

SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

DOMESTIC LABOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA

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JACKLYN COCK — THE SELF IMAGERY OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

JENNIFER SHINDLER **LABOUR SAVING APPLIANCES
AND DOMESTIC SERVICE**

GEOFFREY BUDLENDER - CENSORSHIP AND LABOUR REPORTING

MICHAEL LIPTON **MINIMUM WAGES AND
BOTSWANA'S UNEMPLOYMENT CRISIS**

CHARLES SIMKINS **REPLY TO LIPTON**

DOUG HINDSON **THE NEW BLACK LABOUR REGULATIONS**

W P G W U **DISPUTE IN THE MEAT INDUSTRY**

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Contents

		Page
SALB	Introductory Comment on Domestic Labour	1
	State Repression of Democratic Unions	2
	Letters to the Bulletin	3
Jacklyn Cock	Deference and Dependence : a note on the self imagery of domestic workers	9
Jennifer Shindler	The Effects of influx Control and Labour Saving Appliances on Domestic Service	22
Interview	Maggie Oewies talks about the Domestic Workers Association	35
Geoffrey Budlender	Censorship and Labour Reporting	37
Douglas Hindson	The New Black Labour Regulations: limited reform, intensified control	45
Michael Lipton	Minimum Wages, Exploitation and Botswana's Unemployment Crisis	53
Charles Simkias	Comment on Lipton's 'Minimum Wages'	73
WPGWU	The Meat Workers Dispute	77
Review		
Luli Callinicos	Of Maids and Madams	85

Introductory Comment on Domestic Labour

Included in this edition of the **Labour Bulletin** are a number of articles which deal with different aspects of domestic labour.

There can be little doubt that domestic servants are among the most exploited and oppressed groups of workers in South Africa. They experience, though often in a less overt form, similar hardships of poverty and powerlessness to those of production workers. They too, as Shindler, illustrates, are not immune to the effects of the state's influx control regulations, and they are similarly subject to the forms of workplace control that accompany the contract of employment in the factories. Furthermore, their lives are profoundly affected by developments in the capitalist economy, more specifically by structural unemployment and the effects of the mass production of labour saving appliances.

Nevertheless, the conditions under which domestic workers are employed are qualitatively different to those experienced by factory workers; the isolation and fragmentation of domestic servants creates enormous barriers to organisation. They are employed on a one-to-one basis with their employers and this, to some degree, obscures the collective interests of domestic servants in becoming organised in support of their rights, which, as the articles herein document, are at best negligible.

Moreover, it is the ideology generated by the 'master-servant' relationship which stifles resistance to such conditions, and thus the inclination to organise among these workers. Cock provides an extremely useful understanding of this aspect of domestic labour. A veneer of deference, she explains, is induced by the absolute dependence of the domestic worker on the whims and generosity of her employer; it is the 'powerlessness of the workers' situation which blocks any overt expression of dissatisfaction'. Beneath this deferential exterior is a strongly felt sense of deprivation relative to their white employers.

Clearly, the unionisation of domestic workers poses new problems for labour organisation, and it is instructive to see, as in this edition, how the Domestic Workers' Association has taken up this task.

State Repression of Democratic Unions

The South African Labour Bulletin condemns the recent action by the state against the Western Province General Workers' Union and Fosatu. The ban imposed on Fosatu which prevents the organisation from receiving funds, and the action taken against the WPGWU during the course of a struggle by Cape Town meat workers for the right to democratic non-racial representation at work, fly in the face of the labour 'reforms' ushered in by the Wiehahn report. At the time of the publication of the report there was widespread feeling in the labour movement that the 'reforms' left much room for state action against democratic trade unions. It is likely that these acts will destroy the last vestiges of credibility for the state's labour 'reforms', both here and in the international community. WPGWU organisers Dave Lewis and Di Cooper are being held under Section 10 of the Internal Security Act, which provides for indefinite detention. Another organiser, Wilson Sedina, and two voluntary workers, Mike Morris and John Frankish, are being held under the 14-day detention clause of the General Laws Amendment Act. (A fourth organiser, Zora Mehlomakulu, was detained but has since been released.) Forty-two meat workers have been arrested and endorsed out under the pass laws. The measures taken by the state against the meat workers and the WPGWU clearly show the state's intention of crushing the meat workers' strike on behalf of the employers and crippling the union. This, and the ban on Fosatu, must be condemned in the strongest terms.

Letters to the Bulletin

We would like to take the opportunity of examining some of the points made in Halton Cheadle's letter to the editors of the SALB. We should at once say that we do not intend replying to certain of Cheadle's unsubstantiated insinuations - should he wish to substantiate them (if he can) we shall be happy to reply, but until he does, we feel that our two substantial contributions to the SALB on the policies and practices of the WPGWU stand as sufficient repudiation of his snide insinuations and that the bulk of your readership will reject his comments with the disdain they deserve.

However, Cheadle does raise two important issues - issues of crucial importance to the labour movement in general, and to the editorial policy of the SALB.

Cheadle is counselling against 'public debate' of the issues facing the labour movement today. He justifies this with vague references to 'weak labour movements' under attack from 'powerful state and managerial forces', implying that we cannot debate the issues and strategies to be adopted because we would forewarn the state and the bosses of our strategies and so allow them to subvert us. We reject this extreme position. Firstly, the controversial decision to register is of necessity a public action requiring public justification, particularly when very substantial criticisms have been levelled at this decision. Secondly, and more importantly, to adopt Cheadle's counsel **must** imply that these discussions cannot take place in any forum where the reasonable risk exists of the state or bosses being informed of the discussion, the strategies advocated and the decisions adopted. This counsel flies in the face of any possible democratic mass worker organisation and if supported by others in the worker movement, is of profound significance to the development and future of the workers movement. It would also reflect on the editorial policy of the SALB if the editors remained silent (as they have done up to now) on an issue such as this, embracing, as it does, the role of journals like the SALB.

We would, therefore, like to ask both Cheadle and the editors the following questions: Do you acknowledge that the debate about registration has to be conducted at all levels of the worker's organisations? Do you acknowledge that the decisions about registration can only be taken after the most exhaustive discussion of all the tactical and strategic implications of this move with the rank and file, the workers in the factories? Do you acknowledge that we are open mass organisations and that debate must be conducted within

the ranks of the masses? Do you acknowledge that as open, mass organisations our activities are subjected to the close scrutiny of the bosses and the state? Or do you want the debate to be conducted behind the doors of committee rooms? For this we believe is the upshot of the position taken by Cheadle: for his line implies that it is **not** the state and the bosses against whom he would protect the trade union movement. The **objective** consequence of his position is rather the exclusion of the workers and militants everywhere from the crucial debate about registration.

In a nutshell Cheadle's argument reduces to the following; 'The workers movement is weak; the state and the bosses are strong. We therefore cannot afford to reveal our strategy and tactics to the bosses. Therefore our situation does not allow us to reveal our tactics and strategy to the workers, because by revealing our strategy and tactics to the workers we inevitably reveal them to the 'public' of whom we are so fearful. When the unions are strong and stable we will be able to reveal our tactics and strategy, the basis of our decisions, to the workers. In the meantime we, the leaders, will take the decisions which will ensure that the workers movement becomes strong enough to allow for full discussion of our ideas'.

We are confident that these authoritarian notions would be contemptuously rejected by all workers and officials in the progressive trade union movement.

The second issue raised by Cheadle directly concerns the editorial policy of the SALB, and in this regard, too, we request clarification from the editors. Cheadle accuses us of 'academic and intellectual self centredness' because we equate 'debate about registration with articles in periodicals'. We would like to know whether the editors equate 'academic and intellectual debate' with positions published in the SALB. If the editors do accept the equation then it should be clearly stated because this was **not** the intention to be a journal directing itself at militants primarily - trade union organisers, advanced workers, community organisers, etc. As it so happens, we agree that the Labour Bulletin has, almost since its inception, been undergoing a process of degeneration into just another periodical for academics and intellectuals. We, however, believe that it is not too late to halt the process of degeneration and, moreover, we believe that our recent contributions to the Bulletin could assist in overcoming this disturbing tendency. Cheadle clearly believes that it is too late or, alternatively, he wishes actively to lend weight to this tendency.

Sadly the impression has been created that the editors share Cheadle's views, both by not responding to his views (in marked contrast to your res-

ponse to the views of Grobbelaar's letter in the same issue) and more importantly by giving the impression of an unwillingness to engage in political-debate (as opposed to intellectual academic debate) through the conspicuous absence of an editorial contribution - we believe for the first time in the Bulletin's history - to this important issue of the SALB. If the editors feel that the retention of the 'intellectual and academic' character of the Bulletin does not permit the inclusion of politically pertinent contributions, they they should state so.

We accordingly request a statement of editorial policy on these two important issues raised by Cheadle.

Western Province General Workers Union

SALB Reply

The letter from the Western Province General Workers' Union (WPGWU), which appears immediately before this editorial comment, raises several important questions about the nature of the **Bulletin** and specifically about editorial policy on matters such as the registration debate.

In reply to their letter, we wish to state that the letter from Halton Cheadle printed in the edition on Labour Organisation and Registration (vol. 5 nos. 6 and 7) does not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial board. It is incorrect to assume that this is the case on the grounds that we did not publish a response to his views.

Our policy, as we have repeatedly stated in past editorial comments, is to reflect the dynamics of and support the democratic trade union movement by which we understand all trade unions that have democratic worker participation and who are subject to worker control. As a consequence we publish material on all matters that are able to assist labour analysts to deepen their understanding and can help the democratic trade union movement to take informed decisions. While this certainly includes views that are contrary to those held by members of the Editorial Board, it does not mean that we necessarily publish everything that is submitted to us. Nor does this mean that we will not allow constructive criticisms of the democratic trade union movement to appear in the **Bulletin**. We have done so in the past and shall do so in the future where these criticisms are well founded and fall within our policy guidelines. Our support for democratic trade unions naturally means that we encourage debate at all levels of the workers' organisations on matters that affect members. This applies particularly to policy matters and certainly includes registration. Such debate should take place primarily and in the first instance within the trade unions amongst the rank and file, but we shall continue to make the pages of the **Bulletin** available to such debate.

Although we attempt to maintain a high academic and intellectual standard in

the **Bulletin**, its contents reveals that we engage in issues that are pertinent and relevant to the labour movement. As such, we do not agree that the **Bulletin** has been 'degenerating' into 'just another periodical for academics and intellectuals'. This is evident from the fact that we have published in recent issues, numerous articles on contemporary labour matters, which has been facilitated by the decision of WPGWU to contribute to the **Bulletin** after a long silence.

Dear Sirs,

We have noted certain comments made about the Institute for Industrial Relations in an article 'The Organisation of Parallel Unions' by Mr. Paul Hendler in your issue Vol. 5, No. 6 and 7 March 1980 and would be grateful if you would grant us space to respond to these comments.

Under a section headed 'Worker Education' on page 106, Mr. Hendler on the basis of two interviews, states 'The courses offered by....the Institute for Industrial Relations can therefore only foster the growth of elitism and bureaucracy, as rank and file do not have access to them. The fact that management has played a major role in setting up the courses and that they lack any genuine worker involvement, merely tends to entrench this elitism.

The Institute for Industrial Relations was not established as a worker education body and would at no stage seek to take over this function from trade unions and existing bodies established to perform this function. The Institute for Industrial Relations was jointly established by labour and management with the following objective:

[Extract from the Institute's Statement of Principles]:

A sound industrial relations system must acknowledge the existence of two parties - that of labour and that of management. Industrial relations issues cannot be solved by either labour or management acting in isolation. The main object of this Institute, in order to maximise the common goals and deal constructively and effectively with conflicts which arise, is therefore to bring representative of labour and representatives of management together to promote the joint interests of labour and management by increasing industrial relations skills and expanding the opportunities for communication and cooperation between labour and management.

With the above objective, the Institute for Industrial Relations performs the following functions:-

1. provides training courses to increase the industrial relations skills of

management and works and liaison committee worker representatives and the representatives of trade unions, both registered and non-registered. These courses will be developed by the Institute in consultation with those companies and trade unions who are members of the Institute;

2. provides an industrial relations information service;
3. provides an industrial relations advisory service;
4. organises seminars and conferences on industrial relations issues where feasible in conjunction with other relevant organisations;
5. conducts studies into industrial relations problem areas including current industrial relations legislation with a view to suggesting improvements.

In its work the Institute for Industrial Relations has always emphasised that industrial relations is concerned with the relationship between employer and management groupings on the one hand and employee groupings on the other and that management and worker representatives must see themselves first and foremost as representatives acting on behalf of others. While management and worker representatives must play a leadership role they will not perform their functions satisfactorily if they are not closely linked to their respective constituencies. The Institute for Industrial Relations does not foster bureaucracy and elitism and is very aware of the dangers they present in industrial relations.

We would be very pleased to convey to Mr. Hendler in more detail the activities of this Institute if he should wish to visit us.

Thanking you in anticipation for providing us with an opportunity to respond to Mr. Hendler's comments.

Yours faithfully,

D.L. van Coller
Acting Director

19th June, 1980

Dear Sirs,

I would like to reply to Mr van Coller by making the following three points: Firstly, a scientific analysis of the social events I was dealing with, requires that one looks beyond the subjective interpretations of the individuals and institutions involved in these events. As a participant in the current labour situation in South

Africa, the IIR's perception thereof is informed by certain assumptions and categories of thought. From its point of view, therefore, the role that it is playing is understood entirely in terms of these thought categories. This emphasis on the **Subjective Intentions** of the Institute can sometimes obscure its **Objective Role**. It is in this sense, therefore, that the IIR's declaration of intent, which forms the basis of Mr van Coller's argument, cannot **by itself**, refute my argument. This is not necessarily to deny the sincerity of these expressed intentions.

Secondly, the particular ideology of the IIR also plays a vital role in reproducing the situation the organisation finds itself in. This ideology presents employers and trade unions as if they were equal in status and shared common goals. It does not present workers and employers as two groups unequal in status and with antagonistic interests. Consequently, the IIR does not emphasize strong rank and file pressure as the only way to succeed in demands against management. A lack of emphasis on strong rank and file pressure creates the distinct **possibility** of elitism and bureaucracy.

Mr van Coller seems to object to my including the IIR under the heading "worker education", the implication being that worker education and industrial relations training are qualitatively different activities. However, I would argue that both are merely specific instances of an ideological structure which has the overall function of assigning individuals to their roles in the society, and legitimising these roles. Unless we clearly recognise this, we are liable to obscure the fact that the role of the IIR is not that of a "neutral" arbitrator between management and workers.

Finally, it is incorrect to say that I have drawn these conclusions on the basis of two interviews only. They were drawn on the basis of 17 interviews which revealed, *inter alia*, that: unions that do belong to the IIR are almost entirely TUCSA affiliates, the majority of whom, however, send very few of their personnel on the training programmes; very few of these unions conduct their own worker education programmes; they tend to send only their top executive officials to the training courses, because, in the words of one of them, "the need to educate rank and file has never arisen".

Willy nilly, the Institute is fostering the growth of elitism and bureaucracy.

Yours faithfully,
Paul Hender

Deference and Dependence: a note on the self imagery of domestic workers

Jacklyn Cock

Domestic service in South Africa is a significant social institution in several senses. The structures which control the distribution of power and resources in South African society define the relationship between whites and blacks as 'a master servant relationship in all spheres, enforced through a variety of effective controls and sanctions'.¹ There is thus a very real sense in which the institution of domestic service is a microcosm of the inequality which is refracted through the entire social order.

Domestic service also contributes to this inequality in important ways. The maintenance and daily upkeep of those who work is 'a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital'.² In South Africa, black women play the major role in this. They do so in a double sense, for they are responsible both for the reproduction of their own families and contribute largely to those of the dominant classes for whom they work³. They produce use values, (such as meals) which are necessary for the reproduction of labour power both on a daily and a generational basis. 'Generational reproduction involves biological reproduction, the regulation of sexuality, and the socialisation of children, while **day-to-day reproduction involves numerous tasks of domestic labour such as shopping, cooking meals, washing, cleaning and caring**'.⁴ (our emphasis -ed.)

The waged domestic worker also has an ideological function in the reproduction of the social relations of production. The institution socialises whites into the predominant South African form of racial inequality. While the precise relation of domestic labour to capital has become the subject of many Houdini-type gyrations in what has come to be termed 'the domestic labour debate', it is clear that domestic labour contributes to the circuit of capitalist production.⁵

The objective deprivation of the waged domestic worker compared to other sections of the work force in South Africa, in terms of wages and working conditions, is very clear. Yet domestic workers display few overt signs of dissatisfaction and their voice of complaint is rarely heard. They are often viewed as 'deferential workers' who accept the legitimacy of their own subordination in the social order. This paper suggests that the deference attributed to the domestic worker is more apparent than real. 'Deference' is a mask which is deliberately cultivated to conform to employer expectations, and shield the worker's real feelings. It is a protective device generated by the powerlessness of the worker's situation which blocks any overt expres-

sion of dissatisfaction. Thus the deference attributed to the domestic worker rests largely on a fallacious inference made from her largely passive social behaviour.⁶

This passivity and acquiescence in the social order must be understood to result from the vulnerability and powerlessness of black women in South Africa. Their 'ultra-exploitability' generates the domestic worker's dependence on her employer. This dependence is considerable - it includes food, sometimes accommodation and often permission to live on the farm or in the prescribed urban area.⁷ The employer sets wages and conditions of work according to her own preference. These are usually decidedly disadvantageous to the worker.

In a random sample of 225 households investigated in the Eastern Cape in 1978-79, 'full-time' wages ranged from R4 (in two cases) to R60 (one case) a month. Of the total sample, 198 domestics were full-time workers, as defined by a working week of at least 40 hours. Almost three quarters of the sample of full-time workers earned below R30 a month. The average wage paid to 28 full-time domestic workers in the rural areas was R11,35 a month; 82 per cent of these women earned R13 or less a month. Several workers said they were too afraid of losing their jobs to ask for a wage increase.

'I tried complaining that I cannot afford my children's school fees, but she said she is also struggling. I am afraid she will sack me if I speak again'.

Domestic workers are not protected by any legislation - there are no laws stipulating the minimum wages, hours of work or other conditions of service. They are located in a legal vacuum. The lack of disability and unemployment insurance, maternity benefits and paid sick leave imply that they are an extremely insecure group of workers. They are vulnerable to instant dismissal by employers who often fail to observe the common law provisions.

'You can be dismissed at any time'.

'No matter if I work here for one hundred years I can be dismissed for breaking a cup and get nothing. Not even a thank you'.

In the Eastern Cape, at least, there seems to be no bargaining over wages when the domestic worker is initially employed. This reflects their atomised, vulnerable position as workers. In 74 per cent of the 50 cases investigated in depth, the worker was told by her employer what she would be paid. The remainder started work without knowing and simply waited until the end of the month to see what their first payment would be. Overall, wages appear to be settled entirely by the employer in a haphazard way.

The payment of such low wages is legitimised by both racist ('natives have different needs from us') and sexist ideologies. A component of the latter asserts that women are working for 'pocket money', that their labour is

conditioned by their dependence on fathers and husbands. However, each domestic worker had an average of 5,5 dependents, and in over half the sample she was the sole breadwinner and support of her family. Most of these women are coerced into domestic service by the need to support themselves and their dependents. Many stressed that they had to look after two families and neglect their own families in the process.

'We leave our children early in the morning to look after other women's families and still they don't appreciate us'.

No strong positive correlation was found between wages paid and hours worked. In the Eastern Cape random sample, the average (arithmetic mean) is 61 hours per week for full-time workers. The hours ranged up to 85 hours a week with 77,7 per cent working more than a 48 hour week. The average working week of domestic workers in the rural areas is 73 hours. Almost a third of the total sample worked a seven day week. The majority (83,4 per cent) had to work on public holidays. A large number (40) were given no annual holiday, and overall 34 per cent were given one week's holiday or less each year. Only 40 per cent of these were paid during their annual holiday. The employers who do not give holiday pay and who exact such long hours from their domestic workers include some of the most prominent members of white Eastern Cape society.

None of the domestic workers interviewed in depth said they enjoyed their job. The privatised nature of the work, its monotony and the close supervision it often involves were stated causes of discontent. Similarly their relationship with their employers is mainly defined in instrumental terms.

Overall, the relationship between domestic workers and their employers is both personalised and paternalistic. This has two implications: firstly it generates a sense of power and superiority in the employer, and secondly it consigns the worker to a dependent and powerless position. This dependence both reflects and reinforces the structural location of black women in South African society. All relationships showed some degree of social distance. One employer commented,

'You must keep them in their place....not get too friendly. That's why I don't let her listen to the radio. If we listened to the radio together she'd start getting familiar. Some people make a big mistake....they make friends of their servants. Take my neighbour here, she lets her servant bath in her bathroom. I think that's shocking'.

Consequently when the domestic workers were asked 'What sort of person do you think your employer is?', it is not surprising that the most frequently mentioned qualities were inscrutability and changeability. For instance,

'She wears a mask with me'.

'She does not want to talk. She is a really white woman

'She does not want me to know her'.

'She changes like a chameleon'.

The worker's answers when questioned about the qualities they liked the most about their employers are revealing:

'If she has lost something as soon as she finds it, she tells me. She does not let me look for it for ever'.

'She does greet me in the mornings'.

'When we have a quarrel she does'nt tell the Master about it'.

'She swears at me in a polite kind of way'.

'Sometimes she thanks me'.

Overall 18 per cent of the workers interviewed in depth said their employers never praised or thanked them for the work they did. One commented,

'Sometimes I feel ashamed of myself for wasting all these years when they don't appreciate me'. (Earning R7 a month after 20 years service).

'Obedience' and 'Loyalty' are the qualities most valued by their employers in domestic workers. These encapsulate the role expectations held by employers and underline the power relations between the two groups. These are expressed in various 'deference obligations' such as speaking in a respectful tone of voice and a degree of obsequiousness.⁸ This is a general characteristic of 'greedy institutions'.⁹

The notion of a 'greedy institution' only partially encapsulates the position of the domestic worker because it does not refer to the structural relations and historical processes which have created the 'ultra-exploitability' of such workers and the mechanisms by which this is maintained. Such institutions make total claims on their members, **seeking exclusive and undivided loyalty** and attempting to 'reduce the claims of competing roles and status positions on those they wish to encompass within their boundaries. Their demands on the person are omnivorous'.¹⁰ As Coser points out, there are overlaps between such 'greedy institutions' and Goffman's notion of 'total institutions' but they operate through different mechanisms. 'Greedy institutions' 'though they may in some cases utilize the device of physical isolation, tend to rely mainly on non-physical mechanisms to separate the insider from the outsider and to erect symbolic boundaries between them...Nor are greedy institutions marked by external coercion. On the contrary, they tend to rely on voluntary compliance and to evolve means of activating loyalty and commitment'.¹¹

Payment in kind is an important mechanism by which the employers of domestic workers promote this personal loyalty and commitment from their employees. Payment in kind is far lower than it is generally believed to be in the Eastern Cape. For instance while all the workers received some food, usually 'servants rations', 48 per cent of the depth sample received no meat at all.

'I only get samp, but I cook everything and am not allowed to eat it.

Everybody would like a piece of meat, specially if you have to cook it'.

Almost half (46%) of the depth sample said they received no clothing,

other than a uniform, from their employers for either themselves or members of their families. In seven cases, the uniform constituted the worker's 'Christmas present'. Overall payment in kind is often of a fairly haphazard nature. Help with children's schooling expenses, clinic fees, presents of clothing and extra money, are given as gifts from the employer to her worker. These gifts have important functions.

Mauss has noted how gift relationships help to reinforce the social hierarchy by promoting feelings of loyalty, faithfulness and gratitude.

'...to give is to show one's superiority, to show that one is something more and higher, that one is **magister**. To accept without returning or repaying more is to face subordination, to become a client and subser-
vient, to become **minister**'.¹²

Thus, the gifts given by employers to their domestic workers help to cement their loyalty and reinforce the hierarchical nature of the relationship between them. This is not to deny the often sincere generosity of employers; it is simply to focus on the status-enhancing properties of such gifts which operate to secure the loyalty of the domestic worker within an extremely hierarchical unequal relationship. Such gifts operate to maintain some kind of equilibrium. As expressions of the employer's generosity (and perhaps guilt) they effectively contain tensions and disguise the conflict of interests inherent in the relationship. But this kind of paternalism is entirely demeaning for the domestic worker. The implication is that she is a perpetually irresponsible child. As Rex writes,

'The essence of the domestic servant's position is that he is a child. And the essence of the master's position is that he is the paterfamilias of a household which includes more than simply kin'.¹³

The domestic worker's 'child-like' status within this extremely unequal relationship might be expected to reduce them to a kind of degrading sycho-phancy, and involve at least a level of 'deference'. Evidence from my research suggests that the domestic worker adopts a mask of deference as a protective disguise. This is deliberately cultivated to conform to employer expectations and to shield the worker's real feelings. It is generated by the powerlessness of her situation which blocks any overt expression of dissatisfaction.

