

THE GREAT SOUTH AFRICAN LAND SCANDAL

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to every commercial farmer in South Africa, without whose skill, determination and resilience none of us would survive.
A special thanks to loyal supporters who kept my spirit high – especially Andre du Plessis (Eastern Cape) and Johan Bezuidenhout (Limpopo)

TWO NEWS ARTICLES . . .

THIS DAY, January 8, 2004

Stephen Hofstatter and Michael Schmidt

“Farmland Report Jolts Rand”

JOHANNESBURG – The land issue took political center stage in South Africa yesterday as the rand weakened in reaction to reports of massive land claims as government officials scrambled to allay fears of possible farm invasions by the landless.

The rand lost 39c against the dollar in intraday trading, retreating to R6,62 from R6,23 on Tuesday before recovering slightly to R6,59.

“It’s starting to have an impact on the market. You can see that the issue is becoming an increasing focus ahead of the April elections”, Callum Henderson, the Bank of America’s emerging markets analyst, told Reuters yesterday.

Later this month President Thabo Mbeki is expected to sign an amendment to the restitution act into law that will allow land to be expropriated from farmers opposing claims government deems valid.

Reuters, 07 January, 2004

“Dispossessed want 20% of SA Farmland”

By Alistair Thomson

Families and communities evicted by the apartheid state are claiming 40 to 50 percent of commercial farmland in some provinces and around 20 percent nationally, the land claims chief said on Wednesday.

Currency traders have cited foreign media reports that land restitution would be accelerated ahead of elections this year as a concern for foreign investors given the land grab in next-door Zimbabwe, which South Africa has vowed not to repeat.

A new law that has focused attention on land issues will allow the government to expropriate land for restitution where negotiations on a “willing buyer, willing seller” basis fail.

The New York Times reported that in KwaZulu/Natal up to 70 percent of farmland was subject to land claims – a figure Chief Land Claims Commissioner Tozi Gwanya said was exaggerated. “The real figure is around 40 to 50 percent”, Gwanya told Reuters. He said 155 000 hectares of KwaZulu/Natal were due to be handed back to nine separate communities in February or March 2004 in one of the biggest transfers to date.

THE GREAT SOUTH AFRICAN LAND SCANDAL FOREWORD

This book cried out to be written. Stories about the collapse of farms handed over to emerging farmers under the government’s land reform program have circulated for some time. But over the last two years, the desecration of some of South Africa’s productive farmland has increased to such an extent that land is being taken out of production at an alarming rate.

The ominous element in the picture is: where will it end? Now that the government has given itself powers to expropriate land at will, for whatever purpose, will the end of this destruction ever be in sight?

Concerned farmers are supporting the publication of this book. They see first hand every day the results of the government’s land restitution program. Occasionally one reads about these catastrophes in newspapers. Some television actuality programs feature farms which have been destroyed after a handover. But there appears to have been no concerted effort by anyone to actually investigate the outcome of these transactions, both for the benefit of the public which paid for the land, and in light of the broader problem of decreasing food production in the country.

In most cases, at least as far as newspapers are concerned, handovers are depicted with exuberance by reporters. Pictures of people toyi-toying after receiving title deeds to their ancestral land are complemented by gratuitous individual stories of people returning to “the land of their birth”. In many instances, this is not the case. In any event, why haven’t questions been asked one or two years down the line about what became of this joyous transfer? Some follow ups occur, but not many. And they are journalists’ probes, not government assessments.

This is not a scientific book in the sense that every single land claim transaction has been investigated. Indeed, we have just started. Perhaps this book should be called Volume One. There appear to be hundreds of examples of farm collapses after restitution. We didn’t have the resources to hire an army of researchers to search and account for every farm which has been lost to production, or has been turned into a squatter camp.

But we have garnered enough evidence, at least as a start, to realize that there is a very ominous and ultimately calamitous trend afoot in South Africa, the results of which could seriously undermine food production.

Our researchers were in some instances part time. But they were dedicated and had the advantage of knowing the South African agricultural sector well. Opening one door led to other doors, and a picture emerged which differed little from one end of South Africa to the other. There were no examples found where the conditions existing on the farm at the time of transfer had either been maintained or improved, without the help of outsiders. In some instances, those to whom the farm had belonged helped the new owners. Other examples revealed white managers brought in quietly after production started to wobble.

In many cases, the beneficiaries were left to their own devices. Some recipients really wanted to farm but received little or no assistance. In other situations, a committee representing “the tribe” simply took over the farm, awarding themselves large salaries while carrying on with their lives somewhere else. The workers “ran” the farm until something broke, then the rot set in. Operating capital simply disappeared on salaries, 4 x 4 vehicles and travel expenses, with workers eventually demonstrating in a nearby town for back salaries.

One researcher was shot at by an angry chief, while another was told he must make written application to visit a ailed land reform farm which, in reality, belongs to the taxpayers. He went anyway. There was nobody at the gate, and a detailed examination was made of the farm without anyone even asking who he was!

This is not a definitive history of who is ultimately entitled to what land in South Africa. There are dozens of academic sources where the origins of land ownership can be quoted, and counter-argued. This book is concerned about agricultural production in the last nation in Africa which is self-sufficient in food. We don’t want another Zimbabwe. If 35 000 commercial farmers produce enough food for the people of Southern Africa, why take their farms?

We discovered a number of outrageous land claims – some based on hearsay, others which overlapped as different tribal warlords fought for the same piece of turf. Some claims were simply lies, while others claimed ground for which they had already been compensated. The existence of graves was another reason for land claims.

An important heritage site has been claimed, not by people whose tribal forefathers lived on the ground, but by people whose forefathers were taken in by the missionaries who created the site, to escape warring tribal chiefs. Through the grace

and charity of these missionaries, they were allowed to stay and their children were born at the mission. Now their descendants are claiming the heritage site!

Under what duress do South African farmers operate? They pay taxes for security, yet they conduct their own policing. Many operate in the most violent environment - outside of a war - in the world.

We examine how land claims have affected operating farmers, why they can't sell, or obtain a bank loan. Many have been driven off their farms by invaders and intimidation. They have turned the key on a lifetime of work. Others have been threatened with death. More than 1 500 have been brutally murdered since 1994, in many instances without anything being stolen.

Stock and crop theft are endemic. Aged farmers sit out all night against a tree, shotgun cocked, to catch the corn thieves. Others go into dangerous locations to find their stolen stock because police assistance is simply not available. Farmers pay handsomely for private security, but those supposed to be guarding their property are themselves intimidated and flee..

South Africa can do without its advertising agencies and retail boutiques and horse racing, but it cannot do without its farmers. If matters continue as they are, and productive farms are handed over to people who cannot farm and who do not want to farm, then we are on the Zimbabwe slippery slope. South African farmers are taxed to the hilt. They have high input costs, and they receive very little in the way of relief from the government. They are harassed by human rights investigators, and they are the subject of vicious propaganda.

In a covert way, it appears the SA government has come to realize that handing over a farm to subsistence farmers is a failure, but they are slow to admit this. Instead, they quietly bring in managers and consultants who rectify – if possible – the damage done, and the patched-up project is again given to the same beneficiaries. A further stratagem is to bring in “mentors” who assist black farmers on a daily basis, checking everything and in effect running the farm. There is also the new lease-back policy. But there are inherent problems with these policies. Why not let those who can farm continue to produce the food to feed the millions in Southern Africa?

There are many black farmers who have made a success of ventures, and they are lauded for their hard work, and for the risks they have taken. Neighbouring white farmers are only too happy to assist. But some black farmers obtained loans from the Land Bank, then used their newly-acquired farms as taxi repair depots.

There are alarming signs that no commercial farm is safe in South Africa. At one meeting between land claimants and commercial farmers, the claimants told the farmers “Just give us your title deeds. Then you can work for us”. What is really sought by many claimants is a productive farm which someone else will run so that a large salary and profits can be taken from the operation without too much effort.

Some farmers could not talk to us for fear of reprisals. One farmer was scared to death. His farm is next to a huge squatter camp. He told us he had to keep quiet “so I can at least get something for my farm from the Department of Land Affairs”. His farm contains a R1 million dairy operation, but nobody wants to buy his farm. He is trying to get whatever price he can from the government. It is too dangerous for him to stay on the property. He has already moved his family to town, and appointed a manager.

In one area of KwaZulu Natal, the farming community has been reduced from 56 to 14. In another part of the province, trenches have been dug to stop stock theft. Cruelty to farm animals turns one's stomach. Some farmers have to resort to witchcraft to find their cattle. Farmer Piet de Jager of Levubu told an agricultural

magazine he wouldn't give up his farm. He'd worked for the farm all his life, he was 69, and "what will I do with my life without my farm?" Two weeks after the published interview, he was shot to death in his garden, a few metres from his house, his wife and his grandchildren. Nothing was stolen.

This book is not the beginning. The story started many years ago. I grew up on a cattle ranch on the border of Botswana and South Africa. When my father's farm was expropriated by the old National Party government under the homelands scheme, he died of a stroke. I submitted a claim for the return of this farm in November 1998 but have heard nothing from the government. To date, more than 900 land claims have been submitted to the government by whites and Indians, people whose farms were taken by the previous government.

By highlighting in a small way the heritage which the white farming sector brought to South Africa, we in no way wish to ignore the many black, coloured and Indian farmers who have also struggled, who are also beset with stock and crop theft, intimidation and, at times, assaults. Few acknowledge the contribution to this country of its small band of commercial farmers of all races, and we believe it's time to tell their story. And why not? Everybody else's story has been told!

Cry the beloved country indeed! If many blacks cannot make it as commercial farmers, it is well to remember that most whites are not farmers either. Farming is a highly specialized, risky business. One simply cannot "resign" from farming and get another job. It is a holistic profession, and the land is an emotive element in the equation.

Most of us are "landless", in the literal sense of the word. The 12% of arable land in this country is very fragile. South Africa is not a farming friendly country. Productive farmland has been built up over many years and must not be destroyed with impunity. We believe jobs, not land, are what people want. They need a roof over their head, and education for their children. Destroying good farms is a lose-lose situation, for all of us.

This book is a joint effort between myself and our team of researchers. It will be sent all over the world. South Africans should read it with concern. They take so much for granted - the full supermarkets, the mountains of fruit and vegetables, the steaks, the chops, the boerewors (literally, the 'Boer sausage' - the staple sausage in South Africa.) All of this comes from less than .01% of our population - 35 000 farmers who provide for South Africa's 45 million people. South Africans must resist the senseless transfer of land for ideological reasons.

Dr. Philip du Toit, South Africa, 25 December 2003.

Chapter One

THE LETSITELE VALLEY, LIMPOPO PROVINCE

Paradise is where the devil does his damndest.

“Don’t even talk about logic in this part of the world”.

So declared pioneer farmer Mike Amm as we walked

towards his small holding high in the mountains outside Tzaneen. He was one of seven farmers who sold their farms in this beautiful valley to the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) for land restitution purposes.

Over the past two years, he has observed with dismay how the farms he and his family spent their lifetimes building up, have crumbled and decayed to the point where they have been placed under judicial management.

The word “management” is something of a misnomer, as nothing is happening on these farms. One of Amm’s farms, Murlebrook, was a prime producer of avocados, mangoes, paw paws, bananas, citrus fruits and macadamia nuts.

Amm shows us his large file on the debacle he has chronicled on the demise of his family farm. The file contains the history of the farm and how it was claimed. He wants to get the message out to what he feels is an uncaring South Africa. “Tell South Africa what is happening to agriculture in this country,” he pleads. His letters, exhortations and suggestions to the new owners are all there - offers to assist with business plans, or any assistance the new owners might want - are open-heartedly offered by a man who cares about South Africa and the country’s agricultural production. He is deeply worried about agriculture’s end game.

Nothing would have pleased this farmer more than to have helped keep Murlebrook alive, even if he didn’t own the farm any more. But his endeavours were ignored. Indeed, he and his fellow farmers in the area were told in no uncertain terms that the new owners would “go it alone”.

A report in the local Letaba Herald of February 2001 shows the Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs, Ms. Thoko Didiza, signing the R43 million land agreement for the purchase of the Letsitele Valley farms, while Limpopo MEC for Agriculture and Land Administration, Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi, looks on.

Three thousand people attended the taxpayer-funded shindig which followed the signing. The celebrations were about the restitution of 1 400 ha of land in the valley (the seven commercial farms) to the Mamathola tribe.

The newspaper report declares that “in terms of the government’s Land Restitution Act, the Mamathola had successfully claimed the land on the grounds that the 13 farms involved had formerly belonged to their ancestors but were taken over by white settlers. (Yes, “settlers” was the word used for white South African citizens whose ancestors came to South Africa around the same time as American citizens’ ancestors arrived in North America).

In her address at this “historic occasion”, Ms. Didiza urged the 1,500-strong tribe to administer these highly productive farms on a sound business basis to sustain their economic viability and prosperous future.

“We do not want to see these farms becoming derelict, and you roaming the streets of Tzaneen as beggars” she said. As the new owners, she continued, the tribe

had to work efficiently “to disprove the perception of white critics that black people are lazy and incapable of managing farms”.

The Limpopo MEC for Agriculture Dr. Motsoaledi then stated it was critical that “whites must adapt to the wind of change or die. No one will kill them but if they cannot adapt they will just cease to live,” he remarked. He then went on to say the government had established an Agriculture College to train those who want to run farms.



A deserted packing shed after the handover: the Amm farm, Letsitele.



A deserted “Murlebrook” entrance – the Amm farm after the handover.

White owners

Speaking on behalf of the departing white owners, Mrs. Maggie Baleta said it was a disappointing experience for them to leave farms on which some of them had

lived and worked for 43 years. She said these farms generated a turnover in excess of R15 million a year and that “the tribe would need good planning and dedication to ensure that they remained economically viable for all”.

She said the farmers were willing to help the tribe manage the resettlement of farms and to work together for the economic development of the area.

In reply, the claimants’ committee chairman Mr. Chiko Letsoalo expressed confidence in their ability to run the farms on their own without assistance from previous white owners.

“We are surprised about stories that we or the government would enter into partnership with the current owners so as not to lose the benefit of their expertise. We have already sent people to agricultural colleges to learn more about farming. We will run these farms through our own expertise”, he declared.

He said the tribe would “restructure” the farming operations. His tribe were given R4,5 million as operating capital.

The arrogance of this group of people is, in hindsight, only exceeded by their ignorance and incompetence. Their “going it alone” has resulted in the complete collapse of these farms, while Ms. Didiza, to all intents and purposes, has remained silent about her colossal failure in this regard.

Let us examine this land claim so that South Africa’s taxpayers, who paid for this land and donated the operating capital, can examine the processes of the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) and judge for themselves. Let it be said here that the Letsitele experience has occurred right throughout South Africa, with few variations. Some of the disasters are monumental, others not so grand but ominous nonetheless, because they expose a critical flaw in South Africa’s land “reform” process, a process which seems to have been ignored by those organizations we thought would have been the first to examine just where this policy would ultimately take South Africa.

The Letsitele Valley

This valley is situated 30 km south of Tzaneen, in South Africa’s northern Limpopo province. Farmer Mike Amm has known the valley since 1947.

His wife Monica and her father Noel Tooley were born there. The valley has always been one of the prime agricultural areas of the South African lowveld.

It has produced impressive quantities of fruit and vegetables - citrus, bananas, mangoes, avocados, papaya, litchis, macadamia nuts, tomatoes and a wide array of other vegetables.

The export of many of these products has earned South Africa valuable foreign currency, while the production of these crops and the development of the valley created employment for many thousands of people. The conservation of water through the building of storage dams was an impressive contributory factor to the agricultural success of the valley. The total volume of water stored in dams constructed by private farmers runs into several million cubic meters.

Vast sums of money were spent on the efficient use of water in the form of pumping plants, pipelines, lined canals, drip irrigation and the sophisticated computerised application of this precious resource. In the 1970’s, an Irrigation Board was formed to control the fair and efficient use of irrigation water.

Mamathola 635

At the headwaters of the Letsitele River lay a farm called Mamathola 635 which was also known as Mamathola's Location, and is marked on old maps. This land measuring approximately 1 500 ha had been allocated to the Mamathola people some years before.

This community worked on neighbouring farms and existed on "slash and burn" subsistence agriculture. It is well known that this type of land use is extremely degrading to the environment. The land had become almost completely denuded through over-grazing and other destructive forms of land use. After even light rainfalls, the Letsitele River would turn a red colour from the soil-eroded areas on Mamathola 635. Aerial photographs of that period bear witness to this fact.

During the 1940's, the government under the United Party's Jan Smuts was alerted to this deteriorating situation and was requested to take action. For years debate raged in Parliament regarding this issue. And all the while the situation worsened.

Around 1956, the government decided to move the community from Mamathola's location to two farms in the Trichardtsdal area. The farms "Metz" and "Enable" totaling approximately 7 000 ha were allocated to the tribe. Most of the people moved willingly although a few moved with reluctance.

It should be emphasized that the Mamathola community were not moved for political, but for conservation reasons. The community was more than adequately compensated in terms of land area, buildings, social infrastructure, roads, and so forth.

Mamathola 635 was then handed over to the Department of Forestry to rehabilitate the land. This step proved to be timeous and within a few years the land at the headwaters of the Letsitele River started to recover environmentally. Streams became stabilized and began flowing more cleanly and constantly. Eroded areas began slowly to recover vegetatively. But even to this day, the scars caused by the tribe's destructive practices can still be seen.

28 October 1949

History in the form of a letter written to friends in England by an acquaintance of Mike Amm's was presented to the DLA as further proof that the tribe's removal was not political. This personal account reveals the land in question to be in a state of severe jeopardy, and vulnerable to complete collapse. Had the government of the day not removed those who were destroying the headwaters of the valley and surrounds (to wit, the Mamathloa tribe), there would be nothing there today upon which they could exist, let alone claim back as a viable concern.

We quote from the 1949 letter:

"We went as far as the jeep could go. The road was quite good to begin with, but the scenery was desolate as it was all through the native location where they have ruined the land by constant ploughing and planting of corn (called 'mealies' in South Africa) on the slopes until now nothing will grow at all, not even grass. It's just barren red earth with patches of whitish soil here and there. After about 2 – 3 miles of this we came to the Forestry boundary and what a change! On one side of the line this bare earth, on the other thick grass and forests. The line itself is only about six feet across and yet it looks like a different country. The farmers around here are trying to get the Native Commissioner to move the people from this part so that the land may be given to the Forestry Department for reclamation. Wherever the locations are, the land is ruined as the people will not cultivate it properly."

Concerned that the original erosion situation might return to the Letsitele headwaters after the farms were handed over, Amm wrote to the Kruger National Park for an update and advice. In April 2000, the Kruger National Park replied that *“the Letsitele River is an important tributary to the Letaba River and as such is an important contributor to water availability in the already stressed Letaba catchment. This river has been reduced from a once perennial river to one that now often ceases flowing in the dry months. Due to this situation, the Kruger National Park strongly urges consideration and extreme care to be given to the current and proposed future land use options for the sensitive Letsitele Valley region.”*

The letter continued: *“The case must be strongly made that the land should be retained in a sustainable and conservation-friendly manner to ensure protection of the upper catchment of this vital river. Options for sustainable conservation-based eco-tourism ventures must be considered for the region in question”.*

Given the parlous condition of the Letaba headwaters before the Mamathola tribe was moved, the worry clearly exists that with their takeover of the farms, these original conditions may return, with disastrous results all round.

The Early Nineties

Things changed in the early nineties, according to local people. The unbanning of Nelson Mandela and the cries for land for the landless led to the 1994 and subsequent land legislation after the ANC came to power. The people were promised land and were given the opportunity to claim land from which they felt they had been forcibly removed.

Certain parameters were laid down as to what would constitute a valid claim. For example, if compensation had been paid then a claim against that same land would be invalid. (In the Mamathola land claim case, this was totally ignored, but we will come to that later).

Never in their wildest dreams did farmers in the area we interviewed realize that productive farms would collapse so spectacularly, and that the government would seemingly ignore what farmers believed were logical requests to leave South Africa's productive farms alone, and utilize other sources of land to grant to the landless.

This thought is echoed throughout South Africa. Why in Heaven's name hand over a productive farm to those who really don't want to farm it and, in many instances, to people who firmly believe the operation will continue producing a healthy income without any hard work, risk or capital input?

Why indeed! As Amm declared, logic doesn't come into it, and this is the dark side of land reform. It is actually not reform. In many cases, it is destruction, and the perils in store for South Africa's agricultural production cannot be overstated.

But let us return to the Letsitele handover.

In May 2000, a group of valley farmers received a letter from the Land Claims Commission stating that a claim on their portions of the farm Mamathola 609 had been gazetted, and that they were to appear at a meeting in Tzaneen to discuss the issue.

At the meeting the farm owners declared the claim was invalid because there had been no forced removal from Mamathola 609 which lay several kilometers from Mamathola's location (or 635).

But the chairman of the meeting, Mr. Phogiso Molapo, retorted that the farmers' argument would carry little weight because the community would claim their

cattle would have grazed over the whole area of the Letsitele Valley anyway! Amm declares this statement alone made a mockery of the whole land claims process.

Further, the land claim forms were full of inaccuracies. The claimants admitted that they had been compensated, but said the new land was “too small”. (They received 7 000 ha to replace 1 500 ha). They said the new farm “was far from their graves” but there were no graves on the original piece of property. They also said they had to build new houses, churches, schools, etc. but these were in fact built for them when they moved, with taxpayers’ money. They also declared they received little compensation for their orange plants, but they were paid one pound a tree. According to people who knew the situation at that time, these trees had been in any case stolen from farmers in the area!

The farmers asked what were the conditions to obtain compensation. They adopted a non-confrontational approach as a matter of necessity. They felt they would get nowhere by any other means. They were offered three options regarding valuation of the properties, and they commissioned a local private valuer. Most of the owners were satisfied with the values apportioned. These values were presented to the Lands Claims Commissioner (LCC).

A few months later, a valuer sent by the LCC arrived to value the farms. His values were considerably higher than those of the private valuer. Yet these higher amounts were the values the LCC accepted! Deeds of sale were signed and the farmers were paid out. Some were given time to harvest their crops, while others moved out immediately.

At no time did the incoming “owners” ask to see the Amm farm’s books, nor did they check any inventories. As they had declared they would “go it alone”, they asked no advice of the farmers. The government produced a business plan showing the potential income from the farms as R100 million a year, but this plan was clearly not utilized.

The Amm family left with a heavy heart. Mike and Monica had lived on the farm Murlebrook for 43 years, raised five children and built what they called “a bit of paradise” from nothing. Amm says his type of farming is highly technical and requires 24-hour attention. The Banareng ba ga Letsoalo committee (the name under which the land claims were made) was elected to run the farm on behalf of the tribes. Not one person on this committee had agricultural knowledge or background.

What Happened Next

The Banareng ba ga Letsoalo land claim was ostensibly for 1 500 people to return to their original land. As it later turned out, none of these people returned at all. The committee was appointed to represent them, and this committee would “run” the farm on behalf of the tribe. The committee, as it also turned out, didn’t run the farm at all – they had meetings, of course, but most had businesses elsewhere. One was a panel beater from Hammanskraal (he was the treasurer). Another was a teacher, one was a clerk and the other unemployed. The chairman worked in a bookshop and still works for a publisher. He occupied the 4-bedroomed farmhouse. Nobody from the committee was born in the area. Most are believed to come from Pretoria.

This committee awarded themselves over R12 000 a month each, and went through the operating capital of R4,5 million like a hot knife through butter. They called themselves the “management team” but nothing was managed. The labour continued to work the farm until the pumps broke, or a machine broke down. These

were not repaired. Then there was no money for spraying, and soon salary payments were in arrears.

This ultimately resulted in the farm workers marching five kilometres to the farm office where they toyi-toyi'd and presented a memorandum of grievances. This was February 2003, just 24 months after the newspaper report where DLA Minister Didiza told the world the beneficiaries of the handover would "go it alone", and that the project would prove to the world that black farmers were not lazy and that they were indeed capable of running a farm.

Labour grievances included the late payment of salaries, the incompetence of management, no production bonuses, and threats and undermining of workers' representatives. The manager of the farm committee Ismael Letsoalo said he couldn't pay salaries because he hadn't received the "additional funds" he'd requested from the Limpopo Regional Land Claims Commission.

What was found on the farms

Our researcher and a local farmer requested permission from the judicial manager of the farm to visit Murlebrook. (His role as judicial manager was defined by someone local as "making sure nothing is stolen".) On their way to the farm, the team was telephonically contacted and told the local Land Claims Commissioner wanted a written application to visit the farm, and that there was no guarantee permission would be granted. As they were on their way anyway, the team continued. On arrival, they simply walked in. The judicial "manager" did not appear while the team inspected the farm, taking photos and talking to a few people who were sitting around at the entrance.

The team found avocado trees dying of thirst. While the farm dam was full, the pipes from the dam were broken - there was apparently no money to fix them. The trees' leaves had curled up and were sunburnt. It was too late to save those beautiful trees. The mango trees' spring blossoms were out, but these trees were not watered either. The papayas hung from dry trunks, while grass and weeds grew between the expertly laid out plantation rows.

Said our researcher: "It was criminal to see such waste, such desolation. Three state-of-the-art packing sheds were empty, loose crates lying about. There was not a soul to be seen. Electricity had been cut off so the cool rooms didn't work. We left and moved to the next farm. Nobody stopped us as we drove across a stream (yes, this was a farm where a river ran through it!), but the stream was polluted with plastic bags, pieces of rusting equipment, rubble. Desolation had set in here too. The farmhouse looked forlorn and a cultivated garden had disappeared into weeds and sparse long grass.

We came to a packing shed. A black gentleman was at the gate and we asked for the farmer, the owner. Oh, you mean Mr. Mtetwa (not his real name!). He's not here. He doesn't live here. He lives in town. Then what happens here, we asked. Well, we've still got some bananas, the watchman declared. But they're small. They're for the bakkie (Afrikaans for a pick-up vehicle) trade.

We'd learnt what to look for in neglected banana plantations, the un-pruned, uncared-for trees. They are left to sprout many smaller shoots which grow from the trunk, and smaller bananas result. The bunches were not covered with plastic to protect them from the burning sun.

We couldn't help noticing the difference between these pigmy fruits and the large bananas which Gauteng consumers paid R1 59 per kilo for in late 2003. Each

tree is pruned, and the bunches are covered with blue plastic bags which hold in the moisture while deflecting the sun's burning rays.

These beautiful plantations roll on and on for kilometers right throughout the sub-tropical and lowveld areas of South Africa, and one wonders at the mentality of a government whose policies would destroy this immaculate farming and replace it with subsistence "bakkie trade" production.

As we drove through this once beautiful farm, we came upon neglected macadamia groves. Thousands and thousands of macadamia nuts lay under the trees, unharvested. These are the most expensive nuts on the market: South Africa's macadamia export production goes mainly to the United States where consumers can afford them. In South Africa, they are priced at R110,00 a kilo.

The trees had not been pruned and the ground underneath had not been cleared. Further on, a citrus orchard's trees gasped for water in the searing heat. These "ghost farms" are appearing all over South Africa.

Why the Wheels Came Off

Arrogance and ignorance are a lethal concoction. When people don't know what they don't know, the results are catastrophic. Soon after the 2001 takeover of the Letsitele farms, the general secretary of the farm's committee admitted that "one of the big problems in taking over these farms was that the previous owners tended to be managers as well, and that left a management gap that we are still trying to fill." However, he continued, "we have sent people to agricultural college to learn more about farming and we are confident in our ability to run these farms on our own".

Did Minister Didiza know about this paucity of knowledge, experience and management before she handed over taxpayer-funded farms? If she didn't, why didn't she find out? Why didn't she at least check up on the progress of the management committee? After all, this was funded with public money. And what about the production loss to the country?

Two years later, this same secretary complained that the government didn't assist them with a business plan and a training program. (But a business plan had been set up, although not utilized.) He complained that the government should have sent them Agricultural Extension Officers (AEO). From the time of the handover, only three "managers" of the original committee were left, the whole R4,5 million operating capital had disappeared, the labourers only received R310,00 per month (what about the minimum wages which the government insists all commercial farmers should pay their staff?), while the last of the mangoes were so diseased they had to be thrown away. The farm's previous owner's fertilizer and spray programs were highly effective, but no spraying had taken place because of mismanagement.

The farming equipment which had been handed over in pristine condition was virtually unusable, but the R12 000 a month salaries were still taken until the farm operation was placed under judicial management!

The Indigenous Nursery

An arboretum of more than 200 indigenous trees – each individually marked – was painstakingly created by Monica Amm on the family farm. Called the Matumi Botanical Garden, the trees and an accompanying nursery attracted visitors from all over the world.

The Amms called a meeting in June 2001 at which members of the new farm management committee and people from the Limpopo departments of Environment and Agriculture were present. The meeting was to discuss the continuance of the arboretum as an eco-tourism project, and to give the meeting the assurance that the Amms would do everything in their power to assist in the further development of the nursery as well as the arboretum.

The nursery could produce indigenous trees and medicinal plants, for which a ready market already existed. There was adequate irrigation to maintain the nursery. (The Amms and their family are the only South African members of the International Dendrology Association, while Mike Amm is a well-known and accomplished amateur botanist.)

Everyone was positive and promised to report back. Today the arboretum is dry and neglected, and nobody maintains the nursery which has virtually disappeared. The electric fencing doesn't work. Needless to say, there was no comeback from the provincial government departments. It is a tragedy that even today, overseas tourists still come to look for the famous arboretum, which is no more.

Judicial Management

An application by the State Attorney for the farms to be placed under judicial management was made in January 2003, purportedly on behalf of the Department of Land Affairs, and a commission of enquiry was to be established to find out what happened to the R4,5 million operating capital granted to the farms' management committee. It was reported that the Scorpions would become involved and investigate the misappropriation of funds and mismanagement.

These farms were among the best in the world. Mike Amm's farm alone contained 100 000 trees. A dam he built was the biggest in the district. The farms contained sophisticated irrigation equipment, and the thousands of trees were nurtured to world standards. The rainfall average in the area is 1 000 mm per annum. (Consider that the average rainfall in most of South Africa is 464 mm against a world average of 857 mm). Permanent mountain streams run through many of the valley's properties and the dams are well sited, with gravity irrigation from some. The farm valuer declared in his official valuation that the farms were situated in an area "with abundant water".

The climate is sub-tropical and frost free with average summer temperatures of 29°C and 23°C during winter. The soil in the area is predominantly a sandy loam type, very fertile and with excellent drainage capacity. According to a professional valuer, "the Letsitele Valley can be regarded as one of the best farming areas in the country mainly due to climate and soil factors, but also because of the professional way farmers run their businesses".

(Less than 12% of South Africa's land is suitable for cultivation. Twenty one percent of the country has a total rainfall of less than 200 mm annually, 48% between 200 mm and 600 mm, while only 31% records more than 600 mm.)

The Amms left a beautiful house they built themselves, a manager's house, a separate flat, staff quarters, a reservoir, boreholes, irrigation systems, three packing sheds and sophisticated farm equipment. They watched their years of work eroded because of a fallacious land claim, and because the SA government did not even stick to its own rules when granting this claim. More importantly, there had been no follow up programs to ensure that all went well.

It is not as if the government wasn't warned. The *Letaba Herald* ran an article in September 2000 expressing grave misgivings about the handover of the valley farms to DLA recipients. The paper said that there were signs that the government's land reform policy could become a "sword of Damocles" over the country's agricultural economy. People in the area had seen the disastrous destruction of the Zebediela and other citrus estates after they were given to inexperienced recipients. Millions of rands were lost not only in the price paid to the exiting farmers, but in the huge deficits in export sales, and in the taxes which could have been generated from these productive farms. Now the same thing was about to occur in Letsitele.

The paper continued: "Inexperienced, inadequately funded people who move onto currently white-owned farms could eventually find themselves in a morass of debt, unemployment and the inability to even produce food for themselves at a sustainable rate." Unfortunately, these premonitions and fears were not repeated in the national press.

The *Herald* noted that the valley's "3 000 ha or so of intensive citrus, mango, avocado, banana and papaya orchards bring in tens of millions of rands in foreign currency every year and support a labour force of between 2 000 and 3 000 black workers, plus their families. Now its continued existence as a world-recognized agricultural gem is being threatened by separate, even conflicting, Land Restitution Act claims on white-owned farms in the valley. It's a recipe for shambles. There are only going to be losers, not winners."

Mike Amm was quoted at length. He told the paper that at a recent meeting with the provincial Land Claims Commission, the farmers informed the Commission that the land claims had virtually stopped all development on the valley farms, that retrenchments were already under way and further jobs would be lost, and that banks and other financial institutions were reluctant to support valley farmers who had land claims against them, as they could not offer acceptable security.

Likely Scenario

Asked what would be the most likely scenario if the farms were handed over as going concerns to the claimants, Amm referred to the history of two once-productive farms in the valley which had been bought by the old homeland Lebowa government for tribal occupation.

One became derelict and was then leased to a white farmer who lived well off it for 20 years and employed 400 people. In 1999, his lease expired and he left, leaving his farm improvements intact.

Just one year later, the farm has sank back to its original dilapidated state. Squatters moved in, fences torn down and irrigation piping was stolen. The mangoes became sick and the trees planted for windbreaks were chopped down for firewood. Four hundred people lost their jobs.

The other was the well-known Rolf Flowers operation which had a capital-intensive infrastructure and employed hundreds of people on its 100 ha. It was purchased from Rolf Flowers by the government in the early nineties (it bordered on one of the traditional lands) and today stands forlorn, with its buildings vandalized and its equipment ransacked.

Everything which could be stolen has already been taken, and nothing is going on. There seems little concern by the powers that be about the waste of taxpayers' money for this purchase. The only move the government has apparently made is to employ security guards to protect what remains from further vandalization.

But saddest of all was the story of a black businessman who, up to late 1998, had had a thriving trading store at Giyani. He knew little about fruit farming but decided to buy a citrus and mango farm, with a turnover of about R2 million a year. This farm was next to Amm's farm in the valley. He was given a R2,4 million Land Bank loan, plus a R100 000 production loan, and friendly advice and practical help from his neighbours.

Then he, like his neighbours, was hit by floods and he lost much of his mango crop, while his fences were damaged. He certainly had bad luck but so did everybody. This farmer was in deep trouble. He couldn't meet his land Bank payments and he couldn't afford to spray his mangoes which were then in full flower. He couldn't harvest his fruit because he had little money to pay his labour or buy diesel for his tractors. What fruit he had was stolen at night. His phone was cut off and he had no more air time on his cell phone.

This is what farming is all about, and it is clear that little of the downside of agriculture is relayed to prospective land reform beneficiaries. If it were, would they take on farming at all? (Notable is the fact that during the floods in the area, white farmers had to repair roads and bridges at their own expense).

Valley farmers believe that the same situation and conditions apply throughout the country. And they are right. Said one farmer we spoke to: "Every single person, black or white, in the Letaba district is dependent in one way or another on agriculture. It should not be allowed to go into decline. In the broader sense, the rich, productive valley could be lost to the South African economy. There will be no winners, only losers!"

How prescient he was. But nobody was listening, least of all the arrogant and the ignorant for whose sins the whole of South Africa must pay.

Now that the government has given itself powers to expropriate property throughout South Africa at will, it needs no fertile imagination to think what will happen to the productive farms upon which Minister Didiza will set her sights. There's nothing stopping her, except of course a dearth of food in South Africa's shops, no surplus grain to send to friends across the Limpopo, no taxes from bankrupt and destroyed farms, and no foreign currency to be earned from agricultural exports.

When a government sets out to force through a policy on ideological grounds, without pause to assess what has happened to previous land transfers, then it is criminally responsible for whatever disasters await us in the future. It is clearly not only up to Mike Amm to shout from the rooftops. South Africans of all shades must do something now. When it's too late, it's too late. A broken house can be rebuilt in a week. A destroyed farm takes years to recover, and it needs dedication, love, hard work and skill. These qualities are already in short supply within a community which sees its life's work and its productive farms collapsing before its very eyes.

Chapter Two

BOTSHABELO – THE PRIDE OF MIDDELBURG

Just 12 kilometres north of the Mpumalanga town of

Middelburg is an historical gem which appears to be little known to many South Africans. It is now the subject of a land claim, a claim by people whose forefathers were given succour by missionaries in the nineteenth century and who are now demanding the very land to which their ancestors fled and which fostered them in their time of need.

Enormous tensions have built up in Middelburg between those who are afraid for the future of Botshabelo, and the claimants, some of whom have publicly declared they will turn the South African Heritage Site into a pig farm. The claimants plan to house hundreds of families on the site. The controversy is raging outside South Africa's borders, as far afield as Germany. The Botshabelo affair is an egregious example of how the South African government's land reform policy is out of control, and where the practical has been suffocated by the ideological.

Bothshabelo was established by German missionaries Alexander Merensky and Heinrich Grutzner in 1865. These two men were sent to South Africa by the Berlin Missionary Society, and arrived in Natal in 1858. There they made contact with the Zulus and the Swazis, and then began working among the Pedis with the permission of their king. Their first mission station was built in Gerlachtschoop, in the area controlled by the Pedi chief Maleo. With permission of the tribal chief Sekwati, more missions were built.

Sekwati died in 1861 and his son Sekhukhune inherited the Pedi crown. Two of his wives converted to Christianity and were baptized. This step caused much dissension within the tribe.

One stormy night the Merenskys were woken at the mission Gerlachtschoop in Sekhukhuneland by a distraught convert from Sekukhune's kraal. He warned that hundreds of the chief's impis were on their way to the mission. At that very moment Merensky's wife went into labour, giving birth to a daughter within earshot of the chanting and howling warriors. Merensky sent a message for help to neighbour Hermanus Steyn who farmed on the other side of the Steelpoort river, the border between Sekhukhuneland and the old Boer Republic of the Transvaal, the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR). Steyn sent a wagon packed with roof thatching.

It stopped near the mission station and Merensky's wife and child hid under the thatching grass and were taken across the rising river to safety, together with the black converts from the mission. The water rose so quickly after Mrs. Merensky's crossing that the impis could not cross.



The old German missionary church at Botshabelo - a proposed heritage site.

On 21 January, 1865 Merensky and Grutzner bought the farm Boshoeck (in the district of Middelburg) from Jan Abraham Joubert. On 8 February Merensky, his family and 113 refugees from Sekhukhune moved onto the farm which they called Toevlugsoord. It later became known as Botshabelo (“place of refuge”).

Johannes Dikwanjane, Sekhukhune’s brother, was one of the leaders of the tribal refugees at the mission. He assisted with the building of a fort (Fort Wilhelm, named after the German Kaiser) at the mission station because of the continual fear of a Sekhukhune attack. Other small forts and rampart walls were built to ensure the safety of the mission station. A rondavel and a church were constructed and all these buildings can still be seen today at Botshabelo. A shop, a mill with a permanent miller, a book binding operation and a press, a wagon-making shop and a blacksmith’s shed were created by a missionary with vision and talent.

The refugees had suffered at the hands of Chief Sekhukhune. He had plundered their cattle and crops. When they arrived at the mission in February it was already too late in the season to plant.

With detailed planning and their faith in God, according to historians, the mission and its refugees survived. Thus did Botshabelo become a home to those who had fled their chief and his tyranny. Merensky trained and schooled them. Under the mission’s tutelage, these refugees learnt to make wagons, they became cabinet makers, and they learnt to make bricks and to build. A school was built and the refugees were taught to read and write and were instructed in Gospel teachings.

The Claimants

The descendants of these refugees are now claiming Botshabelo. They say because they were born there, they have an historical right to the mission station, its land and its improvements. Undeterred by the fact that their forefathers survived because of the charity and concern of the German missionaries, these claimants are adamant the land is historically theirs. They have claimed the land under Section 11A (2) of the Restitution of Land Rights Act, 1994, as amended.

Their claim form states that they were forcibly removed in January 1972 to the Motetema area and that their “houses were demolished and we were paid no compensation and received no land”.

This is not true. Lengthy negotiations between the then government’s representatives and the claimants took place, they were paid compensation and they received alternative living quarters.

The reason for their removal was because, at the time, mission stations were the collectors of homeless people who became in actual fact voluntary squatters.

Whether one agrees with the then government’s policy of removal or not, the point remains that the claimants were not the owners of the land upon which they squatted, nor did they have any historical/tribal claim to the land. They were at the mission station at the grace and favour of the missionaries.

In a document dated 8 September 2003, the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, Mpumalanga (CRLR) says that the claimants are the direct descendants of the original “buyers of the farm”. But those who sought refuge at the mission station, and their children, never bought the farm.

The CRLR also says that the community was dispossessed of the “beneficial rights to land, which include occupational rights”. In law, occupying land at that time did not give people legal title to the land.

(The Commission states they were removed in 1959, while the claimants say 1972. Whatever date applies, they had no rights to the land. The land was never transferred to them by the mission society. They simply lived there until they were moved.)

The Early Mission

The early mission’s reputation spread far and wide. More and more people came to be converted, many it was felt because it was a safe place to stay and find work. In 1868 a bigger church building was commenced. It was added to and in 1871, the larger building was consecrated. By 1873, there were 1315 people living at Botshabelo. The mission station was at one time bigger than Middelburg, which was founded in 1864.

After Merensky’s return to Germany in 1882, he was replaced by others from the Berlin Missionary Society. Botshabelo became known as a witness to Christian teaching. It became a place for the propagation of Christian faith!

Many residents of Middelburg, taxpayers whose forefathers contributed to the upkeep and growth of Botshabelo, ask why this historical site (which attracts over 2 000 visitors per week) should now be handed over to a group of people whose forefathers happened to be born on the land because of the compassion of the missionaries. . It is not traditional tribal land. It never was in the hands of the claimants’ forefathers. They did not develop Botshabelo. They lived from it. For many Christians, Botshabelo represents something of a holy place, a place which was a refuge for Christians escaping certain death at the hands of Sekhukhune’s impis. Even the name implies this – Botshabelo means “a place of refuge”.

In 1972, the city council of Middelburg purchased Botshabelo and it has become a world-renowned tourist attraction. It was in the process of being declared a National Heritage Site, but the land claim stopped this process in its tracks. The land claim was contested by Dr. Klaus Merensky, great grandson of Alexander Merensky. His parents and the children of Alexander Merensky were buried in

Botshabelo's graveyard. He asked the Middelburg municipality, the owners of Botshabelo, to remove the graves at their cost.

The land claim should never have even been considered by the government, said Dr. Merensky. It never belonged to any tribal leader. His letter to the head of the Land Claims Commission (LCC), Adv. Wallace Mgoqi, was ignored.

In a letter dated 8 September 2003 inviting people to celebrate the handover of what the LCC calls the Groenfontein Ramohlakane land claim, the Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights outlines what it calls "the history of dispossession". (Groenfontein is one of the seven farms surrounding Botshabelo).

The Commission declares the claimants were forcibly removed from their land in 1959 in terms of the Land Act of 1936, and that the farm Groenfontein is one of the farms that Alexander Merensky of the Berlin Missionary Society purchased in January 1871.

A party for the claimants and their friends was held (at taxpayer's expense) on 17 September 2003 to celebrate the handover of the 600 ha Groenfontein farm, bought by the Department of Land Affairs for the sum of R1 750 000 (again, with taxpayers' money!). The statistical information provided on the invitation says the beneficiaries will be 3 200 people or 400 households. This is an average of 1,25 ha per family.

Groenfontein

What will happen to the farm Groenfontein? Let us examine what happened to another farm which formed part of the same Botshabelo claim.

Our researchers visited the farm Leeupoortjie, in extent 428 ha which, according to the Government Gazette Notice 2233 of 1998, belonged to F.J. and J.D. van der Bank. At the time of handover around two years ago, the farm ran 400 head of beef and dairy cattle, a dairy and some mixed farming. The improvements were in excellent condition.

"We came to the farm in the afternoon", said the researchers. "Three black men sat on tree stumps, smoking. We asked for the boss, and they said he's not here. But we live and work here, they advised. What do you do, we asked. Where are all the cattle?"

The farm property was in disarray. There was no sign of any cattle farming whatsoever. The buildings were decrepit, and the dairy was broken and rusted, while manure more than two years old still lay on the floor.

The cattle pens were broken, and the lighting had been vandalized. A few diseased cows and sheep walked past. The animals were thin.

We were told by a friend who accompanied us the cattle had not been dipped and looked like they had TB. The throats of the sheep were full of worms. We felt desperately sorry for these animals as they struggled along.

Nothing was happening on that farm, paid for with taxpayer's money. The "owner" was nowhere to be seen, while the three workers were clearly just living there and looking after their own poor cattle. There was no sign of a crop or ploughing.



The broken dairy pens at a non-functional dairy – the farm Leeupoortjie, Botshabelo, after the handover.

We moved along to the next farm. We cannot mention the name because the owner is being terrorized off his property. His farm has been claimed as part of the Botshabelo claim. A member of his family had been killed two weeks before we telephoned him. He was afraid to talk to us, and understandably so. This is today's rural South Africa. The farmer has not received a penny for his farm, but he cannot live on it because of the terror and intimidation. It has a dairy on it worth R1 million, and possesses an underground reservoir containing more fresh water than the Loskop Dam.

It is clear he will have to accept what the government decides to give him, if they give him anything at all. After all, why should they? He'll probably leave the property anyway, as have farmers in other parts of South Africa who have been driven off their land.

His farm is next to a huge squatter camp of the same name, which developed on a piece of government property. There had been very little water there, and the original 400 000 squatters were moved off this property. They were given better land, and some were paid out. The water on the property was just enough for washing, and for this reason the pre-1994 government used the land as a training camp for certain government departments.

In 1996, the government training camp was closed down, and the original squatters returned. According to a source, this move was initiated by the Department of Land Affairs. Nobody knows why the squatters came back, but they have disrupted the whole neighboring farming community, including the farmer next door. His family was intimidated to such a degree that he moved them off his farm into town. .

