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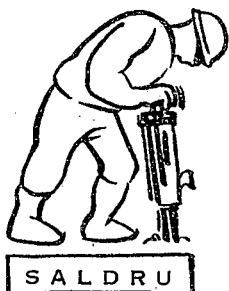
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Labour Problems Appertaining to a Large Sugar Estate
in Natal

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LABOUR PROBLEMS

APPERTAINING TO A LARGE SUGAR ESTATE

IN NATAL

BY

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Maidstone,
July 1976.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The South African Sugar Industry provides jobs for 175 000 South Africans of all races. In sugarcane growing activities it employs 106 000 people. Of these, approximately 102 000 (94%) are African labourers. Within the cane growing sphere, the large miller-cum-planter estates can be seen as distinctly separate entities from the privately owned farms. The approximate areas farmed by these two sectors of the cane growing industry are as follows:

Miller-cum-Planter estates	67 149 hectares,
Private White farmers	271 741 hectares,
Private Non-White farmers	<u>50 002 hectares,</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>388 892 hectares.</u>

The miller-cum-planter operations are classified as being part of industry, and by law they may not house more than 3% of their African labour as married men. This restriction does not apply to the private farmer. The miller-cum-planter estates are hence forced to rely to a large extent on migrant labour, with all its attendant problems. It is against this background that this paper is presented, in order to attempt to highlight the problems peculiar to migrant labour in the Sugar Industry and the results which have been obtained with various solutions which have been tried.

D I S C U S S I O N

A shortage of labour must be seen as the primary labour problem for the Sugar Industry. This labour shortage has come about for a number of reasons. Competition has intensified from industry, the mines, construction industries and other organised agricultural operations. In addition, the Transkeian Government is also employing increasing numbers of its own people. This situation has been aggravated by the political upheavals in neighbouring African countries.

Competition for labour from the Transkei, which has been for years the Sugar Industry's traditional source of labour, has naturally resulted in very rapidly escalating wages. The Agricultural Industry has always found it very difficult to compete directly with industry on wages paid. For this reason, if for none other, it has become of paramount importance to make the Sugar Industry attractive to the Pondo in all aspects. In addition to these reasons of competition, labour is also undoubtedly showing a preference for easier, less physically demanding work.

The Pondo male from the rural areas of the Transkei is by nature an agriculturalist and wishes to be at home over the Spring and Summer period when he cultivates, plants and harvests his crops. He traditionally has only presented himself for work after he has fulfilled his obligations at home. The Pondo, understandably, does not like the migrant system which deprives him of his family life, and he will go to work anywhere else in preference to becoming a migrant worker. Private farmers are generally able to house a large proportion of their African personnel as married men. As a result, farmers in the Sugar Industry are not experiencing anything like the same difficulties with regard to labour shortages as are the Mill-cum-Planter operations. The first approaches to a solution to this problem of labour shortage had obviously to be made in the area of recruiting.

Miller-cum-Planter organisations had, in the past, always undertaken their own recruiting. The first step towards rationalising and streamlining the recruiting effort was in the formation of the Sugar Industry Labour Organisation.

THE SUGAR INDUSTRY LABOUR ORGANISATION

The Sugar Industry Labour Organization, known as SILO, was inaugurated in July 1971 and became operative in mid-1973. Apart from co-ordinating the recruiting efforts of all Miller-cum-Planters south of the Tugela River, SILO has been able to standardize basic wages, tasks, accommodation, feeding, welfare and conditions of service.

SILO has the task of supplying the full labour requirements of its twelve member companies - 20 000 recruits per annum. In the financial year 1974/75, only 17 000 recruits were supplied.

Member companies notify SILO monthly as to their labour requirements, these requirements are then distributed by quota to the various SILO district managers and labour agents. SILO has branch offices in the traditional recruiting areas of the Transkei. These offices are under the supervision of district managers reporting to the head office in Port Shepstone. All the district managers hold Labour Agents licences with endorsements to recruit for all sugar companies.

An integral bus service is also operated by SILO. This runs from Umtata to Lusikisiki, where it connects with member company buses.

Besides this recruiting function, SILO plays an important liaison role between:

The employer and the employee,
the employee and his family,
the employers and the Transkeian government,
independent recruiters and the Transkeian government.

In order to overcome the seasonal fluctuation in the manner in which Pondos presented themselves for work in the Industry, and to provide

SILO with a rational basis of operation, a number of radical changes had to be made in the planning and programming of work and in the drawing up of a recruiting plan.

