The Apartheid City and the Politics of Bus Transportation.
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Résumé
J. J. McCarthy & M. Swilling — L'apartheid urbain et la politique des transports en commun.
Cet article examine l'histoire des systèmes de transport semi-publics sud-africains et le réseau de contradictions qui sont à l'origine de la Commission d'enquête Welgemoed sur les services d'autobus réservés aux Noirs. Les mesures prises par l'État à la suite de cette commission sont analysées dans le contexte de la politisation croissante du problème des transports et de la multiplication des boycotts. L'exemple du boycott récent des autobus d'East London illustre l'interdépendance complexe entre accumulation capitaliste, politique d'État et réaction populaire.

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The significance of local-level politics of collective consumption and urban social movements for national political struggles has been well documented in the social science literature of the advanced capitalist societies (Castells 1977, 1983; Dunleavy 1979). In a South African context, analyses of, and active support for, these local movements and the national alliances of which they are affiliates, such as the United Democratic Front (UDF), has become one of the priorities of progressive academic geographers (Wellings & McCarthy 1983). The present paper documents one aspect of the relationship between community politics, working-class mobilization and State power in South Africa: namely, the politics of bus transportation.

The problem is of special relevance today as the bus boycott emerges once again, as it did in the 1940s and 1950s, as one of the principal axes of popular resistance to the apartheid State. Furthermore, in a situation where the progressive forces are engaged, on the one hand, in increased confrontation with the State yet, on the other, in heightened internecine wrangling over whether ‘the worker’ or ‘the community’ should be the principal political construct in the liberation struggle (Forster 1982; Gelb 1984), it becomes especially timely to consider problems that both politically and geographically straddle what Harvey (1978: 35) terms ‘the superficial estrangement between working and living’. Transportation politics in South Africa, we hope to suggest, constitutes just such a problem.

Our discussion of recent trends in bus transportation politics begins with an historical review of the country’s parastatal bus service for black commuters, and of the events which have led up to the most recent milestone in State policy with regard to bus transportation—the Welgemeid Commission of Inquiry’s reports (South Africa 1983a, 1983b).

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After having analyzed the economic and political implications of the Welgemoed initiatives, we turn to a consideration of the popular response. In particular, we focus on a case study of the extraordinarily prolonged and effective bus boycotts of 1983 and 1984 in the East London area. We conclude with some reflections on political organization and consciousness, and the separation between working and living, with special reference to South Africa.

Parastatal Bus Services for Black Commuters: An Historical Overview

Transportation and urban geographers in South Africa recently began to draw attention to the gigantic transport problems posed by social and economic transformations and the central government’s policies of territorial-racial separation encapsulated in the term apartheid (Lemon 1982; Olivier & Booysen 1983). In the Pretoria area, for example, as a consequence of population removals in terms of the Group Areas and Bantustan policy, and as a result of the accelerating process of proletarianization of the Blacks, bus commuters from nearby Bantustans and townships to central Pretoria increased more than threefold in just eight years from 1969 to 1977 (Olivier & Booysen 1983: 127). The movement of these workers from their peripheralized sites of reproduction to centralized points of production is accomplished, through an alliance of State and capital, in the form of a mushrooming parastatal transport industry.

The origins of the contemporary bus transport industry lie in the 1930s when the State intervened to generally reorganize and regulate a somewhat diffuse and loose-knit system of private transport carriers. These initiatives had important economic and political implications. The Motor Carrier Transportation Act of 1930 (Act 39 of 1930), for example, had the effect of squeezing many African bus companies and taxis out of business the Transvaal (Stadler 1981). This measure not only revealed to the oppressed the racial bias of State policy, but it also provided the framework for the monopolization of the transport industry: by 1940 it was dominated by a cartel, and by 1945 several companies merged to form the Public Utility Company (PUTCO). With a monopoly in effect, the bus companies inevitably began to increase fares. The Alexandra bus boycotts thus triggered off in the 1940s (ibid.), coupled with the greater distances between home and work caused by the Group Areas Act, forced the State to agree to subsidize black transport costs (Bantu Service Levy Act of 1952 [Act 64 of 1952]). However, it was only after the Evaton and Alexandra bus boycotts in Johannesburg in the 1950s that transport policy as it exists today was entrenched with the passing of the Bantu Transport Services Act of 1957 (Act 53 of 1957). This Act provided for the transfer of responsibility for black transport subsidies
from the (then) Native Affairs Department to the Department of Transport (Voges 1983). The subsidy has since been drawn from State monies and a fund made up of compulsory contributions from employers.

