

CHAPTER 4

A LEGACY OF WAR-TIME EXPANSION :
CAPITAL, AFRICAN LABOUR AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

Capitalist Production and Accumulation in Durban

During the "exceptionally fast"¹ economic boom experienced throughout the country in the period immediately after the Second World War, the rate of industrial expansion in the Durban area was greater than that of any other area excepting the southern Transvaal. However, from the year-long recession beginning in December 1948² through to the "slight recession"³ experienced virtually throughout the country in 1953,⁴ Durban's industrial sector suffered a "rather considerable fall in the rate of growth, particularly of net output"; this was to reveal the fragility of many of the structural foundations of local industrial and commercial enterprise.⁵

From 1948 to 1953 the local economy experienced a serious short-term profitability crisis as the organic composition of capital rose, markets remained constant or diminished, the power of White labour increased, and the demands of African labour became ever more pressing. This trend in many ways mirrored, in perhaps a more extreme form, the general trend in the national economy. During the immediate post-war economic expansion, the "trend of profitability of quoted industrial and commercial concerns, as measured by the percentage ratio of pre-tax profits to shareholders' funds, was downwards",⁶ reaching a "nadir" in 1949-1950.⁷ In the following year profitability rose fairly sharply, but declined by 1951-1952, and then remained relatively constant for a few years,⁸ although declining even further in the retail and wholesale and building sectors.⁹

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1. M Katzen and G F D Palmer, "Some Aspects of the Development of Secondary Industry in South Africa since the Depression of 1929-1932" South African Journal of Economics, vol 22, no 1 (March 1954), p 148-153.
 2. P K Lomas, "Industrial Profits since the War", South African Journal of Economics, vol 23, no 1 (March 1955), p 38.
 3. M Katzen, Industry in Greater Durban, Part 3 Natal Town and Regional Planning report, vol 3, (Pietermaritzburg, 1961), p 9.
 4. Lomas, "Industrial Profits", p 41.
 5. Katzen, Industry, p 3.
 6. Lomas, "Industrial Profits", p 41.
 7. Ibid, p 38.
 8. E H D Arndt, "The Union's Economy - A Review", South African Journal of Economics, vol 24, no 3 (September 1956), p 187.
 9. Lomas, "Industrial Profits", p 46 and M H De Kock "Recent Economic and Financial Developments in the Union - A Review", South African Journal of Economics, vol 25, no 3 (September 1957), p 188.

During the period from 1945 to 1954, the total amount of fixed capital invested in Durban's industrial sector increased by over 400% from just over fourteen million pounds to over fifty-eight million pounds. During the same period, the proportion of capital invested in machinery, plant and tools in relation to total invested fixed capital increased appreciably. Thus, although investment in modifying existing plant and acquiring new machinery did not result in a marked increase in the horsepower per worker ratio, there was a significant increase in the amounts of capital which had to be allocated towards capital loan and redemption charges.¹⁰

During the same period, the ratio of capital invested in land and buildings as compared to total fixed capital decreased significantly with local industry preferring to restructure their existing holdings rather than erect new premises. In 1945 the City Council acquired the 143 acre area of Amanzinyama to allow for industrial expansion. However, in spite of much advertising,¹¹ the low-lying and swampy area required much reclamation. Although partially reclaimed and provided with a single railway siding by 1953, only 11 acres of the area had been developed by 1954.¹²

In 1950 the City Council, acting partly to boost the fortunes of the local building industry, lifted building restrictions in respect of premises to be developed on the Mobeni Industrial Estate.¹³ However, little expansion was to occur. The area was distant from the major industrial area of Maydon Wharf, Jacobs and Congella. The municipality also insisted that new employers operating in the area either house their African employees or pay towards the costs of their being housed by the municipality.¹⁴ Thus the City Council's attempt to partially alleviate the shortage of suitable accommodation for Africans merely acted as a secondary constraint against industry's drive not to expand their land and building holdings.

Between 1945 and 1954, the 27% increase in industrial land holdings in the city was mainly due to the development of the 285-acre Wentworth Oil Refinery.¹⁵ Even allowing for an extremely favourable municipal rate structure,¹⁶ the ratable value of land and buildings in the industrial areas of the city in 1954/55 was still just over ten million pounds as compared to the city's total rateable value of 124 million pounds.¹⁷

Durban's market zone throughout the period under review was fixed to an area extending along the rail routes to and equidistant between Durban and Johannesburg and Durban and East London. The "fiercest competition" occurred between Durban and the Witwatersrand in the "no man's land" of Northern Natal.¹⁸ By

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10. Katzen, *Industry*, Appendix 8 D J L McWhirter, *Industry in Greater Durban*, Part 4, Natal Town and Regional Planning Report, vol 4, (Pietermaritzburg, 1961) Appendix 9.
 11. Durban Corporation, *Industrial Durban*, (Durban, 1947), p 3.
 12. Katzen, *Industry*, p 2.
 13. *Ibid*, Chapter 1.
 14. Industrial Employers Association, (Natal Section), Annual Report 1948-1949.
 15. Katzen, *Industry*, Chapter 1.
 16. Broome Commission, evidence of the City Treasurer.
 17. Katzen, *Industry*, p 3, table 2.
 18. McWhirter, *Industry*, p 4.

1950, the Witwatersrand had assumed market dominance in the Newcastle, Paulpietersburg and to a lesser extent Vryheid areas, with Durban influential in Dundee, Klip River and Harrismith. Within Durban's market zone, the greater Durban area was by far the most important consumer, with the remaining market share being spread out along the railway routes to Pietermaritzburg, Harding and Greytown. The possibilities of expanding the consumption of goods either produced in or transported from Durban into these areas was almost completely constrained by the slow White population increase in these areas. People in the African reserves, which comprised about 40% of the total population in Durban's market area had "but a very low purchasing power".¹⁹

For local capitalists these problems were exacerbated by the decreasing consumer activity in the greater Durban area itself. During the period from 1948 to 1952, in spite of a steadily rising population,²⁰ the annual volume of retail trade turnover in Durban declined in both nominal and real terms.²¹ The incidence of shoplifting²² and hire purchase default increased.²³

