

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

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

BEHIND THE MASK OF THE MAIDS AND MADAMS

by Audrey Cobden

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

off in the week, so that they work 7 days a week. 23% do not get an annual holiday.

Of clothes—"anything that's too old or shabby for me, she gets". Another—"I never give them anything which I cannot use".

Family Life: The extent of disruption of the family life of a domestic worker comes through very clearly. Workers care for the children of their employers at a tremendous cost to themselves: the cost of their inability to care for their own. "We leave our children early in the morning to look after other women's families and still they don't appreciate us".

The employers' ignorance of their servants lives outside the work situation was startling. Again this is not confined to the Eastern Cape. A very typical viewpoint is that servants are like children; so that the core of the relationship is paternalistic and these women therefore do not see themselves as exploiters.

Vulnerability: Domestic workers, together with farm workers, are the most vulnerable workers in the labour market of South Africa. Like farm workers, domestic workers are specifically excluded from the definition of "worker" in the labour legislation of the country, and so are totally unprotected. Until 1974 they received a modicum of protection under the "Masters and Servants Act" (who said the slave idea was an exaggeration?) This was then repealed and nothing has replaced it since. Both the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions avoided or ignored the issue. As Ms Cock puts it, domestic workers are in a legal vacuum.

Wages and conditions of service are fixed in an arbitrary private agreement between worker and employer. Domestic workers are excluded from the benefits of the Unemployment Insurance Act and the Workmen's Compensation Act. Strict enforcement of Influx Control regulations have the effect of forcing workers to remain with an employer rather than run the risk of being "endorsed out" of an area. Many workers are tied to a particular employer because of the restrictions surrounding all black work-seekers.

One of the Family: With this phrase many employers describe their relationship with their domestic worker. But in the depth sample in the Eastern Cape, Ms Cock reports that not one domestic worker considered herself, as "one of the family". The relationship between domestic workers and employer showed considerable variation. Most relationships showed some degree of social distance; and workers adopted a mask of deference as a protective disguise. They were powerless to truly express overt dissatisfaction.

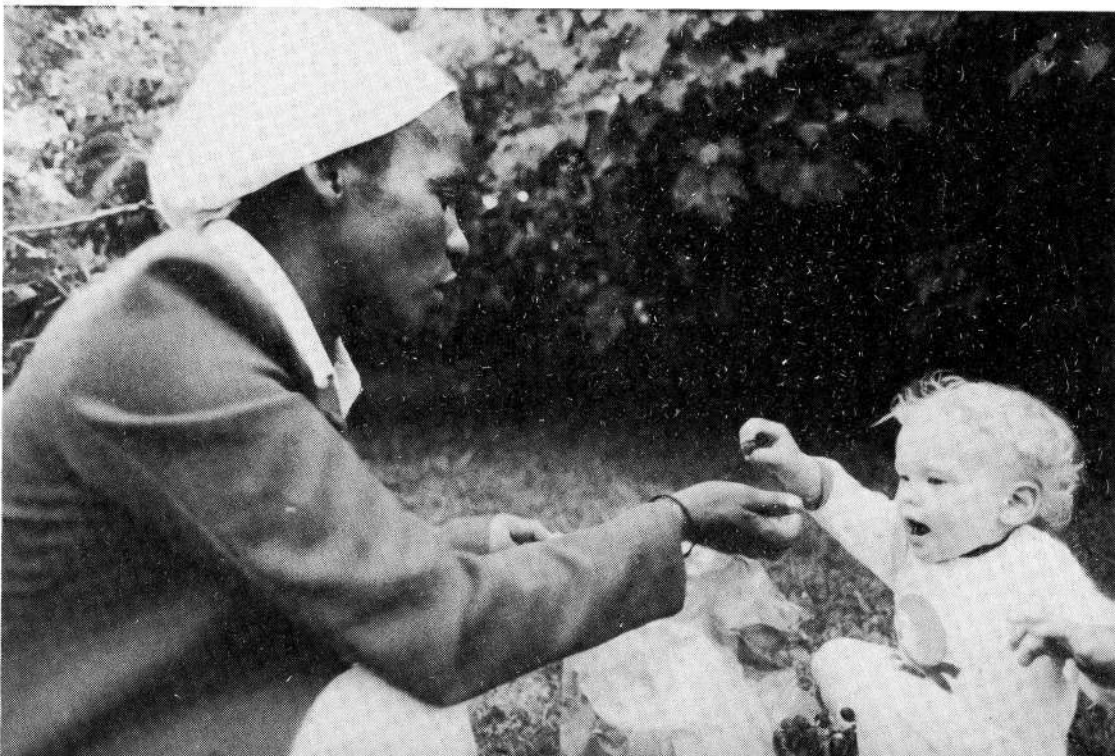
Domestic worker—Self image: The chapter on self imagery was particularly revealing, especially where it investigated the domestic workers' perceptions of themselves as blacks and as women. As workers they all felt they were badly treated and all felt they should get double their present wage.

