

SECOND CARNEGIE INQUIRY INTO POVERTY
AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Poverty in Oudtshoorn
Some impressions
by

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Carnegie Conference Paper No. 37

Cape Town

13 - 19 April 1984

ISBN 0 7992 0734 9

This paper is the result of three brief visits to Oudtshoorn - the longest lasting three days - carried out during the period December 1983 - February 1984. This field-work has been combined with insights gained from my history honours research essay, "Aspects of Material Life in Oudtshoorn 1860 - 1927", a study concerned primarily with the effects of the rise and fall of the ostrich feather industry on the labouring poor of the town and district. (1) While the limited time spent on research has handicapped the depth of this paper, an attempt has nevertheless been made to present a dynamic picture of poverty in Oudtshoorn, by tracing various trends exhibited during the last ten to twenty years, and where appropriate, to incorporate both parallels and flashbacks drawn from Oudtshoorn's more distant past.

In 1980, at the date of the last census, the district of Oudtshoorn, including both urban and rural areas, had a population of 61 460, as opposed to 43 441 people in 1960. (2) This represents a growth rate of 1.7% per annum over the twenty year period, versus a growth rate during the same time period of 2.9% for South Africa, including all the independent homelands. (3) Oudtshoorn has thus shrunk in population relative to South Africa as a whole, meaning that a fairly significant percentage of the population have migrated from the district during the past twenty years. An estimate of this figure is provided below.

MIGRATION FROM OUDTSHOORN 1960 - 1980

Population of district 1960	43 441
RSA Annual growth rate 1960 - 1980	2.9%
Projected pop. of district in 1980 according to national growth rate	76 949
Real population 1980	61 460
Migration	15 489

The above trend is significant for it reflects the inability of the local economy to provide sufficient employment at competitive prices in relation to the rest of South Africa.

Oudtshoorn is an agricultural district based on mixed farming. While the ostrich is no longer the sole basis of local agriculture as it was during the period of the principal feather boom, 1890 - 1914, its products are nevertheless central to Oudtshoorn's economy. During the five year period 1973 - 1978, the last years for which I have been able to obtain figures, ostrich feathers and ostrich leather yielded an average annual income for the district of R 8.7 million, over eight times the average annual income of each of the other agricultural products of the district for the same time period. (4) The importance of the other agricultural products must not be discounted however, as the ostrich itself accounts for only about a half of Oudtshoorn's agricultural income. The district also produces lucerne, lucerne

seed, wheat, vegetable seed, tobacco, fruit, honey, and wine, and is also a major dairy farming area. (5)

Labour in agriculture is constituted almost wholly of people from the "coloured" population group. (6) Ostriches, the prime product of the area are not labour-intensive - not only may the ostrich be left to itself for much of the year but the most important ostrich food, lucerne, requires little labour. (7) In fact, with the exception of tobacco, none of the district's principal agricultural products are particularly labour-intensive. For most of the farms irrigation is the activity where labour is largely required. Irrigation is particularly important in Oudtshoorn, where, owing to the rain-shadow effects of the Outeniqua and Langeberg mountains, rainfall is low and fluctuates from between 120 and 300 mm per year. (8) While new capital-intensive irrigation technology such as micro-irrigation is slowly being introduced in certain areas of the district, the primitive practice of flood irrigation remains the most widely used means of watering the land. (9) Fields along the banks of the Olifants river and its tributaries are irrigated via a system of natural water courses or sluits. Temporary weirs seldom raising the water more than half a metre are constructed at minimal expense along the banks of the Olifants and other rivers of the district, and from these the water is channelled into sluits and distributed for irrigation. (10) As the furrows are seldom made of cement, irrigation involves both an excessive wastage of water and the regular and frequent use of labour both to clean the sluits and to channel the

water to desired areas. (11) The labour demands of irrigation moreover, are heavy. Irrigation water is distributed on a time-sharing basis with farmers being given rights to water for so many days or hours- during these time periods labourers can be expected to work round the clock. Dannie Williams, a 57 year semi-retired farm hand on the farm Wageluk, explaining why he had worked for three farmers in Oudtshoorn, told me that he had left his first two employers on the question of water leading at night. As he put it:

"Ek het vir Baas le Roux gesê ek kan nie weer in die nag water lei nie... ek het die vorige nag daar gelei...toe lei ek die volgende nag weer... Toe sê ek vir hom ek kan nie so nie - Toe trek ek by Baas Willie toe, en by Baas Willie het ek van sy plaas ook vertrek oor die saak van water lei. Ek het op die Donderdag nag, die Vrydag nag, die Saterdag nag, end die Sondag gewerk...toe loop ek so" (12)

WAGES AND TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE

The last estimate of agricultural wages in Oudtshoorn for census purposes was carried out in 1978. (13) It showed that the average wage for regular farm workers was R 10 - 23 per week or R 13 - 15, if account is taken of rations and other goods and services provided. (14) On the basis of my research it is difficult to make a satisfactory estimate of what these wages are today - no questionnaires were distributed and information was not collected on a random basis.

The sources for this research were essentially oral - I was largely, though not wholly, directed to English-speaking interviewees and given that my research concerned what is generally regarded as a social problem, my interviewees were often those most concerned with its solution. In the case of farmers those interviewed would customarily be termed "progressive", that is they were mainly wealthy farmers paying wages greater than those in the immediate neighbourhood. While the "progressive farmer" is often amongst the most open and frank of sources, it nevertheless means that I was largely unable to reach the smaller farmer, the man unable to pay big wages, or the farmer wholly indifferent to the plight of his labourers. Thus the wages and terms of employment cited below are almost certainly better than the average. In cases where such information is at hand however, an attempt has been made to estimate the general position.

