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Banishment: Germiston's answer to opposition in Natalspruit Location, 1955-1957.

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PRETORIUS

It is not by banishment and deportation that peace can be secured. 1

· INTRODUCTION

In line with its apartheid policy the South African government has, ion numerous occasions, constituted quasi-autonomous institutions run by Blacks in their 'own' areas. Notable examples are the man Location Advisory Boards established, throughout the country, as decision-making bodies within Black townships. One of these Boards, the one in Natalspruit, Germiston, is the subject of this paper. More specifically it will focus on the relationship between the Germiston City Council, the Natalspruit Location Advisory Board and the $\Lambda.N.C.$ in connection with the Council's attempted banishment of community leaders in the mid-1950s. Attention will centre upon the legislation and procedure adopted by the Council in attempting to negate the disruption of its administration by A.N.C. members of the Advisory Board. The intention being to contribute to the history of the A.N.C. and of political conflict on the East kand. A broader objective is to show how a legislated nestitution's autonomy can be reduced or increased by local or central government, depending on the composition of the institution.

OUTLINE OF LEGISLATION

** Prior to 1956 urban local authorities could petition the Governor-General for the removal of Black 'agitators' under a provision of the Native Administration Act. This allowed the Governor-General, sacting 'in the general public interest', to order the removal of any black people from any one place to another within the Union. If the afrected

people objected to displacement, the order could not be carried out unless ratified by both Houses of Parliament. After the Act was amended in 1952 and 1956, the Governor-General was able to order a person's banishment without any prior notice being given to anyone. Such banishment was intended to be extremely strict. The affected people could not leave the place to which they had been banished nor could they return to the area from which they had been removed. In addition if a person to whom an order had been issued could not receive it in person, then it was sufficient to leave a copy with someone living at his or her residence or to attach a copy to a conspicuous place at the last known address. Unless the contrary was proved the order was deemed to have been served. A 'Native' could also be provided with a written statement setting forth the Governor-General's reasons for the order. Only information which was not a threat to 'public interest' could be disclosed.

Beginning in 1956 the Department of Native Affairs called on all urban local authorities to effect banishment in terms of the Natives (Urban Areas) Amendment Act arther than in terms of the Native Administration Act. The old measure had proved too cumbersome with deportation being subject delay especially if a person appealed for a review of a banishment The 1956 Act was promulgated with the aim of streamlining the process of removal. It was now possible for urban local authorities themselves to 'effectively deal with' Blacks who could legally remain in an urban or proclaimed area, but whose presence in the area was, in the opinion of the urban local authority concerned, detrimental to the 'maintenance of peace and order'. The section was designed to deal with 'agitators', whose activities made the maintenance of peace and order 'extremely difficult'. 10 Local authorities, who were already able to determine whether a person be allowed to remain in their areas for more than 72 hours, were further empowered to order any 'undesirable elements' to leave their areas. 11 The rationale was that a 'Native' banished from a particular area would still be able to move about and seek employment elsewhere, and was not restricted to a particular locality. Consequently, the Department stated that they would no longer process applications to the Governor-General for removal made by local authorities. 12 The Council did not have to wait for the central government to issue an order of banishment but could carry it out almost immediately. The person was nonetheless still subject to compliance with other legal requirements of general application. For instance permission had to be obtained to reside in another area from the relevant Native Commissioner. The person's previous record of 'agitation' would, no doubt, be taken into account, even though a local authority was not permitted to endorse in a reference book the fact that the holder had been ordered to depart from its area. Likewise, local authorities were urged not to circularise one another if and when a banishment order had been made. As the Department of Native Affairs stated, the intention was that banished people should be given "every possible opportunity" to mend their ways". 13

In making a decision about banishment, a full Town Council and not an official or sub-committee of the Council, had to decide whether a person's presence and actions disrupted the daily administration of its 'Native' Location. It could only carry out banishment from the settlement over which it had jurisdiction to register Blacks. The legislation was not entirely unjust. In accordance with the maxim of 'hearing the other side of the story' the banished person had to be allowed the opportunity to reply to any allegations. The catch was that the local authority could decide as to the form of representation to be made. A person could not appeal to Parliament to review an order of banishment. The only avenue open to appeal was that if the person disobeyed the order and was subsequently charged and convicted, he or she might be given leave to appeal. Only then could the Supreme Court be asked to review the action. An order could only be reversed if it could be proved that a local

authority had acted arbitrarily, with ill intent, unreasonably or had exceeded its jurisdiction. 14

