

# WHY DISTRICT SIX SHOULD BE LEFT UNDECLARED

**T**HE ARGUMENT against forcing the Coloured people out of District Six is fully stated in a memorandum by the Cape Town City Council.

The memorandum says: District Six has been the home of many non-Whites for generations and the people had long and traditional ties with the area. Their schools, places of worship, welfare centres, maternity homes and recreational facilities are there.

‘It cannot be too strongly stressed that the proposal to move residents to other areas bears no comparison with the elimination of slum areas such as *Cato Manor in Durban or Sophiatown in Johannesburg*, which were squatters’ settlements. It is no shanty settlement of homeless people seeking residence in a work-centre, but an established area almost as old as Cape Town itself, and its people are as indigenous to the area as those of any other part of the city.

‘To remove them from what is traditionally and habitually their home will cause endless bitterness and social upheaval.’

## War interrupted

It was true District Six was overcrowded and had deteriorated over the years owing to circumstances beyond the Council’s control. World War II had interrupted a programme of slum clearance, and after the war the country’s resources were strained to catch up with the backlog of houses.

In recent years, with the increase in housing development, the prospects of a rehabilitation scheme became brighter. But the Group Areas Act had resulted in the displacement of many Coloured people from their homes and housing had to be found for them in the Council’s new Coloured housing estates.

Where the National Housing Office at first compelled the Council to allocate 20 per cent of the houses built to Coloured people displaced from their homes by the Group Areas Act, the Department of Community Development now insisted on an allocation of as high as 100 per cent.

‘It will be appreciated that in these circumstances there was little hope of being able to demolish homes in District Six and providing the occupants with alternative housing.’

Nevertheless, in July, 1962, at the instigation of the Mayor of the time, Mr. A. H. Honikman, the Council decided to undertake a comprehensive and ‘most ambitious’ scheme to rehabilitate District Six. Again its intentions were frustrated when it was informed that approval of the scheme could not be given till the zoning of the area in terms of the Group Areas Act had been determined.

It confidently expected that the major portion of District Six would be proclaimed for the non-White groups with possibly only the fringes, which had developed a commercial and industrial character, proclaimed for Whites. It accordingly did not make representations at the public inquiry in April, 1964, particularly in view of the support given to its pilot scheme of rehabilitation by the Department of Housing.

## Work near centre

At present about 26,925 Coloured people, 1,220 Indians and 381 White people were living in the proclaimed group area. A survey had shown that 85 per cent of the breadwinners of these people — a total of over 8,500 — worked in the central business area of Cape Town and the area to the east as far as Observatory.

‘The removal of a community of this size to the non-White townships of the Cape Flats will cause disruption of the greatest magnitude and will create a wave of disharmony and bitterness in the hearts of all the non-White people of the Cape Peninsula.’

The Group Areas Act provided for the separation of the various racial groups and in determining what areas were to be reserved for the race, account was always taken of the group which predominated in a given mixed area.

## Against spirit

‘It stands to reason that by reserving District Six for the White group, the Department has gone completely against both the spirit of the Act, and the way in which it has been administered before. There is scarcely an area which is as predominantly non-White in character as District Six.’

The argument had been advanced that District Six was not overwhelmingly Coloured because the non-White people owned only 44 per cent of the property there — and over 50 per cent was owned by the Whites.

‘This is surely irrelevant to the main issue. The vital factor is not who owns the property in District Six, but who occupies it.’

Throughout the world little slum property was owned by the people who occupied it.

## Working-class ring

In every great city the central business zone was ringed with working-class residential quarters, many of them slums. But the redevelopment, which was known as the urban-renewal

process, never resulted in the elimination of the class of people who lived there. The land was "renewed" by building multi-storey blocks of flats to accommodate the traditional residents under clean, hygienic and more or less spacious manner.

The removal, it was stated, of 8,500 city workers from their homes close to the central-city area would have a severe impact on the workers and the economy of the city.

Transport — apart from great inconvenience and loss of time to the workers — would probably amount to between seven per cent and 10 per cent of their incomes — "a disproportionately high percentage"; and the relocation of the labour force would tend towards the establishment of industries outside the city and its environs to the detriment of existing industrial zones between the central city and Observatory.

### White re-occupation

A serious problem would also be created through the process of re-occupation by Whites, which must overlap the relocation of existing inhabitants, if large untenanted areas were to be avoided.

Whites of the higher economic levels would be unlikely to move into the area before a suitably attractive environment had been created. This would necessitate prior removal of the bulk of the non-White inhabitants. Early investment of large amounts of public capital on facilities and institutions other than housing would also be required.

### Social repercussions

One of the social repercussions of relocating some 28,500 non-White people was the disruption of the community and the disintegration of those social ties and obligations needed to keep social decay at bay. The essentials of community life must be retained and great pains taken in the relocation of displaced persons — for example, social and economic assistance provided to enable them to integrate into their new environment as smoothly and quickly as possible.

It is stated in the memorandum that the total backlog of non-White houses in the city alone, including the relocation of 5,700 families from District Six, would amount to 20,000. A further 1,500 dwellings would be required annually to accommodate the natural increase of the non-White population.

### 15 years

"It would take almost 15 years to work off the backlog even if our present rate of construction was increased to 3,000 dwellings a year. Moreover, during this period, it will be necessary to build and find land for at least 42,500 dwellings representing a population of well over 2,000,000 people. And such a programme would provide for only one section of the population in only one portion of the region of greater Cape Town."

"Clearly the achievement of even this goal may prove a task beyond the reach of our available resources — not only money, but also labour and materials."

While the Council opposed the proclamation of District Six for White ownership and occupation, it would also oppose its reservation exclusively for other racial groups.

### Plea to Ministers

If it was declared for occupation by the Coloured group, while allowing accommodation of the bulk of the existing population, it would exclude the investment of capital from the White group, undoubtedly handicapping the general development of the area.

The City Council then asked the Minister of Planning and the Minister of Community Development to give "careful consideration" to these facts with a view to recommending to the Cabinet that the Proclamation be repealed and District Six be left as an undeclared area.

"Successive events that occurred both in the national and the local spheres have prevented the complete rehabilitation of District Six but there is now no reason why an intensified programme of redevelopment of the area cannot be undertaken.

### Against investment

"The uncertainty of its fate for a number of years has militated against the investment of capital from the private sector in District Six. If this were removed, all groups would be able to participate in the redevelopment of an area which because of its situation alone, must play an increasingly important role in the growth and development of the City as a whole.

"The employment of capital from the private sector, coupled with an intensified rehabilitation scheme financed from public funds, would be the surest and speediest means of redeveloping District Six. This does not mean that it would develop into a multi-racial residential suburb as by a voluntary process of separation it has already become almost exclusively a non-White residential area and it could remain so.

### Joint effort

"At the same time there should be a joint effort on the part of the Government Departments and the City Council for the housing in suitable areas and uplift of those who do not earn enough to afford homes of their own and who have to be moved.

"Should the Ministers agree to the Council's representations, the Council will give an unequivocal undertaking that it will proceed with a scheme of rehabilitation of District Six with the utmost expedition.

"The Council will be pleased to appoint a deputation to discuss the matter with the Minister should he so desire."

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