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A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

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Title: Rural Contradictions and Class Consciousness: Migrant Labour in Historical Perspective, The Ciskei in the 1880s and 90s.

by: Jack Lewis

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Introduction

In a recent work Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone have brought together a collection of articles intended to expand understanding "both of the overall contours of the political economy and more especially of the black experience."(1)

The theoretical discourse in which it is intended that this 'experience' should be analysed is explicitly that derived from Edward Thompson, both in his work on the 'making' of the English working class and subsequently in his attack on the methodologies of 'structuralism'.(2) Marks and Rathbones' main concern is with the active 'agency' exerted by Africans in the process of proletarianisation. The central concept which they adopt is that of 'consiousness', which they define, after Thompson, as "the way in which...experiences are handle. in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms."(3)

The growth of a migrant labour force and its capacity to struggle against capital must be situated within the context of the social relations of household production in the rural locations. The inability of the households to reproduce themselves without the input of wages earned in capitalist enterprises is ultimately the determining factor forcing men and women to migrate in search of work. However, the struggles which result from the contradiction between capital and labour are influenced by the contradictions stemming from the rural social relations in which the migrant worker is enmeshed and which have had a determining effect on his perceptions and consiousness. An understanding of the historical struggles of South Africa migrant proletariat requires that the effects of secondary contradictions within the rural reserves be taken into account. This paper will try to address this issue with reference to the Ciskei in the period 1880-1900, and will attempt some clarification of the conceptual issues involved in this analysis.

Bill Freund, in a recent review of the Marks and Rathbone collection, has correctly observed that the articles dealing with 'rural relations' all emphasise the structure of rural society and analyse particular historical developments as responses to the interaction of these social formations with the emerging capitalist mode of production in southern Africa.(4) Thus for Kimble, "any explanation of the developmer of migrant labour from Basutoland in the 19th C. requires a detailed study of the structural conditions prevailing at both the point of supply and that of demand."(5) Kimble argues that it is important to analyse how the aquisition of commodities and money through migrant labour were "integrated into the cicuits of production and reproduction within the total social formation."(6) In order, therefore, to understand the dynamics which, between 1870 and 1900 led tens of thousands of people into becoming migrant workers on the Cape railway works, the Kimberley

diamond mines, the gold fields and on some colonial farms, it is to the structure of the mode of production to which we must look.

This perspective and the analysis which ensues from it is well represented in the Marks and Rathbone collection and seems to me to be essentially correct. However, in this analysis the process by which a migrant proletariat was formed has precious little to do with the active'agency' of the class itself and everything to do with the structure of the mode of production. It thus remains an extremely abstract characterisation of the social changes inherent in colonial conquest and the transition period that follows this. The tendency in the literature has been to concentrate on this process of transition and to fail to incorporate the concept of class struggle as a term in the equation which links the place of the agent in the relations of production with the realities of appropriation of surplus labour, the determination of levels of subsistence and the reproduction of the worker.(7)

Class struggles are the result of contradictions between classes and it is the conciousness of the individual of these contradictions which animates such struggles and determines the cultural or ideological influences on them. It may be suggested that the complex contradictions between classes in a period of transition in the mode of production has not been generally defined and that the actual class struggles have in consequence remained hidden from analysis and research.(8)

It was van Onslen who, over ten years ago, pointed out that "it is inadequate to guage worker consciousness through the relative absence of overt industrial action aimed at securing improvements through readily identifiable organizations... Rather, it should be sought in workers strategy in the context of the overall functioning of the political economy and in the day to day reponses in the work situation."(9) Similarly, class struggle and the conciousness of migrant workers in the countryside cannot be limited to overt action and the outbreak of hostilities against, for example the Colonial State or against headmen. It has to be taken to include the entire range of ideologically influenced responses and intiatives assumed by people in the rural households towards the conditions under which they lived and their perceptions of those agents which influenced these conditions. It is in the context of these struggles that the emergence of the migrant labour system must be set.

The contribution which follows will attempt to delineate the main contradictions amongst the rural households and between them and the Colonial State in Ciskei between 1880 and 1900. It will then examine the ways in which these contradictions became the sites of class struggles and the influence of this on attitudes to wage labour and long distance labour migration.

II The secondary contradictions between the households.

Colonial conquest inaugurated a distinctive period of transition on both the structure of the labour process in the Xhosa social formation and in its dominant political and ideological relations. The pre-capitalist modes of production in southern Africa supported a distinct polarisation of their productive units both in terms of their levels of accumulation and their output per capita, and this was especially so amongst the Xhosa. Corresponding to this, there existed a hierachical political system in which the domination of productive resources by a restricted group played an important part. The impoverishment of the majority of households through the effects of conquest intensified the inequalities between them. To survive, the households had to increase their output from cultivation and this led those that could afford it to purchase ploughs and other equipment and to participate wherever possible in agricultural markets to gain cash for their produce.

The residual effects of the class structure of the pre-capitalist mode of production ensured great differences in the ability of individual households to participate in the produce markets of the Colonial economy.(10) The capacity to expand production, in terms of access to land, labour, and draught power was very unevenly distributed across particular communities. The extent of this unevenness was such as to ensure that many, indeed most, households did not in fact experience any substantial 'rise' in their general level of consumption, compared with the levels which had previously been maintained. However, small groups of more prosperous households were scattered all over Ciskei and these formed the nucleus of a class that was to be of increasing political importance to the Colonial State.(11)

The main factors influencing the productivity of arable agriculture for each household were:

(i) possession of a plough
(ii) possession of sufficient draught power to pull the plough
(iii) access to sufficient labour to sow, hoe, weed, and protect unfenced lands from animal and human tresspass
(iv) access to political influence to acquire possession of the desired quantity and quality of land.

In the Csikei in the 1860s and 70s, the proportion of households owning ploughs did not exceed 20 to 30 per cent in any of the locations.(12) Owing to increasing population densities this figure was maintained in the 1880s and 90s. Typically the majority of households could not muster enough oxen or cattle of any kind to draw a plough.(13) The size of households had critical effect on their ability

to bring an expanded acreage under cultivation. A cross tabulation of the size of household with the number of acres sown in Ox-Kraal and Kamastone locations in 1861, revealed that of those households with a plough that cultivated 8 or more acres, 84 per cent had more than 4 children, while of those which cultivated less then 8 acres only 37.5 percent had more than 4 children.(14)

These differentiating factors were partly overcome in good seasons through the hiring of ploughs and trek oxen. Between 4 and 8 trek oxen were required for two to three days to plough a 4 acre allotment. The hire fee for this was usually in the region of 12 shillings. However in seasons of drought or low and intermittent rainfall, which are frequent in the Ciskei, ownership of a plough and stock took on special significance.

