The Changing patterns of Labour Relationships in the Sundays River Valley of the Eastern Cape

Arthur Aires

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by Arthur Aires

The citrus growing area of the Sundays River Valley consists of land on either side of the river together totalling between 2-4 kilometres and extending approximately 40 km. along the length of the river. It is not continuous but interrupted by poor topography and non-arable stretches. The peripheral area is almost equidistant from Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage (± 50 km.), they themselves being about 40 km. apart, but gradually drawing closer as industry develops along its axis.

At the upper end of the valley is the town of Kirkwood consisting of a municipal population of 900. (1970 census: Kirkwood municipality). It is mainly a residential area with shops, garages, banks, stores and small hospitals. It no longer serves as an important service centre to the agricultural community because of the proximity of Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage.

In the middle and lower end of the valley are the hamlets of Sunland and Addo respectively. These are less populous and provide services more on an agency basis.

Bantu Population and Urban Employment

According to the Kirkwood Municipal census of 1970 (which deals with the whole valley) the population structure was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Municipal area</th>
<th>Rural areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>2072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloureds</td>
<td>730</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bantu</td>
<td>3450</td>
<td>15194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the Bantu Affairs Administration Board, situated in Kirkwood, figures at the end of June 1976 are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Unemployment</th>
<th>Children at schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kirkwood</td>
<td>4002</td>
<td>23% females</td>
<td>16-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural area</td>
<td>3027 males</td>
<td>2% males</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural area</td>
<td>1824 females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1365 males</td>
<td>16-60 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1510 females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>3241</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1970's total Bantu population was 18644 (Municipality census)
1976's total Bantu population is 14969 (BAAB census)

The depopulation is clearly evident.

There is some comment to make as far as the unemployed are concerned. According to the office of the Bantu Affairs Department in Kirkwood, a very large proportion of those registered as unemployed in both male and female categories,
are in fact employed illegally in the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage complex. The officer also mentioned that more than 10% of the "unemployed" males were in fact employed on MINES in South Africa and others were employed by ESCOM (some not registered as unemployed) and by contractors just outside the municipal areas of Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage, where permits were not required. This figure accounts, in large measure, for the general drop in population. Unemployed also included old-aged, the percentage of which was difficult for the writer to elicit. The officer also mentioned that the work permits in town were not difficult to obtain. The procedure is that the applicant obtains a letter from his "landlord" (farmer) indicating that he no longer requires his services and the prospective employer of the applicant (for such permit) applies to his/her Labour Bureau (e.g. Port Elizabeth) to employ this applicant stating that he will employ and accommodate him.

Another factor to mention is that the Black population is unskilled (majority) or semi-skilled and either illiterate or semi-literate. This applies to the Coloured population too, but all non-white people who are artisans are Coloured although very few of them are artisans. They either work on the farms, mainly close to Kirkwood, or are squatters, populated over the whole valley.

Historical background (with particular reference to 1969-70 drought). Citrus farming in the Sundays River Valley is only now approaching the end of its birth pangs, after + 50 years of gestation, and with it the growing pains begin. There should have been a longer period characterised by gradual growth and maturity but this was not so. The causes were the recurring incidence of drought which continually broke the chain of growth and capital investment and, I feel, the expectation of permanence with respect to future production and income. I am ignoring the market price of productive output, on purpose, because I feel the fluctuations in prices themselves were not, in perspective, a dominant factor influencing long term projections with respect to development. These price fluctuations could be weathered with a reasonable amount of fortitude especially as the national industry developed a sophisticated marketing organisation which obtained promising results in bad times and good and I feel the farmers' confidence in this organisation is generally high.

We are now left with the situation where long term decisions were altered due to climatological extremes, which decisions were detrimental to the society serving, and being served by, citrus farming.
It is understandable that when such an unpredictable situation is faced it is not an irrational decision to try and "get by" by cutting costs. But costs cannot be cut to the detriment of future production. "Production costs" are nearly always incurred (maintained) with or without production, in view of the long term nature of citrus farming. (Production costs are almost fixed or semi-fixed costs. If a crop has been light the previous year, a lower fertilizer application is then the replacement of nutrients absorbed by the extent of the crop and vice versa. But fertilizer would always be applied - fixed cost or production cost?).

The variable costs (I personally see it as "partially variable" in view of the capital expenditure on housing) are then confined to labour when one has drought and a bad crop. It is thus easy to see that the "area" to suffer most would be that of labour and its facilities. The farmer has to house his staff, the price of which appears difficult to be repaid in accounting terms. And thus little development took place in this area. Not only that but the price of labour was determined by supply and demand and this equilibrium price was relatively low even in prosperous times (which occurred despite the possibility of drought) due to supply and demand factors.

