

# **SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN**

## **FOCUS ON BOTSWANA**

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DAVID MASSEY

THE CHANGING POLITICAL ECONOMY OF  
MIGRANT LABOUR IN BOTSWANA

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ERIK LYBY

MIGRATION AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

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JACK PARSON

THE WORKING CLASS, THE STATE AND  
SOCIAL CHANGE IN BOTSWANA

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SALB

INTERVIEW WITH BFTU CHAIRMAN

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# **SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN**

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## **Apology**

It has come to our attention that in the course of editing an article by Pieter le Roux, 'The Retention of Influx Control' (Vol. 5 No. 4), an opinion to which the author does not subscribe, was inadvertently inserted. The paragraph in question reads:

"The precise nature of the Riekert Commission's recommendations affecting influx control is covered elsewhere in this edition. It is, however, necessary to stress the fact that the Commission leaves intact key aspects of the existing system of influx control, and that, where changes are proposed, these are designed to effect a division between urban and rural dwellers."

It must be pointed out that the author does not subscribe to the final statement. SALB wishes to apologise for any inconvenience caused to the author over this error.



## **Introduction**

The term labour usually refers to wage labour (not just 'work' as such) and the study of labour to the three aspects of the employment relationship: wages, relations of employer and employee ('industrial relations') and the size of employment. Where paid and regular wage labour is involved in most productive activities throughout a society, the study of labour is made that much easier, since the relations of employer and employee are more established and obvious, while wage levels, hours of work and numbers employed are more fixed and widely known and therefore more easily measured and compared.

What this means effectively is that the study of labour in industrialised countries is easier than in peripheral economies where labour is often not exchanged for wages. Labour is also of a temporary and not variable nature and often very small-scale (one or two employees), while the relations between employer and employee are inexplicit and undocumented. The lack of documentation is reflected most strongly in the labour statistics of peripheral countries: the only employment and wage statistics usually available are for government employment and for that small part of the private sector in which employment is fairly large and stable - i.e. the so-called 'formal sector' , which is defined precisely in terms of the regularity of employment of labour and the explicitness of the relation between employer and employee and, often, the size of employment per firm.

The consequence is that the working class in peripheral countries tends to be defined as including only those workers in 'formal sector' employment. This has given rise to one of the most discussed issues about labour in peripheral countries where the 'formal sector' involves only a minority of the workforce; namely, whether formal sector employees form a 'labour elite' whose interests are fundamentally divorced from those of other oppressed and exploited groups. In the context of growing class differentiation, typical of an underdeveloped state, are these groups able to forge class alliances in the struggle against exploitation?

It is clear that formal sector workers constitute a highly exploited section of the population. Jack Parson shows that the vast majority of workers in the industrial class receive wages below the Effective Minimum level. They are also an oppressed group along with the 'peasantariat' (peasants who are heavily dependent on migrant labour to South Africa for their daily survival). Both classes remain weak and divided as an effect of political and

economic domination by the ruling class.

This is not, however, to deny the existence of class differences between the rural population and the formal sector working class. The precise nature of the relationship between the two remains difficult to define, and this gives rise to a debate over the significance for the poorer majority of working class struggles. To what extent do poor rural families have members working in the urban formal sector, thus benefitting from higher wages through transfers to the rural areas? In other words, how great is the 'internal migration' of labour within the country between the 'formal sector' and the rural areas? David Massey, in his contribution on the political economy of migrant labour in Botswana, argues that such internal migration is large and increasing because of the inability of families to survive either on urban wages or rural production alone, and that therefore the wages earned in the 'formal sector' to a large extent 'trickle down' into the rural areas.

The other issues on which the contributors to the present edition focus are migrant labour itself and the trade union movement in Botswana. Migrant labour to South Africa is still the dominant feature of the labour picture in Botswana. It involves an estimated 30 000 to 40 000 persons (of whom some 21 000 are mine workers). Total 'formal sector' employment is currently about 60 000. For most of the eighty years of colonial rule (1885 to 1965) the Bechuanaland Protectorate was governed effectively as a labour reserve for South Africa. With only the minimum of jobs available within the territory, migrant labour became a necessity for many in order to pay taxes and to buy the increasingly necessary imported traders' goods. By the mid 20th century it was the most important single source of income for the majority of the population. Schapera found that in 1938-42, 47% of the cash income of the 'native population' came from employment outside the territory. According to the 1971 census, in three of the most heavily populated southern districts of the country (Ngwaketse, Kweneng and Kgatleng) some 40% of males in the 15-54 age bracket were absent outside the country, the vast majority on the South African mines.(1)

In his paper, *Migration and Underdevelopment*, Erik Lyby paints a vivid picture of the concrete effects of the migrant labour system on the rural population. His interviews with migrant workers clearly reflect the way in

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1. The information from Schapera's study and the 1971 census is taken from **National Migration Study, Working Paper No. 2, Economy & Society in Botswana: Some basic national socio-economic co-ordinates relevant to an interpretation of National Migration Study statistics** pp 35-39.



which the process of underdevelopment operates to lock the population into an endless cycle of dependence on the industrial centre in South Africa. It is in this context that family relations and ideology become a principal binding force in society.

As Massey emphasises, current changes in the southern African migrant labour system assume fundamental importance for Botswana. The demand for foreign workers by the South African mines is decreasing while at the same time 'internal' migration within Botswana is increasing. Massey's paper reveals the predicament in which the Botswana government finds itself with respect to migrant labour to South Africa: on the one hand it recognizes some of the devastating effects of the migrant system and would like to end it; on the other hand migrant labour is a major source of income for the poor of the country for which there is at present no alternative source available. This same dilemma is reflected in the resolution on migrant labour passed by the joint meeting of 'the workers' movements of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland' at Gaborone in November 1978, which is reprinted in this edition.

The trade union movement in Botswana is the final major focal point among the contributions. The interview with the president of the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions (Mr. G. Matlhabaphiri) indicates that the trade unionism is comparatively new and has been built up to a large extent on the initiative of the government and with the assistance of the Afro-American Labour Centre and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The movement, still weak and unsophisticated, reflects the backward nature of capitalist industry in the country. Much of the discussion centres on the obstacles blocking effective organization. Parson, in his paper on the working class and the state in Botswana, argues that restrictive and divisive legislation, together with harsh putting-down of strikes, are major reasons for the movement's weakness. Matlhabaphiri, while also blaming some aspects of the legislation, is hopeful that these can be altered, and suggests lack of education among trade union leaders and members as a further major obstacle. It is likely, however, that the problem is more fundamental. Whether Botswana, as a small country peripheral to South Africa can have a vigorous nationally-based union movement is a question raised by Lyby and Parson. Both suggest that a closer alliance with workers in South Africa is needed.

# **The Changing Political Economy of Migrant Labour in Botswana**

**David Massey**

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.

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★ 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,

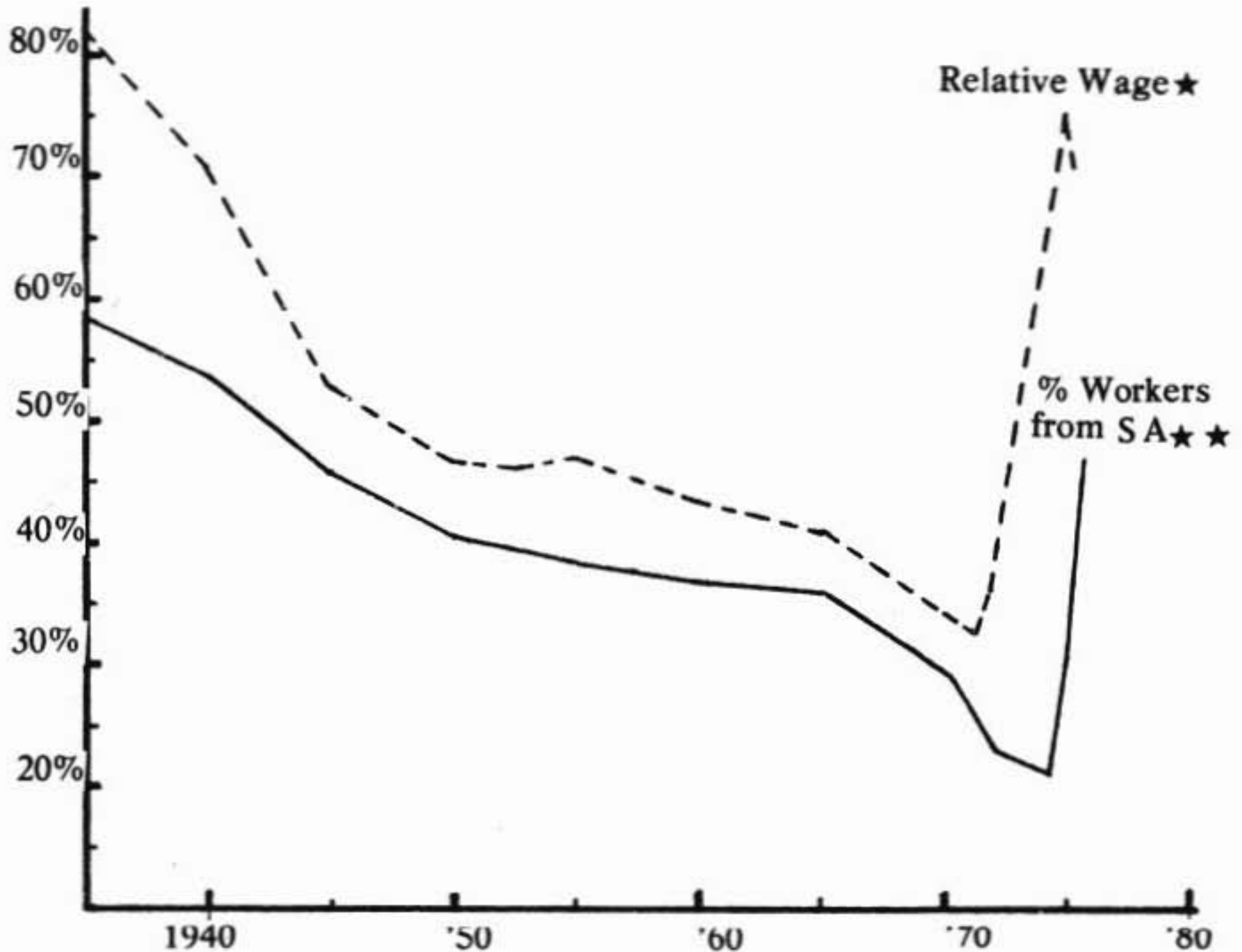
'At certain mines there was an attitude among Mozambicans during times of Frelimo successes, that Frelimo was showing how to deal with Whites. This particular source of migrant labour is especially exposed to infiltration by terrorists.' (6)

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.



