

**THEY
MARCHED
TO
VICTORY!**



**THE
STORY
OF THE**

ALEXANDRA BUS BOYCOTT

COMMUNIST PARTY PAMPHLET 6J

*They Marched to
Victory*



ISSUED BY THE COMMUNIST
PARTY OF SOUTH AFRICA
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THEY MARCHED TO VICTORY

The Story of the Alexandra Bus Dispute

NINE and a half miles outside Johannesburg, just off the road to Pretoria, lies Alexandra Township. Between 40,000 and 60,000 African and Coloured people live in Alexandra. The exact number is not known, because a census has never been taken.

Alexandra Township is not a very attractive place in which to live. It is not like a town, with shops and industries, cinemas and hospitals, parks and swimming baths. There are very few shops in Alexandra—only small places; there are no parks and swimming baths; there are no halls or communal centres, and only one cinema; there are no hospitals in Alexandra, and only one clinic; there are no street lights and people are often afraid to leave their homes at night; there are no industries in Alexandra.

Alexandra is outside the Johannesburg Municipal area, but most of the people who live there work in Johannesburg. They travel to and from work in single-decker buses, and they often have to queue up at night for an hour or more to get a bus. The buses are owned and run by private companies, and fares are a heavy drain on the people's wages. There is no railway or other means of transport to Alexandra from Johannesburg.

WHY DO PEOPLE LIVE THERE?

They live there, in the first place, because they have nowhere else to live. The segregation policy of the Johannesburg City Council and the Government alike drives the Non-Europeans further and further

out of town, away from the Europeans. They live there because the Townships and Locations in the Municipal area are already terribly overcrowded. 15,000 people are living in hessian huts and shanties in Orlando's Shantytown. It is impossible to find anywhere else to stay.

They live there, too, because in Alexandra they can own their houses on freehold land. There are hardly any other places in and around Johannesburg where Non-European people can buy their own houses. And in Alexandra they are free from the petty and irritating restrictions that the Municipality imposes upon its Townships. They fall outside the Native (Urban Areas) Act, and can have their relations come to spend a night without buying a special permit. If Alexandra is mainly a slum with very few amenities, it is no worse than most of the Municipal Townships.

It is important to remember, however, that the people who live in Alexandra Township did not go to live there because they wanted to stay nearly ten miles away from their place of work, or pay high fares, or because they liked the climate or scenery.

They stay in Alexandra mainly because there is nowhere else for them to go.

TO LIVE LIKE HUMAN BEINGS

— *What the Bus Commission says*

"It is clearly established in evidence before your Commissioners that the following facts must be faced:

- (a) That a large urban and peri-urban African population in the areas under consideration has come into existence and is increasing by natural growth and by accessions from elsewhere;
- (b) that this population is becoming increasingly race-conscious;
- (c) that it does not regard the establishment of locations by local authorities with the restrictions which Africans regard as irksome as the proper solution of the housing problem;
- (d) that it cherishes the desire to own property and to 'live like human beings';
- (e) that it has not the money to manage its own communal affairs."

BELOW THE BREAD LINE

The people who live in Alexandra are very poor. They are not poorer than other Africans and Coloureds living in and around Johannesburg, but then the greatest part of this population is living below the breadline.

An inquiry into family incomes of Africans made in 1940 reports that the average family income—the total earnings of a whole family—was £5 6s. 8d. a month (for nearly 1,000 families investigated).

This amount is made up as follows:—

	£	s.	d.
Man's Wage	4	2	0
Children's earnings		8	0
Wife's earnings	14	5	
Sub-tenants, etc.	2	3	

The report says that “forty-five per cent. of the women went out to work leaving their children at home”.

The children's contribution, according to the report, was difficult to assess. Twenty-six per cent. were at work, earning from 2s. 6d. to £7 a month.

This report was made nearly five years ago; since then prices of goods and food have risen enormously, to an extent not fully covered by the Cost of Living Allowance which is now paid.

The Johannesburg Report estimates that 86.8 per cent. of the families investigated were living below the Poverty Datum Line.

The Poverty Datum Line is an amount fixed by the Report as representing “the barest minimum upon which subsistence and health can theoretically be achieved under Western civilisation.”

BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

— *What the Bus Commission says*

“It is clear that in all areas of the Commission's enquiry, the vast bulk of African workers are below the Poverty Datum Line, and that despite the increases in wages (including the cost of living allowances) since 1940, the gap between family income and minimum requirements for subsistence and decency has increased.”

“It is also important to remember,” says the report of the Bus Commission, “that the minimum diet on which the estimates of expenditure on food have been made is in accordance with African dietary habits. It cannot be said to meet the needs of infants, children and growing adolescents”

“It may well be asked: How have the Africans been living, when even the minimum requirements for subsistence, health and decent living have been so unattainable? The answer is a two-fold one: spare diet and many debts. They save on food, and most are in a state of hunger But continuous life and work in confined space and often impure air takes its toll of workers' strength—their sole capital—and of their children's lives. And most families appear to be burdened with debt.”

THE FIRST BUS DISPUTE

In 1939, before the outbreak of war, the people who lived in Alexandra Township and worked in Johannesburg travelled in to work every day by bus, paying 4d. fare for the single journey during the week, 6d. during weekends.

In October, 1939, the bus owners complained of increased running costs, and proposed to raise the week-day fare to 5d. for a single journey. There had been previous attempts by single companies to raise the fares, but this was the first serious attempt of all the companies.

Immediately, the people of Alexandra formed a committee, and for eight months held meetings, demonstrations and issued propaganda on the question of the bus fares and the bus service generally. They presented figures and reports to the Road Transportation Board; they negotiated with the bus owners; but they were determined not to pay the increased fare. And after eight months the Road Transportation Board decided that the fare could not be raised, as increased running costs had not been proved by the bus owners.

This was the first round of the fight to keep the fares down. It was won by the people of Alexandra.

In 1943, the bus companies again complained of increased costs, and the Transportation Board permitted them to raise fares from 4d. to 5d., as from the 1st August, 1943.

On the 1st August a huge procession of about 15,000 people left Alexandra and marched the 9½ miles to Johannesburg. Stretching out for about three miles, and blocking all traffic to and from the Northern Suburbs, it was one of the greatest demonstrations that Johannesburg had ever seen.

It was a demonstration of the unity and determination of the people of Alexandra Township. It was also a demonstration of the extreme and bitter poverty of the African people. Thousands of Europeans learned with amazement that Africans would rather walk 20 miles a day than pay an extra 2d. bus fare.

The march to and from Alexandra lasted for nine days. Many workers started at 3 o'clock in the morning to get into Johannesburg in time for work, and after a hard day's work marched the weary ten miles home, arriving late at night. Some were given lifts in cars and lorries, but most of the people walked.

At the end of nine days, the bus owners gave in. The fare was reduced to 4d. again, and the Government appointed a commission of enquiry on the question of bus services for Non-Europeans.

The people of Alexandra had won the second round in the fight to keep the fares down.

WHAT THE COMMISSION FOUND

The Government Bus Commission sat until the 14th January, 1944 but its findings were withheld from the public until November, 1944.

The Commission found that people were too poor to pay the increased fares. They found that an increase from 4d. to 5d. would provide the Bus Owners with an excessive profit, but proposed that the weekend fare of 6d. should be raised to 7d. to meet increased running costs.

Here is what the Commission report says in its findings and recommendations:—

“The vast bulk of the African workers in the areas covered by the Commission’s enquiry were, in 1940, unable from their own earnings, even when supplemented by the earnings of other members of the family, to meet even the minimum requirements for subsistence, health and decency, not to speak of emergency requirements such as doctor’s fees and medicines, the replenishment of furniture, crockery and other utensils, blankets or other bedding, or the claims of civilised life such as church dues and children’s school books

“Since 1940 the gap between family income and the cost of meeting the essential needs of the family has widened considerably

“. The actual diet of the African workers is far below the nutritional level of the minimum diet

“. The items which make the most rigid and urgent demands upon the African workers are rent, transport and tax. They cannot be escaped. The worker is compelled to live far away from his work, and must in most cases pay for his transport to and from work. The tax must be paid, or he may find himself in gaol. Owing to the compulsion imposed upon Africans by State policy and housing requirements, rent and transport should always be considered together, and these together take too high a proportion of the family income, particularly where the family is dependent entirely upon the wages of the head of the family

“. Transport charges, in relation to the workers’ wages, or even to the total family income, are beyond the capacity of the African workers to pay. Indeed, it may be said that they cannot afford to pay anything. They certainly cannot afford to pay anything more in any direction, except by reducing still further their hunger diet.”

