



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

With the compliments of THE PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

January 17th, 1952.

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON SQUATTER RESETTLEMENT

Broadcast Explanation by Hon. K.M.A. Barnett

The following is the text of a broadcast given last night by the Chairman of the Urban Council, the Hon. K.M.A. Barnett on Government's new overall policy for the resettlement of squatters in the Colony.

The talk was given by Mr. Barnett, both in English and Chinese, over Radio Hong Kong and Rediffusion. The text is as follows:-

Resettlement of Squatters.

In tomorrow's Government Gazette there appears the text of a new set of Regulations made under the Emergency Regulations Ordinance (Chapter 241) and denominated the Emergency (Resettlement Areas) Regulations, 1952.

A NEW POLICY. The passing of these regulations inaugurates a new policy for dealing with what has received a great deal of attention from Government and from the Press — the squatter problem. The time is therefore fit for a few remarks about this problem which Government is now attempting to solve by new methods. These remarks will try to make it clear, not only what Government is going to do but also — since there has been a lot of unauthorised and inaccurate rumour-mongering — what Government is not going to do.

WITHOUT HASTE OR HEAT. I must right away make it clear that Government is not going to start a series of immediate general clearances. Each squatter has got to be turned into a non-squatter, but many of them can remain on their present sites and even with those who must move, nobody is to move until he can be resettled. There are a huge number of them, these squatters, and the job has got to be tackled a bit at a time, without haste or heat. So to those of my listeners

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who are squatters, I say: stay where you are until I tell you otherwise, and don't worry.

SQUATTERS WITHOUT KNOWING IT. To those of my listeners who are not squatters, I must first explain: what is a squatter? The term has been used in different senses in different parts of the English-speaking world. In Hong Kong it means basically anyone who lives in a house or hut erected without lawful authority on Crown Land, on private agricultural land, or on someone else's building land. Strictly speaking anybody who occupies in the urban area a building of which the plans have not been approved by the Building Authority could be described as a squatter. It follows that many people are squatters without being aware of it, having paid to buy or rent the hut or house put up by another squatter or by the proprietor of an agricultural lot. This is one of the reasons why Government has from time to time published warnings to the public not to buy or rent land or premises without satisfying themselves that the person they are paying good money to has a good title.

A PAYING PROPOSITION. Second, what is a squatter not? Well, generally, he is not a destitute. Surveys carried out by the Social Welfare Office show that while most squatters are poor, the great majority have regular means of support and a few are in quite affluent circumstances. Some, indeed, actually own house property in town and have adopted the squatter life as a paying proposition. So that not only are our squatters generally not destitute, in some cases they are not even homeless. Quite a number of them came here as refugees from civil war in North and Central China; others again were Hong Kong people "squeezed out" of their former homes by richer immigrants — or, in not a few cases, having turned an honest penny by subletting their former homes to richer immigrants. And there is a hard core who have always been Hong Kong squatters — for there have been squatters almost as long as there has been Hong Kong.

A VICIOUS CIRCLE. Fundamentally the present squatter problem is a function of the housing shortage. But it is in addition a factor of the same housing shortage. For a squatter settlement, even of so-called "wild" squatters

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their appalling squalor and overcrowding, is a most uneconomical way of occupying land. For example, the pilot Housing Scheme at Sheung Li Uk will provide cheap housing for 270 working class families; the site formerly accommodated about half that number of families jammed tight in squatter huts. So that it may be said that everyone who puts a squatter hut on a possible building site is helping to deprive of their chance of proper housing not only his family but at least one other family besides. This has become a vicious circle, with squatting causing more squatting. This consideration alone would justify a mighty effort being made to remove squatters from the urban area.