Although the most serious problems for the black commuter transport industry are due to an especially pronounced separation of workplace and community, this has generally been accepted by the State’s transport policy as a given fact. In effect, the primary system of economic and political domination brought into effect by ‘grand apartheid’ (or the Group Areas Act and the Bantustan system) was regarded as the framework within which all other policies should develop. Thus, for example, during the 1950s and 1960s, State transportation planners had to cope with the relocation of people living in inner-city locations such as Duncan Village (in East London), Cato Manor (in Durban) and Sophiatown (in Johannesburg) to peripheralized townships, such as Mdantsane (in the Ciskei near East London), Soweto (near Johannesburg) and Kwa-Mashu (in KwaZulu near Durban), created in terms of Group Areas and Bantustan planning (Davies 1976; Western 1981; McCarthy & Smit 1984). These relocations forced the black workers to travel an additional ten to twenty kilometres to the centres of commercial and industrial activity.

The most recent attempted solution to the problem of reproducing the social relations of exploitation on an ideological and political level without seriously jeopardizing the low cost of labour power has become the ‘frontier commuter’ programme. This new method of ‘reversing’ black urbanization through the construction of ‘homeland towns’ became official policy in the late 1960s (General Circular No. 27 of 1967). As a senior State official (quoted in Creecy 1983: 49) put it: ‘the white man must not govern the black man. That’s when the trouble starts. If you could bring the homelands within commuter reach of the growth points, you are solving the so-called problem of urban Blacks. You could accommodate them in a homeland where they can own property and govern themselves’.

The central government’s Riekert Commission (1977) encouraged this process on condition that commuters would not have to travel more than seventy kilometres a day. By 1979 there were nearly 700,000 frontier commuters—an increase of 147% since 1970 (Lemon 1982). It is significant that 51.7% of these commuters take a bus, whereas only 17.8% use the train and a further 18.5% various other modes. Furthermore, 46.5% of all frontier commuters work in the Pretoria, East London and greater Durban areas (ibid.). The fact that the last two areas have been the bus boycott centres in recent years supports the argument that frontier commuters are particularly dissatisfied with the transport system.

There is evidence to suggest, however, that in the period of Verwoedian apartheid the State was oblivious to the effects that the relocation of three and a half million people between 1960 and 1980 would have on
the transport system. There was even a serious suggestion in 1970 that South Africa's entire black proletariat be located in the homelands and then linked up to the employment areas by a sophisticated high-speed transport system (Burger 1970). It was this kind of utopian thinking, in the Verwoedian mould, that eventually presented a crisis to the State's transport planners when they realized just how much it was costing to transport labour over increasingly greater distances (see Fig. 1). This was especially evident in the lower tiers of government, which were required to implement the policy but which were not involved in the priorities of national-level political legitimization (e.g. Bantustan policy). For example, officials in the Transvaal Provincial Administration complained in 1982 about the fact that although R2.40 billion a year was needed to solve South Africa's transport problems, only R50 million from the Urban Transport Fund was spent on projects in the five

![Pattern of annual expenditures on bus company subsidies in South Africa for so-called Coloureds and Blacks as identified by the Welgemoed Commission (Source: South Africa 1983a: 37).](image-url)
major metropolitan areas. Likewise, after the central State only gave Durban municipality R6.5 million out of a promised total of R19.5 million for the improvement of public transport, Mr. Don Macleod, the City Engineer, predicted in July 1983 that Durban’s entire transport structure would collapse by the end of 1984. The growing commuter population—it increased by about 70% between 1960 and 1980—exacerbated this situation throughout the country. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Welgemeed Commission’s primary task was to investigate this fiscal crisis in order to find ways of reducing the cost of subsidization, which by 1983 was rapidly reaching the R150 million mark.

