

**LABOUR, CAPITAL AND THE STATE
IN THE ST HELENA BAY FISHERIES
C. 1856-C. 1956**

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**Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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March 1992

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ABSTRACT

LABOUR, CAPITAL AND THE STATE IN THE ST HELENA BAY FISHERIES C.1856-C.1956

This thesis deals with the history of the St Helena Bay inshore fisheries, 1856-1956. Fishing has long been neglected by social and economic historians and the myths propagated by company and popular writers still hold sway. The thesis challenges these by situating commercial fishing at St Helena Bay in the context of changing regional, national and international economies and showing how it was shaped and conditioned by the struggle for ownership of the marine resource between labour and capital, mediated by the state.

The thesis is organised chronologically into three epochs. In each the focus moves from macro to micro, tracing the processes of class formation, capital accumulation and state intervention. The first epoch (c.1856-c.1914) examines the merchant fisheries, the second (c.1914-c.1939) the crayfish canning industry and the third (c.1939-c.1956) secondary industrialisation.

It is argued that the common property nature of the marine resource and non-identity between labour and production time in fishing created obstacles to capitalist production, discouraging investment and allowing petty-commodity production to flourish. The latter mediated the vagaries of production through a share system of co-adventuring which enabled owners to avoid paying a fixed wage. This system's impact on the nature and consciousness of fishing labour is examined as is its vulnerability to capture by other capitals through insecure land tenure and credit.

Fishing capital, in both its merchant and productive guises was dependent on articulation with petty-commodity production to provide it with commodities or raw material and bear the cost of reproducing labour. Articulation was hampered at St Helena Bay both by the persistence of merchant capital and the rent and labour interests of Sandveld agriculture. The origins and effect of this situation on the fisheries is detailed and discussed, highlighting the importance of agricultural capital's political influence with the colonial and provincial state in blocking or subverting the development of productive capital.

The advent of the interventionist central state in the 1930s undermined merchant and farmer dominance of the fisheries and cleared the way for the articulation of petty-commodity primary production with secondary industry during and after the Second World War. This articulation was facilitated by the central state restricting access to the marine resource and investing heavily in marine research and infrastructure to roll-back the natural constraints on fishing and create the conditions for the establishment of a stable capitalist production regime.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, to my supervisor Howard Phillips who took me under his wing in Honours and saw this project through from its inception as a Masters thesis being written long-hand in old school notebooks. His perseverance, tolerance, discipline, rigour and attention to detail fashioned the work as both concept and end product. Also to Ian Phimister, Bill Nasson and Helen Bradford for their varied advice, encouragement and always unfailing sense of humour. Needless to say, the short comings of the work remain solely my responsibility.

Secondly, to all those who helped in the gathering of primary and secondary material. I particularly wish to thank the archivists at the Cape, State and National Film Archives and the librarians at the South African Library, African Studies Library UCT, Manuscripts & Archives UCT, the Fishing Industry Research Institute and Division of Sea Fisheries. Also to Mr Michael Stuttaford at South African Shipping News & Fishing Industry Review who answered an eleventh hour call for photographs with great generosity and to Rose Kovats and Ann Westoby who produced the maps and diagrams.

Thirdly to all the fishermen, company managers and others who agreed to answer the prying personal questions of a complete stranger. Especially to Dr Nachenius who introduced me to the Bay and Stanley & Mavis Segal, Rene Zamudio and Mrs Brand who opened doors that otherwise would have remained closed. Also to Mr "A", who showed me the other side of the story and who's insistence on anonymity itself speaks volumes about life on the west coast.

Fourthly, to the University of Cape Town, UCT History Department and Centre for African Studies, UCT for financial assistance of various kinds all gratefully received and spent, as well as the Institute for Research Development of the Human Sciences Research Council. The opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at in the thesis, however, are mine alone and should thus not be attributed to any of the above esteemed institutions.

Lastly, to Clive and Andrew who provided financial support of a different kind as well as time, motivation and the computer. To Sia, who stayed sane through all the madness and was always there to help me find my way back from the edge. And finally to The Beat and Meatloaf in recognition of their seldom acknowledged contribution to the pursuit of academic excellence.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASSOCOM.....	Associated Chambers of Commerce
DF.....	Division of Fisheries
DRC.....	Dutch Reformed Church
ETSFZ.....	Exclusive Trek Seine Fishing Zone
FCI.....	Federated Chambers of Industry
FCWU.....	Food & Canning Workers' Union
FDAC.....	Fisheries Development Advisory Council
FDC.....	Fisheries Development Corporation
FIRI.....	Fishing Industry Research Institute
FMIA.....	Fish Marketing Improvement Area
IDC.....	Industrial Development Corporation
KAA.....	Kommissie vir Algemene Armesorg
KVV.....	Kooperatiewe Vereniging van Vissers
MLA.....	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MPC.....	Member of the Provincial Council
SABS.....	South African Bureau of Standards
SAFCC.....	South African Food Canners' Council
SAFIHBG.....	South African Fishing Industry Handbook & Buyers Guide
SAFROC.....	South African Rock Lobster Packers' Association
SAJI.....	South African Journal of Industries
SAL.....	South African Library
SALCA.....	South African Lobster Canners' Association
SASNFIR.....	South African Shipping News & Fishing Industry Review
PUC.....	Public Utility Company
TLFU.....	Trawler and Line Fishermen's Union
WKVV.....	Weskus Vissersvereniging

A "CALL OF THE BLOOD" OR "MEN'S LIVES" ?
FISHING AND HISTORY

MYTH AND HISTORY

Fishing, and more particularly the figure of the fisherman, has a long and enduring resonance within the western cultural tradition. Even before the mythical New Testament Christ, "the fisher of men", fishing and its practitioners have enjoyed a unique status in the eyes of those not so engaged¹. As a form of the oldest of all human economic pursuits (hunting), it still retains the essence of the chase notwithstanding the modern application of fossil fuels, sonar and radar. Linked to this is fishing's dependence on the sea, which by its sheer vastness, depth and innate hostility to human beings remains the last vestige of an unbridled nature². To be a fisherman is thus to be one of the "last hunters", still wresting a living from a potentially lethal natural environment in the "space age" of late capitalism³. Since the Industrial Revolution, those classes whose very genesis and continued existence was predicated on transforming nature and eradicating the pre-capitalist social formations and modes of production it sustained, have evidenced a remarkable sentiment for and idealisation of the nature, societies and modes of production they were so rapidly

¹ D. Profumo & G. Swift (eds) The Magic Wheel (London, 1985) and P. Thompson, T. Wailey & T. Lummis Living the Fishing (London, 1983), pp. 1-5.

² J. Coote (ed) The Faber Book of the Sea (London, 1989); M. Rediker Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea (Cambridge, 1989), pp.1-5 and R. Carson The Sea (London, 1991). For South Africa see C. Von Bonde So Great Thy Sea: A Study of the Oceans (Cape Town, 1956) and W.L. Speight Swept by Wind and Wave (Cape Town, n.d.).

³ P. J. Edwards & J. Marshall "Sources of Conflict and Community in the Trawling Industries of Hull and Grimsby between the Wars", Oral History, 5, 1, 1977, p. 5 and P. Thompson et al, Living the Fishing, p. 1.

destroying⁴. The fact that fishing industrialised relatively late and in many cases not at all, has made the fisherman a visible and seemingly enduring symbol of a bygone age when people interacted directly with nature free from the strictures of the capitalist work ethic in a perpetual struggle for survival. The fisherman - like the peasant - is envied this communion and the supposed freedom accorded him by his work, the rewards of which are deemed all the richer for being so hard won⁵.

In South Africa too, fishermen have acquired a novelty value on a par with "Bushmen" and other "primitives" whose lives appear or remain inextricably intertwined with nature⁶. This association, in the case of fishing, sustains a thriving local tourist, coffee-table publishing and amateur art industry, dedicated to faithfully reproducing in curios, postcards, books, paintings and photographs the essentially timeless nature of fishing and,

"a romantic essence of the fisherman, presented not as a workman dependent by his technique and his gains on a definite society, but rather as the theme of an eternal condition, in which man is far away and exposed to the perils of the sea, and woman weeping and praying at home"⁷.

It is this "romantic essence", packaged in innumerable ways which explains why on any given weekend thousands of locals and tourists flock to fishing ports on the Cape Peninsula and Table

⁴ A. Bermingham Landscape and Ideology (London, 1986) and E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (eds) The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge, 1988).

⁵ Rudyard Kipling Captains Courageous and Ernest Hemingway The Old Man & the Sea are probably the two best known examples. For more recent literary evocations see Peter Matthiessen Men's Lives (London, 1988) and Paul Watkins Calm at Sunset, Calm at Dawn (London, 1990).

⁶ For the changing image of the "primitive" in South Africa see K. Tomaselli et al Myth, Race & Power (Cape Town, 1986) and J.M. Coetzee White Writing (Cape Town, 1988).

⁷ R. Barthes Mythologies (London, 1983), p.95.

Bay Harbour seeking recreation on the quayside amidst the stench of fish, moored fishing boats and bemused fishermen⁸. None of these people would dream of making a similar excursion to Epping Industria, buying postcards of factories, posing for photographs with factory workers or donning T-shirts emblazoned with the logo "I ate at Gunners Circle"! The only comparable examples are from other primary industries - agriculture and mining - romanticised in like fashion through the Wine Route and Gold Reef City⁹. The power and all pervasiveness of popular culture's representation of fishing and its practitioners has attained mythical proportions and remains one of the nearest latter-day approximations to the pastoral idiom of the British Industrial Revolution¹⁰.

Myth, according to Raymond Barthes, is a form of "depoliticised speech" which transforms historical reality into a "natural image" through an act of linguistic distortion and violence:

"[M]yth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it things lose the memory that they once were made. The world enters language as a dialectical relation between activities, between human actions; it comes out of myth as a harmonious display of essences. A conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality

⁸ The present "Waterfront" development in the Table Bay docks is the latest in a long line of appropriations of coastal production sites for recreation\tourism purposes. The list includes Hermanus, Arniston and the False Bay coastline, as well as industrial centres like Hout Bay, "Port Owen" at the Berg River mouth, the ill-fated "Club Mykonos" at Langebaan Lagoon and a number of more recent time-share\holiday resorts planned for the west coast near Paternoster.

⁹ See for example M. Kenneth Fairest Vineyards (Johannesburg, 1966); D.J. Opperman Spirit of the Vine (Cape Town, 1968) C. Jansen Cape Winelands (Greyton, 1985) on the wine industry and W. MacDonald The Romance of the Golden Rand (London, 1933); A.P. Cartwright Valley of Gold (Cape Town, 1961); F. Goldie River of Gold (London, 1969) and E. Rosenthal Gold! Gold! Gold! (London, 1970) on gold mining.

¹⁰ R. Williams The Country and the City (London, 1973) and G.E. Mingay (ed) The Vanishing Countryman and The Rural Idyll (London, 1989).

inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with nature, it has removed from things their human meaning so as to make them signify a human insignificance"¹¹.

Myth thus presents reality as self-evident fact, eschewing explanation and erasing all human agency, dialectics and contradictions. As such it is the ideal mode of operation of ruling class ideology under capitalism. The bourgeoisie for Barthes is "the social class which does not want to be named" and in pursuit of ex-nomination on the ideological plane postulates the concomitant notions of "eternal man" and "unchangeable nature"¹²:

"The status of the bourgeoisie is particular, historical: man as represented by it is universal, eternal. The bourgeoisie class has precisely built its power on technical, scientific progress, on an unlimited transformation of nature: bourgeoisie ideology yields in return an unchangeable nature"¹³.

In South Africa the myths of the dominant class seek to similarly "naturalise" the society's colonial heritage and legacy of dispossession and bloodshed by erasing history. Informing this "depoliticisation" process is the supposedly "natural" phenomenon of race. Race is the explanatory mechanism by which white domination and black subjugation become "naturalised" as immutable and unchanging, an eternal condition¹⁴. This requires an act of extreme linguistic violence, producing, what Barthes terms, "strong" myths in which the depoliticisation process is abrupt and the "political quantum" remains immediate¹⁵. Using

¹¹ R. Barthes Mythologies, p.142.

¹² *Ibid*, pp. 137-142.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 141-142.

¹⁴ K. Tomaselli et al Myth Race and Power, pp.3-5.

¹⁵ R. Barthes Mythologies, p.144.

Barthes' understanding of myth, it is possible to analyse the mythologisation of fishing and fisherman as a point of re-entry on the road to historical investigation and explanation which myth has so effectively closed.

Frank Robb, in a coffee-table publication from the mid-1970s, evokes the archetypal fishermen as follows:

"The Cape Coloured fisherman is ... a small man with a hardbitten face deep-etched by sea and sun and too often further ravaged by shoreside dissipations, with a mordant wit admirably expressed in the vivid 'Capey' dialect, and with a fish-wife who is a bold flaunting harridan-witch with a gift for invective enabling her to hold her own in any slanging match"¹⁶.

This succinct vignette underscores the centrality of race in popular representations of fishermen. The mythical Cape fisherman is thus inevitably "coloured", a group long believed to be "instinctive" fishermen with an innate sea-sense bequeathed them by their "Malay" ancestry¹⁷. Many of the latter were purportedly fishermen in the islands of the Malayan archipelago before being brought to the Cape by the Dutch¹⁸. Once here, they "could not for long be kept from Cape seas" as a "Call of the Blood" drew them inexorably to fishing¹⁹. Their industry, intelligence and abstinence from alcohol saw them dominate the fisheries until the 1880s, easily displacing indigenous inhabitants who "had neither

¹⁶ B. Franck & F. Robb Fishermen of the Cape (Cape Town, 1975), p.65.

¹⁷ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes (Cape Town, 1969), p.8.

¹⁸ On the places of origin of Cape slaves see R. Firth Malay Fishermen: Their Peasant Economy (London, 1946) and N. Worden Slavery in Dutch South Africa (Cambridge, 1985).

¹⁹ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.8 and W. Wardlaw Thompson Sea Fisheries of the Cape (Cape Town, 1913), p.39.

boats nor hooks"²⁰. The corruption of this "Malay" blood-line through inter-marriage, however, ended their dominance and produced a bastardised "coloured" race in which the genetic aptitude for fishing was blunted by a predilection for alcohol²¹. Robb's euphemistically termed "shoreside dissipations" is an oblique reference to this, which - together with the "mordant wit", "'Capey' dialect" and loud, vulgar wife - fills out the racial identity of the image in terms of long-held white stereotypes of "coloureds"²².

The myth of decayed "coloured" labour has as its corollary a much "weaker" white myth. It is Europeans who rekindle the torch of progress in fishing from the 19th Century onwards, following in the footsteps of the Phoenicians who reputedly first fished the waters of the Cape in 610 BC²³. Endowed with the same "sea-sense" which brought the settlers to the subcontinent in the 17th Century, the white legacy of the blood remained uncorrupted by miscegenation and alcohol. This racial purity coupled with a

²⁰ G.M. Theal Ethnography and Condition of South Africa Before A.D. 1505 (London, 1919), p.104. Also A.J.H. Goodwin "Prehistoric Fishing Methods in South Africa" in Antiquity, 20, 1946 and M. Brooker "Hunting and Fishing Methods of the Native Peoples of South Africa as Evidenced in the Records of Some Early Travellers" (Unpublished Archaeology Honours dissertation, UCT, 1971).

²¹ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, pp.188-189.

²² For popular conceptions of "coloured" identity see J.S. Marais The Cape Coloured People (Johannesburg, 1957); A.J. Venter Coloured: A Profile of Two Million South Africans (Cape Town, 1974) and R.E. van der Ross Myths and Attitudes: An Inside Look at the Coloured People (Cape Town, 1979).

²³ T.T. Jeans & C. Struben The Sea and South Africa: Being a Short Historical Survey of the Influence of the Sea on South Africa (Cape Town, n.d.), pp.1-4; R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p. 5 and B. Franck & F. Robb Fishermen of the Cape, pp. 1-2. The basis of this claim is a doubtful circumnavigation of Africa reported by Herodotus. Also J. Fredrickse None But Ourselves (Johannesburg, 1983), pp.10-12. The "Phoenician Myth" has long served as ideological justification for white domination in Africa and its mention here is thus more than coincidental.

vigorous Protestant work ethic and the superior technology of the European Industrial Revolution made them the "natural" pioneers of the modern fishing industry, turning the boundless and previously untapped resources of the southern oceans to profit on a vast scale in the 20th Century. As whites ascended to being industrialists and successful capitalists, the mythical white fisherman and hardy pioneer became an artefact of popular consciousness and all but faded from memory by the late 1960s²⁴. About the growing number of Africans entering the fishing after 1945 there is only silence. Their exclusion is explained by passing reference to a lack of genetic "sea-sense" and observations such as, "[T]he Bantu ate no fish, possibly because they believed it to be connected with the snake, in whose form the ancestral spirits were wont to appear"²⁵. Thus, just as whites and "coloureds" are drawn to fishing in different ways by the prescriptions of the blood, so Africans are repelled. By subsuming fishing and fishermen in this way, race "naturalises" and depoliticises them - substituting the relative strengths and weaknesses of innate racial characteristics for the history of slavery, dispossession, segregation and the development of capitalism which properly explains both.

The racial myth of pure blood overlays the more general equation of fishing with hunting and fishermen with hunters. The latter lends an added timelessness and stasis to the former, reinforcing and fixing it within the mythical matrix. Crucial to this is the notion that, "Despite the advances in techniques and the increase of our knowledge about the sea, the fishermen remains a hunter,

²⁴ D.F. Malherbe Hans-Die-Skipper (Cape Town, 1935); "Jacob Fishes a Fortune - The Backbreaking Way" in John Bull, 15 September 1951; "Oes van Die See" supplements in Die Burger of the 1960s and G.D. Scholtz Die Afrikaner en die See (Johannesburg, 1969).

²⁵ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p. 5. Also H. Hofmeyer Garibaldi's Ski-Boat (London, 1960) for a contrasting view from the Eastern Cape.

reaping without sowing and reaching into the largely unknown"²⁶. By juxtaposing industry and science with the "oldest and most primitive of human occupations", the fisherman is effectively excluded from the modern world and trapped in a vacuum where "the successful hunting of fish still depends on the experience of the fisherman, on his luck, his skill and his intuitive genius for being in right the part of a vast sea at the right time"²⁷. Like the mythical "Bushman", the fisherman is able to predict the weather with an uncanny accuracy, interpret and anticipate the behaviour of animals (seabirds, seals, fish) and navigate without a compass²⁸. He is a quiet, simple man who - although he has very little - wants for nothing save the company and community of others like himself, with whom he shares the happiness and peace-of-heart which only comes from a daily communion with nature. This transmogrification of the fisherman into a variant of "man the hunter" by urban industrial society, represents all which the latter is not and longs for in its idealised imagination. Urbanites, by "invoking peasant virtues which they have experienced only through train windows on their summer holidays"²⁹, remain oblivious to the primitive living conditions, long hours, back-breaking work, frequent danger, harsh discipline, poor and uncertain earnings and failing health of the fisherman, seeing only the postcard image, smelling the sea and hearing the lingering cry "tikkie kreef"! It is an image which brooks no elucidation or change, as Frantz Fanon, commenting on

²⁶ Irvin & Johnson South African Fish & Fishing (Cape Town, 1964), p.17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.17-19.

²⁸ For the mythical Bushman see K. Tomaselli et al Myth, Race and Power, pp.77-101. For the fisherman as hunter see C.L. Biden Sea-angling Fishes of the Cape (London, 1930); D.F. Malherbe Hans-Die-Skipper; F. Robb Sea Hunters (London, 1955) and T. Carse Die Bloudam is Hul Oesland (Cape Town, 1960). Also L. van der Post The Hunter and the Whale (Harmondsworth, 1973) for a different marine industry.

²⁹ T. Nairn The Break-Up of Britain (London, 1981), p. 340.

"the reactions of white jazz specialists when ... new styles such as be-bop took definite shape" after 1945, explains:

"The fact is that in their eyes jazz should only be the despairing broken-down nostalgia of an old Negro who is trapped between five glasses of whiskey, the curse of his race, and the racial hatred of the white man ... And it is not utopian to suppose that in fifty years time the type of jazz howl hiccupped by the a poor misfortunate Negro will be upheld only by whites who believe in it as an expression of nigger-hood, and who are faithful to this arrested image of a type of relationship"³⁰.

So too the arrested "image" of the fisherman erases the historical origins of the fishing labour force, fashioned not by choice or a "call of the blood", but by successive defeats at the hands of historical capitalism. It is a cruel and bitter irony that the fishermen's failure to first resist proletarianisation and then make the transition to fully-fledged wage labour, should lend credence to their mythologisation as a simple folk, engaged in a timeless pursuit untainted by either capitalism or the clock. As the losers in the long war to forge a capitalist economy in the South Western Cape, fishermen have been transformed into the quintessential "eternal men", peopling a romanticised "unchanging nature" for the leisure consumption of the victors.

HISTORY AND MYTH

Rather than challenge the popular mythology of fishing, historians have themselves played a major part in developing, expanding and propagating it. The sparse historical writings on the fishing industry are of comparatively recent origin, dating, for the most part, from the post-Second World War period. Prior to 1945, the only histories of the Cape fisheries were those by

³⁰ F. Fanon "On National Culture" in F. Fanon The Wretched of the Earth (Harmondsworth, 1974), pp.195-196.

an ex-civil servant, a young Afrikaner historian and the Director of Fisheries³¹. The first dealt mainly with the development of a trawling industry, the second with the fisheries of the Dutch period and the third with the role of science in the fisheries. The rapid wartime industrialisation of inshore fishing after 1939 and a sustained post-war boom based on the exploitation of previously ignored pelagic species for canning, fish meal and oil extraction, provided the impetus for a proliferation in popular histories of the industry. Intoxicated by their own success and meteoric rise to wealth and power, the newly rich captains of the industry commissioned family cum-company histories at a steady rate, dominating both the production of fish and the history of fishing for nearly two decades after the war³². Thus Ellis Silverman penned his memoirs with the aid of his wife and published them himself in 1956³³, closely followed by the Ovenstone family who employed a Cape Town public relations consultant for the job³⁴. In the same period, that doyen of popular history hacks, Eric Rosenthal, wrote two pot-boilers on the Stephan and Irvin families³⁵. The latter was finally published in the early 1960s - in abridged form and without acknowledgement

³¹ W. Wardlaw Thompson Sea Fisheries of the Cape Colony; C.F.J. Muller "Die Geskiedenis van die Visserye aan die Kaap tot aan die Middel van die Agtiende Eeu" in Archives Yearbook of South African History, vol.1, 1942, pp.1-100 and C. Von Bonde Die Suid-Afrikaanse Visnywerheid (Johannesburg, 1944).

³² The industry's own journal, the South African Shipping News & Fishing Industry Review [SASNFI] first appeared in January 1946 and has been in existence ever since. In addition to acting as a mouthpiece and trade journal, the SASNFI from its inception carried occasional articles on the pioneers of the shipping and fishing industries.

³³ E. & B. Silverman Memoirs of a Pioneer in the Fish Canning Industry of South Africa (Cape Town, 1956).

³⁴ F. Gill Ovenstones a Story of the Sea (Cape Town, 1958).

³⁵ E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga" and "The Irvin and Johnson Story" (Unpublished manuscripts, n.d.).

- by Irvin & Johnson as part of a promotional campaign to encourage greater fish consumption amongst the literate public³⁶. Finally, in 1969 the daughter of the chairman of South Africa's largest fishing company, Oceana, with the financial backing of the South African Fish Cannery Association, published her appropriately titled Fishing for Fortunes as the definitive account of the industry's history, a book still referred to by government commissions and academics alike³⁷.

All these accounts share a common concern with the pioneering ethic and "progress" of the industry after 1945. They form part of a much larger company history genre, glorifying founders, lauding successors and dazzling posterity (and potential investors) with output, sales and profits³⁸. Richly anecdotal, boringly parochial and meticulously uncritical, this work constitutes a corpus at once tantalising and frustrating to the academic historian. With access to otherwise private archives and individuals, it frequently hints at policies and practices behind closed doors, but seldom develops or expands on the underlying processes. Despite their shoddy scholarship and concern with trivia, "texts such as these are important in that they reproduce the conformist society that shapes them"³⁹. They reflect their producer's and reader's own conceptions of the past, for whom free enterprise is an article of faith and history an act of obeisance. Thus hard work, determination and technology triumph over all obstacles erected by either the state or labour. The individual is the basic unit of analysis and the collective

³⁶ Irvin & Johnson South African Fish & Fishing.

³⁷ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes.

³⁸ For some perceptive comments on this genre see S. Lindqvist "Dig Where You Stand" in Oral History, 7, 2, 1979.

³⁹ D. Haarhof The Wild South-West (Johannesburg, 1991), p.3.

(whether as union or bureaucracy) is an impediment to the individualism which is the dynamo of the system. In seeking to legitimate the post-war status quo in the fisheries, the fishing company histories also amplified the twin themes of pioneering white industrialists and the decayed "coloured" fishermen. Whites were pioneers and industrialists because they were innately gifted, dynamic and hard working. "Coloureds", on the other hand, were labourers because they were lazy, drowned their genetic inheritance in a wine bottle and were simply unable to adapt or keep pace with the rapidly developing industry. As a result the companies had to exercise a benign paternalism over their fishermen, employing and housing them and their families and ensuring that access to liquor was strictly controlled.

The hegemony of the company histories is underlined by the fact that no historical theses on the fishing industry were written during the 1950s and 1960s. What academic work was done was minimal, written by industry insiders and largely confined to the field of economics⁴⁰. Even after the long boom evaporated in the early 1970s and fishing companies lost their separate identities by being integrated into new monopoly capital formations, the earlier histories continued to hold sway. They were supported by newspapers, magazines, popular writers and an emerging tourist industry, which tirelessly reproduced parochial vignettes of fishermen and idealised accounts of fishing villages for the

⁴⁰ L.P.D. Gertenbach "Die Suid-Afrikaanse Visserijwese: 'n Ekonomiese en Statistiese Oorsig" (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1944\46); F.R.L. Baard "Die Ontwikkeling van die Visbedryf in die Republiek van Suid-Afrika en Suidwes Afrika" (Unpublished MComm thesis, UNISA, 1968); F.R.L. Baard "'n Kritiese Beskouing van die Ontwikkeling van die Bestuur en Organisasie van die Visnywerheid in die Republiek van Suid-Afrika en Suidwes Afrika" (Unpublished DComm thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1971).

white middle-class market⁴¹. The industry now became a case study for academics looking to test particular theories mainly concerned with resource management⁴². Heavily statistical, this work was primarily concerned with plotting catch and production figures to test different hypotheses concerning overfishing, maximum sustainable yield and the success or otherwise of state management strategies. Although not historical, it culled liberally from the existing corpus of company histories when necessary. Of the two historical theses written at this time, one dealt with the period 1890-1910 and the other with the crayfish canning industry before 1947⁴³. Based on a minimum of primary research, both relied on a range of uncritically used newspaper, government and company history sources, producing precis rather than analyses of the official view.

Despite the blossoming of revisionist historiography in South Africa since the early 1970s, the new marxist and social

⁴¹ For the more obvious literary manifestations see the copious work of Lawrence G Green, Jose Burman, Arderne Tredgold and other popular writers on the Cape Peninsula and South Western Cape. In the coffee table genre two of the more explicit treatments of the subject are by B. Franck & F. Robb Fishermen of the Cape and J. Schrauwen (ed) West Coast: A Circle of Seasons (Cape Town, 1991). Newspaper and magazine coverage is less systematic, but nonetheless considerable and most Cape Town artists seem to have painted at least one fisherman or fishing village in their career.

⁴² See for example P.S. Stohr "The Fisheries Development Corporation and its Influence on the South African Fishing Industry" (Unpublished PhD thesis, UCT, 1977) and G.A. Boyle "Government Regulation and the Fisheries: An Analysis of Principles and a Case Study of the SA\SWA Industry" (Unpublished Honours dissertation, UCT, 1980). There has also been a prolific growth in research on the scientific and legal aspects of the industry since 1970.

⁴³ J. De Jongh "Die Ontwikkeling van die Seevisserye aan die Kaapkolonie 1890-1910" (Unpublished Honours dissertation, UCT, 1974) and S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast 1874-1947" (Unpublished Honours dissertation, UCT, 1977).

historians paid scant attention to the fishing industry⁴⁴. This is all the more surprising given the growing number of innovative anthropological and historical studies of fishing abroad⁴⁵. The local fishing industry - despite its importance to the South Western Cape economy - came a poor second to the urban metropolis of Cape Town as far as historical research was concerned and fishing labour remained as invisible to the revisionists as it was patronised and despised by earlier writers. It was only in the 1980s that historians began to look at the industry from the perspective of the new school and anthropology. Quinlan and Kirkaldy - the former as anthropologist, the latter as anthropologist cum-historian - produced in-depth studies of the Kalk Bay fishing community in the tradition of West, Whisson and Kaplinsky⁴⁶. Although both moved considerably beyond the latter in their analyses, they were unable to integrate Kalk Bay into the broader context of the Cape Town, regional or national economy because of their limited research focus. Similar problems beset the efforts of van Sittert and Grant in their respective

⁴⁴ R. Moorsom Fishing: Exploiting the Sea (London, 1984) is the sole exception to this rule. For the rest of Africa see E. Verduyn The Penetration of Capitalism: A West African Case Study (London, 1984) and J. McCracken "Fishing and the Colonial Economy: The Case of Malawi" Journal of African History, 28, 3, 1987.

⁴⁵ The most influential historical works in this regard have been P. Thompson et al Living the Fishing and T. Lumis Occupation & Society: The East Anglian Fishermen 1880-1914 (Cambridge, 1985). In anthropology, the work of Raoul Andersen, Cato Wadel and others in the Institute of Social & Economic Research at the Memorial University of Newfoundland has been another important shaping influence. See, for example, the two edited works; R. Andersen & C. Wadel (eds) North Atlantic Fishermen: Anthropological Essays on Modern Fishing (St Johns, 1972) and R. Andersen (ed) North Atlantic Maritime Cultures: Anthropological Essays on Changing Adaptations (The Hague, 1979).

⁴⁶ M.G. Whisson & R.M. Kaplinsky Suspended Sentence: A Study of the Kalk Bay Fishermen (Johannesburg, 1969); M.E. West Divided Community (Cape Town, 1971); T. Quinlan "Line Fishing in Kalk Bay: An Account of a Marginal Livelihood in a Developing Industrial Environment" (Unpublished Honours dissertation, UCT, 1980) and A. Kirkaldy "The Sea is in Our Blood': Community & Craft in Kalk Bay c.1880-1939" (Unpublished MA thesis, UCT, 1988).

histories of the Hout and Rogge Bay fisheries⁴⁷. Influenced by the work of Paul Thompson and others who used oral testimony to recover and reconstruct the history of British fishing, both consciously attempted "histories from below", producing some useful insights on capital and class formation, but again without transcending their local study focus to develop and explore the external linkages which they identified.

Thus, despite a smattering of "alternative" scholarship in the 1980s, fishing - even within the orbit of one of the country's largest port cities - still remains largely outside the ambit of present historical enquiry. The inadequacy of the history of the industry and its "contamination" by myth, leaves the field wide open for further enquiry. This is underscored by the fact that the archival records of both the provincial state and Department of Commerce and Industries have been virtually untapped and contain a wealth of primary data, including substantial correspondence from fishermen and others directly involved in the fishing. This material, together with the collection of oral testimony during fieldwork, makes a fundamental revision of the received wisdom about the Cape fisheries possible.

Given the paucity and limitations of the existing work, a broad periodisation of the fishing industry is urgently required as a guide to future research. Rather than a simple chronology, the fisheries need to be located firmly in the context of an emerging capitalist economy, to reveal class formation, state intervention and South Africa's changing position in the world economy as the key benchmarks of a contradictory and dialectical development process. At the same time, the macro project dare not lose sight

⁴⁷ L. van Sittert "*Gebrei in die Ambag': Farmers, Fish & Fishermen in the Hout Bay Valley c1880-1956*" (Unpublished Honours dissertation, UCT, 1985) and D. Grant "*Bokkoms, Boycott & the Bo Kaap: The Decline of the Rogge Bay Fishing Industry between 1890 and 1920*" (Unpublished Honours dissertation, UCT, 1986\7).

of the richly textured and often corrective insights to be gleaned from a close scrutiny of the world at the grassroots. The notion that people make their own history, albeit not in a world of their own choosing, is particularly apt to the fisheries, where petty-commodity production survived until well into the 20th Century and acted as a powerful countervailing force to the proletarianising effects of capitalism and the designs of the state. The present study aims to mesh these two perspectives by weaving together an analysis of capital, state and labour into a composite tapestry which readmits fishermen to history, not as "ocean hunters", but members of the South Western Cape's rural working class and shows that commercial fishing emerged not as a sideshow to the development of the regional economy, subject to the laws of nature rather than the market, but as an integral part of the mainstream. In so doing, it confirms, questions and even extends some of the basic premises of the new school about the development of capitalism in South Africa.

LABOUR, CAPITAL AND THE STATE

The history of fishing in the Cape has been shaped by specific macro processes which have given it a unique character. The first of these was the absence of any large-scale pre-colonial fisheries or indigenous seafaring tradition. Commercial fishing, when it emerged, did so under the aegis of colonialism and in response to the demands of Cape Town, Western Cape agriculture, the Mauritian and Natal sugar plantations and the Kimberley and Rand mines for cheap food. This in turn determined the development or rather underdevelopment of the fisheries within the primary commodity-producing colonial economy based on agrarian and later mining production. Fishing attracted limited capital investment, was always secondary and subject to the needs of agriculture and mining, and was a low priority for the state. These factors relegated it to a marginal activity in the Cape,

confined to the physical, economic and social periphery of the society. This marginalisation in turn shaped the micro processes of class and capital formation within the fisheries, as well as determining the nature of state intervention and form of integration with the wider regional, national and international economies.

The fishing labour force which emerged in the Cape countryside did so over a period of centuries and was marked by a distinct fluidity and lack of cohesion. The notion that fishermen were self-selected by a "call of the blood" or the innate abilities of their race thus imposes an order and logic on a process which was inherently disorderly and uneven. Fishing took place either at the coast or along the lower reaches of major rivers. These areas were at once geographically peripheral (ie on the outer edge of the land) and also economically and socially marginal. Poor soil, lack of fresh water and exposure to the elements made them both inhospitable for human habitation and unsuited to either pastoral or agrarian production. For this reason they were of very limited economic importance to agriculture, sparsely populated and only superficially policed by the state. A barrier of isolation thus separated the coast from the interior, creating a frontier zone between land and sea. As Greg Denning has argued, "The beach itself ... is a ... marginal space, where neither otherness nor familiarity hold sway, where there is much invention and a blending of the old and the new"⁴⁸. Such "marginal spaces" under colonialism were havens for marginal people displaced from the dominant economy of the rural hinterland by the twin processes of dispossession and the development of capitalism. With the closing of the north-western frontier in the 1740s, growing numbers of ex-slaves, dispossessed Khoi, failed farmers, evicted tenants and

⁴⁸ G. Denning The Bounty: An Ethnographic History (Melbourne, 1991), p.42.

bywoners, new immigrants and fugitives from colonial and military justice moved onto the beaches of the west coast⁴⁹. Here they sought to escape proletarianisation by clinging to the remnants of their earlier economic independence or trying to regain it outside of wage labour. By the first half of the 19th Century numbers of scattered squatter\subsistence communities emerged and, as John Marinowitz observes, it was possible for a squatter to

"[S]ettle on public land, act as small-scale cultivator, petty-pastoralist, transport rider, day-labourer, harvest gang-worker, woodcutter, fish catcher, and perhaps trader in leather-work or wagon repairer. The numbers of people who settled on public land in the commercial wheat-growing areas, and on the peripheries of these areas, increased after emancipation throughout the 1840s"⁵⁰.

The uncertainties of fishing (weather and resource) made a range of other economic pursuits a basic necessity - the most common of which was seasonal farm labour during harvest time. Fishing's inter-dependence with agriculture was further reinforced by the latter's demand for cheap rantsoennis (ration fish) as food for slaves or farm labour. Production at the coast employed rudimentary fishing technology (beach seine nets and rowing boats) and was informally organised by boat and net owners. Relations of production, however, were egalitarian and based on the share system. This recognised the independence of the individual producer (co-adventurer), remunerated fishermen and owner according to contribution (skill and labour power versus boat\net\gear) and allowed both control over the product of labour. The share system gave fishing the resilience and

⁴⁹ J.N.C. Marinowitz "Rural Production and Labour in the Western Cape, 1838 to 1888, with Special Reference to the Wheat Growing Districts" (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1985), pp.40-46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.45.

flexibility needed to cope with the seasonal nature of the resource and agricultural employment. Thus, by the last quarter of the 19th Century fishing labour had emerged as independent if transitory members of the rural underclass, occupying a tenuous niche on the underbelly of the dominant agrarian economy and dependent on the latter for both markets and seasonal wage labour. This labour pool continued to be supplemented by waves of migration, particularly in the 1900s (Italian immigrants) and 1930s (the Depression), as well as an ongoing interchange between fishing and farming. As a way station between the farm and the city the population of the coastal fishing hamlets acted as a barometer of class stratification, capital formation and proletarianisation in the countryside until the late 1940s when the sea frontier was finally colonised and closed by fishing capital in conjunction with the state. Capital penetration, however, had been underway for almost a century before, but found its path blocked both by the nature of fishing and resistance of the petty-commodity economy to outside control.

Historically fishing has been unattractive to capital by virtue of the often extreme non-identity between labour and production time⁵¹. "Natural factors" - the vagaries of the weather and a seasonal, highly volatile and little understood resource - conspire to subvert the establishment of a stable production cycle resulting in a lower rate of profit, the inefficient use of constant capital, problems in the circulation and realisation of value and a dependence on seasonal labour. For this reason production resided, until the mid-19th Century, in the hands of petty-commodity producers supplying local urban or rural markets. The commercialisation of Western Cape agriculture in the second half of the 19th Century, however, created expanded opportunities

⁵¹ S.A. Mann & J.M. Dickinson "Obstacles to the Development of a Capitalist Agriculture" Journal of Peasant Studies, 5, 4, July 1978.

for merchant capital penetration of the countryside⁵². This was facilitated by the lack of adequate road infrastructure and development of a seaborne grain trade along the west and southern Cape coasts. Cape Town-based merchants monopolised the trade with their fleets of cutters and strategically sited coastal land. On the west coast the merchant "empire" of Stephan Brothers rivalled that of the Barrys along the southern coast. In addition to grain buying, usury and land speculation, Stephan Brothers established commercial fisheries on its coastal land-holdings to supply the Mauritian market with dried snoek. Through its ownership of land, boats and gear the firm restructured the share system, abolishing fishing leases, appropriating the whole product of labour (the catch) in return for a token subsistence allowance ("eetvis"), credit and free housing, and extending the formal contract to all fishing labour. These efforts met with sustained resistance from the fishermen to both the loss of control over the product of labour and the restrictions on movement imposed by the contract. Large-scale desertion from the 1880s onwards, the decline of the snoek resource in the 1890s and the construction of railways in the 1900s undermined the Stephan "empire" and merchant fisheries. Both the seaborne grain trade and fisheries collapsed after 1902, the former through competition with the railway and the latter because of its isolation from the Cape Town market and inability to compete with local petty-commodity fisheries for the scattered rural rantsoennis market.

The 1900s, however, saw the emergence of a crayfish canning industry in Cape Town, supplying the Parisian market with a crustacean used locally for bait and regarded as "a poor man's food". The industry expanded rapidly up the west coast after the failure of the American lobster fishery in 1905 and by 1910 there

⁵² R. Ross "The Origins of Capitalist Agriculture in the Cape Colony: A Survey" in W. Beinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido (eds) Putting a Plough to the Ground (Johannesburg, 1986), pp.64-66.

were factories at Saldanha and St Helena Bays. Ten years later Lamberts Bay and Port Nolloth had been industrialised and by 1930 Hondeklip and Thorn Bays and Luderitz in the newly-acquired mandate territory of South West Africa were all canning factory sites. The spread of canning production, however, encountered determined resistance from the petty-commodity economy, particularly at Saldanha and St Helena Bay's where it competed with the latter for inshore fish. As a result crayfish fishing remained highly seasonal (dependent as much on the availability of labour as crayfish), organised on the basis of the share system and co-existent with rantsoennis and other petty-commodity production at many factory centres. The canning companies' provision of free housing and debt-bondage succeeded in part in subjugating petty commodity to factory production within a piece-work system in which the individual producer's independence was purely nominal, but even then it existed alongside more independent forms of petty-commodity production based on land and serving markets outside factory control. The canning industry's failure to oust petty-commodity production or generalise the piece-work system to the coast as a whole raised crayfish prices south of Lamberts Bay, fostered cut-throat competition in the industry and destabilised prices in France, leading to the closure of the French market in 1934. The French quota crisis compelled the state to intervene directly in the inshore fisheries for the first time and by the late 1930s state involvement and control was seen as essential to the industry's future growth and development.

Given the salience of "natural" constraints to secure capitalist production in fishing, a high level of (state) capital investment was necessary to lessen the effects of "natural factors" through the provision of infrastructure (harbours) and research (marine biology) to make fishing profitable for private capital. In South Africa, state involvement, until the late 1930s, focussed almost

exclusively on deep-sea fishing, informed by the British model and using available infrastructure (port facilities, railway links) to provision the emerging urban centres of the interior with fresh fish. In 1895 the Cape colonial state appointed its own marine biologist and purchased a steam trawler to prospect the Agulhas Bank and other off-shore areas for suitable trawling grounds. By the time the survey was abandoned in 1906, due to a lack of funds, several prolific deep water grounds had been proved and a nascent trawling industry established centred on Cape Town and controlled by metropolitan (Scottish) fishing capital. With the advent of Union in 1910 responsibility for marine fisheries was vested in the provincial states of the maritime provinces (Natal and the Cape) which were charged with the "protection" rather than development of the marine resource. The development impetus continued to come from the central state and in 1920 the Fisheries Survey was revived under the control of the Department of Mines and Industries. The director of the Survey served as advisor to the provincial states, but the Survey's main focus remained the prospecting of new deep water grounds for the trawling industry. It was only after the Pact victory of 1924 that this slowly began to change. The 1934 French quota crisis and mounting concern about "poor whiteism" in the inshore fisheries finally galvanised Pretoria into action and it passed legislation to control crayfish exports (1934-1935) and take over responsibility for marine fisheries from the provincial states (1936-1940). Central state spending on infrastructure and research for the inshore fisheries also increased gradually after the mid-1930s. In addition, the consciously modernising central state had, by 1940, committed itself to the economic development of the inshore fisheries by organising the independent petty-commodity producers into co-operatives and integrating them into the national market. Yet opposition from the trawling interests which monopolised the national fresh fish market, resistance from the petty-commodity producers enjoying a boom period during the

war and the emergent wartime crayfish cum-pelagic processing industry's demand for cheap industrial raw material, forced Pretoria to change tack. It abandoned co-operation and sought instead to develop the inshore fisheries by articulating petty-commodity primary production with the secondary industrial production of canned fish and by-products. Massive state spending on infrastructure, research and investment in private companies as well as the assumption of de jure ownership of the marine resource turned this into a reality after 1945, creating both a modern industry and the means to control it so as to minimise the inherent volatility of the marine resource. Marine research set the parameters of control and quotas, closed seasons, boat and factory licenses, sanctuaries and size limits, implemented them, "conserving" the resource not for posterity, but to make it more predictable and thus available for stable exploitation by capital. By the mid-1950s, fishing capital, securely based in both the crayfish and pelagic production and increasingly integrated with national capital, felt sufficiently confident to take over primary production from the petty-commodity producers. In so doing, however, it retained the essential elements of the piece-work system intact, reflecting both the ongoing resistance of petty producers to control by capital and the extent to which the modern industry remained hostage to the "natural factors" shaping and conditioning production in the fishing.

The modern fishing industry in the Cape is thus the result of very specific historical processes rather than a generic path of "progress" or the arrested development of a hunting mode whose origins are obscured in "The mists of early history where facts have merged into legend"⁵³. The "natural factors" governing production and the nature of the colonial economy conserved petty-commodity production in the fishing longer than elsewhere

⁵³ Irvin & Johnson South African Fish and Fishing, p.27.

and gave it a resilience to both the vagaries of the resource and subsequent attempts to establish capitalist production in the fisheries. Fishing capital in its merchant and petty-industrial forms proved unable to either destroy or co-opt petty-commodity production as the necessary pre-requisite for its own successful accumulation and it took massive state intervention at a number of levels to achieve this and create a "modern" industry in the inshore fisheries. In so doing, however, Pretoria was forced to accommodate the petty-commodity economy until fishing capital was sufficiently well established to transform it entirely into an effective piece-work system. The fact that the legacy of petty-commodity production remains visible today is the reason why the inshore fisheries have been so readily appropriated by the tourist industry, writers of "home-spun literature", newspapers and kitsch artists as an artefact of an earlier, more simple and contented life for the consumption of alienated urbanites. In this way, a particular form of proletarianisation is mistaken for its absence, underdevelopment is confused with pre-industrialisation and poverty is idealised and romanticised as the epitome of "the simple life".

WHY ST HELENA BAY?

St Helena Bay is a key case study for charting the above processes because of its historical importance as a centre of commercial fishing, its location on the margins of two agricultural districts and the limited academic attention it has attracted in the past. With the exception of a single predecessor, only a geographer, philologist and urban planner have deemed the Bay worthy of study, relying more on their own fieldwork than archival sources to reconstruct its history⁵⁴. It

⁵⁴ The only systematic historical study of St Helena Bay is A.P. Roux "Saldanhabaai, St Helenabaai en Dassensiland 1652-1806" (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1975). The geographer is P.D.K. Hagen "St Helenabaai: 'n Geografiese Studie" (Unpublished MA thesis, University of

thus remains largely terra incognita to historians. In the century 1856-1956 St Helena Bay was successively the mainstay of the snoek export trade (c.1855-c.1914), a centre of the crayfish canning industry (c.1914-c.1939) and the heart of the pelagic canning and by-products industry (c.1939-c.1956). It thus remained central to the development of the inshore fisheries through successive epochs, giving it special value as a micro-study. Lastly, its rural location makes it typical of the Cape as a whole in a way which existing studies of inshore fisheries, linked to the urban metropolis of Cape Town are not. It is possible to generalise and compare the St Helena Bay example to other fisheries on the west coast, South West Africa and elsewhere, something not possible with Kalk, Hout or Rogge Bays without lengthy qualification. Its all-round representativeness thus makes it a valuable addition to the revisionist work of the past decade, capable of suggesting and opening up new routes of enquiry not only for those concerned with the fisheries, but for all aspects of the South Western Cape economy. The thesis itself is structured chronologically into three epochs:

I	c.1856-c.1914	Merchant Fisheries
II	c.1914-c.1939	Crayfish Canning
III	c.1939-c.1956	Pelagic Canning & By-Products

In each, the "big picture" is refracted through the lens of St Helena Bay as the focus moves from a broad consideration of trends and developments in the world, national and regional economies to a more detailed analysis of their specific impact at the Bay, amplifying and examining the linkages which exist. The

Stellenbosch, 1951); the philologist L.R. Heiberg "Die Taal van die Velddrifse Vissers" (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1950) and "Afrikaanse Visserstaal" (Unpublished D.Lit thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1957); and the urban planner K. Cadle "The Response of a Coloured Fishing Community to Their Marine Resource Base" (Unpublished MA thesis, UCT, 1983).

three central themes of the thesis, state, capital and labour, are explored and developed within the framework provided by this periodisation and determined by the macro-micro shift.

I

Part I of the thesis deals with the period c.1856-c.1914 and defines St Helena Bay's role within the regional and global economy. It seeks to dispel the notion that the Bay was isolated or separated from its agricultural hinterland or the attentions of capital by showing how it was integrated through the agency of merchant capital into both the colonial (grain shipment and rantsoennis) and international (salted snoek export) markets. The effects of this integration on the existing squatter and subsistence fisheries are examined, with specific reference to relations of production. The old share system was retained and adapted to suit merchant needs. The tightening of the labour supply as a result of the mineral revolution in the interior forced merchant capital to further extend its control over labour with the assistance of the colonial state, abolishing fishing leases in Malmesbury and extending the contract to cover all fishing labour. The moral economy of petty-commodity production, however, provided a base for sustained resistance to merchant attempts to arrest and control labour. Desertion and theft of fish, as the two most common forms of resistance, are suggestive of the nature and consciousness of fishing labour as independent producers concerned with the individual's right to control of his own labour power and the product thereof. Desertion was also fuelled by the decline of the snoek resource in the 1890s and this, together with colonial state indifference, the South African War and the construction of railways plunged merchant capital into a protracted crisis in the 1900s.

This crisis was largely confined to the Malmesbury coast of the Bay. The Piketberg fisheries were located on land rented from

Sandveld agriculture and were outside of merchant control. They depended on beach seining to supply farmers in the rural hinterland with cheap rantsoennis to feed farm labour. This trade was, however, also threatened in the 1900s, both by the decline of the snoek resource and arrival of Italian immigrant fishermen from Cape Town with decked cutters and set nets. The latter blockaded the beaches and cut off the fish supply to the sedentary seine fisheries along the coast. An alliance of Sandveld farmers, trek seine fishery owners and tenant fishermen on the Piketberg side of the Bay opposed the set net and its foreign adherents. Stephan Brothers, after initially resisting the newcomers and their more mobile technology, brokered the balkanisation of the Bay by the colonial state in 1909 in an effort to accommodate them. In return for the establishment of an Exclusive Trek Seine Fishing Zone (ETSFZ) on the Piketberg side of the Bay, the Malmesbury coast was thrown open to set net fishing and many Italians settled permanently along the southern shores of the Bay. In this way Stephan Brothers was able to diversify into crayfish canning for the French market after 1909, relying on the Italian fishermen to supply it with raw material. The legislative balkanisation of the Bay thus attempted to accommodate both the petty-commodity fishing economy and the new manufacturing industry, creating a growing economic divide which became a brake on the latter's development by 1914 and a source of increasing conflict at the Bay after 1920.

II

Part II of the thesis looks at the period c.1914-c.1939 and the early industrialisation of the Bay fishing economy. The First World War sparked a crayfish canning boom in the Cape, led by high export prices in Europe. The boom both reinforced the Bay's new position in global economy as a supplier of canned crustacean to the Parisian bourgeoisie and exacerbated tensions within the local fishery. The Berg River trek seine fishermen, confined to a

much-reduced fishing range after 1909, attempted to extend their control over the riverine resource during the war at the expense of a growing number of poor whites dependent for subsistence on set netting in the river's backwaters. The seine fishermen were themselves under pressure from Italian and other crayfish fishermen by the early 1920s as the wartime boom exhausted the local crayfish beds. As the crayfish frontier shifted rapidly north up the west coast after the war, the provincial state abandoned the closed season, declared the southern waters of the Bay a crayfish sanctuary in 1927 and closed it to all fishing. Stephan Brothers' land and trade interests precluded relocation and kept it tied to the Bay and a worked-out resource. Its position was further undermined by the steady fall of prices in France after 1922. Caught between the hammer of lower prices and the anvil of rising production costs, the firm looked to motorisation to lower production costs and the formation of the South African Lobster Cannery Association (SALCA) to maintain prices. Motorisation, the reorientation of fishing effort to the north and sporadic factory closures marginalised many crayfish fishermen throughout the 1920s, resulting in increased poaching in the ETSFZ. This conflict underscored the token nature of the provincial state's fisheries administration which was unable to reconcile the competing demands for resource access from the two groups of fishermen. The colonial state's 1909 balkanisation of the Bay, inherited by a provincial state with no fisheries budget or police force, was thus rapidly undermined by the motor revolution of the 1920s and its already crumbling edifice was finally demolished by the hammer blow of the Depression.

The Depression slowed the movement of commodities and brought prices sharply lower across the globe. Crayfish canners, through the SALCA, were initially assured of a minimum price in France, but in 1931 the Association collapsed under mounting Japanese competition on the French market and the spiralling output of the

big Union canners and South West African industry. Ensuing price wars, opposition from French producers and a declining balance of trade with the Union, persuaded the French government to impose a quota on crayfish imports in 1934. For Stephan Brothers, dependent on the maintenance of a minimum price in France, the Depression induced a profound profitability crisis. Its only alternative was to squeeze its fishermen by lowering the price of crayfish some 50% between 1929-1932 and ceasing production when the French quota was imposed. The crisis in the west coast crayfish fishery, coupled with declining catches of key bait\rantsoennis species, a shrunken rantsoennis trade, falling seasonal labour demand in agriculture and population increase at the Bay, also created a generalised subsistence crisis in the west coast fishing communities. The latter was marked by intensified conflict over the ETSFZ, culminating in the 1934 invasion of Saldanha Bay fishermen using a new type of seine net (lampara) worked by boat rather than from the beach. Unemployed as a result of the Saldanha factory closures, the invaders exploited a loop-hole in the ETSFZ legislation and the range afforded them by their motor boats to fish in St Helena Bay. The superior productivity of the lampara decimated the Piketberg trek seine fisheries, cutting fish off from the beach and driving rantsoennis prices down to an all-time low. The political crisis in France and the resultant poverty, conflict and "poor whiteism" on the west coast, compelled the central state to intervene directly in the inshore fisheries for the first time. In 1934 it passed legislation to control crayfish exports and in 1936 took over responsibility for all marine fisheries from the provincial state. Pretoria was committed to developing and modernising the inshore fisheries, supporting the lampara fishermen in the 1934-1935 conflict at the Bay and refusing to resuscitate the crippled Berg River trek seine economy in its aftermath. It was also opposed to the old SALCA policy of production quotas and a minimum price, accusing the Association of protecting inefficient

producers and advocating rationalisation of the canning industry.

For both Stephan Brothers and the trek seine fishermen, central state control marked the end of an era. The old dual economy of trek seine and crayfish fishing was conditioned by the provincial state's relative weakness and inability to either impose or finance its will on the periphery. This allowed local farmers, fishery owners and canners considerable room to advance and pursue their own agendas. Pretoria, however, operated under no such constraints and saw Stephan Brothers and the Bay trek seine fishery as the epitome of all it opposed - an inefficient producer and poor whites clinging to a backward fishing technology. The firm thus had no option but to try and survive on its shrunken state quota allocation by depressing the price of crayfish paid to its fishermen with the aid of debt-bondage and free housing. The Piketberg trek seine fisheries, however, had been destroyed by the 1934-1935 conflict, creating widespread poverty and state pressure on local landowners to desist from "farming poor whites". With the provincial state vanquished, the ETSFZ gone, Stephan Brothers a spent force and Sandveld agriculture in retreat, many of the fishery-owners at the river invested in motorised craft and lampara nets. In this way they were able both to consolidate their own position and retain their share of the regional rantsoen and fresh fish markets through the increasing use of motor lorries to transport fish to the rural towns and the Cape Town market. It was these independent lampara fishery owners at Berg River who came into their own with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

III

Part III deals with the early modern period, c.1939-c.1956. The onset of war in 1939 had the familiar effect of disrupting trade and creating new opportunities for local producers in the

manufacture of import substitutes. This trend was further encouraged by South Africa's commitment to the Allied war effort and mobilisation of troops. In addition, the trawling industry's historical monopoly over the urban fresh fish market was loosened by the requisitioning of 50% of the trawler fleet for seaward defence purposes. With the demand for fish booming, the trawling fleet under-strength, state price controls confined to the urban areas and Saldanha Bay subject to curfew, the Berg River fishery owners were uniquely placed to reap the rewards of their pre-war adoption of motorisation and the lampara net. By exploiting price differentials on the various regional markets they were able to clear their debts and reinvest in production. Their new-found wealth also trickled down to labour at the river through the share system in a tight labour market created by high levels of enlistment. British Ministry of Food contracts, local military buying and a sharp decline in canned fish imports after 1942 stimulated the canning of new varieties of fish by crayfish canners and other processors. This development focussed on Berg River and in 1943 two outside companies bought land at the river, constructed housing and tried to compel their tenants to sell fish to them at lower than market prices. Fishing capital, however, was not the only outside interest with designs on the product of labour by 1944. The central state was also committed to canalising inshore production through co-operative societies onto the national market as a means of developing the inshore fisheries and "uplifting" the fishermen socially.

By 1940 Pretoria had consolidated its control over the fishing with the passing of the Crawfish Export Act and Sea Fisheries Act. Four years later it unveiled additional legislation to establish a development corporation with power to organise and develop the inshore fisheries along co-operative lines, competing with the trawling industry for a share of the national fresh fish market. The opposition of trawling and organised capital, fearful

of creeping state socialism and competition, however, forced the state to embark on a fundamentally different development path tied not to co-operation and fresh fish production, but secondary industrialisation with inshore fish as raw material for canning and by-products manufacture. After 1945 it pursued this direction with a purpose, investing more than £500 000 in private companies, constructing infrastructure, financing scientific research and allocating exploitation rights to a select group of companies through crayfish export quotas and pelagic processing licences. At the same time, the nascent wartime industry was rationalised to meet international competition with the aid of the state and public share issues. Plant, machinery and technicians were imported from California and ownership rapidly centralised in the hands of a few large financial groups under the aegis of mining and finance capital. By 1955 South Africa boasted the largest fishing industry in the southern hemisphere and one of the ten biggest in the world, supplying both the local demand for canned fish, fish meal and fish oil and earning a further £10 million per annum in foreign exchange.

The industry centred on St Helena Bay and in the decade after the war no fewer than five new processing factories opened along the Bay's southern shores. By 1955 this "Cannery Row" had a reduction capacity in excess of 150 tons of fish per hour and was capable of processing 432 000 tons of inshore fish per annum. The factories looked to the existing private boat owners to supply their raw material needs and this enormous industrial appetite reorientated the Bay fishing economy away from the regional rantsoennis and fresh fish markets to supplying the factories. The fleet expanded rapidly with financial assistance from the state, company and outside interests, rising to more than 100 vessels in 1951. In 1950 the price per ton was fixed at £4 and continued to be distributed amongst owner and crew on a share basis. As catches climbed, the fishermen's earnings rose

accordingly and Velddrift became a boom town, erasing the pre-war memories of poverty and destitution almost over-night. The post-war boom, however, obscured the ephemeral nature of this new prosperity, the extent to which labour's real share of the catch declined and the exclusion of the majority of "coloured" fishermen through formal and informal discrimination. The chief beneficiaries were the new boat owning petty-bourgeoisie and skilled labour (skippers) and it was they who organised and led the Bay's petty-commodity producers after 1951 against encroachment by outsiders and fishing capital on the primary sector (fishing). By 1955 capital was facing mounting competition internationally from Japan and Peru and sought to improve the efficiency of the fleet through the vertical integration of primary with secondary production under its direct control.

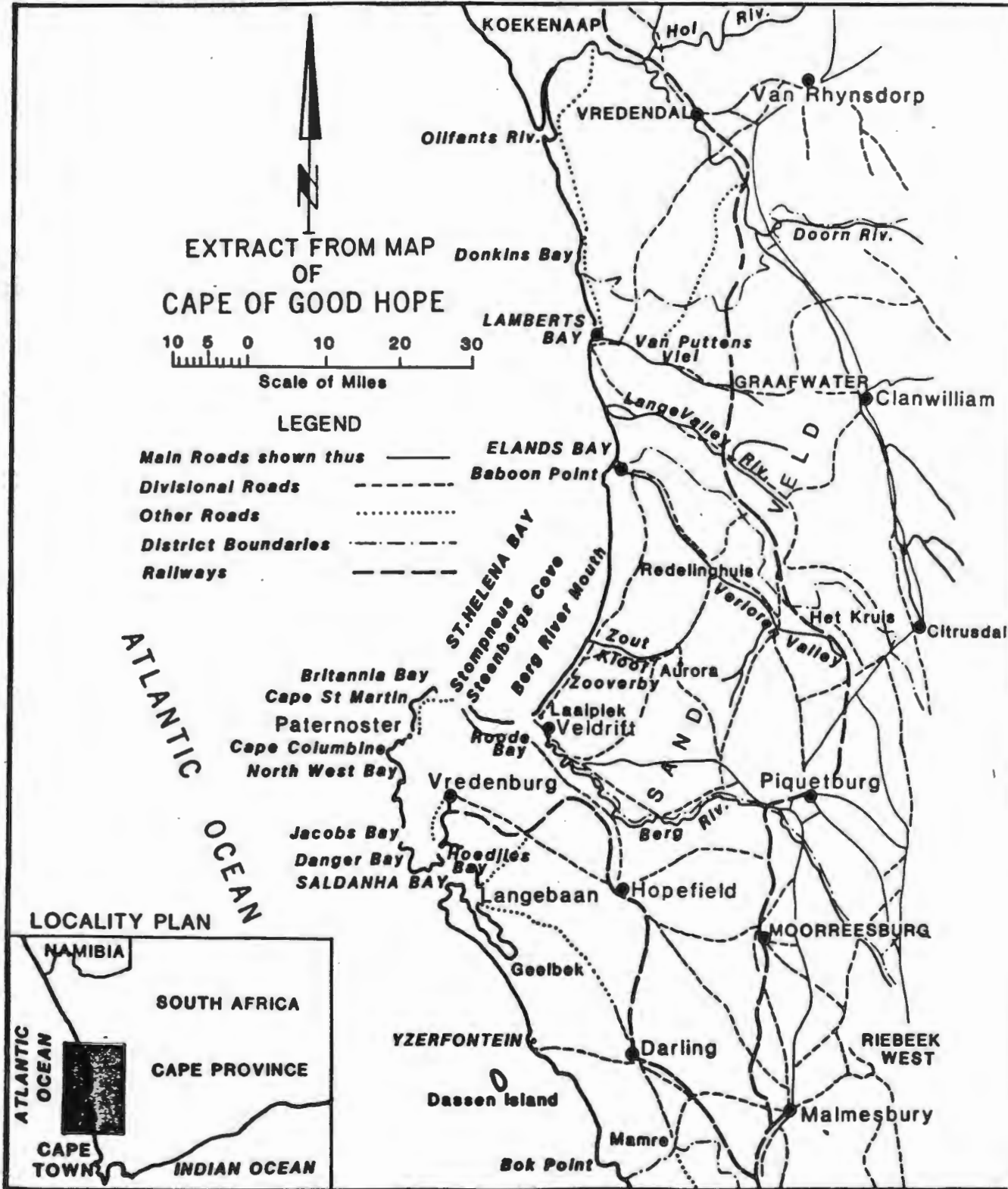
Record low catches in 1956 decimated the ranks of the private boat owners and created an over-supply of both skilled and unskilled labour which provided capital with the opportunity to fundamentally reorganise the Bay fishery. Fleet ownership passed rapidly into company hands and the fleet was thinned out, increasing the size of the average boat (length, hold capacity) and incorporating a range of new fishing technologies (echo-sounders, synthetic nets, puritic power blocks, fish pumps). The share system, however, was retained. The resultant surge in fishing production, together with diversification into other areas (Namibia, Chile) and fisheries (tuna), restored the industry's profitability and prepared the ground for a renewed boom period in the 1960s. The rationalisation of fishing and factory production after 1956, however, shifted the centre of gravity away from St Helena Bay where a shrinking fleet, the closure of a number of processing plants and the inadequacies of the natural harbour at Berg River, relegated the Bay to a secondary position behind Walvis Bay. As a result, large numbers of skippers and fishermen moved north, the population of the Bay

declined and the development promise of the post-war boom evaporated. The opening of the river mouth and construction of a new harbour at Sandy Point in the 1960s gave the Bay fishing economy a new lease on life, but only as a permanent periphery of the national economy.

The history of the St Helena Bay fisheries thus refutes both the popular mythology of fishing and fishermen and the sanguine racism of the company accounts. It was the process of capitalist development within a primary commodity producing colonial economy, rather than a "call of the blood" or "progress", which shaped both class formation and capital accumulation on the coastal periphery. This, together with the disjuncture between labour and production time inherent in fishing, gave the Cape fisheries their unique form (petty-commodity production) and determined their underdevelopment on the structural periphery of the emerging national economy. The predominantly rural nature of the fisheries further reinforced their marginalisation and subjugation to the labour and rantsoennis needs of agriculture, placing an additional obstacle in the way of capital penetration and effectively conserving petty-commodity production until the 1930s. Merchant capital's inability to defeat this alliance between Sandveld agriculture, tenant fishermen and the provincial state slowed and distorted the Bay's industrialisation and required the direct intervention of the central state. Pretoria was, however, also forced to incorporate rather than dissolve the petty-commodity economy. The articulation of petty-commodity primary production with secondary industry after 1945 laid the basis for the large-scale industrialisation of the inshore fisheries at the Bay and the final dissolution of the petty-commodity mode in the mid-1950s. Paradoxically, it is the very endurance of petty-commodity production historically which lends weight to the mythologisation of fishing in the popular mind, giving fishing labour an ambiguity which readily suggests stasis.

The thesis shows that the very opposite was in fact true and that the historical fishermen - unlike his mythical counterpart - was and remains a transitory member of the Cape's rural working class.

MAP 1



I THE MERCHANT FISHERIES
c.1856 -c.1914

1: DEFINING THE PERIPHERY

St Helena Bay's location as a historical, geographic and economic periphery of the South Western Cape is integral to any understanding of the origins of the west coast fishery and more particularly the history of the Bay itself. A periphery is by definition a boundary and the area furthest away from the centre. Otto Mentzel described St Helena Bay in the 1780s as, "the last Bay on the West Coast to be reckoned among the possessions of the Dutch East India Company and the most remote from the Cape"¹. The Bay's peripheral (boundary) status was underlined by his subsequent elaboration of its location:

"Beyond the North-west side of this bay, or rather coast line, there stretches a mountain chain in a slanting and South-easterly direction. This range can with justice be regarded as the boundary between the Dutch settlement and Kaffirland ... for no fixed frontier has yet been proclaimed ... Having reached the mountains to the N.E. of St Helena Bay we have come to the non plus ultra in so far as the N.W. of the Cape settlement is concerned"².

Remoteness, isolation and a lack of human habitation remain recurring images in traveller and other accounts of the area long after the north western frontier was extended to the Orange River and beyond, however. St Helena Bay thus remained a periphery even after it ceased to be the boundary between European civilisation and the unknown. The reason was that the historical periphery overlaid a geographical periphery, separating land and sea. Mentzel again illumines the nature of this periphery in his account:

"Accurately described it [St Helena Bay] is neither a bay nor

¹ O. Mentzel A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope, Part 1 (Cape Town, 1921), p.78.

² *Ibid.*, pp.78-79.

a roadstead, nor a harbour, but rather a gulf or a bend in the land where the sea penetrates for some miles. The open sea laps the coast on the North and the North-west, and this locality is exposed to the full blast of the dangerous winter winds. To the south and east of this bay there is a sandy plain that is not easily traversed. The Berg River ... zigzags North through the sandy wastes and flows into the southern basin of St Helena Bay"³.

The featureless Bay fronting a sandy coastal plain which was once the bed of a shallow sea creates an indistinct, but recognisable boundary between land and sea and as such a periphery of a different kind. The nature of the physical periphery created a third economic periphery. Mentzel compared the Bay's immediate hinterland to "the land of Goshen in the Arabian desert ... everything is sandy and almost uninhabitable"⁴. Poor soil, exposure to wind, low rainfall and a lack of water discouraged settlement, stunted agricultural activity and made St Helena Bay the periphery of the Western Cape wheatlands. This convergence of historical, geographic and economic peripheries fashioned an internal frontier within the colonial economy, an area peripheral to the main and resistant to control or penetration by the latter. Behind this barrier of isolation from the centre, older forms of social organisation remained intact or re-emerged after being vanquished elsewhere. The peculiar nature of society and production, laden with vestiges of proto- and even pre-capitalist forms, shaped and conditioned relations and interactions with the centre. Thus, the dominant classes on the periphery increasingly required the continued underdevelopment of the area as a necessary pre-condition for their own continued accumulation.

³ *Ibid.*, p.78.

⁴ O.F. Mentzel *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, Part III (Cape Town, 1944), p.75.

1.1 ST HELENA BAY AS PERIPHERY

St Helena Bay is a backwater of South African history, warranting only passing mention as the site of the first recorded European landfall on the subcontinent by Portuguese seafarer, Vasco da Gama, on St Helena's day 1497⁵. When the VOC established a way station at the Cape it chose Table Bay 150 kilometers to the south with its safe anchorage, permanent fresh water supply and Khoikhoi pastoralists willing to barter sheep and cattle. The colony expanded rapidly eastward in the 18th Century and the arid western coastal plain or Sandveld attracted few settlers and limited Company interest⁶. The VOC was primarily concerned with security in the west and the danger of the coast as an invasion route for rival colonial powers⁷. Initial hopes of finding mythical mountains of copper and lost cities of gold yielded only semi-desert and roving bands of pastoralists cum-hunter-gatherers⁸. The latter were gradually thinned out by conquest and disease after 1700 and the north-western frontier fixed along the Oliphants River in the 1740s⁹. Inside this boundary, a patchwork

⁵ See for example A.J. Boeseken, D.W. Kruger & A. Kieser Drie Eeue: Die Verhaal van Ons Vaderland (Cape Town, 1952), p.6; E.A. Walker A History of Southern Africa (London, 1964), p.15 and C.F.J. Muller 500 Years: A History of South Africa (Cape Town, 1981), p.10.

⁶ W.J. Talbot Swartland and Sandveld (Cape Town, 1949), pp.1-3 for a geomorphological definition of the Sandveld and P.D.K. Hagen "St Helenabaai: 'n Geografiese Studie", pp.4-5 for very different socio-economic boundaries. It is the latter which are used here.

⁷ A.P. Roux "Saldanhabaai, St Helenabaai en Dasseneiland" and J. Burman and S. Levin The Saldanha Bay Story (Cape Town, 1974) for early European contact with the Cape west coast.

⁸ G. Waterhouse (ed) Simon van der Stel's Journal of His Expedition to Namaqualand 1685-6 (London, 1932) and J.H. Smalberger Aspects of the History of Copper Mining in Namaqualand 1846-1931 (Cape Town, 1975), pp.11-17.

⁹ N.G. Penn "The Frontier in the Western Cape 1700-1740" (Unpublished paper presented at a Spatial Archaeology Research Workshop, UCT, 1984); N.G. Penn "Pastoralists and Pastoralism in the Northern Cape Frontier Zone during the Eighteenth Century" in South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series, 5, 1986.

quilt of grazing licences and loan farms was super-imposed on the old cattle walks and hunting grounds of the Khoisan, but settler agriculture struggled to gain a foothold on the coastal plain¹⁰. The Sandveld thus remained an area of marginal mixed farming and seasonal grazing concentrated along the alluvial flood plain of the Berg River¹¹.

The British takeover of the Cape in 1806 sparked renewed interest in the west coast, particularly Saldanha Bay - in the words of Barrow, "a spacious, secure and commodious sheet of inland sea water, for the reception of shipping can scarcely perhaps be equalled anywhere in the world"¹². A lack of fresh water thwarted these plans, however. With the collapse of the Greenland whale fishery in the first half of the 18th Century, northern whaling effort shifted to the southern oceans and by the late 18th Century European and American whalers were working the Cape west coast on a regular basis¹³. Attempts to establish a local whale fishery failed, however, as the inshore whale population of the colony declined in the 1830s, undermining the industry¹⁴. In the 1840s the discovery of huge guano deposits on the inshore islands

¹⁰ W.A. Burger Piket Teen 'n Berg (Cape Town, 1975), p.24 for a description of the loan farm system in the Sandveld.

¹¹ A discussion of early Sandveld settlers and agriculture can be found in W.A. Burger Piket Teen 'n Berg, pp.1-39 and M.H.D. Smith Boerepioniers van die Sandveld (Pretoria, 1985).

¹² J. Barrow Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa, vol.1 (New York, 1968), p.361.

¹³ P.B. Best & G.J.B. Ross "Catches of Right Whales from Shore-Based Establishments in Southern Africa, 1792-1975" in Report of the International Whaling Commission, 10, 1986 and P.B. Best & G.J.B. Ross "Whales and Whaling" in A.I.L. Payne et al Oceans of Life off Southern Africa (Cape Town, 1989).

¹⁴ Ibid. Also A.J. Boesken "Die Nederlandse Kommissarisse en die 18de Eeuse Samelewing aan die Kaap" in Archives Yearbook for South African History, vol.7, 1943; K.M. Jeffereys The Memorandum of Commissary J.A. De Mist 1802 (Cape Town, 1920) and W.W. Bird State of the Cape of Good Hope in 1822 (London, 1823).

off the west coast touched off a foreign guano rush which similarly decimated this resource in a matter of a few years¹⁵. Finally, in the 1850s finds of copper in Namaqualand stimulated the development of mining and led to the opening of Port Nolloth and Hondeklip Bay as ports servicing the nascent mining industry¹⁶. St Helena Bay, however, possessed none of the natural attributes or guano deposits which made Saldanha Bay so attractive and was too far removed from the centre of copper production to garner any of the related trade. The Bay's exposure to winter gales, the silting up of the mouth of the Berg River and the Sandveld's location on the northern limits of the winter rainfall region thus still consigned it to the periphery of the 19th Century colonial economy.

The Sandveld was unsuited to either viticulture or grain production and offered only poor grazing for livestock¹⁷. While the Swartland to the south and Piketberge in the east became the "Granary of the Colony", frequent droughts, low yields and isolation from the Cape Town market ensured that Sandveld farmers remained relatively poor and outside of the commercial networks which tied their more prosperous neighbours into the colonial and expanding world economy¹⁸. In 1855 the area was incorporated into the newly-created district of Piketberg, with its own magistrate and Divisional Council. Although represented on the latter, the

¹⁵ B. Morrell Narrative of a Voyage to the South and West Coast of Africa (London, 1844); T.E. Eden The Search for Nitre and the True Nature of Guano (London, 1846); L.G. Green Panther Head (London, 1955) and J. Burman & S. Levin The Saldanha Bay Story.

¹⁶ J.M. Smalberger Aspects of the History of Copper Mining in Namaqualand 1846-1931 and O'Kiep Copper Company Namaqualand Copper: 100 Years of Progress, 1852-1952 (Cape Town, 1952).

¹⁷ See for example the observations of J. Barrow Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa, vol.2 (New York, 1968), pp.365-371 and H. Lichtenstein Travels in Southern Africa (Cape Town, 1928), pp.56-68.

¹⁸ M.H.D. Smith Boerepioniers van die Sandveld.

Sandveld failed to benefit from the public works schemes initiated by the new body to link the more fertile eastern region of the district with the Cape Town market¹⁹. As late as 1875 the Cape Colony official handbook said of Piketberg district:

"There is, however, a large portion still uncultivated, and in parts of the flats and the Zandveld the occupiers are a poor and ignorant class, as backward as any who are to be found in the extreme border districts. From the want of roads they have been to great degree isolated from their neighbours, and are not yet much affected by the spirit of enterprise and industry which elsewhere prevails"²⁰.

Peripheral as it was to agricultural production in the district, the Sandveld did provide access to the Cape Town market via the Berg River and sea coast and thus became the transit route for the agricultural surplus of commercial farmers in the interior. Cape Town was the only market for grain in the colony until the last quarter of the 19th Century and all roads out of the wheatlands led, albeit by diverse routes, to Table Bay²¹. Because of the distances involved and the poor state of the roads, farmers in the western districts of the colony relied on travelling traders or "smouse" for essential items and a means to market for their produce. As the commercialisation of agriculture intensified during the 19th Century, so the scope for merchant capital broadened and Cape Town merchants developed a burgeoning

¹⁹ W.A. Burger Piket Teen 'n Berg, pp.117-140 and Cape of Good Report of the Select Committee on the Berg River and Tarka Bridge 1862 [A.2-'62].

²⁰ J. Noble Descriptive Handbook of the Cape Colony (Cape Town, 1875), p.65.

²¹ J.N.C. Marincowitz "Rural Production and Labour in the Western Cape, 1838 to 1888, with Special Reference to the Wheat Growing Districts", pp.18-24.

grain trade along the colony's seaboard²².

Initial attempts to ship grain from the mouth of the Berg River in the late 18th Century were frustrated by VOC monopoly interests, but, by the 1830s, merchant brigs and cutters were plying a growing trade in grain and other commodities from Port Beaufort, Mossel Bay and Knysna on the east coast to Hondeklip Bay, Lamberts Bay, St Helena Bay and Saldanha Bay in the west²³. These coastal entrepôts served as seasonal centres of trade and provided farmers with the opportunity to acquire much-needed supplies. The Sandveld coastline at St Helena Bay and the lower reaches of the Berg River thus became important markets for the farmers of the interior. Wheat, oats, rye, barley, butter, hides, eggs, wool and tallow all found their way from the Piketberg hinterland to the Cape Town market via Soldaten Pos on the St Helena Bay coast, the Berg River Mouth and Elands Bay²⁴. This seaborne trade grew rapidly through the 1850s, amounting to an estimated 15-20 000 muids of grain annually as well as an increasing importation of goods²⁵. So important had the river route become by 1858 that local farmers petitioned the House of

²² R. Ross "The Origins of Capitalist Agriculture in the Cape Colony: A Survey" in W. Beinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido (eds) Putting a Plough to the Ground, pp.64-66 and Cape of Good Hope Report of the Select Committee on the Berg River 1858, [S.C.3\1858], p.4.

²³ C.F.J. Muller Johannes Frederik Kirsten Oor die Toestand van die Kaapkolonie in 1795: 'n Kritiese Studie (Pretoria, 1960), pp.38-40; A.P. Roux "Saldanhabaai, St Helenabaai en Dasseneiland", pp.122-132; J.N.C. Marincowitz "Rural Production and Labour in the Western Cape, 1838 to 1888, with Special Reference to the Wheat Growing Districts", pp.21-22 and R. Ross "The Cape of Good Hope and the World Economy, 1652-1835" in R. Elphick & H. Giliomee (eds) The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840 (Cape Town, 1990), pp.268-269.

²⁴ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\5, Malmesbury Civil Commissioner to the Colonial Secretary, 31 July 1861 and 1\MBY, 6\2\6, Malmesbury Civil Commissioner to the Colonial Secretary, 21 November 1866.

²⁵ Report of the Select Committee on the Berg River, 1858, Evidence of J.C. Stephan, p.10.

Assembly to dam the river a mile and a half from its mouth to provide a year round supply of fresh water and improved navigation for the transshipment of wheat²⁶. In 1860 the Piketberg Agricultural Society reported that wheat to the value of £20 000 was shipped from the mouth of the Berg River and a further £5 000 worth via Elands Bay by some ten cutters bound for Cape Town²⁷. In 1874, the navigability of the Berg River was again the subject of Parliamentary enquiry. Captain D.J. May of the Royal Navy informed a select committee that by removing the sandbars and rocks at the river's mouth, vessels of six feet draught could travel all of forty miles inland "affording great facilities of water transport to a rich and very productive country"²⁸. The productivity of the interior was amply illustrated by May's estimates that in 1873 alone 22 500 bags of wheat, 23 077 bags of oats and 12 077 bags of rye, barley and tobacco were sent to Cape Town and the copper mines in Namaqualand. In addition smaller quantities of whale oil, butter, beans, peas, hides, skins and eggs were also shipped from the river²⁹.

The commercialisation of the west coast through the development of shipping, trade routes, markets and grain depots also facilitated the growth of fishing, closely linked to the food needs of the rural hinterland. The sea on the Cape west coast, in sharp contrast to the barren Sandveld, is some of the richest in the world. St Helena Bay lies on the Atlantic seaboard at the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Evidence of J.J. Kotze, pp.1-7.

²⁷ H. van der Merwe Piketberg 1652-1952: Van Riebeeck-Fees Gedenkuitgawe (Paarl, 1952), p.20 and W.A. Burger Piket Teen 'n Berg, p.326.

²⁸ Cape of Good Hope Report of the Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Berg River Survey 1874, [A.15-'74], p.iii.

²⁹ J. Noble Descriptive Handbook of the Cape Colony, p.64.

heart of the Benguela upwelling current system³⁰. The topography of the Bay enhances the upwelling process, producing verdant plankton pastures which sustain vast shoals of pelagic (surface swimming) fish such as pilchard, maasbanker and harder (mullet), a variety of other inshore species (galjoen, kabeljauw, steenbras, stompneus and crayfish) and attendant large predators (snoek, seabirds, whales and seals). The environmental contrast between harsh land and bountiful sea lies at the heart of the human history of the region from pre-colonial times to the present.

1.2 FARMING AND FISHING

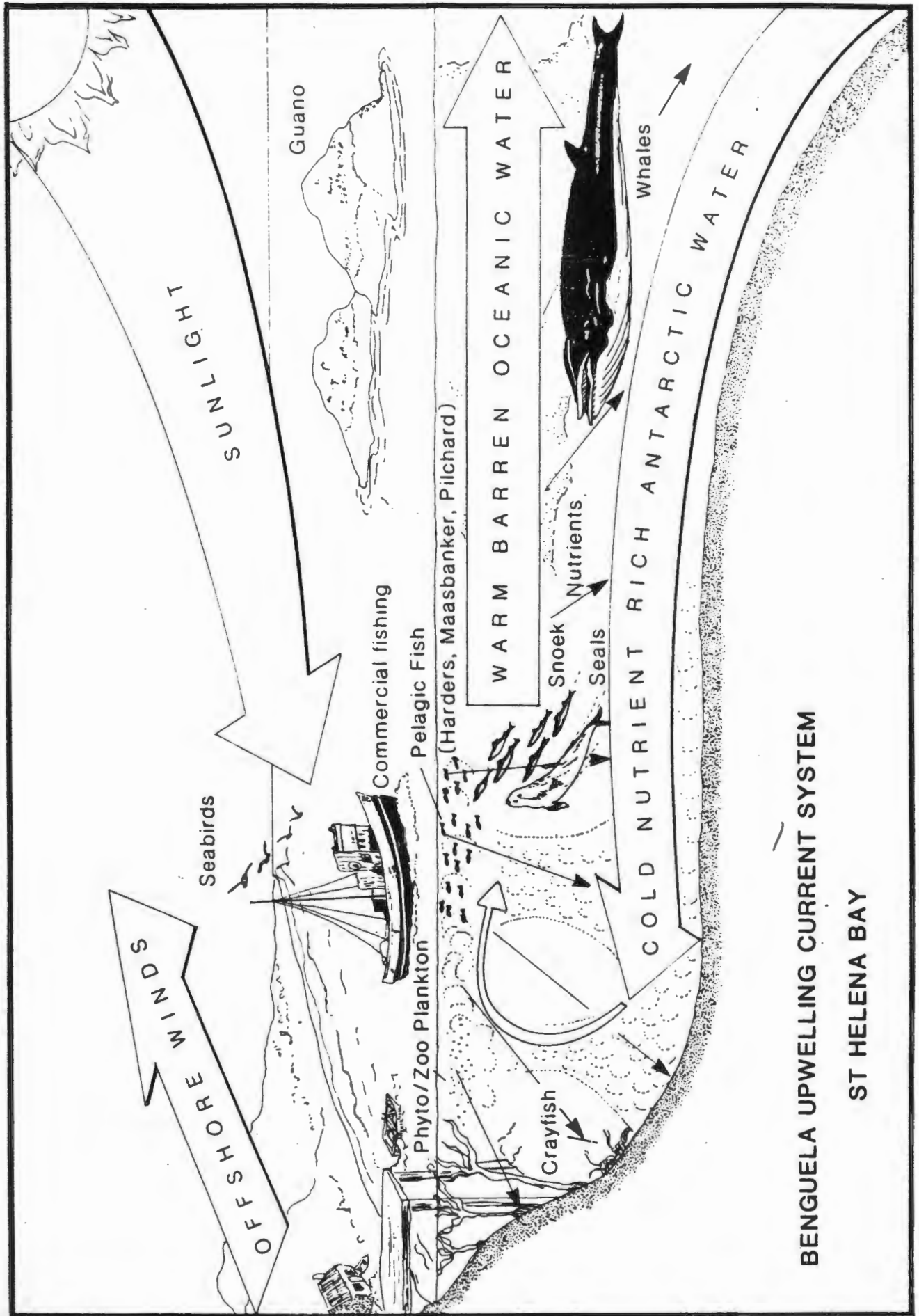
The marine resources of the Cape west coast were intermittently exploited by the region's human inhabitants from pre-colonial times³¹, but, with the advent of colonialism, exploitation was both expanded and intensified. As early as 1658 the VOC stationed free-burghers at Saldanha Bay to provide the Company with fish, seal meat and skins and penguin eggs as well as advance warning of foreign ships³². Centuries of European circumnavigation and visits by French sealers had, however, largely denuded the coast

³⁰ For an excellent layperson's introduction to the west coast upwelling system see R. Moorsom Fishing: Exploiting the Sea, pp.12-15. More scientific accounts can be found in T.S. Hart & R.I. Currie "The Benguela Current" in Discovery Reports 31, 1960; J. Parkington "Landscape and Subsistence changes since the last Glacial Maximum along the Western Cape Coast" in L.G. Straus The End of the Paleolithic in the Old World: BAR International Series 284 (Oxford, 1986) and L.V. Shannon "The Physical Environment" in A.I.L. Payne & R.J.M. Crawford (eds) Oceans of Life off Southern Africa.

