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J.R. Cooper as Township Manager of Mangaung at Bloemfontein
1923-1945

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ABSTRACT

Le Roux, C. 2010. J.R. Cooper as township manager of Mangaung at Bloemfontein 1923-1945. Navors. nas. Mus., Bloemfontein 26(1): 1-44. The increasing number of residents in Mangaung necessitated all the time and tact of John Richard Cooper to create for them an acceptable living environment. His regular negotiations with municipal, educational and police authorities, and black political organisations, not only facilitated sound racial relations between the authorities and the residents of Mangaung, but also enabled him to meet with qualified success his main objectives in terms of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 as amended. This included affordable housing and infrastructure and the upgrading of health and social welfare services. Through patience and clarifying explanations he pacified the minds of his critics, pointing out how these services were disadvantagedly affected by the chronic lack of money and material due to the Economic Depression (1929-1933) and the Second World War (1939-1945). These were conditions beyond his control. The lack of sufficient money for housing and infrastructure was aggravated by the policy of the City Council demanding that all improvements in the township be met by the depleted Native Revenue Account. Contributions by the General Revenue Account were refused due to Council’s racial preference for the interests of its white electors. Fortunately, his submission to sound financial principles – not to spend more than was available in the Native Revenue Account – guided him through his career as township manager. Approaching questions with an open mind enabled him to act as a considerate leader, sometimes sympathetic when endeavouring to improve the interests of the residents, sometimes peremptory when he fearlessly defended his Department against criticism. (J.R. Cooper, Mangaung, Bloemfontein)

OPSOMMING

J.R. Cooper as woonbuurthebestuurder van Mangaung, 1923-1945. Die toenemende getal inwoners van Mangaung tydens die dienstperiode van John Richard Cooper het al sy tyd en takt geverg om vir hulle ’n aanvaarbare woonomgewing te skep. Sy onderhandelings op ’n gereëlateerde basis met munisipale, opvoedkundige en die polisie-owerhede, en swart politieke organisasies, het hom in staat gestel om met geërfkennis akkoord te maak met vir hulle ’n aanvaarbare woonomgewing te skep. Sy onderhandelings op ’n gereëlateerde basis met munisipale, opvoedkundige en die polisie-owerhede, en swart politieke organisasies, het hom in staat gestel om met gekwalifiseerde sukses sy hoofdoelwitte te bereik. Dit sluit in die voorsiening van bekostigbare behuising en infrastruktuur en die opgradering van gesondheids- en welsynsdienste. Hy het geduldig en met verhelderende verklaring en aan sy kritieke verduidelik dat hierdie sake nadelig beïnvloed is deur die chroniese gebrek aan geld en verbruikersgoedere weens die Ekonomiese Depressie (1929-1933) en die Tweede Wêreldoorlog (1939-1945). Die gebrek aan geld vir voldoende behuising en infrastruktuur is vererger deur die beleid van die Stadsraad om alle uitgawes aan verbeterings in die swart woonbuurt vir die rekening van die Naturelle Inkomsterekening te hou. Die Stadsraad het bydraes deur sy Algemene Inkomsterekening geweier weens sy rassevoorkeur vir die belange van sy wit kiesers. Gelukkig het Cooper hom deur geadvocasie van financierlike beginmeisels laat lei – om nie meer te spaandeer as wat in die Naturelle Inkomsterekening beskikbaar was nie – ’n beleid wat vir sy suksesvolle administrasie van Mangaung lof uit plaaslike en nasionale oorde ontlok het. Sy beleid om vraagstukke met ’n oop gemoed te benader het hom tipeer as ’n bedagsame leier wat rasseverhouding tussen die owerhede en die swart inwoners bevordeer het – soms simpatiek wanneer hy poog om die belange van die inwoners te bevordeer, soms gebiedend wanneer hy vreesloos sy Departement teen kritiek verdedig het. (J.R. Cooper, Mangaung, Bloemfontein)

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INTRODUCTION

The motivation for writing this article is threefold: Firstly the sparsity of literature on black urban administration in the Free State, the role of paternalistic township managers in black urban communities in South Africa before 1945 and thirdly, to what extent these township managers succeeded to reconcile municipal legislation promulgated by a white national government (partial to white socio-economic and political interests) with the life expectancies of a poor black community, deprived of these interests/rights. To this end attention is focussed on John Richard Cooper, Township Manager of Mangaung at Bloemfontein from 1923 to 1945 when he retired. He was regarded by contemporaries as an able administrator managing a fairly large township, inhabited by about 20 000 black people when he assumed office, increasing to about 36 000 in 1945.\(^1\) To evaluate his role, his personal characteristics (patience, friendliness, perseverance and inter-personal relationships) and scholarly competencies are all considered important.

The political awakening of blacks after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and the founding of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912 promoted township managers from being unimportant supervisors of backward townships to a position impacting on race relations and racial policy at national level. Race relations and sound interpersonal relationships consequently became of decisive importance in managing a South African township involving different black ethnic groups such as Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu. The township manager was actually in a key position to facilitate co-operation between the township community, himself, his Department and colleagues in other municipal departments.²

For many years before and after the unification of the South African colonies in 1910, conditions prevailing in urban townships were unsatisfactory. In the pre-Union days, with a few exceptions like Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and West Griqualand, it was largely left to the municipal authorities to decide how to control the blacks within the territory of their jurisdiction. Government commissions such as the South African Native Affairs Commission (1903-1905) and the Tuberculosis Commission of 1914 condemned in no uncertain terms the state of affairs that existed. The influenza epidemic of 1918 revealed the conditions of squalor and filth under which urban blacks were living due to the absence of a uniform municipal policy for township affairs. These conditions actually constituted a menace to the health of the whole population of the municipal area.³

Local authorities were not convinced of their responsibilities towards their black populations until the recommendations of the Stallard Commission of Government in 1922 supplied direction in the shape of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, No. 19 of 1923, which came into operation in January 1924. This Act became the basis of urban legislation with its provisions of stricter government control over the municipal management of black affairs, especially with regard to accommodation, registration of labour and some form of urban black advisory body working in close relationship with the township manager. The two outstanding principles of the Act were: i) place the responsibility upon local authorities for the accommodation and well-being of blacks within their area of jurisdiction, subject to government control and ii) the segregation of the urban black population was to conform as far as possible with the segregation policy of Government in reserved areas.⁴

The cumulative effect of the numerous laws providing for black urban control included the Native Administration Act, No. 38 of 1927, the Riotous Assemblies Act, No. 27 of 1914 and its Amendment, Act No. 19 of 1930, making it a criminal offence to strike. The constant fear of banishment for leaders of protest meetings cultivated a feeling of dejection and apathy on the part of many township residents, creating suspicion of any move on the part of local and central government authorities to improve their living conditions. Protest and violence occurred generally in both urban and rural areas in the 1920s, like the April 1925 Riot in Mangaung which erupted only 15 months after Cooper’s appointment as township manager. Riots also occurred at the harbour of Cape Town in 1919, in the townships of the Rand in 1920, Durban in 1929 and Vereeniging in 1937. Demands, instigated by black organisations like the ANC, the All African Convention and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union were, broadly speaking, of a socio-economic

² G.J. Viljoen, *Die taak van ‘n lokasiesuperintendent*, Municipal Affairs, 1 February 1960, p. 15.
⁴ Philips, pp. 328-329.
nature and included better wage structures, more lenient sorghum beer regulations, overpopulated townships, the question of unemployed males and females, and the limited powers of the Native Advisory Board (NAB). At national level these organizations targeted the “civilised labour” policy of the nationalistic Prime Minister, General J.B.M. Hertzog, which protected white workers against competition from blacks – actually discriminating against black workers as being uncivilised. Secondly, they targeted the so-called Hertzog Bills of 1926, discriminating against black voting and land rights.³

These socio-economic and political issues remained serious and provocative bones of contention for both urban and rural blacks during the municipal career of Cooper. The resultant attitude of apathy and suspicion were quite general among township residents countrywide, making the position of township managers a very difficult one. Cooper worked under regulations drawn up by his City Council, the enforcement of which required the utmost tact, patience and understanding of black customs and psychology. His extensive duties, carried out in a supervisory capacity, including the collection of rentals and the ejection of defaulting residents from their homes. These were sensitive issues for the poor residents of Mangaung of whom about 80% were living below the breadline, making the township manager something of a policeman. It is therefore not surprising that residents were not explicitly complimentary about township managers generally. R.E. Phillips, writing on black municipal affairs in the 1930s, regarded township managers as disappointingly unsympathetic after finding only two out of 16 managers on the Rand sympathetically inclined towards the poor socio-economic plight of the urban black. He concluded that they were generally unpopular, being regarded as “township landlords” who were there to raise as much money as possible for the City Council, having no interest in the welfare of the township residents. They were also suspected by the residents of townships to be working on intimate terms with their oppressors – the police – this probably being one of the main reasons for the unpopularity of township managers. Secondly, and closely related, they did not call meetings to advise the residents on how to live without breaking the township regulations pertaining, for instance, to the brewing of beer, hawking, or the stabling of stock on their stands. The outcome was that very little respect was shown to township managers generally.⁶

The ideal situation was a black urban residential environment where the township manager was trusted by the residents as a friend and not as a tormentor, as was the case in the township of Germiston in the 1930s where the manager went about with a fully-loaded shotgun. It follows that City Councils laboured under the responsibility of appointing township managers who were able administrators and cultivators of successful human relationships, and even then the City Council often upset the situation with regulations that were not consistent with the aspirations of the residents. Ignorance and misunderstanding are major causes of race friction. The manager practising effective communication skills, like providing explanations and inviting questions from residents, was in a strategic position for influencing and determining future relationships between the residents and relevant local authorities, including himself. A proper two-way information service constituted by the township manager, assisted by his NAB and departmental officials, kept

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⁶ Philips, p. 331.
the residents fully informed of all matters important to them, such as relevant laws, regulations, directives and what they needed to do if they wished to perform a particular function. A national survey conducted by academics in seven major cities in South Africa in the 1960s revealed that such information and explanatory practices were indeed seriously neglected by township managers and city councillors engaged with township affairs – only to compromise goodwill, understanding, tolerance and mutual respect.  

Personalities known for their knowledge of blacks generally and the urban black in particular – Senator J.D. Reinalt Jones (Advisor to the South African Institute of Race Relations) and the historian E.H. Brookes – depicted the ideal township manager as one disposed of a sound education, a gentleman having character, moral courage, integrity and a forceful personality as well as administrative and business ability, sound judgement and a good knowledge of civil and criminal law. Such a person should also be a good organizer, having sympathy and patience, and be able to appreciate the viewpoint of another person. Apart from these accomplishments, practical knowledge of township planning, architecture and the construction of infrastructure for the outlay of suburbs, were important attributes. It is apparent that a person possessing these qualifications must have had many years of experience and not purely academic knowledge. An experienced township manager would realise that the satisfactory adjustment of the urban black to his environment involved the patient explanation of communal matters, like the necessity to levy taxes to enable the delivery of municipal services, or to abide by the regulations to curb crime or health hazards. Such an information service pre-supposed an understanding by the township manager of the socio-economic problems of urban blacks, their needs and grievances. To this end the manager had to be ready to rely on experts like the local medical officer of health, the police authorities, and councillors of the responsible Native Affairs Committee (NAC), to supplement his managerial role.

It is evident that the township manager assumed an all-important role, acting as a channel to the City Council on behalf of his NAB. He was also in an ambiguous position – being an employee of Council, but also supposed to serve the black community which he had in his charge. His success was measured by the degree to which he controlled the situation and the extent to which he managed to ameliorate discontent. In addition, his success was tested by the lack of violence in the township, no adverse publicity, a balanced budget, and the ability to execute the policy of Council. It is with these criteria in mind that Cooper’s management of the Mangaung township will be measured.


8 Viljoen, pp. 15-17; Holleman, pp. 15, 17.

APPPOINTMENT OF J.R. COOPER AS TOWNSHIP MANAGER

It was the local authorities rather than the Union Department of Native Affairs which first accepted the principle of appointing specially trained and academically qualified people to handle their black affairs. The responsible Native Affairs Committee of the Bloemfontein City Council which had to consider the applications for the post of township manager resolved to give particular attention to applicants disposed of experience in the handling of blacks, knowledge of building and sanitary work, and with linguistic qualifications. Obviously the Committee was looking for a person with not only administrative talents, but also able to cope with the different ethnic factions in the township, i.e. Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Tswana and Coloureds. There were eventually 181 applications. The Committee resolved to appoint J.R. Cooper (Figure 1), satisfied that he met their conditions best, to assume his duties on 23 November 1923. His predecessor, G.P. Cook, left the service of the Bloemfontein Municipality a week later on 1 December 1923.  

Figure 1: John Richard Cooper, Township Manager of Mangaung (1923-1945).

Holleman, p. 15; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/6, Minutes (NAC), 26.10.1923, p. 87.
The NAC was undeniably impressed by the application of Cooper. He had indeed had a varied and impressive career, including experience as a farmer, teacher, soldier and assistant magistrate. Born at Nottingham, England, in 1881, he received his education at the Sedgebrook Grammar School. He farmed for a while until he took up teaching. He came to South Africa in March 1900, serving with the Imperial forces during the Anglo-Boer War, at the close of which he joined the public service of the Orange River Colony in the Magistrate’s Court in Bloemfontein. Cooper opened the first Magistrate’s Court at Brandfort in 1904 where he also married Alida Dorothea van der Spuy (originally from Paarl) in 1909. They had two sons and a daughter.

