

Nondweni is in Northern Natal, about 20kms from the village of Nqutu, 70kms east of Dundee, 60 kms south of Vryheid. It isn't an area whose concerns obtrude themselves on the attention of the White public of South Africa.

It came under the control of the then S A Native Trust some time in the 1950's, as part of the consolidation proposed in the land acts of 1913 and 1936. White farmers in the area were bought out, and a small, almost deserted White village was destroyed. In 1976 a 'closer settlement', called unofficially 'Tin Town' was established on part of the land, to house families evicted from 'Black Spots' and White farms in the Paulpietersburg area. (Increasing numbers of Black families from White farms have been made homeless since the Government's policy of abolishing labour tenancy has begun to be strictly applied, and its operations have moved to districts where very many Black people have always lived.)

Conditions in 'closer settlements' have been familiar to us all since Limehill. Plots of 21 x 35m are allocated to families at the nominal rent of R1,00 per year. (In some parts of 'Tin Town' there are two houses to a plot.) A pit latrine is provided; a prefabricated hut (3,6m x 3,7m - an improvement on the Limehill tents) is lent to each family for three months in the first instance, by which time they are supposed to have built their own house from local clay, wood (obtainable at Nqutu), and thatching grass (only available on farms far to the South). No livestock larger than fowls may be kept. There are communal taps in some streets (the layout is in a grid pattern). There are two or three shops; a clinic has been built but was not yet operating in late 1979; there is no school. (Some way out of 'Tin Town' but still on Nondweni Trust Lands, a primary school is conducted in prefabricated classrooms donated by the - now banned - Black Women's Federation; and a clinic nearby is administered by the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital in Nqutu. School and clinic serve 'Tin Town', an illegal 'squatter' settlement also on Nondweni lands, and people on neighbouring farms - about 10 000 people in all). 'Tin Town's' own population was officially about 4 500 at the end of 1979; but is in fact probably hundreds if not thousands more, and it is still growing.

The extension and maintenance of the township itself provides employment for a few people; but when everything is built, and for the very great majority, there is clearly not the slightest present or future prospect of any local employment, for women or men. People have to register in Nqutu and hope to be recruited for migrant work in the towns.

Nondwenei 'Tin Town' is far from unique. Limehill still exists, not much changed; there are similarly expanding settlements at Mondhlo, Compensation, Qedeni, Ihlumba and probably other places. 'White' Northern Natal, its towns and its farms, are being progressively whitened. A large reservoir is being built near Nqutu, and land has been set aside there for a further settlement of 30 000 people, presumably from the Dundee (and Vryheid) locations.

Nondweni is due to be handed over eventually to Kwa Zulu. The large townships of Ozizweni and Madadeni have already been handed over. It seems that all the settlements, when they are full, will eventually be the responsibility of Kwa Zulu; and White towns and farms will accommodate no Black people except those necessary for the daily work. When this happens, White Natal will no doubt be able to claim that it has 'solved' some of its most pressing demographic, human, social and political problems.

'Tin Town' is a 'popular' place according to the authorities, and people 'flock' there. (But residents of 'No.5', the nearby squatter settlement under constant threat of removal, are not willing to move to 'Tin Town'.) Most of the applicants for plots are probably volunteers in Mr M C Botha's sense ("On occasions we have to do a good deal of persuasion to get them to move - but they are volunteers" - Star 21.11.69); but many people do in fact request admission. If they have been evicted from their homes, they have to find somewhere to live. (One could also call some refugee camps 'popular' in the same sense.)

The inefficiency and departmental unco-ordination with which the resettlements are handled, (in a country which has passed through a technological revolution and leads the world in some very complicated industrial procedures) can only derive from a total lack of human concern at the highest levels; a total unwillingness to spend more than the barest minimum of money and attention on the welfare of the people. For instance, there has never been any attempt to provide a refuse removal service in 'Tin Town'. In 1976 the Chief Health Inspector of Dundee reported that the new pit latrines, (obviously dug in unsuitable ground) were half-full of water, and after coming into use could soon overflow and pollute the water supply. There was a plan to change over to a bucket-and-maturation-pit system. But late in 1979 the original latrines were still in use, still flooding. In 1976 two cases of typhoid were diagnosed at the hospital in Nqutu. Doctors began vaccinating the whole of 'Tin Town', and requested the authorities to halt the resettling; but when 5 000 people had been vaccinated it became apparent to the doctors that more people than they could vaccinate were being moved in every day. (There was no typhoid epidemic at that time, but sporadic cases have been reported since. Pellagra is common in 'Tin Town'; and there is a constant plague of mosquitoes). Samples of water taken by observers late in 1979 from 'Tin Town' taps had 'suspect' or 'unsatisfactory' bacterial counts. The 'Tin Town' clinic, completed in 1979, had not been staffed or stocked by the end of that year. Schools are still (1979) 'proposed'. No arrangements for the transfer of pensions or disability grants from the settlers' previous districts were made in advance; they were at first instructed to re-register at Nqutu. Only after strong representations by the hospital doctors (who often find themselves interceding for the 'Tin Town' people) was a desk sent to Nondweni; but in 1979 it was learned that some pensions and disability grants - often people's sole sources of income - had not yet been paid a year after their removals.

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Perhaps even worse than the practical uncaring inefficiency is the social obscurantism of these removals. The demoralising effects on communities of even the best-planned and most generous 'slum-clearance' schemes have been clearly documented in Europe and America. Psychological and sociological advisers to government departments must be well aware of the totally catastrophic social results certain to follow this massive-scale shunting of communities and families, sometimes through two or three moves, into unwelcoming, isolated and alienating conditions. Some effects are already obvious. 'Tin Town' is a violent and crime-ridden place (much worse than the nearby squatter township 'No.5', in spite of the legal precariousness of the inhabitants there). An article in the Sunday Post of 8 July 1979, described the general malaise and despair of most 'Tin Town' residents, and their preoccupation with the death rate among children. The brutal faction fighting at Msinga (often reported with a kind of racial smugness in the Natal newspapers) is continually exacerbated by the resettling of thousands of Black people evicted from the Weenen district on to an infertile, narrow and overcrowded strip of land.

Dr Piet Koornhof has given an undertaking that people will not be moved until there are 'adequate facilities' for them in their new districts. 'Adequate' isn't defined. The Bishop of Natal asked in a 1979 newsletter whether the plans of 'closer settlements' included space for children's playgrounds and parks. The shock of that question - its patent and pointed incongruity - illuminates the literally inhuman level of the resettlement policy. Its scale and scope, and its cynicism, make it fairly aptly describable as the South African "Boat People" operation.

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