

In July this year another 'black spot' in Natal was eliminated by the state: Kwapitela, the small, isolated community near Sani Pass in the Drakensberg, bought by Pitela Hlophe in 1900 and lived on by his descendants and their tenants ever since. (For an account of Kwapitela before it was moved, see AFRA Report No.5, October 1980). Government officials moved onto the farm early on the 2nd July, with a fleet of about 80 trucks and a huge crew of workers (non-Zulu speaking, brought down especially from the Transvaal). Most of the 630 people at Kwapitela had already resigned themselves to being moved; when the trucks finally arrived, they submitted stoically to the demolition of their houses, loading what they could salvage from the rubble and the dust onto the waiting trucks - windows, thatch, sheets of tin roofing, doors and poles and fencing.

For two days the trucks roared backwards and forwards between Kwapitela and the resettlement camp of Compensation - cynically named, 70 km away near Impendle on a farm bought by the government as a resettlement site for the thousands of people still living on black freehold land in the Underberg/Mpendle districts. (For a description of this camp, see AFRA Report No. 6, October 1980). When the trucks stopped and the dust had settled, almost all the tenants at Kwapitela had been physically shifted, dumped with their furniture in this foreign place. Their former home was in ruins - a bitter landscape of abandoned gardens, derelict houses and ragged, crumbling walls. Only a handful of landowners and a few other families remained, awaiting their turn to be moved at a date "still to be determined" according to Dr Koornhof, Minister of Cooperation and Development (Question No. 441, Hansard 10, 1981).

At Compensation the newcomers appeared more dazed than anything else. As each family arrived, it was allocated a site with a tin latrine, the standard one-room 'fletcraft' - a temporary tin hut, some not even fully erected as their occupants arrived - and one or two tents. It was winter, dry and dusty and bitterly cold at night. People's first concern was to store their belongings and secure their own shelter as best they could. Only later, once the initial shock of the removal had worn off, did they begin to take stock and the implications of what had happened to them became more clear. Six weeks after they had been moved, AFRA interviewed 54 households (almost a complete survey) about their attitudes to the new place and the compensation they had received. The manner of their removal raises many issues but the rest of this Report will deal with only two that were highlighted by that survey: the inadequacy of the compensation most households received, and the coercive nature of the removals.

Compensation: Kwapitela was a farm and it supported a rural lifestyle. Although most households depended on the earnings of wage workers (over half of them commuting to work locally), they also gained a vital supplement to their incomes from their land. Almost every household had a vegetable garden; 90% had fruit trees (an average of 8 trees each); most had fields and 60% of them owned cattle. The grazing was good, the land under-utilised in relation to its potential. Earlier this year a qualified land evaluator visited the farm and assessed the land at R200 an acre, noting that it was of good quality and superior to several white farms in the neighbourhood. People were well-housed, in sturdy wattle and daub buildings. Many houses were painted, several wallpapered inside. A typical homestead consisted of a 3- or 4-roomed square house, with a tin roof, and 1 or 2 thatched rondavels as well. In 1980 AFRA asked people to estimate the value of their houses; their replies averaged out at R880 per family, an amount that did not include any of their significant agricultural assets.

The compensation money people received on being resettled did not begin to cover what

they had lost. According to the AFRA survey, the average compensation paid was R380 per household. According to Dr Koornhof (Question No. 441, Hansard 10) it was R430 - R50 more than the AFRA average (but then he did have the date of the removal wrong: 4th July instead of the 2nd and 3rd), still less than half what the community had estimated their houses to be worth, on average, in 1980. A geographer at the University of Natal has calculated that currently it costs about R150 to erect a one-roomed, thatched rondavel. With their money, then, the people of Kwapitela could probably erect a small wattle and daub house, smaller than what they had had before: they could not, however, recoup the losses they had suffered in land, trees and access to employment, nor replace the goods damaged in the process of being moved. Nor could their compensation provide them with any bulwark against the pressures of living in a totally cash-dependent environment where, for the first time, "a person has to pay for everything".

There are other discrepancies too. Those that AFRA interviewed maintain that they did not know beforehand what compensation to expect; they did not get any official letter of assessment nor any chance to appeal for more money. Payment was made in cash, as they arrived. "There was not much said. They would just shout out one's name as per folio number and summon him to the temporary office. On arrival you were just given a certain amount of money and there was no further discussion". Only 2 out of the 54 households were satisfied with the money they got; also disturbing, some recipients felt there were irregular underpayments and have complained that on the second day the payout clerks were not supervised. Yet Dr Koornhof has claimed, in answer to questions in Parliament, that the people were notified beforehand about the amounts they would be paid and knew that they could object if not satisfied. (Question No. 441, Hansard 10). Some lawyers have been approached to try and investigate these issues but it is a tedious, time-consuming business that at this stage means very little to the bulk of the people struggling to re-establish themselves now.

Voluntary or involuntary removal? No more forced removals said Dr Koornhof in July 1980, and the local authorities who had been responsible for managing the removal had insisted that the people of Kwapitela wanted to go. "They asked if they could move and they chose the date to move", Mr Jonker, Press Liaison Officer of the Dept of Cooperation and Development told reporters on the Natal Witness (16/7/81). On the face of it, the people did go "voluntarily" - in the sense that nobody had to use force to load them onto the GG trucks, while during the almost 2 years of sporadic meetings between the local magistrate and the community which preceded the removal, nobody from Kwapitela spoke out strongly or clearly against being moved. (When a landowner tried to object at one meeting, the magistrate cut him short saying that the matter did not concern him: only tenants were involved at that stage).

AFRA's contact with the community during this time suggests a very different interpretation of these facts from the official one, however. At 2 community meetings attended by AFRA in late 1980, people spoke - hesitatingly - of their fear of being seen to oppose the government, or intimidatory warnings they had received not to have any dealings with outside "agitators", of ignorance about what the law said they could and could not do, of mistrust between tenants and landowners, of reluctance by those women whose husbands were migrant workers to make any decision about the future while their husbands were away. "We did not like to go because we were born here; it was only that we heard that the government wanted it and we submitted to that," was how one woman put it. When the magistrate came on 6th November 1980 to fix a date for the removal, people were too scared to ask for a halt to the plan. They asked instead not to be moved then, because they had already planted their summer crops. The magistrate's response, as reported to AFRA, was that they should contact him after the harvest, to let him know when they would be ready to go. At least one person interpreted this to mean that they were safe: that all they had to do to ensure that they would not be moved, was not report to the magistrate. In the event, the magistrate came back anyway, in late June 1981, and in July the removal began.

The responses of the people AFRA interviewed after they had been moved, reinforce this interpretation: that the great majority of people moved not because they wanted to but because they did not have, and did not believe they had, the resources with which to challenge an all-powerful government. In answer to the question "Are you glad to be here?," only 8 people (15%) responded positively. 35 (56%) were negative and 11 (20%) ambivalent, framing their replies with such revealing statements as "We have no way to like it or not". "There is nothing else we can do". "Because there is no alternative, we have accepted this situation", said one. Most people do not like Compensation: most can say nothing positive about it at all - yet over half the people interviewed said the site was as they had expected. "I expected the place not to be good for I have seen and heard of other removals. I had no hope", explained one woman. Without resistance - but without hope either. That is how the people of Kwapitela were removed.