

## CHAPTER 5

REGULATING THE CRISIS :  
STATE POLICY, CAPITALIST ACCUMULATION AND AFRICAN LABOUR

## African Wages and the Structure of Residential Life

The still predominantly illiterate<sup>1</sup> African proletariat had been able to assert increasing power in the labour market because of both the relative shortage of African labour which could be secured on terms favourable to employers, and imbalances within the local economy. Nevertheless, during the period from 1947 to 1954 African real wages had declined steadily, although not to a point below their immediate post-war levels. Whereas in the period from 1939 to 1947, the real wages of African labour increased by approximately 50%, during the period from 1947 to 1954, African real wages declined by nearly 12%.<sup>2</sup> There were however significant sectoral variations. For example in the period from 1945 to 1954, African real wages in the paper and printing industry rose by 20%, and in the furniture, bedding and upholstery trade by 33%. However, neither of these sectors employed much African labour.<sup>3</sup> In the majority of those industrial sectors which did employ large numbers of African labour real wages did decline. In the period from 1945 to 1954 African real wages in the food, drink and tobacco industry declined by 44%; in the wood industry by 14%; and in the industrial minerals sector the real decline was 15%.<sup>4</sup> While this decline in the food industry assisted in ensuring the increased profitability of this particular sector, similar wage declines in other sectors did little to alleviate crises of profitability. However the wage reductions did in themselves create increased problems among the African population of the city.

During the early 1950's, the few remaining vestiges of the once flourishing African operated barter markets which had proliferated around the bus and railway centres in Durban had disappeared.<sup>5</sup> Such places, where the women of the Umbumbulu<sup>6</sup> and Ndwedwe<sup>7</sup> districts used to exchange commodities for their own surplus agricultural production, were well patronized in Durban in the late 1940's. Khumalo recalls that you

---

1. Union Government Census, 1961.

2. Katzen, *Industry*, p 15.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. The existence of such markets does not necessarily contribute anything to the already fierce debate as to when the countryside was fully capitalist. For this debate see H Bradford, "Highways and byways and cul-de-sacs: the transition to agrarian capitalism in South African historiography", unpublished paper, 1988.

6. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 29 April 1986.

7. Interview with Mr C D S Mbutho, 28 October 1983.

"would go around on a Saturday buying things, ... clothes and things and then go to Dalton Road and get the fowl for dinner".<sup>8</sup> With fowls costing an exorbitant amount at both the municipal and Indian markets in Durban, recourse to the barter markets was a source of relief for many Africans.<sup>9</sup> Such markets were very important to the African proletariat. As Khumalo recalls, "You need a shirt so you go to the Indian shop and if you buy a shirt you get some hankys - if a pair of trousers then you could get a pair of socks, which we would then take to Dalton and give to the women for ... lots of things we could need".<sup>10</sup> Mthethwe, then a migrant railway worker, explains further:

You could go to Dalton and swop things. You could take money to the Indian shops in Point Road and buy things and before you went home you go to Dalton and talk to the women about your shirt, trousers and jacket. Your town clothes. And you could get seed and saddle leather and nails ... to take back to the farm".<sup>11</sup>

By the early 1950's the African proletariat could no longer rely on such methods of partial subsistence in either the city or the countryside.<sup>12</sup> The barter markets had either disappeared or been transformed into produce markets operated by those independent producers who lived close to the city. The women from Mbumbulu "did not want candles and blankets, but money ...";<sup>13</sup> and were competing with women from the Ndwedwe and Mbumbulu reserves for "our money".<sup>14</sup> African workers were increasingly virtually completely reliant on the cash wage.

In 1951, it was estimated that a basic subsistence food charges for an African family resident in the city with a single wage earner was just over £10.12.0 per month. Added to this basic cost would be charges of rent, transport, cleaning materials, medical and schooling expenses, furniture and taxes.<sup>15</sup> However, in a thorough survey,<sup>16</sup> conducted in 1951 among formally employed African men resident in the townships of Lamont, Lamont Extension and Chesterville and the S J Smith mens' hostel, it was found that the majority of those surveyed earned less than £15 a month. In Lamont and Lamont Extension, where 580 men, or 76% of the total registered male population of the area, were questioned, 26% earned £10 or less, and 68% £15 or less a month. In Chesterville, of the 856 surveyed men, constituting over 93% of the registered male population of the

---

8. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 29 April 1986.

9. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 28 November 1986.

10. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 29 April 1986.

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

12. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 29 April 1986.

13. Interview with Mrs M Mnguni, 20 July 1986.

14. Interview with Mr T Shabalala, 20 November 1986.

15. O Horwood, "Some aspects of Urban African Employment in the Durban Area", *Race Relations Journal*, vol 25, no 3-4 (July - December 1958).

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

area, 39% earned £10 or less, and 80% £15 or less. In S J Smith where virtually all the inmates were questioned, of the 3,524 interviewees, 57% earned £10 or less and 88% £15 or less.<sup>17</sup>

While over 90% of the surveyed hostel dwellers were employed by commerce and industry, the mean wage earned was not significantly below that of similarly employed people resident in the two townships surveyed. However, what does distinguish hostel dwellers employed by commerce and industry from their counterparts in the townships is that over 77% of the hostel inmates earned £10 or less a month. The comparable returns for Chesterville and Lamont were 39% and 23% respectively. It is thus possible to argue that in the industrial and commercial sectors of the local economy, the vast majority of those employed at the lowest rates of unskilled labour lived in the hostels.

There was thus a process of differentiation developing within the African working class between those living in townships and those resident in male hostels.<sup>18</sup> A similar trend was evident among those Africans employed by the Union Government living in hostels as opposed to townships.<sup>19</sup> There were thus growing indications of class differentiation within the African proletariat. In hostels and barracks which accommodated a more migrant African workforce, residents were employed in work more inferior to the nature of work undertaken by workers living in formal townships.

In 1948, of the total African city population of 150,000 persons, there existed licensed municipal, Union Government, private employer and private non-employer, and African-owned accommodation for 82,700 persons.<sup>20</sup> This accommodation was both incapable of satisfying the existing demand and the expected increase in the African population of the city. The position was slightly aggravated by the desires of many industrial and commercial employers of African labour to abolish their compounds,<sup>21</sup> often located alongside their concerns<sup>22</sup> to make way for alterations to the plant. Disregarding those Africans in domestic employment, the municipality was the greatest single provider of housing: controlling hostel accommodation for 15,000 persons, both male and female and family accommodation for 10,000 persons.<sup>23</sup> Conditions in all these municipal housing schemes was generally accepted to be unsatisfactory.

Baumannville, the first African family location to be built in Durban and completed in 1918,<sup>24</sup> had 120 houses or tenements, comprising a single room and kitchen. Outbuildings consisted of a toilet and shower

17. MNAD; H/Gen, vol 1; "Income Surveys", 1951.

18. Hindson, *Pass Controls*, p 63.

19. MNAD; H/Gen, vol 1; "Income Surveys", 1951.

20. *Ibid*, Manager, MNAD "Native Housing Policy", November 1948.

