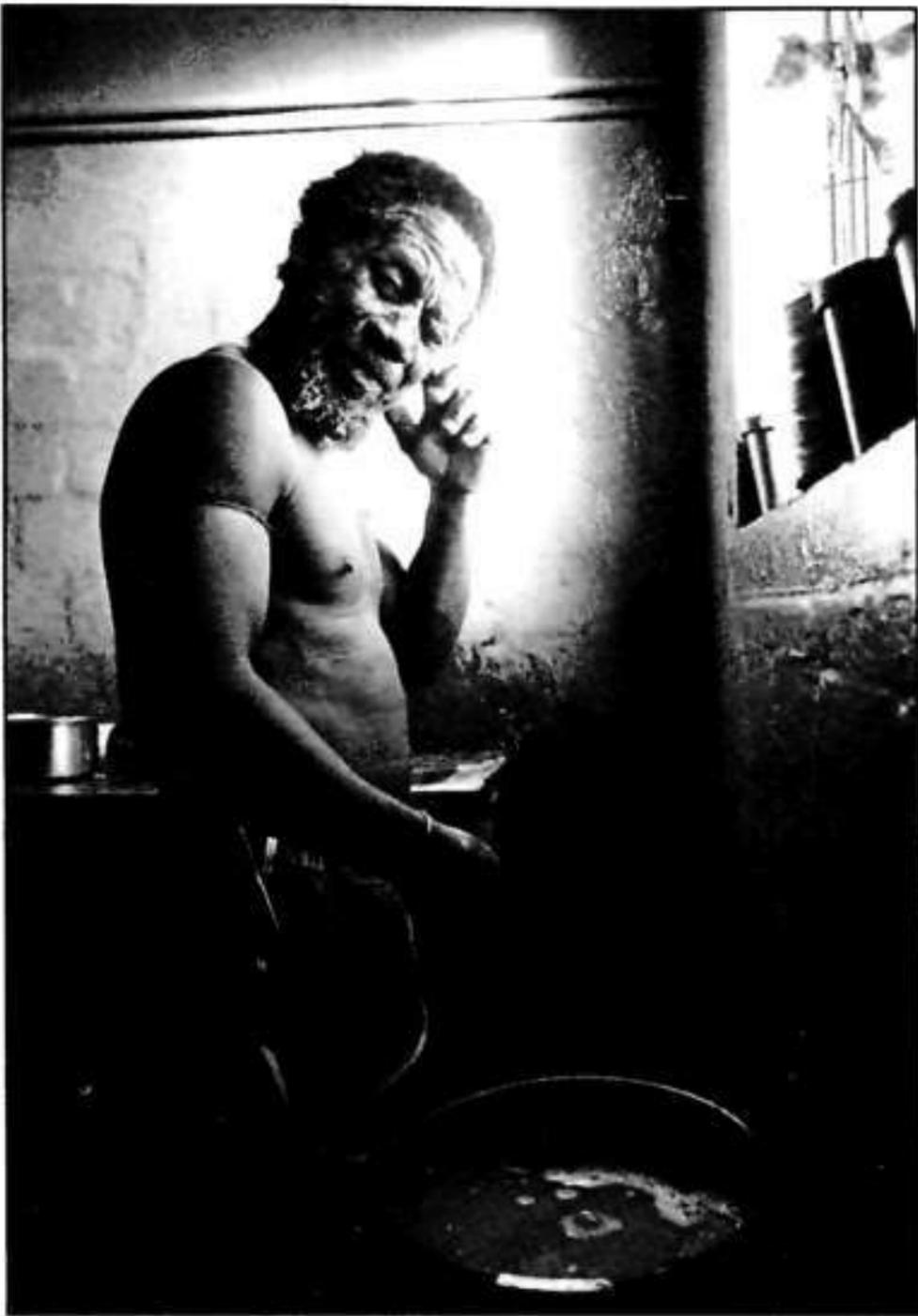


# Searching for an alternative to hell

*Influx control was scrapped four years ago — but the shabby dwellings created to house migrant labourers are still there. In the light of the recent clashes between hostel-dwellers and township residents, Robyn Rafel looks at what alternative forms of accommodation exist*



**S**INCE the violence on the Reef there have been several impassioned calls for single-sex hostels for migrant workers to be abolished. The sentiments behind these calls are understandable - the carnage cannot be repeated. But getting rid of hostels is not as straightforward as it might seem.