³¹ J. Parkington "Coastal Settlement between the Mouths of the Berg and Oliphants Rivers, Cape Province" in South African Archaeological Bulletin, 31, 1976; J. Parkington "Soaqua: Hunter-Fisher-Gatherers of the Oliphants River Valley Western Cape" in South African Archaeological Bulletin, 32, 1977 and A.H. Manhire, J.E. Parkington & T.S. Robey "Stone Tools and Sandveld Settlement" in M. Hall et al (ed) Frontiers: Southern African Archaeology Today: BAR International Series 207 (Cambridge, 1984).

³² A.P. Roux "Saldanhabaai, St Helenabaai en Dasseneiland"; J. Burman & P. Levin The Saldanha Bay Story and C.F.J. Muller "Die Geskiedenis van die Visserye aan die Kaap tot aan die Middel van die Agtiende Eeu".

DIAGRAM 1



BENGUELA UPWELLING CURRENT SYSTEM

ST HELENA BAY

of seals and those that remained were soon culled by the settlers. Whaling and guano production followed, wreaking similar havoc on marine mammal populations and seabird colonies alike. With the growth of commercial agriculture and freeing up of trade under the British, the way was open for the more sustained exploitation of the fish resources along the colony's western seaboard. This was initially closely tied to the food needs and seasonal cycles of colonial agriculture. In 1892 one witness before a Select Committee investigating the fisheries quite unequivocally asserted that:

"The colony is greatly indebted to the western province farmers for the development of the fishing industry; no one has spent so much money on it as we have. We always sell our fish a great deal cheaper than in any other part of the colony, and we really supply the whole of the Paarl and farmers about there".³³

This statement is revealing for what it says about the relationship between farming and fishing. One of the primary needs of the colony's emerging agrarian economy during the 19th Century was for a supply of cheap food to feed farm labour. Fish rapidly became established as the staple ration in this regard and a sought-after commodity, much in demand throughout the coastal farming districts of the colony and far into the hinterland. Fish held a number of advantages for the farmer. It was plentiful all along the coast and lower reaches of the major rivers and thus easy to procure even in isolated rural communities. Because of its abundance it was relatively cheap and in a sun-dried form evinced a good durability in the hot climate; allowing it to be transported over considerable distances and stored for long periods.

³³ *Cape of Good Hope Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892 [G.37-'92], Evidence of H.R. Stephan, p.10.*

Lichtenstein, travelling up the west coast in the early years of the 19th century, remarked on the importance of fish in provisioning the slave population on the farms in the region and at Saldanha Bay noted that:

"As this is a sort of food that the slaves love exceedingly, many colonists have fisheries in the bay or fetch in cartloads from the owners of the ... fishing huts, the provision for their household. The salted fish is sent from thence over the Tulbagh, even as far as the Bokkeveld and Goudinie".³⁴

Similarly, at St Helena Bay, he reported that:

"Here, as in Saldanha Bay, such vast quantities of fish are taken that the trade to the inland parts in salted and dried fish contributes very essentially to the support of the inhabitants of the coast"³⁵.

The obvious importance of "rantsoennis" to the rural Cape economy raises questions of supply. Lichtenstein's observations suggest that those farmers living in close proximity to the coast or major rivers conducted their own fishing operations or relied on those of their fellows to secure their rantsoennis needs. This is borne out by the evidence of Carel Stephan, almost half a century later, who reported seeing the wagons of some two hundred farmers congregated at a well-known fishing spot on the Berg River³⁶. Similarly, William van Putten related how, at Lamberts Bay, "Poor farmers go down to the strand to catch fish and live from it ... Other farmers again who come down to the beach for bathing purposes purchase this fish caught by the others"³⁷. Periodic

³⁴ H. Lichtenstein Travels in Southern Africa, p.45.

³⁵ Ibid., p.65.

³⁶ Report of the Select Committee on the Berg River 1858, Evidence of J.C. Stephan, p.10.

³⁷ Cape of Good Hope Report of the Select Committee on Lamberts Bay 1893 [A.14-'93], Evidence of J.W. van Putten, p.23.

fishing expeditions of this nature continued throughout the 19th Century, no doubt timed to coincide with seasons when fish were known to be abundant. Such fishing activities probably relied on regular farm and family labour and were secondary and subject to the demands of agricultural and pastoral production. They were both too infrequent and largely confined to providing household consumption needs and, as such, cannot account for the extensive trade which Lichtenstein indicates existed in the region. This trade appears to have depended on people who resided more or less permanently along the coast and the lower reaches or at the mouths of major rivers and engaged in fishing as independent producers. It was these small fisheries which supplied the rantsoennis needs of the farmers of Tulbagh and Goudini, relying on itinerant traders, smouse and hawkers for distribution.

The origins of the fishing communities that sprang up along the river courses and sea coast of the St Helena Bay during the 19th Century are to be found in the processes of land alienation and class differentiation at work in the countryside during this period. The effects of subdivision and land shortage on small farmers, ongoing dispossession of the indigenous population and the abolition of slavery and ex-slave's apprenticeships all contributed to the creation of a rural underclass in the western coastal districts of the colony³⁸. For these people, the economic horizons were extremely limited, caught, as they were, between the equally unattractive and uncertain options of regular farm labour, wage labour in one of the small towns or migration to Cape Town. While failed farmers and bywoners were able to draw on the bonds of language and culture binding them to the rural propertied class in mediating their position, no such option

³⁸ R. Ross *The Origins of Capitalist Agriculture in the Cape Colony: A Survey*, pp.66-76 and C. Bundy *Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape before Poor Whiteism* in W. Beinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido (eds) Putting a Plough to the Ground.

existed for the vast majority of those forced off the land in the early phase of a developing capitalist agriculture in the region. Their numbers were swollen by deserters, maroons and other cast-offs from the coastal shipping trade, whaling and guano industries, a miscellaneous flotsam of seaborne humanity which collected in the eddies and backwaters of the coast. For all these people the choices were few and stark indeed. The existence of tracts of crown and waste land in the region held out the hope of a modicum of continued independence for those willing to run the risks of uncertain tenure and possible official and farmer harassment attached to squatting.

The marginal nature of such land made total independence from wage labour impossible in all but a few good years when the returns from small scale production were sufficient to meet household needs. Occupants of public land thus alternated between a wide range of subsistence strategies and casual farm labour³⁹. Because of the seasonal nature of agricultural production, squatters could fall back on brief periods of farm labour at day-wage rates during almost eight months of the year in addition to their other subsistence activities. In the Sandveld, where much of the waste land was coastal, fishing formed the dominant subsistence activity alongside casual farm labour and more or less permanent fishing hamlets began to emerge. Lichtenstein mentioned the existence of "fishing huts" at Saldanha Bay in the first decade of the 19th Century. A similar fishing settlement emerged at the Berg River mouth around the same time⁴⁰. The bishop of Cape Town, visiting Malmesbury in 1848 reported that "There

³⁹ J.N.C. Marincowitz *"Rural Production and Labour in the Western Cape, 1838-1888, with Special Reference to the Wheat Growing Districts"* pp.40-48. Labour was in particular demand only during specific periods of the year: April to June for riding dung, June to August for ploughing and November to January during harvest for reaping and tramping.

⁴⁰ M.H.D. Smith *Boerepioniers van die Sandveld*, pp.66-67 and W.A. Burger *Piket Teen 'n Berg*, pp.259-260.

are not many English here, but I find there are a good many about Saldanha and St Helena Bays, who do not bear the most respectable character"⁴¹. J.J. Kotze too reported the existence of a number of "petty fisheries" as far as fifteen miles upstream from the mouth of the Berg River⁴². Further north at Lamberts Bay the nucleus of a more permanent fishing community also coalesced at the coast⁴³.

Several cases of theft along the lower reaches of the Berg River in 1888 focussed official attention on one such community. The crimes were attributed to a small group of "squatters" residing on unsurveyed crown land at the river mouth. The Civil Commissioner of Piketberg complained that "in only a few cases convictions have been obtained as it is most difficult to bring the crimes home to these persons, they being a gang who club together"⁴⁴. This "gang of thieves" view hardly fits the individual identities revealed by subsequent investigation⁴⁵. The squatters' leader was one, Robert Johnston, who lived in a stone and clay house with a thatched roof which he had built himself. In addition to his wife, Candace, his daughter and her two children - a son of about 25 and a daughter of 14 - also resided with him. Johnston based his occupancy of the land on the verbal permission of a former field cornet given him 25 to 30 years previously and confirmed in 1880 by the then Resident Magistrate.

⁴¹ R. Gray Journals of Two Visitations in 1848 and 1850 by the Right Reverend Gray Lord Bishop of Cape Town, Part 1 (London, 1852), p.76.

⁴² Report of the Select Committee on the Berg River 1858, Evidence of J.J. Kotze, p.2.

⁴³ Report of the Select Committee on Lamberts Bay 1893, Evidence of J.W. van Putten, pp.14-23.

⁴⁴ Cape Archives; LND 1\243, L 367, Civil Commissioner Piketberg to the Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands & Public Works, 6 October 1888.

⁴⁵ Cape Archives; LND 1\234, L 367, Unsigned report by Field Cornet J.C. Stephan, n.d. attached to letter from the Surveyor General to the Crown Lands Office, 10 October 1888.

He paid no rent, only house duty, and gathered his wood-fuel requirements from government ground. He depended for his livelihood on fishing, owning a boat, seine net, tubs and reed huts for this purpose. His location at the mouth of the river allowed him to work the shoals of harder which schooled in the river and inshore waters of the Bay during spring and summer. Johnston's seine net could be worked either from the river bank or the flat sandy beaches on the coast at those places where tide action and the absence of submerged reefs ensured that it would not drift or snag. Once fish were sighted on the trek - perhaps by one of the children posted as lookout for that purpose - the fishermen would gather on the beach and, while one end of the net was held fast on the strand, the boat would be rowed round the shoal encircling it with the net. With both ends of the seine back on the shore and the net laid around the fish, the catch would be drawn up onto the beach⁴⁶. Because of his need for labour, Johnston allowed five other men and their families to squat with him on the land. His control over this labour force was minimal, however, as "[he] does not put the men employed by him under any contract, they come and go as they please"⁴⁷.

One such "employee" was Nicolas Kordom. Kordom was single and about 35 years of age. He claimed to have come to live on the land some years previously with Johnston's permission. He did no other work except fishing and was "under no contract and can leave when he likes"⁴⁸. In addition to Kordom there was Willem Appel alias Willem Visagie, his wife, Anna, and 7 children (the

⁴⁶ For a description of beach seining see C.F.J. Muller "Die Geskiedenis van die Visserye aan die Kaap tot aan die Middell van die Agtiende Eeu", pp.42-43.

⁴⁷ Cape Archives; LND 1\234, L 367, Unsigned report by Field Cornet J.C. Stephan, n.d. attached to letter from the Surveyor General to the Crown Lands Office, 10 October 1888.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

oldest about 14). Appel, like Kordom, had come to fish for Johnston 5 or 6 years previously, but had not worked regularly as a fisherman since and was away from home at the time of the field cornet's visit. Sam Lucas, his wife, Mietje, and their 3 children had also arrived some 5 years earlier. Lucas had worked one season for Johnston as a fisherman and had then returned to the employ of local merchants, Stephan Brothers, intending to relocate to the firm's land as soon as he could find time to remove his house. Joseph Linkerhand and his "uncle", Jonas, also dated their occupancy of the land from a time some 6 years previously when Candace Johnston had given them permission to settle there. Joseph was too old for regular labour, although he sometimes helped Johnston out when asked and went out to work at harvest time. For the most part he depended on his 3 grandchildren for support. The latter worked where they could but were without regular employ. One, Fortuin Linkerhand, was serving a prison term for stealing sheep, but his grandfather denied any complicity in the matter. Another, Abram, had parents, but refused to work for his father. He, like Fortuin, had spent time in prison but found it difficult to recall how often or for what reason. He did, however, remember being had up for theft. Abram lived with a daughter of indeterminate age, Regina, who worked for him. He was clearly suspicious of the field cornet's presence and prying questions and told the latter with thinly-disguised hostility that "the ground is his 'Oude Noois' [meaning the Queen] and he pays house duty so will remain as long as he likes. [It was furthermore] no business of anyone where he gets food from or how he lives"⁴⁹. Johnston's squatter fishery probably operated on a share system, guaranteeing all participants a portion of the catch depending on each individual's contribution. Thus Johnson, as owner of the boat and net and nominal "skipper", would have received a greater number of shares out of recognition

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

of his ownership rights and other skills. The others - Kordom, Visagie, Lucas, Linkerhand and their sons and grandsons - would have been remunerated for their labour with equal shares as "co-adventurers" with Johnston⁵⁰. The families - wives and children - doubtless helped in the preparation and drying of the fish and all subsisted, in part at least, either directly from the catch or indirectly from its sale to local farmers as rantsoenvis. In this way, Johnston was able to avoid incurring fixed labour costs during times of poor weather, off seasons or fish scarcity. His labour force enjoyed access to the means of production as independent producers, able to appropriate a portion of the final product for their own use as well as the freedom to follow other subsistence strategies (farm labour, petty crime) in addition to fishing.

Squatting on the "Oude Nooi's ground" was not always necessary, however. Some proprietors of farms in the Sandveld actively encouraged the development of fishing settlements on their land. Theunis Erasmus Smit was one such farmer who willingly let plots of land on his farm, Velddrif, at the mouth of the Berg River, to would-be fishermen for an annual rental; nor was he the first owner of the farm to do so. From the early years of the 19th century, the farm's value was determined not only by the rough grazing it offered, but also by the annual rent to be made from a growing community of tenant fishermen⁵¹. J.J. Kotze too had a fisherman resident on his farm, Rietvlei, a mile and a half from

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the "share system" internationally see H. Zoetewij "Fishermen's Remuneration" in R. Turvey & J. Wiseman (eds) The Economics of Fisheries (Rome, 1957).

⁵¹ M.H.D. Smith Boerepioniers van die Sandveld, pp.66-67. This practice was not unique to the west coast. See L van Sittert "Gebrei in die Ambag: Farmers, Fish and Fishermen in the Hout Bay Valley c.1880-1956" for the Cape Peninsula and Cape of Good Hope Report of the Select Committee on Caledon Fishing Industry 1899 [A.27-'99] and Cape of Good Hope Report of the Select Committee on the Caledon Fisheries 1904 [A.3-'04] for the southeast coast.

the river mouth, who was required to pay a token rental of two baskets of fish per month⁵². These farmers viewed communities of tenant fishermen as a means of turning a profit from otherwise marginal land. The fishermen were a source of rent, seasonal labour, cheap food and possibly even surplus fish for trade in the surrounding area.

Prior to 1856 the owners of coastal or riverine farms in the Malmesbury and Piketberg districts enjoyed uninterrupted use of their land down to the high water mark and they thus retained the exclusive right to grant access to the coast or river to would-be fishermen⁵³. In 1856, however, the Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury, Captain John Rainer, emboldened by Parliament's new land policies, began issuing five year leases to lots of crown land, extending 120 feet inland from the highwater mark and 100 feet in width, for a nominal rental of £1 per annum⁵⁴. Rainer's motives for doing so were both economic and philanthropic. He wished to encourage the development of the fisheries along the seaboard of his district while simultaneously improving the living conditions of the numerous squatter fishermen already settled on the coast⁵⁵. The "fishing lease" system received official sanction the following year, on condition that the leases were "put up to public competition", a register kept and list of contracts forwarded to Cape Town for

⁵² Report of the Select Committee on the Berg River 1858, Evidence of J.J. Kotze, p.2.

⁵³ Cape of Good Hope Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of the Inhabitants of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, in Reference to Fishing Leases 1882 [A.10-'82], p.iii.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.iii and Appendices E-G, pp. xi-xii. Also Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\3, J. Rainer to the Colonial Secretary, 16 December 1856 and 1\MBY, 6\2\4, J. Rainer to the Colonial Secretary 24 April 1858.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

publication in the Government Gazette. In May 1858 the sale of "wines and spirituous liquors" was contractually forbidden on all leases⁵⁶. The latter continued to be issued without reference to the local farmer dominated Divisional Council and despite the passing of Act No 2 of 1860 which expressly excluded "land on the sea coast lying above and within two hundred feet of highwater mark" from the definition of "crown land" and made the granting of such land subject to the approval of the Legislative Council and House of Assembly. Although subsequently repealed, the provisions of the Act were reimposed by Act No 14 of 1878 and, in the opinion of a later Select Committee, "rendered the issue of these Fishing Leases perfectly illegal", adding "that from the date of the passing of the Act of 1860, they ought not to have been issued"⁵⁷. The fact that leases were granted until the early 1880s reflected the confusion engendered in the local bureaucracy by the string of land laws passed during the second half of the 19th Century and the poor communications with Cape Town. The degree of autonomy enjoyed by Rainer and his successors can be gauged from the Select Committee finding that the Colonial Secretary's instructions regarding the fishing leases had been "entirely ignored" and "no auction of any leases has taken place, and no notice has been published in the Government Gazette"⁵⁸.

In this fashion, no fewer than 76 leases were granted by 1882, earning the Colonial Office a handsome yearly income and opening up the coast of the district to fishing between Ysterfontein in the south and the mouth of the Berg River⁵⁹. The lease system gave an enormous fillip to individuals anxious to establish a base of

⁵⁶ Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of the Inhabitants of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, in Reference to Fishing Leases 1882, pp.iii-iv.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.iv-v.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.iv.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Appendix C, pp.ii-viii.

independent production on the coast. One observer estimated that there were as many as 400 fishermen and their families living along the Malmesbury coast by 1861. A decade later, the population had risen to around 1000⁶⁰. Relations between these fishing communities and most farmers in the area were ambiguous at best. While those renting to fishermen or living inland from the coast benefitted from their presence in the form of seasonal labour or a regular supply of rantsoennis, the attitude of many coastal landowners was summed up in the word they used to describe their unwanted neighbours - "squatters". The latter visited numerous depredations on the farmers of the coastal fringe. The paucity of drinking water and wood fuel on lease-sites forced the occupants to rely on the wells and brushwood of the abutting farms and as one landowner complained, "At Paternoster they have cut down the bushes growing at highwater mark, and I have lost one of my wells of water there already from the sand blowing about after the bushes were cut down"⁶¹. The existence of canteens on some of the leases was another source of complaint, subjecting farmers to the rowdy behaviour of intoxicated fishermen and giving their own labour easy access to alcohol⁶². The leases were reportedly also a haven for a host of

⁶⁰ Cape of Good Hope Correspondence on the Subject of Applications for certain Pieces of Ground at St Helena Bay, Hertzog (Stockenstrom), and Riversdale 1860 [A.8-'61], pp.3-4, Letter from W.E. Belson to the Colonial Secretary, 1 March 1860 and Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\7, Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury to the Colonial Secretary, 8 March 1871.

⁶¹ Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of the Inhabitants of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, in Reference to Fishing Leases 1882, Evidence of J.C. Stephan, p.15.

⁶² Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\4, Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury to the Colonial Secretary, 19 June 1860; 1\MBY, 5\5\1, R. Daly to the Resident Magistrate Malmesbury, 16 & 29 November 1861 and 1\MBY, 5\5\4, A.J Lemmerz to G.R. Duthie, 25 June 1884.

unsavoury characters including "runaway soldiers and sailors"⁶³.

The combination of economic injury and class fear prompted demands for greater state protection. Periodical courts were established at various points along the coast and a permanent Resident Magistrate stationed at Hopefield in 1896, but the propertied class' unease remained. In 1863 the farmers at Saldanha Bay complained that the field cornet was all of four hours' ride from the Bay and twenty years later they were still lamenting their lack of access to the state's coercive apparatus in dealing with the squatter problem⁶⁴. As they intoned:

"In front of homesteads, between ploughed fields and the sea, on all parts hordes of squatters were placed, and hardly any redress can be had for the inconveniences suffered, by reason of the seat of Magistracy being so far away"⁶⁵.

Denied effective legal redress, most farmers did their utmost to prevent the development of fishing communities on or near their land. The resurveying of coastal farms was one means of removing squatters, by re-establishing the landowner's right to the land down to the high-water mark and providing the necessary legal authority to evict leaseholders⁶⁶. In addition landholders refused

⁶³ Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of the Inhabitants of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, in Reference to Fishing Leases 1882, Evidence of J.C. Stephan, p.17 and Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\3, Anonymous to G.R. Duthie, 7 August 1881.

⁶⁴ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\5, Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury to the Colonial Secretary, 14 November 1863.

⁶⁵ Cape of Good Hope Petition of the Undersigned Inhabitants and Owners of Lands in the Division of Malmesbury, in the Wards of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, and in Piketberg 1882 [A.5-'82].

⁶⁶ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\6 Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury to the Colonial Secretary, 11 February 1866, 21 November 1866, 23 July 1868, 16 March 1868, 3 August 1868 & 24 December 1868; 1\MBY, 6\2\7, Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury to the Colonial Secretary, 19 May 1870 & 15 May 1875 and 1\MBY, 6\2\9, Report of the Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury, 5 January 1881.

to lease their land to fishermen, as the Reverend Belson of the See of Cape Town found to his frustration when he attempted to acquire land for a church and school to service the fishing communities on the Malmesbury coast. In his search for an appropriate site, he turned to local farmers, endeavouring "year after year ... by all means in my power, to obtain land from the farmers. I have offered to buy, rent or lease, but in vain"⁶⁷.

Despite such passive resistance, the number of leases continued to increase as did the coastal squatter population. Landowners thus turned their attention ever more forcefully to abolishing the lease system itself. As early as 1860, Rainer was confronted by a memorial from Saldanha Bay farmers demanding that the leasing of coastal land in their vicinity be terminated⁶⁸. He successfully defended his scheme on this occasion, but in 1874 another petition reached Parliament, alleging that the inhabitants and landed proprietors of the area had suffered "a great deal of annoyance, inconvenience, mischief and loss" as a result of the granting of fishing leases along the coast⁶⁹. Such leases, the petitioners charged, were "too often occupied by squatters and other ill-famed characters who breed nothing but mischief and annoyance". Even "respectable occupiers" were forced to trespass on the adjoining farms in search of water and wood and the petitioners asked that the lease system be abolished and they be thereby delivered "from those idlers who wish to live at

⁶⁷ Correspondence on the Subject of Applications for certain Pieces of Ground at St Helena Bay, Hertzog (Stockenstrom), and Riversdale 1860, pp.3-4, Letter from W.E. Belson to the Colonial Secretary, 1 March 1860.

⁶⁸ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\4, Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury to the Colonial Secretary, 19 June 1860.

⁶⁹ Cape of Good Hope Petition of the Inhabitants and Landed Proprietors at St Helena and Saldanha Bay July 1874 [A.30-'74] and Cape Archives: HA 770, 113, "Petisie van die Inwoners en Landeigenaars Woonagtig te St Helena en Saldanha Baai", n.d.

their [the petitioners'] expense on their properties"⁷⁰. This petition reportedly gained the support of the then Governor, Wodehouse, who ordered an end to the lease system, but, as with other such directives from Cape Town, this one too appears to have been wholly disregarded⁷¹. Eight years later, in March 1882, the landowners of the area once again petitioned Cape Town, alleging that they were:

"greatly hampered, damaged and restricted" in their farming and other operations of trade, by the promiscuous issue of what are commonly called 'Fishing Grant' along the Western Coast, and especially in the locality where they reside"⁷².

The petition was signed by sixty farmers and explicitly queried the legality of the leases with reference to the Crown Land Act, pointing out that "they were indiscriminately issued to every and all comers" in direct contravention of said Act. To protect their interests they were forced to take out fishing leases for their land abutting the sea coast and felt that "an injustice of a great kind was being done them"⁷³.

A combination of factors appears to have ensured the continuation of the lease system and attendant coastal squatting in the face

⁷⁰ Petition of the Inhabitants and Landed Proprietors at St Helena and Saldanha Bay July 1874.

⁷¹ Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of the Inhabitants of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, in Reference to Fishing Leases 1882, Evidence of G.R. Duthie, p.11.

⁷² Petition of the Undersigned Inhabitants and Owners of Lands in the Division of Malmesbury, in the Wards of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, and in Piketberg 1882 and Cape Archives; HA 784, 34, "Petition of the Undersigned Inhabitants and Owners of Lands in the Division of Malmesbury, in the Wards of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, and in Piketberg", n.d.

⁷³ Petition of the Undersigned Inhabitants and Owners of Lands in the Division of Malmesbury, in the Wards of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, and in Piketberg 1882.

of such opposition. Firstly, the system was a tacit recognition by the colonial state of the economic importance of the squatter fishing activities for provisioning local agriculture with rantsoennis⁷⁴. The marginal nature of coastal land and seasonal nature of the fisheries ensured that the fishing hamlets would not develop into bastions of independent production at the periphery of a labour-hungry commercial farming district, but would rather serve as a labour pool on which local farmers could draw during crucial periods of the year such as harvest time for both rantsoennis and extra hands. Secondly, local agriculture was divided on the issue as shown by the two counter-petitions from farmers opposing that of their fellows in 1882⁷⁵. Differing economic interests underlay this split (land rights versus rantsoennis and labour supply), enabling the colonial state to continue generating revenue for itself by encouraging fishing in the public interest⁷⁶. Thus, while squatting and independent production was being eroded throughout the commercial farming districts of the Cape after 1853, it survived and was even actively conserved on the coastal periphery. There it exhibited varying degrees of security of tenure on a continuum from illegal squatting, through fishing leases to tenancy relationships with private landholders. The latter were the most secure and predominated on the Piketberg side of the Bay (north of the Berg River) as a vital form of supplementary income for the owners of marginal agricultural land. The Malmesbury coastline, on the

⁷⁴ Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of the Inhabitants of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, in Reference to Fishing Leases 1882, Evidence of A. de Smidt, p.4.

⁷⁵ Cape Archives; HA 784, 34, "Petisie van die Land Eigenaars en Ingezetenen in die Afdeling St Helena Baai, District Malmesbury", 30 March 1882 and "Petisie van die Land Eigenaars en Ingezetenen in die Afdeling St Helena Baai, Malmesbury", n.d.

⁷⁶ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\4, Malmesbury Civil Commissioner to the Colonial Secretary 19 June 1860 and 1\MBY, 6\2\5, Malmesbury Civil Commissioner to the Colonial Secretary, 14 November 1863.

other hand, was "privatised" by the colonial state and opened up to settlement through the lease system. Lease holders, however, were subjected to the constant harassment of their propertied neighbours attempting to reclaim their ownership rights and prevent their property (wells, veld, and the like) from being despoiled. Those without the means, good name or inclination to lease or rent, opted for illegal occupation of vacant land, running the risk of censure from both the state and farmers of every stripe.

The opening up of the Malmesbury coast to fishing and the growth of the coastal grain and other shipping trade at St Helena Bay also attracted outside interests to the coastal periphery in the form of Cape Town merchants. The latter, often acting through local agents, facilitated the commercialisation of agriculture in the interior by linking farmer to market, but also acquired large land interests of their own along the coast through the provision of credit, foreclosure, leasing and purchase. As representatives of the urban metropolis and purveyors of the iron law of the market, they threatened both Sandveld agriculture and the subsistence fisheries. Merchant control of the coastal entrepôts turned the terms of trade against the farmers, depressing prices on the west coast in search of greater profits in Cape Town. For the fishermen, expanding merchant control of the coast and the fishing meant a loss of independence and control over the product of labour. This process intensified with the growth of an export trade in salt fish to Mauritius after 1860, culminating in an all-out assault on the lease system in the early 1880s as competition for labour and marine resources increased. Thus merchant capital, in addition to opening up St Helena Bay and the Sandveld as a conduit for commodities to and from the interior, also integrated it into the expanding colonial and world economies as an exporter of agricultural produce to the Cape and dried fish to the Indian Ocean and Natal sugar plantations. This

integration was resisted by Sandveld agriculture and the subsistence fishermen in an attempt to preserve the periphery and their independence against the corrosive proletarianising effects of unequal exchange fostered by merchant capital. Their sustained resistance, coupled with merchant capital's location at the level of exchange rather than production thus had the paradoxical effect of redefining rather than abolishing the periphery and ensuring its continued existence, in a modified form, on into the 20th Century.

2: THE STEPHAN EMPIRE

A standard theoretical formulation of merchant capital might read something like this:

"The general features of merchant capital are the same in every type of society in which it operates - capitalist or non-capitalist. It has no direct control over the labour process and is always dependent upon the class which does, even where it dominates this class. Secondly, it must always engage in unequal exchange to appropriate part of the surplus product of society. Thirdly, as capital it is driven to accumulate and in this way acts as a medium through which the law of value is brought to bear on all parts of the economy, particularly the sphere of production. The repercussions of these features, however, do differ with the nature of society"¹.

The specifics of merchant capital's "repercussions" for 19th Century Cape colonial society have been largely ignored by historians². What research has been done has focussed on the Eastern Cape and urban Cape Town, but merchant capital was also at home on the periphery of the colonial economy where it had a freer reign and thus a more profound and enduring impact. St Helena Bay is a case in point. Distance and the paucity of an adequate transport infrastructure created numerous opportunities for merchant capital on the western seaboard. These same factors also facilitated the process of unequal exchange by providing it

¹ G. Kay Development and Underdevelopment: A Marxist Analysis (London, 1982), p.94.

² S. Trapido "'Friends of the Natives': Merchants, Peasants and the Political and Ideological Structure of Liberalism in the Cape" in S. Marks & A. Atmore (eds) Economy & Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa (London, 1980); S.H. Dubow Land, Labour and Merchant capital in the Pre-Industrial Rural Economy of the Cape: The Experience of Graaf Reinet District, 1852-1872 (Cape Town, 1982); A.S. Mabin "The Making of Colonial Capitalism: Intensification and Expansion in the Economic Geography of the Cape Colony, South Africa, 1854-1899" (Unpublished PhD thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1984) and J.V. Bickford-Smith "Commerce, Class and Ethnicity in Cape Town 1875 to 1902" (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Cambridge, 1988).

with a captive market uninformed about prices in the Cape. Unequal exchange was further promoted by the absence of formal credit facilities, enabling merchant capital to tie farmers into the exchange network from an early stage, particularly in the less prosperous Sandveld. In addition, merchant capital's location at the level of exchange rather than production enabled it to diversify away from a dependence on grain shipment to other fields of exchange, including fishing. Here it exercised control through its monopolisation of the means of production (land, boats, gear) while leaving the actual production in the hands of appointed skippers. Its ability to effect the transformation of fishing from subsistence to commodity production was aided by the insecurity of tenure characteristic of the fisheries at the Bay. As a marginal activity in the hands of a marginal element of the rural underclass, the fisheries did not develop into a site of rural capital accumulation and thus offered little formal resistance to merchant capital.

Merchant capital, in whatever form or context, however, also evinces a fundamental contradiction inherent in its dependence on accumulation through exchange and consequent detachment from production. As Kay explains:

"[H]istorically merchant capital has never been able to effect [the] transition to capitalism proper itself. Its dependence upon the non-capitalist class that is directly responsible for their [sic] exploitation of labour leads it to support this class at the very moment it is undermining it. Its revolutionary edge is always blunted by this conservative bias"³.

This "conservative bias" was even more pronounced on the periphery, tying merchant capital into a reliance on the underdevelopment of the west coast, but at the same time isolating it - by virtue of its parasitic accumulation imperative

³ *G. Kay Development and Underdevelopment, p.95.*

and physical location - from agrarian capital in the interior. Merchant capital was thus unable to fashion the necessary political alliance with the inland farmers to ameliorate the worsening labour shortage at the coast after 1880 or control the extension of the line of rail into the wheatlands at the turn of the century. The railway sounded the death knell for the grain trade just as the lure of employment on the mines, railways and docks undermined the fishery and left merchant capital holding vast tracts of worthless coastline over which the flow of commodities from both land and sea had all but dried up. The mineral revolution and the South African War thus undermined merchant capital on the periphery, but left the basic structure of coastal\Sandveld society intact, albeit in a significantly altered form. The periphery's integration into the market and the establishment of commodity production in the fisheries could not be undone. Rather, new circuits of production and exchange needed to be established in accordance with the accumulation needs of Sandveld agriculture and merchant capital, as well as the region's continued location on the periphery of an economy in the early throes of industrialisation.

2.1 THE COMMERCIALISATION OF THE FISHERIES C.1850 - C.1880

The burgeoning trade in agricultural produce on the western seaboard of the colony from the early 19th Century integrated the Bay into the colonial economy and opened the door for merchant capital penetration of the periphery. By the last quarter of the 19th Century the west coast farmers' sole road to market, the seacoast, was controlled by one merchant house, Stephan Brothers. Stephan Brothers built its power on the coastal grain trade, but from there it diversified into everything from land speculation

to general dealing, shipping and fishing⁴. The original Stephan, Johann Daniel, was a native of the Rhineland who took up service with the VOC and came to the Cape as a private in Company employ in 1770. He married the daughter of a local Dutch settler and produced four offspring before passing away in 1796⁵. His eldest son of the same name chose a career at sea and by 1806 was operating a cutter along the west coast, trading grain as far north as St Helena Bay. In the 1820s he opened his own general dealership in Cape Town and, while he managed the Cape Town business, his sons, Johann Daniel and Johan Carel - the latter a master mariner like his father - conducted the firm's trading voyages to Saldanha, St Helena and Lamberts Bays aboard the family's thirty-ton cutter⁶. By the 1830s the Stephans had established a permanent trading presence on the west coast at Soldaten Pos on St Helena Bay and traded far into the interior with their "smouskar"⁷. With the death of Johann Daniel junior in 1855 and his son, Johan Carel, in 1871, the family business passed into the hands of Johan Carel's two sons, Johan Carel junior and Hendrik Rudolph Stephan. It was they who transformed the small trading concern into a merchant monopoly whose reach extended from Cape Town to Namaqualand and far into the interior⁸.

⁴ For the history of Stephan Brothers, such as it exists, see E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga" (Unpublished manuscript, n.d.); "Family Business has been in the Cape Fishing Industry for 150 Years" in SASNFIR, August 1959; "The Family that made a Coast their Empire: Stephan Brothers (Pty) Ltd" in J.R. Shorten (ed) The Golden Jubilee of Greater Cape Town (Cape Town, 1963).

⁵ E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga", pp.1-6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.6-8.

⁷ "Family Business has been in the Cape Fishing Industry for 150 Years" in SASNFIR, August 1959, pp.53-55.

⁸ E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga", p.26 ff.

The key to the brothers' success lay in their domination of the market from the point of first exchange (farmer to local buyer) to the point of final sale (merchant to market). They achieved this through the extension of credit, coupled with the rapacious acquisition of exclusive rights to coastal farms and shipping sites by foreclosure, purchase or lease⁹. The firm began acquiring land as a spin-off of their provision of credit to local farmers. A prolonged drought or harvest failure brought a crop of a different kind, defaulted debts, bankruptcies and inevitable foreclosures. The infertile nature of farms on the west coast also ensured that there was a steady turnover of coastal land on the market, offering further opportunities for acquisition. In addition, the rapid alienation of crown land by Divisional Councils after 1858 also brought waste and public land abutting the seashore onto the market, allowing merchants, alive to the chance, to strengthen their hold on the grain trade¹⁰. In this way Stephan Brothers was able to set the ruling price along the entire west coast, shutting out competition by denying trading and landing rights on their property. So successful was the firm in their monopolisation of the west coast trade that, by the mid-1880s, it reportedly had no fewer than forty trading outposts along the seaboard between Cape Town and Port Nolloth, controlled by the extended family and their agents¹¹.

If the consolidation of their strangle-hold on the west coast trade brought new-found prosperity and power to the Stephans, it also met with protracted resistance from local farmers. By the

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of the Inhabitants of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, in Reference to Fishing Leases 1882, Evidence of J.C. Stephan, p.14 and Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\7, Malmesbury Civil Commissioner to the Colonial Secretary, 21 May 1873.

¹¹ W.A. Burger *Piket Teen 'n Berg*, p.263.

last quarter of the 19th Century, the firm was a major source of credit in the Sandveld and acquired numerous farms in default on debt¹². Foreclosures did little to endear it to farmers, but it was the price paid for grain that evoked an enduring and deep-seated resentment to the Stephans in the countryside. In 1888, the farmers of the Berg River opposed the proposed sale of a piece of crown land near the river mouth, claiming that "this is the only safe landing place from where grain can be shipped that still belongs to the Government"¹³ and warning that "if sold, chances are the establishment of a monopoly, the consequences of which would be ruinous to the farmers."¹⁴. The unnamed monopoly they feared was none other than Stephan Brothers and in 1893 a grain buyer, ousted by the firm from Lamberts Bay, explained the reasons for their concern, by relating how produce prices had taken a sharp downturn at Lamberts Bay after the Stephans' arrival:

"Mr Stephan gave 10s to 12s in 1888 for corn and from 4s 6d to 5s for rye. I came to Cape Town and I discovered that the prices here were much higher. I returned and purchased for the Milling Company at 17s 6d; then Mr Stephan offered 18s. I also sent the price of rye up to 10s the 180 lbs, while Mr Stephan had only been giving 5s per 200 lbs."¹⁵

In his opinion, Stephan Brothers "have most decidedly injured the farmers by the low price for grain"¹⁶. The Malmesbury farmers were similarly hard done by, claiming in 1903 that the price for grain

¹² M.H.D. Smith *Boerepioniers van die Sandveld*, p.204 for the examples of the farms "Soutkuil" near Aurora and "Nooitgedacht" at Vredenburg.

¹³ Cape Archives; LND 1\243, L 367, Petition of J.J. Kotze and 58 others to the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Public Works, September 1891.

¹⁴ Cape Archives; LND 1\243, L 367, J.J. Kotze to the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Public Works, 10 October 1891.

¹⁵ Report of the Select Committee on Lambert's Bay 1893, Evidence of S.A. Engelbrecht, p.12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

paid by the firm at Saldanha Bay was 15%-20% lower than that ruling at Malmesbury, which had recently been connected to Cape Town by rail¹⁷. Alternative markets were few due to the bad state of the roads in the interior and the fact that most of the coastal farmers were "obligated" to sell their harvest to the firm in repayment of debt¹⁸. The umbilical cord of exchange tying the Stephan's merchant empire to the farmers of the west coast was thus both twisted and strained and because of these latent tensions and the vagaries of agricultural production, the firm did not confine its activities to the grain trade alone. As it acquired ownership of an ever larger part of the western seaboard, so it turned its attention increasingly to exploiting the marine resources of the coast and, in particular, fishing. Such diversification was at once the logical outcome of the process of seashore land acquisition and part of merchant capital's inexorable search for new sites of commodity production to dominate and exploit.

In the second half of the 19th Century, the demand for fish spiralled as a result of both an expanding local market and the emergence of new markets outside the colony. At home, the growth of commercial agriculture in the South Western Cape, the emergence of an urban working class in Cape Town, the use of indentured Indian labour in Natal, the mineral revolution and construction of railways created a burgeoning demand for fish as a source of cheap protein to feed labour on the farms,

¹⁷ Cape of Good Hope Report of the Select Committee on the Saldanha Bay Harbour Works Bill 1903 [A.5-1903] Evidence of J.J. Kotze, pp.81-83 and Evidence of A.J. Stigling, p.89.

¹⁸ Ibid., Evidence of A.J. Stigling, pp.93-96.

plantations and mines, as well as workers in the cities¹⁹. Abroad, the importation of indentured labour to Mauritius and Reunion in the wake of the abolition of slavery prompted similar demands from plantation owners in the Indian Ocean. The sugar barons turned to dried fish to meet their needs and although fish was imported from a wide variety of sources, dried snoek was found to be best suited to this new demand. As one Cape Town exporter explained, "When snoek is plentiful it is comparatively cheap, and two ounces of snoek go much further than any other fish, because there is no oil in other fish, and snoek is one mass of oil and flavours their food better"²⁰.

The importance of this Mauritian trade to the 19th Century Cape fisheries can be gauged from the name - Snoekopolis - given Cape Town, the chief export port for Mauritian-bound snoek²¹. The demand emanating from the distant Indian Ocean plantations was indeed huge, requiring the annual shipment of literally hundreds of tons of salted fish from Cape Town to Port Louis. The fish was shipped by merchants with the necessary vessels and diversity of interests to make the voyage profitable. They in turn relied on fisheries located along the coast from the Cape Peninsula to St Helena Bay and even as far away as South West Africa for their

¹⁹ See Cape of Good Hope Report of the Select Committee on Colonial Industries 1891 [C.1-'91]; M.M. Irvine "Scratching the Surface: The Archaeology of 56 Dorp Street Bo-Kaap" (Unpublished Archaeology Honours dissertation, UCT, 1990) and M. Hall "Fish and the Fisherman: Art, Text and Archaeology", paper presented at Centre for African Studies, Africa Seminar, UCT, March 1991.

²⁰ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of C. Arnold, p.4.

²¹ W. Wardlaw Thompson Sea Fisheries on the Cape Colony, p.89 and B.A. le Cordeur "Natal, the Cape and the Indian Ocean, 1846-1880" Journal of African History, 7, 2, 1966.

supplies²². In 1830 it was noted that "salt fish is becoming an article of export, especially to Mauritius"²³. The Mauritian export trade only really took off, however, after the abolition of slavery and ex-slave apprenticeships on the island in 1838. Between 1834 and 1907 a total of 450 000 Indian immigrants were brought to Mauritius, the majority as indentured labourers on the sugar plantations²⁴. It was this influx which prompted the rapid increase in both the quantity and value of fish exports from the Cape Colony to Mauritius in the second half of the 19th Century.

TABLE 2.1 Dried, Cured & Salted Fish Exports
from the Cape Colony to Mauritius, 1840-1899²⁵

YEARS	Tons		AVERAGE PER ANNUM		Price per	
		% > <	Value [£]	% > <	Ton	% > <
1840-1849	593	-	7 930	-	£13.8s	-
1850-1859	702	+ 18.4	9 518	+20.0	£13.12s	+ 1.5
1860-1869	1 402	+ 99.7	16 877	+77.3	£12. 0s	-13.3
1870-1879	1 666	+ 18.8	23 047	+36.6	£13.16s	+15.0
1880-1889	1 638	- 1.7	21 844	- 5.5	£13. 6s	- 3.8
1890-1899	597	-174.4	11 338	-92.7	£19. 0s	+42.9

²² The Cape Blue Books show annual imports of fish from the South West African coast 1857-1884. The two key fishing stations were Walwich [Walvis] Bay and Sandwich Harbour, but fish was also imported from Angra Pequena, Great Fish Bay, Prince of Wales Bay, Paul de Loando, Pomono Island, Ichaboe, Possession Island and Halifax Island.

²³ Quoted in W. Wardlaw Thompson Sea Fisheries of the Cape Colony, p.23. The value of Mauritian fish exports for that year was a paltry £428.

²⁴ On indentured Indian labour in Mauritius see H. Tucker A New System of Slavery (London, 1974); R. Hallett Africa Since 1875: A Modern History (London, 1980); P. Curtin et al African History (Boston, 1978); Cd.1867, Great Britain Reports showing the present state of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions. Transmitted with the Blue Books for the year 1865. Part 1: West Indies and Mauritius; and Cd.1867, Great Britain Reports showing the present state of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions. Transmitted with the Blue Books for the year 1867. Part 1: West Indies and Mauritius.

²⁵ Own calculations from data contained in Cape of Good Hope Statistical Registers 1840-1900.

Between 1840 and 1860, the export trade, with the odd exception of a year when fish were superabundant, remained under a thousand tons per annum, valued at less than £10 000. In the three decades between 1860 and 1890, however, dried fish exports to Mauritius doubled in both quantity and value in response to a surge in the number of indentured Indian labourers brought to the island²⁶. The tonnage of fish shipped each year during this period averaged between 1 400 and 1 700 tons, but frequently broke the two thousand-ton mark. Returns evidenced a similar rise, averaging between £16 000 and £23 000 per annum, but with regular annual windfalls in excess of £25 000.

TABLE 2.2 The Rise & Decline of Merchant Fishing at St Helena Bay, 1850-1900²⁷

YEAR	FLEET			CATCH [tons]	VALUE [£]
	Cutters	Boats	Total		
1850	3	19	22	125	?
1855	4	32	36	470	?
1860	16	43	59	188	3 761
1865	20	48	68	370	4 961
1870	32	70	102	520	18 730
1875	37	75	112	230	10 071
1880	14	68	82	1 000	11 400
1885	?	57	57	905	9 050
1890	?	65	65	1 509	13 060
1900	?	?	?	168	1 464

? = Unknown

²⁶ Reports showing the present state of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions. Transmitted with the Blue Books for the year 1865. Part 1: West Indies and Mauritius, pp.118-121. In the seven years from 1854 to 1858, the number of Indian males in Mauritius increased from 70 000 to 120 000 and in the period 1859 to 1865 this figure rose a further 47 000 to 167 000. The number of dependents went unrecorded.

²⁷ Own tabulation from the dubious and often incomplete or inaccurate data contained in Cape of Good Hope Statistical Registers 1850-1900.

The burgeoning export trade led to the rapid growth of new fisheries along the southern shores of St Helena Bay. In 1840 the Bay was reportedly the site of several small fishing places whose catches were "principally for family use, but some is occasionally bartered for cattle"²⁸. By 1850, a fleet of 22 fishing vessels was operating at the Bay, producing 125 tons of dried fish for export to Mauritius and a further 149 casks of cured fish for local consumption²⁹. The new fisheries depended heavily on the Mauritian market. Although snoek fishing was combined with rantsoennis production, profits from the latter were too meagre to warrant specialisation. Thus, by the mid-1860s fishing effort concentrated on snoek to the exclusion of other "coarse" species less suitable for salting and sun-drying³⁰. The Bay was well situated to supply the export demand for snoek. Its southern shore was within easy sailing distance of the migratory snoek shoals as they passed the coast off Cape Columbine, unlike the more sheltered waters of Saldanha Bay which were bypassed by the snoek³¹. In addition, the coves and inlets on the Malmesbury side of the Bay allowed fishing boats and cutters to lie at anchor in relative safety, even during north westerly gales³². The Bay's appeal as a base for snoek fishing was further enhanced by the availability of salt from a pan at Paternoster and existence of fresh water at several springs along the coast³³.

²⁸ Cape of Good Hope Statistical Register 1840, p.293.

²⁹ Cape of Good Hope Statistical Register 1850, p.465.

³⁰ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of C. Arnold, pp.3-4.

³¹ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\5, Malmesbury Civil Commissioner to the Colonial Secretary, 9 December 1864.

³² Report of the Select Committee on the Berg River 1858, Evidence of J.C. Stephan, p.8.

³³ Cape of Good Hope Statistical Register 1862, p.FF4.

In 1866 the Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury reported that:

"[A] new fishery has been established by a Mr Stephan [at St Helena Bay] and extensive buildings have been erected for the purpose of curing and storing fish. The object of the establishment is chiefly for export trade"³⁴.

Although Stephan Brothers based its fishing activities on its coastal farms, it was nonetheless forced to take out some 42 fishing leases along the southern shores of the Bay to protect its access to the best fishing sites from squatters and lease holders³⁵. In addition to Stephan Brothers, 11 lease holders were reported to "carry on fishing on their own account" in Malmesbury by 1882, including Van Rosenveldt, Ehlers and Williams at St Helena Bay³⁶. Direct involvement in the export trade set these men apart from the multitude of other subsistence lease-holders and squatter fishermen like Johnston. Ehlers, in addition to his leases, rented land on an adjoining farm on which he housed the 48 men who fished for him, kept a canteen and speculated in grain. In 1881 he sold an estimated 100 000 snoek "mooitjies" to local farmers and sent 300 tons of fish to Cape Town valued at £3 000³⁷. Likewise Van Rosenveldt, who claimed to be the first person of the coast to establish a snoek fishery, ran a canteen, acted as a grain buyer and paid a local farmer for the right to draw water from his well. He employed 30 fishermen in his fishery

³⁴ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\6 Malmesbury Civil Commissioner to the Colonial Secretary, 21 November 1866.

³⁵ Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of the Inhabitants of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, in Reference to Fishing Leases 1882, Evidence of J.C. Stephan, p.14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Evidence of G.R. Duthie, pp.7-8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Evidence of J.C. Stephan, p.17 and Evidence of G.L. Ehlers, pp.18-20.

and exported 250 tons of fish to Mauritius via Barry Arnold and Co in Cape Town valued at around £2 500³⁸.

Unlike Robert Johnston, these men appropriated the product of labour in full in return for payment. Their ability to do so was based on their land rights, ownership of the means of production (boats, nets, gear) and diverse trade interests. The latter enabled them to subsidise fishing and so assume part of the cost of reproducing labour. The fishing, however, was still controlled by the skippers. They assembled, organised and managed the crews and supervised production at sea. Their semblance of independence was circumscribed by owner appointment, the constraint to fish for snoek and the threat of dismissal. Ordinary fishermen also suffered a decline in status, from independent producer to servant, forfeited all claim to the product of labour and lost their mobility. Shoreside production was also closely supervised to prevent and discourage theft, with contract servants ("coolies") being substituted for family labour at many fisheries and fish being locked away in sheds at night. The reorganisation of production was necessitated both by the demands of the market and the nature of snoek fishing. Snoek was available all year round on the west coast, but became "dry as a piece of wood" and infested with parasites from the end of June until early November³⁹. Thereafter it gradually improved, attaining prime condition from March to June⁴⁰. A rapacious and fast swimming fish, snoek was impossible to capture with nets. Instead, each fish had to be caught with a hook and line trailed in the wake of a boat moving at speed under full sail. Once hooked it was hauled

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Evidence of J.C. Stephan, p.17 and Evidence of C. van Rosenveltdt, p.20.

³⁹ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of H.R. Stephan, pp.6-13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Appendix D, Reports of J.C. Stephan, A.E. Anderson and J.L. McLachlan, pp.16-19.

on board and deftly dispatched with a sharp blow to the head or by breaking its neck. Its razor sharp teeth were capable of inflicting savage wounds on the uninitiated or inexperienced fisherman⁴¹. Snoek fishing was thus both a labour intensive and highly skilled activity and snoek fisherman acquired an increasing mobility and group identity as the Mauritian trade expanded in the second half of the 19th Century⁴². One Cape Town exporter related how "The men often throw a kabeljauw overboard because it interferes with their snoek fishing. They call themselves 'Snoekers'"⁴³. These "snoekers" were much in demand along the western seaboard of the colony from Sandwich Harbour in South West Africa to Hout Bay on the Cape Peninsula⁴⁴.

Because of the growing demand for skilled fishing labour, the St Helena Bay fishery owners were faced with the problem of retaining fishermen at the Bay. Control over coastal land was a necessary, but far from sufficient pre-condition and, in order to bind labour to the fisheries, the owners stole a leaf out of agriculture's book, imposing a contract, paying in kind rather than cash, providing "free" accommodation, extending credit and

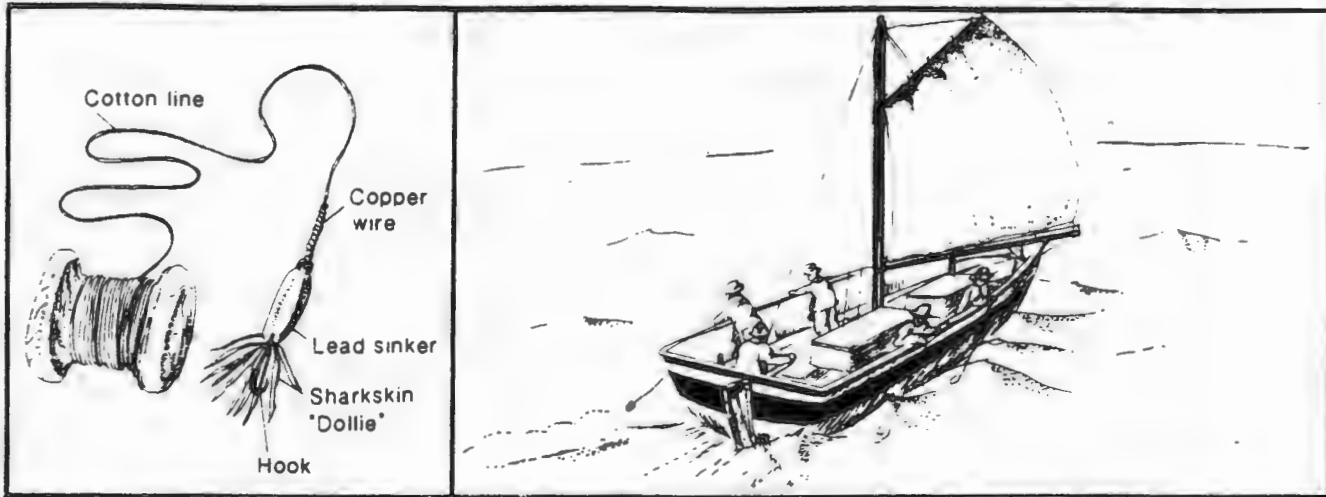
⁴¹ C.L. Biden Sea-angling Fishes of the Cape, pp.135-141 and W. Wardlaw Thompson Sea Fisheries of the Cape Colony, pp.48-50 for descriptions of snoek fishing.

⁴² Interviews with Mr Willie and Gert Smeda, 4 July 1986, Laaiplek and Mr Ulisse Donaggi, 26 July 1986, Velddrift. In addition to requiring knowledge of how to blood a line, cast sinkers, prepare a dollie from shark skin and assemble the different components of the gear, the snoek fisherman needed physical strength and quick hand-eye co-ordination to prevent personal injury or injury to another member of the crew.

⁴³ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of C. Schroeder, p.16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Evidence of David Echardt, Joseph Johnson, Faabie Mathys and Doubt Johnstone, pp.24-27.

DIAGRAM 2: SNOEK FISHING



deferring settlement⁴⁵. Stephan Brothers, for example, paid their fishermen in cash and kind. Married men reportedly received half a muid of flour every fortnight plus 3s 6d a week credit and single fishermen a bushel of flour and 3s a week⁴⁶. As Tommy Summers remembers, his father, an Englishman, caught snoek for Stephan Brothers on the following terms:

"Kyk hy't [Stephan] so gewerk. As jy ses maande kontrak dan teken jy vir ses maande, dan maak jy 'n kontrak. Die pa het nou 'n paar seuns miskien in die huis, en die pa. Nou die pa kry 'n bushel koring en die ma. Dan kry hulle 'n 'good for', seker getal wat jy kan koop. Die broers kry 'n half bushel koring in hulle boek. Maar as jy nie see toe gaan nie, dan word [laughter], dan word die geld gevat van jou. Maar ek meen hulle het dit toe nog nie gedoen nie ... ek meen hulle warn, maar net altyd die mense as hulle nie see toe gaan nie. Maar nie gehoor waar hulle dit afgevat het nie. En so het die mense nou gelewe al die tyd"⁴⁷.

The men were paid per snoek caught and allowed two "eetvis" from the daily catch, but payment was deferred until the end of the contract season⁴⁸. They were thus unable to subsist solely on this meagre allowance and relied on the credit extended to them at one of the firm's stores to make ends meet⁴⁹. At the end of the season a settling of accounts occurred, allowing wide scope for manipulation:

"Normally the pay was 3d a snoek, but in bad times Carel [Stephan] would raise it at his own expense to 6d. If things deteriorated still further he might even increase it to 9d in

⁴⁵ J.N.C. Marinowitz *"Rural Production and Labour in the Western Cape, 1838-1888, with Special Reference to the Wheat Growing Districts"*, p.106 ff.

⁴⁶ E. Rosenthal *"The Stephan Saga"*, p.37.

⁴⁷ Interview with Mr Tommy Summers, St Helena Bay, 5 July 1986.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Also E. Rosenthal *"The Stephan saga"*, p. 38.

⁴⁹ A. Rosenthal *"The Stephan Saga"*, p.38 and Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of C. Arnold, pp.2-3.

the form of a bookkeeping transaction, deducting the surplus against the credits his customers had in his accounts."⁵⁰

Through "bookkeeping transactions" of this kind, the firm was able to set the price of both basic goods and fish and ensure that the fishermen remained in debt and were obligated to contract for the following season's fishing⁵¹. The provision of accommodation further reinforced labour's dependence on the owner. All fishery owners erected cottages or barracks at their fisheries and used these both to draw and coerce labour⁵². The threat of eviction was a powerful means of control over married fishermen and free housing figured centrally in the setting of allowance and price, depressing both and reinforcing reliance on credit.

These various strands of the relations of production, payment (in cash and kind), additional obligations (eetvis and housing) as well as conditions and period of service, were gathered up, as Tommy Summers indicated, in a written contract witnessed by a magistrate and signed by both parties. This contract supplanted the earlier informal, verbal agreements between owners and men⁵³. Despite its pretence at being the legal representation of an agreement between two freely contracting parties, the contract was a class-biased document whose main function was to provide

⁵⁰ E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga", p.37.

⁵¹ See for example Cape Archives; 1\MBY; F1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No 25, Stephan Brothers versus Jacobus Papier, 17 October 1892.

⁵² Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\1\5, Resident Magistrate Malmesbury to Certain Inhabitants of the Field Cornetcies of St Helena and Saldanha Bays, 30 April 1881 and 1\MBY, 6\2\10, Report of the Commission on Fisheries, 31 July 1883.

⁵³ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\4, A. Bester to G.R. Duthie, 24 October 1883; J.C. Stephan to G.R. Duthie, 24 October 1883 and 1\HFD, A1\1\1\2, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Case No.7, The Queen versus Adonis Theunis, 2 February 1900 for examples of surviving contracts.

owners with recourse to the colonial state's legal apparatus (police, lock-up and periodical court) in controlling labour. This it did by transforming the legal status of the fisherman from independent producer to servant and making breaking contract an offence in terms of the Masters and Servants Act. The fishermen's ability to use the contract was also limited by a lack of education, illiteracy and a rural court system which regulated the labour supply in the interests of employers⁵⁴.

The ideological cement of this new status quo was provided by an all pervading paternalism, embodied in the provision of housing and credit and symbolised by Carel Stephan's reference to his labourers as "my kinders". In return Stephan reportedly received "the regard of a somewhat terrifying but nonetheless venerated parent"⁵⁵. Such paternalism - buttressed in the firm's case by sunrise parades, strictly enforced mealtimes, flag raisings and a close watch on church attendance and alcohol consumption⁵⁶ - served as thin veneer for the underlying brutality of relations of production in the snoek fisheries⁵⁷. The frailty of paternalism led fishery owners to rely increasingly on the colonial state's coercive apparatus, as evidenced by the establishment of additional periodical courts at Vredenburg (1881) and Laaiplek

⁵⁴ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, F1\1\2, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Case No.68, Stephan Brothers versus George Syble, 16 December 1895 and Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Appendix D, Report of A.E Anderson, p.18.

⁵⁵ E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga" p.36 ff. Also R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.20. Lees describes Carel Stephan in much the same way, as "Banker, magistrate and patriarch, he controlled the fortunes of the west coast and the lives of the men he employed".

⁵⁶ E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga", p.36 ff.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.36. Also Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\2, Resident Magistrate Piketberg to Resident Magistrate Malmesbury, 28 July 1873, 4 August 1873 & 11 August 1873 and Justice of the Peace St Helena Bay to Resident Magistrate Piketberg, 4 August 1873.

(1882) to complement the existing court at St Helena Bay (1857)⁵⁸.
As the Resident Magistrate of Malmesbury noted:

"The fishing industry along the coast of this Division particularly at Steenberg's Cove, Stump Nose Bay and Paternoster where there are several extensive fisheries, affords employment to a large number of hands. The employers of this description of labour ... deserve some protection and police assistance in dealing with a mixed lot of men of different nationalities; the order which prevails at these places effects great credit on those in charge of the establishments. No doubt the close proximity of the Lock-up and a Policeman in uniform, together with the presence of the Magistrate of the District and the sitting of the Court every alternate month has a wholesome effect on the minds of the fishermen and coolies employed"⁵⁹.

The fishery owners' failure to establish hegemony over the "minds" of their labour force unaided was due to their lack of control over the production process. The transformation of the share system was designed to give them control over the product of labour, not labour itself. As a result, fishermen continued to enjoy considerable room for manoeuvre within the new constraints imposed - not least of all because of the existence of alternative sites of independent production on the leaseholds and farms along the lower reaches of the Berg River. They used this space to contest the owners' control over production and defend their independence - asserting customary rights and freedoms based on a view of themselves as "contracting parties" rather than servants.

⁵⁸ W.A. Burger *Piket Teen 'n Berg*, pp.261-262.

⁵⁹ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\1\5, Resident Magistrate Malmesbury to Certain Inhabitants of the Field Cornetries of St Helena and Saldanha Bays, 30 April 1881.

2.2 CONSOLIDATION AND CONFLICT C.1880 - C.1900

The importance of the St Helena Bay fisheries to the Mauritian export trade in the last quarter of the 19th Century can be gauged from the estimate of one Cape Town merchant that:

"Stephan Brothers, I believe, supply two-thirds of the Mauritius demands, and St Helena Bay, Cape Town and Hout's Bay supply the other one third. Stephan Brothers' fisheries are very extensive; in fact, as regards the fishing, I have not seen anything in Europe better than their establishments."⁶⁰

Although Stephan Brothers controlled two-thirds of the export trade and operated on a scale far larger than its competitors, a significant share of the market (approximately 11% according to the above estimate) was in the hands of fishery owners like Ehlers and Van Rosenveldt, operating from fishing leases. The existence of numerous commercial fisheries along a coastline which offered only limited sites for the establishment of viable fishing operations led to mounting competition for access to the shoreline, fish resources, water, fuel and most importantly, labour. Competition was heightened in the early 1880s by a decline in catches and a growing labour scarcity throughout the colony⁶¹. The expansion of the Cape Peninsula fisheries, a burgeoning public works programme and a declining snoek resource along the west coast, combined to divert labour to other fishing centres or out of fishing altogether. With an open land frontier along the Malmesbury coast, Stephan Brothers' ability to create a stable labour force disciplined to the demands of the export trade were severely limited. Fishermen were able to transfer

⁶⁰ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of C. Schroeder, p.20.

⁶¹ Cape of Good Hope, Department of Agriculture Report of Marine Biologist 1896, p.7; K. Ward "Employers' Perceptions of the Labour Market in the Late 19th Century Western Cape: with reference to the 1893\94 Labour Commission" (Paper presented at the "Cape Slavery and After" Conference, UCT, 10-11 August 1989) and TABLE 2.1 above.

their labour onto a subsistence lease outside the control of the owners giving them considerable leeway to contest relations of production in the fisheries as a whole. In this context Stephan Brothers' continued co-existence with a host of small operators spawned by the lease system became intolerable and forced the firm to act.

In so doing, Stephan Brothers was uniquely placed to use its land ownership rights against leaseholders in a bid to consolidate its control over St Helena Bay. Just six years after establishing its first fishery on the Bay the firm backed the 1874 petition organised by local farmers calling for the abolition of the lease system⁶². In 1882, Stephan Brothers was again involved in marshalling local farmers for a renewed assault on the lease system⁶³. On this occasion Parliament determined to act more forcefully and appointed a Select Committee to investigate the fishing lease system along the Malmesbury coast⁶⁴. At issue was a dispute between Stephan Brothers and Ehlers caused by a resurveying of the former's recently-acquired farm, Noodhulp, at Little Paternoster which included all of Ehlers' buildings within its new boundaries⁶⁵. As a result, Ehlers' fishing lease had not been renewed and the firm used the opportunity to launch a renewed assault on the lease system as a whole. Although couched

⁶² Petition of the Inhabitants and Landed Proprietors at St Helena and Saldanha Bay July 1874 and Cape Archives; HA 770, 113, "Petisie van die Inwoners en Landeigenaars Woonagtig te St Helena en Saldanha Baai", n.d.

⁶³ Petition of the Undersigned Inhabitants and Owners of Lands in the Division of Malmesbury, in the Wards of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, and in Piketberg 1882 and Cape Archives; HA 784, 34, "Petition of the Undersigned Inhabitants and Owners of Lands in the Division of Malmesbury, in the Wards of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, and in Piketberg", n.d.

⁶⁴ Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of the Inhabitants of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, in Reference to Fishing Leases 1882, p.vii.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Evidence of G.L. Ehlers, pp.19-20. Also Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\9, Report of the Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury, 5 January 1881.

in anti-squatting rhetoric, the firm's primary targets were Ehlers and Van Rosenveldt, its chief competitors at Little Paternoster. In so doing it could rely on the support of surrounding landowners who had long suffered at the hands of leaseholders.

As Carel Stephan explained, the leases were issued regardless of whether the applicants were fishermen or not and as a result a large population of squatters had arisen who owned no boats. Three or four of the lease-owners adjoining his property fell into that category and were the source of "great loss, and a great deal of trouble. There could have been many more cases before the magistrate if I wanted to have the law enforced"⁶⁶. The existence of "canteens and bottle stores" on some of the lease sites only reinforced his conviction that in many instances the leases were taken out for the purposes of squatting. Ehlers and Van Rosenveldt were cases in point. The latter kept a canteen, while the former operated a general business and canteen, all for a meagre £3 per annum rent. Stephan, on the other hand, paid between four and ten times that amount in quitrent and road rates, but could not gain access to the Bay over his own ground⁶⁷. While he was careful to stress that it was the conduct of Ehlers' men in taking "wood out of the veldt and water out of my wells" and not the latter's business that he objected to, his intentions became clear when he proposed that instead of leasing, Ehlers and the other leaseholders be required to rent land from the owners of the adjacent farms rather than the colonial state⁶⁸.

⁶⁶ Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of the Inhabitants of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, in Reference to Fishing Leases 1882, Evidence of J.C. Stephan, pp.14-18.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Ehlers was not without support in the matter, however, as evidenced by the forwarding of two petitions opposing that organised by Stephan⁶⁹. The counter-petitioners were all farmers in the Malmesbury district and, as Ehlers explained, "The petitioners all say they would not like me to leave Paternoster, because then Stephan would get everything entirely into his hands, and he would make them pay high prices for fish and everything"⁷⁰. Because of these divisions in local agriculture, the Select Committee - while coming down firmly on the side of the coastal farmers - favoured further enquiry over firm action. In May 1883 a new commission was duly appointed to "make a thorough investigation into the evils of the present system of the Fisheries Leases"⁷¹. The situation, however, had already been resolved in Stephan Brothers' favour. The commissioners reported that Ehlers had abandoned all claims to his leases at Small Paternoster while Van Rosenveldt - still the holder of 14 fishing leases at the Bay - was now completely surrounded by Stephan Brothers' land through recent purchases⁷². Both men had been converted into de facto tenants of the firm, Ehlers leasing land and Van Rosenveldt water and right of way over Stephan Brothers' farms. The commission's recommendation that the leases at Paternoster be allowed to lapse upon expiry in 1886 merely gave official sanction to the new status quo. In June 1886 Parliament agreed to the "grant at fair valuation" of all fishing leases

⁶⁹ Cape Archives; HA 784, 34, "Petisie van die Land Eigenaars en Ingezetenen in die Afdeling St Helena Baai, District Malmesbury", 30 March 1882 and "Petisie van die Land Eigenaars en Ingezetenen in die Afdeling St Helena Baai, Malmesbury", n.d.

⁷⁰ Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of the Inhabitants of Saldanha and St Helena Bays, in Reference to Fishing Leases 1882, Evidence of G.L. Ehlers, p.19.

⁷¹ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\10, Report of the Commission on Fisheries, 31 July 1883.

⁷² Ibid.

along the Malmesbury coast to their original holders⁷³. Van Rosenveldt does not appear to have taken up the option and the lease system had disappeared from the southern shores of St Helena Bay by the late 1880s⁷⁴.

The abolition of the fishing lease system in Malmesbury gave Stephan Brothers an effective monopoly over the export fishery at St Helena Bay, denying competitors a toe-hold on the seacoast as a base for independent production. The firm now had a free hand to evict squatters and competing fishery owners, concentrate labour at those points on the coast suited to snoek production and tighten its control over the fishermen through the generalisation and rigid enforcement of the contract. An 1885 report revealed the extent to which merchant capital had consolidated its control over the Bay fisheries:

"Messrs. Stephan Bros. started their first operations at a small cove known as 'Soldaten Post,' but soon extended them to Steenberg's Cove, a spot close by, and finally occupied every available spot in St Helena Bay. The magnitude of their present undertaking may be estimated when we state that at the present time about 80 large fishing boats and over 600 men are employed at their various establishments"⁷⁵.

This consolidation, facilitated by the change in tenure system, faced fishing labour with a stark choice, to defend or forego their independence. Whereas previously fishing had been, but one of several subsistence strategies, Stephan Brothers now sought to immobilise labour permanently at the coast, substituting credit and accommodation for mobility. For some this was an unacceptable

⁷³ *Cape of Good Hope Parliament & House of Assembly Votes & Proceedings 1886*, pp.335-336.

⁷⁴ *Cape Archives*; 1\MBY, 5\5\4, J.C. Stephan to G.R. Duthie, 20 January 1889.

⁷⁵ "Colonial Fisheries" in *The South African Illustrated News*, 9 May 1885, p.222.

trade-off⁷⁶. The band of squatters living at the mouth of the Berg River in 1888 was one such group. They were most probably refugees from the collapse of the lease system, intent on clinging to the remnants of their independence. Unlike Johnston - who had been squatting at the river for several decades - Kordom, Visagie, Lucas, Linkerhand and their families had only moved there in the early 1880s, at the same time that the fishing leases in Malmesbury were in the final stages of dissolution. The fact that Lucas returned to Stephan Brothers' employ after just one season and none of the other family heads, with the exception of the aged Joseph Linkerhand, were at home at the height of the seine fishing season underscores the difficulties confronting independent producers in the face of the growing Stephan monopoly at the Bay and by the mid-1890s Johnston and his band had all become contract servants of the firm.

The alternative to an ever-more tenuous squatter existence after 1886 was either migration or employment with Stephan Brothers. While numerous fishermen took the former course throughout the next decade and a half - moving onto one of the farms at the mouth of the Berg River, into the rural hinterland, or south to Cape Town - the majority remained at the Bay. Staying did not necessarily imply acceptance of the new status quo and the demands of the contract, however, and it is perhaps more useful to see the formal contract as the "explicit", class-biased embodiment of relations of production in the fishery. Another "implicit" contract was fashioned by the daily lived experience of owners and men in the fisheries, informed by a moral economy which implied certain obligations on the part of owners as regards weekly allowance, price per fish, credit and housing, as well as the nature and extent of supervision or control over both

⁷⁶ See for example Cape Archives; 1\HFD, A1\1\1\1, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Case No.75, Adam Talmakkies versus Henry Kasner, 18 October 1899.

production and personal life⁷⁷. This moral economy was, in turn, shaped by both the memories of earlier independent production and information about fish prices, conditions of service and employment opportunities in the hinterland and the Cape. It was this "implicit" contract and its underpinning moral economy which provided fishing labour with the means to contest relations of production at the Bay after 1886. On the surface, the fishermen were without even the most rudimentary building blocks of a cohesive or coherent identity. The most striking feature of the fishing labour force, to outside observers, was its ethnic diversity, reflecting the wide range of possible entry routes into the fisheries⁷⁸. Upon arrival at the Bay, this makeshift labour force, lacking a common identity, experience or language, encountered the formidable array of legal and extra-legal mechanisms designed to immobilise and detain them there for as long as possible. Subject to the constraints of the contract and with an employer willing to criminalise even minor infractions, their ability to resist Stephan Brothers would, at first glance,

⁷⁷ The notion of "explicit" and "implicit" contract is borrowed from T.D. Moodie "The Moral Economy of the Black Miners' Strike of 1946" in Journal of Southern African Studies, 13, 1, 1986, pp.1-2. The notion of moral economy is, of course, E.P. Thompson's - see E.P. Thompson "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" in Past & Present, 50, 1971; "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture" in Journal of Social History, 7, 4, 1974 and "Eighteenth Century Society: Class Struggle Without Class?" in Social History, 3, 2, 1978.

⁷⁸ W. Wardlaw Thompson Sea Fisheries of the Cape Colony, p.36 ff; E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga", p.84; W.A. Burger Piket Teen 'n Berg, p.261 and Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\1, R. Daly to J. Rainer, 29 September 1862 & 1\MBY, 5\5\2, Resident Magistrate Malmesbury to Certain Inhabitants of the Field Cornetries of St Helena and Saldanha Bays, 30 April 1881.

appear limited⁷⁹. Despite this, the firm's efforts to tighten control over labour after 1886 and staunch the flow of fishermen out of the fisheries, met with sustained resistance from fishing labour, informed by a resilient moral economy whose strongest strands were those of the independent producer, controlling both his own labour power and the product of labour.

It was this moral economy, above all else, which informed the way fishermen approached their contractual obligations. As one Saldanha Bay merchant lamented in 1892:

"In my neighbourhood we have many difficulties with our fishermen, and I consider it advisable to frame laws to remove the grievances of employers, and in the interests of the fish industry. Fishermen are employed by the owners of fisheries, who supply them with boats, gear, tackle, and nets, to fish for them for a certain period, and they are paid per fish caught by the hook and per share of fish caught by the seines or nets; consequently these men do not consider themselves the servants of their employers, but contracting parties to supply (sell) to the owners what they may catch at a certain price and shareholders with respect to seine-fish. And on the strength of this they quit service as their whims prompt, shielding themselves behind the plea that they have committed a breach of sale, and not a breach of service, for which they cannot be brought under the Masters and Servants Act. Now to meet this, I would suggest that all fishermen so employed be directly brought under the effects of the Masters and Servants Act, and considered labourers; also that the fact of their delivering fish to their employers at a

⁷⁹ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\1, Fredrick Barnard to E.S. Ford, 11 August 1866; 1\MBY, 5\5\2, Petition of Inhabitants and Landed Proprietors of the District of St Helena Bay to the E.S. Ford, July 1875 & L. van Niekerk to E.S. Ford, 29 July 1875; 1\MBY, 5\5\3, J. Laubscher et al to E.S. Ford, 22 July 1879, J.C. Stephan to G.R. Duthie, 6 December 1879, J.C. Stephan et al to G.R. Duthie, 15 January 1880 & J. C. Stephan to G.R. Duthie, 2 May 1880 and 1\MBY, 5\5\4, A. Steiner to G.R. Duthie, 10 July 1882 & T. Clementson to G.R. Duthie 26 August 1885. By the mid-1880s Stephan Brothers and their subordinates not only controlled the fisheries, but held appointments as justices of the peace, field cornets, issuers of process and special constables with specific responsibility for the coastal periphery.

certain price should not be considered to constitute a sale"⁸⁰.

The two most contested relations of production were thus control over labour and the product of labour. Resistance to the labour demands of the contract most commonly took the form of a withholding of labour or, in the more extreme cases, withdrawal from the fisheries through desertion during the term of contract or while still in debt to the firm⁸¹. Contracts usually terminated at the end of June, when the snoek started to lose condition, and recommenced in late October. Stephan Brothers relied on debt and the threat of prosecution to renegotiate a new period of service and compel fisherman to honour the bargain. Jacobus Papier, for example, contracted to fish for Stephan Brothers until 18 July 1892, on which day a settling of accounts took place and Papier was found to still be £20 in debt to the firm. The hapless fisherman was immediately required to sign a new contract beginning 1 October 1892 and warned to either return with the money or commence his new period of service. Unable to clear his debt and unwilling to continue in the fishing, Papier absconded to Hopefield where he was arrested⁸². By the 1890s increasing numbers of fishermen were following Papier's example,

⁸⁰ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Appendix D, Report of A.E. Anderson, p.18.

⁸¹ See for example Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No. 13, Stephan Brothers versus Willem Kotze, 19 December 1898 and 1\HFD, A1\1\1\1, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Case No.88, Stephan Brothers versus Silvedora, 20 December 1899.

⁸² Cape Archives; 1\MBY, F1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.25, Stephan Brothers versus Jacobus Papier, 17 October 1892. Papier's was not an isolated case, see 1\MBY, F1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.?, J.A. Schickerling versus Samuel Adams, 15 February 1893; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Case No.?, The Queen versus Thomas Lynham, 17 October 1898; 1\MBY, G1\1\2, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Case No.110, W.P. Veer versus Mogamet Saliena, 19 December 1894; 1\HFD, A1\1\1\2, Case No. 7, The Queen versus Adonis Theunis, 2 February 1900 and 1\HFD, C1\1\2, Periodical Court Hoedjies Bay, Case No.39, Rex versus George Brown, 20 November 1903.

disappearing - often in groups - into the wheatlands or to Cape Town at the firm's expense and discouraging others from signing⁸³. The more brazen among them wrung advances from Stephan Brothers' recruiters or managers, only to fail to report to the Bay or abscond while still under contract⁸⁴. Few of these men were apprehended and many of those that were served their time only to try to do so again.

The second area in which the firm encountered endemic resistance from fishing labour was the catch. Fishermen controlled production at sea and enjoyed unsupervised access to the fish prior to landing. They could find a ready market for any fish smuggled off the boat in their fish boxes or subsequently removed from the drying racks or storage sheds among the multitude of hawkers and itinerant traders who circulated between the coast and the interior⁸⁵. For the fishermen - many of whom viewed the merchants' appropriation of the catch as theft - such illicit trade was both tempting and morally justified⁸⁶. Stephan Brothers, not surprisingly, took a very different view of the matter and Carel Stephan spoke for all fishery owners when he said:

"I would gladly pay a licence yearly not only for catching with nets, but also for catching snoek, provided it was made penal for any unlicensed person

⁸³ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of H.R. Stephan, p.11; Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 6\2\12, Report - Labour Market from the Malmesbury Civil Commissioner to the Under Colonial Secretary, 9 December 1889 and 1\HFD, B1\2\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Criminal Record Book, Entry Nos.35 & 37, Thomas Blatherwick versus Henry Syble & Johan du Toit versus Henry Syble, 13 August 1894.

⁸⁴ See for example Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\3, J.C. Stephan to G.R. Duthie, 6 January 1881.

⁸⁵ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of H.R. Stephan, p.7. Stephan reported that the firm's fisheries were visited by "hundreds of carts from the Paarl and elsewhere, and supply the country".

⁸⁶ See for example Cape Archives; 1\HFD, C1\1\1, Periodical Court Hoedjies Bay, Case No.8, Rex versus Willem Rondganger, 20 March 1903.

to sell fish, and no person to be allowed to take out any licence unless he was *bona fide* the owner of a fishery, this provision not to apply, however, to inland towns or villages. Such provision would at once put a stop to theft of fish which constantly goes on not only at our own fisheries, but at those of others. All fishery owners are aware of the state of things, but we are unfortunately powerless to stop it in the present state of the law"⁸⁷.

Legally powerless though it claimed to be, Stephan Brothers did its best to establish ownership over each fish and limit labour's unsupervised handling of the product. The firm's fishermen were "not allowed to clean fish at sea and throw the refuse overboard, and a heavy penalty is provided in our contract with them for any infringement of this rule"⁸⁸. This prohibition was purportedly to prevent the pollution of the fishing grounds, but also extended the firm's control over the catch out to sea. Once landed, ownership was indelibly imprinted on each snoek by chopping its head off and any and all headless snoek in circulation were automatically assumed to be the property of the firm⁸⁹. Lastly, Stephan Brothers attempted to limit the fishermen's access to the local market through a strict enforcement of trespass laws at the fisheries and the suggested licensing of all fish traders⁹⁰.

⁸⁷ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Appendix D, Report of J.C. Stephan, pp.16-17.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Evidence of J.C. Stephan, p.17.

⁸⁹ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Regina versus Matthys Michiel du Pree, 14 August 1899 and 1\HFD, A1\1\1\1, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Case No.6, Queen versus Lys Berg, 15 February 1899. Harder and other seine-caught fish were also tied in bunches with different combinations of coloured string identifying to which owner they belonged.

⁹⁰ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, F1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.?, Johan Carel Stephan versus Jan Kotze, 26 April 1895, Case No.62, Stephan Brothers versus Adrijana Matthys, 16 December 1895 & Case No.67, Stephan Brothers versus Bella Pharo, 16 December 1895; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Summons of July Afrika, 19 February 1900; 1\HFD, B1\1\2, Case No.4, Rex versus William Fredericks, Klaas Pieters, Jan Salomons Jr. and William Salomons, 15 January 1906 and 1\HFD, A1\1\1\2, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Rex versus John Mossesh, 19 August 1903.

Despite these measures and the use of the courts, the theft of fish continued⁹¹. The paucity of prosecutions is indicative of fishing labour's success in asserting their right to a greater share in the product of their labour than the meagre eetvis allowance granted them by the firm.

