

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Apartheid in
Native Housing

128 First Avenue
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Johannesburg
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs:
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Tucked into a niche carved out of western suburban Johannesburg are the Native African residential areas--Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare.¹ There is a certain weatheredness of brick, a mellowness of stucco, a paintlessness of iron roof that gives the houses in these townships an air of settled permanence. However, the facts (a) that they are tucked where they are, (b) that Johannesburg has grown up around them and (c) that the poorer class of Europeans can look over its back fence at them has caused agitation for their removal since 1937. But the more important fact that non-Europeans own the land on which many of the houses are built has taken the removal of the townships out of the hands of the agitators and placed it in the hands of a determined Afrikaner Nationalist Government. The Government is taking swift, incisive steps to insure that these swart kolle (black spots) are removed. The plan is to eliminate them from their present spot, $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles from town, and replace them in open fields at Meadowlands, 10 miles from town.

In a bill to amend the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act, placed on the Table in the House of Parliament February 10, H. F. Verwoerd, the Nationalists' Minister of Native Affairs, has asked for the necessary powers to implement the scheme of removal. Clause 3 of the Bill will allow the Minister to take the initiative in "removing, curtailing or abolishing" a Native location, hostel or village. He will be able to lay down the terms of compensation and authorities who transfer Natives will no longer have to accommodate them in proper housing, but will merely have to "make available land for occupation." Also, Dr. Verwoerd announced today he will introduce a Bill to provide powers for removal of Natives from any area in and near Johannesburg and their settlement elsewhere. He said he intends to set up a board to carry out the removal under this Bill.²

Judging by these bills, Dr. Verwoerd has become annoyed by the delay since the birth of the plan 17 years ago when it was dreamed up by Nationalist Party men on the Johannesburg City Council. Then, as is the case with most controversial plans, it was discussed, referred to committees, rediscussed and re-referred to committees. After all this battering it was quietly laid to rest in a departmental pigeon hole until the Nationalists won the general election of 1948 when it was resurrected as part of Nationalist Party policy. The City Council held a few more debates, ordered a survey--and accomplished nothing. Dr. Verwoerd must have felt like the coach of a basketball team that persisted in merely passing the ball around instead of trying for a goal.

In February, 1953, he told the team to turn in their uniforms--and took the matter into his own hands. In the name of the Government he bought Meadowlands from the City Council "to avoid delay." Immediately he announced that before March 31, 1954, 160 new houses would be built at Dube and 480 new houses would be built at Meadowlands. A week and a half ago house-building began in earnest. It is now estimated that it will cost a rather grand total of £18,000,000 (\$50,400,000) to move the approximately 57,800 Africans, 3,040 Coloreds and 3,195 Asiatics (Indians) now living in the three townships.

1. It is significant that the municipally-owned Western Native Township, also tucked into this niche, is not affected by the Nationalists' Western Areas Removal Scheme.
2. The Nationalists' Parliamentary majority is 94-64. Both bills should pass easily.

Why should a simple "slum-clearance" plan cause Dr. Verwoerd so much concern? It is because he believes stoutly in the following statement he made during debate in Parliament: "It is the policy of this Government--a policy which I consider sensible and will support through thick and thin--that the Native shall not own any ground in a European area."

One of the leaders of opposition to this phase of apartheid is Father Trevor Huddleston, the Provincial of the Anglican Community of the Resurrection just outside Johannesburg. A tall, grey-haired man whose much-mended cassock and strong hands are those of a worker, Father Huddleston spends most of his time in the schools, homes and missions of the Western Native Areas. During one of our first conversations he told me of conditions in the shacks and shanties in the temporary housing areas outside of Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare. The area, he said, is "a breeding place for criminals, disease and trouble. It is so overcrowded that just as soon as the Municipality sets up an authorized squatters' camp an unauthorized squatters camp springs up outside it."

He showed me the Orlando breeze-block shelters built hurriedly during World War II of cement-ash bricks piled loosely on top of one another and roofed with sheets of corrugated asbestos held down by stones--Moroka, an authorized temporary squatters' camp set up six years ago for a maximum period of five years--and Pimville, established in 1903 as a temporary measure, condemned in 1913 and today still overcrowded. Compared to these shanty towns the overcrowded permanent buildings at Sophiatown, Newclare and Martindale are mansions. In order to relieve the overcrowding and put an end to temporary shack communities there is an immediate need for 50,000 new dwelling units, it is estimated. "Why tear down perfectly sound houses in the name of apartheid when there is such a tremendous need for housing already?" asks Father Huddleston.

