

'I am 80 years old', he said, 'and I must go on with my work for that is how I live. However, I am too old to do more than repairs. This move to Buffalo Flats has knocked me down and I have been almost too old to uproot. I would rather die soon and escape this bitter ending to a hard but happy life. Nor can I understand why the farmers and the government wish to do this to me. I never cheated them and they never cheated me.'

Mr Ngwenya's wish was granted. He died before he was moved to Buffalo Flats. May I ask again the question, how can a government of a state that acknowledges sovereignty of Almighty God do such a thing? How can a Minister of that State sleep sound at night when he has ordered such a thing. How can a jolly farmer lie peacefully in bed.

It is good that you should remember such things at this vigil. They must never be forgotten. No-one must be allowed, jolly farmers must not be allowed to lie peacefully.

I shall close with the words of William the Silent. They may be too stoical for some of you here.

'It is not necessary to hope in order to undertake and it is not necessary to succeed in order to persevere'.

Well, let us continue to undertake and to persevere and let us hope too and who is to say that we may not succeed?



An outstanding South African known to a number of you here, the late Selby Msimang, one of the founding members of the ANC of 1912 and the grand old man of the Liberal Party of 50 years later, regarded the Land Act as the greatest blow ever dealt to the hopes and aspirations of the African people.

Onslaught on black farmers

Tim Keegan

WHAT I want to talk to you about on the 70th anniversary of the passing of the Natives Land Act in 1913 is an aspect of that Act which is least appreciated but which is perhaps the most devastating in its subsequent effects — the suppression of black commercial agriculture in South Africa and the central significance of the Land Act in this process.

Closely allied to the land question was the question of labour. For land segregation went hand in hand with the development of a system of oscillating migration of labour discouraging the permanent settlement of blacks in urban areas and promoting the maximum concentration of Africans particularly of unemployed people, old people, women and children in the newly defined reserves where they did not become a burden on or responsibility of the emergent industrial economy.

From the earliest days of white settlement on the highveld and particularly after the rise of urban markets at Kimberley and on the Rand, black agriculturalists were perhaps the major providers of grain crops to these markets.

On much white-owned land in the South African in-



Tim Keegan

terior — the agricultural heartland of South Africa — much of the cash crop production was in the hands of black tenants in the final decades of the 20th century, paying rent as often as not in the form of a share of their crop. Others, particularly those living on absentee-owned land, paid a money rent. But one way or another, the production of grain crops for market on white-owned lands outside the reserves as often as not was in the hands of black peasants employing their own means of production and utilising by-and-large family labour.

The significance of the sharecropping economy - for it was sharecropping relationships which predominated through much of the white-occupied highveld farming region — is that it was a form of capital accumulation for white landowners. The more undercapitalised and the more overindebted were the white landlords the more vulnerable they were and the more dependent they were on the commercial skills, the capital — the ploughing oxen and equipment — and the labour resources of their black tenant families.

As an indication of what I mean, let me quote from an

The least appreciated but most devastating aspect of the Land Act was the suppression of black commercial agriculture

eastern Free State farmer, George Tylden, writing in 1908: 'Very few of us Boers can afford to keep more than one span of oxen to plough with. This means that in our extremely short ploughing season we cannot bring a sufficient proportion of our land under cultivation. The farmer gives one or more of these natives, who own perhaps three spans between them a certain amount of land to plough. The boy finds the labour and often the seed, and gives the owner of the farm half of the crop grown.' And reliance on grain farming and hence sharecropping relationships were increased as a result of the declining average size of farms.

Again, we might illustrate the extent of this dependence on black tenants by reference to a farmer who leased a farm near the Vaal River and who described himself in 1913 as a 'young, struggling and progressive' farmer. He hoped one day to buy his farm, yet his limited resources restricted him to the use of one plough and one team of oxen, which, given the soaring price of land, provided insufficient income. He supplemented his own efforts with those of two sharecroppers. With the profits gained from the combined efforts of the three, he hoped to buy his farm and invest in stock and equipment for more intensive exploitation of the land.

Finally, we might refer to one G J van Riet, who wrote of one Free State district: 'If you look round the country you will see some of our settlers who, were it not for the sowing on shares could not stand today where they are now... where settlers were not in a position to buy cattle those natives helped a lot. It is practised by nearly every farmer in the district and by the new settlers.'

But, as the white landowners became wealthier and the capital resources at their disposal increased, they were increasingly inclined to suppress and harass independent black commercial farmers on their land, to evict them or to force them to render labour.

The major reason for the rise of white agriculture at the expense of black agriculture was the intervention of government in the transfer of capital resources into white agriculture. Particularly after 1907 when the post war depression lifted, the South African government poured massive funds into the promotion of white ag-

Land segregation went hand-in-hand with the development of migrant labour

riculture, and this increased after Union — particularly through the Land Banks. The economic boom also made large quantities of private mortgage capital and credit available to white farmers on an unprecedented scale. And needless to say, blacks were totally excluded from these resources.

