

THE announcement by Mr M. C. Botha, the Minister of Bantu Administration, of a suspension in the programme of buying land for the homelands focuses attention on a recurring debating point in South African history — the 1936 Land Act.

The suspension relates logically to the Act, because it means a halt in fulfilment of a promise made to the African people nearly 40 years ago.

When the then Prime Minister, General J. B. M. Hertzog, put his land law on the Statute Book, he was hopeful that it held the key to the "native problem".

The Land Act promised a further 6,2-million ha of land to the African people as part of a quid pro quo deal for the removal of African voters in the Cape from the common roll.

### Not enough

The land law was theoretically designed to make possible the segregationist dream of Africans "developing along their own lines in their own areas". The disenfranchisement of Cape Africans was held to be a timely counter-measure to the "danger of integration".

But the hoped-for segregationist millennium was not to be. The promised quota of land brought the proposed African share of land to about one-eighth of South Africa and

# The great Land Act letdown

THE RAND DAILY MAIL

78 OCT 1979

PATRICK LAURENCE

was clearly not enough to contain Africans in their own areas. But apart from that the land purchase programme soon ran into trouble.

Parliament originally hoped to complete the quota within 10 years at a cost of R20-million. Within three years, however, the Native Trust — specially set up for the task — reported that it had acquired only 14 per cent of the quota at the cost of 40 per cent of the R20-million.

Professor Eric Walker records: "It was told that it must be content with half the funds that it had been led to expect for the current year."

Today the Trust is still battling to fulfil the 1936 commitment, and Mr Botha has received a similar message from the Treasury — no more funds for the rest of the financial year, and then only when the financial position improves.

The position on the quota is that about five-million ha have been acquired at a cost well in

excess of R20-million.

According to Dr Phillip Hatching of the Africa Institute, some R116-million has already been spent but it will only be a fraction of what will have to be spent to acquire the remaining 1,2-million ha.

With rising land prices and the ability of White farmers to demand high inconvenience compensation, the price could rise to more than R425-million over the next 15 years — and there is no likelihood of the purchase programme being completed before that.

### Cautious

When Mr Botha met homeland leaders at the summit meeting with the Prime Minister in March 1974, he was pressed for an early completion date. In those more optimistic times, the most he could promise was that it might be completed within five to 10 years.

The prevailing financial situation has made him even more cautious about setting a deadline.

As he told the Transvaal Agricultural Union: "Although my department is compiling a programme according to which we can work, I must point out that one cannot plan far into the future what one will do."

But even when the quota is eventually fulfilled, what will have been solved?

The homelands will not have been consolidated. Even the Transkei, on which so much hope has been pinned, will consist of two pieces. The Zulus will have to settle for 10 pieces, the Tswanas and Pedis for six, the Shangaans for four.

Africans will be confined to 13,7 per cent of South Africa as far as land ownership is concerned, although they will be allowed into White-designated South Africa as landless labourers and second-class citizens.

The December 1936 resolution of the All African Convention — which meet in Bloemfontein to discuss Hertzog's proposed new deal — is as valid today as it was then.

"The true aim of land adjustment should be to provide the bulk of the native population, which is predominantly rural, with sufficient land to allow of their making a livelihood," it said.

"The fact that this aim is ignored by the Native Land and Trust Bill can only be interpreted by the African people as a vague attempt to force them out of their reserves into a position of economic dependency."

### Grievance

The African people have never accepted the 1936 Land Act as a final and just division of land between the races and have stated repeatedly that they have a legitimate claim to a share in "White" South Africa.

It is a simmering grievance as deep as it is dangerous. The full impact comes through in these words spoken 25 years ago in Kenya by ex-Senior Chief Koinange.

"When someone steals your ox, it is killed and roasted and eaten. One can forget.

"When someone steals your land, one can never forget. It is always there. It is a bitter presence."