The ability of Durban's industrial and commercial sectors to expand was, ironically, decisively constrained by its very location around a major port facility. During the period from 1944 to 1954, the total amount of materials processed by private manufacturing industry increased slightly from around 54% of gross output to approximately 60%. Throughout the period only half of the materials used originated in South Africa. This made Durban's industrial sector the highest importer of materials in the country.²⁴ As a result of the Union Government's continued policy of import substitution and the consequent periodic surcharges levied on various imported materials, certain industrial concerns experienced continual difficulties in stabilizing production.²⁵

As a result, local support for the "Buy South African" campaign, initiated by the Union Government and major industrial and commercial groupings during the early 1950's,²⁶ was either muted or non-existent.²⁷ Companies complained when surcharges were levied on imported raw materials and produced goods. Others felt the ill-effects of the lifting of such charges. This was the case with the local textile industry when cheap Japanese articles appeared on the local market. In 1950 Phillip Frame maintained that imported Japanese

19. Ibid

20. See Mayors Minutes, 1946-1953.

21. Durban Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1951-1952.

22. Ibid, 1945-46.

23. Ibid, 1951-52.

24. McWhirter, Industry, Appendix 7 and Durban Chamber of Commerce, Annual Reports, 1948-1949 and 1950-1951.

25. Ibid, 1945-1946 and Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Reports, passim.

26. South African Industry and Trade, passim.

27. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report, 1955-1956.

articles were "crippling local textile industry". Local traders supplying the African market were placing orders of up to fifty thousand pounds for Japanese textiles and crockery.²⁸

Durban's coastal location also adversely affected those manufacturing and commercial concerns which based a significant proportion of their enterprise on exporting locally manufactured goods. With the industrial expansion of Japan and India, previously secure markets, mainly within the Commonwealth, were being swamped with cheaper goods.²⁹

The potential for local industry to expand by capitalizing on Durban's major port facilities was limited by state transport tariff rates which negated any local advantage due to harbour facilities and location. This policy, long a source of anxiety amongst local businessmen, was maintained in order to allow the railway and port facilities of East London and Port Elizabeth to gain a share in the lucrative transportation requirements of the Witwatersrand. Port charges in Durban were deliberately raised as were the rail tariffs between Durban and Johannesburg. This raising of rail charges also benefitted industry centred in the Witwatersrand at the expense of local concerns. For example, it cost the same to transport all the imported raw materials for the production of paint from Durban to Johannesburg as it did to transport paint manufactured in Durban the short distance to Pietermaritzburg.³⁰

In 1947 local industrialists had been posing the question "when is the slump coming",³¹ In 1953 local capitalists were, in common with their counterparts in the other major urban centres,³² expressing concern over the state of the industrial and commercial economy. In December 1953, the President of the South African Federated Chambers of Industry criticized the private sector for having been unable to "avoid booms and slumps". To the "astonished" audience, he then went on to make a call for a commission of enquiry into the "inter-related problems of purchasing power and productive capacity", maintaining that:

We have now reached a stage in post-war development where once again we must face up to the fact that while we, under the system of private enterprise, have largely solved our problems of production, we have by no means solved the problems of distribution. It is necessary to emphasize that at a time when there are signs of some slight recession of economic activity in South Africa, that there still exists a very large unsatisfied demand for the basic necessities of life³³

Despite their professed confusion, which almost certainly had more to do with the central state's attempts to develop the national economy through state corporatist structures³⁴ most representatives of local chambers of

28. South African Industry and Trade, vol 46, no 4 (April 1950).

29. Katzen, *Industry*, pp 40-41.

30. Durban Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1945-1946 and Katzen, *Industry*, p 30.

31. Durban Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1946-1947.

32. *South African Industry and Trade*, vol 50, no 1 (January 1954).

33. *Ibid*, vol 49, no 12 (December 1953).

34. *Ibid*, *passim*.

industries and, particularly, chambers of commerce, did, however, concur.³⁵ Acceptance of such a perspective was not merely a moral issue. Many industrialists did accept the broad argument that the expansion of the industrial and manufacturing sector which had occurred during the 1940's had been achieved without the provision of acceptable infrastructural and service facilities in the urban areas.³⁶ In order to create conditions for a quickening pace of economic activity it was necessary to correct the economic "bottlenecks".³⁷ Most agreed that the most pressing issues were "the now familiar themes of inflation, labour and other shortages, ... backlogs in respect of housing, power and transport and other services ...".³⁸ It is thus unnecessary to distinguish between capital's desire to boost the fortunes of the building industry and their professed concern over the living conditions of the African urban labour force.³⁹ Both issues were inextricably linked as capital attempted to regulate imbalances within the economy.⁴⁰

In addition to many industrialists being concerned about the relationship between production and consumption, the position was further complicated. Many leading industrialists were less than sanguine about the state of industrial production itself. Most pointed to the rising cost structure and diminishing returns on capital investment as the key characteristics of the industrial economy.⁴¹ Some even spoke of the need to plan for a future "recession".⁴² Such trends had been noted during the late 1940's. One commentator had noted that the key factor causing the economy to be "in a bit of a jam" was the "enormous increase in importations, not only of consumer goods, but also on capital account : machinery, rolling stock, motor transport ...".⁴³ In 1954, the President of the Durban Chamber of Commerce, supporting earlier remarks by the President of the Natal Chamber of Industry,⁴⁴ commented that,

...as always at such a stage of the economic cycle, wages and business costs of operation remain high. I am convinced that this trend will continue in 1954. This coming year will demand of businessmen efficiency and a constant attention to costs of operation while maximizing productive capacity.⁴⁵

35. *Ibid.*, vol 50, no 1 (January 1954).

36. Industrial Employers Association (Natal Section), Annual Report, 1947-1948.

37. Richards, "Economic Outlook", p 144.

38. Arndt, "The Union's Economy", p 184.

39. For differing analysis see Hendler, "The making of Soweto".

40. S Gelb, "Making Sense of the Crisis", *Transformation*, no 5 (1987) p.35.

41. *South African Industry and Trade*, vol 50, no 1 (January 1954); Palmer "Secondary Industry" and Lomas "Industrial Profits", p 47.

42. *Ibid.*, vol 46, no 1 (January 1950) and vol 49, no 10 (October 1953).

43. Richards "Economic Outlook", p 147.

44. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report, 1946-1947.

