WOMEN IN WAGE-LABOUR IN SWAZILAND: A FOCUS ON AGRICULTURE

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The Demise of Peasant Self-sufficiency in the Third World

The decline of peasant subsistence production and the destruction in many areas of peasant economies, has been characteristic of the increasing capitalist domination of pre-capitalist social formations. 'The process of colonial conquest and heightened capitalist penetration was not homogeneous in the different regions of Africa. Distinctly different capitals with their own specific demands for labour and commodities moved into each territory, and met distinctly different production systems and pre-capitalist social relations. The contradictions and social struggles which arose led to different outcomes with respect to the economic structure and pattern of class formation in each colonial state, and the conditions of existence of individual women and men'. (Mbilinyi, 1981)

Land alienation and the extraction of labour (male) from the peasant household, led to fundamental changes within the peasant household, and undermined its viability as an economic and social unit. 'Although the forms of peasant household production units appear to be old, traditional relations, they are the product of

completely tranformed modes of organising the labour process ....' (Mbilinyi 1981). As commodity relations began to pervade the countryside, first in the form of petty-commodity production and later in the form of large-scale agricultural units, the position of women within the peasant household changed. 'Almost everywhere, the introduction of widespread production for exchange disrupted whatever reciprocal division of labour existed ... in village communities women made a major contribution to the production of foodstuffs and appeared to have had access to the product of their labour'. (Mullins, 1976).

Women found themselves carrying the burden of having to reproduce the peasant household without the help of the man. This burden increased as the demand for male labour to work in the mines and industries led to lengthening of contracts and more land alienation. The colonial Governments all over the continent adopted the policy of retaining the families of the migrants in the rural areas, not only because of the nature of capital's labour needs at that time, but more importantly because of the advantages this had for capital accumulation. The wages of the migrant worker were calculated on the basis of his individual needs only - those of bare minimal survival - and the wages have been kept at these appallingly low levels on the grounds that the migrant's family is reproduced on the land 'back home' in the rural areas.

But the reality belies this argument. With the men away, peasant productivity began to fall, the poor land onto which most peasants had been pushed during the colonial period, yielded less and less, and the poor physical condition of the women only intensified this decline in productivity. (Boserup, Mbilinyi, Mullins). The responsibiiity of reproducing the family of the worker became more and more difficult and the chances of survival less and less. Attempts by women at petty-commodity production were fraught with all kinds of problems which stemmed from the status of women as users of land. Colonial policy was premised on the belief that '.....cultivation is naturally a job for men ... and virtually all Europeans shared the opinion that men are superior to women in

the art of farming; it seemed to follow that for the development of agriculture male farming ought to be promoted to replace female farming'. (Boserup, 1970)

Therefore, in the colonial and post-colonial periods, men produced commodities for the market and women were not integrated into commercial schemes, except as part of the man's family i.e. to provide free family labour, and to grow food for the household. 'This division was partly the result of pre-capitalist property relations in which the male head of clan or household, or the chief controlled the allocation of land, livestock, labour and labour product. Women had only usufruct rights to land or livestock by virtue of marriage in most cases .... Elders control over the exchange of women mediated by brideswealth (or lobola in Southern Africa) was a vital aspect of their control over production and over the labour force supply. Control over women was necessitated in order to ensure a regular supply of off-spring, the future labour force of the group, and to ensure the supply of labour embodied in the women themselves'. (Mbilinyi, 1981).

Therefore, the commoditisation of the peasantry has not only undermined the viability of the peasant household as an economic unit, but it has also eroded the status of the peasant woman vis-a-vis the means of reproduction. Commercial agriculture is undertaken almost exclusively by men, it is the men who get loans, who are allocated land under traditional land tenure systems, and it is the men who own property. 'As cash cropping developed and the commodity economy became widespread, women's labour became inferior and private, it did not produce the cash crops needed to enter the money economy, and its function was now limited to the domestic group'. (Mullins, 1976)

Boserup argues that; 'The corollary of the relative decline in women's labour productivity is a decline in their relative status within agriculture, and, as a further result, women will want to abandon cultivation and retire to domestic life, or to leave for the town.' (Boserup, 1970). This problem of 'unsuccessfull reproduction' through subsistence production is at the root of the large

outflows of women from the rural areas of Swaziland, in search of alternative means of reproduction. 'They are being forced to seek alternative forms of income in wage labour or non-farm self employment in order to survive. Moreover, all members of poor peasant families are being pushed into the labour market or into commodity production of some kind; wives, husbands, female and male children and other dependent relatives'. (Mbilinyi, 1981). **'The first advantage to capital of the tendency of modern industry to employ all the members of the workmen's family is that the value of labour-power tends to be lowered since the costs of reproduction are spread over all the members of the population. Thus the portion of the working day in which the labourer works for himself is lowered, and more surplus value is thereby extracted'.** (Beechey, 1978).

