

On the 16th November the *Sunday Tribune* carried a story entitled 'The terror they call the magwaza', about a community called Umbulwane at Ladysmith, where houses have been demolished by municipal and Administration Board officials. The houses have been demolished since August, but the story has only recently surfaced. Umbulwane is another one of those small, powerless communities where lives are pulverised by the government's resettlement policies, even while Ministers in high places talk about "no more forced removals" (Dr Koornhof, quoted in the *Daily News*, 17/7/80) or warn that the country has to "learn to live with a certain amount of squatting" (Dr Morrison, quoted in the *Rand Daily Mail*, 2/10/80).

Situation Umbulwane is a black freehold area within the municipal boundaries of Ladysmith, in Northern Natal. Its residents say there are 610 adults and 300 children living there altogether, landowners and tenants. There are 41 landowning families - African, Indian and 'Coloured' - scattered in smallholdings across a bleak, flat plain on the edge of town. The landowners pay municipal rates; one person paid R115,92 in rates in 1979. They do not, however, receive any services from the municipality in return, neither water nor sewerage nor refuse disposal nor electricity nor roads. From the start they had to develop the area with what resources they have themselves. The area is, residents claim, the oldest black residential area in Ladysmith, bought by their grandparents before the First World War. It predates both Steadville, the nearby African township, and Ezakheni, the huge resettlement township which was established 25 km away in KwaZulu in 1972 as an apartheid-style dormitory township for Ladysmith.

At present only the tenants are being harassed but the whole area is to be cleared some day. Nobody at Umbulwane is sure when or even why - some say the area is to become an industrial site, others say simply that "they", the Ladysmith Town Council, do not want them there. But all know that the plan is to move them eventually. In the meantime, while African landowners have had the ominous official numbers daubed on their walls (their only 'notice' of removal thus far), they are being allowed to stay. It is their tenants, then, with whom this report is concerned.

History of previous removals Umbulwane has always had its tenants who pay the landowners rent and build their own wattle and daub houses. It also has a history of removals. Initially, when Steadville was first built, many tenants were rehoused there. Later, after Ezakheni had been built, hundreds of tenants were taken to Ezakheni instead. At Umbulwane people lived close to town, in a peri-urban set-up, and paid rents in the region of R2,50 a month. At Ezakheni they now live 25 km from town, in a huge crime-ridden township of 45 000 people, and pay rents in the region of R14 a month.

After the last set of removals, in 1976/77, officials warned landowners not to allow any more tenants to settle on their land. The 100 odd tenant households still at Umbulwane are there in defiance of that instruction. But, they say, they have nowhere else to go. And neither the Drakensberg Administration Board (DAB) nor the Ladysmith Town Council are offering them any alternative.

#### Chronology of the current demolitions

1. In the middle of this year (June/July), officials arrived at Umbulwane unannounced

and started numbering all African-occupied structures. They did not tell residents what the numbers were for - "They are just putting numbers everywhere; we don't know what they mean", says one resident.

2. At about 8 am, on either the 18th or 19th August (the Ladysmith Town Clerk and Umbulwane residents disagree on the date), several carloads of officials (the cars had Administration Board registration plates), about 6 SAP vans, with police in "soldier" uniforms, plus a municipal front loader arrived, also unannounced. With minimal discussion with those present, they proceeded to demolish, selectively, tenants' houses. They did not demolish completely. Where a household had more than one building, they would leave at least one standing; where there was only one, they would leave one or two rooms standing.  
Wattle and daub crumbles easily and the community put up no resistance. The Town Clerk later claimed only unoccupied structures were demolished (*Sunday Tribune*, 16/11/80); this the community vehemently denies. Most of the men and some of the women were at work - their houses were in that sense "unoccupied" at the time - but women or sometimes only children were present at a number of the buildings.  
AFRA has statements made by some of the tenants whose houses were destroyed which describe briefly what happened. Thus Joseph Mkwanzazi: "My six-room house was broken down on the 19th August while I was at work. My wife was out collecting firewood; there was our three year old baby inside who was taken outside and ran away. I found my house broken down. All the doorframes and windows were broken, my tools were broken and they left me with only one room. They came back later, just to level everything. I did not receive a word of notice."
3. Officials returned again, during the course of October, this time with a smaller contingent of police. They knocked down a few more houses and cleared the rubble from previous demolitions. On the 29/10 DAB officials finally served the landowners with instructions to "get the permission by form of a licence" to have tenants or "let them vacate your premises within three months".
4. Mrs Esther Molefe, a landowner and member of the Umbulwane Residents' Committee, then went to the local DAB office to find out what was happening. The DAB officials referred her to the municipal offices where she was told that only the families of landowners could be registered as tenants and the others would have to go. She was told that housing these others was not the responsibility of the municipality. All they were concerned with was that the tenants were at Umbulwane illegally and must move elsewhere. The Town Clerk confirmed this standpoint with the *Sunday Tribune*: "I am only involved in the removal of the illegal structures and the health hazard ... the people do not fall under my jurisdiction". (16/11/80)
5. The community is rallying to try and meet this crisis but they need support. They have written to the *Sunday Tribune* and the *Natal Witness* to state their case; the *Natal Witness* printed their letter on 27 November. They have also written to Dr Koornhof, as well as to the Chief Commissioner for Natal and the local DAB and municipal authorities, appealing to them to stop the demolitions and discuss the situation with them. More recently they have prepared a memorandum on the demolitions for the authorities.