The squatter camp was like all squatter camps in South Africa, a desolate, filthy place. Dead animals lay around, their corpses decomposing in the sun. We saw some water tanks in the distance. Clearly the government is bringing in water to an area upon which people should never have squatted in the first place.

Our local companion said bringing the squatters back – despite the fact they were paid out – was a political decision. Was it to frighten the surrounding farmers into selling, especially the farmer with the huge reservoir? It is not beyond the

realms of possibility, seeing as this type of rural terrorism exists all over South Africa. We were told that local warlords at the squatter camp were selling plots to Mozambicans, but this could not be confirmed.

What of the other farms handed over as part of the Botshabelo claim? Our researchers were told one farm went to the mother of the Mpumalanga Minister of Safety and Security, another to the chairperson of the local tourism board, while a third was taken by Mr. Richard Mphele of COSATU. This property is purported to be Broodboomkrans, a farm of 780 ha which belonged to a Mr. Koos Stals who managed a successful beef operation. The farm is now occupied by squatters.

Broodboomkrans was a forced sale, and the new occupants obtained a court interdict to prevent Mr. Stals from visiting his farm.

The *Middelburg Observer* reported on 31 October 2003 that the Mpumalanga MEC for Safety and Security Thabang Makwetla confirmed that he was part of the “successful claim” on Botshabelo. The report also stated that the number of claimants and their dependants had risen to 1,200.

The Claim Itself

Local resident Arthur Barlow, chairman of the Mpumalanga Heritage Foundation, the curator of Fort Merensky (a declared historical monument), has repeatedly requested the ID numbers and addresses of the claimants from the chairman of the Land Claims Commission in Nelspruit, to no avail. The *Middelburg Observer* has also tried to obtain the details, with no reply. All the claimants say they are descendants of those born on the farm, but no I/D numbers or other personal details are supplied. (For his trouble, Barlow was severely beaten up outside his door one night, and told to “keep your nose out of Botshabelo’s business”).

The claimants were assisted by the Johannesburg-based Legal Resources Center who are in turn financed by the Ford Foundation of America. The complete history of the apportioning and sub-dividing of the original mission statement is set out, but nowhere does it state that Botshabelo and its satellite farms belonged historically to the claimants. The Botshabelo site was never tribal land. One portion which was purchased by a Mr. Jeremiah Makuse and eight other blacks on 7 November 1925 is declared in the Legal Resources Center report No. 9 of 1995 “to have never been part of the Mission Station area as it was now held in private ownership”. It was sold to the state.

All the other portions were either sold to the state, to the Middelburg municipality or to private persons or companies.



The new owners of Leeupoortjie, a handover under the Botshabelo claim.

What Now For Botshabelo?

The mission farm is nearly 3000 ha in size. An airfield valued at R14 million lies within the property – the longest airstrip in Mpumalanga. The council now pays R800 a month to lease this airport. There is a well-developed tourist apparatus on the farm, with overnight accommodation, a caravan park and restaurants.

The cycad *lanatis* is endemic to the area – it only exists in that part of the world. It has been registered in the International Flora and Fauna catalogue but already most of these ancient trees have been uprooted and sold.

There are walking trails and over R1,5 million worth of game on the farm. More than 176 species of birds have been identified, as well as a large variety of prehistoric cycads. The farm itself is a living museum, with artifacts over 150 years old. Antique furniture, books and other objects were a priceless addition to the complex, but already articles of value and furniture have been stolen. This precipitated the removal of most of the valuables which were returned to their owners. These artifacts were naturally an integral part of the historical value of the site, and have now been lost to the visiting public.

The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) wrote to Mr. Arthur Barlow in January 2003 concerning repairs and maintenance needed for Fort Merensky. SAHRA advised the Middelburg Municipality at the same time that Botshabelo qualified for National Heritage Status, but that it – SAHRA – was concerned at burglaries which were already taking place at the Merensky Parsonage (House Museum). Burglar bars should be installed, said SAHRA, and that small objects should be stored in a safe place. (A sign of things to come, hence the fear of many about the future of Botshabelo under the claimants' charge!)

In May 2003, SAHRA wrote to the COSATU claimant Mr. Richard Mphele, secretary of the Botshabelo Communal Property Association (CPA). They advised that a conservation policy document had been prepared for Botshabelo, and that the CPA's written consent was needed to declare Botshabelo a Heritage Site. SAHRA also expressed its concern about the "forced entry and vandalism of the museum collection in the Merensky House".

To date, according to sources, this written consent has not been forwarded to SAHRA. The reason is simple, say sources: if the CPA signs it before they move in, then they cannot move in! Occupying a heritage site means obeying the rules and restrictions imposed because your property is a heritage site. As transfer to the CPA has not yet taken place, it looks as if SAHRA's request for consent will not elicit the desired results.



The Botshabelo claim. The barren land of Doornkop, and in the distance, the squatter camp – previously farmland.

The Future

The Middelburg council has turned its back on maintaining Botshabelo, says Barlow. There has been no budget allocation for two years, and some of the game is diseased and is now inter-breeding. Furthermore, at a September 2003 Middelburg council meeting, it was resolved that the airfield would be leased to the council for R800 a year for ten years; that council could enter into a privatization agreement regarding the airfield; and that the “compensation received in respect of Botshabelo not be re-invested in the development of Botshabelo due to legislative prohibitions”.

It was also confirmed that the Industrial Development Program (IDP) would support Botshabelo for a period of five years in the first amount of R1 million, decreasing to R200,000, and that 40% of the game (valued at R1,5 million) be sold immediately, and that the CPA be permitted to sell “excess” game as determined by the Council in the future.

It was also resolved that the houses at Botshabelo be ceded to the CPA from date of registration of transfer. (There are purportedly 700 families ready to move into Botshabelo after transfer of title, but nobody knows the exact number of people planning to occupy the site). Where will they live?

Many Middelburgers fear for the future of Botshabelo. There is a story that someone is running around with a cheque for R14 million to build a casino near the airport. Nobody has seen a business plan for the running of the property and tourist sites, and there seem to be no government restrictions or guidelines in force about conserving the place as a heritage site.

A legal appeal to prevent the handover of Botshabelo is being considered. However, already the farms which were part of the claim have fallen into disarray. As a result, those who value Botshabelo and who paid for the site are justifiably worried at what will happen to this important piece of South African history and heritage.

Middelburg municipality is now under the control of the ANC, and although this municipality bought Botshabelo in 1972, the new council (the present owners) did not oppose the land claim. A local newspaper lamented the passivity and couldn't care less attitude of the town council vis a vis the future of Botshabelo. A *Middelburg Observer* report in February 2002 confirmed that the chairman of the CPA Ms. Miza Ranthla wants to farm with pigs, while the Middelburg Council mayor Clr. Mathlakeng Mahlangu said Botshabelo could be turned into a place like the Lost City (at Sun City).

Ms. Ranthla also declared that when the land is in their possession, they will "look for donations" to ensure that their pig, crop and flower farming will flourish. The Council is expected to continue financially supporting Botshabelo.

Chapter Three

VRYHEID, KWAZULU/NATAL

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND ONE

It was five and the heat was quickly dying; the glorious golden colouring of the late afternoon was creeping over everything when she rose from her chair. She moved to the door and took from behind it two large white calico bags hanging there, and from nails in the wall she took down two large brown cotton kappies. She walked round the table and laid her hand gently on her daughter-in-law's arm. The younger woman raised her head slowly and looked up into her mother-in-law's face and then suddenly she knew her mother-in-law was an old, old woman.

"I am going out to sow – the ground will be getting too dry tomorrow," she said gently. The younger woman looked into her face and taking one of the brown kappies from her hand, put it on, and hung one of the bags over her left arm. The old woman did the same and together they passed out of the door.

The mould in the land was black and soft: it lay in long ridges, but the last night's rain had softened it and made it moist and ready for putting in the seed.

The bags which the women carried in their arms were full of the seed of pumpkins and mealies. They began to walk up the land. At every few paces they stopped and bent down to press into the earth, now one and then the other kind of seed from their bags. Slowly they walked up and down until they reached the top of the land, and then they turned and walked down, sowing as they went. The light of the setting sun cast long, gaunt shadows from their figures across the ploughed land, shadows that grew longer and longer as they passed slowly on pressing in the seeds.

The seeds! ... that were to lie in the dark, dark earth and rot there, seemingly to die, till their outer covering had split and fallen from them.... And then when the rains had fallen, and the sun had shone, to come up above the earth again, and high in the clear air to lift their feathery plumes and hang out their pointed leaves and silken tassels! To cover the ground with a mantle of green and gold through which sunlight quivered, over which the insects hung by thousands, carrying yellow pollen on their legs and wings and making the air alive with their hum and stir, while grain and fruit ripened surely... for the next season's harvest.

..... Near one of the camps are the graves of two women. The older one died first from hunger and want. The younger woman tended her with ceaseless care and devotion till the end. They buried them side by side. There is no stone and no name upon either grave to say who lies there ... our unknown... our unnamed... our forgotten dead.

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND FOUR

If you look for the little farmhouse among the ridges you will not find it there today. A syndicate of people from Johannesburg and London bought the farm, they purchased it from the English government, because they think to find gold on it. They have purchased it and paid for it ... but they do not possess it. Only the men and women who lie in their quiet graves upon the hillside, who lived on it, and loved it, possess it... and the piles of stones above them, from among the long-waving grasses, keep watch over the land.

- Entitled "Eighteen Ninety-Nine", from "Stories, Dreams and Allegories" by Olive Schreiner, 1906, from the book "A Century of South African Short Stories", published by Ad Donker, 1978. This Schreiner story recalls the hardships endured by the women left behind after their male relatives had succumbed during the Anglo-Boer war in South Africa, 1899 – 1903.

The Afrikaans word vryheid means freedom, liberty – even independence. Many South African farms and towns have Afrikaans names, and only someone who knows this evocative language can appreciate the passion behind these names.

The country's turbulent history is the fount of many. Other names express the emotions of a certain time and place – longing, happiness, sometimes melancholy. In no other Western country are names used so descriptively to reveal the heart of a people and their attachment to the land.

And so it is with Vryheid, in the province of KwaZulu/Natal. Through this part of South Africa flows Blood River, the 1838 milestone in Zulu/Afrikaner history. Vryheid was the capital of Die Nuwe Republiek, the territory given to Voortrekker leader General Lucas Meyer by Zulu chief Dinizulu in return for help in his struggle against the two opponents of his father, Zulu king Cetshwayo. This land was 1 355 000 morgen in size. The republic lasted only three years, from 1887 to 1890, but this land grant is an historical fact. Farmers in the area should carefully examine the land claims against their farms for historical authenticity.

In the context of South African history, land and its possession gave rise to the ebb and flow of power, struggle and victory. But today's battle is about food, its production and the ultimate survival of 45 million South African people. These people depend on South Africa's commercial farmers for their daily bread. We are talking about an assault on South African agriculture, where the number of commercial farmers has decreased from 70,000 to less than 35,000 over the past thirty years. We are talking about future famine in South Africa if this assault on agricultural stability is not stopped in its tracks.

For years now, Vryheid farmer Kerneels Greyling has been involved in running battles with authorities past and present about his family's four farms he now says are "worthless". Copious correspondence handed to our researchers reveals a desperate farmer trying to save his life's work.

These farms are either near or bordering properties handed over to 'emerging' farmers by the Department of Land Affairs (DLA). Stock and crop theft are the order of the day. "They come seven kilometers to steal. They hire a bakkie (pickup vehicle) to collect the meat and the mealies (corn)", says Greyling. He had to go 38 times last year to his daughter's farm to spend the night trying to catch crop thieves there.

He blames the previous government for his current predicament, and his barrage of letters to the former state president has elicited no assistance, no sympathy. Mr. F.W. de Klerk has essentially washed his hands of the present situation. More ominously, no commiseration has been forthcoming from Deputy Minister of Land Affairs Dirk du Toit – on the contrary, the aging Mr. Greyling was given short shrift by du Toit who told the farmer his efforts at redress bordered on the vexatious (*selfsugtig*).

Greyling's predicament reveals nothing else other than that South Africa's commercial farmers are on their own. Greyling sits with an "emerging farmer" (this is surely a euphemism!) right next to his property. Mr. Johannes Mdlalose, brother of the infamous Jabulani Mdlalose (whose sole occupation appears to be the selling of plots on white farms to itinerants at R1 500 a throw), wants to bring his 400-strong community onto his newly-acquired farm. Johannes has already demanded a five meter public thoroughfare through Greyling's mealie fields.

Greyling says he told the government there was little water on Johannes's new farm – that the borehole had almost dried up. The soil is poor and there is much erosion. Only 18 ha is under irrigation. All the dams are empty, and the farm is only good for a limited amount of cattle.

So why hasn't Johannes invited his community to occupy the farm? Greyling's activism and continual complaining appear to have stemmed an invasion of squatters on to Johannes's farm, at least in the short term. Two years ago, Greyling's attorney

wrote to the DLA and demanded sight of a development plan for Johannes's farm. In March 2002, the DLA informed Greyling that the steering committee formed to look at the planning for Johannes's farm would take into consideration "the views and concerns of the neighbouring farming community, including yourself". Further, the planning would address "the sustainable settlement pattern and the building up of the desired relationship between the Mdlalose community and its neighbours".

In March 2003, the Department of Land Affairs told him that "detailed planning has not been done", but will be forthcoming when DLA transfers planning funds to the Zululand District Municipality.

Satisfied

Greyling says he will not be satisfied unless cognizance is taken of what is needed to sustain residents on Johannes's farm. He refers to Act. No. 70 of 1970 which sets limits on the size of land subdivisions. Although this Act has been repealed, there are some clauses remaining.

The Vryheid farmer declares an acceptable sustainability formula is at least 3,5 ha per beast or 300 ha per family. He says he has no objection to black farmers next to him, as long as they can make a living and not have to steal to keep alive. One needs R3 600 to travel to Vryheid for one year, 6 days a week, says Greyling. So if the farm is non-sustainable, from where will family members obtain money to travel to town for a job and shopping?

Challenge

In 2001, farmer and former Democratic Alliance member of Parliament Wessel Nel wrote that "land is a shaky vehicle for redistribution". He says the government is wrong to believe that small cash grants make for the beginnings of sustainable small-scale farming. Establishment capital of around R25 000 has the purchase capacity of approximately 10 hectares, a meager R10 000 having been set aside for a house, livestock and operating capital. This would only sustain perhaps 2 head of cattle and 5 goats or sheep.

The gross income from such animals would be around R2 500 per annum, with maybe 2 litres of milk per day, says Nel. These facts would assume no deaths or theft, 75% reproduction, no domestic slaughter and no expenses. Nel makes the same argument as Greyling – if a small holding were only 20 km from town, and if only two family members commuted daily by taxi to work or school, the taxi fare alone for the year would far exceed the total gross annual income of the smallholding. Such a land redistribution programme would condemn the beneficiaries to a "rural poverty trap", declares Nel.

Hence Greyling's reasons for demanding a development plan for the neighbouring 5 000 ha farm. Some years ago, seven black farmers and their families were given 200 ha by a church mission group, right next to Greyling's farm. (The church people have long since abandoned their converts. Giving them the land was enough, they possibly thought.) For years now, on a daily basis, Greyling experiences border fencing theft, with the squatters' herds mingling with his. These neighbours walk through the farm, leaving the cattle gates open.

For non-farmers, this mingling of herds seems innocuous. According to another Vryheid farmer with a herd of 400 cattle, most herds belonging to the Zulus have trichomoniasis, commonly known as 'trich.' This disease lowers the healthy

calving rate – a profitable and successful rate is 70% to 80%, while most Zulu herds' calving rate is 40% to 50%. "We have to pay a vet to test our bulls – R200 per bull. The mixing of the herds means a possibility of trich infection, which spells devastation for a healthy herd. A good stud bull is valued at anything from R10 000 to R15 000, whereas a bull for slaughter only fetches R4 000. I recently had to kill 4 stud bulls infected with trich."



Some new settlers, land claim transfer, Vryheid.

Greyling loses R30 000 a year in mealie theft, and fires move on to his farm with regularity. He often hires a helicopter at R1 350 an hour to search for his stolen stock. In one three-month period he lost 85 head of cattle. He and his son, with their security company personnel, regularly go into traditional areas to try and retrieve their cattle. They often see the skins and the heads where the cattle have been slaughtered. They recognize their own animals. This "citizen policing" is obligatory because the police are simply overwhelmed and, in many cases, are clearly not interested. Greyling and his sons have to pay informers – sometimes up to R9 000 a month – to find their cattle. The rate is so high because informers are in many cases beaten by the thieves.

So Greyling and his sons pay the security company, the helicopter costs, the informers, the commandos and the people who patrol their lands.

We drove through Greyling's 1754 ha farm. He produces mealies, wheat, beef cattle and sheep. 400 ha are irrigated. He has built roads and bridges throughout the property. He pointed out a derelict neighbouring property where squatters had moved in.

To stop them stealing from him, Greyling planted mealies for them right on their doorstep. For six years he did this, then they complained the weed killer Greyling supplied was "no good". The stealing re-commenced.

Despite Greyling's activism in trying to stop an influx of squatters on to his neighbour's farm, he currently cannot sell his own farms. The government's land reform program has seen to that. The borders of KwaZulu are moving onto what used to be productive commercial farmland. Other farmers in the area have been driven off their properties.

The Invaders

A pattern is developing throughout traditional South Africa. Tribal chiefs appear to be having a field day courtesy of the land reform program. In northern KwaZulu/Natal, in Mpumalanga, in the Eastern Cape, in Limpopo, the chiefs are working assiduously to gain land, not for "the people", but for themselves. Vryheid is no different. One Jabulani Mdalose has become something of a warlord in the area.

He has encouraged the invasion of privately-owned farmland by selling plots to squatters.

As in the north of the province, Mdlalose is emboldened by the lack of law enforcement. Early in 2003, he notified the provincial Department of Land Affairs in writing that the Othaka Tribal Authority intended to take possession of 200 commercial farms in the area.



A deserted school house, Gwebo land claim, Vryheid.

Although no such land claim has been validated, he has nonetheless threatened certain farmers to vacate their properties. To back up these threats, he has sold plots on their farms, and the illegal invasions have taken off.

When Jabulani's father Chief Dalwayini Mdlalose died in 1994, Jabulani's younger brother Johannes was appointed his successor. Because of Jabulani's activities, Johannes Mdlalose and 18 Vryheid farmers approached the Pietermaritzburg High Court to grant a permanent restraining order to prevent Jabulani from persuading people to invade, trespass, graze livestock, plant crops or build homes on privately-owned farms in the district.⁽¹⁾ A temporary restraining interdict was granted against him.

And not a moment too soon! In September 2002, three local farmers appealed to the government to prevent the illegal occupation of their farms. Since 1986, Johan Birkenstock has produced an average of 30 tons of maize per month on his farm Forlorn Hope. After the new government came to power, things worsened. His fencing was stripped, and his cattle and crops were stolen. The hunting of his game and cattle increased to such an extent that calves were regularly ripped apart by the dogs. His grazing was regularly burnt. Then his life was threatened, and he stopped milling.

Concerned about his labour, Birkenstock told the then MP for the area Jan Slabbert that "this is causing great distress to people who now have to buy maize and mealie meal in town at a very high price."

In 1988, Birkenstock rented the farm Waterval. He received a visit from Jabulani Mdlalose who told Johann he wanted the keys to the farm. In 1999 he was again visited by Jabulani who said the land was his and that he and his followers would "move in" if the government would not resolve the land reform question.

Although Birkenstock told Jabulani he was willing to sell his land, the intimidation continued. Indeed, it has increased over the past three years. In July 2002, he noticed that structures were being erected on the farm Roodepoort, which he

was renting. Those building the structures told him that they had obtained “permission” from Jabulani Mdlalose

Dirk Kotze

In the same vein, farmer Dirk Kotze told MP Slabbert of his woes. He has been farming on Palmietfontein for thirty years. His farming operation supported more than 1 000 families with food per month, and 100 families with milk per day. Farms bordering on his were occupied by illegal squatters and the security situation deteriorated dramatically, he said.

His family regularly received threats, and on 6 February 2003, he and his wife were brutally attacked by five armed black men and robbed of their firearms, money and vehicle.⁽²⁾ As with many other farmers, Kotze feels helpless. With no law enforcement, he sees no future in farming and asks the government to buy his farm. His farm is in pristine condition – Eskom lines, sufficient water, good buildings and chicken runs.

Steve and Fanie Van Jaarsveld

A third farmer in the area, Steve van Jaarsveld was visited by Jabulani in July 1999. He told Steve of his plans to “settle” people on various commercial farms in the district. In March 2002, occupations began on the neighbouring farm Wanbestuur which belonged to absent farmer Neil Prinsloo. The farm had been returned to LandbouKrediet (an agricultural loan company) because of Prinsloo’s financial difficulties. The squatters appeared in April 2002 and erected structures. Van Jaarsveld reported the matter to the police who said they could do nothing because the owner of the property, LandbouKrediet, had not laid a charge. Despite many calls to LandbouKrediet, it appears no charges have been since laid, and more squatters have streamed on to the farm.

In June 2002, structures appeared on the farm Metzelfontein which van Jaarsveld was renting. The police investigated, but again said they could do nothing because “the people said they had purchased the farm from Jabulani Mdlalose”. End of story! No investigation into whether what they said was true, no removals, no charges laid. It would appear that the police and Mdlalose are very good friends, as is the case with Chief Mathaba and the police in northern Natal. (See the story of the Dunn family).

We saw the farms of Dirk Kotze, Johan Birkenstock and Fanie van Jaarsveld. In van Jaarsveld’s living room, he showed us bullet holes in his leg – he had been recently attacked and beaten outside his front door. If it were not for his boerbul dog, he would have been killed. As it was the three men who assaulted him shot the dog who miraculously survived. The bullet holes through the brave animal’s head can be clearly seen, and he is none the worse for wear! Steve van Jaarsveld told us he had lost many head of cattle. “Every year they burn you out”, he declared. “There was no grazing”.

Johan Birkenstock confirmed he had to put out fires 33 times over one winter. “We can’t move the squatters. The police can’t do it, and it takes too much money and heartache. Dirk Kotze’s farm was also burnt out. The fences were simply taken away. They stole all his cattle. They steal each month, and every year they burn him out. How can we farm under these circumstances? Where in the world do you find such a situation?”

Van Jaarsveld told us other farms were being invaded: Mr. Bonnie Hills' Mooifontein, Brakspruit belonging to Mr. Koos Scheepers, and Mr. Heinrich Hegeler's farm Nellie's Rust.

Action

Letters were also sent by organized agriculture to the Minister of Safety and Security about the situation, but despite high level meetings between MP Jan Slabbert, provincial agricultural minister Narend Singh and Traditional Affairs Minister Nkosi Nyanga Ngubane, no action was taken. Instead, the farmers were told they should institute a civil action. Thus, farmers have to spend small fortunes retaining attorneys to seek redress because the police are not doing their job. (Perhaps they should institute a class action to sue the Minister of Safety and Security for dereliction of duty!)

Thus starts the endless cycle of litigation as orders served on certain squatters are rendered invalid because they have left and are replaced by other squatters. In one case, an eviction was granted and the squatter refused to move. He was then evicted (more costs!) but simply moved back into his house and has increased his building activity.

In January 2003, Vryheid attorney Bertus van der Merwe wrote to the Senior Prosecutor at the Magistrate's Court in Vryheid that "a very dangerous situation is developing" along the Vryheid-Babanango road where properties are being invaded by "people who seem to have the impression that the authorities will not step in to take the necessary steps to protect the rights of owners".

The Department of Land Affairs wrote to attorneys representing the affected farmers on 27 March 2003, declaring that they do not support land invasions and that "the landowners should act as soon as possible. They should lay trespass charges with the police in order to avoid legal costs". Farmers know that, but the lack of activity by the police forces them to institute privately-funded civil actions.

The police say they can do nothing about land that is "under dispute". But all they have to do is check with the local municipality to find out who owns what land. This is a lame excuse, and the SA Police's lack of action is probably the main cause of this terrible rash of land invasions occurring throughout South Africa.

In June 2003, Jabulani Mdlalose was arrested and charged with illegally selling plots on commercial farms. He was granted bail in mid August 2003. Further fraud charges are building up against him.

The court has also restrained him from purporting to be chief of the Othaka Tribe and allocating land on private farms. This restraint order came only after civil action was taken by local farmers, one of whom was Jaco Duminy, chairman of the Vryheid Farmers' Association.

He showed us copious correspondence addressed to the Minister of Safety and Security, the local member of Parliament, the KwaZulu/Natal premier, the Department of Land Affairs and the letter that started it all, from Jabulani Mdlalose to the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) dated February 2003 where he declares he is head of the Othaka Tribal Authority.

This letter "informs" the DLA that land which was given to him "by the former government in 1986/7" will now be used "for farming from 1 April 2003". (Of course Jabulani's version of "farming" is somewhat different from that of commercial farmers in the area).

He then attached a list of the commercial farms which he says were given to him – there were nineteen in all.

The wires on Jaco Duminy's farm gate had been cut as we drew up to his farm. Some of his cattle were already drifting on to the road. Duminy told us he had also been visited by a delegation from Jabulani who stated they would take his farm. The restraining order on Jabulani has, however, put a damper on the visiting delegations, but it is a Pyrrhic victory because it cost the farmers more than R80 000 to get that restraining order, and the fraud case against Jabulani is not yet completed.

Once again, complaints about the police abound. A local farmer noticed his fencing wire was cut. Members of the police's Stock Theft Unit came to help. They traced the cattle, and found the culprits but the police didn't arrest them. This farmer says the Stock Theft Unit is "a joke".

It has been reduced from 30 to ten people while the area of jurisdiction has doubled in size over the last 15 years. "They don't even have vehicles", said the abject farmer. He doesn't blame everyone within the SAPS – many are desperately trying to do their job under impossible circumstances.

Gwebo

A serious scandal of lost farmland and waste of taxpayer's money greeted us in the Gwebo area. Three farms totalling around 4 000 ha - Kromellenbog, Eerstepunt and In Memoriam - were handed over to none other than Johannes Mdlalose. We were told that Eerstepunt had been one of the finest farms in the district – "it had the best cover of grass I've seen in a long while" said a local farmer. The owner really looked after the farm, he said – the camps and feeding troughs were in tip top condition for the more than 200 beef cattle which thrived on the farm. After the handover, agriculturalists were called in to give advice, and foremen were appointed so that the new owners had all the help they needed.

Consultants drew up a business plan which was extremely comprehensive. It showed prospective occupants how to run the farm, explained the use of the tools and the farming equipment – the tractors and the ploughs – which were included in the deal. There was a big "handover" party for more than 300 people who ate and drank at taxpayers' expense.

It later transpired that the local indunas (local chief) threw out the qualified people, and ignored the business plan. Fearful of any threat to their authority, their actions resulted in the three farms "falling back into the stone age", according to one observer.

We traveled through these lands. Grazing grass was high – this was during the height of the 2003 drought – because there were no beasts – certainly not in the numbers which would constitute a profitable beef operation. The farmhouse had been occupied by the Zulu VIP's, and squatter huts had been constructed. It looked like a picture from some old South African historical picture of Zululand. The occupants stripped the farm fences and used this to fence their own squatter houses. There is no water-born sewage. There appeared to be abundant water. As we approached one group of buildings, shots rang out in our direction and we quickly turned tail. There are plenty of guns in the beloved country.

"Babanango is one of the best cattle areas in South Africa" said our farmer driver "Now look at it!" He continued, his face etched with stress: "I have to count my cattle every day".

We saw two farms which had turned into squatter camps – the farm Lisbon which used to be a successful dairy and grain farm of 2 000 ha and which was given to the Xhambi Tribal Authority, and the once-productive dairy farm Wanbestuur, around 200 ha, now belonging to LandbouKrediet. Jabulani Mdlalose has already sold a good portion of this farm, which he doesn't own, to squatters. The crime emanating from these farms is endemic, said our farmer driver. He said that LandbouKrediet has yet to lay a charge with the police about the squatters on this farm.

The farm Mooifontein was in even worse condition than the previous two. The fencing had completely vanished. The house was vandalized and what could be taken away was removed. The owner did not live on the farm, but the manager moved off because of the intimidation. Here again, Jabulani sold plots for R1 500 each. The outbuildings had been stripped. This farm under normal circumstances – that is in a normal law-and-order society - would fetch R2 000 per hectare. Today it is worthless.

Farmer Jan Hattingh (not his real name) told us he practically gave away his top farm for R1 000 a hectare to a black farmer who obtained a loan from the Land Bank. The farmer farms a few of his private cattle and uses the farm as a taxi repair operation. He said no white farmer would buy his farm because they simply cannot produce.

We asked a land claims expert in the area what was the basis of the land claims on these farms. His reply was that the Mdlalose community were "landless". We didn't have time to count how many farms the Mdlalose clan had already been given in the area, but they have claimed – and received - at least ten farms that we know of.

We drove back to Vryheid with heavy hearts. What can farmers do, we were told. With government allegedly supporting NGO's who instigate and support land claims (even if the claims are not valid, which happens in many cases!), and with the police literally turning a blind eye, there is no other way than for a farmer to pack his bags and leave the heartache, the fear and the stress.

One reads of successful and happy farmers in South Africa's agricultural magazines. These are the ones who do not live near squatter camps and traditional areas. But as farmers near these areas leave, the cancer invades further into commercial farmland. Will anyone eventually be safe?

The Klipfontein Dam

As we neared the town, a squatter camp on a hill came into view. On the other side of this camp, 500 m away, lay the Klipfontein Dam which supplies the town with its drinking water. So where is the sewage arrangement for these people, we asked. There's nothing at all. When it rains the sewage runs down into the dam. The squatter camp land belongs to the State, we were informed by the Department of Water Affairs. And once again, the Mdlalose's are involved. We were told that Johannes is the "agent" and is selling plots in the squatter camp. Agent for whom we could not ascertain. The Department of Water Affairs says they have received no complaints about the dam, so they cannot investigate the claim about run-off sewage. So where does the sewage go to, we asked? Upon enquiries to the local municipality, we were informed they were "aware of the problem".

This leads us to water, and the "projects" which are being lavishly funded throughout the country. An interested party told us of the Hluhluwe Water project where a purification plant costing R11 million was installed at the Hluhluwe Dam. The water is supplied to a nearby community. Consultants were brought in to monitor

the project. After December 2002, the contracts ended and the community was supposed to run the project themselves.

By March 2003, there was no water in the system. The water was cut off because the community didn't pay. They paid when the consultants were running the project but as soon as they left, there was no payment. In April 2003 the consultants were appointed again to come and sort out the mess. The contract expired in December 2003 . . .

Said one farmer: "They all want this and that but they cannot manage anything." Another R40 million is allegedly being pumped into this project, but it still won't work unless the consultants are there. (We discovered the same problems in the Eastern Cape. Doubtless these situations are endemic throughout the country). This story ends with the report of a bizarre happening – trench warfare in KwaZulu/Natal. Farmers have built trenches 2m wide and 2m deep for more than 200 km in the Winterton/Estcourt area to stop cattle theft. It is working, they say, because the thieves can only slaughter at most one or two beasts and throw the meat over the trench.

Do people in the city who enjoy the best steaks in the world realize what farmers endure to put those steaks on South African plates?

Chapter Four

THE EASTERN CAPE

VOYAGE TO SOUTH AFRICA

“We sailed out of Simon’s Bay on 10th May with a brisk gale from the NW which carried us round Cape l’Aguillas. On the 12th at day break, we found ourselves almost becalmed, opposite the entrance to the Knysna, a fine lagoon which forms a beautiful and spacious haven.

During the two following days, having scarcely any wind, we kept tacking off and on within a few miles of the shore. This gave us an excellent opportunity of surveying the coast scenery of Auteniqualand and Zitzikama, which is of very striking character.

As we passed headland after headland, the sylvan recesses of the bays and mountains opened successively to our gaze, like a magnificent panorama, continually unfolding new features or exhibiting new combinations of scenery, in which the soft and the stupendous, the monotonous and the picturesque, were strangely blended. The aspect of the whole was impressive, but somber; beautiful, but somewhat savage. There was the grandeur and the grace of nature, majestic and untamed; and there was likewise that air of lonesomeness and dreary wildness which a country unmarked by the traces of human industry or of human residence seldom fails to exhibit to the view of civilized man.

Seated on the poop of the vessel, I gazed alternately on that solitary shore, and on the bands of emigrants who now crowded the deck or leaned along the gangway.....

Late in the afternoon of the 15th, we came to anchor in Algoa Bay.....

The whole scene was such as could not fail to impress deeply the most unconcerned spectator. To us, who had embarked all our worldly property and earthly prospects, our own future fortunes and the fate of our posterity, in this enterprise, it was interesting and exciting to an intense degree.

It being too late to go ashore that evening, we continued gazing on this scene till long after sunset – till twilight had darkened into night, and the constellation of the southern hemisphere, revolving in cloudless brilliance above, reminded us that nearly half the globe’s expanse intervened between us and our native land – the homes of our youth and the friends we had parted from for ever.

And that here, in this farthest nook of Southern Africa, we were now about to receive the portion of our inheritance, and to draw an irrevocable lot for ourselves and for our children’s children.’

- From the publication **Narrative of a Residence in South Africa** by Thomas Pringle, in which he tells of the trip to South Africa of the settler ship *Brilliant* which arrived in Algoa Bay, in the Eastern Cape, on 15 May, 1820, as quoted in **The Story of the British Settlers of 1820 in South Africa** by Harold Edward Hockly, Juta and Co., Cape Town, 1948.

This South African province is the most potentially

productive and fertile of all the provinces. The climate is one of the most attractive and productive in South Africa, with mean summer temperatures varying around 22°C.

In the mountainous areas, rainfall averages 1000 mm and along the coast it is as high as 1 300 mm, diminishing to 625 mm in the area in between.⁽¹⁾ The irrigation prospects of the area’s perennial rivers, as well as the fact that the soil compares with

the best in South Africa, point to the considerable potential for agriculture in the area.⁽²⁾ Surface water is abundant.

What used to be known as Transkei and Ciskei became independent homelands under the old National Party government, and considerable money and effort was put into developing the region which, in the years before this initiative, was essentially a subsistence agricultural area.

The irrigation, crop and stock schemes implemented were numerous, and we have tried to follow up on at least a few of them to find out what happened to these developments. Political ideology aside, large amounts of taxpayers' money went into the development of a serious agricultural sector in what is now the Eastern Province.

An examination of publications of the "homeland" era reveals the diversity and breadth of projects introduced to the Eastern Province – irrigation schemes, dairy, beef and sheep farming projects, the construction of dams, crop farms including maize, wheat, lucerne and vegetable plantings, as well as sorghum and legumes grown under dry-land farming conditions. Up to 1975, 61% of the old Transkei was agriculturally planned. There were 14 agricultural cooperatives, with 16 600 members. By June 1975, more than 1 300 dams had been built and 1 100 successful boreholes drilled. More than 600 soil conservation schemes covering an area of 2 300 000 ha had been approved by March 1975, and 922 dipping tanks had been provided for livestock.

At that time, the region was one of the biggest cattle-producing areas in South Africa.⁽³⁾ Maize had to be imported – only around 200 000 tons were produced while there was a potential of approximately five million tons.⁽⁴⁾

Agricultural Crops

The Magwa Tea Estate had been established at Lusikisiki, where 1 500 people were employed by 1975. Coffee projects were established at Lambasi and a smaller scheme was created at Intsimbini. The potential of the land was exceptional. Said the Africa Institute in 1976: "It has been estimated that the Transkei can produce enough tea to supply half of South Africa's demand. In all, 137 000 ha of land is available on which fibre and industrial crops can be cultivated, and another 15 400 ha is suitable for coffee production. There are 43 000 ha suited to the production of cotton and an equivalent amount available for sugar growing. The potential monetary value of the fibre crops, coffee, cotton and sugar cane is estimated to be more than R40 million."⁽⁵⁾ (These were 1976 figures – Ed.)

In the old Ciskei, only 837 ha owned by black farmers were under irrigation by 1975. Of the total surface of about 520 000 ha, 81% consisted of pasturage and agriculturally non-productive land, and only 15% of arable land.⁽⁶⁾ The story of the old Ciskei is even worse than the old Transkei in terms of agricultural development at the time of the 1976 Africa Institute report. For example, the total number of fruit trees planted by black farmers up to 1975 amounted to 48 100. (On one Letsitele commercial farm alone, there are more than 100 000 trees.)

Details of various agricultural schemes in progress and planned are given in the report. Other publications at the time more or less confirm the establishment of these developments, with detailed tables of the number of cattle and other beasts, the size of the crops, and the potential for the area.

What happened to these projects? We chose a few to follow up and the results were alarming.

The Magwa Tea Project

In May 2003, a South African agricultural magazine alerted readers to the fact that the Eastern Province MEC for Agriculture Max Mamase was budgeting R20 million for a “turnaround strategy” to salvage what once was a successful tea project.⁽⁷⁾ Democratic Alliance agriculture spokesman Athol Trollip declared that the corporation was ailing and “doomed to financial failure”.

In July 2003, another press report declared that workers on the estate hadn’t been paid for six months and “years of gross mismanagement” had led to the torching of the Magwa Estate’s offices by thousands of workers.⁽⁸⁾ Fifteen offices, a boardroom, computers and financial records succumbed to the flames. “The fate of an entire rural economy is balanced on a knife edge”, said the article. “Workers children have been pulled out of school to plant vegetables as their parents can no longer make ends meet.”

The 2 500 ha estate has the potential to produce more than 3,5 million kilograms of good quality tea per year. Last season, output was budgeted at 2,3 million kilograms, but only 955 000 kilograms were produced. To remain viable, the operation needed to produce at least 2,4 million kilograms of tea. It is the only tea estate in South Africa that is not irrigated.

In October 2003, the DA’s Athol Trollip issued a press statement declaring that certain creditors had foreclosed on Magwa. One of the creditors had already begun attaching tractors computers and office furniture. The debt dated back to 1998!

Trollip said he and DA MP Stuart Farrow had brought the plight of “this magnificent tea estate” to the attention of MEC Max Mamase and the Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs in September 2002. R20 million was appropriated in April 2003 to effect a turnaround to save the estate. Seven months had passed and no management company had been appointed.

“Magwa lies idle as workers are not paid and the estate is now faced with liquidation, a classic case of ‘too little, too late’.”⁽⁹⁾ If nothing is done, “Magwa will follow the path of other failed parastatals” said Trollip. It later transpired that R15 million was owed to the Land Bank and others, and these debts would have almost swallowed up the R20 million “turnaround” money. Further, Magwa workers had taken management to the Labour Court over disputes arising out of non-payment of salaries.

The history of the tea estate follows a pattern now becoming apparent: when the new government came to power in 1994, they moved to rid many old “homeland” structures of personnel from the old regime. Affirmative action candidates and political comrades replaced what was an efficient band of people, whatever their political affiliations. Thus the rot set in. The plantation was already in trouble in 1997 and was liquidated. The state pumped in R10,6 million to get it back on its feet, and in 1998, the workers became co-owners of the estate in a land reform initiative, funded by South Africa’s taxpayers.

The Magwa estate would cost in excess of R1 billion to re-establish. In his letter to the Minister of Land Affairs dated 19 September 2002, MP Stuart Farrow said the estate’s production levels had fallen dramatically; husbandry practices were not being implemented, professional tea management was deficient and there was low worker/owner participation, with reliance more on casual workers.

A “top secret” memorandum dated 21 April 2003 to the Eastern Cape Cabinet Committee from the Head of Department, Department of Agriculture – EC, entitled “Magwa Tea Estate Restructuring”, refers to persistent labor disturbances, low

productivity, and frequent requests for working capital since the “takeover of the company by the workers”.

Says the top secret report: “A fundamental agreement was reached at the time the workers purchased the company (in 1998) that the *organization should be turned around and transformed into a shining example of a worker-owned and managed company.*” (Italics ours).

“Productivity has dropped to unprecedented levels and all the parties involved (workers, management, board of directors) are accusing one another of mismanagement, non-communication, weak leadership and, in some instances, sheer laziness”. The report goes on to catalogue lists of problems, and there is copious finger pointing. Suffice it to say the whole project collapsed into a management and financial shambles, and this occurred over a period of at least three years.

The report makes mention of the further amount of R20 million set aside by the province to implement a turnaround strategy. But the socio-political factors inherent in the failure of management are frankly admitted to: that “the failure of a project of this magnitude will have great negative implications politically”, and that “other struggling enterprises such as North Pondoland Sugar, the TRTC Bus Company, etc” could also have “a political fallout”. The report also includes letters from top estate employees resigning in protest at the mismanagement of the company.

These professional and dedicated people had to implore the company’s board to pay their six-month salary arrears.

The Department of Agriculture, Bisho

An oral reply in the Parliament of the Province of the Eastern Cape in May 2003 sheds some light on government mentality in that province vis a vis land redistribution and transformation.

In reply to the DA’s Athol Trollip about the R20 million budgeted for the “turnaround” of the estate in April 2003, the MEC for Agriculture declared that “Magwa Tea Estate is a private enterprise that was transferred to the management and workers during the process of transformation of the parastatal for a reasonable consideration.”

“Government assisted the workers in this purchase through their grants of R16 000 each. It was therefore expected that the management and the board should operate the estate like any other business without any interference or intervention from government”.

But it is taxpayers’ money which financed this transformation, so it was government’s duty to see that the estate prospered. Like so many other examples of the government’s land reform policy, the recipients are left to fend for themselves. Clearly, as it was not the Department of Agriculture personnel’s private money, they simply didn’t check up on the progress of this scheme. It was only after creditors began attaching computers and furniture that the Department woke up to the shambles, or so it appears. If they did know beforehand that things were awry, they did nothing to salvage a national asset.

Derek Hanekom

In December 2002 already, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Land Affairs in the province (SCALA) reported that the previous DLA minister Derek

Hanekom had promised the estate's workers "R11 million" but since then nothing had been received.

In January 2003, matters became chaotic. Workers/shareholders invaded the Chief Financial Officer's office and assaulted him. In a confidential internal memo, the situation was referred to as "total anarchy".

Sri Lankan Henry Galahitiyawa is one of the world's top tea experts and has been employed at the estate since 1989. In June 2003, he told the press "hardly any work is being done – and it is being done at a very slow pace."⁽¹⁰⁾ For some time he had not felt safe and feared for his family. Ransacking of houses had occurred and he concurred that there were clear signs of anarchy within the estate. He chronicled the woes of the estate since the workers/shareholders took over. He said strikes, mismanagement, incompetence, fraud, corruption, nepotism, and even liquidations could not kill Magwa until now, "but even immunity has to have an end."

This dedicated non-South African world expert declared that the "inevitable demise of Magwa" can be attributed to the "too rapid transformation from a government-owned plantation to a people's cooperative in 1997, which change precipitated all the other woes. None of those placed at the top possessed the required qualifications or knowledge to transform effectively and to motivate all those who are involved in production."

Yet again, a multi-million rand project which the present government inherited from the previous administration has bitten the dust, due mostly to the arrogance of the ignorant and the misguided belief that they need answer to no one, especially to the taxpayers whose money they use with impunity.

Nowhere in the world has this type of worker "management" succeeded – in socialist countries it failed spectacularly, yet the South African government either did not learn from history, or refused to learn. Threats to destroy the "legacies of apartheid", and wild promises to bring "the people" into management to "share the wealth" have almost destroyed this showcase project.

Some observers say the workers/shareholders "were set up for failure". The estate is a national asset and has the potential to show massive profits and provide thousands of jobs.

The Ncora Irrigation Scheme

The Ncora or Tsomo River Irrigation Scheme was reported upon in 1975 by the Africa Institute as "the biggest in the Transkei which will irrigate 5 700 ha of the Ncora Flats."⁽¹¹⁾ The scheme cost R19,5 million at the time. A reduced 3 600 ha of irrigated land was handed over to the Ncora Trust in 1994, and at most only 500 ha is under irrigation today. Basic cash crops are now being produced. The scheme's dam is only 30% full because 60% to 70% of the water within is leaking into the ground. The 900mm irrigation pipes leak 24 hours a day, and have been leaking non-stop for years now. One observer saw 15 leaking pipes in a row. Although the authorities have known about the leaks for a long time, nothing is done to repair the holes in the pipes.

(The mind boggles at the number of cattle already dead in the 2003/4 drought in other areas of South Africa, many belonging to black farmers who could not find water for their animals. Then there are the Bronkhorstspuit irrigation farmers who were banned in August 2003 from using local river water.

The ban came into effect without any warning whatsoever. The farming group McCain had just spent R1,4 million on a new pumping system and center pivots.⁽¹²⁾

The system has been standing unused ever since the ban was declared, with interest on the capital investment running at over R200 000 a year.)

Originally there were three dairies at Ncora, with three 42-cow turntables. Now none of them work. The back-up generators have been plundered, hit with hammers according to an observer. All the copper wire from the milk cooler tanks has been damaged or stolen.

There were originally 20 to 30 milk and dairy product storage tanks, but they do not function now.

The original scheme ran more than 1 200 head of cattle, “the best Holstein genetics in the Southern Hemisphere”, according to a local. After the handover, these cattle were sold off. The dairies were top producers of yoghurt, maas and so forth.

“When you go to the dairies now”, a local told us, “it looks like a bomb hit them. Fires have been built in the yoghurt processing section. The lorries belonging to the dairies have been burnt out, and two disparate groups within the Trust are squabbling almost every day.”

We are told that the government is planning to spend another R10 million on this project. But if management is poor, the same situation will prevail again after a few years.



The total absence of any farming activity in the Tabankulu region of the Eastern Cape – which has great agricultural potential and was previously prime farming territory – is evidenced by the growth in the shack and squatter community.

The Qamata Irrigation Scheme

The old homeland books say that this scheme “will cover 3 600 ha by 1977 and 1 200 farmers will be settled on it when it is fully developed”. It cost R8,2 million to set up in 1975.