NOISOME POOLS AND ANCIENT FESTERING HEAPS. In addition the "wild" squatter settlements are a standing menace to public health. Most of the inhabitants make a desperate and pathetic attempt to keep themselves and their huts clean and tidy, and to cooperate with the staff of the Sanitary Department in removing rubbish and filth from the area. But among these haphazard masses of huts, without proper drainage and often with no water but what trickles down hillside nullahs, it is impossible to carry out thorough cleansing or scavenging, and so every squatter area harbours, in inaccessible corners, noisome pools and ancient festering heaps of house refuse, food waste, human and animal faeces; a perpetual reservoir of infection, in which flies, cockroaches, mosquitoes and rats multiply unchecked. There are also many wild dogs, mangy, starving, ownerless -- and of course unlicensed, unmuzzled and un-inoculated, keeping alive the rabies menace which would otherwise by now be under control. The risk of fire is common knowledge: in wooden huts, packed together in hundreds, the family rice is cooked over open fires. It needs only one chatty to be overturned and a score of huts are in flames. It is true that in these squatter hut fires lives are seldom lost; but each one means the loss of the pitifully few possessions that the inhabitants possessed, and make the struggle for existence just that much grimmer.

RISK TO NEIGHBOURING HOUSES. Furthermore these "wild" squatters in many places crowd closely round proper domestic buildings; whose occupants are thereby exposed to great risk of fire, and of disease from the filth, flies, cockroaches and other vermin harboured by their squatter neighbours.

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DENS OF VICE. Finally it need hardly be added that the "wild" squatter settlements may be a serious danger to public order. With their rabbit-warren pattern they afford safe harbourage to the fugitive from justice, the gangster, the returned banished; they abound in opium divans, gambling hells and dens of every description of vice; arms and stolen property are easily hidden there; almost any kind of illegal activity can be planned, if not in comfort, at least with small risk of discovery. Squatter settlements can start off epidemics of crime as well as of disease.

MONEY BACK IN TWELVE MONTHS. Why do people become squatters? For three chief reasons. Firstly, there are the relatively small number already mentioned, who have other places to live but find it pays them to be squatters; these, too, are sometimes the shopkeepers and petty "landlords" of the settlements, putting up for a few hundred dollars illegal shacks whose prime cost is recovered in rent over twelve months or less. On this class no sympathy need be wasted; the only problem is to identify them. A second, large class are those whom high rents and the key money racket have forced into squatter areas (though key money can be charged for a squatter hut too!) For these the long-term solution is plenty of cheap housing, preferably non-profit schemes by employers, by subsidised housing societies and by cooperatives. Lastly, and perhaps most deserving of sympathy, are the sturdy individualists, of whom both China and Britain produce so many, who would rather own a hovel than rent a palace.

WONDERFUL RESOURCEFULNESS. The short term solution to the problem of the 2nd class, and the permanent solution to that of the 3rd, is clearly to set aside an area or areas where they can occupy small houses or huts of simple design, but adequate to maintain human standards of decency and health; so planned and laid out as to limit the fire hazard, facilitate cleansing and scavenging, and — most important of all — by allowing some security of tenure to restore and so build up the morale of the former squatters as tolerable all their wonderful energy, resourcefulness and stoical courage to be turned into useful channels of livelihood, instead of being squandered in a futile struggle against the elements, against the eternal dilemma of fire and disease, and against authority.

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squatters have all the attributes of good citizenship, except the circumstances that make citizenship possible. Can they not be given the chance?

THE WAKEFIELD PLAN. Last December Mr. J.T. Wakefield, then Deputy Social Welfare Officer, was appointed to conduct a survey to establish, first, the approximate number of people living in squatter areas and to find, second, sufficient areas where that number of people could be allowed to resettle under improved conditions on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. The plan evolved from his survey is known as the Wakefield Plan.

