

SUNDAY TRIBUNE, JANUARY 14, 1990

Scrap the Group Areas Act soon — estate agents

Sam Sole

THE Group Areas Act is crumbling and should be scrapped as soon as possible.

That's the verdict from prominent Durban estate agents this week, who said the Act was unworkable in principle and overtaken by events in practice.

Tony Dix of RMS Syfrets said the issue had been dealt with in the latest issue of the firm's in-house magazine.

Under the headline: "Grasping the Nettle" the Syfrets editorial noted: "We do not express an opinion as to the morality of this legislation. All we know is that the Act is in tatters."

"It is broken every day and in particular by ownership and occupation by the 'wrong' racial groups of people ... often through ingenious subterfuge, but more often by the practice of turning a blind eye."

Emphasising practical considerations, Syfrets said: "We believe that in

the circumstances the Act should be scrapped entirely, because it has fallen into disrepute."

Mr Dix said rapid change was taking place and could not be stopped: "Albert Park is already a grey area; landlords are faced with either accepting non-white tenants or having empty flats. On the beachfront wealthy Indians are buying properties through white nominees, anticipating price increases once the Act is scrapped."

Quoting the editorial, he said the effects of a repeal of the Act would hinge on the unpredictable criterion of discipline.

If the changed character of occupants resulted in overcrowding, nuisance and poor hygienic standards, the long-term results would be detrimental to ownership value.

"Once skin colour loses its legal

importance, then acceptable standards must take its place. What is 'acceptable' is largely a matter of opinion, but the standards should apply no matter what the colour of the skin.

"Above all, contracts and laws must be enforced promptly without orchestrated protest, fear or favour."

Mr Dix said he felt ordinary leases provided enough scope for laying down standards: "In any case, of the thousands of flats around (occupied by non-whites) there is only a tiny percentage where there has been a problem."

Other agents were more cautious: "It's an invidious law which

should go," said Jenny Marwick of Acutts. "But I'm totally against deceit. Owners must be totally aware of who they are selling to or will have occupying their property. If owners wish to accept the responsibility that's fine, but we insist things should be upfront."

The Durban Central Residents' Association (DCRA) has praised the more open approach taken by estate agents.

"I feel we have achieved a breakthrough with two or three of the big agencies," said DCRA chairman Iqbal Molehane. "It seems generally the attitude of their clients has changed, be it for economic reasons or not."