

Meran

AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

By DOREEN PATRICK

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"I want to say to the world: You can push people around, you can fight them and you can insult them. They will take all this to a certain point, but you must not try to take a man's home away from him. You must not even think that you will go unpunished if you estrange a man's fatherland from him."

The Prime Minister at Windhoek.

Monday 29 January, 1968 was just an ordinary day for most people. It was not, however, for eight families in Natal.

These people were the first of many to be removed from their home to their new homelands; in fact the start of the removals of the Black Spots in the Dundee—Klip River area.

Mary Grice and myself had the honour to travel in Archbishop Hurley's car to witness the removal. Knowing it was an all day excursion we naturally prepared a picnic.

We arrived at 12.30 p.m. The heat was quite beyond belief. The first car we saw was driven by a local farmer, a senator. We knew he was interested in this removal scheme and had just returned from being taken around the area by the local Bantu commissioner. He was pleased to tell us that he thought all as being done in a most humane manner and was well under control. Water was available, plenty of labour, in fact, eventually they would be better off than they were before. We bade our farewells with a few misgivings about this report but hoping that we would find ourselves in agreement with him.

We drove the next eight miles and arrived to find three or four cars parked. Around the cars were the Franciscan fathers from the local mission station. Here we now saw the true picture. Dismantled homes, dejected and bewildered people; worried wives, almost in tears as their husbands would not know where they had gone — twenty miles is a long way to walk to see if your family are well settled in a new home.

Everyone we spoke to had the same sad question. What are we going to do? From this scene of misery we then drove in convoy with the other cars to the new homeland. We had as an escort a caterpillar tractor making the road. I dread to think of this "road" when it rains.

It was now 2.30 p.m. — no lunch — how could we when we were amongst such hardship? No house in sight, no trees, no water, it was beyond belief. As we got out of the cars we saw a bundle of tents which had been dumped in a pile; there was no labour force as we had been told there would be. Three families were already in their new surroundings — a 50 yard by 50 yards plot for each family, sitting with all their worldly possessions around them — one family with a bedroom suite with inner spring mattresses. They had been in this trance-like state since 11.30 a.m. Headed by Archbishop Hurley we started erecting the tents. Within half an hour two tents were up. Ghost town was now looking like an endurance test under canvas. Dogs, cats, children all looking for relief and just a little water to drink.

The people were now beginning to wonder where and how they were going to eat; no wood,

no water. Two bags of mealie meal had been dumped but how do you cook it? The fathers assured us that an Inter-Church committee had set up an emergency food kitchen to send in supplies. I understand that water was brought in later that evening.

About 3.30 p.m. the local authorities arrived in full force to finish erecting the tents. One wonders if they would have come if we had not been in the area.

We left at 4 p.m. to drive the 180 miles back to Durban. About 5 p.m. we stopped to have our picnic. Words fail to describe the effect this day had on us: What right had we even to think of food and drink when fellow South Africans did not know where and how the next meal was coming from.

"and it seems to me only fair when people are moved they must do something about providing some accommodation for themselves".

Mr. Coertze.



"In a democracy dissent is an act of faith, and criticism an act of patriotism; —"

*Dr. E. G. Malherbe quoted Senator J. William Fulbright in his
Presidential address to the Institute of Race Relations*

ON WEDNESDAY 7th February the Black Sash held an all night vigil in protest against the uprooting of settled communities, against the conditions at Limehill in Natal and in sympathy with all the people who have suffered in this way. We stood all through the night from half past four until nine o'clock the next morning. Many students stood with us and some members of the public. There were never less than twenty four people there and at times, especially after the protest meeting addressed by Archbishop Hurley, there were well over one hundred. The thousands of people who passed, enclosed in their motor cars, on their way to their secure homes reacted in different ways. A few, a very few, showed support but most drove past with eyes averted. Perhaps their shame was causing them some discomfort. Then again there were those who showed their anger at having to think for a moment of the suffering caused in their name, with a variety of rude gestures, sneers, facial contortions and trite insults. We were greatly supported through the night hours by those who stayed with us, a group of students, a Professor from Wits., and a man who came all night with large jars of hot coffee and returned again in the morning with a hot breakfast to put new life into us for the last hours.

One of our members, seventy nine years old, stood all night. Her courage and faith symbolises the reasons why the Black Sash will continue to protest against injustice.