

"We started with nothing, now we will have something, and soon we will have everything" said the Deputy Town Engineer of Richards Bay in 1974, speaking at a symposium on the development of the area (Zululand Observer, 15.11.75). The words of the Engineer are an appropriate comment on how development has worked at Richards Bay: the "cornerstone of the Government's national policy of decentralisation", linked to the whole concept of homeland separate development (Sunday Tribune, 8.3.81).

In 1965, when Pretoria first announced that it intended to develop the area into a major port and industrial centre, Richards Bay was a tiny fishing hamlet, surrounded by Kwa-Zulu, with a population of no more than 100 whites. Today, although the projected boom has been slow to gather force, it has a white population approaching 10 000 and has recently been granted borough status. Millions upon millions of rands have been poured into the huge, coal-exporting harbour and the railway yards by the government, and private industry is finally beginning to show interest. Between January and April of this year, the Town Board passed building plans to the value of R7,6 million and predicts a further R1 500 million capital injection over the next three to five years (Sunday Tribune, Property Section, 17.5.81). On July 28, Mondi, the giant paper mill subsidiary of Anglo American, announced that it was going ahead with plans to erect a pulp and paper mill at Richards Bay, at a cost of about R520 million (Natal Witness, 29.7.81).

The thrust towards "everything" has gone ahead without regard for the environment or the original people of the region. To ensure that industrialists will be attracted to invest in Richards Bay, the government is willing to subsidise a monster waste disposal scheme - a R20 million pipeline which will dump industrial effluent (including gypsum and paper mill waste) into the sea. "What on earth does it matter in the sea if plankton in that small area is affected?" asks a government advisor on the project (Sunday Tribune, 8.3.81). The same indifference has been shown to the local African people, whose land this originally was. In early 1976, about 6 000 people were removed off Reserve 6 to a place called Ntambanana, to make way for the prim white suburbs and shopping centres of the town. A further estimated 20 000 people await removal at Reserve 4, along the coast to the north (see AFRA Report 13).

Reserve 6: Reserve 6 was a fairly small piece of land to the west of Lake Msingazi. It was scheduled land: its boundaries established by the 1913 Land Act. Its people had, of course, lived in the area long before that Act, before whites first entered Zululand to claim large tracts for themselves. Reserve 6 was never self-sufficient, many of its people were dependent on migrant labour for a living. But agriculturally it fell within one of the best-favoured regions of KwaZulu, with its high rainfall (1 500 mm a year), its subtropical fruits (avocados, paw paws, bananas), its forests and its fishing potential, in both the sea and the many small lakes. People drew a vital subsistence supplement from their land and the sea: some claim that they made enough at home and did not need to look for outside work.

In 1973 work started on the construction of the Richards Bay harbour, in the vicinity of the Reserve. It was thus hardly surprising that, two years later, the 1975 consolidation plans showed Reserve 6 as one of the areas of KwaZulu to be excised - the land was too valuable to remain in black ownership. By then the rush was on to complete the harbour in time for its official opening on 1 April 1976, when the first consignment of coal was due to be delivered, for Japan. While action on other areas threatened by consolidation has been ponderously slow, the removal of Reserve 6 was carried through

with great speed. People say they had had little warning when on 7 January 1976, government trucks arrived, with bulldozers in attendance, and started ferrying residents and their goods to Ntambanana, 50 km away. By the end of February most people had been moved - a month before the harbour opened. "They are not being forced to go", said a magistrate in charge of the removals. "Most are keen to move" (Natal Mercury, 27.2.76).

Ntambanana: The magistrate was a good public relations man and such reporting as there was on the removals was generally favourable. "We have not changed their tribal pattern, merely improved their way of living", he claimed (Zululand Observer, 27.6.76). The people who were moved tell a very different story: "There were lots of promises which were never fulfilled"; "The place should not have been allowed for resettlement. There was nothing - no water, no schools, no roads. Just recently they have put in roads because they wanted the buses in" (AFRA Field Report No. 2, 1981). Their way of life has undergone a radical transformation which has left them bitter, depressed and more heavily dependent on a fickle labour market than ever before.

Ntambanana is the name given to a large area of Trust farms, bought by the government in 1973 and earmarked for resettlement purposes. It is dry, bush country that has suffered acutely from the current drought - very different from the well-watered coastal plains around Richards Bay. At the time the Reserve 6 people were moved in, the magistrate admitted that water was a problem. Today large sections of the community are dependent on water tankers that truck water in to small concrete reservoirs. When AFRA visited the area in April this year, one reservoir had been empty for three days and nobody knew when the tanker would reappear.

Only one part of the greater Ntambanana area is set aside for the people from Reserve 6. Their section is not a typical closer settlement in layout since the people, having been moved from a reserve, were given compensatory land. Their houses are scattered; from one end of the settlement to the other is a walk of about 15 km. Many houses are in very poor repair. When the people were first allocated sites, they were led to understand that the residential plan adopted was not final; at some future date residential sites would be replanned and they should not build permanent houses before then. They have heard nothing further, but many people have heeded this advice and held back from incurring building expenses they may later regret.

In other respects, it is a typical resettlement area. It is far from the nearest town - Empangeni, 30 km away - and buses start running at 3 am in the morning to take commuters to work at Empangeni and Richards Bay itself. Facilities are generally poor, though better than when people first moved in. There is a clinic (opened in 1976 after people had already arrived), a few scattered shops, and four primary schools. Schools have been a focal point of organisation and friction in the community. In 1976 there were no permanent schools; children were taught in crude, tin prefabs. In several instances, parents themselves organised private teachers paying them out of their own pockets. By now brick classrooms have appeared, although some schools still use prefabs as overflow classrooms. The struggle has shifted to demands over a secondary schools. Parents at one end of the resettlement area have organised a private school, with an enrolment of 116 Std 7 and 8 pupils, and are trying to convince the authorities to site a proposed "official" school in their area. The Chief, however, who lives in one of the original farmhouses 12 km away, insists that the school be built near his place - and the commissioner and education authorities appear to be backing him. He makes his position very clear: "The place is mine and I treat it as I like it. I tell the commissioner that in that place I want this and in this place this. So there is nobody who is permitted to say anything against me because I am in charge of the whole place" (Sunday Tribune, 28.6.81).

In the face of these attitudes, local organisation is very weak. The community is divided on the school issue; many people have given up making representations to remote outside authorities and are preoccupied with the daily struggles of survival - the drought, the long bus ride to town and to work, increasing costs, unemployment. Only the one school committee is stubbornly persevering. "People have gone all over - to magistrates, to commissioners, to lawyers, to KwaZulu - all over. There have been no results", explains a member of this committee. "The difficulty is that things are done without the people's knowledge".

Unwanted industrial by-products into the sea, unwanted people to Ntambanana - government policies make waste disposal at Richards Bay very easy.