RESULTS OF SEGREGATION

— *What the Bus Commission says*

“The Europeans have forced a policy of segregation on the Africans. The transportation of the Africans is, therefore very much a financial obligation of the Europeans”

FARES UP AGAIN

But before the findings of this Commission were made known the bus owners were putting forward claims for greater increases than those recommended on the grounds that expenses had greatly increased since the Commission sat. In conjunction with the bus owners, the Government framed an Emergency Regulation requiring employers to pay any increase in transport fares over those existing at 1st September. The new fares of 5d. per journey were then fixed, and the Commission's report withheld until the last minute.

NATIVE BUS FARES TO BE RAISED

The native bus companies have notified the Government that they intend raising fares on 1st November to the amounts allowed them by the Transport Board. The fare of Alexandra Township, for instance, will be increased from 4d. to 5d.

"The bus owners cannot continue any longer on the pre-war fares," said Mr. E. H. Percival, chairman of the Passenger Transport Owners Association.

—*Extract from a Johannesburg newspaper.*

THE GOVERNMENT'S SCHEME

The Government proposal that the workers were to collect the increased fare from their employers was immediately rejected by the people of Alexandra. It only applied to certain classes of employment—did not cover casual workers, washerwomen, women travelling to town for shopping, children, people attending hospital or visiting friends, the man looking for work. It placed the burden of collecting the extra 2d. a day on the worker, and many felt that employers would be more willing to engage workers living nearer town.

In Alexandra, the Transport Emergency Committee which had conducted a previous struggle against higher fares was revived.

On the evening of the 14th November, the people of Alexandra gathered together to decide what to do. A great mass meeting of more than 6,000 was held. A leaflet issued by the Alexandra Branch of the Communist Party was circulated, calling on the people to reject the Government scheme. Gaur Radebe was in the chair, and the meeting was addressed by Senator Basner, David Bopape (Secretary of the African National Congress), and Communist leaders, Michael Harmel and Dr. Y. M. Dadoo. A police official mounted the platform to read a notice banning processions and gatherings of more than twenty people, as from the following day.

The people of Alexandra Township decided to walk.

The FIRST WEEK

NOVEMBER 15th
to
NOVEMBER 21st

On Wednesday, 15th November, the people of Alexandra started their march amid a great show of police force.

Armoured cars waited in the background, and a military plane swooped overhead. Lorry loads of police arrived at 3 o'clock in the morning, when the people started their 3-hour trek to town.

The native buses were empty, except for those filled with conductors in an attempt to make people think that some were using the buses.

Europeans hurrying to catch their trams and buses home in the evening were handed a leaflet issued by the Workers Transport Action Committee, which had been set up to



co-ordinate the work which was being carried on in various areas against the higher bus and train fares. The Committee included members of various townships, as also of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions and other organisations.

“CITIZENS OF JOHANNESBURG, THIS CONCERNS ALL OF YOU,” said the leaflet. **“We think it important that the public should be acquainted with the findings and recommendations of the Bus Commission, as many persons are under the erroneous impression that the present action taken to increase fares is in accordance with these findings”**

The leaflet outlined the findings of the Bus Commission, explained why the Government regulation was unsatisfactory, and called on the citizens of Johannesburg to support the African people in their struggle. **“Write to the papers! Write to your Councillor! Worry your M.P.!”** said the final appeal.

The newspaper reports said: "According to the Bus Commission's Report, few natives eat breakfast before starting work, and the marchers did not look as if they were walking on full stomachs. Some women were fortunate enough to be taken in donkey carts, but many wash-women, carrying burdens, plodded along with bowed shoulders, feet unshod."

"To a representative of The Star who watched the weary procession, it seemed doubtful how long the Natives could keep up their daily 18 mile walk, with a full working day in between."

On 18th November the papers reported: "A severe storm in the evening did not deter the natives . . . The storm reached its height at a time when most of the natives were already on their way back to the Township. Despite hail and drenching rain, they refused to use the bus service."

GOVERNMENT SOLUTION WRONG

— says Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce

In an interview with a representative of The Star, Mr. N. A. Kay, president of the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce said that . . . commercial and industrial circles were strongly of the opinion that the boycott might have a serious effect on firms if continued. Both industry and commerce were agreed that the Government's attempted solution . . . was wrong in principle."

