AGRICULTURE, FARM LABOUR AND THE STATE IN THE
NATAL MIDLANDS, 1940 - 1960

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Abstract

This thesis analyses agrarian development in the Natal Midlands during the 1940s and 1950s. Based predominantly on archival and primary sources, it seeks to provide some empirical evidence in an area where such information is sorely lacking.

The first chapter briefly analyses the national agricultural economy in the 1940s before turning to the Natal Midlands. The importance of urban factors in fuelling the post-war boom is examined, as is the way in which different groups of farmers reacted to these developments.

The second chapter discusses the position of farm workers. The system of labour tenancy is considered and stress is laid on the various tensions within the system which became prominent at this time. The use of the courts and the police in helping farmers control their workers, informal methods of control and labourers' resistance are also examined.

The next chapter discusses the severe farm labour shortage and shows how it emerged from the tensions within labour tenancy and the increasing urban opportunities seized by farm workers. Attention is also paid to the farm labour policies of the pre-apartheid state and these are compared with the policies demanded by organised agriculture.
The final chapter examines these processes during the 1950s. The effect of the slowdown in agricultural growth is discussed as is the limited success of the apartheid state's farm labour policies. It is suggested that the key to understanding the state's lack of success lies in differentiating between different categories of farmers. The agricultural crisis in the late 1950s and its effects are also analysed. Finally, it is suggested that the key determinants of agrarian development are accumulation and struggle rather than state policies.
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Introduction

At the time of writing, the platteland is undergoing fundamental change. Years of devastating droughts, the slashing of central state subsidies and the imminent of repeal of the foundations of white property ownership, the Land Acts, have all rendered the future of white owned farming uncertain. The land question is higher on the political agenda than it has been for many decades. The urgency of this crisis in platteland power, politics and production was brought home recently to the nation's television watchers when at least 10 000 white farmers temporarily paralysed Pretoria. But amid all the furore farm workers, the vast majority of the platteland's inhabitants, remain almost totally unheard.

Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose. Historically, farm workers have had few means of imposing their opinions, demands and desires on the national agenda. A large component of the national work force (28 per cent in 1970, 13,6 per cent in 1985), they have suffered more than most under white political domination and economic exploitation. Farmers' disproportionately large political power ensures that farm labourers are specifically excluded from most legislation governing employment and safety conditions. All farm workers' remuneration is conditional upon the farmer's favour.

The most striking illustration of their structural weakness has been their forcible dispossession. While there has been
a constant stream of farm evictions since white farmers first used black labour, these turned into a spate in post-war years. Farm workers and their dependants were the largest single group of the 3.5 million South Africans forcibly removed from 1960 - 1982.¹

Furious farmers and the flood of evictees are just two aspects of South Africa's violent rural transformation in the post-war period. But while some study of the evictions themselves has taken place, very little attention has been paid to the social and economic environment in which they took place. The pre-eminent academic journal on Southern African affairs, The Journal of Southern African Studies, has carried only one article on South African agriculture after 1940 in 11 years. The section on Southern African history after 1936, in volume 8 of the Cambridge History of Africa,² accords agriculture, farm labour and farm evictions just one paragraph. As the Surplus Peoples Project pointed out, "[t]he capitalisation of agriculture in South Africa, in the post second world war period in particular, (is) a subject requiring much more specialised and detailed attention."³

This thesis is intended to fill some of that gap. It analyses the interplay between the three key groups of actors - farm workers, farmers and the state - by focusing on the Natal Midlands during the 1940s and 1950s.

¹ The Surplus People Project (hereafter SPP), Forced Removals in South Africa Vol 1, (Cape Town, 1983), p.5.
³ SPP, Forced Removals, Vol 1, p.42.
This period was chosen because it marked a distinct period in agricultural development. As we shall see, the Second World War marked the start of tremendous change in the agricultural sector; for many observers and scholars, this marked the real start of commercial agriculture in South Africa. The most comprehensive survey of agricultural change from the 1940s to the late 1980s periodised agricultural change or restructuring in three stages. The first was from 1948 to the early 1960s, the second from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s and the third from that date to the present.4 The starting date of this study was moved back to the beginning of the decade; while 1948 marked an important change in government, many of the key economic processes and developments in state policy began earlier in the decade.

Natal history has often had a strong provincial concentration: as Saunders recently observed: "Natal is the only part of South Africa where history has always had a strong regional focus."5 While Saunders is referring to Natal as a whole, it is equally true of the different regions within Natal. Many studies of Natal have distinguished three different economic regions within the province: the coastal belt, the Midlands and the northern region.

The distinction is certainly of crucial importance for agrarian history. Both agricultural production and labour systems have taken quite different forms within each zone. The coastal belt differs from the rest of Natal not only in climate but in its cultivation of sugar. Produced in plantations, it is an example of monoculture very different from the diversified farming activities of the Midlands. Labour for these estates, by 1950, came from recruited Mpondo migrants, foreign labour and blacks based in nearby reserves.  

By contrast, the northern region was one of extensive land use. Stock ranching of sheep and cattle predominated with some maize being grown primarily for cattle feed. In 1950 80 per cent of Natal's sheep holding was in this area. It also had the unfortunate distinction of being the region with the greatest soil erosion. Labour in this area was primarily labour tenancy but this institution was often much less developed than in the Midlands. Cash wages were much lower and far less frequent than in the Midlands; cash tenancy and sharecropping occurred most frequently here and the region had the highest ratio of black to white inhabitants.  

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In the Midlands the land was "fairly intensively cultivated" with diversified dairy, wattle, timber and mixed farming. Climate and access to markets were key factors affecting the choice of crops cultivated. Dairy farming, with stock and associated crop cultivation, formed the basis of the farming system along the main transport routes to the north as well as in those areas close to Pietermaritzburg and Durban. Wattle farming was also important; by 1950 the Midlands contained 80 per cent of the South Africa's wattle holdings. In the remoter areas of the Midlands cattle and sheep grazing predominated. Industrialisation after World War One stimulated agricultural development in the Midlands. The dairy industry received a boost as creameries and condenseries provided new markets and the establishment of meat processing plants encouraged livestock production. Two indications of the Midlands' prosperity, in comparison with other areas, are maize yields and debt reduction. In the inter war years maize yields in the Midlands were, on average, 118 per cent higher than those of the northern region and during the Second World war Midland farmers reduced their debt burden by more than farmers in any other part of Natal.8

The Midlands also developed a labour system different from the plantations of the coastal belt and extensive farming areas of Northern Natal. The labour tenant system in the Midlands was often more advanced than that operating in the north. Cash wages were higher, the contracted periods were

longer and the amount of stock permitted the tenant less. A significant feature in the Midlands was the extension of contracted periods with workers being hired by the month at relatively high cash wages.9

As a scholar of this area noted recently, "there are many possible definitions of the Natal Midlands".10 I have chosen a rough rectangle of land between Ixopo, Underberg, Frere and Greytown. While some may object that the northern boundary is outside the Midlands proper, we shall see that this area was at least partially incorporated into the Midlands' agricultural economy. Moreover, I follow Tim Keegan's precedent of drawing on evidence from areas slightly outside that already defined which support my analysis of social and economic change common to the region as a whole.11

Historiography

Existing studies of this agrarian development, both nationally and locally, are sparse. Debate in the available writings has taken place around two main issues, the relationship between agricultural development and state

9 Hurwitz, Agriculture, p.111; Smith, Labour Resources, p.49.
policy, especially farm labour policy, and the transition to agrarian capitalism.

The first area of debate is the role of the state in agricultural development. While noting the huge growth in agricultural production, liberal historians have castigated state involvement in agriculture as 'irrational' (i.e. impeding the operation of market forces). Thus Horowitz forcefully chastised the 'polity' for imposing non-market constraints on the economy. \(^{12}\) Wilson argued that state protection of agriculture had induced "lethargy and complacency" in some farmers, leading to an inefficient farming sector marked by ecologically destructive practices, indebtedness and inefficient labour deployment. \(^{13}\) State involvement and economic development were here held to be processes in conflict.

More recent commentators have seen state policies, especially apartheid, as integrally linked to economic development. They have pointed out that agriculture was a backward sector of a peripheral economy and that these weaknesses necessitated state intervention to fuel agricultural production. Marcus identified the state as a key, if at times contradictory, force in promoting and supporting agricultural restructuring. \(^{14}\) Morris concluded

that state intervention was decisive in pushing "the capitalisation of agriculture onto a higher plane".\textsuperscript{15} Lipton agreed, noting that apartheid was vital to the interests of white farmers "because the needs of white farmers could not, initially, have been secured by... market forces. They required massive state intervention".\textsuperscript{16}

However, few scholars of this period have examined how state policies were put into practice. Morris, for example, claims that state intervention after 1948 was "decisive" in restructuring rural relations of production but provides little evidence with which to substantiate this assertion.\textsuperscript{17} This study reveals that, as with earlier periods, "...state action in the reforging of rural social relations was never as coherently conceived nor as predictable in its consequences as has often been assumed. Government policy was constrained by realities not amenable to social engineering."\textsuperscript{18}

The second connected debate is the controversy around the transition to agrarian capitalism. Much debate in recent rural history has revolved around the question 'when did South African agriculture become capitalist?' As a recent

\textsuperscript{16} M. Lipton, \textit{Capitalism and Apartheid} (London, 1984), p.108. A recent addition to this debate has been the more specific question of the nature of state farm labour policies in the 1940s. For a discussion of this see Chapter Three below.
\textsuperscript{17} Morris, "Apartheid", p.55.
survey observed, the dates chosen range from 1700 to the 1960s. This is because "there is no consensus on the very meaning of capitalism, let alone on what research would help answer when or how it emerged". 19

Morris, in a seminal article, concluded that most farming was capitalist by the 1920s. His criteria were that labourers were totally severed from the ownership of the main means of production and that the principal labour form, labour tenancy, was a "peculiar" form of wage labur, since remuneration from the farmer in both cash and kind was a greater portion of the labourers' reward than the rent and grazing value of the land to which the farmer granted them access. 20

This definition was subject to substantial criticism, theoretical and empirical, not all of which need concern us here. Suffice it to say that other scholars wanted to know when labourers were separated from the land, when farmers invested money in order to make a profit, or when labour power became a commodity for workers themselves before they would define agriculture as capitalist. 21

To answer these and other questions about the nature of agrarian development requires sorely lacking empirical

21 For a full exposition of these arguments see Bradford, "Highways".
information. Much of the theoretical debate is based more on the words of Marx and Lenin than on evidence from the South African countryside. But, as Keegan points out, "[t]rue comparative insight and meaningful generalization is only valid on the basis of detailed and often difficult empirical investigation."22

As part of this investigation we must differentiate between farmers at different levels of development. Studies of earlier periods have stressed the importance of advanced farmers, as the leaders of agricultural development. Few of the treatments of the post-war period make this distinction. Perhaps it is more useful to investigate why some farmers became capitalist producers and others did not, and what this meant for their relations with farm labour and the state, than to bicker about blanket terms applied to the sector as a whole. As we shall see, to understand the nature of agrarian change, the often contradictory developments in state policies, and the behavior of agricultural organisations, it is crucial to disaggregate farmers.

Finally, few studies of this period have concentrated on the role of farm labourers. Morris' study focuses on the development of state farm labour policy but has little examination of its effects on the labourers themselves. For Wilson farm labourers appear to be essentially passive objects on whom history acts. They are oppressed and coerced but play little active role in the development of

22 Keegan, Rural Transformations, p.xvii.
agriculture. Greenberg's preoccupation with the legal and political racial framework excludes any examination of conditions on the farm. In analyses of agricultural change farm workers are frequently neglected.

Information on farm workers which is included is often gathered from state reports and the publications of organised agriculture with little critical appreciation of the various authors' interests. Moreover, there is little awareness of the enormous variety of labouring conditions which exist nationally. The explosion of revisionist case studies of agrarian development pre-1930 has revealed the strong local specificity of this process. However in most treatments of the post-1940, period variations between regions, let alone within regions, have received little recognition. Differentiating farm workers is just as crucial as differentiating farmers.

What, then, should the focus of this enquiry be? Firstly, agrarian development: what processes were involved, where did change stem from and how were the various groups of farm workers and farmers affected? Secondly, state policies: how were they related to agrarian development, whose interests did they represent and how successfully were they implemented? Thirdly, what was the role of farm labourers in the process and how did agricultural change affect the social world of the labourers?

To attempt some answers the first chapter briefly examines developments in the national agricultural economy before looking in more detail at the shape these processes took in the Natal Midlands between 1940 and the early 1950s. The second chapter explores social relations in the Natal Midlands in that period while the third chapter analyses the critical farm labour shortage. The last chapter examines how these processes evolved during the rest of the 1950s.
Chapter One: The Agricultural Economy, 1940 - 1952

The National Agricultural Economy

In 1940 South Africa's agrarian sector bore all the marks of its spectacularly uneven development. White farmers owned 107,536 'farming units'¹ but both farmers and their farming operations varied widely according to region and the type of commodity they produced. The range of agriculturalists extended from commercial sugar and timber plantation owners in Southern Natal, through maize barons in their Highveld stronghold, to advanced Cape wool, wine and wheat farmers; they included the mass of 'boerende boere',² the many who struggled "to keep the Land Bank quiet",³ and the modicum of share-cropping land owners in the South-Eastern Transvaal.

Perhaps the single most crucial difference in this diversity of development, was between those who aimed to farm profitably and those who struggled just to keep going. Numerous historians agree that many of the former had access

² Literally 'farming farmers'- the term indicates those who were neither absentee landlords nor derived much of their income from off-farm sources.. See H. Bradford, "Getting Away with Slavery: Capitalist Farmers, Foreigners and Forced Labour in the Transvaal, c1920 - 1950", paper presented to History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, 1990, p.14.
³ Central Archives Depot, Pretoria (hereafter CAD), NTS 1560/307, D. De Wet to J. Naude, 5 May 1940.
to non-agricultural capital, and most were large landowners. Certainly these progressive farmers were often at the forefront of transforming both the forces and relations production. This grouping tended to dominate national agricultural production. Thus in 1938 just over six per cent of maize farmers grew over 45 per cent of the crop; in the same year just four and a half per cent of wheat farmers produced 55 per cent of that cereal's output.

Apparently, few other farmers hankered after profits. Towards the end of World War Two a state committee reported that:

The large majority of farmers do not aspire to money-making as a vocation. What they want is a reasonable return for their efforts and a reasonable livelihood with economic and social security for their families and themselves.

For such farmers their "reasonable livelihood" was only a couple of hundred pounds a year. In 1941 68 per cent of farmers had a cash income of less than 200 pounds a year.

The low income of most farmers reflected their small contribution to the total agricultural output; in 1939, for example, 80 per cent of maize farmers grew only 20 per cent of the crop.

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5 Calculated from Handbook, pp. 52,70; 54,71.
7 D. Kaplan, "Class Conflict, Capital Accumulation and the State", (PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 1977), Chapter 5, Table C.
Ravaged by such uneven development and, throughout the 1930s, increasingly disadvantaged relative to other sectors of the economy, farming by the 1940s was constantly supplying less and absorbing more of the country's resources. Halfway through the decade even the Department of Agriculture described the sector as "the sick organ of the country's economic body or the drag on our economic life." While agriculture's declining contribution to the national income was the reason for this label it might equally well have applied to its increasing buttressing by state subsidies.

The basis of state support for farming was the 1937 Marketing Act. The Act established a single-channel, fixed-priced marketing system. Control Boards, on which producers' representatives were in a majority, both set the price of various commodities and were the sole purchasers of those commodities. They then sold the products to commercial buyers. The price levels were based on the principle 'cost plus' which in theory meant they were based on the production costs plus a 'reasonable' profit. Since the production costs used in the calculations were those of the less efficient producers, more efficient farmers were presumably assured greater profits.

10 Reconstruction Committee, p.3.
Moreover, agriculturalists were the eager recipients of increasingly large transfusions of state subsidies. According to Simon Brand, farmers were the beneficiaries of "consistent and substantial net official transfers of capital from the rest of the economy." In the early 1940s the average annual state expenditure on agriculture of R8 131 000 was more than eleven times greater than the income it received from farmers. The Land Bank offered low interest loans to farmers unable to obtain credit from the commercial banks. From 1939/40 to 1945/46, by far the two largest components of state financial assistance to farmers were rebates on railway costs for agricultural inputs and supplies (R12 000 000) and subsidies for interest payments on loans (R7 726 000). The cost of supporting producer prices under the Marketing Act was at least partly born by consumers, so that the financial protection of food producers fell "directly on the lowly-paid unskilled workers." By the early 1950s state spending on agriculture had risen 420 per cent to R34 149 000.12

State aid to farmers involved more than financial support. As the segregationist, capitalist state pumped finance into an ever porous sector, like all capitalist states, it simultaneously deployed its powers "to create and sustain an adequate, stable and docile supply of labour."13


13 B. Berman and J. Lonsdale, "Crises of Accumulation, Coercion and the Colonial State: The Development of Labour
"labour is the backbone of agriculture" and farmers had suffered labour shortages since the 1920s, the state evolved a massive arsenal of draconian laws designed to satisfy the agriculturalists' constant craving for cheap and coercible workers. The Masters and Servants laws criminalised breaches of contracts, including oral ones, between farmers and their employees. The last amendment to these was in 1926. But farmers' continuing complaints about the difficulties of obtaining and controlling labourers spurred the state to pass the 1932 Native Service Contracts Act. This Act tried to tighten the shackles that bound farm workers to their employers. It allowed the farmer to evict a whole family if only one member failed to render service and it prevented labour tenants from looking for urban employment without the farmer's written permission. It also increased the power of African household heads over their children by raising to 18 the age under which youths could be bound by contracts entered into by their parents. Although this last provision did not directly further empower the employers it was as vital as the other clauses in the state's attempt to boost the supply of farm labour. Much farm labour, particularly in Natal and the Transvaal, was executed by youths pitched into service by their patriarchal elders. As William Beinart recently pointed out, the fact that most white bosses disparagingly addressed their black male

workers as "boys" should not obscure the reality that many who worked on the farms were actually children.16

The last pre-war law which directly regulated the supply of farm labour was the 1936 Land and Trust Act. Chapter 4 of this Act aimed to increase the number of workers available to farmers by abolishing cash-tenancy and increasing the service demanded of labour tenants. When proclaimed in any one district it required the registration of all labour tenants, established Labour Tenant Control Boards to limit the number of tenants living on a farmer's land and defined the minimum period for which labour tenants had to work. Chapter 4 was enforced only once. In 1937 it was applied in Lydenburg where the raising of the minimum period of service provoked massive tenant migration to unproclaimed districts. The widespread labour resistance threatened to disrupt totally agricultural operations and local farmers successfully demanded its withdrawal.17

For the farming sector, and indeed the whole economy, the Second World War ushered in a remarkable period of growth and change. The Gross National Income rose from 395.6 million pounds in 1939 to 666.8 million pounds in 1946. One of the most important aspects, for our purposes, was the expansion of the industrial sector. Wartime conditions both limited imports and stimulated demand so that, between 1939 and 1945, the gross value of industrial output grew by 216

per cent. By 1946 industry had overtaken agriculture and mining to become the largest single contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a position it maintained unbroken for at least the next twenty five years with the sole exception of 1951. 18

Much industrial growth was highly labour intensive. In this period manufacturing enterprises were mainly established by small scale entrepreneurs for whom capital limitations and the difficulties of importing the necessary machinery ruled out capital intensive industrialisation. These conditions continued into the 1950s and, together with state encouragement of labour-intensive methods of production, ensured that industry remained dominated by small-scale labour intensive businesses. In 1953/4 65 per cent of industrial establishments had less than 9 employees while 92 per cent had less than 49. 19 This boom in labour-intensive manufacturing dramatically boosted the industrial work force; from 1938/9 to 1950/1 the number of industrial employees increased by 230 per cent. 20

Not only did the work force grow in size but it also changed in its racial composition. During the war many white workers left to join the army and were replaced by an influx of blacks. The temporary war-time phenomenon became a permanent peace-time feature; black employment in industry

19 Innes, Anglo American, pp.167-170.
rose from 143 069 in 1938/9 to 375 007 in 1950/1. Industry's urban location provided a further boost to the urbanisation process; the urban share of the total population rose from 32.4 per cent in 1936 to 42.6 per cent in 1951.21

For farmers the wartime boom had two effects both of which led to an increased demand for their products. Firstly, the population's real income increased with the "lower income groups [gaining] more than higher groups, the non-whites more than the whites."22 Greater disposable income resulted in higher consumption of foodstuffs: the average South African ate a third more in 1952 than she had in 1937-39. Not only did she consume more but her diet was increasingly varied. With their higher wages blacks bought not more mealie meal but larger quantities of bread; low income whites bought not more bread but greater amounts of dairy products, eggs and meat. A contemporary study noted:

There has been not only an increase in the food consumption per head of the population but also a shift towards luxury foods the production of which requires a greater outlay of productive factors.23

The manufacturing expansion also raised the demand for agricultural products from the industrial food and beverage sector. According to Africa: "The special conditions arising out of World War 2 resulted in the establishment of several industries which looked on the agricultural sector to provide them with raw materials." Two indications of

21 Ibid.
23 Ibid., p.164.
this sector's growth were the rise in its output and the increase in value of the materials it utilised (excluding fuel, light and power). From 1938-39 to 1950-51 the former grew by 417 per cent while the latter rose by 446 per cent.24

Stimulated by these incentives agricultural production soared. From 1940/41 - 1950/51 the volume of agricultural production rose by over 76 per cent. There was a particularly rapid upsurge in growth from 1949 - 1952 as the Korean war raised both prices and demand.25

Increased output was integrally linked to the development of the sector's productive forces. Regular agricultural employment grew from 658,412 in 1937 to 801,211 in 1952. This was accompanied by a rise in mechanisation. From 1937 - 1950 the number of tractors increased by 800 per cent and the number of combines by 883 per cent. Chemical and biological advances were also introduced as farming techniques changed and the consumption of fertilisers, pesticides and improved seeds grew heavily after the war. For example, in 1937 farmers used 365,000 tons of fertiliser while by 1950 this had expanded to 574,000 tons.26

The increase in mechanisation was but one indication of the increasing concentration of capital in farming. From 1937-46 the total rise in agricultural investment, at constant

prices, was R33 million while from 1947-52 it was R115,2 million. This included not only machinery and motor vehicles but also livestock and fixed improvements such as houses, sheds and dams. During the latter period machinery, implements and motor vehicles accounted for 55 per cent of the net capital formation in agriculture.27

The war also wrought changes in land prices and the agricultural credit supply. Land prices rose steadily during the 1940s partly due to the rising profitability of farming and to inflationary pressures but also because of the ready availability of credit.28 While, as we have seen, some credit came from the state, the Land Bank reported that certain investing institutions and private persons with surplus funds on hand, which could not be readily invested in other directions, have been only too willing to assist farmers on the basis of the unduly high market prices at which farm properties have been and are changing hands.

Moreover, it complained, farmers were using these sources of credit to pay off their Land Bank loans so as to avoid the relatively heavier instalments which the Land Bank demanded.29

Wartime conditions also led the state to alter its price policies for agricultural products. Two fundamental considerations shaped these. The first was the changing position of the country's agricultural sector in relation to

the world economy. In contrast to the position in the late 1930s when local prices were mostly higher than overseas, the prices of Union farm products in the 1940s were on the whole lower than abroad. And where as previously the main problem had been how to isolate local prices from the depressing effects of unremunerative exports, after the war the authorities concerned themselves mostly with the task of preventing rises in local prices resulting from the importation of agricultural products at high prices. For example, during the war maize consumption so increased that it became a crop which, far from having an exportable surplus, suddenly threatened to become a crop which needed to be boosted by imports. Overseas prices in 1947 were double those of the local producers and

\[\text{[t]his change from an exporter to an importer position meant a change from a local producer price not higher than world price minus transport charges to anything up to the overseas price plus transport costs after the war.}\]

This did not affect all farm products. Wattle and wool were largely consumed abroad so they were free from control and vegetables, due to high transport costs and perishability, were also left uncontrolled.30

Another important factor in determining prices was the pressure from industry and mining to keep food prices as low as possible. The wartime urban industrial expansion meant that the industrial work force was increasingly composed of workers separated from the reserves who spent a large part of their wages on food. At the end of the war industrial and mining organisations campaigned vigorously to have

producer prices reduced and the Marketing Act amended. The Smuts government appeared to accede to these demands between 1946 and 1948 when local prices remained constant as international prices soared and the government, mindful of domestic food shortages, halted agricultural exports. The Nationalists' promise of substantial price increases played an important part in attracting the support of rural voters in 1948. While they did introduce price increases soon after coming to power they were similarly constrained by pressure from other sectors of the economy.31

While farmers' prices rose their labour supply dwindled. Throughout the 1940s farmers faced a widespread labour shortage. A large portion of those blacks who boosted the industrial work force were young men who resisted the harshness of farm work and fled to the cities where they sold their labour power for greater remuneration. In the Transvaal the farm labour supply increased by only 2.3 per cent from 1937-46 while in the Orange Free State it actually fell by 1.8 per cent.32 The Fagan Commission claimed in 1948 that while the national black population grew by 18.3 per cent from 1936-46, the same figure for rural blacks outside the reserves was only 15.5 per cent. It concluded: "Natives have indeed moved away from the rural areas." In 1956 the Tomlinson Commission maintained that 40 per cent of the increase in black urban residents in the previous two decades had come from white-owned farms.33

31 Kaplan, "Class", pp.387-394.
32 O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, pp.232-5;
The diminishing labour supply and the pressures on agricultural prices from industrial and mining organisations prompted the South African Agricultural Union (SAAU) to mobilise farmers around these issues. The union launched a campaign in 1944 to unite farmers and their organisations. A year later the President urged farmers to "set aside all political and other differences and to organise a strong and united front." In 1946 all farming co-operatives joined organised farmers in the SAAU which, it declared, "form[ed] the voice of the agricultural community in South Africa."34

The Agricultural Economy in the Natal Midlands

The trends in Natal broadly followed those at a national level. Local industry expanded; the number of industrial establishments in Natal rose from 1,292 in 1936 to 2,273 in 1952/3 while the number of industrial employees increased from 44,674 to 127,111. The rate of industrial expansion in the area around Durban was greater than that of any other region except the southern Transvaal. Durban industry supplied markets in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and along the Johannesburg-Durban railway line as far as Klip River and Dundee.35

Natal farmers increased their output and mechanised in line with their counterparts around the country. For example, between 1936/7 and 1949/50 milk production in the province rose by 134 per cent and the number of tractors by 277 per cent.36

The local development of productive forces occurred unevenly. Mechanisation was mostly the preserve of wealthier agriculturalists. According to the local press, it was not an option for "most farmers" since machinery "prices are so impossibly high." Moreover, disruptions to the supply of agricultural machines during and immediately after the war led farmers to buy "equipment as and when it became available rather than risk the possibility of it not being available when required by them." By 1952 wartime obstacles had gone and supply had caught up with demand. However, some of the machinery farmers purchased during the late forties was either unsuitable for local conditions or of inferior quality. When machinery was in short supply many farmers, often the victims of duplicitous salesmen, "frequently purchased ... implements [which] did not in all respects meet their requirements."37

Like their national counterparts Natal farmers were frequently heavily indebted. In 1949, one survey found that

on smaller farms the debt burden was, on average, 68 per cent of the fixed capital and on larger farms 52.9 per cent. Only 20.3 per cent of farmers had no debt at all while roughly a third, the authors estimated, would have difficulty meeting their liabilities. The extent of a farmer's indebtedness was a crucial factor in determining his overall economic performance. Certainly in dairy farming interest payments were often the farmer's largest single cost.

War-time developments also led to local agriculture and industry becoming more closely meshed. Durban's food and beverage industry was one of the region's most successful spheres of manufacturing. While much of the city's industry faced a short-term profitability crisis during the late 1940s and early 1950s this sector was the only major industrial group to overcome these difficulties by successfully expanding its share of all local industrial activity. Industrialisation, both in Durban and inland, provided a considerable stimulus for further agricultural expansion, especially in the dairy industry, as the following discussion of different agricultural sectors reveals.

The dairy sector was at the cutting edge of progressive agriculture in the Midlands. From 1929-30 to 1949 the Midland's share of Natal's milk production rose from 48.7 per cent to 61.2 per cent and the amount produced from 8.92 million gallons to almost 17 million gallons. Dairy production fell into two categories: fresh milk farming and industrial milk production.41

Fresh milk farming occurred close to its markets, large urban centres, and near to major road and rail routes. In the Midlands this meant that these dairy farms were close to Durban and Pietermaritzburg and in Lions River, Mooi River and Estcourt along the main transport axis from Durban to Johannesburg. By 1949 over three quarters of Natal's fresh milk came from the Midlands.42

Fresh milk production was highly capital intensive. Suppliers to urban markets had to invest in byres, milk rooms and other equipment to meet the health regulations of municipal health departments. A survey of Durban's fresh milk supply noted in 1944 that:

> Improvements in the standards of public health have led to stringent regulation of the conditions under which milk is produced and delivered... To conform with the Public Health regulations has frequently necessitated considerable capital outlay.43

As we shall see, the capital outlay demanded by health regulations often squeezed out smaller producers.