Today, no more than 500 ha are irrigated, and are planted with cash crops. Contractors recently planted 500ha of maize for government at a production cost of R10 000 ha. The selling price of the maize was R800/R900 a ton which works out at around R8 000 per ha.

Thus this particular operation made a loss of R2 000 per ha. The Eastern Cape government spent altogether R5 million on this maize project, and managed to produce R400 000 worth of maize. "One might just as well have imported R5 million worth of maize and have been done with it", said a farmer nearby.

"After 1994, the people on the land were mobilized to destroy everything that belonged to the boer or the homelands government", we were told by a source. "Tractors, irrigation systems, furrows, dams and so forth were trashed", he said. "The promised new revolutionary tractors and irrigation systems never materialized. The people who live on this and other such schemes which used to produce crops for export, now live in abject poverty."

He continues: "The government is now ploughing millions into resuscitating these schemes. However, most of these millions go to consultants or failed former commercial farmers. Such people now masquerade as agricultural development professionals and/or fundis."

The Shiolo Project

This was in the old Ciskei, a 600 ha intensive farming project of mainly fruit. It costs today around R40 000 per ha to establish a fruit orchard.

Many of the trees in this project were cut up for firewood and for use in building houses. The government is now ready to pump another R10 million into this scheme. There was also a small dairy operation within the project, plus a small-plot development.

After 1994, the whites were removed and the budgets "were frittered away" according to a person we spoke to. There is no production at all at Shiolo. All the machinery, the tractors and so forth, is lying around, broken and rusted.

Cala

A beautiful peach tree project with gravity irrigation was established at Cala in 1999. However, the trees were not looked after and one third of the orchard has burnt down. The irrigation nozzles and pipes were burnt and have not been replaced. A weir was built and the government brought experts in to help with the planting, and the orchard was fenced off. The beneficiaries were given R500 000 to maintain the trees until maturity. It was all on a plate. All they had to do was open and close the valves. However, within seven months, the land around the trees was burnt.

The weir is now clogged up. It was positioned to take advantage of gravity irrigation, but now steel pipes and rubbish have been dumped in the weir.

We were advised that the beneficiaries of this peach tree project attended management and technical courses. Despite this, they call the Department of Land Affairs at the drop of a hat when even the smallest thing goes wrong. Technicians have to drive 200 km to undertake a 10-minute repair job.

Farm Handovers

As in the rest of South Africa, there is no end of examples of farm handovers in this province which have failed. We need only mention a few. Farms Deeside, Drummond, Spes Bona, Ensam, Kanuna, Mt. Hopley and Poplar Grove were all sheep and cattle farms in the Queenstown area. They have now become squatter camps. Some pit toilets have been built. The residents overgraze the land, and their cattle are dying because of this and the drought.

A nearby farmer tells us the new owners of these farms are unable to make a living and steal his irrigation equipment and his sheep. (Sheep farming in the Eastern Cape has been drastically reduced over the past five years). This farmer loses around R27 000 to R30 000 a year from theft.

An example of injudicious and unplanned farm transfers is the farm group Thornhill, Koffiefontein, Middelploas and Waterval in the Dordrecht area. They were transferred to beneficiaries a year ago, under the R15 000 per recipient scheme, but the farms have already lost 50% of their potential, and the farm dwellers have applied to the Land Bank for more funding.

The farm Koffiefontein is 400 ha in size, and accommodates 30 families. The carrying capacity of one cow in the area is 6.1/2 ha which means the farm can only carry 61 head of cattle, that is two head of cattle per family. One needs a farm of at least 1 500 ha to make it a viable commercial unit, according to farmers in the area. The families on Koffiefontein can hardly live on two cows each. What about money for their children's education, food, transport, medical bills and other expenses? Where was the forward planning in these handovers?

A Sunday Times lead article on 20 October, 2002 (two thirds of a page) is headed "Sowing the Seeds of Hope". We often see the word "hope" used in these eulogies to the latest land reform transfer. While hope springs eternal, it is usually discovered to be ephemeral. So it is with the handover of the 780 ha farm Merino Rust to Mr. Felix Mtwa and his 17 village compatriots who "became commercial farmers last month, having bought the property from a white rancher on a Land Affairs grant", according to the Times. (Someone should tell the Times that one just doesn't "become" a commercial farmer overnight. It's a highly skilled business, and it's not for those who are easily discouraged!)

The article proceeds to describe the success of the Department of Land Affairs' Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) scheme which is funded, inter alia, by USAID (the US Agency for International Development) in cooperation with the AgriLink project. Have these two organizations been back to see how Mr. Mtwa fared on this expensive piece of land, paid for by taxpayers?

A local farmer who knows this land well tells us "nothing is going on there, nothing". The property was a mixed-farming operation, with a sizeable beef herd, a small dairy and good crop production. There was flood irrigation from two dams, but now the canals or furrows are not cleaned, so the water doesn't come so easily.

There are "a few families" on the property but there's no real production, says the neighbour. "I was there four months ago and nothing much was happening". The new arrivals moved into the house and they appear to be living off grants.

General

The editor of the *Farmer's Weekly* is from Indwe in the Eastern Cape. In 2002 the town was given the dubious honour of being voted the poorest town in the country.

His neighbour's farm was bought by the government and handed over to a group of families to administer. "The new neighbours are trying their best, with no guidance whatsoever", he says. "This is despite my personal attempts at convincing senior officials in the Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs, the Land Bank and a smattering of development agencies that our neighbours need a hand with farming operations. I even supplied them with names of farmers who were prepared to mentor

– all they needed was for someone in authority to tell them and the new farmers what the deal would be. Everyone is still waiting”.

He continues: “So it was with some reservation that I got the news that Guba, arguably the best farming ground in the district, was to be handed over to a group of black communities. My father was among the farmers whose ground was expropriated back in the 1980s. For the next 20 years, the ground lay fallow, and when I recently visited the farm I grew up on, I couldn’t remember the land looking better. What’s more, the huge town dam is situated on the border of this area, making it possible to irrigate quite extensively.

“But when I met one of the new land beneficiaries in the post office, and asked him enthusiastically what they would be farming, he replied vaguely – we will farm big. Further queries about whether there was any plan or not didn’t yield much, so I assumed there wasn’t much of a plan. Which in my book is nothing short of criminal, especially when farmers who farmed that ground are still living in the district and could quite easily be pulled in by the government to come up with ideas on how the land could be used optimally. The water available to these new farmers could mean hundreds of new jobs. But instead, when the Minister of Agriculture and the Deputy President leave on Sunday morning after the handover party, nothing much will have changed. And it will never occur to anyone how much it could have changed”.⁽¹³⁾

Grahamstown dairy farmer Peter Wylie is besieged. In September 2003 he had to sell part of his land after losses from continual theft and trespassing on his grazing land “that were too much to bear. We are under total threat all the time”, he said. “Stock owners from the township don’t brand their stock. There’s over-grazing. Fences are being trampled. There’s no law.”⁽¹⁴⁾

DA spokesperson Professor Michael Wisson told us Wylie is “almost totally surrounded by what is, in effect, uncontrolled commonage. He tries to run a dairy herd whose produce he transforms into excellent yoghurt, but with 6 000 or more uncontrolled cattle from the Grahamstown East herd roaming the area, he is having very serious problems of fence stealing, cattle theft and, probably the most dangerous, cattle diseases. His father was murdered on the farm.” Wylie’s sick father was shot in his bed, while Wylie escaped another bullet in the room by a whisker. “They took R220. My father was killed for R220! This killing changed our lives forever.”

Wylie told the DA’s Athol Trollip and Stuart Farrow that he was being “invaded” and stolen blind. The adjacent “commonage” (communal land) is appallingly run/managed and those who graze their cattle there are a law unto themselves, says Trollip.

It seems there is complete grazing anarchy on these Grahamstown commonages. Professor Whissom says the area is becoming known as the place where animals can roam free. Rural stockowners have persuaded the Makana Council to acquire farms adjacent to the old commonage, through the DLA’s land acquisition policy, and they have “nudged the process along” by removing all the fences along the National road, and on the farms on which they desire to graze their animals.

Farmer Willie Fourie, who used to own Glen Craig, a substantial farm adjacent to the commonage, had his fourteen camps vandalized and his water system wrecked – naturally, he sold to the Department of Land Affairs.

Only Peter Wylie and one or two others have resisted the pressure. He says people shouldn’t excuse the behaviour of certain people because of their race. “There is no excuse for lawlessness. We live on our nerves here. The public doesn’t understand the effect this siege has had on our attitude to life”.

His neighbour across the road is reeling under the pressure. “It’s terrible to see a man’s life, everything he believes in and dreamed about, shattered by unmitigated crime”, says Wylie. “Our dreams for the future are in ruins. Everything is stolen – peaches, cabbages, other vegetables. The young thugs come with bags and simply take, not to eat but to sell. They steal our cattle. We have put up electric fencing at great cost. We now plant chicory because that can’t be stolen. This theft and crime is affecting the economy enormously. The authorities will regret their lack of action in the future, when there’s nothing left.”

Wylie continued: “We try to farm with nature. We appreciate this beautiful country. I don’t like burglar bars but I had to spend R22 000 electrifying our house and also the workers’ farm houses. After doing this, they did not come to work! At Christmas, absolutely nothing gets done. And Christmas is not even part of their culture. What’s wrong here? It’s unfathomable.”

“The main road to Johannesburg is swarming with cattle. Nobody pays for grazing in this area,” says Wylie. “Urban dwellers have herds of cattle. They invade my farm and other areas. I often wonder what would have happened in the homelands if the Israelis or the Thais or the Malaysians had got hold of those regions and farmed them. Today, those regions would be a paradise. It’s all about attitude, the work ethic, an approach to life.”

Conclusion

There are scores of projects we could not investigate because of time and funding limitations. But somehow the results seem predictable. Checking up on old press reports of handovers inevitably results in the conclusion that things didn’t work out. Even mentorship and joint ventures, which look like admirable solutions, have severe drawbacks. Who will recapitalize the project? Will some partners be the workers and others the drones? Who has the authority to make decisions, and what if they are not agreed to?

A *Rapport* newspaper article in July 2001 says “Wit en swart boere vat hande”. (“White and black farmers take hands”).⁽¹⁵⁾ It is a glowing story of a kind farmer who wants to help, and grateful black farmers who need it. This Elliot commercial farmer was lauded by none other than President Thabo Mbeki for his attitude towards his black neighbours. The president even mentioned this farmer’s name in Parliament. The 51 black farmers soon experienced trouble after they had bought the neighbouring farm, and asked the commercial farmer for assistance. Both sides were pictured chatting and smiling over the fence.

We recently telephoned the commercial farmer, more than two years after the press article appeared. How were the neighbours faring, we enquired. Not so good, he said. They have already split into two groups and are fighting and arguing. Things have regressed. They were told by the Department of Land Affairs to plant orange trees. I told them this was sheep farming area and that orange trees would not survive. They received R435 000 as an overseas grant. I told them to buy sheep and goats.

“A smart DLA consultant arrived on the scene and tried to sell the black farmers a computer. I advised them to spend their money on stock, but they purchased the computer instead. Their current stock is dying because they don’t have money for fodder and lick.”

“I don’t want to be involved any more” said the farmer. “If anything goes wrong, then they blame me”. He said many farmers in the district are wary of

mentoring. They don't mind giving advice on an ad hoc basis, but don't want to become involved on a regular basis.

"A promising dairy project is improving the fate of a community" declared a Farmer's Weekly headline in January 2003.⁽¹⁶⁾ What has happened to the 859 ha Melkspruit Farm in Aliwal North since then? Sixty hectares are under irrigation, and the 40 new farmers get their water from the Orange River. But their pump station has been vandalized, and the cables have been stolen, only six months into transformation. The dairy farm cost taxpayers around R800 000 but there seems to be a dearth of operating capital, according to a local official we spoke to. "Their land claim was not based on their being a tribal community. They were just a group, and none of them are farmers" declared the official "The group was too big for this farm (They have 21 ha each). They've split into two factions, and they are fighting. They cannot manage the farm, and a mentoring program has been embarked upon. Local farmers have offered their help on a voluntary basis."

The official blames the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) for pumping up people's expectations. The new farmers have been badly shaken by the problems of farming. Their dairy cows do not have enough nutrition, and there's little milk. The drought didn't help.

We have to leave the Eastern Cape there. Many questions remain unanswered. What has happened to the state land granted to seven black farmers in May 2001 in the Port St. Johns district? We are busy investigating the fate of the Ulimocor projects of the mid eighties. More than two years ago, officials at the Kat River Cooperative said many black farmers "were being a bit laid-back and were not putting in the same effort as their white counterparts."⁽¹⁷⁾ What has happened since then?

What happened to the black farmers on Isidingo in Stormberg. Jim Tukani and 14 others were given R16 000 each and bought the farm in December 2000. They received loans from the Land Bank. They were being helped by a white farmer.

And the Lambasi Project near Lusikisiki where more than R1,5 billion was spent on infrastructure, and the first harvest netted R127,000? There's also the 1 400 ha farm Pilgrimsrest near Steynsburg where the farm operation turned from "a dream to a nightmare", according to *Rapport* newspaper⁽¹⁸⁾. Eighteen black families bought the farm with government grants, and two months later abandoned it, returning to town with their cattle. The working capital provided by the state disappeared. We wonder if this farm has been salvaged.

The farm Farmerfield in the Salem area near Grahamstown was a restitution claim in 2001. Fifty seven families were given 760 ha, or 13 ha each. What eventually happened to this handover?

The province falls down in the social interaction department. There are serious shortfalls in the attitudes and cultural expectations of most of the people, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations. In its report on irrigation technologies in the Eastern Province in December 2000⁽¹⁹⁾, FAO's IPTRID says "irrigation scheme management and operations were centralized and done by the government. In many places this has resulted in unsustainable poorly performing small-scale irrigation schemes with a high level of dependency among the farmers and cultivators."

"At some sites following the withdrawal of government support services, communities have not had the wherewithal to repair and manage the infrastructure they have been given. What was given in the past has now become a burden. Farmers were waiting for "government" in some form or other to fix a problem, repair a pump, build a canal, plough a field or provide more money".

In their summary of the Eastern Cape's social environment, the FAO's IPTRID concludes that expectations that "government will still do everything" in the minds of many lead to strong dependency, and farmers are unwilling to take action on their own.

There is a long list of further reasons why things don't work in the Eastern Cape, including lack of resources in provincial agricultural extension services, immature NGO's, complicated political processes and poor communication between different government agencies. In other words, there is scant praise. The Eastern Province is racked by deep poverty (in the country's most fertile agricultural area), unemployment, incompetence, corruption and profligacy. (The province gave more than R1 million to help fund the royal wedding of a Thembu chief to Zulu King Goodwill Zwelethini's daughter).⁽²⁰⁾ Money is pumped into "projects" but there's not much to show for it.

The Eastern Cape is beset with cholera (275 water tanks were brought in during mid 2003 to Qumbu to prevent its spread)⁽²¹⁾, and an old lady tells the *Sunday Times* the "new generation" doesn't want to farm. "They do not want to work. They just go up and down, drinking all the time".⁽²²⁾

The human capacity is not up to scratch, according to an interim management team appointed by President Mbeki to look into the woeful service delivery in the EC. R240 million is being put into a "turnaround plan". "Our assessment is that a change of behavioural patterns is lacking. The assessment established that managers are not taking responsibility and they are not displaying a strong sense of accountability."⁽²³⁾

In February 2003, it was reported that the Eastern Cape failed to spend more than an eighth of its budget in its last audited financial year – because it didn't have the managers to spend it, or the planning to know how to do it.⁽²⁴⁾ However, in some sectors the province spends with alacrity.

The EC Department of Agriculture has "excess staff". In 2000 already, MEC Max Mamase said there were 4000 "superfluous" staff and they swallowed up nearly 25% of his department's budget ⁽²⁵⁾.

Yet people are "starving to death on arable land. There are vast stretches of arable farming land in the EC, but people do not have seeds or implements to plant and plough."⁽²⁶⁾ Once again, the human capacity aspect is mentioned. "There is a government skills shortage and a lack of development". The government's land reform program in the Eastern Cape can never be successful under present circumstances. Mentoring, joint ventures and lease-backs are plan "B" contrivances which are not solutions, only short-term palliatives to restless political pressure groups. Rural poverty in the Eastern Province is growing.

People want jobs and a roof over their head, not land. People should not be dumped willy nilly on to land from which they cannot make even a basic living. It should be borne in mind that 90% of whites don't know how to farm either. Landlessness isn't the problem, unemployment is. Why not allow those who can successfully produce food for the whole country to get on with their job?

Postscript: **WHAT CAN HAPPEN TO A SOUTH AFRICAN RESEARCHER**

In October 2002, two researchers set out to conduct a study on the challenges surrounding land and agrarian reform on former white-owned farmland in the old Ciskei, now the Eastern Cape. Ms. Michelle Cocks from the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, Eastern Province and Dr. Ilsa Grundy from the University of Stellenbosch, Western Cape were found the following day severely injured and left to die on

an isolated piece of land about two km from a primary school near Bell. One woman had been tied to a tree.

Ms. Cocks, married to Mr. Tony Dold, was pregnant at the time. She and her husband had tried for two years to conceive. Despite her pleas to her attackers, they savagely kicked her in the stomach and her baby died. Both women were cruelly beaten and kicked. At one stage doctors feared that they would not survive their ordeal.

Mr. Dold was naturally bitter. "Unfortunately we live in South Africa. We must protect ourselves against these savage animals. These attackers must have seen my wife was pregnant but that didn't deter them. It is nonsense that poverty is always used as an excuse. I have been in twelve African countries much poorer than here, but crime is under control there. Our country has changed. It is no longer what it was ten years ago."

In the meantime, Dr. Grundy went to stay with her brother in Australia where she is recuperating.

Dold has decided never to allow his wife to conduct research "in these dangerous areas" by herself again. "We must employ someone to accompany my wife in future. This is clearly what one must do in South Africa if one is to survive."

Eight young men from Mdantsane in the Eastern Cape were arrested and appeared in court on 24 February 2003 where they were charged with assault and attempted murder.

Chapter Five

KRANSKOP

Kranskop farmer Günther Gathmann has lost a total

of four members of his family to farm murders. His brother Walter was killed three years ago, a second attempt on his life. His aunt, his cousin and his uncle were all victims of a pandemic which places South African farmers as the world's most murdered group, outside of a war.

At the age of 88, his mother was beaten, pistol whipped and shot at during the first attack which narrowly missed Walter. The Gathmanns farm in the middle of a battleground where their community, mostly descendants of German missionaries who settled in the area in 1854, has decreased from 56 farming households to 14 over the past 28 years.

Eleven farmers have been killed in the area, and no robberies occurred.

Kranskop in the KwaZulu/Natal midlands, is of particular interest to those who are watching South Africa's commercial farmers reel under the myriad assaults on their livelihoods which have become daily occurrences. In some instances, Kranskop farmers have simply abandoned their farms. Others committed suicide under the stress.

If those who perpetrate the theft, the intimidation and the murder have as their agenda the intention to drive farmers off their land, then they can be judged successful.

Sixty two farms in the Kranskop area have been claimed under South Africa's land claims legislation. In September 2002, a highly-charged meeting was held to try and calm the tension which had built up after a protest march the month before: a memorandum was handed to authorities which gave "all white people" one month to leave the area. Four days earlier, security guard Sibongiseni Duncan Ndimande had shot and killed 19-year-old Njabulo Bhengu in self-defence. Bhengu had been part of a group caught poaching on Manfred Surendorff's Druten Ranch.

This killing simply brought to a head the simmering edginess and anger which had been brewing for years in the area. Günther Gathmann told us a story of cattle and crop theft, intimidation, arson, murder and land invasions – his story was no different than those recounted in other parts of rural South Africa. Gathmann says land claims go "hand in hand" with intimidation.

Gathmann grew cash crops next to the road on his farm. He cannot any more. Along the six kilometers where the road runs past his farm, his crops were stolen and stripped with regularity. In one night, more than 36 thieves took away one acre of his potatoes, a crop worth R8 000. (He and the police counted the footprints of 36 people!).

Like all farmers, Gathmann cannot obtain insurance for theft. Now he grows only soya beans near the road. The thieves have not decided what they can do with these beans – yet! Whatever else he plants is stolen overnight.

One of his farms has been claimed. He and the 13 other farm claim recipients in the area are fighting the claims. They have been advised by experts that there were no blacks in their area when their forefathers arrived in the mid 1850s. And no blacks were forcibly removed from the area by the previous government. The first whites came to the area in 1824 and were given land grants by the British government, says

Gathmann. It has cost the farmers more than R100 000 in legal fees so far to contest these claims.

Taxes

Gathmann says he and his fellow farmers are being taxed “into extinction”. They pay taxes for the Joint Services Board (JSB) which, says Gathmann, provides services for blacks in town, such as sporting and other upliftment projects. The farmers see nothing for their JSB payments which are .3% of salaries and .2% of turnover.

There is also a pending municipal tax due to come into operation next year. Greytown, with around 5 000 whites, supports a mayor on a R600 000 a year salary. Farmers will soon have to contribute to this.

Gathmann says the farmers had to give details of their properties to the authorities and must pay tax on the value of their farms, whether or not the farms make any profit.

Thus farmers will be taxed as urban residents are taxed – on the value of the land and the improvements. But the land is their business, their livelihood, and if there is a drought, they must still pay, and receive nothing in return! This they see as a ruse by the government to bail out bankrupt municipalities.

There is also the water tax which, on the face of it, seems punitive. Gathmann says he has a 212 ha forest and he must pay for the rain on his forest. He is taxed on his catchment dams, whether they are full or not. This “rain” tax comes to R36 000 per annum.

South African foresters were billed for the first time by the Department of Water Affairs (DWAF) in February 2003 for the water they “used”. From April 2002, a water resource management charge was introduced to recover some water management costs, as South Africa does not have enough water.⁽¹⁾

According to DWAF, foresters need to pay because afforestation is concentrated on 10% of the land that produces 60% of the country’s water resources. (South Africa’s major metropolitan areas lose billions of litres of piped drinking water annually.

This is a direct result of “poor management and control by local authorities” according to DWAF’s director general Mike Muller.⁽²⁾ The City of Johannesburg was unable to account for 42% of the water it paid for in 2001. The difference between the amount it bought and sold at the time amounted to 165 billion litres which was “lost”.)

“And what do we get for all these taxes?” asks Gathmann. “We must pay for our own security - R3 400 per month.” After R15 000 of sugar beans were stolen last year, he advised the police but they could do nothing. A farm worker and his friends stole a complete verandah worth R25 000, on Gathmann’s property.

The employee sold the verandah, but only received a suspended sentence. He is still on the farm because Gathmann cannot get rid of him. It cost Gathmann R6 000 for the court order against the thief.

His cattle are regularly stolen, and his fencing is cut or removed. He and his fellow farmers are forced to impound the cattle from the Zulu areas which wander onto their properties. These trespassing beasts cause tremendous problems, says Edsel Hohls, vice president of the KwaZulu/Natal Agricultural Union. They carry tick-borne diseases. They are in poor condition and are not inoculated and if a dairy farmer’s

herds catch a disease, contagious abortion can occur in large numbers within the herd. After that, a farmer can “pack up and leave” according to Hohls.

Hohls himself had to leave one of his farms. He has farmed for 22 years in the region but had to leave because of safety reasons. His 150 head of cattle were continuously stolen.

What of Gathmann’s neighbours?

Recounting the conditions under which the Kranskop farmers now live is to reveal how intimidation is used to drive down the value of farms which have been claimed.

The farmer on whose farm the shooting debacle of August 2002 occurred – Manfred Surendorff – has left his farm. According to Hohls, the Surendorff farm was a very productive entity. 3 000 ha in extent, it produced high-quality beef. It has now been abandoned. Even the manager has fled. It borders the KwaZulu traditional area, and the cattle theft and intimidation drove the young man and his family out. It was a family farm – Surendorff inherited it from his father.

At one stage, foreign investors were prepared to pump millions into a tourism project on this farm. “Africa Venture” was an enterprise built around the concept of how to survive in Africa. Big companies from Durban were also interested, but the operation never got off the ground when hundreds of squatters invaded the land. Naturally the investors fled, never to return.

Another young farmer conducted a trading store on his smallholding, as well as a flourishing flower operation, using tunnels. He was relentlessly intimidated for two years – his house was ransacked and he was shot at with AK47s.

The police never managed to apprehend the perpetrators, and the young man and his family abandoned the farm.

Olifantshoek farm, 1 200 ha in extent, was a flourishing cattle farm bordering on KwaZulu. Farmer Edwin Meyer was married with small children, but he eventually committed suicide after his cattle were stolen almost every week. His fences were regularly cut and 200 families moved on to his property.

These squatters threatened to kill him, and murdered his induna. He went to the police but nobody was apprehended. His wife tried to run the farm on her own after her husband’s death but eventually gave up and left. This farm now stands abandoned, a home to squatters.

Farming in South Africa

This is what farming in South Africa has been reduced to under the present government. In a lengthy article on Kranskop in February 2003, Farmer’s Weekly quotes one Gertrude Mkize saying “All the land will be ours soon, I believe”. Indeed, this will happen if things continue as they are now. When four members of your family have been murdered, for how long is it worth while continuing?

Says Farmer’s Weekly: “Make no mistake: what is happening in this part of the aptly-named Battlefields Route is happening all over the KwaZulu/Natal midlands – from Dundee to Utrecht, the amakhosi are raising their voices to demand land, while the white farmers grow increasingly nervous.

“Even before Bhengu’s death (on Surendorff’s farm), the temperature had been rising at Kranskop. Farmers were impounding cattle that constantly wandered on to their lands and destroyed their crops. Farmers were demanding that local people ask their permission to walk across their properties, and they were insisting that police

remove hundreds of squatters from their farmlands. Security guards were rigidly enforcing the farmers' wishes – sometimes at gunpoint.”⁽³⁾

This security blitz precipitated an angry reaction from within the tribal areas and resulted in the August 2002 march and the “whites must go” demands.

To his credit, Nyanga Ngubane, KwaZulu MEC for safety and security was unequivocal: “Land invasions are illegal and what is happening in Zimbabwe will not be tolerated”. He set up a task force consisting of various government departmental representatives and farmers, but it fizzled out.

As in the case of the Dunns of northern KZN, words have no meaning unless they are followed up with concrete and sustained action, and this has not happened. The squatting, the intimidation and the violence is now worse than ever.

According to South Africa's Institute of Security Studies (ISS), 37 chieftancies surround about 200 farmers in the Greytown district, of which Kranskop forms part.⁽⁴⁾ More than half a million people live in the area in extreme poverty. Their land is completely overgrazed so they push their animals into commercial farmland. As soon as the ANC took over in 1994, land encroachment began. Claims were lodged on farms, and once it became known that a farmer was leaving, cattle and goats from traditional areas invaded his land.⁽⁵⁾

Years later, the Department of Land Affairs still had not purchased the property (this happens with regularity throughout South Africa), so the farmer decided to use the land again but found it populated by squatters.

Encroachment

Local people slowly and quietly take possession of a small part of a farm. (This pattern was repeated for example in the Dunns' properties in northern KZN.) Once the farmer retreats from this part, then the invaders advance deeper into the farm. As Mary de Haas says in her ISS paper on land invasions⁽⁶⁾, if the police do nothing, then invasions become virtually unstoppable.

As well, this midlands district has been wracked by political violence between the ANC and the IFP, and is awash with weapons.

Farmers have been impounding cattle since the early 1900s, while the Zulus retaliated by slaughtering the farmers' animals. Thus began the antagonism which has waxed and waned ever since.

In February 2003, Hohls estimated that his fellow farmers in the province abandoned at least 250 000 ha of prime commercial farmland since 1995. Today, it could be more, but nobody's calculating these days.

“Encroachment is the right word”, he says. “They put their cattle in, then they cut the fences, then they start stealing your crops, forcing you to leave your land. And then they say: ‘Oh well, there's vacant land, let's move on to it’. It's a very subtle way of stealing land”.⁽⁷⁾ In Kranskop alone over the past few years, 14 commercial farms of more than 10 000 ha have been abandoned to masses of squatters.

Hohls says that in the Underberg, Swartberg and Himeville districts, the amount of sheep being farmed has been reduced from around 200 000 to less than 5 000 today.

Farmers in KZN pay security companies R60 million a year to watch over their farms. Two years ago, stock theft amounted to R120 million a year.⁽⁸⁾ Millions of rands per annum are lost to wildlife, crop and farming equipment theft. Hohls says the government loses around R100 million a year in lost taxation as a result of besieged and abandoned farms.⁽⁹⁾

Murder

More than 7 000 people are murdered in KZN per year. The 1998 murder of farmer Friedel Redinger is linked directly to a land dispute, according to the ISS. In 1997 a chief lodged a claim on his land, and Redinger agreed to donate some land and began negotiating. In the spring of 1998, three young men stopped Redinger's bakkie on his way home. He recognized them as members of the local Community Policing Forum and got out of the vehicle.

He was shot in the back of the neck, on his knees, point blank, says his brother Walter. "It was a clear execution".⁽¹⁰⁾

The young men who killed Mr. Redinger were neither aspirant farmers nor community representatives, said ISS. "They appeared to be animated by a wild and disturbing political identity".⁽¹¹⁾ Young black men are responsible for the crime, blacks and whites agree. They are the real rulers of the tribal areas. They live outside the parameters of the law. Walter Redinger says their biggest threat is from the youth. "They have no respect for age".

Death threats are endemic. Hohls has been threatened many times. Friedel Redinger was threatened before his death. Hohls has laid several charges of intimidation with the police, but nothing has materialized. Farmer Andre Swanepoel also received threats because he tried to stop people from illegally settling on his farm.

A security company was brought in, much to the chagrin of those who used to move across farms with impunity. A security employee's killing of a poacher was the cause of the threatening march against the farmers. Farmers' attitudes have hardened, while the youth are more and more belligerent.

And once again, as in many parts of KwaZulu/Natal, a chief appears to be behind the campaign to drive the whites out, according to farmers.

Some describe Joseph Khathi as The Great Instigator and The Terror. He was heard saying at a meeting that "it is an accepted fact that the white man hates the black man", and this has incited racial tension. (The Dunns of northern Natal complain of exactly the same thing).

Although Khathi denies saying those words, he admits helping to write the memorandum calling for the removal of the whites. He has been caught poaching.

These men of the midlands live in two different worlds. Versions of history differ markedly and, it seems, never the twain will meet. It is an insoluble problem when commercial farmers (who supply the food for South Africa's 45 million people) are harassed off their farms by people who cannot even feed themselves.

There seems no logic behind the campaign of hatred against white farmers, but then what is logic if it is not culturally defined? Is Robert Mugabe logical? Is it logical to place hundreds of squatters on a productive farm, when nobody wins? Is subsistence farming logical in this day and age?

And is it logical that the SA Police Service, so desperately needed to stem crime not only in the rural areas but right throughout South Africa, should be so emasculated and overwhelmed, while money is spent on private jets and arms deals in a country not at war with an outside force?

When power is in the hands of those who encourage this destruction of the commercial farming sector by its inability or unwillingness to act, or even its passivity which condones the lawlessness, then what will happen to the beloved country?

Chapter Six

THE DUNNS OF KWAZULU/NATAL

Jonny Steinberg's book 'Midlands' - about a farm

murder in the Natal midlands - is an excellent piece of investigative journalism. It gets to the heart of the terrible schisms in the daily life of rural communities.

Steinberg waxes lyrical about Alan Paton's introductory paragraph from *Cry, the Beloved Country*: "There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Carisbrooke, and from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest valleys of Africa".

The famous American talk show host Oprah Winfrey has "discovered" South Africa. She told her audience recently what a beautiful country it was, one of her favourites. She then donated *Cry, The Beloved Country* to everyone in her audience. Clearly, she was intoxicated with Paton's expressive prose, and his eloquent descriptions of the land of the Zulus.

It is indicative of the drastic changes that have taken place in our country that Paton's widow has left South Africa – she was mugged and departed in disgust at what she called a rampant crime wave. Moreover, Paton's beloved Natal is reverting to a savage battleground of souls and bodies which Steinberg has evocatively portrayed in his book.

Of all the provinces in South Africa, KwaZulu/Natal is the most shocking in the ferocity of its antagonisms. The evil which now permeates the rural areas is pernicious and seemingly inexorable.

Land invasions, intimidation, murder, theft, arson, rape and assaults – these are the hallmarks of a province which seems to be out of control. Ms. Pat Dunn, descendant of nineteenth century British settler John Dunn (who married several Zulu wives) is a victim of just about every "gross violation of human rights" which Amnesty International defines. She told our researcher she had written to Chief Gatsha Buthelezi to complain about the behaviour of his people, where youngsters are adrift in a sea of disrespect for life and property, and where tribal warlords kill and intimidate at will, with little chance of conviction and incarceration.

His reply on 26 November 1998 expresses "distress" at the situation but he simply advises Ms. Dunn to take the matter to court. "As a descendant of King Cetshwayo who gave the land to John Dunn, I find it unacceptable that the descendants of Dunn should be robbed of their rightful inheritance".

Since 1998, of course, things only worsened.

The new South Africa has not been kind to the Dunns. Pat left South Africa in 1971 to escape apartheid. She settled again in this country in the mid nineties, and she is shocked at what she finds. She and her family have battled for over 100 years for their land, land which was given to her forefathers by the Zulu chief Cetshwayo. After 83 years, the Dunn family eventually received title to the land which was theirs by right of inheritance.

This land area, situated in a narrow coastal strip between the N2 highway and the sea, immediately to the north of the Tugela River, has historically been owned and farmed by the descendants of John Dunn and his Zulu wives. It adjoins, to its north, a

“reserve” area known as Macambini Tribal Authority, headed by a chief Inkosi Mathaba. By the early 1990s, Mathaba, an IFP strongman, was widely feared, and linked in numerous reports to widespread violence in the area which left many dead or injured. This resulted in hundreds of people fleeing their ancestral homes. Mathaba was subsequently found by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to have been among prominent provincial leaders responsible for deploying hit squads, leading to “gross violations of human rights, including killing, attempted killing, arson....” ⁽¹⁾

Under the direction of Chief Mathaba, people started moving on to the land owned by the Dunn descendants from 1993 and by the mid 1990s, the illegal invasions had gained momentum, and the occupants were building solid structures. ⁽²⁾

Local farmers – the Mangete Landowners’ Association of which Ms. Dunn is chairman - applied to the High Court for an interdict to halt the invasions. This was never finalized because Chief Mathaba lodged a land claim in terms of new legislation (Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994). Thus the interdict was put on hold until the finalisation of the land claim.

Despite the fact that the claim was weak, and was declared so by the Land Claims Court, Mathaba didn’t relinquish it, and the matter dragged on. All the while, illegal invaders continued to move on to the Dunns’ farms. (The invasions took strength after the 1994 elections). Some of these illegals had come from far away, including one family which had been displaced by the violence perpetrated by another chief further north. (Shades of history here!).

The legal property owners and their families, among them the Dunns, were subjected to murder, rape, robbery, threats, intimidation and arson. Sugar cane crops were regularly burnt, especially in the dry season. Ms. Dunn told us she had been burnt out five years in a row, and that her harvest had been well below normal. The local Community Hall, built by the farmers without government help, was destroyed by fire. Dunn appealed for police help, but nothing was done.

She has been threatened telephonically – “once they brought a coffin to a meeting which Chief Mathaba addressed and which I attended. On the side of the coffin was written ‘Pat Dunn’. The coffin was marched to the cemetery and burnt.” She continued: “We have had numerous robberies and break-ins. They came one day looking for work. They took our revolvers and took what they wanted.”

“They took my car – it was found burnt out on the highway. The second time, they killed one dog and poisoned the other one. Four armed men shot my husband and they beat me so badly they broke three vertebrae. I think they were sent by Mathaba. It’s back to the jungle here. I have lost all respect for the Zulus”.

The police were called in, but nothing materialized.. (This phrase was repeated to our researchers right throughout South Africa). “The police go through the motions”, says Ms. Dunn.

The youngsters commit the crimes and they are fed the story that the Dunns stole their land by the older chiefs. It’s a distorted view of history, says an angry Ms. Dunn. Mathaba is the epitome of evil.

(In March 2001, it was reported that the N2 highway was built through his tribal lands. Despite the fact that he already had 30 000 ha of land, he told the roads department he had nowhere to settle the families who had lost their land to the road.. The department then bought four of the Dunn farms to resettle those displaced by the road. Instead, Mathaba settled his family on the farms and claimed that he personally paid for them!) ⁽³⁾

The Dunns don’t know how many squatters are on their land. “They occupy any land that has not been planted”, declares Ms. Dunn. “We found it hard at the

beginning to raise funds. We struggled. We were not white enough for the previous government, and now we're not black enough for this one. We are treated with contempt. Tongaat Hulett (the big sugar company) withdrew their assistance and we were left high and dry. We were burnt out relentlessly."

The Year 2000

Press articles from the year 2000 reported that farmers were abandoning land. At the time Agriculture MEC Narend Singh said "it is an increasingly serious problem, with valuable agricultural land being used for accommodation".⁽⁴⁾ He suggested that an audit be conducted to determine the extent of what he called 'unauthorised occupation' on state-owned and privately-owned property country-wide.⁽⁵⁾ (We heard no more of the audit!) Police spokesman Captain Vishnu Naidoo also said at the time the farmers' allegations would be investigated.⁽⁶⁾ Farmers have heard nothing further about such an investigation.

Further comments along the same lines as the above were made in June 2001 by Chief Buthelezi ("The KwaZulu government will not allow a precedent for Zimbabwe-style land invasions in the province"), King Goodwill Zwelethini (he called a meeting attended by 2000 "to deal with the growing crisis"), and Provincial Safety and Security MEC Nyanga Ngubane ("government will leave no stone unturned to bring the 'barbarians' – the invaders – to book").⁽⁷⁾

This type of behaviour has become a hallmark of the present government. Promises to "look into the matter", to "come back to" the complainants, to appoint a "commission of enquiry", to "address the problem" are made, but nothing happens. In most cases, the situations actually worsen. Derisory laughter greets official promises now, laughter from all shades of the population. One sees the trend after a few years. Just examine the press clippings of yesteryear!

Pat Dunn believes that this type of inactivity actually supports land grabs.⁽⁸⁾

During 2000/1, farmers told of problems plaguing the area near the Nonoti River "but would not give their names for fear of reprisals", according to press reports. A farmer's wife said a gang had brazenly stolen her vegetable crops. "There was nothing we could do. Even the armed guards which made farming uneconomical, were helpless as groups just took our crops". Farm labourers, who feared for their lives, would not come to her assistance.

South Africa's Afghanistan

Zulu chief Michael Umbogazi was reported at the time as subletting farm land (which did not belong to him) to squatters for R30 a month. This practice has worsened. In today's KwaZulu/Natal, it is a common practice, but the price has gone up to R1 500 a plot. The national government is clearly powerless to do anything, and the provincial government even less so. The power is in the hands of the warlords. We have another Afghanistan in South Africa's midst.

Today, invasions threaten the whole province. A similar situation to Mangete occurs in Nqabeni on the south coast of KZN where affected farmers are coloureds.⁽⁹⁾ The local chief is allegedly involved in these invasions, and he reputedly has close links with the notorious Mathaba.

In Nonoti, an area south of the Tugela River, it has been small scale Indian market and sugar cane farmers who have been affected to the extent of having been driven off their land by invaders and, as in both Mangete and Nqabeni, there are

allegations that their land has been ‘sold’ by whoever has orchestrated these actions.⁽¹⁰⁾

In the Verulam area near Durban, Indian market gardeners have been targeted by violence, the most recent example being the cold-blooded murder of a married couple in the presence of one of their children.

Other areas where encroachment and invasions are occurring are Kranskop and Vryheid. (See the stories on these areas).

Papers were served on Mathaba by the Mangete Landowners’ Association after his land claim was “settled”. As the judge was moving towards finalizing the interdict against him, Mathaba appeared in court and declared he would oppose the matter. The case is to be heard in the High Court in February 2004.

According to South Africa’s Institute for Security Studies, there are two crucial factors which have allowed those engaged in the illegal occupation of land, including organizers, to operate with impunity: the failure of the SA Police Service to take constructive action to stop them, and the permissive response of the Department of Land Affairs towards such behaviour.⁽¹¹⁾

Legislation is very clear that the invasion of land which is subject to a claim is illegal. Yet a blind eye is turned to Mangete and other areas in the province. There is bias towards the land claimants, and the suffering farmers are on the defensive. They are not constitutionally protected. Says Pat Dunn: “I thought we had a constitution which is supposed to protect property owners.”

There is simply no law and order. The government is not upholding the laws of the land, and the police are not protecting those who should expect protection. It will be necessary to force the state to protect constitutionally-enshrined human rights. But who’s going to pay to force the government to do its job? Therein lies the conundrum for KwaZulu/Natal farmers.

Chapter Seven

LEVUBU, LIMPOPO PROVINCE

This is the finest farmland in the world. We heard this

phrase more than once as we moved about Levubu, south of the old Venda homeland in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Perhaps it is not true, but it should be true.

The Soutpansberg (salt pan mountains) take their name from a powerful brine spring which surfaces on the western end of the range. Though not a large range – just over 130 kilometres from west to east – it is richly forested. Though the surrounding region receives little rain, the mountains themselves have an annual rainfall of nearly 2 000 mm in places, the best rainfall in South Africa. (The world average for good farming is 850 mm, which is the average rainfall for the commercial farms in the Levubu valley). A section of the Rozvi-Karanga people of Zimbabwe reached the area around the beginning of the 18th century, discovered its fertility and named it Venda (the pleasant place).

These people settled along the summit ridge of the range and are the ancestors of today's Venda people. The soil was deep and plentiful and there was also a lake, the Fundudzi Lake.⁽¹⁾

The area attracted European farmers, the first of which was Coenraad Buys who arrived in the region and made contact with the Venda in 1832. He was a wanderer and walked away from a campfire one night, never to be heard of again.

In 1836 Voortrekker leader Louis Trichardt set up his large family and cattle compound in the area, and in 1847 another Voortrekker group led by Hendrik Potgieter established a town in the area called Zoutpansbergdorp. He was followed by another Boer leader Stephanus Schoeman in 1852, who named the town Schoemansdal. In 1867 it was largely destroyed by the Venda chief Makhado. It was not until 1898 that the old Transvaal government established authority again, but the Venda people are still located in the highlands on the eastern side of the Soutpansberg. Schoemansdal was deserted and in 1899, a new town developed around 20km away called Louis Trichardt. It became part of the old Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek van Transvaal (ZAR).⁽²⁾

Such is the history of South Africa, the waxing and waning of power between groups. In 2002, the town of Louis Trichardt was renamed Makhado by the present South African government.

The roller-coaster political history of this beautiful part of South Africa does not alter the fact that white commercial farmers have created one of the world's most productive agricultural gems. The first white farmer settled in the Levubu Valley in 1871.

Under a newly-created government irrigation scheme, commercial farmers were invited to settle in the valley in the 1930s, and approximately 250 commercial farmers now farm there: their properties are conservatively estimated to be worth around R700 million because of the high level of crop output.

This is the hub of South Africa's sub-tropical production which includes bananas, avocados, citrus, guavas, litchis, papayas and macadamia nuts.

The macadamia and avocado crops alone earn at least R200 million per year, while the total crop is worth R500 million a year.

State-of-the-art irrigation systems pump water from the Levubu and Lotonyanda Rivers, and water is also supplied by canals from the Albasini Dam and the two rivers. This area and the nearby Letsitele valley are the two highest agricultural money earners in Limpopo province.

In the early eighties, the previous government invested heavily in agricultural and social development in the Venda homeland. The 1986/7 annual report of the Agricultural Corporation of Venda (AgriVen)⁽³⁾ reveals the wide parameters of development projects: irrigation schemes and dams were a priority, as was agricultural training for the Venda people. Financial and technical assistance was also provided.

The Sub-Tropical Crops Department's developed an efficient, profitable subtropical fruit industry in the area, and high quality plant material was supplied. Extension services were also provided, with packing facilities constructed for local and overseas markets.

Progress reports on important schemes were included in the annual report - the Barotta Fruit Farm was flourishing - avocados, bananas, guavas and macadamias had been planted and were already well into production. The microjet irrigation system constructed for the fruit farm, and the modern packhouses with ripening and cold rooms, were functioning efficiently.

The Tsianda Fruit Farm, the Matumba Nursery (where fruit and citrus trees were propagated) and the Folovhodwe Nursery with vegetable seedlings and drip irrigation all flourished.

The agronomy schemes were especially ambitious, the purpose being to establish crops most suited to the agricultural conditions of Venda, crops which had commercial potential. Despite drought conditions, tomato, cotton, watermelons, pumpkins and musk melons were harvested, although transport costs were highlighted as a problem. Sisal, grapes, peaches and figs were planted, as was maize and tobacco.

Animal husbandry was a feature of AgriVen's emphasis on future agricultural sustainability. The Venda Livestock Board was created to promote the marketing of livestock by organizing sales and auctions throughout Venda. Two million rands worth of stock was sold during the period under review, while the Mannamead stock farms were developed, and fencing and water pipelines were installed. Dairies were developed and production remained "at a high level" throughout the year, said the AgriVen report. All fodder used for the dairies was self-produced.

Artificial insemination was practiced with good results and the calving percentage for the year under review averaged out at 82%, an exceptional figure.

Assistance

Production assistance in the form of credit was created by granting long-term and revolving credit loans. Mechanical services such as tractors and implements were supplied at reasonable rentals to assist Venda farmers to plant, while extension services consisted of a "highly competent team of officers whose task it is to train farmers in modern methods of production". At the end of 1986, sixteen experienced extension officers were serving the Venda agricultural community.

Food plot schemes (the Vuwani Rural Development Project was one) were instituted, and engineering services were supplied to Venda farmers. Some examples of the latter included sprinkler irrigation systems and road construction at Tshikonelo, Tshaulu and Crystalfontein. Pump stations were constructed on the Levubu and Mutale Rivers.

