

The Changing Political Economy of Migrant Labour in Botswana

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Botswana is often favourably portrayed as a country having a democratic government and an increasingly strong economy based on the export of minerals and beef. Yet, the reality of the political economy of Botswana belies this rosy portrayal. While beef and mineral production do enhance the balance of trade and boost GNP, they have done little to improve the lives of most Botswana.(1) A focus on beef and mineral production turns attention away from another less pleasant aspect of Botswana: the fact that the country is a vast labour reserve in which families survive only by selling their labour power. For over 80 years, Botswana has supplied mines, homes, factories and farms of its neighbour, South Africa, with male and female workers. As we shall see, due to changes in the southern African political economy, South Africa no longer requires as many foreign workers as before. At the same time, the Botswana economy is rapidly developing and its needs for labour are changing. This paper will examine these changes and analyse their impact on Botswana.

The 'Internalisation' of Migrant Labour in South Africa

In 1972, 80% of the black workers on the South African mines were foreign contract workers. For nearly a century the surrounding countries provided a reserve of labour to be drawn on in periods of economic expansion or shed in periods of recession. Due to the peculiar political economy of the labour reserve/migrant labour system that evolved, the mining companies discovered that workers could be paid below subsistence level without jeopardising the process of reproducing the labour force or arousing a successful workers' revolt. By utilizing foreign workers as a reserve army of labour, the mining corporations were able to maintain the same low real wage level for over 50 years.(2) The labour reserves provided for the reproduction of the labour force and the care of the aged; the compound system provided for social and political control of workers at the work place; and the migrancy of workers, itself, provided against any ongoing worker opposition to the system. The miners' strike of 1946 had been the last challenge to the system and it had been brutally and successfully suppressed.

★ My thanks go to the large number of government and private sector officials, academics, workers, and workers' families who have generously shared opinions and information with me. However, I alone am responsible for the interpretation and opinions contained in this paper.

Then some time in the early 1970s the whole system began to unravel. Perhaps it started in Namibia in 1971 with the Ovambo strike against the contract labour system there or at Sover Mine in October 1972 when the first of what were to be over 50 strikes and riots over a three year period took place. Certainly the unilateral decision of President Banda in April 1974 to stop sending Malawian workers to the South African mines provided a large spike in the coffin for the idea that foreign labour reserves were safe sources of supply to be turned on or off at will. The subsequent loss over a single year of 100 000 workers, at a time when the gold price was approaching the \$200 an ounce mark for the first time in history, cost the mining companies millions. As if the Malawi debacle were not enough, in the very same month of April 1974 came word of the overthrow of the Caetano government in Portugal -- an event that immediately put another 100 000 workers coming from Mozambique in the 'at risk' category. (The total black work force on the mines is about 400 000).

The South African government and the Chamber of Mines had badly misjudged the degree and rapidity of political change in southern Africa. After an initial period of unease about the coming of independence to some of its black neighbours in the mid-1960s, South Africa had been lulled into a false sense of control. So much so, that between 1965 and 1972 -- a period of rapid economic growth in South Africa -- the amount of foreign labour on the mines was allowed to increase from 65% to an all-time high of 80%. The choice between increasing reliance on cheap, abundant foreign labour or raising mine wages to make them competitive with other sectors of the economy had been clearly made in favour of the former alternative.

As it turned out, however, the loss of direct British control over neighbouring territories was to make a great difference. Certainly the British would have never have acted as precipitately and as 'irresponsibly' as President Banda if they had still been in control of Malawi. Likewise for Lesotho where the unpopular Jonathan government suddenly introduced a compulsory deferred pay scheme in January 1975 which set off a whole series of riots and walk-outs on the mines.

In fact, by 1975 all hell was breaking loose on the mines. Before the year was over there were to be over 26 strikes and riots on the mines resulting in 69 deaths and over 250 injuries.(3) The old ploys of tribal division and rule, victimisation, blacklisting, and outright physical violence which had previously worked in controlling the large concentrations of workers (up to 15 000 on a single mine) necessary to the mining industry no longer seemed to work.

Obviously some major changes were in order. In April 1975, a Government Commission of Inquiry into the mine 'riots' was convened. It eventually made a series of (secret) recommendations that amounted to a rough blueprint for the re-establishment of control on the mines. In addition to recommendations for improved living conditions for workers, better worker/management communications, better intelligence networks and beefed-up and better planned riot-control capacity, the commission called for a major switch away from foreign sources of labour. Reliance on foreign labour, it argued, had become too risky. The report cited the Malawi cut-off and the Lesotho deferred pay fiasco as examples of outside political problems having been imported into South Africa and concluded that "it cannot be permitted that the Republic be politically injured by actions in which it is not always directly concerned." (4) Although no evidence was found of any outside agitators playing a role in the disturbances, the Commission warned that,

'We expect that with the passage of time (if it is not already happening) agitators (Communistic and otherwise) and terrorists from outside the country will attempt to be absorbed as part of the migrant labour force...'(5)