In times of inadequate rainfall, the owner of a plough and trek oxen could take advantage of whatever small showers occurred to plough and sow his lands. By the time the three of four other households waiting to use the plough had their turn, the land was too hard to plough up succesfully. This forced many households to return to hand cultivation with the consequent drop in acreage and yields. The differentiation of cultivated acreage and of yields obtained between households was thus strongly promoted by the relative scercity of ploughs and cattle.

This leaves only the fourth point to consider, the political position of the households in the location. It is precisely here that the characteristic polarisation of household agriculture can be constituted at the level of a contradiction between the households.

III Of Headmen, households and land.

By 1880 arable agriculture had replaced pastoralism as the key element in the relationship between households. Sandilles' memorable phrase, "we have no cattle; our cattle are our gardens" summed up the perception of most people of the changes that had occurred. In conformity with this shift, the place of the chief gave way to that of the government approved headman. The institution of the headman was a specific creation which grew out of the new relationship between the elements of the mode of production. It expressed politically the place of cultivation in the new social relations being forged. As the headmen drew their pay and owed allegiance to the Colonial State, so the households were linked to the Colonial capitalist economy through the commodity and labour markets. The primary economic focus was now on cultivation and the ability to acquire and utilise arable land.

After the cattle-killing in 1857, the Colonial State began the appointment of headmen to be in charge of various 'locations' in the magisterial districts. In the main locations there were, by 1880, at least 214 paid headmen, a number of whom were the original incumbents of the position- appointed before 1860. Drawn in most instances from the old elites of Xhosa and Mfengu society, they did their best to promote their own agricultural interests and those of their friends and clients. They were prepared to co-operate with the Colonial State in all things, so long as their vital interest in the control over the land was not disturbed.(15)

The power exercised by the headmen was not based purely on their political relationship with, and support of, the Colonial State. It rested on the control they exercised in the allocation of land. In 1890 Verity, a government clerk at Tamacha, wrote to the Civil Commissioner in King William's Town, commenting on a land dispute brought to him on appeal:

> Headmen in tribal locations have exercised the right of alloting lands for thirty-five years. I am unable to say who gave them that authority.(16)

It was almost with a sense of shock that the government realised to what extent effective control had passes into the hands of the headmen. In April 1890 the Secretary of State for Native Affairs issued a circular officially prohibiting the headmen from having any power over the allocation of land or from receiving any fee for their services. The practice of allotment of lands by headmen was to "be at once checked and discontinued..." it stated.(17)

The response of the magistrates was highly revealing. Their leading spokesman, Dick, wrote that giving effect to "this injunction in the exact terms in which it is conveyed would...be productive of much discontent in the minds of the people ...arising principally from its impracticability."(18) Dick chose to interpret the SNAs orders as meaning only that the headmen should be prevented from assuming functions which would "practically give them control of their people without reference to government or its offices." This did not mean that they could not or did not exercise control. As Dick plainly stated, it only meant that such control should not conflict with the interests of the Colonial State.

The great scarcity of arable land of good quality increased the importance of the headmen's role in its allocation. The power to decide on the allocation of land was the base on which the power of the headmen was built. Dick distinguished four categories of cases in which allotment of land occurred:

(i) to newcomers
(ii) to newly married young men who were the sons of residents
(iii) to residents who claimed to have a right to inherit land on the death of the former possessor
(iv) to residents who claimed an extension to their lots.(19)

A fifth category commonly occurred in which a decision was called for in a case of land loaned in whole or part by its possessor to someone else. In such cases the refusal to relinquish possession often occurred.

The effects of the headmans power over land allocation, given the economic polarisation of the households is well illustrated in the case brought by Gqayi against the headman Nguntsele of Tamacha. In the drought of 1885 Gqayi took his cattle to the coast where they died of disease. He had no cattle and had to use a hoe to cultivate and so only used a portion of his land. He share-cropped with Infeke, but in 1886 because of a shortage of food he left to work on the railways. While he was away Infeke died and the headman Nguntsele took possession of the land and gave it to a 'relative' of his.(20)

Once the headmen enjoyed the right to make these crucial decisions, it was a small step to expect from each applicant for land a certain payment for the successful completion of an allotment. Many examples of this may be cited. The magistrate in Glen Grey, enquiring into the conduct of headman Mankai Tabata, wrote:

> I am aware that often people do make payments to the Headmen for acting in land disputes. A common charge would be 7 shillings for any service etc performed, although sometimes only 2 shillings 6 pence was charged. (21)

Bovani Mabanhla, the powerful (and popular) headman in Keiskamma Hoek, was well-known for charging for land allocation. The deposition made against Mabanhla by one Malgas clearly reveals the possibilities inherent in the position of the headmen:

> I arrived here last year when they were reaping the Kaffir Corn. I don't belong to these locations and have no right here; I did not report myself at the office; I went to Bovani Mabanhla and asked him to give me land; he pointed out a measured land and said I must pay £3. I paid I paid him the £3...I believe the land was surveyed for Maqadaza, whom Bovani drove away and is now across the Kei. Bovani also gave me another land that Mata used to plough. Bovani is now demanding £2 17sh and 6d. from me for this second land. I refused and demanded the Government receipts for the first £3 I paid him; he sees I have a good crop of Kaffir Corn, and he is driving me away... (22)

While these charges against Mabanhla were never proved, they point to the insecurity

of many households, the connection between the political factors governing access to land and proletarianisation and finally, the ability of the headmen to profit from their position and make exactions from the people. The ability of the headmen to make exactions for the services they provided lay in the increasing intensity of the contredictions between the households. While most households had very limited numbers of stock, all households hoped to gain a harvest of mealies or sorghum from their allotment. There developed in consequence an intense struggle between the owners of large numbers of stock and the majority of poor households with little or no stock and who were demanding arable land.