21. Mayors Minute 1952 - 1953. Throughout the period neither commerce nor industry housed very many of their own African employees. See Mayors Minutes and MNAD; H /Gen, vol 1; "Registered Native Labour" (Minus togt).

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

23. MNAD; H/Gen, vol 1; Manager, MNAD "Native Housing Policy", November 1948.

24. Natal Regional Survey report number 6, *Baumannville: A Study of an Urban African Community*. (Cape Town, 1959).

cubicle, a pantry and wood and coal shed. A water standpipe was situated in each yard. The monthly rental was £1. Some of the more recently constructed tenements had an additional room, but otherwise for most residents the kitchen doubled up as a bedroom.<sup>25</sup> By the early 1950's this residential location was simply dirty, overcrowded and required major maintenance work. The nearby C T Loram School was swamped both by children from Baumannville and other African pupils.<sup>26</sup>

Lamont had 200 three roomed houses, comprising two bedrooms on either side of a kitchen and coal and wood store. Pit privies existed on each site. Communal water standpipes were located between houses. Drainage facilities were totally inadequate with most of the houses positioned on steep hilly inclines. Rentals varied between 12 shillings and 6 pence and 17 shillings and 6 pence depending on the wage of the male tenant.<sup>27</sup> Although the township was relatively new, residents still complained about inadequate schooling facilities and the lack of other residential amenities.<sup>28</sup>

Chesterville had 1265 four-roomed houses. Each house comprised two bedrooms, a living room and kitchen. Kitchen facilities included a cold-water tap and sink. Waterborne sewerage and ablution facilities were provided on each site. The economic rental was £5.10.0 a month, but rentals charged never exceeded 17 shillings and 6 pence a month. There were two government schools and municipal trading facilities. The schools operated two sessions daily but were unable to meet the demand.<sup>29</sup>

Africans also owned land under freehold title in the small areas of Chateau Estate and Good Hope Estate. This area comprised about 91 acres of land sold to Africans in the early 1930's. The majority of the houses were of wood-and-iron construction. Bare water and sanitation facilities were provided. Rates were in the region of £3.17.0 a month. In order to supplement their own income African land-owners would either build additional accommodation for tenants or informally lease part of their land to a shacklord. The plots could usually be broken into three or four platforms for shack building. The usual rental for one of these plots was £1 a month. The single 250-pupil school was overcrowded at most of the daily sessions.<sup>30</sup> Land-owners in the area attempted to force tenants to grow fruit and vegetable trees<sup>31</sup> as an obvious ploy to prevent the municipality from altering the land's ratable value to residential as opposed to agricultural scales.<sup>32</sup> Despite this, the area was in many respects of similar appearance to the adjoining shantytown sprawl of Cato Manor.

25. Durban Housing Survey, p 332-335 and Broome Commission; evidence of M Vilakazi, 23 April 1947.

26. Interview with Mr C D S Mbutho, 4 September 1986.

27. Durban Housing Survey, p 328.

28. For details on Lamont see Torr "Lamontville".

29. Durban Housing Survey, p 332-335.

30. Ibid, p 300-301.

31. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 29 April 1986.

32. Many residents of the freehold area of Clermont were also aware of the financial benefits of such gardening. See M W Swanson, "A history of Clermont", unpublished draft.

In July 1950 there was official single accommodation for 654 African women in the Thokoza Municipal Hostel in Grey Street. Women paid a monthly rent of 5 shillings for a bed or 5 pence a night for casual accommodation. If a woman had babies or female children sleeping with her, a further 1 penny a night was charged for those not yet able to walk. For children old enough to walk, the woman was charged an additional full tariff. All children slept on mats on the floor.<sup>33</sup> The hostel was totally overcrowded and unhealthy. Mrs Lavoipierre, of the Durban Bantu Child Welfare Society described the conditions in the following way:

I found about a hundred women, many with newly born and young children, sleeping on the cement floors on the open court yard and open verandahs. It was very cold and many of these women and children had very little or no covering and no mats to sleep on. The whole appearance ... gave me the impression of refugees fleeing from an invading army ... Many of the babies are sickly and I was told that no facilities exist for the preparation of hot beverages should an ailing child require it during the night ... Finally those women who sleep on boards in the dormitories testified unanimously to the verminous conditions.<sup>34</sup>

Facilities and conditions in the municipal and South African Railways and Harbour Services male hostels were possibly more unsatisfactory than conditions at Thokoza. Accommodation varied between single rooms with an iron bed, hanging space, sink and hot plate, to dormitories for 40 persons who would sleep on bed boards and provide their own bedding. The single rooms were reserved for indunas, clerks and teachers. The monthly rental for these rooms was 15 shillings. The rentals for the better dormitories varied between 5 and 10 shillings a month. Casual lodgers paid 3 pence a night to sleep on the corridor floors of the larger dormitories. The majority of the hostels had no cooking facilities and inmates either purchased cooked or fresh food from the African traders hiring out stands in the municipal trading sites situated in close proximity to hostels. Overcrowding was commonplace. Officially the Sontseu Road Mens' Hostel could accommodate 4456 persons, but there were often up to 13,000 people crowded into the hostel.<sup>35</sup> Facilities for visiting women and children were virtually non-existent.<sup>36</sup> The paltry recreational and sporting facilities which did exist were situated at the Sontseu Road, Dalton Road and Jacobs hostels.<sup>37</sup>

In 1948 it was estimated that of the total African population of Durban, 67,300 persons had no official accommodation. An estimated 30,000 persons lived in the ubiquitous kias and backyard hovels in an around the city while the remainder lived in the various shantytown sprawls.<sup>38</sup> The main areas of shantytown development were at the Bluff, Clairwood and Mhlatazana, Stella Hill, Mgeni and Sea Cow Lake and Cato Manor Farm. By

33. Durban Housing Survey, p 336.

34. Broome Commission; evidence of M B Lavoipierre, 18 November 1947.

35. Durban Housing Survey, p 324-328 and Broome Commission; evidence of O A Nkwanyana.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., memorandum of the Durban City Cour

38. MNAD; H/Gen, vol 1; Manager, MNAD "Policy" November 1948.



the late 1940's the densest, most popular area of shantytown settlement was in the Mkhumbane area of Cato Manor Farm.

