SECOND CARNEGIE INQUIRY INTO POVERTY
AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Bitter Harvest: Farm Schooling
for Black South Africans

by

Bill Nasson

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'Where schooling tipped the balance from subsistence to starvation, school was easier to give up than food.'

'We are not so young and unsophisticated as to imagine that the farmers take our boys for love. The primary object of the farmer in taking a boy is that his services be useful to him.'


A brief word or two of caution and explanation is necessary. Material presented here is based upon field research involving 40 schools and 20 farmers in one part of South Africa, the Cape Province, which is by no means necessarily representative of conditions in the white rural sector as a whole. How far, therefore, it is possible to draw precise conclusions about farm schooling from this analysis is perhaps a moot point. On the other hand, it is arguable that while there might be broad educational variations from region to region in terms of say, schooling allocation, a study based upon a small random sample of Cape farm schools is probably fairly illustrative of what is happening nationally.

Another point seems appropriate, as I do not want to get into trouble with professional educationists by flying false colours. My training and qualifications lie in history, so this paper is something of a professional departure.

Part of the challenge for a democratic education is the development of new, alternative themes and strategies. But this has to make a start by framing sensible questions about current conditions, and their origins and determinations.

Accordingly, many points are proposed here as speculative questions and hypothetical alternatives requiring further investigation, rather than as conclusions and prescriptions. Perhaps one can go no further than cite some cautionary words from that great socialist historian, Gwyn Williams,

'We do not have many answers yet; indeed, the first struggle is to find the right questions.'

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In order to get to grips with the structuring presence—and, indeed, structuring absence—of formal school education in white agricultural areas, it is important to adopt a broadened perspective on the nature of rural social order. Farm schooling lies squarely within the wider institutional framework of social forces and relationships in rural areas; it is rooted in structures of work discipline, social order, moral policing, and adolescent passivity. Riddled with poverty, the schoolhouse stands on thin and acid soil, while the fertile land around it generates great wealth. Schooling cannot be understood independently of the workings of paternalism, charity, and philanthropy, of social practices and relations between landowners and labouring families. Farm children experience not only literacy but bouts of productive labour as the customary curriculum of everyday lessons. These are the acute and immediate realities of lived experience under agrarian capitalism.

To discuss farm schooling we need, as a starting point, to develop some conceptualisation of relations in white commercial agriculture, some theoretical perspectives on the structures of rural life. It is useful, therefore, to raise some core themes. The essential question about the farm school is what part it plays in the reproduction of the social and economic domain beyond its walls. What is its function? This can, of course, be answered partly in terms of what the school does, that is, assessing its effectiveness in the teaching of reading and writing, and in providing organised forms of recreation and culture. However, beyond this instrumentalist perspective, there lies a more fundamental question. Beyond bricks, mortar, and administrative regulations, the critical question is where does this kind of educational institution stand in relation to the lives of those who are poor, dispossessed, and unprotected? What part do these schools play in the early ordering of the lives of those who are dependent and powerless? Embedded in a particularly total form of agrarian social structure, where does the school lie in relation to the closed culture of the farm? What is its place in the institutional framework of inequality and deprivation in the countryside? Like the elementary Chapel schools of 19th century Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire, are any of them nurseries of partial autonomy, offering children a home and an oppositional culture?

Contemporary farm schooling has to be placed in the context of the localism of the farm and more precisely, of the disciplinary social order which farm life reproduces. Acute equalor, chronic poverty, an almost total lack of alternative employment opportunities, dependency for jobs and housing on local farmers, and isolation from mainstream culture are the customary expectations of the average
farm worker. His or her social world is characterised by an intense and confining localism, a crippling dependency and encapsulation in poverty. Dependence remains the mark of all agricultural wage labour. Anyone who questions this should read that indispensable volume, *Farm Labour in South Africa*. How can one interpret this self-contained work and community situation? The characteristically small-scale and total nature of the farm-centred social structure is a phenomenon which can perhaps be best understood in the light of the suggestive sociological work of Erving Goffman and Lewis Coser. 'Total institution' is the term coined by Goffman to describe all forms of institution in which dominant authority exercises a 'total' regulation of inmates' daily lives. In his pioneering study, *Asylums*, Goffman applies the term not only to mental hospitals, but also to monasteries, convents, prisons, reformatories, schools, and somewhat less credibly, to merchant ships and logging camps. The importance of Goffman's analysis is that he applies the 'total' concept to institutions with clearly diverse populations and purposes, arguing that institutional routines tend to grind out the same customs and rituals of incarceration and depersonalization, whatever their manifest purposes. All residential institutions, whatever their purposes, have many critical features in common, especially the need to regulate the lives of inmates into a common discipline.²

Although the term 'total institution' is not commonly used by Michel Foucault, his *Madness and Civilization*, and *Discipline and Punish*, have something in common with Goffman's work. Foucault's influential writing on hospitals, prisons, and asylums, stresses the development of monotonous routines to ensure inmates' total subjection. The muscular imperatives to control, to dominate, to subdue, do not translate into rule by physical coercion, but rule by discipline, and the extinguishing of all capacities for independence.³

The element of totality is also of central importance in the work of Coser, who has coined the term 'greedy institutions' for isolated, small-scale, and total social structures.⁴ As Coser has pointed out himself, his analysis is complementary to Goffman's, as the concepts of 'total institution' and 'greedy institution' have much in common. Such institutions isolate the individual from competing claims, engrossing as much of his or her life as possible. The dominance exerted is over the ordinary business of people's lives, inside and outside the sphere of productive work. Greedy institutions make total claims on the lives of members, attempting to reduce the claims of competing roles and status positions on these they wish to encompass within their boundaries. Their demands on the person are omnivorous.⁵ Where Goffman focuses on the physical walls separating the institutional members from the outside world, greedy institutions, though they may in some cases utilise the device of physical isolation, tend to rely mainly on non-physical mechanisms to separate the inside from the outside, and to erect
symbolic boundaries between them...Nor are greedy institutions marked by external coercion. On the contrary, they tend to rely on voluntary compliance and to evolve means of activating loyalty and commitment. 6

Those confined within a tightly-knit and tightly-regulated social enclave, as domestic servants, Jesuits, or members of Utopian sects, "Being insulated from competing relationships and from competing anchors for their social identity, these selected status-occupants find their identity anchored in the symbolic universe of the restricted role-set of the greedy institution. 7 In this sense, life for agricultural labouring communities and rural domestic servants is life cramped by the dominance, influence, and authority of greedy institutions. Access to any palpable measure of autonomy, to any other identity to any alternative definition of the social situation, is severely limited, if not blocked off totally. The farm has become a classic greedy institution. Indeed, the boundary of the greedy institution is not necessarily the farm or its milieu can penetrate the locality, impregnating it with the personal authority and influence of the rich and powerful. Thus, a complete district may come to represent the spatial framework within which the traditional authority of farmers and landowners operates. 9 And an oppositional culture against appropriation lacks an autonomous realm in which to take root.

The large farmer's influence as a 'big man' is generated not simply on his land and in the purchase of cheap labour in the locality, but is mediated through a wide range of social institutions, from religion to family life. Much personal influence is exercised in a structured way, through a web of giving and receiving. Employer provision and donation can probably be best interpreted in terms of the gift relationship. What matters is the personal structure of this relationship. The benevolence and generosity implicated in the gift stabilises relations of deference, damping down tensions, ambiguities, and contradictions in the relationship between farmers and the rural poor. The gift celebrates kindness and obligation in the bond between dominant and dominated. As Gareth Stedman Jones has argued, the gift serves as a method of social control. In most societies, gifts, however disinterested they may seem, are generally symbols of prestige. To give imposes an obligation upon the receiver. In order to receive, one must behave in an acceptable manner, only by expressing gratitude and humility. 10 To quote Marcel Mauss, 'if one hoards, it is only to spend later on, to put people under obligations and to win followers.' 11 Mauss argues that 'To give is to show one's superiority...To accept without returning or repaying more, is to face subordination, to become a client and subservient.' 12 The giver, therefore, being blessed by providence, puts the recipient 'in the shadow of his name.' 13
The clearest exposition of the importance of gift relationships in capitalist rural societies is provided by Howard Newby. This is worth quoting at length:

"The identification of agricultural workers with their employer often needs to be buttressed in a positive manner by the application of some substantive and/or symbolic form of reinforcement. That is to say that part of the expected obligations upon employers which deference entails is the recognition of duties beyond the minimal level necessary under the agreed terms of the wage contract. Because they go beyond the formal wage bargain, any extra rewards are typically regarded as gifts, and are attributed to the generosity of the employer. In return they are expected to evoke feelings of gratitude and affection among employees. In monetary terms such gifts—pleasant housing conditions, occasional farm produce, the free use of farm implements and facilities, presents at Christmas, periodic 'treats' of various kinds—may not amount to much, but their symbolic importance is inestimable...Mauss, for example, has noted how gift relationships help to reinforce the social hierarchy in which they occur by prompting feelings of faithfulness and gratitude. "The great acts of generosity", he writes, "are not free from self-interest...To give is to show one's superiority, to show that one is something more and higher, that one is magister. To accept without returning or repaying more is to face subordination, to become a client and subservient, to become minister."

Therefore, whatever the consciously philanthropic motivations which help to stimulate gift relationships, in effect they represent, through their status-enhancing properties, an integral part of the legitimation of traditional authority."

The special significance of the gift in paternalistic social relations is that it is overwhelmingly, a relationship between persons. Gift relationships are thus at their most effective in rural society, where there is no huge geographical separation between rich and poor, and where the poor are known. If it is ever depersonalized and bureaucratized, the gift loses its characteristic moral features of service, obligation, subordination, and prestige. Gift relationships thus work with the grain of personal paternalism on a discriminating, local basis.

Ideally, as Stedman Jones has suggested, the gift represents an organic
relationship between poor and wealthy. As the most palpable expression of rural paternalism, it gives pattern and meaning to relations of deference. Gifts are the thread with which the webs of dependency are woven. Gift-giving is therefore never automatic nor impersonal. As a relation which is overwhelmingly personal and discretionary in texture, it forms part of the opportunities and life experiences of some of the poor, and some of the needy. Generally, those who display cleanliness, providence, and good 'character', virtues which warmed the souls of Victorian and Edwardian Poor Law and charity commissioners. Naturally, only the 'deserving' are thought suitable, for the purpose is to encourage gratitude and respect, and to cement bonds of obligation, not to foster independence. This does not, of course, preclude acts of generosity which are accorded to subordinate communities as a whole. Finally it must be emphasised that the exercising of noblesse oblige is a highly capricious matter. The precise way in which provision takes place varies considerably from one district to the next, and from one farm to the next, according to the predilections of local farmers. And one ought never to exaggerate the scale of petty acts of benevolence. Paternalism is patchy. Differing perceptions of self-interest and ideas of community and social responsibility leads to paternalistic provision which is erratic and highly unsystematic.

