SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

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COMMENT

THE DIVIDED WORKING CLASS

Is there a need for a woman's movement, more specifically a movement for working women, the most oppressed section of our society? Certainly, as we can see elsewhere in this issue, women workers have special needs arising from the hardships of the dual and conflicting roles that industrial society imposes on them. And it is only through the socialisation of housework and child care that this burden can be lifted. Women need to focus attention on these issues. They need to make these demands on the state and on society for the benefit of all. But in order to do this, a militant leadership in the factories and in the unions must create an awareness of the importance of unity amongst workers.

For sexism, like racism, is a divisive force amongst workers. As long as discrimination exists in the factories, shops, offices and homes and as long as we have unequal pay or job reservation along the lines of sex or race, the working class remains divided and manipulated. Discrimination creates an artificial hierarchy, a bogus aristocracy of labour, a contradiction within the working class itself - it teaches acceptance and submission instead of a will to challenge and change, yet it creates insecurity and anxiety amongst a divided working class. One group can be used to oust the others, and the psychology of inequality is perpetuated amongst the workers themselves.

There are two things a woman's movement should emphasise, however: firstly, that a focus on "woman's" demands can clarify the needs of society as a whole; that increasing women's militancy and assertiveness in the workplace is not directed against male workers but against the discriminatory social structure itself. Secondly, a working women's movement does not seek to achieve a sort of "deformed equality" with the male workers. In our particularly vicious form of capitalism workers are oppressed as well as exploited.

A working woman's movement, with its special needs and experiences, can provide a crucial insight into the nature of our unequal and divided society. It should demand the right to fight on an equal basis with men, so that together they can go beyond the limitations of class,race and sex, and in so doing overcome the forces that would keep the workers divided and weak.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa's particular form of racial capitalism has varying and distinctive consequences for the situations of each of the different social groups in the social structure. The position of women is not only affected by the roles that they fulfil as wage and domestic labourers within a capitalist society, but also by the operative ideologies of racism and sexism.

Women workers' position in the labour force is characterized by the discrimination that they experience on the basis of sex; the majority of women workers in South Africa are discriminated against of the basis of colour as well. The African woman workers, for example, constitute the most oppressed group of workers in our labour force. It has been said that the African women in South Africa are perhaps the most displaced and deprived people in any country not involved in open war. In every sphere, the African women's rights have been steadily eroded.

In the urban areas few of the African women have retained the traditional role of being solely a housewife: the majority are both housewives and wage labourers. Thus they carry responsibilities in both the sphere of production and the sphere of reproduction of labour. Those women not entering into employment in the industrial labour force are employed in domestic service, many living an isolated existence in their employers' backyards. They are removed from family life, and their isolation leads to an inability to organize

in order to increase their bargaining power vis-a-vis their employers. Many of these women are migrant workers. Because of the low productivity of the rural areas and the meagre remittances sent home by the male migrants, some women in the rural areas are forced to leave their families in the reserves to seek work.

A systematic analysis of the social situation of the woman worker in South Africa and her position in the labour force would need to include the following:

(1) An analysis of South African society in historical perspective (i.e. an analysis of how the socio-economic and politial structures at present characterizing our situation actually became operative);

(2) A detailed study of the position occupied by women during the different stages of South Africa's history (an important area of interest in this regard would be the early sexual division of labour in the tribal social structures, and how the African woman's position changed with colonialism, and the enforced movement of Africans off the lands and into the towns with industrial and capitalist development);

(3) An analysis of her present social situation, and the development of her consciousness as a mobilizing force for social change.

This edition aims to make a small contribution towards such an analysis. The articles focus on the experiences of the different groups of women in the labour force (e.g. the domestic labourer, the African woman worker in the textile industry, the members of the Garment Workers Union), and the needs of these women that arise out of their social situation. Obviously, much more research should be done into the position of the woman worker in South Africa. Furthermore, an historical perspective on the role of women in society requires more careful study. We hope that the ideas offered in these articles will stimulate further interest and debate in these areas.

INDUSTRIALIZATION AND FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

by Carolyn Stone

For permission to publish this article we are indebted to the Centre for Intergroup Studies, Cape Town.

Economic development is generally held to have a specific effect on the sectoral distribution of the economically active population. Broadly speaking there is a movement from agriculture to industry which coincides with the physical movement of large numbers of people from the rural areas to the towns. The occupational distance between agriculture and industry is often interrupted by what Boserup terms "bazaar and service occupations" which include "own-account workers and family aids in industry and trade, and all personnel in transport, domestic and other service occupations". (Boserup, 1970: p. 177) With industrialization home industries and small-scale market trade wither away, midway service occupations and the tertiary sector, that on non-material production, grows rapidly. Clark expressed the progression thus:

There is a

> "... tendency for the relative number of primary producers in any community to decline as time goes on; while the relative number of secondary producers increases up to a certain point and then also begins to diminish, and the relative number of tertiary producers increases throughout... Within any given secondary or tertiary industry there seems to be a marked tendency for the relative number of administrative and clerical workers to increase, till in many spheres they actually outnumber the manual workers". (Clark, 1940 : p. 220)

This is then the general effect of industrialization on the occupational structure. However, for the purposes of this paper, it is necessary to examine in greater detail the effect of industrialization on female labour force participation. Industrialization in this paper will be taken to mean capitalist industrialization and, although there are many similarities to be seen in the effects of capitalist and socialist (or communist)

industrialization on female labour force participation, no specific account will be taken of the latter.

Under capitalist production the increase in the rate of labour force participation of women takes place within the general framework of the accumulation of capital, the driving force of capitalist development. Capitalist accumulation is the process whereby the capitalist expands his existing capital by converting a portion of his surplus value into additional capital which then enables him to appropriate still more surplus value, convertible into even more capital and so on.

The capitalist's power to extract surplus value and thus to accumulate is enhanced by the employment of the most advanced and efficient technical methods. The acquisition of these methods requires further capital outlay and renders obsolete the existing means of production.

Implicit in the accumulation process is the increased demand for labour power. In other words, more variable capital is required to operate in conjunction with expanded constant capital to produce surplus value:

> "The growth of capital includes the growth of its variable constituent, of the part converted into labour power. Part of the surplus value transformed into supplementary capital must always be reconverted into variable capital or supplementary labour fund ... The reproduction of the labour power which must incessantly incorporate itself with capital as a means for the self-expansion of capital, of the labour power which cannot get free from capital, of the labour power whose enslavement to capital is only concealed by the fact that it sells itself now to one capitalist and now to another, this reproduction of labour power forms, in fact, an essential factor in the reproduction of capital itself. Accumulation of capital is, therefore, increase of the proletariat". (Marx, 1972(a): p. 675-77).

The increased demand for the commodity labour power

increases its price; labour power no longer sells at its value:

> "...The needs of capital for accumulation may outstrip the growth of labour power or of the number of workers, so that the demand for workers will exceed the supply and therefore wages will rise. Indeed, this must inevitably occur ..... sooner of later the moment must come when the needs of accumulation begin to exceed the ordinary supply of labour, and this is the point at which wages must rise".
> (Marx, 1972(a): p.676)

However, unlike other commodities the equilibrating mechanism of supply and demand cannot be brought to bear on the commodity labour power. If, for example (under perfect competition), the price of leather were to increase, certain forces would be set in motion to bring the price of leather back into conformity with the value of leather: because of the high profits being made in leather production, other capitalists will be attracted to the industry and the supply of leather will be increased with the result that the price will fall until it equals the value and profits will decline. But in the case of labour power these mechanisms are irrelevant - labour power, of course, cannot just be churned out.

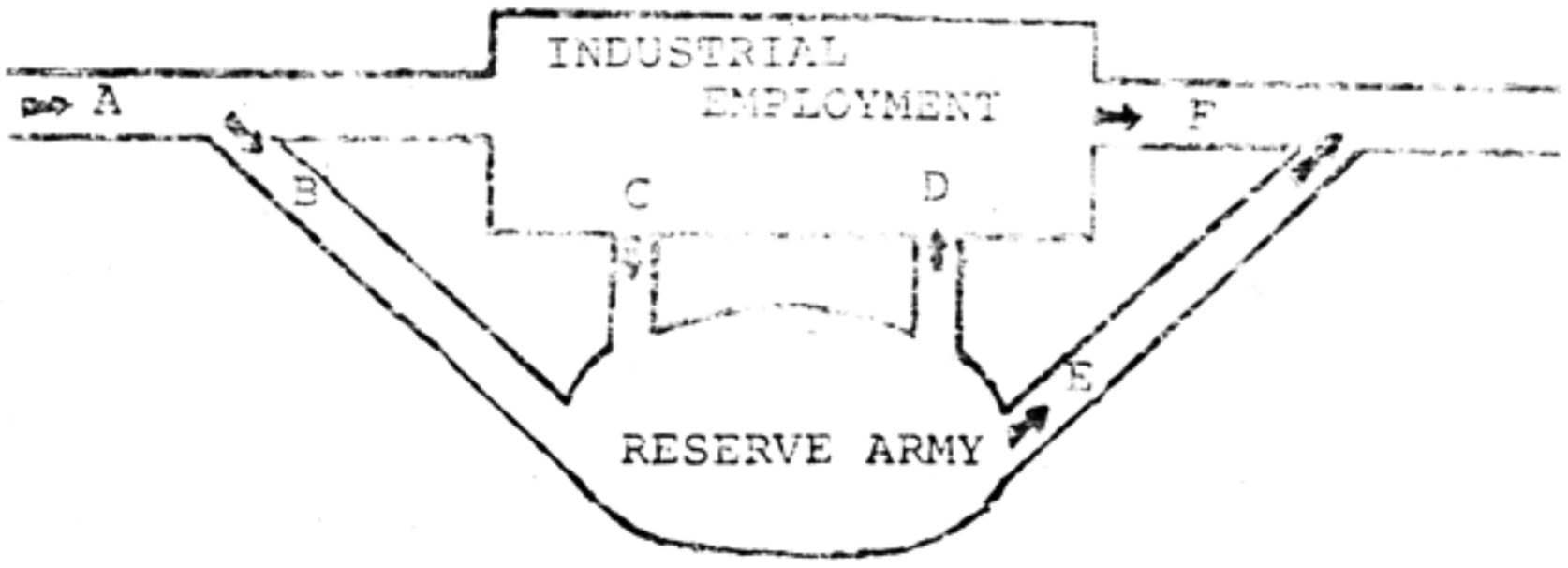
We must remember at this point that in the Marxian theoretical structure surplus value, which is at the root of all profit and therefore at the basis of the capitalist system itself, is derived from the difference between the value of labour power and the value of the commodity produced by the labourer. But then, if equilibrating mechanisms applicable to other commodities do not apply to the commodity labour power, what prevents rising wages from closing the gap between the value of labour power and the value of the product? What inhibits wages so that surplus value and the concomitant capital accumulation continue as the essential feature of capitalist production?

Marx's solution to the problem rests on his concept of the "reserve army of labour" or "relative surplus population". The reserve army consists mainly

of those workers who have been displaced by machinery, whether this takes "the conspicuous form of the dismissal of workers already employed or the less evident but equally real form of increasing difficulty in the absorption of the supplementary working population through the usual channels." (Marx, 1972(a), p.696) (The latter part of this quotation is particularly important as regards the position of women but we shall return to this later). By competing on the open labour market the reserve army forces the level of wages downward. During periods of vast capital accumulation the reserve army is absorbed into the labour force while during periods of depression the reserve army swells. Therefore, writes Sweezy, "relative surplus population is ..... The pivot upon which the law of demand and supply of labour works". (Sweezy, 1968: p.87)

To get back to the particular position of women under industrialization: Sweezy's diagrammatic illustration of the industrial process, reproduced below, helps us to understand the position of women in the industrial process in general and in the reserve army in particular.

