



Thomsville residents organise for better housing

Residents show their dissatisfaction with the houses in Thomsville.

The tiny two rooms that became the homes of people who once lived comfortably in Kliptown and other areas declared white, were far from adequate for the families forced to live there.

In some cases, close to 16 people were living in a two-roomed unit. Overcrowding led to increased crime, drug taking and drinking.

The authorities did nothing to improve the area. They told residents that Thomsville, which became known as "Two-Rooms", was only a transit camp and that

they would be rehoused soon.

But the years passed by and nothing changed.

By 1968, the medical officer of health declared Thomsville an area unfit for human life - a slum.

Individual residents continued to put their case to the authorities without success.

In 1976, residents sent a delegation to the Minister of Community Development, Marais Steyn. The result of this was that certain outspoken members of the delegation were given homes. Others re-

IN THE late fifties, hundreds of Johannesburg families affected by the Group Areas Act were resettled 32 kilometres deep in the veld, into disused army barracks at Lenasia.

Then in 1963, these 'camp people' were moved into a place called Thomsville where the houses consisted of only two tiny rooms, no bathrooms, no electricity and no ceilings. Taps and toilets had to be shared by four families.

The people were angry. For eighteen years they had to live in very bad conditions. A few months ago, they forced the authorities to rehouse them.

This is the story of their struggle for decent houses.

mained in the slum.

Then, in 1978, the Minister visited Thomsville and the houses were renovated. Residents were not satisfied with the renovat-

ions, because the walls were merely sand-bagged and painted and fences were erected.

They were beginning to give up all hope that anything was ever going

to change - that they were ever going to be rehoused.

Then in 1980, some of them realised they would have to unite and form a residents association. They felt for far too long the people had relied on others to help them.

This group decided to have nothing to do with the Lenasia Management Committee.

They called small meetings in every street to give everyone an opportunity to voice his or her opinion. At every meeting, two representatives were elected, and the Thomsville Residents Association (TRA) was born.

For the first time, people could elect their own representatives from amongst themselves in a democratic way.

By the beginning of this year, TRA was ready to go on a campaign for decent hou-

ses.

Members approached other civic, religious and student organisations for their support. A survey was conducted to find out just how overcrowded the area was.

House meetings, house visits and mass meetings were held.

In January this year 200 placard-waving residents marched on the offices of the Department of Community Development.

They demanded to see Mr D H Rousseau, the Regional Representative of the department to present him with a memorandum.

Officials

Although the residents did not see Mr Rousseau, the memorandum was accepted by officials of the department. The demands were:

- the immediate rehousing of the people of Thomsville.
- this rehousing should take priority over the resettlement of people affected by the Group Areas Act.
- The TRA be recognised as representative of the people.
- The Department of Community Development responded within three days.

The Department's reply was that the actions of TRA were hasty and not well-founded since Thomsville will soon be redeveloped. The TRA should work through recognised channels," the letter read.

Letter

But on the same day that the letter was sent off, officials of the Department of Community Development, the Johannesburg City Council and the Lenasia Management Committee decided at a meeting to make 100 homes available to Thomsville residents with immediate effect.

This was a victory for the TRA.

By June about 95 per cent of the original Thomsville residents had been given homes in Extension 10 and 11 in Lenasia.

No Schools

There are no schools, roads, proper drainage, shops or transport facilities in these areas.

In every new extension residents associations have been formed.

And so the struggle goes on.

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