

TITLE: REPORT ON MAJOR  
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AFRICAN FORESTRY  
WORKERS IN THE NORTHERN  
TRANSSVAAL

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REPORT ON MAJOR GRIEVANCES, AND FACTORS  
BEARING UPON PRODUCTIVITY AND APPROACHES  
TO SUPERVISION, AMONG AFRICAN FORESTRY  
WORKERS IN THE NORTHERN TRANSSVAAL.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This report is an interim document which sets out a range of specific problems, grievances and other factors which we consider to be of importance and relevance to the forestry industry for an examination of short-term personnel approaches. The study of the African employees in the forestry industry as conducted by the research team of this Institute has been very much broader in scope than the content of this report would suggest. The initial brief upon which the research programme was based, arose out of discussions between a former executive in a sister company in Natal and the Institute for Social Research. In these discussions great emphasis was placed on the need to conduct research in depth which would provide a basis for longer-term planning of personnel policies, and the emphasis was clearly to be on factors relating to productivity and morale.

However, in the research as conducted, there has been ample opportunity to investigate the nature and extent of the variety of grievances and specific factors which have distinct relevance to shorter-term planning within the industry. It is to a consideration of these more specific aspects of the findings that we now turn.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that a report on Minimum Living Levels in relation to wages has already been presented to the company, as well as a brief survey-based introductory background to problems in the employment situation in the Northern Transvaal.<sup>1)</sup> Further work in these areas has been conducted and the earlier information will be broadly summarised and up-dated and certain additional information relating to Minimum Living Levels will be presented in this report.

The decision to present this interim report is partly based on the fact that a similar interim report has been presented to a sister company in Natal, and partly on the fact that requests have been received from the

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1) R.D.J. Allen, C.F.M. Rawlins, L. Schlemmer (1975): *Minimum Living Levels, Incomes and Family Structure Among African Employees in the Northern Transvaal*, Durban: Institute for Social Research, Document and Memorandum Series; R. Allen (1975): *A Timber Industry in the Northern Transvaal: A Preliminary Focus on Problems in the Employment Situation*, Durban: Institute for Social Research, Memorandum No. ISR.14/75.

company in the Northern Transvaal for a catalogue of more particular grievances among employees as are manifested in various centres of employment within the company.

## II. METHODS EMPLOYED

In this report we will not elaborate on the various approaches used in the collection of data in the course of the investigation. Suffice it to say that three basic methods were employed. The first involved selecting stratified random samples of employees at each mill and plantation selected for investigation. The mills and plantations were so selected as to give a reasonable regional representation to the findings. The samples were stratified in terms of three basic variables:

level of employment;

marital status;

residential circumstances (Homeland residence/  
township residence/single quarter migrants/  
company married quarter accommodation).

This stratification ensured that employees of different types were adequately represented in the final sample.

The second approach employed was to conduct group interviews with selected groups of workers (usually 6 to 9 employees) in order to explore in greater depth the issues which had been isolated during individual interviews and had emerged as important in the pilot study and in discussions with management.

The third approach was essentially an informal one, but one which proved to be most useful; this involved observation of the work situations and broader unfocused discussions with managers, overseers, and employees, complemented by some observation of interaction and conditions on the work-sites. Naturally, all three approaches were complemented by certain information which was obtained from management regarding particulars of the employees in the sample, their length of service and ratings of their work-performance.

It should be clearly recognized that our study was conducted at a particular point in time, and that our samples of employees were exposed to supervision and working conditions at that specific period of time. For this reason we should emphasize that the grievances and other factors discussed

below may not necessarily have continued to exist in the period subsequent to the conducting of the fieldwork. We have noted that there have been changes in company policy, and probably there have been changes in local management personnel. However, even if the data we present are time-bound, they are significant and relevant in the sense that they reflect the type of response which can exist among African workers to particular circumstances and working conditions where they exist.

One important general point needs to be made in regard to the methodology. We found in a pilot investigation conducted at one employment situation in a sister company near Pietermaritzburg, that the characteristics of the employees in the industry made interviews impossible within a short space of time. The interview process was a very lengthy one and we found that the tempo of response was significantly lower than that among African employees in urban industrial situations. This affected our approach in the study as a whole in the sense that we were forced to draw samples which were smaller than were initially intended. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the relative educational and social homogeneity of the labour force, and the fact that the samples were very carefully stratified, the sample sizes are deemed to be statistically adequate. A general point emerging from this, however, is that it would appear to be impossible to conduct valid research among employees of the type encountered in this industry without using very patient and time-consuming methods. The methods which we had to adopt caused the fieldwork to be extended considerably beyond the period budgeted for at the initial stages of the project. However, without spending the amount of time which was spent on the fieldwork this study would have failed completely. We frequently encountered initial suspicion or reserve among respondents and considerable effort was expended in overcoming these impediments and establishing effective rapport. The average length of the interviews with individual respondents upon which these results are based was between 3 and 3½ hours.

In order to convey fully the challenges which faced the research teams, in addition to those outlined above, it is necessary to point out that interviewing frequently had to be conducted under difficult and complicating circumstances. In the case of the plantation workforces, employees often had to be interviewed in the forests at some distance from base, which necessitated considerable movement of the team in order to secure interviews, and which also produced very severe problems of co-ordination of team effort. Furthermore, due to the situation of being interviewed while at work, respondents sometimes wished to interrupt the interviews in order to conform with working hours.

Although the difficulties which arose were usually severely practical in nature the effect was often to undermine the morale of the team to a lesser or greater degree. In one or two centres the pre-conditions of securing the necessary understanding among members of management turned out to be a slightly more complicated task than had been anticipated. It would appear that in some cases local management were not fully aware of the existence of a formal research project until the actual arrival of a fieldwork team. However, much is owed to the subsequent efforts of senior management to co-operate, particularly in respect of the provision of accommodation and related services. We must also make grateful acknowledgement of the help and active assistance of the African Personnel Officers, one of whom conducted a fairly substantial proportion of research interviews himself. These members of management were also able to provide extremely useful general insights into the nature of company functioning and into problems in company operations.

### III. EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTION OF THEIR WORK, AND OF THEIR SITUATION WITHIN THE INDUSTRY: AN ASSESSMENT OF MAJOR GRIEVANCES

Since this report is a policy-oriented document, concerned with possibilities of short-term modification of aspects of company policy, the assessment which follows is concentrated mainly on negative aspects of employees' perceptions; i.e. their grievances. Generally, the grievances of employees appear to loom very large in their perceptions, and in view of this any discussion of the factors relating to productivity, morale and management-employee interaction should commence with an assessment of the patterning of grievances as expressed by employees.

We commence this analysis with a description of replies to one question asked of the employees as individuals in which overall perceptions of problems and grievances was elicited. This analysis is an attempt to give some indication of the relative importance of various kinds of grievances and problems as employees perceive them. However, it should be borne in mind that the employee's own perceptions of the relative importance of grievances as expressed in individual interviews are not necessarily the only indication of relative seriousness of the particular grievances. This analysis is an indication of the more overt conscious grievances and has to be supplemented by a description of perceptions obtained in group interviews, during which employees were able to reflect on their circumstances and present the research team with perceptions at a "deeper" level of consciousness.

### III.1. Individual Employees' Perceptions of Problems and Grievances.

Among all employees employed as individuals at all the various employment situations studied, roughly 79% of workers expressed dissatisfaction in regard to levels of remuneration. The proportions were slightly higher at the Boyne Sawmill and at the Broedersdraai Garage, where they were roughly 95%. It is interesting to note that at the time the interviews were conducted, the Boyne Sawmill and the Broedersdraai Garage were locations of employment where there appeared to be quite considerable discontent and signs of actual or potential labour unrest. There had been a strike at the Boyne Sawmill, and management had expressed concern about the attitudes of employees at the Broedersdraai Garage. It might also be recalled that the results in the previous report<sup>1)</sup> indicated that the Available Income Ratio at the Boyne Sawmill was significantly below that at other centres of employment.

Following the material grievances in order of mention, the need for the provision of or the provision of better, protective clothing appeared significantly in the results, with roughly one-quarter of individual respondents mentioning this as a problem. The proportion was particularly high at the Broedersdraai Garage, presumably because a high proportion of employees are labourers who have to travel on the back of trucks in inclement weather. The proportion complaining about protective clothing is also high at the Haenertsburg Group of Plantations, where some indications are that management policy in regard to the provision of protective clothing might have been less generous than that on some of the other plantations. The provision was definitely less generous than the workers' perceptions of what the provisions ought to have been.

Another grievance drawing a mention from slightly over one-fifth of employees related to the need for rations and/or meals. At two employment situations where a majority of men complained about rations, we were under the impression that rations were not provided at the time of the study. The two places were the Haenertsburg Plantations and the Broedersdraai Garage. There is some indications from the result from the De Hoek Sawmill that the men perceive a need for the improvement in the provision of rations or meals.

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1) R. Allen, Rawlins, Schlemmer, *op. cit.*, p.19.

The same would apply to the employees at the Wolkberg Plantation.

Almost one-fifth of employees complained about the standard of equipment or servicing of accommodation. At some employment situations there was no mention of problems relating to accommodation because the people were resident in nearby homelands, but the problems appears to achieve fairly severe proportions at places like the Wolkberg Plantation, the Haenertsburg Plantations, the De Hoek Sawmill and the Broedersdraai Garage. It is believed, however, that the Company is making or has made arrangements to have the standard of accommodation improved at these places.

A grievance which is present at the moment in just over 10% of employees overall is the fact that the increments dependent upon long service are inadequate or non-existent. This, of course, is one way of expressing a wage grievance although the fact that the wage grievance is related to long service is of some significance in itself and does reveal that employees perceive a right to rewards for long and faithful service. This perception seems to be somewhat stronger at De Hoek Sawmill and at the Shefeera Yard than it is at other employment situations. One must assume that this grievance is a very common grievance among older men.

At a roughly similar order of magnitude to the previous grievance, is the perceived need for some form of assistance with transportation. Roughly 10% of employees overall mentioned this as a factor, although the proportion is much higher at the Wolkberg Plantation and somewhat higher at the Haenertsburg Plantations. This grievance has to be understood in light of the fact that some of these Plantations are very remote from shopping facilities and other services as from transportation routes, and also because of the fact that transportation to and from the actual site where men work was very uncomfortable and exposed to the elements.

The remaining grievances expressed, of which there was a large number, were voiced by small minorities of people among employees of the total group. In a later section, where grievances at particular places of employment are dealt with, some of the grievances not discussed in this broad and general assessment will be referred to and discussed. It is significant that the grievances and problems which were mentioned by substantial proportions of people are mainly material or practical in nature. This is not to be taken as an indication that more subtle problems



do not exist. It simply means that the more subtle and less overt kind of problem is not as easily articulated in individual interview sessions as it is articulated in group interviews and expressed obliquely in forms of behaviour. Finally, we should note that a very small minority of 5% of people chose to mention no grievances at all. This small minority is largely composed of people at the Shefeera Plantation and to a lesser extent at the Shefeera Yard. While this may be a reflection of a more favourable work environment at the Shefeera Yard, the fairly substantial proportion of "non-complainers" in the Shefeera Plantation is probably due to lower levels of expectation as regards working conditions.

What we have presented and discussed are the immediate and consciously felt grievances which individual employees are able to articulate in response to a direct probe on problems which are amenable to rectification by the employer. In other words, the probe elicited responses of a kind which the individual employees perceived to be directly related to company policy. They can, therefore, be regarded as an expression of protest against present management of the company. These results have indicated that an overwhelming majority of employees feel aggrieved about wages and remuneration, and that substantial proportions of employees are discontented about the issuing of protective clothing, rations and meals, the quality of accommodation, increments with long service, and problems of transportation which could be alleviated with assistance from the company.

Grievances of the kind which we have described are not necessarily the only serious problems which affect the consciousness of employees. In the following section we turn to a discussion of problems perceived by individual employees which they did not necessarily see as being amenable to immediate or easy rectification by the company. These problems nevertheless relate very closely to their perception of the employment situation and of the advantages and disadvantages of employment in the company.

### III.2. Serious but less Obvious Problems experienced by Individual Employees not articulated as Grievances aimed at Management.

In this section we will discuss a range of problems which we consider to be serious and worthy of attention by management in any consideration of short-term policy changes. They are problems experienced by individual employees but often expressed indirectly in response to probes concerning a variety of experiences and factors relating to the

work situation. These problems are somewhat more complex than the grievances expressed in the previous section and therefore are not necessarily seen by employees as issues which management can alter very readily. The workers nevertheless see these problems as part of their predicament in the work situation and we consider that these problems have an important bearing on employees' morale.

Problems of the kind we have attempted to describe emerge from a variety of different questions; namely questions on information that employees wanted the company to clarify, ways in which employees felt that management could make their jobs easier, employees' perceptions on how supervisors could lead and guide men better and employees' attitudes to planning and/or change by White management. All these items will be dealt with in greater detail in subsequent sections of the report, but from a scanning of responses to these items certain major broad areas of problems emerge. A slight majority of 51% of employees expressed dissatisfaction or an awareness of problems regarding the manner of supervision and the quality of supervisor-worker communication in the company. This proportion of 51% could possibly be higher, since an additional 15% of employees indicated that they were resigned to the fact that decision making in the company was solely in the hands of Whites and that African workers were never consulted. Hence somewhere between 51 and roughly 65% of employees experience serious problems in the broad area of supervision and White-Black communication. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that slightly over 50% of employees expressed a positive desire to be consulted by management or supervisors in regard to decisions in the workplace. It is interesting to note that problems of over-supervision or punitive supervision seemed to be more readily experienced by employees in the Shefeera Group whereas problems of communication between Whites and Africans or between supervisors and supervised seemed to emerge relatively more strongly in the employment centres in the south.

Another major area of concern for workers appears to relate to the way wages are calculated or to be connected with fluctuations in wages. No less than 38% of employees expressed dissatisfaction in regard to the calculation of wages or fluctuation in wages paid. This kind of issue is one which is obviously related to management-worker communication of information and is therefore relevant to the task of a liaison committee, and we will be discussing the way in which the liaison committees are perceived and the kinds of problems which the workers see the committees as

being unable to deal with in a later section of the report.

In the next section of the report, we will be presenting findings emerging from the group interviews and will deal with the employees' perceptions of the strenuousness of their work. Briefly, at this point we might just indicate that the very high rate of expression of wage grievances relates to perceptions of the work as being strenuous, exhausting and debilitating. From the range of questions which have been outlined above, it appeared that roughly 25% of individual respondents experienced the strenuousness of their work sufficiently keenly in order to express dissatisfaction in response to a range of questions which were not directly related to the kind of work the men perform. We would adjudge this to be a significant indication of a problem affecting the morale and consciousness of workers. This, obviously, is not a problem which can be readily solved, and in the main the employees themselves recognised this as is apparent from the fact that this issue was not raised in response to direct questions on grievances.

The analysis thus far has suggested that the following issues constitute major areas of problems which are almost certainly detrimental to the morale of employees and which probably are distracting and demotivating factors in the labour situation in the company:

- inadequate wages;
- problems of supervision and communication;
- suspicions regarding wage calculations and concern about wage fluctuations;
- perceived inadequacy of protective clothing;
- perceived inadequacy of rations and/or meals provided;
- perceived strenuousness of work;
- inferior quality of accommodation;
- dissatisfaction at absence of increments with long service;
- transportation problems and a perceived need for assistance in transportation by the company.

### III.3. A Closer consideration of Major Problems and Grievances in the light of the Results of Group Interviews and further Analysis of the Data.

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#### III.3.1 Wages

In this section we will deal with the perception of wages and

material conditions among members of the labour force. In a later section of the report, we will consider certain objective data on wages in relation to minimum living levels, and provide an assessment of the adequacy of wages in relation to minimum subsistence needs. However, in this section of the report we will dwell upon the subjective aspects of wages and material conditions.

During the fieldwork, we found that without exception, wages were perceived by the men in a certain context. Similarly, wage grievances have to be understood in a context of the working conditions as perceived by the employees. Generally, the response was an emotional one, in which a perception was expressed of the wages being low in relation to the arduous nature of the work. Wages were seen as insufficient rewards for great effort, long working hours, and years of service put into the job. The expression of this kind of perception in the group interviews generally preceded discussions on the adequacy of wages in absolute terms. In other words, the men appeared to have formulated a highly negative perception of the relation between effort and reward and this perception appeared to take precedence over perceptions of wages as sums of money, or pay packets, or amounts required to meet living expenses. One man said that this is a *"heavy job that does not pay us"* and this kind of comment was very frequently encountered, both in individual interviews and in group discussions. It needs to be noted in this connection that the men felt that they were working very hard. When, in another context, they were questioned about laziness, quite a few respondents indicated that they regarded laziness as being a state of demotivation because of low wages in relation to the amount of effort required on the job. Therefore, the sense of grievance at what were perceived to be poor rates of pay was made more acute by the perception, whether correct or incorrect, that employees generally were working very hard and that the men tended to scorn laziness on the job. A not uncommon perception among the men was that they could not afford to idle on the job since the everpresent danger existed that they would be replaced by one of the many people who would be keen to step into their positions.