A drought in 1969-70 all but devastated farming operations and the agricultural community at large. Not only did White farmers leave the area as commuters seeking job opportunities in the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage complex, but the local Magistrate and White farmers assisted Black employees in seeking jobs in the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage complex by granting temporary work permits for such purpose.

Those who left have not returned and together with the general depopulation of the rural areas, supply and demand curves intersect at another point. But they are not the same supply and demand curves - as both schedules have moved.
For any given price of labour, less labour is now supplied, which means that since the whole supply schedule has moved to the left, the quantity of labour now employed is less than originally. The fall in the demand schedule during the drought to $D_D$ precipitated a leftward shift in the $S -$ schedule to $S_2$ where employees moved out to industry. This they did because of a lower wage level and quantity employed ($W_D$, $Q_D$) resulting from the interception of $D_D$ and $S_1$. Of course when farming output returned to normal the relevant curves were $S_2$ and $D_1$.

The past 2-3 years have seen high production coupled with high incomes, and the expected stabilisation of citrus production due to the elimination of droughts as a result of the impending Orange River Project's supply of water to the area has altered the position somewhat.

A certain aberration in market force sequence has now occurred, due to factor substitution limitations. Unlike other industries or certain types of farming for that matter, citrus farming is limited in the extent to which it can employ factor substitution, i.e. capital for labour, as harvesting of citrus is a manual task. To the extent that factor substitution can take place, it is now a matter of Hobson's choice. The so-called fuel crisis has seen to that. The price of tractors has more than doubled in three years and where in fact substitution could have had its greatest labour saving effect, i.e. in employing chemical herbicides, in terms of relative cost the need for that substitution is now questionable because, since chemical herbicides are a petrolchemical product, their price has risen commensurately. Thus, since the long term outlook has improved and recognising the limitations with respect to substitution, the whole pattern of demand for labour has again changed. Not only must the $D$-schedule return to $D_1$ (rise) but in order to employ the same amount of labour as formerly ($Q_1$) it must move to $D_2$ and it will most probably rise even more ($Q_3$, $W_4$) in order to cater for the increased future production. So we are now saddled with a higher and increasing wage structure. We must nor forget what is happening with the demand for labour a mere 50 km. away, on the outskirts of the Port Elizabeth- Uitenhage complex. Industrial growth is not only taking place but is scheduled for greater expansion, and this will cause the supply schedule of labour to the farms to shift even further left. (We must realise that it is a shift of and not a movement along the supply curve because for the same wage level, an employee would rather live in the city. It is in fact characterised by a kink in
the S-schedule with a very large wage difference (the inelastic range of the curve) needed in order to attract labour to the farms. Therefore, if the quantity of labour employed in the Sundays River Valley is to be maintained, its demand schedule must again rise when the supply schedule of labour falls (leftward movement) as it is likely to given the attraction of city lights, and also, more recently, a more equitable social attitude of Government to Black labour in industry ($S_2$ to $S_3$).

More about capital-labour substitution

The substitution of capital for labour can take place for a certain period in the year. The harvesting season extends over a period of 5-6 months, so that for a period of 6-7 months, mechanical aids can vastly reduce the demand for labour. But there are costs attached to this. Firstly the time it takes for a worker to settle in and "learn the ropes" would be wasted if he were discharged after the season. Secondly, assuming that resident permanent labour is supplemented by imported or migrant labour for the harvesting period, this labour has to be housed well and certain social amenities provided. These extra houses then lie idle for six months and deteriorate. It also means that since one's permanent labour force is lower, and chemical and mechanical aids are now also more costly, it might in fact be cheaper NOT to have substitution at all, but rather a higher permanent labour force.

However, since labour is more difficult to handle than a chemical, at even odds, one would most probably gain more independence in terms of general management and unforeseen circumstances by employing chemical herbicides i.e. substitution of capital for labour. The starting-up costs of labour (investment in housing and training) is high and it is a risky investment (e.g. hangovers, absenteeism and leaving employment when trained). The starting-up cost of investment in herbicide, though perhaps equally high, is more attractive because of lower risk. Not only does the cost of investment in weedicide fall (ignoring price increases) as time goes by (general depression of weed seed population) but people handling such operations become more adept at them too, and since fewer units of labour are needed for such operations, better attention and wages can be paid to them and desire for job-hunting is reduced (together with the fact that it is a more interesting job than spadework and more skill is required).