The Industrial Process



A New Workers
B Unable to find jobs
C Displaced
D Rehired
E Retiring
F Retiring

During the early stages of industrialization, women have very litte place in the industrial process. In terms of Sweezy's diagram they are not to be found in the picture but are situated somewhere to the left of A, the group of new workers, and are engaged in either agricultural production or Boserup's "bazaar and service occupations". As industrialization proceeds, the household production of women is rendered increasingly obsolete. Goods which were produced in the home are now produced more cheaply in the factories. With industrial expansion, carried forward by capital accumulation, vast numbers of new workers are required to enter the industrial process. Simultaneously, large numbers of women, displaced from their non-industrial occupations by technology become available for participation in the labour force. Indeed, their participation generally becomes essential because they now require cash wages to compensate for the loss of those commodities which were previously produced in the home and which are essential for the physiological and psychological reproduction of the family. It would be incorrect to assume that the displacement by machinery of women and their consequent re-employment in industry takes place at an even pace and preserves a nice equilibrium. It appears, on the contrary that vast numbers of women are generally released from household production in a relatively short space of time and, unless they remain in unproductive household activities or the "midway' service occupations, they become absorbed into the industrial process or swell the ranks of the reserve army.

In terms of Sweezy's diagram, therefore and in terms of the changes in the occupational structure described above, large numbers of women are added to A, the group of new workers, during the transition from agriculture and household production to industry. From A large numbers of women proceed directly into industrial employment to participate, in particular, in what are traditional female activities, e.g. the production of textiles and clothing and the preparation of food. The labour of women, in other words, is transferred from the household to industry. Whereas before their labour power became embodied in products for familial or

local consumption, their labour power is now embodied in products sold on the open market. Like the labour power of men before them, the labour power of women itself becomes a commodity.

One of the reasons why in early industrialization, preference is given to the employment of men is the nature of the work involved: many of the jobs during this period of industrialization require considerable physical strength or a degree of skill which only men, as craftsmen in the non-industrial world, have been able to acquire. It appears that etchnology was the single most important factor in bringing about the consequent increase in female labour force participation. Marx and Engels point very clearly to this factor:

> "The less the skill and exertion of strength implied in manual labour, in other words, the more modern industry becomes developed, the more is the labour of men superseded by that of women. Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex ... The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalized, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level".
> (Marx, 1972(b) : p. 341-42)

And in Capital Marx writes :

"... The development of the capitalist method of production and of the productivity of labour (simultaneously cause and effect of accumulation) enables the capitalist, with the same outlay of variable capital, to set in action more labour by the more effective exploitation (extensive or intensive) of each individual labour power. (Furthermore).....
with the same capital value he can buy more labour power, inasmuch as he progressively replaces skilled workers by unskilled, mature labour power by immature, men by women, grown-ups by young persons or children".
(Marx, 1972(a): p.702)

With differentiation and specialization skilled jobs become diluted and women enter the industrial labour force at the lowest rungs. A skilled job may be divided into a number of semi-skilled and unskilled jobs and, unless this occurs in a traditionally female industry women enter the industry as the least skilled workers.

However, some of the women whose household production becomes obsolete, neither enter domestic service nor become directly absorbed into industrial employment. In terms of Sweezy's diagram they are members of group B, "The new workers who, failing to find employment, immediately join the ranks of the Reserve Army" (Sweezy, 1968 : p.90)

As mentioned above, the reserve army is recruited primarily from those who have been displaced by machinery. The idea of displacement by machinery must be understood very broadly. It must not only be interpreted as meaning the displacement of those persons who were employed but, because of the introduction of machinery, have lost their jobs, but also those who may not have been employed but whose activity has been disrupted by the introduction of machinery elsewhere. This applies in particular to women whose household production has been disrupted by the introduction of new machinery in the factories. The reserve army must also be understood to include those women who, because they see no chance for industrial employment, do not consider themselves as "unemployed" but who are, in fact, potential workers because they would work if the opportunity for employment arose.

This is the way then in which women enter the industrial reserve army which, in the early stages of industrialization, consisted almost exclusively of men. As industrialization proceeds and technology changes the nature of jobs to be done in the factories, female workers do not only enter industrial employment directly (as discussed above) but also via the reserve army. (The path A B D IN Sweezy's diagram). The labour force becomes increasingly more sexually homogenous. Very young and very old men are now increasingly excluded from the labour force while female labour force participation rates continue to rise.

From the capitalist's point of view the expansion of the reserve army facilitates capital accumulation. The result of the extension of the capitalist mode of production now becomes the cause of further extension. Women are simultaneously expelled from household production and impelled into industrial employment. Whether they are absorbed directly into industrial employment or whether they become part of the reserve army, the labour power of women, by virtue of its extent, becomes an extremely important factor in the accumulation process.

Sweezy's model is concerned with industrial employment and as such, refers only to the industrial sphere. Little or no account is taken of the sphere of non-material production i.e. the tertiary sector, which grows out of and nourishes the industrial sector. Except in the initial stages of industrialization women play an important role in the tertiary sector, primarily in office work and service activities. Since the expansion of the tertiary sector is dependent on the expansion of the industrial sector and since the expansion of the industrial sector is, to a very significant extent, dependent on the entry of women into the industrial labour force, we may say that the growth of opportunities for women in the tertiary sector is a consequence of their role in industrial employment.

As the tertiary sector expands, new workers are drawn into it either directly, from the sphere of industrial employment, from the industrial reserve army or from what we may call the "tertiary sector reserve army". In relation to the tertiary sector the principles of a reserve army of labour is partially obscured by the fact that special education and training is required in areas of this sector and, indeed, the non-existence of a reserve army for certain areas of this sector may (and does) result in inflated wages. In addition, in the tertiary sector the dividing line between capital and labour is not as easily distinguishable as in the industrial sector. However, under mature capitalism, as has become evident in the United States and Western Europe, a reserve army of highly trained people is created and competition even at high

levels of skill in the tertiary sector ensues. The tertiary sector reserve army consists on the one hand of those who, because of their qualifications, do not wish to seek industrial employment and, on the other, of unemployed unskilled and semi-skilled service workers who are unable or do not wish to secure industrial employment.

We have seen how the accumulation of capital both facilitates and is facilitated by the entry of women into the labour force. We have mentioned that women either enter the industrial process at the lowest rungs or they enter traditional "female" industries. However, the sexual structure of occupations in both the industrial and tertiary sectors requires further examinations.

First the industrial sector. While there are significant variations from place to place, women are generally concentrated in relatively few industries. The largest proportions are to be found in the textile and clothing industries and in the processing of food. In fact, in those areas where these industries are important the degree if female labour force participation is generally higher than in areas where these industries are not significant. The concentration of women in these industries is, as Sullerot puts it, "a hangover from ..... pre-industrial times" (Sullerot 1971: p. 141) The traditional pre-industrial activities of women, the making of clothing and cooking, are transferred to the factory. But even in these industries, where women form an overwhelming proportion of the total labour force, they do not occupy the jobs which require advanced technical qualifications. In recent years, with the introduction of sophisticated machinery into "female" industries, there has been a decline in the proportion of females in these industries. Women have not been trained to operate the machinery; men with advanced technical qualifications have been introduced or have been trained to take on the new jobs. The refusal by management to invest in the training of women often revolves around the fact that female employment is generally discontinuous and of shorter duration than that of males. In all industries, therefore, including "female" industries, men form an overwhelming proportion of skilled workers.

Women are incorporated in all areas of industry but always at the lowest rungs. As Sullerot writes:

> "... it does not really matter to women whether they are setting up looms or placing filaments in transistors, since in either case they are untrained and unskilled and therefore everywhere condemned to the most monotonous and repetitive of tasks, those which are most exhausting to the nerves and the least well paid". (Sullerot, 1971: p. 142)

The situation in the tertiary sector does not differ significantly. Women are generally relegated to inferior positions, whether it be in the service, sales, clerical or even professional area. Women are tearoom waitresses while men are hotel resturant waiters, women sell teapots, while men sell motor cars; women are teachers and nurses while men are professors and physicians. The tertiary sector, a vast source of employment for women does nothing for their employment status; they occupy the most subordinate positions and the least skilled posts.

Occupations in the industrial and tertiary sectors are sex-specific; men and women are employed in specific (different) occupations because it is believed that they possess certain traits which facilitate their doing a specific job - Wilensky summarizes the traits that women are believed to possess when he points to the concentration of women in jobs which involve one or more of the following characteristics:

> "*traditional housewives' tasks - cooking, cleaning, sewing, canning.
> *few or no strenuous activities and hazards.
> *patience, waiting, routine (receptionists, sales workers, telephone operators).
> *rapid use of hands and fingers, such as in office machine operating and electrical assembling.
> *a distinctive welfare or cultural orientation.
> *contact with young children.
> *sex appeal".
> (Wilensky, 1968: p. 235)

The sexual structure of occupations and the sex-labelling of jobs is well documented both in the general literature on female labour force participation and in the women's liberation literature, all of which point to the discriminatory practices which attempt to "keep women in their place". But unless these practices are understood within a broader framework, unless the function of the sexual division of labour under capitalist production is examined, this documentation is of little value.

The sexual division of labour another dimension of the differentiation and specialization required for mass production, facilitates the accumulation of capital in a number of ways. Firstly, differences in pay for equally skilled or unskilled work allows the extraction of even more surplus value than "normal" from female labour and, therefore, the making of even greater profits. No matter what their degree of skill women are generally paid less than men whose work requires an equal level of skill. Wage discrimination on the grounds of sex has often been justified by the claim that women's wages are generally only "supplementary" to the male's, a particularly weak justification when one considers that for most working women, work (whether inside or outside the household) has always been an economic necessity and not merely a question of "fulfilling one's creative potential" or occupying one's time in an interesting manner". In some areas, both industrialized and "underdeveloped", legislation has been enacted to attempt to ensure that women receive "equal pay for equal work". Yet this kind of legislation is virtually meaningless if one considers that women generally perform different kinds of jobs from men and although these jobs may be equally skilled or unskilled, the difference in kind is sufficient, in the eyes of management and of the law, to deem the jobs unequal and, therefore, deserving of unequal remuneration. In such instances the sexual division of labour is necessary for wage discrimination and thus for a higher rate of exploitation of women.

What effect does the sexual division of labour have on male workers? Does it strengthen their bargaining position vis-à-vis capital? At first glance it may appear that because of the sexual division of

labour, female workers do not present a threat to male workers. But this point of view takes little account of the fact that, although the sexual division of labour is maintained, the line of division shifts. In other words, while male workers in the upper levels of skill and male workers involved in physically demanding labour are subject to competition from male workers in the lower levels, men in the lower levels are subjected to competition from unskilled or semi-skilled female workers. Areas of work which were once male become female, even in the tertiary sector. In the nineteenth century, for example, male secretaries put up great resistance to the intrusion of women in offices. Alexander Dumas, who before becoming a playwright and a novelist, held a secretarial post, warned women that "if they put one foot inside an office, they would lose every vestige of feminity" (cited in Sullerot, 1971: p. 147). Thus, in general, we may say that as industrialization creates new types of occupations, primarily for males, women move up into the positions vacated by men. The sexual division of labour allows for the greater exploitation of women while not allowing male workers to become more secure in relation to capital.

Of course, this model of the sexual division of labour is strictly applicable only to homogenous (racially, ethnically, etc.) societies. In e.g. multi-racial societies the hierarchical structure is much more complicated.

The forces maintaining the sexual division of labour and those maintaining the racial division of labour interact to maintain their own equilibrium. Whether the forces maintaining the sexual division of labour are stronger than those maintaining the racial division of labour or vice versa, depends upon particular historical conditions. Szymanski would argue that in contemporary America the racial division of labour is subordinate to the sexual division of labour (Szymanski, 1974: esp. p. 719-22) Conversely in South Africa it appears that the racial division of labour, bolstered as it is by a web of political and ideological structures, takes precedence over the sexual division of labour in influencing the nature of the labour market. The general principles

described above concerning the role of women in the labour force, continue to apply but within a particular framework, a framework determined not only by economic factors but also by political and ideological factors.

It appears that the mechanism described above in relation to males and females in the labour force apply equally to e.g. whites and blacks in the labour force: in the same way that exploitation is facilitated by the sexual division of labour, so it is by the racial division of labour. Super-profits are realized and racial groups are set up against each other in the labour market.

Within such an organization of labour the position of racially dominant women is radically different from their positions, and will receive incomes, vastly superior to those occupied by men of an oppressed racial group. However, the existence of a racial division of labour does not deny the existence of a sexual division of labour; it only serves to complicate it. Women of the dominant racial group may find themselves in a position superior to that of males in a dominated group but these same women are invariably subordinate to men of the same group. It is the women of the racially subordinated group who find themselves in the most inferior position. On the ~~other~~ hand they are subjected to racial and on the other to sexual domination. The sexual and racial divisions of labour generally coincide to relegate them to the most subordinate positions. In instances where the sexual barrier is oversome, the racial barrier remains and vice versa; sexism and racism combine to form a double barrier to true mobility.