As blacks all felt that they were not treated fairly, with examples ranging from pass laws and influx laws, unfairness in lack of work opportunities, and poor housing, to lack of dignified treatment. During the period of the field work of the book, the Black Consciousness leadership was detained. The Black Community Programme, which had been very active in the Eastern Cape, had been banned.

Yet only 44% of the depth sample had heard of the Black Consciousness Movement. There was also a reluctance to talk about the topic.

As women only 16% of domestic workers interviewed in depth (in contrast to 24% of employers) thought women were generally inferior to men in their personal qualities. Most workers felt that although they had more difficulties than men they were better able to handle them. Although only 24% had heard of the Womens Liberation Movement, most of the black women had a much greater "feminist consciousness" or natural insight into discrimination against women. So one gains the impression that for all the oppressions they suffer, domestic workers' personal integrity remains intact.

Trapped: Through many examples Ms Cock shows how



Biddy Crewe

domestic workers are totally dependant on their employers.. The feeling of being owned, as a slave, reflects a feeling of being trapped. This is epitomised in a revealing advertisement by a work-seeker in a Grahamstown newspaper "Cook-general seeks work as owner transferred". The fear of losing her job is also part of the trap. The dependence of employers on their domestic worker is revealed as well. But the curious anomalies in this quasi-affectionate dependent situation are highlighted by the situation of the employers, very comforted by the proximity of her maid, who "sits in the kitchen making her grass mats at night, while I sit here (the lounge) sewing". What a tragedy that these two women can never really share any kind of companionship in a situation which cries out for sharing.

This gap illustrates, par excellence, (to use a favourite phrase of Ms Cock) the fact that the domestic worker/employer set-up is a microcosm of South African society. Even when we share common experiences (in this case loneliness), we cannot bridge the race barrier.

Employers as women: 24% believed women to be generally inferior to men (only 16% of domestic workers thought this). 62% thought women were treated fairly in South Africa. 14% had not heard of the Womens Liberation Movement. The majority accepted their subordinate role in society. These women too are trapped in a society in which the subordinate role of women is the norm.

Some good relationships: Only the bad comments have been quoted because the majority of workers experienced only the bad side of domestic service at the hands of exploitive employers; but some workers expressed feelings about employers thus (inter alia): "I have good feelings about her because she treats me like a person". "I feel pity for her and try to comfort her when she is upset". "If she makes tea, she gives me some too". "She helps me with the housework and we have tea together".

Some employers about their workers—"She's a friend. I'm very fond of her". "We have an easy relaxed kind of relationship based on mutual trust".

The second part of the book deals with the historical overview. With much erudition Ms Cock shows how the pattern of domestic service has changed. It began with whites brought from England with the Settlers. This situation has slowly

transformed in its racial character and domestic service became the prerogative of black women. One interesting piece of information concerns the capture by a British warship of some Arab dhows with a cargo of over 200 slaves from Abyssinia. The slaves, mostly women and children, were sent to Lovedale and ended up as domestic workers in various homes in the Cape.

The third part concerns "The Ultra-Exploitability of Domestic Workers". It shows with great insight, sensitivity and scholarship how discrimination of race and sex affects domestic workers, and sets this in a wider frame of reference. Ms Cock examines in detail the general situation of black women in South Africa, especially in regard to education. Women handicapped by lack of education turn to domestic work as the only work opportunity open to them. But opportunities are gradually changing because domestic service also provides an entry into urban areas and urban contacts. Ms Cock calls this domestic service a strategy of survival.

APARTHEID'S DEEP SOUTH

Ms Cock uses this phrase to describe both the geographical area in which she did the research, and the institution of domestic service itself. It is the title of the slide-tape show she has produced which could be described as a "popular" version of some of her book (mainly the first part). "Popular" meaning "for the people" because "popular" (pleasing to the people) it is not. But the slide show will bring her message to people who will not read the book.

Many will consider the book to be too one-sided. If it is, one must consider that if one side is over-exploited, the revealing of this exploitation will always be considered one-sided by the other side.

This is not a popular (for the people) book. It is a book to stretch the mind, an important book. A serious book about a serious subject. It tends to be repetitive but it is never boring. It should be required reading for all people concerned with exploitation of people by people. But alas! It may be like books about anti-semitism which are only read by Jews. *Maids and Madams* may only be read by the converted madams (and very few maids).

There is so much to this book and space prevents one doing justice to it. One hopes your appetite has been whetted. □