41 Hurwitz, Agriculture, p.111.
42 Ibid., p.168.
Profits in dairying depended "primarily on the yield per cow". To obtain the highest yields some fresh milk advanced producers invested in high quality cattle. In Richmond, for example, progressive dairy farmers after the war imported bulls from America and Holland to improve the quality of their herds.44

More commonly farmers tried to increase their yields through intensive feeding and fodder costs were a high proportion of their total costs. The Department of Agriculture reported that "successful fresh milk farming in Natal is to a large extent dependent on whether the feed requirements for the herd are bought or produced on the farm." The expense of commercially produced feed led many farmers to cultivate their own. This contributed to a high degree of mechanisation in these dairy farming areas which itself increased capital requirements. A survey of fresh milk farmers in Natal in 1948 found that 73 per cent of the sample owned tractors and 61 per cent owned lorries whereas in the country as a whole the corresponding figures were 19 per cent and 24 per cent respectively. While most of the farm-produced feed consisted of maize, progressive fresh milk farmers also laid down high yielding artificial pasture. In 1949-50 such farmers in Lions River and Richmond owned 30 per cent of the total area of artificial pasture in Natal. A study conducted in 1941 found that the average daily yield per acre on pastures was nearly 18 times

as great as the yield from the veld. But because it cost so much to establish the authors concluded that the expense would not be warranted unless the cows grazed on the pasture were of the highest quality.\textsuperscript{45}

Industrial milk production was the other part of the dairy industry. The growth in urban areas and more importantly the burgeoning spending power of their black population boosted the sales of condensed milk. Food processing companies were quick to exploit the market. In 1925 a local Nestle subsidiary set up a condensery in Estcourt and in the next 25 years it established a further five plants in the region. By 1952 the company's milk intake had risen from 100,000 gallons a year when it commenced operations to four million gallons. Carnation Milk set up a condensery in Bergville and by 1949 it consumed 80 per cent of the district's milk output.\textsuperscript{46}

This infusion of industrial capital fuelled the development of local farmers. The condensery companies had their own extension services of field men who advised suppliers on managing veld-grazing, establishing planted pastures and other methods of improving the quality and quantity of milk output. By 1946 other producers looked enviously at the boost the Estcourt factory had given farmers "not only

\textsuperscript{46} Recent Developments, pp.168, 178-9.
financially but also in the improvement of farms and farming methods." In 1948 the province's farming newspaper declared:

> It has been shown that the erection of the factory at Bergville has not only doubled the price of land in that area, but has brought the farmers in that area unbounded prosperity.

And by 1949 industrial milk production was dominated by large-scale producers. A survey of industrial milk producers in the Estcourt and Bergville regions in 1949-50 found that 14 per cent of producers produced 46 per cent of the total output. 47

Fresh milk and industrial milk producers shared common concerns. Both were under severe pressure to cut costs. For the former the incentive came from the high capital costs of meeting health regulations and the high running costs of feed and interest payments. For the latter pressure came from the comparatively low producer prices which they received. During the last years of the war the state lowered the price of industrial milk to encourage more farmers to produce fresh milk which was in short supply. After the war the state kept prices low under pressure from industrialists because the largest consumers of condensed milk were black urban workers. Natal's producers were at a special disadvantage because their costs were the highest in the country. Other areas of the country started to farm industrial milk on an extensive rather than an intensive basis incurring lower costs and the government, noting the steady increase in national production, refused to raise

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prices substantially. These policies clearly benefited efficient large-scale producers.

The quest for high yields led to a polarising of the dairy industry, especially the fresh milk sector. The successful farmers ploughed capital into their farms and sought to produce as efficiently as possible. This often entailed the introduction of milking machines which slashed labour requirements; a small, full-time, relatively well paid labour force was the desideratum. Those dairy farmers close to towns, whose production was often the most intensive, faced the added competition of urban employment opportunities. According to the president of a Pietermaritzburg dairy association:

Farmers close to urban areas are continually losing labourers who prefer to slip away to work in the town... than work on the farm. The situation has reached a state where milk production is so encompassed with difficulty that although he had been 25 years in dairy farming he is now practically out of it all together.

The work discipline of dairy farming also prompted labourers to seek other employment. A local official reported that "dairy 'boys' have the worst time [of all farm workers]. They have to be up at 3 a.m. and work through until sunset."

The combination of labour resistance, high costs and low prices forced some dairy farmers to quit dairying

48 NAUNLU, 10 April 1953; NAUNLU, 27 March 1953.
49 Recent Developments, pp.203-4.
50 FHC, 14 April 1950.
altogether. By 1950 the Natal president of the Industrial Milk Union said there was "a pronounced swing away from dairying to sheep farming in once dairying areas." The attraction of sheep farming was clear. Wool farming required less labour and far less capital outlay than dairying. And in the early 1950s wool prices rocketed as the Korean War boosted international demand.

Far more labour intensive was wattle farming. In the Midlands, New Hanover and Umvoti were the main wattle districts although Richmond and Kranskop also contained substantial holdings. The wattle industry, like other farming sectors, contained different types of producers. A contemporary survey found that "the industry is in the hands of a few large private plantation owners or limited liability companies and also a large number of individual wattle growers." Around 90 per cent of wattle was exported and the Second World War produced a huge rise in both demand and price. Between 1943 and 1952 the price per ton roughly quadrupled. The price rise, and also concerted propaganda by the processing companies on the long term profits to be enjoyed from the crop, led to a large expansion in the area devoted to wattles. In 1949-50 57 per cent of Natal's wattles had been planted in the preceding five years and a further 31 per cent in the five years before that.

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52 FHC, 26 May 1950.
53 Farming Opportunities, p.67.
54 Hurwitz, Agriculture, p.57.
56 Couison, Beaulieu, p.300.
57 Handbook, p.95.
On the large plantations labourers were usually recruited from nearby reserves but for the large number of smaller growers labour tenants performed the bulk of the work. Wattle farming was particularly suited to labour tenancy since labour demands were mainly seasonal, largely concentrated in a five to seven month period, and the low wage costs helped farmers cope with the large initial capital outlay.

Midlands farmers often farmed more than one type of commodity. A survey of Lions River farmers in the early 1940s found that around half had mixed farms, another quarter were dairy farmers and the rest mostly stock producers with a couple of wattle farmers. Dairy and livestock farmers often grew maize and other crops for fodder. Non-dairy specialists frequently engaged in some dairy farming since it could provide a monthly cash income which will enable the farmer to obtain the money needed for current expenses while he is waiting for his crops to mature or is busy raising livestock, sheep or wool to the marketable stage.

In 1949 around 76 per cent of farmers total income in the Midlands came from livestock (mainly cattle - 51.6 per cent and sheep - 16.4 per cent) and the other 24 per cent came from crops.

59 Natal Archives Depot (hereafter NAD) Pietermaritzburg, 1 HWK 3/2/2/1 2/5/9, Farm Labour Advisory Board: Tabulated Results from Questionnaires (n.d, 1942?).
60 Farming Opportunities, p.58.
61 Agriculture in Natal, p.135.
Local farmers displayed the same economic diversity as their national colleagues. True, the average Midlands farmer was better-off than his national counterpart. In 1941 71 per cent of the region's farmers had an annual income of over 200 pounds a year compared to the national average of 68 per cent below that sum. But there was still an important distinction, that between progressive farmers and others. Many of those farmers were the members of long established settler farmer families and this was no coincidence. Land constituted at least 41 per cent of dairy farmers' capital investment and agriculturalists who did not have to spend capital on purchasing land or paying off mortgages were in a comparatively advantageous position to sink capital into their productive operations. It was such farmers who left estates worth tens of thousands of pounds.

An important post-war addition to this group was local urban professionals who invested in Midlands farms. Archival evidence shows only a handful of such people but it is not clear whether this represents the total or is indicative of a wider trend. Certainly those documented took a keen interest in following progressive farmers by attempting to transform rent paying tenants into labourers.

62 Hurwitz, *Agriculture*, p.111.
63 Tomlinson, "Economic Study", p.8. Since dairy farming was often more capital intensive than other forms of agriculture, land probably formed a greater proportion of capital investment in other types of farming.
64 E.g. Natal Witness, 18 January 1944.
65 NAD, 1 HWK 3/2/2/1 2/35/2, J.W.G. Walters to Magistrate, 29 January 1951, and see NAD, Chief Commissioner, Department of Cooperation and Development, Box 7, N2/10/3 Pt 2.
Rising land prices also led urban speculators to buy land without conducting agricultural operations. During the war the imposition of Excess Profits duty led urban capitalists to invest in land "on a scale which would be beyond the hope of economic return if their livelihood were to depend on making use of the land." Such land was often located close to urban areas, the speculators banking on urban expansion raising the land value. Neighbouring farmers complained that this "un-South African attitude of speculation(sic)" was accompanied by the problems of absentee landlords, minimal production and even less control over the farm's black inhabitants. Or, as the region's farmers' newspaper complained:

"City men let 'Jim Fish' and denizens 'run' the farm during the boss's absence. The house lies vacant and idle; the stocks and crops just grow like Topsy, except where pilfered. Jim has a glorious time and we all know how he can work during the boss's absence."  

Long established farmers dominated farmers' associations. For example, one Richmond farming family provided presidents for the local agricultural society in 1930-31 and each year from 1936-47. Another family provided the same society with presidents in 1934-35, 1950-52 and 1956-60. The threats from industry to the Marketing Act discussed above prompted leading farmers to call all agriculturalists to organise together. "Never in the history of agriculture was it so necessary as now for farmers to organise", declared a local farmers' association president; "We must be strongly

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66 NAU Archives, Pietermaritzburg, NAU Minutes, October 1947.
67 FHC, 11 May 1945.
68 Coulson, Beaulieu, p.313.
organised so that in the face of opposition we can stand firm and voice our grievances in such a manner that recognition will be taken of it." But such appeals to the farming community concealed an attempt by advanced producers to foster their own interests. Part of the organising process involved raising subscriptions to finance the associations' work. But when, for example, the Winterton association raised its subscription some farmers complained that it might well lead to a loss of members. The executive replied that it "fully realised... that a sorting of the wheat from the chaff would probably result." Moreover, while membership of these organisations was not confined to progressive farmers they often sought and obtained executive positions. Since attendance at meetings was almost always low they usually had an influential voice.

There were, of course, regional variations in the outlook of farmers' associations which reflected the different stages of agricultural development. Thus in 1951 the associations of Mooi River and Nottingham Road were lauded by the local farmers journal for having "always been in the front of agricultural development, chiefly because their committees have been composed of energetic progressive farmers." On the other hand the Umvoti Agricultural Society consisted largely of members who farmed in "marginal areas" and kept stock "of a nondescript type and of such poor quality". The society was the only one in the Midlands which totally

69 FHC, 3 August 1945.
70 KCL, KCM 33675, Winterton Farmers' Association, Minutes Book 1, 15 May 1945.
71 NAUNLU, May 1951.
72 Farming in South Africa, June 1945.
refused to adopt state measures during the 1940s, taken up mainly by local advanced farmers, to attract farm labourers through improved conditions rather than coercion.73

Progressive farmers also dominated the Natal Agricultural Union, the chief representative of agricultural interests in the province. During the 1940s the NAU underwent extensive reorganisation to counter industrial and mining companies' attacks on the Marketing Act and the state's apparently increasing antagonism to agricultural interests. The NAU Expansion committee reported in 1944 that: "Agriculture is facing a crisis. There is no room for dissension or division among farmers. They must all pull together if agriculture is to weather the storm ahead." The first meeting to plan this reorganisation was held under the auspices of the Nottingham Road F.A. It included progressive farmers from all over Natal. According to one participant writing in 1966 "... every man who has since become well-known in Organised Agricultural circles in Natal was there."74

By 1947 the NAU had finished its reorganisation. It had a new constitution, held meetings more frequently, and for the first time included representatives of cooperatives and special interest groups. It turned the positions of President and Vice President from voluntary to salaried positions. The pressures on farmers and the reorganisation led to renewed interest in the NAU. From 1944 to 1946

73 See Chapter Three.
income from members' subscriptions rose from 690 pounds to 2986 pounds. By April 1951 the organisation was confident enough to launch its own newspaper, NAUNLU, which at first appeared monthly but from 1952 came out every fortnight. All subsequent presidents were prominent progressive farmers as was the first full-time organiser, appointed in 1945, J.J. Botha. At a time when most farmers employed labour tenants, he employed all his labourers full time, paying them comparatively high wages and giving them two weeks leave every year.

Another indication of advanced farmers' domination of the NAU was its call for the implementation of full-time wage labour at a time when the vast majority of farmers in the province employed labour tenants. From 1945 to 1956 the NAU's policy was for "[t]he farm labour-tenant system to be abolished to be replaced by regular full-time employment." The NAU organiser constantly tried to persuade farmers of the inequities of labour tenancy arguing "[t]hey [labour tenants] only work six months out of the year. Fancy six months! You farmers slave and labour twelve months in and out." Moreover the labour policy of the SAAU - which also advocated full time wage labour - was based on a memorandum drawn up by the NAU and subsequently adopted by the national organisation.

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75 Ibid., p.37.
76 NAU Archives, NAU Letter Book, J.J. Botha to Chairman, 7 August 1956.
77 FHC, 19 October 1945.
78 FHC, 17 May 1946.
79 Farmers Weekly, 10 October 1945, and FHC, 22 March 1946.
For some large producers these arrangements did not go far enough. Representatives of special interest groups, those farmers organised according to the commodity they produced, at times argued that their interests would be best served by being outside of the provincial agricultural unions. For example the Nottingham Road meeting referred to above concluded that geographical representation of farmers had become "obsolete" and advocated that the NAU consist of representation according to "specialised interests." The same views were expressed at a NAU meeting in 1951 but on both occasions the view that the agricultural union should include representatives from farmers' associations, special interest groups and cooperatives prevailed.80

The expansion of organised agriculture and the rise in costs of agricultural inputs led to the growth of farming cooperatives. The state marketing organisation forecast during the war that, while in the past cooperatives had aimed to

stabilise prices and obtain a higher average return for their producer members by orderly marketing, in the future the major field for cooperative endeavor will no doubt be in the supplying and rendering of the wide variety of requisites and services required in production.81

In February 1942 the Natal Farmers Cooperative was established to supply farm machinery, requisites and fertilizer on a cooperative basis. Various farmers' associations set up their own similar institutions but they faced a variety of pressures. Industrial competition was

80 NAUNLU, 9 September 1966; NAU Archives, NAU Minutes, 8 August 1951.
one of these. In 1949, for example, a cement shortage prompted cooperatives to import cement at 9s 3d per bag. However the cement manufacturers responded by taking advantage of state subsidies and offering imported cement to farmers at 5s 3/4d per bag. Capital limitations were a further threat to cooperatives. In the early fifties Mooi River farmers formed a "Buying Exchange" to buy farming requisites on a non-profit basis. However in less than two years it was forced to close because some members demanded more credit than the exchange's limited capital could provide.

While farming organisations were dominated by progressive farmers two issues united farmers. The first was the labour shortage. Farmers continuously bombarded agricultural journals and their own organisations with complaints of insufficient workers. Year after year the NAU passed resolutions noting "with considerable anxiety the situation brought about by the exodus of natives from the farms" and seeking to draw "the attention of the government to the shortage of farm labour." The labour shortage was certainly one of the most pressing concerns of organised agriculture but it did not affect all farmers to the same extent. For example, in New Hanover, the magistrate noted that a general labour shortage persisted with the exception of "the larger farms on which a more liberal allowance of agricultural and grazing ground is possible and which are

82 NAU Archives, NAU Minutes, 28 February 1949.
83 KCL, KCM 24440 Mooi River Farmers' Association Minutes Book 6, Report for 1955-56.
84 NAU Archives, NAU Minutes, Resolutions to 1948 Congress.
therefore attractive to the native." Moreover, as we shall see, farmers' individual interests prevented united action by agriculturalists themselves to end the shortage although most were united in favour of increased state action.85

The issue which most powerfully united farmers was the control of land ownership. In the early 1940s the urban furore in the Transvaal and Natal over "Indian Penetration" was echoed in the countryside by an equally virulent anti Indian campaign. The NAU sent delegations to the Prime Minister and Farmers' Associations' held densely packed meetings urging the government to combat the threat of Indians buying farms.86 The NAU agreed to urge farmers to insert clauses in their title deeds preventing the lease or sale of land to Indians, a campaign which found considerable support in farmers associations.87 However the commission appointed to investigate the phenomenon reported that it had received no complaints of Indians buying farms from whites in the Midlands except for five bought in New Hanover since 1927. Instead, it found that many allegations of penetration remained unestablished with witnesses unable or unwilling to give specific examples.88 It was a typical example of 'moral panic'. At a time when farming interests were under threat from labour resistance and other sectors of the economy, farmers "identif[ied] a 'responsible enemy',

85 NAD, 1/NHR 3/2/2/7 2/9/5, Magistrate to CNC, Natal, 26 June 1943. For the labour shortage see Chapter Three below. 86 NAU Archives, NAU Minutes, October 1944; FHC, 8 December 1944. 87 NAU Archives, NAU Minutes, 4 December 1945; KCL, KCM 54088 Camperdown Agricultural Society Minutes, 9 January 1946. 88 Union of South Africa, Report of the Indian Penetration Commission (Pretoria, 1942), p.46, p.4.
and emerge[d] as the vociferous guardians of traditional values."\(^{89}\)

Nonetheless the Asiatic Land tenure Act passed by the Smuts government to combat this apparent threat set up the means by which farmers controlled the sale of land. It established the Land Tenure Advisory Board which had the power to screen all potential buyers and occupiers of "white" fixed property. When the Group Areas Act was passed in 1950 the board extended its powers to include holding public hearings and advising the Interior minister of its findings.\(^{90}\) From the late 1940s the NAU reached a "gentlemen's agreement" with the board that all applications for the exchange or purchase of land in rural areas by blacks were referred to the Union. They then informed the relevant farmers' association which had 14 days in which to object.\(^{91}\) It is unfortunately not possible to tell exactly how influential these associations were in such applications but according to the NAU records very few objections from farmers associations were overruled.


\(^{91}\) See for example, NAU Archives, NAU Letter book, J.J. Botha to H.C. Taylor, 22 January 1953. There are literally hundreds of such letters in these books.
Conclusion

Certain trends stand out clearly. The first is the interlocking of the industrial and agricultural sectors. The expansion of agriculture during the forties stemmed from higher urban demand generated by industrial expansion and the concomitant rise in the "purchasing power of the industrial workers." In farming areas local industries not only provided important markets but also played a key role in developing production facilities. Urban capitalists also bought up farms and formed an important source of credit for farmers expanding production during the post-war boom. Urban and industrial motors of change as well as state intervention pushed "the capitalisation of agriculture onto a higher plane." For the 1940s, as for earlier decades, much of the impetus for agrarian development came from extra-agricultural sources.

The development of agriculture clearly benefited the large scale producers. Economically and organisationally they strengthened their position in the farming sector. Much of the expansion in production was due to "increased capital outlay" and it was this group in particular who mechanised, obtained larger "credit grants" and won the "confidence of credit-granting institutions." This did not mean they

95 Farming in South Africa, April 1955, p.203.
ignored their non-progressive colleagues. They certainly had common interests with the other farmers including the major issues of the Marketing Act and the labour shortage. But often the voice of 'Organised Agriculture', which claimed to speak on behalf of the 'farming community', articulated the interests of progressive agriculture.

Finally the nature of agricultural development must be clarified. While the urban, industrial growth expanded the market for agricultural products, it did not automatically result in increased production. Although demographic and industrial change provided the "incentive to risk capital and labour in an attempt to improve productivity", the particular opportunities an individual farmer seized depended on a tangled web of factors. These ranged from access to capital, links to processing companies and access to transport through to land price changes, producer price changes and class relations on and off the farm. For any particular farmer the relative importance of these variables depended on the particular historical circumstances. But while any attempt to assert the perpetual primacy of any single factor is bound to be riddled with exceptions, studies of economic development elsewhere suggest that it is the structure of class relations, of class power, which will determine the manner and degree to which particular demographic and commercial change will affect long-run trends in the distribution of income and economic growth - and not vice versa.  

Labour relations certainly appear to have been crucially important. If labour was the largest single expense of many a farmer, it was also practically the only expenditure over which he had at least partial control. The often high capital costs of expanding production added pressures to suppress wage bills. Natal's dairy farmers found that "when labour expenses comprise more than 20 per cent of the gross farm income, the operator's earning is very low." Thus controlling labour was a key element in the farmers' bid for profitability and it is to this area that we now turn.

99 Ibid., p.64.
Chapter 2: Social Relations, 1940 - 1952

By 1940 most farm workers in the Natal Midlands were labour tenants. In 1941 almost all Lions River farmers had labour tenants on their farms while two years later the majority of New Hanover farmers employed labour tenants. In 1944 the Weenen magistrate reported that "natives in this district are mostly labour tenants" whilst in Bergville blacks residing on farms were "largely labour tenants".\(^1\) Contemporary studies estimated that outside the coastal sugar and timber areas seventy five per cent of Natal's farm labour consisted of labour tenants.\(^2\)

Under the labour tenant system a tenant household, rather than merely an individual, contracted to work for a farmer for part of the year in return for access to land for grazing and ploughing. In the Midlands the most common contract was the six month system in which the tenants worked for six months on the farm; for the rest of the year, males in particular moved to the towns or mines to boost their cash income. By the 1940s many farmers in the region paid cash wages for at least six months. Tenants received a

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\(^1\) Natal Archives Depot (hereafter NAD), Pietermaritzburg, 1 HWK 3/2/2/1, Advisory Board Minutes, 26 November 1941; NAD, 1 NHR 3/2/2/7 2/9/5, Advisory Board Minutes, 20 March 1942; Central Archives Depot(CAD) Pretoria, JUS 1013, 21/280 Weenen Inspection Reports, 1944; CAD, NTS 1779 Chief Native Commissioners Conference 1944, Annexure A.

low cash wage in the contracted six months and a higher wage for each extra month worked.

Contracts and conditions varied from region to region, valley to valley and farm to farm. In some areas tenants were contracted for nine months "in" and three months "out", in others the system was twelve months "in" and twelve months "out". On some farms the whole family worked for one six month period; on others their labour obligations were staggered throughout the year. However the essence of all contracts was that a family could only remain on the land while it supplied able bodied labour.

Not all farm workers were labour tenants. A handful of capitalist farmers employed full-time labour. In Lions River, one of the most advanced agricultural districts in the Midlands, only 19 per cent out of a large sample of farmers made their employees work between 10 - 12 months a year although 76 per cent favoured a full year's period of service.³ A further category of farm workers were those who lived on labour farms. These farms, usually situated in the thornveld in Msinga, Umvoti and Weenen, were owned by farmers who had another farm elsewhere. They allowed the tenants to stay on the labour farm in return for providing labour on the other farm. Some of these were owned by

³ NAD, 1 HWK 3/2/2/1 2/5/9, Farm Labour Advisory Board: Tabulated Results, 1942.
wealthy agriculturalists from the Orange Free State, a substantial number by the "richer" stock farmers of Mooi River and most others by farmers from around the province.4

A few were owned by non-agricultural landlords. For example the National Co-operative Dairies owned several labour farms in the Weenen area which provided labour for their factories throughout Natal. However, they sold the labour farms when the Minister of Labour ruled that the company had to pay the full dairy industry Wage Determination rates to the factory workers regardless of where they lived. Some bakers, butchers and garage owners in small rural towns were also alleged to have brought in tenants from labour farms to work in their businesses.5

Payment for labour had three components: cash, land and payments in kind. Cash wages were low. Recorded wages during the early 1940s for adult males were usually some ten shillings per month for the contracted period; occasionally they ranged as high as forty shillings. Children received up to half the amount of their fathers. If tenants continued to work outside the contracted period, their wages doubled or tripled. But even this latter amount was

5 NAD, National Co-operative Dairies Minutes, Book 1, 24 October 1944; NAD, Chief Commissioner Pietermaritzburg, Department of Cooperation and Development, (7) N2/10/3 pt 2, CNC Pietermaritzburg to Magistrate Weenen, 23 December 1943.
only half the average wage for unskilled labour in the nearby urban areas. For the average tenant at least two months wages went on the payment of government taxes. These were usually set at 1 pound per adult male, although they could be 1 pound 10s or more depending on the number of wives. Moreover, by no means all tenants received cash payments. There were still plenty of farmers, at least in the Estcourt district, who paid no wages at all.

The number of homesteads on each farm depended on many factors not least the size of the farm, the amount of labour the farmer required and the number of workers in each homestead. In Lions River most farmers had around six to ten homesteads on their farms; few had more than twenty. Typically between six and twenty adult males rendered service on each farm as well as up to ten male youngsters, although one farmer employed sixty two adult males and forty seven youths! The tenants built their huts out of sods or timber and thatch. Each homestead was allowed an average of five to ten acres for grazing stock and planting

6 NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/1c, Native Labour Advisory Board, Report for 1942. and Raefe Bros to Estcourt F.A., 6 January 1942; NAD, 1 HWK 3/2/2/1 2/5/9, Farm Labour Advisory Board, Tabulated Results 1942.
7 NAD, 1 HWK 3/2/1/1 2/5/3, Magistrate to H. Hill, 30 July 1946.
8 O. Walker, Kaffirs are Lively (London, 1948), p.73.
9 NAD, 1 HWK 3/2/2/1 2/5/2, Magistrate to CNC, 26 November 1942.
10 NAD, 1 BGV 4//3/1/18 2/9/2, Magistrate to CNC, 30 June 1943.
crops, and in many cases the landlord ploughed tenants' fields and supplied fertiliser and seed. Most, it seems, followed the farmer who allowed "my natives four acres to eight acres to plow according to the size of the family and the available labourers."\(^{11}\)

Payments in kind were another important part of the tenants' reward. Food rations almost invariably consisted of mealie meal; what was given in addition depended on the whim of the farmer. Cattle farmers sometimes slaughtered bull calves or calves they were not going to rear and gave the meat to their labourers. Others supplied vegetables when they were in season. A Bergville farmer claimed he supplied his workers with

[m]ealie meal, separated milk, pumpkins, marrows, and potatoes once a week during two months. All bull calves are slaughtered and cooked for the labourers from my dairy herd. I have always looked upon this as a part of their rations.\(^{12}\)

However this appears to have been the exception rather than the rule. In 1941 a survey of sixty per cent of Lions River farmers found 54 per cent gave skimmed milk when available, 37 per cent gave a meat ration, (usually bull calves), 36 per cent supplied sugar and 25 per cent gave seasonal vegetables.\(^{13}\) Sometimes not even mealie meal was supplied.

\(^{11}\) NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/1c, Anon to Estcourt F.A., 24 December 1941.
\(^{12}\) NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/9, C.G. Dicks to Magistrate, 28 June 1943.
\(^{13}\) NAD, 1 HWK 3/2/2/1 2/5/9, Farm Labour Advisory Board, Tabulated Results.
In 1946 Joseph Nxculmana reported to the magistrate at Estcourt that, despite having a contract with his landlord that he should be supplied with a bag of mealies each month, not only had he not received any mealies but the farmer refused to advance him any money in lieu of the mealies.\textsuperscript{14}

Farmers were legally obliged to meet their tenants' medical expenses for up to ten shillings a day.\textsuperscript{15} But the first attention which most injured and sick tenants received came from the farmer's wife. This ranged from first aid and home remedies to attending ill babies at the farm house and visiting those unable to leave their huts.\textsuperscript{16} Farmers were not above plying their tenants with patent medicines; an Umvoti farmer claimed he had considerably reduced the incidence of measles as a result of "dosing his natives with Male Fern".\textsuperscript{17} Those who required attention from doctors were sent to town or occasionally driven in by the farmer or his wife. Some farmers paid all medical fees, others only paid for sick children, while yet others refused to pay at all. To avoid such expenditure the NAU unofficially advised farmers to get their workers to say either that they were not employed by the farmer or else that at the time they

\textsuperscript{14} NAD, 2 EST 4/1, 7 March 1946.
\textsuperscript{15} NAU Archives, Pietermaritzburg, Letter Book, Organiser to P[?] Mitchell-Innes, 15 April 1952.
\textsuperscript{17} Killie Campbell Library (hereafter KCL), Durban. KCM 33662 Umvoti Agricultural Society Minutes, Book 4, 16 February 1946.
were not resident on the farmer's premises. Under either of those conditions the worker would receive free medical attention. But it is not clear how many tenants went to white doctors. Certainly a local health inspector disapprovingly noted black patronage of "numerous licensed and unlicensed native doctors (who) aggravate rather than improve conditions."

