BRIGHTON ADVISORY BOARD, 1943-1952

In the 1940s, Port Elizabeth's African working class became worse off than it had been since 1930, when across-the-board wage increases had last been granted. Calculations done in 1940 of living costs for a New Brighton family of four amounted to £6 12s 4d per month for food, rent, railfares, poll tax and other sundries; without provision for clothing, recreation and other necessities.⁴⁴ The average monthly wage of unskilled workers in trade and industry set at £5 8s 0d, plus 8s. per month cost of living allowance, was therefore woefully inadequate. Nor did wage regulation hold for the majority of general unskilled and temporary workers, many of whom were employed by the South African Railways & Harbour and the Port Elizabeth Municipality. Despite raised income levels during the war years, wages did not keep pace with inflation; and increased demands had been placed on these incomes in the form of higher rents and transport costs for former Korsten residents relocated to McNamee Village.⁴⁵ Furthermore, unemployment produced high levels of poverty and malnutrition in New Brighton. The PECC had done nothing to alleviate the plight of the city's African population; the NBAB's pleas for relief measures fell on deaf ears.

⁴⁴ University of Cape Town Manuscripts, Ballinger Papers, BC 347, At.N2 and C5.III.6.5, Statements by African General Workers' Union, PE and PE Joint Council to Wage Board investigating conditions of unskilled working trades in PE Magisterial District, 12 Jan. 1940.

⁴⁵ Robinson, 'The power of Apartheid', 244.

The politicization of the NBAB coincided with the radicalization of the New Brighton community. Many of the features of this 'new radicalism' described by Cobley were common to urban African communities throughout the country. The rising cost of food, housing and transport; as well as inadequate services and amenities caused overcrowding, increasing crime and violence. Subtle variations in class position within the community afforded scant protection against the ravages of socio-economic distress. Certain members of the petty bourgeoisie continued to co-operate with the authorities and put their faith in institutions like the Advisory Board, but others had moved by the mid-1940s towards a new readiness to support, though not necessarily to lead, direct action. Yet, the often ambivalent attitude of some Advisory Board members demonstrated that this radicalization remained patchy and partial. In these circumstances, the petty bourgeoisie found themselves challenged by a new generation of populist radical leaders who sought to capture the Advisory Board as a means of establishing a platform in community politics and exerting pressure on local authorities.⁴⁶

In late 1943 the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) nominated four officials, Isaac Mfuku, Phineas Sandla, B. Ncapayi and A. O. Malakane, as their candidates for the forthcoming Advisory Board elections. The CNETU secretary, Councillor Mohammed Desai,⁴⁷ who was a member of the CPSA and the Indian Congress, took upon himself the role of organiser for these candidates.⁴⁸ Their programme included demands for ownership of location houses after an unbroken occupation for a certain period; the erection of further houses on a leasehold basis; better sports and recreation facilities; and 'the abolition of the NBAB and for the village to be a separate ward within the PEM [Port Elizabeth Municipality] and residents to be given the same rights and privileges as those in other townships in the city'.⁴⁹ Demands for direct municipal representation for New Brighton residents were not without precedent, but it assumed a new urgency as the PECC had deprived many Africans of the municipal franchise through the loss of property rights in Korsten.

At a well-attended election meeting on 15 November 1943, the trade union candidates were reportedly accorded a unanimous vote of confidence by those in attendance. Desai, with his usual rhetorical flourish, warned the people not to heed 'the filthy anti-Communist and anti-Christ propaganda',⁵⁰ which he apparently believed to be the work of local capitalists who aimed to discredit the CNETU candidates. The actual opponents were the sitting members of the Board, who contested the election on a single ticket and had unsuccessfully objected to Desai's 'interference' in the election.⁵¹ All but one of the CNETU candidates (who was disqualified) were returned by a large majority. Sandla claimed that the outcome of

This election clearly indicates the growing class consciousness of the Port

⁴⁶ Cobley, *Class and Consciousness*, 205-14.

⁴⁷ Desai won re-election in the 1944 Council elections and served until 1947. For details of his rather chequered career as a union organizer, see Cherry, 'The making of an African working class', 81, 84, 85-9.

⁴⁸ *The Guardian*, 11 Nov. 1943, ('Advisory Board Candidates').

⁴⁹ *The Guardian*, 7 Oct. 1943, ('Advisory Board Elections').

⁵⁰ *The Guardian*, 18 Nov. 1943, ('T.U. Candidates Election Drive').