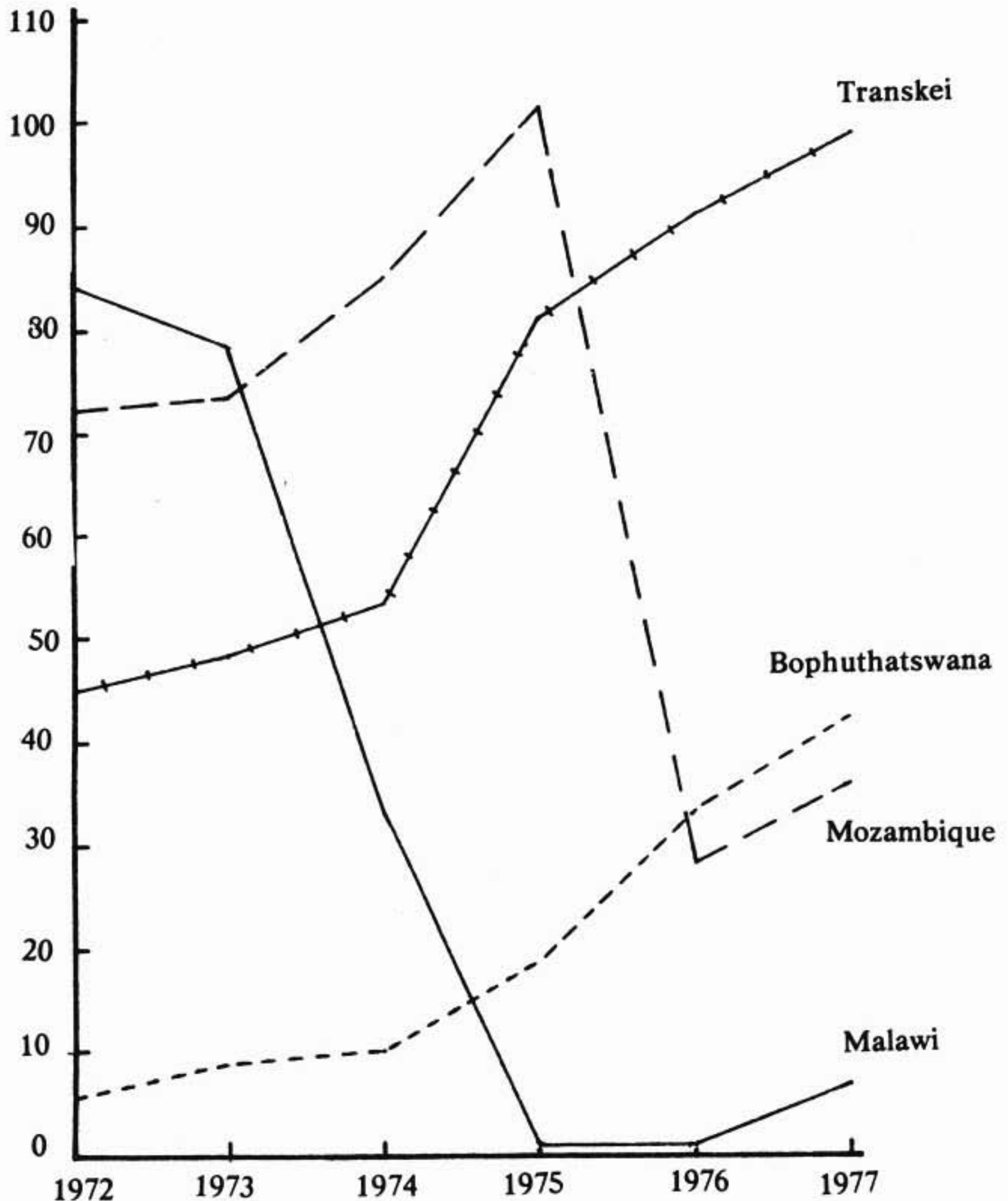
★ Relative wage curve based on cash wages in gold mining as a percentage of cash wages in manufacturing.

★★ 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-



crucial 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 multi-national 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.<sup>38</sup>

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.<sup>(52)</sup> 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, **Alde-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.



# **Migration and Underdevelopment : Interviews with Migrants on SA Mines**

**Erik Lyby**

## **Migration Studies - Macro and Micro**

It is well-known that labour migration is a significant feature of the social economic life of the Batswana and has been so for several generations. However, apart from Schapera's research during World War II<sup>1</sup> until very recently, little attention has been paid to the subject. A few private researchers have been carrying out basically micro-oriented studies since 1975<sup>2</sup> and the Botswana government is presently undertaking a country-wide statistical sample survey, called the National Migration Study. The International Labour Office has initiated migration surveys in Lesotho and Swaziland (in cooperation with the university campuses there), and another survey has been carried out in Mocambique, so a fair amount of material is now building up concerning the labour reserves of Southern Africa.

What kind of material is it then that we get, and how should it be interpreted? If we restrict the discussion to Botswana, the National Migration Study emerges as a macro-oriented, statistical exercise aimed at presenting all the relevant 'hard facts' on the subject. Such large-scale surveys based on questionnaires are suitable for collecting simple factual information. They are less suitable for complicated questions and questions concerning the intentions, attitudes and aspirations of those interviewed. They are unsuitable for finding out about historical changes. The statistics of the National Migration Study, therefore, need to be supplemented by more detailed case studies and documentary studies, in order to provide a fuller picture of migration.

The research method used by the present author included lengthy interviews with Batswana workers migrating to the South African mines. This short paper attempts, firstly, to show the migrant workers' own views in their own words (translated into English) by presenting a few excerpts from interviews, in order to try to reveal some common problems. Secondly, it then attempts to outline a more generalised picture of the migrant workers and their situation.

## **Some Migrant Profiles**

The form in which the excerpts are presented is a slightly edited (shortened) English version of tape transcripts and the excerpts should merely serve as examples and indicators of problems rather than pretend to be representative. Some of the basic data (statistics) will be presented afterwards with a discussion of some of the implications. The interviews used here were all taken at the Mine Labour Organisation's recruiting office at Kanye village in Southern District in 1977.<sup>3</sup>

### **(a) the role of parental authority in the system**

The interviewee is 24 years of age and lives with his father, mother, 4 brothers and 4 sisters in Kanye. His situation is fairly typical, as can be seen by comparing it with the generalised statistical picture presented in Section III below.

**Q: Are your brothers older or younger than yourself?**

**A: (counting) 3 brothers are older, then there is me, I am number 4. One brother is younger, he is attending primary school.**

**Q: Are some of your brothers working?**

**A: Yes, all the old ones work at the mines (in South Africa).**

**Q: Did your father ever work on the mines?**

**A: Oh yes, he went there for many years.**

**Q: So he thinks minework is good?**

**A: Well yes. I don't know. He never said anything about it.**

**Q: Did you never discuss it at home?**

**A: No. He never said anything.**

**Q: Is your father working now?**

**A: Yes, he is a labourer at the hospital here.**

**Q: Does your father have a field for ploughing?**

**A: Yes.**

**Q: Who tends the field when your father is working in the hospital?**

**A: The children look after the field. And my mother.**

**Q: Is the field close to the village?**

**A: It is not very close. It takes more than one day to go there by ox-cart. On a bicycle it takes three hours, or two hours.**

**Q: Do you have enough oxen to pull the plough?**

**A: Yes.**

**Q: How many cattle do you have?**

**A: I don't know.**



- Q: Could you try to estimate it? After all you've been home for some time, so you must have seen the cattle. Do you think there are 10 head? Or 50 head? Or 100?
- A: Well, I don't know, but I think there are about 30. (After some further discussion about cattle).
- Q: Do you or any of your brothers buy cattle with the money you earn on the mines?
- A: No, we don't buy cattle ourselves. We give the money to our parents.
- Q: So you send remittances home from the mines?
- A: Well, some of my brothers do, but I don't. I just keep the money and give it to them when I return.
- Q: Why don't you send the money?
- A: It is because I can't write, so I don't know how to send money. I don't want other people to do it for me. Sometimes they can cheat you and keep the money.
- Q: What do your parents do with the money?
- A: I don't know.
- Q: Don't you know if your father buys cattle with this money?
- A: No, I don't know.
- Q: Who do you give the money to?
- A: I give it to my father, but I don't know if he or my mother keeps it. But my mother built a house in 1975.
- Q: Are any of your brothers married?
- A: No, not yet.
- Q: Do you know if your brothers are trying to save money for **bogadi** (bride-price)?
- A: No, they never tell me anything.
- Q: Do you want to get married yourself?
- A: Yes, I want to, but not now, because I am still young.
- Q: Will you be able to pay **bogadi** when you want to marry?
- A: I think so, because I hope my father will give me some cattle.
- Q: How many times have you been to the mines?
- A: Since 1973 (counts) 4 times.
- Q: Which mines have you been to?
- A: Blyvoor (Blyvooruitsicht). Every time I have been there, and I am going there even this time.
- Q: What kind of work have you been doing?
- A: I am a winch driver.
- Q: Are you satisfied with working at Blyvoor?
- A: Yes, it is alright. I like it.
- Q: What is it that you like in particular?
- A: Well, I am used to it, I am used to the whites there.

Q: They treat you alright?

A: Yes.

