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NATIVE HOUSING.

This Bulletin is devoted entirely to the important question of Native Housing.

1. HOUSING OF NATIVE SERVANTS ON PRIVATE STANDS: In spite of improvements which have taken place throughout the Colony in recent years it is true that many Native servants housed by their employers are made to live under disgraceful conditions which do not comply with the minimum requirements of Public Health regulations. This situation demands the attention of Medical Officers of Health. It should be stated, however, that one of the difficulties is due to the fact that if accommodation is condemned it is often difficult to secure accommodation in municipal locations owing to the acute shortage.

Many municipal bye-laws governing the accommodation of Native servants are completely out of date and should be revised. The Bulawayo City Council in September 1942 introduced a new bye-law prohibiting the erection of accommodation with an air space of less than 1,000 cubic feet and stipulating that provision be made for a minimum of 500 cubic feet of air space for each Native servant accommodated. All quarters are to be provided with a room to be used solely for ablutionary purposes. Owners of existing buildings not complying with these standards are required to carry out the necessary alterations and improvements by 31st December, 1946, or such later date as may be fixed by the City Council. The introduction of this bye-law has meant that all new accommodation for the housing of Native servants on private stands in Bulawayo meets modern requirements, and a good deal of old and unsuitable accommodation has already been replaced. It is hoped that the example of the Bulawayo City Council will be followed by other local authorities.

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2. HOUSING OF NATIVE WORKERS IN PRIVATE COMPOUNDS: A number of large employers of labour provide accommodation for their Native workers and there are many private compounds in the immediate vicinity of the larger towns. Some employers have erected suitable accommodation, but others are apparently satisfied for their workers to be housed in hovels and undesirable shacks, where overcrowding is common and filth abounds. In many cases the air space per adult does not exceed 150 cubic feet. The types of building are often deplorable. It is imperative that a reasonable standard of accommodation be laid down and enforced by Government. Unsatisfactory housing has a bearing on inefficient labour and ill-health.

The condition of many private compounds is such that improvements to existing buildings are impossible, and they should be demolished. Better types of buildings need to be erected or the Native workers housed in municipal locations. Unfortunately, at the present time, building materials are difficult to obtain and there is an acute shortage of accommodation in all municipal locations.

Though the housing of Native workers in private compounds is, generally speaking, unsatisfactory, there are signs of commendable attention being given to the question of improved conditions. One outstanding illustration is the Rhodesia Railways, where provision has been made for the expenditure of approximately £100,000 on the erection of improved accommodation for married Native employees. The major portion of this amount has already been expended and

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excellent accommodation erected at Bulawayo, Gwelo and Umtali. The dwellings consist of a bedroom and a kitchen with built-in shelving, and have a very pleasing appearance. Improved types of sanitary blocks are being erected as well as wash houses, etc. The provision of improved housing accommodation by the Rhodesia Railways is gratifying, and it is hoped that when conditions become more normal other centres will be included in the scheme.

Schemes are being considered by certain local authorities which, if carried out, will provide much more adequate accommodation for municipal Native employees.

3. MUNICIPAL LOCATIONS:

(a) Shortage of Accommodation: There is an acute shortage of accommodation in every important urban area and in consequence serious inconvenience is being caused to Native workers and also to employers of labour. At the present time many urban Natives are compelled to live in unsatisfactory places and under undesirable conditions which constitute a serious menace to health. There is serious overcrowding in many locations and one result is the indiscriminate mixing of the sexes.

In February 1944 the Federation submitted the following resolution to Government :-

"THAT A CONFERENCE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES, GOVERNMENT AND THE FEDERATION OF NATIVE WELFARE SOCIETIES BE ARRANGED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO DISCUSS WAYS AND MEANS OF OVERCOMING THE PRESENT ACUTE SHORTAGE OF AFRICAN ACCOMMODATION IN URBAN AREAS."

(b) Types of Buildings: There have been outstanding developments in the types of buildings erected in municipal locations. Not many years ago one room was considered adequate to house a Native worker and his family. A further stage was reached when a kitchen was added and then followed the provision of two rooms and a kitchen to accommodate a married worker and his children. The provision of accommodation consisting of three rooms and a kitchen has now been recommended in certain municipal locations. It is, however, a well known fact that many married workers live in single rooms. In one location the only type of accommodation available for a married man and his children consists of one room and a small kitchen. There is a need for the pooling of experience and knowledge of Native housing and in February 1944 the Federation submitted a resolution to Government requesting an investigation into the possibility of establishing an Advisory Board on African Housing and Location Planning.

(c) Native Owned Buildings: In Gwelo, Gatooma, Selukwe and Que Que locations Native owned buildings have been erected and in most cases these are most unsatisfactory. In Que Que, owing to shortage of location accommodation, Natives are still allowed to erect their own houses in a separate section of the location, and the type of accommodation being erected leaves a good deal to be desired.

