

**"A nice little house down Mashu way - perhaps a little car one day":  
STATE, CAPITAL AND THE BUILDING OF KWA MASHU, 1947-1958**

by

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In the musical "Mkhumbane" which was staged in Durban in 1960, a woman rejects the advances of shanty-town men by saying she now has no need of such favours as she prefers the Kwa Mashu man: "the man from the Bantustan". As opposed to town men who "go to bed in their boots", she has the chance to go "down Mashu way" with "perhaps a little car one day".<sup>1</sup> This ditty, in a musical by Todd Matshikiza and Alan Paton, was intended to present the dilemma which faced ordinary Africans confronted by the destruction of their shanty towns and their removal to Kwa Mashu. The proletariat was rough, often drunken and violent and only sometimes married, but they were permanent residents of the city, whose "home" was their own community in Cato Manor, situated close to the industrial and commercial heart of Durban. From what Kwa Muhle said<sup>2</sup>, the houses in Kwa Mashu would be better than the often rudimentary shelters common in Cato Manor, but they were far from the city and to be a resident you had to marry and "become a proper civilized person"<sup>3</sup> living in a "location".<sup>4</sup> For the majority of Mkhumbane residents, the problems of making comparisons between the spatial location and housing standards of Mkhumbane and Kwa Mashu were compounded by their essential distrust of the various organizations engaged in developing Kwa Mashu. Khumalo, then a resident of Mkhumbane, recalls:

They would drive around in Mkhumbane telling everyone that you could buy houses in Kwa Mashu and that you could live by yourself and be happy. They had a car with a loudspeaker that drives around telling the women while you are at work. How could you believe that. You still did kaffir work.

Indeed, during the late 1950s the municipality had distributed pamphlets advertising the new township and hostel complex as allowing Africans to have a better and more permanent life in the city:<sup>5</sup> "we were trying to bring out the best in people and create better citizens". In defence of these assertions, municipal officials pointed to the success of the 1963 BATFAIR exhibition in Kwa Mashu, which was sponsored by local capital and was aimed to provide new residents with an idea of the range of household goods which could be acquired, mainly on hire purchase, to place in their new homes.<sup>6</sup> However, Kunene, then a resident of Kwa Mashu, recalls this trade fair in somewhat different terms:

We used to take our wives there. They had this big balloon in the sky - at the place next to the road at the entrance to the township. They used to give free Coke to everyone. And you could see how white man's liquor was made and taste beer without being arrested. All the children liked it, but you never bought. It was too expensive.<sup>7</sup> All these things in this house only came later.

Even to this day, township residents still recall their life in the shanty towns and compare this to township life as a way of understanding the meaning the destruction of the shanty towns and the building of new townships.<sup>8</sup> During the course of the 1980 Kwa Mashu school boycotts, this debate was to assume a rather convoluted but clearly generational dimension, with Kwa Mashu-born scholars accusing their parents of having been defeated through their very resettlement to Kwa Mashu.<sup>9</sup> The whole problem is best expressed by Selby Msimang, at that time a social worker and resident of Mkhumbane:

When people would come and take your house down, put you and your things on the lorry and tell you this is your new house - all in one day - you cannot believe how people talked about this. What was happening? Why did Kwa Muhle do this?<sup>12</sup>

For long it has been accepted that township and hostel facilities are essential institutions for the creation and maintenance of a "cheap" and subservient African labour force in the cities.<sup>13</sup> In 1974, Rex even went so far as to speculate that the effectiveness and durability of the structures of control over the residential and work-place activities of the urban African proletariat were such that "the revolution ... cannot follow the classic Marxist pattern of a revolution led by urbanized African workers".<sup>14</sup>

However, in addition to the many studies which have analysed the nature of urban African class conflict and revolt during the 1970s and 1980s, there have been numerous studies which have dealt with particular aspects of African city life in a way which requires a re-examination of the very nature of the massive township and hostel building programmes initiated during the 1950s and early 1960s. The implications of this work have a significant bearing on the reasons for the provision of these facilities, the nature of the housing structures eventually developed, and the determining influence which these structures exercised over the new residents.