The Destruction of Peasant in Swaziland

Land alienation, in the form of concessions granted to white settlers, combined with various kinds of taxes and natural disasters, began the process which finally transformed large sections of the Swazi peasantry into wage-seekers, dependent on the sale of their labour power for survival. The concessions, granted from the best land in this little country, were the major source of peasant distress. In 1907, Commissioner Grey was appointed to demarcate one third of each concession, all of which took up about 4,000 sq miles of Swaziland, and out of a total area of 6,553 sq miles, the Swazi ended up with 2,420 sq miles, of the poorest land.

'In calculating the area of land to be allocated to Swazi families, Grey employed the principle that each family would be allocated the amount of land that was especially necessary for their reproduction'. (Fransman, 1978). The criteria used by Grey to *determine what was socially necessary for the reproduction of each* peasant family are unclear but what is obvious is that British colonialism made possible the accumulation of capital through the

extraction of cheap male labour and through the expropriation of the Swazi people's land. About 37% of the poorest land in the country was made available to the Swazi people, and this land was scattered around in 35 pieces. (This policy is very similar to that of the Bantustan policy of South Africa).

By the mid-1930's, the self-sufficiency of the Swazi peasantry was declining very rapidly, and cattle diseases were further eroding the ability of the peasants to sustain themselves. Labour migration increased through the 1940's and 50's, and the peasant household began to rely more and more on remittances of the migrants for survival. 'A measure of the generally depressed state of the economy, and especially of the Swazi sector, was the continued outward movement of labour to the Witwatersrand gold mines and to the plantations and mines of the Eastern Transvaal. During the 1930's labour was Swaziland's most valuable export, in 1938 deferred pay and remittances totalled some £51,000 while cattle exports during the same year were valued at £4,000 less'. (Colonial Report, 1966) As Fransman explains it further, '.....it was increasingly the rapidly rising population; land and cattle; land ratios that led to the undermining of Swazi agriculture. In addition the vicious cycle of low agricultural productivity, led part of the economically active population to seek wage labour, in turn leading to even lower productivity'. (Fransman, 1978).

According to the Colonial Report of 1966, two years before independence, there were 40,860 male Swazi and 12,877 Swazi women employed in wage labour in Swaziland. This amounted to 49.5% and 13.7% respectively of the working population. The same report estimated the number of men employed in South African gold mines in 1966 at 6,325 with 342 in the coal mines in South Africa.

Agricultural productivity did not improve during the war years and Swaziland, like the whole of Southern Africa, was not unaffected by the capitalist depression. In a memo, quoted by Fransman, which was submitted in the 1940's on behalf of the High Commission Territories to a Commission which had been appointed to examine the renumeration of Africans on the gold mines, the

position of the peasantry was made clear; 'Whilst in 1904 those inhabitants of the Territories who emigrated to the Union labour centres were receiving a useful addition to their agricultural resources by way of cash earnings, the position is now reversed and the labourer today relies more and more on his mine earnings to live, supplemented by what he can earn from the land. The payment, therefore, of an uneconomic wage by the mines on the grounds that the labourer is only supplementing his income which is mainly derived from agriculture, is unsound and will lead to disaster'. (Fransman, 1978, from Public Records Office, D.O. 35 1172 Y708/6).

By 1960, the Hollerman Survey showed that almost 83% of the rural population relied in varying degrees, according to the different districts, on wages. Between May 1978-June 1979, a survey of 1150 rural homesteads in Swaziland was undertaken by F. de Vletter of the Department of Economics of the University College of Swaziland. 21.6% of the homesteads sampled were in the Highveld, 42,7% in the Middleveld, 28% in the Lowveld and 7.6% in the Lubombo District. These are some of the findings of the survey;

'Countrywide, 67.6% of the homesteads have absentee workers; only 42.4% of the adult male labour force is engaged in homestead-based farming activities, and it is confirmed that much of the farmwork is done by women; 72.3% of whom are homestead--based for this purpose'. (de Vletter, 1979). The report goes on to say that, 'Only 6% of homesteads surveyed could even be regarded as generating a viable existence from crops alone, (and even this figure is upwardly biased due to the presence of Vuvulane sugar growers). 96.1% of the homesteads grow maize, only 12.2% sell any, and 48.3% need to supplement their crops with purchases. 58.4% of all homesteads sell no crops at all'.

Recent studies by the author of the paper of workers employed in the sugar plantations confirm this increasing trend towards almost total reliance by large numbers of rural dwellers on wage labour. Statistics from the Swaziland Government Individual Tenure Farms Census for 1979-80 also confirm this trend. (See Table One).

These facts have very important implications because they expose as a myth the argument that the majority of Swazi people 'live' in the countryside, and get their sustenance from the land. This kind of political rhetoric is merely a justification for the poverty and misery which capitalism inflicts on the oppressed and exploited classes in Swazi society.

Women in Wage-Labour in Swaziland – Agriculture and Processing

Since the early 1970's, women have been drawn in increasing numbers into wage labour within the Swazi economy, for various reasons, some of which will be discussed below. Essentially, they form a reserve army of labour, to be drawn into production when the need arises, and thrown out when the need no longer exists. As Beechey puts it; 'the industrial reserve army ..... provides labour power which can be absorbed in expanding branches of production when capital accumulation creates a demand for it, and repelled when the conditions of production no longer require it. It is therefore a crucial component of capital accumulation'. (Beechey, 1978).

