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Rural development schemes and the
struggle against impoverishment
in the Namaqualand reserves

by

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impoverishment in the Namaqualand Reserves

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I: Introduction

Many inhabitants of the five Namaqualand Reserves - Concordia, Komaggas, Leliefontein, Richtersveld and Steinkopf - have regarded government proposals for agricultural and other development in these areas with great suspicion, and have seen part of their struggle against impoverishment as being a struggle against their implementation.

This paper deals mainly with the period 1963 to the present, during which several pieces of legislation have been aimed at a particular form of rural development in the Namaqualand and other Reserves (or 'Rural Coloured Areas' in official terminology). The paper examines the nature of these proposals and the projected consequences of their implementation; the extent to which they have been implemented thus far in different Reserves; and the reasons for

the failure to implement them fully in all areas.

This involves examining, amongst other things, the different responses to the proposals made by the inhabitants of the various Namaqualand Reserves. The proposals attempt to stimulate entrepreneurship in agriculture; the outcome of implementation would be similar in all Reserves, in that to make room for entrepreneurs most people would lose their access to agricultural resources. These resources comprise the commonage, used for grazing livestock, and arable allotments (which are not however available in all Reserves in Namaqualand - the Richtersveld, in particular, is too dry for grain farming to be possible). People would, at the same time, lose their political status as members of a particular Reserve community. In some Reserves, notably Concordia, Komaggas and Steinkopf, the institution of community membership has long been dignified by the inhabitants' use of an idiom of 'citizenship' (burgerskap) to refer to it (Sharp, 1977). This institution is built on the system of communal land-tenure introduced by the missionaries and the colonial authorities in the 19th century. In all Reserves, therefore, people have realised that the development proposals embody economic and political threats, and that both have severe implications for the question of their vulnerability to impoverishment.

In the larger Reserves - Richtersveld, Steinkopf - implementation of the proposals is, by now, relatively far advanced, although many inhabitants are clearly unhappy about recent events. In the smaller ones, particularly Komaggas, resistance has however been concerted, fierce and sustained over the twenty-year period; and this has contributed to an official re-definition of

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priorities. By the 1980s, officials charged with implementation of the proposals came reluctantly to recognise that their plans were 'not suited' to conditions in the smaller Reserves. The physical extent of different Reserves has indeed been important in shaping both the people's responses and official recognition of the limitations of the proposals. But it is not the only factor. To understand more fully the varied nature of the response in different Reserves one needs to examine the current social composition and organisation of the population of each Reserve, and the way in which these have been shaped by the history of each Reserve and its specific relationship to the wider Namaqualand region over time. In this paper the situation in Komaggas, where resistance has been most sustained, will be examined in the greatest detail; circumstances in other Reserves will be discussed less systematically and used to provide comparisons with Komaggas.

II: The Development Proposals

Act 24 of 1963 (the Rural Coloured Areas Act) gave notice of the government's intention to pursue a particular course of economic development in all the Reserves. The Act made provision for the introduction of betterment schemes, in which the Reserves were to be planned into various discrete zones. Most important was the proposed division between residential and agricultural zones, and the stipulation (in section 21 of the Act) that land which had formerly been commonage could, to facilitate development, be

1. The area of the Reserves (in hectares) is as follows: Concordia 63,383; Komaggas 62,603; Leliefontein 192,719; Richtersveld 513,919; Steinkopf 329,301: Report of the Administration of Coloured Affairs, 1978.

reserved for bona fide farmers exclusively.

These farmers were meant to increase agricultural production in each Reserve and, more important perhaps, to be able to farm productively without subjecting the land to overgrazing and soil erosion, to which communal farming practices allegedly made it succumb. Because they would, it was initially proposed, be full-time farmers they would also be in a better position to use agricultural extension services provided, and because they had individual title they would be able to offer surety for loans from financial institutions to make improvements to their land. But the definition of bona fide farmer has never been made particularly clear; in practice it has been taken to refer not so much to people who would make their living exclusively from farming as to those who possessed sufficient resources to be able to afford and use the 'economic units' into which the commonage was to be divided.

Although the Act made provision for the transfer of title to economic units to individuals, no Namaqualand Reserve has as yet gone beyond granting such lands in exclusive leasehold. Subsequent embellishments to this development plan involved the demise of the old Reserve Boards of Management (or Burgerrade as they were styled in some Reserves) and their replacement by municipal institutions, the jurisdiction of which would not extend to the agricultural areas.

