

REMOVALS

by David Hemson

'Awakening on Friday morning, 20 June 1913, the South African Native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth.' Sol Plaatje, author and veteran of the African National Congress wrote these words in 1915. He said that the revolutionary changes in the lives of African people were not realized until the end of June when many farm tenancy agreements expired.

For many Africans, the realisation that they would have to move has come quite recently.

The increased intensity of the Government's resolve towards full 'separate development' has entailed the removal of hundreds of thousands of black people, placing increased pressure on the African reserves.

The original Land Act of 1913 has been reinforced by subsequent legislation, particularly the Bantu Trust and Land Act of 1936, and the government's aim is to 'Iron out the anomalies' in their drive toward total territorial separation.

WAR

Over the years the sequences of the process of removing Africans from lands which have been occupied by them for centuries has become plain. Control over the land had been brought about by war, and the spoils distributed to the white settlers who formed the basis of the frontier militia. In the beginning most of the settlers acted more as rentiers than as farmers, but with the growth of urban markets the large scale farms were stimulated to produce for these markets. The farm economy was initially built on the surplus labour of the African tenants who have been reduced to a form of serfdom, but with the growth of capital intensive agriculture this labour is now redundant. **Despite the capital intensive agriculture, however, the farming sector remains politically paramount and labour control has become a duty of the state in the interests of the idealised small farmer. It is from the agricultural sector in the main that the occupants of the dumping grounds will be coming.**

To deal firstly with war and land allocation. During the wars of colonisation against the Xhosa and Zulu people in particular, after military victory huge tracts of land were handed over to white settlers. The white colonists, often thoroughly ignorant of the past history of land ownership and African laws and concepts governing the use of land defended their farms with great tenacity against the 'Kaffir hordes'. Every war brought further confiscation of land, and further schemes for colonisation.

The process is best illustrated in the history of land ownership in Zululand.

ZULULAND

In 1843 the British Commissioner agreed with Mpande that the Tugela and Buffalo rivers should form the north eastern boundary between Natal and Zululand. In 1855 trouble began when a group of farmers, led by one Cornelius van Rooyen, who had been given grazing rights in what is now the Utrecht area, claimed the territory as their own and spread abroad the incredible story that they had purchased the land from Mpande for a hundred head of cattle and produced a spurious document in support of their claim which they alleged to have been signed by him.

In addition to this unlawful seizure of land the Boers were encroaching on the northern border of Zululand and were reported to be erecting a line of beacons which penetrated deep into Zulu territory.

The Zulus protested to the British authorities in 1861 but their attempts to get justice were frustrated until 1878 when a Commission found that **'there had been no cession of land at all by the Zulu King, past or present, or by the Zulu nation. Permission had only been given to squat and the land was looked on as belonging to the squatter for only so long as he occupied it, for the Zulu nation acknowledge no individual title to any land whatsoever.'**

The report of the enquiry was, however, withheld from Cetshwayo. The British annexed the Transvaal and the new British Transvaal Government now allocated this disputed territory to the Boers. All they had to do now was to claim their farms, which they would then occupy under British guarantee.

In this way land which had been allocated to the Zulus by the Border Commission would eventually be taken away from them in spite of the Commission's findings that the Boers had no claim to the territory.

After the British war against the Zulus in 1878 they were robbed of 2 260 260 acres of land by a band of 'freebooters' who took advantage of the military defeat. These areas include Vryheid, Babanango, and Louwsberg magisterial districts, as well as the farm lands in the Melmoth district which were the best part of Zululand.

When Zululand was finally declared British territory it was agreed that no colonist would be permitted to settle in the area. Following the World Wars, however, soldiers have been given large tracts as a type of compensation. Zululand, once pledged to be protected against the intrusion of white settlers now has an aristocracy of sugar farmers.

TRANSVAAL AND FREE STATE

Conditions were rather different in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State where firm measures were demanded to control Africans on Farm land, and where the occupancy of land was rather different. After the Land Act of 1913 the commissions which followed delimited 'white' and 'native' areas which had previously not been under definite and continuous ownership. Whites were finally apportioned 87 per cent of the land, and Africans 13 per cent.