While wages differ from area to area, and from farm to farm, the top wage for skilled labourers appears to be between R 30-00 and R 35-00 per week. (15) The average wage of unskilled workers on the farms of the five farmers interviewed works out at R 24-70. (16) The above wages are all based on information provided by the farmers themselves. It is necessary to note however, that there was in two cases a disparity between the wage cited by the farmer and that by one of his labourers. On Stephen Muller's farm, a labourer interviewed in his presence maintained that he earned R 16-00 per week whilst Muller insisted that the man earned R 17-50. (17) Mei Steelman, 55 years

old and clearly a senior labourer on the farm Die Krans, one of the farms of Gerrit le Roux, told me he earned R 25-00 per week. Previously le Roux had said that he paid his labourers R 30-00 per week. (18)

Ostrich farms seem to employ mainly male farm hands, and it is difficult on the basis of present research to ascertain the extent of female employment. Seasonal labourers on the fruit farms in Schoemanshoek appear however, to be predominantly female. Kobus Spies employs between 150 and 200 female labourers in the fruit picking season during December and January, and pays them wages ranging from R 15-00 to R 22-00 per week. (19)

I was told of wages far lower than these quoted above - Jack Klass, a large ostrich farmer, told me he knew of farmers paying wages of R 12-00 a week. (20) In the Schoemanshoek area, on the road to the Congo Caves, a region centred primarily on tobacco and fruit farming, the average wage for male labourers, according to Kobus Spies, is between R 12-50 and R 15-00, whilst that for women is between R 6-50 and R 8-50 per week. (21) How representative any of the wages cited above are is difficult to tell. These figures must, however, be looked at in the context of the 1978 mean wage of R 10-23. Wages can be extraordinarily sticky, and it is quite possible that the wages quoted in this paragraph are more representative of the district than any of those given by the farmers interviewed.

All wages do not necessarily take the form of cash payments nor are they necessarily paid weekly. Gerrit le Roux, a wealthy wine and ostrich farmer in the De Rust region of the district pays his labourers by "good fer" once every two weeks, because it is too much bother to give cash. (22) A "good fer" is a locally accepted bill of exchange which labourers may exchange for cash or commodities at a nearby cafe or trading store. In the case of le Roux's farm the nearest cafes are in De Rust, some 5 km away. The extent to which this means of payment is practiced is unclear.

The above wages exclude the bonus's and food parcels which most farmers give in addition to cash payments. In some cases these are very extensive. Jack Klass gives his labourers and their families 50 kilos of meal per month, vegetables twice a month, and meat every Friday, all over and above cash payments. (23) Micky Fisch in addition to paying his labourers R 30-00 per week in cash gives them weekly food parcels to the value of between R 15-00 to R 20-00. (24) Fisch acknowledges he pushes the food both from considerations of welfare and of improving the efficiency of his labour force. Fisch is a wealthy and enlightened ostrich farmer however, owning a farm to the value of approximately R 3a, and it is doubtful whether such beneficence to farm labourers is very widespread. (25) Gerrit le Roux, the only wine farmer interviewed, acknowledged that the bonus provided to his workers included drink, which he hands out on a weekly basis. (26)

The tot system is still practiced in Oudtshoorn. On a previous visit in July 1982, when carrying out research into the history of the district in the early years of this century, I was told of labourers still being given a daily tot. Johan Olivier, an eighty-one year old ostrich farmer stated:

"We still give them (his 25 labourers) a seppie every evening... otherwise after sundown they leave you. Most of them will wait until 10 o'clock at night until we come round to give them the liquor". (27)

How widely the tot system is practised is uncertain, but as the above case indicated it is not necessarily confined to the grape growing areas. Liquor abuse as in other agricultural districts of the Cape Province is a major problem amongst the district's labouring poor. (28) A number of farmers spoke of the problem of labourers going to town on weekends for a "booze spree" and being of very little use the following Monday. (29) While it would probably be wrong to isolate the tot-system as a sole contributant to this state of affairs, its continued administration must merely perpetuate and entrench the problem.

It would be wrong to leave the question of wages and terms of employment without saying a word about underemployment. Wages simply do not tell the whole story of agricultural employment - many amongst the district's

coloured rural population are underemployed. Underemployment is difficult to measure and its extent is unknown, but its existence relative to the rest of South Africa is reflected in the fact that whereas 64.4% of the country's coloured population are classified as being not economically active, 86.32% of the Oudtshoorn coloured population are so classified. (30) This question of the relatively depressed state of agricultural employment will be examined in greater detail in the section on migration on p.15 below.

HOUSING AND HEALTH CONDITIONS

Housing is one area where amongst the farmers spoken to, together with evidence gleaned from the reports of the Senior Health Inspector of the Divisional Council, there appears to be some improvement - though the precise nature and extent of this improvement remains unclear. Jack Klass told me that the Divisional Council was now breaking down "old shacks" and that workers houses were now being built according to Divisional Council rules, meaning a minimum of four rooms, including a toilet and proper cooking area. (31) The Senior Health Inspector for the Klein-Karoo-Langkloof Divisional Council, Mr J.M.P. Letz, stated in his annual report for 1981 that housing conditions were improving throughout the district and that farmers were making more use of housing loans made available by the Dept. of Agriculture. In his 1982 report he provided a little more detail:

"Gedurende die afgelope jaar is reeds 96 huise opgerig. Talle is verbeter en vergroot. Etlike huise wat nie geskik is vir bewoning nie, is gesloop deur die eienaar." (32)

Further evidence of housing improvements, this time over a longer period than just referred to, was provided by Danie Williams. Williams, the 57 year old labourer whose reason for leaving his former employers were referred to above, recalled that the house he grew up in in George was made from bull-rushes and reeds and that this was the general position on the Oudtshoorn farms too, until around the 1960's when brick and mortar houses became more prevalent. (33)

Neither the change from reed huts to brick and mortar cottages, nor the construction of four roomed houses necessarily mean however, the alleviation of all the enduring problems of farm housing. It is necessary to recall the following findings of the Theron Commission for the Cape Province as a whole, but which very probably still apply in varying extents to Oudtshoorn, that 70% of farm houses have no ceilings, 43% no earthen floors, 94% no electricity, 73% no bathrooms, and that 43% of farm labourers sampled complained their houses were too small. (34) That at least some of these problems still exist in Oudtshoorn is implicit in the comments of Kobus Spies, a concerned and highly enlightened farmer, who acknowledges that housing is still a big problem on his farm. He spoke of being at present engaged in installing ceilings and cupboards in all his labourers cottages, and of his plans

to extend the one single bedroom farm house and the three two-bedroom cottages on his farm. (35) These problems very probably exist elsewhere too, only my impression is that such owner initiated home-improvement programs are not extensive.