45. *South African Industry and Trade*, vol 51, no 1 (January 1954).

It is exceedingly difficult to gain any clear picture of the profit margins within local industrial concerns. However, there does appear to have been a trend towards increasing monopolization and a rapid rise in the organic composition of capital. Faced with the increasing electoral and trade union power of White labour, during the 1950s both the state and capital attempted to come to terms with a series of complex issues. Within the constraints presented by White labour, increasing profitability was in many ways dependent upon a massive state "offensive" on the living standards of the African proletariat.⁴⁶ During the late 1940s and early 1950s, major sectors of local industry were experiencing a serious short-term profitability crisis. Furthermore, during this same period the real wages of African workers declined by 12% from 1946 to 1954.⁴⁷ This reduction did little to alleviate the problems faced by local industry.

During the Second World War, local industrial interests had experienced an increasing return on their capital investments.⁴⁸ However during the period 1946-1954, the ratio of fixed capital over net output increased to the point when, in 1954, fixed capital investment exceeded net output.⁴⁹ During the same time, Durban's market share of national manufacturing output dropped.⁵⁰ While the ratio of the total wage bill to net output was to remain relatively constant during the period, and investment in land and buildings over total capital decreased, the significant rise in investments in machinery, plant and tools resulted in a worsening rate of return on capital invested.

The only major industrial sector which managed to overcome this difficulty was the food, drink and tobacco industry, which during the period expanded its share of all local industrial activity.⁵¹ In this sector the main areas of economic activity were grain, maize and corn milling, cattle feed, tea blending and packaging, milk and milk by-products, sweets, mineral water, canned fruit and meats and jellies and spices.⁵² During the period the ratio of capital investment in land and buildings to total fixed capital had increased, the ratio of investment in machinery to total capital decreased; and the ratio of the total wage bill to net output was slashed by over 30%. Increasing numbers of African were being employed at lower rates of pay. In common with countrywide trends in the food sector, the local industry experienced increasing returns on capital invested.⁵³

The converse was applicable in the chemical industry, which accounted for approximately 20% of all local industrial activity.⁵⁴ As a result of the harbour's proximity to the sources of raw materials required for paint, soap, candles, oils, fats, fertilizer and petroleum, the city's chemical industry accounted for some 30% of

46. R Davies, *Capital, State and White Labour*, (Brighton, 1979), pp 331-344.

47. Katzen, *Industry*, p 41.

48. Hindson, *Pass Controls*, pp 56-57.

49. Katzen, *Industry*, p 22 and Appendix 8 and McWhiter, *Industry*, Appendix 9.

50. *Ibid*, Appendices 1 and 2.

51. Katzen, *Industry*, Appendix 1.

52. *Ibid*

53. Lomas, "Industrial Profits", p 48-49.

54. Katzen, *Industry*, p 70.

the country's production. The local paint industry accounted for more than half of the country's production. However rising rail tariffs and dramatic post-war rises in raw material prices produced severe problems for the industry. A certain measure of relief was gained in 1954 when rail tariffs for paint were reduced. Similarly, while local production of soap, candles, oils and fats dominated total Union production by 1949, expansion was "erratic". Raw material costs increased by as much as three and half times their pre-war levels due to world-wide shortages and the price of purchased new machinery rocketed by as much as 500%

For the chemical industry as a whole, the total amount of capital investment in land and buildings declined by more than half. The ratio of African employment over total employment rose significantly. African real wages declined. However, during the same period the ratio of capital invested in machinery, plant and tools total fixed capital nearly doubled while the ratio of fixed capital to net output increased from 45% in 1945/46 to 136% in 1953/54.⁵⁵ A similar although less marked trend was evident among the other main sectors of local industrial production: metals and engineering, paper and printing, furniture, bedding and upholstery, wood and industrial minerals. Together these enterprises comprised just over a quarter of local industrial activity.⁵⁶

In the textile, leather and footwear and clothing industry the position was distinctly different. During the war, these industries had received a massive boost as a result of military requirements, and because of the "cut, make and trim" production process which allowed for significant profits to be made through the use of surplus materials or "cabbage".⁵⁷ During the war, many White textile workers had left the industry and Black workers became increasingly dominant in an industry where colour bar controls were weak and mechanized production processes required relatively little skills training. By 1944 over half the labour force was comprised of Indian workers. In the period from 1946 to the end of the decade, while the local industry dominated even the Johannesburg market, specialized in cheap clothing lines and faced little competition, there was a high newcomer and mortality rate as the "cut, make and trim" processes made way for new and expensive mechanized production.

During the early 1950's, the industry underwent a period of consolidation as profitable firms remained and fewer newcomers entered the market. However, while returns on capital investment increased, the industry was faced with a major barrier to its expansion. Competition from other locally made goods increased. This situation was exacerbated by the availability of cheaper goods from Japan, Hong Kong and Southern Rhodesia, where wages were lower and there were less stringent factory regulations.⁵⁸

During the period from 1946 to around 1954, as Durban's industrial sector attempted to consolidate and expand their operations, representatives of local industrial interests became increasingly concerned by their inability to stem the declining rate of return on capital investment. While fewer new firms entered the market

55. *Ibid.* Appendix.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.* p 34-35.

58. *Ibid.* p 38-41.

and increasing numbers of local firms became entrenched as public companies,⁵⁹ there was a significant reduction in capital charges other than those payable for the acquisition of new machinery. Industrialists remained cautious about future prospects for the local economy.

Faced with increasing capital charges, the increasing real wages of White workers, many of whom were rapidly moving into supervisory positions,⁶⁰ and the assertiveness of White labour,⁶¹ local capital's attempt to avert a fall in the rate of profit by slashing the African wage bill was to be fraught with contradictions. Such an onslaught would threaten attempts by both the state and capital to increase capital accumulation through a further integration of African wage labourers and proletarian housing into the spheres of industrial and commercial capital. If African wages declined, their ability to afford new forms of housing would be placed in considerable jeopardy.

Within both the state and capital a key debate during the later 1940s and 1950s concerned the means whereby capitalist production costs could be reduced at the same time as ensuring the availability and reproduction of a transformed African urban workforce. However, although much state policy was deliberately designed to ensure both continued economic growth and the transformation of an urban African proletariat, such state intervention never completely displaced or over-rode certain characteristics within local capitalist production or major features within the African labour market.

