

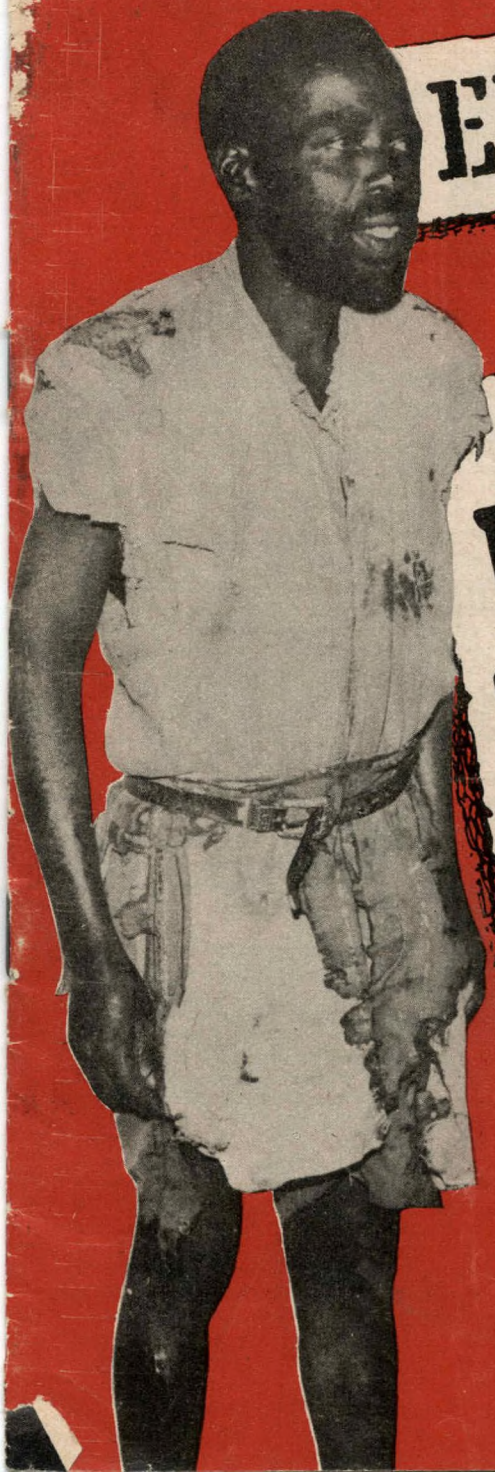
**EXPOSURE!**

The  
**FARM  
LABOUR  
SCANDAL**

*by Ruth First*

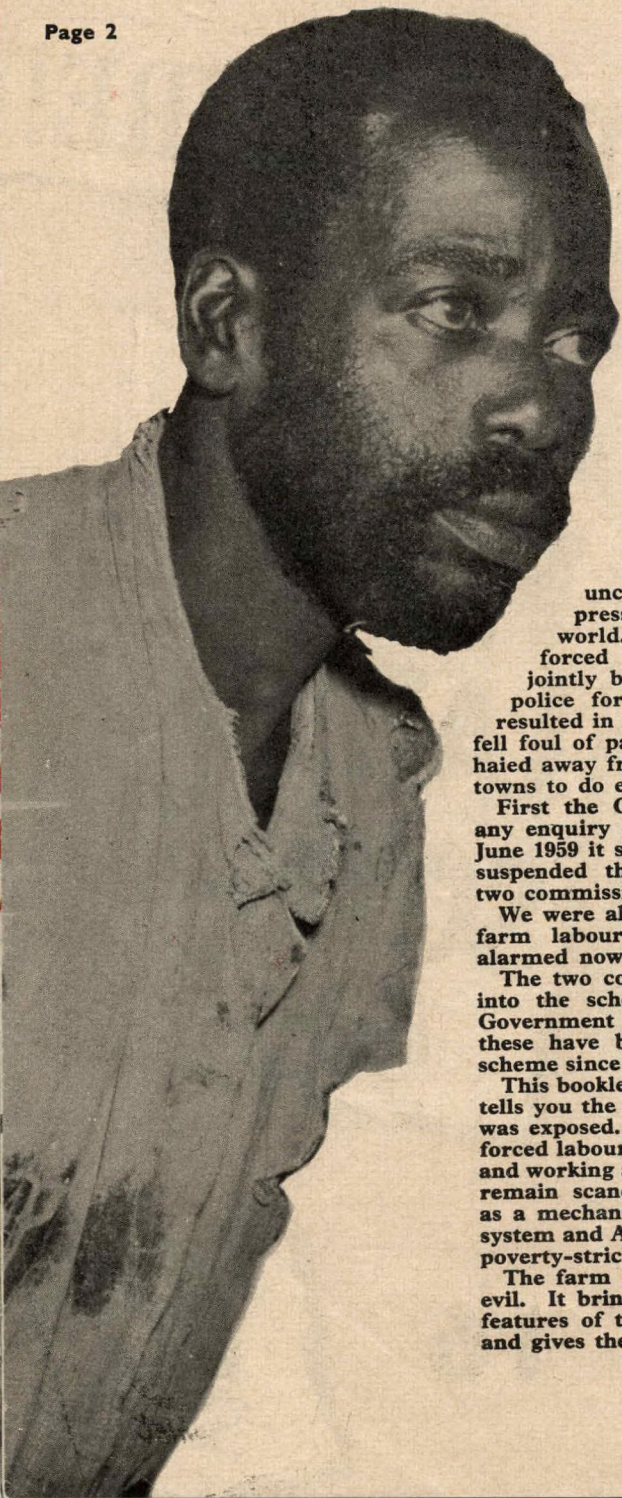
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A New Age  
**NA**  
Pamphlet





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The farm labour scandal recently uncovered in Court cases and the press shocked South Africa and the world. Here was exposed a system of forced labour on the farms operated jointly by Government departments, the police force and private farmers, which resulted in many thousands of Africans who fell foul of pass law restrictions being shanghaied away from their families and out of the towns to do enforced labour on farms.

First the Government strenuously resisted any enquiry into the scandal. Then in mid-June 1959 it suddenly capitulated, temporarily suspended the scheme and announced that two commissions would investigate it.

We were alarmed before at the evils of the farm labour scheme. We are still more alarmed now.

The two commissions appointed to enquire into the scheme are representative only of Government and big farming interests, and these have been the evil genius behind the scheme since 1947 and partners in operating it.

This booklet produces the facts to prove this: tells you the history of the scheme and how it was exposed. And it warns that there will be forced labour in South Africa as long as wages and working and living conditions on the farms remain scandalous, the pass laws are used as a mechanism for the forced, cheap labour system and Africans in the countryside remain poverty-stricken and hungry for land.

The farm labour scandal is not an isolated evil. It brings to the fore some of the worst features of the apartheid, cheap labour state and gives them a more hideous form.



# A Jumble Sale of People

We were driving away from the Nigel Farm Labour Bureau. In the car were two Africans, one newly released from a farm in the Eastern Transvaal, his clothes in tatters, his eyes staring, his hands calloused, the bones around his neck protruding gauntly from under his skin. His friend heard his story of conditions on the farm, eyed him sadly and then said with a shake of the head:

"Ai, it's a jumble sale of people."

**"HE HAS BEEN SOLD TO A FARMER"** is the phrase the African people use. Husbands, sons, fathers, neighbours set off in the morning and do not return at night. Wives and relatives make the rounds of the police stations, the jails, the hospitals, the mortuary.

Some lose all trace of their menfolk for months, even longer.

