

Johannesburg Advice Office

Report for February to October, 1975.

IN October 1974, Mr Punt Janson, Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration, said "bad housing means irritation. Irritation means bitterness, and it all escalates into terrorism."

Over the past two years we have approached the Director of Development for the West Rand Administration Board, the Chairman of the Board and the Minister of Bantu Administration in attempts to point out to them the horror of what is happening in Alexandra. We have tried to help many individuals to prevent the total disruption of their family lives which is caused by the order to move into the hostel and to "send your children away".

Some of these people have sought legal advice. Members of the opposition in Parliament have tried to intervene. But nothing has been achieved. The destruction goes on.

If a family has no male head or if there is a male head who does not qualify for permanent urban residence in terms of Section 10(1)(a) or (b) of the Urban Areas Act the people have no choice when the roof and walls are bulldozed around them but to obey the order to separate and move into the hostels, or to add to the existing overcrowding in Soweto by seeking a room in which they may lodge in a house usually already overfull.

Not all the people whose cases are outlined below appear in the statistics for the shortage of accommodation. Some do not qualify to get on to the waiting list for a house.

If the true figures for homeless people in the urban areas were known they might shock the Administration Board, the Government and the White public into taking the necessary emergency measures.

We are in a crisis situation and Mr Janson's words should be taken very seriously indeed.

MISS M E M has three children and lives with them in Alexandra where she was born. The children all have birth certificates to prove that they were born in Alexandra and she herself has an endorsement in her reference book acknowledging that she has a 10(1)(a) right to be in Alexandra because she was born there and has always lived there. But she is a woman so does "not qualify" for family accommodation. She has been told to get married or to move into the hostel and to "think of something to do with your children".

MRS E T has been deserted by her husband. She is in registered employment in Johannesburg and lives in Alexandra with her two children. She has been told to move into the hostel and

receives no reply when she asks what she must do with her children.

MRS N is a widow who has occupied her house lawfully with her two adult daughters and their children. Now the Superintendent has cancelled the children and grandchildren from the permit and compelled each daughter to take a separate lodger's permit with their children enumerated on the respective lodger's permits. The old lady remains the only person on the actual residential permit and between them the two daughters must pay the increased rent for the house plus R2 a month extra for the lodger's permits.

MR. M R M has been ordered to vacate his house because his wife has gone temporarily to the Transkei to look after her aged and ill father.

MRS M S R is a widow. When her husband died, her son took over the house. Her son died last year and his wife became the permit holder. She has turned Mrs R out of the house and makes her sleep in the garage. Mrs R cannot find any alternative accommodation.

MRS W M M is a widow who qualifies to be in Johannesburg in terms of Section 10(1)(b) because she has worked as a domestic for the same employer since 1963. Her home is in Dordrecht where she purchased a plot of land in 1956 and built a house. She left her young sister there to look after her four children because Mrs M was then the sole breadwinner for the whole family and had to leave home to find work. She has paid the site rent for the house every year. Her eldest daughter is now 22 and the younger three children — two boys and a girl — are still at school. There is also a two-year-old grandchild. On September 2 Mrs M received a notice posted by the township manager in Dordrecht on August 27 that her family must vacate the house by September 20 because she works elsewhere and has lost her rights to be in Dordrecht.

MR L S lives lawfully in Soweto with his wife and seven children but his mother, who was the registered tenant of the house, has died and he and his family have been ordered to vacate the house and find lodgings because he does not qualify as 10(1)(b).

MRS E M M lives in the Meadowlands transit camp with her customary husband and nine children. She shares one room with two other married couples and their families. She has rights to remain in Johannesburg in terms of Section 10(1)(a) but because she is a woman and her husband is a foreigner, they do not qualify even to go on the waiting list for a house of their

own and they have been quite unable to find lodgings for their family in anyone else's house.

MRS E M is a single woman with two very small children. She has no home and sleeps in the streets or wherever she can find shelter. She cannot find anywhere to live and cannot get work until she has somewhere to leave her children during the day.

These are the people behind the statistics. Recently much has been written about the critical shortage of houses for Black people in the urban areas.

The latest figure for *families* who are on the waiting list for houses in Soweto is 17 841 and this does not reflect the thousands of people who do not qualify even to be accepted on to the list. The recent growth of squatter communities is just the beginning of what must happen in the next few years as existing houses become more and more overcrowded and as living conditions in these overcrowded homes become increasingly intolerable.

Yet there seems no sense of urgency on the part of the authorities as they press ahead with the destruction of existing houses in Alexandra and in areas affected by the Group Areas Act. The new regulations for leasehold home ownership promised months ago are still not yet promulgated and the West Rand Board expects to complete only 4 000 new houses in the whole area of its jurisdiction in the current year.

From April to July 15 per cent of the people who came to the office for the first time came with housing problems. Added to these, nearly all those seeking to establish Section 10 qualifications wish to do so in order to be able to apply for houses. Many of those who have been endorsed out or who cannot obtain issue of a reference book are in this position because they have had nowhere permanent to live and are therefore not enumerated on any residential permit.

Many of the men who are refused permission to have their wives to live with them are told that the reason is lack of accommodation and a proportion of those refused permits to work are told that they must find accommodation before they will be registered.

Behind the statistics are homeless people for whom life is a constant struggle to find someone to take them in for a few nights at a time. Sometimes they sleep outside, in outhouses, in empty buildings in town.

They have no possessions and no security. But they do have anger, anger which is growing as every month passes, and a large part of this anger is caused by the fact that they are *not permitted* to help themselves. They may not seek accommodation where it does exist because these are "White" areas nor may they build or buy.