One of the primary objects of the Act was to secure greater control over the black people living in areas 'owned' by white farmers.

After the South African war the Boer people were impoverished by the great destruction of the British armies, and many were forced to migrate from their land to the mines. African foremen were left in control of the farms, and were largely responsible for the increased agricultural output after the war. These farms were operated on the half-share system which allowed the African farmers half the produce of the land for their labour.

As these share-croppers brought the land into production in many areas they earned enough to buy the land for themselves. But more importantly, tribal communities would pool their resources and then have enough money to buy back land which had been confiscated by the military or simply occupied by white farmers.

Mr. Pixley ka Isaka Seme negotiated the purchase of a block of four farms in the Wakkerstroom District in the Transvaal for the Bakgoloke tribe displaced in the Free State. General Hertzog raised the cry of 'black peril' and the nervous Minister of Native Affairs, J.W. Sauer, introduced the Land Act in 1913 to bring this redistribution of land to a halt. At the time of its enactment there were loud complaints that the tribes were offering higher prices for land than whites. Figures presented in Parliament showed that Africans had purchased 162 512 morgen from 1909 to 1912. As Merriman urged the white representatives, 'every good government should set its face against communal purchase'. Tribal organisation was proving dangerously resilient in a new set of circumstances.

TIGHT CONTROL

The other major aspect of the legislation was to tighten control over the Africans living on land 'owned' by white farmers.

This would prove a difficult problem. As the Minister of Native Affairs, Sauer, said: 'Although many people were there illegally it would be very difficult indeed to deal with some of these people who were squatters on land which they and their ancestors had occupied for 60 to 70 years'. That was the case in the Transvaal and in Natal. Some of them had been there from time immemorial, long before the white man.

'In such cases these people were only technically squatters and they had a right to a full and fair consideration when they came to deal with them.'

In fact the legislation had the effect of turning squatters into labour tenants and destroying the independence of the share-cropper. White farmers were given the power of turning squatters and labour tenants off the land.

Sol Plaatje recorded the desperate trekking of these people who went from farm to farm pleading with the white farmers to take them on as labour tenants. Often their livestock and possessions were sold off at very low prices.

This process which started in 1913 has continued with varying degrees of pressure up to today and has been described by Chief Gatsha Buthelezi as 'the great Black trek'.

FUTURE OCCUPANTS

These people are the future occupants of the resettlement camps, as well as the aged, disabled persons, widows and women with dependent children, other 'superfluous Bantu', and owners and residents of privately owned African land and mission stations.

The condition in which people have been moved and the desperate situations in the resettlement camps have been documented by a long succession of courageous persons, among them Peter Brown, H. Selby Msimang, John Aitchison, white journalists, Cosmas Desmond, and now David Russell.

For years these people have been providing the information, on unemployment, repression, disease rates, and starvation. For their courage most have earned banning orders.

When the Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Education, Dr. P.J.G. Koornhof, saw these conditions in September 1971 he said: 'Something must be done and done soon. What can be done to ease this misery?' Yet the people who are still in direct contact with the resettlement camps like David Russell in the eastern Cape say that nothing has changed. Despite the Minister's words, these resettlement camps fall directly under the control of his department which has moved over half a million Africans, and his alone is the responsibility.

WHERE FROM?

Where have the people who are now forced to live in these miserable resettlement camps come from?

Recent reports state that they come from four main sources: from the cities and towns, from the white farms, from mission land and 'black spots'.

Many of the occupants of the resettlement camps are those 'Surplus' people discarded through urban legislation. Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act defines the legal rights of Africans in urban areas, and the procedure whereby Africans may be endorsed out of towns. The Department of Bantu Administration and Development is putting increasing pressure on urban Africans to leave the towns and reverse the flow of Africans from rural areas to urban areas.

Administrative procedures have been tightened and the aged and other 'superfluous Bantu' are being endorsed out of urban areas. Most will end their days in resettlement camps.

Large numbers will also come from being displaced from white farms. In Natal alone it is estimated that about a million Africans will be requiring places in resettlement camps, and according to Chief Buthelezi, 'there is unfolding one of those great human tragedies for which South Africa is becoming well known'.