On 19th November: "Late last night the natives walking back to Alexandra were given lifts by European drivers to save them from the rain."

A Communist Party leaflet issued to Europeans and widely distributed quoted the Bus Commission: "The average African is forced to cut his expenditure on food **BELOW THE BREADLINE** in order to meet his rent and transport expenses." The leaflet demanded a Government subsidy for Non-European transport, and called for support for the people of Alexandra in their demands.

An increasing number of European cars gave lifts to the walkers. The empty buses drove up and down.

On 21st November, Europeans giving lifts were stopped by officials of the Transportation Board who took their names and addresses and asked them questions about their sympathies with the boycott.

Some were asked why they were supporting the bus boycott. Others reported that officials not only took their names and addresses, but criticised them for supporting the Africans and accused them of being "disloyal".

So the first week came to an end, with its hail and storms and interference from the Transportation Board.

But the people of Alexandra Township went on walking.



The SECOND WEEK

NOVEMBER 22nd
to
NOVEMBER 28th

"The health of thousands of natives walking daily between Alexandra Township and the city to avoid using the buses is stated to be good," said the newspaper reports, "but employers, doctors and others are expressing fears that if the boycott goes on cases of sickness will occur."

"The natives are sacrificing their health to establish a principle," said a doctor, "and the consequences of their action may be grave. Immediate action of some kind should be taken . . . Many of the natives are suffering from heart disease, lung trouble, and other ailments . . . the women are the chief sufferers . . . there have already been cases of illness."

The Communist Party issued a leaflet to the people of Alexandra . . . "All over South Africa," it said, "people are

watching you with admiration. They support you. They know you are fighting for them as well as for yourselves. **STAND FIRM! LET THE GOVERNMENT SUBSIDISE THE BUSES!**"

The Campaign for Right and Justice appealed to Mr. Sturrock, Minister for Transport, to intervene.

The Alexandra Emergency Committee arranged for Non-Europeans with lorries to take the people to and from

MORAL OBLIGATION

— *Dr. Xuma's Views*

"No transport scheme is a solution to the Non-European transport problem unless it

- (a) meets the requirements of the whole family;
- (b) recognises the fact that Non-Europeans, Africans in particular, live at unreasonable distances from their employment, compelled by State policy;
- (c) recognises the moral obligation of the State, and not the African worker, to bear the whole transport charge, not as a charitable gesture or gift, but as a duty."

Alexandra, and the Communist Party issued an appeal to all car drivers who had given election support to give lifts to the people.

Hundreds lined up daily to get lifts on lorries, dray-carts and in private cars. But the majority were still walking.

A "Star" editorial complained of the aloofness of the authorities, said that the people of Alexandra enjoyed "wide sympathy", thought the demonstrators clearly could not go on indefinitely walking 18 miles a day, called on the Government to initiate talks to find a solution.

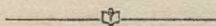
On 24th November the matter was raised in the Johannesburg City Council. A motion moved by Joyce Waring and seconded by Hilda Watts, asked the Government to freeze fares, called for a Council subsidy to the Alexandra buses. On the advice of the Town Clerk this was changed to a request for a Government subsidy, but the motion was withdrawn when it was evident that no support was forthcoming, in favour of a more general resolution.

On 28th November, instructions were given to prosecute persons conveying Africans to and from Alexandra. Euro-

pean car drivers were summoned to appear before the Transportation Board to show why their exemption certificates should not be cancelled.

Thus ended the second week of the boycott.

The people of Alexandra Township went on walking.



The THIRD WEEK

NOVEMBER 29th

to

DECEMBER 5th

At the beginning of the third week, the Communist Party issued a letter to all its members and supporters to help end the deadlock. The letter asked that telegrams be sent to the Prime Minister, letters to the Press, more cars for lifts be obtained, etc.

The Minister of Transport, Mr. F. C. Sturrock, informed the Campaign for Right and Justice that no useful purpose would be served by his meeting a deputation, since the Government was investigating the matter.

Many deputations appealed to the Transportation Board not to proceed with their summonses. A member of the local Board, Mr. Huddle, said that the deputations' arguments, like the Bus Commission's, were "based purely on humanitarian grounds, but the Board was concerned only with the strict interpretation of the law".

