



TRAC

Transvaal Rural Action Committee

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It is seven months now since Mogopa was surrounded by police at 4 am on the 14th February, and the people moved at gunpoint. The anger and despair of these people is still present. Yet the threat of removals as part of the 'ground plan' of Apartheid persists, and communities in Kwa Ngema, Driefontein, Mathopestad, Huhudi — to name but a few, wait for the sword of Damocles to fall upon their heads. Recent events have caused people in Mathopestad to stir uneasily, for once more, the pressure seems to be mounting on this community that has faced the threat of removal and government strategies surrounding this, for many years.

The people of Mathopestad first had hint of their removal when numbers were painted on the doors of their houses in 1967 and 1968. Between 1966 and 1972, the Monnakhotla people, a related tribe, living on a farm adjacent to the Mathope place of residence were moved to Ledig, near Sun City. This too, must have served as a warning.

Subsequently, the Mathopestad tribe has had various meetings with officials. In 1980, the people heard that they were to go to Onderstepoort, near Sun City. Onderstepoort was previously a white-owned farm. It is now administered by the South African Development Trust, and will later be incorporated into Bophuthatswana. In early 1981, officials sent a bus to show the people of Mathopestad their proposed destination. Only six went to survey the area. In a meeting of March that year, the following reasons were put forward by Co-operation and Development officials as to why the Mathopestad community should move to Onderstepoort;

- the new village was a very fertile place, and moreover it was nearer to Sun City where tribesmen could go and 'enjoy' their money,
- the place had been inspected by Agricultural officials and it was suitable for the planting of vegetables.

The tribe hotly contested these points. They pointed out that far from being 'very fertile', it was doubtful whether the soil could support mealies, let alone the wide variety of crops they had been harvesting for decades in Mathopestad. They viewed the fact that the place was near Sun City, the notorious gambling palace in Bophuthatswana, with contempt. With nothing substantial to offer, despite official sales-talk, the Mathopestad people concluded that voluntarily moving to the new village would be tantamount to signing their own death sentence.

These were the premises on which the proposed move was established.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Mathopestad is a freehold area in the Western Transvaal. Approximately 1 500 people live on the land — another 1 500 work in the towns and come home over weekends. In 1911, 22 families bought 1 300 morgen for which they hold the title deed. In 1949, another piece measuring 304 morgen was bought by Chief Cyprian Mathope — this was used for grazing land.

The Mathopestad people grow mealies, sorghum, beans and vegetables, besides owning many herds of cattle. A stream flows through the land, and springs and boreholes supply the community with water. Grazing is plentiful. A primary and junior secondary school are operative, as well as several churches. In 1982, the tribe spoke of 800 bags of sorghum and 700 bags of mealies being harvested a year. The surplus is sold to the Co-operative at Koster. Mathopestad falls into the Maize Triangle in the highveld, with steady rainfall, suitable for the rotation of crops. Seven families own their own tractors. The tribe holds mineral rights

grazing, while the new site at Onderstepoort had running water, **taps** and toilets on each premise, and the Elands River nearby could be used for irrigation purposes! To our knowledge, Mr Ruch has not been to either place.

BOPHUTHATSWANA'S RESPONSE

The issue of title to the land is another point on which people are resisting removal. Co-operation and Development officials said once again in 1981 that the people will enjoy the same tenure as before, once they are removed. Experience of other removals, where people who held title to their original land did not get title to the new land (instead, it reverted to the Bophuthatswana Government), has made the Mathopestad people wary. **Despite this**, the Mathopestad community have said that they would not fight against incorporation into Bophuthatswana **from where they are**, provided they retain title to the land. Therefore in 1981 the people wrote to the President of Bophuthatswana with this request. The reply came in March 1982 from C M Mokgoko (Dept. of the President). Briefly, it said that resettlement was primarily a matter between the Government of the RSA and the tribe, and did not involve Bophuthatswana. (The Department of Co-operation and Development contradicted this rather 'impartial' stand, when they repeatedly stated in meetings that the land, removal, etc., is considered in co-operation with the Bophuthatswana Government.) The Bophuthatswana Government only becomes involved after negotiations have been finalised. **But**, the Bophuthatswana Government will not agree to the incorporation of Mathopestad where it is, as it will create 'another island'. Rather, the Bophuthatswana Government desires the Mathopestad people 'under its wings as soon as possible, and regards Onderstepoort as a suitable place'. This is a very different stand from that taken by Chief Mabuza of KaNgwana for instance. When Moses Ngema, of the farm KwaNgema (which is threatened with removal into KaNgwane) approached the Chief to help them stop this removal, Mabuza publicly refused to take the Ngema people into his country, and thus tried to help the Ngema's remain part of the RSA.