Former community members, or burgers, who were not bona fide farmers, would retain their rights only in the residential zones, insofar as they could not be refused the opportunity of taking title to a planned residential site; but taking up this right would mean incurring the costs of living in villages to

be set out in accordance with general town-planning regulations - transfer fees and rates for services provided by the local municipalities. Under the Board of Management system people had paid a single, annual household tax (which they called the 'burger tax') to maintain their rights as community members and to cover part of the costs of the rudimentary services which the Boards provided.

1963 was not the first time that changes to the communal tenure system had been mooted. As early as the mid-19th century a number of residents of the newly-formed Reserves protested to the authorities about the granting of communal lands. Their protests were partly against the growing secular powers of the Rhenish missionaries who had been instrumental in setting up the Reserve communities and in wresting land-grants from the colonial authorities (Marais, 1939:74-108). But they were also a statement of their particular interests as peasant farmers who were benefiting from the increase in trade in that period with areas to the south and from the local markets provided by the recent opening of the first copper mines in the region (Smalberger, 1975).

In petitions to the Springbok Civil Commissioner in the latter part of the 19th century, numbers of wealthier peasants complained bitterly that their opportunities for accumulation and improvement of land and livestock were inhibited by their poorer colleagues' possession of formally equal rights as regards the Reserves' commonage and arable allotments.² There were also complaints from local White farmers and mine-owners concerning labour shortages in the district, despite relatively high wages (Luyt, 1981:143).

2. See 1/SBK. 5/1/1. Anthing to Colonial Secretary, 19/3/1860.

Government Select Committees which sat to consider the various problems of the nascent mining and agricultural industries of Namaqualand heard a great deal of evidence on this score from these latter sources. . As in other parts of South Africa, it was frequently alleged that large numbers of the 'improvident and idle' were able to subsist without entering wage labour relationships because of the existence of communal lands. Although they listened sympathetically throughout the second half of the 19th century, the Colonial, and then Cape, authorities did not seriously consider meeting the full demands of these several complainants. In the early years they temporised because they were afraid that precipitate action to break up the new Reserves would result in violent disaffection, by the victims of this process, in an area in which colonial control was still tenuous. It would also have alienated the Rhenish missionaries who were, in many ways, acting as important agents of control over the local population in the interests of colonial domination (Sharp, 1977; Klinghardt, 1982). And towards the end of the century, when complaints from the mines and White agriculturalists were becoming more strident, a more subtle solution to the problems of 'idleness' and labour shortages was proposed.

In 1896 a Parliamentary Select Committee to consider the future of the Namaqualand Mission Reserves, collected evidence which led to the formulation

3. See for instance, SC.5-1856: Report...on the petition of leaseholders of land in Namaqualand

4. Notably by Melvill, the Surveyor General, in the 1890s: G60-1890 - Report on the Lands in Namaqualand set apart for Natives and others.

5. A7-1896: Report...on the Namaqualand Missions and Reserves; Act 29 of 1909: The Communal Reserves and Mission Stations Act.

of the first Act, 29 of 1909, to deal with these areas. In his testimony, Charles Scully, the Springbok magistrate proposed that the interests of local mine-owners and agriculturalists would best be served if the communal system was, in fact, retained in the Reserves, provided that measures could be taken to impose an annual head tax on adult males and to prevent further sub-division of the portions of arable land allotted to inhabitants. The missionaries had long attempted to impose a tax on their parishioners for their own maintenance, but were unable to collect it systematically because their position required them to be sensitive to the problems caused in the Reserves by frequent drought and growing indebtedness and poverty. As the committee recognised, imposition of these measures would therefore call for direct State control over the Reserves, with the aim of forcing sub-subsistence peasants onto the labour market.

Arguments along these lines were undoubtedly, as Carstens (1966) suggested, influenced by discussion surrounding the Glen-Grey Act, applied in the 1890s to selected Eastern Cape districts. Scully was also sensitive to the important features of Namaqualand itself at that time and to its place within the wider South African region. Those who argued for the break-up of the Reserves overlooked the fact that neither the White farmers nor the mine-owners were willing to support large, standing labour forces on a permanent basis. The farmers struggled with drought and transport difficulties, and they would best be served by a pool of potential labour in the vicinity on which they could draw seasonally. From 1852, when the first mine opened, until the end of the century, the copper mines in the Springbok-O'okiep area experienced extremely uneven fortunes because of

technical difficulties, the ubiquitous transport problems, and variation in Europe's demand for copper and its price. Moreover, after the diamond and gold discoveries in the interior, there was the danger that both skilled and unskilled labour would, given the uncertainties of secure employment in Namaqualand, drift away to Kimberely and the Witwatersrand. This would have been a severe loss to the two mining companies operating in the 1880s, because they had imported skilled labour from as far afield as Cornwall and St Helena, and unskilled labour from the east coast areas as far north as Mozambique. Scully saw clearly that continuation of the Reserve system would enable mines operating under these circumstances to get the best return from their variable capital (Luyt, 1981:142-7).

