

# GROUP AREAS REMOVALS FROM SIMON'S TOWN

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**T**HE KNOWN HISTORY OF THE CAPE goes back only 300 years, and for 250 of these Simon's Town had been a happily progressing town made up of all races who had achieved peaceful living by simply doing just that thing — by the combined efforts of all racial groups. Mutual respect was the secret of their natural success, combined with the fact that Simon's Town is geographically cut off from all other towns in the Cape Peninsula, and each section of its people was interdependent. Within living memory all races attended the same schools and sporting and social functions and they still share their Churches, and so the people have always had the golden opportunity, so rare in South Africa, of meeting each other on equal terms and not just on a master/servant basis. The inevitable result was a happy town, gay and friendly and colourful, and no legislation was needed to achieve this.

**W**HEN the first advertised proposal for Group Areas appeared in 1959, it was sufficiently shocking, but it did make provision for Coloured and Indian residential areas within the Municipality. In 1960 a second advertisement proposed zoning of a small area inadvertently omitted previously. Then a third and utterly drastic set of proposals was advertised about Christmas 1964, which excluded Indians altogether from the municipal area, named specific areas for Whites, but no specific area for any other group.

Within a couple of weeks of the first advertisement, at a Public Meeting, a Liaison Committee was formed. It consisted of appointed representatives from the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist Churches, the Mosque Trustees, Ratepayers Associations, the Chamber of Commerce, the Black Sash local branch, various sporting bodies and clubs, and all the non-white organisations — in fact, every organisation there was in the town. The Dutch Reformed Church did not have a Mission Church in Simon's Town so was not directly affected, but the dominee was sympathetic and helpful and gave us names of leaders of the Mission Churches in the Peninsula who would give us the benefit of their experiences in their areas.

Representations were sent in to the Group Areas Board by the Liaison Committee, its component bodies, and hundreds of individuals. The Liaison Committee collected signatures for a mammoth petition from the

people of the town and another from the shopkeepers, and correlated the evidence to be laid before the Public Enquiries of the Group Areas Board. Money was raised by a morning market and house to house collections in order to brief Counsel to put the case for the united townspeople and organisations.

Two Public Enquiries were held by the Group Areas Board in August 1959 and February 1965. Not one person at either enquiry — with more than a five-year interval between them — came forward to give evidence that he objected to his neighbours or traders. There was no objection from any section of the community or from any racial group against another, but overwhelming and uncontradicted evidence was given on oath that no Group Areas Proclamation was wanted or warranted in Simon's Town.

In spite of this evidence the guillotine fell on 1st September, 1967, and the whole municipal area of Simon's Town was declared a Group Area for Whites only. No provision was made within the Municipal area — and it is a very extensive area, with plenty of space for all the existing groups in the town and their expansion — for any other race group, and I believe that this is the only Municipality in the Republic to suffer such a fate.

With a deep sense of shock and bewilderment a public meeting was called to discuss the proclamation and see if any other action could be taken to save the town from com-

plete disruption, because more than half of its residents and more than half its traders were now disqualified people. At this meeting, overflowing into the street, a unanimous resolution was taken to send a deputation to the Minister of Planning asking him to reconsider the proclamation and allow the status quo to remain or, alternatively, to allow the non-Whites to remain in Simon's Town. The Liaison Committee was empowered to implement the resolution and it appointed a deputation of three affected persons to represent the Indian, Coloured and Moslem communities. A memorandum was drawn up by the Committee's Counsel and was submitted to the Minister, who refused to see the deputation. The Minister's Secretary replied that Simon's Town was proclaimed a White Group Area "after a thorough investigation by the Group Areas Board and careful consideration of the report submitted in this respect . . . and you have the assurance that due cognisance was taken of all the relevant facts and information supplied. Furthermore the Minister had made it his duty to carry out a personal inspection, in order to acquaint himself with local circumstances before proclamation of Simon's Town as a White group area. In the circumstances it is considered that no good purpose will be served by having further discussions on the matter and consequently your request that the group areas proclamation be reviewed and amended cannot be acceded to."

#### Churches' Advise Office

An Advice Office, sponsored by the Christian Churches, opened its doors for the first time on 20th April, 1968, the very week that the outdoor officers of the Department of Community Development moved into Simon's Town for what is termed a "Socio-Economic Survey". They came in Government cars and were promptly referred to throughout the town as the "G. G. Cars", and those affected became rather panic-stricken.

