

Dumped - and no say, either

Peelton's residents are not only fighting to remain resident in South Africa. Their struggles are also attempts to challenge the deprivation of the homelands, writes **MIKE KENYON**.

On October 16 this year, the Ciskei government declared a state of emergency in three villages in east Peelton and in a fourth village next to the Ciskeian capital Bisho.

Under the emergency, the Ciskei police and army removed part of the community of Nkqonkqweni village, first dumping them across the border in South Africa, then dispersing them in the Ciskei when South Africa objected. Up to half of the homes in Nkqonkqweni were destroyed and at least 96 residents, including children, were detained. About 55 residents were so badly assaulted that they required medical attention and had to be hospitalised.

The rest of the village, some 2 000 people, abandoned their homes, possessions and livestock and fled into South Africa. About 1 000 residents fled into King William's Town where they were sheltered in churches. The others, especially working residents, took refuge in townships in nearby urban areas.

South African ambassador to the Ciskei Christo van Aardt admitted that Ciskei's president, Chief Lennox Sebe, had told him two weeks previously of his intention to demolish homes in Nkqonkqweni.

Van Aardt blamed the trouble in east Peelton on 'outsiders' whom he refused to identify. South Africa refused to intervene in the situation, stating it did not intervene in the affairs of foreign countries.

But after considerable media publicity, local and foreign pressure, and the threat of mass action throughout the Border region, South Africa conceded that only some of the residents of east Peelton were 'dual citizens', and that it would therefore try to re-



Sheltering from the Ciskeian authorities: women and children sought refuge in one of the churches

solve the situation.

Questions have been raised about Van Aardt's role in the events at Nkqonkqweni in the light of his comment to the press that he had advised Sebe to send in the army to maintain order 'as this strategy had worked successfully elsewhere'.

Van Aardt also told journalists that only flimsy shelters had been destroyed at Nkqonkqweni, but this statement was contradicted by aerial photographs which showed that 30 brick houses had been demolished.

On November 8, church leaders were summoned to Pretoria to meet Home Affairs minister Eugene Louw and deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, Leon Wessels.

Following this meeting, Van Aardt announced he had been instructed to resolve the situation, but pointed out that South Africa could not offer land to east Peelton residents.

Recent events in Peelton are rooted in the granting of independence to the Ciskei in 1981. Peelton itself is divided into east and west by a railway line, and it was the western villages which were incorporated into the Ciskei at independence. The villages to the

east of the railway line were scheduled for relocation into the Ciskei at a later date.

Although east Peelton remained under the jurisdiction of the South African courts, confusion arose at senior government levels about the status of the villages. Many residents of east Peelton lost their South African citizenship at independence. But in 1986, when South Africa passed the Restoration of South Africa Citizenship Act, many residents applied to regain their South Africa citizenship.

Thus, when east Peelton was incorporated into the Ciskei on August 12 1988, the vast majority of residents were once again South African citizens who had not been consulted on the issue by the South African government.

East Peelton residents first heard about the proposed incorporation in May 1988 when they were alerted to the proposal by a local Progressive Federal Party member.

In parliament, PFP MP Peter Gastrow denounced the proposal, stating: 'It is a forced removal by legislation. They are being forcibly removed from South Africa. There has been no con-

sultation with the people of Peelton'.

East Peelton residents petitioned the then minister of Development Aid, Gerrit Viljoen, and demanded that instead of incorporating east Peelton into the Ciskei, west Peelton should be re-incorporated into South Africa.

In any event, the villagers of Nkqonkqweni, the largest of east Peelton's three villages, refused to have anything to do with the Ciskei administration. They did not recognise the tribal authority and its headman and refused to pay taxes which they had not formerly paid in South Africa.

Despite retaining their South African citizenship, residents stood to lose their South African pensions, which were double the amount received in the Ciskei, together with access to unemployment insurance. They would also become liable for 'voluntary' but arbitrary taxes, levies, and other forms of tribute in the Ciskei which they had never had to pay in South Africa.

Barely two weeks after the 1988 incorporation, police conducted a raid on Nkqonkqweni residents at night, demanding to see Ciskei tax receipts for taxes paid when the area was still under South Africa's control.

About 60 people were arrested and shunted through the courts the next morning, signalling the start of harassment and intimidation by Ciskeian authorities.

In the first 12 months under Ciskei rule, some 200 Nkqonkqweni residents were charged with various offences. Only one has been convicted so far - for unlawfully allocating a building site.

Elderly villagers have been detained or assaulted. On one occasion in June this year, police opened fire on a house where a party was taking place. In August police broke up a church service when they attacked the church with rubber bullets and teargas.

Residents were denied access to stock-dipping facilities and were barred from attending the clinic. South Africa also stopped pension payments to South African citizens in east Peelton.

In response to the harassment, the community sought protection from the Ciskei Supreme Court - so far it has



All alone: Peelton residents insist they are South Africans

won three interdicts restraining the police from further unlawful action.

The community has also sent several appeals to Van Aardt and to Foreign Affairs minister Pik Botha.

Since then, the struggle has spread to west Peelton where residents are also discontented with Ciskeian rule. Youths have been boycotting Peelton's only high school, demanding the release from detention of their Nkqonkqweni colleagues.

The demands of the vast majority of east Peelton residents are unequivocal - east Peelton must be returned to South Africa, and residents must be fully compensated for damage and loss suffered.

Although the community is unable to stay in churches indefinitely, it is determined to return to east Peelton where most people have lived all their lives. Some people there had freehold title while the majority had other forms of legal land tenure which they had held for decades. The majority of residents also had some livestock and access to agricultural land.

Now they are refusing to return while the area is under the Ciskei. They fear continual harassment by Ciskeian authorities.

The struggles of the people of Peelton are thus not simply motivated by a desire to remain resident in South Africa. They are struggles that attempt to challenge the relatively greater deprivation and poverty of places such as Bophuthatswana and the Ciskei.

Tracing the roots of resistance

SAMUEL MOTLOHI, a high school pupil and youth activist in Botshabelo, traces the roots of resistance in one of South Africa's largest dumping grounds.

At the foot of the mountains some 50 km from Bloemfontein, is one of South Africa's largest settlements: Botshabelo.

The people of Botshabelo - who number as many as 500 000 - were handed over to QwaQwa in late 1987. But this measure was reversed in 1988 as a result of a Supreme Court judgement. The people responded to this decision by dancing in the streets.

But the central government is reluctant to give up on its plan to rid itself of Botshabelo. Not only is it appealing against the Supreme Court judgement, but it is also preparing a law - the Alteration of Boundaries of Self-Governing Territories Bill - which will make the incorporation inevitable.

Residents are not passively awaiting their fate. Their determination to remain outside of bantustan structures was demonstrated just over a month ago when an estimated 50 000 marched on the magistrate's offices. They demanded that they be allowed to remain part of South Africa and that the administration of social services, which has been in the hands of QwaQwa since 1987, revert immediately to Pretoria.

The demonstration took outsiders by surprise; few were there to witness it and the press was caught napping.

This is what Motlohi and his partners in the Trio for Truth and Justice