

Notes and Queries

Local government transition in the KwaZulu-Natal urban areas

As the first fully democratic local government election campaign hots up, albeit somewhat delayed in KwaZulu-Natal, we provide a linked double note on the restructuring of third-tier government in the province's two main urban areas. Margaret Winter, a former mayor of Durban, describes the complexities of the vast metropolitan system of local government in the Greater Durban area; and Barbara Morton, formerly the secretary to the Greater Pietermaritzburg Local Government Forum, describes the process of negotiation that led to the formation of the Transitional Local Council of Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi.

Change is something everyone is aware of at this stage of our country's transformation. Significant change has taken place at national and provincial levels, but those institutions have been there a long time, and the greatest change has been in terms of representation and style. Local government, on the other hand, will see far greater change. Not only is representation changed, but also the size and area of responsibility, many local authorities having more than doubled in size.

Durban

For the first time in South Africa we have a metropolitan government system. The 'Durban Metro' is the only one in KwaZulu-Natal, and becomes by far the largest local authority in our province, stretching from Tongaat in the north to Umgababa in the South and Cato Ridge in the west. In it there are 49 local authorities, whose political elements (i.e. elected councils or boards) have been disestablished, while the administrative elements (i.e. staff) remain in their present administrative homes. Until the elections there are five transitional councils in the Durban Metro area: Metro (150 councillors), Northern (48 councillors), Southern (42 councillors), Western (80 councillors) and Central (130 councillors). The total of 450 councillors may seem large, but in fact it is slightly less than the total number of councillors who served in the previous bodies in the Metro area. The final number of local authorities, or sub-structures, is in dispute at this stage, as is the outer boundary of the Metro area because of the contentious issue of the inclusion of tribal authorities in urban areas. The two models in dispute propose nine and five sub-structures respectively. The provincial Committee on Local Government is dead-locked on the issue and it has now been referred to the Electoral Court for a decision.

Both the Metro and the sub-structures are third-tier levels of government and the difference is simply in the powers and functions allocated to each by the Local Government Transition Act. At present the Durban city administration provides a service to the Metro and the Central councils. As functions are taken over by the Metro, staff and assets will follow functions. However, the rationalisation of the resources of 49 administrative entities is complex and will impact on about 24 000 staff, about four million citizens and on the future of the region. The Change Management Committee is charged with this responsibility, and the task is likely to take time to finalise.

There is some tension between Metro and sub-structures, mainly because those involved in the previous local authorities fear their responsibilities being reduced. The problem results from not seeing the Metro and sub-structures as being interdependent. The best way I can describe Metro and sub-structure interdependence is as an umbrella, the Metro being the material and the sub-structures being the ribs. If there is no material, the ribs do not achieve their purpose, and if the ribs are broken, the material collapses. Each part is dependent on the other for success, and there simply must be co-operation and not competition if this form of local government is to be effective and overcome the social and economic imbalances that exist in the region. In the past the fragmentation of responsibility hindered integrated planning and development, with the result that large numbers of people had no services at all. The Metro system can address these imbalances, and the economies of scale can be of great benefit.

After the elections all councils are likely to be smaller, including the Metro. Sixty percent of the Metro Council will be from the sub-structure councils and forty percent from proportional representation (PR). Similarly, sixty percent of sub-structure councils will be elected ward representatives and forty percent will be elected by PR voting. Each voter will have three votes to cast: for the Metro (PR); for a ward councillor and for the sub-structure (PR).

Having nominated councillors during the pre-election phase is not satisfactory as they lack the direct responsibility of elected representatives; but it was a necessary first step, given the enormous transformation required at local government level. It was also a compromise in negotiations to include members of previous councils. The first local government elections continue that spirit of compromise, as previous local authority areas in a new local authority will have a weighting that allocates fifty per cent of the wards to them. This was an extremely generous compromise to allay the fears of some 'white' towns of being swamped by the larger 'black' vote now included in the local authority.