The list of engineering projects is endless – stores and office complexes, portable water systems, houses and tobacco curing sheds, flood irrigation systems for planting rice, plus a central water reticulation system to deliver drinking water to cattle on 4 700 ha at Mannamead.

Micro-irrigation systems for grapes and sisal plantations were created, and a meat market was constructed..

Altogether there were hundreds of projects launched, while planning and development of further schemes was undertaken. Existing projects were evaluated, future projects were investigated, while the training and development of farmers entailed the creation of the Nwanedi, the Tshimbupfe, the Dzindi and the Mutale/Malonga projects to assist black farmers to move into a successful commercial farming environment in a controlled manner.

AgriVen marketed the production of Venda farmers – a fresh produce market was constructed, while market surveys were completed to assist black farmers to assess what to plant and where to sell their produce.

An Agricultural Training Centre was opened on 27 August 1986 where the management of farms was taught. Training course seminars were held.

What happened to all of these projects?

According to Mr. Nelson Radzilani (not his real name), all of these projects which flourished during the period under AgriVen control virtually collapsed when the ANC government came to power and re-incorporated the homeland into South Africa.

This Venda-born agriculturalist told us some of the projects were privatized, some are being run by white agricultural consultants on yearly contracts, but most of them are no more. Rice, coffee and jojoba beans are no longer grown. A date plantation is moribund, as is a black pepper project.

AgriVen's showpiece Barotta Fruit Farm is now being run by consultants, and is under a land claim. It had all but collapsed. The recovery of macadamia nuts delivered to one of the three processing plants was 10% compared to the average of 22% from commercial farmers. Seven years of mismanagement under the new government precipitated the invitation to the consultants. They do not deny or confirm that irrigation pipes for banana plantations on the farm had not been backwashed since 1997. Down the road the multi-million rand Tshakhuma Store where AgriVen produce used to be stored before delivery to the market stands empty. Houses have been built on the ground and it is now a squatter camp. The Tsianda Fruit Farm is now not making any money. We traveled through the property - it is a beautiful farm, with good dams and a strong river running through it. But its sheds are empty and broken, and there is no farming activity. Tractors need repairing. It is a caretaker-run operation.

Elsewhere, the AgriVen nurseries have been privatized, and the Nwanedi project only produces tomatoes. The sisal plantations are neglected, feedlots and dairies have been closed, and most extension officers have been retrenched.

The bottom line, according to Venda agriculturalist Nelson Radzilani - who used to work with AgriVen and now works for the present government - is that the current administration cut the AgriVen budgets and retrenched the experienced employees. .

Levubu's Commercial Farmers

In contrast to the moribund condition now existing in AgriVen's aftermath, the area's commercial farmers flourish in one of the world's most productive valleys, South Africa's own Garden of Eden. R250 million worth of foreign exchange is earned every year from the Levubu Valley's agricultural production, and the area employs 10 000 workers. With five dependants each, more than 50 000 people rely upon the sustainability of the valley.

But land claims have targeted 50 000 hectares of this productive farmland, and the insecurity, racial tension and lawlessness which has occurred since these claims were gazetted has added an ominous dimension to the future of the valley.

On September 27 2003, Levubu farmer Piet de Jager (65) was gunned down in front of his house, within earshot of his wife and two grandchildren. As he stumbled towards his front door, wounded and trying to warn his wife, she managed to lock the doors and press the panic button. His is not the first farm murder in the area. While de Jager's son tried to revive his father with mouth to mouth resuscitation, the police stood around asking him for a statement. He suggested to them they close off farm roads to catch the killers, but they simply walked away.

This killing sent a shock wave through the community. In 2003, seven farmers in the area were murdered, while crime increased 400% in one year. To her credit, the MEC for Safety and Security Ms. Dikaledi Magadzi quickly ordered the removal of the officer commanding the local police station.

But the de Jager killing only exacerbated the tension which has built up over the government's land reform policy, and the announcement that government land expropriations are on their way. Years and years of peaceful relationships between white and black in the area have been sullied by the new government's land policy.

During a DLA meeting that I attended where I represented some 127 title owners whose farms were claimed, government officials made statements in the presence of many local residents (owners and claimants) that whites stole the land from blacks now claiming, and therefore basically whites had no rights in the first place. Many Vendas themselves are unhappy with developments, and insecurity has set in. Jobs are at stake.



A tale of two worlds: on the left, an overgrazed, eroded "restitution area" in Levubu, and on the right, a commercial farm still in its White owner's hands. The demarcation line between the properties is clearly marked out by the vegetation.

Given the evidence of what happened to the AgriVen projects under the new administration, Levubu farmers are naturally apprehensive about having their land taken from them. During a church service the day after the de Jager shooting, Reverend Petrus Kriel pleaded with the government to leave commercial farmers alone. "Only 5% of South Africa has good quality agricultural land, and each hectare in Levubu is part of that 5%. If Levubu is simply given away, the whole area will be a squatters camp in five years. The end of Levubu will be the end of subtropical agricultural farming in South Africa", declared Reverend Kriel.⁽⁴⁾

As it is now, up to 10% of the annual production of macadamia nuts, bananas, pecans, guavas, litchis, papayas and citrus is stolen. “They just arrive in empty bakkies, fill them up with bananas, pineapples or macadamias, and drive off”, declared Reverend Kriel.⁽⁵⁾ More than 300 complaints have been laid with the police over the past three years, says Herman de Jager, Piet de Jager’s son. They have fallen on deaf ears.⁽⁶⁾ In many cases, the telephone at the police station goes unanswered. More than half of the 80 or so policemen at the station only speak Venda.

“Venda is being stolen blind” says Dr. Henry Numdzivhadi, a Venda historian.⁽⁷⁾ He says it is not only the commercial farmers who are plundered. Venda farmers are also fed up and frustrated. An old Venda lady selling food at the side of the road was killed with a stone for R15, recounts Dr. Numdzivhadi. “Nobody knows if her murderers have been brought to justice”. He also complains bitterly about the police who do not follow up on complaints.

Numdzivhadi declared that the “previously strong government structures have disintegrated, resulting in a breakdown in discipline”. One farmer who retired to Levubu says the agricultural ground is valuable in monetary terms, but in reality it is worthless. The land claims Sword of Damocles has rendered it so.

A current valuation list shows one particular avocado farm at R60 000 per ha, and a macadamia farm at R83 000 per ha. “But these are figures on paper”, says the retired farmer.⁽⁸⁾ Over the past two years, there was no willing buyer, willing seller transaction in the area.

A banking group had to virtually give a farm away, he says, otherwise it would have been plundered. People now rent the farm from the new owner. “Empty farms and houses are simply ransacked”, he declared.

This situation has caused a division within the farming community. Some are prepared to go into an agreement with the government and sell their ground, while others say they will never give up under pressure.

No Different

The situation in Levubu is no different than in other areas of South Africa – poor policing, stock and crop theft, personal intimidation, threats to take land. At one meeting between Levubu land claimants and farmers, the latter were told by a claimant that they should just hand over their title deeds to the claimants “and then you can work for us”.

Indeed, this seems to be the new trend in claimants’ thinking, most of whom don’t want to farm and cannot farm commercially. Farmers must run the operation while the “owners” rake off a good portion of the profits. In some circles this is called mentoring, or “joint ventures” or the latest idea “lease-back”, where the farm is handed over to claimants and leased back to the original farmer who must now hand over a percentage of his profit to people who have had no input into the farm’s productivity or profitability.

It can be guaranteed that the new “owners” will not recapitalise the farm when it becomes necessary, and nor will the manager or the workers. Thus, the farm will be bled to death.

Assurances have been given by Mr. Mashile Mokono, land claims commissioner in Limpopo that production must not be disturbed due to land transfers.⁽⁹⁾

The Land Claims Commission is at present busy with some of the farmers – those who want to negotiate – to find a way to satisfy everyone. The plan seems to be

a more polite version of what was said at the claimants/farmers meeting mentioned above. We'll take the title deed, and you do the work.

Thus the claimants become a sort of landowners' class, doing nothing and sharing the profits with the managers and workers. This arrangement will not suit many farmers who want the full profit for all their work, initiative, skill and heartache. And the landowner class will become people on welfare, paid not by the taxpayers but by a hard-working farm manager.

The Future

One must compare AgriVen's ambitious development and results with what happened when the new South African government took over, incorporated the area into mainstream South Africa, retrenched the experienced AgriVen staff and crimped the budget. Instead of maintaining and building upon something that was already there, they allowed it to crumble and decay. So what are Levubu farmers to think when they look at government land reform policy?

And what must South Africa's taxpayers think when they see the wastage and the decay and the results of land handovers in the rest of South Africa?

Some productive farms in parts of Mpumalanga or North West Province are worth at most R1 500 a ha, but they are nonetheless productive and provide a fair living for their owners who nurture them 24 hours a day.

So much more damage is done to South Africa when land worth R100 000 per ha is turned over to people who cannot farm, where no impact study has been completed, and where operating capital soon runs out. Is Levubu to become yet another South African squatter camp?

Despite the assurances from the Department of Land Affairs that this will not happen in Levubu, it has happened all around South Africa. Examples can be quoted where the handing over ceremonies were replete with guarantees that the recipients would cherish what they had been given for virtually nothing.

Yet except where there has been outside help, or mentoring, not one instance of a successful land handover can be found in South Africa. Why should Levubu be any different?

The farming of such vast fruit and tea estates is extremely labour-intensive and requires many years of experience of local conditions, plus much marketing and management expertise. Years of professional agricultural training is an absolute requirement for anyone managing such land holdings.⁽¹⁰⁾

Farming is remorseless. In the early 1970s Bertie le Roux was one of the pioneers in macadamia nut farming. Macadamias put Levubu on the map. South Africa is now the third largest macadamia producer in the world, after Australia and Hawaii.⁽¹¹⁾

"Our success is due to hard work, diligence, discipline and a lot of planning and risk taking. When we started with macadamias, many mistakes were made because we had no knowledge of the product or the market", declares le Roux. These farms are really smallholdings – around 40ha to 50ha. But when each hectare can produce a gross income of between R35 000 and R70 000 a year with bananas or macadamias, then the value of the land is obvious.

Has the government the money to pay market prices for these farms? The government's total budget for land restitution for 2002 was R701 million, so how can a small farming community occupying only around 30 000 ha lay claim to half of the total nation budget for land redistribution?⁽¹²⁾

A Modern “Betterment” Clause

When the old Department of Land Affairs (DLA) allotted land to white farmers in the early forties in the valley, farming equipment was provided on a loan basis.

Conditions were set down on how to farm economically and seeds, fertilizer and pesticides were also provided on a loan basis. Progress was monitored by agricultural extension officers, and the harvest had to be delivered to the DLA. Each farmer received 50% of the income, while 25% was returned to the state in repayment of the loans, and 25% was kept in trust. A probationary period of four years was allowed, and those who failed were replaced.

(This is how the current DLA should be interacting with the emerging farmers it places on productive land. In the current situation, all the new owners have to do is maintain the already high standard and if they do not, they are not held to account.)



Rusted equipment in a state of disrepair – near the Tshiombo Irrigation Scheme.

Farmer Stephen Hoffman, vice chairman of the Levubu Valley Farmers’ Association, took us to the Tshiombo Irrigation Scheme, set up by the previous government under its homeland development scheme.

The valley is so fertile that mango trees grow up to 30 m high. Irrigation is fed by perennial canals from the Mutale River.

We talked to elderly Jansen Mudau who farms cash crops in the valley. One of his mango trees produces 250 kg of mangoes a year. But he is apprehensive of thieves. Hoffman says the valley is completely underutilized.

“It is now only producing for subsistence consumption, mostly maize and sweet potato., There is now serious erosion, and farming is only at 5% of its potential”, declares Hoffman. “Proper farming here could earn at least R40 000 per ha per annum. It’s doing only around R5 000 per ha now.”

We visited the nearby DLA machinery depot where ploughing services, fertilizer and diesel had been supplied. There had also been a seedlings nursery.

The place was in a dilapidated state, with broken and rusted tractors and ploughs standing around.

A complete weather station was now inactive, and in the office, old government forms were swept around by gusts of wind.

Other Good Land

Why do the chiefs want to take the productive farms of Levubu when there is so much other good land, queries Hoffman. “We made a success of farming through hard work. Nobody gave us anything on a plate. All Venda land is tribal land. The tribal chiefs are demanding the commercial farmers’ land. The government doesn’t go to auctions to see what’s for sale. They don’t contact estate agents in the area for the same reason.”

The black farmers in the area only farm cash crops. This is where their expertise ends. Hoffman says fruit trees would grow exceptionally well in the area, and the top soil is at least three meters deep.

The Tshiombo Irrigation Scheme was well planned, says Hoffman. But already some irrigation pipes and sluices have been broken. Irrigation thus cannot function properly, even though it is gravity irrigation. Residents in nearby houses must carry water themselves from the canals because they have not installed pipes to their homes.

Like farmers throughout South Africa, Hoffman and his compatriots are quite prepared to help emerging farmers succeed on their own land.

He cannot agree however with the taking of already productive farms and giving it to people who, from what they see around them, cannot farm in the sophisticated manner needed to produce the export crops now grown in the area.

A report released in December 2001 by the Department of Land Affairs states that 45% of all land in Limpopo belongs to the State.⁽¹³⁾ This constitutes a total of well over 5 million hectares. Very little of this land has been transferred to developing farmers.

Yet government is very silent on this aspect. I questioned this in December 2001. The Department of Land Affairs advised me in August 2002 that the matter was receiving attention. To date I have heard nothing from the department.

Due to the farming practices in South Africa’s traditional areas – gross over-grazing and over-occupation, poor land management such as slash-and-burn land-clearing – South Africa’s agricultural soil has suffered a great deal of physical degradation over the past thirty years.

Massive soil erosion now affects at least 6,1 million ha of cultivated soil in the once fertile valleys of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu/Natal regions, for instance.

The Claimants

Bertie le Roux (72) arrived in Levubu with his parents in 1940, at the age of nine. Malaria was rife in the area, and there were hardly any roads. Le Roux says there were very few black people there at the time.

They lived up in the mountains to keep away from the malaria in the valley, he said. “We had to get labourers from the Kruger National Park area, most of them Malawians and Mozambicans.”⁽¹⁴⁾

The land claims chart shown to our researchers indicates that a total number of 33 tribes or groups are claiming 15 farms, including Bertie le Roux’s. Some of the claims overlap.

Anthropologists were instructed by a number of affected landowners to investigate the veracity of the Ravele claim. During the investigations, a letter dated 21 October 1996 was uncovered from a Department of Land Affairs ethnology consultant discussing the Ravele tribe’s land claim on certain farms. The Ravele tribe is one of the 33 land claimants in the area.

The history of the Ravele people (of Venda stock) has not been recorded in any detail, says the consultant's letter. As is the case of the Letsitele removals, some of the Ravele people were removed for environmental purposes in 1938. The Raveles were resettled on irrigation and dry land allotments.

"They therefore were not the victims of the 1936 land act but greatly benefited from the application of its provisions".

In any event, title deeds show that large tracts of Levubu land was privately owned by whites as early as 1871.

The Raveles declare in their land claim application that "they have lost their self-determination". They however overlook the fact "that the measure of self-determination which they enjoyed before the war of 1898 (the Mphaphu war) was restored to them in 1938 when they were resettled in terms of the 1936 Land Act."⁽¹⁵⁾ It was on the basis of the anthropological study conducted for the land claim farmers that they have decided to fight the claim in court. They say the Ravele's were give 2 ha for every one ha they were renting (the land did not belong to them). The case is still pending.

Many land claims throughout the country have been based on either hearsay or flimsy, untested evidence. The onus has been on the farmer to investigate these claims, in most instances at great expense. In 2001, the former Transvaal Agricultural Union (now TAU-SA) brought an action against the Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs in the Land Claims Court complaining about the lack of adherence to Section 2 of the Restitution of Land Rights Act No. 22 of 1994 which contains the legal requirements for the entitlement to restitution of a right in land.

The founding affidavit complains about the paucity of detail of farm subdivisions detailed by claimants, how vast tracts of land have been claimed without supporting documents, how the Act has been misinterpreted, and who was actually claiming what in group tribal claims against groups of farmers.⁽¹⁶⁾

In effect, the TAU-SA, representing more than 6 000 farmers, sought a ruling that the state should not expropriate land that is not the subject of a (validated) restitution claim. The TAU-SA also wanted more participation in the investigation of land claims and to be informed of a land claim on a farm before its details were published in the Government Gazette.

Although the TAU-SA lost the case on a technical point (the Land Claims Court said the TAU-SA could not act on behalf of various farmers, that they should institute their own complaints action - this is currently the subject of an appeal), the basic premise contained in the founding affidavit is at the very heart of the slipshod manner in which land claims are made throughout South Africa, and the inaccuracies and even untruths which are contained in many claim forms. (The Botshabelo case is a good example of this. To this day, the LCC in Mpumalanga has been unable to provide the public with the I/D numbers and addresses of the hundreds of claimants of this historical site.)

It is averred that this is why the land expropriation legislation was introduced in 2003 – the government does not have the resources or the expertise to sort out the thousands of land claims, some of which have been made willy nilly by people who have no basis in social history to justify their claims.

In other cases, NGOs have stepped in and urged communities to claim without conducting thorough investigations into the veracity of the claims. The Department of Land Affairs financially supports some of these so-called independent organizations, because "land for the landless" is a very attractive clarion cry to gain political support.

Venda communal land is high potential farmland. There is access to perennial streams and the annual rainfall is higher than in Levubu's commercial farming sector. Surely the government should utilize this land for emerging farmers, and leave alone those who successfully produce food for the whole of South Africa.

Chapter Eight

MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

Of all the provinces, Mpumalanga on the eastern side of South Africa, is the subject of the greatest number of land claims. Since 1994, it has become a place of friction and antagonism, perhaps exacerbated by an earlier struggle for land than in other areas of the country.

One particular land claim caught the attention of the world – the farm Boomplaats belonging to Mr. Willem Pretorius. This farmer refused to accept the price offered by the government and lengthy legal manoeuvring ensued.

On 17 March 2001 the London Daily Telegraph said that “a white farmer became the first to have his land expropriated by the South African government yesterday as part of its attempt to return land stolen from black communities under the apartheid regime.”

“Amid a climate of death threats and intimidation against other white farmers, Willem Pretorius, 50, likened the seizure of his 3 100 acre property in Mpumalanga to the farm invasions in neighbouring Zimbabwe”.

The article continued: “there is still vast land ownership inequality in South Africa with 80% of top quality agricultural land owned by whites, who make up only 13% of the population”. (Naturally there’s not a word about who turned the fallow, uncultivated soil into the “top quality” land it is today!). Overseas television networks joined in the fray.

Mr. Pretorius’ neighbour who occupied the other half of the large farm, agreed to accept compensation after receiving death threats and suffering acts of vandalism.

This 80-year-old farmer accepted a lower-than-market price – he said it was 50% under-valued – just to get out. His property was to be occupied by the new owners numbering 600 families, and he handed over the keys to his farm in April 2001. Mr. Pretorius held out. He said he bought his farm from the state more than 20 years ago when it was “a piece of veld”, and that he had built the farm up from nothing. He eventually sold the farm for R1,2 million, although dissatisfied with the price. (A valuer set the value of the farm at R2,1 million, while another put it at R1,5 million.)

During the argument about the price between Pretorius and the government, media coverage was unstinting. It was indeed a landmark case. The government asserted that because Mr. Pretorius had received various subsidies from the state during the early years, he could not now claim a market price. He left the farm in December 2001 and bought another farm for the same price, but half the size as Boomplaats.

However, the Transvaal Agricultural Union (who backed Mr. Pretorius’ stand) declared that subsidies had been given to many people in society, including students, organizations, and so forth, and utilizing this logic, then they should all be thus penalized!

The farm of 1 276 ha ran 300 head of beef cattle and was a top maize producer in the region. The property had plenty of water from a river “which never ran dry in 22 years” according to Mr. Pretorius.

After the world media publicity about those who had been forcibly removed, and the stealing of land by whites, what eventually transpired at Boomplaats?

Presently no farming takes place at Boomplaats. The cattle have disappeared and parts of the farm are being hired out for grazing.

The Pig Farm

One of the more scandalous examples of skewed land reform was the transfer of a 2 750 ha pig farm for which the government paid R5 million some years ago. This property consisted of one of the country's most modern piggeries where 2 400 pigs were sustained by state-of-the-art feeding equipment. The farm was highly profitable, with ample water, fertile ground and modern sheep and cattle feeding pens. Former president Nelson Mandela arrived in a helicopter to preside over the handover ceremonies. He said the farm would be "the bread basket of the community". The farm was handed over to the stewardship of a tribal chief.

Within a short time, the farm was in total disarray. Squatters from the neighbouring township (where the same chief was something of a warlord) moved in and their cattle grazed at will. The sheep and cattle pens fell into disrepair, *while the remaining 500 pigs were in such a state of starvation they had begun to eat each other.* (Italics ours). A local farmer was called in and he bought the pigs on the spot. The chief pocketed the cash.

In November 2001 I wrote to the Minister of Land Affairs about this and other failures of land reform. I received an acknowledgement of my letter but no indication was given that my complaints and reports would be acted upon.

Given the present state of this farm, the minister did not act upon my information. The people on the farm currently owe R2 million to the Land Bank, we are told and, as with so many other similar cases, nothing much is happening on this farm. It is more or less a squatter camp, says the previous owner who looks in on the mess occasionally.

The Kangwane Story

Mr. Danie Theron (a nom de plume) owned three farms next to the old Kangwane homeland. They were simply invaded by people who settled on his farms and would not move. He offered the government a deal to build houses on the farms as a residential project, but could not remove them from the farms in order to get the house-building started. These invasions occurred in 1996 and were reported on in the local press. Various authorities were brought in to try and remove the people, to no avail.

The police tried to evict them but were threatened. So were security personnel from the local council. At the time, one of the councilors told the press that "it will need the army to move these people because they do not want to listen to the government, the police or the local ANC".

An official of the provincial Land and Housing Department visited the area but was threatened with shovels, and never came back again. Housing MEC Craig Padayachee tried to talk to the squatters, but matters became heated and he retreated.

The invaders were thus completely above the law. They are still there, and the farm owner is still waiting for some cash from the government for his land which has been in essence stolen from under his nose.

His 250 ha farm grew tobacco and oranges – he bought the farm on the open market in 1976. (He told us he was attracted to the bucolic life associated with farming!) His turnover was approximately R2 million per annum.

Unfortunately, his proximity to the Kangwane homeland sealed his fate. During the homeland period of the old National Party government, white farms were purchased to consolidate the homeland, and they soon became squatter camps.

Mr. Theron's problems started with the theft of irrigation equipment. They stole R1 000 worth of draglines every night.

He gave his workers guns to defend his equipment but even the staff were intimidated and the weapons were stolen. In 1992 he gave up and rented his farm to an indigent Zimbabwean farmer. Eventually debt forced this farmer to give up and he left.

Wakkerstroom

A Wakkerstroom farmer sold a 370 ha piece of his farm for R270 000 to the Department of Land Affairs. Today the new "owners" steal from him because they cannot farm. They were given no working capital, and the ground has descended into a subsistence operation with a few mangy cattle and the odd mealie patch.



The extent of the land claims in the Mpumalanga province is evident from this map which shows the location of the claims as squares: the majority of the land in the province is set for 'redistribution'.

Season 25

Michelle Burns of the consultancy Season 25 is at the end of her tether. She has 465 land applicant clients and has already invested R330,000 of her own money as a service provider putting claimants in touch with commercial farm sellers. This is the theory. In practice, the administration of the Department of Land Affairs' (DLA) Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) programme is a shambles. There appears to be no money for farms in this particular area of the country.

Black purchasers and commercial farmer sellers agreed on a deal concerning the farm Blaauwpoort, a 461 ha property with 125 milk cows. According to one of the owners of the farm, documentation was completed in March 2002 and handed in to the Land Bank. Since then nothing has happened with the transaction.

LRAD was supposed to be a keynote element in the DLA's land reform program, and is to be an important vehicle which the government will use to reach its 30% commercial farmland transfer to black farmers by the year 2015. Now it has ground to a halt in Mpumalanga.

Despite the large number of land restitution claims in the province, only R50 million has been budgeted for the 2002/2003 book year.

In May 2003, the Land Bank confirmed that it had approved 1 900 applications which would involve an amount of R476 million loan capital.

Season 25 is caught in the middle. It cannot move forward because there is no money, and both the government and the Land Bank do not communicate satisfactorily with the organization. Season 25's Ms. Burns has been waiting for three years for some of her projects to be settled. She has fifteen projects "in limbo", she says.

Everything is in an administrative muddle, it appears. The Land Bank is over-committed R75 million on its budget this year in this area, we are told.

According to a report at the time, agricultural production on the farms which were offered and approved (but not paid for) is dropping because the farmers believed their money would be paid quickly.

They thus did not inject further capital into the farms, and cannot make improvements according to the DLA's own regulations regarding the conditions surrounding land claims.

Mr. Boetie du Toit, co-owner of the tobacco and crop Blaauwpoort farm, has lost R2,6 million in turnover because of this.⁽¹⁾ "I was told to stop farming after people showed interest in buying the farm and the department (of Land Affairs) promised to sort out payments within a few weeks. That was two years ago", said Mr. du Toit in May, 2003.

DLA Minister Ms. Thoko Didiza is on record as saying her LRAD policy would create a class of black agricultural entrepreneurs, boost the economy and food security in impoverished areas. However, she blames high farm prices as one of the reasons for the failure of LRAD in some areas of the country. Clearly, there is no money to back up her promises.

The Hall Deal

A very smart press release was issued by Mr. Rob Sneddon of the H L Hall & Sons group in Nelspruit in June, 2003. His company transferred 6 000ha of productive land to 1 100 members of the Mdluli clan on a lease-back deal. Also included in this deal were 4 100 legal occupiers of the company's properties in Mpumalanga.

These "legal occupiers" are in fact employees, and this latter group have become owners of their employer's property courtesy of the South African taxpayer.

They cannot be classified as restitution claimants within the legal parameters of the land reform legislation, and it is a question why the Department of Land Affairs could find R63 million for this transaction involving employees of a company when they do not have money for the 27 genuine land claimants mentioned in the Blaauwpoort farm deal above. While the Mdluli clan (and the workers) have title to the land, they will be paid a certain figure per year for the period of the lease (which is not mentioned in the press release). Given that there are still 5 000 land claims to be settled in Mpumalanga, Chris Williams director of the Rural Action Committee says this is a "huge settlement" which will set a precedent others cannot follow.

Indeed! This must be one of the most expensive land claims in South Africa. We telephoned Mr. Sneddon and asked what else the recipients received for the R63 million other than their lease rental payments from Hall & Sons each year and title to the land which they have now leased? The deal is certainly win-win, as Mr. Sneddon says – win-win for him but hardly win-win for the taxpayers who have forked out a

large amount to satisfy 4 200 of Mr. Sneddon's employees who by no stretch of the imagination can be classified as land claimants.

After some testy replies, Mr. Sneddon told our researcher she was "getting up his nose". But as taxpayers, we have every right to know the ins and outs of this deal which, as we said, is one of the most costly land claims transactions since the land reform program came into being.

The Poaching and the Snaring

One of the biggest scandals to come out of this province is the wholesale destruction of game and livestock through poaching and its corollary, snaring.

Mr. Peter Spears farms near Hectorspruit – he is midway between the Kangwane homeland and a municipal squatter camp, between the devil and the deep blue sea! In South African farming, this is the worst position in which you can find yourself, and Mr. Spears' recounting of what happens to his animals is a terrible story.

In two years he has recovered 4 000 snares. He and the other farmers in the area must watch helplessly as their animals are destroyed, many left to die in the bush. He says many of the squatter camp residents are illegals from across the border and elsewhere in Africa. Township gangs organise the farm poaching, and he knows who they are. One gang boss has six or seven men working for him full time. Spears pays a fortune to bring in security personnel from as far away as Hoedspruit because local security personnel are intimidated and threatened with death if they do their jobs.

What he finds astonishing is that he has to fill in forms and obtain permits and go through the realms of bureaucracy in order to run his farm and buy animals and transfer them, but the criminal township gangs roam untrammelled by even the basics of any control system.

His security people picked up one man recently with 40 snares in his possession. These poachers chase the game into one area of his farm and the game become sitting ducks for the meat thieves.

(Another farmer nearby who shall be nameless for fear of retribution told us the police are "hopeless" and that he sees them using police vehicles to load up liquor for the shebeens they own and/or run. They also use these vehicles to pick up people on the road and charge them for the ride. "I have seen this with my own eyes", he said.)

Mr. Spears says as a child they used to sleep in a tent on their farm property (his farm is a family farm), "but now, there is no law and order, no control, and we live like prisoners: burglar bars, alarms, electric fencing".

Now nothing is safe. In 2003 he lost 20 head of cattle and 400 impalas to poachers alone. Foreign visitors know what's going on, he says, and South Africa's shameful lack of law and order is no longer a secret.

Two poachers were recently caught "and they are still inside" declares Mr. Spears hopefully. "Some who do get caught are charged for minor offences and released without bail, and this doesn't deter them from doing it again". His black neighbours who farm on a land claim restitution property thrash anyone caught poaching to within an inch of his life. They have less trouble than Mr. Spears who, like so many whites, will be hauled over the coals if he so much as touches a miscreant. "We are fair game", he says.

In a newspaper report on Mr. Spears' travails, he said the snares were made of wire or copper cable, and looped around two trees.⁽²⁾ His description of the pain suffered by animals who are not killed would break one's heart – but not the heart of

the poachers who are pitiless and ruthless. Every two weeks Mr. Spears sends 100 workers into the bush to clear it of snares.

We asked him about the game farms near the Kruger Park. "They are all suffering. There is no control. The Kruger Park is crawling with poachers. There are lots of people ostensibly out to control poachers but many seem untrained. They need constant supervision which is not always there. The Parks Board should do more. I don't want to say this but I believe there will be no Kruger Park in ten years. That's my assessment".

On that note we left Mr. Spears, yet another victim of the lawlessness now endemic in South Africa.

There are many questions yet to be answered in Mpumalanga. What happened to Trevor Tutu's R2,6 million catfish breeding project. For this scheme, two perfectly good and productive farms were bought out by Tutu's "development project company". We were informed that the Department of Land Affairs allegedly paid for these farms but this could not be confirmed. We also learnt that catfish is not a delicacy in Europe (where it was supposed to be sold) and that it can be caught there by anyone willing to fish for it.

There is also the question of the search for graves. We believe R40 million has been allocated to the University of South Africa to "search for graves" in Mpumalanga and other parts of South Africa. Why graves, we are not sure. Someone told us that the finding of graves could help a land claim, although all claims were supposed to have been in by the end of 1998.

There are numerous farms in the Delmas district which we could not investigate because of lack of resources, wonderful productive farms which are now "a little bit bankrupt" according to one tribal chief whose land claim farm was sold at a "knock-down sale" in October 2002. The farm was sold for R400 000, a fraction of the price paid by the taxpayers for this productive entity.

Other land claims handovers are being run by mentors and managers while the new owners simply take a percentage of the profits or a lease figure. This type of "restitution" actually creates a "dole class" of South Africans – people who live on the work of others, while the government pretends that their land reform program is "building up a class of black commercial farmers".

We want to look at the Nkomazi Irrigation Scheme which Ms. Thoko Didiza launched in 2001 at a cost to the taxpayers of R37 million. The 241 new farmers involved in the project also received a R70 million loan from the Land Bank. We believe many official organizations were involved in this scheme which is billed as a joint venture.

What has happened to the farm Kromkrans outside Hendrina? The farm owner told a journalist that "his heart was sore, but he knew it was the right thing to do" to give his farm to claimants under the government's land reform program. Well, we will find out if this was "the right thing to do".

At the time of the handover in October 2002, 600 families were preparing to go onto the 2 000 ha farm (just over 3 ha allocated to each family). At the time of the handover, the community declared they would be talking to the government "about housing" on the farm. The provincial land claims commissioner said his department would support the new owners.

What happened to the Maluleke Land Claim of 25 000 ha in the Kruger National Park? And the Timber Ridge Project? In April 2000, Ms. Thoko Didiza Minister of Land Affairs gave 15000 ha of land to 1 700 beneficiary families along the Timber Ridge area. The amount paid was R21 million.

(The reason why we mention these projects to our readers is that we have the information of the handovers but we did not have the resources to investigate all of these queries. However, a pattern has been established in enough other instances for us to raise serious questions as to the sustainability of these projects in the long term.)

There are scores of other handovers still to be investigated.

Chapter Nine

THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE

“On the road that leaves Pretoria on its way north to Kipling’s ‘great, grey-green, greasy Limpopo River’, to the land of baobab trees, to Zimbabwe and the enigmatic heart of central Africa, the traveler is confronted by an extraordinary scene – a vast plain, covered in thorn trees, with deep, reddish soil and only the merest hint of a mountain 100 kilometres away on the northern horizon”

- “The Vanishing Landscape” from the “Reader’s Digest Guide to Southern Africa”, published by Reader’s Digest Association. South Africa (Pty) Ltd., Cape Town.

Two years ago, South Africa was shocked to learn about the spectacular citrus and semi-tropical fruit farm failures in Limpopo province.

The Zebediela Citrus Estate

From 1918 to 1926, more than 565 000 citrus trees were planted on 2 260 ha of this estate’s land. For the twenty five years before the estate was sold to the South African government in 1974, it showed a profit of millions of rands every year. After the sale, Zebediela grew to become “the diamond of agricultural projects”.

It was of such great national pride that the Reader’s Digest Illustrated Guide to Southern Africa wrote in 1978 that “nearly 400 million oranges are harvested each year from the groves of Zebediela, the world’s biggest citrus estate. The output is sufficient to provide one orange for every eight people on earth.

“At the height of the season, about 15 000 cases of oranges leave Zebediela every day. The fruit comes from more than 565 000 trees irrigated by enough water to supply a city. The whole estate is highly mechanized and many of the most advanced handling techniques in world citrus production have originated from Zebediela.

“The first fruit was picked in 1926 after W.H. Gilfillan and Isidore Schlesinger divided the two original farms into 1 200 plots of 2 hectares. A handsome brochure was produced at the time offering the plots at 67 pounds each, to be farmed as a profit-sharing operation.

“The scheme proved particularly attractive to retired army officers and by 1921 most plots had been sold. In 1928, a branch railway to Naboomspruit was opened to carry the ever-growing harvest on the first stage of its journey to all parts of the world. In 1974, the South African government bought the Zebediela Estate.”

After the ANC government came to power in 1994, the administration of Zebediela came under the control of the newly-formed Agricultural and Rural Development Corporation (ARDC), a government parastatal whose administration eventually ruined not only Zebediela but scores of other agricultural projects in the area. Before this takeover, Zebediela’s harvest was worth R30 million a year.

It didn’t take long for the corruption, theft and maladministration to set in. By 2001, the estate was in ruins. The original 2 260 hectares planted had been reduced to 800 hectares. Because no fertilizers and pesticides were used, more than half the trees died as a result of the Department of Agriculture’s failure to grant funds for the survival of the project. Only ten per cent of yields could be marketed.

A loss of R35 million in 2001 followed a loss of R30 million in 2000. According to press reports, the estate was “beyond recovery”.⁽¹⁾ Hundreds of thousands of cartons of oranges and lemons were not harvested, and workers were not paid. A lemon yield worth R8 million was left to rot because there was no money to pay staff. The fruit was in any event of inferior quality because it had not been properly looked after. Many of the fleet of 50 tractors collapsed into disrepair. Hundreds of employees were then retrenched.

Managers with in some cases forty years experience were replaced with people who had no experience of farming. One new “manager” was previously a sewing instructor while another was until the previous year a student. The press was informed that not one of the new directors appointed to the Zebediela and its sister Lisbon estate could read a financial statement.⁽²⁾

The death throes of the estate peaked at the end of March 2001 when ABSA bank stopped all credit and bounced a pension cheque of R56 million. Other estates in the area met with the same fate.

The Lisbon Citrus and Mango Estate, the largest producer of mangoes in Africa, was liquidated. While there was no money for pesticides and fertilizers to save thousands of mango trees, a consultant appointed by the province to conduct a “viability study” was paid R300 000, and then told everybody what they already knew.



A typical productive citrus farm - formerly a common sight in the Limpopo province, now in decline as the land claims increase.

Lisbon Estate boasted an annual turnover of R24 million. It produced 1,2 million cartons of mangoes and 800 000 cartons of oranges annually. It was South Africa’s largest exporter of mangoes.

Representatives of the Department of Agriculture did not even attend a Lisbon Estate creditors’ meeting. The telephones were cut because the estate owed Telkom R23 000.

The famous Gillemberg Citrus and Cattle Farm Project was in the same boat as the other estates. It once boasted its own cheque account with no overdraft. The

annual harvest was worth R14 million. The ARDC bled this farm dry, using the estate's profits to fund crèches and pre-schools. It sold livestock from the farm to finance ARDC personnel and electricity bills. In two years, R10,3 million of the farm's resources was purloined by the ARDC. Since its collapse, the Minister of Land Affairs gave the 25 000 hectare estate to 724 black families. Although some offers were made for the project, the matter became bogged down in legal wrangling.

The Saringwa Citrus and Mango Estate which produced citrus worth R5 million six years ago, has died. The accumulated loss at the once "highly profitable and productive showcase project" was R17 million over a period of four years, including R5 million of the 2001 yield of which not one orange was sold due to disease. There was no money for pesticides. More than half of the 63 000 trees died due to lack of care. Thirty families lost income as a result of the collapse.

Under experienced management, the estate produced 500 000 tons of citrus of which 60% was exported. The takeover by the ARDC after the ANC government came to power saw an annual decline of 25% which ultimately ended in chaos in 2001. The Glendale, Allandale, Berlyn and Mariyeni Estates, each equipped with top grade facilities for packing citrus for local and export markets, were shut down in 2001. The Berlyn farm supported 30 000 citrus trees, while at the Glendale Estate, production came to a complete standstill.⁽³⁾

The ARDC

Blame for this agricultural mayhem must lie at the door of the now defunct Agricultural and Rural Development Corporation (ARDC) which took over the running of these estates under the new government.

It was established on 1 April 1996 "to promote sustainable development" but many of its goals were unattainable. Since 1996 to 2000, more than R216 million was transferred to the ARDC. Due to poor management, most of the ARDC's projects collapsed.⁽⁴⁾

In a 2000 audited report, it was revealed that eighty percent of the current R516 million budget was spent on personnel. "This led to the downscaling of veterinary inspections which negatively affected disease control. Ninety four percent of the veterinary budget of R45,7 million for the 1998/9 financial year was taken up by personnel, leaving only 5,9 percent for operational costs."⁽⁵⁾

Many one-hectare plots were allocated to people but were not economically viable as they were not close to markets. Many plot owners were not interested in farming and considered their newly-acquired property "only as a form of retirement security".⁽⁶⁾

Of the 77 community garden projects established by the ARDC, 15 had been abandoned by the year 2000 because there was insufficient water. Inadequate feasibility studies were performed regarding the availability of water resources for these garden projects.⁽⁷⁾ As in the case with the Venda homeland projects, schemes introduced before the new government came to power in 1994 were crippled after their takeover because of the cribbing of budgets. Where incomes had been generated from coffee, citrus, mango and banana farms, new budget cuts prevented maintenance and repairs on equipment. By the year 2000, only 20% of the tractor fleet was still running, while irrigation equipment was in a poor state. Disease spraying programs had been severely cut, and weed control was minimal.

In all, the ARDC was responsible for 285 collapsed projects which, provincial officials said, would eventually be "restructured". An amount of R23,9 million was

paid in respect of wages at ARDC sisal projects, while the income at these projects amounted to less than R1 million.⁽⁸⁾ (The Agriculture MEC at the time of these ARDC collapses, Dr. Tshenuwani Farisani, was transferred to the Public Transport department. He was replaced by Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi)

Taxpayer funds granted for drought relief were used to pay the ARDC's large salaries. The corporation employed more officials and workers than the total number of employees within the provincial Departments of Agriculture of Mpumalanga, the Free State and North West.

A newspaper article in March 2000 said a performance audit revealed that one of ARDC's projects established at a cost of nearly R100 million "had deteriorated into ruin".⁽⁹⁾

ABSA started to bounce the corporation's cheques, and it eventually closed down in ignominy. These estates were destroyed under the ARDC's gross mismanagement – its personnel were incompetent and corrupt.

Where was central government when all of this was happening? Was Pretoria too far away to concern itself with taxpayers' interests?

The ARDC ruined the 285 projects which have shown a loss since they were taken over by this corporation. These included coffee, citrus, mango and banana farms. Only 20% of the tractor fleets were running, while irrigation equipment deteriorated. At some projects, there was no money for diesel while at others, electricity accounts were not paid. Weed control was minimal, and other projects were vandalized.

What has happened to these projects?

In his Department of Agriculture budget speech of 5 June 2003, Limpopo MEC for Agriculture Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi affirmed that the history of the "big five" estates – Zebediela, Gillemberg, Lisbon, Mutale and Mununzvu – was well known and that he acknowledged that there had been "serious management ineptitude on the side of the ARDC." He said they had been forced to retrench ARDC management "and commence with our restructuring plans".

He claimed they had "turned the corner" at Zebediela, although the estate was under a land claim. He said the province had sought help with "strategic partners".

He further advised that his province had distributed 26 000 ha of land within the past financial year, and that some land had been donated by the private sector. In Mopani, 225 farms had been gazetted with more than 200 farms gazetted in Levubu under land claims.

He confirmed his government was working with the Land Claims Commissioner to facilitate the transfer of these farms to their new owners but in such a way that they still remain very much commercially viable because they are *highly developed commercial farms*. (Italics ours). He also said 171 irrigation schemes were in the process of being "rehabilitated" and he believed this process would take six years "if we are lucky".

Dr. Motsoaledi gave the impression that he has taken the bull by the horns as far as the rehabilitation and further development of agriculture in Limpopo is concerned.

He would need to do this – the destruction of some of the world's best citrus estates has left a bitter taste in the mouths of many, especially those who were intimately involved in the development and successful running of these estates.

The press supported Dr. Motsoaledi's speech. The local newspaper AgriReview said in July 2003 that "Lisbon and other ARDC projects (are) on road to recovery". It was essentially a report on the May budget speech. Another account said

“Citrus Estates Back on Track” ⁽¹⁰⁾ Zebediela was “back on its feet”, it claimed. In November 2003, an agricultural magazine declared that there was “Sweet success for Zebediela handover”⁽¹¹⁾ and maintained “the Land Claim’s Commission’s return of the Zebediela Citrus Estate to the Bjatladi community involves an effective partnership between government, commercial and developing farmers, and is a good example of sustainable restitution.”

Zebediela is being run on a fifteen-year management contract by the Boyes family. John Boyes, manager of the Zebediela operating company, is quoted as being confident that next year’s citrus crop will produce a full harvest and yield 1,2 million cartons of fruit. ⁽¹²⁾ In October 2003, an Afrikaans newspaper sang the praises of the reborn estate. The paper said Zebediela was “op die wenpad”. (On a winning streak).⁽¹³⁾

We endeavoured to assess the true position of these estates. From what we garnered from people who were intimately involved in the management of Zebediela, the following facts became apparent. As in most things in life, all is not what it seems!

Until 1980, the citrus trees at Zebediela were regularly replaced. During that period, Zebediela exported three million cartons of oranges per annum. As we mentioned, there were originally approximately 600 000 trees in production. Now, less than 200 000 trees are in production. The rest died, and were cut up for firewood.

Further, the original area under plantation was 2260 ha. Now less than 800 ha are under production. So the estate is being run at a third of its total potential. This season, 300 000 cartons were exported, exactly 10% of the estate’s original export quota. (Mr. Boyes predictions that this year’s harvest will be 800 000 and next year’s 1,2 million cartons is extravagant, say farmers in the area.)

In 1980, Zebediela produced between 1 700 and 1 800 export cartons per hectare. Some private farmers today are producing up to 3 000 export cartons per hectare. Zebediela is now producing only 375 export cartons per hectare.

There has been no replanting since 1987. There are today 350 permanent workers and, in season, another 600 are taken on. Before Zebediela collapsed, 1 200 permanent labourers were on the payroll, with a further 900 taken on in the season. As it is now, the government is paying the permanent workers, while before, the estate carried this cost.

These facts somewhat belie the euphoria about Zebediela “regaining its former glory”. Observers tell us it will never attain this goal. The company managing the estate can hardly be expected to re-capitalize the plantation. If equipment breaks down, we are told that it is cannibalized from other estates which are moribund. Although the Boyes group put R28 million into the business, the production costs per annum are higher than this figure.

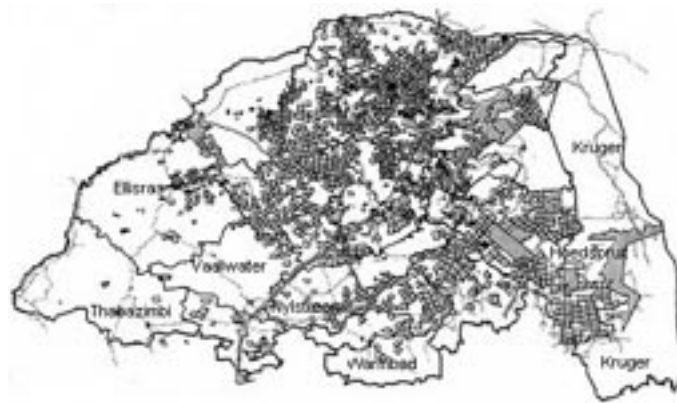
The electrical distribution system is in a “state of collapse” according to someone who knows the estate. The inspectors don’t want to even go into the sub-stations because it is dangerous. There is no investment in the maintenance of the irrigation distribution system.