Others know to go to the offices of the Labour Bureau in Market Street, at Wynberg, or in Kliptown where, if they are lucky, they will find a clerk who will tell them the man they are searching for "has gone to a farm".

These men are arrested by the police for being out after curfew hour, for forgetting their pass books in a jacket back home, for failing to report to a labour bureau within 72 hours if they lose their jobs, for being in arrears with their taxes, for being in the city without a permit.

**After their arrest the men are not brought to court; they do not appear before any magistrate; they are given no chance to defend themselves, to explain, to plead "not guilty", to pay a fine. And the maximum fine for these offences is a pound or two.**





### The "Offer"

Instead they are "offered" work on a farm. Paul Anthony, a Coloured man sent to a Leslie farm, described in a court statement the so-called "offer":

"Shortly after 2 o'clock on the same day, I, together with many others, was brought before a European official whose office is near the Wynberg Police Station. The official separated us into two groups and said that the one group was to go to prison and the other to the farms. I was placed in the group that was to go to the farms, apparently on the ground that I was not in possession of a pass. I protested and told this official that I was a Coloured and that I did not carry a pass. He told me to shut up and he said that as I had shown that I was not capable of keeping quiet, I was to be given greater punishment than the others and that I was to be sent to the farms for 12 months instead of six.

The official then commenced writing on a certain paper and said to me, looking at me angrily, "You get 12 months".

A Native Policeman caught me by the arm and placed my thumbprint on that piece of paper.

We were returned to the cells and kept in custody until the next day, when I and 23 others were called and instructed to get on to a lorry. We got on to the lorry and it then proceeded in an easterly direction."

### The 15 Year Old

There was the case of a 15 year old African, Moses, returned on demand from a farm where he had been digging potatoes.

He had still been at school, but was told that he was 15 and so should leave and apply for a pass.

He was given a temporary document which he lost and as a result found himself arrested and taken to Court. According to Moses he was classified as a juvenile and sent to "S" Court, Johannesburg Magistrates Court where he waited all day without appearing and was then given four cuts and sent home.

He walked to Alexandra.

After a few days, during which he recovered from his cuts, Moses reported to the peri-urban authorities to try his luck again for a "pass". (He was too young for a reference book, apparently).

The peri-urban official sent him home to get his sister to vouch that he was born in Alexandra, but before he could get his sister to the pass office he was visited in his home by a Non-European policeman. For the second time within a week Moses found himself in handcuffs and on his way to a police cell.

At the police station a European police sergeant told him he was too young for farm labour and would have to go to "S" Court again. A little later a Non-European policeman told him that the White sergeant was talking nonsense and that he had been "sold" to a farmer.

He never appeared in Court and protested that he did not want to go to the farm. He was placed in an open-air "cage" and eventually his name was called out.

"I told the White official (not a policeman this time) that I did not want to go to the farm. I cried. But he said I must go. He did not tell me to which farm or which district or how much I would be paid.

Later that day I was taken away with seven others under the guard of bossboys".

### Steady Stream of Cases

These were among the steady stream of cases that came before Transvaal Supreme Courts during 1959 alleging that men arrested for petty breaches of the law were being forced into farm labour — that even men in steady jobs were being shanghaied on to farms; that Native Affairs Department officials, with the forces of the law behind them, were putting pressure on frightened men to place their thumbprints on farm contracts and — more than all this — that the conditions on many of these farms are akin to slavery.

Gruesome, blood-chilling stories have been written into court affidavits in one case after another, alleging forced labour and brutal beatings; deaths after assaults; daily beatings in the fields; locked compounds and armed guards; foul compounds infested with lice and rats.



### Tales of Misery

In the case of James Mkabela, George Dube described conditions on one farm: "After I had been at the Pass Office for approximately one week, I was taken to Nigel in a locked prison van . . . we were told that we would be sold to a farmer who was waiting outside. **The farmer chose the six biggest and strongest. . .** Later that afternoon we arrived on the farm. Immediately after our arrival, we were ordered to go to work, and we were taken to the fields, and began to work. That evening, all the workers in the fields were taken to a brick building with only one entrance, consisting of a door constructed from iron bars, and all the windows were barred with iron.

That first evening all my clothes except my trousers were taken by one of the boss-boys, who gave me a sack and told me to wear it.

I soon found that the living conditions were of the most primitive kind and worse than anything I had ever heard of. **We were only allowed water to drink on our return from the fields in the evening, and before we started work in the morning.** Only occasionally were we allowed any water during the day. During the whole time that I was on the farm I was not able to wash or shower, and I never saw any other worker wash or bath himself. Every evening there was a wild scramble for the drum of water, and on some occasions the water in the drum was finished before some of the workers could get any. We were allowed only about 15 minutes to get water.

The building in which we slept was in a filthy condition. There were two half drums provided as a lavatory, and these two half drums remained inside the building where we slept. This was the only sanitary arrangement for approximately 60 workers employed on this farm. During the whole period that I was there, the dilapidated blankets and sacks given to us were never washed or aired. There were bloodstains and they were infested with insects and smelled. **The walls crawled with bugs and other insects and they were never cleaned whilst I was there.** The floors were never cleaned during the week, but on Sundays when we did not work, we used to sweep the floors, and take the scraps of food and other filth and place it in a bag which remained with us until we were able to dispose of it.

### Under Guard

**During the day, whilst we worked in the fields, we were continuously guarded by bossboys who carried knobkerries.** They were nine in number to guard 60 workers. The bossboys continuously assaulted the workers, more especially when they wanted the workers to do their work more hurriedly. On some occasions



Huddled in the rain under sacks these workers wait to go into the fields.



there appeared to be no reason whatsoever for the assaults other than to initiate newly arrived workers into a general pattern. Often the bossboys would assault the newly arrived workers to persuade them to hand over to them articles of clothing and other valuables. These assaults were committed by them, either with knobkerries or with hoes which they took from the workers. The hoes were usually used to injure the newly arrived worker's feet, in order to make it more difficult for him to escape.

Like the other workers, I received wounds on the head and elsewhere on my body, and I still bear the scars of these wounds."

**(These allegations have been denied by the farmer, and as we go to press we learn that the case will be before the Courts in August when the matter of costs will be argued.)**

### A Herbalist

The petition to court for the release of the herbalist Fernando Modwelo stated: "It is a matter of almost common knowledge that conditions on many of the farms on which forced labour takes place are almost akin to slavery; that the labourers are guarded by day in many cases and locked up by night; that the food is inadequate and the labourers are not properly housed. There is moreover no proper supervision of the conditions with the result that the workers are very often forced to work until almost exhausted and are often deliberately underfed in order that they will spend the meagre few shillings that they earn on food at the stores maintained at the said farms. In order to keep body and soul together. In some cases the workers are forced to live in the most filthy and degrading conditions and have no means or hope of communicating with the outside world and are completely lost to their family and friends for the period of their confinement.

Although the period of the contract is generally said to be for six months, in actual fact the workers are only paid for every 30 days worked and the farmers do not allow them to leave until 180 days have been worked.

### No Force of Law

Successful court applications for the release of a string of men showed this farm labour scheme to be not only a scheme for forced labour, but one with no force of law.

**Police, Bantu Affairs Department officials and farmers denied knowledge and responsibility for it, accused and counter-accused one another, trying to shrug off any part in the operation of its irregularities.**

The legal representative of the Wynberg Native Commissioner told the Court during one hearing:

*"The scheme is to avoid cluttering the jails with petty offenders. The scheme is for the good of the Natives. It is made plain to the men that this is a voluntary scheme. They are only offered work."*

Farmers brought to court for holding African labourers on their farms have protested: "I was sent the labour. I took it in the belief that it was properly contracted."

