## *What it Means to be Banished*

# SOUTH AFRICA'S SIBERIANS

**By FIELDWORKER**

THE word "ban" has crept into the every-day language of South Africa. *It is a sign* of the times in which we live. But how many of us really understand what is meant by *banishment?* How many of us know that the State President may order any African to leave his domicile and be removed to another place until he is once again permitted to leave?

It is far-reaching, this power to uproot a man *from his family, from his house and his friends,* to take him thousands of miles away to an unknown destination. There are no preliminaries, no warning; the police appear with an order, a piece of paper which changes one's whole life, and one is just told to go.

If you refuse to go voluntarily, you are clapped into handcuffs and taken just the same. There is no appeal. You can ask questions afterwards, when you eventually find out that you *may* ask why you have been banished. But no one tells you that you can ask. In any case, asking "Why?" is just a bitter farce, for invariably the Minister comes back with the same reply, "It is not in the public interest to disclose all the reasons . . ."

### *Died in Exile*

Only Africans are threatened under this scandalous, vicious Native Administration Act No. 39 of 1927. Indians, Coloureds and Whites are not so threatened — not yet. But it is no mere threat to Africans, for the Act has already been used against 116 people during the past twelve years; more than 40 are still in exile, some have already been in exile for more than eight years; 11 have died in exile; 41 have been released — most of them on "probation" with the threat of rebanishment hanging over their heads. Six are still missing and cannot be traced. The Minister has not disclosed their whereabouts. A few have

**Two men in exile: Chief Maci (left) and Chief Miya.**

fled this unkind country and are struggling for existence in other lands.

It is true, of course, that there is nothing to prevent the families from visiting their men, except that there is no money even for food and education, let alone for travelling thousands of miles. The Minister talks glibly in Parliament about families being able to go to their men, but in practice it doesn't happen. Anxious wives have been told that they must be prepared to remain permanently with their exiled husbands if they are to be taken to them. It appears to be a one-way ticket.

This weapon of banishment is cruel, unjust. There is no semblance of a trial or any possibility of defence. One and all, the banished men say today, "What did I do to be banished? Why did I have no trial if I did something wrong?" The answer is clear. The banished were not brought to trial — *because the Authorities could prove no case against these men.*

From time to time the shocking, desolate plight of the men in the camps at Frenchdale or Driefontein is brought to the public notice, through the Press. Heads are shaken and some individuals are stirred by shame and pity and

offer personal help. Then the ripple on the sea of apathy dies away and all is still again. The banished are again forgotten by all save a few.

Little is known of some of the other exiles who are not herded in camps, but scattered far and wide in the remotest parts of our land, in the tip of the Northern Transvaal, in the furthest corner of Zululand. With wicked ingenuity, the Zulu is flung into a Sesuto-speaking area; the man from Zeerust will be sent to King William's Town, or to Gollel, so that even the language is strange and must be learnt. Employment is offered; as a labourer one may earn from R6 to R10 a month — top wage after several years! But sometimes there isn't employment for weeks, months, and then there may or may not be "allowances" which are one Rand in cash and rations, supposed to represent R3 worth of food. Study of rations provided invites the comment that prices in the country must be *very* high, if this is all that can be had for R3! However, reports show that usually the banished people do not even get these allowances when they are unemployed. They exist for weeks on end on the kindness of those amongst whom they have been dumped.

## *Despair and Desolation*

The stories of the banished men are tragic tales of despair and desolation, yet infused with an unbelievable dignity and courage. Whoever has managed to see the banished people comes back with the same comment on their amazing endurance. But some of these stories are only now becoming known, as facts emerge from visits and letters. Nor are visits easy, for these men are not free; they are under strict surveillance, though perhaps not actually guarded, and there is also always the danger of victimisation. Visits from friends are frequently followed by visits from detectives. With an indefinite period of banishment, who knows whether it may not be prolonged?