As the prices for land are sky-rocketing, so the pressure on those labour tenants still remaining is increased. Machinery has cut decisively the numbers of workers needed for the full operation of white farms. In 1918 there were only 291 tractors in South Africa, in 1955 there were 87 451, and in 1970 there were 210 000. As more capital is invested in farming, so the number of farm workers declines proportionately.

SURPLUS LABOUR

But farming in South Africa is still based on the surplus labour of the African farm workers, and state officials and white farmers are actually increasing their stranglehold on Africans living on white farms. It is now almost impossible for an African farm labourer in South Africa to escape from the white farms. In 1968 Mr. Andries Vosloo, the Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Development (BAD) told farmers: 'It is not only the Government's policy that Bantu farm workers may not move from the farms to the urban areas to work there, it is clearly provided for in legislation. A record of every registered Bantu farm labourer in your service is kept in a central register in Pretoria, and the position is that the labourer cannot be employed in the urban areas, because as soon as his service contract has to be registered it will be established that he is a farm labourer, and then he cannot legally be taken into service.'

Bantu Labour Control Boards consisting of officials of B.A.D. and farmers control completely the movement of

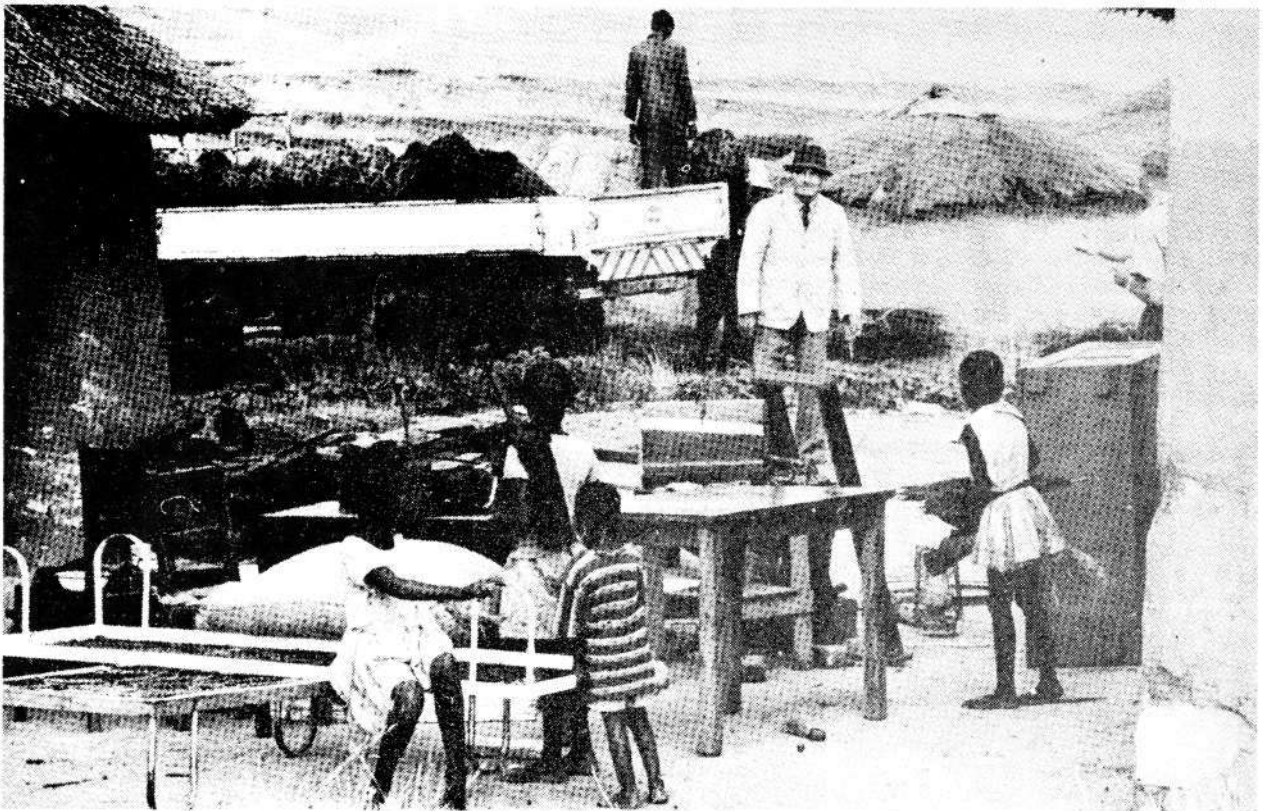
African workers in white rural areas, particularly in stopping the 'infiltration' of farm labour into urban areas. The despair engendered by this regulation has brought African workseekers to commit suicide.