With the limited information at hand it is difficult to make very useful comments on the health conditions of farm labourers. The last two reports of the Health Inspector of the Divisional Council do however provide certain snippets of information. While the infant mortality for the coloured population has dropped over the period 1979 - 1982 from 145 to 89 per 1000births, the three principal infant killers in the coloured community today, gastroenteritis, prematurity and pneumonia, all suggest an unsatisfactory state of infant health. (36) In his 1982 report, Letz lists the following factors as being responsible for these diseases:

"Ondersoek het weereens getoon dat faktore soos swak of geen voorgeboortelike kliniekbywonings, veneriese siektes, drankmisbruik, en buite egtelikheid 'n bindende rol gespeel het. As gevolg van die feit dat baie moeders genoodsaak word om te werk, en hul dikwels, veral kinders in die lae ouderdomsgroepe, onder swak toesig plaas, vind verwaarlosing en sterftes plaas." (37)

The major problem with the above evaluation is that all the factors

listed as responsible for infant death are dependant on individual choice - mothers either do or don't attend clinics, fathers either do or do not get drunk etc - it quite ignores factors like poverty, ignorance, and malnutrition, which all lie beyond the individual's control and which probably underlie all the causes of ill-health listed above.

At present then not enough information is available to explain health conditions in the district. Given that improvements in nutrition are considered to lie at the heart of the modern decline in deaths from infectious diseases, more research in this field in particular is likely to prove helpful. (38) It does indeed appear on the basis of interviews with only a few farm labourers, that the standard farmworkers diet is deficient in both proteins and vitamins, and consists mainly of carbohydrates. Danie Williams observed that with respect to diet little had changed since his youth - meals still consist mainly of potatoes, mielies, bread and coffee, whilst meat is merely eaten "af en toe". (39) If the components of the diet have changed little, what of the quantity of food consumed? Here too, this paper can merely point to questions in need of answers.

FARMERS ATTITUDES TO FARM WORKERS

On the question of farmers attitudes to labour, the limited interviews undertaken revealed wide differences of opinion a fact surprising perhaps to those who believe that members of the same class, sharing the same relationship to their workers, should hold fairly uniform attitudes towards them. On the one hand the old frontier

conviction that the foundations of our society are race and the privileges of race is still very evident. Thus one of the farmers interviewed told me quite explicitly that he regards the coloured farmworker as a member of a servile people, degenerate and lacking in self-respect. The farmer in question, moreover believes in beating unco-operative and disobedient labourers. He claims he regularly has to "neuk" certain of his workers, and using the sjambok, administers between two and twenty lashes at a time. A claim confirmed by one of his labourers who told me that he himself had been beaten only once, but so severely that he was forced to go to Cape Town for treatment - it took him six weeks to recover. Such beliefs and the administration of this sort of punishment reveal both how removed farm life is from the controls that usually govern peoples behaviour in urban surroundings, and how enduring and resistant to change the ways of the platteland can be. This attitude in fact coincides directly with that of many of the witnesses before the 1894 Labour Commission, whose principal remedy to labour problems was, in the words of Hermánus Redlinghuys, an ostrich farmer from the Wynands River area of Oudtshoorn, to give the workers "a taste of the cat". (40)

If attitudes such as the above are depressing to learn of today, it is encouraging to talk to a farmer like Kobus Spies, who is doing much to improve the living conditions of his labourers and attaches great importance to their welfare and well-being. Spies moreover has an intelligent approach to the problem of poverty - he points out

that given the prevailing conditions, wage increases are often of only limited value, often instead of remedying social problems, they exacerbate them. For example in the present situation wage increases, he states, tend to lead to increases in alcohol consumption. (41) Spies feels that what is really needed are improvements in education. (42) He is nevertheless aware of the problems involved and notes that at present most farm children in the Schoemanshoek area drop out in standard one or two, there being little incentive for them to further their education in a rural environment. Indeed he adds the almost contradictory statement that as a farmer, insofar as his needs are concerned, all he requires is a worker with a standard two education. (43)

This ultimate absence of a demand for the social and educational advancement of the rural poor is surely a crucial factor behind the perpetuation of rural poverty. In effect, farmworkers do live in what Galbraith has termed "an equilibrium of poverty" - an equilibrium subject to forces which inhibit tendencies towards their social and economic advancement. (44) Neither the farmers, nor the farmworkers, as they, to quote Galbraith again, "accomodate" to their situation, do particularly seek to alter their position. (45)

Education is however, as Spies recognizes, a means of altering their position and means of escaping rural poverty. Its most important function in a rural setting is to help break the bonds that tie the

rural poor to the land. For to the extent that it generates an awareness that the possibility of a better world exists outside the rural environment, and that those educated are made to realize that their qualifications entitle them to better jobs elsewhere, education ~~prevents migration from the land~~, which in the present circumstances, is surely the only practical solution to rural poverty.

MIGRATION

Migration from the land is nothing new in Oudtshoorn's history. In the late nineteenth century when ostrich farming to a great extent replaced the existent labour-intensive bases of Oudtshoorn's agriculture - wine, wheat, and tobacco farming - large numbers of white bywoners were forced off the land, making for a difficult "poor white" problem in the district. + The Reverend B Marchand explained the process to the 1913 Select Committee on European Employment and Labour Conditions as follows:

"(Whereas) formerly the Oudtshoorn farmer farmed his lands and he had to reap a tobacco crop and a wheat crop and a wine crop and he required the men to help him, (now) the farmers have turned their lands into lucerne fields and ostrich farms, and it does not require the same amount of manual labour as wine and wheat farming...Certainly that has reduced the number of bywoners that they can employ and there is no doubt that the town of Oudtshoorn is full of these poor whites." (46)

* It is highly unlikely that only white bywoners were so affected, but unfortunately history does not record any effect the industry had on the rural coloured population

The bywoner was simply not needed in ostrich farming operations. Neither lucerne fields nor ostrich farming itself require much labour, - the mechanics of this small demand for labour, lie in the fact that lucerne unlike crops such as wheat, requires no annual ploughing and sowing - when cut, grass-like it simply grows again, and that ostriches too require little regular attendance.

