

HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF IN ZIMBABWE?

EVICTIONS IN ZIMBABWE, DECEMBER 2002

Over a two week period it was game, set and match in our district and we lost. It was over. And it was the death of our district. Multiple farmers picked up, jailed, evicted. So sudden. And like most deaths, even those that have been faced up to in advance, it's a gut level shock when it actually happens. I feel unable to describe the pain, the sense of loss and betrayal that people have been enduring - men as well as women in tears, people staring into space, young and old alike shell shocked and completely exhausted. I've learnt as have so many others, the literal accuracy of the expression to be "sickened" by events. There was much caring, as neighbours piled in and arrived en masse to help pack up lifetimes of memories in a few hours and as we all lent our lorries to help evacuate the latest farmer to be given his marching orders. The old "Settlers Inn" was a hoarding and boarding place for refugees from settlers as families that had to get out within hours had all their possessions dumped there in the many rooms. Dirty washing still in the wash basket, possessions tied up in sheets because there wasn't time to find boxes.

And so the district shut down - the club: no more golf course. No more community centre. No more tennis or squash. No members left to pay the costs of running the place. And it all happened within a couple of weeks. And then our church.

The death of our community as we knew it had two final causes, repeated countrywide. The first, the enforced evictions often with only hours in which to pack, which were so many that I've lost count. You will have heard of our President's statement to the World Summit where he declared that each farmer would be left with one farm and that the land reform programme is being done "in accordance with the rule of law as enshrined in our national constitution and laws". We still gasp in shock that he can stand up and say that while simultaneously evicting countless single farm owners country wide. Most of the farmers in our district were single farm owners, most had had their eviction orders overturned in the high court, and had been given permission to continue farming. Indeed many had been told they would be thrown off their farms unless they co-operated and planted a wheat crop, and were given written authority to do this. So while there was concern for those who had the dreaded Section 8 eviction orders that hadn't been overturned in court, those others who had legally had their eviction orders rescinded, or who had been given the authority to go ahead and grow wheat, did not expect it to happen to them. So when the evictions did take place, often with only hours of notice, people were emotionally and physically unprepared. They had wheat crops in the ground that were not yet ready for harvest. They had legal papers declaring they were entitled to be there. And now some had to move twice within a week as evictions spread like wildfire, and no rule of law applied. I can't find the words for all this, to express the heartache, and the enormous dimensions of so many personal tragedies.

The second cause was the extortionist pay demands from labour for "packages". And the strikes from farm labour for these "packages" spread like wildfire round the whole country. It's quite a masterstroke of genius on the government's part. By declaring farmers as the ones who should pay out their farm workers for losing their livelihood, supposedly out of compensation paid by the government to the farmer owner for his farm, the government's debt for land is substantially reduced. And by inciting the farm workers to riot and demand these packages forthwith, and inflaming them to believe that if they don't get paid out it is the farmer who is to blame, another racial wedge is driven between the two groups. I'm told that in a recent plan this was officially described this as a plan to break remaining farmers financially. Whilst legally only those whose farms have been acquired by government have to pay; and whilst legally, these payouts are only

due to farm workers who are losing their jobs due to government land acquisition, “legally” here is a meaningless word. And countrywide the labour are rioting and barricading in the farmer demanding and getting various portions of these “packages” whether or not the farm had been acquired. In a new development workers who left farms several years ago are now coming back to make the same demands. We’re having that happen to us too. Even the stores staff went on strike for “packages”. For many farmers who had hoped to continue this is the final straw, breaking them both financially and emotionally and the sense of betrayal and disillusionment that loyal workers have now turned against them is huge. While some of the workers are embarrassed and ashamed by what’s happening, they can do nothing about it.

(Source: personal friend, white ?former commercial farmer, been on the farm since c.1963)

EVICTIONS IN SOUTHERN RHODESIA, 1948

‘The Land Apportionment Act, as you can imagine, meant a great deal of hardship for Zimbabweans. For my grandfather, going to live in a strange area a hundred miles away from his home meant leaving relatives, friends.... everything he knew. It was the same for everybody who was forced to move.

With my grandparents in the Midlands [in 1948], our trips to their farm became a major event... One day, during my first summer there, we went to visit relatives who lived in a reserve near our farm. These people had already been ordered to move to an area in the north near the Zambezi escarpment - which was thickly forested and tsetse fly infested. They refused to leave. Most had been born in this reserve, had good houses well-kept fields, and felt no one had the right to force them out. The land had been the home of their forefathers for generations.

On our way many police and army trucks raced past us. When we arrived my uncle told us that the Europeans had just arrested the chief, because he told the people to resist. A police truck sped out of the village and we could see the chief and some elders – handcuffed under guard – in the back. Later that day soldiers and police started ordering men to empty their houses and barns. When they refused they were arrested. Soldiers entered their houses and threw everything onto trucks, wrecking a lot of things in the process. Then they did the same with the barns, loading all the tools, grain etc. into the same trucks. This over, the women, children and old people were put on top of their belongings and driven away. The animals had been rounded up and the boys were ordered to drive the herds north. It was a sorry sight – women, children, old people were weeping, the men arrested, homes set on fire and destroyed.

Later I heard that these people were just dumped in the Government’s assigned area – most of their cattle having died on the long trek....

I really felt pity for the people evicted from their homes in such a brutal manner. I didn’t understand why it was done, but I listened to the adults talk about it and they seemed very upset. Everybody opposed the way these people were being treated: the general feeling was one of resentment and hatred towards the government.’

Source: O. Gjerstad (Ed.), *The Organizer Story of Temba Moyo* (Richmond B.C. 1974), 31-2. Cited in Robin Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia* (London, 1977), 247-8.