From Izeli near Keiskamma Hoek, in 1885 the Inspector of Native Locations observed:

> "Owing to the extensive cultivation in this location there is a very little land left for grazing purposes and in dry seasons the stock is very much pinched for pasturage."(23)

Ten years later it was possible to discern open class conflict over the utilisation of land. Dick reported from King William's Town:

> "Generally the limits to which cultivation can be carried on have nearly been reached. A struggle has already commenced between the owners of stock on the one hand and those possessing little if any on the other, but who require gardens, as to whether the grazing lands shall keep on being curtailed for purposes of cultivation until eventually it is all absorbed..."(24)

Many of those with large herds of stock were also owners of private land outside the locations on which they conducted their cultivation. It was common for these private land owners, with the connivance of the headmen, to depasture large numbers of stock on the location commonages. They thus came into conflict with the poor of the locations, who, owning few or no stock, had nothing to loose by seeing culitvation extend further into the commonage.

The peculiar position occupied by the headmen, standing as they did between the mass of households and the Colonial State, led to the politicisation of the post of the headman itself. This was expressed in the development of intense disputes over the headmanship and the emergence of 'factions' supporting rival claimants for the position. In 1897 a group of residents of Cata's village, petitioned the SNA requesting the removal of their headman Zazine. They set out the requirements of a "good headman" as they saw it: Firstly, he had to enjoy the confidence of both Government and the people; secondly, the headman should be independent of the people in regard to his livelihood in order to prevent him from falling into the hands and under the influence of designing persons; thirdly, the headman had to be impartial and 'possess at least some power of reasoning and common sense." Headman Zazine was, concluded the petitioners, "devoid of all the

qualifications above mentioned."(25) The petition was organised by Solomon Jama, a rival claimant for the post of headman and his henchman John Tele.

In most of these struggles competing claims to arable land were found to be the underlying factor in the conflict. Where there was a church presence in a location the disputes often took the form of a clash between rival church groupings. These conflicts could become particularly intense when church allegiance coincided with Xhosa and Mfengu splits.

In Sinxo's location, Middledrift, the headman Sinxo was excommunicated from the Church of England because of his divorce in 1897. He joined the Baptists and about 30 other families left the Church of England (for the Baptists) with him. He started a school with the assistance of the Baptists. The Church of England congregation, who still formed a majority in the location, then began encroaching on the land of Sinxo's followers. The Church of England preacher, Malgas, was a Mfengu whereas Sinxo was Xhosa (Gqunukwebe). Malgas held services in Sinxo's territory, which was regarded by the latter as provocation. Sinxo was successfully winning over Church of England members. In order to break Sinxo's hold on the location, Malgas and the magistrate, Verity, decided to apply for a survey of his followers land in Sinxo's territory without consulting Sinxo and brought forward allegations that he made charges for the allocation of land.(26) Sinxo wrote a letter to Malgas expressing his outrage at his actions:

> "You have written there (Cape Town) asking to Government, begging Amagqunukwebe land, saying you have Church ground which is separate... Where here is the Church ground? By which authority have you gone to ask Amagqunukwebe land? Are the Church Ministers the preachers of the word here, or are they here to rob the people of their privileges..."(27)

The control of land allocation by the headmen along with the unequal distribution of land operated both to reproduce the economic polarisation of the households, increasing vulnerability to proletarianisation and to place political power in the hands of the headmen. Where the headmen extended patronage, for example by allowing encroachment on the commonages, they could often build up a powerful support base that operated not unlike a rural 'mafia'. Thus headman Nqosha in Victoria East described the 'catazas',(or'fowl lifters', the coloquial name for people allowed to carve out land on the commonage), as his "fence" and warned that "he who pulls down his fence must beware of the consequences."(28)

In extending patronage to some groups amongst the poor households, the headmen often came into conflict with other members of their own class who aspired to the position of headman themselves and who would not infrequently make promises to those excluded from the incumbent's favours to recruit their support in any

campaign to unseat the headman. Thus, provided the headmen are not seen as representing the larger households in an undifferentiated way, and the possibilities for utilising the headmen to advance the position of some of the poor households is realised, it is necessary to see the headmen as part of a distinct class, representing the polarised condition of the locations.

IV The primary contradiction: household production, Colonial State and capitalist economy.

The increasing proletarianisation of the households was accelerated by the drought of 1884-1886. While the seasons between 1880 and 1883 were uneven, 1884-1886 saw one of the most decisive droughts of the 19th century. The effects of this drought have not been appreciated in the literature, but it should be seen as a critical event in the creation of a proletariat from the mass of poor households. The timing of the drought was important, coming as it did on the eve of the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand.

The crops harvested in 1884 in Victoria East and other districts were described as "disastrous".(29) Hot winds shrivelled what crops there were. Pasturage was also badly affected. "Grass seems to be almost a thing of the past", wrote a distressed Inspector of Native Locations.(30) People began to sell their cattle and sheep for food. A few, with large herd, were able to sell off part only of their stock and with the proceeds hire grazing elsewhere for the remainder.(31) By May 1884 even the prickly pears in Victoria East were beginning to wither.

From Keiskamma Hoek and Tamacha in King William's Town district it was reported, in 1885, that the crops were a "complete failure, the pasturage scanty and burned up and water so scarce that excepting at the large rivers nothing but puddles remains."(32) Many households were reduced to a state of destitution, with neither stock nor food, and were forced to subsist on roots and herbs.(33) Other households who, at the beginning of 1884 were considered "well off", were now living in a condition if semi-starvation.(34)

With this drought came, for the first time, large scale indebtedness. Those cattle that did not die were pledged to the traders (storekeepers) for grain. This turned out to be the most important way in which food was obtained throughout 1886, in what was known as "Iminyaka wendlala", the year of hunger. Some idea of the extent of indebtedness that prevailed by 1886 was given in a report from Middledrift:

> Over six hundred head of stock were registered in this office on account of two firms alone, and when it is known that every trading station in the District did business on the same principles, and that the same

prevailed in the Tamacha and Keiskamma Hoek districts, the extent to which private enterprise afforded relief will be understood..."(35)

The people received very little grain for their cattle from the traders, the monetary equivalent being upwards of 45 shillings per bag. The terms of credit were generally only three months and this was insufficient time to gain money to redeem the cattle. Consequently many thousands of head were lost to the traders.(36) 'Private enterprise' of this type was little better than usury and was bringing more and more people into the Colony in search of work. As a report from Keiskamma Hoek indicated, such 'enterprise' was also found between the rich and poor households:

"It would not be far short of the truth to state that nearly every beast now in the posession of the natives here is pledged in some way either to the traders or for debts incurred amongst themselves."(36)

At this juncture the Colonial State decided to step up its efforts at collecting the 10 shillings tax imposed on each hut in a household. With the rebellion and drought of 1879 large arrears of unpaid hut tax and quit-rent had piled up. In Middledrift district alone, by 1881 there was £5 893 outstanding, and by 1892 there was £9 000 of unpaid hut taxes in the Tamacha district. Since the passing of Act 2 of 1869 the magistrates had the power to seize stock from households in arrears with their payments. In his last six months as Ngqika magistrate, Charles Brownlee had made wide use of these powers and they had been used only intermittently in the 1870s.

