

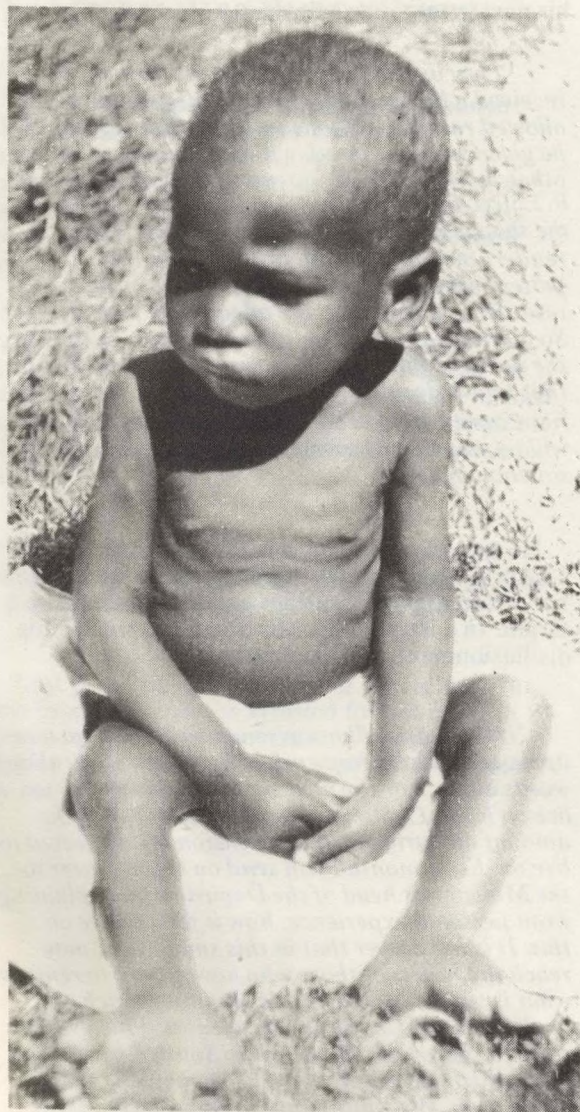
He began living off c.£2.50 (R5) per month on 14 April. In his first Open Letter to the Minister of 15 May, he reported:

My R5 a month confines me to 16.6c a day. I have juggled as best I can with these cents and half cents and the following is the result

Daily:

Maize Meal 1c (4 desertspoons)
Bread or Samp 2½c
Kupugani Soup 1c (3 teaspoons)
Pronutro 1c (2½ desertspoons)
Margarine 1c
Milk 1½c (8 teaspoons)
Coffee 1½c (4 teaspoons)
Sugar 1c (8 teaspoons)
Peanut Butter or Syrup 1c
Vitamin Tablet 1c
Fuel 3c
Salt, Matches, Soap, Toothpaste, Stamps,
Church Giving, (all) 1c. Total: 16½c.

'The values and amounts above are approximate: some are a fraction more, some less. One thing is definite; there are only sixteen and two



Bongani has chronic gastro-enteritis. There was no place in the hospital for him.

thirds cents a day for 'living'. I am aware that it may seem rather absurd for me to write to you, a Senior Cabinet Minister, about teaspoons of soup and desertspoons of maize meal, but alas the pathetic truth is that the lives of thousands (millions) in this wealthy country of ours revolve around these mean amounts, and less. Moreover it is you, Sir, who are the man most responsible for these lives.

'At the outset of this six months on R5 per month I wish to emphasize the vital difference between myself and a person at Dimbaza living on the same amount. Most fundamental are the psychological differences. I set out with an object, a purpose, with some hope, and above all with a knowledge that my journey is not only voluntary but temporary. If I were to become desperate I know that I have friends who would immediately supply my needs. For those at Dimbaza, their condition is a way of life, without purpose, or hope of escape, and with no assurance of support from others. My position is as different from theirs as hope from hopelessness; so I am keenly aware that my knowledge of what their condition really feels like is very limited indeed.