The deferential worker 'does not identify himself with his superiors or strive to reach their status; he defers to them socially as well as politically'.

¹⁴ Here Lockwood refers to the domestic worker as the working class's 'most socially acquiescent and conservative element'.¹⁵ While this may have been true of domestic workers in nineteenth century Britain, in South Africa class inequalities assume a more coercive, direct and visible form.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the image of the obsequious, deferential domestic servant is widespread among employers, at least in the Eastern Cape.

This is due to two factors: firstly, the convenience with which it slots into

paternalistic racial stereotypes. The equation of black with child provides an ideological space for turning domestic workers into family dependents. Thirty per cent of the employers interviewed described their domestic workers as 'one of the family'. Secondly, the worker's situation is characterised by a powerlessness and vulnerability. Isolated and impotent, the only weapon of a dissatisfied worker who finds her situation intolerable is to withdraw her labour and try to find a more congenial place. Because of influx control and high levels of black unemployment this is not always possible. Thus, in the Eastern Cape domestic service is not a very mobile occupation. The great majority of workers interviewed had served the same employer for between 5 - 25 years.

The key to understanding the domestic worker's situation is dependence. The difference between dependence and deference is crucial. It implies that while the domestic worker does not endorse her own social subordination, she recognises her powerlessness in the society.

Of course, subordinate groups within society do 'accept' their position to some extent. But Mann distinguishes between two types of acceptance: 'pragmatic acceptance, where the individual complies because he perceives no realistic alternative, and normative acceptance, where the individual internalises the moral expectations of the ruling class and views his own inferior position as legitimate'.¹⁷ Evidence from the Eastern Cape research suggests that domestic workers show a 'pragmatic acceptance' of their subordinate role in society, but their occupational socialisation involves the adoption of a mask of deference in order to conform to employer expectations and manipulative practices.

The predominant pattern in the Eastern Cape is 'the maid of all work' or 'cook general'. Her work situation is thus characterised by a relative isolation and self-containment; she is an atomised worker. In the work place, the disparity in income and life-style between worker and employer is highly visible. The work situation clearly acts as a model of the wider society as a whole in the minds of many workers. The inequalities of power, wealth and income they experience at the micro-level at work, are reflections of general inequalities. Most domestic workers reject the legitimacy of such inequalities.

All of those interviewed in depth said there was a great difference in their living standards and those of their employers. The great majority thought this difference was 'unjust'. None had any idea of their employer's household income. However, 66 per cent thought their employers were 'very rich' and 34 per cent thought they were 'rich'. Regardless of their perception of their employer's financial circumstances, all the workers thought they should be paid more. Twenty-two thought they should be getting twice as much as they were; seven thought three times as much; ten thought four times as much; four five times as much; and seven said they didn't know but thought they should be paid more because,

'I have been working for these people for a long time (nineteen years) but am still earning R22 a month. But I am working for rich people. My master is a teacher at Rhodes, my madam teaches'. (at a local school)
'I have brought their children up'.

'If you could see my baking you would be surprised. It looks like a hotel'.

I do all the work. I even make the fudge and pineapple juice they sell in that shop'.(farm stall)

'Because I work hard...I look after the house and even the dogs, cats and chickens. I have to sort the eggs very carefully and check if they are first grade'. (Earning R7 per month).

The fact that the majority of workers interviewed thought they should be paid more than double their present wage suggests that their sense of relative deprivation is perhaps even higher than among some black industrial workers.¹⁸

All thought that domestic workers were, as a group, 'badly treated'. Some consciousness of a community of interests emerged here,

'We are all singing one song. We need the same help with low wages and bad treatment'.

The structures which control the distribution of power and resources in society were clearly identified with white domination. Genovese has suggested that 'all forms of class oppression have induced some kind of servility and feelings of inferiority in the oppressed; failure to induce these means failure to survive as a system of oppression'.¹⁹ Therefore, it is not surprising that 46 per cent of the sample thought that blacks are generally inferior to whites in their personal qualities. However, several answers link personal and positional or structural inferiority. For example,

'We are lower than whites because that is where they put us'.

'The whites are sitting on our heads, so we are inferior'.

'Whites have everything under the sun...we have to be lower than them because we have no money'.

A number thought that because blacks are superior or equal to whites in their personal attributes and capacities, whites deliberately keep them in a subordinate position by paying low wages.

'We can cope. You can put a black person in the forest and just leave water with him or her. We can manage because there is a lot we can do. But now we are chained without money'.

'We are more capable than whites. That is why they try by all means to keep us under their feet'.

'If we had money we could be more than them'.(Whites)

All the domestic workers interviewed in depth thought that black people are not treated fairly in South Africa. The examples most frequently cited involved passes and influx control. Others were the lack of employment op-

portunities, the cost of education, prison conditions, low wages, poor housing, lower pensions, lack of dignified treatment, inadequate health services - the list covered an extremely wide spectrum.

'There are so many laws that chain us'.

'There are very few whites who consider us. They look down on us. When you go to town with your madam she puts you at the back of her van'.

'There is no white woman who would do the work I do for so little money'.

'We are dying like flies because of poverty'.

'The whites are standing on our necks with their boots'.

'If you apply for a pension it will take a year to come. In the meantime you have to live on the Holy Spirit'.

'We are not allowed to join our men when they go and work under contract'.

'We are not counted in this world'.

Only 16 per cent of the workers interviewed thought that women are generally inferior to men in their personal qualities. This contrasts with 24 per cent of the far more highly educated, largely middle class white women who are their employers.²⁰ Many domestic workers seemed to have a sense of personal superiority to men rooted in the fact that as women they had more difficulties to cope with.

'We are more capable than men. Men can't face problems...they think it's the end of the world'.

'Every black woman knows we are stronger than men. I don't know about white women if they think the same'.

'We are more than them...men's dignity has gone into a bottle of wine'.

'We are stronger than men but we have to respect them although they don't deserve that respect'.

'Men have lost their dignity in drink'.

'Men are just rubbish'.

'We are stronger...we stand things that our husbands could never stand'.

'Our men treat us badly. Our marriages end like paper fires'.

Compared to their white employers, these women have far deeper insight into the subordination of women. This is clearly related to their location in the social structure. The widespread disruption of family life that the system of migrant labour entails, has resulted in the burden of family responsibilities being placed upon black women. Their sense of grievance against what they see as black men's 'irresponsibility', particularly their drinking habits and secrecy about their incomes, came through strongly in many interviews. However, their indignation about the oppression of women is clearly overshadowed by their consciousness of the oppression of blacks.

When these women were asked what they felt about the difference in living standards between themselves and their employers, 90 per cent expressed

anger or indignation and 10 per cent sadness. All felt strongly about the difference in living standards between blacks and whites generally.

'The whites are greedy. They only think of their own stomachs'.

'It makes me angry to look at their gardens and the food they buy for their dogs. It is better than they buy for us. And the dogs eat off their dishes but we don't'.

'If God could change it all and turn all the blacks into whites and all the whites into blacks, most of the whites would shoot themselves. They could'nt live with our difficulties'.

'It makes me angry. That is why our children just want to destroy and burn things. They are tired of seeing us suffer'.

'I feel sorry for the whites who care for blacks. We tie them with one rope because we don't know them'.

'I feel angry when I look at his sheep and goats and we are not allowed to keep any'.

All the workers interviewed expect the difference in living standards between blacks and whites to change. Almost half thought that though change was inevitable, it was impossible to predict when it would occur.

When asked, 'How do you think you would feel if you had to change places with your employer?' most answers expressed a mixture of incredulity and delight:

'I would feel good to have a farm of my own and my own slaves'.

'The whole world would be mine'.

'I would enjoy employing my madam for R22 a month and sitting in my study while she looks after my black child and does the ironing at the same time'.

'I would smile all day'.

When asked whether the domestic worker would behave differently from her employer in any way, answers often combined feelings of revenge with compassion:

'I would behave the same to start with and loosen the strap later'.

'I would behave differently. I would be ashamed to treat people like slaves'.

'I would behave the same. When she is sick I will tell her that my house is not a hospital. That is what she said to me when I was sick'.

'I would also give her soup with no meat, beans or vegetables'.

'I would behave even worse than she does because some white people think they are made out of white paper and we are made out of steel'.

'I would also make her eat in the toilet when it rains'.

This is unmistakably the language of disaffection. It is generated by the 'conscious deprivation' encapsulated in the notion of alienation with its components of powerlessness and resentment.²¹

However, the multiplicity of images that domestic workers have of them-

selves as workers, as blacks, as women, and of social relations generally in South Africa, suggests that it would be an oversimplification to regard them as representing a broadly uniform group. But it would also be incorrect to infer that no generalisations are possible, or that domestic workers do not share certain characteristics of self imagery which can be related to their location in the social structure. It would clearly be evasive not to ask questions about the political implications of such imagery.

Fisher has analysed Mann's notion of 'revolutionary class consciousness' as involving a number of different dimensions.

1. 'We may say that the individual is objectively deprived, but to what extent does he or she perceive this deprivation? This is the problem of relative deprivation on the individual level.
2. To what extent does the individual who feels deprived perceive a community of interests with other individuals?
3. To what extent does the individual understand the situation in structural terms?
4. To what extent does the individual perceive him/herself or the group as having the power to change the situation?
5. To what extent is an alternative society conceived or conceivable?' ²²

Fisher writes, 'The first four dimensions involve answers to the following questions: To what extent am I exploited? With whom am I exploited?... and by what mechanisms am I exploited?' ²³ To generalise from the self imagery of the domestic workers interviewed in depth, they would appear to answer these questions as follows: I am grossly exploited; I am exploited with other domestic workers specifically and with blacks generally: I am exploited by the structures of white domination and control.

Fisher quotes Leggett who uses the term 'class-race' consciousness 'to refer to those who see themselves as belonging to an economically exploited group (a class) in which they nevertheless define in racial terms'.²⁴ Giddens has referred to this in suggesting his theory that under certain conditions ethnic characteristics offer a strong source of 'class structuration', the formation of a self-conscious class.²⁵ Evidence from my study could be used to argue that domestic workers possess such a 'class-race consciousness'. Their consciousness appears to involve a strongly felt sense of deprivation relative to their white employers, a perception of a community of interests with other domestic workers specifically - 'we are all singing one song' - and with blacks generally; and perhaps an understanding of the situation in structural terms. Comments such as,

'It will change but it will take time. It is not easy to take a piece of meat out of your mouth and share it'.

contain the insight that changes in South Africa will necessitate a redistri-

bution of wealth that will involve whites accepting a lower standard of living.

It was suggested above that domestic service is a 'greedy institution'. Essentially the 'greedy institution' promotes deference relationships which reinforce the legitimacy of the employer's authority. The isolation of the domestic worker and the personal and particularistic nature of her relationship with her employer, both operate to limit access to alternative definitions of the situation. However, the domestic worker is incorporated in domestic service 'from above' and not 'from below'. Important aspects of her life, rooted in the family obligations which propel her into domestic service in the first place, are outside it. This degree of distance, together with the exposure to a vastly different standard of living at the workplace, operates to give the worker access to alternative normative definitions of the situation; definitions which involve a denial of the legitimacy of her own subordination within the existing social order.

The image most frequently used by the domestic workers interviewed in depth to describe their situation was that of 'slaves'.

'I have been a slave all my life'.

'We are slaves in our own country'.

'What can we do? We are slaves'.

While there is much in the domestic worker's situation which is 'suggestive of slavery', domestic workers can best be understood as 'trapped workers'.²⁶ They are trapped within a tightly woven structure of constraints. Lack of education opportunities and employment alternatives, coupled with influx control legislation restricting the movement of black workers, all combine to 'trap' black women generally, and in the Eastern Cape most specifically, in domestic service. They are trapped in a condition of subjugation and immobility within which they are subject to oppression.

Such oppression is evident in their low wages; their long working hours, lack of paid holidays and the deprivation of family and social life this implies; their lack of job satisfaction, demeaning relationship with their employers; absence of legal protection and lack of worker rights. This is expressed in the worker's sense of being 'slaves', of living out an infinite series of daily frustrations, indignities and denials, of leading wasted lives which they are powerless to change.

In the Eastern Cape, domestic workers appear to recognise their dependence in the existing structure; they reject the legitimacy of the distribution of power and control within the existing structure; and they then adopt a mask of deference as a mode of adaptation to their situation. Domestic workers are not deferential workers, but trapped workers. These constraints apply to black workers in South Africa generally, who are among the most regimented labour forces in the world. Ultimately then, the problems of domestic workers are generated by a political and economic system which

does not operate in their interests. Their consciousness of this system is a far cry from T.S. Elliot's notion of 'the damp souls of housemaids'.

Notes

1. F. Johnstone, 'White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today', *African Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 275, April 1970, p 136.
2. K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), p 537.
3. This paper focuses on black female domestic workers because they constitute the vast majority in both the Eastern Cape and in South Africa generally. According to figures calculated from the 1970 Census 88.9 per cent of all domestic workers are black and 88.4 per cent of all black domestic workers are women. *Population Census, 1970. Occupations, Report No. 02-15-14.* (Pretoria: The Government Printer, 1975), Table 1, 'Occupation by Population Group', p 1.
4. V. Beechey, 'Women and Production: a critical analysis of some sociological theories of women's work' in A. Kuhn and A. Wolpe, *Feminism and Materialism. Women and Modes of Production*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p 194.
5. While this debate addresses important questions, much of it has serious limitations. See M. Molyneux, 'Beyond the Housework Debate'. *New Left Review*, No. 116, July-August, 1979, p 4.
6. This paper draws on several insights from H. Newby, *The Deferential Worker. A Study of Farm Workers in East Anglia.* (London: Allen Lane, 1977).
7. The dependence of the domestic worker on her employer has been intensified by the recent decision to strengthen influx control by increasing the maximum fines on employers of illegal black workers.
8. See E. Goffman, *Asylums.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p 22.
9. See L. Coser, *Greedy Institutions.* (New York: The Free Press 1974).
10. Coser, 1974:4
11. Coser, 1974:6
12. M. Mauss, *The Gift.* (London: Cohen and West, 1970) p 72.
13. J. Rex, *Race Relations in Sociological Theory.* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1970) p 53-54.
14. D. Lockwood, 'Sources of Variation in Working Class Images of Society', *The Sociological Review.* Vol. 14, N.3, November 1966, p 252.
15. Lockwood, 1966:250
16. For instance see J. Burnett, *Useful Toll: autobiographies of working people from the 1820s to the 1920s.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1977), p 172.
17. M: Mann, 'The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy'. *American Sociological Review* Vol. 35, No. 3, June 1970, p 425.
18. Fisher quotes a study carried out in East London in 1974 in which workers were asked what wage they thought that they should be getting. 'Most workers named a figure approximately double their current wage'. F. Fisher, 'Class Consciousness among Colonised Workers in South Africa' in L. Schlemmer and E. Webster (eds) *Change, Reform and Economic Growth in South Africa.* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978) p 216. Of course comparisons are only really possible in relation to the different reference groups involved.
19. E. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made.* (New York: Vintage Books 1971), p 6.
20. The great majority of domestic workers in the Eastern Cape study had only a minimum level of formal education. Sixty three per cent had been to school, but three quarters had not progressed beyond Standard 5.

21. M. Mann, **Consciousness and Action among the Western Working Class.** (London: Macmillan 1973), p 68.
22. Fisher, 1978:199
23. **Ibid.**
24. Fisher, 1978:209
25. A. Giddens, **The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies** (London: Hutchinson, 1973) p 111-2.
26. Rex, 1970:54

The Effects of Influx Control and Labour-saving Appliances on Domestic Service

Jennifer Shindler

Introduction

Domestic service comprises the largest section of employment for South African women. These workers play an important part in securing the reproduction of capitalism in South Africa.

responsible for the maintenance not only of their own families, but also those of their employers. (See Cock, pX in this edition.)

Despite its apparently peripheral role in the capitalist economy, domestic service does not exist in a societal vacuum; it will be shown that it constitutes an ever-changing category of labour which is determined by changes not only in capitalist production, but also by the system of political control in South Africa. There are three factors which may be isolated with regard to changes in this sector; recession and cyclical movement in the economy, the introduction of labour saving devices as an effect of mass monopolistic production and the implementation of influx control.

A combination of these factors has resulted in the contraction of domestic service as a sector of employment. In the past decade, and particularly in the last three or four years, there has been a noticeable decline in both the number of full-time domestic workers and the total number of these workers. Surveys carried out by Markinor in 1978 and 1979 show that the number of full-time servants (male and female) in South Africa has declined by 8 percent. Figures supplied by the West Rand Administration Board show that between 1977 and 1979, the number of female domestic workers employed in the West Rand decreased by 13 percent.

The cyclical recession from late 1974 to early 1979 resulted in a decrease in consumer power which has been reinforced by the effects of inflation. Selected groups within the servant employing population have been hit and those who have felt the pressure most have tended to do away with their full-time domestic servants, often replacing their labour with household labour saving appliances.

At the same time, increased mechanisation of mass production units, which characterises the phase of monopoly capitalism, has led to the 'replacement of dead for living labour' and the resulting rise in unemployment.¹ A consequence of this increasing unemployment is the emergence of urban unrest. Capital's response to this is further mechanisation, and thus a cycle is set up through a further displacement of workers, greater unemployment and more unrest. Simkins, in his study on **Structural Unemployment in South Africa**, shows that for most of the 60's, unemployment fluctuated around 19 percent, while in the 70's, it rose beyond 22 percent.²

The state's response to this cycle is to reinforce influx control regulations

which provide for the endorsement out of redundant labour from urban areas. This in turn has resulted in the overburdening of the homelands so that increasing numbers of people need to come to the urban areas in search of work and this is where the state again steps in. By rigidly applying the influx control regulations, the state prevents people from entering the urban areas and legally seeking employment. These issues will be more thoroughly dealt with in the next two sections.

A – Influx Control

The recession (as it usually does) has brought with it a decline in the demand for domestic workers, and the state has responded to this, by controlling the influx of women into the urban areas. Consequently, unemployed domestic workers have been prevented from legally seeking employment.³ Before I go on to describe the reason behind, and the broader implications and effects of, the state's control over the influx of women, it is important to discuss the laws and relevant provisions relating to influx control.

I – The Laws

The first concerted effort to control the influx of women into the urban areas was the introduction of the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act of 1952 and the Bantu Laws Amendment Act of 1952. In terms of the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act, women were for the first time required to carry pass books. These reference books contain the following information: the efflux and influx control endorsements, the woman's employer's name and address, the district where the woman is normally resident, her marital status, name of husband, parent or guardian, his identity number and address. Since the carrying of passes by women is central to the extension and operation of the influx control system, the lives of these women are, in effect, strictly controlled.

Under the Bantu Law Amendment Act, the influx control system, which was previously only applied to men, was now extended to women. The relevant provision – Section 10 (1) a, b, c and d – meant that women entering an urban area, would not be allowed to remain in that area for longer than 72 hours unless:

- a) 'she was born in the area and lived there continuously'

This requirement is often very difficult to prove for two reasons. Firstly, births were often not registered and therefore birth certificates are not available as proof, and secondly, people cannot always provide substantive proof of having lived continuously in an area since birth.

- b) 'she can prove that she has lived continuously in prescribed area since the day on which the permit system was introduced in her area, or for fifteen years with permission, and thereafter she has law-resided in that prescribed area.'

Continuous residence for fifteen years is also difficult to prove for a number of reasons; (i) the non-registration of women workers by employers (particularly domestic workers); (ii) the employer has moved away to another area and is difficult to trace, or has died; (iii) at the time the influx control system was extended to women, and for some time thereafter, women were not required to enter into a service contract with their employers. This contributed towards the difficulties experienced in trying to furnish proof. Proof of accommodation is also difficult to establish. Many women who prior to 1959 (the year in which the Bantu Laws Amendment Act was implemented in Johannesburg) have been working as domestics and who were housed on the premises of their employers, obviously found it difficult to prove their residence in the area before this date and (iv) many women did not get their reference books until the 60's, and this again contributed to the problem of proving residence in an area for fifteen years.

- c) 'she is the unmarried daughter of a man or woman qualified to be in the area in terms of section 10 (1) a or b, provided that she ordinarily resides with her parents',

This clause was amended in 1964 to include the phrase -- 'after lawful entry'. Here again difficulties were created, as women could often not prove that they have entered the urban area 'lawfully'.

- d) 'she entered the area, after the date on which the permit system was imposed, and was given permission for a particular reason to work for a specified employer, to remain in the area for as long as she continued to work for same employer. She is then permitted to remain in the area in terms of Section 10 (1) d. If she loses or leaves her job she will be endorsed out unless she can prove that she has worked for her employer for ten years, then she will qualify in terms of Section 10 (1) b, or unless she married a qualified man while she was legally employed and lives with him at his lawful place of residence.⁴

Although it was Section 10 (1) c which was to be the mechanism through which the embargo on the entry of women into the urban areas was to be effected, the embargo has mainly affected women attempting to obtain Section 10 (1) d status, that is, those women who have entered the area to seek employment.

It is this embargo on women and the rigid application of the influx control law, which has contributed to the decrease in the number of domestic workers. At present the embargo is being applied totally and absolutely. In an interview, Sheena Duncan of the Black Sash, stated that:

"Five years ago, if you were crippled and got a doctor's certificate and said (that) you wanted this particular woman because she suited you, she would be registered to you only. Now you cannot get that permission.⁵

This rigid application of the embargo, at the present time, must be related to the recession that South Africa is presently undergoing, as well as to a broader

strategy on the part of the state to incorporate urban black women into the economy. I will return to this issue later on in this section, but first I will deal with the embargo.

II – The Embargo

The embargo on women entering the urban areas as wage earners was never legislated, but operated in terms of a particular administrative directive. This has made it difficult to establish that it actually operates. In terms of Section 28 of the Bantu Labour Act, the Minister of Co-operation and Development is vested with wide powers, whereby regulations and directives may be issued without any law having to be passed or any proclamation gazetted. Proclamation R1063, 30 May 1975, defines 'the Minister' as 'any official of the department acting under his authority'. Thus, these vast powers allow the bureaucracy to rule all workers. This type of administrative discretion has affected women in a number of major urban areas ever since. Evidence of the embargo is that women without Section 10 (1) a b or c rights, usually were and still are being refused registration. That means many women may not remain in an urban area for longer than 72 hours.

During the 1950's and early '60's, the embargo on women entering the urban areas as workers was only rigidly implemented in the major urban areas. Many of the smaller towns did not fully follow suit. But, with the introduction of the Bantu Laws Amendment Act of 1964, a total embargo on women entering all urban areas was for the first time implemented. This law closed the only loophole that had existed in the 1952 embargo. This loophole – Section 10 (1) c, allowed a Section 10 (1) a or b man to have his wife, unmarried daughter or son under the age of eighteen years, live with him, provided that he could prove that they ordinarily resided with him in the area he qualified.⁶ The 1964 Bantu Laws Amendment Act, however, was to add the phrase 'after lawful entry' to the section. This means that now wives and children of qualified men have to prove that they entered the area lawfully, before they can live with their husbands or fathers. Lawful entry is extremely difficult to prove. Exceptions are only granted under specific circumstances a) If a woman qualifies as Section 10 (1) a or b in another prescribed area, she may be allowed to live with her qualified husband in Johannesburg in terms of Section 10 (1) c, provided he has accommodation for her. b) In 1972, Dr P.J. Koornhof, then Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration, announced that qualified men could bring their wives from the 'Bantustans' or the Platteland to the prescribed areas, provided that the husband had accommodation for his wife and that the marriage took place after December 10 1971. Not many women were able to get permission in terms of this concession because of the crucial shortage of accommodation in the urban areas. c) A very limited number of women are given permission by the labour officer to enter a prescribed area in order to work. The areas where this was allowed were few (Sandton and Randburg, at one stage allowed women into their municipal areas) and are now non-existent. d) A woman may come to visit her husband and may obtain a visitor's permit for a few months.⁷

Thus it is clear that the 'after lawful entry' clause has radically limited the number of women entering the urban areas as wives or unmarried daughters. The

1964 Amendment Act finally put into effect the embargo of 1952. Although the embargo of 1964 specifically affected the entry of wives and unmarried daughters, women, as workers, were indirectly affected by it. Those who were not entering the urban areas to visit fathers and husbands, but in order to seek employment were prevented from doing so by this clause. In terms of Section 10 (2) of the Labour Act of 1965, the labour officer cannot refuse to register such persons, who have Section 10 (1) a, b or c rights. Thus those women who were able to enter the urban area under Section 10 (1) c prior to 1964 were also able to work in the area. After 1964, far fewer women were able to enter the urban area under Section 10 (1) c or d and thus fewer women could take up employment in these areas.

