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Bewyktuk No. -S. S. 28

Gekry by Sidney ShellDeur K. J. Schreuder en J. G. S. van der Watt
Reprodusie van die oorspronklike uitgawe van 1907.Bestuur G. van der Watt en J. G. S. van der Watt
Datum: 22.7.19 - 3.8.45

Verwysings No. 57

An Introduction to the Historical
Position in South Africa

In historical times there have been four distinct societies in South Africa.
 (i) The savagery of the Bushmen who were hunter-gatherers with a technology of stone and wooden implements. (ii) The barbarism of the Hottentots who were herders but not agriculturalists. (iii) The barbarism of the Africans who were both keepers of domesticated animals and agriculturalists and who had a technology of iron implements. The terms savagery and barbarism are used and to be understood not in their vague and insulting "everyday" sense but in the exact archaeological sense. (iv) The capitalism introduced by the Europeans.

The different levels of development of the societies of the Bushmen, Hottentots and Africans are reflected in the different forms and results of their resistances to the attacks of the Europeans. The Bushmen were so unused and opposed to the idea of subjection and labouring for another's benefit that they could not be conquered and exploited. Their numbers, equipment and organization were so small, poor and weak that they never put up a real organized resistance but only sniped, ambushed and raided. The result was the gradual, piecemeal hunting down, driving out and extermination of the Bushmen except for the children who were often taken, "apprenticed" and eventually absorbed into the general, coloured serving population.

The Hottentots were able to fight one resistance "war". However, their tribal organization disintegrated readily, partly due to a devastating country-wide smallpox epidemic. Most were absorbed as servants to the Boers. Some

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of the outlying groups (the Griquas) later developed into an independent society with the same means of production and transport, the same type of farming, the same weapons and methods of fighting as the Boers. All the Hottentots lost their language and were absorbed into the language and culture of the Boers.

The Africans were far more numerous, better organized, better lead and more cohesive and tenacious than either of the other two indigenous groups. For nearly a century the Xhosa held up the European advance and finally deflected it from the coastal strip into the interior. The Basuto and Zulu alike inflicted repeated major defeats on both British and Boers. While in the end all the Bantu-language groups were defeated none were exterminated and none disrupted and absorbed.

Within the capitalist society established by the Europeans two types of differentiation were going on up to say 1850. One was the widening of the gap between the powerful and well-to-do property owners and the propertyless, and the increasing identification of this gap with the colour line. Eventually, in the Cape in practice employers in general were "white" and employees were not. In the OFC and Transvaal in law only whites had political and property rights. The second differentiation was between different parts of the general society. In the first place while near the Cape Town market commodity production i.e. production for sale was quite highly developed and both agricultural and pastoral production flourished, on the frontier due to the small size of the market and the poor transport commodity production was much less important and simple subsistence production, or production of goods for the direct use in a capitalist society is a commodity-producing society in which labour-power itself has become a commodity.

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of the farmer, much more important. Also since only products of pastoral production such as wool, hides and tallow were able to stand the long slow journey to the market only pastoral production had any commercial element in it. Thus while the settled farmers within reach of Cape Town engaged in commercial diversified farming; the farmers further away developed into cattle farmers who trekked from place to place over large areas in search of grazing. A further most important difference evolved on the Bantu frontier and especially after the Great Trek. The Hottentot tribal organization had largely disappeared along with any possibility of organized resistance so that the Hottentots' land was all taken leaving the Hottentots as proletarians with no option but to become wage workers (part of the wages were always in kind). The Africans were never disintegrated or dispossessed. Also they were more numerous. The result was that particularly in the Transvaal, "white farms" contained numbers of African families still working the land in their own way, with their own houses and flocks. The practice was started of making the Africans either pay money or produce for permission to remain ("kaffir-farming"¹) or, more important, contribute a certain number of days labour each year. Thus two extremes developed: what I shall call boland boerism in the Cape and trek boerism in the Transvaal. Boland boerism is characterized by diversified commercial farming based on the purchase of labour power (slaves in the early period, wage workers in the later period). Trek boerism is characterized by largely subsistence farming, (the main emphasis on pastoral production; some barter with storekeepers) based on labour tenancy.² Of course there were intermediate forms and mixtures of the two types. Later an even more capitalistic agriculture sprang up in Natal consisting of specialised tropical farming on a large scale based on imported, indentured Indian wage labour.³

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These differences are reflected in many ways socially, economically and politically. For example the political differences between the Afrikaner Bond of Hofmeyr and the Transvaalers of Kruger cannot be explained without reference to these differences between the type of farming and form of exploitation practised by them. In general the "liberalism" of the Cape was a reflection of its more classical, bourgeois-democratic form of exploitation as well as the foreign influences operating. The extreme repression and racialism characteristic of the Transvaal and to a lesser extent the CFS again are clearly, to a large extent based on the more forcible and less disguised form of exploitation practised there as well as the ideological influences operating and the virtually continuous warfare with the Africans carried on for generations.

