

MOVED OUT AFTER 100 YEARS. THAT'S THE EXILED PEOPLE FROM 'THE SWAMP'

by Peter Kerchhoff of Pacsá.

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COMPENSATION, part of KwaZulu Area 9, is a desolate part of the Natal Midlands lying between Impendhle and Bulwer. Since December 16 last year, it has been home to more than 700 members of the Mndaweni Tribe, who were moved there from their old home "The Swamp" near Pevensey Station, near Himeville.

The tribespeople were given three months notice by two officials from Pretoria and the Himeville magistrate that they were required to move from their land which was situated in a "white" area. They were also advised that they would be compensated for the homes which they and their forefathers had developed over the past century.

Whether these families were adequately compensated no one will ever know because the homes at "The Swamp" are now mere piles of rubble. One of the most disturbing aspects of this removal is the apparent lack of interest or concern over the fortunes of the tribe on the part of the churches and the white farmers in the area. The first news of the tribe's removal was a report in a Natal newspaper five months after the event.

The new arrivals were unwilling new settlers. Although "The Swamp," — home for 100 years — had not been a flourishing place, it was theirs and they had put down roots. What greeted them on arrival at Compensation was a partially developed settlement site, Plots measuring 28 x 40 metres were marked off and on a number of these corrugated iron pit latrines had been installed.

There was a water supply consisting of two 4 500 litre galvanised tanks each fitted with a pipe-line and tap. The only real difference between this settlement and the much-criticised Limehill settlement of a decade ago was the provision of pit latrines.

A rough track linked the settlement to the road running from Impendhle through to Himeville and Loteni. A corrugated iron school building stood a little way away.

The settlers were provided with tents in which to live and store their belongings until they could build something habitable. They had to start from scratch. Fortunately through the kind offices of a nearby Catholic Mission poles were made available to them at no cost except a transportation charge of R10 per truckload.

One truckload was just sufficient for a family. A store a few kilometres away was able to supply most of the required building materials, including galvanised sheeting, windows, doors, nails etc. A small stream trickling through the settlement provided another source of water.

The settlers soon discovered that the soil was friable and thus unsuitable for building purposes. There was no alternative but to use it. As a result, some of the houses are showing patches after only six months. Some families are busy erecting rondavels with thatching, now that thatching material has at last become available.

AT AUCTION

But six families have not been able to establish homes for themselves and are either being housed with others or having to make use of the remaining tents. Some families have started small gardens on their plots and a few have free-ranging fowls.

The leader of the tribe is Mr Juta Mndaweni the grandson of the late Charles Mndaweni who purchased the land known as "The Swamp" at a public auction in Pietermaritzburg on January 24, 1888. Charles Mndaweni was granted freehold title to the land which passed on to his heirs in perpetuity.

In August, 1971, "The Swamp" was expropriated from the estate of the late William Mndaweni. It took eight years before the removal of the tribespeople was enforced and Mr Juta Mndaweni was forced to hand over whatever papers he had in his possession as heir to "The Swamp." In return, he was given land adjacent to the settlement at Compensation.

This is hardly arable land, being uneven, hilly and rocky. With many of the able-bodied workers (men and women) away seeking work in the cities, there are few of the tribe who can help him with ploughing and tilling. What energy and enthusiasm there exists is being expended on building and establishing the small plots.

The people of Compensation are not happy in their new camp but they are powerless to do anything about it. The camp, officially known as Compensation Farm has been aptly named "Kwavulamehlo" which means "eye-opener." This ironic title gives an indication of their feelings. However, they appear to be making the best of a bad bargain. The children play happily among themselves oblivious of the bleak future that lies ahead of them.

The nearest industrial area to Compensation is Pietermaritzburg, but the latter's slow industrial growth will not be able to absorb the fast-growing population. Some work-seekers are still trying to get to Himeville and Underberg where they used to work on farms and in hotels; others seek work further afield in Durban, Newcastle and the Reef. A few are fortunate enough to find jobs and come home at the weekend, month end or, if they are on contract, year end.

FARES HIGH

Transport from the settlement is expensive. There is a daily bus-service provided by the SAR, but it is not suitable for commuting to employment areas on a regular basis. The cost of a single bus ticket to Pietermaritzburg is R1,80. Education is another pressing problem. There is a lower primary school (unregistered) which is staffed by three local teachers and caters for about 150 children.

Teachers from elsewhere are reluctant to travel to such a remote area or to live in the area or to live in the settlement. It is not yet certain whether the secondary schools in the district can cater for the influx of pupils in the higher standards. There are no medical services on site. The nearest clinic is five km away, with a cost for a visit of 60 cents. Patients may sometimes contact a doctor on his visit to the store three or four km away. Consultation and treatment costs R3 for an adult and R2,50 for a child.

For pensioners the move from long-established and well-loved homes has been particularly traumatic. Recently

about 16 old age pensioners received the additional shock of discovering that their pension advice dockets had not been received by the pension clerk, which meant a probable two-month delay in receiving a pay-out. Others, however, are receiving regular pension pay-outs of R47 every second month, which in many cases supports not only the pensioner but other members of the family as well.

Compensation is just one more example of the implementation of official policy of Black spot removal. There are others, and the results have been similar — misery, poverty, unemployment and hopelessness. □

NEW LIGHT?

"More has happened in White South African politics this week than in the previous 30 years." (The Guardian, 28.9.79)

After generations of false rhetoric,
lifetimes of tragic nonsense,
suddenly strange words are spoken.

The old robots at the crossroad,
which have shown a bloodshot red
for longer than anyone can remember —
those robots in front of which
vehicles have rusted, multitudes have died —
suddenly blink, and flicker,
and turn an awkward bluey green.

What do these new words betoken?
What does this change of colour mean?

That sound of ancient stuttering starters,
does it mean people are coming to life?
That smoke, that noise, those exclamations,
are they the start of peace or strife?

And after these years — so bleak, so stern —
Have many waited for the lights to turn?

By the time they're told 'Go if you will'
has a by-pass slipped behind the hill?

By the time they're told 'You needn't hoot'
and the police have said 'We will not shoot',
have most of them taken another route?

VORTEX