Act 29 of 1909, applied after Union in 1913, reaffirmed the principle of communal tenure in the Reserves for the time being, although it made provision for eventual changes such as those proposed in the 1960s. Provisions of the Act such as the imposition of the annual 10/- head tax and the assumption of direct control by the State (by the Department of Native Affairs via the local magistrates) sparked off determined resistance, which was in some instances violent, by those most affected - the poorer inhabitants of the Reserves who were anxious to maintain their former burger-rights precisely because they were becoming increasingly dependent on the local wage labour market.

Nothing was done to change the communal tenure system for the next fifty years. Given the political circumstances of this period, this was not so much a tribute to the powers of resistance manifested in the Reserves as it was the result of several factors which induced an official inertia towards the Namaqualand region as a whole and the major part of its population - those

regarded as 'Coloured' people. The copper mines were forced to close down soon after the war: the largest company, the Cape Copper Company, closed in 1919 and the Namaqua Mining Company followed in 1931, causing widespread poverty which was examined, as it affected Whites, by the original Carnegie Commission of Inquiry in the 1920s (Grosskopf, 1932).

Closure of the mines meant that the copper district and the Reserves around it lapsed into insignificance. Relative to its situation in the mid-19th century as the source of the second most important export (after wool) in the Cape Colony (Smalberger, 1975:69), Namaqualand had by the 1930s become the geïsoleerde gemeenskap (isolated community) of which Kotze (1943) wrote. The beginning of the State Alluvial Diggings in the diamond area near Alexander Bay in the 1920s had little effect on the Reserves, since employment opportunities there were for many years reserved for the Poor Whites of the region. Inside the Reserves, people were brought down to a common denominator of poverty: the wealthy peasants of the 19th century saw their herds wasted by drought and the lack of local markets. Oral testimony collected in the region and the Burgerraad minute books of the period both suggest that, after a few years, formerly wealthy peasants were applying along with those who had depended directly on wage labour, for government poor relief and for work in the road gangs (where the State paid different rates to Whites and 'Coloureds' for doing the same poor relief work). The internal voice of protest against communal tenure was, indeed, muted in this period by the levelling process of general impoverishment.

Even when the mines re-opened the various sources of dissatisfaction with the communal system took some time to re-assert themselves. The assets of the

defunct copper companies were bought by an American consortium, headed by the Newmont Mining Corporation, in 1937; production began on a small scale in 1941, but it was not until the 1950s, when the new O'okiep Copper Company (OCC) had three mines in operation, that employment reached the level attained by the old companies in the first decade of the 20th century (Smalberger, 1975:123-6). In the early years the OCC seemed well-content with the Reserve system, since the latter allowed it to reduce the costs of maintaining at least part of its labour force: it did not have to provide housing and other infrastructural services such as schools for workers recruited from the Reserves.

This is not to make the familiar assertion (Wolpe, 1972; Meillassoux, 1981) that peasant agricultural production in the Reserves was functional to capital in that it provided a subsidy towards meeting the maintenance and reproduction costs of workers' dependents. Oral evidence suggests that by the 1950s, most domestic groups in the Reserves were, at any given time, without access to arable land and without livestock (Sharp, 1977). The system worked tolerably well in the short run, at least as far as the mines were concerned, because the inhabitants of the Reserves were not trapped in these areas or in the Namaqualand region: many of those who could not find work on the mines left both Reserve and region, often with their dependents, and went to Cape Town or to the north - Windhoek, Luderitz - to settle permanently. What enabled the mines to benefit from the situation was not the fact that dependents of workers from the Reserves all had supplementary sources of subsistence from agricultural production, but rather that the continuing exodus by some created leeway for other inhabitants to re-engage in local agricultural production and

for others to be able to activate social relationships of reciprocity with them in time of need. This is an extremely important point, for it was the fact that many people did leave the Reserves to move right away from the region (as people had been doing from the 1920s onwards) which freed the Reserves from the levelling effect of progressive over-crowding thereby also creating, as will be shown below, one avenue for the re-emergence of marked material differentiation amongst the inhabitants.