⁵¹ IAD, 25/104 No. 3, Minutes of the NBAB, 4 Nov. 1943.

Elizabeth workers.... The election was fought on a clear programme and working-class principles. I may add that this election is a moral victory for the working-class organisation, the Communist Party...⁵²

It is unlikely that the CNETU canvassed residents on shopfloor issues, and it was undoubtedly premature to speak of shared worker consciousness; nor is it exactly clear what part the CPSA played in the victory. But there was considerable overlapping of membership and a working alliance between the two organizations. However, it was the first occasion on which the CNETU's capacity to mobilize residents was put to the test. It is difficult to assess their level of popular support in an election where figures of voters are not available. If the number of voters registered in New Brighton for Native Representative elections is anything to go by,⁵³ the poll was large and the trade unionists won convincingly.

Early in 1944, Desai caused a rumpus in a City Council meeting when he claimed that prominent Councillors were responsible for disseminating 'anti-worker propaganda and sabotage' in New Brighton. He predicted that if the Council continued colluding with employers against workers, there was every likelihood that violence and bloodshed, such as had occurred recently at Marabastad, would follow.⁵⁴ The councillors responded with counter-charges that communist 'agitators' were responsible for any disaffection. McNamee categorically denied Desai's charges, but added that Advisory Board members had 'expressed concern at the possible introduction of communism into New Brighton'.⁵⁵ For its part, the NBAB declared Desai's assertion to be totally unfounded.⁵⁶ And an editorial in the *Eastern Province Herald* denounced the 'extravagant but empty promises held out to the Native residents by an active band of agitators working under the aegis of the Communist Party'.⁵⁷ Spokesmen for the CNETU denied that their candidates for the NBAB elections had been controlled or financed by the CPSA or that previous elections had been apolitical.⁵⁸ What probably concerned the Council more than anything else was that the image of New Brighton as a 'model' location and a contented community might be tarnished.

The fears that the authorities harboured about the ramifications of the politicisation of the NBAB soon appeared to have been justified. The NBAB lent its support to the 1944 anti-pass campaign, even though Port Elizabeth's African population was not subject to any form of influx control. But the endorsement was given only after taking precautions to ensure that the Board was not seen to be associated with communism. When communications from the Port Elizabeth District branch of the CPSA called upon the Board to identify with Africans elsewhere and lend its support to the anti-pass

⁵² *The Guardian*, 2 Dec. 1943, ('Sweeping T.U. Success').

⁵³ *Government Gazette*, no. 3080 (24 July 1942), 172, Notice no. 1461, and CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/11, Memo of Supt. NBL to NAC, 20 Nov. 1943. There were 1,449 voters in New Brighton, which formed part of the electoral college for the Cape Eastern Circle in terms of the NRA, and the 1944 NBAB election results indicate that about 1,300 residents cast votes. It seems unlikely that the same lists were used for Native Representative and NBAB elections.

⁵⁴ *The Guardian*, 10 Feb. 1944 ('Storm in Council Chamber').

⁵⁵ IAD, 25/104 No. 3, Report of Supt. NBL, 5 Feb. 1944.

⁵⁶ CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/18, Minutes of the NBAB, 15 Feb. 1944.

⁵⁷ *EPH*, 15 Feb. 1944, Editorial.

⁵⁸ *The Guardian*, 2 Mar. 1944 ('African Unions Attacked at PE').

campaign, it hesitated before doing so. The majority of Board members wished to ignore the request, but Sandla, who had been elected on the CNETU/CPSA ticket, argued that it was the contents rather than the source of the communication that mattered.⁵⁹ Only when the Board had received similar requests for support from various other organizations were they prepared to give their unqualified support to the anti-pass movement.⁶⁰ The nominated members of the Board – consisting of Pendla, Limba, Nikiwe and Molefe – were certainly struggling to come to terms with the changes in the tempo and character of both community and national politics.

The PECC's decision to implement rent increases in New Brighton in 1945 without consulting the NBAB illustrates its dilemma with regard to the question of participation in and identification with community struggles. A demonstration to protest against the rent increases, to be staged on 27 January 1945, was supported by all political and labour organisations. The NBAB could not afford to be seen to be acting against the community's wishes and serving the Council's interests, but it was equally wary of barring further consultation with the PECC on the matter. In the ensuing debate about the best course of action to be taken by Board members, Rev Molefe expressed this ambivalence:

the demonstration was the voice of the people, not of the Board. This movement was not started by the Board, although that particular body sympathised with the people in making this form of protest.... The masses therefore should carry on and this Board should await the City Council's reply.