From the earliest days of white settlement on the highveld black agriculturalists were perhaps the major providers of grain crops to urban markets at Kimberley and on the Rand

Increased attempts were made to undermine black economic independence as agricultural producers, and to turn them into agricultural labourers.

This could be accomplished in different ways. One way was to force African farm tenants to dispose of their very considerable stock holdings. With a great boom in land prices, white farmers were increasingly reluctant to allow large acreages for black-owned animals, and in consequence Africans were increasingly forced to dispose of their cattle and sheep in severely depressed markets, thereby making them also more dependent on rendering Labour service for their subsistence. (Plaatje.)

Black share-cropping was a form of capital accumulation for white landowners

Very importantly population pressures were building up too as a result of the fact that more and more whites were settling on lands on which Africans had always lived — in the middle and lowveld regions. This meant that land pressures inside areas of exclusive African settlement — the reserves — increased greatly too. Just one example of changes taking place was the development of wattle plantations in the Natal interior in land which had previously supported very considerable black communities.

One very important result of these developments and the widespread evictions of blacks from ancestral lands was a very considerable increase in the extent of black land purchase in the few years leading up 1913 — particularly in the Transvaal and Natal. In the Free State black land ownership was not allowed by law. Blacks bought up large areas of land, in the Rustenburg/Marico areas, near Standerton and Wakkerstrom and elsewhere, mainly by subscription, so that the land was bought by an individual, often a chief, on behalf of his followers, all of whom contributed to the purchase price. Many other Africans brought freehold plots in peri-urban areas, and it was quite common for half a dozen well-to-do black families to pool their resources and buy a farm.

But as white landowners became wealthier increased attempts were made to undermine black economic independence as agricultural producers and to turn them into agricultural labourers

Hence many of the so-called black spots of today had their origins in the years leading up 1913 — a period of massive dispersal and insecurity amongst blacks on the land and when many well-to-do black commercial agricultural producers were seeking to win some degree of security for themselves, their families and communities by investing in land ownership and thereby forestalling the process of dispossession and dispersal.

The prospect of more and more land falling into the hands of wealthy black farmers in the future was a source of very considerable concern to whites. Hence the very important provision in the 1913 Land Act prohibiting Africans from purchasing land outside of the already heavily populated reserve areas.

Furthermore the 1913 Land Act sought to force black tenants into wage labour by prohibiting all forms of rent

payment by black tenants others than labour service. Thus it prohibited sharecropping, which in 1913 was still a very widespread relationship throughout the highveld.

However, there was one other way in which the 1913

The 1913 Land Act sought to force black tenants into wage labour by prohibiting all forms of rent payment by black tenants other than labour service. Thus, it prohibited sharecropping

Land Act had long-term importance in the suppression of black agriculture and the development of white agriculture. And that was that it extended the provisions of the Masters and Servants law to cover all black farm tenants and not only, as previously, wage earners. This was a development of crucial importance, for the Masters and Servants Act defined as criminal a whole range of

In the eyes of the law, the black sharecropping was thus in one stroke turned from a partner of his white landlord to his servant

actions and omissions by Africans, ranging from desertion to disobedience and insubordination, to neglect of work, all of which rendered the worker liable to prosecution in the criminal courts. In the eyes of the law, the black sharecropper was thus in one stroke turned from a partner of his white landlord to his servant.

The immediate effect of the 1913 Act was a massive dispersal of black farm tenant families — more particularly of the more substantial and wealthier of the tenant families: the sharecroppers and those with considerable stockholdings. This dispersal, which was most marked in the Free State, where the development of white arable farming was most rapid, was so widespread and traumatic as to classify as the first really comprehensive forced removal from the so-called white rural areas in 20th century South Africa.

One magistrate described in 1913 the evicted Africans who were appealing to him for advice as to where they could go. The natives, he wrote, 'who are typical of their class, are respectable persons — law abiding, thrifty and comparatively high in the scale of civilisation.'

A Free State pass issuer said that Africans were being 'hurtled about considerably' by farmers who told them that they could no longer keep all their stock. Rev C Stuart Franklin, Wesleyan minister of Kroonstad, testified that: 'In some cases these natives have experienced considerable hardships, because they have had to

The immediate effect of the 1913 Act was a massive dispersal of black farm tenant families — more particularly of the more substantial and wealthier of the tenant families: the sharecroppers. This dispersal, which was most marked in the Free State, was so widespread and traumatic as to classify as the first really comprehensive forced removal from the so-called white rural areas in 20th century South Africa

leave under pressure, and have had no time to remove their effects, stock and implements, which have been sacrificed.