Another reason for the persistence of communal tenure for fifty years after 1913 lay in a much more general and overtly political issue: the long term vacillation by the South African government over the status of, and the future dispensation for, the initially ill-defined category of people regarded as 'Coloured'. People in the Namaqualand Reserves had a wide variety of origins - some indeed were Cornishmen and St Helenans who had come to work on the mines and had married and settled locally (Sharp, 1977). Nonetheless, local magistrates referred, in the Raad minute books of the 1930s and '40s, to the Reserves' inhabitants as all being 'gekleurdes' - the term 'Kleurling' not yet being in general use. Although several government commissions of inquiry were sent to the Namaqualand Reserves few of their recommendations were acted upon in this period; the official attitude seemed to be to wait and see what would happen to the whole emerging category of 'Coloured' people, of whom the inhabitants of the Reserves were, for geographical and economic reasons, an insignificant part. ⁶ The only notable step taken in the 1930s in this regard

6. UG.54-1937: Report of the Commission of Inquiry regarding the Cape Coloured Population of the Union; UG.33-1947: Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Coloured Mission Stations, Reserves and Settlements.

was to recognise that the Reserve inhabitants were not 'natives' - the Reserves were removed from the control of the Department of Native Affairs and placed under that of Social Welfare.

The 1963 Act and its provisions regarding economic and political development in the Reserves must, as Klinghardt (1982:142-6) has argued, be seen in terms of general developments in government policy after 1948 towards people regarded as 'Coloured'. In the 1950s a category of 'Coloured' people was legally defined and a government department (Coloured Affairs) was created to deal with matters pertaining to them; and in the 1960s various steps were taken to invest the negatively-defined legal category with the trappings of a more positive 'identity', in line with the notion of a 'Coloured volk-in-wording'.

Act 24 of 1963 was one such step, and the Reserves in Namaqualand and elsewhere were clearly, in its terms, being seen as rural Group Areas for the nascent 'volk'. They were to be the areas where suitable members of the volk could take title to farm land (hitherto denied them in 'white' South Africa) and practise commercial agriculture on it. The provisions of the Act which specified that any 'qualified' (ie. 'Coloured') person could acquire title to land in the Reserves threatened to do away with all the particularistic features of the individual Reserve communities and to destroy their most important function in the eyes of a considerable section of the Reserves' population: the limited guarantee they had offered, in a situation of insecure wage employment opportunities, against the danger of total impoverishment.

III: Social Composition and Organisation of the Namaqualand Reserves

The specific social characteristics of the various Namaqualand Reserves shaped the kind of response made in each to the 1964 development proposals and official attempts to implement them. Nonetheless, at the level of their general economic characteristics the Namaqualand Reserves comprise several variations on a common theme.

Firstly, a majority of the inhabitants of all the Reserves form a specific section, distinct in ways indicated below, of the regional working class: to secure their maintenance and social reproduction they are forced to sell their labour on a regular basis and they share many of the attitudes of working people beyond the Reserves. They also have a large number of links with these people, some of whom are kin and many of whom they have lived amongst for varying periods of their lives.

Secondly, a minority of the inhabitants in all Reserves comprise various salaried officials of local government and teachers; local traders; and relatively wealthy farmers. To these should be added those people who are in secure wage employment in local industry, particularly in the mines - the clerks, the skilled operators - on the grounds that their lifestyles and aspirations align them more closely with the petty bourgeoisie in the Reserves than with those whose income from wage employment is less secure. It must also be stressed that these sub-categories are not discrete: frequently the same individuals and domestic groups fall into several - for instance, teacher, local trader and relatively wealthy farmer - simultaneously.

Delineation of these two main categories within the Reserves' population is important for any analysis of social processes within these areas because, as the section above suggested, the members of each category have tended, over a considerable period of time, towards a fundamentally different view of the existence and function of the Reserve communities. In large measure the struggle within the Reserves against the 1963 proposals articulated with, and indeed formed part of, the ongoing course of conflict between these categories of the population - a process which had roots in the 19th century. But the categories themselves are not simply economic ones, and the issues about which they have fought cannot simply be reduced to an economic essence. And, furthermore, the course which the conflict has charted in the different Reserves has been a function not only of the relative sizes of these categories in the various instances, but also of the nature and extent of the cross-linkages between them and of the changing nature of the relationship between each category and the class structure of the region as a whole over time.

