



# TRAC

Transvaal Rural Action Committee

Newsletter No 14 February 1988

## APARTHEID IS ALIVE AND WELL:

### The removal of Tshikota and the incorporation of Vleifontein

About 450 kilometres north of Johannesburg, in a beautiful setting, lies the Tshikota township. It was built in the early fifties and is situated only two kilometres from the Louis Trichardt town centre, in the Northern Transvaal. Tshikota had a population of approximately 6 000 before removals started in 1982. There are now only 43 families left.

In line with Apartheid policy the population of Tshikota was ethnically divided and removed to areas designated to be the homelands of the residents concerned. Thus between 1982 and 1985 most of the Venda speaking residents of Tshikota were moved to a new township called Vleifontein situated 25 kilometres from Louis Trichardt on the border of the 'independent homeland' of Venda. On 1 April 1986, Vleifontein was incorporated into Venda. Vleifontein's present population is approximately 5 000.

Tshikota's Shangaan-speaking residents were moved 23 kilometres away to a village called Waterval in Gazankulu. Waterval's population is also about 5 000.

The government's intention was to move most of the Pedi-speaking residents 107 kilometres to Seshego in Lebowa. However, most Pedi also ended up in Vleifontein. The government realised that it would be extremely difficult to persuade people to move such a long distance.

In order to consolidate the Apartheid system a cohesive community living in a township that was only built 33 years ago has been torn apart, solid houses have been destroyed and people relocated miles from their workplaces.

#### THE STORY OF TSHIKOTA

The residents of the Tshikota township have been moved once before. Until 1954 people lived on top of the hill just north of the city centre. The reasons for moving the original township are unclear. Possibly the white residents had too clear a view of it. The new township was built in the valley, out of sight of the white residents. It was certainly not built to improve the living standards of the residents: the roads are poor, it has no electricity, or water-borne sewerage — there is a bucket-system.

The Tshikota township was, however, supplied with schools, a clinic and solidly-constructed two and four roomed houses.

The rents are low, with residents presently paying R16,50 for a 2-roomed house and R17,95 for a 4-roomed house.

Although Tshikota was built only 33 years ago, it appears that for a considerable period it has been under threat of removal. For about 20 years no new people were allowed to settle in the township, no new houses were built and no waiting list was kept.

From 1980 the pressure on the people of Tshikota to move became a lot greater. The first indication that something very ominous was brewing was when the Northern Transvaal Development Board carried out a comprehensive survey of the township's residents in 1980. Some residents allege that an important function of the survey was to establish which residents had formal education. Those households whose househeads had had some formal education were initially left alone. The Board first approached illiterate or semi-literate heads of households. It is alleged that Board officials told these residents that they had to move and that if they did not move voluntarily they would not obtain a government-built house and would have to build their homes themselves.

In time a sizeable amount of household heads had signed a piece of paper stating that they 'wanted' to move.

#### RESISTANCE TO THE REMOVAL

There was little overt resistance to the removal. However this does not mean that the people wanted to move. In a letter to the Minister dated February 25 1986 an ad hoc committee based in Vleifontein wrote:

We only moved from Tshikota because we were told the location was to be broken down. People did not want to move but were forced to sign their agreement one by one and at night, which we did under duress.

The remaining residents of Tshikota are now more determined than ever before to remain. Their main inspiration was 80-year-old Mr Titus Kganakga. Mr Kganakga, who died in December 1987, lived in Tshikota from its establishment. Apartheid had already moved him once and he was adamant that he would not again witness the total destruction of his community. He was also determined to die in Tshikota and be buried next to his wife.

His letter to Mr Heunis, the Minister of Constitutional Development, sums up the feelings of the embattled community. The letter was written in May, 1986.

It is clear to us that forced resettlement is nothing less than torture and tyranny to destabilise our families. The poor Vendas who have been resettled at Vleifontein, about 30 kilometres away from Louis Trichardt, ... rue the day they ever thought of being relocated. They now have to pay R2,00 for a return journey to and from work when before relocation a return journey used to be only R0,60. So also are the poor Shangaans who have been resettled at Waterval also 23 km from Louis Trichardt. Some of these relocated people at Vleifontein and Waterval find it so burdensome to commute, that they were even indulging a hope of returning to the ruins of Louis Trichardt Location. They are really ruined by relocation, and really impoverished by the resettlement. If the conditions of resettlement are so abhorrent to the Vendas and Shangaans who still remain in the Soutpansberg and who have not lost their employment, to what degree will resettlement consume the Northern Sothos who are going to lose even their only source of living employment, dumped as they shall be 107 kms away from their place of employment.

Mr Kganakga pointed out to Mr Heunis that his community had played a major role in developing educational facilities at Louis Trichardt:

But now they are being ejected from Louis Trichardt as if they were vomit. They are looked upon as skunks today. Why have they not been skunks all along?