The reader may be tempted to conclude, from the above description, that race and sex are being viewed as primary determinants of stratification. This is not so; what is being said is that the traditional Marxian interpretation of "class" must be expanded to take account of the effects of political and ideological factors (including 'race' and 'sex') on the nature of class formation. And, indeed, if Marxism fails to accomodate the influence of such factors (which have really only been perceived as significant factors in the

time since Marx's death) on the nature and formation of classes, it denies the negative dialectic which is at the heart of Marx's method. Neither time nor space permits a more comprehensive discussion of this very important consideration. However, it is with reference to these general ideas that it must be stressed that, although race and sex are not perceived as primary determinants of stratification, they are essential elements of any stratification system.

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THE AFRICAN WOMEN WORKERS IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN DURBAN

by Jean Westmore and Pat Townsend

INTRODUCTION

An exploratory study recently investigated the situation of the African women workers in the Textile Industry in Durban. Attention focused on features characterising the African woman worker in the sphere of production (i.e. as a wage labourer), in the sphere of reproduction of labour power (i.e. as a domestic labourer and reproducer) and how participation in either sphere interacts with and affects participation in the other sphere.

A tentative attempt was made to assess attitudes of women workers, firstly, towards their structural position in the work-force; secondly, to their role as unpaid domestic labourer and childbearer; thirdly, their attitude to sexism that characterise relationships between male and female; and finally, general response to the social situation in South Africa of African women.

A small sample of intensive in-depth interviews was conducted with women workers, living in Clermont, either in the "single-women' hostels or in housing in the township itself. The interviews were conducted in Zulu with the use of a questionaire schedule. Results gathered from the analysis of interview responses have been used below to illustrate theoretical points rather than to provide a basis for a systematic analysis.

South African society is characterised by two main features, capitalism and racism, and the relationship that exists between them. As a

capitalist society, South Africa comprises a number of social groups or classes differentiated from one another by their relationship to the means of production. (i.e. capital and productive apparatus).

Race overlaps broadly with the economic classes of South African capitalism; and racism operates as a justificatory mechanism for maintaining the white group in a position of prosperity and supremacy. A further component of the dominant ideology which must be taken into account is the sexist component the system of male dominance and the sexual division of labour which has followed the women into industry.

Given this description of South African society, the African women workers' social situation is characterised by a triple yoke of oppression: she is exploited for surplus as a worker, she is discriminated against on the basis of colour, and last but not least, she is discriminated against on the basis of sex.

The exploitation and discrimination on the basis of colour that the African women experience as workers, is shared with African male workers. These two aspects of oppression and the effects they have on the maintenance of wages at a base minimum; and on strenuous working conditions where the work load is heavy; rest periods too short, relationships between staff strained and shift work demanding, have been documented and discussed.

What is of interest here is how the womens' position as workers is further affected by the ideological role of sexism which operates to stigmatise certain segments of the labour force in order to facilitate exploitation. Capitalism creates ghettos in industry as well as in towns.

WOMEN WORKERS AS WAGE LABOURERS

The majority of economically active African women in the industrial labour force in Durban are employed by textile and related industries. The textile industry is a labour-intensive and consequent-

ly has a low wage structure.

During the period 1958-9 to 1973, the employment figures for the textile industry overall, increased from 36,855 to 188,400 (69% African). (From : Institute of Race Relations : Wage Determinants Current in South Africa, 1974). During this period it was decided to employ more black women in industry, as it was argued that they were well-suited to textile manual and semi-skilled work. By 1960, 285 out of the 580 economically active African women involved in the industrial labour force in Durban were employed in textile and related industries. (From S.A. Bureau of Statistics Population Census, Sept. 1960 for the Metropolitan Area of Durban). By 1972 the employment of African women at the group of Frame Cotton Mills in Pinetown alone had reached 3,139 (from National Industrial Council for the Textile Manufacturing Industry of the R.S.A. 1972).

The functionality of a large female workforce becomes apparent upon examining a whole series of discriminations practised against the woman worker. Such discrimination finds an ideological justification in the role of the woman in the family as wife and mother. The role of legal-economic dependant in the family follows women into industry, and by using and manipulating sexual stereotypes perpetuated by the ideology of male dominance and white supremacy, the sexual division of labour is reproduced on the larger terrain of socialised production.

(A) WAGES

Women workers' wages are depressed to a norm below those received by men workers. The justificatory argument is that the majority of women work only to supplement the male's income; or for "pocket money".

The practical enactment of discrimination is ensured by a series of industrial agreements.

The textile industry is divided into two labour relations systems. The controlled sector (i.e. the blanket and rug, kaffir sheeting, canvas &

duck and the flock and felt sections) which is covered by an industrial council; and the cotton sector, which comes under the Wage Order for the Light Cotton Textile Manufacturing Industry. Of the approximately 41 textile units in Durban, 11 are in the controlled section, and 30 in the cotton section (from Institute for Industrial Education: The Durban Strikes 1973).

The Industrial Council agreement is an agreement between the National Textile Manufacturers' Association and the Textile Workers Industrial Union (South Africa). The union is largely a male-dominated body with only a few token women members on the executive. The terms of the agreement cover conditions of work from the payment of minimum wages for different categories of work, to sick leave, to the provision of protective clothing for certain workers.

In terms of a wage differential, the agreement stipulates that in any class of work (excluding female clerical employees and female employees engaged exclusively in picking and sorting rags), females can be employed at a rate of remuneration of 20 per cent less than the minimum wage prescribed by the agreement. Furthermore, it is stipulated that "excluding female persons employed as sewers, spinners, weavers or those whose rate of remuneration is not less than the minimum rate prescribed for her class of work, the number of female employees, employed in any establishment in terms of this subclause at rates lower than the minimum prescribed shall at no time exceed 25 per cent of the balance of all employees in that establishment for whom provision is made in this Agreement." (From Republic of S.A. Government Gazette, Government Notices : No. R. 1676 of Sept. 1972, and No. R. 1465 of July, 1975.)

The latest Wage Board agreement for the Light Cotton Textile Manufacturing Industry makes provision for a 20% wage differential between the wages of adult men (i.e. over 18 years of age), and women and male juveniles.

Furthermore, the Durban area differential is 90.2% of the standard which is taken as 100% in the Cape area; thus the women workers' wage in the Durban district vary between 24.4% and 13.1% of the artisan's rate (taken as 100%). (Information from S.A. Institute of Race Relations: Wage Determination Current in South Africa, 1974).

African women entered the industrial labour force in South Africa largely because they were forced to do so for financial reasons (all the women we interviewed who had come from the rural areas to Durban, did so to seek work to earn money).

Many African women workers are the sole breadwinners and supporters of their dependents. Either they have no male partners (they may be widows, divorcees or single with or without children, or their men are out of work or are intermittent workers (due to drunkeness or other debilitating effects of poverty). For example, 14 of the women interviewed were the sole supporters of their dependents.

In response to being asked why they thought the textile factories employ women workers, the majority replied that the factories employ women because the employers can pay them lower wages than the men. (Some did maintain that they were employed because certain work in the textile industry was more suitable for women.)

One woman stated: "They suppose that it is the males who support families and that women only work for fancy clothes and other pretty things, but our expenses/needs are the same".

In response to a question on why they supposed that men received higher wages than women, the majority stated that they supposed men received higher wages than women because "it was thought that they incurred more responsibilities and expenses than women". However the women argued that such a wage differential does not seem justified because women have the same expenses as men and because some jobs are performed by both men and women.

When the women were asked if they would like to

receive equal wages for doing the same job, they replied with a definite "Yes".

Most of the women interviewed maintained that it is as necessary for women to work as it is for men. Reasons given included the expenses of urban living, poverty, and irresponsible husbands and lovers.

(B) SKILLED WORK

In the different sections of the textile manufacturing industry, categories of work assume a varying status according to what textiles are being processed. Although no factual information regarding the occupation of different positions on the basis of sex was available, it would seem that male workers predominate in the most skilled and supervisary classes of work.

Management argues that they cannot put women workers on educational or training courses for more skilled classes of work because women are intermittent workers due to their reproductive function of childbearing.

On one level, this justification by management tempts cynical comment on the rather blatant assumption that the profit drive should at times supercede the need for workers to find some level of fulfilment and satisfaction in their work. Indeed, only one of the women interviewed voiced satisfaction with her present class of work. The majority of women expressed aspirations for the more skilled and responsible jobs usually performed by men, but specifically stipulated that these aspirations excluded those categories of work requiring heavy manual labour.

However, given the position of women workers in the present system, to be drawn into debate on the worthiness or otherwise of such a justification, draws attention away from whether in fact pregnancy is detrimental to women workers' productivity in any significant way.

For example, in the present clauses of the Industr-

ial Council Agreement covering sick leave, no provision is made for maternal leave for the female worker who falls pregnant, nor for special sick leave, in the case of a pregnant woman who suffers a miscarriage. Both male and female workers share the same sick-leave benefits viz, after one month's employment the worker is granted:

a. in the case of a worker who works a seven-day week, 14 working days sick-leave;

b. in the case of a worker who works a six-day week, 12 working days sick-leave;

c. in the case of a worker who works a five-day week, 10 working days sick-leave.

Such provisions prevent women from taking off additional leave for pregnancy. In any case, the majority of African women workers are forced to work until the final stages of pregnancy for financial reasons alone.

Managements' attitute does however serve the purpose of creating anxiety and insecurity amongst its female workers. Because there is a large reserve army of labour, and because management's attitude is unfavourable, the advent of pregnancy can be interpreted by the woman worker as a severe threat to job maintenance.

Indeed, one of the answers given by the women interviewed when they were asked why they thought women decided to have abortions was that it was feared that pregnancy would jeopardise job security.

There was an acute awareness of management's interests in this regard: the majority of the women interviewed maintained that management would like them to take contraceptive measures, as they do not want workers to stop working due to pregnancy. A sexual stereotype is being manipulated here: management does not want a stoppage of work due to pregnancy, but the reproductive function of women is used as a rationalisation for keeping women amongst the unskilled and low paid workers.

(C) SEXISM AND CLASS SOLIDARITY

Within the Industrial Council Agreement, certain provision is made to prevent the male worker from being undercut by the female worker. For example "no male person employed on any particular class of work shall be replaced in his class of work by a female person at a lesser rate of renumeration than that payable to the male".

By implication this provision serves to protect the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled male worker. But the skilled male worker is put into a position of relative privilege in relation to the large body of unskilled women workers. Women workers pose a greater threat to unskilled and semi-skilled African male workers as they constitute a reserve army of labour willing to work for low wages and to undercut the male workers. This sexual division amongst the working class is likely to undermine the security of the male worker vis à vis capital. It is a useful tool for capital/management: Sexist attitudes can be manipulated in order to defuse the bargaining power of the workers.

The women workers interviewed expressed a clear awareness of the holding of sexist attitudes by men workers from the point of view of the inter-relation of sexist ideology between the home and the factory; and from the point of view of job structure.

When asked whether they thought men workers would like women workers to do the same jobs as them and to receive the same wages, the majority of women maintained that men workers would not be in favour of such measures. They gave two reasons for an unfavourable attitude on the part of the men.

Firstly, they said that men would feel threatened as workers if women were allowed to perform the same jobs with equal pay.
Secondly, they said that men would feel threatened because the pattern of male/female relationships in the family would be affected, and women would lose respect for the men.

(D) SEXISM AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

Not only does the ideology of sexism affect the objective conditions of the female worker vis-à-vis the male worker, but also the nature of relationships established on the factory floor. It seems that the male workers misuse and take liberties with the women workers.

The women reported that the men workers in their factories have no respect for them. On the factory floor, men ill-treat the women, make fools of them, and become vulgar by "touching women in embarassing parts". Others mentioned that the men assault the women that they work with, one noting that if this is reported to the authorities, the latter take the part of the men.

