

June 20, 70th anniversary of THE LAND ACT of 1913, was commemorated by a countrywide

Black Sash week of protest against forced removals

JOHANNESBURG

The campaign was spearheaded in the Transvaal region where a five-day vigil was organized from 8am to 8pm in Khotso House, together with a photographic display.

Throughout the vigil Gill de Vlieg fasted on a daily cup of tea and a slice of dry bread, which she had found out was more or less all that some of the Driefontein people could afford to eat while purchasing title to their land many years ago. She slept each night in the Khotso House chapel, supported by other members who joined her there. In a letter to members she explained that she wanted to acknowledge the friendship of the Driefontein people. After each visit there she said, 'we have come away once again feeling enriched by our contact with the community. We brought home with us more than we had taken.' By fasting she aimed to play her own personal part in drawing attention to the crime of forced removal.

In a circular letter the Transvaal Region appealed to thousands of people in religious groups, community bodies, political organizations, the press, trade unions, schools, business organizations and embassies, asking them to join our vigil and to make a determined effort to persuade the Government to give up its removals policy.

The vigil was well supported by press and public throughout the week and several schools sent pupils to listen to the lectures. In an atmosphere of informality, discussion and prayer sessions sparked off dialogue between all sorts of desparate people, especially between urban activists and rural leaders. People seemed less threatened by each other in a situation in which no con-

clusions had to be reached and no time limit obtruded. This was an unexpected plus to the vigil.

Whatever the impact or lack of it on whites, the leaders of threatened communities treated the vigil very seriously as an opportunity to meet each other, members of the Black Sash, the general public and the media. They took tape recordings of the speeches to play to their communities. Their speeches were reported in the papers and they were interviewed by the SABC. (One of the interviews, that of Mr G D Twala of Daggakraal was recently heard on Radio Today, together with Helen Suzman).

PORT ELIZABETH

Vast quantities of food and flowers, ordered by a bogus caller, highlighted a Black Sash photographic display in the Port Elizabeth City Hall on June 24.

John Kane-Berman addressed a lunch-hour meeting there, warning that the Government's mass removals policy 'poses a much greater threat to peaceful social and economic development in South Africa than anything exiled guerilla organizations may be doing.' He concluded, 'The outbreak of the 1976 Soweto riots awoke South Africa to the anger and desperation that had been building up here. Is it going to take similar violence in the homelands before the rest of the country, black as well as white, wakes up to the problems in those poverty-entrapped areas?'

Members stood in silent protest at seven strategic points in the City during the early morning rush hour that day, with posters reading 'Removals destroy Family Life.'

CAPE TOWN

Lunch-hour presentations filled the Trellis Room of St George's Cathedral each day of the week.

Margaret Nash opened the protest by highlighting the struggles of rural people faced with removal. She also wrote a leader page article for the Cape Times.

On the Tuesday 'The Promised Land', the slide-tape show, was shown, with commentary afterwards by Di Bishop.

Wednesday was something completely different! The Community Arts Project mime group presented 'Die Groot Baas' — a story not of forced removal, but of other forms of oppression and exploitation, with a happy ending which delighted the audience: the 'groot baas' brought low, an attempt by one of the oppressed to take his place quickly foiled, and a jubilant dance of cooperation and triumph.

Thursday's programme was another slide show — 'Vulamehlo', or the Opening of Eyes, presented by Charles Simpkins, of UCT's South African Labour and Development Research Unit, and member of the Surplus People's Project. We had a last-minute change of venue, and joined the Institute of Citizenship in the Cathedral Hall, where their scheduled speaker had not been able to appear. They were glad to have us, and we were happy to allow a larger audience to see the slides and hear Mr Simpkins.

Keith Gottschalk, of the newly formed Political Studies Department at UCT brought the week to a close with an account of the population relocations which have taken place in the Cape in terms of the Group Areas Act, as well as the Urban Areas legislation, culminat-



L to r, Jill de Vlieg, Rob de Vlieg, Saul Mkhize, Josie Adler, Judy Hawarden. Right background, a Driefontein farmer.

ing in the threat of transfer of every black person in the Cape Peninsula to Khayelitsha. He concluded with an urgent plea for all to do what lay in their power to oppose forced removals — to be informed, to keep up the pressure, to join active organizations.

Throughout the week we had bookstalls at the Trellis Room, making available our own publications and a number of other recommended books and journals. We handed out copies of John Kane-Berman's article, and of a reading list suggesting further sources of information.

The sub-committee, convened by Beverley Runciman, which was responsible for the week's organization, produced in addition to everything else, a huge poster giving details of the programme, which was put up on the Cathedral's outdoor notice board facing Wale Street.

Between June 16 and June 24 we held stands throughout the suburbs (in some of the wettest weather we have had for many years!), with posters showing an outline map of South Africa, the Black Sash logo, and the words 'One People, One land'.

M M BURTON
Cape Western Region

DURBAN

The day-long vigil in Farewell Square drew waterbombs, poster-

tearing and verbal hostility — also the usual studied indifference: an accurate picture of overall white response to our demonstrations.

Bishop Hurley came in for especial and prolonged abuse, which provoked a lot of correspondence in the local press. Jo Thorpe, Ann Colvin and others were accosted by a thick-set man in a safari suit who tore up posters and said he would have beaten them up and bashed their teeth in had they been men.

Thousands of pamphlets were handed out, roughly two hundred of which were 'confiscated' by the security police.

At the public meeting in St Anthony's Church, representatives of threatened communities together with 500 members of the public, heard of the destruction of black agriculture and the futility of court actions in opposition to forced removal.

Over a thousand pamphlets were posted to a wide spectrum of community organizations and individuals.

Commenting on the Natal Coastal protest programme Georgina Stevens said, 'we felt that whatever else we achieved we certainly retrieved some of the inspiration needed to galvanise ourselves in the coming months. And public reaction to the stand in Farewell Square put the idea of protest stands firmly back on our agenda of future activities.'

GRAHAMSTOWN

Our Grahamstown members concentrated on getting into the schools to outline the facts, and describe, particularly, the situation in Ciskei. Our speakers visited Kingswood, DSG, and St Andrews senior and junior schools. They took with them a mobile display of pictures taken by Ben MacLennan. Altogether, roughly 700 children were thus informed and many responded with donations to Operation Hunger and requests to become further involved.

More than 60 people heard John Suggit address a vigil in the Catholic Church on Friday June 24.

Professor Rodney Davenport provided background to the protest with an article on the Land Act in the Eastern Province Herald.

PIETERMARITZBURG

Dry bread and tea was served after Ian Donald had addressed a lunch-hour meeting in the Pietermaritzburg City Hall on June 24. A member of the Association for Rural Advancement, he presented slides which documented recent removals in Natal and focused on communities under threat of removal, relating these to the workings of the Land Act.