'Furthermore, at the level of material needs there is a marked contrast. I start off with sufficient clothes, furniture, utensils; they do not; there is manifestly no room for clothes, and furniture (let alone decent food) in 16½c a day.'

In a letter to a friend, Russell explained how little things take on huge proportions when living on the threshold of starvation.

'I will also have to think twice before buying another postage stamp during the five months that remain; I have managed to let some friends and family know that they must send me stamps if they want to hear from me. I realise I am cheating a bit in doing this, because people at Dimbaza earning R5 a month and less cannot depend on stamps from others. Maybe stamps seem the least important item on my budget, but in fact they are something of a literal lifeline for so many people struggling to keep contact with bread winners far away for months and months on end. For the first time in my life I realise how a vital little postage stamp can pose a real financial problem.'

For the month of June he decided to exist on the rations alone, valued at R.2.58 (c.£1.30), rather than the R5 pension; and he invited fellow white South Africans to join him in living off the rations for a month.

Since an important point of the protest was to bring home to white South Africans the realities of the poverty around them by letting them see another white experiencing it, it was important that these experiences were made known.

Mrs Jean Sinclair, President of the white women's organisation, Black Sash, wrote an Open Letter to the Minister:

'I found the diet a grim and devastating experience. The rations are monotonous, flavourless and unsatisfying. I found that my considerable energy dwindled. I was lethargic, tired all the time, cold, irritable and depressed. I found it difficult to concentrate and to settle down to any particular task.'

Mrs. Ray Carter, wife of the Suffragan Bishop of Johannesburg, in her Open Letter to the Minister wrote:

'It seems that people living permanently on this diet will never realise their full potential and that their personalities will be stunted as a result. They cannot have their creative powers that should be theirs as human beings. This diminishes an entire nation and I am ashamed. Most of all this experience has made me ashamed to be white in South Africa. We have such an exaggerated standard of living because we have exploited the Black South Africans.'

A young expectant mother who, for obvious reasons, could not endure the grim diet herself, wrote to Russell to tell him of an experiment she had conducted on her dog of which she was particularly fond. She cut her monthly expenditure of R8 on its upkeep to R2.50. 'I can only report that my beautiful animal now looks unkempt, thinner and that her constant foraging in refuse, accompanied by the pitiful inquiring look she gives me, keeps me constantly aware of your hunger and that of thousands of African families.'

Russell commented: 'Some might be shocked at a person conducting such an experiment on dogs; the horrible truth is that we whites are conducting this experiment on human-beings'.

When an interviewer referred to 'Russell's fast', he replied: 'If it is a fast for a white man it is a fast for a black man. The difference is that I am eating these rations voluntarily. They are being forced to eat them'.

'I have seen the hand of the Almighty in South Africa's affairs in the past two years.'

Prime Minister Vorster, October 1968

The June Open Letter to the Minister was written in the middle of the period on the rations alone and expresses the controlled passion as well as the insights reached through his experience.

'I understand only too well now how those at Dimbaza tend to finish their rations before the next lot is due. One's body begins to demand immediate satisfaction regardless of the 'foolishness' and 'lack of self-discipline' involved in eating too much too soon, and going hungry when all is finished.



A Living Wage In Dimbaza . . .

Mr.E.M. arrived at Dimbaza in July 1970 with his father, a sickly T.B. patient; his mother and sister, both asthma sufferers; and four other children in the house. Himself unmarried, he went to seek work at the Good Hope Textiles (3½ miles from King William's Town), and was offered £1.50 per week.

His entire family depends on his earnings. Transport would have cost 54 cents a day (about 3 shillings): so he had to refuse the job. (When he eventually obtained work at Dimbaza for £9.69 per month, he was told he must pay off his three years tax arrears at £1.78½ a year).

On 9 January 1971, he set off with his mother and a sick baby to walk the 12 miles to the nearest available medical attention. Asked why he hadn't borrowed money for the bus fare he said he already had so many debts that no-one would lend him more. The Dimbaza clinic was out of medicines.