So far, then, it would appear that evaluations of the wage tend to be made in relation to the conditions of work. We will return to perceptions of conditions of work in the next section. A few questions were asked in the individual interviews which enable us to form a clearer picture of how wages are seen by company employees. We asked the men to give an estimation of what they would consider to be a "fair wage". We must assume that in answering the question most of the men would have thought of a fair wage for the job they

were doing or the kind of work they were doing within the company. The results are interesting, since, among employees as a total group, those who gave an estimate of what they would consider to be a fair wage generally gave fairly low estimates relative to the wage structure in the company as a whole. Among the group as a whole, the median fair wage expectation was R54,50 among those who gave a figure to an interviewer. This median of R54,50 is well below average wages in urban industry, and certainly does appear to reflect a lower level of wage expectations among the rural people interviewed than one would find in any medium to large industrial area.

On the plantations, the estimated fair wage tended to vary between R40 and R70 with very few people giving replies above the upper limit of this range. In the mills, the majority of employees gave answers within the same range, but a slightly higher proportion tended to give estimates of a fair wage which was in excess of R90 per month. This probably reflects the different occupational structure in the mills as compared with the plantations; in that latter situation the relative lack of opportunities for promotion into better paying jobs would undoubtedly restrict the perceptions of the employees to some extent. At the Broedersdraai Garage, wage expectations generally tended to be some roughly R10 a month higher than among the labour force as a whole. This probably reflects the much larger proportion of relatively better-paid people among drivers centred at the garage.

In our experience in conducting research in urban situations, we have found that employees most commonly give an estimate of a fair wage as being roughly 1,8 to twice the wage they are actually receiving. These are usually employees who are earning average wages of some R80 to R90 per month. It is significant, therefore, that the employees studied in the company in the northern Transvaal gave a median wage expectation of well under twice their average wage at the time of the investigation. We take this to be clear evidence that the company is fortunate in having employees who appear to have lower wage expectations and a lower norm for wages regarded as fair and just than employees in an urban industrial setting. We should note in addition, that the wage expectations are also lower than those wage expectations we have found among rural employees in Natal. It is probably this lower level of wage expectation which accounts for the fact that the men tended to perceive their wages predominantly in relation to conditions of work rather than in relation to absolute figures regarded as being adequate or sufficient to meet general living costs.

A tentative indication from group discussion material is that levels of wage expectation are higher among younger men than among older men, as one would expect. Thus we have a situation which is favourable for the company at the moment, but which may be in a process of change. In the final report we will explore the relationship between previous work experience and level of wage expectations, and also manipulate the data in such a way as to establish what background factors are related to different levels of estimation of a fair wage.

In the group interviews we explored the way in which men compared the wages they received in the company with the wages they thought were being paid in the wider work environment in the area. On the plantations, the general picture which emerged was that the workers felt that they were better off than any other private employer and that only government forestry work was more adequately rewarded. The position was different in the mills and at the garage, where our general impression was that people compared their wages unfavourably with wages they perceived to be typical of other employers in the surrounding area. The most unfavourable comparisons were made at the Shefeera Yard in Louis Trichardt, where the presence of a good number of surrounding industries appeared to lead to a greater intensity in the negative evaluation of their own circumstances as compared with wages in other surrounding industries. What appeared to be in the minds of the men in this regard, was the belief that an older, more established and larger company like Bruply should be in a position to pay better wages than newer and smaller companies in Louis Trichardt. Perceiving this not to be the case, the intensity of unfavourable comparisons appears to be somewhat greater than that encountered elsewhere in the company. This appears to be a function of the situation of the Shefeera Yard in a small industrial complex, and possibly bears out remarks made earlier on the relationship between the rural situation of the men and lower wage expectations.

Another aspect of wage policy which appeared to be emotionally viewed by older respondents in particular, was the lack of long service increments. One old man of long service summed up the feelings of many of his peers when he said to the interviewer that he experienced a sense of shame on pay-day to be receiving the same wage as most of his younger colleagues. It needs to be noted that this sense of grievance was well-nigh universal among more mature employees with some years of service, and represents a very considerable source of grievance and poor morale among the labour force.

Wages in relation to overtime seem to constitute another fairly serious cause of dissatisfaction. Firstly, to many the method of computation of overtime pay was unclear; one man expressed the issue as being "a mystery". Furthermore, normal fluctuations in wage rates due to differing lengths of the working month are not understood by all employees, and also appear to be the cause of some confusion. More complex, however, is the issue of involuntary overtime. It would appear that at the Shefeera Mill, the men often work on past the time which they perceive as the normal "knocking-off" time for the Mill. This is as a result of decisions taken among charge-hands, and the men are not consulted. Nor, presumeably, are they remunerated for extra work, and this fact plus the fact that the men have a very clear perception of the Mill as having fixed working hours leads to considerable confusion, if not dissatisfaction. Perceptions are less clear on the plantations, for example, where very often work will continue until it gets dark in order to attain a particular work-task. This may be due to a variety of factors; the weather may be bad, work may start late because of a break-down, or the process of work may be delayed for other reasons. Generally speaking, on the plantations, the men are somewhat more reconciled to the idea of having to work on after what would be a normal time for stopping, simply because this tends to be a norm in the forestry industry generally. However, this does not mean to say that they are altogether happy with the fact that they do not get paid for having to work late from time to time. Grievances on the plantations were not as sharp as they were at Shefeera Mill, but nevertheless the topic is not unproblematic. Similar problems existed at the Broedersdraai Garage where due to the nature of trucking and logging operations, people would be naturally compelled to work on until a particular trip or logging operation had been completed. Although the men may be getting additional piece-rate payments once they have passed a certain target, the general perception appeared to be that in most cases the additional time on the job was not rewarded. The problems in this area are not only that the men perceived it as being unfair to them as workers to be exposed to involuntary overtime, but also because of disruptions in their private lives; working late means arriving home late and possibly disrupting social engagements.

Although we will be dealing with wages in relation to absolute criteria of need in a later section of this report, in this section where we are dealing with employees' perceptions of their wage, it would incorrect not to refer to the fact that wage grievances are not exclusively seen in relation to effort, or conditions of work, or levels of normative expectation. We have established that the perception of the wage in relation to conditions of

work is a very important primary factor relating to dissatisfaction, but when employees, as individuals, were asked how they evaluated their wages, very large majorities did refer to the inadequacy of wages in relation to cost of living. As distinct from relative perception of their wages, there is therefore also a strong absolute perception of wages as being inadequate for the demands of living. Employees did express widespread and emphatic dissatisfaction, which appeared to be stronger among the Venda-speaking than among the groups in the south. The reasons for this are generally ones that one would expect; many complained about the cost of living which was said to be very high and rising very alarmingly, a good number perceived the wages as being sufficient only for young single men without family responsibilities, and a substantial proportion of men mentioned that they were either getting further into debt or in danger of deepening their debts. A few even spoke of the risk of arrest because of the inability to pay Poll Tax, quite apart from basics such as food, schooling and other necessities. Hence the "materialist" view of the wage cannot be overlooked when considering the grievances of the men. We will explore the wages in relation to objective measures of need in due course, as we have already indicated.

Before passing from the general issue of wages to the general issue of perceptions of work, a subtle but important distinction requires to be made. It will become apparent to the reader that certain types of wage grievance and certain types of work grievance are inextricably linked, inasmuch as they are elements of a single problem in the general perceptions of the worker. The wage is viewed with dissatisfaction not only because it fails to make ends meet, but because it is plainly regarded as insufficient compensation for the very arduous conditions of the manual work. Conversely, the negative perceptions of the work, which is viewed as extremely arduous and unreasonably heavy, are aggravated to the level of grievances precisely because a low remuneration is offered.

What must be noted here, however, is that although actual work in the timber industry is necessarily arduous, perceptions of that work need not be. It would thus appear that, from the point of view of the manual worker, a more satisfying wage would contribute to improved perception of the work, even if no changes in working conditions had actually occurred on the ground. Employees commonly refer to what they call "*the pain*" of their (poorly paid) work; but they just as often state that "*the pain of work*" lessens with better pay. It is with these comments in mind that we should consider the way in which employees perceive conditions of work. We turn to this in the following section.



### III.3.2 Employees' Perceptions of the Work

We have already alluded to a number of typical perceptions of the work among employees, but in this section we will expand on various topics in our comments, focusing on those perceptions which amount to serious grievances.

Very frequently, we were informed that the work is very heavy, strenuous and exhausting; as we have already indicated. However, in addition, among a substantial proportion of employees the work appears to be perceived as being permanently debilitating; this applies in particular to those employees who perform the very heaviest of tasks and may also be more typical of Vendas than of employees in other language groups.

More specifically, employees referred us to the fact that they see the loads they have to carry as being too heavy, that many jobs involve standing all day, or working in uncomfortable positions, and, among plantation workers in particular, the fact that workers have to traverse rough terrain, operate in heavy undergrowth, and do a great deal of walking, travelling and climbing in order to gain access to places of work.

The highly strenuous nature of work in the forestry industry is probably self-evident to the reader, and the information we are providing is certainly nothing surprising adjudged against objective criteria in regard to types of work. It is obvious from our observations, however, that although the strenuousness of the work is self-evident, the employees themselves do not take it for granted. They appear to be constantly aware of the nature of the work, and this awareness is often not recognised among employers of heavy manual labour in South Africa. Very often there is a perception among members of management (not necessarily in the company under discussion) that African manual labourers are quite at home with, or reconciled to, heavy manual labour. The evidence from the study in the forestry industry in Natal and the Northern Transvaal, indicates that the opposite is more likely to be true.

These observations may lead one to think that those employees working on mechanised tasks are likely to have less of a perception of debilitation as a consequence of working conditions. This is undoubtedly true to a considerable degree, but we found evidence that the effects of certain machinery are also perceived to be negative and exhausting; if not permanently debilitating. For example, in the mills many employees claimed that the machinery set an exhausting pace and that as a consequence they suffered not

infrequent feelings of weakness and nausea after work. The vibration of chain-saws and the bumping of tractors were also seen as being damaging to health; some employees said that they "*shock the blood*", or that the harsh noise of the chain-saws were such as to make it necessary for workers to be issued with protective masks which would block the ears and at the same time protect them from sawdust, petrol and exhaust fumes. In regard to the topic of strenuousness of the work and associated problems we refer the reader to our second preliminary report, pages 3 to 7.<sup>1)</sup>

In connection with the topics of working conditions and effects of mechanisation, we refer the reader to Appendix A which contains excerpts from a report of the International Labour Office on the timber industry. This appendix gives an interesting perspective on the problems we have been discussing since it deals with problems in the timber industry in an international perspective. It certainly suggests that the problems we have been outlining, and the workers' perceptions of these problems, are probably by no means limited to South African conditions.

Apart from the complaints about perceptions of strenuousness of the work, the workers generally had a number other particular grievances relating to working conditions. One of these was concerned with the extent to which the workers are exposed to the environment. What is relevant to note here is that forests are necessarily in mist belts with high rainfall. Therefore, especially plantation workers and logging transport employees (from the Broedersdraai Garage) are exposed to rain, damp, cold and mud. The particular complaints of the men, as revealed in group interviews, is that the damp and the rain and mud spoil their clothing, and also have a debilitating and depressing effect on them.

In regard to exposure to the environment, we should see complaints as relating to two separate issues. The first concerns what is perceived to be an inadequate issue of protective clothing, and the second refers more broadly to inadequate protection in the workplace, whether protective clothing is worn or not. As regards the need for protective clothing, the workers are generally insistent that they need to have clothing which would protect them not only against weather in the plantations, but also against undergrowth, and

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1) R. Allen, *A Timber Industry in the Northern Transvaal: A Preliminary Focus on Problems in the Employment Situation*. Institute for Social Research, University of Natal, Durban. June 1975.

against the irritations of contact with a rather spiky, abrasive environment of trees while pruning. This is specially relevant where people are using short pruning saws and hence have to approach very close to the tree. The plantation environment is not only one where workers are exposed to damp, rain and dirt, but they are also exposed to the constant irritation of small injuries and damage to clothing. Female pruners in particular fear falling branches but claim that they have no hard hats, and also claim that they do not get issued with gloves which are essential for use in pruning. In other words, all plantation workers, men and women, perceive an urgent need for more adequate protective clothing. This need is aggravated by the fact that the oil from chain-saws is extremely messy and spoils clothes.

In summary then, the requirements as perceived by the workers are for: durable overalls; gloves for pruners; waterproof complete outfits for those working in rain, mud and undergrowth, or with chain-saws; and among women workers especially, hard hats to protect them from falling branches. In addition to this, what the workers perceive is the need for a regular issue of the items outlined above. Even in the case of boots which are already issued, a general complaint was that the boots would wear out and there was not a sufficiently regular supply of these boots. Therefore, the workers perceived a need for an issue of protective clothing based on the actual amount of wear and tear on the job.

As regards protection in the workplace the complaints appear to originate from loaders involved in transport and logging operations as well as from plantation workers who are ferried to and from work. These categories of workers appear to desire shelter from rain and mud thrown up from the wheels of the vehicles in which they are travelling. There was also some perceived need for more comfortable transportation, since the kind of vehicles in which the men were being ferried back and forth apparently had very hard or non-existent springing and the trailers in which the men had to sit were exposed to mud flung up by the wheels of the tractor or truck pulling the trailer. People claimed to be arriving at work feeling exhausted and dirty.<sup>1)</sup> Obviously, there is much less need for protection in the mills, but some

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1) It needs to be noted that some of these complaints have already been attended to in the sense that on a return trip to the field, our staff noticed that a new covered truck with seats for the workers had been purchased for the plantations in the southern area of operations. This innovation was greatly welcomed by the employees who seem quite pleased with the new provision.

attention seems to be required to the problems of workers on the green-chain at the Shefeera Mill and also to the problems of workers in outdoor timber handling operations around the mill building. The green-chain operation was regarded as offering the worst possible kind of employment in the mill situation. No doubt the discomfort of outdoor work on the green-chain is aggravated by the fact that the green-chain sets a pace which the workers have to keep up with and also the fact that the work involved is very heavy.

Another aspect of the working conditions which requires some comment is that of the hours of work. We recognise that this is a factor almost to be taken for granted with plantation work, which universally involves long travelling distances to work and operations in which all daylight hours have to be used. The men, while recognising that long hours have to be worked, perceive their problems in regard to the fact that they have to get up very early and arrive home after dark, having had no time to shop, cook or eat. These long hours and the effects on the lives of the men are obviously related to an appeal which the men made for the provision of rations but preferably pre-cooked meals. In similar vein, the logging transport operators, made a request for communal kitchens with fires burning and water boiling so that they could commence the preparation of meals immediately upon return from work. The logging transport workers have particular problems due to irregular hours and the fact that on occasions the completion of a particular transportation target is completed after dark. It is of interest to note that in a group discussion among the transportation workers at the Broedersdraai Garage the men claimed that they had to wake up as early as 4.30 a.m. in order to assemble as a team to commence work.

In the light of these facts it is not surprising that there was fairly frequent complaint of the targets being too high, since the men associated high targets with the long hours of work. Needless to say, our earlier comments on involuntary overtime work point to a pattern which can only aggravate complaints and grievances regarding long hours.

Needless to say, the problems which the men experience with regard to long hours, involuntary overtime, early rising and late return to home, are all aggravated for those employees who are commuters. Even in the mills where the problems of long hours is not perceived to be as serious as it is in other places, those workers who have to commute some distance to and from work nevertheless experience many of the same problems as plantation workers and logging transport employees.

Another major area of concern is that of fear of injury on the job. On the topic of work safety in the forestry industry we refer the reader to pages 5, 6, and 7 of the second interim report furnished to the company.<sup>1)</sup> In this report, Allen has given a background to the issue of safety in international perspective, quoting from a report by the International Labour Organization, and made the point that by any standards the forestry industry is a high danger industry as far as worker safety is concerned. The point is also made that safety is not necessarily improved by mechanisation since certain kinds of modern machinery are primarily designed to increase production rather than to decrease the risk of injury or the effort required in the work. In the group interviews it became abundantly clear that the men are generally very aware of dangers in the workplace and that not insubstantial proportions of them experience considerable anxiety and/or tension as a consequence of the danger element. For example, in the mills, it appears that many of the men have a fear of saws, and that some also fear being struck or injured by wood which is moving along conveyor belts or which is being thrown from heights in order to be sorted into the different sizes. Very often the danger is seen as being from adjacent machinery which might be conveying large quantities of wood, pieces of which could quite fortuitously strike a man working on a saw or machinery nearby. The men generally seem to be aware of the fact that injuries in the mills are more likely to be serious and, in some cases fatal, than injuries sustained, say, in the plantation situation. Obviously, the presence at the workplace of workmates who have lost fingers and suffered other small injuries as a result of accidents, is a constant reminder of the presence of danger in the workplace.