In Kenya today labour-tenancy is the form of exploitation practised on European farms. It has been too, the main form in Southern Rhodesia and in the Transvaal, CFS and midle and high veldt regions of Natal. In the labour-tenancy system the African in lieu of part of the whole of his wages is given a small plot of ground to cultivate, the right to build a hut, and to run a few head of stock on the farm. As commercial farming had developed and land prices risen, the tendency has developed of paying more in cash and kind and restricting the land used and stock kept by the African.² In a word the tendency has been to move from labour tenancy toward wage labour in the Union.

A number of factors have been operating for many decades to expand the market available to South African farmers. These include the growth of the internal market produced by the development of mining and later industry, the development of exports based on the improved exploitation of South African natural advantages e.g. wool and ostrich plumes, and in the most recent period the effects of government actions; protective tariffs to gain the whole of the internal market for South African farmers,⁴ and the operation of marketing boards to

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subsidise agricultural and pastoral exports.⁵ After the Boer War attempts were made to reconstruct agriculture on more modern capitalist lines and steps were taken to foster development in a more scientific and commercial direction.

Since union considerable government assistance has been extended with the effect of helping farmers accumulate and invest capital.⁶ In the most recent period new and even more horrible forms of exploitation have appeared in the countryside. Compounds have appeared on farms into which Africans are locked at night. On such farms considerable numbers of "boss-boys" are employed as slave-drivers. Finally there is minister of Justice's baby the private farm jails from which surrounding farmers can hire prisoners under police escort for 9d per head per day.

In 1913, 1936 and 1954 important land acts have been enacted to control the conditions of rural Africans.

Prior to 1913 two ways were open for Africans to become private producers for the agricultural market. In Cape and Natal they had long had the right to purchase land. In fact some purchase of land was beginning to develop, especially in Cape.⁷ In the OFS a certain amount of share-cropping had developed.⁸ In this system the entire farm was divided up and given out to Africans. Each African then worked his portion as a separate producing unit and paid a portion (usually 50%) of his produce to the European farm owner. Share-cropping was thus a system of rent-in-kind, whereas labour tenancy was a system of wages-in-land-use. In the case of share-cropping the African was an independent producer and the possibility existed of his becoming a big producer and employer of labour. The labour tenant is a worker with a garden.

The possibility of the development of African capitalist farmers was not to the liking of the ruling class and so the 1913 Land Act⁹ made share cropping illegal,¹⁰ and made it illegal for an African to buy land from a European.¹¹ It was also attempted to end "Kaffir-farming".¹

It was also attempted to end "Kaffir-farming"¹ i.e., the practice of giving over an entire farm to tremendous numbers of Africans, charging each a cash rent. By this means certain areas (mainly in Natal and the Transvaal low veldt) were turned into privately owned reserves from which large rentals were obtained. The means adopted was the adoption of a Squatter's Act empowering the government to set an upper limit to the number of African families a European could have on his farm.¹² This provision was never effective. An extension to the reserves was promised in the Act but never effected.¹³

In 1936 an attempt was made to create "Apartheid".¹⁴ The main provisions of the acts (the Representation of Natives Act and the Natives Land and Trust Act) were as follows: (i) To remove the Africans from the common voters roll in the Cape and create instead three African seats in the lower house and four very indirectly and undemocratically elected "African" senators - all candidates must be Europeans of course. (ii) The establishment of the South African Native Trust Fund to purchase certain "released areas" for addition to the reserves. Then and if these purchases are completed the African 70% of the population will have 13% of the land in South Africa. (iii) The elimination "of 'squatters' or cash tenants by a system of registration, licenses and a rising scale of fees" and the allowance as labour tenants "only those who worked at least half the year for the farmer. This would mean driving many families off European farms, and increasing the services of most labour tenants by 50%, while it was notorious that the reserves and the released areas had no room for more. In due course this provision of the Act was applied, by proclamation, to one District of the Transvaal. After a few years trial the policy was found unworkable, and the proclamation withdrawn. That is the best postscript, to date, on this Act.¹⁵ We should not be too ready to accept this final judgment of Keppel-Jones, I think. It is true of this act as of much of South Africa's apartheid legislation

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that it is unrealistic and bureaucratic to the point of being unworkable. On the other hand the existence of such legislation has also undoubtedly served to enable the farmers gradually, in a piecemeal way as their labour needs grow to increase their exploitation of the rural Africans. There is no doubt that there has been a gradual transformation of squatters into labour tenants, an increase in the labour extorted from labour tenants, a decrease in the land allotted and the stock allowed to labour tenants, and a replacement of labour tenancy by full-time proletarian wage labour of the most unfree and brutally exploited type.

This year the South African parliament has returned to the attack with yet another land act aimed at transforming labour tenants into proletarians.

Accompanying these changes in the legal position and the conditions of the rural toilers have been great advances in mechanization, modernisation, intensification and concentration of South Africa's capitalist, "European" agriculture.

In the next section the figures will be examined to see how far these developments have gone and to obtain a picture of the present situation in "European" agriculture. In the final section of this paper attention will be directed to the little information that is available on the recent developments in the economies of the reserves.

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TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand

Location:- Johannesburg

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