Under neo-colonialism, and as the needs of capitalist production have changed in relation to labour, the demand for female labour has increased in those sectors of the Swazi economy which benefit from the employment of female labour, i.e. Libby's Citrus company. But, the employment of women began already in the 1920's and the population census of 1921 showed that 2.6% of women were engaged in wage employment mainly in agriculture and as domestic workers. In 1921, Millin suggested the use of female and child labour to fill the vacuum created by the migration of men out of the Swazi economy.

'I think women will be very useful at some later date when labour is very much in demand and other propositions start up in Swaziland. And I think there is a lot of light work in the sheds that can be taken over by women, and the cooking on the compounds

as well' (Fransman, 1978).

As more women were employed, their employment had to be regularised and Proclamation No. 73 of 1937 was passed to regulate this matter. The 1956 census showed that '25,928 Swazi were peasant farmers, 200 own their own businesses, and 26,050 were enumerated as employees, of whom 14,322 were employed within the Territory .... Some 24% of the total labour force was employed in farming and forestry, 9% in domestic service and 26% in mining'. (Colonial Report, 1960).

The 1963 Colonial Report showed a dramatic increase in the numbers of Swazi engaged in wage labour. 'Salary and wage earners make up more than 50% of men in Swaziland and more than 8% of the women'.

The Report noted that '....in 1962, (the working age population (aged from 15 - 64) was about 138.000 or 15% of the total African population. Of this total African working age population 65.000 were men and 72,100 were women), and of these 32,500 (49% of men) and 5, 700 women (8% of women) were in employment, making a total labour force of 38,200 representing 24,800 workers in rural areas, 5,400 workers in proclaimed urban and peri-urban areas and 8,000 in industrial settlements'. (Colonial Report, 1963).

'Among rural females 5% only were engaged in wage employment and among urban residents 21% of females were so engaged ... The main employers of rural families were domestic service (61%), farming and forestry (22%) and religious and welfare services (11%), while in urban areas most women were employed in domestic service (65%) and Government (18%)'. (Colonial Report, 1963).

As the numbers of 'propositions' have increased, especially since independence in 1968, hundreds of women have been entering the labour market as the cheapest source of value, unprotected by labour legislation and completely vulnerable to excessively high rates of exploitation in the production mainly of agricultural commodities (and as providers of domestic services, working an average of 60 hours a week for appallingly low wages).

'In general, a large proportion of wage labourers work in unskilled, low paying jobs in the modern organised sector or what

is called the 'informal' sector. The majority of women workers are relegated to these jobs. Moreover, women often have access only to seasonal, casual or temporary labour leading to even lower pay and irregularity of income' (Mbilinyi, 1981).

In agriculture, women are the cheapest labour simply because they have no alternative to what is offered them. They are usually illiterate and unskilled, and have no job security as casual and seasonal labourers. In many cases they are not even registered as employees and this enables the companies to pay dismally low wages, thereby increasing their profits. They are 'employed' for only a few months in the year, and once the job is finished, they are laid off and told to try the next season. They cannot be assured of a job in the next season, but because they cannot return to the rural areas for very long, they return to the plantations to offer their labour-power at whatever price is offered. In our presentation of the interviews with female workers at Libby's, this helplessness will be brought out by the statements made by these women on the question of job availability and job security.

Companies like Libby's who grow most of their raw materials (pineapples, oranges and grapefruit), and the sugar companies which depend on locally produced cane, prefer to use female labour because it is supposed to be least 'troublesome', and should be docile. These women have been socialised from childhood not to question authority (represented by the male figure, not only in the home but also in the work-place), and this oppressive socialisation, combined with a strong patriarchal ideology, has served capital's interests extremely well in Swaziland.

This is not to suggest that women workers in Swaziland are not aware of their exploitation, it is merely an acknowledgement of the effects certain social and political forces can have on worker consciousness. As Akerele put it, 'The employers prefer to hire women because they are more careful, patient and manually dextrous.' (Mbilinyi, 1981). Because of this lack of formal training, women have no real bargaining position, and in the

absence of Trade Unions, they are used even more effectively as a lever against the rest of the working class – to depress the wages of the workers and keep them as low as possible. Not only does capital have to pay less for the reproduction of labour, it uses female labour as a lever to reduce even further the costs to capital for the reproduction of the working class.

'The lower wage received by a specific group, in this case women workers, contributes to the lowering of the wage for all workers.' (Mbilinyi, 1981). 'Female employment also poses particular pressures on wages since womens' wage rates are substantially lower than men's. The fact that women's wages can be paid below the value of labour power means that women are part of the industrial reserve army by virtue of the sexual division of labour which consigns them to the family and inscribes a set of assumptions about women's roles'. (Beechey, 1978).

As the process of pauperisation has intensified in the countryside, thousands of women, who no longer can reproduce their families on the little bits of ground they cultivate by virtue of being 'someone's wife' and who are unable to satisfy basic needs from the unreliable remittances sent by migrant husbands, have flocked into the towns seeking employment of any kind. Many end up in the fields and on the factory floor of companies like Libby's.