TOLERABLE CONDITIONS OF LIVING. The survey was completed in March and showed that there were about 500,000 squatters living in some 47,000 wooden shacks, scrap-metal hovels or sub-standard stone or brick houses. Areas were available near town where this approximate number of squatters could be resettled in the desired conditions. Unfortunately a good deal of work was, and much remains, necessary before most of those areas could be opened for settlement. Many of them had no water, or not enough. Others were difficult of access. The largest areas must be provided with the essential municipal services, with police posts and with at least those facilities absolutely necessary to enable the settlers to maintain tolerable conditions of living. Finally staff had to be engaged and trained to take charge of the formidable migration, to screen and record each squatter family, to supervise the moves and finally to administer the new settlements. The plan suffered a grave setback in the untimely death of Mr. W.R. Myers, C.B.E., only a month after he had been appointed Chief Resettlement Officer.

NO EASY LIFE. It must now be made clear that Government is not going to set up vast relief camps, nor to provide free homes in beautiful scenery for everyone who was once a squatter. Although much sympathy is felt for the squatters, every one is a law-breaker, and there are no rewards for law-breaking. Preparation of the areas will cost over four million dollars, and their administration a million and a half annually. Some of that cost must be recovered by charging for the sites (the fee will include water) and these must be paid in advance. The resettled squatter will have to build his own hut or hire somebody

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to build it for him. Life in the settlements will at first be pretty tough. Government will police them, remove refuse and nightsoil and do its best to keep down flies and mosquitoes -- and pariah dogs. There will be water, but it will be strictly rationed -- in some places 2 gallons a head daily. It is hoped, but cannot yet be promised, to establish schools and clinics in the biggest, isolated areas. But this will all take time and money. The minor amenities that make so much difference to life will have to be provided by the settlers themselves.

TWO KINDS OF SETTLEMENT. Of the new settlements there are to be two kinds. One will be on the lines of the Urban Council's existing settlements at King's Park and Healthy Village, North Point. Candidates for these are required to put up small houses or bungalows of a variety of approved designs, suitable for permanent occupation. The cost of one of these houses varies according to size and materials used from \$1,200 to \$3,000. In these areas it may be possible to organise a kind of housing scheme whereby bungalows can be built for sale or hire-purchase to approved settlers at controlled prices; if this proves possible it will be a great help to those who though otherwise qualified for admission, cannot put their hands on the money all at once. A small monthly fee will be charged for the right to occupy a site, and admission is as far as possible restricted to class three -- the sturdy individualists who have been in the Colony for some time and may be regarded as permanent citizens. These areas are small, containing from a few score to a few hundred houses, and while an officer of the Sanitary Department is placed in control of each area -- or in the case of the smallest, of a number of areas -- every encouragement is given to the settlers to form committees to manage their own affairs. The other kind of settlement, for which at present only 3 suitable areas have been found, is a much larger affair in which each family will be given, for a very small annual or half-yearly fee, about 400 sq. ft. of ground on which to erect almost any type of hut not exceeding 170 sq. ft. which complies with a basic minimum standard laid down by the health authorities. Huts have already been built by the department which comply with these standards and which when made of wood

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with a brick kitchen cost about \$800 to build, and settlers will be urged to keep as closely to this design as their means will allow. Each of this kind of settlement will be administered by a resident supervisor, with an officer in control of and residing in each section of about 500 huts. Only experience will show to what extent the formation of settlers' committees is possible in these areas. In any case it is hoped that this type of settlement, which is intended to cater for class 2 and for the temporary refugee, will not be permanent: the class two type of settler will move out into workers' housing schemes as these are completed, and the temporary refugee will return to his home when conditions become settled. In both types of settlement there will be certain conditions of occupancy which must be agreed to and observed by every settler. These are necessary for the protection of the settler himself, for the prevention of rackets and gross abuses, and will be enforced with sympathy and moderation.