The Countryside, African Labour and Capitalist Production

Statistical evidence on Durban's African population derives from diverse sources which are often directly contradictory.⁶² Apart from Union Government general and manufacturing census figures, further evidence is provided by the municipality's official figures, unofficial statistics, reports and correspondence from the municipal pass office, labour bureau, location and hostel superintendents, and the Supervisor of Shack Surveys, a post formally established in November 1951 to co-ordinate the existing Inspectorate of Shacks Section, and certain important and reliable personal recollections.

During the 1940's the municipality lacked both the resources and the personnel to accomplish what would anyway have been a virtually impossible task.⁶³ With the suspension of influx control and the massive movement of Africans into the city, calculations embodied a large measure of guesswork. Willson, who then worked in the pass office recalls that

59. *Ibid.* p 17-18.

60. *Ibid.* p 21.

61. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report, 1946-1947, Industrial Employers Association (Natal Section), Annual Report, 1949-1950. See J Lewis, *Industrialization and Trade Union Organization in South Africa, 1924-55*, (Cambridge, 1984) for analysis of White trade union organization during this period.

62. For important analysis of this issue see C Meth, *Sorry Wrong Number, a critical examination of African labour force estimates, 1970-1987*, (Durban, 1988).

63. Broome commission; evidence of the City Council.

Most of the paperwork was in a mess, with us being so short staffed and even then we could not really go around into the shacks. We knew how many were in the hostels ... but we really needed to count the rest. I remember Robson⁶⁴ would get furious when people asked him for figures. He would just reel off any old number and put the phone down.⁶⁵

By the end of the 1940's, the position was somewhat improved, with municipal officials being able to supply fairly accurate estimates of the shack population of the city. With improving conditions at the Ordnance Road pass office, the municipality was also able to supply reasonably reliable estimates of the city's African workforce.⁶⁶ The position was to get increasingly better during the early 1950's as the Department's own internal administrative restructuring proceeded. Major employers of African labour also appreciated the need to assist the municipality in "keeping statistics".⁶⁷

In the 1946 Census it was estimated that 110,677 Africans lived in Durban.⁶⁸ In the age group 20 to 24 years old, there were 1,97 men to each woman as opposed to the rural average of 0,66 men to each woman. With regard to those between 25 and 29 years old, the city's ratio was 2,36 men to every woman in contrast to the rural average for the same persons of 0,68. For those between 30 and 34 years of age, the urban average was 2,52 men to every woman, with the rural average being 0,66. The African female population of Durban was estimated to be around 28,000 persons.⁶⁹

In November 1948 the municipal Native Administration Department worked on a total African population of 150,000, with 115,000 being male and 35,000 female.⁷⁰ While the City Council was never to publically acknowledge this figure⁷¹ and other municipal departments disagreed with this total,⁷² Shum recalls that "in the Department it was generally accepted as the most likely estimate".⁷³ In 1950 the Native Administration Department estimated that the African population of the city had risen to 165,00. By 1953, the

64. Mr "Tings" Robson was then Chief Superintendent, Sontseu Road Mens' Hostel.

65. Interview with Mr R G Willson, 21 November 1980.

66. *Ibid.*

67. Industrial Employers Association (Natal Section), Annual Report, 1954-1955.

68. Union Government Census, 1946.

For the same year, the municipal Health Department quoted a similar figure: 108,866. See *Durban Housing Survey*. Smith's unreferenced figure of 166,000 has been ignored as being impossible to substantiate and improbable. See R H Smith, *Labour Resources of Natal*, (Cape Town, 1952).

69. TCF; Crime and Unauthorized Shacks, vol 4; Memorandum by Mrs M Maytom, 22 February 1948.

70. MNAD; H/Gen, vol 1; Manager, MNAD "Native Housing Policy", November 1948. This figure was 50,000 higher than that estimated by the Broome Commission report of April 1948 and 40,000 higher than that set down in the 1948-1949 Mayors Minute.

71. See Mayors Minute, 1948-1949.

72. Interview with Mr D McCullough, 23 April 1982.

73. Interview with Mr C N Shum, 20 June 1985.

estimated African population in Durban had declined slightly to 160,000, of whom 110,000 were men and 50,000 women.⁷⁴ This small decline in the African population of Durban was significant as such population reductions went against the trends in other cities in the country where the African urban population was steadily increasing. What is even more noticeable in these figures is that the African male population of the city had declined.

During the early 1950s the municipality attempted to control African entry into the city and otherwise reduce the city's African population. With the implementation of the new pass laws, a general tightening up of control in the city, and municipal officials' deportation of the unemployed or those deemed 'idle and undesirable', the municipality began to gain control over African urbanization. However, the declining African population of Durban probably had more to do with a brief improvement in agricultural productivity in many African reserve areas.⁷⁵

It is entirely possible that as a result of the massive townward movement of the 1940s, pressure on land and agricultural resources in the reserves may have decreased somewhat. With a temporary small improvement in agricultural conditions in such areas, fewer men may well have been forced into the cities. Indeed, throughout the 1950s, municipal ability to alter the composition of Durban's African labour force was to be fundamentally constrained by certain structural features within the city's relationship to the African countryside.

When compared to the total African male labour force in the city, relatively little labour originated from the reserves which surrounded the city. Most of that labour was migratory. As a result, municipal and employer attempts to restrict African city employment only to persons coming from the seven major reserves which surrounded the city were fraught with contradictions.

The majority of African males employed in Durban did not originate from the African reserves that surrounded the city. It appears that agricultural production in the reserves of Lower Tsekela, Ndwedwe, Inanda, Pinetown, Mbumbulu and Mzinto had not declined to such an extent that Africans living in these areas were forced to seek work in Durban.⁷⁶ During the whole period from the late 1940's through the early 1950's, Durban derived only 20% of its African labour force from these areas.⁷⁷ Furthermore, few Africans formally employed in Durban and living in these areas chose to reside permanently in the city. Africans originating from these areas and working in the city appear to have preferred to utilize the relatively well developed road and railway networks to commute on a weekly or fairly frequent basis.⁷⁸

74. *Ibid*

75. C Simkins, "Agricultural production in the African reserves of South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol 7, (1981), More research is required into the changing relationships between African reserve areas in Natal and Durban.