The Mothers Who Lost Their Sons . . .

N. arrived at Dimbaza in 1968. Her son went as a migrant to the Transvaal. Months later he sent his first letter home — there was no money in it. Nevertheless her rations were stopped because she was told she 'had someone working for her.'

This is typical of many cases. Often young sons go off for the first time in their lives and take some time to settle down; sometimes they forget those left behind — often because they cannot manage to live in a town on what they earn.

The Family Who Lost Their Home . . .

Mr and Mrs K. lived in Wellington for over 30 years living happily in their own house and paying only fifty pence per month for the plot. They did not want to move, but 'the law' ordered them to go. At Dimbaza they had to pay £1.10 per month for their 2-roomed house. To earn money Mr. K had to return to Wellington — but this time without his wife, as a migrant worker. There he has to pay £1.35 per month for his bachelor quarters.

'I feel I must confess to you how I myself have lapsed into this undisciplined shortsightedness of which poverty-stricken people are so unremittingly accused. On more than one occasion I have dug rashly into my supply of powdered milk, literally craving for the taste.'

'On another occasion I was even more irresponsible; I was feeling the hunger and longing for satisfaction. I walked out of my house like one possessed and went to buy a packet of cigarettes for 20c.'

'What a waste! It is true I haven't the money for such 'falls'. I think I am beginning to learn from within why the poor man turns so 'foolishly' to drink, or buys sweets instead of Pronutro and cool drinks instead of cabbage.'

'At times I feel quite limp and weary . . . listless and without zest for life. May those pause and ponder who charge the poor of "having no initiative", of "laziness", and of "not bothering to help themselves". The enervating effects of this diet make me, too, feel lazy and not wanting to bother. I have felt myself wondering whether I was crumbling — whether I could stand the grimness of this diet. I have prayed for strength. Even in my prayers my thoughts wander so often to food, my longing for adequate food.'

'But it is not food alone I want; it is warmth. It is cold today. I wear two vests, two jerseys with my shirt and jacket. On cold nights in bed I also wear my underclothes and socks, and sleep under six layers of blankets! I find it hard to understand how the poor at Dimbaza manage, especially when for heating they are refused paraffin or any regular form of fuel with the rations.'

'It is you, Sir, and your colleagues who do this to the poor of this land, by taking people and pushing them into the Bantustan resettlement townships. Your Deputy, the Hon. Mr. A. J. Raubenheimer, told Parliament (May 8) that the people were taken "from gravel pits, from under trees and from everywhere". Yes I have been helping a family which had been picked up from a quarry near Queenstown; but to give the impression that the majority were thus "saved" is grossly misleading.'

'I am only too keenly aware that there is poverty not only in Dimbaza; there was poverty where they came from. However, the fact that they have been forced by White man's laws, and circumstances, to become refugees in their own land, hardly makes your Dimbaza rations an act of generosity.'

'The truth surely is that you, Sir, are determined to remove Africans into Bantustans as cheaply as possible, even if it means confining them to lives of bare survival. Is not this violence of a subtle and insidious kind? May God have mercy on you, Sir, maybe you know not what you do.'



No fuel, No soap, No sugar, No . . . Government rations invariably run out before the next lot is due.

His stand was beginning to attract attention both within South Africa and overseas. The Cape Times commented:

‘. . . Nothing can justify or excuse the human misery caused by the (Separate Development) policy’s day to day implementation: the constant humiliations, the break up of families, the uprooting of settled communities.’

The *Cape Argus* wrote: ‘Life is being blighted. It should not be so. It need not be so. It is disgraceful, outrageous that it should be allowed to be so.’

‘The stability which South Africa enjoys is due to the country being a Christian state, and its people, in spite of normal human limitations, are doing their best to give effect to, and to abide by the ordinance of God.’