Since 1957, the South African government’s Department of Transport has subsidized transportation of ‘bona fide employees’. The size of the subsidy, which goes directly to the transporter and not to the consumer, is calculated on the basis of the operating costs of the firm concerned and on the commuter’s ability to pay the ‘economic fare’. The calculation of that fare recognizes the right of companies to make a ‘normal profit’: the subsidy is equivalent to the difference between the actual fare paid by bona fide workers for a weekly clip-card and the economic fare as identified by the transporters. In 1982 the commuter paid an average of about 50% of the economic tariff, employers paid 13% and the State 37% (a substantial amount of the latter’s contribution coming from profits from the State-run liquor industry and the Durban-Rand pipeline service) (Voges 1983). It is interesting to note, moreover, that capital-in-general’s share has declined over time, from 32% in 1974-75 to 16% in 1976, 14% in 1980-81 and 13% in 1981-82 (Randall 1983: 305).

Capital’s minor role in financing subsidized transport was challenged by the central State in 1983, however, when the Black Transport Services Amendment Act was passed. The Amendment was designed to correct the imbalance between the employers’ and the Department of Transport’s contributions by giving the Minister the power to increase the levy on employers after twelve-month notice (ibid.: 306). In October the chairperson of the National Transportation Commission announced that the employers’ monthly contributions would increase from R1 to R3 per employee in certain specified areas. The Associated Chambers of Commerce objected to this, arguing that it would force certain employers to retrench workers and would also lead to mechanization. The modesty of the State’s intervention is clear, however, insofar as it will only increase the employers’ share by at most 3%, whereas it will probably induce a downward pressure on wages.

It seems likely that, as capital is encouraged to invest more into the reproduction of a relatively cheap transport system in order to help solve the fiscal crisis of the Transport Department, it will argue that employers

should not be required to contribute to a transport system that must in
the long run be extensively subsidized by the State. This will, however,
contradict both capital and the State’s current ideological orientation
that favours the limitation, and not the extension, of State intervention
in the sphere of reproduction. Alternatively capital may try to compen-
sate by keeping wages down, which will, in turn, increase commuters’
pressures on the State (primarily through boycotts) to maintain its costly
subsidization schemes. In short, transport policy in South Africa
manifests the characteristic contradictions of the politics of collective
consumption under capitalism (Castells 1977).

It is clear that the alliance of interests that has controlled the transport
system up to now has recently been put under severe strain. The under-
lying structural cause was the escalating cost of transporting an increasing
number of commuters over longer distances. Whereas the State was
faced with the need to reduce their share of the cost without restructuring
the spatial separation of workplace and community, any shift of the
burden onto capital would either result in greater mechanization or a
downward pressure on wages. As far as the transport monopolies are
concerned, it makes little difference how the subsidy is raised as long as
it reaches them in the end. Either way their interests, which can always
be backed up by the political threat to increase fares, do not coincide with
those of capital in general, nor are they in favour of an unconditional
phasing out of the subsidy system. It is against this background that
the recommendations of the central Welgemoed Commis-
sion must be understood. It chose to respond to three basic conditions
inherent in the emergent socio-spatial formation: the problem of regional
co-ordination; the difficulties involved in regulating the costs of repro-
ducing the work force via the transport system; and the historical impli-
cations for political legitimacy.

Regional Co-ordination

Historically, the problem of black labour movement had been managed,
at least in the matter of bus transportation, by local authorities (subject
to the regulation of a national advisory body). Both the Driessen report
(1974) and the Welgemoed Commission (1983) argued, however, that this
scale of operation was now too small, given the spatial expansion of
urban production and exchange in a rapidly urbanizing society. Travel
to urban centres in order to work and shop from far-flung Group Areas
or Bantustans, in particular, present a problem of efficiency and co-
ordination for transportation planners. In the course of a journey from
home to work, a given worker might have to travel through several
national, regional and local government areas, each with its own public
transport systems and general transportation policies. Hence, much
of the Driessen Commission's report and the bulk of the Welgemoed Commission's First Interim report (South Africa 1982) were devoted to problems of regional co-ordination of intra-metropolitan bus services. The reorganization of bus routes or the problem of tariff adjustments, for example, could not be effectively handled without consulting bus companies operating from several local authorities in South Africa, and those operating from closer settlements or established formal townships in the Bantustans (e.g. Mdantsane in the Ciskei).