Charitable agricultural landowners involved in gift relationships tend to express their role not in terms of benevolence or charity, but in terms of 'service' to the labouring community, and more specifically, through what Newby and his co-authors call an ideology of stewardship with regard to property. That is, just as at the workplace farmers would prefer to be thought of as 'looking after' their workers, so this is reflected in a similar interpretation of their associational role in the affairs of working communities living on their land.

It is worth stressing here that the obligations and duties to which farmers sometimes refer are seen as social and not legalistic in character. They are not viewed as a matter of statutory provision. Instead, the justification is paternalistic, resting upon farmers' voluntary, benevolent activities in relation to their labourers' welfare, and to community involvement. The key themes are voluntarism and welfare. And, of course, the socially sanctioned and customary response to the receipt of charity is quite different from that which usually follows from the receipt of one's rights, for the recipient generally displays gratitude and indebtedness as a token of his recognition that such benefits have not have been distributed to him. Accordingly, the gift relationship is a core social mechanism for maintaining deference and for legitimising structure of inequality.
Through personal involvement with the fortunes of deprived communities, landed families convert the exercise of power, and racial and class dominance, into service to those over whom they hold sway. Social relations of superiority and subordination are blurred by the potent ideal of an 'organic' rural community of mutual dependency, in which the propertied discharge their obligations through the assumption of benign authority and leadership, and through periodic doles of patronage and charity. The stressed values of community and customary social bonds have a beguiling grip upon rural sensibilities. There what Edward Thompson has described as an inherited grid of customs and controls which help to maintain a delicate agrarian equilibrium. With processes of social control based on paternalism, power relations become moral ones.

'Looking after' working communities as a form of social interaction or relationship most emphatically does not mean paying higher wages. Naturally, a few of the larger and most prosperous farms do have wage-rates higher than average for their localities, related to workforce composition, work-practices, and management concepts. For most enterprises, 'looking after' workers implies a genuine concern for their personal welfare, including individual, discretionary help with domestic and personal matters, the provision of secure housing, and small acts of generosity. In other words, to cite Newby's archetypal successful capitalist farmer, 'the good employer is one who extends his relationship with his workers beyond the wage bargain—an employer who cares.' Thus, farmers' wives might go sick-visiting, take an interest in visiting young single girls with small babies to give them advice on child-rearing; and may provide some educational assistance in the form of books or uniforms.

Is education considered to be a significant force in personalized welfare relationships? Farmers are almost to a man agreed that education is a positive social good, and in the interests of children's needs and self-development. Despite some ambivalence about the value of post-primary schooling, 'education' is generally considered to be beneficial, particularly in the building of 'character.' Historically, formal education and the drive to moralise and civilise the poor are of course closely associated. At a practical level, one catches glimpses of farmers' beliefs in education in action, embodied in the bricks and mortar of classrooms, in the provision of soup kitchens, and in subscriptions to school funds. But it is necessary also to say what this belief in education does not entail. It does not entail any acceptance by farmers of the principle that education should entitle workers to enhanced status and greater income.

There is certainly no evidence of any important link between educational certification, farm employment, and earnings. Except at the upper margins, it is highly improbable to expect that rising levels of certification will be matched by rising levels of remuneration for farm work. By the standards of urban occupational
structures, promotional ladders are either non-existent or highly truncated. Even on larger company holdings, where there is a formalized promotional ladder, educational credentials provide rungs only at the upper levels. Information provided by one such estate in the Paarl district confirms this. Formal schooling is not considered relevant when hiring workers in its main AI-A2 unskilled category; general farm labourers and pruners. At the BI-D4 semi-skilled category, which includes tractor drivers and spray tractor drivers, education levels, in particular circumstances, may improve hiring prospects, and may have some minor incremental impact upon minimum earnings. This is a discretionary, rather than a universal practice. Attention is paid to educational levels only when recruiting and determining pay levels for more specialised employees in skilled, salaried, CI-C4 and DI-D4 occupational grades.

Even in animal husbandry, which as highly skilled work is one of the few jobs requiring good formal trade certificates in the British agricultural labour market, education is not a factor in hiring or in wage negotiation. Most of the farms investigated employed African migrant contract workers to tend to their herds, however small in size. Migrants' lack of schooling is considered to be irrelevant. Overwhelmingly, the reason for employing Eastern Cape Africans in this capacity was that in comparison with Coloured workers, they were considered to be men of diligence, initiative, and responsibility, who could be safely entrusted with valuable livestock. Moreover, one was repeatedly told, in addition to being temperate, Ciskei or Transkei ans made "natural" stockmen, as they had innate abilities in coping with animals. For their rural employers, what matters is not education but their beliefs in the wholesomeness of inherited peasant skills.

That farmers are in general indifferent towards, or very suspicious of, schooling as a qualification for farm work is not a particularly novel finding in 1983. Even in the heavily mechanized, efficient, high technology world of British capitalist agriculture, educational levels continue to have little if any determining effect upon pay and employment practices. Farmers' views of rural education are thus somewhat inconsistent and contradictory. Respondents were asked whether they thought educational provision for labourers' children was important, and this was followed with a question as to whether they thought that the possession of education made an individual a better farm worker, and whether it would affect employment and pay. One farmer speculated that 'too much' education was of suspect value, as 'big ideas' would lead to capricious behaviour, and threaten his future labour supply. He nevertheless shared a common belief that as schooling promotes the wellbeing and development of children, learning is to be encouraged. Yet, without exception, farmers and farm managers discounted education as an important variable in the critical area of granting employment, determining skills, and working out wages. And, rather interestingly, given the increasing mechanization, technological advance and often fairly formal and bureaucratized nature of one or two larger company
estates, there is little distinction between them and smaller family farms. Educational qualifications are regarded with scepticism and some scorn by farm managers and farmers alike.

Recruiting practices are highly localized and particularistic, and concentrate heavily upon the personal character and qualities of labourers. What emerges is a firmly grounded belief in farming as practical work, in which, for self-evident reasons, education is considered to be a negligible asset. What carries force is the homespun philosophy that agricultural work is something that cannot be learned from books. A premium is placed upon 'character', made up of a whole cluster of attributes, such as honesty, reliability, temperance, experience, ability, willingness to learn, and stable and 'respectable' family background. Agriculture, as Newby has so well observed, is an occupation in which the personal nexus between employer and employee seems so large that farmers set quite extraordinarily high by their judgement. A premium is placed upon 'character', which can undermine personally sanctioned work relationships. The typical approach can be illustrated most usefully by citing some comments which reflect the general view:

'Of course it's useful now and then to hire a man who has a Standard 5 or Standard 6 level, as he is more likely to understand a complicated order about checking machinery in the cellar, especially from my wife, who doesn't speak good Afrikaans. But the main thing for us is, is he honest, sober, and respectable? Does he come from a good local home?'

( Farmer, Paarl district)

'For us, the most important consideration is whether a man is of good character and not afraid of hard work. I also like him to come from a clean home and a good family, so we only hire locally as the foreman knows all the people around here. Paper qualifications are no good. We want people who have practical abilities.'

(Farmer and wife, Robertson district)

'Look, if I have the choice of some boy who has been to school but who comes from a family I don't know, and a local youngster who is willing to work hard and has some experience, it is common sense to hire the person you can judge. It's all very well to have gone to school, but that doesn't mean you'll make a reliable tractor driver.'

( Farmer, Stellenbosch district)
One Stellenbosch farm manager pointed out, with breathtaking candour, that he would never hire labourers who had been in contact with 'books', as he did not want men who would be out for money, and who would not have the 'welfare' of the farm at heart. As this wine estate offers a wretched cash wage of R4 per day it hardly seemed the place for ambitious workers to make a killing.

Respondents were asked a general question about whether they would like to see any changes in schooling in rural areas, followed by a specific probe for their views on the merits of a more locally relevant rural curriculum. These queries prompted an interesting set of responses, with some particularly expressive replies. On the whole, few farmers were willing to give the matter very much thought. Several seemed proud of the fact that teaching staff would sometimes apprise them over school affairs, interpreting this as evidence of good communications and harmonious relations on their farms; everyone connected with their enterprises, one was told, worked together as a 'family' or as a 'community', those overworked, organic metaphors of paternalism which farmers seem to use with such fascinating regularity.

While the majority of landowners are clearly indifferent to the real and multiple hardships and deprivations confronted by rural schoolchildren and teachers—although some are disposed to murmur sympathy—a minority suggested improvements in the running of farm schools. One bluff Vredendal farmer proposed that farmers be given the right to hire and fire headmasters, to ensure the appointment of the 'right man', thereby guaranteeing compatibility between the interests of the school and the needs of the farm. 'Give and take', as he put it, was essential, especially at peak harvest period when children were needed to swell the labour supply. On these terms, who does most of the taking can be readily imagined.

A more disinterested suggestion came from a Paarl farmer who pointed to lack of mobility as one of the major built-in disadvantages which impede children in rural areas from obtaining higher levels of schooling and qualifications. He condemned a situation in which children of white farm personnel have access to a full range of state educational support services, such as good transport and ready boarding facilities, while Coloured children are at the mercy of inclement weather, erratic transport, and poor quality schools. Increased state spending was favoured. This farmer suggested that the state ought to strengthen transport services to secondary schools in rural towns, and that the resources of schools themselves be upgraded.

This respondent was not opposed to children from his farm obtaining the kind of educational qualifications which can aid labour mobility. Over the last decade, one was told, one youth had secured a job as a blackman in a supermarket butchery, while a girl had entered nursing, although it was not known whether she had
eventually qualified. These slight examples of farm children making the urban occupational grade were a source of considerable paternalistic pride. Little wonder, then, that objectively, access to secondary education is not necessarily always seen by farmers as a significant threat to the reproduction of their labour supply. For the vast majority of rural school-leavers, there is no choice but the staple of recruitment on to the land. The alternative is unemployment. On the whole, there is little hard evidence of the agricultural situation being seriously threatened by urban and industrial inroads upon labour. Here and there, of course, there are small, visible changes: a brickfield in Klapmuts, a food processing plant near Vredenburg, to disturb settled patterns. But their presence as competitors for labour in rural areas fails to raise farmers' eyebrows or their wage levels. Despite some continuing penetration of rural areas by non-agricultural labour markets, and despite growing reluctance on the part of many rural school-leavers to accept the oppressive conditions of labouring on the land, outward mobility of labour remains extremely restricted. Whether, say, over the past ten years, white agriculture's preponderant share of rural school-leavers has declined markedly, in a question well worth investigating. And equally if not more to the point, how drastically might the supply of poorly educated farm labour outstrip decreasing demand, due to continuous mechanisation in the decades ahead? While that is a question best left to those with statistical and demographic skills, it is clear that market prospects for future generations of children born into shrinking, stagnant and depressed rural communities look ominously bad. Unless the structure and dynamics of rural schooling undergo major surgery, these children will grow up educationally disfranchised. The trend is unmistakable, and the implications appalling.