REDESIGNED RECRUITING PLAN

The situation which tended to occur, not only at Tongaat, but at most sugar farms in Natal, was an extreme peak in labour requirements in November and an extreme valley in March. Consequently, labour either could not be detained during the peak period, or excessive labour was recruited to cover peak periods, which obviously resulted in additional costs. (see Appendix 1)

During the peak period, heavy demands are made on the labour force with the planting and cultivation programmes being at their height. Conversely, availability of the Pondo workers reaches its peak in approximately March and is in an extreme valley during November-December. (see Appendix 2)

At Tongaat, an attempt has been made to even out the seasonal workload to make it compatible with the traditional pattern of labour availability. This has been done by 'out of season' planting using filtercake as a seed covering medium and by careful programming of irrigated or sandy fields to be planted in the winter season. In this way, the bulk of planting could be done before the onset of Spring rains. The remainder of the planting programme was then postponed until the end of the harvesting season. (see Appendix 3)

A further solution to overcoming the seasonal fluctuation in labour strength was to offer incentives to Pondos who were prepared to take a seasonal contract.

TONGAAT SEASONAL CONTRACT SYSTEM

Normal cane cutters' contracts are for a duration of 180 shifts. Once these have been completed, the worker will return to his homeland. Usually a large number of workers would return to the

homeland many months before the cutting season was complete, and at a time when new contract workers are difficult to recruit (see Appendix 1). To alleviate this problem, the Seasonal Contract System was introduced at Tongaat.

The Seasonal Contract is for 220 shifts (40 more than the normal contract). A worker can only take a Seasonal Contract during the months of March, April, May or June. (If he were to take it earlier than this, it would last longer than the cutting season, again defeating its purpose).

Incentives offered for this seasonal contract, are:

- a) An extra 30c per day (from R2,00 up to R2,30 per day),
- b) A bonus on completion of the contract, equal to two weeks' pay,
- c) Priviledged accomodation on the section where he is employed.

A condition of the seasonal contract is that the cutter must cut at least 800 tons in 220 days (i.e. he must average more than 3,6 tons per day).

At present this season Tongaat has 220 seasonal cane cutters.

SUPERVISION

Problems are experienced at the level of first line White supervision. These are because of:

- a) Poor communication, particularly because of language difficulties,
- b) A high turnover rate of first line White supervisors, due to promotions and outside opportunities. (Tongaat has for many years acted as a training ground for young White men entering sugarcane management).
- c) Incorrect attitudes and a lack of understanding of Pondo customs on the part of White staff.

To overcome the problems outlined above, a number of steps have been taken: Wherever possible, new White recruits have been required to have a high level of proficiency in Xhosa or Zulu. For those staff members who are not proficient in the languages, instruction has been provided both through the medium of language laboratories and of individual tuition through Black instructors. High level Black lecturers have been introduced to talk to all levels of White management, to bring about attitudinal changes and to further understanding of Pondo customs. Management training has been provided on an ongoing basis.

THE PONDO WORKER

Because of the 100% turnover rate from the migrant system, the Pondo has very little time to apply the basic skills and training needed to improve his performance on the job. The new recruit has to be fitted into the organisation and given a clear understanding of the work he must fulfill. In order to overcome these problems, Tongaat has set up a sophisticated induction and training centre.

RECEPTION & TRAINING CENTRE

The new recruit arriving from the Transkei at Tongaat finds himself welcomed at the Reception Centre, where he spends the night. The next day, after undergoing a complete medical examination and having his employment details collated, he moves to the Training Centre which adjoins the Reception Centre. He will spend the next three days at the Training Centre.

The first day will consist of a general induction to the company. He will undergo two induction lectures, using slides and tapes. These cover, amongst other subjects, company policies, discipline, wages, bonuses, incentives, taxation, channels of communication (including the function of Liaison Committees), Family Aid schemes (including the remittance of money), recreation and welfare, conditions of service, safety and personal hygiene.

After lunch, the new recruit will be taken on an orientation trip by bus. He will visit the mill where he will see sugar being made and he will also see the Group hospital.

The second day of his training will consist of lectures using slides, and practical exercises on basic job skills such as cane cutting, loading and bundling of cane, weeding, weedicide spraying, care of tools, fertilizer application, etc.

