

Black Sash and Sister Theresa's Surveys of Occupants of Demolished Squatter Homes in Grassy Park on Thursday, 17th February, 1977.

Introduction.

The Black Sash and Sister Theresa have conducted surveys amongst the squatters residing in Klip Road in Grassy Park whose homes were demolished on Thursday, 17th February, 1977. The surveys tried to establish inter alia, the place of origin of the squatters, their family situation, residence history, applications for housing, current employment, and medical needs. Out of the nature of such an urgent survey, the results given below are not as detailed or accurate as they might otherwise be. Nonetheless they do shed valuable light on the plight of these unfortunate Grassy Park Squatters.

Family Situation.

Sixteen homes were demolished in which 27 families were living, comprising about 150 people in all. Thus many of the families were doubling up in the same house. 78 of the people are the children or grandchildren of the occupants. About one-third of the children are above the age of 17 years, while about half of all the children are working. Thus about 50 children below the age of 17, including babies in arms, primary and secondary school children, resided there. In a number of cases, three generations were living together, namely grandparents, parents and children.

Place of Origin.

In view of the Minister of Community Development, the Honourable Mr. Marais Steyn's remarks that squatters are to be moved back to their place of origin, it is perfectly clear that the Grassy Park squatters are to remain in Cape Town, in and around the region of Grassy Park! Only three parents were found to be born outside Cape Town, two in Oudtshoorn and one in East London, but in two of the cases, their spouses were born in Cape Town, where they, as all the other residents who were born here, have been residing continually since birth. Five of the parents were in fact born in Grassy Park, others were born in Ottery, Diep Rivier, Athlone, Woodstock and District Six. Their children, without exception, were all born in Cape Town.

It is quite clear that all that would happen if these squatters, and others in similar situations to them, were to be moved back to their places of origin, they would all simply be reshuffled around Cape Town like a pack of cards, except that one would go back to Constantia (Group Areas Removal) and another to District Six!

Residence History

Of the twenty-seven families whose homes were demolished, about 21 had been living for approximately one year in Klip Road, while 3 families had been living there for about 2 years. Before that, they lived in Grassy Park's Avenues for varying lengths of time:

2	families	lived	there	for	2	years,
2	"	"	"	"	3 - 5	years,
5	"	"	"	"	7 - 10	years,
3	"	"	"	"	14 - 20	years, and
3	"	"	"	"	30	years.

Others lived for similarly long time periods in Retreat, Lotus River, and so on.

The most common reasons for leaving their homes in the Avenues were because the property was either sold, or the owner wanted to move his family into the house, or he wanted to build on the place.

Thus, one of the most remarkable features of these squatters is the extent to which they are Grassy Parkers. Before moving to Klip Road most of them lived in one of the Avenues in Grassy Park for a very large number of years in regular housing, but for one valid reason or another, they had to relinquish their accommodation and start squatting instead. Thus, through a sad process of events, these citizens, formerly properly housed, first became squatters, then homeless families. Such total regression is indeed a very poor reflection on our society and the responsibility of the local authorities.

Employment

At least nineteen of the main breadwinners of the 27 families are employed. In some cases the husband and wife are both working. In nine cases regular employment periods of at least 2 years exist. As was pointed out above, about one half of all the children are also out at work, comprising virtually the children above the age of 17 and quite a few younger ones. Six clear cases of unemployment were encountered. It is clear that this was not a voluntary state of affairs for at least four of them because there is either no work currently or because of disability.

These squatters and their families are therefore responsible, working people and not lazy layabouts who are simply living off society. To the contrary, they are contributing meaningfully to our economic output, but are being paid inadequately to afford the housing they deserve, the average weekly wage being about R23. The impression is rather gained that our society is extracting labour from these people, but is unwilling to provide their basic housing needs in return.

Waiting List

At least eight of the families are on Divisional Council waiting lists for housing. Of these eight, at least

2 have been waiting for 2 years,
2 " " " " 4 " , and
2 " " " " 5 " .

It must be hard for those of us who are comfortably and securely housed to imagine the sense of frustration and bitterness of people desperately trying to get housing by going on waiting lists, to have their temporary, self-erected homes destroyed while waiting for the Divisional Council to get a move on.

Medical Needs.