It is in this spirit that we should go forward. Of course there are difficulties, but there is no alternative, so we need to get on with it and make local government work for all the people. As a person from the previous 'white' Durban City Council, I consider it an honour to be serving on the Durban Metro Council that is representative of all the people in the region. There is a commitment and a sense of urgency that is stimulating, but is not to the detriment of pragmatism and planning. There is not a shortage of funds, but the processes set up to spend that money must be correct. Involving the communities in projects may mean

that it takes a little longer to deliver, but to sustain any development makes that involvement critical. That is what the Reconstruction and Development Programme is all about – in our case, building communities so that they become part of one urban fabric and enjoy what urban life has to offer.

Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi

For many years local government, not only in Pietermaritzburg, was perceived by most of the population to be undemocratic and racially based. The Pietermaritzburg City Council comprised fifteen white councillors, fifteen Indian members of the Indian Local Affairs Committee and five Coloured members of the Coloured Local Affairs Committees. While the white city councillors had full voting rights, the others could participate in debate, but were not permitted to vote. There was no representation for African people on the Council.

In February 1995, the Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi Transitional Local Council was established. This nominated body reflects the realities of Pietermaritzburg more than any council in this century, and the forthcoming local government elections will change the picture even more.

According to Dr C.E.P. Seethal, who recently completed a doctoral dissertation local government in South Africa, the following five primary national and local initiatives which provided the impetus which was to result in this change.

1. In 1986–1987 the PMB 2000 group explored the establishment of an alternative ‘non statutory’ council for the area.
2. In May 1986 the City Council adopted a resolution that accepted the ideal of a non-racial City Council and this ideal was pursued until the Natal Provincial Administration stopped any progress in this direction.
3. The third attempt at producing non-racial local government ‘the open city referendum’, was precipitated by a property taxation protest march on the City Hall by the Pietermaritzburg Combined Ratepayers and Residents Association in October 1989.
4. In July 1990 the central government introduced five models of local government which were intended to replace existing structures. This culminated in the Interim Measures Act in 1991, and proposals were put forward in September 1991 for the combining of the Pietermaritzburg City Council with the Local Affairs Committees.

Influenced by events at national level, including CODESA in 1991 and growing local unrest, the City Council launched the Greater Pietermaritzburg Local Government Forum. The aim of this forum was to introduce, in terms of the Local Government Transition Act in 1994, a more democratic local government structure for the Greater Pietermaritzburg area. The Forum comprised the following categories of organisations who were interested in participating in the transformation process: political parties, academic institutions, business and professional organisations, local authorities, religious institutions, trade unions, parastatal organisations, township civic organisations, ratepayers associations and interest groups. A steering committee, chaired jointly by Councillor Rob

Haswell (African National Congress) and Mr Mike Tarr (Inkatha Freedom Party) was established to guide and manage the forum. All the primary role players were represented on the steering committee. Working groups were established to investigate and report on specific areas. These included the constitutional/legal, finance, development and planning, institutional and health working groups.

The forum laboured for nearly two years to produce an acceptable model of local government for the area. At first, a metropolitan model was proposed which sought to establish a two-tier system of local government throughout an area spanning from Table Mountain in the east to Vulindlela in the west and from Howick in the north to Ashburton in the south. According to Professor Douglas Irvine of the University of Natal's Department of Political Studies, it was envisaged that the metropolitan option would 'be less disruptive of existing systems, as it could be implemented fairly readily, with co-ordination and economies of scale as obvious advantages and there would be no loss of subsidies for the townships. In a full two-tier system, existing local authorities could maintain a degree of autonomy . . . and could conceivably accommodate urban, rural and agricultural sectors'. The alternative was the 'single-city' or one-tier option which envisaged the creation of a single policy-making and administrative structure for the urbanised area of Pietermaritzburg, including Edendale.

The steering committee, following recommendations from the forum's constitutional/legal working group recommended the metropolitan option. However, these proposals were defeated after three attempts in secret ballots held towards the end of 1994. The single-city proposals were finally accepted and the Transitional Local Council was established on 25 February 1995. Sixty-four councillors were nominated on a '50/50' statutory/non statutory basis resulting in the first non-racial municipal council in the history of the City.

The Transitional Local Council will continue to function until the local government elections which are planned for early 1996 and perhaps after these elections democracy at local government level will have been truly achieved in Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi.

