

## Katlehong Removals

Let's come together. When they demolish 10 shacks tomorrow we must build a hundred behind them. These people believe we should stay in a hostel. It's unchristian to stay alone without a family. The best way is to fetch our families from the homelands and come here. If we are cowards we'll achieve nothing.

(Speaker at May meeting in Katlehong)

In November last year the East Rand Administration Board (ERAB) began demolishing shacks in Katlehong. Katlehong is part of a group of townships south of Germiston on the East Rand. There are an estimated 44 000 shacks in Katlehong. But only 27 000 'legal' box houses.

The chronic shortage of municipal houses has forced workers to construct their own homes. The shacks are built out of corrugated iron with a timber frame. Sometimes they have a cement floor and have newspaper or cardboard 'wallpaper'. Workers call them 'umkhukhu' which literally means chicken hocks. The umkhukhu are cramped, cold in winter and often leak. In places, up to 16 families or more have built umkhukhu on the narrow strips of land surrounding each two-roomed municipal house.

In Skosana Section, in Katlehong, piles of corrugated iron and bare cement floors are evidence of demolitions carried out by ERAB. Baznaar Moloi, former secretary of the Katlehong Shop Stewards' Council of Fosatu (The Federation of South African Trade Unions) said, 'As the Administration Board knocks down homes like a wave, workers jump ahead and around the wave and reconstruct their umkhukhu behind it.'

Some workers have moved onto wasteland to the East of the township in the hope of escaping ERAB. Moloi predicted that as the months go by, these and other areas would turn into squatter camps.

The demolitions are specifically aimed at workers who don't qualify for urban residence — 'illegals'. Migrant workers are especially hard hit, but residents claim that a lot of umkhukhu's belonging even to 'legals' have been knocked down.

Many workers in the Fosatu unions which organise in the area are migrants. These people have faced increasing hardships through changes in influx regulations. Urban residence in terms of Section 10 (1)b is denied to migrants even when they fulfil the legal requirement of working for one

employer for more than 10 years. 'Specials' have been withdrawn. These permits allowed migrant workers to seek employment and register at the pass offices after finding a job. Pass offices now also refuse to transfer contracts even when a worker is retrenched. Frequently a clause was introduced into the standard contract which allows it to be cancelled if a worker brings his family to the urban area. Metal workers have been forced to sign shorter contracts of 6 months. To back up this tightening of the regulations, workers have faced more frequent pass raids and the demolition of their homes.

These attacks on migrant workers give a foretaste of the proposed Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill. The Bill aims to reduce the number of people eligible for permanent urban residence and links this to legal accommodation. Preference will be given to local labour in the allocation of employment. The Bill provides for stricter influx and recruitment controls.

To get a permanent urban residence exemption under the Bill, a person must be a citizen of SA. This excludes Xhosa, Tswana and Venda speaking people. As other 'homelands' go 'independent' it will exclude their 'citizens'. A person must also have lived in an area continuously for 10 years and both his parents must have the right to permanent urban residence (PUR). Urban residence is made even more tenuous than in the past because a person who loses his approved accommodation also loses this right.

Migrant workers will only get work through a centralised system of labour bureaux in the 'homelands'. This control is reinforced by a 10pm to 5am curfew for workers without permanent urban residence certificates. The Bill sets down massive fines for breaking these laws; R500 for workers and R5000 for employers, in the case of illegal employment.

But the attacks that migrant workers already face in their day to day lives are evidence that many of the controls envisaged by the Bill are already practiced by the East Rand Administration Board.

It is in this context that angry workers raised the issue of demolitions in the Katlehong Shop Stewards' Council (referred to as SSC).

*The SSC represents stewards from all Fosatu unions in the Wadeville and Alberton areas. But the meetings are open to all Fosatu workers. It meets every week. this year numbers attending the meetings have varied between 100-200 workers. At its peak in the middle of last year up to 500 workers were attending meetings. Ronald Mofakeng, a former chairman of the*

council, explains the decline in numbers in terms both of mass retrenchment and the lack of transport to take workers home late at night. But he also sees it relating to the level of worker struggle in the area. Two committees have been elected to tackle this problem, one to research why factories are no longer attending and the other to follow up the research committee and attempt to re-organise shop stewards in the factories.

Workers at the SSC have decided that office bearers, such as the chairman and secretary, should be rotated and elected for a maximum of one year. This is to give others a chance and to prevent 'power mongering'.