76. Natal Regional Survey, vol 7, *The Native Reserves of Natal*, (Cape Town, 1957), p 94 & 100 and MNAD; H2/CM, vol 1; Union Government, Department of Native Affairs, Technical Sub-Committee of the Native Affairs Commission, February 1949.

77. Smith, *Labour Resources*, p 57-58.

78. Interview with Mr C N Shum, 20 June 1985.

In the peri-urban areas within a fifteen mile radius of the city centre, this preference for not residing permanently in Durban was even more pronounced. Of the estimated 4,494 African men who worked in the city and who came from these areas, the vast majority commuted on a daily basis while all the remainder returned home at weekends. This survey, undertaken by the municipality and completed in 1951, was found to correlate accurately with an earlier Local Health Commission report.⁷⁹

During the late 1940's and early 1950's, approximately 60% of Durban's African labour force originated from areas of Natal and Zululand distant from the city. A further 20% of the city's African male labour force came from areas outside the province.⁸⁰ Willson remembers that one of the 'striking things about that period ... was that all the blokes flocking to Durban came from the bundu. A hell of a long way away. You would even get [African] from [Nyasaland], Sothos, Mpondos .. the works.⁸¹

The specific rural origins of Durban's African labour force had much to do with the very differing conditions in particular rural regions. The effects of legislation aimed at stimulating White capitalist agriculture and curbing the growth of an African peasantry, and the creation of African reserves and an African farm labour force had an uneven impact in the countryside. These legislative strictures, when combined with climatic and other agronomical features, produced often sharp distinctions within the southern African countryside. The particular relations between the city and specific rural areas were also partially responsible for the increasingly more evident distinctions of employment, class and ethnicity which developed among the African proletariat.

During the same period increasing numbers of Africans began to settle permanently in the city, either bringing their families and establishing new households in Durban or renting single accommodation in hostels or shantytowns. Colin Shum offers his recollection:

I think it would be safe to say that by the time I became Superintendant in Cato Manor (1953), probably a full 50% of all Africans [in Durban] were living permanently in the city. You only had to look at the shantytowns to see that. When you add that total to the people in the townships it was around half.⁸²

Having streamed to the city during the war time economic boom, by the early 1950's such Africans were determined to remain as permanent residents of the city.

During the period from 1946 to the early 1950's, while the pattern of migrancy continued, an increasing number of African male migrants tended to stay in Durban for longer periods of time and rely more heavily on their wages to assist in the maintenance of rural households.⁸³ Willson recalls:

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79. Shum Papers; C N Shum, Totals and Percentages Extracted from the Peri Urban Survey, 18 April 1951.
80. Smith, *Labour Resources*, p 57-58.
81. Interview with Mr R G Willson, 21 January 1981.
82. Interview with Mr C N Shum, 20 June 1985.
83. D Hemson, 'Dockworkers, Labour Circulation and Class Struggles in Durban, 1940 -1950, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol 4, no 2 (1978), p 106, and J Kelly, 'Durban's industrialization, unskilled labour supplies and proletarianization, 1920-1950', unpublished seminar paper, University of Natal, 1987.

Most service contracts were for a month. Before the war when I started lots of people would pop in as it were, work for a couple of months and then bugger off. All that changed after the war when I came back. Now you had most people living in Durban all the year and only going back when the factories closed over Christmas. Everyone wanted to renew their contracts.⁸⁴

Mr Mthethwa, then living in the South African Railways and Harbour compound at the Point confirms the tendency:

I came to Durban during the war as a boy. I got a job in the Railways sweeping the trains in Durban station. I would live with my brother who had a room at Msizini,⁸⁵ but I would go home every few months to look after my mother. My father was on the mines. But then as I got older I stayed in the Point Road Barracks all the time and sent money home. Then I moved to Mkhumbane when I was married.⁸⁶

In 1950, the Natal section of the Industrial Employers Association recognized this tendency, remarking that whilst it was 'well nigh impossible' to provide a definition of 'an urbanized Native', it was nevertheless true that the number of Africans who, apart from annual leave, remained with employers in the city was growing.⁸⁷

It is significant that in Durban there were fewer women in relation to the number of African male residents than was the case in any of the other main urban centres of the Union. In 1946 the Union-wide male-female ratio for African urban dwellers was 1,8 men to each woman. By 1951, this ratio had declined to 1,6 men to every woman.⁸⁸ However in Durban, the male-female ratio stood at 3,28 men to every woman in 1948 and declined to 2,2 men for every woman by 1953. Municipal officials were constantly aware that their 'figures probably underestimated the number of women in the city',⁸⁹ but it was generally true that Durban's African population was significantly more male in composition than was the case in other South African cities. African proletarian culture in the city was thus largely based on mens' consciousness of the city. Nevertheless, three key characteristics of the role of African women in the city were to influence the manner in which both the state and capital could intervene in social relations.

First, there were very few opportunities for African women to become formally employed in either industry, commerce or domestic labour, with the latter the sole, although slowly declining preserve of 'kitchen boys'. From the middle 1950s onwards African women did gain increasing domestic employment, mainly as 'nannies'.⁹⁰ However throughout the 1940s and 1950s African employment in the hotel and domestic sectors

84. Interview with Mr R G Willson, 21 January 1981.

85. Popular name for the Somtseu Road Mens' Hostel.

86. Interview with Mr H Mthethwe, 28 November 1986.

87. Industrial Employers Association, (Natal Section), Annual Report 1949-1950.

88. Hindson, *Pass Controls*, p 53-54.

89. MNAD; H/Gen vol 1; Manager, MNAD 'Native Housing Policy', November 1948.

90. *Ilanga lase Natal*.

was predominated by men. In industry and commerce there were almost no employment opportunities for African women.⁹¹ Willson sums up the position:

Look African women did not work in those days. ... Where could they work? There was no factory work. That was all men and Indian women in the clothing places - laundries - ...there were a lot of them but they were full of Indians who had been involved for donkey's years. The other real thing was that kitchen work was scarce. People used to have boys.⁹²

Second, many of the African women who entered the city, not necessarily with either spouse or male relatives, desired to settle permanently in the city. Finding few formal job opportunities, such people rapidly became a pivotal force in the range of expanding petty entrepreneurial activities centred in all the African residential areas of the city. These activities, while officially frowned upon and castigated, were a vital component in ensuring the reproduction of the city's total African population: both male and female, permanently employed, casually employed and unemployed.

