

The farm Doornsluiten, or Doornkop as it is known by the families living there, is surrounded by SADT ( South African Development Trust ) land and black freehold farms some of which have already been incorporated into KwaZulu. To the west lies Annadale, a farm bought by the SADT in 1954, where people live together in closely packed homesteads. These are clearly visible from the farm Doornkop, and are a visual testimony of the shortage of access to land which black people have.

At present there are 20 families living on Doornkop. They have built substantial scattered homesteads and have cultivated large fields of maize. Doornkop remains an anomaly in the area since it is one of the few farms still owned by a white man. The present owner, an absentee landlord, evicted 100 tenants living on his farm in 1976. These tenants were moved by the police and by the Department of Co-operation and Development to Mzimhlope, a closer settlement in the district of Qudeni.

Despite the eviction of former tenants, the owner began taking on new tenants shortly after the initial eviction. These tenants are the present occupants of Doornkop. When they arrived at Doornkop they were told by the owner that they could occupy the land for an indefinite period. They were also told that the farm would be incorporated into KwaZulu at some point. Tenants paid an initial R14 to gain access to a plot and then agreed to pay an annual rent of R60. In addition to this each family contributed R90 towards the construction of 2 boreholes for water on the property.

Despite the farmer's assurances, the people of Doornkop have been under the threat of eviction for some years and their position has been made more confusing because of abrupt changes in government statements. In 1983 the man responsible for collecting rent for the owner did not arrive and consequently the people living on Doornkop did not pay rent. They were issued with their first 3 month eviction notice in June, 1983. This eviction was postponed until May of the following year. On the 14th of May, 1984 the magistrate at Dannhauser informed the tenants that there was no need for them to move as the farm was going to be bought by the SADT. The deputy Minister of Co-operation and Development had stated in parliament on the 13th of April, 1984, that the farm was to be bought by the SADT and that consequently the people would not have to move.

Suddenly in July 1984 a black businessman, Mr. M, from Madedeni made his appearance at Doornkop. He told the people that he had bought the farm and that they would have to move by the end of the month. The people said that they were prepared to buy individual plots from the SADT if necessary so they could remain at Doornkop. In August, 1984, Mr. M sent police to give eviction notices to the inhabitants of Doornkop. It seems that the said businessman was leasing the land from the white owner although no official papers could be located. When the people of Doornkop asked the magistrate at Dannhauser if the land had been sold, he informed them that it had not been sold yet and that Mr. M was not even officially leasing the farm. Mr. M had brought his cattle to the farm in May and had fenced off a large field for cultivation.

The people of Doornkop again heard rumours of eviction in March, 1985. A spokesman from the Chief Commissioner's Office in Natal informed AFRA that the papers of sale would be coming through at any time and that Mr. M was indeed buying the farm. AFRA then had to inform the people that there was little chance of them resisting evictions if Mr. M had indeed become the new owner. Mr. Mike Tarr, FFP M.P. for Pietermaritzburg subsequently asked the Minister of Co-operation And Development, Dr. Viljoen, why the government had reversed its decision to buy Doornsluiten.

The Deputy Minister of Co-operation and Development , Mr. Ben Wilkins, wrote a reply to Mr. Mike Tarr stating that the land would no longer be sold to Mr. M. This reply does not offer complete assurance to the people of Doornkop though, because it ends ambiguously saying that if the SADT succeeds in buying the land, the families will not be moved. In any case the people of Doornkop are still uncertain about their future.

This particular case raises a speculative question. Does the government plan to sell off SADT farms to individual black farmers thus creating an elite group which will evict tenants in a so-called ' legitimate ' manner?

People evicted in similar cases are seriously disadvantaged since they are termed 'illegal squatters ' even if they have paid rent. Also they are not entitled to full compensation for their homes and may theoretically only collect crops which they have cultivated and their animals. They often lose both in the process. Such 'quiet' evictions effect thousands of farm tenants and labour tenants who in terms of the law and in every other respect are virtually without protection. These 'quiet' evictions continue unabated and no mention is made of suspending these type of evictions in Dr. Viljoen's statement on the suspension of forced removals pending a revision of the policy.