Rents in the shantytowns were based on the size of the shack, the costs of construction, rents payable in municipal sub-economic housing schemes and the popularity of a particular shantytown area.<sup>39</sup> Rentals in Mkhumbane were thus possibly higher than those prevailing in other African shantytown areas in the city.<sup>40</sup> Rooms in the shantytown could be rented out for between 12 shillings and 6 pence and 25 shillings a month.<sup>41</sup> It was not unusual for rooms to be sub-divided or inhabited by more than one person. In 1951, the average African family was estimated at 2,7 persons, while the average density of the Cato Manor Farm shantytown dwellings was 8,8 persons per shack.<sup>42</sup>

The shantytown areas, and particularly those in Cato Manor Farm, were places where municipal,<sup>43</sup> South African Police and any other form of unwanted external authority could be either easily evaded or repulsed. The police limited their operations in Mkhumbane to occasional forays, the well-known "Melek" raids,<sup>44</sup> and motorcycle "enquiries" into what they saw as "the dreaded hole of all policemen".<sup>45</sup> The only policemen who had any knowledge of the shantytown's intricate road, path and shack layout and who were capable of conducting routine enquiries in the area were the policemen at the understaffed Cato Manor Police Station.<sup>46</sup>

The "Melek" raids were large-scale crime prevention incursions. The Cato Manor police, aided by reinforcements from other police units would cordon a particular area off and then comb the shacks for any evidence of "illegal activity".<sup>47</sup> During such raids, Africans would vacate their shacks and stand in the open in an attempt to confuse police attempts to ascertain the owners or residents of a particular shack. Ngcobo, a resident of Cato Manor remembers that "... when people saw the Meleko approaching they all flocked out of their houses .. It was the warning signal. When they shouted 'Meleko!' everyone knew they had to hide their liquor because a police raid was on".<sup>48</sup> Drew, then a policeman stationed at Cato Manor, recalls the same

39. See also Kelly, "Durban's industrialization".

40. Interview with Mr C Khumalo, 26 July 1985.

41. Durban Housing Survey, p 372 and 376-377.

42. Shum Papers; C N Shum, Cato Manor Survey.

43. MNAD; H2/CM, vol 2; Manager, MNAD - Town Clerk, 31 January 1952.

44. The South African Police 3 ton pick up vans were commonly referred to as "Meleko" after their similarity with milk delivery trucks. The name "Kwela" (jump) vans was also used. See Mphahlele, Second Avenue.

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

46. Ibid.

47. See Daily News photograph appendix to interview with Mr R F Drew, 16 January 1981.

48. KCAV; interview with Mr Z A Ngcobo, 13 September 1980.

tactics: "I mean I knew that when we went out that perhaps we would get knocked around, but I think that was part of the game ..."<sup>49</sup>

With regard to the provision of health facilities in African residential areas, it was openly admitted that municipal, provincial and Union Government health services had, to all intents and purposes, broken down. As City Medical Officer of Health commented,

An impartial analysis of the present state of health services must recognize the patent limiting factors of the existing administrative set up which are themselves explicable of a tardy recognition by legislative authorities of the revolutionary changes which have taken place in native life of late years and particularly during the last decade. Whereas formerly the Native was a sojourner in the city for a few months - a seasonal migrant, he now generally comes to stay, accompanied in ever increasing degree by his dependants. This transformation in Native life and custom has imposed a shattering strain on the elementary system of health service ...<sup>50</sup>

Notwithstanding the administrative difficulties of introducing more improved services, nor the difficulty of controlling the entry of disease into the city from the countryside,<sup>51</sup> the situation posed problems which required more than preventive or curative health schemes. Typhus, dysentery, typhoid, tuberculosis, bilharzia, clinical malnutrition, kwashiorkor and infant mortality could not be eradicated because of the very living conditions of Durban's African population.

The shantytown areas of Cato Manor Farm and Mayville yielded by far the greatest incidence of disease. While preventive schemes were in operation in the area, their effectiveness could only be limited. Indeed that measure of success which had been attained was due in large part, so the City Medical Officer of health believed, to "climatic conditions, hot sunshine, drenching rains and high winds in season, together with the steeply sloping and self draining ... sites has played an immeasurable part in the dissipation of epidemic potential".<sup>52</sup> However, by early 1951, the City Medical Officer of health stated that the problem was now completely out of control: "... now even nature herself, as a purifying agent, revolts in the filth and the faeces - at the chaos and the confusion."<sup>53</sup>

City Health officials noted that the problems of overcrowding, alcoholism, dietary deficiency and fatigue, and the incidence of tuberculosis in Cato Manor Farm and Mayville African communities was higher than in any comparable area in and around Johannesburg.<sup>54</sup> A similar situation was found to exist with respect to cases of both amoebic dysentery and venereal disease in Cato Manor. Referring to the venereal disease rate

---

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

50. Broome Commission; memorandum of the Durban City Council, Chapter 3.

51. *Ibid.*

52. MNAD; H2/CM, vol 2; Manager, MNAD - Town Clerk, 16 April 1951 quoting an earlier report of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

in Cato Manor, City Health officials, somewhat aghast, maintained that "we find it difficult to award the palm to either side - Cato Manor Farm or Johannesburg - all we can say is that we believe the Durban team is unbeatable."<sup>55</sup> Hospital facilities at King Edward VIII were swamped by Africans from Mayville and Cato Manor Farm. In 1950, of the 857 admitted cases of gastro-enteritis contracted by children under four years of age, 271 came from these two areas. Of the 1050 cases of malnutrition admitted to the hospital, 240 came from the Cato Manor shantytowns.<sup>56</sup> City Health officials believed that such figures "throw into relief the embarrassing relationship which exists between Cato Manor and the King Edward VIII Hospital".<sup>57</sup>

For Africans moving between such residential areas and their places of work and other locales within the city, the transport system had for long been inadequate.<sup>58</sup> By the late 1940's and early 1950's local employers<sup>59</sup> amongst others,<sup>60</sup> were calling for drastic changes to the local road transportation network as it affected African commuter traffic. In 1950 there were only 282 municipal, Indian or African-owned buses available for African passengers,<sup>61</sup> the two main main African bus ranks, Warwick Avenue Market and Dalton Road being overcrowded and disorganized.<sup>62</sup>

The transport crisis was in many ways brought to a head immediately after the 1949 Riots when all Indian-owned buses stopped entering African areas<sup>63</sup> so that the daily transport requirements of places like Cato Manor Farm overburdened the municipal resources. The municipality set up an emergency bus rank outside the Alice Street Bus Depot and made its fleet of Leyland double-decker buses, only acquired in 1948, available for Black commuter routes. Municipal transport staff worked 18-hour shifts in order to cope with the demand. However the problems grew worse, even with the double-decker buses, designed to carry a maximum of 64 passengers, often carrying up to 125 persons.<sup>64</sup>

While another thirteen buses were permanently added to the municipal African commuter fleet soon afterwards<sup>65</sup> neither this increase, nor the increase in African-owned buses during the early 1950's, would alleviate the position.<sup>66</sup>

---

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. See L. Torr, "A Ticket to Drive: the Struggle over African Bus Services in Durban, 1930-1961". Paper presented at the conference "The History of Natal and Zululand", University of Natal, Durban, July 1985.