It is important to note that, despite these draconian labour control measures, many women took up employment illegally, and up until last year many people were prepared to employ illegal domestic workers as it was the worker who suffered the consequences of being caught. However, after the Riekert Commission's recommendation that employers be fined up to R500 for the employment of an 'illegal' worker, was gazetted, those people who were not able to register their workers under the moratorium, dismissed their workers for fear of being fined.

The conditions of the moratorium were the following:

If an illegal worker has a) worked in the same job for one year (that is, one year prior to July 1979) for one employer or b) for three years for different employers, in the same administration board area, then they shall be registered in their employment as long as they also have approved accommodation.

Thus it can be seen that Riekert has clearly found the answer to the 'illegal problem' by shifting the emphasis of prosecution from the worker to the employer.

III – Reasons behind the state's control over the influx of women

The reason behind the state's rigid application of influx control must be seen in terms of an overall strategy on the part of the state during recession, in relation to white women, black urban women and black rural women.

Women in capitalist societies have always formed part of the industrial reserve army, which can be absorbed into the economy or disposed of, according to the needs of the economy. When the economy is in the process of expansion, or men do not meet the labour requirements, women are absorbed into employment, for example, the rapidly expanding clerical sector in South Africa was largely filled by women who were drawn into the labour force. Beechy shows how, during the First World War, large numbers of women entered paid employment, especially in the munitions and engineering industries since there were not available men. After the war, those women were forced to leave these jobs (in terms of an agreement signed between the engineering union and employers) since these jobs 'belonged' to men.⁸ As this example of the women in the munition factories shows, as soon as capital no longer requires the services of women, they are pushed out of their jobs and usually 'shunted' back into the home. Women's employment:

is often hidden (mystified) since once unemployed, they are reabsorbed into the household unit as 'housewives' rather than classified as unemployed. The exclusion of women from the occupational sphere is usually accompanied by the re-assertion of the patriarchal ideology -- that a women's home and children are her first obligation. Marx clearly points out the reserve army function of women as a *r serve* army of labour, and how their focus and ideals change when their labour is no longer required by capital. He writes:

. . . (cotton crisis in Britain as a result of the American Civil War) had several advantages. The women now had sufficient leisure to give their infants the breast, instead of poisoning them with 'Godfrey's Cordial' (an opiate). They also had the time to learn to cook. Unfortunately, this art occurred at a time when they had nothing to cook. But from this we see how capital, for the purposes of self-valorisation, has usurped the family labour necessary for consumption. This crisis was also utilized to teach sewing to the daughters of the workers in sewing schools. An American Revolution and a universal crisis were needed in order that working girls, who spin for the whole world, might learn to sew!⁹

In South Africa, a similar situation has occurred. With the displacement of women due to the recession, many women, either because they cannot afford a domestic worker or because they prefer to do their own housework, are now doing without domestic workers. No research has been done into the forms that the patriarchal ideology has taken during the South African recession, but perhaps the limited number of creches and nursery schools in South Africa, reflects a tendency on the part of the state to discourage women from seeking wage employment. Yawitch states that it has been shown with reference to Britain, "that the presence or absence of day care centres, creches, etc., can be linked directly to the pace of capital accumulation. The absence or inadequacy of these facilities is related to the need to keep women in the home, but as an industrial reserve army with the potential for reincorporation into production".¹⁰ In South Africa, both black and white women, are being encouraged to 'return to the home', and fulfill their so called primary role of reproduction.

Faced with this drop in the demand for domestic workers, and the concomitant increase in the number of unemployed domestic workers seeking employment, the state steps in to prevent women from coming into the urban areas to look for work. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the main function of the reserves is to provide subsistence for the migrant's family, as well as to perform a 'welfare' function for the young, the old, the sick and the unemployed. Women clearly play a central role here. This function becomes more important during a recession when many of the unemployed return to the homelands. The maintenance of the rural areas (artificial though this might be) is vital for the profitable existence of South Africa's capitalist industrial sector. During the recession, the contribution of the reserve economy to the subsistence of the African population would be even more important.

The second reason must be seen as political rather than economic. Despite the recession, the wages of domestic workers are rising, (although not sufficiently to

keep up with the present inflation rates). Research done by Markinor has shown that the average wage for domestic workers throughout the country was R35,00 in 1978 and in 1979 this had risen to R37,00. Research, which I conducted on domestic workers in Johannesburg in 1978, showed the average wage to be R50,00 per month.¹¹ In January 1980, the average wage of the domestic workers I interviewed had risen to R57,00 per month. In other words, despite the increasing number of unemployed domestic workers, the wages of those domestic workers still employed have increased and not, as one would have supposed, decreased. By refusing unemployed women permission to enter the urban area so that they can seek work, the state is in effect maintaining the value of labour power in the urban areas, although this is unintentional. It would seem economically rational for the state to allow the influx of greater numbers of African workers into the prescribed areas as competition between workers would lower wages. The point I wish to make here is that for political reasons, the government would prefer to exclude large numbers of Africans from entering the urban areas in the light of the past increase in instances of urban unrest during periods of recession and unemployment.

On the other hand, there is another economic imperative working here. During a recession when there is an oversupply of labour, the state seeks to remove superfluous Africans from the prescribed areas where they would be a draw on the urban economy.¹² The House of Assembly Debate around the 1964 Bantu Laws Amendment Act shows this quite clearly. F. Steyn, Nationalist Member of Parliament for Kempton Park, stated that, "we do not want the Bantu women here (the urban areas) simply as an adjunct to the procreative capacity of the Bantu population." He also goes on to state that women would only be allowed into the urban areas "if they were needed on the labour market. If not, they would have to stay in the reserves. Husbands and fathers could visit their wives and daughters from time to time, or give up their jobs and cease to be migrant workers."¹³ Simons adds, "The embargo on women entering the urban areas legally, confirms the impression that the migration of women to the towns will be adjusted to the needs of employers rather than the needs of husbands and families."¹⁴

The examples of Sandton and Randburg, show how the embargo on women can be flexibly used to meet the demands of employers. When these areas became municipalities, they found that they had insufficient local female labour, and with the embargo, women were not allowed in from outside. This situation was reconsidered by the relevant Administration Board and it was decided to allow women in from outside. In this situation, the demand for domestic workers was great enough to allow for the relaxation of the embargo for a short period. The embargo was, however, reinforced, as it was argued that with the rise in unemployment, sufficient local female labour was now available. By rigidly applying the embargo during recessions, the state is meeting both economic and political needs.

The third reason is closely related to the second. Because of the large numbers of legal women already in the urban areas, the state is trying to absorb them into employment, especially in the domestic service sector.¹⁵ Mr S. van der Merwe, chairman of the East Rand Administration Board, said in an interview that he had not wanted the moratorium "to apply to domestic women workers, primarily

because there is a high percentage of legal black women (Section 10) already in the townships who could take these jobs.' He went on to say that 'illegal women domestic workers should be endorsed out of the urban areas, and sent back to the particular homelands.'¹⁶ He had made recommendations at Cabinet level on this point. It is clear, from these statements by Mr van der Merwe that there is an attempt to absorb urban black women into the economy by phasing them into the domestic job category and thereby preventing the influx of 'illegal' women into this category. It is interesting to note that although there has been enough legal female labour in the urban area to go into this job category, women with Section 10 rights, have been extremely reluctant to enter domestic work. They have only done so when their situation has been desperate.

Despite the state's attempts to control the movement of women from the rural to the urban areas, there are still a large number of 'illegal' women in the cities and suburban areas. This must clearly be taken as evidence of the deterioration of the reserve economy. This is substantiated by the fact that women from the reserves are willing to accept domestic work, which is characterized by low wages, long hours and bad working conditions. Mr van der Merwe's point on the exclusion of 'illegal' women from the concessions under the moratorium supports the idea that the state believes that women should be locked in the reserves, and that the overall number of Africans in the urban areas should be limited.

B – Labour Saving Devices

Although the development of the use of labour saving devices in South Africa has been slower than that in other advanced capitalist societies, there has been during the 70's, an obvious trend towards the buying of labour saving devices. Katzman, in an analysis of domestic service in the U.S. between 1870 and 1920, characterises it as a non-industrial rather than pre-industrial occupation, and as such one that is able to show that with industrialism and the consequent increase in the productivity of labour in industry, 'labour-saving machinery became cheaper than human labour'.¹⁷

In South Africa, this has not occurred so rapidly because the very cheapness of human labour, has permitted continued reliance on hard labour, instead of machine power. The employment of servants and the patriarchal beliefs which dominate domestic labour and the family, have delayed the modernisation of housework. This situation is not unique to South Africa, but can be found in all societies, which have or had, at some stage, domestic workers to perform household duties. The development of labour saving devices and services, which serve the home, has lagged behind the technological innovation which occurred in other sectors. The presence of servants retarded modernization in the household.

The introduction of labour-saving appliances into the household in the United States and Britain, was a direct result of the shortage of servants. More and more, as the burden of housework became that of the housewife, the invention of labour-saving appliances solved the 'problem' caused by the scarcity of servants, and made housework much easier and quicker. In South Africa though, the introduction of labour-saving devices has occurred along with the use of servants. In other words,

despite the continued employment of full-time servants, white middle and upper-class families are also steadily modernizing their homes.

It must be noted, that labour saving in the home goes beyond the mere introduction of vacuum cleaners, dishwashers, although today these are obviously the most important labour-saving devices. Housework has become much simpler for women since the withering away of craft skills and the growth of factory production. With the advent of industrial capitalism, many of the functions which had previously been performed by the wife and mother were slowly taken over by capitalist industry. Initially meat was slaughtered, skinned, cured and cooked at home, the woman made her own and her families clothes, curtains, sheets and jerseys, baked her own bread, preserved, pickled and canned her own fruit and vegetables and did her own and her family's washing herself. Although these activities were slow to change, over approximately the last century, industrial capital has taken over many of these tasks from women. Food is bought semi-prepared or even fully prepared, clothes are bought ready made, bread is bought from bakeries, rather than made at home. Also commercial laundries relieve women of the arduous task of washing and cleaning clothes.

These changes were, of course, as a result of industrialization and urbanization, which destroyed the conditions under which "it was possible to carry on the old life".¹⁸ Urban life precludes the self-provisioning practises which existed in the rural areas, and at the same time, the income that the new urban dweller is earning, makes available the wherewithal to purchase the means of subsistence, rather than to produce one's subsistence oneself. The invention of electricity and its introduction into the home, instant hot water and modern heating systems, have all played an extremely vital role in easing the time and the burden involved in housework, whether it is performed by the housewife or a domestic servant.

Today, with automatic washing machines, a woman merely has to load the machine and remove the washing after it has been washed and spun-dried. This gives her more time for leisure and other work. Another technological development in the home was the suction cleaner, patented in 1901. This precursor of our vacuum cleaner was made up of "pumps, electrically or petrol driven, mounted on horse-drawn carts". For domestic cleaning, the cart stopped outside the house and a hose was passed through a window. Today the number of labour-saving appliances in the kitchen and home are endless. Besides washing machines and vacuum cleaners, there are steam irons, tumble dryers, electric rubbish disposals, dishwashers, mixmasters, wall-to-wall carpets, specially treated floors, electric frying pans, grillers, etc. Beside these labour-saving appliances many labour saving services have also been established, for example, laundromats, nappy services, supermarkets, char services, food take-away establishments, carpet cleaning services -- the list is endless.¹⁹ The existence of labour-saving devices has made it easier for women to dismiss their domestic workers and do their own housework, in some cases with the aid of a char, who comes in once a week.

In interviews which I conducted in January 1980, I found that in many cases where either the women or their husbands have retired, they could no longer afford to keep their domestic workers. The majority of these women felt that in the long run it would be more economical to dismiss their domestic workers, and either

make do with their existing labour saving devices, or buy additional ones, such as dishwashers and tumble dryers. I must point out, however, that a lot of women who had full-time domestic workers, felt that it was cheaper to employ a domestic worker than to replace her and do their own housework with the use of labour saving devices. Very few of these women considered buying labour saving appliances, particularly dishwashers, as they "have someone in the backyard to do that type of work, so why should I spend more money".

It is, I believe, still too soon to tell whether the decline in the number of domestic workers will be permanent rather than temporary, but it is possible that the decision which employers make to reduce the number of servants which they employ, may become permanent as white housewives begin to rely more and more on labour-saving devices. This aspect came out very clearly in my interviews; where many women stated, that the idea of running their households without the use of a washing machine and vacuum cleaner was totally inconceivable. Surveys carried out by Market Research Africa shows how the purchases of labour-saving devices have increased from 1970 to 1979. In 1970, they found that 71 percent of the white population owned washing machines, 60 percent, electric floor polishers and 47 percent, vacuum cleaners. A similar survey carried out at the beginning of 1979 showed that 77 percent of the white population owned washing machines. The number of floor polishers had dropped to 51 percent and the number of vacuum cleaners had risen to 69 percent.²⁰

What of the relationship between domestic employment and labour-saving devices? I found that although employers had labour saving devices in their homes, often they were very reluctant to allow their domestic workers to use the machines. I found, for example, that more than half of the women in my sample who employed a domestic worker and had a washing machine would not allow the domestic worker to use the machine for fear of it being damaged. This idea was usually accompanied by statements like, "Blacks don't understand machines" or "They (black people) are generally uneducated, so if I let her (the domestic worker) use my washing machine, she will only know how to break it" or "The reason why my machine has lasted so long is because I have always done my own washing". It seems that a kind of inbred racism, (even amongst those women who appeared to be fairly 'liberal'), has led many women to take on some of the household tasks themselves. Although washing machines, especially the automatic kind, are very useful time savers, many women are prepared to spend their own time (and consequently save time for their domestic workers) doing their own washing, rather than allow their domestic worker to use the washing machine.

The dishwasher was another example of this type of practice. Four women in my sample had dishwashers. Two of them employed domestic workers and the other two did their own housework. The two women who still employed domestic workers, bought dishwashers because they (the employers) hated washing dishes. In both cases, the dishwasher was only used on the domestic workers' day off and when the employers had many visitors.

The domestic workers themselves felt that a dishwasher might be useful and time-saving, but as none of them had even seen one before, they were not very sure. However, they did not feel that a dishwasher would make a radical difference

to their lives, as washing dishes was not the most tiring or time consuming chore. In any event, the domestic servant is on duty for a set number of hours determined by the routine of the family, rather than the amount of work to be done. The domestic worker must come into the house in time to make breakfast in the morning and can only leave again after she has washed up the supper dishes. The introduction of technology into the home, has therefore, made very little difference to the hours which a domestic servant works. Furthermore, it should be added that, rather than saving work and therefore time, the introduction of labour saving devices into the home has actually made more work for domestic workers. The relative ease with which these appliances can be used means that they can be used more often. For example, because of the difficulties involved in cleaning carpets by hand, women without vacuum cleaners or carpet sweepers, will only clean the carpet once or twice a week. Women who own vacuum cleaners will have their carpets cleaned every day.

In order to realize the relative triviality of modern technical appliances in the home, I shall briefly look at the mechanization of industry and its effects on the labour process.

Marx argued that capitalism was based on an inherently necessary drive to expand capital and produce surplus-value on an extended scale. This is law for capitalist production, imposed by incessant revolutions in the methods of production themselves, by the depreciation of existing capital, by the general competitive struggle and the need to improve production and expand its scale "as a means of self preservation and under penalty of ruin".²¹ He then argues that there is a tendency for the rate of accumulation to exceed that which the system can sustain and thereby to undermine the conditions of profitable production.

The continuous accumulation which Marx argued was necessary for the continued existence of capitalism, soon comes across limits of the existing working population, that is, since the normal working day has certain physical and social limits, a transition has occurred from the production of absolute surplus-value (extension of the working day) to the production of relative surplus-value (decreasing the necessary part of the working day by an increase in the productivity of labour).

The introduction of machinery had as its initial object the intensification of work (in other words an increase in the abstract social labour time devoted to production) rather than the augmentation of productivity by lowering the time necessary for the reproduction of labour power. In other words, the object of mechanization was to reduce the porosity²² (periods of inactivity) in the labour process.

Because domestic work does not produce but serves, it is difficult to make comparisons between domestic work and factory work, and in fact, especially with regard to mechanization, very few similarities occur.

The working day in the home, as it was in the factory, is relatively porous. There are particularly intense periods during the day, especially in the morning when the whole house is cleaned, but there are also periods of inactivity especially in the evening when the domestic worker is waiting for her employer to eat, so that she can wash up and go. The introduction of technology into the home has not eliminated this porosity, but has aggravated it. Because the domestic worker can

complete her basic chores quickly, she is left with some spare time. Although, some domestic workers use this to relax, clean their own room etc., most usually find other tasks to do, such as clean the fridge or wash the walls. It is the women themselves who usually look for other work to keep themselves busy, but this is motivated by the fear that if their employers find them not working, they will lose their jobs. Therefore, the amount of work the domestic worker does, increases.

In short then, the introduction of modern technical appliances in housework has made very little actual contribution to the domestic worker's job. Firstly, because they are quick and easy to use, the chores are done more often than they were prior to the introduction of these appliances. Secondly, even if the appliances do ease the load of work, it does nothing to shorten the hours that a domestic servant works, and thirdly, because these appliances enable the worker to complete her basic chores with relative speed, the domestic worker is forced to increase her work load for fear of being fired.

Conclusion

It appears to me, that the domestic worker is in a difficult position all round, in that firstly, the introduction of labour saving appliances has meant that in times of crises such as a recession, the domestic worker's labour becomes dispensable, as these appliances make it possible for the housewife to do her own housework without much effort on her part; therefore, the threat of unemployment is always present. Secondly, even if the introduction of these appliances into a particular home has not displaced the domestic worker, these appliances have effectively increased the domestic servants workload, rather than decrease it as we would imagine. The continual threat of unemployment, has meant that the domestic worker, must spread her work out over the whole day or else find other work to fill in. In short, the extremely sensitive position of African female domestic workers has made them exceptionally vulnerable to the whims and wishes of the economy, the state and their employers.

Notes

1. See K. French for analysis of this tendency in S.A. **South African Capital Restructuring : Crisis and Tendencies in the 70's**, Unpublished Honours Dissertation, Wits, 1979.
2. C. Simkins, and D. Clarke **Structural Unemployment in South Africa**, Development Studies Series No. 1, Pietermaritzburg. 1978 P.104.
3. Older women who have lost their jobs are being endorsed out of the urban areas, and younger women are being prevented from coming into the urban areas to seek work, and if they should find work, they cannot be registered.
4. This information comes from L. Woolley, **Women and Labour Allocation**. Unpublished Mimeo. 1979. p. 3-4
5. Quoted from L. Woolley, *Ibid* P.14
6. Black Sash 'Memorandum on the Pass Laws and Influx Control' *Sash* Vol.16, No.8, 1974.
7. *Ibid* p. 29-30
8. V. Beechy 'Some notes on Female Wage Labour in Capitalist Production' **Capital and Class** No.3. 1977. P.55
9. K. Marx **Capital** Vol I. Middlesex. Penguin Books, 1976. P. 517-518.

- 10 J. Yawitch. 'African Women and Labour Force Participation' in WIP No. 9 p41
- 11 Shindler, J., **The Reproductive Function and Ultra-Exploitability of South African Domestic Workers**, Unpublished Mimeo. 1978.p23
- 12 I am pointing out here a contradiction in economic motives behind the state's policy. On the one hand, excluding blacks from the urban economy has the effect of increasing the value of their labour power and raising their wages. On the other hand though, with the contraction of the economy, the state is removing the problem of unemployment and the subsistence of the proletariat from the urban areas to the homelands.
- 13 House of Assembly Debates quoted in M.D. Simons, **African Women, their legal status in South Africa**, London, Hurst,1968 P. 281 -282
- 14 Simons Ibid.p.281
- 15 One of the recommendations of the Riekert Commission is that urban workers must be given priority over migrants in terms of employment.
- 16 Quoted in L. Woolley: **Op. Cit** Interview Section p.26
- 17 Katzman - **Seven Days a Week: women and domestic service in Industrializing America**. O.U.P. New York,1978.
- 18 H. Braverman. **Labour and Monopoly Capitalism: The degradation of work in the twentieth century**. New York, Monthly Review Press, 1974. P.275.
- 19 Unpublished Survey. The decrease in the number of floor polishers and the increase in the number of vacuum cleaners is a result of the increase of another labour saving device - wall-to-wall carpeting.
- 20 In effect, capitalism has transformed the home and the family into a gigantic market place. Yet,despite the technologically advanced appliances, which are easing the tasks of housewives and domestic workers, the way in which the household is organized, and the social relations of production within the family and between the domestic worker and her employer, has remained unchanged. It is still women who run the home. Even though more and more women at all levels of society have paid jobs outside the home, they still expect and are expected by others to carry the main burden of reproducing either their own family or the family of their employer, by doing the shopping, cooking, washing and ironing of clothes and caring of children.
- 21 Marx, K., **Capital Volume III**,p.p.244 - 245.
- 22 That is,reduce the difference between the apparent duration of work or time of production, and the abstract social labour time devoted to production.

Maggie Oewies talks about the Domestic Workers Association

We have been going for some years now and we've got several thousand members, all in the Peninsula. And we're getting new members all the time -- there are 20 000 domestic workers in Sea Point alone . . . those are the concentrated areas, Sea Point, Bellville, Oranjezicht, where we do most of our work.

Our members are coloured and African. We don't distinguish. After all, our employes can be German, Italian, Greek . . .

We are mainly concerned with money issues. We find a wage of R25 to R35 a month for a domestic worker, and sometimes in Bellville even R15. What's R35 a month today? A pantie costs R1. Some are getting R55 or R60, but then they are often working 12 or 16 hours a day. And of course it's a lot of responsibility. To look after someone else's child, that's a lot of responsibility. The parents expect you to look after the child better than they would themselves. If a child falls when his parents are there and scratches himself, well, they pick him up and don't think about it, but if they come back and find that the child they left with you has fallen and scratched himself, there's a whole court case, and lawyers and things. We try to teach the workers some child psychology here, so that they can understand the children. Also it's difficult for the worker to keep a balance, to keep control when she is thinking about her own problems. Employers don't expect you to think about your own child, to wonder where your own child is and what's happening to your own family. You might not even see your own child for three weeks or a month at a time. And if you have to take your child to Red Cross Hospital, say, they think you are trying to get time off. But if they are paying you R35 a month and your child gets sick, they are partly to blame . . . who can keep a child with R35 a month?

They don't pay domestic workers a wage, they just scratch a few cents. They don't touch their pockets. Sometimes you can see, they just give what is left from the petrol money or something. But if a woman gets a job for R700, that is because the domestic worker is looking after her house while she is working, she is keeping the woman in that job.

We are also concerned about working conditions. Some of those rooms are terrible, you can't imagine. In Bordeaux flats in Sea Point, where we are organising now, there are 12 to 13 people sharing one bathroom. And the toilet is often in the same bathroom, so you can imagine.

And the women are doing their washing in the bath, often it is left very dirty. There should be laundries for them.

We are different from other unions, although we have good relationships with some of them. The Food and Canning Union, we are closer to them, because we cook the food those workers make. But it's difficult organising domestic workers. They are all scattered around, and the employers make difficulties. We have representatives in each area elected by the workers. We are a voice for the workers,

we make press statements and we take up the workers' complaints. If we can't settle a case with the employer, it goes to court.

For example, we have been fighting the City Council on the issue of the keys. The Green and Sea Point Ratepayers wanted to have a bill passed which would give the keys to domestic workers' rooms to the police. The City Council refused to pass it. Now we expect the Community Development Department to try to take it further.

Then we are teaching the workers all sorts of things, domestic science, child care, teaching them about commerce, and so on. For example, if an employer works in a bank, the worker must know that at one time of the month that employer might have to work late, she must understand why and so on. And we talk about the issues of the day. We have been talking about the bus boycott and things like that. The bus boycott affected domestic workers hard, especially the chars. But also the other workers, because even if they go home only once a week or once a month, the high fare is really a problem for them on their low wages. And they have to buy things in the cheap places, they can't shop in Sea Point, that's a holiday resort with luxury prices, they have to travel to the cheap shops. We discuss these issues with the workers.

