

RURAL RESISTANCE: the Batlokwa

Statement issued by the Makgato families
who resisted forced removal.

FORCED REMOVALS OF THE MAKGATO FAMILIES

500 FAMILIES RENDERED HOMELESS BY THESE REMOVALS.

On 25 September 1979 Government officials started removing willing families to Kromhoek. Things ran smoothly up to 28 - 09 - 79 as only those who wished to be resettled were removed and unwilling families were made to believe that they would remain unmolested with.

On 01 - 10 - 79, however, the removals took a new turn. Families were forced to move. It was on this day that families who were opposed to removals sought shelter at the neighbouring villages. In the meantime those Government officials started breaking down houses and carrying the contents and roofing materials to Kromhoek. Even when the owner of the house was absent, they would carry a 12 year old child with his/her family's belongings. In the case where a woman was present she was carried away in the absence of her husband to Kromhoek. When the head of the family resisted the removals he was chased by a police van and police dogs, and if he was caught he was thrown into the removing truck and taken away together with his belongings. In such cases doors were broken open and in other cases they entered locked houses by removing the iron sheet from the roof, and would from within force the door to open.

From thatched roofed houses they took doors and windows away, together with what they found in the house. In many cases walls of rondavals were broken down and the thatched roof would eventually fall in and break. Where a teenage boy resisted the removals he was bitten by police dogs and when he surrendered he was removed with whatever belonged to his family. There are families whose properties were removed to Kromhoek in their absence.

Houses were carelessly broken down in these removals. Herds of cattle, sheep and goats were carried away whilst their owners remained behind. Amongst other things there are two tractors and a trailer that were taken away leaving the owner behind. We who remained behind received no compensation for all these losses.

TRIBAL PROPERTIES TAKEN AWAY

- SCHOOLS :
- a. Roofing materials.
 - b. Door frames and window frames and doors.
 - c. Benches and desks.
 - d. Schools record books, viz
 - (i) Sebeme books
 - (ii) Registers
 - (iii) Financial books etc.
- CLINIC :
- a. Roofing materials
 - b. Door frame and window frames and doors
- TRIBAL AUTHORITY :
- a. All equipment viz
 - (i) Roofing materials
 - (ii) Door frame and window frames and doors.
 - (iii) Benches, tables, chairs, water tanks and fencing materials.
 - b. The Tribal car.
 - c. 6 Afrikaner bulls belonging to the tribe.

The families who were willingly removed are less than one hundred, that is why we mention these tribal properties as the bulk of the tribe has remained behind.

OVER the past 8 months, there has been a huge outcry in the media about the fate of the 66 000 Batlokwa people - both those who have accepted, as well as those who have resisted government removal.

BACKGROUND

THE Batlokwa people live in the Sekgosesa district of Lebowa, about 50 km north of Pietersburg. There are two tribal authorities in the area under Chief Machaka and Chief Romakgopa. The land on which the Batlokwa people live is their own. Apart from the tribal locations, there are collectively bought farms as well as trust farms granted to the people. The Batlokwa's right to the land, according to one of the tribal councillors, was 'guaranteed us by Paul Kruger'.

In about 1962 the Makgato tribe who were 'squatters' on a European owned farm at Munnik, south-west of Soekmekaar, were moved to the Trust Farm Klipplaatdrift (No 508) which adjoins the Matoks (Machaka) tribal area. It is this group of people who now, 18 years later, have once again accepted removal.

While the Batlokwa people have occupied their land since time immemorial, the recent attempts to move them have not been the first bureaucratic intervention in the Batlokwa's chosen way of life. The institution of agricultural planning, or betterment, has always meant considerable upheaval for the rural population of South Africa. This is because the division of

the land into rigidly demarcated residential, arable and grazing areas, means that in most cases, people have to move their houses into 'lines'. Under no circumstances is compensation given for houses that have to be pulled down and rebuilt, and this division has usually meant that the amount of land available to families for ploughing is severely restricted. The Batlokwa area, as were most of the farms in the northern Transvaal, was 'planned'. In 1954 the people from the more remote and scattered homesteads were brought nearer to the more densely populated areas, and in 1959 the entire area was 'planned'.

It must be recognised then, that for the Batlokwa, as well as for the Makgato people, removal is not new. Their experience with planning and 'squatter' removal has taught them exactly what resettlement means and why they should resist it. Their prior experience of having to break down houses, move their possessions and recreate their homes (even if only a couple of miles further), should be remembered when people try to understand their present militancy.