'Royal loyal Natal'

In March 1995 a British monarch as Head of the Commonwealth once more set foot on Natal soil, and for many Natalians it was the most satisfying symbolic manifestation of South Africa's readmission to the Commonwealth. Many older citizens remembered the Royal Visit of King George VI 1947, during which the Princess Elizabeth (now the Queen) came of age, and Natal's darling, Prime Minister Jan Smuts, accompanied the Royal Family to a Drakensberg resort henceforth to be known as the Royal Natal National Park. So much has happened in South Africa since 1947 as to make it seem another country entirely from that which the 21-year-old princess visited nearly fifty years ago.

The logistics of a royal visit have themselves changed with the revolution in transport and communication. In 1947 the Royal Family sailed to and from South Africa in the battleship *HMS Vanguard* and during the the two-month-long visit travelled to all parts of the country in the White Train. In 1995 the

Queen and Prince Philip travelled by air, and the royal yacht *Britannia*, which had arrived in South African waters in advance of the visit, shuttled between Cape Town and Durban to provide the visitors with a familiar home base when their plane landed!

The changes in South Africa during that half-century are obvious, and during that time the British-descended citizenry of Natal cannot in general claim to have been shining champions of the political and social ideals of contemporary Britain. Their carry-over of colonialist attitudes often struck a chord embarrassingly close to the ideological tune of the Afrikaner nationalists. However, such musings seemed out of place in the happy and glorious few days of royalist fervour.

Lincoln Link

The cities of Pietermaritzburg and Lincoln entered into a 'twinning' relationship as long ago as 1947. At that time they were about the same size, and had a similar mix of agricultural, industrial, ecclesiastical and educational elements. For some years the contact was maintained from both sides, but as apartheid established itself and as Lincoln became a Labour Party stronghold it was inevitable that from the British end there was less and less enthusiasm for the connection. In the meantime Lincoln had forged similar links with Neustadt in Germany, Tanshang in China and Port Lincoln in Australia. Overtures from Pietermaritzburg were rebuffed or ignored. But regaining our place in the world community has changed that. In May 1995 a citizen of Pietermaritzburg visiting Lincoln was cordially received by the Mayor and Town Clerk, and on behalf of the Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi Transitional Local Council handed over a letter, a photograph of the TLC's recent inaugural meeting, and a 1949 sound recording featuring the link-up. It seems certain that the connection with Pietermaritzburg will once more be publicly acknowledged in Lincoln, without embarrassment.

Provincial name and capital

KwaZulu-Natal (like the Free State) was largely unaffected by the boundary changes and administrative fission which attended the birth of the nine new provinces in 1994. It is thus ironical that our province should, almost two years later, still not know what its official name will be, and which town or city will be the provincial capital. A commission has recommended a highly unsatisfactory interim dual-capital arrangement until a referendum can decide between Pietermaritzburg and Ulundi. Whether we are a 'kingdom' as well as a 'province' will probably involve more voting or else a ruling of the Constitutional Court. Intense and uncompromising political rivalry, which has caused so much violence and suffering in the province, permeates everything. Even the outward signs and symbols of provincehood, which should focus the pride and loyalty of all citizens, remain sources of division and friction.

Development and preservation

It is pleasing to record that in its construction of an additional large building in Burger Street, Umgeni Water has saved a second old Pietermaritzburg cottage from destruction by carefully restoring it and incorporating it in the overall

plan for the site. And as we go to press, developers of the large property in Loop Street between the Imperial Hotel and Killarney Terrace are restoring the house occupied in 1852 by the schoolmaster John Marquard and later by his successor George Thompson, and by John Bird. Part of the house had been demolished by a previous owner of the site, and the remaining portion has been a derelict eyesore for some years. Bird was the colonial surveyor, and compiler of *Annals of Natal*, which Hattersley describes as ‘the start of historical research into the public records of the Colony.’ (It was from a window in the south-west-facing gable that Bird would signal the exact time to Fort Napier, for the firing of the ‘nine o’clock gun’.)