Jabavu expressed the opinion that the Board should participate in the demonstration as representatives of the people. But Molefe's motion that members of the Board should participate in their private capacities, as a protest against the increase of rents, was carried.⁶¹ What concerns us here is not so much the Board members' attitudes towards the demonstration *per se*, but how they perceived their standing *vis-à-vis* the community. It would appear that Molefe thought that the Board should take a backseat rather than try to hijack this expression of the popular will. It is difficult to know whether Molefe's motives were sincere or whether he wished to avoid confrontation with the authorities. Nominated members would appear to have seen themselves merely as a channel for representing legitimate grievances to the authorities, whilst elected members saw themselves as being at the forefront of popular protest. The perceptions of the latter reflected a view that their identification with the community in subsistence struggles infused the Board with greater legitimacy.

On account of the position adopted by the NBAB with regard to the protracted resistance to rent increases during 1945, relations between the Advisory Board and the City Council deteriorated markedly. Even nominated Board members expressed strong objections to the fact that the Council had ignored it when it had not been prepared to rubber stamp its decisions. The usually circumspect Rev Molefe complained that there was no co-operation, and, if the Board was to serve as an effective link between the people and the Council, it would have to be appraised of Council's intentions

⁵⁹ CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/18, Minutes of the NBAB, 20 Apr. 1944.

⁶⁰ CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/18, Minutes of the NBAB, 27 Apr. 1944.

⁶¹ CAD, 3/PEZ 1/3/2/15/19, Minutes of the NBAB, 25 Jan. 1945.

before the latter passed final and binding resolutions. Jabavu remarked that the Council was showing a dictatorial attitude and making high-handed decisions. When the Board asked to meet with the Native Affairs Committee to discuss the rent issue, the latter declined.⁶² The PECC's intransigence added to the problems of the moderate Board members who were already hard pressed to justify making further representations to the local authority, knowing that the outcome was a foregone conclusion. In any event, the NBAB gave its tacit support to the rent boycott.

CNETU candidates were elected *en bloc* in the elections for the NBAB in 1946 and 1947. In the 1946 election they defeated candidates of the Civic Association.⁶³ But the following year the CPSA nominated its own candidates, and the sitting CNETU Board members refused to share the platform with them.⁶⁴ There appear to have been no other candidates, so the Communists did not exactly split the left-wing vote. Yet some prominent members of CNETU actively supported the Communist candidates, thereby straining relations between the two organizations. But if the working class alliance in New Brighton appeared to be in disarray, a resurgent African National Congress (ANC) was set to become a major contender in future Advisory Board elections.

The New Brighton ANC branch had gone from bad to worse in the early 1940s under the leadership of the 'old guard'. At the beginning of the decade, Molefe had reported to ANC President-General, Dr A. B. Xuma, that Congress was 'absolutely dead except in name'.⁶⁵ When Pendla and other executive members of the Cape African Congress were suspended in 1942, the provincial headquarters were moved to Cradock under Rev James Calata. Nikiwe and Molefe continued to serve on the executive of the local branch of the ANC but were slowly alienated by the uncompromising militancy of the Youth League at the local and national levels, and the ousting of Xuma as President-General. Molefe finally resigned from the ANC because of his unwillingness to endorse the principles of the Programme of Action. Instead, he endeavoured to promote racial reconciliation through the offices of the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Moral Re-Armament movement. They also both served on the executive of the Port Elizabeth Joint Council, with Molefe acting as President during the latter years of the War. It has been suggested that the collapse of the Port Elizabeth Joint Council immediately after the War 'seems to have been tied up in part with the radicalization of local politics in New Brighton' and the waning influence of long-standing Advisory Board members.⁶⁶ Both Nikiwe and Molefe continued to serve as nominated members of the NBAB, except that the former declined nomination for three consecutive years from 1947. By the end of the decade they had been completely marginalised.

Instead of the appearance of new petty bourgeois leaders, the ANC 'old

⁶² IAD, 25/104 No. 3, Minutes of the NBAB, 29 May and 23 July 1945; Minutes of the NAC, 3 and 31 July 1945.

⁶³ *The Guardian*, 6 Dec. 1945 ('Progressives Score Victory').