Working for Libby's

Housing (1)

The majority of the workers, especially those working in the fields, live in slums bordering the pineapple plantations. Sprawling clusters of crudely built structures, most consisting of corrugated iron, scraps of cardboard and other odd-fitting materials, litter the area which has come to be known as Emangozeni (mangoes).

The place is a death trap; garbage is scattered all over the place, and the shacks and lean-to's are so crammed with people

and so close together that one can hear someone else breathe next-door. Privacy is an unknown luxury. Worst of all, there are no water or sanitation facilities. The people would like to build latrines, but cannot do so because there is hardly space to move. Consequently, the place has become a hot-bed for diseases like cholera, dyptheria, typhoid and tuberculosis. There isn't the remotest chance that these people will get any of the basic infrastructural facilities in the near future.

The slum is located on various plots of land which belong to the Carrington family. Mr. Carrington, who came to Swaziland during the colonial period, acquired by whatever means, large tracts of land in the Malkerns area. This valley is the most suitable in the area for pineapple and citrus production. Carrington divided the land among his children and it is upon these plots of land that the slum has mushroomed.

There are two types of housing in the slum, the 'single' rooms which are built by the landlady/landlord, and rented out to workers at approximately E10.00 a month, and which relatively speaking, are less depressing than the second type. This latter type is built by the worker, using any material she/he can get hold of. The plots are leased to several 'slumlords' who in turn rent out a portion of the plot to several workers. The worker then pays the 'slumlord' the rental, also approximately E10.00, of which the 'slumlord' keeps part and gives the rest to the owner of the plot. This type of arrangement releases the landowner from any responsibility for the people living on her/his land. The slumlords are responsible for rental collection and for maintaining 'law and order'. They have employed security guards, and interestingly enough, there is a rather large police station opposite the slum. The residents of the slum 'buy' water from the police.

The crime rate is very high in the area, and a new and different social scene has evolved. Women have assumed headship of the household and one respondent told us that the women call the shots in most relationships. The male-female relationship is based on a new set of values. The women are the breadwinners in most

cases since the industry employs mainly women workers, and the man is usually unemployed and lives-in as a boy-friend. This peculiar relationship - peculiar within the setting of a strongly patriarchal and male dominated society like Swaziland - has come tc characterise the majority of working class 'marriages'.

We interviewed a middle-aged woman who lives in the 'build-it-yourself' section of the slum, and she, like many in her position, expressed a great deal of hostility and anger at her situation. She blamed the authorities for failing to enforce certain conditions with which landlords should comply, and implied that in fact, having failed to enforce these conditions, ie. the provision of water, sanitation and electricity, the Government was obliged to provide them itself.

She took us around the slum, and unhesitatingly showed us the poverty and squalor that abounded. The biggest complaints were about unsatisfactory housing and insecurity of fencing. No control exists over rents, and the landowners, through the 'slumlords', can demand any amount of money as rent, non-payment of which leads to eviction. The same person also raised the problem of nepotism and bribery, and expressed disillusionment with the authorities responsible for public welfare.

Her sentiments, which can be said to represent the general feelings of the slum dwellers, were appropriately expressed in this statement; 'You do not exist for them (the authorities). Only when there is work to be done, so-called community projects to be undertaken, then they remember you. Otherwise, you are nothing'.

We were then showed the 'single' room section of the slum. These rooms are built very close together, in a barracks-type style, a very dull and colourless long building with small doorways opening into its many rooms. There is only one entrance to each room, and all face the same way with rows facing each other. Each room measures about 2 - 2 meters, they are small, low-roofed, stuffy cubicles, poorly ventilated and with only a tiny window to let in some light and air.

In spite of the fact that most of the workers live with whole

families in these tiny rooms, most of the workers keep their rooms as clean as can be expected under such conditions. They cook, eat, wash, entertain and sleep in the same room. As one worker put it; 'They (the company) don't care where we live. We are employed but they don't care what happens to us. We sleep in the same room, porridge under the bed, children on the floor. Disease is rampant in this place'.

A woman worker whom we approached first when we entered the 'compound', described the rooms thus; 'They are built for you to live alone, and not to have any property'. These workers sometimes have to pay as much as E10.00 for smaller rooms, and again they have no say over rentals, and must pay what the landlady/landlord demands. Asked why they did not want to live in the compound as alleged by the company officials, the workers reacted very angrily. They complained that the company housing was not only inadequate, but also very poor. Approximately 60 women are crowded into a domitory and the bunker beds are without mattresses, which means that the workers have to sleep on the springs. The company only began providing some accomodation in the late 1960's after Libby's took over the industry. Before then, workers were recruited and picked up from certain points in the valley, and after work they had to fend for themselves. The situation is still unchanged for the majority of the workers. One employee of the company explained that during the peak season the numbers of women employed can reach a thousand, and the company can barely house half this number.