Prime Minister Vorster, October 1969

Russell’s third Open Letter began, ‘Dear Sir; It is as if I have become prematurely old. The other morning I felt too weak to finish making my bed’. He drew the Minister’s attention to the pitiful circumstances of just two persons, typical of the 30 or so he had seen that day (15 July), and describing his own experience of living on their income. It went on:

‘It is like serving a prison sentence, I hold on grimly, counting the days. . . The R5 is utterly inadequate for my needs. I have no money for shoe-laces, let alone shoes. How can you expect people to pull themselves up by their boot laces when they don’t even have any and when you squeeze and

extinguish their opportunities to acquire them? . . . I wait with hope for your response.’

There was a response. It was a bare note of official acknowledgement and was the first he had received. It was also to be the last.

In his fourth Open Letter, Russell gave an indication of the sort of action that should be taken to begin the job of alleviating the suffering.

- No more resettlement will be undertaken to these poorly sited townships;
- Instead, the much-needed housing be provided in city areas where there is work potential;
- An independent economic commission be appointed to investigate the capital requirements needed to create work with living wages, and to provide better facilities for those already in the resettlement townships like Dimbaza.

‘If we do not do this’, he added, ‘If instead we persist in talk of “easing the white man’s burden” by obliging blacks to be resettled in Dimbaza, then history will find us guilty of making people expendible because they were born black not white.’

‘If you believe I have overstated my case, then I can only say try living on R5 a month, amongst people living on this and less, and you will begin to discover that I have been speaking of what is real for people at Dimbaza and beyond.’

In August, sympathisers in Cape Town organised various fund-raising and publicity events to draw attention to the poverty in the rural areas. David

Russell addressed a 'Dimbaza lunch', attended by civic, academic, political and business figures. A few days before a full-page article had appeared in the *Cape Argus* of 26 August detailing all the improvements in Dimbaza and claiming that the 'Concentration Camp' image had 'gone forever'. Large photographs showed the interior of a 'smart' room, an outdoor cinema screen and a crowd of smiling school children; the accompanying article was clearly designed to ease troubled white consciences.

A more significant development, was a memorandum sent to the newspapers from the Deputy-Minister of BAD, defending the government's record in the three townships of Sada, Illinge and Dimbaza. This provided Russell with a chance to deal in detail with the official defence of its policies. The claim that 550 people had been provided with work opportunities, he said, referred to 520 people who have got some sort of work in the home industries at Sada — but what wage are they getting? The 30 remaining jobs refer to the bead work at Dimbaza under — according to Mr. Raubenheimer (the Deputy Minister) — the Xhosa Development Corporation. In fact the bead work was run by a group of church women in King William's Town after a grant of R600 (£300) from the Churches. With an estimated 40,000 people in the three townships, only 550 people working for between R5 (c.£2.50) and R7 (c.£3.50) per month provides yet another illustration of 'too little too late'. He added:

'It was difficult to make any sense at all of a figure of 298 employed females at Dimbaza where the vast majority of heads of households are women. The statistics were meaningless for the many hundreds of people who would love to work; who desperately need to work, where there is no work. In Dimbaza, the jobs are feeble and few.'

A glowing picture had been painted by Mr. Raubenheimer of life for the pensioners: 'In these townships they can live quietly among persons of the same age and in almost a rural atmosphere'. Said Russell: 'No-one wants to live quietly in rural poverty. No-one wants a forced separation from relatives who might be able to help'.

The memorandum had stated that 'the amount of rations given to needy Bantu (Africans) was compiled by the Department of Bantu Administration and Development in collaboration with the Department of Health and was considered to be adequate for adults and children over twelve years'. In his own correspondence with the authorities he had been told that the rations were 'sufficient for non-active people'. He had pointed out that 12-year old children could hardly be described as 'non-active'.

'A woman who has to go and fetch wood, who has to bring up a family, who has to do all the housework, is no less active than any other woman anywhere else.'

Published medical reports had all said that there was insufficient vitamin C, and that the calories were very low.