The overall picture is that although prior to 1956 legislation did exist for the banishing of 'Native agitators', the final decision to issue an order lay with the central government. This meant that the local authority had to petition for a removal order after which the Governor-General, in consultation with the Ministers of Justice and Native Affairs, could issue the order. Further delay could be caused if the affected person appealed to Parliament. In order to streamline and make the banishment process more effective it was decided, in 1956, to give local authorities the necessary power to unilaterally remove activists. The affected person could, thereafter, only hold out hope for an impartial legal judgement, although even then only after he or she had been convicted.

BANISHMENT OF 'NATIVE AGITATORS'

In 1952 the Ministers of Justice and of Native Affairs and the Executive Committees of the four Provincial Municipal Associations met to discuss the 'Defiance Campaign' and the course of action urban local authorities could take in reaction to it. At the gathering the Minister of Justice pointed out that provision existed in the Natives Administration Act to remove 'agitators and undesirable elements' from urban areas to another place if this was in the 'public interest'. Consequently, numerous urban local authorities petitioned the Department of Native Affairs for the removal of Africans from their respective areas. No action was forthcoming from the Department in response to Germiston's petition in 1955. Later, once legislation had been promulgated enabling the local authority itself to order the removal of people from its area, the Germiston City Council attempted to banish four Natalspruit Location

leaders. The direct cause was the political activism which arose due to the social and political conditions within Natalspruit Location.

A great majority of the people had, since the 1940s, been moved to Natalspruit from the old Germiston Location or 'Dukathole', as it was known. 17 This meant that workers were forced to leave home at inconvenient hours and travel a much greater distance to work in Germiston at vastly increased cost. 18 Furthermore, the Council licensed approximately twenty taxis as an alternative to public transport. These taxis were operated both by members of the Natalspruit Location Advisory Board elected prior to October 1955, and by their supporters. Community leaders appealed in vain to the Council to licence more taxis because of the exorbitant rates charged. 19 Consequently taxis and Nunicipal buses were boycotted in October and November 1955 with the result that a vast number of 'pirate' taxis were put into operation. 20

Exacerbating the situation, the Council continually increased rents at its economic, sub-economic and 'site-and-service' housing schemes.²¹ The revenue thus derived was used to cover the costs of both the removal from Dukathole and of supplying (inadequate) housing. This precipitated a rent boycott during 1955.²²

Germiston, as with other towns on the East Rand, has a long history of political turmoil, and given that the overall South African situation was, during the 1950s, extremely turbulent, 21 the conditions in Germiston should, therefore be seen, not only in the context of local but national politics as well. The high rate of activism in Natalspruit (and Dukathole) was not unrelated to, for example, the 'Defiance Campaign' and general opposition to apartheid. The imposition of Bantu Education, for instance, gave rise to widespread protest throughout the country, not least in Natalspruit where the A.N.C. set up their own schools. 24

These factors, plus the authoritarian and intransigent attitude of the Council meant that five of the six members elected to the Advisory Board in October 1955 belonged to the A.N.C.²⁵ In contrast to the earlier Board members, Phillip Mofokeng, Timothy Rampai, Onius Ngwenya, and Christopher Mkwanazi no longer acceded to the Council's every demand. It was hardly surprising that the Germiston City Council felt that its authority, and thus the status quo, was being undermined. Rather than alleviate the underlying conditions giving rise to the protest they decided to remove the leaders instead. The case against a fifth person, Peter Bellington Ngomezulu, was withdrawn by the Council because he did not stand for re-election to the Advisory Board and did not take part in A.N.C. activities after January 1956. The Manager of Native Affairs in reply to a question by a Councillor said that the case against Ngomezulu was rather complicated. He was the owner of property in Natalspruit "whilst the other agitators were men of straw". 26