One conclusion that emerges from this particular interview is that the migrant is not in a mood to open his heart and soul to the interviewer. There can be several reasons for this. One reason is a (natural) scepticism towards any 'official' - he could be a tax collector in disguise or in some way associated with the recruiting agency. In the first case, it is better not to reveal too much about cattle numbers, and in the latter it might be dangerous to criticise the conditions on the mines.

Apart from this it is clear that this young migrant and all his brothers and sisters form part of one extended household, headed by the father. The fact that all these full-grown brothers just hand over their total earnings to the parents without asking any questions (and many interviews show this to be the common pattern) shows that parental authority is, indeed, very strong.

The parents own enough cattle to plough with, and they are likely to be able to provide the sons with enough cattle for **bogadi**, once they intend to marry, also considering that **bogadi** cattle will come **into** the household in case of the daughters marrying. On the other hand, there is not a very big herd to share between 9 children, when the parents die. Each son will then have to start with a few heads of cattle; to keep going to the mines to increase his herd; to maintain a field while he is away; and to get many children who can, in due time, go to the mines or elsewhere, **just to keep the system going**. A breakdown of the parental authority could lead to disastrous consequences. Cohesion within the extended family provides the only - very feeble - life insurance for everybody involved. Without money coming in from the sons working in the mines, the parents, the young children, the unmarried sisters with their children, etc., would not be able to make a living - in the literal sense of the word. Parental authority and the system of **bogadi** help to preserve this system of reproduction, but at the same time to keep the level of material reproduction very low.

#### (b) The deceased parents

Another case could demonstrate some of the difficulties faced by a migrant, whose parents are both dead. His attitude towards minework is at the same time not quite as docile as the first one.

He is 23 years old, his father died when he was a baby and his mother died



in 1969. He lives in Ranaka village some 40 kms from Kanye and the household consists of 4 brothers and 2 sisters. He is the last-born. The sisters stay at home, heading the household, while all the brothers work on the mines.

Q: Do you own any cattle?

A: Well, not me, I don't own cattle, but my parents have 15 head of cattle.

Q: Now that your parents are long dead, you mean that their cattle have not yet been divided between you and your brothers and sisters?

A: Yes, they still belong to my parents, even if they are dead.

Q: Who looks after these cattle?

A: My uncle lives nearby, he looks after them.

Q: Does he get the milk then?

A: Yes, but he gives some to my sisters for their children.

Q: Would you like to marry sometime?

A: Yes, I want to, but I have not made my final decision yet. It is very difficult, because I have so many problems.

Q: What kind of problems are you thinking of?

A: Well, it is hard because I don't have any money and I don't have any cattle, so I will just have to wait and prepare myself to be able to marry. It will take a long time.

Q: So you want to save money and buy cattle?

A: Yes, I want to buy cattle, because I don't have a father who can help me.

Q: Could your brothers not help you?

A: No, they can't help me, because I don't have a mother or a father who can persuade them to take a cow from the kraal to help me with **bogadi**, I can only help myself. If the cattle had only been divided, it would have been much better. Now it is only the older brothers who want to keep the cattle for themselves. It is very bad, but what can I do?

(The discussion turns to the work on the mines. He has been there 3 times before, at Blyvoor, Durban Deep, and Randfontein).

Q: Do you like working on the mines?

A: Yes, I like it.

Q: Is it not a very hard job?

A: I am used to it now, so it is not so hard. In the beginning it was hard.

Q: Don't you think it is very hot working underground?

A: Well yes, it is hot, but now I am used to it.

Q: Are you satisfied with the way you are treated by the whites there?

A: Well, I am not satisfied, because the treatment is very bad. But it doesn't

mean anything, because there is nothing else to do but to accept it. I mean, we can't leave the job.

Q: What do you mean when you say the treatment is very bad?

A: Oh, you see, anything can happen. If you make a mistake, the Boers can easily kick you, or just give you some cust, or they can just tell you to go out from the job. They don't treat us well at all.

Q: Is it because you are from Botswana, or do they treat the other workers the same way?

A: If you are from Botswana, if you are from Lesotho, even if you are from South Africa, as long as you are black they don't treat you like a human being, they just treat you like monkeys. They kick you for nothing. It is just because they are Boers, these people are very rough. A Boer is a Boer, they always do this kind of thing, without any reason. They just call us **kaffirs** and insult us. They don't call us by name, they just say "Kaffir, come here."

(So much for the Boers. Equally generalised statements about other groups appear).

Q: How is your relationship with the other groups of mineworkers, who are not Batswana?

A: Well, it is alright for the most part.

Q: Are there any groups that you like or dislike in particular?

A: The Xhosas are often very difficult people, because they don't like other tribes. These Xhosa boys can fight you or stab you when you are along. They always go together and live together. The **indunas** sometimes try to make them co-operate, but they don't want to. Also some **indunas** are Xhosas themselves, they don't care.

Q: Can you communicate with each other except in **Fanakalo** (the simple **lingua franca** used in the mines)?

A: We all know **Fanakalo**, so that is what we can talk.

Q: Do you think it is easy to have good discussions in **Fanakalo**? After all, it is a very limited language with only a few words in it?

A: It is easy enough for working, but when you want to relax it is no good. For example, we like telling stories in the evening. But how can you tell a proper story in **Fanakalo**? You must plan it before and make it short. It is not very interesting that way.

Summing up this interview it will be seen that the migrant attributes a major part of his troubles to the confusion in the household due to the fact that both parents are deceased and he is not himself able to tell the older brothers what to do.



While this worker's particular situation is untypical of the family circumstances of most migrants (as represented by the first interview), deviations of one kind or another from the norm, and variations within the norm, are common. The 'deviations' referred to could typically be: the migrant never having known his father, and his mother's parents being old or dead with their household dissolved; old or disabled relatives and a dis-proportionate number of small children, who must be supported, an 'unequal' balance between the sexes in the household, e.g. many unmarried sisters with children; any of the above combined with having no cattle for security.

The statements about the conditions in the mines show that the migrant typically starts out with a fatalistic attitude ("It is not so bad when you are used to it. I like it. There is nothing else to do"), but ends up with a different story. It is obviously not out of love for any 'bright lights' that he is on the way to the mines again.

(c) The man with the brick house

The following interview is with an older migrant. He is 40 years old and married with 5 children of whom 2 are attending primary school. Like the others he never went to school himself. He is going to the mines for the seventh time. The family lives in Kanye village.

Q: How long have you stayed home since your last contract, and what have you been doing?

A: It is about a year now since I returned. I haven't been doing anything except enjoying life.

Q: Did you not plough this season?

A: Oh yes, I ploughed and looked after my cattle.

Q: How many head of cattle do you have?

A: 4 head.

Q: That is not enough cattle to pull a plough?

A: No, but I borrowed some from my brothers for the ploughing.

Q: How did you get your 4 cattle?

A: Well, I bought the first cow when I worked in Lobatse. Then I got one from my father when he died. Since that time I bought one, and one of them had a calf.

Q: Are you planning to buy more cattle?

A: Oh yes, I want to buy more.

Q: Did you pay **bogadi** when you married?

A: Yes, my father gave me 4 cattle for **bogadi**.

Q: You are 40 years old now. How long do you intend to keep going to the

mines?

**A:** Well, I don't know, but I have just completed building a house, so I need to buy a lot of things. When I have bought all the house equipment, I think I can stop going to the mines.

**Q:** What kind of house have you built - a rondavel or a brick house?

**A:** It is a 4-cornered house with a tin roof.

It would be a safe guess to say that this man will not be able to 'retire' to farming before he has at least one child old enough to support him and his wife. Four cattle and a bit of farming in a very unreliable climate will not be sufficient to see the family through - even if they own a brick house with a tin roof.

#### (d) The special case

The last case to be quoted here is again a young man - 20 years old - who follows the general pattern to a large extent, except that he has a 'special' problem (which again may not be totally uncommon....)

He is the first-born and lives with his parents and 3 younger ones who all go to school. He never attended school himself. They live at Sekgogo, a 'lands area' 20 miles Southwest of Kanye. His father and himself are the only ones to earn wages, both work in the mines. It is his second time there.

**Q:** Does your mother farm while you and your father are away?

**A:** We don't have our own fields, so she does not farm.

**Q:** Doesn't she cultivate anything at all?

**A:** Well, sometimes she does, but she mostly works for people. She helps them with picking up the beans, or with harvesting. Sometimes they give her money or some grain or beans. She doesn't plough herself, but sometimes we have borrowed part of a field from somebody, then she has cultivated it. But we don't have a plough, so she has been using a hoe.

**Q:** Do you have any cattle?

**A:** Yes, we have 5 cattle, they are all female. And then we look after some cattle for a certain man, and now he is to give us one calf every year for doing that. We have just received the first one. Before we only had 4, now we have five.

**Q:** How did you get the other four?

**A:** My father inherited 2, and then he bought one and then my brother got one for herding somebody else's cattle.



Q: Do you like farming, or would you rather be a mineworker?

A: Well, I prefer to stay in the village and be a farmer, but now I have some problems, so I must go to the mines.

Q: What kind of problems do you have?

A: Well, you see, since I came home I had some girlfriends. Now my two girlfriends are pregnant. So I must pay a lot for that.

Q: Doesn't sound very good. What are you going to do?

A: I just don't know, because the girls' parents have not yet reported it to my parents, so I don't know what they are going to demand. I haven't told my parents yet, but I am sure I must earn some money.

Q: Are you going to marry one of them?

A: Maybe, but I don't know as that is a matter for my parents to decide. Myself, I am still young. If my parents say I must marry, I shall try to tell them that I am too young, because it is necessary to have money in the bank or something if you marry, in order to provide for your wife.

The precarious circumstances of this landless family headed by a migrant made it probable that the next generation of males would also go to the mines. Combined with unwanted pregnancies, it becomes a certainty.

