

generation, who were relatively uncommitted before. The success of the stayaway was surely evidence of this, for at a time when the economy is in a worse state than most people can remember, the response was overwhelming. It couldn't all have been due to gullibility and intimidation. For another thing, businessmen seem at last to have come to the conclusion that it is more important for them to get on well with their workers than it is for them to try to please the Government. If they carry on in this vein they may begin to give the 'free enterprise' system some much needed credibility in those workers' eyes. Finally, the Government's attempt to exclude urban blacks from its new constitutional proposals has proved a total disaster. That exclusion gave to its opponents of all colours and a wide range of political persuasions the one thing they needed most, a single, simple rallying-point cutting across their differences, around which to get together and organise. And how successfully they did it. As a result, as we start on the New Year, instead of standing quietly in the wings, where the Government intended them to be, black urban South Africans stand firmly on the very centre of the political stage.

1984 has seen what must surely be the final collapse of

the Urban Council system, its supporters having been the first unhappy victims of anti-government wrath and violence last year. The Government has for months had a Cabinet Committee working on something to take its place. It is wasting its time. Whatever it proposes will go the same way as the urban councils. Less and less people will be prepared to risk involvement and hardly anyone will vote for those who do.

We need a revolution in 1985 all right, and the revolution we need is in the Nationalists' thinking, so that they start talking to the leaders of black people in the towns who count for something with them. If at first both sides find it too embarrassing to be seen to be talking to one another, by all means let the talking be in secret. Amongst other places, it could start at Pollsmoor and on Robben Island, which shouldn't be too difficult to arrange. A suitable starting point for the discussion could be the suggestion put forward by Rev. Peter Storey of the Methodist Church recently. It was that the Government unban all banned organisations, that in return those committed to violence abandon 'the armed struggle' and that we set off anew from there. That really would give us something to look forward to in 1985. □

By DAVE WALWYN

STENDAHL MISSION : A LESSON FOR THE CHURCHES

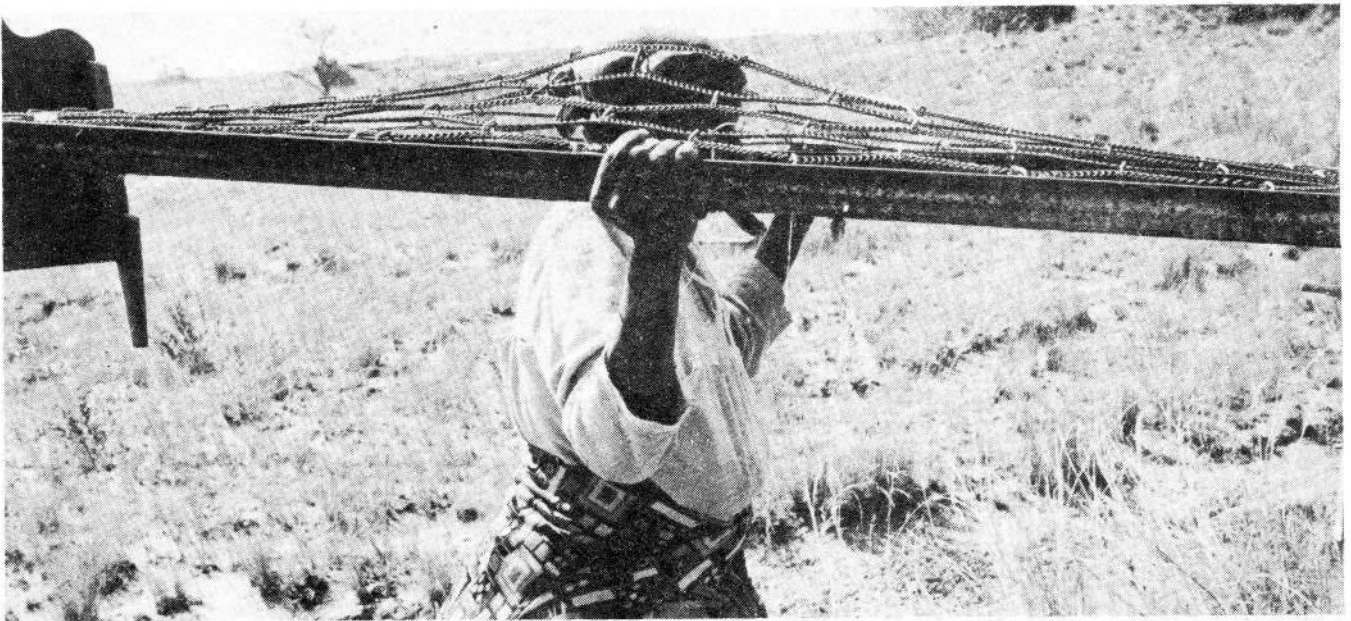
The recent removal of 37 families from Stendahl Mission is a strong warning to the Churches not to sell off mission property without taking strict precautions to ensure that the future of the community living on the land is secured.