The meat boycott, we discuss that. Some of those men who were sacked are the husbands or part of the families of our workers. At a domestic science course we had just a little while ago, one of the recipes they are going to learn was with meat, and the workers refused to cook the meat, they said we must find a recipe with fish or chicken. Of course they may have to cook meat in their employers' houses. . . . they don't approve, but then they don't approve of many things. It's their situation.

One worker I know told her employer that she would cook meat for the employer's family but she wouldn't eat it herself. The employer said to her 'What do you mean, do you expect me to go and plan different meals just for you?' The worker said, no, she didn't expect that, but she would eat the other things, not the meat. Anyway, her employer went out and bought her some beautiful snoek.

I just want to add that I really appreciate Jackie Cock's book. To my mind it should become a set book for every up and coming woman who will employ a domestic worker. She really explained our situation.

Censorship and Labour Reporting

Geoffrey Budlender

During 1976, a Committee of Publications established in terms of the Publications Act 1974, declared three issues of the **S A Labour Bulletin** undesirable: Vol. 1 Nos. 3 and 5 and Vol. 2 No. 5.

The right to appeal to the Supreme Court against a 'banning had been abolished in 1974, and the publishers therefore appealed to the Publications Appeal Board established in terms of the Act. The hearing took place on 26 August 1977, before the Hon Mr. J H Snyman (formerly a judge of the Supreme Court), Prof. J C W van Rooyen and Dr. K S van Wyk de Vries. On 8 September 1977, Mr. Snyman (the Chairman of the Appeal Board) delivered the unanimous decision of the Board rejecting the appeals and confirming the ban on the publications.

This article is concerned not with the reasons given for the Appeal Board's decision, but with the arguments presented by the Publications Committee at various stages of the proceedings.¹ This is so for the following reasons:

- (a) A committee of 'highly specialised persons' functions weekly on a permanent basis to examine what the Directorate of Publications calls 'communistic and potentially subversive publications'.² and to decide whether they are 'prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare or the peace and good order' in terms of Sec. 47(2)(e) of the Act. It is presumably this Committee which decided that the three issues of the **S A Labour Bulletin** were undesirable, and the attitudes revealed in the Committee's arguments should therefore fairly represent the attitudes which will be taken to other 'communistic and potentially subversive' publications.
- (b) In most cases, no appeal is lodged against the decision that a publication is undesirable. During 1977 (the relevant year) 1 246 publications or objects were declared undesirable³ and only 43 appeals were lodged.⁴ As a result, whether rightly or wrongly, the decisions of Publications Committees generally constitute the final decision on whether a publication is undesirable. The Committees' attitudes are therefore of fundamental importance in understanding how censorship functions in South Africa.
- (c) During 1977, the Appeal Board rejected every appeal against a Committee's decision that a publication was 'prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare or the public order'.⁵

As a result of all these factors, an examination of the Committee's reasons should constitute a useful guide to the attitude which has been taken and will be taken, to publications which deal with labour matters.

The Committee appears to start from the premise that the Government knows what is best. In its reasons, the Committee referred to the Bulletin's support of African trade unions, and to the 'more peaceful and constructive system of Works Committees and Liaison Committees' (my translation). When the Bulletin argued that it was merely the Committee's subjective view that this system is more peaceful and constructive, the Committee retorted that 'the statements of Cabinet Ministers, including the Minister of Labour....are authoritative in regard to whether the system of Works and Liaison Committees is more peaceful and constructive than granting blacks full trade union rights'.

Given this attitude, it is not surprising that the Committee objected to the Bulletin on the grounds *inter alia* that it allegedly 'rejects Liaison Committees....and also, except when an African trade union can be involved, the Works Committees....' This was described as 'against the spirit of the 1973 Act', and the Bulletin was accused of 'undermining the State's policy of establishing Works Committees and Liaison Committees', and of having 'rejected or disparaged the well-intentioned provisions of the Act'. This was unacceptable, as the 'government and most employers prefer the committee system' (my translation).

On the other hand, another article's 'contents are acceptable and the author's encouragement of the use of liaison committees praiseworthy'. This article 'would have been acceptable in a publication, which does not devote a large part of the contents to biased descriptions of lawbreaking'. The view that as in Germany, trade unions should be active in factories to make works councils function effectively 'is a perfectly acceptable remark but it is just possible that an unsophisticated African labour organiser might look upon it as justification for the demands, accompanied by threats to strike illegally, of African unions to be as active in factories and works councils in South Africa as in Germany. Circumstances are not the same in South Africa as abroad'.

Just as one must accept the Government's view of what is the most peaceful and constructive system of labour relations, so one must not challenge the motives of the security police. In one issue, 'the Special Branch is accused of attempting to intimidate a certain union organiser. The alleged motives of the police are not substantiated and their status as guardians of the law is undermined. This is prejudicial to the general welfare and peace and good order'.

In similar fashion, the Committee objected strongly to a Bulletin editorial comment which criticised the Schlebusch Commission and defended the student Wages Commissions. After quoting certain passages of the Schlebusch

Commission's report, the Committee concluded that 'these and other portions too numerous to mention indicate the utter undesirability of the Wages Commission which the Bulletin is at such pains to defend'. The Committee at no stage attempted to join issue with the Bulletin on the substance of its defence of the Wages Commissions: the report of the Schlebusch Commission apparently satisfied the Committee that there was no need to inquire or argue any further.

A natural corollary of this attitude was the Committee's view 'that every thing is not as it should be with the journal and its control, appears from the fact that two of the members of the 'Editorial Board'....are or were involved with security legislation. Herold(sic) B Nxasana was....detained on 5 December 1975 in terms of the Terrorism Act. Eddie Webster is currently standing trial under the anti-Communist Act, together with a number of NUSAS leaders. Pindele Mfeti, co-author of the report against the Leyland Motor Corporation, was....detained on 10 May this year' (my translation). The Committee gives this as a reason why the publication is undesirable.

Not surprisingly, the publishers objected to this as irrelevant to the question of whether these particular issues of the Bulletin were 'undesirable' as defined. The Committee's response was interesting:

- (a) In regard to Webster, the Committee 'hastens to add that Mr. Webster is still on trial and innocent until proved guilty (if he so be). It may, however, be possible that the prosecution has evidence not available to the Hon. Appeal Board and Respondent (the Committee) in regard to the activities of the IIE and the Bulletin'.
- (b) Webster was then found not guilty and acquitted. The Committee 'unreservedly accepts the Court's judgement on Mr. Webster's innocence on the charge laid against him, but would reiterate that the evidence in the trial, now evaluated by the Court in its judgement, could provide information of value to the Appeal Board'.
- (c) "In the case of Mr Nxasana and Mr Mfeti, Respondent respectfully submits that he acted correctly in taking cognizance of the Government's action. Mr. Mfeti was detained under Section 6 of the Terrorist Act because there was reason to believe that he 'is...withholding from the South African police any information relating to terrorists or to offences under the Act'.⁶ Respondent submits that he was justified in taking cognizance of this serious surmise on the part of the police, which must have been based on adequate knowledge and intelligent deduction. The same applies to the detention of Mr Nxasana under the Suppression of Communism Act."

The reasoning is particularly revealing in two respects. The mere fact of Webster's trial was initially given as a reason for the banning; and when he was acquitted, the Committee shifted its ground to stating that there **may** have been evidence of relevance given at his trial. As far as Mfeti is concerned, it was automatically assumed that the police action **must** have been based on adequate knowledge and intelligent deduction. In other words, the detention must have been justified and Mfeti must be an undesirable person - although at the time there was no suggestion that he was to be prosecuted⁷ and neither was there any suggestion that his detention was in any way related to the South African Labour Bulletin.

The suggestion seems to be that people of this sort are not fit and proper members of the Editorial Board of the Bulletin as their motives are suspect. These suspect motives in turn colour the Bulletin itself and provide a reason for the banning. The Bulletin is thus neatly placed in a Catch-22 situation: on the one hand, there is an implied questioning of the motives of the editors. On the other hand, the Act expressly provides⁸ that in determining whether a publication is undesirable, the author's motive is irrelevant. The Bulletin is thus prevented from answering the allegation directly.

In fact, Catch-22 situations abound during the course of argument. On numerous occasions, the Committee quoted and referred to banned publications in support of its arguments. In the very nature of things, it is only the Committee which has access to this evidence - because the Committee itself (or one of its partners) has so decided! The Bulletin was thus prevented from examining the quotation in its full context, from evaluating it properly and from presenting conflicting evidence from other banned publications.

A further Catch-22 situation arose in regard to an American coal miners' song. The Committee, in its reasons for the banning, states that the publication of this song (which formed part of an article on American workers) 'can have only one reason, namely to serve as an example for black strikers'. (my translation)

The Bulletin responded **inter alia** that 'when the intended and actual readership of the publication is recognised....this finding is clearly incorrect, for very few black workers would be likely to read the publication'. The Bulletin submitted as evidence its distribution list, which confirmed this statement. The Committee then replies as follows: 'The Appeal Board in a previous decision stated that no cognizance should be taken of the possible readers of a publication. Under the new Act, undesirability must be judged from the material itself'. One might think that this neatly terminates the Catch-22 argument; we say it will have effect X on Y who reads it, and you may not set out to show that Y will not read it in any event. But no. The Committee now does precisely what it has argued the Bulletin may not do: 'It may be stated, however, that amongst 'the very few black workers' who

would read the Bulletin would in all probability be those students taking the IIE's Diploma Course in Trade Unionism'.

A major criticism of the Bulletin was that its reports of strikes and labour problems were 'biased' and 'one-sided', and that companies (particularly the Leyland Motor Corporation, Anglo American Corporation and Reynolds in Pinetown) were unfairly attacked. The Committee appears to regard it as part of its brief to defend commercial organisations from unfair criticism. Further, the frequent accusations of bias and one-sided reporting were not supported by any evidence. It is difficult to understand how the Committee arrives at its view that a report is biased or one-sided, without any suggestion that facts were wrongly stated or that other facts were omitted. Perhaps the clearest example of this was the complaint by the Committee that 'the writer (of an article on Leyland) is accusing Leyland's South African branch of victimisation, which is a crime under the law'. The Committee appeared to assume that the accusation **must** be ill-founded - there was no attempt made to deal with the facts set out in the article which in fact **do** suggest that unlawful victimisation took place.

Despite this desire to protect Leyland from accusation of criminal conduct, the Committee did not hesitate to suggest that the Bulletin might be guilty of criminal conduct. After a fairly cursory glance, I made the following list of Acts which the Committee directly or indirectly suggested the Bulletin may have contravened: Political Interference Act, Riotous Assemblies Act, Bantu Administration Act (racial hostility clause), the second General Law Amendment Act (1974), the Suppression of Communism Act and possibly the Terrorism Act.⁹ In relation particularly to the first of these Acts, the Committee displays a surprising degree of misunderstanding of what the Act in fact means. However, this is perhaps not a fair point of criticism. The Committee itself states 'Respondent...is not a member of the legal profession' (is this perhaps a one-man committee?) This is amply proved by the Committee's faulty assertion, made twice without qualification and subsequently qualified, that black strikes are illegal.

A major point of criticism was the unsavory overseas connections which the Bulletin was alleged to have. As this could hardly have any bearing on the merits of the contents of the Bulletin, this was presumably to show suspect motives, and possibly the dangers of publishing reports of this kind. In this regard, the Committee constructed what the Bulletin termed an 'intricate construction of vicarious liability'. The argument, based largely on a (banned) issue of the SACTU publication 'Workers Unity', ran as follows:

1. 'The IIE and the Bulletin are in part dependent on the finances received, through the TUC, from British Labour Unions hostile to South Africa'. (The Bulletin denied receiving funds from or through the TUC.)
2. 'There was contact between South African and British workers to assist

in making the boycott (of SA by workers abroad) effective'. (The passage quoted by the Committee does not appear to support this allegation).

3. 'Articles and comment in the Bulletin contributed materially to unrest at Leyland (SA)': (The Bulletin denied this, pointing out that a report on past events could hardly contribute materially to those events. No evidence was submitted to support the Committee's allegation).
4. 'These articles contained one-sided information which was made available via the Bulletin (and, possibly also via the IIE, the ANC and the anti-Apartheid Movement) to the TUC or its affiliated unions or both. Information of (this) nature...contributed materially to organising the boycott at the 6 November conference in London'. (Denied by the Bulletin: no evidence submitted, despite the Bulletin's express request).
5. 'The Conference was organised by the anti-Apartheid Movement, a Communist and ANC supported organisation aiming at revolution in South Africa'.
6. 'The Conference was widely representative of the British Labour Unions and the trade union movement. They are the sponsors of the IIE grant and the January boycott against South Africa in Britain'.
7. 'The Communist-line SACTU played a prominent part. Its general secretary, Mr. John Gaetsewe (who represented the ANC at the ILO Conference in June 1975), described how Black workers were 'by their powerful strike action, showing the way forward in the struggle'.'
8. 'Not only representatives of the ILO and the ICFTU attended the conference, but also of the WFTU. The WFTU is ...the international organisation of Communist trade unions behind the Iron Curtain and in Africa and Asia'.

I have quoted this reasoning at length, because it displays the logic behind what was clearly a major factor in the decision to ban these issues of the Bulletin.

I come finally to what was perhaps the dominant factor in the Committee's decision: namely, the reporting of strikes. The kernel of the Committee's complaint here is as follows:

'The publication nowhere states that strikes, if inevitable, should conform to the provisions of Act 70 of 1973. Having rejected or disparaged the well-intentioned provisions of the Act, aimed at maintaining industrial peace, the Bulletin gives excessive publicity to dozens of illegal

strikes ostensibly under the pretext of analysing what was wrong in the field of labour'.

A further cause of complaint is that by reading the Bulletin's reports of strikes, 'Some readers are able to study the techniques of illegal strikes and to discover why they failed - and how to avoid a future illegal strike collapsing'.

The Committee's views on this topic pose substantial problems for a publication which wishes to report breakdowns in the industrial relations system, to describe strikes which took place, and to analyse why the strikes were successful or unsuccessful.

In the first place, the Committee might regard this as 'excessive publicity' for illegal activity. The publication might carry a general note to **all** articles on strikes, indicating that illegal activity is not condoned by the publication, but as the Committee feels itself in a position to decide what the motives of publishers are (cf 'ostensibly'), this might be dismissed as mere pretext. A further problem is of course that the analysis **might** enable some readers to plan more effective illegal strikes.

These problems are compounded by the fact that the Committee tends on occasion, to equate analysis and prediction with prescription. In an article on Leyland, the following conclusion appears:

'It is obvious that the unrest in Leyland Motor Corporation will not be settled as long as this firm continues to turn a blind eye to the dissatisfaction and grievances of its workers; until they decide to recognise the form of representation which the workers are determined to have. Management is naive to think that this determination can be squashed by what appears to be repressive measures. The workers have shown that they are not prepared to conform to the form of representation desired by management, so management is going to have to choose between no form of negotiation and the consequences of this, or recognition of the union'.

This passage is interpreted by the Committee as follows: 'In effect the Bulletin is saying: If Leyland does not give in to the MAWU, the workers will inevitably and deliberately break the law. This is a veiled threat and an incitement to lawbreaking which deserves the serious attention of the authorities entrusted with law and order'.

In attempting to draw together some of the themes underlying the Committee's reasons, I do not wish to re-hash the argument which took place before the Appeal Board. The purpose of this article is rather to show some of the difficulties facing a publisher in the sensitive area of labour, in the light of the Committee's stated attitudes, and its underlying premises. The fundamental problem in dealing with the question of censorship was concisely stated by the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court in **S v Moroney**. The Committee was there described as

'....an extra-judicial body, operating in an administrative capacity, whose members need have no legal training, before whom the appellant has no right of audience, who in their deliberations are not required to have regard to the rules of justice designed to achieve a fair trial, whose proceedings are not conducted in public and who are not required to afford any reasons for their decisions'.¹⁰

Notes

1. Some of the material in this article is to appear in an article for the S A Institute of Race Relations dealing with a wider range of decisions by the Committee.
2. **Report of the Publications Appeal Board and of the Directorate of Publications for the Calendar Year 1977: p 18.**
3. **Ibid**, p 30.
4. **Ibid**, p 9.
5. **Ibid**, p 5.
6. Detention is authorised by Section 6 of the Terrorism Act which provides that '...any commissioned officer...of or above the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel may, if he has reason to believe that any person...is a terrorist or is withholding from the South African Police any information relating to terrorists or to offences under this Act', have person arrested and detained for interrogation until the Commissioner of Police or Minister of Police orders his release.
7. The Committee subsequently stated that it had been informed that Mr Mfeti was being held as an awaiting-trial prisoner. Mr Mfeti was held in detention for 366 days, was released without being prosecuted or brought to Court as a State witness, was banned and placed under house arrest, and was then deported to the Transkei.
8. Section 47(4), Act 42 of 1974.
9. The Committee also suggests that the IIE and the Bulletin may fall within the ambit of the Affected Organisations Act.
10. **S v Moroney**, 1978 (4) SA 389, at 403 (AD). In practice, the Directorate will provide the reasons for the Committee's decision, although not obliged to do so.

The New Black Labour Regulation: limited reform, intensified control

Douglas Hindson

The Black Labour Regulations gazetted on the 13th June 1980¹ represent the first translation into law of the Riekert Commission² proposals on recruiting, registration procedures at labour bureaux and the extension of the system of labour bureaux. This paper examines the changes introduced and assesses their effects on Black workers and to worker's movement.

The basic objective of the new regulations is to make movement and job selection freer amongst workers qualifying under Section 10(1) (a), (b) and (c) of the Black (Urban Areas) Act,³ but more tightly restricted for those who do not qualify. For qualified workers it is no longer necessary to get prior permission from the labour bureau to enter an employment contract if the employment is undertaken within the Bantu Affairs Administration Board area in which the worker resides.⁴ It is no longer compulsory for these workers to register as workseekers.⁵ They are provided with a standing authorisation to seek work in terms of a single endorsement in their reference books which indicates that they have permission to be in a prescribed area in terms of Section 10(1) (a), (b) or (c) of the Urban Areas Act.⁶

The position on registration of employment contracts (as against registration of workseekers) is ambiguous. Sub-regulation 15(1) of Chapter VIII of the new regulations, which deals with 'Notification of Employment in a Prescribed Area' stipulates (sub-regulation 15(1) (b)) that employers must within three days of engaging a Black worker send a duplicate copy of the employment contract to the labour bureau. However, this requirement is qualified by sub-regulation 15(2) which states that the provisions in sub-regulation 15(1) 'shall not apply in the case of a Black who falls within any of the categories enumerated in sub-regulation 14(3)' that is, in the case of Section 10(1) (a), (b) and (c) workers (and other specified cases).⁷ This indicates that employers are not required to make out or send a copy of the employment contract to the labour bureau or carry out any of the other requirements in sub-regulation 15(1) in the case of these workers.

This is a point of considerable importance. It suggests no less than that registration of these workers is no longer required, something which would go well beyond the intentions of the Riekert Commission. But it seems highly probable that it is the result of an incorrect framing of the regulations. This is suggested by the wording in regulation 16 of the same chapter which deals with the 'Record of Employment in a Prescribed Area' and gives instructions to labour bureau officials. Sub-regulation 15(1) (b) specifically states that employers of Black workers with qualifications under Section 10(1) (a), (b) and (c) are not absolved from their obligations under sub-regulation 15(1), implying that their contracts of service must be registered in the same way as in the case of other workers. Although legally it is sub-regulation 15(2) which should determine the labour bureau re-

quirements it is assumed in the rest of this paper that this is an error and that practice will follow the recommendations of the Riekert Commission as accepted by the Government White Paper on the Commission Report.⁸

It must be noted that, although it is the employer who is obliged to send the employment contract to the labour bureau, the onus is on the worker to prove that he is in registered employment. Employers must provide all workers with a duplicate copy of the employment contract 'for production to an authorised officer as proof of employment.'⁹

A further change in the regulations is that qualified workers may take jobs in Board areas other than the one in which they are domiciled regardless of the availability of local labour in the area into which they move. This is, however, subject to the labour bureau being 'satisfied' that suitable accommodation is available.¹⁰

It is on the basis of these measures more than any others that claims to reform in the labour bureau system have been based. There is some substance in these claims. In effect, the new registration procedures allow for the act of exchange between the (qualified) worker and the employer to take place before, rather than after, the intervention of the labour bureau. The physical site of exchange becomes the factory gate rather than the labour bureau yard. If the labour bureau merely seals the contract, after the event, it loses the capacity to channel and direct workers against the dictates of the market.

Too much should not be made of this relaxation of control. A large proportion of the contracts entered into by employers and workers have always been made without the workseeker having previously acquired a workseeker's permit, despite the legal requirements.¹¹ The new regulations mostly legitimise this practice. It is also likely that, despite this contention many who would not in the past have registered will in future do so. The Riekert Commission recommended that labour bureaux should deal with unemployment insurance handouts and this was accepted by the White Paper.¹² The objective of this recommendation was 'to promote the registration of Black workseekers'¹³ Despite these provisos, the simplifications in the registration procedures for these workers will undoubtedly reduce the length of labour bureau queues.

These changes in labour bureaux regulations introduce a number of concessions to industrialists. They go some way towards meeting their complaint, voiced consistently since the 1950's, that registration procedures were cumbersome, time consuming and costly. They meet their objection against movement controls between Bantu Affairs Administration Board boundaries, but they fall short of the demand for a relaxation in influx controls.¹⁴ In addition, the regulations abolish the monthly labour bureau fee,¹⁵ a long-standing source of discontent amongst employers. But what do the new regulations mean for workers?

In assisting the nature of the concessions to Black workers, it is important to note the way in which the regulations are phrased. Qualified workers are not given a positive right in law to choose their employers, nor employers to choose their workers. The general rule as applied in the past continues to hold:

'No person may take any Black into his employ in a prescribed area or have such Black in his employ and no Black may take up or be in employment in a

prescribed area unless permission to take up employment has been granted to such Blacks by the labour officer concerned. . . ."¹⁶

The concessions are given by way of special exemption from this rule. Permission is 'deemed to have been granted' for qualified workers who remain in their Board area.¹⁷ Permission 'shall not be refused' if 'suitable accommodation is available' for qualified workers crossing Board frontiers.¹⁸

Regulation 14 of the Black Labour Regulations which introduces these exemptions now runs parallel to Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act. Section 10 does not confer the right of permanent residence to any Black people in the towns, contrary to popular belief. It is framed in the negative. It prevents any Black person from remaining in a prescribed area (urban areas plus a few urban areas in South Africa, excluding the reserves) for more than 72 hours.¹⁹ If a Black person meets these qualifications, he or she may then be exempted from the general rule. The new regulations extend an equally narrow concession.

The message is clear. The state in South Africa, far from having granted any rights, is prepared only to extend a restricted concession, and this only to one section of the Black population at the expense of the other.

To focus only on what has changed would leave unnoticed the more important controls; those that have not changed, even for qualified workers. Although registration procedures have been simplified, it is still necessary for the contract of employment to be registered. Employers must still endorse the workers' reference book within three days of the worker taking up employment²⁰ and notify the labour bureau within three days of its termination.²¹ Labour bureaux must record these changes on the individual's record card.²² The record card contains a history of the individual's work and unemployment.

These records are intended to provide the means of ascertaining an individual's skills and experience so as to facilitate the placement of workers. Collectively, they are intended to provide a means of measuring the size, capabilities and level of employment of the labour force in the bureau's area of jurisdiction. The object of this is, in the official expression, 'to regulate the supply of labour with a view to correlating it with demand'.²³ It is, however, well known that labour bureaux pay little attention to the individual capabilities of Black workers, that their records provide no reliable measure of either labour availability or labour demand and that they have not been noticeably successful at 'correlating' supply and demand.²⁴

This does not mean that the record cards perform no serious function at all. Their use pre-dates the establishment of labour bureaux as they are known today. Registration of service contracts and the maintenance of files of record cards showing the work histories of Black workers were major pre-occupations of the pass offices, the antecedents of labour bureaux. The role of the record cards in these pass offices was to facilitate pass control. They were also referred to in disputes arising between workers and employers over the terms of work. Registration certificates which gave the same information as the current entry in the record card, had to be produced on demand and were rightly regarded by Black people as just one of many passes. The employment contract duplicate which must, under the new regulations, be produced as proof of employment by the worker appears to re-introduce this practice.²⁵

The record cards continue to play an important role in maintaining pass control under the present system. They make it possible to establish the employment status and history of an individual who has lost his reference book or employment contract duplicate. This has a special significance in the case of individuals suspected by the authorities of being chronically idle, Section 29 of the Urban Areas Act, which still remains in force despite the recommendation by the Riekert Commission that it be repealed,²⁶ makes a Black worker who remains unemployed in a prescribed area for more than 122 days liable to conviction as an 'idle Black'. The sentences for people convicted under Section 29 are severe. Although this section has proved difficult to apply as a mass expulsion measure, it poses a real threat to qualified workers.²⁷ For many, there is little that can be done to avoid this threat. Given the high rate of unemployment among Black workers in the cities, involuntary 'idleness' is inevitable for many.