In the same letter Mr Kganakga pointed out that those people (Pedi) who are moved to Seshego will suffer considerably:

The Northern Sothos staying in Louis Trichardt Location are employees and have no other source of income but their meagre wages. ... Dumping them at Seshego 107 kilometres away from their place of employment is just as good as throwing them in the street or veld because they will not be able to pay their rentals unemployed. They appreciate their urban rights and will never out of free will desire to live in homelands ...

Despite pleas from the community to relieve the township there has been no indication that the authorities intend doing so. The authorities have continued to apply pressure on residents to move. In July 1986 another two families left after the local superintendent told them that if they did not move to Vleifontein their houses would be demolished with all their possessions inside. Both household heads affected are very old. In October 1987 a resident who was in arrears came home to find himself locked out, his furniture outside and his house partially demolished. He subsequently moved to Waterval.

The government has said that the township is to be reserved for single men only. However, the residents of Vleifontein are determined to return to Tshikota and the remaining Tshikota residents are determined to stay. As Mr Kganakga wrote in a letter to TRAC in May 1986:

In that first meeting when removal was suggested I told the meeting that I would only leave the location when compelled and even then the Administration Board would carry me and my family and see where to dump us.

It is clear that the government has not altered its desire to move the residents of Tshikota. After a longish lull it again started applying pressure. In November 1987 notices were issued to 10 household heads stating that the residents had to move. However, the notices were withdrawn after the



Wanton destruction of housing in Tshikota



community's lawyer informed the authorities that the notices were not legal and that residents were under no obligation to move. At this point there is a stalemate. What has clearly emerged is that the move of 6 000 ex-Tshikota residents had no legal basis but was provoked by pure intimidation and political thuggery.

### THE INCORPORATION OF VLEIFONTEIN INTO VENDA

When Tshikota residents were moved to Vleifontein they were not informed by the government that plans were afoot to incorporate it into Venda. It only became clear once the people had been moved. The ad hoc committee referred to earlier, wrote to Dr Gerrit Viljoen, the Minister of Development and Land Affairs on February 25 1986, complaining bitterly about being deliberately misled by the government.

When we had moved to Vleifontein we were told to apply for Venda citizenship. We were very surprised to hear this. We were not told of this before we left the location. We feel that we were tricked. Pensioners cannot get their pensions without a Venda identity document, our young men now have to work on contract and all residents in government service have to have Venda ID to keep their jobs.

They received no response to this letter and despite the pleas to the Minister concerned not to incorporate Vleifontein into Venda the incorporation went ahead and was gazetted on 1 April 1986. The first indication the residents received of their new status was via a news broadcast on Radio Venda. They were not officially informed. The legislation does not require that the people affected be consulted. The State President merely has to issue a proclamation that a particular area is no longer a part of South Africa.

Resistance to the news was swift and widespread. At a mass meeting attended by almost all the adult residents, a 12 person committee called the Vleifontein Crisis Committee (VCC) was elected. The VCC consisted of four students, four teachers and four workers. Its mandate was to negotiate with the authorities and to persuade them to reverse the incorporation. If this was not possible the VCC was to request that people be allowed to return to Tshikota.

At the meeting residents made it clear that:

- they did not want to live under the Venda administration.
- they did not want to lose their South African citizenship.
- they were worried about lower pensions.
- they were concerned about their children's safety and schooling.
- they objected to and were very angry at not being consulted at any stage by the government.

