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**LABOUR PROBLEMS IN
RHODESIA**

Contributors

**Labour Problems in South
Africa**

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F. A. H. Wilson

Dr. Francis Wilson is Senior Lecturer in
Economics at the University of Cape Town.

LABOUR PROBLEMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

DR. F. A. H. WILSON

Summary

South Africa has a number of labour problems which are by no means unique to that country but which, in different ways, are faced by numerous economies round the world. Of these problems we would mention four, three of which derive primarily from the growth of the economy and one which is due primarily to the failure of the economy to grow sufficiently. The problems are:

1. Agriculture's human surplus

As in most other countries in the world people are being pushed off the land by the introduction of labour-saving machinery and chemical weed-killers.

2. Rapid urbanization

As an economy grows the demand for labour producing urban-based products grows faster than the natural population growth. Hence there is a continuous pull drawing people to the cities. The process of urbanization, particularly when rapid, causes severe dislocations, not least when the expansion of necessary social infrastructure (housing, sewerage, etc.) is not sufficient to keep pace with people pouring off the land.

3. Shortage of skilled labour

One consequence of economic growth is that the demand for skilled labour grows more rapidly than the demand for unskilled labour hence most countries find that severe bottlenecks to expansion exist in the form of insufficient educational and training facilities. At the same time this is often accompanied by insufficient demand for all the unskilled people wanting jobs and hence a paradoxical situation arises whereby the economy suffers both from labour shortages as well as from unemployment. Which leads us on to problem No. 4.

4. Rural under-employment

This under-employment exists not so much in those areas where commercial agriculture has long been established but is found rather in subsistence economies where, due often to the introduction of medical knowledge, population growth rises to outstrip the expansion of employment in small-scale, traditional, agriculture. In South Africa, where there is both a commercial farming sector as well as a subsistence sector, one finds people being pushed off the land in the one case by the very success of the economy and in the other case by its failure to grow.

But in South Africa there is a second set of labour problems which arise more from the political pressures in this society than from the economic forces operating there. Of these problems we would isolate two:

- (1) *the colour bar*
- (2) *separate development:*

The policy of separate development, which in its pure form implies the establishment of politically independent economically-viable homelands, has the consequence of making part of South Africa's rural areas far more densely populated than they would otherwise be. This exacerbates the problem of rural under-employment and poverty mentioned above.

However, some of the most difficult of all South Africa's labour problems arise not from the process of economic growth alone nor from the implementation of the policy of separate development in itself but from the simultaneous pursuit of the two goals of economic growth and separate development. Many of South Africa's current labour and socio-economic problems can be shown either to be caused directly or to be worsened by the simultaneous pursuit of the twin goals. Of these problems we would focus attention on ten:

1. Re-settlement villages

The 1960's have seen the establishment in most of the homelands of numbers of large settlements which may be called townships in the sense that they are densely populated, but which lack the economic base which forms the foundation of any town.

2. Single-sex hostels

The 1960's have also seen an enormous expansion in the accommodation provided in the urban areas for men (and, in some cases, for women) on a temporary migrant basis. Examples of this are the State-built hostels in Alexandra or the employer-built hostels in Guguletu, Cape Town.

3. Pass law arrests

It can be shown that the astronomical increase in the number of Africans arrested for contravening the pass laws arises primarily from the desire both to expand the economy as well as to develop separately. In South Africa today more than one person is arrested every minute of the day and night throughout the year for contravening one or other of the pass laws.

4. Haemorrhaging of the homelands

Closely associated with the pass laws is the fact that the Bantu homelands are being bled of their economically active men whilst the women, the children and the old folk have to stay behind. This has caused such distortion to the population structure of the homelands that, quite apart from the problems of over-population, economic development there is virtually impossible.

5. Prison labour

The use of prison labour, particularly on the farms of the Western Cape between 1948 and 1972, can be shown to be not unconnected with the conflicts inherent in the simultaneous pursuit of twin goals.

6. Housing crisis

Shortage of housing in urban areas is by no means confined to South Africa but there is no doubt that the problem is made far more acute by the fact that housing in the cities has been deliberately slowed down in order to make it more difficult for Blacks to settle in the "White" urban areas.

7. Lack of industrial communications

The lack of adequate institutional channels for communication between management and the majority of workers is deeply disturbing, not least because of South Africa's own history of industrial unrest exacerbated precisely by the lack of such channels (e.g. the Rand rebellion of 1922).

8. Income distribution

The widening gap between the earnings of White and Black workers in significant sectors of the South African economy is brought about by a combination of economic growth with the political constraints (colour bar, oscillating migration, lack of trade unions) imposed by the political goals in the society.

9. Inadequate educational foundations

The educational patterns imposed by the political goals are proving increasingly inadequate for the needs of the industrial economy. One of South Africa's major labour problems arises from this discrepancy which has the effect both of slowing down the growth rate and of causing unemployment.

10. Perpetuation of poverty

From an economic point of view one of the major drawbacks of the pattern of oscillating migration as it exists in South Africa is that it has the effect of preventing men from staying long enough in their jobs to become very skilled. Hence the productivity of labour (and therefore income) is held down.

It must be emphasised that South Africa's labour problems cannot be solved overnight by the mere waving of a political wand. At the same time one of the main arguments of this paper is that some important labour problems far from being eased by the policy of separate development are in fact made worse by this solution.



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