(E) SEXISM AND INTERNALISED OPPRESSION

Men workers are not the only holders of divisive sexist attitudes. Many of the women interviewed have internalised the stereotypical differentiation between the sexes. For example, when asked whether it was as necessary for women to work as it was for men, some of the women interviewed responded that this was not a good practice: a woman's place was in the home with her children. Furthermore, some women indicated that the ability of women to persevere, even though jobs were monotonous and routine, was one of the reasons why management employed them. Rowbotham has stated:

"Women are so often told that they are patient, conforming, modest, good at routine work and so on that in the end they come to believe it themselves. Every woman in the labour force in capitalism .. has had the view of both male domination and the white ruling class imposed on her".
(Rowbotham, S..."Woman's Consciousness, Man's World" p. 97)

Women need to break with these definitions of their womenhood, and free themselves into dignity and the solidarity essential for industrial organisation. Women workers should organise with their men, and in the process of this organisation struggle for their

liberation from all aspects of their oppression: exploitation as workers, and the facilitation of this exploitation by discrimination on the basis of sex.

WOMEN WORKERS AS UNPAID DOMESTIC LABOURERS OR REPRODUCERS OR LABOUR POWER

When the women interviewed were asked if women workers had more problems than men workers, they replied that women workers do have more problems then men workers because of their responsibilities vis-à-vis the home and child-care. Some responses were: "Women have a number of problems. Firstly, they bear children" ; "The running of the home is my sole responsibility". ; "The women sees to it that everyone in the family gets food despite that there may be no money available; the man will demand food. This leads the woman to secretly lend money from others. With a small child the mother has to see to it that he is provided with food and clothing".

The African woman as domestic labourer and child bearer fulfils two important functions for South Africa's racial capitalism. Firstly, as a domestic labourer, the woman as unpaid worker battles to eke out an existence for her family from the meagre family wage packet. This ensures that workers arrive at their place of employment clothed and fed and in a fit condition to work. As a child-bearer and child rearer , the woman as unpaid worker ensures a continual supply of cheap labour by providing subsistence for the present workers. She also provides unpaid substitutes for herself to continue the function of domestic labour.

Women are allocated full responsibility for domestic labour and child-rearing although they still have to work long hours at the factories. There is very little division of labour in the home. A sexist attitude is also evident in the way that many men guard their wage packets. The women are usually given a sum of money every week to cover household expenses, and many have no idea of what their men earn. Few sit down to work out a common budget together.

The average day of the African woman worker begins at about 4,30 a.m. Before she catches the bus to the factory at 5,15 a.m. she completes a few domestic chores (e.g. making beds and breakfast). In the evening she arrives back home any time between 5,30 p.m. and 7 p.m. depending on overtime and the availability of transport. On arriving home she has to cook the evening meal, put the children to bed, and sometimes do washing and ironing before she herself lies down for the night. During the weekends, heavier household chores are performed as well as other domestic work like sewing and knitting.

Clauses in the Industrial Council Agreement operate to ensure that the female worker will fulfil her domestic labour role. These provisions are incorporated into the clauses dealing with overtime. It is stipulated that no employer shall require or permit a female worker:

a. to work overtime for more than two hours on any day or on more than three consecutive days;

b. to work overtime on more than 60 days in any year;

c. to work overtime after completion of ordinary hours of work for more than one hour on any one day unless she has:

   i) before midday given notice thereof to such employee; or

   ii) provided such employee with an adequate meal before the commencement of such overtime; or

   iii) paid such employee 15 cents in sufficient time to enable her to obtain a meal before such overtime is due to commence".

Furthermore, no employer shall require or permit a female worker to work.

i) between 6.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m. or

ii) after 1.00 p.m. on more than 5 days in any week.

The women's twin role in the spheres of production and reproduction means that during the week, there is more or less no free time at all (only one woman in the study said that she had time to sit back and relax with a newspaper during the week); during the weekend the little free time available is spent either visiting friends or going to church. None of the women interviewed had creative hobbies not connected with domestic labour. The labour-saving devices that have alleviated the duties of the housewife in other social groups are beyond the financial means of the majority of the African women in the townships.

The sexist division of labour in the home and the clauses in the Industrial Council Agreement, serve in turn to withold from women workers the opportunity of either taking part in creative activities (outside the factory); and from the possibility of earning a higher wage from overtime work.

These two aspects of the women workers' everyday life interact with each other in contradictory ways that render the women workers' situation problematic and tension-ridden.

LIMITING EFFECTS OF THE ROLE OF REPRODUCER OF LABOUR POWER

The limiting effect the womens' role as reproducer of labour power has on her role as wage labourer has already emerged in discussion on how the women's role reproducer is used manipulatively to justify the retention of women workers as a subservient section of the workforce. The two main effects of this ideology are the creation of a male worker 'aristocracy', and prohibitions on overtime work, done by women workers.

The women interviewed in the study did not seem aware of the way in which their role as reproducers affects their position in the labour force. For example, most of the women answered the question "Why do you think women workers do different jobs to men workers?" in terms of conventional sexual stereotypes (i.e. "men do harder jobs than women

because they have more strength", "men do dangerous jobs", "women work with cloth", "this is a suitable job for them" etc.).

However, the role of reproducer as a limitation on the role of wage labourer, has a structural as well as an ideological dimension. The isolation of domestic labourers is broken down when they enter the public sphere of work, but the potential for collective organisation and action is curbed due to the fact that they are not alleviated from time consuming labour in the home. Only 5 women interviewed belonged to any organisation besides the church: 4 were trade union members; and 1 was in a stokfel group.

LIMITING EFFECTS OF THE ROLE OF WAGE LABOURER

The womens' participation in the workforce shortens the time available for domestic work, but no alternative base of socialised domestic labour and child care is available. Creches in the townships are few and far between and the facilities inadequate to cater for the needs of the township.

The majority of the women textile workers who were interviewed left their children in the care of family and relatives, some employ young girls to look after their babies and children. The migrant women workers' children are usually cared for by family in the rural areas. If they become pregnant while in town, they send their babies back to be cared for by the reserve mothers. Child care has in a sense also become commercialised. The women pay R5,00 to R20,00 per month to have their children looked after.

When asked if they thought it would be a good idea for factories to provide creches for the children of the working mothers, the majority strongly supported the idea. (One respondent suggested a boarding school for the children of migrant workers).

It has already been mentioned that some women undergo abortions for fear that falling pregnant will jeopardise job security. The abortion issue is obviously a sensitive one as it was difficult to illicit discussion on this topic.

Reasons given for abortion other than fear of losing jobs included the expense of having a child, and cases where the father of the child either disputed the pregnancy or deserted the woman.

If asked what condition women are in after having an abortion, most respondents said that they did not know. One women knew of a case where a woman had died after an abortion, and another said that an aquaintance had fallen ill and had been fired from work as the result of an abortion.

It has been estimated that 1% of women whose abortions turn septic die, 25% are rendered infertile from septic abortions, and of that 25%, 50% have to undergo hysterectomies. One month intake of septic abortion admissions (this includes spontaneous abortions) to Baragwanath Hospital was over 1,000. (From newsletter 8, August 1975, abortion Reform Action Group).

Although Family Planning Clinics have been established in the townships under the auspices of the Department of Health and the pill is distributed free of charge, only 5 of the women interviewed knew that the pill could be obtained without payment, and hence without an additional strain on the monthly budget.

A COMMENT ON SEXUAL AGGRESSION

The majority of women interviewed were concerned with sexual aggression by male workers in the factory, irresponsibility on the part of male partners (drunkeness, desertion, failure to take financial or other responsibility for pregnancy or child-birth), and also the high incidence of sexual assault in Clermont township. The incidence of sexual assault in Clermont is so high that all women interviewed said that they were afraid of walking alone in streets at night. Furthermore, it is rumoured that some men landlords offer women accomodation in return for sexual favours, although only one respondent reported that she knew of a case like this.

Sexual aggression and exploitation within the townships, are community-based symptoms of the sexual oppression that takes place in the industrial and family institutions of capitalism, and by the part-

icular form of exploitation within South Africa's racial capitalism.

The system of migrant labour, influx control, and the Urban Areas Act render the township population a perpetually changing mass of persons who are denied the assurance of permanent residence, and who are thus in a perpetual state of rootlessness. This type of existence leads to frustration which is expressed in aggression and violence, a displaced aggression directed at groups within the community (e.g. men sexually assaulting women) rather than being constructively channeled into challenging the institutions that perpetuate the state of impermanence and insecurity.

As we come marching, marching we battle too for men,
For they are women's children, and we mother them again.
Our lives shall not be sweetened from birth until life closes;
Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!

As we come marching, marching unnumbered women dead
Go crying through our singing their ancient cry for bread.
Small art and love and beauty but their drudging spirit knew
Yet it is bread we fight for ..... but we fight for roses too.

As we come marching, marching we bring the greater days
The rising of the women means the rising of the race.
No more drudge and idler..... ten that toil where one reposes,
But a sharing of life's glories : Bread and roses! Bread and roses.

(Song inspired by banners carried by young mill girls in the 1912 Lawrence Massachusetts textile strike)

AFRIKANER WOMEN OF THE GARMENT UNION DURING THE 'THIRTIES AND 'FORTIES

INTRODUCTION

by John Mawbey

Below we publish three edited versions of auto-biographical sketches by Afrikaner women members of the Garment Union. The sketches cover the period of the 1930s and 1940s and deal with three major issues: the nature and extent of their exploitation; the development of trade unionism among them; and their successful defence of their Union in the face of the onslaught by the "reformers" of Afrikaner Nationalism.

The story of these women and the nature of their response to the changes taking place in the South African social formation during these years of rapid secondary industrialisation must be of central concern to those involved in an analysis of the development of South Africa's racially divided working class. Heavily exploited, there developed amongst these women the seeds of a trade union consciousnesswhich went far towards transcending the racial antagonisms which South Africa's ruling classes have used so successfully to inhibit the development of working class solidarity.

The proletarianisation of Afrikaner women began, as with the Afrikaner people as a whole, as a consequence of the economic devastation of the rural areas during the Anglo Boer War. It was only after the onset of secondary industrialisation, however, that sufficient employment opportunities were created, and that substantial numbers of these women entered industry. The first such influx took place as a result of the accelerated development associated with the First World War. It was followed by further and more substantial increases at the end of the 'twenties and during the early 'thirties following the boost given to secondary industry by the protectionist policies of the Pact Government and more particularly by the increased foreign investment which followed the devaluation of the South African Pound in 1933.

Unskilled and newly arrived in an industrial milieu Afrikaner women faced crude exploitation. If wage rates for Afrikaner men had to be based on a recognition of the needs of their families as the reproducers of labour power the rates for women workers could be differently assessed. On the assumption that part of the costs for the reproduction of their labour power was met from elsewhere, their wages were calculated at a level close to that of migrant Black workers who were similarly assumed to have other resources. Thus in 1917 a Government Commission of inquiry concluded that in the clothing industry "the payment of wages (to white, mainly women, workers) below what may be called the subsistence minimum is common." The extent of their sufferings during the thirties is told in the sketches below.

The Garment Union of predominantly Arikaner women developed out of the earlier Witwatersrand Tailors Association under the able leadership of Solly Sachs. The WTA was initially a union of the more highly skilled bespoken tailors and contracting tailors of the Witwatersrand. During the twenties an Industrial sector had been established in the face of the threat posed by industrial production. It was however only after the assumption of office by Solly Sachs in 1928 that a concerted effort was made to organise the Afrikaner women. The early development of the Union was characterised by sharp conflict with the employers, with two major strikes taking place in 1931 and 1932. These actions also lead to conflict with the state particularly in the second case where the defiance of the Garment women was seen by the Nationalist Government of the time as threatening their chances in an impending by-election in Germiston. Minister of Justice Pirow decided on harsh measures to contain the strike and large numbers of women were arrested. Yet the Garment women were not intimidated, and during the following years they were to move even further along a path which was perceived as threatening by all classes of the South African establishment.

The trade union sympathies of the large mass of Afrikaner workers had always posed a threat to the development of Afrikaner Nationalism and it

was in fact only after a sustained attack on key trade unions that the Nationalists were able to gain the electoral victory of 1948 (1). The success of the Afrikaner "reformers" in capturing control of some unions (eg. the Mine Workers' Union) contrasts strongly with their complete failure in the case of the Garment Union. Despite repeated assault both verbal and physical the women of the Garment Union remained committed to the trade unionism which they had forged and moved even further in the direction of the non-racial class solidarity so inimical to Afrikaner Nationalism. (Or for that matter to all of the dominant classes in South Afirca).