'If these things were done to white people there would be an outcry and one would presumably find that the Government was out of power within a matter of months. But these are voteless, voiceless black people. Inhuman grants are given and rations are callously withdrawn.'

Russell's fifth Open Letter further detailed the privations he suffered, commented on the minor alterations which had been made, and once again expressed utter frustration at the lack of any sympathetic response from the authorities. He therefore decided to address his final Open Letter to the Dutch Reformed Church, the spiritual home of the Nationalist Government, some of whose ministers had expressed concern over conditions in Dimbaza and a willingness to help. (See Appendix).

David Russell ended his £2.50 a month existence on 14 October, hoping that his stand had created a greater awareness among white people of how black people are being forced to live.



The Victim of Bureacratic Whims

When her son, the sole breadwinner on a farm near Queenstown, became ill, **Mrs N. Sigowele** and her other children were ejected from the farm and spent weeks on the roadside. They were brought to Dimbaza in July 1971.

She had been receiving £2.25 every second month at the Bantu Affairs Commissioner's Office in Queenstown, but the grant was not transferred to King William's Town, 12 miles from Dimbaza. This means she has to travel to Queenstown every second month to collect £4.50. The train fare cost her £2.25 for every trip.

On one occasion she did not go to Queenstown because she had no money for the fare. When she eventually got the money from friends she was told in Queenstown that her pension had been transferred to King William's Town; but when she went there there was nothing for her.

She gets no rations, but her four children do.



The Choice Offered To Two Mothers Of Five Children

Mrs A., is a young widow with 5 children. After many pleadings and long delays, she was given a Maintenance Grant; but soon after the authorities cut off all her rations. She went to beg an official to continue her rations as she simply could not survive on the Maintenance Grant alone. She was told to seek work. When she said she could not leave her children, it was suggested that she placed her children with someone else and go to town. She was seriously considering becoming a migrant labourer to provide for her children when Church assistance kept her family together.

Mrs. P.N. was widowed with 5 young children. Unable to survive on the government rations, she left them with another family and went as a migrant to Mossel Bay. Before long some of her children fell ill through lack of care.

PART 4

More Dimbaza on the Way

David Russell's action resulted in some improvements. In December 1972 he acknowledged that there had been changes in the fields of health facilities, drainage, house floors and education. The Dutch Reformed Church announced in September that it planned to erect a factory in Dimbaza which will employ 150 people during 1973. Russell welcomed the move:

'It would appear that the missionary branch of the NGK (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) has been touched by the plight of Africans living in Dimbaza.'

But this was a minor victory.

The grants have not been increased, nor have the rations. The government has still not agreed to allow anyone to have both. The rents in Dimbaza remain exactly the same and, if anything, the collection is more strictly enforced. Essential things like wages, like maintenance grants and rations haven't changed.'

Russell did not have any illusions about achieving great changes in the system. Finding himself in a desperate situation, he reacted in a way to try to alleviate some aspects of the suffering and the appalling conditions he witnessed every day.

Although David Russell's campaign has concentrated on the need to relieve immediate hardship, he has never lost sight of the fundamental issues behind the policies of places like Dimbaza.

'The best that one could hope is that behind the scenes in Pretoria it will be decided not to push these people away as cheaply or at the same rate . . .

It's no use the Church just starting little sewing groups, dealing out soup packets, going around like a big, white Father Christmas. We must ask WHY?'

On another occasion he said: 'It's just a glaring example of the relentless enforcement of ideology which makes no economic sense. A bad dream come true.'

Dimbaza has become the symbol of the whole cancer of discrimination . . . and the disease is the same all over. We must start looking in our own backyards. Whites who claim to be Christians are hypocrites when they do nothing. And words are not enough.'

Nadine Gordimer, the distinguished South African novelist wrote in her introduction to *The Discarded People*, that to advocate that removals should be 'better planned' or carried out 'more humanely' or for the provision of better facilities, is tacitly to accept these removals.