It is doubtful whether the term 'reform' is justified when the case of qualified workers is considered. It becomes nothing less than false when the case of unqualified workers is considered. Who are the workers who fall into this category?

The term 'qualified' as used in this paper includes only Section 10(1) (a), (b) and (c) workers. Strictly speaking, there is a fourth category of workers who may qualify to remain in the prescribed areas. These are workers who qualify under Section 10(1) (d) of the Urban Areas Act. Section 19(1) (d) caters for workers who reside outside the prescribed areas, whether in non-prescribed areas (the white-owned farming districts) or in the Reserves (now officially called Black States). Many of these are people recruited directly by employers on annual contracts. These so-called contract workers are obliged to return home before the expiry of 360 days, even if only for a token period. But there is a 'call-in-card system' available to employers, which makes renewal of the contract automatic.²⁸ Employers may also obtain rural workers by going directly to a labour bureaux in one of the rural districts.

Individual workseekers wishing to go to the prescribed areas, or search for a job after they have already moved into a prescribed area, are also provided for in the regulations. But they have to obtain special authorisation. Unqualified workers found illegally in the prescribed area may in certain 'technical' case be allowed to stay and seek work after they have passed through the courts and aid-centres,²⁹ but most of these people are 'endorsed out' or given the alternative of work on white farms.

Not all workers who qualify under Section 10(1) (d) are rural workers. A substantial and growing number are 'commuters' who travel daily from quasi-urban townships and other settlements located in the Reserves, adjacent to the industrial centres. There are also many contract workers who are domiciled in the rural areas, but have few remaining material attachments to rural production.

Finally, not all workers in the prescribed areas who do not qualify under Section 10(1) (a), (b) and (c) are qualified under Section 19(1) (d). There is a further category which is mostly residual in the legislation, but is nevertheless important in numbers. These are the so-called illegal workers who bypass the labour bureau system entirely, unless they are discovered by the police or municipal labour officers; for simplicity's sake all these workers who do not qualify under section

19(1) (a), (b) or (c) are called disqualified workers in this paper.

The position of Black workers in the non-prescribed area, has not been substantially altered by the new regulations as far as registration procedures are concerned. They are affected by the changes in recruitment procedures. These apply to all Black workers recruited by employers or agents who are licenced in South Africa (excluding the areas defined as Black States) to recruit either in the non-prescribed areas or in the Reserves.

The major changes in recruitment regulations are the abolition of the system of runners and the introduction of a repatriation fee.³⁰ Runners are individuals hired by labour agents to seek out potential labour in the countryside, for recruitment. This system, and also that of free-lance labour agents (professional recruiters working on their own account), was found by the Riekert Commission to be subject to abuses. The absence of specific mention of free lance labour agents in the new regulations does not auger well for the future of the system.

The second change of importance relating to recruitment is the introduction of a 'repatriation' fee. An employer who employs a Black worker domiciled in the Reserves may be required to deposit an amount with the Labour Bureau which is sufficient to cover the cost of the worker's return journey home. This measure is aimed primarily at small employers who recruit sporadically in the Reserves. Employers in this category have a tendency to leave their workers stranded in the towns once they have finished with them. Large employers, those who use bulk requisitions and the call-in-card system, may be exempted from this at the discretion of the labour bureau. The regulations also allow for the exemption of daily commuters.³³

The sign

The significance of these changes in the recruitment procedures should be judged in the light of the Riekert Commission findings and recommendations on recruitment. The Commission found that large employers and established recruiting organisations were more reliable in carrying out registration procedures than smaller employers.³⁴ In the case of larger employers, recruitment was itself a means of securing control over workers moving from the Reserves to the towns in the prescribed areas. Where the problem lay, from the point of view of the Commission, was with the small employers and individual workseekers who failed to pass through the labour bureau machinery. With a view to control of the movement of these workers out of the Reserves, the Commission stressed that the attestation of contracts of employment of Section 10(1)(d) workers should be strictly enforced.³⁵ But this, it realised, would make little difference unless there was adequate machinery to implement the recommendation. Tribal labour bureaux, which did not always function effectively, could not be relied upon, especially after the "Black States" had been handed their 'independence'. The only solution was to create a new set of structures.

Here then has the significance of the 'detached' labour bureaux provided for in the new legislation.³⁶ They are undoubtedly intended to take over the tribal labour bureau's function of control over the 'efflux' of workers from the Reserves. They will be established at what the Riekert Commission described as 'assembly

centres' on the borders between the Reserves and the 'white' areas of South Africa.³⁷ Here they will attest and register contracts of service for those deemed to meet the necessary requirements and, subject to the availability of 'local labour' and 'suitable accommodation', channel workers to employers in the various regions and zones of the country.

On the basis of the Riekert recommendations, it may also be deduced that detached labour bureaux will be established in the Black urban townships. Here, in contrast to the 'assembly centres', the intention is to place emphasis on the provision of employment services. If the Riekert proposals are to be implemented, an attempt will be made to differentiate between workers according to their training and experience. These 'detached' labour bureaux will be concerned mainly with the placement of qualified urban workers.³⁸

As is well appreciated within the independent workers movement, the strategy put forward by the Riekert Commission Report hinges on the entrenchment of the division between qualified and disqualified sections of the Black population, a division which co-incides to some extent with that between urban and rural workers. The recommendations of the Commission detail how this division should be deepened through the controlled provision of housing, education, banning and, above all, jobs for Black workers and their families. This is a policy which relates directly but not exclusively, to the sphere of reproduction of the worker.

As regard control over the immediate sphere of production, the direct relations between the worker and the employer at the workplace, the state has provided itself with a twin Commission Report, the Wiehahn Commission on Labour Legislation.³⁹ This sets forth a strategy which is parallel to that of the Riekert Commission, but aimed primarily at dividing the Black workforce at the place of work through control of workers organisations.⁴⁰

In order to assess the new regulations, it is necessary to consider them in the light of the broader strategy laid out in the two reports. The new regulations represent a formal, legal rendering of one part of the overall strategy of the South African state currently directed at the Black population. Their immediate objective is to increase the occupational mobility of qualified workers, and at the same time increase control over the movement and entry into employment of dis-qualified workers. This has a direct economic significance for Black workers. It helps provide qualified workers with better access to jobs and thus higher incomes, and it tends to worsen the chances of dis-qualified workers. There is also a direct impact as regards unemployment. It is reduced amongst qualified and increased amongst disqualified workers.

These economic divisions are intended to provide the material basis for the maintenance of political divisions between strata of the Black workforce. A concession is given to qualified workers, at the expense of disqualified workers, and the former are expected to see it as in their interests to have the controls maintained.

The regulations, when backed by the machinery designed to enforce them, also have a direct political significance within the workplace. Disqualified workers are more vulnerable to dismissal from their jobs, and expulsion from the area. This is particularly important in periods of industrial struggle when the weakness of one section of the workforce is detrimental to the interests of all.

The regulations also have a direct political significance outside the workplace. The displacement of unemployment to the Reserves helps remove a serious threat from the major industrial centres. The system of regulations and the control machinery also play a crucial role in the broader political programme of apartheid. They help perpetuate the regional and political separation of the population. They are crucial in securing the infrastructure of the Bantu Authorities (called independent States) which rests on the people in the Reserves and their absent breadwinners. The existence of these structures helps prevent Black people, the entire population of the cities and the countryside, from participating in the political procedures of a unitary state.

The Bantu Labour Regulations and the labour bureau system designed to implement them provide powerful instruments whose potential to make the state's strategy work should not be under-estimated. But it is important not to be mesmerised by these regulations, nor by the apparently monolithic capacity of the state to implement them. Past experience teaches us that decades of control have failed to eliminate 'illegal' urban employment and urban unemployment. At present, according to the conservative estimates of the Department of Statistics, the rate of unemployment amongst Black workers in the metropolitan areas is over 11 per cent,⁴¹ a far cry from the objective of full urban employment.

The controls discussed in this paper are set up to contain the effects of fundamental forces in the system, but can never fully overcome these forces. Employers have a continuing interest in using contract workers, given the low cost of these workers, and their political weakness. Some employers will inevitably continue to exploit the particular vulnerability of illegal workers, despite the fines they face if they are caught. For their part, rival workers and those in rural townships and settlements, all of whom face deepening impoverishment as a consequence of increasing unemployment, and under-employment in the countryside, will seek work in the cities whatever the regulations.

The underlying forces which determine the system also operate against state measures directed at relationships between workers in the immediate sphere of production, without, however, automatically undermining them. With each new phase of expansion, the socialisation of production is increased. Workers are drawn together in common productive purpose within economic units of growing size. The objective binding together of the workers runs against the legal barriers erected by the state to divide them. What does it matter, on the production line, whether the state calls one worker a 10(1)(a) and another a 10(1)(d) Black?

It is on the basis of this tendency; the socialization of production; the experience of co-operative work and the common interest this creates amongst all workers, that the independent workers movement in South Africa has built itself. The ultimate interests of the workforce as a whole in South Africa as well as the interests of the particular section of workers represented by this movement has in overcoming the division imposed on workers by the state whether in their place of work or in their domestic lives. It is therefore necessary to add to the demand for independent democratic and non-racial organisations the demand for the abolition of enforced registration of employment contracts, the abolition of the pass laws and the dismantling of the machinery designed to enforce them.

Notes

1. Government Gazette 18th June 1980, R1208. All further references to the regulations will give only the chapter and regulation number of the altered regulations, not the gazette numbers.
2. Republic of South Africa, Report of the Commission of Inquiry in Legislation Affecting the Utilization of Manpower, R P 32/1979. Hereafter referred to by the abbreviation RC and the relevant paragraph number.
3. Act No. 25 of 1995.
4. VIII 17 (3) (a)
5. VIII 10(1)
6. VIII 16 (4) (a)
7. VIII 14 (3)
8. RC 4.105(l). Republic of South Africa, The White Paper on the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Legislation Affecting the Utilization of Manpower, W.P. T-1979. Hereafter referred to as WP, with the chapter and paragraph number. See WP A7(l).
9. VIII 14(2) and 15(1)(c) read with 16(7)(b)
10. VIII 14(4)
11. RC 4.104(d). See also W. van Breda, *The Employment Process*, Personnel Research Division, University of the Orange Free State, 1975, Pp119.
12. RC 4.105 (j) and WPA 7(j)
13. RC 4.104 (d)
14. South African Federated Chamber of Industries, selected memoranda and letters 1950's to 1970's.
15. VIII 24
16. VIII 14(1)
17. VIII 14(3) (a) (c)
18. VIII 14(4)
19. Act 25 of 1945 Section 10(1)
20. VIII 15(1) read with 16(4)(b) This is subject to the assumption discussed earlier in this paper regarding an error in the framing of the regulations.
21. VIII 17
22. VIII 16(1)(a). This is subject to the assumption made earlier in the paper.
23. VIII 2(a)
24. R C 4.84 Van Breda op cit p 115- 140.
25. VIII 15(1) (c)
26. RC 4.244(a)
27. See D Hindson, 'The Rule of the Labour Bureaux in the South African States' Urban Policy, with particular reference to the Riekert Commission Recommendations', African Studies Seminar Paper, 12th May, 1980.
28. VI 1(2)(g) and VIII 21(4)
29. VIII 10(2)(b)
30. IV 3 and VIII 27A
31. RC 4.8
32. VIII 27A
33. VIII 27A(2)
34. R.C. r 44 (b)
35. R C 453 (a)
36. VII 1(7)(a)
37. R C 4 45 (b)
38. R C 4 105 (b) and 4 105 (i)
39. Republic of South Africa, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Labour Legislation, Part I, R P 97, 1979. Hereafter referred to as W C with the paragraph number following.
40. W C 3 43- 3.63.4 and for the minority report 3 73-3 82
41. Republic of South Africa, Department of Statistics, Current Population Survey, P 27 3, 28th May, 1980, table 6.

Minimum Wages, Exploitation and Botswana's Unemployment Crisis

Michael Lipton

I

It is natural to think that the poor must gain from a high, rising **minimum wage rate** (MWR). The poorest 50-60 per cent of people in Botswana, however, have probably got worse off as a result of the high MWR, of its recent rapid increase, and of its spread and homogenisation across sectors of the economy. Why? Is there an appropriate alternative strategy for Botswana's poorest groups?

Section II sets out the data on Botswana's MWR, and on the affected groups. Section III considers the conditions in which a high, rising or uniform MWR is likely to benefit the poorest and shows that they do not apply to Botswana; in particular, both the share of national product and the prospects of formal-sector work (which is relatively well-paid) for the rural and peri-urban poor have been, and are being, substantially reduced by a wage regime that benefits a 'labour elite' and neither reduces the profit rate nor allows the poor to share in formal-sector profits or wages. Section IV summarises the survey evidence that rising MWRs damage employment prospects, especially for the unskilled, the rural and the female. Section V sets this evidence into the context of Botswana's deepening crisis of unemployment. Section VI considers whether, nevertheless, high and rising MWRs are necessary to prevent 'exploitation'.

Finally, Section VII suggests that only through an alternative strategy - major redistribution of access to income, power, assets, skills and sectorally-readjusted public investment, together with a tough incomes policy - can Botswana's poorest people achieve the gains that have in the past been sought through MWR policies. Such policies should not be **dismantled**, because they can serve as beacons for a future in which Botswana's poor have become much more powerful, and in which their Government is able and willing to keep employment levels high. However, until then, any further rise in or sectoral extension of MWRs, without accompanying rises in the efficiency of labour, must damage the real income and employment of the poorest.

II

Botswana has two categories of MWR. The lowest Government industrial-class wage sets a 'floor' for about 19 000 local and national-government

employees and perhaps 4 500 public-sector teachers (the 'floor' is effective for many of the 7 500 Industrial Class workers; teachers, and most non-IC public employees, receive far more than this minimum but may be affected via differentials). The public-sector MWR has been set by Salaries Commissions, chaired by Ministers Makgekene (1974), Chiepe (1976) and Mmono (1978), which reviewed all public-sector emoluments.

For private and parastatal firms, MWRs are set by **Wages Councils** for employees in five sectors: hotels and catering, wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, garages and mining and quarrying. These Councils have overlapping membership (representing employers, unions and the Department of Labour, but not other Ministries such as Finance and Development Planning) and a common chairman and meet simultaneously. They form enough of a unit to have combined, in 1977, to 'homogenise' the two formerly distinct private-sector MWRs (see the Table) and to establish, for the first time, a separate MWR for guards, watchmen, etc.

The Wages Councils issue a joint report to the Department of Labour, which may propose changes to Cabinet, but has apparently not so far found this necessary. The Salaries Commission, on which several key Ministries (e.g., in 1978 Education and Finance, among others) are represented and to which civil servants give evidence on policy and cash resources as well as on labour, reports to Cabinet, which does on occasion modify the outcome (for example by appointing an 'Anomalies Commission' in July-August 1978), but not so far in the direction of reducing proposed wage rises. At least in recent years, neither the National Employment, Manpower and Incomes Council nor the Wages Policy Committee appears to have played any part in Salaries Commission or Wages Council deliberations.

The Table shows the path of MWRs, public and private, in the past decade. Only formal-sector employees (excluding domestic servants and agricultural workers) are covered by MWR legislation. In 1976, these numbered 52 000 among Batswana citizens;¹ many earned far above MWRs, but - because of the working of labour markets and of attempts to maintain differentials - often earned more than would have been the case without MWRs.

Since the domestic citizen workforce in 1978 was about 365 000², of whom only 55 000 could have been covered (directly or via differentials), it is important to compare the lot of the 'MWR sector' with that of others. Hence we should take trends in the Table alongside trends in available real GDP per resident. Between 1969 and 1973-4, this roughly doubled³; this rise was comparable with that enjoyed by public-sector workers until mid-1974, while private formal-sector workers may have fallen behind.

However, between 1973-4 and 1976-7, real output per person fell by 9 per cent,⁴ and has hardly risen since. Yet the public-sector MWR exploded in April 1974, and (with fluctuations) has been maintained since; private-sector MWRs have risen in a more rapid and sustained fashion. There are

TABLE : TRENDS IN "MINIMUM" WAGES, 1969-78

Date of commencement	Government ^b	Hourly minimum wage (t) ^a		Cost of living ^e (March 1974 - 100)	Real hourly minimum wage (April 1969 - 100)	
		Private: hotels, catering wholesale, retail	Private: other (except ag., domestic service)		Government	Private: hotels retail, etc.
(Say) April 1969	7.0	(4.5 ^d)	72.8	100	(100)	100
1 April 70	8.9	(4.5 ^d)	75.1	123.2	96.9	(96.9)
1 April 73	11.4	(4.5 ^d)	88.8	133.5	(82.0)	(82.00)
1 April 74	22.4	9.5	100.6	231.6	152.8	213.9
1 April 76	26.9	(9.5)	124.1	225.4	(123.9)	(173.4)
1 July 77	(26.9)	20.0	147.2	(190.0)	219.8	219.8
1 April 78	31.8	(20.0)	159.7	206.9	(202.6)	(202.6)
3 October 78	36.1	24.0	166.1	226.1	245.5	245.5

a Thebe; until April 1976, cent wages multiplied by 0.95

b 8½ hour day until 1 Oct. 1978; thereafter 7½ - hour day.

c Manufacturing, construction, garages, mining and quarrying.

d 8R/month "average minimum" (not legally binding): D. Ghai, A Long-term Wages Policy for Botswana, Nairobi, 23.5.70.

e Average for middle of preceding and current months. Statistical Bulletin, Rec. 1978, p.7, and other Statistical Bulletins, Abstracts and Newsletters. Latest available figure, where possible for Low Income used. Original base March 1974; 1969 and 1970 data linked via

GDP deflator (see NAB 1974-5). Interpolation where necessary.

Figures in single brackets indicate no legally binding change from previous wage figure in same column.

four possible ways to reconcile this with falling income-per-person.

First, the rise in MWRs might have had little effect on actual rates because (a) few people had been receiving less than the new, increased minima, or (b) the rates were not widely observed, and/or (c) there was little impact, via differentials, on formal-sector wage rates above the new MWRs. Both (a) and (b) are ruled out by the survey findings (See IV); so substantially, is (c).⁵

Second, profits and other property incomes might have 'taken the strain' of huge, real rises in minimum wage-rates alongside falling real output. To a certain extent this did happen, but as a pure arithmetical coincidence, not as a causal phenomenon. Much of the boom of 1969-73 had been linked to the construction of the Shashe complex. The withdrawal of much of the construction capital, the rise in oil prices and the losses at BCL (due to technical problems and world metals prices) reduced profits after 1973-4 - indeed this helps to explain the fall in real GDP per person. Moreover, the 1976-9 recession in RSA induced some businessmen (especially in construction) to operate in Botswana at lower profit rates than hitherto. But in no way did Botswana's labour - even the relatively well-off formal-sector workers protected by MWR legislation - 'finance' the increases in MWRs by using them to erode the rate of profit on capital. The relatively free movement of finance between RSA and Botswana means that Botswana's post-tax profit rates are to a great extent internationally determined. It would be wishful thinking to hope that rises in MWRs in Botswana could be met by an effective squeeze on profits.

Third, rising MWRs might be compatible with falling real GDP-per-person if employment prospects fell. This has certainly happened; formal-sector citizen employment, growing at about 5 per cent yearly in 1970-74, has since slowed to about 2 per cent yearly,⁶ though natural increase of the working force has been over 3 per cent⁷ (and on top of a fall of over 10 000 in mine migrants working in RSA between 1977 and early 1979).⁸ The **economics** of how rising MWRs affect employment, are reviewed later; here I record merely the **arithmetical** contribution, from such damage, to the explanation of how Botswana pushed up MWRs so rapidly while real GDP was stagnating.

Finally, rising real formal-sector wage rates - given the growth of formal-sector employment prospects and of real profits - might be consistent with falling real GDP per person, if real non-formal incomes per worker were falling. Unfortunately, there are indications that this was happening.

In face of rapid population growth, crop production shows no significant uptrend;⁹ nor do the real rewards (mostly in kind) of traditional-sector farm labourers, as reported in the anthropological surveys of the Ministry of Local Government and Lands. Between 1971-2 and 1976-7, the ratio between income per formal-sector employee and income per self-employed person

(mainly for agriculturists) rose by **at very least** 20 per cent.¹⁰

Hence the rising real wages of the formal sector, together with falling real GDP per person and exogenously-determined profits, hit the poorest - those in the informal sector - in two ways: by cutting the income-per-person available for them, so that the rural (especially farming) and urban informal sectors bore the brunt of down-trends in GDP; and by reducing their prospects of formal-sector jobs. Even the 'minimum' wage, moreover, represents relative wealth to a poor man; for example, before he could expect to earn the public-sector MWR, a traditional farmer of average efficiency would need to own 33 ha. of cereal land or 55 cattle.(11)

These big, growing disparities do not correspond to stated policy, to trade-union power, or to 'supply and demand'. Official policy remains to align real MWRs with average real farm incomes, to concentrate compensation for price rises upon the poorest and to align wage rises with rises in productivity.(12) Trade unions operate mainly (though not only) among artisans, and the leaders, at least, seem ready to cooperate with the above policy in return for guarantees of rising employment.(13) Numerous applicants competed for each public-sector unskilled job even before the April 1978 increase, and there is ample evidence of substantial overt unemployment since 1974 at least.

III

How should we expect a high, rising MWR to reduce or to increase the numbers of Botswana living in poverty, or the extent to which they fall below an adequate level of living?(14) Pseudo-rigorous language, either of theory (necessary and sufficient conditions) or of applied analysis (correlations, regressions, etc.), is best avoided.

At the level of theory, too little is known - especially under conditions such as those prevailing in Botswana - about the relative importance of three **frameworks**, and hence sets of relationships between MWR and numbers in poverty: 'neo-classical', between the wage paid in a specific occupation and the supply and demand of hours worked in it; 'Keynesian' relationships between the total wage-bill, total spending on goods and services, and the 'derived' demand for Botswana labour to make them; and 'power-class' relationships, affecting the capacity of groups of people to improve their circumstances by organised action (e.g., strikes, lockouts, political pressure, negotiation) given particular levels or changes of MWR. Probably responses to MWR affecting the welfare of the poor via neo-classical relationships are, in Botswana, much more important than via Keynesian relationships (because the economy is so 'open' that most extra wage demand leaks abroad) and responses via class-power relationships favour the organised sectors - larger employers, skilled and public-sector employees - at the expense of the

(mainly rural and self-employed) poor.

Anyway, there are three theories, sometimes conflicting, about the relation of MWR to employment. Can we do better with applied analysis - 'just looking at the facts?' This is always risky in the absence of clear, prior theory to be tested. Section IV presents results suggesting substantial damage to employment from the big rise in MWR in mid-1977. But the results catch only short-run effects, mainly 'neo-classical' in nature. Probably 'class-power' effects take considerably longer, and 'Keynesian' effects rather longer; and even the 'neo-classical' effects of a wage rise, especially in inducing employers to substitute machines for labour, take time to be fully felt.

Not only are we uncertain about **how long** it takes for MWR changes to affect employment; the **exact relationship** is not certain either. Suppose we make strictly 'neo-classical' assumptions: that all firms maximise profits; that they compete; and that a change of $x\%$ in total output requires a change of exactly $x\%$ in total costs. Even then, the impact of a change in the MWR, either on employment or on the total wage-bill, depends heavily on the extent to which employers can readily vary the ratios of capital to labour. There are, therefore, plenty of 'grey areas' in analysing the effects of MWR.

Yet we can be almost sure that the findings in Section IV do not deceive us: that high, rising MWRs substantially reduce employment. True, the 'grey areas' preclude pseudo-rigour. But they do not prevent analytical progress altogether. In all the three frameworks - neo-classical, Keynesian, class-power - the impact of changing MWR on the poorest depends on the **alternative responses open** to the agents: how can they change their behaviour after MWR changes? Neo-classical approaches stress alternatives for individuals: workers, employers, the self-employed, the unemployed. Keynesian approaches stress alternatives for consumers (and responses, by firms and 'the State', to these). Power-class approaches stress alternatives for concerted action by groups or classes: big capital, unionised workers, 'peasants', etc. All three areas of 'alternative response' render it likely that in Botswana exogenous, legislative action to raise, extend the coverage of, or homogenise MWR will have an unfavourable impact on the poorest groups. That is made more probable by certain central arithmetical facts about workforce structure at Botswana's level of development.