Responsibility for the administrative resolution of this regional co-ordination problem was, in the view of the Welgemoed Commission, appropriately delegated to the central government's Department of Transport and the National Transport Commission. These bodies should form—and assume a directorship role within—new Regional Transport Co-ordinating Boards and Metropolitan Transport Advisory Boards which would take over the newly required regulatory functions. Effectively, therefore, current trends in State policy with regard to the regional co-ordination of bus services reflect a tendency towards greater administrative centralization. This occurred under the influence of a growing contradiction between the fixed geographical units of reproduction established in the 1950s and 1960s (Group Areas and Bantustans) on the one hand, and the rapidly expanding geographical extent of urban production and exchange in the 1970s and 1980s (metropolitanization) on the other. The new bus transportation boards, it should be noted, will conform to the regional demarcations of the State's current industrial decentralization policy. They will also be compatible with, or even integral to, the second tier of government envisaged in the State's new constitutional framework (the Regional Services Councils) (Todes & Watson 1984). As such they are part of an attempt at streamlining the current disarticulation between regionally defined productive and reproductive spheres.

Costs of Reproduction

The entire Second Interim report of the Welgemoed Commission concerned itself with the problem of tariffs and subsidies. Given that the Commission recognized the basic causes of rising costs in the relocation of large numbers to outlying areas and the increasing volume of passengers as a result of urbanization and longer trip lengths; and given the ideological content of the 'free market' currently expounded by many State representatives with regard to reproduction, it is perhaps surprising that the Welgemoed Commission did not emphasize further privatization of bus services. In fact, it rejected the school of thought that believes that subsidies will become redundant if all restrictions on passenger transport are lifted and the free market is allowed to determine fares (South Africa
It even steadfastly defended the principle of subsidization. In particular it argued that ‘the Government began to pay subsidies to the workers so as to enable them to be economically active while at the same time retaining their family ties [in the Bantustans] and so as to make sources of labour available to the employers of the Republic of South Africa’ (ibid.: § 4.34). The argument, in short, is that State intervention is necessary to secure capital’s expanding labour needs under conditions of urban production and reproduction in which the rate of remuneration for labour power does not adequately meet its costs of reproduction.

The Welgemoed Commission’s interest in bus fares and subsidies, however, did not derive simply from pressure brought to bear by industrialists for efficient labour transport services, or by the irate cries of parliamentarians for a reduction in expenditure on a budgetary item for which there is no political constituency. Much of the concern with tariffs and subsidies derived from media and police warnings of the political significance of bus boycotts, and from sustained pressure by bus companies for increases in fares and subsidies. The latter interests were strongly represented in memoranda submitted to the Welgemoed Commission (ibid., Annexure B: 81-83), while the former group’s warnings were at least noted with apprehension by the Commission (ibid.: § 3.43-3.49). The Second Interim report (ibid.: § 3.44-3.45), for example, adopted the view that bus boycotts resulted in ‘the politicization of public transport’ and that this was the unfortunate result of the work of ‘agitators’:

‘It is an unfortunate fact that in South Africa public transport, particularly public bus transport, is highly politicised. Because large numbers of people are brought together... in circumstances in which the group largely has a shared destiny, it is only to be expected that shrewd observers would see opportunities for making political capital from the situation’.

The commissioners, however, were not so naive as to assume that bus boycotts were caused exclusively by the work of activists bent on popular fomentation. They also indicated (ibid.: § 3.46-3.47) some understanding of the structural context of bus transportation as an object of popular struggle:

