

SOME REMARKS ON LAND REFORM IN SOUTH AFRICA

A DISCUSSION

by Tom Lodge

I will first summarise briefly Norman Bromberger's article.

True land reform involves the expropriation of landowners by the State and the reallocation of land in such a way that a wider section of the population benefits from it. Such a measure normally has three objectives: equalisation of income within the rural population; reduction of urban-rural disparities; increase of output. Land reform can have both a reformist and a revolutionary content: in pursuing reform (moderation as opposed to total change of the socio-economic system) its exponents may heighten social tensions to a point where they can no longer be contained.

Land reform has been common in the twentieth century and often practised on a massive scale. Two sets of explanations are useful. One is to view it as the result of conflicts that arise when the changes arising from the transition to modern industrial society can no longer be contained within the framework of existing pre-industrial social relations. The second is to see the demand for land reform as being especially powerful in the cases in which a feudal landowning class succeeds in transforming itself into a large-scale capitalist group as opposed to the development of relatively small-scale commercial agriculture. The second explanation seems more applicable to the South African situation.

Given the hypothesis that redistribution in the South African case would have considerable popular support (whether undertaken as an ante or post-revolutionary measure) what benefits would redistribution in favour of a recreated peasantry (the strategy Bromberger chooses to consider) bring?

Experience elsewhere (Taiwan is cited specifically) suggests that reform can bring about substantial alleviation of poverty and reduction of inequalities within rural society. In South Africa, however, bearing in mind the vast size of the rural landless population, the question arises as to whether there is enough land to meet all demands. Also, in terms of level of available skills, nature of infrastructure, and ecological factors, redistribution might lead to shortfalls in production (at least temporarily) affecting both the welfare of the rural and urban populations. It is likely that in the event of a peasant oriented land reform, townspeople (or certain classes within urban populations) would have to pay more than they do at present for food and raw materials.

Many development economists argue that 'output per

unit of land is inversely related to farm size'. In other words peasant agriculture, with its greater degree of labour intensity is actually more productive. Large farms only appear more productive because infrastructure, credit and markets are geared to their advantage.

Bromberger has doubts about the salience of this argument in the South African context where immense costs would be invoked in reorienting the infrastructure, credit and markets to a rural population largely illiterate, and, because of landlessness, without experience of commercial farming. He goes on to quote evidence from an Indian context which suggests the inverse relationship between output and unit size to be operative only in an overall context of backward technology.

In any case in an industrial economy such as South Africa's is labour intensive small-scale farming feasible? There is .. something else for rural labour to do ... to work for wages which could not be matched by family labour on a family farm. On the other hand existing examples of small-scale Black farming (e.g. Kwa Zulu sugar farmers) suggest that redistribution, if not actually leading to increases in output, will not necessarily cause dramatic deteriorations. There is a paucity of conclusive evidence.

This is the gist of Bromberger's argument.

In the South African context there can be no serious doubt as to whether the alleviation of rural poverty could be achieved without the redistribution of land either from the private sector to the state or through the peasant strategy discussed by Bromberger. Existing land allocation and influx control (not mentioned in Bromberger's paper) are the root cause of rural poverty and the puny efforts in homeland job-creation schemes and state sponsored rural development programmes are little more than propaganda exercises. At best they have the effect of helping to develop a tiny homeland bourgeoisie which may serve to deflect some political aspirations. The removal of influx control would provide powerful stimuli for an improvement in the lives of the rural poor. A massive and uncontrolled swelling of South Africa's urban population would bring with it considerable social distress but it would also present very powerful pressures favouring a massive increase in wages, vast expansion of housing, and heavy progressive taxation. Of course reform would involve considerable costs: at present white urban populations are provided with services which compare favourably with those existing anywhere else in the world at rates which are derisively cheap.

Even with the removal of influx control land reform will be necessary. South African industry is increasingly capital-intensive and without the political protection they at present receive from the state, employers, forced to pay higher wages, will be induced (unless prevented from doing so) to cut down on their labour requirements. In any case, given the sort of climate in which these reforms would be possible there will be a slump in investment. Some third world economists are enthusiastic about the capacity of the 'informal' sector to soak up urban unemployment but increasingly it is doubted that activities in this sector can do more than provide a very bare survival, often at the expense of an already poor community. So obviously reallocation of land will have to take place, especially if African farmers are expected to produce the surpluses necessary for their own security and investment in improved technique.