Generalised self-sustaining peasant agriculture was a phenomenon of a brief period in the 19th century after the founding of the Reserves and the opening of the mines. The missionaries introduced cultivation to supplement pastoralism, but their arrival also heralded the drawing of geographical boundaries and the creation of Reserves. Traders brought new consumer goods, but also provided credit facilities which ruined many formerly self-supporting peasants. The frequent droughts in the region became much more severe in their social consequences as people began to be restricted to finite territories. By the 1880s, and despite the complaints of labour shortages,

substantial numbers of Reserve inhabitants (particularly from Concordia, Komaggas and Steinkopf) had been drawn into wage labour or small-scale entrepreneurial activities such as transport riding. Few were able to plough this back into local agriculture to produce for markets regularly themselves - they were insufficiently capitalised to withstand the droughts. And at the start of the 20th century, farming in the Reserves faced additional competition from White farmers who were receiving state aid.

The acute dependence of most of the Reserves' inhabitants on direct access to income earned by wage labour in the mines, in fishing, in local commerce and manufacturing developed from all the factors mentioned above. The period during which the mines were closed served to confirm this dependence once they re-opened, and it is significant to note that the people who are now the traders and wealthier farmers are, frequently, people who entered the Reserves after the 1940s. They brought resources with them to establish themselves in their current position and, in a sense, they replaced local people whom the depression had reduced to penury and whose descendants are, in many instances, still in the Reserves today. This adds another dimension to the uneasy relationship between the two main categories within the Reserves: many of the petty bourgeoisie are resented not merely for their economic success, but also because they have attained that success as former outsiders, as people who were permitted to enter the communities by the very people they now ostensibly look down on (Sharp, 1977).

It was stated above that since the 1950s relatively few of the working people in the Reserves have possessed livestock or actually worked the arable allotments (which have long been in short supply) at any given time. At the

time of a random survey of 10% of the households in Concordia and Komaggas in 1974, only just over one-third possessed any livestock at all, while fewer than fifteen percent had worked the land in the previous season (although 30% of the households in Concordia and 44% of those in Komaggas had paid the annual tax giving them exclusive use for that year of an arable allotment) (Sharp, 1977:113). Since it is true, however, that for working people in the Reserves participation in agriculture is in part a function of the phases of the household developmental cycle, one may be certain that a great many more individuals and households will possess livestock and fields at some time over the longer term.

But the situation differs from that described for Lesotho (Murray, 1976; 1981; Spiegel, 1979) in the sense that there is no general premium placed on attempting assiduously to 'build a house' over the long term by systematically investing the returns from migrant wage earnings in developing an agricultural base for a domestic group's security in the last phases of its developmental cycle. In Lesotho the only basis of security for working people in their old age lies in their command of scarce agricultural resources which function instrumentally to give them a hold over the young. In the Namaqualand Reserves however old people receive the civil old-age pension for 'Coloured' people (and experience no particular difficulty in securing receipt of it), so that communally-based Reserve agriculture is not invested with this particular significance.

Nonetheless, the working people in the Namaqualand Reserves form a specific segment of the regional working class, and the reasons for this do involve the opportunities for agricultural activities offered by the communal system in

the Reserves. But one needs to approach the significance of agriculture by examining the meaning attached by local people to the institution of Reserve membership or, as it is called in some areas, burgerskap.

The factor which sets people in the Reserves apart within the regional working class is their formal membership of the Reserve communities. This membership does not, of course, ensure that people will have ongoing security from agriculture as a source of income supplementing the returns from wage-earning; nor, as has been shown, does it impose on people the injunction to invest wage-earnings in building a basis of future security in agriculture. But it does ensure that all members of a Reserve have the right to keep animals or use available cultivable land should they choose to do so. And it is the fact that members have this right which is important in a situation where most wage-earning opportunities are insecure in the long run.

In the 1970s the major employers of labour from the Reserves were the mining, fishing and construction industries - all subject to frequent and violent fluctuations in their demand for labour (West, 1984). Many people had had, and expected to have, the experience of sudden retrenchment. In such a situation, people in the Reserves had the opportunity of hooking in to networks of reciprocity - networks which were often expressed in the idiom of kinship and affinity, but which were structured around the communal land tenure system and the practise of Reserve agriculture. An individual or domestic group, faced with a sudden crisis of unemployment, needed to be able to activate relationships of reciprocity quickly. What was necessary was not the actual possession of livestock, lands or implements at that given moment, but possession of the right to have these things at some time in the future.

In the last analysis, it was the right of community membership which provided the guarantee that a supplicant would be able to reciprocate the help of a benefactor should the tables be turned later.