He was promoted to the position of assistant magistrate at Jacobsdal in 1910. Later he served in that capacity at Senekal, and eventually at Bulwer, Himeville and Harding in Natal. He was allowed to go abroad in 1916 to join the Imperial forces, being mentioned in dispatches like the London Gazette and promoted to commissioned rank. Cooper served in France until the end of the First World War and returned to South Africa in 1919, going to Newcastle as assistant magistrate before being transferred to Bloemfontein in the same capacity in 1920. Three years later he resigned from the Public Service after being appointed as township manager of Mangaung.11

**DUTIES AND POWERS OF COOPER**

An important first step towards an evaluation of Cooper’s administration of Mangaung is to consider the nature of his duties and powers as township manager. Section 11 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 provided for the appointment by the larger local authorities like Bloemfontein of a superintendent of locations, also acting as head of the Department of Native Affairs, to be helped by an assistant superintendent. The City Council changed the designation of the Department to the Department of Native Administration in August 1929 to avoid confusion with the Union Department of Native Affairs. The designations of the superintendent and his assistant were then changed to manager and assistant manager.12

The superintendent/township manager was a municipal employee and as such the servant of the City Council, though he could exercise his duties and powers only under a personal and revocable licence issued to him by the Minister of Native Affairs. He therefore had to serve two masters who might not, and often did not, see eye to eye with regard to township policy. He was exposed to pressure from both, irrespective of whether it was legislative matters or matters needing his discretion. The legislation which the township manager had to apply, though voluminous and detailed, was not a complete guide for every conceivable local, national or even human problem, nor so rigid as to exclude all discretion on his part. Such discretionary powers, for instance, applied to applicants acquiring permits to enter the township, to acquire stands for building purposes or hawkers’ licences, the domestic problems of residents and municipal sports clubs, and negotiations with church societies. The township manager, indeed, lived in a hornet’s nest of potential and actual conflicts.13

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11 The Friend, 22.3.1945. J.R. Cooper to retire, p. 8; The Friend, 8.4.1946. Mr J.R. Cooper, p. 4; FAB: MHG 38829, Death Notice J.R. Cooper, 1946.
12 MBL 1/24/1/19, Minutes (NAC), 2.12.1930, p. 2.
13 Holleman, pp. 15, 17.
The Union Department of Native Affairs was responsible for carrying out the general policy for the administration of urban blacks, as laid down by Ordinance No. 4 of 1913, until repealed by the Natives (Urban Areas) Act in 1924. Section 23 provided that a local authority may make regulations not inconsistent with this Act as to the management of townships, including the maintenance of good order, health, proper housing and infrastructure such as water, electricity, sanitation and roads. The wide range of duties reflected the many responsibilities of the township manager. Should he as a responsible official fail to give good effect to these duties, the Minister of the Department of Native Affairs may step in and, after reference to the City Council and the Provincial Administration, provide the necessary services at the expense of the City Council – a step that implied an abrupt end to the municipal career of the township manager. Such a drastic step, however, almost never happened.\(^\text{14}\)

In conducting his responsibilities the township manager stood in close relationship to his NAB (a statutory body), the responsible Native Affairs and Public Health Committees of the City Council, the Native Commissioner representing the Department of Native Affairs and also acting as magistrate, the South African Police, and finally the Department of the City Engineer (for improvements to infrastructure). It obviously stands to reason that the township manager had to maintain friendly relations with the officials and members of these bodies, being dependent on their co-operation for the success of his township management. As far as Cooper was concerned, the experience he had gained as a farmer, teacher, soldier and assistant magistrate would certainly come to his aid when seeking their co-operation.

The township regulations for Mangaung, framed by the NAC in terms of Section 23 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, prescribing the powers and duties of Cooper, were quite extensive. He firstly delivered monthly reports to the Committee on the management of his Department and on conditions in general, reflecting the social welfare of the township residents regarding housing, health, crime, unemployment, disputes between masters and servants, and the institution of criminal and civil proceedings, including all complaints and representations that could from time to time be made by the residents or local branches of black political organisations like the ANC – an important regulation therefore, aiming to prevent a recurrence of the riot of April 1925.\(^\text{15}\)

The discretionary powers of Cooper in respect of housing, covering the allotment of stands and houses, the sub-letting thereof, lodgers’ permits, loans, and the supervision of building activities, are discussed in more detail under the question of housing. Suffice to state here that these powers were extensive, being supported by the register he kept of all persons to whom stand, residential and lodger permits had been issued (representing the residential figure) to improve his management of the township in terms of tax levies, crime prevention and health precaution measures.

Cooper also exercised his discretionary powers with respect to blacks applying for permission to occupy premises to manage eating houses, indicating localities where rubbish might be dumped, washing places for clothing, and keeping a register indicating figures of

\(^{14}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/35, Minutes (NAB), 31.1.1941, p. 11; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/38, Minutes (NAB), 13.7.1944, p. 4.

\(^{15}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/6, Supplementary Agenda (NAC), 7.5.1924, pp. 1-2.
livestock, the localities of their stabling and domestic animals. The City Council required of Cooper to rely on the advice of the medical officer of health in order to control health conditions in the township. To this end he disposed of the power to eject from the township, for instance, the licence holder of an eating house not complying with health regulations. Obviously, the outbreak of contagious diseases, which also endangered the lives of white Bloemfonteiners, exposed Cooper, as responsible township manager, to serious reprimand by the City Council, which was primarily responsible for the well-being of its white electors. He consequently impressed on his NAB and block men to report contagious diseases immediately to enable him to take contraceptive measures in conjunction with the medical officer of health.  

Cooper had a decisive say in the conduct of the social life of his township residents. He was empowered to prohibit any entertainment or gathering which, in his opinion, was likely to create a disturbance or to be a nuisance to the residents. In more practical terms it meant, for instance, that no dance, film show, birthday party or marriage ceremony could be arranged, nor walking about after sunset at certain hours, without his written permission. The fact that he, or any person deputed by him, had at all times the right of entry into any building in the township in the execution of their duties, made it virtually impossible to arrange any social event without Cooper knowing it. Any person obstructing him or his deputy in the execution of their duties was guilty of an offence and was liable, on conviction, to a fine or imprisonment.

The township regulations highlighted Cooper’s duty to preserve law and order in the township, in its dwellings and hostels, including supervising and controlling the actions of the residents. Cooper, for instance, granted temporary permits to blacks who visited the township for longer than three hours. Furthermore, every black person, before being admitted to the township or hostel, had to produce to his satisfaction, written proof that he/she had reported to the registration officer regulating the housing and employment needs of the community at large. Cooper was empowered to arrest, without warrant, any black person committing any of the offences described in the regulations, such as loitering in the streets, absenting himself from the township between 21:00 and 04:00 without official permission, creating any disturbance, being found intoxicated, or wilfully damaging the property of the municipality. The regulations practically empowered him to warrant the arrest of any black person abusing or disobeying any order of his, issued to maintain good order, discipline or health conditions in the township.

Summarising the powers exercised by township managers with respect to the socio-economic life of urban blacks, it becomes clear that, generally speaking, township managers regulated virtually all aspects of township life. Even with respect to occupational competencies, blacks did not receive the security of full ownership. When purchasing the right of occupation or building at his own cost, he still required official authority to sublet, or to sell, cede, assign, make over, alienate, pledge, hypothecate or encumber his interest in the premises.

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16 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/6, Supplementary Agenda (NAC), 7.5.1924, pp. 2-3.
COOPER ORGANISING HIS DEPARTMENT OF NATIVE ADMINISTRATION

The powerful backing supplied by the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 and the township regulations were not in themselves sufficient foundation for the successful management of the township of Mangaung. The personal hand Cooper took in the organization of his Department of Native Administration to implement the policies of his two “masters” – the City Council and the Union Department of Native Affairs – was to be of decisive importance, involving his discretionary powers and personal attributes which will surface in the succeeding discussion of his municipal activities.

Cooper described the primary function of his Department: “To interpret the policy of the Council as indicated by its Regulations, to make recommendations when necessary and to protect and further the welfare of the location residents”. To this end he proclaimed in his first monthly report (January 1924) to the NAC his intention to work in close co-operation with the Department of the City Engineer to improve the infrastructure of the township; to consult with the responsible Public Health Committee for a healthy environment; and with the South African Police, to render assistance in crime prevention. He realised that the NAB, serving as an important channel of communication with the township residents, demanded his close attention for training to execute their duties responsibly and to convince them of his sincere intention to manage township affairs in the interest of the residents. Being an outspoken advocate of education, Cooper promised the Provincial Department of Education the provision of physical amenities like buildings for classrooms and grounds for recreational activities.

Immediately after his appointment as Manager in November 1923, Cooper was obliged to upgrade his Department, finding it as he stated, “in a chaotic state due in a large measure to being understaffed by officials ignorant of the elementary principles of Native Administration. Records were practically non-existent and the few there were, quite unreliable. The location was seething with discontent and overrun by irresponsible agitators”. The gravity of the maladministration in the Department was again impressed on his mind by the riot on 19 April 1925, scarcely 15 months later – one of many riots countrywide against socio-economic problems in townships. Research on preventive actions taken before the riot blamed the racially motivated City Council for its unsympathetic attitude and delaying tactics after being informed by Cooper via the Natives Affairs Committee about the serious reservations residents had in respect of the contentious wage and sorghum beer questions. Cooper’s findings of maladministration in his Department, the attitude of Council, and the undisciplined and generally hostile attitude of his NAB (instigated by black political influence towards the authorities), only served to convince him of the necessity to re-organise his Department to cope more effectively with the socio-economic problems of the township’s residents, not forgetting the racial animosities between the white and black sections of the population as represented by Council and the NAB respectively.

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22 Le Roux, p. 25.
Cooper regarded able employees as a prerequisite for the successful management of his Department. To this end he pronounced his intention to make “every endeavour to fit both European and Native members to fill positions of responsibility”.\(^\text{23}\) For them to be good administrative officials Cooper evidently placed a high premium on intellectual and emotional characteristics. His greatest difficulty was to obtain whites and blacks with the necessary qualifications and training in administrative duties which he regarded as “complex and exacting, demanding initiative, tact, enthusiasm and painstaking attention to details”.\(^\text{24}\) To maintain good relations between the residents and the local authorities and between black and white generally, he needed to carefully “appoint only men temperamentally fitted to the work and with qualifications entitling them to share the responsibilities of senior officers”.\(^\text{25}\) True to the definition of a capable manager, Cooper kept a close check on staff matters such as timely promotions, a safe work environment and encouraging them to be conscientious and reliable workers (qualities he expected of himself). Looking after the conditions of employment of his staff, requesting for instance an improvement of their salaries to compare more favourably with the salaries of officials in other municipal departments in 1929, Cooper won their trust and support.

The effective execution of his duties as township manager also depended on proper office accommodation, facilities and official transport amenities. He was concerned about the inadequate office accommodation for the registration of employees and control of passes, handicapping the proper functioning of his Department in the face of growing residential numbers in 1924. He complained to the NAC about the crowded office space, exposing the cashiers, receiving large sums of money in the presence of residents looking on, to assault and robbery. Cooper convinced the Committee to extend office accommodation in December 1924 to facilitate the administrative duties of his officials. His appointment of an additional book-keeper, and request for a new typewriter, a larger safe for books and ledgers a month later, in January 1925, were indicative of his ability to upgrade the administrative efficiency of his Department.\(^\text{26}\)

On a more personal note, but still relevant to his effective management of township affairs, Cooper successfully requested, soon after his appointment, that the NAC add two more rooms to his official house, situated at the entrance to the township. One room was to accommodate his family more conveniently and the other to serve as an “office at home” for “the continual number of natives who interview me at the house after hours”.\(^\text{27}\) Such a request was of course a fair indication of the increasing volume and demanding nature of his work as township manager – Mangaung comprised approximately 23 300 residents in the middle 1920s. The decision by the NAC to erect a tennis court at his home as well was probably in recognition of Cooper’s strenuous work environment, his sincere dedication to his work and a serious illness which befell him (the nature of his illness was not mentioned), compelling him to take sick leave for some weeks in 1925 and again in 1926. He obviously did not enjoy a strong and healthy constitution, as his health, until his retirement in 1945, sporadically obliged him to take sick leave. It was perhaps for this reason that he requested more suitable transport, seeing that he had to travel about 20 miles

\(^{23}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/17, J.R. Cooper Annual Report, 31.3.1930, p. 10.
\(^{24}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/17, J.R. Cooper Annual Report, 31.3.1930, p. 10.
\(^{25}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/17, J.R. Cooper Annual Report, 31.3.1930, p. 10.
\(^{26}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/17, Minutes (NAC), 1.12.1924, 23.1.1925, 29.2.1925; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/7, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, September 1924, January 1925, June/July 1925, September 1925.
\(^{27}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/18, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, June 1930, p. 2.
(33 km) daily for official reasons. He and his predecessors had to avail themselves of transport on horseback. The slowness of horse transport only aggravated the pressure of work and exposed him to inclement weather, obliging him sometimes to carry out his inspections before and after working hours. He recommended the sale of the horse and that he be supplied with motor transport. The NAC had a lengthy discussion in June 1925 on the question of whether to supply him with a new horse, a motor cycle (as for senior officials in other departments) or a motor car. The Committee eventually resolved to approve a loan to Cooper for a motor car, on the usual terms applicable to municipal officials preferring to provide for their own transport.28