In the future the SSC may meet once a month, over a weekend, to allow the maximum possible attendance. The weekly meetings would continue, but would only be obligatory for committee members.

The demolitions have been discussed at SSC meetings this year. Some workers suggested approaching community councillors in Katlehong and Thokoza, an adjoining township. Other workers rejected this, saying that the community councillors were 'part of the system'. The workers should go straight to Koornhof, the Minister of Co-operation and Development, who, they said, was the top boss of the community councillors. Still other workers wanted more direct action in defence of their homes.

It was finally decided to test out the community councillors to see if they would respond to the workers.

In the first week of February, letters were sent to the Katlehong and Thokoza community councillors calling for a meeting. The first letters were unanswered. More letters were sent off. Finally, the Thokoza Community Council agreed to meet with the SSC on February 21. But the councillors failed to turn up at the meeting. A few days later elected worker representatives cornered a councillor, who 'probably stressed to the others the need for a meeting'. A month later, in March, they met. The councillors claimed there had been no demolitions. But that in the future people who didn't have urban residence rights; and people with rights but who weren't on the waiting list for houses, would definitely have their umkhukhu knocked down. However the councillors also claimed that they had no power to prevent demolitions. They said the decision was taken over their heads by ERAB. Workers have completely rejected this saying the Community Council has done nothing to prevent demolitions, and had given their consent. As one worker put it, 'These people we elected as CC's. I didn't see them telling us about the demolition of shacks. I only saw them when they wanted votes.'

Mofokeng explained that having found it useless to speak to community councillors, the SSC decided to address itself to the government. In March a general meeting took place in Katlehong. The meeting was a reportback for all Fosatu union members in the Wadevill and Alberton areas. Two important issues at the meeting were the demolition of umkhukhu and the proposed Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill.

A report was given about the community councillors. Workers agreed to withhold their votes in the next elections. Workers expressed concern that the councillors obtained their votes from women who were at home during the day. They demanded that the councillors come to the factories.

A decision was taken to approach employers and ask them to intervene against the demolition of umkhukhu. Moloï said, 'We felt we could use management as a weapon. Management needs workers.' Finally a declaration was agreed upon. This states that:

1. Workers must be free to seek employment wherever available, and management must be allowed to employ any worker, with no interference from the pass offices.
2. That all people born in SA should have equal rights to citizenship.
3. That all workers must have the right to decent housing within reasonable distance from their place of work.

The declaration lists and rejects all the measures used by the Administration Board to tighten the pass laws. And it rejects in its entirety the proposed Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill. It provides space for workers, union members in a factory, and management to sign.

After the meeting in May some workers took the declaration to their managers, but reports are that few companies responded. However the Fosatu unions took up the issue throughout South Africa and, following meetings in all the Fosatu regions, it was decided by the Central Committee that independent action should be taken. The declaration is to be retained but only union members in a factory are to be approached to sign it. In addition there is to be a petition which all are to be encouraged to sign, non-union members and management included. The original declaration and the petition are to be submitted to the Minister of Manpower Utilisation.

This decision was discussed at a Fosatu meeting on the East Rand in May. Workers at the meeting stressed that those with and those without Section 10 rights (residence qualifications under Section 10 (1)a and b of the Urban Areas Act) should stand together. Opposition was expressed to state at-

tempts to divide workers ethnically. As workers at the meeting put it, 'They want to divide us. If we keep thinking this Sotho or that Zulu we'll get nowhere. Let's unite brothers!' And, 'They are trying to get us back to the Bantustans. After the Bill, no-one will have rights to stay here even if born and bred here. In the Bantustans hunger will strike you until you come back as cheap labour.'

· Anger was expressed at the housing situation in general. One worker explained how an administration board employee had entered his house without permission to put in a pipe: 'The land belongs to them. When I complained they said, 'Why don't you put your house on wheels and go somewhere else'. Another reported, 'These umkhukhu are still being demolished. People disappear. We don't know where they are. Other people go up and down looking for a place to stay.'

The declaration and petitions are going to be collected in the next two weeks. What they achieve is impossible to say. It is clear though that feelings amongst the workers of Katlehong are running high. They are aware that the outcome of their struggle will affect many others who face similar attacks from Bantu Administration Boards in other areas: 'The eyes of other workers are on us in Katlehong. They are ready to back us up in any action we take.'

(Johannesburg Correspondent, May, 1983)