This was the point which official thinking on the Reserves, including that of the Theron Commission, consistently missed: why, the stock question ran, should so many people who weren't even using the land at any given time persist in their enjoyment of untrammelled rights to do so in the future? But it was not simply that (the few members of the petty bourgeoisie aside) the function of agriculture was redistributive rather than merely productive, but also that agricultural activities provided a medium of reciprocity which allowed people to seek and give each other assistance without resort to the indignity of begging. 'Social reproduction' is as much about the maintenance of socially-accepted standards of humanity and dignity as it is about straightforward survival (Spiegel, 1982:44); and the system of community membership or burgerskap, operating through the practice of Reserve agriculture, provided a shield against the degradation of impoverishment.

IV: Responses to the proposals

In Komaggas Reserve, 80kms to the south-west of Springbok, the response to

7. The Commission of Enquiry into Matters relating to the Coloured Population Group, RP38/1976

the 1964 development proposals has taken the form of concerted and sustained resistance. As soon as action in terms of the proposals was threatened, the inhabitants of Komaggas voted out those members of their Board of Management (Raad) who had shown sympathy for the plans, and re-instated former Board-members who had recently completed a period of official banishment from local political office because of their persistent hostility to the Administration of Coloured Affairs.

When the Administration showed signs of attempting to circumvent the intractable Raad-members, the people began to take direct protest action against its local representative - the superintendent of the Reserve. On one notable occasion in the mid-1970s, when a team of bulldozers arrived unannounced in Komaggas to begin the task of constructing the planned village, several hundred women from the community marched together to the superintendent's office and barricaded him in it for the day. After several hours in which the women discussed the matter quietly with the police who had been summoned from Nababeep, the superintendent arranged for the workmen and their equipment to leave the Reserve and was allowed to go home (Sharp, 1977:271).

This was the most dramatic manifestation of the community's anger, but there was, in this period, a great deal of covert organisation of support and co-operation using forums which were ostensibly devoted to other purposes - the church, the burial society. Overt political gatherings, other than those organised by the superintendent or by recognised political parties, had been banned by the authorities in 1957 in an attempt to control disturbances surrounding the secession of people from the Dutch Reformed to the Calvin

Protestant Church - an event in which Komaggas people had also played the most prominent role (Erwee, 1970).

People made a concerted effort to demonstrate popular non-cooperation with the superintendent on every possible occasion; he was politely, but firmly and frequently, told that his presence in the Reserve was no longer wanted. White officials who came to Komaggas to explain the alleged benefits of the development schemes were either boycotted or listened to in stony silence. In the late 1970s the superintendent was withdrawn from the Reserve and posted to Steinkopf: he was, he said, heartily glad to leave because the people's stubbornness had made it impossible for him to accomplish anything in Komaggas and unpleasant for his family to live there. His post was left vacant, and a member of the Komaggas Raad, one who was implacably opposed to the development scheme, was elected chairman to fulfil some of the superintendent's functions.

Komaggas has been left to its own devices thus far in the 1980s. Officials (now of the Department of Internal Affairs) have restricted contact with the Reserve to a necessary minimum, which has meant not only that the development plans have fallen into abeyance, but also that the provision of services has become less efficient. The water supply has been subject to break-downs, the roads less well maintained. In the view of many Komaggas people a certain inefficiency is the price of maintaining their gemeenskap (community), and it is a price worth paying. The Komaggas Raad has remained resolute in its defence of the communal system: an offer from Kleinzee diamond mine to build houses in the village for some of its more than 200 workers from Komaggas was turned down, because the mining company wanted title to the land on which it

was to build.

In the other Namaqualand Reserves responses to the development proposals were neither so vehement nor so directly successful, although working people in Concordia and Leliefontein have benefited from the stand taken in Komaggas. There are several structural reasons for the particular response from Komaggas people. In Steinkopf Reserve, for instance, 26 'economic units', each between 6,000 and 9,000 ha. in size, have thus far been demarcated and leased to individual farmers: in an attempt to defuse protest from ordinary Steinkopf burgers, a further 30 units of variable size have been released as vennootskap plase (jointly-occupied farms). Any number of burgers can go into partnership to acquire such a farm: they are instructed as to the maximum carrying capacity of their land, and must agree amongst themselves about how to apportion the livestock quota. ⁹ Officials have had leeway to make this latter modification to the development plans because Steinkopf is a large Reserve (329,301ha.). Komaggas, on the other hand, is the smallest Namaqualand Reserve (62,603ha.) and its population density is greater than that of Steinkopf. All of Komaggas's commonage would disappear if even six or seven reasonably-sized economic units were surveyed and given out. In principle, of course, such a division could well have taken place were it not for certain social characteristics of the Komaggas population.