The magistrate in the Tamacha disrict was determined to take action against the large number of defaulters. Throughout 1883 he issued summonses and confiscated cattle. To redeem their cattle, households had not only to pay the arrear taxes, but also 2sh 6d. as court messenger fees for the issuing of the summons. By Decmber 1883, he had collected £5 540, the "greater portion" of which he reported, was obtained through confiscations.(37) The effects of the downward shift in the aggregate position of the households was clearly revealed in a sudden and unexpected obstacle to this method of tax collection. The magistrate found that:

many young and able bodied men pleaded inability to pay, and having no stock to seize, their taxes remain un-paid. The men have huts and gardens for which they pay nothing, to the exclusion of better men... and while contributing little or nothing to the revenue they are the principle cause of the scarcity of labour...I have every reason to believe that the class alluded to exist in considerable numbers in nearly every large location."(38)

It is clear from this that taxation and proletarianisation were very closely linked. It was through the effects of taxation on the poor households, usually of newly married men, that large numbers of workers could be obtained. But first they had to be made to pay. The enforcement of taxation ensured that living standards declined more sharply for the poor. While it was always possible for households to suffer declining levels of subsistence in the struggle to resist proletrianisation, it was not possible through this essentially passive struggle to obtain cash. The sale of stock, often at ruinously low prices, to obtain cash for taxation placed the life support of some households in great jeopardy.

The extensive use of summary legal process to obtain arrear taxes rapidly developed into a political problem. Fielding, Dicks counterpart in the Middledrift district, did not share his enthusiasm for the use of summary process as a means of obtaining taxes. He wrote:

> there is a great difficulty in the way. In seizing stock you are just as likely to seize animals belonging to any other person as from those you desire to do so..."(39)

As many stock were held on loan by poor households from richer ones, this situation often prevailed.

Act 37 of 1884 confirmed the powers of specially appointed Hut Tax Collectors to seize stock in lieu of payment of hut tax, which, if not redeemed within 14 days, were to be sold. All through the desperate years of drought from 1884 to 1886 the magistrates, far from granting concessions in the payment of taxes, were empowered to proceed more rigorously than ever in enforcing payment of taxes. In 1886,at the height of the drought, the Reverend Ross of Pirie mission station told Dick:

> The name of the Government is being made to stink in the nostrils of the people by the acts of some of its officers in carrying out and executing stock seizures..."(40)

An article in the Kaffrarian Watchaman confirmed:

> The complaints of Natives against the collectors in connection with the summary seizing of stock are almost of painful frequency, and scarcely suppressed threats which are beginning to be heard to every side, bode little good to the collectors themselves or the future peace of the country..."(41)

At the beginning of 1887 a deputation was sent to Dick requesting a postponement of the final date for the payment of the arrear taxes. The SNA denied this request.(42) The people had every reason to protest, for in the aftermath of one of the worst droughts in memory, Dick had 21 special messengers employed serving writs to attach cattle and other property. (43) Dick was perfectly aware that many

households had sold almost all their stock during the drought and retained only one or two cows for milking.(44) The collectors went so far as to take bags of grain which had been purchased for over 30 sh., thereby literally taking the food from the mouths of the people.(45) In addition, as Fielding had expected, it frequently occurred that cattle were wrongfully attached:

> Stock is passed from one to another to evade payment...but this does not, I maintain, justify a collector in seizing or attaching the property of one man for the debts of another...and it is this that exasperates them..."(46)

The people objected to the provisions of Act 20 of 1878 which allowed the Hut Tax collector to charge a 5 sh. grazing fee on any cattle seized. In Middledrift district, one De Beer, who was solely employed in making cattle seizures, was actually illegally charging people 5 sh. in cash in advance for the grazing costs, whereas the law stipulated that the money should be recovered from the sale of stock.(47) Even Dick and Chalmers regarded this as unjustified. In October 1885, out of 187 payments of hut tax received only 15 were voluntary. However the majority of the people managed to redeem their stock before it was sold, only at the expense of incurring further debts to traders or to richer neighbours.

Whereas in Tamacha, in 1885, Dick had been loath to remove a household's last cow, by 1898 use of summary procedure had extended so far as to lead to the attachment of "even the very cooking pots" before arrears were accepted as irrecoverable.(48) Land was removed from the possession of households which had not paid their rent and was re-alloted. Although the magistrates had no power to actually expel households from the locations, they brought great pressure to bear on those who through poverty, ill fortune and lack of political connections were unable to pay or avoid paying.

V Long distance labour migration and the domestic economy of Ciskei

The contradiction between the Colonial State (and the demands of the capitalist economy) and the mass of households through the effects of taxation, indebtedness and land scarcity, encouraged proletarianisation. The declining yields obtained from agriculture ensured that increasing numbers of workers were forced into migratory labour to earn money for subsistence purposes. During the drought of 1881, the desription provided by Fielding at Middledrift, has an ominously modern ring to it:

> the men of the district are providing for the future by seeking for employment all over the Colony, amd I anticipate that few but old men, women and children will remain at the villages and be supported

> by their absent relatives. There must be want to a certain extent, as the last years crops, although somewhat better than usual, were but sufficient to partially release the people from accumulated debts to the Government and on their private accounts..."(49)

The key to an understanding of the nature of the last two decades of the 19th century in the Ciskei lies in an appreciation of the extent of the opposition that existed amongst the poor, the unemployed and the under-employed to any lowering of the wage rate that had been set by the Government public works ever since they were introduced by Sir G. Grey in the 1850s. The railway building boom in the Cape in the 1870s confirmed the expectation by potential workers of wages of 1sh. 6d. or more per day. Workers struggled desperately against all attempts to reduce this to the level of farm wages which were 10 to 15 shillings per month. It did not require much sophistication fully to appreciate the significance of the 100% difference between the two rates of wages. The railways and other public works has set a precedent to which potential workers readily responded; they soon showed that they would literally rather starve than be forced to accept 10 to 15 shillings a month on the farms.