In the years to come work in all branches of his Department increased considerably due to a growing township population, stimulated not only by a fertile birth rate, but also by influx from the rural and other urban areas, mostly for reasons of employment. These demographic tendencies exercised considerable pressure on Cooper to meet the conditions of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, namely to create favourable living circumstances for urban blacks, especially after the unpleasant riot of April 1925, which reminded him of the dire socio-economic circumstances of the residents in Mangaung. Fortunately for Cooper, two considerations strengthened his hand to straighten out the tumultuous spirit rife in the township in the late 1920s. Firstly, he explicitly appreciated the loyal services “so cheerfully rendered” by his black and white officials, reflecting favourably on the excellent inter-personal relations he cultivated amidst strenuous circumstances like the demolition of houses in the old suburb of Waaihoek, resettling the residents in neighbouring suburbs, the depleted Native Revenue Account impacting negatively on the critical housing backlog, and the ineffective slop water and night soil removals endangering health conditions. Secondly, being an orderly civil servant carrying out civil functions strictly along prescribed administrative lines, Cooper emphasised to his officials and members of the and their block men to present all matters concerning the interests of the residents to him via the officials designated. These officials were not mere figureheads, but responsible servants capable to assist him in solving the many critical matters as soon as possible to ward off any future confrontations in good time.29

The professional and able manner in which Cooper managed his Department of Native Administration to cope with pressing township affairs did not go unnoticed in municipal circles inside and outside the Province. In 1928, a mere four years after his appointment, the Orange Free State Municipal Association asked him to deliver an address on the practical administration of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act at its annual congress in Winburg, after Senator J.D. Rheinallt-Jones, representing the interests of urban blacks in Government, published a report prepared by Cooper on housing for urban blacks. Impressed by the high standard of Cooper’s report, the Pretoria Branch of the Economic Society of South Africa requested him to deliver an address on the socio-economic problems of urban blacks in 1930 – an invitation which was deserved recognition of his knowledge of the difficulties present in township management. These achievements, including the expressed appreciation of his NAB for his tolerant, sympathetic and untiring efforts to create for the residents of Mangaung a better living environment, convinced the NAC to promote Cooper to the maximum of his salary scale in 1929. Quite significantly

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29 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/12, J.R. Cooper Annual Report, April 1927, p. 9.
the Mayor, S. Harris, revealed that Cooper received tempting work offers from other local authorities which he (Cooper) had refused.\(^{30}\)

Cooper sincerely appreciated these supportive gestures at national and local level during the difficult years of the serious global Economic Depression in the early 1930s, when he struggled to keep the depleted Native Revenue Account afloat to finance critical housing schemes and necessary improvements to infrastructure, like road making and sanitary services. To enhance the income of the Account he arranged with the Pass Office and the local police to check for monies due on residential passes, and with the Employment Registration Office he arranged to introduce fees for employment contracts (with the approval of the NAC) to be paid by employers. He arranged the plant and draught animals (for road making and sanitary services) by substituting oxen for mules, these being cheaper to feed.

In the last instance Cooper recommended to the Committee to purchase Scotch carts, dust carts and slop wagons, being cheaper, instead of hiring them from the Department of the City Engineer. He succeeded in balancing the Native Revenue Account after being pressurised by the racially biased City Council to retrench some black staff members, but he could not negotiate alternatives for all of them at other municipal departments, as these departments were themselves suffering because of the Depression.\(^{31}\)

The severity of the Depression and declining income of the Account in 1933 left the NAC with no alternative but to insist on an increase of sixpence monthly, payable for ground rent, water, sanitary and refuse services. Cooper, in an effort to postpone the tax increase, well aware of the economic plight of the residents, but also to defuse the increasing spirit of confrontation between the NAB and the Committee, forwarded extracts from the minutes of the monthly meetings between him and his Board for the years August 1931 to August 1933, explaining in detail to the Committee the plight of the township residents. He indicated how they suffered under retrenchments, unemployment and the rising cost of living, resulting in serious socio-economic and domestic problems in the township, like crime and juvenile delinquency. The Committee was impressed with the insights provided by Cooper into the dire socio-economic living circumstances of the residents, and resolved to postpone the raise in municipal taxes for the next few years.\(^{32}\)

Cooper, accompanied by members of the NAC, discussed the economic plight of the residents with the Secretary of the Department of Native Affairs in Pretoria in 1933, but failed to negotiate a better wage structure for black municipal workers. He probably expected such a disappointing outcome, but proposed it in any case, hoping that political and economic developments at national level in the course of the 1930s would benefit black people. However, his hope did not materialise. The National Party Government of Prime Minister J.B.M. Hertzog incorporated his policy of civilized labour, fortified by legislation


\(^{31}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/6, Minutes (NAC), 7.4.1924, pp. 2-3, 8.4.1924, p. 3.

which practically provided employment to poor whites at the cost of blacks. Probably more
disheartening to Cooper was the retention of the civilized labour policy and its
discriminating legislation when the National Party of Hertzog and the South African Party
of J.C. Smuts fused to form the United Party in 1934. The Smuts regime, winning the
general election at the dawn of the Second World War in 1939, continued this
uncompromising attitude towards black people, prioritising the economic interests of whites
in the wake of the Economic Depression and the war effort, which relied on the support of
whites. Neither urgent speeches in meetings of the Native Representative Council
(advising Government on matters affecting the black population), nor the protestations of
the ANC, were able to convince Government to turn a sympathetic ear to the economic
plight of the blacks.  

During the war years Cooper found himself in one of the most difficult situations of his
entire municipal career. To manage surpluses in the Native Revenue Account he was
obliged to carefully plan extensive housing schemes and costly improvements to
infrastructure. Expenditure in his Department was as low as it could possibly be, disposing
of a staff of 16 whites and 126 blacks to help administer a township inhabited by 31 400
residents, occupying about 3 500 houses. However, necessary municipal services like night
soil removal (done by the Department of the City Engineer), the rising cost of building
material during the war, and money restrictions by the Union Treasurer, resulted in a deficit
of almost £9 000 in the Native Revenue Account in 1944. These were circumstances
beyond his control. He was in the unfortunate position of explaining to his NAB about the
necessity to finally implement the monthly increase of sixpence which was originally
scheduled for 1933, payable for ground rent, water, sanitary and refuse services, to ensure
the continuation of municipal services. More bad news for the poverty stricken residents
(abut 80% were living below the breadline) was the refusal of the City Council to meet the
deficit out of the General Rate Account, knowing that their white electors, on account of
their racial bias, would not approve of it. Cooper pointed out to the Board that, refusing to
approve the proposed tax increase, the Council would be compelled to curtail municipal
services to the township – a step which put the health of both white and black residents at
risk. The Board was left with no other choice but to approve the proposed increases,
realising that Cooper, always supporting the interests of the residents in the past, had to
abide by circumstances beyond his control. 

The efforts of Cooper to bring some consistency to the rudely upset socio-economic living
circumstances of the residents in the 1930s were dearly appreciated from different quarters:
The NAC in its report on Mangaung in 1936, referring to Cooper’s deft managing of
township finances during the difficult 1930s, acknowledged that it should pay more
attention to the minutes of the Board for a better understanding of township affairs – an
approach that would have facilitated the administrative task of Cooper. The Secretary of
the Department of Native Affairs described Mangaung as a “well-managed location”. J.
Rodseth, Inspector of Townships of the Department, concurred, viewing Mangaung as one

33 C.F.J. Muller (Ed.), Five hundred years. A history of South Africa, pp. 415-417; FAB: MBL
1/2/4/1/22, Minutes (NAC), 18.10.1932, p. 3, 12.4.1933, p. 2.
34 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/39, Minutes (NAB), 13.2.1945, pp. 5-6; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/39, Minutes (NAC),
11.5.1945, p. 7; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/21, J.R. Cooper Annual Report, 31.3.1932, p. 9; FAB: MBL
1/2/4/1/36, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 11.9.1942, pp. 3-4; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/38, Minutes (NAC), 19.9.1944, p. 3.
of the best administered townships in the country, and fortunate to have Cooper as manager. His NAB in 1938 and again in 1944, thanked him for “his kind understanding in all matters”, having the “interests of the Location inhabitants at heart” at all times, and praised him for his success as township manager. Cooper assured the Board that he exercised the greatest care in township expenditures, spending no money without the approval of the Minister of the Department of Native Affairs, and having accounts regularly audited by government auditors. Thankful that he had succeeded in preventing a repetition of the 1925 Riot, he explained his approach to defuse contentious socio-economic questions at a joint meeting of the NAC and the NAB observing that: “... in the administration of Native Affairs throughout the Union, generally the great weakness in the past had been too much reliance had been placed on laws and regulations and not enough on contact or on personal touch which meetings afforded”. Indeed, the Institute of Race Relations and T.M. Mapikela (chairman of the Central Committee of the NAB and Assistant Treasurer of the ANC) appreciated Cooper’s “progressive Native and Location Policy”, which allowed for regular meetings where township matters were discussed without reservation – a sure token of confidence in his ability to conduct sound race relations, proving his humane and tolerant attitude towards the residents of Mangaung.

In his memorandum on the post-war development of Mangaung, requested by the NAC in 1943, Cooper recommended some important administrative measures to cope with the needs of a fast growing township, then inhabited by about 34 200 people. He proposed that the township manager to be relieved of many of the routine duties more suitable for his assistant, in order to concentrate on defined duties pertaining to questions of policy, appeals, inspections, legal matters and supervision generally. Doubting the administrative abilities of his black staff for senior positions, he believed that with time, experience and education, they would be able to fill more responsible positions. These views were in accordance with the practice that applied generally in the other large urban centres.

Reviewing his administrative role, no justification could be found that he misused his extensive powers to establish himself as a minor despot. Rather, he emphasised the value of approaching township questions with an open mind. The overall impression is of a considerate leader, sometimes sympathetic as in his recommendation to the NAC to increase the allowances of Board members, sometimes peremptory when he fearlessly defended his Department against criticism, be it on the critical housing or employment questions.

\[35\] FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/29, Minutes (NAB), 28.3.1938, pp. 1-3; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/21, Minutes Joint Meeting (NAC) and (NAB), 10.5.1932, p. 6; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/33, Minutes (NAB), 26.2.1940, p. 3.
COOPER AND HIS NATIVE ADVISORY BOARD

Cooper had high expectations of the NAB system, which offered urban black communities the opportunity to have a voice in the management and control of their own affairs. He explained at the meeting of the Congress of s in Pretoria in 1935 that he highly valued a relationship of consultation and collaboration between the township manager and his Advisory Board, so as to cultivate a spirit of co-operation to co-ordinate efforts in the interests of the community.  

He took a decisive hand in the effective functioning of the NAB, which was a statutory body needing to be consulted by the township manager in matters affecting the residents. Municipal regulations, for instance, could not be enforced unless approved by the Minister of the Department of Native Affairs after reference to the Board and the Provincial Administrator. Cooper realised that a well composed Board, representing the interests of all the residents and well-informed about their obligations towards the residents whose interests they represented, was a prerequisite for the effective administration of the township. To this end and guided by townships elsewhere in the Union, he framed a draft constitution for the Board in terms of Section 10 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923.

The clauses of the draft made provision for 12 elected and three nominated blockmen. The elected blockmen, consisting mainly of unschooled workers, clerks and professional people, each represented one block in the township. They were elected by the registered occupiers of stands, including the tenants of houses and rooms, being at least 18 years old. These blockmen, constituting the NAB, convened on a monthly basis with Cooper who acted ex-officio as chairman of the Board. The nominated and elected blockmen were part-time officials of the municipal Department of Native Administration, each receiving £6/13/4 annually. Elected blockmen had specific duties, such as the reporting of diseases, grievances such as low wages, and the arrival and departure of strangers in the township. The three nominated members acted only in an advisory capacity. Each elected blockman was assisted by a block committee consisting of 10 members, elected on a popular basis. The Advisory Board disposed of a Central Committee, consisting of a black chairman and two residents, popularly elected in each block, serving as its executive committee. Constituting the Committee, Cooper aimed to draw some expertise from the black community to discuss and advise his Advisory Board on thorny matters like the financial statements of the Native Revenue Account. The three blockmen, appointed by the City Council on recommendation by Cooper, included teachers with broad educational backgrounds and experience of life. These organs were supposed to keep Cooper in touch with the needs and grievances of the residents, interesting themselves in the general welfare of the residents and helping preserve the peace, order and good conduct in the township. Cooper aimed with these organisational arrangements to represent as many groups as possible in the local black community. Together with the elected members, nominated members rendered advice with the making, amending or withdrawal of township regulations. Determined to prevent a recurrence of the 1925 Riot, Cooper also convinced the City Council to appoint T.M. Mapikela, one of the nominated blockmen, as chief blockman. This was an exceptional appointment as the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 made no provision for a chief blockman. Cooper regarded Mapikela, a senior member of the ANC, also acting as Treasurer of the South African Congress of Location Advisory

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38 FAB: MBL 1/24/1/25, Minutes (NAC), 12.4.1935, pp. 21-22.
Boards, as a key person to render special assistance to his Department in investigations into critical issues like the wage and beer brew questions, including the solving of disputes between the residents, and the Municipality and residents, mutually. 39