At one level the reasons for their steadfast adherence to their union can be located within the structure of the Union and the nature of its leadership. A comparison with the Mine workers Union is instructive. The leadership of the Mine Workers' Union was hopelessly corrupt and continually failed to respond to the grievances of its members. In this situation the Reformers were able to use economic grievances in their struggle for control of the Union. The Garment Union on the other hand had been successful in defending its members and in responding to their needs. Thus the Reformers had to rely entirely on appeals to national sentiment whereas Sachs was able to locate his appeals to the National Oppression of Afrikaners in a class context. There were however underlying structural causes for the direction in which the Garment Union developed. The industrial development of the 'thirties was not merely quantitive, but also entailed qualitative changes in the structure of industrial production. Where the Garment industry had previously been characterised by production of the basis of small-scale factory units and "contracting out" systems it began now to be increasingly dominated by larger factories. These changes also threatened the previous labour structure of industry between skilled and unskilled, entailing their replacement by increasing numbers of semi-skilled operatives. Faced by this process of "deskilling", skilled workers react by attempting to entrench their privileged position while the unskilled find the development

to their advantage as it strengthens their bargaining position. For the majority of the skilled workers in South Africa (or for those who had previously had their jobs defined as skilled through the imposition of job colour bars) the response was to call for further ectrenchment of such colour bars. For them the threat was posed by the increasing number of African men entering industry. For the Afrikaner women of the Garment Union the threat was posed in a very different way. The formative years of the thirties were barely passed and they had only just achieved tenable conditions when in the forties the accelerated development of the war period led to an influx of African women into the industry. Being themselves at most only slightly more skilled than the new recruits the threat was particularly acute especially as employers assumed that African women did not qualify as "employees" under the Industrial Conciliation Act and paid them much lower wages. In this situation the Garment Union's strategy was to enter into legal proceedings to procure African women rights under the Act. The I C Act specifically excluded "Pass bearing natives" but as African women were not obliged to carry passes the Supreme Court was forced to admit in the case of Christine Okolo vs the Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (Tvl) in 1944, that African women were entitled to the rights of workers as defined in that Act. Employers were thus forced to pay the rate for the job and the threat of undercutting was averted. At the same time the Garment Union went ahead with the organisation of African women as a section of the Union.

If in subsequent years the Nationalist Government was to take measures to exclude all Africans from the Industrial Conciliation machinery through the 1953 Bantu Labour Relations (settlement of disputes) Act, forcing African Women to establish a seperate union, this does not detract from the solidarity displayed in this earlier period. As an example of the potential for non-racial class solidarity and a tribute to the Afrikaner Women of the Garment Union we publish the following self portraits.

REFERENCE :
(1) For an analysis of the "Reformer" attacks see: Dan O'Meara : White Trade Unionism Political Power and Afrikaner Nationalism. (SALB, Vol. 1 No. 10)

For permission to publish these autobiographical sketches we are much obliged to the archives of the Garment Workers Union in Johannesburg.

HESTER CORNELIUS

In 1930, at the age of twenty-two, I came to Johannesburg to look for work. I worked for one year as a table hand in a clothing factory and was then dismissed. In 1931, I tried to find another job, without success - there were hundreds of girls looking for jobs. I returned to the farm and became an ardent Nationalist, believing that the South African Party was to blame for our poverty and unemployment. Later, I returned to Johannesburg and found work. My sister Johanna and I shared a back room in Vrededorp with the two Vogel sisters. Although I was a fast worker, I was paid only 17s. 6d. a week and there was a lot of slack time in the industry.

I began to fight for my rights and the rights of my fellow-workers almost immediately I started work in a factory. The girls in the factory would come to me with all their complaints and I would take them up with the employer. As I was a good worker, I was confident he would not sack me. Then I heard about the Garment Workers' Union and, one lunch time, we went to the union office. Mr. Sachs, the secretary of the union, took down all our complaints, and I felt straightaway that we could rely upon the union to help. The more I saw of the union activities, the more I realised how necessary it was for the workers to become organised.

At first I could not understand why Mr. Sachs, who was a Jew, fought so hard for the Afrikaner daughters. I spoke to many Nationalists about this very

good Jew, who was doing so much to help us. They attacked him bitterly and this made me lose faith in the Nationalist Party. In 1934, I was elected as a member of the executive committee of the union and learnt much more about trade unionism and about Mr. Sachs. I saw how angry he used to be when employers treated workers badly, and how hard he worked to improve our conditions. I also learnt that Mr. Sachs fought not only for garment workers, but for all the workers. It took a Jew to make me understand that poverty could be wiped out in sunny South Africa and that, if the workers were organised and united, they could gain higher wages and a better life.

In 1932, my sister Johanna was arrested in Germiston whilst taking an active part in the general strike in the clothing industry. My parents came for a few days and I took them to my uncle's family, who were disgusted with Johanna. One of them asked my father what he thought of his daughter going to jail. My father smiled and said she was a'chip off the old block.'

The first strike in which I took a leading part was in 1936, in Cape Town. The garment workers of Cape Town were even worse exploited than we in the Transvaal. Our Union had sent delegates to Cape Town to organise the workers and I was one of them. The workers came out on strike in several factories and I was arrested together with about twenty others. The workers lost the strike and, even today, they are paid much lower wages, than the workers in the Transvaal. Over the years, I took part in numerous strikes of garment workers of the Rand and in Port Elizabeth. In 1942, I helped the Johannesburg sweet workers in their strike for higher wages, and was again arrested together with Anna Scheepers and Dulcie Hartwell.

Over twenty years have passed since I started work in the clothing industry and, during that period, there has been a complete change in our wages, conditions of work and way of life. It was the union with its courageous, able leaders, which set us free from the hell of starvation wages and slum squalor, and no-one else. The Nationalists, the so-

called friends of the Afrikaner workers, have never helped us. On the contrary, they have always tried to break our union.

KATIE VILJOEN

I left school at the age of fifteen and, to help my parents, took employment in Kimberley as a dressmaker at £2 a month. I stayed with relatives who did not charge me for board and lodging, and regularly sent my parents £1 to 30s. a month. I worked in Kimberley for about three years, until 1932, without any increase in wages.

In 1932 - a year of depression - I came to Johannesburg and obtained a job with a private dressmaker in Bezuidenhout Valley at 30s. a week. Unfortunately she closed the workshop after two weeks. I boarded with a Jewish family, Suzman by name, who were extremely good to me and whom I paid £1 a week for board and lodging.

I knew a girl, Lena van Rensburg, also from Boshoff, who had already worked in the clothing industry for some time, and she found me a job in a dressmaking factory at £1 a week. The firm's motto, inscribed in white letters on black cloth, affixed to the entrance, was "Work Like Hell and Still be Merry". They employed about forty women and we did, in fact, work like hell, but were not particularly merry.

* * * * * * * *

As I could not afford tram fares on £1 a week, I walked home from work with my friend, Lena, who, though she lived in an entirely different suburb, acted as my guide. To make sure I would not lose my way, I took a piece of white chalk with me and made various marks on the route from the factory to my lodgings. Next morning, I left the house at 5.30 a.m. as I had to walk a distance of about four miles and work started early.

For a month I walked to and from work every day, but then these long journeys became unbearable. The work was really slave-driving. We started at seven a.m. and finished at six p.m. I could not send any-

thing home to my parents, as my total earnings just covered my board and lodging.

At the end of the first month, I went to see my friend, Lena, again, and she found me a job at Awlwear Overall factory. I started as a shirt machinist at £ 1 10s. a week. Most beginners started at 15s. a week, but when Lena told the manager my sad story, he agreed to raise the wage. I was very anxious to send some money to my parents, and I needed new shoes and clothes as the old ones were wearing out. I did not know the town, but I went from building to building enquiring about cheap accommodation and at last, after a great deal of walking, found a room to share with another young girl, a sweet worker, for which we had to pay 17s. 6d. a week.

My budget was made up as follows:
Rent: 17s. 6d. per week.
Saving up for new clothes: 7s. 6d. per week.
10s. a month I sent to my parents.
The balance of 2s. 6d. a week had to be sufficient for food.

Once a week I used to buy a loaf of bread for 6d., and a pound of butter at 1s. 8d. I lived on bread and butter the whole week and still had 2d. left over at the end. Deeply religious, I used to pray every night for enough strength to carry on with my work. I was a very healthy girl, strongly built, weighing a hundred pounds. I kept my health, but in a short space of time my weight dropped to a hundred and seventeen pounds. My parents never knew the hardships I had to endure.

I knew nothing about trade unionism at that time, but after I had worked for a short while, Johanna Cornelius came and appealed to the workers to join the union. When she mentioned that the contribution was 6d. a week, I decided not to join. I did not know what the word "union" meant, but I knew that if I paid 6d. to the union there would not be enough for a loaf of bread.

A month later, Mr. Sachs, the general secretary,

came to the factory and spoke to the workers about joining the union. I remember him telling us that, although the employers paid us our wages, it was the union that fixed the amount. About a hundred and fifty workers were employed in the factory, of whom more than half were already members of the union, and after this visit more joined. When Mr. Sachs left, a girl, Maria Primavesi who was sitting next to me at the machine, said that I was a coward for not joining the union. I was too proud to admit that I could not afford to contribute 6d. a week, so I merely replied that one day she would find out the reason.

After working for three months, I received an increase of 5s. a week. I immediately went to Maria, told her why I had not joined before and became a member of the union. From that day onward, I took an active interest in the welfare of the workers of the factory where I was employed. I brought all the workers' complaints before the manager, who rather liked my courage and straightforwardness. This made me popular with the other workers, who regularly came to me with their complaints. I managed to settle many minor disputes over wages with the management and put a stop to petty underpayments altogether. I also succeded in getting the cloakroom regularly cleaned and washed and in having tea served for all the workers.

My wages increased every three months, in accordance with the agreement which the union had made with the employers' association and, in time, life became more tolerable. When my weekly wages reached £2 10s. I could afford to rent a room for myself and to send money regularly to my parents.

In 1938 I was elected a member of the central executive committee of the union. I found the work on the committee very interesting and took an active part in union work. In the same year, the "Reformers", led by a certain D.B.H. Grobbelaar, started their attacks on the union and on Mr. Sachs. I understood at once that these people were not interested in the welfare of the workers, but were out to destroy the union, and I despised them intensely. All the workers in my factory felt the same.

In March 1938, the union had arranged a challenge meeting with Grobbelaar at the City Hall, Johannesburg, and all the workers were greatly excited. A few days before the meeting was held, I spoke to the workers and told them that we were going to march as a body to the meeting hall. We received information that a gang of Reformers was going to attack us when we left the factory. The Manager received several anonymous telephone calls, saying the mob would be waiting for Katie Viljoen, but on the afternoon of the meeting, the workers marched out of the factory and nothing happened. Ours was the only factory where the workers - three abreast- marched to the City Hall, singing home-made songs and shouting, "Down with Grobbelaar and up with the Sachs". When we arrived at the City Hall, we gave three cheers for Solly Sachs. The hall was crowded and an overwhelming majority of the workers showed, in no uncertain manner,their bitter hostility towards Grobbelaar and the Reformer disrupters.

Some months later, the union sent me to Port Elizabeth to organise the garment workers there. I had no previous organising experience, and fully realised that I had a tremendous job of work ahead of me, but I was determined to do my best. There were about eight hundred garment workers in Port Elizabeth and not many were members of the union. Wages and conditions were bad - much lower than in the Transvaal - and most employers were not well disposed towards the union.

Apart from having to battle against the employers for higher wages and better conditions, there was the tragic position, common in South Africa, that the workers were divided amongst themselves. Many of them had come under the influence of the Reformer disrupters.

In 1942 the union decided, after months of negotiations, to call a strike in Port Elizabeth. The union was asking for increased wages, paid holidays and the introduction of the closed shop. The employers agreed to the first two demands but obstinately refused to accept the principle of the closed shop.

When the strike began, Mr. Sachs, Hester Cornelius, Dulcie Hartwell and Anna Scheepers came from head office to help. Philip, my husband, took leave from his work at the Ford Motor Company to give assistance. We divided our forces. Hester and I and a group of pickets went at about six a.m. to Mosemthal's factory, and Anna and Dulcie went to Teikamdas.