For this reason, and most probably as a result of paternalism too, I feel that smaller farming units (should) have better and more stable employer/employee relationships.
Housing facilities
The general quality of housing is poor, not only in structural terms but in terms of location and arrangement with respect to other houses. A large proportion is still the "wattle and daub" type house with unsightly sheet iron rooms or enclosures annexed. The old 2-roomed brick house has mud and iron annexes with very poor roofing with a 44 gal. drum (200 litres) providing drinking water, from rain off the roof. Gardens are all but non-existent and the area in front of the house is usually hard, sun-baked ground normally swept clean, slightly raised at the wall, providing squatting-type seating. Floors are made of cow-dung and even in the spacious modern housing cow-dung is used by choice as it provides soft and well-wearing insulation. The farmer appears to take little care of the state of employees' housing and leaves them to their own devices. The rooms are generally neat with little or no bedding, but a dresser and dining-room table and chairs are a must. (The writer employs a Black tractor driver whose basic wage is R50,00 p.m., and who saves R10-R15 p.m. This man wanted to build his own mud and reed house away from the others and he has no beds at all in his house. It is apparently not as necessary as the dresser in the front room). One must not forget that the cow-dung floor is very comfortable, some even make patterns on the floor, using a type of clay for darker or lighter shades. Cooking is done outside on an open fire, even though most houses have a fire-place with chimney. This is apparently not because of the smoke, because there is often a fire inside on the floor when the weather is cold. It is interesting to note that this cooking fire is most economically produced using one or two logs burning for a long time. A stove or barbecue-type fire would require very much more wood, and presumably, since the women-folk normally collect the wood, there is a lot of sense in this method. Homemade mud and reed houses always have roundish looking window spaces with a diameter of ± 15 cms. (6 ins) and there are only one or two in the house. Door spaces are always lower than an adult's height. I have asked numerous inhabitants the reason for this, but there is no answer. Apparently it stems from the traditional practice that when a stranger or intruder entered the house, he would have to crouch, and if there were evil intentions, the owner of the house would be at an advantage to overpower him.

The majority of farmers appears not to be doing anything right now, although there is at the present time a lot of talk about providing better living conditions. The Government provided most attractive incentives to facilitate building new houses and modernising old. This was a loan for 30 years at 1% interest. However due to lack of funds this has been stopped temporarily, but
will no doubt be resumed. This is perhaps the reason for delay in providing better housing. That it will come, I have no doubt. Economic necessity will see to it, even if the welfare element is lacking. The farmer has to attract the black man, and the white foreman, to stay in the rural areas.

That is not to say that nothing is being done at the moment. There are some farmers (writer included) who are building new and better housing. The house has three rooms (with provision for a 4th at a later stage, when the backlog has been fulfilled) measuring 10' x 12' and two rooms 12' x 12'. There is a fireplace and chimney and five windows. These houses are built according to minimum requirements for housing laid down by the Uitenhage Divisional Council. One of the labourers who acquired one of the first new houses felt the house too big! Subsequent residents are very pleased with the housing and have made enclosures for garden and vegetable patches. There has been very a very good response. At a later stage, every two houses will share a 2000 litre rain-water tank with the possibility of plumbing to the house.

It should be mentioned that the fire place is not often used for cooking but as a mantle piece. I enquired from the wife of one of the employees just before new houses were to be built for them, where they would do their cooking if I provided a stove for the fire place or otherwise made one of the other rooms smaller by dividing it with a separate entrance as a kitchen with fire place. She replied "outside" but when it rained, or if it was very windy, she would cook inside. I inspected a neighbouring farmer's new 4-roomed houses where a separate kitchen was provided, and this space was used for storing their flour and grain. Cooking was still done outside. They obviously take advantage of the open air to provide an economically-fueled fire.

Social amenities
Generally are NOT catered for at all and drunkeness is rife over the week-ends. So is absenteeism in work. Whether there is a direct relationship I am not sure, but indications point that way.

On a recent tour of the Eastern Transvaal citrus areas, I found very much more done in the field of amenities such as organised film shows, sporting competitions (often with prize money). Such entertainment (e.g. film shows) was also used as an incentive bonus for the day's/week's work.
I would go as far as to say that drinking in groups in houses is a general week-end pastime. Rugby is very popular and those who participate do so all year round. Competitions are run among themselves with neighbouring sides, but lack organisation. I feel a great deal can be done by way of personnel relationship by capitalising on this enthusiasm.