Before completion of their course, all new recruits are given a reflex test. In addition to determining reflex ability, this test also determines hand/eye co-ordination.

On the third day, the new recruits go out into the field and actually cut and load cane as they will soon be doing on their sections. This is done under the supervision of demonstrators who correct faults, etc. Thereafter the new men are awarded a Certificate of Completion and are then sent to their respective cane sections.

Because he is a migrant worker, the Pondo is cut off from his home and family. He often leaves home because food and money are short and he is then naturally concerned as to the welfare of his family. He needs to be able to communicate with his family and, if necessary, must be able to travel home. In order to overcome these problems Tongaat has introduced a Family Aid Scheme whereby families needing cash urgently (as in the case of sickness) are advanced this money immediately by the local area manager of SILO. This money is then subsequently deducted from the man's wages at his place of work.

A Money Remittance Scheme is provided, whereby a worker may send money home to his family at regular intervals. He approaches one of the recruiting clerks with the amount which he wishes to remit and details of the person to whom money is being sent, address, etc. A voucher with these details is then sent, via SILO, to the nearest area manager or recruiter, who travels to the man's home and delivers the money.

All employees, including migratory workers, are covered by Tongaat Group life insurance. The relatives of any man who dies while in

Tongaat's employment, will receive a payment of twelve month's wages.

A communication scheme has been established, owing to the fact that Tongaat employs nearly 4 200 men in agricultural work, and the possibility existing that once a man has been employed here, he 'vanishes' from his family. It is nearly impossible to trace a man by name only. It also happens from time to time, that a man does not arrive at his place of work. As far as his family is concerned, he is working at Tongaat, but Tongaat has never heard of him. To prevent this type of situation from occurring, a preprinted postcard is automatically completed and posted after a man has been employed. This card contains the following information: section employed, man's company number, which district manager or recruiter should be contacted by the family in an emergency, etc.

Medical aspects of the migrant labourer at Tongaat are covered by an article written by one of Tongaat's medical officers, Dr. N. McE. Lamont and attached. (see Appendix 4)

The Induction and Training Centre introduces the Pondo the the concept of a correctly balanced diet, which he receives in the hostel to which he is posted. (see Appendix 5).

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The Pondo worker has in the past been confined to the lower grade jobs in the Sugar Industry. There has been little or no opportunity for advancement into the better paid, more rewarding jobs traditionally held by permanently resident Zulu or Indian males from the area. To overcome this, a driver training programme has been considerably expanded and Pondos are being trained in driving and also in supervision. Men taking up such opportunities are required to sign a contract for the full season.

Because of the high training and skill investment, it is obviously desirable to get as many as possible of the past employees to return to Tongaat for further contracts. In order to encourage

this, systems have been devised whereby past employees are able to gain preferential treatment for re-recruitment and are offered cash incentives and preferential accommodation if they offer themselves for a further contract within a specified time period.

GENERAL

There has been little or no formal communication system, particularly from the Pondo worker up to Management. A number of steps have been taken to overcome this problem. A periodical, the Nkosibomvu, has been introduced, which attempts to keep all workers fully informed of current events. In addition, newsletters are printed and distributed in the Transkei to families of migrant workers currently employed at Tongaat, to act both as a propaganda medium and as a news medium.

A Liaison Committee System has been introduced, whereby elected members sit on a committee where grievances are brought to the notice of Management. Regular meetings are held with indunas, and, in addition, senior SILO personnel are utilized to conduct investigations into any grievances which may remain unresolved in particular hostels.

If the Pondo who has finished his contract has any grievance or problem, these must be cleared before he returns home, otherwise he may well damage the company image in his home district. To overcome this, exit interviews are conducted with each and every returning recruit. All relevant complaints are noted and action taken.

The Pondo men are very clannish and have strong tribal ties which are jealously guarded. This fact is taken into account, in that men are encouraged to work in groups of their own tribe, controlled by men whom they recognise as being in authority over them. These are usually chiefs' sons in their home areas, or indunas.

The Pondo migrant needs to be provided with plenty of leisure time activity, particularly because he is living in an all male community. Activities such as soccer, Ndlama dancing, films, T.V. and an African Club have been set up in recent years.