In view of farmers' mistrust of formal schooling as a useful asset for farm employment, it is not altogether surprising to find little stirring of interest in the potential merit of vocational and technical training in agriculture, and in rural studies in the school curriculum. This disdainful attitude is not, of course, peculiar to South African producers. Newby has shown that in Britain, recent attempts to introduce formal worker education in agriculture under an Agricultural Training Board have been greeted by most farmers 'with thinly veiled contempt.'

No farmer expressed an interest in formal rural education or training for adult workers, tending again to stress the virtues of acquiring skills through application and sheer hard work: the proverbial muck on one's boots. It is, on the face of it, possible that increasingly specialised job processes and the increasing complexity of the farming industry generally may make formal agricultural skills training more relevant in the future, but again, the experience of postwar British agriculture suggests that this is by no means certain.

On the question of the hypothetical value of a locally relevant curriculum for
schoolchildren, one farmer and one farm manager departed from the predominant tone of disinterest. The young head of a Paarl family proprietorship deplored the inadequacies of a school curriculum wholly remote from pupils' experience. Pointing out that white schools (commencing at junior levels) offer agricultural science options in rural areas, he advocated the adoption of a rural studies syllabus in all farm schools. Rural biology, botany, and environmental studies were mooted as suitable subjects. A farm studies syllabus identical to that available to white schoolchildren at primary and secondary levels was not recommended, on the grounds that the needs of black children would be best served by a more elementary and narrower band of studies.

Emphasising that as most of the farm workers' children on his land would remain in the district after they had left school, he felt that early exposure to knowledge about horticulture and plant and animal nutrition would make farm jobs more interesting and rewarding. While this employer's interest in the educational welfare of workers' children was unquestionably genuine and humane, one cannot help thinking that present and future generations of farm workers will find more job satisfaction in a more equitable share of the income and wealth derived from their sweat.

A manager of one very large Paarl enterprise (which adopts a paternalist role in worker welfare as a conscious and deliberate policy of labour management) had equally strong ideas about the deficiencies of farm schooling. Arguing that it was in the long term interests of capitalist agriculture to construct and nourish communities rather than labour camps, this respondent criticised the inadequacy of state educational provision, and the attitudes of many farmers which stifled educational chances for labourers' children. Although he favoured the injection of a rural studies element into the core primary and secondary school curriculum - practical rural biology was cited - it was felt that this kind of innovation required cautious handling. Regardless of the usefulness of farm based studies, it was argued that if this were to come to dominate the curriculum, education would become unbalanced; the ideals of a liberal education would be at risk. In particular, it was felt that one function of farm schools should be that of providing able pupils with qualifications which offer opportunities for social, occupational, and geographic mobility.

What this manager advocated with some energy and passion was the introduction of educational support services into white farming areas; non-formal literacy programmes for adults, and compensatory education to provide special learning resources for underprivileged children whose cognitive capacities were critically impaired. With crowded and chronically impoverished labouring households producing many children with genetic and neurological abnormalities, it was suggested that adaptation classes and remedial teaching ought to form an essential part of the educational environment on farms. If implemented at state level, one was
told, such policies would go some considerable way towards remedying farm children's lack of educational achievement.

In the case of this estate, interest in establishing remedial teaching for farm children had been pursued for many months, through lobbying of school circuit inspectors and personal representations to officials of the Department of Internal Affairs and Department of Education and Training. At the time of writing, no progress had been made; official interest continues to be precisely nil. It is virtually certain that the issue will remain a dead duck.

The belief that education is the key to a better life is very old. Do beliefs in schooling and opportunities carry much popular force among the labouring poor on white farms? Although this question is clearly in need of more informed and systematic research than the exploratory investigation I have undertaken, the general impression one has is that labouring families accord low priority to schooling. Comparative worldwide evidence reveals that manual workers are unsympathetic to their children staying at school beyond elementary levels; in fact, only small numbers remain beyond the statutory leaving age. This is a critically important issue which should be central to any discussion of educational strategy and policy in white farming areas. How do we account for this outlook in the family-school relation? Why has it developed? Why is there so much parental indifference, apathy, and occasionally, aversion towards schooling? Why is the communicative link between school and working adult often so precarious? Why is the adult population so socially estranged from the world of the school? Unlike some urban schools, why do farm schools only rarely have a sustaining network of active sympathies and attachments?

Lack of adult enthusiasm for schooling is mostly viewed through the prism of liberal cultural deprivation theory. Inspired by incontestable statistical correlations between low-income households and low educational motivation and achievement, there is a huge literature on the problems of cultural deprivation and the 'culture of poverty' thesis fashioned by such 1960s American liberal critics as Daniel Moynihan and Oscar Lewis. A 'culture of poverty' argument has a number of different meanings and consequences; not all of them very useful to an understanding of why working class children have such a hesitant foothold upon the educational and cultural escalator.

The range of hypotheses about the effects of virtually all aspects of the lifestyles of unskilled, low-income and low-status families on children's cognitive development and responses is highly perplexing, and their complexities need not detain us here. For present discussion, we need only refer to the most commonsense understanding of the effects of cultural deprivation. Which factors are most commonly identified as the dominant characteristics of educational retardation? As Flude and Ahler put it, the following are the distinguishing features of disadvantage in culturally deprived children: linguistic inadequacies; a tightly restricted attention...
span; visual and perceptual deficiencies; a concrete rather than idea and concept focused mode of expression; a stress on immediate rather than deferred gratification; a low self-image; mean aspirations, and low motivation to academic goals.

Explanations of educational failure and underachievement provided by theories of cultural deprivation share a close affinity with the 'culture of poverty' thesis. Both concepts seek to establish a causal relationship between parental attitudes and conduct, the values that underpin this, and the consequent behaviour and attitudes of children. It is argued that poverty generates its own distinctive and nearly autonomous subculture amongst the poor, and that the dominant fatalistic, passive, and low-motivational values of this culture help to perpetuate those conditions that bind successive generations to an impoverished existence. Educational disadvantage is thus reproduced generationally. Emphasis is placed upon the sociocultural characteristics of impoverished households, tending to locate the source of educational failure and disadvantage within the lifestyles, values, and perspectives of the poor themselves.

Households in chronic poverty are run by unskilled adults who are ill-equipped, both mentally and physically, to provide a stimulating environment for learning. Apathy in the domestic domain (often coupled with poor quality teaching) leaves young children materially deprived and lacking in cultural resources. Through lack of a whole range of material resources which affect the conditions in which children learn, and lack of education and foresight, impoverished parents are incapable of fully enriching the lives and minds of children, and of encouraging them to remain at school, and to do well. There are thus critical deficiencies, at both home and community level, in the lifestyles, values, and personality structures of disadvantaged groups. The depressive effects of low household educational motivation are seen as inadequate preparation for occupation, underemployment, unemployment, poverty, and distress.

In terms of the cultural conditions of socialization and education, the lack of harmony between the cultural resources of the family and the cultural resources of the school are viewed as major obstacles to working class educational progress and achievement. Poor children are deprived, stigmatised, and disadvantaged culturally. Those who enter a period of institutionalised learning do so not only underfed and ill-clothed, but lacking what Pierre Bourdieu calls the cultural capital. These are the arguments of those writers who insist on predominantly cultural explanations of class differentials in educational achievement.

In recent years, French sociologists have (from both a Marxist and non-Marxist perspective) made much use of the concept of 'reproduction' when describing the social function of education, and Bourdieu, Passeron, and Boudon in particular have examined what they call the unequal class distribution of cultural capital. Cultural endowments (language, status, values, norms, customs), which children brin
from family background determines how far and how fully they can respond to the literary culture of the school and exploit what advantages are open to them. Boiled down to its basics, Bourdieu's thesis has two main elements. Firstly, capital is not only economic but also social and cultural in form. Secondly, the 'aristocratic' cultural capital shared by the dominant class provides the symbols through which the controlling group's values, its master pattern or 'habitus' comes to be legitimated as the natural order of things. In Bourdieu's hands, the notion of 'habitus' has a wide meaning, in the sense that each class, and groups within social classes, will develop its own distinctive and organic 'habitus' or master pattern. Each will develop a life perspective into which children will be socialized, and through which they will make sense of their world, and at the same time consolidate, interpret, and change parts of their habitus. Bourdieu argues that fairly early on in life, working class children 'internalize their fate' in the course of their education, and come to see education as having little relevance to their life chances and opportunities. Their behaviour', he writes, 'is based on an empirical evaluation of the real hopes common to all individuals in the social group.' Education is not seen as carrying with it the freight of independence and mobility. Bourdieu contends that 'the structure of the objective chances of social mobility, and more precisely, of the chances of social mobility by means of education, conditions attitudes to school.'

In other words, the real question is not that there is an association between working class parental attitudes and failure in schooling, but why these attitudes persist. Do they represent an irrational or non-rational response to a community resource? Instead of concentrating upon culture of poverty formulations such as stimulus deprivation and the general lack of educational encouragement, the point is that one needs to establish the context of negative parental attitudes. What matters is that at the level of the concrete, the immediate, and the familiar, at which so much of social experience is formed, investment in farm schooling is not a self-evident paying proposition for poor households. Is it, for instance, surprising that after bringing up their children under conditions of enormous hardship and privation, farm workers should wish to get these children into employment as early as possible? Even if there were a wide range of occupational choice in rural areas, skilled occupations simply do not fill the conditions of pressing household need. An apprenticeship, or some comparable period of training for a skilled occupation entails not only the loss of children's earning power, however slight, but levels of parental economic support beyond the means of most poor families.
The same tightly constrained conditions apply should the option arise of placing children on the slippery slopes of secondary education. As far as the overwhelming majority of parents are concerned, the developmental dilemmas of rural education represent a rather academic question; immediate economic necessity dictates that work and earnings take precedence.

Furthermore, it might be argued that the general irrelevance of what schools teach for the low-paid, unskilled and semi-skilled work that most farm school-leavers will end up doing, together with the fact that they tend to do rather badly at school anyway, reinforces beliefs that formal education offers very little. Now, the issue here is not that there are no beliefs in the potential of education to liberate children from the traditional controls of extreme rural deprivation. One is not suggesting that education is never seen as the seedbed of a better life. The important point, however, is that it is either diametrically perceived as such, or else the view of occupational possibilities for children is wholly at variance with objective reality.