On the plantations there is a danger of more frequent if less serious accidents. One man said "*Axe injuries on duty are frequent and people are disillusioned by the fact that they are dismissed when injured on duty*". We do not know whether dismissals as a result of injuries do in fact take place, but what is relevant here is the fact that men generally feared injury and in addition seemed to fear dismissal as a consequence of injury. This perception, whether right or wrong, does little to encourage peace of mind whilst working. As we have noted, women in particular fear falling branches while engaged in pruning work, while men involved in debranching work fear falling timber if the area of debranching is close to a felling area. The fear of dismissals as a consequence of injury seems to apply

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1) R. Allen, *op.cit.*, pp.5-7.

particularly to Shefeera Plantation and to Shefeera Mill. Among logging transport workers at the Broedersdraai Garage there seemed to be a slight concern over the safety and conditions of the trucks on which they have to travel. There was also an indication of some fear of sustaining injuries while loading heavy logs on to a truck as well as some ill-feeling among those workers unfortunate enough not to be allocated to trucks with hydraulic lift-cranes. The issue of holidays and leave pay was another source of grievance among plantation workers who claim to receive four days leave per annum whereas they knew perfectly well that people working in the mills receive three weeks when the mills close down for Christmas. Obviously, the grievances of men in the mills would be similar if they were not to receive pay during their three weeks' leave over the Christmas recess, and this, among a group living at an extremely level of subsistence is likely to create great anxiety and a sense of general insecurity. Being moved from job to job appeared to be a pattern of operations which was unappealing to the plantation workers who expressed a distinct preference to stay in a single clearly defined task which they could learn to do well. Related to this was an express desire for properly defined jobs, so that employees would know exactly what was expected of them. This was mentioned by small numbers of employees but it was a concern which cropped up almost everywhere in the course of research.

The desire for medical facilities to be provided for workers and their families was expressed quite frequently where such facilities had not yet been provided. On most mills such facilities are already provided but in other places of work this is not always the case. One of the concerns of workers in the field of medical care was the fact that it is tremendously difficult for them to obtain medical attention for their families. Many of our respondents spoke about the relatively great expense to them of obtaining medical attention outside the employment setting, and also of the distances involved in obtaining such attention. It seems quite clear that some of the absenteeism among workers where no clinics exist is due to the fact that they have to take their children off to seek medical attention quite far away from places of work. What is obviously perceived to be necessary here is a clinic available to both workers and their families, staffed by a nurse who can give simple but useful medical attention. Another need perceived by the workers was for first aid facilities to be available in the plantations and at other places of work where no clinic existed. One older employee, for example, said *"When someone is bleeding here at work, no one knows how to stop the blood. If you are injured on duty you only get proper medical treatment if*

*they take you to hospital".*

The compound at the De Hoek Sawmill was perceived by the interviewers on the project to be an extremely unhealthy and insanitary place; the interviewers even went so far as to request an antibiotic to act as a prophylactic against disease. A nursing sister does operate at this sawmill but the practice is for men to approach her when they have a complaint rather than for her to institute regular check-ups and surveillance of living conditions. In particular, venereal disease appears to be a severe problem in this compound. Therefore, this compound and quite probably others as well require some kind of concerted health programme.

### Conclusion

The grievances that we have enumerated above may or may not all have a basis in objective reality. Nevertheless, what is important to recognise is that they are perceived to be valid and very real by the employees themselves. We have drawn attention to regular and ubiquitous complaints about overwork, targets being too high, feelings of exhaustion and debilitation due to very heavy work, the perceived need for precise job definitions and defined working hours, inadequate protective clothing or inadequately protected work conditions, perceptions of the inadequacy of rations or meals, and many other complaints and grievances. Although the men themselves were not sufficiently articulate to draw these many and varied complaints together in summary statements, we were sufficiently aware of the general mood among the men to detect a widespread sense of exploitation. Tentatively, we could not help gaining the impression that the Pedi-speaking people tended to experience this sense of exploitation in feelings of resentment, bitterness and resignation, whereas among the Venda-speaking people there was somewhat more of a suggestion of indignance, a slightly more outspoken manner of complaining and a greater sense of the legitimacy of their complaints.

If we add to this general sense of exploitation the very prevalent fears of permanent debilitation and of injury, we arrive at the observation that what the company faces is what we will term an "orange-squeezer syndrome". This syndrome relates to the feeling that a long period of work in the company is not only a period of exploitation but that the years of life devoted to the company are unappreciated by management. The men seem to have a mental image of giving their strength and bodies to the company and being "*sucked dry*", to

be thrown out like an orange peel in their old age. These responses are more dramatically illustrated in the feelings of older men in the company, as would be expected. Here, the feelings take the form of specific resentments; i.e., resentments about the lack of pensions, no reallocation of old men into lighter jobs, and what are perceived to be strategies by management to encourage the resignation of older men. Younger men, however, talk to and observe the older men, and they are not unaware of the fact that these problems would apply to them in due course as well. Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of this syndrome came from answers to questions about the possibility of obtaining other employment. More than one respondent indicated something like the following: "*Shefeera has condemned us*"; an expression of the feeling that after a period of work in the company the men were not suitably fit to be employed by anyone else. While the Venda-speaking employees seemed to be more sensitive to these issues, these feelings are sufficiently prevalent to constitute, for the company, a severe problem of poor morale.

### III.3.3 Problems in Regard to Benefits

In this section we will cover topics which have to some extent been covered by earlier comments made. Nevertheless, there is a need to draw together the problems perceived by the respondents and by people interviewed in the group interviews in regard to facilities and benefits provided by the company. We may commence this analysis with brief comments on the answers to a question asked of the individual respondents. The question asked was which benefits employees recognised as being provided by the company. Overall, no less than 17% of employees refused to concede that any benefits at all were given by the company; this despite the fact that obviously benefits were received even though the benefits might differ in quality from place to place. Among workers at the Shefeera Sawmill as many as 38% refused to recognise benefits; other notably high perceptions were 30% at Broedersdraai Garage, 28% at Shefeera Plantation and 15% at the Boyne Sawmill. The proportions not recognising any benefits were low at Shefeera Yard, Haenertsburg Plantations, De Hoek Sawmill; and at Wolkberg Plantation everybody recognised some benefit or other.

Among those who recognised benefits provided by the company (the majority) the overwhelming proportion of people spoke of the smaller things which helped to make the job easier, like protective clothing, protective hats, overalls, transport, waterproof clothing, etc. Very often these were mentioned in conjunction with food or accommodation. We gain the impression that a



substantial proportion of people tend to take accommodation for granted and therefore did not mention it first, or in some cases even mention it at all, even though they recognise the fact that it is provided. We must assume that at a different level the provision of accommodation is very much appreciated but that it is seen as one of the obligations of the company and not as a benefit in any special sense. We also gained the impression that respondents were very appreciative and indeed excited about the new building scheme to provide married quarters which had already commenced in certain centres.

In order to make an assessment of how benefits are perceived, it is necessary to look at the matter in comparative terms. We asked respondents how they thought their benefits compared with benefits at other places of work, rural or urban. Obviously, in many cases respondents were simply using their imagination with regard to other places of work, but we did gain the impression that a majority of people were thinking of concrete instances of benefits provided at other companies nearby. Overall, 16% of employees considered that they were better off in Bruply than in other places as regards the benefits provided. Nineteen per cent of people claimed that they did not know what the position was in other places, and a further 7% stated that in their view most or all companies offered very much the same kind of benefits. However, as many as 52% of respondents claimed that other places were better off than they were at Bruply. In some centres of employment this proportion was particularly high, like at Shefeera Sawmill, or Broedersdraai Garage. The fact that roughly half of the respondents felt that benefits were definitely better elsewhere and that less than one-fifth of respondents were convinced that their own benefits were more favourable than those given at other employment situations is evidence of a large range of specific perceptions about benefits which are negative. It is to a presentation of these specific perceptions that we now turn. The data we will mention were obtained largely in group interview sessions.

We have already mentioned that housing and accommodation is generally appreciated, although it may tend to be taken for granted by a very large proportion of people working for the company. We did obtain some evidence of a sense of grievance among single-quarter residents at Shefeera Sawmill because of the fact that a small group of senior employees receive more perks in the way of married quarter accommodation with brewing rights for their wives and permission to have their families with them. Those employees living in single-quarter accommodation also felt that electricity could easily be provided by the company, since the company has its own power plant which

apparently runs 24 hours a day. The complaints about lack of electricity were evident elsewhere as well. Otherwise we encountered very few specific complaints about accommodation, even though we gained the impression that the quality of the accommodation was negatively perceived in some centres of employment, particularly where the quality of accommodation is poor by objective standards. We did observe a fairly general need, among men in a number of the centres of employment, for sheltered cooking facilities and for fireplaces in dormitories which would work sufficiently well to allow smoke to escape and the rooms to be warmed. In some places meals have to be made over an open fire, very often in the rain.

Among the men there was a general desire for medical facilities where these were absent, and that such facilities should be available for use by families as well as by employees. Our observation was that such facilities should be in the form of a clinic rather than merely an official with a first-aid kit.

As regards food and rations, one very strong desire among plantation workers and among logging and transportation workers was for hot meals to be provided. The desire for this is understandable since these men work long hours and return after dark, and were very often too tired to cook adequate meals for themselves. At the Broedersdraai Garage, the desire was expressed for a company shop; this arising out of a suspicion among the men that the company was charging interest on shopping credit advanced on request. This desire might also reflect the popularity of the small start that has been made in the provision of Kupagani foods for sale at the De Hoek Sawmill. We encountered very mixed attitudes to the soup. Among many workers in all centres, but particularly among the Vendas, there appear to be misunderstanding about the nature of the soup. The soup provided is a mixture designed primarily to provide nutrition rather than flavour and some of the men, not being aware of this, considered that the preparation was simply a poor quality because of its unusual taste. In other places, where it was realised that the soup does provide healthy nutrition, we encountered many employees who attached great value to the soup and would actually look forward to the time when it was provided. This was particularly so in the plantations where the men work for long hours without adequate break for meals. One other problem regarding the provision of soup occurred at Broedersdraai Garage where a great deal of ill feeling was caused by the fact that the soup provision was discontinued and the men perceived it to be withheld as a punitive measure.

In the group interviews many workers complained about the irregular supply of protective clothing and the fact that protective clothing would fall into a state of advanced disrepair before new items were provided. There was also a feeling that the provision of waterproof clothing for outdoor work should be in the form of a protective suit which would prevent all the clothing from getting wet.

There were a number of difficulties mentioned in regard to transportation which is or might be provided by the company. Firstly, as regards transportation provided for workers to take them to work sites, there was a general feeling that some categories of employees, particularly women pruners for example, were not being given transport and that they would arrive at work very tired as a consequence.

Where workers can use an existing bus service to get to and from their homeland residences, many workers saw a need for the company to attempt to persuade the bus companies to improve their service. Some of the problems were that buses would depart late with a consequence that workers would not arrive at work in time. In some cases buses would stop to offload excess passengers if an official was in the neighbourhood. In other cases, it appears that on Monday mornings buses are simply not available because they have been hired out on charter for the weekends. In all instances like this the employees encountering these problems feel particularly aggrieved because they are not able to prove to the company that their late arrival was for reasons beyond their control. There was an active expression of the need for the company to preach punctuality to the bus services so that these problems could be avoided. Where no bus service to and from the homelands exists there was a wish that the company would provide transportation to enable men to get home without enormous difficulties which are currently endured. It goes without saying that it is also very expensive for some of these men to make their way home privately and there is always the danger of arriving back late. Where bus service does not exist it usually coincides with very long journeys which have to be made, for example, like the journey between Giyani and De Hoek. It was felt by many of the men that the transportation service could also include the laying on of one shopping trip to the nearest centre. If the company were to consider providing a transportation service, we know that it would be very necessary for the service to be very clearly explained to the men, and that it should be organised in such a way that buses or trucks leave punctually. In other words the whole arrangement should be defined to the men otherwise the provision of such a service, once the men are accustomed

to it, may generate the same sort of grievances and complaints as does the homeland bus service at the moment.

We have already mentioned some of the complaints about leave and leisure time. These were essentially that plantation workers desired more than four days' leave per year; they felt that three weeks' paid leave would be no less than fair. Also we could not help noticing that men manning the fire towers, which are usually on the tops of mountains a long distance away from accommodation or shops, get no breaks at all and no week-ends off. These men, who have a highly responsible job, appear to have roughly the same benefits and privileges as ordinary manual workers in other respects and this would appear to be inappropriate to the kinds of tasks allocated to the men.

More generally, there appears to be need for an arrangement to legitimise short periods of "compassionate leave" to enable men to attend funerals, important family gatherings, and to meet legal obligations like payment of taxes, settling of document and pass problems, etc. This would also apply to days when men are ill themselves. These problems apply particularly to migrants and commuters who when they are ill or cannot avoid staying away from work, do not have anyone who can go to inform management and thereby legitimise their absence. As we will discuss presently, this is one of the factors contributing to a more general perception among the men of an unsympathetic personnel policy. It seems necessary for some sort of regulation to be formulated in terms of which the sporadic leave of absence can be legitimised in some way so that the supervisors do not automatically perceive such absences as the dereliction of duty.

A few other comments should be made about specific perceptions among the men. These do not necessarily relate to benefits as such but they are problems which are very similar in nature to grievances regarding benefits. First of all there is a suspicion among some men that deductions are made for benefits. This is unlikely to be objectively true, but nevertheless the fact that suspicion does exist constitutes a problem for the company.

One issue which deserves some discussion is the time of payment on pay day. Whether legitimate or not, employees at Louis Trichardt and at De Hoek Sawmill feel that they should be paid in time to do shopping in Louis Trichardt or Tzaneen before setting off for the weekend. This, obviously, applies mostly to weekly migrants or longer-distance commuters. These men naturally do not want to spend an extra night in Louis Trichardt or De Hoek

but would like to leave on the Friday night for their homeland residences. However, because the process of payment often takes an extended time, and there is no opportunity to make purchases on a Friday afternoon, these men have their week-end drastically shortened by the arrangement. We have noted that an experimental scheme was started at the De Hoek Sawmill to provide men with transport to Tzaneen on Friday afternoons so that they would be in time to make purchases. This scheme was perceived by the men to be a failure because of the fact that the truck did not arrive punctually and eventually the scheme was as likely to cause frustration as satisfaction. We do not know whether this problem can be resolved, but we feel it necessary to draw the company's attention to the fact that the men themselves, who are in the position outlined above, see it as being only fair that they should receive their pay and be able to knock off in time to make purchases on a Friday afternoon. We should add to this observation the fact that some of the men felt that there was a great need for arrangements to be such that they could promptly go and spend their money responsibly before shops closed and only beerhalls were open so that their family interests could be protected; these men were quite commendably aware of the temptations which could result in a large proportion of their money being frittered away before being spent on family needs.

One small passing observation is that we could not help noticing that the football pitches at De Hoek and Shefeera Sawmills were in a poor state of repair. Since most of the young men claimed that their favourite recreation was playing football and many of the older men said that their favourite recreation was watching the younger men play football, the state of the fields may help to explain why so little of this kind of recreational activity occurs.

In conclusion we would like to sum up and say that there is a need for company policies regarding the provision of benefits to be very clearly explained to the men so as to avoid problems of rumour and hearsay. Where a particular benefit is provided it should be provided consistently and reliably and so avoiding the generation of frustrations and grievances which may not have existed had the benefit not been provided. Furthermore, company policy in regard to the provision of major benefits like, for example, housing, has to be consistent from centre to centre. An example of the importance of this consistency is the expectations of people as regards the new married quarters being built on the plantations. The research team, when residing at Bergplaas where the building programme had not yet commenced, could not help noting that

there was a great deal of anxiety at this centre of employment as regards the new married quarters. The employees were excited at the prospect of being given new houses and very anxious as a consequence of what appeared to be delay or even a possible decision on the part of the company not to build at Bergplaas. Understandably, this anxiety is especially acute among plantation workers where the families are permanent residents on the estates, and where the estate itself represents the entire future for a family.

#### III.3.4 Job Security

In the individual interviews we asked respondents whether they felt secure in their present jobs. The answers given suggested that roughly 48% of employees overall felt insecure in their work, compared with roughly 42% who felt secure. Although the respondents found it difficult to give reasons clearly for the perceived lack of security, the major factors emerging as being the cause of insecurity were the fact that workers were seen to be dismissed unexpectedly or arbitrarily, and because of the fear of possible conflict with bosses and supervisors. A small proportion of 10% of employees were either indifferent or resigned and fatalistic about the prospects of losing their jobs. These results, which are only briefly referred to in this report, suggest that the morale of the workforce must inevitably be affected by the widespread insecurity which is felt.

In the group interviews there was not much mention of job insecurity although the group interview leaders were aware of a generally shared feeling that other employment was very difficult to find. The insecurity, therefore, is something which exists in the backs of men's minds and which is brought to the fore by a specific question rather than by general discussions about working conditions. However, on all the plantations there were signs, in the group interviews, of greater overt anxiety about dismissals. This seemed to be connected with a higher general turnover, the fact that there are seasonal fluctuations in labour on the plantations, and with what men perceived to be high-handed management. The same sort of feelings also emerged at Shefeera Mill, where men saw substantial numbers of arbitrary dismissals and also of a practice of jettisoning old men. We have referred previously to this perception that old men may even be made to do very heavy work in order to encourage them to resign. These perceptions, whether correct or incorrect, were very seriously resented at this place of employment. It needs to be noted that in the group interview at this centre of employment, the men spoke a great deal about what they perceived to be dismissal on false or unacceptable

pretexts; for example "laziness" in employees who had in fact served the company for a number of years, and also because of "cheekiness". Partly as a consequence of these grievances and fears, the members of the one group interview at Shefeera Sawmill went so far as to list what they regarded as being the qualities of an ideal charge-hand: such a man should be respectful, sympathetic, understanding, interested, impartial, rewarding true merit only, and refraining from any form of favouritism.

