

DECENT HOUSING — A HUMAN RIGHT

Freedom of movement and the choice of where to live are the democratic rights of all people of this country. With the scrapping of the obnoxious Group Areas Act, people are exercising this right to build or buy houses in areas of their choice. There are sections of the “white” population group who want to still enforce the Group Areas Act by intimidating people of colour who have moved into formerly exclusively “white” residential areas. This reaction is not surprising from people who belong to the privileged minority of the ruling class. However, what is most disturbing are reports of the racist attitude of some people, who themselves have been the victims of the racial laws of this country. We appeal to these people to set aside their racial prejudices and exercise tolerance, especially towards that section of our South African society that has been the worst victim of “racial” apartheid.

No human being wants to live in overcrowded, anti-social conditions that breed crime and misery. Yet millions of people live in dehumanizing and squalid conditions in squatter camps on the periphery of urban and developed residential areas. The scrapping of the Pass and Influx Control Laws has led to the movement of impoverished people to urban areas in search of work. These squatter communities are seen as a threat to the security and peace of the better-off communities. Here again we wish to remind people that the suffering and degradation that these communities undergo is not of their making. Successive generations of white rule in this country has been responsible for breeding such misery.

We do not condone or encourage squatting for the obvious reason of the attendant human suffering that accompany it. Our stated view on squatting is clear. We want a total elimination and disappearance of squatter settlements and townships. However, we abhor the demolition of existing squatter settlements without provision of suitable, alternate housing.

THEY ONCE SUFFERED TOGETHER

A local authority was recently offered R4-million by the Independent Development Trust to develop a buffer zone between two residential areas. The development was aimed at providing low-cost housing for people earning less than R1000,00 per month.

The owners of one of those areas raised strong objections to the proposed scheme. The basis of their objections was that the scheme, if implemented, would reduce the value of their properties. At a meeting called to discuss the matter, out of a vote of 140, only 26 voted for the scheme. The rest voted against the scheme.

The immediate effect of the decision is to deny workers the right to own houses in the buffer zone. The objectors went so far as to say that they preferred "squatting" with all its attendant evils than formal low cost housing.

Who were those objectors? Were they the rabid members of the AWB, White Wolves or the Boerestaat Party? No! The majority who voted against the scheme were Africans!

Makes you think, doesn't it? It shows that a black (African, Indian and "Coloured") worker is oppressed in more ways than one. Here we have the case of better-off Africans, many of whom can only afford those houses because of government subsidy, turning against their less fortunate fellow oppressed. Those better-off were only yesterday herded with all other Africans into locations and townships with all their inferior or non-existent facilities, poor housing, violence, etc. They all suffered together. With the abolition of the Group Areas Act, the better-off were able to buy and occupy houses in a relatively cheap residential area. As soon as they got into "paradise", they turned against their poor fellow oppressed, and treated them in the same way the racist whites treated the better-off Africans just a few months before.

There is a very important lesson to be learnt here. The incident is a taste of what the CODESA brand of the "New South Africa" will look like. In that South Africa the colour of your money will count far more than the colour of your skin. There will be new alignment of forces. The rich and well-off among the black population will have more in common with the rich and well-off among the whites. Their class interests are the same and they will band together to fight any threat to their wealth.

From the time society was divided into rich and poor, the rich have always feared the poor. And with good cause, too. For, when the poor take what is due to them, there will no longer be any rich.

EDITORIAL NOTE

The buffer zone referred to lies between The Grange which, until recently, was Whites Only area and Slangspruit, a poorly-built and serviced African Township. Both are in Pietermaritzburg.