The regulations in the company compound are unacceptable to most workers who felt that they were being treated like children. This rejection of the restrictiveness of company 'morality' is another sign of the growing assertion by young Swazi working class women of their right to decide on their own morals. The matron at the company compound bemoaned the break-down of traditional/-national morality, and argued that there was an urgent need for the company to provide adequate and decent accomodation suitable for adult women. The large numbers of illegitimate children, the

breakdown of family structures, loose morals and vices like drunkenness, were all 'evils' which could be partially controlled if the workers were provided with proper housing, among other things.

She said, 'My child, the company has an obligation to look after the workers, especially since they are women, coming from the rural area into a situation where there is no one in charge of them. They need to be protected from themselves'. The attitude of the matron is typical of those occupying a position of authority over female workers, an attitude re-inforced in this case by the matron's close ties with the royalty who sees her duty extending into the realm of 'personal responsibility over minors'. In Swazi customary law, women, married and unmarried, remain minors all their lives.

Conditions of work

Women workers at Libby's are divided into two groups - Agricultural workers, who work in the fields, growing and harvesting the pineapples, and Industrial or factory workers, who clean and can the pineapples and other citrus which the firm processes into juices, preserved fruit, and jam. The workers are then sub-divided into Permanent, Seasonal and Casual within these two main categories, with conditions of employment differing in some cases.

Agricultural Workers

Libby's grows about 65% of its pineapples, and buys the remaining 35% from private growers in the Malkerns area. Most of the agricultural workers are seasonal or casual, and are employed by Libby's. Some are employed by the private estates which provide Libby's with agreed quotas of citrus. Because the conditions of employment do not differ in any real way between Libby's and the private growers, we have generalised the conditions of work relating to Libby's for all agricultural workers in the area.

These women work long hours in the blistering sun, without

any protective clothing to keep the prickly pineapples from injuring their legs and arms. They try to improvise, most of them wrapping the long black plastic strips used to protect the young pineapples from the sun, around their legs and arms. Others wear tattered old-fashioned tights, and still others simply tie dirty rags around their bodies. On their heads, they wrap odd scraps of dirty cloth, to try and keep the heat off. As one passes by, one might wonder what sort of strange birds these are, bent double, seemingly crawling slowly along the endless rows of succulent looking pineapples. The scene is reminiscent of Southern slavery in the North American continent a hundred years ago. They wear a perpetually tired look on their faces, it is difficult to believe it when they say how young they really are. Most are between the ages of 20 and 35, but they look much older.

They are mostly casual and seasonal workers, and one woman told us that it was virtually impossible to become permanent as a picker. They come to the Malkerns Valley every year, and most do not return to the rural areas after a season in the fields. Instead, when the picking is over, around November, they hang around in the slum, waiting until the planting begins in the new year. While they wait, they live by whatever means they can, most engaging in illicit beer-brewing and prostitution.

These women have no maternity leave, and when they do fall pregnant, they are told to 'resign' and take at least 3 months unpaid leave. After three months have elapsed, they can join the line outside the company offices and try to get to a job again. This means getting up at 3 o'clock in the morning to get to the gates first, because there are hundreds every day seeking unskilled jobs at the firm. These conditions also apply to seasonal workers employed in processing the fruit.

An employee of the company gave several reasons for the low labour turn-over in the firm, especially among the unskilled women. The main reason was that these women have no alternative means of livelihood. They come mainly from the Shiselweni District in the south of the country (about 50% come from the south), another 25%

come from the Hhohho District in the north, and about 25% the Lubombo and Manzini Districts.

Having worked as a picker before, even if for the last ten years, does not guarantee one a job during the next season. After the pineapples have been cleared from the fields, the women are laid-off until the next season, when they start at the bottom of the scale again, earning approximately 44cents per hour. In spite of the fact that most of these women are seasonal and casual and earn the lowest rates, they still have to pay taxes and have to contribute to the National Provident Fund (NPF). For instance, one woman who is seasonal showed us her pay slip, and all the deductions made from what she earned after about 58 hours in a fortnight in the blistering sun. The value of 58 hours of work was E25.74. Then the company deducted E1,25 for NPF, 69c for Graded Tax, 08c for some other tax which is not clearly identified, and E2.64 for meals. Total deductions equal E4.66. She takes home E21.08c in a fortnight.

Like the women employed in processing (seasonal), the agricultural workers complained bitterly about having to pay all this tax and then still have deductions for meals which they do not want. The company insists on providing the workers with the only meal they have a day, a practice common to the sugar industry as well. In this way, the company can pay the workers less because it claims that it feeds them. It can buy cheap rotten food, and thereby keep the wages below the legal minimum, a minimum which is set without the consultation or real participation of the workers affected. So far, the companies have used the legal provision in National labour legislation which makes it legal to pay women even below the minimum wage.

The workers rejected the practice of providing them a meal, because they say that the food they are given is 'rubbish'. They called it 'luzizi', an inedible mixture of rotten beans, maize, bits of meat and some vegetable scraps, unfit for human consumption. We were reminded of the so-called food we had seen being prepared for workers at the sugar estates. The 'cook' was literally throwing all

kinds of junk into a big black three-legged pot, which hadn't been properly washed so that yesterday's muck still clung to the edges of the pot. He threw in chunks of unwashed cabbage, scraps of meat, etc. and the final mixture was absolutely revolting. We could not believe that this disgusting looking muck was to be served to people who had been in the fields since day-break.

