



# TRAC

Transvaal Rural Action Committee

## Newsletter No 7(a) April 1985 • BROKEN PROMISES PART I

### The promise made:

Dr Viljoen's statement on the 1st February 1985, that forced removals would be suspended while the Government reviewed its policy on this matter, was greeted with mixed feelings. Communities in the Transvaal reacted sceptically that they would 'wait and see'.

Dr Viljoen mentioned to the Rand Daily Mail that his department was 'unwilling' to proceed with a removal without the agreement of the people concerned. However, his statement also said that the Government would continue to resettle black communities if 'their leaders agreed'.

The communities themselves felt no relief. In a joint statement replying to Dr Viljoen they asked: 'What leaders are the government talking about when it says it will move the people whose leaders agree? Are these the chiefs and 'leaders' they have put over us or our real leaders?'

There is therefore some vagueness as to whether the bottom line of halting a removal will be due to the resistance of the leaders or the people in the community, i.e. whether the Government will move a community if the leader agrees or whether an agreement of the majority of the people is also needed. It seems as if the strategies used by the Government since February 1st have varied according to the 'inroads' the Government has made to persuade the people in various communities to move.

### The promise twisted — Kwa Ngema

In Kwa Ngema for example, the strategy has been concentrated on the leadership issue. The majority of the community is opposed to the removal. Accordingly the government has refused to agree to negotiate with representatives elected by a general vote in Kwa Ngema. It has long been clear to all concerned that the community would re-affirm its support for the Ngema Committee at any such election. Government officials did initially meet with this committee, but when its stand against the removal proved unshakeable, they decided to appoint a chief instead. They chose one Cuthbert Ngema who said that he was in favour of the removal.

The Ngema Committee applied to the Supreme Court for an interdict to stop this appointment. However their application did not succeed. In terms of the 1927 Black Administration Act the state can appoint whoever it wishes as chief over a black tribe. The Ngemas averred that they were not a tribe; the judge ruled that anthropological evidence to this effect

was irrelevant, as the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of a tribe could be applied to them. This means that is Cuthbert Ngema agrees to the government's terms the removal will go ahead as an 'officially negotiated' removal. Dr Viljoen's criteria will be fulfilled in that a 'leader', albeit a state-appointed one, has agreed to the removal.

The most recent example of such 'negotiations' was Mogopa. The State insisted that it had negotiated the removal with an officially recognised headman. No matter that the headman had been democratically deposed by his tribe, that the majority of the tribe refused to follow him when he moved, and that the Government then had to smash the schools and church in a further effort to get the people to go. Even then they refused.

### The Promise Broken — Mathopestad

In Mathopestad the Government strategy has included several unsuccessful attempts to co-opt the existing acting Chief, and in the past vague attempts have been made to set up an illegitimate child of the wife of a past chief as the rightful Chief.

After these unsuccessful attempts at obtaining the agreement of the chief, it seems the local commissioner concentrated on secret meetings with informers in the village — who in turn were able to get a small number of followers in the village to agree to go and see Onderstepoort (the proposed resettlement camp), on the 11th March.

On this date, a truck belonging to a neighbouring white farmer arrived on Mathopestad land, and parked near the bus rank. The driver did not approach the chief to announce his business. 29 people got onto the truck. It then drove off to Mathopestad land to where two government buses were parked (it was as if a larger number of people were expected). The people were taken to Onderstepoort, the resettlement camp earmarked for Mathopestad. It seems that most of the 29 people who went on the 11th March to see Onderstepoort on buses arranged by the government were tenants — and not the landowners or members of the Mathopestad tribe. The tenants are often labourers who were evicted from farms and sought refuge in Mathopestad. Now these people were being promised a place of their own and were serving the Government's strategy of getting a number of people to move, who would then be classified as residents of Mathopestad. Obviously from the Government's point of view no distinction is being made between tenants and landowners in the tribe.

being taken to meet with the leaders, although many promises to negotiate have been made. Why does Dr Viljoen not meet with the leaders of the community and fulfil his promises?

## STOP PRESS

On 29th April the Deputy Minister of Co-operation and Development, Mr Ben Wilkens announced that Kwa Ngema would no longer be moved.

