

ADDRESS ON GROWTH OF JOHANNESBURG'S BANTU  
TOWNSHIPS BY COUNCILLOR P.R.B. LEWIS, M.P.C.  
TO THE STUDENTS OF THE JOHANNESBURG COLLEGE  
OF EDUCATION - 26TH NOVEMBER 1963.

I was very pleased to receive the invitation from Dr. Holmes to tell you about the Townships in which the Bantu population of Johannesburg live. It is a story, at first, of indifference, of neglect. Then a story of an awareness that something must be done. A hesitant start but with no enthusiasm. Then a story of hopelessness due to the inability to cope with the flood of people who moved into the towns during the war years when men, women and children came in their tens of thousands. A story then of human degradation, crime, and suffering and then, at last, the awareness amongst the Europeans that something gigantic must be undertaken and at last the break through when the seemingly impossible was achieved.

It is a human story too, and I wish that I had the brushes to adequately paint the canvas of the upheavals and change that has taken place in the lives of the Bantu people who from an illiterate rural folk with a well formed pattern of tribal society have been catapulted into the vortex of an industrial area where their old customs and pattern of living have been thrown into the melting pot.

But let us go back to the turn of the century when the Bantu population of Johannesburg was approximately 60,000. At that time, the pattern was for the men to leave their families in the Native Reserves and come to the Cities to work for a spell often of six months to a year and when he felt he had accumulated sufficient funds the man would return to his family until the money had given out when he would return again for another spell. At that time, there were few Bantu women living in Johannesburg. The ratio of males to females being 1 female to every 12 males. By 1911 the population had increased to 102,000, the next ten years only showing an increase of 15,000 and by 1927 the total was 136,700.

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However, the ratio of male to female had now changed as the pattern of working for short spells and returning to the Reserves was losing favour and the men were now bringing their wives to the towns and the ratio was now not 12 to 1 but 6 to 1.

Then the movement to the towns began in earnest. At the outbreak of war in 1939 the male population had in twelve years increased by 50% and the female by 300% so that of the total of 234,000 one third were females. In the next seven years the population increased by more than 50% to make the total 395,000 of whom 211,000 were men, 100,000 were women and 84,000 were children. In the next sixteen years, that is in 1962, it had increased again by 50% to 609,000 of whom 211,000 were men, 179,000 women and the children were now the largest group, being 219,000. The latest statistics reflect that 20,000 Bantu babies are born in Johannesburg every year.

It has been necessary to give you these figures to appreciate the change that has taken place from a population of migrant male workers to a population who have decided to make the city their home. This movement of people to the cities has happened in all the major cities in South Africa in varying degrees. It is also in conformity with trends throughout the world. The rural worker is moving to the towns. For example, in the United States of America 13.6 million were employed in agriculture in 1910 when the total population was 92.4 million. In 1960 it only required 7.1 million persons employed in agriculture when the total population had increased to 180.7 million. In 1910 it required 1 agricultural worker to feed 6.8 people - now 1 person can produce sufficient food for 25.4 people. In other words while the population doubled the number of agricultural workers was halved. If the same pattern is followed in South Africa some time in the future we should only need 650,000 agricultural workers against the present 2 million.



In South Africa, the main reason for the movement is the inability of the Bantu to make an adequate living for himself and his family on the limited land available in the Reserves and to their primitive agricultural methods. With the industrial expansion in the cities their labour is required to enable the factories and industries to function. The wages paid on farms is usually low. The services provided in the towns, the education facilities available and the general better living conditions lure people to the cities.

Having sketched the population movement let us return to see where and how the people lived. If you look at a map of Johannesburg dated 1900 you will find a portion called Kaffirtown. It was where the Newtown Market stands and stretched into the present Vrededorp. In 1906 plague broke out in Kaffirtown and the Bantu were hastenly removed to Klipspruit, a township now called Pimville. Their shacks in Kaffirtown were burnt to minimise the spread of plague and they were leased sites on which to erect their homes and corrugated iron tanks were also provided as temporary housing. Then too, there was the suburb of Sophiatown. This suburb had no restriction in the Title Deeds prohibiting the stands from being owned by non-Whites and the same applied to Alexandra Township, which was outside the City limits.