REQUIREMENTS NOT EASY. It has been mentioned that only three suitable areas have been found for the large semi-permanent settlements. A little thought will show that the requirements for such a settlement are not easy to meet. It must not occupy an area suitable for a permanent housing scheme, because, as already explained, permanent housing schemes are a much more economical use of the land and must be given priority if the problem of the class two squatter is ever to be permanently solved. Each settlement must be large, because being only semi-permanent they require much closer administration, which is not practicable in a multiplicity of little hamlets. Therefore they cannot in general be put in the heart of the urban area, unlike the small permanent settlements previously described which can be tucked away in any suitable parcel of land. But neither can they be set too far from the fringe of the town, for the settlers have got to get to and from their work, which is usually in town, and cannot be expected to travel great distances.

LARGE AREAS NOT READY. Quite a lot of work remains to be done on the large areas before they can be opened as settlements of the second type. The Ho Man Tin area is already practically full of squatters who were there before the new

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policy was determined, and these will mostly be allowed to remain as approved settlers though the area will be properly planned and some movements will be necessary. A few squatters have also settled in Chai Wan, but no more have been allowed in since the area was taken over and these again may have to be moved in conformity with an approved lay-out.

INDUSTRIES. I have not said anything about industries. Many of the existing squatter areas have factories of various kinds in their midst, giving employment. Although these factories are illegally established and conditions in many of them are appalling, it is recognised that something must take their place. The answer may be cottage industries or cooperatives and this is being gone into.

THE REGULATIONS. The Regulations are very straightforward and need little explanation. They give the Urban Council power to set aside pieces of Crown Land as resettlement areas, to grant permits to approved persons for the erection of buildings in these areas, to charge fees and impose conditions for such permits, and in the event of a breach of those conditions or failure to pay the fees charged to evict the offender and demolish his hut without compensation. The Council has discretion to waive a breach of conditions and, in cases where the building can be taken over by another approved settler, to pay compensation. The Council may also make Rules (which must be confirmed by the Legislative Council in the same way as Urban Council by-laws) governing the details of building, sanitation, and so forth. Since buildings in the resettlement areas are exempt from the provisions of the Buildings Ordinance it will be necessary to fill the gap by special rules in making which the Council will no doubt be generally guided by the Director of Public Works who is a member of the Council; similarly any factories and workshops which may be permitted in the areas will not be subject to the Factories and Workshops Ordinance but to special rules made after consultation with the Commissioner of Labour. In addition to the general penalties of eviction and demolition, power is given to impose specific penalties for breaches of rules. A set of general conditions is contained in a Schedule and the Council is also empowered to impose special conditions. One general condition specifically prohibits private transfer or subletting; another

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forbids the use of any premises in the areas for the sale or use of dangerous drugs, etc. and it is the intention to use this condition to enforce immediate eviction of anybody who keeps an opium den or a brothel in any resettlement area.

MODERATION AND COMMONSENSE. The regulations, in short, give all the powers thought necessary to establish the elements of administration in the resettlement areas. To ensure that these wide powers are used with moderation and commonsense they have been given not to me or to any other single officer but to the Urban Council, a body, which as you all know has an unofficial majority and has established a record of quiet efficiency in matters which affect the everyday life of every citizen. The Council will probably establish a Select Committee to which, in the usual way, a large part of its functions can be delegated.

There is a general right of appeal by way of petition to the Governor-in-Council, but it is specifically provided that such an appeal will not mean a stay of execution.

Admission to the settlements will be, as now, on the recommendation only of the Social Welfare Office.

NO WHOLESALE CLEARANCE. It was originally intended that this legislation should be brought into force when the large areas were ready. But the necessity to provide urgently for the resettlement of those rendered homeless by the recent fire at Tung Tau Village requires the immediate organisation of a number of settlements of the smaller permanent type, and it is therefore expedient to promulgate the regulations now. But as I have already said, this does not mean that an immediate general clearance of squatters is to begin. The areas will be taken into use as they can be made ready and water and access roads provided; and when the time comes to begin clearance of those places which are to be cleared, the squatters in them will be warned to remove as space is provided for them, and not before.

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January 30th, 1952.