The assumptions, likely if fulfilled to be linked to a **favourable** impact of MWR on the poorest, are considered briefly below, in the light of Botswana's realities - and starting with the arithmetic. A high, rising MWR will help the poor to the extent that an economy fulfils:

(i) ARITHMETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

1. A large proportion of poor people depend for work on activities where

MWRs are paid, or are related to other wage-rates by fixed differentials. In 1978, only about 55 per cent of Batswana work-time was used at all (Section V); of resident Batswana workers fewer than 60 000 - about 15 per cent - worked in the formal sector within Botswana (Section II); and at most 35 per cent of such workers are in sectors and at levels of pay, such that MWR changes are likely to affect their actual wage-rates. Apart from these low levels of 'MWR workers', Section IV presents evidence that rising MWRs retard **growth** in demand for those workers affected by them, and hence in all these three low percentages.

2. **For poor people actually or potentially affected by MWRs, the difference between the formal-sector wage and the return in alternative occupations is small.** If that were so, any worker dismissed when MWR rose would lose little. In practice, alternative rewards in Botswana are far, and increasingly, below MWR;(15) while alternatives in RSA are decreasingly available, acceptable or reliable.
3. If the formal job is lost, an income floor, not too far below MWR, exists to prevent destitution. Neither State social security, nor family and community, provides such safeguards in Botswana.
4. Much of the income of the poorest unless they retain employment in 'MWR sectors' (see (1) above, derives from 'expansible' activities in sectors where levels of work and reward are independent of MWR. Only superficially does this apply in Botswana. Of the four candidate sectors -- domestic mining, government, foreign work, and agriculture -- **domestic mining** does have fairly 'set' technologies and very high capital/labour ratios, but these, while reducing responsiveness to the (anyway small) impact of MWR on mining wages, also means that the mines of Botswana employ a smallish share of even the formal workforce; even if (as is unlikely) that changes significantly, the rate of improvement will be virtually unaffected by increased availability of workers from other sectors due to rising MWRs, because Botswana's mines do not face shortages of unskilled labour. **Government's** capacity and will to finance extra jobs is not likely to rise independently of any deterrent from rising public-sector MWRs. While the absorptive capacity of **foreign (RSA) work** for Batswana is hardly at all affected by MWR in Botswana -- and while many remittances go to very poor rural Batswana¹⁶ -- access to such work is dwindling. The residual sector remains **domestic agriculture**, therefore; but the constraints on expanding output are animal-draught, water, and technology, not labour-power, so that the release, into agricultural work, of employees no longer in demand (e.g. after MWR rose) would reduce the available agricultural income per worker.

(ii) **ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ALTERNATIVES FOR INDIVIDUALS:**

5. **Formal-sector price-elasticity of demand for workers whose wage is affected by**

MWR is low, so that few jobs are lost when MWR rises. This could be the case for three reasons. (A) Few substitutes for such labour might exist; but the data in Section IV suggest short-run substitution of family and semi-skilled supervisory labour for unskilled workers after MWR increases, while long-run capital-labour substitution is also likely. (B) Or there might initially be excess profits; that is rather unlikely in the conditions of Botswana in 1977–8 (recession, foot-and-mouth, etc.), and anyway would merely render it **feasible** for an individual employer to keep on all workers full-time despite rising MWR – such a course would not normally be made **optimal** for him by initial excess profit alone. (C) Finally, a rising MWR might be associated with higher productivity. However, (a) MWRs are flat-rate and not output-linked; (b) as regards employers, it is not clear why attainable productivity rises should not have been sought with equal success before MWR rose – indeed, a rise means that employers have less cash-per-worker to supervise or assist such a rise, but not affect the extra profit-per-worker that such a rise could entail; (c) as regard employees, any suggestion that they will eat more, and thus work better (and be more attractive to employ even at a higher wage) when MWR rises, is implausible at initial MWR levels in Botswana; even if it were true, GNP must be enhanced, given the availability of food, by transferring nourishment towards the poorer and thus hungrier agricultural and informal-sector workforce, not away from it by raising the formal sector's share in food consumption.

6. **The poorest groups with lowest productivity and/or fewest alternatives are exempt from, or subject to special and lower, MWRs.** This assumption – which would protect such groups from (otherwise especially high) liability to retrenchment if MWR were raised or 'homogenised' – applies only to a small extent in Botswana. MWRs are largely homogenised: the same for women as for men; for rural and urban areas; for slack as for busy seasons; for smaller as for larger (and hence more capital-intensive and labour-productive) employers; and since 1977 for sectors normally employing less-productive workers and paying lower wages (hotels and catering, wholesale and retail trade) as for the more capitalised and skill-intensive sectors. A given level of MWR, or a given rise in it, therefore comprises a **larger** cash-value, when the worker's contribution (average or marginal) to product is deducted – and a much larger proportion of the value of that contribution – in the case of relatively 'weak' sections of working groups, than in the case of 'stronger' groups with higher productivity, better alternatives, and thus better market rates of pay. Accordingly it is the poorest people in the formal sector – the rural, the women, the unskilled, employees in small firms – who are likeliest to find that a rise in, or 'homogenisation' to urban or manufacturing levels of, MWRs substantially reduces their economic appeal to employers. Since it is also such groups who are likeliest to fall below a given MWR, or therefore to be affected directly by a rising MWR, one would expect them to suffer the most serious rises in unemployment when MWR rises. Section IV confirms this.

Similarly, such groups if **outside** the formal sector are likeliest, on account of rising MWRs, to experience greater difficulty in entering it. Since MWRs do

not apply to domestic service and farm labour, actual and potential workers in these sectors do not suffer in this way, except to the extent that the rising MWR pushes up the supply price so that less well-off employers, e.g. schoolteachers, are induced or forced to lay off domestic servants.

The bad effects of rising, homogenised MWRs on the poorest groups stem largely from their lack of assets. If they could plough their own land with their own beasts, their alternatives to formal-sector employment would be more, and their losses from unemployment therefore less; or if they corporately owned the formal-sector equipment with which they worked (as at Lentswela-Oodi Weavers), a rise in MWR would comprise an intra-working-owner transfer and a purely accounting shift between 'wages' and 'profits' of wage-earners.

7. **Potential labour-suppliers are well-informed.** If so they will move swiftly into any available empty workplaces rendered attractive by a rising MWR, and will not leave self-employment in search of job chances that have been reduced due to the high or rising MWR. In Botswana — with an active press and radio, but no national network of labour exchanges — there is a 'perverse' possibility of excellent information about MWR entitlements and increases, but bad or absent information about consequent falls in formal-sector job prospects relative to workforce. Hence when MWR rises, very poor people may abandon the substance of informal or self-employed work, for the shadow — apparently more attractive, actually attenuating — of a formal-sector MWR job.

(iii) **KEYNESIAN ASSUMPTIONS ASSISTING FAVOURABLE
MWR-EMPLOYMENT LINKS:**

8. **Rising MWRs, via rising wage-rates, increase aggregate demand for goods and services.** This will happen only if demand for labour declines much less, proportionately, than the increase in the actual wage-rate. It must be much less, and therefore raise the wage-bill substantially, if aggregate demand is to rise; because those who benefit from a higher MWR tend, for some time, to save most of their extra 'windfall' income. We cannot be sure; but Section IV suggests that groups directly affected by rises in wage-rates due to rising MWR suffered a fall, in 1977–8, in job prospects of about 9 per cent relative to those not directly affected. Probably the relative rise in wages actually paid was below 9 per cent. This suggests, not very conclusively, that (8) is not fulfilled.
9. **Aggregate demand increases, due to a rising wage-bill following MWR increases, are sufficiently concentrated on the output of sectors that are (a) within Botswana, (b) able to produce more (not just raise prices) when demand rises, and (c) labour-intensive, to raise demand for Botswana unskilled labour sufficiently to outweigh the disincentive effects on employers of a rise in the price of such labour relative to other factors of production.** Even if (8) is fulfilled, (9) is very unlikely to be. Much of the extra wage bill will be spent on food, which is labour-intensive, but seasonal and hence particularly price-inelastic, short-run supply from farmers in Botswana. Both extra food and other items of increased

working-class consumption can be imported readily from RSA. Hence the main impact of extra demand from a higher wage-bill for poorer employees is (a) in RSA, (b) if somehow directed towards Botswana inflationary rather than generative of higher output and thus employment, and hence (c) although probably for products with relatively high labour content when produced in Botswana, not likely to generate much extra derived demand for Botswana labour through Keynesian effects, except perhaps to a small extent in retail trade.

(iv) **CLASS-POWER ASSUMPTIONS:**

10. **Poor people are organised (a) effectively; (b) so as to represent and unify those with common interests in, or similar resources to respond to, particular changes in formal-sector circumstances of employment; (c) with an order of effectiveness and of priorities stressing the unemployed first, the rural and informal sectors second, the poor employed third, and better-off, skilled, urban, male workers last; (d) seeking to control access to jobs, assets and total income, and not just to raise wages.** In Botswana effective trade-union organisation is concentrated on artisans, miners, clerical workers (e.g. banks), the public sector (including teachers), and such skilled groups as diamond sorters. Perhaps because of strong family ties to rural relatives, as well as a sense of responsibility and decency, most union leaders are more concerned with employment for low-income groups — much more willing to trade wage-restraint for employment — than one might expect from the composition of their membership. However, that does not suffice to fulfil assumption (10). Traditional small farmers and attached workers (especially the very poor Basarwa and Bakgalakgadi), are almost wholly unorganised, as are the unemployed and most off-farm informal family-sector workers (Carpenters, brewers, etc.). rural and urban. Organised workers' groups, and intellectuals and parliamentarians sympathetic to them, stress wages rather than assets, and embody the aspirations chiefly of urban male artisans. For such groups and persons, rising MWRs — plus maintained differentials — constitute all too easy and generous-sounding a 'Fabian' concession to 'the poor'; if the latter thereby lose their jobs, articulate complaint is unlikely (though the long-run force of the undischarged reservoir of anger, especially if swollen by a flood of returning migrants, should not be underestimated).

11. **'The State', having willed high MWRs, does not then use them as a financial argument against employment.** This condition is not satisfied in Botswana. The choice of activities in the Molepolole brigades; labour-intensity in rural roadbuilding; the choice of tractors rather than oxen to plough Government research farms: these are among State or State-influenced decisions influenced in a money-saving but employment-harming way by the high and rising minimum Government industrial wage. Furthermore, rises in that wage, during a budgeted accounting period, induce local authorities in particular to defer new labour-intensive activities, to avoid decasualisation in the Industrial Class, and otherwise to restrain their levels of labour use.

12. 'The State' is controlled by people, groups or classes that – either to advance their interests or for reasons of welfare or 'insurance' – are urgently concerned with high, rising levels of employment, self-employment, labour use, and hence income, among the poorest groups. This would produce a tendency to correct any possible damage to such groups, via unemployment, from rising MWRs. In practice, however, there is a major prospect of wide-ranging legislation, ostensibly to protect employees, with the likely effect of further raising the real cost of employing them.¹⁷ The fate of such proposals, as compared with the fate of the 'Employment Report', will provide some guidance as to the preferences of Botswana's Government, as between livelihoods for the poor and wage-rises for the urban labour elite. A non-Motswana, like myself, must hope that such decisions will be taken by Botswana, not by that small, but vocal and influential, minority of Botswana's expatriate Western officials who are dedicated to Western-style regulations on health, building or conditions of work; who are largely unfamiliar with the conditions, motives or options of Botswana's rural-poor; and whose concern to reduce poverty and even unemployment, while genuine, is ineffective due to their ignorance of the facts of either markets or power, combined with a sense of virtue in pressing for wages and work conditions that – however harmful to employment and output in Botswana – conform to Western standards set by Fabian meliorism.

IV¹⁸

In mid-1978, an attempt was made by Ms. Szawelski at IDM (at the request of the Wages Councils) to assess the effect on employment of the huge MWR rises of July 1977. Overall employment in Botswana is affected by many things. There is a steady uptrend as more people enter the formal-sector. Also in 1977-8 there was some recovery from recession, a downward impact from foot-and-mouth, etc. The overall employment level from July 1977 to July 1978 rose by 1 percent, as against a fall of 7 percent, from July 1976 to July 1977, in the sampled firms (which were confined to those trading at all three dates).¹⁹

How did the MWR increase affect employment and hours of work? The only way to answer this question is to compare the positions of workers affected by the MWR rise, and of workers less-affected or unaffected. Workers likely to have been affected are:

- (i) Those in sectors that earned less to start with;
- (ii) Those in sectors receiving a large rise (the July 1977 rise was from 10t/hr. to 20t/hr. for hotels and catering and wholesale and retail trading; from 14t/hr. to 20t/hr. for garages, manufacturing, construction and mining and quarrying; and from unregulated status to 10t/hr. for watchmen);
- (iii) Those with relatively low productivity (e.g. the unskilled or the rural) that might fall below the new MWR.

In all three groups we see a worsening employment position, as compared with workers outside the groups. This suggests a clear negative effect of the 1977 wage rise upon employment.

The wholesale-retail sector had the largest rise in the MWR actually paid. Employment in this sector fell 3 percent in 1977-78 (as against the 1 percent overall

rise in employment for firms in all sectors sampled). Hotels and entertainment, with many low-paid workers, also had a large effective rise in minimum wage. Employment fell by 2 percent in those sectors.

Unskilled employment fell by 1 percent and female unskilled employment fell by 7 percent. Employment of nightwatchmen fell by 4 percent (though the sample was small). Yet skilled employment rose by 4 percent in 1976–77.

Small firms showed slower employment growth than large firms. It is smaller firms that are likelier to employ low-productivity workers, and to retrench them when the minimum wage rises.

According to the author's draft summary, "the survey shows a reduction in the length of the working week -- focused on the sectors experiencing the largest MWR increase and on the lowest income groups". The proportion of employed unskilled females who worked under 40 hours per week rose by 47 percent.

Employment in rural firms fell by 3 percent (as against a 10 percent rise in urban firms). Small villages, where the skill-level and the impact on output of employees are likeliest to fall below the value of the higher MWR, showed the largest fall. Exclusion of border villages possibly affected by hostilities, and of areas in the 'closed zone' due to foot-and-mouth, improves the employment performance of rural areas, but does not alter the ranking: small villages did worst, then large villages, then towns. This conforms with expectations of what would have happened, if the actual legislated wage rise had harmed employment; for the smaller and more remote the locality, the more actual wages would be low enough to be under the new MWR.

The author writes in her draft summary: "Any impact of the (increased) MWR is likely to manifest itself via the employment of those earning below the (new 20t/hr.) minimum prior to the July 1977 changes. The survey shows a fall in employment in (this) wage category of 37 percent (between July) 1977 and July 1978". Some of these moved into the 20–23t/hr. category in conformity with the law, but the numbers employed in this category also declined. Ms. Szawełska concludes that -- on the reasonable assumption that hardly any workers earning below 20t/hr. before July 1977 rose to over 23t/hr. by 1978 -- "the decline in employment" of people earning under 20t/hr. before July 1977 was "about nine percent" by July 1978. This dramatic finding -- while overall employment rose by one percent -- may reflect in part the properties of the sample or the survey methods, but a substantial negative impact on employment -- on top of a fall in hours of work -- seems proven. The decline (in the size of the group earning below 20t/hr. before July 1977) was even faster in the wholesale/retail sector, where the effective minimum wage had risen most rapidly.

Just under 1 percent of employees in July 1977 had, according to their employers, been dismissed by July 1978 because, according to the employers, "it no longer paid to employ them at the new MWR". That would raise the numbers unemployed in the formal-sector by 6–10 percent at any one time (of course many individuals dismissed find new jobs). In addition, there was an impact -- not readily measurable -- via the non-replacement of workers terminating voluntarily. Further, 23 percent of firms said they would discharge workers if the MWR were now further increased from 20t/hr. to 22t/hr. -- let alone the 24t/hr. proposed by

the Wages Councils in October 1978, and accepted by the Government.

Perhaps because there was little time to order and install machinery between the wage rise and the survey, hardly any replacement of men by machines was reported. But there was considerable replacement of unskilled labour (whose wage had been raised sharply) by skilled labour (little affected by the rise, because mostly well above the new MWR) and of wage-paid labour by family labour.

A large proportion of firms, mostly in wholesale and retail trade, had raised prices due to the higher minimum wage. This would further reduce employment, because rising prices reduce demand for goods and services. Also it would reduce the amount of real national income left for groups not benefiting them from the MWR increase. Price rises would make it likely that these groups – not profit receivers – paid for the wage rises!

While one or two of these effects might be accounted for by factors other than the rise in the MWRs, it would be stretching coincidence much too far to resist the conclusion, from all the survey observations, that the July 1977 MWR determinations seriously reduced employment and hours-of-work in the affected groups. These happen to be the poorest groups among those seeking formal employment: women, the unskilled, shopworkers, people in small villages, nightwatchmen, etc. That must be set against the benefits of the increase for those who kept their jobs.

V

It is not obvious how to make that trade-off. My concern is not to attack Botswana's commitment to MWRs, but to stress that big, sudden rises have real and major costs – in both employment and income share – to the poorest. These have to be set against income gains for less-poor, but far from rich, employees, around public or private MWR levels, but secure in their jobs. It is arguable that such employees could be helped by higher incomes to act as an organised, unionised 'vanguard' for a movement of poor people that will ultimately benefit the rural and the jobless, the Basarwa and the Bakgala kgadi; and that growth (and diamond surpluses) will quite soon recruit such groups to the formal workforce that gains from high MWRs. I don't find that argument plausible, but it is not contemptible. What is, in my judgement, contemptible is to neglect the theory and the evidence that high, rising MWRs do increasing actual harm to the income and job prospects of the poorest – whatever may be the offsetting potential benefits to their long-run 'mobilisation'.

To evaluate the seriousness of the damage to employment – so as to set it against the possible gains to wage income from a high or rising MWR – we must assess the seriousness of Botswana's employment situation itself. Botswana faces a severe, deepening employment crisis.

If 1978 had been a normal year climatically and otherwise, with no foot-and-mouth disease, Botswana would have provided work for about 200 000 persons (assuming they wanted only 240 days of work per year). There were, however, at least 365 000 persons available for work.²⁰ This backlog of 165 000 represents underutilisation of about 45 percent of the workforce. It is being swollen by:—

(a) Natural increase in the labour force;

- (b) The prospects of return migration from RSA: 55–65 000 Batswana now work there, but mineworkers alone fell from over 30 000 to about 20 000 between 1977 and 1978, and no novices have been accepted from Botswana for over two years;²¹
- (c) The impact of the Tribal Grazing Lands Programme in reducing employment and self-employment on non-freehold livestock -- currently providing about 60 000 years of work -- as some *mafisa* and employee herders are replaced by fences.

We can estimate (a) at about 130 000 over the decade 1978–88; (b) and (c) are more speculative but it would be unwise to allow for less than 60 000 over the decade.

Yet -- facing an unutilised supply of 45 percent of the workforce, a backlog likely to increase by at least 5 percent yearly - labour requirements in Botswana have been sluggish. The growth of citizen employment in the formal-sector, about 5 percent yearly in 1970–74, has declined to about 2 percent yearly since, with the end of work on the Shashe complex; some 60 000 Batswana are now in domestic formal-sector jobs.²² There has been little sign of growth, in output or self-employment, in arable agriculture. Although livestock -- thanks to good rains, pastures, and EEC prices -- have multiplied to record herd sizes and have thereby provided more productive work, such factors are unreliable in the long term. Both livestock and crop farming are threatened by the downswing in the drought cycle -- the late rains of 1979–80 were an ominous warning.

Does this add up to crisis? Massive underuse of labour is appallingly wasteful, but does it threaten the security of the State? Traditionally most of the workless have been dispersed, illiterate rural women, relying on migrant remittances and/or domestic service for income support. But increasingly the workless are young people, getting an education, coming to town, and acquiring leaders. Young men, willing to take risks to improve their lot, can no longer do so as novice workers in RSA mines. Decisions to spread and improve primary schooling, while fully justified, promise to offload, by the mid-1980s, large number of 'completers' with expectations of and qualifications for, but no prospects of obtaining, formal-sector jobs. These familiar formulae, especially superimposed on an appalling initial body of underused, poor workers with few prospects of rapid absorption in agricultural self-employment, do not promise either stable development or functional radical change, but chronic frustration tempered with irruptions of anarchy. Not merely a democratic polity in many respects exemplary, but prospects for any manageable and well-distributed development benefits, are at risk in Botswana from a swollen army of increasingly urban, educated, self-aware unemployed.²³ The dangers, in the political context of Southern Africa especially, need no embroidery, save to stress that diamond-based surpluses can help only if directed towards employment-intensive economic activity; as mere overflows from private affluence into public privilege, via taxation to support a high-wage elite workforce, these surpluses would only sharpen the provocation to the poor.

This discussion can provide no more than Cassandra-like summary of a detailed argument, based on conservative statistical projections.²⁴ If it is even roughly right, however, it argues strongly against doing anything that makes matters worse.

Indirect gains to the relatively poor, resulting from high, rising, spread or homogenised MWRs, would have to be massive and guaranteed, if they were to justify any risk of serious exacerbation of an already critical employment situation.

VI

But is MWR needed to prevent morally intolerable 'exploitation'?²⁵ There are six main senses in which it is claimed that an employer may 'exploit' his workers via their pay.

- (a) As a sole buyer, or as one of a very few buyers, of labour-power, he may obtain labour more cheaply than competitive employers would be prepared to bid for it, and thereby makes excess profit. (This we term 'monopsony power').
 - (b) He may use their workers' ignorance of, or artificial inability to move to, jobs elsewhere, to pay less than they could get elsewhere.
 - (c) The very existence of a return to capital is seen, by some, as 'exploitation' of those who sell their labour-power and do not own capital.
 - (d) Many people feel that it is morally wrong for very rich people (e.g. most expatriates, or big cattle-owners) to pay an employee much less than they would be prepared to pay if they had to do so.
 - (e) It is often regarded as 'exploitative' for a worker to receive less than some fixed amount, e.g. a Poverty Datum Line (PDL).
 - (f) A worker may be forced into an 'improper' contract, or an existing contract may be 'abused', because of a special advantage enjoyed by the employer, or because the worker does not know his rights.
- (a) Objectively, there are hundreds of buyers of unskilled labour-power in Botswana (though their total demand is less than the supply, at MWR). Hence there would, if labour were mobile and informed, be no monopsony power. In practice, however, monopsony power is felt by:—
- (i) Attached farm labourers (especially on cattle posts): because only their employer can provide a nearby job (and often water and shelter for themselves and their families), and because they cannot (for reasons of language, information, transport, or other people's 'tribal' preference) readily move elsewhere. These people are not, and could not be without damaging their prospect of a job even further, subject to MWRs. The best way to assist them to overcome 'subjective local monopsony' is to give them options (especially access to land and cattle), information and education.
 - (ii) Workers with particular non-transferable skills (e.g. diamond valuers) in fact bid for by only one firm (or a very few firms). Here the position is one of bilateral monopoly — the workers, too, can 'exploit' the scarcity of their skill — and anyway MWRs are hardly relevant.

In general, if the cost of labour to a monopsonist is pushed up artificially, he buys less. MWR remedies for his exploitation, therefore, are at the expense of the unemployed. Instead, information, employer competition, and above all employee

bargaining-power, assets and alternatives, are needed.

- (b) Employees' ignorance may be an important cause of their accepting a lower wage than they might command elsewhere. It is, even more, a major cause of their getting less paid work than they want. But an industry-wide rise in, or imposition of, MWR — irrespective of the local environment — is a blunt instrument for dealing with such ignorance. If such wages were fine-tuned enough to act as announcements of changing local market rates, they could help; but MWRs hardly improve the (scant) prospect of that. Employment Services Unit activities — and perhaps nation-wide industrial unions — are the appropriate cures for this sort of 'exploitation'
- (c) For many radical critics 'exploitation' exists wherever there is any return to capital. They believe that labour is entitled to the whole of the income (net of raw-material costs) received for its product, and that workers should decide the proportion of that income to be reinvested (and hence the amount available for wages), at the level either of each enterprise or of a State controlled by labour's representatives. Obviously, reformist manipulations of MWRs have little direct relevance to 'exploitation' in that sense. If a rise in MWR increases the wage share, then it reduces the rate of exploitation on a Marxist definition — but any resulting increase in the numbers of the unemployed would at once set up downward pressures on wages tending to push that rate back upwards. If a peaceful, parliamentary path to reduced exploitation in this sense were sought, it would lead, not via MWRs, but via family enterprises that hired in about the same amount of labour-power as they hired out (in farming, crafts, etc.); via cooperative production; or via nationalised enterprises.
- (d) The 'moral egalitarian' sense of 'exploitation' is at once the most confused and the most prevalent. It is felt by some to be 'exploitation' for a rich man to pay a domestic servant, say, P25 per month. But how much must he pay if he is not to 'exploit'? As much as he earns himself, half as much, a tenth as much? Some expatriates do not employ domestic servants because they cannot bear to pay them low wages. If one can afford it, it is morally better to pay more; but also better, surely, to pay less than to unemploy?