C O N C L U S I O N

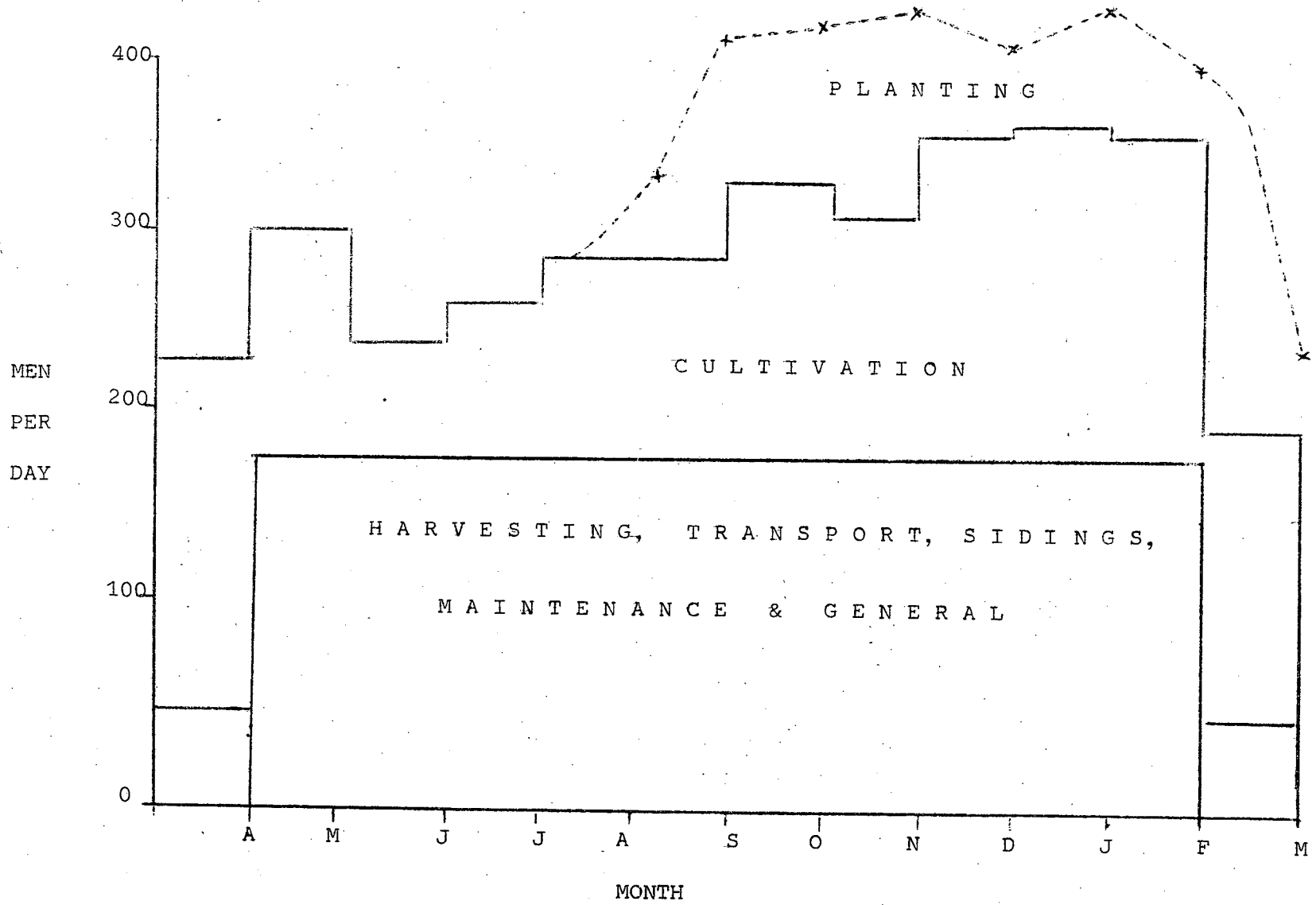
The Miller-cum-Planter sector of the Sugar Industry is almost totally reliant upon migrant Pondo males to perform the labour intensive work in its agricultural operation.

