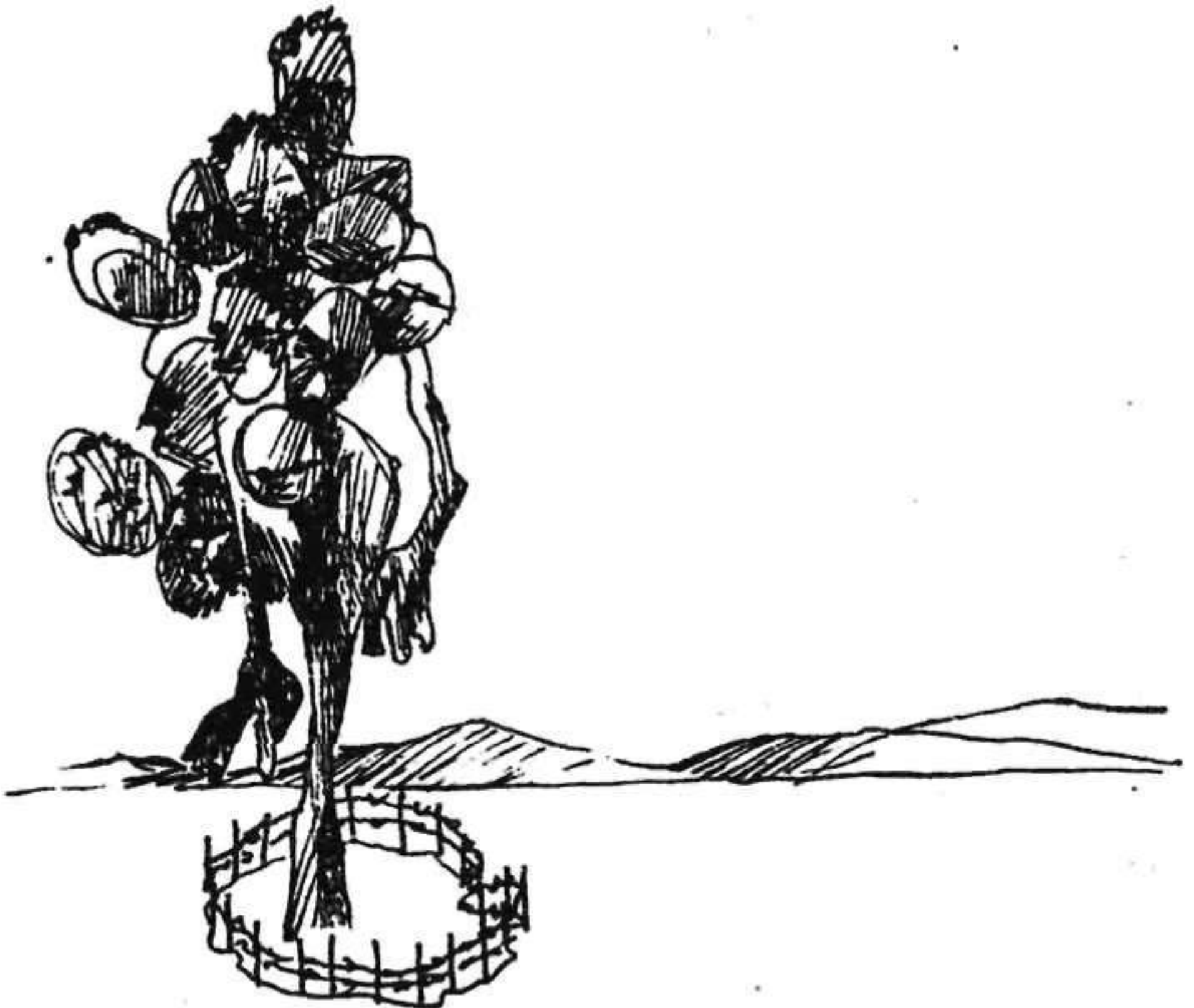


MAJOR SURGERY NEEDED FOR THE ECONOMY -
AND DOCTORS PRESCRIBE THE PILL.

DISCUSSION OF "OVERPOPULATION" AND
FAMILY PLANNING.