‘For understandable reasons the entire question of tariff increases is one of the most sensitive aspects of the problem of politicization. If this potential for destabilisation is seen against the background of interaction between wage levels, the profitability of operation, quality of the service, user convenience, the human dignity of the user in particular and many other factors, each of which may contain the germ of possible dissatisfaction, it is laudable that users of many services make use of the services with so much understanding and responsibility... In the South African set-up, furthermore, there is the question of Group Areas within the country that is exploited to a large extent to whip up feelings and it appears that cross-border transport is also exploited and will become a greater source of conflict in the future than it is at present’.
The Commission, as might be expected, however, could offer no real solutions to these structural problems and implicitly favoured the use of repression to contain the activities of ‘agitators’. The heavy representation of bus company interests in the Commission, moreover, led to the view that the problem of tariff adjustments was one which could simply be resolved by changing the formula for calculating adjustments, from that of profit rates in relation to historical capital costs, to that of profit rates in relation to total revalued capital. This will effectively enlarge the profit margins of the bus companies. In addition, the Commission found on the question of subsidies that ‘each passenger should pay the whole of his economic fare himself’ (ibid.: 50) and it reported that it was ‘against the use of subsidies primarily for the redistribution of wealth and is of the opinion that subsidies should not be used for purposes other than economic ones where these are involved’ (ibid.: 50-51). Although it conceded that ‘there is sufficient justification for the payment of subsidies to worker commuters who cannot pay their own transport costs’ (ibid.: 51), it nevertheless was ‘of the opinion that it is necessary to phase out subsidies in the long term’ (ibid.). Thus, in short, the outlook provided by the Welgemoed Commission was bleak indeed.

Political Implications

The policy direction implied by the Welgemoed Commission with regard to bus tariffs and subsidies is likely to intensify the ‘politicization of public transport’, as it terms it. This is largely because of the increased costs of living that will result for workers, who have no access to any form of popular political expression except the bus boycott. The process of politicization is likely to be greatly augmented, moreover, by the fact that the Final Report of the Commission makes a devastating attack upon the interests of black taxi operators. The rationale is that if subsidies are to be phased out, the transport monopolies will be compensated by the gradual legislative elimination of the ‘unhealthy competition’ from the taxis (South Africa 1983b: 24-25). Although the transport monopolies support this suggestion because they are perturbed about the large numbers of commuters who use taxis, the taxi associations have vociferously rejected the idea.

Although the fact that the working class will be confronted with rising fares will ensure that transport continues to be a site of working-class struggle, it does not automatically follow that the black petty-bourgeois transport sector will be able to form an alliance with the working class as was the case in the 1940s and 1950s (Lodge 1983: 153-188).

Many workers in the trade unions, for example, argue that since taxi drivers raised their fares during the bus boycotts, there is no reason why they should help the taxi operators now that they are in trouble.

The difficulties involved in any alliance between petty-bourgeois led, community-based struggles on the one hand, and working-class led, production-based struggles on the other, are now well documented, for example in the previously aborted attempts at creating an alliance between the major trade unions and the UDF (Lewis 1983). These difficulties are being resolved through the development of a political culture in which the workplace/living place dichotomy characteristic of most capitalist societies (Harvey 1978) but augmented by State policy in South Africa, is not assumed as a given in the political struggle. For instance, with the formation of the pro-UDF Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in November 1985, community-trade union differences were clearly set aside. It is possible that by taking up issues such as transport within their programmes, worker organizations such as COSATU could develop an objective site of struggle that links up the condition of oppression in black townships with the nature of exploitation in the workplace. And the way in which such links are made, of course, will depend upon how the question of transport is posed by working-class and progressive political organizations.

It is in this context that we can attempt to understand the working-class experiences that led to bus boycotts in recent South African history. Indeed, ever since workers have had to travel in large numbers to sell their labour power, they have frequently identified the transport system as part of the cause of their exploited condition (Ellsworth 1983). In contrast to wage disputes, the creation of a racially exclusive State that excluded the black petty-bourgeoisie from the transport industry has often resulted in the interests of working-class commuters and aspirant transport capitalists uniting against the transport monopolies and the State (Stadler 1981; Lodge 1981). An analysis of the East London bus boycott that began in July 1983 and ended in March 1985 will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the political texture of bus transport as a contemporary site of struggle.

The East London Case

The duration and level of political consciousness that the East London bus boycott gave rise to, coupled with the failure of the unprecedented use of State terror to break it, makes it one of the most important South African political struggles of 1983 and 1984 (Swilling 1984).

East London is a minor port city that is based on a small, crisis-ridden local economy dominated by the food and textile sectors. The fact that it is heavily reliant on the State's decentralization strategies, its location in an area where unemployment was as high as 40% in 1984, the political consequences of drastic population relocation measures, all underpinned by the notoriously coercive and illegitimate rule of the Ciskei State, makes it one of the most politically volatile regions in the country (Lodge 1983).