Realizing this problem, Havemann, the Manager of the municipal Native Administration Department, attacked those city councillors who were engaged in fulminating over the illicit ventures prevalent in Mkhumbane. Havemann noted that "while there are criminals and idlers, the residents of Cato Manor are not a mass of brawling insurgents. They are on the whole decent working men trying their best to provide for their families".⁹³ Determined to remain in the city and aware of their importance in African urban society such women were an awesome presence for municipal and police officials alike. Drew, then a policeman stationed at Cato Manor maintains:

You should have seen it. Everyone had a little pondok there. Just the girlfriend - often young and the cheek. Shit you would think you were talking to the queen. Even the Bantu constables were furious. They were just girlfriends but they controlled the whole show.⁹⁴

Finally, many of the African women in the city would sustain casual live-in relationships with African who might also have been married to someone in the rural reserves. Kunene, who came to Durban in 1949 and gained work at the newly expanded South African Fertilizer Company in 1952, recalls,

When I got the job at SAFCO I took a wife in Mkhumbane. You would have to get the whole house nice - buy the bed and the pots and things. I stayed in the compound in Sydney Road but I had rooms in Cato Manor for us. When my wife came from the farm I stayed in the compound. It was a common practice.⁹⁵

91. Katzen, *Industry*, p 79.

92. Interview with Mr R G Willson, 21 January 1981.

93. MNAD; H2/CM, vol 1, Manager, MNAD - Town Clerk, 30 July 1949.

94. Interview with Mr R F Drew, 17 December 1980.

95. Interview with Mr M O D Kunene, 21 April 1985.

All attempts to restructure African society in Durban would have to come to terms with these features of African women's life in the city.

In summary, the African population of Durban originated primarily from areas far distant from the city, had a far higher average of men to women than national urban averages reveal and was, while divided between permanently urbanized and migrant, either totally or ever-increasingly reliant on the urban wage for the costs of their reproduction in both the city and countryside. The movement and character of this population was not solely the result of the imperatives of local capitalist accumulation itself. Local employers and the municipality confronted an urban African population that was not solely of their own making. It was this proletariat which was to decisively constrain both the state and capital in their attempts to restructure city life. In the city itself however, the specific nature of capitalist production was to shape a particular African labour force in ways which were to deepen the complexity of the issues faced by both the state and capital.

During the period from 1946 to 1951 the number of Africans living in Durban who were between the ages of ten and fifty years old and thus were regarded by both the state and capital as the economically active African urban population rose from 103,551 persons to 136,279 persons.⁹⁶ From 1946 to 1953 the number of African men formally employed in the city by either the local or central state, commerce and industry, domestic and hotel concerns or other registered employers rose from 74,610 persons to 100,367 persons.⁹⁷ However, during this period, the number of Africans who were in employment remained fairly stable at around 72% of the total economically active population. However, the wages received by this African workforce were increasingly required to support spouses and other dependants, as both the urban African birth-rate had increased sharply⁹⁸ and elder relatives moved into the city.⁹⁹ Therefore in this period the number of Africans employed in the city over the total African population of Durban dropped slightly from 67,4% to 64,3%.

For the vast majority of African male workers, whether they be migrant or permanent city dwellers, their involvement in the local economy was at the level of casual, unskilled labour. While certain particular industrial sectors had expanded their production in a manner which permitted African labour access to semi-skilled positions,¹⁰⁰ the great majority of industrial enterprises, let alone other employers of African labour, still employed Africans in predominantly unskilled positions. Stanford Mtolo, then an organizer for the African Dairy Workers' Union remembers that 'it was only much later in the 1950's that Africans could say 'I am an operator in the mills', or 'I drive a lorry for the Railways'. Before this time everyone would do the same work.¹⁰¹

96. Statistics derived from Union Government Population Census, 1946 and Katzen, *Industry*, Table 4.

97. Statistics derived from Katzen, *Industry* and MNAD; H/Gen, vol 1; 'Registered Native Labour' undated. This latter set of statistics excludes togt labour.

98. Mayors Minutes, 1946-1953, reports of the City Medical Officer of Health.

99. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 21 August 1985.

100. Natal Regional Survey, additional report no 5, *The African Factory Worker*, (Cape Town, 1951).

101. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

This was acknowledged by most of the main employers of African labour.¹⁰² In 1953 the Chairman of the Industrial Employers Association in Natal commented,

I would liken the employment of Africans in industry to that of pouring untrained troops into a military operation in order to cope with an emergency, but always in the hope that sooner or later respite will be gained and an opportunity afforded to remedy the absence of pre-employment training.¹⁰³

The position was such that an accurate commentator on the local economy pointed out that Durban's African labour supply resembled "one huge casual market".¹⁰⁴ As a result, in this labour market the African proletariat resorted to 'job hopping'. Willson explains:

At the Pass Office you would get hundreds of people queuing to change their jobs. Some labour service contracts were for a month. Others for 12 months. But you would get lots of blokes changing in midstream. It was a circus or job hopping we used to call it.¹⁰⁵

It has been argued that this practice was the result of African labour mainly originating from the rural reserves around Durban being able to "resist total subjection to the work disciplines of wage employment" through having access to resources produced in these reserves.¹⁰⁶ In 1945 municipal officials estimated that given the relatively stable conditions which prevailed in these reserves, "it can be seen that it is Natives coming from areas close to Durban who undertake the highest number of separate jobs".¹⁰⁷ However the scale of job hopping was far greater than that which could solely have been undertaken by such workers, who only accounted for some 20% of the city's African labour.

Nevertheless there is evidence which reveals a clear tendency for many Africans who originated in areas stricken with declining agricultural production and far distant from the city to remain in a particular job for many years. Furthermore African workers were keenly aware that employers would only select people from certain areas for particular jobs: "if you wanted to be a guardboy you had to put on the earrings of people" from the Mahlabatini and Nongoma area.¹⁰⁸ Such workers, known for their "loyalty" to a single employer became the subject of derision within the proletariat.¹⁰⁹ Shabalala recalls:

There was this stupid old Zulu with his big earrings. He was a watchboy who, if the boss said 'Do not let anybody come in tonight', would even refuse to let the boss back in! If you

102. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Reports, 1945-1946 and 1949-1950.