The charges against the four A.N.C. members of the Location Advisory Board were that they had on various occasions instigated, or participated in, acts of violence against residents in the Location, and had caused damage to public and private property. Furthermore, they were said to have organised various boycotts of licensed taxis, the Municipal bus service, rents, and of schools after the imposition of Verwoerd's Bantu Education Act in 1955. Not least serious was the unwritten charge made by the Manager of Native Affairs. After the October 1955 election, he complained that the Board became solely a political organisation which was not prepared to work with the Administration. Their attitude, he said, was "Africa for the Africans! Away with the whites!"²⁷

In addition the Council also alleged that they had been involved in extortion In order to cover legal costs in connection with the boycotts and people arrested for 'public disorder', residents were said to have paid either voluntarily or under compulsion 2/6 per month. The Manager

pointed out that the four accumulated more money every time the Council increased rents, announced malt regulations or prosecuted for illegal trading. The result, he said, remained the same: "Pay or leave yourself open to violence!". 28 He queried, as well, the final destination of all the money, alleging that the chief instigator, Rampai, "a man who does not earn much", had bought himself "a Hudson car". 25

That Rampai and the others may have gained materially from their activities is suggested by a statement supposedly made by Ngwenya to the effect that Rampai "is not fair to the Africans" because he bought a car. Ngwenya also noted that after being elected, Masinyane, an A.N.C. member of the Advisory Board, had bought a shop. It was possible that friction existed between the Board members, perhaps brought about by jealousy. Ngwenya, for instance, claimed that he was "the only man who has not got anything". The Manager of Native Affairs also alleged that a number of the 'pirate' taxis put into operation during the taxi and bus boycott were operated by the newly elected Advisory Board Members and by their supporters. 30

The final accusation levelled at the four by the Germiston City Council was that they formed a so-called 'Civic Guard', in December of 1955. According to the Manager of Native Affairs, this boiled down to hundreds of "young tsotsies wearing a witdoek on their head", armed with 'kieries', axes and other weapons' grouping together and patrolling the Location, supported by prominent A.N.C. leaders and followers. Residents were apparently forced to join the groups or run the risk of being assaulted and having their houses damaged. There was also a campaign of violence against the single non-A.N.C. member of the Advisory Board and his supporters. They in turn retaliated with the help of the so-called 'Russians', a Reef gang probably brought in from outside the Germiston area.²¹

Having devised its charges the Germiston Council resolved, after receiving legal advice from Advocate B.J. Vorster. 12 to give the four men the opportunity to make representations to the Council. The motive was not mere charity for, if the opportunity was not given, any subsequent appeal against a conviction for failing to obey a banishment order would probably be reversed by the Supreme Court. In September 1956 notices were issued to Rampai, Ngwenya, Mofokeng and Mkwanazi informing them that they must depart from the Germiston area because they were a disruptive influence in Natalspruit Location. They were given nine days in which to to make written representation in respect of the allegations and to argue why they should not be evicted. 31 Attorneys Mandela and Tambo were appointed to represent the four men. They began their task by stating that their clients could not deal adequately with allegations which were framed very broadly and lacked specific detail. They went further to outline numerous particulars the Council needed to supply in order that their clients might state their position more clearly. They then applied for an extension of the time limit for further representations. 34

The issuing of these orders gave rise to an upsurge of protest in Natalspruit Location. The Kathlehong Women's League, of which, Rampai's wife was chairperson, threatened to march to the City Hall in mass protest about the banishment orders which hung over their elected leaders. The League also refuted the City Council's allegations against the four men. and demanded that the orders be rescinded. They said that the four had been faithfully dedicated in service of the community for years. It was true, they stated, that the men were indeed opposed to the "reactionary and unchristian policy of the Nationalist Government which seeks to suppress and exploit the African people (and) that (the) Council has taken this drastic step in order to defend and protect the policy of apartheid and baaskap". The League went on to argue that South Africans could not be deceived by a Council which "elects to talk of peace and order, but, in fact, thinks purely in terms of preserving a reactionary

rule of a white minority which the people of South Africa will fight and resist to the bitter end". 30 A request by the League for a deputation to interview the Mayor was turned down by the Council. 30 Similarly, representation was made by the Natalspruit Ward B Committee members on behalf of their Advisory Board representative, Ngwenya, 40 and by the Natalspruit Ward A Committee on behalf of their representative, Rampai, 41 protesting the banishment orders.