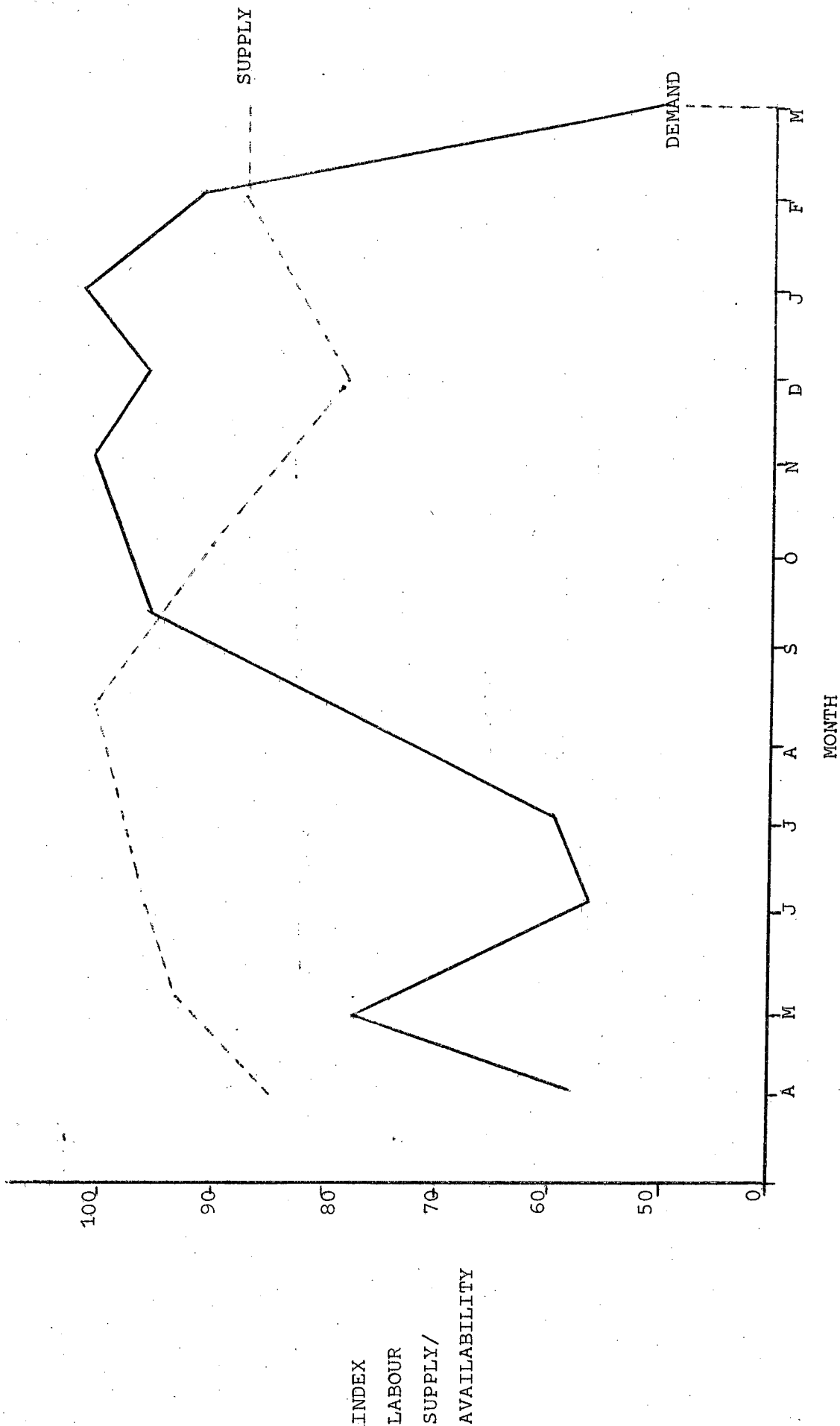
This paper has attempted to highlight some of the steps which have been taken to recruit, train and retain the migrant worker as a force in the Industry, in the face of still competition from other industries and of a growing reluctance on the part of the migrant to do heavy manual work.

What has become apparent, as the tempo of change has increased, is that there is no immediate end in sight to the change. Programmes are put in and are revised on a frequent basis.

Perhaps the most significant steps have been the creation of more and more job opportunities for the migrant workers within the organisation structure. These changes, together with literacy and other training programmes, can lead the migrant into playing a greater and greater part in the affairs of the Sugar Industry and in earning due rewards for his increased contribution.