Colenso homestead rescue

The year after Bishop Colenso’s death in 1883, a runaway grass fire destroyed his house at Bishopstowe, which is a few kilometres from Pietermaritzburg. The family built another house on the same foundations and continued to live there for some years. Later the whole mission property *Ekukhanyeni* (the place of light) was sold, and passed into the ownership of various farmers. The house survived, with various additions and alterations, and was used as a dwelling by successive owners. In recent years it became very dilapidated, and this year a new owner, not knowing anything about the significance of the place, proposed to demolish it in order to increase his acreage under sugar-cane.

Fortunately this was stopped in the nick of time, and it was pointed out to him that, although not a proclaimed national monument, it is at least a ‘listed site’.

It is now leased for a year to the Anglican Diocese of Natal, which has effected the most urgent repairs and put in a family to act as caretakers. An independent committee of interested persons, on which historical, ecclesiastical and architectural interests are well represented, is considering a restoration project. This would include the large garden with its magnificent view eastward, so often referred to by Bishop Colenso, whose study faced that way.

If restored, half the house would be a caretaker’s flat. The other half would be suitably furnished for use by any group wanting a venue for a meeting, conference, seminar or training course, in the peace and quiet of the countryside, yet only ten minutes’ drive from the city.

Natal has many battle sites, visited each year by thousands of South Africans and foreign tourists. The Colenso homestead, by contrast, is associated with peace, enlightenment and the Bishop’s unremitting quest for justice, especially for the Hlubi chief Langalibalele and the Zulu king Cetshwayo. Given John William Colenso’s stature and fame, his Natal home of 28 years has at least as much claim to be preserved as places associated with war.

The committee is seeking funds to undertake the restoration, and has already received some welcome donations. The Cathedral Parish Office is undertaking the treasurer’s function, and donations may be sent to The Dean, Cathedral of the Holy Nativity, P.O. Box 1639, Pietermaritzburg 3200.

Significant Conservation Centenary

In several articles and notes over the years *Natalia* has focused attention on the conservation of the natural environment, reflecting, we believe, a widespread interest and concern in this province. It is important to note that on 30 April 1895 Hluhluwe, Umfolozi and parts of St Lucia were established as ‘protected areas for game’, and therefore celebrated their centenary during the past year.

They are without doubt the oldest game reserves in Africa, and among the oldest in the whole world. The centenary was observed at Hilltop Camp, and important persons attending included South African President Nelson Mandela and the Director of the World-wide Fund for Nature, Dr Claude Martin. At the time the Natal Parks Board's news release contained the following statement: 'The Natal Parks Board is proud to be the custodian of these internationally recognised protected areas, and will continue to administer them as part of the priceless natural heritage of the South African people, and indeed, as part of the natural heritage of the people of the world.'

Misunderstood mammal

Dr Peter Taylor of the Durban Natural Science Museum has provided the following note on a Bat Interest Group established in 1994.

To many, bats are blind, evil, bloodsucking and disease-ridden varmints. In reality they are gentle, clean and ecologically vital mammals. In response to declining numbers and prejudiced public perceptions of bats world-wide, many amateur bat conservation groups have sprung up in Europe, America and Australia. In Britain, for example, some 90 bat clubs with 2 000 members were operating in 1992, compared to 24 in 1984. The involvement of so many trained bat workers has had a profound impact on bat research and conservation in Britain. According to a recent article by Mitchell-Jones *et al.* in *Mammal Review* (Vol.2, 1993) 'The growth of interest in bats and bat conservation has been one of the most remarkable phenomena of species conservation in the 1980s'. High-profile, colourfully-illustrated articles on bats in *Time* and *National Geographic* during August 1995 attest to the current level of public interest in and awareness of bats.

The first bat interest group in Africa was founded in Durban in February 1994 under the auspices of the Durban Natural Science Museum's Friends Association. Some 70 interested persons attended the first meeting, and the membership has since grown to 130. The rapid growth of the Durban Bat Interest Group (BIG), and the media exposure and favourable public response which it has received, is proof that sufficient public interest exists for a growing number of such groups in South Africa. Indeed, bat interest groups have already been established in Gauteng and Pietermaritzburg. If and when legal protection of bats is introduced in this country, these bat clubs will serve the useful purpose of policing the law, as is the case in Britain.