Hostels are the product of the migrant labour system and the pass laws. Influx control, of course, no longer applies, having been scrapped in the middle of 1986. But - and this is the point - large parts of the economy are still based on the migrant labour system and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future.

There are two categories of migrant - foreign migrants and migrants from inside South Africa (including the bantustans).

Analysing the changing patterns of foreign migration in a forthcoming book, *Apartheid's Hostages: Foreign Migrants in South Africa*, University of Natal economist Alan Whiteside makes four points:

- overall numbers have dropped significantly in the last two decades. In the post-war period over half a million Africans

from outside the country were employed in South Africa. By 1973 the figure had fallen to 475 968. In 1982 it reached an all-time low of 279 760. By 1986, the last year for which accurate information is available, there had been a slight recovery: the figure rose to 302 685. According to Whiteside, the downward trend is likely to continue;

- the sexual make-up of the foreign migrant labour workforce has altered considerably. Women accounted for 17,5% of foreign migrants in 1960. In 1970 the figure had dropped to 9,5%. In 1985 it stood at 2,1%. This is unlikely to be reversed;

- there have been major changes in the sectors in which foreign labour is employed. In 1964 58% of foreign migrants were employed in the mining industry. The next biggest employer was the agricultural sector, employing 30% of all foreign workers. By 1970 the numbers employed on the mines had reached 77,4%. In 1986 the figure stood at 81%, the total for agriculture had nose-dived to 4,6%, while the manufacturing sector employed only 3% of foreign migrants. It is expected that the mines will continue to be the greatest users of foreign labour

in the future;

- there have also been major shifts in recruitment patterns, the most important of which are steep declines in recruitment from Malawi and Mozambique.

The mines are the largest employer of foreign migrants, but even there the number of foreigners employed has declined dramatically in recent years. In 1972, for example, 78% of workers employed at mines affiliated to the chamber were foreigners. Today black South Africans make up 60% of the total workforce of 550 000 on chamber mines.

Commentators have isolated several factors to explain this change:

- Malawi's decision to stop recruitment in 1974 following an air crash in which 74 of its nationals were killed. The incident made mine owners edgy about relying too heavily on foreigners;

- fears that the supply of Mozambican workers would be disrupted as a result of the ending of Portuguese colonial rule in Mozambique; and

- a major increase in the gold price in 1973-74 which led to improved pay for miners. Combined with recessionary conditions and the rise of unemployment locally, this meant mining was no longer

## HOSTEL WAR

so unattractive to rural - if not urban - black South Africans.

Because this made black labour more expensive, however, the mining houses required black labourers to be more productive so they began to mechanise. This meant blacks would have to perform more semi-skilled and unskilled jobs and the mining houses had their doubts that a labour force consisting mostly of migrants would give the desired result.

The mining houses therefore started promoting the concept of 'career' mining: instead of workers working out their contracts and then returning home, they were given incentives to return to the mines within a period which would not necessitate their being retrained. Against the background of rising unemployment, this policy has drastically reduced the number of newcomers to the industry.

Improved accommodation was also meant to be part and parcel of the promotion of 'career' mining. But this side of the equation remains decidedly unbalanced. Today, the vast majority of blacks on the mines still live in hostels situated on mine property.

In the past the mining houses have justified lack of change by putting the blame on an order issued by the late Hendrik Verwoerd stipulating that no more than 3% of any mine's black workforce would be allowed to live in married accommodation on mines. This rule was eased slightly in 1975, when the government allowed mines to build ac-

commodation for workers who were married and qualified for urban residence in terms of the Black (Urban Areas) Act. Applications by individual mines wanting to go over the 3% limit would also be countenanced. Highly-mechanised collieries and diamond mines could also exceed the limit.

In 1984 4,4% of workers on collieries were living in married accommodation. But by 1986, when the 3% rule was dropped, none of the gold mines had even got anywhere near the ceiling.

