



TRAC

Transvaal Rural Action Committee

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Valspan is the African township of Jan Kempdorp about 120 km north of Kimberley in the Vaal-Harts irrigation area. Many of the people moved into the area when they were evicted from Fourteen Streams where the Vaal-Harts irrigation project was being established. They found some people already living there in an informal settlement. In 1952 the village was formally declared a township. Employment is provided mainly in agriculture, small related industries in the town and at the large military base outside the town.

People built their own houses, using mud and corrugated iron as a rule. In 1964 the Government put a freeze on housing. No-one was allowed to renovate or repair their houses. The people were told they would be moved in the future to Pampierstad, about 31 km away, in Bophuthatswana. That year heavy rains came and wreaked havoc on the usually sturdy buildings. The people were not allowed to repair the damage done to their houses. They have thus lived for 20 years under these conditions, some families moving out to Pampierstad in despair when their houses were no longer capable of providing shelter.

Removals started in the early '70's. Many of the first people to go to Pampierstad were tenants, who went because they were offered houses there after officials prevented them from building their own houses at Valspan.

In 1979 the Afrikaanse Sakekamer of Jan Kempdorp circulated a questionnaire to test the feelings of the white community about the removal of Valspan. The results showed that an overwhelming majority of the White community wanted Valspan to remain. Thereafter, a delegation of businessmen went to Cape Town to see Dr Koornhof to protest about the removal. (The delegation included Mr W H Tolmay, townclerk of Jan Kempdorp.) They returned disillusioned, having been told the removal was to go ahead.

The then Mayor of Jan Kempdorp, Mr P R Botha wrote to President Mangope of Bophuthatswana in 1979 informing him that the Afrikaanse Sakekamer and the Boerevereeniging (Agricultural Union) were against the removal of Valspan residents.

In a recent letter to Dr Koornhof, dated the 26th June 1984, the Community Council stated, "In 1978 the Administrative Secretary, Mr Goosen, replied to our plea not to move us, that because a few hundred families had already moved to Pampierstad and that a large amount of compensation had already been paid out, 'it would be rather unfair on the people who have already been moved to Pampierstad should another decision now be taken.'

This is a strange thing to say. If the removal is 'voluntary', then those who have moved are supposed to be **happy** in Pampierstad and therefore would surely not regard the fact that some have chosen to remain in Valspan as **unfair**. Does this mean that your department admits we are better off in Valspan? Does this logic also mean that because some are suffering in Pampierstad, it is only fair that we **all** suffer?"

In 1980 the removal process was extensively publicised. There were reports through the Community Council that people were being harrassed and intimidated by officials if they refused to go to Pampierstad. People interviewed in Pampierstad complained of the distance they had to travel to work and the cost of transport.

A meeting was scheduled for May 1980 at which people were to be told by the Community Council that the move was definitely going ahead. Two officials were present. The people were so angry that chaos erupted before the meeting could begin.

A church spokesman, Rev J Palos, wrote in *Kairos* in August 1980, "The choice is not one of being relocated in better housing where they are, but involves either staying in houses which have deteriorated because of no improvements being made while under threat of removal for over 10 years, or being moved, in the Jan Kempdorp instance, over 26 km away to Pampierstad into a homeland."



Mrs Agnes Isaacs and family at Valspan. Mrs Isaacs was born in Valspan.

This is the crux of the matter. The Valspan removal is an example of a particular strategy used in urban removals in the Northern Cape and elsewhere. The Administration Boards, responsible for developing the townships, budget huge sums of money for developing relocation areas in the reserves, while freezing all development in the existing townships so that these areas become "slums". (If the people in Valspan disobeyed the freeze on housing and added onto their houses, the structures were demolished.) Often basic services are not provided. For example in Huhudi, where a freeze on housing also exists, garbage removals sometimes take place only once a month. The services in Valspan are minimal — there are communal toilets, and garbage removals only once every fortnight.

Rents and rates are increased in these townships yet no development takes place — deterioration occurs rather. This makes people in Valspan believe that their rent money is being used to build Pampierstad — a place they may never be able to afford to live in, let alone want to live in.

Moving to Pampierstad means people lose their Section 10 rights and have to travel over a distance that often makes their jobs economically unviable due to transport costs. (A subsidised monthly bus ticket is R14,50.) Although Valspan rents are to increase from R11,00 to R13,50 this is far less than the R30,00 rent charged in Pampierstad. Many people earn between R20,00 and R35,00 in domestic jobs or piece-work on surrounding plots. Others are pensioners. This means that a large number of Valspan residents will not be able to survive in Pampierstad. Reports have reached Valspan of people in Pampierstad being locked out of their houses for being in rent arrears for 3 months. Their belongings are auctioned, and they are forced to leave. "We don't know where they end up," remarked two women at Pampierstad.

The people of Valspan built their own houses, and thus qualify for compensation. But, after 20 years of no repairs, the most ridiculously low amounts are being paid.