This was a time when the European community felt no particular responsibility for providing facilities or services for the Bantu. It was not until 1919 that the City embarked on its first housing scheme when 2,300 houses were built at a place called Western Native Township.

1923 was an important year for in that year an Act called the Urban Areas Act was passed. There are three main provisions of that Act with which I want to deal. Firstly, the Act set out to control the movement of Bantu from rural areas to the towns. It set out to define those who were entitled to be in the cities and those whose presence was limited to their being granted permits to work in the cities and then to return to the Reserves after their employment was terminated. Secondly, for the

first time it placed a responsibility on Local Authorities to house the Bantu living within their boundaries. Thirdly, it established the principle that trading rights within a Bantu township should be reserved for the Bantu.

Johannesburg was slow to accept its obligations under the Act. A new township, Eastern Native Township, was established and 628 houses were built between 1925 and 1930. Then in 1930 a start was made on the development of the area in which the Bantu are now accommodated. For the township of Orlando was started and 2,800 houses were built between 1930 and 1934. Up to the outbreak of war in 1939 the total number of houses built was just under 9,000.

During the war years no houses were built. The country concentrated all its efforts on the war. Labour was scarce, materials were expensive and funds were not available. It was at this time that people were flooding into the towns because Bantu labour was being used on many tasks which were previously thought to be beyond their capacity. It was a period of great industrial expansion. Influx control was relaxed at this period. The people had to live somewhere and it was at this time that the squatter movement developed. In 1944, 4,000 families were established on a squatter camp called Shantytown. The houses were cheek by jowl, narrow lanes served as streets and in 1946 to 1947 a further squatter camp was established at Moroka. Some effort was made to control the camps and persons were allocated sites of 20 x 20.

An effort was made to build new houses but the great difficulty was to erect houses at a cost low enough to allow the Bantu to pay the rents. From the end of the war to 1953, 9,000 houses were built. One of the difficulties was that more often the cost of installing the services such as water, sewerage, construction of roads cost almost as much as the house. During the period 1953/5 only 1,000 houses were built



so that by 1955 the total number of houses was 19,000. However, things were to change rapidly. In 1951 an Act was passed called the Bantu Building Workers Act. Up until this time all the houses constructed had been with European labour. In terms of the Bantu Building Workers Act it was permissible to train Bantu building workers to work for their own people. In 1952 the Bantu Services Levy Act was passed. This was a tax on employers of Bantu workers who did not house their employees. The tax was originally 2/6d per week for every Bantu employee. This established a fund which could be used for the establishment of sewerage disposal works, provision of water mains, access roads, water towers, lighting, and sanitation, and also for the subsidisation of the transport of the Bantu to and from work. The money collected was paid by the fund to the Local Authority as a direct contribution to the services so that in calculating rentals it was not necessary to include the cost of these services. In order to assess the number of houses required and to give the persons temporary accommodation until the houses could be built for them the Site and Service Scheme was introduced. Under this scheme townships were planned and some 40,000 sites were surveyed. The sites were 40' frontage and 78' depth. The idea was that essential services would be laid on such as water, sanitation, access roads. The Bantu were then allocated a site on which to erect a temporary shack. On the site a lavatory had been built, water laid on. The shack was to be built at the back of the site so that when the building teams came they could build on the front of the site while the tenant remains in the shack. As soon as the houses were built the shacks were pulled down. In 1954 the Johannesburg City Council established their own Housing Division with the intention of training the Bantu building workers. The Shantytowns were a disgrace to Johannesburg and in 1956 Sir Earnest Oppenheimer was so appalled by what he saw that he induced his colleagues in the Mining Industry to loan the City £3 million in order to speed up the building of houses and with that money some 14,000 houses were built to