Child-rearing and schooling
Illegitimate births are more the rule than the exception. A young girl from the age of ± 16 years will usually succumb to these circumstances and she will stay with her ("mother-in-law") boy friend's mother, or where there is not a boy friend then with her mother. In the latter case when there is difficulty in getting the father to support the child and mother, the father's mother often takes over the upbringing of the child when the child stops breast-feeding; thus the father supports the child but not its mother. (This is when the mother is young and can still be supported by her parents). In the case where the mother is older, and where the father does not voluntarily support mother and child, the mother applies to the local Magistrate who then summonses the father to pay monthly maintenance to the Magistrate's office for support of mother and child. When the mother marries another man, the father has to pay for the support of the child only.

Dr. Anthony Barker, a missionary doctor working among the Zulus, coined the word "gogulation" (from the word "ngogo" meaning Granny; Xhosa is "khoko"). It refers to a set of circumstances affecting both the social and physical well-being of the child. A young mother leaves the rural areas to seek work in the city and leaves her child/children in her mother's care. Initially she sends money home frequently to support and educate her offspring. As time goes by, she becomes fashion-conscious and more sophisticated and reduces the frequency of remittances and possibly terminates them. Back home the grandmother (unemployed) feels the pinch and has to cut down on a nutritious diet and the child eventually succumbs to kwashiokor.

However it is noteworthy to see that Black children are not neglected as far as mothering or affection is concerned. There are no abandoned children in the rural areas, though there are many reasons for such abandonment.

The family circle is often not clearly definable from an outsider's point of view and it is difficult to ascertain who are real brothers, uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers. "Grandmothers" funerals can take place more than twice and the employer assumes that the employee's excuses for such absenteeism is downright dishonesty, and this can lead to a lot of friction as regards mutual trust and understanding. It is a common occurence to see a married couple with their own
family but the wife usually has one or more of her own children from a previous relationship staying with them. (One notices it on sight mainly due to age/size differences in the offspring). The wife is seen going to the Magistrate's office once a month to collect the child(ren)'s maintenance.

In the case of a widowed mother, she will more than likely never marry again, in order not to lose her maintenance allowance, but might have a number of children with one or more fathers.

The use of Government sponsored clinics has now become widespread. For the cost of R1, a mother is entitled to all nursing and medical facilities, especially for confinements and child nursing and T.B. care. All medicines are 20c each. In the case of pregnancy labour, an ambulance is provided free. If the clinic feels it is a case for a medical officer or hospital, she is conveyed to the nearest hospital, usually the Provincial hospital in Uitenhage where the total account is R1. She is also entitled to a railway concession (free) which is obtainable at the nearest Magistrate's offices.

Gastro-enteritis is a common illness among black children that all too often is not attended to medically in time. Consultation with witch-doctors is usually the cause of delay and often leads to deaths. I had a case where I was called by one of my employee's children to say that the child was very ill. I rushed up to his house and after lengthy questioning eventually elicited the fact that the child was given "Dettol" to drink in order to cure the ailment. The child was rushed to the doctor in Kirkwood and then sent to Uitenhage by ambulance. Needless to say it died. Even in this day and age, the power of the witch-doctor is very strong, although calls for trained doctors are definitely on the increase.

An interesting point is that if they know that a certain doctor in the district does not administer injections, they will not go to him. It has to be "pills and injection". On a number of occasions the local doctor only prescribed pills (consultation fee R1,75) but the employee stayed out of work again the next day to go by train to another doctor in Kirkwood because he gives injections and pills, another R1,75 for the treatment of that self same "ailment".

Although the older folds didn't regard schooling as all important, possibly due to more traditional kraal systems or herdsmanship, coupled with the difficulty of maintaining a child at school and forgoing the labour or income earned by the child, the younger men think otherwise. It is still difficult to maintain children at school, especially in clothing and payment for school books. I cannot
understand why they require uniform clothing (not necessarily uniforms as such) since it must be more expensive as opposed to less uniform second hand clothing. The farm schools are overpopulated and understaffed; and often the quality and even the integrity of many teachers leaves much to be desired. These schools are either Government-subsidised mission schools or state schools as such both under the control of the Bantu Education. The syllabus is controlled by the Department. The primary schools usually teach up till St. 4 in the immediate district and then the children must go away to a more central area for Stds. 5 and 6. After St. 6 they have to go to Port Elizabeth or Uitenhage and this is most certainly a strain on family resources and any child who obtains a J.C. or Matric has certainly something to be proud of. Of course, they are lost to agriculture. This is perhaps a pity - bearing in mind the quality of life that agriculture can provide under ideal conditions (not at present existing of course). This is the object of this whole exercise - to provide educational facilities and appropriate employment opportunities in agriculture, adequate housing and social amenities with security in employment and income.