When we arrived at Mosenthal's we found a large number of policemen and a "pick-up" van. Groups of pickets were placed outside the four or five entrances and, at 7.45 a.m., when the factory was opened, not a single worker tried to go to his work. At 8 o' clock, however, a group of scabs who had gathered in a worker's house near the factory attempted to force their way through. They were organised and led by the Reformers. A fight ensued, and the police, as usual, protected the scabs, most of whom were by no means against the strikers, but had been misled. At about nine o' clock, the sergeant in charge of the police came up and very politely asked whether he and his men could have some of the refreshments which we were serving to the pickets. Many of the police had members of their families working in clothing factories and they themselves have always been badly underpaid. A jug of coffee and plates of sandwiches were soon brought out and the entire police force got into the pick-up van, closed the door and enjoyed the refreshments. They were certainly in no hurry to come out to attend to their duties. Indeed, the sympathy of the police and of the public of Port Elizabeth as a whole was entirely on the side of the workers. Later in the day and during the following days, whenever the strikers assembled in a hall in the centre of the city for refreshments and dancing, quite a few policemen in uniform used to come inside to enjoy a snack and a dance.

At the Teikamdas factory, things did not go well. The majority of the workers were non-European and they were terrified of losing their jobs. A large number of scabs brushed the pickets aside and poor Dulcie, who had come to Port Elizabeth to help in the strike, was knocked over the head by several scabs and found herself covered with blood. She

was rushed to a doctor, had her head bandaged and went back to the factory on picket duty; during the lunch hour, when we called a mass meeting in the centre of Port Elizabeth, Dulcie, with a huge bandage over her head, addressed the audience, bearing no malice towards the misguided workers and no hatred towards anyone. Her bandages had attracted as much attention as her ringing voice.

On the third day of the strike, the employers agreed to refer the closed shop to arbitration. Mr. T. Freestone, an officer of the Department of Labour, was by mutual consent appointed arbitrator.

A satisfactory agreement was reached and, as soon as the closed shop was introduced, there was complete harmony amongst the workers and between the union and the employers.

* * * * *

My whole family has always been staunchly Nationalist, except for my sister, Jacoba, and my brother, Johannes, who are United Party supporters with very strong Labour sympathies. Whenever I discuss politics and trade unionism with my brothers, Koos and Albert, who are both fanatical Nationalists, I can see clearly the tragedy of the workers of South Africa. Like tens of thousands of others, they have a tremendous amount of energy and capacity for hard work. As with many other Afrikaners of their generation, the terrible wrongs of the Boer War still rankle in their hearts. They have many English and Jewish friends, but in their hearts they are fanatical followers of Dr. Malan. They read only the Nationalist papers, they hate non-Europeans and firmly beleive in apartheid. To them communism means "your sister marrying a 'kaffir'". They hate the "Jew-Communist", Solly Sachs, and also dislike the other officials of the union, whom they regard as communists. I often argue with them and tell them: "But look, it is Solly Sachs who has done so much for the garment workers, the majority of whom are Afrikaners. He fought for improvements in their wages and working conditions, organised them and helped them to gain a better living standard". The reply is that they do not believe it and that the

Government has improved the workers' wages and conditions. I tell them that no government has ever helped the workers, and that Sachs and the other leaders of the union have often had to fight the government. They remain unconvinced and say: "We believe what we want to believe and what we do not want to believe we will not believe".

ANNA SOPHIA SWANEPOEL

At the beginning of 1911, I arrived in Johannesburg and obtained employment through a school friend of mine, Julia Makonik, whom I had known in Bloemfontein. She found me a job in a small workshop where she was a tailoress. I started at 10s. a week. The hours were from seven a.m. to six p.m. daily, with an hour for lunch, and seven a.m. to twelve noon on Saturdays. The workshop was terribly overcrowded and hot, with primus stoves going all day and the smell of paraffin filling the air.

For about three months, I lived with my brother and sister-in-law and did not have to pay board. Then I went to Julia's people, where I also had nothing to pay. A month later my parents arrived in Johannesburg and my father got a job as a ganger on the railways. My family rented a house and I went to live with them.

Very often, we had to take work home and sit up late at night finishing it. For this, we received no extra pay. The boss of the workshop was Mr. Schiller, a highly qualified tradesman, friendly but fond of using bad language. There was no union in existence, as far as I know, and workers were entirely at the mercy of their employers. I worked for Schiller for one year and during that time, I received a rise of 2s. 6d. and, a few weeks before I left, one of 5s. making my wage 17s. 6d.

I then went to work in another tailoring workshop, where I received 25s. a week to start with and, after six months, was earning £2 a week; this was considered a particularly high wage at the time.

At the end of 1912, I married Pieter Swanepoel, a labourer-fitter on the railways. His wages were

about £6 a month, but we got a free railway house and he also earned about £6 a month in his spare time from boot-making. We moved to Germiston, and my husband changed his work several times in order to better our income. In November, 1927, he died, leaving me with two children, aged eleven and fourteen. We were practically penniless and my total income was 17s. 6d. a week, which I earned as an usherette at the Apollo Theatre, Germiston. One evening, Mr. Schiller, my employer of sixteen years ago, came to a show at the Apollo. He told me that, if I wanted work, I should get in touch with him at the African Clothing Factory, Germiston, where he was now employed as a foreman. I did so and, on the 23rd January, 1928, I started work there at 25s. a week, which in those days was the highest wage paid to any factory worker. We worked from 7.30 a.m. to 6 p.m., with a lunch break of one hour, and on Saturdays from 7.30 to noon. The African Clothing was the largest factory in the Transvaal and one of the largest in South Africa. There was a piecework system in existence and we had to turn out a certain amount every day. Many workers would start work before time and work through their lunch hour to make up their quota. There were no rest intervals.

I found it impossible to live with two children on my wages of approximately £5 a month. I therefore continued working as an usherette at the cinema and also took in two young girls of the factory as boarders at 10s. a week each.

When I started working for the African Clothing there was a union of garment workers in Johannesburg and I believe they had a wages agreement, but the workers of Germiston were not organised. One day, about three months after I had started work, Mr. Dan Colraine, who was then secretary of the Johannesburg union, visited our factory and spoke to us during lunch hour. The majority of the workers readily agreed to organise a union and Mr. Colraine handed me several membership forms. Immediately he had left, one of the girls said to me: "Don't take the forms round. You will get the sack. A union has been started once be-

fore in the factory and the workers who helped to organise it were all sacked".

I took no notice of the warning and, with the help of three others, got over a hundred and sixty workers to sign the forms and enrol as members of the union. At the end of the week I found a week's notice in my pay envelope, and so did the three other girls who had helped. I at once got in touch with Mr. Colraine and told him about it. He came the following Monday and wanted to address the workers, but only a few gathered to hear him. All the others were afraid. He called another meeting outside the factory for the following day and this time all the workers who had enrolled as members turned up. The workers there and then decided to strike for the right to belong to a union and for the reinstatement of the four of us who had been dismissed.

The following day, all the workers turned up at the factory, but only about twenty went in to work. I automatically became the strike leader and the workers looked to me for guidance. At first the employers were bitterly hostile and said that they would sack all the strikers, but after four days an agreement was reached to reinstate all the workers, including myself. Everybody got a full week's pay, including the four days we were away, and we were brought under the Johannesburg agreement, which fixed wages for women workers at £1 to start and £2 10s. after two-and-a-half years. Many of the workers received increases in wages; my own were raised to £2 a week. We also succeded in getting a ten-minute interval in the morning and the lunch hour was properly observed. All the factory workers now joined the union and I was elected shop steward. The workers used to come to me with their complaints, which I had to take to the employer, and naturally I was not very popular with him. Most of the complaints were settled to the satisfaction of the workers, as the employers did not want to have any trouble. On one occasion, there was an argument about singing in the factory. The workers found the work monotonous and strenuous and, to break the monotony, they would start singing popular songs. Mr. Sam Kalmek, one of our em-

ployers, apparently did not like the music and tried to stop it. He told me that, if I wanted to sing, I should go on the stage, where I would earn more money, and lodged a complaint against me with the industrial council for leading the singing. The Chairman of the Council told Mr. Kalmek that there was no ground for complaint and that, in his own factory, he encouraged the workers to sing as it meant more production.

Trade unionism spread quickly among the workers of Germiston and, within a short time, all the garment workers were members of the union. The workers gained more and more confidence in the union when they saw that it was successful in getting them higher wages.

In 1931 the union called a general strike of all workers in Johannesburg and Germiston against the attempt by the bosses to cut our wages by twenty-five per cent. The workers loyally responded and there were no scabs.

After about three weeks, the strike was settled, neither side winning a victory. But the employers started organising immediately to break the union and to reduce wages. They did not openly attack the union, but used all sorts of tricks to get the workers away from it.

I did not return to the factory as I had been appointed organiser of the union for the Germiston branch. There were about a thousand workers in Germiston at that time and the town had become an important clothing centre.

In 1932 the employers once again tried to cut the workers' wages and the union called a general strike for the second time in August, 1932. This time, the workers were not as united as in 1931 and there were a number of strike-breakers in some of the Germiston factories. We organised pickets and did everything possible to prevent scabs from entering the factories. The pickets had to be outside the factories early in the morning, even before five a.m., as the employers were doing their utmost to bring in scabs.

The pickets did not use violence against them, but resorted to booing and singing uncomplimentary songs or pelting them with tomatoes and eggs. Later on, the bosses called in scores of police to break the strike. The police must have had instructions from Mr. Pirow, who was then Minister of Justice, to handle the strikers without kid gloves and many workers were beaten up and arrested. On one occasion, one of the girl strikers standing outside one of the factories had her pockets filled with rotten eggs. One of the policemen came up to her and slapped her on the pockets, with disastrous consequences to her clothes. He then arrested her. I went up, got hold of the girl and tried to pull her away from the policeman, but suddenly I "saw stars". The policeman had slapped me violently across the face and, for a whole week, I proudly bore my badge of honour - a black eye.

One day, when there was a crowd of pickets standing outside one of the factories, about five or six mounted policemen rode up and told the workers to disperse. Before the workers had time to make up their minds what to do, one of the mounted policemen rode into the crowd and several of the girls were knocked down. There was a general commotion and some of the girls were severely injured. A few had to be taken to hospital and one of them suffered from an injured ankle for some years. The general treatment by the police of the girl strikers was shameful.

In the end the workers had to give in, and after about two months they returned to work with a cut of ten per cent in their wages. Many of them had lost their faith in the union, and the employers, taking advantage of the situation did everything in their power to discourage union activities. Many workers were paid off and there was a great deal of unemployment.

In 1934, I gave up the position of union organiser and went to work for a factory in Johannesburg. After about a year, I returned to work in Germiston. In 1936, I started to work for New York Clothing, where I was employed until 1951.

By 1936, the workers had forgotten their earlier defeat and the union once again began to make progress. For a year or two, I was quiet, then I started taking an active interest in union affairs again. For the last ten years, I have served on the Germiston branch committee, on the industrial council, the medical aid society and as a member of the central executive committee of the union.

In the last twenty years there has been a complete change for the better in our wages and conditions of work. My wages now are £5 4s. a week and I work a five-day week of forty hours. I get three weeks and six days paid holidays, as well as free medical attention and sick pay in case of illness. The small,overcrowded tin shanties of the earlier years have disappeared and today Germiston has a dozen large, modern factories, with cloakrooms and other amenities. But what is more important, perhaps, than any material improvements in our conditions, is the fact that we no longer feel like slaves, but like free men and women, and know that we have a strong union to depend on in time of need.

A CONVERSATION WITH MRS. TSHABALALA

CHAIRPERSON OF THE

TRADE UNION ADVISORY & CO-ORDINATING COUNCIL

Q : **Have you always worked in Durban?**

A : **Yes. Ever since I started in 1953.**

Q : **Had you lived here as a child?**

A : **No. I was born in Ladysmith and grew up there. My family lived at the Mission, just outside of town.**

Q : **And you went to school there?**

A : **Until I was seventeen. Then my mother died and I had to leave school.**

Q : **What work did your family do at the Mission?**

A : **They were just farmers. But my father was working in Durban.**

Q : **Had your mother ever left home to work?**

A : **No.**

Q : **Did you think that you would? Or was it only when your mother died that you decided to work in town?**

A : **After my mother died I had to leave school and look after the small children. Afterwards I asked my father if I could go and work in Durban.**

Q : **How old were you by this time?**

A : **Twenty-one.**

Q : **What was your father's attitude when you told him this was what you wanted to do?**

A : **He was quite happy with the idea. You see I had already told him, before my mother died, that I wanted to become a nurse. He had said O.K. So he knew that I wanted to work in town and he allowed me to go.**

At the time that I asked him, in 1952, my family had come to town and we were all living with him in Lamontville.

