

## 2. MEWA RAMGOBIN

Two months ago it was Fatima Meer, this time it is Mewa Ramgobin — banned for a further five years. The only difference is that the Ramgobin ban is even more onerous than the Meer ban, and that Mewa is starting on his fourth stint, while Fatima was starting on her third.

The reason the Minister of Justice gives for renewing Mewa Ramgobin's ban is, it seems, that he "is satisfied" that he "was engaged in activities which endanger or are calculated to endanger public order in South Africa". While he was banned? The kindest thing one can say about the Minister is that he is talking rubbish.

Mewa Ramgobin to the best of our knowledge, and we know him a good deal better than the Minister ever will, has never wanted to endanger public order in South Africa. What he has wanted to do is to bring an end to the apartheid order in South Africa. That is something quite different, and in our view, and that of most other people who have had experience of it, highly desirable. Whatever the Minister of Justice may have been led to believe, Mewa Ramgobin does not advocate

violence. It would be a strange thing if he did, as a member of Manilal Gandhi's family. So why has the Minister banned him again? Obviously because the local members of the Security Police have advised him to do so. And why should they give such advice? We think that it is because, in spite of all the terrible restrictions they have placed upon him, he won't give in. He continues to believe in a non-racial South Africa with equal rights and opportunities for everyone and no doubt tells them so when they come round pestering him. The Security Police don't like that.

Of course the Minister and the Security Police have a problem. If they unban Mewa he'll start saying and doing the things he believes in. And if they ban him, which they have decided to do, he will handle his ban in such a way that he will inspire others to say and do the things he believes in.

One thing is certain. In the contest between what the Minister advocates and what Mewa advocates, in the end only Mewa can win. We hope this knowledge will sustain him in the five long years ahead. □

## DURBAN HOUSING CRISIS II

by Garth Seneque

A previous article in REALITY discussed the housing crisis in Durban.<sup>1</sup> It referred to the growing resistance on the part of the residents, to the City Council's and the Government's policies and actions in the public housing schemes. This article is an attempt to provide some background for an understanding of this resistance.

A publication issued by the Durban Housing Action Committee — an umbrella co-ordinating committee of community organisations — noted: "Although the struggle against high rentals reached its most intense phase in 1980, the Phoenix, Newlands East and Sydenham Heights communities have been protesting against high rentals from the very inception of these housing schemes. The responses, if any, from the Community Development and the Durban City Council to these protests have always been meaningless and indicate their non-co-operation and uncaring attitude to problems faced by the Black community."<sup>2</sup>

What are these problems? A few statistics provide an insight. These are taken from a survey conducted in Phoenix in September last year.<sup>3</sup>

	Above HSL	Below HSL
Phoenix	55,6%	44,4%
Newlands East	52,5%	47,5%

The Household Subsistence Level (HSL) is an index which has replaced the Poverty Datum Line (PDL). It takes into account only the very basic necessities required by a family for mere subsistence. It has three components — the Primary Household Subsistence Level, rent and transport

The Primary Household Subsistence Level, in turn, is comprised of estimates of food, clothing, fuel, light, washing and cleansing components.

In October, 1980 the Household Subsistence Level for a Coloured Family in Durban was:<sup>4</sup>

P.H.S.L.	Rent	Transport	H.S.L.
160,66	32,27	13,43	206,36

To give one a better idea of the meaning of these figures, it should be noted that the food component of the Primary Household Subsistence Level was R23.61 per month for a Coloured male, 19–50 years old. It is interesting to note that when the Minister of Health, Dr. L. Munnik maintained earlier this year that White pensioners could live on R25,00 worth of food per month, the White public was shocked and angry. The outcry that followed this contention studiously ignored the fact that this was merely a component in the subsistence level. Yet the Household Subsistence Level is not achieved by nearly 50% of the residents in the Durban City Council's Housing Schemes.

However, I believe the situation to be far worse. The three components are average figures for the Durban area as a whole. The very location of Phoenix and Newlands East increases transport costs. The rentals are, on the whole, higher. The costs of the Primary Household Subsistence Level components are higher because of the serious under provision of shopping facilities. The residents are forced to pay high prices because they have to depend on mobile shops and small stores. They do not have local shopping centres with large chain stores. Should they do the bulk of their shopping in the shopping centres in White areas, they incur further transport costs.

I would therefore, roughly estimate the Household Subsistence Level for Phoenix and Newlands East communities to have been closer to R250 per month. However, the survey indicated that more than 80% of household heads in Phoenix had a monthly income of less than R250. Further if found that nearly 20% spent more than 50% of their income on rent alone.

To cope with this situation, many families have simply cut back on the consumption of items such as food. Socio-