

Working together to get back their land

THE Mandlazini Interim Committee, the body which is coordinating community efforts to restore their land in Richards Bay, is made up of 10 members. Besides the normal office-bearers, there are two older members of the community- history advisors to the committee. "We were young when the removal took place," explained Mr Jotham Sokhule, the committee's secretary. "So we need the older people to help us with what happened long ago." The committee also has a technical advisor, Mr Joe Mkhwanazi.

The committee has some members with ANC, IFP and PAC affiliations, but they have agreed to put aside their party politics in their struggle for the return of their land. So far, the



Members of the Mandlazini Interim Committee speaking to the community before the march. *Front row, left to right: Mr Jotham Sokhule (secretary), Mrs Gertie Hlabisa (ass. secretary), Mr Selby Mthiyane (chairperson).*

committee has worked very successfully to highlight the concerns of the community. The protest action organised on February 14 is a good example of the committee's resourcefulness and seriousness.

The committee has also approached several government bodies about their plight. They wrote to the Natal Provincial Administration, the Advisory Commission on

Land Allocation (ACLA), the state president and the Richards Bay Town Council. None of these appeals to have their case settled have met with much progress from these bodies. In its reply to the Mandlazini Interim Committee, ACLA said in November 1992 that it could not deal with their case because the land in question was not owned by the state, but by the Richards Bay Municipality.

Some facts about the removal

IN early 1976 about 6 000 people living at Reserve 6 in Richards Bay were removed to Ntambanana, some 60km away. In 1977 a section of Reserve 4 was excised from the schedule of African land and the people were also removed to Ntambanana. A further estimated 20 000 people were removed from Reserve 4 after it was excised from the schedule of African land in 1979 and excised from KwaZulu in 1981.

Both areas are in a lush sub-tropical belt with high rainfall. People grew fruit trees and had lumber plantations. Although much of the agriculture was of a subsistence level, some people made an independent living from the land. In some cases, a fairly extensive form of agriculture was

practised. Those people living close to the coast could also supplement their produce with fishing. Fresh water and fuel were readily available. In addition to the agricultural wealth of the areas, Reserve 4 had extensive mineral wealth. This mineral wealth was controlled by the South African Development Trust (SADT), which was recently disbanded along with the DDA, and was mined by Richards Bay Minerals. In 1976 Richards Bay Minerals signed a 25 year lease with the SADT. In 1980 the Financial Mail reported that the area had known reserves of 700 million tons of mineral deposits, expected to last for 30 years. Richards Bay Minerals was described as the world's second largest producer

of zircon (used in the steel foundry, steel refractory, glass refractory and ceramic manufacturing industries) and the third largest producer of titanium.

In contrast to the wealth they had to leave, the people found hardship in Ntambanana. Ntambanana is dry and bushy and suitable for cattle ranching. It was not suitable for intensive settlement and agricultural production. Water was also a problem and, when people were first moved there, they were dependent on water supplies brought in by tanker.

This summarised account of the removal comes from the Surplus People's Project Reports, Volume 4, 1983.