It decided that Mozambique was especially suspect,

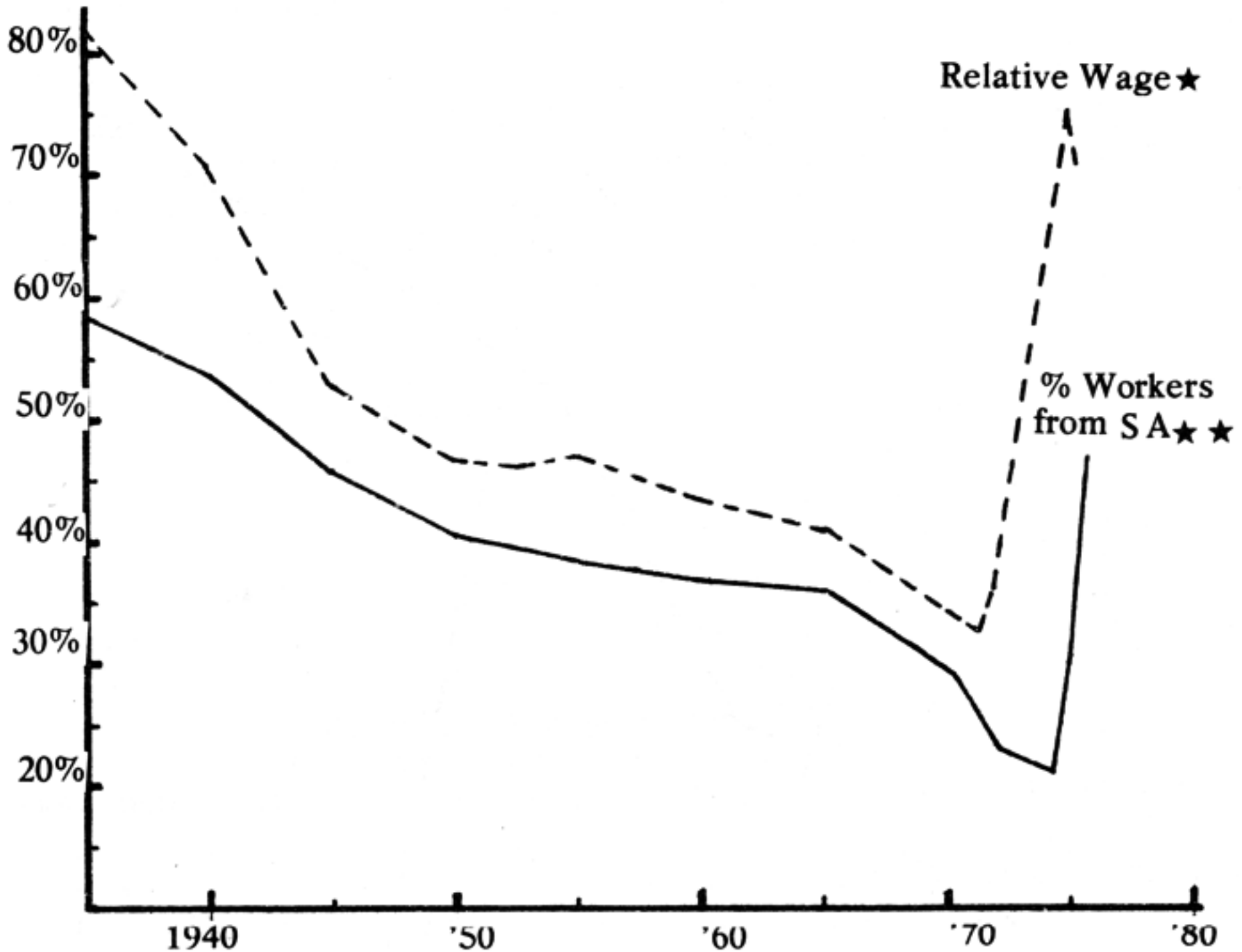
'At certain mines there was an attitude among Mozambicans during times of Frelimo successes, that Frelimo was showing how to deal with Whites. This particular source of migrant labour is especially exposed to infiltration by terrorists.' (6)

Regarding rumours that the OAU was going to sponsor the formation of a suppliers' cartel with the aim of eventual withdrawal of foreign labour from South Africa, the Commission noted that 'coordinated action may therefore be expected in the future, with ever increasing demands which may also be politically motivated.' (7)

Accordingly, an initial goal was set of lowering the percentage of foreign workers from the then current level of 70% to 50%. The major means of accomplishing this was to be the raising of wage levels to a point where they would be competitive with the lower ranks of industrial employment in South Africa. In effect, such a programme was already under way. By December 1977, the goal of 50% local labour had been reached and it has since been surpassed, with rumours that they may go as far as 70%. Figure 1 shows how effective the wage increases were in inducing South Africans to work on

Figure 1.

South African Gold Mines: Changes in Relative Mine Wages and the Percentages of Domestically Recruited Labour. 1935-76.



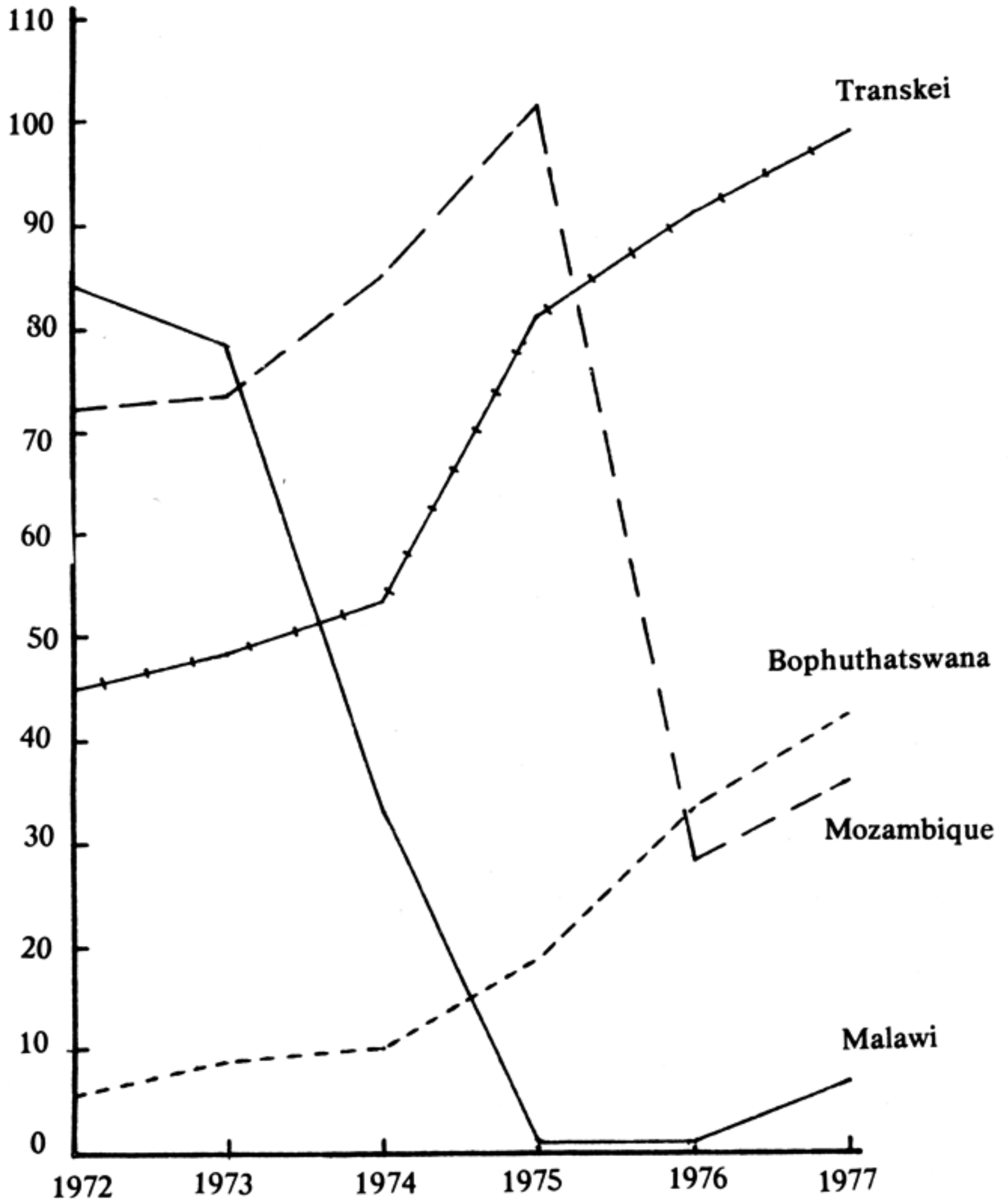
★ Relative wage curve based on cash wages in gold mining as a percentage of cash wages in manufacturing.