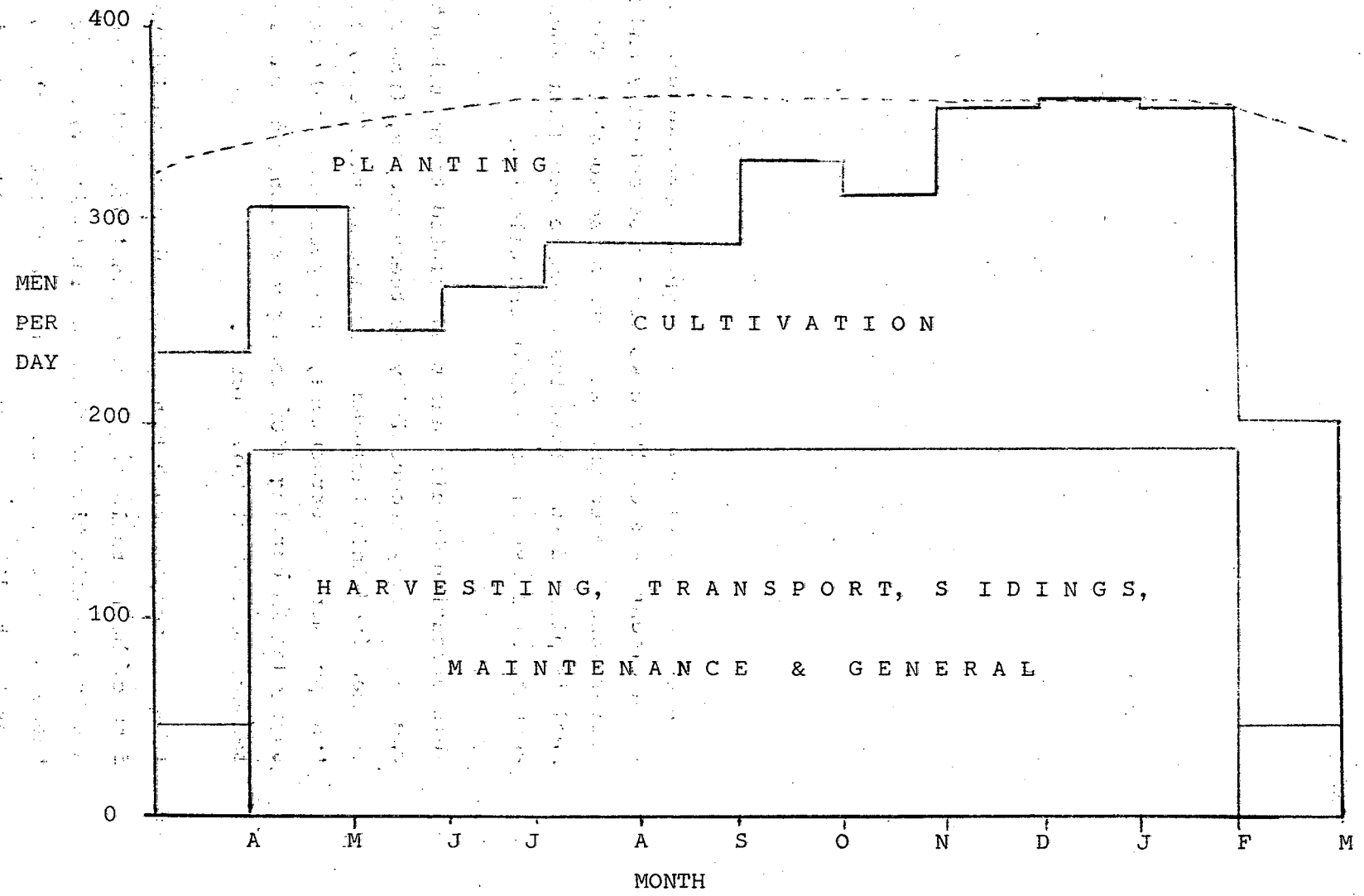
TRADITIONAL SEASONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR LABOUR FOR SUGARCANE FARMING