Is it not much worse 'exploitation' to sentence potential employees to idleness, perhaps to beggary or prostitution, by thus not employing them? The vast majority of domestic servants are employed, not by fortunate expatriates, but by lower-middle-class Batswana, who if compelled to pay even P1 per working day would have to dismiss their domestic staff. It would, therefore, surely be immoral and exploitative — in this almost theological sense — to set a MWR that caused poor people, with few decent options, to lose their livelihood. (This is why any extension of MWRs to farm labour or domestic service would be so very harmful to the poorest.)

- (e) The trouble about defining 'necessary (non-exploitative) minimum income' by reference to a 'poverty datum line' (PDL) is fourfold:--
- (i) What happens if total GNP per worker is less than what is needed to bring all workers, plus their average family, to the PDL level? If emigrant and Government workers and their incomes are excluded, and if we take the urban PDL in Botswana for urban workers and the rural PDL for rural workers, this is probably the case. (If we further exclude profit incomes and their recipients, it certainly is).
 - (ii) By raising the MWR – and, for the poorest in the affected trades, the actual wage – one reduces employment. If the wage is raised to the PDL, some poor workers will receive a PDL wage for the first time, but others will have their wages reduced to zero.
 - (iii) The rural poor are mainly self-employed or farm employees. The first group is unaffected by a 'PDL rise' in average levels. The latter group is hard to cover, even if coverage did not (as it would) reduce employment. If the formally employed poor get a rise to PDL levels out of a fixed GNP, then the (much poorer) 'informal' and unemployed poor get poorer still.
 - (iv) PDLs can be wrong. While the rural PDL in Botswana²⁶ reflects a rigorous minimum, the urban PDL – which is allegedly over twice as high,²⁷ despite findings elsewhere in Africa that rural-urban income differentials are barely 10 percent²⁸ – does not. A poor household tends to consume what will mostly cheaply meet its basic needs. But the food items (in Botswana's urban PDL) are based on a survey of food preferences among trainee nurses'.²⁹ Every human is assumed to need an apple and an orange a day to keep poverty away, so that, for children under 4, 41 percent of food outlay (and 28 percent of total outlay) is on apples and oranges to meet the 'poverty datum line' in Gaborone.³⁰ A family on the urban PDL is also assumed to need a radio; to need twelve nappies, replaced yearly, for each child of two or less; and to pay high rent, because the main peri-urban areas of Naledi and White City have been excluded as 'unrepresentative of minimum desirable standards'.³¹ Any attempt to raise the wage rates of urban workers in Botswana to such a minimum standard inevitably exploits the much poorer rural and informal sectors, both by cutting their share in GNP and by reducing their prospects of a formal job.
- (f) Another sense of 'exploitation' is the capacity of a local 'big man' to deal with many poor people in several markets, and to use his power in one market to rig other markets in his favour. A farm employer, for instance, sometimes can ensure that his employees buy from him in his function as a trader. Since a big employer in a rural area often supplies his employees with shelter, water, credit and transport – as well as work and a shop – the opportunity for such cross-market activities, and hence for the abuse of contracts, is substantial. However, MWRs help little. The problem is one of

power. If the farm employee — the main victim of such situations — has options, he can more easily escape these multiple binds. Job information, access to cattle and land, a choice of traders unhassled by licensing restrictions, training in skills to improve job access: these are the necessary cures.

All the above senses of 'exploitation', except (d) and (e), are important and can be made precise. What is objectionable is the emotive use of the term to describe the market situation of groups of workers whose wage-rates are in fact far above the national average income from work, and whose productivity is frequently insufficient to justify that wage in any socio-economic system. Once one does start defining 'exploitation', it turns out that rises in MWRs are seldom the best way to deal with it.

VII

Human sympathy, plus the word 'minimum' which seems to imply that people receiving it must be the poorest, induces a natural reaction in favour of high, rising MWRs. However, in Botswana, those subject to MWRs — while far from affluent — are not among the poorest. More of the national product for MWR-receivers (and for higher-paid employees with fixed differentials) means less for others. Since profit rates are largely determined internationally, and since large business is well organised to protect its share in GNP, the losers, if rising MWRs increase the share of organised labour without increasing its productivity, are likely to be the unprotected, non-unionised poor: small farmers, farmworkers, herders, domestic servants. That is especially probable if a rising MWR reduces their prospects of formal employment, especially if a homogeneous MWR applies to those with below-average labour-productivity (women, slack-season workers, the rural sector).

The ideologies, underlying support of high and rising MWRs, are varied, honourable, but uniformly inappropriate transfers from 'Western' experience. First, Keynesian liberal expansionism, which may well have justified raising wages in (say) Canada in the 1930s to expand aggregate demand, is irrelevant or damaging in Botswana, where most extra wage demand leaks into RSA. Second, reformist and Fabian wage legislation indeed benefits 'the poor' if most of the poor are among the beneficiaries; if most beneficiaries are among the poorest (as with the US minimum-wage laws); and if the State can, and wants to, sustain employment levels after MWR rises. Given the structure of Botswana's workforce, however, the poorest do not substantially overlap with those on MWRs. Moreover 'the state' is not permeated with influences from the organised workers and the poor, and is thus unlikely to compensate fully for the dampening impact on employment of MWR rises (even if that were possible). A third ideological underpinning, for some who seek higher MWRs — that the beneficiaries comprise a 'vanguard' that will later lead the poor rural classes, too, out of poverty — also seems irrelevant to Botswana, especially because the explosion in MWRs revealed by the Table (combined with stagnant crop production and lack of rural asset redistribution) has been a major factor in identifying the interests of 'MWR' workers with an urban labour elite, and in widening gaps, and sharpening conflicts of interest, between such

workers and the poor.

Can the human sympathy and the honourable ideology, underlying the pressures on MWRs, instead seek aims more likely to help Botswana's poor? In a sense, it is an odd sort of question. States help, indeed are, those who help themselves, and major advances for Botswana's poorest people depend mainly on their awareness of their situation and willingness to organise for its improvement. But one should not adopt an unduly deterministic, downbeat interpretation of the role of intellectual analysis and leadership. Inappropriate or counter-productive advice (e.g. on MWRs) from intellectuals can harm both the capacity of the poorest to organise for objectives beneficial to them, and the prospects that those parts of the State apparatus, sympathetic to such objectives, may achieve something significant. Conversely, if analysts point out **feasible** paths for poorer groups, such groups are more likely to organise and cohere as they advance along such paths.

Fortunately Botswana has three advantages. First, diamonds, thanks to the large royalty share of the public sector, provide a large, steadily expanding surplus to finance productive activity. Second, several sectors, especially small-scale arable farming and supportive rural artisan output, offer both excellent growth prospects and special advantages, to efficiency as well as to equity, in concentrating assets, inputs and skills upon small family units that will manage directly and operate labour-intensively. Third, part of the State machine recognises that, to achieve these ends, investible resources must be switched on a massive scale, away from infrastructure (especially roads) towards direct support of arable agriculture and complementary small industry. Since Independence, agriculture and industry have enjoyed less than 10 percent of investment in Botswana -- less than almost anywhere else in Africa. While there was (and remains) a real need for more infrastructure, it can neither yield much benefit nor provide productive work unless the **proportion** of capital -- and of incentives, administrative attention and skills -- going to directly productive activities rises sharply.³²

This shift is necessary for Botswana's resources to provide productive employment for its poorest groups, but not sufficient. Two more elements will be needed. First, more assets and resources for productive work must reach the labour-intensive poor. Draught-power and arable land for agriculturists, especially women; skills (and loans for tools) for small rural artisans; and perhaps further schemes of co-operative management in industry, are indicated here.³³ Second, incentives and restrictions affecting business enterprise -- not only incomes policies, but also tax incentives (as between using labour and capital), training schemes and allowances, health and building regulations, licensing procedures, and much else³⁴ -- have to be revised so as to encourage higher productivity, labour use; and training and upgrading, not (as now) to discourage them. Such a programme does not fit neatly into anybody's ideology. It does, however, constitute a feasible path towards acceptable levels of income from work for Botswana's poorest groups. The path of rising MWRs, while such groups have so few assets or choices, leads in the opposite direction.

Footnotes

1. M. Lipton, *Employment and Labour Use in Botswana*, Min. of Finance and Development Planning, 1978 (hereafter ELUB), p.17. For other wage and employment data cited here, see also *Statistical Bulletins*, esp. 3, 4, Dec. 1978.
2. ELUB, Vol. 1, p.24
3. *National Accounts of Botswana 1974-5*, p. 0-4; population growth at 3.2 yearly.
4. ELUB, Vol. 1, p.36.
5. ELUB, Vol. 2, Appendix 9.1; C. Szawelski, *Impact of the Minimum Wage Rise in July 1977 on Employment*, Institute of Development Management, Gaborone, 1978.
6. *Statistical Bulletin*, Dec. 1978, p.5. The once-for-all rise in public-sector employment in 1977, due mainly to recruitment for the Botswana Defence Force and not to underlying growth.
7. ELUB, Vol.1, p.22.
8. ELUB, Vol.1, p.188, and more recent data from Central Statistical Office (Gaborone).
9. *Agricultural Statistics 1977*, Min. of Agriculture, Gaborone, 1978 (hereafter AS),
10. ELUB, Vol. 2, p.34, note 4.
11. ELUB, Vol.2, pp.187-8. In 1978 there were probably about 80 000 families cultivating directly, and another 20-30 000 otherwise dependent on traditional farming; at most 4mn. cattle; and at most 400 000 ha. cropland. But all this was very unequally distributed - at least one in three farm families owned no cattle, and these averaged well below 5ha. of cropland (AS; *Rural Income Distribution Survey*, Gaborone, 1976 (hereafter RIDS); and personal communications).
12. ELUB, Vol. 2, App. 5.2,
13. ELUB, Vol. 1, pp. 60.1.
14. On 'poverty datum lines', see Sec. VI below.
15. ELUB, Vol. 2, App. 7.2.
16. *The Rural Income Distribution Survey in Botswana 1974-5* (hereafter RIDS), Gaborone, 1976, p.10.
17. ELUB, Vol.1, Ch.5, Sec. (f); Ch.12, Sec. (h); Ch.14, Sec. (b); and Vol. 2, App. 5.5 and 8.4.
18. This summary of Ms. Szawelski's work is reproduced, in essence, from ELUB, Vol.2, App. 9.1. I take full responsibility for it but have since received a letter from Ms. Szawelski that fully confirms it. A much longer summary by Ms. Szawelski, concentrating upon methodology as well as findings, is available from IDM. The basic survey work and analysis was conducted by Ms. Szawelski in April-August 1978, and has been published by IDM.
19. The sample treated small firms (under 50 employees) and large separately. The small-firms sample is more reliable, as non-respondents left the large-firm sample rather small. The sample excludes Ghanzi and Kgalagadi (where the impact of the wage-rise on employment was probably greater than elsewhere). Otherwise, rural and urban areas were sampled in proportion to the number of firms responding to the CSO's 1976 *Employment Survey*.
20. ELUB, Vol.1, Ch.3. Hoyt Alverson, "Agricultural Development in Botswana: Targets and Constraints", IDM Public Lecture Series, Gaborone, November 1978, suggests that underuse of female labour is overstated in ELUB. However, both the UNDP Shoshong activities survey, and the subsequent survey in eight communities by C. Sheppard, suggest under-estimation if anything.
21. ELUB, Vol.1, Ch.16.
22. *Employment Surveys*, CSO, Gaborone, annual.
23. For relevant data, see ELUB, Vol.1, Ch.2.
24. ELUB, Vol.1, Chs. 2, 11, and Vol.2, App. 2.1.
25. This section is a shortened version of ELUB, Vol.2, App. 5.3.
26. RIDS, p.213.
27. For example, a household comprising one adult male is estimated to need 2.96 times as much income to meet the urban PDL in 1976 as to meet the rural PDL in 1974 (though the low-income cost of living had risen only by 32 percent). RIDS, p.213; *Poverty Datum Line for Urban Areas of Botswana* (hereafter UPDL), CSO, 1976, p.12.
28. See evidence for Ghana and Kenya in M. Lipton, *Why Poor People Stay Poor*. Temple

Smith, 1977, p.146 and note 4

29 UPDL, p.146: my italics.

30 UPDL, pp.17, 30

31 UPDL, p.6

32 ELUB, Vol.1, pp.24--6, and Ch.4

33 ELUB, Vol.1, Ch.6 and pp.76--85, 100--103

34 ELUB, Vol.1, pp.55--9, 111--115; and Vol.2, pp.217--237

Comment on Lipton's 'Minimum Wages'

Charles Simkins

Trade unionists and people sympathetic to their cause may be alarmed, dismayed even, to find in the pages of the **Labour Bulletin** an article by one of the most eminent development economists of the English-speaking world arguing against spreading the coverage or raising the real level of minimum wage determinations in Botswana. It is the purpose of this comment to suggest that nearly all such alarm can be dispelled by careful reading of Michael Lipton's arguments. A careful reading is necessary because although his discussion serves as a salutary warning (which is why it may be hard to take at first sight) to progressive people not to make a fetish of minimum wage rates to the extent of making no attempt to influence or control other economic variables of critical importance to workers, it is important to understand also that the structure of his argument implies that a particular set of conclusions reached for Botswana in the mid-seventies are not necessarily to be reached at other times and in other places.

Why not? First, because the combination of goals among working people may vary with the level of capitalist development. Two importantly different goals which might be served by raising minimum wages or extending their scope are:

- (i) the reduction of poverty either (a) in an absolute sense (i.e. reducing the number of households with incomes below a fixed real level which varies only with household size, or (b) in a relative sense (i.e. reducing inequality between all households after adjustments for size have been made).
- (ii) the reduction of exploitation in a socialist sense (i.e. the reduction of the return to capital and an increasing ability of workers to decide on the apportionment of income between consumption and investment).

That these goals are different can be seen from the example of countries at an advanced stage of capitalist development where both absolute and relative poverty are generally very low compared with countries at an intermediate stage such as South Africa. Similar clearcut change in exploitation is not found — exploitation continues in all fields in advanced capitalist countries for as long as they remain capitalist.

If the balance of emphasis between these goals changes over time, it does not do so uniformly, or entirely predictably, for at least two reasons. First, as income per head rises in poor countries, there is a tendency for relative inequality to rise also, for a time, so that absolute poverty at best declines sluggishly (it may even rise) as income per head rises. After a certain point, relative inequality starts to decline, so absolute poverty starts to decline more rapidly with increasing income per head. These changes can be explained (but in part only) by changing economic structure. One can distinguish three cases, in a rough sort of way.

- (a) Poor countries, such as Botswana, where total GNP per worker (with certain exclusions) is, as Lipton observes, less than that which is needed to bring all workers and their households to the Poverty Datum Line income level. There

one may be concerned with sharing very low incomes as equally as possible — and this, above all, is what Lipton is concerned with. That done, however, absolute poverty necessarily remains and so one should be at least as interested in the prospects of raising the growth rate. Oddly, Lipton does not discuss this and his omission may lead some readers to suppose that he is arguing that high minimum wages are responsible for workers' income per head having declined in recent years. This is not so; since (i) 'between 1973–4 and 1976–7 real output per person fell by 9 percent and has hardly risen since', and if one assumes (ii) 'since the relatively free movement of finance between RSA and Botswana means that Botswana's post-tax profit rates are to a great extent internationally determined', then one need only assume further that neither Botswana's capital stock nor the international profit rate declined over the period to infer that worker's living standards must have declined, minimum wage rates or not. This is not to say that minimum wage rates made no difference — arguably they induced a greater degree of capitalisation than would have otherwise occurred, reducing labour's share in national income, and they certainly favoured the workers protected by them at the expense of unprotected workers. But we are left with the question of why Botswana, a country with considerable potential for minerals-led development, grew so slowly after 1973–4 after enjoying five years of rapid growth before that, since low growth was primarily responsible for the drop in worker living standards. The explanation is to be found in the determination of the government of Botswana to limit mining company profits to a 'reasonable rate of return'; this it seeks to do by imposing a package of free equity participation, taxes and royalties designed to set the expected rate of return at a specific level. If things turn out differently, the government can use its right to adjust royalties to bring the rate of return part or all of the way back to this level. Now, if the policy is indulgently applied; the state will sacrifice revenues it might otherwise have had and it is possible that too great a volume of mining investment would materialise bringing undesired consequences in its train such as a large influx of foreigners to fill skilled jobs that Botswana are unable to fill as long as the educational system remains at its present rather primitive level. If it is strictly applied, as seems currently to be the case, the rate of growth will be low, new towns such as Selebi-Pikwe (where the multiplier effects of mining investment can be seen) will only rarely come into existence and large numbers of people will be thrown into the very poor agricultural sector to try to make a living there. The thing to note is that Botswana has a choice about its growth rate — this choice is prior to a discussion of minimum wage rates. Under one kind of decision, minimum wage rates will have one kind of role to play, under another, a different role.

- (b) An example of the second economic structure, that of intermediate countries, is South Africa, where national income is certainly sufficient to allow all households to have at least a Minimum Living Level income. In 1978, South African gross domestic expenditure was estimated by the Reserve Bank to be

R36 745 million; allow for government expenditure of R5 576 million and investment of R9 114 million and one has R22 055 million left for private consumption. Now the population of South Africa (including the Transkei and Bophutatswana) in 1978 can be estimated from Department of Statistics figures at 27 310 000, so consumption for every five people works out at R4 040. The median MLL for black households of five (excluding the allowances for taxes) as calculated by the Bureau for Market Research for August 1978 was R131 per month or R1 572 per year, so that the MLL requirement for households of five (about the average size) was covered more than 2½ times by funds available for consumption. Further growth is no longer a prerequisite for eliminating absolute poverty: attention can legitimately be focussed on the problem of reducing the very high level of relative inequality.

- (c) Rich countries, where there may be little absolute poverty except among specific groups (e.g. the old). Concern with inequality in this case arises less out of a desire to reduce absolute poverty than from the widespread perception that it is unfair for different earners to receive widely differing incomes.

The second reason for a changing balance of emphasis between the goals of reducing poverty, and of reducing exploitation has to do with political and ideological developments; since the concept of exploitation being used here is specifically socialist, one is concerned with the development of a socialist consciousness which is only likely to proceed beyond a certain point with the appearance and growth of a socialist party. The stage of capitalist development at which a viable socialist party appears is very variable and progress is subject to reverses of all sorts; yet socialists must constantly attend to their strategy for the reduction of exploitation. Can one consider demands for raising and extending the scope of minimum wages as a possible part of such a strategy? Lipton's answer is in the negative: 'If a rise in MWR increases the wage share, then it reduces the rate of exploitation on a Marxist definition – but any resulting increase in the numbers of unemployed would at once set up downward pressures on wages tending to push that rate back upwards. If a peaceful, parliamentary path to reduce exploitation in this sense were sought, it would lead, not via MWRs, but via family enterprises that hired in about the same amount of labour-power as they hired out (in farming, crafts, etc) via co-operative production; or via nationalised industries'. This might seem a sound observation in the Botswana context but what if one is faced with large-scale privately-owned factory production? Progressive nationalisation has been a frequent socialist demand, but this has a limited potential for decreasing exploitation in a capitalist context, especially if the process is limited, as, for instance, in the British case.

Another approach would be to seek to control the level of employment by reforming relations at the workplace so as to require worker participation in planning the long-term future of the production unit and by introducing guaranteed employment at rates of pay adequate to keep workers out of poverty. The rate of pay in such a scheme would serve as a national minimum wage; one could then use industry-specific minimum wage rates to improve conditions in the poorest-paying

sectors.

If the goals of working people may vary with the level of capitalist development, the economic structure on which they must express their desires certainly does. Lipton lists a dozen assumptions which, to the extent that an economy fulfils them, ensure that a high rising MWR will help the poor. It is important for South African readers to understand that the South African economy fulfils some of these to a greater extent than does the Botswana economy: a larger proportion of poor people depend on activities where MWRs are paid and the poorest workers (agricultural workers) benefitted when wages paid in mining and manufacturing rose in the early seventies, the price elasticity of demand for workers in South Africa's large manufacturing and mining sectors is probably quite low (i.e. employment shrinks relatively little as real wages rise, other things being equal), aggregate demand increases following MWR increases can largely be met from domestic production in South Africa and there is an emerging concern (albeit only for 'insurance' reasons) with the level of employment on the part of the South African state. All these considerations make the case for high and rising minimum wage rates stronger in South Africa than in Botswana, though they are not so overwhelming as to justify an uncritical demand to have them extended to all sectors or to have them rise precipitously.

One final point: it is often not sufficiently appreciated that intervention in the labour market affects the positions of individuals, whereas poverty is an attribute of households. In other words, there are intervening demographic variables to consider if one's labour market operations are designed to reduce poverty. Moreover, there may be problems of allocation of income within a household if that household is split for most of the time; there may also be redistribution of income between households. These processes are very little understood in South Africa, yet it may be the case that redistribution serves to decrease inequality. If it does, one need worry only whether a particular intervention increases labour's share of national income; if not, then a change which satisfied this condition might still be undesirable on the grounds that it leaves the poorest worse off. Lipton's general case is that in Botswana adequate secondary distribution mechanisms do not exist; a closer look at the evidence for this thesis would have been of interest. My own studies of the African unemployed, on the other hand, show that the majority rely on their families for support, some of which are able to give it quite easily, others with difficulty. (Most families fall into poverty as a result of unemployment of one of their adult members, showing that redistribution can only be relied on to a limited extent.)

If this comment has been critical of Lipton at various points, it should not be concluded that his main line of argument has been refuted. On the contrary, I urge **Labour Bulletin** readers to study his article with care and learn how complicated the minimum wage issue is.

The Meat Workers Dispute

Western Province General Workers Union

MEMORANDUM PREPARED BY WPGWU

1.

Many of you will have read in the Press about the serious dispute between the workers and the management of Table Bay Cold Storage. We have prepared this memorandum for general circulation but, more particularly, for the attention of those organisations and individuals that have in the past indicated their sympathy for the plight of Black workers.

BACKGROUND:

2.

We should preface this memorandum with some necessary information about the Western Province General Workers Union and about the situation in the meat industry in general.

The Western Province General Workers' Union is an unregistered union which has been operating in the Cape Peninsula since 1973. Our membership is predominantly African though we enjoy a growing membership amongst Coloured workers.

Our members have, after careful consideration, declined to seek registration under the recent labour dispensations because of the racial division of the union which registration would imply and because of the stringent controls exercised by the state over the registered unions. We are a **General Workers Union** which means that any workers are admitted to the union. At present, we have members from a variety of industries — dockworkers, engineering workers, building workers, textile workers etc. We also enjoy particularly strong support from the meat workers in Cape Town. In this industry we are supported by the overwhelming majority of workers and we count amongst our members the workers of, inter alia, Cape Slaughtering, Cape Offal, Karoo, S.V. & M. Consolidated Meat, National Meat, Premier Meat, the Meat Board, Table Bay Cold Storage, Braams and also many of the smaller employers. In many of these factories we have 100 percent support and in no single factory are less than 75 percent of the workers members of the union. In these factories the workers are represented by committees which enjoy a regular and, in general, peaceful relationship with their respective managements. Grievances of the workers are presented to the managements through these committees and they are generally discussed and resolved in an amicable manner. In the minority of these factories there are registered works committees, although even in these factories the constitutions of these committees are drawn up by the workers themselves and do not approximate the constitutions suggested by the Department of Manpower Utilisation. In the majority of factories the Committees are unregistered workers committees defined entirely by their constitutions and not in any way associated with the registered committees favoured by the Department of Manpower

Utilisation. The reason for this difference is that when we first started organising in the meat industry there were very few Coloured workers employed, and we encountered a resistance on the part of African workers to unite with Coloured workers, and a resistance on the part of the Coloured workers to participation in the activities of an unregistered union. In recent years a large number of Coloured workers have entered the industry (although the African workers are still the vast majority). Moreover, unbearably harsh working conditions and low wages, general political developments in South Africa and Cape Town, and years of patient organising and training have broken down any division between Coloured and African workers. For these reasons the workers have refused to accept a committee which constitutionally implies a racially based division and which implicitly sanctions the controls suggested by the registered Works and Liaison Committees. Accordingly the workers in the various factories (in the meat industry and other industries) have insisted upon representation through unregistered, democratically, elected workers committees. This demand has been acceded to in a great many factories including many of the major meat factories. It is against this necessary background that the dispute in Table Bay Cold Storage must be understood.