In addition to such overt resistance to the contract, many fishermen resorted to less detectable acts of insubordination. Here too they had to be careful not to offend the sensibilities of their masters which were acutely attuned to detect even the smallest sign of impertinence, real or imagined. Henry Syble's comment to the firm's manager at Stumpnose Bay - McLachlan - that "you meddle with business that you have nothing to do with" was enough to earn him a court appearance⁹². McLachlan's intrusive supervision also put him on the receiving end of George Clark's caustic tongue. In response to a query about the catch, Clark countered, "stront met jou, wat moet ik morgen eten", receiving 11 or fourteen days hard labour for the indiscretion⁹³. So too Gert Joubert whose sole crime was to use the familiar form of the personal pronoun "jy" in answering William Stephan⁹⁴. These seemingly innocuous encounters are revealing of labour's view of the world - one soured by a lost independence, but still resonant

⁹¹ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, F1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.7, Regina versus Thomas Don and Klaas Appel, 18 February 1895; 1\HFD, B1\1\2, Rex versus Jacob Andrews, 13 January 1908; 1\HFD, A1\1\1\1, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Case No.20, James Kasner versus Siebert Patience, 24 August 1898 & Case No.6, The Queen versus Lys Berg, 15 February 1899 and 1\HFD, A1\1\1\2, Case No.44, The Queen versus Andries Mitaanie, 6 May 1900.

⁹² Cape Archives; 1\HFD, A1\1\1\2, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Case No.23, Regina versus Henry Syble, 20 March 1901.

⁹³ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, A1\1\1\2, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Case No.83, Regina versus George Clark, 21 November 1900.

⁹⁴ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, case No.22, Stephan Brothers versus Gert Joubert, 17 December 1900 and 1\HFD, B1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.35, Rex versus William Jordaan, 19 November 1906.

with the self-assurance of that existence. At the opposite end of the continuum, fishermen with a particular axe to grind, emboldened by alcohol or simply at their wits' end, resorted to overt acts of physical violence against their employers or their property. Constand Von Rosenveldt, for example, was lucky to escape with his life when attacked with a spar by two of his fishermen following an argument and Stephan Brothers' manager at Steenberg's Cove had the unwelcome experience of being confronted by a fisherman brandishing a gun⁹⁵. More common were attacks on the firm's property - Fritz Verelst poured lamp oil on the thatch of a company house and burnt it to the ground; Gert Ehlers removed the door, windows and several sheets of galvanised iron from another and the Michel brothers vandalised a third with stones, destroying doors and walls. James Hayward, after being convicted of stealing medicinal brandy from the firm, emptied a bucket of "filthy matter" onto a loft of wheat and flour, rendering it unfit for sale⁹⁶. Countless other acts of petty theft further added to the merchant's sense of unease and insecurity⁹⁷.

Within the strait-jacket of the contract, labour was thus

⁹⁵ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\3, Field Cornet J. Laubscher to Malmesbury Civil Commissioner, 27 May 1879 and 1\HFD, B1\2\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Criminal Record Book, Entry No.722, Johannes Reynders versus Fortuin, 16 August 1886. On the existence of firearms at the coast see 1\MBY, 5\5\3, C. von Rosenveldt to G.R. Duthie, 16 November 1879.

⁹⁶ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, F1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Sworn Statements of Mietjie Lucas and Elizabeth Pharo & Case No 37, Stephan Brothers versus Gert Leopold Ehlers, 19 June 1893; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.19 Stephan Brothers versus James Hayward, 19 December 1898; 1\HFD, B1\2\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Criminal Record Book, Entry No.3, Rex versus Andries and Felix Michel, 17 June 1901 and 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Case No.3, Rex versus Fredrick Brookes, 18 January 1904.

⁹⁷ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\2, Frederick Barnard to E.S. Ford, 17 November 1870; 1\MBY, F1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.30, Queen versus Andries Doosen, 18 June 1894, Case No.17, Regina versus James Hayward and Gert Danster, 19 December 1898 & Case No.13, Rex versus Thomas Baumeister, 17 November 1902 and 1\HFD, C1\1\2, Case No.58, The King versus Hermanus Vragom, 18 January 1907.

anything but quiescent. The fact that much of its resistance was covert and most effective when it involved breaking contract and physically abandoning the west coast, raises questions about class consciousness and the extent to which fishermen constituted a proletariat by the close of the century. In November 1880, at the start of the Basuto War, the Field Cornet of the St Helena Bay Ward, Jacob Laubscher, was instructed to levy twenty men from his jurisdiction for service at the front. He conveniently decided to draw his required complement exclusively from the fisheries with near disastrous results. As he related,

"I have ordered out of the fisheries of Messrs Stephan Brothers: 10 men, out of Ehlers' 5, and out of Rosenveld's 5, making up the total of 20 men. They all positively refuse to go, and I find I cannot take them with force, as the mob is so large and furious, that by attempting to do so would place my own life and that of the constable in jeopardy. The cry is, shoot us here, but go, we shall not"⁹⁸.

Carel Stephan confirmed that, "The men are determined not to go and will meet force by force if it is employed against them. They say they have committed no crime and the F.C. has no right to take them by force which he tried to do ordering the Constable to take them out of their houses"⁹⁹. This show of solidarity in the face of the local representatives of state power is suggestive of a developed sense of both community and class consciousness amongst the fishermen at the Bay. Such impressions, however, belie the extent to which fishing labour was divided against itself throughout this period.

The first fault-line ran between skipper and crew. The former occupied an invidious position between owner and men, exercising

⁹⁸ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\3, J. Laubscher to G.R. Duthie, 21 November 1880.

⁹⁹ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\3, J.C. Stephan to G.R. Duthie, 22 November 1880.

control over the production process at sea, but within the "constraint to produce" imposed by merchant capital¹⁰⁰. Pleasing the merchant often meant antagonising the fishermen and many skippers found their every order contested and their authority eroded through insubordination. Fishermen frequently mistrusted the skipper's judgement and expressed this by refusing to go to sea when ordered to do so¹⁰¹. Those skippers who insisted on an early start to the day's fishing were also unpopular. Jan Solomons, for example, accused one of Stephan Brothers' skippers, Johan Waso, of "seeking favour" by going to sea ahead of the other boats. The favour sought was clearly not that of Solomons and his fellows¹⁰². Similarly at day's end, the back-breaking task of carrying the boat and catch onto the beach was another arena of conflict between men and skipper¹⁰³. Frans Witbooi succinctly summarised the view of many fishermen when he accused his skipper of being "more master than the master himself" for telling him to hurry up so that the boat could put to sea¹⁰⁴. These various acts of insubordination hint at the latent tensions inherent in power

¹⁰⁰ G. Sider Culture and Class in Anthropology and History (Cambridge, 1988), p.36.

¹⁰¹ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, F1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, case No.25, Stephan Brothers versus Willem Palpas, 17 June 1895 & Case No.61, Stephan Brothers versus Joseph Abrams, 16 December 1895; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Case No.28, Stephan Brothers versus Piet Swarts, 18 October 1897 and 1\HFD, A1\1\1\2, Periodical Court Vredenburg, case No.30, Queen versus George Belle and John Ludar, 21 April 1900, Case No.48, Queen versus Johannes Jager, 20 June 1900 & Case No.24, Regina versus George Verby, 20 March 1901.

¹⁰² Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No. 13, Regina versus Johan Carel Waso, 19 June 1899 and 1\MBY, F1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.71, Stephan Brothers versus Jozie M. Lowies, 18 December 1893.

¹⁰³ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, A1\1\1\1, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Case Nos. 16 & 17, Donald and Kerma McKraw versus Edward Cottle Snr & Piet and Frans Pharo, 15 June 1898.

¹⁰⁴ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.23, Regina versus Frans Witbooi and Paul Paules, 18 December 1899.

relations at sea. The tenuous nature of the skippers' authority was also evidenced by their violent over-reaction to such slights. Solomons had the misfortune of making his remark within ear-shot of Waso's manager and the skipper felt compelled to fell him with a blow to the side of the head. The McKraws, for objecting to their skipper, Edward Cottle's, refusal to assist in carrying out the boat when they had already brought the fish ashore, earned a beating from Cottle assisted by two other fishermen during which Kerma McKraw, wielding an axe, was struck a blow on the head with a boat tiller by his skipper. Witbooi too became embroiled in a fight with the skipper for his sarcasm and attempted to throw the latter into the water with the assistance of a fellow crewman¹⁰⁵.

Violence, however, was, in many respects, endemic to the fishery. Legalised violence was perpetrated against fishermen by the merchants, brutalising and criminalising the labour force, and it is thus hardly surprising that labour's life at sea and in the domestic sphere was similarly conditioned. Violence infused not only relations between skippers and crew, but also those between fishermen and between men and women. This climate was fostered, in part at least, by competition and resultant tensions engendered in relations of production by the system of payment and "constraint to produce" imposed by merchant capital. The income of the individual fisherman was dependent on his ability to catch a single fish species in sufficient quantities to survive. In this context, each crew member was in direct competition with every other, but conversely depended on his fellow crewmen's co-operation at sea to compete effectively with the crews of rival boats¹⁰⁶. The intra-group rivalry and animosity

¹⁰⁵ See Footnotes Nos. 102-104 above.

¹⁰⁶ P. Thompson et al Living the Fishing, pp.4-5 on the ways in which their work divides fishermen.

created by the linking of individual reward to collective effort readily spilled over into violence. Frans Witbooi's skipper, in expressing his irritation with his crewman's lack of punctuality, was well aware of the detrimental effect this would have on the collective effort of the trip. Fredrick du Toit and Goliath Kotze also came to words and then blows, over similar neglect of collective duty, the latter's refusal to clean his portion of the boat¹⁰⁷. When Du Toit's skipper failed to summon the whole crew to catch eetvis, it was again Du Toit who fell upon him with a stick and the promise, "Ik donder ver jou op, Ik slaan jou stukkend dat de honderen jou bloed drenk"¹⁰⁸.

The tensions, conflicts and humiliations of the labour process were also transposed on the domestic life of the fishermen, manifesting themselves in the brutalisation of women in the home¹⁰⁹. The trigger for much of this internecine violence was the generalised consumption of alcohol. Alcohol was readily available, not only from the four licensed canteens at the Bay, but from farmers and travelling hawkers who brought illicit supplies of wine and brandy to the coast in the hope of trading alcohol for fish¹¹⁰. The canteens were not only the mustering

¹⁰⁷ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.7, *Queen versus Goliath Kotze*, 23 April 1897.

¹⁰⁸ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.27, *Regina versus Frederick du Toit*, 18 October 1897.

¹⁰⁹ See for example Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\2, *Fredrick Bernard to the Malmesbury Civil Commissioner*, 20 August 1874 and 1\MBY, F1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, *Sworn Statement of Mietjie Lucas*, August 1895.

¹¹⁰ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\4, *J.C. Stephan to G.R. Duthie*, 28 August 1884 & *F. Kasner to G.R. Duthie*, 7 November 1888; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.15, *Regina versus Alexander Ravell*, 19 June 1899, Case No.16, *Regina versus Andreas Jaap*, 19 June 1899 & Case No.17, *Regina versus Matthys Michial du Pree*, 14 August 1899 and 1\HFD, A1\1\1\1, Periodical Court Vredenburg, *Sworn Statement of C.F. Pieterse and Kaffie Broekvas*, 4 June 1898, Case No 15, *Regina versus Domingo*, 15 June 1898 & Case No.21, *Regina versus Sam Segul*, 24 August 1898.

points for crews, but also sites of some of the bloodiest violence at the fisheries¹¹¹. Skippers and men frequently went to sea inebriated and those fishermen who ignored their skipper's call to sea were routinely reported as being too drunk to obey¹¹². Insobriety also figured prominently in the many cases of assault and domestic violence at the fisheries. The McKraw brothers and Frans Witbooi, for example, were reportedly drunk when confronting their respective superiors. Merchant capital's response to the widespread consumption of alcohol and the resultant violence was ambivalent. While Stephan Brothers operated a number of canteens at the coast, it strenuously opposed the unlicensed sale of alcohol to labour and regularly prosecuted fishermen for being drunk on duty¹¹³. Other owners implemented tot systems at sea, supplying their fishermen with a contractually stipulated quantity of alcohol each day. The deciding factor seems to have been control. Provided they were able to monitor and limit consumption to levels that did not impede production, the owners were satisfied, seeing alcohol in much the same light as the local farmers, as a means of tying

¹¹¹ See for example Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\2\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Entry No.36, J.C. Stephan versus Kapenier Dalla and Klaas Siemons, 19 December 1887 and 1\HFD, B1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.6, Rex versus Adam Andrews, 13 January 1908.

¹¹² Cape Archives; 1\MBY, F1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.66, Stephan Brothers versus Jacob Stevens and Jacob Kordom, 16 December 1895; 1\HFD, B1\1\2, Case No.18, Rex versus Joseph Jozua, 14 May 1906 and 1\MBY, 5\5\4, S. Henry to Malmesbury Civil Commissioner, 19 December 1883.

¹¹³ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\1 T.E. Smit to J. Rainer, 8 December 1865; 1\MBY, 5\5\4, A. Steiner to G.R. Duthie, 23 October 1884; E.J. Cordy to G.R. Duthie, 1 January 1885; A.J. Lemmerz to Malmesbury Civil Commissioner, 7 October 1885; A.E. Anderson to G.R. Duthie, 14 October 1885 and A.J. Stigling to G.R. Duthie, 19 November 1885; 1\MBY, F1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.24, Stephan Brothers versus Fredrick Reinders, 17 June 1895 and 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Case No.14, Stephan Brothers versus Sam Cortie, 19 December 1898, Case No.15, Stephan Brothers versus Abram Danster, 19 December 1898, Case No.16, Stephan Brothers versus James Hayward, 19 December 1898 & Case No.18, Stephan Brothers versus Gert Kotze, 19 December 1898.

labour to the fisheries¹¹⁴. The effects of such abuse on the fishermen, their wives and families, was conveniently overlooked.

The divisions within the labour force, fostered by the productive process and aggravated by internecine violence fuelled by alcohol, have important implications for the notion of fishermen as a proletariat. The absence of collective action was not simply a result of the legal and coercive power ranged against them by merchant capital, it also reflected their incomplete or partial proletarianisation. The one instance of combined resistance to the 1880 levy, hardly constituted the act of an emerging proletariat. The field cornet's mistake was not to challenge a class in the making, but rather to attempt to take the fishermen on a Sunday, transgressing the sanctity of the customary day of rest at the coast. The very next day all the levies presented themselves at the St Helena Bay courthouse for duty in the colonial war against the Basuto¹¹⁵. Far more common than such displays of collective anger were the isolated and individual acts of day to day resistance perpetrated by fishermen against the owners. The very isolation and individuality of these acts is indicative of the degree to which the fishermen remained divided by relations of production in the fishery. Their inability to transcend these divisions was determined by the extent to which they could still aspire to independent producer status. As the owners themselves pointed out, the fishermen's defence for breaking contract was not a rejection of the contract as the symbol of their exploitation as labour, but rather an insistence on their rights as "contracting party". Such rights were essentially individual, not collective. They assumed the individual fisherman's right to fish when and where he pleased

¹¹⁴ J. Bor "Liquor and Labour at the Cape in the Late Nineteenth Century" (Unpublished Honours dissertation, UCT, 1978).

¹¹⁵ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, 5\5\3, Andre Bester to G.R. Duthie, 2 December 1880.

and to sell his catch (not his labour power) to the highest bidder. It was defence of these personal rights which made desertion and theft the two most common forms of resistance to merchant capital at the St Helena Bay fisheries, protecting, as they did, the freedom of the individual fisherman, rather than the collective, to mobility and the product of labour.

2.3 THINGS FALL APART

The St Helena Bay fisheries depended for their continued existence on the bounty of the sea, but, by the early 1890s, decades of sustained fishing had seriously depleted that bounty. Declining catches, a decrease in the size of the fish caught and a roller-coaster ride of alternate years of plenty and famine were the signs of the impending collapse of the fish stock¹¹⁶.

TABLE 2.3: Stephan Brothers' Declining Catches
1880-1899¹¹⁷

YEARS	AVERAGE PER ANNUM					
	Snoek [Tons]	% > <	Harder [No]	% > <	Bokkom# [No]	% > <
1880-84	1 229*	-	143 371	-	1 027 780	-
1885-89	1 056	-16.4	81 988	-74.9	844 510	- 21.7
1890-94	683	-54.6	119 940	+46.3	640 880	- 31.8
1895-99	?	?	68 300	-75.6	189 675	-237.9

? = Unknown, # = Immature harder (mullet), * = For years 1881-1884 only.

Reversing this trend required the extension of fishing out beyond the Bay and the adoption of new fishing technology, but merchant

¹¹⁶ Reports of the Marine Biologist, 1896-1906 and TABLE 2.1 above.

¹¹⁷ Own calculations based on data contained in Report of the Marine Biologist 1896, p.7 and Cape Provincial Administration, Marine Biological Report No.2, 1914, pp.77-80.

capital was severely constrained in this by its own internal logic and dependence on snoek fishing. Throughout the 1890s and up until the First World War, no technological innovation of note was introduced by Stephan Brothers. The latter's sole contribution was to build ever larger boats capable of venturing further out to sea in search of snoek, but the ceiling on such innovations of scale had already been reached by 1892 with boats averaging 5 tons and capable of venturing sixty miles offshore¹¹⁸. As Carel Stephan admitted, "larger boats would be too heavy to row, and would be dull sailers"¹¹⁹. Merchant capital was thus content to remain within the limits imposed by sail and oar power and was sceptical of the viability of deep sea fishing¹²⁰. Such reticence to adopt or even experiment with new fishing methods was in stark contrast to the unprecedented innovations under way in the Cape fisheries during the 1890s.

Spurred on by the mineral revolution and the development of railways linking the burgeoning inland markets to the coastal port cities, numerous new fishing methods were introduced to Cape waters in the last decade of the 19th Century. In 1890 the American schooner "Alice" appeared in Table Bay, catching vast quantities of mackerel with a purse seine net¹²¹. The purse seine was initially outlawed from the territorial waters of the Colony, but by 1893 the ban had been lifted and a number of these nets

¹¹⁸ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Appendix D, Report of J.C. Stephan, p.17.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Also Report of Marine Biologist 1896, pp.1-2.

¹²⁰ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of H.R. Stephan, pp.6-13.

¹²¹ Cape of Good Hope House of Assembly Debates 1890, p.208 & pp.305-307 and Cape of Good Hope, Department of Agriculture Sea Fisheries: The Mackerel Purse-Seine Fishery 1897.

were in use at Hout and Saldanha Bays¹²². In 1896, following sustained agitation from the MLA for Wodehouse, Joseph Orpen, the colonial state appointed its own marine biologist and the following year purchased a steam trawler to "prospect" deep-sea trawling grounds off the Cape coast¹²³. This led to the proving of the Agulhas Bank (1898) and other prolific grounds at Mossel Bay (1899), East London (1901) and Cape Infanta (1903)¹²⁴. By 1904 there were nine steam trawlers operating from the major ports in the colony¹²⁵. In addition, an influx of Italian immigrants to the Colony during the 1890s led to increasing use of set nets in Table Bay and later on the west coast as far as St Helena Bay¹²⁶. The stagnation of the St Helena Bay fisheries and their continued reliance on the beach seine and hand line in the midst of this surge in the forces of production in the colonial fisheries, suggests the fundamentally conservative nature of merchant capital. This conservatism was not an outmoded adherence to particular technologies for their own sake, but rather reflected the internal logic of merchant capital and the way in which relations of production were structured in the fisheries.

Merchant capital derived its profit from the commodity trade and the most important commodity for west coast merchants was snoek. None of the new fishing methods pioneered in the 1890s was

¹²² *Cape of Good Hope House of Assembly Debates 1893*, pp.160-162 & p.243. The provision of the Fish Protection Act outlawing purse seining in the colony's territorial waters was repealed in 1893.

¹²³ *Reports of the Marine Biologist 1896-1897 and W. Wardlaw Thompson Sea Fisheries of the Cape Colony*, pp.64-79.

¹²⁴ *Reports of the Marine Biologist 1898-1903*.

¹²⁵ *Report of the Marine Biologist 1904*, p.2.

¹²⁶ *Reports of the Marine Biologist, 1896-1906*; D. Grant "Bokkoms, Boycott and the Bo-Kaap" (Unpublished Honours Dissertation, UCT, 1987) and P. Corgatelli "Tapes and Testimony" (Unpublished MA Thesis, UCT, 1989).

applicable to snoek fishing. The snoek's speed and preference for offshore waters made the trawl, set and purse net unsuited to its capture. Success in snoeking thus continued to depend upon putting as many boats and fishermen to sea as possible each day in season, to work the shoals with hook and line. In the context of a sharp decline in the availability of snoek, beach seining became crucial for maintaining this labour-force and retaining sufficient fishermen at the Bay to resume snoek fishing when the resource improved. Beach seining was ideally suited to merchant capital's needs in this regard. It was both labour-intensive and sedentary, requiring a limited capital outlay and allowing for ease of supervision. In addition, rantsoennis found a ready market with local farmers. The beach seine's sole draw-back was its dependence on environmental factors beyond the control of either merchants or fishermen and it was here that the set net and purse seine were available to merchant capital to offset the damaging effects of the general resource scarcity along the coast. In 1898 a purse seine was introduced to Stephan Brothers' Stumpnose Bay fishery, but was sold the following year because it "could not be successfully worked"¹²⁷. Merchant capital, however, had nothing but outright hostility towards the set net.

The set net went by a number of different names at the Bay, depending on the way it was employed, but the basic principle remained the same. It hung suspended in the water like an invisible curtain into which the fish swam fast and became entangled by their gills. If weighted down to hold a fixed position, it was a set net, allowed to float on the tide it became a drift net and secured to stakes driven into the bed of the river, a stake net¹²⁸. In its latter guise it had long been

¹²⁷ Report of the Marine Biologist 1899, p.22.

¹²⁸ Report of the Marine Biologist 1896, p.9.

used by squatter fishermen working the backwaters of the Berg River, but, by the late 1890s, had come increasingly into use on the sea coast of the Bay. Here it was set across the off-shore channels leading to the treks, thus effectively preventing fish from coming within reach of the beach seines. The result was a sharp decline in the catches of beach seine fishermen and stagnation in prices on the rantsoennis market, both of which cut at the very heart of the beleaguered merchant fisheries¹²⁹. The reason for merchant capital's failure to adopt the set net, as it attempted to do with the purse seine, lies in the extent to which the two new nets complemented snoek fishing. The cost of a purse seine put it beyond the reach of the individual fisherman, but the set net was a more democratic fishing technology, affordable to the individual fisherman and capable of being used without a boat. The implications for merchant capital were obvious. The set net threatened both its ownership of the means of production and labour supply and its generalised use promised to undermine merchant control over labour and with it the relations of production on which the snoek fishery rested. For this reason, Stephan Brothers responded to the resource crisis by attempting to ban the set net.

In 1892, a decade after the sitting of the 1882 Select Committee, Stephan Brothers was again called on to give evidence before an official investigation into the state of the fisheries. The picture Hendrik Stephan painted for the colony's legislators in 1892 was a bleak one:

"I say the fishing industry is dying out now, and we have not got the fishermen now we used to have, simply because they don't earn enough: they can get 4s. or 5s. a day in the

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10. Also Cape Archives; GBT 1, J.L. McLachlan to the Government Biologist, 20 June 1903.

docks, but they can't earn that by fishing, and fishing is not an easy occupation"¹³⁰.

Hendrik's gloom was not unfounded and in the last two decades of the 19th Century the St Helena Bay fisheries went into protracted decline, caused by falling catches of the staple commercial fish species, a burgeoning public works programme in the colony which drew labour away from the fisheries and the contraction of the Mauritian market without the development of viable local alternatives. Attempts by the firm to diversify its flagging west coast fishing interests by expanding into crayfish canning also failed¹³¹. Numerous reasons were offered for the dramatic fall-off in catches. Conventional wisdom blamed the increase in the steam coasting trade and the activities of the American schooner "Alice", but more informed sources identified overfishing as the chief culprit¹³². Carl Stephan, for one, was clear that the "catching [of] all that came to hand, whether male or female, young or old" led to the drop in catches¹³³. He called for comprehensive state regulation of the fisheries including the imposition of a closed season on snoek fishing, a minimum mesh size for seine nets, a ban on the construction of fish kraals and a prohibition on the use of the set net¹³⁴. The latter was deemed to both frightened the fish and, if made with a small mesh,

¹³⁰ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of H.R. Stephan, p.11.

¹³¹ E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga" pp.76-77 and Cape of Good Hope Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of Stephan Brothers 1890 [A.29-'90].

¹³² Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of H.R. Stephan, pp.6-13 & Appendix D Reports of J.C. Stephan and J.L. McLachlan, pp.16-19 and Reports of the Marine Biologist, 1896-1906.

¹³³ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Appendix D Report of J.C. Stephan, pp.16-17 and Reports of Marine Biologist, 1896-1897.

¹³⁴ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Appendix D, Report of J.C. Stephan, pp.16-17.

destroy undersized fish¹³⁵. The fact that no minimum mesh size was advocated for such nets, as with the trek seine, was indicative of the depth of merchant hostility to the new technology. The colonial state, however, was ambivalent towards the set net. On the one hand, it styled itself as a modernising agent, harnessing science to the development of a vast, untapped resource capable of rivalling the mineral discoveries of the interior. On the other, it tried to limit the conflict generated by modernisation by shielding the inshore fisheries from the new fishing technology¹³⁶. This broad contradiction manifested itself in microcosm at St Helena Bay, in the colonial state's attempts to simultaneously protect the merchant fisheries from the ravages of the set net without unduly prejudicing or discouraging the activities of the set netters. The newly appointed marine biologist, Gilchrist, posed the problem as follows:

"[Set] nets can be used in the open sea and in any depth, being buoyed up by floats and stretching in a straight line, often long distances. It is a mode of fishing not developed in the Colony, but when legitimately used is worthy of all encouragement. The nets above described, as drifting in the river, are a step in this direction, and if such nets could be used in the open sea it would be a decided gain to the fishing industry. But it has been generally recognised that such nets must not be allowed to interfere with the proper working of seine nets, and there can be no hesitation in condemning their use for the blocking up of a bay where a number of seine

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Cape of Good Hope House of Assembly Debates 1890*, p.298 & pp.305-307; *Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892*, Appendix D, Reports of J.C. Stephan, A.E. Anderson and J.L. McLachlan, pp.16-19; *Report of the Marine Biologist 1900*, Appendix V, "Report of the Select Committee on the Fishing Industry", pp.303-362 and *Reports of the Marine Biologist*, 1896-1907.

boats can fish, or the blocking up of the main channel of a river and preventing the coming in of the fish"¹³⁷.

Despite his ambivalence and realisation of the set net's productive potential, Gilchrist drafted regulations in May 1897 prohibiting the use of stake, set or drift nets within two miles in front of any trek or in any way detrimental to seine fishing. In addition, the use of such nets within the main channels of the Berg River was also banned and a maximum penalty of £5 or one month hard labour imposed for offenders¹³⁸. The legislation, however, embodied the colonial state's fundamental ambivalence towards the new net. As Gilchrist explained, "Some difficulty was experienced in framing the regulation ... in such a way as to give legitimate scope for both seine and drift net fishermen and the form finally decided on, allowed some latitude of interpretation"¹³⁹. The "legitimate scope" granted the set net (outside of two miles in front of any trek) was arbitrary and in the absence of any clear definition of what constituted a trek or how the two mile limit was to be determined by fishermen working at sea, frequently after sunset, the "latitude of interpretation" granted was wide indeed. Gilchrist hoped that the legislation could be "more definitely determined after further experience of its practical working"¹⁴⁰.

Practical concerns also tempered enthusiasm for other conservation measures such as a closed season on snoek. Merchants feared that new restrictions on fishing an already scarce snoek

¹³⁷ Report of the Marine Biologist 1896, p.10.

¹³⁸ Report of the Marine Biologist 1896, pp.18-20 and Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette, Proclamation 81, 27 March 1897.

¹³⁹ Report of the Marine Biologist 1896, p.19.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

resource might further threaten the labour supply. As Hendrik Stephan explained, "A fisherman will not take trouble to get bait and so on when he can get snoek so much more easily"¹⁴¹. Attempts at stricter enforcement of the Masters and Servants legislation in the face of increasing desertions had little effect in stemming the outflow of labour during the 1890s. Stephan Brothers were also severely hamstrung in this regard by their dependence on the Mauritian market and constraints on expanding their share of the local market. The Mauritian economy was itself in a depression during the last decade of the century¹⁴². Increasing competition from the emerging European sugar-beet industry and devastating hurricanes in the early 1890s forced the island's sugar barons to resort to cheaper local varieties of fish in preference to imported snoek¹⁴³. As the export trade contracted, Cape merchants looked to the local market to take up the slack. The growth of the mining economy and the construction of a railway linking the coast and the Reef prompted the increasing railage of fish to Kimberley and Johannesburg and growing agitation for the development of a deep-sea trawling industry in the Colony¹⁴⁴. For Stephan Brothers and other west coast fishery owners, however, their location far distant from the Cape Town railhead kept them dependent on the rural rantsoennis trade and Cape Town as alternative markets. The former, while extensive,

¹⁴¹ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of H.R. Stephan, p.11.

¹⁴² P. Richardson "The Natal Sugar Industry in the Nineteenth Century" in W. Beinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido (eds) Putting a Plough to the Ground.

¹⁴³ R. Hallett Africa Since 1875, p.700 and W. Wardlaw Thompson Sea Fisheries of the Cape Colony, p.84.

¹⁴⁴ See Report of the Select Committee on Colonial Industries 1891; Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892 and Report of the Marine Biologist 1897, pp.10-11 & 14-15 for the increasing trade with the interior. Also Cape of Good Hope, Department of Agriculture Memorandum on the Development of Sea Fisheries 1895 [G.61-'95] for a summary of the debate on the viability and need for a deep-sea trawling industry in the colony.

was both seasonal and unremunerative, whereas prices on the latter were extremely volatile and returns uncertain, as Hendrik Stephan noted:

"Cape Town is a peculiar market. As soon as fish is plentiful, nobody seems to care for it; it is only when fish is scarce, and it is a luxury, that it sells well. As soon as it comes into season, it won't sell. When the boats get few snoek, they fetch 9d., but when the snoek are plentiful they will hardly fetch 2d"¹⁴⁵.

The export trade allowed the firm to stockpile dried fish and only sell when the market was favourable. The Cape Town market, on the other hand, was for fresh fish which, in the absence of any stable industrial demand, had to be sold immediately on the open market leaving merchants vulnerable to oversupply and widely fluctuating prices¹⁴⁶. As Hendrik Stephan put it, "The fact of the matter is the fishing industry is dying out for the want of a [local] market. If the supply is small, the fish command a good price; but as soon as there is a good supply, they fetch nothing"¹⁴⁷. Trapped between the hammer of supply and demand and the anvil of a declining resource and shrinking labour supply, Stephan Brothers ability to reverse the slide into crisis was limited. Events in the first decade of the 20th Century further exacerbated this crisis and severely weakened merchant capital dominance of the St Helena Bay fisheries by 1910.

The South African War of 1899-1902 wrought widespread disruption on the west coast. Agricultural production and rural trade were

¹⁴⁵ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of H.R. Stephan, p.7.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Evidence of C. Arnold, p.4 & H.R. Stephan, p.11 on the stockpiling of dried fish.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Evidence of H.R. Stephan, p.10.

severely curtailed by the imposition of martial law, the St Helena Bay fisheries were visited by raiding Boer commandos, fishing boats were scuttled by British forces as a war measure and fishermen lured away by the lucrative opportunities offered as transport riders and camp followers in the army¹⁴⁸. The war, coupled with the continued scarcity of snoek on the west coast, thus further eroded Stephan Brothers' position in the Mauritian market. One observer reported in 1903 that,

"For the last two or three years, shoals of snoek which frequented Cape waters and were such a popular export, have unaccountably left the shores. The stagnation in the fish trade at Malmesbury and Piquetberg is due to a like cause, viz; the disappearance of the fish that made the trade"¹⁴⁹.

By 1907, control over the Mauritian trade had shifted into the hands of Cape Town fish merchants who organised annual snoeking expeditions to Walvis Bay. The depleted local resource never regained its export importance, being consumed almost entirely by local demand¹⁵⁰. The Cape Town merchants were able to monopolise the Mauritian trade by combining the export of dried fish with wholesaling fresh fish to the expanding local and interior markets, an option not open to Stephan Brothers. The firm's St Helena Bay base left it isolated from and unable to effectively

¹⁴⁸ W. Wardlaw Thompson Sea Fisheries of the Cape Colony, p.84; W.A. Burger Piket Teen 'n Berg, pp.264-65 & 327; E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga", p.78 ff; Report of the Marine Biologist 1901 and Cape Archives; 1\HFD, A1\1\1\2, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Case No.45, 21 October 1903, Rex versus Piet Walters.

¹⁴⁹ A.R.E. Burton Cape Colony for the Settler (Cape Town, 1903), p.28. Also W. Wardlaw Thompson, Sea Fisheries of the Cape Colony, pp.84-85 and Reports of the Marine Biologist, 1901-1902.

¹⁵⁰ Union of South Africa Select Committee on the Fishing Industry Development Bill 1944 [S.C.4-'44] Appendix H, p.xxxix, "Memorandum by the South African Frozen Rock Lobster Association on the export salt snoek trade and snoek catches generally".

exploit the new opportunities opened up by industrialisation, urbanisation and rail. If anything, the coming of the railway dealt Stephan Brothers another body blow by destroying the coastal grain trade and its monopoly over it. Under impetus of war, first Malmesbury and then Piketberg were connected to Cape Town by a branch line pushed into the western coastal districts between 1899 and 1902. By 1911 the line had reached Graafwater in the Clanwilliam district¹⁵¹. The railway gave the coast a wide berth passing instead through the heart of the South Western Cape wheatlands which had previously depended on Stephan Brothers' cutters and steamers to reach the Cape Town market. The firm was unable to compete with the railway which was faster, more efficient, cheaper and more accessible than its fleet. Commercial farmers were now able to bring more land under cultivation, save on transport costs and expect a better price for their produce. In a matter of a few years the farming communities of the west coast hinterland literally turned their backs on the old road to market in favour of the new¹⁵². Stephan Brothers protested, but the broader process was irreversible and the firm was left with a much reduced trade from the poorer coastal farmers, too far removed from the line of rail to benefit. The 70 miles of coastline that had served as base for the Stephan empire's grain and fish trade remained, but even this was under threat from developments internal to the firm by 1900. In that year Carel Stephan died, leaving the usufruct of his huge estate to his brother, Hendrik. The latter outlived him by a mere six years, passing away in 1906. To Hendrik's twenty-two year old son, Henry Stephan, a Cambridge University law graduate, fell the task of unravelling his father's tangled legal legacy. In a process

¹⁵¹ W.A. Burger Piket Teen 'n Berg, p.327; J. Burman & S. Levin The Saldanha Bay Story, pp.113-120 and J. Burman Early Railways at the Cape (Cape Town, 1984).

¹⁵² Report of the Select Committee on the Saldanha Bay Harbour Works Bill 1903 for farmers evidence in this regard.

lasting all of a decade, Henry was forced to dispose of vast tracts of the firm's land (75 000 morgen in all), trimming operations down to a scale more appropriate to the lean days of the Cape Colony's last years¹⁵³.

While the collapse of the west coast merchant fishery was due to factors - both environmental and macro economic - beyond merchant capital's control, Stephan Brothers' response was determined by the specifics of its own accumulation imperative. The latter was inextricably intertwined with the maintenance of the west coast as a periphery of the regional economy and the firm thus sought to block the development of a railhead at Saldanha Bay, secure its fishing labour needs through the contract and ban new fishing technology inimical to its monopolisation of the means of production in the fishery. On the latter issue it enjoyed the support of Sandveld agriculture whose rentier interests in the Piketberg trek seine fisheries were similarly threatened by the set net. The collapse of the coastal grain trade, decline of the snoek resource and internal crises within Stephan Brothers itself, however, made the development of new areas of commodity production essential to merchant capital's continued survival. With profits shrinking and legal and other costs associated with the settling of Carel Stephan's will mounting, the issue of future direction became ever more pressing. As Cape Town merchants consolidated their hold over the urban market, took control of the Indian Ocean export trade and expanded along the line of rail into the interior, the comparative advantages of west coast merchant capital were transformed into crippling disadvantages. Isolated from the Cape Town market and without the raw material for export to Mauritius, Stephan Brothers looked to the rich crayfish beds of the Bay to resuscitate the empire and revive its fortunes. Crayfish production, however, was geared to

¹⁵³ E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga", p.87 ff.

a very different (European) market and required a complex manufacturing process to add value before exchange. For these reasons, relations of production at the Bay had to be restructured in accordance with the new demands of crayfish fishing and factory production. Implicit in this was the incorporation of the set net and its practitioners by merchant-cum-productive capital, thus setting the scene for a protracted interregnum marked by a bitter conflict between Stephan Brothers and Sandveld agriculture. The resolution of this conflict was to determine the nature of the St Helena Bay fisheries until the mid-1930s.

3: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

The set net conflict at St Helena Bay was not unique. By the turn of the century inshore fishermen at Mossel and Kalk Bay were attempting to ban the new steam trawlers from their fishing grounds, just as their Table Bay counterparts had done with the "Alice" in 1890¹. Elsewhere in the British empire, on the Gold Coast of West Africa, the introduction of the larger adii net and Mfantse canoe in the 1890s also met with sustained resistance from petty-commodity fishermen on remarkably similar grounds to that in the Cape². Vercrijssse, in his study of the Ghanaian fishing industry, rejects the notion that the adii net disrupted a traditional fishing economy in symbiosis with the marine environment, asserting that:

"A more fruitful starting point ... is the concept of correspondence between the level of the productive forces and the relations of production. There is good reason to assume that at the turn of the century the Gold Coast fishing industry was characterised by such a close correspondence. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that the productive potential of the adii net, used in conjunction with the larger Mfantse canoe, threatened the correspondence and, by undermining the existing production relations, gradually led to their dislocation from the productive forces ... [T]he fierce resistance to the adoption of the adii and twuwii nets was due to the undermining of existing relations of production by new labour processes which incorporated a higher level of productivity, and to the insertion into canoe fishing of social relations of exploitation that were alien to the petty-commodity mode of production"³.

¹ Cape of Good Hope House of Assembly Debates 1890, p.298 & pp.305-307; Report of the Marine Biologist 1900, Appendix V, "Report of the Select Committee on the Fishing Industry", pp.303-362 and Reports of the Marine Biologist 1896-1907.

² E. Vercrijssse The Penetration of Capitalism: A West African Case Study (London, 1984), pp.112-128.

³ Ibid., pp.113-114.

Vercrujisse's analysis can be usefully applied to the St Helena Bay conflict. Here the set net also threatened to disrupt the petty-commodity mode of production on which merchant capital and Sandveld farmers depended, the former for snoek and the latter for rent and labour. They thus acted in unison to ban it from the Bay in the same way as the chiefs in the Gold Coast attempted to outlaw the adii net in areas under their jurisdiction. The latter were constrained by their subjugation to the colonial administration under indirect rule, unlike merchant and agrarian capital in the Cape, which exerted considerable influence over the colonial state and used this power to have the set net legislatively restricted.⁴

With the continued stagnation of the snoek fishery in the 1900s, merchant capital looked increasingly to diversify into crayfish production, requiring a significant reorganisation of the relations of production. Unlike the snoek and seine fisheries, there was no local market for crayfish other than the canning factories. The latter thus tried to set the price of the raw material and impose a more intense production regime on the fishermen, without the benefit of supplementary earnings through eetvis and illicit fish trading. Few fishermen were willing to forego the vestiges of their independence in seining for lower earnings and a greater dependence on credit and free housing associated with crayfish fishing. Having struggled for more than a decade to subjugate the labour force to the contract, merchant capital now looked to the set net and its Italian practitioners to achieve what it failed to do and dissolve the remnants of labour's control over the means of production and product of labour. Sandveld agriculture, however, remained implacably opposed to the set net, fearing it would destroy the symbiotic

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.118-120 for the Gold Coast colonial state's approach to the adii\Mfantse conflict.

relationship between fishing and farming, important to rural accumulation on the Piketberg coast. The colonial state, in seeking to mediate the burgeoning conflict, "territorialised" it in the same way as the Gold Coast administration and with the same intention of promoting the new technology at the expense of the old. The resulting balkanisation of the Bay, however, proved more enduring than either Cape Town or Stephan Brothers anticipated, reflecting both the economic and political weakness of merchant-cum-productive capital on the periphery, as well as the resilience of the petty-commodity mode in alliance with Sandveld agriculture. As a result, the dissolution of petty-commodity production was uneven, incomplete and confined to the Malmesbury coast, setting the scene for a future conflict to generalise the process to the fisheries of Piketberg district.

3.1 "COLONIALS" VERSUS "ITALIANS": THE SET NET WAR

The set net was used to fish the backwaters of the Berg River long before merchant capital's outcry alerted the colonial state to its presence. An "unwritten law" of custom prevented it from being used to the detriment of beach seining⁵. By 1896, however, this "unwritten law" was being openly flaunted, as Gilchrist reported:

"The nets of which the fishermen complain are in principle similar to these latter [stake nets], being gill nets and capable of being fixed by wooden stakes in the same way. They are, however, longer and deeper and of a somewhat wider mesh. They are not used on the flats, but are set across the main channel of the river, where they may be left overnight. They may also be used without being fixed,

⁵ Report of the Marine Biologist 1896, p.10. Also S. Forman *The Raft Fishermen: Tradition and Change in the Brazilian Peasant Economy* (Bloomington, 1970); J. Cordell "The Lunar Tide Fishing Cycle in Northeastern Brazil" in *Ethnology*, 13, 4, 1974 and J.M. Acheson "Variations in Traditional Inshore Fishing Rights in Maine Lobstering Communities" in R. Andersen (ed) *North Atlantic Maritime Cultures for comparative perspectives from the Americas.*

being allowed to drift up and down the river with the tide. Outside of the river, in the Bay, they are set across the entrance to the small bays where the fish come to shore and be captured with the usual seines."⁶

The transgressors were not local fishermen, but transient foreigners, Gilchrist identifying a "few Italian fishermen" as the chief culprits.⁷ Numerous Italians had found their way into the west coast fisheries in the 19th Century. Many were skilled sailors and boat builders and had been assimilated into the local fishing communities by the turn of the century.⁸ The new arrivals, however, were distinguished by their inability to speak the lingua franca and lack of ties to the Bay. They were Cape Town based, owning large half- and full-decked cutters and ranging between Cape Point and Elands Bay in search of fish.⁹ Some had originally been recruited in Sicily by the fledgling Cape Town canning industry to catch crayfish in Table Bay. Others were recent immigrants, forced out of their homeland by drought and poverty. With the collapse of the canning industry, many went fishing on their own account, but by the turn of the century they encountered increasing opposition to their set netting activities from the fishermen of Table Bay. This opposition and the independence and mobility afforded them by their ownership of decked sea-going craft forced them out along the coast in search of new fishing grounds and led them inexorably to St Helena Bay. There they encountered not only the commercial fisheries of

⁶ Ibid: p.9.

⁷ Ibid: p.10.

⁸ See for example E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga", p.84; M.H.D. Smith Boerepioniers van die Sandveld, p.203 and R.C. Knott-Craig "The Boat Builders of Velddrift" in Cape Times, 15 October 1938.

⁹ D. Grant "Bokkoms, Boycott and the Bo-Kaap"; P. Corgatelli "Tapes and Testimony" and Cape of Good Hope, Table Bay Harbour Board Report of the Fishing Industry Commission, August 1904, pp.9-17.

Stephan Brothers, but flourishing tenant fisheries on private farms near the mouth of the Berg River.

The merchant fisheries overshadowed, but never fully displaced the squatter or petty fisheries at the Bay. The latter remained, nestled along the less hospitable parts of the Malmesbury coast and the lower reaches of the Berg River and coast in the neighbouring Piketberg district. Piketberg was not opened up to merchant capital in the way Malmesbury was. The influence of men such as Theunis Smit - "Grondbaron van die Sandveld" - who had vested rent interests in the squatter fisheries of the district and the unsuitability of the coast for commercial fishing saw to that. The Piketberg coastline lacked the natural coves and inlets which attracted would-be fishery owners to the Bay's southern shore. It was exposed to the full fury of north-westerly gales, making it impossible to establish safe anchorages or construct jetties for the off-loading of fish and the transshipment of grain¹⁰. The only haven for fishing boats and cutters was inside the mouth of the Berg River where local agriculture jealously guarded its labour and rentier interests against encroachment by merchant capital. By 1902 there were at least twelve independent boat owners operating from Velddrift and Laaiplek farms near the mouth of the river¹¹.

These and other farms were also home to numerous tenant fishermen who owned no boats, but worked the river for subsistence, crewed for boat owners and engaged in seasonal labour in the surrounding

¹⁰ Union of South Africa, Department of Mines and Industries Fishing Harbours Report Part III Saldanha Bay, Malmesbury District, to Lamberts Bay Clanwilliam District, 1926 for a survey of the nature and attendant difficulties of fishing the Piketberg coastline.

¹¹ Cape Archives; AGR 371, 1417C, H.B. Keytel to the Attorney General forwarding the Petition of Various Owners and Managers of Fishing Industries at St Helena Bay, 27 February 1902.

countryside¹². These people were tied to the landlords through rent obligations and constituted a sizable labour force outside merchant capital control. The dominant fishing technology at the river was the beach seine and the chief market the rantsoennis trade with the agricultural interior. In addition, the Piketberg fishermen worked the river's backwaters on their own account and engaged in winter snoek fishing from tent camps established along the southern shores of the Bay¹³. The tenant fisheries' co-existence with merchant capital was conditioned by a number of factors. The former provided only limited competition to Stephan Brothers in the rantsoennis trade and their small scale and meagre capital resources prevented them from exporting or drawing labour away from the merchant fisheries in large numbers. The riverine fisheries' close links to Sandveld agriculture further circumscribed their potential to develop into alternative bases of capital accumulation. The one area in which they did compete with merchant capital, however, was for fish.

Competition in beach seining was governed by the "unwritten law" of custom, explained by one of Stephan Brothers managers as follows:

"The old rules and regulations also the mutual understanding among the local fishermen is very good, that no fishermen are to hinder one another while occupying a Trek nor to enter the fishing ground until the occupier is finished with Trekking and leaves the Trek then any other fishermen may enter the same"¹⁴.

Such understanding was essential because there were no fewer than 42 beach seines at Berg River and a further 20 on the Malmesbury

¹² Fishing Harbours Report, Part III, 1926, p.62.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.58-59.

¹⁴ *Cape Archives; AGR 371, 1417 C, T. Blatherwick to the Assistant Resident Magistrate Hopefield, forwarding Report by J.L. McLachlan on different fishing nets in use at St Helena Bay, 29 May 1902.*

coast of the Bay¹⁵. As the resource crisis deepened in the 1890s, however, this unwritten law broke down and tenant fishermen found common cause with merchants in opposing the depredations visited on both by the Italians set netters. Complaints against the Italians were legion. They frightened and broke up the shoals, preventing the fish from coming onto the treks where they were accessible to the beach seines. One man using a set net could prevent any number of seine fishermen from making a catch - an especially sore point in view of the prevailing fish scarcity¹⁶. In this context and backed by the 1897 regulations, seine fishermen conducted a concerted campaign of prosecution against the Italians after 1900 who were contesting the "legitimate scope" allowed the set net by the 1897 legislation. The aim of both the Italians and the so-called "Colonials" or local fishermen was to force the colonial state to define the inbuilt "latitude of interpretation" more clearly in their favour. In the process, the state's ability to confine the conflict to the court room and within the bounds of the regulations was gradually undermined, giving rise to a virtual state of war between local fishermen and Italians after 1900.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Also PAN 83, K 59\5, J. Gilchrist to the Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture, 16 February 1908.

¹⁶ Report of the Marine Biologist 1897, pp.18-20.

TABLE 3.1 The War Against the Set Net
St Helena Bay 1900-1908¹⁷

Year	Accused	Convicted	Withdrawn	Fines
1900	13	6	7	£14.17s
1901	-	-	-	-
1902	9	7	2	£17. 0s
1903	1	1	-	£ 5. 0s
1904	2	2	-	£10. 0s
1905	1	-	1	-
1906	8	5	3	£17. 0s
1907	1	1	-	£ 5. 0s
1908	3	1	2	£ 5. 0s
TOTAL	38	23	15	£73.17s

The primary cause for this failure was a lack of effective policing. There were only two policemen at St Helena Bay, one at Steenberg's Cove on the Malmesbury side and the other at Berg River Mouth in Piketberg district. Neither had boats and thus relied on telescopes, field glasses and the use of private craft to apprehend offenders¹⁸. Gilchrist's appointment of fishery officers at the Bay in 1896 was also of little practical effect as these were honorary posts and the incumbents had no "authority

¹⁷ Cape Archives; 1\MBY, F1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Criminal Cases - Records of Proceedings [1893-1895]; 1\MBY, G1\1\2, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Criminal Cases - Records of Proceedings [1892-1897]; 1\HFD, 1\2\1\1-1\2\1\2, Magistrate of Hopefield, Criminal Record Books [1892-1916]; 1\HFD, A1\1\1\1-A1\1\1\3, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Criminal Cases - Records of Proceedings [1896-1945]; 1\HFD, A1\2\1-A1\2\3, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Criminal Record Books [1881-1919]; 1\HFD, B1\1\1-B1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Criminal Cases - Records of Proceedings [1897-1908]; 1\HFD, B1\2\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Criminal Record Book [1885-1906]; 1\HFD, C1\1\1-C1\1\2, Periodical Court Hoedjies Bay, Criminal Cases - Records of Proceedings [1901-1907] and 1\HFD, C1\2\1, Periodical Court Hoedjies Bay, Criminal Record Book [1901-1908].

¹⁸ Cape of Good Hope; PAN 83, K 59\5, Civil Commissioner Piketberg to the Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture, 10 July 1908.

to prosecute for the infringement of the law"¹⁹. As a result, local fishermen played an important role in alerting the police to offences and conveying them to sea to apprehend the guilty parties. The implementation of the regulations at the Bay was thus tainted from the outset with a perceived bias in favour of the seine fishermen, antagonising the Italians and prompting the seine fishers to take the law into their own hands by seizing set nets and laying charges against the owners²⁰. Public policing created additional problems for the state in the ensuing court cases, as the Hopefield Magistrate complained:

"There is so much jealousy among the different classes of fishermen and so much feeling has been displayed that it would be difficult to obtain a conviction upon their evidence. There is always a taint of bias about the evidence of interested parties"²¹.

The key evidence in securing a conviction was the distance from the shore where the illegal act occurred. The protected area extended two miles out to sea in front of any recognised trek, but, as Gilchrist complained, seine fishermen understood this to include two miles on either side as well and acted accordingly²². The Magistrate of Piketberg reportedly also shared their somewhat broader interpretation of the legislation²³. A sympathetic

¹⁹ Report of the Marine Biologist 1900, p.22.

²⁰ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, B. McMillan to the Secretary for Agriculture, 15 February 1908 & Civil Commissioner of Piketberg to the Acting Under Secretary of Agriculture, 10 July 1908 and PAN 69, K 59\5, Report by Trooper A. Roll on Complaint by W.A. Kotze, 9 October 1908 & Assistant Resident Magistrate Hopefield to the Resident Magistrate Malmesbury, 12 November 1908.

²¹ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K59\3, Assistant Resident Magistrate Hopefield to the Resident Magistrate Malmesbury, 12 November 1908.

²² Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Government Biologist to the Acting Chief Clerk to the Secretary for Agriculture, 11 January 1906.

²³ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Civil Commissioner Piketberg to the Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture, 10 July 1908.

magistrate, policeman on board and careful measurement of distance from the shore, were, however, no guarantee of a conviction because of the inherent bias assumed by all magistrates.

Even when a conviction was secured, sentencing frequently transformed this into a pyrrhic victory and the lack of sufficient deterrent remained a recurring complaint for seine fishermen²⁴. Few Italians were caught in the act of setting or retrieving their nets and those that were often got off with a caution from the court²⁵. Nor did any Italians serve prison sentences because of the token nature of the alternative cash fines imposed. In 1902 the fishery officer at Steenberg's Cove complained that:

"On several occasions these Foreigners have been caught in the act, brought before the Magistrate convicted and fined the maximum penalty of £5 which they cheerfully paid, considering it a mere trifle in comparison with the large profits they are making out of their illegitimate trade and immediately afterwards commenced the same old game again"²⁶.

As a result, the St Helena Bay fishery owners and fishermen kept up pressure on the colonial state for more stringent penalties. In 1902 the maximum fine was increased to £20 or 3 months hard

²⁴ Cape Archives; AGR 371, 1417C, H.B. Keytel to the Attorney General, forwarding the Petition of Boatowners and Managers of the several Fisheries established along the Coast of St Helena, Hoedjies and Saldanha Bays in the Districts of Piketberg and Malmesbury, 27 February 1902.

²⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, Handwritten Memorandum signed G. Ailing, 24 August 1908.

²⁶ Cape Archives; AGR 371, 1417 C, T. Blatherwick to the Assistant Resident Magistrate Hopefield, 29 May 1902.

labour²⁷. Calls for the confiscation of gear and a proposal from the Hopefield magistrate that the fines be shared with informers were, however, rejected²⁸. By 1906 the stakes were upped again with renewed calls for a maximum fine of £50 plus the confiscation of all gear²⁹. The legislation's lack of teeth compounded the initial problems of policing and evidence and created a growing disillusionment with due process among the Bay seine fishermen. The Italians exacerbated this by doing their utmost to frustrate the legal process. Speaking neither English nor Dutch and doubting the impartiality of local law agents, they hired Vredenburg, Saldanha Bay and Hopefield agents to defend their cases³⁰. The latter excelled in foiling quick convictions through aggressive cross examination and by casting doubt on the prosecution's evidence³¹. In addition, fish and money were used as bribes to forestall prosecutions and persuade key witnesses to change their story³².

²⁷ Cape Archives; AGR 371, 1417C, H.B. Keytel to the Attorney General, forwarding the Petition of Boatowners and Managers of the several Fisheries established along the Coast of St Helena, Hoedjies and Saldanha Bays in the Districts of Piketberg and Malmesbury, 27 February 1902 and Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette, Proclamation No.142 of 1902, 12 August 1902.

²⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Acting Chief Clerk to the Secretary for Agriculture to Messrs van der Bijl and de Villiers, 22 January 1906 and AGR 371, 1417C, Assistant Resident Magistrate Hopefield to the Civil Commissioner Malmesbury, 5 June 1902.

²⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, van der Bijl & de Villiers to the Minister for Agriculture forwarding the Petition of 316 Fishermen residing at or near Saldanha and St Helena Bays, 9 January 1906.

³⁰ G.H. O'Connell of Vredenburg, H.J. Schickerling of Saldanha Bay and J.W. Stigling of Hopefield were the three law agents most frequently used.

³¹ See for example Cape Archives; 1\HFD, 5\1\2\8, Assistant Resident Magistrate Hopefield to the Resident Magistrate Malmesbury, 8 October 1906, complaining about O'Connell's tactics.

³² Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.7, Rex versus Nicola Borass, 16 March 1903 and 1\HFD, B1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.1, Rex versus Hermanus van Schalkwyk, 13 January 1908.

Ultimately this war of position, fought out within the legislative parameters laid down by the colonial state, was both inconclusive and disruptive. The seizure of nets and prolonged legal wrangles, often involving whole crews as witnesses, wasted precious fishing time without any visible improvement in conditions on the beach for seine fishermen. The situation had become desperate by 1906, as the fishery officer at Stompneus Bay reported:

"Local fishermen have absolutely no chance to trek with their seines. Formerly four seines were in use at Stompneus Bay, and all kinds of trek fish were caught in great abundance; now only one is in use, whereby only 500 medium bokkums [immature mullet] were caught this season. The fishing grounds along this part of the coast of St Helena Bay are practically blockaded for miles by the set nets"³³.

Disillusioned with their ability to lift the blockade by way of the courts, local fishermen turned increasingly to extra-legal methods. Stephan Brothers had initially attempted to deny the Italians mooring rights at the Bay and its example was followed by the fishermen who engaged in acts of sabotage and intimidation against the foreigners³⁴. These focussed on seizing or damaging the hated set nets and the Italians alleged that threats of assault were also made against them³⁵. They were, however, more than equal to the challenge and seine fishery owners claimed in.

³³ Report of the Marine Biologist 1906, pp.17-18.

³⁴ Cape Archives; GBT 16, Civil Commissioner Malmesbury to the Under Secretary for Agriculture, 28 December 1899; J. Gilchrist to the Under Secretary for Agriculture, 3 January 1900; Surveyor General to the Marine Biologist, 13 August 1906 & Government Biologist to Stephan Brothers, 15 September 1906.

³⁵ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.1, Rex versus Hermanus van Schalkwyk, 13 January 1908 and PAN 83, K 59\5, B. McMillan to the Secretary for Agriculture, 15 February 1908.

turn, that their nets were regularly damaged by set netters³⁶. In addition, the Italians enjoyed a reputation for being quick with their knives, a notoriety enhanced by a number of violent assaults which intimidated the locals³⁷. Thus, for example, Joseph Griffith's attempt to seize Edward Nardine's set net failed, because, Griffith explained, "We tried to take away the net as evidence, but he and his mates prevented us"³⁸. After a similar heated confrontation at sea, the local policeman at Berg River admitted that, "it is a very dangerous game going trapping these people [Italians] at night"³⁹. This was confirmed by his superior who reported that the Italians are "most aggressive and have been heard to threaten the lives of any Policeman approaching them when contravening the Fishing Laws", adding that, "my life was threatened by some of the very low class Italians who live in the neighbourhood of the St Helena Bay and endeavour to obtain a livelihood by illegal means"⁴⁰. One of his men had also been "dangerously assaulted" by said foreigners⁴¹. In 1907 the Magistrate of Malmesbury recommended an additional constable at

³⁶ Cape Archives; AGR 371, 1417C, H.B. Keytel to the Attorney General, forwarding the Petition of Boatowners and Managers of the several Fisheries established along the Coast of St Helena, Hoedjies and Saldanha Bays in the Districts of Piketberg and Malmesbury, 27 February 1902.

³⁷ R. Lees *Fishing for Fortunes*, p.110; Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Preparatory Examination, Rex versus Dominico Pollicardo and Paolo Patroni, 14 July 1902; 1\HFD, B1\1\2, Preparatory Examination, Rex versus Joseph Babriani, 16 January 1905 and PAN 83, K 59\5, van der Bijl & de Villiers to the Minister for Agriculture forwarding the Petition of 316 Fishermen residing at or near Saldanha and St Helena Bays, 9 January 1906.

³⁸ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\1, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.9, Rex versus Edward Nardine, 18 March 1902.

³⁹ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.14, Rex versus Dominico Poggi, 19 March 1906.

⁴⁰ Cape Archives; CO 8354, X 9458, Inspector J.T. White Cape Mounted Police [CMP] to the Commander CMP, 27 April 1906.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

the Bay, noting that "a policeman boarding the fishing-cutters at night, alone and unarmed, runs more than the ordinary risk"⁴².

John Griffith's own experience of the risk, coupled with economic desperation, drove him to more extreme measures in 1906. As he explained, "there were a lot of fish [in Britannia Bay] and the fish would not land. We looked after the fish the whole day"⁴³. That evening as he and his crew were gathering firewood on the beach, they saw Angelo Joenta's cutter enter the Bay. Griffith, who honed his marksmanship shooting seabirds, promptly fetched his shotgun and fired a single shot at the cutter, passing just over Joenta's head and peppering the sail. The terrified Italians took refuge below deck, losing an oar overboard in their haste and allowing the cutter to drift onto the rocks and damage its hull⁴⁴. The Italians' group solidarity, reputation and transience, however, made them difficult targets and attention focussed on locally resident transgressors. Chief among these was Hermanus van Schalkwyk, cutter owner and set net fisherman resident at Slippers Bay. Van Schalkwyk was convicted of illegal set net fishing on no fewer than six out of seven court appearances between 1900 and 1908. Unable to legally deter him from his nefarious practices, the seine fishermen resorted to more direct methods. In November 1907 Joseph Galwitch and his crew discovered Van Schalkwyk's set net on a trek. As Floris Binneman, one of Galwitch's crew related:

"While we were pulling up the net the accused [Van Schalkwyk] came from the other side and caught hold of the net and started pulling it in. And when they came together he called upon the people in his boat to give him a knife.

⁴² Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Secretary to the Law Department to the Acting Chief Clerk to the Secretary for Agriculture, 21 January 1907.

⁴³ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B 1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.1, The King versus John Griffith, 19 March 1906.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

The accused would not loosen the net and Dirk Wall cut the net in the middle through and he pulled the piece of the net that was over into his boat. And the accused became so angry and wanted to throw me with a knife. The accused then took our oar out of our boat"⁴⁵.

Van Schalkwyk denied threatening Binneman with a knife, claiming he only wanted to use it to unsnag the net. As for seizing an oar, he alleged this was self-defence as one of Galwitch's crew was attempting to hit him with it⁴⁶. Van Schalkwyk had another close encounter with hostile oars the following month when no fewer than five seine boats drove him from a trek. As he explained, "I saw the boats come right behind me. We rowed fast and they rowed fast also behind us. As they came past us we had to duck our heads their oars came right over us. There was one boat on each side of me and three boats behind me"⁴⁷. Harried in this fashion for more than two hours, Van Schalkwyk also had to fight off attempts by the seine fishermen to seize the set nets from his boat, preventing him from fishing that night⁴⁸. The escalating tension, fuelled by the failure of the fishery regulations, declining trek seine catches and increasing recourse by both parties to sabotage and intimidation, alerted the colonial state to the fact that "feeling is running high against the Italians" and the possibility of "murder in these waters and very soon"⁴⁹. As one report put it, "the present unfortunate

⁴⁵ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.1, *Rex versus Hermanus van Schalkwyk*, 13 January 1908.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, B1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.4, *Rex versus Charles & Jaapie Constable*, 13 January 1908.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Also Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, G.H. O'Connell to the Marine Biologist, 23 December 1907 and PAN 69, K 59\3, G. Williams and J. Daneel to the Under Secretary for Agriculture, 3 August 1909.

position ... if continued, would inevitably give rise to constant friction, with a possibility of bloodshed, between otherwise law abiding and respectable people"⁵⁰. Having failed to deter the Italians from transgressing the regulations through increased fines and without the funds to step-up policing, the colonial state looked to a more radical solution - the division of the Bay between set net and trek seine⁵¹.

Developments between 1906 and 1909 ratcheted up the level of conflict even further as a marked down-turn in the availability of fish adversely affected the catches and income of both locals and Italians. The seine fishermen employed longer hauling lines on their seines and fought over access to treks, while the Italians resorted to "keering" and ghost nets in a bid to offset the effects of the scarcity⁵². In addition, the seiners pressured the colonial state to once again raise the penalties for offences

⁵⁰ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, G. Williams and J. Daneel to the Under Secretary for Agriculture, 3 August 1909.

⁵¹ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, J. Gilchrist to the Acting Chief Clerk to the Secretary for Agriculture, 11 January 1906; Government Biologist to the Acting Chief Clerk to the Secretary for Agriculture, 13 February 1907 & Secretary to the Law Department to the Chief Clerk to the Secretary for Agriculture, 5 March 1907 on the funds shortage.

⁵² Cape Archives; 1\HFD; B1\1\2, Periodical Court St Helena Bay, Case No.43, Rex versus Joseph Novella, 15 November 1905; PAN 69, K 59\3, Alleged Diminution of Fish Supply on Piketberg Coast. Protection of Fish in Berg River, Enquiry held at Roode Baai on 21st-24th November 1913, Joint Report by Mr F. Shaw RM of Piketberg and Mr F. Wrensch, RM of Malmesbury, pp.2; PAN 69, K 59\3, Alleged Diminution of Fish on the Coast of Malmesbury, Report by Resident Magistrate Malmesbury, November 1913, pp.6-7 & Detached Assistant Magistrate Hopefield to the Magistrate Malmesbury forwarding Report from Sergeant Baker, 29 August 1913. "Keering" involved driving the fish into the set net by beating on the water with oars or rattling tins filled with stones beneath the surface. White "ghost" nets were also used to scare the fish into the set nets.

under the fishery regulations as a deterrent against the set net blockade⁵³. In February 1907 a meeting took place in Cape Town between the Minister of Agriculture, set net representatives, the seine fishermen and Stephan Brothers in an attempt to resolve the impasse, but the colonial state's promise of an in situ investigation fell through due to financial constraints⁵⁴. Many of the Italians had settled along the southern shores of the Bay by 1906 and were thus more vulnerable to local censure than previously⁵⁵. For this reason too, they reacted to the call for heavier fines and confiscation of gear in more direct fashion, utilising the existing legislation to cripple the seine fisheries. In the second half of 1907 the Italians began reporting the trek seiners at the Berg River for having mesh below the minimum size laid down in the regulations⁵⁶. The police responded by measuring all seines on the river and warning owners with illegal mesh⁵⁷. Unused to such harassment, the seine fishermen ignored the warnings, claiming the undersized mesh was due to natural shrinkage in the cotton net fibre and denying

⁵³ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, van der Bijl and de Villiers to the Minister for Agriculture forwarding the Petition of 316 Fishermen Carrying on their Trade at Saldanha Bay, St Helena Bay, Berg River and along the Neighbouring Coast, 10 January 1906.

⁵⁴ Cape Archives; GBT 16, Stephan Brothers to the Minister of Agriculture, 19 December 1906; G.H. O'Connell to the Marine Biologist, 5 February 1907; Petition of the Boat Owners and Fishermen Residing on the Banks of the Great Berg River, Piketberg District, 23 February 1907; Government Biologist to G.H. O'Connell, 16 February 1907; Government Biologist to the Acting Chief Clerk to the Secretary for Agriculture, 24 April 1907 & Government Biologist to G.H. O'Connell, 4 May 1907.

⁵⁵ Cape Archives; GBT 1, J.L. McLachlan to the Government Biologist, 20 June 1903 and PAN 83, K 59\5, J. Gilchrist to the Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture, 16 February 1908.

⁵⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, G.H. O'Connell to the Marine Biologist, 23 December 1907 & Telegram from Redmond Orpen to the Department of Agriculture, 20 January 1908.

⁵⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Chas T. Quincey to the Officer Commanding "V" Division CMP, 20 January 1908.

allegations that the nets destroyed immature fish⁵⁸. After two months' grace the police acted, seizing the seine of W.A. Kotze, a prominent farmer and boat owner, at midnight on the river⁵⁹. This confiscation set the trend and by the end of January 1908 the seine fishermen's activities had been brought to a virtual standstill by prosecutions and the threat of heavy fines⁶⁰. Out of 42 seines on the river only four were found without illegal mesh. Of the 38 banned from fishing, 28 belonged to "a poor class of fisherman" without the £70-80 needed to replace illegal mesh⁶¹. The loss of their sole means of livelihood at the height of the summer trek season spelt hardship and even ruin for many seine fishermen.

In desperation, they sent a deputation to Cape Town pleading for a reprieve⁶². The gist of their case was that the illegal meshes had been used for years without any complaint and thus constituted a "technical illegality" of small consequence

⁵⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Petition from Residents of Roode Baai, Velddrift and De Plaats, Piketberg District, n.d.

⁵⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Chas T. Quincey to the Officer Commanding "V" Division CMP, 20 January 1908, Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture to the Civil Commissioner Malmesbury, 11 December 1907; Resident Magistrate Piketberg to the Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture, 19 December 1907 & the Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture to the Under Colonial Secretary, 30 December 1907.

⁶⁰ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Telegram from Redmond Orpen to the Agricultural Department, 20 January 1908 & Petition from Residents of Roode Baai, Velddrift and De Plaats, Piketberg District, n.d.

⁶¹ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, J. Gilchrist to the Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture, 16 February 1908.

⁶² Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Telegram from Redmond Orpen to the Department of Agriculture, 20 January 1908 & Petition of Subjects of King Edward VII Residing at Roode Baai, Velddrift and De Plaats, District of Piketberg, n.d.

compared to the devastation caused by the set net⁶³. The sudden publicity and spate of prosecutions was rather a concerted effort by the Italians to destroy them. Styling themselves "Local South African born Europeans", the Berg River fishermen claimed that outlawing their nets would both jeopardise the rantsoennis supply to agriculture and drive them and their families to the "brink of starvation"⁶⁴. The implications for the state were clearly spelt out: an increase in internecine violence at the Bay and the possibility of a large, indigent population at the river dependent on state relief aid for survival⁶⁵. Under pressure, the colonial state dispatched Gilchrist and the Chief Clerk of the Department of Agriculture to the river in February 1908 to investigate. After hearing the views of the different parties, both agreed that "in view of the extreme hardship involved in the sudden stoppage of their employment" the trek seine fishermen should be granted a limited stay of prosecution at least until the end of the trek season⁶⁶. This was duly granted and at the end of February all prosecutions of trek seine fishermen for undersized mesh were waived until 31 August 1908⁶⁷. Investigations in May, however, revealed that the seine fishermen had done nothing about replacing their nets, but were "waiting to see what

⁶³ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Telegram from Redmond Orpen to the Department of Agriculture, 20 January 1908.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, B. McMillan to the Secretary for Agriculture, 15 February 1908 & J. Gilchrist to the Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture, 16 February 1908.

⁶⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, ; Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture to the Under Colonial Secretary, 17 February 1908 and Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette, Proclamation 80 of 1908, 20 February 1908.

Parliament would do for them"⁶⁸. As the snoek season ended and the August deadline neared, so they revived their agitation, asking for immunity from prosecution for a further two years until their existing nets were used up⁶⁹. In early August the Minister of Agriculture relented and granted a final extension until the end of May 1909⁷⁰.

The trek seine fishermen's ability to manipulate the regulations in this way, gave them a distinct advantage over their Italian rivals. Without merchant or farmer patronage and denied independent access to local political power by their foreign status, the Italians were forced to rely on the exertions of their chief spokesman, Vredenburg law agent, O'Connell, to put their case. The latter did his best to generate support for their position in Cape Town, but with little success. In early 1907 he accompanied a delegation of set netters to an interview with Gilchrist, but later wrote to the latter complaining that the promised in situ investigation had not taken place⁷¹. The state's plea of poverty was still ringing in O'Connell's ears when, in February 1908, Gilchrist and the Chief Clerk were hastily dispatched to the Bay following a visit to the Department of Agriculture by a delegation of trek seine fishermen accompanied by their local MP, J.A.C. Graaf. Even O'Connell's attempts to use

⁶⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Civil Commissioner Piketberg to the Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture, 10 July 1908 & Civil Commissioner Malmesbury to the Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture, 9 July 1908.

⁶⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Petition of G. Visser and 127 others (Petition No.60 of 1908), n.d., [Translation].

⁷⁰ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, P.J. du Toit to J.A.C. Graaff MLC, 8 August 1908.

⁷¹ Cape Archives; GBT 16, Petition from Set Net Fishermen to the Secretary for Agriculture, February 1906, G.H. O'Connell to the Secretary for Agriculture, 13 November 1906, G.H. O'Connell to the Marine Biologist, 5 February 1907 & Government Biologist to G.H. O'Connell, 4 May 1907 and PAN 83, K 59\5, G.H. O'Connell to the Marine Biologist, 23 December 1907.

the legislation to his clients' advantage by prosecuting seine netters for undersized mesh was defeated by Government proclamation. At the root of the Italians' woes was the two-mile limit, because, as O'Connell explained, "It is impossible for them [the Italians] to go out for a distance of two miles in their small dinghies - if a sudden squall were to arise everyone would lose his life or if a whale, which is frequent in these waters, were to strike the dinghy"⁷². For this reason they had no choice but to break the law and fish the inshore waters of the Bay, running the risk of constant harassment, gear seizures, threats, physical violence and prosecution. O'Connell thus appealed to the Government "to relieve that hard-working body of fishermen - the Italians" from the constraint of the two-mile ruling by allowing them to set their nets alongside treks and on or over inshore reefs in the bay⁷³.

The colonial state also favoured redefining the regulations by 1908, but in a very different way to that desired by the set netters. While the latter wanted the two-mile limit relaxed, the state, hounded by the seine fishermen and parliamentarians like Graaff, fearful of a fatal confrontation and without the funds for stepped-up policing, sought to separate the warring parties even further in the hope of containing the burgeoning conflict through the courts. Opinion was divided on how best to do this. Elements within the Department of Agriculture advocated apportioning the Bay between the two groups of fishermen and appointing a fishery officer to adjudicate disputes⁷⁴. This argument was informed by a strong modernising ethos and realisation that "the Italians are also an important economic

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, B. McMillan to the Secretary for Agriculture, 15 February 1908.*

asset in that they can be relied on to exploit fishing grounds and render more constant and regular supply of fish"⁷⁵. The modernisers were opposed by officials on the ground sympathetic to the seine fishermen and highly sceptical of such notions. As the Civil Commissioner of Piketberg retorted:

"I fear it [balkanisation] would not work unless they were miles apart or unless there were a fast official steamer to see that no encroachments took place. The cutters will go to the places where most fish are to be had and paper regulations will not stop them. Nor would a competent Fishery Officer be of much use in settling disputes on the spot because there are no disputes to settle. The Regulations are perfectly well known and are deliberately contravened owing to the difficulty of detection as the fishing is done by night. A Fishery Officer on shore is of no more value than a Proclamation in the Gazette. A Fishery Officer in a fast boat with net-cutting implements is what is wanted"⁷⁶.

He believed that "Seine net fishing and set net fishing cannot take place on the same shores" and that it was the latter which had to go⁷⁷. Proponents of this view, including the trek seine fishermen themselves, urged a blanket ban on all set net fishing within two miles of the coast. With their successful politicisation of the issue it was the latter view which prevailed and in October 1908 a proclamation was promulgated forbidding the use of stake, set or drift nets within a two mile radius of any trek ground⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5 Annotation by G. Williams on undated Minute, c.1908.

⁷⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Civil Commissioner Piketberg to the Acting Under Secretary for Agriculture, 10 July 1908.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette, Proclamation 456 of 1908, 12 October 1908.

The effect of the new regulation was, as the Hopefield Magistrate explained, to effectively ban the use of set nets anywhere within two miles of the coast "as the recognised 'treks' or seine net fishing grounds are many and in some places in close proximity to each other, and, as far as I can learn, in no place are two adjacent 'treks' as far as 4 miles apart"⁷⁹. This left "only the deep sea open for set nets and at 2 miles off the shore the water is too deep to suit the ordinary class of set nets and the small craft of the poor man very often cannot venture out to sea for such a distance"⁸⁰. Rather than resolve the impasse, Proclamation 456 brought down the proverbial "storm of criticism" on the colonial state⁸¹. It was seen as "a palpable hit at set net fishing" and in February 1909 a petition organised by O'Connell and signed by more than sixty Malmesbury farmers called for the cancellation or suspension of the new regulation⁸². The farmers alleged, "That owing to the said Proclamation ... [we] are unable to procure any fresh fish which are most essential ... it being now threshing season, and the labourers ask for and expect a daily ration of fish"⁸³. They complained that since the ban on the set net, only small and prohibitively expensive rantsoennis was available from the seine fishermen at the coast⁸⁴. The rentier

⁷⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, Assistant Resident Magistrate Hopefield to the Magistrate Malmesbury, 24 February 1909.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Cape Archives; PAN 83, K 59\5, Handwritten note by G. Williams, 1 August 1908.

⁸² Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, Assistant Resident Magistrate Hopefield to the Magistrate Malmesbury, 24 February 1909 & G.H. O'Connell to the Governor forwarding the Petition of Farmers Resident in the District of Malmesbury, 4 February 1909.

⁸³ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, G.H. O'Connell to the Governor forwarding the Petition of Farmers Resident in the District of Malmesbury, 4 February 1909.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

interests of the Sandveld landlords thus conflicted with the rantsoennis and labour needs of their Malmesbury neighbours, forcing the colonial state to adopt a more accommodationist stance on the set net.

To this end a committee of the newly created Fishery Board was sent to St Helena Bay in June 1908 to conduct yet another on site investigation⁸⁵. The two members of the committee, Williams and Daneel, spent a week on the west coast collecting evidence between Langebaan and the Berg River mouth⁸⁶. Both were firm believers in the need to modernise inshore fishing methods and in their view:

"[T]he very acute stage at which matters had arrived at the Berg River was really due to disputes between the fishermen living on the Malmesbury side of the [Berg] River (a large number of whom are Italians) who are mostly either direct employes [sic] of, or suppliers of fish to, Messrs. Stephan Brothers, and who really are the more important fishermen, and persons dwelling on the Piquetberg side, mainly farmers combining fishing with their agricultural operations, and coloured people"⁸⁷.

Their self-proclaimed bias in favour of the set net was premised on its technical superiority to the traditional trek seine. As they explained:

"With the former it is reasonably certain that the fishermen will bring in a fair quantity of fish from day to day, maintaining an even supply and consequently receiving a

⁸⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, Secretary of the Fishery Board to the Under Secretary for Agriculture, 24 June 1909.

⁸⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 8, A 120\b\48, G. Williams to J. Gilchrist, 9 March 1909. Williams was Chief Clerk of the Department of Agriculture and Secretary of the Fishery Advisory Board. He recommended John Daneel, an employee of the General Post Office in Cape Town, for appointment to the Board on the basis of his being "a most enthusiastic fisherman of over 20 years standing, owning his own boat and in daily touch with the members of the fishing community".

⁸⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, G. Williams and J. Daneel to the Under Secretary for Agriculture, 3 August 1909, p.2.

steady price. While with the trek net it may happen that no trek may be able to be carried out for several days, the men thus earning nothing, or on the other hand, phenomenal trawls are often made, the market is overstocked and prices consequently fall, exemplifying the old saying 'a feast or a famine' only it is mostly the latter"⁸⁸.

As a consequence of its greater productivity the set net also fostered a better class of fishermen. The Italian fishermen earned on average more than double that of their local counterparts. These high earnings, coupled with "notoriously frugal and temperate" habits, allowed many Italians to set themselves up as independent boat owners, something few seine fishermen were ever able to do⁸⁹. The trek seine, on the other hand, in addition to its destabilising effect on the rantsoennis market, was held to have a "bad moral effect" on the fishermen who used it. "The long hours spent hanging idly about are not conducive to building up industrious habits," the two investigators noted⁹⁰.

Despite their enthusiasm for the set net they were forced to concede that its use was detrimental to seine fishing and that whatever its advantages, "it will be a considerable time before their use becomes general, and for certain purposes the trek net will never be superceded"⁹¹. Compromise was called for and, while they regarded it as essential to lift the burden of illegality from the set net, they also recognised the need to safeguard the interests of the trek fishermen, at least in the short term. They thus recommended "balkanising" the Bay into an Exclusive Trek Seine Fishing Zone (ETSFZ) and a Free Fishing Zone (FFZ) where

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

set net fishing could take place unhindered. It was no coincidence that the proposed boundaries of the two zones corresponded exactly to the district boundaries of Piketberg and Malmesbury. The ETSFZ stretched from the joint boundary at the Berg River mouth north to the farm Zoutkuil encompassing the entire Piketberg coastline of St Helena Bay, while the FFZ to the south included the whole southern shore of the Bay⁹². The proposed solution thus exactly mirrored the different relations of production in the fisheries of the two districts and attempted to facilitate the transformation of the Malmesbury merchant fisheries while simultaneously protecting the trek seine fishermen and their farmer landlords along the Piketberg coast from the corrosive effects of this transformation. Final agreement was hammered out in the courthouse at Laaiplek between the committee, Stephan Brothers and a "thoroughly representative throng" of interested parties⁹³. Williams and Daneel believed the agreement ensured "that neither party will be prejudiced in any way but, on the other hand, will gain advantages and be able to pursue the respective modes of fishing undisturbed"⁹⁴. The agreement was gazetted in September 1909, and by the end of November beacons had been erected to mark the southern and northern boundaries of the ETSFZ⁹⁵. Thereafter the conflict along the shores of St Helena Bay went into abeyance.

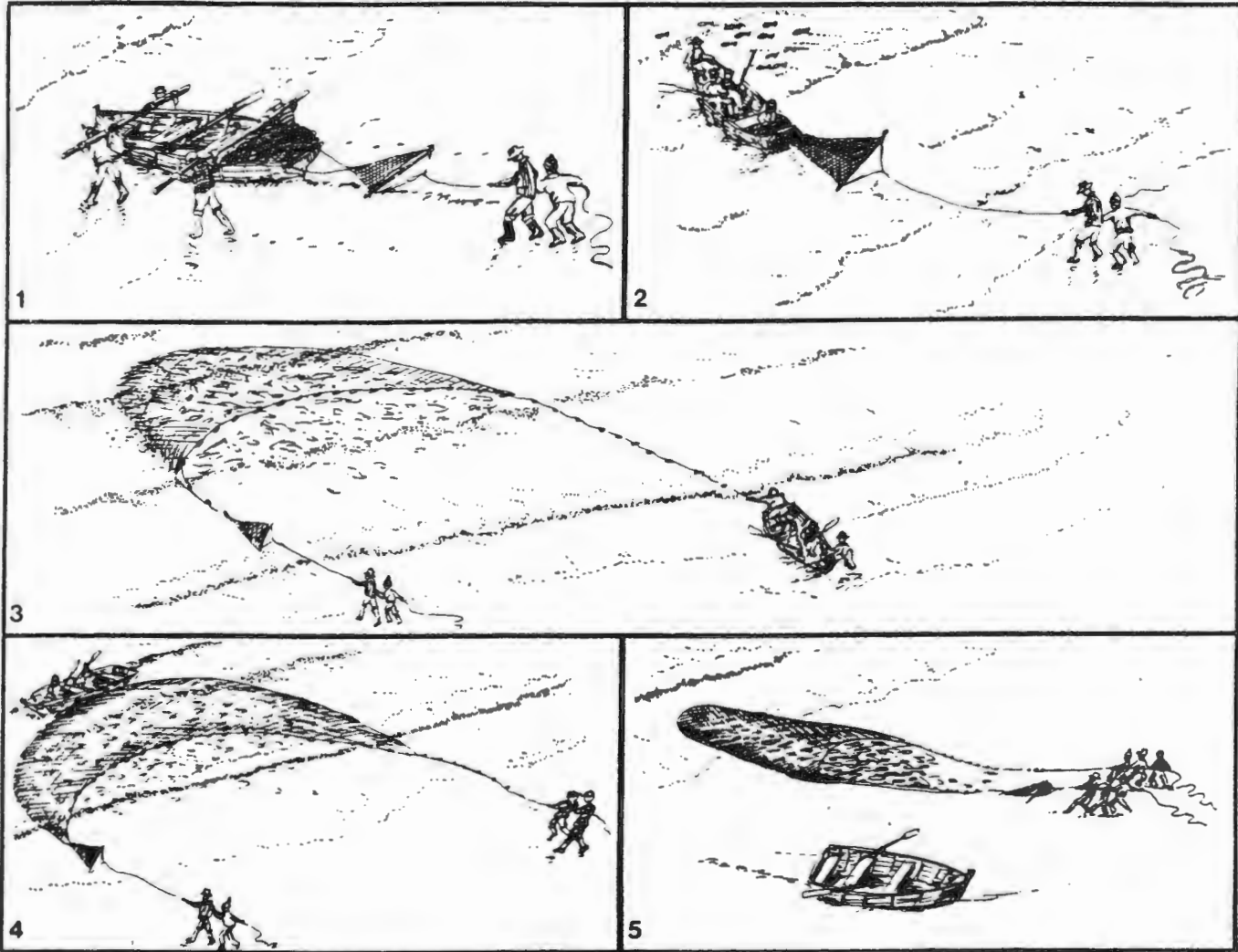
⁹² *Ibid.*, p.4 and "Resume of Recommendations".