The police say:

*"We handed the men over to the Native Commissioner. If there was any irregularity in the contract, the Native Commissioner's office is to blame."*

Counsel appearing for the Native Commissioner said during one Pretoria court hearing:

*"If there is an illegality it is not by us, but by the police."*

The Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, Mr. F. E. Mentz, crowned them all when, under pressure from the press and in Parliament, he said:

*"Not a single Native is working as a farm labourer in lieu of prosecution for minor offences."*

Has South Africa ever known a Cabinet Minister so ignorant of his own Department and its workings?

There have been several dozen statements before court charging just this illegality of the scheme, and the N.A.D. did not try to defend these cases but paid the legal costs of them.



**And**

As this booklet shows, the farm labour scheme was devised by officials of this Deputy Minister's own department; is referred to repeatedly in the reports of the Department of Native Affairs from 1947 onwards: and was operated by the officials of the Department.

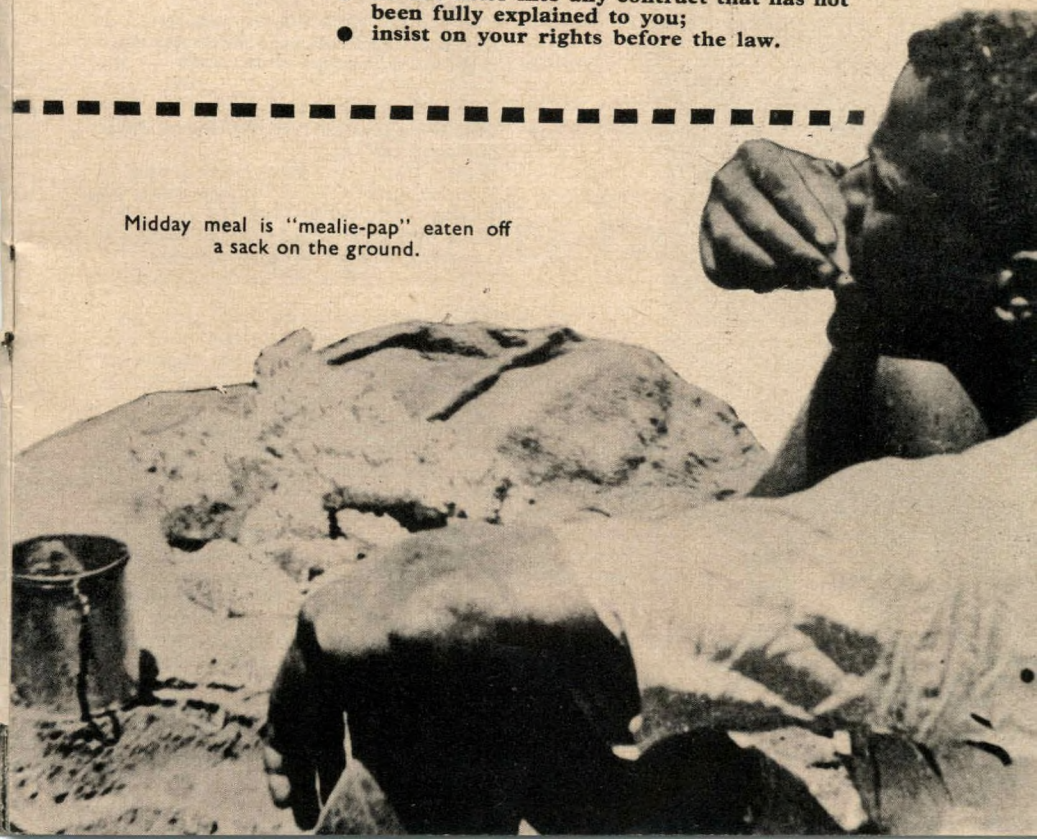
### The Big Bluff

To show how ignorant and misinformed the Deputy-Minister is, 11 days after the Minister's bare-faced denial, his superior, the Minister of Bantu Administration, Mr. De Wet Nel, said the farm labour system would be suspended temporarily, because it was "technically wrong" to place Africans arrested by the police in cells before they were taken to officials to be placed in employment.

**If YOU are arrested for a pass offence:**

- insist on being taken before a Magistrate for a proper trial;
- do not sign any document you do not understand;
- do not put your thumbprint to any document you do not understand;
- do not enter into any contract that has not been fully explained to you;
- insist on your rights before the law.

Middy meal is "mealie-pap" eaten off a sack on the ground.





# ARRESTED! one street cleaner, broom in his hand!



SACKS — The farm "uniform".

The story goes back two years to July 1957 when Nelson Langa, a street cleaner in the employ of the Johannesburg City Council, disappeared one afternoon. His clothes were in the municipal compound at Springfield. His brother began a search for him and eventually was told by the District Labour Bureau that he was working on a farm in Bethal. Yes, said the farmer, when approached by the attorney for the Langa brothers, Nelson Langa was on his farm. He was one of a batch of labourers he had obtained from the Native Affairs Department on the day of the month when he was allocated his labour.

## The Judge and Langa

An application was made to court for the production of Nelson Langa, and on the duly appointed day he was brought to court by the farmer and questioned by the Judge.

Mr. Justice Rumpff: You have just come from a farm in the Bethal district? — Yes.

Can you tell me when did you arrive on this farm? — This is the third week since I got to this farm — this week — the present week.

How did you arrive at this farm, how were you brought there? — By one of these big troop carriers.

Before that you have been living in Johannesburg? — I was working in Johannesburg before that.

What were you doing? — I was sweeping. Sweeping where? — In the streets.

Were you working for the Municipality? — Yes.

What happened to you? — At about 3 o'clock when I was about to knock off work some members of the police that were dressed in private clothes came to me. They said to me "Pass".

Where were you when they came to you? — I was in the street on my way to the compound where I live after I knock off work.

They asked for your pass? — Yes, I said to them 'I have not the pass on me. We don't carry the passes when we work. They said 'We are arresting you.' I said 'Here is my badge with the number of my work and here is the broom that I use in my work'. They said 'We have nothing to do with that. Get on the lorry. I got on to the lorry. . . .

What happened to you? — The lorry continued with the lot of us that were in



the lorry through the streets arresting people in the same way I was arrested and put on to the lorry and that night we slept in Regents Park. Next morning we were taken to Johannesburg. I had left my broom which I had used at Regents Park. We were taken to the Old Pass Office in Johannesburg. There each one was called out by name and after the names were called out we were told that we were going to be given some work. I then spoke and said 'I don't want to be given work because I am working.' They said 'We have nothing to do with that. You are going to be given work.'

Who said that? — There was a clerk who took down our names, he said so. Our names were taken down, we were told we were going to be given work and on Thursday we were put on to some vehicle and taken to Bethal.

The Judge: Tell Nelson that he is released. He can go home.

It transpired later that Langa showed the policeman who arrested him the notebook he had which contained the 'phone number of his employer, and begged him to telephone his employer. The policeman told him to "voetsak."

When brought to Court Langa was still wearing his belt with the Johannesburg Municipality badge on it numbered CED 10729, stamped "City of Johannesburg" with the crest.

The Regents Park Police Station roll showed that Langa had been arrested under the Urban Areas Act for failure to produce a pass. The maximum fine is £1.