Cooper explained to the members of the Board and the Central Committee the procedures to keep him posted as to the needs and grievances of the residents. His monthly meetings with the Board were the usual and convenient opportunity for members to discuss matters reported to them by dissatisfied residents. If the severity of the complaint justified the immediate attention of an official in his Department, such member accompanied the complainant to the Department. If the complaint was not solved to the satisfaction of the complainant he might report to Cooper or his assistant. Cooper was quite emphatic that on no account should members of his staff, his NAB or Central Committee prevent residents from meeting him. 40

The first impression Cooper had of the actions of the Board members, only four months after his appointment, was not very favourable. His disappointment with their irresponsible action related to their boycotting of two consecutive meetings which he arranged with their knowledge with the NAC to discuss important amendments to the township regulations. They tabled no excuse for staying away from the meetings, forfeiting the opportunity to speak on behalf of the residents for the improvement of their living conditions, including more lucrative trading opportunities and the cancellation of the detested bodily search of women for passes by the police. Cooper doubted the effectiveness of the Native Affairs Board in his monthly report to the NAC a few weeks before the township riot in April 1925: “Generally speaking the past year has not disclosed the potential benefits of such body. Members and residents generally have still to be taught and make to realise the elementary principles of civic responsibility”. 41 His words came true two years later when the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, as well as himself, criticised the laxity of the Board members in making recommendations to improve the wage structure of the urban blacks or help solve the sorghum beer question for the sake of peace and obedience to the law. These questions were indeed some of the major causes of the 1925 Riot but, as Cooper remarked, they still had not realised their civic responsibility towards the township residents. 42

Cooper realised that part and parcel of his duties as township manager was the education of his Board members and the strengthening of their decision-making abilities. To this end he recommended to the NAC the appointment of six Council nominees (three blacks and three whites), preferably cognisant with municipal matters, to supplement the doubtful expertise of the Board and its Central Committee. With this recommendation, approved by the NAC and the Board, Cooper was adamant about enforcing the qualification clause to ensure that

40 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/38, Minutes (NAB), 22.11.1939, p. 2.
41 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/7, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, March 1925, July 1924.
42 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/9, Minutes (NAC), 4.2.1926, p. 3.
the best men were elected “as it was evident from the display of intelligence by some of the members at the monthly meetings that the best men were not elected”.43

The arrangements of Cooper to upgrade the advisory capacity of the Board soon proved to be inadequate, only serving to accentuate its inability to advise wisely on serious township matters in the 1930s. The ANC petitioned him in 1931, complaining that members of the Board and Central Committee neglected the interests of the residents. Cooper, acting as mediator and adjudicator, investigated the complaints pertaining to sorghum beer, wages, taxes, lodgers’ fees and the stabling of stock in the township. As at so many occasions in the past he again, acting as educator now, soothed their differences of opinion, emphasising that co-operation for the common welfare of the black community of Mangaung must triumph to ensure the peaceful and effective administration of the township.44

Cooper remained adamant that the Board had a constructive role to play in township affairs. As a first step he encouraged members to bring to him and the NAC all matters effecting the well-being of the residents for discussion at joint meetings arranged by him. These meetings had the benefit of acquainting the city councillors first hand with the most pressing problems/grievances of the residents, enabling Cooper to make recommendations, whereafter he immediately attended to decisions of the Committee, assured of the cooperation of the Board. These joint meetings also enabled Cooper to intercept complaints of the Board that the Committee stood unaffected towards their grievances, their advice not receiving attention. A second step to improve the effectiveness of the Board was to enlist members of the Board and its Central Committee to assist him actively in the settling of disputes and the maintenance of law and order generally.45 Thirdly, Cooper encouraged the City Council to officially recognise the Congress of Location Advisory Boards in 1928. Such recognition enabled s to deal with the problems/grievances of township residents; to make, via the township administrator as chairman, representations to local authorities and government with respect to improvements in township administration countrywide. By creating these steps Cooper succeeded in avoiding being targeted for not attending to township matters and secondly, skilfully promoted the interests of the politically powerless black residents without compromising the racially-inclined City Council.46

The preference of the NAB and the residents generally to support Cooper as chairman of the Board, ex officio, after his chairmanship was questioned by the ANC (viewing him as an employee of a racially-biased white local authority), served to establish his position, in 1935, as an able mediator and administrator of their affairs. Indeed, T.M. Mapikela, a prominent resident of the township, described Cooper as being “conversant with the wellbeing” of the residents.47 The NAC undoubtedly appreciated his untiring efforts to elevate the Board to higher levels of civil responsibility.

The Native Economic Commission of Government, visiting Mangaung in 1933, and J.E. Mathewson, a contemporary of Cooper and manager of the Department of Native Administration of Benoni on the East Rand, supported Cooper’s handling of the NAB.

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45 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/22, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, April 1933, p. 3.
Mathewson concurred that these Boards certainly did not measure up to the standards of bodies such as municipal councils, being heavily handicapped by lack of experience, knowledge of public affairs and administrative procedures. He appreciated Cooper’s initiative to make his Board a more effective instrument by organizing it in a manner which imbued its members with the knowledge that their deliberations received recognition from the authorities concerned. Constantly ignoring their views undermined any hope on success, only to let them sink into apathy or simmer with frustration – fertile ground for a second riot like the one of April 1925.48

In March 1940 Cooper remarked with satisfaction at a meeting of the NAB that his constant admonitions of its members to carry out their duties in a responsible way, did deliver some good results. He appreciated the considerable progress made since their boycotting of the meeting with the NAC at the cost of the interests of the residents in 1924. He concluded that “there were a few who had attained that stage where they could be entrusted to carry out their duties without fear or favour”, referring to their illuminating debates on the much criticised lodging question and increased fees for municipal services in view of the economic plight of the residents.49

THE HOUSING QUESTION

The housing question presented probably the most responsible and complicated task to Cooper. He had under his management about 2 600 houses and a population of 20 000 on 275 acres of land in the early 1920s. Besides the related questions of overcrowding, health and employment Cooper had to supervise in terms of Section 23 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 the provision of house loans and building material, the erection of houses and construction of infrastructure, the selling of houses in execution on account of arrears, and lastly the demolition of houses to provide space for industrial expansion.50

The erection of houses and the provision of infrastructure taxed the patience and management skills of Cooper to the utmost. Discussions Cooper conducted with the Native Economic Commission and the (NAC) indicated that he was quite well-informed about the architectural layout of townships (Fig. 2). In view of the overcrowding problem and its health implications to Mangaung, Cooper exercised direct control over the influx of blacks, the allocation of stands for building purposes, the layout of new suburbs and accompanying infrastructure. He submitted to this end plans of the relevant municipal areas reserved for black residential settlement, co-operating with the Department of the City Engineer to prepare plans for proposed parks and sports grounds. He stated himself in his annual report for 1927 that he exercised the strictest supervision over the allotment of stands to meet the structural requirements of the building and health regulations, including the recommendation of loans under the Native Housing Loan Fund of Government. Though he had to approve in terms of the building and health regulations the building plans of prospective home owners, he exercised his discretionary powers to decide whether the

49 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/33, Minutes (NAB), 20.3.1940, p. 2.
applicant was a “fit and proper” person, taking into consideration his age being 18 years or above, lawful presence in the township, and whether he was married with dependents and employed. To prevent the suburbs of Mangaung degenerating into slums, he aimed to keep a close eye on the erection of authorised structures to complement the halls, sports grounds and schools.\footnote{FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/7, Minutes (NAB), 10.3.1930, p. 2; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/10, Minutes (NAC), 30.11.1926, pp. 5-6; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/6, Supplementary Agenda (NAC), 7.5.1924, pp. 1-2; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/14, Minutes (NAC), 10.5.1928, p. 2.}

Blacks, 18 years and older and in regular employment, were permitted to either rent accommodation from the City Council or to built their houses independently. The poorer, sub-economic class relied on the self-built or self-help housing scheme, also known as the Bloemfontein System, which was developed by Cooper, assisted by his Department, in 1928. P. Morris, the well-know author on the history of housing for blacks in South Africa, appreciatively referred to the benefits of the self-help housing scheme. It certainly was a prime example of benevolent paternalism on the part of Cooper. The scheme, sustained by the loan system of the Native Housing Loan Fund, also applied, as far as could be determined, to Kroonstad and Pietermaritzburg. It enabled blacks to meet the cost of building a house. These blacks received on loan the necessary building material from the

Figure 2: Bethanie suburb, Bloemfontein.
municipal Department of Native Administration, the loan to be paid back within 10 years. The cost of the house erected this way was £100, saving the person £100 on the price of a similar house costing £200 if built by the City Council or a building contractor. Building inspectors assisted blacks to draw up their own building plans, thus ensuring that the plans adhered to the municipal building standards. Cooper contended that the self-built scheme was much cheaper, allowing the local authority to charge lower rates to meet municipal services, and instigating residents to take a greater interest in their properties. In an effort to enable more blacks to own homes and to alleviate the pressure on the shortage of housing, Cooper arranged with the NAC to amend Article 6 of the township regulations to enable not only blacks in the regular employment of whites, but also blacks in the regular employment of other blacks and Coloureds to qualify for a site permit for building purposes, and to also allow his Department to manufacture the necessary bricks, purchased by stand holders, on monthly instalments. He was also empowered to cancel the building permit of the applicant if the building was not erected in a reasonable time (although no explanation was given for a reasonable time).

The same conditions applied for the erection of outbuildings on stands like stables and ablution amenities. Every title holder of a site, requiring a building loan from Government or a supply of building material for the construction of a hut or house, applied to him in writing for such. He could refuse to continue to issue building material at any time if the foundations and walls were not properly constructed. If the title holder failed or refused to pay any sum for which he was liable within one month from the date upon which it became due, or ceded, assigned or transferred his hut or house without the consent of the manager, the latter was empowered to order his removal from the township, and if failing to comply, bring him to court for sentence.

The powers of Cooper in respect of housing stretched further than the mere allotment of stands, loans and the supervision of building activities. It also covered the allotment of houses after issuing a residential permit to an applicant, the sub-letting of stands and houses, and the granting of lodgers’ permits (he granted permits for six days to blacks from elsewhere who were looking for lodging). The granting of these permits also depended on the discretion of Cooper, taking into account the conditions mentioned above for applicants preferring to build their own houses. His NAB, block men and holders of site and residential permits reported to his office within three hours regarding the arrival of visitors - clearly indicative of Coopers determination to control influx to Mangaung in order to regulate the provision of sufficient accommodation to blacks, and labour to employers, in Bloemfontein.

In 1927 the City Council requested that Cooper supervise the demolition process of houses in the condemned areas of the old suburbs of Waaihoek, Bethanie and No. 3 Location (for industrial purposes), the houses in Kaffirfontein (for becoming too dilapidated) and those at Tempe (to make way for extensions to the military base) (Fig. 3). In view of Cooper’s legal obligation to provide sufficient stands and housing to the increasing population of Mangaung, the request for these large scale demolitions put the administrative abilities of

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54 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/6, Supplementary Agenda, (NAC), 7.5.1924, pp. 2-3.
Cooper to the test. The demolition process was scheduled for three years, but eventually took 10 years due to time-consuming property evaluations and the purchasing process involving not-too-willing sellers at times, and the provision of alternative housing to them and their lodgers in the remaining suburbs and in the new suburb of Bochabela being delayed. His task was not made easier by telling these poor people that Council intended to resort to arbitration and expropriation if they sold their houses at excessive prices to him. More than 1 023 houses/huts, valued at about £19 000 by Cooper himself, were involved. Determined to keep the financial statements of the Native Revenue Account sound, he contradicted the City Treasurer when the latter endeavoured to hold the Account responsible for the costs of the demolitions. He pointed out that the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 did not permit costs of such a nature to be a charge against the Account. The demolitions had been done in the interest of white industrial empowerment. The economically and politically powerless urban blacks were also not consulted in the case.  

Cooper preferred to be directly involved in township planning and the layout of new suburbs to ensure that neither time nor money was wasted. The layout of the new suburb of Bochabela provided for 1 852 houses on 900 acres of land to accommodate the people who lost their homes in the demolition process. He was obliged to appoint an assistant building inspector, engaged some 21 labourers on road making, and arranged with the Department of the City Engineer for water installation for domestic use. The steady influx of blacks from the rural and other urban areas for employment opportunities in the 1930s put the efforts of Cooper - to provide proper and sufficient housing - under severe pressure. Influx figures averaged 300 to 500 people per month with some 800 houses in various stages of construction – figures which clearly point to a growing housing shortage and critical overcrowding. Supervising the construction of 300 residential buildings in 1932 he expressed his satisfaction with the progress made to provide housing for the residents: “The facilities offered for building are undoubtedly an attraction to these locations” (suburbs of Mangaung).  

Throughout the ensuing years until his retirement in 1945 Cooper endeavoured to keep influx under control to prevent an over-supply of labour in Bloemfontein, including related social welfare problems like overcrowding and health hazards. To this end he limited the allotment of stands to applicants from the condemned areas, married applicants in the municipal area and males from outside who obtained regular employment. To meet the critical need for housing by non-stand holders Cooper called upon the NAC to bring pressure to bear upon the Provincial Administration for the approval of a loan from Government Loan Funds for 650 four-roomed cottages in 1937. He succeeded in delivering the cottages only in 1940, due to the indolence of the Provincial Administration and the reluctance of black builders to work for a wage of 3/6 per day – a wage regarded by Cooper as sufficient for everyday needs.  