## **The Generalised Picture**

It should be safe at this stage to present a few statistical data on the mine-workers. The following results are not intended to be regarded as conclusive, as they are based on the present writer's relatively small sample from Kanye which has not been fully analysed as yet. On the other hand, it has been possible to compare the results with those of Birgitte Krogh (from Lobatse) and David Massey (from Mochudi), and since these samples all match very closely, it would seem that they are not too far off the mark.

The general impression is that the majority of mine migrants are very young with little schooling; live with their parents; are unmarried; own no cattle yet, but are eager to buy some; and bring home some R300-400 in cash + some commodities bought in South Africa.

### **(a) Age and marriage**

The ages of returning workers differ according to the time of the year (1977) they are recorded. This is mainly because of the restrictions imposed by the mines during most of that year, i.e., supply of labour exceeded the demand, so the mines could afford not to take on any 'novices' (first-timers). The consequence of this with regard to age distribution is a higher average,

as most of the young applicants were turned away.

At different times of the year, the median age varied from 23-25 years, i.e. half of the recruits were below this age, and the other half older. Only 3-4% were above the age of 45 years. Put differently, the major age group was 18-29 years, which made up between 70% and 80% of the total number of recruits.

Twenty five per cent were married (or engaged with children) (n equals 286).★ Most of the men (even those who were married) were found to have their residence with, or next to, their parents' homestead. Half of the married men had paid **bogadi**, the rest said they intended to, but had not managed so far.

### (b) Schooling

Seventy seven per cent had never been to school, while 23% had spent some time at school (n equals 205, going + returning).

**Table I Schooling**

Level of Education	% migrants	Accumulated
No education at all	77%	77%
Standard 1	3%	80%
Standard 2	5%	85%
Standard 3	2%	87%
Standard 4	1%	88%
Standard 5	3%	91%
Standard 6	1%	92%
Standard 7	5%	98%
Secondary School	3%	100%

### (c) Cattle ownership

As could be expected the migrants, being mostly very young, don't own many cattle themselves. Usually a herd is only divided between the children at the time of the parents' death, so it is necessary to know the size of their herd as well, in order to get a picture of the (actual and potential)

★ n equals size of sample, in this case a mixture of going and returning migrants.



cattle ownership of the son. In some cases, one or more head are 'given' in advance by the father to the son, although they usually stay in the father's kraal until the proper time of inheritance. These cattle are called **tswalso** and are regarded as the son's property as in the following table. About 11% of the parents had **mafisa** cattle, i.e. cattle on loan. The **mafisa** holder has a right to use **mafisa** cattle but not to dispose of them. Since **mafisa** cattle are not automatically inherited from father to son, they are not included in this breakdown.

**Table II Cattle Ownership**

No. of cattle	migrant's own cattle	Accumulated Total	Parents' cattle	Accumulated Total
no cattle	64%	64%	30%	30%
1-2 head	16%	80%	2%	32%
3-10 head	15%	95%	28%	60%
11-20 head	3%	98%	18%	78%
more than 21	2%	100%	22%	100%

While hardly any of the migrants had more than 10 head of cattle (95% had less), 64% had none at all. As could be expected, the figures are much different for the parents: 30% had no cattle, but about 20% had more than 20 head. About half of the cattle-owning migrants were found to have bought some of their cattle with money earned on the mines. This applied in particular to the older miners.

The Rural Income Distribution Survey of 1974 (RIDS)<sup>4</sup> in Botswana concluded that 45% of the rural households owned no cattle at all. In the present survey the corresponding figure is only 30%, suggesting that the households with migrant workers are generally better off. However, it would be dangerous and probably wrong to draw such a conclusion, since the definition of a **household** in the RIDS is much narrower than the one used here.

<sup>5</sup> According to RIDS a household is more or less the group of people who are eating from the same pot, whereas the present survey is concerned with the migrant's own idea of the extended family he belongs to. It is very likely that many of these families would be regarded a number of adjacent households by the RIDS. Nevertheless, it is suggested that the definition used here is more close to reality, since it is within the framework of this extended family that social reproduction should be seen. It is within the extended family that cattle ownership has a significance, as well as the amounts of

money remitted by the migrants. The parental authority has already been mentioned as one important factor in this particular kind of reproduction.

**(d) The economic impact**

Money or goods can be sent or brought home in the following ways (this applies especially for men recruited by TEBA, the Chamber of Miners' recruiting agency):

**Remittances:** money sent from the mineworker to a relative either through TEBA or the Post Office, while he is still on the mines.

**Voluntary Deferred Pay [VDP]:** usually a major part of the earnings which are paid out to the migrant once he has returned to the recruiting office in Botswana after finishing his contract.

**Cash** held by the migrant when he returns from South Africa.

**Goods** bought in South Africa and brought back by the migrant.

About half of the men send home remittances, typically amounting to an average of R100 per contract (each contract usually lasting 9 to 12 months). Table III shows a sample of Voluntary Deferred Pay, paid out at Kanye in March-April 1977.

**Table III Voluntary Deferred Pay (n = 153)**

Amount in Rand	% of migrants	Accumulated Total
Nothing	6,5%	6,5%
R 0-100	11%	17,5%
R100-200	23,5%	41%
R200-300	19%	60%
R300-400	14%	74%
R400-700	19%	93%
more than R700	7%	100%

About half the migrants had amounts exceeding R250 paid out to them after returning.



It has sometimes been argued, for example in the RIDS report, that the migrants blow all their money on women and wine, and bring home very little.<sup>6</sup> The RIDS claims the median value of **cash and goods** brought home to be around R60, i.e., half of migrants brought home more than that, and the other half brought less. Although the wages were considerably lower in 1974 than 1976,<sup>7</sup> this is certainly not likely to hold true. The Central Statistics Office in Gaborone has made an estimate of the value of all transfers in cash and kind brought home by approximately 27 000 migrants in 1974.<sup>8</sup> The amount is R6 430 000, which averages **R238 per miner**. The corresponding figures for 1976, after the wages had risen, are R18 460 000 and 39 000 miners, an average of **R473 per miner**.

A word of warning is necessary here. If someone might consider this a 'substantial donation to Botswana from the Chamber of Mines' they ought to think again. Firstly, when talking about mine wages, we are talking about very small sums of money. It should be kept in mind that the amounts mentioned are related to almost a year of working and living under dangerous, hard and thoroughly unpleasant conditions. **Secondly**, these amounts have to go a long way to keep a big family going. **Thirdly**, inflation is running very fast. The R238 brought home per miner in 1974 must be matched with R300 in 1976,<sup>9</sup> and probably R400 in 1978 to make up for inflation. Rather than showing prosperity, the figures indicate an impressive determination on the part of the migrants to save as much as possible out of the little they earn.

Finally, to indicate the importance of these transfers in a different way, one could mention that the total amount transferred in this way in 1974 (R 6 430 000) is roughly equal to **the total income of the poorest 28% of all rural households**, according to RIDS.<sup>10</sup> That is to say, the poorest 28% of all rural households, all having annual gross incomes of less than R328, had a total income equalling this amount **between them**. One might add that the 'income' concept used in the RIDS includes value of such items as firewood and wild fruits gathered by the household itself; value of dwelling (hut); weight gained by livestock; value of meat from deceased livestock; etc. What these figures show is really **how poor** the majority of Botswana are, and how **dependent** they are on the continued availability of wage labour.

### **Social Reproduction in a Labour Reserve**

In strictly economic terms, Botswana is 'developing' fast. The National Development Plan 1976-81 foresees a growth of the Gross Domestic Product of 9,6% per annum. A breakdown of figures shows, however, that the mining

sector is expected to have a growth rate of no less than 26,3% (mainly due to the expected development at the Jwaneng diamond mine), while the share from agriculture is only expected to grow at a rate of 4,3%.<sup>11</sup> The Plan also states that

'Agriculture is the backbone of Botswana's rural economy. It involves 80% of rural households and contributes 35% of total rural incomes.'<sup>12</sup> A little further on, the Plan continues: 'livestock production, mainly cattle, accounts for over 80% of total agricultural production.'<sup>13</sup>

This does not leave very much for arable production, and the often-used phrase 'subsistence farming' is in fact much too optimistic in that it indicates that this type of small-scale farming is sufficient to subsist on, whereas it is not. The vast majority of Botswana, while living in rural areas, are not really farmers at all, but very heavily dependent on wage labour. Yet they **do** farm a little, and they **do** try to become cattle-owners to the best of their ability, but without any significant success. The 'important livestock production' referred to above, does not in any way relate to the majority of the rural population, many of whom either don't own livestock at all, or have herds that are barely sufficient to pull a plough. Cattle owned by this large section of the population very rarely enter the market at all. Why is it then, that people bother to keep any agricultural production going at all? Are they just 'conservative' or 'traditional in outlook?'

Samir Amin suggests the following:

"Emigration impoverishes the region, it also prevents the socio-economic structure from undergoing radical, progressive change; also to defend themselves, to survive, these societies react by reinforcing those aspects of their traditional structure, which enable them to survive this impoverishment. But at the same time, this impoverishment reinforces the push-effect on certain elements of the population, reproducing the conditions of emigration. The form that this development then takes is that of a degenerated agrarian capitalism, corrupted and poor."<sup>14</sup>

The Botswana migrants live in rural areas, because there is nowhere else they can stay. The rural home is more important as a **home** than as a farming unit, albeit any additional income from agricultural produce is welcome. The migrant labour system of Southern Africa is one based on **forced cyclical migration**, i.e. there is no way in which a migrant can ever hope to settle permanently near his place of work. This is one of the main reasons why it is



necessary to maintain strong ties to the village, and to keep all aspects of 'traditional' life and values alive. The context of social reproduction in the rural areas involves economic, political and ideological aspects of such institutions as the extended family, brideprice, **tswaiso** and **mafisa** loan systems, small-scale farming, chieftainship, religion, perhaps even witchcraft.

Many of these institutions have a completely different content today than they had a hundred years ago and are as such not really 'traditional' at all, even if they look so. The preceding sections should have revealed the importance of parental authority and brideprice, among others.