It is these objective conditions that have structured the nature of the East London working-class. There are 51,613 workers employed in the industrial, commercial, domestic and services sectors (Jenkinson 1982); 65% live in the exurb of Mdantsane in the Ciskei, and 32% in Duncan Village in East London proper; it is significant that a large number (47%) are industrial workers. The East London working-class is unique in many ways: firstly, it earns the lowest wages in urban South Africa, which is directly related to the level of unemployment; secondly, there is a higher proportion of Africans in the work force (78%) than in any other area of the country; thirdly, there is a higher proportion of Africans in skilled and semi-skilled jobs (Hirsch & Kooy 1982). The overwhelmingly homogeneous racial nature of the working-class which is all drawn from the Xhosa language group, its particularly exploited position and its place in relatively skilled jobs, are the objective conditions that help understand the dramatic series of struggles in which this working class has participated during the last few years. These struggles, in turn, gave rise to the muscular democratic trade unionism associated with the South African Allied Workers Union (saawu), which is particularly strong in the East London area.

Whereas Duncan Village is conveniently located within a few kilometres of the major industrial concentration, Mdantsane, where most of the working-class lives, is approximately twenty-five kilometres away from the major work zones (Fig. 2). The reasons for the relocation of workers to Mdantsane are similar to those applicable to townships in many other South African cities. During the 1930s and 1940s hostility developed amongst East white residents towards the physical proximity of poverty-stricken black 'slums'. This pressure resulted in the appointment of the Thornton and Welsh Commissions to consider conditions in Duncan Village and to establish a new peripheral 'location'. When the Nationalist government came to power and implemented its twin race-space policies of Group Areas and Homeland Development, the present Mdantsane site suggested itself as appropriate: by 1963 the first houses were built and relocation began. Not only did Mdantsane satisfy local authority demands for an 'invisible' black work force. It was consistent with the central State's ambitions to contain urban black political aspirations to rural townships dominated by precapitalist élites—in this case the Ciskei (Southall 1982).
An attitude survey conducted by the authors in Mdantsane in July 1981 found that amongst a random sample of 200 persons, 70% of all working-class respondents identified transport as their ‘most serious problem’. It was followed by crime (59%), housing (32%), educational facilities (19%) and services (17%). This contrasts drastically with the concerns of the petty-bourgeois respondents, 65% of whom identified crime and the general threat to property, and only 36% transport, as their most serious problem. In Mdantsane, in short, transport is a *working-class issue* of primary importance, rated well above crime, unemployment, education, housing and other traditional objects of working-class struggle.

In 1982, 69% of Mdantsane commuters used the bus, whereas 22.7% went by train, 1.4% by taxis, 6.4% by car or pirate taxi, and 2.5% by various other modes (Jenkinson 1982). The travail of travelling to work usually begins before dawn: commuters walk for about ten minutes on crime-ridden streets to reach the nearest bus stop; they catch a bus to the central terminus in Mdantsane, where they join long queues to find room on a second bus to East London. Every commuter spends two to three hours a day travelling to and from work. Transport, therefore, is not merely a necessary inconvenience, but a daily struggle experienced by nearly 25,000 commuters who are processed *en masse* through a central terminus twice a day and get compressed into 276 dirty, unkempt buses.

Fig. 2. Mdantsane and East London in regional setting.
In the final analysis, Matravers (1980: 36) is correct when he concludes about the Mdantsane public transport system that it 'becomes a service to employers and not to travellers'.

The bus company, the Ciskei Transport Corporation (CTC), is jointly owned by the Ciskei State and the Economic Development Corporation (of South Africa). It was formed in 1975 when the previous owners, Tollgate Holdings, were forced to sell out after a two-month-long bus boycott over fare increases. The Chief Executive of Ciskei, Lennox Sebe, initiated a takeover bid of the crippled company believing that if the Ciskei State owned it, the people would support it. Not only was this assumption refuted when vigilantes had to be used to break the boycott, but today the widely accepted rumour that Sebe is a director of CTC is expressed as proof that his terroristic actions to break the 1983 boycott were designed to protect his own material interests.