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

60. Ilanga lase Natal, 7 January 1950.

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

62. Interview with Mr S Shabalala, 21 June 1985.

63. Interview with Mr J Hlope, 29 June 1985. Hlope who was then a bus driver for an Indian firm operating in Mkhumbane.

64. Municipality of Durban, Durban Transport Management Board, Annual Report, 1949-1950.

65. Mardon Papers; K Mardon, A History of the Durban Corporation "Green Mamba" Bus Service", unpublished, August 1985.

66. Torr, "Ticket to ride", p 13.



The municipality operated bus services to and from the city to Somtseu Road, Umbilo, Sydenham, Brighton Beach, Maydon Wharf, Mayville and Queen Mary Avenue; to and from the Market to the Point, Somtseu Road and Mayville, and to and from Dalton Road and Chesterville; and it tried to cater for the heavy morning and afternoon traffic. But the system was never able to cope.<sup>67</sup> The municipality operated 20 services from Chesterville through the middle of Mkhumbane down through Wiggins Road to Dalton Road between 4.30 and 9.00 in the morning.<sup>68</sup> At these peak times, and again in the evenings, commuters could wait up to 2 hours for transport.<sup>69</sup> While there were also 17 African buses running in the Mkhumbane area by 1951, it was often the case that only two would be operational on any one day.<sup>70</sup> Employers found that many of their employees spent between forty and eighty minutes walking to work while many of those choosing to catch buses could spend up to two hours commuting to work.<sup>71</sup>

By the early 1950s both the municipality and leading employers of African labour had recognized that the lack of residential and urban amenities for the city's African labour force had produced alarming consequences. The lack of suitable housing, the appalling health conditions so prevalent in residential areas, and the inadequate transport amenities lent support to those increasing number of calls for a restructuring of African employment and residence in the city.

#### African Workers, Capitalist Production and State Regulation

By the early 1950's the Union government, the City Council and representatives of major local employers had striven for basic consensus on broad policy guidelines on future African employment. These negotiations brought the various parties into a closer working relationship than had ever previously been the case<sup>72</sup> and resulted in numerous inter-related policies<sup>73</sup> which were seen as providing for a dramatically restructured urban African working class. These often acrimonious discussions on policy, the future of local industrial enterprise, and the function of both the local and central state, did result in an important measure of consensus being achieved by the mid-1950's. But the policy was full of inherent contradictions, incorporated both long and short-term goals, and was ultimately never to be fully implemented.

All parties clearly recognized that the basic success of these policies was crucially dependent upon the manner in which African labour in the local economy could be refashioned in a way which would assist

---

67. See Municipality of Durban; Tram and Bus Timetables, 1943-1954.

68. *Ibid.*, November 1949.

69. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 28 July 1951.

70. *Ibid.*

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

72. For similar analysis see Wilkinson, "Adequate Shelter" and Posel, "Doing Business".

73. *Ibid.*

economic growth. Interventions initiated by either the local or central state were to be constantly monitored to ensure that they either served to support or override market forces evident within the local economy.<sup>74</sup>

For local employers of African labour the starting-point of these discussions was, as the Natal Chamber of Industries commented in 1950, that "(the) evils of inefficient and so-called cheap Native labour must go ...".<sup>75</sup> Local employers were afraid that the Nationalist government might try to restrict both urban economic growth and supplies of African labour to the cities;<sup>76</sup> so they therefore eagerly supported Dr Eiselen's remarks on how an entirely different conception of the function of African labour in the cities should be viewed and noted that such ideas went against White "public opinion".<sup>77</sup>

In 1950 Eiselen, who as Secretary for Native Affairs and an influential figure in the government,<sup>78</sup> maintained that "our present economic life bears the stamp of very expensive cheap (African) labour" with "low standards of efficiency ... and a huge turnover of African labour", being detrimental to the industrial economy. To alter this situation, it was necessary for local employers to recognize "the diverse aptitudes" of African labour and, through "selective canalization of labour into appropriate channels of occupation" and rewarding "continuous service by progressive grading", begin to change the labour functions of urban Africans. Employers should stop seeing the African labourer as "a jack of all trades ... one African equals one African".<sup>79</sup>

Such a view was in many ways identical to those of local employers of African labour and local city councillors, despite many being United party supporters.<sup>80</sup> In his address to the Natal Chamber of Industry in 1947, the Mayor of Durban echoed earlier calls by local industrialists<sup>81</sup> that Africans be recognized as permanent urban workers who should be gradually employed in more semi-skilled capacities so as to create greater consumer demand for locally produced products.<sup>82</sup> In 1950 the Natal Chamber of Industry, somewhat optimistically, maintained that through job grading and aptitude testing it would be possible to employ increasing numbers of Africans in semi-skilled employment and reduce the total African population of the city

74. Hindson, *Pass Laws*, p 55.

75. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report, 1949-1950.

76. See for example *Daily News*, 13 June 1953 and *South African Industry and Trade*, vol 49, no 7 (July 1953) for general analysis of this point see A Torchia, "The Business of Business: An Analysis of the Political Behaviour of the South African Manufacturing Sector under the Nationalists", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol 14, no 3 (April 1988).

77. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report, 1949-1950.

78. Kenny, *Verwoerd*, p 7.

79. W M Eiselen, "Plan to Rationalize South Africa's Native Labour", Native Affairs Fact Paper no 13, (Pretoria, State Information Office, 1950), p 10.

80. Broome Commission; evidence of the Natal Employers Association and interview with Mr S Bourquin, 6 September 1980.

81. Natal Chamber of Industries, Annual Report, 1945-1946.

82. *Ibid.*, 1946-1947.

'in a few years'.<sup>83</sup> Peppercorn, then President of the Chamber believed that this could only be effected through the government intervening to 'remove obstacles' to the increasing use of Africans as semi-skilled labour.<sup>84</sup>

Such calls were to be repeatedly made by economists and employer groups throughout the country during the late 1940's and early 1950's.<sup>85</sup> In the period around 1950 many local industrialists viewed these ideas as a virtual panacea for all social and economic ills. It was generally believed that the idea of employing increasing numbers of African in semi-skilled capacities would alleviate many of the economic troubles which characterized local industry at the same time as ensuring a more stable and less militant African urban population. Through introducing measures to stabilize a large section of the urban African population it would be possible to reduce the costs of training and re-training,<sup>86</sup> to achieve increased labour productivity<sup>87</sup> and curtail the process of 'job hopping'. This had already been done by the South African Railways and Harbour Services. From 1947 onwards, the SAR&H, which was the largest single employer of 'togg' labour in Durban, had already introduced pay, pension and leave incentives to induce the workforce to become more stabilized.<sup>88</sup>

Such a policy, it was believed, would reduce the total African population of the city<sup>89</sup> and ensure the future growth of the economy.<sup>90</sup> With the permanently settled African workforce, long recognized as "our future customers",<sup>91</sup> being settled in new townships,<sup>92</sup> the resultant increase in consumer expenditure would 'justify heavy capital investment in industry'<sup>93</sup> and halt declining consumer demand and the shrinking local market zone. This idea was to be central to the thinking of many industrialists throughout the country. An editorial in the influential South African Industry and Trade asserted that the then current debate both inside and outside of Parliament over whether African labour was essential or not to the industrial economy was in many respects missing the main issue. The editorial commented that "this debate over non-European labour virtually ignores the even more vital contribution of non-European consumers to a stable, progressive economy".<sup>94</sup>

When it came to discussing the wages which should be paid to this semi-skilled African labour force opinion was fiercely divided. While many employers were at pains to reveal how wages would automatically rise

---

83. Ibid, 1949-1950.

84. South African Industry and Trade, vol 46, no 1 (January 1950).

85. N N Franklin, Economics in South Africa, (Cape Town, 1954) p 171.

86. Industrial Employers Association, (Natal Section), Annual Report 1952-1953.

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

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

89. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report, 1949-1950.

