

'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

WHY D RANDO



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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". ●

new total strategy of a completely different order involving its radical restructuring.

DO WHITE GUNMEN MAKE RANDOM ATTACKS ON BLACKS?

AS WE teeter uneasily on the brink of a New South Africa, violence is tearing the fabric of our country apart, and poses the single greatest threat to future stability. Media reports on violent crime have become routine, and a low intensity civil war — euphemistically referred to as ‘unrest’ — rages, largely unseen, in black areas. The painful fact that there is no corner of our lives that violence does not penetrate, is becoming increasingly evident.

Recent weeks have seen the emergence of a new manifestation of violence, in the form of a spate of apparently random attacks on blacks by armed whites.

Now, attacks on blacks by whites is nothing new: Fifteen years ago, for example, the Commissioner of Police reported ‘nearly three times more assaults . . . by whites against Africans than vice versa.’ Ten years ago, the Sunday Tribune carried a report on independent ombudsman Eugene Roelofse, whose time was spent investigating ‘sjambok-happy white farmers who also use guns, knives, ropes and other torture refinements to chastise their labourers.’

What is new is the way in which beserk white gunmen — such as Kallie Delpont who allegedly killed 9 people in Lady-smith — who appear to lack an overtly political agenda, vent their destructive aggression primarily on members of another racial group.

The question is, why?

THE ROOTS of violence are complex, and are embedded in our human condition. Simplistic theories which conjure up images of the naked ape defending his territory are clearly inadequate, and the fact that they continue to enjoy a measure of popular support is doubtless linked to the way in which they deflect attention from a critical examination of individuals and societal culpability.

The anthropological evidence shows quite clearly the way in which the nature of society may either promote or minimise whatever inherent destructive

potential humans have. In understanding human violence we need to look to the way in which we *differ* from animals — to human consciousness, the symbols it creates, and the meanings with which it invests those symbols.

In South Africa, it is race which is of key symbolic and structural significance, for it has given rise to grossly distorted power structures, which cannot but negatively affect oppressors and oppressed alike. As with slavery, ‘the master is as much imprisoned, if not as painfully, as he (the slave) is.’ It is to the racist nature of our society that we must look if we are to understand why these recent attacks have occurred.

THE HISTORIAN Leonard Thompson describes South Africa as a ‘pigmentocratic industrialised state’. The ‘schizoid world’ of which the industrialised state is an integral part, itself engenders human responses which may fuel destructive tendencies, such as existential angst and a sense of impotence. More important, however, is the pigmentocratic nature of our state, in which formal political (and economic) power rests firmly in white hands.

The structure of South African society is legitimated by the myth of the differentness of its inhabitants — of its ‘unassimilable races and cultures’. The foundations were laid during colonial expansionism in the 19th century, a process greatly facilitated by the twin dogmas of Scientific Racism and Social Darwinism — an unquestioning belief in the inherent and God-given superiority of some races, (defined in terms of criteria such as skin colour and head size) over others, who were lower down the evolutionary scale.

It was, however, not only the indigenous blacks who were the victims of British colonialism; Afrikaners, too, fought to retain their birthright against the foreign intruders, and initially lost. In the ensuing struggle, a sense of nationhood was forged. It was a nation with biblical parallels, a nation with a calling:

A people (volk) elected by God with a God-given destiny.

When the struggle was finally won, and the Nationalist Party government came to power in 1948, it set about fulfilling that destiny, a destiny from which blacks were excluded: ‘. . . there is but one way of saving the white races for the world. And that is for the white and non-white in Africa each to exercise his rights within his own areas,’ said Dr H.F. Verwoerd.

Building upon the tribal foundations of colonialism, the government set about creating black nations. The fact that the division into nations involved only blacks, and not whites, further reveals the fundamentally racist ideology upon which the policy was premised. Thus ethnicity became a window dressing for the fundamental racism which remained both structurally and ideologically entrenched. At a structural level, the bantustans became the cornerstone of grand apartheid (which is thus, by no means dead), and notions of race explaining cultural differences, long since discounted in scientific circles, continued to hold sway.

THUS WERE the seeds for much of the violence we see around us today sown. Black resistance to apartheid erupted in violence in 1960 and again in the 1970’s. Since Soweto in 1976, political violence has been a conspicuous feature of South African life, and has gained increasing momentum in Natal from the early 1980’s. Crime, too — long the scourge of economically and politically deprived black ghettos — has also intensified, and has increasingly spilled over into white areas.