### III.3.5 Concluding Comments on Problems and Grievances

In the preceding sections we have discussed a wide range of issues which the employees in the company consider to be problematic. Some of these are grievances in the sense that employees are able to articulate specific and keenly felt feelings of aggrievedness as a consequence of certain problems which they perceive. Other issues we have mentioned are problems without them necessarily being crystallised and overt grievances. In an earlier section we have attempted to give the employees' grievances in a rough order of importance. We have not been able to rank-order the many problems we have discussed in the same way. Obviously, not all the problems are of equal seriousness. To a large extent a reader acquainted with the company will be able to draw his own conclusions as to the gravity of the various problems we have noted. Some assistance in this regard, however, will be found in Appendix B of this report in which we present a catalogue of major problems and grievances at the different centres of employment within the company. In this appendix we have attempted a very rough indication of the relevant importance of different problems based on the frequency of mention of each problem in group interview settings.

We turn now to a number of brief concluding comments on problems and grievances. These comments, to a large degree refer back to ground which has been covered in the preceding sections, but we present them as a series of separately identifiable themes relating to major problems and grievances.

(1) Firstly, we would like to note that there is generally more discontent among young men in the workforce than among older men. One exception to this is that old men are, however, very sensitive about the issue of recognition of seniority in the sense of long service in the company. Fundamentally the older men would like to see such recognition take the form of additional remuneration or increments with long service, but in addition to this, they also desire that in some small way their age and status as old hands with

long experience in the workplace (as opposed to newcomers or rookies) should be acknowledged and appreciated. This could take the form, for example, of separate accommodation which would allow older men to form an identifiable social group with a lifestyle of their own. Another token of such recognition could be a practice of paying the old hands first on pay day so that their longer experience and longer identification with the company would be visible to other employees and they would also have the practical benefit of not suffering inconvenience as a consequence of long drawn-out payment procedures. The practice of being paid first would also avoid the older hands experiencing a sense of shame when younger men are paid before them and, in most cases, are paid the same amount, or almost the same amount of money, despite much less experience. However, we do not wish to create the impression that there is discontent among the older hands as a consequence of the present lack of recognition; in fact the older hands tend to be docile and relatively compliant, conservative and very much set in their ways. Their response to lack of recognition is likely to be lowered morale and possibly hostility towards the younger men rather than towards the company.

Because of this distinction in attitude between the younger men and the older hands, we found that most of the complaints tended to be voiced by the younger men rather than by the more experienced workers.

(2) Employees in forestry and logging operations (loading and transport) have genuinely more to complain about than those in sawmills. Although justifiable grievances abound in all situations, work is more physically demanding in the forestry and logging operations than it is in the mills, and this is reflected in the responses of employees. In forestry and logging operations, long hours bring about severe practical problems in shopping, setting aside of leisure time and communicating with the homeland, and these problems are relatively more severe than is the case in the sawmills.

(3) As regards the financial situation of employees, long-distance homeland migrants (not daily commuters) tend to suffer more poverty and social problems than those employees resident with their families in company accommodation.

(4) There is a universal plea for more money; this perception of need is particularly urgent in jobs carrying remuneration below R40-R50. We will devote attention to this problem in a later section.



(5) There is a virtually universal complaint of heavy work and fatigue. In particular, there are manifold complaints regarding involuntary overtime in most production line or "target operations" such as logging, transport, wet-mill work, work on the green-chain, and work in the warehouses. In regard to the problem of perceived strenuousness of work, we refer the reader back to our discussion of the way in which perceptions of remuneration and perceptions of work are mutually reinforcing and interdependent.

Finally, we would like to hazard a broad comment; this being the fact that while all workers tend to experience a sense of grievance, among the Venda-speaking employees, we detected signs of a greater degree of indignance and a more lively and spirited response to setbacks in the work place and their circumstances generally.

#### IV. ABSENTEEISM AND TURNOVER

The issues of absenteeism and turnover have not been emphasised by the company in the formulation of the general approach to the study of the labour force. Nevertheless, there are reasons why some brief comment may be required on these topics. Of the two, the problem of absenteeism is probably the more serious one. The General Manager of the Shefeera Sawmill and the Shefeera Yard did indicate to the team that he was concerned about the problem of Monday morning absenteeism, and there is no reason to believe that the problem does not exist to some degree at the other centres as well. Furthermore, the seriousness of the problem of absenteeism is aggravated by the fact that a loss of remuneration at an already low level of wages can have a seriously disruptive effect on family subsistence.

In the individual interviews we asked the respondents to give their opinions as to what would make a man decide to stay away from work for a day. The most prominent reason emerging from the responses is, not unexpectedly, that of ill-health and/or "bad blood"; the latter can be taken to be largely synonymous with a pervasive debilitation, lassitude and weakness. Overall, 50% of respondents mentioned this. Nearly 20% of respondents mentioned laziness as a cause of absenteeism; here presumably not necessarily thinking of themselves. The Venda-speaking respondents tended to give more emphasis to laziness as an explanation of absenteeism than other respondents. The Venda-speaking respondents displayed a greater measure of moralism and a judgemental attitude in commenting on reasons for absenteeism. Other reasons which emerged with some prominence were unavoidable practical factors

like bad weather or transport, the after-effects of liquor or the psychological after-effects of week-end leisure, a state of demotivation resulting from low pay or other aspects of working conditions, and various reasons connected with the strenuousness of work or long periods of work. When the respondents were asked on what particular days they felt less like working, it was interesting that overall only 46% said that this did not occur — in other words they consistently felt like working. In the answers there was quite a good deal to suggest that a disinclination to work was experienced regularly, or fairly regularly, by employees. At the Broedersdraai Garage, the results suggested that there is quite a degree of demotivation as a result of the response to the level of pay received on pay days. As many as 50% of employees in this location mentioned month ends or pay day as days on which they did not feel like working.

When the respondents were questioned on why they personally felt less like working on some days, the results obtained largely reinforced what we have already discussed in regard to the two previous questions. Here again, problems of health and/or "*bad blood*" emerged with greatest prominence, and the reasons which we have already discussed also appeared in much the same pattern. Here again, the employees at Broedersdraai Garage gave very great prominence to pay day demotivation. In this question fairly considerable prominence was given to the factor of exhaustion on a heavy job by the employees in the southern plantations.

In a follow-up to this question the respondents were asked about the nature of those feelings which made them disinclined to work. They were asked whether they experienced the feelings on waking, or later when working; they were also asked whether they experienced feelings in their body or in their minds. What is interesting in the results to this probe is the fact that while the majority of the men experienced the disinclination to work because of physical sensations of conditions, as many as 18% of employees overall indicated that they also felt the disinclination in their "*minds*". Here we may be dealing with something like a psychological depression, although this would be a rather extreme formulation of the condition experienced by the men. More people tended to indicate that they experienced a disinclination to work on waking in the morning rather than later on while working.

In the individual interviews we also explored whether the men were aware or not of any collective disinclination to work on a particular day by asking whether or not "all the men" ever felt less like working on a particular

day. While the majority (i.e.  $\pm$  65%) did not know, or indicated that there were no collective reactions, the substantial minority remaining did suggest that such collective conditions did exist. Among the circumstances put forward by the men were included collective feelings of lassitude after week-ends or after recreation or drinking, collective disinclination to work after pay day disillusionment, similar feelings as a consequence of shared and mutually discussed grievances, and lastly, as a consequence of exhaustion following hard work.

Generalising from the results of the individual interviews, which we have just discussed, and from impressions gained during the group interviews, we would suggest that the causes of absenteeism can be broadly categorised into a number of basic causal elements. Firstly, we have avoidable practical reasons: these would include the effects of drink and a fear of using machinery, saws or driving whilst suffering from a hangover.

The following broad set of causal factors can be termed unavoidable practical reasons. In this category a major factor would be transport and commuting problems which would obviously affect some employees more than others, kin obligations and ritual obligations in African communities, illness of self or members of the family, general exhaustion and lassitude which may or may not be combined with any specific ailment; some of this may be associated with the general and pervasive feeling of weakness that we associate with the concept of "*bad blood*" and some of it may be similar in the sense that feelings of debilitation combined with a perception of the potentially damaging effects of heavy manual labour produce what we will term a form of hypochondria. Lastly, unavoidable events like arrest, or detention as a consequence of pass offences, etc. The first two sets of unavoidable problems - transportation and commuting problems, and kin and ritual obligations in African communities - are an inevitable corollary of the phenomenon of migrant labour. The fact that migrants are "men of two worlds" and have to try to maintain a commitment to two totally different and widely separated spheres of existence means that a certain degree of absenteeism is entirely to be expected. This observation underscores the need for some kind of formal provision to be made for sporadic leave for migrant workers, and also for providing reliable, punctual and inexpensive transport to and from African areas, where such transport does not already exist.

A third major category of causal factors we would term demotivation. Demotivation would be a factor essentially embedded in the consciousness of

the workers and would relate very directly to conditions of work or perceived conditions of work. In enumerating some of the specific factors and perceptions which contribute towards this orientation, we are not denying that there may be an overlap between this orientation and one of simple "laziness" (whatever that may imply). However, we are satisfied that the state of demotivation in general is more than laziness; that it has structural foundations in working and living conditions and in the general situation of the employees.

We would see demotivation as connected with, *inter alia*, the prospect of work which is seen to be unpleasant, or the prospect of exhaustion in very heavy work, or a sense of futility in working because of poor pay, or a sense of resentment for the same reason, or unsympathetic or authoritarian supervision, or shyness and/or humiliation following punitive reprimands, or the prospect of working in bad weather, or other similar factors.

We have devoted quite a considerable amount of space to the discussion of the perceptions of wages and of the strenuousness of work in earlier sections of the report. What needs to be noted here is that while these are grievances in one sense and therefore cause conscious feelings of disappointment or discontent among members of the labour force, they are likely to have hidden consequences for worker motivation as well. In other words the pay grievance or the way in which pay grievances and strenuous work interrelate are not simply problems in themselves for the workers and for the company but they are also factors which are likely to cause men to respond with particular forms of behaviour. If the labour force was organised and characterised by a highly developed sense of class or worker-consciousness, then one would expect periodic labour disturbances in the form of strikes or other informal or semi-formal patterns of withdrawal from work. However, the majority of the labour force appears to be atomised and not characterised by a set of clear perceptions of opposition to management, and for this reason one must expect the reaction to poor wages and unfavourable working conditions to manifest itself in indirect and individuated ways. One of the ways in which this is known to occur is in the form of high rates of absenteeism, or high rates of labour turnover. In other words, the response is one of withdrawal rather than of opposition. Obviously the withdrawal response is less threatening to the interests of management in some ways, but in other ways it does imply that the prospects of increasing the individual productivity and motivation of workers are highly problematic.

Finally, we need to make a brief observation to the effect that

where the workforce live on site in company accommodation, absenteeism appears to be concentrated among lower paid workers in lower status jobs. This is a tentative observation but if it is true then we would suggest that motivation is related to the nature of the work performed; we gained the impression that absenteeism was not as high among drivers and charge-hands as it was among the kinds of workers referred to.

We have noted that there appears to be a high rate of absenteeism among people in the northern centres of employment. If this is so, it is probably to be explained by transport and bus problems among employees who work at Shefeera Yard, but among those working at Shefeera Mill a more probable explanation is that the proximity of the Maelula district of Vandaland to the Sawmill offers opportunities for sustained involvement in the ongoing life, social habits and ritual practices of a tribal community. The expectations in such a community can be very powerful and quite capable of generating pre-occupations which keep men away from work from time to time.

In regard to labour turnover, we must re-emphasise that we did not make any specific investigations of the issue. In the final report we will present statistical evidence of turnover rates, but our observations in this report will be very brief and general.

On the basis of the "withdrawal response" which we outlined above in relation to absenteeism, one would expect that rates of labour turnover would be quite high if alternative opportunities for work existed. In fact, however, there is not much evidence of opportunities to seek other employment except in the case of employees with specific skills which are generally sought after, such as drivers, the minority of employees in semi-skilled jobs such as mechanics, chain-saw mechanics, saw doctors, clerks, trained forresters, and builders and carpenters. In the Shefeera Yard at Louis Trichardt there are probably greater opportunities to seek alternative employment because of the fair number of other industrial establishments situated nearby. Even so, however, the competition for jobs in an area like Louis Trichardt would be fairly fierce, and the opportunities to find alternative work easily, very limited. Therefore, we may be dealing with a situation where labour turnover is limited by these constraints which while favourable for the company in some ways must, if it exists, have certain negative consequences as regards worker motivation and morale. If the expression of the problem is blocked the consequences are likely to be felt in indirect ways, particularly in the field of employee motivation and morale.

No doubt some of the labour turnover which does exist will be due to the desire to seek other employment but this may not account for all the turnover. Some people may be leaving employment in order to go back to the homeland for various reasons. In view of the way in which work is perceived by a large majority of the men, it is entirely possible that homeland agriculture may be seen in terms which are more favourable than those which it objectively deserves. Then again, some young men may be expected to withdraw from industrial labour for a while in order to plough, take over the leadership of the family, or to attend to some fairly prolonged crisis in the family, after which men may feel that it would be inappropriate to return to the same job, or to expect the employer to take them back.

A factor operating against labour turnover was encountered in the responses of some men, especially at the De Hoek Sawmill, who expressed the hope that they would be rewarded for staying on and rendering long service by being given increased remuneration and other privileges. These men had lived with deferred expectations for a long time, since many of them had worked for a long time without experiencing the rewards they had hoped for. The accumulation of "unrewarded" service appears to generate the expectation that sooner or later the company will meet their expectations, and this in itself appeared to be a factor which produced job commitment of a type.

Nevertheless, we found some indication of turnover in plantation work (probably related to the unpleasant nature of the work) which was revealed in plantation workers' complaints that the turnover was constantly changing the composition of work teams. As a consequence of this they would find themselves sometimes having to work with a new recruit who was unfit, untrained, and inexperienced.

## V. COMMUNICATION AND SUPERVISION

### V.1 Supervision

In regard to patterns of supervision we have discerned three situations within the company. First of all, in plantations there appears to be relatively little white intervention in the supervision of Black labour. However, in most departments at the mills, the garage and the yards there are White supervisors. In the logging transport operations the Black workers are independent while on the job, but they begin and end a day with orders or attention from Whites. Mill workers and workers in the yards receive orders

all day from Whites in most departments, while the African labourers in the plantations would probably receive orders very seldom from Whites.

In the plantations the White managers appear to have to pre-occupy themselves with forest matters, and as a consequence delegate their responsibility for dealing with the Black workers to the Black foresters. This is probably seen as very appropriate by the White managers, if only because the Black foresters are Africans like the labourers in the plantations. However, this approach appears to be problematic since the Black foresters appear to have limited executive authority and are probably not well informed of general company policy. They may also not be given an opportunity to participate in making the decisions which they have to execute in the field. For these reasons they are not really equipped to "stand-in" for White supervision, as is tacitly expected. For example, they may be given a particular task to execute through the Black labour force which involves attaining a work target which turns out to be unrealistically high in the actual circumstances in the plantation. They then have to bear responsibility for this, certainly in the eyes of the workers.

The position we have outlined is relatively more clearly apparent in the south than in the north, where a highly experienced Black forester has been observed to take considerable responsibility for all forestry operations in the absence of the White manager. However, in the south the White managers are to a lesser or greater degree protected or shielded from the negative response to job tasks by the fact that Black foresters have to see to the execution of these tasks in the field.

In the mills, we make the tentative observation that there may be a fairly high turnover of White supervisors. This would more or less inevitably mean that certain Black charge-hands who have long experience are likely to know more about the work than the new White supervisors. This, obviously, is not an ideal situation for sound supervision and communication. Furthermore, we would suggest that in many branches of South African industry (and industry elsewhere in the world for that matter) the role of a supervisor or foreman as a person who is superordinant to an experienced charge-hand, may be in some ways redundant. In the South African situation, this role is not redundant in one sense; a sense which derives from the racial cleavage in industry. An African is generally not perceived as someone who can communicate with or make requests or recommendations to White middle management. Therefore, a White supervisor appears to be required in order to authenticate the flow of

communication between work groups and their charge-hands, and middle management, or between work groups and their charge-hands and other work groups performing some other function (such as maintenance functions, for example). Bearing in mind the fact that the quality of White supervision is not high in South Africa, due to high labour turnover, and due to the lack of competition for such jobs, we would suggest that it may possibly be worthwhile reviewing the supervision in the mills with a view to considering the appointment of Black charge-hands as supervisors.

We turn now to a brief outline of the average worker's perceptions of White supervision in the company. Management tends to be viewed as ignorant of employee problems, or as a group of people who merely give token acknowledgment of workers' problems. Workers have told us that White managers may express sympathy but do nothing. Even in employment situations where the style of supervision is perceived as satisfactory and is appreciated (Shefeera Yard) the supervisors are nevertheless perceived as being indifferent to Black poverty.

At the Broedersdraai Garage we were given some verbal evidence of what is apparently crude supervision, brutal reprimands involving occasional kicking of men, etc. Workers indicated to us that they had an intense dislike of this kind of physical experience and that it led to demotivation and absence from work. Other more generous supervisors were, however, appreciated.

At the Boyne Sawmill we encountered workers who were highly dissatisfied with the White supervisor. The pattern of supervision here complicates and aggravates a range of other problems.

