



# TRAC

Transvaal Rural Action Committee

## Newsletter No 8 August 1985 • MACHAVIESTAD

### Machaviestad: The Discarded People

The Machaviestad people are facing a forced removal: again. In the midst of struggling to survive after being ruthlessly discarded the first time round, they are about to be delivered a coup de grace. Not being able to return to their land nor receive adequate compensation for what was taken away from them, the Machaviestad people are the victims of two governments. The South African government washed its hands of them and the Bophuthatswana government is perhaps about to deal with them in as heartless a way as its predecessors — a forced removal, Bophuthatswana style may be imminent.

The story of the Machaviestad people, often known as the Rooigrond community or the Barolong ba Modiboa, epitomises the breakdown of relationships in our country which leads to unnecessary human tragedy and suffering. It is a story of black hospitality, sympathy and assistance, ultimately resulting in white betrayal and oppression.

Many patches of the history of South Africa have yet to be written, but the story of the Machaviestad people will be remembered as one of a community that clung to its sense of justice against all odds. It was prepared to suffer in the hope that justice would one day prevail, that the white man's word is his bond and that the Afrikaner government would repay its historical debt to these people.

Now, however, it seems as if the Machaviestad people face an immediate future of destruction as a community and economic disaster. Their heroic struggle against the SA government for 70 years while in Machaviestad and 14 years while in Rooigrond, Bophuthatswana is about to end — they have become victims of two governments — the Republic of South Africa and Bophuthatswana.

The Machaviestad people have ancient historical roots in the area. They stem from the Modiboa clan of the Barolong tribe of the Tswana-speaking people. They originate from

Moroka, a famous Tswana chief in the Matlwang area (the early name for Machaviestad), near Potchefstroom in the Western Transvaal. When Moroka left Matlwang and settled at Thaba Nchu in the Orange Free State, some of the clan stayed at Matlwang under his brother, Ntsinogang.

In the 1830's, Voortrekkers arrived in the Matlwang area and their leaders, Potgieter, Maritz and Uys asked Ntsinogang for a temporary place to stay. The response was one of hospitality and the Boers were allowed to settle on the banks of the Mooi River.

Later, some Boers who had moved to the Thaba Nchu area approached Moroka to help them retrieve cattle that had been stolen by the Zulu chief Mzilikazi. Again the Barolong were sympathetic. Moroka agreed to help and came to Matlwang to get recruits. In return, Moroka merely asked that the Voortrekkers recognise his headmen and chiefs and do not interfere with them or their land at Thaba Nchu and Matlwang.

Moroka died in 1840, but apparently this agreement was officially accepted after 1885 in a 'Patch Kontrak' which recognised Ntsinogang (also known as Quagga or Roagga) as chief of the area and his right to the land. This document has since gone missing. Mr Simon Makodi, the present leader, said, 'We know we have the winning

horse, but where is the ticket to show we backed it?' To these trusting people, a verbal agreement would have been sufficient.

The present SA government, however, does not accept the Machaviestad people's claim to the land. It says that because the Barolong have no title deed, they are squatters.

From 1907 to 1971, the SA government attempted to evict the Machaviestad people but met with fierce resistance. Structural force was then brought to bear. Taxes were levied on animals and houses, many parts of Machaviestad land was fenced off, animals were impounded and in 1966 the Machaviestad school was deregistered and forced to close. Roads to Machaviestad were also closed.

In 1968/9 the Department of Co-operation and Development agreed to give the Machaviestad people alternative land — implicit recognition of their right to land at Machaviestad. The land shown to the people was much smaller than Machaviestad and at the time the tribe was so determined to fight for their land that they rejected the offers and wanted to take the matter to court.

A meeting was held at which the people say they were surrounded by police and forced to sign a blank piece of paper. They claim to have seen this paper years later in Mmabatho as a document in which they agreed to move.

The then chief, Israel Mokate, Mr Makodi and other elders held a meeting at which they decided to approach chief Kebabipile Montshiwa for a place to stay while they fought the case. He agreed to let them stay at Rooigrond temporarily. The Machavie people then went to the authorities and informed them of their decision.

On August 1, 1971, government trucks arrived to move them, a concession the government made for the temporary move as it was anxious to get the people out of the area. The army waited in the distance. The people took a few cattle along, and each family received about R18,50 as 'compensation' for their homes. About 37 families were moved to Rooigrond while others went to reserves or the Potchefstroom township. Mr Makodi says of the move, 'It still saddens me when I think of those days, slowly watching our homes disappear.'

Once at Rooigrond, the people approached lawyers about their situation. Reputable advocates involved with their case came to the decision that 'sadly these people have no legal claim', however, they also stated that the people have a strong moral and historical claim, and suggested that counsel approach the relevant authorities about allocating land to the tribe as a moral obligation. Advocate Junod, SC's opinion was: 'On moral grounds, the consultants have a strong case for assistance and they should

pursue the matter in conjunction with the Department who can hardly afford to turn a deaf ear to the consultants' plight.'