To understand the effects of this one needs to have some idea of just how efficient South African agriculture is at present. Though the game reserves are an area where distribution can initially take place with little disruption of production, inevitably there will have to be major interventions in the commercial agricultural sector. Some of these of course, could take place without serious social conflict. By the time South Africa has developed to the stage in which these changes become possible there may have been considerable depopulation of 'white' rural areas. (Mozambique is a case in point: on the whole there has been little expropriation, rather deserted states have been taken over either by the state or by peasant farmers). Though the Kenyan example suggests that a carefully controlled reform need not bring about production falls, (in fact Kenyan agricultural production increased at a rate of 4 per cent in the 1960s), it is misleading in the South African context. The white commercial sector there was relatively small and less efficient than, for example, plantation agriculture. Landlessness was not a universal problem amongst Kenya's black population: the regulated transfer of settler land to individual African owners could resolve the immediate problems posed by landlessness amongst the Kikuyu without interrupting production patterns. The fact that the pattern of landownership and usage has remained unaltered except in the racial sense has caused some radical political economists to argue that all that has been achieved in Kenya is the postponement of social conflict. But in South Africa's case such a smooth transition would be unlikely: the demands confronted by any post-liberation regime would be far more intense and less easy to meet within an unchanged agricultural framework. Whether the breaking of this framework would, in the long term, be disastrous is, in the absence of a technical appreciation of South African agriculture, a difficult question to discuss. At present farmers are able to employ political muscle to gain state protective measures; in the past these were crucial to their success in competing with black peasants, but today, given their technological sophistication, they may only be socially costly luxuries farmers could well do without.

African precedents suggest that a post-revolutionary regime, even if it was during its revolutionary phase of development fuelled by agrarian discontent (and contemporary South African revolutionary movements are urban oriented), tends to favour the conversion of the colonial estates into state farms or at least areas in which collaborative forms of

production would predominate. For example, in Algeria before independence a third of the cultivated land was taken up by large mechanised European owned farms and the rest was divided into over 600 000 Muslim small holdings, most of which were inadequate to provide subsistence for their inhabitants. The shortfall in production within the Muslim sector was made up by remittances from the Algerian migrant workers in France. Following independence, with a massive exodus of French settlers, farms were seized by farm labourers and soldiers and worked on a basis of democratically elected management committees, which were to become increasingly bureaucratized and subject to state control. In the first six years production per acre fell by approximately a third (though remaining substantially higher than the 'traditional' Muslim sector), though this fall may have in part been a consequence of the State's preference for industrial as opposed to agricultural investment. Only in 1971 did expropriation in favour of the creation of a prosperous peasantry begin. In Ethiopia in 1975 peasants were given 'rights of possession' to the land and freed from the exactions of a feudal landowning class. But the Dergue has stopped short of granting individual tenure (ownership is vested in the state) and the ultimate intention is some cooperative if not collective form of production. Social equality and, in the short term, political loyalty of the formerly most oppressed sections of the rural population, have been bought at the cost of chances of increasing productivity (land redistribution has been executed with tremendous enthusiasm but in units more suitable for subsistence rather than cash agriculture). But in the Ethiopian case static production levels and even urban food shortages represent an improvement on feudal conditions. State farms have been important in the Mozambican context. For the first two or three years of the FRELIMO administration they received priority in terms of development expenditure. Communal ventures by the peasantry have not normally been at the expense of the estate sector (instead they have involved resettlement and occupation of the smaller settler holdings). The inefficiency of the estate sector as well as ideological considerations have since 1978 caused a re-orientation of strategy in favour of small-scale peasant producers.

Do such case studies have much significance for South Africa? I think they do. Given a conflict free environment it may be possible to argue for the virtues of mechanised as opposed to peasant labour-intensive production. But even if the Indian evidence cited by Bromberger had a general significance (and comparisons between peasant and capital-intensive production in Eastern Europe suggest rather different conclusions), lessons drawn from it may not be applicable to a revolutionary aftermath. Shortage of skills, investment capital, social tension, sabotage and the effects of wartime disruption would make simpler forms of agricultural production the most sensible to adopt in the short term. They would also go further towards providing political stability. In the light of African evidence a socialised mechanised sector however desirable in the long term, is difficult to erect immediately on the still-warm funeral pyre of capitalist agriculture. Moreover the conservation of the estate sector even under worker management may perpetuate rural inequality (here the Algerian and Mozambican evidence is relevant), unless the labour process itself is substantially altered so it can absorb a major proportion of the rural population.