In the Haenertsburg plantations the issue is somewhat more complex. There, according to the feedback which we received from the workers, the manager, while never actually offensive, tends to have a somewhat tactless style of supervision. He is viewed as being brusque, unsympathetic, unappreciative and sometimes callous. In one group interview the men gave a long example of this which concerned a severe public reprimand of the men for having allowed a tree to fall into a dam, when the men felt that the error was not unreasonable and could have been justified in front of an official of the Department of Water Affairs, in whose presence the reprimand was given. On the other hand we should point out that the manager is responsible for the home-building programme and other positive developments and is probably very well-intentioned.



The accounts we received from the employees interviewed at the De Hoek Sawmill suggested that the men were generally fearful of the foreman and charge-hands. Management again was viewed as ignorant of employees' problems. At the Shefeera Mill the account we received was of generally unsympathetic supervision. Men claimed that they had particular difficulties in explaining small errors like being late, absence due to unavoidable reasons, and errors in task performance. The impression they gave was of an over-punitive response to errors and absence. Furthermore, they claimed that there were arbitrary dismissals of men without a particular employee being given a fair hearing or opportunity to explain his actions. Another problem which emerged here was that the men perceived the supervisors and charge-hands as being over-zealous and harsh in their expectations as regards work. The men claimed that they were being overworked and forced to do considerable amounts of involuntary overtime. It needs to be noted that the Black charge-hands were generally blamed for the situations but it must be true that Whites in supervisory positions would have to condone or turn a blind eye to this kind of supervision for it to continue.

In the Shefeera plantation the expert supervision on the job by a Black forester was genuinely appreciated. What was particularly appreciated in certain work teams was that the workers themselves were able to share in deciding on work targets. However, the Whites were nevertheless seen as responsible for overall company policy; wages, standards of accommodation, transport, job security, and general conditions of work. Despite the sound on-the-job supervision, the management was not viewed as being particularly concerned about workers, predictable or reliable in respect of the general working conditions.

The general attitudes of the workers to supervision within the company is summed up in a sense by their responses to the question on the possibility of senior African supervision in the company. The respondents in the individual interviews were asked what they thought of the idea of a senior African supervisor. As many as 77% of the employees were unequivocally in favour of supervision being delegated to Blacks in senior positions. Among these the majority felt that it would lead to better communication or a more sympathetic understanding of the Black workers by the company. A smaller but substantial number felt such a person was more likely to represent workers more adequately to management than the present supervisors. A much smaller proportion (i.e. 12%) were equivocal or noncommittal about the idea, while only 6% felt that Whites should remain in supervisory positions. These replies give

some indication of the extent to which the employees feel that the supervision can be improved within the company.

## V.2 Communication

Central to the issue of communication is the liaison committee system as it operates within the company. Workers were questioned on liaison committees, both in the individual interviews and in group interviews. In the individual interviews, 35% of the employees overall stated that they were satisfied with the committees, and a further 17% declared them to be generally in favour of liaison committees but did not indicate whether they were satisfied with the particular committee they had or not. In the responses of the remainder, however, there are indications of problems with the committees. Eleven per cent of employees knew about the committee but did not understand it or did not know who the representatives were. A further 11% stated that they regarded the committee as ineffective and useless. Even more surprising, was the fact that 12% stated that they had never heard of the committee. In general, then, it would appear that a substantial proportion of the labour force views the committee system with some scepticism or is not sufficiently acquainted with the committee system in order to be able to evaluate it. In the latter case it probably also means that the workers do not perceive any benefits as flowing from formalised means of communication between workers and management.

An interesting aspect of the findings, however, is that a proportion of the employees who indicated that they were satisfied with the liaison committee or were favourably disposed towards the liaison committee did not appear to have used the committee constructively. When asked whether they had discussed any of their problems with the liaison committee or its members, some 72% of respondents in those centres where committees had been operating for some time indicated that they had either not approached the liaison committee, or felt that it was a waste of time, or were fearful of consequences, or did not know the committee members or rules. Some 7% of the employees in these centres indicated that they had discussed their problems with the liaison committee but were not able to give any more details. Nineteen per cent indicated that they had discussed their problems with the liaison committee but that no reply had been forthcoming, or that management had been unsympathetic or had not acted. We gained an overall picture from the individual interviews, then, that the committee system is not operating as well as it could, certainly at the level of perception of the individual employees.

We turn now to more general comments which are derived from results of group interviews and broad observations of the situation. It is our impression that, as well as having built-in limitations, the liaison committee system does not appear to be functioning as well in the De Hoek group of centres as it is in the Shefeera group. Then again, mainly as regards the De Hoek group of centres, but possibly elsewhere as well, it seems that the liaison committee system had an optimistic start; the group personnel department and local personnel officers having taken pains to arrange elections and the selection of representatives, etc. However, at the time of the fieldwork it appeared that the system in the De Hoek group was in danger of foundering upon the rocks of disillusionment. The men had elected representatives, put forward communications, which had been raised at committee meetings but which had thereafter received little or no response, as the men saw it. The men at various centres felt that management was inert and not reacting to the input from the committees. They considered that in effect the committees were not changing their lives. After an initial enthusiastic response, therefore, a considerable proportion of men were declaring that they would not be interested in voting for future committees.

In July 1975 part of the team returned to conduct further interviews in the southern group of centres. Impressions regarding developments in the liaison committee system since the earlier fieldwork were rather mixed. The following remarks are tentative but may nevertheless be of some value. At the De Hoek Sawmill it seemed that genuine effort was being made to receive communication from the workers and to give feedback to them. In the outlying areas, however, there appear to be some dragging of feet by management and a general lack of enthusiasm for the committee system. The impression was gained that the committees are not taken very seriously. More specifically, for example, in the Haenertsburg plantations it seemed that the manager was continually unavailable to discuss the committee minutes with the Black personnel officer, or this was certainly so at the time of the fieldwork.

At the Broedersdraai Garage, the manager appeared to have displayed some hostility towards the personnel officer, in as much as the latter represented the interests and input of the liaison committee representatives. This had led to a breakdown in the effective functioning of the committee to a certain degree. At the Boyne Sawmill, our tentative impression was that there was a serious breakdown in the communication system via the liaison committee. We are not certain as to the basic reasons for the virtual disintegration of the committee system; one possibility is that there was a hostile reaction by

the manager to the communication of liaison committee representatives' grievances through the personnel officer, and another possibility is that the liaison committee representatives had gradually withdrawn from active involvement and the men in turn had withdrawn from putting through requests for information and other forms of input to the committee. Whatever the reason, it certainly did not seem as if the committee was operating effectively.

Unfortunately, there has been no recent visit to the Shefeera group, but at the time of the original fieldwork the committee system seemed to be viewed by the men more positively than was the case in the south due to the management's methods of writing a reply or comment against each issue recorded in the minutes of the liaison committee. The Minute Book plus the replies was then, we understood, studied by a second follow-up meeting of the committee. This system seemed to be meeting with general approval from the men. It is our experience from other studies, and from general observation, that a feedback component, like that described above, is essential for the success of a committee system.

A brief comment is required on the method adopted in the election of representatives. In the southern centres it would seem that there was a more or less democratic procedure adopted for the elections, with individuals nominated and the men being given an opportunity to indicate their preferences. In the north, however, the African personnel officer appears to have selected representatives. In the case of this particular personnel officer, we were satisfied at the time of the fieldwork that his orientation was sufficiently sound as to make the selection of representatives very appropriate for the task to be performed. However, this success would probably be due to the orientation of one particular personnel officer, and in general it cannot be recommended, since it has the obvious weakness of producing representatives who are not the legitimate spokesmen for the workforce.

In order to shed more light and understanding on the problems which beset the operation of the liaison committee system in the company, we present a somewhat more detailed analysis of the functioning of the liaison committee system at the Boyne Sawmill, where the problems besetting the committee system are rather extreme and therefore illustrative of what can happen elsewhere as well. Indeed, it is our view that many of the basic problems which are illuminated by the analysis of the situation at Boyne exist in nascent or weaker form elsewhere.

During the fieldwork in July 1974, on the basis of group interviews, discussions with the Black personnel officer, and other discussions and general observation of the situation, it would seem that a number of factors were combining to inhibit the effectiveness of the liaison committee system in its intended function. These factors may be summarised as follows, we enumerate them first and elaborate on them afterwards:

- (i) a certain uncomplaining male ethic among the workers;
- (ii) ineffective functioning of the liaison committees;
- (iii) employee reluctance to use the liaison committee; and
- (iv) employee perception of a communications barrier.

(i) Uncomplaining Male Ethic. It would seem that an informal norm has formed among the men which might be described as a "male ethic of uncomplaining stoicism". The men normally regard a querulous person as a weakling, or as a person deserving scorn, and they therefore tend to have a natural inhibition about complaining openly about problems. To complain formally, i.e., to make unsolicited complaint, is to swallow one's pride, to sacrifice a certain amount of dignity and independence; while in fact the personal need for dignity is possibly at its greatest when one is working in either an alien cultural environment or working in a situation of blanket subordination. Both of these qualities are applicable to the situation of the migrant worker.

Another factor is that resignation and a sense of futility develops over time as the men "*get tired of continually complaining in vain*"; i.e., with no response or changes resulting.

(ii) Ineffective Functioning of the Liaison Committee. From the employees' perspective the liaison committee has established a reputation of achieving very little. The committee members at Boyne are said to be unsympathetic to many issues referred to them, divided and incapable of reaching consensus among themselves, and uninterested in reporting back to the men the outcome of any of their meetings. Employees tend not to refer issues to the committee any longer, as they expect to hear nothing in response either from the committee or from management. The problems noted above raise the question as to whether the committee members are truly representative of the workforce or not.

(iii) Employee Reluctance to Use Liaison Committee. Supporting the suggestion that the committee is not truly representative, are indications that

the majority of its members are old men with views tending to be markedly more conservative than those of the average employee. Should an employee wish to communicate a certain issue to management, such a committee merely represents an inhibiting factor, an unnecessary and distorting mediation in the attempt to communicate. Such an employee is not at all motivated to bring his issue before his committee - he feels he would rather try to take it, if only he knew how, directly to management. Furthermore, certain more personal or sensitive issues such as redetermination of wages or increments are plainly considered not to be the legitimate domain of such an alienated committee.

A further question arising out of the observations given immediately above, is why the committee is over-representative of old men on the workforce. The old men tend to be perceived as unsympathetic; they are to some extent indifferent to the feelings and responses of the younger men in the workplace. It seems odd that a system which is based on an elective procedure should emerge with a basic weakness in terms of the legitimacy of its representatives.

(iv) Perception of Communications Barrier. Independent of the problem outlined above is a general perception (by employees) of management as unapproachable and not amenable to effective communication, excepting on superficial levels. In this context the entire constitution of a liaison committee system is handicapped by a credibility-gap, and probably regarded with doubt or pessimism. The men find it hard to believe that a group of White managers should suddenly have an interest in their welfarā. Such a view is aggravated by a poor record of achievements on the part of the committee.

In the situation at the Boyne Sawmill, in particular, employees have expressed disillusionment with the liaison committee system and indicated sharply declining enthusiasm for further participation, e.g., a lack of interest in voting for future committee members.

In view of the apparent weakness of the liaison committee system, within the company, it is necessary that we make one or two very brief comments about other avenues for communication which exist in the structure of the company. More in the south than in the north, it is our impression that a great deal of the load of responsibility for communication between management and Black workers is being placed on the shoulders of the Black personnel officer. It appears all too easy for any White employee at the supervisory level and above to, in a sense, abdicate responsibility for direct communication

with African workers and to attempt to funnel the communication through the; Black personnel officer. Similarly in cases where the communication required is of a two-way kind, it is once again rather too easy to have the Black personnel officer perform a mediating function. In other words, we feel that there is a danger that communication channels may be becoming rather too focused and that the link between management and the workers and vice-versa, in effective terms, is tenuous in that it depends on the orientation and talents of an individual. Whatever the abilities and talents of the individual Black personnel officer may be, this displays the structural weakness in the communications set-up. In the north, although some of these observations would hold as well, we did gain somewhat of an impression that there were more Whites at the level of supervision who were prepared to attempt to communicate directly with the Blacks in their scope of operations. We should point out the obvious, and that is that any Black personnel officer in the situation we have described for the southern group of centres, is in a very difficult, intercalary position in the company structure.

The Black personnel officer, irrespective of who the individual might be, has to try to maintain legitimacy on two fronts; with management on the one hand, and with the Black labour force on the other. Needless to say there is a considerable gulf of mutual alienation from one another between these two segments in all too many South African company labour forces. Hence the intermediate or marginal position of the personnel officer is such that he has to attempt to straddle a wide cleavage in his orientations. On the one hand, the Black workers will tend to see the personnel officer as a spokesman and, indeed, management would also tend to regard him as a spokesman, if only because he is Black like the majority of the workers. Obviously, it is very difficult for a Black personnel officer who is, at least in part, identified with and obligated to management to maintain a stance as spokesman. In order to be an effective spokesman for the men he has to relinquish his "allegiance" to the interests and immediate concerns of management to a considerable degree. This the Black personnel officer in Bruply obviously cannot afford to do. Therefore, his role as a spokesman must inevitably be limited. Another problem which arises in the marginal position of the Black personnel officer in the company is that of maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of the Black workers. We have gained the impression that the personnel officer in the southern group of companies is expected to communicate company or management expectations and regulations to the workers. This, he is obviously able to do, but what he is probably unable to do is to interpret those expectations and regulations flexibly as sees fit in particular

situations. Hence, it can happen, for example, that a particular instruction is issued through the Black personnel officer, and when someone transgresses an instruction, action taken against him may not be in accordance with the terms of the regulations or expectation communicated initially. The Black personnel officer then is in severe danger of losing credibility in the eyes of the workers. Yet his success as a personnel officer appears to hinge on his maintaining credibility among the workers in order to act as their spokesman. If he is to maintain credibility and to maintain a constructive relationship with management, he needs the executive authority to enforce and interpret company policy as he sees it as being necessary in the light of his greater knowledge of the circumstances and feelings of the African employee he is dealing with.

We have noted and we have been told that these problems exist with regard to the role of the Black personnel officer in the southern group of companies and possibly in the northern group to some extent as well. At the present time the institution of having a Black personnel functionary is relatively new in Bruply operations in the Northern Transvaal. In research and interviewing conducted in Durban among Black workers, many of whom work in companies where Black personnel officers have been employed for a considerable number of years, we gain the impression that there is mounting disillusionment and conscious distantiation of African employees vis-à-vis the typical Black personnel officer. Unless this very problematic role is very carefully conceptualised and unless very clear areas of executive authority are given to such a person, the positive effects of the introduction of a Black personnel function cannot be expected to last indefinitely.

Finally, we would like to make the observation that it seems necessary for the White supervisors in general, to take a greater interest in attempting to communicate directly with the men in their sphere of operations, and through their demeanour and stance to make it possible to receive feedback from the men directly. It becomes all too easy to refer all communication problems to the Black personnel officer, who becomes like an overloaded switchboard, as it were.

#### VII OBJECTIVE SUBSISTENCE NEEDS AND COST OF LIVING PROBLEMS

We have noted the existence of widespread and intensively felt wage and income grievances among a majority of the labour force. It is necessary, in the light of these grievances, to assess the objective relationship between



incomes and cost of living needs.

The most widely accepted standard measurement of minimum subsistence needs is that of the Bureau of Market Research at the University of South Africa; the so-called Minimum Living Level (MLL). The MLL comprises all the basic items of essential family expenditure, being defined by Professor Nel as "the lowest sum possible on which a specific size of household can live in our existing social set up".<sup>1)</sup> The items comprise food (based on the lowest diet scales of the Department of Health), clothing, fuel and light, taxes and compulsory payments to authorities, washing and cleaning materials, transport costs, medical and dental costs, education of children and replacement of household equipment. The calculation of MLL's for different categories of workers in the company has been explained in detail in the previous report and the readers are referred to this document,<sup>2)</sup> for a presentation of basic procedures.

We have considered it necessary in this report, however, to include a second standard presented by the Bureau of Market Research; this being the so-called Higher Living Level (or Supplemented Living Level), for the following reasons. The MLL is basically a survival measure, below which absolute deprivation occurs. It is not a "humane" standard, since it does not allow for:

- recreation and entertainment;
- personal care and cosmetics;
- contributions to pension, unemployment or burial funds; or
- savings for the payment of lobola by single men, etc.

The Higher Living Level allows for certain additional items of food, small amounts for tobacco, recreation, personal care and contributions to pension or insurance funds.<sup>3)</sup> Needless to say, it is a more appropriate

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- 1) P.A. Nel, *The Minimum and Humane Living Levels of Blacks in Black Homelands, White Rural and Border Areas*, February 1974. Pretoria: Bureau of Market Research, Research Report No.42, p.3, 1974.
  - 2) For a full discussion of the calculation of the MLL standards for Bruply workers see R.D.J. Allen, C.F.M. Rawlins and L. Schlemmer, *Minimum Living Levels, Incomes and Family Structure among African Employees in the Northern Transvaal*. Durban: Institute for Social Research, March, 1975.
  - 3) In detail, the additional items, as given by Nel, *op.cit.*, are: (per month) 8 litres of home-brewed beer, 2 x 100g packets tobacco, 10 boxes of matches, 2 jars petroleum jelly per household, 1 toothbrush per person, 1 medium-sized tube of toothpaste per household, contributions to pension and burial funds (in this case 5% of the wage), additional meat or fish, margarine, oil, brown bread, jam, cheese, eggs, a suit for males and material for a costume for females.

measure of the adequacy of family incomes since African families, no matter how poor, tend to spend money on these additional items and do not confine themselves to the basic food items in the MLL.<sup>1)</sup>

It should be emphasised that both measures, the MLL and the HLL, tend to be conservative, since they assume rational minimum expenditure on the cheapest suitable items, the purchase of items in conventional quantities, the seeking out of the least expensive retail outlets, a choice of food and clothing determined by rational criteria alone, and no (or in the case of the HLL, little) "superfluous" expenditure on items or activities which can be argued to enhance the quality of life.