THE TABLE BAY COLD STORAGE DISPUTE:

3.

In April, a letter was addressed by the union to the management of Table Bay Cold Storage requesting that management convene a meeting of all Table Bay workers. The letter informed management that, at this meeting they would be introduced to the workers democratically elected committee of 6 representatives. This letter was only written after all the labourers in the firm were members of the union. Management convened this meeting but insisted, firstly that they would only consider recognising a Liaison Committee on which the workers would have 4 representatives. Secondly, Mr Selzer, the Managing Director, insisted that the workers disassociate themselves from the Western Province General Workers Union. We should point out that the workers never at any stage demanded formal recognition of their union. They never at any stage insisted that union officials and management sign a formal recognition agreement, they never insisted that union officials be present at their meetings with management. But on the other hand, they were, quite understandably not prepared to be instructed to disassociate themselves from the union. Accordingly, the workers refused to accept the Liaison Committee and management's conditions with respect to the union membership. On hearing the workers attitude, Mr Selzer tore up the letter in the presence of the workers. Acting on the workers instructions, the union wrote a second letter to Mr Selzer repeating the request that management convene another meeting of all workers and repeating the rejection of the management's conditions. Mr Selzer responded to this by sending a message to the workers via the foreman that they send the six workers to see him. The workers then sent a message back to Mr Selzer. They requested explanation of this sudden request (they were understandably worried about the possibility of victimisation) and asked if Mr Selzer's request now meant that he recognised their unregistered committee and that he would no longer try and compel them to relinquish their union membership. No reply was

forthcoming from Mr Selzer.

4.

On Wednesday the 7 May the workers reported to work and donned their work clothes as usual. They, however, refused to work until Mr Selzer spoke to them. Mr Selzer and representatives of the Department of Manpower Utilisation then addressed the workers. They continued to insist upon a Liaison Committee. Moreover, they made certain scandalous lying references to the union. (Inter alia, they said that the union would misuse the workers money.) Their behaviour is considered particularly provocative. Knowing full well the workers absolute rejection of Liaison Committees and their strong affinity for the union, the management and government officials continued, in the midst of a strike, to insist upon these absolutely unacceptable conditions. The workers refused to accept these conditions. They were then told that they should take their pay and sign off. They refused to accept their pay and left the factory. The following day they returned to the factory -- the workers indicated that they were willing to work immediately management recognised their committee. This was refused and management again said that the workers should take their money and leave. The workers refused to take their money and, once again, left the factory. On leaving the factory, a particularly ugly incident occurred. It is alleged that one of the workers decided to return to the factory whereupon he was apparently beaten by the workers. The union deplors this incident. But we are compelled to point out that it does indicate the intense anger and strength of feeling of the workers.

5.

On the Thursday evening the Joint Meat Workers Committee, representing 14 factories, convened a meeting in the union offices. They drew up a letter to Table Bay management. Union officials delivered the letter to Table Bay and a copy was taken by the factory representatives to their respective managements. This letter expressed the concern of the meat workers for the plight of their fellow workers in Table Bay and informed management that workers in other factories would not be prepared to do the work of the Table Bay members for them. On Monday morning the Table Bay workers returned to the factory to hear Table Bay managements response to this letter. Mr Selzer refused to speak to the workers but sent out his spokesman to inform the workers that they had, by striking, terminated their contracts (they are all contract workers) and instructed them to collect their pay. They refused to do this and sent their committee into the factory to speak to Mr Selzer, he refused to see them. The tension at the factory was exacerbated by a large police presence at the factory. The workers left the factory at about 9.30 am. Repeated phone calls by union officials to Mr Selzer have all met with the same response, namely, an angry refusal to discuss the issue. Managements response has been to issue a statement reiterating their basic points and claiming the collective support of all meat employers for their stand.

6.

Last Saturday (10 May) 500 meat workers met to discuss the dispute and angrily supported the stand taken by the Table Bay workers. On Monday 12 May the meat committee met again to discuss Mr Selzer's response and have decided to convene a second mass meeting of meat workers for Saturday 19 May. Now that

Mr Selzer has implicated the other meat employers in his stand, it is all but certain that the conflict will escalate within the meat industry. The workers are not seeking this confrontation but they believe, quite understandably, that they are being provoked into responding. They believe that if they accept the treatment meted out by the Table Bay bosses, then it will only be a matter of time before they suffer the same indignities. They have addressed a letter to this effect to the meat employers. Escalation of this conflict is clearly undesirable. It would involve not only other meat workers, but also workers from other industries who perceive their union to be under attack. It would unquestionably involve the wider community. We believe that the shortsightedness of the Table Bay management and the other meat employers will result in an escalation of this conflict and any pressure directed at compelling the meat employers to see reason would be welcomed.

Updated Summary of the Dispute – 26th May

The summary below is intended to update our previous memorandum on the dispute at Table Bay Cold Storage which has now spread to involve the entire management and work-force of the meat industry in Cape Town and is spreading further in a conflict involving management, workers, the general community and the state.

This memorandum must be read in conjunction with our previous memorandum.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDUSTRY-WIDE STRIKE OF CAPE TOWN'S MEAT WORKERS

Following the letter written by representatives of the workers at 14 Cape Town meat firms to their managements calling on them to dissociate themselves from the position adopted by the management of Table Bay Cold Storage, and to use their influence on that management to effect a settlement of the dispute, the Table Bay manager issued a public letter to the other meat bosses in reply. In this letter, he claimed that the Table Bay management had not insisted on a liaison committee, but had offered a works committee or a liaison committee. In the letter, he claimed that the workers had insisted on recognition of the union, but said that if they are now only wanting a committee, no dispute existed as management agreed with this. (He did not specifically say that management agreed to an unregistered workers committee). However, he ended by stating that the workers had terminated their contracts by the work stoppage and management was not prepared to even consider their reinstatement. Attempts by union officials to arrange a meeting with Table Bay management were bluntly turned down. Workers in other firms were told by their managements what the Table Bay dispute had nothing to do with them and that the meat bosses were preparing for an industry-wide strike the following week.

In the meantime, the workers at two other meat firms, National Meat Suppliers (employing about 250 workers) and Braams (employing about 50 workers) had also approached their managements with demands for recognition of unregistered democratically elected workers committees to represent all workers (African and Coloured) in their firms. (The 3 firms, Table Bay Cold Storage, National Meat Suppliers and Braams were the only 3 large firms in the Cape Town fresh meat

industry without recognised workers committees at the start of this dispute.) The Braams management readily agreed to recognise an unregistered non-racial workers committee. The National Meat Suppliers management agreed to recognise an unregistered workers committee, but insisted that it represent African workers only. (The manager put it this way, "Over my dead body will I have both Africans and Coloured workers on this committee") The workers obviously rejected this. These 3 divergent responses on the part of the 3 managements to the same demand from their workers only added to the provocation of the meat workers, particularly as the Table Bay manager had simultaneously issued a statement claiming the unanimous support of the meat bosses for his stand, the most intransigent and right-wing of all.

9.

In another development, the Cape Town Stevedores Committee, an unregistered committee recognised by the stevedore managements and representing the 600 Cape Town stevedores who are also members of the W.P.G.W.U., issued a statement that the stevedores would not be happy to load any export meat packed by the scab labour at Table Bay Cold Storage.

10.

By Saturday 17th May, the position was as above, with the meat bosses persisting in their completely intransigent stand. A general meeting of meat workers was held on the Saturday at which it was decided that the Table Bay worker committee would again go to the firm the following Monday in an attempt to discuss the issue with Mr Selzer. The committee would be accompanied by a workers' representative from each of the other meat firms and the workers of the other firms would refuse to start work until their representatives returned to these firms to say that the Table Bay dispute had been settled.

11.

On Monday 19th May, this approach was followed, but Mr Selzer sent out a messenger to the committee saying that the workers were no longer employed at Table Bay, and he had nothing to say to them. On hearing this, the vast majority of the workers of Cape Town's meat industry walked out of their firms in a one-day protest and solidarity demonstration - an action involving about 750 workers. At a general meeting following the walk-out, the workers decided to return to work the following day and demand of the meat bosses that a settlement of the Table Bay and National Meat Suppliers disputes be effected by the end of the week.

12.

On returning to work on Tuesday 20th May, the workers found all the firms surrounded by members of the riot squad (a special paramilitary unit of the police force used by the state to control internal unrest) and were turned away. No attempts were made by managements to discuss the issue with the workers.

13.

The workers now decided to remain out until 3 demands were met:

- (i) the unconditional re-instatement of all meat workers (a total of 800 are out).
- (ii) the recognition of an unregistered workers committee at Table Bay Cold Storage.
- (iii) the recognition of an unregistered workers committee at National Meat

Suppliers.

The workers also for the first time raised the question of instituting a boycott of red meat, and resolved to go to community for support for their struggle.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR THE MEAT WORKERS

Support from the black community of Cape Town was spontaneously forthcoming.

14.

Representatives of the Western Province branch of the African Chamber of Commerce and of the Cape Flats Trades Association attempted to arrange a meeting with Mr Selzer to discuss the issue, but the Table Bay management cynically attempted to deny that a dispute existed --- as far as they were concerned, it had been resolved by the dismissal of the workers.

15.

The call for a boycott of red meat was formally made by a mass meeting of the meat workers on 21st May. This has been endorsed by a large number of community organisations, rate-payers associations, organisations of pupils and students, and by the butchers of the African townships. Attempts are being made by the butchers to discuss the issue with the meat bosses and mediate in the conflict, so far without success.

16.

Community support for the meat workers is to be organised through a committee representing the union, other sympathetic unions and community organisations. The workers have emphasised that the workers are to lead the struggle and that all support must first be sanctioned by the support committee. The workers have called on the community for support in three areas:

- 1) financial support to enable the workers to remain out until the demands are met.
- 2) support of the red meat boycott.
- 3) discouragement of scab labour in the meat firms.

17.

It is essential, in order to understand the potentially explosive situation which exists with regard to community support, that some of the political background be briefly sketched.

The support offered to the workers by the black community has been spontaneous and extensive, even crossing class lines. The reasons for this are not hard to find; the demands of the workers are for democratic representation of their choice on the factory floor. These demands have been bluntly ignored, with bosses using the force of the state to support their position. The demands of the black community generally have been the same in all spheres of life: demands for democratic representation of their choice. These demands too have been forcibly ignored wherever they have been made. The meat workers dispute, a confrontation provocatively asked for by the meat bosses with the apparent blessing of the state, has provided the whole Cape Town black community with an immediately tangible

struggle with which they wholeheartedly identify.

The explosive political climate in which the dispute takes place is exacerbated by the struggle against apartheid education which has been waged for the past 3 months by the black pupils and students in the Cape Peninsula. This struggle has involved almost the entire black student population of Cape Town, and their parents. Overt confrontation with the state with memories of the riots of 1976, has been simmering just below the surface. The students have now pledged their remarkably well co-ordinated and disciplined organisation to the support of the meat workers as well.

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE DISPUTE

18.

The workers have remained absolutely committed to their demands as the strike enters its second week. Not one worker has returned to work, and more workers have joined the strike during the past week. In order to support the workers and their families, the W.P.G.W.U. has decided to pay them a grant of R15 a week each - a weekly bill of R12 000. This sum is a huge drain on union resources, and cannot be supported for long without large-scale financial support from the community. Union members have decided to contribute R1 a week in excess of union subscriptions in order to support the meat workers.

19.

The meat bosses have persisted in stating that as far as they are concerned, the workers have terminated their services and will not be re-instated. In half-page advertisements placed in the Cape Town daily press, the meat bosses have again stated this, saying that they were and are at all times prepared to negotiate, but were not prepared to tolerate "illegal strike action (by employees) before (they) attempt to discuss their claims in a constitutional manner."

The effects of the strike on production have been immediate and show no signs of lessening. Management have, of course, attempted to belittle the effects, but have made two calls in the past week for farmers to stop sending animals to the Cape Town abattoirs for slaughter without first consulting the abattoir. Meat is being transported to Cape Town from Port Elizabeth and the Transvaal. (The Cape Town meat industry is part of the national industry with virtually all meat firms being subsidiaries of 3 large national companies. The meat industry is controlled by a statutory body, the Meat Board, which oversees all local and export meat products.) Many butcheries in Cape Town are receiving no supplies, and others are having to lend their own staff to the meat firms to cut and deliver their meat supplies. Production figures are difficult to estimate, but seem to be about 30 percent of normal. As far as scab labour is concerned, some meat workers (about 15 percent of the labour force) have remained at work. Management has taken on casual workers (although they have not managed to replace anything like the number on strike), but this has not solved their problem of finding the essential skilled workers to keep production going. Attempts by the workers and the community to discourage scab labour are also having an effect with some scab labour leaving the firms.

Community support has been outlined above. All the butcheries in the African

townships have stopped selling red meat, and support for the boycott is rapidly spreading throughout the Coloured townships. Workers are addressing meetings throughout the Cape Peninsula called by community leaders in support of the meat workers. The African butchers have had a meeting with one of the meat bosses and attempts are being made to set up a meeting between the butchers and the meat industry management in order to initiate a process of negotiation between the management and workers. The butchers have stated their absolute commitment to the workers demands and have a mandate from the workers to attempt to establish renewed contact between management and workers.

22.

The state's involvement in the dispute is not immediately clear. As has been outlined above, state apparatuses in the form of the Department of M U and the police have certainly been involved in the conflict from the beginning. However, the intransigence and provocation of the meat bosses over the eminently reasonable demand of the workers raises the possibility of deeper state connivance with the meat bosses to use this issue to smash progressive trade unionism among the workers, particularly in the Western Cape where the strength of the progressive unions has been rapidly growing over the past year. The other uncertain factor regarding the state's response to the present dispute relates to the explosive political climate in which it is taking place. It seems incredible that the meat bosses can be allowed by the state to provoke such a confrontation in this climate. The uncertainty arises in whether the state will respond to defuse the situation by applying pressure on the meat bosses to negotiate a settlement or whether they will step in to smash the worker and community organisations, with the very real danger of a leaderless confrontation exploding out of control. The state must also be very concerned at the depth of unity with the meat workers amongst all layers of the community, a situation which directly contradicts the state's plan for co-option of a black middle class alienated from the workers. The meat bosses were summoned to an urgent meeting with the Deputy Minister of Co-operation and Development, the state department in charge of the African Community, on Friday 23rd May; a meeting which underlines the concern of the state with the dispute, but there have been no indications of the nature of the state's involvement at this meeting.

23.

We remain confident that with the united commitment of the workers, and the over-whelming support of the community behind them coupled with the eminently reasonable nature of the workers demands since the beginning of the dispute, we can force the meat bosses to see reason and negotiate a settlement. However, their intransigence up till now and their seemingly deliberate actions in provoking this confrontation have been incredible, and this makes it impossible to predict the amount of pressure which will have to be brought to bear on the meat bosses before they will see reason.

We call on all sympathetic organisations to support the meat workers and to direct pressure on the meat bosses to compel them to negotiate a settlement.

Of Maids and Madams

Luli Callinicos

A review of 'Maids and Madams: A study in the politics of exploitation' by Jacklyn Cock : Ravan Press 1980.

'This research has been done in the belief that social scientists in this society have a particular obligation to record the cruelty, injustice and exploitation that surrounds them and of which they are often a contributing part.' *Maids and Madams*, page 320.

Domestic service constitutes the largest source of black female wage labour in South Africa, bar agricultural work – there are some 800 000 black women, some of them migrants, others fully proletarianised workers, in domestic service. Yet in spite of the importance of this sector to black workers, very little research has been done in recent years.¹

Jacklyn Cock's *Maids and Madams* is a welcome addition to the small collection of work done on domestic work. Her study focusses specifically on two Eastern Cape towns, Grahamstown and Port Alfred, yet it is sufficiently penetrating to be applicable to all of South Africa. As she says, "domestic service is a microcosm of the existing patterns of inequality of South Africa", so that, although the Eastern Cape is the 'Deep South' of South Africa, "there is a sense in which the institution of domestic service itself constitutes apartheid's Deep South in that it is the crudest expression of inequality in that society."

The book is divided into three sections, each of which is thoroughly researched. Part I is mainly a description of the experiences of the domestic workers themselves, their self-perception, and the perceptions of their employers. These are based on a survey undertaken of 175 domestic workers and 50 of their employers. The in-depth questionnaire of 50 workers covers a number of issues, including the worker's mode of recruitment, her work history, employment conditions, wages, hours of work, work attitudes, work relations and the class responses.

The survey reveals some interesting (but typical) figures. For example, of the sample studied:

- * the average wage was R22,77 per month and was fixed by the employer, without negotiation – this was some 5 or 6 years after the Primary Poverty Datum Line for the area had been calculated to be R66,32;
- * over 77 percent were working more than a 48-hour week – 23 percent were putting in more than 75 hours a week;
- * 31.8 percent had no day off per week;
- * 83,4 percent had to work on public holidays;
- * 34 percent were given one week's paid leave -- or less -- per year;
- * 50,7 percent started the working day between 6 and 7 a.m.

These figures sum up the domestic workers' lack of "critical rights as workers." "They lack the right to a negotiated wage and favourable working conditions, membership of an effective workers' organisation, to have their families living with them, to rent or purchase accommodation in a place of their choice, to respectful treatment, to the further acquisition of knowledge and skills, to opportunities and scope for advancement, to sell their labour in the place of their choice, to an acknowledgement of their contribution to society and the dignity of their labour."

Part I is likely to be the section which will arouse the most interest, judging from the press reviews. Comments from the workers reveal the resentment, anger and humiliation seething behind the usually deferent exteriors - it is so seldom that white South Africa can get a frank response from this particularly oppressed segment of the black working class.

"There is nothing good to say (about the job). My job is hell."

"We are slaves."

"Their children don't respect us."

"Sometimes I feel ashamed of myself for wasting all these years when they don't appreciate me."

"It makes me angry. I wish Idi Amin was nearer."

Given their conditions of work, what degree of class consciousness is expressed in the survey? Some workers articulated an awareness of the need for collective action:

"If we could have some organisation where we could complain without fear of being dismissed."

"If we could get together with our employers and talk openly about our problems on the table, without worrying about losing our jobs, that might help."

And, expressing a strong sense of identity: "I would not like to change places (with her employer) because I do not want to be like whites."

Cock maintains that the evidence of the study "suggests that domestic workers possess . . . a class consciousness" and "a perception of community of interests with other workers specifically." She quotes one worker who said, "We are all singing the same song," and another who said about the social structure: "It will change but it will take time. It is not easy to take a piece of meat out of your mouth and share it."

In the survey, the madams displayed characteristic managerial attitudes towards their employees, seeing them as "deceitful", "lazy and unreliable" and "taking no pride in their work". Compare the different perceptions of the same characteristics: where the employer complains that her servant is 'secretive', as Mpahlele in the *African Image* comments 'This non-committal attitude of the silent servant is his most effective weapon against the white master who has all the power on his side. Both of them know this'. Again, petty pilfering, Cock suggests, may be 'muted rituals of rebellion' or it may be 'a strategy of survival to supplement the workers' meagre savings.'

In the survey, maids frequently refer indignantly to employers' accusations of theft or penalisation for breakages. At least one employer assumes the worst and explains how she deals with the phenomenon: "The first time she chips a plate or a cup I call her out to the stoep, I take that plate or cup and tell her to watch. I

then drop it on the cement floor so it smashes. I then I deduct the cost from her pay. You only have to do it once. You have to do it, otherwise they chip things on purpose because then they think you will give it to them. You only have to do it once.' But while employers may perceive informal resistance in their workers, precisely how and to what extent these in fact occur Cock does not explore.

According to Cock, "the majority of these employees accept their subordinate position in society. They are trapped in an ideology of domesticity which accepts as natural and inevitable the relations of male domination and female subordination." Day-to-day experiences are often intimate, though impersonal - some women describe their maids as being "one of the family" yet at the same time acknowledge a "difference". To quote one employer: "There's a difference (in living standards) but it doesn't hurt them. They are used to it. They wouldn't know what to do with our standards." - a variation of the old coal-in-the-bath-tub theme propagated by the Victorian middle-class.

Cock explains this contradictory attitude of madams: "(The servant's) life is viewed as totally enmeshed with that of her employers. . . It is precisely the unequal nature of the relationship and the mutual recognition of such inequality that allows the relationship to be described so often as a close and friendly one." Some employers are so out of touch with their servants that they believe that their workers are happy in their jobs.

Cock sees the "madams" themselves as victims of a sexist and hierarchical society. They are unable to go beyond it. This presents enormous problems for feminism: "The institution of domestic service presents a challenge to any feminist notion of sisterhood." It is a challenge which South African feminists have (understandably) failed to meet as yet.

Part II of the book gives an historical overview, tracing the developing patterns of sexual and racial domination in our society, particularly in the Cape. Cock describes the initial, often coercive contacts made with the Xhosa, the Khoi and the San in the Eastern Cape, resulting in the frequent kidnapping of women and children for service in colonists' homes. She describes how the coming of the 1820 settlers introduced class-based attitudes to domestic workers which fitted in neatly with the racist ideology then operating, serving to legitimise the system of racial domination which was emerging, in domestic service as well as in the social structure generally. White domestic servants became scarcer as their skills were required in other sectors. In their place came blacks, coerced into wage labour by the succession of tax laws, or by the dispossession of their land and the disintegration of their redistributive society (undermined wittingly and unwittingly by missionaries). For most men, wage labour usually meant the mines, for the women, their "initial point of incorporation . . . into the colonial economy was in domestic service." The control of labour was ensured by further legislation, including the Master and Servants' Act (which bound employees to a contract) and Ordinance 9 (which regulated the flow of labour with a pass system).

"In the last analysis," concludes Cock, "in South Africa labour was controlled by force, either through the legal apparatus of enslavement, apprenticeship or indenture, or through the existence of ties of dependence binding workers with no property to the owners of such property in the means of production."

Part III, **The Ultra-Exploitability of Domestic Workers**, examines the reasons for the extreme vulnerability of domestic workers -- their position as blacks in a racist social structure, as women in a sexist society and as workers in a capitalist society -- a triple oppression which drives them into accepting perhaps the lowest paid, most oppressed and isolated work available to black women, in order to survive, as the last chapter indicates. Legal discrimination imposed by white colonial (male) interpretations of African customary law on women, combined with our efficient system of labour control - its pass laws and contract systems, its migrant labour and apartheid regulations -- plus the fact that domestic work is not "productive" work in the economic sense and therefore not as useful to the capitalist system, has reduced the domestic worker to a further category of oppression and "ultra-exploitability" in our already ultra-exploitative society.²

While clearly not a plan of action, the study does underline the need for workers' rights for domestic servants.

For me, the title of the last chapter, **A Strategy for Survival**, suggests an additional approach for domestic workers. Notoriously difficult to organise, domestic workers can nevertheless form benefit societies, in which the advantages of collective organisation can be practically demonstrated and solidarity can be developed. Clearly, such a pressure group would push for the introduction of protective legislation which is necessary to bring domestic workers into the wider working-class movement.

There seem to me to be two limitations in this study: very little account is given of the actual work process, the division of tasks in the home and how they are actually executed. Furthermore, it does not systematically examine the mechanisms of informal resistance in the work situation, beyond some interesting glimpses of workers' self-image. These are two areas which would have filled out the picture of domestic servants as workers, responding less than passively to a work situation of relative deprivation.

Maids and Madams, nevertheless, makes a useful contribution to the study of feminist and labour issues, as well as raising theoretical questions as to the precise nature of paid domestic labour in the capitalist mode of production -- issues and questions which we are only beginning to explore.

Footnotes:

- 1 Preston-Whyte's largely descriptive study of domestic workers in Natal *Between Two Worlds* was submitted as a Ph.D. thesis in 1969, and never published. Whisson and Weil's *Domestic Servants: A Microcosm of the Race Problem* was published nine years ago. Charles van Onselen's study of domestic workers on the Rand in the early years of this century is being published this year -- *Witches of Suburbia in 'Essays in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand'*.
- 2 The term is F.A. Johnstone's (*Class, Race and Gold: a study of class relations and racial discrimination in South Africa*) and suggests that South Africa's colonial, racist background was superimposed on our capitalist mode of production at its inception. It created a class of conquered people, dispossessed of their means of production -- their land -- and sufficiently weakened to be transformed relatively easily into not merely an exploited working class, but an "ultra-exploited" working class.