Wilkinson has pointed to the crisis between labour and capital during the late 1940s occasioned by the continued growth of shack settlements in all the major cities in South Africa. Within this context, Wilkinson then analysed the manner in which state and capital were to reach basic agreement on principles which were to guide attempts to exercise increased control over the African proletariat.<sup>15</sup> Maylam has pointed to the structural contradictions which underlay the growth of shanty towns and the intractable problems inherent in the manner in which both state and capital attempted to curb the growth of shack settlements. Maylam emphasizes the manner in which the Durban City Council's response to the problems of shack growth in the period up to 1950 was couched essentially in terms of a concern for health and sanitation.<sup>16</sup>

While De Villiers was at pains to emphasize the congruent attitudes of both the Johannesburg municipality and the Union Government over approaches to alleviate the shack problem in Johannesburg,<sup>17</sup> both Wilkinson and Maylam have stressed that the problems raised by the African proletariat did not necessarily result in relations between capital and state being completely cordial. In his recent critique of the "cheap labour thesis", Hindson accepts the notion of a structural crisis during the later 1940s, partly evidenced in the massive growth of the urban African population. Hindson interprets the development of hostel and township facilities of the 1950s and 1960s as attempts by state and capital to create the mechanisms whereby the process of class differentiation within the urban African proletariat could be developed in manner suitable to both state and capital. Nevertheless, Hindson notes the importance of distinguishing between the intended aims of both state and capital and the structural features of African labour in the cities.<sup>18</sup>

Recently, there have been analyses of the African shanty-town population that thrived during the later 1940s. Various writers have pointed to the fact that the numerous shanty-town movements were often introverted, sectional and incapable of really making any real strategic gains against the then indecisive state.<sup>19</sup> Hendler has recently criticized work such as that by Wilkinson, in a manner which virtually downplays the existence of a crisis within the urban economy and argues that the township building programme of the period must be viewed within the context of the state's desire to boost the fortunes of various local industrial and manufacturing concerns.<sup>20</sup> Adding yet a further complexity, Kelly has shown that the cost of life in shanty towns need not necessarily be cheaper than that in formal townships and hostels.<sup>21</sup>

Such studies have torn some rather crucial holes in our understanding of the nature of the township development of the 1950s and early 1960s. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it was during this period that the two "lungs of Durban" were provided: Kwa Mashu to the north and Umlazi to the south. Between these two "labour

reserves" stretched the port and the ever-expanding industrial and commercial development along the main road and rail network to Pietermaritzburg.<sup>22</sup> The purpose of this paper is to analyse the nature of the debate between the Union Government, the Durban City Council, and local capital that was to result in particular housing facilities being developed in Kwa Mashu township.

The land eventually chosen for the development of Kwa Mashu lay approximately 11 miles north of the city, on an extensive portion of the 6343-acre Richmond and Zeekoei Vallei Farms. This area comprised nearly all the land bordered by the Umgeni River, the North Coast Road, the Inanda Road, and the South African Native Trust areas of Dalmeny, the Inanda Mission Reserve and Released Area 33. By far the greatest portion of this land comprised sugar plantations owned and cultivated by the Natal Estates sugar company.

This land had for long been viewed as suitable for African settlement. In 1946 the Union Government had recommended that part of the area could be developed as a formal township, with the remainder being used as a rural overflow from the already overpopulated African reserves nearby. In 1948 the Broome Commission also suggested that the area was suitable for the development of an urban African township that should be built contemporaneously with another African township to the south of Durban on the Umlazi Mission Reserve.

During the late 1940s the Durban City Council was, however, implacably against the provision of formal African housing to the north of the city and, furthermore, asserted that township facilities for African labour employed in the city should be provided by the Union Government on land situated outside the city. Within these areas, Africans could be given some political rights and allowed to control and administer themselves. However, by the early 1950s, through extreme pressure from the Union Government Department of Native Affairs, the City Council agreed to accept responsibility for the provision of African township and hostel facilities located within the city boundaries. The City Council and the local Chambers of Industry and Commerce now recommended that land should be acquired in the Richmond and Zeekoei Vallei Farm area. Under the City Council's Group Areas proposals, all Africans living in shanty towns in the city and employed north of Berea and Old Fort Roads would be settled on Richmond and Zeekoei Vallei Farms. Shanty-town residents employed south of this line would be resettled on the Umlazi Mission Reserve.