Methods of Payment: Cash wages, Rations, Incentives, Fringe Benefits

There are essentially three types of payments methods: Cash wages, cash and rations, and piece-work incentive payments. The large farming units tend to stick to weekly or monthly payments based on daily attendance. Absenteeism without notice or excuse leads to deduction of that day’s money. The smaller farming units tend to pay a slightly lower cash wage but include weekly or monthly rations purchased wholesale but reckoned in at retail prices, at no disadvantage to the wage-earner. This is a very difficult practice where a large staff is concerned, and which can lead to malpractice when weighing and dealing out is done by an employee. In the smaller farming units the farmer himself dishes out and there is more control. The few labourers' needs are better known too and the required rations can be purchased. In the large units this is difficult to ascertain and will obviously lead to provision of unsuitable rations. Therefore cash wages are paid.

Incentive Payments (Piece-work) are applied to a certain extent and should be used more frequently as fewer workers would be required, but unfortunately it requires more management on the part of the farmer. The capacity of the labourer must be accurately assessed in order to ascertain the piece-rate. Where accurate work (e.g. levelling tree basins by hand) is done piece work rushing often fouls up the results, and if workers are called back to tidy up this tends to break the spirit of incentive. In this case the use of a "boss boy" is essential, but the experience among the East Cape Xhosa is that they are not used to or do not like a black man in charge of them. With the pruning
being an accurate job piece work leads to cheating, and there is a great deal of difficulty with piece-work picking on an individual basis. The experience has been that price per full bag picked by each picker and a disc given or card punched for each full bag unloaded led to dissatisfaction, in fact to a sit-down strike. One of the reasons was that a picker using a ladder and whose tree has just been picked would have to walk some distance carrying his ladder and a 3/4 bag. Even though the ladder picker's piece-rate was higher than the ground pickers, I surmise that he felt he was being cheated as he had fewer discs issued. This system broke down. (I saw in the Eastern Transvaal the young children carrying and off-loading the bag for the father who was a ladder picker - there was a standard nominal fee for all pickers and this seemed to work quite well, so I imagine it was a psychological "burden" not to pick the same quantity of fruit even though the money might be the same). What we are trying this season is to divide the workers into teams and either employ target work - fill so many trailers per week - or pay a piece rate for each trailer filled by the team (that is evenly weighted in strength and numbers). I shall return to the question of target work later in the discussion.

However, the experience has been that the East Cape Xhosa has not been used to piece-work (either because he is more gregarious and prefers team work, or because the farmer has been slow to realise the overall benefits, or because the nature of the work itself is difficult to organise as piece-work or because of the past abundance of inexpensive labour) and as a result his productivity is low.

I enquired on tour of Eastern Transvaal citrus areas about their piece-work incentives and was told that the farmers could NOT attract labour unless they paid piece-work - "gwazi". Their wage rate was also lower than ours, but because they had dry winter mornings (one does not pick citrus when the tree is wet from dew) and they could start picking at 7 a.m. their workers picked very much more per day (nine hours as opposed to our five hours per day). Our Black labour has always been paid weekly, calculated on a daily attendance. However the unnecessary administrative work involved in weekly payments forced us to attempt monthly payment calculated on the same basis. We did not succeed. However, we did manage to persuade them to adopt this method by increasing the wage-rate. (In order to make the switch we had to lend them three weeks' wages to tide them over till the month's end and then deduct the loan over a period of four months). Their argument has always been that if they were paid monthly they would never be able to make ends meet. This type of labour is not able to
hold cash in reserve for purchases at some later stage and where somebody wishes to "save" for something, we are then called upon to retain a certain amount each week from his wages.

Even though they did not accept monthly or even bi-monthly payment, they had devised a widespread practice amongst themselves which they called "gooi", whereby X would give Y his whole wage packet this week, in order that Y could purchase something big that week. X would therefore forgo his money this week but the following week Y would give his whole wage packet to X. This was in fact a bi-monthly payment, which they would not accept from us.

With weekly payments, we found that where a labourer had missed one day's work in the week he felt his money had already been "broken", so he would more than likely miss more days or even the whole week. However, with monthly payment, we have found that absenteeism has been much lower because he cannot afford to "break" a whole month. We have found however, that the Monday following the end of the month is very badly attended, as a result of drunkenness and sleeplessness. But on balance attendance records are much better throughout the month.

