

OUR VIEWPOINT

NEED FOR URBAN LAND

THERE'S an irony about the debate on land, and that is while the big debate is about expropriation of farms, the real pressure for land is around the cities and towns.

Human Settlements and Public Works MEC Ravi Pillay offered a glimpse last week, during his budget speech, of how acute the pressure is. There are, he revealed, 743 informal settlements in the province, and counting. Of these, most, as

one would expect, are in eThekweni, where there are 547, while around uMgungundlovu there are 97. Economic prospects determine the attractiveness of places to migrants, and the cities are not geared towards accommodating or regulating the growing numbers of people drifting off rural land. One result of this is land invasions, either passive in nature where encroachment occurs as a result of pressure, or more active and concerted,

as in the campaign by the shackdweller movement Abahlali baseMjondolo.

The demand for land often goes together with a need for housing, and the bottleneck caused by the government's inability to provide either inevitably fuels frustration and anger.

The eThekweni solution has historically been forcibly to remove informal settlers, court orders notwithstanding. With nothing to offer instead,

this policy was never likely to succeed and the sheer numbers provided by Pillay prove it.

The premier of Gauteng, David Makhura, has proposed a *quid pro quo* which he hopes will bring some order and calm to the problems on his doorstep.

He will be offering land for free to people who can build houses for themselves. A tour of Pietermaritzburg or Durban will show just how many

people do this anyway.

How it will solve other pressing questions is not clear. How are services going to be rolled out, given that this is not happening to anyone's satisfaction as it is? How are rates to be collected?

It's anyone's guess how this will work, but at least it's an attempt to find a way through a problem that is growing by the day.