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.4. The two reported that the "leading men" at Berg River were "evidently inclined to 'fight shy' of the meeting".

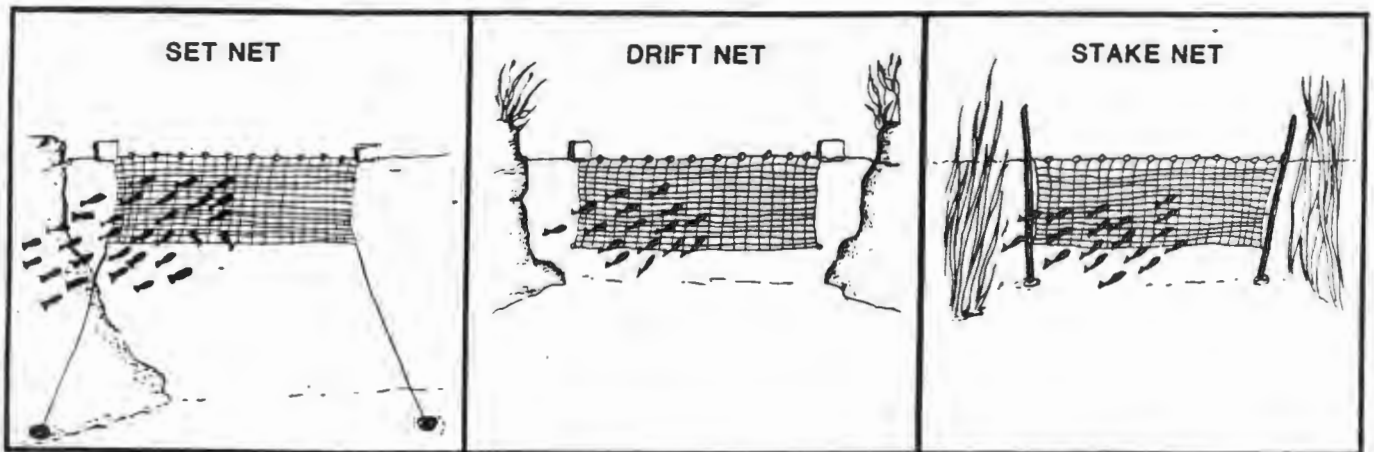
⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

⁹⁵ *Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette, Proclamation 385 of 1909, 14 September 1909 and Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, Civil Commissioner Piketberg to the Under Secretary for Agriculture, 20 September 1909 & 22 November 1909. The Civil Commissioner supervised the erection of two 24-foot tarred masts with two white cross-pieces at the top, one above the high water mark half a mile south of the Berg River mouth and second on a dune on the farm Zoutkuil.*

DIAGRAM 3
TREK SEINE FISHING



SET NET FISHING



3.2 THE STEPHAN PLAN

The successful implementation of the 1909 agreement was, in large measure, due to a change of heart on the part of merchant capital. Stephan Brothers, from being the most vociferous opponent of the set net, played a central role in drafting and brokering the new *modus vivendi* which opened up the Malmesbury coast to the Italians. Williams and Daneel reported that "Stephan Brothers local representatives all spoke very highly of the Italian fishermen" and were instrumental in formulating the legislative division of the coast in such a way as to allow the Italians unhindered fishing along the Bay's southern shores⁹⁶. The firm's belated conversion to the set net was prompted by its gradual move away from a reliance on snoek fishing and the *rantsoennis* trade towards the production of canned crayfish for export to France. By 1909 the export potential of the St Helena Bay snoek fishery had been undermined by long years of resource scarcity⁹⁷. This, coupled with the internal crisis within Stephan Brothers brought about by the deaths of Carel and Hendrik and the end of the coastal grain trade, made restructuring of the firm's west coast operations imperative to its continued survival. It was in this context that the new head of the firm, Henry Stephan, set about expanding its involvement in crayfish production.

The crayfish was regarded as "a food for the poor" during the 19th Century and used as bait for catching other types of fish⁹⁸. By the 1890s, however, a number of factories had been established

⁹⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, G. Williams and J. Daneel to the Under Secretary for Agriculture, 3 August 1909, p.3.

⁹⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, A. Cripps to the Secretary of the Fishery Advisory Board, 10 July 1911 and PAN 69, K 59\3, *Alleged Diminution of Fish on the Coast of Malmesbury, Report by Resident Magistrate Malmesbury, November 1913, p.5.*

⁹⁸ Report of the Fisheries Committee 1892, Evidence of C. Schroeder, p.18 and W. Wardlaw Thompson *The Sea Fisheries of the Cape Colony, p.48.*

in Cape Town producing canned crayfish for the European market. All of these early attempts had met with financial disaster due to problems with the canning process and competition from American lobster on the lucrative French market⁹⁹. After 1902, however, the canning industry was revived on a small scale by a number of expatriates with experience in the French, Canadian and British fish canning industries. Their use of improved canning methods and the decline of the American lobster resource after 1905 gave the Cape industry a new lease of life¹⁰⁰.

The Table Bay crayfish beds had been heavily fished during the 1890s leading many of the new canneries established in the 1900s to locate outside Cape Town at Hout Bay and Saldanha Bay. By 1909 there were two canning plants at the latter locale. One, the North Bay Canning Company, owned by a Canadian and a Briton and the other, the Saldanha Bay Canning Company, owned by a Latvian tinsmith and a local coaster captain¹⁰¹. In view of the restricted fishing-range of oar- and sail-powered craft, the canneries were compelled to locate as closely as possible to the resource. Thus in 1908 the North Bay Canning Company leased a site at Steenberg's Cove from Stephan Brothers for an additional factory to tap the crayfish beds at the Bay¹⁰². The North Bay Canning Company's factory at Steenberg's Cove was forced to shut down for repairs in 1910 after being battered by heavy seas, but re-opened the following year and in 1912 produced some 10 200 cases of canned

⁹⁹ S.C. Townell "The Crayfish Industry of the Cape West Coast", pp.10-27 for the early history of crayfish canning in the Cape Colony.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp.28-49.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp.28-30. Also E. & B. Silverman Memoirs of a Pioneer in the Fish Canning Industry of South Africa.

¹⁰² Cape Archives; PAN 40, A 120\e\15, Memorandum on Crayfish Canning Factories, n.d. and PAN 84(1), A 120\x, General Information Regarding the Fishing Industry Prepared for the Assistant Provincial Secretary: Crawfish, c.1913.

crayfish valued at more than £18 000¹⁰³. Stephan Brothers' failed attempt at crayfish canning at Granger Bay in 1890 probably accounts for the firm's initial reluctance to establish its own factory. In the interim, however, the North Bay Canning Company's plant opened up a new market for crayfish, which the firm was eager to exploit¹⁰⁴. Crayfish fishing was concentrated in spring and early summer as a result of the legislatively closed season, snoek fishing and heavy winter seas along the Cape coast. The crustaceans were caught with hoop nets baited with fish and lowered to the seabed where they were left attached to a buoy or float for a period before being retrieved. Fishermen worked in pairs from a dinghy, one man rowing and the other placing and hauling the nets¹⁰⁵. This new fishery competed directly with beach seining for labour during summer, the prime fishing season for both. From the fishermen's point of view beach seining was the far preferable occupation as it allowed them a share of the catch for subsistence or sale. The share system, however, was entirely inappropriate to crayfish fishing, there being no local market for crayfish outside of the factories owing to crayfish's unsuitability for transport and storage as rantsoennis. To forego trek for crayfish fishing was thus to lose all control over the product of labour in return for a cash payment per hundred fish landed and greater dependence on credit and free housing.

The Italians, on the other hand, were ideally suited to Stephan Brothers' needs in this regard. Not only were they well accustomed to working in pairs using dinghies to set and clear their nets, but their independence from merchant or farmer

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 38, A 120\5 (2), Under Secretary for Agriculture to the Resident Magistrate Malmesbury, 12 November 1909 & North Bay Canning Company to the Secretary for Agriculture, 12 February 1910.

¹⁰⁵ S.C. Townell "The Crayfish Industry of the Cape West Coast 1874-1947", pp.56-57.

control made them immediately available to the firm for crayfish fishing. This explains the rapprochement between Stephan Brothers' managers and the Italians at the Bay noted by Williams and Daneel in 1909. It also sheds a different light on the "hostile disposition towards the set net" encountered by the committee amongst the firm's "coloured" employees. The two investigators dismissed such sentiments as unimportant, noting that "these men were merely servants, fishing with set or trek nets at the discretion of their employer"¹⁰⁶. It was precisely their status as servants which prevented the firm's seine fishermen from resisting their employer's incorporation of the Italian set netters, rapidly undermining their last vestige of independence and compelling them to accept employment as crayfish fishermen. By 1913, four years after the balkanisation of the Bay, the dissolution of seine fishing along its southern shores was all but complete. At Paternoster it was reported that:

"There had been no trek of harders ... for two years owing to there beong [sic] no fish inside the bay, these being prevented from entering by set nets spanned across the channels in the openings in the reefs across the entrance"¹⁰⁷.

Stephan Brothers had been compelled to advance some £10 000 in credit to their fishermen as a result. At Britannia Bay one of the two trek seine boats had to be sent away "as the fishermen were starving owing to the fish being driven away by set nets and there being no catch"¹⁰⁸. Stephans' ex-manager at Stompneus Bay, John McLachlan, reported as many as 38 boats carrying around ten set nets each anchored at Stompneus Bay in the years just prior

¹⁰⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, G. Williams and J. Daneel to the Under Secretary for Agriculture, 3 August 1909, p.3.

¹⁰⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, Alleged Diminution of Fish on the Coast of Malmesbury, Report by Resident Magistrate Malmesbury, November 1913, pp.4-5.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.7.

to his retirement. McLachlan's estimates were wrong on both counts, but the hegemony of the set net and the Italians along the Malmesbury coast of the Bay was undisputed by 1913.

TABLE 3.2 Italian Dominance of the Malmesbury Coast:
Boat Ownership on the Southern Shores of St Helena Bay, 1913 ¹⁰⁹

Owner	No	Cutter	Fishing Boat	Dinghy	Crew	Trek Seine	Set Net
Stephan Bros	1	2	23	6	135	3	23
North Bay CC	1	-	2	-	10	-	-
Italians	10	13	13	15	137	3	118
Others	4	1	5	7	48	1	20
TOTAL	16	16	43	28	330	7	171

The legislative assimilation of the Italian set net fishermen thus enabled Stephan Brothers to restructure relations of production to suit the demands of crayfish fishing without any direct confrontation with fishing labour. The decline of seine fishing appeared to be the result of a general fish scarcity aggravated by state indifference rather than the needs and designs of merchant capital. Without the backing of their employer, the firm's fishermen were powerless to halt their own proletarianisation and were forced off the beach and onto the sea to fish for crayfish or to work as wage labour in the canneries.

The seine fishermen along the Berg River were protected from a similar process of dissolution by their landlords' rentier interest in the fisheries and the ETSFZ. Paper regulations, however, were no deterrent against a cutter poaching at night in unpoliced waters. Thus, as the beach seine fishery in the Free

¹⁰⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 70, K 59\15, Fishing Ordinance Registration of Nets, c.1913, Magistrate Malmesbury to the Provincial Secretary forwarding List of Boats in the Hopefield Sub-District, 8 January 1913 & List of Fishing Boats, etc called for by letter from Provincial Secretary, A59b, dated 11th November 1913, addressed to Magistrate Malmesbury.

Fishing Zone collapsed under pressure from the set net, the Piketberg trek seine fishermen consolidated and defended their exclusive right to the river and sea coast north of the river mouth against encroachment. In 1910 W.A. Kotze reported that the Italians were trespassing in the trek seine fishing area using an adapted form of set net containing a pouch, in an apparent attempt to exploit the 1909 legislation's failure to define a "trek seine"¹¹⁰. A similar legal loophole threatened the new status quo the following year when the new provincial state consolidated all the colonial state fisheries regulations, including Proclamation 385 of 1909, into a single ordinance¹¹¹. The amended regulations governed the territorial waters of the province, defined as extending as far as the highest spring tide. This was taken to exclude the waters of the Berg River and the Italians took advantage of the sloppy legalese to again fish with set nets in the main channels of the river. Early in 1912 Kotze reported that:

"The Italians were trespassing on the night of 30th Jan. I went so far as to throw three stones at a boat and hit the boat with last stone and damaged one plank and nearly killed one of the boys while they (boats) were busy trekking with their seines. If Government does not interfere into the net business there will be a fighting on the sea between Italians and niggers for it is a shame the way the Italians are trespassing"¹¹².

A petition to Cape Town and the intervention of the Magistrate of Piketberg led to the passing of a further regulation extending the definition of territorial waters to include the Berg River as far as its ebb and flow at Wilgenboschdrift some 40 miles from

¹¹⁰ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, 4\1\6\2, W.A. Kotze to the Assistant Resident Magistrate Hopefield, 26 September 1910.

¹¹¹ Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette, Ordinance No.12 of 1911 To Consolidate and Amend the Fisheries Laws, 1 August 1911.

¹¹² Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, W.A. Kotze to the Administrator, 12 February 1912.

the mouth¹¹³. This determined opposition mirrored the economic concerns of the different groups along the river - the desire of local farmers to protect their rent interests, fear of competition on the part of independent boatowners and the determination of tenant fishermen to resist proletarianisation. Rather than an innate conservatism therefore, the Berg River fisheries' resistance to the set net was an attempt to conserve the existing relations of production from dissolution. This was evidenced by the extent to which the set net was incorporated into the riverine fisheries.

TABLE 3.3 Ownership in the Piketberg Fisheries, 1912¹¹⁴

Owner	No	Sailing Boat	Rowing Boat	Crew	Trek Seine	Set Net
Stephan Bros	1	2	-	12	2	-
Seine Fisheries	16	25	17	122	22	57
Set Net Fisheries	22	4	22	54	2	83
Subsistence	11	-	1	12	-	16
TOTAL	50	29	40	200	24	156

By 1912 there were thus more than 150 set nets in use at the river, rising to 228 by 1920¹¹⁵. The majority of these nets were used for subsistence fishing along the river's backwaters, often

¹¹³ Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, W.A. Kotze to the Civil Commissioner Piketberg forwarding the Petition of Poor White Fishermen Against the Set and Drift Nets in the Berg River, 12 April 1912, Magistrate of Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, 17 April 1912 & 3 July 1912; PAN 70 (2), K 59\12, Civil Commissioner Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, 19 June 1912 and Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette, Regulation 160 of 1912.

¹¹⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 75, K77\1, Fisheries Ordinance 1911: Statistics District Piketberg, 14 February 1912.

¹¹⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 22, A 120\b\158, Abstract from Register Showing the Numbers and Various Kinds of Nets in Use at the Different Fishing Stations in the Cape Province during the Year 1920.

as an adjunct to seine fishing¹¹⁶. This co-existence was subject to the undisputed primacy of seine fishing, a dominance increasingly dependent on state edict. The balkanisation of the Bay after 1909 was thus the state's attempt to accommodate the relations of production which arose as a result of the historical development of the fisheries in the two districts. The move towards factory production along the Bay's southern shores, however, dictated that the solution to the set net war negotiated in 1909 was at best temporary. The Italians had shown their willingness to poach in the ETSFZ almost from its inception and, in the absence of stepped-up policing, such incursions were bound to intensify given a continued fish scarcity. The resource crisis also presented opportunities for merchant capital to further its own agenda, as the incorporation of the set net and consequent decline of trek seining along the Malmesbury coast after 1909 showed. By 1913, Stephan Brothers' involvement in the crayfish industry was changing from the supply of raw material to actual production and in this context the firm launched a direct assault on the ETSFZ and the seine fisheries along the river under the guise of conserving the fish resource.

In July 1913 Stephan Brothers forwarded a report to the Provincial Administrator from the firm's inspector of fisheries, J.F. le Noury¹¹⁷. The latter advanced a radical new theory to explain the decline in the fish supply at the Bay over the past

¹¹⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 68; K 59\1, J. Paxton to the Provincial Secretary, 2 August 1915. Trek seine fishing was only possible every six hours with the ebb and flow of the tide and providing there were fish on the trek. Seine fishermen therefore had considerable time on their hands to engage in set netting in the river's backwaters on their own account.

¹¹⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, L. Raphaely [Stephan Brothers] to the Administrator forwarding the Report by J.F. le Noury on the Destruction of Fish at St Helena Bay, 26 July 1913.

decade¹¹⁸. While conventional wisdom blamed the set net, Le Noury alleged that the real culprits were the trek seine fishermen fishing unhindered in the main fish breeding ground along the west coast, the Berg River. He claimed to have seen hauls on the river estimated at around 50 000 fish of which only 3 000 were fit for sale and the rest had to be buried in trenches along the banks. Le Noury concluded, "I consider it high time that steps are taken to amend the present state of affairs, and to protect both fish and fishermen in the near future, and to do this all fishing should be stopped inside the Berg River Mouth"¹¹⁹.

TABLE 3.4: Stephan Brothers Declining Beach Seine Catches, 1880-1913¹²⁰

YEARS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF FISH PER ANNUM					
	Harders	%	Bokkoms#	%	Total	%
	>	<	>	<		>
1895-99	68 300	-	189 675	-	257 975	-
1900-04	35 948	- 90.0	95 318	- 99.0	131 266	- 96.5
1905-09	45 697	+ 27.1	115 788	+ 21.5	161 485	+ 23.0
1910-13	17 306	-164.1	51 439	-125.1	68 745	-134.9

= Immature harder (mullet).

Henry Stephan, embellishing on the Le Noury report, maintained that the Berg River "affords great possibilities for breeding and experimental purposes ... [it] would afford a splendid site for

¹¹⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\5, H. Stephan to the Administrator forwarding figures as to the Quantity of Fish Netted by Messrs Stephan Brothers at St Helena Bay 1880-1910, 23 August 1913 & L. Raphaely to the Administrator forwarding similar figures for the years 1911-1913, 8 September 1913.

¹¹⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\5, L. Raphaely to the Administrator, forwarding the Report by J.F. Le Noury on the Destruction of Fish at St Helena Bay, 25 July 1913.

¹²⁰ Own calculations based on data contained in Cape Provincial Administration Marine Biological Report No.2 1914, pp.77-80.

the stocking of Salmon"¹²¹. In his opinion, banning all fishing in the river

"would be far more preferable and beneficial to our fishing industry, which ought to be an enormous asset to this country, than the laws regulating the usage of different kinds of nets in various districts which are absolutely impossible to control without involving great expense by having water police"¹²².

Stephan rejected any inference that he was "trying to injure the small man" with his proposal¹²³. The small man (seine fishermen), he pointed out, blamed the set net for the fish scarcity, but a minimum mesh size for set nets was laid down by law and the so-called small men themselves used set nets in the river. Rather it was their seines which were the real cause of declining catches. Minimum mesh legislation was useless for seines, Stephan explained, because when they were drawn to shore or bank the meshes closed, trapping small fish inside. This was especially true of treks in the river where distances were much shorter and the chance of escape for immature fish consequently less. He thus advocated a five-year ban on all net fishing in the river within a one mile radius of its mouth on the seaward side. In addition, he also proposed that set net fishing be prohibited from Great Paternoster to Baboon Point (ie the whole of St Helena Bay). Stephan was quite clear that his plan would entail equal "hardship" for Italians and the seine fishermen on the river¹²⁴. Thus, rather than reviving the set net-trek seine conflict laid to rest in 1909, he claimed to be acting in a non-partisan

¹²¹ *Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, H. Stephan to the Administrator, 23 August 1913.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

fashion to protect the resource and the fishing industry as a whole.

The Stephan Plan, however, while superficially about the diminution in the fish resource, was not primarily concerned with conservation. Timing is crucial to deciphering intent and the Stephan Plan, far from a belated conversion to the need for resource management, was inextricably tied to the firm's transition to crayfish canning at the Bay. In 1913 Stephan Brothers commenced canning crayfish at its new Paternoster factory, processing 52 000 crayfish in just two months of operation in 1913 and 1.7 million fish in its first full season the following year¹²⁵. In 1915 it opened a second factory at Steenberg's Cove¹²⁶. These developments necessitated the creation of a crayfish fishing and factory labour force. The Berg River fisheries represented a potential labour supply in this regard, but one insulated against the proletarianising effects of the set net through its alliance with local agriculture and the legislative protection afforded it by the state. The Stephan Plan aimed to reverse this situation by having the state drive the trek seine fishermen out along the river in the name of conservation. After five years, legislation would no longer matter for the Piketberg seine fishery would have gone the same way as the Malmesbury fishery after 1909. The plan's accompanying prohibition on set net fishing recalled the demands of Carel Stephan twenty years earlier, but with a very different goal in mind. As producers of canned crayfish with substantial investments in plant and machinery, Stephan Brothers needed to

¹²⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\e\3(1), Return showing the number of crayfish captured and the number of boats employed in the capture of such fish during the years 1913 to 1918 inclusive: Stephan Brothers, 19 February 1919.

¹²⁶ Ibid. Also Cape Archives; PAN 40, A 120\e\15, Crayfish Canning Factories, n.d. and PAN 84 (1); A 120\x, General Information Regarding the Fishing Industry Prepared for the Assistant Provincial Secretary, c.1913.

concentrate the precious fishing time during spring and summer exclusively on crayfish. By banning the set net outright from the Bay the Italian fishermen would have no alternative, but to fish for crayfish. The implicit removal of the legislative division which this entailed, further benefitted the firm's crayfish enterprise by allowing unhindered movement of labour and craft in inshore waters. The Stephan Plan was thus a bold attempt to reorganise production across boundaries at St Helena Bay and consequently had little to do with conservation, as the "small men" whose labour power it was ultimately about, all too clearly understood.

In September 1913 a meeting took place at Velddrift farm on the Berg River attended by some 200 fishermen and farmers. The meeting was chaired by F.F. Nimb, local Justice of the Peace and seine fishery owner¹²⁷. The topic of discussion was - "a rumour afloat that certain persons on the Malmesbury side of the Berg River have approached the Government with a petition to close the fisheries"¹²⁸. By September, the Stephan Plan was more than a rumour. The police had canvassed opinion among boatowners and fishermen in late August and the details of the proposal before the provincial state were thus well known¹²⁹. This was clear from Nimb's opening remarks to the assembled throng rejecting the allegations that small fish were destroyed by trek seines in the river and pointing out that a minimum mesh size for seines was laid down by law which prevented such destruction. Other speakers

¹²⁷ "The Berg River - A Question of Fish - Meeting of Protest" in Cape Times, 11 September 1913 and "Fishing in the Berg River - Protest Against Rumoured Closing" in South African News 13 September 1913.

¹²⁸ "The Berg River - A Question of Fish - Meeting of Protest" in Cape Times, 11 September 1913.

¹²⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, Detached Assistant Magistrate Hopefield to the Magistrate Malmesbury forwarding Report by Sergeant Baker on the Protection of Fish in Berg River, 29 August 1913.

dismissed the notion of the river as a breeding ground for sea fish. Freddie Tallie, a prominent boat owner and builder, pointed out that the current in the river was too strong to permit spawning. A certain Mr Pickstone concurred, stating that "The river was so small and the current so strong that wind and current would carry away the eggs if they were all laid in the river, so that it was senseless to allow such an assertion for a moment"¹³⁰. The majority of speakers, however, were less concerned with the rationale behind the planned closure than its implications. There were reportedly "over a thousand souls who had to make a living out of the river" and some 27 boats suitable only for river fishing. The river was also the only place "where a poor man could catch fish with ease and safety" and its threatened closure would result in widespread disaster and starvation¹³¹. Jan Bindeman, a man with 53 years' experience on the river, expressed the disbelief and sense of injustice felt by many of his fellows:

"He said he could not understand why people must oppress one another, nor why the bread should be taken out of the poor man's mouth in such a deceitful way. It was the rich men who now wished to drive out the poor fisherman and where would the poor children obtain their living and their education if the river were closed to these people"¹³².

Gert Visser, a farmer from Paarde Dam who came specially to register his protest, was similarly dumbfounded and "could not believe that the Government would permit such glaring injustice"¹³³. Swept up in a mood of heightened indignation and

¹³⁰ "The Berg River - A Question of Fish - Meeting of Protest" in Cape Times, 11 September 1913.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

anger, the meeting carried a proposal by Nimb, seconded by Tallie, "unanimously amid cheers" which dismissed Stephan's claim that fish bred in the river as "sheer invention" and called on the Government to institute a "thorough enquiry" before taking any action¹³⁴.

The coverage given the Velddrift meeting in the Cape Town press brought the simmering debate about Stephan's proposal into the public arena. At the end of September 1913 a letter appeared on the Cape Times under the nom de plume "A Fishery Preserver"¹³⁵. "Preserver" dismissed the Velddrift gathering as "one of those indignation meetings which happen all over the world whenever any attempt is made to preserve fish" and defied anyone to dispute that the Berg River was a spawning ground and nursery for important commercial species such as harder¹³⁶. Mesh size limits were useless to protect immature fish from capture, he maintained, given the steady increase in fishing pressure on the river. For this reason, closure was the only solution and in "Preserver's" opinion,

"No one who understands fishery matters and who is acquainted with the facts would for a moment hesitate in prohibiting the use of nets in such a nursery for immature fish as the Berg River. That the destroyers of small fish will make an uproar on this subject goes without saying"¹³⁷.

¹³⁴ *Ibid* and Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, P.J. Retief to the Minister of Interior forwarding copy of the Resolution, 16 September 1913.

¹³⁵ Letter from "A Fishery Preserver" on "Preservation of Fish in the Berg River" in Cape Times, 26 September 1913. "Fishery Preserver" was almost certainly Henry Stephan. "Preserver's" argument in favour of closure was a summarised version of Stephan's case as presented to the Administrator in personal correspondence the previous month.

¹³⁶ Letter from "A Fishery Preserver" on "Preservation of Fish in the Berg River" in Cape Times, 26 September 1913.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*.

A month later a similar article endorsing the Stephan Plan appeared in the Afrikaans newspaper Ons Land¹³⁸. The author, who again preferred the anonymity of a nom de plume "J.S.", berated the Government for neglecting its duty to protect a national asset by allowing netting to continue in the river to the detriment of the fish resource. "J.S." also questioned the desirability of river fishing for its practitioners. These were chiefly what he termed "poor whites" who were quite capable of fishing the sea, but "simply wish to keep the river as a back-door when the sea is too rough or if they are unlucky in their catch in the sea, or perhaps when they do not feel inclined to go to the sea"¹³⁹. By refusing to close the river the Government was not only permitting the destruction of vast quantities of immature fish to continue, but also encouraging the "systematic developing of the poor uneducated whites to the level of the coloured people"¹⁴⁰. Closure would thus both protect the fish and "force the strong young men who are growing up along the river to look for a better and more elevated occupation", presumably in the emergent canning industry¹⁴¹.

The provincial state once again found itself in the unwelcome position of arbitrator. As one internal memorandum nervously put it, "out of this multiplicity of statement and conflict of view it is difficult to find a solution, and someone is bound to be

¹³⁸ J.S. "Onze Visserij: Versuim van het Gouvernement" in Ons Land, 30 October 1913 and Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, Provincial Secretary to the Resident Magistrates of Piketberg and Malmesbury, 4 November 1913. Stephan Brothers' hand was once again in evidence here. "J.S." used identical phraseology and argument to that of Henry Stephan and was clearly indebted to them for information if not actual copy. Henry Stephan also felt it appropriate to draw the provincial state's attention to the article.

¹³⁹ J.S. "Onze Visserij: Versuim van het Gouvernement" in Ons Land, 30 October 1913.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

hit by whatever is done"¹⁴². The Berg River fishermen had explicitly demanded a "thorough enquiry" from Cape Town and "Fishery Preserver" singled out Gilchrist as "a gentleman well qualified to advise the authorities" on the matter¹⁴³. In a no-win situation, fearful of a resurgence in the old seine-set net conflict and in need of objective evidence to decide the case, the provincial state requested the magistrates of Malmesbury and Piketberg as well as its Fishery Advisor, Gilchrist, to investigate. The magistrates were the first to visit the Bay in November 1913. They found the old tensions between set netters and seine fishermen still very much alive, which greatly hampered their task as "The evidence given ... varied considerably and the witnesses contradicted each other freely"¹⁴⁴. Faced with such an array of partisan opinion, they relied instead on their own experimental fishing in the river to make their report. On the basis of one trek, they concluded that fish spawned in the river and spent a period of their early life there and that trek seines destroyed large quantities of these fish when used in the river. As they put it:

"to our minds it is immaterial whether fish actually spawn in the river or whether in their earliest infancy take sanctuary there. The river if not the breeding ground is certainly the rearing ground and should be closed to all kinds of nets for a period of three years at least if not permanently"¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴² Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, Memorandum Berg River: Netting in and Near Mouth: Apparent Diminution of Fish Supply, n.d.

¹⁴³ "The Berg River - A Question of Fish - Meeting of Protest" in Cape Times, 11 September 1913 and Letter from "A Fishery Preserver" on "Preservation of Fish in the Berg River" in Cape Times, 26 September 1913.

¹⁴⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, Alleged Diminution of Fish Supply on Piketberg Coast. Protection of Fish in Berg River, Enquiry held at Roode Baai on 21st-24th November 1913, Joint Report by Mr F. Shaw RM of Piketberg and Mr F. Wrensch, RM of Malmesbury, p.1.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.3-4.

They further maintained that "The Berg River fishermen should not suffer too severely" from such a closure as they still had the snoek season, beach trekking and the option of crayfish fishing to subsist on¹⁴⁶. The magistrates thus recommended a permanent prohibition on the use of all nets except seines in St Helena Bay and a three year moratorium on all net fishing in the Berg River and to a mile either side of its mouth. A fishery officer should be stationed at the river to make monthly treks over the three year period to determine whether fish did indeed spawn in the river. If this was proved conclusively then the ban should become permanent. In addition they also advocated further controls on beach seining along the coast, including a larger minimum mesh size, limitations on the length of hauling lines and the imposition of a closed season from 1 September to 31 January each year¹⁴⁷. Their report thus endorsed all the key points of the Stephan Plan and, if implemented, promised the fundamental reorganisation of the Bay fishing economy for the second time in five years.

The provincial state, however, was wary of acting on the magistrates' reports alone, wanting to legitimate any action with scientific proof. For this it looked to Gilchrist. The latter only reached the Berg River in February 1914. Having read the magistrates' report and its recommendations, Gilchrist set about conducting experimental treks of his own. His findings were inconclusive at best and cast serious doubt on the assumptions underpinning both the Stephan Plan and the magistrates' findings. Gilchrist concentrated on the commercially important harder and found no evidence to substantiate the claim that the fish spawned in the river, pointing out that this could only be ascertained with the aid of special nets and a microscope as the spawn was

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.7-9.

invisible to the naked eye. The presence of small harders in the river was also not evidence of spawning, in his opinion, being more likely the result of tide action¹⁴⁸. Despite this, Gilchrist acknowledged that "it is chiefly young immature fish that are caught in the river", but pointed to what he called a "greater source of danger" to the fish resource - the catching of so-called bokkoms in the Bay¹⁴⁹. These were not a small species of harder as was commonly assumed, but immature fish of the same species. Referring to the catch figures supplied by Stephan Brothers, he noted that, "In the matter of the destruction of immature fish the sea fishermen are probably as blamable as the River fishermen"¹⁵⁰. In view of this and the absence of any more reliable statistics, he did not feel able to recommend the closure of the river fisheries on the grounds that they were destroying the fish stock, advocating a size limit for the different fish species or a larger minimum mesh size for nets as more appropriate interim solutions¹⁵¹.

Gilchrist's report discouraged the provincial state from proceeding any further with the Stephan Plan. Its enthusiasm was also sapped by the anticipated resistance of the Berg River communities¹⁵². As the Provincial Secretary cautioned, "[A]ny substantial advance in the direction indicated will create a

¹⁴⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, J. Gilchrist to the Provincial Secretary forwarding his Report on the Alleged Destruction of Fish and Fish Spawn in the Berg River, Piketberg District, February 1914.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p.4.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.5. Also Cape Province Marine Biological Report No.2, 1914 [C.P.6-'14], pp.75-84.

¹⁵² Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, L. Mansergh to the Provincial Secretary forwarding report on South West Coasts: Piketberg and Malmesbury: Alleged Diminution of Fish Supply: Destruction of Immature Fish: Netting in the Berg River, etc, 11 June 1914.

tremendous outcry from practically all affected ... the matter is one of a character which calls for serious consideration and tactful introduction and is a case in which rushing tactics must be avoided"¹⁵³. In keeping with this cautious approach he suggested appointing a fishery officer at Berg River to monitor the situation in the interim¹⁵⁴. Fear of antagonising the vested interests at the river, a lack of scientific evidence and limited funds ensured that nothing further was done on the matter and the Stephan Plan was quietly shelved with the advent of the First World War which imposed new financial constraints on the provincial state's already limited fisheries budget and sparked the biggest boom on the west coast since the heady days of the snoek export trade in the 1870s and 1880s¹⁵⁵. The canned crayfish boom reinforced and entrenched the existing divisions between the Malmesbury and Piketberg fisheries codified in the 1909 balkanisation of the Bay, by concentrating development of a crayfish canning industry on the Malmesbury coast into a few brief years. The rapid growth of factory production along St Helena Bay's southern shore in turn dictated that, rather than dissipate, pressure to abolish the legislative protection afforded the Berg River seine fisheries would intensify in the post war period.

3.3 MERCHANT CAPITAL AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Merchant capital's dominant presence on the west coast during the 19th Century, has readily evoked notions of "empire" in the minds of writers, both contemporary and recent. Vast landholdings,

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Cape Archives: PAN 8; A 120\b\48 (1), Provincial Secretary to the Secretary of the Fishery Advisory Board, 19 January 1916 for the provincial state's wartime budget crisis.*



extensive fleets of fishing boats and cutters and a diversity of interests are all offered as evidence of this fact. The rapid decline of Stephan Brothers' trade monopoly after 1890, however, is suggestive of the fundamental weakness and vulnerability of merchant capital to developments in the national and regional economy over which it had no control by virtue of its location at the level of exchange rather than production. The coming of the railway and the concomitant reorientation of the grain trade in the Malmesbury and Piketberg districts, cut at the very base on which merchant hegemony rested - the underdevelopment of the region as a whole. The isolation of the western coastal districts during the 19th Century underpinned and nurtured the seaborne grain trade. Distance and the absence of an adequate road infrastructure were the key components of this isolation which enabled Stephan Brothers to insert itself into the local economy in parasitic relation to the dominant agricultural interests. In reaction to the loss of trade occasioned by the extension of the line of rail, the firm did its utmost to prevent similar developments from reaching the coastal periphery. It thus resolutely opposed the plans of the Saldanha Bay Development Company for the construction of a port at Saldanha Bay and the establishment of a rail link to the interior.

The underdevelopment of the coastal districts was also crucial to the Stephan Brothers' other chief trade activity - fishing. The rantsoennis trade and the labour needs of the fisheries themselves, depended on a labour intensive agriculture to provide a market and seasonal pool of labour for fishing. The arrival of the railway promised a further intensification of commercial agriculture and increasing mechanisation of production, both of which threatened the rantsoennis market and the fishing labour force. A decline in the number of seasonal farm labourers and their expulsion from the countryside into the urban proletariat translated directly into a shrunken local market for fish and

increasing labour shortages in the merchant fisheries. Stephan Brothers' ability to diversify its fishing interests in the face of the macro-economic changes undermining its trading monopoly was severely hamstrung by its dependence on the Mauritian market and inability to develop the forces of production in the fishery. The former required the active encouragement of infrastructural development in the region, contrary to the firm's trade interests, whereas the latter necessitated the complete immobilisation and full proletarianisation of the fishing labour force, a task that was both beyond merchant capital's capabilities and inimical to its own interests in the fishery. The 19th Century fisheries depended on the seasonal movement of labour into and out of fishing and were tolerated only insofar as they did not disrupt or threaten the labour needs of agriculture and kept the latter provisioned with adequate supplies of cheap rantsoenvis. The complete immobilisation of fishing labour at the coast would have placed merchant capital in direct competition for labour with farming, a showdown it was unable to win because of its lack of access to the levers of regional political power. A proletarianised fishing labour force would have also put an unwelcome debt burden on merchant capital during off-seasons and periods of bad weather or fish scarcity. Dependence on a single fish species for competitive advantage in a highly volatile export market and isolation from alternative local markets made Stephan Brothers acutely susceptible to the combination of resource failure and market contraction which plagued its fishing enterprise in the last decade of the century. In this context it had neither the ability nor the desire to effect the complete proletarianisation of the labour force. The very logic of merchant enterprise also dictated the degree to which it was willing to invest in the fishery, looking to exchange rather than production for profit. The result was the emergence of a commercial fishery based on the partial proletarianisation of a fishing labour force bound to fishing by relations of production

in which the individual fisherman still enjoyed the de facto status of independent producer.

The changed conditions of the 1900s, however, forced Stephan Brothers finally to diversify away from snoek into new areas of commodity production. In seeking to make the transition to crayfish canning, merchant capital remained constrained both by its limited control over production and the rentier interests of Sandveld agriculture in the Piketberg trek seine fisheries. The latter's conservatism derived not from an innate and irrational opposition to modernisation, but out of confluence of diverse economic interests - the rentier income of local farmers, the market share of independent boatowners and the resistance to proletarianisation among the fishermen - all of which were threatened by the new forces of production unleashed at the Bay by the Italian set netters. Legislative protection remained their only defence against the mobility, greater productivity and lower labour costs of the set net and in turn blunted technological innovation in the river fisheries and made the maintenance of such protection ever more vital to their continued survival. These factors forced the firm to rely on the colonial-cum-provincial state for support in seeking to restructure relations of production in the Bay fishery. The state, however, proved a contradictory ally, its support for modernisation counterbalanced by its susceptibility to pressure from local interests via popular representation in Parliament and the Provincial Council. This contradiction culminated in the 1909 balkanisation of the Bay, which - although it facilitated the restructuring of relations of production in the Malmesbury fishery, destroyed the vestiges of labour's residual control over the means of production and the product of labour and cleared the ground for the development of a piece work crayfish fishery - nonetheless left petty-commodity production on the Piketberg side of the Bay largely intact. With the commencement of crayfish canning by

Stephan Brothers in 1913, the captive labour and marine resources of the petty-commodity mode in Picketberg and independence of the Italian boatowners of Malmesbury needed to be subjugated to the demands of factory production. The firm was again forced to turn to the state to overturn the ETSFZ, but with similarly disappointing results. The new provincial authority proved no more willing or able to confront Sandveld agriculture than its colonial predecessor and the Stephan Plan was mothballed. Merchant-cum-productive capital's political weakness and detachment from production thus continued to blunt its revolutionary edge, making it hostage to the petty-commodity mode and subjugating crayfish production to the seasonal rhythms and resource imperatives of the latter. Petty-commodity production remained as a site of alternative employment and accumulation to Stephan Brothers and an increasing brake on the development of productive capital on the periphery in general.

Kay's assertion that,

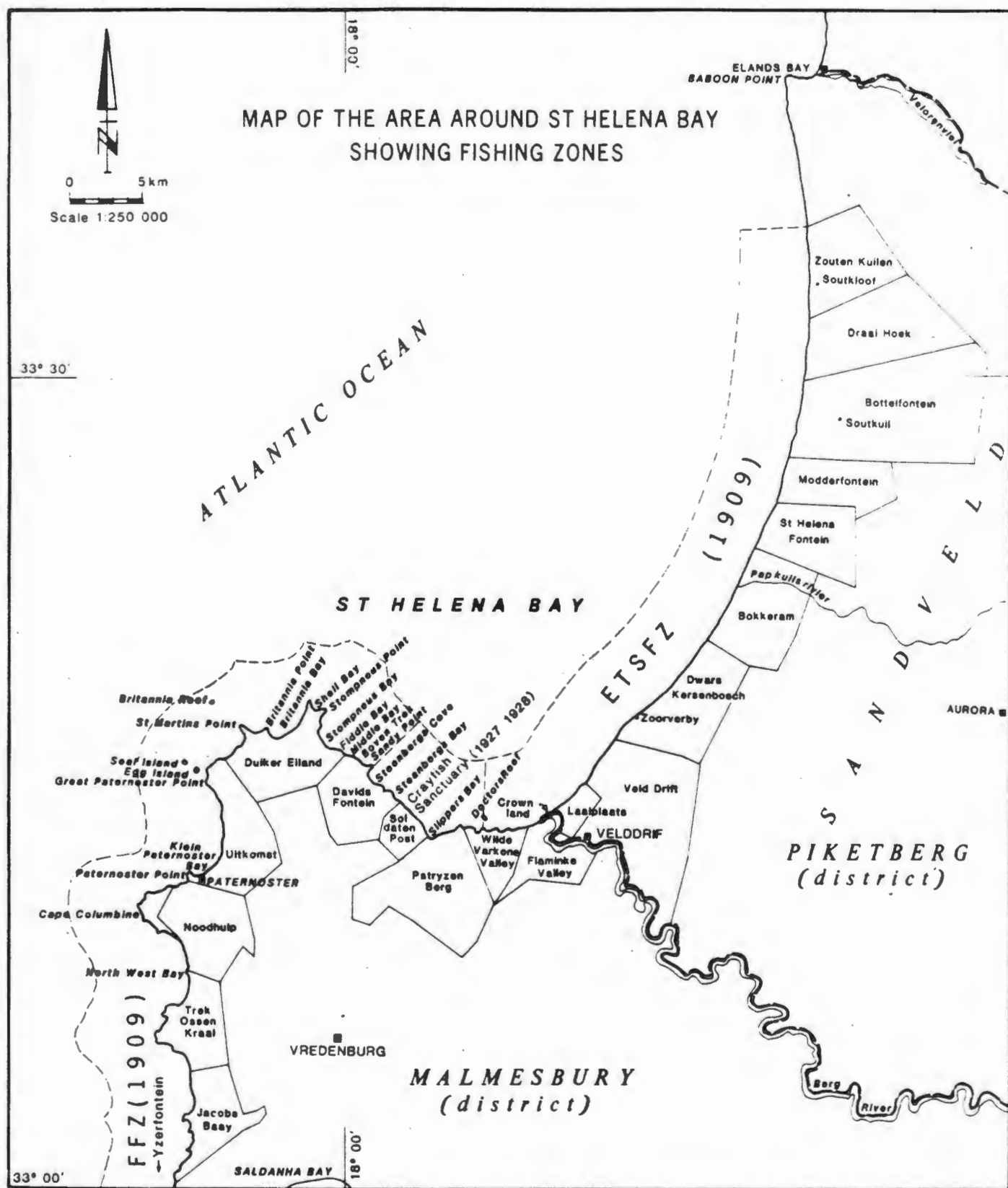
"The history of underdevelopment is the fullest expression we have of [the] contradictory tendencies of merchant capital to both stimulate and repress the development of the forces of production and to both open and block the way for the full development of capitalism"¹⁵⁶,

has the macro-theoretical ring of a law of an abstract process of capitalist expansion. It only has validity, however, when seen in terms of "the particular, historically developed class structures through which these processes actually worked themselves out and through which their fundamental character was actually determined"¹⁵⁷. Merchant capital played a central role in the underdevelopment of the west coast in the 19th Century through

¹⁵⁶ G. Kay Development and Underdevelopment, p.95.

¹⁵⁷ R. Brenner "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism" New Left Review, 104, July-August 1977, p.91.

MAP 2



the "conservative bias" inherent in accumulation through exchange. Its peripheral location and inability to translate economic into political power, however, saw it defeated by organised commercial agriculture at the turn of the century. The very class structures which had sustained merchant accumulation and underdevelopment thus became its prison and forced merchant capital itself, with the aid of the state, to attempt to destroy the petty-commodity mode it helped create and sustain. The political power of Sandveld agriculture and the importance of petty-commodity production to rural accumulation on the coastal fringe, however, blocked this dissolution process at a critical juncture, imparting an unevenness and incompleteness to the process which was to shape and determine the post-1914 development of productive capital at the Bay. The underdevelopment of the west coast was thus neither fixed nor immutable and the corollary of development always possible, but within the constraints of the existing class structure.

II THE CRAYFISH FRONTIER
c.1914 - c.1939

4: THE PERIPHERY REINTEGRATED

The mineral revolution subjugated all modes of production and forms of capital to the demands of mining capital. Mining's hegemony was entrenched and consolidated after the turn of the century, with the end of the South African War in 1902 and Union in 1910. For merchant capital on the Cape west coast this translated into the loss of labour and trade in competition with a burgeoning public works programme and new branch railways, geared to integrating the Cape and Transvaal economies and servicing the need of the mining industry for cheap food and imports.

"To survive as capital it [merchant capital] was forced out of trade directly into the sphere of production; that is, it was forced to act as productive capital openly ... But [merchant] capital could not wipe out its own history and begin as though nothing had happened previously: it was forced to operate in the conditions of underdevelopment which it had itself created"¹.

These conditions were a severe brake on Stephan Brothers' attempts to establish canning production at St Helena Bay, confining it to the Malmesbury coast and erecting a legislative barrier around the labour and marine resources of Piketberg. The advent of the First World War, however, provided nascent manufacturing capital nationally with the space to expand from the isolated beach-heads of the 1900s and forged closer links between merchant and manufacturing capital on an economic and political level².

¹ G. Kay Development and Underdevelopment, p.124.

² B. Bozzoli The Political Nature of a Ruling Class (London, 1981), pp.143-148.

Unlike many of the import substitution industries which emerged during the war, the crayfish canning industry retained its exclusive export orientation and dependence on the French market. While this insulated it against the worst effects of the post-war resumption in foreign competition on the local market and isolated it from the 1920s tariff debate, it made the industry hostage to international developments over which it had even less control. This was underlined by falling prices in Europe after 1922 as a result of political instability in France and growing Japanese competition. The effect of lower prices and mounting competition internationally opened a moving crayfish frontier on the Cape west coast in the 1920s as canners sought to preserve profits by keeping raw material costs low. Relocation, motorisation and a protracted debate over conservation were the main outcomes of this policy, creating an ever widening north-south divide in the industry and prompting the struggling southern canners to try and impose a production quota and minimum price restrictions on the industry as a whole.

Stephan Brothers found it increasingly difficult to adapt to conditions in the post-war industry. Having expanded production during the war with a second factory at St Helena Bay and a third at Lamberts Bay, it rapidly lost ground as the crayfish frontier moved north after 1918. The chief reason for this was its continued trade and rentier interests at the Bay which precluded relocation and kept it tied to a worked-out resource, finally closed to fishing by the provincial state in 1927. The firm thus looked to motorisation to keep it competitive and protect profit margins, but the effectiveness of motorisation was undermined both by the lack of adequate harbour facilities at St Helena Bay and, more importantly, the ETSFZ. The latter starved the crayfish fishery of bait and made it harder for crayfish fishermen to subsist during the ever-more frequent factory closures and lengthening off-season. Stephan Brothers made renewed efforts to

have its 1913 proposals implemented by the provincial state during the war without success. The failure of this and attempts in the 1920s to exploit loopholes in the 1909 legislation forced it to rely on large-scale poaching, in the context of a worsening crayfish scarcity locally and falling prices internationally. The ensuing conflict once again pitted seine fisherman against set netter in a replay of the pre-war dispute, but for higher stakes. Population pressure, a reduced fishing range and a continued resource-crisis made poaching a life and death issue for Piketberg seine fishermen, just as the declining Bay crayfish fishery and the marginalisation of a growing number of fishermen due to motorisation heightened the resolve of their counterparts. The provincial state, without its own police force and facing a deepening budget crisis, proved increasingly unable to hold the circle. The industrialisation of St Helena Bay was thus at best partial and incomplete, with Stephan Brothers unable to dissolve the petty-commodity mode or generalise the piece-work system to the Bay as a whole. This failure and the atrophy of the provincial state by 1929 threatened to consign the Bay canning industry to the margin of the regional and international economies once more.

4.1 THE CRAYFISH BOOM 1914-1918

The crayfish canning industry depended, from its inception, on the food tastes of Europe's new middle classes and by 1913 "the crayfish ... [was] much in demand amongst the *bourgeois* class in Paris"³. It was shipped in unlabelled tins to British agents who distributed it, under their own brand names, to retail outlets on the Continent.⁴ With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914,

³ W. Wardlaw Thompson Sea Fisheries of the Cape Colony, p.86.

⁴ S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast 1874-1947", p.37 ff. and Cape Archives; PAN 84(1), A120\X, General Information Regarding the Fishing Industry Prepared for the Assistant Provincial Secretary, n.d.

the demand and price for canned crayfish boomed on the British and French markets.⁵

TABLE 4.1: Canned Crayfish Exports to Europe 1914-1918⁶

YEAR	UK			FRANCE			% of Exports
	Cases [48lb]	Value [£]	Price Per Case	Cases [48lb]	Value [£]	Price Per Case	
1913	41 632	51 366	25s	13 375	21 463	32s	88.4
1914	52 755	70 879	27s	6 643	11 031	33s	91.8
1915	71 249	87 875	25s	4 504	8 600	38s	89.3
1916	73 581	129 000	35s	1 844	2 741	30s	91.8
1917	45 592	93 595	41s	39 121	72 632	37s	97.7
1918	28 567	80 752	57s	20 033	36 051	36s	96.9
1919	18 102	43 800	48s	61 005	150 536	49s	99.7

This export-led boom resulted in a doubling in the number of canning factories in the Cape by 1918 and a massive increase in fishing pressure on the crayfish resource.⁷ The boom also made itself felt at St Helena Bay, where Stephan Brothers erected a second cannery at Steenberg's Cove in 1915. By the end of the war there were thus three canneries and around 80 boats employed in

⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 39, A 120\5 (4), Hickson and Sons to the Administrator, 8 October 1915.

⁶ Own calculations from data contained in Union of South Africa, Department of Customs and Excise British South Africa, Annual Statements of Trade and Shipping of the Union of South Africa, Southern and Northern Rhodesia and South West Africa, 1913-1919.

⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 38, A120\5 (2), Fishery Board Officer to the Secretary of the Fishery Advisory Board, 16 February 1912; PAN 37, A120\3 (1), Return Showing the Number of Crayfish Captured and the Number of Boats Employed in the Capture of such Fish during the Years 1913 to 1918 and PAN 42, A120\36, Annual Return Showing the Number of Crawfish Caught for use of the Canneries of the Cape Province 1916-1918.

catching and processing crayfish for export⁸. Even the Berg River fishermen were drawn into fishing for the factories and in 1920 there were more than 230 crayfish nets registered to fishermen along the river⁹. By the end of the war the St Helena Bay canneries accounted for 38% of the total industry catch and a third of all exports¹⁰.

TABLE 4.2 Crayfish Fishing at St Helena Bay 1914-1918¹¹

Year	No of Plants	No of Boats	Catch	% of Total	Cfish per Boat	Pack	% of Total
1914	2	40	1 710 311	?	42 757	?	?
1915	3	54	2 993 383	22.9	55 433	?	?
1916	3	67	5 114 849	36.1	76 341	?	?
1917	3	82	5 112 897	35.4	62 352	20 159	25.6
1918	3	77	3 464 546	37.7	44 994	15 298	31.5

? = Data incomplete or unknown.

Stephan Brothers' participation in the wartime boom was made possible by legislative reorganisation of production in the fisheries after 1909, facilitating the incorporation of the set

⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\e\3 (1), Return Showing the Number of Crayfish Captured and the Number of Boats Employed in the Capture of such Fish during the Years 1913 to 1918.

⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 22, A120\e\158, Abstract from Register showing the Numbers and Various Kinds of Nets in use at the different Fishing Stations in the Cape Province during the year 1920.

¹⁰ Cape Archives; PAN 42, A120\e\26, Returns showing the Total Canned Crayfish Pack for the Years 1917-1918 and PAN 37, A120\e\3 (1), Return Showing the Number of Crayfish Captured and the Number of Boats Employed in the Capture of such Fish during the Years 1913 to 1918. The local market was extremely limited and in 1917 the industry sold just 738 cases of canned crayfish in South Africa, dropping to 354 in 1918.

¹¹ Cape Archives; PAN 42, A120\e\26, Returns showing the Total Canned Crayfish Pack for the Years 1917-1918 and PAN 37, A120\e\3 (1), Return Showing the Number of Crayfish Captured and the Number of Boats Employed in the Capture of such Fish during the Years 1913 to 1918.

net and demise of the contact-based snoek and seine fishery. Despite this, the crayfish fishing season remained inordinately brief. In 1915 the firm's crayfish boats managed only 90 days' fishing. The following year this increased slightly to 103 days, but fell back to 80 in 1916 and just 72 days in 1918¹². Thus, for roughly three-quarters of the year, Stephan Brothers' investment in canning plant and machinery stood idle for want of raw material, nor was this unique¹³. Such idleness was enforced on the industry as a whole by a range of factors. The first was the Cape winter which marked the onset of heavy seas on the west coast and the annual snoek migration. Not only were the small oar-powered dinghies and hoop nets used for crayfish fishing unable to operate in the rough seas at the Bay, but the fishermen abandoned crayfish in favour of the more remunerative snoek¹⁴. Also the crayfish moulted annually, shedding its old shell or exoskeleton. The new shell took a period to harden during which time the fish was "soft" and unsuitable for canning¹⁵.

In addition to these "natural" constraints the provincial state imposed legislative limitations on the fishery as well. Heavy fishing of the Table Bay crayfish resource in the 1890s had prompted the colonial state to introduce a minimum size limit, closed season and prohibition on the catching of females in

¹² Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\e\3 (1), Return Showing the Number of Crayfish Captured and the Number of Boats Employed in the Capture of such Fish during the Years 1913 to 1918.

¹³ Ibid. Also Cape Archives; PAN 39, A120\e\5(5), H. Scharnberg to J.G. Reid, 15 January 1918 & Hickson and Sons to the Provincial Secretary, 26 September 1918.

¹⁴ See for example Cape Archives; PAN 38, A 120\e\5 (2), North Bay Canning Company, Steenberg's Cove to the Minister of Agriculture, 28 September 1908.

¹⁵ C. von Bonde and J.M. Marchand "The Natural History and Utilisation of the Cape Crawfish, Kreef or Spiny Lobster", Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Bulletin No.1, 1935.

berry. These measures were retained by the new provincial authorities after 1910¹⁶. By far the most important restriction for the canners was the closed season, designed to allow the resource 2-4 months' respite from fishing each year and timed to coincide with the period when the fish were moulting or in berry. Before 1906 it was assumed that all crayfish moulted and mated at the same time making a single closed season possible¹⁷. In 1906, however, investigations by Gilchrist revealed that the off-season varied at different points along the coast and a uniform closed season hindered canning either by denying fishermen access when the fish were neither soft nor in berry or allowing exploitation when they were breeding or otherwise unsuitable for canning¹⁸. Following Gilchrist's advice, the coast was divided into three fishing areas in 1906, increasing to four in 1915, each with a different closed season¹⁹. The admitted fallibility of the previous legislation sparked a prolonged debate between the canning factories and the provincial authorities over the best time to close fishing in the different areas, with the canners using their representation on the Fishery Advisory Board to pressure the provincial state into making frequent adjustments²⁰.

¹⁶ Cape Province Marine Biological Report No.1, 1913.

¹⁷ Ibid. Also C. von Bonde and J.M. Marchand "The Natural History and Utilisation of the Cape Crawfish, Kreef or Spiny Lobster", Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Bulletin No.1, 1935 and D.E. Pollack "Spiny Lobsters" in A.I.L. Payne and R.J.M. Crawford (eds) Oceans of Life off Southern Africa for the life history of the crayfish.

¹⁸ Cape Province Marine Biological Report No.1, 1913.

¹⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 39, A 120\e\5, Statement Showing Alterations to Crawfish Fishing Season in the Different Areas since 1906, n.d.

²⁰ In 1913 the managing director of the North Bay Canning Company, R.G. Reid, was appointed to the Board and was joined in 1916 by Henry Stephan. The correspondence on the closed season fills all of seven volumes at the Cape Archives and can be found in PAN 38-40, A 120\e\5 (vols.2-7).

The fledgling industry evinced an understandable ambiguity towards the closed season. On the one hand, it was in the canners' interests to protect the resource from overfishing, but on the other they were anxious not to unduly limit the already restricted fishing season²¹. With the spread of canneries along the west coast and the onset of the wartime boom the debate intensified, leading to repeated annual revisions²². The canners especially disputed the dubious scientific data on which the closed season purportedly rested, asserting their own or their fishermen's experience as having equal or greater validity than the occasional experimental haul organised by Gilchrist as the basis for legislation²³. As to whether the closed season fulfilled any useful protective function, the industry was equally sceptical. Some canners went so far as to argue that legislation was unnecessary²⁴. Whatever its dubious conservationary merits, the closed season hampered canning in numerous ways, concentrating production into a few hectic months each year, with detrimental effects on the final product. In 1913 Stephan Brothers alleged that "hurried work is the cause of the large quantity of unsalable Cape crayfish now offering on the European market", explaining that, "The effort to can a large number of fish in a short time invariably leads, we need hardly point out, to hasty work, much of which has to be done at night, undue

²¹ See for example Cape Archives; PAN 39, A120\5 (4), Provincial Secretary to the Members of the Fishery Advisory Board, 5 February 1917.

²² Cape Archives; PAN 39; A 120\5, Statement Showing Alterations to Crawfish Fishing Season in the Different Areas since 1906, n.d.

²³ See for example Cape Archives; PAN 39, A 120\5 (5), John Ovenstone Ltd to the Provincial Secretary, 27 December 1918.

²⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 38, A120\5 (2), North Bay Canning Company, Steenberg's Cove to the Secretary for Agriculture, 4 March 1909; PAN 39, A120\5 (4), Provincial Secretary to the Marine Biological Adviser, 6 October 1915 and PAN 39, A120\5 (5), North Bay Canning Company to the Secretary of the Fishery Advisory Board, 19 September 1918.

pressure on the employees, and does not tend towards a first class production such as we would like to turn out"²⁵. The closed season played havoc with production in other ways too. Unexpected revisions created shortfalls on forward contracts, gave better-informed competitors an unfair advantage for extended fishing and canning and imperilled new investment²⁶. In 1918 Stephan Brothers invested £20 000 in "a new up-to-date and modern factory" at Lamberts Bay on land leased from the government²⁷. The imposition of a closed season on the coast north of St Helena Bay from December 1918 to April 1919 threatened, in Henry Stephan's words, to "cripple and bring disaster" to the new venture²⁸. As the firm explained, the closed season effectively prevented its factory from operating until October 1919, due to north-westerly gales from May to October²⁹. The first year's rent was thus "absolutely wasted" and it would be all of fifteen months before the factory could process its first fish³⁰. Stephan Brothers thus pleaded that "until more official information is known as to the habits of the

²⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 39, A 120\5 (4), Stephan Brothers to the Administrator, 6 December 1913 & 30 December 1913.

²⁶ See for example Cape Archives; PAN 38, A120\5 (3), Hout Bay Canning Company to the Provincial Secretary, 9 August 1913 and PAN 39, A 120\5 (4), Stephan Brothers to G. Ailing, 10 November 1914, Stephan Brothers to the Provincial Secretary, 9 September 1915 & the Provincial Secretary to the Marine Biological Adviser, 6 October 1915.

²⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 39, A 120\5 (5), Stephan Brothers to the Provincial Secretary, 23 December 1918 & Stephan, Lord & Co to the Provincial Secretary, 19 November 1919.

²⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 39, A 120\5 (5), Stephan, Lord & Co to the Provincial Secretary, 19 November 1919.

²⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 39, A120\5 (5), Stephan Brothers to the Provincial Secretary, 23 December 1918.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

fish, and the weather conditions in that locality, no closed season should be made for the year 1919"³¹.

A paucity of scientific knowledge about the resource and the demands of the wartime canning boom combined to frustrate the provincial state's attempts to reach a workable consensus on the closed season and forced it to rely instead on the minimum size-limit ruling to afford the resource a modicum of protection. The first size-limit, imposed in 1893, was set at 3 inches, excluding crayfish caught for bait³². It remained so until 1914 when it was increased to 4 inches and strictly enforced by the police³³. If the canners were opposed to the closed season, the fishermen opposed the size-limit because it undercut their earning power. They were paid per hundred crayfish landed which required them to catch as many fish as possible each trip in order to maximise their earnings. As the fishery officer explained in 1916, this also encouraged them to catch the smallest possible fish:

"The principle reason why the fishermen have vacated Area No. 3 [St Helena Bay], where they were catching very large male and medium sized female crawfish, is that they are paid by the Factories per 100 fish, and as long as they can get the factories to accept their catches they naturally catch and bring in as many fish as their boats will hold, thus fishing in Area 4 [north of Baboon Point] where the fish are on the average much smaller than those in Area 3, the boat's crew are capable of earning a much larger wage per diem"³⁴.

³¹ *Ibid.* Also correspondence in Cape Archives; PAN 39, A120\e\5 (5). Stephan Brothers was not the only company affected; the newly-formed Lamberts Bay Canning Company's factory and that of John Ovenstone Ltd at Port Nolloth were similarly disadvantaged.

³² Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette, Proclamation 453 of 1893, 21 November 1893. The bait provision was subject to widespread abuse.

³³ Cape Archives; PAN 38, A120\e\5 (3), J. Gilchrist to the Provincial Secretary, 22 July 1913.

³⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\e\3 (1), Fishery Officer to the Provincial Secretary, 1 April 1916.

Thus, while the factories wanted large crayfish for canning, the fishermen "were more concerned in catching crawfish just over the legal limit so as to increase the carrying capacity of the boats"³⁵. Stephan Brothers confirmed that,

"The reason why Fishermen go to Seal Island and Paternoster in preference to North West Bay is that in spite of the extra distance they fill their boats very quickly, and being paid by the hundred can load, say, 3\4000 fish as against 1500\2000 large fish from North West Bay"³⁶.

Given the constraints of weather and closed seasons, the size-limit was an added irritant, eroding the fishermen's earning capacity by demanding a degree of selectivity disruptive of established work rhythms and cutting into precious fishing³⁷. Practical considerations also undermined the size-limit's effectiveness. Spiralling wartime demand and a limited fishing season prompted many canneries to work at night. In 1916 it was reported that on the west coast,

"the canneries are working at full pressure day and night and are constantly discharging their boats during night time by the light of a few miserable oil lanterns, the light of which is of little or no use either to the fishermen in the boats or to the men on the jetties in the detection of undersized fish"³⁸.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 39, A 120\e\5 (4), H. Stephan to the Provincial Secretary, forwarding Report by D.C. Burrell, 8 February 1916.

³⁷ See for example "Fishermen Strike: Sequel to Police Court Prosecutions" in *Cape Argus*, 27 July 1914. One of the fishermen interviewed asked, "How can they expect us to fish with a tape measure in our hands ... There are two of us in a boat, each with a dozen nets to attend to, and it is impossible to examine each fish as it is caught and reject those that are too small, especially when it is dark".

³⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A 120\e\3 (1), Fishery Officer to the Provincial Secretary, 1 April 1916.

The degree of company complicity in catching undersized crayfish is difficult to determine and although all the canners denied knowingly accepting undersized fish, they argued that a certain percentage was inevitable, given the size of the catch³⁹. To what extent this was simply due to haste and poor lighting, and to what extent it involved a complicity of silence between management and fishermen is a moot point⁴⁰. Hendrik Brand recalls how the Steenberg's Cove cannery used to fly its flag at half-mast whenever the police were inspecting the factory. The boats would then wait at sea until the flag went up to top mast before coming in to off-load their catches, presumably including a sizable proportion of undersized fish⁴¹. What is clear is that the attempted enforcement of the size-limit provoked a violent backlash from labour. In 1916 the police at Paternoster reported that five fishermen had been apprehended for catching undersized crayfish and a further six summoned for fighting⁴². The latter occurred at Stephan Brothers' other cannery where strict instructions had been issued to the fishermen not to catch or land undersized fish. Henry Stephan reported that, "in carrying out my instructions, the Manager of the Factory last week was savagely attacked by several fishermen, and had his head cut open. Two or three others of the staff were also thrown into the

³⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\e\3 (1), Secretary of the Fishery Advisory Board to the Provincial Secretary, 1 May 1916.

⁴⁰ See for example Cape Archives; 1\HFD, A1\2\3, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Case No.85, Rex versus Alexander Smith, 18 May 1916. Smith was fishery manager at Stephan Brothers' Paternoster cannery and was charged with selling and trading in undersized crayfish. The case was dismissed.

⁴¹ Interview with Mr Hendrik Brand, Velddrift, 19 July 1986.

⁴² Cape Archives; PAN 37, A 120\e\3 (1), Provincial Secretary to the Secretary of the Fisheries Advisory Board, 13 April 1916 and 1\HFD, A1\2\3, Periodical Court Vredenburg, case No.71. The King versus J. Ward, C. Read, W. Williams, S. Manual, C. Williams Jnr, 20 April 1916.

water"⁴³. Such violent reactions and economic self-interest on Stephan Brothers' part no doubt accounts for the dearth of prosecutions at the Bay during the war⁴⁴. For both the provincial state and the canners, therefore, the crayfish legislation had to do with ensuring the longevity of the resource and the continued profitability of the industry, although the canners sometimes lost sight of the latter goal. For the fishermen, on the other hand, the closed season and size limit were direct constraints on income. Crayfish fishing became an increasingly important source of seasonal earnings for the fishermen of St Helena Bay in the wake of the pre-war resource crisis and the balkanisation of the Bay. In this context a process of accelerated class division within the fishing communities produced new faultlines and tensions.

The wartime crayfish boom put a temporary end to the pre-war conflict between Italians and locals. The former were the prime beneficiaries of the new demand for crayfish emanating from the Stephan Brothers and North Bay Canning Company factories. Their cutters and dinghies were well suited to crayfish fishing and, with the exception of the three-month snoek season, they had every incentive to concentrate their fishing effort on crayfish. The market was insatiable, the earnings were higher than the rantsoennis trade and the resource was abundant. The range and mobility of their cutters also allowed them to circumvent the closed season at the Bay by sailing south to fish a month or more

⁴³ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A 120\e\3 (1), Secretary of the Fishery Advisory Board to the Provincial Secretary, 1 May 1916.

⁴⁴ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, A1\2\3, Periodical Court Vredenburg, Criminal Record Book 1914-1919. In all there were just 8 cases involving wartime contraventions of the crayfish regulations relating to the catching and sale of undersized crayfish. These involved 31 fishermen of whom 23 were convicted and fined a total £33. All but one of the cases was heard in 1916.

before the St Helena Bay season opened⁴⁵. Italian involvement in the rantsoennis trade thus dwindled to a few months each year and this, together with the ETSFZ legislation, kept direct competition and conflict with the Piketberg seine fisheries to a minimum.

For the remnants of the contract labour force created by the 19th Century merchant fisheries, the outlook was less favourable. The legalisation of the set net in 1909 all but destroyed the seine fishery along the Malmesbury coast and the snoek fishery had lost its export potential by 1908 and was confined to a brief winter season. The canning factories also offered few employment opportunities for these men. In 1918 the entire industry employed less than a thousand workers, half of whom were female⁴⁶. Factory labour was also an unattractive option with low wages, long hours, poor conditions and seasonal employment⁴⁷. The only alternative was crayfish fishing, not as independent producers, but as piece-workers whose wages depended on the number of fish caught. The factory boats were oar-powered and thus confined to the inshore waters of the Bay, subjecting these fishermen to the closed season and minimum size-limit in a way that the Italian cutters were not. At Steenberg's Cove one observer was told that, "if the fishermen did not poach they would starve", but dismissed this argument, noting that Stephan Brothers

"supply their men with tents to live at Paternoster so that they are within a short distance of Cape Columbine, the dividing point between areas 2 and 3, and can fish at North

⁴⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 39, A120\5 (4), Stephan Brothers to the Administrator forwarding Telegram from C.H. Cook, 4 March 1914, Statement by C.H. Cook, 13 March 1914 & North Bay Canning Company to L. Mansergh, 20 January 1917 for the mobility and range of the Italians.

⁴⁶ Union of South Africa, Office of Census and Statistics Statistics of Production 1923-24 [U.G.35-1926], p.90.

⁴⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 39, A 120\5 (4), Fisheries Officer to the Provincial Secretary, 27 April 1916.

West bay, whence they return to Paternoster and discharge their catches into larger vessels for transport to Steenberg's Cove"⁴⁸.

Reliance on oar- and sail-power invariably reinforced dependence on company credit by making factory fishermen's income directly subject to legal and natural constraints. The snoek season and occasional poaching and beach seining were the sole vestiges of independence still permitted these men, for whom the wartime boom entrenched the loss of control over the means of production and further enmeshed them in the webs of dependence woven by company credit and housing. The boom thus sharpened divisions along the Bay's southern shores between Italian fishermen whose ownership of their own vessels made them independent of direct factory control and locals who had lost independent access to the means of production in the 19th Century and were reduced to being company fishermen, hamstrung by the canners' limited investment in crayfish fishing and working the inshore beds of the Bay with rowing boats. As these crayfish beds were depleted, their incomes fell and their dependence on company housing and credit increased.

The Piketberg fisheries witnessed a similar differentiation process during the war. Many boat owners turned to crayfish fishing with the onset of the wartime boom, but those without access to sea-going vessels or trek seines continued to fish the ETSFZ and the river for the rantsoennis market and subsistence⁴⁹. The failure of the Stephan Plan, the protection of Sandveld agriculture and the crayfish boom ensured that they remained relatively undisturbed within their legislative cocoon, but still

⁴⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 39, A 120\e\5 (5), J. Gilchrist to the Provincial Secretary forwarding the Report by H.A. Hunter, 23 April 1919.

⁴⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 22, A 120\b\158, Abstract from Register showing the Numbers and Various Kinds of Nets in use at the different Fishing Stations in the Cape Province during the year 1920.

vulnerable to the resource crisis which prompted the Stephan Plan. Whatever Stephan Brothers' motives, the inshore fish resources of the Bay had undeniably been depleted by 1914⁵⁰. Even with the easing of competition, catches remained small and uncertain and the seine fishermen relied on working both coast and river to make a living. This brought them into increasing competition with the class of poor fishermen after 1914.

The riverine population increased markedly in the first decade of the century and swelled further during the war⁵¹. The intensification of wheat production in the surrounding agricultural districts after 1914 drove ever-greater numbers of people off the land and onto the farms at the river mouth where they rented a stand and engaged in subsistence fishing and seasonal farm labour⁵². It is in this context that the established trek seine interests at the river launched a concerted and bitter campaign against the so-called "squatter" set net fishermen working the river's backwaters. At issue was control over the riverine fish resource, a matter vital to the continued independence of both classes of fishermen. In 1909 the magistrates of Malmesbury and Piketberg reported the existence of a "poorer class of European who maintains a scanty living by netting etc for food (not commercially) in the River"⁵³. They continued:

⁵⁰ See TABLE 3.4 above.

⁵¹ Compare Cape of Good Hope Statistical Register 1890, p.243; Cape Archives; PAN 61, K 18\19, Fisheries Ordinance 1911, Statistics District Piketberg and PAN 75, K 77\1 Magistrate of Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, forwarding the List of Fishing Boats in the District of Piketberg, 3 January 1914.

⁵² W.J. Talbot Swartland and Sandveld, p.34 ff for the intensification of wheat production in the Western Cape during the war.

⁵³ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, G. Williams and J. Daneel to the Under Secretary for Agriculture, 3 August 1909, p.5.

"These poor people who are without the means of purchasing boats or the expensive trek net, which costs about £70 or £80, are in the habit of setting nets by wading into what are known as the 'plaaten' or 'flats' on each side of the main channel, the fish caught being used by them for food purposes"⁵⁴.

A river set net cost 10s-£3 and was used, without a boat, on the river's backwaters, where the depth of water was only a few feet⁵⁵. These backwater fishermen reminded one observer of the woodcutters of the George and Knysna forests in their determination to "work only when they are forced to"⁵⁶. Nor did they confine themselves to fishing, but, as the farmers on the river complained, they "disturb, destroy and kill every water fowl, wild duck and eatable bird they come across"⁵⁷. Their modus operandi was summed up by the local constable who reported that "the man that selects the river for fishing ... prowls about it all by himself ... sometimes tak[ing] a small boy with him and searches the river for miles in every hoek and corners [sic] until he makes a catch"⁵⁸. It was this "prowling about" which alarmed local landowners and seine fishermen, making the activities of the subsistence fishermen impossible to control⁵⁹. For the seine fishermen control was essential because illegal

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, J. Paxton to the Provincial Secretary, 2 August 1915 and TABLE 3.3.*

⁵⁶ *Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, Magistrate of Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, 27 February 1919.*

⁵⁷ *Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, J.N. Townsend to the Resident Magistrate Piketberg, April 1922.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, J.N. Townsend to the Resident Magistrate Piketberg, 19 March 1922.*

fishing was "irresistible and owing to the remote position of the shallows can be done with impunity"⁶⁰.

As a result, relations between the seine and subsistence fishermen were strained if not openly hostile. In 1909 the magistrates reported a "heated argument" between the two groups over the seine fishermen's demand, made "in a somewhat churlish spirit", that subsistence fishermen be banned from fishing the river's backwaters⁶¹. The intervention of "some of the leading men of the community" forced this demand to be withdrawn⁶². Two years later, however, W.A. Kotze asked that the river be closed to set nets for five years to prevent them being spanned across the river or placed in the main channel⁶³. While primarily aimed at the Italians, Kotze also identified eleven locals as among the guilty parties⁶⁴. The local MLA, M.J. de Beer, and Piketberg general merchant, produce buyer and MPC, J. Dommissie, again saw to it that the interests of these locals were protected after Kotze succeeded in having the river closed to set net fishing⁶⁵. "[A] good deal of pressure [was] brought to bear" on the provincial state by the two politicians to ensure that the

⁶⁰ Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, Magistrate of Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, 27 February 1919; W.A. Kotze to the Administrator, 12 February 1912 & Fisheries Officer to the Provincial Secretary, 4 September 1916.

⁶¹ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, G. Williams and J. Daneel to the Under Secretary for Agriculture, 3 August 1909, p.5.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, W.A. Kotze to the Administrator, 29 September 1911 and 12 February 1912 & Fishery Board Officer to the Provincial Secretary, 9 October 1911.

⁶⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, W.A. Kotze to the Administrator, 12 February 1912.

⁶⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, Daniel Groenewald to M. de Beer, 22 May 1912, F.F. Nimb to M. de Beer, 24 May 1912 & *Precis of Correspondence Dealing with Netting in the Berg River*, n.d.

backwaters were left open for set net fishing⁶⁶. The increasing fishing pressure on resources, coupled with seasonal droughts which lowered the water-level in the river and exposed the flats, made the 1912 settlement the subject of ever more heated debate after 1914, as competition for the fish resources of the river intensified. At issue was the definition of a backwater, with both sides attempting to secure exclusive access to as much of the river as possible⁶⁷. The issue was given added importance by Henry Stephan's continuing attempts to close the river to all fishing. Stephan was appointed to the Fisheries Advisory Board in 1916 and immediately revived his 1913 plan in the hope of using the Board as a lobbying forum to pressure the provincial state⁶⁸. The Board endorsed Stephan's proposals in May 1917, but the following year the local magistrate reported an "unanimous opinion" at Berg River opposed to closure⁶⁹. This opposition again dissuaded Cape Town from attempting to close the fisheries⁷⁰.

The revival of the Stephan Plan polarised the internecine squabble between seine and subsistence fishermen, however, with the latter accusing the former of destroying immature fish in

⁶⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 69, K 59\3, Memorandum Berg River: Netting in and Near Mouth: Apparent Diminution of Fish Supply, n.d and Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette, Regulation 160 of 1912, 16 July 1912.

⁶⁷ See Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, for the lengthy and detailed correspondence on the wartime conflict between seine and subsistence fishermen at the river.

⁶⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, J. Dommissie to the Provincial Secretary forwarding the Petition of Voters and Persons Interested in the Division of Piketberg, Wards 4 and 5, Groot Berg River, 24 November 1916.

⁶⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, Magistrate of Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, 21 May 1918.

⁷⁰ It was not fishermen sentiment alone which swayed the state. Gilchrist called the Plan "excessive and beyond any legislative reasons in any other country". See Cape Archives: PAN 68; K 59\1, J. Gilchrist to the Provincial Secretary, 11 June 1917.

treks along the river⁷¹. The provincial state, after attempting to accommodate the riverine set netters by beaconing-off some backwaters for their use, gradually lost patience. By 1919, the local magistrate "strongly recommend[ed] no further concessions be granted to set netters who are few in number"⁷². In a reassessment of past policy he noted that the reason for allowing them access to the river was "purely philanthropic" and, in his opinion, a mistake⁷³. They had increased in number, creating an escalating conflict with seine fishermen. "Indolence" alone kept them from sea fishing and, "If they cannot afford to buy expensive trek nets they could make a capital living by sharing with others"⁷⁴. A firm attitude was required to stop these "useless importunities", he ventured, failing which, set netting should be "entirely prohibited" in the river⁷⁵. The provincial state agreed and the new hardline approach was endorsed by the Advisory Board in July 1919⁷⁶. Henry Stephan labelled further concessions to subsistence fishermen "an incentive to pauperisation" and J.G. Reid warned against "the making of more poor whites"⁷⁷. Despite this, the subsistence fishermen remained a

⁷¹ Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, Magistrate of Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, 21 May 1918.

⁷² Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, Magistrate of Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, 14 April 1919.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, Provincial Secretary to the Secretary Fisheries Advisory Board, 25 June 1919, Extract from Minutes of Meeting of Fisheries Advisory Board, 10 July 1919 & Secretary of the Fisheries Advisory Board to the Provincial Secretary, 11 July 1919.

⁷⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, Extract from Minutes of Meeting of Fisheries Advisory Board held at the Huguenot Buildings, 10 July 1919.

thorn in the flesh for several years after the war⁷⁸. As late as 1920 the local constable reported that a "strong feeling of Bitterness and Jealousy" still persisted between the two groups⁷⁹.

The wartime crayfish canning boom thus had far-reaching effects on the whole St Helena Bay fishing economy. It created new seasonal accumulation opportunities for private boat owners alongside rantsoennis and the winter snoek season, inducing owners of cutters and decked sailing craft from both sides of the Bay to include crayfish fishing in their expanded repertoire of petty-commodity production. They were, however, a minority. For the majority of company fishermen along the southern shores of the Bay, the boom confirmed the demise of the seine fishery on the Malmesbury coast and forced them to sea in open boats to fish for crayfish. The demands of the piece-work system and their vulnerability to natural and legislative constraints on production by virtue of their non-ownership of the means of production, reinforced their dependence on company credit and housing. At Berg River, those fishermen without ownership or access to sea-going boats continued to work the ETSFZ and river with seines and set nets. The pre-war loss of trekking grounds to the south of the river and wartime expansion of the crayfish fishery forced the seine fishermen to rely on a much restricted fishing range and made the river a vital adjunct to the sea in the context of a continued resource scarcity. This created increasing conflict after 1914 between seine netters and the "poorer class" of subsistence fishermen over access to the

⁷⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, Provincial Secretary to the Secretary of the Fisheries Advisory Board, 7 June 1920, J.N. Townsend to the Resident Magistrate Piketberg, 19 March 1922 & the Provincial Secretary to the Secretary of the Fisheries Advisory Board, 24 July 1922.

⁷⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 68, K 59\1, J.N. Townsend to the Resident Magistrate Piketberg, 19 March 1922 & J.N. Townsend to the Resident Magistrate Piketberg, April 1922 and Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 181 of 1922, 25 August 1922.

riverine resource. The seine fishers succeeded in establishing the primacy of their claim to the river with the aid of the provincial state. The latter remained unwilling to risk open conflict with the seine fishermen and again balked at implementing the Stephan Plan, despite its endorsement by the Fisheries Advisory Board. The process of accelerated class division under way in the Piketberg fisheries during the war was thus conditioned by the canning boom along the Malmesbury coast and the attempts of the seine fishers to preserve independent commodity production at the river from the corrosive effects of the latter. Their success can be gauged from the fact that, when the crayfish frontier began moving north in 1918, it by-passed Piketberg entirely, leap-frogging to Lamberts Bay and Port Nolloth. The seasonal nature of crayfish fishing, its co-existence with other kinds of petty-commodity production and the interchange of labour and craft, however, made the seine fisheries vulnerable to unseasonal incursions into both resources and markets by crayfish fishermen. While the boom lasted this was not a threat, but when the boom faltered in the early 1920s, it became an ever present reality, initiating a new wave of conflict at the Bay.

4.2 A TROUBLED NEW ORDER

The wartime canning boom continued until the early 1920s, sustained by the increasing price of canned crayfish in France - nearly doubling from 36s per case in 1918 to a record 71s in 1922⁸⁰ - and growing interest nationally in the development

⁸⁰ See TABLE 4.5 below.

potential of the Union fisheries⁸¹. This post-war euphoria was short-lived, however, giving way to a distinct downturn in the canning industry after 1922.

TABLE 4.3: Canned Crayfish Exports to France, 1918-1929⁸²

Year	Cases [48lb]	Value [£]	Price Per Case	% of Exports
1918	20 034	36 051	36s	39.9
1919	61 005	150 536	49s	76.9
1920	64 395	224 341	70s	86.1
1921	52 850	170 948	65s	89.4
1922	65 634	233 305	71s	79.1
1923	47 951	168 142	70s	76.8
1924	53 214	159 064	60s	71.6
1925	59 278	156 394	53s	66.3
1926	35 696	93 550	52s	52.3
1927	42 542	119 584	56s	59.9
1928	64 006	161 800	51s	75.7
1929	65 270	163 838	50s	74.2

Political instability in France, frequent devaluations of the French franc and growing competition from Japanese canned crab eroded price levels and the Union industry's position in the

⁸¹ See R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, pp.50-55; "The Fishing Industry of South Africa" in South African Journal of Industries [SAJI], 2, 10, October 1919; H. Warrington Smyth "The South African Fisheries Survey" in SAJI, 3, 8, August 1920; J.D.F. Gilchrist "The Fish and Fisheries of South Africa" in SAJI, 4, 2, February 1921; J.F. Dunn "The Fishing Industry of the Union and Its Possibilities" in SAJI, 4, 5, May 1921; "The Fishing Industry of the Cape Coast" in SAJI, 5, 7, July 1922; "The Fishing Industry of the Natal Coast" in SAJI, 5, 9, September 1922; K.R. Thomas "Fishing Possibilities of the South West African Coast" in SAJI, 6, 10, October 1923; J.D.F. Gilchrist "Fish and Fisheries of South Africa" in SAJI, 7, 2, February 1924; F.H. Sibson "The Crawfish Industry" in SAJI, 8, 6, June 1925 and "Development of the Fishing Industry" in Industrial South Africa, 221, 20, September 1925.

