

REPORT ON CONDITIONS PREVAILING IN THE WINTERVELD

A summary of a series of articles prepared for the
Pretoria News by Neil Jacobsohn

Thirty-six kilometres from Church Square lies a vast area of slum appropriately called the "Winterveld." Its sleazy sprawl is accentuated by the neat and orderly towns it borders on - Mabopane and Ga-Rankuwa, towns in the Bophuthatswana homeland. When the "Pretoria News" reported on conditions there three years ago, the population was officially estimated by the Government at 113,000 people, as tabled in Parliament in March 1973. Today the population has trebled to a staggering estimated 350,000.

Where do these people come from? There's a vast influx from all over - from Carolina, Ladysmith, Pietersburg, Groblersdal and even from Natal; to look for work in Pretoria and the nearby industrial areas. They arrive at night, rent a minute piece of ground from a Black landowner for a fee ranging from between R3,00 and R6,00 and erect some sort of shelter from whatever comes to hand - corrugated iron, wood, cardboard, even mud. Exploitation is rife. Second-hand building materials are sold for more than new materials fetch in Pretoria, but no Pretoria firm will deliver to Winterveld's bewildering maze. Since two or three roads only serve the whole vast area, it's hadly surprising. More than 90% of the land in Winterveld is owned privately, by black citizens of the Tswana homeland, some of whom are ruthlessly exploiting their own people in the absence of any sort of control.

In such an area it is to be expected that disease is rampant. A handful of homeopaths and a few doctors to their best to stem the rising tide of dysentery, diarrhoea, gastro-enteritis, influenza, measles, malnutrition and venereal disease. With the lack of sanitation, the high incidence of disease is hardly surprising. One doctor described a big shopping centre in the township: "It has no running water, no toilets - and this is where hundreds of people go to buy food." Fruit and meat is sold on the street, amidst dust and flies.

Those people "lucky" enough to have found work in Pretoria are further weakened by the fact that they never see the sun. They leave home between 3 and 4 a.m., not returning until 7 p.m. at the earliest.

There is a health service of a kind. The Ga-Rankuwa hospital admits people from Winterveld and there ARE clinics in Mabopane, but, incredibly, there are no plans afoot to build a clinic in the Winterveld. Innoculation drives are carried out at school - especially against TB. This merely scratches the surface as only half the children of school-going age actually attend a school.

Where life is held cheap, the birthrate is invariably high. As Winterveld has no family planning clinic or contraceptive advice, both birthrate and illegitimacy rate are soaring.

To add further to the general misery, there is the high cost of living. For those 30% who have found work in Pretoria, the daily return bus fare of 80 cents is expensive - but part of it is Government-subsidised. Bread is often sold at 18 cents a loaf - two cents more than its stipulated price. Before the Government sank boreholes to supply the needs of the squatters, water was sold for 15 times the price of water in Pretoria. Those who live a long way from the boreholes still pay inflated amounts for life's most basic need.

The school situation is chronic. here ARE schools - paid for by the parents - where hundreds of children are taught by a handful of workers while countless more roam the streets. In some places, "school" is a cleared patch under a tree, where children squat in the dust in classes of more than 100 to be taught by unqualified teachers. The Sozama school, meaning "to try" has, for example, 720 pupils instructed by six teachers - only two of them having any qualifications.

With crippling poverty, no electricity, no housing schemes, no parks and no community services, one would expect a soaring crime rate. Until recently it has been a very real problem with a police force of five trying to cope. Within the last few years, a powerful force of 79 has slashed the crime rate. Lieutenant Thami Masilo, station commander of the Mabopane police force, feels that since last year the crime rate has been reduced by half. The main problems are housebreaking, armed robbery and rape. Shebeens operate everywhere and with more people there is inevitably more trouble.

The real problem of the Winterveld is - whose responsibility is it? As the area is situated in the homeland area of Bophuthatswana the Government feels it cannot interfere - it can merely advise. Homeland sentiment is that the black man is attracted to this area so that he can work in the white man's cities. The white man then should accommodate him. A daunting lack of funds in the homeland prevents swift and complete action. Available funds are split because the shortage of black housing in the Pretoria area is general and widespread. Although the Government is putting up houses as fast as it can at Mabopane East to absorb the population of the Winterveld, there is a backlog of between 10,000 and 12,000 people from Atteridgeville and Mamelodi that first have to be housed.

Meanwhile the uncontrolled influx of squatters to the area continues. The Bophuthatswana Government IS considering legislation to limit the number of people landlords will be able to have living on their property. They were considering the same legislation three years ago. Even if the people were thrown off the land - where would they go? Though there are 25,000 houses planned for Mabopane East to accommodate approximately 175,000 people - there are already 350,000 in the Winterveld, with presumably more to come. As one family moves out another moves in.

One can derive some slight encouragement from the National Building Research Institute of the CSIR's research into low-cost housing and squatter dwelling upgrading. Another glimmer is the S.A. Government's offer to take the Winterveld residents employed in Pretoria off Bophuthatswana's hands. Despite this, the problem remains enormous.

Punt Jansen admitted, while still Deputy Minister of Bantu Affairs, that "there is still a vast squatter problem in South Africa." Quite obviously, Winterveld is a distinct case in point.

- - - - -