56 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/17, J.R. Cooper Annual Report. 31.3.1930, pp. 2-3; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/18, Minutes (NAC), 11.9.1930, p. 2; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/14, Minutes (NAC), 10.5.1928, p. 2.  
57 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/27, Minutes (NAC), 8.9.1936, p. 5; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/31, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, April 1939, p. 3; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/32, Minutes (NAB), 8.5.1939, p. 2.
The succeeding war years proved to be even more exacting than the financially depressed 1930s. The housing schemes planned by Cooper soon proved to be insufficient. His and the municipal medical officer pointed out to him the utterly dilapidated housing conditions of 1,246 aged and infirm still living at Kaffirfontein, being in need of 489 rooms. Married lodgers with 628 children were in dire need of at least 300 four-roomed cottages. The housing crisis was aggravated by two cases of typhus, directly connected with the poor living conditions at Kaffirfontein, the influx control measures which failed to mitigate overcrowding, and the Central Housing Board of the Union Department of Health criticising Cooper for the poor quality of houses erected by stand holders. In 1940 and again in 1943 the Central Housing Board refused to finance the building operations planned by Cooper for the aged and infirm, lodgers, and stand holders generally. War-time requisitions for building material, and money restrictions by Government, contributed to the Board’s refusal of loan allocations. Cooper resolved to demolish the houses, some only mud huts, of the aged and infirm at Kaffirfontein, only after he was able to provide them with cottages.58

58 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/20, Minutes (NAB), 20.1.1944, pp. 6-7; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/37, Minutes (NAC), 11.2.1944, pp. 6-8.
To his great relief the Central Housing Board resolved to approve his request for an allocation of £60 000 from the sub-economic housing funds in April 1944. The Board probably resolved to finally approve of Cooper’s request after the outbreak of typhus in the township and his contention that the self-help building scheme for stand holders, as supervised for 25 years by his deputy, R.N. Brits, did meet the requirements of the township’s building and health regulations. Referring to the excellent cost-effectiveness of the self-help scheme, Cooper pointed out that to expect of a stand holder to acquire a house from a building contractor as prescribed by the Board, on an average daily wage of 3/6, was “to expect the impossible”. The allocation enabled him to accommodate the lodgers, aged and infirm in cottages, which the latter acquired free of charge due to their indigent circumstances – an arrangement not practiced by other local authorities in the country at that time. The approval by the City Council for the extension of Mangaung to provide for an additional 600 stands in November 1945 was a great relief to Cooper, coming only two weeks before his retirement. The leniency for building material and money by Government after the end of the Second World War in September 1945 enabled him to apply successfully to the Central Housing Board for loans to supply housing as requested by stand holders.59

Cooper also considered the erection of hostels to help solve the demand for accommodation during the war years. However, in his memorandum on the post-war development of Mangaung he doubted the success of it. He argued that the township chiefly disposed of a residential population, most of whom own their own houses, while single blacks lodged with them to relieve financial stress. Their aversion to hostel accommodation related to their attachment to home life and the social atmosphere that generally pervaded the township, fearing that hostel life might impose undue restrictions on their leisure hours. He was, however, convinced that the more respectable class of unattached female, having difficulty in obtaining suitable accommodation, might be attracted to this type of accommodation, especially if properly managed by a matron who had the welfare of the tenants at heart, without imposing irritating and unduly restrictive regulations. Rating the social upliftment of blacks generally highly, he also envisaged reading and writing rooms and facilities for indoor and outdoor recreation at such hostels for females.60 However, as far as could be determined, such housing and facilities were never provided.

Cooper’s duty to provide proper and sufficient accommodation to the township people included supervising the collection of the monthly stand fees and rents due by residents hiring rooms or cottages from the City Council, lodgers’ fees payable by stand holders accommodating lodgers, and taxes for the delivery of cleaning services. A substantial amount of his time was taken up by solving the question of accumulated arrear fees, generally due to the low wage incomes of the residents. He had the difficult task of frequently admonishing his tax officials and members of the to pressurise the residents to pay up in order to avoid legal proceedings, an increase in rents and taxes to finance municipal services, or even the selling of their homes in execution. Knowing very well the dire financial status of the residents, Cooper, true to his benevolent spirit, shortly after his

60 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/36, Minutes (NAC), 11.9.1942, p. 3; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/38, Annexure B, Memorandum on post-war development of Mangaung 1945, pp. 7-8.
appointment, arranged with the NAC to accommodate those residents who fell in arrears, by letting their homes to tenants approved by him, provided the original owners be given the opportunity to recover their homes on payment of all arrears due.\textsuperscript{61}

Such accommodating arrangements by Cooper were not received in the same spirit by the local branch of the ANC in 1932. S. Leshoai, a local representative of the organisation, regarded by Cooper to be irreconcilable and an agitator, instigated residents to oppose ejection orders issued by Cooper if residents eventually failed to pay up after his accommodation arrangements with approved tenants. Cooper assured the local branch of the Association of Bantu Women and an ANC Deputation, led by its president, Dr P.K. Seme, that he always exercised his discretion in these matters, treating each case on its merit. As with so many meetings with his NAB, Cooper pointed out that he was bound by law to collect arrears. As a responsible official, he regarded increased charges as inevitable for a sound Native Revenue Account, being responsible for the delivery of municipal services. Articles 13 and 14 of the township regulations clearly stated that any person failing or refusing to pay the amount for which he was liable within one month from the date when it became due, to pay the amount by Court order or in default, be liable to imprisonment for one month while remaining liable for arrear monies. Article 14 empowered the manager to eject such person from the township if failing to meet his obligation, instead of being sued to appear before Court. He instituted proceedings only if considerable amounts were involved and no effort was made by the stand holder to reduce his debt. For instance, only seven blacks were ejected from their homes during the period 1928 to 1933, while five had their properties returned to them. In 1940 some 80 summonses had been issued in respect of arrear municipal rents, of which only 20 ended at the sale of homes in execution.\textsuperscript{62}

The NAC and the NAB appreciated Cooper’s exceptional leniency to stand holders and tenants being in arrears with their payments, especially during the Economic Depression of 1929 to 1933. His close observation of collecting procedures and sympathetic approach towards residents unable to pay their accounts were responsible for the remarkable decrease in the deficit of the Native Revenue Account during these years. Dedicated to the orderly and fair administration of the township, Cooper, supported by the NAC, warned the residents by mouth of his Advisory Board members that unless the campaign of mis-representation by a small section of irresponsible agitators ceased, he would be obliged to withdraw the privileges enjoyed by debtors, selling their properties to the highest bidder.\textsuperscript{63}

The question of lodger fees exposed Cooper to perhaps even more criticism than the question of arrears in general. The raising of lodger fees to 2/- in 1927 (and to 2/6 in 1941), payable by each lodger scarcely two years after the 1925 Riot, elicited severe criticism from the NAB, the local branch of the ANC, the Congress of Location Advisory Boards and the local Association of Bantu Women. These organisations expressed their dissatisfaction


\textsuperscript{62} FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/23, Minutes (NAC), 12.9.1933, pp. 3-5; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/23, Minutes (NAB), 8.9.1933, p. 2; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/24, Meeting Township Manager, standholders and tenants of City Council houses, 26.3.1934, p. 2; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/34, Minutes (NAC), 14.1.1941, p. 1a; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/25, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, December 1934, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{63} FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/23, Minutes (NAC), 14.11.1933, p. 4; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/24, Minutes (NAC), 23.4.1934, p. 1; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/25, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, December 1934, p. 4.
about sons lodging with their parents (stand holders) being obliged to pay lodger fees. If failing to pay, the stand holders were obliged to pay for them. Cooper explained that it was only fair to treat all sections of the community equitably, except the aged, chronically ill and infirm, who were absolved from paying rents. Therefore, sons 18 years and older who were assumed to be employed, were all required to pay towards the Native Revenue Account for the upkeep of municipal cleansing services and infrastructure. The alternative was to increase stand fees considerably at the cost of stand holders who did not keep lodgers. He thus regarded lodger fees as a fair tax in so far as it was payable by people who derived an income from keeping lodgers. Not losing sight of the weak economic circumstances of the residents, he arranged with the NAC to increase the employment registration fees payable by employers to supplement the Native Revenue Account. In this way he postponed an increase of lodger fees and a general tax raise for the immediate future. This indulgent attitude of Cooper towards the financially poor residents and his accommodation of the aged, chronically ill and infirm, facilitated the readily acceptance of the succeeding increase of lodger fees by his critics in 1945. Their acceptance of his tax arrangements and the resultant sound Native Revenue Account (praised by the NAC) reflected favourably on his successful administration of the township and what could be achieved by way of explanation and co-operation in spite of the difficult years of economic depression.

The provision of infrastructure was probably more demanding than the questions of housing, tax arrangements and lodger fees. It links directly with the upkeeping of safety health standards. The NAB reminded Cooper at almost every monthly meeting of the “shameful and dangerous” condition of the 30 miles of roads in the township. His efforts to provide and keep the roads in a reasonable order, including the surface and drainage for storm water, water for domestic purposes and streetlighting, were severely handicapped by a shortage of water carts, oxen, labourers and money. He did receive some praise from the Board for efforts to improve the township roads, though probably heaved a sigh of relief when the NAC accepted his recommendation to burden the Department of the City Engineer with the task of infrastructure in 1943.

Once the responsibility to provide infrastructure was taken off his shoulders, Cooper was left with more time to persuade the Committee to extend streetlighting to the new suburb of Bochabelo in view of the alarming increase in criminal activities, and to approve of a comprehensive road building programme that included macadamised roads, to facilitate the municipal bus service. His proposal to the Committee to privatise the bus service in view of the many complaints about the insufficient service was refused for fear that it would jeopardise the monopoly exercised by the City Council over public transport. Consequent arrangements on behalf of the NAB for an additional bus and a more effective time-table were more readily received by the Transport and Electricity Committee. It is obvious that

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64 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/13, Minutes (NAC), 16.10.1927, p. 12; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/25, Minutes (NAC), 12.4.1935, pp. 15-18; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/34, Minutes (NAC), 17.1.1941, p. 1a; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/35, Minutes (NAB), 1.5.1941, pp. 1-2; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/24, Minutes (NAC), 16.8.1934, pp. 5-6; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/33, Minutes (NAC), 26.2.1940, p. 2; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/39, Minutes (NAB), 22.3.1945, pp. 1-2.


Cooper’s efforts to improve the living circumstances of the residents in terms of more effective infrastructure and transport were tied down by money constrictions and the self-interest of the City Council.

**INFLUX CONTROL**

The question of influx control related directly to available housing, employment opportunities in the industrial and domestic spheres, and social welfare matters like crime and domestic disputes. Explaining to the NAC the causes for the ever increasing influx of blacks, Cooper revealed his remarkable insight into the political forces at work in the country in the 1920s. He ascribed the residential figure of Mangaung, totalling almost 24,000 in 1926, to natural increase, but also to some external causes like the Land Act, No. 27 of 1913, which prohibited ploughing on shares with white farmers, the substitution of black labour by whites on the Railways and in other departments of Government. Bloemfontein, being the largest industrial centre in the province, disposed of good railway facilities for the flow of people to and from nearby black areas like Basutoland (Lesotho), Thaba Nchu and Transkei (Eastern Cape). Cooper managed a selective labour supply involving close liaison between his department, industry, and the Union Department of Native Affairs. In this situation of pressure and counter-pressure, he stood as township manager – the servant of the white labour-seeking public but also the protector of his black charges.  

Section 5 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 allowed blacks in the possession of a permit, signed by the magistrate of the district where he resided, to enter the urban area of Bloemfontein to look for employment and accommodation for a period not exceeding two weeks. His admission to Mangaung, however, was subject to the approval of the township manager. Section 6 entitled blacks, not in possession of a permit of a magistrate, to enter the township for a period of six days to seek employment in the municipal area. The Manager was not empowered to refuse the issue of such permit. Cooper lamented the condition of Section 6 which practically limited his power to control influx, remarking at a meeting of the NAB, “If I had the power to stop people coming in, I would do so”.  In his report to the NAC which he also presented at the Municipal Congress at Winburg and at his meeting with the Secretary of the Department of Native Affairs in 1929, he discussed the practical administration of the Act, warning that, unless some residential qualification was applied to restrain influx, it would result in families from rural and other urban areas migrating to Mangaung for the sole purpose of enjoying the facilities afforded in the township, resulting in critical implications for housing and infrastructure. If a black person did obtain employment, he became entitled to a lodger’s permit. Cooper doubted the feasibility of restricting the number of lodgers to each house due to limited financial and manpower resources to exercise effective control.

Cooper pointed out to his NAB that a lenient influx control policy jeopardised the employment opportunities of the permanent residents. To this end the township

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69 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/16, Minutes (NAC), 14.2.1929, pp. 3-4; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/15, Minutes (NAC), 12.9.1928, p. 3e.
regulations, framed in terms of the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 and Government Notice No. 1992 of 1924, empowered him to eject from Mangaung all black persons who were not usefully employed, excluding of course the families of those lawfully resident, those in regular employment and labourers returning to the township after being engaged temporarily elsewhere. Cooper, indeed, found himself caught between the clashing interests of the City Council and competitive industry. Council drew his attention to the “unrestricted influx” of blacks in excess of labour demands. On the opposite side, competitive industry, including domestic management, demanded a reservoir of unemployed labour to keep such labour readily available and wages low. Conscious of such reservoirs of labour being prevalent in European countries like Britain and Germany, Cooper himself regarded such a practice as cruel and wasteful, causing many families to break up due to insecure employment and uncertain earnings.