★★ Workers from South Africa curve is based on South African black mineworkers as a percentage of all black mineworkers in gold mining.

Source: J.A. Parson, **How attractive is Gold Mining To Black Mineworkers?** South African Chamber of Mines, Human Resources Laboratory, Johannesburg, 1977, p 18.

Figure 2.

S.A. Mine Labour Organisations' Recruitment from Malawi, Mozambique, Transkei and Bophuthatswana, 1972-77. (,000s)



Sources:

M.L.O. (Wenela), Annual Reports

M.L.O. records, Mafeking and Gaborone

W. Beinart, "South Africa's Internal Labour Supply with special reference to the Transkei and Bophuthatswana", UN/ECA/Mulpoc, 1978, mimeo.

the mines. The major increases in this internal supply have come from the two newly independent Bantustans -- the Transkei and Bophuthatswana. Not surprisingly, the number of workers coming from politically suspect Mozambique was cut back more than 65% in 2 years. (see Figure II)

Migrant Labour in Botswana

Before discussing the implications of these changes for Botswana, we must first briefly describe the role of migrant labour in the historical development of the Botswana political economy. The migrant labour system has been entrenched in Botswana since the country's creation as a British Protectorate in 1885. As far back as 1844, there were Batswana working for Boer Voortrekkers in the Western Transvaal. By 1880 there were reportedly over 2 500 Batswana working on the diamond mines at Kimberley. Over the next 50 years, Batswana were to be found working in the South West African diamond mines (until 1930), in France as part of the African Labour Corps during World War I, on the farms of the Western Transvaal, for the municipalities and industries and in the white homes on the Rand, and in Rustenberg District, and of course, on the gold mines.(8) Many factors contributed to the transformation of the Protectorate into a steady supplier of labour to South Africa: the paucity of wage labour opportunities at home; lack of arable agricultural development; recurring drought and outbreaks of cattle diseases; South African marketing regulations which indirectly limited the sale of 'native' cattle; active collaboration on the part of tribal authorities and colonial officials in pushing men onto the labour market in order to pay hut tax, tribal levies, and fines; serious land shortages in the three tribal reserves from which white farming blocks were carved; the negative developmental effects of the loss of manpower and skills implicit in the migration process itself, etc.

In 1940, after a decade of receiving complaints from tribal authorities about the increasingly harmful effects of migrant labour on tribal life, the colonial government commissioned an anthropologist, Isaac Schapera, to make an investigation into the problem. A comparison between some of Schapera's findings in the 1940s and some more recent data is revealing of how deep and continuous the process of underdevelopment has been in Botswana.

Schapera found that in 1941 28% of working age males and 5% of working age females were outside the country.(9) Corresponding figures in the 1971 Botswana Census were 25,5% and 5,1%. Another 10% of the working age

population were estimated to be missing from the Census enumeration -- presumably having emigrated either permanently or temporarily to South Africa since the previous census in 1964.(10)

In 1941 Schapera found that, 'the vast majority of the families in each tribe reaped either too little or barely sufficient for their needs.'(11) A government study carried out in 1971 (which was considered to be a good crop year) found that 84% of the households in eastern Botswana did not produce enough grain to be self-sufficient.(12) According to Schapera, in 1940, Botswana imported about R40 000 worth of maize and maize meal -- the standard store-bought food.(13) In 1975, Botswana imported maize and maize meal worth R3,5 million.(14)

In 1943, Schapera wrote that,

"On the social side, it (labour migration) has resulted in many evils, even though they are the direct result not so much of migration itself as the overlong separation of husband and wife, father and children that it often entails....Unless the periods of absence are greatly curtailed, the evils will continue and possibly even spread.'"(15)

Today in Botswana half of all children are born out of wedlock and 15% of all households are headed by unmarried women with children.(16) The number of child-support cases heard in court has increased substantially.(17) The complaints of older people of lack of support and concern for them on the part of their relatives are legion.

Schapera's overall conclusion in 1943 was that migrant labour was having a decidedly deleterious effect on 'tribal' life. His primary policy recommendation was that the colonial government should put into effect a programme of agricultural and industrial development to stem the tide of out migration -- "the only alternative (to continued migration) is to embark on a policy of agricultural and industrial development."(18) Under the British, no such programme was ever attempted. Their interests were well-served by allowing Botswana to stagnate as a labour reserve. The people generally did not starve, hut tax was collected and the meagre budget balanced, and the mines, farms, kitchens, and factories of South Africa were assured a cheap supply of labour to the ultimate benefit of the enormous quantities of British capital invested in that country.

Since independence in 1966, there has been no indication that the Botswana Government intends within the foreseeable future to end, or even wind

down migrant labour to South Africa. The official view is that it is 'unfortunate' but 'inevitable' that Batswana still seek work in South Africa given that 'employment opportunities within Botswana will only build up slowly.' (19) In practice the only discernible policy toward the system has been that it should be milked for as much government revenue as possible, which is very much the policy pursued by the British during the colonial period.(20) For example in June 1976, it was decided to raise the recruitment fee due to the government from R1 to R40 per mine recruit. In response, the major mine recruiting agency, TEBA, immediately closed down recruiting operations. This was something the government had not counted on and, after some hasty negotiations, a compromise was reached with the recruiters and a R10 fee agreed upon. The government had gained several hundred thousand rand in revenue and TEBA had shown it was not to be easily pushed around.