This ongoing political revolt was met, until relatively recently, with increasingly repressive measures, including bannings, detentions and torture. During these years of repression (1970’s and 1980’s), immense powers were given to the police; they were, as Pauw’s recent book on apartheid’s death squads amply demon-



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strates, above the law, and exercised their will with impunity.

Repression was ideologically justified: With the independence of neighbouring states such as Angola and Mozambique, and internal revolt, South Africa, the government declared, was facing a total onslaught. To deal with the onslaught a total strategy was needed; this strategy involved the increasing militarisation of South African society, the tentacles of the military extending further and further into civil society. Like the subjects of witchcraft persecutions throughout the ages the enemy, in the form of the ANC/Communist Party and their allies, represented a threat to the core values of society, including its Christian ethos. The social construction of 'the enemy', of necessity, involves a destruction of the enemy's humanness.

Apart from a few misguided whites, the enemy was, of course, black.

This strategy was facilitated by the authoritarianism which permeates our society, which extolls conformity and stifles critical thought. It was also made possible by the unique nature of South African society — the 'separate realities' of whites and blacks. Social and spatial isolation is, itself, a breeding ground for violence, for violence flourishes when communication breaks down.

It is against this background that the changes of February, 1990, took place. Suddenly, the enemy was unbanned and the previously unthinkable — black majority rule — had become a distinct possibility, with all that entailed, including the threat to all that whites held dear.

What sort of effect have all these events had on whites?

ALTHOUGH it is, of course, an oversimplification to talk about *the* white response, a certain level of generalisation is possible, provided one bears in mind the degree of variation around the 'average' which exists.

Firstly, it would be unrealistic to expect that years and years of indoctrination about 'the enemy' can be undone with the same speed as can the unbanning of political organisations, and it is likely that many whites are experiencing a high

degree of what social psychologists term cognitive dissonance as a result of the sudden 'disconfirmation of a firmly held expectation'.

Whites have a very limited knowledge, and virtually no understanding, of what is happening in black communities around them. They continue to accept that blacks are 'different', and the way in which this difference is perceived varies from the colonial stereotype of people who are 'less civilised' because they are on a lower rung of the evolutionary ladder, to their being of different, non human order altogether — a view which is certainly encountered amongst some extremely right-wing Afrikaners.

The partial knowledge of whites is based on media reports (which are often grossly inadequate), and the limited type of interaction which has been the norm (e.g. with domestic workers). There may also have been personal experience as a victim of crime. The militarisation of our society has, through the call-up system, also impinged upon the lives of the majority of whites, and increasing numbers have served in local townships.

An overhaul of the legal/judicial system, itself subverted by the power of the security establishment, is imperative.

The lack of understanding can only worsen the fear which is almost palpable in white South African society. For some years, social scientists have noted a relationship between the white fears engendered by the social upheavals of the 1970's and 1980's and the move to new religious movements. The events of February, 1990, would have exacerbated these fears.

Whites are not only fearful, they are also beset by feelings of guilt. There are obvious parallels between our situation and that of Nazi Germany, and Fromm (1973:86) points out that 'the Nazis had to use an elaborate system of camouflage of atrocities in order to cope with the conscience of the average man'. It is

significant that Riaan Malan's book, *My Traitor's Heart*, which represents in many ways an outpouring of guilt (and no real understanding of the dynamics of the situation) should strike such a responsive chord amongst many South African whites.

We are, as many put it, a country in the grip of 'massive unreality and fear' and it is small wonder that so many whites have sought refuge in the possession of guns. Quite apart from the high percentage who own licensed firearms there is the question of the apparent ease with which they acquire weapons not available to the general public, such as the semi-automatic weapon allegedly used by Delpont.

Guns, with their powerful phallic symbolism, are the instruments par excellence for overcoming a sense of powerlessness and impotence, and they have 'a strong effect — generally dulling — on the consciousness of those who use them'.