Anyone dealing with the archives of the Department of Native Affairs in the late 19th century will not find them short of references, in the reports of its officials, which offer evidence that at first appears contradictory, and for which no explanations were initially offered. Typical is this extract from the magistrate at East London who in 1882 reflected:

> The labour difficulty is as great as ever... the farmers also complain loudly that they cannot get labour, but this is chiefly, I believe, owing to the fact that better wages are offered at the ports...the natives in some portions of the Division are beginning to feel the want of food..."(50) (emphasis added)

The constant appearence of this condition of a farm labour shortage and a scarcity of food in the 1880s can only lead to the conclusion that people were rather prepared to suffer a drop in their standard of living than to work for 10 or at most 15 shillings a month.

King , at Middledrift, specifically observed that at the height of the drought work was offered by the Government in road building at 6d. per day (i.e. 12 sh. per month):

> not a single native from this district is known to have availed himself of the offer, able bodied men and youths preferring to remain in idleness and semi-starvation at home. (51)

The wage offered of 6d. per day was thought by the men to be "a huge joke!"(52)

At the beginning of 1884 the railway contractors working on the Molteno line came to Middledrift to recruit 300 workers. They offered 3 shillings per day. A meeting was called in the location to discuss the matter, but not a single worker subsequently came forward. The experience was repeated later in 1884 when the Jaggersfontein Diamond Company tried to obtain 300 workers on six months contracts at the same wage and was similarly unsuccessful. The reasons given by the people for the refusal to work was that experience had shown them that on the diamond mines and the railway compounds they had to buy their food from special shops, which overcharged, and that all sorts of other deductions and charges were made from their wages. At the end of a month's work the worker was handed only "a few shillings".(53)

From this it seems clear that a definite perception of the importance of the determination of wages and working conditions prevailed in the minds of the potential recruits in the locations, who carefully weighed every offer. They were prepared to use the physical base of the locations to resist bad conditions and low wages. They could however, only do this at the expense of the very standard of living they were trying to protect.(54)

The effects of the Colonial economy on the households were to remain persistently negative no matter what agricultural conditions prevailed. The breaking of the drought in the 1886-87 season was to bring fresh trials upon the beleaguered households. Excellent rains, combined with extensive ploughing of all available land and considerable attempts to ensure a winter crop in 1886, led to a bumper harvest. The harvest of 1886-87 was superb and it was, briefly, known as "Iminyaka Ndybo", the year of plenty. The result of the unexpectedly large harvest was that the price of grain brought to the traders for sale plummeted. Bick observed:

> I do not think there has been such a heavy yield for more than 10 years... but extremely low prices are ruling for all descriptions of stock and grain. The bewilderment of the native mind in regard to the difference in the price of grain now as compared with last year, must be seen to be realised. Why they should receive four shillings per bag for grain which last year they had to pay from fourty to fifty shillings for is a problem in the law of supply and demand which is painfully beyond their comprehension to solve. (55)

Far from being "beyond their comprehension" the people observed only to acutely the injustice of the "law of supply and demand". In consequence they decided to keep the grain that they could not sell at a reasonable price, make huge quantities of beer from the sorghum and have a long celebration of the harvest.

Needless to say the labour market which had obtained several thousand men a year from the Ciskei in 1880-1886 was suddenly reduced to a mere trickle. There was a deep bitterness and frustration with the low prices of grain and this took an increasingly political shape. From Peddie it was reported:

> the natives have this year discarded wheat to a greater extent as a good proportion of them labour under a mistaken idea that they do not get such good prices for it as Europeans, simply because they are natives. (56)

The result was that while there was plenty of grain, there was a shortage of money. Cash was urgently needed by most households to pay off debts to the Government for taxes and to traders for grain and commodities purchased on credit during the drought. The attitude first apparent in Peddie, of refraining from the commodity market in the face of low prices spread to other districts. In 1888 it was reported from East London that:

> The natives are not ploughing and sowing so largely this season as they have in the past. They say they have suffcient on hand for food and that at the low prices at present obtainable it does not pay them to grow for the market... (57)

Having experienced the effects of large harvests on prices, the incentive to produce was being steadily eroded. At the same time there were increasing numbers of households incapable of increasing production because of lack of arable land, seed, ploughs and labour. Many had to continue to sell grain to realise cash. The effects of low prices was to force households to part with more grain than they would otherwise have sold. This situation was aggravated by many traders who began to refuse to give cash for grain, insisting instead on payment in kind. The sale of grain was ceasing to be a source of cash. In consequence, in 1888 at the height of the 'good years' over 2.000 people left King William's town district proceeding to employment.(58)

The availability of grain in the locations shut down the last remaining trickle of labour to the farms. At the same time it greatly stimulated the brewing of beer for sale in the locations, which rapidly became a popular activity. This was to lead to a particularly sorry episode that well exemplifies the contradictory effects of the demands of the capitalist economy, the interventions of the Colonial State and the perception by the people of these contradictions.

The increased availability of beer led to the holding of many ad hoc beer drinks for its consumption. However there was a limit to the number of such beer drinks that could respectably be held. To cope with the increased supply of beer, those occassions at which beer was normally drunk, such as at the end of male and female initiation ceremonies, weddings etc were eagerly seized upon. The period of celebration associated with them was lengthened to allow for the consumption of more beer.