It has been claimed that even if the 3% embargo had lifted earlier, influx control laws would have prevented the mines from doing anything much about housing workers on mine property. But a statement made by former Anglo American chairman Harry Oppenheimer puts the issue into its proper perspective. Interviewed in October 1988 on his 80th birthday, Oppenheimer said: 'There are many things I wish I had done. Although we were reasonably in the forefront of improvement in South Africa, I feel the forefront should have been further ahead. We thought we were doing as much as we could, but in fact we were doing as much as was practical. I have one particular regret concerning housing for black miners. We got a long way towards getting them housed on the mines, but Verwoerd stopped us. We then preened ourselves on having made the effort, instead of keeping up the pressure - I think we missed out there'.

Given that migrancy will not end

overnight, what are the mining houses doing to improve the living conditions of their employees?

Of the various mining houses and their various divisions, Anglo American's gold division has been the most active. Its approach to accommodation is based on a study conducted in 1986 which revealed that many migrants were keen to bring their families to live with them on the mines in housing that they would either buy or rent. A significant number, however, opted for continued migration. The latter were mostly foreigners or migrants from within South Africa who had dependents in the bantustans or ties they did not want to abandon.

Armed with this information, the division established a home-ownership scheme. According to gold division spokesman Adrian du Plessis, the home ownership will assist a process of 'orderly urbanisation.' The division assists local communities in securing serviced land - either in extensions to existing townships or completely new towns - and also helps employees secure access to finance for home ownership. Anglo heavily subsidises both deposits for homes (instead of paying a 5% deposit, workers are only required to pay 2,5%) as well as bond repayments - workers pay only 5% interest on 20-year loans.

As for hostels, the division continually reviews standards for the physical condition of hostels, administrative procedures and hostel management. However, it has stressed that financial constraints mean that rapid progress in altering all the hostels to achieve a uniform standard throughout is unlikely.

Notwithstanding the results of the 1986 study, gold division employees have not responded to the home ownership scheme with as much enthusiasm as management anticipated. In April this year only 2 460 of the approximately 200 000 workers in the division were living in their own homes. Of these, the vast majority were skilled workers.

Clearly, although the lowest-paid workers can in theory participate in the home ownership scheme, in practical terms they find the houses too expensive. Du Plessis concedes this point, but adds: 'We do, however, have further proposals to adjust the remuneration structure which will allow even the lowest-paid workers a real and practical choice to live in accommodation they can afford. We are no longer going to impose standards on our employees because it directly affects



*Vengeance from the hostels: Kagiso resident Willem Stemper surveys the damage caused by hostel dwellers at the height of the conflict in Reef townships*

## HOSTEL WAR

affordability.'

Genmin, the second largest mining house, has tackled the accommodation issue from a different perspective. According to Dawid Groenewald, senior human resources manager, the group's policy has been to adopt a 'clean wage' approach and to encourage home ownership off mine property. By 'clean wage' he means an all-inclusive wage as opposed to a system whereby a worker's remuneration consists of a wage component and additional components for food, accommodation and the like.

The 'clean wage' policy was introduced at Genmin head office in October 1987. The target date for all employees to go on to the system is July 1992.

Says Groenewald: 'Instead of subsidising workers, you pay them more so that they can choose where to live. If they want to live in their own homes, they can. If they opt to live in a hostel they also can: they will have to pay for this, though. Look at the total cost to the company. It is cheaper. Building means huge capital expenditure'.

