

# THE WESTERN AREAS SCHEME

## Discussion Notes.

### 1. Short Description

"The Malan Government's aim in declaring Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare as a 'black spot' is to throw out every Non-European, man woman and child, from the Western Areas, and to take away their right to own and occupy property which they have in these areas. "

(leaflet issued jointly by African National Congress and S.A. Indian Congress, June, 1953)

The population involved (including Western Native Township) is estimated at about 83,500 in the "Survey" issued by the Non-European Affairs Department of the Johannesburg City Council. (1950)

The "Verwoerd Plan" proposes, in effect, uprooting these people from their homes and transferring them to the bare veld at "Meadowlands", an open space in the Orlando-Pimville area. There they will be expected to put up their own shelters and pondokkies, after the style of Moroka and Jabavu.

It is likely that legislation will shortly be introduced to give effect to this plan.

### 2. Freehold Rights

Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare are the only big areas in Johannesburg where Non-Europeans exercise rights to own freehold land. (Alexandra is outside the municipal area.)

These rights date back to the time of the Republic and have been continuously exercised since then. The City Council estimates the compensation value of the land and buildings (1950) at £4,260,487.

Sophiatown and Martindale were established as townships in 1905. In 1934 the Asiatic Land Tenure Commission reported :

"Sophiatown consists of 1,694 lots, the great majority of which are held in freehold ... 37 lots are held in leasehold."

Martindale adjoins Sophiatown. There are 332 stands; all are held in freehold, without any restriction against non-white occupation.

There are 579 stands in Newclare. All are freehold. From its inception the township was intended for non-white accommodation. The title contains a specific restriction that "no whites shall be permitted to reside in the township."

### 3. Urban Areas Law

The significance of these freehold rights can only be properly appreciated in the light of the Union's Urban Areas legislation affecting Africans. Broadly speaking, these laws are designed to prevent Africans and other non-Europeans from owning land and houses in the towns. (Native Land Act of 1913 etc. have a similar effect in rural areas)

The object is that urban Africans of



shall all be tenants of municipal locations, subjected to strict surveillance and control, and deprived of opportunities for economic advancement.

The location system has been fully enforced in Johannesburg, and big municipal locations exist at Orlando, Pimville, Jabavu, Moroka, George Goch, Western Native Township, etc. But hitherto, although continuous proposals and threats have been made, the authorities (both local and government) have hesitated to interfere with such firmly entrenched vested property-interests as exist in the Western Areas and Alexandra. They have feared the very heavy expenses involved in compensating the owners and providing alternative freehold land and housing.

The Verwoerd Plan would solve this problem by simply not providing any alternative.

4. Overcrowding and slum conditions.

Undoubtedly, compared with middle-class European living areas the western areas afford deplorable examples of slum conditions. The average stand has seven or eight families living in single rooms. The original buildings, mainly of brick, are usually in a bad state of disrepair, and nearly every yard is crowded with rude tin shanties in which people live. As usual, the City Council has scandalously neglected the interests of these voteless ratepayers and citizens. Water, lighting and other municipal services are tenth-rate; parks, playgrounds, swimming baths, etc., are non-existent. Rents are usually exorbitant.

The authorities will doubtless attempt to present the Verwoerd Plan as a commendable act of "slum-clearance." Before accepting this conventional picture, it is necessary to enquire more closely into certain questions.

5. Why the overcrowding?

Since the Urban Areas Act prevents Africans erecting their own homes in the towns, the onus of housing then falls, naturally, upon the local authority (City or Town Council.) The Johannesburg City Council's neglect of this duty has become a notorious international scandal.

The African population of Johannesburg has grown by leaps and bounds. Here are some figures

1927	130,000
1935	200,000
1947	395,000
1952	468,000

The Johannesburg City Council has made no serious effort whatever to cope with this growth in population.

The last time any substantial number of houses was authorised by the Council was in 1947 (5,748 houses). No houses were authorised to be built in 1949, 1950 and 1951. In 1952, 1,000 were authorised.

THE TOTAL NUMBER OF HOUSES BUILT (INCLUDING HOUSES NOT YET COMPLETED) SINCE 1918 -- 18,649.

THE JOHANNESBURG CITIZENS' NATIVE HOUSING COMMITTEE (headed by the Rt. Rev. Ambrose Reeves, Bishop of Johannesburg) estimates the number of houses urgently required at -- 50,000



## 6. The Shantytowns

The above total of houses needed is an underestimate, for it omits to provide for thousands of families of Johannesburg workers urgently in need of housing who live at present in grossly overcrowded conditions at Alexandra and elsewhere. Probably 70,000 would be nearer a correct estimate.

But the most urgent and burning problem is clearly to provide housing for those thousands of wretched families at present existing in the Moroka-Jabavu shanties, in the incredible breeze-block shelters at Orlando, and in the "temporary" galvanised iron tanks at Pimville --- condemned as a "major slum" for over 40 years.