In 1959 the Coloured township of Andalusia Park was established, and over the years Coloureds have moved out of Valspan to this separate area. Some stayed in Valspan, either because the cost of housing was cheaper there, or because they did not want to be separated from the Black community. The Valspan people fear that once they are moved, the town of Jan Kempdorp will be declared a Coloured Labour Preference Area. The Chairman of the Community Council, Mr Cwaile, says that he was shown a letter in 1981 to this effect by a White business friend of his. Lately the Government has admitted in Parliament that some Black townships are being declared Coloured areas, so this is not an unfounded fear. Women at Pampierstad reported that Coloured labour was increasingly being used in the domestic sphere, since housewives did not want to pay the cost of transport to Pampierstad.

Besides the Black/Coloured divide, the effect of the threat of removal to Pampierstad has caused some Sothos to apply to go to Onverwacht before they are removed to Pampierstad, where they fear discrimination as non-Tswanas in Bophuthatswana. Xhosas too, are adamant that they will be opposed in Pampierstad, and will not receive pensions etc. In fact, some people still have to come to Valspan at present, for pension payouts. At the last payout, only half the number of Sotho pensioners from Onverwacht arrived back in Valspan, because the rest could not afford the journey.

In the letter to Dr Koornhof this June, the Community Council voiced their feelings about this attempt at "separate development".

"We reject the way the government has divided our once united community, along racial and ethnic lines. Some Sothos have gone to Onverwacht, and the Xhosas amongst us feel very threatened at the prospect of moving into a Tswana homeland. We have also been alienated from our Coloured brothers and sisters who have now indirectly become a threat, as their new township, Andalusia Park, can only expand in the direction of Valspan, at our expense. The fact that some of our Coloured brothers and sisters are still living in Valspan and have chosen not to go to Andalusia Park, is for us a symbol of unity in the face of a plan that seeks to divide a once united community into Coloured, Tswana, Xhosa and Sotho, giving some privileges at the expense of others."

A Government circular on removals, dated the 22nd January, 1982, states:

"The aged, disabled, widows and women with dependent children, as well as other Blacks not fit for labour residence in urban Black residential areas and elsewhere in prescribed areas. Those in this category who have qualifications in accordance with Section 10(1)(a) or (b) of the Black (Urban Areas) Consolidated Act, Number 25 of 1945, **cannot be forced to settle** in a national or independent state. Where settlement takes place, after persuasion, or on request, free housing

may be provided in settlements and, if need be, in rural townships (or even border townships in exceptional cases) and the services in such settlement places are also available to such persons free of charge."

Most of the people of Valspan hold Section 10(1)(a), (b) or (c) rights. Pensioners have not been given free or very cheap housing in Pampierstad.

The forms of persuasion here are obvious. People's houses are allowed to fall down around them amid threats to individuals by officials. "People stand together and say they won't move. Yet when an official comes to old person and says that he is moving him/her tomorrow, 'finished and klaar', this person is afraid, and feels so helpless he/she moves," a minister in the township reported. Mr Richard Nkomo, a pensioner, was arrested last year and taken to the police station in Jan Kempdorp. He was held and questioned as to why he would not move to Pampierstad.

These removals are all the more insidious because they take place family by family and not on a mass scale, all at once. Hence there is no sensational publicity of a removal at gun-point, although the results are the same, and the threat of direct force is present, albeit cloaked. The effect of these threats means that the community is fragmented. Some people move against their will, while others stay, often because even though they are afraid, they cannot move to Pampierstad and survive.

The Community Council has asked Dr Koornhof to reconsider his decision, in the light of what faces many in the community, should the removal go ahead.

"We have always lived peacefully here, and do not understand the fact that you stated we are not being moved in terms of any Act, but 'a long standing policy'. We feel that we can only appeal to you now, not to move us according to this 'policy', that surely can be flexible enough to change in order to prevent suffering, rather than cause it.

"We implore you to let those remain in Valspan who wish to develop a harmonious prosperous community, and not to continue with this subtle, yet forced, removal. We, the Community Council, have on behalf of the people, asked the Chief Commissioner once more for a meeting to discuss our fears and hopes. We feel as a Community Council that we have not been treated as a representative body of the people, but as 'boys'. We are no longer consulted on matters and we feel the government does not therefore take the structure of the Community Council seriously.

"We appeal to you in the name of sanity to consider our problems and come to a more humane decision."

Dr Koornhof has said that removals take place for **development**. Had the Northern Cape Administration Board developed Valspan, these people could have survived comfortably, and the town of Jan Kempdorp would have remained sure of its stable labour force. The removal to Pampierstad will mean for most, a future of homelessness, starvation and unemployment. Such disruption and destruction is heralded as development — a 'development' that is linked up with the current policy of 'reform'. It seems that the relevant Government department uses Orwellian doublespeak to disguise the repression accompanying the 1984 'reform' initiatives.