More recently, in early 1978, the Department of Taxation decided that miners in South Africa should be forced for the first time to pay the full amount of local government tax due on their wages. Previously the labour recruiting organisations had been paying R6, the minimum amount of the tax, to the government for each recruit as an advance on his wages to be paid back to them out of his first month's wages. This system of advances is basically a holdover from colonial times when one of the principal reasons for going out to work in the mines was to get some cash for paying hut tax.(21) The present local government tax is a regressive tax with a maximum level of P84 due on incomes of P1 000 and above. By coincidence, a majority of the miners working in South Africa in 1978 were making just enough money to be liable to pay this maximum amount.(22) It was estimated that by collecting the full amount of tax from the miners, the government could bring in an extra P2 million a year in revenue. Unfortunately for the government, TEBA refused point-blank to have anything to do with collecting the full tax. (Undoubtedly the riots, deaths and production losses which had resulted from the Lesotho government's sudden introduction of its compulsory deferred scheme had taught TEBA a lesson). Instead, they convinced the Botswana government that it merely had to inform the miners that they must send the appropriate amount of tax each month to the government tax office through the existing channels for remittances and they would do so. Two months after the miners had been informed of their 'new' tax requirements, only one miner had remitted his tax. Subsequently, a delegation was sent by the Botswana government to the South African mines to inform Batswana miners in person of their tax obligation. The delegation wisely decided to cut the trip short after having been chased into their car which was then shaken and nearly turned over by a group of angry miners at one of the Klerksdorp mines. As the

head of the delegation later put it, "I should have known there was going to be trouble when the mine manager asked me if I was prepared to give my life for my country." (23)

TEBA's relations with the Botswana government have always been cordial. The former Minister of Home Affairs, whose portfolio included the Department of Labour, once worked for them. In a more recent coup, they managed to hire away from government service a very able District Commissioner to work in their head office. There have been conflicts, of course, like the attestation fee dispute, but under the new regime of Tony Fleischer, the TEBA administration is pointedly less heavy-handed than it used to be. An incident such as occurred in September 1973 when Botswana first learned from radio reports that 2 citizens had been shot and killed during a disturbance at Western Deep Levels is not likely to be repeated. When push comes to shove, however, TEBA is well aware that in the present circumstances, with no effective supplier cartel to face and a successful programme of internalisation of supply under way, it can bargain from a position of strength. Hence, its flat refusal to help the Botswana government collect the local government tax.

Internationally the Botswana government has been embarrassed by the country's reliance on South Africa for employment. When the OAU passed a resolution in 1975 saying that foreign migrant labour should be withdrawn from South Africa, Botswana had the resolution amended to say that employment at home must be provided first. In April 1978, the Economic Commission for Africa organised a conference in Lusaka to discuss migrant labour to South Africa including as points for consideration such topics as,

Trade Unionism and the struggle for a birthright by the migrant worker and the need to radicalize the workers in South African mines.

The need for psychological re-orientation of migratory workers to see their progressive role in the liberation struggle.

Organising the solidarity of migrant labour supplying countries as an economic (anti-apartheid) strike force. (24)

The Botswana government was so upset at the agenda and the thought of being pressured to take a radical stand on migrant labour, that it seriously considered not even attending the conference. (Not that there is any doubt that the government is opposed to apartheid and on those grounds would like to discontinue sending labour to South Africa). But, as we shall see, since there are not sufficient employment opportunities in Botswana -- nor are there likely to be in the future, given present government policies --

continued labour migration to South Africa lessens the immediate need for a rural transformation in Botswana. International calls for withdrawal from the migrant labour system, therefore, have pretty much fallen on deaf ears in Botswana. Ironically, it has been left to the South Africans to force the issue of disengagement.

Forced Disengagement

Despite the turmoil on the mines described earlier, until 1977 Botswana's role as a labour supplier remained largely unchanged. It continued to act as a 'safe' source of what were considered on the mines to be 'safe' workers. Unlike the governments of Lesotho and Malawi, the conservative and democratically elected government of Botswana has always acted responsibly in the eyes of the Chamber of Mines. Further in its favour, according to the prevailing ideology among white miners regarding the tribal attributes of Africans, the Batswana are **supposedly** unaggressive. (25) During the period when the Chamber of Mines was still in the process of inducing increased supplies of labour from inside South Africa, Botswana was used to pick up some of the slack. In 1976, it supplied more miners -- 40 000 -- to South Africa than ever before in its history. This record number was due mainly to the substantial wage increases that had been instituted to attract South African blacks to the mines. The average cash wage for miners in 1976 was R91/month versus R21/month in 1972. In January 1977, the usual post-Christmas jump in mine recruitment turned into a deluge. In Bophuthatswana, for example, more men were recruited in that one month than had been recruited in the entire year of 1974. The mines were suddenly over-supplied with labour. As a result, restrictions were placed on recruiting in Botswana (and other foreign countries) in February 1977.(26) For the next 10 months, TEBA did not recruit any novice (i.e. first-time) miners in Botswana. Meanwhile, in line with the internalisation strategy, it did accept novices from inside South Africa including Bophuthatswana and the Transkei. This restriction was imposed again in Botswana in February 1978 and has been on and off since.

Of more immediate seriousness for Botswana, in the first quarter of 1978, mine recruitment from northern Botswana was cut to a trickle -- a mere 12% of what it had been the previous year. Since an outbreak of foot and mouth disease had stopped cattle exports from this region for over a year, this was a very bad time indeed for such a cutback. There was even talk that recruiting from the area would be completely phased out by the end of 1978. Previously the Wenela depots in the region had acted more as staging areas for the transit of workers from Angola, Malawi, and Zambia than as actual re-

cruiting centres. Since Zambia has long stopped sending men, Malawians are now flown direct to Johannesburg via Air Malawi, and Angolans are recruited at Runtu in the Caprivi Strip, much of the rationale for maintaining these depots has been removed. The writing was on the wall when Wenela sold its planes and its airport at Francistown in 1977. Given the relatively small number of workers actually being recruited in the area (0,8% of total South African mine labour recruitment in 1976) and the added costs to the mines of flying them to Johannesburg, it seems logical that it could be one of the first areas to be phased out in a situation of surplus supply.

