

THE Khoi/Xhosa alliance succeeded for a time but it had collapsed by 1802. This was because racial divisions were exploited by the British government in Cape Town, and the Xhosa were persuaded to make a separate peace with the British which did not include the Khoi. Also some of the Khoi leaders were bought off with promises of land. Finally, many ordinary Khoi rebels believed the British government would be less oppressive than the settlers on the farms. So, as a result of this division and confusion the rebellion collapsed.

AFTER THE REVOLT

The Khoi hoped that the British government in Cape Town would stop the white farmers treating them so badly, and maybe allow them to return to their old way of life. These hopes were soon crushed. Some of the worst treatment of the Khoi was stopped, but the Khoi were not allowed to regain any of their land. Most of them were therefore forced to continue working on the farms. What the Khoi had failed to understand was that the British were just as determined as the farmers to prevent them leaving the working class.

How did the British tie the Khoi workers to the land? One of the first steps the British took was to make sure that labour contracts between the farmers and the Khoi were put down in writing. These contracts were then registered with the nearest magistrate. In 1809 a new law was also passed called the Caledon Code. This law said that Khoi labourers were free to leave their employers at the end of their contracts, and were allowed to take their children and property with them. Finally, courts were set up throughout the Cape to make sure the new regulations were obeyed.

Some historians believe the Caledon Code led to better conditions for Khoi workers, and see this as a good example of liberal reform. Other historians disagree. Like a lot of liberal legislation the new laws also seem to have had another purpose. Two years before the Caledon Code was passed the import of new slaves to the Cape was stopped by the government. This created a serious labour shortage. The new law was trying to solve the new labour problem. It changed the old system in which every farmer tried to control his labour by himself, and put in its place a new and more efficient system run by government officials.

How was this done?

PASSES

* The law required every Khoi to have 'a fixed place of abode' - that means, a fixed place to live. His home was then registered with the magistrate. This meant that almost all of the Khoi had to live on white farms because they were not permitted to own their own land until 20 years later.

* The law said Khoi workers could not leave their home without a pass from the magistrate. Here we see how passes started with the objective of controlling the movement of workers and making sure each employer had an adequate labour supply. One missionary at the time described how the system worked.

FORCED LABOUR

'According to the regulation, (the Khoi) must be under contract. The contracts are annual (this means they last for a year) and if the Hottentot (i.e. the Khoi) refuses to renew his engagement with his former master when the contract ends, he demands a pass from him. This he shows to the neighbouring landdrost (a government official) from whom he receives another pass permitting him to hire himself to another master. The time given him to find a master may be 2 weeks, 1 week, 1 day or 12 hours. If he does not find a master he must return within the time stated on the pass or he is liable to be punished as a vagabond (a tramp).'

The punishment for this was forced labour for up to 12 months.

* Another law passed 4 years later allowed magistrates to tie children between the ages of 8 and 18 to a farmer if he had housed and fed them when they were very young.

So it seems clear that the Caledon Code in fact introduced a more efficient way of stopping Khoi workers from selling their labour freely. Because labour was in short supply, a free labour market where workers could sell their labour to whoever

The making of the WORKING CLASS



Khoi farm workers (Picture courtesy of Africana library Wits University)

LAST month's article in FOSATU Worker News looked at how the Khoi (who later became the so called 'coloured' people) lost their land and their cattle, and so were forced to work on white farms. The article also showed how the Khoi eventually joined with the Xhosa in 1794 to resist the white settler advance.

paid the highest wages, would have pushed wages up. At the same time the arbitrary brutal behaviour of individual farmers had caused the rebellion of 1794. So now the pass, the magistrate and courts were introduced to solve the problems the owners faced.

The conditions of these Khoi farm labourers did not improve for another 20 years. Then, suddenly, a new law called Ordinance 50 was passed in 1828. By this law, passes were abolished, labour contracts could last for less than twelve months and the Khoi were legally allowed to own land. Why did this happen?

Some writers think that it was because of the pressure of missionaries and liberals in England who publicised the sufferings of the Khoi. But a closer look makes it clear that this was only a small part of the reason. The real pressure for change came from inside South Africa and from workers themselves.

HATED CONDITIONS

Khoi workers had for a long time hated their conditions on the farms. Open resistance had failed in 1802, so workers looked for other ways of easing their exploitation. Many tried desertion, but then the worker faced the problem of the pass. More often workers avoided their employers' demands by pretending illness, by laziness, by destroying the owners property and by getting drunk. In short, they resisted their conditions by being bad workers.

Employers and others continually complained about the 'want of energy' of Khoi workers. Some missionaries suggested the solution was more freedom for the Khoi. One missionary wrote:

'Make the coloured population free.....Permit the natives to choose their own masters ...(give) them the right to their (children)....Allow them to bring their labour to a free market, and the farmers will no longer have occasion to complain of a want of servants.'

PUSH UP WAGES

But the employers knew better. They knew a free labour market would push up wages. It might even allow some Khoi workers to get enough money to buy property and escape working for farmers.

So what caused the change? What freed the Khoi from the pass?

The main reason was the arrival of large numbers of Xhosa from independent nations to work in the Cape Colony. Under Ordinance 49 (the law passed just before the law that freed the Khoi), those migrant labourers were placed under exactly the same controls as had previously oppressed the Khoi. Xhosa workers had to sign written labour contracts, they had to carry a pass, and they could not move around without work.

So the arrival of Xhosa migrant workers allowed the farmers to free the Khoi. They knew these Xhosa workers would flood the labour market. They knew Xhosa workers would compete for jobs with the Khoi. And they knew that in this way wages would be kept down. It was no longer necessary to subject the Khoi to the pass. Workers of one race could be played off against the other, and both would suffer.

Next month we look at how these Xhosa came to work for the farmers and the conditions they found there.