### A "Volunteer"

The Native Commissioner insisted that Langa had been a volunteer. The registration card filled in for Langa at the Labour Bureau showed under the item 'Present Address: Municipal Compound, Springfield, and the judgment of the court said:

"I am satisfied that some official must have known he was employed by the Municipality and what satisfied me was the production at a very late stage of the card filled in showing his address as 'Municipal Compound, Springfield' and under the heading 'former work' appears 'Municipal Labourer.' Langa should never have been sent away. . . ."

It was during this court action that the official circular for the Scheme for the Employment of Petty Offenders in Non-Prescribed Areas came to light.

# The Blue-print for Forced Labour!

The official directive titled "SCHEME FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF PETTY OFFENDERS IN NON-PRESCRIBED AREAS" was issued on June 14th, 1954, by the Department of Native Affairs, together with the Secretary of Justice and the Commissioner of Police. It was General Circular No. 23 and was sent to all Native Commissioners and Magistrates.

Its language was clear and unmistakable:

**"It is common knowledge that large numbers of Natives are daily being arrested and prosecuted for contraventions of a purely technical nature. These arrests cost the State large sums of money and serve no useful purpose. The Department of Justice, the South African Police and this Department (Native Affairs) have therefore held consultation on the problem and have evolved a scheme, the object of which is to induce unemployed Natives now roaming the streets in the various urban areas to accept employment outside such urban areas."**

The circular lays down:

**"When contravention of two of the sections of the Natives Taxation Act, 1925, two sections of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, 1945, and certain regulations under this Act, and of the Labour Bureau Regulations are alleged — Natives arrested between 2 p.m. on Sunday and 2 p.m. on Friday are not charged immediately after arrest, but merely detained by the police.**



Natives so detained are removed under escort to the district labour bureau and handed over to the Employment Officer. The Natives must be offered such employment as is available in non-prescribed (rural) areas. Priority should be given to farm labour . . . ”

“Natives who, on account of their declining to accept employment, are not released, are returned to the police for prosecution . . . ”

The circular includes a paragraph instructing the Employment Officer in the case of any who refuse to accept employment, to add any suggestions or information that might help the police in formulating the charge against the man.

This farm labour scheme has no force of law. It is neither statute nor common law. It is a circular that has not even been gazetted by any Government Department.

### Breach of Duty

It is a breach of the policeman's duty not to bring a man to court within 48 hours of arrest. It is illegal to arrest a man for an alleged breaking of the law and then to tell him he must either go to jail or to a farm. A man who puts his thumbprint to a contract to serve on a farm with the threat of a jail sentence hanging over his head is not signing a valid contract. He is no “volunteer”!

The contracts are not read or properly explained to the men. Touching a pencil in the hand of an official, placing a thumbprint on the contract sheet are regarded as signing on.

The men are told that they are signing contracts for six months, but in practice are bound to the farmer for 180 working days — seven or even eight months, depending on the number of working days or sickness of the labourer.

Africans signed on under this scheme are locked up from the moment of their arrest. They are given no chance to contact their families or employers, to fetch their clothes, to put their affairs in order.

“Pass!” demands the policeman.  
Is the next step forced labour on  
the farms?





## Abuses

The scheme is wide open to abuse. Men trapped in the net of the pass laws are made to believe they have no option but to sign themselves away to farms for six months. Others are led to believe that if they serve a period on a farm they will have their passes "fixed up" at the end of the contract period and be allowed to remain in the city after that.

After he is signed on the "volunteer" remains in custody. In many cases wives or relatives who come to pay fines for them are told they are too late.

The labourer is now the property of the farmer and in a matter of hours, the next morning or in a day or two the truck of the farmer is at the door of the pass office or labour bureau ready to load the batch of labourers.

**The police, the pass offices, the farm labour bureaux and the farmers have become partners in a vast labour recruiting business.**

Every day hundreds of Africans are arrested for pass offences. In 1957 alone, one-and-a-quarter-million Africans came before the courts for these petty crimes. The number of arrests gets higher every year and as they mount so, too, do the numbers of men sent to the farms under this farm labour scheme. Every male African in the cities can expect to be run in by the police at least once a year and it is from among the ranks of these men who have fallen foul of the scores of pass law and control regulations that the farmers get their labour.

**Farmers have come to have a vested interest in the pass laws. The more arrests for petty offences, the more labour for them.**

The farmers do not have to pay a penny recruiting fee for this labour. This is one of the reasons farmers prefer to get labour from the authorities: they have to pay a fee for every worker contracted through a private recruiting organisation, but from the farm labour bureaux they get labour merely for the asking. A recommendation from the local magistrate that he be placed on the list at the offices of the farm labour bureaux, a weekly or monthly telephone call from the official to the farmer to fetch his labour, and the farmer is assured of a regular stock of workers. It has been estimated that half the farmers in the maize triangle in the Eastern Transvaal, employ a labour force of from five to thirty Africans arrested for technical offences.

# Farmers as Jailers!

From the time the farmer calls at the pass office or farm labour bureau to fetch his batch of workers, he takes the place of the policeman and becomes the jailer.

It is because these workers are not volunteers but unwilling and unhappy conscripts of the pass laws that farmers have to devise ways of keeping their workers prisoner.

It has become the practice for many farmers, their foremen or "indunas" to collect and keep the reference books of labourers to prevent their escape, **though this is illegal.** (A reference book is by law to remain in the possession of the holder.)

## The Sack Uniform

On some farms the moment the labourer arrives, he is ordered to strip and hand over his clothing and possessions, and he is handed out the farm "uniform": a rough sack with holes scooped out for head and arms.

But these are only first steps to anchor the worker to the farm.

The farms in the Eastern Transvaal which draw so heavily for their labour on the N.A.D. and police farm labour scheme are notorious for the methods used over the years to prevent labour from running away.

**These are the farms of the locked compounds and the armed guards, of brutalised "indunas" or boss-boys who use terror methods to break the spirit — and too often the limbs too — of the contracted workers.**

## Black Record

These are not blind charges levelled to blacken the name of farmers in this part of the country, and these abuses and cruelties do not date from this month or last, this year or 1958 only.



Court records show that the assaults on labourers and the system of locking them up to keep them on the farms has been going on since the 1920's.

Every few years there has been an exposure of the shocking conditions of this farm compound system, there has been a public outcry, and then the evils have been hushed up or forgotten — till the next public exposure.

### The Nafte Case

Wide publicity was given to the ill-treatment of Africans in the Bethal area when the case of Rex v. Nafte was heard by the Circuit Court at Bethal in 1929. In this case a farmer was sentenced to a term of imprisonment for the murder of a labourer in his employ.

In 1944 the Diocesan Synod of the Anglican Church sent a lengthy memorandum to the Native Affairs Department:

"The contract labourers are shared out among the farmers in lots of 10 or 20 according to the size of the farms. They are housed in any farm building available and the area is fenced and policed by indunas. There they remain and except when they go to work are never let out unaccompanied by indunas. Contract labourers move only at the will of the employer, weekdays and Sundays alike. They cannot get to the Magistrate unless they escape."

In the same year Mr. Justice Maritz tried a case (Rex versus Isaac Sotetshi) in which a labourer Franz Marie had been flogged to death for trying to escape. The compound system was something quite new to him in South Africa's agricultural economy, said the Judge. It was not so much the accused induna who was to blame for the killing, he commented, but the system which subjected him and those in his charge to such conditions.