Water utilization is poor. Zebediela’s lifeline is water, and it is essential that proper irrigation be practiced. During the last five years the dams filled up twice. There is good catchment water.

Prior to 1974, the trees were watered with flood irrigation. Now drip irrigation is used. When the original 2260 ha were under production, the water lasted three years with flood irrigation. Now with less than 800 ha in production, the dams are emptied in one year. Thus, the use of water is not optimal, and in a country like South Africa, this is crucial.

The results of the claim by Mr. John Boyes that next year's citrus crop will yield 1,2 million cartons of fruit will be awaited. Everybody in South Africa hopes Zebediela will regain its strength, but it is incumbent upon the management and the provincial government to enlighten taxpayers of the true situation at the estate and its future under non-owner management with eventual handover to land claim recipients

These recipients, the Bjatladi community, took over the Zebediela Estate on 28 September 2003. The Boyes group Henley Farm Properties will pay them R1 million a year to lease the estate. They also hold 35% of the shares of the estate's operating company.



The crowded pattern of Limpopo province land claims (each square represents a restitution demand) shows clearly where the most highly-developed areas of the province lie.

The Lisbon Estate

Lisbon is “chugging along” according to farmers in the area. It was South Africa’s top mango exporter. At its peak, it exported 1,2 million cartons of citrus and mangoes per annum and employed 1 000 people. In 1996, the crop was destroyed by a severe hailstorm, and the crop loss amounted to R14 million. However, those managing the estate sought financial assistance because they could revive it. They wanted to take a bond on the property, but the new people in control “could not take a decision and the estate never recovered”.

After 2000, most experienced and competent workers were dismissed and a loss of R20 million was incurred. A new management company was brought in and ran the estate for a year. They were making progress when they were summarily removed and the Boyes group was brought in. This group thus picked the harvest fruit planted by Bruboer (Pty) Ltd., the first management team appointed. It is believed the Boyes group is on a one-year management contract at Lisbon. Now there is a land claim on the farm. If Lisbon is to be run by a management company on short term contracts, there will be little capitalization of the project, planting of new trees or the purchase of new equipment. This does not bode well for the long-term future of what once was South Africa's top mango producer.

Gillemberg Estate

This is today being run by the Bruboe Group and we have learned it is progressing well. Despite the fact that Gillemberg has bigger water problems than Zebediela, and poorer soil, and is only farming on 420 ha, the new managers exported

600 000 cartons of fruit last year, double that of Zebediela which is farming on double the size of Gillemberg's land.

Other Land Transfers

The 3000 ha farm "La Boheme" near Tzaneen was handed over to land claimants in 1996/7. It was a thriving mango and citrus farm. It is now a squatter camp.

The Inyaka/Waterval/Zoeknag coffee estates were started from scratch in the old Lebowa homeland. These three projects occupied approximately 1 000 ha. More than R6 million was put into the projects at the time and the estates' turnover was R3,2 million a year, with a profit margin of 20%.

Extensive plans were made to expand these projects as they had not reached their full potential. However, the new 1994 administration gradually crimped the budget. There was no development capital available, and eventually no money for electricity and the telephone. The efficient management structure was replaced by the new administration's political appointees. Nothing was planted and the development plans came to a halt. Today these former coffee plantations have been invaded by squatters and their cattle. The fields were burnt out three times. Everything has been stripped – the whole pump station – its roof, the pump, the electrical cable motors: everything that could be stolen has been stolen.

Roodevaal Farm

R11 million was paid for this 3 600 ha Oerlemans brothers property which was given to the Makotopong Community at a handing over ceremony in March 2002. Thousands were at the party, according to an observer. In September 2002, the Oerlemans brothers harvested their last crop of tobacco, onions and some fruit.

Since then, theft has been chronic. Equipment broke down and was not repaired. The community had no experience, say the Oerlemans, and they had no operating capital. "We offered to sell them all the implements and machinery on the farm, but they did not have money to buy them", say the brothers. The new owners did not plant. There were no crops to harvest because the grapes and peaches were dying.

The electricity supply to the irrigation systems and the pumps was cut off, so the new owners sold one of the irrigation systems, it is believed, to pay the electricity. They say they want to bring people on to plots on the land but there is nowhere for people to live.

Bartlo Oerlemans told the local Land Claims Commissioner Mr. Mashile Mokono that the people had no operating capital, to which Mokono replied that the people must go somewhere else and find operating capital. He is reported to have repeated this statement on television.

The community complained to Oerlemans that the government promised they would carry them for the first six months, but no money appeared. For example, they received a new tractor but they had no money for diesel.

The turnover of this farm under the Oerlemans was between R2,5 to R4 million per annum, depending on the crops and the weather. They paid taxes of more than R200 000 per year. They employed 120 workers, 80 of whom are now unemployed. (The Oerlemans took forty of their workers to their new, small farm).

Today there is no farming on Roodevaal. Four or five people are reputed to be there but the vast bulk of the 200 and more claimants don't want to move to the farm because there are no prospects for them there. Where will they get the money to build a house? How will they live if there is no capital?

Bartlo Oerlemans offered to help the community with his experience and his advice. They said they wanted money, and at last count, the community was demanding R4 million from the government to replace transformers, cables and water pumps. Much of the equipment is in a state of disrepair, and the community members are arguing and fighting amongst themselves.

The Soekmekaar Farm

In May 2001, the Sowetan ran a piece entitled "Land redistribution 'will bring success.'" ⁽¹⁴⁾ In this article, Limpopo MEC for Agriculture Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi's tone was somewhat different to that reflected in the mainstream press. The good doctor said that "a culture of dependency had developed in the former homelands of Lebowa, Venda and Gazankulu that had destroyed the people's will to achieve success and prosperity". (The three former homelands amalgamated to form the Northern Province, now known as Limpopo province, under the new government).

Motsoaledi affirmed that it was the government's most important strategy "to change the mindset of people who had been welfare beneficiaries and to instill a sense of independence and ownership (in them)". The MEC then cited a citrus project at Soekmekaar where 137 workers had each applied for a R16 000 subsidy from the government and, in addition, had obtained R350 000 from the Land Bank. In 2000, they purchased the farm for R2,1 million. Dr. Motsoaledi claimed the provincial government would "support all agricultural projects".

The farm workers on the newly-transferred Soekmekaar property "are now independent and enjoy ownership of the farm", he said. The (Limpopo) provincial government was trying to redress "the mess" created by the former homeland administrations, he averred, and he then accused previous white managers of homelands projects of mismanagement. (Our findings are completely to the contrary. Every homeland project which was handed over to the present government was efficient and productive. Some were on their way to further potential, but in all examples, if there was failure, it was drought or some other natural disaster. There was little, if any, mismanagement and ineptitude).

What happened to the Soekmekaar farm?

The farm's previous owner was asked to stay on for five years to help the new owners. He managed a few years, then left in disgust. He said it was nothing but meeting after meeting, and no decisions were made, while everyone argued about salaries.

The farm produced tangerines, oranges and other citrus, plus avocados and granadilla. It was a beautiful farm, say people from the area. After the old owner left, the farm collapsed. The granadilla plantation disappeared. The other fruit was unmarketable – it was too small because it had not been fertilized. No spraying had been undertaken. And the boreholes were not functioning.

The community didn't pay their electricity. The sprinkler system was then sold, as were the cold rooms. Everything went for a veritable song – the packing equipment, the belting, all loose assets, everything removable was removed.

A farmer nearby saw what was happening and told the community to at least plant mealies. He offered to buy the seeds and plant for them, and they would split the

profit. But the community started arguing about who within their group would get what profit, and the farmer gave up.

Creditors moved in and took certain machinery and equipment which was apparently leased.

At present, there are two or three people on the farm, according to local observers. They survive by fishing and grazing their cattle, sometimes on neighboring farms because their fencing is broken. It would appear Dr. Motsoaledi has not come back to see what happened to the people who's "will had been destroyed because of their dependency on former homeland developments". A comment would not go amiss here. This is a perfect example of how the public is misled by grandiose statements at handing-over ceremonies, suitably reported on and sometimes embellished by the press. In fact, the results of the outlay of taxpayers' money are kept hidden, never mind the loss of production and the loss of taxation to the country's fiscus. This and hundreds of other cases throughout the country are examples of criminal neglect by the government and provincial authorities who should be monitoring what happens to taxpayers' money and to the hapless people who are left to "farm" virtually on their own.

The Khajadira Farm

In this case, the press was vigilant, but nothing was done to correct the situation. "At least 613 farm-worker families in the Northern Province (now Limpopo) face eviction or have already lost their land after local land affairs officials bungled land redistribution projects," said a local newspaper.⁽¹⁵⁾

This was an October 2001 report about "disasters which included flagship redistribution projects such as the R3,1 million Khajadira farm which was supposed to provide a new start for 230 families".⁽¹⁶⁾ Land Affairs officials had neglected to tell the families they had won ownership of the 299 ha citrus farm, giving a community leader and his deputy the chance to secretly use all 230 title deeds as collateral in hotel and bottle store deals.⁽¹⁷⁾

Attorneys then sold the farm for R600 000 after the leader and his deputy faulted on payments for a Leydsdorp hotel and a Lenyenye bottle store.

Declared an official of the NGO National Land Committee (NLC): "This kind of shoddy follow through and after-care service by Land Affairs is shattering people's lives and their trust in the system. What is the use of giving people land if you simply abandon them without the skills or resources to manage it? The real tragedy is that this is not an isolated incident".⁽¹⁸⁾

This particular newspaper article mentions two other incidents involving farms costing R2,1 million and R 2,2 million, and involving 383 families. Said the NLC: "Some beneficiaries simply want new houses but are then expected to run entire farms". If this is the case, and there is no reason to believe it isn't, then the Department of Land Affairs is not choosing land beneficiaries well. If a land claim is granted, and taxpayers fund it, then the farm must carry on producing. If it doesn't, then this is fraudulent.

There are many more questions to be asked about agriculture in Limpopo province.

A figure of R3,5 million was reported as having been paid to consultants and advisers in the province in 2001. In many instances, these consultants were involved in what was called the "revitalization" of irrigation schemes and the "commercialization" of projects of the discredited ARDC.⁽¹⁹⁾

In May 2002, Dr. Motsoaledi declared that multi-million rand programmes aimed at poverty eradication collapsed in his province “because beneficiaries did not know what to do with the money”. Tabling a budget of R721 million in the provincial legislature, Motsoaledi said that of an amount of more than R1 billion spent in one year, no significant outcome could be noticed.⁽²⁰⁾

Dr. Motsoaledi receives mixed reviews from the people to whom we have spoken. There is no doubt he was landed with an agricultural calamity when he took over, and he is trying to resuscitate the many failed citrus estates in the province.

We should wait and see what happens to the projects which he says are being reconstructed. They are on the mend because of consultants who have been called in on contract. By definition, this is a temporary solution to the catastrophe which struck one of South Africa’s most fertile provinces.

The future will tell, but the omens are not good. If nobody follows through on land redistribution transfers, then the policy is an abject and expensive failure. It must be discontinued because the province cannot afford any more fiascos.

The MEC appears to be trying to prevent further collapses through his new policy of lease-back. According to a report in the Letaba Herald (September 2003), another 225 farms totaling some 31 000 ha in the Mooketsi and Duiwelskloof areas of the Letaba district have been gazetted and are the subject of Land Claims Court hearings.

The report says that government policy “is also to offer owners whose properties have been declared legitimately claimable, the option of doing lease-back and other joint deals with the tribal communities concerned”.

Some farmers say they would be prepared to enter into such a deal, while others ask the question: who will re-capitalize the project as time goes by? The lessee will not own the property so will not be prepared to put money into it, and those who own it may be short of capital.

This is a real problem. Lease-backs mean someone has to be the boss, and arguments could arise regarding management policy that could be a sticking point for further development. The joint venture proposal is also a problem for the same reason.

The Polokwane Land Claims Commission told us that they are aware of the failures of the past, and that they do not want to repeat them. They want every land claimant to enter into a contract or a partnership with white farmers.

“Most of the farms will collapse if we do not have joint ventures”, said the LCC’s representative. “We cannot just hand over these farms to unskilled people, otherwise the whole industry will suffer. We now ask claimants if they want to become involved in farming.”

The Limpopo LCC set out this policy in a structured document, and it remains to be seen whether it will work in practice. At least the LCC is trying in this province.

Agriculture is of vital importance to employment in the province. According to the October 2001 census, agriculture was responsible for the employment of 10% of the working population throughout South Africa, but reached a high of 17,8% in Limpopo. This is exceptionally important when it is remembered that 34% of the population of 20 years or more has had no schooling.

Chapter Ten

THE WESTERN CAPE

This cape is a most stately thing, and the fairest Cape we saw in the whole circumference of the earth.

- Sir Francis Drake, English seaman. (1540 – 1596)

Organised agriculture is extremely worried: it warns

that an alarming 75% to 80% of all the government's land reform agricultural projects for small holders end up as failures.

This pronouncement was made at Agri Wes-Kaap's annual congress held at Goudini in the Western Cape in September 2003.

The Transvaal Agricultural Union South Africa (TAU-SA) made the same announcement at its annual congress in Pretoria in August 2003. It named numerous examples of failed land transfers where beneficiaries did not maintain the farming operation received under the government's land reform program, and issued a warning to the government to take note of what was happening to farm production in South Africa.

Personal representations by organized agriculture have been made to the government on a regular basis. The country cannot afford to lose more productive land when, in some parts of the country, natural attrition, poor farming conditions and other factors are reducing the number of viable farms. The Western Cape has experienced a number of serious setbacks which have exacerbated the position of agriculture in the region – the repercussions of the fruit farm liquidations over the past two years are still being felt. The Watervliet farm near Paarl, valued at R12,3 million four years ago, went for R2,7 million at an auction in July 2001. A number of other fruit farms were liquidated around the same time.

Reasons given were increased production costs, falling world prices for fruit, increased competition from other countries and an over-supply of fruit on world markets.

Kromvlei, one of the largest fruit farms in the Western Cape's Elgin district – about 80 km from Cape Town – went under the auctioneer's hammer on 25 July 2001 to fetch "a disappointing" R11,7 million, according to auctioneer Leon Deacon.⁽¹⁾

He said they had hoped the farm would fetch at least R20 million, which is just over a third of the value of the farm in the mid nineties. The land alone was valued at more than R15 million.

Another factor which caused the shake-out in the fruit-growing industry was deregulation after the new government came to power. Farmers used to sell their produce through the Deciduous Fruit Board's Unifruco – its marketing agent – but now they are on their own in a volatile market.

The ripple effect of the low prices for these once- expensive farms is that banks usually re-value the farms in the nearby area on which they have lent money. Overnight a farmer can be rendered insolvent, said Auction Alliance MD Alon Kowen.⁽²⁾

At the Agri Wes-Kaap congress in September 2003, Mr. Pieter Strauss, deputy chairman of the Agri Klein-Karoo cooperative at Oudtshoorn referred to a report commissioned by Agri Klein-Karoo on the situation surrounding a government

initiative called the Toekomsrust Smallholders Trust. Formed in 2001 with 47 members, each of whom received R20 000 as a government grant, the 30 ha Karoo farm Groenfontein, with 18 ha of fertile agricultural land, was purchased and carved up into 47 smallholdings.

R160 000 was spent on a tractor, a bakkie and agricultural tools. This left working capital of R200 000. Few of the farmers knew each other, and had no experience of operating such a cooperative venture. They had no individual title to their pieces of land, and their lack of responsibility soon created splits in this community. They had no knowledge of any kind of financial management or budgeting, no knowledge of managing farms and its manpower needs. None of them could add up costs or do calculations. Further, they were not pre-selected for their farming ability, or even their desire to farm.

Of course the project failed. It was set up to fail. Of the 47, only 17 wanted to farm, while the others – with no incentive to succeed because they received everything for nothing – didn't pull their weight.

The state brought in consultants who conceived three business plans at R100 000 each. Local farmers say the consultants came from up country and knew little about local conditions. One consultant's report, for example, showed that he knew nothing about access to viable water supplies and other resources. Another business plan drawn up by the Land Bank did not contain medium- to long-term projections nor environmental sensitivity studies – only short-term projections.

Local farmers were prepared to do a business plan for the project free of charge, but the offer wasn't taken up. Today, the farm, Groenfontein, is inoperative and the trust shareholders have disappeared.

The report on this failure concluded that the government should not use land in its attempts to alleviate the problems of joblessness, food insecurity and poverty.

Carving up valuable agricultural land should never be seen as a long-term solution for re-housing the poor. ANC politicians should stop issuing public, self-serving promises such as “within two years 7 000 new farmers can be settled in the Western Cape”. These statements create false expectations, says the report, and the land reform process will descend into utter chaos.

The government must stop appointing inexperienced city “consultants” without any agricultural knowledge or local conditions. The report recommends that the government appoint experienced agriculturalists from the regions in question. They have the hands-on knowledge and are willing to help, concluded the report.

Thembulethu

The 23 hectare property Thembulethu near George was a highly-productive, intensively planted vegetable farm using tunnel cultivation. Seven years ago it was purchased for R8 million and handed over to 15 recipients who then carved up smallholdings of 2.1/2 hectares each. The property had excellent soil and good ground water. After five years, things started to go wrong and the Department of Land Affairs refused to provide more funding for the operation. It is now inactive and the smallholders have left.

Elandskloof

In August 2002, The Sunday Times reported that the people who had received Elandskloof six years ago under a land claim transfer were “battling to prosper”.⁽³⁾ In a

rare instance of good journalistic follow up, the Times reporter highlighted the “hope and pain” of Aletta Titus “who is grumpy today. She may be standing on the very spot where she grew up, a beneficiary of South Africa’s first successful land claim, surrounded by lands that can easily earn R2 million profit from citrus a year – but six years after the claim was settled, she still does not have a proper house to call her own and the valley is severely underdeveloped”.

The farm Elandskloof is situated in the beautiful Elandskloof valley of the Cedarberg mountains, two hours north of Cape Town. Commented the Times: “Despite a six-year process that has seen more than 332 000 ha of land handed over at a purchase price of R377 million – often with the assistance of neighbouring white farmers – land restitution has often been dogged by community in-fighting, state uncertainty, red tape and a critical lack of skills”.⁽⁴⁾

Elandskloof was a guinea pig on which the government’s developing policy was tested, and the people are having trouble making this project viable. There is still no electricity in Aletta’s tin shack, the school is a ruin, and most of the fertile valley lands are unused.

Continues the Sunday Times: “In 1996, the mood was totally different as the then Land Affairs Minister Derek Hanekom celebrated the return of the land that the around 600 people had been evicted from in 1961.” Not many of the families moved back to Elandskloof, and there was no community spirit among those who did. The National Land Commission said at the time that the restitution process had not satisfied the country’s land hunger.

To date, nothing further has happened at Elandskloof, and this example of haphazard land reform was included in the Toekomsrust Project report.

Northridge

Northridge Farm in Ceres was placed under provisional liquidation in June 2003. Plans were being made to try and salvage the 1 500 ha farm with its 148 inhabitants. The farm is believed to owe creditors, including the Land Bank, R4,5 million.⁽⁵⁾

This was another example of the joyous handover and the sad failure. In November 2002, the Sunday Times showed farm “boss” Niklaas Syster leaning on a glamorous car he had purchased. “A year ago, fruit packer Niklaas Syster stared poverty in the eye. Today he’s got a new house, a fancy car and he’s boss on the farm where he once toiled”.⁽⁶⁾ At the time of the report, the farm was being held up as an example of a successful land reform project. The farm had purportedly just made a profit of R2 million. Land Affairs Minister Thoko Didiza handed over R1 000 cheques to each of the workers after the profit announcement.

A year before, the workers had approached the Department of Land Affairs and the Land Bank and managed to raise R4,6 million to buy the farm which was struggling and in the process of liquidation.

Various employees then took over the farm. Herman Martin, the mechanic, became the director of finance and administration, while Syster was reported as earning R7 000 a month, and “lives in a three-bedroomed house on the farm and drives a luxury German car”.⁽⁷⁾

Fast forward to April 2003. A consultant was called in. Mr. Kevin Wustefeld-Jansens “has been providing the skills training and development required by the workers.”⁽⁸⁾ It was soon discovered that the skills needed to run this type of operation were lacking.

A firm called Thomas International conducted some aptitude tests and the consultant was told “that he could not appoint anyone on the farm to a management position because the workers had an inadequate number concept, poor visual perception and insufficient management profiles”.⁽⁹⁾ They advised him to appoint people “from outside”.

A local attorney involved in black empowerment initiatives said at the time that “empowerment farms need a visionary mentor – someone with exceptional people skills, knowledge and drive. Preferably the consultant should be directly involved with the business for a good few years”.⁽¹⁰⁾ Translated, this means someone to run the operation on a day to day basis, as commercial farm owners do.

Fast forward to June 2003. Northridge is placed under provisional liquidation. Paul Onrust, chairman of the Northridge Community Board said there had been “internal problems with the management of the farm”. Local ABSA bank risk manager Pieter de Beer said he was aware that a forensic audit had been called for by external consultants.

Four months later, the liquidators are still trying to sort out the mess.⁽¹¹⁾ Meanwhile, 150 people are looking for jobs as only three of the original 153 employees have been kept on to help the auditors.

The story of these failed farms is beginning to sound like a scratched and annoying ancient record. As with so many other failed projects, a combination of poor management, ludicrous expectations and the Department of Land Affairs’ lack of serious follow up has resulted in an expensive failure for the taxpayers, loss of agricultural production and export currency, loss of taxation to the South African fiscus and a ruined farm which may never be resuscitated.

Local farmers say the farm laborers were left to manage a failing farm, planted with old orchards and apple types no longer popular in the market – without the necessary support and expertise.⁽¹²⁾

The government has admitted that it did not monitor the project properly. “The largest mistake in this project was to assume that the project was doing well, based on what the beneficiaries and a consultant maintained”, the Department of Land Affairs told *Noseweek*.⁽¹³⁾ All of these people, of course, had a vested interest in keeping the project alive, because they were being handsomely remunerated from it.

The role of expensive consultants comes into question, and is a matter of great concern to organized agriculture. Some comments made to our researchers about these city slickers are unprintable. Mr. Kevin Wustefeld-Janssens received R3 000 a day, while his partner Gavin Wright received R12 000 month as the bookkeeper. (We thought Mr. Herman Martin was the financial whiz kid at the farm!)

The ongoing tale of these two consultants’ eventual takeover of the management of the farm makes gripping reading. Suffice it to say they ruled the roost, even buying more farms to “soak up” employees.

In April 2003, at the time of the *Farmer’s Weekly* article where nothing seemed to be amiss, it is now revealed that the labor was only receiving R100 a week. After Easter, the model land reform project collapsed completely. According to *Noseweek*, the two consultants sold the extra farm they had bought with Northridge’s money, and made a profit of R600 000. This money has been retained by the liquidators.

The consultants have packed up and gone back to the city, while creditors line up to try and salvage some of their money. Herman Martin, the financial man, is now being sued for debt which he incurred on behalf of the farm (up to R200 000). Absa alone is owed in the region of R6 million, according to *Noseweek*.

At last call, the government was searching for new investors in the farm.

Conclusion

Millions have been poured into agricultural training in the Western Cape. In September 2002, it was announced that the “ANC/NNP coalition government in the Western Cape” is to start training more than 7 000 people from disadvantaged backgrounds as farmers over the next few years”.⁽¹³⁾ This will increase the existing number of farmers in the province to 11 000, the report says.

In May 2003, a further R24 million was set aside by the Western Cape provincial government for agricultural training.⁽¹⁴⁾ And in November 2003, it was announced that a R2,6 million training center for emerging farmers has opened in George.⁽¹⁵⁾

The sub-heading to one newspaper report says “NNP gives support to fast-track responsible land reform”. There doesn’t seem to be too much of that around. Perhaps political parties should concentrate on irresponsible land reform, as a starter.

Chapter Eleven

THE NORTHERN CAPE

*And the springboks bounced, and fluttered, and flew,
Hooping their spines on the gaunt Karroo.*

- From "The Flaming Terrapin" by Roy Campbell, South African poet (1901-1957)

Kgalagadi

The Khomani San people of the Northern Cape are stumbling under the complexities of owning thousands of hectares of land they cannot manage. Their current travails are about land they received under a claim they made for six farms totaling 36 000 ha in 1999 near the Kgalagadi National Park in the Northern Cape.

In addition to this, they were given another 25 000 ha of the park itself in 2002. During the handing over ceremony, Minister of Land Affairs Ms. Thoko Didiza hailed the second handover of land to the Khomani San people as an example of how a community "can claim its heritage".⁽¹⁾

What makes these remarks so astonishing is that the six farms originally given to the San people were already on the ropes at the time Minister Didiza made her remarks committing a further 25 000 ha to them. According to a February 2002 press report⁽²⁾, the first property was already on its last legs.

It had been handed over in a blaze of publicity on Human Rights Day, March 21, 1999 by President Thabo Mbeki. Just two years later, the farm infrastructure had collapsed, the community had no motorized transport and virtually no livestock, most of the game had been either sold or poached, the remaining game was dying of thirst because the water pumps were broken, leading community members were occupying houses earmarked for tourism initiatives, and the community had split.⁽³⁾ Seventy five percent of the farms' infrastructure had disappeared

Did neither Ms. Didiza nor the State President check up on the San people after the handover party was over?

In June 2003, Jan van der Westhuizen, chairman of the Khomani San Communal Property Association (CPA), said the farms were going "from bad to worse because we don't have the money."⁽⁴⁾ Members of two previous committees had been dismissed for mismanagement and corruption, a story now endemic throughout South Africa.

For four years, nothing happened on the six original land claim farms which cost the taxpayers R8 million. They have not generated any income. "There is no water, there is no money to buy diesel", says van der Westhuizen. "We live off the pensions of the elderly".⁽⁵⁾ Each family gets a litre of water a day because water and electricity to the farms were cut off in September 2002, at the same time Minister Didiza was handing the community another 25 000 hectares.

Phillipa Holden, an ecologist working with the San, said it was incomprehensible that the government would hand over property worth millions of rands to a community "but fail to ensure they have the support and training to run the farms".⁽⁶⁾

What is even more incomprehensible is the government's attitude to this scandal. Mr. Sugar Ramakarene, Free State and Northern Cape commissioner of land affairs said the government knew about the problems "but the point of land redistribution is to give the community their land, not run it for them".⁽⁷⁾

He then asked for a "workable business plan", this after already handing over 61 000 ha. There is a trust fund of R2.7 million which the tribe cannot touch because this money is earmarked for even more land for these hapless people! Mr. Ramarakane criticized the previous CPA because they used the interest from the fund "for their own personal expenses. The Khomani San have to be accountable for their own fate". Unfortunately, this catastrophic situation was precipitated with taxpayers' money.

Despite the fact that in 2002, a court ordered the government to appoint a manager, this has not happened. (Who else in the country can ignore a court order with impunity?) It would appear that, here too, this community has been set up for failure. Said Ms. Holden: "Someone is needed to help the community get on their feet and train them to self-sustainability. We write letters, hundreds of e-mails, make numerous phone calls. All we have is someone from Land Affairs saying they will look into it".⁽⁸⁾

Mr. Ramarakane says the government is looking into establishing a partnership between the community and business people. "But in the end it is not an ideal situation for us to give people land, but then run it ourselves".

This of course begs the question – why hand over 61 000 ha of land when it is almost a foregone conclusion that the recipients will fail? Surely the Khomani San deserve better than that? And surely the taxpayers should also expect a better deal!

A development consultant said in June 2003 that there were only 12 gemsbok and 60 springbok left on one farm which once held game worth millions of rand.⁽⁹⁾

What leaves a bitter taste is the press coverage surrounding most of these handovers. Indeed, it is the glowing newspaper articles and the TV clips which alerted us in the first place to investigate these changes of ownership. Without exception, the handovers are treated as joyous affairs, with the San bushmen "getting their land at last" ⁽¹⁰⁾ The tragedy is that the Department of Land Affairs apparently did not follow up on the progress of these hapless people after they received their first batch of farms. This is evidenced by the handing over of a second group of farms at the very moment the water and electricity supply was being cut to the first farms they received!

The Paprika Project

We were informed on good authority that close to one million hectares of land has been transferred in the Northern Cape area. "Only a few projects can be described as successful", said a dispirited member of organized agriculture who lives in the area. "We want these people to succeed, but they don't. It's a tragedy," he said.

He told us of the paprika project, where more than R50 million was pumped into setting up a new 550ha paprika farming scheme near Goodhouse in the baking Northern Cape, arguably the hottest place in South Africa. "Temperatures reach up to 50°C in summer in Goodhouse, while for paprika to be grown successfully, the temperature must not be warmer than 32°C", said a farmer in the know.

This project is not a viable proposition, he declared. The market value of paprika is R7,50 per kilo. But labor costs to harvest one kilo of paprika are already R4,00. Paprika farming is very labor intensive, and workers are not paid per kilogram

but are paid a salary no matter how much they harvest. In early March 2003, it was reported the 55 small-scale farmers who are part of this scheme had signed a production contract with the project managers. “The beneficiary shareholding is set to ignite an immediate change in their fortunes”, said Mr. Thabo Mothibi, Western Cape Land Reform, Agriculture, Environment and Conservation spokesman at the time.⁽¹¹⁾

However, just eight months later, another picture has emerged. The “immediate change in their fortunes” has not been ignited, and will possibly remain just a dream. In an article published on 5 December 2003, it was reported that the multi-million rand Paprika Project almost collapsed “earlier this year”.⁽¹²⁾

Millions of rands worth of paprika was not harvested. Mr. Thulani Binase, chairman of the Northern Cape standing committee on public accounts said the paprika development was supposed to create work opportunities for people in the province. “This did not happen. Training programs must be implemented in order that the people become involved”.⁽¹³⁾

Other projects upon which the committee expressed its misgivings were the Wavelength Steel Project and the Kalahari Kid goat project which had as yet not produced a profit. During a visit in November 2003, the committee found that the steel project was not even in operation.

The committee also decried the fact that the large number of overseas visits conducted by the department’s personnel had not borne fruit. “Various representative delegations went to China and have not yet informed the committee of the results of their visits.”

There were serious recriminations about the paprika project. Mr. Binase complained that the people who developed these projects “from outside” brought nothing to the table. In the March press report, Haymake Investment, Gili Greenworld, Variety Holdings and Nocal Ltd. were mentioned as the project managers

The provincial government set up the paprika scheme next to the Orange River. No impact study was apparently concluded, said the local farmer, otherwise they wouldn’t have created this project in this area. Questions as to the role of the consultants are being asked locally.

The processing factory is 300km away in Springbok, and if not enough paprika is harvested, then transporting it is not an economic proposition. The 55 participants from the coloured community, received 10ha each. The professional consultants were “doing their best”, said our farmer. But the project was stopped in the recent past for three months, and this resulted in the crop loss of some few million rands. Fortunately, the project is on course again, but for how long? The advice of the consultants is often not taken, we heard, and the owners – the community – “don’t want to farm - they want the money without the hard work”, said a source. “The only thing that will work here is a joint venture (with professionals) or a one-manager arrangement. Too many people as “owners” is a recipe for disaster, he said.

He added that the area never before produced paprika, and that the Department of Agriculture had conducted a study on paprika growing near Upington and had concluded it would not work there. Goodhouse is hotter than Upington, so why the R50 million development when there is only a slim chance of success?

Riemvasmaak

The origins of the land claim against the Riemvasmaak area of the Northern Cape are an interesting legal conundrum. One hundred and forty kilometers west of

Upington, one of the hottest places in South Africa, live 2 400 Namas on 14 000 ha of hilly desert wilderness. These Namas were originally from the old South West Africa (now Namibia) and during the 1914 war, they fled across the South African/SWA border and were given refuge and helped to settle in the area by the Roman Catholic church.

Under the old National Party government policy, the community was returned to the then South West Africa. After the present government came to power, they claimed the land “where their forefathers were buried” and some of the community returned to Riemvasmaak in South Africa after the claim was granted. Others remained behind in Namibia. (Land claims based on graves is a moot point, and is contested by many farmers in the courts. As in the Botshabelo case near Middelburg, Mpumalanga, claims based on forefathers being given refuge at churches or missions would also not appear to be legal.)

Riemvasmaak has turned into something of a disaster. It was one of the first land restitution projects in South Africa. There is no electricity or running water for the community, and the ground is full of shale and stones. “It is not good enough to simply dump people on a piece of ground and then hope they can look after themselves”, said a farmer near Upington.

At the end of 2003, the community was struggling to establish a tourist operation - a four-by-four hiking route and other related schemes. There is no irrigation at Riemvasmaak, and development is very slow. A new housing scheme has been built but there is no self-development, no spring of initiative, no investment of note. This project is hardly the shining light of the government’s land reform initiative.

Richtersveld

The Nama people of Richtersveld, a barren piece of land along the southern banks of the Orange River in the Northern Cape, were the beneficiaries of a recent Constitutional Court decision confirming a Supreme Court of Appeal ruling to return their land from which they were removed in the 1920s, when alluvial diamond mining commenced.

The land is currently held in trust by the South African government and is leased by mining companies Alexkor and Transhex, who pay a small royalty to the Richtersveld community. This land claim was the first brought under aboriginal title rights in South Africa, and the ruling made history because, inter alia, the government sided with the mining company Alexkor and not the claimants.

Several elderly community members testified that their historic links to the land went back 200 years when the Nama occupied the land as semi-nomadic pastoralists. Their land claim was originally rejected by the Land Claims Court - the SA government and the mining company Alexkor entered a defence against the claim. The case involved the key issue of the validity of aboriginal title, and set a precedent in land claims applications in South Africa where “aboriginal” title claims are unusual. The Richtersvelders’ claim was supported by the South African Legal Resources Centre, and the amount of their legal compensation for diamond sales, if they should eventually win, would be considerable.

The government for its part did not want to lose the lucrative benefits of its ownership of Richtersveld and its minerals. The Constitutional Court’s ruling that the Richtersvelders have a right to the land they are claiming has implications for property rights in South Africa. It also reveals something else: if the Richtersvelders

have “aboriginal title”, then who else is “aboriginal” in South Africa? Or is no one else “aboriginal” except the San, the Khoi and the Bushmen? This implies that everyone else living in the country is, in one way or another, a settler.

While the government is prepared to dish out private farm land to claimants on the flimsiest of bases at times, they appointed rafts of expensive lawyers to fight the Richtersvelders tooth and nail – because diamonds are clearly Ms Thoko Didiza’s best friend!

The Goats Milk Project

Four years ago, this project was set up near Victoria West at a cost of around R2 million. The plan was to make cheese from free-range goats belonging to local residents, and the dairy production company Simonsberg was called in to provide training for the project. Cheese-making equipment was provided and forage was purchased for the goats. However, some participants forgot to bring their goats in at the weekend, and many of the animals were mishandled. They were badly penned, and in the end, the SPCA was brought in to remove the last two remaining goats which were in a parlous state.

Naturally this cooperative venture to assist fifty people collapsed, and in 2003 the equipment was sold under auction.

Bucklands

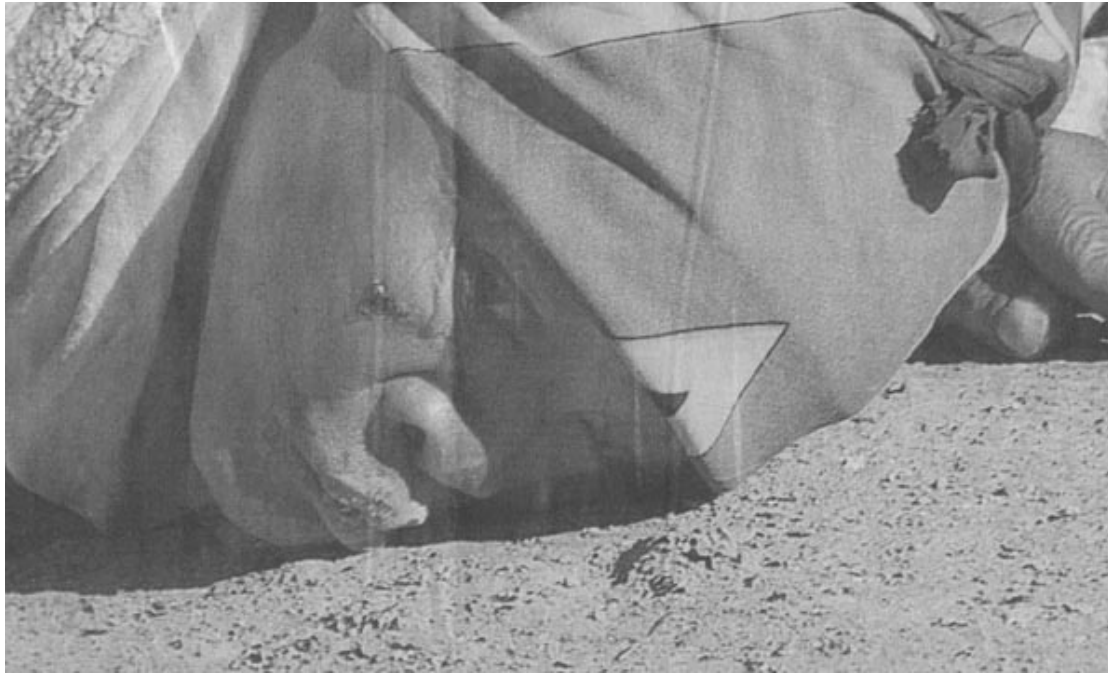
In June 2003, “after almost ten years of struggle”⁽¹⁴⁾, the Griqua people of Bucklands near Kimberley received nine farms under South Africa’s land redistribution policy.

This prime land is on a spot at the confluence of the Vaal and Orange Rivers. “The 13 000 ha have great development potential for irrigated agriculture. It is virgin soil and is reputed to be some of the highest yielding farmland in the country”.⁽¹⁵⁾

Most of the land is covered with thorn trees and shrubs, but there are reputed to be many diamond deposits on the farms. A further 12 farms valued at R41 million by the Department of Land Affairs in 2001, are due to be handed over under the same claim. There is however resistance from some of the present owners because the farms carry expensive agricultural structures and contain diamond deposits. Further, and perhaps more importantly, two owners dispute the validity of the claims.

Schalk Human is one of the farmers challenging the claim against his property. He said he didn’t even know there was a claim on his land until the local claims commissioner came to his farm. Louis Wilken also contests the claim. The land has been under white ownership since 1876, both farmers say, and the restitution law commences from 1913 and onwards. Human and Wilken say the local land claims commissioner warned them that if they resisted the commission’s ruling, they might be taken to court and their land could be expropriated.⁽¹⁶⁾

In another twist, a local farmer says the land already given to the Griquas - Bucklands - was originally state land, and the claim on that could be invalid as well. However, the farmers who occupied it didn’t contest the claim, and because it was state land, the claim was not argued in court.



A land claimant kisses the soil of Bucklands – nine farms at the congruence of the Vaal and Orange Rivers which were handed over. In addition to the farms, the claimants also received rights to diamond deposits in the area. Local farmers, who contested the claim on the grounds that the land has been under white ownership since 1876, while the restitution law commences only from 1913, were warned by the local land claims commissioner that if they continued to resist, they might be taken to court and more land expropriated.

William Wellen, chairman of the Bucklands Community Property Association (CPA) has big plans for the farms. He wants to build the Nelson Mandela Holiday Resort. The community is also hoping diamond mining companies will come in. However, it seems there is no fixed business plan for agriculture or any other project, and it cannot be ascertained whether working capital was given to the community.

A report in July 2003, just one month after the handover, tells of a split in the community of 3 500.⁽¹⁷⁾ They want to obtain mining permits before giving access to their land. At the other end of the spectrum, mining companies both in South Africa and overseas are dealing directly with the government to try and obtain permits to mine the land.

So far, the Bucklands people have not received their permit. They cannot fill in the application forms, and they say no one in the government will help them. In desperation, the community has turned to lawyers to exert pressure on the Department of Minerals and Energy Affairs to help them. But the department says it doesn't know what the community is talking about.⁽¹⁸⁾

The community wants a moratorium on any permits issued until it can obtain help with its application. Its previous application was rejected for technical reasons. The community says it wants to form a mining company and then enter into a joint venture, but the community wants to keep the majority of the shares. This is of course a problem, for obvious reasons. In the meantime, the community has hired a lawyer, and they need help. They have met neighbouring farmers who want to help, but the figure being tossed around to develop the land is R40 million to start.⁽¹⁹⁾

Groot Vlakfontein/Metsimatshwe

Another claim we will be watching is the 10 000 ha handed over to the Metsimatshe community at Groot Vlaktefontein near Kuruman in the Northern Cape. The five farmers who sold did not contest the claim and “were happy with their price”, we were told. However, the history of the claim reveals why perhaps the farmers were happy to go. The community’s first claim in 1996 was rejected. In 2001, some of them simply camped on Groot Vlaktefontein. They were arrested and charged with trespassing.⁽²⁰⁾ They again pitched tents on the land, and were again arrested. The claimants were supported by the National Land Claims Committee, an activist NGO.

This pressurized both the DLA and the farmers, and a compromise was reached “in the spirit of reconciliation” said one of the farmers.

The properties are excellent cattle farms, there is enough underground drinking water, with first rate housing and outbuildings. What we must watch now is whether the Metsimatshe community can make a go of their new farms, and whether they will be assisted in their endeavours by the Department of Land Affairs. All of this remains to be seen.

Good cattle farming land in the area goes for around R500 per ha. We were unable to ascertain the price paid for the farms but it is estimated to be in realm of R5 million.

Diamonds

Two land claims in the Northern Cape involve considerable diamond deposits. The small Tswana community headed by brothers Abel and Joseph Pholoholo are angry because the claim they lodged in 1995 has been gazetted, but they say they sit on the sidelines and watch diamonds being taken out of their ground, and can do nothing.⁽²¹⁾ The ground belongs to a British company and they have lodged their rejection of the claim.

Abel Pholoholo says there has been much hedging over their claim because of the overseas company’s involvement.

In another case, there appears to be government involvement in a claim at Schmidtsdrift, about 80 km west of Kimberley. A black economic empowerment company New Diamond Corporation (NDC) was accused by the claimants of acquiring the land “illegally” ⁽²²⁾ Claimants say “political forces” have prevented the community from obtaining their mineral rights from the NDC. In December 2002, lawyers representing 1 200 people who form part of the Schmidtsdrift community wrote to the Minister of Mineral and Energy Affairs about the problem, and four months later they hadn’t received a reply.

The NDC holds 80% share in the Schmidtsdrift Mining Company and the community 20%. The dealings between the mining company, the NDC and the community are something of a cat’s nest. Five businessmen involved in African Renaissance Holdings, one of the companies within the NDC group, are reportedly part of President Thabo Mbeki’s Consultative Council.⁽²³⁾

Without the diamonds, of course, Schmidtsdrift would hardly be on the map. A rocky dry place, most of its inhabitants do not have access to health facilities, there is no high school, and the majority of the people are unemployed and illiterate. The people are waiting to see what benefits they will receive from the mine.

Something that works

South Africa's biggest grape exporter told us his partnership with local people in the Kubus Fruit Farms in the Northern Cape is working. Piet Karsten says the only deal that works as far as land reform is concerned is a joint-venture operation where inexperienced potential farmers can be brought into farming through a learning process. Dumping people on land and expecting them to farm with no support is a recipe for failure.

His company Karsten Boerdery has entered into an agreement with the Industrial Development Corporation and a black empowerment group to produce grapes for export. The project is predicted to bring in much needed foreign currency and create thousands of jobs. At its peak, 1,9 million cartons of table grapes will be exported to Europe from the 500 ha development, predicts Mr. Karsten. This deal is the IDC's largest empowerment investment into the agricultural sector to date.

Karsten Boerdery will control the operation and run the farms. The farm workers will be part of the project. Piet Karsten told us his group had been empowering their employees for years. His group already has 300 black shareholders. The Kubus project is not part of the government's land reform program, but is an example of cooperation within the agricultural community, Karsten says.

Observers have faith in Piet Karsten's business ability, experience and skills. As long as his company continues to run this huge operation, everyone will benefit. .

Despite the success of groups like the Karsten Boerdery, poverty lurks on the fringes of communities in the Northern Cape, South Africa's most barren and harsh landscape. Farming here is the most difficult in South Africa, all the more reason for circumspection in deciding whether a land claim will be of benefit not only to the claimants but to the whole of South Africa.

A harsh terrain needs a highly skilled operation to be viable, something outside the parameters of South Africa's aboriginal people who populate this desolate area. A new look at how to assist them is needed.

Chapter Twelve

THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE

Yes, it's a queer thing about wanting to get into history. Take the case of Manie Kruger, for instance. Manie Kruger was one of the best farmers in the Marico. He knew just how much peach brandy to pour out for the tax collector to make sure that he would nod dreamily at everything that Manie said. And at a time of drought, Manie Kruger could run to the Government for help much quicker than any man I know.

- From "The Music Maker" by Herman Charles Bosman, 1935

South African author Herman Charles Bosman

immortalized the Marico district in what is now called the North West Province. In his day, life was simpler and Bosman's whimsical tales of the people of that part of the world are all the more evocative when one considers what is taking place on a daily basis to farmers in this special and beloved part of South Africa.

A member of organized agriculture in the district recently sent out a questionnaire to local farmers regarding their problems with crime, land claims and other matters. What came back was astonishing – there were few if any who could say they were not living under serious duress. Some situations were so bad, farmers had abandoned their properties. Others were living on their nerves, frustrated with what they were seeing around them and unable to do anything about it.

The land reform and restitution process plays out in North West as it does in the other South African provinces. We were regaled with the same tales of stock and crop theft, intimidation, vandalism and even murder. The map of North West land claims as at December 1998 is quite an eye opener. More than half this provincial map is blanketed with dots.