The challenge facing Cooper on the eve of the 1930s was to regulate labour resources in the municipal area of Bloemfontein in order to satisfy industrial and domestic needs without creating a pool of idle people practising criminal activities. Cooper had employment registration officials in place soon after his appointment. He was empowered by Section 8 of the Wages Act of 1925 to decline the registration of an employment contract if the employee was an unskilled labourer, receiving in his (Cooper’s) opinion, remuneration lower than that stipulated by the Wage Board. The NAC also approved his request to decline permits of applicants looking for employment if, to his judgement, the supply of labour equalled the demand. Assisted by his registration officials, Cooper applied this decision strictly. The permits of almost 200 applicants from outside the municipal area were refused during the seven months from July 1928 to January 1929. Influx and employment control became more exacting in the 1930s due to limited staff resources (on account of the Economic Depression), failing to trace employers, and employees who neglected to observe the regulations for influx control and employment contracts. Cooper himself had to supervise approximately 850 permits to seek employment and 570 employment contracts on a monthly basis in 1931. He arranged with the District Commandant of the South African Police for constables to assist in checking the influx of strangers after experiencing reluctance from his Advisory Board members and block men of the Central Committee to render assistance due to dissatisfaction countrywide among urban blacks with their politically inferior position, instigated by political organisations like the ANC. Such political influence also contributed towards their reluctance to participate in the counter-influx control measures of Cooper.

Influx to the municipal area of Bloemfontein increased considerably on the eve of the Second World War. The Economic Depression of the early 1930s resulted in the migration to urban areas of impoverished rural black people. A noteworthy aspect of the South African economy during the late 1930s and the war years was the rapid development of industry to produce war materials. Money was plentiful, attracting blacks to the urban areas for employment and a better living. To supplement his influx control measures, Cooper proposed to the NAC the possible erection of a hostel or a compound near the Railway Station, including the fencing of the township with only a few entrances as a

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means to control influx into the township. He directed enquiries to various large urban centres like Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town where hostels existed, serving as a reception depot for strangers seeking employment and from where those blacks not finding employment within six days were repatriated. The NAC appreciated Cooper’s excellent report, but decided to postpone his proposal in view of the heavy financial layout for such a venture in terms of additional staff at the entrances, the upkeep of the hostel and the reluctance of the NAB and block men to render their support for reasons mentioned above.  

Cooper remained committed to Council policy to apply influx control as strictly as possible within the parameters of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 as amended during the war years (1939-1945). Proof that the influx of blacks was not abating was manifested by his remark to the councillors of the NAC that “unless drastic measures be taken to arrest the influx we shall soon be faced with large numbers of unemployed and also a serious problem of overcrowding”. One of his most important arrangements in the early 1940s was to successfully apply to Government via the Committee to proclaim the Bloemfontein municipal area a closed area in terms of Section 5 and 21 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 as amended. Read in conjunction with Proclamation 210 of 1938 and Cooper’s discretionary power to decide who was a “fit and proper” person to enter the municipal area, he restricted the entry of blacks to those born in the area but employed elsewhere. For instance, the employment records of miners and soldiers returning to the township after their service contracts had expired, convinced him of their right to reside in the township. However, people like teachers or ministers of religion belonging to recognised churches transferred to Mangaung were only permitted entrance provided accommodation was available. Two other concessions were school children returning from educational institutions elsewhere, and blacks claiming convincingly that they had to look after their aged and infirm parents. To meet the demands of employers for male and female employees from outside the municipal area, Cooper only allowed such employees in if the employers accommodated them on their premises and were willing to send them back to their original places of residence after conclusion of their period of service, i.e. employees visiting the municipal area *bona fide* and only on a temporary basis.

In spite of these arrangements Cooper remarked to the NAC that his controlling measures were not effective, seeing that 317 houses were still overcrowded in 1942, even after 4 000 males and females were ordered to leave the municipal area – not being able to provide written proof of being employed, permitted to seek employment or on a *bona fide* temporary visit. After admitting, probably with some concern, that “numbers return and evade detection for days and weeks”, the Committee approved of his proposal to empower his officials and constables of the South African Police to inspect documents of suspicious-looking blacks and, in terms of Section 23 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, to also search any premises at all reasonable hours during the day or night.

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73 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/34, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, April 1940, pp. 3-4.
74 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/38, Minutes (NAB), 15.6.1944, p. 2; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/33, Minutes (NAC), 6.3.1940; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/34, Minutes (NAC), 14.6.1940, p. 6 and Minutes (NAB), 12.6.1940, p. 1.
The building and commercial industry and the NAB were quite upset about the closed area clause which in practice meant that blacks were only allowed to enter the area on his discretion and if accommodation and employment were available. These conditions made it almost impossible for children of residents, being 21 years and older, to re-enter the municipal area. Board members advocated the entrance of these children and all blacks born in the municipal area despite the lucid explanation by Cooper that there was no accommodation for these people in the township and that the war effort restricted money resources and the availability of building material to alleviate the housing crisis. A lenient influx control policy and resultant overcrowded housing conditions instigated social-welfare problems like health, crime and limited employment opportunities. However, they refused to change their minds, even after Cooper re-iterated that the constrictions on money and building material were conditions beyond his control.\(^\text{76}\)

The severe criticism elicited by his strict housing and influx control policy was certainly not gratifying to Cooper, suggesting that he failed to control influx effectively and jeopardised his able management of Mangaung. The situation was aggravated by employers who were not required to take out service contracts in respect of females. Nonetheless, he derived comfort from the support rendered by the NAC and the Union Department of Native Affairs, realising that these conditions were actually beyond their control. These war-time conditions also faced the other larger cities in the country, preventing them from coping effectively with increasing black urban populations, leading to housing crises, despite legislation conferring upon them wide powers of control.

Cooper criticised municipal policy for maintaining a steady and progressive policy of limiting accommodation and restricting township extension to the needs of blacks ordinarily employed as not practically possible. Such a policy might afford some relief to urban areas, but remained problematical because it unduly restricted the movements of blacks – peremptory measures morally and ethically unsound, failing also to meet the labour demands of industry and domestic managements. Without fear of reprimand by the City Council, Cooper proposed alternative options for black urban settlement to relieve the pressure on congested townships, stressing that delay in this matter was inviting disaster: “I trust that I shall not be accused of a desire to enter the political arena by venturing an opinion that the only source of relief is land with facilities for settlement.”\(^\text{77}\) He proposed land for settlement by blacks in the British High Commission Territories of Bechuanaland (Botswana), Swaziland and Basutoland (Lesotho), and in the reserves of Thaba 'Nchu, Transkei and Ciskei (later known as homelands) to facilitate the regulation of labour supplies for the demands of industry, domestic management and the orderly development of townships. He was convinced that such an objective could only be met by measures and means of a legislative or voluntary nature, offering facilities and attractions for the settlement and progress of blacks. The NAC, impressed by the proposal of Cooper, recommended to the City Council that it make representations to Government to consider for its national policy the setting aside of areas for black settlement as suggested by Cooper.\(^\text{78}\)

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\(^{77}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/10, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, November 1926, p. 3.

\(^{78}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/21, J.R. Cooper Annual Report, 31.3.1932, pp. 1-5; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/10, Minutes (NAC), 30.11.1926, p. 9.
It is significant that his viewpoint - that township extension could not be restricted to the needs of blacks ordinarily employed - coincided with that of the Fagan Commission, appointed by Government in 1946, a few months after his retirement. The Commission, however, differed from Cooper regarding the setting aside of areas for black settlement as the policy of territorial segregation was altogether impracticable because the influx from these black territories into the townships at white urban areas was a natural economical phenomenon which could not be reversed. Secondly, in the white urban areas there were not only black migratory labourers, but also a permanent black population. For these reasons, legislation based on the viewpoint of the Stallard Commission of 1921 – that blacks were merely temporary visitors to the urban areas – was no longer appropriate.\(^{79}\)

To what extent the proposal of Cooper to set aside areas for black settlement, dating back to November 1926 and revived in 1932, influenced the national policy for blacks, or vice versa, is uncertain. Government postponed the purchase of additional land for the reserves due to the high price of land during the war. Cooper’s warning that delay in matters like these invited disaster was indeed realised during the war. Dissatisfaction manifested itself in speeches made in the Native Representative Council, in the activities of black organisations like the ANC and finally in strikes, boycotts, protest marches and disturbances countrywide.\(^{80}\)

**UNEMPLOYMENT**

The end of the Economic Depression in the late 1930s unfortunately did not mean an end to unemployment and poverty. The question of unemployment, with poverty in its wake, confronted Cooper in Mangaung on a daily basis. It was complicated by the large numbers of unskilled labourers. The City’s minimum wage of 3/6 per day enticed blacks to influx, putting employment opportunities for local blacks under pressure. Failure by Government to render assistance like wage increases or employment creation served only to convince Cooper that it was dependant on him to find outcomes for the unemployed in the township. It was not only his duty by law, but also his humanitarian conviction, that motivated him to improve their socio-economic plight. He relied on the members of his and their block men to support him by suggesting avenues of relief for the unemployed.\(^{81}\)

Cooper proved himself to be much more liberally disposed towards the economic upliftment of urban blacks than the majority of City councillors, setting a fine example for other local authorities. Trading rights and hawking were the first two options considered by Cooper to counteract unemployment. His actions in this regard proved that he was quite leniently disposed towards improving the economic self-sufficiency of urban blacks. Because of his legal experience as assistant-magistrate, he realised that the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 removed the ban placed by the Municipal Act, No. 8 of 1893, on black trading rights. However, soon after his appointment the members of the NAC informed him in no uncertain terms that the City Council was averse to black trading rights – on account of their racial partiality for protecting white trading rights. Failing to extend

\(^{79}\) Compare Muller, pp. 455-457.

\(^{80}\) Muller, pp. 429-435, 449.

\(^{81}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/20, Minutes (NAB), 24.11.1931, pp. 3-4; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/21, J.R. Cooper Annual Report, 31.3.1932, p. 9; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/21, Minutes (NAB), 25.2.1932, p. 3 and Minutes Joint Meeting (NAC) and (NAB), 10.5.1932, p. 2.
trading rights to the residents of the township, he convinced the Committee to permit hawking within the township – a step which elicited the appreciation of the NAB and members of the local ANC in 1927. To make up for the refusal of trading rights, Cooper promoted the Mangaung Market Project of the Market Committee, an initiative regarded by him as important for urban blacks to gain greater financial independence.\textsuperscript{82}

He sympathised with his NAB about the disgraceful behaviour of whites making a living by hawking in the township, “allowing their love of money to cause them to forget all the laws of courtesy and civility”.\textsuperscript{83} These whites actually deprived the unemployed blacks of one of the few opportunities to earn a living. He regarded the township not only as a reservoir of labour, being the popular view in local and government circles but, like the Fagan Commission, also as a place of permanent residence for people who had nowhere else to go. On his request the NAC recommended to Government via Council an amendment to the Natives (Urban Areas) Act to bar whites from hawking in the township – a request which was affected in the amended Act, No. 25 of 1930, Section 5. It was only in 1943 that the City Council resolved to grant the residents of Mangaung trading rights, including the erection of eating houses. The Receiver of Revenue granted licences to trade to applicants, after this had been recommended by Cooper. He was willing to encourage black trading as long as he exercised the power to decide whether the applicant was a “fit and proper” person for a trading licence in order to meet the condition of Council for the orderly conduct of trading activities in the township. These trading arrangements, including hawking, were a major step to counter unemployment and speaks well of Cooper’s endeavours to improve the economic well-being of township residents.\textsuperscript{84}

Cooper placed a high premium on the value of formal education for training unskilled workers and countering unemployment. For his fixed convictions on black education he was respected by the NAC, the Provincial Department of Education, the local branch of the ANC and the National Council of Women of South Africa. Besides advocating the founding of a large public school in Mangaung, he was requested in 1929 by the Chief Inspector of Education in the province, H.G. Kuscke, to provide a report on establishing a domestic training centre in the township. To improve the skills levels of black male and female workers he recommended that all black children between the ages of seven and 14, roaming the streets, be compelled to attend school. Such an arrangement was a preliminary step towards establishing a domestic training centre, including agricultural training in the township, to be erected by municipal funds and equipped by the Provincial Department of Education. Cooper also envisaged a properly organised employment bureau to arrange employment opportunities for students graduating from the training centre. The City Council appreciated his recommendation for such a centre and the beneficial effects of compulsory education, but regarded it as a governmental matter, doubting its feasibility in the light of the political climate and the Economic Depression of the early 1930s.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{82} FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/12, Minutes (NAC), 15.3.1927, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{83} FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/25, Minutes Joint Meeting (NAC) and Native Advisory Board, 27.3.1935, p.1.
\textsuperscript{84} FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/14, Minutes Joint Meeting (NAC) and (NAB), 10.5.1928, pp. 3-5; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/15, Minutes (NAC), 12.9.1928, p. 3b; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/37, Minutes (NAC), 11.2.1944, p.2; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/88, Supplementary Agenda (NAC), 8.10.1944, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{85} FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/17, Minutes (NAC), 16.9.1929, pp. 1-2; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/13, Minutes (NAC), 11.7.1927, p. 1.
Cooper was disappointed by the negative impact of white racial partiality on black education. He expected Government to take the initiative in black educational matters, seeing that education for blacks was not the responsibility of the local authority. The Apprenticeship Act, No. 26 of 1922, stipulated minimum educational qualifications for apprentices, which effectively prevented blacks from obtaining apprenticeships to pull themselves out of the ranks of unskilled labour. In his so-called “black manifesto” on the eve of the general election of 1929 the National Party’s Hertzog attacked the leader of the South African Party, General J.C. Smuts, for his socio-economic and political leniency towards the black people who were regarded by the National Party as an overpowering danger due to their large numbers. Hertzog obviously realised that compulsory education for blacks, including the cost thereof, in the face of the majority of white voters fearing their growing numbers, would certainly cost him votes at the polls. The report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Native Education in 1936 convinced Cooper of the strong opposition by whites generally against black education: that it made blacks lazy and unfit for manual labour, making them less docile as servants and led them to despise their own culture. He probably echoed the question asked by the Committee, namely whether Government aimed to Europeanize the black people or to prepare them for an isolated black civilization? 

