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Sunday EXPRESS

Atrocity: who did what?

CRUELTY, like any sin or any crime, is easier after the first time, and it becomes progressively easier with each repetition.

That, surely, must be the explanation for the ease — the pitiless ease — with which South Africans continue to uproot people from homes and familiar surroundings, and chuck them into the wilderness like so much trash.

The five-volume report on forced removals published this week by the bitingly named Surplus People Project comes like a blow to the solar plexus, breath-taking and numbing and painful all at the same time. No newspaper account can possibly convey, as these volumes do, the full horror of the cold-blooded policies that the Nationalists have pursued since 1960.

Find a set and read it for yourself.

As a nation we have committed atrocity on the same scale as the Russians; in terms of numbers of victims, if not of deaths, we have outdone the Turkish forced removal of the Armenians which ranks as one of the great blots on this century. We have forcibly removed 3½ million people and we propose to move another two million.

In doing so we have seized land, desecrated holy places, broken families, divided friends, and smashed the small affections of small people for a familiar locality; inflicted hardship and pain, perpetuated poverty, and wasted the scarce wealth of a half-developed country; smashed the hopes and the lives of little people, bullied the weak, broken the strong; and generally behaved with an indifferent callousness that deserves only one description: it has been a triumph of evil.

It is all recorded, in an overwhelming mass of dispassionate detail, in the five volumes under the title 'Forced Removals in South Africa'. Copies can be ordered from the Surplus People Project, PO Box 187, Cape Town. No library should be without them.

Faced with this shattering evidence we have only one, rather despairing, suggestion to make: it is that opponents of this Government and its policies should begin now to compile a register of those who have, in the name of the nation, committed these atrocities.

We need to begin now to work towards our own redemption by recording the names of the politicians who have made these policies, and their words. We need to compile a register of the names and pictures, and a record of the specific acts of the officials and the policemen who have carried out these mass removals. We need to begin now to record who did what to whom so that, one day, when South Africa is put on trial for its actions, the guilty will not be able to hide in the ranks of those who were merely indifferent.

For surely, as there is justice under heaven, there will be a day of reckoning.

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