Later in 1914 the crash in the ostrich feather market that accompanied the austerity of world war one, caused a further movement of impoverished farmers from the land. This time both rich and poor were affected. Indeed so severely did the crash hit the region that the town's of Oudtshoorn and Calitzdorp suffered significant population losses as well. During the ten year period 1911 to 1921 the population of the district fell by 5.6% and the rural population by 4.4% when about 1800 people left the district. (47)

Push factors such as the above seem to be less important as contributants to contemporary rural-urban migration. Those labourers and their families moving off the land today appear to be doing so because of the attractions of the town and city - these being not so much "bright lights" as the greater prospect of earning a decent wage in the urban centres. To be sure push factors such as agricultural mechanisation are operating to some extent as well. Kobus Spies observed that local dairy farmers, by employing capital-intensive equipment such as choppers and milking machines require fewer labourers

today than in the past. (48) Nonetheless of the small but random selection of migrants and would-be migrants interviewed all cited the larger wages of the town as being the main reason for moving. Jומר van Niekerk, a 43 year old garage attendant in Oudtshoorn, grew up on a farm in Klein le Roux's Rivier, about 35 km from the town, and upon leaving school after passing standard six, he moved to Oudtshoorn "om 'a beter lewer te lei". (49) He added that, "die lone was die enigste rede waarom ek van die plaas getrek het". Mei Steelman on Gerrit le Roux's farm near De Rust noted that because wages are too low on the farms labourers have sought and to some extent found employment in the building industry in nearby Dyseldorp. (50) Though this old mission station is not of any economic viability itself, the Department of Community Development appears to be attempting to create a coloured town here, and the development schemes of the past few years have no doubt provided employment in the local building industry. (51) Jan Piet, a 47 year old "estrich boy", on a farm on the outskirts of Oudtshoorn, in response to a question as to whether he was happy with his life on the farm, expressed the desire to migrate to Cape Town like his two eldest children. (52) He added that his current wage of R 3.50 per day was too little to support his wife and seven remaining children still living on the farm. (53)

The extent of migration from the land may only be estimated. It is reflected in the declining percentage of "coloured" people employed in agriculture - 35.1% in 1970, 29% in 1980. (54) A better idea of the

number of people involved is provided by an estimate calculated in the same way as that on p. 2 above, and is based on the growth rate of the coloured population of the district.

MIGRATION OF THE "COLOURED" PEOPLE FROM THE RURAL AREAS OF OUDTSHOORN

1960 - 1980

Coloured population of rural areas of Oudtshoorn 1960	14 769
Coloured population growth rate for the district of Oudtshoorn (rural and urban areas) 1960 - 1980	2.1%
Projected population of rural areas in 1980 according to district growth rate	22 380
Real "coloured" population 1980	12 960
Migration 1960 - 1980	9 420

(55)

If the above suggests that a movement from the land is taking place it must be recalled that the process is never easy. To those without family and friends in the place of destination the move is difficult to make. The unknown town presents a hostile face to the country farmworker, accustomed to the rhythms and mores of a very different way of life. This is to some extent illustrated in the experience of Jacob Witbooi, a labourer on Kobus Spies' farm in Schoemanshoek. At the age of 21 Witbooi left the farm for Oudtshoorn. He spent a number of years in the town (the precise number I was unable to ascertain) working first in the building industry, then the post-office, and

finally a local hospital, earning in each of these occupations more than he could have earned on the farm. (56) Yet eventually Witbooi returned to Schoemanshoek "om 'n vrou te vat". Today he is married with a family of three children and confesses to preferring the stability and safety of farm life to that in the town. He put it this way,

"Vandag verdien ek nie meer op die plaas as in Oudtshoorn nie, maar ek verkies om op die plaas te bly om my kinders te versorg. Op die dorp is dit te grof...die skollies ens...Dit is beter om die kinders op die plaas op te pas." (57)

Encapsulated in the above are some of the factors that have combined to temper the movement off the land, the loneliness of town life for the newly urbanized, reflected in the need to return to the farm to get a wife, and the not necessarily imaginary belief, given the often sordid living conditions of new-migrants, that the town or the city is a centre of violence and danger.

LIFE IN THE TOWN - HOUSING, OVERCROWDING AND HEALTH

The large movement of people off the land during the last twenty years probably accounts for the town of Oudtshoorn's dramatic population growth during this time period, a growth of some 62%

<u>OUTSHOORN POPULATION</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1980</u>
(including the Black township Bofolethu)		
Whites	8 952	10 680
Coloureds	11 287	22 640
Blacks	1 987	2 660
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<u>Total</u>	22 226	35 980

(5E)

A glance at the above table reveals that the main contributant to this population growth has been a 100% increase in the "coloured" population. This population growth has caused considerable social distress in the coloured township, Bridgton - a distress which is most evident in the severe overcrowding that now prevails in the township

According to the secretary of the Bridgton Management Committee, the housing shortage is the principal problem facing local government in the township. There is he states, a shortage of some 2000 houses in Bridgton today. (59) Insofar as the local population is concerned, this means a considerable number of people are unable to live in houses of their own. Unlike Cape Town, Oudtshoorn does not have a squatter problem, but the housing shortage has translated into appalling overcrowding. I was told of an instance where five families, totalling 27 people, are living in a standard four-room municipal house. (60)

I visited a house occupied by a man, his wife, and their family of five children, the two oldest of whom had children of their own, totalling six further occupants. To these were added the wife's sister and her four children - amounting to a total of 18 people in the house. (61)

Crammed conditions are not the only source of trauma when more than one family is forced into a small, four-roomed house. I was introduced to Arrie Botha, an apprentice mechanic at Oudtshoorn's military base, who together with his family of four, was forced to leave his previous address, because of constant internal friction in the family with whom he shared a house. (62) The friction stemmed apparently from a broken-down marriage. The wife of the other party was carrying on an affair with another man and the Botha family were unable to avoid the violent arguments that developed between the husband and wife when she came back from visiting her lover at about 12 o'clock at night. These arguments often lasted till about three o'clock in the morning. As Botha said, "the shouting was terrible.. the kids couldn't be brought up in a house like that." (63)

The Botha family's troubles didn't end there however, for having left their original home for a vacant house promised them by a member of the Management Committee, a Mr le Roux, they found themselves ordered to leave by another member of the Management Committee, a Mr Charlie du

Plessis. (64) The new house turned out to be in Du Plessis' ward, as such giving him rather than le Roux, first choice on house applicants to the area. (65) Le Roux had not been unaware that he had been acting out of turn however, for it transpired that le Roux had secured the house for Botha, merely to annoy Du Plessis, a political rival on the management committee. Thus the Botha family were evicted from their home and when interviewed, Botha, his family, and belongings, were standing in the street outside - the unwitting victims of petty politicking on the management committee.