Of course, farming is not completely insignificant as a source of income. With good rains and no serious mishaps such as attacks by insects, birds, or livestock, a migrant's wife may produce enough grain, beans, sweet reed, etc., to cover most of the family's requirements. Nevertheless, the **market value** of a good year's crop rarely exceeds R50 to R100 partly because product prices for agricultural produce are roughly equal to the prices in South Africa, which in turn are fixed on the basis of large-scale and highly productive farming enterprises. The fruits of a whole season's labour for wife and children is consequently of a magnitude similar to what the husband earns in 2-4 weeks at the mines.

On this basis it is possible to sketch out what may be a typical reproduction cycle, involving both 'traditional' and 'modern' aspects.<sup>15</sup>

A young man goes to the mines several times and brings home money for his father. The father uses some money for consumption and some to buy cattle with. Some of the cattle are used to help his sons to get married by paying the brideprice. Thus his herd is quite small when he dies, and the children only inherit very few cattle. But marriage means children who can migrate in due time and help build up the father's herd, etc. It also establishes a permanent tie between two families, which may be very useful in time of need. Getting married with many children is the way to bring about security in old age, but it also means that each child inherits very little, and the cycle has to repeat itself all over again.

The situation is slightly different in the case of the increasing internal migration in Botswana. The rural-urban migrants may settle permanently in the towns some day, but the evidence seems to show that the very limited security in the urban situation forces them to maintain their rural ties for a

long time to come.

## **The Integrated Economy of Southern Africa**

Migration is only one factor in the dependency pattern between South Africa and Botswana, although an important one. Other factors are the openness of the market and the differences in productivity levels, which at the same time serve to block any possibility of a diversified, capitalist production in Botswana. Anybody with capital to invest in, say, a manufacturing enterprise, would have to face competition from the big capital-intensive companies in South Africa; and he would have to deal with an unskilled labour force, high transportation costs, and a limited home market. If he wanted to go into farming, he would again compete with capital-intensive and state-subsidised South African farmers. What he typically does, then, is to buy a trading store, a bar, or cattle for his money, leading to an 'agrarian capitalism, corrupted and poor.'

This is what we mean by underdevelopment - a process of growing class differentiation and dependence upon the economic centre, in this case, South Africa.

Those who benefit by the present arrangement are obviously the mining capitalists in Johannesburg and elsewhere, since it makes it possible to pay the migrants extremely low wages. It could be said that the mines only pay for the reproduction of the **worker himself** and not for the **working class** as such, as this ought to include the wives, parents, children (next generation's migrants), etc., who are now being partly provided for in the rural areas - at an appallingly low material level of reproduction.

The government of Botswana can do very little to break this dependence, and - made up largely of wealthy cattle-owners - does not seem to have much interest in trying. The core of the problem lies within South Africa itself, and if the workers of Botswana want to play a part, they will serve their own interest best by siding with their fellow workers on the mines in South Africa.

### **Footnotes**

1. Isaac Schapera: *Migrant Labour and Tribal Life*, London 1947.
2. The Studies referred to are Carol Kerven's work in Francistown, David Cooper's in Selibiphikwe, David Massey's in Mochudi, Birgitte Krogh's in Lobatse and Serowe and my own in Kanye and Shakawe.



3. My thanks are due to Miss Florence Rakgole for helping with the interviews used here.
4. The Rural Income Distribution Survey in Botswana 1974/75, published by the Central Statistics Office, Gaborone, 1976.
5. See **RIDS**, p 147.
6. **RIDS**, p 72.
7. The average monthly wages were reported by the Chamber of Mines to be just over R100 in 1977.
8. **Botswana Mineworkers in South Africa**, p 7, mimeo by the Central Statistics Office, Gaborone, 1977 (unpublished).
9. Cost-of-living index for low-income groups (all items) shows an increase of 25% from June 1974 to June 1976. Central Statistics Office: Statistical Abstract 1976, p 50, Gaborone.
10. Calculated on the basis of the table on p 80 in **RIDS**.
11. National Development Plan 1976-81, p 55. Published by the Ministry of Finance & Development Planning, Gaborone.
12. **NDP**, p 135.
13. **Ibid.**
14. Samir Amin: "Introduction", p 104 in Amin (ed): **Modern Migrations in Western Africa**, Oxford University Press, 1974.
15. It ought to be pointed out that the importance of brideprice differs considerably from one area to another in Botswana. The following is based on the situation in the Southern part, where brideprice is absolutely necessary in any 'proper' marriage.

# **The Working Class, the State and Social Change in Botswana**

**Jack Parson**

## **Introduction**

The working class in capitalist society, broadly defined, consists of those persons who sell their labour in order to purchase the means of subsistence. In expending this labour they create the wealth of society, but themselves receive a wage representing less than the value created. That value (a surplus value, in excess of that required for subsistence) accrues to those who employ labour, those who own the means of production, those who have capital. This article is concerned with the working class in more or less full-time employment in commercial and industrial enterprises and in the state apparatus (local and central government) in Botswana.

A major implication of this rough definition of the working class is the obvious opposition of capital (the bourgeoisie) and labour (the proletariat). This opposition takes the form of classes locked in struggles at various levels. But these struggles take place in conditions where capital is dominant. This domination conditions the struggles of the working class and is characterised by the complex mediations of the struggles through the state. The state, in its enactment of laws, use of force, and policies adopted, acts to organise and reproduce the domination of capital and to disorganise the dominated classes.

Generally the working class in Botswana is numerically small, badly educated, divided horizontally in 'economic' sectors, and vertically within enterprises, is poorly paid and lacks an authentic working class organisation. It is generally politically isolated from other classes in society with whom it shares certain objective characteristics. In particular, the 'internal' working class has few links with the peasantry, or migrant workers who work outside Botswana. The working class is dominated by a state which represents capitalist interests including those of the metropolitan bourgeoisie in alliance with a local governing petty-bourgeoisie. The present article briefly examines this situation historically, then looks more carefully at the post-independence era, concluding with some comments on problems and prospects for the future.



## **The Working Class in Historical Perspective**

The history of the working class in Botswana is primarily the history of imperialism in this country. That history has been one of the subordination of the people of Botswana to the requirements of international capital, specifically to British and South African capital. A concrete manifestation of this is the drain of manpower from Botswana to the mines, farms and factories of South Africa, the whole system of migrant labour. 'Bechuanaland' became a 'labour reserve' for the South African economy.

It is important to see that this is something that happened to Botswana. It is not, in other words a 'natural' fact. The natural environment of marginal soils and unpredictable rainfall did not alone cause labour migration; this was mainly the result of the imposition of taxation, the enforcement of internal and external boundaries, and the undermining of then existing productive capacity in agriculture and manufacturing beginning at the end of the 19th century.

The colonial government was the instrument engaged in creating and maintaining this situation. Through the imposition of taxation, and its other activities, the colonial government created conditions causing men to search for work and then facilitated their emigration to South Africa. In particular, virtually nothing was done to develop the productive capacity of African agriculture in the colonial period. The colonial government, throughout most of the colonial period, channeled virtually no resources into developing social services and industrial capacity.

The consequences of this for the development of the working class in Botswana were significant. The total number of workers was very small. As there was little development of manufacturing, there was no rapid growth in the number of workers. Secondly, the working class constituted largely agricultural workers on freehold farms, in commerce and on the railway. All these sections were geographically dispersed and isolated, making it difficult for workers to be in touch with one another. Thirdly, the enterprises tended to be very small, each employing only a few workers. No single enterprise, with the possible exception of the railway, provided a numerically strong base for working class organisational development. Fourthly, throughout most of the colonial period the development of working class organisation would have been viewed with hostility by the colonial government.

The results of such factors were predictable. By 1964 there were only about 31 600 workers in employment in Botswana and this includes self-

employed traders and other petty-bourgeois elements.<sup>1</sup> The first union was only formed in 1949 in Francistown and the first and unsuccessful attempt at establishing a federation of unions came only in 1966, the year of independence.<sup>2</sup> Despite these facts, the urbanised working class did have an impact on politics during the nationalist period. It largely supported the then Bechuanaland Peoples' Party, and was involved in several impressive public demonstrations against the colonial government, notably in Francistown and Lobatse.

### **The Working Class in the Post-Independence Period**

The purpose of this section is to outline some of the leading characteristics of the working class since 1966. In doing so, mention will be made of the size, concentration, wages, and organisation of the working class. There are problems in estimating the size of the working class because most government statistics are based on total number employed rather than figures based on whether this is wage labour, self-employment, etc. One can get a more realistic figure by looking at wages paid, but here again the result will be somewhat imprecise. Official figures of total employment show significant increases over the independence period. Total formal sector employment increased to 47 804 in 1972 and by 1976 reached 71 380.<sup>3</sup> However, if one takes a more realistic look at wage levels, the actual working class component of these figures is smaller. In reality, the clearly identifiable working class in 1973 was roughly 44 000 and in 1976 was roughly 48 000.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in 1976 with a total labour force numbering 373 000, roughly 12% were in the working class properly speaking, i.e., in more or less full-time wage labour in Botswana.<sup>5</sup>

The working class is also geographically dispersed and divided in small units into a variety of different activities. More than half (57%) of the working class live in urban areas, but this is divided into four towns with Gaborone having 27%, Selebi-Pikwe 12%, Francistown 10% and Lobatse 9%.<sup>6</sup> The rest work in villages and more rural areas. The average size of enterprises tends to be small which means that the working class is divided among a large number of small enterprises. In 1976, in the private sector there were 1 368 enterprises some 97% of which had 100 or fewer employees. 68% of enterprises had 10 or fewer employees. Of the 46 enterprises with more than 100 employees, 13 or 28% were in construction (where the work is carried out on geographically dispersed sites), 4 were in mining and quarrying, and 5 were in manufacturing.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of the division of work those in employment were distributed



among a variety of types of work. In 1976 of those in formal employment (regardless of wage level), 13,1% were in mining and quarrying, 14,4% in construction, 19,5% in commerce and 19,4% in the industrial class. Only 11,1% were in manufacturing and 8,1% were in (freehold) agriculture. The remaining 14,4% were divided among electricity and water (1,8%), transport and communications (3,5%), finance (5,2%), and community and social services (3,9%).<sup>8</sup> In terms of the division of labour as skilled and unskilled, in 1976 about 52% of all employment was skilled in the formal sector, although this varied from 10% in freehold agriculture, 28% in transport and communications, to 93% in education, 64% in central government, 54% in manufacturing and 40% in mining and quarrying.<sup>9</sup>

The working class as a whole has been paid very low wages. Agriculture, commerce, manufacturing and construction were the least well paid, and in none of these areas did more than 40% receive wages of more than P 50 (1 Pula equals R1) per month. Of those receiving no regular wage, 22% were in agriculture and 38% were in commerce.