The women (and men) at Libby's complained about their helplessness regarding these meal deductions, and said that even if one refused to eat company food, the company still made the deductions. Seasonals in the field or in the factory do not get any compensation in cases of injury, and even those permanent workers who live off the company compound are not eligible for medical aid in cases of injury which occurs outside the work place. With what they earn, they can barely afford to pay hospital fees, and this is a contributory factor to the high mortality rate in the area, especially among children in the 1 - 5 age group.

Factory Workers

Here too, the women are sub-divided into seasonal and permanent workers, but since we discussed the conditions of seasonal workers in agriculture, and those conditions apply to seasonals in the factory we shall now concentrate on so-called permanent workers.

Most of the women who were in the permanent bracket had worked for the company for at least 7 to 10 years. One worker described the criteria for becoming permanent thus;

'To become permanent, you must work with all your might, and "roll yourself over", "kill yourself", then you might become permanent. The company sets certain work levels which you must reach. These are virtually impossible to reach, of course, but if you try hard enough, go without your meal break, you might get promoted to "permanent" status'.

They stand for up to 10 hours at a time, sometimes more, in fruit juice, usually on the ice-cold cement floor, without the

protection of boots or planks on which to stand. When they first join the company they are issued with a pair of boots, gloves, a plastic apron, an overall, and a head-scarf. The cost of these items is deducted from their wages at the end of the first month. In addition, they have to pay for an identity card, without which they cannot enter the factory. After a short while, the boots and gloves are dissolved by the juice and fall apart. Because Libby's pays *even below the minimum wage (by special arrangement with the* Deputy Prime Ministers' Office), these poor women cannot afford to buy another pair of boots or gloves. So they stand bare-footed or in cheap takkies for long hours every day in citrus juice, and after a while they develop ulcers on the hands, arms and legs. After a few years, they end up with arthritis, varicose veins and all kinds of related diseases which leave many crippled for life. One woman put it this way; 'After working for several years, in these conditions, you are useless even to yourself, and the company tells you to go home'.

Job security

The workers said that they were instructed on how not to injure themselves, but that there are no courses as such on safety. They complained that because they are unskilled, even after working for several years they remained at the bottom of the scale. Graduates who enter the company with little or no knowledge of the job, earn many times more than they earn. This presents a problem, which creates antagonisms between 'skilled' and 'unskilled' nationals. One of the workers posed the problem to us;

'Why does the company give people with degrees more money than someone like me, yet I have learnt this job through practical activity. There is no school for my experience, except on the *factory floor. I now have to teach this newcomer. Why should I* have to teach someone who is supposed to know more than me?'

If a permanent worker suffers injury, they are eligible for compensation, but the workers used a very apt phrase to describe this eligibility. They said 'Oh yes, they say we are eligible for

compensation, but you have to dig for the money'. They gave the example of a woman employee who lost her arm in an accident inside the factory. She received about E2,000 compensation after a long struggle, and was kept on as an ordinary worker doing odd jobs.

We came across similar cases in the sugar industry, where in one instance a man who lost a leg in the mill, received only E40,00 compensation, and was kept on as a sweeper.

Most permanent workers earn approximately E38.00 per fortnight, for about 56 hours of work at a rate of 63 cents an hour. From this the company deducts E1.90 for NPF, 69c for Graded Tax and E1.32 for Income Tax. These workers do not have to pay for the meals because they do not get any. Their meals are included in the 63 cents per hour, although some permanent workers can earn as little as 52 cents an hour.

During the peak season, these women can work from six to six without any breaks, except for lunch. It is during this time when work is plentiful that they earn the above quoted wages. But as the year draws to a close, the number of hours they are allowed to work also decreases. The company tells the women to work for less hours and they get paid only for the time they have worked. There was bitter resentment at the unfairness of this practice, because the women felt that as permanent workers they should be paid a full working day even if there was less work to be done.

This problem became clearer when we asked the women what they did during the off-months. We had assumed that most workers return to the rural areas to plough, and return in the new year for the next season. But we found out that this assumption was unfounded. The workers pointed out to us that they now live in the Malkerns area, and they have made their homes there. As women, most of them unmarried and therefore without any rights to land under traditional tenure, they had additional reason not to return to the rural areas. Most of them come from rural areas, especially from the south, but as one woman put it; 'We won't return to the rural areas, we have lived here too long. Of course there is land

in some places, you can grow a bit of food, you won't really starve, but, how are you going to pay the school fees; where will you get the money to pay for the hospital since clinics are far away; what will you wear?'

They also explained that most of them were unmarried and had several illegitimate children whom they described as orphans (tindzanza) and they could not survive in the rural areas. 'Our life is different here'. Therefore, the company policy of saying that some days the workers should not even come to the factory, was a way of not having to pay their employees during slack periods, thereby making higher profits at the expense of the workers and their families. We asked one worker what she thought about this practice, and she replied; 'I would like to say that it is wrong to make us work for one day in a week, and yet we have to eat and pay rent. We want the company to pay us even if we are not working because they stop us from coming to work, and because we are permanents. If I work from 6 - 8 a.m., I only get paid for those 2 hours, yet I didn't say I want to stop working at 8 a.m. If the machine breaks down, we are told to leave the factory, and are paid only for the few hours that we worked'.