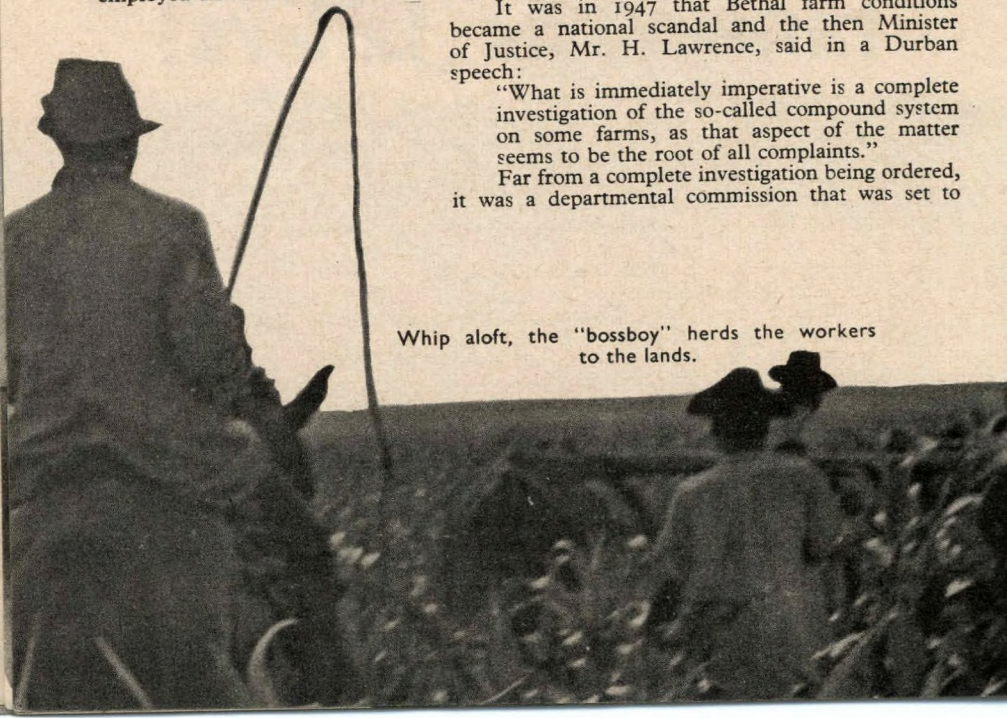
### "Akin to Slavery"

Three years later the Bethal newspaper *De Echo*, reported the case in which a farm foreman, Johannes Brenkman, was tried for setting dogs on deserters and having them beaten with sjamboks. After the assaults, the evidence revealed, the labourers were chained together with donkey chains and were taken to the compound where they slept naked and chained together. **The conditions disclosed in this case, said the magistrate, are tantamount to slave driving.** On a farm of 400 morgen 251 labourers were employed and were driven to work by means of a sjambok. It is akin to slavery. . . ."

It was in 1947 that Bethal farm conditions became a national scandal and the then Minister of Justice, Mr. H. Lawrence, said in a Durban speech:

"What is immediately imperative is a complete investigation of the so-called compound system on some farms, as that aspect of the matter seems to be the root of all complaints."

Far from a complete investigation being ordered, it was a departmental commission that was set to



Whip aloft, the "bossboy" herds the workers to the lands.



work to single out the worst abuses and to whitewash the general system of farm labour in the district. By the time Minister of Justice Lawrence came to Bethal to address a crowded farmers' meeting in the Town Hall, he had changed his tune. The police investigation had completely vindicated the large majority of farmers, he said.

Yet at the same meeting an outspoken farmer let the cat out of the bag. Labour desertions were as high as 25, even 50, in every 100 workers, he said and matters had got so bad that farmers no longer bothered even to report deserters to the police. "After all, if a farmer is lucky enough to catch "Natives" who had deserted and who had cost him a lot of money there was provocation to give them a cuff (klap)". (Applause from the assembled farmers.)

The compound system still continues in this district, and so do the desertions. Farmers go to enormous lengths to get workers and to try to chain them to the farms, but they still suffer from a shortage of labour.

## N.A.D. and Farmers put their heads together!

This severe shortage of farm labour has caused the Native Affairs Department "constant anxiety", in the words of the Department's annual official reports.

### Farmers' Pressure

During the war in 1942 and 1943 farmers' organisations pressed the Department to pass an emergency regulation that would compel African squatters who lost their plots on farms to work as labourers on farms short of workers. Farmers also demanded that the government take steps to remove "redundant" Africans from the towns. The N.A.D. dug its heels in. "While keenly sympathetic with the farmers in their difficulties and most anxious to help in the production of food" the Department felt that a measure to force squatters into wage labourers would amount to conscription of labour . . . and though it was war time, no other section of the community was being conscripted. And as for a surplus of labour in the towns, said the Department, "there does not appear to be any surplus of the type which would be suitable for employment on the farms. (The contrast between this attitude of the N.A.D. 17 years ago shows how even the N.A.D. — never a friend of the African people — has changed for the worse under the Nationalists.

Still the farmers' bodies made representations for more labour, so the N.A.D. made approaches to the government of Portuguese East Africa for those Mozambique Africans rejected as unfit for mine work to be diverted to farm work, but this scheme was not agreed to — even by the government, which does a yearly deal in human labour with the Union.

Then the N.A.D. set up Native Labour Advisory Boards in various districts throughout the Union, consisting of the local magistrate as chairman, with N.A.D. officials and farmers as members. These boards were meant to discuss steps for the improvement of the conditions of employment of farms workers.

### The Smit Circular

It was at this time that the N.A.D. sent out the Smit Circular on Farm Labour:

"The fact of the matter and one which must be faced squarely by all is that relative to labour in towns and industry, farm labour is generally not popular. As was pointed out by the Farm labour Committee, further restrictive measures (of which there are already a considerable number) will only make farm labour still more unpopular. As one poet aptly put it 'One may take a horse to water, twenty cannot make him drink'. "While farm labour is generally unpopular, there is ample evidence that on many farms conditions are very satisfactory and that on these, labour is normally sufficient and reasonably efficient. When abnormal circumstances arise, the farms on which conditions are satisfactory suffer because of the general unpopularity of farm labour, particularly when distant areas are the sources of supply.

"The first essential is therefore to create on all farms certain minimum conditions so that no employer may affect the reputation of any district, or the farming industry as a whole, and so that when the Native is recruited



for farm labour he has some assurance in regard to the treatment he may expect."

On the Smit circular, the N.A.D. reports "Replies from farmers were not helpful." Though 80 Farm Labour Committees were set up, the Department recorded "They have achieved very little and in many cases have ceased to function."

Then the Department and the farmers (a special committee of the S.A. Agricultural Union worked with government officials) devised a scheme for the Government to take control of all non-Union Africans and distribute them among the farmers.

From March 1st, 1947, all illegal immigrants were to be diverted to the farms. The police started intensive round ups of Rhodesian and Nyasa Africans, imprisoned them in special depots and gave them the "choice" of signing a farm labour contract for at least 180 days or being put over the border and sent home.

**The scheme was a costly failure.**

In 1947 6,032 non-Union Africans were arrested, but only 502 (8 in every 100) agreed to work on the farms. The following year, in 1948, 3,474 men were detained, 1,254 signed on for work in coal and manganese mines, 1,566 were sent back to their home countries and only 95 (three in every 100 arrested) accepted work on farms. The scheme had cost the country £20,000 but non-Union Africans knew farm conditions too well to fall in with this scheme.

## The Farm Labour pool is started

It was Johannesburg's Native Commissioner who hit on the Farm Labour Scheme which was the direct fore-runner of the present scheme operated by the Department of and Native Affairs and the Prisons.