This very quickly led to complaints from farmers that prolonged festivities aff affected their scanty labour supply. In 1891, Dick recommended to the SNA the curtailing, through prohibitive legislation, of "the continuing of the period of the novitiates probation" (in male and feamle intiation ceremonies) in order to cut down on the time consumed by these ceremonies.(59) In due course the Cape Parliament passed an "Abakweta and Intonjane Dances Prohibition Act", No 19 of 1892, which quickly drew the thanks of the Colonial farmers. Field Cornet Liddle in East London, where the Act had been strictly enforced by the vindictive magistrate Fleischer, wrote:

> *I am thankful that the Intonjane Dance Act has been enforced in this* District, as this business has been a very great hindrance to the farmers in obtaining labour, more especially young boys. (60)

The opposition to the Prohibition Act provided a political focus in the locations. It fell to the headmen to voice the opposition of the people to the Act. A series of meetings were held in most locations in the Ciskei and the people expressed their intention not to submit to the law.(61) There was a general belief that the Government was not serious in its intentions. Dick pointed out that pressure of the Government on the people was very great at that time and this new measure could be the last straw needed to precipitate a major conflict:

> the natives are being sharply reminded of the presence of Government by the numerous prosecutions under the Location Act, Forest and Vagrant Acts which may lead many of them to think they were being thrashed with scorpions... (62)

On the 6th June 1894, 34 people were actually arrested for participating in prohibited dances and were subsequently convicted by the magistrate at East London.(63) Petitions were organised appealing for the abolition of the Act; the feelings of the petitioners being that "without these customs, we remain deaf and dumb, as if we were slaves, our lives being an intolerable burden to us..."(64) The author of this petition. Mnyeliso, the son of a headman, was described by the magistrate as a "well-known agitator". In deference to the opposition that it

received, the Prohibition Act was allowed to fade quietly away, as larger forces were now affecting the labour market, far outstripping in their consequences the modest contribution made by the Prohibition Act.

The 1889-90 harvest was drastically lower than that of the two preceding years, while the 1890-91 harvest was a failure. In 1890 the number of men leaving the Middledrift district in search of work rose to 2 423. This represented nearly one person from each of the 2 455 households in the district.(65) In 1891 the number of workers leaving Middledrift had risen to over 3 000, and 2 500 left Tamacha district on fixed contracts. From Victoria East, which had a total population of 3 393, nearly 1 000 men went to work on railway construction. These workers were still expecting, and were promised, 2 sh. 6d. per day on the railways and diamond mines. Those involved in sheep shearing were contracted for 6 or 7 shillings per 100 sheep sheared.(66)

As workers began discovering the pitfalls of long-distance labour migrations, there were those who were prepared to opt for the relative security of working within a day or two's journey from home, in a known social environment, which still held out the prospect of the acquisition of stock and the use of the farmers' grazing. It was frequently reported that desertions from the railway works were common because of ill-treatment, the non-payment of promised wages, and the expense of buying provisions from the concession stores which still overcharged tremendously.(67)

Despite these setbacks, by 1893 reports were eagerly listened to of conditions in the Transvaal on the gold fields, as prospective workers weighed up the risks of making the long trek north. With the opening of the railway line to the Witwatersrand from the Cape late in 1892, more and more workers began to make this journey. The opening of the railway coincided with a period of further rapid deterioration in the locations.

Poor rains, plagues of locusts, followed by flash floods, did severe damage to crops in all districts in the 1892-93 season. The Field Cornets in the East London district reported by late 1892 "that a scarcity of food exists is an undoubted fact..."(68) The traders were again, as in 1885, asking up to 45 shillings for a bag of mealies. Because of the effects of red water disease on the stock and the need to sell cattle for grain, many households did not possess a single head of stock. The high price of mealies made wage work the only possible way of gaining a bare minimum of subsistence. From Victoria East it was reported that most households did not have a single bag of mealies or sorghum and very few had more than five bags.(69) The consequence was that by late 1893 young men were beginning to leave in large groups for the gold fields.

In Victoria East it was reported that:

> Nearly all the young men have gone to Kimberley and Johannesburg and continually send money by post office orders to their parents and families for the purpose of buying grains. (70)

The remittance economy had, by 1893, truly arrived. The ensuing years favoured its rapid grwoth. The 1895-96 season, wrote Dick, "threatens to be one on the very worst experienced since 1884, known as the year of famine..."(71) Now another tune began to be heard in the locations. Labour recruiting agents in the King William's Town district found that they could not obtain a single man, because there were no able-bodied men who had not already gone to work. (72)

While this compulsion to work existed many thousands trekked to the centres of employment. However the reports of their experiences there soon became a major disincentive to further such migrations. The returning migrants complained of appalling conditions on the Witwatersrand and the many attempts to cut wage rates previously agreed upon. They were robbed, arrested under the Pass Laws, had 'fines' illegally extorted from them by police, were subject to rackets in the issuing and charging of vaccination certificates and were defrauded of ticket fare on the railways.(73)

Pass officials operated a protection racket, 'renting' passes at 2 shillings per month. If a worker refused to pay, his pass was confiscated and he was liable to arrest. On the railways, ticket sellers overcharged and failed to issue proper tickets, pocketing the money themselves - the worker then having to pay again when discovered without a ticket. The effects of these reports circulating in the locations began to worry the magistrates, who by this time appreciated the strength of worker resentment of such conditions. The magistrate in Victoria East wrote anxiously:

> A large number of natives have gone to the Johannesburg gold mines under contract and as by these means many are able to find work, I should be sorry if anything serious should be believed which would... lead to their refusing employment in that direction..."(74)

For a short while a distinct reluctance to go to the gold mines, reminiscent of the spirit of the 1880s, was evident. From Keiskamma Hoek it was reported:

> previously large bodies of men used to go to the Transvaal gold mines, native labour agents having no difficulty in securing them in batches of one hundred for that purpose, but lately they have been afraid to engage themselves.(75)

The close of the century from 1898 to 1900 was to see the re-emergence of severe drought, in conjunction with strong attempts by the Witwatersrand gold mines to lower the rate of wages. In East London, King William's Town and

other districts the people determined to refuse to accept 'cheap labour' rates. The magistrates and other officials watched with incredulity as the struggle intensified:

> A number of natives did not reap a single bag this season. Those that have a little food are lying about their huts, and will not work so long as any food remains. I have impressed upon them the necessity of everyone starting work at once to earn money to hire cattle to plough their lands when the drought breaks up...There need be no starvation as their is a great demand for labour all over the country...but they stand out for higher wages and will not work under 1/6d per diem and their food.(76)

The incidence of crop failure, locusts and rinderpest were rapidly to ensure that no matter what people believed about conditions on the mines, they would have to work there. In 1896 2 346 men left Keiskamma Hoek and about 4 000 left the Middledrift district in search of work.