Cooper derived some consolation from the realisation that he was not alone in his quest for better educational facilities for the youth of Mangaung in the late 1930s and during the succeeding war years. The Native Representative Council, not being discouraged by the racial viewpoint of Government, voiced the pleas of urban blacks countrywide by requesting compulsory education and more educational facilities to counter the growing lawlessness of the youth in 1937. In 1940 the Chief Inspector of Education in the Transvaal, W.W.M. Eiselen, supported requests by Cooper and black political organisations countrywide for compulsory education to take over the disciplinary role of tribal institutions. However, Cooper saw no educational improvements during the war years due to the constraints placed by Hertzog’s successor, J.C. Smuts, on financial expenditures and commodities like building material and fuel. Smuts was Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Officer commanding the South African Forces, and was so imbued with the war effort and supporting Britain that he neglected affairs at home – black education was certainly not a priority then. 

The Economic Depression obliged Cooper to look in all earnest at alternative solutions to the unemployment and poverty question. First of all he explained to his NAB the nature and implications of this serious question – affecting “all countries and people of every colour and race”. In South Africa the question was complicated by the large number of unskilled black workers. He pointed out to Board members that the unemployed in Mangaung amounted to 1 090 in 1931, rapidly increasing to 1 700 in 1932. Practically every business in Bloemfontein was obliged to retrench employees. Cooper expressed his concern about the unemployed blacks, queuing daily at the Pass Office to renew their permits to look for employment, their faces revealing a pitiable state of hunger and anger. His Advisory Board members informed him that more than 80% of the residents, normally

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86 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/17, Minutes (NAC), 11.11.1929, p. 2. For more detail on the Black manifesto of Hertzog, consult Muller, chapter 18.
87 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/17, Minutes (NAC), 11.11.1929, p. 2; M. Wilson and L. Thompson (Eds.), The Oxford history of South Africa, II, pp. 223-226; Muller, pp. 442, 448.
88 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/20, Minutes (NAB), 24.11.1931, p. 3.
living below the breadline, were in need of substantial material help as they were verging on starvation. He recalled the riot of April 1925, being triggered by, among other things, low wages and resultant poverty. These conditions were much more serious in the early 1930s. As responsible official and from experience he realised that these people had reached the limits of their endurance.\(^89\)

Cooper arranged, with the support of his NAB, a public meeting of black employees to establish a poor relief fund in June 1932. Black employees paid 1/- per month into the fund in order to pay unemployed blacks a daily wage of 1/6 for relief work like road and sewerage works which Cooper identified in the municipal area. Eight months later, in February 1933, Cooper had 285 workers engaged on relief works. He, however, lamented the displacement policy of the City Council and Central Government, involving the substitution of blacks for whites at the work place, causing unemployment figures to increase to 3 000 in Mangaung in April 1933. Cooper warned Council of the growing dissatisfaction and ill-feeling of residents, especially after an additional 557 stand holders were unable to pay their stand fees the next month. Situations like these also impaired the successful management of the township. Supported by the NAC he convinced the Union Department of Native Affairs to subsidise each black employed at the relief works at the rate of six pennies per day, on condition that Council contributed the same amount for each worker. Concerned by the displacement policy of Government and the economic depression still lingering on in 1934, he instructed his officials and the members of his Advisory Board to encourage unemployed blacks to report at the recruiting agents of the Johannesburg gold mining companies, also arranging with the Provincial Administration of the Free State to employ at least 200 blacks from Mangaung at road works in the Province, such as in the districts of Heilbron and Viljoensdrif. He visited some of these construction sites after receiving complaints about their working and living conditions – a token of his constant interest in the welfare of the residents of Mangaung.\(^90\)

Cooper’s dedicated efforts to carry the residents through the economic depression did not pass unnoticed in Government circles. Appreciation for his endeavours to combat unemployment surfaced when the President of the Urban Native Affairs Conference, under the auspices of the Union Department of Native Affairs, invited him to Johannesburg in August 1933 to deliver a paper on unemployment among urban blacks. At home in Mangaung his Advisory Board and T.M. Mapikela, chairman of the Central Committee of the Board, appreciated his endeavours to literally save their people from starvation. Of equal importance was the considerable trust the City Council and its NAC put in Cooper to successfully uplift the economically depressed people of Mangaung – proof again of his humanitarian approach and ability as successful administrator of his Department.\(^91\)

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\(^{89}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/21, J.R. Cooper Annual Report, 31.3.1932, p. 9; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/21, Minutes Joint Meeting (NAC) and (NAB), 10.5.1932, p. 2.


\(^{91}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/23, Minutes (NAC), 15.8.1933, pp. 2-3; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/22, Minutes (NAB.), 7.6.1933, p. 2.
HEALTH MATTERS

Cooper regarded a healthy environment as a prerequisite for any community to carry out its daily social and economic activities. The health situation in Mangaung impressed itself upon Cooper soon after his appointment. Within his first year the local medical officer of health of the Public Health Committee drew his attention to the irregular cleansing services. It entailed a shortage of carts, oxen and buckets and the need for a re-scheduling of rounds on a weekly basis. Two years later the Union Departments of Public Health and Native Affairs requested from township managers a report on the successful delivery of municipal cleansing services after representations made by local health officials, ANC branches and s countrywide about the poor delivery of these services.\(^\text{92}\)

Cooper pointed out to his critics that the provision of a satisfactory municipal cleaning service was a problem in townships generally, aggravated by the economic depression and increasing township populations. The limited money in the Native Revenue Account prevented Cooper from summarily purchasing more equipment and appointing more staff. He expressed himself in favour of a water-borne sanitation system at a meeting with the Native Economic Commission of the Department of Native Affairs in 1933, acknowledging however that, until the economic position of urban blacks improved to allow increased taxation necessary to meet the extra costs of such a system, the bucket system had to suffice. When the city engineer expressed his concern about the inadequacy of the cleaning service due to the shortage of equipment and staff, endangering health conditions, Cooper, without concern for rebuke, reminded the NAC that the City Council of Bloemfontein was indeed the only large local authority not making a substantial contribution from its General Rate Fund to the cost of cleaning services to protect general health conditions in its white and black suburbs. He again reminded the Committee that the residents of Mangaung were not financially capable of upgrading the costly cleaning services. The delivery of these services increased to such an extent that Cooper was obliged to recommend to the Committee in 1937 that these services be transferred to the Department of the City Engineer which disposed of the financial resources and necessary technical assistance.\(^\text{93}\)

The city engineer, taking over the cleaning services, did not absolve Cooper from his responsibility to look after the welfare of the residents. In fact, acting as overseer, he still had to negotiate with the city engineer for delivering the best services possible. He was not always successful in this regard. For example, his requests for a larger water supply for the washer women, schools, and ongoing building operations in 1939, 1943 and again in 1944, were turned down. The excuse was that constrictions on money resources and building materials like iron (due to the war effort), prevented the mains from being replaced to provide larger volumes of water from the reservoir. These constraints also incapacitated other aspects of infrastructure, exposing Cooper to severe criticism. A petition signed by six black females, representing an unknown number of residents, contained numerous complaints about the cleansing services not being carried out effectively in February 1945. Cooper was probably quite relieved to refer the vexed cleansing question to the City Engineer, who provided petitioners with an extensive explanation of obstacles he had to

\(^{92}\) FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/10, Minutes (NAC), 12.8.1926, p. 2; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/7, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, March 1925, p. 2.

The provision of health services presented multiple difficulties to Cooper, especially with the Asiatic flu epidemic of 1918 still fresh in the minds of the people. Soon after his appointment Cooper drew the attention of the NAC to Section 2 of the Public Health Act, No. 36 of 1919, imposing on local authorities a duty to prevent or remedy the danger of diseases to blacks living in an urban environment. These people, subjected to poor socio-economic conditions, were exposed to illnesses like influenza, enteric and typhus fever on an epidemic scale. The township health regulations did not empower the medical officer of health to immediately apply effective precautionary measures to deal with a breakout of plague, for instance. Therefore, Cooper, in terms of Section 5 of the Public Health Act of 1919, as amended by the Public Health Act, No. 36 of 1927, recommended to the NAC that it expand the scope of duties of the location medical practitioner to investigate and instruct in all matters pertaining to preventive and curative health measures. These precautionary arrangements came none too soon as members of the NAB complained to him about patients not receiving proper medical care at the township clinic due to insufficient nurses and unnecessary delays in the appointment of medical staff. About 100 patients per month were attending the clinic in 1930. After the outbreak of typhus and enteric fever in 1933/34, almost reaching epidemic proportions, Cooper lodged a complaint with the Public Health Committee for not keeping him posted on health questions in the township such as the lack of money to upgrade the poorly-equipped dispensary at the clinic and the absence of qualified nurses to teach residents preventive health measures in an effort to diminish the alarming high infant mortality rate. He nonetheless encouraged his Advisory Board and block men to convince as many residents as possible to attend the lectures presented by available medical staff on precautionary health measures to combat the possible outbreak and spread of infectious and contagious diseases.

The NAC, convinced by the gravity of Cooper’s complaints, rallied the support of the Public Health Committee and its medical officer of health to be more attentive about the precarious health position of the residents. The support of these bodies was a comfort to Cooper, knowing well how defenceless the poor residents were in the aftermath of the economic depression, prevailing low wages and the overcrowded living conditions in the township. In his memorandum to the NAC on the post-war development of Mangaung, Cooper recommended the upgrading of health services in the township, lectures on public health matters and stricter control of the clinic staff. These recommendations are a fair
indication that he had the interests of the residents at heart and understood the requisites for an effective municipal health service.

SOCIAL WELFARE

Cooper regarded the improvement of social welfare conditions in Mangaung as one of his primary duties. Indeed, a considerable amount of his time was occupied by welfare matters. As he remarked in his memorandum on the post-war development of the township: “This service demands every encouragement. In parenthesis I would venture the opinion that the future of native society will depend on the character of the social service”.97 One of his first actions was to confer with the NAC for the establishment of some welfare action to cope with the voluminous and critical number of welfare cases in the township. These included more than 2 000 domestic disputes such as desertions, assaults, illegitimate children, juvenile delinquency, alcohol abuse, maintenance charges and, not less important, poor relief for the aged and infirm.98

The question of the aged and infirm was indeed a social question continually occupying the attention of Cooper. His Advisory Board and block men frequently reminded him of the poor relief for those aged above 60, and the infirm who were incapable of working due to sickness and without those relatives to look after them. He pointed out that local authorities in the larger urban areas like Bloemfontein were participating in an increasing degree in social work, seeing that the number of old and indigent people was increasing annually, amounting to at least 600 in 1936. He arranged with the NAC for free accommodation in City Council houses and free medical attendance at the clinic/dispensary. From the Bantu Benevolent Fund of his Department he made provision for grants and about 8/- per person monthly. Cooper encouraged his assistant, R.N. Brits, and his Advisory Board, to stage entertainment in the Community Hall to raise money for the regular annual grant (Christmas Cheer) for the benefit of the aged and infirm. Less successful were his repeated appeals to the NAC to increase the pensions of municipal employees, who received only £1 monthly, and upon the Provincial Secretary for larger contributions to the Bantu Benevolent Fund in 1938 when there were more than a 1 000 poor, aged and infirm in Mangaung. Action on his memorandum on old age homes was postponed until after the war when money and building material would be more readily available.99

Cooper became increasingly concerned about the immoral behaviour of schoolchildren, constantly receiving complaints from parents and nurses of the clinic about children becoming uncontrollable in the 1930s. He entered into discussions with his Advisory Board, the local police and educational authorities, the NAC and representatives of residents and parents, to arrive at some means whereby the immoral conduct of these juveniles could be remedied. He ascribed the immoral conditions relating to juveniles to the lack of parental control and moral training due to the desertion by one or both parents of their children or the daily absence of parents from homes, being at work for long hours. Besides advocating compulsory education for juveniles (refused for reasons already

97 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/38, Minutes (NAB), 16.1.1945, p.2.
98 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/8, J.R. Cooper Quarterly Report, September 1925, p. 5.
discussed) to get them into a disciplined environment and off the streets, he requested, with the support of his Advisory Board, that the educational authorities strictly discipline teachers who were supposed to act as role models, but arrived drunk at school, and conducted immoral relations with schoolgirls and adult women. He also reprimanded the Advisory Board for not reporting unmarried women hiring rooms where they brewed beer illegally, and instructed his officials to prosecute any lodger without a lodger’s permit. Looking from whatever point of view at the liquor question, Cooper was convinced the attempts at enforcing prohibition among urban blacks had failed, only to instigate the abuse of liquor by juveniles. Not to despair, he arranged with the provincial educational authorities, responsible for education in townships, to propagate at school and sports functions the health and social dangers of alcohol abuse.  