Some of the medical needs that the survey came across are the following: a child with colic, a four-year boy with a fractured skull who had been knocked over by a car recently, an 18 year-old stabbed in lung and unable to work, a man stabbed in hand which is paralysed (also unable to work), a mother and baby visiting Grassy Park clinic, a wife with asthma, and two cases of Tuberculosis.

This list of the medical needs is by no means complete because the surveys could not probe deeply into this.

Conclusion

These surveys give us some picture of the Grassy Park Squatters whose homes were demolished. Most of the main breadwinners are working, as are half the children. Some families have been on housing waiting lists for considerable periods of time. They are virtually all Capetonians, with long residence records in Grassy Park or neighbouring suburbs.

Saddest of all is the steady regression these people have faced: from regular accommodation they moved to squatting. Now they are homeless. Something drastic needs to be done.

The Squatter Community referred to in this memorandum is situated on Klip Road in Grassy Park close to the Plantation Road turn off.

Twenty-seven Coloured families (approximately 150 people) are affected. All the families, with the exception of three, have resided in Grassy Park for a considerable period of time.

The attached appendix gives more detailed information on crucial aspects of the Squatters, based on two separate surveys conducted roughly at the time of the demolition.

Several of these people have given their names to the Grassy Park Divisional Council Offices and are on their official waiting list. In addition to these, all have given their names to the officials who frequented the area and were under the impression that their request for housing was being taken into consideration.

Three houses on this site are still intact. These occupants came from a nearby area where the houses in which they were living were demolished to make way for a new road. According to information received from the residents of these houses, and which seems to be confirmed by the fact that they are still standing, permission was given by the Divisional Council to these few to remain on the site until such time as housing is available. The Divisional Council seemed to have used their discretion in showing compassion for these families, and it therefore seems strange that they have failed to see that the people originally there are in a similar plight.

The answer given by Divisional Council to the requests of these people for homes was discouraging. The following dates point out clearly the liaison between Council Officials and the people concerned.

On March 30th, 1976, the people received their first Eviction Notice. However, seven days later, the Divisional Council still had not acted on the threatened eviction.

Again on June 3rd, 1976, a second Eviction Notice was issued, and again no action was followed through.

At this time the whole matter was brought to the notice of the Cape Flats Committee for Interim Accommodation and a letter sent off to the Housing Engineer, Mr. Coetzee of Divisional Council. Within a few days Officials appeared on the scene and the houses were lettered from A - P (16 in all). At the same time, verbal permission was given by the officials for the families to remain on the site, provided they helped with influx control. This they did. A newcomer to the area arrived in the second week of January, 1977. The Council were duly informed and the house demolished.

On the 19th January, 1977, in spite of all previous negotiations, the Divisional Council again issued the families concerned with a seven day eviction notice.

This time on the seventh day their houses were demolished. The people in the meantime had been given no alternative accommodation. They moved up a little closer to the road because the bushes on the plot were cut down and burnt by Divisional Council workers. They had no alternative but to stay where they were. Exposed to the elements, some people slowly managed to get more materials. However, on 9th February, 1977, they were again served another eviction notice which was carried through on February 16th, 1977. Their materials were again removed, but this time retrieved the same day. They are now in storage, awaiting the Council's initiative to provide land so that the people may lawfully re-erect their homes. Since the time

their materials were taken, up to the present date, 3 children and 1 adult have been treated at hospital. After the severe storm on Saturday 18th February, there no doubt will be more.

The people concerned are prepared to move to any plot of land in the Grassy Park area which can be made available to serve as an emergency camp.

Various bodies have been approached for assistance, but the same basic reply is given by them all.

Although people have rallied to supply food, blankets and clothing, and although land has been offered privately for a limited period and a fund already created (the financial aspect is not therefore insurmountable) the question of shelter for these people is one which can only be answered by the Divisional Council.

In terms of Section 4 of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Bill, only the Ministers of Bantu Administration and Development, and of Community Development, have the power to instruct any local authority (the Divisional Council in this instance) to establish an emergency camp for the accomodation of homeless persons.

This memorandum has therefore been drafted as an appeal to the Divisional Council to accept its responsibility as the only body which can directly approach the Department of Community Development for the necessary permission to erect an emergency camp whilst the relevant departments sort out the housing backlog.

Cape Flats Committee for Interim
Accomodation.

February 20th, 1977.