The figures which will be presented below are based on costing conducted at a cross-section of retail outlets near the areas of employment in November 1973 and July 1975. In calculating the MLL's and the HLL's we have followed as exactly as possible the procedures outlined by Nel of the Bureau of Market Research. In calculating family incomes we have used our own survey data to establish additional income in kind (from sale of crops, etc., or lodging costs paid to the family), additional earned income by other family members, and we have also taken into account the theoretical retail costs, to the employee, of company rations and meals.

We have based our calculations on two types of family structure:

the nuclear family; and the *de facto* dependent family.

The first is defined as the husband, wife and own dependent children. The *de facto* family is larger and includes *bona fide* dependents whom the family head is expected to support. These may include aged parents, or, say, an unmarried daughter's children, or even an orphaned or destitute nephew or niece. The *de facto* family is not to be confused with the extended kin-grouping which can be much larger than *de facto* dependent units. We have not calculated standards for extended African families.

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1) In discussions of the Poverty Datum Line, for example, it was often asserted that families required  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times the Poverty Datum Line figure in terms of income before they would spend appropriate amounts on the Poverty Datum Line items; see, for example, H.L. Watts, *The Poverty Datum Line in Three Cities and Four Towns*. Durban: Institute for Social Research, Fact Paper Series, 1967.

Before presenting the data, we must make mention of the fact that our stratified random samples of employees in various company situations produced wage figures which were higher than the average wages furnished by the company. Any sample is subject to sampling error, and it is possible that our results over-estimate employees incomes. In some of the results to be presented, therefore, we have given calculations based both on our sample results and on the wage statistics furnished by the company.<sup>1)</sup>

In Tables I and II below we present the nett Minimum Living Levels and Higher Living Levels for nuclear and *de facto* families for three broad regions of employment (Table I) and for the entire labour force divided into categories of age and marital status (Table II). The figures given are for two different dates: November 1973 and July 1974. The figures given are self-explanatory and require no comment.

It will be noted that there was a very substantial increase in living costs between November 1973 and July 1975. As it happened, the increase was remarkably consistent in all regions, at 45% (the increases in different areas differed only by a few decimal points).

How do these increases compare with wage increases? According to figures furnished by the company, the increases between September 1973 (which we have taken to represent November 1973) and July 1975 were as follows:

WAGE RATES:	Boyne Sawmill	84%
	De Hoek and Broedersdraai (Sawmill and Transport Garage)	78%
	Southern Group Plantations	27%
	Northern Group (Sawmills and Plantations)	50%
ACTUAL EARNINGS:	De Hoek, Boyne, Broedersdraai	83%
	Shefeera (Sawmill and Yard)	36%
	All Plantations	51%

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1) Information telexed by Mr. Markey on 20.11.1975, 24.11.1975 and 26.11.1975. A comparison of wages throughout the company shows our figures to be some 40% higher than the company statistics.

TABLE I

A COMPARISON OF NETT MINIMUM LIVING LEVELS AND HIGHER (OR SUPPLEMENTED) LIVING LEVELS AT NOVEMBER 1973 AND JULY 1975 FOR VARIOUS EMPLOYMENT SITUATIONS IN THE COMPANY

	De Hoek, Broedersdraai, Boyne		Shefeera Sawmill and Yard		Shefeera, Haenertsberg, and Wolkberg Plantations	
	Nov 1973	July 1975	Nov 1973	July 1975	Nov 1973	July 1975
	R	R	R	R	R	R
<u>Nuclear Family: MLL</u>						
M.Q.R.*	38,95	56,43	45,76	66,73	40,92	59,46
S.Q.M.**	44,69	64,51	47,41	68,72	43,05	62,00
L.D.M.***			53,91	77,50		
Unweighted Average	44,24	64,01	46,84	68,00	41,99	60,73
<u>De Facto Family: MLL</u>						
M.Q.R.	54,73	79,26	70,84	103,30	58,26	84,68
S.Q.M.	59,91	86,45	72,93	105,73	60,38	86,91
L.D.M.			78,29	112,55		
Unweighted Average	59,46	85,99	72,14	104,75	59,32	85,80
<u>Nuclear Family: HLL</u>						
M.Q.R.	53,25	77,20	61,41	89,48	56,23	81,74
S.Q.M.	62,65	86,90	63,06	91,47	65,71	84,28
L.D.M.			70,14	101,10		
Unweighted Average	59,72	86,40	62,49	90,75	57,54	83,01
<u>De Facto Family: HLL</u>						
M.Q.R.	73,88	107,09	93,76	136,62	78,83	99,08
S.Q.M.	80,89	117,30	95,84	139,06	98,22	141,55
L.D.M.			101,09	145,71		
Unweighted Average	79,50	115,19	95,05	138,07	80,13	116,04
General Percentage Increase		45%		45%		45%

\* M.Q.R.: Married Quarter Residents

\*\* S.Q.M.: Single Quarter Migrants

\*\*\* L.D.M.: Location Dweller Migrants

TABLE II

A COMPARISON OF NETT MINIMUM LIVING LEVELS AND HIGHER (SUPPLEMENTED) LIVING LEVELS AT NOVEMBER 1973 AND JULY 1975 FOR MARRIED EMPLOYEES OF DIFFERENT AGE-GROUPS AND SINGLE EMPLOYEES

	Married 22-34 yrs		Married 35-54 yrs		Married 55 yrs +		Unmarried -34 yrs		All Male Employees	
	Nov 1973	July 1975	Nov 1973	July 1975	Nov 1973	July 1975	Nov 1973	July 1975	Nov 1973	July 1975
<u>Nuclear Family: MLL</u>	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
M.Q.R.*	35,96	53,28	53,22	77,49	55,38	80,74	17,75	25,17	42,89	62,67
S.Q.M.**	39,01	56,79	56,11	80,73	58,18	83,83	20,29	27,95	45,90	65,97
Unweighted Average	37,49	55,04	54,67	79,11	56,78	82,29	19,02	26,56	44,40	64,32
<u>De Facto Family: MLL</u>										
M.Q.R.	52,74	78,14	70,23	102,26	63,90	93,16	49,36	69,99	61,74	90,21
S.Q.M.	55,79	81,22	73,12	105,20	66,70	96,11	51,90	71,49	64,75	93,06
Unweighted Average	54,27	79,68	71,68	103,73	65,30	94,64	50,63	70,74	63,25	91,64
<u>Nuclear Family: HLL</u>										
M.Q.R.	49,73	73,30	71,68	104,42	74,11	108,02	25,36	36,10	58,30	85,11
S.Q.M.	52,78	76,81	74,57	107,66	76,91	111,11	27,90	38,88	61,31	88,41
Unweighted Average	51,26	75,06	73,13	106,04	75,51	109,57	26,63	37,49	59,81	86,76
<u>De Facto Family: HLL</u>										
M.Q.R.	71,49	105,37	93,39	136,05	85,47	124,58	67,15	95,59	82,77	120,83
S.Q.M.	74,54	108,48	96,28	139,00	88,27	127,52	69,69	97,12	85,78	123,70
Unweighted Average	73,02	106,93	94,84	137,53	86,87	126,05	68,42	96,36	84,28	122,27
<u>Family and Dependency Data</u>										
Nuclear Family Size	3,79		5,54		5,46		1,00		4,30	
De Facto Dependent Unit	5,53		7,22		6,25		4,23		6,20	
Extended Family Size (not used in cal- culations above)	5,81		7,35		6,73		4,90		6,49	

\*M.Q.R.: Married Quarter Resident

\*\*S.Q.M.: Single Quarter Migrant

The latter category of figures - ACTUAL EARNINGS - is based on the total wage bill divided by the number of employees, and is affected by absenteeism and a variety of other factors, rendering strict comparison with wage-rates difficult. From these figures, however, it seems that wages have increased relative to cost of living in general; markedly so at Boyne, De Hoek Sawmill and Broedersdraai Garage and narrowly so on the Plantations taken together. The wages may have decreased relative to cost of living at the Shefeera Sawmill and Yard and on the southern group Plantations.

At the base of Table II are data which are relevant to an interpretation of the figures in the tables and to subsequent figures; these being average family sizes of different categories of employees. We must note, for example, the large discrepancies between "nuclear" or elementary family sizes and the *de facto* dependent units. The latter, in fact, do not fall far short of the full extended family sizes of employees. It is clear from these data that the employees are not, in practice, limited to supporting only their elementary families (wives and children) but have a large actual dependency load, from obligations to which they cannot escape. We were careful in the fieldwork to establish the nature of the relationships involved in the *de facto* units so as to exclude persons for whose maintenance the employees were not responsible. It seems quite clear from these *de facto* dependency unit sizes that the employees carry a considerable burden of dependency beyond that which would pertain among settled urban employees.

We turn now to the most relevant part of our analysis, however, this being the relationship between workers' incomes and the Minimum and Higher Living Levels. As mentioned previously we were faced with some difficulty in this operation due to discrepancies between wage data from our sample and wage data furnished by the company. For example, the average wage for all African employees (actual wages paid) towards the end of 1973, according to company records for September 1973, was R24,47, compared with our sample estimate (November 1973) of R34,24. If the company records are correct, our sample data reflects (a) a relatively favourable month in terms of time worked, and/or (b) an over-representation of better-paid employees. The over-estimate is in the order of 40%.

In calculating wage data for 1975, we used company records of actual wages paid in July 1975. To obtain an equivalent figure for July 1975 for our sample estimate we raised the 1973 estimate by the relevant percentage increases reflected in company wage data. For family income data we raised,

in the same way, our estimate of the total of the average employees wage, average earnings of additional breadwinners, and average income in kind (see description earlier). The company record data was "augmented" to represent family income by raising it by the same proportion as the difference between employees wage and family income in our sample data. By this method we obtained the following estimates, for all African employees, of average family income data (nuclear family), July 1975:

based on company information	-	R39,87
based on sample survey information	-	R56,58

Bearing in mind these discrepancies, we had no option but to present two analyses of the relationship between family income data and MLL's/HLL's - a high figure (sample survey based) and a low figure (company record based).

In Tables III and IV, then, are presented figures on the so-called Available Income Ratio, that is, the estimated family income divided by the Minimum Living Level and Higher Living Level, for the nuclear and *de facto* family units. Data are presented for Married Quarter Residents and Single Quarter Migrants, since the travelling costs borne by the two groups differ markedly. The first table (Table III) gives the most favourable ratios being based on sample survey data, raised by the percentage increases in wages as appearing from company records. For this it was assumed that other income would increase in roughly the same proportions, an assumption which may not be true and is likely, if anything, to over-estimate "other income" slightly. This was the only option available, however, short of conducting a new sample survey in July 1975.

The second table (Table IV) gives the least favourable ratios, since it is based on company wage information, augmented as described earlier, to give an estimate of family income. As in the previous table, the amount of "other income" is probably slightly over-estimated by this procedure, but no other practical way of approaching the problem existed.

Finally it should be noted, that the Available Income Ratios (AIR's) for *de facto* families are based on extended family income, thereby giving a slightly more favourable ratio of income to subsistence needs than would have been the case had only *de facto* dependent unit income been taken. One must assume, however, that income from earners in the extended family is available to help support the main breadwinner's *de facto* dependent unit. In

practice, the difference between *de facto* and extended family incomes was negligible, on average, indicating that the employees have even more dependents than the *de facto* dependent unit size would suggest.

Due to the assumptions made in estimating family incomes, and bearing in mind the last point made, it should be borne in mind that the picture presented, even in Table IV, is an optimistic one. If the data are in error, the error is in a favourable direction as far as the relationship between family incomes and subsistence standards are concerned.

TABLE III

AVAILABLE INCOME RATIOS EXPRESSING THE AVERAGE FAMILY INCOME AS A PROPORTION OF THE MINIMUM AND HIGHER LIVING LEVELS, APPLICABLE TO NUCLEAR AND DE FACTO DEPENDENT FAMILY SIZES, BASED ON INCOME ESTIMATES DERIVED FROM THE SAMPLE SURVEY - JULY 1975

Category of Employee, Type of Family and MLL/HLL	Estimated Family Income 1)	AIR - Married Quarter Residents	AIR - Single Quarter Migrants	AIR - ALL (Unweighted Average)
<u>Nuclear MLL</u>	R			
Married - 22-34 years	53,67	1,01	,95	,98
- 35-54 years	62,46	,81	,77	,79
- 55+ years	57,11	,71	,68	,69
Unmarried	44,07	1,75	1,58	1,66
All	56,58	,90	,86	,88
<u>De Facto MLL<sup>2)</sup></u>				
Married - 22-34 years	63,42	,81	,78	,80
- 35-54 years	73,05	,71	,69	,70
- 55+ years	78,29	,84	,81	,83
Unmarried	59,79	,85	,84	,85
All	69,00	,76	,74	,75
<u>Nuclear HLL</u>				
Married - 22-34 years	53,67	,73	,70	,72
- 35-54 years	62,46	,60	,58	,59
- 55+ years	57,11	,53	,51	,52
Unmarried	44,07	1,22	1,13	1,17
All	56,58	,66	,64	,65
<u>De Facto MLL<sup>2)</sup></u>				
Married - 22-34 years	63,42	,60	,58	,59
- 35-54 years	73,05	,54	,53	,53
- 55+ years	78,29	,63	,61	,62
Unmarried	59,79	,63	,62	,62
All	69,00	,57	,56	,56

- 1) Assuming constant increases in wages across categories of employees.
- 2) Family income data relevant to extended family (see text).



TABLE IV

AVERAGE FAMILY INCOME AS A PROPORTION OF THE MINIMUM AND HIGHER LIVING LEVELS (AIR), APPLICABLE TO NUCLEAR AND DE FACTO DEPENDENT FAMILY SIZES, BASED ON INCOME ESTIMATES DERIVED FROM COMPANY RECORDS OF ACTUAL EARNINGS - JULY 1975

Category of Employee, Type of Family and MLL/HLL	Estimated Family Income <sup>1)</sup>	AIR - Married Quarter Residents	AIR - Single Quarter Migrants	AIR - ALL (Unweighted Average)
<u>Nuclear MLL</u>	R			
Married - 22-34 years	38,06	,71	,67	,69
- 35-54 years	44,30	,57	,55	,56
- 55+ years	40,50	,50	,48	,49
Unmarried	31,26	1,24	1,12	1,18
All	40,13	,64	,61	,62
<u>De Facto MLL<sup>2)</sup></u>				
Married - 22-34 years	44,98	,58	,55	,56
- 35-54 years	51,81	,51	,49	,50
- 55+ years	55,52	,60	,58	,59
Unmarried	42,40	,61	,59	,60
All	48,94	,54	,53	,53
<u>Nuclear HLL</u>				
Married - 22-34 years	38,06	,52	,50	,51
- 35-54 years	44,30	,42	,41	,42
- 55+ years	40,50	,37	,36	,37
Unmarried	31,26	,87	,80	,83
All	40,13	,47	,45	,46
<u>De Facto HLL<sup>2)</sup></u>				
Married - 22-34 years	44,98	,43	,41	,42
- 35-54 years	51,81	,38	,37	,38
- 55+ years	55,52	,45	,44	,44
Unmarried	42,40	,44	,44	,44
All	48,94	,41	,40	,40

- 1) Company wage data augmented and varied according to category on the basis of results obtained from sample survey.
- 2) Family income data relevant to extended family (see text).

We are able to draw certain broad conclusions relevant to the objective material situation of African employees in the company on the basis of the results in Table III and IV.

Firstly, we should note that the Available Income Ratio for July 1974 is adversely affected by the high rate of increase of the cost of living for Africans in the Northern Transvaal. An increase of 45% in 18-19 months is equivalent to an increase of roughly 30% per annum - a very high rate of inflation indeed. This, however, appears to be congruent with the pattern

noted elsewhere and by other researchers<sup>1)</sup> for African cost of living to increase more steeply than the increase in the official Consumer Price Index (which is applicable to White spending patterns at central city retail outlets). Undoubtedly inflation appears to have affected rural African employees more adversely than other groups.

The results in Table III are the most favourable being based on sample survey data which appears to have over-estimated incomes. Yet, they are relevant since they represent the objective circumstances to which our interviewees were responding when they expressed wage grievances. We note from these results that it is only the nuclear MLL for unmarried men and the youngest married group which is exceeded by average family income. As far as the HLL is concerned, only the unmarried group has incomes higher than the HLL for nuclear families. Unmarried men, however, lose their favourable position when the *de facto* family MLL's and HLL's are referred to, since they would appear to have considerable family obligations, despite their unmarried status (see data on family sizes in Table II).