This reprieve was greeted with joy by the people of Kwa Ngema. The following is a statement by Moses Kwa Ngema, the elected head of the Kwa Ngema family:

'I am very very happy. I can now see brightly with my eyes. I don't believe but I do believe. I have heard God hears quickly and replies later, but God heard me quickly and replied quick-

ly. I believe White and Black can be friends now. I fought for the community and they will be happy because I was strong for them. I am saying thanks to the Government that they saw if they took us to Oshoek we would die. I am glad they listened to us. I feel if the Government listens to the others coming behind us, I will be happy — to mention one, Mathopestad.

'The people of Kwa Ngema will be flying now, for the first time in four years, the people will be able to live a normal life.'

Already his joy has been tempered. The reprieve was announced on one SABC radio broadcast and then apparently withdrawn from the news. Because the reprieve was verbal only the Ngema Committee's lawyers telexed the Minister requesting official confirmation of the reprieve. Now, over a week later, a reply has not yet been received. Because of previous broken promises, the Ngema leaders are very worried.

## Newsletter No 7(b) May 1985 ● BROKEN PROMISES PART II

Most of the recent debate about the suspension or non-suspension of removals has focussed on township removals and 'black spots' or freehold farming areas like Mathopestad, Driefontein and Kwa Ngema.

However these removals account for a relatively small proportion of people who have already been moved and of those still under threat of removal. Other kinds of forced removals are those of black farm workers out of the 'white' rural areas, 'squatter' evictions from the settlements around the towns, and those arising from the re-shuffling of homeland boundaries caused by the consolidation proposals. Dr Viljoen's initial statement about suspending forced removals referred only to township removals and black spots. His statement ignored the 1½ million people in these other categories who have already been removed, and the fact that many more are still scheduled for removal.

In their statement made in response to Dr Viljoen's announcement communities under threat of removal in the Transvaal said: 'It is not enough that the government says it will reconsider some areas. All removals must stop. Both ourselves, as well as other communities under threat of removal have the right to stay where we are.' In addition, they responded to the explicit exclusion of 'squatter' removals from the suspension by saying: 'What does Dr Viljoen mean about squatter removals? We believe that rural squatters are people who have lived on farms for hundreds of years. In fact since before Whites took these farms over. Now they are being pushed into overcrowded reserves as "squatters". And urban "squatters" are often people with urban rights who have no houses because of the housing crisis.'

From this it is clear that for communities under threat of removal, a basic demand is that all removals cease.

This however has not happened. In the Transvaal alone, since February 1st there have been a number of disturbing incidents.

## THE PROMISE IGNORED

**Swartruggens:** At much the same time as Dr Viljoen made his announcement, the deproclamation (notice of abolition) of the black residential area of Swartruggens in the Western Transvaal was gazetted and signed by the Deputy Minister of Co-operation and Development. This is in direct contradiction to stated intentions to reprieve urban townships.

**Ekangala-Bantutstan Corporation:** On February 9th Dr Viljoen made an announcement to the effect that Ekangala was

to be incorporated into KwaNdebele. Ekangala is a township near Bronkhorstspuit. Half of it is in South Africa and half in KwaNdebele. Its residents for the most part are people who were forced to move there from East Rand townships because of the impossibility of obtaining houses there. Ekangala residents insist they were promised that they would not be incorporated into KwaNdebele. But this promise, like so many others, has now been broken. Although incorporation does not mean physical removal the Ekangala residents are adamant that they were 'tricked' into moving from the East Rand so that they would end up in a homeland. Their rejection of what they have termed an 'underhand removal' has resulted in much community strife. Most recently leading opponents of incorporation have been threatened by supporters of the KwaNdebele government. Many people are now talking of fleeing Ekangala. If they did, no doubt some would end up in backyard shacks and once more be subject to the threat of demolition and forced removal.

**Tsakane Repeated Removals:** In early February a number of shack dwellers at Tsakane near Brakpan were subjected to a 2 am raid in which some shacks were demolished. These people had originally been moved from the Brakpan old location in 1981 and were leased sites for shacks by the East Rand Board until proper accommodation was provided for them. They were promised 4-roomed houses, but were never given them. Early in 1985 the East Rand Board began to insist that they leave the shack area and move into a site and service scheme where they would take a loan for building materials and pay an average of R150 per month.

