



TRAC

Transvaal Rural Action Committee

AND NOW WE HAVE NO LAND

AN UPDATE ON THE STRUGGLE OF THE MOGOPA PEOPLE

The two adjoining Mogopa farms are situated in the Ventersdorp area. The farms were bought by the ancestors of the dispossessed Mogopa in 1912 and 1931 respectively. For decades the Mogopa people devoted themselves to farming and developing their community. By 1984 there were 2 schools, a clinic, numerous shops, a reservoir and a thriving farming sector. Cash crops were sold to the local cooperative.

The Removal of Mogopa

From October 1981 it became apparent that the government had decided to remove the Mogopa people in the interests of grand apartheid. To this end, the government worked together with the discredited headman, Jacob More. The tribe had accused More of various acts of corruption and wanted him deposed. The local Commissioner responded to their request by stating, "I as a white man and Magistrate of this whole area say Jacob More will rule until he dies."

In 1981 officials of the Department of Cooperation and Development announced that More had agreed to a removal on behalf of the tribe. The Mogopa people vehemently rejected this plan. The community thought they were now safe. However, unbeknown to them negotiations between Jacob More, his committee and the Department continued.

The Department's trucks arrived in June 1983 to begin the removal. Since very few people knew of the "negotiations" only ten families left with Jacob More. The Department then returned towards the end of June and knocked down the school and withdrew its staff. At the same time three churches and the medical clinic were destroyed. The bus service between Ventersdorp and Mogopa was stopped and the pumps which were used to pump water into the reservoir were removed. The government was hoping to demoralise the community and force them to leave "voluntarily". This tactic had some effect. By 21 August 1983 170 families had left Mogopa and gone to Pachsdraai. However, over 350 families still remained at Mogopa.

The remaining families issued a legal challenge to the presence of a bulldozer which knocked down houses of people who left the village for any reason. The government responded by withdrawing the bulldozer. However, it issued the tribe with a "Removal

Order" stating that they must leave Mogopa within 10 days or be forcibly removed. An interdict was sought to stop the implementation of the order. The interdict and leave to appeal was refused. The tribe then petitioned the chief justice for leave to appeal. When the tenth day of the removal order dawned, many people including Bishop Tutu, Allan Boesak, members of the Black Sash and UDF attended a vigil at Mogopa so as to be there when the forced removal was to take place. However, after an inspection of the crowd, the contingent of government officials and police withdrew.

After the removal deadline passed the community rebuilt the school and managed to have the bus service and pension payments restored. They were confident that they would remain at Mogopa forever. However, on the 14 February 1984 the Department of Cooperation and Development proceeded with the removal notwithstanding the fact that the petition for leave to appeal was before the Appeal Court.

The removal came without warning. The area was cordoned off, the phones were cut and the police moved in. In one day, the remaining 350 families were moved to Pachsdraai and in the process another independent black farming community was destroyed.

The Aftermath

The residents were moved to Pachsdraai. There they were met by rows of tin toilets and the headman, Jacob More. All the facilities were given to More and his "planning committee" to allocate. They allocated themselves the houses that had belonged to the white farmers. The doors, windowframes and roofing materials from the smashed schools at Mogopa are now in a big shed in the deposed headman's yard. The allocation of all fields and grazing was also controlled by More and his committee.

The Mogopa refused to stay under these conditions and almost immediately left for Bethanie. It was felt that Bethanie would be an improvement as it is the home of the Mogopa people's paramount chief. However, conditions in Bethanie turned out to be appalling and have steadily worsened over the last three years.

At this stage many of the ex-Mogopa residents are destitute. They have been refused pensions, access to clean water, they are not allowed to be registered for

employment and no meetings are allowed. Their situation has become more desperate of late as many families have now exhausted the compensation money received for their houses.

The Appeal Court Decision

The Mogopa people have never given up hope of returning to Mogopa. Their hopes were raised significantly by the appeal court finding in September 1985 that the Presidential Order issued in terms of section 5 (1)(b) of the Black Administration Act 38 of 1927 was defective and invalid in law. The implication of this legal victory was that the removal was illegal.

Expropriation of the Mogopa Farms

The Mogopa people thought that they could now return to Mogopa. However, these hopes were dashed because, in the interim, the government had expropriated the 2 farms. The people were never officially informed that the expropriation had occurred and no compensation for the land was offered to them.

The plans to move back to Mogopa and the purchase of Holgat

By December 1986 the once proud and prosperous landowners had been reduced to ragged, destitute squatters. The desire to return to Mogopa became increasingly intense. The possibility of a solution occurred in December 1986 when the government agreed to meet representatives of the Mogopa people. However, although the government said that a solution to the Mogopa problem must be found it refused to allow the people to return. Instead they were offered an alternative



piece of land, "Kaffirskraal". The alternative offered was, for a number of reasons, completely unacceptable to the community. Firstly, if the community settled there they would have to accept incorporation into Boputhatswana. Secondly, they would merely be tenants on the land and have no security of tenure. Thirdly, President Mangope has stated that because the Mogopa people had defied him, he would ensure that ultimately they would end up in Pachsdraal. The community asked the government to reconsider these conditions but were met by a refusal. Thus they became even more resolved to return to Mogopa.

The Holgat/Botshabelo Project

It was evident that the possibility of the government allowing the people to return to Mogopa was remote. Thus after many meetings between the Mogopa people and support groups such as the SACC and TRAC it was decided that the Mogopa people would

participate in a Church project to buy land for dispossessed communities. This project had been initiated for the Machavie people who were removed 16 years ago.

The Botshabelo Trust was established to buy Holgat, a large farm in the Ventersdorp area. Close on R3m was raised to purchase the farm from the Hermannsburg Mission of the Lutheran church. Legal opinion had ascertained that even in the context of apartheid, black settlement of Holgat was perfectly legal. This was because as an old mission the Holgat farm is "released land" in terms of the 1913 Land Act. Numerous meetings were held with the Mogopa and Machavie communities to discuss the project. Studies were done to ascertain its feasibility.

By the beginning of July all the loose ends had been tied and there was a great sense of anticipation and excitement. The first installment had been paid and the only aspect that remained was the official registration of the transfer of ownership. This was expected to occur in mid-July.

The Expropriation

The transfer of ownership never took place. On the 7 July the government expropriated Holgat, stating that the land was urgently required for the setting up of a black agricultural college. This act can only be seen as an attempt by the government to forestall the movement of the Mogopa and the Machavie people to Holgat. The expropriation was unnecessary as the area on which the government wants to start the school is not situated on the section of Holgat which the trust was buying. Furthermore the farm has been on the market for years. During this time the government has never expressed any inter-

est in purchasing it. It is apparent that the real reason for expropriation is to satisfy the interests of the local white farmers. Once again the severe limitations of the government's reform policy have been exposed.

The Future

The Mogopa people are now in a desperate situation. They are destitute and have exhausted every avenue in the quest to regain Mogopa or its equivalent. No matter how unequal the struggle between the forces of the government and the Mogopa, the latter will continue to resist the government's plan to incorporate them into Bophuthatswana. They are now more determined than ever to return to Mogopa and have stated publicly that they have the moral right to do so. Only the South African government can defuse this potentially explosive situation.