(d) Rentals: Rentals charged by local authorities are on the whole reasonable and in the majority of cases sub-economic. Building costs have increased during the war period, but with one exception location rents have not been increased. Rentals charged bear no relation to capital costs and the general principle appears to have been to fix a rental which it was considered Natives could afford to pay. Even with this generous assessment of rents the Survey of Urban African Conditions (1942-43) revealed that a large proportion of married Africans in receipt of only cash wages paid one-fifth or more of their wages in rents, while a number paid more than a third of their wages in rents. For workers in receipt of comparatively

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low wages one-fifth is the maximum which should be expended on rent. While wages remain on the present level, married Native workers cannot possibly afford to pay increased rentals.

In viewing rentals charged in municipal locations consideration must be given to administration costs and the cost of essential services. These costs are often high, and in certain locations are almost equivalent to the total income from rentals.

(e) Finance: It is evident that local authorities are in difficulty regarding the financing of Native housing and location developments. In certain districts the decision has been made to erect no further location accommodation until the financial position has been clarified. The wisdom of accumulating substantial debts which cannot be met from rentals has been questioned and certain local authorities are already involved in serious financial obligations connected with housing which has already been provided. The following illustrations are given relating to the financial indebtedness on Native Administration and location housing at the end of the financial year 1942/43.

SALISBURY:

Net Loan Debt on Native Affairs £200,475, of which £189,380 represents Loan Debt on Native Housing.

The Salisbury City Council has not used profits from the Beer Hall for expenditure connected with location housing. Income from this source has been used in the past two years to reduce rentals which were previously sub-economic.

From the present rentals charged it will not be possible to meet loan interest and redemption.

The Beer Hall account shows a credit balance of £11,498.

European labour is used in the erection of Native housing.

GWELO:

Outstanding loans on Native housing and location improvements - £25,393. (Loan Redemption Reserve £5,790).

European labour has been used in the erection of Native housing.

Prior to the Kaffir Beer Act amendment of 1942 profits from the Beer Hall were used to assist in the payment of loan interest and redemption. The present rentals charged are sub-economic and cannot meet the charges for loan interest and redemption. No further housing is to be erected until some form of assistance is given in the provision of sub-economic housing.

The Beer Hall account shows a credit balance of £1,938.

BULAWAYO:

Total debt on Native housing and location improvements - £47,984.

Native labour has been used in the erection of Native housing.

Prior to the Kaffir Beer Act amendment of 1942 a considerable amount from Beer Hall profits was used for Native housing and location improvements and this, along with the use of Native labour, accounts for the comparatively low debt on a large location where the value of buildings is possibly three to four times the amount of the present debt.

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Prior to war conditions the rentals charged approximated to economic, but since the war, building costs have increased and certain new types of accommodation have been let at rentals which are not economic.

The Beer Hall account shows a credit balance of £34,167, of which £8,080 has been ear-marked for special location improvements. The Beer Hall takings in Bulawayo are approximately double those of Salisbury.

(f) General: The Government Native Village Settlements at Highfield and Luvave are excellent and are being steadily developed. These settlements are not large enough to make an appreciable difference in the problems associated with Native housing in urban areas.

It is clear that if the provision of Native housing is to proceed on a scale required to meet present and future needs in urban areas, a re-adjustment of financial obligations will be necessary. It has already been stated that Natives cannot afford to pay increased rentals in view of their low wages and unsatisfactory economic position. The following alternatives appear to be possible:-

- (1) The provision of long term Government loans at low rates of interest. (Not necessarily on the basis of loans through the Union Central Housing Board.)
- (2) The acceptance by Government of partial responsibility for the cost of Native urban housing (apart from Native Village Settlement Schemes).
- (3) Certain items of expenditure at present debited to Native Administration Accounts to be met from general municipal revenue.
- (4) The use of Beer Hall profits for approved sub-economic housing schemes.

It is also suggested that fuller use be made of Native artisans in the erection of location accommodation. This procedure would reduce building costs and if linked up with one of the above alternatives, would afford considerable financial relief.

Under the Housing Amendment Act No.49 of 1944 of the Union of South Africa the Central Housing Board is replaced by a National Housing and Planning Commission and a National Housing Council. The Union Government has accepted two new principles, viz. differential rentals and the acceptance by Government of the major share of losses involved in sub-economic housing.

The need for immediate action in Southern Rhodesia to deal with the problem of Native housing is beyond doubt, and the calling of a conference, as outlined in the resolution submitted by the Federation of Native Welfare Societies, appears to be a necessary step which should not be further delayed.

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