The reasons for the present removal are not entirely clear. It is said that in 1977 the area was excised from Lebowa. This meant that it became a 'black spot' in 'white' South Africa (and from then it was no longer shown in the maps as part of Lebowa) and the land could be expropriated and the people living on it moved so that the consolidation of the Lebowa 'homeland' could be completed. The measure was gazetted in August 1978 under Regulation

R217 (Government Gazette No 6139, 25th August 1978, page 2). This meant that the areas were excised from the jurisdiction of the legislative assembly of Lebowa and were thus 'black spots' under central government control. However, today it is still the Lebowa administration which is responsible for education in the area, for collection of taxes, stock counting, etc, and all that Proclamation R217 has done is to legally dispossess the population of their rights to the land.

The land belonging to the Batlokwa people is the only black area through which the road leading to the northern border passes. It is this which has prompted statements such as the following:

Their removal is viewed by (the tribes) as a provision for the so-called 'white corridor' for the security forces to the North (Star, 78.11.15).

It was only on the 28th September, 1978, that the chiefs of the area were summoned by the Chief Commissioner for the Northern Areas, and informed that they were to be resettled in the Kromhoek area near Vivo in the Bochum magisterial district (Star, 78.11.15).

Chiefs Machaka and Romakgopa were both determined not to move, and they tried to organise a meeting of their people to hear about the proposed removals when the whole tribe, including migrants, would be there. To have had the whole population together presumably meant that the meeting would have had to take place in December/January when most migrants were on holiday. How-

ever, this did not happen and on November 15, 1978, a meeting consisting mainly of women was addressed by the Deputy Secretary, Serfontein. The meeting was said to have been a stormy one, with protests, and people stating that they would not move (Star, 78.11.16).

In the meantime, the third chief in the area, Chief Makgato from the farm Klipplaatdrift, agreed to be moved. The two dissenting chiefs were summoned by the Chief Commissioner to attend a meeting shortly after this, but did not attend because 'no agenda was provided' (Voice, 79.05.22). The meeting was, however, attended by Chief Makgato and by the Lebowa MP for the area, Kobe. (The shop belonging to Kobe was boycotted by the people of the area, because of his said support for the removals. This caused his turnover to drop radically - from R400,00 to R5,00 a day. Eventually he was forced to close the shop (Post, 79.06.22)).

It was then decided that the resettlements would be discussed between the Lebowa Legislative Assembly and Dr Koornhof at Sheshego on July 4. The Minister was expected to outline the government plan for the removals. On the same day the Batlokwa people put forward a memorandum to Koornhof asking that Proclamation R217 be withdrawn, and that plans for the removals be halted. (As yet no official removal notice had been served on the chiefs and to date the houses have not yet been numbered. This means that people are still free to continue building).

On the 3rd October, 1979, the real drama started. The time had come for the people living under Chief Makgato to move. It was reported in the RDM (79.10.03) that hundreds of families at Dwars River fled when police with 30 trucks moved in to resettle them.

The homes of several people who refused to move were demolished and it was also reported several days later that some of the people who had been resettled at Kromhoek were returning to their old homes and discouraging their friends from leaving the area. By now the Makgato people who had stayed at Dwars River had abandoned their homes and were setting up a 'squatter' camp in the bush.

The response of the Chief Commissioner to the returning people was to state that '(t)he people who are already resettled there can't come back. If they do they'll be committing an offence. You must expect some resistance (against the removals) but once they are settled they will be happy' (Star, 79.10.30).

On the 9th October, 1979, another meeting of the chiefs was scheduled at the Northern Transvaal Commissioner's court where complaints by Chief Solomon Makgato were to be heard. He said that, 'They (Chiefs Ramakgopa and Machaka) had taken his people'. The chiefs rejected this allegation claiming that they 'had offered sanctuary to stranded people' (RDM, 79.10.11).

Initially only 78 out of 614 Makgato families accepted removal from Dwars River. This meant that the vast majority of 536

families had totally rejected the moves. Chief Makgato's reasons for moving were that he wanted to settle at Kromhoek because the village at Dwars River was scattered. The comments of his people about the removals show clearly that they did not share his attitude. People fleeing into the bush said that, 'We don't want to move so we are making sure that when they come to take us away we won't be here'.

Apart from police pressure to get people to move to Kromhoek, 8 people were arrested, 14 detained, a number of others assaulted, and at least one person bitten by a police dog (RDM, 79.10.03; Post, 79.10.04).

On the 25th October the RDM reported what was perhaps the worst tragedy of all: Mosima Sekole, a Batlokwa migrant who worked in Johannesburg, returned home to find that his wife and children had moved to Kromhoek leaving behind their home that had taken years to build. He was later found hanged.