The aims of the Durban BIG are to promote bats, bat conservation and bat research, principally in the KwaZulu-Natal region, through (a) the training of volunteers (b) regular talks, meetings and outings for members, and (c) public interaction. Public interaction involves advising and assisting the public with bat-related queries and problems, as well as educating the public about bats through talks, exhibitions and the media. . . . BIG also plays a vital role in the care and rehabilitation of sick or injured bats brought in by members of the public. Some of these have proved invaluable in gaining public sympathy for bats in educational demonstrations, particularly involving children.

Conservation of bats is BIG's primary focus. It has gathered valuable information on the distribution and habits of the rare large-eared free-tailed bat, a species found in South Africa only in the roofs of houses in the Durban area.

Anyone interested in obtaining more information about the Durban BIG, or bats in general, can contact Kim Mari at 031-3006229, Peter Taylor at 031-3006218, or Kate Richardson at 031-2618099.

Unusual observations in the year 1914

Prompted by press reports of unexplained lights in the sky in the Natal Midlands, Mrs Lotte Engblom provided us with an account of events in Umvoti County in 1914, at the beginning of World War I. Her father, Revd H. Pohle, wrote them down in 1956. My translation of the original German is given here.

J.M. Deane

It was in the winter of 1914 that one heard in various places here in Natal – Greytown, Hermannsburg, etc. – that again and again in the evening or late at night, aeroplanes were sighted. They supposedly came from the coast, where there was a ship which brought them and took them away again. One also heard that people in Tongaat had observed them. I was not much interested in this, as I had come to Africa in December 1912, my bride would soon be following, and a war seemed imminent.

On Wednesday 2nd September 1914 I caught the evening train from Schroeders station, via Dalton to Mispah, a siding before Greytown. I had ridden to Mispah the day before, left my horse on a farm with a parishioner, travelled by rail to Schroeders station, and from there by wagon¹ to Wartburg where I was to preach at the Mission Festival on 2nd September. There I met my colleague Pastor Bodenstein from Moorleigh. He was in the same situation as I, also waiting for his bride, and we talked half the night about whether their journey would actually be possible. Thus I was very tired on the return journey, but dared not go to sleep on the train and be carried past the Mispah siding. The weather was cold, a starry night, with no wind. I was alone in the compartment, and the windows were misted up. At times, sometimes on the right, sometimes on the left of the train, I saw signs of a fire, thought it was a grass fire, and did not open the window. When towards 8:30 pm I alighted at Mispah, the ticket-examiner, who knew me, came up, very agitated, and said Mr P., look here, that is a German aeroplane! And in fact there was a large aircraft to be seen, that was alternately following the train and flying over it, as the ticket-examiner said. From where we stood [we saw it] fly towards the Blinkwater mountain, some 50–60 degrees above the ground. (Not zigzagging.) I had seen aeroplanes in Germany in 1912² – this was larger, but they could have been making bigger ones in the intervening two years. There was another farmer on the train, Mr N., a member of my congregation, who also came up, and we looked at the German aeroplane', and the ticket-examiner thought they were probably German spies, who came often now. The plane was illuminated throughout. One could not make out individual lamps, but it was, as it were, emitting a faint light.² Finally the train pulled off, the two of us stood there for a while, until the aeroplane was lost to sight in the valley of the Blinkwater mountain. Our horses had been sent to the station, we rode to Mr T.'s farm, but after supper we decided to ride to Hermannsburg, keeping a good lookout in case the thing was to be seen again. But it did not return.

Now we both agreed that the following evening I would come to Mr N.'s farm and we would then ride together to Hermannsburg station, from where one had a good view over Greytown and as far as the Blinkwater. Before we reached the hill at Hermannsburg station, we saw on the horizon, in the direction of Greytown, a star' that quickly disappeared in the direction of the Blinkwater. We waited at the station for more than an hour, but it did not show itself [again].