They must wait for official action and they recognise very clearly that the lack of action has been deliberate policy for many years and that, in spite of recent promises and soothing noises made by deputy ministers and senior officials, no emergency measures are being taken. The waiting lists go on growing longer and the homeless have no patience to wait for a lifetime for somewhere to live.

Now the Aid Centre in Johannesburg run by the Department of Bantu Administration has stopped dealing with Black people who go there voluntarily for help. It seems that this is the result of a directive from the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner for Johannesburg and that in future the Aid Centre is to be allowed to deal only with people who are under arrest for pass law offences.

The Black Sash offices in other cities have not found the Air Centres to be of any significance in assisting people in need of help and have reported that they seem to operate only as clearing centres designed to remove people from the urban areas to the homelands. But in Johannesburg we believe that the Aid Centre has helped many Black people to break out of the vicious circle in which they were caught.

The Manager, Mr Bender, has always been ready at least to read submissions presented to him, to consider each case on its merits and, within the regulations, to assist people who were clearly unable to get a permit to be anywhere at all or those whose difficulties arose through misadventure or ignorance of the law.

There are many Black people in the urban areas who have been unable to prove that they have a right to remain in terms of Section 10, or who have lost that right because they lived or worked temporarily in the wrong place and who have been endorsed out over and over again. But they cannot have a new appeal considered because no one in authority will listen to them.

These people are arrested, imprisoned, released, refused registration in work and then are arrested again. They have no homeland to go to and no area where they are allowed to register as workseekers.

Already in the month which has gone by since people have been turned away from the Aid Centre, workers in the Advice Office have noticed the difference. People are complaining that when they try to submit requests for their cases to be re-investigated they are told to go away; that they cannot appeal twice; that once the Chief Bantu Commissioner has disallowed an appeal they may not try again.

The Deputy Ministers of Bantu Administration and Development have stated on many occasions that they are concerned with streamlining procedures, with removing unnecessary frustrations,

with making life easier for urban people and for migrant workers.

The Black Sash has always stated quite categorically that no amount of cosmetic action can remove the injustice and discrimination inherent in the pass laws. We have always maintained that to control the lives of the majority of our citizens through a system which demands that every Black person must have a permit to be where he wishes to be and to do the ordinary things which all people desire to do and which denies all freedom of movement to millions of people, is so evil that it is totally unacceptable.

We have been accused of cynicism because we have expressed doubts about the intentions and willingness of the Government to bring about real and meaningful change in the urban areas of the Republic. Nevertheless, we had hoped that the assistance given by the Aid Centre in Johannesburg and the evident concern of its manager and staff would prove to be a first step in the right direction.

It seems we were quite wrong in this. That such an attempt to bring some humanity and compassion into the system should have been so ruthlessly stamped out demonstrates that there is no real intention to work for change, that things will continue to go from bad to worse and that the cynicism lies more in the pious statements of the authorities whose deeds belie them, than in us.

MRS A T first came to the Black Sash because she had been refused assistance by the Bantu Affairs Commissioner in applying for a travel document which would enable her to emigrate to Mozambique to live in her husband's home.

The Commissioner told her she could not apply for a passport in Johannesburg because she had no permit to be here in the first place.

As her story unfolded it turned out that she had no permit to be anywhere and had only decided to try to leave the Republic because she had been unable to find a legal home for herself and her three children.

She was born in Johannesburg but was orphaned when she was very young and was sent to her grandmother who lived on a White man's farm in the Free State. Her grandmother died and in 1971 she was chased off the farm by the owner. The Bantu Commissioner in the Free State refused to issue her with the reference book which the law demands that she carry, so she came to her uncle in Johannesburg.

She was endorsed out but stayed because she had nowhere else to go. She married a Mozambique miner but of course, could not get a permit to live with him in Germiston where he works. When she came to us she had been trying for three years to regularise her position but no one would listen to her.

She collected as much proof of her life history as she could find and submitted an affidavit to the Aid Centre. She is now registered in employment in Johannesburg and has a lodger's permit to live with her uncle. She is at least near enough her husband to enable him to visit her when he is off duty.

No one can claim that she is in any way satisfactorily settled or that this solution is anything other than horrifying but at least she can expect that her children will be allowed to attend school because their names are on her lodger's permit. Without the help of the Aid Centre, she might well have remained totally displaced, helpless and without hope for a better future for her children.

MISS L M L is a misplaced person. She has lived in Johannesburg since birth except for 14 months in 1973-74 when her employer transferred her to Bloemfontein. Her reference book only has Bloemfontein endorsements in it and when she tried to be registered in her Johannesburg employment, the Labour Officer looked only at the reference book and refused to read her affidavit or to look at the accompanying documents of proof.

He just told her to go back to Bloemfontein where she has no relatives, friends or home. Hers is the kind of case where the assistance of the Aid Centre would have been invaluable. Now that this channel is no longer open to her she has not even been able to have her submissions considered.

MR D F M is caught in another kind of vicious circle. He is a misplaced person trying to get permission to work in Johannesburg. The Labour Officer told him to get a birth certificate, the registrar of births told him this application could not be accepted until the tax place in his reference book was changed, and the Bantu Commissioner to whom he applied for this to be done told him he must be fixed up by the Labour Officer first.

Without the Aid Centre to unwind this bureaucratic tangle for him, he fears he will spend more years standing in queues at 80 Albert Street, at 15 Market Street, at 13 Newton Street, always being told to go somewhere else.

**SHEENA DUNCAN,
Advice Office Director.**

'No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent.'

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, 1784.