Where do the tenants come from? Implicit in much of what the Town Clerk is reported to have said is the assumption that these people are "illegal squatters" who have no claim to live at Umbulwane or be in the Ladysmith district. AFRA has details on 12 tenant households which present a very different picture.

Four of them have lived at Umbulwane for many years - one since 1927, one since 1931 and 2 for 23 years. Their houses, it appears, have not been demolished. Another tenant (Joseph Mkwanzazi, quoted above) is a relative of one of the landowners and used to live with her. Then he got married and built a separate house for himself and his wife, in January this year, and thus became an illegal resident whose house had to be destroyed.

The remaining 7 households, all of them victims of the demolitions, are newcomers to Umbulwane having moved on since early 1979. They are not newcomers to the district, however. 3 of them used to work on white farms but were evicted and had nowhere else to go. One, a widow, used to live at Roosboom, a local black freehold farm which the government expropriated in 1975. This woman felt she could not afford either to build or rent a house at Ezakheni (which is where the Roosboom people were resettled) so she built a place at another, as yet unthreatened 'black spot' in the Ladysmith area. Later her house burnt down. She already had a job in Ladysmith and so in early 1979 she decided to rebuild at Umbulwane. Another one of the 7 also moved to Umbulwane to be closer to his job, after a building

contractor hired him earlier this year.

The remaining 2 tenants for whom we have details, moved to Umbulwane after getting married to establish their own homes. In the case of one couple, the man used to live in the single quarter hostels in Steadville while his wife was a live-in domestic worker in Ladysmith before their marriage. Once they got married, they applied for a house in Steadville and in the meantime lived in the township as lodgers. Eventually they despaired of ever getting a municipal house of their own, so they moved to Umbulwane in August 1979.

These people are not wilful vagrants, they are not criminals, they are not maliciously breaking the law. The law and government policy as it stands simply does not provide for them. They want to be allowed to remain at Umbulwane, with security of tenure, so that they can continue with their jobs and their children can remain in school. They want the area to be properly developed - and the landowners' rates used for the purpose for which it is raised - so that they can live there in health and in order. They want to be involved in planning their future, they want to be heard.

The reality of the situation is, however, that by the time this report is read, officials may already have scattered these people, destroyed what is left of their houses and sent them on another desperate trek to find somewhere else to settle. It is almost bound to be another 'illegal' place, since the 'legal' areas are full or closed because they are about to be removed or too far away from work opportunities to offer people a viable chance of survival.

These people are victims of apartheid and its policies. Until they and the thousands upon thousands of others like them find their voice and their strength, they will remain victims.

The following is a copy of one of the letters mentioned above.

**The Witness**

NATAL WITNES  
postbag 27/11/80

P.O. Box 362, Pietermaritzburg

## Landowners speak on Umbulwana

WE as Umbulwana residents and landowners wish to reply to Mr Hurter's remarks about Umbulwana which were published in the 'Sunday Tribune' of November 16, 1980 and the report in The Natal Witness on Friday, November 14, 1980.

We wish to advise Mr Hurter that, for his information, Umbulwana has been in existence for 72 years more or less.

Mr Hurter's remarks about health hazards were surprising. In connection with flooding, we suggest he should first rectify a similar problem which occurs in Lyell, Alexandra and Forbes streets in there is no problem with floods.

The 42 buildings at Umbulwana which were demolished were fully occupied by the owners.

Furthermore we wish to inform the DBAB and Mr Hurter, who states he is unaware of Umbulwana re-

sidents, that we pay rates. Who does this money go to if Mr Hurter is unaware of us?

To clarify the point regarding the origin of the many people at Umbulwana: it is totally incorrect to say they come from other towns. They all come from the Klip River complex and from local farms. They are all employed in Ladysmith.

The worst thing is the chasing away of people Umbulwana about demolishing structures on their them to go.

The corporation did not consult the landowners at Mbulwana about demolishing structures on their properties.

**E. MOLEFE AND  
M. MANYONI**  
on behalf of land-  
owners and Umbulwana  
tenants.  
P.O. Box 327  
Ladysmith,  
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