The City Council's plans to acquire land to the north of the city embraced two principles. Firstly, the development of a formal African township on a part of Richmond and Zeekoei Vallei Farms. Using the British New Town planning ideas, it was envisaged that this township would consist of 11 Neighbourhood Units, each consisting of 4 villages of 400 houses each. No hostel accommodation would be provided and the whole township was to be run on a home-ownership basis. Each Neighbourhood Unit would be connected to a main spinal road with no secondary roads connecting the various Neighbourhood Units to each other.

Each Neighbourhood Unit was to be provided with its own shops, community centre, school and recreation facilities. The essential idea was to break the township into a number of isolated and self-contained units. Furthermore, formal housing should be provided right away, with no gradual development from site and service shacks to formal family housing. Municipal officials noted that, in order to transform the lifestyles of the shanty-town residents, it would be pointless merely to relocate such persons and then allow a new shanty town to develop: "the sheer removal of shanty towns would not change their character".<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, the City Council, as part of its attempt eventually to halt the entry of Africans from areas far away from the city into Durban, desired to acquire the whole area of Newlands and Richmond and Zeekoei Vallei Farms. While the topography of much of this massive area of land was unsuitable for development of formal township housing, the area could be used to bolster up African rural productivity and create an African labour force which would in effect be migrating within the city from rural villages to wage employment. The area would have "a number of more or less independent villages" providing for African settlement "in

gradation from rural and tribal to urban and detribalized". Explaining the benefits of this approach, the Manager of the municipal Native Administration Department noted:

Native life in individual villages separated from one another by wide green belts will certainly be more conducive to healthy and peaceful development and will be more readily administered than a large unbroken city area.<sup>24</sup>

These policies accorded well with the Union Government's desire to relocate urban Africans to formal housing located on the outskirts of the city on land adjoining African reserves. Verwoerd intimated that, once the City Council acquired all the land and started building the township, the Union Government would commence the development of a formal township on the Umlazi Mission Reserve and resettle rural producers living under freehold tenure on the Umlazi Mission Reserve upon the rural, non-freehold villages on municipal land to the north of the city. It was anticipated that development would commence in April 1954 and both the City Council and the Union Government appeared optimistic. However, in the course of negotiations over the project, various crises and contradictions were to develop and result in the basic principles of the development scheme being altered in various crucial ways.

The municipality had for long upheld the principle that all land acquired for the provision of facilities for urban Africans should not be bought in terms of the Native Urban Areas legislation. This legislation should only be used to provide the houses and sanction African residence in a particular area. The land itself should be purchased by the municipality through its own Public Improvement Fund, or by means of loans raised on the open market. As owner of the land, the local authority would then be responsible for the provision of essential services to the area.

The advantages for the municipality were twofold. If the land was later utilized for non-African purposes, the City Council would be able to profit from the sale of that land at market prices calculated at the period of sale. Secondly, while the land was utilized for African purposes, the City Council, as owners of the land, rented the property out to the Native Revenue Account. This rental was calculated on the basis of the municipal valuation of the land and all the buildings. For the services which the municipality provided, the Native Revenue Account paid rates based on the market valuation of the land and all the buildings. This market valuation was always significantly higher than the municipal Valuation Roll Estimates. This policy, unique to Durban, was merely one of the ways whereby the municipality was able to "milk the Native Revenue Account dry".<sup>25</sup>

When the idea of the municipality acquiring land to the north of the city was raised, municipal officials had agreed that the greatest obstacle would be the attitude of Natal Estates. Initially, Natal Estates were in fact not interested in any negotiation, but then reluctantly offered to negotiate. In these negotiations Natal Estates was in an extremely powerful position, as they already had access to all the municipal documents relating to the scheme, knew that the City Council required the land urgently, and, most importantly, were aware that the City Council did not desire to acquire the land in terms of the Native Urban Areas Act legislation.