Early on the morning of Tuesday, 27 November 1984, these families awaited the arrival of government trucks to take them to the Waayhoek Resettlement Camp. They were to leave behind a farm which had been the home of the Stendahl congregation since November 1860. They were to be the latest victims of a widespread State policy to remove gratuitous tenants and illegal squatters from white-owned farmland in the Western district. Since the abolition of labour tenancy in July 1969, nearly 20 000 farm tenants have been evicted and resettled in the Msinga district. For most of 1969, 1970 and 1971, the district was in turmoil ' Tractors demolish kraals — 200 homeless' (Rand Daily Mail, 9/11/70). Large numbers of tenants passively resisted eviction and had to be forced out by hut burnings, bulldozers, arrests and prosecution.

This initial purge passed by the people of Stendahl. They were able to escape because at that time the land on which they were living belonged to the Berlin Mission Society.

The original grant of the farm Middel Plaats in extent 6186 acres, was registered in January 1853 and on 8 May 1860 sold to the Berlin Mission, later renamed the Berlin Missiongesellschaft. After the end of the First World War, and the subsequent collapse of the German economy, the Mission ran into serious financial problems and was forced to sell the major portion of the farm, comprising 6 000 acres, to Mr Moe in 1924. The Church retained ownership of the remaining 186 acres for the use of the Stendahl congregation. Although the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 severely restricted the right of landowners in the white sector to accommodate black people on their land, subsequent legislation in the 1950's specifically enabled the Churches to retain mission communities as legal tenants. At Stendahl, the tenants became closely associated with the mission, the mission school and the outlying preaching stations. At one stage the mission was listed as consisting of 4 Church branches, 18 preaching stations, 1 missionary, 13 preachers, 7 teachers, 126 men, 167 women, 264 children and 5 schools.

Then in 1978 the Berlin Mission Society took a decision to divest itself of its land holdings and sold the property of Stendahl Mission to Sun Valley Estates, who now own



the adjoining farm. The congregation maintain that they were not at the time consulted about the sale of the farm. The Berlin Mission did, however, obtain a verbal promise from Sun Valley Estates that they would not evict the community. How much importance was attached to this promise soon became clear when, in February 1980, five families were given notice to leave on the grounds that they were not working for Sun Valley Estates. It was only when the Association for Rural Advancement got to hear about this and approached the Church to intervene on their behalf with the new owners that the eviction notices were withdrawn.

This sudden attack on a portion of the people living at Stendahl was an ominous sign that worse was still to come. In mid 1984, the land was leased by Sun Valley Estates to Mr R.J. de Bruin, who is a neighbouring white farmer. On 18 August 1984, he served the following eviction notices on all the families at Stendahl:

'Ek gee jou kennis om van my plaas af te trek met al jou vrouens, kinders, vee en pluimvee voor 17 November 1984. Jy mag nie hout van die plaas gebruik nie, mag ook nie om die plaas rond loop nie'.

('I give you notice to leave my farm with all your wives, children, livestock and poultry before 17 November 1984. You may not use wood from the farm, nor wander around on it'.)

On the 7 November 1984, the community met with Mr King, who is the magistrate at Weenen. During the meeting he agreed to apply for an extension of their eviction notices to 31 December 1984. This application was refused on the grounds that removals at that time would be more difficult because of the return of the migrant workers to Stendahl over the Christmas season. On 22 November 1984, they were again approached by the magistrate and told that they would be moved on the following Tuesday.

AFRA fieldworkers were puzzled as to why the magistrate did not follow established legal procedures for the eviction. According to the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, an enquiry must be held by the magistrate into the circumstances of the eviction before removal can take place. When asked why such a step had not been taken, Mr King replied that the community had wanted to move. This does not correlate with impressions obtained by AFRA fieldworkers during conversations with the local

people. It was found that there was unanimous opposition to removal from land where many families had been living for several generations.

On the other hand, by November they were dispirited and resigned to the removal. A long process of intimidation and harassment had destroyed their will to stay and fight the destruction of their homes. When the magistrate came that Thursday to tell them that they would be moved the following Tuesday, they began reluctantly to dismantle everything they had built up over the years.

Now they will have to find new strength to start life again in the corrugated iron fletcraft huts that they have been allocated at Waayhoek, a remote and inhospitable place where even water is at a premium and work is non-existent. Using bits and pieces of building material salvaged from their old homes, they will have to rebuild their houses. Many of them will be unable to start without some capital to purchase even the most rudimentary building materials. It is hoped that the Berlin Mission Society will be able to compensate them for their homes which are now destroyed, but it will be some time before assistance is forthcoming.

The removal of Stendahl has a lesson for all the Churches. It is now obvious that the State is desperate to clear all surplus black people from the white areas of South Africa. Sophisticated and extensive legislation has been passed to bring this into effect. Verbal agreements taken between two parties, on behalf of a third, are completely useless as protection against this legislation. The Churches are under a special obligation to their mission communities because they alone are allowed to retain such people as legal tenants. If the land must be sold, then the community whose status will be affected as a result, must be consulted and kept informed at all times. Proper legal documents must be entered into by the new owner and the community to ensure that they will not be dispossessed of their right to the land. And finally, proper monitoring systems must be established to ensure that the new owner complies with the terms of the agreement.

This will be a complicated and expensive process, whose legitimacy may in the future be overturned by new legislation. Undoubtedly the best assurance that could be given to people living on Church land, is that the Church retain ownership of the property. □