When men complain of inadequate wages, they most probably have standards in mind which approximate to the *de facto* HLL benchmark. We note from Table III that family incomes as a proportion of the *de facto* HLL vary between 53% and 63% for the different groups of employees.

As regards the standard for the nuclear family, it is the oldest men who are worst off (marrieds, 55 years and older) whereas when *de facto* family patterns are considered, the married employees of 35-54 years are worst off. Further comment on the table is unnecessary since the ratios are self-explanatory.

The same general pattern pertains when we look at the results in Table IV, but here the relationship between wages and MLL's/HLL's is less favourable, since it is based on family income data derived from wage figures given by the company. Here it is only the unmarried employees whose family incomes exceed the nuclear MLL. In all other comparisons the calculations show the family incomes to be between broadly, 50%-70% of MLL's and 40%-50% of HLL's. A detailed perusal of the results is left to the reader.

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1) See previous report: Allen, Rawlins and Schlemmer, *op.cit.*, p.16.

In Table V, the same calculations are presented for the various employment situations in the company, grouped into three broad categories :

De Hoek Sawmill, Boyne Sawmill and Broedersdraai Garage;  
Shefeera Sawmill and Yard: and  
All plantations taken together.

TABLE V

AVERAGE FAMILY INCOME AS A PROPORTION OF MLL's AND HLL's (AIR)  
APPLICABLE TO NUCLEAR AND DE FACTO DEPENDENT FAMILY SIZES,  
BASED ON INCOME ESTIMATES DERIVED FROM COMPANY RECORDS  
OF ACTUAL EARNINGS - JULY 1975

Region of Employment, Type of Family and MLL/HLL	Estimated Family Income <sup>1)</sup>	Married Quarter Residents	Single Quarter Migrants	Location Dwelling Migrants
	R			
<u>Nuclear MLL</u>				
De Hoek, Boyne, Broedersdraai	42,78	,76	,66	-
Shefeera Mill and Yard	41,04	,61	,60	,53
All Plantations	31,25	,53	,50	-
<u>De Facto MLL<sup>2)</sup></u>				
De Hoek, Boyne, Broedersdraai	50,46	,64	,58	-
Shefeera Mill and Yard	50,48	,49	,48	,45
All Plantations	39,72	,47	,46	-
<u>Nuclear HLL</u>				
De Hoek, Boyne, Broedersdraai	42,78	,55	,49	-
Shefeera Mill and Yard	41,04	,46	,45	,41
All Plantations	31,25	,38	,37	-
<u>De Facto HLL<sup>2)</sup></u>				
De Hoek, Boyne, Broedersdraai	50,46	,47	,43	-
Shefeera Mill and Yard	50,48	,37	,36	,35
All Plantations	39,72	,40	,28	-

- 1) Company wage data augmented and varied according to category on the basis of results obtained from sample survey.
- 2) Family income data relevant to extended family (see text).

These results suggest that plantation workers are the most disadvantaged group. This disadvantage is considerably narrowed, however, when the *de facto* family situation is considered. However, family incomes of plantation workers do not exceed 53% of any standard of subsistence, and for single quarter migrants, are as low as 28% of the *de facto* HLL. The small number of employees in Louis Trichardt who are location dwelling migrants also appear to be a somewhat disadvantaged group.

We are not suggesting that a company wage policy should necessarily

be related to *de facto* family situations or to Higher (Supplemented) Living Levels. Our comments are not intended to be prescriptive. We do suggest, however, that the wage grievances which we have described are placed in some perspective by the results we have outlined in this section. Bearing in mind that employees do not spend wisely, that they, quite understandably, spend some money on liquor and small luxuries, and considering that their socio-cultural background does not allow them to limit obligations to their nuclear families, then the Available Income Ratios applicable to the *de facto* Higher Living Levels are probably a reflection of the standards of comparison which many of our respondents had in mind when expressing wage grievances.

Of more critical concern, perhaps, is the fact that mature married African employees' family incomes fall short of even the "nuclear" Minimum Living Level. If the concept of Minimum Living Levels (or Poverty Datum Lines) is to be taken seriously, then this fact has a significance which extends beyond wage grievances since it reflects a situation where the health and physical stamina of employees may be undermined. Further implications of these results are left to the company to consider.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

In concluding this interim report, we will not repeat the major findings given in the body of the text since we will assume that the reader will have perused the previous pages. A few general comments might, however, be appropriate.

This report has focussed almost entirely on the grievances of African employees. We have presented these attempting to give some indication of the intensity of the particular dissatisfactions involved. We do not necessarily assume that all the grievances are founded in incontrovertible fact. Some of the grievances may very well be the result of a skewed perception by the men of their situation and conditions in the company.

One major area of grievance, however, which does relate to factual circumstances is that of the all-pervading sense of material deprivation among the employees. The previous section has shown that it cannot be assumed that the employees have responsibility only for themselves and their immediate families - their wives and children. Whether justified or not in our eyes or in the eyes of management, by and large the employees - even those who are unmarried - have far greater burdens of dependency than urban experience would lead one to expect.

A recent return visit to the field in July of this year enabled us to explore briefly the question of whether or not recent wage increases have reduced the sense of material deprivation. As would be expected from the objective data presented in the previous section, this does not appear to be the case. The reason for this, obviously, is the excessive rate of inflation in the areas and the fact that some leeway remains to be made up before minimum subsistence needs are adequately gratified. However, bearing in mind the load of dependency which the employees carry, the company should not expect wage satisfaction to be achieved within the framework of wage increases of the order of those granted over the past 24 months.

The critical questions to be asked of wage policy within present limits, is whether or not wage increases exceed the rate of increase in the cost of living, thereby giving the employees, if not material satisfaction, at least a sense of progress. The contact with the employees on the most recent field trip suggested that the wage increases were appreciated, and have produced a measure of hopeful anticipation. In this sense the increases might have had a positive impact and, therefore, a sense of material progress might not be impossible to achieve.

Even more generally, the recent field trip suggested that there is a sense among employees of company policy being "on the move" and of a concern by the company for its African employees. This appears to have generated hope and greater optimism. The employees do not necessarily understand these changes fully at this stage, but sufficient impact seems to have been achieved to make it essential that the momentum of policy change is at least maintained. A loss of momentum in policy change will more than undo the new cautious optimism and have severely deleterious effects on employee morale.

On the topic of employee morale, it was noticed that there were signs among the labour forces at Boyne and in Louis Trichardt of a greater independence of spirit and less apathy and demoralisation. When explored, this relatively more positive morale seemed connected in part, at least, with the fact that the men lived off company premises; in the former setting in a Homeland from where they could commute daily to work. This feature of these two groups draws attention to the phenomenon that when labour forces are housed on company premises, a sense of dependency and a lack of positive self-identification can result. There were signs of this among some employees housed in the company married accommodation. The dependency is not positive for morale since it incorporates a mixture of gratitude and resentment at lack of autonomy and encapsulation within the company.

We have no doubt that a greater sense of autonomy can be achieved even for workers housed in company accommodation with the correct use of "compound committees", the "Liaison Committee" system and perhaps company encouragement of the married quarters respondents in establishing some stake in an African area. We have also little doubt that both for married quarter residents and single quarter migrants a greater sense of identity and autonomy will lay the basis for improved productivity.

We say this despite the fact that there is a reverse side of the coin; the more autonomous workers are likely to be more prone to industrial protest and an open expression of grievances (an indication of this, perhaps, was the strike at Boyne).

In this sense improvements in company policy, both as regards the issue just discussed, as well as regards wage increases and improvements in material benefits, bring greater challenges for personnel policy. These challenges are primarily the result of a more independent orientation and a higher level of expectations. Yet, without these risks and challenges, improved motivation and morale is probably impossible to achieve. These are but a few very brief comments and observations on a topic which is being more fully explored in a final report which is presently in preparation.

In this report we have presented a wide array of grievances and dissatisfactions, and the readers' impressions may be unduly coloured by our deliberate choice of subject matter for this report. In closing, therefore, we must again emphasise that the employees currently display a real, if vague, sense of hope and optimism. This, coupled with the excellent communications with the employees maintained by the personnel officers, provide grounds for optimism. If the system of labour relations and communication between management and workers can commence a development towards an eventual situation where authentic negotiation between legitimate employee leaders and management is possible, the solution of many other problems could follow.

APPENDIX A

EXCERPTS FROM THE REPORT: *RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND PROGRESS IN THE TIMBER INDUSTRY.*, INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE, GENEVA, 1973. pp. 27-28.

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"EFFECTS OF TECHNICAL PROGRESS.

...Mechanisation of forest operations has brought about considerable increases in the productivity of labour. In the Soviet Union, labour productivity increased by more than 50 per cent between 1958 and 1968. In Finland, it increased by 4.5 per cent per annum from 1960 to 1965, and since then by 3.5 per cent per annum. Productivity improvement in the United Kingdom is estimated at an annual rate of 6.3 per cent during the period from 1962 to 1970.

Little information is available on this point from developing countries. Where machines help to open up forests, they are a useful means of improving the economy and creating new job opportunities. But in many other cases, it is doubtful whether mechanisation is economically or socially justified.

All too often, machines are introduced without calculating operating costs and labour input or comparing them with manual operations. Where such calculations are done, they normally only relate to inefficient manual work with primitive tools and methods and neglect completely the possibility of improved labour-intensive work. This, for instance, is the case where replacing axes used for timber felling and cross-cutting by power saws without trying to introduce hand-saws which, if of the right design and properly maintained, will at low wage levels in most cases be more economic, provide more jobs and save foreign exchange spent on the purchase of machines, spare parts and fuel.

In view of the increasing number of jobless in the rural areas of developing countries, these problems are now better understood than formerly, when technology used to be transferred unthinkingly from the industrialised to the developing world.

Working and Living Conditions.

There can be no doubt that in the industrialised countries the forest worker is now much better off than fifteen years ago. There are more permanent jobs; mechanisation has made the work more attractive; wages

and social benefits have increased. The forest worker has, in fact, improved his social position vis-à-vis the worker in other industries and the earnings gap has been closed or at least narrowed quite considerably.

However, work in forestry is still arduous and accident risks are high. There are long distances to be covered to reach the work site, although motorisation has helped a lot to improve the situation in this respect. There is still considerable exposure to bad weather although shelter huts are now commonly provided and quite a number of machines are fitted with weather-protected, or even weather-proofed cabins. There is a reduction of physically heavy work, especially in timber transport and handling, but at the same time, an increase in mental strain in highly-mechanised operations must be noted. Last, but not least, there is the accident record, which in most countries has not improved at all if related to hours worked, and there are serious new occupational health risks in the noise and vibration of power saws and tractors.

Compared with the worker in manufacturing industry, the forest worker is definitely at a disadvantage. Furthermore, life in rural areas today appeals much less to many people, especially the young, than before and workers are increasingly difficult to recruit, in spite of the material progress achieved.

There has been some improvement in wages and social benefits in developing countries as well. However, apart from the rather few machine operators and timber cutters working on piece rates, the wage level mostly corresponds to the minimum wage for agricultural labourers. Small private contractors often pay even less. Social benefits are mostly extremely limited, but free medical care is provided by larger logging companies. Only in a few cases are there any trade unions to conclude collective wage agreements and strive for better conditions in forest work.

As regards the length of the working day, the length and spacing of rest periods and the quantity and quality of nutrition of forest workers, few if any attempts have been made to adapt these to the heavy physical work in forest operations in most developing countries especially tropical ones. Endemic diseases are widespread and accident rates in comparison with forestry in industrialised countries have been found to be excessive in the few cases in which reliable data are available.



It is not surprising that under such conditions labour turnover in the industry is extremely high and that the status of forest work is low in comparison with other occupations. There are, for these reasons, recruiting difficulties even in places where unemployment or underemployment is widespread.

Just as there is a need to introduce proper forest management characterised by sustained yields, the forest worker's capacity for work should be used in a manner allowing a long, efficient period of work and life. When this principle is not respected, ruthless exploitation of men and forests may result, leaving behind irreversibly depleted natural resources and impoverished people with little or no hope for the future."

APPENDIX B

In this Appendix we will attempt to set out in some detail the principle grievances mentioned by employees, mainly in group interviews, at each of the different employment centres. We will commence with a very detailed description of the results which emerged from group interviews at the Bisru Sawmill at Boyne, where group interviews were conducted in July 1974. We will give the position for Boyne in greater detail than for the other centres of employment for two reasons: firstly, so that the responses for Boyne can be used as a model for the interpretation of different kinds of responses at the other centres of employment; and secondly, because the sawmill at Boyne is of particular interest due to the fact that a strike occurred there at some stage subsequent to the study. (By this we do not mean to suggest that the strike was somehow connected with the study; we are more than satisfied that there is no connection between the two events).

I. THE BOYNE SAWMILL: PRINCIPLE GRIEVANCES

a. Low Wages

By far the most commonly mentioned complaint was that the wages were too low. Time and again the idea was expressed that the wage was insufficient reward for the great effort, long working hours, and years of service put into the job. It seems that it was generally perceived that the wages were insufficient exchange for the value of the work done. The flow of conversation during the group interviews, even on other topics, was continually interrupted in order for men to re-emphasise what they saw as the seriousness of the wage complaint.

The respondents further high-lighted the sense of deprivation by pointing out that they, at Boyne, received very little else from the company the way of benefits: they appeared to compare themselves with the African employees of a tea estate in the vicinity. However, they further stated that if a choice had to be made between higher wages or additional benefits, they would prefer to be remunerated only in cash, rather than partly in kind. It appeared to be an indication of fairly serious poverty in the district, that the men would rather sacrifice some benefit given only to themselves in order to have the necessary extra cash to support their families.

Standing distinct from the feeling that the wages were unfair

remuneration for the work done, was the additional complaint that objectively, the average wage is insufficient to allow for the proper provision of the basic necessities of life. This is another indicator of absolute rather than relative poverty in the area. The men complained that they simply could not make ends meet in such a way as to provide for their wives and families. It was also said that the only way in which the young men in the district could effectively save enough cash for lobolo and marriage was by migrating and seeking work in the cities, like Johannesburg. Local wages even at the sawmill were seen to be of too low an order.

Complaints were made further that the majority of manual jobs were too tiring and that the work was too arduous: in other words, that employees were overworked. Some such complaints, however, appeared to be closely allied to the wage grievance, for when pressed on the work issue the men tended to admit that sawmilling occupations were necessarily strenuous and that they accepted this fact. Their argument could be summed up in something like the following: "Look, we know that the work at the sawmill is very tough men's work. We wake up each morning knowing full well that we shall return home exhausted in the evening. This we know and we can accept it - if only the company will pay us a decent living wage in return". (This is the writers' summary of a variety of responses, and not a single, verbatim reply of a respondent). In this context, certain complaints concerning long-service, fatigue or over-work, and particularly those referring to long hours, may be seen as a transferred expression of a wage grievance.

The following are some verbatim excerpts from group interviews on the topic of wages:

*"We are alive, but we don't live well. The big problem is with the money they pay us."*

*"Our biggest problem is money, because I have been working here a long time, and I begin work at 7 o'clock and knock off at 5.15."*

*"We like this firm. You know this because we help the firm with our hands, but the firm does not help us with anything because we do not get anything."*

*"The only problem we have here is with money, because the work we do is great in value."*

*"I would like goods (benefits) from the company, but I also want more money. My children are always asking for things and I have to pay. I want more money because it gives me buying power, which I need."*

*"I cry because the money is little, but what else can I do?"*

*"If I did not have any children, I could get by with R40 per month."*

*"The firm does not help us with money. We are not fighting or arguing with the firm, we are merely asking for higher wages, because if they help us we will help them."*

b. Overwork

A series of regular complaints were made that the loads carried by manual labourers were excessively heavy, requiring but not having mechanical assistance in some cases. The men appeared to regard this problem with particular resentment in as much as they combined it with the fact of long working hours and low wages. Evidently, it is not so much the heavy loads or long hours *per se* considered separately that are resented, as much as the accumulation of what are seen as manifestly unfair conditions.

c. Recognition of Seniority

Allied to the issues of wages and overwork was a complaint by older men that their wages did not reflect any recognition by the company of long service. In these cases, long service is also regarded as implying competence and reliability at the job. Therefore, it is these attributes as well as seniority which are seen as going unrewarded under present conditions.

d. Unsympathetic Personnel Policies

The men complained that managerial attitudes to certain issues did not accept or face up to particular unavoidable problems that they, the employees, necessarily experienced. Traditional family and kinship obligations, for example, occasionally necessitated the absence of a man from work, but apparently the management would not recognise, or even discuss such problems. Similarly, the readiness of the supervisor to announce abdication of his responsibility for valuable equipment, or to automatically blame unqualified operators for any form of breakdown was cited as a further example of hostile and unrealistic policies.

