

Towards the end of 1983 AFRA came across a number of tin toilets being erected past Ekuvukeni, about 60 km east of Ladysmith. A new site was clearly being erected for the settlement of some removed community. The new sites adjoin St Antonine's Old Age Home yet no one there knew for whom these sites were intended, nor did those people living closeby.

The area in which this settlement lies, is part of a cluster of SADT farms bought up from white farmers in the 1960's and set aside for the settlement of all those people currently living in the african freehold areas around Ladysmith. This area has already seen such removals as those of people to Limehill in 1968 which brought worldwide publicity, and in 1978 to Ekuvukeni.

This process is of course part of the state's extraordinary attempt to consolidate KwaZulu into some sort of geographical and political entity, with this block of trust farms joining up with the Klip River reserves. Though the reasons for the removal of people from freehold areas are many, (and will be discussed later), the main motivation remains a determination on the part of Pretoria to consolidate the homelands, and through this process eventually to deprive black South Africans of their South African citizenship.

A question was eventually asked in Parliament about these new sites. The answer given by the Minister on the 7th Sept 1983 was:

'A residential area, and not a closer settlement is being developed between Ekuvukeni and Limehill. The planning of the residential area makes provision for 65 residential sites. The sites have already been laid out and the necessary infrastructure is presently being provided. The area is being developed for settlement of members of the black community of Steincoalspruit.'

This was the first that the Steincoalspruit landowners had heard of the proposed settlement area, although they had been aware of the threat of removal since 1978 when the tenants were moved to the relocation area, Ekuvukeni, resulting in suffering and impoverishment. In the same year the state expropriated the land on which these african tenants had been living for more than a 100 years. The landowners have chosen to ignore this development and continue to live on the land which they still regard as their own.

The Department's policy is to provide land for land compensation for only those people with more than 17 ha of land. Those with less are merely given cash compensation and moved to a closer settlement.

Thus it seems that it is the department's intention to 'compensate' those people at Steenkoolspruit who own more than 17 ha of land with clearly inferior thornveld, suitable only for large scale ranching. But more than this, the department's intention seems to be to compel people to reside close together in a 'residential area', at a distance from their 'compensatory' land.

Landowners at Steincoalspruit have neither been shown this 'residential area', nor the compensatory land, yet the construction of this residential area continues apace.

A meeting was held at Steincoalspruit on the 26th December 1983 to discuss these new developments. The community once again affirmed that they did not wish to be moved.

#### HISTORY OF STEINCOALSPRUIT

The first african purchase of a section of Steincoalspruit in 1874, was made in the form of a syndicate, which was one of the most common ways in which africans bought land in Natal at that time. The transfer of the land was made on 7th April 1874 to Abraham Limberg, William Africa and Lucas Jacob, acting on their own behalf and in

trust for 39 others. The majority of these early owners were former slaves of Boer farmers in the OFS and Cape. Abraham Limberg (Kazi), for instance, escaped from a Free State farm at the age of 18 and made his way down Van Reenen's Pass to Natal. After initially living on a mission he bought shares in the syndicate farm at Steincoalspruit and also bought subdivision C of Steincoalspruit. In time he became a considerable fruit grower. In 1913 the land was not scheduled for black occupation, nor was it released in 1936. However only in 1978 did the threat to the landowners become immediate with the removal of the tenants and the expropriation of the land.

Consolidation has been given as the main reason for the threatened removal of Steincoalspruit. However other factors also operate.

#### WHITE FARMERS

White farmers in the area wish to take over the land. At the annual meeting of the Ladysmith Farmers' Association in 1981 the President said that 'no time should be wasted in taking the land back into use once the former occupants had been resettled... Areas falling within the white area or adjacent to it should be preferred for sale to farmers (Witness 27/6/81).' On 1 July 1983 the President of the Ladysmith Farmers' Association wrote to the Ladysmith Gazette once again pressing for the removal of black freehold areas. In 1983 white farmers protested that Roosboom, an african freehold area from which people were removed in 1976 had still not been sold to white farmers.

Since 1933 the Elandsplaagte Farmers' Association have been attempting to have the african people cleared off their own land. In 1938, H.C Lugg, Chief Native Commissioner in Natal, pointed out that any proposal for the removal of blacks from freehold areas, including Steincoalspruit "would probably meet with considerable opposition" and "coercion should only be resorted to as a last resort."

#### COAL

Although removals are of course implemented in terms of the 1975 consolidation proposals, the timing of the removals can also be understood in economic terms. A preliminary investigation by the Surplus People's Project, into the coal deposits on the 66 black spots (removed and under threat) in the 8 northern districts of Natal has shown that at least 30 of them have coal deposits, much of it of a high quality, 5 of the 66 do not have any coal deposits on them, while the position of the remaining 31 requires further investigation.

On 16th June 1978 the landowners at Steincoalspruit were served with expropriation orders and a general meeting of the syndicate was held. The landowners responded within 60 days informing the Minister of Agriculture that the amount of compensation was rejected, particularly because of the dissatisfaction with the evaluation of the coal deposits. However the Secretary for Agricultural Credit and Land Tenure argued in a letter that from "expert advice on the mineral rights... it appears that the coal deposit is of such poor quality that it has practically no economic value. The value of the coal is thus purely nominal and was included in the land. The offers represent the land value, plus the rights to minerals and improvements if any."

This conclusion is open to dispute. The fact that the coal resources of Steincoalspruit are potentially valuable is indicated by the approaches made by Platberg Colliery to certain of the landowners to explore and exploit the coal on their land. The colliery withdrew the offer after the government had expropriated the land. Through open cast mining, Grinaker is at present successfully exploiting sub B of Steincoalspruit- a white owned portion. Eventually, because of the opposition of the landowners, the Dept of Co-op and Development requested an investigation into the value of the coal deposits. A prospecting licence was granted to Newcastle Platberg Colliery on the 27th Oct 1980. A further lease of two years has been issued to them. In reply to a question in Parliament on 29th March 1983, the Minister replied that the valuation had not yet been received by the Department and 'it is not yet possible to indicate when a report would be available.'

Thus we have a situation at Steincoalspruit where landowners have repeatedly indicated that they do not wish to be moved, where no conclusion has yet been reached as to the value of the coal deposits underlying the land and yet, where sites are already being erected in the area allocated for the community.

The removal of Steincoalspruit is imminent. And the small number of landowners make them vulnerable to the power of the state. However Steincoalspruit is represented on a new umbrella body which represents all threatened areas in the Ladysmith district.

This body, formed in March this year, is the first time that threatened areas have come together since the 1960's. This body gives Steincoalspruit new hope.