Echoing Keesy's findings in the 1970s, one also encountered farm workers who expressed aspirations that with adequate schooling, their offspring might become nurses, clerical workers or artisans. But the relation is problematic. As far as realistic work situations are concerned, such aspirations lie far beyond the pale of lived experience. The grinding constraints of the rural labour market dictate what is ultimately feasible and possible.

Most especially in rural society, there is a thick blanket of customary community definitions and expectations. It constitutes the social experience and common lore dominated and deprived communities, defining the boundaries of what is possible, and cramping the growth of alternative horizons and expectations. The pull is undeniably strong. This social landscape of habits and customs runs across as well as within generations: to use a characteristically striking phrase by Edward Thompson, 'each generation stands in apprentice relation to its seniors.' Although social life and experience is always changing in a myriad of ways, and although there is slowly increasing mobility in some areas, the hold of the known, the immediate, and the inherited, is immensely powerful. Labouring rural society is still far from that point at which it is commonly assumed that the horizons of successive generations will be different. Formal education - particularly post-primary - has not yet lodged itself into this generational transmission of the social experience and boundaries of life. It is not the common currency of emancipation from subordination, hardship, poverty, and deprivation.

Since the objective chances of the rural working class gaining access to it are negligible, secondary schooling is not pressing and formative in social experience. Indeed, one encounters a wariness even among some households which have managed to place children in secondary schools, and have taken on the burden of their maintenance. There is uncertainty about prospects of completion, consciousness of the loss of a
potential contributor to family income, and a gathering mood of scepticism about the market value of secondary school certification. In many areas, the inability of numbers of older rural school leavers (including some with Senior Certificates) to secure skilled employment is undoubtedly proving a painful experience for the tiny minority who have taken on the risk of educational investment. There are two themes problems. Firstly, the trickle of farm school children who obtain a Matriculation Certificate find themselves too well qualified for the local job opportunity structure. And the practical possibilities of outward mobility to urban centres are limited. Moreover, job opportunities for matriculants generally are contracting. Secondly, the bulk of farm school pupils drop out at the lower, pre-Junior Certificate levels. The market value of these lower grades of formal schooling, compared with no education at all, is becoming increasingly marginal, as Von Kleist has suggestively shown in the case of Namibia. The income-generating capacity of say, Standard 6 or Standard 7 is pitifully low, and will continue to fall.

Farm schools clearly find it difficult to displace the subordination, deference, and mystifications of living and working conditions on farms. Lying at the lower depths of consciousness and concern, their status is a lowly one. Often isolated from even small rural centres of population, their existence is only occasionally acknowledged. For urban dwellers, they remain objects in a landscape, fleetingly glimpsed from the nearby road or railway line. With most of them ill-equipped to offer very much more than the bare architecture of a basic formal education, these schools form the lowliest and most persistently neglected link in the chain of apartheid education. Inferiority, low status, and dreadful neglect are themes which dominate not only the history of farm schooling. They are qualities which continue to define social recognition of farm schools today.

If one thinks of apartheid education as a social system of domination and cultural resistance, of battles of the confined and segregated against the ordering of their lives, one is hard put to assign much of a role to these institutions in this drama. They endure passively, as downtrodden rural educational dormitories. No doubt their staff and some older pupils may resent the deplorable lack of resources and opportunities, but bitterness does not flare up into open struggle. In the 1976 student rebellion, there were no Thomas Mofolo Secondary Schools in Namaqualand. Farm schools' isolation and dependent situation ensures that they are bypassed by the main arteries of democratic political and educational communication.

In the social encounters of everyday life in small localities, farm school children are often caricatured through the derogatory stereotypes of rural idiocy and subnormally intelligent farm workers. In the eyes of the suburbs and the towns, rural youth comprises the dense children of the poor, the inarticulate, and the culturally dispossessed. Us and them is sharply defined. Urban and rural community structures
produce wide differences in social standing and social perception which take their meaning from relationships of superiority and inferiority. Such attitudes reside in the polarity of urban culture and class imagery against stereotyped images of rural social inferiority. They continue to infect and stain many strands of thinking and action.

In general discussion, teaching staff seemed very aware of urban opinion which persistently devalues and denigrates farm schools. Staff were asked, 'What sort of view do you think town people in general have of farm schools and their pupils?'. What emerged from the response is a sharp sense of bitterness, and enormous resentment at the attributional status of educational and social inferiority which defines their position. Headmasters were pretty much unanimously agreed that their schools find it difficult to shake off the derogatory meaning which the term plaasskool has acquired, with its customary implications of poor status and inferiority. The situation is clearly aggravated by the fact that there are town-based commuting farm teachers who are themselves culpable of holding indefensible assumptions and hard values. Children are sometimes viewed with open disdain as slow, stupid, and wilful, and the connection between their 'low' habits and their low origins is forcefully impressed upon them. One need not endorse all of Nell Keddie's polemic against the teaching profession's practices to accept the validity of her critique of the deficiency of teachers' 'mainstream culture' in categorising pupils in this way.41

Rural teachers, including many who travel from nearby towns, are clearly acutely aware of their own status situation, as well as that of their children. Teachers' social position can certainly be ambiguous. On farms, they can enjoy some standing in the eyes of labouring families, as well as the patronage of farmers who choose to associate themselves with educational interests. However, in an urban setting, rural teachers may find their professional position to be rather shaky. In their urban community lives, they may find themselves at the mercy of a cluster of clichés about inferior job choices, avoiding or failing the challenges of a real school, and about having to deal with the bovine intelligence of farm children.

The category plaasskool kinders embodies massively dominant assumptions about the inferior calibre of farm workers' children. Central to an understanding of the tissue of subjective experience of any primary farm school pupil in an urban secondary school is the fact that the stigma and brandmark of farm education and farm living come to be deeply embedded in the fabric of daily life. The corrosive stigma of rural 'degeneration' and pauperism defines and cages them at the bottom of the schooling hierarchy. One aggrieved Piketberg primary school teacher summed up the situation with some justice:

'Look, if you're a plaasskool pupil, life can be very difficult. There is a genuine stigma attached to coming from a farm school, believe me. Some of our kids who've made it to town secondary schools don't have an easy time there. There are ignorant pupils in these schools who look down on farm children.'
They think they are stupid, growing up and living on a farm. Even some of the teachers have a negative attitude. They make the kids feel inferior, treating them like slum children who can't be expected to do well at school. Would you like to be called *penkop* and *plaasjie* in the classroom?42

The experience of these wounding images, the subjective feel of condescension, of being caricatured and marginalised as a dunce, living out in the sticks, cannot but be numbing. They shape children's sense of their personal worth, limiting already meagre expectations and possibilities. We can have but the faintest glimmer of understanding of how impoverished rural schoolchildren live out their lives in relation to their urban cohorts, and to the adolescent and adult world of the secondary school. How do they cope with the injuries of inferiority? Is a *plaaskoel* pedigree always an embarrassment or a handicap? Is it simply a fate to be endured? What do pupils feel about farm living, and the leisure and consumption patterns of youth in towns? And, most crucially, how do farm children experience the relationship between class and age? As the progeny of poor and unskilled households, they experience the bonds and deprivations of a class society simultaneously with those of age, for it is class which determines how youth learns its existence in the home, the school, and the workplace. Class, as Williamson has so brilliantly illuminated, 'is a system of domination, injury, constraint, and social recognition which shapes experience, and it is confronted first in childhood.'43 Insofar as farm pupils' subjective feelings register a sense of their social inferiority, of their physical and mental infirmities as the 'rough' and the 'unwashed', their lived experience will reflect what Sennett and Cobb so perceptively call 'the hidden injuries of class.'44

One cannot be blind to these processes of stigmatising children from encapsulated farm communities. Urban perceptions of the rural working class as primitives or defectives 'down on the farm', slumbering on in ignorance, continue to have stifling and compelling force. Although sometimes softened by well-meaning liberal concern for material and cultural deprivation, these meanings and values have penetrated into the bone and marrow of urban-industrial culture. Their influence and infection cannot easily be expunged, for they are built upon an accumulation of situations, attitudes, and social contacts.

But neither is their existence necessarily permanent and immutable. The need to counter the stigma of *plaaskoel* learning is something to which energies should be turned. What has to be confronted is not rural idiocy or lack of educability but a process of social deprivation - of exploitation, suffering, ignorance, and illiteracy.45 Here, teachers have a role to play.
If urban teachers are involved with education and communications then it cannot be completely outside their sphere to involve themselves in informative debate and discussion with farm school colleagues. What is needed is sensitive action, a broadening of political awareness, and crisp clarification of educational problems a relations between the country and the city. We cannot have suburban schoolrooms perpetuating the idea that food grows in shops, or is magicked into existence by International Harvester. Cultural and educational development and relations ought not to be thought of as necessary adaptations to urban and industrial productive and material practices. One is struck by the sight of rural teachers drawn from urban backgrounds displaying city clothes, manners, and wealth; the contrast with their puny, poorly-clad charges is painful. Can teachers' self-images fail to affect their behaviour at school?

Naturally, however, the problem of farm school status is not simply reducible to the transformation of urban attitudes. There is a reservoir of prejudice to be breached, but any transformation of beliefs involves working for the transformation of the social order; political and economic as well as cultural.

What of the present state of the schools themselves? Since no real alteration in the general structure of method, uniformity of standards, organisation, administrative and funding has taken place since the findings of the farm schooling studies produced for the September, 1976 SALDHU Farm Labour Conference, I will not comment at length on these issues here. Similarly, there has been little change in provision at macro level; while an increase of over 1,000 African farm schools in the last decade may look impressive, facilities remain miserably inadequate and problems of access, attendance, and opportunity continue to be immense. Thus, one can still usefully consult Tim Plaut's 'Farm Schools for African and Coloured Children in South Africa' (Conference Paper No.17), and Brian Levy's 'Farm Schools in South Africa: An Empirical Study' (Conference Paper No.44). In many essential aspects, neither has dated greatly.