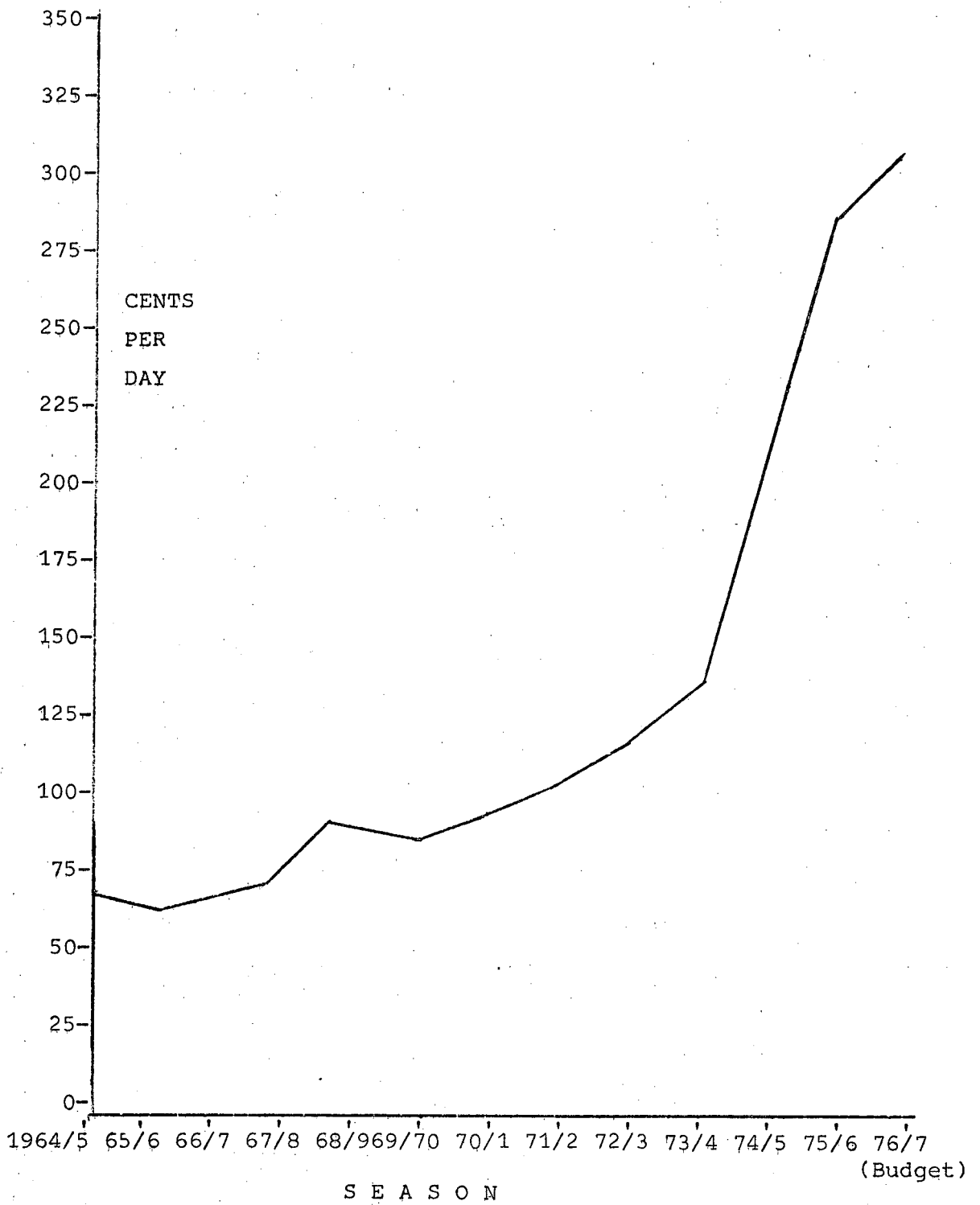




NON-COMPATIBILITY IN SEASONAL DEMAND AND SUPPLY OF MIGRATORY LABOUR IN THE SUGAR INDUSTRY

READJUSTED SEASONAL LABOUR REQUIREMENTS ON THE SUGAR FARM





AVERAGE COST PER MAN PER DAY - NON MANAGERIAL MANPOWER
ON AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

MEDICAL ASPECTS OF THE MIGRANT LABOUR OF TONGAAT

BY

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The Pondo stems from an essentially agricultural society in which the hygiene and public health arrangements are primitive, and in which the level of education is also very low. Nevertheless, in making a careful study of a year's intake of over 4000 recruits, I have come to certain conclusions which may be of significance.

