

# The illegal children

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Alexandra Township, just a few kilometres from the centre of Johannesburg is being demolished. All the houses are being bulldozed and hostels are being built which will eventually house from 60 to 65 thousand men and women in separate "single" accommodation.

According to official figures released in January, 1973, by the Peri-Urban Board 10 685 families have been moved to better housing in Meadowlands and Diepkloof, and 2 668 families to Tembisa since 1958; 3 800 people have been moved to single accommodation in Meadowlands and Diepkloof and 17 000 people are in single accommodation in Alexandra, either in the completed hostels or in houses where they are waiting for hostel beds.

There are also 4 000 Coloured people who will be moved to the Coloured group areas in Johannesburg, and 4 400 old or disabled people who are awaiting resettlement.

What is not mentioned in these statistics is the number of families in Alexandra who have been refused housing on a family basis and have been told to move to the hostels and to send their children away. They are given the alternative of going to the homelands with their children. Mr. Coen Kotze, manager of the Peri-Urban Board's Bantu Administration, said in a statement to the Press that the women are given ample time to make up their minds.

"We are giving them the choice: they must send their children back to the homelands and move into the hostels or must go back to the homelands themselves... this is the policy and we will enforce it."

Mr. Kotze said that the children being ordered out were "illegal" and that their mothers were migrant workers recruited from the homelands on a single basis.

"The law states that they are illegally in the area so they have to go. It's as simple as that."

Some of these families are the wives and children of the men already moved to single accommodation, other are still living together in houses in Alexandra but have had their permits cancelled and been told to separate and go to the hostels. They are now, therefore,

living together "illegally" but hang on until the last possible moment because the separation is more than they can bear.

Yet other families are desperately trying to find themselves lodgings in Soweto, which they are allowed to do if they are registered in employment in Johannesburg itself. This is an almost impossible task. Mr. Sam Moss, chairman of Johannesburg's Non-European Affairs Committee, has said that housing is urgently needed in Soweto for 84 000 people.

These people are already living as lodgers in other people's houses and there is just no room for families coming from Alexandra, particularly if they have no friends or relatives on the other side to help them in the search for accommodation.

The authorities are taking no responsibility for any of these people. They are given no assistance in finding accommodation. Alexandra will be bulldozed regardless of the human suffering involved. If a man does not "qualify" to rent a house then it is just too bad if he happens to have a wife and children. He is officially "single" and must live in a male hostel. If a woman has no husband but a family of children she too is officially a "single" and must live in a female hostel.

The housing regulations state that only a man over the age of 21, who qualifies in terms of Section 10(1)(a) or (b) of the Urban Areas Act and who has dependents will be allotted a house in the townships in prescribed areas.\*

When such a man is allotted a house he rents it on a monthly lease and the names of every person living with him in that house must be enumerated on his residential permit. Every man, woman and child living in an urban Black township must have his or her name on such a permit or on a lodger's permit.

The authorities in Alexandra seem to be using the fact that many of the children of unmarried mothers or unqualified fathers have not had their names enumerated on any house permit as an excuse to say that the children are illegal immigrants who have been recently brought from the homelands.

In many cases the authorities have consistently refused to put a child's name on a permit, whether or not the child had a birth certificate to show that he was born in the area.

Our experience in the Black Sash Advice Office have been that the women come for assistance because they have been told to send their children away have tried on several occasions to have the names of their children enumerated on their residence permits.

They have been refused and, in at least one case, the mother was told (in flagrant disregard of the regulations) that it was not necessary for her to worry. The children were too small to need permits and the "police will not worry them".

Many of these children have birth certificates or other documentary evidence to show that they were born in Alexandra or Johannesburg but this has made no difference to the authorities. Their mothers have been told to send them away, thus depriving them of their rights under Section 10 to remain permanently in the area. These children have no homeland to go "back" to.

One woman who has been ordered to go into the hostel and to send her two Johannesburg-born children away, is unmarried. She is intending to marry a man from Botswana, but, even were they already married, it would not help her because, as a foreign worker, her fiancé will never qualify to have a house.

She has been living in the Johannesburg area since 1956 and was registered in employment in Johannesburg until her employer transferred her to work in the adjoining municipality of Randburg in 1968. This was a grave mistake because it deprived her of her right to return to Johannesburg and to seek lodgings for herself in Soweto.

She had a permit to live in Alexandra which was cancelled in January, 1972. She made an appeal and was given a temporary permit until November, 1972, but this has now also been cancelled.

She has absolutely nowhere to send her children as her parents are both dead and she has no relatives in the homelands nor has she any homeland herself to go to as she has always lived in White areas. If she asks for

resettlement in a homeland she will be destitute because there is little work.

A married couple who have been living together with their three children have now been forced apart. They both had single permits to live in adjoining rooms but the children were not enumerated on either permit. The husband does not qualify for a house as he has not lived in Alexandra for 15 years.

He is registered in employment in Alexandra, she is registered in employment in Johannesburg, so they are not even allowed to seek lodgings together in Soweto. The wife's permit has been cancelled and she has been told to go to the hostel. Her husband remains in his room waiting to be allotted a bed in a hostel and the children must be sent away.

These families are only two of many who are in the same position. In the last quarter of 1972 the Citizen's Hostel Action Committee drew the attention of the Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration to the plight of a few of the Alexandra families.

Their cases were re-investigated and the answer was the same as before: they do not qualify to be housed together. Mr. Moss appealed to the Peri-Urban Board for more flexibility in the implementation of the regulations and the preservation of family life. The Press reported that he met with an icy reception and was told that the Board would carry out Government legislation to the letter, even if it meant separating children from their parents.

Whatever the law says, these women have families with whom they now live and these families are being torn apart. Human decency demands that they be rehoused as family units, whether in houses, flats, or lodgings and that existing houses are not demolished until their occupants have somewhere else to live.

It is a pretty rotten society where children can be described as being "illegal" when they are living with their mothers — mothers whose labour is being used by the White economy.

\* *He must have lived continuously in one area since then or lived lawfully and continuously in one area for 15 years, or been continuously employed by the same employer for 10 years.*