One of the more controversial land claims in the province is that of Putfontein. With land restitution, the state has three options in the event of a successful land claim. The claim can be settled as follows:

- ◆ The return to the claimant of the specific land in respect of which a claim was lodged;
- ◆ Other land may be made available to the claimant; or
- ◆ Compensation may be granted to the claimant for the loss that was suffered.

If the State grants financial compensation, this is paid from the Treasury. The third party is the landowner. He plays no part in the action but is merely an interested party. But if the landowner is affected insofar as the claimants want his land, he becomes involved in the claim and must pay his own legal costs. It is not possible for him to obtain an order for costs against one of the other parties.

If the restitution claim goes to court, the court must decide in what way the claimant will be compensated, i.e., in which of the above three ways.

Section 2.2 of the Restitution Act says that if the claimant had previously (at the time of his removal) received compensation, *he or she may not apply again.* (Italics ours). Many claimants in terms of the Restitution Act have in fact received compensation, yet they lodge claims all the same. Most claims are lodged in respect

of specific land to which claimants want to return, irrespective of whether other land or compensation had been granted in the past.

Should the State wish to return the specific land to the claimant, and the present landowner must be evicted, *the claimant must give up the existing land that was given to him before occupying the new land*. This latter point is often ignored, and everything possible is done to return the original land to the claimant, *whether they vacate their compensatory land or not*.

Up to September 2001, for example, seventeen such claims had already been settled countrywide. Not one of the cases where land was returned resulted in successful agricultural production. Virtually all have resulted in failed settlements.

As mentioned, a perfect example of this anomaly is Putfontein, near Coligny in the North West. The claim took six years from the time the claim was approved to the time the farmer was paid out. It should be noted that as soon as a claim is approved, a farmer's security is affected: all production aid and financing are suspended. This places the landowner under enormous financial pressure.

The community which claimed Putfontein had already received ample reparation at the time of their previous dispossession, in the form of compensatory land and monetary compensation. The land they were living on at the time they made the claim against Putfontein possessed a good infrastructure. Yet the 6613 ha farm Putfontein was bought out for R13 million and given to the claiming community. Now this community owns Putfontein and the compensatory land they were originally given. They have in other words received double compensation.

Only a quarter of the original community came back to live at Putfontein, which had excellent irrigation and boreholes. Now nothing is happening at Putfontein, just subsistence farming and squatting. Some parts of the farm are being hired out to white farmers because the claimants cannot farm.

They steal from their neighbours – cattle and grain - which they sell because they cannot make a living on the farm.. There is no electricity, no fencing, and the boreholes are not working.

The original Putfontein farm was highly successful, cultivating mealies and peanuts. There was an excellent beef herd with a dairy, plus successful sheep farming. One of the farmers said he spent a lifetime and thousands of rands nourishing the soil on his farm, On his particular 372 ha farm (there were seven farms on the original Putfontein), only six people are now living. The rest stayed in their old homes.

Previously, Putfontein created a combined income of R7 million a year, on which taxes were paid. Now there is nothing, and R13 million of taxpayer's money is down the drain. The claimants now own two excellent pieces of farm land in the North West Province which produce absolutely nothing.

At a handing-over ceremony in the year 2000, Land Affairs Minister Thoko Didiza urged the Batlounge tribe to keep to their promise on land utilization. "It is important that this land be put to production instead of being turned into a squatter camp. You should not fail us. After a year I will visit this place and I want to find it in its current state or better". ⁽¹⁾

We are not sure if she did visit Putfontein after a year, but after three years nothing is happening on the 372ha portion, where only six people are now living.

Questionnaire

These questionnaires mentioned above were divided into sections which were to be answered - the ESTA legislation, the undermining of land rights by crime and

intimidation, black empowerment land transfers, injudicious or ill-considered land reform, and willing seller, willing buyer (black farmers) transactions.

(The ESTA legislation – the Extension of Security of Tenure (Occupiers) Act 62 of 1997- became law on 28 November 1997 and affords all persons who are not labor tenants (and a few exceptions pertaining to persons using land for commercial purposes and having a certain level of income) security of residence from 4 February 1997 on property they occupy which belongs to another person. This right is also applicable to persons who occupy such property (whether as tenants or not) with the permission of the owner, and to persons in charge of the property (thus obviously not squatters). The Act gives these occupiers the life-long right to occupy land which is not theirs.

The object of the Act is to protect people who are faced with eviction or who want to strengthen the newly-defined “rights” of occupiers of property. In a nutshell, this Act gives persons occupying rural or peri-urban land, with the consent of the owner or person in charge, a right of residence that can only be terminated in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

The Act further regulates the day to day relationship between owners, persons in charge and persons who occupy the owner’s land. The Act is enforceable through the magistrates’ courts, the Land Claims court and, in certain instances, the provincial high courts.

Occupiers may therefore obtain security of tenure on someone else’s land at the expense of the owner and/or at cost to the taxpayer.

Chapter III of the Act covers the “fundamental rights” of occupiers. The language of the Act is seen to favor the occupiers. The use of the word “fundamental” implies that the occupier has basic rights to occupy land which is not his.

Thus those who wrote this law have decreed that occupying someone else’s land (even though with the consent, tacit or not, of the owner) conveys on the occupier a fundamental and even an inalienable right. Surely this is a first in the world!

An occupier’s right of residence can only be terminated if such termination is “just and equitable”. Further, the courts will not grant an eviction order unless the owner makes alternative accommodation available – Chapter IV, Section 9. What represents “suitable” accommodation is also set down in the Act, and in most cases the farmer is unable to find this “suitable” accommodation and he simply buys a piece of ground somewhere else and gives the occupier building materials with which to build a house.

Another problem inherent in evictions is that the farmer must be subjected to a departmental investigation as to whether an eviction “will affect the constitutional rights of any affected person, including the rights of children, if any, to education”. (Section 9, Clause (3) (b).

This Act’s raison d’etre is to facilitate long-term security of land tenure to a person who has resided on land as an occupier (even if he has not worked or does not work for the person who owns the land). The Act makes it extremely difficult to evict an occupier.

The Act states unequivocally that this “situation” (where someone occupies land which is not his) is “in part the result of past discriminatory laws and practices”. This seems to refer to the fact that South African commercial farmers of European descent have “caused” the homelessness and rootlessness of many indigenous peoples and that this “past practice” gives those now without land a “right” to occupy land not theirs.

Another factor to be considered is the security risk involved in evicting occupiers. In some instances, occupiers threaten the farmer with violence, or the farmer learns through the grapevine that he would be ill-advised to evict an occupier. For the sake of his family's security, he leaves the occupier and family where they are.

The Act has come in for some criticism in the courts. In October 2000, Deputy Judge President of the Witwatersrand High Court Hermanus Flemming declared that the Act was unconstitutional. "Allowing people to choose to stay at another's property whenever they choose and simply because they so choose, at the expense of others' lawful rights, is clearly not land reform." ⁽²⁾

Thus the South African farmers, in not mechanizing and being consistently encouraged to adopt a labour-intensive farming operation to absorb South Africa's huge mass of unemployables, is now penalized for his actions. Occupiers are referred to as "vulnerable" in the preamble to the Act.

The wording throughout the Act gives the impression that the farmer would, if he could, exploit the occupier who is posed as something of a victim. The reality is that the South African farmer who has farmed labor-intensively instead of capital-intensively as a result of demographics, is now the victim of his benevolence, unlike his contemporaries throughout the Western world.).

As well as details of one's farm, the questionnaire solicited comments on crime, the environment, whether the police were involved in solving crime, and a section called "details". The devil is in the details in this instance! It was under "details" that the real story of the North West's turmoil was revealed.

Mrs. Louise Viljoen (not her real name) is the owner of a North West farm. In October 2000, her husband was murdered in his study by five young black men. They took nothing. The five men were from Alexandra Township, near Sandton in Gauteng. (Mrs. Viljoen believes the killers were especially brought in for the job). They cut the telephone lines and looked for her to attack as well, but she managed to escape. They knew the house's layout well.

One of the five had lived on her property, without her permission, for a month before the killing. Two months before her husband died, this young man visited her husband saying he was the local secretary of the ANC and that he represented the farm workers. He sat in their living room and her husband gave him tea, drove him to the nearest town after their meeting and paid for his taxi fare back to Johannesburg. He told her husband his workers "hated" him.

Mrs. Viljoen tried to remove some antagonistic former workers from her farm. She paid them off and even offered to build dwellings in town for them, but they wouldn't budge. They informed her the houses on the farm which her husband built "belong to the state".

Before her husband died, he received phone calls at night where nothing was said but there was clearly someone on the line. After he died, an ANC councilor from the Klerksdorp municipality informed Mrs. Viljoen that she must now allow the people working on her farm to have her farm.

In answer to our question – was there a connection between the murderers and the ANC, she replied: "Definitely. The police checked the telephone number one of them gave my husband – it was the ANC's Shell House number. The ANC then informed the police they were no longer in Shell House and that they did not know that person". (We print both Mrs. Viljoen's statement and the ANC's reply.)

The Department of Land Affairs continues to ask Mrs. Viljoen if she wants to sell her farm. She continues to refuse, because the farm was built up for her children's

inheritance, she says. Then she was told she would have to give a piece of land “as a donation”. Intimidation increased. She then received a letter dated 10 September 2003 from “Scorpion Legal Protection (Pty) Ltd.” acting on behalf of “Our clients: your employees – water and electricity ” (which was the heading of the letter).

The letter said Scorpion’s clients advise “that their water and electricity have been cut without any valid reason. According to the Tenure Act of 1997, Chapters 3, 5 and 6, our clients should enjoy their privileges.” The letter was signed by Mr. T.J. Gaanakgomo.

Eighty hectares of her grazing land was set on fire in 2003. Mrs. Viljoen’s son saw men in a car who set fire to the ground, and gave the police the registration number but the police appear to have done nothing with this information. Her 700 ha farm is typical of a good commercial farm in the area, producing mealies and sunflowers, and an excellent Angus stud herd.

Since her husband was murdered, she left the farm and members of her family stay there. They have dropped the crop farming and now only farm with the Angus herd.

She experiences endless trouble with people who occupy her worker’s houses and won’t get out. They throw stones at the people who run her farm and squat outside her farmhouse front gate, making it difficult for the farmhouse’s occupants to come and go.

There is much antagonism and continual belligerence, and she feels this is part of the program to move her and her family off the farm, to make it so unpleasant that they will give up and go. Her own farm workers must be fetched from neighbouring farms every day and taken back.

There are always confrontations, she reports. At one stage she had to bring in the SA National Defence Force to remove the workers’ cattle off her farm. These workers nearly killed the SANDF personnel. Recently, expensive bull semen was stolen and the thieves broke her fence.

She confirms the Department of Land Affairs continues to pressure her to allow people to farm on her land. She told us a black man phoned her one day and said “they” are going to shoot two of her workers.

As in so many other crime cases in South Africa, friends or relatives of a crime victim find it unfathomable why that particular person was chosen.

“My husband was such a kind person. He was always the one at meetings who said we must negotiate with the black people. He wanted to help them: he believed in training. He went out of his way to help the black people, he always wanted to have good relationships”.

Farmer Gert Pretorius, Lichtenburg

Under the questionnaire section “Details” (Omstandighede is the word used in Afrikaans. The literal translation is “circumstances”), Mr. Gert Pretorius’ “details” were as follows: “Twelve farm workers have occupied his workers’ houses for the past three years under the protection of the ESTA legislation. (See an explanation of ESTA under the Putfontein story.)

As a result, Mr. Pretorius must fetch and return his own workers on a daily basis from Lichtenburg. Theft is a serious problem on the farm, and there is a severe security problem.

We spoke to Mr. Pretorius. He has two farms and these workers who were fired years ago are still on his farms. The police informed him he must supply these

workers with water. These “ex-worker/occupants” steal his maize and slaughter his cattle.

They steal the calves and slaughter them in his sheds and then leave the residual flesh there to rot.. They only consume around 20% to 30% of the meat. His staff must clean up after these “occupants”.

Mr. Pretorius cannot catch them at this slaughter. If he turns the lights off in the sheds, they slaughter at night. They intimidate anyone he puts in the sheds to keep watch. He cannot leave anything unlocked, even if it is used regularly.

He caught someone stealing his maize and took him to the police station. The man told the police he brought the maize from his own place.

At the police station he – Mr. Pretorius – was accused of wrongful arrest of a citizen. He then had to pay the transport of the thief who stole his maize. In order to get rid of the “occupants” of his workers’ houses, he must supply them with homes.

The Department of Land Affairs told him they must approve the homes. It would cost him between R100 000 and R200 000 to build them, he states, and he doesn’t have the money.

Farmer Jannie Bezuidenhout (not his real name)

His “details” section of the questionnaire says it all! “Here is a typical ESTA case”, says the report. Mr. Bezuidenhout bought the farm, and the former owner’s workers and their families (around 50 people) stayed on. Mr. Bezuidenhout had lived in town for many years and knew nothing about the ESTA legal provisions.

He encountered his first problem when he brought his own workers on to the farm. They were chased out and some were assaulted. Mr. Bezuidenhout himself was taken prisoner by the “occupiers”. A fire was made around him and these squatters commenced toyi-toyi-ing around him. He luckily used his cell phone to call the police who came and rescued him.

What is interesting about this intimidation of the farm owner by these “occupants” is how the intimidation is structured. Banners were wielded (how can the people afford banners who need to steal maize to live?). It was clear to Mr. Bezuidenhout that political activists were behind the threats and terror.

This particular farmer had to receive psychological counseling, and was severely traumatized. He is afraid for his life on the farm. To try and salvage the situation, he has consulted attorneys about what to do. In the meantime, these attorneys received a letter from the Department of Land Affairs making an informal offer for the farm. They have claimed it on behalf of the very workers who terrorized Mr. Bezuidenhout.

He told us that the farm, a productive operation of around 400 ha cultivating crops and rearing cattle, was in white hands since 1902. The ground was never tribal ground so the claim is not a restitution claim but a “handover” according to local observers.

A neighbour asks: is this now the modus operandi of the Department of Land Affairs and/or their proxies, to terrorize someone until he can’t stand it any more and gives in? This happens all over the country, and a pattern has definitely manifested itself.

Mr. Johan Botha (not his real name)

“I really don’t know what to do. I’m damned if I do and damned if I don’t. We are criticized whatever we do”. Thus spoke Mr. Botha after two and half years of exasperation, frustration and defeat at the hands of a worker who simply refused to move despite being fired. That one man could cause so much trouble is astounding. Only in South Africa!

The Botha family has farmed near Potchefstroom for fifteen years on 1 000 ha. They farmed cattle and had a small dairy. One worker made their lives a misery: he was a regular drunkard, abusive and violent. He was fired by Mr. Botha and paid out, but he would not move. He and two other workers took the farm car one day and crashed it. The worker was hospitalized, and the farmer paid R20 000 for repairs to the car.

He felt sorry for the worker. He gave the family food and money. He tried to obtain a social pension for the worker, but the man’s wife harassed the family for a long period of time.

This is a small example of the pitfalls of ESTA. Even when a worker is a threat to one’s safety and livelihood, you cannot get rid of him.

Many workers have abused this law. Was this the goal of the legislation, that farmers would be at the mercy of people who are not only of no use to the farm operation but who are a danger to the whole farming venture?

There are scores of names on the questionnaire and their stories are quite similar. Under the section “Undermining of ground rights through intimidation and crime”, numerous names appear. A serious problem in this regard is the proliferation of squatter camps in their midst.

A farm is handed over and is ruined, but the damage doesn’t stop there. Surrounding farms suffer because of environmental problems (no water, electricity, or rubbish and sewage removal), crime, broken fences and the theft of cattle, and the lowering of farm values in the market.

Some of this section’s stories

Farmer Malan

The DLA bought the farm next to mine, he said. No impact study was completed. There is very little water – the boreholes are dry. There are no roads, no sanitation, no rubbish removal.

Houses were built but they were constructed in a low-lying pan and when it rains, they are flooded out. Seventy families complained to the Department of Land Affairs that the surrounding farmers “tried to get rid of them”.

“They steal from us and they affect all the farms around them. They live from what the old pensioners receive each month. They regularly throw stones at farmers passing in cars. There is drinking and crime within the community, and their cattle are diseased. More than R800 a hectare was paid for this farm.”

He refers to another farm nearby, recently transferred to fifty five families, a 300 ha property with irrigation. Nobody from the DLA came to the surrounding farmers to discuss the environmental impact of possible squatting on the farm, or whether the farmers could help in any way (which they were prepared to do). Again, no impact study was completed. Surrounding farmers give the new residents water because pumps are broken. Now the municipality has to deliver regular water to the new owners at the rate of 20 litres per house per day, by water tank. “You cannot wash with 20 litres”, says Mr. Malan.

The case of Mr. P.J. Meyer

This farmer abandoned his Hartbeesfontein farm two years ago. It produced beef and had excellent grazing, with a good strong water supply and some boreholes. Mr. Meyer's problem was the positioning of his farm – it was near a location. (A neighbour told us that in South Africa, the closer to a location or a tribal rural area, the greater the crime. This doesn't say much for the people in those areas, he says wryly.)

Farmer Meyer's cattle were stolen and slaughtered, and his fencing was stolen. His trees were cut down and burnt for firewood. The water pumps were stolen, the cattle pens were stripped. Despite abandoning the farm, he still had to pay tax on the land because it was shown on his balance sheet as an "asset".

The thieves broke his cement dam and the wind pumps. They stole the pipes from the boreholes and removed every piece of equipment on the farm.

He sees this as unambiguous intimidation, and this is why he eventually abandoned the farm. His family was threatened and told "not to come back".

Nearby black farmers are also robbed of their crops, said one of Meyer's neighbours. Many really tried but the crime was too much for them. They have the same problem as the white farmers. There is no law and order, they say. There's no prosecution of the criminals. The police are simply incapable of handling the problems. Foreign cattle are allowed to roam through private property and when property owners go to court to try and remove the cattle, the court is told the miscreants did not know it was private property. Sometimes the sentence is 30 days, and we have to spend time in court, said Mr. Meyer. Then the criminals are out the next day.

Mr. J.J. Coetzee (not his real name) farms near Delareyville. He loses four to six head of cattle a week, while his sheep losses were seven to eight a day until he gave up sheep farming altogether. His farm is unfortunately near a squatter camp, and his fate was sealed because of this condition. Neighbouring white farmers sold out to black farmers who then "farmed" with squatters.

Shops on these "squatter" farms were closed, and the NoordWes grain silo wants to close down because of the conditions of the roads on which they transport the grain. Mr. Coetzee says big farmers don't support these silos any more because the roads are in such a state of repair they damage the lorries. Some of the roads have gone from tar to dirt.

Roads in the North West are collapsing. Some main roads in Malopo have deteriorated to the point where it is feared long stretches are already beyond repair.⁽²⁾ Private transport companies refuse to enter the area to transport cattle to the market, and farmers are now forced to buy their own cattle trucks.

Mr. Giel Theron, chairperson of the Molopo West Agricultural Union, says various discussions with the North West provincial administration have been fruitless.

The roads department has only three bulldozers to cover 2 000 km. Cattle farmers in the surrounding area say the rot set in two years ago when all planning seemed to go to pieces. Farmers have planted sticks to warn motorists of unsuspected dongas and potholes. Cattle trucks often get stuck in the loose sand, contributing to the time and cost of transportation to the market. The nearby squatter camp residents steal Mr. Coetzee's electricity cables and illegally connect their houses. When it rains everything is shorted. The power is out sometimes three to four hours at a time. Mr. Coetzee says it is a waste of time to complain to Eskom.

The squatters cut down the farmer's bluegum plantation – they cut the trees at night, as well as some of his indigenous trees.

He loses around R 1 200 per year because of the theft of petrol and fertilizer, and loses R6 000 to R8 000 in stolen green mealies (corn) and R4 000 to R6000 in ordinary mealies each year. These mealies are then sold at markets and pension pay-out points. According to him, you can write off up to 10% of your mealie harvest per annum because of this type of theft.

Farmer Coetzee has approached the Department of Land Affairs to buy his farm. His neighbour's farm was sold to the DLA for R2 000 per ha. The DLA unofficially offered him R1 800 per ha, but he tells us he'll now sell for as little as R1 000 per ha just to get out. They steal his diesel in 20 litre cans. The can is worth R100 but they sell it for R20 a can in the squatter camp. His own workers and the neighbouring squatters work together

He sees his agricultural environment turning into one big squatter camp, "what happened when the whites left Bophuthatswana". Prestigious buildings built during the homeland era have been vandalized. The boreholes are plugged with stones. The people are living in dams there. They have broken the dam walls and put corrugated iron roofing on the dam. Seven black farmers who took over an area after the homeland was abolished have been reduced to three now. They also suffer from theft.

"There is great potential if people want to work", says Mr. Coetzee. "They prefer stealing to working, and I cannot live in such an environment. But where will I get work?" he asks.

On the same list are the Viljoens, the Pretorius's and the Oosthuizens (not their real names). All their complaints are similar. They farm near Sannieshof and Fochville. Crop and stock theft, stock gates opened at night, high unemployment surrounding their farms. All of these farms were family farms. The Oosthuizens farmed in the area from 1908. Their 4 500 ha family farm was productive in beef and grain.

Black families were given R15 000 each under the old "Derek Hanekom scheme" as it is called by local farmers, and nearby farms were purchased. Now they are squatter camps feeding off productive farms nearby. (Where is Mr. Hanekom now? Has he visited these areas?)

The squatters steal anything they can lay their hands on – copper valves, steel gates, even the feeding troughs. The police caught some of them red-handed and they were charged but given bail. They stole again, were caught, charged and given bail again.

Out for the second time, they stole again, were caught, charged, and given bail for a third time. The police tell the farmers confidentially that some courts ruin their policing by letting the criminals off. The police are discouraged. Who wouldn't be?

The Pretorius family abandoned their farm in August 2003. Everything was stolen. Members of the family were threatened with death. Eight percent of their harvest of 60/80 tons of grain was stolen. The local municipality bought the neighbouring farm for a black empowerment group. It is now a basic, subsistence operation. The farm is full of weeds, and there is no labour evident. The new empowerment farmer says he can't afford to pay labour. Mr. Pretorius made an interesting comment to us – "despite the failures", he says, "they (the Department of Land Affairs) do not stop with their hopeless policy. They simply make things worse. They don't learn from their mistakes. Maybe they think next time they'll be lucky!"

Farmer T. Viljoen placed costly electric fencing around his 1250 ha Lichtenburg farm. He has already asked the Department of Land Affairs to buy his land. He tells us of a neighbouring farm which was bought for a black empowerment group for R1 million. Six hundred hectares in size, it had a flourishing dairy and beef

herd and excellent water. Today nothing is happening at that farm. There are no implements, no tractors. Sixty or seventy families occupy the farm and they have no income. Mr. Viljoen promised the DLA in Lichtenburg he would help these new black neighbours - the DLA just had to tell him what to do. The department never came back to him.

As for the old Bophuthatswana tribal land into which so much money was pumped in the old National Party days, blacks do not farm there anymore and whites are renting some of the farmland.

His brother Hennie Viljoen farms at Sannieshof, on 800 ha. His fencing has been cut and he is robbed on average of R30 000 worth of grain per annum. The thieves rode his prize horse around the property looking for what they could steal, and then stole the horse! He says some neighbouring black farmers who are trying to make a go of it are also stolen blind.

And so the list goes on. There are scores more names, with the same complaints. One particular story caught our attention. A 700 ha insolvent chicken farm outside Lichtenburg was bought by the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) in May 2003. Five ANC youth members formed a Community Property Association (CPA) and the farm was given to them.

The road to the property was rebuilt, the farm buildings were spruced up and the house was painted and refurbished. There was a spirited handover ceremony attended by at least 500 people. Two air force helicopters were used to bring in dignitaries, and many policemen attended the ceremony. One hundred and twenty cows were given to the youth as a kick-off present from the government. We believe the young men are looking for funding to salvage this operation which is not running well.

Mr. Danie Oosthuizen sold his property at Schuinsdrift to the DLA two years ago. It was given to 31 families. There were six farms altogether, 3 000 ha in all. The Oosthuizens cultivated mixed crops – tobacco and maize – and ran a dairy herd. The water supply was good, with boreholes and irrigation canals from the Marico Dam 10 km away, previously constructed under a state water scheme. The total amount paid by the government for these farms was R7 million.

The new owners divided the irrigated sections of the farm into 10 ha plots. Today nothing is happening on that farm. There was no business plan. Various organizations tried to help. The surrounding farmers and Mr. Oosthuizen himself wanted the new owners to succeed.

There was an excellent chicken farm on the premises, and Eskom offered electricity so the owners could obtain a contract with Rainbow Chicken. But there was no management or planning from the government's side.

"The extension officers were not up to standard", said the farmer. "In the old days, extension officers were qualified specialists. This is not the case today".

The farm was eventually over-grazed and has turned in parts to bushveld. It was reported that the tribal leader who headed the community ran off with the operating capital.

The following stories are of special interest for the specific detail which emerged in the telling.

Mr. Van Vreden of Leeukuil

Ben van Vreden, formerly of the farm Leeukuil in the Devondale district, is Secretary of the Broedersput Boerevereniging (the Broedersput Farmers Union). He sent us copious correspondence criticising the government's land reform policy. He has written to organized agriculture repeatedly complaining about the desecration of the neighbouring agricultural environment by new farm "restitution/redistribution" owners, and their atrocious treatment of the animals bequeathed to them.

He and other farmers in the area question the logic of a farm restitution policy which destroys rather than builds. He refers particularly to the farm Enkeldoring, a 300 ha property on which 70 new families were supposed to farm. An impact study was apparently completed, but was found unsuitable for this particular project. (One farmer told us the extension officers have a total lack of knowledge of commercial agriculture). There is no provision for sewage, van Vreden wrote, and this has resulted in serious health implications for the new owners as well as the surrounding areas. The water supply is weak, and who is going to remove the rubbish created by these 70 families, he asks. There is no electricity, so how can the families cook and warm up water?

He wants to know if it is Mr. Thabo Mbeki's grand land reform plan to turn productive farmland into squatters' camps? Farmers' properties bordering this new handover project have put their farms on the market because of – as usual – crop and stock theft. One of the unoccupied farms bordering this new squatter camp has had its house simply taken away, and farmland in the area has drastically decreased in value as the result of these new land owners.

Mr. van Vreden's complaints are no different to the thousands of others throughout South Africa. But what made his file so shocking were the newspaper clippings he sent us about the treatment of animals by the new owners.

The mind simply boggles and is even numbed at how human beings can treat animals – God's creatures – in such a horrific manner, especially animals which are supposed to be their livelihood.

Headlines of the *NoordWes Streeknuus* of 15 February 2003 declared "Farm has twenty owners but the animals remain uncared for". The next paragraph is shocking:

"Broken fences, an empty dam. Leaking water from pipes. A wind pump from which water exits drip by drip if the wind blows hard enough. And animals which like dogs storm the wind pump to try and lick a few drops of water from the pipe to drink. No, this is not Zimbabwe. Here on our doorstep, on a farm between Vryburg and Devondale on which twenty people live, there exists such a situation."

The article informs us that the poor animals have basically been left to their own devices by the new "owners". Farmers in the area say it is heartbreaking and traumatic to see how the poor creatures walk round and round the wind pump to try and drink a little water. Some have even broken through the wire to get to neighbours' water supplies.

StreekNuus spoke to some of the new owners about the situation. They said that someone from their group was always on the farm but in any case, *it was nobody else's business if their animals died of thirst.*

A nearby farmer told *StreekNuus* he hadn't seen anyone on the farm for the past four weeks, and the animals were not being looked after. They were not being injected and had developed diseases, and no lick had been set out for them. Another farmer told the newspaper that he had crops growing up against the fence between the two farms. The poor animals had stormed the fence to try and obtain moisture from the crops.

This farmer told the newspaper he had told the new owners on a number of occasions that he would be prepared to give water to the cattle if they would place a drinking trough on their side of the fence. The new owners said this wouldn't work because the animals would have to walk through a vlei to get there, and if it rained, they would get wet! They actually found an excuse not to take up this offer!

Many people in the area phoned the SPCA: they were sick to the stomach at the way the new owners treated the animals. The SPCA warned the owners that water must be supplied and gave them a date on which they must react to the warning. The owners did nothing and now the SPCA must obtain a court order against these people. At the time of going to press, the newspaper wasn't sure whether the court order had been granted.

In the meantime, the new owners of Leeukuil accused those concerned at the animals' plight of stealing the cattle which had died of thirst!.

A later report in the same newspaper said the new owners were "angry" at the previous press report and had laid a charge with the Department of Land Affairs against the newspaper and the local farmers for complaining about their treatment of the animals!

DLA told the owners they must start "working" on the farm. While the representative was there, they saw a neighbouring farmer apparently taking some of the cattle to his farm to try and give them water. The owners immediately laid a charge of theft against the farmer with the DLA, but it was later discovered the farmer was simply taking back his own cattle.

The cattle theft unit of the SA Police Service was called in and repaired the water pipes so the cattle could drink. After that the new owners simply disappeared and the animals were again left to their own devices.

People in the area told us they cannot live near people like the new owners. "How can we share the same planet with them? What do we have in common with human beings who treat their very own animals in such a way? There is absolutely no compassion whatsoever in their hearts for anything. They are selfish, lazy and uncaring. How can the government use taxpayers' money to give a beautiful farm to people like that?"

This animal incident caused great soul searching in the community. The horror which this engendered in the hearts of people who love animals and the environment can never be erased. And this incident will probably always be remembered by our readers.

The Bray Story

The Department of Land Affairs published a glossy booklet entitled "LandInfo". Edition No. 2 of the year 2000 shows a picture of President Thabo Mbeki congratulating Mr. Bob Namusi, new chairperson of the Bray farm project, after receiving title deeds to this scheme.

A Mr. Jaap de Bruin is seen in the DLA book "addressing the crowd" with President Mbeki. De Bruin owned a 1 300 ha cattle farm Sonning in the area and allegedly experienced financial problems with the farm.

According to people in the area, Mr. de Bruin devised a scheme to firstly sell his farm to 74 recipient families, some of whom were his workers, and secondly, to set up a new housing project of 150 dwellings at Bray for the 74 families and others. Bray is a small town right on the South Africa/Botswana border.



Pages from the Department of Land Affairs publication, Landinfo, showing the celebrations at the handover of the North-West Province Bray area by president Thabo Mbeki. Despite grandiose plans, the project has to date produced nothing except a squatter camp. Raw sewage from the Bray squatters camp runs into the Molopo River which is the drinking water source for the entire area's residents.

Kafferskraal

This is the story of Mr. Kerneels van Rensburg who, with four other farmers, owned a 3 900 ha property called Kafferskraal. On his 700 ha portion he produced 800 tons of mealies per annum and as much meat needed to feed 20 000 people.

A land claim on these farms was completed in July 2001. In September 2001 the farmers left and there has been no movement on the farms since then, except that one of the previous owners is renting his particular property back. No business plans were produced, although Mr. Van Rensburg said he'd help the new owners.

Since he left, his beautiful house has been vandalized: toilets, taps and pipes were removed, and doors and cupboards throughout the house were broken off from their hinges and taken away. Some of the roofing has disappeared. The farm's dams and pumps are now inoperative. Nobody wants to pay the electricity to work the pumps.

This was one of the best and most productive farm groups in the area. It cultivated mealies and ran an excellent dairy herd. Altogether the taxpayers paid R5 070 000 for these four farms.

What makes this story exceptional is how the farmer ran around taking photos of his farm, his house and his furnishings, as if expecting the whole thing to sink into chaos. Which it did! Which is to say nobody expects any more than chaos these days with these handovers. It is almost a given that the project will fail, as most of them do.

Last but not Least

We cannot possibly mention this farmer's name, nor where he farms. Suffice it to say it is in the North West Province.

We telephoned him with regard to reports we had heard about the continual and relentless theft he experiences on his farm. He answered the telephone in a soft voice. We thought he was ill, and asked him if we could call back. No, he said, I'll talk to you now. He confirmed the nearly R350 000 worth of theft he had experienced in one year. We asked him about an attack on his person some years ago, and how was he managing today. Yes, he said, I was stabbed several times in the throat with a long spike. Hence his difficulty in speaking - his vocal chords had been damaged. Stunned, we said goodbye and put down the phone.

So this is farming in South Africa today. A good decent man who, if his forefathers had gone to any other new world country, would be living the life he deserves, after all the years of hard and dedicated work on the land. No, fellow South Africans, this is not how it should be. Something must be done!

Chapter Thirteen

THE PROVINCE OF GAUTENG

If a man does away with his traditional way of living and throws away his good customs, he had better first make certain he has something of value to replace them.

- Basuto proverb

Gauteng province includes the huge industrial and residential complex of Johannesburg, Pretoria and the southern areas of Johannesburg, what used to be known as the PWV area – the Pretoria/Witwatersrand/Vereeniging complex.

One of the most serious social problems of this, South Africa's most populous province, is human squatting and land invasions. On the outskirts of the cities, in the peri-urban and small-farming areas, farms have been invaded, while formerly-productive farmland lies fallow and untended.

In an October 2003 address on land reform to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Professor Lawrence Schlemmer of the Helen Suzman Foundation discussed property rights and the government's stand against land reform that would undermine property rights.

The real danger, says Schlemmer, does not lie in formal policy but in the government's capacity to enforce property rights.

He referred to the Duvenhage case which captured the attention of, particularly, city and peri-urban dwellers in South Africa. This type of farming land on the outskirts of South African increasingly attracts invasions and take-overs which, if large enough in size, take on a momentum of their own.

The extraordinary phenomenon of squatting has become a hallmark of the new South Africa, with urban "land grabs" a permanent blot on the geographic landscape. The principle of the right to defend one's property, and win, took second place in the case of farmer Braam Duvenhage.



The face of land reform in Gauteng: massive squatter camps, housing millions of people who for the greatest part have turned their backs on farming and have left agriculturally potentially rich areas to settle in urban and semi-urban areas.

The farm Modderklip, Benoni, East Rand

In September 2000, Braam Duvenhage reported the illegal squatting of 50 people on his farm to the local police. Some arrests were made but eventually he was told that “the jails were full” and no more arrests could be made.⁽¹⁾ This opened the floodgates for more squatters to move on to the farm.

Duvenhage farms commercially – the farm is his livelihood. He bought the farm in 1965 and grows soya beans, sorghum and maize. He spent his life developing the farm - 2 300 ha in size – and now squatters have occupied 40 ha of it. He bought the property from a mining company and there was no land claim on the farm.

Eventually the squatter figure rose to 40 000 and included Mozambicans and Zimbabweans. Duvenhage blames the squatters’ boldness on the contemporary Bredell incident where members of the Pan African Congress (PAC) sold plots for R25 on a piece of private land. Two farmers, the government, Transnet and Eskom jointly owned the occupied Bredell land, also on the East Rand.

In Duvenhage’s affidavit to court, he declared that in May 2000, 400 squatters had erected 50 shacks and had unlawfully occupied his land. *Local police tried unsuccessfully to remove the squatters* (italics ours) until a final court order was granted against the squatters in April 2001.⁽²⁾ They were to go within two months, but they never moved. Duvenhage then called on the government to act in terms of the sheriff’s order to have the squatters removed.

He was informed it would cost him R1,8 million to have the 40 000 people on his farm removed, money that Duvenhage certainly did not have.

In September, the farmer asked the High Court to enforce the order handed down in the Witwatersrand High Court to evict the people from his land. But the case was defended by the State President, the ministers of agriculture and land affairs, housing and safety and security, the commissioner of police and the local municipal council.

The squatters have illegal electricity connections and for water, they tapped into a pipe line from a nearby settlement. “For food they pinch crops from my farm”, said the 73-year-old farmer.⁽³⁾ “Recently we traced a ton of maize worth R70 000 stolen from my farm.” One of his tractors simply disappeared and he receives threatening phone calls. In May 2001, Duvenhage was already out of pocket by R200 000 for legal fees. He was forced to go to the higher court to get the local court order enforced. Because of these legal delays, more squatters arrived by the busload. For practical purposes, says Duvenhage, a private property owner in South Africa who cannot afford to pay to remove illegal squatters has in effect lost his land.

Duvenhage’s farm borders on the Daveyton township where “crime is rife and an ever-expanding morass of shacks and filth has swallowed once-fertile fields”.⁽⁴⁾ He now finds the farm a trap, as do so many other South African farmers. What was planned as a nest egg for his sons has now become a burden, and he would sell it tomorrow if – and it’s a big if – someone would buy it.

“At least Mugabe tells the farmers straight ‘I’m going to take your land’. But in South Africa, a High Court judge orders that the squatters be removed and the government ignores it”, complained Duvenhage.⁽⁵⁾ “President Mbeki keeps on saying that what’s happening in Zimbabwe won’t happen here. But it’s happening. If this is not a farm invasion, then I don’t know what is!”

Court

In November 2002, Judge William de Villiers found that government had failed to carry out its constitutional duty to protect Mr. Duvenhage’s property rights

and to carry out an eviction order which the farmer had won. The judge ordered the SA government to present a comprehensive plan to court by February 28 2003 to either evict the squatters and rehouse them, or to buy the affected land.⁽⁶⁾

Government's comment on the ruling was interesting. Land Affairs minister Thoko Didiza said that if the government upheld the court order, it would encourage "queue jumping", allowing illegal squatters access to housing ahead of people on waiting lists for houses. The government decided to appeal against the High Court judgement to the Appeal Court in Bloemfontein.

There could be a long delay before the case is heard. Meanwhile, the squatters are still on Mr. Duvenhage's farm.

Squatting All Over The Country

In the Bredell case mentioned above, the government was granted an order to evict the squatters from what was, in part, government land. But other cases have not been so easily solved. Squatter camps have completely encircled Johannesburg and its suburbs. Further north, in March 2003, squatters made themselves at home right in the heart of the up-market suburb of Kosmos, on the Hartebeespoort Dam.

The Johannesburg Central Business District's buildings are full of squatters. Some simply seized control of buildings from landlords. In the Hillbrow area, now virtually under the control of Nigerians and known informally as "little Lagos", drugs are sold openly and home-made abattoirs have mushroomed in hotel and apartment rooms.

Pretoria's parks are a haven for squatters who camp out near streams and rob nearby houses. Many come from other countries, including Lesotho and Swaziland. The Alberton railway station was reported as home to squatters. Nearby factories are regularly vandalized and/or burgled.

The Ekurhuleni municipality on the East Rand used taxpayers money to give free water to squatters.⁽⁷⁾ There are 205 squatter camps in this municipality alone, of which 68 are illegally on private ground.

A businessman north of Johannesburg told the press his business had gone from being worth R15 million to nothing, adding that he had lost R64 000 income a month.⁽⁸⁾ Squatters occupy an adjacent property to his place of work. In December 2002, the businessman found a corpse on his property with a gunshot wound, and two days later police picked up another corpse in the next-door squatter camp with stab wounds. This citizen has already spent more than R750 000 to try and remove the squatters. He is said to be suing the local council for R2,5 million.

Some years ago, residents of Kempton Park on the East Rand built a deep trench 2m wide, 2m long and 9 km long to prevent crime from neighbouring areas. (Vryheid, KZN farmers have built the same size trenches to stop cattle theft. South Africa's urban residents build the same trenches to stop car hijacking!)

These Kempton Park residents were the victims of a relentless crime wave. One car was stolen every day. Women were raped when they drove past in their cars, while people no longer stopped at stop streets for fear of being attacked.

The place looked like a war zone, according to a journalist who visited the area.⁽⁹⁾ Watchtowers had been built and were manned 24 hours a day. Houses looked like forts and many had been sold for a song. One couple told the journalist they had had thirteen break-ins over the past four years. In one two week period, they were broken into eight times. Insurance companies have for years now refused to insure properties and contents in the area.

An “idyllic retirement farm” became a “putrid nightmare” for Mr. Blackie Swart when squatters invaded his property. “They have used my home, my farm as a toilet”, he lamented⁽¹⁰⁾. Mr. Swart sold his working farm and bought his retirement property at Hartebeespoort where he believed he would be able to live in peace and quiet.

A nearby squatters camp has made his life a misery. “They walk through my farm as if it were a public thoroughfare. They slaughtered my cattle and broke the wire fence. They use our farm and its buildings as a huge toilet and shower ground. When the wind changes, the smell is unbearable”, declares Mr. Swart. More than twelve telephone calls to the Madibeng municipality were completely ignored.

Because he complained about the squatters, his animal forage was burned, so much so that the whole farm nearly burnt down. Despite his visits to the police, nothing has happened to the case he opened.

Other squatters in the area received free water from another farmer “so they won’t steal”. But on other neighbouring farms, water is stolen using buckets in a queue to the borehole. “They even stole the sleepers off the nearby railway line”, complained Mr. Swart.

Mrs. Poeka Eckard, a lady farmer in the area, says the squatters do what they want.⁽¹¹⁾ “We have stopped farming with sheep. They are stolen day after day and we find the legs in the veld. The pipes from our borehole was stolen three times this year”.

Sometimes the court’s judgments encourage squatters. In July 2001, a judgment in the Witwatersrand High Court left the door wide open for other land invaders to legally challenge eviction orders. After a four-year wrangle, the Northern Metropolitan Local Council lost its move to rid Kya Sands and Houtkoppes, north of Johannesburg, of squatters. Judge J. Mlambo found that officials had no authority to apply for the eviction and that eviction notices should have been served in the home language of the squatters!

Since this particular judicial outcome, hundreds more squatters have moved in with alacrity. A local resident claimed “it is an open secret that many of the so-called squatters own one or more houses in Soweto and other townships, bought with government first-time buyer’s subsidies. They rent out these houses, and then come and squat in our area.”

“If the eviction notices must be served in the squatter’s own language, then they should be written in Shona (from Zimbabwe) and Portuguese (from Mozambique). It is also known the local warlord is a Nigerian, so maybe the court should have issued an eviction order in that language too!”

Brick By Brick

It is not unusual in South Africa to see whole residences plundered and carried off brick by brick. Residents of the small-holdings at Mapleton, near Boksburg on the East Rand were tormented day and night by more than 200 squatters who stole everything that moves, and fixed property as well.



The remains of a house – literally dismantled brick by brick by squatters – in the Mapleton small agricultural holdings area on the East Rand. Similar scenes are to be found up and down the province.

Anyone who goes on vacation can find their house gone when they come back. Mrs. Lorraine White who lived in the area for 50 years said it used to be a veritable paradise.⁽¹²⁾ It doesn't help to put up fences, she said. They are broken within hours. Dogs are poisoned, and everything is stolen. People who couldn't sell their houses simply left, and the empty houses were dismantled brick by brick. The police were informed, but nothing was done.

Two years ago, squatters armed with hacksaws, spades, forks and hoes invaded privately-owned plots near the Rietvlei Dam outside Pretoria, but were forced off by public order police and private security guards hired to keep them away.⁽¹³⁾

Leaving behind them the poles they had brought to demarcate stands (plots), the group marched back to where they came from. They informed the police they were the "advance party" sent to clear the land and threatened the residents that they'd be back "with 10 000 people". This was the third time the squatters had tried to occupy the private small-holdings.

On a previous occasion, a High Court interdict was obtained to prevent an invasion and 4 000 structures which had been set up, were removed. It was discovered that many squatters came from as far away as KwaZulu/Natal. During the latest invasion, the squatters told security guards they were "testing the water to see what happens".

Land is not the only refuge for squatters. In October 2003, it was reported an empty house in Johannesburg's trendy suburb of Melville has been occupied by squatters for two years. The house has no electricity, water or sewage service. All the furniture, kitchen cabinets and wooden doors have been used for firewood.⁽¹⁴⁾ It is believed more than 100 people stay in the house.

A local resident says she has complained numerous times to the authorities about the squatters, but the authorities say they are "looking into the matter". Various officials have visited the house, but could not find the owner.

Early in 2003, the Johannesburg City council had to evict squatters from an empty clinic in the city. More than 400 people were found there, and firearms were discovered in the building.⁽¹⁵⁾ Only two floors of the nine floor building were occupied until evictions occurred. Medical refuse such as swabs, used syringes, bandages and bloodied gloves were among the debris carried out of the building by officials. Rentals were charged by self-appointed “landlords” to live in the building.

In a final insult to injury, a January 2003 report revealed a Mogale City councilor had called upon police to protect illegal squatters on a farm in the Magaliesburg district, north west of Johannesburg. Neels Oosthuizen, attorney for property owner Richard Theron* (1) said it was clear the Mogale city councilor had encouraged squatters to seize his client’s farm.

“Councilor Mabe** (2) has actively incited the illegal land seizure to the point of calling in armed and uniformed municipal police to intimidate my client, after he has succeeded at great personal financial cost to resolve the illegal settlement issue. This is an extremely ominous development as the farm seizures in Zimbabwe started the same way, with groups of squatters seizing land with official ruling-party support”, Mr. Oosthuizen said..

On that note we end the squatter stories. Can any civilized country imagine that its citizens would have their property rights treated with such contempt? What would George W. Bush do if his farm were invaded? Unthinkable! But in South Africa, anything goes without law and order and good policing.

* (1) Update: Richard Theron and his wife were murdered on 5 June 2004.

** (2) Councilor Mabe is on record as saying to the now murdered Richard Theron “Your attitude will be the reason for another farm murder”. Numerous death threats were received by Theron, and despite pleading for protection via calls & letters to local Police, Police headquarters and several other parties, both were brutally murdered.

The Farm Debacles

An agricultural holding at Orange Farm, south of Johannesburg - meant for use by veteran former soldiers – is lying idle because the beneficiaries do not have the capacity to take it over.⁽¹⁶⁾ The Doornkuil Agri-Business Industrial Park has a newly-completed building for manual workshops and equipment for poultry rearing, welding, fence making and farming. It has two horse and trailers, three tractors and two trucks. There is a dairy and two milking cows which were, until recently, part of a herd of 12. One night 10 of these cows were stolen. This “park” was the brainchild of the Airborne Trust, which received R5 million from BAE Systems, the firm awarded the government contract to supply aircraft to the South African Air Force. This was one of the offset/reinvestment projects promised by those who won contracts under the arms deals.

