

To buy or the choice

IS it better to remain tenants in Group Areas or to purchase homes offered by the government?

This is the question that has been bothering many community organisations and one which the Durban Housing Action Committee DHAC has recently attempted to answer.

DHAC organised a workshop to discuss the sale and purchase of sub-economic housing and many community organisations attended.

The government and various city councils have been offering sub-economic dwellings for sale to tenants. But there was a catch — the selling prices were much higher than the original cost.

In response, several communities in Durban — such as Springfield and Chatsworth — have been struggling to reduce selling prices. As a result the government changed the interest rates structure as from July 1980.

However communities still need to see whether it is in their interest to remain tenants or purchase homes. The DHAC workshop aimed to formulate guidelines for communities facing this problem.

Virgil Bonhomme of DHAC opened the workshop with a call for solidarity amongst progressive organisations all over the country to strengthen the fight against the Department of Community Development. He warned the Durban City Council for its attitude and actions over the rent struggle which he described as "insulting" and "injurious". The rent struggle, he stated, is part of a wider struggle which will continue to grow in strength. He warned the Council that the communities will never forget the switching off of the electricity of rent boycotters and made it clear that the hatred caused by the Council has produced a great militancy in the communities.

"Housing is a right, not a privilege. It is the duty of the Government to provide secure and adequate housing for all."

While the workshop focussed on home ownership, the issue was placed in its wider context. Housing in South Africa was seen to be a political issue. Papers, discussion groups and area reports offered a useful opportunity for groups throughout the country to establish contact and exchange ideas.

Peter Wilkinson of the Institute



of African Studies gave a paper on the Economics of Housing. He said the political nature of this area is linked to economics.

Mr Wilkinson placed housing within the context of the development of capitalism in South Africa. Before capitalism people provided their own housing and other needs. With the spread of capitalism these needs came to be supplied by specialists.

In the area of housing, he said, building firms provided housing, their aim being profits.

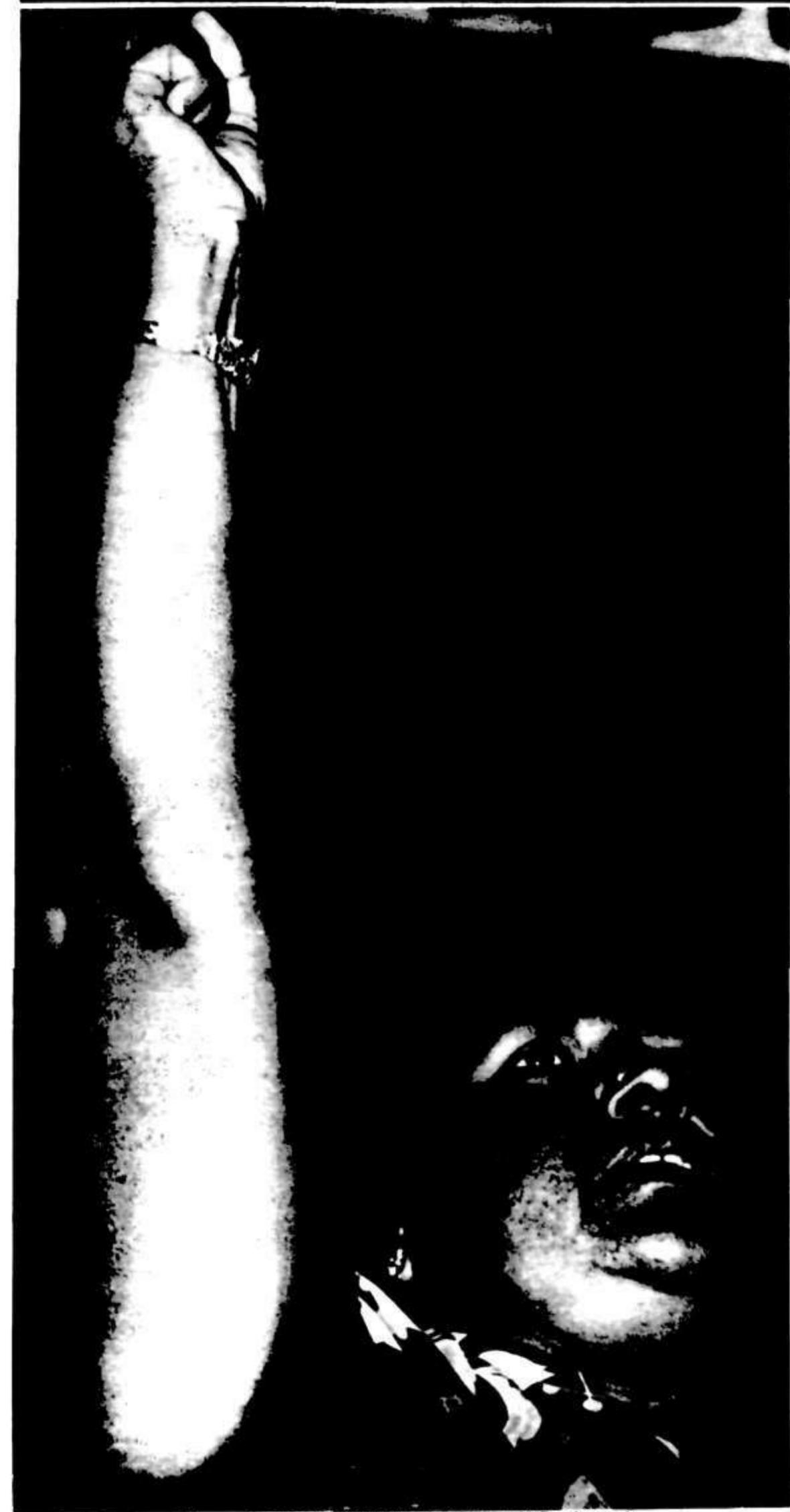
'The government must give secure housing to all'