The newspapers reported that "thousands of Natives have completely worn out their shoes".

Car and lorry-drivers appeared before the Transportation Board to answer allegations of having contravened the Motor Carrier Transportation Act by conveying Natives to and from Alexandra.

At a suggestion of the Communist Party, a deputation was sent from the Alexandra Emergency Committee (the body set up in Alexandra to organise the boycott) to interview the Tramway and Lighting Committee of the City Council. They were introduced to the committee by Councillor Watts. Speaking on behalf of the deputation, Mr. M. Rammitloa spoke of the desperate plight of the people of Alexandra and asked the Committee if the Council would run a temporary service as far as Bramley (the Municipal border).

The Government turned down a proposal that they should subsidise the service. "The Minister regrets that your proposal cannot be accepted," said Mr. Sturrock, in

reply to the Campaign for Right and Justice. "It is not understood why casual workers and washerwomen are not also able to recover their fare."

The Mayor and Deputy-Mayor, in speeches to the Rate-payers Association, accused "agitators" of stirring up feeling.

A new proposal was put forward to charge 5d. during "peak" hours, and 4d. during "valley" periods, when not so many people used the buses. This proposal was put forward at a meeting between representatives of the Alexandra Health Committee, the bus proprietors, the Minister for Native Affairs, Major Plet van der Byl, the Secretary for Native Affairs, Mr. D. L. Smit, Dr. A. B. Xuma, president-general of the African National Congress, and Mr. Makabeni, President of the Council for Non-European Trade Unions. The proposal was approved of only by the bus-owners, Dr. Xuma warning the meeting that the people would not accept it.

Still the people of Alexandra Township went on walking.

The FOURTH WEEK

DECEMBER 6th

to

DECEMBER 12th

So the march went on. In the early hours of the morning and until late into the night the people of Alexandra carried on with their long trek. Neither hail nor rain nor the thought of the 18 mile walk could deter them.

More and more support came for the people from all sections of the citizens of Johannesburg.

Still the Government took no action to end the boycott. And the people of Alexandra Township went on walking.

The FIFTH WEEK

DECEMBER 13th

to

DECEMBER 19th

By the fifth week the character of the daily procession had changed. At night the route to Alexandra was one long procession on bicycles. While thousands still had to walk or try to get lifts, more and more employers were providing their workers with bicycles, or they were being borrowed from friends in other Townships.

On 13th December, the Government rejected the Council's proposal to subsidise the buses. "The Government, while appreciating the Municipality's offer,



considers that the amended scheme approved by the Local Transportation Board is a reasonable one, and is not prepared to depart from it."

The Government could not undertake to hold a further inquiry, because all the information was available from the Bus Commission's report. Nor could the Government consider a State subsidy, because such subsidisation of private enterprise was unsound and would eventually involve subsidisation of all transportation services.

A statement issued by the Communist Party declared: "It would appear from this statement that not only does the Government refuse to do anything itself to resolve the Alexandra crisis, but it is even prepared to prevent others doing it . . .

"If the African residents of Alexandra and their segregated townships were on the same basis as other sections of the population, then something might be said for Minister van der Byl's arguments . . . The State is responsible for the policy of segregating Africans in residential areas which are far away from their place of work. The Government which maintains a policy of Pass Laws and discriminates against African employees' organisations is also responsible for the shockingly low standard of living of the urban African population, which is testified to in the reports of one Government Commission after another. In the circumstances it is clear that it is the responsibility of the Government to see that cheap transport is provided for the African workers in urban areas who have to travel far to their employment . . .

"The Communist Party issues a sharp warning against the stubborn and intransigent reactionary policy of the

Minister of Native Affairs . . . perseverance in this policy can only lead to rapid deterioration in the internal position of the Union which will adversely affect the war effort . . ."

Reaction from other quarters was sharp and critical.

The "Star" leader of 14th December spoke of a "sense of frustration" that the Government's reply had produced. "The clear impression is given," said the paper, "that the Government is not prepared itself to take any further action and is unwilling to allow anyone else to intervene. In this attitude we believe it to be out of touch with public sentiment and at variance with public interest."

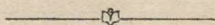
The "Star" also reported that "little support is forthcoming in commercial, municipal and other circles for the Government's attitude."

