

CROSSROADS – ANOTHER VIEW

REPLY TO ARTICLE: "CROSSROADS: FROM CONFRONTATION TO CO-OPTION : (REALITY VOL 13 no 4)

by D. Cleminshaw

The article asks what has happened to the united Crossroads community which said "we will not move", and the authors declare that there is a little truth in each of the conclusions that the community won its cause, but that "black South Africa lost".

One quite agrees that the struggle that was being waged was indeed against the evil system of black migratory labour and influx control, as well as for the creation of a just society, but also, practically, for the sake of retaining residence, employment and shelter in Cape Town.

The decision to give Dr. Koornhof's proposals a chance in a conditional sense, i.e. co-operation in building the new township, providing all was done in the letter and spirit of his undertakings to the community, did have one positive result – namely an end to the threat of demolition by bulldozers and the prospect of improved housing in the near future. Dr. Koornhof stated his intention to proceed with or without that co-operation. His decision had the clearly intended effect of defusing the international publicity campaign over Crossroads.

But the Crossroads people's decision in no way gave the authorities a blank cheque, and it remained open to the community to take up their ongoing stance (as in recent times they clearly are doing) should the authorities appear to be reneging on the spirit or letter of the Koornhof undertakings. It was inevitable that once the crisis and fear of demolition were removed, divisions and factions, such as exist in most communities, would resurface in the ensuing months. In addition to corruption and internal disorganisation, these have essentially been bound up with the divided nature of the leadership, given the inevitable tendency by authorities to try and promote their own type of community council.

The fact remains that until the recent swoop on squatters (gathered together from several areas at the instigation of the officials) when some Crossroads people were caught up and bussed out of Cape Town with hundreds of others, there has as yet been no case of deportation of someone complaining of unjust treatment in the light of the Koornhof proposals. There is indeed a list of cases pending clarification, the particular situation of contract workers, and others with moral if not legal rights, but these form part of the ongoing effort to ensure that claims are properly dealt with. A positive gain has been the addition to the housing stock for Africans in the Peninsula of improved accommodation in the New Crossroads township for some 3 000 families, so that in spite of their determination to the contrary, the officials are required to regularise the presence of a significant increase of families residing in the Western Cape.

What one takes particular exception to in the article is the accusation that the Crossroads support group, and particularly the lawyer and delegation, were manoeuvred by Dr. Koornhof in a "stroke of political genius" as an "example of total strategy at its best", to achieve a solution that was "in the interests of the government".

At least three advisers were more actively involved with the negotiations, namely Mr. Michael Richman, the lawyer, Professor Francis Wilson and Bishop Patrick Matolengwe, Anglican Suffragan Bishop of Cape Town. They were not self-appointed advisers, but emerged with the positive support of the Crossroads Residents' delegation as those they most wanted to have represent them. Among others in the wider support group, these three have devoted considerable energy to the struggle against the migratory labour system and the breakup of African family life. Quite contrary to the opinion of the authors of the article, they were always fully alive to the underlying causes of the Crossroads situation, and the dynamics within the community itself, and not so naive as to fail to recognise the existence of divisions and unverifiable leadership.

The fact that the Crossroads community exists to-day is primarily due to the people themselves, their courage and perseverance, but it is doubtful if they would have lasted without the help of friends from outside. It was tremendous how many people contributed to the campaign, and no-one can really know the effectiveness of individual roles, but the most crucial was surely the role of the lawyer, Michael Richman. He applied his considerable skills and intelligence and concern for the sake of that community. It is highly unlikely that Crossroads would still exist but for his tireless work. Bishop Patrick Matolengwe is trusted and deeply respected in the black community, and he too put a great deal of his time and energy into this issue. Francis Wilson's integrity and stature as academic, writer and campaigner against the migratory labour system is internationally acknowledged. He poured his talents and energy into the whole Crossroads situation over a long period and made a vital contribution. These three constantly sought to convey the feelings of the people clearly to Dr. Koornhof and to ensure that the people did so for themselves as well. There is no doubt that when the delegation eventually decided to give the proposals laid down by Dr. Koornhof a chance in a conditional sense, they were representing the position of the vast majority of the Crossroads residents.

Indeed, it is an unwarranted reflection on the intelligence and commonsense of the Crossroads delegation and the people themselves to suggest that, after their long experience of the ways of South African authorities, they could easily be led against their better interests by someone advising them from outside.

Among those relatively few groups and individuals who are working for fundamental change and a more just society, there are bound to be differences of approach. It is a pity therefore that there is sometimes a lack of generosity of spirit that at least gives credit to the labours of others and the integrity of their motivation. This creates unnecessary problems when the need is to continue co-operating in the struggle against the migrant labour system and the forced relocation of tens of thousands of people. □