In this way, housing has become a commodity and a market has developed for it. But, the housing market in South Africa is inadequate to supply housing for all at a price they can afford.

Mr Wilkinson said all of those involved in housing operate to secure profits: landowners and property speculators; building firms; estate agents; building societies and landlords. Most people are forced out of this "private" sector because of the cost involved (building societies only provide loans to people with secure, relatively high incomes).

Mr Wilkinson outlined the alternatives. The first is the slum option when people overcrowd existing accommodation and are exploited by landlords who cash in on the need for accommodation. The second is squatting — where people provide their own housing independent of the private market.

These options, he said, fail to fulfill the basic functions of housing and in many cases lead to ill-health. Those who benefit from capitalism



Call comes to strengthen the fight against Community Development

The grand scheme of '73 becomes the

ANGLO-AMERICAN workers at the corporation's Johannesburg head office have begun to organise themselves to resist new pension legislation — they saw the new proposals worked against their interests.

The new struggle against the pension proposals is not confined to Anglo workers — more and more workers are beginning to demand the new pension schemes work to their benefit.

The 1973 Anglo pension fund for its head office workers — cleaners, clerks, typist, etc — was supposed to be one of the most liberal schemes for black workers introduced at the time.

Unlike many other companies, the workers were forced to join the ANMERCOSA. The workers were never given a detailed introduction

to the fund, but they believed the following things:

- If workers resign, or are dismissed before the age of 60, they receive their contributions plus interest;
- At retirement they receive their own and Anglo's contributions plus interest;
- If a worker dies before or after retirement his/her dependents receive a lump sum of contributions plus interest;
- On retirement, workers would receive their pensions in lump-sum form.

In 1975, the Anglo workers became dissatisfied with their pension fund, and talked of withdrawing from the fund.

This was after they noticed a former worker's widow making many futile trips to head office to try and get her husband's money.

Workers began to worry that the fund was not all it was made out to be. They went to management and asked for explanations, voicing their fears about their families' futures.

Management evaded the workers' call for explanations, and instead offered a management-run educational programme to explain to workers.

For some time after this, the Anglo Workers were disorganised.

Since 1975, workers have remained unhappy about the scheme. They felt they could not change the scheme, but it was better than nothing.

When workers heard of the proposed legislation — a draft bill was expected in March 1981 — they began to organise against the issue of preservation.

