

## FOCUS ON FARM EVICTIONS

### 2. Vryheid Richmond Hlobane

#### VRYHEID

An estimated 380 people living on six farms in the Vryheid area face an eviction deadline in May this year.

The thirty-two families, who are all part of a long-established labour-tenant community, were given eviction notices early last year by the owner of all six farms, Dr. H. Gertges, an absentee landlord living in Pretoria.

Although the families were not given any reason for the eviction, it would appear that the owner has recently acquired a number of the farms and clearly wishes to join them into a single management block and streamline the labour force. This agglomeration and consolidation of farms reflects a general trend in South African agriculture. Between 1970 and 1985, the size of farms in South Africa increased by 47% whilst the number of farm units decreased by 54%.

But the evicted families cannot bear the prospect of leaving the farms with which they have been associated all their lives, where their children go to school and where their parents and grandparents are buried. In addition they have substantial numbers of livestock - more than 300 head of cattle and 350 sheep - and access to arable land.

They have attempted to find alternative accommodation at the informal settlement of Kwabhekumthetho, but this place is already hopelessly overcrowded.

The only other places that might be available are the resettlement camps of Qudeni in the Nkandla district, Waihoek near Ladysmith, Compensation near Impendhle and Franklands, Port Shepstone.

(In November last year the Vryheid families appeared in court on charges of illegal squatting. The court gave the families until 17th May to leave the farms).

#### RICHMOND

Six families of labour tenants have been evicted from a farm in the Richmond area by the new owner who wishes to convert it into a private game reserve.

(Changes of farm ownership are often accompanied by farm labour removals. New ownership often means increased capitalisation and mechanisation; and new owners feel less inclined to deal with the welfare and control of a large labour force. Relationships with families, that have often been built up over a number of generations, are disregarded).

The families allege that the new owner has several times threatened to shoot them. He has admitted to shooting two of their dogs. In December last year, after the expiry of the notice period, he impounded their livestock.

Already hard pressed, the families had to find money to get their stock released. One of the tenants, Mr. G. Mkhize had to pay R454.00 to get back his 47 goats. They also paid R200.00 for hiring a transport truck.

The tenants, who are still on the farm, say they are not resisting the eviction.

"It will be very painful if we have to move from this farm after so many years. But if this white man has the right to do this, then we cannot object. But the thing is that we have nowhere to go", explained Mr. Ngubane, one of the evicted tenants.

The families have approached a local chief for a place, but as he indicated to Afra fieldworkers, the land he administers is already overcrowded:

"It is absurd that when the government has no place for these people, the magistrate sends these people to me, believing that I will have place for them. This place is full".

### HLOBANE

About 400 people face eviction from a number of farms in this coal mining area of Northern Natal.

Evictions in the area are not new. Many thousands of labour tenants were evicted from the Hlobane, Louwsberg and Paulpietersburg area in the 1970's.

The present group of families being evicted includes labour tenants who have been on the farms for many generations, and rent-paying families who have moved there so that they can be close to the breadwinners working in the collieries.

Linah Mahlobo is a 56 year old widow who has been living on the farm 'Wolgender' for 17 years. She has four children, three of whom attend school in the area. The fourth son was working on the mine at Hlobane until he lost his job during a strike.

Although Mrs. Mahlobo has been paying R30 per month, government policy classifies her as a 'squatter', and she has no legal protection against eviction or unfair practice on the part of the landlord.

Last year she was given three months to leave the farm. On expiry of the notice period, she appeared in court and was found guilty of illegal squatting. The magistrate told her that she had to move to the resettlement camp at Qudeni.

Mrs. Mahlobo is desperate to stay in the area. She is afraid that she will not find work anywhere near Qudeni. She is also concerned about her children's schooling.

Often families are evicted after disputes (sometimes trivial), between workers and their employers. Because housing is bound up with employment, dismissal means eviction. Mr. Mkhwanazi of the farm Helpmekaar was dismissed from his work and evicted from his home because the farmer claimed that "he was wasting time for being sick".

Farm workers are excluded from almost all the protective legislation applying to industrial and commercial workers. They are not guaranteed minimum wages or a set working day/week, or allowed unemployment benefits or protected from unfair labour practices. Trade unions are not legally recognised.