In order to reveal something of the localism, variability and uniformity of farm school settings, it is useful to list some details of sample schools. For reasons of space, eight have been selected. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest ten in order to remove any illusion of statistical precision.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Enrolment</th>
<th>Highest Standard</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Classrooms</th>
<th>Minimum and Maximum Journey Length to School (Kms)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nelspoort</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10 - 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letjiesbos</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 - 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klapmuta</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4 - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kareebos</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seekoegat</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50 - 100 (hostel accommodation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pniel</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5 - 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agter-Paarl</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 - 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koelenhof</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7 - 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mode of Transport**

- **Nelspoort**: Walk. Use of Mule Carts over longest distances.
- **Letjiesbos**: Walk. Unsubsidised rail travel from farthest afield.
- **Klapmuta**: Walk
- **Kareebos**: Walk
- **Seekoegat**: School hires truck to transport pupils home every 3rd weekend during term
- **Pniel**: Walk
- **Agter-Paarl**: Walk
- **Koelenhof**: Walk. Some farmers provide irregular transport in trucks carrying convict labour to and from prison situated in proximity to school.
### Dropout Rate between Std A and Highest Standard (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Dropout Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nelspoort</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letjiesbos</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klapmuts</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kareebos</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seekoevat</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pniel</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agter-Paarl</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koelerhof</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Pupils who commenced and completed Highest Standard (1982) (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Dropout Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nelspoort</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letjiesbos</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klapmuts</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kareebos</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seekoevat</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pniel</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agter-Paarl</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koelerhof</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Naturally, these figures do not tell the full story. Particularly notable is the fact that the dropout rate tends to be concentrated at the highest standard as children reach an age when they might find a place on the labour market, the costs of schooling become too great. Earnings, however trifling, are needed as a matter of course, not as an exceptional response to a particular crisis of family poverty. So, at some time between roughly the ages of twelve and fourteen, many farm labourers' children are no longer a costly and burdensome presence at school. For these young people, childhood is at an end.
Farm schools all teach an orthodox curriculum, the full subject range available being: Afrikaans, English, Mathematics, General Science, History, Geography, Health Education, Environmental Studies, Handwork/Needlework, Music, Art, and Religious Education. Size and staffing are key determinants of the shape of curricula, although not necessarily of pedagogic effectiveness. While greatly disadvantaged in terms of facilities, the smallest schools have very favourable pupil-teacher ratios, and often highly-motivated and dedicated staff. Largest schools teach a full spectrum of some twelve subjects, while one or two-teacher establishments have a truncated curriculum, generally comprising Afrikaans, English, General Science, Health Education, History and/or Geography.

All schools suffer from immense pressure on buildings; double shifts are common, and thirty-seven of the forty schools sampled had different standards (sometimes several) sharing classrooms at the same time. The difficulties of teaching under such conditions can be readily imagined. Despite modernisation and the building of extensions at some schools, the quality of stock clearly always lags far behind what is needed. There are, for instance, still plenty of schools without toilets or piped water. Apart from an acute, pressing shortage of space (partially alleviated in one or two instances by the use of church halls), there is also the continuing problem of old and dilapidated accommodation; leaks, draughts, cold cement floors and a total absence of heating makes life in classrooms in winter an unpleasantly bracing business. Staffroom facilities are a rarity, and few of the schools on farm land possessed a telephone. This lack of a communication line is more than just a practical difficulty; it is a symbol of the structure and culture of school life within the 'greedy institution.' The absence of telephones was a running grievance with teachers, particularly as installation was in all cases a simple matter of running off a farm branch line. Lack of cooperation on the part of landowners has resulted in instances of friction between staff and farmers. At one small two-roomed school, the headmaster spoke of an unsuccessful, nineteen-year long battle for a telephone, against the obduracy of two local farmers.

In weighing up the question of the quality of classroom resources, one important element in any such calculation is the variability in levels of provision from school to school. Any future policy of educational investment would need a lever of highly flexible positive discrimination, so as not to reinforce existing inequalities. Present anomalies in provision are very obvious. Staff at all schools considered classroom resources to be inadequate. Here, it should be borne in mind that within a situation of overall scarcity, schools often varied considerably in the weight and emphasis given by teachers to particular items. One individual's new wooden floor is another's tape recorder. One of the most vexatious issues was electricity and heating, a point which those concerned with formulating energy and fuel policies would do well to take up. Possibly the most bizarre example of energy deficiency was one Beaufort
west school, endowed in 1981 with an overhead projector, television set, and video recorder, all of which lie unused at the time of writing.

All schools had the mainstays of classroom blackboards, desks, tables, chairs, cupboards, and stationery, occasional wall charts, and a small stock of basic reading material. To a man (are there any women?) head teachers fumed over inordinately long – sometimes six months and more - delays in receiving school supplies, or of the non-arrival of promised apparatus, such as audio-visual equipment. One is again forcibly struck by localised inequalities of provision. While one school may be insufficiently provided for in textbooks and chairs, another fifty kilometres away, with good communication lines and a sympathetic farmer’s ear, may boast a functioning television set, overhead projector and photocopier. The issue of needs is raised in an acute form at least once annually. Every school reported an annual visit (usually unheralded) by Departmental Regional Inspectors who habitually promise all manner of prompt remedial action which seldom, if ever, materialises.

There is also enormous dissatisfaction everywhere with levels of library provision. Schools are mostly meagrely equipped with textbooks and a sprinkling of basic reading matter, and what limited stock there is is under great pressure. Teachers all pointed to the need for a greater and more varied stock of reading matter, and favoured the construction of separate library space with adequate lighting, to compensate for children’s reading and study difficulties in noisy, overcrowded, and poorly-lit and poorly-serviced labourers’ dwellings. With library provision, there is universal evidence of a high level of need. Equally, that the library needs of different schools vary is undeniable. The problem is initially one of identification and measurement. Then comes the more difficult question. How does one link the technical problem of measuring need with the political problem of determining appropriate allocations?

Thirty of the schools had some formalised method of raising independent funds, although extreme levels of local community deprivation make it impossible to generate much more than a small flow of petty cash to finance minor additional school services. Farmers are for the most part tightfisted. The structure of, and limits to, white farmers’ paternalism means that they are invariably reluctant cash donors when approached by a school appeal. Only six schools reported farmers’ contributions to funds of sums ranging from Rs 50 - Rs 1000 per year. Landowners are clearly uneasy about permitting schools discretion and autonomy in deciding upon areas of expenditure, for the essence of farm philanthropy is the imposition from above of elite guidance and control. As one farmer put it, he never contributed to school appeals because he was never approached for “advice” on spending, and considered that teachers put funds to ‘frivolous’ use.
Frrollity is mainly school feeding of weak and undernourished children. It is teachers who live on the most inescapably intimate terms with the needs, miseries, and privations of farm children. Most schools have some formal or semi-formal workplace whip-round, to which staff contribute on a weekly or monthly basis. At several schools, blankets and clothing in winter accompanied cash. Larger establishments sometimes have the human resources (if seldom adequate venues) to hold small fund-raising concerts and produce sales. In all bar a tiny handful of instances, where funds are accumulated to assist in the purchase of sports items or to help fund a local excursion for senior pupils, collections all have some direct welfare or charitable objective.

Twenty-five of the schools maintained some kind of pupil feeding service, all on very precarious margins. Soup, bread, and fruit was supplied once or twice per week; running a daily ration was beyond the means of schools except those few able to draw on the resources of established, urban-based pupil feeding schemes. Schools levied a nominal sum on pupils, generally 5c, 10c or 20c per week, although one headmaster requested an optimistic R2 per month. Neither teachers' donations nor pupil levies are extensive or reliable enough an income to permit more than the provision of a bare minimum. Nevertheless, it is not surprising to find that school feeding schemes are a hugely popular measure. Schools which normally experienced a dramatic drop in winter attendance, down to 50% or 60% on the coldest and wettest days, reported that the inducement of soup far outweighed the costs of getting drenched. However inclement the weather, children trudged to school. The record books of three schools revealed 100% attendance on the one or two days each week when food was provided, through the worst weather of June, July, and August.

Recreational and cultural activities are drastically curtailed by crippling shortages of equipment and suitable locations. Making the best of hard, sandy, terrain, most schools held some limited sporting activity; netball, rugby, football, and occasionally, athletics. Several schools were denied land-use for weekend sports, and were obliged to use non-central sites. Larger and better-organised schools held quarterly or annual concerts, and music and games evenings. Only two schools were able to scrape together the funds needed for a bi-annual outing for pupils. Teachers constantly underlined the desperate need for transport and for the construction of school or farm halls as a social and community recreational facility. Because of transport difficulties, inter-school contact is exceptionally perfunctory, further deepening the spatial isolation experienced by pupils.

A glance at school staffing revealed a fairly mixed state of affairs. If account is taken of the general dismal picture of the inferior qualifications of black teachers, then farm schools do not appear to be markedly worse off than those in urban settings. Sample schools were all staffed by men and women who possessed some level of teaching certification; at several schools teachers were upgrading their qualifications to degree level. Staff turnover fluctuated from school to school, under the influence of a number of general trends and localised factors. Twenty-seven headmasters reported...
regular staff losses as a result of urban migration or transfer. In the most isolated postings in areas like Namakalnd, it is not uncommon for new staff to leave after a stint of as little as six months. The rude shock of the solitude and conformity of farm life is often sufficient to ensure that young urban recruits do not linger for very long. In general, the many known disadvantages of teaching and living in rural areas make it difficult for many schools to retain staff and stabilise their teaching force. One important factor which emerged from this investigation was the enormous uncertainty and unattractiveness of the housing environment in country districts. Twenty-four schools cited accommodation difficulties as a major contributory factor in staff losses. In complete contrast, twelve of the schools were experiencing little of this disruptive pattern of movement. Mostly small, tightly-knit, and run by a core of energetic and dedicated teachers, their staffing appeared stable, with minimal losses over the past five years.

Communication between teachers and parents is poorly developed. Two of the schools operated a system of huisbesoek by teachers and held regular parent-teacher meetings on a quarterly basis. For the remainder, there were annual get-togethers at the end of the school year, and sporadic contact of an ad hoc nature. Predictably, meetings were widely held to be of limited value to either party. Widespread adult illiteracy, class divisions, and the absence of a general educational environment in the countryside make bridging the gap highly problematic. Teachers rightly saw poor contact with parents as a major educational problem. Not unexpectedly, they were prone to stress the usual litany of cultural deficiencies: negligent families with low 'values' and 'motivations.'

Three of the schools had no official formal contact with farmers, while the headmaster of one larger Church school deliberately avoided any personal dealings with several nearby landowners, who were all unsympathetic or openly hostile towards schooling. Whether landowners acted as school managers or not, there were varying levels of interaction between farmers and teachers in all other cases, ranging from an annual meeting to discuss pupil progress to farmer attendance at staff meetings. Anxious to display paternalistic plumage, the bulk of farmers interviewed lay claim to frequent and close contact with neighbouring or directly dependent schools, and to thriving welfare relationships. When measured against teachers' accounts, a strong element of exaggeration was much in evidence. On the whole, the quality of relations, and the terms upon which they were conducted, varied in texture along a paternal-social grid.