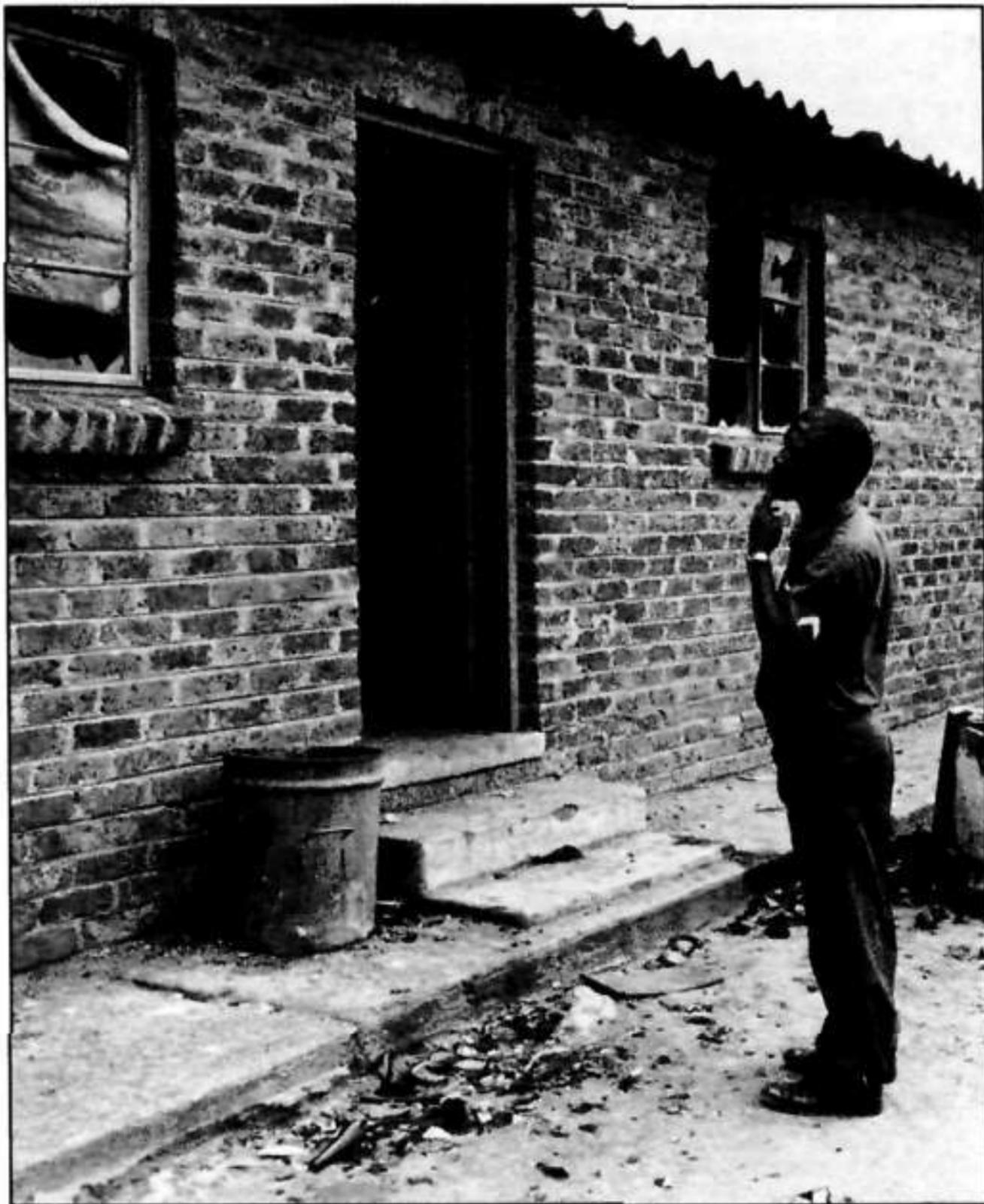
At Khuma near Stilfontein Genmin has given developers the go-ahead with a residential development on mine land adjacent to the existing township. Prices for homes there vary from R30 000 up to R85 000.

Employee response to Genmin's home-ownership scheme has been lukewarm. 'The whole question of housing is a new concept to our workers. Rural ties are stronger than we anticipated. The scheme won't catch on until workers see the advantages of the secondary housing market', says Groenewald.

As with Anglo's gold division scheme, however, not all Genmin employees will earn enough to participate in the home-ownership scheme. Like Anglo, Groenewald says Genmin is looking at the SA Housing Trust to supply the solution for lower-paid workers.

**T**he schemes described above have been instituted with little, if any, consultation with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). What does the union make of them? According to NUM spokesman Jerry Majatladi, the union's policy on migrant labour is continually evolving. Nevertheless, he did make some observations.

'You cannot address ending migrant labour without addressing the question of housing. Therefore, we say that in the long run the compound system should be speedily dismantled as it constitutes a



*The hostel he once called home: a burnt-out hostel in Ackerville, Witbank, after clashes between hostel-dwellers and township residents*



*Life on the inside: a hostel 'room' in New Canada, Soweto*

*The Soweto Council says there are 9 000 empty bedspaces in its hostels. Visit the hostels, however, and no empty beds will be found*

People are living in the hostels without paying and the council is either unaware of this or reluctant or incapable of doing anything to change the situation.

According to Petros Mashishi, president of Cosatu's South African Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu), all the municipalities make use of migrant labour because black urbanites have traditionally regarded their jobs as work fit only for uneducated people. Hostel conditions for these workers vary enormously, he says.