It is the removal themselves which are wrong and since they are, as has been shown, an integral part of the "separate development" policy, it is that policy and all its implications which must be questioned.'

Despite the outrage at the conditions in places like Dimbaza, the signs are that more Dimbazas are being created. In the immediate vicinity of Dimbaza at least two new resettlement camps are being built. In the Gaga Valley to the north east of Fort Beaufort, a large number are being resettled from White farms, mainly in the Cradock district. A rural township is being created at Committee's Drift, just east of the Fish River which is to house former home-owners evicted from the Fingo Village in Grahamstown, 37km away. A town of 100,000—200,000 has been planned for a place which, ac-

According to Dr. Francis Wilson, has 'even less potential for growth than Dimbaza.'

Thus one can see that the terrible conditions of life at Dimbaza are far from unique. What is ominous for the future is that the architects of apartheid, so far from being influenced by Cosmas Desmond, David Russell and others among their white critics, are determined to pursue this policy of Separate Development regardless of the cost in human misery or the sacrifice of human dignity and decency.



"Home" for some in Dimbaza.

APPENDIX

**EXTRACTS FROM DAVID
RUSSELL'S OPEN LETTER TO THE
MINISTERS OF THE DUTCH REFORMED
CHURCHES**

Dear Colleagues in Christ's Ministry,

When Jesus came in sight of the city He wept over it (Luke 19:41). I believe that Jesus weeps over this land when He sees Dimbaza, when He sees men suffer under cruel discrimination, when He sees us Whites making Mammon our God as we hold and enjoy our privileges at the expense of Blacks.

For several months now I have been writing to the Hon. Mr. M.C. Botha, Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, about the sufferings and hardships of the people in the resettlement townships like Dimbaza. I have drawn his attention among other things to the grossly inadequate wages, maintenance grants, pensions and rations. Alas, like Dives he has ignored Lazarus at the gate; like the Levite and priest he has 'passed by on the other side'.

I now write to you in the hope that where I have failed, you may succeed. The reason I am writing specifically to you as ministers of the Dutch Reformed Churches is not because I think that ministers of other churches have 'seen light' any more than yourselves. On the contrary it is my deep conviction that we all share the guilt of our tragic condition.

The reason I address myself to you is because I believe you are placed in a unique position to influence those who have the power to change conditions so as to conform more closely to the Christian ethic . . .

Time has run out. We must save those fellow Whites who blindly insist that all is well, or who try to hide injustice behind mere tokens of change, through measures which only paper over the cracks of inequality. God warns us against those who 'dress my peoples' wound' but skin deep only, saying 'All is well', when this is not so (Jeremiah 6:14).

It is claimed that many were worse off before coming to Dimbaza. No doubt, for some this was the case, but then their condition must have been pitiful indeed. The authorities up to now have failed to improve sufficiently the housing in the towns of the Western Cape, so naturally conditions are bad.

Government spokesmen have openly admitted this. They have not coped with the problem. Is it a solution to put people in Dimbaza — places of negligible work potential, too far from towns for adequate employment? The solution surely is to provide housing in the city areas where there are reasonable job opportunities.

It has been reported that many people are queuing for a house at Dimbaza. This is true. More than once I myself have gone cap in hand to the authorities to plead for a place for a homeless, stateless African family. These facts appear to have lulled some Whites into thinking that if some people want to go there, then all must be fine.

However the brutal truth is that the rights of Africans to remain in the urban areas have been systematically and relentlessly undermined. Many are desperate for a place where they are allowed to be. They have been made refugees in their own land. If Dimbaza is the only place offered, of course people will queue to get there — so would you and I. Thus, talk of many applications to come to resettlement townships only underlines the injustices of the total situation.

Several people have been moved to compassion by the plight of people in the resettlement townships and have written to ask how they can help. They appreciate that 'charity and hand-outs' alone, though necessary, are not a satisfactory

solution to the problems of poverty. I have pondered over this question a great deal.

