

If recent press reports on Cabinet Ministers' speeches in Parliament are to be taken seriously, then the era of massive, forced population removals is over in South Africa. It has been declared officially dead - just like apartheid itself. It has been replaced, we are told, by a new era, one characterised by "compassion and due respect for human dignity", in which people are only removed "in their own interests", "when there is no alternative" (Sunday Tribune, 20.02.83, quoting Dr. Koornhof) and as "part of a policy of building national states and improving the living standards of the people who must be resettled". (Natal Witness, 12.02.83, also quoting Dr. Koornhof.) While Dr. Koornhof and his deputy, Mr. van der Walt, have both been careful not to rule out the possibility of further removals, they have implied that any future removals that do take place will be on a very limited scale: according to Dr. Koornhof, certain planned removals have already been called off and the government "will do everything possible" to avoid any more removals "as far as is practicable and possible". (Sunday Tribune, 20.02.83)

How do these reassuring but abstract undertakings compare with what is actually happening on the ground in Natal? This report deals with just one of the many questions to arise from this latest round of talk.

Have mass removals come to a stop?

The answer is quite simply, no. To date there has been no fundamental reversal in policy, merely delays, confusion and concealment in its implementation. Furthermore, as we move into 1983, there is mounting evidence not of a relaxation in the removals programme for the province, but of a renewed determination on the part of local commissioners and Administration Board officials to push ahead with black spot removals in particular, and to clamp down more tightly on the presence of African residents on white-owned and Indian-owned land in the countryside. The following examples illustrate this trend; the list is by no means comprehensive.

Black spot removals

Since the beginning of 1981 only one black spot has been removed in Natal, Kwapitela, near Sani Pass, in July 1981. (See AFRA Report no. 14.) This has not been because all the other threatened black spots are to be reprieved. No significant reprieves have been announced anywhere in Natal to date; not even St Wendolins, outside Pinetown, has heard the results of the Group Areas Board hearing called in June last year to consider rezoning the area for African occupation once again. As argued in other AFRA reports, expediency, not compassion, explains this apparent lull in removals. The main reasons for it have been financial (the shortage of cash for buying out land, resettling and compensating people) and political (the opposition to being moved on the part of many threatened communities and the opposition of white interest groups to the government's consolidation plans for KwaZulu). Now, however, the lull appears to be coming to an end. For instance:

-In November 1982 44 households living on an isolated farm called Scheepersrust, near the Oliviershoek Pass, were given 3 months notice to leave their land. 11 of these families helped pay for the land, in the 1930s; the rest are their tenants, many of long standing. The land is, however, registered in the name of the Mahon Church, which has confirmed that it took transfer because the 1913 Land Act prevented the African purchasers - all members of the Mahon Church - from doing so. Now the church is evicting all the families, claiming it is under pressure from the Drakensberg Administration Board to do so. The land owners may be offered somewhere to go; to date no arrangements have been made for the tenants.

-In December 1982 officials visited 2 adjoining black spots in the Estcourt district, called Cornfields and Thembalihle, to announce that the long-threatened removal of both places would start soon. Both farms are freehold, previously incorporated into KwaZulu, with a combined population of about 10 000 people. No discussion on the basic issues involved was allowed at these December meetings. Tenants - the great majority of households - were excluded and the landowners - those who could be present - were told that the officials had not come for a debate: the question of their removal had already been settled, by an Act of Parliament, and nobody had the power to alter that. The landowners were instructed to elect a committee which would help the Department of Cooperation and Development carry out the removal. No date has been set for this yet, but the preliminaries are thus well advanced.

-In January 1983 the chief at Matiwane's Kop, a freehold farm north of Ladysmith (population: 12500 or more) received a verbal message from the local commissioner that officials were coming to re-issue expropriation orders and re-number all houses; a similar message was also conveyed to the adjoining farm of Jonono's Kop. Both farms have already been numbered and expropriated, although people have disputed the validity of the first expropriation, claiming that notices were not served on all the landowners personally. The 2 farms appear to top the priority list for black spot removals in the district (there are a further 13 still to be moved here) but, largely because of sustained opposition and the skill of the communities' leaders in dealing with officialdom, previous attempts to remove them have been frustrated. These latest manoeuvrings indicate that officials are preparing a new drive against them. Both places have already placed it on record, before Dr. Koornhof himself, that they do not want to be moved from their land.

Farm evictions

Along with the above, a disturbingly large number of cases of people being evicted off white or Indian-owned land have come to AFRA's attention since the beginning of 1983; we are sure that the cases that happen to reach us represent only a fraction of what is taking place, unreported, around the province. The proposed Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill of 1982 made provision for extending existing but often disregarded legislation designed to control and limit the numbers of African people allowed to live in the white rural areas - a tightening up of rural influx control. While the Bill itself has been withdrawn for further revision, in the wake of extensive criticism, it appears that the attitudes that informed its original drafting have not been suspended: instead Administration Boards are now applying the existing provisions more forcefully to achieve the original objectives. Large numbers of people, deemed to be "squatters", are being evicted as a result.

-About 60 tenant households on an Indian-owned farm called Good Hope, near Ladysmith, were given notice in late 1982. The landowner has no objection to their presence but is being threatened with prosecution by the Drakensberg Administration Board.

-Another large group of tenants on Indian-owned land at Cliffdale, near Hammarsdale, have been issued with notice to leave the area - local people say 100s are affected. Many have lived at Cliffdale for years. They work at Hammarsdale but have been unable to get accommodation in the nearby township of Mpumalanga because that is full. They have been told simply to find their own place in KwaZulu.

-Smaller numbers of eviction cases in other areas - 5 families on a farm at New Hanover, 7 families on a farm near Estcourt - all serve to confirm the impression that the Orderly Movement Bill is being applied in Natal even while it is being reconsidered in Cape Town.

Perhaps the Minister of Cooperation and Development ought to define more precisely what exactly is "practicable and possible" in his new dispensation.