The Johannesburg City Council's hostels, for example, have been significantly upgraded. Many other municipal worker hostels are, however, 'not such nice places', says Mashishi.

Conditions in company-owned hostels also vary enormously. Generally speaking, the smaller the company the worse the conditions.

According to worker housing consultant Ian Bernhardt, many major corporations such as Sasol, Iscor, Sentrachem and AECI have made in-principle decisions to abandon the use of migrant labour. In practical terms, however, this is not always possible as it is the workers themselves who wish to continue migrating.

There are a multitude of reasons for this. As with the miners, some have

dependents beyond their immediate nuclear family who they cannot desert. Others don't want their children to be exposed to evils of township life. Yet others are concerned that the education standards in the townships are inadequate. Some simply fear falling victim to township violence. The companies will have to cater to these workers' needs. But they are not recruiting any new migrant labour. In future they will recruit local labour.

If Bernhardt is right, it is quite conceivable that 'internal' migrancy for non-mining companies will end in anything from 10 to 15 years. Mashishi is convinced that the same will apply regarding migrant municipal workers because the pressure for jobs in the cities will be so great.

What about the mines? Will there ever come a time that they won't use migrant labour? Although present recruitment patterns will almost certainly change, this seems less likely. At present foreign migrants tend to be more skilled than 'internal' migrants. With time, however, this profile will change. That will probably result in a reduction in the recruitment of foreigners. Nevertheless, migration from Lesotho seems set to continue indefinitely. The same is probably true of Mozambique.

As for 'internal' migrancy, the industry has had little success in recruiting from the urban areas or urban concentrations near mines. If this trend persists, 'internal' migrancy will continue. But this also depends on what kind of land reforms are introduced in the future and whether attempts at decentralisation will be successful.

The wild card in the pack is Aids. If the killer disease assumes the proportions that have been prophesied, all these predictions will be wide of the mark. •

## Three into one might go

REELING from deep rifts amongst its membership sparked by the Reef violence, Cosatu's National Union of Metalworkers (Numsa) is working on an ambitious scheme to scrap single-sex migrant worker hostels in urban areas and replace them with housing units that are integrated with the communities around them.

No details were available at the time WIP went to press. But in broad terms the scheme calls for Cosatu, Jan Steyn's Independent Development Trust and the state to each contribute R1-billion to bankroll the endeavour. It is envisaged that the financing would be guaranteed by a consortium of financial institutions, possibly under the SA Perm.

Numsa has undertaken to bear the major responsibility for raising Cosatu's share with funds from the metal industry's pension and provident funds. •

gross violation of human rights,' he told WIP.

'We think the foundation for doing away with this lies in finding alternate accommodation which will have to be in the form of family units. But people should not be forced to own these units, they must be able to rent them just as white miners do. Another alternative we see is that the state should take the responsibility and work together with the mine owners to build mine villages or suburbs with decent houses with rentals that black mineworkers can pay easily'.

Majatladi is dismissive of Anglo's gold division scheme. 'Miners are not interested in it because the houses are beyond their means', he says. He is equally unimpressed by Genmin's 'clean wage' philosophy. 'Normally, when we negotiate wages at the chamber, the mine bosses tell us they pay for accommodation and food and that is the equivalent of an extra R200. Genmin now wants to make this a cash payment. But it does not mean workers get anything extra. All that happens is that Genmin washes its hands of any responsibility for housing and feeding workers'.

'Internal' migrancy is not restricted to the mining industry alone. Countless companies still employ 'internal' migrants, as do many municipalities.

There are three options for hostel accommodation for 'internal' migrants:

- hostels operated by black local authorities;
- hostels catering for municipal workers; or
- company-owned hostels.

It is the hostels run by the black local authorities that have been at the centre of the Reef violence. Within these hostels bed spaces may be rented out to individual migrants, but it is also common for companies to reserve blocks of beds.

Black local authorities have never had adequate sources of revenue. On its own, this factor has militated against any significant improvements to the hostels they run. But what with rent boycotts in the Transvaal and the general breakdown of local government in the townships, conditions in many hostels have deteriorated significantly and there is little, if any, control. For example, according to the Soweto City Council, there are 9 000 empty bedspaces in its hostels. Visit the hostels, however, and no empty beds will be found.

What can we conclude from this?