What are the routes of entry into higher levels of schooling? For all but a statistically insignificant trickle of pupils, educational prospects beyond farm school horizons are bleak. What paths there are lead steeply uphill. For those who complete a full course of instruction and breast Std. 4, 5, or 6, there are intractable problems of cost, mobility, and access in maintaining some kind of
educational progression. Economic barriers to pupil entry and costs of maintenance to impoverished families are fear-so-mely high. Hostel facilities at country secondary schools (for which most levy boarding fees of R2 – R4 per month) are extremely limited and of a rather spartan kind. Unless there is cash, nearby kin, or connections, adolescents have no realistic hope of continuing through Secondary or Senior Schools which can be up to 50kms or 60kms way away from homes. Again, one encountered a spatial dimension to the basic issue of pupil access. In the Western Cape, for instance, farm school pupils in Simondium and Klapmuts have at least the opportunity of free state transport (although somewhat irregular in schedule) to secondary schooling in nearby Paarl. In more far flung areas, schools are quite exceptionally far apart, and transport is entirely unavailable. In Beaufort West, for example, pupils from Nelspoort and Letjiesbos faced an average journey distance of 80kms to the nearest high school. Overall, the proportion of farm pupils who achieve any kind of sustained contact with the secondary educational system appears to remain statistically negligible.

In discussion of strategies for improvement, a number of emphatic points emerged. Firstly, teachers produced a remedial shopping list: transport, proper sports fields and equipment, recreational halls, audio-visual classroom aids, libraries, truancy officers, social workers, experienced child welfare fieldworkers, and bursaries to ease the cost burden of higher levels of schooling. All cited the need for a programme of adult worker education on farms, to teach such things as literacy, health, and environmental education; this, it was felt, would help to weld closer relations between schools and parents who were often caricatured as dumb and uncomprehending. Secondly, a significant minority of headmasters favoured the closing of all farm schools and the transfer of pupils to State or Church Schools, in order to place schooling outside the dominating influence of white agricultural enterprise. A third and most significant central theme was despondency and indignation at the appalling material circumstances of labouring families. Teachers were sharply aware of the patchwork of social conditions on farms in the vicinity of their schools, where there were marginally better levels of housing and cash wages, where ultra-exploited cheap labour was most concentrated, where the use of child labour was customary, and from which farms levels of pupil attendance were higher than average.

Levels of school enrolment vary from farm to farm. One of two farmers claimed that all children of under 14 on their properties received primary schooling, but such inflated assessments were wholly lacking in plausibility. Compulsory schooling has no force in the countryside. The universal trend is one of partial attendance. One some farms, two-thirds or more are schooled, at least up to the ages of 12 or 14, while on others, rates of attendance are lower or irregular. On all sample
farms there were varying proportions of the child and young adolescent population of school-going age which never entered a classroom. Without full and free access to families, it is difficult to go further than this very general assessment, and attempt some reliable empirical farm-by-farm calculation of varying rates of school attendance. Even on the best-run large capitalist estate, with well-equipped separate primary schools for African and Coloured children, an estate manager reflected that given the multiple burdens under which farmworkers lived, there was no reasonable hope in the short-term of getting all their sons and daughters into its schools. One also encountered cases of extreme adversity. Legislation may have established for children the right to public education, but where are the penalties for farm masters who deny them that right? On two farms, parents could not enrol children in school of their own accord. In effect, they were illegally bound; employers lay down work stipulations which prohibited full-time school attendance. At a third, only a small minority of children were freed for local primary schooling because, as the respondent pointed out with bland indifference, 'we pay quite low wages here (R3 - R4 per day) and our families can't really afford to spare children from their share of work. They need the money.'

How do school-going children fit into structures of service work and production on farms? Given what we already know of the use of child labour on South African farms, it was not surprising to come across only one larger estate which expressly prohibited the employment of all children under the age of 16. Under the terms of its labour regulations, managers and supervisors were instructed not to engage children's services for any kind of paid work, however irregular and casualised. There was little evidence here of conditions of work and employment practices directly undercutting children's rights and access to education. In all other cases, farmers acknowledged that farm pupils were often involved in what they were at pains to describe as light, part-time work. The structural powerlessness of the farm school is such that producers can boldly remove children from classrooms for one or two hours daily during harvesting. Teachers are able to offer little protection from abuse.

Although broad generality naturally hides differences in degree from one farm to the next, there is a common trend for numbers of rural pupils to experience part of their youth as part-time child workers. Sexual structure affects the rhythm of labour patterns. Young girls' weekend and afternoon domestic employment can be a year round business, while boys' tasks tend to be more seasonal. Thirty-seven schools confirmed that it was customary for numbers of their pupils to participate in paid work after school hours, at weekends, and during holidays. It is important to stress that these casual chores are far from light; in several cases children were participating in heavy housework
and the fetching and carrying of crates. Although earning a miserable pittance, these children are undoubtedly often valued contributors to family income.

Not all child work rests upon some wage relation. One came across several instances of teenagers on larger, modern, farms, bartering part-time labour in return for an array of educational commodities. The classic mentality of moral accountancy was very visible in the case of those farmers - and their wives - who were lightly involved in childrens' educational welfare at an individual, domestic level. Much emphasis was laid upon informal ties and affective relations between employers' and their employees' children. Although the wearing of school uniforms is nowhere obligatory, the costs of an inherited educational culture bite deeply, especially in quarters where teenage children are commuting to secondary schools in nearby towns. In schools where children are judged for neatness of dress as well as for cleanliness, punctuality, and classroom performance, it is likely that daily contact with traditional school values will tend to sharpen differentiation between 'rough' and 'respectable' working families. In formal schooling culture, the distinctions that often really matter are those between clean and dirty hands, bare feet and shoes and socks, and a frayed T Shirt and navy blue sweater. Teenage farm pupils are not indifferent to these distinctions. One interviewee revealed that pupils worked at weekends for items of school clothing, reflecting, 'Well, it's not as if the teachers oblige them to wear uniforms, but I suppose they like to feel properly dressed for school, like most of the other children. So I do what I can to give them opportunities.' Another farmer's wife disclosed that in return for stints of laundry work and household cleaning, she supplied sweaters and blazers to older pupils. This respondent emphasised, 'I'm a great believer in helping whenever I can, but not in giving something for nothing. I try to teach them the importance of earning things they want. It doesn't do to let our workers' kids grow up thinking the world owes them a living, now does it?' If schooling is stimulating these kinds of consumption needs, what are the possible long term consequences for childrens' work and cultural strategies?

At this point, it is probably most useful to return to the question of paternalist practices, the importance of which I attempted to explore briefly in the introduction to this paper. For the approach to uniform provision serves as a kind of metaphor for the whole edifice of discretionarv, particularistic patronage, personal incentive, dependency and indebtedness which characterises the grain of social relations on countless white farms. It must always be stressed that schooling assistance is rarely the pure milk of benevolence. Farmers are not charitable organisations, and any liberality of provision is tempered by beliefs in the earning of rewards, and in the value of self-reliance and individualist self-improvement. Among schools visited were those which had
a television set, an additional classroom, an ablution block, a set of rugby balls and footballs, and a fully-fitted kitchen, donated by various landowners. In all such cases, there was a dividend. One could not but be struck by the way in which such patronage cemented an essentially affirmative deference in relations between schools and the employer as large patriarch. We should not lose sight of this agrarian nexus, particularly the rituals of personalised giving and supplicatory receiving. At the heart of the matter lies teachers' and pupils' continuing consciousness of personal indebtedness to particular rural masters.
It is not at all certain which way the long term future of farm schooling lies, whatever the current drift of government thinking, a topic to which we shall turn in conclusion. While the closure of small farm primary schools is to be condemned, the educational implications of simply reproducing conventional schooling structures in white farming areas are not easy to determine. Should farm schools 'school' for work or the straw of social mobility, or should they 'educate' for rural community living and development? Here, it is critically important to recognise the possibilities and limits of education in the struggle for redistributive objectives. For instance, education alone will not reduce economic inequality because the provision of education and of more equal educational opportunity does not eliminate low-paid work or unemployment. White farmers are independent and wealthy because of their location in the structure of capitalist productive and property relations, not because of privileged access to formal education. So any serious interim strategy against poverty would have to engage state social policies across a broad spectrum, incorporating income, employment, taxation, housing, health, energy, social welfare and benefits, as well as education. The struggle for an equitable share of the harvest cannot be reduced to the struggle for more and better farm schooling. One would hope that the present Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa will not trample the path of the first, and again 'resuscitate the myth of advancement through schooling'.

But at the same time, the campaign for education as a right and an entitlement is an issue which we cannot afford to neglect. Any long-term battle for democratisation of political, social, and economic institutions presupposes the education of all classes of people to a level above that required merely to fulfil elementary economic functions.

Can we find in present working actualities and social experiences definitions of problems in the distribution of educational resources, and possible modes of solution which can indicate the shape of a practicable, more egalitarian future? Ideas, strategies, and policies must be developed in the context of prevailing unequal conditions. There is much complexity, and there are no shortcuts. The need above all is for complex skills and resources to meet many diverse and uneven situations. In the farming sector there are clear district, regional, and individual school differences in educational access, opportunity, and achievement. And there are sharp class and racial differentials. How does one set about creating conditions for transformation? Clearly, there is a whole cluster of detailed areas of possible interim action which lie beyond one's grasp and understanding, but it is absolutely necessary to consider and debate feasible practical intervention which may assist schools to break out of their depressed, marginal condition.

At this point, it is useful to cast a backward glance at what emerged from the deliberations of the 1976 SALDUJ Conference on Farm Labour in South Africa. Let us take the critical factor of educational transport. The 1976 Review observed that
Transport to school is expensive and the conference heard of areas where school buses collecting White children drive half-full past Black children trying to get to school. Surely, even within the present ideological climate, it would not be impossible to integrate the school buses? And what of integrating the schools, if only to reap the economies of scale? Research is needed into the costs of segregation in the rural areas. Needless to say, unfulfilled buses are still driving past barefooted children. And, while schooling segregation still stands in urgent need of some thorough cost evaluation, argument for rural desegregation seems, if anything, even more improbable as a practically realisable remedy now than it did then. The segregatory clamour from the November, 1983 White Paper on the Provision of Education in the Republic of South Africa is deafening. Integrated schooling was in any event never part of the ideology of the De Lange Commission findings.

Moreover - to hazard an improbable scenario - should the Pretoria administration suffer an unprecedented rush of integrationist blood, there will unquestionably be no shortage of local Orval Faubuses and George Wallaces to turn Hoerskool Pofadder into Little Rock Central High. In many ways, therefore, the prospects of achieving an integrated state transport and schooling system in white farming districts do not seem particularly bright.

The preoccupying question then is what can be done to tackle the pressing issue of school transport? What are the technical possibilities of setting up, on a supra-administrative district basis, minibus service centres to feed primary schools and undertake longer-range trips and expeditions? The chronic lack of a transport net, particularly for primary schoolchildren for whom there is not even modest statutory provision, is appalling. For small groups of schools to work effectively - either individually or collectively - bussing would seem to be a strategic necessity. Whatever the cost-benefit issues of bussing in rural education (and these I leave to economists) the immense problems of pupil mobility make it imperative that proper transport provision be given high priority.