The point was made earlier that whites are differentially affected by the general social climate and the changes which have been set in motion. Here class is an important factor, because of its association with variables such as education and wealth. In terms of the argument advanced here, one would expect that those for whom the situation was most threatening, and lacking the means for dealing with the threat in a constructive manner, would be those resorting to violence; i.e. extremely right-wing

Afrikaners, whose 'objects of devotion' — land and volk — are being threatened and must be defended. The view that blacks are less than human would be another predisposing factor. Indeed, the perpetrators of recent violence appear to have been working-class Afrikaners.

In explaining why some persons erupt in 'one big blow up' personality factors, seen in the context of the broader familial and social milieu, are obviously crucial.

One would hypothesise that such persons are plagued by emotional problems, and feelings of inadequacy and impotence, and lack the ego strength and communicative ability to deal with them.



AFTER NINE PEOPLE WERE KILLED WHEN A LONE GUNMAN RAN AMOK IN A NORMALLY GENTEEL NORTHERN NATAL TOWN, SARA JAGWANTH, RESEARCHER AT NATAL UNIVERSITY'S CENTRE FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE WENT TO INVESTIGATE. SHE FOUND THE INSENSITIVITY OF MANY WHITES TO THE RESENTMENT AND HURT OF THE BLACKS HAD MATERIALLY CHANGED THE FACE OF LADYSMITH.

Killing spree

I AM NO stranger to the town of Ladysmith, having visited my family there over several years. But when we drove into the town on the Friday morning, four days after nine people were gunned down in a crowded shopping centre, I knew then that the genteel face of this northern Natal town had changed forever.

Ladysmith is no stranger to tragedy or

drama, and as the mayor, Ruston Muller, put it: "We always bounce back".

But since the shooting spree on the morning of January 20 which left nine people dead and scores of others injured, the resentment, anger and pain seems destined to endure long after the blood stains have been washed from the pavements.

The killing spree began that Monday

morning on a nearby farm, when Kallie Delpport allegedly shot dead his father and a domestic worker, and ended an hour later in the busy business centre in a trail of death and mayhem.

Save for Delpport's father, all the victims were black. This has left the majority of the blacks in Ladysmith believing that the attack was a racially motivated one.

Though this is emphatically denied by the mayor, who dismissed the theory as "bad publicity for the town," the racial hostility, bitterness and anger is clearly evident, especially in the wake of widespread allegations of preferential treatment given to Delpport.

As Cosatu spokesman AK Rassool remarked, emotions have steadily grown into a "terrible spiral" and many are asking if this tragedy can indeed be classed together with the ravaging floods that have plagued the town in the past.

The alleged attitude of many whites after the killing has done little to allay the tensions in the community. At least three Indian businessmen, who declined to be named, described the recent "arrogant and almost triumphant" attitude of whites which was not prevalent before the killings, as if giving tacit support for the incident.

There have also been increasing reports from black workers that their white employers are treating the incident as a joke and have expressed open support for Delpport. One shop steward has already confirmed that he is investigating complaints from workers regarding a remark from a supervisor that "Kallie had not done a good enough job".

The shop steward remarked that it was indeed sad that it took a spray of bullets and the blood of nine residents to flush to the fore the "bigotry and conservatism" that has long pervaded the minds of the conservative whites in Ladysmith. Soon after the shooting, Mr Mathe, the regional director of the

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Is there a solution?

There is certainly no quick fix solution. In the situation we are in, as long as there are inadequate people with access to guns, we should not be surprised if further such incidents occur. These incidents are part and parcel of the violence which is so deeply embedded in the structure of our society that the road ahead is a long and arduous one. It calls for a new total strategy of a completely different order to the old one, which involves a radical restructuring of society.

There is, firstly, a need for a far tighter control over access to dangerous weapons — the problem is far greater than simply allowing licences, because illegal access is so widespread. Weapon control involves also the question of private armies which include not only MK, but private security companies,

and, in Natal, the KwaZulu police.

Secondly, an overhaul of legal/judicial system, itself subverted by the power of the security establishment, is imperative. Concern is quite correctly being expressed over the cavalier way in which prison sentences are being reduced by the Department of Correctional Services.

Proficient investigation and sentencing is a matter in need of *urgent* attention.

In conjunction with a new political dispensation which sets about correcting the gross imbalances in power should go a concerted effort to destroy racism at all levels; the role of contact, and improved communication, is paramount.

There is no time to lose. If the root causes of violence in its various manifestations — including the indiscriminate killing of blacks by whites — are not addressed *now* the prospects of a protracted civil war can only increase. ●

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