It is exceedingly doubtful, however, that the Chamber of Mines would stop recruiting in Botswana altogether. It is in their interest to keep as many potential labour sources on tap as possible as a hedge against the sudden loss of any one source. Although with wages where they are and black unemployment in South Africa as high as it is, there seems to be no short term obstacle to increased internalisation of supply, there is always the possibility that the internalisation of supply could backfire. There is certainly no guarantee that the mines will find it easier to control increasingly militant and better-educated South African blacks than foreign blacks. Further, there will always be the temptation -- especially if the gold price starts dipping -- to allow real mine wages to fall and to use the foreign sources once again as a reserve army of cheap labour to break any internal resistance to wage losses.

But for the short term at least, the number of mine recruits to South Africa from Botswana will drop and the mines will become more selective, favouring 'career' miners to lessen the costs of constantly retraining and reconditioning workers for mine work. In the long term, it seems highly unlikely that there will be any substantial increase in demand for mine labour. Most current projections foresee a levelling out of total demand for mine labour in South Africa in the 1980s and a gradual reduction in numbers from then until the year 2000.(27)

There is a definite tendency for researchers to focus on foreign **mine** workers to the exclusion of all others. This is mainly due to the fact that there is much more and better quantitative data available for the miners, but also partly because many of the non-miners are women and because of our sexist preconceptions we tend not to think of workers as women. There is every likelihood, since most of these workers are illegal, that they are grossly underenumerated. Unless they have been working at the same job since 1963 or have been properly recruited by their employers -- who first must prove that there is no local labour available -- these workers are illegal

immigrants and subject to deportation if caught. Contrary to popular belief, few of the non-miners from Botswana are employed on farms. Nearly 40% of them are women who are employed mainly as domestic servants.(28)

There is evidence from my own field work that increased security checks inside South Africa and the tightening of border surveillance are taking their toll. A number of former workers told of being arrested and imprisoned, fined, or sent back to Botswana by special train. This has had a tendency to deter others who might be tempted to seek work illegally. In 1977, 2 879 foreign Africans were convicted in the Johannesburg Fordsburg court for illegal entry.(29) In May 1978, a representative of the Black Sash told me in an interview that there was a definite increase in the number of alien workers being deported due to the post-Soweto increase in pass raids and raids on places of employment. Further difficulties arise for foreign workers due to a new law that makes it compulsory for the employer of an arrested foreign worker to appear in court. Previously, the employer merely had to send in the amount of the fine. It is not surprising, therefore, that my own survey of 200 households in Kgatleng District found that of those people still working in South Africa, the percentage in the non-mining sector had dropped significantly from 73% in 1971 to 60% in 1978.

The overall picture, then, for Botswana is clear. After 100 years of exporting labour to South Africa it is being slowly squeezed out of the market. The disengagement which the 'radicals' in the liberation movements had been calling for is occurring -- forced from the South African side.

Post-Independence Development In Botswana

Over the last 10 years the pace of change in Botswana has been dizzying. GDP has increased nearly tenfold. Minerals have replaced cattle as the major export. What is rumoured to be the richest diamond mine in the world is under development at Jwaneng. The urban growth rate since 1971 has been a phenomenal 12% a year. So many international aid agencies are interested in providing funds to government that administrative and technical capacity not capital is the major constraint in carrying out development programmes. One would expect in a country making such incredible macro-economic progress that the phasing out of what has been generally accepted as a socially destructive system of labour exploitation would be on the agenda. On the contrary, what has occurred is basically a reproduction of the migrant labour system on an expanded scale **within** Botswana itself. What was in Schapera's time a river of people leaving the rural areas to find work has in the 1970s become a flood. In 1943, 8% of the rural population had migrated

out.(30) In 1971, 14% of the rural population had migrated out and nearly half of these rural migrants went to urban areas within Botswana.(31) Since 1971, this process has accelerated. My Kgatleng study, done in 1978, revealed that at any one time 23% of the population was absent from the district and that fully two thirds of these absentees were internal migrants (versus one third in 1971 for Kgatleng). The vast majority of these internal migrants are oscillating back and forth between the rural and urban areas in similar fashion to the migrants to South Africa. The process of development and underdevelopment which defined the relationship between white South Africa and the black periphery is being duplicated in the uneven development of urban and rural Botswana.

To understand why and how rural-urban migration in Botswana itself has developed an oscillating pattern, requires a rudimentary analysis of class development in Botswana and of the related role of the post-independence state in creating a structure which induces oscillating migration. It is the Botswana government, in cooperation with the various international aid agencies and the multi-national mining companies, which has shaped and directed economic development since independence. It has not placed a high priority on employment creation in rural areas. Instead, it has willingly joined with the multi-nationals and followed the advice of its skilled Western advisors in pushing for rapid development of the beef and mining industries along capitalist lines. This is understandable given the class character of the government itself.

Basically, the Botswana government represents the interests of a small but rapidly emerging bourgeoisie consisting of overlapping national and bureaucratic segments. The material basis of the national segment is its ownership of cattle and its access to land, water, and investment capital. For the most part, this class has been dominated by people high up in the tribal hierarchies of the various Tswana ethnic groupings who by virtue of their standing have traditionally enjoyed favoured access to these income-producing assets and also to opportunities for high education.

Holm's study of political office-holders in Botswana revealed that 47% of MP's had paternal kinship ties with a chief or headman, that 76% owned more than 50 head of cattle (as opposed to 7,5% of the general population), and that all were literate in English (this is in fact a requirement of office for MP's).(32) Although no comparable studies have been done of the burgeoning government bureaucracy, many of the middle and upper level civil servants are also known to be members of this largely cattle-based, national bourgeois segment.

Given the class background of the politicians and bureaucrats, it is not surprising that the government, together with its embarrassingly large cadre of Western advisors, (33) has guided the country along a path of capitalist development. In this way, it serves both the class interests of its own members -- who are rewarded with government and aid agency subsidies for their businesses and high salaries -- and the interests of the multinational banks and companies - such as Anglo American, American Metal Climax, De Beers, The First National Bank of Boston, etc., who are provided with the appropriate investment climate for carrying out operations in Botswana.

In general policy terms, this has meant the maintenance of an open economy allowing the unfettered repatriation of profits; the lop-sided investment of resources into urban development and physical infrastructure; the creation of private property rights in land; an emphasis on production for export and the earning of foreign exchange and the provision of a cheap and disciplined work force. A brief look at those government policy decisions which have specifically dealt with rural development and urban migration will illustrate how these have served the interests of the emerging bourgeoisie and the multi-nationals and fostered an internal migrant labour system in Botswana.