Negotiation between the City Council and Natal Estates were to begin in 1952 but Natal Estates were to succeed in dragging negotiations out until September 1956, when agreement was finally reached through the Union Government threatening to expropriate the land on behalf of the City Council. At Verwoerd's insistence, the final terms of sale included no clauses that would disallow the South African Native Trust from later acquiring the township. The total purchase price of all the land, including that owned by Natal Estates for the development of Kwa Mashu township, was £900,000. While the Union Government granted the City Council a special allocation from the National Housing Commission to purchase the land, the high cost of the land was to place an extremely high financial burden on the African residents of the

township. Furthermore, the land actually purchased was only sufficient to develop the township and did not include the larger area which had been intended for rural village schemes.

While the process of land acquisition continued, representatives of local capital, the City Council and the Union Government were engaged in often acrimonious discussions over the types of facilities which should be provided in Kwa Mashu. As a result of the central role which the site and service principle occupied within the Union Government's rather desperate attempts to control the urban African labour force, Verwoerd assumed near total control of all negotiations involving African urban housing. The Department of Native Affairs, which by now had gained increasing power within the state at the expense of the Department of Health, viewed its task as that of curbing the provision of funds for formal African housing, transforming sub-economic schemes into fully economic schemes and in forcing local authorities to develop site and service projects.

According to the Department of Native Affairs, all sites in Kwa Mashu were to be levelled but left with earth floors. On every alternate site, Africans were to erect their own dwellings at the side of the site so that these dwellings would not interfere with the building of permanent houses at a later date. Such Africans should be assisted by a £35 economic loan from the Native Revenue Account, which should be paid back over five years. On the remaining sites, the municipality was to erect temporary one-roomed dwellings whose value should not exceed £35. These dwellings should be built in such a way that they could later be demolished and the materials reused in the erection of permanent housing. Additional rooms could be provided by the tenant, providing that they accorded with housing standards. No Native Revenue Account loans would be available for such additions. The municipality should control this single site, single tenant project so as to prevent it from becoming another shanty town.

Formal housing would only be provided once funds were available, all sites had been occupied, and tenants were capable of paying economic rentals. However, even then formal houses would only be provided on every second or third site. This, it was believed, would "give a favourable impression to the scheme" and encourage other tenants to build formal houses without the use of state funds.<sup>26</sup> During the site and service period of the scheme, Native Services Levy funds could be used to provide roads to the township and even finance the tarring of particular roads inside the township. Under normal situations, the responsibility of providing basic services inside the township would have been that of the municipality as owners of the land, but, owing to the hilly nature of the land, the Department of Native Affairs agreed to make this case an exception. However, the Department of Native Affairs insisted that during the site and service period no water-borne sewerage facilities should be provided. Furthermore, they virtually warned the City Council that no funds from the Native Services Levy would be available for financing internal services in Kwa Mashu unless the township was developed according to site and service principles.

By 1956, the municipality had completed intensive investigations into the soil conditions and topographical features of the new township, and had toured the African housing projects being undertaken in other parts of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. With this information the City Council became even more reluctant to even consider a site and service development. They maintained that site and service schemes rapidly developed into shanty towns, despite every effort by local authorities, and that once such a project was undertaken it was extremely difficult for the local authority to get state funds to provide better housing. In addition, conditions within the African shanty towns in Cato Manor made the municipality insistent that the basic structure of life in the shanty towns should be destroyed. In 1953 the municipality had developed an Emergency Camp in part of the Cato Manor area in an attempt to control the population. Essential facilities were provided and many of the shack clusters demolished and replaced by single site, single dwelling accommodation. However, by 1956 even the Emergency Camp had reverted back to being a shanty town sprawl, accommodating a population increasingly violent and assertive in proclaiming their refusal to move to Kwa Mashu.

Furthermore, the land intended for township development was unsuitable for the successful application of orthodox site and service principles. The hilly terrain, the clay soil, and the Lower Ecca Shale geological formation did not provide the required natural drainage. The area was also subject to seasonal flooding, and it was anticipated that, as a result of the cessation of cane cultivation, further drainage problems would result. The City and Water Engineer also pointed out that the costs of providing formal houses on every second or third site was substantially greater than the costs of providing immediate formal housing on all sites.

As a result of these constraints, the City Council reaffirmed its decision that Kwa Mashu should be developed as a formal housing township and instructed the City and Water Engineer to start a Native Housing Construction Section and train African building workers in terms of the Native Building Workers Act.