The first vital questions were "where" and "when" were removals to take place. It had taken us almost into April to find out where, and nobody knew when. The "when" is still most uncertain for the vast majority of the people. The Indians will have to go to Rylands on the Cape Flats, about 23 miles away, and the Coloured people to Slangkop Township, ten miles from Simon's Town Railway station and about 2 miles from Kommetje, over the mountains near the Atlantic coast of the Peninsula.

#### Slangkop

To get to Slangkop the only road is from Simon's Town to Fish Hoek and then on the Kommetje/Noordhoek road to the Township. Eventually we are told there will be a double carriageway built over the mountains from Slangkop to Glencairn Valley which will save time and mileage and, we sincerely hope, bus fares. The Township is situated in very pleasant surroundings on a portion of the old Imhoff's Gift Farm at the foot of the hills. The people are much distressed by the name Slangkop — meaning Snakehead — and, amongst themselves, those already resettled there refer to it as "Upper Fish Hoek".

On the plans for Slangkop provision is made for schools, an old age home, playgrounds, a cinema, shopping centre, a hall and churches but of course, none of these exist at present. Only a few houses are as yet ready and occupied and no flats are completed. Street lights are not yet functioning because they have run out of cable and the only telephone is in the Housing Supervisor's office which is closed at night. There are no halls, no library and no police station, and there is already some hooliganism there, and also a shebeen or two. The local M.P. has tried to get a police station or police post there but was told "the present policy is not to open new Police Stations in close proximity to existing Stations, but rather to increase man power and mobile patrols." He is, however, taking the matter further and also trying to get a public telephone and reduced bus fares.

We are told that the quality of the Slangkop houses is better than in any other Housing Scheme, and this we can believe. There are three groups for housing purposes, according to income. The sub-economic group comprises those earning up to R60.00 per month, the economic group those earning R61.00 to R180.00 per month and the self-help group who earn more than this. The latter are not provided with housing, but are expected to make their own arrangements.

The Act lays down that nobody may be moved until one year after the date of proclamation but the first families in Simon's Town were moved during the month before this date, having been notified of offers at the beginning of August. The first batch consisted of 40 families and the second of 33, all sub-economic group, and these were

resettled by the end of August. The majority were very poor and the Department of Community Development very kindly brought transport down and moved the very poor families, although the Act says they must pay for their own removals. A senior official helped, together with the Simon's Town Housing Supervisor, and worked late into the night riding on the lorries themselves — with cats, dogs and chickens getting a free ride too. Those with chickens were allowed to take them provided they killed one a week until all were consumed. By the end of October, the first 28 families in the economic group will be resettled.

#### Notice to move

The Act lays down that three months notice must be given to residents to move, but in actual fact they are being given a couple of weeks notice and then four days in which to sign the contract, and they must pay one month's rent in advance plus a 10 cent revenue stamp, and pay an electricity deposit of R6.00 if they want to use it. They have to sign a form stating whether they are prepared or not to accept the allocation offered, and that if they are not they will themselves "find alternative accommodation for their family and declare, further, that they do not hold the Department of Community Development or any other authority responsible for finding alternative accommodation, and they undertake to move from their present accommodation as soon as a removal notice has been served on them." If they do not accept the offer then the Department of Community Development can give them, at any time, the three months notice, laid down in the Act, to vacate. But as there is no alternative accommodation available anywhere else they must perforce take the offer or be out on the street. In 1967, there were 12,000 names on the waiting list for rented houses and 1,200 for Home-Ownership in Cape Town City Council Area.

#### Rents raised

At present there is a very meagre bus service from Slangkop to Simon's Town — three times a day each way. Leaving Slangkop at 6.45 and 7.40 a.m. and 3.30 p.m.; the first bus goes to Seaforth (beyond the Dockyard), the second to Jubilee Square in the centre of the town, and the third only to the bus depot at the foot of Red Hill — about a mile or more before reaching the centre of Simon's Town. The return buses from Simon's

Town depart at 7.15 a.m. from Seaforth, 3 p.m. from Jubilee Square and 5 p.m. from Seaforth.

The fares are "Economic", which makes them, for the present, quite exorbitant, and there is no reduction in price for weekly or monthly tickets.

