



Howard Cowling and Errol Moorcroft.

The burning question of ecology and the need for urgent action to avoid catastrophic degradation was raised but not carried through sufficiently. Numerous speakers stressed that South Africa had

tions of free and fair transactions and secured individual rights. It had been established by way of physical conquest, detailed and complicated contracts between governors and illiterate chiefs, and in the context of missionary outreach and mineral acquisitions. Once land was obtained it was granted to loyal European citizens.

Claassens said that time and again in the course of her work she had traced the origins of title deeds at the Deeds Office to find the land had been granted by the state to a white person.

Farmers assaulted their workers as a matter of routine, she said, and were so confident of acquittal that they reported the events to the police themselves. This was the case recently when a farmer who had beaten a crippled worker to death was fined R100. "Such incidents are increasing," she added.

Land was taken from people through force and trickery, not through fair practices. The entire system of private property was bound up in racial terms.

She said it was necessary to dwell on this history because similar practices were being recreated daily. The land laws and Group Areas Act were still in force and the present realities in which communities, identified by the government as black spots and in the process of resettlement, struggled to stay on their land were occurring under the cabinet of the current State President.

"We must move the debates away from the ideologically bound reference points to see who is on the land and what is happening there," she said.

In an eloquent historical overview, UCT historian Colin Bundy offered an understanding of the land question in which he identified certain themes which could explain the present situation and constrain future developments.

Firstly, throughout its evolution, capitalist agriculture in South Africa had been an arena of backward and brutal social relations. Until 1980 agriculture was the largest single employer of black labour and farm-

## LAND WORKSHOP

virtually reached a ceiling in terms of available agricultural land and present systems of farming could not be sustained. There were also differences between delegates over what sustainability meant and how to deal with it.

There was consensus, as Mike Savage spelt out during the final session of the conference, on the importance of the rural land issue - whether it be a concern over agriculture, access to land or agrarian relations. Delegates also agreed on the need for concrete actions to effect change, that there was a lack of relevant and detailed information on vital areas (white farming was one such area) and that more case studies were needed which involved people from those specific circumstances.

Sue Valentine is Publications Assistant with Idasa



UCT academic Mike de Klerk who helped organise the conference

workers were the worst paid labour force. In this context, Bundy asked whether it would be possible to retain social relations like these in a different state. Could they be reformed or should they be fundamentally transformed?

Secondly, capitalist agriculture had relied heavily on the state for its development. The supposed "superior efficiency" of capitalist agriculture possibly needed to be revised when considered in the light of state aid and repressive legislation to secure land and labour.

Thirdly, the evolution of capitalist agriculture had taken a long time and non-capitalist methods of farming (such as tenant farmers) had persisted until the early 1960s in some cases. Bundy said the implications of this were that an extremely powerful popular preference for peasant farming remained.

Ultimately, Bundy reduced the situation to two options: can rural social relations be altered significantly enough and the hunger for land addressed if large-scale agriculture is left intact? Or, can the national food supply be sustained and can the countryside feed the cities if things are significantly changed?

To Page 6

# Endangered by freehold

By Sue Valentine

**THE DANGERS** of freehold tenure and the insecurity it ultimately produces for poor people was one of the themes to emerge from a paper on land tenure in black rural areas delivered by Unisa anthropologist Catherine Cross.

She argued for three possible reformed forms of tenure: freehold or individual tenure, which she suggested was safe only for the rich; modified indigenous tenure, the mode for most African forms of tenure; and state leasing, a familiar system under which black people hold land at present, but one which might be difficult to "sell" to the white community.

Cross stressed that it was not necessary to find "THE" tenure system. Most important was to provide security and allow for the creation of flexible and accountable models.

Expanding on her statement about the dangers of freehold tenure, she said people did not realise how easily freehold (in comparison with communal tenure, where security is relatively good) could be lost.

"Freehold land is only secure if people can pay," she said. "All too often freehold land is timebound. People with a low cash flow run high risks of losing their land on a mortgage or because of not being able to pay their taxes . . . An enormous amount of land was lost on mortgages in the late 19th century."

She suggested that in the present situation potential black land owners are attracted by the prospect of freehold tenure because they see whites apparently retaining control of their land on that basis. However, what many aspirant black land owners do not realise is the amount of economic support white landowners receive.

Cross acknowledged that in the present economic climate in South Africa whites too were in danger of losing their properties because of escalating land and housing costs and bond repayments.

Another danger contingent with freehold tenure is the potential erosion of empowerment and equity. Superficially freehold seems to be a fair system, but when land is lost - due to a range of circumstances - it inevitably goes to rich landlords from whom the former landowner then has to seek work as a tenant. The power structures consequently emerging from freehold tenure tend towards the inequitable.

Cross suggested that the violence in Natal was related to the prevailing land tenure system: because much of the land is freehold neither government nor homeland structures can control what happens in such townships. The eruption of physical violence thus emerges from the lack of bureaucratic control the authorities can exert on land owners.