

NATAL MIDLANDS REGION

Low-Cost Removals : the continuing process

In Natal there were no Black Spot removals in 1982 and 1983. The last one was in 1981 from Kwa Pitela, near Himeville, when about 500 tenants were moved in Government trucks to the closer settlement of "Compensation", 65kms away. (Some sympathetic publicity was given at the time by the local press.) The landowners, grandsons of the Pitela Hlophe who bought the farm in 1900, remained on the land; but late in 1983 they were given their final notice to leave. Apart from them, the 200 000 inhabitants of 188 Black Spots and mission lands in Natal remain with the sword over their heads, in varying states of foreknowledge, determination or resignation.

However, the low-keyed, low-profile relocations that people don't hear about have been going on all the time. The clearing of Black Spots often seems to be the worst kind of eviction because to the loss and suffering inflicted on those who are deprived of their homes and security is added the outrage of the dishonouring of title deeds - what seems like legalised theft of painfully hard-won property. Landowners, however, simply because of everyone's uneasy respect for ownership, are in a position of some, if minimal, power. If they make common cause with their tenants to protest and resist, if they can obtain publicity and legal help, they can be a serious embarrassment to the authorities and at least put up the political and financial cost of the removal - or, more accurately, make the authorities pay some proportion of the cost, which is usually borne almost entirely by the victims.

But the removal of tenants who own no land strikes no such obstacle and costs the authorities very little. Under the 1936 Land Act, no African may be a tenant on unreleased land unless he or she is "registered". It isn't clear who does the "registering", but it's clear that the authorities are empowered

to instruct owners of the land to evict Africans from it. In October 1983 a rural community of about 400 Black tenants on Indian-owned land in Cliffdale, near Hammarsdale, was dispersed in this way. The landowners were reluctant to evict their tenants, who were financially necessary to them and with whom they had lived amicably for many years. One woman was prosecuted for failing to serve notice, and fined R100,00. The community too, tried to resist and asked for legal help which was provided by the Legal Resources Centre. But there was no possible redress in law; the most that could be achieved was a series of delays. The Administration Board offered places at Compensation again (90kms from there) but residents chose instead to scatter into neighbouring districts of Kwa Zulu, within more reasonable distances of the Hammarsdale factories. There is now some legacy of racial animosity since the community knows only that they were evicted by the Indians.

More recently residents of Indian-owned property at Inanda - a peri-urban area near Durban - have had to be evicted; and places have been offered to them at Compensation (again!) and another closer settlement called Frankland near Port Shepstone. Again it's impossible that any of these remote places will be accepted and so the cost to the Government of the relocations (wherever the people find to go) has been nil.

Eviction of labour tenants from farms has also doubtless been proceeding steadily. It's hard, even impossible, to keep track of this, even harder to help the people or publicise their plight. The scale of these relocations in Natal is immense. In 1967 the Natal Agricultural Union estimated that if all labour tenants were to be summarily evicted, a million people would have to move. In 1982 AFRA estimated that 300 000 had been moved already. In many areas, particularly in the Midlands, labour tenancy has in practice been abolished and farmers accommodate only the families of their full-time workers. (Even these families aren't secure. The draft Orderly Movement and Settlement Bill provided for Tenement Boards to determine how many Black families farmers would be allowed to accommodate; and it's probable that a similar provision will be re-introduced.) In Northern Natal, however,

there are still many labour tenants to be dealt with although the system was supposed to come to an end in 1980.

Farm workers have always been among the most vulnerable people in the community. Accommodation for their families is at the pleasure of the farmer if the worker is dismissed, the family has to leave, even if (As often the case) they have lived on the land for one or two generations before the farmer became its owner. With pressure from the authorities on the farmers to reduce their numbers of tenants, and with the general movement towards more mechanised farming, their position is even more precarious; and nobody can prevent its becoming desperate. No significant legal help can be offered, even if the tenants are well-informed and determined enough to seek it (and they are more likely to be bewildered and isolated). Rearguard actions only can be fought, achieving delays, insisting on adequate notice, protecting stock and property left on the farm while people search for another place. Probably most of these evictions happen without anyone but the families concerned hearing anything about them - an eviction is a matter between landlord and tenant; and although the cumulative reality of hundreds of thousands of evictions is mind-blowing, individual ones can't hope to gain more than a few inches in the local paper.

For some of the Governments' purposes, the steady unobtrusive "whitening" of the platteland is more material than the intensive clearing of pockets of Black-owned land. On the 6th of June last year the Deputy Minister of Development and Land Affairs said in Parliament (in reply to a Conservative Party reproach that removals were too slow) :

"Does the Hon. member mean to tell me that if we concentrate only on the so called Black Spots or poorly situated areas, these are the only removals that should take place? There is enough evidence in this connection in our neighbouring states to the North of South Africa. It has been said that the most dangerous situation that has arisen in Zimbabwe was due to the fact that the Government did not give attention to the Black people on the farms, in the rural areas. Before Onverwacht came into being,

the White : non-White ratio on White farms in the Free State was 1 : 15. As a result of the fact that people have moved voluntarily to Onverwacht - at least 150 000 souls have moved there-we are reducing the ratio. At the moment the ratio is 1 : 13. Is this not something that has been achieved?"
(Hansard 1983 : 18 : col. 8374)

Relocations seen thus are elements of the Total Strategy (and poor rural families attached to their own homes parts of the Total Onslaught). We need to understand and to publicise as much as possible the demented grandiosity of these actions and conceptions.