A number of diseases afflicted labour tenants. Venereal disease, tuberculosis, dysentery and typhoid all ravaged farm workers and their families. According to one survey at least fifty three per cent of tenants used the veld as their toilet and at least sixty per cent collected water from a river or rain water. The Ixopo health inspector reported in 1949 that "[d]irt diseases still exert a heavy toil and the minor childish ailments still provide a huge mortality rate through the lack of knowledge of simple hygiene and nursing." Local mobile clinics ran immunisation programmes against diseases such as diphtheria and smallpox but notification of their visits was sent to the farmers who were then expected to inform their workers. Some farmers, however, begrudged their labourers the time off to receive

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19 NAD, 1 IXO 4/1/2/7 13/2/6, Report of Health Inspector, 1949.
21 NAD, 1 IXO 4/1/2/7 13/2/6, Report of Health Inspector, 1949.
such attention. In January 1944 the farmers at Richmond were notified by the police that the District Surgeon would be visiting the area to vaccinate all the local farm occupants against smallpox. He had threatened to prosecute the farmers if they failed to bring in their labourers for inoculation. Even so, the turnout when he arrived was "exceedingly poor". It seems that tenants' most effective barrier against illness was the fact that their homesteads were dispersed over a wide area rather than clumped together. An official reported that the "isolated nature of their habitations appears to be the greatest safeguard against infectious diseases."  

Education was another area where poverty and dependence on the farmer crippled labour tenants. Debbie Bonnin's research with a group of ex-labour tenants revealed that, in the 1940s and 1950s, twenty three per cent had no formal education and sixty seven per cent had at most standard four education. Apart from inadequate school facilities, the expense of educating a child often meant that only one or two children from the same family could attend at the same time. Godfrey Labazana recalled of his eldest brother: "my father couldn't afford to pay all these school expenses so he had to leave. And even myself came the stage when I had to leave." Both he and his brother went to work in a

22 Natal Witness, 21 January 1944.
23 NAD, 1 IXO 4/1/2/7 13/2/5, Annual Report for 1950.
factory to earn money to educate their younger siblings. For Simon Ntomebela it was the farmer's intervention which abruptly ended his school career. His journey to school took him past the farm house and once he saw me...and said no I want that boy in the fields here at the farm. And he ordered that on Monday I must come and report for work. I never went to school anymore.24

There is little information on religious observance among farm workers. In a contemporary survey the author only had "mutually contradictory impressions" to draw on. There was some evidence that farmers were relatively disinterested in their workers' religious lives thus allowing the labourers to go to religious ceremonies freely. In all cases, however, "the personal link was decisive" - in other words the farmer had the final say in whether or not the tenants attended church.25

Occasionally the conditions of labour tenancy were laid out in a written contract drawn up by the farmer and his tenants which was registered with the local magistrate. In practise many farmers relied on oral agreements, regarding written contracts as bureaucratic irritations.26 Most agreed with the anonymous farmer who argued that the fact that

26 Loudon, White Farmers, p.75.
a native resides on a farmer's farm should be sufficient proof that such a native has agreed with the other members of his family to render the recognised six months contract and the yearly agreement... should be done away with.27

Nonetheless the law required a fresh contract each year; for farmers the main incentive was that Masters and Servants cases were sometimes thrown out of court if there was no written contract.28 Since few tenants could read the contract it was usually explained to them by the farmer or the local magistrate.

Though the exception rather than the rule, the written contracts illuminate the farmer-tenant relationship. Their language was often complex and extremely difficult for the tenants to comprehend. One common formulation began:

That whereas the said (landlord) is the owner of the farm, and the undersigned natives are tenants thereon the kraalhead hereinafter referred to entering into same on their own behalf and on behalf of their inmates of their respective kraals under the age of 18 years...29

The contract's terms revealed the inequalities. One farmer agreed to supply firewood to his tenants provided they brought a similar amount to his house for his own use. Phrases like "as employer may chose" or "as employer may desire" were scattered liberally throughout the contract in clauses relating to such varied matters as rations and

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27 NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/1c, Anon to Estcourt F.A., 24 December 1941.
29 NAD, 1 WEN 2/1/1/1/2, Wood v. Mbata.
absence from work.\textsuperscript{30} The contract represented in writing the lived relationship of farmer and tenant; while both had obligations to the other it was crushingly weighted in the farmer's favour.

Social relations under labour tenancy involved more than those between farmer and tenant. While the homestead head had obligations to the farmer alone, the other members of the homestead were beholden to both figures of authority. For the tenant family labour tenancy involved a tangled web of class and gender relationships; many of these had their roots in pre-capitalist societies where women had played the role of both labourers and bearers of future labour power in the form of children.\textsuperscript{31} In the 1940s women and children were still often trapped in situations which benefitted primarily married men.

In the homestead the patriarchal family system meant that fathers controlled their offspring's productive capacities. Although the labour tenant contract was signed by the family head much of the labour he contracted to supply was performed by his children. In Estcourt and New Hanover the admittedly skimpy evidence indicates that these patriarchs made up only 40-45 per cent of the contracted labour

\textsuperscript{30} NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/9, Terms of Work.
force.\textsuperscript{32} In Lions River more solid data shows that although ninety per cent were obliged to work, they only comprised some 55 per cent of the workforce.\textsuperscript{33} Not only did the younger male family members do much of the work but they also received few rewards. Only married men were granted access to land. Payments in cash usually went only to the homestead head. V. Zwane, for example, recalled that after he worked constantly on the farm for two years because no other family members were available to take his place the farmer refused to pay him directly. Instead the farmer told him "[y]ou have finished today, go and fetch your grandfather to draw your money for you." When the old man arrived the farmer gave him the money saying: "Ndolozo, your child has worked for me... here is the money I am giving him."\textsuperscript{34} Non contracted children were expected to work "as required" by the employer for daily remuneration but their fathers generally demanded that any cash wages be handed over to them.\textsuperscript{35} The meagre rewards of children's labour nearly always ended up in their fathers' pockets.

Homestead women were similarly ensnared. Labour tenant wives and mothers were valued not merely for their labour

\textsuperscript{32} Calculated from contracts in NAD, 1 WEN 2/1/1/1/2, Case 123 of 1952, and Case 120 of 1953.
\textsuperscript{33} NAD, 1 HWK 3/2/2/1 2/16/5, Farm Labour Advisory Board, Tabulated Results.
\textsuperscript{34} KCL, Oral History Project, KCAV 363, Interview with V.W. Zwane, 18 November 1986.
\textsuperscript{35} NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/9, Terms of Work. Loudon, White Farmers, p.117.
but especially for their reproductive capacities. Tenant women did form an important part of the agricultural labour force; throughout the province in 1936, 26.5 per cent of workers who lived on the farms were women although it is not clear whether this meant that women 'sold' their labour power as individuals or, instead, as part of the labour tenant system. In New Hanover women constituted almost half the workforce, twice the average amount of other districts. This was probably due to the greater use of women in that district's timber plantations. More widely, women were often called upon to perform hoeing, weeding and domestic service in the farmer's home. Casual labour in New Hanover and many other districts was carried out mostly by women and girls but their wages were one half to two-thirds of men's for the same tasks. This form of discrimination was widespread. Estcourt farmers' representatives agreed that men's wages should exceed those of women despite the fact that "in certain spheres, e.g. hoeing and housework, women rendered more valuable service." Many women, however, performed such work without cash reward since their household's contract stipulated that "all women, girls and unemployed umfaans to work as may be required; without any cash pay."

While women were gradually drawn into the labour force, they were still valued most for their reproductive rather than their productive powers. For husbands their wives were the main means of the homestead's social reproduction. They raised children who laboured on the farm and in return for whom the farmer provided the patriarch with either cash or land to cultivate. They also maintained homestead life, performing domestic duties and cultivating the family fields. For fathers daughters meant lobola, the payment of cattle by son-in-laws on marriage. Cattle still retained their importance as a form and sign of wealth and the means by which married men obtained access to the labour and reproductive power of women. One group of patriarchs explained to a local administrator in 1946 that "cattle means everything to (them) and they invest their money in stock because they need it for lobola." Cattle changed hands primarily as part of a marriage contract and on the farms, noted one observer, the predominant function of the clan networks was "the regulation of marriage". Married women's domestic duties were intended to be their main contribution to the smooth functioning of agricultural life. For married black men, and indeed for farmers, the tenant

NAD, 1 NHR 3/2/2/7 2/9/5, Magistrate New Hanover to CNC, 26 June 1943; NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/9, Minutes of Native Labour Advisory Board, 19 March 1942; NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/9, Terms of Work, 1 January 1942.
38 NAD, 1 WEN, 3/3/2/1 1/16/3, Magistrate Weenen to CNC, Minutes Of Native Meeting at Weenen, 19 March 1946.
39 Loudon, White Farmers, p.84, p.117.
women's subjugation was an essential part of the labour tenant system.

The system did not go unchallenged. During the 1930s and 1940s an increasing number of young women throughout the province defied their parents, often by seizing opportunities in the towns, and rendered patriarchal control ever more fragile as they began to gain control of their lives.40 On the white-owned farms young women clawed back at least a measure of independence primarily by starting to control their own sexuality. These challenges to patriarchal authority prompted an unholy alliance of state officials, farmers and homestead heads for all of whom the women's actions threatened to undermine not only the labour tenant system but also the hegemonic social order. "It's a disgrace the way the natives are carrying on these days", thundered a Richmond farmer. He described three couples living on his farm who had children but were not married. These scenes, he added, were "taking place on all the farms in the district" and he suggested that the state impose fines on the guilty males and the fathers of the women involved. An Estcourt farmer opined that the best way to counter "immorality among the younger natives" was to give patriarchs greater power. But homestead heads sought more

material enhancement. As their daughters' partners began to pay lobola only partially or, in some cases not at all, some patriarchs demanded larger and larger payments. Those more closely meshed in the capitalist economy began to require payment in cash instead of cattle.41

Despite these developments most tenant families remained locked into the patriarchal system. Married men continued to appropriate the benefits of female and child labour and, for the majority of tenant families, "the terms of black family life [stayed] predicated on the servitude and bondage of the family."42

Control and resistance on the farm

The labour process on the farm has been a neglected area in South African agrarian writing, a strange omission for a historiography seemingly besotted with labour relations. Unfortunately for this period the evidence is once again very skimpy. Contractually many labourers were bound to work "[i]n summer, from one half hour after sunrise to one half hour before sunset. In winter from sunrise to sunset."43

41 NAD, 1 RMD 3/3/1/8 N1/15/4, J.H. Mcullough to Magistrate, 8 July 1944; NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/9, Anon to H. Forder, 24 December 1941; NAD, 1 RMD 3/3/1/8 N1/15/4, Meeting of Chiefs, Indunas and Natives, Richmond, 22 September 1946.
42 Marcus, Modernising Super-Exploitation, p.100.
43 NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/9, Terms of Work.
The sort of labour performed varied with the type of farming carried out. In dairying the demand for labour was fairly regular; cattle had to be fed and milked each day. But the demand for labour varied a great deal during the year on farms with timber or arable land, planting and harvesting both being particularly busy times of the year.

Many farmers appointed one labourer as an induna or foreman to superintend the work of the other labourers. Their roles ranged from close supervision to simply acting as a conduit for orders from the farmer. Often they were men who had status as senior family heads or heads of a lineage segment. In these cases their oppressive powers in the one context reinforced, and were reinforced by their status in the other. Some independent church leaders were also employed as indunas possibly because "the farmer [regarded] his influence on the other Africans on the farm as wholesome."44 Positions of special responsibility were filled by men of a similar position. Posts such as grooms, stock handlers and cooks were often the preserve of individual families whose male members inherited the position from the previous generation.45 Here, as for farm workers elsewhere, the "division of labour was also often a status division."46

44 Sundkler, Bantu Prophets, p.88.
45 Loudon, White Farmers, pp.106-113.
In addition to social hierarchy farmers drew on a wealth of mechanisms for controlling their tenants. One of the most important sanctions was the withholding of benefits labourers received outside the terms of their contracts. A contemporary observer noted that troublesome tenants would find the farmer withholding one or other of the payments in kind which are customary but by no means obligatory. Usually no relation is made between the offense and these penalties when they are put into operation by a farmer, a Black merely finds that, over a period of time certain rewards are withheld from him.\(^{47}\)

Farmers recalled longstanding loans or refused to grant one the next time it was requested. They ordered tenants to destroy their oxen or dogs on the pretext that they were damaging fences or attacking livestock.

Control did not necessarily mean punishment. Farmers used other subtler means for emphasizing their authority. Old clothes, for example, were a common form of payment in kind for workers and their families. To prevent the tenants selling the clothes, the clothes - if not already damaged - were deliberately torn. The farmers justified their action by stating that it was well known that blacks preferred to wear torn clothing.\(^{48}\)

Debt bondage was another instrument of control. Their meagre cash payments meant many if not most tenants were

\(^{47}\) Loudon, *White Farmers*, p.128.
\(^{48}\) Loudon, *White Farmers*, p.123.
rarely out of debt to their employers. One official, otherwise sympathetic to local farmers, believed that
to expect a married man with a family to work for six months in each year for a wage as low as 10/- a month, is merely compelling him to contract debts which will take him the rest of the year to work off.49

Young men seeking to raise lobola for a wife were particularly frequent supplicants for loans. Granting such demands had two advantages for the farmer; firstly, men with family responsibilities usually proved more stable workers; secondly the continual burden of repayment tied the tenant closely to the farm and kept him at work.50

However it was the threat of eviction which remained the most important sanction for maintaining the farmers' domination. Evicted blacks lost more than just a source of employment - they lost land on which to accumulate cattle, land on which to grow crops, and land which had often been occupied for generations by their ancestors. The constant possibility of eviction hung over tenants, often forcing them to accede to the landlord's demands. V. Zwane recalled how when the farmer demanded that he work his second year in a row it was "hard because I had served a long time." However he could not refuse "because of the peculiar circumstance that if argued with him our family might be driven out; I didn't like that and decided to submit."51

49 NAD, 1 NHR 3/2/2/7 2/9/5, Magistrate to CNC, 26 June 1943.
50 Loudon, White Farmers, p.99.
51 KCL, KCAV 363, Interview with V.W. Zwane.
Farmers were not required to give a reason for an eviction - three months notice was all that was legally necessary. A variety of factors spurred the eviction process. Sometimes the tenant offended the farmer's political beliefs. For example the luckless Johannes Kuberlu, returning from military service, found himself without a place to live because his pro-Axis landlord refused to accept tenants who had served on the Allied side. More often tenants were cast out for failing to meet the farmer's labour needs. Sickness and old age led to V. Makathini's eviction in 1947 after thirty-two years service with the same farmer. When a hail storm destroyed Nathan Mbele's crops and left him and his family without food, the landlord not only refused him permission to work elsewhere but gave him notice to quit for even considering such a move. For the farmer labour was all; "If a native will not work I will not keep him."

Evictees faced a myriad of problems once they were thrown off the farm. Foremost was the question of finding another residence. In Lions River farmers collaborated to ensure the evictees were excluded from other farms in the district. The local Native Commissioner noted in 1947 "the practise in the Lions River District of prospective employers of native

52 NAD, 2 Est 4/1, 16 March 1946.
53 NAD, 1 HWK 3/2/2/2/2/2/35/2, V. Makathini to Magistrate, 9 June 1947; NAD, 2 Est 4/1, 7 March 1946; NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/1c, R. Kemp to H. Forder, 27 December 1941.
labour getting into touch with the previous landlord... with a view to establishing his abilities and character."54 However "in surrounding districts... he would not suffer any difficulty in finding employment."

Despite the farmers' range of powers over their workers they still resorted frequently to violence. Van Onselen has recently argued that violence was not the central tenet of social relations throughout the entire platteland. He claims that the similarity in class position of the share croppers and bywoners in the South-West Transvaal meant that co-operation rather than violent antagonism was the essence of relationships in that area.55 While that may have been true for that region's share-cropping economy, in the Natal Midlands the class position of farm workers was far removed from that of their employers and violence continued to be employed in dispensing "the quick-triggered, big-booted brand of private justice which farming districts [exercised] with impunity."56 Questioning farmers' orders led to whippings, threshings and employers reaching for their guns. For example, a dispute over whether Maleni Mbata struck a cow too hard while driving it to be milked resulted first in the farmer punching him, then forcing him to the ground and

54 NAD, 1 HWK 3/2/2/2 2/35/2-2, NC to CNC, 11 June 1947.
56 Walker, Kaffirs, p.168.
finally shooting the fleeing worker in the back.\textsuperscript{57} Labourers who escaped from such conditions were liable to be pursued by farmers in cars and fired on if found on the road.\textsuperscript{58} Merely the inkling of wrongdoing was enough for some farmers to grab their guns. A Nottingham Road farmer received a report of a "suspicious" person on the farm. On going to inspect he spied a "poacher" whom he shot dead at a distance of 500 yards. To his "utter astonishment" it turned out to be one of his own tenants.\textsuperscript{59} Tenants who hunted too near their landlords' herds were liable to be shot at and killed.\textsuperscript{60}

The landowners' domination did not prevent their tenants clawing back space of their own. Their resistance can be divided into two categories; that conducted while the tenants were on the farm and that carried out when they had been given notice to quit.

On the farm the scope for overt resistance was limited since the tenants' presence depended on the farmer's assent. Nonetheless workers did find ways to avoid or lessen the ever present grip of the farmers' control. A contemporary observer noticed the passive resistance displayed by rural blacks which he explained as

\textsuperscript{57} NAD, RSC 1/1/192, Case 7 of 1949, Rex v. Mouton.
\textsuperscript{58} NAD, RSC 1/1/183, Case 13 of 1945, Rex v. Meyer.
\textsuperscript{59} NAD, 1 HWK 1/1/1/1/1, Case 500 of 1940.
\textsuperscript{60} NAD, 1 IPD 1/1/1/1, Case 180 of 1942, Rex v. Lindsay.
their way of insulating themselves against the shocks, rebuffs, insults, surprises, chicanery, and dictates which can be visited on them by the white man...⁶¹

At work tenants wriggled out of the work discipline which their employers tried to impose on them. It is hard to quantify these actions. Farmers were always prone to complain about their workers but the vehemence and frequency of their complaints on this issue indicate that these deeds occurred often. In a typical recrimination the Colenso Farmers' Association claimed that tenants were lazy, regarded work as "a necessary evil" and laboured in "a spirit of indolence, inefficiency and lack of ambition."⁶² The tenants' reluctance to work at the farmer's pace was compounded by absenteeism. In New Hanover the magistrate disapprovingly noted that workers are irregular, thinking nothing of taking Monday off, after a weekend orgy of beer drinking and the farmer is therefore unable to arrange his work beforehand with any certainty that the necessary labour will be available.⁶³

Back at work breakages caused by tenants were "considerable" and one farmers' association concluded that the natives have deliberately set out on a cunning scheme of nothing more or less than wholesale sabotage - their policy is to deliberately mismanage, neglect, destroy and render farming futile so that farmers will be driven off the land.⁶⁴

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⁶¹ Walker, Kaffirs, p.219.
⁶² NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/1c, Colenso F.A. to Advisory Board, 28 August 1942.
⁶³ NAD, 1 NHR 3/2/2/7 2/9/5, Magistrate New Hanover to CNC, 21 June 1943.
⁶⁴ NAD, 1 EST 3/21/2/6 2/5/1c, Anon to H. Forder, 24 December 1941; Same file, Magistrate to CNC, 21 June 1945.
The farmer's provision of meat was a particularly bitterly contested area. On those farms where the owner provided no meat or did so only rarely cattle and sheep tended to be "lost" from time to time. The Farm Labour Committee reported in 1939 that many witnesses "stated that the illiberality of the meat ration was one of the causes of stock theft throughout the country." The Natal agricultural paper The Farmer several times carried the same cartoon showing a worker pointing to a dead sheep and earnestly telling the farmer it had died of disease while grasping a huge bloody knife behind his back. In Lions River in the early 1950s a farmer who only gave tenants meat from animals which had died accidentally stopped this practice when he suspected the labourers of deliberately poisoning his cattle. However this resulted only in more cattle dying - this time from barbed wire thrust into their entrails.65

Tenants facing eviction sometimes used even more dramatic means to vent their grievances. They no longer needed to mollify the farmer; he had already deprived them of their land and livelihood, and with no official channels through which to address their grievances their vengeance was often swift, serious and costly. In 1944, for example, sixteen year old Konkoso Makwanase was sentenced to two months in prison and six strokes with the cane for burning down his

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65 Report of the Farm Labour Committee 1937-9, p.46; FHC, 14 June 1948; Loudon, White Farmers, p.123.
employer's cow shed. A month previously his father had left the farm but the owner, to whom his father owed money, insisted Konkoso stay to work off the debt. Konkoso desperately wanted to leave the farm and vented his frustration through arson.\textsuperscript{66} Similarly in 1950 Loyi Magubane burned down a mealie shed, a hay stack and 15 acres of black wattle trees causing damage of around 570 pounds. He had been evicted for being "very insolent from time to time." Loyi's grievance stemmed not only from his eviction but also because his ex-landlord had persuaded a neighbouring farmer who had offered Loyi's family a place to live not to grant them a place on his farm. As Loyi expressed it: "He stopped the other European who had offered to take us from taking us. That is why I burned."\textsuperscript{67}

While these incidents gained widespread publicity they were less common than other subtler forms of resistance; forms less damaging to the farmer but considerably more beneficial to the tenants. Cases where evicted tenants managed to keep their cattle on their ex-employer's land were not uncommon. Thus a Lions River farmer complained that "a native has left the farm and has not removed his cattle. Against all orders he has handed them over to another native on the farm."\textsuperscript{68} Occasionally tenants simply ignored their eviction orders.

\textsuperscript{66} NAD, 1 CPD 1/1/1/1/1 Case 588 of 1944, Rex v. Makwanse.
\textsuperscript{67} NAD, 1 RMD 1/1/1/1/1, Rex v. Magubane.
\textsuperscript{68} NAD, 1 HWK 3/2/2/2 2/35/2-3, R.D. Cooper to Magistrate, 4 June 1948.
and continued to plough, plant and reap crops for months and sometimes years after they were due to leave. In addition tenants leaving a farm had to obtain a permit to move their stock. At least one enterprising tenant who owned no stock at all got such a permit and drove off two head of his former employer's cattle which he later sold. While such actions lacked the impact of arson or sabotage their constant undermining of authority helped adjust the balance of the hugely unequal social relations.

On labour farms the lack of close supervision by the owners allowed the tenants greater scope for resistance. Local administrators constantly complained that tenants were not under "proper control" which resulted in "endless trouble". Much of the area's stock thieving was alleged to emanate from the labour farms with "whole flocks disappear[ing] at times." Tenants on these farms often owned large flocks of cattle, sheep and goats whose persistent grazing caused great soil erosion. Particularly in times of drought, the black stock owners frequently cut the fences of neighbouring farms and grazed their cattle without permission. Such bids to increase their access to land caused "a lot of friction" with the adjacent white landowners.

70 KCL, KCM 33675, Winterton Farmers' Association Minutes, Book 1, 8 September 1945.
Tensions over land shortage were often expressed in faction fights. These conflicts, which occurred both between different so-called tribes and different sections of the same tribe, took place almost every year and almost invariably resulted in fatalities. Much contemporary white opinion believed these clashes were "a normal occurrence in Bantu life" and were "not the result of White legislation, nor connected in the slightest with White affairs."72 But both local officials and recent researchers have revealed that they were frequently attempts by local blacks to re-assert their control over land which had been taken from them by white colonists. A local administrator reported that various local "tribes" had settled on the white-owned farms "more or less in blocks. These blocks are now regarded by them as their own tribal area."73 As Clegg explained: "Although the farms belonged to whites, the 'phantom districts' into which the farms were incorporated 'belonged' to the labourers."74 Many of the faction fights were started when members of one ethnic group came to live on a farm which was regarded by another as its own territory. An official admonished chiefs whose followers he held

73 CAD, NTS 131/332, Native Commissioner Estcourt to CNC Natal, 23 November 1949.
responsible for outbreaks of violence that "a Chief who lives on a private farm has no territorial jurisdiction and it rests with the owner of the farm who he will have as a tenant on his farm. The farm belongs to the Europeans and not the Natives...."\textsuperscript{75} Such reprimands went unheeded and as the land shortage intensified so did the faction fights.

Ideologies on the land

Powerful ideas and attitudes infused social relations on the land. For many blacks their tenancy represented a link with the land. They did not live there to work but worked to live there; "You worked for the right to settle and build houses there."\textsuperscript{76} At this time many tenants (at least fifty per cent according to one survey)\textsuperscript{77} had lived on the farm for generations although the women were more likely than the men to have moved from their homes since on marriage they moved to their husbands homestead.\textsuperscript{78} Nonetheless elderly male tenants could often remember when farm land had been a location, recall its transformation into white-owned farm

\textsuperscript{75} NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/10/3E, Minutes of a Meeting held on the farm "Erinsdale" Estcourt, 22 October 1941, sgd. Acting Native Commissioner Estcourt.
\textsuperscript{76} KCL, KCAV 363, Zwane interview.
\textsuperscript{77} Bonin, "Class", p.84.
\textsuperscript{78} Loudon, \textit{White Farmers}, pp.78-9.
land and reel off the names of previous owners. If it was not land which they owned it was still land to which they belonged.

For many farmers, on the other hand, the land was the foundation of their way of life. Underlying their outlook was the belief that the farm lands were "the birthright of the European", a fact apparently beyond dispute since "many of the farms had been settled by the same families for 80 years." Blacks on the platteland were there solely to provide labour for the farmers. "To many farmers," remarked a local magistrate, "the native is purely a labourer." The NAU president expressed similar sentiments but with rather more vigour. He wanted to see "circumstances created that would drive the native to work. The man who did not work should not eat." A correspondent to a local farmers journal noted that "[f]arm natives do not as a rule like to move away from the areas where they have grown up." Therefore he admonished, "let them earn the right to stay living in these areas otherwise they must go." The SAAU

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79 E.g. NAD, 1 HWK 3/2/2/2 2/35/2, Magistrate Lions River to CNC, 31 December 1943.
80 For similar attitudes in the Transvaal see A. Claasens, Umhlaba - Rural Land Struggles in the Transvaal in the '80s (Johannesburg, 1989).
81 KCL, KCM 33675, Winterton Farmers' Association Minutes, 6 June 1945.
82 NAD, 1 NHR 3/2/2/7 2/9/5, Magistrate New Hanover to CNC, 26 June 1943.
84 FHC, 23 January 1948.
representative, appearing before the Native Education Commission, stressed that education for farmworkers would have to "take account of their future role as an economic unit in European areas." He emphasized the Union's belief that "the greatest need of the native is not literacy but education aimed at... inculcation of Christian norms and the correct attitude to labour." 85

Most farmers regarded blacks as children who required guidance. Male tenants were "boys" whether aged seven or seventy. The African was ignorant, uneducated and had to be shown what was best for him. The NAU, for example, claimed that it would be irresponsible to pay a high cash wage because "money is not always spent wisely in procuring the essentials of well-being." 86 The corollary of this argument was that the farmer naturally knew better than the worker what was good for him. Indeed this was the foundation of the farmers' expressed ideology; within the framework of master and servant "the master is always right and the servant always wrong." 87

Accompanying their belief in the correctness of this world order was their dread that it would be overturned. In part this stemmed from their physical isolation. The white

85 UCT, BC 282, Native Education Commission, Al.13, 16 September 1949.
86 UCT, BC 630 NAU Memorandum, 9 December 1946.
87 NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/9/1c, Colenso F.A. to Board, 28 August 1942.
population of the Midlands was small, scattered and vastly outnumbered by blacks. In 1946 the rural Midland black population was 389,057, a 33 per cent increase since 1921. The corresponding white figure was 15,308, a mere four per cent increase from 1921. Small wonder that rural Natal was disparagingly referred to as "a handful of whites... in the midst of a kaffir location." The farming community of the 1940s, like that of the nineteenth century, "was always fearful of the possibility of a black rebellion, a fear that verged on paranoia and should never be underestimated."