90. Broome Commission; evidence of the Natal Employers Association and Prof H Burrows.

91. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report, 1945-1946.

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

93. South African Industry and Trade, vol 46, no 3 (March 1950).

94. Ibid, vol 50, no 5 (May 1954) and Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report, 1946-1947.

if African labour became utilized in semi-skilled capacities, such broad perspectives embodied little substance when employers concerned themselves with the nature of their own production processes. At various times the Durban Chamber of Commerce stated that increased labour productivity would "obviously" lead to higher wages with commensurate improvements in social conditions and "more spending power".<sup>95</sup> On other occasions they maintained that it would be "a fatal mistake to improve Native wages any more (sic)".<sup>96</sup> There were five main reasons for such indecision.

Firstly, there was general concern over the "rising cost structure" of local production,<sup>97</sup> with increases in the total wage bill and capital's determination to avert a profitability crisis. This was compounded by the existing large variations in minimum wages for unskilled African labour. Many local employers, unable to afford wage increases and facing rising capital costs, were experiencing problems in securing sufficient African labour.

Secondly, during the late 1940's there had been some employers who maintained that there was a surplus of African labour in the city that could either be expelled from Durban or "rounded up" and made to work. Other employers maintained that they had never experienced any difficulty in getting adequate supplies of African labour on suitable terms.<sup>98</sup> However by the very early 1950's most employers were expressing concern over general shortages of African labour and fearing that market forces would push up the costs of even unskilled African labour.<sup>99</sup> Local employers were thus unanimous in rejecting Eiselen's belief that there existed a large under-utilized African labour force resident in Durban.<sup>100</sup> For employers the question was not so much around levels of unemployment *per se* but the need for and functionality of a reserve army of unemployed resident within the city area.

Thirdly, both the municipality and local employers were concerned that any rise in wages paid to African workers would result in such labour being more expensive than either 'Coloured' or Indian workers.<sup>101</sup> In such an event employers would either employ less African labour<sup>102</sup> or large-scale unemployment amongst the already fully urbanized 'Coloured' and Indian working classes would produce serious problems within the city.<sup>103</sup>

Fourthly, employers were fully aware of the power of organized White labour. White labour resisted the idea of employers opening up semi-skilled labour to Africans at either the rate for the job or at lower

---

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

96. Broome Commission; evidence of the Durban Chamber of Commerce.

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

98. Broome Commission; evidence of the Durban Chamber of Commerce.

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

100. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report, 1949-1950.

101. MNAD; Housing Policy, vol 2; Manager, MNAD, African housing, commerce and rentals, August 1952.

102. *South African Industry and Trade*, vol 49, no 9 (September 1953).

103. Broome Commission; evidence of Prof H Burrows.

wages.<sup>104</sup> Although often resenting the power of White labour, employers appeared reluctant to openly challenge the already highly politicized influence of White workers.<sup>105</sup>

Finally, employers rejected the idea that all African labour in the city could be fully employed at any one moment. Employers needed a reserve army of unskilled African labour permanently resident in the city. Employers also desired to ensure that part of the African labour force remained migrant. Therefore employers opposed wage increases by using a variant of the old argument<sup>106</sup> as to the relationship between higher wages and working class preference for increased leisure time activities or consequent ability to escape from the disciplines of continual wage labour.<sup>107</sup> Employers maintained that if migratory labour was paid higher salaries then Africans would remain in the reserves for longer periods of time or otherwise remain in the city but seek employment for diminishing periods of time. Higher wages for such workers would lead to idleness, vagrancy and the growth of shack settlements.

Throughout these discussions on how a segment of the urban African population could be suitably employed in semi-skilled work and the economic advantages and disadvantages which would be entailed by such a process, local employers were insistent in their view that there was both a shortage of unskilled African labour in the city and that employers would always require adequate supplies of African migrant labour.<sup>108</sup> While keen to encourage a certain section of African labour to remain permanently in the city, hold down a near permanent job and eventually fill semi-skilled posts, local employers never really saw the migrant labour system as completely at odds with the needs of economic growth. In 1951 the Federated Chamber of Industries maintained that,

Because it moves constantly from country to town and back, and from job to job within the town, migrant labour tends to be casual and to produce less and earn less than stable labour ... Movement from job to job also enlarges the difficulty of training. Even in tasks requiring little skill, the training period is one of low output, and the longer this period lasts, the greater is the total loss of production. Constant movement involves constant retraining and readjustment and hence a continuous state of sub-optimum efficiency.<sup>109</sup>

Local employers accepted that casual work and migrancy did imply a lower level of productivity, and they were continually concerned about levels of productivity. But radical changes in the labour process were seen as

---

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

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

106. See P Mathias, "Adam's burden: historical diagnoses of poverty" in P Mathias, The Transformation of England, (London 1979).

107. Broome Commission; evidence of Prof H Burrows. By not analysing the structure of capital and the various counterposing problems which besett local industrialists, Posel's rebuttal of Hindson's work is unconvincing. See Posel, "The contribution of apartheid" p 5.

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

109. South African Federated Chamber of Industries, The Native in Industry, (internal memorandum, 1951), quoted in Hindson, Pass Controls, p 57.



impossible. For certain types of work, employers would have to maintain a supply of either migrant labour or unskilled labour resident in the city which could be drawn on, according to the changing seasonal and other variations in the local economy. Various discussions were held with the Department of Native Affairs and the municipality, and it was decided not to limit African labour supplies to the city to only the natural increase in the city's existing African population. But all new entrants to the city would have to return to their place of origin after their period of urban labour.<sup>110</sup> Faced with the dual constraints of reducing the costs of local industrial production and the problems which would arise through attempting to achieve a significant measure of local economic growth by creating more semi-skilled jobs for permanently urbanized African workers, local employers saw in the new influx control, labour bureau and labour laws the means whereby certain market and social forces could either be enhanced or negated. But both the Durban municipality and local commercial and industrial interests were convinced that existing influx control mechanisms had simply "broken down".<sup>111</sup> Existing legislation was incapable of being applied and was in any case unsuited to the labour needs of the local economy.<sup>112</sup>

From the late 1940s, as local industrialists, the municipality and the government conducted negotiations over a new pass law system, the municipality attempted to introduce various measures to stem the flow of Africans into the city. During this time the Durban municipality was clearly in the vanguard of those local authorities which were in many ways experimenting with new methods of influx control regulation.<sup>113</sup> This was in total accordance with the wishes of the government. After the 1948 Parliamentary session the new Minister for Native Affairs, Dr E G Jansen, initiated an enquiry to ascertain whether the number of Africans resident in the major cities was above the labour needs of the local economies.<sup>114</sup> The Department of Native Affairs also convened a series of conferences to discuss how to effect "a tightening up of internal and influx control measures under the existing provisions of the law pending the introduction of new legislation."<sup>115</sup>

In 1948 and 1949 the Durban municipality endeavoured to restrict the number of Africans registering as tog labourers for the stevedoring trade by only registering those workers who had accommodation provided by employers.<sup>116</sup> In both November 1948<sup>117</sup> and July 1949<sup>118</sup> the municipality also started to enforce Proclamation 39 of 1940 which allowed for the expulsion from the city of any supposed surplus African

110. Durban Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1951-1952 and interview with Mr S Bourquin, 6 September 1980.