The farm was handed over in 2002 but it was found the recipients were unable to “capacitate” it, said the Airborne Trust’s spokesman Michael Chemaly. (This new euphemism in the South African lexicon – to capacitate – is interesting. It means people are unable to do something because they don’t have the ability to do it.)

Rust de Winter

The Rust de Winter land, 75 km from Pretoria, was originally an irrigation scheme created by the old National Party government. Around 100 plots of approximately 25 ha each were sold to commercial farmers who cultivated cotton, tobacco and vegetables.

It was a highly successful and productive scheme. In 1978, the government bought out the farmers and in the eighties, this land was incorporated into the newly-formed Bophuthatswana homeland, under the SA Development Trust.

Today this land has turned to dust. There is nothing but a barren landscape, and the former post office, co-op, local store and filling station have disappeared. Empty houses dot the landscape.

At present the water from Rust de Winter dams is supplying nearby townships. This was very well-developed, irrigated land which now lies in ruins. The government should resuscitate this land for its land restitution beneficiaries instead of taking productive farm land for the purpose.

Farming with Squatters

An interesting phenomenon has manifested itself east of Pretoria. The farm Kleinsonderhout between Bapsfontein and Bronkhorstspuit was sold by a white farmer to a black gentleman who now “farms” squatters. There are now more than 2 000 people on this once-productive farm, each paying rent to the new owner. There is no sewage, no potable water, no electricity. Naturally, the residents are stealing from the neighbouring farms. Now the squatters are demanding “services”, although they are 28 km from Bronkhorstspuit.

In Kekana Gardens, near Hammanskraal, a 1 000 ha cattle and game farm belonging to a Mr. Roos is under siege. Mr. Roos wished to sell but couldn't get his price. A local warlord is believed to have supported the invasion of squatters onto Mr. Roos' farm. There are now 4 000 people there, living in shacks with no sewage or electricity. The Standard Bank is believed to have spent R45 000 to connect a water pipeline for the residents.

The above reveals under what pressure South Africa's cities and peri-urban areas are. We have quoted Gauteng examples but the pattern is the same, to a greater or lesser degree, in all South Africa's cities and towns. Squatting is here to stay, as are land invasions and intimidation of those who resist.

Chapter Fourteen

BLYDEVOORUITZICHT NO MORE: KWAZULU / NATAL

Blydevooruitzicht: Dutch for “Joyous Prospects” - the name given to the land of Natal by the Boer trekkers in the 1830s on account of the rich potential of that region.

We have dealt with Vryheid and Kranskop and the

Dunns of Northern Natal as separate chapters, which says much for the province of KwaZulu/Natal as a contentious region where four of South Africa’s peoples – the Zulus, the whites, the coloureds and the Indians live side by side in the cities, but share an uneasy truce in the rural countryside.

It is also fitting that we end our provincial stories on land reform in KwaZulu/Natal. So much of South Africa’s world image is formulated around this part of the country – the Zulu wars, the British imperial expeditions, the Afrikaners and their treks, the oft-forgotten struggle of John Dunn’s descendants to gain title to land given to them by Zulu kings, and of course the Indians, most of whom call KZN their home.

Land reform in the province is a sorry story. As with the other provinces, we have collected scores of stories and anecdotes and have made so many personal connections with people involved in a thwarted and skewed land restitution and handover process that this book could go on forever.

We will tell three stories to end our provincial tales. The first is about two examples of animal cruelty – mindless, pitiless sadism against defenceless creatures. The people who committed these acts of savagery have votes in our legislature and, by extension, have a say in the future of our country. It’s something to think about.

Mr. Serfie Serfontein farms cattle at Newcastle. Six of his young cows and a stud bull worth R24 000 were cruelly stabbed with spears on his farm. We noticed this in a Johannesburg newspaper ⁽¹⁾ and telephoned him. He sent us some gripping photos which we have printed.

Mr. Serfontein said it took 50 years of breeding to get close to the perfect Bonsmara bull, ‘which mine nearly was. Now I’ve not only lost him but all the calves he would have sired. I can’t afford to buy another bull’, he said. The bull had been shot, as were three heifers.

His cows were herded into the cattle pens and then stabbed with spears near their hearts. Only one carcass had part of its hind quarters missing, a sign of vindictive killings not for the pot. He believes he is being chased off his 940 ha farm where he has to contend with young Zulu men hunting his animals with dogs

And the police, we asked? The newspaper report said Police Captain Polla Paulsen declared the police were investigating the slaughter. “We are doing everything in our power to bring the culprits to book”, he told the press.

So what happened? Nothing, said Mr. Serfontein. They took photos and opened a docket and that’s the last I heard of them. One policemen told him “if you know or suspect who they are, you must catch them for us”.

Mr. Serfontein believes the mutilation of cattle echoes the Zimbabwean farmer’s troubles at the beginning of the land grab era. We would also mention that the cruel mutilation of cattle and pets was a hallmark of the Mau Mau era in Kenya’s terror tactics against the mainly white farming community before independence.

In another instance, farmer Roy Ferguson of Vryheid noticed that the tails of seven of his stud cattle had been severed. The tails were “savagely hacked off” according to Mr. Ferguson. He said it appeared the culprits “swung a machete in the general direction of the cows’ tails in the dark”. In the process they inflicted severe wounds on the back of the cows’ legs.⁽²⁾ One cow had to be destroyed, five had to be sewn up and treated by a vet for infection. Another cow disappeared, and probably died.

Mr. Ferguson offered a R10 000 reward for information leading to the capture of the miscreants. We telephoned him to ask what had transpired. “Nothing” he said. Nobody came forward to claim the reward. So he consulted a witchdoctor, taking his herdboys along to see the sangoma. He received muti (medicine) from the witchdoctor, which transaction was witnessed by the herder, and no further mutilations took place.

Some of Mr. Fergusons’ pigs’ tails were also cut. Through the grapevine he discovered the thieves use these animal tails as whisks – they push a stick up through the tail skin – and that this purportedly provides immunity from being caught while stealing cattle. They sell these tails as fly whisks for this purpose.

The farmer now puts bells and reflector tape-covered cable around his cows’ necks. As with Mr. Serfontein, farmer Ferguson reported the matter to the police who took some photographs, took the names of the perpetrators (yes, the farmer knew who committed the deeds), and weren’t heard of again.





In scenes reminiscent of the 1960s Mau Mau in Kenya, cattle on farms in Kwa Zulu Natal are mutilated and killed for no other purpose than attempting to drive the farmers off their land. A selection of pictures from the farm of Mr. Serfie Serfontein, Newcastle, KwaZulu/Natal.

The Makhatini Flats

We had heard rumblings about the Flats for some time, but it was difficult to find anyone who would talk to us. Eventually we found someone in Swaziland who had become disillusioned with the ANC-led local council. He told us the 10 000 ha flats had been Crown land, and that the old National Party government had allocated it to commercial farmers. The land was then incorporated into Kwa Zulu as part of a proposed homeland consolidation.

There was much activity – extension officers were appointed, small-scale farming was started with sugar cane and maize. An experimental station was built.

With the advent of the ANC government, most of the people from the “old order” were thrown out and replaced with political appointments. They were not trained, declared our contact. “The place had great potential, but it was underutilized” he said. “The new management was supposed to have business plans but we didn’t see them.” Then the real rot set in. There were severe water supply problems and eventually all the machinery was auctioned.

A mentor/manager/joint venture partner has now been brought in to get things right. We are told that no new sugar cane had been planted for 8 to 10 years. Because of these problems brought about by the new political correctness, only 65 tons of cane

was being harvested per hectare as opposed to the previous 120 tons per hectare. Over the past few years under the new government, hundreds of emerging farmers tried to make a living but failed due to a collapse of infrastructure, the lack of technical support and proper financial underpinning.

We were also informed that Tongaat Hulett is to invest R600 million in new sugar cane growing “only if the new extension officers will be part and parcel of the deal, and the whole project is controlled by the new venture capital group”.

Much has been written about the Flats and it remains to be seen whether the current projects can restore this area to its former glory. It has great potential, with a sub-tropical climate and deep and fertile ground.

In the meantime, it is reported that Tongaat-Hulett’s 120-job Entumeni sugar mill is closing due to drought. The company’s total sugar production from plantations throughout South Africa in 2002 increased to 1,3 million tons, 16% up on 2001.

Piet Greyling, Mkuze farmer

Piet is a South African small farmer. He owns a 1 100 ha farm in Mkuze. Originally he farmed sisal and employed 142 people. The government’s new labour laws affected the relationship between him and his staff. He took up the sisal crop and replaced it with vegetables and fruit and downsized to 55 employees. Then a new law was announced - if you have more than 50 employees, some of them must serve on your board. Then came the minimum wage legislation. He laid off more than half his work force, ending up with 22 employees, farming tomatoes and running a game farm.

He downsized from 142 to 22 employees because of labour and wage laws. His game is now the victim of theft and poaching. His fence wires are regularly cut – he is next to a location and he wants to sell out. His son was attacked on the farm and emigrated.

That in a nutshell is the latter-day “story of an African farm”. It is just an example, in Piet’s own words. Some will say Piet is pessimistic. Maybe he is. But he used to employ 142 people and now he doesn’t, and he believes it was through no fault of his own. He is the victim of theft, poaching and trespassing. His children are not interested in carrying on farming. In fact, they have left the country. Is Piet a typical example of a South African farmer in 2003? There may be thousands of farmers who are better off than he is, who are richer and more confident. But there are thousands who live similar lives to Piet. And this doesn’t augur well for the future of farming in South Africa.

Chapter Fifteen

THE ROAD TO POVERTY - DISTURBING TENDENCIES

Many aspects of life in South Africa have a direct bearing on successful agricultural production. Some are out of our hands – the weather, world commodity prices and falling and ascending markets of particular products, to name a few.

In our previous chapters we have brought to the reader's attention the patent failure of some of the most crucial aspects of the South African government's land reform program. In this chapter we focus on further alarming trends which could have a serious effect on the continuation of productive farming in this country, given that farming is currently successful under the most trying of circumstances.

Unlike subsistence farming (and indeed a subsistence mentality!), long-term planning has been the hallmark of successful states. Looking ahead has been the linchpin of why the first world progresses and develops and innovates. One thing leads to another, and research is possibly the most crucial element in this continuous development.

Section A:

THE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH COUNCIL (ARC)

Until the present government came to power, South Africa was not only a leading player in agricultural research in Africa but indeed in the world. Many of its institutes were world famous - Onderstepoort for example was South Africa and Africa's most prestigious veterinary science research institution. South African scientists were lauded throughout the world (as were South African doctors and other professionals) for their dedication, skill and innovation. It looks as if this has come to an end. In 2002 already, the red lights were flickering. A report entitled "Onderstepoort in Crisis" ⁽¹⁾ named important scientists who had fled the institute:

- Dr. Frank Vreede, a molecular genetics expert who left for Europe. He specialized in controlling gene expression by manipulating animal responses to vaccination to optimize immunity.
- Dr. Mandy Bastos, a molecular epidemiologist who specialized in foot and mouth disease. She played a large part in tracing the origin of the disease.
- Dr. Kelly Brayton, molecular parasitology expert, now in Washington. She had trained in the techniques needed for parasite whole genome sequencing.
- Dr. Etienne de Villiers, a bio-informatics expert, is now in Nairobi. Bio-informaticians are essential computer experts who analyse the masses of genome sequencing data.
- Nico Gunter and Henriette Macmillan, both cellular immunologists who worked on vaccine development. They worked on understanding how animals control infections with parasites that live inside the animal's cells.
- Dr. Mary Louise Penrith, a head of pathology after 10 and a half years at the institution, left for Mozambique.
- Dr. Leon Prozesky, veterinary pathologist and head of pathology, had extensive experience in performing post-mortem diagnoses of tropical diseases.

- Dr. Theo de Waal, veterinary parasitologist, was head of the parasitology department. His expertise was in tropical parasites in domestic animals. He is now in the United Kingdom.
- Dr. Albie van Dijk, a virologist and previous head of the biochemistry department. He developed vaccines against tropical viral diseases such as African horse sickness and bluetongue. He is now in Australia.
- Dr. Gavin Thomson, internationally recognized expert in foot and mouth disease and rabies. Previously the director of Onderstepoort, he now works in Nairobi as an international consultant in the disease.
- Dr. Durr Bezuidenhout was an expert in heartwater disease. This disease is a tick-borne disease and is a killer of cattle, sheep and goats. He took early retirement.
- Dr. Janusz Paweska was head of the virology department with experience in tropical virological diseases of animals and man. He is now a consultant on Ebola fever in Central Africa.
- Dr. Jan du Preez was head of the technology transfer department, which is now closed.

(This report was dated May 3, 2002. It is possible these scientists are not currently working where the report stated.)

In the year 2003, matters came to a head at Onderstepoort. Reports that the institute was “collapsing” were underpinned by various political parties, one of which - the Democratic Alliance - said the Minister of Agriculture Ms. Thoko Didiza appeared “unaware of the dire situation at the center”.⁽²⁾ DA Agriculture spokesman at the time Dr. Kraai van Niekerk said the news that the center was to close its pathology unit was shocking. This now means that research into animal deaths will not now take place.

In August 2003, Dr. Fred Potgieter told the world that the institute’s scientists were “deeply demotivated”.⁽³⁾ He criticized the appointment of researchers for two-year periods, saying research was a long and diligent process which could be adversely influenced when researchers worked with a sword over their heads. A researcher in the institute’s tuberculosis unit resigned because of this two-year problem, and the institute now has no researchers in this important field.⁽⁴⁾ It was the only institute in the country which investigated TB in, particularly, buffalo breeding projects. At the time of this report, Dr. Gerhard Verdoor of the Endangered Species Trust declared that TB is already a big problem in South Africa.

Many buffalos in the eastern part of the country have TB, he said. Lions and other predators then become infected after eating the carcasses.⁽⁵⁾

The institute has been hemorrhaging expertise for some time. An article as far back as 2000 revealed the paucity of bursaries being made available to young researchers.

It was said that bursaries for young white students were not being made available, and more than 400 agricultural researchers withdrew their services from the ARC over the previous year.⁽⁶⁾

The acting executive officer Dr. Mishack Molope said at the time that he told ARC personnel in an open letter that there had been discrimination in the past, and that there had been a “skewed” representation between black and white at the ARC, and there were instances where parliamentary financing had been directed at “non-profit undertakings” which provided no “returns”. (Here of course is the kernel of the problem - a manifestation of the subsistence mentality writ large. Clearly there is no sense of long-term thinking here, a tragedy for first-world research).

Loss

Up to May 2002, Onderstepoort had already lost almost 200 years of experience through resignations.

The mentality that funding research of “non-profit undertakings” is not acceptable had clearly won the day. Money dried up and salary increases were far below the norm.

People said they left because of this, but researchers with whom we talked declared it was virtually impossible to work for people who were not scientists, who knew nothing about science, and who did not understand long-term thinking. This bleeding of exceptional people was all the more tragic given that Onderstepoort has been at the forefront of South African veterinary science since 1908. In mid 2002 already, several departments had closed - the departments of information technology, bacterial vaccine development, ostrich diseases and marketing. Many middle-level researchers with specific expertise had left.⁽⁷⁾

The government’s new broom approach precipitated the centralization of authority. Thus the ARC’s thirteen institute’s could not make decisions on their own, sometimes having to wait months for a reply from the top. The directors of these institutes had no control over their organizations. The new president of the ARC Dr. Nthoana Tau-Mzamane has come under attack from all sides, but seems unperturbed. In an October 2003 interview, she blithely brushed off concerned questions about the ARC.

Her style of answering is quite non-committal, even brusque. In ten years time, she says, the ARC “will be more representative of the racial and gender demographics of South Africa and will be a much younger organization.”⁽⁸⁾ “We have a core staff of young, vibrant technicians and scientists who will locate scientific excellence in the socio-economic realities of South Africa, the SADC and the African continent”. Well, we’ll see! Her prognoses may go the same route as those of the Minister of Land Affairs and her land reform guarantees.

Expertise

Dr. Mary-Louise Penrith said she left Onderstepoort because she feared she could no longer make a difference. “We were losing too many people and the burden of working under those conditions was too great.”⁽⁹⁾ Expertise, contrary to some popular ideas, is not acquired via a year’s mentorship by an expert who is then encouraged to depart. Breaking Onderstepoort down can be accomplished within a year or two, because experts have a market elsewhere, as do bright young people who could be the experts of the future. Building it up again will take at least the 90-plus years of its present existence.”

The situation reached crisis proportions in late 2003 when researchers from the ARC’s thirteen institutes took to the streets in protest. For scientific South Africans to take this type of action is highly unusual, but they were watching years of achievement being destroyed before their very eyes.

The thirteen ARC institutes throughout South Africa cover all there is to know about agriculture and animal care, from tropical and sub-tropical crops to animal nutrition, to soil, climate and water research and plant protection. There are 81 branches of these institutes throughout South Africa.

In August 2003, Dr. Fred Potgieter, acting director of Onderstepoort's veterinary services, was suspended for talking to the press about the parlous situation at the institute. On Friday 31 August 2003, this expert with 31 years experience, was ordered to leave his office.

The trade union Solidarity had for some time been involved in putting the case for its members (numbering around 1 000 of the 2 600 employees at the institute).

In a Memorandum of Concern dated 2 September 2003, Solidarity said there was a clear lack of vision towards agricultural research in South Africa by the government. There was a lack of commitment to the organization and its personnel, it declared.

"Agricultural research is the reason why European countries and countries in North and South America and Australia produce enough food for their citizens and a substantial surplus for export," said the Memorandum. "The inability to maintain and replace equipment used to provide diagnostic and research services in general, and specifically in the area of foresight research, is making agricultural research in South Africa more and more difficult. Over the past ten years there has been a drop in researchers of 51%. Forty percent of researchers with a doctor's degree left the ARC during the past year."

The biggest decline was at Onderstepoort and three other institutes. These four institutes are doing critically important work in order to improve the quality of food produced in South Africa. In order to make the food safe, they needed to work at full capacity. Since 1993, there was a decline in the number of researchers at these four institutes of up to 74%.

Unmoved

Management appears to be "totally unmoved" by this decline, said Solidarity. In fact, they are in denial that there is even a problem. The consequences of this decline are serious. The diagnoses of animal diseases will not be conducted, and there may be an outbreak of diseases *that cannot be identified*. (Italics ours). "South Africa is at the moment playing dangerously with tuberculosis. The last TB researcher at Onderstepoort resigned last month", declared Solidarity. TB is transmitted to people through unpasteurised milk. It is one of the worst transmitted diseases in South Africa and is especially deadly for people with HIV/Aids.

"Furthermore, the more than 1,5 million small farmers in South Africa can suffer badly if they don't get support from the ARC to build up their herds and improve their crops", continued Solidarity.

The union demanded a commission of enquiry into the deterioration of the ARC. The union's actions were supported by organized agriculture throughout South Africa.

Crossroads

Agricultural research in South Africa is at a crossroads. Not one of the ARC's institutes can claim to be without a flaw of some nature. Staff employed by the ARC has declined from 4 800 in 1994 to 2 554 at the end of March 2003.

Employees at the ARC no longer see a future for themselves. These people are approximately 30% behind their public service colleagues in terms of salaries.

Private sector organizations are shifting their contributions to other research facilities, since the ARC can give no guarantee that long-term research projects can be

brought to a successful conclusion. Funds for specific research projects are closely linked to specific researchers. If they leave, the funds follow them.

Decision making has been centralized at head office. Many opportunities are lost because the decision-makers at head office are unfamiliar with conditions at the coal face. The distrust has grown, and the level of victimization of employees deserves scrutiny. The brain drain must be halted, or all of South Africa will lose.

Furthermore, there is a huge gap in salaries between researchers and new appointments. Secretaries at Central Office receive equal and more than researchers with M.Sc. qualifications and many years of service. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of secretarial and administrative staff at Central Office.

Solidarity has demanded full disclosure of the financial situation of the ARC.

In the meantime, the bleeding continues. The situation vis a vis food production and safety could become dangerous. A toxin has been discovered in a fungus growing on peanuts. This can cause liver cancer. Peanut butter is one of the basic ingredients supplied in the government's school feeding scheme, but the peanut butter researcher has resigned. There is thus nobody to monitor this situation. Further, the researcher monitoring bacterial and toxic residues in meat has resigned. Antibiotics are used on animals in South Africa, and it takes time for these anti-biotics to work themselves out of the animal's system. The withdrawal period differs with each type of animal. Periods vary from 48 hours to a month.

We were told that snap inspections of abattoirs have stopped. State veterinarians usually collect samples of meat at abattoirs and send these samples to the ARC. But there is no one left to analyse these samples, and the consequences of this hardly need elaboration.

The meat researcher told us he left because "he couldn't stand it any more. There is no research money, no promotions, no long-term thinking. There is only one nutritionist left. There is no research on the nutrition of animals for food safety for South Africa. Humans will eventually suffer," he said "If new products come on to the market, how will the public know they're safe? One needs proper research structures which the private sector cannot provide."

The pork research sector of the ARC at Irene was the best in the southern hemisphere, we were told. Now the pork researcher is gone.

Another scientist told us he couldn't survive on the salary, even though his wife was working. "Many people took early retirement, they saw the writing on the wall. The planning went haywire," he said. "Lots of projects were simply stopped in mid stream. We were not acknowledged for what we had done. We simply lost heart. We love our jobs, we love our country, we want to be part of helping South Africa with food safety, but we are not allowed to fulfill our dreams".

The ARC tried to kill the messenger when it suspended Dr. Fred Potgieter, said Solidarity. The organization is destroying research in South Africa. Other African countries are concerned because they depend on the ARC to keep their livestock and plant life thriving and healthy. Anthrax is a huge problem with cattle in Africa, and Onderstepoort helped numerous countries to fend off this disease.

Mr. Guy Robinson, president of the Zambian Agricultural Union said that his country's agriculture will "sink" without the assistance of the ARC.⁽¹⁰⁾ He said South Africa had an "unbelievable responsibility" towards Africa's livestock with vaccines which Onderstepoort manufactures. Robinson said a few years ago Japan had given money to Zambia to build another Onderstepoort in that country, but the buildings stand empty because of a dearth of money and expertise. Zambia is one of the countries which desperately needs vaccines because of a high incidence of lung

sicknesses in cattle. “The whole area is in danger if we don’t have vaccines”, said Mr. Robinson.

South Africa supplied Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana with vaccines. A TV interview with Ms. Elsje Pieterse and Dr. Potgieter revealed the ARC had enough supplies of foot and mouth vaccines nationally, but there was extremely low back-up within the borders of the country.⁽¹¹⁾

Although Dr. Potgieter resumed his duties after a court case, Ms. Pieterse was suspended for talking to the media. She has since resigned.

South Africa will pay dearly for this political interference in a scientific organization vital to the future food safety of not only South Africa but the whole southern African region. We don’t know what will happen. Judging by the couldn’t-care-less attitude displayed by various government ministers to other problems in government, we don’t expect much from the Department of Agriculture. If affirmative action is more important than scientific expertise, then Heaven help us. It appears as if this is the case.

All we can hope is that private organizations will step in, as they have done in the case of security, hospital care, education and other aspects of South African life, and save us from the government. We encourage business to move quickly and staunch the bloodletting. Private enterprise must act quickly because food safety is at stake. We simply cannot trust the government with this vital obligation.

Section B:

MUNICIPAL TAXES FOR FARMERS

When one thinks of it, this phrase is a contradiction in terms. Farmers do not reside in municipalities, unless of course one lives in South Africa where the new government stretched the boundaries of municipalities to include farm properties, thus widening the tax net to include people who are sitting ducks for the tax collectors. In this gerrymandering process, the government downsized the number of municipalities from 800 to 284. Concomitant with this “restructuring”, administrative systems went to pot. The country’s municipalities have descended into the shambles predicted by those who warned against this government move.

This process of widening the net has not helped. Indeed, things are worse. South Africa’s municipal debt climbs every year – in April 2003, Finance Minister Trevor Manuel announced it had reached the R24 billion mark, increasing by around R1,8 billion a year. Funds must be found somewhere to pay for the millions who use municipal services but do not pay. Two years after the Property Rights Bill (known as the Land Tax Bill) was published for public comment, farmers are still objecting to its contents.

Professor Johann Kirsten of the University of Pretoria says the proposed land tax as outlined in the Bill will not generate much revenue, and will damage the global competitiveness of South African farming.⁽¹⁾ He believes the income earned will not even cover the total cost of valuing land and collecting the revenue. “It is only at 4% or higher that this tax will make economic sense, but then all profits or returns from land will be taxed away. *Nobody will want to farm.*” (Italics ours).

A tax on agricultural land will lead to a considerable drop in the value of the land, says Professor Korsten. It will also lead to a reduced investment in improvements. The average return on agricultural land is 5% - not very attractive to any investor. Crops, vineyards and orchards are already taxed through income tax. Sometimes these crops are of more value than the land on which they grow.

Valuing land will be difficult. There will be litigation when the valuation base is disputed, declares the professor. Finally, farmers do not benefit from municipal services. The 38 functions provided by municipalities are largely to the benefit of urban dwellers. Already one of the important services of municipalities – road maintenance – is increasingly being taken over by farmers themselves.

In April 2003, the Free State Agricultural Union announced it would seek a court interdict against the local Nketoana Council to prevent its imposition of a 2% land tax on farmers in the district. (In 2002, the Bloemfontein Appeal Court found the Ekurhuleni municipality east of Johannesburg's flat rate tax on agricultural land unfair and discriminatory.)

Some South African municipalities, including the Nketoana Council, began to levy taxes on agricultural land, including unused land, even before the Property Rights Bill had become law! Desperate to cover their exorbitant arrears, badly-run municipalities saw the farming community as an easy target.

Free State farmer Hendrik Boshoff told the court the Nketoana municipality levied taxes merely to pay the local council's overdue debt amounting to R9 million. He produced documents to prove this, showing that taxes were being levied in an ad hoc manner. In December 2003, the Bloemfontein High Court set aside the levy imposed by the Nketoana Council on Mr. Boshoff. It is strange that only after winning his case did the government publicly state municipalities were in the wrong to impose municipal taxes on farms since the Property Rates Bill had not become law. The government could have stopped the municipalities from acting illegally if they had wanted to. It was again up to a private citizen (financially backed by organized agriculture) to take a matter to court. The problem should have received government's attention from the beginning.

The court's ruling does not outlaw land taxes, but it does set a precedent. "Ground must be properly valued", said Agri SA president Japie Grobler.⁽²⁾ Declared TAU-SA: "This judgement against the municipality of Reitz (Nketoana) only strengthens TAU-SA's viewpoint that taxes on agricultural land are impractical and are another form of wealth tax. We hope the government will realize with this court result that agriculture will not allow the taxing of agricultural land by municipalities to make up financial deficits caused by poor financial management."

Closer Look

Let us take a closer look at what can be expected in the way of "service" from South Africa's municipalities, many of which have virtually collapsed since the new government came to power.

One of the main problems is the question of huge salaries granted to themselves by inept and sometimes corrupt councilors. The Tshwane (Pretoria) municipal salary structure is mind-boggling – top officials earn between R672 000 and R775 000 per annum.

But let us start with Johannesburg, once billed as the "diamond of Africa". "City Revenue Department must confront its chaos – over one million people complaining about the billing shambles in Johannesburg" shouted a headline.⁽³⁾ One resident received an electricity bill for R70 000. A Sandton mother dumped her washing on a Johannesburg councilor's desk after her water supply had been cut three times, despite regular payments.

"Outsourced" meter readers are hopeless, according to one resident.⁽⁴⁾ (Why do consumers pay municipal personnel when basic functions are "outsourced"?) "She

didn't even read the first number on the meter. If I hadn't pointed this out, I would have been billed for thousands of rands", said the elderly resident.

Electricity thieves are costing Johannesburg a fortune while families are left in the cold and dark as a result of their actions.⁽⁵⁾ An official said this was the result of the theft of underground cables and the illegal use of electricity. Electricity supply fails with regularity in many areas of Johannesburg, leaving people without the means to cook and even see properly.

In December 2002, Johannesburg mayor Amos Masondo announced a R2 billion write off of arrear rates and taxes – approximately 16% of the city's total annual budget.⁽⁶⁾ He said the debt was owed by liquidated companies, poor residents who could not afford to pay, inaccurate information about debtors and untraceable debtors. But earlier that year, numerous promises were made to "fine tune revenue collection".⁽⁷⁾

The "human resources" employed by the Johannesburg municipality came in for some drubbing. "We are taking action against those committing fraud and against those we suspect of drunkenness, of being absent without leave or of being involved in fist fights", intoned Mr. Keith Sendwe, director of revenue.⁽⁸⁾

The billing department "lives all by itself. It employs lots of people who don't know what they're doing", said DA councilor Peter Heim.⁽⁹⁾

In the meantime it costs Johannesburg R20 million a year to clear up 1 000 tons of "illegally dumped" rubbish in Soweto.⁽¹⁰⁾ Teams were appointed to go door to door to "inform the residents about the illegality and hazards of dumping". Meanwhile, an outsource company Pickitup was appointed to collect the rubbish. (Remember the good old days when municipal dustmen came around and collected the garbage?)⁽¹¹⁾

At the same time, yet another scheme was put forward to rejuvenate a tired, dirty city that nobody goes to anymore. A variety of "renaissance" plans have come and gone, said one observer⁽¹²⁾, while Johannesburg continues its slide into slum conditions. Certain inner city "social projects" collapsed under the weight of non-payment and mismanagement. Of eight housing projects established since 1996, only one survived.⁽¹³⁾

A little north of the city, the Hillbrow area has become known as Little Lagos. Nigerians control the town, and drugs are their business. We can be sure very few rates and taxes are paid there, and collecting arrears would be a life-threatening job.

The Johannesburg town planning department is "in chaos", said a Midrand estate agent in a newspaper interview.⁽¹⁴⁾ "The situation is causing outrage among those whose lives and businesses are shackled by the long delays and incompetence". The estate agent says that a simple sub-division which should take a month takes up to a year to complete. Another well-known estate agent said "plans are lost, clearance certificates take a long time and transfers are tardy".

This is having a devastating effect on estate agents and builders. The department is a shambles, said Councilor Judith Briggs.⁽¹⁵⁾

A budget deficit of R4 billion emerged in an Auditor General's (AG) report in March 2003. There are "serious flaws in municipal accounting" said the AG.⁽¹⁶⁾ The money is "missing" said the report. Two months before, Johannesburg wrote off R2 billion in bad debts.⁽¹⁷⁾ For the eighth year in a row, the Auditor General slammed the city's financial proficiency.

Meanwhile, people are stealing the water meters.⁽¹⁸⁾ From February to August 2003, 1 760 water meters were stolen, leading to thousands of litres of water being washed down the drain. Johannesburg Water, the company responsible for the city's

water supply, set up a hotline to deal with the vandalism. “The thieves are stealing the metal meters installed ten years ago. They sell the brass to scrap dealers for R10 each”, said a spokesman. It costs the company about R200 to install a meter.

Emergency services in the city have apparently fallen prey to a mafia-type cartel.⁽¹⁹⁾ The result is there are only three emergency-response cars and 24 rickety ambulances to serve 2,8 million people. “The ambulances are reduced to half in the rainy season because the roofs of some of the vehicles leak”, declares a media report.⁽²⁰⁾

The city needs at least 10 response cars and 56 ambulances. Operations chief David Tembe said that to tackle the shortage of ambulances, the city occasionally uses fire trucks to transport medics from one of their 28 bases to the scene of an emergency. To make up for the shortage of firefighters, ambulance personnel have been made to undergo part-time training as firefighters.

Pretoria/Tshwane

Scandal permeates the administration of one of South Africa’s most beautiful cities. Revolutionary cleric Father Smangalisu Mkatshwa moved very smartly into gravy-train mode when he became mayor. He lives in a palatial mansion which cost R2,5 million while using his housing allowance of R39 000 to pay off his private home in Edenvalle on the East Rand.

His managers’ salaries run from R775 000 to R692 000 per annum. Recently his council had to pay millions of rand to get rid of an incompetent city manager who was described as arrogant and who failed to deliver.⁽²¹⁾ Mr. Thoahlane Thoahlane earned R830 000 a year, yet demanded a payout of R9,5 million. He “only” received a R3 million handshake.

After his suspension in January 2003, he continued to draw his monthly salary of around R70 000 while boasting in a local Pretoria newspaper that he was busy “enjoying my golf while earning a good salary every month”.⁽²²⁾ Thoahlane’s brief stay at the council (two years of a five year contract) was preceded by a short stint at the National Development Agency where he also got a golden handshake. His exit there was shrouded in controversy.

For this money, what do Pretoria’s residents receive in return? Efficiency is not at the top of the list. At the end of 2002, R1,8 billion was owed by electricity users. The net growth per month of this debt is R15,7 million.⁽²³⁾ In February 2003, it was reported that R83,9 million of water “disappeared” during the period of the book year 2001/2002. The Tshwane Metro also could not give an accounting of why R98,5 million worth of electricity also disappeared.⁽²⁴⁾ These figures represent 20% of the water and 12% of the electricity’s total distribution.

The council’s report said that this loss was due mostly to leaks, vandalism and the tampering with meters. “Informal power” is another problem in Tshwane/Pretoria. A woman resident turned her government-awarded RDP house into a mini-power station by illegally providing electricity to more than 15 of her neighbours.⁽²⁵⁾ She had charged her “clients” R150 a month for the last two years, since her electricity was installed. (Remember those politicians who said modernizing the black urban areas of South Africa would bring stability and a booming economy?)

Electricity cables were carefully buried in trenches dug into the ground around her house and extended across the street to a squatter camp. Strangely enough, a newspaper report said that “everyone made it a point to pay on time, as a delay could

mean darkness". So why can't other users "pay on time" to the municipality? Perhaps because the council does not cut the power, as Mrs. Mini-Eskom threatened to do.

So what is mayor Mkatshwa doing about this shambles? He's busy organizing the change of names in the city. While the city's pipes and structures collapse because of poor maintenance, Mr. Mayor is planning "large-scale" name changes, at a cost of R16 000 at each facility.

Cash strapped Cape Town council is facing blackouts and sewer collapse. Budget cuts could lead to catastrophic problems in these two areas, the council was warned in August 2003.⁽²⁶⁾ Because of incompetent management, capital spending has been drastically cut. Vulnerable electricity areas include the CBD.

Other problems include waste water plants. "Virtually all of the council's 17 waste water treatment plants need upgrades or extensions to comply with statutory obligations".

Even the historic old Company's Garden near Parliament in Cape Town is going to ruin. This heritage garden was established in 1652, the oldest garden in the country. Over the years, it had become the setting for some of South Africa's most important buildings including Parliament, the national museum, the national library and art gallery.

It has been badly neglected.⁽²⁷⁾ Piles of rubbish, broken garden seats, weeds and overgrown shrubberies now deter visitors, "even if there were not a good chance of being mugged", says a newspaper report.

And the rest of South Africa? Just a few examples. In a town of just 35 000 registered voters, the council manager has awarded himself a R630 000 per annum salary. The council of greater Wolmaransstad is so bankrupt, it hasn't enough money to repair the potholes in the main street. If it were not for money received from the provincial government, the town would have ceased to function.

Despite this, Mr. Elie Tsietsie Motsemme, 38, the well-paid town manager of this beleaguered council, has given himself a whopping salary increase of 20% from the end of 2003. The council's salary bill is 81% of the council's total income. There is not enough money left over to do even the basic maintenance work, said the assistant town manager.⁽²⁸⁾

Eight ANC councilors in the Kungwini (Bronkhorstspuit) municipality have been implicated in various irregularities including the taking of bribes and the misuse of public funds.⁽²⁹⁾

At the Klerksdorp City Council in October 2003, the majority ANC party told the opposition DA that it would be a "cold day in hell" when it supported the ousting of executive mayor Dr. Magome Masike.⁽³⁰⁾ He was asked to resign because the council's finances were a "disgraceful shambles" and because the mayor had neglected his duties to Klerksdorp. DA councilor Peter de Jongh charged that the mayor had embarked on "wild and speculative ventures without consulting council, that the council's investments had dropped from R69 million to R35 million in six months, that he had allowed consumers to accumulate R190 million in debt for services, and that the National Treasury had rejected the budget and returned it to the council. But it will be a cold day in hell before anything happens to him!

(It says something for the governing party's accountability that party loyalty stands above all else, including the bankrupting of a once-functioning city council.) Forcing increases on ratepayers to pay for presidential salaries and luxury cars were among the council's "multitude of mistakes" said councilor Ted Hart.

Developers in the Midrand area are battling to get even the simplest applications processed.⁽³¹⁾ "All we want are the same standards we had in the past"

lamented a Midrand, Gauteng developer. General problems include a backlog in the approval of building plans, delayed transfers and people not being correctly billed for rates and taxes.

In the nearby township of Tembisa, meanwhile, there have been no service bills “for years”.⁽³²⁾ “Pay what you think you owe us”, the council told residents of the Hospital View area of the township. These residents are non-existent on the council’s data base, although they get serviced every month. (Note: the farmers have not been told to “pay what you think you owe us”. Wouldn’t that be nice!)

In other parts of Tembisa, rats terrorize residents. The rodents “emerge” from piles of uncollected rubbish and “harass us”, say the residents. Last year, the township was without a refuse-collection service. The previous black empowerment collector had his contract nullified when it was discovered he had no equipment with which to collect rubbish.

Residents of Rustenburg in North West Province complained last year that the town’s sewage system was overloaded.⁽³³⁾ The situation was so bad that a local developer asked the Pretoria High Court to order the supply of basic water and sewage facilities to his business so he could complete his work.

West of Johannesburg is the historic town of Krugersdorp, now named Mogale City. Every month the ratepayers pay R11 000 for the mayor to lease a luxury car. The metallic-blue BMW four-wheel drive is more expensive than the mayoral car of Johannesburg.

Mayor Lentswe Mokgatle recently decided his R1,5 million house was too humble, and received R3,6 million to purchase a more luxurious residence. This town of only 300 000 residents (many of whom do not pay tax) must now set aside R215 400 to maintain this estate. Mokgatle also owns a home in Sandton for which he has also been granted a subsidy.

And in Polokwane (Pietersburg), a new manager Mr. Leshabe Sam Rampedi has been awarded an annual salary of R650 000.

He and former acting municipal manager Henry Lubbe together draw R1 million a year remuneration, quite a burden on this rural town in the north of the country.

Bankruptcy threatens many of South Africa’s local governments. African National Congress MP Yunus Carrim says “ineffective administration in local government has resulted in accumulated services debt of more than R24 billion and many municipalities are on the edge of bankruptcy”.⁽³⁴⁾

The municipal salaries bill is putting a damper on economic growth and fuelling inflation, said Trevor Manuel, Minister of Finance.⁽³⁵⁾ He said municipalities had spent about 32% (R19,8 billion) of their operating budgets on personnel in 2002/3. This compared with only 19% a few years ago.

Further, municipalities are not budgeting for repairs. This finding was published by the SA Local Government Association on July 14, 2003. The report said repairs and maintenance are still well below the 10% norm of total expenditure. It also highlights the declining allocation for capital projects at local government level.

Is it any wonder farmers baulk at paying municipal taxes? Apart from the fact that urban dwellers have grounds for real complaint about the wastage of their hard-earned money on lavish salaries and accommodation (with poor concomitant capacity to handle the job for which they are paid), farmers will receive little or nothing for their contribution to this profligacy. There should be a basis for a court case somewhere here.

Section C:

THE COMMANDOS

For decades, South Africa's farming community has been protected by the Commando system: deriving its name from the old Boer military formation, the Commandos traditionally consisted of civilians with military training being called up for service when and if necessary.

South Africa's efficient commandos are to go. The number of commandos vary, from 50 000 to 70 000, according to different sources. Whatever the figure, the commando system of the South African National Defence Force or the part-time component of the military will be phased out "because of the role it played in the apartheid era", according to Safety and Security Minister Charles Nqakula.⁽¹⁾

This announcement was greeted with consternation by South Africa's organized agriculture and opposition political parties. Nqakula said the commando system did not have the "level of acceptance" by the public that it ought to have.⁽²⁾ He said the commandos would be replaced by a new unit of the SA Police Service (SAPS) which would be responsible for border protection and national key points. He claimed part of the responsibility would be farm safety.

These part time soldiers belong to more than 180 commando units and carry out thousands of operations each year, many in support of border control. Many of the members depend on their part-time soldiering as their only source of income.

Organised agriculture has warned the government about abandoning the commandos before a replacement organization was in place.

The South African countryside is "chillingly violent", says Jonny Steinberg, author of the book on a farm murder *Midlands*.⁽³⁾ Policing on the ground is often incompetent, always woefully thin. Who is to protect the settlements of the hinterland, both black and white, he asks.

The commandos are to be replaced, inter alia, by a police reserve. Many of the recruitment criteria – a matriculation certificate, a driver's licence, passing a psychometric test – are to be dropped.⁽⁴⁾ People from the countryside are to be recruited – the idea is to incorporate grassroots policing. But, says Steinberg, the social topography of rural South Africa does not lend itself to adequate policing.⁽⁵⁾ When communities are homogenous, people trust each other. But how to police areas where strangers are viewed with suspicion?

Freedom Front leader Pieter Mulder warned President Thabo Mbeki that the South African countryside was "the most dangerous in the world", and that the president's decision would leave many millions of rural dwellers totally unprotected from the thousands of heavily-armed gangs which terrorize them.⁽⁶⁾ More than 20 000 of the commandos are not white South Africans, so President Mbeki's statement that the commandos are "mainly white structures" is incorrect. Around 300 people of all races out of every 100 000 population are now being murdered on South African farms, both commercial and subsistence.

In the broader South Africa, says Mulder, about 55 out of every 100 000 people are murdered each year. Compare this to six out of 100 000 in the United States and 2 out of 100 000 people in Europe.

Farmers feel betrayed by Mbeki's decision. Some communities benefited almost exclusively from commando protection. The commandos have been traditionally used in rural areas to assist under-resourced police to combat crime.⁽⁷⁾

The commando system goes back to 1715 when part-time volunteer commandos were established to safeguard the community in the Cape. The system has undergone several changes in the past 100 years to adjust to changing

circumstances.⁽⁸⁾ Henri Boshoff of the Institute for Security Studies says phasing out the commandos and replacing them with police “will mean that the country will lose all rear-area defence capability.”⁽⁹⁾

Minister Ngakula announced that 30 000 police force members and 100 000 reservists will be used for the protection and security services division, but the SAPS is already struggling to fulfill its obligations to fight regular crime in South Africa, says Boshoff.

South African Police Service

So with whom will the commandos be replaced? What is the state of the South African Police Service, the people who are being mooted to replace the commandos? The government has promised 30 000 people to help with farm protection. How is the SAPS run? What is the personnel capacity of SAPS members? Can they do the job they are paid to do, and are they paid enough? Can South Africa’s commercial farmers depend on the SAPS to defend them in crime-ravaged rural areas?

From all reports, the SAPS is badly run, under-staffed and poorly capacitated. Altogether 366 people died in a nine-month period in 2002 “as a result of police action or while detained in police custody”. The SAPS Independent Complaints Directorate (ICD) announced this in Parliament in March 2003. Seventy-three percent of these were found tortured in police holding cells in Durban, KwaZulu/Natal alone.

An enquiry was launched in 2002 into alleged police misconduct at Nyanga police station in the Cape after officers were caught sleeping on duty.⁽¹⁰⁾

Police dockets are regularly stolen or destroyed. The police are often involved in robberies, hijackings and burglaries. Police vehicles are misused, and police run shebeens while on duty. Politically correct appointments sometimes leave good people unpromoted.

The Institute for Security Studies reported that there were five and a half times more inspectors than constables in the SAPS.⁽¹¹⁾ Sergeants and constables comprise only a third of the total police force when they should be in the majority. (This reveals an attitude that the police force is a salary cash cow to be milked). Australia, Britain, Canada and the US have one sergeant for between four and six constables, but in South Africa there are 5.1/2 times more inspectors than constables. For sergeants to constables, the ratio is nearly four to one. Despite these promotions, the country is still short of quality policemen. At station level, for example, 60 percent of personnel do not have driver’s licences.

Studies undertaken show that full police strength should be 161 755 but the force is 25% understaffed. Lack of intake at the bottom is said to have worsened the imbalance.⁽¹²⁾

Two policemen were arrested at Philippi Police Station for allegedly issuing firearm licences to people not entitled to them, such as gang leaders.⁽¹³⁾ “Child raped while in Police Care” reads a headline.⁽¹⁴⁾ A policeman under criminal investigation was transferred to the Child Protection Unit where he raped a 14-year-old girl he was supposed to be assisting.

A Pretoria motorist was shot dead by a policeman after a heated verbal exchange on a road. The officer was arrested and detained and appeared in court.⁽¹⁵⁾

There are numerous problems with the public calling the police emergency number 10111. A Germiston, Gauteng woman was ignored when she called this number on behalf of her seriously-wounded husband. He had been shot, and she

rushed him to various police stations where she said officers refused to help her.⁽¹⁶⁾ Passers by eventually took the man to a hospital, where he died of his injuries.

Complaints against the police have increased markedly. The ICD received 217 complaints of deaths in police custody and 311 deaths resulting from police action in the 2003 financial year.⁽¹⁷⁾ A report tabled in Parliament stated that these were among the 4 443 public complaints received within its mandated period in 2002/3. This is 38% more than the previous financial year.

Pretoria prosecutors descended on Mamelodi police station on 26 September 2003 to “check whether investigators were collecting enough information in crime dockets to enable them to successfully oppose bail and obtain convictions in court.”⁽¹⁸⁾ This has become a “regular exercise”

The European Union donated R17 million to a “police driver program” to teach 6 000 police officers how to drive.⁽¹⁹⁾ It says something for the state of the SA police force that the security industry in South Africa employs four times as many staff as there are police. The police continue to ask the public to help them with crime detection and prevention. Local newspapers often carry pleas from the police for the public to help them, but “residents are slack in SAPS support”, said one editor.⁽²⁰⁾ The police blame “poor community involvement” in crime prevention. There are few volunteers to help, said the local police commander.