Rural Poverty, Wage Controls and Oscillating Migration

A survey of rural incomes carried out in 1974 found that 45% of rural households in Botswana were living below a very bare poverty datum line and that the same percentage owned no cattle -- the principal form of rural wealth.(34) An often stated intention of the government of Botswana is to use the revenue from the newly created mining sector for rural development to alleviate this poverty.(35)

The government's first major rural development project, the Accelerated Rural Development Programme (ARDP) of 1973-76, did spend R21 million on rural schools, clinics, roads and water supplies. However, almost half of this money was given by aid agencies and, as a government report concluded, ARDP was really a 'building programme' and not a 'development programme.'(36) In other words, it did not address the crucial issues of redistributing rural productive assets or of improving rural productivity. Nevertheless, timed as it was to have projects 'visible on the ground' shortly before the 1974 elections, (37) it proved to be a good political move on the part of the government. The ruling party, the Botswana Democratic Party, won the election handily, winning 27 out of 32 seats.

To date, the only major government programme dealing directly with the development of productive forces in the rural areas has been the recently introduced Grazing Land Policy (TGLP). TGLP is, in effect, an enclosure act involving the creation of new commercial ranching areas similar to the white farming blocks established in colonial times. It is envisaged that eventually this programme will result in the establishment of 1 500 or more new privately run commercial ranches. The inexpensive leasing arrangements and 'soft' loans for ranch development will, it can be assumed, mainly benefit the 1 500 largest cattle owners in the country. This would amount to barely 3% of rural households. Thus the budding national bourgeoisie is being well catered for by the government. While there is some disagreement about whether or not this enclosure movement will be labour extruding, there seems to be general agreement that at best it will not produce many new jobs. At any rate, it is unlikely to benefit those households without cattle which, all agree, need help the most.

The government has done relatively little, then, to raise the productivity and incomes of the mass of the rural population. This has helped create a situation of increasing rural out-migration to urban Botswana. At the same time, the government has set urban wage rates within Botswana at such a low level that migrants to urban areas cannot afford to break their rural ties completely and become a fully proletarianized urban work force. Unable to get by on the basis of rural production alone, yet unable to support a family on their urban wages, the majority of workers within Botswana have, of necessity, adopted a strategy of oscillating migration, moving back and forth between their rural homes and urban places of employment. The government policy on incomes, drawn up with the advice of a consultant provided by the Ford Foundation, was introduced in 1972. It is explicitly based on a totally inappropriate dual-economy model which assumes that in Botswana there is a modern urban sector developing separately from a traditional rural sector.³⁸

Following from this, the policy argues that modern urban sector wages must be kept low to minimise rural-urban income differentials (thus lessening inequality and urban migration): to encourage the use of labour-intensive technology (thus providing more employment): and to maximise modern sector profits to government and private enterprise (thus providing more capital for reinvestment in further development projects). The underlying assumption of this policy that there are separate modern and traditional sectors in Botswana is simply wrong. The rural and urban sectors of Botswana are unified through the internal migrant labour system. Carol Kerven's study of migration to Francistown shows quite clearly that, due to low wage levels

and lack of job security, urban workers maintain strong rural ties.(39) The 1976 Gaborone Migration Study found that there was a constant flow of people, cash, goods and services back and forth between urban workers and their rural homes.(40) My own work in Kgatleng District found that 34% of rural households had members working in urban areas of Botswana (another 30% had members working in South Africa) and that these rural households generally carried the burden of providing maternity care, child care, education and unemployment and old age security for urban workers. The maintenance of a rural base is an economic necessity for most workers. That so few Batswana consider Gaborone (or Francistown or Selebi-Pikwe or Lobatse) to be their permanent home is not just some 'traditional' hangover. It is a result of the fact that so many families are unable to exist either on urban wages or on rural production alone. The majority of households get by only by combining income from wage labour in the urban areas or in South Africa with crop and/or cattle production in the rural areas.

One outcome of the incomes policy is that it has provided cheap labour for the new mining industry. At the Selebi-Pikwe copper-nickel mine, for example, wage levels for Batswana miners are about one third below what is paid in South Africa for comparable work, and the average wage is well below the established urban poverty datum line.(41) The low level of wages in general, but particularly this differential between wages in Botswana and South Africa, has aroused a lot of resentment.

In July 1975, a wildcat strike over new wage levels nearly closed down the mine before the strike was crushed by the police. The government and the mining company (15% government owned) joined together in retaliation against the workers. The entire black labour force was sacked and 'selectively' rehired; (42) 34 miners were later sentenced to prison terms ranging from 3 to 12 months; and (according to the press) a top union official was publicly thrashed in front of the Vice President who, during the height of the strike, had been shaken up (while inside his car) by the workers. (43) In a later speech about the strike, the President defended the government's actions in terms of the need for maintaining an acceptable investment climate in Botswana.

'It is well to remind you that as a young developing nation we will for many years depend to a large degree on external assistance for development funds. The assistance cannot continue unless we maintain peace and stability in our country....Huge sums of money are involved. The establishment of Selebi-Pikwe cost R250 million of which R60

million was borrowed from various overseas sources by government. Therefore, in order for government to be able to repay this money, in addition to making sure the mine operates properly and becomes profitable, there is an imperative need for industrial peace.'

He then went on to justify the government's low wage policy in terms of the dual-economy model.

'It is necessary that wage demands by the fortunate few (those who have jobs) should be as minimal as possible. You ought to bear in mind that every wage increase you ask for denies many Batswana the opportunity to find employment. Not only that, but excessive wage demands also exacerbate the disparities which exist between the modern sector and the rural sector and hasten mechanisation.' 44)

One of the results of the low wage levels at Selebi-Pikwe has been an annual turnover rate of over 40% Batswana workers (45) who maintain their rural links and move in and out of wage employment as if they were contract workers. The bottom line in all this is that common labourers are paid below their cost of reproduction, the balance being provided by rural production. Consequently, extra profits accrue to the mining companies and to the government. Supposedly these extra profits -- which originate in the rural areas -- are to be used for rural development. The profits of the private companies mainly accrue to non-citizens and are lost to Botswana. (The current National Development Plan estimates that no less than 41% of GDP is appropriated by non-citizens).(46)

With regard to the government's share of profits, it is generally agreed even in government circles that to date the transfer of mining revenue to rural development has not taken place. Over the next 5-year plan period, it is projected that only 29% of development expenditure will go into rural development and physical infrastructure. (47) The government rhetoric about transferring resources from the urban sector to the rural sector cannot hide the reality of the situation: through its explicit policy of low urban wage rates and its neglect of mass rural development, the Botswana government has encouraged the growth of a migrant labour system within Botswana itself.