Bromberger's article is a valuable and interesting introduction to a set of complex and debatable issues. But to centre the discussion on the potential of a revived peasant sector is, I feel, a little artificial. In the kind of political environment in which land reform could take place the element of choice between one strategy and another will be subordinated to immediate political considerations. (I do not think that pre-revolutionary land reform is an option worthy of serious consideration: any measures would be

of a co-optive and partial nature). What deserves more emphasis is the price which will need to be paid whatever strategy is adopted. The wealth of South Africa's white (and largely urban) society is at least partly based on massive social injustice in the countryside. Historically it involved capital accumulation at the expense of the rural poor. Any reforms in their favour will involve a drastic reduction in the grotesque levels of consumption amongst members of South Africa's ruling class.□

BEHIND THE MASK OF THE MAIDS AND MADAMS

by Audrey Cobden

"I've been a slave all my life." So feels a domestic worker in the Eastern Cape. "They should not treat us like slaves" says another—"She can't do without a slave like me". An exaggeration? Too sensational? No, not at all. This feeling of entrapment permeates the book, *Maids and Madams* by Jacklyn Cock. It is both a sensational and a serious book. Though titled "Maids and Madams" it takes a much wider look at women, black and white, in South Africa, and at the whole institution of domestic service. Indeed it is subtitled "A Study in the Politics of Exploitation". Ms Cock feels that both maids and madams are victims of exploitation.—Their experiences of course differ greatly, and it is the examination of them that is such a fascinating aspect of this book.

The sensational part of it is that in which the direct experiences of workers and employers are explored. It is the revelations that are sensational, and many white readers will prefer to judge the expressed feelings of the domestic workers as exaggerated.

The book as a whole is an entirely serious and well documented study of women in a particular area of South Africa, the Eastern Cape, in which the British Settlers of 1820 were located. Rural and urban areas are included: Grahamstown, Port Alfred and the rural area between.

A semi-structured interview questionnaire was used, producing 225 interviews with domestic workers and employers. Fifty domestic workers were interviewed in depth by Ms Cock's field worker Nobengazi Mary Kota. Being a part-time domestic worker herself, she was able to establish a remarkable degree of rapport and trust with the domestic workers interviewed. An interesting fact about the employer interviews, conducted by Ms Cock, is recorded. She conducted a pilot survey and experienced great hostility when intro-

ducing herself as investigating the situation of domestic workers, getting a 25% refusal rate. When she changed the wording to saying she was studying "the position of women and the organisation of the home", she got only 3 refusals! Thus was she able to get through the mask of guilt behind which many "madams" hide.

Domestic servants are part of the South African way of life. In this, Ms Cock points out, our society resembles the Stuart period of English history where "a quarter or third of families contained servants. This meant that very humble people had them as well as the titled and wealthy".

Inhumanity: The truism "Man's inhumanity to man" is as nothing compared to woman's inhumanity to woman; and this is often embodied in the madam-to-maid situation. So you find workers being paid wages ranging from R4 (2 cases) to R60 (1 case) per month with an average of R22,77. This figure is certainly higher in other centres but it remains an incredible indictment.

You find a worker whose daily food ration includes 2 inches of milk (the container is not specified), 2 slices of bread, 2 tea bags, 1 spoonful of jam (tea, dessert or table?) A worker records "I only get samp, but I cook everything and am not allowed to eat it. Everybody would like a piece of meat, especially if you have to cook it. The smell is enough". Another on left overs "I'm just a rubbish bin for them".

A few of the more remarkable comments made by employers about food:—"I don't like to throw anything away so I give it to her rather." "I give her what the dogs wouldn't like". 40% gave no meat.

You get full-time workers doing an average of 61 hours a week, with the range from 40 hours to 89 hours per week. 9½% do not get any time off in a day. 31% do not get a day