But why should people assist when the cause of crime is a weak government unable to maintain law and order, and a top-heavy police force where members sleep at their desks and don’t answer phones?

Reports of police malfeasance are daily occurrences. Policemen held on bribe charges⁽²¹⁾; evidence in murder case “lost” by police⁽²²⁾; 921 service weapons lost in one year by police⁽²³⁾; killer cop sentenced to 18 years (he murdered a suspect)⁽²⁴⁾.

A Free State police captain Vincent Tebogo Makoko was arrested on charges of helping and supplying weapons to gangs of African youths who were attacking local farmers⁽²⁵⁾. The entire management team at the Gugulethu Police Station in the Cape were replaced because of public complaints about poor service and violence at the station, including an assault on a journalist which blinded him in one eye⁽²⁶⁾.

The police were accused of robbing illegal aliens instead of arresting them⁽²⁷⁾. According to one of the victims, he was robbed of all his money during a raid at Rosebank, Sandton but was afraid to lay a charge because of his illegal status.⁽²⁸⁾

There are 38 000 illiterate and semi-literate police officers in the SA Police Service.⁽²⁹⁾ Twenty five percent of police in the Mpumalanga province are illiterate. One report said SAPS recruits get “minimal training”.⁽³⁰⁾ Parliament’s Safety and Security committee was told new recruits were only receiving three months training before going into service.

Ted Leggett of the Institute for Security Studies said new recruits were being pressed into service after ninety days training. The core of the problem was that there were 2,5 million recorded crimes in South Africa in 2001/2. This translated into 115 crimes for each detective to investigate each year, one new case every two days.⁽³¹⁾ “This results in crisis management”, declared Leggett.

Five policemen were held after robbing a cell phone shop in Hillbrow.⁽³²⁾ A police spokesman said the five would be facing charges of armed robbery, corruption and theft.

Police corruption is on the rise, says the Internal Complaints Directorate (ICD).⁽³³⁾ Director Karen McKenzie declares “the numbers are increasing. We have a 100% increase in corruption cases compared to the past two financial years.” Low pay was one of the reasons, observers said.

They could have a point. The government has its priorities wrong, said one young policeman to us. “They allow useless corrupt and inefficient mayors to receive R700 000 a year, with perks, while we – who put our lives on the line – only get around R44 000 per annum”. In September 2003, 73 students at the Pretoria Police Training College had not received any pay for three months.⁽³⁴⁾ Adding to the anger of these rookies, staff allegedly threatened to halt their graduation if they talked to the press.

In the meantime, it was announced that Commissioner of Police Jackie Selebi has a luxury aircraft set aside for his use that costs R5 000 an hour to operate. Selebi’s office told a newspaper the plane was bought by the previous government. Selebi’s Beechjet eats into the SAPS Air Wing’s budget, as its running costs are twenty times those of other planes in the SAPS fleet. The Beechjet could have been sold to boost the Air Wing’s budget, said a newspaper editorial.⁽³⁵⁾

During our research throughout South Africa, the role of the SAPS in crime prevention and the apprehension of criminals has been of a very low standard, according to farmers. A very high percentage of farmers say the police can do nothing, or they are overwhelmed, or they simply open a docket and “that’s the last we hear of them.”

Of course there are many efficient and dedicated people in the SAPS, and this fact must never be over-looked, but on the whole, standards have dropped considerably (where in the world are nearly 40 000 of a police force illiterate?) Replacing the commandos with unskilled and poorly-trained policemen will not suffice.

The SA National Defence Force

On July 24 2002 it was announced that South African National Defence Force (SANDF) troops would be withdrawing from border defence posts.

The SANDF stated that border protection is the duty of the South African Police Service and there are not sufficient funds to provide back-up.⁽³⁶⁾

At the same time, it became known at an Institute for Security Studies seminar in Pretoria that the South African border with Namibia and Botswana was totally unprotected and that only 952 troops were stationed on the country’s borders with Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Lesotho.

The curbing of trans-national crimes such as stock theft and car theft syndicates, plus the flow of illegal immigrants across South Africa’s borders, would be severely crimped because “there is not enough money to fill the gaps”, said Major General Jan Lusse at the time.⁽³⁷⁾

Some months before, disquiet was expressed when 70 students who failed the staff paper in a formative course for officers at the Army Gymnasium were granted passes for the course.⁽³⁸⁾ At the same time, nine basic flying students at the Military Academy failed their ground school phase and would have to repeat, and only two out of a narrowed-down four former homeland pilots made their SAAF wings.

The Democratic Alliance’s spokesman on Defence Hendrik Schmidt called on the Defence Minister Mosioua Lekota to urgently investigate. “Transformation should never lead to a lowering of standards”, said Schmidt. Developments within the SANDF were worrying. In October 2002 it was revealed that twenty one SANDF members had been paid millions of rands over the previous 20 months to stay at home because of drawn-out negotiations over the payment of pensions to former liberation army members.⁽³⁹⁾ In 2001, R4,2 million had been paid to this group.

Then the SANDF was rapped over the knuckles for spending R203 million on consultants over two years.⁽⁴⁰⁾ (The use of consultants by government was criticized by the opposition, with more than R1,6 billion being spent across all government departments in 2000/01.)

A rash of promotions caught the public's attention. The Defence Minister was asked to explain why the army had promoted another seven generals when the department gave the assurance it would reduce the top brass, DA spokesman Hendrik Schmidt declared.⁽⁴¹⁾

Figures presented before Parliament in October 2002 showed the SANDF had 206 generals in the army, with 60 000 ordinary members, a ratio of 1:291. The German army has one general for every 1684 soldiers, and America's ratio is 1:2 428, making the SANDF one of the world's most top-heavy armies.

One year later, in November 2003, this situation had not been rectified. In fact, nineteen new generals were appointed.

"Serious doubts have been raised about the suitability and qualifications of some of our top brass" editorialized *The Citizen*.⁽⁴²⁾ These are highly-paid persons, and their salaries are more questionable given that the SANDF is strapped for cash to defend the country's borders.

An SANDF 2002/3 annual report revealed that nearly half the SANDF's members took sick leave in one year. This cost the taxpayers R45,6 million, the report said.⁽⁴³⁾ Figures released by the SANDF in December 2002 show that SANDF members are getting older. In answer to a Parliamentary question, the Defence Minister declared the average age of a SANDF soldier, including the auxiliary service, was 35. The average age of the rank group private to corporal was 32.

This in light of a March 2003 warning that few young whites were joining the SANDF. Lt. General Gilbert Ramano told a National Assembly defence committee that 92% of the 47 000 strong army is black, 6% coloured and only 2% white.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Further, General Ramano said many soldiers "steal state property and misuse state vehicles. Many belong to gangs and syndicates or are corrupt and keep busy with illegal activities." Deadly weapons have been stolen from the SANDF, 73 to be exact. These include R4 and R5 assault rifles which are frequently used in transit robberies. These rifles cannot be bought over the counter, said the Freedom Front's Pieter Groenewald.⁽⁴⁵⁾

However, in some areas the Defence Force is excelling. In cooperation with local farmers, personnel from the SANDF have successfully weakened stock and drug smuggling across the border between Kwazulu/Natal and Lesotho.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The SANDF can make a difference, given the quality of some of its personnel. How the rank and file will contend with commando duties remains to be seen.

Section D: NAMIBIA

The American Central Intelligence Agency's website says Namibia, a former German colony north west of the Republic of South Africa, is a land of "very limited natural fresh water reserves, where desertification, land degradation and wild life poaching exist. It is mostly desert, hot and dry with sparse and erratic rainfall. Its surface area is 825, 418 sq. km. (82,541,800 hectares), about four times the size of the United Kingdom, with a small population of less than 2 million, only 6% of whom are whites."

Namibia's arable land is just 0,99% of the total, with no permanent crops. It has only 70 sq. km (7 000 ha) of irrigated land. Clearly, agricultural development in Namibia is seriously hampered by a lack of water. As a result of the low and spasmodic rainfall, normal dry-land cropping can be practiced on only 1,1% of the country's land surface. The grazing areas have an extremely low carrying capacity.

The country's salvation is its treasure chest of important minerals, but we wish to focus on agriculture. Given the facts above, one could believe there is no agriculture to speak of. However, despite its aridity, the country's 3 500 mainly beef-producing commercial farmers provide 50% of the food requirements for nearly 2 million Namibians (the balance of the country's food requirements is imported from South Africa).

Who owns what land in Namibia is a subject for the historians. Suffice it to say that the only truly indigenous peoples are the Bushmen tribes. In South Africa, they were the Khoi and the San in the south, and the Bushmen in the north western parts.

What the Namibian government should be focusing on is how to feed its people. (In fact, all African governments should be doing this but, as we see every day, this is not so). One would think that a former office sweeper like President Sam Nujoma⁽¹⁾ who came to power after a prolonged revolutionary bush war (and with the help of the West) would look to the future. He is adjudged one of the world's least-educated heads of state – he was taught by (white) missionaries and only has a grade school education.⁽²⁾

Namibia became independent in 1990 with a constitution that limits the president to two-five-year terms, but in 1999 Nujoma managed to have this altered to allow himself a third term – he insisted that it would be his final one.⁽³⁾

His utterances over the past eighteen months have alerted his countrymen and the world to one implacable fact: his rhetoric is modeled on that of Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, a tyrant of the first order whose official policies include murder, rape, torture and the indiscriminate expropriation of his country's productive farmland. Mugabe, as the world knows, has irreparably destroyed what used to be a breadbasket of Africa. His sins are legend. Suffice it to say that commercial farmers in Namibia are stunned at Nujoma's utterances in a land where the margin between the success or failure of food production is one of the slimmest in the world.

But who said logic is a norm in some parts of Africa? Nujoma is not only calling for white land expropriation, he is building himself a palace outside Windhoek, the country's capital, for R186 million, in a country where a third of his citizens earn less than R7 a day. He awarded the job to a North Korean firm without a tender, the same firm that built a giant monument of him holding an AK47 in Windhoek.

He is increasingly paranoid and is following the Mugabe path to the letter. "The arrogant whites" are his *bête noire*. In August 2002 he warned the country's white farmers that they had better comply with the country's land reform program or else. During his party's congress at the time, he told his followers he planned to take over 192 farms owned by foreigners.

Then came his "landless majority" clarion cry (he's trying for a third presidential term?), followed by threats of expropriation if the "arrogant white farmers" did not adhere to the government's willing seller, willing buyer policy. It certainly sounds familiar!

Expropriation cannot be too far away. The law in Namibia already says the government can expropriate "under-utilized farms" with due compensation. In a

country where the cattle-carrying capacity is probably the lowest in the world, how does one define “under-utilization”? The South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) of which Mr. Nujoma has been president since its founding in 1960, declared at its 2002 congress that the party “was concerned at the slow pace of land distribution which has the potential to cause civil strife”.⁽⁴⁾ The message was loud and clear to the farmers. Fears of a Zimbabwe-type grab were palpable, and with reason. Nujoma had loudly supported Mugabe at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg shortly before, with talk of “British colonialists” owning 80% of Zimbabwe’s land. (This of course is not true!)

Some Namibian farmers there and then decided to sell their farms. “I was sick and tired of being told I was arrogant and punished for being white. Why should I invest my money and time in a country where I no longer feel welcome?” said one farmer.⁽⁵⁾ “The whites are being driven out. In 20 or 30 years’ time I don’t imagine there’ll be any whites left in Southern Africa”.

As in South Africa and Zimbabwe, overseas press reports always refer to whites owning the “best” land, but no reference is made as to how it became the “best” through hard work and skill. As in Zimbabwe, Namibia has a healthy opposition “He’s the twin brother of Robert Mugabe” said Ignatius Shixwameni, secretary general of the opposition Congress of Democracy. “The ruling party needs scapegoats to divert attention from the real problems of poverty and unemployment, and the easiest targets are white farmers” declared Shixwameni.

President of the Namibian Agricultural Union Jan de Wet said he was telling his members “that our relationship with the government is good”. It was only three years ago that the Commercial Farmers’ Union in Zimbabwe was giving its members similar reassurances, commented a journalist.⁽⁶⁾

Clearly, the policies of Mugabe and Nujoma are the policies of resentment. Their people sat in Africa for millennia and achieved little except subsistence farming and fratricide. Along came the whites and created productive agricultural systems and first world structures. These two men have monumental inferiority complexes and lash out at those who show them up. The tragedy is that they are in power and can act upon their venomous designs.

Bureaucracy

“Leaden-footed bureaucracy rather than commercial farmers dragging their heels, is the main reason why it will take decades before black Namibian farmers will own half of the country’s commercial farmland”, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) said.⁽⁷⁾

In 1999, the state bought only four of the 142 farms for sale. In 2000 this increased to the purchase of 15 farms. By August 2002 the state had bought only 118 farms in total. There is the complaint that farmers want too much for their land (the going price is around R250 to R350 a hectare, far below South Africa’s average market prices.)

The political reality is that the bulk of Swapo’s support base is made up of Oshiwambo-speaking groups from Northern Namibia who never lost any land to the colonial process.⁽⁸⁾ Some of the farms owned by “foreigners” are in the high-income tourism business. Some of these foreigners are South African while other properties belong to German passport-holders who have lived in the country for some time. However, nearly every Namibian cabinet minister has availed himself of cheap Agriculture Bank loans to buy farms for themselves – Nujoma himself owns several

in the Otavi district – so the land reform program, as in Zimbabwe, is presently benefiting the privileged elite.⁽⁹⁾

Government rhetoric was followed by land invasions, as happened in Zimbabwe. The threats against the arrogant whites were translated as a go-ahead by the masses to grab farms. In December 2002, workers took over the farm Kalkpan near Gobabis and vandalized property. There was talk that that farm would be expropriated without compensation.⁽¹⁰⁾ The owner Mr. Ron Pieterse, obtained a court order evicting the workers.

Due to poor health, Pieterse's 95-year-old father in law left the farm and by the time Pieterse and his son visited it to take occupation, the four families resident on the farm had increased their cattle herd to 500. They had simply availed themselves of the sparse grazing and, as a result, Pieterse asked them to reduce their herds. This they refused to do. When the bailiff began removing workers' structures, a mob moved towards the farm armed with weapons including knives and pipes. They assaulted the bailiff's workers. They then moved to the farm residence, broke the gates and fencing and destroyed outbuildings. Pieterse was ordered to come out of the house where he had taken refuge.

In the meantime, the mob wrecked Pieterse's motor vehicles, tractors and farm implements. All of this was encouraged by one Laura McCleod, governor of the Omaheke district in which the farm falls. The following day the workers threatened to burn Pieterse's house down. In the meantime, the Namibian government instructed lawyers to appeal the eviction order! Appeals usually take two years in Namibia and in the meantime, all evictions were stopped. Thus the workers remained, with their cattle.

For the sake of peace and his own safety, Mr. Pieterse came to an agreement with the workers that they pay a small amount per head for their cattle's grazing. The SWAPO youth branch in Gobabis demanded the government expropriate the farm without compensation! It was later rumoured the cabinet decided to expropriate the farm, but with compensation. This was not however confirmed.

Clearly, the government's ramblings about arrogant whites bore fruit in terms of citizens' demands for expropriation, albeit in this case as an ad hoc move. Now everyone is working on the land reform "question", but the real question is: is there any reason to believe that resettled land will not end up in the condition in which South African transferred land has been found?

In November 2003, the invasion of 15 commercial farms was planned but staved off by the authorities. However, unrest had begun - a few months earlier, a farm dam, irrigation pipes and fencing were damaged on the farm Krumhuk belonging to Mr. Ulf-Dieter Voigts.⁽¹¹⁾

It can only become worse, given the fragile farming conditions in Namibia. Reports are already filtering in about the conditions on resettled farms. A Namibian newspaper said on November 11, 2003 that officials from the Ministry of Lands in the Oshikoto region of the country were taking bribes in exchange for farmland earmarked for resettlement, according to documents in the newspaper's possession.⁽¹²⁾

These irregularities came into the open when people resettled on the farm Welmoed about 20 km north-east of Tsumeb complained about overcrowding and overgrazing.

In another instance, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance's member of Parliament McHenry Venaani said the government's resettlement program was simply "following in the path of Kenya and Zimbabwe by apportioning land to government leaders".⁽¹³⁾ "You are giving land to the wrong people" he said. He also declared that

farms acquired by government for resettlement “were deteriorating rapidly and that productivity on these farms was not what it could be. Those who do not work the land must be evicted from the farms and replaced with others who want to be resettled and want to farm”.

The government told the House of Parliament in early October 2003 that “little was known about how effective the resettlement policy actually might be”.⁽¹⁴⁾

If such land degradation continues, Namibia will descend much faster into desert than other countries in southern Africa. But who seems to care in the ruling elite? On 14 November 2003 Mr. Risto Kapenda of the National Union of Namibian Workers said “whites must go”.⁽¹⁵⁾ “You Europeans must go back to Europe, nobody will miss you. Before you stole our land, we were self-supporting farmers. If we get back the ground which belonged to our forefathers, we will be able to sustain ourselves. We don’t need you!”

If he’s wrong, which he is, the consequences of this racist invocation to national suicide will be, as the saying goes, too ghastly to contemplate. “Land reform” in its various guises has meant nothing but tragedy in southern Africa. Namibia’s president is determined to tread the path of Zimbabwe. Let us hope South Africa will not move along that road as well.

Chapter Sixteen

SLAUGHTER – THE FARM MURDER PLAGUE

Department of Land Affairs minister Ms. Thoko

Didiza's newest expropriation legislation has become law. Amendments to the Land Restitution Act went ahead, despite objections by several institutions, commercial agriculture and some parties.

"The Act was ratified on November 27, in the absence of the President, notwithstanding expectations that ratification was to be debated early in 2004", declared Mr. Willie Lewies, Transvaal Agricultural Union South Africa (TAU-SA) vice president.

South African property is now subject to expropriation by the government. Some "sweetener" clauses were added to this legislation at the last minute, but the bottom line remains – nobody, least of all a South African farmer, possesses secure property rights.

TAU-SA is planning to oppose this unilateral termination of property rights, and has placed accountability for the economic and security consequences of land invasions and trespassing at the door of the State President, claimed Mr. Lewies.

Land invasions, intimidation, arson, stock and crop theft, the vagaries of the weather and the devaluation of farm properties – farmers try to cope with these adversities every day. What has become impossible to bear is the emergence of farm murders and attacks as a terrible fact of daily life in the ANC's new South Africa.

Since the new South African government came to power in 1994, 1 600 farmers have been murdered, and there have been well in excess of 8 000 farm attacks. Some victims have been horribly tortured, and in many instances, nothing was stolen during the perpetration of the crime.

(Since the SA government's ascendance to power in May 1994, a farm murder has occurred on average once every second day, while there have been on average 77 farm attacks per month).

The pervasiveness of these murders and the Mau Mau-type behaviour of the criminals who commit them has alerted the world to what is happening to commercial agriculture in South Africa, especially in light of the catastrophe which has befallen Zimbabwe. Critical eyes have now been fixed on the South African government's reaction to these murders, and what the regime proposes to do about them.

Not much, it seems. South Africa has become the crime capital of the world. In itself, this is a devastating indictment of the ability of the new SA government to govern. But what is alarming about the farm murder plague is the systematic destruction directed at the very few people who keep over 100 million people in Southern Africa fed.

The public outcry about farm murders precipitated the appointment of a commission of enquiry by the government into farm murders, but the commission's report has been disappointing and frustrating. It has been met with scathing censure in some quarters. Like so many official enquiries in South Africa, this one appears to be something of a whitewash.

It was due for release in August 2003, but was delayed. Apparently two government ministers said they were unhappy with the report, resulting in an outburst of criticism that there would be interference in the final draft. This was denied by the

ministers involved. It was claimed the report was referred back to the independent committee, to all intents and purposes thus sully their independence.

Whatever caused the delay, the interpretation of certain facts was disputed. In nearly 90% of the murders, says the report, the motive was robbery. Intimidation was given as the reason for 7,1% of the attacks, while only 2% were attributed to racial motives. The committee found there was a perception that farmers were rich, and that they had many firearms. The report recommended the government give “urgent attention” to the illegal land invasions which have beset South Africa, as these could have led to farm murders and attacks.

What do we say about farm murders? What have we found throughout South Africa?

It is a fact that most murders are carried out by young black men between the ages of 18 and 30. There is no law and order in the country, an extremely low murder conviction rate (9% as against Japan’s 99%), no jobs for people whom the State President himself describes as “unemployable”, and the belief in many black communities that having a piece of land, even as a subsistence possession, is better than living in a squatter camp.

Murder Rate

The murder rate among South African commercial farmers (who are not all white) is the highest for a specific group in the world – 313 per 100 000.

In his keynote book “Farm Attacks and the African Renaissance”, Professor C.J. Moolman outlines the role of land in traditional Africa. He succinctly defines the basic polarity between Western and African cultures. “The livelihood of Blacks has traditionally been, and is currently still in rural areas, intricately connected to their system of land tenure. They erect their dwellings on the land, cultivate it, graze their livestock upon it, and hunt over its surface.”

“They use its water for domestic purposes and for their herds and flocks. They eat the wild fruits and other fruits it produces, and make medicines from its vegetation. They convert its wood into huts, palisades and various utensils, and its reeds and grass into basket-work, thatch and string, and they extract from it metals, clay for their pots, and earth for the floors and walls for their huts.”

This describes traditional Africa. But traditional Africa cannot feed itself. There is not one single African country self-sufficient in food. They have to depend on the West for survival. And the West has a completely different approach to food production, and to life itself.

This cultural dichotomy unfortunately occurs in one country – South Africa – and the contents of this book shows clearly that Western commercial farming has rescued South Africa from the fate which befell the rest of the continent.

“Rural land hunger”, says Professor Moolman “cannot be satisfied when its needs for land are based on anything other than agricultural production. Ideologically motivated “liberation of the land” is not an accepted motive for either redistribution of land or the intimidation of white farmers in an effort to force them off their land”.

Thus the government’s promise to return the land to the people as outlined in the Freedom Charter is an invitation to famine. By turning a blind eye to land invasions (except of course when the government itself owns the land or where diamond mining is involved), and by withdrawing the commandos from rural areas, the government has exposed the South African commercial farming sector to the

current wave of criminality, where hatred, resentment and cruel savagery accompany so many farm murders.

South Africa cannot survive this genocidal wave, and it must be checked. Given the disastrous results of Minister Didiza's handover of productive farms to unskilled people, many wonder why she insists that 30% of productive farmland will be transferred to emerging farmers before 2015. (We use the term "emerging" with some caution, given that most people who received restitution or redistribution farms were not farmers.)

There is talk that Ms. Didiza knows her policy is a failure, and is prepared to sacrifice 30% of South Africa's productive farms "in the interests of her party's idealism and promises".

It is claimed she believes that the remaining 70% of the farming community will continue operating "and carry us all". She may be in for a big surprise.

A large number of farmers have had enough. Some would sell tomorrow at a fair price, others for what they can get. When four members of your family have been murdered on your farm, it is not really an attractive proposition any more. When you see what has happened to Zimbabwe's commercial farming community, the future looks bleak, despite government assurances that "it won't happen here".

When your grazing is burnt out four times a year, when your crops and stock are stolen, when you can do little to stop squatter invasions on what is after all your private property, and when your chances of being slaughtered in your home are the greatest in the world, why bother?

Then of course there's the expropriation legislation. Why put your heart and soul into something that can be taken away at the stroke of a pen? Why, indeed!

Many farmers soldier on because farming is their life. But their children? Are they attracted to a life of danger, or does a career overseas or in the cities look more alluring? Ms. Didiza should not depend on her 70% back-up. There are no guarantees here.

The Questions

The next question about farm murders is why? The government report declared that most murders and attacks are simply criminal. But Professor Moolman points out the following:

- Why are the attacks and murders on farms so premeditated, while statistics indicate that the overwhelming majority of murders in South Africa are related to alcohol, drug abuse, and interpersonal and domestic conflict?
- Why are farm attacks so extremely brutal which is not the case with the majority of murders in South Africa?
- Why are farm attacks and murders mostly black on white, while this is not necessarily the case in the rest of South Africa? If theft is the most important motive, why are thousands of black shop owners in rural areas not brutalised remotely as much during attacks by gangs as is the white farming community?
- Why are farmers constantly accused of mistreating their workers, thus precipitating farm attacks, while the Helen Suzman Foundation found that 93% of farm workers indicate their relationship with their employers is good?
- Why have bad socio-economic conditions become the reason for attacks, while it is acknowledged that bad socio-economic conditions existed before 1994 in black communities?

Professor Moolman says cases of “senseless killing” have been identified. Criminals wait at the farm house, without taking anything, and then torture and kill the farmer on his return. Other cases reveal a farmer’s family being held hostage until he returns. Some criminals travel vast distances to attack people on farms and then only take firearms or the family car, which is later found abandoned down the road. (See the case of Mrs. Viljoen in the North West chapter). Racial utterances at the crime scene are commonplace.

Gratuitous violence is widespread. If women are present, they are often raped. Torture is now fairly routine, something relatively new in South Africa’s criminal history. Cruelty to animals is recurrent, a hark back to the Mau Mau terror campaign which drove whites off Kenyan farms.

Space prevents us from placing pictures of gruesome farm murders in this book. In any event, out of respect for the families we cannot. Suffice it to say evidence has been placed before the South African public by way of television and the printed media of the sheer savagery of those who inflict pain on innocent people: an elderly farmer whose head was opened by an axe; a lady of 84 who was repeatedly raped. Vicious stabbings are common, as is using a heated iron to burn victims. Some victims have been suffocated, others slashed with a panga (a heavy knife used to cut sugar cane). People have been set alight (including a year-old baby), while others were strangled, garroted, pistol-whipped, mutilated, and dumped into boiling water. Children have been threatened and beaten up, and some youngsters were tied to trees and left to die.

Then there is the post-traumatic stress, the fear of returning to one’s farm, the frequent repeat attacks, sometimes up to four or five times.

Teaching people to secure themselves is big business in South Africa. People are warned not to do this or that, to watch for something here, to be vigilant for someone there. Security habits must be cultivated, we are told, and looking over one’s shoulder has become a way of life. Bakkies (pick-up trucks) are now being advertised as bullet-proof.

Clearly, robbery is not the main motive for farm attacks, and our research shows that farmers feel this to be so. “They want to drive us from our land” we heard continuously.

The additional problems of intimidation, crop and stock theft, illegal squatting and expropriation legislation all point to this being a fact.

Recently two men were given life sentences for killing an 81-year-old farmer. Judge J.M.C. Smit told the court that there were “other motives” besides theft. The old farmer was so terribly and brutally assaulted that he died from his wounds. In another similar case, Judge Smit made the same remark.

Minister Didiza should remember that attacks on farmers will considerably reduce her remaining 70% of commercial farmers who are expected to feed us all. The way things are going at present, she will be lucky to have any farms left to expropriate!

Chapter Seventeen

CONCLUSION

“Land Dilemma for Zimbabwe’s Farmers”
(from the *South African Farmer’s Weekly* March 29, 1991)

“The fairy-tale ending of the independence war in Zimbabwe ten years ago, with its emphasis on reconciliation between black and white ... has been rudely shattered. The cause is the state’s pronouncements on land ownership since the recent termination of the Lancaster House Constitution.

Black workers on white-owned farms are worried that farm take-overs will threaten their livelihoods. Among white farmers, there is a growing feeling the government has finally decided to run roughshod over their interests. In terms of the latest amendments to the country’s constitution, the state can legally take over any property at a compensation to be determined by itself and at a price that cannot be challenged by arbitration or in court.

Large-scale commercial farmers, almost all of them white, own nearly 29% of Zimbabwe’s utilized land. But they produce marketed products worth nearly two billion dollars a year and support more than 1,5 million black workers and their families on their farms.

Farmers foresee their highly-productive additional farms being reduced to small plots of 4 –5 hectares each for settlement by subsistence tribesmen, inevitably with resultant erosion, degradation and a massive loss of potential output.

*Agriculture Minister Dr. Witness Mangwende has assured white farmers the government is willing to discuss the procedure of land take-overs. **Once a white farmer has relocated elsewhere, his new farm would not be expropriated.** (Emphasis ours)*

White farmers’ strongest criticism is that the present government is unable to give an assurance as to how the powers will be used in future. The powers (of expropriation) will be very wide and vested in one minister and outside the scrutiny of the courts.

The minister warned the white farmers not to use the issue of farm workers as an excuse to maintain the status quo. “Government must redress the imbalances of the past in the interests of both political and economic stability”, said Dr. Mangwende.”

At the time, the greatest problem for Zimbabwe’s

commercial farmers was the potential loss of production to the country and the plight of their black workers. Never in their wildest dreams could they have imagined what was in store for the country known as “the breadbasket of Africa” – the terror, the murders, rapes and tortures, the famine, the destruction of the judiciary, the arbitrary closures of the media and the huge and obscene profligacy of the ruling clique while their citizens starved.

Could it happen here in South Africa? You bet it could, unless South Africa’s citizens stand up and do something now, not later.

The Zimbabwe government's assurances and the guarantees are eerily repeated in today's South Africa, and it is not "pessimistic" at all to wonder whether we could end up a second Zimbabwe.

Some Points to Ponder

- "The greatest danger in respect of land reform is not official action – it is official incapacity to support new small farmers. It seems very unlikely that the Department of Agriculture will be able to establish a level of support services to ensure that rural slum conditions on redistributed land will be avoided."

- Dr. Lawrence Schlemmer of the Helen Suzman Foundation at a Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) address 30 September 2003.

- "In no area inhabited by blacks were there any systems of individual freehold of land. There were only guaranteed rights of usage inside the territory of tribal leaders. The different tribal groups were separated by large sectors of uninhabited land so that the constant sub-division of tribes and the occupation by them of uninhabited land was possible. Because of the slow southward movement of tribes, a specific area was seldom inhabited for more than fifty years by the same people. The same area would frequently be inhabited by different tribes one after the other. If war between these tribes – through which tribal cohesion was sometimes destroyed – is taken into account, the question arises as to just how long a certain vaguely-defined piece of land would have to be inhabited before a legal right to that land would be established."

- Professor R.D. Coertze, former head of the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Pretoria, quoted from Property Rights in South Africa, commissioned by the Transvaal Agricultural Union South Africa. (1999)

- There were 20 000 job losses in South Africa in the first quarter of 2003. Less than 6,5 million of South Africa's 44,8 million people were formally employed by March 2003. South Africa's third-largest singular employer group is the agricultural sector – although it now employs less than 600 000 people, down by 420 000 since 1992. The October 2001 census shows an estimated South African population of 44,8 million, up from 40,6 million in October 1996, with 79% African, 9,6% European, 2,5% Asian and 8,9% Coloured. The Census estimated that, overall, 43,9% of the SA population surveyed was "economically inactive". The African population has 47,1% unemployment.

- Statistics South Africa, official government website:
<http://www.statssa.gov.za/specialprojects/census2001>

- South Africa's unemployment rate increased by 54% between 1996 and 2003. The total number of unemployed people increased by 136%. Yet the total number of employed people rose by 25% in the same period. In other words, there were some 2,3 million more jobs in 2003 than there were in 1996. Why so much unemployment?

- SA Institute of Race Relations, Fast Facts, Nov. 2003.

- There are successful black farmers, and their achievements are often noted in the media. In most of the cases we investigated, they had used their own money (or they had invested a substantial shareholding in their farms). They had listened to and taken advice, and had sought out people who could help them. Various sustainable systems for small-scale farming have been developed by academics and agricultural

practitioners, and if the government would use these, and ensure that the methods are adhered to, there is a chance that sustainable small-scale farming could work.

“Professor Frits Rijkenberg of the University of Natal’s Centre for Rural Development Systems has developed a project that aims to foster sustainable, resource-efficient small-scale farming with the goal of encouraging the rural poor to uplift themselves throughout agriculture.” - Farmer’s Weekly, 4 July 2003.

The government should support the use of these projects, and assist the participants with constant supervision and advice.

- South Africa’s commercial farmers are among the best in the world, if not the best. They have to contend with a plethora of problems – the vagaries of the weather, constant drought, rising taxes on everything from the rain on their trees to municipal levies (for which they receive nothing), and excessively high toll road costs. South Africa’s land tenure laws make it difficult to dismiss workers, let alone remove these workers from their properties, and they are besieged by land invasions and squatters. They are the victims of crop and stock theft, more murders per capita of their group than any other community on earth. They are burnt out, their fences are destroyed, and they are intimidated to the point where many have abandoned their farms.

The government’s minimum wage policy has resulted in a fifty-percent drop in farm labour numbers, and many of these ex-employees now wander the cities looking for work.

“It is said that white farmers currently own 87% of South Africa’s land. When one deducts the 25% owned by the government, the remaining figure of 62% must be viewed against a background of other vital factors. Less than 12% of SA’s land is suitable for cultivation. South Africa has an average annual rainfall of only 464 mm, against a world average of 857 mm. Twenty one percent of the country has a total rainfall of less than 200 mm annually, 48% between 200 mm and 600 mm, while only 31% records more than 600 mm. Thus 65% of the country has an average annual rainfall of 500 mm – usually regarded as the absolute minimum for successful dry-land farming.”

“Some of the best and most fertile, high rainfall land in South Africa is found in six traditional black areas, but most farmers there produce only for their own consumption. More than 70% of South Africa, including more than 100 medium-sized towns, is dependent on underground water sources, tapped through the use of sophisticated borehole equipment. This represents about 13% of all the water used in the country. It should be remembered that huge tracts of land in South Africa, particularly in the northern areas, would be completely useless if it were not for these deep boreholes. Cattle farming in these areas depends almost completely on these underground water sources.

South Africa’s greatest export is topsoil, which is stripped away at a rate four times higher than the world average, and 20 times faster than it can be replaced. Thousands of tons of eroded earth disappear into oceans every year. Most of this scourge is due to poor land management.”

- Mr. Willie Lewies, TAU-SA Vice President, *The Citizen* 19 May 2000

- South African agricultural technology is world-renowned. The Zebediela Estate in the Limpopo province, for example, was a world leader in modern citrus production. Every week, farm magazines contain details of some new experiment or

innovation or patent registered or, significantly, some new theft preventative or innovative security measure.

(One such invention is a gravity gate – a boon to farmers who suffer from stock theft and/or loss.) One water expert was praised by National Geographic for his creative water saving programs. Another grows mushrooms with water hyacinths. Research is now being conducted into crops which can be irrigated with salt water. The creativity is seemingly boundless...

South Africa's mohair farmers are the world's best. The country's sugarcane industry is world-class, as is (was) its agricultural and veterinary scientific endeavours. In contrast to most of Africa, Western-style farm technology and methods have more than doubled South Africa's agricultural production during the past 30 years. South African agriculture earns around R25 billion in foreign exchange each year.

- Many academics concerned about land reform place the emphasis on settling millions of peasants onto farm land. In the numerous tomes presented at conferences and summits, and repeated in South Africa's media, this ideology wins the day.

The reason for this resettlement policy is "poverty alleviation", but no empirical data is given proving this notion to be successful. Whole sectors at South Africa's academic community are devoted to this premise.

We have found that the government's "resettlement" policy in point of fact creates more poverty. We wonder why so much money is spent on theorizing about the purported efficacy of resettlement without any academic institution actually investigating the results of government's handover policy, which we have now done, albeit without a bevy of researchers and unlimited funding.

This would have been a salutary exercise for South Africa's academic community to undertake! Surely the "poverty alleviation" theory should be backed by hard evidence that it works?

In addition, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) spend their time and their overseas-funded budgets supporting and indeed initiating the handover of productive farmland in South Africa to the so-called dispossessed. These groups, one of which is the Nkuzi Development Association, are actively involved in pressing communities to claim land, whatever the consequences.

Are the taxpayers in Norway, Denmark, Britain, Canada and the United States not concerned that their money is used to reduce farm production in South Africa?

The activities of these NGO's could eventually result in serious food shortages in South Africa. Are these same governments prepared to feed 45 million people when famine strikes this part of the world?

- Do young black people really want to farm?

Not according to an informal think tank meeting conducted at the invitation of the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation's regional office in Harare, Zimbabwe. This get-together was held in Pretoria on 1 and 2 March 2003 and was attended by international land reform and agricultural luminaries from the United Kingdom, the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, South African university academics, and representatives from Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Senegal. They declared they wanted to analyse the constraints of sustainable land reform. Despite apartheid and colonialism, they said, it was becoming increasingly difficult for donors to justify the allocation of aid resources to land reform in southern Africa. (This is of course reflected in the South African

government's paucity of funding for land reform. After the Zimbabwe experience, countries are not going to throw good money after bad.)

It was agreed the Zimbabwe situation was a total disaster. More than one and a half million people lost their livelihood as a result of the Zimbabwe government's policy of grabbing white farms. What then for South Africa? Significantly, it was declared that a "systematic review of land restitution and redistribution projects implemented during the last decade is clearly needed, together with a review of the assumptions on which these models are based.

A rigorous re-examination of the economic rationale for redistribution is essential. *Hard evidence is required if current dysfunctional policies are to be challenged and alternative paradigms advanced.*" (Italics ours).

This we believe we have accomplished with this book, at least as a start. Small-scale farming came under the microscope. The committee declared that this type of farming could not compete production-wise, locally or in world markets, with large-scale commercial farming. Post-transfer support (or the lack of it) came in for a drubbing.

There has been a movement away from small-scale farming in Africa, said the committee, and the question they asked is – do today's young people (say 15 – 45 years) want to be farmers? This of course was a rhetorical question, because evidence throughout Africa shows young people want jobs, and they eschew the agricultural life.

Our research revealed a disappointment by older black people in the young people of today who are in many instances seen as worthless, lazy and unprepared to do a day's work. The last two years have seen a discernible increase in the number of youths involved in crime, and particularly young men. (*Citizen* 12 September 2003) This is borne out by the fact that most if not all crimes against farmers are committed by young black men. Indeed, most of the crimes committed in South Africa are by the same group, according to political observer Dan Roodt. His column to this effect was spiked by the liberal Afrikaans newspaper *Rapport* editor Tim du Plessis. Pity, because it is the truth and it needs to be publicly declared.

- It is a disgrace that America's wealthy Ford Foundation funds local land NGO's in their efforts to encourage people to claim productive farmland, in many cases without a legal basis. In one instance, the South African Legal Resources Center, heavily funded by this American foundation, has kept up its legal fight against South African farmers in the Mabaalstat case.

The Baphiring community/tribe owned 7 000 hectares and, upon removal, received 17 000 hectares of prime agricultural land, together with monetary compensation and infrastructure. Now they are claiming back the 7 000 hectares although the chief of the Baphiring tribe testified in court that he will not relinquish one inch of the 17 000 hectares. Land claim legislation specifies that if compensation was granted after a removal, then there is no valid claim.

So far it has cost farmers who are rejecting this claim R800 000, while those who are instituting a frivolous claim pay not a penny in legal fees! We will be investigating the role of the Ford Foundation and other overseas funders of land claimants in the coming year.

- What about land reform in other countries?

From our research, one glaring fact is apparent. Land reform depends on the ability and willingness of the recipients to farm, or to adapt to farming. Chile for example introduced serious land reform in 1958 where land barons' farms were split up and given to small farmers. This eventuated in a four-phase process, and with the exception of the third phase under communist President Salvador Allende, the process was successful. The old owners were compensated, and technical assistance and research was introduced to help the new owners. During the fourth phase under the government of Augusto Pinochet, land was set aside for the indigenous Indian population. Chile now has the most advanced economy in South America - the majority of its population is educated and hard-working.

During a question and answer session at a recent seminar on land invasions held at the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria, Mr. Edward Lahiff of the University of the Western Cape was asked where land reform was successful. He mentioned his own country Ireland, and certain Asian lands. Ireland's history was always one of a political struggle for land, but its people adapted to modern farming because they had the innate capacity to do so. Such was the case in Asia.

Most Asians are hard workers. The example of South Korea's rise from the ashes is salutary. In the mid-1950s, Korea's per capita income was \$146 (on a par with Ghana and Nigeria). It had come out of 35 years of Japanese colonization, and was plunged into a civil war which left 25% of the population as refugees.

With no resources and virtually no agricultural economy and a population of 45 million (74% of whom were illiterate), it changed into the 12th largest economy in the world within 40 years. It had become the second largest shipbuilder in the world, and the fourth largest maker of electronics in the world. It was the planet's largest steel producer while its GDP grew on average at 9.1/2% per annum. (*Business Day* Oct. 4, 2002)

The small island of Hokkaido is Japan's most productive agricultural area – it produces 11% of the country's food. There are 5,6 million people on this island, the size of Pennsylvania. Hokkaido is subject to frequent earthquakes (the last one was in September 2003). The average farmer plot is 16,1 hectares. Hokkaido's land reform program consisted of developing the land from scratch, and placing farmers on small plots as far back as the turn of the previous century. Why does Hokkaido work? Because the people make it work, just as the Japanese have created one of the world's leading economies on a rocky, earthquake-prone series of islands, with few natural resources.

Contrast this with Brazil, one of the largest countries in area in the world. One per cent of Brazil's farmers own 46% of the country's arable land. (Reported during the Earth Summit in September 2002). Agri-business in Brazil accounts for 27% of the country's GDP. But in early 2002, the Brazilian government succumbed to peasant violence and pressure and introduced a land reform program which was to liberate millions.

This program was a monumental failure. It was precipitated with farm invasions. In one of the most ambitious land reform programs ever, Brazil parceled out 18 million hectares to 542,000 families – nearly 2 million people. It cost the Brazilian taxpayers \$6,5 billion, and these peasants were supposed to become "family farmers". The Landless Workers Movement was at the forefront of the land invasions and farm violence which forced the Brazilian government's hand. (This same movement was in South Africa giving advice to local land activists!)

What *Newsweek* (21 January 2002) calls "partial surveys" revealed that in some areas, up to half of the new landowners left their plots - *Newsweek* declared that

most new settlers were welfare cases. “The vast majority cannot feed themselves. Their collective output doesn’t even get tallied into Brazil’s \$80 billion a year agricultural production.”

In the last three decades, Brazil became an agricultural powerhouse. Large-scale commercial farming produced the 100 million tons of crops which brought in the annual \$80 billion. This commercial farm sector accounts for 61% of Brazil’s internationally-traded farm goods.

As in South Africa, most of the hand-over farms collapsed. Equipment rusted, people didn’t pay for electricity. And as in South Africa, political activists purported to speak for “disinherited” Brazilians and said that land reform “shouldn’t be measured by an economic yardstick”. The present government of Luiz Lula da Silva is under pressure to fast track more land reform, despite the disasters of the past.

Brazil’s indigenous Indians have now invaded border farmland. They have claimed 12% of the country’s productive farms. (BBC, 9 January 2004).

Where a country has a mass of people who are virtually unemployable, they cry for land as a last resort. They do not have the capabilities to become involved in other aspects of their country’s economy. They are unskilled and cannot compete. Western people in countries like the US, Canada and Australia, for example, do not demand land, even though they are landless. They are employable in other sectors of the economy. Only 2% of the US population farms, while the rest work in that country’s other sectors.

South Africa is unfortunately similar to Brazil, Venezuela and Peru (where 50% of the population lives in extreme poverty and where infant mortality is 78%).

● We do not have the space to discuss Zimbabwe. Everyone in South Africa knows about that country’s horrors and terrors, and the softly-softly approach to the tyranny by the South African government. It gives many South Africans pause for thought – if the SA government finds little to complain about north of the border, what are they prepared to permit in a future South Africa?

Will they sit back and see South Africa’s commercial agricultural sector destroyed? Will they watch as South Africa’s commercial farmers move to Zambia, Mozambique and Malawi as have some Zimbabwe farmers?

Do they realize the risk inherent in land expropriation in South Africa? Barloworld economist Pieter Haasbroek supports the oil-from-coal giant SASOL’s stance over black economic empowerment. “It has a negative impact on productivity, on the cost of business and therefore on the competitiveness and profitability of companies”, he declared. (*Business Day* December 1, 2003)

But the government’s policy of land reform is also a black empowerment policy. The same principle applies. Farms are given to unskilled people just as cushy jobs are handed to unqualified blacks. Those blacks who can farm and are competent to run a company are penalised because of this. The whole process is skewed and, ultimately, dishonest, and it is little wonder foreign investment is shaky. So many commentators both here and overseas find the SA government’s policies “unfathomable”, a word used often. Robert Mugabe’s behaviour is unfathomable, of course, but it is unfathomable to people not of his mindset. Are those in charge of South Africa of the same turn of thought? Let us hope not.

Journalist Stephen Mulholland wrote in 2001 that “the greedy rob the wealthy”. There is a ratio of 11:1 of voters to taxpayers. In the USA the ratio is approximately 2: 1. (*Sunday Times* 23 September 2001) In February 2002, journalist Matthew Lester reported that there were 3,4 million individual taxpayers in South

Africa who take on the burden of R90 billion of individual taxes out of a total tax collection of R233 billion. (*Business Times* February 10, 2002).

This statistic excludes the substantial additional taxes that are paid by individual taxpayers by way of VAT. These individual taxpayers represent only 9% of the population, but they are the people with some real power, and they should be heard. They should speak out for this country's agricultural sector. Business should also be up in arms, because dozens if not scores of towns throughout South Africa will disappear if agriculture fails. Businesses will then be taxed further to make up the shortfall.

A well-known media commentator was recently heard to say that what is happening on South Africa's farms "is a small price to pay for stability in South Africa". Well, it is not a small price, and stability will not be guaranteed if famine stares us in the face.

It is time to act, South Africa. Reject farm expropriations, and demand that those farms already destroyed be resuscitated. In the end, we are all in this together.

END

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