111. Broome Commission; evidence of the Durban City Council.

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

113. See Wilkinson, 'Adequate Shelter', p 97.

114. Union Government, Department of Native Affairs, Annual Report, 1948-1949.

115. *Ibid.*

116. Mayors Minutes, 1948-1949.

117. Industrial Employers Association, (Natal Section), Annual Report 1948-1949.

118. Mayors Minutes, 1948-1949.

population: those deemed to be idle, undesirable and workshy.<sup>119</sup> Between July and August 1949 some 4,000 African men were expelled from the urban area.<sup>120</sup> The enforcement of such legislation was opposed by the municipal Native Administration Department. The Manager, Havemann, noted that "while the City Council could screen redundant natives it had never been tried and adequately served its purpose".<sup>121</sup>

The enforcement of all these regulations, which were aimed essentially at trying to control the further growth of shantytowns,<sup>122</sup> was soon relaxed. Employers complained of dire labour shortages within a matter of a few weeks.<sup>123</sup> Employers also noted how wages in certain economic sectors had risen rapidly and appreciably as a result of labour shortages. This was particularly evident in casual and unskilled hard manual labour.<sup>124</sup> Employers became "alarmed" at the situation. Both the Natal Employers Association and representatives of the stevedoring industry met with the City Council to seek immediate relief.<sup>125</sup> These meetings and further discussions with the Native Administration Committee and the Manager of the municipal Native Administration Department proved "fruitless". It was only after the intervention of the Minister for Native Affairs in June 1950 that the restrictions were lifted.<sup>126</sup> Taking the side of local employers, it was the National Party which drew the Durban City Council into line.

In the interim, the City Council tried to deflect blame for the increasingly bitter relations between the City Council and employers<sup>127</sup> on to Havemann whom they accused of "following the letter and not the spirit of the law".<sup>128</sup> But it also promulgated a further law by which only Africans originating in the seven reserves which surrounded Durban would be allowed to enter the city to seek work. In terms of proclamation 250 of 1950, which had been formulated with the consent of the Department of Native Affairs,<sup>129</sup> only Africans from Lower Tukhela, Ndwedwe, Mapumulu, Mbumbulu, Pinetown, Mzinto and Inanda were to be permitted to register as work seekers in Durban.<sup>130</sup> Commenting on these moves, the Department of Native Affairs noted

---

119. For comparative analysis see S H Alatos, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, (London, 1977).

120. Hemson "Dockworkers", p 116. These figures derive from correspondence between the Native Commissioner, Durban and the Department of Native Affairs.

121. MNAD; H2/CM, vol 1; Manager, MNAD - Town clerk, 3 august 1949. City councillors refused to accept Havemann's assertion, implying that his department was incapable and even inefficient. Havemann merely rephrased his point, saying that "he knew of now cases where it had been tried and adequately served its purpose. See minutes of the Native Administration Committee, 3 August 1949.

122. Interview with Mr S Bourquin, 8 September 1980.

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

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

125. *Ibid.*

126. *Ibid.*

127. *Ibid.*, 1951-1952.

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

129. Interview with Mr S Bourquin, 8 September 1980.

130. Mayors Minutes, 1949-1950 and Horwood "Urban African Employment", p 24.

with appreciation that "the municipal Native Administration Department (of Durban) has introduced a very strict influx control and is taking every possible step to deal with natives of the vagrant type already in the area".<sup>131</sup> In 1949 1,876 Africans had been refused work-seekers' permits in Durban. In 1950, with the enforcement of the new provisions, 7,481 Africans were refused permits.<sup>132</sup>

With Durban deriving only 20% of its African labour supplies from these areas, local employers experienced almost immediate labour shortages.<sup>133</sup> They again faced the possibility of wage rises. It was noted that Africans were "quickly realizing" that "their labour was at a premium".<sup>134</sup> While the labour problems of the stevedoring industry had largely been alleviated, the labour problems in the ship building industry were "as bad as ever". Industrial and commercial concerns located outside the harbour area could hardly get any casual labour and many employers complained that they could not even obtain "a sufficiency of full time Native employees".<sup>135</sup>

The proclamation was not to be abolished and in fact became the key element, albeit in an amended form, in the new pass laws as they affected the Durban area.<sup>136</sup> Under this system, only introduced and implemented from around 1954 onwards, all African labour originating from outside of these seven reserve areas and coming to Durban for work, would be required to return to their "homelands" after their period of contract service had ended. This provision would not affect those Africans originating in areas outside of the seven reserves who were already resident in the city and qualified for permanent urban residential status.<sup>137</sup>

With regard to those workers already resident in the city and either permanently or intermittently employed, local employers, together with counterparts in other urban centres, vigorously and successfully opposed the government's initial desire to force such workers to be permanently employed in order to qualify for permanent urban status.<sup>138</sup> Most of Durban's African workforce originated far from the city and Durban's economy was still subject to significant fluctuations in levels of activity. It was thus imperative that the city have within close proximity a substantial reserve army of labour which could be utilized in periods of peak need. Thus the amended pass laws gave to "urbanized men, women and youths the legal right to resist taking jobs which they did not want, remaining unemployed if they chose to".<sup>139</sup>

The new pass laws were specifically designed to further enhance the process whereby Durban's African labour-force had already become differentiated between low paid hostel workers and those resident in

---

131. Union Government, Department of Native Affairs, 1949-1950.

132. Mayors Minutes, 1953-1954.

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

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

135. *Ibid.*

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

137. Interview with Mr S Bourquin, 6 September 1980.

138. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report, 1951-1952.