The housing crisis has however, generated more serious political activity than that indulged in by the management committee. An estimated figure of up to 2000 people attended a meeting organised by the Cape Areas Housing Action Committee (CAHAC) at the Protea Hotel hall in Eridgton on the 23 January this year, at which residents for the first time publicly expressed their dissatisfaction with the state of local housing. (66) The spark that prompted the meeting was the proposed new home-ownership scheme for coloureds, currently being organised by the Department of Community Development. (67) There appears to be a widely felt belief that dramatic rent hikes will in the next few months force tenants into home-ownership, something they neither wish nor are financially able to do. (68)

The tone of the meeting is reflected in the following resolution

passed unanimously by the meeting, revealing the unpopularity of the management committee and interestingly the Labour Party.

"We, the residents of Oudtshoorn reject the Management Committees and the Labour Party for the role they play in enforcing apartheid. We reject these bodies as causing hardship and suffering to our communities." (69)

For our purpose the meeting also provided useful information with regard to popular perceptions of local housing conditions. A pamphlet was circulated at the meeting, criticising the proposed home-ownership scheme largely on the grounds that the current condition of houses in Eridgton renders them unworthy for purchase. Here is an extract:

"Ons ken die huise waarin ons woon - stukkende dakke, deure en mure. Huise wat papnat is gedurende die winters en 'n lewende hel gedurende die somer. Drade wat plat lê en nooit reggemaak word nie. Vuil en stukkende strate wat gedurig vol water is. Dit is hierdie toestande wat siektes in ons huise bring... Dit is hierdie vrot huise wat die munisipaliteit aan ons mense wil afsmeer teen diuisende rande".

There is a reference in the above quotation to "sickness in our houses" and it is appropriate at this stage to make some comment on health conditions in the township. As with the rural areas, on the basis of present research it is not possible to provide too deep an analysis.

During the past few years Bridgton has witnessed significant improvements in factors related to the so-called secondary prevention of disease - that is to say there have been important developments in providing better facilities for the treatment and early recognition of disease. (71) In 1980 Bridgton was provided with a modern, well-equipped, and centrally situated clinic replacing the two small prefabricated clinics that had hitherto served the coloured community. (72) The clinic carries out extensive immunisation of infants against tuberculosis, polio, small-pox, measles and typhoid, in addition to work in the fields of child health, family planning, venereal diseases, and old age services. (73) These developments have done much to improve the health of the community insofar as the treatment of disease is concerned, and appear to be largely responsible for the significant decline in the coloured infant mortality rate during the past ten years. (see table p.32)

While these developments cannot and must not be negated, there seems to have been little progress during the same period at the level of primary prevention. This being the advance of those factors

preventing the incidence of disease. (75) The primary reasons for ill-health in the community appear to have remained intact and may in some cases have deteriorated. The state of such variables as housing, sanitation, nutrition and poverty does not appear to have improved during this time period.

URBAN EMPLOYMENT

Some comment it seems, is required on employment - its conditions and extent - in the town. According to the 1980 census the largest employer of coloured labour in the Oudtshoorn, Calitzdorp, Ladismith region is the services sector, employing some 30% of the economically active labour force. (76) Included here are such diverse occupations as domestic servants, shop assistants, employees in the tourist and related industries, employees in the military, and employees in the various arms of local government. Unfortunately there simply was not time to begin to sample the state of employment and wages in any of these occupations, though some rudimentary information was obtained on the wages of domestic servants. + The second most important employer of coloured labour is the manufacturing sector. According to Claasen there were 28 factories in Oudtshoorn in 1975, employing a total

+ According to Kobus Spies and an unemployed one-time domestic servant by the name of Marina, R 3-00 per day is the going rate for dailies in Oudtshoorn. Charlie van Hansen, a colour-blender in the tannery section of the co-operative told me his wife earned R 45-00 per month as a char for three days service per week. This works out at R 3.46 per day.

of 1735 people. (77) This figure has probably increased slightly since then. The goods manufactured centre on the farm products of the region - the major employers therefore include producers and processors of ostrich leather, ostrich meat and tobacco.

The Klein Karoo Landbou Kooperatief, the sole agent for the marketing of ostrich products, lucerne, and grain is a major employer in the town with a work-force of about 800 people. (78) I spoke to the managers of two sections of the co-op, the leather tannery and the abattoir. The tannery employs sixty fairly skilled coloured males - wages in this section of the co-op are governed by an Industrial Council agreement and range from R 45-00 to R 90-00 per week. (79) The abattoir employs 183 workers, 75% being women. (80) Wages here range from R 20-50 to R 65-00 per week, with approximately one third of the work force earning the former wage. (81)

While it was not possible to examine working conditions in the co-operative, I did manage to tour the local tobacco factory. Tobacco was one of the region's principal products long before ostriches and ostrich feathers became the agricultural symbols of Oudtshoorn, and though its relative importance today is less great than in the past, it is still one of Oudtshoorn's leading agricultural products. (82) The factory employing 150 labourers, 50 of whom commute to work daily from Dyselsdorp, some 30 km away, is the only remainder of an industry

that in the 1920's and early 1930's dominated the local labour market, employing between 1300 and 1600 people. (83) If fewer labourers are now employed in the industry than in the past, those still labouring in the trade work under conditions that have changed little in the past half-century.

