

Changing Patterns of Employment and Labour Processes in Zimbabwean Agriculture and Agro-industry

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Introduction

The backbone of the Zimbabwean economy is generally acknowledged to be agriculture. In common with most developing countries, agriculture is the mainstay of the bulk of the population as well as an important source of inputs for agro-based and manufacturing industries. Agricultural exports account for over 40 percent of total exports and agriculture provides employment for over a quarter of the total wage-labour force. In fact it has been estimated that one out of two employed Zimbabweans is engaged in the food system and closely allied non-food industries such as tobacco and cotton (Chavunduka Report, 1982 :35). Furthermore, the agricultural sector is a major source of demand for output from the manufacturing sector with regard to basic consumer goods, intermediate and capital goods; major inputs into the sector itself include seed, fertilizer, agri-chemicals, stockfeed, machinery, spares and liquid fuels. (Zimbabwe Government, *Socio-Economic Review 1980 – 85*, 1986: 114). The principal agricultural commodities exported include maize, tobacco, sugar, cotton and beef. In addition, the production of coffee, tea, groundnuts, wheat, sorghum, soyabeans and sunflower has been expanded in recent years.

In this paper we discuss the nature of labour processes in this crucial sector of the Zimbabwean economy. The main thrust of our analysis is the capitalist control of those processes at the work-place. The forms of capitalist control and manipulation have centred on what has been termed "scientific labour management", a version of Taylorism on the plantations and in agro-processing industry. Changes in labour processes are discussed in relation to the circumvention by capital of post — 1980 labour legislation to protect workers; and the trend towards mechanization to reduce labour costs. Labour's response through strikes to these capitalist stratagems and the

mediation by the state of these conflicts between capital and labour are assessed. There is also a related discussion of labour processes in smallholder (peasant) agriculture. In the more favourable agro-ecological regions of the country, smallholders have in recent years been encouraged by the state in conjunction with multinational corporations to diversify into the production of such commodities as cotton, coffee, tea and tobacco largely for export. Their adoption of production inputs and crop technologies disseminated by the companies has necessitated the introduction of new labour processes amongst these strata with access to these means of production. It also appears to be leading to the incorporation of the smallholders into international capitalist relations of exchange and division of labour as their choice of commodities to produce and technology to utilize becomes increasingly determined by international capital.

Labour Processes in Agriculture

The constituent elements of the labour process have been defined as the (a) personal activity of the human being, work itself, (b) the subject of that work and (c) its instruments (Marx 1954: 174). Any work context involves an economic dimension (production of commodities) a political dimension (production of social relations) and an ideological dimension (production of an experience of those relations) (Buroway, 1985: 39). Some of these dimensions are apparent in our survey of labour processes in agriculture and agro-based industry in Zimbabwe.

The agricultural sector consists of what have been termed (a) a large-scale commercial farming sub-sector (b) the small-scale commercial farming sub-sector and (c) the communal (smallholder) farming sub-sector. The large-scale commercial sub-sector is the domain of medium-sized and large agrarian capital which includes such multinational companies as Anglo-American, Liebig's and Lonrho among others. Initially created to be a preserve of small African agrarian capital, the small scale commercial farming sub-sector was constrained in its development by the policy measures of the colonial regime. Its recovery since 1980 has accordingly been slow. The communal farming sub-sector sustains the bulk of the rural smallholders and it is the least developed. Under colonialism, its main function as a labour reserve for mining, manufacturing and to some extent agrarian capital depleted it of the requisite labour resources for its own internal development. Its large share of the reproduction of the poorly remunerated labour force served to subsidize that capital. Lately, however, its productivity and output of maize and cotton amongst some strata in certain regions have been on the increase. In this paper our discussion of labour processes in agriculture is confined to the large-scale commercial and smallholder farming sub-sectors.

Controls on Plantation Labour

One of the major problems which capital encountered during the early decades of colonial rule in Zimbabwe was the shortage of labour. So critical was the problem for many years that a large component of contract agricultural labour had to be imported from adjacent territories principally Malawi and Mozambique. It was the primary responsibility of the Rhodesian Native Labour Bureau (RNLB) and later the Rhodesian Native Labour Supply Commission (RNLSC) to recruit such migrant labour and distribute it amongst plantation owners and mining companies. This cartel organized jointly by the colonial state and capital not only ensured consistent labour supplies but also determined the abysmally low remuneration rates and terms of the repatriation of such labour.

With the advent of political change in the neighbouring territories in the 1960s and 1970s, it became imperative for agrarian capital to localize its sources of labour as much as possible. Such localization necessitated the stabilization of that labour on the plantations and farms. In the 1960s and 1970s, it therefore became imperative to create the necessary conditions on the plantations in order to attract local labour which historically had boycotted plantation work because of its notoriously bad conditions.

This was the context in which such multinational plantation owners as the South African-based Anglo-American and Hullet corporations devised the strategy to "localize" and "stabilize" their labour forces. Whereas prior to 1970, the Triangle sugar estates had been heavily dependent on single male RNLSC contract labour, by 1972 their proportion had diminished to about 7% of their total workforce (Clarke, 1977: 228–229). The phasing out of external migrant labour was speeded up by the expansion of local labour supplies. The 1969–70 drought in the South-Eastern Lowveld also contributed to that expansion. At Triangle, the localization of labour supplies was accompanied by a deliberate policy to reduce the casual labour force to about 14.8% of the total workforce by 1972 (*Ibid.*).