Over the last months I have come to realise that resettlement townships like Dimbaza are not just isolated examples of human suffering, but symptoms of the sickness of our whole South African society. Dimbaza has become for me a symbol of the cancer of racial discrimination, and alas this disease will not be healed by covering up the scandal with minor improvements and adjustments to the whole resettlement policy.

Thus when people ask how they can help, I now feel I ought to point them to their local situation, their own backyard, to their own African township. In an important sense the problem is one; the disease is the same. It is therefore my considered opinion that each individual who is anxious to help solve the problems of the resettlement townships, would be best advised to get involved in the crying needs of the township nearest at hand.

What of the conditions and particular hardships? What of the wages of those I employ? What am I doing about it? What am I prepared to sacrifice to bring about a more responsible society which reflects my Christian convictions?

Where are the 'marks of the nails' in our White Christianity today? We White South African Christians need to examine ourselves against the touchstone of the Gospel demands as they relate to our use of our money and possessions and our use of power. Discrimination on the grounds of colour is an abuse of power, and the abuse of power is a form of violence.

Thus if we, who have power, do nothing to change social structures which oppress, we become guilty of violence, and should not be surprised if the victims respond in self-defence. Moreover, we will also share the guilt of provoking them. African people don't want to rely on our 'charity' — they want work and a just wage. They want their rights.

Tomorrow I will be free to live normally again after six months on R5 per month. I feel brittle and wrung out. I have a great longing and need for a break from it all, like a man about to be released from prison. For most of our Black brothers in Christ, however, there is no release. For too many the situation is intolerable, humiliating, unending.

**Yours sincerely in His service
D. RUSSELL
14 OCTOBER 1972.**



The Pensioner Who Lost His Sons

Mr. J.B. is an elderly sick-pensioner. He gets just over £2.50 per month and so must depend on his sons who work. He used to live with his family near Worcester, until he was removed to a resettlement township because he was told 'the Cape is for Coloureds (and whites) and the Bantu must move'. His sons became migrants and after a time he lost effective contact with them.

'I used to have them right in front of me, but now they are elsewhere and I have no influence'.

POPULATIONS' REMOVAL PROTEST IN PARLIAMENT

Mr. Eric Winchester, MP for Port Natal, warned Parliament that the actions of the Department of Community Development were creating bitterness and hate which was a worse threat to the security of the State than anything else.

The 'monstrous acts' of the department in forcibly removing people from their homes while the country's housing shortage was getting worse had affected the lives of thousands of ordinary and defenceless people, he said.

'This Department has displayed a callous disregard for human values and its actions have been allowed to go unchecked for too long.'

He continued: 'The attitude in the townships which we have created is frightening. The slums and ghettos we have created are breeding bitterness which is a threat to our security.'

'Frustration is leading to bitterness, bitterness to hate and hatred to crime and the breaking down of law and order. 'In our mania to separate we have created scars in every city and in the minds of the people.'