In September, 1947, the Native Commissioner's Court in Fordsburg, Johannesburg, introduced a scheme whereby men arrested for contravening the Urban Areas Act (the pass laws) were told they would not be prosecuted if they accepted work on the farms.

In the first year of its operation this scheme supplied farmers with 3,086 men, in the second year the figure was 3,636.

Here at last was a scheme that served both government and farmer alike.



A farmer fetches labour.



## New Zeal

With the Nationalist Government in office from 1948 onwards the N.A.D. set to work with new zeal and vigour to force a steady supply of labour on to the farms.

N.A.D. reports are brimfull of phrases like "the effective control of the system of labour canalisation". Labour bureaux have been set up throughout the Union, and it is compulsory for every African workseeker to report to a bureau. "It is the main function of the regional and district labour bureaux controlled by the N.A.D. to meet the labour requirements of rural employers and especially of the farmers" admits the government.

## Harvesting Teams

In 1952, 21,823 urban Africans were placed on the farms.

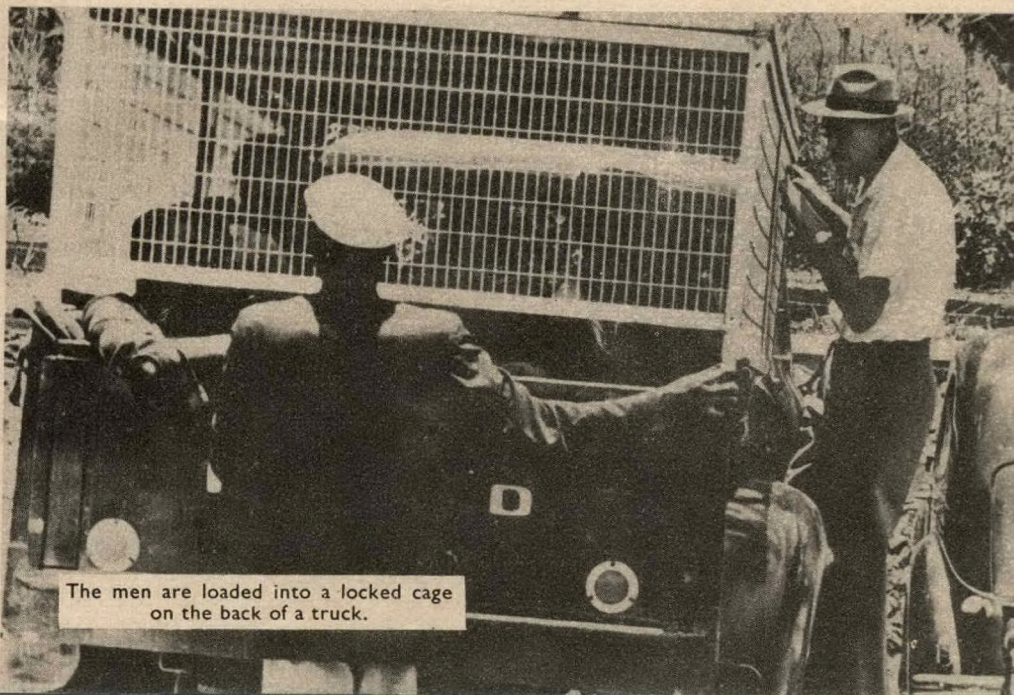
In 1953 the number was 32,582. That year also the N.A.D. organised harvesting teams and arranged for farmers to get 20,000 Africans on contract during the harvesting season.

The N.A.D. made no bones about its scheme. Its bluebook for 1954-54 explains its aims very plainly. **Africans who contravene the labour bureau regulations and enter an urban area to look for work without the necessary permission, are not prosecuted but work in a non-prescribed area (rural area) is offered to them.**

Yet the Deputy Minister of this Department, Mr. Mentz, could tell Parliament he knows nothing of this scheme!

**It is because the N.A.D., working hand in glove with farming interests, is the evil genius behind the farm labour scheme that the two enquiries ordered by the Minister since the exposure during April, May and June 1959 of the farm scandal, will be worse than useless for putting wrongs right.** (The officials serving on the Departmental Committees are the very officials responsible for the operation of the scheme. They are being asked to investigate their own side-stepping of the law, their own misuse of their powers.

The second Commission is composed of a Nationalist member of Parliament who is a member of the Native Affairs Commission, the Chief Bantu-Commissioner of King-williamstown and the Director of Bantu Agriculture. Members of the South African Agricultural Union will also be drawn into this enquiry.



The men are loaded into a locked cage on the back of a truck.



Only Government and farming interests are represented on the Commissions. They will try to cover up the scandals, not remove their causes. They will try to tighten up the operation of the system for the supply of farm labour, to seal the system off from scrutiny and public examination, to clear the name of the government and yet devise ways of giving the farmers even more forced labour.

# Convict Labour too!

The Director of Prisons made a speech at Riversdale, in the Cape, in February of this year when he said "Lack of labour is the farmers' greatest problem. **The Department of Prisons has become the focal point for the farmer, from the Limpopo to the Cape.** They all want labour from us but we cannot supply it all, but we are doing everything in our power to meet the emergency."

## "National Emergency"

This Government classes the supply of forced labour to the farms as a **national emergency**, and strains every nerve to meet this emergency.

The scheme under which African short-term prisoners were contracted out as labour to farmers started as far back as 1932. In those days it was known as the "6d. a day scheme". Prisoners sent to prison for less than three months were handed over to farmers to serve their sentences on the farms and the farmer paid the jail 6d. a day for every day worked by every prisoner.

The scheme was compulsory, the prisoner was not asked if he wished to work his sentence out on a farm, and he lost his remission privileges which would have reduced his sentence by one quarter if he remained in jail.

## Abolition Urged

In 1947 the Landsdowne Commission strongly criticised the scheme and recommended its immediate termination. Evidence showed, they reported, that prisoners deserted and on return to jail reported bad conditions of employment and treatment. When a prisoner's fine was paid at the jail there was often a delay in contact being made with the farmer and the prisoner released. This meant that prisoners were being illegally detained after fines had been paid in at the prison.

The scheme was abolished in 1947 but, says the Director of Prisons Report for 1952, "within a very short while numerous representations by influential bodies were made to the then Minister of Justice for the re-introduction of the scheme". "Influential bodies!" Farmers' bodies no doubt, so in no time the scheme was back in full swing again.

To save face the Prisons Department brought in some changes:

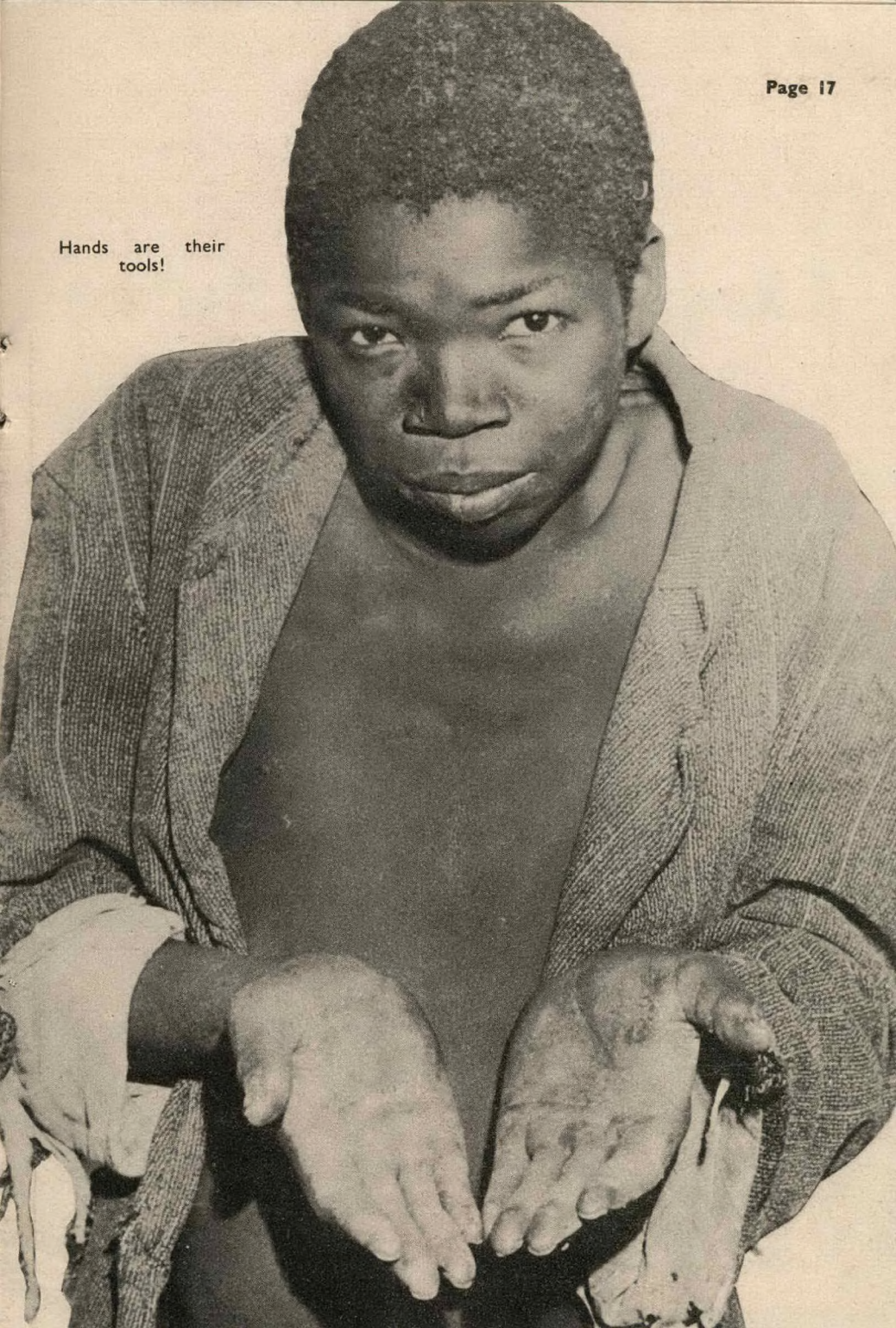
1. The prisoner must be asked for his consent to work on a farm.
2. The 6d. a day scheme became the 9d. a day scheme, the amount payable to the prisoner on his release.
3. Prisoners sent to farmers had to get the benefit of their remissions.

**There is evidence that many a prisoner is never asked if he is agreeable to working on a farm but simply finds himself one of a work team sent out from the jail to the platteland, never knowing that he has any choice in the matter.**

The Prisons Department annually pats itself on the back and calls this scheme a great success. No doubt it is — for the farmers. In 1951 persons sentenced to terms of imprisonment up to four months were included in the scheme. In 1952 some 40,553 prisoners went to work on farms, whereas the numbers in earlier years had been in the region of 25,000 and 30,000. For the two years 1953 and 1954 the number was 100,000. **During 1957-58, 199,312 African men were sent from jails to work on farms. All 165 jails in the Union are operating this scheme.**



Hands are their  
tools!





The Department of Prisons claims to keep a black list of bad farmers, but there appears to be only one farmer on this list!

Apart from this scheme for prisoners sentenced to short terms, long-term prisoners also end up as farm labour. Sixteen farm jail outposts in the Union built by farmers' unions and then handed over to the Prisons Department supply regular labour spans sent out to weed, plant and harvest farmers' fields under guard.

## A New Deal for Farm Workers!

In some parts of South Africa farmers are going back to the ways of slavery. On the land the farmer is the master, the overseer, the policeman, the judge. The labourer is not owned bodily as were the slaves of old, but the wretched wage paid him for his back-breaking work barely distinguishes him from a slave, and he is no freer than a slave to leave the farm and look for work elsewhere.

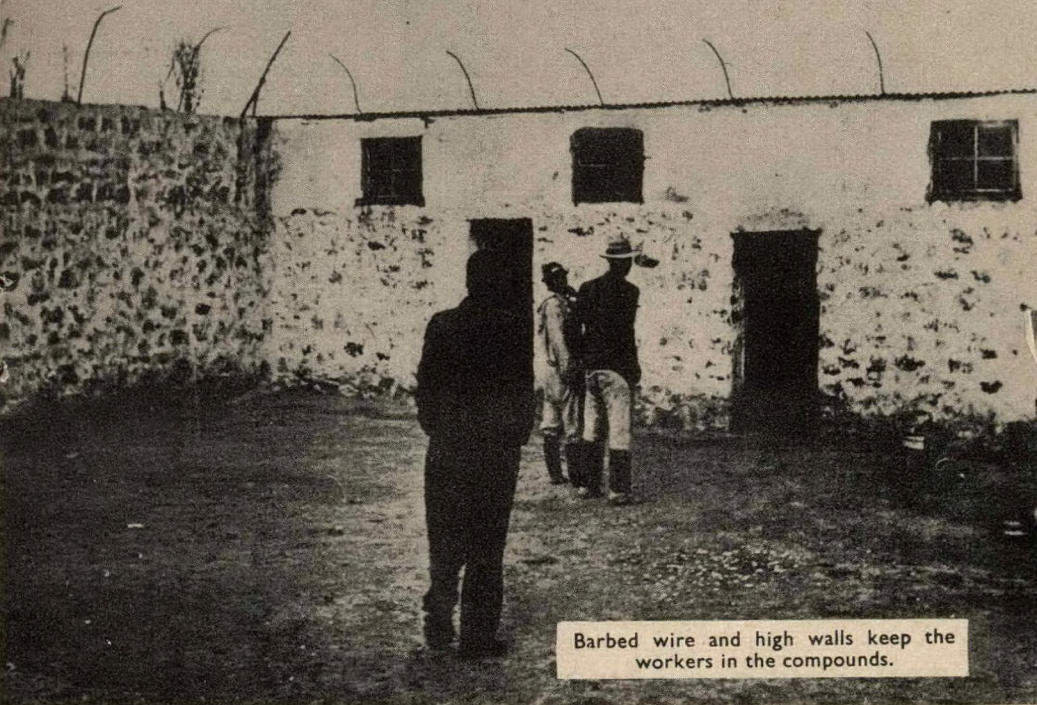
There are undoubtedly farmers who do not use forced labour and practice these near-slavery methods, but over the years Bethal and Trichardt, Leslie and Heidelberg, Nigel and Kinross have earned a fearful reputation for the conditions on farms in these districts.

**It is the use of pass laws to force men into forced labour that gives the system its character.**



Inside a farm compound.





Barbed wire and high walls keep the workers in the compounds.

### I.L.O. Condemnation

The International Labour Organisation has branded this as forced labour. Its 1953 reports said:

"The state through the operation of this legislation is in a position to exert pressure upon the native population which might create conditions of indirect compulsion similar in its effects to a system of forced labour for economic purposes.

The legislation's effect is to channel the bulk of the indigenous inhabitants into agricultural and manual work thus to create a permanent, abundant and cheap labour force."