The National Council of Women sent a letter to Mr. Sturrock asking him to reconsider proposals for a Municipal subsidy.

A stream of letters to the Press expressed sympathy with the boycotters and what one described as their "patient determination". The sympathy and indignation of the Europeans of Johannesburg was aroused by the sight of the daily, long weary trek of so many people.

Christmas approached, with many expressions of the need for "goodwill".

But the people of Alexandra Township went on walking.



The SIXTH WEEK

DECEMBER 26th
to
DECEMBER 20th

A deputation from the Johannesburg City Council interviewed Mr. Hofmeyr.

The people of Alexandra threw a cordon across the road to prevent buses entering Alexandra, after all except two lorries had been withdrawn from the road. The bus owners alleged that only intimidation prevented the people from using the buses, and the buses were then brought in under police escort. Nobody entered the buses, either while the police were there, or after they had left.

There was discussion about the people of Alexandra staging a "sit-down" strike and refusing to come to work.

The Johannesburg City Council opened negotiations with the bus owners to buy the buses. The Council also discussed the possibility of running buses as far as Bramley.

They applied for permission from the Transportation Board to start a temporary bus service.

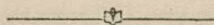
The Transportation Board turned down the application.

A memorandum was sent to the Government by the Witwatersrand Church Council appealing to the Government to make immediate provision for transport to Alexandra at the old 4d. fare. "We believe the Christian conscience of Johannesburg demands such action," the memorandum stated, "and that public opinion will lay at the door of the Government the blame for any unfortunate incidents that may develop out of the long delay to deal fairly with these people."

The Campaign for Right and Justice started a petition to the Government to end the deadlock by reverting to the old fare with a temporary subsidy while investigation was made for a more permanent settlement.

The Christmas holidays came and went.

And still the people of Alexandra Township went on walking.



The SEVENTH WEEK

DECEMBER 27th

to

JANUARY 2nd

As the bus boycott entered its seventh week, public dissatisfaction at the Government's attitude became more pronounced.

"The general feeling in commercial circles," said the "Star", "is that, in spite of Mr. Hofmeyr's disclaimer that the Government wants a 'showdown', these are, in fact, the tactics being pursued and it is felt strongly that the authorities are choosing the wrong time and wrong occasion for it."

On the 29th December, the City Council made a new proposal to settle the question. It was suggested that books of coupons should be sold—12 coupons at 4s. a book. Passengers without coupons would pay 5d. during weekdays, 6d. on Saturdays and 7d. on Sundays. For the week-end, no coupons would be available, the full fare being charged. The Council undertook to erect and staff booths for the sale of coupons.

300 people met in Alexandra and rejected the proposal.

But on the 1st January, a mass meeting of residents was held in Alexandra Township. Members of the City Council and Senator Basner explained the proposals and urged

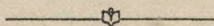
that they be accepted. The proposals were discussed and accepted by the people.

The scheme was to operate for 3 months, during which time a more permanent solution would be sought.

On the 2nd January, the Transportation Board ratified the scheme.

On the 4th January the scheme was put into operation. After seven weeks of walking, the people of Alexandra took to the buses again.

The boycott had ended, with victory for the people.



AFTERMATHS

A number of Non-European drivers of lorries and other vehicles had their exemption certificates suspended or cancelled and faced prosecution for various offences connected with carrying passengers.

But this was not the only aftermath of the bus boycott.

As soon as the buses started running again, the owners complained that they could not carry on. They had accepted the proposal believing that a considerable number of passengers would not bother to buy coupons, and would pay the 5d. fare. In practice, practically 100 per cent. of the passengers had coupons, or bought them from other passengers.

The bus owners, while complaining bitterly of their heavy losses, yet valued their assets (many of the buses being unfit for further service) and goodwill at a quarter of a million pounds, which the Council thought too much to pay.

PEOPLE'S VICTORY

The people of Alexandra had won a tremendous victory. It was all the more important because of weakness in their own leadership. The Alexandra Emergency Committee was not elected, but self-appointed, and was dominated to a certain extent by the Workers' Transport Action Committee. This latter Committee adopted the policy of calling on workers from other areas to boycott the trains, saying that the success of the Alexandra boycott depended on a boycott in other areas.