ROTHMAN K.M.A. BARNETT DETAILS GOVERNMENT PLANS

FOR SQUATTER RESETTLEMENT

A very intimate picture of the problems thrust upon the Hong Kong Government by the descent of refugees into the Colony since the war, particularly in the matter of re-housing them, and the detailed plan the Colony's administrators have drawn up to try and satisfy the needs of these thousands of unfortunate - from the realistic point of view of housing, administration, sanitation and the general humanitarian aspects - was given by the Hon. K.M.A. Barnett, Chairman of the Urban Council at a meeting of Hong Kong Notarials yesterday (Wednesday).

Recalling that he had recently made a broadcast, both in Chinese and English on this subject, Rotarian Barnett pointed out that a squatter was not generally a destitute, nor necessarily homeless, nor always a refugee but simply someone who, whether in ignorance or open defiance of the law, lived in a house or hut erected without lawful authority on Crown land, on private agricultural land, or on someone else's building land.

The word "land" was used in its legal sense - squatters were found on the roofs of houses, in derelict buildings, in cemeteries excavated below basements, in malleys and conduits, under bridges, and all sorts of places not usually described simply as "land". But the general idea he wished to convey was that every squatter was a trespasser and a contravener of the law.

There were lawbreakers and lawbreakers and there were squatters and squatters. In the vast majority of cases it would do no good simply to prosecute. A lot of squatters had bought or rented the huts where they lived in the honest belief that the "landlord" had a good legal title and had complied with all the requirements of the law. But most squatters were "mugs" and "suckers" - it was the people who had battered onto them that he was concerned with.

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GOVERNMENT'S GOVERNMENT

Recalling his broadcast, Mr. Barnett said that Government was spending over four million dollars capital expenditure and about a million and a half annually recurrent on a scheme for the resettlement of all urban area squatters - 300,000 of them - in 19 or more areas of which most would be permanent "housing schemes" of a simple nature, and a few - three or four very large areas - would be only semi-permanent settlements of a pretty primitive type.

After referring to press comment on Government's scheme, Mr. Barnett said that he was certainly confident in the basic soundness and common sense of the plan, and confidence in the officers to whom its implementation had been entrusted, but between confidence and common sense there was a great distinction. With good will and co-operation of all concerned, with self-forgetting labour, with kindness and generosity, with cheerful zeal in the face of difficulty and discouragement, and above all with readiness at all times to admit error and think again, the plan would succeed.

But there should be no doubt about either its magnitude or its object. He reminded Rotarians that the whole Colony half a century ago numbered little more than the present estimated squatter population. The task of resettling them demanded stout hearts and broad backs. And the object of the plan was not just to remove them; it was to integrate them into stable and valuable community units.

Quoting his mind back three years ago, Mr. Barnett reminded his listeners that at that time over 200,000 squatters were in the central built up area, living in shacks and timber hovels on bombed-out sites, or on roof-tops, right in the heart of the town. They all remembered the big squatter fires of the last twelve months but who remembered the Bridges Street fire? It was touch and go for the houses in O'Connell Road, and if they had caught light heaven knew where the thing would have stopped. Nearly a quarter of a million squatters had been winked out from those ultra-dangerous spots and sent out to the edges of the town. That was a most valuable and difficult operation.

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achieved with the minimum of hardship and without the use of force. And small part of the confidence he had expressed derived from the fact that the hard-working and efficient officers of the Sanitary Department who carried out that move were still with him to assist in the new project, of which their earlier work was the foundation.

Lessons From Earlier Experience

From that earlier work they had learnt a lot about the economic conditions of the squatters, how they lived, why they were squatters, and so on; and they had therefore had plenty of time to recognise one great difficulty which was going to face the squatters themselves; and that was the cost in money and physical effort of re-establishing themselves in the new settlements. A large percentage of them had the money, a larger percentage thought they could collect it; a still larger percentage built their own huts and had only to pull them down and re-erect them on the sites now to be allocated to them. For those there was no great problem. But there were those who could not.