For 300 years South African farmers have been trying to increase their supply of labour with a series of restrictive measures. More and greater restrictions, is the cry of the farmers.

**The Government Farm Labour Committee that sat from 1937 to 1939 was convinced that more compulsion on Africans to accept farm work would make farm labour even more unpopular than it was.**

### Wretched Lot

The farm worker has a wretched lot, even those not doomed to the life of a contract labourer on an Eastern Transvaal compound.



His working hours are from sunrise to sunset; he and his family are ill-fed and raggedly clothed. If he is a labour tenant or a squatter, his children start work herding cattle from the age of eight; his wife, his sons, his daughters are all bound to give service to the farmer. Contracts are verbal and in a dispute the African labourer invariably gets the raw deal. The labour tenant may work a small plot of land in return for 90 or 120 or 180 days labour for the farmer, but he has no security of tenure and any day may be handed his "trek pass" and told to move off.

Many agricultural workers receive no cash wages at all, merely rations and grazing and ploughing rights for as long as the farmer pleases. The cash income of an entire African family on a White farm has been variously estimated as £30 a year (4d. per head a day) and £51 a year. Labourers in some districts get 20s. and 25s. a month; daily paid workers 1s. or 2s. 6d. a day. Rations are small, housing appalling. Farm labourers are sunk in poverty and ignorance.

The pass laws, Master and Servant regulations and influx control prevent the farm worker from leaving one district for another in search of better work and higher pay.

**The farm worker today is probably no better off than his father before him or his grandfather before that.**

The ambition of every son of every farm worker is to strike away from this misery; to do better than his father did; to desert the poverty of the farm for a chance to do better.

**In South Africa as anywhere else there is only one way to attract a flow of willing labour to the farms and that is to pay farm workers a living wage, to provide conditions fit for human beings and incentives to men to do farm work.**

Any other method to reduce the labour shortage is doomed to failure.

The brutalities of the present forced labour debase those who use such methods and create a store of hatred, resentment and bitterness that must inevitably threaten the security and happiness of all who live in this country.

Nationalist apartheid policies and repression of the African people are plunging this country to disaster. The Nationalist Party is the political wing of the farming group and those employers of labour in other spheres who demand that the whole machinery of the state be used to turn all Africans into cheap unskilled labourers, giving them no choice but to work where the Government orders them and for the wage the farmer decides.

### Hypocrisy

There can be no more dishonest and blatant hypocrisy than the justification the Nationalist Government trots out for its labour control and farm labour schemes.

"In every community a small percentage of people is found who are unwilling to earn a living by honest work" says the N.A.D. report, and

"The major problem of native administration is to control the surplus in the towns."

The Nationalists talk as though the drift to the towns is unique to South Africa or a habit only of Africans.

**The growth of industry needs a flow of workers to the towns and this migration of population from rural to urban areas has happened in every country of the world that has become industrialised.**

One law after another has been passed in the Union to push the African off his land, to impoverish him and compel him to offer himself as a labourer in gold or coal mines, iron and steel foundaries, factories or mills.

### No Land

The Land Act of 1913 robbed him of all but 13 per cent of the land; the poll tax forced him to leave his village to go the mines or towns to earn a cash wage to be able to pay the tax collector; the Land and Trust Acts threw squatters and labour tenants off farms without giving them any other home on the land. Over the years hundreds of thousands of families became wanderers, without land, homes or work in the countryside. From being the owners of their own fields and grazing lands they became hirelings and dispossessed servants of the new owners.

The enclosure acts in Britain at the time of the industrial revolution forcibly expropriated the peasants of that day from their land and then made vagrancy a crime punishable by public whipping, brandings, imprisonment or deportation to an overseas penal colony.



The Nationalists are trying to turn South Africa back 250 years.

The farm labour scandal is not an isolated evil. It brings together some of the worst features of the apartheid, cheap labour state and gives them a new and more hideous form.

There will be poverty in the countryside till the reserve system is scrapped and Africans have the right to own and farm land freely. Men will try to find work in the towns as long as they are starving in the rural slums. Men will have to be kidnapped, shanghaied and driven to work on the farms as long as farm labourers have no wage increase, no improved conditions and no rights.






A new deal for farm labourers must guarantee them the right to organise for better conditions; for national wage legislation; for minimum housing standards, health services, schools for their children and social services.

A new life for farm labourers is bound up with the need for a changed rural economy for South Africa. This involves a re-distribution of the land and the effective use of the country's land and labour resources.

No other country with a comparable degree of industrialisation exists on a semi-slave labour force in the rural areas, with the state acting as a recruiting force for bad farmers who cannot attract labour by normal means.

South Africa's farm labour force is inefficient because a farm worker, like any other worker, needs a stake in his job and incentive to labour.

**South Africa needs free working men, not half slaves. South Africa will not have farm workers with a love and knowledge of their work and a willingness to labour, till the farm worker is ensured a living wage, adequate food, housing education, leisure and security — and above all the freedom to enjoy the fullness of life.**



No age-limit here. These youngsters have been recruited for farm work.



# CENSORED!

In this space should have been the picture that appeared in **THE GUARDIAN** on Thursday, June 2, 1949. It showed Africans detained for pass offences being guarded by policemen in a wired-in yard at the Native Commissioner's Court in Fordsburg, Johannesburg. We printed this picture 10 years ago but we cannot publish it today because the Nationalist Government put the Prisons Act through the 1959 parliamentary session to make it an offence (which is punishable by a fine of £100 or one year in prison) to "*photograph any prison, portion of a prison, prisoner or group of prisoners, whether within or outside any prison . . .*"

This is the way the Nationalists try to keep the ugly facts of forced and convict labour hidden from the public



# Exposure! 10 Years ago...

## JO'BURG'S "SLAVE MARKET"

### Arrested Men "Persuaded" To Take Farm Work

(From RUTH FIRST)

R. JANSEN, Minister of Native Affairs, talks about setting up labour bureaux. Africans call them slave markets.

A new phrase has been coined by Africans this year. A man arrested for a 'pass offence' who is sold to a farmer at the jail, or the court.

Reports from all over the country received by The Guardian show that today the pass offences and the courts are becoming part of a huge organisation for forcing African workers out of the towns and on to the farms. A vast new recruiting agency for farmers is being set up.

At the Native Commissioner's Court in Johannesburg hundreds of Africans are charged each day with pass offences. Only a handful means prison or hard labour on the farms, because most must pay their fines.

A further bait is the belief that when they have finished their contracts they will be allowed six days in the city to find work and become registered.

JOHANNESBURG. Africans call them slave markets.

THE ALTERNATIVE

In 1949 *The Guardian* was the first to expose the 'slave markets' at the Pass Office. In 1947 the *Guardian* reporter and the Reverend Michael Scott went to Bethal to expose farm labour conditions there.

*The Guardian* was banned in 1952. *New Age* was born to carry on the fight.

*New Age* first learned of conditions on the Potgieter farm at Heidelberg which led to the Mura Sadika case, the first in the string of cases that led to the 1959 farm labour scandal exposure.

*New Age* was the first with the story of the death of 24 year old Cornelius Mokgoko on a farm, with the story of the assault of Gabriel Madeira, the teacher, with many other farm labour exposures.

*New Age* has campaigned relentlessly against scandalous farm labour conditions, against the pass laws and against forced labour of all kinds.

*New Age* is first with the news of Congress and its campaigns, and carries full, true reports of the peoples' struggles.

*New Age* is the peoples' newspaper, fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Congress movement.

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