

Homes for the homeless

JOYCE HARRIS

Lack of home ownership and the right to freehold tenure, while not being by any means the most severe deprivation suffered by Black people, is nevertheless an important aggravating factor in their rootlessness and utter lack of security.

It is very difficult to uncover the exact degree of availability to Blacks of land for freehold tenure, but it is quite obvious that it is very small.

It is not available at all in the common areas or in the White urban areas. Such freehold rights as did exist for Africans have been abolished by this Government.

When all the trust land for the Bantustans has finally been acquired for them, they will own 13.7 per cent of the total land area of the country, that is 15½ million ha in a total land mass of 427 359 square miles.

Transvaal Region is presently trying to ascertain, through the chief ministers of the Bantustans, how much of this land is available for individual freehold tenure and how much is tribally held. A recent statement by Chief Matanzima said that Transkeians would be able to buy freehold tenure in 25 of the Transkei towns, but this is not yet a fait accompli, nor does it present anything like a total picture for the Transkei.

The Government is spending money in the Bantustans on the building of resettlement townships and closer settlements, but there is no indication how many of these properties will become available for purchase with freehold tenure, even assuming that any of the inhabitants could find the necessary money.

Modern townships close to employment are also being built, but a great deal of money is being spent on housing for key White personnel. For instance it has come to our notice that Giyani, the brand-new town which is the capital of Gazankulu, is largely inhabited by White personnel, while the Africans are con-

finied to a location outside the town — and this in a "homeland"!

There are apparently residential areas with grazing rights in the Bantustans, but to what extent we do not know, nor do we know the conditions under which they are made available.

Everywhere there are indications of the denial of home ownership to the vast majority of Black people, yet every human being knows, and surely acknowledges the sense of security derived from owning the roof over one's head, knowing that one's home is one's own and cannot be invaded, enjoying the privacy of one's own four walls.

Throughout the Blash Sash conference, papers and reports from all regions demonstrated that the lack of housing in both rural and urban areas for Black people has now reached critical proportions.

People are being moved out of houses where they may hold freehold title to be settled in other places where characterless corrugated iron or cement block houses are built for them or where they are sometimes expected to build for themselves on a site allotted to them.

Money and resources are being used to build houses for those who already have them in pursuit of the Government's ideological master plan while many people remain entirely homeless or are living in critically overcrowded conditions or in shacks because they have no alternative.

The proper provision of towns and suburbs offering freehold title would mean that some at least of South Africa's Black population would provide their own houses. A complete embargo on the removal of families from existing houses would allow the authorities to set about providing accommodation for the homeless with the urgency which the situation warrants.

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