The Coming Crunch

A series of years with above average rainfall, high cattle prices and high recruitment levels and wages on the South African mines have created what the government's employment advisor has called a 'deafening silence' regarding a growing employment problem. The movement of workers to South Africa has been functional to the government in several ways. It has supplied the government with important foreign exchange earnings -- over P10 million in 1976 -- and some extra revenue in taxes and fees. More importantly it has served to defuse rural discontent and political pressure for a rural transformation. The natural increase in the labour force is forecast to total 124 000 between 1978 and 1988. Given that presently there are only about 55 000 in wage employment in Botswana; that there are another 50-60 000 employed in South Africa whose jobs are in jeopardy; and that less than 10% of rural households are able to grow enough food to subsist on, (48) it would appear that Botswana is heading for trouble.

The coming massive expansion in diamond mining is not the answer, since diamond mining in Botswana uses the most highly capital intensive methods possible. This is done for security reasons -- reportedly with the full support of the government.

The only imaginable solution to the growing employment problem is a massive programme of development in arable agriculture.

The emergence of a small group of progressive farmers has demonstrated that cash-cropping can be done successfully in Botswana. My own investigation of a successful crop-farming region and an earlier study done by John Comaroff of the Barolong farms indicate, however, that in cash-cropping areas class divisions are rapidly emerging.(49) Successful crop farmers generally tend to be men who already own large herds of cattle and/or have managed to raise capital through wage employment in South Africa or in urban Botswana. In addition, they usually have had favoured access to large portions of good land (often by dint of their superior positions in the tribal hierarchies and/or through their political influence); own tractors which they hire out for transport and ploughing; and employ farm labourers at extremely low wages. In most cases, they represent the expansion of the cattle-owning bourgeoisie into cash-cropping activities. Often their workers are members of one of the ethnic minorities -- for example, Basarwa -- or women who have neither cattle nor fields of their own and are unable to find work in the urban areas or in South Africa because they are uneducated, too old, nursing chil-

dren, etc. The men herd cattle, destump and clear fields and do piece-jobs. Women are often employed as domestic servants or they work 'majako'. Under the **majako** system, a woman will come to work in someone's field at the time for bird-scaring and stay to help with harvesting, threshing and winnowing. Her pay is generally a share of the harvest and can vary anywhere from a few buckets of grain, if there is a poor harvest, up to 12 bags -- worth about P144 -- if she is working for a generous and successful farmer.

Men and women who work as farm labourers are on the bottom rung socially and economically in Botswana. They are the people most in need of government assistance. Present trends indicate, however, that the resources that the government does put into arable farming will be in the form of price subsidies, easy credit and improved extension for the small class of capitalist farmers. The conservative lending policies of the National Development Bank have already ensured that nearly every new tractor owner is already a successful cattle owner or shop-keeper, or a government bureaucrat. (50)

As employment opportunities in the urban areas and in South Africa become scarcer and commercial agriculture develops further, the number of people forced to seek work in the poorly paid farming sector will grow substantially. There is already some evidence that big farmers will resist any attempt at the redistribution of land or cattle necessary to aid the rural poor. Politically they have the clout to do so. A proposal for a national education programme to inform all citizens of their rights to land -- a critical need at this time as practically the whole country is being mapped and allocated -- was rejected by the politicians in 1976. In northwest Kgatleng District, which is a cattle post and arable lands area, attempts by farmworkers to get their own fields and to have primary schools have met with strong opposition. Workers have been threatened with the loss of their jobs and eviction and the denial of access to water by the big farmers in the area. One of the workers aptly explained the basis for these threats as follows, "If we are to become educated and go away to work or if we have our own cattle and fields to plough, who will be left to bring our masters their tea in the morning?"

Conclusion

Time and again village studies in Botswana mistakenly describe the rural population as subsistence farmers, when, aside from the large cattle owners, most families subsist on wages earned by migrant workers which are supplemented by cattle and small stock husbandry and by crop production. (51)

Surprisingly, despite the low yields and increasing costs of ploughing, 75% of households still do try to grow crops.(52) With both a relative and absolute decrease in employment opportunities on the cards, the time is ripe for a major push in arable farming financed by the available international aid and the growing diamond mining revenue.

A naive view of Botswana could lead one to assume that the government will encourage the creation of family-based, cash-cropping, mixed farms as a solution. A more sophisticated view would recognise that the big farmers who are in political control will attempt to consolidate and expand their agricultural holdings, drawing on the returning migrants as a cheap labour force. As this will only make a small dent in the employment problem, unemployment will inevitably grow and, with it, political discontent.

Footnotes

1. Despite a six-fold increase in GDP since independence, 45% of rural families were found to be living below the poverty datum line in 1974. Government of Botswana, **Rural Incomes Distribution Survey, 1974-75**, Gaborone, Government Printer, 1976, p 226.
2. Francis Wilson, **Labour in the South African Gold Mines: 1911-1969**, London, Cambridge University Press, 1972, p 54.
3. D. Horner and A. Kooy **Conflict on South African Mines, 1972-76**, Capetown, SALDRU, 1976, p 1.
4. Government of South Africa **Report of the Inter-Departmental Commission of Inquiry into Riots on the Mines in the Republic of South Africa, 1975** (not released) p 37.
5. *Ibid*, p 29.
6. *Ibid*, pp 33, 35.
7. *Ibid*, p 29.
8. Isaac Schapera, **Migrant Labour and Tribal Life**, London, Oxford University Press, 1947, p 191.
9. *Ibid*, Tables XIII and XXX.
10. Government of Botswana, **1971 Population Census**, Gaborone, Government Printer, 1972, p 25-33.
11. Isaac Schapera, **Land Tenure in the Bechuanaland Protectorate**, Lovedale Press, 1943, p 120.
12. Government of Botswana and UN/FAO, **A Study of Constraints on Agricultural Development in the Republic of Botswana**, Rome, 1974, p 4.