All these people are Council tenants. Their conditions defy description. The Citizens' Housing Committee estimates their needs at a minimum of 22,800 houses.

In 1950 the municipal Medical Officer of Health reported to the Johannesburg City Council on this area. He expressed "grave concern with regard to the difficulties of effectively controlling an outbreak of serious and infectious disease in this area." He placed the area as "priority number one in Johannesburg in the question of slum clearance." He said :

"Your officials are agreed that the shantytown area in Orlando is undoubtedly the worst from a housing point of view in the city."

If Verwoerd and the City Council were interested in slum clearance and public health, instead of pressing ahead with the Western Areas Scheme (which involves not only abolishing backyard shacks but also ejecting families from solid weather-proof buildings) they would press ahead urgently with rehousing the 22,800 desperate families in the municipal shanty towns.

## 7. Why Western Areas are Overcrowded.

Areas such as Sophiatown and Newclare and Alexandra are densely overcrowded precisely because the Council has not provided housing, as is its obligation - AND BECAUSE THE PEOPLE WOULD RATHER PAY HIGH RENTS FOR ROOMS IN THESE AREAS THAN LIVE IN A MUNICIPAL SHANTY TOWN.

It is important to understand why, in order to appreciate the fierce opposition to the Verwoerd Plan among the people of the Western Areas.

- A. The people are not fenced in. There is no superintendent; no visitors' and lodgers' permits and all the other irksome and humiliating restrictions of locations.
- B. However dilapidated, the rooms and shelters are far more cosy and weatherproof than the death camps of Moroka and Jabavu.
- C. There is an established community life in Western areas; made up roads, schools, churches, hospitals, sports fields, etc.

Naturally those who do enjoy property rights in these areas, mainly small owners heavily bonded, will fight tooth and nail to retain their property. But the above reasons, among many others, help to explain why the struggle against expropriation is no mere "landlords' affair" but is massively



supported by all tenants and residents in the area.

1,600 delegates representing every conceivable section of the people of the areas unanimously voted to fight the scheme, at a mass conference held on 28th June, 1953.

#### 8. The Verwoerd Plan

There has been no denial of the newspaper report THAT THE CABINET WAS EXPECTED TO GIVE HIGH PRIORITY IN THE COMING PARLIAMENTARY SESSION TO A BILL TO SET UP AN AUTHORITY TO REMOVE NATIVES FROM JOHANNESBURG'S "BLACK SPOTS", and

"resettle them on newly-acquired land at Meadowlands and Diepkloof, and supervise all matters of re-housing, expropriation and compensation". The Natives would be shifted from Sophiatown, Martindale, Newclare, Vrededorp, Pageview and W.N.T. in that order. About 600,000 Natives would be involved". (Star, June 29th, 1953).

"Advance" (18th June 1953) published further details of this plan, based on information handed out by the Native Affairs Department.

The "re-housing" of the Western Areas Africans is to take place on the open veld at Meadowlands, in the Orlando area. The basis will be the "site and service" scheme, adopted by the Pretoria municipality at Mooiplaats. Essentially, this is a "housing scheme without housing". Water and later sanitation will be provided: the rest is up to the Africans themselves.

This report was confirmed by Dr Verwoerd (House of Assembly; 21st July 1953) when he said:

"Assistance, either by way of loans or the advance of materials would be given to Natives wishing to build their homes themselves or have them built for them".

In other words, the displaced families will be offered a site on the veld. Then they will be expected to put up their own houses. The Government then "generously" offers "assistance" to the unfortunate African (to be paid for, of course!) for doing the job which the Government and the Council refuse to do!

And so, Johannesburg's housing problem will be gravely intensified by the erection of a great new State-sponsored shanty-town, and the eviction of 75,000 people from existing homes.

#### 9. Some Questions Answered

A. "Black Spots": Haven't these non-whites encroached on white living areas?

Answer: The question assumes acceptance of the dishonest, immoral and undemocratic theory of apartheid. But even within this unacceptable frame of reference, the facts are wrong. The Western Areas were originally a non-white residential area. Since then white suburbs and industrial areas (built there because conveniently close to non-European labour) have "encroached upon" and surrounded the original townships.

B. What is the United Party's attitude?

Answer: The United Party City Council of Johannesburg



has for many years cast greedy eyes on the potentially valuable areas occupied by non-white owners in the Western Areas. They have drawn up various schemes from time to time to effect the removal of people from these areas. But these schemes have involved very heavy expenses. In 1950 the Council N.E.A.D. estimated a cost of £4,260,487 for compensating the dispossessed owners and a further £5,819,752 for providing alternative houses and hostels for the residents. The Council was deterred by this vast expenditure of over £11 million, and also by the difficulty of allocating alternative land for freehold occupation by non-whites. For the past year or two, their main point of difference with the Nationalist Government has been who should provide the money. The Verwoerd plan "solves" the problem by

(i) dispensing with compensation. ("The Native owners are at liberty to sell to Europeans or the Department ... on the open market. The question of compensation, therefore, does not arise". Dr Verwoerd, Assembly, 21st July 1953).