These controls have been largely successful in fixing African labourers to white farms, the only remaining escape route being the resettlement camps. In 1960 35 per cent of the total population of adult males were employed in agriculture, while during the same year agriculture constituted 11 per cent of the gross domestic product. South Africa is distinguished in having the highest ratio of the percentage of labour in agriculture in terms of the contribution of agriculture to the gross domestic product. In Israel where agriculture also contributes about 11 per cent of the gross domestic product only 14 per cent of adult males are employed in agriculture. These figures indicate that a permanent surplus of labour is being maintained in the agricultural sector to depress wages and to provide for control of the impoverished.

While the rapid mechanisation of agriculture removes the necessity for a high proportion of African labour in agriculture, the rigid controls imposed leave the resettlement camps as the only possibility for farm labourers. The removal of farm labourers is taking place rapidly at a terrifying cost in human suffering.

WEENEN

Recently a number of farm workers from the Weenen district were dumped in the overcrowded Msinga reserve. Weenen district has been an area where a protracted struggle has taken place between farm workers and their employers for the past few decades. Over the years the power of the white farmers has been reinforced by legislative



'Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house?'

and administrative measures which have enabled them to substitute wage labour which has no rights to the land and produce of the farm in the place of labour tenants who enjoy some residential permanence.

The farmers used a variety of measures to expropriate the labour tenants. About 200 African tenants were made home-less after tractors towing a steel cable demolished 21 huts on a farm belonging to P.H. van der Westhuizen in November last year. The farmer had got a court order in the Weenen Magistrate's Court to evict the Africans as illegal 'squatters'. The police were used in other instances.

By May 1972 it was reported that scores of farm workers and their children displaced by the abolition of the labour tenant system were starving in the Msinga reserve. The Natal Mercury reporter wrote that pellagra, malnutrition sores, incipient kwashiorkor, and loss of weight were clearly evident. These families were given no land for ploughing, not even gardens, had no water or medical facilities.

The government required their Chief Simakade Mchunu living in Msinga to provide them with land, but the destitute families were not welcome. The older residents already living in real poverty objected to their presence. The newcomers had no firewood and the other residents objected to their using cow dung as a substitute because they had no stock. The farm workers dumped in the area have to live under canvas or crude wattle and daub. On rainy days their clothes and furniture are soaked, and the bags of mealies brought from Weenen also become saturated.

The process of expropriation has become formalised and administered by the Department of Bantu Administration. In July 1970 a total of 36 areas under the jurisdiction of the Bantu Affairs Commissioner in South Africa were prohibited from having further labour tenant contracts.

The prohibition notice was issued in the name of Philip Torlage, Chairman of the Bantu Affairs Commission who played an active role in forbidding tenant agreements in the Weenen district.

The magisterial areas included in this prohibition include large areas of agricultural land in the Transvaal and Natal. In Natal these include the areas which were occupied by the 'freebooters' in the 1880s: Vryheid, Babanango, and all other magisterial areas where agriculture is of any significance.

WHAT HAPPENS

What happens to a labour tenant who is given notice to leave the farm he has lived on for years? An example was given in an article appearing in the Daily News.

'William' was given three months notice to move from a farm in the Louwsberg district. His family was one of seventeen families evicted from this farm. He had been on the road for ten months looking for somewhere to live before he was interviewed.

He could not find any place in the reserves where he could farm because they are already overcrowded and the sparse grazing is overstocked. He went from official to official with a bundle of soiled trekpasses.