By this time, most of almost 700

workers were members of the unregistered General Allied Workers' Union (GAWU).

The workers say this was a state attempt to control pension funds, but soon saw their bosses were also interested in those changes.

Anglo-American is a multinational corporation including industrial (mining and manufacturing) and financial activities (insurance companies).

Like other financiers and some industrialists, Anglo is interested to see investable funds grow bigger.

Further, like other companies, Anglo believes workers resign "To lay their hands on pension money". Anglo hopes more skilled and better paid workers will be tied to their jobs once the legislation is passed.

The Anglo workers approached management through the Employees' Representative Council

(ERC) on 18 February, 1981. The workers discussed the issue, and the ERC promised to take their problems to top management.

The workers decided to elect their own committee of 6 workers to fight the pension issue, because they had no confidence in the ERC.

This workers' committee met Mr Brown, the actuary in charge of pensions, and objected to the proposal of freezing pension funds. They said this went against the 1973 contract.

Brown dismissed worker fears and said preservation was a good idea. He gave the example of preserved British schemes.

Workers pointed out that South Africa, unlike Britain, had no democracy.

In South Africa the state could not be trusted to protect black workers' interests, and guarantee

to resist—that's of the ghettos



George Sewpersahd — banned NIC President

Community to resist proposed removals

THE residents of St Wendolins are proud of their village, the community and their achievements. Ask anyone you meet there about their feelings towards the proposals to move them to Kwa Ndengezi or Kwa Dalseka and the answer is always the same, "We don't want to go".

The St Wendolins community near Pinetown is closely knit, lively and self-sufficient. They stand to lose all this security when they are removed to the newly established townships, where the box-like houses stand out row upon row.

It is easy to see why a community as colourful as St Wendolins would not willingly 'resettle' in these alien, dismal surroundings amongst strangers.

A few years ago a vigilante group was established to protect the community. This was done on their own initiative as there was a need for responsible security guards.

The group has been successful in keeping down the crime rate through the confiscation of dangerous weapons. This is a fine example of the resourcefulness of the community, which has always found difficulty in contacting the police during times of emergency.

The welfare committee was founded to voice the needs of the community and to call meetings together and act on resolutions.

There are numerous womens organisations which meet periodically to discuss church, welfare, and other matters, and the members of these groups are involved in teaching each other domestic skills.

St Wendolins boasts a lovely old school building on mission-owned land. Both parents and pupils are proud of their schools and the parents are able to exercise a certain amount of control over the affairs of the school.

Their removal to another strange school threatens to destroy this security, and many parents have expressed fears about the 'township elements' which will most likely intrude into the school environment.

The self-sufficiency of the community is further evident from the informal activities which occur. Orchards and well maintained vegetable gardens indicate productivity and years of diligent labour. The new plots in the townships are too small and too steep to permit such activity.

Financially, the residents will become more impoverished than ever before when they are moved. Whereas they now pay between R5 per annum to the mission for rent and R6 per month to landlords in the townships the cheapest houses are R16 per month and the most expensive is R35.

Transport costs will be doubled and so will the length of the journey from Kwa Ndengezi.

The minister of Co-operation and Development, Dr Koornhof, has been quoted as saying that people will not be forced to move and that removals are conducted in a humane manner. The people already removed have by and large denied that they want to move, despite official claims that everyone is moving voluntarily.

The St Wendolin community expressed misgivings about the fact that they were never even consulted on the issue of removal, which affects them very deeply and threatens to destroy their whole way of life, while the future offers no viable advantages.



The state has most to gain, but people still want to own their own homes

maintenance. The State covers some of the capital cost with a fixed amount. But, running costs are constantly rising and the local authority

'Slums' are seen as threats to the SA social order

passes the buck onto the tenants (hence ever-increasing rents). This is so only for "Coloured" and "Indian" housing — the State keeps a much tighter control over "African" housing.

In 1973 the State removed control from the local authorities and set up Administration Boards — clearly illustrating the role housing plays in maintaining the status quo.