The removal was also characterised by considerable intimidation of young people. According to a report in Post (79.10.06) 'Boys had taken to the hills for fear of police. They have been the main target of police patrols', and 'Only ten people have been detained according to Brigadier D Nothling, Divisional Chief of Police in the Northern Transvaal, but people in the area spoke of vans "coming and going" loaded with detainees, mainly students'. On the 15th October, 7 000 students from the schools in the area boycotted the lessons and staged a 20 km march protesting against the removals and particularly

about the fate of all the Makgato scholars who were now out of school. At Mokomene High School there was also considerable intimidation of students - some were banned from Lebowa schools altogether, while attempts were made to force the rest of the student body to fill in forms stating who the leaders of the strikes were (Post, 79.11.05).

Ultimately, the Makgato scholars were absorbed into the other Batlokwa schools; the teachers who had refused to move were transferred and the Makgato families who had stayed behind found refuge with friends and relatives. Yet the warning by a Catholic priest in the area that, 'Unless an acceptable and lasting solution to the problem of the displaced Makgato people can be found soon, real trouble lies ahead' (Post, 79.12.04) is an indication of the real problems. Speaking about the provision of food parcels and blankets he said, 'What we are doing here might ultimately prove dangerous because this is a temporary relief. These people need a permanent home which we cannot offer and unless an acceptable solution is found immediately real trouble with the possibility of violence lies ahead'.

This is the precise point about the removals. Resettlement in whatever form it appears - whether as betterment schemes, slum clearance, 'black spot' removal is a violent and brutal process. It usually means that people's material conditions deteriorate. The amount of money they will have to spend on building a new house, on increased travelling expenses, means

impoverishment. The trauma and insecurity of resettlement likewise has severe effects on people. The division of tribe against tribe, brother against brother, husband against wife is an effect of any forced removal. The breakdown of communities of the unity and coherence which can only grow in a situation in which people are secure, has not yet been fully explored.

What is becoming more and more clear is that these are not incidental side-effects of removal but are integral to it. In other words, removal of people is not simply a physical act, it is part of a process and a strategy that seeks to push increasing numbers of South Africa's people into ever more remote and inhospitable areas. Areas where these people, broken and fragmented by the experience of removal and all that it means, are left to exist under conditions of increasing apathy and powerlessness.

Chief Solomon Makgato and his people have already undergone one major resettlement. The enduring effects of this and the memories of it may well be one reason why he did not have the spirit to resist being moved yet again.

Today Chief Solomon Makgato and his people are settled at Kromhoek in the Bochum area. As yet they have not been allocated arable land and the fate of their stock is uncertain. Most of the people there have begun to build mud and even brick houses, but in late February some were still living in tents and in corrugated iron houses. There is one school that has been built, but the other is still a completely corrugated iron building. The numbers of

open plots - planted with mealies by those resident - is a testimony to the numbers of people who wouldn't move, as are the zinc latrines to be glimpsed through the bush. The people at Kromhoek are suspicious of strangers. At the same time they are completely defensive about the move, making such statements as: Things are better here, we have taps.

As yet, the rest of the Batlokwa people have not moved. They are still as determined as ever in their resolve not to move. It would also seem that the government has, in the face of this militancy, back tracked. The rest of the removals have been postponed until after the report of the Van der Walt Commission on land consolidation. In addition, it was reported in the Rand Daily Mail (80.04.09) that Koornhof, while addressing the Zionists at Moria in the Pietersburg area, had said that there would be no further removals in the area.

More realistically however, Koornhof's promises in the past have contained a sting in the tail, and the numbers of cut plots at Kromhoek indicate that rather than giving in, the government is stepping back and giving itself time to devise a new and probably more sophisticated strategy. It is this which the Batlokwa people should guard against, for their stand up to now has demonstrated with force that unity is strength. It is only the maintenance of this unity that will ultimately allow them to win their struggle.

RURAL RESISTANCE: the Matlala

IT IS COMMON in South Africa that clashes between groups of blacks, for which no apparent explanations can be easily found, are termed 'faction fights'. The term carries with it connotations of irrationality, tribalism, and unreasoned violence. All too often, however, the use of the term 'faction fight' reveals, more than anything else, the ignorance and prejudice of the writer. This article attempts to reveal the logic and the history behind one of these so-called 'faction fights'.

The Post newspaper reported on 79.12.24. that the Lebowa police had detained 56 people after the petrol-bombing and stoning of Chief BK Matlala's home in the Northern Transvaal. The report stated that this was the second attack within a week and was the culmination of a long-standing feud. The group of people who attacked the chief's home, injured his guard and caused damage to the value of R25 000 are known as the Congress People. They comprise a group who have maintained an anti-government stand for more than 30 years. They have always refused to pay taxes, allow their cattle to be dipped, or move into demarcated areas. (Post 79.12.24).