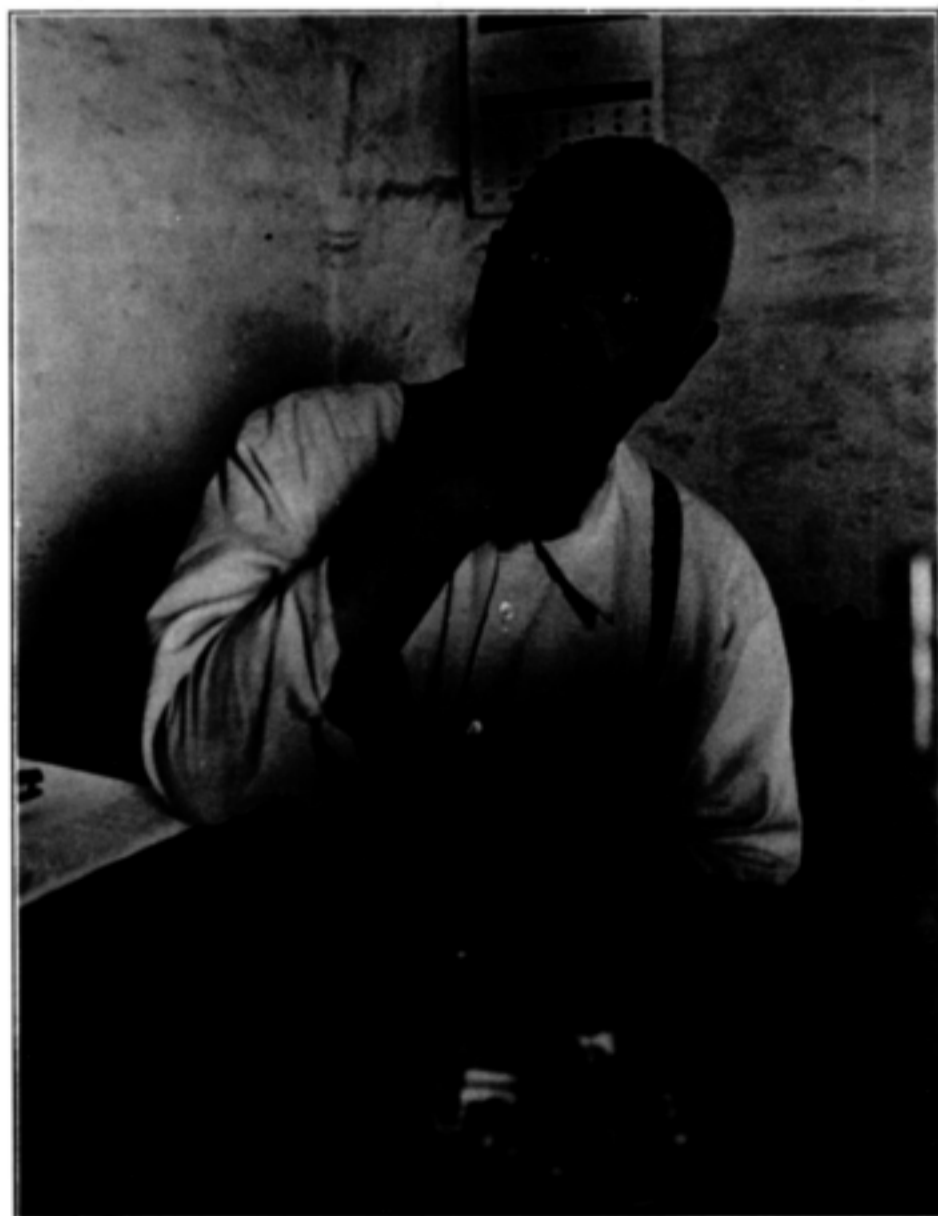
Parents voiced their opposition by refusing to pay rent for the month of May. School pupils boycotted classes in protest. No cars with VV registration numbers were allowed into the township.

### THE CRUSHING OF RESISTANCE TO THE INCORPORATION

The Venda security forces soon received reports of the formation of the VCC and its activities and of the general opposition to the incorporation. They immediately set about trying to break the back of the VCC and the opposition of Vleifontein residents.

In the early hours of 13 June 1986, the Venda police detained three young members of the Crisis Committee. Eyewitnesses allege that the three youths were viciously sjambokked when they were detained.

On Saturday June 14, Daniel Ramahlape, a Methodist priest based in the area and Peter Tshikota, a local high school teacher, went to Sibasa police station to inquire about detainees. They were both detained. On Saturday afternoon an elderly Vleifontein resident, Mr Livingstone Phulwana, was taken from his house by the Venda police. Mr Phulwana worked closely with the VCC against the incorporation. Mr Phulwana's son, Punkie Phulwana, who was a member of



**Mr Kganakga, prominent leader of the anti-removal struggle in Tshikota.**

the VCC was detained at his workplace in Louis Trichardt.

After nearly three months in detention, a great deal of which was allegedly in solitary confinement, the detainees were released in the first week of September. No charges were laid. The main spokesperson of the VCC, Mr Danie Ramahlape, was given 24 hours to leave Venda.

Those members of the VCC who were not detained were forced, for their own safety, to leave Venda. None have been able to return.

On the 13 June a bus transporting Vleifontein residents to work in Louis Trichardt was stopped at a roadblock manned by Venda police. The commuters were ordered to disembark. They refused, saying they would be late for work. The bus driver was then ordered to drive to Tshitale police station, 20 kilometres away.

At the police station the commuters were ordered out and sjambokked by a gauntlet of policemen as they emerged. The police told them that they must realise that Vleifontein was now part of Venda.

They were then taken to Vuwazi police station. They were released on Monday, 16 June after paying R20 bail each.

Almost all the bus passengers were charged with public violence and malicious damage to property. They subsequently appeared in court five times and each time the case was remanded. Eventually all the accused, except three,

were found not guilty. The three who still faced charges were the ones who escaped by jumping through the bus windows. They were eventually found guilty of malicious damage to property.

At present there is an almost constant Venda police and army presence in Vleifontein. It is clear that, despite the total rejection of incorporation by the community, the Venda authorities are not prepared to reverse their decision.

## THE EFFECTS AND THE FUTURE

The incorporation of Vleifontein into Venda has altered the lives of its residents. They have lost their South African citizenship, and live in fear of the unpredictable Venda authorities. Some have been separated from their family and friends.

The incorporation has sharpened the resolve of the remaining Tshikota residents to stay. Their struggle is being keenly watched by the Vleifontein residents who are desperately keen to return to Tshikota — the place they should never have been forced to leave.

The story of Tshikota and Vleifontein dramatically illustrates the barbarous quality of the Apartheid system and how people's lives are totally disrupted to promote its aims. Talk of reform is rendered absurd in this context.

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