In the ensuing conflict between the City Council and the Department of Native Affairs, local capital was to side with the City Council. Local employers had for long voiced concern about the increasingly serious social and political conditions in the Cato Manor shanty towns and desired the provision of immediate permanent housing. This hiatus was to be exacerbated by the fact that all parties came to realise that the types of accommodation desired by the municipality would cost far more than the vast majority of the intended African residents could afford either to buy or rent at economic rates.

In 1958 it was estimated that approximately 75 per cent of the African male workers resident in Cato Manor were employed at the lowest levels of unskilled work. The majority of these persons earned less than £12 a month. This situation was compounded by the fact that the Cato Manor shanty towns had a higher proportion of African women per male inhabitant than did any other African area in the city. With the almost complete lack of any industrial and commercial employment for African women, the majority of these women either worked in the badly paid domestic sector or conducted lucrative but illegal petty entrepreneurial activities. Such enterprises would be forbidden in Kwa Mashu.

Commenting upon the position, which nearly compelled all parties to abandon any developments in the Richmond and Zeekoei Valley area, the Manager of the municipal Native Administration Department noted:

It would appear that while the average householder could afford combined rentals of up to say £2.5s a month any increase beyond that limit must be regarded as imposing severe or even unbearable burdens.

Faced with this deadlock and the increasingly explosive situation in the Cato Manor shanty towns, state and capital became ever more closely involved in producing a revised plan for the township. According to this revised plan, four types of permanent housing were to be allowed. Africans wealthy enough and willing to build their own houses would be allocated 4,500 square foot plots for a site rental and rate payment cost of £3.19s.9d per month. Plans would have to be approved by the municipality, who could offer economic loans of up to £250 per applicant. In the eight Neighbourhood Units now set aside for African family accommodation, the municipality and, eventually, after strong calls from the Chamber of Industries and the Master Builders and Allied Trades Association, the building industry would provide detached and semi-detached four-room houses and detached two-room houses.

The Union Government agreed to set aside sufficient capital. All the housing would be provided immediately before any resettlement took place. All the houses were to be provided with full standard water-borne sewerage and metered water facilities. The Union Government agreed that the costs of the project could be reduced by allowing the costs of water-borne sewerage development to be financed by the Native Services Levy. However, the housing development was to be funded by the Union Government economic loans. Thus, as a result of the fact that rentals were still between £3.6.3. and £2.16.5. per month, the Native Revenue Account was obligated to assist the majority of residents in paying for the accommodation. In order to hasten the pace of resettlement from Cato Manor, the municipality set up a temporary log cabin camp in Kwa Mashu and set aside a Neighbourhood Unit for site and

service development. The two Neighbourhood Units for African male hostels would accommodate 25,000 persons living in single-storey cottages, each comprising four two-roomed, four-bed flatlets. Inmates would pay an economic rental of £1 per month.

By late 1958, 13,000 houses had been constructed, 750 of which were occupied. The majority of these people had volunteered to move to Kwa Mashu and were willing to buy their houses. They were settled in the then only home ownership section: "E" Section. Transport to and from the township was provided by Putco bus company and by a new railway line into the township. Medical and school facilities were meagre and there was a near total absence of any proper recreational facilities outside of the male hostel area. By the mid-1960s, Cato Manor was finally cleared of all African residents, who were now living either in Kwa Mashu or the Umlazi township, which was developed in the early 1960s. From the time when all the building developments were complete up until the Kwa Zulu Government took over administration of the township, the City Council were continually attempting to sell the township back to the central state as a way of divesting itself of responsibility for the area.

In conclusion, it is necessary to raise certain analytical points within the context of the details provided. Firstly, it is clear that there was a crisis within Durban society caused by the massive and uncontrolled growth of shack settlements in the city. These shanty towns were not only unsanitary and thereby posing health problems within the African labour force and for the city as a whole, but these shack settlements sustained a type of life-style which was inimical to the interests of both state and capital. While the shanty towns allowed for the reproduction of a large portion of the city's African labour force, they were volatile areas where respect for the work ethic and the state's coercive apparatus were not accepted uncritically. Nevertheless, they did house that very segment of the urban African work force which both state and capital desired to mould into a permanently urbanized African working class living on the outskirts of the city, close to African reserves.