Leave

Permanent workers are eligible for leave after a few years of employment. During the off-season, a worker can take her 3 months leave but she gets paid for only 2 weeks of the 3 months. If she gets ill during her leave period and overstays the time, she loses the job as a permanent, and can only be re-employed (without guarantee, of course) as a seasonal. The same applies with pregnancy. Once she falls pregnant, she must leave the job at 7 months, for three months, without maternity leave pay. If she overstays the leave period, her name is cancelled from the permanent list, and she starts all over again as a seasonal.

'Even if you are ill, you have to go to work. They refuse 'tinyanga' (traditional healers), they want a doctor's certificate.

You don't argue, you are just grateful to get the job back'.

Libby's is not contented with extracting the highest rates of surplus value possible from cheap defenseless female labour, it refuses to pay such a meagre sum as maternity benefits, and instead will use any illness resulting from child-birth as a pretext to push workers back to a position where the rate of exploitation is highest. As Mbilinyi puts it, 'So long as the employer pays the cost of providing maternity leave benefits and pays for the substitute labour force, without state contributions to defray the costs, hiring child-bearing women becomes less profitable.' (Mbilinyi, 1981). But for Libby's which is owned almost completely by Nestles (80%, the Swazi Government and the Commonwealth Development Corporation own 10% respectively) to pay for maternity leave would make it 'unprofitable' and not worth remaining in the country - a country which has provided the company with some of the cheapest labour-power in the world, and with a very high rate of profits over the 12 years that the company has been in operation. (See Table 2).

The company refuses to give the workers a bonus at the end of the year, using the same excuse which the sugar industry and many other capitalist firms use, i.e. that it is not making enough profit, and therefore needs more land before it can give bonuses or improve the basic living conditions of the workers. (2)

In an article published by the Swazi Observer newspaper of 21 November, 1981, the company's Managing Director, Mr. David Jelly, complained that the lack of land has led the company to halt any plans for wage increases, housing and training programmes for its employees. 'He said more land around the factory would help him regain profits which could be re-invested into this country through increasing wages for employees, housing and training for localisation'. (Swazi Observer, 21.11.81).

It is the same old story concocted by capitalist industry all over the Third World. When the capitalist world economy slides into a recession, it is the working class which must bear the burden of so-called lost profits. Since 1969 when Libby's began operating as

a multinational concern (previously it was a privately owned company which grew and processed the pineapples), the company has made steady profits, and 'eaten up' thousands of acres of land in the Malkerns Valley, land which could have been used to grow food for the Swazi people. The author is reliably informed that the chemicals used by Libby's and other growers of pineapples are so strong, that after a few years the land upon which the pineapples have been grown becomes completely barren and unproductive, unless for anything else except to be left idle. No wonder that Mr. Jelly is asking for more land. The Company wants more land to increase its production, thereby depriving the Swazi people of any alternative sources of reproduction, and consequently creating an even bigger reserve of cheap black labour dependent on the abysmally low wages the company pays.

Conclusion

The workers at Libby's, like those in the sugar industry, and in all the capitalist enterprises in this country, are angry and tired. Government claims that Swaziland is a peaceful country, perfect for foreign investment, do not reflect the real mood of the people who make these excessively high rates of profit possible. The workers know that they are exploited, they know how much the company is making every year, because they produce the wealth. They grow the pineapples and the sugar cane, they process it, pack it and see the profits enjoyed by the management. Libby's, like most foreign companies in Swaziland, pays some of the highest salaries to skilled personnel (local and expatriate), provides them with housing of the highest standards, and with all the other privileges which the petty-bourgeoisie enjoys in most African countries where capital is uncontrolled in its exploitation of the working class.

Government participation in such companies does not benefit the Swazi worker in any real way - except as a politically

expedient excuse to enable the petty-bourgeoisie to claim that the Swazi people have a share in the company. The Government ends up with the task of holding the whip over the workers, reminding them that the companies are here to help them, and that they should be grateful for the jobs that they have.

The workers were in fact very cynical about the Government's role in the industry, and when we asked them if they received any help from the Labour Department, they said that they did not even know about such a Department. 'If you take your case to them, you can be sure that you will lose, even if you know you are in the right. They never come to see us, only to see the company. You can see by the flag going up that Government people are around, that is all. They don't care where we live, how we live'. Another worker put it this way; 'Anyway, the District Commissioner's office is open only during working hours'.