One insight into the way Africans perceived the act is eloquently provided by a petition from Winberg: '...to say to a human being no matter what intellect, what quality of industry, what force of character, or what other gifts you may have received from God, you will

What can and must be said of the Act was that it was a statement of intent by the dominant interests in white society

never be allowed to profit by them, this differs from the proposition of the old slave trader only in form and in degree, further in all essentials the attitude is the same...'

As late as August 1914 a Heilbron correspondent wrote in the *Farmers' Advocate*: 'Kaffir wagons are daily passing to and from, the owners looking for some employer to take them on, but the 'brand of Cain' appears to attach itself to the native who has stock in any number.

However, one should not overemphasise the extent to which the 1913 Natives Land Act engineered an immediate social revolution in the countryside.

By 1913 white agriculture was still not strong enough to suppress entirely and at a stroke the black tenant farmers on white owned land. There were still many white landowners who were dependent on black tenant production for their own income and survival. While many white farmers remained under-capitalised or even in-

Mechanisation on the farms rendered labour tenant communities increasingly expendable

debted, independent black producers — sharecroppers — continued to survive. There was also still much land owned by absentee owners, particularly in Natal and the Transvaal, big land companies who obviously resisted any dispersal of their black commercial tenants. Thus, given the unevenness of development of white agriculture, the 1913 Natives Land Act was of limited immediate effectiveness in forcing blacks living on white owned land into labourers and only intermittent attempts were made to implement it.

But what can and must be said for the Act was that it was a statement of intent by the dominant interests in white society.

But in the decades following 1913 black farm tenants generally experienced a gradual erosion of their status, a growing degree of impoverishment as their access to markets and to alternative means of maintaining their standard of living eroded. Their access to ploughing and grazing land steadily diminished and they were forced into ever more servile conditions and ever greater reliance on wage labour.

However, the levels of wages in cash and kind on the farms have always been pitifully small. Little wonder then that by the 1940's a very serious labour crisis threatened white farming. For under these circumstances, black farm tenants were increasingly in-

Thus we have moved from the stage of the forced making of a black working class to the stage of invariably forced expulsions of the unwanted surplus

clined to desert the farms for urban areas where job opportunities were increasing rapidly as a result of secondary industry.

It was now the farms which were performing the function of reserves of migratory and seasonal labour for the urban areas. And it was very largely the most serviceable young unmarried men and women in black farm families — who had least to gain by staying on the farms — who were deserting the farms — despite the paraphernalia of pass laws, influx control regulations, labour contract laws, masters and servants laws, etc etc, which sought to keep them on the farms.

The labour tenant system was also collapsing as a result of mechanisation on the farms which rendered labour tenant communities increasingly expendable.

It was under these circumstances that after 1948 the labour tenant system was gradually abolished and replaced by a system of contract labour, labour bureaux and bureaucratic controls over labour allocation which effectively put an end to the drainage of farm labour from the farms.

All these factors meant that more and more blacks on farms became expendable. The victory of white farmers, with the massive financial and coercive backing of successive governments since 1913, is now almost complete. According to the calculations of the Surplus Peoples Project, the largest single category of displaced people in South Africa are ex-tenants on farms who have become expendable and redundant.

One interesting implication of this massive exercise in forced removals of people is that in recent decades South Africa has entered an entirely new phase, where the priority of farmers and government is no longer primarily to pressure blacks to labour by suppressing their independent farming enterprise. The major priority of government now is quite literally to expel the hundreds of

thousands who no longer have any role to play in servicing the economic needs of white South Africa and who therefore are uprooted and dumped beyond the self-defined borders of white South Africa.

Thus we have moved from the stage of the often forced making of a black working class — a process largely completed by the 1930's — to the stage of invariably forced expulsions of the unwanted surplus. And it is perhaps striking to realise that those ex-sharecroppers and black commercial farmers who managed in the years before 1913 to gain legal titles to land in the mistaken hope that they would thus be exempted from the leveling forces of white capitalist development in a racially exclusive society — such as those who settled at, for example, Driefontein and Daggakraal — have in the end found that even legal title to land is no protection against the rapacity of their rulers.



Resisting removal — the Batlokwa

HELEN MARY BROOKE

HELEN JOINED the Black Sash when she retired, and began to work in the Advice Office in many capacities — from tea maker to adviser. She was popular with everybody, black and white, because she was unfailingly polite, patient, and deeply concerned. Above all she was prepared to spend hours — from her home — on any case which required more time. She is much missed, especially when her 'cases' come in and somebody else has to pick up the problem. Her out-going friendliness endeared her to everyone.

Noël Robb

ARE you involved in education, community work, advice, research information, social awareness, industrial or youth work?

The Human Awareness Programme publishes **BRIDGE** — an index of organisations oriented towards change in South Africa. Do you want to be listed?

Contact: Administrative Secretary
P O Box 95134
GRANT PARK
2051

Phone: 728-1211