It is true that children are no longer employed in the industry and that the youngest employees in the factory are now aged 16. (84) It is also true that the leaf openers and sorters who were generally children in the 1920's and 1930's, are no longer paid by the twistlers a practice that often resulted in leaf openers and sorters going unpaid. (85) It is also uncertain whether the average wage of R 22-00 paid to the 100 female employees of the factory, and the average wage of R 30-00 paid to the 50 male employees of the factory, would today be regarded as constituting a wage structure so low that employees could not be expected to support themselves in accordance with civilized standards of life, which was the finding of the Wage Board when it examined the local industry in 1926. (86)

Roll tobacco used chiefly for chewing and aimed mainly at black consumers, continues nevertheless to be produced in much the same unhealthy way as in the early years of this century. (87) The dry tobacco leaves are steeped in water to which has been added a quantity of ash - this mixture of ash and water is called loog and the persons who steep the leaves therein are called loogers. The process is wet and dirty. After being removed from the loog the wet leaves are packed in large bins to dry, where they remain for some time. This is

known as sweating. The leaves are then ready for twisting into roll tobacco - but because at this stage they are in a crumpled state, the leaves have first to be opened by leaf openers and sorters. The leaves are then twisted on wooden spindles into long ropes of varying thickness. The ropes are finally made into rolls by the rollmakers. the entire process of manufacturing roll tobacco evidently injures the hands. In 1926 the Wage Board noted that some of the looers had sores on their hands which they held to be due to the action of the loog - it also observed that vaseline was used in twisting both to give the tobacco a gloss and to protect the hands of the twisters. While I do not have the evidence of looers and twisters on this score, when Piet Jagter, a seventy-five year old rollmaker was asked about the health conditions in the factory, his response was to show me his badly blistered hands. (88)

The Wage Board report of 1926 observed that the conditions under which tobacco workers laboured were bad - they still are. Leaf openers and twisters sat flat on the floor with legs outstretched - the board was told that twisters could not sit otherwise, as they had to hold the spindle with their feet so as to obtain sufficient strain for twisting. (89) This is still the practice as regards twisters, some sit on the floor, others sit on improvised seats, made of boxes and bundles of sacks, and all without back support - the strain of sitting in such a manner for long periods is no doubt considerable. To the

casual observer however the most unpleasant and pronounced effect of roll tobacco production is the extremely strong smell of the nicotine fumes released by the tobacco. The production room is permeated by a suffocating, semi-sweet, thick and pungent smell of tobacco. One of the twist-ers, Mina Lewis stated that so strong are the fumes that workers cough and spit as soon as they get out of the factory, and that this lasts throughout the night. (90) These were precisely the symptoms noted by the Wage Board in 1926 where a witness stated:

"As soon as we get out of the factory and start moving about we start spitting, and this goes on practically right through the night... It is impossible to eat, and you have no appetite either." (91)

The Wage Board reported that in addition to loss of appetite, workers complained of nausea, lack of sleep, raw and burning feelings in the chest, and smarting of eyes, nose and throat as a result of the fumes, adding that the feelings of suffocation were experienced by all new entrants to the work. (92)

If working conditions in Oudtshoorn can be difficult and trying, they are almost certainly more bearable than the experience of being unemployed. Anita Tannies, a fifty year old grand-mother, told me the story of how her husband, having worked for 30 years in a local laundry, was now unemployed after the laundry closed down last year, Since then neither he nor she have been able to find any regular employment. (93) He receives unemployment insurance of about R65-00

per month, but as the sole income earner in a household of 18 (see p.20 above), this is not enough to support the home. She poignantly contrasted the situation as it is today with that prevailing when her husband was employed:

"Daai tyd het dit goed gegaan - nou gaan dit bitter. Daai tyd het ek nou met my kinders sonder kos gaan slaap nie, maar hiêrs nou al baie aande wat ek moet kinders op koffie en brood gaan lê, of party maal is daar net 'n bietjie koffie." (94)

Little is known at present about the current state of unemployment in Oudtshoorn. We know, neither the extent of local unemployment, nor who the unemployed are - that is to what sex, age or any other relevant grouping do the unemployed belong? There is little doubt however, that unemployment is widespread. Stephen Muller, farm manager of Karoo Valley farms situated on the outskirts of the town, and paying his labourers R 3-50 per day, made the revealing observation that were he today to fire ten workers on his farm, he could quite easily get ten different workers from the town tomorrow. (95) Indicative perhaps that the unemployed are mainly female is the fact that Kobus Spies has no trouble obtaining female labour from Oudtshoorn during the fruit picking season. To quote Spies:

"The town pays very badly especially for women. We can employ a lot of people during the season from the town. I can get as many people as I want every morning. I usually take a truck-load of about 55 to 60 girls. I pay them a minimum wage of R 3-00 per day, plus R2-00 bonus (per week) - which is very low - and that's