1. The state of nutrition of the Pondo recruits coming to Tongaat have been eminently satisfactory. Although these people are not giants of men, they are in an excellent state of nutrition, and this may be related to the fact that dietary patterns in the Transkei include the consumption of sweet potatoes and madumbis, in addition to their traditional maize staple diet.
2. On arrival at Tongaat, each new recruit is given a thorough medical examination and is given, as a routine, a vermifuge and a month's course of Vitamin B compound and Vitamin C. He is also inoculated against Tetanus and Typhoid.
3. Any recruit suspected of having tuberculosis is subjected to an X-ray and is isolated and is not returned to the compound to which he was originally directed, nor repatriated back to the Transkei, until he has been rendered sputum negative.
4. It must be borne in mind that Tongaat has a hot humid climate, whereas the Transkei has a cold climate and therefore it is most essential that these people are given a period of physiological and dietary acclimatisation. To cut cane in hot, humid conditions, it is essential that these people be given adequate amounts of first class protein and furthermore, their fluid balances must be maintained, bearing in mind that the sensation of thirst is inadequate to provide sufficient fluid

intake during the hot, humid summer of Tongaat, and therefore the workers are encouraged to drink at frequent intervals and a supply of cooled water is kept available in the fields and delivered to each worker at regular intervals.

5. It is remarkable how the dietary planning of a large proportion of our industrial labour force has evolved in a haphazard and unscientific manner. For example, the giving of a single large meal in the evening predisposes to the development of midday hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), which not only lowers work output, but increases accident rate and, as a result, it has been planned that at least two meals are given to these manual labourers during their working day.

The sugar worker begins his working day very early in the morning and before departing for the field, he is given a slice of bread and a cup of coffee and then again at 9 a.m., two high protein biscuits and a cup of tea are delivered to each man in the field. This simple expedient has reduced the accident rate of these workers substantially and has furthermore delayed the peak rate of accidents. The evening meal is planned such that these people are given adequate amounts of first class protein and calories.

This attention to diet has been related to an undoubted increase in daily productivity of these people, from 2,2 tons per man (and this included every man in the field) to 3,7 tons per man. Furthermore, five years ago, only one man succeeded in cutting 1000 tons per season, whereas last season, 38 men cut this figure.

6. I have, over the past five years, uncovered an interesting form of heart failure. I have concluded that it is probably due to a combination of factors, including an addiction by these people to an excessive amount of daily salt intake, plus the traditional consumption of mahewu in the fields. This is a sour watery maize porridge which seems to produce a diarrhoea in these subjects. This has been prevented by the midday meal of two high protein biscuits, so that not only has the diarrhoea disappeared, but also the incidence of heart failure has fallen very sharply.

7. As was found by the Mines, heavy labour places a great demand on Vitamin C in the diet, and compound diets tend to be short of Vitamin C. Chopped or dried vegetables, added to the stews only 20 minutes before serving, have succeeded in obviating this.

It has also been found by me that sugarcane in itself contains Vitamin C and the regular chewing of sugarcane in the field has a preventitive action against scurvy and is also of great benefit to the dental hygiene of these people.

TONGAAT SUGAR LIMITED - AGRICULTUREMENU FOR AGRICULTURAL MIGRANT WORKERS

<u>BREAKFAST</u>	Brown Bread	1/6 loaf
(every day except Sunday)	Tea	0,5g
	Sugar	40g
	Milk powder	10g
<u>MORNING MEAL</u>		
(every day except Sunday)	Fortified biscuits	2
	Mahewu	500g per 5l water
	Milk powder	10g added to mahewu
(Can be given at evening meal if preferred)	(Tea	0,5g
	(Sugar	40g
	(Milk powder	10g
<u>EVENING MEAL</u>		
<u>MONDAY</u>	Meat	180g
	Dried vegetables	10g
	Samp	250g
	Beans	85g
	Salt to taste(about)	50g
	Curry to taste "	4g
<u>TUESDAY</u>	Eggs	2
	Curry soup	15g
	Samp	250g
	Beans	85g
	Salt to taste (about)	50g
<u>WEDNESDAY</u>	Meat	180g
	Samp	250g
	Beans	85g
	Dried vegetables	10g
	Salt to taste (about)	50g
	Curry to taste (about)	4g
<u>THURSDAY</u>	Vegetine	72g
	Samp	250g
	Beans	85g
	Dried vegetables	10g
	Salt to taste (about)	50g
	Curry to taste (about)	4g
<u>FRIDAY</u>	Meat	180g
	Samp	250g
	Beans	85g
	Dried vegetables	10g
	Salt to taste (about)	50g
	Curry to taste (about)	4g
<u>SATURDAY</u>	Meat	454g
	Samp	250g
	Beans	85g
	Salt to taste (about)	50g

SUNDAY

Samp	250g
Beans	85g
Mealie Meal as Putu	270g
Maas	,5 l
Beer	454g per 5 l water
Fortified Biscuits	2
Tea	0,5g
Sugar	40g
Milk Powder	10g