13. Schapera, **Migrant Labour**, p 119.
14. Government of Botswana, **National Development Plan, 1976-81**, Gaborone, Government Printer, 1977, p 161.
15. Schapera, **Migrant Labour**, p 197.
16. The usual figure quoted for female-headed households is 30% but about half of these are headed by widows. The 15% figure is based on my own sample of 210 households in Kgatleng District.
17. In the Mochudi Tribal Court 45 such cases were heard in 1977 as compared to 5 in 1965. (From court records).
18. Schapera, **Migrant Labour**, p 210.
19. Government of Botswana, **National Policy on Incomes, Employment, Prices and Profits**, Government Paper No. 2 of 1972, Gaborone, Government Printer, 1972, p 2.
20. The colonial administration saw labour migration principally as a source of revenue. In 1936, for example, in reply to complaints from a number of chiefs, the Resident Commissioner defended mine recruitment saying, "From the point of view of Government, it enables taxes to be paid...and it makes them (the workers) richer and more able to meet demands made upon them." Botswana National Archives, File S/387/5. From 1900 through the 1930s hut tax accounted for an average of 40% of Government revenue.
21. Schapera, **Migrant Labour**, pp 121, 141.
22. In theory, although those who make much more than P1 000, would still only pay P84 in local government tax, they would become liable to pay the progressive national income tax, thus making the tax system more equitable. In practice, according to an official of the Bank of Botswana, only 1 of 8 cattle owners who should be paying the income tax actually does.
23. The Botswana Government later gave up collecting this tax from the miners in South Africa. According to the **Botswana Daily News** of December 13, 1978, "The Government has reached a decision that as they (the Botswana miners in South Africa) are in effect unemployed Botswana they should not pay tax in accordance with the law. They will continue to pay tax at P6 per annum. This variation in the application of the law applies to Botswana working at the mines in South Africa only."
24. UN/ECA, Mulpoc Division, **Aide-Memoire for Conference on Migratory Labour to South Africa**, Lusaka, 1978, Annex I.
25. This statement is not meant in any way to suggest that these stereo-typed views have any validity. It is merely meant to explain why white South Africans consider Botswana workers to be 'safe'.
26. The only previous time that restrictions had been placed on recruitment from Botswana was during the 1965-66 drought.
27. See, for example, Rob J. Davies **Demand Trends for Foreign Workers and Employer Strategy in South Africa**, Lusaka, UN/FAO Mulpoc Conference on Migratory Labour to Africa, 1978, mimeo.
28. Government of Botswana, **1971 Census Table 12**. My own field work revealed that most female migrants to South Africa are employed as domestic servants.

29. **Financial Mail**, June 9, 1978.
30. Schapera, **Migrant Labour**, computed from data in Tables I, IV and XIX.
31. Government of Botswana, **1971 Census**, p 107.
32. John Holm, 'Rural Development In Botswana: Three Basic Political Trends' **Rural Africana**, Fall, 1972, p 86.
33. For example, 18 out of 20 superscale and professional posts in the key Division of Economic Affairs of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning were filled by expatriates in 1977. Government of Botswana, **Establishment Register 1977§78**, Gaborone, Government Printer, 1978. The effect of this dependence on policy is substantial.
34. Government of Botswana, **Rural Incomes Distribution Survey 1974§75**. p 111, 223.
35. For statements of this policy see, for example, Government of Botswana, **National Development Plan**, p 18, or Government of Botswana, **National Policy for Rural Development**, Gaborone, Government Printer, 1973, p 1.
36. Robert Chambers, **Botswana's Accelerated Rural Development Programme 1973-76**, Gaborone, Government Printer, 1977, p iv.
37. **Ibid**, p xi.
38. Government of Botswana, **National Policy on Incomes**, p 1.
39. Carol Kerven, **Underdevelopment, Migration and Class Formation in the North East District of Botswana**, University of Toronto, Ph.D. dissertation, 1977.
40. Sherry Macliver, **Gaborone Migration Survey, Follow-up**, Gaborone, NIRDAS, 1976, pp 62-82.
41. The **maximum** wage levels for the bottom three grades of work at Selebi-Pikwe (which covers most of the Batswana working there) were below the established Poverty Datum Line in 1976. Wage data are from N. Moyo, **Notes on Industrial Relations at BCL, Selebi-Pikwe**, Gaborone, NIRDAS, 1978 p 30. The PDL is from Government of Botswana, **PDL for Urban Areas of Botswana**, Gaborone, Government Printer, 1976, p 11. A mine official in an interview with me, estimated the average wage to be about P75 in 1976. The average black wage in cash and kind on the mines in South Africa was P125.
42. 625 miners were not rehired. This represented over 20% of the work force and included the majority of the union officials on the mine. (N. Moyo, **Notes on Industrial Relations**, p 33.)
43. 'BCL Miners Convicted', **Kutlwano**, (Gaborone), January 1976.
44. 'Speech by His Excellency the President, Sir Seretse Khama, Addressing workers at Selebi-Pikwe 19 December 1975,' Gaborone, Government Printer.
45. N. Moyo, **Notes on Industrial Relations**, p 13.
46. Government of Botswana, **National Development Plan, 1976-81**, p 25.
47. **Ibid**, p 51. In fact it is unlikely that even this proportion will be spent on rural development as the Ministry of Agriculture, which has a large share of the rural development budget, spent less than one third of its budget in the previous plan period and will probably underspend its budget again.
48. According to a UN/FAO study on agriculture in Botswana, 9% of households reported that

they regularly grow enough crops to live on. (Government of Botswana and UN/FAO, **A Study of Constraints**, p 4)

49. John Comaroff, **The Structure of Agricultural Transformation in Barolong**, Gaborone, 1977, mimeo.
50. This statement is based on an interview with an official of the Bank of Botswana. An example of the National Development Bank's policies was provided by the family I lived with while doing field work. Their ownership of 95 cattle put them in the top 10% of rural households. After selling 35 head to get enough cash for a down payment on a tractor, they found that the remaining 60 cattle were not enough collateral for a loan from the bank.
51. See, for example, Malcolm Odell, ed., 'Report on the Sociological Survey of the Losilak-gokgong Area', Gaborone, Ministry of Agriculture, 1977, p 11. Also, R. Eschelman, 'A Review of the Mochudi Farmers' Brigade's Contribution Toward Improving Arable Crop Production in Botswana', Gaborone, NIRDAS, 1976, mimeo, p 1.
52. Government of Botswana and UN/FAO, **A Study of Constraints**, p 4. My own figures from Kgatleng show that there has been a steady increase in the price of hiring a tractor for ploughing. These higher prices placed a majority of the 54% of the households in my sample who hired tractors in 1977 perilously close to reaping a negative return -- even when their own labour input was costed at zero.