In January 1953 I began to work for Non-Ferrous Metals.
The first work that I did there was to pack drums, and to weigh them. Then one day the boss asked me to do some counting. There was a large number of drums stacked there. After a few minutes I went and told him how many. He didn't believe me, and said I must count them again. The drums were stacked in rows of a hundred and so it was easy for me to count them quickly in my head. My figure was correct, and it was after this that he gave me another job. I had been working for £1 5s. and now got an increase of 5s. I worked with a scale, helping the boss to weigh out metal. Then after two months I was promoted again. I had to weigh the scrap metal that people brought in, and pay them. I did this job for five years. Then he opened another branch in Moore Rd. I had to work there for four years, then they closed that branch. I came back to Jacobs where I'm now in charge of the Despatch Department. I have to check the products as they come from the plant, set aside what has to be kept in stock, what goes to local customers, what is exported, and so on.

Q : What is your wage now?

A : Twenty - five rands.

Q : The starting wage at the factory?

A : The girls are getting nineteen rands, eleven cents.

Q : And the men?

A : Twenty -two rands, eighty-five cents.

Q : For the same work?

A : For different work. But there are jobs that men and women do.

Q : When you started, and were pushing the drums around, there were men doing the same thing?

A : Yes.

Q : But they were getting more money for doing it?

A : Yes.

Q : What is your comment?

A : Well, it doesn't sound nice. But we can't do anything about it.

Q : You've accepted that this is the way things are. Do you think that the women working with you share this view?

A : They do.

Q : Can you think of jobs that you might have had if you were a man and not a woman?

A : As I've had experience of all the jobs in the factory, there isn't one that I couldn't do. Being a woman is the only thing that stops me.

Q : What jobs are these?

A : Drivers, fork-lifters, operators of all kinds. All these jobs have been introduced during my time at the factory, and I know them all.

Q : What are men in the best-paid grades of work getting?

A : Not more than twenty-nine rands.

Q : Do you think a man doing your job would be paid more for it?

A : Yes. And if an Indian, Coloured, or White worker was doing my job, he would get more.

Q : Your view seems to be that the wage bar on the grounds of sex is a small matter compared with the wage bar on grounds of colour?

A : Yes.

Q : You've been an industrial worker for twenty-two years. When did you first become interested in worker organisations?

A : It was in 1972 on the day when Mr. Frame had his first strikes. Our boss saw the road full of striking workers. He called us together and asked us what we wanted. First he said he didn't want us to go on strike. And so we must tell him what we wanted. We told him he must give us a five rand increase. He went into the office and discussed this. Then he came out and offered us ninety cents. So our boys said, if you want to give us ninety cents, we'd rather go home now. Go home if you want to, he said, but if you do, those boys who are living in the compound must leave immediately. (About 50 out of 200 workers are lodgers in the compound). So we had to change our tastics a bit. And so one of our boys Ignus Makhanya (who is also a shop steward and B.E.C. Member now) spoke up for the workers, making it clear why we were not satisfied with the offer. And the boss was very cross, and called him into the office, and told him that if he spoke like that in front of the workers he would be fired. So then Ignus kept quiet and I came in front and spoke.

Q : This was how you became a spokesman for other workers?

A : Yes. I told him what Ignus had been telling him. He said we were worrying him and he did not want us to trouble him. But as we kept on coming into his office, O.K. he would give us more. And I had to tell the people that we were going to get a two rands, two cents increase. That satisfied us. Then after two hours he came out and said we had to elect seven people to talk for the workers.

Q : And you were the only woman on this committee which was then elected?

A : Yes, and I still am.

Q : Why do you think the workers wanted you as a spokesman?

A : I think it was because I was not scared to tell the boss what the workers wanted. After that, a year later, it was strike time again at Frame Group. In our factory the boss called us and asked us why we had not told him there was something wrong. And so we asked him for money again. This time we got an increase of three rands, and an allowance. By June, 1973 we were able to hold a meeting at which all the workers showed their union cards and we then elected shop stewards. (In 1974, management became alarmed by the union's strength in the factory).

It began early one morning. One of the girls was cleaning the office when she found a copy of *ABASEBENZI* on the director's desk. (*Abasebenzi* is a workers' newspaper published in Durban). And the name of Non-Ferrous Metals was underlined. (The factory had been mentioned in a round-up of union news). At 8 o'clock the boss came and called me to come to his office. By this time I had heard that something was up and passed the word around to the other shop stewards and to the workers. I put my union card in my pocket and went to the office. There I was asked if I knew anything about the paper. I said that I did and had my own copy. Where had I got it from? Our trade union. He said that he didn't understand how the name of his factory came to be printed in this paper, which was all in Zulu. I told him that all his employees were members of a trade union. I told him that he must know that we had a right to fight for ourselves. Works committees did not give us enough protection. I reminded him of what happened to an outspoken committee member at a Frame Group. I told him he must expect us to look after ourselves. From that day he said that I must give him our secretary's address and phone number.

Q : Has he recognised the union now?

A : Not yet. He's afraid of SEIFSA, he says. But he likes to co-operate with the union officials. He's also asked the works committee to have its constitution drawn up in consultation with the union.

Q : What do you think Black women in South Africa are fighting for?

A : Their rights and their children's rights.

Q : Are they fighting as women or as workers?

A : In the factories we are fighting as workers, we are also fighting in the townships - as women.

Q : As a woman organising men in the factory - have you had any problems?

A : I first had trouble in January, 1974. It was when Ignus Makhanya had lost his father and was away. They decided - these indunas decided they would try and break the union. They decided this was their chance to catch me because I was alone. It was me and Ignus they were afraid of. And so they called a meeting early in the morning - five o'clock, as they started, in the garage. The meeting was for indunas, machine operators, and people who'd been working at the factory for more than ten years. They said that now that Ignus Makhanya was away they were going to break the union in the factory. Before Ignus Makhanya got back the boss must know that I was doing in the factory - and kick me out.

Q : This was before the boss knew about the union?

A : Yes. They told the workers they mustn't listen to me anymore. From today they must turn back and do what they told them, because they were the leaders of this factory.

Q : Have these indunas been employed at the factory as long as you have?

A : Two of the five have been there longer than I have.

Q : Are they paid more than the other workers?

A : The boss gives them an extra five rands every Monday morning .....(laughter).

Q : You think this money helps them to see things the boss's way?

A : Yes. And we had to chase them, you see. They are off the works committee now.

Q : They had been elected on it at first. Why?

A : At first the workers did not see through them.

Q : Getting back to the day they challenged you - how did it go?

A : Before I entered the gate - it was twenty-five past six - one of them came out and spoke to me, warned me.

Q : One of the indunas? Was he sympathetic?

A : Yes, I think so. Because even now he doesn't follow the others, and doesn't like what they are doing. Anyway, - after this I went inside and started to work as if it was a normal day. At half-past eleven I called a meeting of the whole factory, a special meeting for all workers. And at this meeting I got the workers to ask the indunas about this meeting they had had at five o'clock that morning. They got cross, all of them. They told me I had no right to ask them that in front of all the workers. I told them no, I must ask them in front of the people because we were working for the people. If you are at the head, I am also at the head. So what you do mustn't go behind me, I told them. Tell us straight what you have been talking about this morning. If you have been talking about me, and the union, you must tell the workers now that you don't want me, and that you don't want the union. They kept quiet, and when people asked them questions they were unable to answer. They said they would only discuss these things in a council meeting. I told them I would call a meeting

in a week's time, when all the members would be back. At this meeting the head induna admitted that they were opposed to me and the union. We asked them who had asked them to join the union. Hadn't they been the first, and weren't their union cards about the oldest? Then they admitted that what worried them was that the boss might find out about the union. I told them not to worry - that when the time came I would stand in front.

Q : Have you had any trouble from the indunas since?

A : It's not over yet. It was also just after this meeting that I had a visit from the special branch.

Q : What did they ask you?

A : They said there were some people who were saying they could do things for people, and asking people to join them? Maybe I had joined one of these groups. I told them I had joined the workers' group, which is the union. They said yes, they knew I was a B.E.C. member. So I asked them - if they already knew that what more could they want to know from me. And then they told me that if I gave them information about what happened at each B.E.C. meeting they would pay me well and pay for my children to go to university ...

Q : You became an industrial worker, and also a leader of workers, a woman who men were happy to accept as their spokesman. How could this have seemed to people in Ladysmith when you were a child?

A : I don't know what you are thinking about now. You see one of the first things I saw when I started opening my eyes was my father's I.C.U. card.

Q : Did you speak to him about the I.C.U.?

A : Not then. But now that I have found out about the I.C.U. we talk about it.

Q : Are most of the women you know in Umlazi working?

A : Some are not, but not many. There are those whose men do not like them to work. Mostly these are women who came to town for two or three months at a time, and then go back to the country areas.

Q : You are married with two children. How did you care for the children when they were small and you were working?

A : Their granny (my husband's mother) looked after them in Lamontville. When I had the children I stopped work two months each time.

Q : You said that in the township women organised as women. Could you give an example of this?

A : We have got together through the Umlazi Residents Association, for instance.

Q : Do you have any contact with Coloured, Indian, or White women workers?

A : There are Coloured and Indian women working as clerks at the factory. But they can't really help us. I don't have much contact with them.

Q : What message do you have for other South African women?

A : That you get nowhere fighting on your own. We must join unions and also get together to do something about problems in the townships.

(The above interview was conducted by Mike Kirkwood of the English Department of the University of Natal).

BOOK REVIEWS:

DOMESTICATING WORKERS

by Luli Callinicos

Reviews of:

M.G. Whisson & W. Weil : Domestic Servants - A microcosm of the race problem" (SAIRR 1971)
Sue Gordon : Domestic Workers - A handbook for Housewives (SAIRR 1974).

Increasing interest has been shown in recent years in the situation of domestic workers. Workers' strikes, followed by the re-emergence of African trade unions and rapid inflation together with political events beyond our borders, have focused attention on the need for better industrial relations. This attention has spilled over into the arena of domestic service. Newspapers and magazines have run articles on the issue of a "fair wage" for the domestic worker in an effort to make employers aware of their responsibilities to their employees. (A typical recent article appeared in the Daily News, 5th September, - "Are you fair to your maid?") Seminars have been organised and public lectures have been given to white audiences. The Domestic Workers' and Employers' Project, a national organisation which promotes lectures for housewives on the situation of domestic workers has organised Centres of Concern, where housewives can pass on "skills such as literacy, cooking, and dressmaking." More recently DWEP has advocated, in the absence of any legal provisions, the drawing up of individual contracts between employer and employee.

Reflecting this interest, the Institute of Race Relations has published two booklets on domestic workers. The first, published in 1971 is a survey on Domestic workers in the Western Cape. The book, "Domestic Servants" makes a comparative study of the conditions of domestic workers in three different income areas : "Goodwood is predominantly an Afrikaner, lower and middle income group, and a part of a large group of adjoining suburbs which developed later than most of the greater Cape Town

as a result of the drift from the farms between and after the world wars." Bishopscourt is "one of the wealthiest suburbs in Cape Town" and Sea Point is a middle and upper-income resort suburb in Cape Town.

They found a great variation in the number of hours worked and wages earned by full-time workers; wages ranged from R16 average in Goodwood to R29,51 average in Sea Point. (Although Whisson and Weil do not supply average income figures for each area, I suspect that the higher wages reflected in the wealthier areas do not correspond proportionately with the higher incomes in these areas.)

Much of the domestic worker's wage is paid in kind- a servant loses precious accomodation if she loses her job. Then, too, living-in servants are in danger of being "'on duty' throughout their waking hours and whenever they were present in the house. The cash wage itself tends not to be seen as a calculated return for labour. Whisson and Weil quote a Goodwood housewife who, when asked why she paid her part-time worker 15c per hour said that it was so that "she can buy things with this" implying that the cash wage was really pocket money, or a token wage. Alternatively, "a Sea Point employer explained that 'she lives in Guguletu which is a long way to travel and also she has a family to support', for paying a part-timer 27c per hour, plus bus fare."