It would appear that most of the men, especially the older or married men, are capable of generating a loose sort of loyalty to the company. However, the persistent tendency of management to reveal generally unsympathetic,

uninterested or unpredictable attitudes to employees, especially when in situations not directly related to production, appeared to succeed only in limiting employee commitment, restricting their orientation to a purely contractual attitude and also resulting in deteriorating relationships.

e. Unpopular or Unsympathetic Supervision

There were numerous indications that the men were in various diffuse ways highly dissatisfied with the supervision as it existed at the time of the study. An impression was gained that the men were referring, *inter alia*, to the manager's deputy. An harmonious and communicative working relationship between the supervisor and the men appeared to be non-existent, or at best, artificial, fragile and uncertain. The supervisor was described as being hostile, abrupt in the issuing of instructions, not inclined to explain and instruct people, especially when criticising mistakes, scolding in attitude, impossible to communicate with (although able to speak Pedi), unsympathetic and imperceptive of human or complex problems. It was claimed to have been the experience of the men that the supervisor could be a man of irascible and changeable moods. It would appear that the supervisors ever-suspicious, over-punitive and highly disrespectful style, as perceived by the men, had considerably strained the patience of all but the oldest employees at the mill, leaving an emotionally-charged and distracting atmosphere in which lack of trust, respect and motivation appeared to be pervasive. The fear of victimisation generated by the way in which the men perceived supervision may probably have been a factor contributing to the apparent reluctance of the men to voice complaints or to use the committee in a constructive way.

The following are some excerpts from the group interviews on the topic of supervision:

*"We would prefer to work under a Black man so that when we do something wrong he can explain to us how to go about the job correctly."*

*"The problem with this supervisor is that he will not hear us out."*

*"The White man never listens to a Black man when he talks."*

*"It does not really matter whether a supervisor is Black or White, as long as he has the interests of the firm at heart, and treats us fairly. If a worker does something wrong he does not do it deliberately, so why does the supervisor always shout at him?"*

*"A problem I have experienced with the firm was the time when my father was ill. I asked time off to visit him but they refused, so I had to take time off without permission, and then they chewed me out the following day for missing work and took a day's wages off my pay. When I explained to them that I had asked for permission and acted in good faith, they refused to listen to me."*

*"I cry in my heart because I know I am being treated badly. If I am paid badly as well I will loaf at my work."*

In reply to a question as to whether the men would be happy to work under prevailing conditions, if they were paid higher wages, a typical answer was: *"No! You cannot like the work under these conditions"*.

f. Provision of Meals

The men felt that the provision of food at work - at the time amounting to soup and plain porridge - was disappointing. Their subsistence-level incomes and relatively large family commitments did not permit them to give themselves proper nutrition at home in the quantities demanded by their strenuous jobs, they therefore appealed to the company to provide proper daily meals which included meat. The following are some excerpts from the group interviews in this regard:

*"No, we get very little from the firm. No meat, only soup."*

*"We also get nothing to eat with our porridge, like meat."*

*"At Sapekoe and Grenshoek, at Tzaneen, the men get food including mahewa for breakfast. Then at about lunch time they are again given rations, and further rations for dinner. For breakfast they get tea, buns and mahewa. A firm with such facilities has happy workers. Look at us, we are thin because our rations are insufficient. Some of us are ill because of our diets."*

g. Provision of Medical Services

Older employees, while tending to be relatively more tolerant of the low wages, aggressive supervision, etc., expressed an urgent need for effective medical facilities at the workplace. Such facilities, it was argued, would, if provided, have a generally productive effect as well as alleviating particular health and injury problems, and a great deal of anxiety.

#### h. Ineffective Liaison Committee Functioning

In the text of this report we have given a detailed description of why the employees did not make best use of the Liaison Committee system. The following points are essentially a repetition of points made in the text, but are repeated here to complete the record in this Appendix. A number of factors appeared to have combined to inhibit the effectiveness of the Liaison Committee system in its intended function. These factors may be summarised as follows:

- (1) uncomplaining male ethic;
- (2) ineffective functioning of the Liaison Committee as a feedback system;
- (3) employee reluctance to use the Liaison Committee; and
- (4) employee perception of uselessness of the Liaison Committee due to a communications barrier between men and White management.

As said before, an explanation of these problems appears in the text. Some excerpts from the group interviews are relevant to the problem of the Liaison Committee:

*"Yes, there are plenty of things we would like to complain about, but we normally keep our problems within our hearts, because we are men - we do not want individuals complaining."*

*"I like the firm but I have complaints as well. There are no medical facilities available for our families. When my child becomes ill there is no one to give him medical help. When someone is bleeding here at work, no one knows how to stop the blood. If you are injured on duty you only get proper medical treatment if they take you to hospital. So if they establish a proper medical care centre, it would be a great help, not only to us but also to our families. This in turn would prevent us from running to town every time a family member felt ill."*

Interviewers comment: "But you have a Committee, why do you not submit your problems to them?"

*"No, none of us submit problems. The members of the Committee never agree on any one point. Most of them hold individual views about certain problems. Most times they do not tell you of the outcome of your problem."*

Numerous other comments along these lines appear in the transcript of the group interviews.

i. The Influence of the Zion Christian Church

Adjoining and overlooking the sawmill at Boyne is the Zion City of Moriah, a large tract of land comprising the principle settlement and modern headquarters of the Zion Christian Church, headed by its millionaire "Bishop" or Prophet Lekhanyane.\* The Zion Christian Church is a prominent and widely-spread African separatist church having considerable influence over its many followers. The strength of its following appears to be as much due to the charismatic leadership of Lekhanyane and his predecessors as to any particular theology propogated, and locally the Zion Christian Church is often referred to simply as "Lekhanyane". The impression gained is that not the least of Lekhanyane's charismatic attributes is his conspicuous wealth. Although many of the sawmill employees are devout Zionists, many are not, and it is clear that Lekhanyane and the Zion Christian Church are be no means respected by all. In particular, two grievances held by locally resident men in respect of Lekhanyane, though not the responsibility of the company, are stronly enough held to require mention here. It appears that approximately 20% of the workers are resident at Boyne itself, and live on the neighbouring land of the Zion Christian Church (or "on Lekhanyane's land"). Such residents pay to the Zion Christian Church a monthly rental of about R1,00 in order to maintain a house on this land. In addition they pay an annual rent of 50c for the privilege of drawing water from a local water supply, also on Zion Christian Church land.

The men view these monies as going straight into the pocket of Lekhanyane and very much resent paying them. As one man put it *"I have a big house and all I work for is the rent of my house"*. The grievance is aggravated by the fact that the water is very far from the settled area. Thus the settled area is in effect without water, and the fetching of water from the distant supply is difficult and irritating. Rent is being paid for a "convenience" which does not exist.

These grievances were among the first to be mentioned by employees during the group interview sessions. These are serious grievances, and, although not the responsibility of the company, they are playing their part in creating a discontented workforce.

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\* We understand that the Bisru Sawmill itself stands on land leased from the Zion Christian Church.



j. Community Solidarity

We would like to emphasise, once again, in regard to the Boyne Sawmill employees, that the fact that they all live in a homeland, and tend to live in close proximity to one another, in a settled community, has created a greater degree of worker solidarity than would be the case at other centres of employment. The kind of accommodation, the relative security of land tenure, and the cohesiveness of the community, produce somewhat higher morale than would be encountered elsewhere. This higher morale is undoubtedly something which could be of great benefit to the company in view of its potential for raising productivity and overall work performance. However, under conditions where the men collectively experience grievances and discontentment, the sense of solidarity and a higher morale is more likely to result in collective action or, at the very least, collective and mutually communicated orientation towards limitation of output and low productivity.

We will proceed now to summarise the results of the group interviews at Boyne in the way in which summaries will be presented for the other places of employment. (Note: The grievances are presented in rough, descending order of importance, as judged from the tape-recorded transcripts).

II. SUMMARY OF GRIEVANCES: BOYNE SAWMILL

- (1) Insufficient pay.
- (2) Insufficient pay combined with arduous work and/or long service.
- (3) Arduous work and long hours.
- (4) Unsympathetic personnel policies.
- (5) Unpopular/unsympathetic supervisor.
- (6) Communications problems (non-use of the Liaison Committee; uncomplaining male ethic; fear of victimisation; Committee members divided or ineffective or unsympathetic).
- (7) Problems in residential community (remote water supply; rentals paid to Zion Christian Church).
- (8) Complaints regarding the provision of meals.
- (9) Resentment at social domination by Zion Christian Church in community.

III. SUMMARY OF GRIEVANCES: BROEDERSDRAAI GARAGE (Loaders)

- (1) Insufficient pay.
- (2) Arduous work (long hours; having to stand for long periods; exposure to rain and mud).
- (3) Pay insufficient in relation to cost of living.
- (4) Indications of concern about relations with colleagues (conflicts between drivers and loaders).
- (5) Resentment that mechanised loaders have unfair advantages.

Note: The following points are all of equal importance and no ranking is implied in the order of presentation:

- Calculation of wages and/or overtime unclear.
- Suspicion that Saturday overtime is unpaid.
- Long hours leave no time for essentials like eating.
- Work perceived as particularly debilitating, requiring appropriate payment.
- A suggestion of a reaction to "over-supervision".
- Evidence of crude supervision or brutal reprimands (including kicking).
- Concern about mechanical condition of trucks.
- Anxiety about lack of control over production (i.e. dependent on functioning of truck or co-operation of driver).
- Inertia on Liaison Committee, and no feedback.
- High interest on credit at local shops (want a company shop).

IV. DE HOEK SAWMILL: OLD MEN

(Note: Here no ranking of grievances was possible because of certain difficulties in obtaining precise information during the group interview).

The old men, especially those in married quarters, appear to be

- very much set in their ways;
- normatively conservative; and
- docile.

There is a strongly stated and frequently reiterated complaint about the serious inadequacy of the wages; references made to the absolute impossibility of properly providing minimum subsistence needs for the family. Apart from this, the only significant grievances appear to be:

- (1) No recognition, in wages, for long service.
- (2) An uncertain kind of suspicion about benefits provided by the company; i.e., the possibility that deductions are made from wages to purchase benefits.
- (3) A desire for longer leave in order to visit families in homelands (this is prevalent among the full migrant workers).
- (4) The need for subsidised or free transport to homelands.

It seems that the old men simply want more money in order to continue more comfortably in their present way of life. They want to continue with the same set of goals which they already have which includes feeding their families, educating and clothing their children, clothing wife attractively. Their own wage aspirations are relatively low. The old men estimated a fair starting wage as roughly R30,00 per month (as compared with an estimate among younger men in the same employment situation of R70,00 per month).

V. DE HOEK SAWMILL: YOUNG MEN

(Note: The following is a very rough rank-ordering of grievances)

- (1) Insufficient wage, or poverty.
- (2) Overwork or heavy work.
- (3) Insufficient company benefits.
- (4) Rising cost of living and impossibility of saving.
- (5) Poor communication and poorly functioning Liaison Committee (management is viewed as being ignorant of employee problems).
- (6) Fear of foremen.

V.1 General Note

The young men at De Hoek display a very strong general money orientation in their aspirations. As regards motivation, most of the young men appear to work purely for the remuneration. Therefore, they have a very high wage expectation of roughly R70,00 per month as a fair starting wage. They tend to compare themselves with other rural workers in some respects, but there is evidence of a fairly marked comparison of themselves with equivalent urban workers, as regards remuneration. They appear to have some degree of veiled optimism as regards the prospects of increased wages in the future and this undoubtedly is contributing to stability of employment. Another factor contributing to the stability of employment, which does exist, is the perceived

scarcity of alternative work among these men.

Despite this materialist orientation, however, there does appear to be an awareness among these men for the need for sustained productivity. However, the young men at De Hoek have a very clear conception that the African workers must work and management should manage. Therefore, this does seem to indicate that they resent over-supervision and feel themselves competent to take a range of small decisions on the job.

VI. SHEFEERA YARD IN LOUIS TRICHARDT

(Note: The following is a rough rank-ordering of grievances).

- (1) Insufficient wages.
- (2) Separate mention of absolute poverty; i.e., an inability to maintain subsistence standards on family incomes.
- (3) Lack of recognition for long service, associated among some older men with a sense of shame.

(Note: The following are grievances which cannot be ranked and which have roughly equivalent salience).

- High cost of living.
- Transportation problems (buses often late).
- Company perceived as unsympathetic to problems of punctuality and occasional unavoidable absences.
- Pay received too late on Fridays to allow for any shopping before departure for home.
- Some fear of danger involved in working on machines.
- Some indication of negative effects of working at chain-saws.
- Liaison Committee not yet functioning.
- Supervision appreciated yet supervisors felt to be indifferent to Black poverty.

VII. SHEFEERA SAWMILL

(Note: The following is a very rough rank-ordering of grievances and perceptions of the work-situation).

- (1) Poverty (high cost of living, inability to sustain minimum subsistence needs, high food debts).
- (2) Poor pay.
- (3) Work perceived as involving great effort and physical hardship (this effort is seen very clearly in relation to rates of pay).
- (4) Long hours and regular overtime perceived to be unpaid.
- (5) Lack of recognition for long service.
- (6) Perception that company attempts to cast off older workers, thereby leaving older men to their fate.
- (7) Complaints about charge-hands (charge-hands overwork the men, are unpopular and suppressive, and in regard to compound workers, expect unreasonable overtime).
- (8) General perception of unsympathetic supervision by Whites.
- (9) An unsympathetic or unsatisfactory policy in regard to time allowed off for sickness, injury and related absences.
- (10) A belief that wages are cut to pay for benefits.

(Note: The following grievances and perceptions cannot be rank-ordered but are simply listed in random order).

- Uncertainty over method of wage calculations.
- Poor job security (sudden or arbitrary dismissals).
- Victimisation of absentees.
- No official compensation for serious injury of disablement.
- Abuses of the rules for the compensation for disablement.
- No pensions and inadequate retirement policy, causing anxiety.
- Machinery in the mill sets an exhausting pace.
- Feelings of weakness and illness as a result of exhausting work.
- Perception of physical dangers in the work-place as a result of various machine operations.
- Need for protective boots and gloves in re-saw operations.
- Serious effects of inhaling sawdust.
- Complaints about peculiar smell or poor quality of soup.
- Issue of overall often irregular or late.
- Complaints that overtime work is involuntary and often unrecorded and unpaid.

- Distant migrants have transport problems which leads to absenteeism.
- Tensions between married quarters and single quarters residents (married quarter men are seen as an elite who abuse the Liaison Committee to get certain advantages and to have bachelors fired for misdemeanours - largely adultery).
- A feeling that only compound dwellers are eligible for charge-hand positions.

#### VIII. SHEFEERA PLANTATION

(Note: No rank-ordering of grievances can be attempted here due to difficulties in obtaining precise information from the men in the group interviews. However, the following grievances are seen as having salience).

- Feelings of job-insecurity.
- Low pay in relation to arduous work.
- Grievances in regard to the quota-system (quotas are perceived to be being increased; some job functions as dictated by the quota-system are seen as impossible to perform).
- Practical inability to report absences through sickness or family problems because of distance of home from workplace. (This problem goes in hand with a perceived lack of sympathy of charge-hands when men are absent).
- Transport problems for workers who have commute back to homelands (buses are not always available).
- Petrol fumes and vibration of chain-saws are seen as exhausting and dangerous to health.
- Feelings of there being little or no chance of promotion.
- Shortages of water.
- High turnover leads to changing composition of work teams; newcomers unfit or inexperienced.
- Involuntary overtime.
- (At Hlatini) Compound roofs in disrepair.
- Employees not well-informed about the Liaison Committee system (they expected representatives but the present purpose is unclear).

##### VIII.1 General Note

The perceptions of the men as regards the ill-effects of working with chain-saws and double-handsaws are particularly important. Phrases like the following are used: they "*shock our blood*", or, "*shock our muscles*", or even

"they draw blood from my body because they use electricity". Therefore, the effects of operating these particular pieces of equipment seem to go beyond the kind of reactions which one would expect, bearing in mind the nature of effort required to operate them.

IX. HAENERTSBURG PLANTATIONS

(Note: Here again it is impossible to give a precise rank-ordering of grievances. The following kinds of grievance seem to be important).

- Insufficient pay.
- Arduous work.
- Female pruners fear falling branches, and have no protective hats.
- Female gum-debarkers and debranches work near the gum-felling groups and, therefore, perceive themselves to be in danger.
- (At Wolkberg) Workers complained of work tasks being too high.
- Pruners need protective clothing because of underbrush, thorns, etc.
- Employees in certain places need transport to work, which involves travelling fairly long distances.
- (At Haenertsburg) Plantation women feel that making firebreaks is too tough for women - it is men's work.
- Plantation workers sometimes complained of being shifted from task to task. There is a very definite preference to remain in one defined job. This may be a desire for a clear statement for the employers expectations and emphasises the contractual way in which the work relationship is perceived. This attitude could be a response to a perception of being overworked or exploited.
- (At Koningskroon) The men complain of arriving home too late from work and having no time to cook or eat.
- Complaints about oil from chain-saws damaging clothing.
- Perceptions that working with axes lead to frequent injuries and some evidence of disillusionment because of the fact that men perceive a danger of being dismissed when injured on duty.
- Complaints in some places by the odd charge-hand that White foremen do not take their advice and that they also have very little real authority as Black charge-hands, and that the labourers undermine them.

IX.1 General Note

Although the complaint of targets being too high has been mentioned only in regard to the Wolkberg Plantation (see above) there was evidence from group interviews that targets were also seen to be too high at other plantations. There was also a general suggestion emerging from the group interviews at plantations that the men experience feelings of helplessness, due to poverty as well as the inability to find other employment and job-insecurity. This helplessness appeared to be undermining employee morale to quite a considerable extent.





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