139. Posel, "The Construction of Apartheid", p 19.

formal townships who generally received more substantial, if still unsatisfactory remuneration. In the flurry of municipal shack and wage surveys, academic analyses of African labour migration patterns and employment trends, and studies by individual companies undertaken in the late 1940's and early 1950's, both the municipality and local employers were able to clearly discern this differentiation and to fashion legislative enactments which would further enhance and institutionalize differentiation within the African urban proletariat.<sup>140</sup>

Both local employers and the municipality accepted and advocated policies to assist in creating or enhancing the growth of a class of permanent African city workers. However, initially both favoured that population being removed from the city and resettled in formal accommodation located on the periphery of Durban. When faced with the issue of the political status of Africans in the city and the costs of providing African housing, neither body accepted the United Party's policy on African urbanization.<sup>141</sup> In 1947 the Natal Employers Association, giving evidence to the Broome Commission, favoured the idea that African workers be housed outside the municipality and then be given "some say in the Local Government of the area in which they live". Relations between these areas and the city should be controlled by a regional body with representatives from all local authorities and employers.<sup>142</sup> The Durban City Council agreed. While it desired to see the permanent African working population of the city stabilized, it stated that African residents of the city "will never form a productive part of the city". Land allocated for African residence was not profitable to a local authority whose "main source of revenue was through facilitating the capitalization of its land". Africans should be relocated to housing on the outskirts of the city.<sup>143</sup> Such views were to be frequently advocated by White ratepayer groups in Durban. For instance the Durban Branch of the National Council of Women believed that "eventually" permanently urbanized African families should be "allowed", but they should live in their own areas "away from the city" but in close proximity to their places of work.<sup>144</sup>

Both Jansen and then Verwoerd, who had become Minister for Native Affairs in 1950 were implacably opposed to such ideas. As a result Douglas Mitchell, then leader of the United Party in Natal, accused Verwoerd of attempting to make "political capital".<sup>145</sup> While Mitchell was clearly being disingenuous, councillor Percy Osborn, the Mayor of Durban was even more cynical, publically accusing Verwoerd of endangering the social health of Durban.<sup>146</sup> The Department of Native Affairs however saw these ideas as

---

140. Hindson, *Pass Controls*, *passim*.

141. See Davenport, *South Africa*, for further details on United Party urbanization policy.

142. Broome Commission; evidence of the Natal Employers Association. Although relatively undeveloped, these ideas appear to be very similar to the more recent state sponsored Regional Services Councils.

143. Broome Commission; evidence of the City Council.

144. *Ibid.*, evidence of the National Council of Women, (Natal Branch).

145. House of Assembly Debates, vol 76, 21 May - 21 June, 1951, column 8330. The incorrect belief that Verwoerd was essentially making political capital is upheld in Maasdorp and Humphreys, *From Shantytown to Township*, p 7 and 17.

146. *Daily News*, 18 June 1951.



attempts by both employers and the Durban City Council to abrogate their responsibility to provide the permanent urban African population with houses. By 1953 the Department of Native Affairs had after many heated discussions compelled both local employers and the City Council to drop such attempted distinctions between a stabilized African workforce and legal residence in the city. That there was organized resistance to certain ideas advocated by the government is apparent, but this does not imply that the battle lines were always and necessarily drawn between opposing White political organizations.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, it was the National Party which during the early 1950s compelled the United Party dominated Durban City Council to accept African residence in the city.

In the period between the enforcement of proclamation 250 of 1950 and the enactment and implementation of the new pass laws, which were to be totally accepted by local employers,<sup>148</sup> local employers and the municipality were engaged in continuous discussions over the mechanisms whereby periodic and seasonal labour shortages could be overcome. Such shortages occurred in the domestic labour market during the early 1950's, during peak holiday seasons and with upturns in economic activity. When shortages did occur restrictions were temporarily relaxed to maintain an "equilibrium" in the labour market.<sup>149</sup> In response to the labour shortages, local industrialists applied for and received government permission to be exempt from stipulations in Wage Determination legislation.<sup>150</sup>

From the optimistic days of 1950 through to the early 1950's employers, municipal officials and the Department of Native Affairs gradually became aware of the impossibility of rapidly and radically transforming the function of African labour in Durban. Local economic growth would not be achieved through raising the skill level and consumer power of the urban African population. While there was a large measure of differentiation within the African proletariat working in the city, most African workers, whether permanently employed or casual would still remain as unskilled labourers.

Both the government and the municipality had desired to introduce stringent but temporary measures to control new shantytown development. But all measures to control the growth of the city's African population were to be finely co-ordinated with employers' needs for labour. Initially at least the government was more receptive than the municipality to the labour problems of local industry and commerce.<sup>151</sup> It was soon accepted that because local employers were experiencing shortages of African labour and because of the seasonal and cyclical fluctuations in economic activity, a permanent reserve army of labour would have to be located in or close to the city. Influx control measures were thus to be used not to halt the movement of African labour to the city, but to achieve what the Natal Chamber of Industry and the Durban City Council called "orderly and controlled" urbanization.<sup>152</sup>

---

147. Greenberg, *Legitimizing the Illegitimate*, p 41.

148. Interview with Mr S B Bourquin, 6 September 1980.

149. Mayors Minutes, 1951-1952.

150. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report, 1950-1951.

151. MNAD; H2/CM, vol 3; Secretary for Native Affairs-Town Clerk, 5 December 1952.

152. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report 1948-1949.



With all parties agreed on the long-term need to assist with the development of an increasingly semi-skilled African urban workforce, employers of African labour would nevertheless continue to require significant supplies of unskilled, and even casually employed, workers. Based on the existing distinctions within the African proletariat, it was believed that through careful and constant monitoring of the new pass laws it would be possible to facilitate the creation of a permanent urban African working class which through economic growth, education and training would become increasingly semi-skilled and at the same time ensure the continued availability of sufficient supplies of unskilled labour through bolstering up the migrant labour system. The success or failure of this policy, decided on during the early 1950s, would only become apparent during the very late 1950s and 1960s.

Closely related to the new influx control and pass laws was the re-organization of the local labour bureau and the introduction of regional and national labour bureau. In the late 1940's the City Council was to continually impress upon the government the need for such a national system in order to make the local labour bureau more efficient<sup>153</sup> and to stop people drifting unnecessarily to the city to seek work.<sup>154</sup> While it was only in September 1953 that Durban's labour bureau was to become part of the new national system<sup>155</sup> established in terms of legislation enacted in 1952, from April 1950 onwards the municipal Native Administration Department had restructured its own local labour bureau and begun attempting to control the influx of Africans into the city.<sup>156</sup> Willson, then employed at the pass and labour bureau office<sup>157</sup> recalls the process:

In the old days you really did not know what was going on. Blokes would just get off the bus or the train and come and want to register. Now they could not do that. They had to get permission to come to the city and we would only register them if there was work. You still got the guys who went to the factory first and then came. Then you checked what the wages was - if it was right and he was OK then you could register him as well.<sup>158</sup>

The purpose of the labour bureau system was to ensure that African workers, who now had to register as work-seekers at a rural labour bureau, would only be allowed to move from particular reserve areas to certain prescribed urban areas, and then only if work was available in that prescribed area. On entering the city, the

---

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

154. Mayors Minutes, 1951-1952.

155. *Ibid.*, 1951-1952.

156. *Ibid.*, 1949-1950. Local urban authorities were empowered to establish such systems if they so wished in terms of Government Notice 1032 of 1949. In terms of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 and its various amendments including the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1945 any local urban authority was permitted to establish labour exchanges. During the early 1940's it appears as if these systems had been either ignored by local employers or collapsed.