(ii) dispensing with alternative housing (See para 8 above).

(iii) no alternative freehold land will be provided.

Will the United Party oppose this ruthless and inhuman scheme, evolved by the Nazi agent, Dr Verwoerd? The present conduct and recent record of the U.P. in Parliament and on the Council would indicate that unless vigorous and determined pressure is forthcoming from the voters and ratepayers of Johannesburg, the U.P. will support the Verwoerd Plan.

C. Why Should Special Legislation Be Needed - wouldn't the Group Areas Act serve the purpose?

Answer: The "cumbersome" procedure of the Act provides for hearings before the land tenure board, at which representations can be made by affected parties, including the non-white people and their organisations. The initiative must be taken by the local authority which may be unwilling to co-operate on the Government's terms. By-passing the Act (its own Act!) would be well in line with the marked Nationalist trend towards abolition of the vestiges of democratic and judicial procedures and public enquiries and representations.

D. What's the Idea? Why are they in such a hurry; and what do the Government hope to gain by the Verwoerd Plan?

Answer: i. The plan is in line with general Nationalist policy of making life as difficult as possible for non-white industrial workers in the towns, with the object of speeding up the flow of cheap labour to farms and mines. (compare the new passbooks, the steady intensification of police raids, Schoeman's Native Labour Bill, etc.) In addition, the Western Areas plan has the "advantage" of :-

ii. removing an area where Africans are not subjected to constant "control", terrorisation and surveillance by the location system.

iii. winning additional electoral support from the European dupes who swallow the Nats "apartheid" propaganda;



iv. -- depressing the economic status of the non-white commercial classes (particularly Indian and Chinese) whom the Nationalist and other European businessmen wish to eliminate as economic rivals;

E. WHAT ABOUT TRANSPORT FROM MEADOWLANDS ?

Ans: "The existing railway loop through the Orlando area was suitably situated to serve the new area. Arrangements had been made by the Railways Administration to provide extra rolling stock as the population increased."

(Verwoerd - speech quoted above)

Question for Dr. Verwoerd: Is he aware of the existing gross overcrowding on the Orlando-Pimville line? Does he know that the S.A.R. admits 40 per cent overloading on this line ?

F. What Shall I do about it ?

Ans: Only organised people can resist this wicked scheme. Join your Congress (A.N.C., S.A.I.C., C.O.D.) and get others to become active members. Tell everyone you know these facts. Get your trade union, church, sports club, etc. to send delegates to the Transvaal Provincial Conference on September 7, 1953.

Stop this Nazi scheme to destroy a community of 83,500 people, with streets, shops, churches, schools, bioscopes, sports fields and hospitals !

Demand decent housing for all workers !

Demand the equal right of all South Africans, irrespective of race sex or colour, to votes, economic opportunities and ownership of property !



TABLE SHOWING COMPARISON OF REHOUSING COSTS UNDER THE VARIOUS PROPOSALS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE  
"WESTERN AREAS SCHEME" BASED ON THE FOREGOING.

RACE.	SCHEME "A"		SCHEME "B"		SCHEME "C"		SCHEME "D"	
	Total Number of Houses.	Estimated Total Costs.	Total Number of Houses.	Estimated Total Costs.	Total Number of Houses.	Estimated Total Costs.	Total Number of Houses.	Estimated Total Costs.
Coloured .....	1275	878,224	972	651,554	479	374,522	444	306,588
Chinese .....	155	111,240	150	107,610	25	19,310	100	71,680
Indian .....	441	348,490	392	299,520	150	131,380	242	160,760
Native .....	16,154	4,171,798	13,451	3,351,302	9,309	2,585,576	9,911	2,493,405
HOUSES TOTAL .....	<u>18,025</u>	5,509,752	<u>14,965</u>	4,409,986	<u>9,961</u>	3,110,788	<u>10,697</u>	3,032,433
Hostel Requirements -	Persons		Persons		Persons		Persons	
Native - Male .....	3,348	210,000	3,790	210,000	1,821	105,000	2,918	210,000
Female .....	290	20,000	286	20,000	137	10,000	254	20,000
Others .....	253	30,000	232	30,000	62	—	140	40,000
TOTAL PERSONS .....	<u>4,391</u>		<u>4,308</u>		<u>2,020</u>		<u>3,322</u>	
TOTAL COSTS .....		£5,819,752		£4,719,986		£3,225,788		£3,302,433

SCHEME "E" : Moving families from premises needing demolition, i.e. clearing slum properties, would require slightly less than half the amount of Scheme "A". Western Native Township would remain untouched.

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