



AFRA

ASSOCIATION FOR RURAL ADVANCEMENT

AFRA NEWSLETTER 9 (FEB. 1991)

CORNFIELDS CELEBRATES REPRIEVAL VICTORY



For the last 25 years, the Cornfields community, a rural freehold area near Estcourt, has been under threat of forced removal. But the residents fought all attempts by the State to relocate them, and in July 1990, the South African government finally conceded defeat; Cornfields would not be removed. To celebrate this victory,

the community organised a feast on the 16th December which was attended by other reprieved freehold areas, supportive organisations and interested individuals. The rural people were also saying farewell to Peter Brown, who is retiring as chairperson of AFRA, and who has supported rural struggles since the 1950s.

The Celebration

A large marquee housed the guests, two beasts were slaughtered, and there were many speeches recording the joy of the reprieved communities. Children and men expressed their delight in dance and song. By late afternoon the crowds had swelled into the thousands.

Representatives of other freehold areas which had also been reprieved from the threat of removal, such as Tembalihle, Matiwane's Kop and Steincoalspruit, attended the feast. Journalists and a video team recorded the occasion.

The S.A. Council of Churches (SACC) sent representatives. Messages of support were received from Archbishop Denis Hurley, and from Beyers Naude, past president of the SACC. Costs were shared between the Archdiocese Development Fund, the Cornfields community and AFRA.

The speeches

Mr Miya of Cornfields outlined the history of their struggle against the policy of forced removals, which had aimed to remove black communities from so-called 'white' land even though many of them had freehold title. Mr Miya and other community representatives thanked the government for the reprievals, and also thanked AFRA and Peter Brown for their many years of support.

Pierre Cronje, Democratic Party M.P., said that a distinction had to be made between the thanks that were said to Brown - who had been a long and loyal friend - and those made to the government, which by contrast had attempted to steal their land.

The communities presented an ox-hide shield to Peter Brown to thank him. Brown, past chairperson of the Liberal Party, was banned for 10 years from 1964, and was one of the founders of AFRA in 1980. In his speech of thanks, Brown remembered other early rural activists, such as Eliot Mngadi of Roosboom.

Richard Clacey of AFRA warned that there were many obstacles ahead for the reprieved communities. Firstly, repeal of the unjust Land Acts will achieve little unless accompanied by means to assist poor rural people to acquire more land. In addition, the government had so far refused to return land to people who, like Roosboom, had been forcibly relocated.

Secondly, Clacey said that the development of the reprieved communities would be a difficult task; rural people would have to remain united to make their voices heard by government. He also paid warm tribute to Brown.

The feast ended with the singing of N'kosi Sikelele iAfrika.



Mr Shabalala (Cornfields),
Sithembiso Gumbi and
Peter Brown (AFRA)

(Laser-printed by AFRA: printer
supplied by the Canadian Embassy)

P.O.Box 2517/170 Berg St.
Pietermaritzburg
3200, S.Africa.

ASSOCIATION FOR RURAL ADVANCEMENT

(0331) 457-607/
458-318/943-732
Fax: 455106