⁸² Union of South Africa, Department of Customs and Excise British South Africa, Annual Statements of the Trade and Shipping of the Union of South Africa, Southern and Northern Rhodesia and South West Africa, 1918-1929.

French market⁸³. The price of canned crayfish slumped - falling steadily from the high of 71s in 1922 to a mere 50s a case by 1929⁸⁴. At home the wartime boom severely depleted the crayfish beds of the Peninsula, causing the Cape canneries' share of the catch to collapse from 8 million crayfish (60%) in 1915 to 4 million in 1920 (26%) and a paltry 1 million by 1928 (8.5%)⁸⁵. This forced many companies to relocate to sites as far north as South West Africa or go out of business⁸⁶ and sparked the motorisation of the fishing fleet⁸⁷. These developments, in turn, frustrated provincial state attempts to reach consensus on the closed season and allowed the confusion over resource management to drag on until 1927⁸⁸. Relations between the industry and the

⁸³ S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast", pp.50-51; R. Lees *Fishing for Fortunes*, p.67 ff.; Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.3, 1922, p.ii; Cape Archives; PAN 41, A120\24(2), F.H. Sibson to the Secretary Crawfish Survey Committee, 30 November 1925, pp.4-5 and PAN 40, A120\5(6), A.L. Brown to the South African High Commissioner London, 17 March 1925.

⁸⁴ See TABLE 4.3 above.

⁸⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\3(1), "Return Showing the Number of Crawfish Captured and the Number of Boats Employed in the Capture of such fish During the Years 1913 to 1918 inclusive"; PAN 42, A120\36, "Annual Return Shewing the Number of Crayfish Caught by the Canning Companies of the Cape Province During the Year ending 31 December 1920" and FDS 12, FS 8\6\1, Return headed "Crawfish - 1928".

⁸⁶ R. Lees *Fishing For Fortunes*, pp.68-73; Cape Archives; PAN 42, A120\36, Annual Returns Shewing the Number of Crayfish Caught by the Canning Companies of the Cape Province During the Years 1916-1921 and Union of South Africa, Office of Census and Statistics, Statistics of Production [U.G.35-1926, U.G.32-1928, U.G.18-1930 and U.G. 44-1930,].

⁸⁷ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.4, June 1923-June 1925, pp.v-vi and pp.ix-x; Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.5, 1927, p.8; Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.6, 1928, p.12 and Cape Archives; PAN 41, A120\24(2), Hickson and Sons to the Provincial Secretary, 9 April 1925.

⁸⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 39, A120\5, vols. 5-8 for the full debate and FDS 4, MIC 178\24, "Diary" of the Crawfish Observer F.H. Sibson, 1-10 October 1924 for a revealing, sample of industry opinion about the crayfish closed season.

provincial authorities were further strained by the imposition of a controversial provincial tax on canning company profits in 1922⁸⁹. The canners' attempts to offset this by fostering closer ties with the central state bore little fruit⁹⁰. The combined effect of provincial state indifference and central state vacillation further constrained production and eroded already shrinking profits without providing the industry with the research, infrastructure and control it desired.

Instead, a growing north-south divide appeared in the industry, shaped by the impact of raw material availability on production costs in the context of a declining price in France⁹¹. The industry was split between the area of high production costs in the Cape Peninsula and low costs on the west coast, north of St Helena Bay⁹². By the late 1920s the northern canners enjoyed a profit per case of around 15s while their southern counterparts

⁸⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 42, A120\e\31 and PAN 4, CFT2. Also "Cape Provincial Taxation - Crayfish Canning Co's Action - Test Case in Supreme Court" in Cape Times, 3 February 1921; "The Provincial Taxation - Canning Company's Action - Important Judgement in Supreme Court" in Cape Times, 14 April 1921; "Tax on Canning Companies - Decision of Appellate Court - Administrator's Appeal Fails" in Cape Times, 7 July 1921; "Taxing Crayfish Profits - Provincial Executive's Bombshell - Canners Aghast at Proposal" in Cape Times, 5 December 1921.

⁹⁰ Cape Archives; FDS 4, MIC178\24, Secretary Fisheries Survey Committee to the Chairman Fisheries Survey Committee, 22 April 1924, Chairman Fisheries Survey Committee to John Ovenstone et al, 1 September 1924, Minutes of Meeting between Secretary for Mines and Industries and Representatives of the Crayfish Canning Industry, 9 September 1924 & Minutes of Meeting between Secretary for Mines and Industries and Representatives of the Crayfish Canning Industry, 22 April 1925.

⁹¹ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.12, 1934, p.6 and State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Department of Mines and Industries, "Report of Cost Accountant for Board of Trade and Industries: The South African Crayfish Canning Industry", 16 November 1931, pp.6-8.

⁹² State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Department of Mines and Industries, "Report of Cost Accountant for Board of Trade and Industries: The South African Crayfish Canning Industry", 16 November 1931, Table IV, pp.7-7a.

struggled just to break even⁹³. With the increase in Japanese canned crab on the French market after 1925, the northern canners began price-cutting to fend off competition and protect their market share⁹⁴. The southern canners, dependent on a high price in France to show a profit, were unable to follow suit and faced bankruptcy⁹⁵. In a bid to stabilise the market and protect their vulnerable profit margins, they formed the South African Lobster Canners Association (SALCA) in 1928 with the dual policy of a production quota and a minimum price in France (initially set at 60s per case)⁹⁶. The SALCA's effectiveness was jeopardised by the refusal of the largest canner - the North Bay Canning Company - to join the Association, but, despite this setback, its first year was a relative success and the industry appeared to have weathered the crisis of the 1920s without the assistance of either the provincial or central state⁹⁷.

The macro-crisis of the 1920s was reflected in microcosm at St Helena Bay. In the heady years immediately after the war Stephan

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.18. Also Cape Archives; FDS 12, FS 8\6\1, Secretary Fisheries Survey Committee to the North Bay Canning Company, 29 August 1928 and State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), C. von Bonde to the Chairman Board of Trade and Industries, 28 November 1930, forwarding articles from *Commercial and Industrial Gazette*, June 1928 and "South African Industry: How Japanese Product is Proving a Menace" *Fishing News*, 8 November 1930.

⁹⁵ For a nonsensical explanation of price cutting as beneficial to and initiated by smaller canners, see S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast, 1874-1947", p.60.

⁹⁶ State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Stephan Brothers to the Chairman Board of Trade and Industries, 30 October 1928 & SALCA to the Chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries, 31 October 1928.

⁹⁷ State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Department of Mines and Industries, "Report of Cost Accountant for Board of Trade and Industries: The South African Crayfish Canning Industry", 16 November 1931, pp.13, pp.15-16 & Table VI, p.17 and HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), C. von Bonde, "Memorandum on the Proposed Re-Establishment of a Closed Season for Crawfish", 1 May 1931.

Brothers initiated an ambitious expansion programme in anticipation of a continued high price in Europe. The firm brought two American canning experts out to St Helena Bay to assist with operations, launched itself as a limited company, opened a new factory at Lamberts Bay, split the general dealership from the canning side of the business and set up a can-making factory in Cape Town to supply its west coast canneries⁹⁸. With the downturn in prices in France in 1922, however, the firm's canning operations contracted, leading to the abandonment of the ill-fated Lamberts Bay factory in 1921, the evaporation of Consolidated Goldfields' interest in 1924 and the dissolution of the limited company in 1925⁹⁹. A proposed merger between the Hout Bay and North Bay Canning Companies and Stephan Brothers also fell through¹⁰⁰. Instead, both Stephan Brothers and the North Bay Canning Company found themselves straddling the growing north-south divide in the industry. From being the furthestmost canning outpost in 1914, St Helena Bay was rapidly overtaken by the shifting crayfish frontier after 1918 as it leap-frogged up the west coast. The Bay's wartime catch figures already showed tell-tale signs of a declining local crayfish resource and by 1926 the North Bay Canning Company's Steenberg's Cove factory manager reported that:

"originally good-sized fish could be found in large numbers in the bay, but that in recent years the size has decreased, till now nothing but undersized fish and fish on the edge of the size-limit are obtainable"¹⁰¹.

The following year, the provincial state, well aware that St

⁹⁸ E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga", pp.91 ff.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.101 ff. Also R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.66.

¹⁰⁰ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, pp.71-72.

¹⁰¹ Cape Archives; PAN 41, A120\e\24(2), F.H. Sibson to the Secretary of the Crawfish Survey Committee, 13 April 1926 and TABLE 4.3 above.

Helena Bay was "almost entirely stocked with undersized fish"¹⁰² and set on abandoning the closed season, proclaimed the southern waters of the Bay a crayfish sanctuary permanently closed to all fishing¹⁰³. This confirmed the demise of the local crayfish fishery and in 1927 the North Bay Canning Company closed its Steenberg's Cove factory and shipped the plant north to Thorn Bay¹⁰⁴. Stephan Brothers, however, did not follow suit. Although it temporarily shut its Steenberg's Cove plant as early as 1924, it continued canning at its Paternoster factory, utilising crayfish caught between 15 and 40 miles distant from the Bay¹⁰⁵.

Stephan Brothers' decision was doubtless influenced by the failure of its earlier Lamberts Bay venture, as well as its landholdings and other "mercantile" interests at the Bay, all of which mitigated against relocation and reinforced the inherent resistance to change in what remained a quintessential family firm¹⁰⁶. Instead, it attempted to offset the effects of a worsening crayfish scarcity by lobbying for a more sympathetic resource management strategy and experimenting with new fishing

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 15 of 1918, 13 February 1918 and Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 9 of 1927, 6 January 1927. The southern shores of St Helena Bay were first proclaimed a sanctuary and closed to fishing in 1918, but this legislation was totally ineffective and ignored by both fishermen and canning companies. The Bay was re-proclaimed in 1927.*

¹⁰⁴ *R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.72 and S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast, 1874-1947", pp.59-60.*

¹⁰⁵ *Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\e\5(6), Stephan Brothers to the Provincial Secretary, 25 March 1924 & 8 April 1924 and 1\HFD, 7\1\4, Petition of A. Dipaola et al to the Magistrate of Hopefield, 10 October 1932.*

¹⁰⁶ *E. Rosenthal "The Stephan Saga", p.96 and Cape Archives; 1\HFD, 7\1\7, 15\1\2\4, Magistrate Hopefield to the Provincial Secretary, 13 April 1922. The firm retained a 100 foot strip of land above the crown land reserve during the sell-off of its coastal farms in the first two decades of the 20th Century.*

technologies. Henry Stephan had been a strong advocate of the closed season during the war, but his enthusiasm was tempered by the failure of the firm's Lamberts Bay cannery due to provincial state intransigence over the closed season¹⁰⁷. The wartime practice of proclaiming different closed seasons for each part of the coast became untenable after 1918 as factories relocated to unsurveyed waters further north and motorisation gave the fleet an increased fishing range. The provincial state thus favoured a return to the old uniform closed season, but agreement on exact dates remained elusive. In the absence of scientific research, the industry contested all the provincial state's proposals, severely straining relations after 1920¹⁰⁸. The canners were further angered by Cape Town's refusal to use the revenue generated by its canning profits tax for research on the closed season and turned to the central state for assistance¹⁰⁹. Pretoria had resumed the marine survey in 1920 to prove new deep water trawling grounds, but although sympathetic to the problems of the canning industry, was of little practical help¹¹⁰. The industry thus agreed to fund its own "crayfish survey" in 1925, but by 1928 it had run out of funds and failed to produce any new

¹⁰⁷ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, pp.43-47 and Cape Archives; PAN 39, A 120\e\5 (5), Stephan Brothers to the Provincial Secretary, 23 December 1918 & Stephan, Lord & Co to the Provincial Secretary, 19 November 1919.

¹⁰⁸ For the full debate see Cape Archives; PAN 39, A120\e\5, vols. 5-8.

¹⁰⁹ See for example Cape Archives; FDS 4, MIC178\24, Minutes of Meeting between Secretary for Mines and Industries and Representatives of the Crayfish Canning Industry, 9 September 1924 and State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Stephan Brothers to the Minister of Justice, 11 September 1930 & Stephan Brothers to the Chairman Board of Trade and Industries, 30 September 1930.

¹¹⁰ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.1, 1920 and Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.6, 1928, p.6.

evidence on the closed season¹¹¹. With Gilchrist's death in 1926, the Fisheries Survey Division [FSD] was restructured and control over the industry began to shift away from the provincial state¹¹². The new-look FSD was more amenable to the needs of the canners and instrumental in moving Cape Town to abolish the closed season in 1927, relax the legal size-limit in 1929 and block the erection of new canneries after 1930¹¹³.

Stephan Brothers' sustained attempts at easing state regulation of the crayfish fishery complemented its introduction of new fishing technology at the Bay after 1920 to shore up flagging catches. In 1922 the firm imported a Danish seine and power winch from Europe to circumvent the effects of the ETSFZ on bait acquisition¹¹⁴. In 1924 it implemented a crate system for transporting crayfish from distant grounds to the Bay canneries and in 1925 considered importing lobster pots to extend the

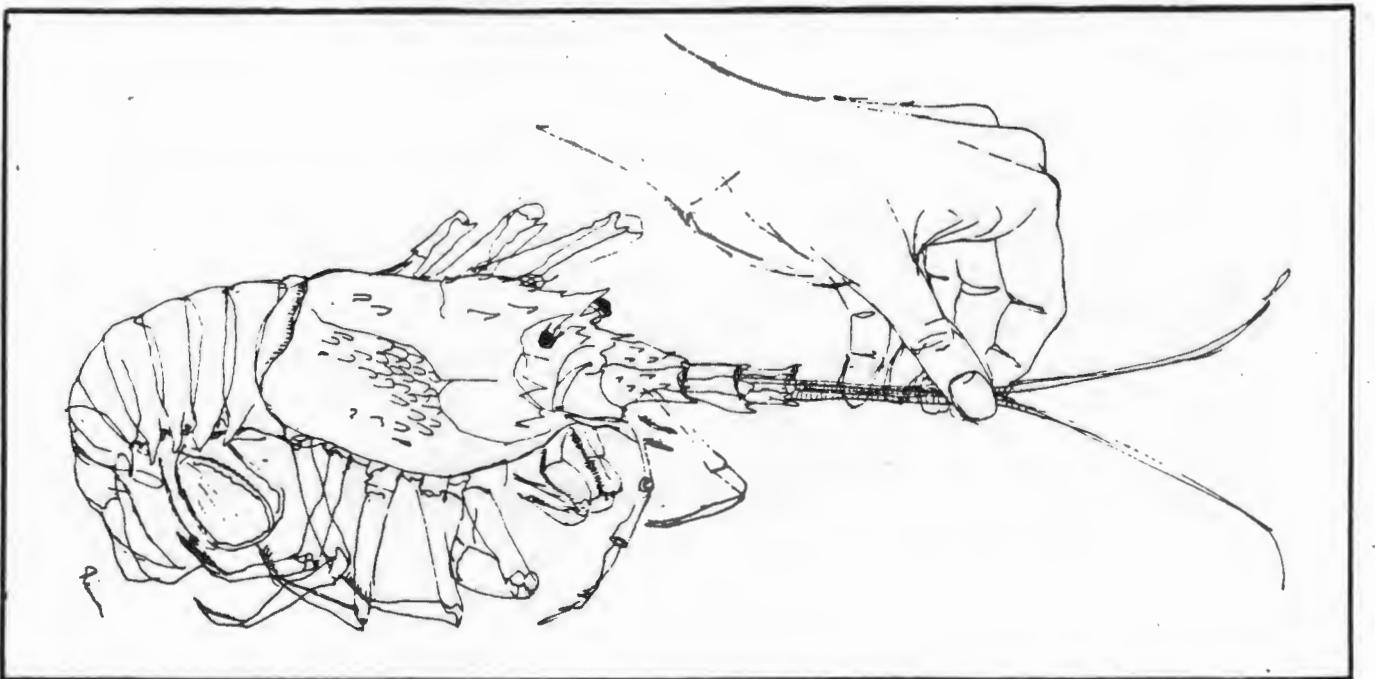
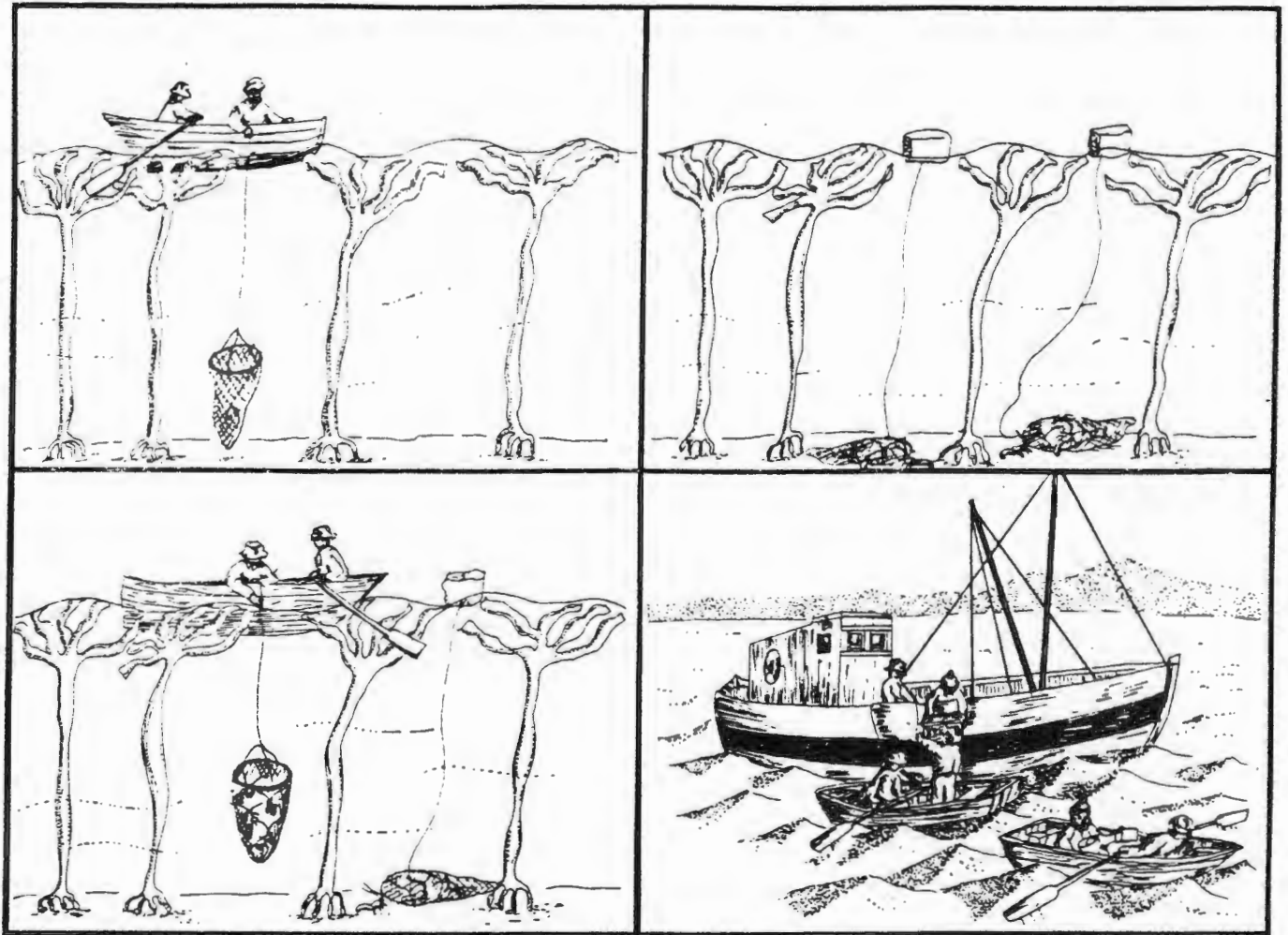
¹¹¹ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.6, 1928, p.8 and Cape Archives; FDS 3, MIC 169\25 vols.1 & 2, F.H. Sibson, Crawfish Survey Monthly Reports, 1924-1926.

¹¹² Union of South Africa Debates of the House of Assembly, 13 February to 15 April 1925, vol.3, cols.458-480; Union of South Africa, Fishing Harbours Committee, General Observations and Conclusions in respect to the Fishing Industry of the Cape Province, 1927, pp.80-85; Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.7, 1929, pp.4-10; Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.8, 1930, p.4; Cape Archives; PAN 26, A120\b\305 vols.1-2 and State Archives; HEN 1499, 180\1\7(1).

¹¹³ Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\e\5(8), C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 10 March 1927, forwarding "Report on the Desirability or Otherwise of a Close Season for Crawfish"; PAN 37, A120\e\3(3), C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 5 February 1929 and State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), C. von Bonde to the Chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries, 28 November 1930.

¹¹⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 25, A120\B\206, Stephan Brothers to the Secretary of the Fishery Board, 7 November 1922. The Danish seine resembled the trek seine, but was worked from a boat out at sea with the aid of a power winch.

DIAGRAM 4: CRAYFISH FISHING



crayfish fishing effort out to deeper waters¹¹⁵. The latter plan was abandoned because the currents on the west coast were too strong to allow pots to be set. Lastly, the firm turned to motorisation to extend its fishing range to new distant grounds beyond Lamberts Bay¹¹⁶. It purchased a number of motorised fishing craft in the early 1920s, but with disappointing results, as Henry Stephan explained in 1926:

"[T]he difficulty ... was that 40 to 50 ton [motor]boats were required and as there were no facilities for slipping boats of this size if anything went wrong with them, people were unable to use them. He at one time owned a number of motor boats, but owing to difficulties which he had had with them, he had scrapped pretty well all of them. Pulling these types of boats on to the shore strained them"¹¹⁷.

The paucity of adequate harbour and maintenance facilities exacted a heavy toll on motor vessels and acted as a brake on motorisation along the entire west coast¹¹⁸. For this reason, the firm followed the industry trend of encouraging and assisting private boat owners who fished for its factories to install paraffin engines on their boats at a cost of around £950, thereby

¹¹⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\5(6), Stephan Brothers to the Provincial Secretary, 17 July 1924 and FDS 3, MIC 159\25, F.H. Sibson to the Secretary Fisheries Survey Committee, 26 June 1925 & F.H. Sibson to the Secretary Fisheries Survey Committee, 20 July 1925. Crayfish often arrived dead at the factory after hours in the boat hold. The crate system attempted to keep the fish alive in crates submerged in the sea immediately after capture until canning.

¹¹⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\24(1), Minutes of Meeting of Fisheries Advisory Board, 5 February 1918.

¹¹⁷ Cape Archives; FDS 17, FS36, Notes of Interview between Mr H.J.C. Stephan (Messrs. Stephan Bros., Cape Town) and Captain H. Scharmberg (Saldanha Bay Canning Co.), and the Fishing Harbours Committee, 18 May 1926.

¹¹⁸ Union of South Africa, Report of the Fishing Harbours Committee, Part III, 1926 and Fishing Harbours Committee, General Observations and Conclusions in respect to the Fishing Industry of the Cape Province, 1927, pp.76-77.

lessening its own risk while still reaping the benefits of a motorised fleet and an extended fishing range¹¹⁹.

Stephan Brothers' refusal to relocate, coupled with the indifference of the provincial and central states and the failure of new fishing technology and motorisation to lift catches, saw the company slide into financial crisis by the end of the decade, reporting a large overdraft in both 1928 and 1929¹²⁰. As profit levels shrank, so the firm became increasingly dependent on the maintenance of a minimum price in France and acutely susceptible to any instability in the market caused by its northern rivals. The abolition of the closed season in 1927, mounting competition from Japan and the South West African canning industry and fears about foreign factory ships canning crayfish in Union waters created general unease in the industry by 1928¹²¹. In this climate Stephan Brothers lent its support to the formation of the SALCA to limit production at home and set prices abroad. Facing competition from more efficient producers, local and foreign, the firm was, by 1929, entirely dependent on containing such competition in order to remain profitable¹²². While the SALCA was

¹¹⁹ Union of South Africa, Board of Trade and Industries, Report No.180: The Fishing Industry, 1934, p.30.

¹²⁰ State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Department of Mines and Industries, "Report of Cost Accountant for Board of Trade and Industries: The South African Crayfish Canning Industry", 16 November 1931, pp.10-11.

¹²¹ "Floating Cannery for West Africa - Converted White Star Liner" in Cape Times, 26 September 1929 and State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Stephan Brothers to the Chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries, 30 October 1928, SALCA to the Chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries, 31 October 1928; SALCA to the Secretary for South West Africa, 23 November 1929; Minutes of Meeting between SALCA and Board of Trade and Industries, 8 April 1930 & C. von Bonde "Floating Crawfish Canning Factories", 8 May 1930.

¹²² State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Stephan Brothers et al to C. von Bonde, 5 September 1930, Stephan Brothers to the Minister of Justice, 11 September 1930 & Stephan Brothers to the Chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries, 30 September 1930.

moderately successful in this regard up until 1929, the onset of the Great Depression was to erode its fragile hegemony over the industry and plunge the firm into renewed crisis after 1930.

The post-war crisis in the canning industry also impacted directly on the fishing labour force, many of whom depended on crayfish fishing as a source of seasonal income by 1918. On the strength of the boom, many boat owners went into debt in the early 1920s, motorising their craft and relying on sustained good catches of crayfish to repay their loans. For these men the downturn in the industry, marked by frequent resource and market crises throughout 1920s when fish were scarce or the canneries ceased production in season, translated into longer fishing trips, smaller catches and lower earnings. Under these new pressures, they resorted to ever-more frequent poaching in the ETSFZ for bait and the rantsoennis trade and so came into increasing conflict with the seine fishermen. The paraffin engine also gave the crayfish fisherman-cum-poacher the advantage of speed over his pursuers in their oar- and sail-powered craft, made apprehension unlikely and illegal fishing irresistible, whether for bait or resale. By the end of the war crayfish fishing was an integral part of the St Helena Bay fishing economy. In 1919 the Bay canneries processed a record 7.5 million crayfish caught by fishermen from Paternoster, Steenberg's Cove, Stompneus and Berg River¹²³.

As the focus of fishing shifted north in the 1920s, so these men were compelled to move further afield and spend longer periods at sea. A round trip to Donkins Bay or Groen River took more than 24 hours in travelling time alone, making the average fishing trip

¹²³ Cape Archives; PAN 22, A120\B\158, Abstract from Register Showing the Numbers and Various Kinds of Nets in Use at the Different Fishing Stations in the Cape Province During the Year 1920.

in the 1920s about a day and a half (36 hours)¹²⁴. Each motor boat "mothered" several dinghies which were used to fish the coves, kelp beds and inshore reefs inaccessible to the larger vessel. The catch was then loaded into the hold of the motor boat for the long journey back to the cannery. At St Helena Bay itself the open boat crayfish fishery, conducted with dinghies launched from the factory jetties, continued, but for ever declining returns. In all cases, crayfish fishing was back-breaking work. One man rowed the dinghy while another set and cleared the nets and both helped unloaded the catch. Besides physical exhaustion from rowing and hauling, the crayfish's spiny exoskeleton left the fishermen with blistered and bleeding hands. Those in the bakkies were also vulnerable to sudden changes in the weather or swamping by heavy swells. The canneries operated a strict piece-work system, paying per hundred crayfish caught and relying on independent motor boat owners for an increasing proportion of their raw material as the 1920s progressed¹²⁵. The boat owners retained all the earnings until the end of the season (3 months) when a settling of accounts took place. In the interim the fishermen and their families subsisted on advances from the owner and credit at the local store just as the company fishermen did. Willem Theart - a private boat owner at Velddrift - was particularly adept at manipulating this situation to his best advantage, as his skipper, Ulisse Donaggi remembers:

"Hy [Theart] gee sak geld. Ek het min of meer meeste Kleurlinge gehad. Dan kom die Kleurling se vrou na sy [Theart] se huis toe. Dan moet hy hom nou in die week miskien 5s [gee] en dit laat hom lewe. Dit is wat sy kry, maar toe was dit nog baie geld. Toe vir die half-kroon kan sy nog goed gekoop het, maar nou kan jy niks daarvoor koop nie. En nou na drie maande dan reken ons nou af. Dan maak hy - hy't altyd 'n vat wyn - en nou die Kleurlinge

¹²⁴ Interview with Mr Willie & Gert Smeda, Velddrift, 4 July 1986 & Interview with Mr Hendrik Brand, Velddrift, 19 July 1986.

¹²⁵ Board of Trade & Industries Report No. 180: The Fishing Industry 1934, p.30.

drink en nou weet hy [Theart] net mooi hoe om sy sommetjies te maak [laughter]. Hy was 'n slim kalant!"¹²⁶

Theart was not the only "slim kalant" among boat owners at the Bay. Willie Smeda regularly supplied his crew with cheap wine provided by his boss, Alkie Theart, restricting consumption to weekends and the end of season¹²⁷. In addition to debts incurred on alcohol, fishermen shared all food, fuel and other boat expenses, the amounts being deducted from their earnings before final payment¹²⁸. Bertha Chilcott ran the store at Laaiplek for her uncle Carosini and recalls how the skippers would come in at the end of the season and settle their crew's accounts before handing over what was left to the men¹²⁹. The withholding of payment, credit, the provision of alcohol and illiteracy all gave owners wide scope for skimming-off fishermen's earnings. When catches were small or non-existent or crayfish fishing prevented by weather or law, both independent and company fishermen earned nothing and resorted to other avenues to subsist. While credit and housing were available to tide company employees over, independent producers depended on the annual winter snoek fishery and bouts of harder fishing for the rantsoennis trade during off-seasons, bad weather or fish scarcity to make ends meet¹³⁰.

The gradual decline in legal-sized crayfish at St Helena Bay and the general fall-off in catches in the early 1920s hit all fishermen. Many boat owners responded by motorising their craft,

¹²⁶ Interview with Mr Ulisse Donaggi, Velddrift, 22 July 1986.

¹²⁷ Interview with Mr Willie & Gert Smeda, Velddrift, 4 July 1986

¹²⁸ Board of Trade & Industries Report No. 180: The Fishing Industry 1934, p.30.

¹²⁹ Interview with Mrs Bertha Chilcott, Laaiplek, 3 July 1986.

¹³⁰ Interview with Mr Ulisse Donaggi, Velddrift, 22 July 1986.

but the cost and lack of safe harbour protection at the Bay made this an expensive and risky investment. As a result, the motor revolution at St Helena Bay was less spectacular than at Saldanha, where safe anchorage was readily available.

TABLE 4.4 The Motor Revolution on the West Coast, 1920-1935¹³¹

STATION	1920		1930		1935	
	Mboats	% of Total	Mboats	% of Total	Mboats	% of Total
Saldanha B	22	22.2	38	16.6	52	21.1
St Helena B	8	8.1	12	7.2	13	9.5
Berg River	15	10.6	21	13.5	28	10.6
Lamberts B	5	6.0	15	16.7	26	14.1
TOTAL	50	12.2	86	13.4	119	16.2

Motorisation also threatened owners' independence, many of them taking loans from the canning companies and gambling on sustained crayfish catches to clear their debts. Those that failed became de facto company employees. Other independent boat owners could not afford motorisation and thus continued fishing the local grounds for shrinking catches. A similar fate befell company fishermen. After the failure of Stephan Brothers' attempts at motorisation, the firm relied increasingly on independent producers, assisting them to motorise their craft rather than maintaining a fleet of its own. Motorisation also enhanced the efficiency of the individual vessel, increasing its range and allowing it to tow 4-5 dinghies to distant grounds to fish¹³². The sedentary open boat fishery at the Bay thus became an increasing anachronism by the mid-1920s, forcing many company employees out

¹³¹ Own calculations based on data contained in Cape Archives; PAN 13, A120\b\90 and PAN 16, A120\b\90\1.

¹³² See for example Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\e\5(6), Hickson and Sons to the Provincial Secretary, 15 May 1924.

of the crayfish fishery into rantsoennis fishing¹³³. For those fishermen and boat owners who made the transition to motorisation, the economics of fishing also changed radically. Whereas the old sail and rowing boats ran on wind and muscle-power and required no mechanical skill and little ongoing maintenance, motorisation introduced a number of new costs, including fuel and spares. Nor were motor vessels as forgiving of rough handling or amenable to local improvisation in upkeep. These new demands led to a revision of the share system in favour of the owner and by the early 1930s, he received approximately double the share of a counterpart in the oar-powered trek seine fishery and more than his whole crew combined¹³⁴.

TABLE 4.5: The Impact of Motorisation on the Share System¹³⁵

Informant	Owner		NUMBER OF SHARES		Crew		Total
		%	Skipper	%		%	
TREK SEINE [OAR-POWERED]							
Alkie Theart	2.0	25.0	1	12.5	5	62.5	8
John Tolken	2.5	27.7	1	11.1	5	55.5	9
CRAYFISH [PARAFFIN ENGINE]							
Hendrik Brand	5.0	55.5	-*	-*	4	44.4	9
Ulisse Donaggi	5.75	47.9	1.25	10.4	5	41.7	12

* = Owner-skipper

¹³³ Cape Archives; FDS 17, FS36, Notes of Interview between Mr H.J.C. Stephan (Messrs. Stephan Bros., Cape Town) and Captain H. Scharnberg (Saldanha Bay Canning Co.), and the Fishing Harbours Committee, 18 May 1926 & Fishing Harbours Committee, Notes of Meeting at Berg River Mouth, Piketberg District, 4 June 1926.

¹³⁴ Board of Trade & Industries Report No 180: The Fishing Industry, 1934, p.30 and TABLE 4.5 below.

¹³⁵ Own tabulation based on data collected in Interviews with Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986; Mr Alkie Theart, Dwarskersbos, 18 July 1986; Mr Hendrik Brand, Velddrift, 19 July 1986 and Mr Ulisse Donaggi, Velddrift, 22 July 1986.

Because of the high operating cost of a motorised boat new levels of efficiency were also required. A fishing trip cost money for fuel, regardless of its result and a series of failed trips ate into owners' cash reserves. With the exception of weather, closed seasons, and the vicissitudes of the resource, the other major constraint on a successful trip was an adequate supply of bait. Many owners of motor boats moved to Berg River during the 1920s because of the safe anchorage it provided¹³⁶. It was thus no longer cost-effective for them first to go south to the free fishing zone to set nets for bait before heading north, when they could more easily and cheaply find bait in the ETSFZ en route and save fishing time and money. Surplus bait or fish caught on the return trip also supplemented earnings from crayfish fishing or turned a failed trip into a paying one through resale on the rantsoennis market. In seeking to procure their bait needs without wasting time crossing and recrossing the Bay or simply looking for a welcome windfall, the motor boat fishermen began to poach with increasing regularity in the trek seine reserve after 1922. If the cost pressures introduced by the new economy of motorisation were the primary cause of these incursions, a paraffin engine also gave poachers virtual immunity from prosecution. The decline of the Bay crayfish fishery and Stephan Brothers' resort to distant fishing over relocation thus revived the whole issue of non-seine access to the Piketberg coast and repoliticised it along the old faultlines of seine versus set net fishermen.

Developments in the Sandveld during the 1920s also set the scene for a renewed conflict, as the roll call of evictions and bankruptcies of bywoners and small farmers steadily mounted. Alkie Theart remembers how his family lost their land in 1926:

¹³⁶ See TABLE 4.4 above and Cape Archives; PAN 41, A120\e\24(4), C.F.J. Thiart to J.J.H. de Waal, 25 March 1925.

"Ons het tog geboer. Hierdie plaas [Dwarskersbos] dit was ons plaas. Ek was dertien jaar oud toe my oorlede pa dood is. En toe hou ons later aan vandisie, die kinders. Ons ander broer dié - hy was toe see toe. Nou ja, ek was toe nog baie jonk en ons - hulle't [the older brothers] toe perde, en hulle't beeste, en hulle't skape, en hulle't bokke, maar ek het niks. My een broer het [ook] niks gehad nie. Toe moet ons eers onder ander mense loop werk. Die oestyd en so aan ... Ja, ja, sekel. Ooh vader ek het sekel gesny! Nou ja, in daai tyd 'n daler per dag gekry"¹³⁷.

Theart's experience was not unique. Abraham Tolken's childhood was also shaped by poverty and hard manual labour. Born in 1915 the son of a seine fisherman too poor to afford his own boat, Abraham's grandfather had been a herd in the Sandveld. He and his brothers were hired out as child labourers to local farmers in order to supplement the families income:

"Toe loop ek. Toe's ek nog jonk. Toe maak hulle hier 'n pad hier uit hier. De Plaat kereels - daai pad - maak gruis vir die boere. Toe's ek jonk. Toe sê my pa ek moet nou gaan kap - klip kap, klei kap, graaf werk. Dit is bitter daardie jare. Aah, jy's te jonk om die werk te doen"¹³⁸.

Abraham's namesake, John Tolken, was raised in similar circumstances. His family of eleven initially lived as bywoners in the Sandveld. Unable to support them on the returns from his own farming efforts, John's father worked as a shepherd for food and helped out on his own father's farm at harvest time, taking a "slagding" in payment¹³⁹. As John explained, "Ons is te veel en die plekkie waar ons sit is te klein. Ons kan nie so bestaan nie, ons moet uitsprei"¹⁴⁰. For this reason Tolken senior hired out his sons' labour to local landowners:

¹³⁷ Interview with Mr Alkie Theart, Dwarskersbos, 18 July 1986.

¹³⁸ Interview with Mr Abraham Tolken, Velddrift, 27 July 1986.

¹³⁹ Interview with Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

"Voor ons nou visvang het ek twee jaar by 'n Boonsaaier gebly, met ander woorde met plaas werk groot geword. My pa't my verhuur aan die, maar ek weet waarvoor nie. Ek werk! Die tweede jaar - ek weet nou nog - toe begin vandisie. Staan pa en die Boonsaaier daar bymekaar. Ek sê 'Pa, maar waarom moet ek bie waarvoor ek werk?' Goed jy kan nie vir 'n ander man werk en werk en weet ook nie waarvoor jy werk nie. 'Nee ek kannie uitkom met die ding nie'. Ek sê 'Nee, pa moet uitkom met die ding, ek moet weet, vanmore moet ek weer werk!' Pa sê 'Vir 15s in 'n maand'. Toe sê ek 'Dis 'n sixpence op 'n dag!' Dan moet ek met die sekel op die oesland loop, krom loop, benede kap vir 'n sixpence. Ek sê 'Nee, ek sal nie langer werk in die Vlak [Sandveld]'. Toe sê die man [Boonsaaier] vir my 'Jy moet jou maand uitdien'. Toe sê ek 'Ek sal die maand in die tronk loop sit!' - dit onthou ek goed - 'maar [ek] werk nie vir 'n sixpence nie!'¹⁴¹

Despite this experience, John spent a further four years working for another farmer in Malmesbury for £2 a month from April to September each year. Piet Smit too was inured to labour at an early age. The son of a failed farmer-cum-seine fisherman from the northern Sandveld, Piet grew up working for wealthier relations:

"My pa het nie 'n trek net gehad, want ons het by ander mense gewerk. My pa was 'n boer en wanneer die boer klaar was ek gekom, was ek nege jaar oud. Daar het ek so swaar gekry. Toe't my ma siek gewees, haart moelikheid gehad. Toe my pa nou by die see kom werk toe sê ek 'Nee, die see is nie vir my nie'. Toe't ek by 'n oom van my gebly, daar in Aurora se distrik. Daar het ek skool toe gegaan, daar was 'n plaas skooltjie gewees. Ek kan, maar sê ek het gewerk vir kos en ou klere, soos die mense altyd gese het. Ek het niks verdien nie. En dié het kos gegee en nou en dan 'n stukkie klere en so aan. My ma het ook vir my opgekom het. En toe ek 16 jaar toe dink ek nee ... Ek kan mos nou nie 'n lewe lank vir ander mense werk en diet nie ek wat daaraan bou nie. Maar toe kom ek see toe. Toe kom ek ook vis vang"¹⁴².

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Interview with Mr Piet Smit, Velddrift, 1 July 1986.*

Both Tolkens and Alkie Theart followed Piet Smit to sea during the 1920s as an escape from exploitation as farm labourers and way of improving their lot in life. All but Abraham Tolken settled on Dwarskersbos farm to the north of the Berg River mouth. While the provincial state fretted about burgeoning informal settlement along the west coast, the Dwarskersbos community grew rapidly due to uncertainty over legal ownership of the land¹⁴³. From a handful of inhabitants in 1919 the population rose to 96 in 1925, 128 in 1930, and nearly doubled to 236 by 1935¹⁴⁴. Although small in comparison to the estimated 2000 people living along the lower reaches of the Berg River by 1926, Dwarskersbos was similar in many respects¹⁴⁵. The land was owned by the Smit family who levied an annual rental of £3 on each household and the community retained direct links with Sandveld agriculture through labour service at peak periods in the agricultural year. Like Berg River there was "a certain amount of joint relationship ... between farming and fishing" conditioned by the seasonal nature of both¹⁴⁶. As John Tolken recalls, "Ons het eers net so, hoe sal ek nou sê - oes tyd dan gaan ons oes op die plase, dan gaan ons sny met die sekel. Dan kom ons - as die af is - dan kom ons weer see toe, dan kom ons weer vis vang"¹⁴⁷. Unlike Velddrift or Laaiplek, however, Dwarskersbos was a far

¹⁴³ See for example *Fishing Harbours Committee, Part III, 1926*, pp.43-45; Cape Archives; PAN 70, K59\16, Provincial Secretary to the Magistrate Malmesbury, 24 September 1919 & precis of correspondence relating to Application of H.J. van Schalkwyk for lease of a Fishing Site on Elands Kloof (Patrysen Berg), n.d. and correspondence in State Archives; JUS 549, 73\30, about the disputed boundaries of Dwarskersbos farm.

¹⁴⁴ Calculated from State Archives; VNW 1075, SW 456(3), F.G.A. Kotze to the Department of Lands, 3 June 1952, forwarding list of families and dates of occupation at Dwarskersbos.

¹⁴⁵ *Fishing Harbours Committee, Part III, 1926*, p.62.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986.

more homogenous fishing community, relying almost exclusively on the beach seine to survive and thus depending heavily on the ETSFZ for undisturbed access to the marine resource.

The Dwarskersbos fishery owners built their fish houses at Zooverby, a trek ground between Dwarskersbos and Berg River. Johnny Eigelaar remembers there being six fisheries owned by different families, each employing two boats and twelve fishermen to work the ten treks along the coast between Zooverby and Bobbejaanberg¹⁴⁸. For young men like Tolken, Theart and Smit, Zooverby offered freedom, camaraderie and a better living than farming. The trek season stretched from October to March and teams staked their claim to a trek for the season by anchoring one of their boats on it, leaving the second free to range along the coast¹⁴⁹. The treks could only be worked twice a day at high tide, so fishermen bivouacked on the beach nearby for the week. Temporary windbreaks were erected in the dunes and fires built for cooking, coffee, warmth and to dry out men wet through from fishing. Each fisherman dug a hole in the sand lined with a sack of straw as mattress in which he slept under a sack blanket, fully clothed except for his shoes¹⁵⁰. The skippers cycled down the beach at low tide or rowed from trek to trek looking and listening for fish and the smoke from a green wood fire or a whistle in the dark brought the team down to the beach to throw the net¹⁵¹. Once the fish were landed and the boat beached, cleaning and curing of the catch began, assisted by the women and children. The staple fish remained the harder, but catches of stompneus, galjoen and elf were common. The fish were sorted,

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Mr Johnny Eigelaar, Laalplek, 10 July 1986.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. Also Interviews with Mr Piet Smit, Velddrift, 1 July 1986 and Mr Alkie Theart, Dwarskersbos, 18 July 1986.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Mr Johnny Eigelaar, Laalplek, 10 July 1986.

cleaned, gutted and then cured in cement tanks in the fish houses, soaking for two days in a pickle of sea water and salt. They were then threaded into bunches according to size and hung out on racks to dry in the wind and sun¹⁵². The whole catch, except discards and eetvis, was the property of the owner, who sold it to farmers and hawkers either at the coast or in the rural small towns of the interior. The earnings were retained by the seine bosses until the end of the season in April, compelling fishermen to subsist on eetvis, credit and bartering fish for wood, food and alcohol with neighbouring farmers. Settlement included deductions for salt and, because most owners were also skippers, kept the tally book and sold the fish, there was wide room for manipulation of earnings¹⁵³. After nagmaal in mid-April the boats crossed the Bay to Stompneus where the men camped each week for three months, worked the migrating snoek shoals off Cape Columbine and salted in the fish and mooitjies for transport back to the fish houses at Zooverby¹⁵⁴. Payment was again deferred until the end of the season, but, unlike seine fishing, was individual rather than collective. Each fisherman thus split his catch (vlekked and salted) 60-40% with the boat owner, enabling a skilled line fisherman to equal or better the £50-£60 earned during a good six month seine season in just three months snoeking¹⁵⁵. At the end of the snoek season in June fishing ceased until October and many fishermen went out to work on the farms, ploughing and harvesting. Those that remained subsisted from line fishing and voet seining, caulked and painted the boats and

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Interviews with Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986; Mr Alkie Theart, Dwarskersbos, 18 July 1986 and Mr Abraham Tolken, Velddrift, 27 July 1986.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Also Fishing Harbours Committee, Part III, 1926, pp.58-60.

¹⁵⁵ Interviews with Messrs Willie & Gert Smeda, Laaiplek, 4 July 1986; Mr Hendrik Brand, 19 July 1986; Mr Ulisse Donaggi, Velddrift, 22 July 1986 and Mr Abraham Tolken, 27 July 1986.

repaired and blooded the nets in preparation for the new seine fishing season in October¹⁵⁶.

The growth of Dwarskersbos was indicative of the increasing fishing pressure on the marine resources of Piketberg. Having lost the trek grounds along the southern shores of the Bay in 1909, the district's seine fishing economy thus faced an internal crisis by the 1920s due to rising coastal populations, a sedentary fishing technology and a finite fishing range circumscribed by the ETSFZ and under threat from a swiftly motorising crayfish fishing fleet with problems of its own. The ETSFZ was first openly breached, not by the independent motor boat owners, but by Stephan Brothers in November 1922. The firm deployed its Danish seine in the reserve, apparently to procure bait for its shore-based, open boat crayfish fishing operations¹⁵⁷. In so doing, it took advantage of the ETSFZ legislation's failure to define what constituted a "trek seine". The Berg River seine fishermen protested, fearful that every crayfish boat would soon be carrying a Danish seine, fishing at will in the reserve and driving the fish away from the treks¹⁵⁸. The provincial state, however, was impressed by the "labour and time" savings and low cost of the net and gave Stephan Brothers "every encouragement" to persevere with its experiment¹⁵⁹. The

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Mr Johnny Eigelaar, Laaiplek, 10 July 1986.

¹⁵⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 25, A120\B\206, Stephan Brothers to the Secretary of the Fishery Board, 7 November 1922.

¹⁵⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 25, A120\B\206, J.N. Townsend to the District Commandant SAP Paarl, 14 November 1922, District Commandant SAP Paarl to the Provincial Secretary, 17 November 1922, J.N. Townsend to the Resident Magistrate Piketberg, 20 November 1922 & Magistrate Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, 6 December 1922.

¹⁵⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 25; A120\B\206, J.D.F. Gilchrist to the Provincial Secretary, 15 November 1922; Provincial Secretary to Stephan Brothers, 2 December 1922 and Provincial Secretary to the Magistrate Piketberg, 13 December 1922.

firm's lead was not copied, primarily because the net was unsuited to local conditions and, despite its low cost, was imported and required a power winch to operate. As a result the seine fishermen's protests abated.

Three months later, in March 1923, more than 200 crayfish fishermen petitioned the provincial state to delay the impending close of the season by at least two weeks until the end of May¹⁶⁰. They claimed that "Crayfish really only attain good condition in about the month of May" and to close the resource to fishing in mid-May was not only "premature", but

"necessarily involves loss to those of us who have invested capital in suitable boats and gear etc, and means positive hardship, often want, to those of us who earn our living as fishermen in the crayfish industry"¹⁶¹.

Despite Stephan Brothers' support, their request was turned down and in March 1924 the agitation revived once more¹⁶². The situation had deteriorated markedly in the interim, with both the North Bay Canning Company and Stephan Brothers temporarily closing their canneries at Steenberg's Cove on account of the low price of canned crayfish in France¹⁶³. Henry Stephan estimated

¹⁶⁰ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\e\3(2), Stephan Brothers to the Secretary of the Fishery Board, 16 March 1923 forwarding The Petition of Fishermen and Fishing Boat Owners in the Fishing Industry in the St Helena Bay Area, Division of Malmesbury, March 1923.

¹⁶¹ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\e\3(2), Petition of Fishermen and Fishing Boat Owners in the Fishing Industry in the St Helena Bay Area, Division of Malmesbury, March 1923.

¹⁶² Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\e\3(2), J.D.F. Gilchrist to the Provincial Secretary, 24 March 1923 & Provincial Secretary to Stephan Brothers, 28 March 1923.

¹⁶³ Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\e\5(6), Stephan Brothers to the Provincial Secretary, 25 March 1924 & 8 April 1924 and PAN 42, A120\e\32, Stephan Brothers to F.S. Malan, 14 March 1924

that the closures had cost the fishermen and factory workers at the Bay between £30 000 and £60 000 in lost earnings:

"Last season ending 15th May we paid out for crayfish catches the sum of £24,000, and although not having the figures of the North Bay Canning Company we would estimate this at something like £35,000, whereas this year we have not paid out £5,000"¹⁶⁴.

He thus appealed to the provincial state to delay the 15 May close for two months to give the fishermen some relief by allowing them to fish for his firm's Paternoster factory. This request was granted and in April 1924 Stephan thanked the Administrator "for his human action toward our workers on the Malmesbury coast", adding that it would make "a wonderful difference" to the St Helena Bay fishing community.¹⁶⁵

Such a brief extension for one factory only was unlikely to make much difference to the earnings of crayfish fishermen and boat owners, who made up for lost income with bouts of rantsoennis fishing. This explains the journey to Cape Town, in May 1924, of A.J. Brink, a farmer from Drommelvlei on the Berg River, and F.D. Visser, a seine fishery owner from Velddrift, to deliver a petition to the Administrator signed by more than 100 seine fishermen. The petitioners asked that the ETSFZ legislation be tightened to curb poaching by set net fishermen¹⁶⁶. To this end they wanted to prosecute anyone anchoring a dinghy with set nets on board in the ETSFZ, increase the maximum fine to £25 with the automatic cancellation of the offending boat's licence after a third offence and a clear stipulation that only trek seines be

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\5(6), Stephan Brothers to the Administrator, 23 April 1923.

¹⁶⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Petition to the Honourable Administrator and the [Executive] Committee from the Fishermen of Velddrift, n.d. & Provincial Secretary to the Magistrate Piketberg, 9 May 1924.

allowed in the reserve¹⁶⁷. The Magistrate of Piketberg confirmed that poaching was on the increase, noting that,

"[C]rawfish boats encroach upon the three mile limit for the ostensible purpose of obtaining bait, and with the noise of the motorboats disturb the influx of fish from the ocean. As their [set] nets do not reach the bottom the vast majority of fishes escape back to the ocean. Fishing with set nets is mostly done at night, while trek nets are used day and night"¹⁶⁸.

By October 1924 the old animosities were rekindled, prompting one seine fisherman, to implore the Magistrate to "a.u.b. maak so gou as u kan om die proklamatee [sic] te laat kom ... want anders sil [sic] ons later mekaar nog doodmaak"¹⁶⁹. The provincial state was wary of being stampeded into granting the seine fishermen such wide-ranging control over the ETSFZ. Gilchrist, while in favour of heavier fines, was concerned that if the seine fishermen were allowed to prosecute any boats found in the ETSFZ with set nets on board, this would "be a serious handicap to the Italian fishermen who find it convenient to anchor in this place, with no intent to use the nets illegally ... [and] have done so much to develop the industry"¹⁷⁰. The local policeman, J.N. Townsend, agreed that such an amendment "would most decidedly be a very serious handicap to the Italian fishermen"¹⁷¹. During the crayfish season they always carried set nets for catching bait and, if they entered the ETSFZ to seek shelter, they would now be

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Magistrate Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, 29 July 1924.*

¹⁶⁹ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, F. Wiid to the Magistrate Piketberg, 1 October 1924.*

¹⁷⁰ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, J.D.F. Gilchrist to the Provincial Secretary, 9 October 1924.*

¹⁷¹ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, J.N. Townsend to the Resident Magistrate Piketberg, 31 October 1924.*

"pounced upon" by the seine fishermen. A "feeling of bitterness and jealousy" existed between the two groups of fishermen, he explained, and any new powers granted the seiners would inflame the situation "instead of bringing more harmony amongst the fishermen"¹⁷². The seine fishermen, however, were desperate and, in December 1924 Piketberg attorney, C.J. Watermeyer, forwarded a second petition to Cape Town signed by more than 200 of their number, reiterating the demands of the May petition¹⁷³. The authorities now favoured a boundary revision, because, as the Magistrate of Piketberg put it, "the fishing population ... [was] outgrowing the supply of fish"¹⁷⁴. Instead of heavier fines, he thus suggested reducing the ETSFZ "owing to the scarcity of fish" and the clear demarcation of the new boundary as more effective ways of controlling poaching¹⁷⁵. Gilchrist concurred, but suggested that any decision be left to the Fisheries Advisory Board¹⁷⁶. The opposition of the Magistrate, Gilchrist and Townsend, decided the provincial state and it dismissed the petitioners' requests out of hand¹⁷⁷.

The root of the problem - the decline of the Bay crayfish fishery - remained as intractable as ever and in 1925 boat owners and fishermen again lobbied Cape Town for an extension to the closed

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, C.J. Watermeyer to the Provincial Secretary, 10 December 1924, forwarding the Petition of Charles Nimb and 218 Others, 22 November 1924.*

¹⁷⁴ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Magistrate Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, 6 January 1925.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, J.D.F. Gilchrist to the Provincial Secretary, 9 January 1925.*

¹⁷⁷ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Provincial Secretary to the Administrator, 9 April 1925.*

season until the end of June¹⁷⁸. As A. Summers, a Berg River boat owner explained, the 1925 season had been a failure and "many of the fishermen are in want at present and have the greatest difficulty in keeping their families"¹⁷⁹. He depended on crayfish fishing for a living and had invested in boats and gear, incurring heavy debts in the process which, on the strength of the current season's poor catches, he was unable to repay¹⁸⁰. A similar fear was voiced at Saldanha Bay, where boat owners spoke of the "positive hardship and in many instances severe losses" which would result if the season closed on 15 May¹⁸¹. "Some of us owe large sums of money," they explained, "Debts incurred in fitting out our boats for crayfish catching", and a 15 May close would mean that "we shall find it most difficult to meet our liabilities and provide for our families"¹⁸². In support, they submitted a petition signed by fishermen from Saldanha Bay, Paternoster, Steenberg's Cove and Berg River, calling for the fishing season to be extended until mid-July each year¹⁸³. After lengthy discussion, the Fisheries Advisory Board agreed to delay

¹⁷⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\5(6), Stephan Brothers to the Secretary of the Fishery Board, 25 March 1925, forwarding Petition of Fishermen and Fishing Boat Owners Resident on the South West Coast at and between Saldanha Bay, Paternoster, Steenberg's Cove and Berg River, March 1925.

¹⁷⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\5(6), A. Summers to H.J.C. Stephan, 24 March 1925.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\5(6), W.P. Veer to H.J.C. Stephan, 21 March 1925.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\5(6), Petition of Fishermen and Fishing Boat Owners Resident on the South West Coast at and between Saldanha Bay, Paternoster, Steenberg's Cove and Berg River, March 1925 & W.J. Leeson to Whom It May Concern, 30 March 1925, forwarding identical petition to that submitted by Stephan, signed by 25 Berg River fishermen.

the season's close by two months until 15 July 1925¹⁸⁴. By 1926 the scarcity of crayfish at the Bay had become acute and marginalised a growing number of boat owners and fishermen¹⁸⁵. Stephan Brothers ceased all open boat fishing as a result and the manager of the North Bay Canning Company's Steenberg's Cove factory - Heydenrich - freely admitted accepting large numbers of undersized crayfish from local fishermen¹⁸⁶. He explained that, "[T]he offenders were Italian fishermen, owning open sailing dinghys which could not safely fish beyond the limits of the bay, and that he did not like to reject their fish on that account"¹⁸⁷. This, he claimed, was a purely humanitarian gesture, as the factory obtained "larger and more satisfactory fish" from motorboats which fished further afield¹⁸⁸. Both Heydenrich and the industry's "Crawfish Observer", Sibson, favoured closing the Bay to crayfish fishing from Stompneus Point to the Berg River mouth. Sibson claimed that this "would be welcomed by all save the Italian fishermen", because:

"With their present equipment they would be unable to continue in St Helena Bay if this area were closed, and a certain amount of initial hardship would appear inevitable. However it is universally recognised that the

¹⁸⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\5(6), *Minutes of a Meeting of the Fisheries Advisory Board held in the Provincial Council Chambers on Thursday, 2 April 1925.*

¹⁸⁵ See also Cape Archives; PAN 40, A120\5(7), *Petition of the Coloured and Native Labourers at Lamberts Bay, 17 November 1926, North Bay Canning Company et al to the Chairman of the Fisheries Advisory Board, 18 November 1926, Petition of the Fishermen at Lamberts Bay, 18 November 1926 & Petition of the Fishermen and Factory Workers of Saldanha Bay, 2 December 1926 for the general crisis in the west coast canning industry in 1926.*

¹⁸⁶ Cape Archives; FDS6, MIC 298\26, *Secretary Fisheries Survey Committee to the Resident Magistrate Malmesbury, 7 December 1926 & Magistrate Malmesbury to the Secretary Fisheries Survey Committee, 21 December 1926.*

¹⁸⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 41, A120\24(2), *F.H. Sibson to the Secretary of the Crawfish Survey Committee, 13 April 1926.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

day of the open sailing dinghy is practically over in crawfishing, save where the boats are towed to the grounds and 'mothered' generally by a larger vessel"¹⁸⁹.

In his opinion "the immediate welfare of a few Italians should not be allowed to weigh against the lasting welfare of the industry in general" nor "sentimental considerations ... close the eyes to manifest infractions of the law"¹⁹⁰. Stepped-up policing would only lead to increased prosecutions, "bad blood" and a gradual "strangling" of the Italian fishermen's activities¹⁹¹. Closing the Bay, on the other hand, would "settle the matter straight away once and for all" and was, Sibson believed, "the most satisfactory solution of the problem", allowing St Helena Bay to become "a valuable breeding-ground" for crayfish, and forcing the Italians "either to go in for motorboats or to move elsewhere"¹⁹².

The sustained agitation surrounding the crayfish regulations in the period 1923-1926, underlines the disruptive effect of the postwar crayfish scarcity on the local fishing economy. The recurring refrains of debt and subsistence crisis echoing through the petitions reflected the growing plight of fishermen and boat owners, a plight which cut across ethnic divides, marginalising Italian and company fishermen alike. While the canning companies could relocate, the fishermen remained tied to the Bay by family, debt and housing and, contrary to Sibson's glib assertion, were unable to simply "move elsewhere". Sibson conveniently overlooked these ties as well as the way in which crayfish fishing meshed

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* Also F.H. Sibson "The Crawfish Survey" in South African Journal of Industries, 8, 6, June 1925, pp.359.

¹⁹⁰ Cape Archives; PAN 41, A120\e\24(2), F.H. Sibson to the Secretary of the Crawfish Survey Committee, 13 April 1926.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

with other fishing activities, leaving a number of alternatives to migration open to those fishermen displaced by the collapsing fishery. Rather than an exodus, the decline of crayfish fishing diverted effort into the rantsoennis trade and intensified the conflict between the set netters-cum-crayfish fishermen and the Piketberg seine fishermen over the ETSFZ. In September 1926 J.H.H. de Waal, MLA for Piketberg, appealed for greater police protection for the seine fishermen, warning that,

"[S]trafbare onreematighede word daagliks in die water gepleeg en ek het verlede jaar voorspel dat daardie dinge in moord gaan eindig. Wat ek voorspel het is sedert byna bewaarheid, want 'n tydjie gelede is op een van die bootjies geskied"¹⁹³.

In October 1926 Townsend reported that poaching was again on the increase - 14 set nets having been seized the previous week and 10 fishermen summoned to appear in court¹⁹⁴. The seine fishermen had made very poor catches during the year and tensions were running high. Townsend stressed the need for heavy sentencing to discourage poaching¹⁹⁵. The seine fishermen, for their part, wanted the legislation amended to stipulate routes through the ETSFZ for boats carrying set nets, a time limit for being in the reserve and a strict prohibition on set netters taking shelter in the ETSFZ during bad weather except "under dire circumstances"¹⁹⁶. The provincial state was also anxious to contain the tensions within existing legal channels, appealing to the Department of

¹⁹³ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, J.H.H. de Waal to the Administrator, n.d. & Provincial Secretary to the Secretary for Justice, 29 September 1926.

¹⁹⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, J.N. Townsend to the District Commandant SAP Paarl, 16 October 1926.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. Also Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Inspector C.R. Seeber District Commandant SAP Paarl to the Deputy Commissioner SAP, 11 November 1926.

¹⁹⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Pierre du Plessis to S.F.C. Malan, 22 October 1926.

Justice for an additional policeman at Berg River to patrol the ETSFZ¹⁹⁷. It remained wary, however, of acceding to seine fishermen demands for legislative amendments for fear of provoking the set net fishermen. The latter wrote to the MLA for Malmesbury, F.S. Malan, in October 1926, dismissing the seine fishermen's protests, demanding a reduction in the ETSFZ boundary from 3 to 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles and the right to use shark set nets in the reserve¹⁹⁸. In November they accused Townsend of favouring the seine fishermen¹⁹⁹. Rather than tamper with the legislation and risk a set net fisherman backlash, the provincial state thus bided its time in the hope that the Department of Justice would agree to step up policing of the coast, but in March 1927 this request was declined by Pretoria²⁰⁰.

Meanwhile, the situation at the Bay remained unchanged. J.F. Waso, a fisherman resident on the farm Kliphoek on the Berg River, warned that "die mense moet geen wet trak nie elke man maak wat hy wil"²⁰¹. Poaching intensified as a result of the proclamation of a crayfish sanctuary at the Bay in January 1927 and the relocation of the North Bay Canning Company to Thorn Bay

¹⁹⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Deputy Commissioner SAP to the Secretary SAP, 15 November 1926.

¹⁹⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, J. Novella to S.F.C. Malan, 27 October 1926.

¹⁹⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, J. Novella to S.F.C. Malan, 12 November 1926 & S.F. Malan to the Administrator, 7 January 1927.

²⁰⁰ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Handwritten minutes headed "Piquetberg and Malmesbury Coasts: Trek and Setnet Fishermen", signed G.A. van O. and dated 2 March 1927 and 4 March 1927.

²⁰¹ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, J.F. Waso to the Administrator, 29 March 1927.

the same year²⁰². There were no fewer than 42 crayfish boats (18 motorised) as against 29 trek seine crews and the set netters thus continued to press their case²⁰³. In March 1927 140 of them signed a petition asking for the ETSFZ to be reduced from 3 miles to 1 mile and for the right to use 4-5 inch set nets in the area to catch shark and barber for crayfish bait²⁰⁴. Townsend, however, cautioned against allowing the set net fishermen access to ETSFZ, noting that "the two classes are very vindictive towards one another" and "cannot and never will work together in harmony on the same fishing grounds"²⁰⁵. The 4-5 inch set net would also provide poachers with a "golden opportunity" to carry the smaller 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch mesh set net in the ETSFZ, he warned, and advocated a 1 mile reduction in the ETSFZ boundary to create a "neutral zone" between the warring fishermen²⁰⁶. In September 1927, C.F.J. Thiart, a Dwarskersbos seine fisherman, appealed to the MLA De Waal to speak to the police on the trek seine fishermen's behalf,

"want as dit langer so moet gaan sal die trek seene se manne moet omkom. Ons het geen vis om te eet in [sic] bakkies loop gelykvol die rivier in mouters duisend. Want

²⁰² R. Lees *Fishing for Fortunes*, p.72; S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast, 1874-1947", pp.59-60; *Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette*, Proclamation 9 of 1927, 6 January 1927 and *Provincial Gazette*, Proclamation 234 of 1928, 25 October 1928. The latter proclamation extended the St Helena Bay sanctuary from 1½ to 3 nautical miles from the coast.

²⁰³ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Typed minute signed G.A. van O., 16 August 1927, including attached statistics from Townsend.

²⁰⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Petition by Fishermen Residing at and about the Berg River Mouth to the Honourable Administrator to amend Section 17(4) of the Regulations framed under Section 5 of Ordinance No.30 of 1920, n.d.

²⁰⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, J.N. Townsend to the Resident Magistrate Piketberg, 6 August 1927.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

waar 15 tot 20 mouters in van 20 to 30 bakkies vang tel
hoveel nette dit is elke bakkie besit 11 tot 10 nette"²⁰⁷.

De Waal duly wrote to the Commissioner of Police, who sent the deputy inspector of police to investigate²⁰⁸. The latter found six poaching cases still outstanding at Berg River and favoured amending the existing legislation to define a clear passage for the set net boats through the ETSFZ, making their presence elsewhere in the area illegal. He also authorised Townsend to hire a skipper for occasional night patrols in the reserve²⁰⁹. The pending showdown was averted and poaching went into temporary abeyance after September 1927, reportedly due to the appearance of the so-called Italian seine or lampara net in the Bay²¹⁰. Introduced at Saldanha Bay in the mid-1920s, after being banned from Table Bay after the war, it was worked from a motorboat in much the same way as the Danish seine, but was smaller and could be used without a power winch²¹¹. In Townsend's opinion, the lampara, "will have very effective results affording the motorboat fishermen an ample supply of bait without intruding in the trek seine reserves"²¹². Despite his optimism, however, the new net's high cost, unsuitability to local conditions and inexperience in working it, ensured that it was not widely

²⁰⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, C.F.J. Thiart to J.H.H. De Waal, 26 September 1927.

²⁰⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, J.H.H. de Waal to the Commissioner of the SAP, 28 September 1927.

²⁰⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Deputy Inspector SAP Paarl to the District Commandant Paarl, 14 October 1927 & Deputy Inspector SAP Paarl to The Deputy Commissioner of the SAP, 1 December 1927.

²¹⁰ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, J.N. Townsend to the Resident Magistrate Piketberg, 6 August 1927.

²¹¹ Fishing Harbours Report Part III, 1926, p.50 and Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, J.N. Townsend to the Resident Magistrate Piketberg, 6 August 1927.

²¹² Ibid.

adopted²¹³. The first to try it were again Italians, popular memory naming Michael di Paola on the Malmesbury side of the Bay and a Casselegio, Carosini and Tallie at Berg River as the innovators in chief²¹⁴. Di Paola reportedly bought his net from a man in Moorreesburg while Casselegio's net was purchased by Carosini who sold it to Tallie because he could not catch anything with it²¹⁵. The fish tore the nets out of the crews' hands, the currents washed them onto reefs and they were too shallow to catch fish in paying quantities²¹⁶. Tallie though persevered, deepening the net and learning how to work it, but the majority of crayfish fishermen continued to rely on the tried, trusted and cheaper set net to procure their bait requirements²¹⁷. A more compelling reason for the respite in poaching after 1927 was rather the abolition of the closed season which allowed year-round crayfish fishing and removed one of the chief constraints on the motor boat fishermen's activities.

The effect of the motor revolution at St Helena Bay was thus to gradually undermine the pre-war fishing economy and threaten the position of the seine fisheries at Berg River. Motorisation burdened boat owners with new fixed costs, necessitating a high level of efficiency in operation to avoid having to absorb fuel bills out of their own pocket. The economics of motor fishing led to increased poaching in the ETSFZ by crayfish fishermen for bait, confident in the ease of escape afforded them by their paraffin engines, ineffectual policing and pedantic legal

²¹³ Interview with Mr Ulisse Donaggi, Velddrift, 22 July 1986.

²¹⁴ Interviews with Mr Amil Di Paola, Laaiplek, 6 July 1986 and Mr Ulisse Donaggi, Velddrift, 22 July 1986.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Interview with Mr Ulisse Donaggi, Velddrift, 22 July 1986.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

process²¹⁸. It was in the latter areas that the pre-war balkanisation of the Bay broke down in the 1920s. The 1909 *modus vivendi* assumed a rough equivalence in forces of production between set and seine netters and relied on the latter, rather than the police, to bring transgressors to book. This arrangement, however, was unable to accommodate the advent of the motor. Not only could the seine fishermen not police the reserve effectively against motorised craft, but the motor boat owners proved adept at using the court system to their advantage and were immune to its censure²¹⁹. The court required proof "beyond any doubt" that nets had been set inside the ETSFZ, which was unobtainable, because the exact boundary of the ETSFZ was unmarked and poaching was done at night when distances were hard to judge²²⁰. Cases were also dismissed if the seine fishers seized gear and they were often sued by poachers for damages²²¹. In addition, when a conviction was secured, poachers received only nominal fines which served as no deterrent and were "amply recouped by the amount realised by the offenders for the fish

²¹⁸ See Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, C.J. Watermeyer to the Provincial Secretary, 10 December 1924, forwarding the Petition of Charles Nimb and 218 Others, 22 November 1924 and Pierre du Plessis to S.F.C. Malan, 22 October 1926 for the seine fishermen's difficulties in apprehending poachers in motor boats.

²¹⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 41, A120\24(2), Acting District Commandant SAP Paarl to the Deputy Commissioner SAP, 18 June 1926 & J.N. Townsend to the District Commandant SAP Paarl, 20 September 1926 on the difficulties of policing the Bay.

²²⁰ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, C.J. Watermeyer to the Provincial Secretary, 10 December 1924, forwarding the Petition of Charles Nimb and 218 Others, 22 November 1924, Magistrate Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, 6 January 1925 & Deputy Inspector SAP Paarl to the District Commandant Paarl, 14 October 1927 and PAN 71, K59\27(2) Magistrate Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary, 8 August 1932.

²²¹ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Inspector C.R. Seeber District Commandant SAP Paarl to the Deputy Commissioner SAP, 11 November 1926.

sold"²²². The crayfish fishermen thus contested the restrictions on their activities with increasing vigour during the 1920s, aided by the court system and weak legislation. The weakness and creeping atrophy of the provincial state fisheries administration, unable to reconcile the competing demands of the crayfish and seine fisheries, left the latter powerless to defend themselves against this onslaught.

Motorisation and the ensuing poaching conflict cannot be understood in isolation, however, and is only intelligible against the background of the crisis in the Union and St Helena Bay crayfish canning industries during the 1920s. Although international factors played a role, developments at St Helena Bay were shaped more by the specifics of Stephan Brothers accumulation regime. Despite its entry into production, the firm still retained many vestiges of its merchant pedigree, making it an ambiguous agent of industrialisation. Its land, rentier and trade interests thus kept it shackled to the Bay at the very moment the crayfish frontier was expanding northwards. Unwilling to relocate, Stephan Brothers relied on motorisation and distant water fishing instead to keep its canneries supplied with raw material. In so doing, however, it encountered its own legacy in the lack of harbour infrastructure at the Bay and the existence of an alternative petty-commodity economy only loosely tied to crayfish fishing. Having failed to motorise its own fleet, the firm fell back on the private boat owners, but with limited success. The latter's operations were constrained by the ETSFZ and Stephan Brothers' failure to defeat Sandveld agriculture in 1913 and 1917 and the poverty and reluctance to act of the

²²² Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, C.J. Watermeyer to the Provincial Secretary, 10 December 1924, forwarding the Petition of Charles Nimb and 218 Others, 22 November 1924, Magistrate Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary 6 January 1925, Inspector C.R. Seeber District Commandant SAP Paarl to the Deputy Commissioner SAP, 11 November 1926 & J.N. Townsend to the District Commandant SAP Paarl, 16 October 1926.

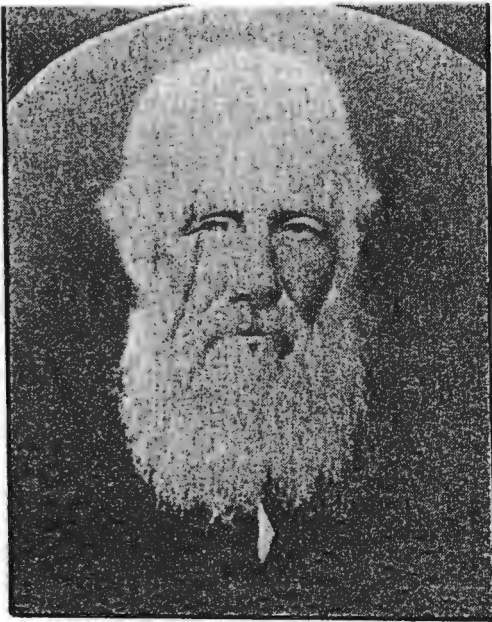
provincial state ensured that this obstacle remained as intractable as ever. As conflict raged at the Bay between crayfish and seine fishermen, the firm's profits declined and it was forced to seek remedies further afield. Its support of the SALCA marked the culmination of these efforts. Shunned by Pretoria, Stephan Brothers resorted to shoring up its position on the export market by imposing a production quota and minimum price on the industry as a whole, seeking to protect its inefficient operation at the expense of the industry. While initially successful, the SALCA controls were undermined by the onset of the Depression in 1929, exposing the firm to the brunt of market forces with disastrous consequences for both the bottom line and Bay fishing communities.

PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Theunis Erasmus Smit, "Grondbaron van die Sandveld" (b.1804-d.1892) [M.H.D. Smith].
2. Johann Carel Stephan (b.1843-d.1900) [SASNFIR].
3. Hendrik Rudolph Stephan (b.1845-d.1906) [SASNFIR].
4. Col. Henry John Charles Stephan (b.1874-d.1966) [SASNFIR].
5. Stephan Brothers' snoek fishery at Steenberg's Cove c.1885 [South African Illustrated News].
6. Stephan Brothers' crayfish cannery at Paternoster built in 1915 [SASNFIR].
7. Stephan Brothers' crayfish cannery at Steenberg's Cove built in 1913 [SASNFIR].
8. Crates of live crayfish float at the jetty awaiting canning at Paternoster, c.1925 [Cape Archives].
9. View from the jetty at Steenberg's Cove c.1925. Note the bakkie towing crates of crayfish in the foreground as well as the fishing boats, two cutters and two steam coasters at anchor [SASNFIR].
10. Harvest time in the Sandveld. White labourers cut wheat with sickles under the watchful eye of a member of the Smit family and his horse c.1920 [M.H.D. Smith].
11. Inside Stephan Brothers' cannery Paternoster, showing the primitive canning machinery and "coloured" female work force [R. Lees].
12. A crowd of men, women and children cleaning fish at Berg River c.1930. Note the pickling vat in the foreground and racks of fish drying in the background [B. Chilcott].
13. Rantsoennis sun-drying on racks [SAL].
14. Aerial view of Berg River mouth c.1949 showing Laaiplek in the foreground, Velddrift in the distance and the flat sandy wastes of the Sandveld all around [SASNFIR].
15. Laaiplek Fisheries' rantsoennis factory at Berg River mouth c.1946 [SASNFIR].
16. The same factory rebuilt and operating as Marine Products c.1949. Note the mechanised off-loading facility [SASNFIR].
17. African Inshore Fisheries' factory at Velddrift c.1949. Note the construction of a bridge across the Berg River in the top right of the photograph [SASNFIR].

18. The old and the new, Velddrift c.1949. The old pontoon across the Berg River at Velddrift dating from the 1890s framed by the new African Inshore Fisheries factory [R. Lees].
19. St Helena Bay Fishing Industries' factory at Stompneus Bay on the Agterbaai c.1949. A joint FDC venture with four private companies, including Stephan Brothers and Marine Products, it operated the first Californian fish meal and oil reduction plant in South Africa [SASNFIR].
20. Mid-Western Fishing Industries' factory at the Agterbaai c.1954. Formed in 1949 by local boat owners and farmers, Mid-Western was floated as a £500 000 public concern just four years later [SASNFIR].
21. "Coloured" housing erected by the FDC at Stompneus Bay c.1950 [SASNFIR].
22. White housing at Laaipek built by Marine Products c.1948 [SASNFIR].
23. Tee-totaling white fishermen outside the Laaipek hotel bar c.1950 [B. Chilcott].
24. A family affair. Mr C. Theart (centre) with his four sons aboard the family's 48-ft. pilchard boat "Normandy" c.1952 [SASNFIR].
25. Fishing boats moored at Velddrift c.1949. Note their small size (approximately 33-ft) and masts as well as the lampara nets drying on the jetties [SAL].
26. Marine Products trial fishing with a Californian purse seine net in St Helena Bay 1947. The net was not adopted at the Bay or anywhere else and only became standard in the South African pelagic fishery in the mid-1960s [SASNFIR].
27. The standard pilchard boat design of the 1950s with the wheelhouse aft. Note the deckload of fish [SASNFIR].
28. A Californian design pilchard boat with wheelhouse fore and large rear deck for working a purse seine net [SASNFIR].
29. "Die water vuur". The phosphorescence created by a shoal of pilchard in the sea at night [SASNFIR].
30. "The World's Richest One Hundred Miles of Sea". A record 35-ton catch of 120 000 maasbankers taken in a single haul by the "Patryberg" in 1948 [SASNFIR].
31. A "bakkieman" in tow behind a pilchard boat holding the end of the net in readiness for a set [SASNFIR]
32. The net has been set. Note the bakkieman in the background attaching the net to the dinghy while the crew begin the long haul [SASNFIR].

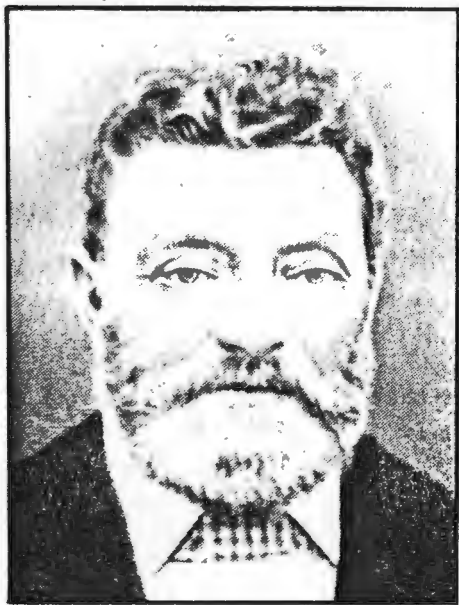
33. Hauling the net. The crew pulls the lampara net in by hand with the cork line clearly visible [SASNFIR].
34. The catch. Note the bakkieman alongside, with the net still attached to the dinghy, waiting to start brailing [SASNFIR].
35. Brailing the catch. The brailer emerges from the net with a load of fish while the bakkieman uses an oar to keep the dinghy away from the boat [SASNFIR].
36. Into the hold. The brailer's purse string is released and the fish shower into the hold [SASNFIR].
37. Offloading the catch at the factory using a crate and winch [SASNFIR].
38. Mechanised offloading with the aid of a wet vacuum pump [SASNFIR].