The rinderpest had already broken out in the Transvaal in 1896 and its arrival in the Cape was anticipated. When it finally did arrive in July 1897 there was very little that could be done to contain it. In East London at least 75% of all cattle died of rinderpest, causing starvation and misery(77). From Fort Jackson it was reported:

> The children are beginning to look thin and haggard, as milk can only be obtained from goats, which are being bought at from 20 shillings to 30 shillings each.(78)

Despite a 30% reduction in wages which occurred in 1897 after the formation of the Native Labour Supply Organisation, men continued to travel to the gold mines.(79)In 1898 at least 8 000 men left King William's Town district officially. "A great many more" observed Dick, "now travel by rail and men proceeding to the Transvaal seldom bother about procuring passes."(80)

The struggle in the 1880s and 90s to maintain the rate of wages was a class struggle, conducted by a semi-proletarianised rural population striving to sustain their standard of living. That they failed to do so had great consequences for the development of the South African economy, for it lowered the material and so-called 'moral' value of a black persons labour power.(81) It assisted in the determination of a very low minimum of nutrition and basic comforts which rapidly became the historically accepted norm for the employment of black workers in the 20th century. The struggles of the 1880s and 90s described above were thus of the utmost significance for the future development of South Africa.

Some Conclusions

In this paper an attempt has been made to draw together a highly complex set of data, impressions and episodes from the Ciskeian countryside in the period of the formation of the migrant labour system. In attempting to conceptualise a history of rural struggles stemming as much from the contradictions within the society of rural households as from their contradictory position within the capitalist mode of production, I was faced with the very diversity of data that may be held to indicate the existence of such a history of struggle.

In so far as such struggles exist,(beyond the order imposed on the data by the author),they involved both the pursuit of land and other means of production so as to expand the agricultural base of the households and a struggle for more favourable terms of entry into the dominant capitalist system itself. It has hopefully been shown that the political level within the locations was a particularly sensitive arena of struggle affecting the ability and possibilities of the households so far as the first of these objectives is concerned. In this regard it may be suggested that it is at this level that the whole (now somewhat forgotten) question of 'conservation' ought to be addressed and that it was the political links between the individual migrant worker, his household and the location that were vital in underwriting the persistence of the migratory labour system. This should be complemented by an understanding of the hostile economic environemnt presented by the capitalist economy which held persistently negative implications for both the rural households and prospective migrant workers, and were perceived as such.

An appreciation of the extent of the transformation in the countryside, which defined in many ways an entirely new economic and political system, has had unfortunately to be expressed in often highly abstract and theoretical language. It is seldom that contemporary observers leave their subjective understanding of such changes behind. It is therefore very fortunate when a contemporary observer actually notes, in terms far clearer than any theoretical formulations allow, the very changes that are under discussion. In 1889, ten years after the Rebellion, Chalmers (the Chief Magistrate at King William's Town) explained the difficulty of finding any informants who could tell him the whereabouts of the Xhosa chief Phalo's* grave; he wrote:

> The advance of Civilization among them, with all its advantages and all its vices, has completely changed their mode of living, their habits, customs, and subjects of conversation, so that the natives of today are a totally different people to those of even the last generation, and take little or no interest in

> their past history. I refer to Colonial Natives. Before the advance of civilization and Christianity among them, their inexhaustible subject of conversation was the history of their Chiefs and of their tribes, their wars and their hunts. Now these subjects are seldom if ever handled by the present generation who have become supplied with new and altogether different topics of conversation arising out of the new state of things which has been brought upon them by civilization and Christianity.(82)

One could do worse than to let this be a concluding judgement on the relative explanatory priority to be accorded to 'structure' and to consciousness in the logic of historical explanation.

(1) S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds.) Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa. African class formation, culture and consciousness 1870-1930. (London, 1982)

(2) E.P. Thompson The Making of An English Working Class, (Penguin 1968)

(3) Marks and Rathbone, op.cit. 'Introduction', p8.

(4) B. Freund, Review of Marks and Rathbone (eds.) op.cit. in Review of African Political Economy No.29. p159. Freund criticises the 'Introduction' for providing "no real answer to the question of how to conceptualise society society without structural and causative categories..." in addition, he finds that "many, if not most, of the contributors find it difficult to break meaningfully with earlier paradigms about Africa and social change."

(5) J. Kimble 'Labour Migration in Basutuland, c1875-1885' in S.Marks and R. Rathbone (eds.) op. cit. p136.

(6) Ibid. p130

(7) In this sense the debate between Anderson and Thompson (and between Marks and Rathbone and the 'Althusarian Structuralists') is no more than yet another incarnation of the debate between individualism and determinism, which is neither specific to historical materialism or resolved by it. For a good refutation of the logic of methodological individualism, see S. Lukes, 'Methodological Individualism Reconsidered' in Essays in Social Theory, (London, 1977)

(8) Thus Marx frequently attacked the idealism which separated man and society and established a spurious dualism between them. The problem in contemporary research has been that the language and method of research aimed at illuminating structural relations has precluded much attention being given to the effects of these relations on the historical subjects.

(9) C. van Onselen, 'Workers Consciousness in Black Miners: Southern Rhodesia 1900-1920', Journal of African History, 14, No 2 (1973)

(10) For the importance of the recurrent crisis of the lineage mode of production caused by the depth of economic polarisation beterrn households see, J. Lewis, 'An Economic History of the Ciskei 1848-1900' Ph.D. Thesis, UCT, (1984)

(11) The British Kaffrarian census of 1848 provides valuable data on the extent of concentration of control over the population. In the crucial Ngqika division of the Xhosa, of the 20 928 people under Sandille, over 40 per cent

of the population were effectively commanded by 213 heads of homesteads with over 8 households each in their homestead group. The remaining 877 homestead heads commanded only their immediate families and the households of one or two married sons.

(12) For a more complete treatment of the theme of polarisation between households in the period of commodity production, see J. Lewis, 'The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry: A Critique and Reassesment' Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol 11 No 1 October, 1984. (Forthcoming)

(13) Thus in a leading 'mission community' such as Healdtown, in 1869 only 96 households out of 513 owned a plough.

(14) In Healdtown only 25 per cent of households had more than 6 cattle, while 22 per cent had none at all. In the Ngqika location in 1865 Brownlee noted that there were "a few wealthy men" who owned from 100 to 300 cattle and a slightly larger class who had from 30 to 60 head and that "this distribution of stock leaves the mass of people entirely destitute and they have nothing but their grain for subsistence and the payment of their taxes" B.K. 73, Brownlee to Brownlow, 17th May 1865.