On the 1st September, 1969, the wages of unskilled Coloured labourers in the Dockyard were raised from R18.00 to R35.00 per month. This rise does not even cover the daily bus fare of one adult in the family who works in Simon's Town, quite apart from any working wives or children travelling to school. The monthly bus fare is between R9.00 and R10.00 per month for one adult, and for those in the sub-economic group, that is more than the rent they have to pay even for the biggest house.

#### Bus Service

On top of all this, just six weeks after the first families had been resettled at Slangkop all rents were raised. The reason given was that "The rents at present in operation were based on Divisional Council's past experience in operating costs in other housing schemes, but as it has become clear at this early stage that the operating costs generally have increased, it has been deemed advisable to adjust the rents without delay whilst only a relatively few families are in occupation. One of the factors which has increased the rent is that the water consumption allowances have been doubled as the present allowance is inadequate."

There is no choice of housing when being resettled under the Group Areas Act. The people must take a flat or house of whatever size is offered, or fend for themselves, which is impossible. There is no accommodation at all for single persons — they must find somebody to give them lodging, unless, of course, they can afford to build for themselves.

Eventually, houses will be available for purchase and land will be for sale for people to build to their own plans. No details are yet available for the home-ownership scheme

**Shops**  
As regards shops: Three were advertised for letting, together with flats over them, at a rental of R115.00 per month, to be ready approximately at the end of September, 1968. A butcher, a general dealer and a cafe/restaurant. The applicants had to fill in a most formidable questionnaire.

The vast majority of businessmen in Simon's Town OWN their shops with flats above, and some have done so for up to 50 years. How can they now start paying rent for the rest of their lives with no chance of buying? It is Government policy to give preferential allocation in Coloured Areas to Coloured persons who were required to relinquish their businesses in declared White areas. But those who own in Simon's Town cannot now will their shops or their property to their descendants because they are "Disqualified", and it appears that they will not be able to BUY shop premises in the re-settlement areas.

### Indian traders

For the Indian traders in the town the outlook is even more bleak. Their shops are often open for 18 hours a day to serve a seaport of men, frequently doing overtime in the dockyard, and who start work daily at 7 a.m. They are only able to perform this much-needed and much-appreciated service of such long hours because the family live on the premises and work in shifts. They may not move to Slangkop with their Non-White customers — and they have a great number of White customers too — and will eventually have to live at Rylands where they cannot all trade with each other. Even if they are allowed to carry on their businesses in Simon's Town, they cannot commute from that distance and keep open the usual 18 hours a day.

With the closing down of the African Location, Luyolo, in Simon's Town in 1965 and the enforced removal of between 1.600 to 1.700 Africans to Guguletu, all trade in the town suffered a severe blow because these people were good cash customers. Now, although only about 80 families have been moved out to Slangkop the trade is suffering a further decline, and all the traders, of whatever race, face a future losing more trade with every batch of removals for several years to come. One wonders how many will be able to tide over the very lean period ahead because none of them have ever made more than a modest living. There is no compensation laid down in any legislation for loss of trade due to the removal of whole communities, presumably because this has never occurred in any other town before, but the Minister of Planning assured the men who sought permission to take the deputation to him to re-consider the Group Areas proclama-

tion that "It has repeatedly been stated by the Government that no disqualified merchant will be deprived of his livelihood and that a trader who was in legal occupation on the date of the proclamation of a group area will be allowed to remain in such occupation until reasonable alternative trading facilities are available elsewhere. Likewise it has been indicated that places of worship will remain unaffected."

But of course the places of worship will suffer. The Mosque will be left derelict when all the Moslems have gone, and the Christian Churches will suffer severe setbacks. The present congregations of the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches are about two-thirds non-White and one-third White. There are no churches yet in Slangkop and these will have to be built.

### Schools

The present position with regard to the non-White schools in Simon's Town is fraught with anxiety and uncertainty for all those concerned — the churches, the teachers, the parents and some of the pupils. At present, the children who have been taught in English medium and have been removed to Slangkop are now being taught in Afrikaans medium. This is a struggle for them and detrimental to their work and against what the Churches, and, consequently, the teachers and parents were promised. One good thing is, that for education purposes, Slangkop falls under the Simon's Town district, because Simon's Town is one of the very few areas where non-White schooling is compulsory.