As far as fringe benefits go we had always encouraged our Black staff to plant food and vegetables for their own use but they would never accept the offer, for some reason. I enquired from one of the employees why they did not plant mealies or something and eventually he told me that other labourers would steal his mealies especially if he planted earlier than others. However, last year we divided the whole planting space equally amongst all the labourers, irrigated the area and supplied the seeds for all to plant at the same time. It worked fairly well, although there were some complaints from some of the more enterprising workers that the lazy ones had stolen some of their crops.

On balance, the labourers were very well provided but it appears that we will have to organise this again next season in order to eliminate as far as possible the malpractices involved when undertaken on an individual basis.

This type of arrangement appeals to us more than buying or growing and supplying the end product as rations. It certainly provides an outside interest and an incentive to do the best for themselves as they look after their own area in our working time.
An important aspect in which the traditional lifestyle of the Black worker has changed is that of running livestock. Before the Valley had reached its present state of development, there was an abundance of unused bush veld where workers and their dependents were able to run small livestock and cattle. As these areas were developed, either for livestock farming by the white farmers or cleared for citrus farming, these privileges or facilities were done away with. This had a tremendous impact on the traditional lifestyle and welfare of the African population. No longer were they able to provide their own cattle for lobola, consume their own produce, fall back on "capital assets" when times were hard, nor build up any capital. This is a sad state of affairs and possibly the crux of the malady they suffer today.

And so, with the cost of livestock today it is almost impossible to follow traditional practices in marriage and sacrifices.

However, we have made a small concession with the labourers who tend to the livestock side of the farming operations. They are allowed to run their own livestock but only in conjunction with ours, as a result of which the animals get the same treatment against diseases and illnesses; and they are permitted to acquire livestock from us only in order to avoid spreading diseases through outside animals. Needless to say, the workers were overwhelmed with this concession.

Those labourers not involved in the livestock farming operations have adopted the ownership of pigs, as this animal is able to feed on most types of food and also has a high productive capacity. This ownership has become widespread in the past 2-3 years and is still expanding. Not only do they consume the meat, but they also sell the off-spring, often to white farmers who then fatten them for the market. The labourer is also keenly aware of the value of the animal and is not taken advantage of as in the old days.

The keeping of poultry has also become widespread but these are used mainly for household consumption and not sold generally.

Certain traditional practices have also led to the "impoverishment" of the African, in the manner of "sacrifices" or "geloof", especially amongst the older men. We employ a man who saved R100,00 last year in order to buy a young ox for sacrificial slaughter. Traditionally, everybody on the farm is entitled to partake of the meal but the majority of those who partake are not likely to reciprocate and therefore this man will not get the benefit of a meal given to
him by one who has eaten from his plate. However, the "religious" feeling is so strong that it has as yet not deterred the man from continuing with this practice.

We used to have a lot of trouble meeting our daily/weekly picking quota. We had tried piece-work and other incentives unsuccessfully. We also tried strict supervision and harshness, to no avail. However, from the beginning of the season we divided the labourers into two teams. They had to pick a certain amount of fruit per week, irrespective. If a team did not manage by the end of Friday it would have to come in on Saturdays to finish its quota (and they would still be paid extra for the Saturday). The team/s that finished early could go off early. I am pleased to say that this has worked exceptionally well but I would like to comment on one aspect. They have NOT worked on a Saturday yet. If they were running late on a Friday, they would rather work till full time than come in the next day, even for half an hour and receive an extra full day's wages! The choice is not for more money, but more leisure time. However, they have normally achieved their quota by Friday lunch-time, so that perhaps delaying the picking rate by $\frac{1}{2}$ day has not been worthwhile - however it would make a difference of R6-R10 per month.

I have spoken to the General Manager of the Co-op. packhouse and he confirms this experience of their choosing leisure as opposed to money. It makes one wonder what the attitude is to work. However, what can transpire from this if it continues to be successful is fewer, more efficient, better paid and better cared-for workers. We are at present using only about 70% of the work force we used last year for a similar sized crop!