rehouse 70,000 people. It was at this time that the break through commenced and between 1956 to 1962 over 40,000 houses had been built. In addition to the houses erected by the Johannesburg City Council the Resettlement Board has to date erected 21,000 houses to house over 100,000 people. In 1958 alone 11,000 houses were constructed. Not only were the houses built but the costs of construction were reduced from R1-22 per square foot to sixty-seven cents a square foot. The townships now cover an area of 26 square miles and the problem is now where to find more land not too far from the City.

Where has all the money come from to undertake this gigantic housing scheme? Funds have been provided by the Government, who loaned money to the City repayable over varying periods. Some of this money is loaned at what is termed sub-economic rates of interest but most of the money now loaned is at economic rates. The funds provided by the Bantu Services Levy amount to approximately R1½ million per year and to date they total over R14 million. The Total Capital expenditure as at the 30th June 1963 amounted to R50,042,554. The administration of the townships involves the City in a considerable loss each year. For last year the loss amounted to R913,481 and over the last ten years has amounted to over R5 million. Today, it is pleasing to report that all the people from Shantytown and Moroka have been rehoused and with few exception all the stands in the Site and Services Scheme have had new houses built on them so that it is only in an isolated case that a shack remains and this is because the persons on these sites allocate to build a house to their own design rather than the Council's standard house. Now that the main problem of providing people with a roof over their heads has been dealt with in earnest the Council is endeavouring to provide the other needs of any City such as recreational facilities, parks, creches, community halls, sports stadia etc. Medical facilities have reached a very high standard and it is pleasing to report that in the last five years the infantile mortality rate, i.e. the deaths between birth and the age of one year have



been halved from 132 per thousand to 61 per thousand. Mass immunisation drives have taken place from time to time with very great success.

I would now like to say something about the people. In my introductory remarks I talked about the upheaval during this transitional stage. People, who have lived in a tribal society which was presided over by a Chief with his Counsellors. Tribal societies usually observed a very strict pattern. It was a feudal system in which age was venerated. Each member of the tribe was allocated more duties. Women usually tilled the fields and produced the food; the men looked after the cattle; the young boys usually herded the cattle. Poligamy was the order of the day but it was a communal society where, if a man died his wife was cared for by his brother and his children adopted. The aged were the responsibility of the young people. Marriage customs were strictly enforced. Under the lobola custom contact was made with persons of other clans and marriage contracts arranged. Generally, people had very little contact with people of other tribes.

How different it was in the Cities. People mixed with people of many tribes, they heard strange tongues, tribal sanctions were gone, people were away from their parents, men had to work to the clock instead of to the sun. Long distances had to be travelled to work in crowded trains. For the women there were no fields to till, for the children no cattle to herd, payments had to be made in cash. They had to have money to pay rents, train fare, to buy food, children had to be clothed. Poligamy does not fit into City life. Who was to care for the aged? Who was to look after the children while the wives went to work? The children went to school and got a smattering of education. They were not happy to do the work their fathers did. Often it was difficult to find employment and then one was in fear of being sent out of the City. In the City, liquor was more easily available to the young than in tribal society.

When one takes all these circumstances into consideration I think it is remarkable how the Bantu have settled in to their new surroundings. If one visits the townships one is impressed by the manner in which the houses are kept, the gardens that have been built, and how neat the houses are inside and this has all happened in a relatively short period of time. As I have said 40,000 houses have been built in the last six to seven years. You will be interested to know that 121 schools have been built, that 70,539 number of children are now at school, of these 67,618 are in Higher and Lower primary and 2,921 in Secondary Schools.

I believe that Johannesburg can be proud of its achievements and I hope that it will be possible to arrange for those of you who wish to, to visit the townships so that you can see for yourselves what has been done.



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