The greatest threat to this uneasy community was the spectre of armed blacks. The ban on black gun ownership was the whites' personal security against rebellion and any breach of the legal status quo brought forth animated calls for ever heavier punishments. Blacks who used the weapons for murder invariably received the death penalty. But for some farmers this was not enough. The Winterton Farmers' Association declared that there was "a prevalent and widespread belief among the natives that the death penalty is not carried out." To quash this impression they suggested that the bodies of murderers be sent to their relatives or that close relations should witness the

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89 FHC, 16 March 1945.
hanging. A resolution to this effect was passed with only dissenting voice, that of the secretary who remarked unhappily "that it savoured of the Dark Ages."91

These extremes were the peak of a racism which informed the more mundane activities of daily life. Certainly farmers embraced segregation as regards facilities under their control. Farmers' association halls were barred to blacks. Winterton farmers agreed that the only blacks allowed in their hall were those on domestic duty.92 Richmond farmers allowed a local mission to hire the hall for entertainment on condition that all items on the programme were performed by white actors.93 Blacks intruding into areas reserved for whites provoked deep alarm. A Mr Van Der Merwe received the backing of his local farmers' association to write to the Minister of Native Affairs expressing consternation that "Non-Europeans were allowed to enter the European section of the post office and use telephone booths marked for European use."94

More worrying still was when blacks exerted authority over whites. When Winterton farmers believed that two local whites arrested by the police had been placed in the back of a police van in the charge of a "native

91 KCL, KCM 33675, Winterton Farmers' Association Minutes, 18 April 1947.
92 KCL, KCM 33675, Winterton Farmers' Association Minutes, 11 April 1950.
93 KCL, KCM 33649, Richmond Agricultural Society, Minutes, 1 September 1950.
94 KCL, KCM 33675, Winterton Farmers' Association Minutes, 27 May 1949.
"constable", they agreed that, if their suspicions turned out to be correct, they would protest to the District police commander.\(^{95}\) Obviously for these farmers the breaching of the racial hierarchy outweighed any wrong-doing those arrested might have committed.

Most farmers reserved a special vehemence for Indians. Their fears of Indian penetration were translated into an intense racism directed against Indians in farming areas, especially those who were trading store owners. One tenant recalled that

where we were living the Afrikaaner farmers didn't like Indians. There was only one store and it belonged to Indians... these whites on the farms where we were living didn't buy there because they and the Indians disliked each other intensely.\(^{96}\)

In 1947, at the height of India's attacks on South Africa in the United Nations, belligerent Winterton farmers proposed that the two local white-owned stores be asked to keep fuller stocks so that "it would be unnecessary to patronise the Indian store." This proposal aroused a "general howl of hate against the Indians which sounded suspiciously like an echo from a certain European country, Indians being substituted for Jews."\(^{97}\)

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\(^{95}\) KCL, KCM 33675, Winterton Farmers' Association Minutes, 26 November 1948.

\(^{96}\) KCL, KCAV 363, Interview with V. Zwane.

\(^{97}\) KCL, KCM 33675, Winterton Farmers' Association Minutes, 8 February 1947.
urged their members that they and their employees should similarly boycott Indian-owned premises.98

But boycotts, and more commonly talk of boycotts, were not the main means of enforcing domination in the farming community. To maintain control on the farm, and to keep order outside it, farmers also relied heavily on the influence and authority of the state.

The State in the Midlands: Police, Magistrates and the Law

Magistrates were the principal representative of the state in farming districts. In Natal, at this time, magistrates were employed by the Justice Department and combined the duties of Native Commissioner except in Zululand, where they came under the Native Affairs Department, and Dundee, Durban, Estcourt, Pietermaritzburg and Vryheid where the two positions were filled by separate officials.99

Magistrates in the other districts bore two main obligations. As representatives of the Justice department magistrates were responsible for administering the law. But as functionaries of the Native Affairs Department(NAD) they were responsible for fulfilling that ministry's requirements. Their standing instructions made clear that

98 E.g. KCL, KCM 33662, Umvoti Agricultural Society, Minutes 8 February 1947.
requirements. Their standing instructions made clear that they were to act as the government's eyes and ears as far as "the Natives" were concerned. Magistrates, under the Smuts government, had to observe and report on "...the development of the outlook, activities and needs of the native population, and to exhibit a considerate and painstaking understanding of native ways of thought and methods of business." Moreover an essential part of their duty was to ensure that blacks' grievances were met through state channels and not left to smoulder unresolved:

It is important that official hearing and advice should be available to individual natives in their difficulties and that natives should be encouraged than otherwise to resort to the representative of the government. 100

Some performed their duties with zeal. A few magistrates entered the civil service because of a profound interest in the "Native question." Some had belonged to "radical" sociétés at university where these issues were debated and discussed. 101 Others came from families for whom service in the NAD was a generations old tradition and who regarded 'native administration' as something of a secular mission. 102 They shared a philosophy of economic liberalism: the black male was to be civilised through

100 UCT Manuscripts Division, BC 105, W.G. Hoal papers, BC 14.5 Department of Justice, Consolidated Standing Circular Instructions, Magistrates. n.d.(1938?) p.86.
101 Interview with AS, Cape Town, October 1989.
102 S. Dubow, "Holding 'a just balance between white and black': The Native Affairs Department in South Africa c.1920-33", JSAS, 12, 2 (April 1986), p.221.
realising the dignity of labour; he should be allowed to supply his labour to whoever could pay him the most; incentive not coercion should bind the labourer to his work. However, most civil servants had little special interest in black administration. In the mid-1930s an ex-official had claimed that in Natal administrators of the former variety had been almost entirely replaced by "imported" officials from the Transvaal and Orange Free State who were "grousing about having been transferred from civilization to the back block, and were trying every means possible to get back to civilisation again."\footnote{Natal Mercury, 24 November 1934.}

In 1945, Oliver Walker spent six months closely observing the NAD after having been commissioned by the department to produce a report to counter its vociferous critics. His initial impression of the department was of a state body "full of white officials earnestly devoted to the welfare of such of their African countrymen as might need their help." Closer acquaintance, however, revealed that it contained "more than its quota of time-servers who spend their days ravelling and unravelling themselves in red tape." Such officials had no special sympathy for blacks; when one of them confided that he avoided physical contact with blacks whenever possible, Walker asked him how he could possibly work in the NAD holding such views. He replied that "its because I hold the
views I do that I am in the department. My attitude is the average South African attitude."  

Local officials' attitudes to farm labour reflected these beliefs. On the one hand magistrates were adamant that blacks could live on the farms only by dint of their labour. The labourer had to be made to realize that if

he doesn't work - and when I use the term work I use it in the widest sense of doing an honest days work in a reliable manner - then he cannot expect to live on a European owned farm; or to enjoy the privileges attaching thereto. 

Time and again officials, irked at blacks' failure to adhere to their masters' work discipline, complained that "few natives realise the dignity of labour and only work to provide their immediate needs". In their eyes much farm labour was characterised by inefficiency and unreliability. "Few natives take the trouble to make themselves expert at their various jobs," reported the New Hanover magistrate, and the majority are irresponsible to a degree. Though the majority of farmers are prepared to pay for greater efficiency and reliability, very few natives are able to claim this concession.

On the other hand magistrates recognised that farmers were

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104 Walker, Kaffirs, p.156.
105 NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/1A, Magistrate Estcourt to CNC, 21 June 1945.
106 NAD, 1 NHR 3/2/2/7 2/9/5, Magistrate New Hanover to CNC, 26 June 1943.
107 Ibid.
poor employers. While their criticism of landlords was much muted compared to their criticism of the workforce, officials did accuse farmers of displaying a lack of consideration and sympathy for their labourers. The magistrate cited above claimed that many farmers expected the native to perform his duties in all weathers and under any conditions. Little attention is paid to his domestic affairs and he is charged for the slightest infringement of farm discipline. The native, is after all but flesh and blood and he cannot be expected to give efficient service if he is harassed by poverty, squalor(sic), and often times illness in his family. Against such maltreatment officials saw themselves as the sole defense:

unfortunately some masters can at times be quite unreasonable and the law is the only protection afforded to the servant who finds himself in this unfortunate situation; to preserve a fair and just balance is one of the difficulties that faces an official.

The balance, however, weighed heavily in favour of the whites. For a start, the magistrate relied on the local white population for social interaction. Frequently living in a house and garden maintained by gangs of convict labour he played polo, golf, and shot in clubs and teams consisting predominantly of farmers. When, for example, the Estcourt magistrate and his wife were transferred to another district in 1941, they were given a dinner hosted by the Women's Institute, the Tennis club, the Parish Association and the

108 Ibid.
109 NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/1A, Magistrate Estcourt to CNC, 21 June 1945.
bowling club of which he was president. The local newspaper reported that they would be missed "throughout the district where they have been active in every sphere of social life." Given the Midland's miniscule white population it is hardly surprising that the magistrate was often on "friendly terms" with local farmers.

His contact with the local black population was far more distant. Even though magistrates came from a tradition of administration based on constant close personal contact and detailed local knowledge, their offices were often understaffed during the war and into the late 1940s. Officials did hold quarterly meetings with local chiefs and indunas in which the blacks were appraised of new laws, warned not to break existing ones and given a chance to vent their concerns. But in 1946 the Assistant Native Commissioner at Estcourt stated that due to inadequate staff he was tied to his office and felt that more travelling should be undertaken "in order that contact with the natives can be maintained." Two years later a local farmer wrote to the Minister of Native Affairs declaring that his own experience of "native thought" gave him greater insight than Government officials.

110 FHC, 7 November 1941.
111 Interview with AS, Cape Town, October 1989.
112 Dubow, "Holding", p.223.
113 Interview with AS, Cape Town, October 1989 and see, for example, NAD, 1 RMD 3/3/1/8 NL/15/4.
who are unfortunately constantly shifted about the Union, and whose knowledge of the trend of Native feeling is mostly gathered from comfortable town office chairs... One never hears of a Native Commissioner going quietly on foot into the backwoods of native areas, with the object of getting information on native thought and feeling, but what we do see are high officials, who can't even speak the language car-speeding along tarmac roads.\textsuperscript{115}

At the magistrate's offices blacks were severely disadvantaged. Although the administrators were charged with ensuring that blacks received "official hearing and advice... through an attitude of sympathy and a detached impartiality of treatment", their instructions admitted that one of the obstacles to this end was "the priority of the claim to attention on the part of white persons which may tend to monopolize the time of a busy office."\textsuperscript{116}

Apart from occupying time, the priority accorded to whites' demands resulted in a dearth of able interpreters. From the early 1930s the Justice Department, keen to employ unemployed whites, insisted on using only whites as interpreters.\textsuperscript{117} Their justification for this was that whites refused to be served by blacks. At a conference of Native Commissioners in 1945 officials from all over Natal declared that while they were amenable to employing "Native

\textsuperscript{115} CAD, NTS, 208 131/332. R.J.P. Otto to Minister of Native Affairs, 23 December 1948.
\textsuperscript{116} UCT, BC105 14.5, Consolidated Standing Circular Instructions, p.86.
clerks", to do so would provoke hostility from the white public. As one Commissioner put it:

Our difficulty is that the Department of Justice generally will not allow a Native to come into contact with the European public. Many of us would welcome the Interpreter... but Europeans will not be attended by Natives.118

The problem with only using whites was not only that there was a shortage but that many of those employed were incompetent. Interpreters did not have to be matriculants and since promotion prospects were poor the post often attracted people with a relatively inferior school education.119 One long serving official claimed that

it is becoming more and more difficult every year to find young men able to speak Native languages. I find very few boys are able to speak Zulu fluently. I had an interpreter clerk at Camperdown who was absolutely hopeless. I had to ask him to come to my house two nights every week for a whole year to drum Zulu into his head.120

In 1949 the magistrate at Impendle wrote to the Justice Department expressing anxiety and concern over the lack of staff in the office. An ever increasing workload, he said, meant that "[a]ll the time one finds oneself giving the absolute minimum attention to a matter in order to try to attend to as many matters as possible." He added that for future appointments the Department must realise that since much of the work consisted of "dealings with natives" a

118 CAD, NTS 1780, 77/276, Conference of Native Commissioners, Natal, p.44.
120 CAD, NTS 1780, 77/276, Conference of Native Commissioners, p.44.
knowledge of Zulu was vital. Later in the year he wrote again. The office had received another employee but he was a junior clerk "with two and a half years experience and whose knowledge of Zulu laws, customs, and language is entirely nil." As a result other officials had to handle all matters pertaining to blacks leading to "excessive amounts of overtime, frustration" and "a failure to serve the public adequately." 121

The failure to serve the public properly especially affected blacks appearing in court. Trials were conducted in English or Afrikaans and the black accused faced the special disability of giving evidence and following the proceedings through an interpreter. A contemporary legal authority explained that

At its best, interpretation is an obstacle to the formation of a sound opinion of a witness's credibility; when faulty, it may be a serious source of injustice. An explanation may be transformed into an admission, or a vague statement into a positive assertion. 122

Witnesses before the Fagan Commission of Enquiry into Native Laws claimed that in the criminal courts there were many inadequate interpreters whose poor performance often placed blacks in jeopardy. They asserted that some of the worst interpreters were men who had applied for the job because

121 NAD, 1 IPD 3/2/2/8 17/15/5, Magistrate to Secretary for Justice, 28 January 1949 and 4 October 1949.
they were "hard up". Their precarious financial position rendered them vulnerable to monetary encouragement to make a misstatement. In a criminal court a man's all may be at stake - and yet we have the Secretary for Justice saying that interpreters can be picked up at street corners. ...[The Interpreter] is a human being and his wife and children may be in need of assistance, and he is going to make that statement - to tell that lie. It does not matter if the native goes to gaol.123

It did not take bribery to stack the odds against blacks looking to the courts for protection against their employers. In farming districts white interpreters often came from farming families. The magistrate at Kranskop declared himself "fortunate in having the services of a farmer, who is a really excellent interpreter."124 Other court officials also placed blacks in perilous situations. When Johannes Ntuli's son quarrelled with their landlord, the farmer refused to give them a trekpas because although "he saw no reason for refusing to give me a letter... he wanted to torture my son and give him a hiding every day." Ntuli went to the Mooi River magistracy to obtain a trekpas. The Clerk of the Court gave him a letter to take back to his landlord. The clerk, apparently failing to comprehend what was happening, wrote to the farmer "Dear Mr R, Please let me know what the trouble with this boy is." The farmer mistakenly took this as proof that Ntuli had laid a charge

123 UCT Manuscripts Division, BC 630, Minutes of Evidence to the Native Laws Commission of Enquiry, p.2440.
124 CAD, NTS 1780, 77/276, Conference of Native Commissioners, Natal, pp.44-45.
against him, fetched his gun and shot Ntuli's son at his homestead.125

As far as the clerk is concerned there are two possible interpretations. Perhaps he failed to understand Ntuli because of language difficulties and wrote to the farmer for clarification. Or maybe he understood the tenant and decided not to take action on the strength of the complainant's description but rather sort out the situation in cooperation with the farmer. Either alternative indicates the obstacles blacks faced in seeking assistance in the magistrate's court.

The common interests of magistrates and farmers was nowhere more apparent than in their verdicts. Even though magistrates' records for this period are extremely skimpy, and even though sentencing was bound by the rulings of the Supreme Court and legislation such as the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act,126 it is clear that magistrates' decisions were often biased in favour of farmers. When the police produced evidence against blacks accused of stock theft magistrates ignored the witness's allegations that confessions had been literally "flogged" out of them.127

125 NAD, RSC 1/1/217, 10 of 1954, Regina v. J.K. Rautenbach.
126 NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/1A, Magistrate Estcourt to CNC, 21 June 1945.
127 See NAD, 1 COL 1/1/1, Case 410 of 1951, Mncunu and others v. Rex. and 1/WEN 1/1/1/4.
During the War when some farmers were engaged on active service magistrates were keen, sometimes to the point of ignoring legal considerations, to punish blacks who were even suspected of taking advantage of a farmer's absence and so threatening the stability of the rural social order. In 1940 M. Msomi and his wife were found guilty by the magistrate at Greytown of stealing fifty bags of mealies from the neighbouring farm. The owner of the farm was on military service and there was no direct proof that Msomi had taken the missing mealies although "by a coincidence the accused admitted possessing some 40 to 50 bags of mealies" even though his own crop had failed. The magistrate admitted that there was no direct proof of his culpability since "in thefts of this nature the identification of the mealies is well-nigh impossible." But this fact was overridden by the need to prevent others taking advantage of absent farmers. Uppermost in the considerations in sentencing Msomi was

the fact that a number of farmers in the Rietvlei area have proceeded on Active Service and their dependants are struggling to carry on the farming operations and only by the imposition of salutary sentences will the Courts be able to prevent further acts of a similar nature.

The difficulty in identifying the mealies was not seen as detracting from the guilt of the accused but, instead, was taken as an additional reason for a stiff sentence since it was "taken advantage of by the thieves."128

128 NAD, 1 GTN 1/1/1/1/1, Case 2837 of 1940.
Clearly the magistrate allowed his desire to preserve the local social order to take precedence over the cardinal legal principle, the presumption of innocence unless proven guilty. All magistrate's cases where the sentence was more than three months in prison or a small fine were reviewed by local judges; when this case came up for review the judges criticized the conviction. The most that could be concluded from the available evidence, they ruled, was that it was a "case of grave suspicion." They admonished the magistrate for drawing an inference of guilt and berated him for not properly investigating the case in court. Given the lack of definite proof they felt "it would be unjust to convict the accused on the case made by the Crown." The convictions and sentences were set aside and the magistrate cautioned for not feeling the "same doubt about the guilt of the accused as we do."129

Not all magistrates identified so closely with farmers. In 1942 when an Impendle farmer shot dead a black walking with a dog near his sheep the magistrate sentenced him to a 100 pound fine or nine months imprisonment. When the accused appealed against the sentence for being "excessive and unduly harsh" the magistrate reiterated that his conduct had "fully merited such a sentence". No grounds were given for

129 Ibid.
considering the sentence too severe and the magistrate hoped that "the race of the victim" was not a possible reason.\textsuperscript{130}

But it was judges more than magistrates who spoke out against farmers' violence. After a young farmer was convicted of shooting and seriously wounding a black man whom he accused of trespassing, the Attorney-General of Natal, referring to this and other similar cases, said that "he was very perturbed at the number of these cases. The public must realise that they could not use shotguns in such circumstances... this kind of thing could not go on."\textsuperscript{131}

When P. Bester was convicted for shooting one of his workers the judge declared that: "Our farming community must be taught that... any grievances that they may have against their Native servants should be dealt with through the Police or the Courts of law. They should get out of this habit of taking the law into their own hands."\textsuperscript{132}

The judges' rationale for speaking out in this manner was not so much the farmers' violent behavior but the effect they believed that such actions had of undermining the prevailing racial social order. Violence or brutality frequently troubled them less than the jeopardising of social stability. The judge quoted above went on to

\textsuperscript{130} NAD, 1 IPD 1/1/1/1, Case 180 of 1942, Rex v. Lindsey.
\textsuperscript{131} UCT, BC 630, Memorandum to the Fagan Commission, C D Don "Homicide and assault when Europeans are accused in respect of natives."
\textsuperscript{132} NAD, RSC 1/1/193, Case 20 of 1949, Rex v. Bester.
explain that: "It is now particularly the duty of the white population in this country to set an example to the inferior races that law and order must be preserved. It is for this reason that I cannot do otherwise but take a serious view of the offence that you have committed." 133 In another case, where a Natal farmer was found guilty of sjambokking a labourer to death, the judge told the accused that: "We, as a white race in this country, have a responsibility to the coloured races and must set them an example. Taking the law into your own hands is not the kind of example we want; and that being so I cannot but take a serious view of your action." Similarly when a white railway guard was found guilty of indecently assaulting a "native girl" the judge impressed upon the man that "[t]he well-being of this country depends very largely upon the white people having a respect for the natives, and for the natives to have an equal respect for the white people... What you have done... is an offence against the white people and not only against this girl, because conduct like this means that the native loses his respect for all white people." 134

The sentences such convicts received indicates that the judiciary placed the race of the accused before the nature of the crime itself. Prison terms for whites convicted of assaulting blacks were almost unheard of, although suspended

133 Ibid.
134 NAD, RSC 1/1/191, Case 35 of 1948, Rex v. C.F. Van der Nest.
sentences were fairly common. By far the most usual punishment was a fine usually between 30 pounds to 50 pounds but occasionally going as high as 100 pounds. In contrast blacks who were convicted of murder were almost invariably executed. Those found guilty of stock theft were fined 15 to 20 pounds perhaps indicating that on the judicial scale of values one dead black was worth two cattle.

While magistrates often had farmers' interests at heart they were not merely administrative puppets fulfilling farmers' every wish and whim. Much to the annoyance of agriculturalists they did have duties and interests which were at times at variance with farmers' desires. The fact that farmers were convicted of assaulting their workers, albeit rarely, was one indication of this. When workers complained to the magistrates that they were about to be evicted, magistrates sometimes interceded with the landlords, as the law allowed, to delay the evictions until the tenants were able to harvest their crops.135

Many farmers regarded the local courts as an institution established only to represent their particular interests. The magistrate at Richmond declared "[t]here have always been complaints from farmers and there always will be. Farmers deem it their sacred right to claim the whole

attention of the Government and to have things run just as they wish." 136

One particular source of frustration was that a labourer could not be charged twice for the same offence. Thus a Winterton farmer complained that workers who had been convicted for failing to begin six month contracts sometimes failed to return to work. The farmer could not charge him again and he felt that the law should be altered to enable the worker to be recharged with the same offence. 137

More importantly farmers felt that while the courts did exert the authority of the state they at times diminished the authority of the farmer. An Estcourt farmer claimed that "a big snag" with using the courts to enforce discipline was that the farmer's word would not necessarily be accepted against that of a black unless it was corroborated. Since the farmer was usually the only white among a dozen or more blacks and since they "will stand up and back each other" the accused was often acquitted and "the trouble is accentuated a thousand times." 138

136 CAD, NTS 3282, 1373/307, Richmond Magistrate to CNC, 23 October 1941.
137 KCL, KCM 33675, Winterton Farmers' Association Minutes, Book 1, 16 June 1950.
138 NAD, 1 EST 3/1/2/6 2/5/1, H.W. Green to H. Forder, 2 May 1942.
Due to such considerations, not to mention the break required in the working day, many farmers used the courts only sparingly or as "a last resort". 139 Such farmers saw relations between themselves and their workers as essentially a private matter which brooked no outside interference. Resorting to the Courts was to them an admission of their failure to exert their will over "their" labour tenants. Instead of reinforcing their control such farmers regarded recourse to the law as an indication of the limitations of their personal authority.

POLICE

The other arm of the state dedicated to upholding farmers' interests in their locality was the police. As well as the courts farmers looked to the police to preserve law and order. Their relationship with the police followed along the same lines as those with the magistrate; support for the police when they were defending their interests and bitter criticism when they felt the police were failing to serve them in the manner they desired. During and after the war the police were very short staffed and farmers' associations were vociferous in their calls for additional manpower. In Mooi River, for example, the police station which served the whole district was meant to consist of eight white police,

139 NAD, 1 HWK 3/2/2/2 2/35/2, W.A. Campbell to Magistrate, 4 August 1952.
one detective and "native constables." But in 1949 the staff consisted of two whites and four blacks. The local farmers' association urged the NAU to call for a doubling of the police force, especially the white section, a substantial increase in pay and requested that at least seventy-five per cent of the white police should be fluent Zulu linguists. In the main farmers reported that they received "strong and active sympathy from the police."

This strong and active sympathy was returned especially when the police came under criticism for actions of which the farmers wholeheartedly approved. In 1951 several policemen were found guilty of assault after investigating the theft of guns by blacks in Tugela Ferry. The Umvoti Agricultural society was outraged that policemen should be prosecuted for merely "doing their duty."

Even though the fine was small the costs were fairly high and a few months later the society sent an undisclosed contribution after having collected from four other local farmers' associations.

140 KCL, KCM 24439, Mooi River Farmers' Association Minutes, 27 October 1950, 15 May 1949, KCL, KCM 24438, 28 July 1945.
141 NAD, 1 RMD 8/3/1/3 17/7/9, Richmond Agricultural Society to Magistrate, n.d.
142 KCL, KCM 33663, Umvoti Agricultural Society Minutes, Book 5, 22 September 1951, 6 October 1951, 17 May 1952.
Occasionally the police came in for criticism when they failed to live up to farmers expectations. One persistent complaint was that the police pressured farmers to withdraw charges if there was little evidence so they could make "favourable returns of convictions." Farmers did not object to policemen serving as public prosecutors except when they failed to obtain what the farmers thought was the correct number of convictions. When one such prosecutor was unable to obtain the conviction of alleged thieves whom the farmers considered guilty, they branded him a "square peg in a round hole", complained to the police authorities and demanded a civilian prosecutor. Similarly when Umvoti farmers called a special meeting in 1949 with a police major over the question of stock theft the major admitted that three or four years previously the Greytown station had been very shorthanded due to the war but said that since then it been well supplied. He reported that in the past four years fifty two sheep cases had been reported, that nineteen convictions had been obtained and that in thirteen cases the sheep had been found in the pound or other farms. Thirty eight cases of cattle had been reported, nine convictions obtained and in nineteen other cases the animals had been recovered in pounds or on farms. Perhaps because the high rate of animals found on farms or in the pound undermined

143 KCL, KCM 33675 Winterton Farmers' Association Minutes, Book 1, 8 January 1945.
144 KCL, KCM 24439 Mooi River Farmers' Association Minutes, Book 5, 27 October 1950.
their persistent claims of widespread stocktheft the farmers called his evidence into doubt and in the mild words of the minutes "indicated to him that his report in no way represented the correct position." 145

Conclusion

Labour tenancy in the 1940s was a complex institution which pitted farmer against tenant, and patriarchs against their families. The farmer clearly dominated; in his "multiple occupancy of authoritarian roles" 146 which included employer, landlord, and sometime moneylender, he held sway over almost every aspect of the tenant family's life. As the arbitrator of tenant life, he stopped and started as it suited him, tenants' access to food, cash and other benefits. Yet even these powers proved inadequate for maintaining control and farmers demonstrated a perpetual predilection for administering their own personal form of justice.

They also relied on the authority of the state. Blacks were aware that "behind each [white] rears the gigantic power of the state." 147 In white agricultural districts the courts

145 KCL, KCM 33662, Umvoti Agricultural Society Minutes, Book 4, 15 October 1949.
146 Newby, "Deferential", p.47.
147 Walker, Kaffirs, p.219.
and police undoubtedly served farmers' interests, enforcing and legitimising existing social relations and "maintaining the social order as a whole" albeit "under the hegemony of the capitalist class."\(^{148}\) But there was also an important divergence of interests between farmers and the state. For farmers the protection of property and the extraction of labour were their overriding interests. While the state functioned to protect such concerns, it was also concerned to perpetuate its own authority. This contradictory clash of interests\(^{149}\) meant sometimes accommodating, however slightly, the interests of blacks and attempting to convince them of its sincerity and ability in representing their interests. Occasionally this meant convicting farmers or throwing out a Masters and Servants case for lack of evidence.

Labour tenancy was a changing system. Black youths were becoming increasingly independent of patriarchal control. We have seen that young women were starting to shrug off family constraints. And young men were increasingly looking to the farmer instead of their father for loans to help with lobola payments. But above all, they were asserting their independence by leaving the farms altogether. This

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meant the patriarchs themselves had to supply an increasing amount of labour. The percentages of family heads in the labour force noted above, were much higher than during the 1920s and early 1930s when their involvement was "exceptional".150

Lastly, tenants' resistance is difficult to evaluate. Tenants rarely participated in any open collective defiance and their actions were almost always individualistic and on a small scale. Perhaps it is best seen as a form of self-help, the tenants' most effective way of lessening their disadvantages151 and mitigating landlords claims upon them. It is also vital to differentiate resistance.152 As we have seen the tenant family was itself an exploitative institution. And, as we shall see, the most widespread form of class struggle came from tenant children who were resisting not only the farmers but their families as well.

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Chapter 3: The Farm Labour Shortage, 1940 - 1952

The critical shortage of farm labour during the 1940s and into the 1950s has been clearly recognised by several scholars. Alan Jeeves, Mike Morris and Francis Wilson among others, have all identified the phenomenon as a major influence on the agricultural economy and state labour policy throughout this period.1

One of the most thorough of the existing studies has been Morris' "Apartheid, Agriculture and the State." His work, rooted in the statist perspectives of the 1970s, concentrated almost exclusively on the impact of the shortages on state policy. While it arguably analysed state policy thoroughly, by failing to delve below the level of policy formation and into its implementation it glossed over the actions of farm workers and failed to analyse either the dynamics or the local variations of the shortage.

Nonetheless, Morris did make a vital contribution. He firmly defined farm workers' urban migration not, as liberal historians would have it, as a result of "push-pull" factors, but as a specific form of class struggle. Much

migration of farm labourers world-wide has been interpreted in terms of the push-pull model; the push factors being those forces within agriculture that reduce labour and the pull factors being those which boost non-agricultural employment. What the model obscures is the importance of the worker's choice as to whether or not s/he will take the employment opportunities available.² In South Africa liberal commentators, such as Nattrass and Wilson,³ used the model to account for the huge migration of blacks from the farms to urban centres. Morris' article, instead, emphasised the importance of farm workers actions, of human agency, in explaining the labour shortage.

This too needs further development. While Morris explained migration in terms of class struggle he did not sufficiently analyse the various conflicting historical forces which led to migration as a major form of resistance in agrarian social relations. The following chapter will try to tease these out for the Midlands and examine the responses of farmers, organised agriculture and the state.