Some time later – whether it was 8 or 14 days I am no longer sure – I was on the farm of Mr K.³ at the Blinkwater, because there was a small German congregation there which I ministered to. The church services were held in rotation in the farmhouses, and I always stayed over from Saturday until early Monday morning. Mr K., who was also a provincial councillor, was at the time alone at home with his grown-up son, as his wife was away. We talked for a long time on the Sunday evening, about these observations of mine, and about the possibility of a war. He had already heard about the aeroplanes', but didn't really believe it; and, regarding a war,⁴ he was very sure of victory. (I contradicted him, for in 1912, soon after my engagement, my fiancée had seen the war in a dream, with many details.) We went to bed at 10:30pm. Mr K. as usual went into the yard to see that the blacks were in their huts, and heard a motor car [engine] roaring. He thought his neighbour, an Englishman, right down in the valley, was having a late visitor. He looked over the yard gate, and at that moment it became bright around him, and he was lit up from above by an aeroplane. He called to his son, who called me. I had just taken off my trousers, but I slipped them on again very quickly, and ran out. The plane was already over our heads and away. One could see it clearly, flying at an angle along the valley. Now there was no longer any beam of light directed to the ground, but the plane was, as before, illuminated, right to its wingtips. Those darned Germans,' we said, come here to our country and possibly get us into trouble if they land.' But the way these spies fly with a light – you would expect them to keep in the dark,' I said. Up there, no one can get them – they're sure of themselves,' was Mr K.'s opinion.

These are my personal observations in the year 1914.

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In addition to the observations on page 1, I may also say that on each occasion it was a clear, starry night. The aeroplanes did not fly faster than one would see them today at such distances. They did not hover in the air, nor did they make any sharp turns. No smoke was visible. On the first occasion, in the excitement, I did not pay attention to the humming noise; on the second occasion Mr K. certainly noticed the roar of the engine. The size was such as one would expect of an ordinary aeroplane at that distance. The whole phenomenon at the time had nothing supernatural about it.

Naturally there was much discussion at that time about these observations, especially as other people had also seen something. Thus, a farmer near Greytown, whose farm was situated on a mountain-slope, recounted the following. He was still single, and his brother was a municipal employee in Greytown. (Both belonged to my congregation.) He often visited his brother, and late at night took the long road back to his farm. The route went first through a large black-wattle plantation, then over broad grassland, to the small house. When he was going along there late one night, and almost through the plantation, he saw that an aeroplane had landed on the grassy area near his house. With some excitement, he lay down flat in the plantation, and saw two men from the aircraft going to a nearby stream with a bucket or large tin. He slipped away back to Greytown, as under no circumstances did he wish to make any contact with the German fliers, who could possibly get him into trouble. Only on the following day did he go home, and the aeroplane was gone.

Some time later – exactly how long, I am now not sure – I was once on a farm in Hermannsburg where the farmer mentioned in my first observation, Mr N., lived with his mother and sister. It was a clear, starry, windless night again, perhaps about 8 or 8:30pm, when the farmer's brother, who had a farm at Kranskop, arrived from there on horseback, having ridden directly over the mountain, where the church was. He said he had just seen a round, shining object flying swiftly from Kranskop towards Greytown. It flew not very high above the mountain, and very fast. We surmised that it was a lightning fireball, but the thing was apparently larger than that. Now, at night one can be deceived, we thought, and at the time did not attach any further importance to the matter.

Recently I asked a retired stationmaster who was in Dalton at the time, as a young railway official, if he still remembered anything [of this sort]. He said that at that time, i.e. 1914, two trainloads of soldiers were sent to Stanger (presumably from Durban) to search the sugar-cane fields for German fliers who had landed, but found nothing.

Hopefully I have not detained you too long with this lengthy account. If I have not set out anything clearly enough, you are welcome to ask. I still remember these incidents very clearly.

Bishopstowe
P.O. Pietermaritzburg, Natal
6 September 1956

(Signed) H. Pohle

NOTES

1. The German word 'Wagen' is used for a wagon and also a motor car, but in this case Mrs Engblom says it was a horse-drawn vehicle.
2. A light-source in the fuselage, and the thin fabric then used in aeroplane construction, might explain this.
3. Mr August Kohrs MPC
4. Britain and the Empire had in fact been at war with Germany since 4 August 1914.