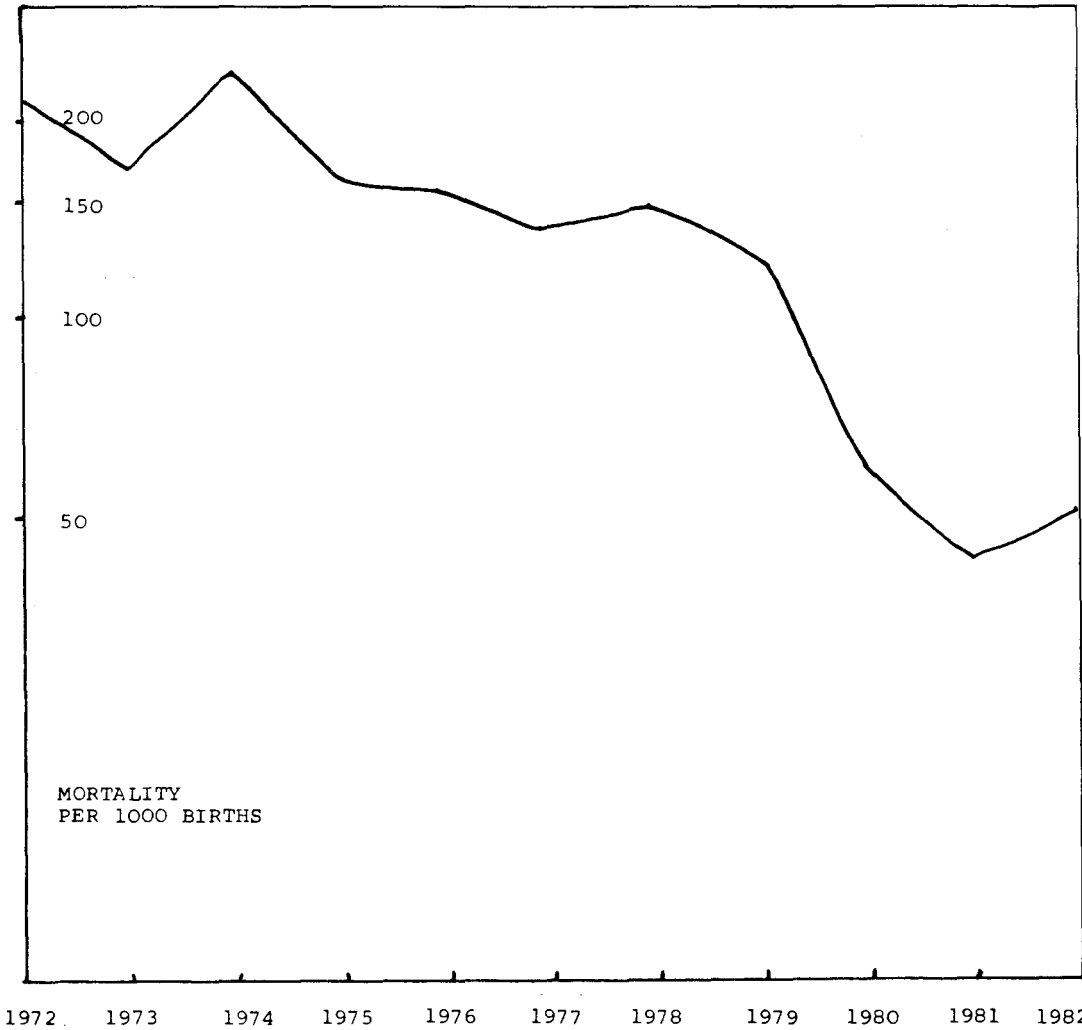
more than they'd get anywhere in town." (96)

CONCLUSION

None of the conditions and situations referred to in this paper are necessarily concerned with people whose plight is the most desperate, for the sources employed constitute a very narrow segment of the local population. All of the so-called poor however, live in what Hobsbawm has termed a state of "social poverty" - that is all share an inferior, dependent and exploited relationship to the rest of their society. (97)

With respect to agricultural labour an attempt has been made to show something of the wages paid, the terms and nature of employment, and the current state of health and housing. The working and living conditions of agricultural labour are depressed, and it is evident that this state of affairs relative to the town of Oudtshoorn and to urban areas generally, has prompted a significant movement off the land. New migrants from the rural areas do indeed appear to be the principal reason for the shocking overcrowding that now prevails in Bridgton, Oudtshoorn's coloured township. But housing isn't the only gripe of the urban poor. Workers who choose to settle in Oudtshoorn, though no doubt marginally better off than those on the land, are faced with limited employment opportunities. A situation which forces them to accept low wages and working conditions in some cases little changed from the early years of this century. For the large percentage of unemployed even this option is denied them.

"COLOURED" INFANT MORTALITY OUDTSHOORN (MUNICIPALITY) 1972 - 1982



SOURCE: ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH
OUDTSHOORN 1972 - 1982.

ORAL SOURCES

Order below corresponds to that used in the footnotes

- 1) Jack Klass, farmer
- 2) Kobus Spies, farmer
- 3) Danie Williams, farm labourer
- 4) Micky Fisch, farmer
- 5) Stephen Muller, farmer
- 6) Gerrit le Roux, farmer
- 7) Jan Piet, farm labourer
- 8) Mei Steelman, farm labourer
- 9) Johann Olivier, Farmer
- 10) Kobus Spies, (second interview)
- 11) Joumer van Niekerk, garage attendant
- 12) Mr Boesak, Secretary Bridgton Management Committee
- 13) Jacob Witbooi, farm labourer
- 14) Reggie Olifant,
- 15) Anita Tannies, housewife
- 16) Arrie Botha, apprentice mechanic
- 17) Mr Wilken, Manager Tannery Klein Karoo Landbou Koop
- 18) Mr Appel, Manager Abattoir
- 19) Charles Singer, Director, Barron's Tobacco Company (Pty) ltd.,
- 20) Mr Fourie, senior employee of Barron's Tobacco Company (Pty) Ltd.,
- 21) Piet Jagter, rollmaker
- 22) Mina Lewis, twister

FOOTNOTES

In these notes Int stands for interview.

- 1) P.A. Buirski, "Aspects of Material Life in Oudtshoorn 1860 - 1927 - with particular reference to the labouring poor", (B.A.(hons) U.C.T. 1983)
- 2) Report O2 -02 - 01, Urban and Rural Population of South Africa 1904 - 1960 Report O2 -80 - 01, Population Census 1980