Alcohol abuse and the illicit brewing of beer posed a continuous problem to Cooper. Once again, as in the case of the self-built housing scheme and accompanying loan system, his benevolent paternalistic approach towards the socio-economic plight of the urban black inspired him to arrange an acceptable solution with his Advisory Board and NAC. To gain more knowledge on the means to combat these social questions he made numerous visits to the townships at Durban and Pietermaritzburg in 1927, to the townships at Pretoria, Boksburg and Springs in 1939 and 1945, provided memoranda on the question to the NAC in 1928 and 1939 and addressed a public meeting at Bochabela Square in Mangaung in 1945. He advised the NAC that to municipalise beer, including the brewing and selling thereof under controlled circumstances, for instance at a municipal beer hall, certainly was a means to cater for the so-called “loose boys”, seeing that the manager of the township at Durban experienced a decrease of 501 crime cases in 1927. However, remembering that one of the main causes of the 1925 Riot was the infringement by Council of the traditional right of urban blacks to brew their own beer, convinced Cooper to recommend to the NAC not to municipalise beer brewing. He recommended continuation of domestic brewing of beer, but qualified his recommendation in two respects. Firstly, to continue the traditional domestic brewing of beer without a permit and secondly, to introduce licensed houses for the manufacture and sale of beer. His recommendation, which was accepted by the NAC, was sanctioned by Government Notice, No. 70 of 19 January 1945, in terms of Sections 20 and 21 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 as amended. Cooper, however, reminded his Advisory Board and block men that if such arrangement be abused, the brewing of beer would be municipalised. The Board appreciated his efforts and sympathetic approach to finalise a sensitive question which dragged on for about 20 years.  

Cooper pointed out to the NAC that Mangaung was inadequately policed, incapacitating his duty in terms of Sections 11 and 23 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act to maintain the social welfare of the residents by protecting them, for instance, against criminal activities like the illicit brewing of beer, theft and assault. He appreciated the new police station erected in the suburb of Batho in 1927, but was alarmed by the intention of government to decrease

the police service in townships countrywide to save on national budget expenses. This was to happen when an estimated 1 600 juveniles in the township were not receiving education in 1932 – “creating a large class of criminals” in the words of Cooper.¹⁰² He highly valued the upgrading of educational standards in Mangaung to lighten the task of the police who were struggling to keep the increasing criminal activities under control. Until the number of police constables was considerably augmented and sufficient educational facilities provided, he saw no means of preventing these juveniles from becoming juvenile delinquents and eventually criminals. Reaching the criminal stage, Cooper warned his Board members, the only alternative was to send these youths, in terms of Section 17 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, to a farm or work colony established under Section 50 of the Prisons and Reformatories Act, No. 13 of 1911. To make up for limited police enforcement Cooper, after discussions with the NAC and the Minister of Native Affairs in Pretoria in 1928, appointed peace officers in terms of Section 390 of the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act, No. 31 of 1917. Sections 27 and 29 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act empowered him and his authorised peace officers to demand from arrested persons the production of identity documents. He was quite adamant about detecting blacks without the necessary permits to seek employment or visit friends, licences to brew beer, or those instigating residents to rebel against his administration of the township. He expected the people to co-operate with him against crime – his Advisory Board, police, block men and peace officers – to act firmly in accordance with municipal laws and regulations, putting the welfare of the residents first. It is obvious that the improvement of social welfare conditions, generally speaking, were handicapped by financial constraints and the absence of compulsory education due to the racially biased white nationalistic government, limited police assistance and parental control impaired by employment obligations.¹⁰³

The disrupting influence caused by the Economic Depression in the socio-economic lives of the township residents in the early 1930s finally convinced Cooper of the necessity for a social welfare office for his Department in 1934. To this end he chaired a meeting, called by him and attended by about 20 welfare societies including church and sport organisations, teaching associations and the Congress of Location Advisory Boards, to discuss the feasibility of his proposal. His report of the meeting, which included a definition of the duties of such a welfare service and its co-operation with these organisations to promote social welfare in the township, impressed the NAC. After Cooper pointed out that his budget for the 1936 financial year provided for the appointment of a black male social welfare worker, the Committee resolved to approve his proposal.¹⁰⁴

The social welfare worker supervised the Bantu Social Institute, which under the auspices of his Department, catered in particular for the recreational needs of black teenagers, including indoor (e.g. reading) and outdoor (e.g. soccer) activities. It stands to reason that Cooper kept a close eye on the activities of the Institute, providing as it did a valuable addition to the curricula of the surrounding schools and serving as an important means to keep the youth off the streets. Lamenting the absence of compulsory education, Cooper

¹⁰² FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/8, J.R. Cooper Quarterly Report, September 1925, p. 5.
¹⁰³ FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/12, Minutes (NAC), 15.3.1927, p. 7 and J.R. Cooper Annual Report, April 1927, p. 7; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/15, Minutes (NAC), 14.8.1928, p. 3; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/16, Minutes (NAB), 25.6.1929, pp. 3-4.
pinned his hopes on the Institute to offer opportunities to the youth to combat the many social evils in the township, but also to improve relationships with whites, starting with inter-racial school sports activities. Due to the racial policy of the ruling white Government, such inter-racial school activities never occurred. He regarded social work at juvenile level in a broader context, namely the improvement of racial relations at a time when the black people of South Africa began to show increasing signs of dissatisfaction with their inferior socio-economic and political position (low wages, reservation of employment for whites, and the absence of voting and land rights). This dissatisfaction manifested itself in speeches made in the Native Representative Council and in the activities of the ANC and other black organisations. In reply to the Native Economic Commission, that local authorities generally were lagging behind with respect to recreational facilities, Cooper emphasised that his Department was at the forefront of providing the necessary facilities, with himself acting as facilitator for the establishment of sports clubs like soccer, cricket and tennis, until the newly appointed welfare worker took over such functions in 1936. He furthermore encouraged social organisations like the Association for Wayfarers, the Young Men’s Christian Association and the Pathfinders (a scout movement) to play valuable roles in terms of acculturation, calling upon head masters of black schools, members of his Advisory Board and their block men to propagate membership of these organisations.\textsuperscript{105}

The sports and cultural clubs for boys and girls at the Bantu Social Institute, ostensibly, were not as successful as Cooper expected them to be. These clubs enlisted only about 400 members, while more than a 1 000 youths were still roaming the streets during the war years. Authors on municipal recreation are of the view that these clubs, including youth and community centres run by welfare agencies for considerations of crime prevention, were subjected to public prejudice. The public felt that recreation under such circumstances deprived recreation of its real meaning. It has to be conceded that Cooper, like other township managers in the country, was handicapped by two important considerations: Firstly, the parsimony of a racially-biased white City Council, refusing to make money available from the General Revenue Account for improvements to the sports grounds of the various sports clubs. Secondly, in South Africa recreation is still seldom seen as an obligation falling within the framework of governmental responsibility. In many other countries like the USA and Britain, recreation is considered to be an indispensable facet of governmental concern for the well-being of the population. Through city planning, local government is best equipped to acquire, develop and administer areas for parks and recreational activities, being the property of local authorities.\textsuperscript{106}

The completion of the Mangaung Sports Grounds in 1927 was a personal achievement for Cooper, being responsible for the financial arrangements and construction in conjunction with the city engineer. At the opening ceremony the residents expressed their keen appreciation of the facilities afforded them – a token of Cooper’s willingness to render support for their social upliftment despite financial and political setbacks. Cooper achieved more success, with the limited resources at his disposal, to develop in consultation with the city engineer, parks and playgrounds for general recreational purposes, these costing less

\textsuperscript{105} FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/35, Minutes (NAB), 22.9.1941, p. 9; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/36, Minutes (NAC), p. 2; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/22, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, April 1933, pp. 5-6; Muller, p. 449.

\textsuperscript{106} Opperman, pp. 10-11; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/36, Minutes (NAB), 17.6.1943, p. 5 and 1.2.1943, pp. 4-5.
than the development of sports grounds and buildings. Soon after his appointment, Cooper arranged with the Municipal Departments of the City Engineer and Public Works for the planting of a belt of trees to mark off the so-called Native Park along the railway line. Some 2 000 trees were planted in the Park in 1929. He strongly recommended the enclosing of the football and cricket grounds to prevent hooligans and roaming cattle from damaging the grounds and destroying thousands of trees. Ostensibly to no avail, he requested, on many occasions, that his Advisory Board members and block men warn residents not to allow their stock to run loose, contrary to township regulations. He lamented the little interest shown by them in encouraging residents to plant trees, obtainable free of charge from his Department. He convinced the NAC to appoint, as in other larger urban environments, a horticulturalist for the maintenance of the parks, sports and recreation grounds in 1944. It is obvious that, despite setbacks, Cooper remained steadfast in his conviction to create a natural environment for the residents, conducive to recreational activities.

CONCLUSION

The duties and responsibilities of Cooper increased considerably during his years in office, taking into consideration that the number of residents of Mangaung increased from about 20 000 in 1924 to 35 600 in 1945. It demanded considerable time and tact to create an acceptable living environment for the township residents. His successful involvement on a regular basis with municipal, educational, police and black political authorities enabled him to meet, with qualified success, his main objectives in terms of the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 as amended, namely to improve their living conditions, including affordable housing for employees, the aged and infirm, the provision of infrastructure and health facilities, and the upgrading of social welfare services. The non-recurrence of incidents like the 1925 Riot and the subduing of agitating voices at public meetings testified to the trust the residents of Mangaung put in his ability to improve the administration of the township and to secure a better life for them. To this end he remained dedicated to promote education and recreational activities to combat crime and juvenile delinquency, including the beautification of parks and recreation grounds. This is not to forget his efforts to provide employment during the Economic Depression in the early 1930s to help township residents to survive, his sympathetic approach to solve the lodging question, more lenient sorghum beer regulations and the stabling of stock on premises – three issues reflecting his respect for black urban traditions.

Cooper, nonetheless, experienced serious difficulties meeting all the objectives of the Act satisfactorily, despite his wide powers of control. The question of influx control and quest for employees by industrial, commercial and domestic managements put unbearable pressure on the provision of sufficient housing and infrastructure, cleaning services and health. Through patience and clarifying explanations he pacified the minds of his critics, pointing out how the provision of these services were disadvantageously affected by the chronic lack of money and commodities due to the Economic Depression (1929-1933) and

\[\text{Opperman, p.11; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/13, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, September 1927, p. 2 and Minutes (NAC), 17.8.1927, p. 3a; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/16, Minutes (NAC), 17.5.1929, p. 4; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/37, Minutes (NAB), 10.11.1943, p. 2 and Minutes (NAC), 18.4.1944, p. 1; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/35, J.R. Cooper Monthly Report, February 1941, p. 4.}\]
the Second World War (1939-1945). These were conditions beyond his control. The lack of sufficient money for housing and infrastructure was aggravated by the policy of the City Council demanding that all expenditure for improvements in the township had to be met by the Native Revenue Account, which was depleted most of the time due to meagre revenue contributions by residents – the majority of whom were living well below the breadline. Requests by Cooper for contributions by the General Revenue Account were refused by Council due to its racial preference for the interests of its white electors. It stands to his credit that Cooper did not advocate increased taxation without first probing alternative avenues, realising the generally low income structure of urban blacks. Resourceful as he was, he increased the employment contract fees payable by white employers to augment the income of the Native Revenue Account, thereby avoiding taxing the poor residents. His submission to the fundamental principles of sound finance – not to spend more than was available in the Revenue Account, guided him through his career as township manager.

Cooper received praise from various quarters for the successful administration of Mangaung and for his sound conduct of race relations from the early 1930s until his retirement in 1945. Praise came from the Institute of Race Relations, his N.A.B, black leaders locally and nationally, and senior officials of the Union Department of Native Affairs. Indeed, he could not have asked for a better testimonial than when two prominent black leaders at national level, Sol T. Plaatje and D.D.T. Jabavu, pronounced Mangaung as a “model location”, regarding Cooper as a most able township manager. It consequently came as no surprise when councillor J.H. Pretorius, chairman of the NAC, concluded that Cooper carried out his duties loyally, always willing and ready to assist and: “Mr. Cooper had done his work to the entire satisfaction of the Council. He had been able to hold the scales evenly between the town and the location.” It meant that Council never needed to call him to heed his duties as township manager. Such praise was finally borne out by his remarkable cognisance of the contents of municipal law, relevant municipal agenda and minutes pertaining to the administration of Mangaung, and respect for urban black traditions. No justification existed for misusing his extensive administrative powers to establish himself as a minor despot. He acted as a considerate leader, approaching questions with an open mind, sometimes sympathetic to the interests of the township residents and sometimes peremptory when he fearlessly defended his Department against criticism.

Cooper retired on 22 November 1945, having served almost 22 years as township manager and head of the Department of Native Administration of Mangaung. A few months later, on 6 April 1946, he died at the age of 64 at Port Shepstone in Natal. He was buried in Bloemfontein. Apart from councillors, municipal officials and members of the NAB, many black people attended the service. Tributes were paid to him, especially for the work he did in the interests of the black population among whom, The Friend reported, he was dearly loved and respected.

108 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/24, Minutes (NAC), 16.8.1934, p. 4; FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/27, Minutes (NAB), 27.4.1936, p.3.  
109 FAB: MBL 1/2/4/1/40, Minutes (NAC), 9.11.1945, p. 15.
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