Because Trade Unions are banned in this country, the workers are unable to organise and defend themselves against the excessive exploitation and oppression of the company. The absence of Trade Unions makes Swaziland even more of a favourite for foreign capital, and leads, on the part of the workers, to uncertainty, disunity and intimidation. They (the workers) told us of a case of a woman who dared to question the company's policy of limiting working hours during the slack period. She was reprimanded and warned that if she dared to 'instigate' the other workers again, she would be fired. We asked the workers what they would have done if she had been fired, and they said 'Nothing'. One worker said quite honestly, 'If she had been sacked, we would have hidden, we would not have come out in support of her because we want to keep our jobs. We are here because we need to work, even if we are oppressed, we still come here to work'.

Another worker said in reference to the separation of Agricultural and Factory workers; 'We are divided, yet the company is one. We know nothing about Trade Unions. They (the company) victimise us if we try to talk. There are so many of us without jobs, the company can hire and fire as it pleases.'

The company uses the carrot and stick approach to control workers' discontent, depending on the circumstances. If the worker is fast, efficient and has a high productivity record, rather than lose her, the company will either give that worker a slightly superior job, or bribe her into silence, or put her on another job in a different section. The workers put it best in this phrase; 'They put a pineapple in your pocket?'

The company can also demote a worker to a menial job if she is suspected of inciting' the other workers. We found this practice in the sugar industry as well. The workers told us of cases where vocal workers were made to cut grass on the company premises for several weeks, to get them out of the mill and 'teach them a lesson'. The arrogance of the oppressor who has not yet tasted the wrath of the oppressed.

Unfortunately, we were unable to discuss with the workers the forms that worker resistance takes under such conditions, but it is hoped that in the future such a study will be undertaken, to bring out more clearly the true nature of this section of the Swazi proletariat. Although the workers appear to be afraid, and this was the impression we got with the workers in the sugar industry as well, this is mainly because of the lack of strong leadership and of better conditions of struggle. Once these two factors come into existence, the workers in this country will begin to flex their muscles more openly.

Footnotes

1 The author was unable to visit the company housing or any part of the compounds because she was refused an interview by the company, which argued that there are certain things which Libby's does not want to be publicised because they would jeopardise the reputation of the company. That is one reason why we have concentrated on living conditions outside the company compound, but we are reliably informed by the workers that the company housing is not much better than that available outside the company property.

2 Of course, the figures given to Government Departments by these companies are unreliable simply because they cannot be double checked, and Libby's has the notorious reputation among Government researchers into industry, of being the most unco-operative industry in the country as far as the release of statistics concerning labour and productivity are concerned.

TABLE 1

NUMBER AND WAGES OF PAID EMPLOYEES ON FARMS - MANUAL WORKERS AND TOTALS

UNSKILLED MANUAL WORKERS

REGION	SEX	SEPTEMBER 1979 NO.	SEPTEMBER 1979 TOTAL WAGES	JUNE 30 1980 NO.	JUNE 30 1980 TOTAL WAGES
SWAZILAND	MALE	12 882	905 837	13 650	1 157 834
	FEMALE	3 649	153 193	5 152	215 216
	TOTAL	16 531	1059 030	18 802	1 373 050
HIGHVELD	MALE	2 130	174 366	2 282	212 257
	FEMALE	525	24 779	656	31 290
	TOTAL	2 655	199 145	2 938	243 547
MIDDLEVELD	MALE	1 535	61 045	1 614	67 124
	FEMALE	1 021	27 290	1 276	37 816
	TOTAL	2 556	88 335	2 890	104 940
LOWVELD	MALE	9 042	666 523	9 546	873 815
	FEMALE	2 001	99 104	2 484	133 371
	TOTAL	11 043	765 627	12 030	1 007 186
LUBOMBO	MALE	175	3 903	208	4 638
	FEMALE	102	2 020	736	12 739
	TOTAL	277	5 923	944	17 377

Swaziland Government, Census of Individual Tenure Farms, 1979-80. Central Statistical Office, Mbabane Swaziland. Page 25.

TABLE 2

AREA, PRODUCTION AND SALES OF CITRUS FRUIT

CROP / REGION	Orchard on 30.6.80 Area ha	No. of Trees	No. of Trees harvested Winter 1980	Quantity Produced m. tons	Quantity Sold m. tons	Value of Sales E.
TOTAL CITRUS						
HIGHVELD	9	357	128	4	4	640
MIDDLEVELD	650	114 692	83 735	8 314	8 214	1 025 442
LOWVELD	1 743	459 080	412 768	51 172	51 166	8 241 598
SWAZILAND	2 402	574 129	496 631	59 490	59 384	9 267 680
ORANGES						
HIGHVELD	3	42	28	1	1	40
MIDDLEVELD	599	106 821	75 861	6 714	6 642	865 785
LOWVELD	648	169 175	166 117	20 544	20 544	3 365 416
SWAZILAND	1 250	276 038	242 006	27 259	27 187	4 231 241
GRAPEFRUIT						
MIDDLEVELD	34	7 102	7 102	1 485	1 484	148 140
LOWVELD	1 037	271 650	228 401	29 536	29 530	4 562 952
SWAZILAND	1 071	278 752	235 503	31 021	31 014	4 711 092

Swaziland Government, Census of Individual Tenure Farms, 1979-80, Central Statistical Office, Mbabane, Swaziland, P.18.

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11 Swazi Observer, (21.11. 81).