There is currently appearing a change in the structure of the work-force which is interesting in itself. As I have mentioned, there has been a movement of Black labour to the cities but this has not been applied to the female population of the rural areas to any great extent. This is borne out by the fact that for harvesting we are now employing more female labour (who I might add are more diligent in their work, too). We are also paying them higher wages if they pick from ladders and for this purpose we have had special light-framed ladders made in order that they can do a man's work. The tendency too has been to plant a smaller variety of citrus tree in order to beat the labour shortage and difficulty of picking huge trees from ladders. The smaller tree (and therefore more trees per hectare, the same amount of fruit per hectare and possibly a quicker return on investment in the earlier years) has gained world-wide acceptance and is already bearing the fruits of its recent application.
Role of White overseer, channels of communication, attitudes towards instructions, on-job training

It has always been the practice of farmers who were not resident on the farms or who had a large enough staff to warrant it, to employ white foremen to oversee and organise the black labourers. Unfortunately, they took no pains nor had any interest in learning the Xhosa language. The area of personnel relations was as yet underdeveloped and perhaps in a practical kind of way "unnecessary". The spirit of the pioneer and entrepreneur was dominant as with any new industry and men had work to do and that was that. All that the farmer required of his men was to get the job done and the white foreman say to it. If a labourer was slack he was dismissed immediately and replaced the same day. There was no shortage of labour and tasks were of a back-breaking nature. Little or no attempt was made at communication and it was the white foreman who hired and fired, drove the tractors and maintained machinery. Unfortunately the attitude of the white foreman still prevails today but the situation has begun to change, for a number of reasons. The approach of the farmer is changing, if not for any benevolent reasons then from necessity. The shortage of labour and the climate of thinking has made him more mindful of the needs of his employees. Then too the shortage of white foremen has curbed malpractices and where white foremen are still employed the farmer appears to be keeping a better check on their behaviour. Lastly, more responsibility is given to blacks, and I might add that, although very few are taking the initiative and accepting responsibility, those that do, show great promise in developing skills and "foremanship" in routine work types.

I have one big criticism to level at past farmers and the white foremen. Little or no time was ever taken and no patience was ever practised in seeing firstly that instructions were properly understood and that secondly where they were bona fide not understood the matter was explained patiently in order to teach by mistakes. The attitude adopted was one of "flying off the handle", cursing the worker and from them on he was ignored with regard to any future responsibilities given. A worker was employed, put to work and had to follow the gang. No time was taken to show him the ropes nor in fact see if he had any knowledge of the work he was about to do. At the same time he was allocated a house, and was expected to repair it (normally in an appalling condition) in his own time and with his own basic materials e.g. mud and reeds and old scraps of iron and timber. There appeared to be no follow up, in order to see that he was satisfied with his working and living conditions. This was a great mistake and one of the reasons contributing to the poor quality of labour we have to contend with
today. The good ones have left the agricultural sector and the potentially
good ones were not given incentives to develop - this aside from the wage structure,
which I feel was not the most important factor in determining the quality of
labour.

Fulfillment in employment - aspirations with respect to status/achievement
The old notion that work was a means to an end is regarded as being not quite
tenable today. Sociological research like Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of
needs, maintains that once Man has achieved his basic needs (e.g. food and
shelter) he then seeks other "higher" needs on different planes of psychological
achievement, e.g. fulfillment in employment, achievement and status. Experience
till now has been one of struggling to achieve the most basic needs, and it will
continue to be so for some time to come. But there are small pockets of change
to be seen today, and I will venture to say that this has been largely a result
of better housing and living conditions. We have found that where a worker has
a good house he has fewer gripes in his work. It stands to reason that if he is
not happy and has to struggle with his poor housing, he cannot pay full attention
to his work. I feel that a sense of pride in housing has led to a certain
feeling of status and belonging in employment and there has been great interest
in the question of to whom the next batch of new housing is to be allocated.

Although it may be misleading to say that the average number of occupants per
house is five because it can range between 2 and 20, the modal figure is probably
around 7 or 8. And since our average wage rate for a "family" of five is not
less than the Poverty Datum Line times 108% this does not leave much over where
only one occupant is a wage earner. The moment a second member of the household
becomes a wage-earner, the average wage for a family of five becomes PDL x 216%,
well above the effective minimum level of PDL x 150%.