In April 1983 President Mangope of Bophuthatswana told the Rand Daily Mail that he would look and see whether Mathopestad's request was feasible. Nothing else has been heard from him on the issue.

ASPECTS OF THE REMOVAL

There are other facts of the removal that weigh heavy on the tribe. Old people when moved, will not be able to rebuild the houses that they built in their prime. Joyce Harris, then National President of the Black Sash, wrote in February 1982,

'It is horrifying to think that these solid houses must be demolished, the life that has been established there destroyed, and the people uprooted, with what is left of their property after the demolitions, and dumped on the bare ground in a forest of shiny tin toilets, there to try to re-establish themselves as a community and somehow find a means of earning their livelihood, having been deprived of their cattle and their farms.'

STRATEGIES OF PERSUASION

Moves have been made to divide the tribe on various grounds. In June 1981 at a meeting of the tribe with the Commissioner, the latter arrived with a list of non-Tswanas resident in Mathopestad, and wanted to move them out. Mr Rankoko, one of the councillors, said the Commissioner should come back and talk to them about that 'when the Government separates the Boers from the English'. Many non-Tswanas have married into the tribe. The councillor continued to say that if they let the Zulus and Xhosa be moved, they will have allowed the Commissioner to chop off one leg, and he'd come back again to cut off an arm — in such a manner would the tribe be dismembered.

In 1982, Mr Wentzel of Co-operation and Development said that non-landowners would not be allowed to take stock with them to the new place, only landowners.

Recently, two members of the tribe have been found going around taking names of those who want to move, for the Commissioner. People complained to the Chief that even if they did not want to move, their names were written down. The Commissioner has denied knowledge of this, yet the two tribespeople claim they did it on his request.

Intimidation has been used as well. In 1981 in reply to a letter from the Mathopestad lawyer asking whether the people would be moved by force if they resist, a Co-operation and Development official reminded him that the removal had been approved by Parliament and Section 5 of Act 38 of 1927 (this is the State President's Order, which was served on Mogopa shortly before the forced removal there).

to the land as well, and according to an opinion given by a geologist in early 1983, there are gold deposits in Mathopestad. As an indication of the amount of gold in the area he pointed out that there was a gold mine on a farm nearby to Mathopestad.

ATTEMPTS AT DEVELOPMENT

Over the years, the tribe has attempted to maintain a decent standard of living and to develop and improve their way of life. They have been hindered at every point by officials who have used the argument that because they are going to be moved, they should not extend or develop Mathopestad, but rather the new place. Then, ironically, Koornhof has said lately that the reason why the tribe has to be moved, is for **development**, i.e. because they lack facilities where they are. The tribe has responded by requesting that the money that is to be spent to develop their proposed destination, be rather used to develop Mathopestad. Meanwhile, attempts by the tribe to develop Mathopestad, that have been thwarted, include the following:

1. In 1973 and '76, the tribe applied for medical facilities in the form of a clinic. A local doctor had offered his services, should the clinic be built. The Government refused the tribe's application.
2. Since 1977 the tribe repeatedly applied for a telephone. In March of this year, they received a reply to the effect that since they were to be resettled, the high cost of extending this service to them, would not be justified.
3. In 1978/79 the tribe attempted to build a secondary school. They were stopped.
4. Shopowners have been forced to operate illegally, because their applications for licences have been refused on the grounds of the impending move. Police have then raided shop owners because they do not have licences.

THE PROPOSED DESTINATION — Community fears versus Government propaganda

The land the community is supposed to be removed to, Onderstepoort, is in the bushveld. It has come under heavy criticism by the Mathopestad people, press and churchpersons, as well as the Black Sash women who have visited it. One old councillor of Mathopestad remarked,

'The Bushveld soil is dry, and we are a maize farming community, which does not want to fight for jobs with the poverty stricken people of Bophuthatswana. In fact, the people who were moved from our neighbouring villages (a reference to the Monnakhotlas) to barren patches of Bophuthatswana, starve and come back to beg for food.'

There are over 4 000 tin toilets demarcating plots 1/10 of an acre each at Onderstepoort. To date, these toilets form the only infrastructure, besides a school and a reservoir. The number of toilets raised the fear that other people besides the Mathopestad community would be moved in and this was confirmed by a statement in Hansard last year. The Deputy Minister remarked,

'Many more people are going to be resettled in the Onderstepoort area than only the people of Mathopestad. We are going to see if we can accommodate the people of Mathopestad at Onderstepoort.'

All this directly contradicts the statement made by Co-operation and Development in 1979 that the land given to Mathopestad in compensation would allow them to retain their present standard of living, and also be registered in their name on the same basis as their land is presently being held.