⁶⁴ *The Guardian*, 14 Nov. 1946 ('Advisory Board Elections at PE').

⁶⁵ A. B. Xuma Papers, ABX. 410617a, Molefe to Xuma, 14 Aug. 1940 and 17 June 1941.

⁶⁶ R. Haines, 'The politics of philanthropy and race relations: the South Africa Joint Councils c. 1920-1955' (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1991), 325-6.

guard' was supplanted by trade unionists with working class backgrounds.⁶⁷ An exception was A. P. Mati, a former trading partner of Pendla who turned his talents to union organization. He retained a position on the ANC executive committee and, along with Raymond Mhlaba, won election to the Advisory Board in the early 1950s on an ANC/CPSA ticket.⁶⁸ Mhlaba himself had progressed from being an organiser of the Laundry Workers Union to become secretary of the local branch of the CPSA and ANC chairman in 1947.⁶⁹ The activist, Gladstone Tshume, who was also a member of the CPSA, the CNETU and the ANC, unsuccessfully contested the 1948 NBAB elections.⁷⁰ Lodge observes that 'by 1950 politics was in the hands of working-class leaders to a degree which clearly distinguished Port Elizabeth from any other centre'.⁷¹ Under its new leadership, local ANC branches were not only rejuvenated but became more attuned to national political currents.

In 1947, the ANC Working Committee had forwarded a resolution proposed by the Africanists which recommended to the annual conference that all elections under the Native Representative Act, including Advisory Boards, be contested on a boycott ticket.⁷² However, the moderates, led by Xuma with the support of the Communists, repudiated this strategy in favour of one with a greater degree of flexibility.⁷³ The whole question was reviewed at the 1949 national conference when the Programme of Action was on the agenda. A memorandum argued that the boycotting of 'dummy' institutions should remain a strategy and not be elevated to a principle. It argued that:

It is essential to realise that mere membership or participation in the political, social, cultural and other institutions established by the oppressor does not necessarily imply collaboration with the oppressor. Collaboration must depend on the nature and function of the institution and also the activities of members within the institution. It is possible under certain conditions to use the institutions of the oppressor as an auxiliary force for the downfall of the ruling class.⁷⁴

Nonetheless, the newly-elected President-General of the ANC, Dr J. S. Moroka, pledged the organization to a policy of non-collaboration with the government and the boycott of Advisory Boards, the Native Representative Council and indirect parliamentary representation.⁷⁵ But local ANC branches were still not completely bound by this decision or chose to ignore it.⁷⁶

In the case of New Brighton, Mhlaba and a number of ANC colleagues

⁶⁷ Lodge, *Black Politics*, 51, and 'Political mobilisation during the 1950s: an East London case study', in Marks and Trapido (eds.), *The Politics of Race*, 312-13.

⁶⁸ For information about Mati, see K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, *Organise or Starve! The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions* (London, 1980), and Cherry, 'The making of an African working class', 78, 215.

⁶⁹ Interview with Raymond Mhlaba, Kwaford, 11-12 Jan. 1990; *Weekly Mail*, 13-19 Oct. 1989; *EPH*, 23 Oct. 1989; *Monitor* (December 1989), 20-32; Gerhart and Karis (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge*, iv, 88; Cherry, 'The making of an African working class', 109.

⁷⁰ Lodge, *Black Politics*, 51. For biographical information on Tshume, see Gerhart and Karis, *From Protest to Challenge*, iv, 159, and Cherry, 'The making of an African working class', 84, 102, 124, 191, 215.

⁷¹ Lodge, *Black Politics*, 55.

⁷² *The Guardian*, 27 Nov. 1947 ('ANC Decision on Boycott').

⁷³ Lodge, *Black Politics*, 29, 78; Posel, *Making of Apartheid*, 37.

⁷⁴ Cited in Bloch, 'Using the institutions of the oppressor', 49.

⁷⁵ L. Kuper, *Passive Resistance in South Africa* (New Haven, 1957), 98.