 8. Personal communication - the Chairman, Komaggas Board of Management, January 1983.

9. Personal communication - the Superintendent, Steinkopf Reserve, January 1983.

Firstly, Komaggas is relatively distant from any major source of employment except Kleinsee; all workers, save those who choose to leave the Reserve with their families, are therefore forced to be migrants (including those working at Kleinsee who must remain on mine property during the week for security reasons). Many who leave Komaggas for the duration of their working lives are in secure wage employment; almost all who remain domiciled in the Reserve and migrate to work find themselves limited to employment opportunities which are less secure - a two-way causal process operates here. And the more insecure their employment, the more weight workers and their dependants attach to the institution of local burgerskap and its associated shield against impoverishment.

This was clearly observable in Concordia Reserve in the early 1970s: Concordia is near to O'okiep and the heart of the copper district. Some of the OCC's most important mines at that stage were situated within Concordia Reserve. The OCC wrested the concession from the White Mine Workers Union that 'Coloured' workers could advance to the level of shift boss at mines within 'Rural Coloured Areas': many Concordia men got promotion, technical training and pay rises in this period. A trade union for 'Coloured' mineworkers started up with the OCC's blessing. The view grew, particularly in Concordia where a very high proportion of men were employed by the OCC, that copper mining constituted a career and that jobs in the industry were becoming relatively secure (Sharp, 1972). These beliefs have since been shattered by the OCC's programme of retrenchments in the late 1970s and 1980s, but were sufficiently strong in the early 1970s for numbers of working people in Concordia to begin to feel that involvement in a tightly-knit Reserve

community was becoming redundant: why even think of expending resources on agricultural activities and sustaining networks of reciprocity when these seemed unlikely to be necessary in future? Many Concordia people were unhappy about the possible implementation of the 1963 development plan, but the category of working people was much more fragmented than in Komaggas and a coherent response to the Act did not manifest itself.

Secondly, the category of the population which, for convenience, has been labelled the local 'petty bourgeoisie' was small in Komaggas - proportionately smaller than in some other Reserves. There were relatively few traders in Komaggas because of competition from the successful 'Co-op' shop (in which all the burgers had shares). The primary school had brought a number of outsiders into Komaggas as teachers; some had been there for many years and had married locally, but, with one exception, they had not been accepted as Komaggas burgers, precisely to prevent them investing their salaries in local businesses or agriculture. Most secure wage earners were living elsewhere to be nearer their places of employment: whether they would ever return to Komaggas in the future was uncertain. Those who were shopkeepers or had other small businesses were also, in the main, the largest stock-owners in the Reserve, but between them and the working population there were a great many cross-linkages which both sides regarded as important.

The degree of homogeneity of the population and lack of social distance between its two main categories were in sharp contrast to the situation in Reserves such as Steinkopf and Richtersveld. In Komaggas one-third of the population reckon that they are the lineal descendants of one man - the founder of the community in the early 19th century (Sharp, 1980). The

forebears of nearly everybody else can be related affinally to this one family, but a very dense network of kinship and affinity has developed amongst all members of the community over time. For many this network was invested with great practical and emotional significance during the course of the bitter struggle over religious freedom and community autonomy waged over a thirty year period.

The Rhenish Mission Church abandoned its Namaqualand parishioners in the 1930s, handing them over without proper consultation to the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (NGSK): for a variety of reasons many opposed this very strongly; and for a long time sought an external benefactor which was both powerful and unconnected with Afrikanerdom and the state. The Anglicans, Bishop Dunn, some prominent Cape Town communists were all approached to act in this role; the state responded by banishing from Komaggas some of those who made contact with the communists in the 1950s. Eventually when the people found the Calvin Protestant Church, a break-away from the NGSK, the government prohibited its leader, the Revd I.D. Morkel, from entering Komaggas (Erwee, 1970). Only after further bitterness was the Calvin Protestant Church allowed to begin its ministry in the Reserve and Namaqualand as a whole.

The church struggle split Komaggas, since some elected to remain with the NGSK, but the division was not seen by the people as being along family or class lines. Members of the petty bourgeoisie are more prominent in the NGSK simply because its parishioners in Komaggas are few in number, and people such as the current chairman of the Raad, who is a shopkeeper and livestock owner of consequence, are staunch members of the rival church. The latter's followers, moreover, include a large number of people who have been schooled

over a long period in the tactics of concerted opposition: they acquired experience as delegates from Komaggas to church leaders, politicians, lawyers elsewhere in the country, and over the last twenty years they have used their skills to orchestrate the response to the development plans.