MAJOR SURGERY NEEDED FOR THE ECONOMY =
AND DOCTORS PRESCRIBE THE PILL.

A DISCUSSION OF "OVERPOPULATION" AND FAMILY PLANNING.

Since the 60's, overpopulation has been one of the world's most talked about problems.

It is seen as a great threat to continued human survival. Finite resources like wood, coal, oil, are being used up by the evergrowing world population. Soon we will all be sleeping standing up and chewing a synthetic food capsule.

Closer to home, overpopulation has been blamed for many of South Africa's problems. Degradation of farmland in the homelands, poverty, unemployment and crime have all been ascribed to the problem of "too many people".

Many people pin their hopes for a better future on a widely available (or even forced) family planning service. It is thought that through family planning, overpopulation and therefore poverty and social problems will decrease if not disappear. Numerous family planning clinics have sprung up all over the country, and these are seen as the answer to poverty. If people have fewer children there will be more money and therefore children will be healthier.

Some blacks have for a time, seen the government's clinic for family planning in this country as a polite form of genocide. And with race relations as they stand at present, they may have some cause for concern.

We, however, believe that the term overpopulation, and the family planning ethos it leads to, are being used by the State to explain and control very complex economic and historical forces.

There are three parts to this argument.

Firstly, this article will show that population pressure (a better term^{for} overpopulation) is a result of the long history of capitalism and apartheid in this country.

Secondly, we will argue that the term overpopulation is used

when people need the resources which are most profitable to the more powerful group (in this case the white capitalist ruling class) in our society.

Thirdly, we will look at the conventional theory which says that economic development, must keep pace with population growth to avert national disaster.

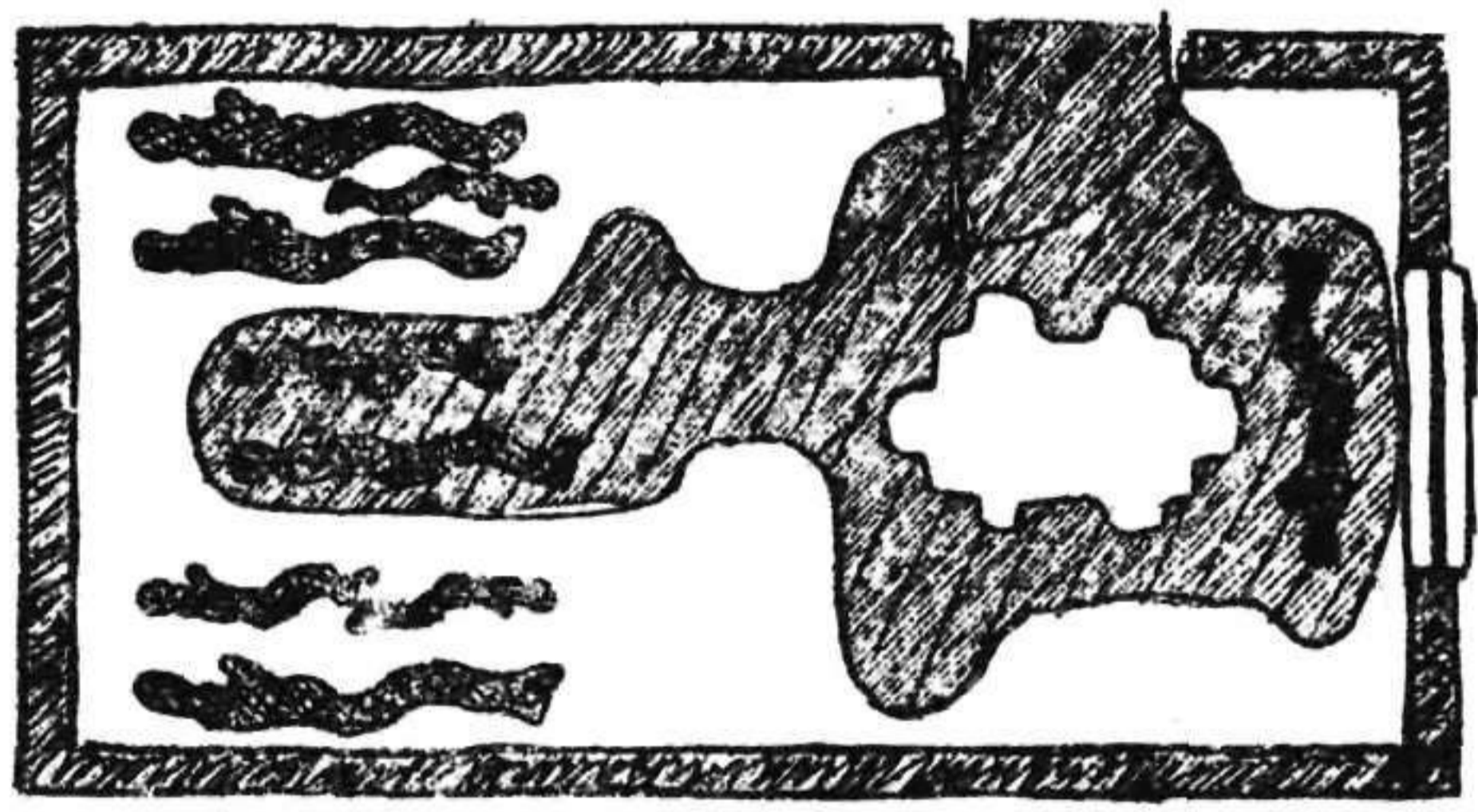
I. POPULATION PRESSURE IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT.