However, in moving these people to new townships and in destroying the basic fabric of communal shack life, both state and capital raised up a host of contradictions. Firstly, although the vast majority of the new residents in Kwa Mashu were unskilled labourers, capital was forced to raise the direct wage packet of all African wages in order to assist persons to live in the new township. This increase was over and above its financial payments to subsidize facilities and transport required for the township. The increase in African wages brought no commensurate increase in the buying power of this labour force. Secondly, although both state and capital had been concerned about health conditions in the shanty towns, the failure to provide more than basic health facilities in the township merely perpetuated the problem, which grew more severe as residents were forced to pay increasing amounts of their wages for accommodation and transport. Thirdly, as a result of the costs of acquiring the land, developing essential services and subsidizing rents, neither the municipal Native Revenue Account nor the local Native Services Levy Fund was in a position to meet its obligation towards the remaining African population of the city.

Finally, with regard to political expression among the new residents of Kwa Mashu, during the period of extensive negotiation over the intended township both the African National Congress and the South African Congress of Trade Unions had established extremely powerful and militant branches in Cato Manor. In what is perhaps a unique situation, while the pattern of removal to Kwa Mashu was undertaken with a view to breaking up old communities, both of these organizations were to establish their power in Kwa Mashu right from the outset.

\* The basic evidence from which this paper is derived comes from the Natal Estates Archive and the microfilmed archives of the municipal Native Administration Department, which are located at the Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of Natal, Durban.

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- 1 "Mkhumbane", Gallotone. 1960.
- 2 African name for the Municipal Native Administration Department.
- 3 C D S Mbutho Papers; volume 3, interview 4.
- 4 Generic name amongst Africans to refer to any formal housing scheme.
- 5 Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 13 June 1985.
- 6 S B Bourquin Papers.
- 7 Interview with Mr S B Bourquin, 8 September 1980.
- 8 Batfair Bulletin, Vol 1, No 4 (June 1963).
- 9 Interview with Mr M O D Kunene, 27 June 1985.
- 10 Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 13 April 1981.
- 11 Interview with Mr R G Wilson, 23 January 1981.
- 12 Interview with Mr S Selby, 14 January 1981.
- 13 See D Hinson, Pass Controls and the Urban African Proletariat (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1987), for a review on such literature.
- 14 J Rex, "The Compound, the Reserve and the Urban Location: the essential institutions of southern African labour exploitation", South African Labour Bulletin, Vol 1, No 4 (July 1974).
- 15 P Wilkinson, "A Place to Live: the resolution of the African housing crisis in Johannesburg, 1944-1954", African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, July 1981.
- 16 P Maylam, "The 'Black Belt': African squatters in Durban, 1935-1950", Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol 17, No 3 (1983).
- 17 R de Villiers, "The State, the Johannesburg Municipality and the Reserve Levy", History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, February 1978.
- 18 Hindson, Pass Controls, chapter 1.
- 19 See, for example, P Bonner, "Siyawugogha, Siyawugubholo, Umbhlaba ka Maspula: popular struggles in Benoni, 1944-1952", African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, October 1985.
- 20 P Hendler, "The Interweaving of Social Reproduction and Capital Accumulation in the Making of Soweto", History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, February 1987.
- 21 J Kelly, "Durban's Industrialization, Unskilled Labour Supplies and Proletarianization, 1920-1950", University of Natal, Durban, seminar series, August 1987.
- 22 Interview with Mr S B Bourquin, 8 September 1980.
- 23 Municipal Native Administration Department, Cato Manor Housing and Planning,

- Vol i, Manager-Town Clerk, 14 July 1949.
- 24 Municipal Native Administration Department, Kwa Mashu Housing and Planning, Vol i, Personal Memo, S B Bourquin - Councillor A L Barnes, 21 October 1952.
- 25 Interview with Mr S B Bourquin, 6 November 1980.
- 26 Municipal Native Administration Department, Kwa Mashu Housing and Planning, Vol 4, Memo, Union Government Department of Native Affairs "Site and Services Schemes", 21 January 1957.
- 27 Municipal Native Administration Department, Housing/General, Vol 1, Manager - Town Clerk, 9 November 1957.