

LANGA

By MARY BIRT

(This paper was presented to National Conference)

I AM AWARE of the dangers mentioned by Mrs. Cluver yesterday that some people might get the idea that a few more amenities and another ablution block here and there is all that is necessary concerning living conditions of migrant workers. On the other hand a few details of their actual living conditions has stunned some of our members to a greater concern. We feel that such concern can be increased throughout the country by similar investigations.

The following facts were collected last Friday afternoon but the reason why we knew what to ask and where to go when in the Township is that we have been investigating these conditions on many previous visits and had a good number of the facts already. Otherwise the Superintendent might have confined our tour to the beautiful swimming bath, the Churches, Schools, Clinic, Community Centre and the three white liquor stores, of which he is inordinately proud, and the house of one of the most respected and delightful old Grandfathers who has been given two houses in which to enjoy his declining years with his children and grandchildren.

In Langa there are four different types of dwelling for migrant workers. The best are called the Flats and are well constructed 3 storey brick blocks of rooms, each of which is shared by 2 men. Each man pays R3.25 a month. The idea was that senior men on each floor would help the caretakers to keep the buildings fit for decent living. Through lack of proper supervision much damage has been done to the building, but what is even worse, the recreational rooms, the committee rooms and the store rooms have all been turned into dormitories in some cases with hardly 18" between the beds, and on the ground level having 60 men to one lavatory, 1 urinal and 2 wash basins. As the supervision decreased the vandalism increased and now there is no resident caretaker. One responsible man who spoke to me said that he had to try to keep the peace between the 30 men in the storeroom next to his room and the 30 men on the other side of his room who came at each other with weapons. The people of the Townships look upon migrants as a different class, they fear them, and do not accept them as full residents and so they are left to fight and drink their way through the weekends.

The next variety of dwelling is for 16 men per brick construction with 2 or 3 men to a room and one communal room equipped with a concrete table and concrete benches on a concrete floor.

The Superintendent said that this "furniture", had been destroyed on occasions! The filth around

these zones, as they are called, is appalling. 13,600 men live in the Zones. Most of the women who enter any of the Bachelor Quarters are prostitutes, a great number of whom come from the neighbouring Coloured Township of Bonteheuwel.

Another form of housing for migrants is known as the Barracks where 24 men live in what looks like a cave with two-decker bunks round the blackened walls. What windows there are, are firmly shut against thieves as well as the weather, and their belongings and clothes are festooned from the rafters or nails on the walls and the cooking utensils lie about in the middle of the floor.

When the Superintendent tells me "they like to live this way and they like to save the money", I am not reassured. I just cannot accept that any system should suggest, let alone demand that people should live like this because there is nothing better.

But there is something even worse. Since the Western Cape was told in August 1966 that there is to be a withdrawal of 5% in the African working force annually, until there are no more Africans there at all, firms have been very anxious to keep the African labour they have and have been learning new ways of acquiring more.

The City Administration has no money to house newcomers, in fact, it is severely strained in housing those men who used to live on the job but are no longer allowed to do so.

However Africans working in the Cape Town municipality may only live in Langa or Guguletu, so ground has been made available to firms in Langa on which these firms, at their own expense, have constructed sheds that look like miniature hangars and are equipped with something for men to sleep on — be it a single iron bed or in some cases double decker bunks with no safeguard against falling off for the top occupant. If he comes off he lands on the cement. There is nothing else in the shed. The ablution block is far away so many of those who live there don't get that far in bad weather. In one of these sets of huts we found that for 120 men there were 6 bucket lavatories.

The Railways are building their own sheds for 1,000 more labourers on land just outside the fence of Langa. No doubt the fence can be adjusted when necessary. The Railways already employ 4,000 migrants who live in Langa.

A stevedoring company has taken over sheds built by an oil company when their building project near Cape Town was completed. These sheds

house 400 men at a maximum but have so far only 320 men in them. There are 12 lavatories and 12 showers available for them.

The excuse that the Administration gives for all this is firstly lack of money. The other major excuse is equally real and that is that unless they allow such a state of affairs the men will not be allowed to work in Cape Town and will be denied the wages that are better than they would find under maybe easier living conditions nearer the Transkei, and the men want the money.

Any complaint will only come into open conflict with the Bantu Affairs authorities and all the men will lose their jobs and any further hopes of migrant contracts in Cape Town. It seems to be a period of make or break as far as the labour requirements of the Western Cape are concerned and so our "seeking to co-operate with local authorities to improve the living conditions of migrant labourers" is going to be very difficult.

Perhaps the definition Dr. Oscar Wolheim gave at a Conference on Poverty in June 1967 on what constitutes a slum will be a help to those who have to try to implement this resolution if it is passed. He said that if the following four conditions are not met in a household dwelling you have the conditions of a slum before people ever move into it:—

- (1) that father and mother should have privacy at night — internal doors.
- (2) that growing boys and girls should have separate sleeping quarters, with doors.

- (3) that the different functions of life should take part in separate rooms.
- (4) that it is not difficult or impossible to keep yourselves and your premises clean.

According to this definition Cape Town City Council is the biggest owner and constructor of slum property in the city! and yet the City may only build houses according to the pattern laid down by the Government. Group areas has caused havoc in the already harrassed position in the City's Housing Department. In regard to Coloured Housing over 20,000 families await houses and that does not take into consideration the newly wed couples who start married life in a single room in the home of the parents of one of them and will be lucky if they get a home of their own by the time they have three children. To alleviate the distress of the Coloured people, the City is able to build between 1,500 and 2,000 new match boxes a year. There are a few schemes for home ownership, in one case daintily arranged around the perimeter of a sub-economic block. It improves the view from the National road.

Administration Officials and one local member of Parliament with whom I am in correspondence are overwhelmed by the facts on paper and they are formidable, but through the years we have all lost sight of what is necessary for a human being to have in order to remain human. It seems that we must enquire into and make known the facts so that the crippling conditions imposed on the migrant workers be improved.

DICTIONARY

By JOYCE HARRIS

THIS DICTIONARY is intended to provide a brief, quick, easy source of reference for those who wish to interpret and understand statements by representatives of the Government. Its purpose is to introduce some clarity into the welter of confusion that prevails because of a breakdown in the essential lines of communication. When words are deprived of their generally recognised meaning it is imperative that they be re-defined.

FIRST INSTALMENT

Abolition, as in "abolition of passes": Introduction of reference books which it is compulsory for African men and women to carry at all times.

Apartheid: archaic, no longer traditional, see Separate development.

Border, as in "Border Industries": a dividing line which itself may have a width of 40 or more miles, a demarcation made valid by simple proclamation, not to be confused with recognised, geographical boundaries.

Decentralisation: proclamation of existing industrial areas as "border industries."

Development, as in "Separate development"; restriction to inadequate homelands, restriction of labour market, restriction of avenues of employment, restriction to special prescribed school syllabi.

Education as in "Bantu education": tuition to ensure that Africans know their place in life.

Extension, as in "Extension of Universities": removal of rights of non-whites to attend open universities.

Equal, as in "separate but equal": disproportionate land apportionment, disproportionate allotment of national income, disproportionate educational facilities, disproportionate taxation, disproportionate civic facilities.

Fraud: That which is perpetrated on a gullible public by a brilliant and calculated abuse of the written and spoken word.

Humanism: always qualified as sickly, unhealthy quality of being human, unhealthy devotion to human interests, unhealthy concern with the welfare of the human race, unhealthy facet of Western civilisation — see "liberalism."

To be continued.