The CTC bus service is notoriously inefficient. Buses frequently arrive late, making commuters wait for up to two hours. In order to avoid being late at work, they are often forced to walk or spend money on a taxi fare in addition to that already spent for their weekly ticket. The buses are dirty and broken windows are left unrepaired. Rainy days are intolerable due to the lack of bus shelters. A further grievance, expressed from a typically working-class point of view, is that the bus timetable was drawn up without consulting the workers. This means that bus times do not always coincide with shift times. In 1980, therefore, the SAAWU took up grievances associated with the bus service. Four demands were drawn up at a mass meeting, and the union leadership was mandated to take them to the CTC. They were: (1) the provision of bus shelters; (2) scrapping of the weekly ticket and the provision of a ticket only invalidated when it is used; (3) students and pensioners should pay half price; (4) cushions must be put on the cold wooden benches. These demands were ignored.

Dissatisfaction with the bus service reached a head when the CTC increased the fares on 13 July 1983. The only people who were consulted were leading members of the ruling Ciskei National Independence Party (CNIP), community councillors (the equivalent of city councillors) and various other unrepresentative bodies. The problem with this, one worker said, 'was that all the people who had been consulted do not use the buses'. Within a week a boycott was called after the CTC refused to meet the elected representatives of the commuters who formed the so-called 'Committee of Ten'. During the first few days the commuters began to walk the 25 km to work. In the process of this truly impressive display of physical denial, they sang freedom songs, taunted the police and many were drawn into the emotionally explosive atmosphere of solidarity. However, as the police reacted by setting up road blocks and harassing people in order to put a stop to what was in effect a mass demonstration, the commuters began to use the trains.
The railway line runs along the outskirts of Mdantsane and forms the Ciskei’s border with South Africa. The trains which are run by the South African Transport Services were crucial to the success of the boycott. They provided the only legal public space where commuters could meet and discuss the daily progress of their action.

The Ciskei State used the police and army and it hired vigilantes to try and break the boycott by forcing people to board the buses. Massive State-sponsored terror tactics and loss of life ensued (Swilling 1984). The turning point came during the cold early hours of August 4th 1983. Police and soldiers formed an armed human blockade at the Mount Ruth and Edgeton stations to prevent commuters from catching the train. The police fired into the crowd and 15 were left dead and 35 wounded (ibid.).

The August 4th massacre had an electrifying effect on the political consciousness of the people. Within hours the boycott was transformed from a rejection of fare increases into a political struggle against the Ciskei State. Many former CNIP supporters tore up their membership cards and vowed never to use the buses again. One worker commented: ‘After the shooting, what people learnt was that the bus company has directors in the Cabinet. When the shooting took place, the bus company and the Ciskei Government had joined’. On the trains, this summation of political and economic demands was reflected in the emergence of new slogans: ‘Away with Sebe, Amandla [“Freedom”]!’ became the main one. In December, after his release from detention, a ‘Committee of Ten’ member summed up the mood of the people: ‘The people say the buses are full of blood and when they pass the buses they smell the blood [. . .] the people have realised that they need transport but the Ciskei Government must have no strings attached to it’ (ibid.).

Although the Ciskei State responded to this new mood by declaring on the day of the massacre a state of emergency, followed by the banning of the SAAWU a month later, the boycott continued unabated. The concern of the central State with the situation was revealed by top-level visits from South African cabinet ministers and security officials. At first it was not the boycott that began to crumble, but the Ciskei State itself as seventeen of its top officials were detained, including the head of the security police, Charles Sebe, and a number of cabinet ministers. Towards the end of September, a number of petty-bourgeois elements, whose shops surrounding the central bus terminus were seriously affected by the absence of the commuters, set up a ‘Committee of Twenty’. Their main objective was to find a way to end the boycott after the release from prison of the ‘Committee of Ten’ on November 4th.

The determination and unity of the commuters, who resolved at a mass meeting in early December 1983 that the boycott should continue, made it clear that the CTC would be unable to operate according to its previous habit. The transport manager of the East London municipality
admitted to the authors in 1984: 'I don't see the boycott ending, the people don't want to use the buses'. As it turned out, however, local capital in the East London area—represented by the Border Chamber of Industries—took the initiative in setting up a board of arbitration similar to the Industrial Council System which reviews labour disputes in South Africa. A Transportation Committee was established which included representatives from the Border Chamber of Industries, the 'Committee of Ten' and the CTC. It provided a forum for negotiating between the various parties, from which compromise solutions to transport problems could be reached. Ultimately, this led to a formal end to the East London bus boycott in March 1985.

