

BLACK SASH

MEMORANDUM ON WALMER TOWNSHIP

The Black Sash wishes to draw the attention of the Minister to unnecessary, unwise and immoral decision by the Administration Board for Cape Midlands to "disestablish" Walmer Township and shift approximately 1000 families to an unsalubrious area adjoining the present large African housing scheme at Zwide.

It backs the proposal made by residents that money available for rehousing should be spent on improving the existing Township and that the houses to which they would be unwillingly moved be made available instead to some of the 11,500 people whose names are presently on a waiting list for accommodation for their families.

The Board's move towards consolidation is totally against the wishes of the residents of Walmer Township as expressed unanimously and with considerable feeling at a recent meeting addressed by the Community Councillor for the area as also in letters and statements by residents, some of whom are third generation in the location.

The only reason publicly advanced for the proposed move is that Walmer Township is ideologically unacceptable since it is "an island" at the wrong end of town, that it would be in residents' interests to take part in the "exciting development of the giant at the other end of town" and benefit from its facilities even if they feel disinclined to move, that the present township is "old, uneconomical and unviable" and that the new Buffelsfontein way will go through the area.

These contentions are denied by the inhabitants of Walmer township and their publicly stated opinions may be summarised as follows:

1. People's convenience should come before planning, and centralised administration should take second place to the uprooting of 6000 people.
2. Why should valuable land be lost to the African community?
3. There is general scepticism about the "exciting development" at the other end of town and people seem mystified at the mention of amenities and facilities. They say they can build up their own sports and community centre facilities in Walmer Township.
4. Residents have expressed a strong desire to remain where they are (inspite of the fact that the local constable is instructing people to put down their names for houses in Zwide 4). They have expressed fear of moving to an area where there is a comparatively much higher crime rate.
5. Their present rental of between R6,67 and R12,89 for private and Board-owned houses in Walmer compares very favourably with the R40 or more they will be required to pay in the new area.
6. Busfare to present places of employment will be R1 a day, commuters to Walmer being required to take three buses each way, totalling between R22 and R 30 a month.

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7. It is anticipated that there will be an increase in unemployment. Many of the residents are in domestic service and would find it difficult to find alternative employment if their employers found it more economical to relinquish their services rather than pay their busfares and subsidise their increased rentals.

Walmer Township, though dilapidated in parts, has a village atmosphere with trees and gardens and is regarded as "home."

The township is old, but no older than other areas. If the Chief Director's argument is valid, then Mill Park, old city suburb should similarly be knocked down.

The township is considered uneconomical by the Board who have withdrawn a maintenance official and reduced the services of the superintendent from 5 days to twice a week. This grudging attitude of the Board is in sharp contrast to the alacrity with which excess administrative staff are employed at the new ABCM headquarters in P.E.

A better distribution of manpower and services would clearly cut down superfluous staff and luxurious office trappings at ABCM headquarters in New Brighton and then spend the people's money on services to themselves. (top heavy structure by higher paid white officials being looked into)

As the Board has neglected Walmer Township it has assumed a seedier, more "old and uneconomical" appearance. For months street lighting has been cut off. Undoubtedly there is an overloading of domestic electricity, but the Black Sash believes the answer is to make provision for an increased flow of power, not merely to cut off essential street lighting.

The income to the Board from its Bottle Store in Walmer Township is considerable. According to established policy fixed percentage of that income should be ploughed back into the area. This does not appear to be done.

The claim by the Chief Director that the area is "not viable" is incorrect. The township is a living, vital organism and is dependent for income on employment in the neighbouring homes, offices, shops, garages etc. There is interdependence between White and Black areas of Walmer and a spirit of mutual and longstanding co-operation prevails. If by "viable" is meant self-sufficient, this is a term that would be better applied to Walmer Township than to Zwijl 4 - (at present a barren stretch of treeless ground next to the salt pans where the ground oozes mud,)

Regarding the construction of the Buffelsfontein Freeway, according to information received and maps given by the road planning department of the Port Elizabeth Municipality, only 17 houses would be affected. Provision, moreover, has been made for a new access road to the township, contrary to information given by a responsible official in the ABCM.

The proposal has been made in the press by leaders of the Walmer community that the R3 million plus - the minimum cost of building 1400 houses at Zwide 4 (present costs being R2,200 per house) - be spent instead on improving Walmer Township and that Zwide 4 be developed for some of the 11,500 families (i.e. about 60,000 people) who are already on the waiting list for housing in P.E.

The Black Sash wholeheartedly supports the community at Walmer in their protest against the proposed move.

B. MELUNSKY

THE BLACK SASH PORT ELIZABETH MARCH 1979.