The position was entirely different in other areas. The train service in Orlando and other areas was very much more satisfactory in every respect than Alexandra's buses. The fare increase was smaller, and the distance greater. But the real objection to a boycott of the trains was that the trains served other places besides Orlando, and if all

the residents of Orlando had boycotted them, they would have continued to run to the outlying mines and districts. The Government might have taken off one or two coaches, and used them elsewhere. A boycott of Alexandra buses brought the whole service to a standstill. A boycott of the trains would not have affected the service to any great extent.

On two or three mornings a group of 20 to 30 people walked from Orlando to town. But the majority of people used the trains.

The Transport Action Committee had been penetrated by Trotskyite elements who played their usual role of splitting and disruption. In turn, they tried to dominate the Alexandra Committee. They opposed every attempt at reaching a settlement, and did not want the people of Alexandra to accept the arrangement finally arrived at, saying that it was "defeat".

This had an unfortunate effect on the Alexandra Emergency Committee, which as a result was never really united. In a struggle of this nature, decisions must be taken quickly by the people on the spot. But for various reasons, the majority on the Alexandra Committee would not take decisions without first receiving approval from the Workers Transport Action Committee, and thus opportunities were lost on many occasions, and useful proposals were more than once rejected.

The victory was all the more important because everything that could be done to break their spirit and prevent a settlement was done by the Government. The display of military force on the day the boycott started, the banning of processions, the police visits to Alexandra, the obstinate refusal to countenance one proposal after another, the many statements from Cabinet Ministers that they would not depart from their unworkable and obviously unacceptable scheme, all this gave the impression that the Government was pursuing a vindictive and petty vendetta against the people of Alexandra, regardless of their poverty and suffering, and disregarding as well the clear and forthright findings of their own Commission.

It was all the more important because in spite of difficulties and provocations, they paid no heed to defeatists or dividers. They went on marching for seven weeks. They did not board the buses—not a single one—until the old fare had been won.

For many years the people of Alexandra travelling daily between their homes and the city have endured discomfort and inconvenience. They have had what one writer to "The Star" described as "a poorly equipped transport with no shortdistance fares and long waits, in all kinds of weather, at seatless and shelterless bus stops . . . if Alexandra Township had been a European suburb, with a large population of parliamentary voters of the lower wage groups, its transport needs would have been met long before now . . ."

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

While the City Council was negotiating with the bus owners to purchase the buses, it was unexpectedly announced that a new private "utility" company had bought out the buses. The spokesman of this company stated that it was their intention to keep down the fares and effect many improvements in the service, and also that they were buying up privately-owned transport everywhere that they could.

The new company has reverted to the old fare of 4d. without coupons, and they appear to be introducing one or two improvements.

An attempt was made by some members of the Workers' Transport Action Committee to restart the boycott on the grounds that they did not want a private company to operate the service. A huge mass meeting in Alexandra rejected this suggestion, which was advanced by those very elements that had played such a disruptive and damaging role throughout the whole boycott. Senator Basner spoke on behalf of the Alexandra Emergency Committee, who were unanimously against the suggestion. He said that the new company was not a solution of the transport problems of Alexandra Township. But it was unthinkable to start a new boycott on the issue of public control of transport. They should wait and see how the new company conducted its business and whether the Government carried out its promise of providing a railway.

Now our job is to see that the people of Alexandra get some permanent satisfaction, lest their patience be tried too much.

Alexandra Township must have a railway service. We must see that it is built, and not forgotten. The people want food and fuel brought to the Township cheaply, and they want to resist attempts of the Johannesburg Municipality to incorporate the Township within its borders. The people of Alexandra want what all South Africans want—a living wage, enough for their families. They will have to go on fighting for these things.

Their bus dispute was more than a local affair. So was the solidarity by which they won their victory.

General Smuts has stated that his policy is residential segregation. Africans and other Non-Europeans are to live in separate areas, outside our towns, often far away from the places where they work. That means rail fares, bus fares—the lowest paid sections of our population are to spend most in fares.

The Communists say that while this segregation lasts, the Non-European must not be made to pay for a policy to which he is opposed, and in the making of which he has had no part. The Government which segregates him must ensure—by subsidy or otherwise—that he gets cheap transport.

On issues such as this it is militancy and solidarity that can win the day. The people of Alexandra Township have displayed the courage, unity and determination which is necessary for all of us if we are to win the kind of South Africa we want.



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