For this reason we no longer employ the job seeker who has a very large number
of dependents both young and old. Often a man of twenty seeks employment but
because he has aged parents and four or five young children being looked after
by the parents we turn him away, as it is not beneficial to the worker who will
continually struggle to support the dependents. He will most probably turn to
us when debts cannot be met and the quality of his work is not usually good
because of all the trouble he has. Our experience has been that it also affects
the well-being of the general labour force especially as far as their living
conditions are concerned, as this type of worker cannot be properly accommodated
in the type of housing that is provided. It leads to the building of squatter-
type tenements.
Old Age and its problems (squatters)
The prospects for retirement of Black labour are dismal and it is asking too much of the farmer to provide facilities for keeping body and soul together. Consider the situation: a worker retires, and unless there are people living in his house who provide labour on the farm his income is taken away. The small Government pension he receives is hardly enough to feed one person. The chances of his being able to run livestock on the farm are nil. If he has occupied a house which may now be needed to house labour which replaces him he is asked to move out and build his own house on the farm, which he does - he has no option. Naturally, these houses are very poor and detract from the beauty or neatness of the surroundings. One must realise too that the "old folks" seldom live alone. They "house" and look after numerous children left behind by parents having moved to the cities. What about medical attention, schooling, food, clothing? If they "housed" people of labour - supplying capacity and who were in fact employed, the situation would be better financially and comfortwise - they would also not be moved out of the allocated houses. This is a problem that must be solved by the state. Settlement housing will provide material benefits, but what about spiritual and social? A man is born and bred on the farm - he regards his employer as a master and guardian. If he runs into trouble, he goes to his "master" and he expects help, which he normally gets. He has now lived on the same farm for 50-60 years and just because the farmer may not be financially able to provide old-age benefits he has to be physically and spiritually moved out - who knows where - in order to have better material benefits. What price comfort? On the other hand, what are the prospects for those dependent on his custodian role? (It annoys one to see visitors to a farm blame the farmer for this situation - it is indeed a difficult problem to solve). And so with the full courage of my convictions, I am thankful that there exists no minimum wage legislation and also none against child labour. For those living in this household who can provide whatever labour they can (e.g. 12-15 year olds helping with harvesting and those doing light menial jobs for a wage lower than that commanded by able-bodied and competent workers) this definitely relieves a dismal situation and one that is difficult to solve by whomever is at the helm.

Projections for capital and human investment
The scope for capital investment is, as far as one is able to predict long-term, reasonably clear. It can only essentially be improvements in existing capital assets and systems, because of the limitations on substitution set by the very
nature of the industry itself. No doubt greater savings in time and labour are still possible but the technical problems can and will be overcome and more efficiency related to a certain time phase will be obtained in this field (e.g. tractor/acreage ratio etc.).

However, the investment in human capital is precipitated by two causes; necessity and concern. Let us leave the problem of concern, it is the sense of moral obligation and does not concern all who struggle to eke out a living. For our purposes, we will ignore the possible causal relationship that "concern" has on human endeavour. Cold and selfish analysis as far as I am concerned should produce certain expected results (see section on housing) and this in itself calls for response to immediate change. We have discussed housing and the benefit it entails to both employer and employee. It provides the farmer what a home-owning middle class provides a nation - a vested interest, an acceptance of a status quo that is both desirable and financially possible. Social life is the investment the employee undertakes in order to fulfill his economic productivity without unnecessary dismal burden. Therefore the provision of social amenities by the farmer could well be a subsidy payable to the labourer in order to fulfill his task towards his employer. How much more so with provision for training and at a later stage the acceptance by Blacks of responsibility in managerial roles. Schooling? who wants social scientists? We want artisans and farmers, people who can get on with a job with as little supervision as possible. We want trade schools and agricultural colleges in the platteland, and we must train those already employed. Trained, they would be economically more useful and could thus command higher incomes. This could provide middle class Black agricultural labour.

After all has been said and done, I would like to make one important comment. It is easy for those not involved in working with this kind of labour (uneducated and to be permanently accommodated) to find excuses for all the slovenliness and ills associated with Black labour. Just because they are Black does not mean there is no laziness or "unambitiousness" amongst them. Every class of labour has its weaknesses from an employer's point of view. But they also have their strengths, and these we must appreciate, nurture and use as a foundation for building a better future for all:

Arthur Aires
July 1976
Technical Note: In the discussion of the possibilities of capital-labour substitution reference was made to 'mechanical and chemical aids'. In the process of cultivation between the rows of trees and the removal of weeds, the relevant alternative aids are:

1) the tractor-drawn disc harrow and
2) herbicides (or weed killers). These latter may be applied from tractor-drawn sprays fitted either with a boom-spray (no labour) or a spray-lance (held and directed by a labourer). The chemical method is less labour-using because it does not break down the irrigation-banks - which discing does - and so does not require the labour-using process of reconstructing the banks (flood irrigation is employed). If one adopted herbicides one might well do so for 70% of the orchard-area leaving the permanent labour-force to do the remaining 30% entirely manually (spade-work or skoffeling).