(15) N.A. 205, King to Chalmers, 14th September 1886 and Dick to Chalmers, 14th October 1886.

(16) N.A. 207, Verity ot Holland, 1st May 1890.

(17) Circular No1 of 1890, Office of the Under Secretary for Native Affairs, 18th April 1890 and N.A. 207, Holland to Rose Ine s, 30th September 1890.

(18) N.A. 207, Dick to Holland, 27th September 1890.

(19) Ibid.

(20) Tem. 5/1, Gqayi vs. Nguntsele, December 1891.

(21) N.A. 209, Magistrate Glen Gray to Rose Innes, 23rd July 1892.

(22) N.A. 203, King to Hemming, 27th April 1885, Enc. 8. Deposition by Malgas before C.A. King, 22nd April 1885.

(23) N.A. 203, King to Hemming, 17th July 1885, 'Report on Izeli Commonage.

(24) G.9-94, BBNA, Dick to Holland, 31st DEcember 1893.

(25) N.A. 242, Petition addressed to the SNA, Cape Town, by the 'Native Residents of Cata, King William's Town', March 1897.

(26) Such opportunism does not gainsay the undoubted validity of the charge, for which Sinxo was ultimately found guilty and removed as Headman.

(27) N.A. 260, Rose Innes to Sprigg, 'Report on Correspondence', 16th September 1898.

(28) N.A. 220, Bell to Rose Innes, 20th September 1893.

(29) N.A. 200, INL to Steward, n.d. April 1884.

(30) N.A. 200, INL to Steward, n.d. April 1884.

(31) N.A. 200, INL to Steward, 13th April 1884.

(32) N.A. 203, King to Hemming, 30th May 1885.

(33) N.A. 204, INL to Steward, n.d. August 1885.

(34) G2-85, BBNA, Green to Pugh, 2nd January 1885.

(35) G5-86, BBNA, King to Judge, 14th January 1886.

(36) G5-86, BBNA, Verity to Judge, 31st December 1885.

(37) G3-84, BBNA, Dick to Hemming, 15th January 1884.

(38) Ibid.

(39) G3-84, BBNA, Fielding to Hemming, 4th January 1884.

(40) Tam.9/7, Dick to Chalmers, 10th November 1886.

(41) Tam. 9/7, Dick to Rose Innes, 22nd November 1886.

(42) Tam. 9/7, Dick to Chalmers, 11th January 1887.

(43) When the headman Sebe opposed the collection of House Duty, (an additional tax never effectively enforced), Dick wrote that he thought Sebe ought to be excused of insubordination as "he is an old man and extremely stupid", Tam. 9/7, Dick to Chalmers, 27th January 1886.

(44) Tam 9/7, Dick to Hemming, 13th October 1885.

(45) Tam 9/7, Dick to Rose Innes, 22nd November 1886, and Tam. 8/19, Dick- 'Rough memo', 29th September 1885.

(46) Tam 9/7, Dick to Rose Innes, 22nd November 1886.

(47) N.A. 203, King to Chalmers, n.d. October 1885.

(48) Tam. 9/7, Dick to Chalmers, 4th November 1886 and Tam 9/9. Dick to Garcia, n.d. April 1898.

(49) G33-82, BBNA, Fielding to Judge, January 1882.

(50) G3-83, BBNA, Fleischer to Rose Innes, 30th December 1882.

(51) G5-86, BBNA, King to Judge, 4th January 1886, and Fleischer to Rose Innes, 15th January 1886, "The bulk of the people, however, refused the terms offered by government. To obtain food the natives sold his cattle at very low prices..."

(52) Ibid.

(53) G2-85, BBNA, King to Hemming, 2nd January 1885.

(54) In the Ciskei at least, there was no neat shift from a 'discretionary' disposition to the labour market giving way to 'necessary' wage labour as suggested by Giovanni Arrighi in his article 'Labour Supply in Historical Perpective'. Migrant labour, when it occurred, was from the outset occassioned by necessity- the point was that as workers, the early migrants wanted to retain wages at as a high a level as possible.

(55) G12-87, BBNA, Dick to Chalmers, 13th January 1887.

(56) G12-87, BBNA, Dell to Rose Innes, 13th January 1887.

(57) G -88, BBNA, Fleischer to Rose Innes, 13th Nanuary 1888

(58) G3-89, BBNA, King to Gerradi, 3rd January 1889.

(59) G4-91, BBNA, Dick to Holland, 3rd January 1891.

(60) N.A. 209, Liddle to Fleischer, 21st March 1892.

(61) N.A. 211, Dick to Rose Innes, 26th February 1892.

(62) Ibid.

(63) G9-94, BBNA, Bousefield to Fleischer, 20th December 1894.

(64) N.A. 234, Petition of Mnyeliso and 32 others, 24th April 1897.

(65) G4-91, BBNA King to Holland, 5th January 1891.

(66) N.A. 209, Vennables to Fleischer, 20th November 1891.

(67) N.A. 209, Sgt. Ellis to Fleischer, 21st March 1891.

(68) N.A. 217, Field Cornet at Braakfontein to Fleischer, 31st December 1892.

(69) N.A. 200, Liefeldt's reply to Circular No 3 of 1893, 28th August 1893.

(70) Ibid.

(71) G5-96, BBNA, Dick to Garcia, 10th January 1896.

(72) Ibid.

(73) N.A. 241, INL to Webb, 24th May 1897.

(74) N.A. 239, Backer to Rose Innes, 14th January 1896.

(75) G19-97, BBNA, King to Garcia, 9th January 1897.

(76) N.A. 246, Ellis to Fleischer, 30th September 1898.

(77) G42-98, BBNA, Wylde to Stanford, 2nd February 1898. Attempts were made to utilise innoculation against Rinderpest. Over 27% of all innoculated cattle died and many suspected that this was because of the innoculation rather than the Rinderpest. There was thus strong opposition to innoculation. See N.A. 242, Dick to Garcia, 23rd March 1897.

(78) G42-98, BBNA, Bousefield to Wylde, 4th January 1898.

(79) N. Levy, The Foundations of the South African Cheap Labour System. (London 1982) p92.

(80) G31-99, BBNA, Dick to Garcia, 24th January 1899.

(81) K. Marx, Capital, Vol 1. (Penguin, 1976) p274.

(82) N.A. 206, Chalmers to Rose Innes, 24th April 1889.