None of these people could pay such a high monthly sum and reiterated their demand that the original promise of 4-room houses be kept. In the face of both publicity and militant action by the shack-dwellers, the East Rand Board agreed to negotiate the issue, and those whose shacks were demolished rebuilt them. Here, victims of removal were not given houses and have ended up in an invidious position — their inability to pay for the expensive site and service scheme meant demolition and the possibility of being forced into the bantustans. These people, the vast majority of whom have section 10 rights have, through a process of removal now become seen as 'squatters' who, according to Dr Viljoen must be moved.

**Katlehong-'Squatter' Evictions:** Likewise the shack-dwellers from Katlehong near Germiston, who have repeatedly resisted shack demolitions over the past few years. Currently, in late April renewed demolitions and evictions have aroused mass community anger and support. These people

The leaders of Mathopestad and the majority of the landowners are clearly against the move. They have not been consulted by the Government since May 1983, where their strong opposition was voiced to Dr Koornhof in a meeting held in Pretoria.

The Government insisted on a planning committee being set up to liaise about the removal. The committee was set up by the tribe and voiced its opposition to the removal. Since then it has never been consulted. Instead the government has had a series of secret meetings with private individuals.

It is clear that the event on the 11th March was arranged secretly because the headman and Chief knew nothing about it beforehand. The Chief had in fact complained to Dr Koornhof in May '83 about strangers having secret meetings in Mathopestad at night and Koornhof had agreed that the Government officials concerned, especially the local commissioner, could only come to Mathopestad with the knowledge and permission of the Chief. Sending a white farmer onto the land was a pathetic attempt at circumventing this agreement.

On Tuesday 9th April Peter Soal, a member of the PFP opposition party, asked a question in Parliament about whether it is the intention to resettle the residents of Mathopestad in Onderstepoort. The reply by Dr Gerrit Viljoen was YES, because it is in the interests of all parties concerned. He added the date would be determined in consultation with the residents of Mathopestad.

Acting Chief John Mathope's response to this statement was: 'We read in the newspapers that Dr Gerrit Viljoen says the removal of Mathopestad will go ahead. Why didn't he come to us before he wrote our name in the papers? Dr Viljoen has said that there will be no more removals unless the leaders agree. With whom did he talk? With whom did he settle this removal? We as owners of Mathopestad are innocent of this.

'We the Mathopestad people will not move from our land. If we move we will lose our farming and be poor. There will be no progress. We will die there. We own our land. We were born here and our parents were born here. We will not move.'

On the 10th April the Black Sash sent Dr Viljoen a telegram. It read: 'You stated 1 February all forced removals would be suspended. Now you tell Parliament Mathopestad will be moved. You misled South Africa and the World. Again you promise, you withdraw, you inflame peaceful people. Black Sash.'

Dr Viljoen replied on the same day in a telegram stating that: 'Removals are suspended except where it takes place with the agreement, that is in consultation with residents.' Here Dr Viljoen equates agreement with consultation. The residents of the tribe of Mathopestad have never been officially consulted neither have they agreed (except for the small group that the Government has met with clandestinely and which consists of mostly tenants). Has Dr Viljoen made a foregone conclusion of removal therefore?

On the 10th, the SABC announced that the Deputy Minister of Co-operation and Development, Mr Ben Wilkens had informed the radio station that a large number of Mathopestad residents had declared themselves willing to go to Onderstepoort and that on request many residents had been taken by the department to see Onderstepoort.

On Monday 15th April the Mathopestad acting Chief, John Mathope invited the Commissioner of Koster and Rustenburg to a tribal meeting in Mathopestad on Saturday 20th April. On Thursday these Commissioners came to inform John that they had received a phone call from Dr Viljoen and that they were coming to fetch 'their' people from Mathopestad on Saturday at 8 am to go and see Onderstepoort. They invited John and headmen too. In fact the buses came at 6.30 am to fetch the people and about 150 people, about 12 of them teenagers, boarded the bus.

Reporters from the BBC and CBS News followed these buses to Onderstepoort. There they interviewed people. It became clear that the majority of these people had agreed to leave Mathopestad because they were tenants, and therefore did not own land. The landowners there had given them a stand to live on when they were homeless. Now they were under the impression that if they moved they would get land. The reporters asked the Chief Commissioner of Rustenburg, Mr Pretorius which land the tenants would be given. The answer was that he could not guarantee these tenants any land — it would depend on the Mathopestad tribe once they were moved. Then afterwards if the tribe did not decide to give these tenants land they would be in the same position as before. The tenants clearly did not know this.

