

THE BLACK SASH - NATIONAL CONFERENCE 1981

CAPE WESTERN REGION FACT PAPER

DISTRICT 6 IN MARCH 1981 - by D. BISHOP

GENERAL

At this time last year we reported that we hoped to prevent the removal of approximately 10 000 people who then still lived in District 6 - now renamed Zonnebloem. Now we have to report that despite sustained protest from various quarters, there are fewer than 3 000 people living in this historic area of the mother city. Families living in the area to be occupied by the Cape Technikon campus have been rapidly moved this year and their houses demolished, along with the old Tafelberg Hotel which latterly was run as a rehabilitation centre for "white" people with problems.

The removal of people was hastened after the "purchase" by the Department of Community Development of some 600 houses in Lentegeur, one of the more attractive areas of Mitchells Plain. These houses were made available to residents of District 6 at a very reasonable rental. The railway service to Mitchells Plain was opened during the year after a long delay in its completion.

RENNOVATIONS AND BUILDING

As part of the Department of Community Development's renewal scheme for the area, the blocks of flats along De Waal Drive which border District 6 have been beautifully rennovated and relet to "white" families. Remaining residents of District 6 often pass these blocks on their way home and must nightly wonder at the injustice of differential treatment.

The remaining fish shop in Hanover Street was demolished during the year, as was the Avalon cinema which burnt down prior to meeting its final fate. The cause of the fire is still unknown. The removal of these structures helped to make way for the construction of a dual carriageway along what was once Hanover Street.

As planned, the Department of Community Development has built several blocks of maisonettes and flats for police and Defence Force personnel. These will be made available at very low rentals or for purchase. These buildings are nearing completion.

There is speculation that land in District 6 will be used for the erection of homes for "black" members of the Presidents Council who do not live in Cape Town. Housing of these Council members is at present a problem on account of the distance from the Council chamber in the city centre of "coloured" and "Indian" group areas on the Cape Flats.

The Oriental Plaza was officially opened in May 1980 without a fanfare of trumpets nor as much as an announcement in the Press - presumably to avoid a barrage of further negative publicity. Although the Department of Community Development insists that the demand for premises in the Plaza is greater than the supply, several shops have not been rented.

The Plaza is not far from the city centre with which it fails to compete for most shoppers, nor is it situated in a residential area - the local District 6 residents having been removed, alas - and therefore has no local clientele on which to rely. There is, in addition, a widespread boycott of the Plaza by Capetonians who abhor association with the "rape of District 6". The problems of the traders in the Plaza would indeed seem to be more profound than mere teething problems. As a result, Indian tenants have apparently been assisted by the Department of Community Development with rent remissions, and some families have been moved into houses vacated by "coloured" families in District 6 to reduce travelling costs between the Plaza and "Indian group areas". The Plaza traders appear to rely almost entirely on tourist trade at the moment.

At the time of Minister Pen Kotze's statement in December 1980 that there would be "no more mass removals of people", all the 475 families of the Bloemhof flats were still living there. Most of these families have since been removed and it is said that these solidly built blocks of flats will be renovated for "white" residential purposes. They are in close proximity to the police and Defence Force flats.

REMOVALS

The Advice Office has continued to function during the year and it was to this community service that many people threatened with eviction without the alternative offer of "suitable housing", turned for advice. Together with the Rent, Ratepayers and Residents' Association of District 6, an interdict was sought temporarily stopping the Department of Community Development from further evictions on the grounds of eviction notices being "illegal". The Department in turn requested that the application for an interdict be dropped and that it would pay costs. Finality on this issue has been delayed.

In reaction to the publicity afforded to the opinions of those who oppose the destruction of District 6, the Department of Community Development has published a brochure entitled "The other side of the coin".

THE CAPE TECHNIKON

Despite suggested alternative sitings for the Cape Technikon and well-motivated reasons for the unsuitability of the siting of the Technikon in District 6, the final decision to build the institution on the ruins of the area has been confirmed. Building has been planned to commence in 1983. The Cape Technikon is making every effort to encourage the financing of this building by the private sector. Several companies have stated their intention of withdrawing support for the Technikon if its campus is sited in District 6. Efforts to involve Technikon students in becoming aware of the controversy surrounding the siting of the campus had little apparent effect.

CHURCHES AND MOSQUES

If the Technikon is built in District 6, it will have four mosques and two churches on the campus. The mosques have not been threatened with demolition as they may not be deconsecrated.

However, several churches were demolished after their parishioners had been removed from the area. Two such churches were due for demolition - the Moravian Hill Church and the Anglican "Klipkerkie". Amidst a barrage of protest, these 2 churches have now been declared historical monuments and are to be incorporated into the campus of the Technikon. The Moravian Church held its final service before the building was "saved", but the Anglican Church has declared its intention to continue to serve whatever community may surround it. A religious procession on Good Friday in 1980 stopped on the sites of demolished churches.

OPEN TRADING AREA

In September 1980 the Department of Community Development proposed the declaration of a section of District 6 as an "open trading area". Written and verbal opinion on this proposal was invited from the public and was submitted by the Cape Town City Council, the Western Cape Traders' Association, the District 6 Advice Office, the Rent, Residents and Ratepayers' Association of District 6 and the Friends of District 6 (on which committee the Black Sash serves). All these bodies expressed guarded support for the proposal which provided an alternative to it remaining "white" only. The Friends of District 6 pointed out the necessity for allowing such traders to reside on their trading premises - a Cape tradition apparently not known to the committee of Pretorians sent to hear evidence at the public enquiry. The Friends therefore urged again the need for not only an "open trading area", but also for an "open residential area". It pointed out that "white" pioneers had not been forthcoming to settle in District 6 for the following reasons:

- * Political: Verkramptes did not wish to live where "coloureds" had been; liberals did not wish to live where "coloureds" had been evicted;
- * Economic: The "whites" who live in marginal areas such as Woodstock could not afford to buy property in District 6;
- * Cultural: Suburbanization: this is a phenomenon observed throughout the world: upper income groups are prepared to spend considerable sums in both money and time to escape from the city centre into commuter belts.

The outcome of the enquiry is yet unknown.

SUSTAINED PROTEST

The Black Sash has continued to serve on the committee of the Friends of District 6 which has met throughout the year. The Friends have been responsible for encouraging the writing of letters to the Press and for the organisation of a public commemoration meeting on 11th February 1981 to mark the 15th anniversary of the declaration of the area as a "white group area". The Ministers Fraternal organised an interdenominational service on the same evening.

The tragedy of District 6 is very much linked to Mr P.W Botha who as Minister of Community Development in 1966 was responsible for its declaration as a "white" area. So far he has resisted widespread opposition, a course attributed by many to his well-known combination of vacillation and stubbornness. We call on him to reverse his decision before it is too late.