A maximum distance acceptable for walking from home to schoolroom is required, as a working official standard. We need to think in terms of maximum distance desirable, rather than simply acceptable. Access to daily transport services as of right should be available to all pupils who face a walking distance which exceeds this official standard. And given the distinct influence of inclement weather upon attendance patterns, it would be desirable to expand provision for the wettest winter months. Appreciable funds will be needed. Bicycles will not do. The extraordinary 'Bicycle Bursary' scheme launched by one Cape Town businessman in September, 1983, is somewhat short of what is required. It certainly bears the familiar stigmata of urban mission, patronage, and the gift. To have dozens of budding Jude Pawleys pedalling past their dullard fellow pupils, slogging it out on foot, seems a socially questionable idea, although it is probably the kind of proposal to excite the fostering free marketers of the Johannesburg Star's
In this context of course, the large question is whether capital's dash into the funding of education and training at all productive levels - vocational, industrial, technical, and commercial - will have any impact at all upon niggardly levels of provision in farming areas. Anything substantial seems unlikely. It must surely be recognised that whatever else it is about, expansion of vocational and technical education at secondary levels is not about equalising the distribution of education provision on the basis of social needs and egalitarian objectives. The market order's dominant interests lie in productive skilled labour within industrial capitalist relations.

Coherent policies for transport investment are an urgent necessity, but given the increasingly social market character of the state, where is funding to come from?

Rural teachers and pupils are also faced with the problem of library provision. To meet the multiple needs of deprived children who have no customary access to library resources, there is a great need for schemes to deliver this essential service. Organisations like Learn and Teach have some rural penetration on a regional basis, but mobile libraries are not the familiar sight they ought to be in the countryside.

Farmers' beneficence runs to sports equipment and ablution blocks but rarely to the supply of that most vital form of the production of knowledge, the book. Generally, children have access to reading matter within school hours or not at all. Most schools lack even the most rudimentary library. Without continuing education for adults, and without books, periodicals, and newspapers - the infrastructure of literacy - children's literacy levels will inevitably deteriorate. In Johan Galtung's pungent phrase, 'like a leg never used, it will tend to wither away.' Mobile libraries, with specialist staff and reading space, can play a varied role in learning support systems for both children and adults. If (and one must anticipate this) some awkward landowners try to obstruct access to farms, alternative sites, such as church property, could be explored.

What is the potential for rural training in formal, in-service education? Depending upon the politics of education provision, a progressive step would be specialised college-based training courses to familiarise trainee teachers with the particular problems of small farm schools. Attention also needs to be given to the feasibility of developing teachers' resource centres in farming areas. Provided suitable locations can be found, centres can help to reduce the crippling spatial isolation experienced by teachers staffing small schools, can strengthen confidence and competence, and provide a framework of skills and technical resources to encourage possible innovation in launching integrated, locally-based community studies, developing other curriculum changes, and in expanding non-formal learning options.

Might it be possible to introduce and extend the idea of peripatetic teachers? This presupposes effective, responsive, and generous budgeting and administration. At
present many regular teachers are already loathe to undertake fixed daily commuting to outlying schools, either because travel allowances are not paid on time, or on account of bureaucratic problems in recovering full transport costs. To make the concept of itinerant teaching attractive, adequate remuneration and effective transport supplementary grants will be necessary.

Moreover, a mobile classroom - perhaps a van or trailer specially fitted-out and equipped to teach say, environmental studies or primary science - could enormously improve the effectiveness of a peripatetic farm teacher. And specialist mobile classrooms could periodically visit remote schools which lack particular resources, to initiate and maintain pupil study projects on a regular basis. To have just one or two such mobile classrooms operating in bleak and deprived Platteland localities could have a significant cultural and psychological effect on the small school environment.

Liberal theorists interested in compensatory education programmes might look at the question of developing farm preschooling. The debate as to whether or not education, particularly in the preschool years, can compensate for various economic and cultural handicaps, has raged fiercely in both Britain and the United States of America. There is evidence from such authoritative British studies as the Halsey Report (1972) that some children are able to maintain improvements in such areas as language, given preschooling experience, but such evidence seems far from compelling. The most one can realistically say, therefore, is that so far as compensatory preschool education is concerned, the signs are no more than cautiously hopeful.55

Already many farm schools are providing some pupil feeding, relying on very slender means. Why not invest greater resources in school feeding, to extend and upgrade provision, and coordinate schemes? While the soup kitchen concept clearly reekles, it is arguable that some kind of universal nutrition provision ought to become a routine benefit of schooling, and should be campaigned for as a political right. It is surely evident to all but the most blinkered that rural children are at terrible risk. Two Clanwilliam primary school headmasters reported that pupils were regularly fainting from hunger, while in Vredendal, school staff have been purchasing food personally for severely malnourished pupils, a situation sufficiently black to have prompted the Sunday Times (II.9.1983) to run an exposure. The issue is not simply one of remedial health benefits. In the short term, quite apart from any nutritional impact on ill-fed, severely weakened young children, there is evidence that school feeding has a markedly beneficial effect upon levels of attendance.

I am at one with the conclusion of the Farm Labour Conference Report that 'If one is seeking to maintain a community on the land, it is surely foolish to ensure that almost all secondary schools are not in the rural areas where, if they are to be persuaded to stay, children should grow up.'56 Universal access to formal secondary schooling of good quality should form a policy objective of any serious attack on educational deprivation in farming districts. To put the matter plainly, we need locally-based secondary schools, the lower the degree of centralization the better.
Given the fact that there are huge, isolated areas which are very sparsely populated, it is likely that there will always be children for whom access to local secondary schooling will be a problem. In this respect, South Africa is not unlike Australia or New Zealand. In Australia, schools of the Air (using two-way radio communication channels and peripatetic teachers) have been serving remote farming settlements since 1951, while in New Zealand, the National Correspondence School has been educating children (and adults completing School Certificate) in farming settlements since 1922. Both these models might have something to offer. According to one seasoned observer of these Antipodean initiatives, they "are at least as effective as conventional schooling, although elsewhere the use of such media in the learning process has not been a demonstrable success at the level of schooling certification. A major 1980 study concluded that the evidence about distance teaching at school level is not encouraging.59 Although, as we have already noted, many headmasters seem to favour the closure of small farm schools in favour of an expansion of town boarding facilities and schools be thought of solely in terms of their economic viability as public utilities? Is it desirable to follow the Australian pattern of missing pupils? or (c) each day? If one is seeking to directly involve parents and community in schooling, increased centralisation would pull in the opposite direction. Social factors should always be a crucial consideration, whatever the undoubtedly high cost of maintaining one or two-teacher schools. And there is no conclusive evidence that the small size of rural schools is a factor depressing educational attainment. Research carried out in rural North Wales in the 1970s demonstrated that there were instances when small schools will probably have to be maintained, no matter how small they become. A special dimension and those in larger establishments. 60 There are instances when farm schools and schools of the kind currently being constructed and sensibly located, will be seeing more large, well-equipped and amenably located secondary schools of the kind currently proposed, 60 which are very sparsely populated.

To ensure that the provision of more comprehensive and differentiated compulsory education are all issues central to the question of schooling and learning. Access to study and reading space on farms, to school-based community facilities, such as library facilities and swimming pools, and the proper enforcement of social factors should always be a crucial consideration, whatever the undoubtedly high cost of maintaining one or two-teacher schools. And there is no conclusive evidence that the small size of rural schools is a factor depressing educational attainment. Research carried out in rural North Wales in the 1970s demonstrated that there were instances when small schools will probably have to be maintained, no matter how small they become. A special dimension and those in larger establishments. 60 There are instances when farm schools and schools of the kind currently being constructed and sensibly located, will be seeing more large, well-equipped and amenably located secondary schools of the kind currently proposed, 60 which are very sparsely populated.

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One could list much else. It is easy to spin a web of minor, incremental improvements and innovations as policy ideas; much harder to see net goals achieved.

Let us take compulsory schooling as an example. Statutory provision of attendance or truant officers appears to be a dead letter; in Paarl, Piketberg, and Beaufort West for instance, local schools have yet to sniff attendance officials for whom funding was made available in 1980. However, even if truancy and absenteeism measures were activated, it is difficult to see this having more than a very marginal impact on levels of attendance. Outside poor labouring households, girls and boys are expected to participate directly in the existence of the family as an economic unit, while within the confines of the home itself, there are necessary duties which obstruct children’s exposure to schooling. Moreover, there are forms of household work - such as nursing and acting as ‘little mothers’ - exclusively performed by female children, which represent a further obstacle to their obtaining some regular school education. It is not surprising that so many children are unlikely to have sustained contact with the formal educational system. Rhythms of exploitative, low-wage work and dispositions of time in home labour all of necessity bring children into production and the servicing of essential household human needs, whether it be tending younger children, running errands for farmers’ wives as a means of earning a few cents, or the daily humping of bundles of wood over long distances. Winter makes rigid demands upon children’s labour; with diminishing common access to woodland, young children are having to trudge increasing long distances daily in search of firewood for fuel.

Such demands, roles, and practices are incompatible with the requirements of schooling. Children, in company with women, are perhaps the primary victims of the ugly reproduction of farmworkers’ poverty.

Moreover, as long as field and other labour for children remains an integral part of the farm economy, it is difficult to see how compulsory education in the countryside can become really effective. One obvious remedy is properly enforced legislation on child labour and education, although even in this context it is instructive to note that despite the impact of the British 1867 Agricultural Gangs Act, 1875 Agricultural Children’s Act and 1870 Education Act, compulsory schooling only bit fully when changes in the productive process removed children from farm labour in the English countryside.

One need hardly stress that the individuals who have the real power to enforce compulsory education locally are precisely those who benefit most, directly or indirectly, from the availability of ultra-cheap child labour. It is not surprising that farmers are none too diligent in urging all children into school regularly, or are often unresponsive to headmasters’ queries about persistent absenteeism.

And here lies the nub of the matter: the awesome power of white farmers. Prospects of breaking or curbing this are not very bright, and it is depressing to have to once again draw attention to Levy’s conclusion to his 1976 Farm Schools paper. I would endorse his argument that ‘Whatever the (educational) solution is to be (e.g. the
establishment of Government-run schools on Government-owned land in strategic parts of the rural areas) it must clearly involve some diminution in the authority of the farmer, especially with regard to the power he exerts over his workers. Given the nature of the distribution of power in this country... it will take much effort and will before such a step is taken. On the other hand, the Conference Review speculated that 'Faced with insufficient educational facilities for the children of farm workers it is tempting to press for the state to take over the schools from farmers. But, given the existing political structure, it is by no means clear that shifting responsibility from the shoulders of farmers to the government... would necessarily ensure better or more widespread education.'