For the past 14 years the people of Machavie have lived at Rooigrond in the hope that either they would win the court case or that the Patch Kontrak would come to light. They have been cautious about putting down roots in the area for fear of the Department of Co-operation and Development abrogating its responsibility for them. Therefore no-one has applied for Bophuthatswana documents, but as Makodi says, 'We made it clear that our quarrel is not with that government, but with Pretoria.'

As a result, the Bophuthatswana officials have become impatient with the Machavie people and are now exerting pressure on them to move. The tribal authorities of the area say they must stop resisting and be absorbed into an urban setting around Mafikeng.

This would have terrible consequences. Firstly, it would destroy their group identity; secondly, they would have to sell off their remaining head of cattle they need for survival as well as sell a vegetable garden developed with the help of the South African Council of Churches. Furthermore, it would crush any hope of the central government providing them with the land they feel is their historical and moral right.

Life has not been easy at Rooigrond, but the people have been prepared to spend fourteen years in 'temporary' shelters and eke out a living while clinging to their hope of either returning to Machaviestad or getting a decent piece of land. Farm implements lie rusting next to the zinc houses — mementos of days when the people were prosperous farmers and no-one lacked land or food.

In May this year, Mr Makodi instructed their lawyer to request that the Department of Co-operation and Development re-open negotiations with the tribe about land, on the basis that it was promised in 1971. The reply from Deputy Minister, Mr B Wilkens was similar to that of Pontius Pilate. He acknowledged that the government had offered the tribe 2 026 hectares of the farm Leeufontein in the Pilanesberg district in 1970, but went on to say: 'The farm Leeufontein is now part of Bophuthatswana and cannot be offered to the Barolong ba Modiboa by the SA government. Also, as they are resident in Bophuthatswana, it follows that the SA government does not have any jurisdiction over them. In the circumstances this department is unable to assist them as an offer was made to them which they rejected and the matter was accepted as finalised.' Ironically, if they had accepted this offer at that time they would have been moved again as Leeufontein now forms part of the Pilanesberg Game Reserve.

When Mr Makodi read this letter from Mr Wilkens, he said, 'So it is finished. They have finally thrown us away.'



*These people were dumped here 14 years ago, and hoped they would go back to Machaviestad when their right to the land was recognised. Now they face another removal — from one wasteland to another.*

Bophuthatswana did not take long to act. Authorities informed Mr Makodi that Mr Mokale, the Minister of Land and Rural Development, would meet with the Machavie people on Tuesday August 13. An eviction order was feared. The tribe still feel that the central government is responsible for the tragedy of the situation. 'Our people helped the Boers during the war against Mzilikazi. We also fought with whites in World War 2, but have not been paid anything for that. What have we done to deserve all this?' asked Mr Serwalo.

The SA government is clearly in a position to give these people a piece of land on which they can live and let their cattle graze. Various pieces of land due for incorporation into Bophuthatswana would be suitable. These are in any event supposed to be filled by tribes in the Western Transvaal who have good land of their own and so do not want to be uprooted and dumped in these areas. If the government is sincere in stopping forced removals, why does it not grant one of these areas to the people of Machaviestad, honour a past promise and alleviate the past, present and future suffering of these people?

The Afrikaner nation has projected an image of pride in

their history, but this incident is one to be deeply ashamed of.

The Machaviestad people have watched their herds diminish from 250 head of cattle to 70 and from 300 goats to 80. They have seen their children handicapped through inadequate schooling. Nevertheless, there is still a sense of dignity and hope. Mr Makodi has been largely responsible for keeping the history of the tribe alive. He has 'wallpapered' his house with strips of cardboard on which the history of the Barolong is written. An avid historian, he has kept newspaper clippings, letters and documents over the years and has written the history on his walls from these sources and from oral tradition. His one wish is that his people have a piece of land where they can preserve their identity and tradition.

'If there is no settlement, I cannot say what we will do. I cannot speak on behalf of the community, I am only their representative. I am aware that I may never see the land of Machavie in my life-time again, but my attitude is like that of the children of Israel — I will go on praying, hoping and wishing that I will find my rightful place. I hope and pray that subsequent generations will ultimately have this dream I am cherishing realised.'

## **STOP PRESS ... STOP PRESS ... STOP PRESS**

The magistrate of Mafikeng informed the Machaviestad people on Friday August 9<sup>th</sup> this year that the meeting scheduled for August 13 had been postponed. No future date was set. The people feel the postponement was due to members of the press interviewing President Mangope of Bophuthatswana about them on that Friday and Helen Suzman of the PFP phoning Mr Mokale about their situation the same afternoon.

The situation remains unchanged. Mr Makodi fears that another meeting will be called at short notice, preventing strong press coverage.

The tribe has written a letter to Mr Wilkens in response to his notification. They were shocked by his reply and as Christians have appealed to him to reconsider their case. 'When we came to Rooigrond we were received by Chief Montshiwa. Since the Bophuthatswana government gained independence we never fell under their jurisdiction since we were still negotiating with our lawyers and your government to compensate us accordingly, or return us to Matlwang. We are amazed that you say we are under their jurisdiction.'