The Labour Shortage on the Farms

As already noted, farmers suffered from an acute labour shortage throughout this period. The shortage was partly seasonal. During the mid-1940s Umvoti farmers remarked that

² For this point and further discussion on this topic see, H. Newby, The Deferential Worker - Farm Workers in East Anglia (London, 1977), pp.149-150.
labour supplies "were not unsatisfactory" but did call for greater control over blacks living in locations and Crown lands to ameliorate the paucity of togt labour. Bergville farmers reported shortages of "reaping hands" and complained that there was "very little outside labour offering." The local magistrate observed that the labour scarcity occurred only at certain times "i.e. ploughing and reaping seasons."4

The lack of seasonal labour was, however, compounded by a shortage of regular staff. Such shortages often occurred on farms where conditions were comparatively poor. Cash and land provided for ploughing and grazing were both important considerations for tenants. "The very great shortage of labour" in Estcourt, said a local official, was due to "the poor wages paid, want of better accommodation, long hours and poor quality of food."5

In addition, particular branches of farming were unpopular for their own peculiar reasons. In the Midlands dairy farming was the most noticeable of these. The Klip River Dairy Farmers' Association complained that the labour position had deteriorated to such an extent that some dairy farmers had either sold or reduced their herds. Local butter production plummeted in 1946 because there was no labour to milk the cows. Other dairy farmers complained

4 Killie Campbell Library (hereafter KCL), Durban, KCM 33662, Umvoti Agricultural Society Minutes, 6 March 1944; NAD, 1 BGV 4/3/1/18 N2/9/2, Bergville Farmers' Association to Magistrate, 28 June 1943; C.G. Dicks to Magistrate, 23 June 1943; NAD, 1 EST 3\1\2\6 2\5\9, Native Commissioner to CNC, 30 June 1943.

5 NAD, 1 EST 3\1\2\6 2\5\9, Acting Assistant Native Commissioner to CNC Natal, 25 May 1943.
that the desertion of young male workers had forced them "to employ a class that is really unemployable." According to the president of a national dairy producers union the reasons for the unpopularity of dairy farming were obvious. He listed the perpetual milking, early morning, late at night, Saturday, Sunday, all days every day. Boys don't like it and won't have it any longer and there is no double time or time and a half or minimum pay like there is in a cheese factory or garage so why should they like dairying? 

The labour shortage crippled production in other areas as well. In 1946 a large landowner chose not to sow wheat because he was unsure of obtaining sufficient labour for harvesting. He explained: "If you can guarantee that I will get labour to reap, I have the land and I will plant." In 1947 the NAU president reported that production was severely hampered by the shortage of labour.

The shortage of regular farm workers was due largely to the permanent migration of young blacks from the farms. As we have seen, for sons and daughters of the homestead head labour tenancy was an institution of double exploitation: exploitation by both farmers and their own fathers. The Native Farm Labour Committee noted that young homestead members' dissatisfaction with being bound by a contract made solely with the family head was one of the principal causes for the desertion of farm labour. Since the "young natives were the main source of the work force their desertion left

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6 FHC, 23 April 1946; FHC, 18 January 1946; FHC, 14 April 1950.
7 NAUNLU, June 1951.
8 FHC, 29 March 1946.
9 FHC, 12 September 1947.
the farmers with the elderly, sick and inefficient workers." As Morris has pointed out, the youth had little interest in the perpetuation of a system under which "they were bound to provide most of the labour under conditions where they received none of the direct benefits." This was certainly the case in the Midlands. Farmers reiterated that their complaints were "directed mainly against the younger type of natives" and stressed the very apparent difference between the outlook of the older type of natives and the younger generation - lack of respect of the farmer and master and lack of respect for authorities.

In Lions River a farmer bemoaned that "a boy who is trained for a special job is away just now when he is needed..." In Camperdown one tenant had "two or three able-bodied sons who... simply refuse to work for the landlord."

As labour tenancy's attractions waned alternative avenues of employment increased. As we have seen, during the 1940s the industrial workforce expanded enormously. During the 1950s, too, industry remained labour rather than capital intensive with a high labour turnover. The vast majority of

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12 NAD, 1 EST 3\1\2\6 2\5\1A, Acting Magistrate to CNC Natal, 21 June 1945.
13 NAD, 1 HWK 3\2\2\2 2\35\2, Cooper to Magistrate, 29 June 1949.
14 NAD, 1 CPD 3\2\2\16 2\43\2\3, Native Commissioner Camperdown to CNC Pietermaritzburg, 5 March 1949.
industrial workers were employed as casual unskilled labour.

An ex-union organiser in Durban recalled that it was only late in the 1950s that Africans could say 'I am an operator in the mill' or 'I drive a lorry for the Railways.' Before this time everyone would do the same work.\footnote{I.L. Edwards, "Mkhumbane Our Home - African Shantytown Society in Cato Manor Farm, 1946-1960", (PhD thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1989), p.108.}

Government departments, the railways, the Post Office and road building were all areas in which regular hours and high wages attracted fleeing farm workers. A dairy farmer complained in 1950 that "boys" from a tenant family who had been on the farm for 30 years were saying, "why work on the farm for two to four pounds per month when the railways pay from six to twelve pounds per month and you do not have to work over weekends." He went on to protest indignantly:

> It makes me sick to see boys loafing when they are getting double the pay of farm natives. Is a boy more value scoffling weeds on the railway or planting wheat or milking cows?\footnote{Central Archives Depot(hereafter CAD), Pretoria, LDB 1758 R2989, Lake to Minister of Agriculture, 24 April 1950.}

The chairman of a local stock farmers' association reported that a government "bush clearing scheme" operating in the area paid its workers 5 pounds per month plus a cost of living allowance. Since local farm wages were 2 pounds 10s per month "natives are leaving the farms on wholesale and going to this government work."\footnote{CAD, LDB 1758 R2989, F. Deakin to Minister of Agriculture, 30 March 1947.}

Farm workers' urban employment included domestic service. Despite the protestation of the Chief Native Commissioner
for Natal that "no Zulu would go to Pretoria", ex-labour tenants found domestic employment in Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria. The Native Farm Labour Committee found that the "employment of males not females as domestic servants in Natal and the Transvaal" was one reason for the farm labour shortage. In Durban domestic service was still the preserve of "kitchen boys" and many new arrivals to town used the position as a secure base from which to look for commercial or industrial work. A Benoni council investigation in 1951 found that employers of domestic servants were prejudiced against "urban juveniles and prefer to employ rural youths whom they regard as more amenable and reliable."19 Many of the female tenants who complained to the Estcourt magistrate that their husbands had deserted them gave domestic addresses in Cape Town as well as the three cities already mentioned as their husbands' last known place of employment.20

Rural towns as well as cities contained increasing job opportunities for unskilled, dissatisfied farm workers. In Estcourt, for example, in the late 1940s the opening of new food processing factories and a large construction programme led to many workers from nearby farms "finding their way to town." As in the cities, wages were far higher than those on the farms. Against an average wage of around 10s per
month, workers at the Estcourt factories and electricity works received from 45-67s per month.21

Trekking to town was thus a major escape route for workers resisting exploitation on the farms. Their seizing of urban opportunities was a fundamental cause of the farm labour shortage. The Native Commissioner in New Hanover was in no doubt that

so long as the native is free to sell his labour to the best advantage and wages in a town are so much higher than those the farmer is economically able to pay the shortage will continue.22

This was combined with a seasonal labour shortage caused by the seepage of blacks from the reserves. Throughout the 1940s officials observed that "a large number of natives resident in the locations prefer to seek employment in the larger towns of the Union rather than enter the service of neighbouring farmers."23 Casual labour, it appeared, also preferred to turn to the towns rather than farms for work.

There is unfortunately little evidence as to the exact patterns of off-farm migration in the Midlands. A purely impressionistic guesstimate is that around half of those leaving settled in Johannesburg, around a third in Durban and most of the rest in urban centers such as East London, Pretoria and Cape Town. In 1943 Nottingham Road farmers complained of labour tenants breaking their contracts and obtaining work in the towns, particularly in Johannesburg.

21 FHC, 15 October 1948; NAD, 1 EST 3\1\2\6 2\5\9, Assistant Native Commissioner to CNC Natal, 26 May 1945.
22 NAD, 1 NHR 3\2\2\7 2\9\5, Magistrate to CNC Natal, 26 June 1943.
23 NAD, 1 NHR 3\2\2\1 2\18\5, Annual Report for 1940.
Five years later Colenso farmers reported that "they used to want to go to Johannesburg and now it is Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and Kimberley." It is clear that family and ethnic connections helped determine patterns of migrancy. Many employers deliberately chose workers from a particular area and workers obtained jobs for their relatives in the same company; at other times workers chose a certain destination because they had a relative there with whom they could stay while they searched for work.24

While workers chose their destinations for a variety of reasons most migrated alone, leaving their families on the farms. Farmers were often annoyed that not only did their workers desert to the towns but that their "wives, children, cattle and other vermin" stayed on the farms without providing labour.25

The migration of farm youth often jeopardized the position of their family. Since the family's residence on the farm depended on maintaining a supply of able-bodied labour, one son's desertion could lead to the eviction of a whole family. Reporting on a pattern common throughout the Midlands the Native Commissioner for Richmond noted that

owing to many of the younger boys leaving the kraals (of their fathers) on farms, and not giving labour as

24 NAD, 1 HWK 3\2\2\1 2\5\9, Nottingham Road Farmers' Association to SNA, 16 December 1943; UCT, Manuscripts Division, Minutes of Evidence to the Native Laws Commission of Enquiry, BC 630 (hereafter UCT, BC 630), p.2748; Edwards, "Mkhumbane", p.110.
25 FHC, 17 May 1946.
labour tenants, farmers in this district have been serving notices on the fathers to vacate the farms.26

In Camperdown a farmer agreed to employ a family as labour tenants when the father told him he had "three workable sons and one workable daughter." But the daughter married soon after they arrived and on two occasions none of the sons performed their six month stints. The farmer decided that he "had had enough of them" and evicted them from the farm.27 Sons and daughters who deserted the farm were often pursued by delegations of brothers, parents and members of the extended family who pressurised them to return.28

The migration of married men also meant hardship for their wives and families who remained on the farms. In a complaint typical of many, Esta Sibuya, who lived on a farm near Estcourt, reported in November 1945 that her husband had been in Johannesburg for eleven months; on only two occasions had he sent her money. He had made no provision for his mother, she continued, and "I wish him to return home and send me money in support of myself and the two children." Similarly Emmala Bhenga, living on a farm near Winterton, protested that her husband had left her and their five children without support for the previous 15 months while he had been in Johannesburg. Moreover the farmer refused to allow her to harvest the crops on the land granted to her husband.29

26 NAD, 1 RMD 3\3\1\8 N1\15\4, Meeting of Native Chiefs, 18 May 1943.
27 NAD, 1 CPD, 3\2\2\14 2\35\2, H. E-D. Briscoe to Magistrate, 17 March 1948.
29 NAD, 2 EST 4\1, 28 May 1946, 29 November 1945.
Occasionally wives' actions went further than lodging complaints with magistrates. B.A. Dladla from Weenen, who obtained work in Johannesburg's Non-European Hospital, found that his wife refused to accept his desertion passively. After lodging a complaint against him for non-support she embarked on a furious crusade of revenge, which left Dladla writing to the magistrate bewailing his fate and begging for a divorce. "In the first place", he wrote,

she has sold my house's door without my permission after which she left Natal for Johannesburg where she again took all my articles such as blankets, pairs of trousers and all from I kept them and ran away with them back to Natal. When she arrived in Natal she sold them all. She also sold everything of mine which I left in Natal.

After this his wife returned to Johannesburg and settled by herself in the Orlando location ignoring her husband's strictures to go home to Weenen.30

Not all migrating farm workers moved to the cities. Wattle and timber plantations, especially those owned by timber companies, offered higher wages than arable or pastoral farmers. Particularly in areas where timber estates existed alongside other types of farming many labourers temporarily moved to the plantations to take advantage of the higher wages. This was often in the period September to March when intensive plantation operations unfortunately coincided with peak labour demand in arable farming.31

30 NAD, 1 WEN 3\1\2\1 2\7\3, B.A. Dladla to Magistrate, 14 September 1945.
31 FHC, 11 June 1948.
Others moved off the farms onto the so-called blackspots from where they led a migrant existence, working in the town but maintaining an extra-urban home. A Local Health Commission survey in 1945 of these "rural urbanized areas" remarked that contrary to prevailing assumptions the amount of farm labour provided by their residents was negligible.32 According to the Native Commissioner for Pietermaritzburg, "many of the natives at Edendale were ex-farm labourers who had settled there because they could not make a living on the farms." Others moved off farms into various rural locations. Farmers from Muden complained to the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) of the "great numbers" of blacks leaving the farms for Kranskop location and Zululand. They added that "members of this Association are greatly inconvenienced by the scarcity of labour, and if you can assist us to retard the migration of Natives it will be greatly appreciated."33

Attempts to overcome the labour shortage

Farmers tried by a variety of means to obtain additional labour. Among the more unorthodox were a few calls to import farm workers from Europe. An NAU editorial in 1945 declared that farmers had to get workers "to fit the job, not to invert and cramp the job to suit ethnic

32 NAD, Pietermaritzburg Commissioner for Cooperation and Development (hereafter PCCD), Correspondence Box 3, N2\10\pt3, Local Health Commission; Supplement to Joint Memorandum, 15 October 1945.
33 CAD, NTS 1779, Chief Native Commissioners' Conference 1943, p.7; NAD, 1 KRK 3\2\2\1 2\5\3, Muden Agricultural Association to CNC, 10 November 1950.
peculiarities. If natives don't cooperate we must use white workers as in America, New Zealand and Australia.  

Argentina and Canada were also cited as examples of countries successfully opening their doors to European immigrants. Many farmers had been impressed by the Italian prisoners of war used during the war; unfortunately a scheme announced in 1947 by General Smuts to attract farm workers from North Italy and Austria for agricultural work was soon dropped.  

Of greater material consequence was renewed attempt to force rent paying tenants to supply labour. Under the 1913 Land Act those homestead heads (and their descendents) who had been rent paying tenants before 1913 could continue on that basis. The Native Land and Trust Act of 1936 repealed this, laying down that the formal approval of the Governor General had to be obtained to enable these rent paying homesteads to continue. Owing to the difficulty of finding places for homesteads should approval be withheld, the state felt that approval must be granted in every case. To save the work that formal applications would have entailed, it was agreed that the homestead heads and their descendents could remain as rent paying tenants until Chapter IV of the 1936 Act was enforced in the district concerned. Failing this, the tenants could continue to pay rent either until they were given notice to quit or their contract altered from cash to labour rent.  

34 FHC, 26 January 1946.  
35 NAU Archives, NAU Minutes, 24 February 1946; NAUNLU, August 1951; FHC, 10 October 1947.  
36 NAD, 1 HWK 3\2\2\2 \2\35\2, Magistrate to J. Franklin, 9 March 1944.
With powerful incentives to expand production and a decrease in available labour, a number of farmers tried to rein in these rural blacks who had remained outside the agricultural labour force. Sometimes a tenant's contract was altered by the existing landlord but it occurred more often when the farm was sold to a new owner. In 1944 E. Zondi and several others complained to the magistrate in Lion's River that their landlord had told them that they must either become labour tenants or leave the farm but could not continue as rent payers. The Zuma brothers reported to the Chief Native Commissioner that the farm where they paid rent had been a location during their grandfather's time. Around 1900 the land was purchased by white farmers but their father, by then the homestead head, had remained a rent paying tenant. As descendents of a pre-1913 rent payer, they continued to pay rent for the site. In 1943 the farm changed hands,

and suddenly our new landlord told us to leave his farm. We pleaded with him to give us longer notice as we had lived on those sites all our lives, and we would find it hard suddenly to find a new place.

However the new farmer remained resolute since he claimed the "the attitude of these people, who do not and never have worked for the farm, is having a bad effect on the farm labour generally." 38

In 1947 M. Hlengwa was similarly evicted after he refused to submit to the increased labour demands of a new landlord.

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37 Ibid.  
38 NAD, 1 HWK 3\2\2\2 2\35\2, Magistrate to CNC, 31 December 1943.
Hlengwa's family had paid rent there since 1889 and the previous owner had told him that he "was allowed to remain on this farm until death on condition that I paid rent." The new owner called a meeting where he told tenants they would either have to enter labour tenancy agreements or leave the farm. None of the tenants entered into contracts but instead continued to tender rent which was refused. As a test case Hlengwa was taken to court where the owner explained that he wanted to lease the farm to another farmer who needed the tenants to work on yet another farm in New Hanover. As the new owner made clear: "I want the natives off because I want to farm labour tenants."

For Hlengwa the threat of eviction was baffling. He protested: "I have not done anything at all to cause this tenancy of mine to be broken... I have not been told that I have done or have omitted to do anything." Nonetheless, the state was firmly behind the landlord's bid to appropriate the tenants' labour and the court issued a warrant for their removal. On 14 December 1948 Hlengwa's family were ejected and their huts destroyed in circumstances which, their lawyer claimed, "would have created an uproar if they had been white people."

Tenants resisted these pressures in a number of ways. Some, as in the case above, refused to supply labour until forced by a court order or threat of eviction. Others moved to

39 NAD, 1 CPD 1\1\1\1\1, Case 1015 of 1947, Meyer v. Hlengwa.
40 NAD, 1 CPD 3\2\2\16 2\43\2\3, Cowley and Cowley to CNC, 13 November 1950.
urban or peri-urban areas to find alternative employment rather than submit to the rigours of farm labour. A further reaction was the desperate bid by blacks to buy land so that they could maintain a rural toehold outside the increasingly demanding sphere of the farm economy. The CNC received a constant stream of letters such as this one from chief Bhewula Mncunu. Writing from a Mooi River farm he asked him to let me know whether it is possible for me to obtain a farm which is for sale in the Mooi River district because we natives has got it very bad nowadays.\textsuperscript{41}

A lawyer from Ladysmith noted that "natives are ready to snap up land in the locality at astonishing prices."\textsuperscript{42} Lawyers for the Xaba family from Impendle, evicted from the farm where they had paid rent, enquired

Whether there is not a piece of land somewhere in the native area in the same District which could be acquired by their families who are now landless and are entirely at the mercy of farmers in the District.\textsuperscript{43}

In almost every case the CNC replied that there was no land available for sale to blacks.

Labour farms were also used by wealthier farmers to circumvent the labour shortage. In Estcourt an official noted in 1943 that "those farmers who have labour farms have plenty of labour but others are experiencing a very great shortage."\textsuperscript{44} An Ixopo farmer, who owned a labour farm in Umzinto, observed that "without my labour farm I could not

\begin{footnotes}
\item[41] NAD, PCCD Box 4, N2\10\3 part 2, B. Mcunu to CNC, 1 April 1942.
\item[42] NAD, PCCD Box 4, N2\10\3\48, Walton and Tatham to NC Ladysmith, 8 December 1946.
\item[43] NAD, PCCD Box 4, N2\10\3\ H3, J. Herschenson to Dept of Lands, 24 August 1942.
\item[44] NAD, 1 EST 3\1\2\6 9, Acting Assistant Native Commissioner to CNC, 25 May 1943.
\end{footnotes}
farm here anymore." For their predominantly progressive owners, these forms of unfree labour were an essential part of their productive operations.

The value of labour farms was demonstrated in 1947 when the government expropriated two Weenen labour farms. The owner, dissatisfied with the compensation offered, took the matter to court. Both sides agreed that the farms were very badly eroded and that as farming land it had "no real value at all." But since the farms contained "141 occupied native huts" farmers testifying for the owners argued that the readily available labour supply made their market value much higher than their agricultural value alone. They produced handbills for other farm sales in which labour, listed as "55 full grown male natives, 13 umfaans and 14 girls, all labourers under contract for six months alternative service", was included as a major selling point. As one witness pointed out, what was of value was not merely the land, "but the right to use human beings."46

The labour shortage provoked a lively debate among farmers over the respective merits of labour tenancy and full time service. For the advocates of labour tenancy its greatest attraction was the small cash wage which farmers were bound to pay. One proponent argued: "We are lucky to get a Native to work for one pound a month and this is only possible because he is able to work the remaining six months in the

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45 NAD, PCCD Box 6, N2\10\3, J. Farrell to Magistrate Umzinto, 2 January 1946.
46 NAD, 1 WEN 3\3\2\2\ Government v Estate John Geekie, 1947.
towns on very high wages."47 Some attempted to justify the small cash wage by claiming that labourers required only a small amount of money for tax, had little need or desire for anything else which had to be purchased with cash and so had only small, fixed cash requirements. This meant that "the higher the wages paid to a Native the less number of days he will work."48 In addition, some claimed that tenant resistance rendered futile attempts to increase the period of service; several farmers maintained that "the Native becomes 'tired' after six months of regular work, and that once he says he is tired or 'katele' he is no further use and may as well be allowed to go and work elsewhere."49 Moreover, if tenants were prevented from working in the towns, "you may well find yourself with no labour at all."50

But preventing the passage of labourers to towns was a key element in the argument of those in favour of full time service. They claimed that labour tenancy was ultimately an expensive system since it needed twice the number of employees than the system of full time service. If this was implemented then half those employed under labour tenancy would be available for those farmers short of labour.51 Full time employment was necessary to stabilise the labour supply which would in turn enable the farmer to train the worker and so increase his efficiency without fear that he would rush off to sell his newly acquired skills in the urban labour market. These farmers claimed that they were

47 FHC, 21 June 1946.
48 FHC, 1 April 1949.
49 FHC, 7 May 1946.
50 FHC, 21 June 1946.
51 FHC, 17 May 1946.
not in a position to compete in an open labour market partly because they could not compete with the regular working hours and conditions of urban employers and also because workers refused to recognise the non-cash 'privileges' supplied by the farmer as part of their wages. "Farming cannot continue", they argued, "if Natives under existing conditions have the unlimited right to sell their labour on the best market." Their solution was to compulsorily separate the urban and rural labour force, so that farm workers would not be able to seek work in the towns. To avoid compulsion, they said, would continue the stupendous waste of manpower but when one advocates compulsion, one is accused of Nazism, or of wanting to introduce slave laws, but it would be to the ultimate good of the farmer, the Native himself and the country generally.

While the debate continued throughout the second half of the 1940s several farmers' associations made a further attempt to counter the labour shortage when they drew up proposals for a uniform labour contract. They aimed to attract new labour, to make their existing labour more productive and to stop farmers attracting labour off other farms by offering better conditions than their neighbours. The contracts all reflected the desire to intensify demands made on labour tenant families yet few called for a total change to wage labour without access to land. The Mid-Illovo Farmers' Association called for male workers to work full time on the farm with two months unpaid leave each year. The Richmond Farmers' Association called for either nine months service, three months leave on no pay, or eleven months work and one

52 FHC, 28 August 1947.
53 FHC, 17 May 1946.
month's paid leave. The Underberg Farmers' Association called for able-bodied men to work the whole time "if necessary" and one month's paid leave per year.

The differences were more marked in their proposals for the limits on tenants' access to land. They reflected the different stages of capitalist development in the regions, with Mid-Illovo the most, and Underberg the least, developed. The Mid-Illovo plan called for lobola to be paid in cash not cattle, presumably to remove the need in farmers' eyes for tenants to keep cattle. The Richmond farmers proposed merely that tenants' stock be limited to around four per adult and that the labour tenants' dependants be reduced by limiting polygamy. Underberg suggested that each family be allowed three acres of land and each homestead head permitted up to a maximum of six head of cattle and two horses. Except in the high paying capital intensive Mid-Illovo region, farmers recognised that tenants could be better kept by offering access to land. In the cases of Richmond and Underberg stabilisation was to be further enforced by the stipulation that no farmer should accept a new tenant without written approval from his previous landlord.54

None of the proposals was ever implemented, as they were intended, throughout the province. While individual farmers may have put features of the plans into practice, as the Estcourt Farmers' Association pointed out, it was impossible

54 FHC, 3 September 1948; FHC, 18 March 1949; FHC, 20 May 1949.
to "lay down a hard and fast system for the whole province when conditions in the various districts differed so vastly." Any attempt to enforce a framework throughout a district, let alone the province, would have been problematic at a time when the very labour shortages the proposals were intended to solve, meant that farmers increased individual incentives to attract or retain labour rather than standardising conditions with their neighbours.

As labour tenancy appeared unable to satisfy their labour needs, a few farmers introduced full-time service to provide a more stable work force. Other farmers tried to convert their work force from labour tenancy to full-time service but were defeated by their tenants' refusal to behave in a more economically agreeable manner. Colenso farmers reported in 1948 that

it would be far better for farmers if they had boys for 11 months of the year and you know you have a boy for 11 months of the year and he will not go to town for six months. We tried it and the boys don't like it.

Asked if they had increased wages at the same time, they replied, "we tried boys working 11 months at 30s per months (double wages) with free grazing and free lands. There were one or two who tried it but the others won't."56

For spokesmen of agrarian capital the solution was clear: eliminate labour as far as possible by mechanisation. The president of Imphendle Agricultural Society insisted that "[t]he only solution is to mechanise."57 The editor of a

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55 FHC, 1 April 1949.
56 UCT, BC 630, p.2748.
57 FHC, 27 August 1948.
local farming paper concurred declaring, "[i]n a country... where manual labour is the biggest problem, and at its best of a poor quality, mechanisation is the only way to make sure of maximum production." ⁵⁸ Such a change in production necessitated a core labour force of skilled, permanent workers. To achieve this, as advanced farmers and their representatives repeated ad nauseam, the migratory system of labour tenancy would have to be replaced by a more stable work force. This, as we shall see, was in turn to be brought about not by increased 'market solutions' but the coercive powers of the state.

Organised Agriculture and State Farm Labour Policy

The NAU's labour policy throughout this period contained two main tenets. Firstly the stabilisation of the black labour force by dividing it into two separate groups: an agricultural or rural and an industrial or urban. This was to ensure that farm workers could not leave the farm and that industrial workers' families would move nearer to their work place in the towns. The labour shortage would be solved, they believed, "if legislation was introduced to ensure farm natives work only on the farms and those working in the towns should be housed in native villages, nearer to towns and bring their families with them." ⁵⁹

⁵⁸ FHC, 16 June 1950.
⁵⁹ FHC, 1 April 1949.
Once the labour force was stabilised the agricultural section could be transformed into full-time wage labourers. Unlike the majority of its members who continued to rely on labour tenancy, the NAU, throughout the 1940s, remained firmly in favour of full-time service. But while full-time wage labour remained imperative in the long term the supply of farm labour was the immediate concern. "The division of labour is ranked as first," stated the NAU president, "and second comes the scrapping of the pat-time system of farm labour."  

Organised agriculture proposed several measures to effect these changes, all requiring increased state intervention. "Proper methods" of identification and registration were seen as a vital part of effective labour control.  

The abolition of the plethora of different passes and their replacement by one general identification document was coupled with a system of registering the identity, abode and place of work of every black in a central office. This was to enable officials to control black movement through the enforcement of pass laws. 

You have no hope of controlling anybody or anything which has no identity or abode. [The centralised system] is the only system under which a native will never have any hope of getting away from his identity argued the NAU.  

The distribution of labour was to be carried out by a system of labour bureaux. All blacks seeking work would have to register with the bureaux which would then channel the work seekers into existing vacancies. 

60 FHC, 11 March 1949.  
61 NAU Archives, NAU Minutes, 4 November 1949.  
The flow of labour to the towns could thus be carefully controlled while farmers would, in theory, receive a steady inflow of those looking for work.

The NAU's emphasis on controlling labour mobility was, by and large, welcomed in the Native Affairs Department (NAD). The dominant tone of state farm labour policy was set out in the 1939 Native Farm Labour Committee Report. It clearly favoured capitalist farmers. The committee was convinced that none of the "more advanced and progressive class of farmers" was guilty of assaulting, ill-treating or underpaying their workers. More importantly, it declared that "the ultimate objective shall be the gradual development of a definite class of full-time agricultural labourers." 63

While an agricultural proletariat was the long term aim, in the short term it advocated the establishment of recruiting firms to supply farm labour, dropping the minimum age limit of recruited blacks from 18 to 16, and the subsidy of the transport costs of these recruits by central government. In addition, it recommended that African immigrants should be extracted from urban areas and then given the choice of farm labour or deportation. The central state was also to strictly control urban influx, forcibly ensuring that those rural inhabitants not needed in urban jobs remained in the rural labour market. 64

63 Report of the Farm Labour Committee, p.6, p.15.
64 Ibid., pp.66-79.
Yet in an apparently contradictory approach, the report also argued that farmers had to attract workers through better pay and conditions and not through ever more legislation designed to tie workers to the farms.