Levy's point, nevertheless, still seems to me to stand. The preoccupying question is the dreadful reality of farm school dependence. To accept existing structural relations and organisational links between white farmers and the state is to accept the continuing, extreme vulnerability of schools. Ultimately, however much persistent prodding there may be from clergymen, agricultural bodies, or from officials of the Departments of Education and Training and Internal Affairs, it is the farmer who decides whether or not to establish a school. Its erection is a voluntary, private initiative, defined not by law but by goodwill and paternalism. While the state provides generous subsidies for construction and maintenance (increased most recently in 1980, 1982, and 1983) and for specific items of additional expenditure, while there is a state regulatory presence in the form of school inspectors, while teachers control the daily running of schools, ultimate power over the destiny of any particular school is always in the hands of the landowner. A farmer who opens a school may equally, if he so chooses, close it. Transfer of farm ownership can jeopardise the existence of a school at a stroke. Typically, one thirty year old Magaliesberg primary school, originally funded and constructed by farm labourers, now faces summary closure by a new landowner, one Franz Elsmeier, who has been quoted as saying, 'I merely inherited the school when I bought my farm so it's not my problem... I want that school shut down.'

This relationship is of striking importance. Under present arrangements, farm schools are always vulnerable, insecure and at risk from arbitrary actions. What is crucial about the assumptions of farmers are not simply the rights and leverages they are able to assert over the life of the school - in structural terms, through funding and maintenance - but in the school itself, in conscious and structured involvement. There can be direct and impressionable contact with pupils and teachers, the most extreme example of which is farmers' voluntary presence at religious assemblies, to deliver homilies. God and Mammon are seldom far apart on South Africa's white farms. Schools may become the benevolent, proprietary interest of farmers, and this is experienced and understood on a personal, face-to-face basis.

Such identification of course forms the core of effective paternalist practice. At an institutional level, schooling provision provides opportunities for an
assertion of elite paternalism and fostering of employer beneficence. One cannot look at the school in isolation and without reference to its social context.

And paternalism is a Janus-like phenomenon. Life in proximity to the farmhouse can lead to intolerable levels of interference in schools, and to all manner of petty restrictions on outsiders' access and use-rights. Schoolrooms are not secure; children are regularly poached at peak harvest periods, and are also removed to do intermittent work as herd boys, in addition to other agricultural duties. And sporadic attempts to use schools as a meeting place for adult evening classes (in Ceres and Montagu, for example) have typically been sabotaged by the farmers concerned, who have blocked access to facilities. At present, landowners are of course within their rights to do so. The prerogative of ownership and power is vividly illuminated by the bitter comment of one Namaqualand headmaster. Pointing out that one of his three classrooms was being used as farm storage space, he remarked of the landowner, 'He gave the land, he helps with repairs to the building so now he looks upon my school as part of his farm.'

These deep and pervasive proprietorial pressures make it imperative that there be some drastic reorganisation of existing structural relations between schools and landowners. Only with the independence borne of greater autonomy and firm statutory rights can schools emerge from their position of insecurity and marginality, to develop pedagogies and curricula which might provide, to borrow and adapt Richard Johnson's phrase, 'really useful knowledge.' Apart from the quantitative poverty of farm schooling, there is an equally important qualitative issue.

The problems of rural poverty, deprivation, and dependence coalesce around the place of the school. Except on the urban fringe, where schools can sometimes fall within the orbit of a relatively less monolithic, more diverse social and occupational world, rural schooling is the embodiment of the social closure and containment of 'the greedy institution'. Maps, wall charts and biology diagrams may enlarge the scope of children's imaginative lives, but are insufficient to liberate the mass of the young from the confines of physical isolation, and the enervating poverty of local life. The general lack of outward mobility, even to create and maintain a more dispersed network of regular contact with fellow pupils, compounds the educational deprivation of the already disadvantaged. Localism remains powerful. For most adolescents on the land, beyond the agricultural labouring community is a dimly perceived urban and industrial world, where institutions, services and amenities are thought to be better, where social relations are thought to be different, and where white racism is thought to be less abrasive and bullying.

In conclusion, it is rather puzzling to turn to the recent Education White Paper. This is a predictably dispiriting document, locked and hobbled in the leg-irons of current state policy on restructuring apartheid, and thickened to impenetrability by what Buckland terms 'techocratic language and instrumentalist traditions.'
Yet, quite without precedent, in its policy formulations the White Paper has singled out a special niche for farm schooling. Although policy recommendations are often a notoriously poor reflection of the actualities of provision, it is interesting to note plans for long-term investment and budgetary medicine. Referring to the 'development and upgrading of state-aided farm schools', the White Paper asserts that 'The Government is of the opinion that farm schools make a very important contribution to the provision of education at present and will have to continue to do so in future. The Government also accepts that the standards at farm schools will have to be raised to acceptable levels in cases where they are not acceptable at present.'

In addition to points we have already raised (the White Paper's recommendations on small schools and secondary schooling) there are references to Department of Education and Training management courses for headmasters, in-service training courses for teachers, increases in subsidies for construction and maintenance, and enforcement of minimum standards. Noting that with over 5,000 African schools accounting for over seventy percent of all schools controlled by the DET and containing thirty-three percent of all pupils, the White Paper proposes that, 'With a view to the improvement of the quality of education, it is intended to appoint inspectors solely for farm schools to carry out an upgrading programme that will include, inter alia, remedial teaching and the introduction of a class library scheme.'

Does this startling, apparent stirring of interest represent a shift? If this is genuinely the case, why this new attention to labour force sectoral interests? Is educational degeneration on the periphery to be arrested? Is this some belated attempt to tackle all the strains and contradictions of uneven educational development? It is difficult to grasp the real meaning of the White Paper's comments. Is the whole thrust of this related to the much larger and developing educational field of skills and training, the object of which is to ensure that individuals are responsive to 'a market orientated economic system'? There may be something in this connection, but the shape is not as yet clear. The doddering history of farm schooling may yet confound us all; it may be altered in ways that will give it more substance and bite. Still, it must remain perfectly legitimate to ask, how much headway can farm education be expected to make as long as rural life is cast in such an impoverished, stratified, and deferential mould?
A questionnaire technique was used to gather information. For shaping of detail, all respondents were asked to supply specific categories of data, but the lion's share of descriptive information was gathered by means of unstructured or semi-structured informal interviews. Discussion was (other than when cut short by farmers) free-flowing and open-ended. Where possible, supplementary information was accumulated through discussion with older pupils and agricultural workers, but this was of limited depth as I was hamstrung by lack of competency in Afrikaans. In all, forty schools were investigated, and twenty landowners were interviewed.

A. School staff were asked to supply information on the following:

1. Enrolment
2. Highest Standard
3. Pass Rates
4. Dropout Rates
5. Attendance Levels and Absenteeism
6. Classrooms, Classroom Facilities, and Ancillary Teaching Resources
7. Staffing
8. School Funds and Fees
9. Pupils' Distance from School
10. Transport Facilities

II. Extra-Mural Cultural and Recreational Facilities

In addition, the following questions were posed:

1) What is the attitude of local farmers towards the school?
2) Do local farmers ever meet with you regularly to discuss school affairs and educational matters?
3) Do you ever meet with pupils' parents to discuss educational problems?
4) What post-primary educational facilities are realistically open to farm children in this locality?
5) Supposing there were genuine possibilities of improving farm education, what sort of changes and improvements would you like to see?

B. Farmers were all asked the following specific questions:

1. Do all children on your farm attend school?
2. Do you ever meet with local teachers to discuss schooling?
3. Do you allow children of school-going age to assist in farm work? If yes, when, and why?
4. When employing someone, do you generally regard educational qualifications as important?
5. Would you pay higher wages to workers (doing the same job) who have better levels of education?

6. Would you like to see any changes in education in rural areas? If so, what sort of changes and improvements would you like to see?

With common questions, on such issues as farm work, levels of school attendance, and regularity of contact with teaching staff, there was rather more conflicting than corroborating evidence. Persistent discrepancies in accounts provided by teachers' and farmers' suggested that the testimony of the latter group was extremely suspect.
REFERENCES


5. Ibid., 4.

6. Ibid., 6.

7. Ibid., 7-8.


12. Ibid.


15. Stedman Jones, op cit., 257; 'Class Expression versus Social Control?', History Workshop Journal, 4, 1977, 163; 'From Historical Sociology to Theoretic History',


22. At the time of writing, their respective weekly cash wages of £34.50 and £38.81 are well above national average earnings in white agriculture, and ought not to be regarded as typical of any trend.
23. Occupations which pay £54 and £67 per week respectively.


25. The fact that migrants are so highly valued as stockmen probably has as much to do with demanding hours of work as with specialist skills. Unlike labourers with resident families, migrants are generally more willing to undertake unseclusive weekend and overtime work.

26. See, for instance, Kees, 'Farm labour in the Karoo', in Farm Labour, II6-17; 'Farm Labour in South Africa: A Review Article', Social Dynamics, 2, (2), 1976, 140.


28. Newby, Property, 158; Deferential Worker, 159.

29. Deferential Worker, 197.

30. Displaying a keen sense of history, this respondent ventured: 'It's in everyone's interests to improve farm conditions. We don't want to see a Captain Swing here, do we?'. Captain Swing was the term by which the 1830 English farm labourers' rising became known. The classic work is Hobsbawm, E.J., and Rude, G., Captain Swing, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1969.


34. Bourdieu, 'The School as a Conservative Force', 32.

35. Ibid.


37. Thompson, 'Eighteenth Century English Society', 152.


42. Derogatory Afrikaans equivalents of 'yokel' or 'bumpkin'.


48. 'Farm Labour', 144.


51. By September, 1982, twenty Soweto schools (and a few institutions in rural areas)
had been 'adopted' by 'Foster Companies' through the Star newspaper's Adopt-a-School Scheme, launched in the middle of that year. Industry provides libraries and funds to meet school running and repair costs. The Star has described such relationships as 'not paternalism, but vital partnership.' See Chisholm, 'Redefining Skills: South African Education in the 1980s', Comparative Education, 19, (3), 1983, 367.

52. Ibid.
56. 'Farm Labour', 144.
64. Levy, op cit., 27.
65. 'Farm Labour', 144.
69. At the last count, that of Plant in 1976, there were 3,815 African schools listed in the most recently available figures (1978).

70. White Paper, 19.

71. Investigation by the Science Committee of the President's Council into the Stimulation of Formal and Non-Formal Education: Outline for the Investigation, Doc 83/3, 1982.