"We are doing all we can in the way of laying on transport, and saving them money by bulk purchase of building materials. But that, broadly speaking is the limit of Government's help. I could digress at some length here on the so-called 'responsibilities of Government'. It has been suggested that Government ought to build 48,000,000 dollars worth of approved bungalows and give them to the squatters. We could have a long and interesting debate on this question, which is complicated from the start by the paradox, pointed out by more than one expert, of a city without citizens. I don't want to fog the issue more than I can help on this point. I offer only one thought: Hong Kong is like a heart whose function is to pump international trade through the circulatory system of which it is the centre. To whom, then, is the heart's first duty? To the muscle-cells of which it is itself comprised, or to the other vital organs and limbs at the extremities of the same system?"

Mr. Barnett continued that it must be assumed out of the question for Government to intervene directly either by building those houses, by lending money to others to build them, or by guaranteeing a loan for the same purpose.

But this did not exhaust the possibilities. As good a result - indeed in most ways a better result - could be achieved by the organization of a Building Society which would build the houses on land made available by Government - the land was already available - for resale; letting at approved rentals, or hire-purchase to those people selected by the S.W.O. and himself for resettlement who could not themselves afford to build. For such a Building Society there were three pre-requisites. First, the Society must be controlled by prominent and well-trusted personages; second, it must have access to sufficient funds which were either freely subscribed, or lent philanthropically for subsequent repayment without interest, or finally lent as a low-interest-bearing debenture if, as was to be expected, the amounts available by the first two methods were insufficient. Third, there must be only one Society of the kind, established under the Companies Ordinance or by a special enactment, and run in accordance with strict rules under public scrutiny.

To explain these, he thought he must generalize and talk for a moment about the distressing subject of racism. It was a great pity that people were so slow to learn from the mistakes of others - but it was no surprise, since they were just as slow to learn by their own mistakes. In public services in England it was established over many years of trial and error that to provide the public with that most precious possession - an honest public service, three things were necessary; every public servant must be carefully selected from a class or section of the society which had, as a tradition, the idea that to be chosen to serve the public was the highest honour life had to offer, in about that public service was its own reward; second, he must be prepared on selection to put behind him all other desires and ambitions - riches, honour, even politics, contenting himself with the reward which the work itself constitutes and the modest sufficiency allowed him by way of emoluments - which must, nevertheless, be always enough to ensure that sufficiency; and third, having selected him with such care and assurance that he had a reasonable sufficiency and no political or other affiliations, to surround him with a system of checks and counter-checks so that the smallest deviation from the standard of absolute honesty would be at once detected and the offender cast out. Tradition,

In considering the needs of a big organization such as the one for the rehoming of ex-convicts, the same three rules obviously have to apply. He contended he was right in insisting that the organization they were seeking, which would perform the functions of a Housing Society in the new settlements, should have the same three safeguards: Those controlling its affairs must be well known and respected persons who would not lend their names to anything on the smallest degree questionable. The motive must be public service and only to a secondary and limited degree profit. And the checks and safeguards must be pretty well those of a public department; and that meant that there could only be one organization of the kind.

Mr. Barnett told his audience that discussions were already in progress with public-spirited gentlemen who would be happy, he hoped, to join forces in that venture.

in that venture.

"I am breaking no confidences in mentioning the general lines which have been proposed to me - they are still only general lines and much more has to be done before they can be drawn up as formal proposals and submitted to Government's legal and financial advisors for examination. The Society requires a capital of about five million dollars. As much as possible will come it is hoped in the form of non-interest bearing Members' Shares: the remainder will have to be interest-bearing Debentures. Control of the Society, subject to the safeguards - which will have to include a safeguard against modification of the Society's articles without the prior consent of Government - will be in the hands of the Members, that is to say, of those who have subscribed the non-interest bearing shares. The whole of the subscribed capital, and of all profits after payment of debenture interest and provision for gratification of shareholders, will go into the building of approved buildings, shops and cottage