The Council, in reply to Mandela and Tambo's request for more detailed charges, outlined numerous acts the four men were alleged to have committed in Natalspruit during 1955 and 1956. The allegations are too numerous to enumerate here. Suffice it to say that they included Rampai describing the Location Superintendent as a 'barbarious Dutchman', Ngwenya burning a bag containing notification to residents of a rent increase and Mofokeng saying that the new administrative building should be burnt down.⁴²

After some delay and granting of further extensions Mandela and Tambo finally replied on behalf of their clients. In all instances the four accused argued that their actions had been in the best interests of their constituents. Mandela and Tambo went on to state in reference to the three Advisory Board members (Ngwenya, Mofokeng and Rampai) that their clients never regarded themselves as administrative officials whose duty it was to carry out every suggestion and policy proposed by the authorities. They argued that it was absurd of the Council to consider it the duty of an Advisory Board member to become a 'rubber stamp'. Clerks rather than elected officials, could be hired to endorse the policy and demands of the local authority and its officials. Nkwanazi, they pointed out, was chairman of the Natalspruit Branch of the African National Congress and had never regarded himself as an agent of the Council. On the contrary, he had always regarded it as his duty to voice, in a peaceful and

non-violent manner, what he considered to be the best interests of the people of Natalspruit.**

The Attorneys asked the Council to supply more information regarding the allegations and that their clients be allowed to address a meeting of the Council. *5 The latter upon obtaining legal counsel *6 informed the four men's attorneys that their clients never had a right to a hearing at all, let alone to be furnished with particulars. They also felt that no purpose would be served by any of the men or their attorneys addressing the Council. They were allowed another extension of time to make any further comments in writing. Mandela and Tambo, however, did not reply to the Council.*7

At a special meeting to resolve the issue, the Germiston Council decided to call on the Manager of Native Affairs to carry out the banishment orders. This meeting was not without controversy. Four of the Councillors walked out after failing to get the meeting postponed indefinitely. The Councillor who put forward the proposal, together with the remaining Councillors, voted for the issuing of the banishment orders. This was after the Manager of Native Affairs assured the meeting that the affected men would be able to appeal against the orders. The notices containing the orders were, in turn, handed over to each of the men in November 1956.

OUTCOME OF CASE

All four of the men ignored the banishment orders. They were duly arrested, but were released on bail. In a test case, Ngwenya was convicted in December 1956 and sentenced to 10 days in prison without the option of a fine. Upon his release, a police officer had to ensure that he was removed from the Germiston area. Ngwenya was, upon application, granted

leave to appeal against both the conviction and sentence, and released on bail provided that he did not speak at any meetings other than those of the Natalspruit Advisory Board. 50

The test case decided, the Council resolved not to proceed with the cases against the other three accused until after the appeal had been heard. In February 1957 the Supreme Court set aside the conviction and sentence on a technicality: the defence had argued successfully that the charges were ambiguous. All four were then again charged with the same offence and the charges amended. In May 1957 they again appeared in court, and, as before, the case was only proceeded with against one of the accused, on this occasion Rampai. He was also found guilty but his sentence was three weeks in prison. Upon release he too was to be escorted out of the Germiston area. Like Ngwenya before him, Rampai appealed against both conviction and sentence and was, together with the others, released on bail and prevented from speaking at official meetings. 51

The Supreme Court's judgement on the appeal later that year, went against the Council. Rampai's conviction and sentence were set aside and by implication, charges against the other men were dropped. The Supreme Court's decision rested on the Council having "misunderstood the legislation which it was administering". 52 The objection was that the Germiston City Council could not allow the men to appeal against the order until they had been convicted on a charge of disobeying the order. The Manager of Native Affairs was said to have misled the Councillors at the special meeting held to resolve the issue. 51 Council brought no further charges against either of the men, because as it was reported, the men 'behaved' themselves since the outcome of the case. If their 'behaviour should worsen' the necessary steps would have been taken against them. 54 It seems that the Council as a result of its actions succeeded in negating the four men's political activities. It is difficult, however, to

ascertain whether the men continued as Advisory Board members or resigned themselves to Location life and worsening conditions.