Such passages from the Report and similar statements in the various annual reports of the Department of Native Affairs have recently prompted some scholars to emphasize the 'liberal' aspects of state farm labour policy at this time. For example, according to David Duncan, the late 1930s "saw the ascendancy of a less repressive more constructive policy towards farm workers, which has its roots within a department (the Native Affairs Department) of the State's central bureaucracy."65 Greenberg similarly argues that the period saw "an increasing resort to market solutions."66

The protestations of these reports were, however, out of step with daily actions of the same department's officials. From the 1920s the NAD actively facilitated the "slave traffic" of thousands of African immigrants into virtual serfdom at the hands of labour hungry capitalist Transvaal farmers, intentionally circumventing the labour market. In the late 1930s, the NAD issued a General Circular which sought to further tie farm workers to the exclusive service of their employers. Head office officials in the mid 1940s cringed with embarrassment at the mere suggestion that farm workers...

labourers should be included under the Wage Determination Act. And all the while, NAD officials at national and local level enforced, if occasionally unwillingly, the stringent legislation described earlier.67

These contradictory forces within the state bureaucracy demand explanation. How and why did coercion and free market principles exist side by side in the late 1930s and early 1940s? The espousal of such opinions was not mere ideological pretence for as we shall see, the state did implement some of the Herbst report's proposals for improving labour conditions on the farms while continuing with its coercive practices.

To start with, the different approaches reflected different strategies of control. While there may have been a modicum of "principled opposition to the maltreatment of farm workers", most proponents of paternalism believed it an effective method of control. Increased compulsion was opposed because such officials felt it would be ineffective and "resented by the Natives", thus making existing legislation more difficult to enforce.68

In addition, the NAD saw themselves as agricultural modernisers, pushing capitalist agriculture to employ a stable permanent work force which would complement the

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68 CAD, NTS 1779, CNC Conference 1944 Annexure "A".
settled urban proletariat. From 1944 the NAU met with representatives of organised agriculture on a liaison committee to discuss all labour matters affecting agriculture. While they agreed with agricultural capitalists about the necessity of dividing South African blacks into full-time agricultural and industrial workers, at least in the Natal Midlands they felt that existing coercive measures had to be complemented by better wages and conditions to stabilise the agricultural workforce.

To some extent the contradiction can be further explained by noting that the state at that time was more responsive to the interests of mining and industry than those of farmers. While the labour demands of farmers still commanded attention, the NAD was loath to implement steps demanded by organised agriculture which would interfere with the industrial and mining labour supply especially at a time when mining was suffering severe labour shortages.\(^69\)

At a wider level, the contradiction was a reflection of the contradictions inherent in the role of the state in a segregationist, capitalist society. As Lonsdale and Berman have argued, the state had two main functions; on the one hand it had to create and sustain capitalist relations with an adequate supply of labour, and on the other it had to be the authority which legitimated that class order. The two functions were at times contradictory, especially as regards the use of coercion; "capitalism depends on accumulating surplus value from labour but if coercion is to be seated

\(^{69}\) See Morris, "Apartheid", p.21.
overtly within relations of production the intensity of class conflict would rise to intolerable levels." Excessive coercion posed a threat to the political order and since the state had to be seen "to act on behalf of the social order as a whole... it may have to act... against the perceived interests of particular segments of the dominant classes...."70

The state refused those farmers demanding greater coercion of Union blacks in the late 1930s and early 1940s, partly because it was unwilling to jeopardise its interest in future control. The exception proves the rule. A key area where the state participated in greater coercion in the supply of farm labour was the "slave trade" in the Eastern Transvaal. The trade dealt in "alien" immigrants who were not part of the South African social order and who the state tried very hard to ensure remained outside it. Where the state did not have to worry about appearing as paternal protector it abandoned its concern with relative autonomy and worked hard to ensure farmers an adequate and cheap supply of labour.

As for the Herbst report's recommendation's the war prevented prolonged consideration of these but at least one, the establishment of farm labour advisory boards, was carried out. The Native Labour Advisory Boards were set up by the NAD under general circular number 20 of 1941.71 It

71 NAD, 1 EST 3\1\2\6 2\5\1.
stipulated each board should be chaired by the local magistrate and include at most three farmers' representatives. The Board's chief function, continued the circular, was to

make a more adequate supply of labour available to farmers and the method by which this is to be done is to popularise farm labour with the natives by giving attention to such matters as the improvement of wages, rations and housing of labourers.

The Boards had no power to enforce their decisions but instead relied on "members to use their influence with their brother farmers and to induce them to regulate their labour matters in accordance with the recommendations of the Board."

The Boards began their work by distributing questionnaires to all farmers on the wages and benefits paid to their labourers. The Boards intended to draw up a model contract to attract labour. However, they faced considerable opposition, mostly from the non-capitalist farmers they were intended to help. Nottingham Road farmers argued that the Boards' efforts were not only misguided but were a betrayal of farmers' interests:

We do not agree that farm labour, as such, is generally unpopular... We feel that by his unquestioning acceptance of this point of view the Secretary for Native Affairs is adopting a defeatist attitude and one which colours all his proposals to remedy the shortage which undoubtedly exists.\(^7^2\)

In Estcourt and Lion's River, around half the farmers failed to reply. Many others shared the feelings of a New Hanover

\(^7^2\) NAD, 1 HWK 3\12\2\1 2\5\9, Copy of N.R.F.A. replies to Circular issued by the Secretary for Native Affairs, 16 December 1943.
respondent: "unless it is compulsory to answer this questionnaire, I would rather have nothing to do with these affairs, as they involve a lot of extra work."\textsuperscript{73}

Farmers' opposition to the Boards soon undermined their efficacy. Umvoti farmers' rejection was so complete that a board was never set up. In New Hanover the wage question proved too controversial and the Board changed tack declaring that an improvement in labour "will not be brought about merely by the payment of a higher wage"; instead it devoted its efforts to the "restoration of the attributes of honesty and reliability... to the natives."\textsuperscript{74} The enforcing of wartime rationing and regulations soon became a higher priority for magistrates and enquiries by the CNC in 1945 showed the Boards to have effectively ceased functioning in 1942.\textsuperscript{75} By 1945 the NAD admitted "with regret that they have achieved very little and in many cases have already ceased to function."\textsuperscript{76}

With the failure of the Advisory Boards, the state acted sporadically to stem the efflux of farm labour. In 1942 the Native Affairs Department expressed concern that labour tenants looking for work in town were joining the Native Military Corps. It ordered its officials to forbid any native, whose documents show that he is a farm labourer who has been given permission by his employer

\textsuperscript{73} NAD, 1 NHR 3\textsuperscript{22}/27 2\textsuperscript{9}/5, F. Redinger to Magistrate, 7 February 1942.  
\textsuperscript{74} NAD, 1 NHR 3\textsuperscript{22}/27 2\textsuperscript{9}/5, Magistrate to NAU, 24 March 1942.  
\textsuperscript{75} NAD, 1 EST 3\textsuperscript{1}/2\textsuperscript{6} 2\textsuperscript{5}/1a, Magistrate to H. Despard, 9 June 1945.  
to obtain employment in a town for a limited period, to enlist for military service.\textsuperscript{77}

At a local level magistrates tried to persuade blacks living in the reserves of the attractions of farm work. At Richmond in 1946 the Native Commissioner addressed a meeting of chiefs and headmen stressing the advantages of labour tenancy "such as family life, lands to plough and grazing for small herds of cattle as well as a permanent home (sic)." He explained that the smaller wages paid on farms as against towns was more than offset by there being no rent to pay for accommodation, arable land and grazing.\textsuperscript{78}

Magistrates also prevented blacks settling in the reserves. The same commissioner noted that many natives wish to live on locations and Trust farms but... I have more often than not refused to allow them on the reserves because of the fact that the farm labour position will become more serious than it is if natives are allowed to squat on the reserves, Trust farms and locations.\textsuperscript{79}

At a national level the Smuts government failed to implement the agricultural unions' demands for greater state intervention in coercing Union blacks. During the war it softened various laws intended to prevent rural blacks obtaining work in the towns. In 1940 it relaxed provisions of the Native Service Contract Act so that blacks arriving in towns without documents could lawfully look for work. From 1942 to 1946 urban pass laws were relaxed in all major urban centers except Cape Town. Although their enforcement was tightened after that the police were instructed to use

\textsuperscript{77} NAD, 1 EST 3\1\2\6 2\5\9, General Circular 25 of 1942.
\textsuperscript{78} NAD, 1 RMD 3\3\1\8 N\1\15\4, Quarterly Meeting of Chiefs, Indunas and Headmen, 26 September 1946.
\textsuperscript{79} NAD, 1 RMD 3\3\1\8 N\1\15\4, Quarterly Meeting of Native Chiefs, 15 September 1944.
"their powers sparingly.".  

80 In Natal, as late as 1947, the CNC reminded the NAU congress that in his department's opinion the only way to "stem the tide of migration is to offer better wages."  

While the NAD continued to press for the amelioration of farm conditions most farmers remained adamant that the only solution lay in greater control of the farm population. Farmers' newspapers abounded with articles carrying titles such as: "Control the native: that is the key to the farmers difficulties today."  

82 In New Hanover the magistrate noted the "unanimous desire for control."  

83 One farmer, rejecting the use of advisory boards, suggested instead "some legislation compelling all native workers to have a Labour pass Book with their photo to encourage better labour."  

The farmers' urge for greater control was part of a growing hegemonic consensus favouring greater control over the black population. Industrialisation, black urbanisation, and the resultant social conflict led to two national enquiries into policies and methods of control over the black population. Both the Sauer (1947) and Fagan (1948) Commissions, espoused respectively by the Nationalist and United parties, recommended a national system of labour bureaux and population identification operated by central government to
achieve firmer control.\textsuperscript{85} The Chairman of the Fagan Commission, referring to the need for a national identification document, remarked: "There is a remarkable unanimity on this point which we hardly expected. Practically everyone who has appeared before us has expressed the same view."\textsuperscript{86} A joint memorandum from the Natal Coal Owners Society and Natal Mine Managers Association epitomised the views widely stated by other white witnesses. "It is considered that the continuance of the pass system is necessary for the same reason as passes are necessary for soldiers in the army. Natives, like soldiers, are largely moving units and this form of control and restraint is necessary for their ready identification in an organised community."\textsuperscript{87} Although the two reports differed on whether registration at the labour bureaux should be voluntary or compulsory, they both reflected the widespread desire for a tighter system of influx control.\textsuperscript{88}

The Nationalists' election victory in May 1948 signalled the arrival in power of a new class alliance in which agricultural interests were strongly represented. Senator Verwoerd told the Senate that one of the Nationalists' main objectives was: "The imposition of state control in matters of labour in such a way that the necessary farm labour will be sufficiently assured."\textsuperscript{89} In 1949 the retitled Department

\textsuperscript{85} Hindson, Pass Controls, p.59.
\textsuperscript{86} UCT, BC 630, p.2436.
\textsuperscript{87} UCT, BC 630 B2.2.2, Joint Memorandum 22 January 1947.
\textsuperscript{89} Quoted ibid., p.69.
of Native Affairs drafted the Native Laws Amendment (NLA) Bill in close conjunction with the SAAU.

The Bill made provision for a national labour bureau system intended to redirect job seekers surplus to urban requirements to the farms. Yet it fell short of organised agriculture's demands. Firstly, it was only once urban labour demand had been satisfied that the bureaux would direct labour to the farms. Secondly, while organised agriculture insisted on compulsory registration the bill remained ambivalent on this point making provision for the "voluntary or compulsory registration of natives with labour bureaux."\(^90\)

This ambivalence reflected the Nationalists' uncertainty. Their majority in parliament was small and the UP opposition insisted that registration be voluntary. Facing opposition from the United party and powerful urban local authorities whose powers the NLA superseded with central state control, the Nationalists compromised and fell short of agriculture's demands and the Bill was withdrawn in late 1949. The DNA under Jansen remained cautious. In 1950 Jansen warned that as far as the farm labour shortage was concerned, "The creation of labour bureaux will undoubtedly help, but it should be realised that there cannot be any compulsion."\(^91\)

It was not until the early 1950s that the Nationalists were

\(^{90}\) Ibid., pp.108-9.

in a strong enough position to adhere more closely to the demands of organised agriculture.

Conclusion

The shortage of farm labour during the 1940s illuminated some significant aspects of the agricultural economy. It revealed the limits of farmers' authority and the power of tenants' actions. During the tremendous expansion of commercial agriculture, farmers were unable to staunch the flow of their most productive workers to other areas of employment. It was an act of resistance, uncoordinated and individualistic, carried out on a remarkably large scale not merely in the Natal Midlands but nationally as well.

It also revealed the extent of the breakdown of patriarchal control. The labour shortage was partly due to youths flouting the authority of their elders and freeing themselves so as to reap the rewards of selling their own labour power, perhaps an indication that labour power was becoming a commodity for at least some black workers themselves.

The labour shortage was, however, unevenly spread. On larger stock farms where farmers granted their tenants access to relatively large amounts of land the shortage was not so serious. But for smaller farmers unable to offer sufficient cash or land and those capitalist farmers whose
intensive production process ruled out large grants of land, the impact of the shortage was severe.

At the same time the state failed to find a solution. Despite constant and vocal calls by farmers the state in Natal either refused to further intervene or else pursued a policy inimical to most farmers. However the lines of future state action were firmly drawn up by organised agriculture and the state. As we shall see, the legislation of the apartheid government to control farm workers' actions had its roots in the class struggle and changing nature of agrarian capital accumulation in the 1940s.
From 1953 to the end of the decade the rate of growth in the agricultural sector slowed down. During this period, which is termed by some the post-Korean, the volume of agricultural output grew by around 4.7 per cent a year compared to 7.6 per cent during the previous decade. Producer prices remained relatively constant from 1953 onwards, although the removal of price controls on cattle in 1956 led to comparatively sharp price increases for related products. The cost of farm requisites rose sharply compared to the prices that farmers received. This "cost-price squeeze" led the South African Agricultural Union (SAAU) to complain in 1957: "For the past few years there has been a slow but continuous pressure being exerted on the farmers' profit margins." ¹

The rate of mechanisation also declined. Capital investment in machinery, implements and motor vehicles from 1953-1959 averaged R3.8 million p.a. at constant prices, compared with R10 million p.a. for 1947 - 1952. The expansion of capital stock was largely due to the high replacement demand as bad maintenance, a largely untrained workforce and sabotage by disgruntled labourers led to many breakdowns. ² But while

² From 1958/9 - 1968/9, the amount farmers spent on the maintenance and repair of machines and implements exceeded the cost of new equipment. In that period they spent R706.4 million on the former compared with R498.8 million on the
the mechanisation of agriculture slowed down the introduction of biological and chemical innovations accelerated. By the end of the 1950s agriculturalists used twice as much fertilizer as at the start of the decade. Improved seeds and insecticides also began to be introduced more widely. 3

The process of differentiation between advanced farmers and others continued. Several factors caused some smaller farmers to leave farming. Land prices rose even more steeply in the 1950s then they had in the 1940s and the rate of increase was far above that of production values. This was partly because wealthy farmers continued to plough their profits back into land, partly because increased profits made agriculture an attractive field for investment and also because of speculation by urban capitalists. Especially in the Transvaal Highveld and Northern Natal, investment corporations and urban development companies bought land near to new industrial areas "with an eye to expected urban developments." The rise in land prices prevented new or poorer farmers from purchasing land, particularly since Land Bank valuations were usually considerably below the market price. This left many smaller farmers owning "uneconomic farm units", farms too small for the owner to cultivate at a profit. 4

Many smaller farmers also faced "financial collapse" from the debt burden of excessive borrowing as they sought loans to meet interest payments, to buy and maintain machines and to satisfy the ever present need for short term credit. As a state commission reported later, the shift to a system of "production for an exacting market economy and increasing capital demands" meant such farmers incurred heavier and heavier loans and interest obligations. The state reacted in the mid-1950s by making available special short-term loans for seed, fertilizer and tractor fuel "designed chiefly to help poorer farmers". The Land Bank, at the same time, admitted that it had become a "relief institution" which confined itself mainly to "those farmers who did not go in for farming on a large scale". Consciously leaving the best investments for commercial investors, it achieved a sequestration rate of only 1.5 per cent by granting payment extensions, adjusting due dates and suspending capital redemption payments if debtors could not meet their commitments due to the "vicissitudes of nature, stock diseases, or because they had to change from one form of farming to another." Such measures were one aspect of the apartheid state's reorientation from the United Party's alliance with large rural capitalists to the Nationalists' embrace of smaller farmers.

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But the mere provision of finance was not enough to guarantee success to struggling farmers. Even though state aid to agriculture grew by 50 per cent during the decade, there was a growing realisation that efficient management was the key to prosperous agriculture. A Department of Agriculture survey in 1957 found that "[p]roper farming methods can earn efficient farmers ten times as much as inefficient farmers out of a piece of land the same size in the same area." The dearth of farmers with any sort of agricultural education (only 15 per cent according to one admittedly conservative estimate) meant that "[m]ore than half the farmers in the union are apparently not good managers, nor do they systematically apply proved business principles."\(^7\)

As a result, there was an increasing concentration of farm ownership. From 1951-1960 the number of white male entrepreneurs declined by 20.8 per cent (from 125,020 to 98,960), the number of farming units fell by nine per cent (from 115,965 to 105,889) whilst the average farm size grew by 18.1 per cent from 857.1 to 1012.3 morgen. Larger farmers continued to increase their share of the output. By 1962, 20 per cent of all farmers produced fully 70 per cent of the total agricultural output.\(^8\)

\(^8\) Africa, "Mechanisation", p.8; Second Report, p.27.
The Natal Midlands, 1953 - 1960

In the Midlands the slow down in growth and producer price movement also led to changes within the farming sector. Low prices and labour resistance prompted more farmers, especially those with few capital reserves, to move out of dairy farming. One such struggling farmer complained in 1953 that "in just over two years... the price I received for my milk has risen by 12 per cent, the cost of my peanut meal has risen 44 per cent, petrol 44 per cent and railage 35 per cent."9 The Umvoti Agricultural society reported in 1956 that out of 158 farmers who had supplied milk formerly, 100 had given up dairying. Rising production costs, static producer prices and the high capital demands of stringent health regulations were all cited as the main reasons for this change. As the chairman declared: "Dairying remains the hardest type of farming to make an income at, especially with the increased capital expenditure on buildings and modern milking machinery which is demanded."10 The lower labour costs in stock farming compared to dairying were a further reason why struggling dairy farmers left the sector.11

However, for those farmers who remained milk producers the "1950s was a new era for dairy production." In Lions River, cultivated pastures were grown more extensively and advanced

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9 NAUNLU, 9 October 1953.
10 Killie Cambell Library (hereafter KCL), Durban, KCM 33663
Umvoti Agricultural Society Minutes, Book 5, AGM 1956;
Greytown Gazette, 14 December 1956.
11 Greytown Gazette, 21 May 1954.
dairy farmers booted labour out of and poured capital into their enterprises. Milking machines cut the labour requirements by up to two-thirds and by 1960 114 out of the district's 316 farmers had installed these labour eliminating machines. The increasing introduction of milk tankers eliminated the labour previously required to wash, fill and handle individual cans of milk. The high capital inputs demanded skilled financial management from the farmer as well as efficient production; a dairying expert commented at the time that while fresh milk farming "makes heavy demands in terms of capital investment, it is still the most lucrative of all dairy markets for the farmer who really understands the economics of his business." 

The labour-intensive timber industry expanded considerably during the 1950s. Much of this was due to extensive planting by large forestry companies hastening to exploit the world shortage of softwood and the demand for timber from the building, furniture, synthetic fibres and paper industries. In Richmond, New Hanover and Umvoti, thousands of morgen of farmland were diverted from pastures and milk production to timber, especially pines and gums. The availability of tractors and bulldozers which could plough up areas impossible for oxen or early types of tractor facilitated the process. The drying-up of streams and the movement of labour onto the better paying forestry concerns

also expedited the conversion of pastures to plantations. In the second half of the decade, the demand for wattle extract fell as leather products were increasingly replaced by synthetics. This led to a sharp drop in the sale of wattle extract. The resultant problems for the growers were further aggravated by panic stripping and more overproduction. In 1956 wattle was put on a quota basis to the detriment of small producers. By the end of the 1950s in the Midlands there were 300,000 acres of surplus wattles.  

Some of the large timber farmers joined together to form private companies or co-operatives to facilitate the marketing of their products. In Richmond in 1951, 5 of the largest farmers joined together to form Springbok Forestry Company which was the largest privately owned timber company in the area. Another company, the Enon Forestry Company, was formed by four local farmers who planned the venture while they were prisoners of war. In Umvoti, the Natal Cooperative Timber Company was formed in 1948 by a group of timber growers to market their timber on a more efficient and organised scale. Certain large local farming families dominated, and continue to dominate, the co-operative; three of the present directors are the sons of the original directors. Moreover all the chairmen since the co-operative's inception have been "prominent farmers in the Natal Midlands and have served with distinction on the

boards of various agricultural and forestry organisations for many years." Many of the private companies concentrated on forging links with processing companies and some, such as the Union Co-operative Limited of Dalton, established their own factories.15

Wool farmers continued to receive high prices. Although the boom prices of the late 1940s and early 1950s were not maintained throughout the decade, by 1959/60 wool prices had risen higher, compared with 1940 prices, than those of any other agricultural product. Midlands farmers seized the opportunity and increased their sheep holdings. From 1949-50 to 1959-60, the number of sheep in Bergville and Lions River rose by 50 per cent, in Estcourt by 93 per cent, in Umvoti by 870 per cent and Richmond by 1500 per cent. The total quantity of wool obtained rose by 68 per cent in Estcourt, 104 per cent in Umvoti, 295 per cent in Bergville, and a massive 1280 per cent in Lions River. As with other sectors, sheep ownership was highly concentrated. In 1959-60, 20 per cent of owners in Estcourt possessed 64 per cent of the sheep, in Lions River 17 per cent owned 73 per cent of the flocks, and in Umvoti 30 per cent had 85 per cent of the stock.16

15 Coulson, Beaulieu-on-Iallovo, pp.302-3; Umvoti County, p.145, p.143.
Mechanisation in the Midlands followed the national trend. From the early fifties many farmers bought machinery with more caution than they had in the immediate post-war years. A local agricultural machine dealer reported in 1956 that its turnover had actually declined because "farmers are tending to confine their purchases to absolute necessities, rather than their previous policy of buying equipment as and when it became available." A year later it remarked:

The farming community as a whole have tended to contract their purchases as their need for further mechanisation of the farms falls away and it would appear that until such times as the existing machinery becomes obsolete, or requires replacement, the overall volume of business available to the importers of agricultural machinery in the Union will remain on a lower basis than before.17

The agricultural press abandoned its previous eulogies in favour of mechanisation, and began to caution on the process's inherent limitations and problems. In 1952, NAUNLU carried an article which noted that "mechanisation has not increased production as much as we have expected it to." It went on to report on an experiment in which it took almost twice as long to plough the same area when it consisted of small fields than when it was one large field, and concluded: "The efficiency of machinery can be brought down by use in small fields." It went on to point out the constraints of mechanisation:

Farming is a continuous production process with the likelihood of peak labour requirements at certain times of the year. The farmer may have to keep a large labour force to meet these peaks. Mechanisation may ease a bottleneck in production only to be thwarted by other bottlenecks. The advantage of a manure-spreader

17 KCL, KCM 53368, G. North and Sons, Minutes Book 1, 1 August 1956; 7 August 1957.
Three years later, a commentator again noted the problems of mechanising small farms. Apart from the technical aspect of many machines being unsuitable for use in small areas, he pointed out that the costs of mechanisation for the small farmer were much greater than those of larger property owners: "There is required practically the same capital expenditure for small farms as for larger farms, which means so much more capital per acre." To solve this problem he proposed that the proprietors of small farms should not necessarily buy machines but should approach "capitalist" tractor owners who would have "the trained and efficient boys on the tractors; they will understand the machinery and they will get the best results from mechanisation." The small farmer and the tractor owner would then plan which work should be done and when. He pointed out, however, that "little has been done in this country at present in this connection."  

While there is no data to indicate the extent of state aid to Natal farmers alone, some of these farmers did make increasing use of one particular group of state personnel, extension officers. In Umvoti the extension officers were in "constant demand" and a reduction in their mileage allowance in the early 1950s brought forth loud complaints from farmers who feared that this would lead to a reduced service. When the first extension office opened in Howick

18 NAUNLU, 6 June 1952.
for the Lions River and Nottingham Road districts in the late 1940s, heavy demand was placed on the advisory services. This was brought home to a newly appointed extension officer when an impatient farmer, after being told he could only be visited the following week, retorted, "Well, son, let us agree that we are going to build a great country but hell it is going to take a long time!"\textsuperscript{20}

It is unclear from the available census data what the effect of the above processes was on agricultural employment. The census only gives the number of regular agricultural workers in each district. There is no definition given of 'regular worker' so it is unclear whether or not this includes labour tenants although, given the large numbers of regular workers, it is probable that labour tenants are included. Yet even this limited information indicates certain important trends. Firstly, agricultural employment fell between 1949-50 and 1959-60 in almost all districts. For example, in Estcourt employment fell by 34 per cent, in Lions River by 14 per cent and in Umvoti by 9 per cent. Small rises occurred, however, in those districts with extensive timber production such as New Hanover where the number of workers rose by six per cent.

Most of those who lost their jobs were women. Thus, in Estcourt female employment fell by 75 per cent, in Bergville by 48 per cent, in Lions River by 35 per cent and in Richmond by 29 per cent. Whereas in 1949 women made up

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Greytown Gazette}, 6 June 1952, 22 August 1952; Scotney and Scott-Shaw, \textit{Lions River Division}, p.50.
around 23 per cent of the regular labour force in the Midlands, by 1959 this had shrunk to around 11 per cent. Again, the main exceptions were in the timber districts of Umvoti and New Hanover where the percentage of women rose to 32 per cent. With the exception of 1955, none of the pre-1958 censuses list the number of casual employees. However, the census for 1959-60 makes clear that, in that year, the number of female casual employees was usually between two and four times the number of male casual employees in the Midlands districts.  

This decline in regular female employment and their growing role in the increasingly important casual labour force, the 'casualisation' of women farm workers, was an integral part of the "quantitative and qualitative shifts in the gender and age composition of agriculture's workforce" which occurred nationally within the restructuring of commercial agriculture. According to Nattrass, during the 1950s "capitalist farmers did indeed substitute casual labour for full-time labour on a substantial scale" and the vast majority of these casual employees were women.  


23 For a similar phenomenon occurring on Western Transvaal maize farms in the late 1960s and early 1970s, see M. de Klerk, "The Seasons That Never Will Return: The Impact of Farm Mechanisation on Employment, Incomes and Population..."
research among ex-farmworkers in resettlement camps in the Orange Free State has shown that, around the mid-1950s, many women members of labour tenant families began to sell their labour power independently of patriarchal control, receiving cash wages for casual agricultural work. For female workers in these regions at least, it seems that it was in the 1950s rather than the 1930s and the 1940s, as Bradford has speculated, in which "labour power became a commodity for African workers themselves."

As for child labour, the censuses contain no information although it was reported in Camperdown in 1961 that: "Children over 8 years old are being compelled to work for 6 months every year."

It is also difficult to tell from census data to what extent wages fluctuated or even whether cash wages became a larger part of the labourers total payment over this period compared with payments in kind. According to the 1959-60 census cash wages on average varied between 3.2 and 4.1 pounds per month with payments in kind ranging from 0.8 to 1.1 pounds per month. However it is not clear whether or

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not wages paid to casual employees were included in the figures given for the wages paid by farmers. Nor is there any breakdown of wages between male and female employees. In 1949-50 Midlands' women received, on average, 63 per cent of that paid to their male counterparts.27

Some advanced farmers implemented full-time wage labour in their labour force. Dairy farmers figured prominently in this group of employers. Many of the more successful ones mechanised in response to the labour shortage and, in particular, to the shortage of trained, skilled workers. A contemporary observer noted that "the difficulty in securing reliable and skilled milkers has led to a very considerable adoption of milking machines." This, in turn, changed the type of labour they required:

While this step has eased the labour problem, a new one arises in its place because the milking machine requires an intelligent, careful and skilled operator. Unless it receives very great care and thorough, regular cleaning it is, all too frequently, a serious source of contamination and so lowers the quality of the milk.28

Some of these farmers managed to change their employment from labour tenancy to full-time service with few reported difficulties and many alleged benefits. One such farmer claimed to have "no labour troubles" after completing this transition. In a letter to NAUNLU he told how, after coming back from the war, his labour tenants had given him "endless

trouble." He evicted all those labourers who refused to stop keeping livestock and forbade his remaining employees to keep sheep, cattle or goats. The one exception to the ban indicated the farmer's implicit recognition of the tenants' right to the land, "I have one old boy who has been with me for nearly 30 years, who still has his few cattle and I haven't the heart to send him away; he just belongs to the place and the place belongs to him." In place of labour tenancy, he put all labour to work on a monthly basis. The working week started on Monday morning and ended on Saturday evening although operating the dairy meant "work also has to be done on Sundays which is a drawback." To overcome this he split the workforce into two gangs. The gang which worked on a Sunday had the next weekend off from Saturday lunchtime, while the other one stayed to complete the weekend work. He claimed that it was evident that his workers were satisfied because there were always other Africans coming to the farm seeking work and wanting to live there. He concluded by extolling the advantages of his new system, "I get very much more work out of them because they are working all the year round and through that they are trained and know their job."29

For many other farmers, the transition to full-time service was much more difficult. For example, a Weenen citrus farmer, who farmed "a big concern" of around 70 000 acres, took one of his labour tenants to court when the tenant refused to leave after being given his notice to quit. The farmer explained that a year previously he had tried to make

29 NAUNLU, 21 May 1954.
the tenants sign a contract to work for 12 months but "only a few signed and in the end all reverted to 6 months work and 6 months off." A year later he had tried to make those labour tenants finishing their six month stint work for a further six months. As a result of this, those tenants had then gone on strike and he had issued all of them with notices to quit. This case, he continued, was a test case:

I feel all these natives are waiting the result of this action and there will be no change until this action is heard. They are just trying to delay the case as has happened in the past.