European merchants brought the people of Southern African into contact with capitalism for the first time. Merchants would trade things like beads and cloth for animal skins and ivory. At that time there was a subsistence economy — people grew enough food to live on. (They did not produce in order to sell) The elders of the society had control of the trade. As merchants demanded more and more goods the subsistence economy of the Blacks was slowly undermined. This was because elders put pressure on their subjects to hand over increasing proportions of their produce. The elders could then use this to trade with merchants, and in so doing to increase their own power. But this threatened the ability of people to support themselves from their land. The deterioration of subsistence production was further exacerbated by the need for labour in diamond and then gold mining. From this time blacks were progressively drawn off the land through such forces as land expropriation; the 1857 Xhosa cattle killing; the rinderpest epidemic of the 1890's; the Anglo-Boer war; the 1912/1913 East Coast Fever which killed off 70 to 80% of the cattle in the Transkei; and also periodic droughts.

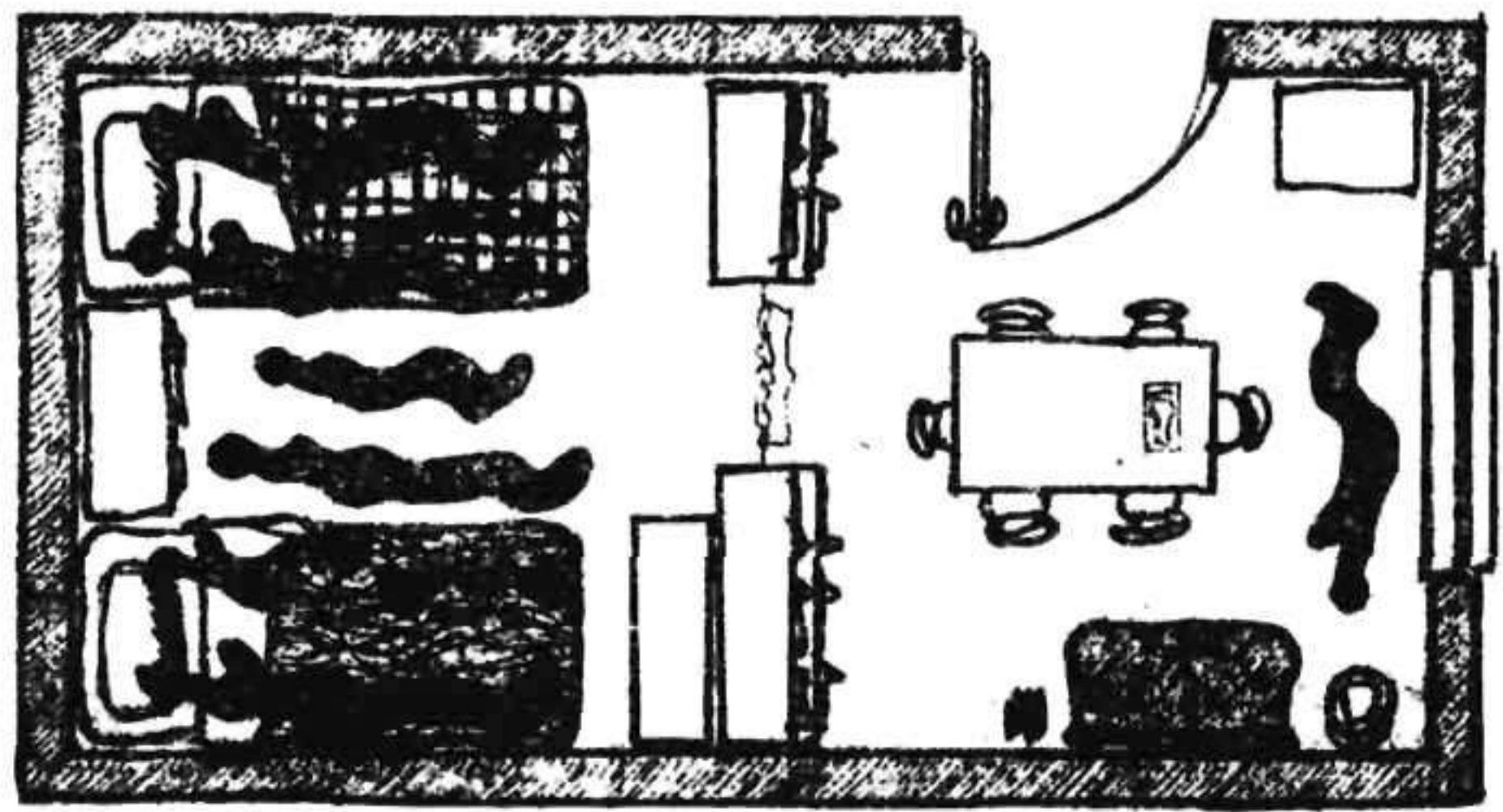
These forces effectively pushed them into the labour market. The Land Act of 1913 demarcated the "homelands". This made migrant labour possible. The family of the able-bodied worker who was needed to work on the mines, and later in other industry, could stay behind in the reserves. Mine-owners were then in a position to pay the worker only enough for his own survival. This was done under the notion that the worker's family could support itself in the reserves. The reserves however comprised only 13% of all the land in South Africa. They were too small to allow each family enough land to produce for themselves. There was another factor which caused the collapse of rural subsistence society. Both men and women had always been involved in production. But they had also each had tasks that differed from the other. With migrant labour women were left completely responsible for production. At the same time they were responsible for the