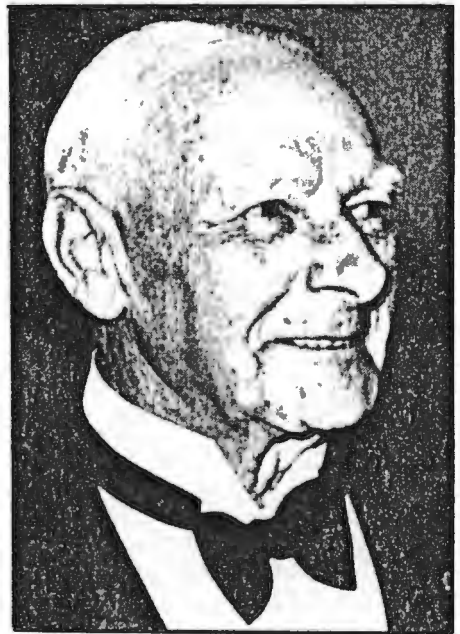
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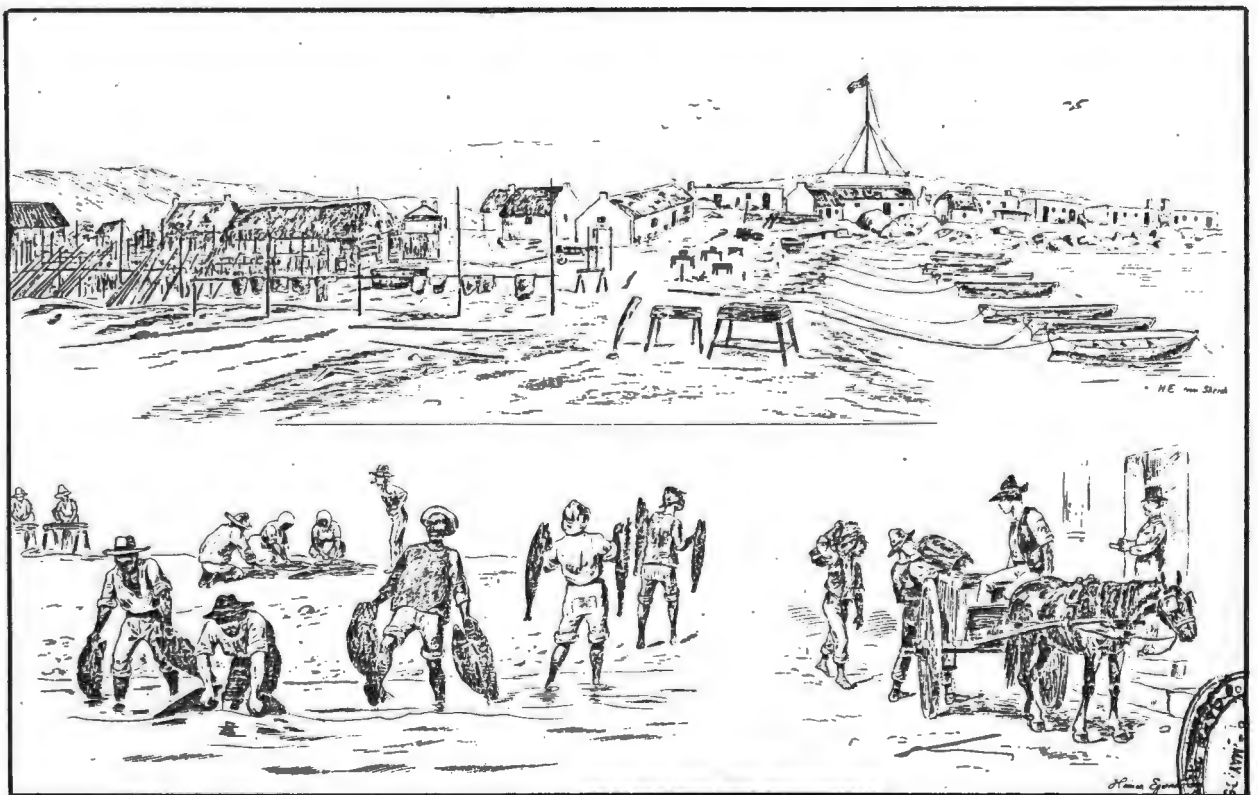
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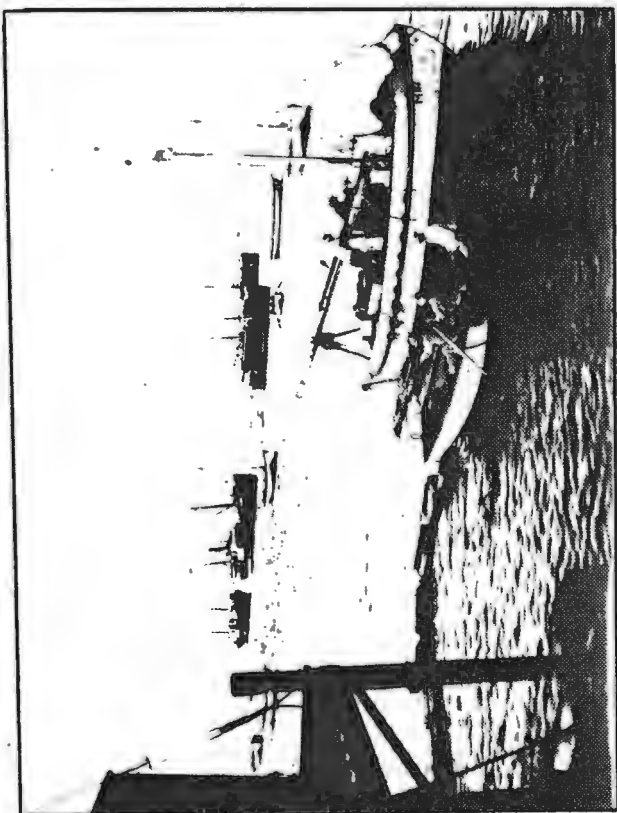


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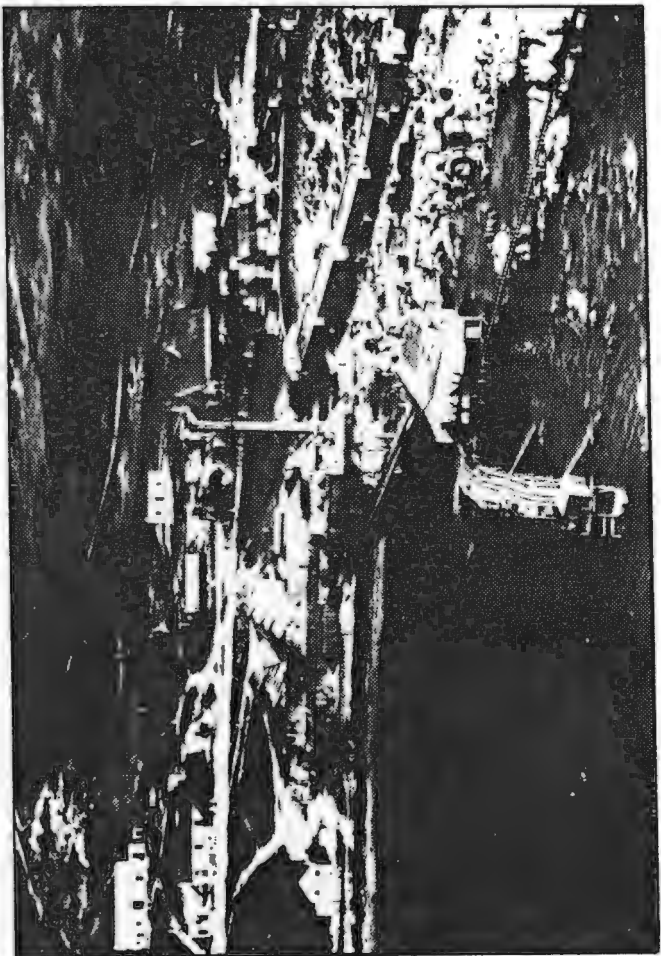
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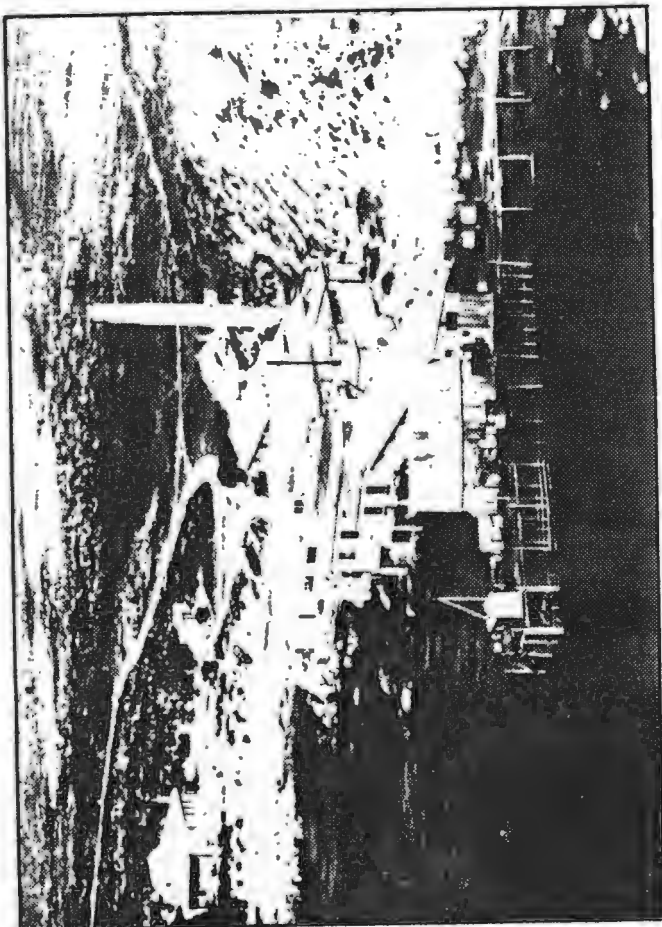
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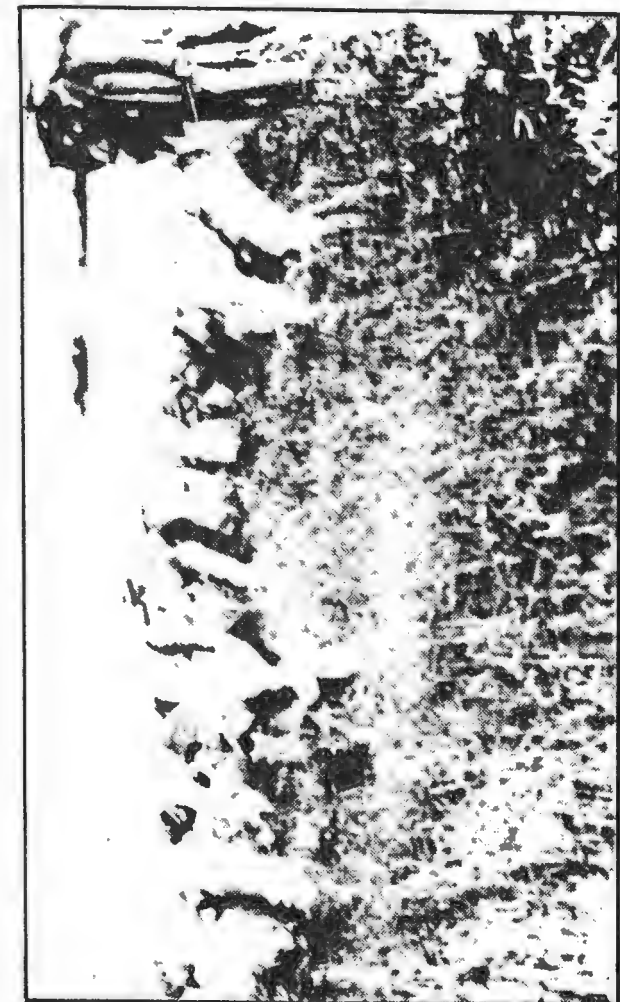


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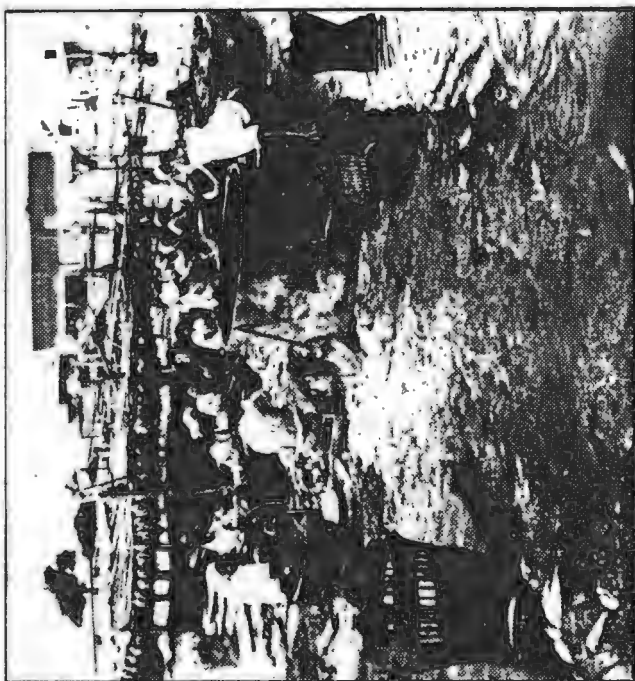


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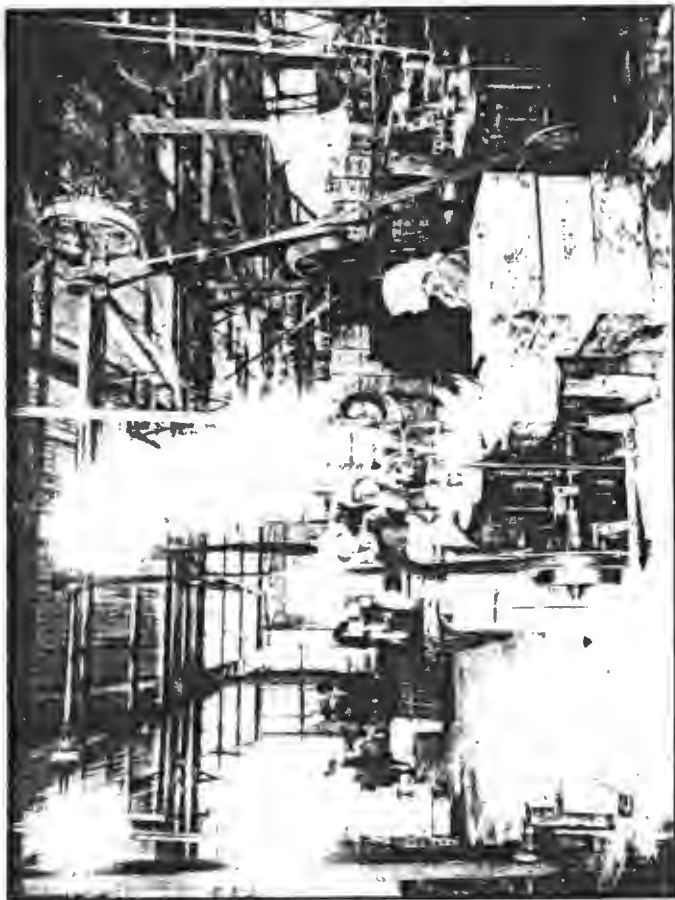




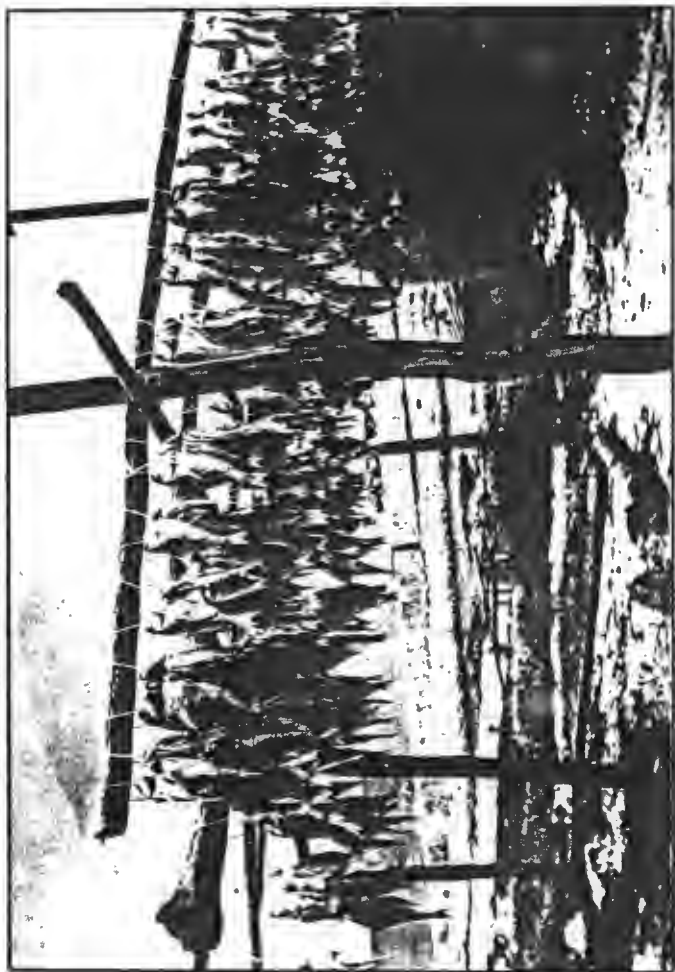
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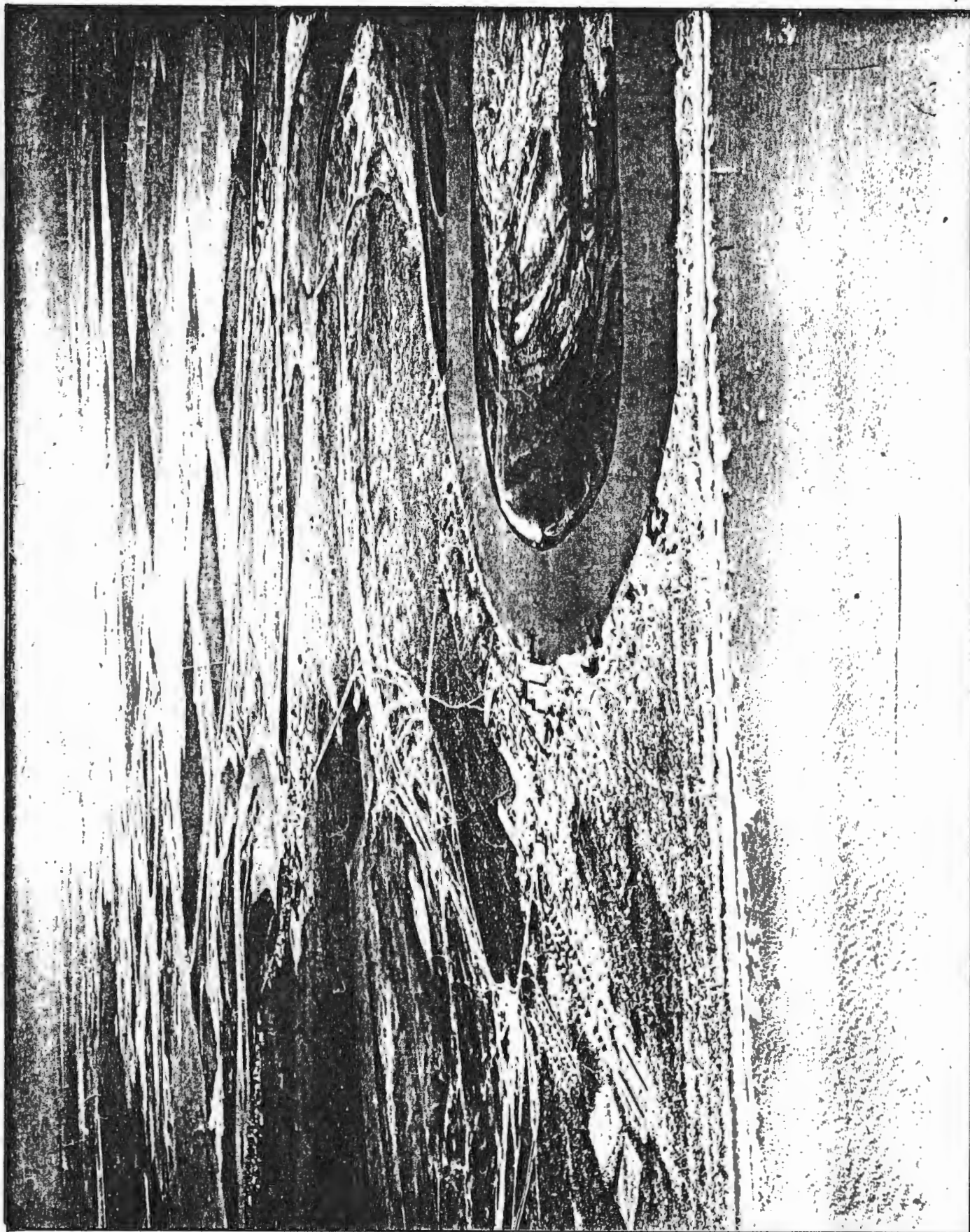
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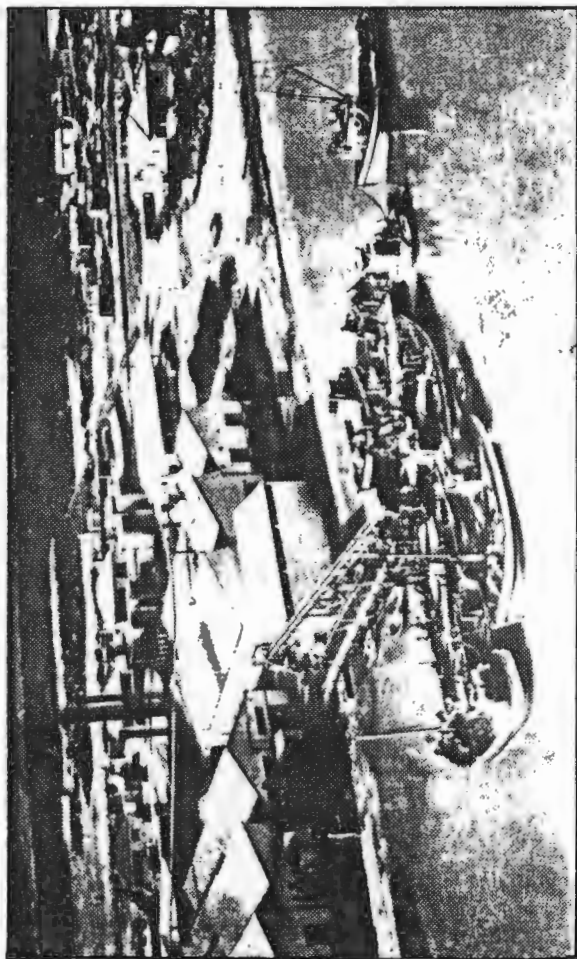


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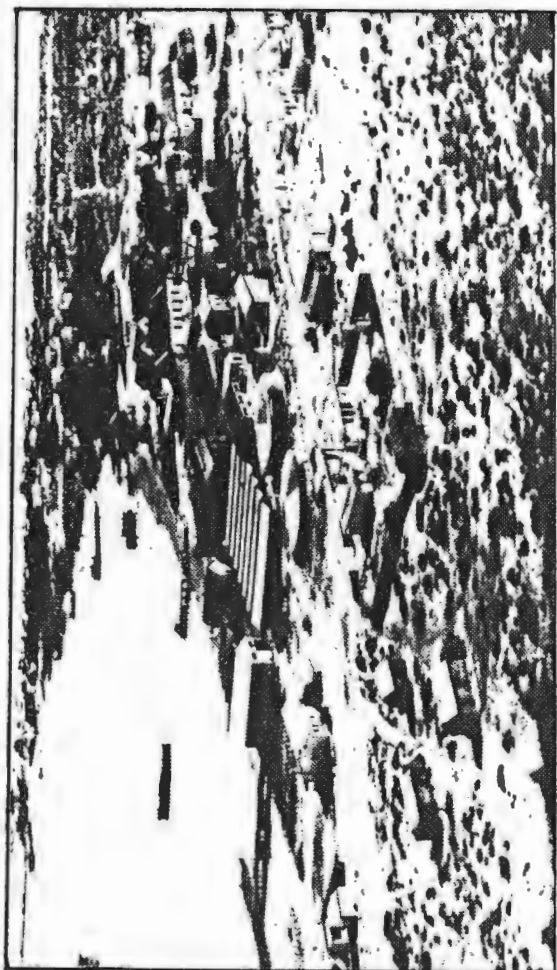




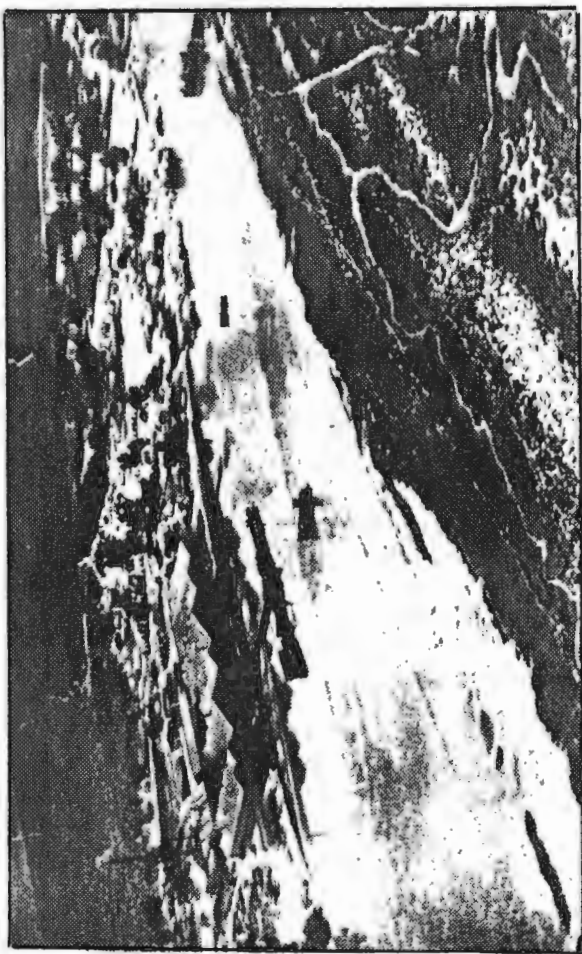
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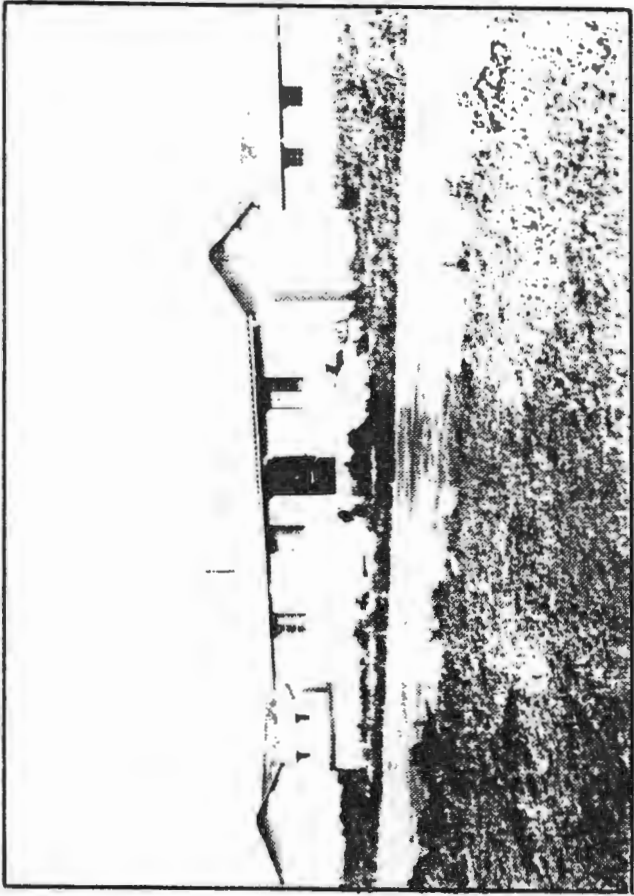
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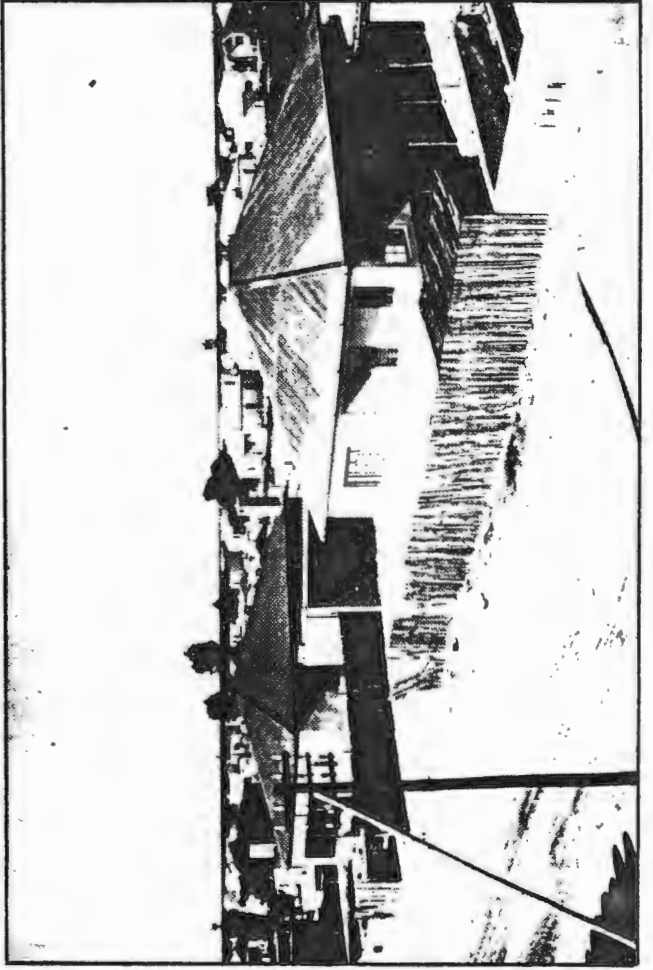
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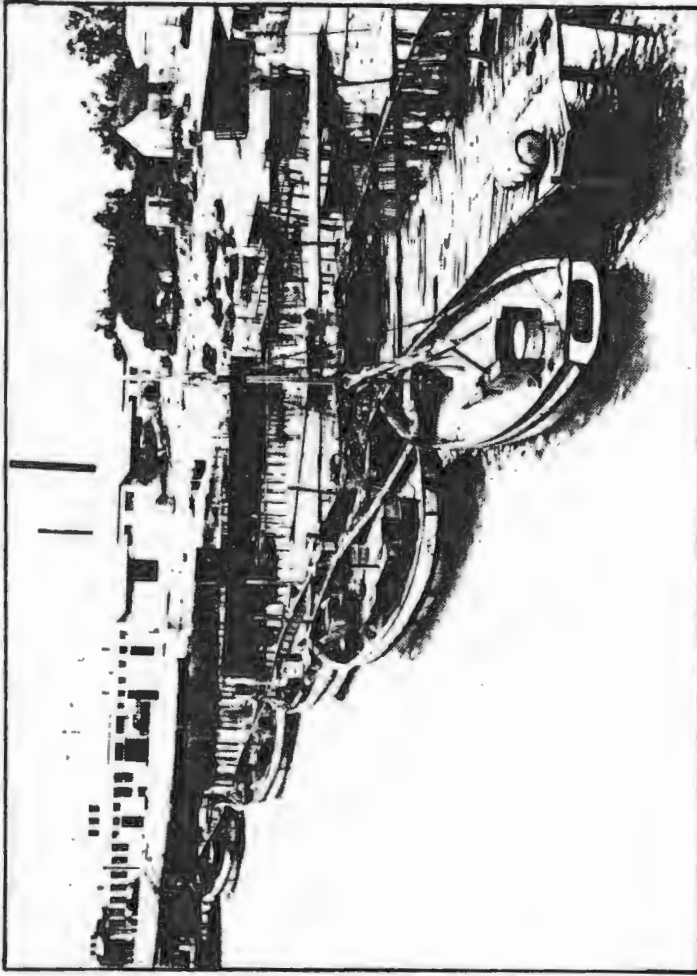
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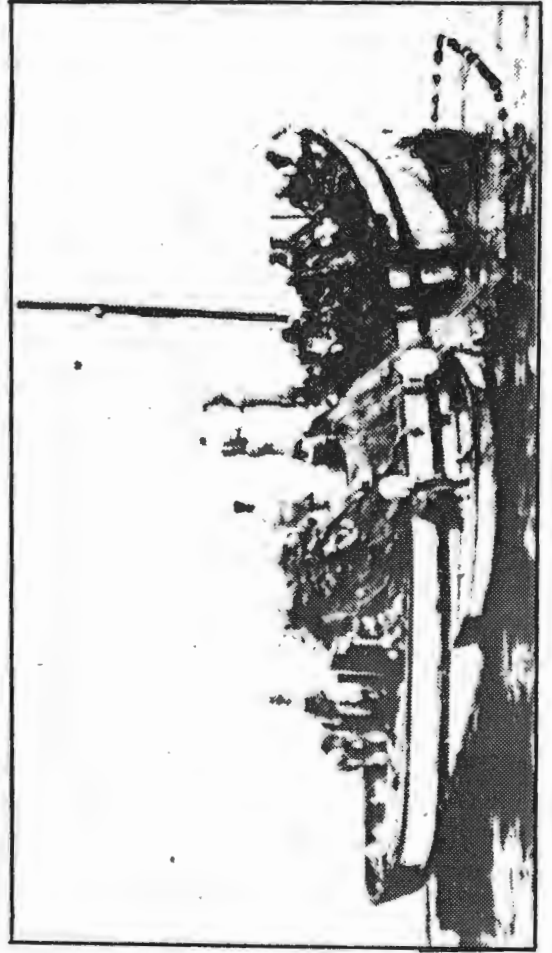
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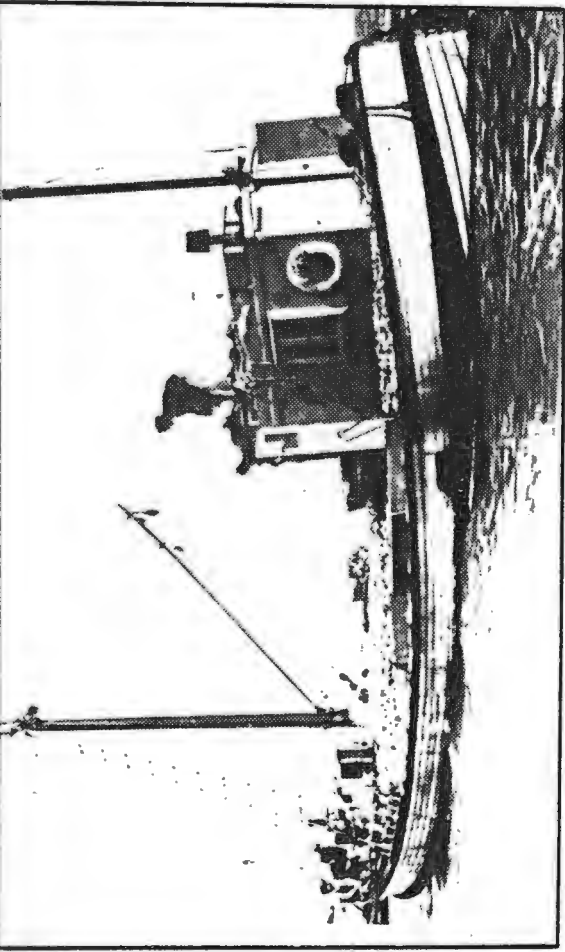
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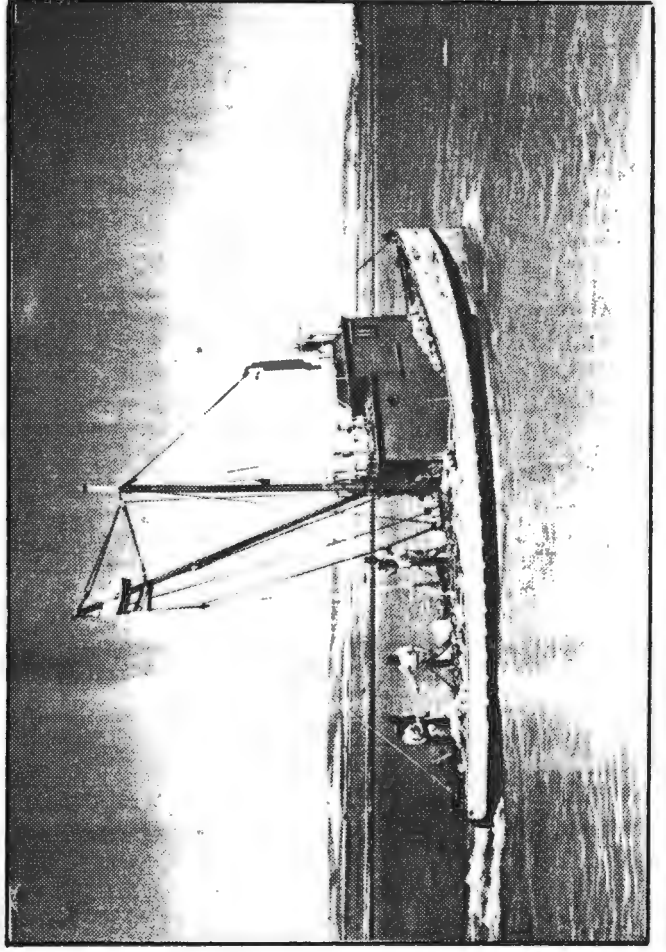
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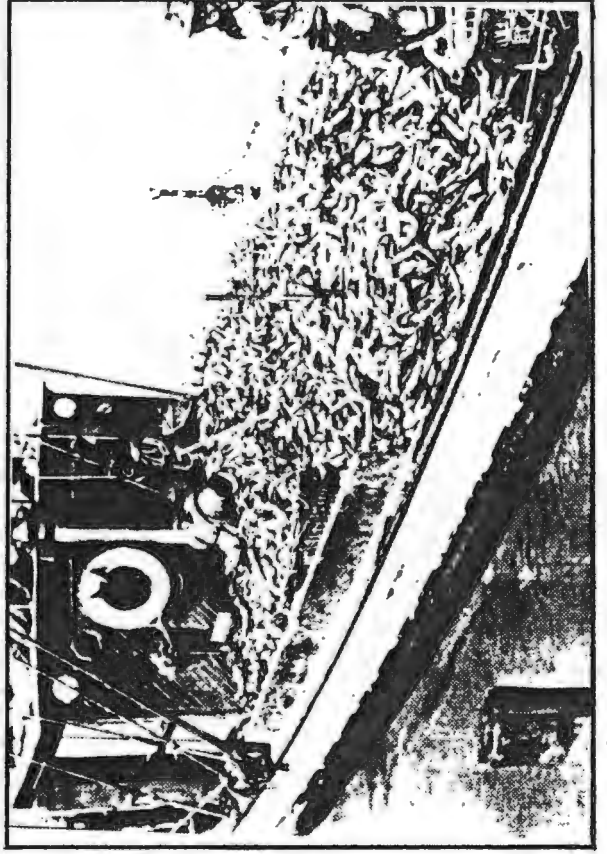
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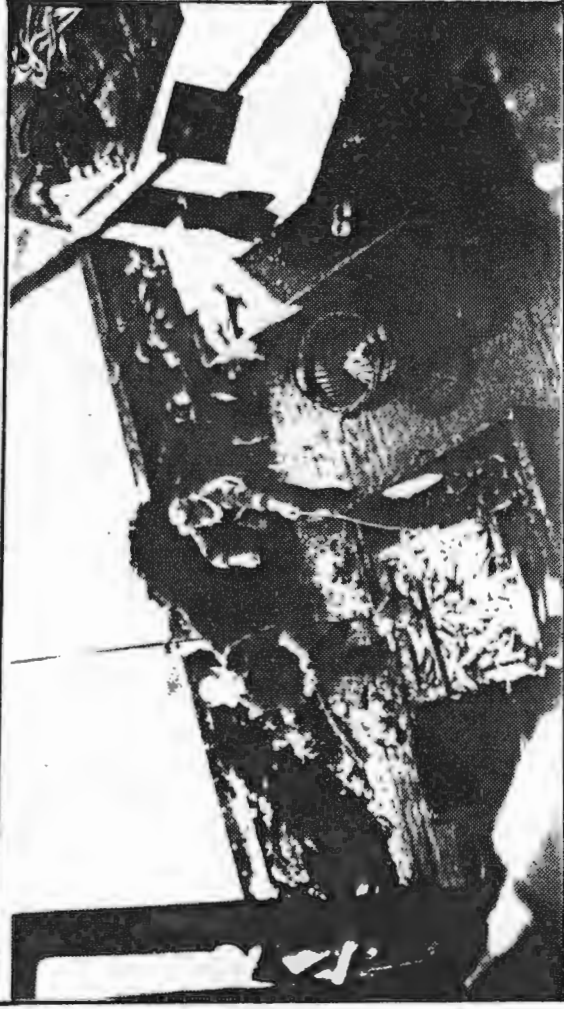
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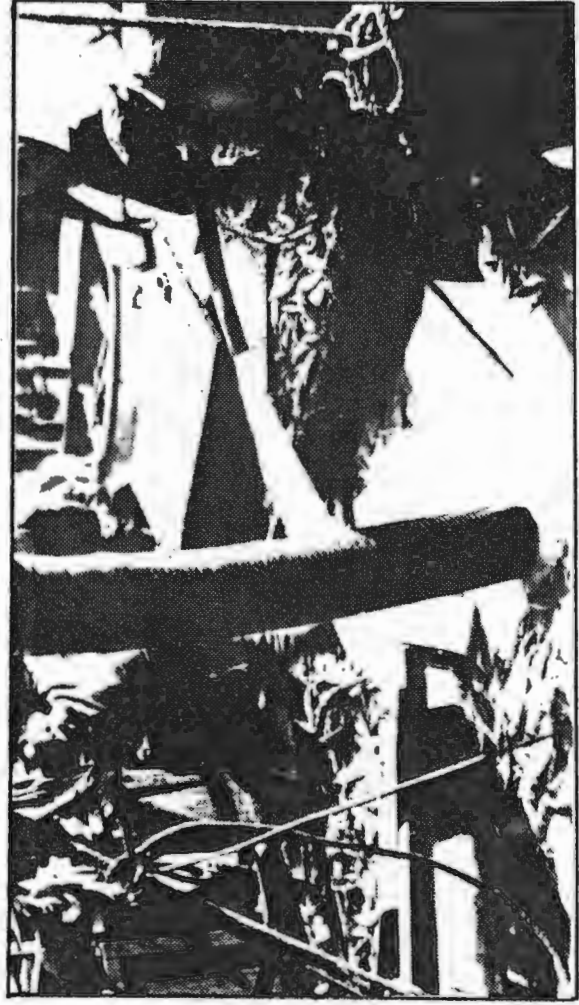
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5: THE PERIPHERY DISINTEGRATED

By 1929 the St Helena Bay fishing economy was in the grip of a protracted organic crisis, caused by the 1909 balkanisation of the Bay. This division initially reflected the balance of class forces between Sandveld agriculture and merchant-cum-productive capital. By the 1920s, however, the balance had tilted decisively in the latter's favour, with the motorisation of the Bay fishing fleet making the ETSFZ an increasingly permeable barrier against outside access to the marine resources of the Piketberg coastline. Stephan Brothers, however, was unable to exploit this opportunity to the full because of its lack of direct control over distant water fishing and rapidly declining position in the industry. The revolutionary potential of motorisation was thus blunted by its being controlled by petty-commodity producers rather than productive capital. As the latter stagnated, independent boat owners at the Bay fought a prolonged internecine war of position along faultlines reflecting less a traditional versus modern dichotomy than growing class differentiation within the petty-commodity mode itself. The inherent weaknesses of merchant-cum-productive capital and the provincial state fuelled this impasse which saw the wartime promise of development strangled at birth. St Helena Bay had, however, been reintegrated into the world economy by the wartime canning boom and as such was subject to the long wave of capitalist development both nationally and internationally. The post-war boom ended in the Great Depression of 1929, sending shock waves around the globe which continued to reverberate at the Bay until the late 1930s.

The Depression undercut the St Helena Bay fishing economy both from without and within and the interdependence of petty-commodity and factory production amplified its effect on both sectors. A worsening balance of trade between South Africa and

France after 1929 prompted the latter to impose strict quota restrictions on crayfish imports to France in 1934. Coming in the wake of the collapse of the SALCA production and price controls in 1931-32, the French quota forced Stephan Brothers to cease canning altogether. The collapse of the crayfish fishery created an acute subsistence\accumulation crisis for many fishermen\boat owners at the Bay. The petty-commodity economy was in trouble from other quarters too, as the Depression decimated the agricultural demand for rantsoennis and seasonal farm labour in the context of increasing population pressure at the coast and a renewed marine resource crisis. The inshore fishery was thus unable to absorb the ever-more frequent and unseasonal incursions of crayfish-cum-set net fishermen into depleted fishing grounds and shrunken markets. Nor was this influx confined to locals, but included motor boats from Saldanha Bay, unemployed as a result of factory closures and using lampara nets at will in the ETSFZ. The lampara fishermen devastated the already weakened seine fishing economy of Piketberg in two short years, 1934 and 1935, and by 1936 the Berg River fisheries were an increasing cause of DRC concern as "poor whiteism" reached epidemic proportions.

The Depression also tilted the balance of power politically away from the provincial to the central state. The latter, bolstered by increased tax revenue from mining after South Africa left the Gold Standard in 1932, was able to consolidate and expand its role in the economy, pursuing secondary industrialisation with new vigour. Pretoria was specifically drawn into the inshore fisheries in the wake of the French quota crisis, negotiating with France for revisions based on reciprocal trade and legislating to ensure an equitable distribution of the quota among canners. The central state also refused to uphold the ETSFZ against the lampara fishermen in 1934-1935 and the reserve finally collapsed in 1936 when Pretoria took over responsibility for marine fisheries from Cape Town. Determined to develop the

inshore fisheries along modern lines, the central state passed two pieces of enabling legislation in 1940, laying the basis for the rationalisation and single-channel marketing of the crayfish export trade as well as the integration of the inshore fisheries into the national fresh fish market through co-operatives. This increasing state intervention confirmed the demise of the old status quo at the Bay, as Stephan Brothers and Sandveld agriculture were subjugated to the national agenda. The central state allocated the crayfish export quota on the basis of efficiency and Stephan Brothers received only a small pack, while the Sandveld farmers' harbouring of poor whites came under increasing attack from the Department of Social Welfare and the DRC.

The Depression and its aftermath thus led to the disintegration of both factory and petty-commodity production at the periphery, in the context of consolidation by the central state of its political and economic power in the fisheries and ever more direct intervention in production. The initiative at the micro-level now passed to the nascent petty-bourgeoisie boat-owning class who, following the collapse of the crayfish fishery and powerful demonstration effect of the Saldanha Bay lampara fishermen, turned to lampara fishing for the rantsoennis and Cape Town markets by the late 1930s. Motor lorry transport facilitated the Bay's integration with the economy of the Cape Town metropolis and price equalisation on the west coast which prevented any large-scale recovery in beach seine fishing. Labour from the shattered Piketberg seine fisheries was either absorbed into the expanded motorised lampara fishing fleet or abandoned the Bay altogether. The de facto abolition of the ETSFZ, decline of Stephan Brothers and Sandveld agriculture and advent of the motor lorry enabled a new class of fish dealers and petty merchants to emerge at Berg River. Freed from the strictures of competing and more powerful capitals, they were able to

accumulate in their own right, combining crayfish, rantsoen and fresh fish production in an annual production cycle attuned to shifts in the different markets and the marine resource and more responsive to the vagaries of both than either the canning and seine fishing economies.

5.1 CONSOLIDATION BY THE CENTRE 1929-1939

The Depression undermined the canning industry's consensus over the SALCA quota and price controls. The contraction in international trade after 1929 resulted in large quantities of canned crayfish being diverted to France, where the SALCA minimum price guaranteed a reasonable return. This created an oversupply which slowed the movement of stock and threatened a resurgence in internecine price wars by 1930¹. In a bid to avert this, the Association concluded the so-called "London Agreement" in June 1931 with a cartel of British and French buyers, to take the industry's entire 1931-1932 season output at a set price of 65s 5d per case up to 130 000 cases². The Agreement broke down in late 1931, however, due to opposition from the North Bay Canning Company and the South West African industry, as well as the British government's abandonment of the Gold Standard³. In the

¹ State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), C. von Bonde "Memorandum on the Proposed Re-Establishment of a Closed Season for Crawfish", 1 May 1930, Minutes of Meeting between the SALCA and the Board of Trade and Industries, 28 April 1931, Minutes of Meeting between the SALCA and the Board of Trade and Industries, 27 May 1931 & Minutes of Meeting between the SALCA and the Board of Trade and Industries, 10 June 1931.

² State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), SALCA to C. von Bonde, 10 August 1931.

³ See correspondence in State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1 vols.1-2. Also see HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), North Bay Canning Company to the Chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries, 10 August 1931, North Bay Canning Company to the Chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries, 21 September 1931, Department of Mines and Industries, "Report of Cost Accountant for Board of Trade and Industries: The South African Crayfish Canning Industry", 16 November 1931, Table VI, p.17 and R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.79.

wake of these setbacks and the continued inactivity of the central state, the SALCA collapsed in February 1932⁴. The abandonment of the SALCA production and price controls turned 1931-1932 into a bumper season for the industry⁵. Price cutting re-emerged, output surged and at home the canners faced mounting competition for raw material and labour from a nascent export trade in frozen crayfish tails at Cape Town⁶. The first attempts at freezing for export were made in the early 1920s and, with the abolition of the closed season and relaxation in size-limit, Cape Town merchants commenced large-scale production using rented cold storage near the docks. In 1932 they exported more than 1.5 million lbs frozen tails valued at £32 000 to Britain and France; by 1933 this had increased to 3 million lbs worth £94 000⁷. Packing was labour intensive and had none of the overheads of canning. Packers thus invested in boats and paid higher prices for their crayfish, drawing both labour and raw material away

⁴ State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Stephan Brothers to the Minister of Mines and Industries, 22 February 1932.

⁵ Union of South Africa, Department of Customs and Excise British South Africa, Annual Statement of the Trade and Shipping of the Union of South Africa, Southern and Northern Rhodesia and South West Africa, 1931-1932. Union canned crayfish production rose from around 72 000 cases in 1931 to an all-time record of nearly 88 000 cases the following year.

⁶ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.11, 1933, pp.18-20; Board of Trade and Industries Report No.180: The Fishing Industry, 1934, p.61; R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.80 and S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast, 1874-1947", pp.87-92.

⁷ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.11, 1933, pp.18-20.

from the beleaguered canners⁸. Abroad, frozen tails competed with French langouste, prompting the French government to raise tariffs on all crayfish imports in July 1933, undercutting the canned product's ability to compete with Japanese canned crab and posing a new threat to industry profits⁹. The 1931-1932 boom and increasing pressure from the frozen tail packers also compelled canners to increasingly process soft, undersized and berried crayfish. This, together with unhygienic factories, defective processing methods and the use of unlacquered tin plate, resulted in a sharp decline in the quality of the Union pack¹⁰. Poor quality and renewed price wars in France prompted complaints from French importers and renewed calls in industry circles for tighter state control¹¹. In October 1933 the majority of canners joined the South African Food Canners Council (SAFCC) and proceeded to use this forum to lobby the central state¹². The establishment of a Department of Commerce and Industries in

⁸ Board of Trade and Industries Report No.180: The Fishing Industry, 1934, pp.59-66. Comparative prices per 100 crayfish in 1934 were as follows:

<u>Location</u>	<u>Canning</u>	<u>Packing</u>
Cape Town	7s.6d - 15s.0d	16s.0d - 20s
West Coast - Company Boat	3s.6d - 4s.6d	-
- Private Boat	9s.0d - 13s.0d	-

⁹ S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast, 1874-1947", pp.76 & 94.

¹⁰ Union of South Africa, Board of Trade and Industries Report No.180: The Fishing Industry, 1934, pp.59-62.

¹¹ Ibid., pp.96-99. Also State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(2), Secretary Board of Trade and Industries to Angra Fish Canning Company, 28 March 1933 and Angra Fish Canning Company to Secretary Board of Trade and Industries, 3 May 1933.

¹² State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(2), SAFCC to the Chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries, 10 August 1933, SAFCC to the Secretary Board of Trade and Industries, 6 October 1933 and 10 October 1933, SAFCC to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 24 November 1933 and 14 December 1933.

November 1933, raised hopes of closer co-operation between industry and state, but developments were cut short in January 1934 by the French government's imposition of an import quota on Union and South West African canned and frozen crayfish¹³.

The French were anxious to protect their own langouste and nascent colonial canning industries and right the skewed balance of trade which had developed between France and South Africa in the wake of the 1933 Ottawa Agreement¹⁴. This was underscored by France's linking any increase in the quota to reciprocal trade with the Union. In the interim, the price of canned crayfish rose sharply as stocks rapidly accumulated in bonded warehouses in France and by April 1934 all the Union canneries had closed, leaving their labour forces unemployed¹⁵. Under mounting pressure from the industry and Parliament, the South African government unsuccessfully attempted to head off the quota in January 1934 and then began negotiating for a trade agreement with France¹⁶. In May 1934, amid accusations of inactivity, foot-dragging and sacrificing the crayfish industry on the "altar of Empire", the government passed the Crayfish Export Control Act as an emergency measure with industry support¹⁷. The legislation was aimed at allocating the French quota equitably among canners, prohibiting the export of crayfish without a government permit and imposing

¹³ R. Lees *Fishing for Fortunes*, p.81 and S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast, 1874-1947", p.76 ff.

¹⁴ S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast, 1874-1947", p.76 ff.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates 1934*, vol.23, cols.3441-3442 & 4529-4536 and *Union of South Africa Extraordinary Government Gazette*, No.2202, 7 June 1934, *Crawfish Export Control Act*, Act No.50 of 1934.

heavy fines on transgressors¹⁸. Initially it was seen as an interim measure, but the Crawfish Export Control Amendment Act of May 1935 extended the new provisions indefinitely¹⁹. In February 1935 a preliminary trade agreement was signed with France and the quota increased²⁰. Despite this and subsequent increases, the canning industry never regained its former productivity or share of the French Market.

TABLE 5.1: Canned Crayfish Exports to France
1930-1939

YEAR	Cases [48lb]	Value [£]	Price per Case	% of Exports
1930	77 024	205 929	54s	79.1
1931	71 951	187 250	52s	79.5
1932	87 898	220 066	50s	89.0
1933	86 105	234 067	54s	90.8
1934	47 502	135 601	58s	84.6
1935	40 432	132 986	66s	74.9
1936	62 959	204 209	64s	87.9
1937	55 472	156 281	56s	84.1
1938	43 895	108 076	50s	83.8
1939	36 626	91 583	50s	57.3

Output and earnings lingered at half 1933 levels for the remainder of the decade as the canners struggled to find alternative markets. The quota was jointly allocated by the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates 1935*, vol.25, cols.5240-5244 and *Union of South Africa Extraordinary Government Gazette*, No.2272, 10 May 1935, *Crawfish Export Control Amendment Act*, Act No.41 of 1935.

²⁰ S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast, 1874-1947", pp.80-81.

²¹ *Union of South Africa, Department of Customs and Excise Annual Statements of the Trade and Shipping of the Union of South Africa and the Territory of South West Africa, 1930-1939.*

Department of Commerce and Industries and the SAFCC²². In addition, the state produced a spate of new research to help the industry improve the quality of its product and tightened controls over the crayfish resource²³. The SAFCC, emboldened by Pretoria's new attitude, established an industry newsletter, standardised the use of lacquered tin plate in canning, substituted cardboard for wood in packaging, attempted to find new markets for canned crayfish and encouraged canners to diversify into the local market²⁴.

TABLE 5.2: Frozen Crayfish Tail Exports, 1935-1939²⁵

YEAR	BRITAIN\FRANCE			USA		
	Cases [301b]	Value [£]	% of Total	Cases [301b]	Value [£]	% of Total
1932	51 821	31 959	99.9	-*	-	-
1933	103 185	93 318	99.5	-	-	-
1934	27 664	21 916	86.3	-	-	-
1935	30 797	27 304	75.2	3 449	3 010	5.7
1936	36 162	30 510	60.2	20 853	19 701	34.7
1937	34 967	37 501	37.6	54 42	260 008	58.5
1938	42 145	39 484	45.5	41 642	32 268	44.9
1939	27 600	23 099	30.2	59 046	53 935	64.5

* = < 100 cases or £100.

²² S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast, 1874-1947", p.80.

²³ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.12- No.17, 1934-1939; Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Division Investigational Report No.5, 1935 and diverse articles in Cape Archives; PAN 43, A120\e\46, vols.1-2, "Crawfish Canners News Bulletin" 1933-1939.

²⁴ S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast, 1874-1947", pp.82; R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, pp.82-85 and Cape Archives; PAN 43, A120\e\46, vols.1-2 for "Crawfish Canners News Bulletin" 1933-1939.

²⁵ Union of South Africa, Department of Customs and Excise Annual Statements of the Trade and Shipping of the Union of South Africa and the Territory of South West Africa, 1932-1939.

The frozen tail packers, for their part, also reorganised, seeking a political voice through membership of the SAFCC and successfully pioneered a new market for their product in the United States of America²⁶.

This period of growing state intervention in the industry culminated in the passing of the Crawfish Export Act in 1940. Ongoing price wars, a falling price in France and the threat of a ban on frozen tail imports to America due to poor quality ensured that both canners and packers supported the new legislation²⁷. The Act entrenched Pretoria's right to set export quotas and quality standards for producers and, most importantly, enforce any agreement reached by seventy-five percent of exporters on the industry as a whole²⁸. In the ten years 1929-1939, the crayfish industry thus moved from a situation of disruptive competition to the threshold of collective marketing under the impetus of an increasingly interventionist central state.

The shift away from competition towards single-channel marketing under state auspices threatened Stephan Brothers. The firm was a major supporter of the old SALCA production and price controls and vociferous in its call for state enforcement of these

²⁶ S.C. Townell "The Crawfish Industry of the Cape West Coast, 1874-1947", p.95 ff.

²⁷ R. Lees *Fishing for Fortunes*, pp.86-95 and Union of South Africa *Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Crawfish Export Bill, 1939 [S.C.13-39]*, Evidence of N. Swerling, H. Goodspeed, E.R. Keegan, A. Ovenstone, pp.5-13 and Evidence of J. Lurie, p.20-21.

²⁸ *Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Crawfish Export Bill, 1939; Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates 1940, vol.38, cols.3692-3699, 3702-3737 & 3744 and Union of South Africa Extraordinary Government Gazette, No.2749, 10 April 1940, Crawfish Export Act, Act No.9 of 1940.*

measures²⁹. Pretoria, however, was sharply critical of the SALCA, dismissing the Association's argument that price instability in France was the result of overproduction at home³⁰. The state alleged that divergent production costs were to blame, allowing more efficient producers to lower prices and meet Japanese competition³¹. The SALCA, however, set its minimum price "at a level sufficiently high to allow of the most inefficient [producer] making a profit"³². Pretoria's commitment to the Union crayfish export industry was premised on rationalisation at home to eliminate inefficient producers. The state-administered production quota, quality standards, resource management and support for the frozen tail industry combined to alienate the smaller and less efficient canners, including Stephan Brothers, from the reorganisation of the industry after 1934. Stephan Brothers was something of an enigma by 1929, being one of the three biggest producers in the industry in terms of capital employed and output, but recording a loss of £1 600 because "costs were loaded with an additional burden of 3s per case to meet interest charges on a huge overdraft"³³. The Department of Commerce and Industries' cost accountant reported in 1931 that,

²⁹ State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Stephan Brothers et al to C. von Bonde, 5 September 1930, Stephan Brothers to the Minister of Justice, 11 September 1930 and Stephan Brothers to the Chairman of the Board of Trade and Industries, 30 September 1930 and HEN 1538, 180\2\1(2), Extract of Letter from Stephan Brothers, 12 May 1933.

³⁰ State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Department of Mines and Industries, "Report of Cost Accountant for Board of Trade and Industries: The South African Crayfish Canning Industry", 16 November 1931, pp.16-20 and Board of Trade and Industries Report No.180: The Fishing Industry, 1934, pp.59-64.

³¹ State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Department of Mines and Industries, "Report of Cost Accountant for Board of Trade and Industries: The South African Crayfish Canning Industry", 16 November 1931, p.18.

³² Ibid.

³³ State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(1), Department of Mines and Industries, "Report of Cost Accountant for Board of Trade and Industries: The South African Crayfish Canning Industry", 16 November 1931, pp.10-11.

"[T]he company's factory costs compare favourably with those of the other large factories, but their Cape Town overheads are extraordinarily heavy. There appears to me to be a lot of dead wood in the head office organisation of this company which it should be possible to eliminate under a drastic scheme of reorganisation"³⁴.

The "dead wood" reflected the firm's mercantile roots and the fact that it was not just a canning company like its competitors. The profitability of its St Helena Bay canneries depended, from the mid-1920s onwards, on the SALCA controls and exploitation of its fishing labour force. The price of crayfish at the firm's jetties fell steadily after 1927 as the firm took advantage of the abolition of the closed season and relocation of the North Bay Canning Company, to intensify the extraction of absolute surplus value from the Bay crayfish fishermen. In the late 1920s the piece work system was revised and the "tel" (payment per 100) replaced by payment per crate containing 300-800 crayfish, depending on size³⁵. The price, however remained the same until 1930 whereafter it was repeatedly cut. From £1 per crate before 1930 it fell to 17s in February 1931, 13s by November 1931 and a mere 8s by March 1932. By October 1932 it had recovered slightly to stand at 10s for locally-caught crayfish and 14s for fish netted 140 miles away - still a 50% reduction in less than three years³⁶. Stephan Brothers' raw material problems were further exacerbated after 1934, by the growth of the frozen tail trade, an industry-wide quality drive and the tightening of state

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Interviews with Mr Hendrik Brand, Velddrift, 19 July 1986 and Mr Ulisse Donaggi, Velddrift, 22 July 1986.

³⁶ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, 7\1\4, Petition of A. Dipaola et al to the Magistrate of Hopefield, 10 October 1932.

controls over resource exploitation³⁷. With the French quota limiting output, no alternative foreign or local markets and unable to diversify into frozen tail packing, the firm found it increasingly difficult to keep production costs down by squeezing labour in order to show a profit on its much reduced canning output³⁸. By the late 1930s, Stephan Brothers had become one of the main obstacles to the SAFCC's attempts to establish single-channel marketing in the industry, refusing to join unless it was assured of a larger quota allocation³⁹. Such obstructionism prompted the majority of the canning industry to support the 1940 Crawfish Export Act, to compel Stephan Brothers and other renegades to abide by majority decisions in the interests of the industry as a whole.

Increased state intervention in the crayfish industry and the decline of Stephan Brothers further disorganised the St Helena Bay fishing economy, marginalising a growing number of former crayfish fishermen, intensifying conflict over the ETSFZ and hastening the final collapse of the Piketberg seine fisheries. This process of disintegration was accelerated by the devastating effects of the Depression on agriculture along the west coast and the replacement of provincial by central state administration of the country's marine fisheries. Pretoria's commitment to secondary industry and modernisation led to the rupturing of the earlier alliance between Sandveld agriculture and the provincial state, which provided the Berg River seine fisheries with legislative protection and cleared the way for their final

³⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\e\3(4), *Stephan Brothers to the Provincial Secretary, 17 November 1937* and State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, *Stephan Brothers to the Minister of Mines and Industries, 21 February 1936*.

³⁸ *Ibid.* Also Cape Archives; PAN 41, A120\e\24(5), *Saldanha Bay Canning Company to the Provincial Secretary, 16 October 1936* for a company in a similar position to Stephan Brothers.

³⁹ R. Lees *Fishing for Fortunes*, p.87.

dissolution and incorporation into the central state's scheme for centralised co-operative marketing in the inshore fisheries.

5.2 DISSOLUTION AT THE PERIPHERY 1929-1939

The proclamation of a crayfish sanctuary at St Helena Bay in 1927 shifted fishing effort to more distant grounds and, whereas in 1930 some local fishermen still operated within a 15-40 mile radius of the Bay, by 1932 all were travelling 120-150 miles to find legal-sized crayfish in paying quantities⁴⁰. Owners and fishermen without motor boats continued fishing the coast between Paternoster and Saldanha Bay for ever-diminishing catches. The erosion of both groups' earning power was worsened by Stephan Brothers lowering the boatside price of crayfish after 1930⁴¹. In a bid to halt their gradual immiseration, fishermen and boat owners pressurised the provincial state into reducing the minimum size-limit for crayfish to 3 1/2 inches for a twelve-month trial period from February 1929, explaining that 1928 had been an exceptionally bad year due to drought and the loss of earnings caused by the proclamation of sanctuaries at Saldanha and St Helena Bays⁴². The 1927 relocation of the North Bay Canning Company also cut raw material demand and only 3.8 million crayfish were processed by Bay canneries in 1928, half the number canned a decade earlier⁴³. The concession was extended each year

⁴⁰ Cape Archives; 1\HFD, 7\1\4, Petition of A. Dipaola et al to the Magistrate of Hopefield, 10 October 1932.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\e\3(3), Provincial Secretary to C. von Bonde, 1 February 1929, forwarding petitions from "Fishermen and Fishing Boat Owners Resident on the South West Coast in the Malmesbury, Piketberg, Clanwilliam and Van Rhynsdorp Divisions", handed in by MLA J.H.H. de Waal and C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 5 February 1929 and Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 37 of 1929, 19 February 1929.

⁴³ Cape Archives; FDS 12, FS 8\6\1, Return titled "Crawfish 1928", n.d.

until June 1933, when the rapid growth of the frozen tail trade prompted reinstatement of the 4 inch minimum size ruling⁴⁴. Following sustained agitation by the west coast crayfish fishermen supported by the SAFCC, however, the state reintroduced the 3 1/2 inch minimum in November 1933⁴⁵. In 1932, it granted yet another concession to open boat crayfish fishermen at St Helena Bay, allowing them to fish in the sanctuary for three months from March-May 1932 and again from December 1933 until the end of March 1934⁴⁶.

The declining position of the crayfish fishermen was exacerbated by a contraction in the rural rantsoennis market and a protracted resource scarcity along the west coast. The Depression, coupled with drought, eroded agricultural production in the coastal districts, undermining demand for both seasonal labour and rantsoennis, the two points at which fishing and farming intersected and mutually reinforced one another most strongly. Seasonal farm labour, as an alternative source of income to

⁴⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\e\3(3), J.H.H. de Waal to the Provincial Secretary, 24 March 1930 and Provincial Secretary to the Administrator, 24 March 1931; Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 59 of 1930, 27 March 1930; Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 40 of 1931, 25 March 1931 and Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 80 of 1932, 27 April 1932.

⁴⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\e\3(4), F.C. Erasmus to the Administrator, 25 August 1933, forwarding the Petition of Fishermen Resident at and about the Mouth of the Berg River in the Divisions of Moorreesburg and Piketberg, n.d., General Manager SAFCC to the Provincial Secretary, 17 October 1933 & C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 30 October 1933 and Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 88 of 1933, 21 June 1933 & Proclamation 168 of 1933, 17 November 1933.

⁴⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 41, A120\e\24(4), C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 22 February 1932 & 9 March 1932; PAN 41, A120\e\24(5), C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 27 November 1933; Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 49 of 1932, 9 March 1932 & Proclamation 67 of 1932, 7 April 1932 and Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 173 of 1933, 6 December 1933. Also PAN 41, A120\e\24(4), C.F.J. Thiart to J.J.H. de Waal, 25 March 1932 and M.J. Koegelenberg to J.J.H. de Waal, 25 March 1925 for seine fishermen opposition to this concession.

fishing, thus declined at the very moment when failure of the marine resource made it essential to supplement earnings from fishing⁴⁷. The concomitant shrinkage in the rantsoennis trade further depleted the subsistence base of the Bay fishermen, offset to some extent by the introduction of motor lorries in place of horse-drawn carts in the conveyance of fish to the interior⁴⁸. It was now possible to find markets as far afield as Cape Town, but the impact of motorisation on the St Helena Bay trade was limited by isolation, poor roads and a scarcity of fish along the coast between Saldanha and Lamberts Bay⁴⁹. In 1929 and again in 1931 the snoek season failed and in April 1931 the research ship "Africana" spent two weeks searching the west coast between Cape Town and Port Nolloth, but located only one small shoal and a few "strays" off Paternoster. Von Bonde concluded, "the fish were either swimming deep for some unaccountable reason, or ... were keeping very far away from the coast"⁵⁰. In October 1931 the Lambert's Bay canning companies suffered a crippling bait shortage, reporting that only dogfish were readily obtainable⁵¹. When the snoek stayed away for a third year the "Africana" again "scoured" the west coast in March 1932 with even more depressing results, a solitary snoek hooked off Baboon Point during a cruise of more than two weeks⁵². In July 1932 the

⁴⁷ Cape Archives; 1\PKB, 6\1\23, Magistrate of Piketberg to the Secretary Industrial Legislation Commission, 3 October 1934 for the effect of the Depression on Piketberg district.

⁴⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwerts to F.C. Erasmus, 30 June 1934.

⁴⁹ See Fishing Harbours Committee Part III, 1926 for the state of roads at the Bay.

⁵⁰ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.9, 1932, p.12.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁵² Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.10, 1933, p.8.

Vredenburg Farmers Association complained about the high price of rantsoenvis in the district. Maasbankers, not usually prized as rantsoenvis, were selling for 15s a 100, more than six times the normal price of 2s 6d five years previously. The farmers blamed the scarcity of fish and higher prices on the seabird colonies in the area and called for their immediate extermination, but, as one farmer pointed out, "many birds on the islands are [themselves] dying of starvation owing to the scarcity of food"⁵³. The crisis in the crayfish fishery coupled, with depression in the rantsoenvis market and general fish scarcity thus defined the Depression at the Bay. Bertha Chilcott recalls:

"It was very bad ... it was very bad. You know that the people - there was no food, very little food and you would see many women and children and the men also - they would come early in the morning you know, even from the farms - from Velddrift and everywhere - with bags or baskets. And they would go down to the beach at low tide and take out white mussels and the black mussels. But people practically lived on that"⁵⁴.

Mounting poverty and endemic "poor whiteism" at the Bay drew little official attention. The Department of Health decried the unsanitary living conditions at Berg River, branded the fishermen "a dirty thriftless and shiftless lot", and worried about malnutrition among the children⁵⁵. Its hands were tied, however, because the fishing communities resided on private land and were

⁵³ "Decline of Fishing Industry - Destruction of Fish By Sea Birds" in *Cape Times*, 21 July 1932.

⁵⁴ Interview with Mrs Bertha Chilcott, Laaiplek, 3 July 1986.

⁵⁵ Cape Archives; 1\PKB, 6\1\10 13\2\3, A.P. Viljoen to the Health Department, 25 February 1930, Magistrate Piketberg to the SAP Roodebaai, 24 March 1930, Assistant Health Officer to the Secretary for Public Health and 2 March 1932, Under-Secretary for Public Health to the Magistrate Piketberg, 23 October 1935.

too poor to provide a rate base for a Village Management Board⁵⁶. By the early 1930s many tenants were in arrears with their rent and struggling to survive from either fishing or farming⁵⁷. Baas Wiid left, working where he could on construction sites and as foreman of a road gang and only returning to Velddrift in 1934⁵⁸. Abraham Tolken also abandoned the river, going to Middelburg to work on building the Loskop Dam⁵⁹. His three brothers followed, the one to Paarl, another to work in the post office and a third for the railways⁶⁰. The latter was a popular choice, Dan Groenewald's family also trading in the uncertainties of fishing for a secure wage on the railways at Bellville⁶¹. The majority of fishermen, however remained at the Bay and were joined by many first-time arrivals at the coast, refugees from the rural hinterland. In this context of depression, resource scarcity and rising population pressure, renewed conflict over the ETSFZ was inevitable.

In 1929 the provincial state was still considering a reduction in the ETSFZ boundary to create a neutral zone between the set and seine fishermen, a decision delayed for more than a year by a lack of accurate survey maps of St Helena Bay which made location

⁵⁶ Cape Archives; 1\PKB, 6\1\10 13\2\3, Senior Assistant Health Officer to the Magistrate Piketberg, 9 March 1933 and Provincial Secretary to the Magistrate Piketberg, 17 July 1937. Also State Archives; LDE 4733, 19784\17, Senior Welfare Officer to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 5 January 1939.

⁵⁷ See for example Cape Archives; 1\HFD, 7\1\4, for the rent difficulties facing the Novellas and Angelo Dipaola at St Helena Bay.

⁵⁸ Interview with Mr Baas Wiid, Velddrift, 18 July 1986.

⁵⁹ Interview with Mr Abraham Tolken, Velddrift, 27 July 1986.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Interview with Dan Groenewald, Velddrift, 18 July 1986. Also "Hard Times at Oliphants Kraal" in Cape Times, 9 August 1928.

of ETSFZ boundary beacons impossible⁶². The police, however, remained unconvinced and the provincial state requested Von Bonde to once again investigate⁶³. In March 1930 he reported that the existing restrictions on set net fishing were hampering the crayfish fishermen in procuring bait and that the 60 square miles allotted the trek seine fishermen was "too large"⁶⁴. He proposed a trade-off, banning set net fishing in the Berg River in return for moving the southern boundary of the ETSFZ 3 miles to the north of the river mouth, thereby opening up 9 square miles of the reserve for set net fishing⁶⁵. The low cost of Von Bonde's scheme appealed to the provincial state, but before legislation could be enacted, the Speaker of the House, De Waal, intervened to block its passage⁶⁶. He claimed that the proposed changes would antagonise the seine fishermen and suggested that he, Piketberg MPC, J. Kellerman, and Von Bonde go to Berg River to reassess the situation⁶⁷. Von Bonde and Kellerman eventually went to Velddrift in January 1931 and held a public meeting to review the evidence. The set net fishermen claimed the ETSFZ was too large and openly admitted to poaching, "being drawn to this expediency owing to the lack of grounds where fish could be obtained for the purpose

⁶² Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), Provincial Secretary to the Deputy Commissioner SAP, 18 April 1929.

⁶³ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), District Commandant SAP Paarl to the Deputy Commissioner SAP, 30 April 1929 and Acting Provincial Secretary to C. von Bonde, 11 September 1929.

⁶⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 10 March 1930.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), Provincial Secretary to the Administrator, 16 June 1930 and Provincial Secretary to the Acting Provincial Secretary, 10 November 1930.

⁶⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), Provincial Secretary to the Acting Provincial Secretary, 10 November 1930.

of bait for catching crawfish"⁶⁸. The seine fishermen, countered that the set net fishermen "fouled" and "spoilt" all the areas they worked and would "ruin" the ETSFZ if given access⁶⁹. Following the meeting, Von Bonde changed tack, claiming that a boundary reduction would give encouragement to poaching, be impossible to control and stressing the need for stepped up policing⁷⁰. His report, coupled with further pressure from De Waal and Kellerman, prompted the provincial state to again appeal to the Department of Justice in early 1932 for a "water policeman" to be stationed at Berg River, but the request was curtly refused⁷¹.

De Waal and Kellerman were also under pressure from their fishermen constituents feeling the effects of increasing population pressure on the resource. In March 1932 C.F.J. Thiart appealed to De Waal to stop the influx of "buite mense" to the river,

"[w]ant dit is van nag tot nag van 20 tot 30 bakkiens dis nie die ou en mankoliekes wat in die bakkie is nie dis almal die jong jong manne wat nie wil onder een baas werk nie"⁷².

In the same month 80 trek seine fishermen from Zoverby on the Piketberg coast petitioned the provincial state for a ban on all

⁶⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 6 February 1931.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Also Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 4 November 1931.

⁷¹ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), Deputy Commissioner SAP to the Provincial Secretary, 8 February 1932.

⁷² Cape Archives; PAN 41, A120\24(4), C.F.J. Thiart to J.J.H. de Waal, 25 March 1932.

set net fishing boats in the ETSFZ⁷³. Failing this they warned, "ons as seën vissers geen bestaan sal kan maak en ons met ons vroue en kinders die weg van werkloos moet volg en 'n las vir die staat moet word"⁷⁴. With no prospect of additional police at Berg River and hounded by De Waal, Kellerman and the seine fishermen, the provincial state finally relented and in July 1932 banned all boats carrying set nets from passing through or being inside the ETSFZ unless seeking shelter during a storm⁷⁵. Instead of resolving the conflict, however, this created chaos on the west coast, preventing set net fishermen at both St Helena and Saldanha Bay from leaving their moorings along the Berg River and Langebaan Lagoon⁷⁶. Cape Town was thus forced to stay implementation and finally repeal the new legislation entirely in September 1932⁷⁷. As the Magistrate of Piketberg explained, all such measures were doomed to failure, not because of inadequate legislation, but its lack of enforcement which encouraged poaching and denied the court the objective evidence it needed to prosecute offenders⁷⁸. The provincial state was back to square one. De Waal and Kellerman were asked to use their "influence"

⁷³ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), *Petition of Soverby Trek Seine Fishermen to the Provincial Council*, 30 March 1932.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Also Cape Archives; PAN 41, A120\24(4), *C.F.J. Thiart to J.J.H. de Waal*, 25 March 1932.

⁷⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), *Provincial Secretary to the Administrator*, 14 June 1932 and Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 126 of 1932, 8 July 1932.

⁷⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), *Hand written minute titled "Netting at Berg River Mouth (Roodebaai)"*, signed by the Provincial Secretary, 22 July 1932.

⁷⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, *C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary*, 29 August 1932, *Provincial Secretary to G.A. van Oordt*, 12 September 1932 and *Provincial Secretary to the Administrator*, 20 September 1932.

⁷⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), *Magistrate Piketberg to the Provincial Secretary*, 8 August 1932.

with Pretoria to get more police stationed at Berg River and a new proclamation was issued in September 1932, setting out a route through the ETSFZ for set net boats entering or leaving the Berg River⁷⁹. In January 1933 the provincial state itself approached the Commissioner of Police for a greater police presence at the Bay, but was told that its request "cannot be considered"⁸⁰. Cape Town was saved further trouble by a recovery in catches after 1932. The poaching issue, however, remained unresolved and when the gathering crisis in the crayfish fishery, temporarily delayed by state concessions on size-limits and sanctuaries, broke with the French quota in January 1934, it re-emerged with a vengeance.

Whereas canning companies measured the effects of the French quota in lost production time, declining profits, mounting fixed costs and wavering investor confidence, their labour force experienced it as an acute subsistence crisis. The sudden factory closures deprived many men and women of their chief means of livelihood and transformed the loss of a distant export market overnight into personal poverty, destitution and imminent starvation for many thousands of crayfish fishermen, factory hands and their families. Between 1933 and 1935 nearly 500 factory workers were laid off by the industry, with a corresponding loss of income in excess of £114 000⁸¹. In the absence of alternative employment, the effect of these lay-offs was devastating. In October 1934, one observer reported that

⁷⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Provincial Secretary to G.A. van Oordt, 12 September 1932 and Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 195 of 1932, 23 September 1932.

⁸⁰ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Provincial Secretary to the Commissioner of the SAP, 26 January 1933 and Commissioner SAP to the Provincial Secretary, 30 January 1933.

⁸¹ Union of South Africa, Department of Census and Statistics Census of Industrial Establishments 1936-1937 [U.G.39-1939], p.52.

unemployed workers "had no other means of living and could not find work in the surrounding district, that, since the closing of the canneries, they had been living on mielie meal, and that in small quantities"³². He further warned that "if work was not resumed at coastal canneries before long, a large population along the coast would be on the very verge of starvation"³⁷. The fishermen and boat owners fared little better as crayfish catches plummeted, from 22 million fish in 1933 to just 9 million in 1935, driving earnings down from £102 500 in 1933 to £41 800 by 1935³⁴. The dual income strategy sustaining many fishing families had thus been thoroughly disrupted, leading to a widespread resort to rantsoenvis and subsistence fishing in order to survive.

In May 1934 250 Berg River seine fishermen petitioned their new MLA, F.C. Erasmus, for protection from a sudden invasion of poachers, spear-headed not by set net fishers, but "in veel gevaarlike mededinger" - the Italian seine or lampara net, enthusiastically welcomed by Townsend in 1927, but subsequently not widely adopted at St Helena Bay³⁵. At Saldanha Bay, however, road and rail connections with Cape Town, two canning factories, a natural harbour and extensive motorisation, justified the lampara's adoption by boat owners confident of recouping their investment through crayfish fishing, the rantsoenvis trade and

³² "Facing Prospect of Starvation - Acute Distress Among Fishermen - Waiting for News from France" in Cape Times, 12 October 1934.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Union of South Africa, Department of Census and Statistics Census of Industrial Establishments 1936-1937, p.52.

³⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), Petition of 251 Dwarskersbos and Velddrift Trek Seine Fishermen to F.C. Erasmus, 11 May 1934.

Cape Town market⁸⁶. Their devastating effect on the seine fishing economy of the Langebaan Lagoon, however, resulted in lampara fishing being banned there in September 1932⁸⁷.

With the onset of the French quota crisis, the lampara owners' investment was once again threatened and, in desperation, they turned to St Helena Bay, where the ETSFZ legislation's failure to define a "trek seine" allowed them to fish at will in the reserve⁸⁸. For the seine fishermen this invasion of motorised craft and a highly efficient fishing technology placed further unbearable strains on their own continued existence as independent producers. They warned Erasmus that the lampara net would destroy both them and the fish as it had done elsewhere on the west coast. They claimed that the lampara fishermen's ability to hunt fish at sea enabled them to "rooi die vis totaal uit, daar die vis nêrens buite hulle bereik is"⁸⁹. The invaders' large catches bore ample testimony to this and had already driven the price of rantsoervis down from 18s a 100 harders to a mere 6s⁹⁰. These Saldanha Bay fishermen were not only outsiders with no permanent ties to the Bay, they asserted, but also "bemiddeldes", able to afford motorboats and expensive nets beyond the seine fishermen's means⁹¹. The latter thus demanded the closing of the

⁸⁶ Board of Trade and Industries Report No.180: *The Fishing Industry*, p.29. The Board reported that there were no fewer than 9 lampara nets in use at Saldanha Bay in 1932.

⁸⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\20, Provincial Secretary to the Administrator, 21 September 1932 and Cape of Good Hope *Provincial Gazette*, Proclamation 196 of 1932, 24 September 1932.

⁸⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwerts to the Provincial Secretary, 4 September 1934.

⁸⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), Petition of 251 Dwarskersbos and Velddrift Trek Seine Fishermen to F.C. Erasmus, 11 May 1934.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

entire Bay to lampara fishing. The Saldanha Bay fishermen, under the leadership of one Manus van Schalkwyk, were also girding for battle, hiring a lawyer, Rudolf Schwers, to represent them⁹². Schwers kept up a steady stream of correspondence to Erasmus, explaining that his clients were opposed to the seine fishermen's demand, claiming instead that the ETSFZ was too large and ought to be reduced⁹³.

Both sides saw Erasmus' support as vital and on 9 June 1934 he convened a meeting at Velddrift under the auspices of the Velddrift Farmers Union and attended by MPC, Jacob Laubscher, J. Brink of the Piketberg Divisional Council and some 400 farmers and fishermen⁹⁴. Erasmus gave "a very sympathetic hearing to both sides" and informed the gathering that he had spoken to the Administrator and that Von Bonde, would visit Velddrift on 25 June to investigate⁹⁵. After appointing delegates to interview the Fisheries Advisor, the meeting broke up. Von Bonde, however, only reached the Bay on 4 July 1934 and "did not commit himself in any way as far as the respective methods of trek fishing and trawl fishing were concerned"⁹⁶. Instead he spoke at length about the need to protect immature fish and a plan for constructing weirs in the Berg River to allow fish to breed undisturbed and restock the Bay. This, he believed, would be "a most important factor in staving off the ever impending 'poor whiteism' with

⁹² Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwers to F.C. Erasmus, 28 April 1934.

⁹³ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwers to F.C. Erasmus, 28 May 1934.

⁹⁴ "Trekking versus Trawling - St. Helena Bay Fishing Controversy - The Rival Method Explained" in Cape Times, 14 June 1934.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ "Trawl-Seine Fishing Opposed - Deputation Meets Dr. Von Bonde" in Cape Times, 14 July 1934.

which this fishing area is threatened"⁹⁷. Back in Cape Town, Von Bonde dismissed the trek seine fishermen's demands as impractical, claiming that the ETSFZ gave them sufficient protection and calling yet again for stepped-up policing of the existing reserve⁹⁸. His sympathies clearly lay with the lampara fishermen. In his Annual Report for 1934, he stressed the need for the "adoption of additional and more modern methods of capture, and ... a more enterprising spirit amongst the inshore fishermen" to offset the endemic problem of fluctuating catches⁹⁹. The "progressive" Saldanha Bay fishermen epitomised the modernisation he advocated and the "usual outcry of conservatism" from the seine fishermen and their "very militant attitude" he saw as "the outcome of a desire to remain undisturbed in their operations, but cannot be acceded to"¹⁰⁰.

The lampara fishermen, however, were feeling increasingly isolated by July 1934 and Schwerts voiced growing concern to Erasmus about the way he and his clients were being misinformed about developments. He complained that he was only told about the 9 June meeting half-an-hour before it started, making attendance impossible¹⁰¹. Similarly, his clients, going by the Cape Times report on the meeting, journeyed to Berg River on 25 June

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 18 July 1934.*

⁹⁹ *Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.12, 1934, pp.42-44. Also Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.10, 1932, pp.26-28.*

¹⁰⁰ *Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.12, 1934, pp.42-44. Also Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.11, 1933, pp.24-26 for an earlier example of von Bonde's attitude towards the Berg River fishermen.*

¹⁰¹ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwerts to F.C. Erasmus, 9 June 1934.*

expecting to meet with Von Bonde, only to find that he was not due until 4 July¹⁰². Aggrieved at the unnecessary expense, they demanded their travelling costs be refunded¹⁰³. Rumours were also circulating which added to the Saldanha Bay fishermen's unease. Chief culprit was Laaiplek merchant, L.H. Carosini, who claimed to have been told by Von Bonde, during a recent visit to Cape Town that the legislation would be amended in January 1935. The exact nature of the amendment was not specified, but on the strength of this Carosini was collecting money from the seine fishermen to cover the cost of his trip¹⁰⁴. Schwerts himself had also been stonewalled by Erasmus since he had begun writing to the MLA in April 1934¹⁰⁵. In spite of this, he remained optimistic in dealings with his clients, exhorting Van Schalkwyk to ignore the seine fishermen's protest and dismissing them as:

"these minor and nonsensical moves of Dowe Jan [Smit, the owner of Velddrift farm] his advisers, farmer-friends etc., a move instigated for nothing but benefit to them through the medium of the Zooverby-Velddrift fishermen, whose interests stand or fall by the will of the owner of Velddrift etc. farm"¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰² Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwerts to F.C. Erasmus, 30 June 1934.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwerts to F.C. Erasmus, 16 August 1934.

