

58 000 left homeless by Katlehong shack demolitions

MORE than 58 000 people have lost their homes in the East Rand Administration Board's campaign to clear out 'illegals' from the Katlehong township near Germiston.

Over the past year, ERAB officials have systematically broken down shacks and have sent more than 29 000 people back to the drought-stricken 'homelands'.

Recently, three FOSATU members who all live in Katlehong gave a public talk on the issue of shacks.

Brother Ronald Mofokeng said that the shacks were make-shift homes made out of corrugated iron, timber, cartons and plastic.

He said that with the establishment of the capitalist system in South Africa, rural people were forced to leave their land to seek work in the cities and mines.

And because the State did not ever take the responsibility to build houses for the workers, people were forced to build shacks.

He said in some cases the employers took up this responsibility and built large corrugated compounds.

However, because the shacks were a 'health hazard' and as illness would affect production, the State eventually built 'ash-brick shacks'.

'But since it is not in the interest of the profit hungry bosses and their State to meet the needs of workers, a large section of the working class never received any accommodation,' Brother Mofokeng said.

He explained that during the boom period, industry developed and a large number of workers were drawn from the 'labour camps' in the rural areas.

'With the housing shortage already high, these workers were forced to build more shacks.'

'But today,' he said, 'the capitalist system is experiencing an economic recession and the bosses are shifting the burden of the crisis on to workers by making them redundant.'

'A large number of workers now find themselves unemployed and the State wants to drive them back to the homelands to avoid the responsibility of granting them social benefits.'

Brother Mofokeng said these unemployed workers were seen as a 'political threat' by the State so it was demolishing the shacks and sending these workers away from the urban areas.

'However, the workers have been resisting in different parts of the country and have shown their resistance by squatting,' he said.

Brother Baznaar Moloi said that in Dukathole in Germiston there were so many shacks that one cannot even walk through them.

'But up to now nothing has happened with those shacks because they are not owned by migrant workers.'

He said a shack was only a shack because it did not have the approval of the authorities - this was a political decision.

Brother Moloi said shacks had been built in Katlehong as early as 1945 when people were moved from the old location leaving only 'coloureds' and 'Indians' behind.

Why did they move people?

He said this was done to separate the different race groups and to make it easier for the new industries to draw on their labour.

'Because the economy was booming and the employers needed labour, they never complained about the shacks - but now the recession has cursed our acceptable houses,' he said.

The last speaker, Brother

Calvin Makgaleng said the East Rand Administration Board was building 'heavenly mansions' in the 'homelands' of Lebowa and KwaNdebele.

'Why is workers' money being used to promote separate development - why is our money being used to promote homelands?' he asked.

He said that influx control had been introduced to the gain of employers and therefore the employers should take on the responsibility of worker housing.

But this did not mean building 'unchristian' hostels, he added.

He said workers must begin to 'pressurise' employers to provide 'decent' houses for them or to buy land so that workers can build their own houses.



Above: This pile of corrugated iron was once somebody's home
Below: A FOSATU member stands outside his 'shack'



Urban rights for 300

ABOUT 300 workers from Mooi River Textiles have been given section 10 rights after a campaign by the National Union of Textile Workers.

It is believed that this is the largest single group of workers to be given section 10 rights since the independent union movement together with the Black Sash began to urge workers to apply for urban rights.

The Rikhoto court judgement earlier this year opened the way for workers who have 10 years or more service with one company to get section 10 (b) rights.

Section 10 (b) gives workers the right to look for work and to live permanently in 'prescribed' areas - areas outside of the 'homelands'.

It also means that if a worker loses his/her job, the worker cannot be sent back to the 'homelands'.

PRIVILEGE

However, although Mrs Rosina Rikhoto in a further court case won the right to live with her husband, Tom Rikhoto, not all women married to husbands with section 10 rights, will be granted the same 'privilege'.

A new law passed in August this year says a person with section 10 rights will only be allowed to bring his wife and children to town from the rural areas if he has a house of his own.

The only way to get round this is if the worker can prove that his wife and children were living with him before August 26.

RIGHT

So, although the Rikhoto judgement has paved the way for more workers to live permanently in the urban areas, they are still deprived of the basic human right of living with one's family.

Meanwhile, the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union reports that it is becoming more and more difficult to get a job in Pietermaritzburg unless a worker has section 10 rights, 'even if your KwaZulu home is as little as 15 kilometres outside of town'.

'It was clear to SFAWU that there was little point having a clause in a retrenchment procedure which guaranteed first option on employment if your non-urban status prohibits you from returning to the same job,' a union organiser said.

She said a retrenched worker from Epol Feed Mill had been offered a job but a Drakensberg Administration Board official had told him that the wages were too high for a 'rural' person.

SFAWU approached the Administration Board and threatened to take legal action as the Board was 'interfering in a legal agreement between the company and the union'.

The organiser said soon after this the Board agreed to register the retrenched worker.

'Now SFAWU is including a clause in retrenchment procedures which says that the company has to inform the relevant Administration Board of its intention to take back specific workers,' she said.

New union for FOSATU

A NEW affiliate has been admitted into the ranks of FOSATU - the Natal Sugar Industry Employees Union.

The NSIEU was one of the first unions to be formed in the sugar industry, way back in 1937 when sugar workers earned R3 a month.

It was formed as a non-racial union and at present has a membership of about 1 000.

Brother R R Pillay has been general secretary of the union for 26 years.

The NSIEU was admitted as an affiliate at the October meeting of the Central Committee on the recommendation of the Natal Region.

The Natal Region said it had worked for some time with the new affiliate to ensure that it met the requirements of affiliation - that it operated as a non racial, democratically controlled worker organisation.

Retrenched workers found jobs after workers down tools

MEADOW Feed workers in Pietermaritzburg have successfully blocked the retrenchment of 26 workers.

But because of the deafness of management to their demands, the workers had to down tools before their bosses would listen to them.

In September, the company informed the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union shop stewards that it intended to retrench 53 workers.

The company said it had to lay off these workers because their work was going to be done by a new machine.

The bosses also wanted to take people off the trucks in order to 'pass on the savings in transport to the customers'.

The management agreed to meet with the union shop stewards and officials to discuss the alternatives to retrenchment but during the meeting it became clear that they were not taking the workers' demands seriously.

The Meadow Feed workers were demanding that their bosses:

- * postpone the introduction of new machinery until 1984.
- * keep as many people as possible in employment.
- * absorb the 53 workers into the

departments where the workers felt they were needed.

* first fill the jobs of outside contractors like security and the gardens with Meadow Feed workers.'

* pay two weeks severance pay for each year of service.

The day before the company was due to give notice to the retrenched workers, a petition was handed to management by the workers.

The petition laid out the workers' demands and requested that the managing director address them the following morning.

'As he was not taking our representatives seriously, he was asked to speak directly to the workers,' a worker said.

At 6am the next morning the entire workforce waited for their manager who only arrived at 8am.

In response to this united action by the workers, management agreed to seriously negotiate with the shop stewards.

Knowing that the meeting would soon be in progress, workers returned to work at 10.30 am.

As a result of the negotiations that followed 26 workers were protected against retrenchment by being placed in other jobs.