Because domestic workers have no defined wage rate or collective bargaining power, employers tend to pay what *they* feel are the "needs" of the employee.

Indeed, the domestic worker has a quasi-feudal relationship with her employer[1] The nature of this institution affects the whole pattern of dependency in a different way from the factory worker's unequal relationships with his employer. The domestic worker's vulnerability is illustrated not only by the low wages compared with industry (I shall explore this point later) but also by the fact that the wage tends to be fixed by the employer without consultation with the domestic worker. Whisson and Weil point out that

this is the "traditional relationship", whereby the employer states the terms and the employee accepts them without attempting to negotiate. "If the employee does not like the terms, she may well leave without warning...Such behaviour is the simplest way out of an impossible situation where an attempt to negotiate is regarded as 'cheek' and where one is too intimidated to be articulate." 23% of the workers whose jobs ended, according to the survey, " just left" or "decided to leave".

In the section, "The Bases of Inequality", the authors point out that "the needs on both sides which are met in the institution of domestic service are far more complex than the simple exchange of labour for cash and kind seems to imply". The relationship between master and servant, while one of institutionalised inequality, is nevertheless confused. On the one hand, the employer may be seen by both parties as a protector, especially from the potentially catastrophic laws of the state. Employers' accusations of "ingratitude" so often heard in societies which have domestic servants, reveal that they see themselves in the role of protector and benefactor. Yet, as Mannoni says in "Prospero and Caliban" (quoted in the booklet), "gratitude cannot be demanded, even though in a way it is obligatory, ... in spite of appearances, it can exist only where people are equal."

Whisson and Weil describe very well the social effects of this almost total dependency. They refer to the humiliation of receiving unreciprocated (if unsolicited, sometimes unwanted) gifts. The ambiguity of payment in kind (which incidentally is calculated as a cost to the employer, rather than in terms of its value to the worker) places the recipient in the position of a child. "The recipient of a tiny wage, secondhand clothes, food and lodging, 'holidays with the family', medical care and school fees for her children is most completely demeaned. That part which is a payment for work and that part which is a gift for charity or friendship is not made clear."

The destructive nature of paternalism is clearly spelt out. " The more paternalistic employers ap-

pear caught in a paradox. They deplore the 'weakness of character' displayed by their employees, yet cannot take the steps to remedy them. Instead they give presents rather than wages, kind rather than cash and so reinforce the very traits that they deplore."

But is this phenomenon solely the product of colonialism? The authors make frequent allusions to class differences, comparing situations observed in their Western Cape survey with other societies: "Social historians, rumaging through the diaries and letters of the English servant-keeping classes, peeping, as it were, through the elegant windows of Georgian London or listening to the idle conversation of leisured ladies a century earlier, record echoes of middle-class Cape Town suburbia." They maintain that thinking of the "problem" predominantly in terms of race confuses the issues. They give examples of attitudes, subjectively racist, such as "the common assumption among whites..... that non-whites are more highly sexed than themselves and also more promiscuous", when in fact it is as much a class phenomenon (see *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, *Fanny Hill* and *Room at the Top*). They add wryly: "In the absence of any reliable evidence, it is no more valid to assume that all male visitors to domestic servants have come for sexual intercourse than it is to assume that all white males have the same intentions and their white hostesses the same inclinations." Then again, convictions under the Immorality Act disguise the fact that the offence for soliciting is committed by poor girls rather than specifically Black girls.

On the other hand, the fact that the base of inequality inherent in that institution is predominantly *believed* to be racist is reinforced by the fact that almost universally, whites have access to cheap domestic labour. This has a political as well as an economic function in our social system. For example, Eddie Roux's comment (2) on thefact that white workers in 1922 failed to respond to exhortations of solidarity with fellow Black workers: "A realist... might have pointed out that the white miners earned ten times as much as the blacks, that

many of them employed servants in their homes..... Such was the reality of the situation which the white workers understood very well". Ultimately, it would seem, Whisson and Weil express a cautious belief in the development of industrial capitalism. "Improvements in the circumstances of domestic workers appears to be tied to the conscience of the employers and, more important, to the state of the economy," they conclude.

There is one important omission, however, which I feel is central to an analysis of the institution of domestic service, and that is its economic base, which ultimately shapes the inequality, the dependency, the guilts and resentments in the master-servant relationship.

For the domestic worker is a partial substitute for the housewife,who, if unaided in her labours, is isolated and vulnerable too. The housewife performs a necessary task in reproducing labour power: that is, in converting her husband's wage into meals, clean clothes and home, so that the breadwinner is able to present himself for work in the morning. She is a vital part in that economic unit, the family. But because the labour of a housewife or a domestic worker does not produce value in the market place, her role is seen as that of a menial, her occupation consisting of trivialities; whereas the breadwinner's is seen as crucial, in spite of the fact that the wage he is paid is meant primarily if not wholly, to cover the cost of the reproduction of his labour power. The housewife is paid indirectly, through the breadwinner's wages:but it is he who controls and distributes the wages.

It has been said that within the family, the husband is the bourgeois, his wife the proletarian. In South Africa, the domestic worker releases the white housewife for highly skilled and service jobs in commerce and industry,where she can earn a salary many times the amount which she pays her domestic worker. With the surplus, the wife can then accumulate petty capital, and consume luxury goods. If the white housewife does not take on a salaried job, she increases her leisure consumption and takes on a sort of managerial position in

the home. Besides servicing the day-to-day maintenance of the family, the domestic worker's labours often result in the enhancement of the property value of the employer's home. Thus, in a number of ways, the domestic worker produces surplus value for the white family.

The South African economy has not developed industrially to that stage where much of what were formerly products of domestic labour - processed foods, crêches, child-minders, nursery schools, automatic laundries, cheap cafes and factory canteens and sophisticated electrical household appliances-have been taken over by private enterprise. In South Africa, our white homes are still largely labour intensive, and it is the domestic worker who performs these functions.

Because the domestic worker's labour is not immediately part of modern industrial society, South Africa's industrial laws do not encompass her as a worker. The old, colonial Master and Servant's Act has recently been dropped. It is no longer needed, as Colin Bundy pointed out (SA Labour Bulletin Vol. 2 No. 1) for now more modern and efficient means of labour control exist in our legislation. Nevertheless, loaded as the Act was against the servant, the domestic worker now has no legal protection at all - she has become further marginalised.

This powerlessness is further exarcebated by her isolated existence in her work. Her economic, political and social position provide her with no basis for bargaining. She has little opportunity for collective negotiation - the domestic worker is notoriously difficult to unionise. It is this atomisation which affects the consciousness of the domestic worker, and is also reflected in the master-servant relationship.

An added dimension of the domestic workers' situation lies in the colonial nature of South Africa's laws that constrain African workers, more especially women workers. With the decline of the reserves, women and their families are no longer able to survive on the subsistence economy in these areas of

low productivity and are forced into the industrial sector. Whereas previously young rural men would serve a period of "apprenticeship" in white houses for a few years before finding jobs in the factories, many are now being absorbed directly into industry. Women have now formed the vanguard of marginal workers coming into the towns. Recognition by The state of the increasing proletarianisation of women came in the mid-fifties when, with the expansion of industry, the pass laws were extended to women. But again, as industry is not expanding fast enough to absorb them all, women are obliged to enter into domestic service. As women they are particularly vulnerable and more dependent on their employers' goodwill than are workers in the industrial sector. Under Section 10(1)a of the Bantu Urban Areas Act, no African woman may enter any "white" area to seek work. She may not remain in an urban area for longer than seventy two hours unless she has lived there continuously since birth or has lived there continuously for 15 years or has worked continuously for 10 years for one employer (Section 18(1)b) or has been given permission to remain because she is the wife or unmarried daughter of a man who has fulfilled the above conditions. If her husband is a migrant labourer, under no circumstances will a rural African woman be allowed to come and work where her husband spends his working life. These are crucial factors which need to be taken into account in an examination of the situation of domestic workers in South Africa.

The second booklet, "Domestic Workers" by Sue Gordon, is an altogether more difficult undertaking than the survey. Sue Gordon has subtitled her book, "A handbook for housewives". It is therefore directed at employers and must be seen against this background. The handbook recognises the limited position of the domestic worker's dependence on her employer and tries to sensitise the employer to the needs of the domestic worker. "It is true that in the ordinary way an employer does not concern himself with the dependants of his employee and pays a wage suitable for the work performed. However, in the case of the domestic workers whose wages are depressed by a

number of factors, such as not being free to sell their labour on the open market, the legal restriction of their movements and the difficulty they experience in gaining education or training, it is up to the employer to consider just how a family is to be maintained on the salary he pays."

And again, using images with which the employers can identify: "Meat costs more and so do hairdos and new shoes: these are prices one has to pay; whereas the domestic worker, having no rights, no bargaining power, cannot raise the price of her labour despite the fact that she, in providing for her family is caught in the same wicked pincer of rising prices."

The handbook deals with several practical matters such as salary, hours, overtime pay, leave and living conditions. Although it is emphasised that in deciding these matters, the domestic worker's views should be sought, it is plain throughout the booklet that it is the employer who makes the important decisions. It suggests, for example, that the interested employer provide supplementary benefits such as bus fares, school fees for the worker's children, medical and dental care, legal aid, access to Family Planning Clinics and photocopies of the worker's documents. The last mentioned"are far more important in the life of the African than in our own lives, for not being endorsed out to a Reserve, being permitted to work in the city, might hinge on one or all of these(documents)."Touches of paternalism inevitably slip in: "Listening to an African speaker is a good way to gain some knowledge of her people... There is no reason at all why you should not invite people of other races to visit your home to share tea or a meal."

Indeed, the book as a whole seems obliged to advocate paternalism - or is it a realistic assessment of the limited situation of the domestic worker? Accepting the premise that in order to improve conditions, employers have to be courted, the handbook tries to make the best of the domestic workers'position by persuading the more con-

scientious employers to "soften the blow". After all, the book is openly didactic . "It is ... a matter of weighing one's material needs, against a human existance" - These are the only tools available in the absence of state protection for the domestic worker.

The end of the book deals with estimates of the Poverty Datum Line in various districts of South Africa. The PDL is generally recognised to be a very rough approximation of a household's most basic needs. "It must be emphasises that the technical measurement of poverty by means of the poverty datum line is purely theoretical. The method assumes that people budget perfectly, and that they shop at the lowest current prices. For the poor, that is, however, often not possible." It comes as a typical and final irony that this chapter is an attempt to persuade the employers to even approximate this income and tries to suggest that domestic workers have the right to a subsistence income.

CONCLUSION

While Whisson and Weil on the one hand advocate a straight-forward commercial relationship in which only a cash wage is exchanged for part-time services - "domestic workers are close to being the equal (sic) of their employer as they exchange a defined service for a defined wage and that is the end of the matter" - Sue Gordon tries to combine both the modes of production of feudalism and capitalism by at once advocating a kind of "noblesse oblige" philosophy and the notion of a fair commercial exchange.

Because of their limited aims neither of the two books reviewed here is able to point sufficiently clearly to the central role of domestic service in South Africa. The institution of domestic service is so embedded in the social structure of white South Africa that it cannot be reformed simply by moral appeals to the consciences of employers. The structural function of domestic service is two-fold: Firstly, it provides whites of all classes access to a cheap form of labour, thus giving them a shared benefit in the exploita-

tion of colonised labour. Secondly, it serves an ideological function - it socialises both whites, from earliest infancy, and black domestic workers into a master-servant relationship.

Furthermore, unlike factory workers, domestic workers are unable to act on their situations through collective solidarity and this by their own actions increase their bargaining power. Their situation will change, like that of slavery, only when the changing labour needs of capitalism make domestic service an uneconomic and outmoded institution.

FOOTNOTES :

(1) In referring to domestic workers I have used the feminine gender for three reasons:
(a) most domestic workers in South Africa are now women;
(b) the reproduction of labour power i.e. work performed to maintain the family in the home is traditionally "woman's work", and
(c) as Whisson and Weil have expressed it, the type of dependency relationship between master and servant imposes on the domestic worker a "feminine, submissive, subordinate" role.

(2) Eddie Roux : Time longer than Rope.

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