CONCLUSION

This paper has described a little known case of political conflict between Germiston City Council and the A.N.C. during the mid-1950s. Residents of Natalspruit Location, Germiston, elected five African National Congress (A.N.C.) members onto the Location Advisory Board. This was to a large extent influenced by the social, political and economic conditions that predominated at the time. The Board members refused to comply with any whim of the Germiston City Council, under whose jurisdiction they fell. The Council reacted by attempting to banish three of the Board members, and the chairperson of the Natalspruit Branch of the A.N.C. They based their argument on the grounds that the men's presence in the proclaimed area of Germiston was a threat to the maintenance of 'peace and order'. In countering the Council's accusations the four men pointed out that their actions were solely in the interest of the people of Natalspruit. They were also not prepared to carry out anything demanded of them by either local or central government. The City Council's reaction was alleviated by the Government's streamlining of the relevant legislation. The only means then left to the four men after being convicted was recourse to the courts of law.

In addition to documenting a slice of South Africa's political history this study serves to highlight the manner in which central government has ensured the sub-ordination of 'self-governing' institutions. In this instance, the Natalspruit Location Advisory Board. The members of the local Branch of the A.N.C. proceeded to undermine the authority of the Germiston City Council after assuming control of the Natalspruit Location Advisory Board. The Board's relative autonomy was then reduced through

the Council's attempt at deporting the affected people. This is not the first situation whereby the state has attempted to enforce the sub-ordination of Black people. There are numerous examples of this happening throughout South Africa's history. Prime examples being the Bantustans and the various Black, 'Coloured' and Indian Local Authorities. Very recently P.W.Botha said in Parliament that if the Black people do not accept the Local Authorities the Government will 'convince' them into accepting the Authorities. The increasing political conflict over the past thirty years has vindicated the view that peace cannot be secured through banishment and deportation.

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- (1) Transvaal Archives Depot (Pretoria) (henceforth, TAD), Archives of the Germiston Town Clerk (henceforth, GTC), Box 409 (42/7/2 Vol. 1)

 1952-1956 (henceforth, GTC1) and Box 409 (42/7/2 Vol. 2) 1956-1957

 (henceforth, GTC2); Letter from the Secretary, Natalspruit Branch of the A.N.C. to the Town Clerk, o November 1956.
- (2) TAD, GTC1: Department of Native Affairs, Contidential Circular to all Urban Local Authorities in the Union of South Africa, 15 September 1956; and Department of Native Affairs, Native Disturbances and the Rumoval of Native Agitators, n.d. (henceforth, Department of Native Affairs, 15 September 1956; n.d.).
- (3): Section 20 of the Native Laws Administration Amendment Act (No. 42 ... of 1952), South Africa; and Section 3 (b) of the Native Administration. Amendment Act (No. 42 of 1956).
- *(4) Section 1 bis of the Native Administration Amendment Act (No. 42 of 1956).

- (5) Section 1 ter of the Native Administration Amendment Act (No. 42 of 1956).
- (6) Department of Native Affairs, 15 September 1956; n.d.
- (7) This Act (No. 69 of 1956) inserted a new section, Section 29 bis in the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act (No. 25 of 1945).
- (8) TAD, GTC1: Department of Native Affairs, 15 September 1956; n.d.
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) Ibid.
- (11) Ibid.
- (12) Ibid.
- (13) TAD, GTC1: Germiston City Council, Minutes, (Appendix to Report of the Manager, Native Affairs, Confidential Notes made at Interview with Ministers of Justice and Native Affairs 20 November 1952), 16 February 1953.
- (14) TAD, GTC1: Letter from Town Clerk to Secretary for Native Affairs, 15 November 1955; Germiston Town Clerk, Correspondence, November, 1955.
- (15) TAD, CTC, Minutes Book 46: Germiston City Council, Minutes, 6
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- .: (16) TAD, GTC, Box 412 (42/10c Vol. 1) 1949-1950: Germiston City Council,

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 Letters from Messrs. Mandela and Tambo to Town Clerk, 1 October 1956
- (17) TAD, GTC1: Mandela and Tambo, 1 October 1956 Germiston City Council, ... Minutes, 8 October 1956; 5 November 1956; 8 November 1956.