¹⁰⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwerts to F.C. Erasmus, 30 June 1934, S. Siebert to R. Schwerts, 4 July 1934, F.C. Erasmus to R. Schwerts, 11 July 1934. Schwerts' and Erasmus' paths had crossed in the 1920s when Schwerts had represented another group of fishermen in a bitter rent struggle with their landlord, local MPC, Jacob Laubscher. Erasmus took Laubscher's side and both he and Laubscher blamed their troubles on Schwerts' involvement. It is unlikely that the Saldanha Bay fishermen knew of Schwerts' track record with Erasmus when they hired him.

¹⁰⁶ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwerts to M. van Schalkwyk, 7 July 1934.

Schwerts believed the Sandveld farmers were behind the seine fishermen's protests and that the latter were mere pawns in the hands of their landlords. "If the farmers are allowed to interfere with the fisheries," he warned, "everything in that industry will go to wreck and ruin, that the past has sufficiently proved"¹⁰⁷. Schwerts thus urged Van Schalkwyk and the rest of the lampara fishermen to concentrate on preparing for the coming season, safeguard their share of the rantsoennis and Cape Town markets and trust in Erasmus' impartiality¹⁰⁸. He, however, evidenced none of the trust in Erasmus that he encouraged in his clients. Schwerts explained to the MLA that the rumours and misinformation circulating at the Bay had sown confusion and uncertainty amongst the lampara fishermen, making them hesitant to invest in new gear and asked for a statement of intent from the provincial state as well as an undertaking to consult all the affected communities in the event of any major changes to the legislation¹⁰⁹. This would allay fears, he explained, and allow the Saldanha Bay fishermen to expand their operations with obvious benefits to the country's food supply¹¹⁰.

Erasmus' main concern, by August 1934, was not food, but his personal popularity in the district. Alarmed at Von Bonde's recommendations, he led a deputation of seine fishermen to interview the Fishery Advisor, Administrator and Executive

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* Also Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwerts to M. van Schalkwyk, 13 & 17 July 1934.

¹⁰⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwerts to F.C Erasmus, 16 August 1934.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Committee in Cape Town¹¹¹. The deputation succeeded in getting Von Bonde's to reconsider extending the ETSFZ and an assurance from the provincial state to approach the police for more men at the Bay. The deputation also waited on the Minister of Justice to discuss policing with him in person¹¹². Erasmus thus came down firmly on the side of the seine fishing interests and in September 1934, Von Bonde again visited Berg River, agreed to the extension of the ETSFZ north to Baboon Point, but refused a similar extension southward to St Martin's Point¹¹³. The Cape Times, however, gave a very different account of the visit, stating that the Fisheries Advisor had agreed to ban the lampara net from the territorial waters of the Bay¹¹⁴. The report provoked an angry response from Schwerts who dismissed Von Bonde as merely an "adviser" and questioned why he had only visited the Berg River, when his reported decision affected fishermen from Cape Town to Lambert's Bay¹¹⁵. No legislation had yet been gazetted either Schwerts pointed out and he asked the Provincial Secretary to warn the editor of the Cape Times against false reporting likely to create uncertainty on the west coast¹¹⁶. If the Saldanha Bay fishermen were alarmed by the Cape Times report, it did not deter them from continuing to fish in the ETSFZ, although they appear to have ended their relationship with Schwerts after September 1934. By the end of the year it was the seine fishers

¹¹¹ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), Handwritten minute, "Fishing off Mouth of Berg River" signed G.A. van O., 27 August 1934.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 21 September 1934.*

¹¹⁴ *"Trawl-Seining ban at the Bays - Record Catch of 250,000 Maasbankers" in Cape Times, 10 September 1934.*

¹¹⁵ *Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwerts to the Provincial Secretary, 14 September 1934.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

who were becoming increasingly restless as the promised extension of the reserve failed to materialise and their own catches declined¹¹⁷. The new policeman at Berg River was the main target of their discontent¹¹⁸. Unlike Townsend, who patrolled the coast on horse or by car and observed boats working in the ETSFZ through a telescope to identify poachers, the new incumbent, one Senekal, was totally uninterested in policing the reserve, claiming he was a land policeman. Because of this and the seine fishermen's inability to apprehend the faster motorboats, prosecutions for fishing offences declined in 1934-1935.

TABLE 5.3: Prosecutions for Poaching in the ETSFZ, 1933-1939¹¹⁹

Year	Cases Involving 1-5 Fishermen					Cases Involving >5 Fishermen				
	No.	C	Aq	C\Aq	Fines	No.	C	Aq	C\Aq	Fines
1933	17	7	4	5	£ 47.10s	1	-	1	-	-
1934	11	10	1	-	£ 47.10s	-	-	-	-	-
1935	10	6	2	2	£ 33.00s	2	1	1	-	£ 8.00s
1936	5	3	2	-	£ 3.10s	1	-	1	-	-
1937	1	1	-	-	£ 2.00s	-	-	-	-	-
1938	3	1	2	-	£ 2.00s	-	-	-	-	-
1939	2	1	1	-	£ 14.00s	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	49	29	12	7	£149.10s	4	1	3	-	£ 8.00s

C = Convicted; Aq = Acquitted; C\Aq = Cases in which both applied

The majority of those convicted were working alone or in pairs and were thus not lampara fishermen. The brunt of the prosecutions were borne by fishermen resident at the Bay fishing

¹¹⁷ See for example Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), J.J. Gallowitz to the Administrator, 30 November 1934.

¹¹⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), J.J. Gallowitz to the Administrator, 18 December 1934.

¹¹⁹ Cape Archives; 1\PKB, A1\2\1, Periodical Court Roodebaal, Criminal Record Book 1933-1939.

with set nets. As such they did not constitute the major threat to the seine economy. The paucity of both cases and convictions against large crews (upward of 5 men) underscores the seine fishermen's inability to apprehend or obtain legal redress against the lampara fishermen. In venting their anger at their own powerlessness, the seine fishers picked on the more vulnerable, locally resident set net fishermen. By March 1935 no legislation had been forthcoming and Erasmus felt compelled to again enter the fray. In mid-March he led yet another delegation to Cape Town, this time to interview the Secretary for Commerce and Industries¹²⁰. The fishermen demanded an end to poaching in the ETSEZ, stiffer fines for offenders and the provision of a water police service at St Helena Bay. Their last request was dismissed by the Secretary as impractical, given the high cost and small number of boats involved and he suggested that, once the legislation had been amended, the local Magistrate be asked to warn lampara fishermen against poaching under threat of further restrictions¹²¹.

This was not what the delegation had hoped for and their confidence in the authorities was further shaken when one of their number, J.F.J. Theart, obtained a copy of Von Bonde's September report from Erasmus in which it was revealed that the ETSEZ would not be extended south to St Martin's Point¹²². In addition, Von Bonde claimed to have informed the seine fishermen

¹²⁰ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, Handwritten minute from the Secretary of Commerce and Industries to the Minister, 8 March 1935.

¹²¹ Ibid. Also State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, Secretary of Commerce and Industries to the Magistrate of Moorreesburg, 21 March 1935, Secretary of Commerce and Industries to F.C. Erasmus, 3 April 1935 and Acting Magistrate Piketberg to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 19 July 1935.

¹²² Interview with Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986.

of this at a public meeting at Velddrift in February 1935¹²³. The report's disclosure to an uninformed community which had entrusted its future to power-brokers and state functionaries like Von Bonde, created a heightened sense of betrayal and unleashed an acrimonious hate campaign against the Fisheries Advisor. At issue was his handling of the whole issue since September 1934. The seine fishermen alleged that his September "investigation" involved nothing more than him driving down the main street to the post office, climbing out of his car and announcing that the ETSFZ would be extended¹²⁴. Similarly, in February, he arrived to speak to J.F.J. Theart about the latter's allegations that he and Carosini were "kop in een mus", following Carosini's rumour-mongering about an impending amendment to the legislation. On this occasion Von Bonde met with Theart and five others at Theart's house. His claims to have held a public meeting were thus a lie¹²⁵. Willem Nieman summed up the feeling along the river in April 1935, when he said, "Ons ver wag ook nou nie meer beloftes nie dit is al genoeg, ons wil nou liewe dade hê"¹²⁶. Von Bonde did little to restore the seine fishermen's faith in the authorities, arriving at Velddrift a few days after the first allegations reached Cape Town, accompanied by a constable and sergeant from the local police station and having several seine fishermen arrested for making libellous allegations

¹²³ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, J.C.P. Theart to the Minister of Labour, 19 March 1935 and J.F.J. Theart to the Minister of Labour, 19 March 1935 with attached handwritten copy of Von Bonde's report.

¹²⁴ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, J.C.P. Theart to the Minister of Labour, 19 March 1935 and J.F.J. Theart to the Minister of Labour, 19 March 1935 with attached handwritten copy of Von Bonde's report.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, W. Niemann to the Minister of Labour, 9 April 1935.

against him¹²⁷. Such strong arm tactics were sufficient to stamp out agitation at the Bay and back in Cape Town Von Bonde commenced a libellous campaign of his own to repair his damaged reputation. "It is very difficult to deal with the type of mentality as exemplified by the fishermen at Velddrift", he explained, "who are, in most cases, illiterate, and do not interpret clear and logical explanations of facts"¹²⁸. He thus suggested that "knowing the type of mentality from which these letters originate, I think that a practical solution would be to completely ignore all such effusions in future"¹²⁹. The Secretary of Commerce and Industries was inclined to agree, providing a telling insight into the central state's change in attitude towards the seine fishing economy at the Bay.

By April 1935 the seine fishermen's agitation against Von Bonde as the symbol of their betrayal had given way to a more general sense of desperation. In March they had gone a month without any catches and by July starvation was threatening¹³⁰. This was in stark contrast to the lampara fishermen who continued to dump large quantities of fish along the river for want of buyers¹³¹. The seine fishermen's inability to halt their own immiseration was underscored by their failure to obtain legal redress through

¹²⁷ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, J.C.P. Theart to the Minister of Labour, 4 April 1935 and J.F.J Theart to the Minister of Labour, 15 April 1935.

¹²⁸ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, Handwritten notes by von Bonde rebutting J.C.P. Theart's, 3 April 1935 and C. von Bonde to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 17 April 1935.

¹²⁹ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, C. von Bonde to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 17 April 1935.

¹³⁰ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, D.J. Waso to the Minister of Labour, 18 April 1935, P.J. Meissenheimer to the Minister of Labour, 17 May 1935 and J.F.J. Theart to the Minister of Labour, 1 July 1935.

¹³¹ Ibid.

the courts. Not only was the new policeman unsympathetic, but the old problem of evidence remained as intractable as ever. P.J. Meissenheimer spoke for many in May 1935 when he complained that "ons as Trek vissers kry geen reg voor die hof nie," adding, "die Trol vissers drywe die spot met die wet"¹³². The lampara fishermen usually eluded capture and could only be charged if they were injudicious enough to have set nets with them in the boat when apprehended. Even then, cases were still lost on evidence and the fines handed down were too small to act as deterrent¹³³. For this reason, a proposal in July 1935 by the Department of Justice to transfer Velddrift from the Piketberg to Hopefield magisterial district was roundly defeated at a public meeting at Roodebaai¹³⁴. As the Magistrate of Piketberg explained:

"By die bespreking was dit duidelik, dat die treknetvissers net een beswaar teen oorplasing het en hulle noem dit die 'vyand, wat van oorkant kom'. Hierdie vyand is dan die sleepnetvissers. Hulle is bang, dat hulle regte ingekort sal word, terwyl die van die sleepnetvissers uitgebrei sal word sodra die oorplasing plaasvind"¹³⁵.

The proposed transfer aimed to streamline the court system and give the Berg River community easier access to the local magistrate, but with Von Bonde's betrayal still fresh in many people's minds, it readily suggested conspiracy and the plan was

¹³² State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, P.J. Meissenheimer to the Minister of Labour, 17 May 1935.

¹³³ Ibid. Also Acting Magistrate Piketberg to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 19 July 1935, K.J. Thiart to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 23 September 1935 and J.J. Gallowitz to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 24 September 1935.

¹³⁴ Cape Archives; 1\PKB, 6\1\21 17\17\2\3, Magistrate of Piketberg to the Secretary for Justice, 25 July 1935. The voting was evenly divided between lampara and trek seine fishermen with 28 of the former voting for incorporation into Hopefield and 75 of the latter carrying the meeting with their veto of the idea.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

shelved soon afterwards¹³⁶. In view of the continued impasse and the provincial state's failure to provide the promised legislative protection, Erasmus again took up the matter with the Administrator in July 1935, asking for the legislation to be speeded up and the ETSFZ to be extended to St Martin's Point. At the same time he stressed the need for an adequate water police service to enforce the extended ETSFZ and asked the Administrator to put pressure on Pretoria in this regard¹³⁷.

With the end of the snoek season in July, the lampara fishermen returned to the Bay in force and tensions escalated accordingly. By September the seine fishermen had gone three months without catches due to the daily presence of the lampara fishermen in the ETSFZ¹³⁸. The latter were landing vast quantities of fish, dumping most of it and driving the price of rantsoennis down even further¹³⁹. From 15-16s a 100 harders in 1933 the price collapsed to a mere 3s 6d by the second half of 1935¹⁴⁰. The lampara fishermen had also been encouraged to apply for anchorage rights in the ETSFZ by the local Magistrate and adopted a policy of "vervolging" against the trek fishermen, attempting to run them

¹³⁶ Cape Archives; 1\PKB, 6\1\21 17\17\2\3, Secretary of Justice to the Magistrate Piketberg, 20 August 1935.

¹³⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(3), F.C. Erasmus to the Administrator, 18 July 1935.

¹³⁸ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, P.J. Meissenheimer to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 19 August 1935 & 21 September 1935 and K.J. Thiart to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 23 September 1935.

¹³⁹ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, J.F.J. Theart to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 3 September 1935, P.J. Meissenheimer to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 21 September 1935, K.J. Thiart to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 23 September 1935 and K.J. Thiart to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 14 October 1935.

¹⁴⁰ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, J.J. Gallowitz to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 24 September 1935.

down with their motorboats in the reserve¹⁴¹. In September one seiner alleged, "dit is hopeloos vir ons om vir hulle te vang in die verbode waters, want hul wil vir ons stukkend loop met die motor bote"¹⁴². The following month he again warned:

"Ons is in groot gevaar. Hulle is baie woedend en ook érenstig en ons word al bang, want hulle is daaglik in die verbode waters met die motor schuie en vervolg ons om ons stukkend te loop en as U nie nou vir hulle weg neem uit die kus uit nie zal daar groot ongelukke plaas vind op die see"¹⁴³.

Under intensified assault, denied legal redress by the courts and facing a "naderende hongersnood", the trek seine fishermen threatened more drastic action if the state failed to act¹⁴⁴. As J.F.J. Thiart said, "vir ons is baie beloftes gemaak, maar nou sien ons in werklikheid uit na die dade", warning that if legislation was not soon forthcoming, "sal ons maar ons wapens neem en uitkoms soek, want die boer word op elke gebied gehelp en die visser word vergeet"¹⁴⁵. By the end of September 1935, the State's continued inactivity had added a new layer of cynicism and contempt to the seine fishermen's already jaundiced view of their erstwhile protectors. They compared the treatment accorded farmers to that meted out to them and concluded that:

¹⁴¹ Ibid. Also J.J.D. Thiart to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 24 September 1935, P.J. Meissenheimer to the Minister of Labour, 29 August 1935 & 21 September 1935.

¹⁴² State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, P.J. Meissenheimer to the Minister of Labour, 29 August 1935.

¹⁴³ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, P.J. Meissenheimer to the Minister of Labour, 21 September 1935.

¹⁴⁴ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, J.J. Gallowitz to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 24 September 1935 and J.J.D. Thiart to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 24 September 1935.

¹⁴⁵ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, J.F.J. Thiart to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 3 September 1935.

"as ons 'n bietjie ondersoek doen en ons sien hoe die boere behandel word en ons arme vistermense wat omtrent soos [sic] is klein en groot dan sal jy sê ons is diere om ons niks verkrij nie maar as die man in die Parlement wil wees dan is ons goed"¹⁴⁶.

The collapse of their universe and their failure to right it was as devastating a blow psychologically to the seine fishers as the lampara fishermen's presence was economically. The old methods of protest through petitions and the intercessions of, in their eyes, all-powerful local power-brokers such as Erasmus, had failed and left widespread depression, disillusionment and anger in its wake¹⁴⁷. A half century later John Tolken still remembers Erasmus with great bitterness as a "klaerige, suinige ding" who failed his fishermen constituents in their hour of need¹⁴⁸.

After a delay of more than a year, the Administrator finally signed the long-awaited legislation extending the ETSFZ in October 1935¹⁴⁹. It was a pyrrhic victory for the seine fishermen. Two long years of sustained lampara fishing in the reserve had devastated the seine fishing economy of Piketberg, starving it of resources, undermining the rantsoenvis market, immiserating many

¹⁴⁶ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, K.J. Thiart to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 14 October 1935.

¹⁴⁷ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, K.J. Thiart to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 23 September 1935 and J.J. Gallowitz to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare 24 September 1935.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986.

¹⁴⁹ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, Provincial Secretary to C. von Bonde, 1 October 1935 and Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), Provincial Secretary to the Administrator, 12 October 1935 and Minute No.64,132 of the Executive Committee of the Cape Provincial Council, 16 October 1935.

trek fishermen and driving others to the brink of starvation¹⁵⁰. The legislation itself was also inadequate, because, as Von Bonde conceded, without an effective water police service it was a dead letter¹⁵¹. Erasmus knew this as well and continued to lobby for the extension of the reserve to St Martin's Point, but to no avail¹⁵². He was flatly refused and the Department of Commerce and Industries moved swiftly to straitjacket further protests from the seine fishermen after October 1935¹⁵³. A Complaints Committee, comprising two seine and two lampara fishermen with an "impartial chair", was formed at Berg River and the fishermen informed that all future grievances were to be brought to and discussed in this forum. If necessary, the chairman would relay matters to the "right quarters" and the Minister of Commerce and Industries would only consider representations from the Committee¹⁵⁴. Thus, by the time the legislation was actually promulgated in July

¹⁵⁰ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, K.J. Thiart to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, 14 October 1935; Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), P.J. Meissenheimer to the Administrator, 15 October 1935 and I. Freed "Weight-Weight-Age Standards as an Index of Nutrition of Children" in South African Medical Journal, 13 July 1935.

¹⁵¹ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, C. von Bonde to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 13 November 1935.

¹⁵² Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), F.C. Erasmus to the Administrator, 21 October 1935.

¹⁵³ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 13 November 1935.

¹⁵⁴ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, Secretary of Commerce and Industries to C. von Bonde, 10 October 1935, C. von Bonde to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 14 October 1935, C. von Bonde to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 13 November 1935 and Handwritten Memorandum from the Secretary for Commerce and Industries to the Minister, 20 November 1935.

1936, owing to a delay in erecting the boundary markers for the extended reserve, it was of little more than token value¹⁵⁵.

The seine economy's recovery was frustrated by more than just inadequate legislation, provincial state ineptitude and central state indifference, however. While the easing of the French quota after 1935 lessened pressure from the Saldanha Bay lampara fishermen and seine catches recovered, the Bay crayfish fishery did not enjoy such a swift recuperation¹⁵⁶. In December 1936 more than 200 crayfish fishermen at the Bay petitioned for the minimum size-limit to be reduced from 3 1/2 inches to 3 inches. As they explained, "We are finding it increasingly difficult [to catch legal size crayfish], and are obliged to go further and further afield ... while fish 3 inches long are found within comparatively easy reach"¹⁵⁷. The request was flatly refused¹⁵⁸. A year later Stephan Brothers threatened the permanent closure of its Steenberg's Cove factory, because "we cannot get supplies [of crayfish] in conformity with the law to-day"¹⁵⁹. Many crayfish fishermen went north in the late 1930s, Hendrik Brand to fish for the Lamberts Bay Canning Company after 1934 and Bertha Chilcott's

¹⁵⁵ Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27, Provincial Secretary to the Administrator, 6 December 1935, C. von Bonde to the Provincial Secretary, 18 May 1936 and Provincial Secretary to the Administrator, July 1936 and Cape of Good Hope Provincial Gazette, Proclamation 88 of 1936, 20 July 1936.

¹⁵⁶ For the recovery in crayfish fishing see Department of Census and Statistics Census of Industrial Establishments 1936-1937, p.52. Industry catches climbed back from 9 million fish in 1934-1935 to 14 million in 1935-1936 and more than 16 million fish in 1936-1937, the same as before the French quota crisis. For the recovery in seine catches see Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.14, 1936, p.20.

¹⁵⁷ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\3(4), L. Carosini to the Administrator, December 1936.

¹⁵⁸ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\3(4), Provincial Secretary to L. Carosini, 30 December 1936.

¹⁵⁹ Cape Archives; PAN 37, A120\3(4), Stephan Brothers to the Provincial Secretary, 17 November 1937.

father for three months each year to Thorn Bay where he fished for the North Bay Canning Company¹⁶⁰. Stephan Brothers blamed its problems on the packing industry and called for the abolition of the size limit for canners, but to no avail. The de facto erosion of the ETSFZ and the demise of the local crayfish fishery encouraged independent boat owners to invest in lampara nets¹⁶¹. The greater productivity of the new net continued to undermine rantsoennis prices, inducing a protracted profitability crisis in the seine economy which made recovery impossible.

Price erosion was hastened by the rapid integration of the Bay fisheries into the Cape Town market through improved road infrastructure and motorised lorry transport. In December 1935 Von Bonde reported that only 20 % of the fish landed at Berg River still went direct to farmers, the remainder was taken by local lorry drivers who sold roughly three quarters of it in the rural towns of the South Western Cape and transported the rest to the fish market in Cape Town¹⁶². Thus, when Bay seine fishermen landed "remarkable quantities" of maasbankers in 1936, a staggering 1 million lbs found its way to Cape Town and "the surrounding countryside was flooded with lorry loads of these fish"¹⁶³. The net result, however, was "sub-economic prices" and, although 1936 "was a good fisherman's year from the point of view

¹⁶⁰ Interviews with Mrs Bertha Chilcott, Laaiplek, 3 July 1986 and Mr Hendrik Brand, Velddrift, 19 July 1986.

¹⁶¹ Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of S.J. Levin, pp.170-171; Cape Archives; PAN 71, K59\27(2), R. Schwerts to F.C. Erasmus, 30 June 1934 and State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, F.C. Erasmus to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 7 March 1936 and Secretary for Commerce and Industries to F.C. Erasmus, 21 March 1936.

¹⁶² State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, C. von Bonde to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 6 December 1935.

¹⁶³ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.14, 1936, p.20.

of captures, it was a bad year as far as earnings were concerned. Prices for line- and trek-caught fish reached a record low level"¹⁶⁴. This pattern was repeated in the years 1937-1939, with good catches on the west coast flooding the Cape Town market and undermining prices¹⁶⁵. Even the annual snoek season, traditionally the time of good earnings at the Bay, was affected, through competition from Walvis Bay snoek for the Cape Town market. The Walvis Bay season ran from November to February and with the return of the fleet from South West Africa, the Cape Town market was flooded, large quantities of snoek remaining unsold when the Union season opened in April depressing prices. Thus in 1934-35 750 000 salted snoek were shipped to Cape Town from Walvis Bay. This coincided with "one of the best ever" snoek seasons in the Union and by October 1935 the price of snoek in Cape Town had dropped to 40s per 100¹⁶⁶. The effects of the 1934-1935 season were still being felt in 1936 when "prices were too low to make this [snoek] a profitable fishery due to the large quantity of salted snoek held over from the exceptional 1935 glut"¹⁶⁷.

The prime beneficiaries of this expansion in production and markets were the owners of motorboats and lampara nets. For the seine fishermen the steady increase in catches undermined prices and the west coast's integration into the Cape Town market brought about a price equalisation which was detrimental to their interests. Coming so soon after the 1929-32 resource failure and the 1934-35 conflict, the new market conditions were a further

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.15, 1937, p.24 and Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.16, 1938, p.148.

¹⁶⁶ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.13, 1935, pp.32-34.

¹⁶⁷ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.14, 1936, p.20.

body blow to the seine fishing economy and prevented its recovery after 1935.

In February 1936 a delegation from the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Kommissie vir Algemene Armesorg (KAA) met the Minister of Labour in Cape Town to discuss the "êrnstige toestande" at Berg River¹⁶⁵. The Minister asked the KAA to make recommendations and in March 1936 Dominee A.D. Luckhoff, KAA Secretary, forwarded his report. It painted a graphic picture of a community in decline, "Alles het goed gegaan tot 'n jaar gelede toe die begin gekom het van 'n proses van agteruitgang en verarming onder die mense," the dominee reported¹⁶⁶.

"Vandag heers daar meers as armoede; daar is by baie huisgesinne nood en broodgebrek. Die Inspekteur van Skole is begaan oor die ondervoeding wat by die kinders te gespeur is. Die selfstandigheid, wat tot 'n paar jaar gelede 'n aangename kenmerk was van die mense van Velddrift, raak stadigaan verlore en die Ned Geref. gemeente wat tot nog toe sy mas self kon ophaal, is op weg om 'n hulpbehoewende gemeente te word"¹⁷⁰.

More than 75% of those interviewed gave their income as less than £30 per annum - nearly half of whom earned under £15 a year¹⁷¹. Dwarskersbos evidenced a similar process of "verarming", the chief cause of which, according to Luckhoff, was "die verouderde metodes van visvang" in use¹⁷².

¹⁶⁸ DRC Archives; SKDB S13, 2\b\1, A.D. Luckhoff to the Minister of Labour, 19 March 1936.

¹⁶⁹ DRC Archives; SKDB S13, 2\b\1, A.D. Luckhoff, "Rapport oor die Toestande op Velddrif, Piketberg District", 18 March 1936, p.2.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ See TABLE 5.4 below.

¹⁷² DRC Archives; SKDB S13, 2\b\1, A.D. Luckhoff, "Rapport oor die Toestande op Velddrif, Piketberg District", 18 March 1936, p.3.

TABLE 5.4: "Poor Whiteism" at Velddrift 1936¹⁷³

CATEGORY	INCOME PER ANNUM				TOTAL
	£150	£30-£60	£15-£30	<£15	
No. of Families	9	29	72	66	176
No. of People	44	131	299	373	847
% of all families	5.1	16.5	40.9	37.5	100

Luckhoff noted that the fish resources of the river and the Bay had declined,

"en die ou toerusting van 'n skuit met trek seine wat vroeer voldoende was vir 'n broodwinning, is dit vandag nie meer nie. Trawlers en diepsee-nette en motor-skuite is vandag nodig om 'n bestaan te maak. Al meer en meer word dit reel onder die vissers van die ou bedeling om nie na see te gaan nie ... dit betaal nie en is nie die moeite werd nie"¹⁷⁴.

The collapse of trek seine fishing was accelerated by other factors, including non-enforcement of the ETSEZ, the lack of adequate marketing of catches, a sharp fall in the prices due to over-supply caused by the lampara fishermen and the absence of co-operation among the fishermen themselves. As Luckhoff put it, "elkeen is 'n wet vir homself en maak soos hy goeddink"¹⁷⁵. While the dominee proposed immediate relief through the provision of a soup kitchen for the children and a public-work programme for the men, he was also concerned to find a long-term solution and stressed, "die noodsaaklikheid dat die vissers hulle ou metodes van visvang sal prys gee en die nuwe en beter metodes sal aanvaar ... [want] hoe langer hulle vashou aan die ou metodes van

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.3. Also DRC Archives; SKDB S13, 2\b\1, A.J. Wagenaar, "Statistieke re Velddrift Huisgesinne met Afhanklikes", February 1936.

¹⁷⁴ DRC Archives; SKDB S13, 2\b\1, A.D. Luckhoff, "Rapport oor die Toestande op Velddrif, Piketberg District", 18 March 1936, p.3.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

visvang, hoe dieper sal hulle in ellende van armoede gedompel word"¹⁷⁶. New methods required sizable capital outlay, however, and Luckhoff thus advocated the formation of a fishermen's co-operative at Berg River to enable the government to assist them in this regard. The "onverbiddelike rots" in the way of such assistance, however, was the Velddrift community's residence on private land¹⁷⁷. The Smit family resolutely refused to sell, but the burgeoning poverty on the farm had led to a change of mind. Luckhoff thus suggested that the state purchase the land and either establish a township with a village management board or turn it over to the DRC to run as an "arbeidskolonie"¹⁷⁸. He favoured the latter course, because, as he put it, "dit kan nie ontken word nie dat Velddrift 'n bietjie dissipliene nodig het, en die kerk sal dit beter kan beoefen as die staat"¹⁷⁹.

5.3 STATE INTERVENTION AND THE PERIPHERY

The state shared the dominee's concern with disciplining the Berg River fishermen, but refused to regard their plight as a symptom of the wider pathology of "poor whiteism"¹⁸⁰. Both the Minister of Labour and the Secretary of Commerce and Industries referred the DRC to the provincial authorities and otherwise ignored the

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ C.J. Groenewald "The Methodology of Poverty Research in South Africa: The Case of the First Carnegie Investigation 1929-1932" in Social Dynamics, 13, 2, 1987 for "poor whiteism" as a pathology.

Luckhoff report¹⁸¹. When the KAA again approached the government, in February 1937, with the warning that, "Die toestande op Velddrift bly onveranderd en die laaste berigte wat die Kommissie ontvang het, bevestig die oortuiging dat die Regering hier sal moet ingryp om noodlottige gevolge te voorkom", it was dismissed with a token donation of £25 for its soup kitchen at Velddrift¹⁸². The newly created Department of Social Welfare also made several ineffectual efforts to tackle the problem as a welfare issue. In February 1938 it requested the Department of Lands to investigate overpopulation on the farms at Berg River, but the latter was unable to take action because the land was being sub-let by the owner¹⁸³. In January 1939 the Department's Senior Welfare Officer again raised the issue of overpopulation, accusing the Smit family of "uitbuiting van armblanke families" and calling for drastic legislation:

"om te belet dat onverantwoordelike persone groot getalle arm families aanlok en versamel met die doel om 'n lewensbestaan uit sulke mense te maak, sonder om aan hulle die allernodigste aangeleenthede te verskaf vir 'n redelike beskaafde lewe"¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸¹ State Archives; HEN 1512, 180\1\24, C. von Bonde to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 6 April 1936 & Secretary for Commerce and Industries to the Secretary for Labour and Social Welfare, 16 September 1936 and DRC Archives; SKDB S13, 2\b\1, Minister of Labour to A.D. Luckhoff, 22 July 1936.

¹⁸² DRC Archives; SKDB S13, 2\b\1, A.D. Luckhoff to the Minister of the Interior & National Health, 11 February 1937 and Minister of Mines, Education and Labour & Social Welfare to A.D. Luckhoff, 12 February 1937 & 1 March 1937.

¹⁸³ State Archives; LDE 4733, 19784\15, Secretary for Lands to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 28 October 1938 and Cape Archives; 1\PKB 6\1\13, 15\1\16, Secretary Department of Lands to the Magistrate Piketberg, 14 June 1938, Magistrate Piketberg to the District Commandant SAP Paarl, 20 June 1938, L.J. Jones to the District Commandant SAP Paarl, 4 July 1938 and Magistrate Piketberg to the Secretary for Lands, 11 July 1938.

¹⁸⁴ State Archives; LDE 4733, 19784\15, Senior Welfare Officer to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 5 January 1939. Also Cape Archives; 1\PKB, 6\1\10 13\2\3, Senior Assistant Health Officer to the Secretary for Public Health, 2 March 1933 and Under-Secretary for Public Health to the Magistrate Piketberg, 23 October 1935.

Drastic legislation was indeed in the pipeline by 1938, but it came not from the Department of Social Welfare, but from the Department of Commerce and Industries and looked to the market rather than state welfare as the salvation of the beleaguered Berg River community.

The Sea Fisheries Act of 1940 aimed at the comprehensive development of the inshore fisheries as a whole rather than a piecemeal approach to isolated problem areas, such as St Helena Bay. The long delay in amending the ETSFZ legislation in 1935, Von Bonde's resistance and the constraints imposed on further seine fishermen protests by the Department of Commerce and Industries were indicative of a fundamental shift in state policy. In the 1920s it was widely believed that underdevelopment of the inshore fisheries was due to a lack of adequate harbour facilities which discouraged investment in motorisation and new fishing technology and constrained productivity¹⁸⁵. With increased state intervention in the fisheries in the 1930s, the continued backwardness of the inshore sector offended the modernisation ethos of state scientists and bureaucrats alike¹⁸⁶. The latter pointed out that "adequate shelters for the fishing craft are not sufficient in themselves, if the actual practical methods of fishing do not show concomitant developments"¹⁸⁷. By 1934 the inshore fisheries employed 90% of all fishermen and 95% of

¹⁸⁵ Union of South Africa Debates of the House of Assembly, 13 February to 15 April 1925, vol.3, cols.458-480; Union of South Africa, Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.4, 1923-1925, pp.iv-v; Union of South Africa, Fishing Harbours Committee, General Observations and Conclusions in respect to the Fishing Industry of the Cape Province, 1927, pp.76-77 and Union of South Africa, Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.8, 1931, pp.8-10.

¹⁸⁶ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.10, 1932, pp.26-28 and Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.12, 1934, pp.42-44.

¹⁸⁷ Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.10, 1932, p.28.

all fishing craft. Despite this, less than 10% of the fleet was motorised and it accounted for only 50% of the total Union catch¹⁸⁸. The need for "more efficient methods of fishing and the employment of up to date equipment" was self-evident, but, as the Board of Trade and Industries explained in 1934, "The importance of effective fishing gear is thoroughly realised by the [inshore] fishermen, but they are too poor to buy their own boats"¹⁸⁹. The Board ascribed the lack of investment capital in the inshore fisheries to "marketing difficulties" and the fact that fishermen had no means of storing their catch and were thus "at the mercy of local buyers"¹⁹⁰.

This new understanding shaped central state thinking on the inshore fisheries until the Second World War. Modernisation was no longer sought solely through the provision of infrastructure, but also by strengthening the inshore fishermen's position in the market¹⁹¹. Pretoria proposed establishing co-operative societies linked to a national selling organisation to overcome the scattered nature, lack of organisation and predominance of small producers with a notoriously "conservative disposition" in inshore fishing¹⁹². It was impressed by the success of co-operatives both in addressing the "poor white problem" at home, such as the Hereford scheme in the Transvaal, and modernising the United States fisheries through the provision of credit,

¹⁸⁸ Board of Trade and Industries Report No.180: The Fishing Industry, 1934, pp.38-39.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.44-45.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.84-87. Also Union of South Africa, Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Reports No.9-17, 1932-1939 for ongoing harbour construction during the 1930s.

¹⁹² Board of Trade and Industries Report No.180: The Fishing Industry, 1934, pp.38-39 & 84-87 and Union of South Africa Fisheries and Marine Biological Survey Report No.13, 1935, p.32.

education and infrastructure and the elimination of damaging competition¹⁹³. The co-operative idea was given legislative expression in the Sea Fisheries Act of 1940 which made provision for the proclamation of so-called Fish Marketing Improvement Areas (FMIA's), the establishment of co-operatives with the sole right to receive and market all fish landed in such areas and a levy of 1s per catch on all non-members as an "inducement" to join¹⁹⁴. The co-operatives were to be linked to a central co-operative society in Cape Town through proportional representation¹⁹⁵. The central co-operative would control the selling of the fish "to get surplus from the coastal fishing centres to Cape Town for distribution either in Cape Town or up country" and create a "marketing unit" able to compete with the trawling industry in the national fresh fish market¹⁹⁶.

Central state intervention in the inshore fisheries after 1934 was thus qualitatively different to the provincial state, being solely concerned with development via modernisation and the creation of a unified marketing entity capable of competing effectively for a share of the Union market under the umbrella of

¹⁹³ Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of C. von Bonde, pp.27-56.

¹⁹⁴ Union of South Africa Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Sea Fisheries Bill, 1939 [S.C.12-'39], Evidence of E.P. Smith, F.P. Spooner and C. von Bonde, pp.1-6, 15-31 & 82-83; Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates 1940, vol.38, cols.3692-3699, 3702-3737 & 3744 and Union of South Africa Extraordinary Government Gazette No.2749, 10 April 1940, Sea Fisheries Act, Act No.10 of 1940.

¹⁹⁵ Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Sea Fisheries Bill, 1939, Evidence of E.P. Smith, F.P. Spooner and C. von Bonde, pp.1-6, 15-31 & 82-83

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

co-operative societies¹⁹⁷. Pretoria's refusal to treat the collapse of the Piketberg trek seine economy as separate from this broader project was premised on its political defeat of the tacit alliance between Sandveld agriculture and the provincial state and the consequent dissolution of the tenant relationship between Sandveld landlords and their fishermen¹⁹⁸. No remnant of the old order was allowed to remain, hence the central state's resistance to treating the Berg River as a special case of the broader "poor white problem". Instead, the St Helena Bay fisheries were reorientated away from the rural rantsoennis trade and their integration into the Cape Town and national fresh fish markets encouraged. The new order which emerged at the Bay after 1940 was fashioned in the market-place and conditioned by competition for raw material, labour and market share.

For the Bay fisheries the advent of the interventionist central state produced few immediate benefits and promised a further loss of local control over the fishing economy. The shift from provincial to central state administration of marine fisheries in the mid-1930s undermined the power of both the Piketberg trek seine fishermen and Stephan Brothers. While the former drew more direct and tangible benefits from Cape Town's control over the

¹⁹⁷ For a general discussion of the "coming of age" of the interventionist South African state see D. Yudelman The Emergence of Modern South Africa (Cape Town, 1984), pp.249-262. State intervention in the fishing industry conforms to Yudelman's broad periodisation of the interventionist state during the inter-war period.

¹⁹⁸ Union of South Africa Report of the Provincial Finance Commission, 1934 [U.G.46,1934]; Union of South Africa, Board of Trade and Industries Report No.180: The Fishing Industry, 1934, pp.79-84 and State Archives: HEN 1505; 180\1\20(1) and HEN 1512; 180\1\27(1). The political defeat of the provincial state for control over the marine fisheries of the country came in 1936, in the wake of the French crayfish quota crisis and after the earlier defeat of Von Bonde's "National Fisheries Bureau" idea. The drafting of enabling legislation to give effect to the new division of responsibility - the Sea Fisheries Act - took all of three years to complete, creating a fairly lengthy impasse in the years just prior to the Second World War.

west coast fisheries via the ETSFZ, Stephan Brothers had also enjoyed considerable influence through the Fisheries Advisory Board and Henry Stephan's prominent position in Cape Town municipal politics. The central state's assumption of control and the formulation of a broad development strategy for the inshore fisheries as a whole envisaged by the Crawfish Export and Sea Fisheries Acts, eroded and ultimately undercut local influence. Pretoria's embrace of modernisation and concern with efficiency of production boded ill for both the Bay canning industry and inshore fisheries, exposing them to the full force of market forces and threatening to consign them to the periphery of the new order if they failed to adapt.

III SECONDARY INDUSTRIALISATION
c.1939 - c.1956

6: THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Robin Lees titled her chapter on the inshore fisheries in the Second World War "Into the Melting Pot", explaining that

"At the start of the Second World War, South African inshore fisheries were nearly 300 years old - yet still insignificant. But during the next five years, world events provided the sparks which were to ignite the latent fires of prosperity. Just as the French Revolutionary Wars had stimulated research into food preservation, so this war gave food, and particularly preserved food, a premium value. Traditional sources were disrupted or fell into enemy hands - and armies had to be fed consistently and well"¹.

On the one hand, Lees is merely restating an accepted truism about the relationship between the wartime disruption of imports and the growth of secondary industry². On the other, she implies that "igniting the latent fires of prosperity" was a simple and trouble-free process, the natural next step in fishing capital's pre-ordained forward march of progress. Such a glib, after-the-fact assumption, made from the vantage point of the late 1960s with the benefit of hindsight and two decades of post-war development in canning and by-products production, belies the extent to which wartime industrialisation in the inshore fisheries was a difficult and highly contested process. Whilst the Second World War certainly provided the Union canning industry with virtually free access to the local market for the first time in its history, the "melting pot" of global conflict was an insufficient solvent to erase the previous half century of troubled development. The formalisation of relations between the

¹ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.100.

² See for example D. Hobart Houghton The South African Economy (London, 1969), p.112 ff.; B. Bozzoli The Political Nature of a Ruling Class, p. 143 ff.; G. Bloch "The Development of Manufacturing Industry in South Africa, 1939-1969" (Unpublished MA thesis, UCT, 1980) and D. Innes Anglo: Anglo American and the Rise of Modern South Africa (Johannesburg, 1984), p.118 ff.

canning industry and the central state was only completed in 1940 and the new modus vivendi had yet to be implemented in practice. In the interim, serious problems continued to hinder canning production, including a paucity of marine research and a lack of adequate harbour and other infrastructure. The existence of a large petty-commodity producing sector also placed constraints on the canning industry's ability to restructure production in accordance with the new market opportunities created by the war. In addition, the state remained committed to fostering co-operation in the inshore fisheries, geared to supplying the national fresh fish market. Rather than dissolve in the crucible of conflict, these structural features instead shaped the rapid wartime expansion of the canning industry according to the existing contours and topography of the fisheries.

The structure of the industry reflected the particular balance of class forces in the fisheries on the eve of the war. As such, the reorganisation of inshore fishing to meet changed circumstances necessitated a realignment of class forces through a process of heightened struggle. At issue was the nature and direction of development in the most neglected of the nation's primary industries. The struggle culminated in the passing of the Fishing Industry Development Act in June 1944. The new legislation saw the state jettisoning the co-operative idea under pressure from both trawling capital and the canning industry, and its belated embrace of direct assistance of fishing capital through a new parastatal, the Fisheries Development Corporation. This change of tack was prefaced by the defeat of militant trade unionism in the most highly capitalised sector of the fishing industry and a rapprochement between the state and the petty bourgeois boat-owning class in the inshore fisheries. The latter was persuaded to shun trade union organisation in return for a share of the new state largesse. The alliance of state, capital and petty bourgeoisie thus co-operated to eradicate all vestiges of trade

unionism in the inshore industry through formal and informal means, placating fishing labour with a range of social upliftment schemes instead, closely tied to the needs of an emergent fishing capital.

6.1 INTO THE MELTING POT

Whereas the First World War strengthened the infant canning industry's export orientation, the 1939-1945 conflict encouraged a shift to import substitution. Aside from the inter-war growth and consolidation of the canning industry and a more sympathetic central state, the Second World War had a very different impact on both foreign and local markets, which combined to shift the canning industry's focus from export production to import substitution after 1942. A fall-off in fish exports from the Union was occasioned by the loss and/or disruption of both the European and American markets. With the fall of France in May 1940 the crayfish canners' chief export market closed³. The British Ministry of Food stepped into the breach in 1941 and contracted to take all the Union and South West African canner's surplus canned crayfish production⁴. In the absence of the French market and with only "negligible" local demand for canned crayfish, the Ministry of Food absorbed virtually the entire industry pack. While these wartime contracts provided the industry with unlimited demand, the controlled price was not sufficiently remunerative to sustain exports at their pre-war level⁵. Rising production costs at home, increasingly hazardous

³ R. Lees *Fishing for Fortunes*, pp.101-102.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ See TABLE 6.1 below. The average price per case of canned crayfish in Britain rose from 66s in 1941 to 80s by 1945.

trade routes and a growing local demand combined to make export to Britain risky and unattractive.⁶

TABLE 6.1: Union Canned Crayfish Exports 1939-1945⁷

YEAR	FRANCE		BRITAIN		% of Exports
	Cases [481b]	Value [£]	Cases [481b]	Value [£]	
1939	36 626	91 583	22 878	59 148	93.2
1940	21 339	54 765	49 723	135 421	96.3
1941	-	-	53 216	173 977	89.5
1942	-	-	67 220	216 219	96.3
1943	-	-	38 668	129 219	89.7
1944	-	-	33 594	125 045	92.9
1945	-	-	29 836	118 907	79.5

The frozen tail trade was similarly hard hit. Exports to Britain were prohibited in August 1940 to preserve refrigerated shipping space and with America's entry into the war in December 1941, frozen crayfish was excluded from the list of permissible imports.⁸ Although the newly formed South African Frozen Rock Lobster Packers Association (SAFROC) succeeded in having the embargo lifted in 1942, the American government took over all shipping and controlled both its movement and cargo, giving essential war supplies first priority.⁹ In 1942 the west coast canners stopped packing frozen tails and Cape Town packers were forced to stockpile their output until they could find space on

⁶ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, pp.107-108.

⁷ Own calculations based on data contained in Union of South Africa, Department of Customs and Excise Annual Statements of the Trade and Shipping of the Union of South Africa and the Territory of South West Africa, 1939-1945.

⁸ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of J.F. Stubbs, pp.76-83.

⁹ *Ibid.* Also R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, pp.102-104.

passing ships. Consignments waited 4-5 months before shipping and in 1943-44 only three shipments actually reached New York¹⁰. In 1944 SAFROC reported 15 000 cases in cold storage at Cape Town and one member stated that "to-day it [the frozen tail industry] is a gamble so much so that I do not think an industrialist worthy of that name would attempt to go in for that class of business"¹¹. The packer's attempts to expand the local market proved "an uphill struggle" in the face of sustained consumer prejudice and resistance to the high price of frozen tails compared to other fresh fish¹².

The disruption of trade routes, price controls and the shortage of shipping space thus forced the industry to turn inward after 1941. In the past, neither canners nor packers had had much success in finding a local market for crayfish due to the availability of cheap imported canned fish in the interior and fresh crayfish at the coast¹³. In addition, the industry had encountered cultural prejudices against crayfish from newly urbanised Africans and Afrikaners¹⁴. By 1942, however, imported canned fish's hegemony over the Union market had been broken by

¹⁰ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of J.F. Stubbs, p.83 & p.87.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Evidence of J.F. Stubbs, p.107 and Evidence of C.H. Gaggins, p.92.

¹² *Ibid.*, Evidence of J.F. Stubbs, N. Swerling, C.H. Trautman, C.H. Gaggins and A. Friedlander representing SAFROC, pp.76-114.

¹³ Department of Mines and Industries Fishing Harbours Committee: General Observations and Conclusions in respect to the Fishing Industry of the Cape Province, 1927, pp.75-79 and Board of Trade and Industries Report No.180: The Fishing Industry, 1934, pp.43-57, for a review of the local and export markets for fish during the inter-war period.

¹⁴ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of J.F. Stubbs, N. Swerling, C.H. Trautman, C.H. Gaggins and A. Friedlander representing SAFROC, pp.76-114 and Evidence of A. Ovenstone representing SAFCC, p.356.

the wartime disruption of shipping and trade routes, opening the way for the canners to make the transition to import substitution production. The initial impetus was provided by the Union's entry into the war in 1939. The rapid expansion in the armed forces and their deployment in East and North Africa created an expanded demand for cheap, non-perishable foodstuffs¹⁵. Similarly, Allied convoys required victualling, giving further encouragement to the development of fish processing in the Union¹⁶. The military market, though, was too small to supplant the British Ministry of Food demand.

Developments in 1940-1941, however, were to fundamentally alter this and encourage the local canning industry to turn its attention increasingly to the Union market. The German occupation of Norway in 1940 and South Africa's declaration of war on Japan in 1941, both major suppliers of canned fish to the Union, put an end to imports from these sources¹⁷. South Africa's other major suppliers, Canada and America, also scaled down exports rapidly, redirecting output to their own home markets and armed forces¹⁸. The spread of the sea war to the South Atlantic and the declining number of Allied convoys calling at Union ports further disrupted trade and fish imports plummeted after 1941¹⁹.

¹⁵ R. Lees *Fishing for Fortunes*, p.106.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.100.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.105.

¹⁸ State Archives; HEN 1497, 180\1\1(1), "Report of the Committee appointed by the Controller of Food Supplies to advise him in regard to the Canning of Fish other than Crawfish in the Union of South Africa", 9 July 1943, pp.2-3.

¹⁹ J.C. Goosen *South Africa's Navy: The First Fifty Years* (Cape Town, 1973), pp.81-110.

TABLE 6.2: Union Fish Imports 1939-1945²⁰

YEAR	PRESERVED		CURED\DRIED		FRESH\FROZEN	
	lbs [1000s]	£ [1000s]	lbs [1000s]	£ [1000s]	lbs [1000s]	£ [1000s]
1939	12 974	402	3 285	71	271	7
1940	11 307	427	1 918	52	173	5
1941	11 046	368	1 168	43	128	5
1942	2 367	106	343	12	86	4
1943	1 500	184	95	5	140	7
1944	797	137	403	20	21	1
1945	1 310	130	629	34	78	4

The gradual decrease in fish imports from 1939-1941 gave way in 1942 to a massive 79% drop, followed by further drops of 37% in 1943 and 47% in 1944²¹. In addition, the British Ministry of Food began contracting for canned fish other than crayfish and the local industry started receiving orders from Africa, India, the Middle East and Australia²². The incentive to produce a wider variety of fish for both local and overseas consumption had never been stronger and the canners were able to capture a sizable share of both the military and national market. The industry thus turned its attention to more abundant and readily available pelagic species such as maasbanker, pilchard and harder²³. In

²⁰ Own calculations based on data contained in *Union of South Africa, Department of Customs and Excise Annual Statements of the Trade and Shipping of the Union of South Africa and the Territory of South West Africa, 1939-1945*.

²¹ See TABLE 6.2 above.

²² R. Lees *Fishing for Fortunes*, p.108 and State Archives; HEN 1497, 180\1\1(1), "Report of the Committee appointed by the Controller of Food Supplies to advise him in regard to the Canning of Fish other than Crawfish in the Union of South Africa", 9 July 1943, p.3.

²³ State Archives; HEN 1497, 180\1\1(1), "Report of the Committee appointed by the Controller of Food Supplies to advise him in regard to the Canning of Fish other than Crawfish in the Union of South Africa", 9 July 1943, pp.3-7.

addition, the wartime demand for fish meal and oil from local agriculture and industry prompted canners to utilise the high oil content of these pelagic species to expand into another import substitution niche, by-products production²⁴.

TABLE 6.3: Union Fish Processing Industry Output [1000s]
1939-1945²⁵

YEAR	CANNING				MEAL		OIL	
	Crayfish		Other		lbs	£	lbs	£
	lbs	£	lbs	£				
1939	2 527	130	?	?	?	?	?	?
1940	3 083	178	1 615	52	?	?	?	?
1941	3 337	208	3 971	139	?	?	?	?
1942	3 689	227	3 889	137	?	?	446	49
1943	2 731	184	3 622	183	?	?	779	134
1944	2 185	167	6 302	367	3 567	32	797	156
1945	2 235	175	7 684	499	2 810	28	733	153

? = unknown.

By 1942, however, the burgeoning demand for pelagic fish and the requisitioning of trawlers had raised the price of inshore fish, making it too expensive for processing. In 1940, the canning industry was working at only 35% of its total capacity, rising

²⁴ See TABLE 6.3 above. Also C. von Bonde "Fish Oils: Their Manufacture and Uses, a South African Industry with Great Possibilities" in Commerce and Industry, 4, 5, November 1941; C. von Bonde "The South African Fishing Industry" in The Annual Proceedings of the Associated Scientific and Technical Societies of South Africa, 1941-1942, pp.85-87 and C. von Bonde "Our Sea Wealth is a Gold Mine Still to be Prospected" in The Outspan, 35, 902, 9 June 1944.

²⁵ Own- calculations based on data contained in Union of South Africa, Department of Census & Statistics Census of Industrial Establishments, 1939-1945.

slightly to 43,5% by 1943²⁶. The trawling industry, by contrast, was utilising 83,4% of its available capacity in 1943²⁷. The latter's raw material was caught in vast quantities on the deep-water grounds by a highly mechanised fleet, while the canners experienced increasing difficulty in obtaining supplies of inshore fish for canning²⁸. A 1943 committee investigating the industry pointed out: "In general it would seem that only when the demands of the fresh fish traders and the curers have been satisfied can any fish be obtained by canneries"²⁹. The canners estimated £5-£10 per 100 snoek as an economic price for processing, but even this was less than half the ruling price in Cape Town that year and well below the price on the west coast, ensuring that the availability of snoek for canning purposes was restricted to:

"[I]ndividual days when available transport is insufficient to remove the fish from the beaches to other centres, or towards the end of the season, when the demands of the curers have been completely satisfied, and they are making no further purchases"³⁰.

Curers paid higher prices for their fish, making it too expensive to process. In 1944 the SAFCC lamented the "woefully disappointing" wartime snoek pack, complaining that "The industry

²⁶ State Archives; HEN 1497, 180\1\1(1), SAFCC, "Report on the Productive Capacity of the South African Fish Canning Industry", 9 October 1940 and "Report of the Committee appointed by the Controller of Food Supplies to advise him in regard to the Canning of Fish other than Crawfish in the Union of South Africa", 9 July 1943, pp.3-7.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of H. Abao, p.242.

²⁹ State Archives; HEN 1497, 180\1\1(1), "Report of the Committee appointed by the Controller of Food Supplies to advise him in regard to the Canning of Fish other than Crawfish in the Union of South Africa", 9 July 1943, p.10.

³⁰ Ibid.

was quite unable to obtain snoek at prices which were in any way economic; the demand for it in the fresh or dried state being apparently insatiable at prices which made the canning of it prohibitive"³¹. The catching of other pelagic species was similarly problematic. Seasons were unknown, crayfish boats unsuited to this kind of fishing, gear inefficient and fishermen inexperienced or unwilling to fish for the new species³². The industry was thus forced to rely on independent boat owners and fishermen to provide it with raw material, in competition with other producers, who drove the price of the fish up to levels at which it could no longer be profitably canned³³. "The success of a fish canning industry", said the SAFCC, "depends fundamentally on its ability to obtain ample supplies of fish at economic prices"³⁴, because

"the cost of the fish ... does not by any means represent the major portion of the cost of a can of fish and as the canned product must necessarily be sold at an economical price, the canners are unable to pay for their [fish] ... prices as high as those paid for fish which is sold as fresh or cured"³⁵.

An "economical price" was one "which will enable you to compete with the imported article, and of course is one which your public

³¹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of A. Ovenstone, pp.350-352.

³² *Ibid.* Also State Archives; HEN 1497, 180\1\1(1), "Report of the Committee appointed by the Controller of Food Supplies to advise him in regard to the Canning of Fish other than Crawfish in the Union of South Africa", 9 July 1943, pp.6-7.

³³ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of A. Ovenstone, pp.350-352.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.354.

³⁵ State Archives; HEN 1497, 180\1\1(1), "Report of the Committee appointed by the Controller of Food Supplies to advise him in regard to the Canning of Fish other than Crawfish in the Union of South Africa", 9 July 1943, p.10.

can afford to pay"³⁶. Noting that in the pre-war period South African canners had had to compete with imported canned fish produced in countries where large quantities of fish were available at very low prices, the SAFCC warned that they would inevitably have to do so again after the war³⁷. A single factory in Vancouver or California, it claimed, produced as much canned fish in a year as the entire South African industry. Large boats and nets ensured these factories of a regular supply of raw material by the ton. In South Africa, however, it was "unthinkable" that pilchards could be caught in sufficient quantities to price by the ton. Catches were small and purchased by the bushel basket at a price of 8s per 100 lb as against 2s.6d per 100 lb in Vancouver³⁸.

The wartime demand for fish was thus increasingly incompatible with the continued independence of producers in the inshore fisheries, their ownership of the product of labour and free access to a range of both local and regional markets. And yet it was this independence which the state proposed to conserve and expand through the co-operative societies. By 1944 the co-operative idea was pure anathema to the canning industry. Instead of inshore co-operatives integrated into the national fresh fish market, the industry wanted the state to expand research into the pelagic fish resource, construct harbours for larger fishing vessels and provide other necessary infrastructure, to ensure that the wartime processing of inshore fish did not suffer the same fate as similar efforts in 1914-1918. In short the development of the inshore fisheries, the industry argued, should be linked to supplying the raw material needs of the canneries,

³⁶ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of G.E. Williamson, p.385.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Evidence of A. Ovenstone, p.354.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

not competing with the trawling industry for a share of the finite fresh fish market. Only in this way could the wartime gains of the industry be consolidated and expanded in a competitive post-war climate and the long-standing development of the inshore fisheries be achieved³⁹.

6.2 THE WARTIME BOOM AT ST HELENA BAY

On the eve of the war the St Helena Bay fisheries were in the final stages of protracted dissolution. The canning industry was being undermined by its distant location from the prime crayfish grounds and increasing competition for raw material with the frozen tail industry, while the inshore fisheries were undergoing a process of speeded-up stratification and attrition in the wake of the 1936 de facto abolition of the ETSFZ and subsequent widespread adoption of the lampara net. In December 1940 a Department of Social Welfare investigation estimated that fully 70% of the fishing population at Berg River still lived below the bread-line⁴⁰. With the advent of the war two related trends emerged: an ever-more rapid movement away from seine to lampara fishing and the steady movement of labour out of fishing altogether. As one local observer explained:

"There was a lot of prejudice there [at St Helena Bay] for a long time. There were two schools, the trek-netters and the trawl-netters. The trawl-netters earn big money because they go out to sea. They have big catches as compared with the meagre catches of the people with tiny rowing boats who fish near to the shore. These two sections were always in conflict with one another. All the reports way back mention this fact. The result is that very often there is a sort of prejudice among them, from the primitive type to the better type, but once they see that somebody else has brought himself a motor boat and has got a big trawl net and that it is bringing him more

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.349-359.

⁴⁰ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, M.A. de Beer to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 9 December 1940.

money, a lot of the prejudice is broken down. And so there came a period just before the war when that prejudice was breaking down en masse. Every month almost a fisherman who had borrowed or saved sufficient money went and bought a motor boat"⁴¹.

The shift to lampara fishing involved a concomitant reorientation of the Bay fishery towards the Cape Town market and away from the rural rantsoennis trade. Increased catches and oversupply made rantsoennis production unprofitable and motor lorries became necessary adjuncts to lampara fishing, enabling owners to transport fish fresh to Cape Town or the small rural towns of the region. Alkie Theart bought a motor boat and lorry, the latter second-hand for £150 from a school in Moorreesburg and the former on credit from Jasper Visser, brother-in-law to the Smits and a big fish trader on the river;

" Daar was 'n ou, ou Visser kerel, ou Jaapie Visser. Hy was 'n harde ryk man - jy weet daardie jare. Hy't sy geld in sy Bybel gehou, in sy Bybel gebere ... in die blaai van die Bybel ... En toe koop ek 'n skuit by hom vir £350, maar ek het nie die geld nie - al die geld nie. En ek kom en ek leen hier by my broer leen ek 'n £50 en ek leen by my swaer ook £50 en toe skuld ek nog £100. Ek het toe die ander [£150] het ek en ek skuld £100 nog toe. En hy [Visser] gee my daardie sonder rente of iets, teken ek skuld vir 'n jaar. En binne 'n jaar betaal ek toe vir Jasper"⁴².

John Tolken too sold his trek seine net to put a £125 down payment on a 3 ton Chevrolet lorry. The balance (£250) he worked off selling fish in Cape Town, but had to borrow £5 from his brother for petrol on the first trip⁴³. Johnny Eigelaar's family also moved from Dwarskersbos to Laaiplek, paying £1000 for a fishery (including land, fish houses and jetty) with £900 loaned

⁴¹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.171.

⁴² Interview with Mr Alkie Theart, Dwarskersbos, 19 July 1986.

⁴³ Interview with Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986.

from an uncle who farmed at Tiervlei in the Sandveld⁴⁴. Johnny, who was still at school, lent his father a further £95, saved from fishing in his spare time, to buy a black Dodge lorry for £100⁴⁵. Theart, Tolken and the Eigelaars either owned boats or had family who did and were thus assured of a regular supply of fish for transport to the Cape, but others relied on buying from the boats as middlemen. Baas Wiid bought his first lorry for £120 from his employer, fish trader Bull Waso, paying it off over twelve months in £10 installments⁴⁶. He sold the lorry for £140 and bought a new Chevrolet with £20 loaned (at 12% interest) from his wife's employer, local farmer Martin Melck⁴⁷. With this lorry he began his own business as a fish dealer and retailer with shops in Moorreesburg and Porterville.

For those without the capital or credit to become lampara owners, few options remained, but to continue in the old way or depart the Bay altogether. The shift to lampara fishing and the introduction of motor lorry transport created massive oversupply and undermined prices at the river. By 1939 the price of harder and maasbanker had collapsed to 1s per 100 and snoek was little better at £1.13s per 100 (vlekked) and 1s.6d for 100 mooitjies, with fishermen compelled to attract buyers by giving free bokkoms or two for the price of one in the case of snoek⁴⁸. With the onset of the war and expansion of the armed forces, Velddrift thus had the highest per capita enlistment rate of any town in South

⁴⁴ Interview with Mr Johnny Eigelaar, Laaipek, 10 July 1986.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Interview with Mr Baas Wiid, Velddrift, 18 July 1986.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Interviews with Mr Piet Smit, Laaipek, 1 July 1986, Mr Dan Groenewald, Velddrift, 18 July 1986 and Mr Ulisse Donaggi, Velddrift, 22 July 1986

Africa⁴⁹. The majority of enlistees sought to escape the grinding immiseration of the post-1935 years and gain a monthly maintenance grant for their families while they were away on service⁵⁰. Others left to work elsewhere. Ulisse Donaggi came to Cape Town to fish for snoek and took work on the harbour tugs. At the end of the war he bought his own boat to catch snoek, but when the vessel was wrecked at Ysterfontein he returned to the Bay⁵¹. Abraham Tolken, recently returned from Middelburg, spent 1941-1944 as a crayfish fisherman at Lamberts Bay⁵². Tommy Summers also abandoned Stephan Brothers and worked at Saldanha Bay during the war transporting water for the Saldanha Bay Canning Company⁵³.

For those who stayed, however, the war brought new and expanded opportunities for trade and accumulation as the burgeoning demand for fish in Cape Town and on the west coast gave a new lease of life to the river's beleaguered fishing communities. The requisitioning of the Union trawler fleet in 1939 created an expanded market for fresh fish in Cape Town which was further enlarged by the demand of Cape Town canners and smokers. On the west coast, the use of Saldanha Bay as a marshalling point for Allied convoys led to restrictions on fishing activities there, which constrained the Saldanha Bay fishermen and weakened their pre-war advantage over the Bay fisheries in supplying the Cape

⁴⁹ R. Lees *Fishing for Fortunes*, p.110. A propaganda film, "Men of Velddrift" was made during the war in recognition of this fact and the Berg River community's contribution to the Allied war effort.

⁵⁰ Interview with Mrs Bertha Chilcott, Laalplek, 3 July 1986.

⁵¹ Interview with Mr Ulisse Donaggi, Velddrift, 22 July 1986.

⁵² Interview with Mr Abraham Tolken, Velddrift, 27 July 1986.

⁵³ Interview with Mr Tommy Summers, St Helena Bay, 5 July 1986.

Town market⁵⁴. Berg River thus become the centre of inshore fishing on the west coast, supplying Cape Town, the regional rantsoennis trade and increasingly the local canning factories as well.

Boat owners exploited their unique position and range of market opportunities to the full, manipulating supply and demand on the various markets. In 1944 it was reported that 2 million lbs of fish were sent annually from Berg River to Cape Town where it fetched an average of 16s 6d a bushel basket as against 11s 6d on the west coast⁵⁵. The major Cape Town demand came from fish processors and in 1943 Irvin and Johnson paid £22 000 to Berg River fishermen for maasbankers for its smokery in Maitland⁵⁶. When the Cape Town market was over-supplied, the catch was directed elsewhere. As one boat and lorry owner from Berg River said, "You can bring quite a lot of fish [to Cape Town] before the prices fall. Today if the market is low, they do not bring the fish to Cape Town, and the result is that within a day or two the market recovers again"⁵⁷. The alternative to Cape Town was the countryside and the rantsoennis price doubled from 3s.6d-5s.6d a 100 in 1939 to 8s.6d-10s.6d by 1944, due to the increased demand from the canneries⁵⁸. In 1944 fish from Berg River was sent by lorry 22 miles to the Saldanha Bay canneries, 24 miles to Stephan Brothers at Paternoster, and 40 miles by sea to the Lambert's Bay

⁵⁴ State Archives; HEN 1497, 180\1\1(1), "Report of the Committee appointed by the Controller of Food Supplies to advise him in regard to the Canning of Fish other than Crawfish in the Union of South Africa", 9 July 1943, p.9.

⁵⁵ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.153 & p.175.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Evidence of H. Abao, p.237.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Evidence of F. Tallie, p.175.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Evidence of F. Tallie, p.176 and Evidence of A.J. Smit, p.287.

factories⁵⁹. The increased price of fish at Berg River was thus due "very largely if not wholly to the large amount taken off the market by the canning factories. They are canning tremendous quantities for military purposes, apart from the normal trade, and export, and that most definitely have [sic] increased the price"⁶⁰.

This expanded market depended for its supplies on the increased productivity of lampara fishing, but the latter was constrained by environmental factors, the seasonal nature of the pelagic resource and the winter snoek season. Even during the lampara season prices fluctuated. At the start of the season "junior maasbanker" retailed at only 4s a bushel basket because they were small and difficult to process, producing a low grade product⁶¹. As the season progressed, however, the size and quality of the fish improved as did the price. This rose to between 5s and 5s 6d for "mixed" fish (both small and large maasbankers) and peaked around 12s a basket once catches were of a uniform size⁶². The price also fluctuated on a daily basis. Each boat landed roughly 3-4 lorry loads of fish after a night's fishing, with the first boats usually returning at around 3.00 a.m. and the last at noon⁶³. There was thus a steady fall in price in the intervening nine hours. Those buyers with the longest distance to travel or shortest deadline bought immediately at the highest price, 12s a basket. As the morning wore on, however, demand tapered off and the last fishermen back had to take a 50% cut in

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.154.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.176.

⁶¹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of A.J. Smit and P.E. Rosseau, pp.282-283.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

price, letting their catch go for a mere 6s a basket⁶⁴.

The wartime boom at the Bay focussed on Berg River and by 1944 there were 66 motor boats at the river, compared to 17 a decade before⁶⁵. With the rapid increase in the fleet after 1941, land for a jetty, fish house and drying racks was at a premium⁶⁶. The only public land available along the river was just inside the mouth where ten crown land lots were leased by the state to would-be fishery owners in addition to the private land leased out by Stephan Brothers and the Smit family on Laaiplek and Velddrift farms⁶⁷. In 1941 the Department of Lands started charging jetty owners £1 per annum rental in addition to £3 annual rent for crown land sites and by 1944 the local Receiver of Revenue suggested tripling rents, "In view of the enormous profits which fishermen have been making during the past two years - and are still making"⁶⁸. The main beneficiary of these "enormous profits" was not the state, but an emerging, petty bourgeois, boat-owning class which controlled both the lampara fishery and the Cape Town trade⁶⁹. The latter provided a new

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.152 and Cape Archives; PAN 16, A120\B\90(8), "Return Shewing Number and Value of Vessels, Boats and Gear and the Number of Fishermen engaged at the Different Fishing Stations in Division Piketberg, Cape Province during the year ended 31 December 1934".

⁶⁶ Cape Archives; 1\PKB, 6\1\14-16 15\8\5\6-13, For correspondence on wartime land issues at the river.

⁶⁷ State Archives; LDE 4733, 19784\14, Secretary of Lands to the Minister of Lands, 7 June 1943 and HEN 1518, 180\1\34, M.A. de Beer to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 9 December 1940.

⁶⁸ Cape Archives; 1\PKB, 6\1\14 15\8\5\10, Receiver of Revenue Piketberg to the Provincial Representative Department of Lands, 23 May 1944 and 1\PKB, 6\1\16 15\6\5 P.IA, Provincial Representative Department of Lands to the Secretary of the Piketberg Divisional Council, 25 March 1942.

⁶⁹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.152.

outlet for the enormous surplus catches generated by the introduction of the lampara net in the late 1930s. Demand peaked in spring and summer, tapering off during the winter snoek season, and turning a profit on the Cape run depended on a number of variables⁷⁰. The first was tight fuel management. Petrol was rationed and its coupons were issued monthly by the Magistrate at Piketberg bearing the registration number of the vessel or vehicle⁷¹. The petrol price was controlled at 4s per gallon and owners received coupons according to the number and engine size of their lorries and motor boats⁷². Many owners thus kept a second truck or vessel for the extra petrol allowance, all traded fish for coupons with local farmers and some built up their own private stores which they sold illegally⁷³. In this way most managed 3-8 return trips per month - a far cry from the pre-war days when 4-5 runs per day were not uncommon⁷⁴. Given this fuel constraint, timing was also vital. The Salt River market opened at 5.00 am so the lorries loaded at night after the boats came in and set off for the Cape around 1.00-2.00 am⁷⁵. Most owners stressed the importance of being first, in order to get the best price, but one said he was not a fast driver out of respect for his vehicle and benefitted from reaching Salt River after

⁷⁰ Interview with Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986.

⁷¹ Interview with Mr Alkie Theart, Dwarskersbos, 18 July 1986.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.* Also Interviews with Mrs Bertha Chilcott, Laaipek, 3 July 1986, Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986 and Mr Hendrik Brand, Velddrift, 19 July 1986.

⁷⁴ Interviews with Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986, Mr Baas Wiid, Velddrift, 18 July 1986 and Mr Hendrik Brand, Velddrift, 19 July 1986.

⁷⁵ Interview with Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986.

everyone else had sold and left⁷⁶. Speed led to many accidents as tired drivers negotiated the poor roads south in ageing lorries. Burst tires, overturning, waking up behind the wheel and running off the road were all commonplace⁷⁷. In addition the blackout in Cape Town meant that lights had to be switched off at Melkbos and, unless the lorry had a dimmer, the vehicle had to wait there until sunrise⁷⁸. For this reason buyers often came to Milnerton and even Darling to meet the incoming trucks⁷⁹. Once in the Cape the owners attempted to sell their entire consignment to a single buyer, but were often forced to sell by the basket and even hawk it around Cape Town as far afield as Lansdowne and Hout Bay in search of buyers⁸⁰. The alternative was to dump the fish or take it back to Berg River for salting and drying which involved a loss to the owner for petrol and fish because he had to pay the fishermen upon his return regardless of the success of the trip⁸¹. Because of this secrecy was also essential. In Cape Town owners lied to one another about asking prices and undercut each other freely to make a sale and upon return to the river kept their earnings to themselves⁸². In this way they were able to both exploit the individual advantage of contacts, personality and salesmanship to maximum benefit and ensure that the fishermen

⁷⁶ Interviews with Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986, Mr Alkie Theart, Dwarskersbos, 18 July 1986 and Mr Baas Wiid, Velddrift, 18 July 1986.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Interview with Mr Alkie Theart, Dwarskersbos, 18 July 1986.

⁷⁹ Interviews with Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986 and Mr Baas Wiid, Velddrift, 18 July 1986.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* Also Interview with Mr Alkie Theart, Dwarskersbos, 18 July 1986.

⁸¹ Interviews with Mr Johnny Eigelaar, Laaiplek, 10 July 1986, Mr Alkie Theart, Dwarskersbos, 18 July 1986, Mr Baas Wiid, Velddrift, 18 July 1986 and Mr Dan Groenewald, Velddrift, 18 July 1986.

⁸² Interviews with Mr John Tolken, Dwarskersbos, 17 July 1986, Mr Alkie Theart, Dwarskersbos, 18 July 1986 and Mr Baas Wiid, Velddrift, 18 July 1986.

remained ignorant of market conditions. By so doing, prices at the river were standardised and owners could widen their profit margins while lessening the risk of a failed trip. A few owners secured supply contracts with Cape Town processors such as the trawling companies and were thus assured of a ready market at a set price⁸³.

The Cape Town trade also had a trickle-down effect on the fishing labour force at the river. The share system in theory ensured that the fishermen also enjoyed the benefits of the wartime boom, but this was less through increased earnings than the more ready availability of cash. Deferral of payment, common in the interwar years in all the Bay fisheries, appears to have been eroded during the war. Because the lampara net was less environmentally dependent than the beach seine and the Cape Town trade was in fresh fish, productivity increased while the time it took to realise the value of the catch declined sharply. Fishermen no longer spent hours after each catch cleaning, salting and drying the fish which was sold within hours of landing rather than hung out on racks drying for days and even weeks before sale⁸⁴. Owners thus began paying their men more regularly, sometimes immediately after returning from a trip to the Cape, and the old barter economy based on credit gave way to a more monetised economy. The average income of a Berg River fisherman reportedly rose to between £150 and £200 per annum by 1944 - three to four times

⁸³ Cape Archives; 1\PKB, 6\1\16 15\6\5 P.1, Atlantic Smokeries to the Provincial Representative Department of Lands, 11 July 1944 & Station Commander SAP Roodebaai to the Magistrate Piketberg, 11 September 1944; 1\PKB, 6\1\16 15\6\5 P.1A, National Trawling and Fishing Company to the Provincial Representative Department of Lands, 26 May 1945; 1\PKB, 6\1\16 15\6\13, Provincial Representative Department of Lands to National Trawling and Fishing Company, 28 June 1945 and Interview with Mr Amil Di Paola, Laaiplek, 6 July 1986.

⁸⁴ Interviews with Messrs Willie & Gert Smeda, Laaiplek, 4 July 1986, Mr Hendrik Brand, Velddrift, 19 July 1986 and Mr Ulisse Donaggi, Velddrift, 22 July 1986.

that reported by Luckhoff in 1936 - with skippers earning even more⁸⁵. Luckhoff, however, only recorded the fishermen's take home earnings and the increase was probably less dramatic than his figures suggest as, instead of extended credit, labour gained its first taste of a cash economy. This opened new consumption horizons for people accustomed to subsisting on dried fish, brown bread, black coffee and credit and led one observer to note with disapproval that:

"Laaiplek gives one the impression that it is a newly rich community. All the houses are small and the people are very simple. Prior to the war they lived under very poor conditions. During some periods they did not earn a decent livelihood, but now the average income of an ordinary fisherman is anything from £150 to £250 per year. And as can be expected of people like that, many of them do not know how to use their money. As a matter of fact they refuse to buy suits that are ready made. It must be tailor made costing up to £17 per suit. If they require a hat it must be a stetson and it must be purchased from Phil Moss [a fashionable clothing shop in Cape Town] and when it comes to drink they are prepared to hire a lorry and pay £9 for it to go and get a couple of vaatjies of wine. Mr Carosini is a local shopkeeper and he will tell you that he cannot import biscuits and jams fast enough to meet the demand. The women folk are not interested in cooking a decent meal at home. They prefer to buy tinned foods"⁸⁶.

The Berg River community's new "wealth" stood in stark contrast to the factory hamlets along the Bay's southern shores where Stephan Brothers' monopoly of the coast and means of production prevented fishermen from responding to the boom. As the Coloured Advisory Council reported in 1944, "Being private property the

⁸⁵ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.170 and DRC Archives; SKDB S13, 2\b\1, A.D. Luckhoff, "Rapport oor die Toestande op Velddrif, Piketberg District", 18 March 1936 and A.J. Wagenaar, "Statistieke re Velddrift Huisgesinne met Afhanklikes" February 1936.

⁸⁶ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of G.J. van Zyl, p.280.

residents cannot own their own boats and nets"⁸⁷. There were 300 fishermen dependent on Stephan Brothers for housing and "good fors"⁸⁸. The firm used these controls to depress prices, reaping the benefits of the boom for itself and recovering some of the ground lost during the 1930s.

TABLE 6.4: Stephan Brothers Fish Prices c.1944
Compared to Cape Town & the West Coast⁸⁷

COMPANY\ FISHERY	CRAYFISH [per crate]	MAASBANKER [per crate]	SNOEK [per 100]
Stephan Bros	9s-10s	1s.6d	£1
Lamberts Bay CC	17s-30s	-	-
Berg River	-	11s.6d	£15
Cape Town	-	16s.6d	£22.10s

It is thus not surprising that the firm had to buy in fish from Berg River as independent boat owners abandoned crayfish fishing and Stephan Brothers for the more lucrative profits to be made on the open market⁹⁰. The Advisory Council described the condition of labour along the Bay's southern shores as follows:

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Evidence of Dr F.H. Gow, p.458.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* The "Good Fors" [credit] allowed fishermen by Stephan Brothers varied from 5s per week at Steenberg's Cove to 8s at Paternoster.

⁸⁹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of Dr F.H. Gow, p.458; Evidence of J.F. Stubbs and C.H. Gaggins, pp.90-91; Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.158 & Evidence of F. Tallie, p.175 and State Archives; HEN 1497, 180\1\1(1), "Report of the Committee appointed by the Controller of Food Supplies to advise him in regard to the Canning of Fish other than Crawfish in the Union of South Africa", 9 July 1943, pp.10.

⁹⁰ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.153 & p.161 and C.H. Gaggins, p.91 for Paternoster crayfish fishermen fishing for the Lamberts Bay Canning Company for 30s-33s per crate of crayfish.

"The housing is very bad, there are no sanitary arrangements; water is stored in tanks in winter and in the summer is sold at 3d. per paraffin tin. Similar conditions regarding health and drunkenness [ie. very poor and rife] exist here"⁹¹.

The contrast with Berg River was stark indeed and explains the appeal of the Cape Town-based Trawler and Line Fishermen's Union (TLFU), along the southern shores of the Bay, with its call for higher prices and collective action⁹². The Stephan monopoly also deterred new capital from locating along the Malmesbury shores of the Bay as they preferred Berg River where the open market promised a ready supply of raw material. Between 1942 and 1944 two new companies, one owned by incipient Afrikaner capital and the other by Irvin and Johnson, established factories at Berg River to process pelagic fish. Both attempted to incorporate the primary producers into a dependent relationship as suppliers of raw material for factory production. The state, for its part, was also intent on using Berg River as a testing ground for co-operation. These various attempts to control the primary producer's access to the market heralded a new phase in the history of the Bay fisheries.

In January 1942 Marine Products was formed in Cape Town⁹³. The main shareholders in the new company were a local firm, Jameson Welding and Engineering Works and the emergent Afrikaner

⁹¹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of Dr F.H. Gow, p.458.

⁹² TLFU Archives; "Maritime Union of South Africa: General Secretary's Report to the Conference", 4 January 1944, pp.4-5.

⁹³ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, Marine Products to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 29 January 1943.

financial corporation, Federale Volks Beleggings⁹⁴. Jamesons used the knowledge acquired erecting a vitamin oil plant for Irvin and Johnson in 1938 to enter the industry in its own right⁹⁵. It soon diversified into inshore fishing, reconnoitring the coast between Mossel Bay and Still Bay and acquired options on land at Gansbaai and Hermanus⁹⁶. After experimental fishing at St Helena Bay, however, it decided on Berg River as providing the "most stable and consistent conditions for the development of an intensive industry" because of the large number of private fishing boats and their "embrace" of a fishing area rich in pelagic fish, especially pilchard⁹⁷. Jamesons attempted to secure a crown land site at the river mouth with the aim of salting, smoking and packing pilchard on a scale similar to the British herring industry⁹⁸. Lacking the requisite capital, however, it entered into partnership with Federale Volks Beleggings. The latter was

⁹⁴ D. O'Meara Volkskapitalisme, (Johannesburg, 1983), pp.192-193 and Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau, p.286.

⁹⁵ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, pp.106-107; Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau and F.C. Jameson, pp.272-273 & 278-280 and State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, Secretary of Commerce and Industries to the Minister forwarding letter from Concerta Ltd to Dr L. Brown, 22 June 1943, intercepted by wartime censor.

⁹⁶ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau and F.C. Jameson, pp.278-280 and State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, Marine Products to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 29 January 1943.

⁹⁷ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, Marine Products to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 29 January 1943 and HEN 1538, 180\2\1(2), Jameson Welding and Engineering Works to C. Von Bonde, n.d.

⁹⁸ State Archives; HEN 1538, 180\2\1(2), Jameson Welding and Engineering Works to the Secretary for Lands, 20 August 1941; Provincial Representative Department of Lands to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 29 August 1941, Secretary for Commerce and Industries to the Provincial Representative Department of Lands, ? August 1941, Provincial Representative Department of Lands to Jameson Welding and Engineering Works, 18 September 1941 and Jameson Welding and Engineering Works to C. Von Bonde, n.d.

formed in October 1940 after the 1939 Ekonomiese Volkskongres, with the aim of establishing Afrikaner businesses in commerce and industry by taking shares in appropriate undertakings⁹⁹.

In September 1942 Marine Products began negotiations with the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) for funding to float the Berg River Mouth Development Company, but the IDC withdrew¹⁰⁰. Unable to acquire a crown land site on suitable terms, Marine Products purchased Laaiplek farm from Stephan Brothers in October 1942 and registered a new company in November, Laaiplek Fisheries, with a starting capital of £50 000¹⁰¹. Included in the 150 shareholders were the Smit family and local merchant, Carosini, while Marine Products held a two-thirds majority interest and exercised control by way of interlocking directorates¹⁰². Laaiplek Fisheries began production in May 1943, concentrating on rantsoennis and in September received permission to erect a canning factory¹⁰³. Other concerns were also eyeing Berg River with interest by 1941. The growing wartime demand for canned fish prompted the trawling giant Irvin and Johnson also to diversify into inshore fishing. Its Cape Town cannery processed mainly stockfish, but it was aware of the availability of inshore

⁹⁹ D. O'Meara Volkskapitalisme, pp.191-194.

¹⁰⁰ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau, p.288 and State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, Marine Products to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 29 January 1943.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp.285-286. Also State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, Marine Products to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 29 January 1943.

¹⁰² R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.123; Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau, p.285-286 and State Archives; SES F1900\A\C\05, Prospectus of Marine Products Corporation of Africa Ltd, 15 June 1950.

¹⁰³ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau, p.283 and State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, P.E. Rosseau to C. Von Bonde, 13 September 1943.

fish at St Helena Bay through purchases of maasbankers to feed its Maitland smokery¹⁰⁴. In 1943 it despatched one of its chemists to America to investigate inshore fishing methods and applied for crown land at Berg River¹⁰⁵. In June 1943 managing director, Herbert Abao, visited the river as part of a government committee and, after discussions with local fishermen and boat owners, began pushing for a canning factory and smokery at Velddrift, with facilities for the production of by-products such as fish meal, oil and fertilizer¹⁰⁶. Priority certificates were arranged for the importation of new plant and in July 1943 Irvin and Johnson purchased a portion of Velddrift farm from the Smit family¹⁰⁷. Two months later it formed a subsidiary, African Inshore Fishing Development Corporation, but only commenced production at Berg River in July 1944¹⁰⁸. In the interim it continued to purchase fish at the river for its Cape Town factories.