It now seems probable that such decentralized negotiating forums will become part and parcel of the politics and economics of transport generally within South Africa. The President's Council report on An Urbanization Strategy for the Republic of South Africa (South Africa 1985), for example, recommended the devolution of financial responsibility for public transport to the regional level. Specifically, it noted (ibid.: 91) that:

'The new Regional Services Council Act, 1985 (Act 109 of 1985), makes provision for the regional component of urban transport to be transferred to the new Regional Services Councils (RSC's) that are to be established [. . .] Local authorities and representatives of communities of all population groups are members of the RSC's.

The two new sources of income provided for in the Regional Services Council Act, namely a regional services levy and a regional establishment levy, can also be used for the provision of urban transport infrastructure, and specifically also, in terms of section 12(6) (d), for "the payment or part payment of the costs of the establishment, improvement and maintenance of an infrastructure for, and the running of transport services for commuters between their places of residence within or outside the region or outside the Republic and their places of employment in the region".

It therefore appears that it may be possible to partly solve the financing problems experienced with the implementation of the Urban Transport Act by implementing the Regional Services Council Act. The Regional Services Council Act makes further provision for the relevant amendment of the Urban Transport Act so that it fits in with the management of the RSC's'.

The use of new sources of taxation derived locally from capital so as to fund commuter transport, and the creation of multiracial structures at the regional level to bargain over the costs and benefits of urban services without reference to Bantustan boundaries are clearly a new development in State strategy. Observers close to the State have made it apparent that the new strategy is not a major departure from the Welgedoomed proposals, insofar as the objective is still to shift the responsibility for transport financing away from the central State (Cameron & Naudé 1986). What is new, however, is that the State appears to have settled upon the notion that decentralized forums for bargaining between capital, workers and transport companies should become the focus of
transportation politics, rather than of struggles over the legitimacy of apartheid political structures (McCarthy 1986). Clearly, working-class organizations such as COsATU (of which SAAWU is now an affiliate) will have to take these new State strategies into account as they struggle to build a new progressive politics that straddles the divide between living and working in South Africa.

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A dominant feature of transportation politics in particular, and class politics in general in South Africa, is the entirely transparent way in which State-capital alliances work to the material disadvantage of the working-classes, and in which forces of State coercion are relied upon to ensure the maintenance of the status quo. In this respect, State structures in South Africa have more in common with those in authoritarian, semi-peripheral capitalist societies such as Argentina or Brazil than with those in the advanced capitalist societies. Certainly the politics of working-class transportation have much in common with the former societies (Moisés & Stolcke 1980). In addition, the racial character of South African capitalism has given rise to a high degree of specificity of State structures here (Greenberg 1981). Neither analyses of State policy nor the formulation of working-class strategies for change, therefore, can afford to borrow too simplistically from the experiences of left-wing practitioners and theorists in the world-core societies (Mingione 1981; Castells 1983).

South Africa’s apartheid structures remain a subtle and insistent feature of capitalist domination, in which racial and other divisions amongst labour, and the separation between working and living, are exploited at every turn for ruling-class advantage. These observations, together with the recognition of an awesome State monopoly over the forces of coercion, mean that there are a few progressives in South Africa who would argue that either bourgeois democracy or democratic socialism will be easily achieved here in the short run. Nevertheless, the accelerating process of proletarianization poses major problems for the ruling class in the future, just as it creates opportunities for labour. The organic intellectuals of the ruling class often issue the hope, through their slanted, ‘Gallup-poll’-type, analyses of popular consciousness, that neither proletarianization nor worker organizations constitute a significant political threat to the power bloc (Schlemmer 1984). As the history of the South African Allied Workers Union’s role in the East London bus boycotts shows, however, and as recent mass strikes in the Witwatersrand and elsewhere demonstrated, political consciousness and organization is

a continually changing and developing phenomenon, and the hopes of the conservative are not always borne out in the process. Political geographers in South Africa have a very fertile research field in the sphere of transportation politics, and many others beyond, to contribute towards the documentation and articulation of progressive hopes for South Africa. But these hopes, as we clarified above, will constantly have to be reassessed against the background of the changing tactics and strategies of the South African State.

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