When asked why the workers were against the introduction of full-time service he replied when full-time service was implemented, he intended to halve the workforce.30

Much to the disgust of the NAU, it was clear that many blacks on the farms preferred the six month system. A farm worker who had been to Johannesburg and learnt to drive, wrote to the NAU asking if they could help him find work on a farm as a "motor or tractor driver". The secretary replied that they were pleased that he wished

to get back into the rural areas, but regret to see the attraction is 6 months work and 6 months free. On that basis I am afraid you will not be able to make an existence. There is no nation in the world that can prosper under this old system.31

While many, if not most, farmers continued to employ labour tenants, they began to limit the terms under which labour tenants could remain on the land. Unable to afford the

30 Natal Archive Depot (hereafter NAD), Pietermaritzburg, 1 WEN 2/1/1/1/2, Case 8/1955, Tugela Estates v. Q. Cedebeculu.
31 NAU Archives, Letter Book, J.J. Botha to A. Gebengana, 5 March 1953.
extra capital outlay that full-time service demanded, many farmers with labour tenants began to tighten their control over their employees. Debbie Bonnin's research in the Lions River district revealed that from the early 1950's to the mid 1970's the "labour tenancy system was eroded from three sides: the abolition of the six month system, restrictions on the keeping of cattle, and to a larger extent restrictions on land available for ploughing."32 Certainly the census data shows that in Lions River, the number of cattle owned by blacks on white farms dropped by 38,5 per cent from 1948-49 to 1960-61 although in the less capitalised districts of Estcourt, Richmond and Umvoti the reductions were less than 10 per cent. In Mooi River, members of the farmers association noted in 1958 that "a number of farmers were glad to see their employees selling cattle at this time and it was therefore agreed that Natives could sell their cattle at the [association's] sales."33

Restrictions on the land available for ploughing can be seen from the decline in mealies grown by blacks on white farms. Comparing the average production over the four years of 1951 - 1954 with the period 1955 - 1959 the yield in Camperdown dropped by 24 per cent, in Umvoti by 21,3 per cent, that in Lions River by 13,7 per cent, in Richmond by 9,3 per cent and in Estcourt by 8,5 per cent.34

33 KCL, KCM 24440, Mooi River Farmers' Association Minutes, Book 6, 28 May 1958.
34 Calculated from Agricultural Censuses, Nos 26 - 33.
Further evidence that capitalising farmers increased restrictions on their labour tenants comes from the oral testimony of ex-tenants. In Lions River, the experience of Simon Ntombela was representative of many other labour tenants. He was born on a farm in Dargle in the early 1940s where he lived with his family working on the farm under the six month system with their cattle holding limited to five. Towards the end of the decade the farmer "was saying no to that system. We had to leave because his rules were getting more tough." They moved to another farm where the farmer did not allow them to keep any cattle. The conditions on this farm were considerably harsher: "It was much worse. I was the one responsible for working on that farm. It was so hard I ran away. I got arrested, my father came to fetch me, and I had to work on that farm for nine years."\(^{35}\)

Individual acts of resistance by labourers continued although it is difficult to tell from the scanty, existing records whether or not they increased at this time. In Estcourt a correspondent to the local farming paper noted that:

Thieving is so common today among Native Labourers that farmers are at a loss to know how to combat it. Dairy farmers find milk being stolen and hidden in cans and drums; poultry farmers, housewives on farms, find their birds disappearing.\(^{36}\)

The court records contain instances of stock theft and attempted poisoning of farmers by their workers.\(^{37}\) In one

\(^{35}\) Bonnin, *Class*, pp.134-5.

\(^{36}\) NAUNLU, 21 February 1958.

\(^{37}\) NAD, RSC 1/1/234, 127 of 1955; NAD, RSC 1/1/237, R. v. Mnikate.
of the latter cases, two young boys were found guilty of trying to poison their employer. After being assaulted by him and made to work late, the two eleven year olds resolved to take revenge. The next morning, while they were eating breakfast the farmer came and again hit them with a stick. They ran away, hid, and while the farmer was busy elsewhere, put "the medicine that kills cockroaches" in his flask of tea.38

Labour Migration

Farmers' complaints of labour shortages were more muffled from the mid-1950s as the supply and demand for labour reached a tenuous balance. In Umvoti, the labour position in 1954 was "sufficient for the normal requirements of the farming industry... due to crop failures in the native areas and a decrease in the flocking to the cities." In 1956 the local agricultural society reported that: "In most cases labour for farming operations has been sufficient but with the increased timber production every year there will be more and more labour required to carry on."39 These local occurrences reflected the national trend from the mid-1950s for the end of the substantial labour shortage as "employment [levelled off] in absolute terms at a stage when labour supply continue[d] to grow."40

38 NAD, 1 WEN 1/1/1/1/3, Case 16 of 1953.
Part of the reason for the improved labour supply was the severely diminished migration to urban areas. This was due to several factors. Firstly, industrial jobs became scarcer as the economy slowed down in the mid-1950s and, from the end of the decade, industrialists began to rely on permanent rather than temporary employees (see Chapter 3). By the early 1950s the labour market in Pietermaritzburg reached "saturation point."\textsuperscript{41} Moreover, the new urban influx control measures started to take effect (see below), and labourers were wary of courting arrest if they went to urban areas illegally.

Of course, many labourers still tried to migrate to the cities. Nationally, industrial wages in 1952-3 remained 3.7 times as high as those in agriculture. In Mooi River, gangs of youths deserted from farms and made their way to Port Elizabeth to find jobs. Other labourers forged notes from their employers requesting that they be given authority to seek work in Durban. Farmers were irate that

\begin{quote}
Natives are getting into Durban without passes and on arrival there, are from various sources and for a consideration able to obtain the necessary papers. This is serious and it would appear that there is slackness in Durban and a very well organised 'market' in passes etc., is flourishing.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

Indeed, those migrating labourers able to elude detection by vigilant influx control authorities were swiftly welcomed

\textsuperscript{41} NAD, 1 RMD 3/3/2/2 N3/11/2 pt 12, J. Bang to Native Commissioner, Richmond, 13 April 1951.

into the ranks of the urban proletariat. Employers were keen to engage rural workers who appeared far more reluctant to openly defy the capitalists' authority than their urban counterparts. The Nel Committee reported in 1960 that "[e]ven today the urban employer prefers the disciplined entrant from the farm to certain residents of the urban Bantu residential area."43

Farmers were also very wary of any local enterprise that threatened their near monopoly in the local labour market by offering labourers higher wages than those they received on the farms. The Mooi River Farmers Association wrote furiously to their local Provincial Councillor deploiring "the action of the executive of the Natal Provincial Council or whoever may be responsible for the raising of the wages of the Native employees in the service of the Agricultural High School, Mooi River to a level out of proportion to those paid to farm labourers in the district." When a new factory was opened in Camperdown in 1957, the district's farmers made it clear that, while they had no objection to the employment of "native labour from the local native reserves", they viewed the factory's establishment with concern because "wages paid to factory employees would have an influence on the wages paid to farm labourers."44

44 KCL, KCM 24440, Mooi River Farmers' Association Minutes, Book 6, 9 June 1953; KCL, KCM 54089, Camperdown Agricultural Society Minutes, Book 3, 19 July 1957.
Farm workers still took advantage of employment which offered higher wages than those paid by their employers. In the mid-1950s, the local press in Umvoti carried numerous notices issued by farmers warning others that they would prosecute anyone "poaching their labour." A typical notice exclaimed "WARNING - Mr Van Rooyen wishes to inform the public that any person engaging his native labour, male or female, residing on the farms "Burrups" and "Olivefontein" without his written consent will be prosecuted."45 Labourers also continued to join road gangs for the same reason. Again in Umvoti, several farmers complained that "[n]atives were leaving their employ and working for the Roads Department without any authority."46

The State and Farm Labour

Close collaboration between the state and farmers continued at a local level. Magistrates continued to enjoy close social relations with farmers and their associations.47 Magistrates' sentencing also continued to favour farmers when disputes arose between the latter and their labourers. This was especially true in stock theft cases. Judges across the country continually reduced, on appeal, the sentences that magistrates gave first offenders for stock theft. For example, in 1961 the magistrate at Ixopo sentenced a farm worker to six months imprisonment for

46 KCL, KCM 33663, Umvoti Agricultural Society Minutes, Book 5, 28 January 1956.
47 For example, KCL KCM 54090, Camperdown Agricultural Society Minutes, 28 May 1958.
stealing a duck worth R1,25 from his employer. In passing sentence the magistrate admitted "with great respect that the sentence passed in this case is a robust one." His reason was that Ixopo was chiefly a farming district and that numerous cases of stock theft had caused poultry farming in the district to be "a risky and unrewarding business." He added that for the past two years a sentence of six months had been the normal sentence passed on first offenders where no mitigating circumstances existed. The case went to appeal and the judge slashed the sentence in half. He said the magistrate had misdirected himself in declaring that no mitigating factors existed since he had not heard any evidence regarding the accused conditions of employment.48 Small wonder that farmers' associations persistently campaigned for a reduction in the number of magistrates' judgements which were subject to automatic judicial review. They demanded that, instead of all cases where the sentence was three or more months imprisonment being reviewed, the judges should examine only those cases where the sentence was twelve or more months imprisonment.49 But, at least by the early 1960s, the criteria for review remained three months.50

While local level collaboration continued much as before, far reaching changes occurred within the central state apparatus. A year after the Nationalists took office Dr Eiselen was appointed as Secretary of the NAD. His appointment caused much consternation among the senior members of the predominantly English speaking civil service who were outraged at the unashamedly political posting. It was a clear indication of the way the department was to change; experienced administrators were shafted in favour of new Afrikaner nationalist appointees who turned the department into a vigorous enforcer of the emerging apartheid policies. (Henry Gibbs summed up the government's lack of discretion in politicising the civil service with the phrase: "Excuse me, your Broederbond is showing.") Verwoerd became Minister in 1950 and ran the department with an iron hand. Officials who criticised his ideas were subject to a "lateral cadenza." The victims had no hope of receiving further promotion but, instead, were shuffled sideways within the bureaucracy into obscure and powerless posts. By the mid-1950s, it was clear that only "Ja Broers" received advancement in the NAD, and, with a handful of exceptions, only members of the Broederbond were promoted to senior positions.51

As we noted above, the first few years of the Nationalist government involved little break with the policies of the

previous incumbents. The new administration's slender electoral majority and opposition from the powerful urban local authorities led it to concentrate on tackling immediate problems rather than working on long term aims.52 A contemporary observer in 1950 noted, "[t]he picture I would draw is of muddle-headed administration, not the conventional one of deliberate repression."53

By the early 1950s, however, the Nationalists had consolidated their grip on the reins of power and began to implement their policies. In 1952, the government reintroduced the Native Labour Amendment Act (NLAA) which formed the basis of state attempts to control labour distribution. The Act set up a national labour bureau system; local labour bureaux were set up in urban districts to regulate the influx of Africans, district labour bureaux were set up in white-owned rural areas and reserves to control African efflux, nine regional bureaux coordinated the movement of labour between town and country and all was supervised by the central labour bureau in Pretoria. As far as farm labour was concerned, the system aimed first to curb the influx of rural Africans to towns and second to redirect or canalise those unable to get work in the towns to the white-owned farms.54

In the first case, rural workers wanting to look for work in the towns had to register at rural labour bureaus. If allowed to proceed to town, they had to re-register there as work seekers and stay in labour depots until they obtained a job. Workers who lost their jobs had to return to their home district and re-register at the rural labour bureau. In the second case, Africans arrested in towns for petty pass law offences were given the choice of facing prosecution or being sent to work on white farms. First introduced in Fordsburg in 1947, this scheme became applied nationally in 1954. It applied not to permanent town dwellers but only to "those natives from the rural areas who have entered the towns illegally."55

The NLAA is often seen as the unadulterated state implementation of the SAAU's labour policy.56 However, it is important to note that, although it reflected the power and influence of organised agriculture, it represented primarily the interests of the NAD. As Posel has pointed out, during the 1950s the NAD became a powerful autonomous contributor to the shaping of Apartheid policies. The NAD was indeed concerned to solve the farm labour shortage but its greatest priority was to limit discontent amongst the increasing urban proletariat by ensuring that urban employment was limited to permanent urban residents. Thus, though the labour bureau system certainly met most of organised agriculture's demands, it

55 Posel, "Influx Control", pp.150-2; NAUNLU, 10 April 1953.  
had an inbuilt urban bias: it was only once the urban demand for African labour had been satisfied that labour bureaux would step in to redirect work seekers from the reserves, away from the cities to the white farms. Labour bureaux were not empowered to satisfy rural demands for labour first, before allowing Africans to seek work in the cities.57

The authorities set up a central reference system to enforce influx control. The Natives Abolition and Coordination of Documents Act (1952) introduced a uniform pass book for African men to be used as identification when Africans moved from one district to another, registered at a labour bureau, and when registering service contracts. The Act also set up the central reference bureau to issue the book and keep population, movement, and finger print registers.58

Although the influx control mechanisms were established in the early fifties, their enforcement took several years. From March 1953, teams from the NAD consisting of clerks and photographers toured the Transvaal and parts of Natal collecting old documents and issuing reference books.59 Because of the time taken to issue them, the use of reference books was not made compulsory until February 1958. It was only then that farmers were forbidden to employ unregistered workers and that they had to sign the books monthly to prove that their labourers were employed. The NAU noted in 1955 that, although ID books were being handed out, they were not "in actual fact of any use."60

57 Posel, "Influx Control", p.108.
58 Hindson, Pass Controls, p.61.
60 NAU Archives, Letter Book, Secretary to D. Chandler, 4 August 1955.
The process of issuing the reference books to farm labourers proved highly problematic. African men were reluctant to register, not least because they had to pay 3s 6d for the new book. Moreover, the responsibility for obtaining a reference book lay on the tenant when a registration team was in his area. But often these teams only came "around once in a lifetime to get all the registrations"\(^\text{61}\) and even then there was no guarantee that all those who turned up could register.

Many farmers expressed their irritation at the bureaucratic incompetence displayed by the issuing authorities, especially when it meant their workers having to spend extended periods off work. Richmond farmers resolved not to comply with NAD's local registration proposals because these entailed all of the district's black farm population going to town on the same day. They expected this to cause "very great congestion", and result in many of the labourers having to return "day after day thus wasting their employers time." The Pietermaritzburg Farmers' Association felt it was bad enough that their employees had to take off a day from work to obtain the photographs required for registration. But when delays at the place of issue meant that the workers had to make several visits before receiving their books, they decided the whole position was most "unsatisfactory" and clearly against "the interests of the employer." A local farmers' association complained in February 1958 that the order making possession of reference

\(^\text{61}\) NAU Archives, Letter Book, Secretary to M. Watson, 11 July 1956.
books compulsory was impossible to effect because "a registration photographic unit came to the district in 1955, spent one day of the allotted three, ran out of materials, and have never returned to complete their work."⁶²

Many farm workers resisted registration because of what the reference books represented - an attempt to shackle them to the farms. In 1953 Lions River farmers reported that prospective labour "simply disappeared if a farmer insisted on seeing a work seeker's permit."⁶³ In 1957 a Lowlands farmer repeatedly asked his labourers for their newly issued pass books for him to sign. The tenants prevaricated, inventing all manner of excuses to explain why they could not produce them. After a fruitless confrontation the younger workers left leaving the older ones to explain that "the story in these parts is that if a farmer signs the books the holder will be his 'cooie' for life and will not be able to leave his farm."⁶⁴

Once the use of reference books became compulsory some tenants resisted in the very way the system had been designed to prevent - by deserting. The Elandslaagte Farmers' Association complained to NAD officials in November 1958 "that farmers in the area, as far as labour was concerned, were in a hell of a mess. Some farmers had lost

⁶³ NAU Archives, NAU Minutes, 7 May 1953.
⁶⁴ NAUNLU, 24 January 1958.
as much as a third of their labour. The NAD was squarely to blame for this state of affairs through the timing of their 'dompas' legislation. The whole atmosphere in the district was now one of suspicion, hate and fear."65 In Estcourt enforcing the signing of the reference books led to a labour crisis. Many labourers either refused to produce the books or, having been prosecuted, left the district. One farmer, after completing his milking, transported his labourers to a neighbour's farm since the latter's labourers had quit after he insisted they produce their "dompas".66

Other labourers tried to escape the state restrictions by altering their reference books. Many of those caught received heavy fines. For example, in Umvoti George Gwavutha was fined 20 pounds for tearing out a page of his book. Two months later, Phoyisa Zondi was fined 25 pounds for "erasing particulars" in his. Such sentences reveal the seriousness with which the state viewed these attempts to escape its authority since they were almost twice the average penalty for desertion. In Weenen the police received complaints from farmers that reference books were being forged to enable the holders to seek work and avoid completing their contracts. On further investigation they found that one of the constables at the police station was altering the books for payments of 5 pounds a time.67

65 NAUNLU, 14 November 1958.
66 NAUNLU, 8 August 1958.
67 Greytown Gazette, 10 February 1956, 6 April 1956; NAD, 1 WEN 1/1/1/1/4, R v. Ntsibande, Case 318 of 1959.
Despite such attempts to circumvent them, the barriers to town bound migration proved reasonably effective. This was largely due to the widespread abuse of the system rather than its efficient operation. In 1957 the Chief Native Commissioner reported to the NAU that he had received complaints that "many farmers... are in the habit of taking possession of the reference books issued to their Native employees." He stressed that the reference book was the "personal record of the Native", that it had to be in his possession at all times and that failure to produce the book on demand rendered him liable to prosecution. Two years later the retitled Bantu Affairs Commissioner wrote to the NAU saying that it was illegal for farmers to hold their employees' books as security. The main reasons that farmers did this, he continued, was to prevent their labour from "absconding", or to make sure indebted workers stayed in their employment.68

By 1959 government influx policy forced Durban to draw black labour freely from only seven areas, all in the city's immediate vicinity. Blacks trying to enter from other areas had little hope of gaining permission to seek work in the city unless they had worked there before.69 Many other urban areas in Natal drew a large part of their labour from their own districts. Thirty percent of Pietermaritzburg's male African labour supply, 69 percent's of Estcourt's and

68 NAUNLU, 9 August 1957; NAUNLU, 1 May 1959.
81 percent of Ladysmith's came from within their respective districts.  

Influx control in urban areas was an equal deterrent to would-be urban immigrants. In 1959 Mid-Illovo farmers reported that "[t]he labour position has improved over the last year owing to stricter control in the town." Rural chambers of commerce, who had been in favour of influx control at its inception, later voted for its deproclamation when it led to a decline in trade because "natives were afraid to enter the town as they might be arrested." Housewives likewise criticised the scheme for promoting a shortage of domestic servants.

The other aim of influx control, the rechanneling of rural workers back to their home districts, was less successful. Most farmers bypassed the bureaux, procuring their labour by other means. The NAU reported that farmers demands on the labour bureau at Ladysmith were "negligible." In Richmond the Bantu Affairs Commissioner reported that despite the fact that he stressed the importance of labour bureau registration at "every quarterly meeting of chiefs etc.", there had been no registrations whatsoever. By May 1964, only three people had registered in the previous nine months. The Commissioner explained that the reason was that "the large number of employers are farmers who have large numbers of labour tenants residing on their properties."

70 Ibid.
71 NAUNLU, 1 May 1959.
72 The Estcourt Gazette, 2 November 1955.
73 NAU Archives, Letter Book, Secretary to LDFA, 21 January 1956.
When farmers did apply to the bureaux with vacancies most of the registered workseekers were unwilling to take up agricultural work. At the Richmond bureau most of those who applied for agricultural vacancies to be filled were not local farmers but sugar and timber plantation companies from the coastal region.\textsuperscript{74} By the end of the 1950s most of the Lowland farmers still had not "appreciated that the registration of all labour tenants was compulsory."\textsuperscript{75} By 1960 only eight per cent of the workers in white agriculture were registered.\textsuperscript{76} Regional figures for the operation of Natal's labour bureaux are not available but nationally far more blacks were refused entry into urban areas than accepted work on farms. For example in 1953/4 over 71 000 Africans were refused work seekers permits in the Witwatersrand alone but 72 670 were placed in farm work by labour bureaux nationwide.\textsuperscript{77} Posel attempts to give an indication of the importance of agricultural workers supplied by the bureaux in a table which compares the annual labour bureau agricultural placements with the size of the regular agricultural work

\textsuperscript{74} NAD, 1 RMD 3/3/2/2/3 N3/11/2 pt 14, Bantu Affairs Commissioner to Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, 17 September 1963; Inspection Report: District Labour Bureau, Richmond, Natal: 1 May 1964; NAD, 1 RMD 3/3/2/2/3 N3/11/2 pt 15, OPEN REQUISITION FOR BANTU LABOUR, Regional Employment Commissioner: Natal to Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Richmond, 20 December 1963, 10 January 1964. For the identities of those employers requesting farm labour see the various OPEN REQUISITION FOR BANTU LABOUR forms in the above files.

\textsuperscript{75} KCL, KCM 43079, Lowlands Farmers' Association Minutes, Book 4, 20 August 1960.

\textsuperscript{76} Hindson, \textit{Pass Controls}, p.69.

\textsuperscript{77} Posel, "Influx Control", p.190.
force. But the comparison exaggerates the labour bureaux' contribution to the farm labour supply for two reasons. Firstly the majority of those placed in farm jobs were not regular labourers but casual workers who had been forced into signing 90 day contracts with farmers to avoid prosecution for pass law offences. Many of those sent to the farms through this scheme deserted leading to a high labour turnover. Secondly though the scheme operated nationwide, it was concentrated mainly in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

By the early 1960s influx control afforded farm labour supply a precarious stability although large regional differences preclude any judgement applicable to the province as a whole. In 1959, while Ladysmith farmers were still reporting a labour shortage, Mid-Illovo farmers declared that influx control over the last year had improved their labour position, "[t]here has been labour available on the farms... there is no doubt that the new passes that have been issued are serving a very good cause and we farmers will be able to have stricter control of our farm labour." By 1963 Lions River also reported a labour surplus although it noted that it needed only "a couple of new factories in the district to deplete farm resources."

78 Ibid., p.168.
81 NAUNLU, 20 February 1959.
82 NAUNLU, 1 May 1959.
83 NAUNLU, 13 September 1963.
While influx control restricted labourers to the farms, changes in production affected farmers' labour requirements. The effect of changes within dairy farming on employment has been referred to above. In Dalton an adequate labour supply in 1960 had changed three years later to a labour scarcity. This was due to a substantial shift in production from mainly wattle plantations to other types of timber plantation and the growing of arable crops. The clearing and conversion of wattle areas and the planting of new plantations raised both labour needs and wages.84

Thus by the early 1960s the first aim of organised agriculture, the containing of farm labour, despite prolonged and continuing resistance crawled shakily into effect. But the second aim, the replacement of labour tenancy by full-time wage labour, proved more problematic.

Chapter 4 of the 1936 Land Act was reintroduced in 1954 virtually unchanged. The one significant alteration was that whereas previously the Act had obliged the government to provide alternative land for those made homeless by the Act's operation, under the amended version the provision of other land was left to the discretion of the Minister of Native Affairs. The Act further stipulated that labour tenants had to give a minimum of 122 days service a year and that farmers had to pay a licence fee for each labour tenant that they had registered. Through such measures the state hoped to force farmers to alter their employment from labour tenancy to what the state and advanced sectors of capitalist

84 NAUNLU, 22 November 1963.
agriculture saw as the "the most economical and the most sensible" type of farm labour - full-time wage labour. It also aimed to ensure an even spread of farm workers throughout the sector so that former tenants would be "freed" to sell their labour to those farmers suffering a labour shortage. The whole policy was to be implemented by the establishment of Labour Tenant Control Boards. As Marcus points out, "[t]he amended law was designed to complement machinery set up to 'canalise' African labour between sectors."85

The Labour Tenant Control Boards were set up and by 1960 they had held 350 meetings and made 1 531 determinations mostly in the Transvaal.86 In Natal, the NAU's enthusiasm for the act proved to be out of step with the majority of Natal farmers. Each board consisted of NAD official and three resident farmers. In October 1955 the minister called for nominations from NAU associations for board members. By January 1956 nearly half the forty three districts had not sent in one nomination and thirteen had submitted less than the three. Both cases included districts from all around the province; in other words disinterest was not limited to one particular region.87 By 1957, 36 Labour Tenant Control Boards had been appointed in Natal although due to their lack of activity, at the end of the decade some farmers associations had no idea whether or not the Control Boards were operating in their district. Where the boards did

85 Marcus, Modernising Super-Exploitation, p.67.
87 NAUNLU, 13 January 1956; NAU Archives, Letter Book, Secretary to K[?] Rowe, 5 January 1956.
operate many farmers avoided having their labour tenant population reduced by the board by classifying all their workers as full time servants rather than tenants. While a farmer was only allowed five tenants, he could have as many servants as he deemed necessary.  

While the state made little headway against labour tenancy, it took more concerted action against "squatting." In the 1950s, as in the years prior to apartheid, "state resolve to take action on "cash" tenancy was far stronger than its position on labour tenants." The aim of state policy was to ensure that those blacks in the white rural areas who were not dependent on farm labour for their livelihood would either join the agricultural work force or be moved out of the platteland. The Native Affairs Department claimed that:

If all Natives who live on the Platteland but who do not work there or do not even constitute a labour potential for the area, were to be removed, those remaining would be a far more stable source of labour than is the case today.

Under the amended Chapter 4 all cash tenants had to register within three months of the new law coming into operation and only those tenants who could prove that they had been continuously resident on the land since 1936 could register. Moreover, the farmer on whose land the tenants resided had to pay a tax for each registered squatter. This started at

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89 Marcus, Modernising Super-Exploitation, p.63.

90 Report of the Native Affairs Department for 1954-57, p.44.
one pound for the first year and rose to 16 pounds by the ninth. 91

In Natal the main thrust of the state's offensive against squatting related to 'blackspots' and labour farms. Since the 'black spots' contained few farm workers they will not be discussed here. 92 Labour farms continued to play an important role as reservoirs of labour for local wealthy farmers. The inhabitants continued to keep large herds of cattle and other stock, and complaints by government inspectors of soil erosion persisted. The state tried to organise the farm owners to take action to limit soil erosion by restricting the number of animals their tenants were allowed to keep. These attempts came to nothing because farmers were convinced that if stock "were eliminated, the native labour would leave." 93 Three other features of the labour farms worried the state. One was the lack of white control. A local farmer claimed labour farms were the only area in Natal "where the squatters and tenants control the farmers and not the farmers the squatters." 94 Another related problem, from the state's point of view, was that many evicted tenants from other farms in the Midlands took refuge on the labour farms. 95 But the real problem was that most of the residents of labour farms firmly refused to be drawn into the full-time agricultural labour force.

91 Ibid., p.66.
92 For the state's campaign against black spots see The Surplus Peoples Project (hereafter SPP), Forced Removals in South Africa, Volume 4 Natal (Cape Town, 1983), pp.91-137.
93 Greytown Gazette, 28 March 1952.
94 NAUNLU, 19 February 1960.
95 KCL, KCM 43079, Lowlands Farmers' Association Minutes, Book 4, 12 September 1957.
According to one state commission reporting in 1959: "In most cases the Bantu living on the labour farms are antagonistic towards farmers who insist on full time labour... Nor do the farmers get any seasonal labour from such farms." \(^{96}\)

After failing to persuade the landowners to clamp down on the number of tenants and animals on the labour farms, the state took the initiative. In 1958, after a lengthy court battle, the state evicted 99 families off the farm "Onverwacht." The court case established an important legal precedent which was later used to facilitate the flood of forced removals in the following decades, and it revealed also that the history of the farm and its inhabitants was a textbook case of dispossession, resistance and the overwhelming power of the state.

