

Sowetan 15/7/81

AAQ 16

POWER IN THE COUNCILS?

'Let's first ask the Minister'

THE community council system has never worked, does not work and will never work out.

That is the opinion of the man who pioneered the chairmanship of the community council system, Mr George Thabe.

"For as long as community councillors imagine they have full control, for as long as they don't go out to grab the powers envisaged in the Councils Act of 1977, they are useless," said the ex-chairman of the Vaal Council.

Speaking from his Sharpeville home this week, Mr Thabe said the future that followed his dramatic resignation from the Vaal Council last month was mostly "frivolous."

"I wouldn't like to be dragged into petty arguments with my former colleagues. Mud-slinging on such small matters is out for me. But it is childish to suggest I resigned because I lost the chairmanship elections. It is just nonsensical," Mr Thabe said.

When he agreed to stand for elections in 1977, he said, it was after a thorough study of the Act pertaining to the system.

"By then it was clear that the councils, if given the full autonomy promised, could be used as a stepping stone — they were not the ultimate — to full control of their areas," he said.

The move towards autonomy has been stagnated by the continued presence of administration boards.

"I remember during my first election campaign address," Mr Thabe said, "one old man from the crowd, a Mr Paul Nhlapo, rose to ask me if I thought two bulls could exist in one kraal and still keep the peace."

"In answer to that, I quoted from the Act and said it was envisaged that the council system would phase out the boards. Well, it has not. Community councillors imagine they have all the powers they need, and are not doing enough towards attaining all that was promised them. After three years in the Vaal Council, I saw there was very little or no progress; I then kept my promise to the people and resigned."

In his resignation letter, he said he was leaving for "personal reasons."

"It is my firm belief that if any organisation, whatever it is, should run its matters efficiently, it should have total control of its finances. However, in the council system, the budget is actually controlled by the boards, and councillors only act in an advisory capacity. They merely suggest what could be done."

"As for the Vaal Council, even when the Orange-Vaal Board decided to expand its area of jurisdiction to areas in the northern Free State, nobody was told. I find it strange that the Vaal Council should claim it is being 'consulted' all

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Mr George Thabe... "councillors are so ignorant they can't see they don't have the powers."

the time when money set aside for the Vaal Board is developing the northern Free State without the council being told," Mr Thabe said.

He branded community councillors who claimed they were in full control as "ignorant."

"They are so ignorant they don't even know they do not have power. They are stagnant, sometimes even moving backwards. Until they render the administration boards redundant — something they do not seem able to do — then they are just not in control," Mr Thabe said.

During his term in the council, he said, there was always the hurdle: "The Minister won't like that... he won't accept that... he may never agree to that... let's first ask the Minister..."

"What kind of power is that? You can't call that power. Least of all autonomy," Mr Thabe said.

"It is the Administration Board which has to make recommendations to the Minister about the community council proposals. That is after the council has consulted the board and ultimately the result is that the proposals that go to the Minister are the brainchild of the Board, rubber-stamped by the council. I don't call that power."

Mr Thabe singled out the chairman of the East Rand Liaison Committee and the Kallang Community Council Mr Mpyake Khumalo who said he agreed with him (Mr Thabe) about the scrapping of the councils, but said the ex-Vaal chairman had been dishonest.

"If Mr Khumalo sincerely agrees with me that the councils should be abolished, if he genuinely sees wrong in the system, I would expect such a man to have the courage of his convictions."

"I would expect him to pledge to the people that he would fight for the fighting of the wrongs in the system, not just to agree the system is inadequate and do nothing about it. In this case who is being dishonest?" Mr Thabe asked.

"This system has the potential to be a stepping stone, but the way it is being handled won't take the black man much further from the old Urban Bantu Councils," he concluded.

Mr Thabe declined to comment on the issue of the renaming of the George Thabe Stadium in Sharpeville which was named after him. The chairman of the Vaal Council, Mr Knox Matjila last week expressed misgivings about Mr Thabe's name being linked to the stadium.

"The honour to name the stadium after me was bestowed upon me by the people of Sharpeville. They did that in a democratic way, and it is they who may perhaps want to comment should the name be changed. In any case, I will not comment on a threat... or a promise. Perhaps we should wait until they take that action."

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