A TYPICAL HOME IN ALEXANDRIA

TOWNSHIP



CIRCULATION



SLEEPING PLACES

AREA = 13m²

9 OCCUPANTS

domestic needs of the family and for rearing the children. Not only was there less time for production than when men were around, but also all the means of decision-making had been the province of men. Without them, the possibility of innovation was diminished. So even though the reserves were retained, their basis of subsistence was eroded.

Thus we can see that rural people have progressively lost the means to produce food and goods for themselves. It is the long history of the theft of land (and labourers) which has crippled the rural areas - not the growing birthrate.

2. "OVERPOPULATION" AS A THREAT TO THE WEALTH OF THE RULING CLASS.

South African society is capitalist. It is made up of various classes. Among these is a class of people who control the economy (through their ownership of land, factories, etc.) and thereby the government. There are also those who sell their labour (as farm labourers, factory workers, etc.) for a wage, in order to subsist. The former class pushes certain beliefs that are in its own interests. The crisis of overpopulation is one such belief. It is an ideological mechanism used by the ruling class when it feels that its life-style is threatened. In the case of "overpopulation", the ruling class focuses its argument on the resources that it wants. If people need resources which the ruling class wants, then the conclusion is that there are too many people. One example in South Africa is that Blacks need land which capitalist businessmen want. So the term "overpopulation" is used to justify the taking of land from people who need it to survive. People who believe in "overpopulation" assume that the money generated by land under capitalist agriculture benefits all. But land expropriation in South Africa has brought increasing poverty and suffering to the mass of the country's people while securing the best land for farming, mining and harbours for white capitalists.