The farmer who had lived on the farm at Onderstepoort previously did not plant maize or sorghum — he rather left a legacy of unarable, hot bush country, covered with stubbly bushes and a **bone dry riverbed**. Transferring the cattle to a new area is a problem. 'Even cattle that could graze, often die when brought from the Highveld to the Lowveld' remarked one of the tribe. 'The people will not have the facilities to farm at Onderstepoort as they do now, nor will the climate be suitable to the crops they are experienced in growing,' was Joyce Harris's (the then President of the Black Sash) remark.

Government propaganda has claimed otherwise. In 1981 officials claimed the tribe could sell vegetables to Sun City (despite the fact that people already face malnutrition and unemployment on the borders of Sun City). The following year, the Deputy Minister of Co-operation and Development said there was a river **flowing** through the territory of Onderstepoort. Referring to Mathopestad, the same Deputy Minister said in 1983 that it had 4 classrooms, at a time when it had 10. The most startling statement came from P Ulrich Ruch, Deputy Consul General (Information) in New York, on the 9th February 1983. He claimed that Mathopestad had no purified or **running water**, no bus services (a regular bus service exists!), no **irrigation** and no

On the 17th October 1981 the police came at night and took one man from his house — he was not a leader, but proved to be very mettlesome under the circumstances. They drove him to Rustenburg where he was questioned, and asked to organise people to prepare for the move. He asked who had sent them to fetch him and insisted he had nothing to discuss, that they could talk directly to the Chief. He also said that as they had taken him from his house in the night, and left it unlocked, he would hold them responsible for any losses or missing possessions. He was then returned home.

John Mathope was visited by Security Police in February 1983, after the PFP MP Helen Suzman had visited him, and asked what they had discussed. And the notorious strategy of bribing the Chief of the tribe has been attempted in Mathopestad by officials. Arthur, a young chief who served in 1981/1982, at first resisted the removal, but in March 1982 the Mathopestad lawyer had a letter from the Tribal Council declaring a vote of no confidence in the chief. He had begun to have secret meetings with the Commissioner, and to deliver by hand letters from the latter, something forbidden by the tribe. The tribe felt that he had made a deal to move. They therefore agreed that the chief had no powers to communicate with the local Commissioner without the consent of the headmen and deputy chief.

Arthur died in September 1982. His wife, Dorothy, had a son by a previous marriage and no son by Arthur. Therefore it was decided by the tribe that Arthur's uncle, John, should be head. The Commissioner was informed of this on 21 May 1983. In July the Mathopestad family were called to the Commissioner and told that in fact John was only regent and that his older brother's son, Solomon (Arthur's cousin) was to be chief. This was agreed to. Solomon is also against the move. Recently however, John and Solomon were called to another meeting with the Commissioner at which they were told that Solomon is only acting chief, and that Dorothy's son is in fact Arthur's son, and the rightful heir. (In previous meetings with the tribe, the Commissioner had admitted that Dorothy's son was not Arthur's.) The tribe say that Dorothy had had this baby by another marriage, and already had the child when she first came to their village. Yet the Commissioner now supports her claim. Dorothy will agree to the move ...

The officials of the Department of Co-operation and Development have at recent meetings hinted that Onderstepoort is not necessarily the only place that the Mathopestad people have to move to. Rather, officials have encouraged the formation of a Planning Committee, consisting of fourteen members of the tribe, to work with Co-operation and Development officials to meet the demands of the tribe and find a more suitable place. The Planning Committee has been formed — not to agree to the move on the tribe's part, but rather so that they can keep in touch with what is being planned for them.

And so it continues ... the co-option and hidden force. Recently officials came to Mathopestad to declare that land that the Monnakhotlas used to live on would be fenced off. The Mathopestad people feel that a lot of this land was theirs, and the Monnakhotlas merely had the use of it. Four top officials came to a meeting recently to talk about this fence. A reporter, an MP and a Black Sash field worker were present. When the reporter asked one official why four people had come to talk about a fence, he said, 'Keep guessing, I came to feel the mood of the people.'

Two days later, on the 14th September 1984, the Mathopestad lawyer received a letter from Koornhof confirming that the Mathopes would have to move. No date has been given, or destination confirmed. This is merely another waiting game with attempts to weaken the resolve of the tribe that they will not be moved unless it is by force.

CONCLUSION

Mathopestad is one of two 'Black spots' left in the western Transvaal. It is surrounded by pieces of land that was black freehold land, now scattered with ruins of houses. Mogopa, Tsetse, Omega, Putfontein, Monnakhotla, to name but a few.

The Mathopestad people have decided to go ahead and build a school, and continue to rebuild and repair their houses. They are adamant that they will not move except if they are forced. Money is being collected by the tribe for a new high school. They are developing and improving their quality of life, in a situation where they already have more security and income than most of their removed neighbours have in the homelands. To move them would be to destroy this viable community and allow their quality of life to decline, for ideological fanaticism.