Perhaps the most shameful story of all is that of the Matlala Reserve. Eight years ago, 20 men and three women were banished from Matlala Reserve; five have already died in exile. Little is known of how they died, but reports of their condition suggest that they probably died of

**"When we get White liquor, will we be allowed to say 'Cheers', or do you think Maree will insist on 'Sakabona' or something?"**

poverty and neglect. Only two of the 23 ever returned to Matlala — both to die within a month. The remaining 18 are scattered all over this land; some are struggling in destitution in Zululand, where two have already died, others are working on Trust farms in the Transkei, or in the Northern Transvaal. One is already an old age pensioner. Oh, yes, he gets his pension now, all of R4.75 every *two* months! And he gets nothing else, except what friends send him. Yet this man fought in East Africa in the 1914-18 War. "I saw Mount Kilimanjaro," he says. Today he is a very old and sick man, but he is still not allowed to go home.

And what of the families of the banished? They are destitute. Sometimes they are not even allowed to plough, and the new Bantu Authorities chiefs have been known to take their land away, burn down or confiscate their huts. Children grow up without education, because there is no money for school fees or clothes. When the families are not allowed to plough they must live on the charity of friends and relations. Stark poverty is their lot, with little hope of future improvement. Even when the banished — some of them — are eventually allowed to go home,

they find ruin and destitution, and must start again — with nothing. And all for no crime, for if crime there were they would have been tried by the Courts.

Three men have been banished from Sekhukhuniland. One was banished for three years, then graciously allowed to return home — only to be banished again, for no given reason, back to the very place where he had already lived out three lonely, unhappy years. What sort of refined torture is this, to return a man to his family after three years and take him away again, back to the horror of banishment? Yet there is worse even than this. The other two men were convicted in the Sekhukhuniland land trials a few years ago and served their sentences. *But, on leaving the gaol they were served with banishment orders,* and taken straight from the gaol to a remote part of Zululand, without being allowed to go home to see their families.

### *They Want to go Home*

The Minister says that the banished people are not held in prison conditions. They are not prisoners, says he. But when one of these banished Sekhukhuni men was visited recently, friends were not allowed to speak to him in his own language without every word being translated into Zulu for the benefit of the three Zulu policemen who remained throughout the visit.

Sometimes these banished men live in exquisitely beautiful surroundings, among waterfalls, mountain streams, luxuriant bush country, or maybe beside the blue Indian ocean. But the greenest of willow trees, the loveliness of the low veld cannot ease the ache in the heart of a man for his home and children. "I want to see my children," they write sadly. "I want to go home."

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*Many readers of this article may feel that they would like to do something practical about the tragic situation disclosed. Further information may be obtained from The Secretary, Human Rights Welfare Committee, P.O. Box 10876, Johannesburg and P.O. Box 59, Claremont, Cape Town.*

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## GOODWILL BRIDGES

*Lady Packer opens Fête*

LADY JOY PACKER, opening the Cape Western region of the Black Sash annual fete on 4th November, described the Sash as a continual irritant to the conscience of our over-privileged society.

"Repressive laws that might have slipped by as far as we were concerned were brought to our notice with all their ugly implications."

While Dr. Verwoerd was raising his granite wall higher every day, the Sash was doing the opposite by building "goodwill bridges" between the races.

"I would go so far as to say that one day, when the storm breaks, the rest of us may depend on those bridges for our survival."

The Sash had also shown itself eager to create greater understanding and harmony between English- and Afrikaans-speaking people.

It was also pressing for a government-sponsored multi-racial national congress at which leaders of all groups could put forward their points of view towards a solution to our problems.

Lady Packer said "legalized apartheid" was the ugly feather in the peacock's tail.

### *Degrading Distinctions*

Foreigners to Cape Town were instantly struck by the degrading distinction of one entrance for Whites and one for non-Whites. How could anyone explain this away as being essential to separate development?

It must seem to the foreigner that the South African believes that if he joins the same queue, and sits next to a non-White in the bus, tram or taxi, he is risking some sort of infection. Yet at home, our most precious heritage, our children, were left in the care of non-white nannies. There is no reasonable explanation for such inconsistencies. If we, in our turn, were isolated from the rest of the world, it was no more than a richly deserved dose of our own medicine.

Lady Packer pointed out that attention was drawn by the Sash to the "heart-rending" implementation of the Group Areas Act. No man's home was his castle here while those in authority