In Steinkopf and the Richtersveld, on the other hand, people are split along ethnic lines in a way which reinforces material differentiation. There are no marked cultural differences amongst the populations of these Reserves, but there are groups which set themselves apart from each other by claiming or being assigned different historical origins. In each case, as Carstens (1966) and Boonzaier (1980) have argued for Steinkopf and Richtersveld respectively, these groups have cohered around the labels 'Nama' and 'Baster' which have been used to indicate Boorling (autochthonous) and Inkommer (settler) status, and have contested the relative standing of these statuses. The Richtersveld is a particularly interesting case, because the Inkommers arrived relatively recently (Boonzaier, 1984).

The people of the Bosluis congregation had existed for fifty years in a social limbo in the Bushmanland, where they were not accepted as White Afrikaners, but they arrived in the Richtersveld in 1949 with herds of livestock and other resources they had acquired while living on Crown land. This afforded them a distinct material advantage over the original inhabitants, who had suffered through the depression years in the Richtersveld. At present the Reserve is geographically split, with the two groups residing in different villages: most of the Boorlinge are working people, dependent on migrant wage remittances; many, although not all, of the Inkommers are relatively wealthy peasant pastoralists, and even those who are

currently migrant workers aspire to this independent life-style and may well inherit or be helped to acquire the means to adopt it in future. The Inkomers welcomed the development of economic units and have scrambled to acquire them; many of the Boorlinge looked on with resentment as their land was parcelled out amongst 'outsiders', but since the latter dominate the Reserve's political institutions, the response by the Boorlinge has been no more than a forlorn proposal that they be allowed to secede with half the Reserve.

IV: Conclusion

Ever since industrial development began in Namaqualand in the mid-19th century, most employment opportunities have been in primary, extractive industries - copper and diamond mining and fishing. The experience of working people in Namaqualand has therefore been that wage labour is a relatively insecure undertaking. Distinctions between jobs in the primary and secondary labour markets (Giddens) tend to be apparent at one particular time rather than real over the longer term: recent retrenchments of highly skilled personnel, and of both White and 'Coloured' workers, at the OCC, show that the boundary between the markets can shift rapidly upwards in the face of a falling copper price and technical difficulties.

The development proposals for the Namaqualand Reserves embodied in the 1963 Rural Coloured Areas Act took no account of this situation of insecurity. It

would be naive to suppose that this occurred simply by default: the Act was part of a much wider design - to establish the 'identity' of a whole 'population group' and to foster a middle class which would willingly bear this identity. The Act made provision for this middle class to gain a rural, agricultural dimension by opening access to the 1,7 million hectares of land locked up in the 23 'Coloured' Reserves in South Africa (Klinghardt, 1982:11). Insofar as the fate of working people in the Reserves was considered in the Act, it was supposed that, given the growth in work opportunities in Namaqualand in the 1960s and early '70s, they would have little difficulty in finding wage-employment and would, presumably, acquiesce in the final step in their proletarianisation.

For the twenty years since 1963, officials have consistently misinterpreted dissatisfaction in the Reserves with the development plans as the manifestation of an irrational desire by many to return to an era of generalised peasant agriculture (van der Horst, 1976:45). As has been shown above, however, working people have argued for the retention of a system which allows income derived from wage labour outside the Reserves to be redistributed between households in time of need in an institutionalised and dignified way. Relationships of reciprocity require a medium through which to operate: the right of access to agricultural resources served as such a medium in the Namaqualand Reserves. The 1963 proposals made people vulnerable to the demise of this medium for reciprocity; it rendered them, in other words, more vulnerable to impoverishment.

This paper examined the response by the people of Komaggas Reserve to this threat, and indicated that their determination contributed to an official

reappraisal whereby the development plans were dropped in relation to the smaller Namaqualand Reserves by the start of this decade. Without detracting from this achievement, it must, finally, be pointed out that their efforts succeeded in a wider context which became more favourable over time to the desired outcome. In the 1960s the government confidently advertised the immanent creation of a 'Coloured' volk; in the 1970s the government saw the position of the same people as a problem for future generations to solve. By the late 1970s control over the Reserves had passed from the Department of Coloured Affairs to the executive of the Coloured Persons Representative Council (CPRC). With the Labour Party newly in control of the executive, the latter was particularly sympathetic to popular protest against the designs of the Apartheid regime. These circumstances provided leeway for protests against the development plans to become effective.

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