Both Laaiplek Fisheries and African Inshore Fisheries sought to harness the primary producers to factory production, although well aware of "the different temperament of the average inshore fisherman who is an individualist and not a good co-operator"¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁴ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of H. Abao, p.237.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p.239.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.239-240.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* Also State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, Secretary of Commerce and Industries to the Minister forwarding letter from Concerta Ltd to Dr L. Brown, 22 June 1943, intercepted by wartime censor.

¹⁰⁸ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.109; Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of H. Abao, p.240 and State Archives; EVE 251, N9\1, Irvin and Johnson (South Africa) Ltd, Report of the Directors, 1944-1945.

¹⁰⁹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau, p.274 & p.288.

The wartime prosperity of the Berg River fisheries was conditional upon their independence from outside control and free entry to the market, allowing owners to manipulate supply and demand in their favour. This autonomy was dependent on access to land readily available before 1942 on the crown reserve at the river mouth or one of the farms¹¹⁰. With the sale of Laaiplek farm and a large portion of Velddrift in 1942-43, however, numerous boat owners and fishermen found themselves with new landlords who were more interested in appropriating the product of their labour than their ground rents. In seeking to tie the inshore fishermen to factory production, capital was able to use its land ownership to incorporate the primary producers into factory production as raw material suppliers. Both Laaiplek and African Inshore Fisheries embarked on housing construction programmes soon after acquiring their land. Laaiplek Fisheries presented its housing scheme as a commitment to building a "happy community"¹¹¹. The majority of Laaiplek farm's 500-600 strong coloured population lived in wood and iron houses or tin shacks, most of which were in a bad state of disrepair¹¹². Laaiplek Fisheries invested 10% of its starting capital in the construction of 29 cement block houses between October 1942 and March 1944 moving families out of the old wood and iron structures and demolishing the latter¹¹³. The company charged no rent, but limited occupation to company

¹¹⁰ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, M.A. de Beer to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 9 December 1940.

¹¹¹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of H. Abao, p.241 and Evidence of P.E. Rosseau, p.273.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau and G.J. van Zyl, pp.276-277 and Evidence of A.J. Smit, P.E. Rosseau and G.J. van Zyl, pp.284-285.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau and G.J. van Zyl, pp.276-277; Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.176 and Evidence of A.J. Smit, p.284.

employees¹¹⁴. It also engaged in incipient social engineering, setting out separate "coloured" and "European" townships, with the nucleus of 29 houses forming the core of the former¹¹⁵. This was reinforced by different tenure systems in the two townships, with coloured housing for rent only, but whites encouraged to buy their plots. In March 1944 it reported 70 plots had already been sold¹¹⁶. Laaiplek Fisheries was eager to expand its housing scheme and applied for funding from the Housing Board to construct an additional 30-40 houses in the "coloured township" as well as housing for its white employees and tenants¹¹⁷.

Whatever Laaiplek Fisheries' claims, the local boat owners were deeply suspicious of its motives. While acknowledging that the new housing was an improvement, their legal representative, Levin, warned that:

"One must always take it that they [Laaiplek Fisheries] want a direct return. It is not only altruism and I infer by putting up these houses they want to have a hold on the fishermen"¹¹⁸.

Given the high enlistment rate in the army, the labour supply was tight along the river by the early 1940s and boat owners were not in a position to compete with Laaiplek Fisheries' housing to attract fishermen. Such fears were reinforced by the ensuing squabble over a liquor licence at Berg River. No licence had been granted prior to 1939 and liquor was provided by local farmers or

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Evidence of A.J. Smit, P.E. Rosseau and G.J. van Zyl, pp.284-285.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Evidence of G.J. van Zyl, p.293.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau, pp.272-273 and Evidence of G.J. van Zyl, p.293.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau, pp.272-273 and 276.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.172.

smuggled in by hawkers¹¹⁹. Despite this, all sides were unanimous that drunkenness was rife amongst the "coloured" fishing community at the river¹²⁰. Boat owners, however, rejected company claims that a licence was necessary to control workers' access to alcohol, claiming that, "It is a remunerative business apart from other aspects", particularly the "coloured" trade¹²¹. The companies took a different view, although this was not without its contradictions. One Laaiplek director, G. van Zyl, claimed that African Inshore Fisheries, the loser in the contest for a liquor licence, was using the fact that his company had been awarded a licence against it in the community¹²².

"They also interested themselves in the application for a licence but the application was refused and now they are inclined to use the fact that we have got a licence against us by stating that we are out to exploit the people"¹²³.

Van Zyl categorically denied his company was interested in the £1000 per annum to be made from liquor sales to the fishermen. Rather, possession of the licence was part of its attempt to build a "happy community" and was obtained "purposely with the intention of trying to control the sale of drink to these people"¹²⁴. Van Zyl had no doubt that such control was necessary, for the fishermen "When they get hold of liquor ... generally consumed [it] in one night"¹²⁵. Attempts to control access to

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.178-180.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.178; Evidence of G.J van Zyl, A.J. Smit and P.E. Rousseau, pp.280-282 and Evidence of Dr. F.H. Gow, pp.453-461.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.178.

¹²² *Ibid.*, Evidence of G.J. van Zyl, p.281.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.280-281.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.280.

alcohol in co-operation with the local store owner proved futile because there was another store at Velddrift¹²⁶. The company thus had no alternative but to control the sale of alcohol itself by means of a licence¹²⁷. Laaiplek Fisheries' concern, however, was more than philanthropic. One of Van Zyl's co-directors alleged that at least once or twice a month a boat was unable to put to sea on account of the crew being drunk¹²⁸. Thus the disruptive effect of liquor on production was also a motive behind the company's acquisition of a licence. Van Zyl himself made the connection when he said, "It will be against our own interest to sell liquor in excess quantities because we want the fishermen to catch fish and work in our factory"¹²⁹. The local petty bourgeoisie's interests coincided with Laaiplek Fisheries' in this regard. Indeed private boat owners were major suppliers of liquor to their crews, keeping large quantities on tap for limited distribution at weekends and more liberally at the end of the season when shares were paid out and accounts settled¹³⁰. Thus, as with housing, the boat owners were less opposed to the control of alcohol than the fact that the company was exercising it and wresting yet another key labour recruitment and control device from their grasp.

Underlying Laaiplek Fisheries' housing and liquor control initiatives and informing its notion of a "happy community" was the need to create a settled industrial labour force, best

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, Evidence of A.J. Smit, p.281.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, Evidence of G.J. van Zyl, p.281.

¹³⁰ See for example Interviews with Messrs Willie & Gert Smeda, Laaiplek, 4 July 1986 and Mr Ulisse Donaggi, Velddrift, 22 July 1986.

defined in Van Zyl's own words as "orderly"¹³¹. Orderliness began at home with a stable domestic life. Hence the company's concern with what it perceived to be the two main threats to such stability, poor housing and alcohol abuse. Its concern, however, extended to encompass consumption as well. Noting that some women were not interested in cooking, baking bread and other domestic responsibilities and that children were often improperly fed as a consequence, Laaiplek Fisheries launched several initiatives to encourage correct consumption habits¹³². It arranged for the local store to sell flour, cooking fat, bread, milk, meat and fire-wood on a non-profit basis¹³³. For its own part, it provided fresh water free of charge and announced plans to set up a soup kitchen and a bakery, provide its factory workers with a midday meal and allow female workers to buy meals for their children¹³⁴. The results were very encouraging, with orderliness, house pride and an improved outlook everywhere in evidence. As one director, A.J. Smit, said, "I can take anybody into those [company] houses and they will find them clean and tidy. We make them realise that they have to look after their homes"¹³⁵. If domestic pride and correct consumption habits were easy lessons to teach, respect for the production cycle of would-be industrial capital and submission to its work regime was far more difficult to inculcate and as traumatic for the fishermen to accept. Laaiplek Fisheries was a stern taskmaster, but its recalcitrant pupils were equally stubborn.

¹³¹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of G.J. van Zyl, p.282.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.281.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp.280 and 291.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.281 and Evidence of A.J. Smit, p.285.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, Evidence of A.J. Smit, p.282.

The factory was initially geared to producing rantsoennis for the rural market¹³⁶. In addition to demolishing the fish houses of all competitors on the farm to make way for its factory, Laaiplek Fisheries mechanised production, enabling it to handle larger quantities in a shorter time. Mechanisation, however, was extremely primitive. Lees, referring to "homespun attempts at mechanisation", describes "A machine for cutting heads off the fish ... designed out of bicycle tyres and other parts"¹³⁷. Experiments were also made to improving curing methods by mechanically cleaning and partially curing the fish. The most important refinement was the removal of the fish head, previously pickled and dried, before processing¹³⁸. The company began "educating" farmers to buy rantsoennis without the head and so retained approximately 25% of the weight of the catch, containing the highest oil content for its own use¹³⁹. Initially the heads and other offal were buried, but the wartime demand for fish by-products soon presented a more profitable waste disposal solution, meal production¹⁴⁰. The problem was again plant, but for a company boasting a biochemist, food technologist, chemical engineer and two chemists, innovation was no problem and on 1 March 1944 the company's new fish meal "plant" went into operation¹⁴¹.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, Evidence of G.J. van Zyl, pp.286-287.

¹³⁷ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.123.

¹³⁸ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rousseau, p.287.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.122 and Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rousseau, p.287.

¹⁴¹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rousseau, p.289.

"It was improvised using an old grape press, the back-axle of a motor-car, bicycle chains and belts of all descriptions. Both the cooker which was coal fired, and the press were on a platform above the plant, but the drier was at ground level. The press was tiny and the cooker liable to boil over unexpectedly with some risk to anyone working down below. They called it a 1-ton-an-hour plant and they were very pleased if they got two-thirds of a ton through it in an hour"¹⁴².

Laaiplek Fisheries' claim to conduct inshore fishing on an "industrial basis" must thus be seen in the context of its "homespun" and inefficient plant and machinery. The factory was not only susceptible to frequent mechanical breakdowns, but also solely dependent on local fishermen for its raw material. Never intending to fish itself, it bought on the local market in competition with Cape Town buyers, local hawkers and canning company representatives¹⁴³. This arrangement worked satisfactorily until the end of 1943, with seasonal and daily fluctuations in price enabling it to obtain sufficient fish for its factory and lower the retail price of rantsoennis to the farmers from 25s a 100 in 1943 to 10s 6d a 100 for big bokkoms and 8s 6d for normalized fish by 1944¹⁴⁴. The company ascribed the lower consumer price, with no concomitant decrease in the cost of raw material, to improved methods of handling and distribution¹⁴⁵. This period of successful market "articulation" of petty commodity and nascent industrial production was short-lived, however, as

¹⁴² R. Lees *Fishing for Fortunes*, pp.122-123.

¹⁴³ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rousseau, pp.275-276 and State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, Marine Products to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 29 January 1943.

¹⁴⁴ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rousseau and A.J. Smit, pp.286-287.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Evidence of G.J. van Zyl, p.287 and Evidence of F. Tallie, p.167.

competition for raw material increased, forcing Laaiplek Fisheries to try and subordinate the fishermen to the demands of factory production more directly.

New demand and growing competition for fish emanated from a variety of sources. Laaiplek Fisheries itself was diversifying away from rantsoennis production into canning and fish meal by late 1942, requiring larger quantities of fish at a cheaper price in order to be profitable¹⁴⁶. Other canning companies at Saldanha Bay, St Helena Bay and Lambert's Bay were doing likewise and drawing on the Berg River fisheries to supply them with raw material¹⁴⁷. Then in July 1943 Irvin and Johnson purchased land at the river for its own factory. In September the managing director of Marine Products, P.E. Rousseau, protested against what he called, "nothing more than an attempt to embarrass our company"¹⁴⁸. He claimed there was room for only one factory at Berg River and Irvin and Johnson, although long familiar with conditions along the west coast, had never entered inshore fishing until now, when it acquired land right next to Laaiplek Fisheries after earlier refusing an offer from Marine Products to supply its Cape Town factories with raw material¹⁴⁹. Irvin and Johnson's aim was to compete with Laaiplek Fisheries, Rousseau alleged, adding "their representatives have openly stated that they are out to destroy our business"¹⁵⁰. He thus appealed to the state to prevent

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Evidence of P.E. Rousseau, pp.296-297.

¹⁴⁷ See *R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes*, p.105 ff and *Union of South Africa Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944*, Evidence of S.J. Levin, pp.153-154.

¹⁴⁸ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, P.E. Rousseau to C. Von Bonde, 13 September 1943.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Also HEN 1518, 180\1\34, Secretary of Commerce and Industries to the Minister forwarding letter from Concerta Ltd to Dr L. Brown, 22 June 1943, intercepted by wartime censor.

"unnecessary duplication of effort and increase in production cost which is bound to happen if new developments at Berg River Mouth are given free reign"¹⁵¹. Marine Products' protestations fell on deaf ears and its hostility to the new venture was not shared by the primary producers. They looked forward to increased competition for fish on the Berg River market and correspondingly higher prices for their catches. As Van Zyl said, "If they [Irvin and Johnson] erect a factory it will force the price of fish up as the supply will be smaller than the demand"¹⁵².

Laaiplek Fisheries' options were severely limited in meeting the challenge posed by African Inshore Fisheries as Irvin and Johnson had the capital to equip and supply a more efficient factory than their own "homespun" affair¹⁵³. The one option was to transfer its shark fleet from Kalk Bay, but this meant jeopardising vitamin oil production in Cape Town¹⁵⁴. It is also doubtful whether the Kalk Bay fleet would have been able to produce maasbankers at a "lower cost" than Laaiplek Fisheries could buy them on the open market, as Van Zyl claimed¹⁵⁵. Buying from the locals still remained the preferable alternative, as Rousseau pointed out:

"We went there [to Berg River] with the idea of buying fish from the fishermen ... We thought that by letting the fishermen fish for us it would save us a great deal of trouble; we would have no worry, and as long as they

¹⁵¹ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, P.E. Rousseau to C. Von Bonde, 13 September 1943.

¹⁵² Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of G.J. van Zyl, p.286.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.285.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Evidence of P.E. Rousseau, p.286 and Evidence of P.E. Rousseau and F.C. Jameson, pp.289-290.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Evidence of G.J. van Zyl, p.286. Pelagic fishing required skill in using a lampara net and a good working knowledge of local conditions and it would have taken the company boats some time to acquire the necessary experience to be able to operate efficiently.

fished without exploiting us we would be prepared to let them carry on in that way"¹⁵⁶.

By the end of 1943, however, Laaiplek Fisheries was feeling ever more vulnerable and "exploited". Not only were Irvin and Johnson buying large quantities of fish at Berg River, but African Inshore Fisheries had begun work on its new factory up-river and the prospect of a future rise in the price of raw material loomed large in the minds of the Laaiplek Fisheries directors. With no other alternative, they thus sought to fundamentally alter relations of production with the fishermen, forcing those resident on company land to sell their catches only to the company, at a lower than market price. To this end the company used its ownership of both the land and houses. Asked about the relationship between the fishermen tenants and companies in 1944, African Inshore Fisheries managing director, Abao, said:

"I think you will admit ... that it would only be fair in regard to people who come to live there [on company land] in future and for whom we provide houses that we should make it a condition of their staying there that they co-operate with the company"¹⁵⁷.

Housing was thus seen by capital as a legitimate lever with which to obtain "co-operation" from the fishermen who, both companies agreed, were ill-disposed to give such co-operation voluntarily. As early as January 1943, Laaiplek Fisheries attempted to induce the fishermen to sell directly to it. At a meeting at Velddrift Van Zyl tried to negotiate contracts for the delivery of fish to the Laaiplek factory by intimating that the company was a government concern and claiming that "all fish will ultimately

¹⁵⁶ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rousseau, pp.275-276.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Evidence of H. Abao, p.241.

flow through [its] ... hands"¹⁵⁸. He demanded and obtained the books of a local fish dealer, whose representative handed them over under the impression that Van Zyl was a government official¹⁵⁹. Van Zyl also tried to organise the fishermen to support the company's application for crown land and promised to assist those who only delivered fish to his factory¹⁶⁰. Van Zyl's deceitful bullying achieved little. No boat owners or fishermen were prepared to bind themselves contractually to one company when the demand on the open market assured them of a higher price for their catch.

By the end of 1943, however, Laaiplek Fisheries was desperate and also possessed a new hold over the fishermen, land and housing. In March 1944 Van Zyl informed boat owners and fishermen resident on company land that in future they would be forbidden to sell their fish on the open market and would have to sign a contract to deliver it to the factory at 6s.6d per crate, 5s less than the ruling market price¹⁶¹. No reference was made to punitive measures, but this was understood to be implicit, as the case of Fernando Tallie makes clear. Tallie, a long-time resident of Laaiplek, did well for himself during the war. In 1944 he lived at Laaiplek in a house rented from the company and initially conducted his fishing business there as well, until his fish store was demolished to make way for the new factory¹⁶². He then moved his fishery to a crown land site leased from the state for

¹⁵⁸ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, J.C. Bodenstein to F.P. Spooner, 24 February 1943.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.158.

¹⁶² Ibid., p.159.

£4 per annum¹⁶³. Laaiplek Fisheries' arrival brought other changes as well. The price of rantsoennis increased, according to Tallie, from 5s-8s a 100 to more than 10s and the company prohibited production of rantsoennis on its land, demolishing all private fish houses¹⁶⁴. Forced to carry on his fishery on crown land, he found even this avenue closed to him by Van Zyl's March 1944 announcement. He agreed to sign a two-month contract on the latter's terms because, as he explained, "I do not want to insult the man because I am on his ground"¹⁶⁵. He had since been forbidden to load his lorry with fish to transport to Cape Town and vehemently rejected any suggestion that the 5s reduction in price was merely rent for the company house. As his lawyer, Levin, said:

"Mr Tallie is paying rent for his own place in addition [to the price reduction], and he is continuing to pay rent. By virtue of the fact that they are occupying these [company] houses they are getting lower prices"¹⁶⁶.

The reason, Levin suggested, was rather that the ruling price of 11s 6d was not "economic" for Laaiplek Fisheries¹⁶⁷. It was thus making use of "the power it can wield by reason of the land it owns" to drive down the price and bind the fishermen to supplying its needs alone¹⁶⁸. Laaiplek Fisheries, however, denied Tallie's allegations and attributed the drop in price to a fall-off in

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, Evidence of F. Tallie, p.167.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.167-168 and Evidence of F. Tallie and S.J. Levin, p.159.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Evidence of F. Tallie, p.166.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Evidence of S.J. Levin, p.172.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.173-174.

demand and a decline in the market price¹⁶⁹. Its tenants could sell to anyone and even load lorries at its jetty, except hawkers who distributed the company's rantsoennis. The latter were only allowed to load a limited quantity of fresh fish to prevent them competing with the company¹⁷⁰. Laaiplek Fisheries itself bought on the open market at the ruling price and did not contract for its raw material. Besides, the company pointed out, it was impossible to impose a contract price on its tenants, because both the boat owners resident at Laaiplek had crown land sites¹⁷¹. Rather, it ventured, fishermen preferred to sell to the company because of its large jetty¹⁷². Despite the denials, it is unlikely that Tallie, a company tenant, would jeopardise his position by making unfounded allegations in public. His disclosures, however, were an acute embarrassment to the company, tarnishing its carefully cultivated image of a group of benevolent entrepreneurs with the best interests of the community at heart, and under the circumstances denial was the best defence.

Away from the public eye, however, Laaiplek Fisheries intensified attempts to bind the fishermen to supplying its raw material needs at below-market prices. To this end it attacked the open market, querying the legality of trading on crown land and the subletting of leases¹⁷³. It alleged that state tenants not only bought fish from other fishermen for resale, but frequently acted as agents for Cape Town buyers. The result was that "[hulle] sake

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Evidence of P.E. Rousseau and A.J. Smit, pp.275-276 & 283 and Evidence of P.E. Rousseau, A.J. Smit and G.J. van Zyl, p.293.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Evidence of P.E. Rousseau, A.J. Smit and G.J. van Zyl, p.293.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Evidence of P.E. Rousseau and A.J. Smit, pp.275-276 & 283 and Evidence of P.E. Rousseau, A.J. Smit and G.J. van Zyl, p.293.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Cape Archives; 1\PKB, 6\1\15, 15\8\5\15, Laaiplek Fisheries to the Magistrate Piketberg, 26 & 28 June 1944.

moeilik maak vir die besigheid [Laaiplek Fisheries] wat op groot omset staatmaak. Op die manier word die minder lonende handel [rantsoenvis] aan die groter besigheid gelaat wat dan kwalik sy bestaan kan regverdig"¹⁷⁴. The company thus requested the local magistrate to put an end to the practice. As a result, the Department of Lands inserted a clause into contracts with its crown land tenants in 1945 stipulating that:

"No person other than the Lessee shall, while on the site ... or any jetty abutting ... request, solicit or invite any person who may be conveying fish on the Berg River to sell or deliver to him the said fish or any portion thereof. The Lessee should take all reasonable steps to ensure that this condition is not infringed"¹⁷⁵.

In the absence of effective policing this was a purely token gesture. It is doubtful whether Tallie paid any heed and the open market remained until the end of the war. Laaiplek Fisheries' lack of success was due to a number of factors, the most important of which was the wartime importance of the open market at the river for other concerns, especially the Cape Town trawling companies and the canning industry. In this context, the appeals, protestations and ambitions of a small Afrikaner company were largely ignored. Laaiplek Fisheries' problems, however, were not unique and canners in general began to encounter ever-more serious barriers to expansion by 1944 as a result of their enforced reliance on inshore fishing for raw material¹⁷⁶. State activity, in this regard, was limited by wartime financial constraints, the requisitioning of its research vessel for seaward defence purposes and the loss of personnel and increased

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Cape Archives; 1\PKB, 6\1\14, 15\8\5\10, Provincial Representative Department of Lands to the Receiver of Revenue Piketberg, 1 June 1945.

¹⁷⁶ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of A. Ovenstone representing SAFCC, pp.349-359.

administrative duties of the Department of Commerce and Industries¹⁷⁷. More importantly, Pretoria was still wedded to co-operation as the solution to the inshore fisheries' problems. This blinded it to the wartime articulation of canning and inshore fishing and was directly contrary to the interests of the canning industry, with its aim of higher fish prices for primary producers.

6.3 CO-OPERATIVES VERSUS CANNERIES

The Sea Fisheries Act made provision for Fish Marketing Improvement Areas (FMIAs) as the base for co-operatives¹⁷⁸. The state, however, had no idea how such co-operatives would operate in practice. Its models were European and American where industrialisation created a massive demand for fish at a constant price as raw material in factory production¹⁷⁹. No such demand existed in the Union and the state thus looked to integrate the inshore fisheries into the national fresh fish market. The economics of co-operation were also fused with social welfare concerns about increasing poor whiteism in the inshore fisheries by the late 1930s. Attention thus focussed on those fisheries where white fishermen predominated, such as Berg River and

¹⁷⁷ Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates, vol.47, January-March 1944, col.511; Division of Sea Fisheries 19th Annual Report for the year ended December 1947 in Commerce and Industry, 7, 8, April 1949 and State Archives; HEN 1497, 180\1\1(1), "Report of the Committee appointed by the Controller of Food Supplies to advise him in regard to the Canning of Fish other than Crawfish in the Union of South Africa", 9 July 1943, p.14.

¹⁷⁸ Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Sea Fisheries Bill, 1939, Evidence of E.P. Smith, F.P. Spooner and C. von Bonde, pp.1-6, 15-31 & 82-83; Union of South Africa, Department of Commerce and Industries Report of the Rural Industries Commission, 1940 [U.G.27\1940], pp.50-58; Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates vol.38, 1940, cols.3692-3699, 3702-3737 & 3744 and Union of South Africa Extraordinary Government Gazette No.2749, 10 April 1940, Sea Fisheries Act, Act No.10 of 1940.

¹⁷⁹ Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, Evidence of C. von Bonde, pp.27-56.

Gansbaai on the southern Cape coast, and looked to co-operatives to uplift this sector of the white population in much the same way job colour bars and civilised labour policies had done in industry during the inter-war years¹⁸⁰. In April 1941 the Department of Commerce and Industries recommended Velddrift as a site for the establishment of one of eight local co-operatives¹⁸¹. In October, the Department of Social Welfare's Controller of Settlements, J.C. Bodenstein, also proposed a pilot co-operative at Berg River to test the viability of a larger welfare scheme for fishermen¹⁸². Berg River thus became the designated testing ground for the state's co-operative plans during the war and by the end of 1941, the Departments of Commerce and Industries and Social Welfare were collaborating on refining their ideas¹⁸³. At the Treasury's behest, control was vested with the former and the emphasis placed on reorganising the inshore fisheries as a whole¹⁸⁴. In July 1942 a joint proposal was submitted to the Minister of Commerce and Industries calling for the establishment of a state-controlled Public Utility Company (PUC) with a capital

¹⁸⁰ Union of South Africa Report of the Commission of Inquiry regarding the Cape Coloured Population of the Union, 1937, pp.79-80 and Union of South Africa Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of the Coloured Advisory Council, pp.453-469 for attempts to foster a similar state concern for the declining lot of coloured fishermen during the late 1930s and Second World War.

¹⁸¹ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, Secretary for Commerce and Industries to the Minister, 2 October 1940, Booklet "The Co-operative Movement Among South African Fishermen", n.d. and "Report of the Departmental Committee Appointed to Investigate and Report Upon the Organisation of the Inshore Fishing Industry", April 1941.

¹⁸² State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, J.C. Bodenstein "Voorgestelde Skema vir Behoeftige Vissers: Velddrift", n.d.

¹⁸³ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, J.C. Bodenstein to the Secretary for Social Welfare, October 1941.

¹⁸⁴ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, Secretary for Finance to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 5 December 1941, "Notes on the Proposed Scheme for the Reorganisation of the Fishing Industry", n.d. and Secretary for Finance to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 25 March 1942.

of £1 million for this purpose¹⁸⁵. The PUC would fulfil the functions of the central co-operative society envisaged by the Department of Commerce and Industries, as well as the local level social welfare work proposed by Bodenstein. The PUC was approved by the Treasury support, but legislation was delayed until 1944¹⁸⁶. In the interim, Bodenstein's pilot scheme went ahead, on condition that it was later transferred to the Department of Commerce and Industries' PUC¹⁸⁷.

Bodenstein soon encountered problems. In addition to rising costs, delays in acquiring land and the small amount of land finally made available, he encountered the hostility of local capital and labour¹⁸⁸. The wartime boom had effectively undermined whatever support may have existed at Berg River for the co-operative idea before 1939. With the primary producers experiencing resurgent profitability, state proposals for an end to independent production and market competition in return for a small weekly allowance and deferred profit share eaten away by administrative costs held as much attraction for boat owners and fishermen as a contract with Laaiplek Fisheries. They were also unhappy with the scheme's intention to tie them to the Bay by providing alternative employment ashore during off-seasons. Laaiplek Fisheries also opposed Bodenstein's plans. News of the scheme frightened off the IDC and prevented the company securing

¹⁸⁵ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, F.P. Spooner to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 20 July 1942.

¹⁸⁶ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, J. H. Hofmeyr to R. Stuttaford, 30 October 1942.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, Secretary for Social Welfare to the Secretary for Finance, 18 December 1942.

crown land at the river mouth for its factory¹⁸⁹. After Bodenstein had addressed a meeting at Velddrift in February 1943, Pretoria was inundated with protests from Marine Products¹⁹⁰. Having itself failed to persuade the fishermen to deliver fish to their factory the month before, the company confidently asserted that "the Fishermen are not enamoured of the Scheme and do not want to participate in it"¹⁹¹. It asked to be given an opportunity to develop the local fisheries before the state intervened¹⁹². The resistance of local capital, fishermen and boat owners sapped the Department of Social Welfare's philanthropic zeal and the Bodenstein scheme died a quiet death before the end of the year¹⁹³.

¹⁸⁹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau, p.288; State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, Marine Products to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 29 January 1943 and J.C. Bodenstein to F.P. Spooner, 24 February 1943 and LDE 4733, 19784\14, Secretary for Social Welfare to the Secretary for Lands, 30 April 1943 and Secretary for Lands to the Secretary for Finance, 10 September 1943.

¹⁹⁰ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, P.E. Rousseau to C. Von Bonde, 3 February 1943; P.E. Rousseau to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 20 February 1943 and C. Von Bonde to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 2 March 1943. On 1 March 1943 Von Bonde met a delegation from the river comprising the MPC for Piketberg, J. Kellerman, G.J. van Zyl, and Messrs Thiar and Carosini. The delegation had previously met with Dr D.F. Malan, MP for Piketberg.

¹⁹¹ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, C. Von Bonde to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 2 March 1943.

¹⁹² State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, P.E. Rousseau to C. Von Bonde, 3 February 1943; P.E. Rousseau to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 20 February 1943 and C. Von Bonde to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 2 March 1943.

¹⁹³ State Archives; LDE 4733, 19784\14, Secretary for Social Welfare to the Secretary for Lands, 30 April 1943; Provincial Representative Department of Lands to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 6 May 1943; Secretary for Lands to the Minister, 19 June 1943; Provincial Representative Department of Lands to the Secretary for Social Welfare, 29 July 1943 & 7 August 1943; Secretary for Lands to the Secretary for Finance, 10 September 1943 and Secretary for Social Welfare to the Provincial Representative Department of Lands, 24 November 1943.

The larger PUC, however, remained on track through 1943 and on 17 December the Fishing Industry Development Bill was gazetted¹⁹⁴. The PUC was renamed the Fisheries Development Corporation (FDC) and its £1 million share capital equally divided into A and B shares, the former devoted to social upliftment and the latter to the improved marketing of inshore fish¹⁹⁵. FMIAs were superseded by "Controlled Areas" and the levy provision replaced by compulsory registration of all fishermen and boats¹⁹⁶. The Minister was also empowered to prohibit fishermen selling fish to any person except the Corporation or an approved company and anyone except the FDC or an approved company buying fish in a controlled area. He could fix fish prices, setting down a maximum and minimum for fishermen and maximum price for traders¹⁹⁷.

The state blueprint was, however, pre-war in its conceptualisation of the inshore fisheries, remaining oblivious to the articulation of canning and inshore fishing and viewing the canners as crayfish producers unaffected by the Bill¹⁹⁸. Indeed, the state evidenced a growing hostility towards private

¹⁹⁴ Union of South Africa Extraordinary Government Gazette No.3280, 17 December 1943, pp.ii-xviii; State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, Secretary for Commerce and Industries to the Minister, February 1943 & March 1943; Department of Commerce and Industries Explanatory Memorandum "Fishing Industry Development Bill", 19 July 1943 & n.d.; "Government Proposals regarding Fisheries Development", [marked Confidential], n.d.; Secretary for Commerce and Industries to the Minister, 9 September 1943 and "Statement to Press: Fisheries Development", 17 December 1943.

¹⁹⁵ Union of South Africa Extraordinary Government Gazette No.3280, 17 December 1943, pp.iv-viii.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.viii-xvi.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.xii-xiv.

¹⁹⁸ See for example State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, Department of Commerce and Industries Explanatory Memorandum "Fishing Industry Development Bill", 19 July 1943.

capital. In 1942 the Department of Commerce and Industries argued for the state "supplanting" private capital in inshore fishing, warning that the majority of fishermen were indigent, illiterate and thus "in danger of being exploited by private enterprise, if it was allowed to fund the reorganisation of the industry"¹⁹⁹. These sentiments were echoed by the Treasury in approving funding for the FDC and the Minister of Economic Development, S.F. Waterson, in presenting the Bill to the House in 1944²⁰⁰. Waterson called the inshore fisheries "a child problem in the South African family" manifesting in a profound socio-economic crisis, with low wages and "drunkenness" as the key indicators underscoring a host of related social ills²⁰¹. Private enterprise, the Minister ventured, had failed to either address or alleviate these problems and the state as "guardian of the inshore fishermen" thus had an obligation to intervene²⁰².

Because of the Bill's narrow definition of capital in the inshore fisheries, only Marine Products was asked for pre-publication comment on the Bill²⁰³. Although Laaiplek Fisheries had opposed Bodenstein's co-operative scheme, by late 1943 the threat of African Inshore Fisheries prompted it to enthusiastically endorse the new Bill, stressing how its own commitment to a happy and

¹⁹⁹ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, F.P. Spooner to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 20 July 1942.

²⁰⁰ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, "Notes on the Proposed Scheme for the Reorganisation of the Fishing Industry", n.d.

²⁰¹ Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates, vol.47, January-March 1944, cols.510-517; Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of the Coloured Advisory Council, pp.440-447 and Memorandum by the Department of Public Health on the "Fishing Industry Development Bill", Appendix E, pp.xxvii-xxviii.

²⁰² Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates, vol.47, January-March 1944, cols.510-517.

²⁰³ State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\34, P.E. Rousseau to F.P. Spooner, 5 November 1943.

orderly community at Berg River meshed with and complemented the state's plans²⁰⁴. Irvin and Johnson, on the other hand, had no prior warning and was taken unawares by the far-reaching powers proposed for the FDC²⁰⁵. It was more concerned that the FDC's B share capital would be used to nationalise its national fish distribution network than it was about the situation at Berg River²⁰⁶. Its financial resources and diversity of processing interests in Cape Town enabled it to continue purchasing fish on the open market at Berg River for the duration of the war. In the long term too it was confident of its ability to produce more efficiently, pay higher prices for its raw material and so squeeze out Laaiplek Fisheries, as it had with so many of its under-capitalised competitors in the trawling industry. It thus concentrated on addressing the widely perceived anti-Irvin and Johnson and anti-capitalist slant of the new legislation.

While the Minister of Commerce and Industries was at pains to allay private enterprise's fears, others were less circumspect²⁰⁷. The Bill was welcomed by the Labour and National Parties, both of whom saw it as primarily aimed at Irvin and Johnson's monopoly of

²⁰⁴ Ibid. Also Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of P.E. Rosseau, pp.270-275 & 296.

²⁰⁵ Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Sea Fisheries Bill, 1939, Evidence of H. Abao, S.F. Furneaux, L. Leask and H.J. Lait, pp.44-81; State Archives; HEN 1518, 180\1\32, "Report of the Departmental Committee Appointed to Investigate and Report Upon the Organisation of the Inshore Fishing Industry", April 1941 and HEN 1518, 180\1\34, Secretary for Commerce and Industries to the Minister, 17 August 1943.

²⁰⁶ Union of South Africa Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of H. Abao, pp.219-233.

²⁰⁷ Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates January-March 1944, vol.47, col.510-517.

national fresh fish production and distribution²⁰⁸. The anti-private enterprise stance of this cross party consensus and the Bill's neglect of the needs of capital in the inshore fisheries united the industry against it. Fishing capital was incensed by the veiled suggestion that it was responsible for the socio-economic problems of the inshore fisheries and pointed to past state neglect as the root cause of the problems²⁰⁹. Organised commerce and industry was also worried about a home-grown variant of "state socialism"²¹⁰. The "fundamental issue", according to Association of Chambers of Commerce (ASSOCOM), was "that of the proper sphere of State and private enterprise"²¹¹. In this regard Irvin and Johnson spoke for everyone when it said, "the fishing industry, either sectionally or as a whole, does not look to the State for adoption, but for advice and guidance"²¹². Capital, in dismissing the state's parastatal solution as an unworkable encroachment on private enterprise, set about re-ordering priorities for the state. The socio-economic crisis was downgraded and a series of production problems prioritised,

²⁰⁸ Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates January-March 1944, vol.47, cols.510-539 & 807-831 and House of Assembly Debates May-June 1944, vol.50, cols.8301-8333, 8495-8526 & 8562-8580.

²⁰⁹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of Prof. S.H. Frankel, pp.1-26; the Wholesale Fish Distributors in the Cape Peninsula & SAFROC, pp.56-114; National Trawling and Fishing Company, pp.190-219; Irvin and Johnson, pp.219-270; ASSOCOM, pp.298-339 and FCI & SAFCC, pp.340-386. Also Appendix B "Memorandum by Mr G.D. Irvin"; Appendix D "Memorandum by Prof. W.H. Hutt; Appendix G "Memorandum by SAFROC on Harbour Facilities"; Appendix H "Memorandum by SAFROC on the Export Salt Snoek Trade, etc" and Appendix I "Memorandum by Wholesale Fish Distributors in the Cape Peninsula on the Earnings of Fishermen, etc" for the wide-ranging, but uniformly outraged response of fishing capital, organised commerce and industry and a brace of eminent liberal economists to the Bill.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of W.R. Skeeles, p.298.

²¹² Ibid., Evidence of H. Abao, p.220.

constituting an accumulation crisis requiring both urgent state attention and a redirection of funding away from fishing labour into research and infrastructure²¹³. The Select Committee ignored these lengthy protestations and appeals, however, reporting an essentially unchanged Bill to the House in April 1944²¹⁴.

Rather than closing the debate, the Select Committee report only intensified it. Irvin and Johnson, the Federated Chamber of Industries and ASSOCOM conducted a concerted lobbying campaign in Parliament and finally forced the Government to agree to a series of amendments before the second reading²¹⁵. These included trawling capital's exclusion from the Bill, Parliamentary approval for all FDC B share issues and a levy provision to fund the expanded research programme demanded by capital²¹⁶. While in the Minister's opinion these last-minute amendments left the socio-economic functions of the original Bill intact, for the Labour and National Parties they were a blatant indication of the United Party's capitulation to the demands of big capital. The early cross-party consensus was shattered and the Minister forced

²¹³ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, the Wholesale Fish Distributors in the Cape Peninsula & SAFROC, pp.56-114; National Trawling and Fishing Company, pp.190-219; Irvin and Johnson, pp.219-270; ASSOCOM, pp.298-339 and FCI & SAFCC, pp.340-386 for the various alternative solutions to the development problem of the inshore fisheries.

²¹⁴ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, pp.iii-ix. Waterson, in addition to making himself chairman of the Committee, appointed only MPs known or thought to be supporters of the Bill, including representatives of the Labour and National Parties, to the Committee. The Committee's sole amendment was to make provision in the legislation for a Fisheries Development Advisory Council (FDAC) to advise the FDC. The FDAC was less a sop to capital's demands for a greater say than it was to allay the fears of boat owners and fishermen about registration and the controlled areas.

²¹⁵ Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates, vol.50, May-June 1944, cols.8301-8333, 8495-8526 & 8562-8580.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

to run the gauntlet of Opposition outrage in piloting the revised legislation through the House at the end of May 1944²¹⁷.

For the National Party, the government's capitulation was both a political and economic defeat which placed nascent Afrikaner capital's attempts to gain a foothold in a primary industrial sector not dominated by English capital in jeopardy²¹⁸. As the National Party MP for Mossel Bay, Dr van Nierop, put it, "the back of the Fishing Bill has been broken"²¹⁹. Moorreesburg National Party MP, F.C. Erasmus, a strong supporter of Marine Products, warned the House that Irvin and Johnson "have now parked themselves alongside Laaiplek Ltd. of the Afrikaners at the mouth of the Berg River"²²⁰. Erasmus claimed Laaiplek Fisheries was a company "in which the whole of the people of South Africa have representative shares in both branches"²²¹. This was in stark contrast to Irvin and Johnson which he likened to the "the tentacles of the octopus" whose reach extended into various sectors of the national economy and apparently into the

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ D. O'Meara *Volkskapitalisme*, pp.212-213 for the importance of fishing to the economic movement of Afrikaner nationalism, spearheaded by Federale Volks Beleggings.

²¹⁹ *Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates*, vol.50, May-June 1944, cols.8563-8567.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, col.8317. Erasmus, as chairman of the 1939 Select Committee on the Sea Fisheries Bill, had ridden rough-shod over Irvin and Johnson's earlier objections to the FMIA's in returning an unchanged Bill to the House. He was similarly antagonistic to trawling capital as a member of the Select Committee on the 1944 Bill and may well have exerted an influence on Waterson, steeling the latter's resolve. His outrage and anger at the subsequent amendments was thus all the stronger, also because Laaiplek Fisheries was located on the boundary of his own constituency.

²²¹ *Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates*, vol.50, May-June 1944, col.8329 and *Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944*, Evidence of P.E. Rousseau and G.J. van Zyl, p.288.

halls of political power as well²²². On this basis, he appealed to the House, "If one can protect the Laaiplek fishing concern one should do so because of public interest"²²³. It was rather Afrikaner capital's interests which were at stake after the last-minute amendments to the Bill; but the National Party's attempts to prevent Irvin and Johnson "torpedoing" the Bill were to no avail and amid taunts from United Party members the Nationalists saw all their counter-amendments and objections defeated²²⁴.

The FDC was formally constituted in October 1944²²⁵. Despite its inauspicious pedigree and the growing misgivings about the viability of pelagic canning once the war ended²²⁶, the Corporation committed itself to "From the outset ... working in the closest co-operation with those already established in the industry"²²⁷. To this end, co-operatives were abandoned and by the end of the war the FDC was talking instead about a boat-financing scheme to uplift inshore fishermen²²⁸. In addition, A share capital went on the provision of housing at a number of key west coast factory hamlets²²⁹. The bulk of the Corporation's time,

²²² Union of South Africa House of Assembly Debates, vol.50, May-June 1944, col.8317.

²²³ Ibid., col.8329.

²²⁴ Ibid., col.8310.

²²⁵ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.125; Fisheries Development Corporation [FDC] 1st Annual Report, 1945, p.3 and State Archives VWN 1074, SW456(1), FDAC Minutes of Inaugural Meeting, 30 October 1944.

²²⁶ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of H. Abao, pp.247 & 265-266.

²²⁷ FDC 1st Annual Report, 1945, p.3.

²²⁸ Ibid., p.8. Also State Archives VWN 1074, SW456(1), FDAC Minutes of the Second Meeting, 4 June 1945 and FDAC Minutes of the Third Meeting, 24 July 1945.

²²⁹ FDC 1st Annual Report, 1945, pp.7-8.

effort and resources, however, were directed into healing the breach with capital and proving the prophets of doom wrong by assisting the canning industry to meet international competition after the war. In this regard,

"[I]t was suggested that the Corporation should invest new capital in all the companies, to the extent of a one-third share - this new money to be devoted to the purchase of new plant, boats and gear and to the general modernisation and improvement of the factories. Such a link-up, it was hoped, would bring about the measure of co-operation and rationalisation needed to develop the industry to its fullest extent and to meet keen competition from overseas after the war"²³⁰.

Initially, however, only the Lamberts Bay Canning Company and Stephan Brothers agreed to sell a third interest to the FDC²³¹. These joint ventures soon bore fruit, with the Lamberts Bay company importing a plant to produce oil and meal from the offal of its canning operation and joining the FDC, Stephan Brothers, the Table Mountain Canning Company and Laaiplek Fisheries in erecting a new canning and by-products plant at St Helena Bay²³². The Corporation also paid increasing attention to research and infrastructure²³³. Thus, in its first year the FDC went a long way towards assuaging the fears of fishing capital and its chairman, S.H. Skaife, could justifiably claim that "The first year's work of the Corporation has ... laid sound foundations for big and far-reaching developments in the months and years to come"²³⁴.

²³⁰ *FDC 1st Annual Report, 1945, p.4.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid., pp.5-6.*

²³³ *Ibid., p.3. Also State Archives VWN 1074, SW456(1), FDAC Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting, 30 October 1945, Memorandum by C. von Bonde.*

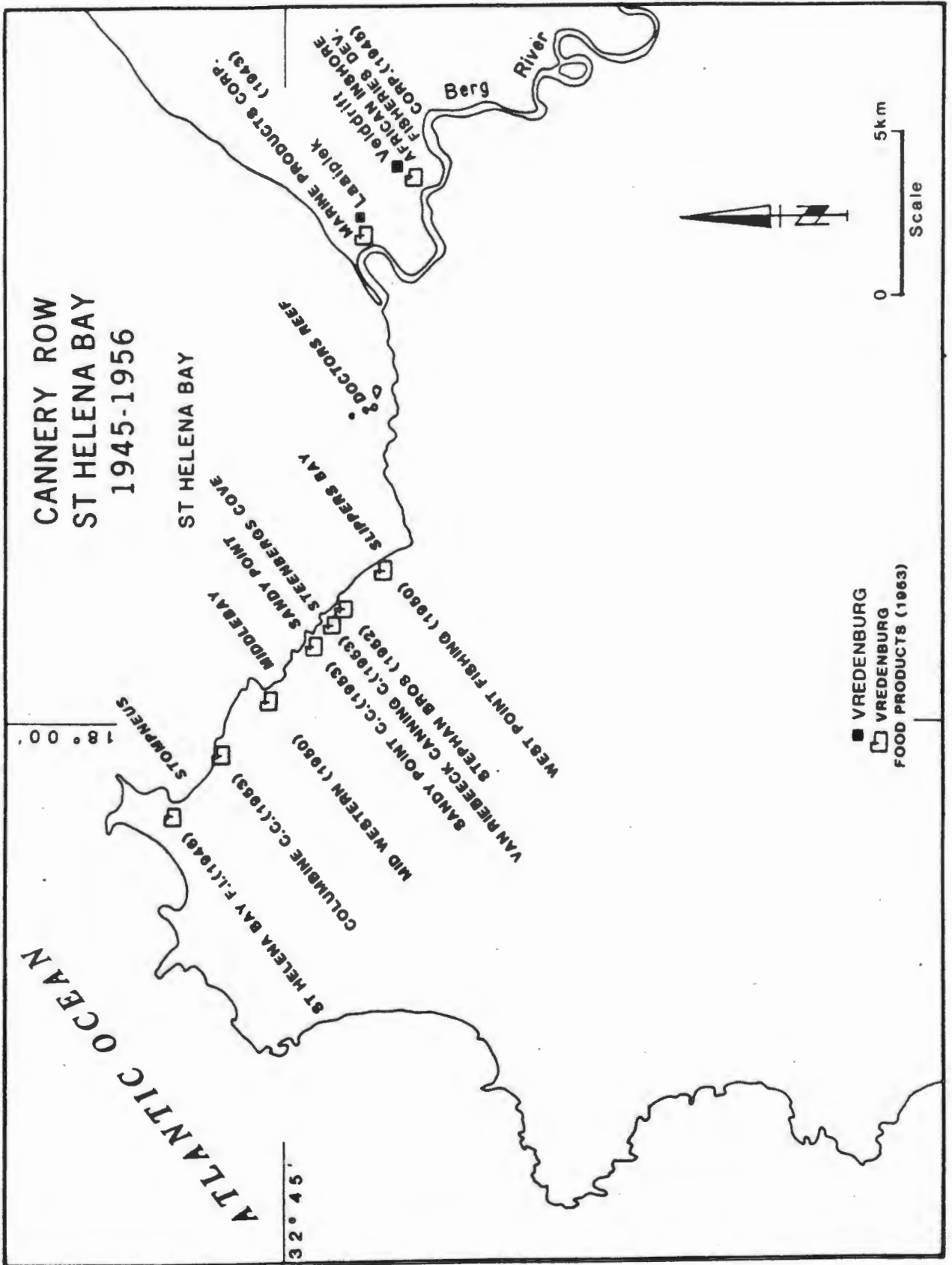
²³⁴ *FDC 1st Annual Report, 1945, p.9.*

The "melting pot" of the Second World War was certainly critical for the local canning industry in making the transition from export to import-substitution production. It was not, however, a sufficient panacea to conjure away the old, and the wartime gains of the canning industry were tenuous at best by 1945. What the war did do was recast the balance of class forces in the industry in a way that made a different path of post-war development possible. Key to this was the clarification of "the proper sphere of State and private enterprise"²³⁵. Pretoria's attempts to take over development of the fishing industry via the FDC were defeated by capital. The long march of the interventionist state, which carried all before it in the wake of the 1934 French quota crisis, was finally checked ten years later in 1944. The future development of the fishing industry would be undertaken by private capital with state assistance through research, infrastructure and capital to rationalise the industry and ensure its competitiveness in the post-war world. The state's social welfare concern was also fundamentally recast. The petty-bourgeoisie boat-owning class in the inshore fisheries was encouraged and supported as a bulwark against trade unionism and the suppliers of raw material for post-war factory production. Most canners realised that with the return of foreign imports and the local trawler fleet after the war, the huge demand and high prices for inshore fish would rapidly dissipate and independent producers once again be dependent on the canning companies for a market. Provided their boats and equipment could be modernised to keep pace with the industry, capital was happy to leave the fishing up to them while it concentrated on processing, looking to the state, via the FDC, for assistance in meeting labour's basic housing and social welfare needs.

²³⁵ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of W.R. Skeeles, p.298.

Wartime developments found their echo at St Helena Bay, where the post-1939 boom in demand and price for fish facilitated a major shift in focus from the old canning factory hamlets along the southern shores of the Bay to Berg River. Stephan Brothers and the Sandveld landlords were both spent forces by 1939. The former was conspicuous by its absence from the wartime debate over the future of the fishing industry and the latter was under increasing pressure from both church and state as conditions on the farms at the river mouth deteriorated after 1936. Both gave ground quite literally during the war, selling up their land at the river to new interests from outside. These new interests, Laaiplek Fisheries and African Inshore Fisheries, integrated the Bay into the emerging industrial order in South Africa. Their presence on the periphery was conditioned solely by the opportunities which it offered for rapid capital accumulation. They were uninterested in ground rent or trade except insofar as it complemented their need to secure adequate supplies of labour and raw material for canning and by-products production. As the post-war period would show only too clearly, however, once these conditions disappeared, so did the companies, closing down or moving elsewhere. Thus, despite the wartime boom and the resurgent profitability of the primary producers at the river and increasing state involvement in the fisheries, St Helena Bay and Berg River still remained very much on the periphery of the new order which emerged as if by magic from Lees' metaphorical "melting pot".

MAP 3



7: MAKING LIKE AMERICA 1945-1956

In 1944 the South African fish processing industry was casting a wary eye to the future and the unwelcome prospect of renewed international competition after the war. Irvin and Johnson's managing director, Herbert Abao, told the 1944 select committee quite unequivocally, "Actually we have not got a canning industry to speak of. If we are to continue after the war it will just be a question of whether we can compete with the overseas product"¹. The canning industry was even more pessimistic, citing the lack of marine research, paucity of harbours, inadequate and costly rail transport and small local market as major obstacles in the way of competitive post-war production². Both Abao and the industry looked to the state to remove these constraints and guarantee the industry an adequate supply of raw material at a price low enough to make processing profitable and the product competitive.

The post-war development of the South African inshore fisheries, however, was determined by more than just the specific concerns of the nascent canning industry. The reconstitution of the world capitalist order under American hegemony fundamentally altered the terms of "international competition", placing new constraints on industries in peripheral economies³. The most important shift to occur within the advanced capitalist countries was from the

¹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill 1944, Evidence of H. Abao, p.266.

² Ibid, Evidence of A. Ovenstone, pp.349-359.

³ G. Bloch "The Development of Manufacturing Industry in South Africa" (Unpublished MA thesis, UCT, 1980); G. Bloch "Room at the Top? - The Development of South Africa's Manufacturing Industry 1939-1969" *Social Dynamics*, 7, 2, 1981 and G. Bloch "The Development of South Africa's Manufacturing Industry" in Z.A. Konczacki, J.L. Parpart & T.M. Shaw (eds) *Studies in the Economic History of Southern Africa Vol.2: South Africa, Lesotho & Swaziland* (London, 1991).

generation of absolute to relative surplus value, increasing labour productivity through greater technology inputs and the incorporation of science in production⁴. Plant specialisation and integration across national boundaries within a unified production process laid the basis for the emergence of monopoly capital and its internationalisation in the form of multinational corporations (MNCs). The impact of these changes on peripheral economies in the capitalist world economy was profound. Whereas prior to the war,

"Any industrial development had been predicated on a struggle by 'national' capitalist classes to assert their independence against the grain of imperialist producers ... Capitalist production, using the high technology and sophisticated techniques of the capitalist centres, could now take place under imperialist aegis in select countries on the periphery where conditions were 'right'"⁵ [emphasis in original].

Peripheral countries were thus compelled to open up their economies to MNCs, reproduce the new capitalist relations of production pertaining in the advanced capitalist economies and create the conditions conducive to both, or face the extinction of their own industries through "international competition" on both local and foreign markets.

South Africa's post-war industrialisation was no exception and was conditioned by the shift to relative surplus extraction and the emergence of monopoly capital in the metropole. Despite its impressive wartime growth, local secondary industry was poorly equipped to meet the challenges of the new international order⁶. Growth had been largely quantitative and created a "profound ...

⁴ G. Bloch "Room at the Top? - The Development of South Africa's Manufacturing Industry 1939-1969" *Social Dynamics*, 1981, pp.47-49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.48.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.49-50 for a quantification of the wartime growth of manufacturing and its social implications.

'duality' between small and large undertakings" in a wide range of industries.⁷ Capital, assisted by the state, thus sought the urgent "rationalisation" of the country's ambiguous wartime manufacturing heritage to ensure its survival in the post-war world. This involved the reorganisation of production through plant specialisation and vertical integration, laying the foundations for the emergence of monopoly capital and the shift to relative surplus extraction via increased investment in technology and a dependent relationship with multinational capital.⁸ In all this, the state played an active role, turning a blind eye to monopolies, making selective use of tariffs and taxation and itself funding and assisting in the establishment of specific secondary industries.⁹

The result was that South Africa's post-war industrialisation was a form of "dependent industrialisation where the dominant influence came from outside the periphery"¹⁰ [emphasis in original]. However

"[I]t is the articulation of these changed conditions on an international level with the specific internal determinants of the social formation, that determine the trajectory and nature of the path of development that emerges"¹¹ [emphasis in original].

Thus, although the post-1945 development of the local fish canning and by-products industry conformed to the "dependent industrialisation" model, it also exhibited certain peculiarities of its own. These reflected both the uncertainties of secondary

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.49.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.50-54.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.54-55.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.49.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

production based on a largely unknown primary resource and the historical development of the fishing industry and balance of class forces which had evolved within it prior to 1939 and emerged intact from the "melting pot" of global conflict.

7.1 DEPENDENT INDUSTRIALISATION

In 1945 the inshore fish industry comprised some 16 factories on the west coast from Hout to Walvis Bay, most dating from the pre-war period and geared to crayfish canning. Capital stock was antiquated and run-down and the industry was a "one-plant business", the majority under-capitalised and with a history of mutual animosity and cut-throat competition¹². Just eight years later, however, the inshore fisheries were "entirely modern" and "highly trustified", reflecting capital's rapid re-adjustment to the new conditions of international competition, with state assistance¹³. By 1945, the state had acquired extensive, albeit contested, powers to conserve the marine resource and develop the fishing industry through the FDC¹⁴. It was thus well placed to restructure the industry along "rational economic" lines and used the sector it was most familiar with, crayfish canning and packing, as its testing ground.

In August 1946 the state activated the 1940 Crawfish Export Act's quota provisions, making it illegal to export crayfish without a

¹² Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953, p.58.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.58 & p.74.

¹⁴ See for example FDC 1st Annual Report, 1945, p.4; R.F. Robinow "A Million Tons is a Lot of Fish" in South African Business Efficiency, 12, 5, April 1945 and Editorial "The Fishing Industry" in SASNFIR, January 1946, pp.18-19. The anti-state animosity generated by the 1944 Fishing Industry Development Bill lingered on until the late 1940s.

government permit¹⁵. The quota was portrayed as a conservation measure necessary to, "prevent the over-exploitation of our crayfish beds" and complement existing measures dating from the late 19th Century¹⁶. It was set annually, purportedly on advice from the Division of Sea Fisheries as to the maximum sustainable yield¹⁷. In reality, horse-trading between the state and industry and the old tensions between canners and packers determined the global export ceiling and its 70-30 split between canned and frozen crayfish¹⁸. Individual allocations too were set according to political influence and economic muscle¹⁹. Conservation was thus at best an ideal and at worst a gloss on the state's real agenda, the rationalisation of the crayfish export industry²⁰. As F.P. Spooner, chief architect of the 1940 legislation and the FDC, put it, quota allocations were used to "eliminate small capitalists" from the post-war industry by denying them the right to export²¹. For this reason the state allocated half the frozen

¹⁵ *Union of South Africa Extraordinary Government Gazette*, No. 3698, 30 August 1946, Notice No.1866.

¹⁶ *FDC 2nd Annual Report*, 1946, p.4; State Archives: HEN 1555, 180\29\13 (1), *Commercial Adviser to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries*, August 1947; VNW 1074, SW 456(1), *Memorandum "Control of the Crawfish Industry"*, n.d., discussed at 5th Meeting of the FDAC; *FDAC Minutes of 5th Meeting*, 29 April 1946 and HEN 1558, 180\29\13\16, C. von Bonde to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 20 February 1948.

¹⁷ *Division of Fisheries [DF] Annual Reports 1947-1955*, for the post-war crayfish patrol and research work carried out by the Division of Fisheries.

¹⁸ State Archives; VNW 1074, SW 456(1), *SAFROC to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries*, 21 May 1946; *SAFCC to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries*, 27 May 1946 and *FDAC Minutes of 6th Meeting*, 10 June 1946.

¹⁹ State Archives; VNW 1074, SW 456(1), *FDAC Minutes of 6th Meeting*, 10 June 1946 and HEN 1558, 180\29\13\19, F.P. Spooner to the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 9 September 1946.

²⁰ State Archives; VNW 1074, SW 456(2), *FDAC Minutes of 7th Meeting*, 9 December 1946.

²¹ State Archives; HEN 1558, 180\29\13\19, F.P. Spooner to the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 9 September 1946.

tail quota to South African Sea Products, formed out of the amalgamation of several small Hout Bay and Cape Town packing interests and assisted by substantial infusions of capital from both the FDC and the state²².

Reorganisation in the canning industry was necessarily more circumspect²³. The canners were still contracted to supply the British Ministry of Food and saw little immediate need for the quota, except to limit and control the packing industry²⁴. While the four largest producers were endowed with generous export quotas and FDC capital injections, reorganisation was less immediate and dramatic²⁵. By the end of 1946, however, South African Sea Products and the North Bay Group controlled more than 43% of the total quota, with the other three big canners accounting for a further 35%. South African Sea Products' position was entrenched in 1947 with state acceptance of the South African Frozen Rock Lobster Packers (SAFROC) as the sole marketing organisation for export tails²⁶. All packers had to be

²² "South African Sea Products Ltd.-£250,000 Expansion" in *SASNFIR*, June 1947, p.34; Editorial "Hout Bay: Model Fishing Station" in *SASNFIR*, October 1947 and "Great Send-off for Sea Products at Hout Bay" in *SASNFIR*, October 1947, p.51. Also State Archives; SES, N1900\A\c\09, Prospectus of South African Sea Products, 19 December 1947.

²³ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill, 1944, Evidence of A. Ovenstone, p.356 for the SAFCC's views on the difficulty of rationalising the canning industry.

²⁴ State Archives; VNW 1074, SW 456(1), SAFCC to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 27 May 1946 and FDAC Minutes of 6th Meeting, 10 June 1946.

²⁵ The bulk of the canned crayfish quota went to the North Bay Group of companies formed in the late 1930s (North Bay, Namaqua and Hicksons Canning Companies), Ovenstones, the Lamberts Bay Canning Company and the African Fish Canning Company.

²⁶ FDC 3rd Annual Report, 1947, p.4.

members of SAFROC and export through it to the United States²⁷. In 1949 the South West African administration passed similar legislation compelling Luderitz producers to follow suit²⁸.

State intervention in other areas of the inshore industry, however, was complicated by the dearth of scientific knowledge about the pelagic resource and absence of specialised plant and machinery. Wartime production used excess crayfish canning capacity and "homespun mechanisation" with wide variations in the quality of the product²⁹. Given the primitive methods of handling, only a limited proportion of fish caught were suitable for canning³⁰. The rest, together with the offal from canning was discarded. A few crayfish canneries had installed plants to process this waste into meal akin to the fisheries of Europe, America and Japan which systematically processed the bulk of their catch through reduction plants to produce meal and extract fish body-oils for agricultural and industrial applications. The state, on the assumption that "specialisation is wasteful", thus sought to ensure the post-war viability of the pelagic canning industry by diversifying it into meal and oil production³¹. Pretoria's first task was to create a modern processing industry and standardise and improve the quality of its output. To this end the FDC invested more than £400 000 (80% of its B share capital) in twelve fish-canning companies in the first five years after the war and by 1955 had exceeded its permissible B share

²⁷ State Archives; VNW 1074, SW 456(2), FDAC Minutes of 9th Meeting, 1 September 1947 and FDAC Minutes of 10th Meeting, 12 December 1947.

²⁸ R. Lees Fishing for Fortunes, p.135.

²⁹ State Archives; HEN 1497, 180\1\1(1), Deputy Controller of Food Supplies to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries, 16 March 1943.

³⁰ Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953, pp.73-74.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.90.

issue by reinvesting its profits in shares³². In addition, a growing number of canning companies went public after 1945, offering their shares on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and more than tripling the capital investment in the inshore industry from £1.1 million in 1944 to £3.7 million by 1947.

TABLE 7.1: Capital Investment in the Fishing Industry
[£ '000s] 1939-1947³³

YEAR	TRAWLING		INSHORE		TOTAL	
	K	Market Value	K	Market Value	K	Market Value
1939	950	1 575	725	775	1 675	2 350
1944	1 100	2 050	1 175	1 380	2 275	3 430
1947	1 550	3 150	3 765	6 950	5 315	10 100

K = Subscribed Capital & Reserves.

The capital raised through FDC and public investment facilitated the importation of canning and reduction plant from California³⁴. The latter's sardine industry went into protracted decline after 1945 and American suppliers were anxious to find new outlets for their plant³⁵. By 1950 the South African industry had the capacity to reduce 178 tons of fish per hour, increasing to more than 237

³² *Ibid.*, p.60 and FDC Annual Reports 1945-1955.

³³ S.H. Skaife "Remarkable Growth of South African Fishing Industry: Fourfold Capital Increase Since 1939: Production Soaring" in SASNFIR, July 1948, p.43 and Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953, pp.52-54 for later figures on capital investment.

³⁴ FDC 1st Annual Report, 1945, p.4 and Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union, 1953, p.54.

³⁵ M. Culley The Pilchard: Biology & Exploitation (Oxford, 1971), pp.143-174 and A.F McEvoy The Fishermen's Problem: Ecology & Law in the Californian fisheries 1850-1980 (Cambridge, 1986), pp.123-155 for the Californian sardine fishery's collapse.

tons in 1953³⁶. With the plant came American experts, wholesale distributors and the whole gamut of fishing technology, turning the South African industry into "the Californian fishery on a smaller scale"³⁷.

This rapid expansion placed an enormous strain on the west coast's rudimentary infrastructure, forcing the state to again intervene. By 1950, the FDC had loaned more than £330 000 of its A share capital to fishing companies for the provision of "houses and other amenities for fishermen"³⁸. The state also provided water and electricity to inshore stations, reorganised its pre-war harbour construction programme to create "suitable all-weather harbours" at key points along the west coast, upgraded road communication and erected bulk handling facilities for fish

³⁶ C. G. du Plessis "Trends in the Pilchard Fishery of the Union of South Africa, 1943-1958", Division of Fisheries Investigational Report No.38, Table V, p.25 and Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953, Table XXXI, p.89.

³⁷ "No Peanut Game' on Pacific Coast: SA Expert's Impressions of American Fishing" in SASNFIR, January 1946, pp.14-15; "American Expert on SA Pilchards: Says They're better than California's" in SASNFIR, August 1946, p.33; "Canning Lessons from Monterey" in SASNFIR, January 1947, pp.41-42; "Know-how from Pacific Coast" in SASNFIR, June 1947, p.46; "Well-known US Company sets up in SA" in SASNFIR, July 1948, p.64; "US Interest in SA Fisheries" in SASNFIR, February 1949, p.80; "American Expert on Union's Fishing Possibilities" in SASNFIR, June 1949, p.58; "Americans Who Aid Union's Fish Exports" in SASNFIR, July 1950, pp.46-47 and Editorial: "An Industry Matures" in SASNFIR, October 1951, p.53 for the American influence on the South African inshore fishery after 1945.

³⁸ FDC 6th Annual Report, 1950, p.5; FDC 7th Annual Report, 1951, p.6; FDC 8th Annual Report, 1952, p.5 and Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953, pp.64-65.

oil at the Cape Town docks³⁹. The need to improve and standardise output led to the establishment of the Fishing Industry Research Institute (FIRI) in 1946 as a joint venture between the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and the industry on a pound for pound basis⁴⁰. FIRI took over inspection of the industry's export production and conducted research aimed at improving the quality of its products⁴¹. The harnessing of science to production continued in marine biology where shortages of staff and essential equipment as well as the advanced age of the state's research vessels hampered progress until the late 1940s⁴². In 1950 the Division of Fisheries took a new research vessel into commission, established research stations at St Helena and

³⁹ "Cape West Coast Water Problems in the Fishing Industry" in *SASNFIR*, December 1947, pp.57-59; Editorial "Fishing Harbours" in *SASNFIR*, June 1946, p.17; Editorial "A West Coast Highway?" in *SASNFIR*, October 1950, p.51; "Union Harbour Improvements will Cost £2 1/2 Million" in *SASNFIR*, April 1954, p.71; "South Africa's Fishing Harbours" in *Commerce and Industries*, February 1958, pp.293-296; *FDC 1st Annual Report*, 1945, p.3; *FDC 7th Annual Report*, 1951, p.6; *FDC 8th Annual Report*, 1952, p.5; *FDC 9th Annual Report*, 1953, p.5 and *Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953*, pp.63-64.

⁴⁰ "Fishing Industry to Finance Research Institute: Preliminary Plans for Ambitious Project" in *SASNFIR* May 1946, pp.13-15; "Fishing Industry Research Institute Goes into Action" in *SASNFIR*, August 1947, p.55; Editorial "Research & Fishing" in *SASNFIR*, January 1950, p.45; Editorial "Fishing Industry Research Institute" in *SASNFIR*, July 1950, p.45; Editorial "Increasing Efficiency" in *SASNFIR*, October 1953, p.59; *Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953*, pp.76-77; "Science Serves the Fishing Industry" in *SASNFIR*, June 1954, pp.71-77 and Editorial "The Bureau Forgets" in *SASNFIR*, February 1955, p.49.

⁴¹ *FIRI Annual Reports 1947-1956* and *Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953*, pp.70-76 for a discussion of production processes in the canning and reduction industries and some of their shortcomings.

⁴² *DF Annual Reports 1948-1955* and S.H. Skaife "Development of the SA Fishing Industry" in *SASNFIR*, November 1949, p.55.

Lamberts Bays and initiated a comprehensive Pilchard Research Programme⁴³.

An expanded marine research programme was vital to both capital and the state, the former because of concern about "overfishing" and foreign intrusion into Union waters⁴⁴, the latter because it provided "the only means by which the fundamental scientific facts for State management of the fishery in a proper manner can hope to be determined"⁴⁵. In the absence of such research, the Californian industry's decline provided the state with the pretext to extend its conservatory control over the pelagic resource⁴⁶. In 1948 the FDAC established a Pilchard Advisory Committee to recommend appropriate measures and the following year the FDC called for legislative restrictions on the number and capacity of processing plants as well as a catch quota⁴⁷. In 1949-1950 the state took the first steps in this regard, with the promulgation of a minimum mesh size for nets, two-month closure of the resource to fishing, licensing of all plants and a three

⁴³ C. Von Bonde "Fishery Science and the Fisheries" in SASNFIR, November 1949, pp.57-61 for a review of past work and a statement of future needs.

⁴⁴ Editorial "A Matter of Urgent National Importance" in SASNFIR, July 1948, pp.36-37; C. Von Bonde "Fisheries and International Law" in SASNFIR, August 1949, pp.53-76; Editorial "The Pilchard Problem" in SASNFIR, February 1950, p.45; Editorial "The 'Africana II'" in SASNFIR, March 1950, p.43; Editorial "Fisheries Research" in SASNFIR, April 1950, p.47; Editorial "Foot in the Door" in SASNFIR, February 1952, p.59; Editorial "A Warning Repeated" in SASNFIR, March 1953 and Editorial "Science and the Fishing Industry" in SASNFIR, April 1953.

⁴⁵ DF 22nd Annual Report, 1950, p.82.

⁴⁶ State Archives; VNW 1075, SW 456(2) "Memorandum on the Control of Fish Meal and Fish Oil Plants", 19 July 1948, discussed at 12th Meeting of the FDAC and VNW 1075, SW 456(3) "Memorandum on the Conservation of the Pilchard and Maasbanker Fisheries of the Union West Coast and South West Africa", n.d., discussed at the 24th Meeting of the FDAC.

⁴⁷ State Archives; VNW 1074, SW 456(2), FDAC Minutes of 12th Meeting, 19 August 1948 and C. von Bonde, Memorandum "Pilchard Advisory Committee", discussed at 13th Meeting of the FDAC.

year-moratorium on the erection of new factories or any increase in the capacity of existing plants⁴⁸. With the collapse of the Californian industry in 1952, sustained growth in local reduction capacity, mounting concern about the effectiveness of existing measures and the continued absence of firm scientific evidence on the local resource, additional conservation measures were introduced in 1953-1954⁴⁹. These included an extended closed season, restrictions on the size of the fishing fleet and a "purely arbitrary" catch ceiling of 250 000 tons based "on a comparison between the area of commercial pilchard\maasbanker fishing in Union waters and the area over which the erstwhile sardine fishery of California extended"⁵⁰.

Although growing state control over the pelagic resource was motivated by conservationary concerns, its effect was similar to that of the crayfish quota, limiting exploitation to a small group of producers with factory licenses who reaped the "profits of privilege"⁵¹. By 1953 profits were averaging 25% on operating capital⁵². Privilege and record profits encouraged producers to further reduce competition among themselves through the establishment of collective marketing structures in the pelagic industry similar to SAFROC. Meal and oil producers' associations were formed in 1949-1950, enabling the industry to cut costs by

⁴⁸ L.P.D. Gertenbach "License Limitation Regulations: The South African System" in Fisheries Research Board of Canada, 12, December 1973 and State Archives; VNW 1074, SW 456(2), FDAC Minutes of 13th Meeting, 24 September 1948 and P.E. Rousseau & F.P. Spooner Memorandum "Conservation of Pilchards & Maasbankers", 23 September 1949, discussed at 15th Meeting of the FDAC.

⁴⁹ DF 22nd Annual Report, 1950, p.82 and Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953, pp.89-92.

⁵⁰ DF 25th Annual Report, 1953-1954, p.542.

⁵¹ Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953, pp.92-95.

⁵² Ibid., pp.80-81.

refining at a single plant and share the proceeds of foreign sales equitably through the collective marketing of exports⁵³. Combination was also facilitated by the growing centralisation of ownership in the industry. From twelve "one-plant" businesses in 1945, ownership was concentrated in three big "financial groups" by 1953⁵⁴. This reflected the fishing industry's vertical integration into the food, animal feeds and associate secondary industries by mining and finance capital. The largest of the three groups was controlled by Anglo Transvaal and Tiger Oats & National Milling, the second by the Seafare Holdings and the FDC and the third by Federale Volks Beleggings⁵⁵. Combination allowed for economies of scale and the horizontal integration of different sectors and geographical areas, ensuring year-round production and offsetting the effects of poor catches on profits. The FDC, through its representation on the boards of the majority of big companies, played an important role in establishing producers organisations and brokering company mergers⁵⁶.

This reorganisation of the inshore fisheries after 1945 was thus integral to the making of "Little California" and the inshore

⁵³ Editorial "A Great New Enterprise" in SASNFIR, September 1948, p.37; "£500,000 Fish Oil Refining Plant - the First of its Kind in the World - Swings into Operation at Simonstown" in SASNFIR, September 1948, pp.42-51; FDC 5th Annual Report, 1949, p.5; FDC 6th Annual Report, 1950, p.4 and Board of Trade and Industry Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953, pp.61-62.

⁵⁴ Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953, p.58.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.58-59.

⁵⁶ FDC 5th Annual Report, 1949, p.4; FDC 7th Annual Report, 1951, p.5 and Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953, pp.60-61.

fishing boom which gripped the west coast from late 1940s⁵⁷. Legitimated by the "tragedy of the commons", joint state-capital management of the marine resources had gained international recognition by the mid-1950s and ideology and necessity merged⁵⁸. State control became the sine qua non for successful industrialisation⁵⁹. The resulting boom rested on the increasingly inter-related exploitation of the crayfish and pelagic resources of the west coast by a modernised and highly trustified industry created both directly and indirectly by state intervention.

In the crayfish industry, SAFROC secured and expanded the Union's share of the lucrative United States market with improved products tailor-made to American consumer demand. By the early 1950s, the conflicts of the immediate post-war period vanished as the packing industry shed its pariah status and overtook canning in export earnings by the mid-1950s. Frozen tails became a "substantial dollar-earner" and canners began to process an increasing percentage of their canned quota in the form of frozen tails⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ Editorial "A Great Industry" in SASNFIR, August 1950, p.51; "£2,000,000 Pilchard Harvest on West Coast this Season" in SASNFIR, August 1950, pp.57-87; Editorial "A Great Adventure: The Pilchard Industry" in SASNFIR, March 1951, p.51; Editorial "A Permanent Asset" in SASNFIR, May 1951, p.47; Editorial "The Pilchard Industry in 1951" in SASNFIR, December 1951, p.52; "South Africa's Pilchard Industry in 1951" in SASNFIR, pp.63-103 and "South Africa's Pilchard Industry in 1954" in SASNFIR, November 1954, pp.55-113.

⁵⁸ C. von Bunde "Conservation of Our Natural Fisheries Resources" in Commerce and Industries, 6, 11, July 1948; FDC 8th Annual Report, 1952, pp.5-6; Board of Trade & Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union, 1953, pp.86-89 and FDC 11th Annual Report, 1955, p.5.

⁵⁹ See for example FDC 5th Annual Report, 1949 p.5 for the Corporation's views as regards the crayfish industry.

⁶⁰ FDC 7th Annual Report, 1951, p.3 and DF Annual Reports 1950-1956. The percentage of the canned quota convertible into frozen tails started at 30% in 1950, rose to 50% by 1953 and reached 100% in 1956.

Table 7.2: Crayfish Catch & Exports 1945-1956⁶¹

Year	Catch [Millions]	EXPORTS [1000's]					
		Frozen		Canned		Total	
		lbs	£	lbs	£	lbs	£
1939	14.1	2 746	82	3 066	161	5 812	243
1945	9.5	996	54	1 802	145	2 798	200
1946	14.8	2 536	161	2 544	222	5 080	383
1947	17.8	2 567	183	3 691	366	6 258	549
1948	17.9	2 767	148	3 875	467	6 642	615
1949	20.3	2 346	188	3 957	516	6 303	704
1950	21.2	4 310	638	5 175	925	9 4851	563
1951	28.2*	4 218	640	5 502	1 157	9 7201	797
1952	22.4*	3 983	593	3 756	959	7 7391	552
1953	21.0*	3 743	791	3 519	1 111	7 2621	902
1954	19.2*	3 545	946	3 062	996	6 6071	942
1955	28.7*	5 383	1 449	4 514	1 436	9 8962	885
1956	27.8*	6 385	1 732	3 229	1 065	9 6142	797

* = Estimates.

The biggest growth in output, however, came from the production of import substitutes by the new pelagic industry. In 1955 the FDC reported that twenty brands of local canned fish "now compete for the South African housewife's favour", compared to five or six a few years previously⁶². Competition and the easing of price control prevented canned fish imports, which averaged 12 million lbs per annum prior to the war, from regaining a hold on the Union market⁶³. Fish meal and oil also secured a sizable share of

⁶¹ Union of South Africa Department of Customs & Excise Foreign Trade Statistics, 1945-1956; Union of South Africa Bureau of Census & Statistics Census of Industrial Establishments, 1939-1950 and State Archives; HEN 1556, 180\29\13(11-12), Memorandum "Kreefruitvoerkwotas", n.d. [1959], attached Table 1.

⁶² FDC 11th Annual Report, 1955, p.2.

⁶³ Union of South Africa Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill 1944, Evidence of A. Ovenstone, p.356. With the exception of 1947-1948, canned fish imports only once topped the 2 million pound mark until the early 1950s. After 1952 they inched back up to half their pre-war level of 12 million lbs for the remainder of the decade.

the local market, even without tariff protection⁶⁴. High protein pelagic fish meal was used in the preparation of balanced livestock feeds for agriculture, while hydrogenation and fractionation converted pelagic fish oil into a cheap substitute for vegetable oils in the local food, soap and paint industries⁶⁵.

Table 7.3: Pelagic Catch & Processed Output 1945-1956⁶⁶

Year	Catch [Tons]	Canned [Tons]	Meal [Tons]	Oil [Tons]	Total [Tons]
1945	14 072	3 842	1 405	367	5 614
1946	19 044	5 771	2 085	512	8 368
1947	21 628	6 914	3 185	?	?
1948	57 374	8 304	9 130	2 719	20 153
1949	91 075	9 378	17 054	5 140	31 572
1950	136 618	7 710	21 731	8 541	37 982
1951	200 400	9 823	31 465	9 611	50 899
1952	272 663	16 383	38 300	12 220	66 903
1953	221 467	24 469	31 460	11 364	67 293
1954	206 440	28 763	31 562	11 428	71 753
1955	200 769	17 652	37 480	10 928	66 060
1956	121 915	14 140	26 679	6 683	47 502

? = Data unknown or unavailable.

The price of fish meal and oil was controlled and the industry had to supply local demand before exporting. By the 1950s South African agriculture and industry accounted for between 40% and 70% of the inshore industry's meal output and virtually all of

⁶⁴ Board of Trade and Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oils Industry of the Union 1953, pp.95-101.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.5-10 & pp.42-43.

⁶⁶ Union of South Africa Bureau of Census & Statistics Census of Industrial Establishments, 1939-1950; C.G. du Plessis Trends in the Pilchard Fishery of the Union of South Africa, 1943-1958, 1959, p.23, Table I and R.J.M. Crawford Catch per Standard-Boat-Day and Deployment of Effort in the South African Purse-Seine Fishery, 1964-1976 (Sea Fisheries Institute, Investigational Report No.122, 1981), p.6, Table V.

its oil production⁶⁷. The local market, however, was incapable of absorbing the massive surge in inshore production after 1950.

Table 7.4: Pelagic Fish Exports 1945-1956⁶⁸.

Year	Canned		Meal		Oil		Total	
	Tons	[£]*	Tons	[£]*	Tons	[£]*	Tons	[£]*
1946	348	52	2 418	37	347	221	3 113	310
1947	3 301	442	2 789	43	643	533	6 733	1 018
1948	6 589	787	12 528	202	1 767	834	20 884	1 823
1949	7 171	815	11 999	201	3 633	941	22 803	1 957
1950	6 941	840	9 822	249	3 582	367	20 345	1 456
1951	9 387	1 116	18 272	702	1 296	173	28 955	1 990
1952	12 174	1 584	17 230	625	5 214	623	34 618	2 832
1953	19 765	2 480	16 672	683	12 804	975	49 241	4 138
1954	24 874	2 794	21 322	870	7 638	571	53 834	4 235
1955	32 372	3 550	56 419	2 516	10 112	750	98 903	6 815
1956	33 363	3 780	53 542	2 383	3 838	402	90 743	6 565

* = 1000's of £.

As early as 1944 the SAFCC warned that the Union's "relatively small and poor population" was a severe restriction on the canning industry's future growth⁶⁹. Sustained efforts to expand consumption after the war, particularly among the African population, failed, and by 1950, the pelagic canning industry exported more than 14 million pounds of canned fish, increasing more than five-fold to 72 million (73% of total production) by

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.57-58. Also DF 23rd Annual Report, 1951, pp.83-84 and DF 24th Annual Report, 1952-1953, p.35

⁶⁸ *Union of South Africa, Department of Customs & Excise Foreign Trade Statistics*, 1945-1956.

⁶⁹ Report of the Select Committee on the subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill 1944, Evidence of A. Ovenstone, p.356 and F.W. Fox "Agricultural Foundations of Nutrition: IX Sea Foods" in South African Medical Journal, 28, 41, 9 October 1954, p.899.

1955⁷⁰. The destruction of the Japanese fishing industry during the war and the post-war collapse of the Californian sardine fishery created a "very favourable world market constellation" enabling Union producers to capture a share of the Asian market and even start exports to the United States⁷¹. By 1954, however, only 20% of the Union's pelagic catch was canned, the rest being reduced to meal and oil, which also found a burgeoning market in Europe and the United States in the wake of the Californian collapse⁷². Thus by 1951, pelagic fish had overtaken crayfish as the industry's chief export earner, worth more than £6 million in foreign exchange in 1955 (three times as much as crayfish)⁷³. The production boom in the inshore fisheries made the South African

⁷⁰ Editorial "The Land and the Sea" in SASNFIR, February 1946, pp.14-15; "Fish Flour for Human Consumption: Dramatic Possibilities in Cape Town Research" in SASNFIR, February 1946, pp.8-10; Editorial "Gold and Fish" in SASNFIR, May 1946, pp.16-17; "Basutos Eager to get Sardines: No Taboos Against Fish and Proteins Needed" in SASNFIR, September 1946, pp.30-31; Editorial "Meat-A Luxury-The Answer" in SASNFIR, May 1949, p.43; Editorial "The Union's Consumption of Fish" in SASNFIR, June 1949, p.51; Editorial "Eat More Fish" in SASNFIR, August 1949, p.47; "Eat More Fish Campaign" in SASNFIR, November 1949, p.67; Editorial "Fish for the People" in SASNFIR, August 1951, p.51; "Fish Flour Will Help to Conquer Malnutrition in the Union: National Feeding Scheme to Use Fishing Industry in Battle Against Diet Deficiency" in SASNFIR, August 1951, pp.59-63; Editorial "The Market for Fish" in SASNFIR, October 1952, p.65; Editorial "Selling Fish" in SASNFIR, February 1954, p.57; Editorial "Fish Against Malnutrition" in SASNFIR, April 1955, p.49 and Editorial "Disguising Fish" in SASNFIR, September 1955, p.51.

⁷¹ Board of Trade & Industries Report No.337: The Marine Oil Industries of the Union, p.45 & p.81. Also "Cape Canned Fish to Replace Jap Salmon: Sign of Pelican Heralds New Trade Bid" in SASNFIR, March 1946, p.27; "SA Ousts Yank Canned Fish in Malaya" in SASNFIR, November 1948, p.43; Editorial "The Export of Fish" in SASNFIR, February 1949, p.43; Editorial "Fishing: An Export Industry" in SASNFIR, April 1949, p.41; "'Ikan Burum' - the Pelican - is Household Word in Malaya" in SASNFIR, May 1950, p.51; "South Africa-Britain-Holland-Japan Compete for Big Fish Market in West Africa" in SASNFIR, March 1953, pp.69-87; "Union Fish Cannery React Well to Tighter Overseas Markets" in SASNFIR, July 1953, pp.65-67 and "Canned Fish Deal Opens Huge Market for South African Maasbanker" in SASNFIR, July 1954, pp.55-75.

⁷² "Four-fifths of the Union's Catch becomes Fishmeal or Oil" in SASNFIR, March 1954, p.64.

⁷³ Compare TABLES 7.2 and 7.4 above.