The farm from which he had to move had been bought by a new owner who gave the families three months' notice to quit. 'When I asked him where we were to go he said it was none of his business so we did not move. A few weeks after the notice expired the police came to arrest us. Whenever we asked what to do they all said there was nothing they could do about it.

At one time somebody said we should go to Paulpietersburg, but I am not happy to go there because there is no water, no houses, no pasture, nothing there at all and we were told we could not take our cattle.

'We are not being difficult, but we want somewhere to live.'

William went to the local Bantu Affairs Commissioner who told him the old farm system had ended. He took the particulars of the 17 families and said the matter would be passed to Pretoria.

The Magistrate warned him to leave the farm with his family and livestock. Then he set out for Pietermaritzburg to make representations there and Paulpietersburg was again suggested. 'But there's nothing — particularly no water. Where can we go? Nkosi, my case is this ...'

He is fated to join resettlement camps set up for old people, widows, the 'surplus appendages', such as Limehill, Morsgat, Sada, Illinge, and Dimbaza.

BLACK SPOTS

The occupants of resettlement camps also come from 'black spots' which were bought by African people before 1913, or which are isolated areas in the middle of white areas falling foul of the grand strategy of territorial separation.

An example of this type of displacement is shown in the case of the Kunene tribe. This tribe lived on the farm Hlatikulu in the Glencoe District. There were about 4 000 people on 8 000 acres, the land had many springs and streams, good grassland, and an annual rainfall of about 30 inches.

These people were moved to the farm Vergelegen which has sandy soil, thorn scrub, poor vegetation, and about 10 inches of rain annually. They were moved from an area where intensive farming was possible to an area where it was obviously not.

The major problem with the resettlement camps is that they are sited miles from industrial centres. Resettlement accentuates the migratory labour structure, and further destroys African family life.

In other countries where large numbers of people were being displaced from rural areas, industrial occupations were springing up and these people constituted the growing industrial labour force. In South Africa employment opportunities for Africans in urban areas are being reduced deliberately by the Physical Planning Act and administrative measures, and the policy of decentralisation of industry is providing only a limited number of jobs.

The administrative procedures adopted by B.A.D. ensure the creation of a vast rural proletariat hemmed in by influx control and stagnating in dire poverty. Agriculture requires a large number of workers for short periods of employment particularly for harvesting maize) and the



A place to stay

'homelands' contain the reserve army of farm workers which can be drawn upon at will.

The process of administrative expropriation and the severity of controls over mobility have caused many African people to be unemployed, and a recent estimate put the number of African unemployed at 1 288 269; a huge reserve army of workseekers which depresses the wage rates offered in the scramble for jobs during the annual migration from the reserves to industrial centres. The most desperate areas within the reserves are the resettlement camps themselves.

DR. KOORNHOF

Dr. Koornhof said during his tour of resettlement camps in September 1971 that these resettlement camps would be stopped.

'Places like Sada, Dimbaza and Illinge, will no longer be established for widows and old folk. They will be settled in the normal, well planned modern townships and, as far as possible, near work opportunities, but not specifically where they are thrown together.'

Yet resettlement camps are occupied by persons who have been denied the opportunity of employment in industrial areas. Many people living in Dimbaza had worked in the Western Cape from where they were endorsed out: from Worcester, Wellington, Mossel Bay, Knysna, Burgersdorp, Middleburg, and Beaufort West.

African women in resettlement camps are denied the opportunity of domestic work while their husbands will be fortunate to earn half of the poverty datum line in urban areas. The lack of employment leads to utter destitution. As David Russell said: 'I've never seen such concentrated and depressed poverty as I've seen at Dimbaza. **The people are completely at the mercy of the local magistrates for the right to state welfare.**

While Dr. Koornhof has said that this type of resettlement camp will be stopped, it is difficult to see how this is possible without a complete change in policy. The pressure on labour tenants would have to be removed and 'surplus appendages' allowed to remain in urban areas.

As you read these lines there are families struggling along farm roads and national highways looking for a place to stay. □