In 1976 there were also differences between wages in the private and public sectors. 55% of workers in the private sector, as against 13% of workers in the public sector, earned P 50 or less per month, although at the very top 3,6% of 'private' workers and 1,1% of 'public' workers earned P 151-200 per month. The bulk (88%) of 'public' workers earned P 51-100 per month.<sup>10</sup> The advantage of public over private workers in 1976 is, however, marginal when one compares wages to an arbitrary measure of the standard of living of the working class. Here we find that 88% of workers in the Industrial Class receive wages below the Poverty Datum Line (PDL) and 99% receive wages below the Effective Minimum Level (EML). In the private sector, there are 87% below the PDL and 96% below the EML. The differences are slight and demonstrate the essential similarity in the condition of workers in the public and private sectors.<sup>11</sup> Thus, despite the criticisms of this particular PDL by the Employment Development Adviser,<sup>12</sup> the number below acceptable levels is very large indeed.

According to 1978 figures, minimum wages in the public sector have just kept pace with inflation since 1974 and although the proportionate increase in private sector minimum wages during the period has been greater, in 1978 private sector minimum wages were still only two-thirds of those in the public sector.<sup>13</sup> There are as yet no minimum wages for agricultural workers or domestic servants, who are among the lowest paid (if paid in cash at all) of all workers.<sup>14</sup>

## **The State and the Working Class in the Post-Independence Period**

The above description helps build a picture both of the condition of the working class and of the prospects for its sustaining permanent organizational strength. The former picture is one of poverty and instability; the latter is one of problems arising historically from the size and divisions of the class.

The colonial period created these conditions. It was the interests of British, South African and Rhodesian capital which dictated colonial policy. The effect, was the creation of Bechuanaland as a labour reserve and the reproduction of this through its integration in the Southern African Customs Union, the lack of any development in Bechuanaland, and the domination of the colonial government which represented the interests ultimately of British imperialism. The effect on the working class has been severe as noted above.

This general situation has been reproduced in the post-colonial period where the direct domination of the metropolitan bourgeoisie has been replaced by the domination of that class through an alliance with a dependent but local capitalist class in charge of the post-colonial state apparatus. And this state, through its laws, policies, etc., is principally responsible for the continued political weakness of the working class despite several significant working class struggles. Through this, Botswana as a point of capital accumulation is reproduced, meeting for the time being the needs of the dominant and governing classes.

Organisationally, the domination of the working class is illustrated by the Trade Unions Act under which all unions must be registered and with which they must comply under threat of heavy penalties. The disorganising effect of the post-colonial state is evident in several respects, each of which may have a small impact, but the cumulative effect is devastating. First, the very definition of a 'trade union' in Botswana's law is debilitating. A union is defined as "...any combination of more than thirty persons...associated together primarily for the purpose of regulating relations between employees and employers or between employees and employees in any industry, trade, or occupation..."<sup>15</sup> Where the size of the working class is small, the requirement of 30 persons may prevent organisation. More significant is the requirement that unions must be defined in terms of individual industries, trades and occupations. The Act makes illegal a **single** trade union for all workers in the country. Further on this point the Registrar of Unions "...shall refuse to register any trade union if he is satisfied that...the combination seeking registration is an organisation consisting of persons engaged in or



working at more than one trade or calling, and that its constitution and rules do not contain suitable provision for the protection and promotion of their respective sectional industrial interests..."<sup>16</sup> Where workers are thus divided, individual union membership will be small and being poor, each union's finances will be inadequate. Additionally there will arise individual sectional interests with each union defining itself very narrowly, not clearly perceiving its joint interests with all other workers.

Another area of legal disability is that the Registrar must refuse registration if "...any of the proposed officers of the trade union or any other committee member thereof is a person who is not a citizen of Botswana."<sup>17</sup> In a situation like Botswana's where colonial history denied to the working class any opportunity for formal education and where some of the more articulate and skilled workers are non-Batswana, this provision denies the working class the services in unions of some of its more educated, articulate, and experienced members.

Furthermore, the unions representing the largest numbers, being unskilled workers, were subjected to a severe restriction in 1974. An amendment to the Act provided that "in no trade, industry or occupation shall persons employed in a managerial, supervisory or administrative grade become members of the same trade union as the remaining employees in such trade, industry or occupation",<sup>18</sup> the effect of which was to "...remove from the field of existing trade unions those better educated and more senior employees. In a trade union movement which relies so heavily on honorary officers it has been largely from these categories that the leaders were drawn, ranging from Shop Stewards to General Secretaries."<sup>19</sup> Additionally, this allows management to silence the less skilled unions simply by promoting their leaders to minor supervisory positions.

Moreover, unions may not require an employer to recognise them as the representative body for the employees unless the union "...obtains 25% of the eligible membership in any undertaking."<sup>20</sup> In a situation where unions are weak, the benefits of union membership are not self-evident, and where there are few protections for militant workers, this requirement may prove a stumbling block. "If the objective is to facilitate the development of strong trade unions it could be argued that **prior** recognition could be more beneficial...very often workers will only join a trade union after it has demonstrated its worth...Granting unconditional recognition could thus break a real vicious circle and open the door to union membership growth."<sup>21</sup>

Finally, by way of illustration, there is no closed shop which limits the

ability of unions to compel membership by those who benefit from union activity, constrains the ability of unions to achieve financial viability, and to speak effectively for all workers.

Capital through its control of the state imposes such laws on the working class introducing divisions and severe organisational problems. It is therefore, not surprising that the trade union movement in Botswana remains weak and divided. In 1971, the President of Botswana said

‘We have made considerable progress over the last two years in establishing industrial unions which are hopefully in a position to advance the interests of all workers in a given industry – skilled, unskilled and semi-skilled, and irrespective of tribe or region. The Government would like to see...a united central organisation develop in Botswana.’<sup>22</sup>

But the fragmented unions did little about forming a federation; in fact it was not formed until 1977 and then two of the five founding member unions were the Bank Employees and Diamond Sorters, unions which represented petty-bourgeois interests in alliance with the local governing class. This was not lost on the latter which argued that such unions “...have a special responsibility to brother trade unions in assisting to educate workers in the meaning of trade unionism and its role in the development of the country.”

<sup>23</sup> In other words, the unions are invited to form a united front from a divided base (reinforced by the Government), to be led by the ‘white collar’ unions who would then negotiate by itself tripartite decisions dominated by a coalition of government and employers.

In direct contrast, such legal disabilities affecting the working class do not apply to capital which is able more or less to organise as a united block without serious divisions and is able to seek out the most effective leadership. Capital is organized in the Botswana Employers’ Federation (BEF) membership of which is open to all employers regardless of ‘industry, trade or occupation’. Capital is indivisible, Labour is not. Elected leaders of the BEF need not be citizens and frequently are not. How can this possibly be reconciled with the disabilities imposed on the working class? The simple answer is that it cannot.

These conditions against which the working class must fight are not isolated; they form part of a more general pattern of ‘industrial relations’. Important in this regard is the government’s response to union strikes. The general fact is that strikes have often been met with force, threats, and little



sympathy from the state. For example, in 1974 a strike at the Orapa diamond mine was caused in large part by the state's negative attitude toward a wage increase although the mining company was prepared to increase wages. The 1974 bank workers' strike was broken by the government's declaration of the action as illegal and the threat of dismissal of the strikers. In 1975, the then equivalent of the army (the police mobile unit) broke up a strike at the Selebi—Pikwe mine. Subsequently, the government allowed the company to dismiss workers and rehire selectively. In addition, scores of workers were put in jail by the state.<sup>24</sup> In 1978 the meagre rise in minimum wages was met by protests from the working class which were ignored by the state.

Given these facts, it is not surprising that the trade union movement has not prospered. In 1971, there were 8 unions with a total membership roughly of 6 722<sup>25</sup> and in 1978 there were 11 unions while estimated membership dropped to 5 772.<sup>26</sup> Of the 11 unions in 1978, four represented 'public' sector workers including the industrial class, the Botswana Meat Commission and the non-academic staff of the University College of Botswana. It is also clear that unions represent only a small proportion of all workers. Further, three of the eleven unions (bank workers, diamond sorters and cooperative managers) clearly represented white collar workers whose interests are closer to those of capital than to the rest of the working class.

For the time being, domination of the working class is quite comprehensive and this domination is materially reproduced in the operation of laws, policies and administrative activity. Ideologically, this domination is represented by the specifically petty-bourgeois idea of the 'labour aristocracy' in Botswana. The urban manual worker is told he/she is 'privileged' to have a job at all, regardless of the wage, in comparison with the rural farmer. If the worker is so ungrateful for the job he/she can easily be replaced by someone from the labour reserve hinterland. This is reproduced as well in the intellectual gymnastics accompanying the political act of setting working class wages. The so-called legal minimum wages policy for the unskilled "...is that it should equal the average rural income of farmers with an allowance for any differential in the overall costs of urban living,"<sup>27</sup> a policy which has two major problems. One is that it means that minimum working class wages are more or less unrelated to the value produced by that working class, which means that exploitation of the working class is almost certainly increased. Secondly, it is the case that historically 'the average rural income of farmers' has been one of marginal subsistence. Agriculture has historically paid part of the cost of reproducing the 'urban' or 'formal sector' working class. This is the meaning of the labour reserve as a source of 'cheap' labour.