The principal defendant in the case was one of the tenants, Ngwiligana Zulu. He was uncertain exactly when he was born but knew that "when the Bambata rebellion took place - I was a child knee high." He claimed that the farm had been "bought by our grandparents in ancient times," and that during the 19th century it had been taken over by a white landlord. He and all the other tenants had paid rent to the owner until 1948 when the government expropriated the property.

The expropriating force was the Native Affairs Department but the government handed it to the Department of Agriculture for use as a model soil conservation farm, probably thus hoping to set an example to the district's private landlords. In 1952 the Department of Agriculture approached the tenants and told them they could only continue living on the farm if they signed contracts agreeing neither to cultivate crops nor keep any stock. Some tenants did sign because either they or their relatives were in Johannesburg and they therefore had an income without "keeping cattle or ploughing." But many of the tenants refused to sign because "there were many evil conditions which they imposed on us... we could not own anything, not even a goat... How can one live and maintain one's family under such conditions?"

The tenants opposed to the contracts approached H.M. Basner who was then practising as a lawyer in Durban. He had been a Native Senator in Parliament from 1942 - 47. According to Zulu, Basner advised the tenants not to sign the contracts. According to Basner he did not advise them not to sign but made representations to the Native Commissioner at Weenen and the Department of Lands at Estcourt asking the officials to find the tenants alternative accommodation. He claimed that both officials were anxious to provide alternative accommodation and that on a few occasions between 1956 and 1958 they had promised to make representations to find the tenants land on a Trust farm. But a month after the last of these meetings around half the tenants were served with
eviction notices under the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1952.

It appears that the central government departments overruled attempts by local officials to find alternative land. Certainly the plan for the tenants' resettlement was devised by an official in the NAD office in Pretoria and "had the full blessing of my Department including the Minister." His scheme was to "dump" all the tenants in a nearby location and give them tents. No sanitary arrangements existed in the location and no animals were allowed. The NAD did, however, allow the tenants to keep their stock for three months on "Onverwacht" so as to make arrangements for their disposal.

Despite an impassioned defence by Basner, the Magistrate found the tenants guilty. The Magistrate concluded that "while I realise that these ejected native families will find themselves in a predicament, it is nevertheless of their own making." The defence immediately appealed to the Provincial Court but under the Natives (Prohibition of Interdicts) Act of 1956 the enforcement of an eviction notice could not be suspended because an appeal had been lodged against the conviction.97

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97 NAD, RSC, Regina v. N. Zulu, Case 82/1958. The Court Record when I consulted it in 1989 was in the Natal Supreme Court, Pietermaritzburg. However it was on the point of being transferred to the Natal Archives Depot where, I presume, it now rests endowed with a volume number in the RSC accession.
Police armed with rifles and sub-machine guns moved into the area and burnt and bulldozed the huts of those convicted. Most of the tenants refused the temporary accommodation which the authorities offered in Estcourt. A Drum reporter went to the scene and interviewed several of the tenants. One woman admitted that she knew of the "legal trouble of living in the area" but did not imagine that "anyone would be so cruel as to burn down our houses." She and her children were frightened when the police came "because they had so many guns." They ran away but the family became separated and she had not seen her children for three days. A male tenant reported that most of the tenants had no option but to sell their cattle on the spot. They received extremely low prices mostly from white farmers "who offered to buy our stock while our kraals were still burning." He had no idea what would happen to him next. "I was born on the farm and now I am kicked off like a dog... where are we to go from here?"  

The farm was later turned into a nature reserve leading one former tenant to remark bitterly that "he should have been born an animal - then the government would have taken care of him."  

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Farmers' Ideologies

Many farmers wholeheartedly embraced apartheid ideology. At provincial level the NAU was forthright in declaring its support for the Nationalists' philosophy:

The policy of this Union is that the Europeans and the Natives should develop as separate entities; that natives can only be allowed to remain in a European area while they are servants as such. When they are inclined to compete with the Europeans then it will become integration and integration must be stopped at all costs.100

In November 1953 the NAU joined SABRA, the Broederbond's think tank on racial affairs. Early the next year, the NAU's Secretary, J.J. Botha, attended a SABRA conference on farm labour. He reported that some of the delegates spoke in favour of total apartheid. He had intervened at that stage because, while "a 100 per cent division between the races may be the ideal, he could not support a forced economic division or separation which might upset the farming community tremendously at this stage."101 He admired SABRA's "scientific" approach to racial affairs but contrasted it with the "practical" stance of the NAU and organised agriculture. The realities of the issue were, he claimed, that forced or legal implementation of economic apartheid was unnecessary at this stage because it would soon occur anyway. The black farm labourer was already beginning to work for his employer much longer and soon would be so skilled and efficient that he would be able to

100 NAU Archives, Letter Book, Secretary to Land Tenure Advisory Board, 5 August 1954.
101 NAU Archives, NAU Minutes, 6 November 1953; 19 February 1954.
dictate the terms on which he worked. Black labour would then be so expensive that white farmers would be unable to afford it and "it will be at that stage when it will be most important that economic integration should not have taken place in the true sense of the word." Botha appeared to be envisaging a day when farmers would have to turn to whites for their farm labour but this part of his argument is not clear. More important, however, is the distinction between the "practical 'apartheid of the NAU and the total apartheid of SABRA. This reflected the wider division in Afrikanerdom and those contributing to the formulation of apartheid policy between the proponents of "practical" and "total" segregation. However the NAU, or a least its secretary, appear to have gone further than the SAAU in bridging this gap. Whereas the SAAU accepted the dependence of white agriculture on black labour Botha apparently foresaw the time when this would come to an end. Still, given the differences between the NAU and SABRA, it is not clear whether the NAU joined SABRA because it agreed with the latter's policies or whether it hoped to persuade the influential body to move closer to its own views.

At a local level, individual farmers' associations rigorously enforced apartheid in the use of their facilities. After the local Liberal Party used the Mooi River Farmers' Association hall for a meeting at which "natives were present", the association decided to exclude "the attendance on this property of Natives and non-

102 NAU Archives, Letter Book, Secretary to Director, SAAU, 24 February 1954.
103 D. Posel, "Influx Control", pp.57-8.
Europeans at any gathering which encourages social integration." However the Winterton Farmers' Association graciously granted the use of its hall to the Durban Blood Transfusion service for donors of all races. It agreed that "Non-Europeans who are blood donors be allowed to be bled on the Eastern verandah of the hall." But it reserved the right to revoke its permission "at any time should they not be satisfied."104

Any hint of opposition to apartheid values was instantly labelled as 'political' and therefore not a topic for discussion. In 1954 a meeting of the Mooi River Farmers' Association discussed the magistrate's allegedly lenient sentences in criminal cases. When a participant pointed out that a farmer had recently shot and wounded a labourer but had not been arrested, the chairman replied that "he felt discussion on this matter might raise political issues which as members were aware could not be considered by the Association." A month later a liberal farmer sent the NAU a copy of the SAIRR's "Race Relations News" and asked them to comment on an article it contained.105 The secretary answered that the policy of the NAU was "totally at variance" with the Institute's ideas. He invited the correspondent to come to the NAU offices and discuss the matter in person but stated "I definitely do not desire to

105 The source does not specify which was the article in question but it was probably A.W. Hoernle, "Report on Farm Labour", Race Relations News, 1953 No. 1.
state our views in a letter since the whole problem has been
drawn into dirty politics."  

One farmer who certainly contravened both the spirit and law
of the new regime was Friedrich Surendorf. In 1962, he and
Gladys Qwabe, one of his domestic servants, were found
guilty of contravening the Immorality Act. From 1957 Gladys
used to visit him "for days." In 1960, she had a baby of
which he was the father. At the beginning of 1962, she
moved in with him and it became obvious to all on the farm
that she was pregnant again. In February, he gave the
Induna seven pounds and told him to take it to Qwabe's
mother and "to tell her it was for damages because he had
pregnated (sic) Gladys." They lived together in his house,
not making any attempt to conceal their affection for each
other from the other servants. The other domestic servants
addressed her as "Sister" because Surrendorf told them
"whenever [she] spōke to us we should not say "whore" or be
disrespectful to her, we must say "Sister."

Later he
invited her family to visit the farm and ordered one of his
servants to make "kaffir beer" which the family drank on
their arrival and before staying the night at his house.
Surendorf's wife returned after a month's stay in
Pietermaritzburg and Qwabe moved out. Mrs Surendorf soon
left where-upon Qwabe moved back in.

This curious mixture of babies, beer, lust, lobola, passion
and paternalism came to an end when Mrs Surendorf questioned

106 KCL, KCM 24440, Mooi River Farmers' Association Minutes,
Book 6, 9 March 1954; NAU Archives, Letter Book, Secretary
to H.M. Brown, 28 April 1954.
one of the other domestic servants who reported to her what had happened. She then reported it to the authorities who laid charges. When this occurred, Qwabe brandished Surrendorf's revolver and threatened to shoot the servants who had spoken to Mrs Surendorf whereupon they fled out of the house, never to return. The court sentenced Surrendorf to one year's imprisonment, a considerably harsher sentence than any given to a farmer found guilty of murdering a labourer. Qwabe received nine months in goal, six months of which were suspended.107

Such exceptions aside, most farmers were determined to keep the black population in white-owned farming areas to a minimum. They resolutely opposed any applications made to the Land Tenure Advisory Board which they feared would lead to "the gathering of many natives" in what they expected to be "an essentially European area." Land and property sales to blacks and applications by mission stations to extend their facilities were met with determined objections. Even applications by Indians to run trading stores were opposed on the grounds that such positions should go to "a member of the white race."108

At the root of these attitudes lay the "beswarting van die platteland." The black population continued to grow because, in part, of the prevention of urban migration by

107 NAD, 1 GTN 1/1/1/2/1, RC 29/1962, The State v. Surrendorf and Qwabe.
108 NAU Archives, Letter Book, General Secretary to Land Tenure Advisory Board, 12 October 1955; Assistant Secretary to Land Tenure Advisory Board, 21 February 1955; KCL, KCM 33652, Richmond Agricultural Society Minutes, Book 7, 19 November 1954.
successful state influx control. By 1959 it was estimated that nationally there were 1,600,000 "surplus Bantu on farms." However, in 1962 the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner for Natal reported that there were 250,000 'surplus' blacks on white-owned farms in Natal, mostly labour tenants. As we shall see below, the white population continued to move to the cities and an agricultural crisis in the late 1950s added to the huge difficulties in the path of new farmers trying to establish themselves on the land. The soaring black population - the result of state policies and the growing area of farmland outside of direct white control - proved a nightmare for a government resolutely committed to apartheid. The Commission appointed to examine the beswarting identified the growing dominance of capitalist farmers as one of the main causes. However its main worry was "the danger that Bantu preponderance on the White platteland could extend to such a degree that even the whole Western civilization in this country may suffer as a result." Natal farmers echoed these concerns. Signing himself "Worried", one farmer wrote that the "miles and miles" of unoccupied farmlands had become "a breeding ground for Communism." Farmers in his area were worried about the meetings which were held on these farms, which were too big for the police to control. There were farms with absentee owners, he claimed:

110 European Occupancy, p.20.
111 SPF, Forced Removals, Vol 4, p.42.
112 Ibid., p.58.
where every loafer, every skellum chased away by neighbouring farmers finds a home... Hasn't the time come to make it law that at least one white man (be it owner, or a manager, or foreman) has to live on every farm in the country?113

But, while many expressed concern at the racial manifestation of the problem, others were well aware that "the basic cause of [white] rural depopulation is economic." 114

The Agricultural Crisis, 1958 - 1960

In the late 1950s an agricultural crisis placed further constraints on the agricultural economy. In 1960 an NAU memorandum entitled "What is basically wrong with our Industry" noted that:

During the war years and the immediate post war period agriculture enjoyed relative financial prosperity: producer prices generally were at a level which created an incentive for greater enterprise. Since these years... there have gradually developed greater discrepancies in the balance of the whole agricultural cost structure resulting in a reduction of the nett return on capital investment and farmers being subjected more and more to a "cost price squeeze." 115

A further handicap was the increasing amounts of capital needed for efficient farming. The NAU remarked that "the trend on farms today is towards the need for more capital... efficient farming is dependent on a high turnover backed by considerable financial resources." Mechanisation, stock improvements, and fertilisers all required ever larger

113 NAUNLU, 21 June 1963.
114 NAUNLU, 14 April 1961.
115 NAUNLU, 13 May 1960.
amounts of capital. Noting that in the previous decade land prices climbed by 94 per cent whereas producer prices rose by only 34 per cent, the NAU began to question whether farmers could afford to spend precious capital on procuring ownership of their farms. In the past, it believed, land ownership was "a symbol of authority and social prestige rather than a means of producing food." But the NAU doubted whether the contemporary farmer could continue both to follow that tradition and engage in profitable production. After all, it pointed out, there was "nothing admirable in owning a farm and not being able to work it for lack of capital."116

And a dearth of capital was a serious worry for a good many farmers. According to a local agriculturalist, "[m]any farmers have already reached or even over-reached the amount of credit they can carry under the farming methods now being practised."117 One solution for a substantial minority was to simultaneously engage in other employment. In 1958-9, 20 per cent of Natal's farmers had other "remunerative occupations". In the Midlands the proportion was often considerably higher. In Lions River 34 per cent were in the same position and in the Pietermaritzburg district 40.5 of farmers held other jobs.118

The high capital investment needed to start farming caused much concern, particularly when set against the background

116 NAUNLU, 6 January 1961.
117 NAUNLU, 27 December 1957.
of the burgeoning black population. The president of a local farmers' association claimed in 1960 that the new farmer needed a minimum of two or three thousand pounds for leasing a farm and to closer to 20,000 pounds to buy one. At a time when 60 per cent of the nation's farmers had an annual income of under 500 pounds, few farmers were in a position to find the capital needed to start their sons in agriculture. The result was that we have in our district an alarming number of farms... falling into disrepair and ruin owing to the fact that they are not occupied. We have also a number of well educated and healthy young farmers in our midst who would be only too pleased to make a reasonable living on any available farm.

He warned that the state had to find a solution to the ever widening gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" caused by the high capital barrier on entry to farming, otherwise "reaction must eventually take place, resulting in a clamour for socialism or even communism."

Inefficient mechanisation also crippled farmers. The State Director of Agriculture in Natal warned that many farmers who had introduced machines on their farms, had not mechanised but motorised. He defined motorisation as "[t]he mere substitution of animal power by tractor power", while mechanisation was "the judicious use of tractor power and machinery so as to make the most efficient use of available labour and capital." Part of the problem was that farmers placed the machines in the hands of "untrained Bantu operators" whose lack of skills resulted in huge repair

119 NAUNLU, 1 March 1963.
120 KCL, KCM 43079, Lowlands Farmers' Association Minutes, Book 4, AGM 1960.
Many farmers were reluctant to train their workers because workers tended to exploit their newly acquired skills and desert for better paid jobs in the cities. In 1957 the NAU congress voted against a resolution that the government should set up training centers for farm workers. The majority of delegates argued that "with a little mechanical knowledge the average Native leaves farming and takes a job in a garage or goes to one of the towns." 122

In the dairy industry farmers faced additional pressures towards capital intensive production. In 1959 the purchase by manufacturing companies of industrial milk on a quality basis which had begun as an experiment in Bergville, Estcourt and Winterton in 1957 was extended throughout the country. 123 In 1958 a particularly severe drought forced Natal farmers to buy expensive commercial seed and request financial assistance from the state. 124 Two years later, in 1960, wattle growers received another "kick" as the wattle price dropped between three to five pounds due to competition from the Argentine. 125

Invariably these problems hit the smaller farmers hardest. In dairy farming it was "the small man who was going out of business." In agriculture generally, the tendency was "to oust the small man by means of large scale production from

121 NAUNLU, 28 October 1960.
122 NAUNLU, 20 September 1957.
125 NAUNLU, 18 March 1960.
those who can afford large scale undertakings." The Minister of Finance reported in 1960 that requests for emergency assistance were increasing so much that he was beginning to wonder how much longer he could continue granting such assistance. When the Land Bank eased its loan conditions to aid farmers, loan applications rose from 8.5 million pounds in 1958 to 49 million pounds in 1959.  

If many Natal farmers faced financial hardship, different difficulties faced the NAU. The organisation's membership was dwindling. Although it claimed to represent the majority of Natal farmers, by 1957 only forty percent of them were directly affiliated. The Secretary admitted that if the fact was published it "might do our cause some harm." The main reason for the union's unpopularity was its domination by progressive agriculturalists. As agricultural growth slowed down, small farmers began to differentiate their interests from those of the hegemonic "autocrats" and campaigned for the NAU to pay attention to their interests. "The Union was in the hands of the big farmer", claimed one such member, "and the small farmer was lucky if he got a hearing." Its critics claimed the NAU appeared to have forgotten that its very existence depended on the affiliations of the various farmers' societies since it persistently rejected many of the resolutions they sent to the annual congresses. The Umvoti Agricultural Society

126 KCL, KCM 33663, Umvoti Agricultural Society Minutes, Book 5, 8 December 1956; KCL, KCM 43079, Lowlands Farmers' Association Minutes, Book 4, Annual General Meeting 1960; NAUNLU, 13 May 1960. 
127 NAU Archives, Letter Book, Secretary to Shaw, 8 June 1957.
declared it had achieved more by its own efforts over the past ten years than it had by approaching matters through the NAU. Even some members of the Mooi River Farmers' Association, normally a solid pillar of support for the NAU, believed that "little or no benefit accrued to the Association" from its membership of the NAU. 128 In 1963 the President noted the NAU had the lowest percentage of members out of all the provincial agricultural unions and in June that year a special congress met to plan the organisation's revitalisation. 129

This loss of support, combined with economic pressures and its members continuing proclivity for labour tenancy in the face of financial hardship, led the NAU to retreat from its call for the abolition of labour tenancy. Ironically, at a time when the state had appointed a committee to investigate the abolition of labour tenancy, the NAU expressed alarm at any intention to end it forthwith. Though change to full time employment remained "an ideal" the NAU felt it should be on "an evolutionary rather than revolutionary basis". 130 It noted that sudden abolition would mean an immediate increase in cash expenditure at a time when few farmers could afford this. Moreover it doubted that abolition would enable the farmer to gain additional income from cultivating land previously allocated to labour tenants because "in many cases full-time employment is based on the labour tenant

128 Greytown Gazette, 18 October 1957; KCL, KCM 33663, Umvoti Agricultural Society Minutes, Book 5, 12 October 1957; KCL, KCM 24439, Mooi River Farmers' Association Minutes, Book 5, 2 April 1955.
129 NAUNLU, 9 September 1966.
130 NAUNLU, 18 March 1960.
system in that ploughing and grazing rights are provided."
Labour tenancy was certainly "adequate and reasonably satisfactory" and the NAU saw no reason why it "should not continue successfully for many more years."

By the early 1960s, then, farm labour in the Natal Midlands reflected the highly uneven nature of agrarian development. On some advanced enterprises, mainly intensive dairy, wattle and mixed farms, single male workers lived in compounds and laboured all year round. Labour tenancy occurred on most other farms in the Midlands. Farmers still received considerable income from cash tenants.

Labourers' cash income remained anything but substantial; in 1959 the NAU calculated that most farm workers' total payments, including payments in kind, were 11 pounds short of the minimum monthly income needed for subsistence. It blamed this state of affairs partly on influx control which prevented the worker "selling his services to the highest bidder" and partly on the low prices the farmers received which rendered them unable to pay higher wages. Many farmers, crippled by the economic crisis, undermined labour tenancy by restricting tenants' benefits and ejecting those surplus to their needs; in 1962 evicted tenants reportedly 'flooded' off the farms. Some progressive farmers urged their colleagues to raise wages and improve conditions; this was both to increase the workers' efficiency and dissuade

131 NAUNLU, 18 August 1961.
132 NAUNLU, 18 March 1960; European Occupancy, p.19.
133 NAUNLU, 7 August 1959; 27 April 1962.
labourers from continuing acts of resistance so that farmers could remain in "in the 'bundu' without a saracen standing by in every yard." Nonetheless, on most farms in the Midlands, labour tenancy in its multitude of forms remained in operation. According to the NAU president the reasons for this were clear. Any move to full-time labour would provoke widespread labour resistance manifested in a shortage of labour. As for the employers, "the tenant system was still in operation because it was the only one most farmers could afford."  

135 NAUNLU, 16 September 1966.
Conclusion

To recapitulate. Agriculture in the 1940s was a backward sector of the economy propped up by state support and dominated, organisationally and in terms of production, by a powerful minority of progressive farmers. The war-time and post-war boom saw a rapid expansion of agricultural production. Driven by urban and industrial capital, credit and demand, farmers, especially advanced farmers, strove to increase production. However, their bid to raise output was mediated through a complex and changing structure of agrarian social relations.

In the Midlands the widespread system of labour tenancy was a complex institution. Farmers attempted to secure the labour power of their tenants through a contract made with the homestead head. To support them they had the considerable powers of the state in the shape of highly coercive legislation enforced by largely compliant local officials. These measures were often inadequate for controlling unwilling workers and frequently floundered on the reef of worker resistance. Farmers turned to a number of measures ranging from debt bondage to ferocious violence in order to better control their labourers. Though farmers were in a structurally powerful position their recourse to such actions would seem to indicate their weakness in imposing their will on their workers.

Not only were tenants pitted against farmers but, within the tenant family, women and youths were set against patriarchs.
In the 1940s this last tension began to undermine labour tenancy on a large scale as youths broke free of patriarchal shackles and left to sell their labour power for greater remuneration, usually to eager urban employers. At the time when farmers' market opportunities were expanding rapidly their most productive workers were fleeing in droves.

To counter this townward trek farmers adopted two tactics. Firstly, they attempted to increase the labour demands from those left on the land. Cash tenants were forcibly incorporated into the work force, homestead heads became labourers themselves instead of merely signing away the labour power of their women and children, and progressive farmers tried to introduce full-time labour. All these efforts were met by determined tenant resistance.

The second strategy was to demand greater state controls. Farmers deemed the existing state measures inadequate. Convictions under Masters and Servants cases were difficult to obtain and few farmers, except those close to town, were willing to take the time and trouble to settle disputes through a legal process where the outcome was uncertain. State controls aimed at preventing farm labourers' urban migration were similarly ineffective. Blacks often found ways of circumventing these controls and from 1943-46 they were suspended by a government more responsive to the requirements of mining and industry.

In response to these weaknesses farmers and their organisations formulated a series of demands. They had two
aims. First, and the immediate priority, was the stabilisation of the labour force by dividing it into urban and rural groups with little movement permitted between the two. The second aim was the conversion of the agricultural work force to full-time wage labour. This last aim in particular revealed the dominance of progressive farmers' interests in organised agriculture.

These aims were to be effected by state measures in the shape of new methods of identification and a national system of labour bureaux. However, in the Natal Midlands the pre-apartheid state first concentrated on an ineffective and short-lived drive to persuade farmers to solve the labour shortage by raising wages and improving conditions. Instead, farmers added their voices to the growing white clamour for greater control over the black population. The intentions of state bureaucrats were thwarted by the exigencies of accumulation and struggle.

These processes changed in the 1950s. Nationally, agricultural growth slowed down as did capital investment. Smaller farmers were hit hardest causing some to leave farming and others to shift production into more profitable sectors. Rising land prices left some small farmers unable to expand their uneconomic farms while the rising debt burden also meant that efficient management came to be a vital factor in the quest for profitability. The initial enthusiasm for mechanisation became more guarded as the realities of huge repair bills and the inefficiency of mechanisation for certain tasks became apparent.
In the Midlands, these trends together with labour resistance led to major shifts. Smaller farmers moved out of dairying and timber. Progressive producers ploughed in capital, mechanised and cut their work force. Employment in most districts fell with women workers particularly hard hit. Some farmers introduced full-time wage labour, others tried but failed while most retained labour tenancy but imposed increasing restrictions on their tenants.

State policy makers became more sympathetic to the demands of organised agriculture with the Nationalist take over of government and the civil service. The Native Affairs Department introduced legislation similar to that demanded by organised agriculture which laid the basis for a nationwide system of labour bureaux together with a new method of identification in the shape of centrally registered reference books. However the legislation was not identical with that demanded by the agricultural unions. The Native Affairs Department under Verwoerd was not only a powerful contributor to state policy formation but also had its own interests. Its greatest priority was to limit discontent among the burgeoning urban black proletariat. One method by which it hoped to achieve this was by making the labour bureaux system grant priority to meeting the labour needs of urban employers.

The enforcement of these policies proceeded unevenly. The new reference books, upon which influx control was based, were not made compulsory until 1958. The registration
process was often inefficient with much bureaucratic incompetence and opposition from farmers. The enforcement of the reference books in 1958 provoked widespread resistance.

Of influx control's two aims, ending urban migration and channelling ex-farm workers back from the cities, the first was the most successful. Urban migration declined for two reasons. Firstly, strict enforcement of influx control in the towns made rural workers wary of being arrested. Secondly, farmers did employ the system but more often in the breach than according to the letter of the law. The second objective was never really met as farmers bypassed, almost completely in the Midlands, the bureaucratically unwieldy labour bureaux for their labour needs.

The move to full-time labour was even less successful. The machinery to implement it was introduced in 1954 with Chapter 4 of the 1936 Trust and Land act. Under the Act Labour Tenant Control Boards were established to limit the number of labour tenants and force a move to full-time work by taxing farmers who continued to employ labour tenants. By the end of the decade their impact in the Midlands was minimal. In many districts boards were not set up. Where they were, farmers often avoided restrictions by simply reclassifying their labour tenants as full-time workers.

Why did the policies demanded by farmers prove so ineffective? The answer reveals the importance of differentiating between different types of farmers. The
solutions so vociferously demanded in the 1940s were drawn up by the representatives of progressive farmers, by organised agriculture. When the policies were implemented they were actually opposed by ordinary farmers whose interests were by no means identical with those of their advanced colleagues.

The attractions of labour tenancy increased in the late 1950s as farming was hit by an agricultural crisis. Returns on capital diminished and the "cost-price squeeze" hit many farmers who were already heavily indebted. The high capital requirements of farming led the NAU to wonder if farmers could afford both to farm profitably and to spend precious capital on purchasing their own farms. Inefficient mechanisation and high repair costs caused by untrained and unwilling workers increased farmers' distress. As before, smaller farmers were hit hardest.

The NAU also underwent dramatic changes. After more than a decade of articulating the policies of local progressive farmers by urging a rapid move to full-time labour, in 1956 it declared that the shift from labour tenancy should be gradual. The shift was prompted by its dwindling membership due largely to smaller farmers leaving their organisations as their interests were persistently ignored. Moreover, the economic crisis meant farmers clung on to labour tenancy since it allowed them to minimise cash payments at a time of high credit needs and low availability of finance.
By the early 1960s, while some farmers had switched to hired labour and others employed full-time labour, most were still enmeshed in the labour tenant system. Moreover, as mechanisation and shifts in production reduced some farmers' labour needs and influx control tied blacks more securely to the land, the Midlands saw the rise of a burgeoning 'surplus' black population.

These then are our findings - but what of the gaps? Further research remains to be carried out before we can glimpse anything approaching a full picture of agrarian development in this region or indeed nationally. The first lacuna is state fiscal and monetary policy. Was the agricultural crisis in the late 1950s - and in particular the drying up of credit - partly due to developments in this area? And did the nature of state monetary support to agriculture change under the apartheid government particularly with regard to the relation between the state and progressive/smaller farmers?

A second crucial gap is the production process itself. Much greater knowledge is required here before we can clearly distinguish the impact of the labour shortage and fully delineate the development of the productive forces. While some evidence has been presented about dairy production, more information is needed in this area as well as data on wattle, timber, maize, stock and wool production. Perhaps it would also be useful to utilise the neo-classical categories of efficiency and productivity in analysing production.
The third major area of ignorance concerns patterns of the tenant migration. Research in the Midlands suggests that labour tenants played an important part in the early industrialisation of that region. What effect did this have on farm workers, particularly as regards worker consciousness? Did youths working in urban industry remit money to their families? If so, how important was this to the survival of labour tenancy? Evidence from East London certainly indicates that urban migration was a complex process with many migrants, even those who had moved 'permanently' to towns, continuing to visit their families on farms at periodic intervals. Tantalising evidence for Durban suggests that a similar phenomenon occurred here but much more research needs to be carried out before we can reach definite conclusions. Certainly, studies of other industrialising countries have revealed the frequent occurrence of "circular migration" in their urbanisation processes.

These questions are not merely academic. As bureaucrats and politicians consider land reform they would do well to

remember the inadequacies of the implementation and efficacy of state policies in the 1940s and 1950s. Whatever politicians may wish it is the powerful imperatives of accumulation and struggle which provide the key determinants for the course of agrarian development. To be sure, state policies can be effective. But as Keegan points out: "If the history of South Africa's countryside demonstrates anything, it is that legislative edict and administrative fiat have little force in shaping the substance and context of class struggle unless the material conditions are also propitious."\(^5\)

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