(henceforth, Mandela and Tambo, 1 October 1956).

- (18) TAD, GTC1: Germiston City Council, Confidential Report on Application for the Removal of Four Natives from the Proclaimed Area of Germiston, Manager of Department of Native Affairs, 4 January 1950 (henceforth, Manager, Native Affairs, 4 January 1956); Mandela and Tambo, 1 October 1956.
- (19) TAD, GTC, Minutes Book, 46: Germiston City Council, Memorandum on Proposed Assisted Housing (Momeownership) Scheme: Natalspruit,

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 October 1956; Star 21 November 1951; 17 December 1951.
- (20) TAD, GTC1: Mandela and Tambo, 1 October 1956.
- (21) Lodge, T., 1983: Black Politics in South Africa since 1945, Ravan, Johannesburg.

- (22) Ibid.
- (23) TAD, GTC1: Manager, Native Affairs, 4 January 1956; Germiston City Council, Minutes, 27 August 1956; 28 August 1956.
- (24) TAD, GTC1: Germiston City Council, Minutes, 27 August 1956; 29 August 1956.
- (25) TAD, GTC1: Manager, Native Affairs, 4 January 1956; Germiston City Council, Minutes, 27 August 1956; 29 August 1956.
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- (26) Ibid.
- (27) Ibid.
- (28) Ibid.
- (29) Ibid.
- (30) TAD, GTC1: Letter from Wright, Rose-Innes, Louw and Wise, Attorneys, to Town Clerk, 29 August 1956, Enclosure: Opinion, Adv. B.J. Vorster; TAD, GTC1: Germiston City Council, Minutes, 5 November 1956; 8 November 1956.
- (31) TAD, GTC1: Respective letters to Messrs. P.Nofokeng, O.Ngwenya, C.Mkwanazi, and T.Rampai, 4 September 1986.
- (32) TAD, GTC1: Letters from Messrs. Mandela and Tambo to Town Clerk, 7 September, 10 September 1956.

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- (34) TAD, GTC1: Letter from the K.W.L. to Town Clerk, 18 September 1956.
- (35) Ibia.
- (36) Ibid.
- (37) TAD, GTC1: Letter from the K.W.L. to Town Clerk, 20 September.
- (38) TAD, GTC1: Letter from Committee Members, Ward B, Natalspruit to Town Clerk, 2 October 1956.
- (39) TAD, GTC1: Letter from Committee Members, Ward A, Natalspruit to Town Clerk, 2 October 1956.
- (40) TAD, GTC1: Letters from Town Clerk to Messrs. Mandela and Tambo, 21 September 1950 (henceforth, Town Clerk, 21 September 1950).
- (41) TAD; GTC1: Mandela and Tambo, 1 October 1956.
- (42) Ibid-
- (43) *Ibid*.
- (44) TAD, GTC1: Letter from Messrs. Wright, Rose-innes, Louw and Wise to Town Clerk, (enclosing Legal Opinion, 21 October 1950), 25 October 1956.

- (45) TAD, GTC1: Letters from Town Clerk to Messrs. Mandela and Tambo, 30 October 1956; TAD, GTC2: Germiston City Council, Minutes, 8 November 1956.
- (46) TAD, GTC2: Germiston City Council, Minutes, 8 November 1956.
- (47) TAD, GTC2: Letters from Manager of the Department of Native Affairs respectively to Messrs. O.Ngwenya, T.Rampai, P.Mofokeng and C.Mkwanazi, 9 November 1956.
- (48) TAD, GTC2: Letter from Town Clerk to Native Commissioner, Germiston, 20 May 1957.
- (49) Ibid.
- (50) TAD, GTC2: Letter from Messrs. Wright, Rose-Innes, Louw and Wise to Town Clerk, (enclosing copy of Supreme Court Judgement Re: Timothy Rampai vs. Regina, 27 September 1957), 8 October 1957.
- (51) Ibid.
- (52) TAD, GTC2: Germiston City Council, Minutes, 6 November 1957.