- 3) D Hobart Houghton, The South African Economy, (Oxford 1976), p.270
- 4) M Leibold & A.P. Melck, Onderzoek na die Ekonomiese Groeipotensiaal van Oudtshoorn, (Buro vir Ekonomiese Onderzoek, Universiteit van Stellenbosch 1980) p.29
- 5) ibid and int 1 (12 - 12 - 83)
- 6) Report O6 - O1 - 14, Census of Agricultural and Pastoral Production 1978, Table 4.1
- 7) Buirski, op cit, pp. 22 - 23
- 8) P E Claasen, Beplanningstudie van die Klein Karoo, (Instituut vir Beplanningsnavorsing, Universiteit van Stellenbosch, Verslag No.23 1978), p.12
- 9) Int 2 (14 - 12 - 83)
- 10) Buirski, op cit, p.29
- 11) Int 1 (12 - 12 - 83)
- 12) Int 3 (2 - 2 - 84)
- 13) Report O6 - O1 - 14, Census of Agricultural and Pastoral Production 1978
- 14) ibid , tables 4.1, 4.2, 4.3
- 15) Int 1 (12 - 12 - 83) , Int 4 (13 - 12 - 83) , Int 2 (14 - 12 - 83)
- 16) Int 1 (12 - 12 - 83) , Int 2 (14 - 12 - 83) , Int 4 (13 - 12 - 83)
Int 5 (13 - 12 - 83) , Int 6 (14 - 12 - 83)
- 17) Int 7 (13 - 12 - 83)
- 18) Int 8 (1 - 2 - 83)
- 19) Int 2 (14 - 12 - 83)
- 20) Int 1 (12 - 12 - 83)
- 21) Int 2 (14 - 12 - 83)
- 22) Int 6 (14 - 12 - 83)
- 23) Int 1 (12 - 12 - 83)
- 24) Int 4 (13 - 12 - 83)
- 25) ibid
- 26) Int 4 (14 - 12 - 83)
- 27) Int 9 (July 1982)
- 28) RP 38/1976 Report of the (Theron) Commission of Inquiry into Matters relating to the Coloured Population Group, pars 7.29, 7.33 - 7.39
- 29) Int 1 (12 - 12 - 83) , int 5 (13 - 13 - 83)
- 30) Report O2 - 80 - O3 Census 1980 Economic Characteristics, tables 1,6

- 31) Int 1 (12 - 12 - 83)
- 32) Gesondheidsverslag 1982 van die Afdelingsraad Klein Karoo-Langkloof.
p.4
- 33) Int 3 (2 - 2 - 84)
- 34) RP 38/1976 , op cit , par 7.27.
- 35) Int 2 (14 - 12 - 83)
- 36) Gesondheidsverslag 1981 and 1982 van die Afdelingsraad Klein Karoo-Langkloof p.2
- 37) Gesondheidsverslag 1982 van die Afdelingsraad Klein Karoo-Langkloof,
p.2
- 38) See eg. T Mc Keown, The Modern Rise of Population, (London 1976)
- 39) Int 3 (2 - 2 - 84)
- 40) G 3 - 1894, Cape of Good Hope Labour Commission, par 11842
- 41) Int 2 (14 - 12 - 83)
- 42) ibid
- 43) Int 10 (1 - 2 - 84)
- 44) J.K Galbraith, The Nature of Mass Poverty, (Pelican 1980), ch.3
- 45) ibid. ch 4
- 46) SC 9 - 1913 , Select Committee on European Employment and Labour Conditions , paragraphs 515 - 518, 676
- 47) UG 15 - 1923 , Third Census of the Union of South Africa, table V
- 48) Int 10 (1 - 2 - 84)
- 49) Int 11 (2 - 2 - 84)
- 50) Int 8 (1 - 2 - 84)
- 51) Int 12 (2 - 2 - 84)
- 52) Int 7 (13 - 12 - 84)
- 53) ibid
- 54) Claasen, op cit, p.79 , Report 02 - 80 - 03 , Census 1980 Economic Characteristics , table 6
- 55) Leibold & Melck, op cit , p.45, Report 02 - 80 - 01, Population census 1980
- 56) Int 13 (1 - 2 - 84)
- 57) ibid
- 58) Leibold & Melck, op cit, p.45 & Report 02 - 80 - 01, Population Census 1980
- 59) Int 12 (2 - 2 - 84)
- 60) Int 14 (10 - 2 - 84)
- 61) Int 15 (10 - 2 - 84)

- 62) Int 16 (10 - 2 - 84)
- 63) ibid
- 64) ibid
- 65) ibid
- 66) Grassroots , Vol 5, 1, (Jan/Feb 1984)
- 67) Oudtshoorn Courant, 27 - 1 - 1984
- 68) ibid
- 69) Grassroots , Vol 5, 1, (Jan/Feb 1984)
- 70) Oudtshoorn Courant , 27 - 1 - 84
- 71) For distinction between primary and secondary disease prevention see C H Wyndham & L M Irwig, "A comparison of the Mortality Rates of Various Population Groups in the Republic of South Africa", S.A. Medical Journal, 53, 1979, p. 801
- 72) Jaarverslag van die Mediese Gesondheidsbeampte vie Oudtshoorn 1980 p.4
- 73) Jaarverslag van die Mediese Gesondheidsbeampte vie Oudtshoorn 1982 pp. 4-5
- 74) ibid p.4
- 75) Wyndham & Irwig, op cit , p.801
- 76) Report O2 - 80 - 03 Census 1980 Economic Characteristics, Table 6
- 77) Claasen, op cit , p.80
- 78) Int 17 (14- 12 - 83)
- 79) ibid
- 80) Int 18 (15 - 12 - 83)
- 81) ibid
- 82) Leibold and Melck , op cit, p.24, table 2.2
- 83) Int 19 (15 - 12 - 83) & Buirski, op cit , pp. 77-78
- 84) Int 19 (15 - 12 - 83) & Buirski, op cit , p. 81
- 85) Buirski , op cit , p. 77
- 86) An 56 - 1927, Wage Board Report on Wages, Rates, Hours, and Conditions of Labour in the Tobacco-Twisting Industry (Oudtshoorn Area) , paragraph 28
- 87) Int 20 (12 - 12 - 83) , An 56 - 1927, paragraphs 5 - 7
- 88) Int 21 (15 - 12 - 83)
- 89) An 56 - 1927 , paragraph 16
- 90) Int 22 (15 - 12 - 83)

- 91) An 56 - 1927 , paragraph 20
- 92) ibid , paragraphs 18 - 20
- 93) int 15 (10 - 2 - 84)
- 94) ibid
- 95) Int 5 (13 - 12 - 84)
- 96) Int 10 (1 - 2 - 84)
- 97) E J Hobsbawm, "Poverty" , International Encyclopaedia of Social Science, (New York 1968) , p. 398

These papers constitute the preliminary findings of the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa, and were prepared for presentation at a Conference at the University of Cape Town from 13-19 April, 1984.

The Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa was launched in April 1982, and is scheduled to run until June 1985.

Quoting (in context) from these preliminary papers with due acknowledgement is of course allowed, but for permission to reprint any material, or for further information about the Inquiry, please write to:

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