⁷⁶ Kuper, *An African Bourgeoisie*, 328-9; Lodge, *Black Politics*, 78.

had contested the 1949 elections and won seats on the Board. It would appear from Govan Mbeki's account that this was in line with a strategy of supporting the election of the branch chairman to the NBAB with a mandate to raise general grievances at its meetings and provide regular reports at open-air meetings as to the progress made.⁷⁷ Within a few months, Mhlaba gave expression to popular disillusion when he stated that 'the people are beginning to realize that the Advisory Board is useless because the Council is not prepared to act on the recommendations of the Board'.⁷⁸ But, despite this frustration and the 1949 ANC Conference resolution, Mhlaba stood for and won re-election to the Board the following two years. It was not until 1951 that he resigned from the NBAB. Mhlaba's letter of resignation noted that 'as long as Africans had no real legislative powers, their struggle would be an ex[tra]-parliamentary one'.⁷⁹ Participation in the affairs of the Board had shown at first hand that there was nothing to be gained. Mhlaba acknowledged having been influenced by the debate which the Programme of Action had precipitated about participation in 'dummy institutions'. He claimed to have been given no directive by the national executive of the ANC to resign, and his decision followed that of the local branch to boycott government institutions.⁸⁰ This position may have reflected the increasing influence of the Youth League, of which Mhlaba was a member, on the decisions of the New Brighton ANC branch.⁸¹ However, none of his colleagues in the ANC followed his lead in resigning from the NBAB.

On 26 June 1952, Mhlaba led a group of volunteers through the 'Europeans Only' entrance of New Brighton, an action which marked the launch of the Defiance Campaign in Port Elizabeth. At the same venue on 18 October, an alleged thief was shot whilst resisting arrest and this incident triggered off the tragic New Brighton riots in which four whites and seven blacks were killed. The PECC responded to the bloodshed by imposing a curfew and a ban on all except recreational and religious meetings in New Brighton. A lead article in *Advance* reckoned that the situation did not warrant such measures and represented 'a craven capitulation of Port Elizabeth liberalism to the Nationalists'.⁸² Whilst condemning the indiscriminate attacks upon whites in New Brighton, the ANC called for an indefinite general strike to demonstrate its opposition to the restrictions. Following behind-the-scenes approaches by the Mayor to ANC local leaders, a decision was made to limit the strike to one day, in return for the restriction of the operation of the curfew to three months and the ban on meetings to one month. In spite of negotiating this compromise, the PECC still dismissed all of its workers who heeded the stay-away call and refused to re-engage them without prejudice.⁸³

⁷⁷ G. Mbeki, *The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa: A Short History* (Cape Town, 1992), 53-4. ⁷⁸ IAD, 25/104 No. 3, Minutes of the NBAB, 28 July 1949.

⁷⁹ IAD, 25/104 No. 4, Mhlaba to Sec, NBAB, 24 May 1951.

⁸⁰ Interview with Mhlaba, Kwafoord, 11-12 Jan. 1990.

⁸¹ T. Orie, 'The relationship between the Trade Unions, the Communist Party and the ANC in the 1940s and 1950s in Port Elizabeth' (unpublished paper, July 1992).

⁸² *Advance*, 6 Nov. 1952 ('P.E. Africans Call General Strike') and 13 Nov. 1952 ('Port Elizabeth City under Siege' and 'Port Elizabeth Strike Successful'); Lodge, *Black Politics*, 54.

⁸³ M. Benson, *The Struggle for a Birthright* (Harmondsworth, 1966), 151, 155; Lodge, *Black Politics*, 61.

During this crisis, neither the PECC nor the Ministers of Justice and Native Affairs, who made fleeting visits to Port Elizabeth, deigned to meet the Advisory Board. Consequently, all eight elected members, as well as one nominated member, tendered their resignations from the Board. They expressed their indignation and dissatisfaction with the failure of both the PECC and government to consult them, and added that

It is ... our considered opinion that it would be dangerously treacherous to continue to serve on a segregatory institution in which the African people throughout the Union have ceased to repose any confidence...[and]...that served as the last vestige of collaboration with Authorities that be.⁸⁴

Nikiwe and Molefe were two of the nominated NBAB members who did not resign. With a number of other moderate community leaders, they made their own representations to the PECC. They argued that the dismissed workers had faced two alternatives: either the loss of work or the loss of life and limb; and precisely because they had been intimidated, they should be reinstated. They stated that such an act would reduce the tension between the ANC on the one hand and the City Council and commerce and industry on the other. Despite the plea that such an act 'would restore the spirit of goodwill that has existed for the last thirty years',⁸⁵ their faith in the PECC proved to be misplaced. Instead of a gesture of goodwill, the PECC decided to enact the provisions of the Urban Areas Act which enabled it to institute pass laws and labour registration. A combination of the changing composition and attitudes in the PECC, as well as pressures from central government, convinced it to comply with all the strictures of urban apartheid.