103. Industrial Employers Association, (Natal Section), Annual Report, 1953-1954.

104. Broome Commission; evidence of the Department of Economics, Natal University College, 1947.

105. Interview with Mr R G Willson, 21 January 1981.

106. Kelly, "Durban's Industrialization", p 12.

107. Smith, *Native Reserves*, p 113.

108. Interview with Mr M Mthethwe, 14 January 1986.

109. Interviews with Mr H Mthethwe, 28 November 1986 and Mr C Khumalo, 21 April 1985.

wanted to be a guard you had to get earrings! They would do the same thing for years. Just stalk up and down with their sticks. Even if their relatives came to visit they would not even open the gates. 'Yes what do you want?' And they would talk to them through the gates.¹¹⁰

The riposte to this joke however warns of the pitfalls likely to be experienced by those too scornful and dismissive of the disciplines of the workplace and confident of their ability to find eagerly sought after work. This story, again obviously apocryphal, concerns a youth from northern Natal who gets a job as a nightwatchman:

When the boss leaves in the evening he puts an upturned bowl next to the boy's stool. 'Now boy, I want you to see that nobody ever touches this bowl.' 'Yes boss'. But ... in the night he looks at the bowl all the time and he cannot help himself. So he lifts it up and out runs a little mouse. The next day he is fired.¹¹¹

To many African workers, their mobility within the city's labour market was a crucial bargaining power which they endeavoured to uphold. This was recognized by local employers who often complained that registered African workseekers adopted "a very selective attitude as to the type of work which they were prepared to accept".¹¹² But many members of the African proletariat could hardly afford the luxury.

Conditions in the African countryside varied from area to area. These varying circumstances explain the nuances of the proletarianization process. Certain people would accept certain forms of employment. A regionalism or ethnicity could be sustained in the workplace.¹¹³ This was furthered by many employers deliberately choosing workers from a particular area,¹¹⁴ or through the practice of workers gaining employment for their relatives in the same company. This tendency, common in the stevedoring industry,¹¹⁵ was how Kunene got his job: 'My brother worked at SAFCO as an induna and I went to the gates and the boss tells me that 'if you do not work well your brother will give you! [a hiding]'.¹¹⁶ Only arriving in Durban as work seekers during the 1940's and 1950's, Mpondo became known for their willingness to accept the most menial and dirty of work which henceforth became known as "Mpondo work". Mpondo workers were employed

110. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 7 July 1985.

111. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 21 April 1985. For the prevalence in the Johannesburg area for Zulu nightwatchmen sitting around braziers see E Mphahlele, *Down Second Avenue*, (London, 1973) and C Themba, *The Will to Die*, (London, 1979).

112. Industrial Employers Association, (Natal Section), Annual Report, 1950-1951.

113. For such argument see A Sitas, 'Class, nation and ethnicity in Natal's Black working class', paper presented at the Workshop on Regionalism and Restructuring in Natal, University of Natal, Durban, 1988.

114. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 21 April 1985. Details on employer attitudes are sketchy.

115. Interview with Mr M Mthethwe, 28 November 1986. See also G D Sack, 'IziMpoblo: the bachelors. A study of Black migrant labourers in Durban', (M A thesis, Rhodes University, 1976).

116. Interview with Mr M O D Kunene, 28 April 1985.

on the night soil bucket rounds,¹¹⁷ and as sugar plantation field labour¹¹⁸ for which there was then a serious shortage.¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, the growth of regionalism was to be counteracted by other forces. With most African labour being unskilled, many employers often chose African workers with the skills to boost company-sponsored sporting, musical and dancing teams.¹²⁰ However an even more important counter-balance to the force of ethnicity came from the practice of 'job hopping', which was essentially the result of the nature of capitalist accumulation in the city.

While there had long existed a practice whereby new entrants to the city would first secure domestic employment while scouting around for a place in the industrial and commercial sector,¹²¹ the practice of job hopping within these latter sectors was distinctly different. As a result of the rapidity of economic expansion during the war, and the eagerness of both the state and capital to gain sufficient African labour and avert potentially costly strike action, the state had continually laid down various different wage determinations affecting unskilled African labour.¹²² By 1947 there were 78 controlled industries in the Durban area which were affected by 20 different wage rates for unskilled African labour. These stipulated minimum wage rates varied between seventy-six shillings per week and less than twenty-three shillings per week.¹²³ As a result employers often complained of their inability to obtain sufficient African labour through the unfair advantages of those employers able to pay higher wages.¹²⁴ While representatives of local employers called for a single regional minimum wage rate for African unskilled labour, provided all "competitors" were willing to abide by the principle,¹²⁵ their attempts to thereby reduce labour turnover were fundamentally flawed. In 1956 the Natal section of the Industrial Employers Association was still noting that there were "so many" different wages "for the same job". In forty-three industries there were eleven different minimum wage determinations affecting unskilled African labour.¹²⁶

Durban's economic activity was to a large extent based upon the city's location as a coastal tourist resort and its relatively well developed and situated harbour and airport facilities. Durban's sub-tropical climate and coastal location made the city a premier tourist resort which in addition stood "at the centre of a

117. Interview with Mr C Ndlovu, 7 July 1985.

118. Union Government, Department of Native Affairs, Report, 1948-1949 and interview with Mr R Arenstein.

119. Ilanga lase Natal, 12 June 1949.

120. Interviews with Mr C Khumalo, 21 April 1985, Mr T Mcanyana, and Mr T Phewa.

121. Interview with Mr D McCullouch, 23 April 1982 and interview with Mr J Mzimela.

122. Edwards "Recollections", p 35.

123. Broome Commission; evidence of the Natal Employers Association.

124. Interview with Mr R G Willson, 14 February 1981.

125. Broome Commission; evidence of the Natal Employers Association.

126. Natal Employers Association, (Natal Section), Annual Report, 1955-1956.

chain of coastal holiday resorts stretching far to the north and south ... a gateway to Zululand with its fauna and native life, and to the Natal hinterland with its multifold scenic attractions.¹²⁷ However the tourist market was subject to significant seasonal trading fluctuations and whilst consistently employing many thousands of African workers in any one year, was never in a position to stabilize its unskilled African labour force.¹²⁸