Thus, urban and rural 'wages' are not comparable and separate things. They are closely tied together. Whatever other inducements force people to work for wages, the induced marginality of the average rural farmer forces members of his family into wage employment to supplement agricultural production. At the same time it is made to appear as if the returns to agriculture are somehow an adequate 'wage' against which to independently compare the 'urban' wage.

The hypocrisy involved here is evident when one considers the fact that such wage determinations are not applied to capitalist aligned bourgeois classes. Outside of the working class, wage determinations depend upon constituting an arbitrary 'high' cost of living and comparing salaries against it as well as comparing income with other bourgeois classes in southern Africa and beyond, not with 'the average rural income of farmers' with whatever due differentials might be appropriate. For the capitalist classes, for example, the 1978 Salaries Commission "...had also to consider how competitive salaries and conditions in Botswana are in the international market."<sup>28</sup> For the working class this means of wage determination was most certainly not used!

### **Conclusion: Notes on Working Class Strategy**

It is appropriate to conclude this very brief review on a 'down-to-earth' note, as it were, because of several serious practical issues arising out of the substance of what has been said above. Such practical issues have serious implications for the political strategy of the working class, both short- and long-term. However, such comments as can here be made can be nothing other than 'pointers' or notes for consideration; the real struggle is on-going within a changing situation and that struggle's concrete course will be determined by those engaged actively in it. My intention here is to highlight a few general issues that provide a continuing basis for political decisions.

The two general issues highlighted here are those of organizational struggles and the question of class alliances. The working class will and must continue the struggle to build a genuine working class organization. A major device is to persist in building worker solidarity across the artificial divisions in existence. Increased inter-union contacts, formal and informal, should be encouraged in the interests of political solidarity. All efforts should be made to develop common positions on issues of wages and conditions of work. Unions might consider, for example, bearing in mind very limited resources, involvement in organizing community action programmes in working class living areas specifically for the purpose of political mobilisation. Institu-



tionally, the struggle for more effective organizations must continue. Consistent pressure for changes in the law must be brought to bear to change those aspects of the Act which are divisive. One should have no illusions about the short-term prospects of success, but unless such pressure is exerted there will certainly be no change. Here the working class must look carefully for allies in Parliament and the public service and should very instrumentally choose whom to support or not. In other words, more generally, the working class needs to look very long and hard at its condition and the reasons for this condition and formulate some very specific responses to this.

The second general set of considerations has to do with the question of class alliances. There are a variety of exploited classes in Botswana and as yet very little political contact among them. The working class in particular, being small and weak, has not sought in any consistent way to examine its position with a view toward developing alliances with other exploited classes. In large part, this is because of the induced division among the exploited by the activities of the state, but to the extent that these divisions are induced they can be overcome. The working class cannot allow itself to develop in antagonism with or separately from the peasantry (i.e. the migrant workers). It can and should seek to develop close ties and joint strategy with it. In like manner, the exploited classes must evaluate carefully the nature of petty-bourgeois classes and what, if any, identity of material interest they have with the capitalist-aligned classes. Such an evaluation may lead to the real possibility of developing alliances with fractions of the petty-bourgeoisie under working class and peasantry leadership.

Finally, but not least important, there are issues of class alliance that extend beyond the borders of Botswana. Here the issue is two-fold. On the one hand exploitation is an international phenomenon. It is metropolitan non-Botswana capital that imposes certain relations of production in mining for example, though in alliance with certain local capitalist classes and working class struggles must take this into account. Secondly, there is a danger that the exploited classes will adopt a wholly nationalistic outlook and in doing so fail to seek alliances with other exploited classes across national boundaries, e.g. in South Africa, classes often exploited by the same capital. Such issues need to be explored in detail and appropriate strategies formulated.

There is nothing easy in all of this, nor are the issues simple no matter how superficially they can be stated. But at the same time, such issues cannot be wished away or ignored. They exist in concrete reality, are a matter of day-to-day struggle and it is up to those whose vision is a better life for all to pursue these and other issues as a matter of urgency.

## Footnotes

1. Charles Simkins, "Labour in Botswana", *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 2, No. 5, p 28.
2. *Ibid.*, pp 28-29.
3. **Employment Survey 1976**, (Gaborone: The Government Printer), Table 1, p 4. Domestic servant figures are included from the **National Development Plan 1976-81**, (Gaborone: The Government Printer, 1977), Table 1.5, p 10.
4. Computed from **Employment Survey 1973**, **Employment Survey 1976**, and the **National Development Plan 1976-81**, and inclusive of all citizens with incomes of P 100 or less per month in 1973, and P 200 or less in 1976.
5. Labour force figure from **National Development Plan 1976-81**, Figure 2.6, p 32.
6. **Employment Survey 1976**, Table 7, p 11.
7. *Ibid.*, Table 8.
8. *Ibid.*, Table 5, p 9.
9. *Ibid.*, Table IA, p 5.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, and **Poverty Datum Line for Urban Areas of Botswana**, (Gaborone: the Government Printer, 1976), Table 1, p 11.
12. See Michael Lipton, **Employment and Labour Use in Botswana**, Volume II, Footnotes and Appendices, (Gaborone: The Government Printer, December 1978), particularly appendix 5.3, p 164.
13. *Ibid.*, Volume I, Final Report, Table 5, p 42.
14. In 1976, 94,4% of agricultural workers earned P 50 or less per month and 22,5% were paid 'no regular wage'. **Employment Survey 1976**, p 9.
15. **Trade Unions Act**, (TUA), Section 2(1).
16. TUA, Section 8(1)(g).
17. TUA, Section 8(1)(j).
18. Act 3 of 1974, quoted in John Price, **Industrial Relations in Botswana and the Role of the Botswana Employers' Federation**, International Labour Organisation, Nairobi, January 1977, p 9.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, p 10.
21. N: Moyo, "Some Aspects of the Trade Union Law in Botswana" **Pula**, (Botswana Journal of African Studies), Vol. 1, No. 1, June 1978, p 173.
22. Sir Seretse Khama, "Trade Unions in Botswana" **Africa Today**, Vol. 19, No. 2, Spring, 1972, p 15.
23. Report of President Khama's speech on the inauguration of the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions, **Dally News**, 5 April 1977, pp 1 and 4.
24. See, for example, James Cobbe, "Wage Policy Problems in the Small Peripheral Countries of Southern Africa, 1967-1976", **Journal of Southern African Affairs**, Vol. II, No. 4, October 1977.



25. **Simkins, *op cit.*, p 30.**
26. **Department of Labour Interview, 14 April 1978.**
27. **Republic of Botswana, National Policy on Incomes, Employment, Prices and Profits, (Gaborone: The Government Printer, 1978,)p 6.**

## **The Views of the Chairman of the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions**

An interview with Mr. G.U.S. Matlhabaphiri, Chairman of the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions (BFTU).

### **Background**

**Q:** What is the background of the trade union movement in Botswana and which unions are currently in existence?

**A:** The trade union movement in Botswana has really only got off the ground since the early 1970s, following the Trade Union Act of 1969 and the setting up of the Trade Union Education Centre in 1971. There are presently thirteen unions in Botswana. Their names and membership, actual and potential, are as follows:

	Actual Membership	Approx. No. of Potential Members
1. National Union of Govt. Manual Workers	4 000	8 000
2. Botswana Bank Employees Union	550	550
3. Botswana Commercial & General Workers Union	655	10 000
4. Botswana Construction Workers Union	7 000	20 000
5. Botswana Railway Workers Union	600	600
6. Botswana Mining Workers Union	2 000	4 000
7. The Meat Industry Workers Union	650	650
8. Botswana Non-Academic Staff Union (at University College of Botswana)	?	?
9. Botswana Diamond Sorters Valuers Union	45	45
10. Botswana Local Government Workers' Union	600	850

All the ten unions above were registered during the 1971 to 1976 period. Since 1977 three more have been registered:

11. Central Bank Workers Union	?	?
12. Botswana Railways Staff & Artisans Union	100	100
13. Botswana Cooperative Managers Union	?	?



**Q:** Why are there two unions for bank employees and two unions for railway employees?

**A:** In the case of the railway employee this is because the 1974 amendment to the Trade Union Act stipulates that no employee in a supervisory role may be in the same union as the workers under him. Thus the Railways Staff and Artisans Union represents mainly white collar employees. In the case of the bank employees, part of the problem was the difference in job categories between the central bank and the commercial banks; also, the central bank is a parastatal organisation and there has been some disagreement over whether the white collar workers in it should legally be able to form a union at all, or only a staff association.

### **The Organisation of the Unions**

**Q:** Which of the above list of unions are mainly white collar employees?

**A:** Nos. 2, 9, 11, 12 and 13.

**Q:** How well organised are the trade unions? In a speech to a conference of the Botswana Local Government Workers Union, the Minister of Education, the Hon. K.P. Morake, said: "looking at the way in which trade union leaders ignore their own constitutions, fail to hold annual conferences, act unilaterally without consulting their members, it would appear to me that some of you have really failed to learn the fundamentals of Trade Unionism." Is this true of the entire trade union movement in Botswana?

**A:** It applies to some unions but not to others. The unions which are presently suffering from considerable administrative problems are Construction, Commercial and General and the Local Government Workers Union. In addition, two others, the Botswana Cooperative Managers Union and the union of Non-academic staff at the university college, are more or less dormant at present.

**Q:** What are the reasons for the weakness of some unions?

**A:** The main reason has been weak leadership. This has been caused both by the lack of education of trade union members and leaders and by the exclusion of 'supervisory' personnel from being members of the same union as other workers in the industry, thereby excluding the most able leaders from the movement. This is a real stumbling block. A leader can be removed from the trade union ranks by 'pseudo-promotion' by the employer. The very least that is required here is an adequate definition of 'supervisor' in order to prevent this clause being exploited by employers in the manner described. Another factor is the present policy

on National Incomes, which restricts wage increases according to job categories: the only way that an able employee can raise his income is by accepting promotion - and then he's lost to the union. Yet another reason is communications. The serious organisational difficulties experienced by the Commercial and General Workers Union is in part due to the great number of work places involved and the distances between them. By comparison, the railways unions are among the best organised because all their members are along the railway line.

