

CIVIL



RIGHTS



Box 3807

Cape Town 8000 Vol. XXIV No. 4
12/5/75

News Letter

Home ownership - but for how many? (Cape Times 5/5/75)

The Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, Mr M.C. Botha, has announced what the Cape Times somewhat wryly calls "major refinements" in Government policy regarding Black urban home ownership. Needless to say, this will be welcome not only to the Africans concerned but to all thoughtful citizens. The paper ^{comments} on the principle of the change - "At least some urban Africans are now seen as permanent members of an industrial society and not merely temporary sojourners in the cities". This can only make for improved race relations, and is an important step towards dealing with what the Cape Times rightly terms the central problem in our multi-racial society. It is only a beginning, but it is a valuable beginning. Together with the gradual relaxation of job reservation, it offers hope to our African citizens. We can hope that, in the not too distant future, something may be done about the question of political rights as well. In this as in these earlier changes, the attitude of the homeland leaders will play a crucial rôle.

But, as the League pointed out in a letter to the Cape Times (5/5/75), the renewed raids on squatter "camps" detract from the value of this development. We cannot be satisfied with the mere granting of home ownership to those in the townships, while hundreds of workers, whose labour is required in the urban area, are hounded from even the shacks that they have erected, and their wives and children are compelled to go back to the "homelands" - which some of them have never seen. It should be a fairly simple matter for the Government or the local authority (but of course the Government has the final say) to set aside areas for controlled site and service schemes, as our Divisional Council has in fact already done for Coloured squatters on a smaller scale. The Minister must know that this is at least as serious a matter as the concession he has already made. The families who are being uprooted from Crossroads and other squatter camps must, on grounds of humanity, be provided for. If the Government can act, as it did recently, to "freeze" a considerable area for the possible exploitation of kaolin deposits, it can also act in this emergency. We hope the matter will not be delayed until the onset of winter brings more suffering to these people.

Two voices ...

We cannot but sympathise with the Minister, whose foes in this matter are probably mainly of his own household. So Mr H.J. van der Walt, Nationalist M.P. for Schweizer-Reneke, felt called upon in Parliament (Cape Times, 3/5/75) to admonish the Opposition that the time had arrived for them to rid themselves "of the myth that Blacks were in the White areas permanently". The Black man, he said, was in the republic as a citizen of his particular homeland merely to sell his labour. He was not there on a permanent basis but in a loose capacity. Mr Botha's announcement that Blacks in urban areas would now be able to own houses on municipal property "should not be seen as an admission that Blacks were there for all time". Deplorable though it is, he doubtless speaks for a large proportion of government supporters. Even with the best intentions, Mr Vorster and his colleagues will need more than six months for peaceful change But we cannot let the matter drop on that account. As one correspondent wrote to the Cape Times, "An ideology which in its practical application leads to the break-up of normal family life is morally indefensible". (2/5/75)

A strange argument ... (Cape Times, 3/5/75)

Mr Punt Janson, one of Mr Botha's Deputy Ministers, also seemed to think it necessary to rebuke the Opposition. The people who were really responsible for the misery of Blacks who squatted illegally on the land of others, he said, were those who incited them to squat. "All the Progressive Party policies will lead to," he said, "is for the White man either to leave the country or to commit suicide." It would help nobody, he said, continually to blame the Government. Employers and the Opposition also had a responsibility. He appealed to those concerned with the problem to "help the Blacks and the Government to provide the necessary schools and recreational facilities for the Blacks in their own townships".

With due respect to Mr Janson, this is passing the buck. He has been to the squatter camps and knows the position there. No amount of help with schools and recreational facilities (laudable and desirable though this is) will alter that. In the first place, the squatters do not come because anyone "incites" them, but from sheer economic necessity or to preserve the unity of their families. This, Mr Janson must know quite well. No one but the Government can take the necessary steps to make land available. The power is in their hands.

The responsibility of local government and industry

Having said this, however, we feel bound to add that our local authorities must take some initiative. As the League pointed out in a letter to the Argus (26/4/75), this is all part of the problem of industrialisation. Forty years ago it was Windermere; thirty years ago it was part of Retreat, Cook's Bush and Blouville; twenty years ago it was the Elsie's River area; ten years ago it was the "Valley of Plenty"; today it is Vrygrond and Crossroads. The problem is not new. The local authority is responsible for health conditions in its area. If it needs authority from the Government to incorporate these areas, let it make the necessary approach. And let the State, which encourages industrialisation, take the necessary steps to rectify the position. We, who are citizens, have our part to play in bringing pressure to bear on our local authority through our elected City Councillors.

According to the Minister of Community Development, there are 108 000 Coloured squatters in the Cape Peninsula, and there is a housing backlog of 50 000 for the Coloured population.

The Chairman of the Institute of Race Relations has pointed out (Cape Times, 26/4/75), in a thoughtful and candid article, that given security of tenure, squatters at (for instance) Lourdes Farm could form a viable community. It would then be possible for them to spend time, money and energy on improving their shacks, as indeed some of them are doing even under present conditions.

The City Council could help by re-assessing its spending priorities, says the article, and cutting down on luxury spending until such time as the necessary infrastructure for site and service schemes is provided; and, if necessary, approaching the Government for additional funds. Apart from merely practical considerations, we can think of nothing that would contribute more to improving race relations in our City.

But the responsibility rests finally on Mr M.C. Botha. Until he refuses to offer alternative accommodation to "illegally present squatter families (who) do not qualify for family housing within the prescribed area" (Cape Times, 26/4/75) nothing much can be done.

We commend the decision of the Cape Province Municipal Association at its congress last month that representations be made to the Department of Community Development through the United Municipal Executive that land and funds be made available for temporary schemes (site and service) in addition to the funds at present granted for permanent schemes, and that allocations be

made for longer periods, and hope this will bear speedy fruit.
(Cape Times, 23/4/75)

A generous amnesty ? (Cape Times, 17/4/75)

We do not know whether the Government has in mind any amnesty for prisoners to mark the inauguration of our new State President. But, if so, we would support the suggestion made in Parliament that it should include political prisoners and also banned people - at the least, that the cases of all such should be considered. Hitherto the Government has refused to consider any remission of the sentences of such people. We agree with Mrs Helen Suzman that such a move would contribute considerably to the atmosphere of détente for which our Prime Minister is at present striving.

No comment (Cape Times 12/4/75)

In reply to a question in Parliament the Minister of Police, Mr J. Kruger, said that during last year R21 973 was paid to members of the public in respect of assaults by members of the police force. The money was paid to 35 complainants.

Second thoughts?

In addressing the 300 delegates to the biennial South African Law Conference the Minister of Justice (Mr J.T. Kruger) is reported to have said, inter alia:

"The creation of too many petty offences breeds a contempt for the administration of justice.

"We overcrowd our courts and prisons. To put a man in prison is an expensive way of dealing with a problem. It requires a policeman or other investigator to investigate the case, a court and its personnel to try the case, an attorney for the defence and a prison and its staff to imprison the person."

The question arose, he said, whether the legal system was not too inclined to look to criminal law for solutions to problems. "...The criminal law as an effective means to regulate matters is also subject to limitations."

We congratulate the University of Cape Town and Mr Justice J.H. Steyn, president of the National Institute for Crime Prevention (NICRO) on the establishment at the University of an Institute of Criminology which will investigate the causes of crime and of the social defences against it. Mr Steyn considers that this new research and teaching unit "will make a real contribution to the containment of our crime problem". "We must see to it", said Mr Steyn, "that the criminal law operates in such a manner that it provides equal justice for all."