

# FROM HUMANSDORP TO KEISKAMMAHOEK – THE EXPROPRIATION AND REMOVAL OF A FINGO COMMUNITY

by E.K. Moorcroft.

The forced removal of the Fingo people from their ancestral lands in the Humansdorp district of the Cape received a great deal of publicity during the recent session of Parliament. Unfortunately, all the shock, anger and dismay which greeted the publication of the facts changed nothing. The Fingo people continue to die of starvation and disease in their barren and inadequate settlement camp at Keiskamma Hoek in the Ciskei. The whites who have taken over the Fingo lands proceed to marvel at their fertility, and gloat openly over the productive potential of the lands they have acquired.

The Fingo removal epitomizes all that is evil and unjust about the Government's apartheid policy. It serves as an example by which the policy and its implementation can be judged.

Firstly, we have the insensitivity of Government to historical rights. The Fingos were granted the land in 1851 and 1858 by Deed of Reservation. It was given in perpetuity to the Fingo people and their descendants. This was done out of gratitude by the then Governor of the Cape for services rendered by them to the Crown.

The next feature of the removals is the total disregard by the Government for the legitimate objections of the people to the move. For the Fingos, the move meant loss of land, loss of livestock, loss of homes, loss of jobs and job opportunities, and loss of South African citizenship. The Fingos had never been part of Ciskei, either culturally, ethnically or historically. Some were even more fluent in Afrikaans than in Xhosa. They had no ties whatsoever with Ciskei other than that they had passed through it briefly in the early part of the nineteenth century. It just happened to be the nearest convenient homeland for the Government's purposes, which were to get rid of them at all costs.

We then have the arrogance of officials who proceed to implement the removals without proper consultation with the people concerned, or provision for their needs. The first that the majority of Fingos learnt about the removals was at a meeting at Snyklip on the 5th October 1977. This meeting was addressed by the magistrate of Humansdorp, who read out to the assembled people the contents of an order issued by the State President. The people were bluntly told that they were to be moved to Keiskamma Hoek, and that if they did not agree to move voluntarily, they would be taken by force. This did in fact happen. Eighty two of the one hundred and four families affected refused to move.

The brutality of the officials of Government towards inno-

cent men, women and children makes a harrowing story. According to sworn affidavits made by the people, those who refused to move were beaten with sticks, threatened by guns, and jailed. The Department of Co-operation and Development denies that this was the case, but their denial is greeted with absolute incredulity and derision by the people concerned, who are ready to defend their sworn statements at any time.

An equally bad form of brutality is being practised by the "out of sight, out of mind" attitude of the South African government towards the plight of the Fingos at their re-settlement camp in Keiskamma Hoek. Over seventy children have died in the camp since their arrival, together with many elderly or infirm people who have been unable to withstand the rigours of their new life. The South African government refuses to accept responsibility for the community, claiming that the people are now citizens of a sovereign, independent state, and must therefore take their grievances to the Ciskeian government. The people laugh wryly at this suggestion. After publicity in the South African press, the wife of the Ciskeian president allegedly arrived at the camp with a parcel of second-hand clothes for the children, but other than this token gesture, there has apparently been no response from Ciskei whatever.

According to Dr. Koornhof, an area of about 8,000 hectares has been made available to the Fingos on the commonage at Keiskamma Hoek for their exclusive use, but this is denied by both the Fingo people and the former deputy Minister of Co-operation and Development, Mr. Greyling Wentzel. Mr. Wentzel concedes that the land was not given exclusively to the Fingos, and the Fingos themselves maintain that they are not allowed to run stock on it at all. They are bewildered by suggestions that they have been given access to the 8,000 hectares, since they have not even enough land to make vegetable gardens for themselves.

The Government's scant regard for the provisions of the law in the implementation of its policies was well illustrated by the attempt to sell the Fingo lands to whites without first having complied with the statutory requirements. Earlier this year, it was noted that the land was being offered for sale. However, since the land is zoned as "scheduled land" for the purposes of Black Land Act, 1913, it could not be excised before compensatory land had been provided. In terms of Section 3(b) of the Development Trust and Land Act No. 18 of 1936, land of at least an equivalent pastoral or agricultural value has to be provided as compensatory

land in the province concerned. When questioned about this provision, the Minister of Co-operation and Development denied that this was necessary. Only after sustained pressure by the P.F.P. in Parliament was the validity of the objections conceded. However, the government in its own inimitable way proceeded to add insult to injury by making the compensatory land available to Transkei rather than to Ciskei (where the people have been settled). When questioned about this injustice the Minister of Co-operation and Development responded by saying:

"The reason why land which has to be added to the Transkei was identified as compensatory land was merely to comply with legal requirements, namely that land in the same province should be designated as compensatory land, irrespective of where the people concerned are settled". (Hansard, 11 June 1982, page 9492).

The Fingos, a law-abiding and peaceful community for over a hundred years, were not prepared to give up their land without protest. Their first step was to take their case to court. In their application, it was contended that the only resolution adopted by Parliament was the resolution of 16th May, 1975, which approved of the report of the Select Committee of Bantu Affairs. It was submitted that Parliament did not approve of the removal to the areas to which the Fingos were supposed to withdraw, nor did Parliament have before it the terms of the State President's order, nor did Parliament consider what accommodation was available in the area to which the Fingos were required to move. It was contended that Parliament in 1975 approved only of the Fingos' withdrawal from their present land, but did not approve of their being moved to any specific area or place. These contentions were rejected by the Supreme Court. The Fingos received opinions to the effect that the Court decision was wrong, and desired to take the matter on ap-

peal. However, the applicant who brought the application to Court on behalf of the Fingos did not wish to proceed on appeal, and consequently no appeal was lodged or heard.

Having failed to gain redress from the Courts, the Fingos then attempted to approach Parliament. They requested an interview with the Minister of Co-operation and Development, but this was refused on the grounds that they were not South African citizens and that they should lodge any complaints they might have with the Ciskeian Department of the Interior.

The importance of the treatment meted out to the Fingos is compounded when one considers that in the Eastern Cape and Border alone, an estimated 50,000 Blacks still face eviction from cities, towns, villages and so-called "blackspots" in the region. Are these people also to receive the same rough-shod treatment as the Fingos? The Eastern Cape is already seething with industrial unrest. Confrontation in the rural areas could be the spark in the powder keg.

Land is always an emotional issue. No government can proceed to dispossess people of it in so cavalier a fashion. By doing so, it will generate enormous resentment, hatred and bitterness. Is it too much to hope that the Fingo incident might have taught the Government the folly of its ways?

Unfortunately, there is at present every indication that further removals will proceed as planned, particularly in those parts of the country where the Government has been able to win the compliance of the Homeland leaders most directly concerned. Whether or not the people will be as compliant, and what the Government's reaction to defiance will be, is uncertain. But what is certain is that those of us in opposition politics in South Africa will not be the only interested observers. □

#### **Madam's Mission Child:**

Raised at the mission  
She walks like a nun,  
Darkly about her madam's business:  
Her child on the farm  
Runs snot to the ground  
As she nurtures one of a white race  
Of babies, city-bred:  
Swiftly, feet out, in sensible shoes,  
To the corner café from the washing-line,  
Some friends slop or amble  
Others chaff and make laughter,  
but God has made her obedient  
handmaiden to the chosen  
racing for heaven in labourless mornings  
and white linen nights:  
She grinds the bread  
And presses the wine,  
Serving it too - to fastidious communicants.

*Margo Wallace*