New Brighton residents consequently decided to boycott the forthcoming NBAB elections and resolved that 'in the future [the African National] Congress is going to be the only mouthpiece of the people'. A field officer employed by the South African Institute of Race Relations considered it 'quite conceivable that this decision [would] be carried out in view of the solidarity of the people'.⁸⁶ In the event, his prognostication proved incorrect, for the NBAB was reconstituted and it proved difficult for the ANC to sustain the momentum of the Defiance Campaign or its membership levels after the riots. Although the NBAB weathered the crisis and continued to function, it did so without the slightest vestige of popular legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

During the 1930s and the early 1940s cliques coalesced around certain individuals able to establish patron-client networks in New Brighton. The period was relatively quiescent, with the local authority able to co-opt the most influential community figures through the Advisory Board. However, the subsequent politicization of the Advisory Board turned it into a potential ally of civic, political and labour organizations. The challenge posed to the local authority by the Board was obviously limited in that it had no real

⁸⁴ IAD, 25/104 No. 4, Minutes of the NBAB, 28 Oct. 1952; *EPH*, 30 Oct., and *Advance*, 6 Nov. 1952.

⁸⁵ IAD, 25/169 No. 7, Minutes of Council-in-Committee, 13 Nov. 1952.

⁸⁶ University of the Witwatersrand, Rheinallt Jones Papers, AD 843/RJ Aa 12.20.2, RR. 182/52, Report of Field Officer, W. B. Ngakane, 're. PE riots and events that followed', 24 Nov. 1952, para. 11.

power to act. Yet, as Posel has pointed out, the protests of Advisory Boards underlined the breadth and intensity of African dissent. The very bodies created by the state for the purposes of co-opting support from moderate Africans were joining the throngs of the disaffected.⁸⁷

Paradoxically, Advisory Boards were being used to subvert local authorities at precisely the time when their legitimacy was increasingly being called into question.

In Port Elizabeth local protest actions, such as the 1945 and 1951 rent boycotts and the 1949 bus boycott, established precedents for mobilization during the Defiance Campaign. The success of the last-mentioned was unequalled elsewhere in the country. Lodge holds that political mobilization in this period was exceptional, both in the quality of its achievement and in the conditions which facilitated it. Part of the reason for this success was that Port Elizabeth represented an easier environment for African political organization than other centres and so New Brighton became an ANC stronghold. He ascribes this to the ethnic and linguistic homogeneity of the workforce; the relatively relaxed administrative framework, which included an absence of influx control; the very rapid industrial growth with labour shortages persisting into the late 1940s [sic]; and the groundwork done by trade unions in the 1940s, with certain trade unionists holding political office and, in particular, dominant in the local ANC leadership.⁸⁸ But account must also be taken of the political training acquired by these activists on platforms provided by civic organizations and Advisory Boards. In other words, the NBAB contributed in some measure to the formation of a dynamic political tradition. This is perhaps the ultimate contradiction of community politics in the Port Elizabeth township.

SUMMARY

Studies of the politics of urban African communities in South Africa have focused on the sporadic manifestations of mass protest, identifying formal labour and political organizations as the prime agents of mobilization. Whilst some recognition has been accorded to the role played by vigilance and civic associations in contributing to the growth of community politics, Advisory Boards and other government-created institutions have been portrayed as 'collaborationist' bodies, and those serving on such Boards dismissed as 'stooges'. Looking beyond the political rhetoric that has surrounded the Advisory Boards, the historical reality has been more complex. Although Advisory Boards lacked legitimacy, and were often powerless in policy terms, even progressive political organisations were prepared to use these 'institutions of the oppressor' to further their aims in the 1940s and 1950s. This case study of the politics of the New Brighton Advisory Board demonstrates the way in which such institutions provided a platform (albeit a limited one) from which African communities might be mobilized around the everyday issues of urban life. In this way, the Advisory Board contributed to the formation of a strong political tradition in the Port Elizabeth township. This tradition was appropriated by different political groups and used to mobilize the African community around a variety of social, economic and political issues affecting the township.

⁸⁷ Posel, *Making of Apartheid*, 38.

⁸⁸ Lodge, *Black Politics*, 45, 47, and 'Political mobilisation [in] East London', in Marks and Trapido (eds.), *The Politics of Race*, 318.