157. Due to accommodation problems both the pass office and the labour bureau were, for a while, unsatisfactorily housed within the same office space. See Mayors Minutes, 1952-1953.

158. Interview with Mr R G Willson, 16 January 1981.

prospective African worker would have to register at a local labour bureau, which would then allocate particular employment to him according to local employer needs. On expiry of the service contract the employee would be obliged to return to the reserve area of origin before seeking either a renewal of the initial contract or other work in the city.<sup>159</sup>

The structure of the new national labour bureau system was "pyramidal".<sup>160</sup> Over the local urban labour bureau and rural district offices were regional bureau and then a central labour bureau. This central body was to monitor and control the demographic movement of African labour in the country and between various economic sectors.<sup>161</sup> The key instrument in ensuring the success of the new system was the issuing of new reference books to Africans. Under the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents) Act of 1952, African women were potentially liable to carry such new pass books.<sup>162</sup> However through the protests of African political organizations, and in the Durban area, the appeals by both the municipality and local employers<sup>163</sup> as a result of the massive popular militancy against such moves,<sup>164</sup> African women were not required to register for new passes until much later in the 1950's. For African men however, the issuing of these documents was to be central to the success of the new labour bureau and pass control system. Tom Roche, then a municipal official in the labour bureau comments: "You could tell at a glance where the guy came from, where he was working, if it was only domestic labour, if he could stay in the city for ever and what he was being paid. It helped the cops no end".<sup>165</sup> In Durban, the Durban Chamber of Commerce, the Natal Chamber of Industry, the Natal Employers Association and the Master Builders Association supported the idea of the labour bureau system in broad principle.<sup>166</sup>

However under a system worked out by the Natal Chamber of Industry and accepted by the municipality,<sup>167</sup> the precise "laws of procedure" whereby the new system was to be interpreted and controlled were adapted to local demands.<sup>168</sup> Employers demanded and received the right to employ African labour "at the gate" and then refer employees to the labour bureau for ratification "even if they came from Timbuku"<sup>169</sup>:

- 
159. For the workings of the labour bureau system see interview with Mr R G Willson, 18 January 1981 and Hindson, *Pass Controls*, p 63.
160. *Ibid.*
161. *Ibid.*
162. *Ibid.*, p 64.
163. Mayors Minutes, 1952-1953.
164. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 12 August 1951.
165. Interview with Mr T Roche, 22 April 1982.
166. Union Government, Department of Native Affairs, Report 1954. See also Durban Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1951 - 1952 and Industrial Employers Association, (Natal Section), Annual Report 1952-1953 and 1954-1955.
167. Natal Chamber of Industry, Annual Report, 1949 - 1950.
168. *Ibid.*
169. Interview with Mr R G Willson, 16 January 1981.

those areas which did not fall within those seven non-prescribed reserve areas in close proximity to the city. Furthermore, when the labourer returned to the rural areas after the expiry of his contract, "the worker would be given a letter by the employer saying that he must come back to work on such and such a date".<sup>170</sup> The ability of the migrant to job hop was thus severely constrained as was his freedom to become active in any militant groupings on the factory floor: "in this way individual workers could be victimized without the danger of fellow workers striking in solidarity".<sup>171</sup> This policy was supported by A J Turton, then Chief Native Commissioner in Natal, who publicly announced that if an African man had been away from his rural area for 12 months and was to return to his "last employer in the same class of work" then the regional labour bureau would permit him to return to the city.<sup>172</sup>

By 1954, when the Department of Native Affairs began to issue the new reference books to African men in the Durban area,<sup>173</sup> the labour bureau was functioning "very well".<sup>174</sup> By the end of 1954, 38,000 reference books had already been issued to African workers in Durban.<sup>175</sup> In spite of employers and the municipality using the system flexibly, employers began to perceive that with the expansion of the labour bureau system, African labour was less able to become choosy about employment.<sup>176</sup> As early as 1952 employers noticed that "in recent months" Africans were becoming scared of being thrown out of the city and "are willing to accept any suitable employment".<sup>177</sup>

## Conclusion

During the period from the end of the Second World War through to the early 1950s, the local economy experienced a serious short-term profitability crisis. Faced by rising costs and declines in production and consumption of locally produced goods, employers began to believe that it was possible to rejuvenate the local economy through rapidly restructuring the role and function of African workers in the city.

Most of Durban's African labour originated in areas far away from the city. Over half of the city's African proletariat was either permanently resident in Durban or continually migrating between reserve areas and the city and fully reliant on urban wages. Within this still largely unskilled and often casually employed labour force an unregulated, but by the early 1950's clearly apparent, process of differentiation in terms of wage

---

170. Interview with Mr T Roche, 22 April 1982.

171. See Editorial Comment, "Free Wage Labour and the Labour Bureau System", *South African Labour Bulletin*, vol 3, no 9 (1977).

172. Industrial Employers Association, (Natal Section), Annual Report, 1956-1957. My emphasis.

173. Mayors Minutes, 1954-1955.

174. Interview with Mr R G Willson, 16 January 1981.

175. Mayors Minutes, 1954-1955.

176. Interview with Mr T Roche, 22 April 1982.

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

remuneration had developed between those living in hostels and those who lived in the formal family residential areas.

Concern over the condition of the local economy occurred at the same time as did an increasing awareness that the very conditions of city life among the African population were totally unsatisfactory. With the shortage of formal hostel and township accommodation, much of which anyway was either overcrowded or in a bad state of disrepair, the chronic deficiencies in transport and health facilities, and growing shantytowns, many employers and municipal and state officials saw the need to re-fashion the very basis of African life in the city. By the middle 1950's the optimism which had characterised earlier ideas on how the economic crisis and the inadequacies of African life in the city could be rapidly and dramatically alleviated had largely disappeared. Employers soon gave up the idea of quickly boosting economic growth through employing Africans as semi-skilled labour. Employers became more keen on curtailing any rise in African wages.

By the middle 1950's, after some often acrimonious negotiation, the basic policy guidelines for African access to city employment and conditions of employment had been laid down and accepted by employers, the municipality and the government. With the new pass laws and labour bureau system, the focus of attention turned more towards regulating the townward movement of Africans and on further enhancing the already existing divisions within the urban African proletariat in a manner which would secure both a permanently urbanized African working class with a legal right to city residence and a requisite supply of migratory labour. However, while the labour bureau and new pass law system served to assist local employers in maintaining an appropriate supply of labour, this merely served to exacerbate the already critical problem of the residential conditions of Durban's African population.

The government, the municipality and local employers became involved in ever more bitter negotiations over how to finance the housing and residential facilities for both migrant labourers and permanently urbanized workers and their families. Central to these discussions was the problem of the Cato Manor Farm shantytowns. As a result of the central location of Cato Manor Farm within the city, the massive African population in the area and the nature of life within these shantytowns, all attempts to find alternative land and provide housing for the residents of Mkhumbane raised the more general problems of African housing and its relationship to African waged labour service and economic growth.