

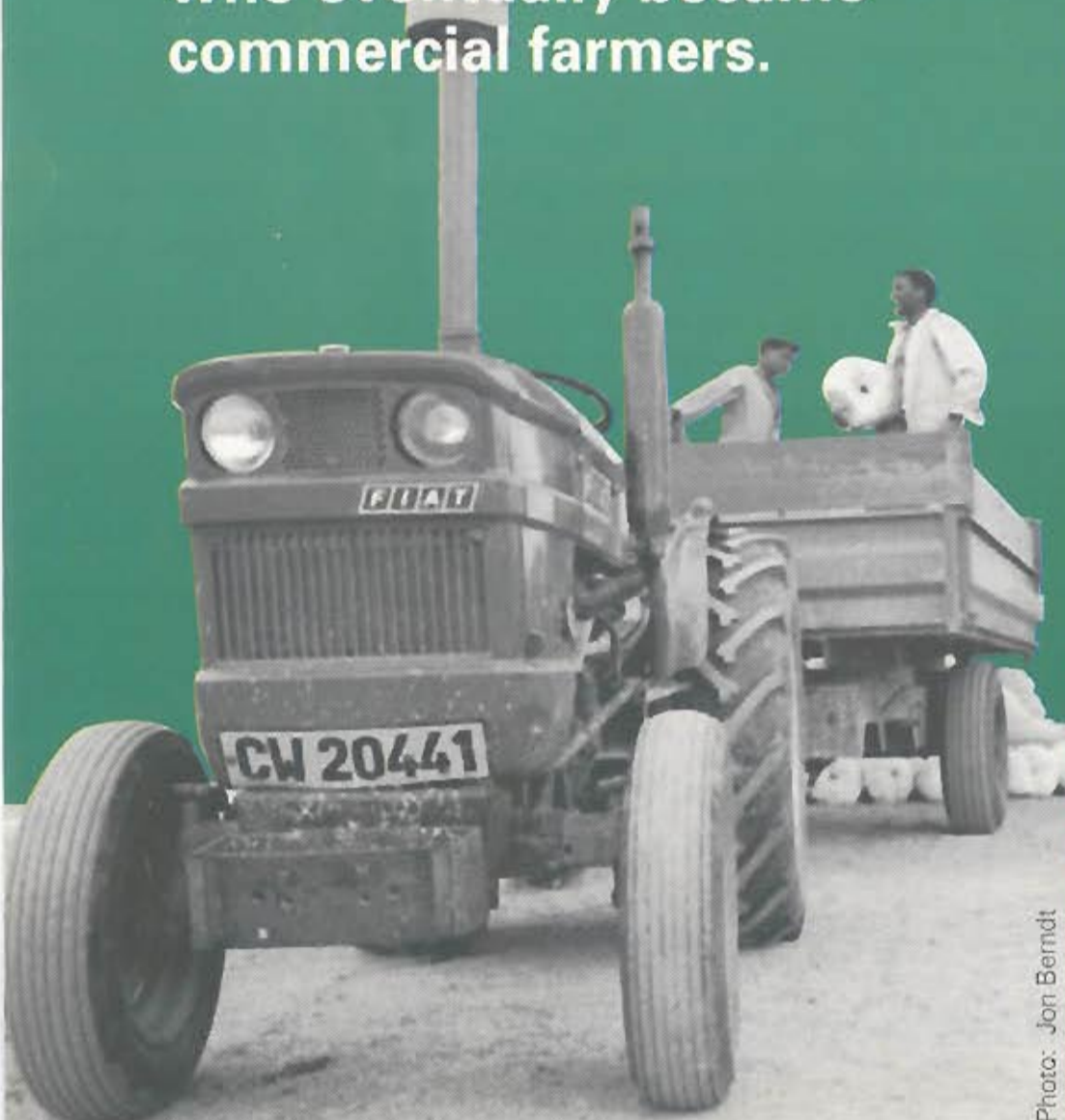
BUILDERS OF THE NATION

1 WORKING THE LAND

Nearly a million workers in South Africa are based on white-owned farms. They are descendants of those who fought for many years but lost their land during the nineteenth century. This land was taken over by whites, who eventually became commercial farmers.



Farmworkers harvesting the landowner's crop. Until the 1996 Labour Relations Act, this category of workers had no minimum wage and did not enjoy the protection of the state.



The introduction of the tractor to the commercial farms drove many thousands of workers off the land.



Children of migrant and farm workers formed an important part of the rural labour force.



Farmworkers in the vineyards of the western Cape were further exploited by the 'tot system'. A drink of wine or brandy replaced part of the daily wage.



A truck removes farmworkers with their meagre belongings to a so-called homeland.

There were three kinds of farm workers:

- * Farm labour tenants were allowed to stay on a piece of land and cultivate it for themselves provided they, and their wives and children worked for the farm-owner for six months of the year. Child labour was rife. Many thousands of children living on farms got little or no schooling because they were required to work on the farms.
- * Sharecroppers had to give the landowners up to a half of all the crops that they and their families produced.
- * Still others lived in rural compounds built by the landowners and worked as labourers for very low pay and a few bags of mealies a month.

While some farmers had good relations with their workers and tenants, the whole system of farm labour caused much suffering and reinforced poverty. Farm workers were not given the opportunity to learn new skills or earn enough to become independent farmers themselves. The 1913 Land Act denied the right to own land outside of the so-called homelands. Under the apartheid government, the 'homelands' consisted of less than 13% of the land.

In 1997, the democratic government proposed a Security of Tenure Bill which provides tenants with protection against eviction from the land. For the first time, the new Labour Relations Act has brought farmworkers under the same law that applies to other workers. Farm workers now have rights against unfair dismissal, they are safeguarded by health regulations, hours of work, etc. Farm workers are also encouraged to organise themselves into trade unions. They are urged to seek training to build up their skills. These are the men and women who are the producers of the nation's most basic need, food. We salute the farmers of this land.