



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC  
OF SOUTH AFRICA

7th February, 1990

The Right Revd. David Russell,  
Bishopsbourne,  
P.O. Box 162,  
GRAHAMSTOWN  
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Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 2nd February concerning the eviction of farm dwellers from Mr. Syd Knott's farm in the Kei Road district. I thank you too, for your concern in drawing this matter to my attention.

First of all, on the question of the Democratic Party's attitude towards summary evictions, neither ourselves nor our predecessors have ever condoned such evictions. As a party committed to Christian liberal principles, we believe in fair and compassionate labour practices. Our record in this regard speaks for itself and cannot be challenged because of the actions of individuals who might or might not be supporters of ours. (Mr. Knott, incidentally, is not a 'local leader of the D.P. on the Border': he holds no office in the party).

Mr. Knott's case has two aspects, it would seem - its relation to the law, and its relation to Mr. Knott's own actions.

The shortcomings of the laws relating to farm-workers are well known, and the D.P. is committed to working for the improvement of these laws. Domestic workers fall into the same category. These shortcomings place an additional responsibility on farmers to act compassionately, particularly with regard to the sensitive matter of relocating people whose services on a farm are no longer required. (Townsfolk have no such responsibilities - they can simply fire their staff and whether or not they have a job, or a home, to go to is no concern of theirs). Until such time as the law has been amended to give adequate protection to farm workers, good-will is their only protection.

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The D.P. accepts the right of employers to discharge workers, but only in terms of the law, and where this law does not exist as yet, then in terms of reasonable norms.

We believe that a "reasonable norm" would be the giving of at least one month's notice, this to be extended if genuine difficulties were being experienced by the labourer.

The D.P. also accepts the right of a farmer to determine who may or who may not live on his farm. This is subject to laws relating to the use of agricultural land - I could not within the terms of the law, accommodate people on my land who did not work for me. Farm land is private land, and to withdraw from a farmer his right to prescribe who might live on it, would place him in an untenable position.

So much for the D.P. What of Mr. Knott? I have spoken with Mr. Knott to get his side of the story which is briefly as follows:

1. Mr. Knott bought the farm at an auction in March, 1988.
2. At the auction he informed the seller, Mr. Adler, that he would not be requiring the services of his staff. This placed the onus on Mr. Adler to provide for the future welfare of his people, either through his own good offices, or through the appropriate State department.
3. Mr. Adler informed his staff of Mr. Knott's wishes, (he, in fact, used Mr. Knott's daughter as an interpreter) but did nothing more about the matter.
4. In August, 1988, Mr. Adler held his dispersal sale (at what time Mr. Knott was due to take possession). No attempt had been made by the staff to find alternate work or accommodation, and this time Mr. Knott himself warned them that their services would no longer be required.
5. At the beginning of January, 1990, there had still been no attempt by the people to find other homes and so Mr. Knott gave them written notice.
6. When, in February, the terms of this notice expired, Mr. Knott took steps to have them evicted.

This evidence differs drastically from the report in the newspaper which suggests that the people were 'told that they could stay', and that Mr. Knott had not 'told them properly' that they were to go.

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Mr. Knott is happy to have his side of the story verified by Mr. Adler. I have no reason to disbelieve him.

Who is to blame then, Mr. Knott who did not want the responsibility of a large community of unemployed people living ultra vires on his property? The labourers who refused to find other jobs or places of abode? Or would it be Mr. Adler who sold his farm and then washed his hands of his labourers?

I do not know. My inclination would be to place at least part of the blame on the policy of apartheid which has created such massive shortages of housing, employment and skills that for an uneducated farm labourer to lose his job is a major crisis in his life.

Mr. Knott feels that because of the publicity that has been given this case, and because the facts have been distorted, he has been cast in the guise of an ogre. He is very resentful. This is unfortunate and does nothing to resolve a situation in which human lives are affected.

I have suggested to Mr. Knott that he arrange a meeting with the local representative of the Regional Services Council and request him to assume responsibility for accommodating the people (as Mr. Adler should have done in the first place), and this he has agreed to do.

Mr. Rogers has, at the same time, undertaken to arrange a meeting of the surrounding Farmers' Associations in order to work out an employment code relating to the hiring and firing of staff.

I trust that these measures will go some way towards alleviating the plight of the people, and preventing a repeat of this unfortunate incident.

With very best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



E.K. Moorcroft M.P.  
ALBANY