At present 1,257 pupils have to be catered for at Slangkop having been moved from perfectly good schools in Simon's Town. The Government School has both English and Afrikaans medium, and the Roman Catholic is English medium, the Moslem, Methodist and Glencairn are all Afrikaans medium, and the Anglican in Simon's Town is both English and Afrikaans medium, so that pupils taught in English medium are in a minority.

The only school near Slangkop is at Imhoff's Gift (Primary only) and it is bursting at the seams. Two classrooms are being used in Slangkop Township in a semi-detached housing unit with no inside walls. Three extra teachers have already been granted there.

There is no provision at Slangkop

for Church schools, and these will eventually be closed down in Simon's Town. We are told that there may be 16 pre-fabricated classrooms ready in January 1969 to take 40 children per class — primary only. All those attending secondary school will have to travel to Simon's Town for some time to come. Eventually primary schools and one High School will be built at Slangkop.

### Gross overcrowding

Ever since the first proposal for Group Areas in 1959 no housing has been undertaken because of the uncertainty of which areas would be declared for which group and so the consequent overcrowding in the town has reached formidable and most unhealthy proportions. Now, since the proclamation, nobody may move into the town without a permit and nobody may change residence within the Municipality without permission, but families continue to grow apace, much quicker than houses can be built. There are 132 sub-economic flats in the town and the Town Clerk reckons that there are now about 150 sub-tenants in these 132 flats. We have put in strong pleas for the sub-tenants to be moved first to relieve the grossly overcrowded conditions, but the Inspector tells us that they will not be moved, probably until 1969, because the Municipality cannot lose rents on properties not yet paid for to the National Housing Commission. The Town Clerk has offered a list of tenants so that sub-tenants could be moved, but we have not been able to persuade the Inspector yet, and anyway there are not enough houses ready. It is a very serious health hazard, and there is also terrible overcrowding elsewhere too, but this is being dealt with, of necessity, slowly, because houses do not build quickly. We were able to get a move for one family who were sleeping 8 in a small room, father, mother and 6 year old in a single bed and five others in bunks, teen-age boys and girls having to share bunks. But this was only because one family resettled itself elsewhere, and the father applied, through the Advice Office, to be allowed to move into this vacant house in Simon's Town. There are even worse conditions than these in some households and one woman has been housed in the ironing room of the flats because there was literally nowhere else for her to go when a European bought the plot of land on which she had a shack, and there is nothing ready to accommodate her yet at Slangkop. Another house

of 4 small rooms, which includes the kitchen, has 25 children in it, 11 sleeping in the dining-room. Some of the families in this house have just been resettled, as a result of the Advice Office taking their case to the Inspector. One couple and six children are living in one room. Others are living in dilapidated Nissen Huts, which were the "bachelor" quarters of Luyolo Location, but the iron has rusted through, the children have constant eye infection from dirt and rust falling into their eyes and when it rains hard a river runs through the Huts. There are many more sad stories, particularly tragic because in 1959 there were no such overcrowdings; it has all occurred as a result of the Group Areas Act because the Municipality were unable to build for the growing population, and children have married and borne children, and parents have borne more children, until the accommodation is unbearable.

No applications for anyone living at present outside Simon's Town can be considered for Slangkop, not even from the very old families who have been forced out for lack of space, but many Naval personnel living in other areas will be housed at Slangkop, the Inspector tells us, to save the Navy transporting them. It seems that Slangkop will become a sort of dormitory suburb for dockyard workers.

All must sell on a buyer's market with the Government having a pre-emptive right to buy every single property if it so wishes. What the people find hardest to bear in a world of hardship and uncertainty is their lack of choice of housing. Whatever size home they have been used to, whether it was a large house with large rooms, or a sardined sharing, unless they build they cannot decide on the number of rooms they will live in, nor whether they will live in a house or flat. They must either take what is offered as laid down in the Housing Code, which takes no account of human beings or their stratum of living, or be homeless.

Every single one of the disqualified families became, on the 1st September, 1967, a Reference No. on a card Index, to be moved at the stroke of a pen, nobody knows when or to what size and type of letting, nor do they know who their next door neighbour will be. They are just family units to be housed according to a Housing Code, and they cease to be individual human beings at all.