With regard to trade through Durban harbour, in 1947 the harbour handled more than half the Union's total import and export trade, dealing with more cargo than all the other South African ports combined.¹²⁹ There were however always significant fluctuations in the amounts of cargo handled and thus often dramatic changes in the amount of casual togt labour required.¹³⁰ This had the obvious effect on local industry. Employers always had the needed to employ African labour "at the gate"¹³¹ in order to assist in the "loading and unloading of trucks" and other tasks.¹³²

As a result of the seasonal nature of the local tourist industry and the constant changes in the import and export trade, various different economic interests required different amounts of African labour throughout the year. Justice Broome, chairman of the Durban Native Administration Commission of Enquiry remarked in 1948 that "the demands of industry fluctuate; all Native labourers cannot be employed all the time. But the requirements of industry demand that there shall be readily available a reserve of labour that can be drawn upon to meet seasonal demands. This is particularly the case in the harbour areas."¹³³ With the vast majority of Durban's African male workers having originated in areas far away from the city, it was thus imperative for employers that a large reserve army of unskilled labour be resident in the city.

Such needs coincided with the desire of an increasing number of both permanent urban residents and supposedly migrant workers. When confronted by the long distances to their rural households, and ever more dependent upon urban wages, Africans remained in the city during periods of unemployment. The benefits to employers of having such a population close at hand were noted in October 1946 by Durban's Chief Medical Officer of Health:

Although the activity of wartime industry has greatly diminished, the effect of its stimulus remains such that it has not been possible, even if it were politic, to repatriate the Native workers and their families back to the Reserves. Indeed were it possible to do so, it is at least doubtful whether it would be politic in view of the far reaching plans which are now

127. Durban Corporation, *Industrial Durban*, p 6.

128. MNAD: H/Gen, vol 1; "Registered Native Labour" (minus togt labour). It is difficult to gain a clear picture of how many Africans were employed in the hotel trade. Prior to 1949 such persons were included within the general category of "hotel and domestic" but from 1950 were included in the general category "commerce and industry".

129. Durban Corporation, *Industrial Durban*, p 7.

130. For example see Industrial Employers Association, (Natal Section), Annual Reports, 1950 - 1951 and 1951 - 1952.

131. *Ibid.*, 1953-1954.

132. *Ibid.*, 1950-1951.

133. Broome Commission Report.

being conducted for the expansion of Durban's post-war industry, commerce and general development.¹³⁴

With the expansion of industry in the later 1940's and early 1950's increasing numbers of casually employed African workers were needed. Africans waiting for employment would often sit in the beerhalls and discuss employment possibilities, following a rather structured ritual whereby certain seats would be clearly demarcated for use by people from a certain area or chiefdom.¹³⁵ Mr M Mthethwe explains:

At the Victoria Beerhall we had our place for everyone from Kwa Mbonambi. It was the same at Point Road because lots of us lived in the Railway Barracks at Bell Street. There we would sit and listen and talk about jobs - what ships were in the harbour. People would talk about how many boys Dusty Smith needed to scrape and paint tomorrow.¹³⁶

By the early 1950's local employers were continually complaining that the reserve army of African labour was too small.¹³⁷ As a result particular sectors of the local economy had the greatest difficulty in securing both a "sufficiency of full-time Native employees"¹³⁸ and in satisfying their need for temporary African labour.¹³⁹ Some employers remarked that because of the labour shortage Africans quickly became aware that "their labour was at a premium" and thus became choosy about what work they would accept.¹⁴⁰

Such employers' views contradicted the generally held attitude amongst White citizens of Durban who complained about the existence of apparently huge numbers of work-shy "illegal" Africans in the city.¹⁴¹ However, employer analyses were borne out by municipal statistics. In 1948 it was estimated that there were only 4,400 African males in legal employment who were not officially registered. However it was estimated that there was a further 8 000 to 10 000 adult males who were either unemployed or seeking work.¹⁴² Throughout the early 1950's, the total African reserve army of labour in the city was to remain relatively high.¹⁴³ Most unemployed African men lived in those same shantytowns which both the state and capital wished to destroy.

134. MNAD; "Housing and Shacks", vol 1, City Medical Officer of Health - Town Clerk, 14 October 1946.

135. For similar analysis see J K McNamara "Brothers and Work Mates: Home friend networks in the social life of Black migrant workers in a gold mine hostel" in P Mayer (ed), Black Villagers in an Industrial Society, (Cape Town, 1980) and Sack, "The bachelors".

136. Interview with Mr M Mthethwe, 28 November 1986. The firm of "Dusty Smith" had for long been one of the major stevedore firms.

137. For example see Industrial Employers Association, (Natal Section), Annual Report, 1951-1952.

138. Ibid

139. Ibid, 1952 - 1953.

140. Ibid, 1950 - 1951.

141. See Natal Mercury and Daily News passim.

142. MNAD; H/Gen, vol 1; Manger, MNAD "Native Housing Policy", November 1948.

143. South African Industry and Trade, vol 49, no 9 (September 1953), p and interview with Mr C N Shum, 20 June 1985.

During the early 1940's many, including members of the Communist Party of South Africa, had believed that African participation in the industrial and commercial economy would quickly lead to the growth of a stable, permanently urbanized African working class increasingly employed as semi-skilled labour.¹⁴⁴ While changes in the labour process¹⁴⁵ had not resulted in many Africans being employed as semi-skilled labour, this does not necessarily imply that the African proletariat was in any sense absolutely weakened in the face of both capital and a rejuvenated state.

Conclusion

During the late 1940's and early 1950's, although still employed as largely unskilled labour, the African workforce of the city had as a result of changing relationships between countryside and city and the nature of industrial and commercial production within the city, acquired certain characteristics at the point of production which were to present both the Union Government, municipality and local employers with severe problems when they discussed various means whereby the life of the city's African population could be altered. Such problems were to be compounded by the essential features of African residential life in the city as a whole.

144. Edwards, "Recollections", p 35.

145. Lewis, Industrialization, chapter 7.