3. OVERPOPULATION, FAMILY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT.

Proponents of family planning often justify it by a comparison between a country's economic growth and its population growth.

As one South African theorist said in 1979 :

"If you have a 3% population increase per year and want to develop a country, you require a growth rate of more than 3%. In the last two years in South Africa

South Africa didn't have a 3% growth rate therefore it slipped back. In a boom, population wouldn't be such a problem because there'd be higher employment".

There are a few aspects to this kind of explanation. Firstly it assumes that the growth of capitalism and the distribution of income that this implies, is the type of "development" that is desirable for South Africa. It also assumes that lack of "development" can only be solved by further capitalist investment. For example this view thinks that investment in the reserves is enough to "develop" them. It does not recognize that the "development" of industry in South Africa is in fact based on the progressive "underdevelopment" or erosion of the reserves. Secondly, the quote assumes that the products of capitalism are divided equally amongst all people -- the idea that if the population growth rate increases, the national growth rate must increase for the people in the country to maintain their standard of living. It does not allow for the likelihood that, for example, in a boom, when national output increases, capitalists will benefit enormously while the majority of people will only be slightly affected, if at all. This is especially pertinent in South Africa because of the nature of unemployment here. In most western capitalist societies, unemployment rates increase during a depression and decrease in a boom. So unemployment is cyclical. But in South Africa, it is a part of the nature of capitalism here that unemployment is high. There are many reasons for this. One is that industry has become increasingly capital-intensive, importing new industrial technology from capitalist countries that are far further advanced in their development than is South Africa. The introduction of machinery into production increases the amount that can be produced in a given space of time. This ultimately increases the rate of profit. Since profit is the prime concern of capitalism, mechanization has proceeded even though this means that workers are laid off, and few new jobs are created. Another reason for South Africa's unemployment has been the legal exclusion of Blacks from skilled labour.

South Africa's tremendous unemployment - between 1,5 and 2,5 million, depending on whose statistics one accepts - has been the main factor contributing to the fear of "overpopulation" in South Africa. But once again we have seen that it is caused by the nature of capitalism and apartheid in South Africa, and not by overpopulation.

These statements typify the white, ruling class' attitude towards overpopulation"

Sterilisation is the solution

STAR
24/5/80

"Health facilities for blacks are poor" was the report (The Star, May 15). This should give no cause for surprise but for concern.

Professor John Gear, speaking at Wits University, gave the comparative statistics for the difference between the mortality rates of white, coloured and black infants

As the professor says, there is a shortage of doctors in rural areas, but surely the situation is exacerbated by the fact that there are thousands more amongst blacks and coloureds needing treatment than amongst whites. In other words, gross and uncontrolled over-breeding.

Further in the report Professor S A Strauss and Professor L Cavalli-Sforza agree that compulsory sterilisation reminded them of Nazi Germany. The professors seem to be unaware of the difference.

The Nazi policy was genocide.

If the blacks and coloureds were to realise that sterilisation would on a long way to solving their self-imposed problem, however repugnant such a policy might seem to them.

How this could be achieved is another matter

Professors Strauss and Gear say that "South Africa is light years away from abortion on demand." Would abortion really solve the problem, which will always raise the question of the right to terminate life?

Sterilisation is the only way to stop the appalling birth rate amongst the black and coloureds. This would effectively stop the potential life of misery and early death such as exists today and which is destined for millions of yet unborn children.

Roy Patten

Voortrekkerhoogte.

RM 13/5/80

Planning with aid

Own Correspondent

CAPE TOWN. — Medical aid schemes have been asked to consider sterilisation as a preventive health measure and include it in their list of benefits.