**Q:** You've mentioned the problems stemming from the restriction of 'supervisory' employees in regard to union membership. Do other aspects of the laws help or hinder effective organisation of trade unions?

**A:** The provision of the Trade Union Act that an employer is forced to recognise and bargain with the trade union once it has 25% of eligible employees registered is in itself very helpful, since it gives unions the legal backing they need in order to secure recognition from employers. But 'recognising' the union can have many meanings: there has to be some definition of what is negotiable and what is not negotiable. At the present time several of the unions' leaderships have been too weak to negotiate a strong agreement regarding recognition - just accepting the standard contract offered by employers (which has been drawn up by the Botswana Employers Federation).

In the Trade Disputes Act the clause stating that both parties to a dispute must agree to it being put forward for arbitration to an industrial tribunal is another obstacle. What this means is that a dispute can remain unresolved because of the unwillingness of one party to refer the matter for arbitration. This is the reason why there hasn't been a single **legal** strike in Botswana - because it is only legal to strike after the dispute has been arbitrated.

I've already mentioned how the National Incomes Policy weakens trade unions leadership. It also restricts collective bargaining between unions and employers. All the negotiated agreements between unions and employers regarding pay, have to be approved by the Government's Wage Policy Committee. In terms of the National Incomes Policy, this committee must try to ensure parity between state sector and private sector wages by rank of employee. This leads to comparisons, often very unrealistic, between public sector and private sector jobs and has the effect of keeping some private sector wages and salaries down.

**Q:** What about the provisions of the Trade Union Act encouraging industrial unions (rather than craft unions or general unions) and the pre-



vention of expatriates from being office bearers in the unions?

A: We feel industrial unions facilitate collective bargaining and that the legislation is therefore correct in this respect. Regarding expatriates as office bearers: this prohibition hasn't been a disadvantage. We feel that trade union leaders need to have an intimate knowledge of standards and conditions in Botswana, and thus citizens are most suitable.

Q: Is there any chance that the restrictive clauses in the labour legislation, as you've identified them, will be amended or removed?

A: We are currently appealing for this and have already obtained some significant support in the Government. Therefore we are quite hopeful.

Q: How much cooperation do unions get from employers?

A: It varies widely from active opposition to active support by way of running a 'check-off' system for union dues from members pay packets.

Q: Is cooperation generally better from larger or from smaller employers?

A: Again, it varies widely - but not according to size of employer. Very often, the reason why an employer might appear uncooperative (e.g. no 'check-off' system) is because the union hasn't even approached the employer about the matter.

Q: How much support do the unions get from the Labour Department?

A: Generally very good support - with the exception of course, of the occasional uncooperative individual. In fact, I would say that often the Labour Department ends up carrying out tasks which individual unions should have carried out but have failed to.

Q: Do any of the unions run benefit schemes for their members?

A: Yes. Credit unions are run by the Railway Workers and the Mining Workers. The Railway Workers Union also run a funeral insurance scheme. The Bank employees are starting a child day-care centre. The BFTU plans to open a lunch counter for workers at the industrial site in Broadhurst. The Diamond Sorters and Valuers and Bank Employees plan to start credit unions.

### **The Botswana Federation of Trade Unions [BFTU]**

Q: As early as 1971 the President called for the formation of a trade union federation. Why was it only formed in 1977?

A: As I mentioned earlier, the trade union movement in Botswana really only got underway in the early 1970s. In the early years, the individual unions were concentrating on building up their membership and organisation rather than on forming a federation. It was after repeated appeals by the government and after the bringing in of assistance from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation to help set up the Federation, that it was

begun in 1977.

**Q:** Are all of the thirteen registered unions affiliated to the BFTU?

**A:** So far only eight are affiliated. We expect the remaining five to affiliate once they've held the necessary ballot among their members.

**Q:** What is the structure of control of the BFTU?

**A:** The supreme authority is the delegates' congress, held every two years. In between delegates congresses the General Council is in command. Under the General Council is the Executive Committee, the Finance and General Purposes Committee, the Education Committee, the Industrial Relations Committee and the Labour & Wages Advisory Committee.

**Q:** How is the BFTU funded?

**A:** There is an affiliation fee of P50, and affiliated unions pay 15 thebe per member per month to the Federation. While the running costs of the Federation could be covered in this way, there would be no funds available for projects. So at the moment we are still heavily dependent on the donations of our two 'friendly organisations' - the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Afro-American Labour Centre.

**Q:** From which unions are the members of the present Executive Committee of the BFTU drawn?

**A:** The Chairman is from the Diamond Sorters and Valuers; the Vice Chairman from the Government Manual Workers; the General Secretary from the Bank Employees; the Treasurer and the Assistant General Secretary are from the Railways Staff and Artisans. The five additional members are from Bank Employees Union, National Union of Government Manual Workers, Botswana Meat Industry Workers Union, Botswana Commercial and General Workers Union and Bank Employees Union.

**Q:** Are all the positions on the Executive Committee unpaid and voluntary?

**A:** Yes. We also have a full time Education Secretary and Administrative Secretary.

**Q:** In recent months there have been rumours of an internal quarrel within the BFTU. Is this the case? If so, what were the reasons and has the quarrel now been resolved?

**A:** Yes, there was disagreement within BFTU which effectively prevented it from operating for the first eighteen months of its existence -- that is, until recently. The main issue was over whether office bearers in the BFTU should be allowed to have any party political affiliation in their personal capacities. The Trade Union Act doesn't bar union office bearers from being members of political parties or from holding posts in political parties: it simply prohibits union offices from being used to



serve party political purposes, in order to ensure the independence of the trade union movement. However, there were some who felt that BFTU office bearers should have no party political connections at all. The issue has now been resolved along the lines laid down in the Act. Thus even though I myself, as Chairman, am an active member of the Botswana Democratic Party (being General Secretary of the BDP Youth) this has nothing to do with my activities as a trade unionist. On the BFTU 'executive Committee at present, the Chairman and the General Secretary are both BDP members, but the Vice Chairman is BPP (Botswana Peoples Party), and we all work together to further the aims of the trade union movement, independently of our party political affiliations. Also there was a question of donor organisations. There was evidence that some of the previous leaders preferred certain donors to others, which, of course, was dangerous to our movement. This lost the system its non-alignment which this country encourages.

### **Migrant Workers**

**Q:** The 30 000 to 50 000 Botswana migrant workers at present in South Africa amount to the largest single group of workers in Botswana. Does the BFTU intend to make any attempt to unionise them?

**A:** This is a very difficult matter because it involves an agreement between the governments of Botswana and South Africa. We would like to unionise them. But what could we offer them? We recently held a seminar on the subject of migrant labour and forwarded our recommendations to the Labour Department. But so far we've had no response on the matter. Here is a copy of our recommendation (attached).

### **Role of the 'friendly organisations'**

**Q:** Finally, could you please comment on the role that the two 'friendly organisations' (the Afro-American Labour Centre and the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation) have played in building up the trade union movement in Botswana?

**A:** In a nut-shell, I feel both organisations have played the major role in our new labour movement, both financially and technically. BFTU urges the organisations to work harmoniously with us by fulfilling what has been laid out in their contracts and this, I assume, they will not fail to do.

**Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland Countries Symposium  
On Migrant Labour Symposium held in Gaborone,  
Botswana 6-10 November, 1978.**

In an endeavour to assist the social life of the migrant workers try and reduce the number of migrant labour, the workers movements of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland countries gathered in Gaborone on 6-10 November, 1978 to study and identify problems of Migrant Labour with a view of trying to seek possible solutions.

During this gathering, constructive suggestions were brought forward by participants. It goes without saying that supplier countries economies are pegged to the South African economy.

Having realised the inhuman conditions under which the migrant workers are subjected and that the poor labour supplier countries are subsidising the economy of South Africa, the participants hereby resolve that:

the labour movements of the Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland countries encourage their respective governments to further spearhead possible ways of creating small scale industries in the rural areas thus to gradually reduce the outflow of labour.

trade unions in the Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland countries be involved in job creation by forming cooperative movements.

noting that complete withdrawal is a long process project, the trade unions in conjunction with the Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland countries should negotiate with the Chamber of Mines to better the conditions of Migrant Workers, that is to say, better shelter and working conditions.

each supplier country should undertake to plan its economic development in such a way as to restructure its economy through industrialisation, agricultural and rural transformation and the development of other productive activities.

as an interim measure, the Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland countries should undertake immediately to monitor the socio-economic conditions of the migrant workers with a view to eventual complete withdrawal.



in order to enable the phasing out of migratory labour system to occur with the minimum dislocation to the economies of the Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland countries, by the migratory system should operate and coordinate their activities to this end.

motivate people in the rural areas to grow vegetables for sale.

cash crops like cotton be produced.

money should be directed to rural areas to as to create employment.

whether be it in town or bush, machines deprive people of employment. In economic terms this is termed technological unemployment.

the aforesaid is meant to highlight the question of capital intensive methods used in the Mining Industry which is unfavourable to the Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland countries.

governments of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland countries with particular reference to Botswana and Swaziland should promote tourism as this is a source of national income.

minerals should be processed into finished goods, i.e. in the case of Swaziland (a) pulp should be processed into paper (b) sugar should be refined.

in Botswana the government should establish the mining of secondary minerals, e.g. (a) sulphur plants at copper mines (b) copper ware manufacturing industries (c) plants for processing asbestos products (d) the diamond industry should establish cutting and polish factories.

there should be decentralisation in industries.

Botswana and Swaziland countries should insure that migrant labour to South Africa are provided with better houses and other social security and strongly urge the governments to set up a standing committee which will work out and review from time to time the working conditions of migrant labourers.

To sum up, the participants extend their sincere gratitude to the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Botswana Federation of Trade Unions for having

organised this very important symposium.

**Long Live the Working Class**

**Solidarity for Ever**

Adopted this 10th day of November 1978 at Gaborone, Botswana.