The Government has promised not to let the normal Johannesburg building program suffer because of the Western Areas Removal Scheme, but Father Huddleston showed me figures which indicate that the annual cost of the Scheme plus the annual cost of the normal Johannesburg building program equals the total amount of money allocated by the Government for Native Housing for the whole Union for each of the past eight years. Add to that the fact that there is an acute shortage of trained builders and Father Huddleston comes up with the conclusion that it would be an impossibility, both financially and physically, to implement the Scheme and provide other housing at the same time.¹

As an alternative the opponents of the Scheme propose the following: Provide housing for the overcrowded and temporarily housed population only, demolish major slum properties in the African freehold townships and repair minor slum properties. This would cut the cost of the Scheme by more than half.

The most important consideration, in Father Huddleston's opinion, is not the material, but the moral cost of the Scheme which treats Africans, not as human beings, but as ciphers and units of population that can be picked up, moved six miles away, and be put down without any complaint. The Nationalists forget the fact that a man who owns his home and the land beneath it is almost automatically a more responsible citizen--a citizen with a real stake in his city and country and a consequent urge to protect them from crime, damage and disease. They forget that when an African believes that if he earns enough money he will be able to buy his own home he becomes a more willing, ambitious and responsible worker.

1. Other objections: The increased cost of transportation to the African who must make a daily round-trip to his job in the city; the cost of replacing missions, etc.

In answer to this the Government, through Dr. Verwoerd, has stated that (a) very few Africans (between 550 and 600) actually own their own homes, (b) most of these homes are heavily mortgaged and (c) private ownership of land is not customary in a tribal society. Father Huddleston answers these points as follows: (a) Africans should not be deprived of the right of home ownership just because they cannot afford it; (b) mortgages can be paid off and the urge to save one's home is a strong human trait tending to produce responsible rather than irresponsible citizens; and (c) the people concerned are no longer living in a tribal society but have chosen to live in a society where the right to own property is basic.

The Africans concerned are angry. In spite of assurances, they have not been consulted in any way. Dr. Verwoerd gives the following reasons for this: "We know that Native agitators . . . are not prepared to fall in with such a Scheme. To have consultations with them would be of no use . . . In addition, there are many Natives, especially the lodger type, who are afraid of intimidation. They will not come out into the open and ask for the removal of something which has now been made into a fetish, but they are longing for removal and beg and plead us to go on quickly."

Dr. A. B. Xuma, former president of the African National Congress, said at a conference on the Western Areas Scheme held last August 22 by the South African Institute of Race Relations: "In any event, our chief concern is the right of ownership and not the number of properties owned. That is the thing we cherish and treasure beyond all else. We hold and believe that as long as this right exists, so long does the hope exist for all our people that one day they, too, like other sections, will be able to own properties when their economic status improves . . . The essence of the matter is that the Africans of the Western Areas do not want to be removed. They do not like being pushed around. They regard themselves as human beings, entitled to certain rights, and object to being treated as something second-rate, removable at the will of others. It is their homes that are at stake."

Father Huddleston is trying to fight the Western Areas Scheme with his only available weapon, public opinion. His principal target is the bill to amend the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolodation Act. As matters stand now, Dr. Verwoerd could get the Removal Scheme under way by declaring Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare residential areas for Europeans only,¹ declare the non-Europeans now there illegal residents, and move them to Meadowlands and Dube. But to do this Dr. Verwoerd needs the cooperation of the Johannesburg City Council--and the Council, made up mostly of United Party members, is far from being cooperative. Under terms of the Bill to amend the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolodation Act, Dr. Verwoerd will be able to by-pass the City Council, removing Africans from Sophiatown to bare veld, if he so desires.

I have not seen Father Huddleston for several days. But in this morning's newspaper I saw the following story: "NEW MOVE TO FIGHT WEST AREAS SCHEME--A branch committee of the Western Areas Protest Committee was formed at a meeting organised by the Protest Committee in Kensington (a Johannesburg suburb).

"Mr. Cecil Williams presided, and Father Trevor Huddleston gave an address.

"Six people volunteered to 'mobilise and arouse' the people of the municipal ward in which Kensington falls to fight the western areas removal scheme by asking the Johannesburg City Council to refuse to co-operate in the fulfilment of the scheme.

"This committee of six will also organise petitions and meetings and ask members of the Kensington constituency to send telegrams to their M.P., Mr. P. A. Moore, asking him to fight the scheme in Parliament."

Sincerely,

Peter Bied Martin

1. Under the Group Areas Act.