

'Trekpass' says: Pack-up and go!

FERIAL HAFFAJEE and JOSIAS CHABALALA, who write for *Weekly Mail*, report on growing tensions on the Eastern Transvaal platteland.

PARANOIA on the platteland is likely to leave droves of labour tenants and their families homeless in the south-eastern Transvaal.

The spectre of trade union rights for farmworkers and a Land Claims Court is provoking a "general hysteria" among Transvaal farmers, says Ken Margo of the Transvaal Rural Action Committee.

And this hysteria is resulting in a spate of evictions which started late last year.

One of those facing eviction is Christina Hlatswayo, a labour tenant on the farm 'Amakhaya' near Piet Retief (see David Goldblatt's cover picture). She takes out a crumpled piece of paper with four lines of spidery writing from her mourning dress. Signed by the farmer on whose land she is a tenant, it is her 'trekpass' — the eviction notice previously used to allow evicted labour tenants to travel without being arrested.

In these post-dompas days, all the note means to her is the loss of the land she and her family have worked for fifteen years.

The trouble started on Christmas Day last year when her cattle wandered onto land through a hole in the fence. They trampled part of his mealie field and ate stalks.

The farmer promptly loaded the cattle onto a van and carted them to a butcher in Piet Retief. The Dirkiesdorp police intervened and transported the cattle to a pound in Ermelo. After paying almost R1500 and a further R300 in transport costs, Christina got the cattle back, but four were missing.

In February the farmer gave her her trekpass — three months to get off the land.

Way off the beaten track, you reach her compound via a maze of dirt roads and roughly constructed fences. From the five houses, small children come running out to greet her. Young men set out chairs for us. In the background, a

breastfeeding mother stares inquisitively.

Christina points proudly to a field of flourishing mealies, to spinach, tomatoes, and cabbages all of which are used by the family. A traditional beer brewing hut, a maize storage room, a pen for her livestock and five huts complete the scene.

Christina cannot read and she has never been further than Ermelo. Asked what she will do, she casts her eyes heavenward, throws up her hands and takes another sniff from her snuff bottle.

Abraham Dithlake, of the Farmworkers Research and Resource Project, believes the reason for the current spate of evictions lies in the fear of land claims by those labour tenants with generations' old tenure.

Last year, the Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act provided for the setting up of a Land Commission to consider various land claims.

Most of the evictions are aimed at those with the longest tenure, those who have burial ground on the farms, according to Solly Zwane, a representative of the African National Congress in the Eastern Transvaal.

Recently when lawyers asked the tenants to say what they thought was a fair solution they replied that they wanted to stay on the farm and be allowed to keep livestock. Not one spoke about wanting to own the land.

Parliament may pass legislation this session, which will grant farmworkers the protection and rights of the Labour Relations and Basic Conditions of Employment Act. Farmers fear trade unionism growing among farmworkers.

Boy Nzimande, whose grandfather was born on the farm he must soon leave, says that the farmer told him to "go and report the matter to the Cosatu" when he complained. According to the tenants, no unions operate on the farms they work on.

The attitude of farmers to trade unions

Society needs a

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is illustrated by a recent article in the journal "Effective Farming": "If you can train, select and motivate workers you need not fear trade unions because the teamates on your staff will be more loyal to you than to any meddlesome shop steward or politico."

Kobus Kleynhans, deputy director of the Agricultural Union, says the organisation has not heard of the evictions. He said a solution to the crisis was to "enter into a normal service contract" where the tenants would be paid wages and in turn would rent the land.

Joan Bekkers, a representative of the Rural Foundation, an organisation training farmers in community development and labour relations, says the crisis stems from the fact that many farmers are moving from a labour tenant relationship to a wage relationship.

Transvaal Rural Action Committee's Ken Margo says that the breakdown of the traditional baasskap relationship between farmer and worker, increased mechanisation and the fact that tracts of land are being sold to forestry companies are also reasons for the evictions.

Odette Geldenhuys, of the Legal Resources Centre, says the only long-term solutions to the eviction problem is "for us, as lawyers, to make representations to the land commission". ●