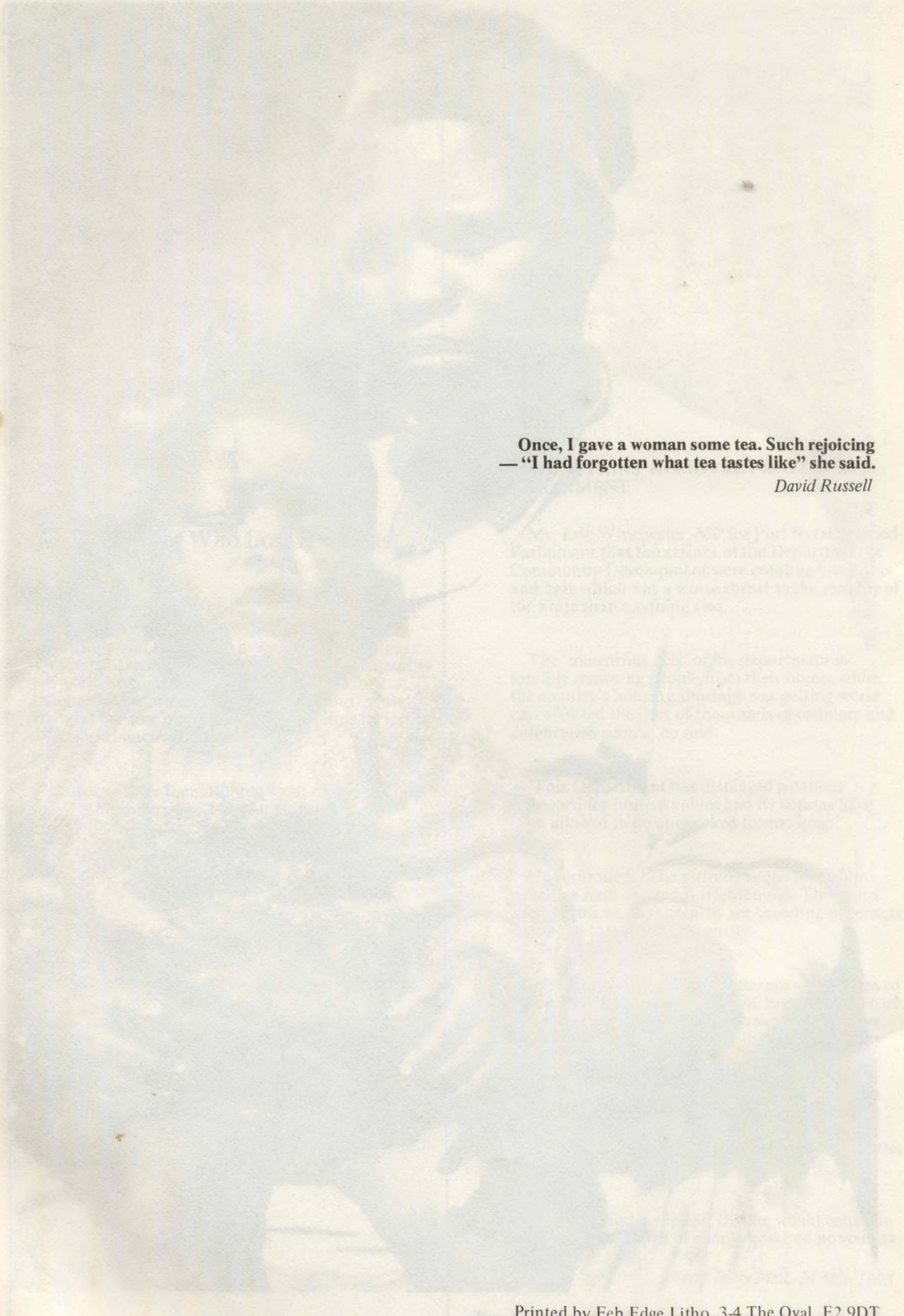
Mr. Winchester was strongly attacked by Nationalists who accused him of inciting racial hatred and of delivering a speech 'loaded with hate, frustration and venom.'

Mr. Winchester replied, that he would continue to fight for the rights of people who had no voice in Parliament.

Rand Daily Mail, 24 May 1973



There was no more medicine at the clinic for Mandla.



**Once, I gave a woman some tea. Such rejoicing
— “I had forgotten what tea tastes like” she said.**

David Russell

The following is a transcript of a speech given by the author to the House of Commons in 1971. It is a transcript of a speech given by the author to the House of Commons in 1971. It is a transcript of a speech given by the author to the House of Commons in 1971.

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Russell lived off the pension

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Koornhof visited Sada
to ease this misery?
that women and children
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resettlement camp.

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A typical caller at Mr
Russell's door is Mrs
Twala. Her husband is

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gone

Studies in the
Mass Removal of Population
in South Africa

Africa Publications Trust
48 Grafton Way
London W1P 5LB

50p

Collection Number: A3299

Collection Name: Hilda and Rusty BERNSTEIN Papers, 1931-2006

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