

# The days of horror

## *Vigil for Driefontein's leader*

**WE HAVE COME** here to honour a man who sought no martyrdom or glory but only to serve his people and fight for what belonged to them. To do that in South Africa requires bravery, energy, and hard work. Saul Mkhize tried to live for his community. Instead, he died for it — his life simply snuffed out by a white policeman half his age, a man whom he was trying to protect from angry people. If Mr Mkhize had not attempted to protect that policeman, he would probably still be alive today.

One had only to visit Saul Mkhize's home on a hillside and look at the rest of Driefontein stretching away in tranquillity below, to realise the abominable wickedness of a policy seeking to destroy what these South Africans and their fathers and grandfathers before them have painstakingly created. Like most people in this and other countries they probably had no greater ambition than to be left in peace, earning enough to feed and clothe their children and send them to school, abiding by the law, posing no threat to anyone else and representing no burden to the state. In a land riven by fear and hate and turmoil, they are a force for stability — their kind of people on whom the future of this country should be built.

Instead, in the name of selfishness so grotesque as to be almost beyond understanding, they face eviction from their homes and removal to one or other of the human refuse bins that dot the face of this country. They are not alone in this threat, for hundreds upon hundreds of other similar farms, and thousands upon thousands of similar people, are in the same predicament. Never having been in such a plight myself, I find it difficult to do anything more than guess at the deep anxiety and even terror that must grip the hearts of people who are to be violently torn away from a place that belongs to them and deposited they know not where. Most of them, probably, are people who have never had the chance to learn modern technical skills or save very much money. The mastery that they have over their environment, they have gained through experience. Depositing them in a new and alien environment, without even the land to carry on the activity they know best, which is farming, does not fall far short of simply destroying them. Instead of health they will face sickness; instead of contentment, stress; instead of tranquillity, anger; instead of self-sufficiency, destitution; and instead of hope, despair. This fate has already fallen upon hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of other South Africans before them.

They are victims of a policy that is the greatest outrage that apartheid has yet inflicted upon this country. Forced population removals rank very high even on the list of outrages committed in Africa. The murderous crimes of Idi Amin have come to an end, but the number of victims of forced removal mounts remorselessly. The enforcers of removal do not even have the excuse that the British had when they herded Boer women and chil-



*Saul Mkhize's family at his graveside*

### *Leader of Driefontein shot — 1983*

dren into concentration camps during the Boer War, namely that their actions were necessitated by the exigencies of war.

The violent uprooting of black South Africans is happening in peacetime, and it is not the result of the obsessions of a single madman like Idi Amin but a systematic programme that forms an integral part of a policy of physical and political dispossession that is being pursued by our government. It is the geographical arm of the one policy to which Mr P W Botha and his colleagues are unequivocally committed, the one policy over which they are not tying themselves up in knots in Soutpansberg and Waterberg, namely Dr Connie Mulder's policy that there must one day be no black South Africans. If Dr Andries Treurnicht or Mr Jaap Marais had been the people to whom Mr Mkhize had addressed his pleas for help, instead of Dr Koornhof, probably the only difference in the callous rejection that came back would have been that neither Dr Treurnicht nor Mr Marais would

have had the cynicism to write 'with warm regards' above his signature on the letter.

This policy of violent uprooting — sometimes referred to euphemistically as 'resettlement' or 'relocation' — is a crime against the people of South Africa. It is a brutal assault on the rights of man on a massive scale, causing suffering to a degree that the bare statistics of malnutrition and other evils, including death, can only hint at. It is carried out for a greedy and ignoble purpose, and its victims, like the Jews in Germany, are selected by racial madness. It is quite terrifying to realise that the people who rule us are actually capable of using the great power of the state for so utterly destructive a purpose. It is also a terrible indictment of white South Africa that this destruction is carried out in our name by men who get re-elected to power time and time again. In the not too distant future, probably, it will be carried out also in the name of people of other races who will be appointed to the new white-Asian-coloured cabinet that is apparently in store for us.

One day, no doubt, history will point its finger at us and say 'guilty', just as it still points its finger at another master race in another country. Those few of us who hate this policy will be able only to confess our helplessness in not having been able to stop it. Some of the others will no doubt say that they were only obeying orders. Many will say, 'we never knew'. There will, regrettably, be an element of truth in that claim, for white South Africa as a whole has succeeded in blotting this horror out of its mind. Tragically, Saul Mkhize had to

die before anyone other than a handful of his friends paid any attention to his plight. Both in this country and abroad, there is now a brief flicker of interest. Soon it will die, and Driefontein and its people simply become another statistic, another entry on the charge-sheet that white South Africans will one day have to answer.

Death found Saul Mkhize deeply agonised by the hardness of men's hearts, as Dr Koornhof and his officials simply spurned his approaches. But even as his anguish increased, he never lost his grace. He remained also a reasonable and infinitely courteous man. It is sad that his funeral should have been treated by some of those present as an occasion for a heartless and alien political display. Saul's quiet and noble heroism was expressed in painstaking and devoted work against dreadful odds. It needed consistent support in life, not hollow and noisy exploitation in death. He battled hard to build up his community's determination to withstand the wicked plans of the government. I wonder how much help it is to such people when outsiders who have not been part of their particular, lonely struggle suddenly barge in with unfamiliar behaviour. I also wonder if there is very much difference between the lack of feeling of people who jostle and bruise a family in its moment of farewell and the lack of feeling of a policeman who rides on a horse around Saul's house, insensible of the grief inside.

**Address by John Kane – Berman**  
*St Mary's Cathedral, April 1983*



*Funeral of Saul Mkhize. The scene at the graveside. (Bishop Desmond Tutu second from right)*