Back in Mathopestad the tribe held their meeting. There were also tenants present who had no wish to leave. The Chief, six headmen of the six clans of the tribe and the planning committee declared their rejection of the removal. 291 men and women (no teenagers) signed the petition.

Since the meeting members of the tribe who were absent on the 20th have signed the petition. Over 750 signatures were collected. These were then summarised into **families**. The figures include families who are landowners but are resident in urban areas at present. However, they were born in Mathopestad and will retire there to their stands.

Government figures change constantly. On the 11th April, a SABC report spoke of 335 families in Mathopestad. On the 27th April, SABC spoke of the 230 families in Mathopestad (both figures are from government sources).

According to the petition, 80 landowning families currently resident in Mathopestad are against the removal. 179 landowning families currently living in the urban areas are against the removal.

These results clearly show that an overwhelming majority are against leaving Mathopestad. This includes all the leaders of the tribe and the planning committee. The criteria that Dr Viljoen gave for not moving a community have all been met — i.e. the majority of the residents **and** the true leaders do not wish to move. The tribal leaders have said that the tenants are free to go or to stay, but in no way does this change the stand of the tribe and the land owning families. Instead of consulting the people as promised, however, the Department of Co-operation and Development has embarked on a programme of misinforming the public about Mathopestad, using the government controlled media.

On Saturday 27th April, the SABC TV1 news displayed a very inaccurate picture of affairs in Mathopestad. As a result, the Mathopestad tribe has instructed their lawyer about inaccuracies and to request a right to rely on TV1 news.

Some inaccuracies include a very biased picture of Onderstepoort. The single white farmhouse was concentrated on and not the 900 toilets and fletcrafts that the people will have to live in. The Agricolor project which allows for irrigation of 40 hectares out of 2 000 was also shown and nothing of the remaining 1 960 hectares of dry bushveld.

Only two people were interviewed — both tenants — one of whom expressed a desire to leave, believing she would get land at Onderstepoort. This misunderstanding was not corrected. The SABC crew started interviewing the primary school headmaster, but when he said he did not want to move they stopped interviewing him and did not screen his views at all. There were many other inaccuracies about the facilities at Mathopestad and the average building was not filmed. Rather, in once case, a zinc hut (actually a tool shed) was shown, giving the impression that it was a standard dwelling.

Mathopestad is a test of the sincerity of Dr Viljoen's statement that he will consult the people and that no community will be moved against its will. At the moment no steps are

too are victims of a housing crisis of massive proportions, and consequently have become 'squatters'.

**Northern Transvaal-Bantustan Consolidation:** Homeland consolidation has always been a major category of removal. Dr Viljoen said nothing about their suspension in his statement. In the Transvaal the government is currently negotiating consolidation plans with homeland governments and White farmers in the Northern Transvaal. In many areas the new proposals involve transfers of land from one bantustan to the other. Apart from the dispossession and removal that inevitably occurs when people have their land taken away from them, these events have resulted in ethnic hostility and fights between people who are opposing plans to transfer land to the adjoining bantustan. In the Acornhoek area of the north-eastern Transvaal, and in the Tzaneen area where Lebowa and Gazankulu share boundaries this has caused enormous upheaval. In addition plans to incorporate parts of the Moutse

district of Lebowa (near Groblersdal) to KwaNdebele has caused Sotho people to panic and move off by themselves rather than face incorporation.

In all of the areas listed above removals are going ahead. The Government has tried to justify this in terms of the 'need for orderly urbanisation' in the case of so-called squatters and in terms of the need for cohesive land units in the case of bantustan consolidation. Whatever the rationale these all involve forced removal and are all a direct consequence of government policy.

In their statement the Transvaal communities stated that they would be relieved if Dr Viljoen's promises were true. This is indeed so and the strong possibility that Driefontein will not be moved has been welcomed. Yet the current threat to Mathopestad and the daily on-going removals of the kind described above, mean that there is still a long way to go before it can be said that the era of forced removals is over.



**Residents in Silverton, Tsakane rebuild shacks which had been pulled down by the East Rand Board**