A letter in the latest issue of the SA Medical Journal says that sterilisation would save on illnesses, unplanned pregnancies, confinements and children's ailments.

"Control population growth or else!"

Sir, Alas, I can hold my tongue no longer! Headlines two weeks ago of the poor unfortunate mother whose six children are forced to work on a farm for virtually nothing — Headlines last week of starvation in the KwaZulu homelands — Headlines this week of massive aid to needy people! //

— Those headlines should instead be highlighting the greatest problem facing the underprivileged of South Africa today and indeed the whole of the so-called Third World. They should be screaming out at us all — every week, every day — the absolute necessity to curb the frightening population explosion in this our country, and the whole of Africa, South America and Asia. I do not think the

average man-in-the-street, even newspaper editors or politicians, quite realise the seriousness of the situation, or just how completely out of hand it has got. Living in the luxury suburbs of our big cities, or driving along our modern highways through the rolling green hills of our lovely countryside does not give one the faintest indication of what is happening in the vast African areas beyond those green hills, or in the sprawling townships situated conveniently out of sight of prying eyes. "The answer lies in controlling that population growth now, before it is irretrievably too late."

No longer can control of population growth be interpreted by Blacks as a device by Whites for obliterating their race, because the Whites have long ago been effectively and irretrievably outnumbered. It therefore cuts right across racial and political boundaries and can no longer be regarded as a political tool in the hands of the Whites."

— D Barker, South Coast, Natal.

10 + 20
29 Aug 80

THE STATE'S SOLUTION.

The problem remains as to what course of action can be followed to deal with the apparent "overpopulation". Masses of unemployed and starving people pose a serious political threat to the government. One answer would be to restructure the economy such that the distribution of property and income was more equitable. Clearly the present structure is desirable and profitable for those in control (politically and economically) and they would never consider such a change. So from their point of view, the only answer is to devise some means of controlling these surplus people. The first move on the part of the government has been to "export" these people from "white" urban and rural areas, in the hope of removing the instability and potential unrest that they generate.

The government's following move has been to institute a birth control policy under the less provocative term of "family planning". Although this policy, operationalized in 1974, could never hope to eradicate those who have no economic value, as labourers, for South African industry, it is a part of an overall policy of political control. However essential contraception may be for individual women, its provision as part of an overall strategy of control must be recognized.

It is not possible to describe the Health Department's "Family-Planning" programme in detail here. But reference is made to two examples that help to illustrate its aims.

Here is a quote from a Health Department brochure that asks managers to arrange for the "motivation" of their workers :-

"What are the benefits of family planning to the employer and his workers?

- * A stable and more productive work force.
- * Less risk of losing trained workers through unplanned pregnancy.
- * Decreased training costs.
- * Lower recruitment costs."

This indicates quite clearly that health is the last of the incentives motivating the Health Department. In this case the advantage of a productive labour force for businessmen is the main concern of the Health Department. Another clear illustration that health is not the Department's main concern is its stand on pap smears. South Africa has the highest rate of cervical cancer in the world. Pap smears are the

only way of reducing this. Yet the Health Department refuses to provide them as part and parcel of their "Family Planning" service. So women are left to die of cervical cancer when a pap smear could have detected the cancer at an early stage and allowed it to be cured. And yet another example appears in this issue of Critical Health where we comment on the removal of Rifampicin from the drugs used for treating tuberculosis. These examples show that preventative health care is not the purpose of the "Family Planning" programme of the Health Department. It is a programme aimed at taking control over one more part of people's lives. Its motives are primarily political.



WORK IN PROGRESS

WORK IN PROGRESS is a journal which explores and presents ideas about contemporary South African society. WIP appears about five times per year.

REGULAR FEATURES include summaries of political trials, and items on strikes and other labour action and on labour organisations.

ARTICLES in previous editions have dealt with strikes, resettlement, community organisation, bus and consumer boycotts, education for white and black, health, and many other contemporary issues.

SUBSCRIPTIONS are available at R5,00 for five issues within South Africa. Rates elsewhere are available on request.

WRITE TO: The Editors,
PO Box 52174,
2143 Yeoville,
South Africa.