Garth Seneque of Natal University discussed State housing policy. He dealt more directly with the issue of home ownership and offered an analysis of why the State is

presently encouraging home ownership and offered an analysis of why the State is presently encouraging home ownership. He also focussed on the central question of who benefits most from this system.

He said owner-occupancy and private renting serve an ideological function by involving people in the payment of mortgages and instalments, and discouraging them from strikes, boycotts and the like.

Individual contact with the authorities works against the community solidarity which is created by collective tenancy. It also supposedly gives people a "stake in the system" so they will be less likely to "rock the boat".

Ultimately the state and local authorities benefit since the cost of maintenance is lumped directly on to the owner.

Mr Seneque said the recent upsurge in resistance amongst communities over housing has thrust the housing issue firmly into the politi-

cal arena. The State has tried to develop strategies to diffuse solidarity and resistance.

A representative of the Cape Housing Action Committee (CAHAC) gave a brief account of the nature of the housing struggle in the Cape area. He stressed the need for national contact between DHAC, CAHAC and other organisations.

Housing issues have been thrust into the spotlight

Reports were also given by members of the Asherville Housing Committee and the Chatsworth Housing Action Committee on the nature of their struggles and how their community organisations came about and grew in strength.

The results of a survey on people's attitudes to home ownership were read out. The survey was conducted by DHAC and showed that most people were in favour of purchasing homes but said the prices are too high. Many of the dwellings are in poor condition.

A central part of the workshop was the discussion groups in which people discussed the pros and cons of home ownership and attempted to formulate guidelines for the communities involved. Although there was consensus that the State had more to gain than anyone else, it was noted that most people do want to buy homes.

It was suggested the communities should be informed of the reasons for the State's offer so that existing community solidarity be maintained.

A tribute was paid to George Sewpersahd, President of the Natal Indian Congress who was recently served with his second five-year banning order and could therefore not attend the workshop.

see slums and squatting as a threat to social order: they often become "hotbeds" of crime and political agitation, they threaten the dominant: of the state of property and authority, and most importantly, they fail to create a workforce healthy and thus the activity is affected.

Mr Wilkinson suggested that it is under these conditions that the State intervenes since it is its task to maintain existing social order. Thus the State is forced to provide public housing for those excluded from the private sector. However, the State is unable to provide housing for all — the problem being the amount of money available and the distribution of that money.

Mr Wilkinson added that the implementation of the Group Areas Act has involved the destruction of already-existing housing on a massive scale thereby increasing the burden on State expenditure.

There are two costs involved in the provision of state housing: building cost (which is fixed) and

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the payment of pensions. Also, in Britain the private pensions schemes add to the large state scheme which is funded out of taxation.

In South Africa state pensions are so bad workers are forced to rely solely on private company pensions. Black workers pay taxes, but once they receive a company pension, they no longer qualify for a state pension.

Many meetings followed between workers and management at Anglo. They discussed the rules of the scheme, the preservation issue, and the possibility of withdrawing from the scheme, but management remained evasive.

Workers were told they could only withdraw and be reimbursed if they resigned. Re-employment was not guaranteed.

The workers held a protest meeting on 28 April, and this led to a further meeting with Brown, a Mr Morgan and ERC chairperson Philip Baum: it ended in deadlock.

The committee of 6 then wrote to the operating committee of Anglo. Once again they received an evasive reply from Mr Relly, the Vice Chairman.

By that time, all black workers demanded reimbursement of all pension contributions. It was clear management was not prepared to resist the proposed legislation or to raise objections on the workers' behalf.

In reply to another letter from the workers, Mr N Oppenheimer stated the company's position:

- In future workers would not receive more than 1/2 of their pensions

in lump sum;

- Workers had to wait for the Bill before rejecting the proposed legislation on preservation.

The workers have rejected this response.

It is clear management is applying stalling tactics — when the legislation is passed, workers will be forced to accept preservation. The Anglo bosses are not prepared to reject the proposed legislation.

The workers at Anglo have shown in their struggle the most powerful worker weapon is unity.

In the struggle over pensions, there are many strong forces against the workers, but the state and the bosses will have to listen to the worker demands if they take a united stand.