There was a correlation between the serious recruitment of a local and stable workforce and the requirements of agrarian capital in the 1970s. Most importantly, the heavy investments in the sugar plantations and to a certain extent in the tea industry required such a stabilized labour with the relevant skills to ensure the timeous cutting, stacking and processing of the cane and tea picking. Before the stabilization programme was begun, it was observed with respect to the Triangle Sugar Estates that the instability of agricultural labour was having "a serious effect on Triangle's profitability" (*Ibid.*). To rectify the situation, the company's labour policy was reshaped to ensure that permanent workers were restricted to the "most productive and valuable

labour available". In accordance with this policy of "localization" and "stabilization" of labour, the company invested in studies on labour processes which would increase the individual output of its workers. Productivity studies on cane cutting and stacking methods were conducted. An agricultural training centre for selected workers was established by the company for that purpose (*Ibid.* p. 243).

Similar efforts at the localization and stabilization of the workforce were made at another large sugar plantation, Hippo Valley where by 1966 over 90 percent of its labour was drawn from local sources. It was observed that at the plantation the policies of scientific labour management were more comprehensively applied (*Ibid.*, 247). Work study techniques were used to eliminate 'wastage' and maximize productivity. Welfare policies — regarding education, health, beerhall and sports facilities — were developed to 'stabilize' workers (*Ibid.*, 247). The material results for the sugar plantations in the 1970s through to the post-independence period sufficiently vindicated the new labour policy of the companies in terms of increased profitability.

On tea plantations the process of purging immigrant and casual labour had its rationale — as on the sugar plantations — as the stabilization of labour on a family basis. As one estate manager had been quoted in saying:

"what we are really aiming at in the long run is family participation — the husband, the wife and children all working on the plantations" (*Ibid.* 248–250).

The desire to stabilise labour on a family basis stemmed from the benefits accruing from the utilization of trained and experienced pickers. Whereas training could raise productivity considerably, a seasonal labour force had become more and more a liability in this respect.

Working Conditions and Remuneration After 1980

The impetus towards mechanized processes of production grew in the post-independence period as a consequence of the new labour legislation which specified the minimum wages and working conditions in agriculture and agro-based industries. Although the new minimum wage of 30 Zimbabwean dollars a month in 1980 which was increased to 85 Zimbabwean dollars a month in 1985 was not a large increase in real terms, its introduction combined with restrictive retrenchment procedures generated a great deal of resistance from agrarian capital (*The Sunday Mail*, 6th July, 1980). Such resistance was inevitable in a sub-sector in which monthly wages of 20 Zimbabwean dollars or less per month had been the norm rather than the exception.

The significance of the introduction of minimum wages lay in that it forced agrarian capital to reassess its recruitment and training policies for workers in the sub-sector. The process of the reduction of its work-force gathered increased momentum.

TABLE 1

Average Annual Number of Workers in Agriculture and Forestry

Year	Agriculture ('000)	Total Work-force in the Country ('000)	Percentage
1964	299	736	40,7
1969	307	835	36,8
1974	365	1040	35,2
1979	335	985	34,0
1980	327	1010	32,4

Source: Central Statistical Office, Harare.

TABLE II Agricultural Employees and Earnings

Year	No. of Employees ('000)	Earnings (\$ million)
1975	364	93
1979	335	138
1980	327	150
1981	294	219
1982	274	252
1983	264	280
1984	276	308

Source: Central Statistical Office, Harare.

From these figures, the decline in employment levels is discernible from the late 1970s after the 1974 peak of 365,000. Clearly, declining employment opportunities in capitalist agriculture appear to be an inexorable process. The factors underlying the process require examination.

In the post-independence period, increased labour costs (in the form of minimum wages) and the option of mechanization to substitute for labour-intensive production were crucial factors. There has therefore been a debate on the rationale and limitations of the minimum wage policy and optional

labour processes. *The Chavunduka Commission of Inquiry into the Agricultural Industry* observed that as commercial agriculture moved onto higher levels of production the demand for permanent and skilled workers had risen necessitating the establishment of a clearly differentiated, functional and permanent labour force (Chavunduka Report, 1982: 91). Increased mechanization on large-scale farms "allowed larger areas to be handled rapidly at critical periods and simplified the tasks of management and labour supervision . . . Increases in real wages are bound to accelerate the trend to replace manual labour with machines". (*Ibid.* 92).

In its recommendations to the Zimbabwe Government, the Commission therefore argued that higher minimum wages had an adverse effect on employment levels.

In its own analysis of declining employment levels in agriculture, the Zimbabwe Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning observed that despite the impressive growth in agricultural output between 1980 and 1981, employment in the sector had fallen at an annual average of more than six percent (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1986: 97). The reasons for the consistent decline were cited as "natural trend towards agricultural mechanization, farmers' response to rising wages through increased mechanization and other labour-saving methods, thus avoiding replacement of workers once they leave, and through a switch to production of less labour-intensive crops, and the engagement of more casual and contract workers as opposed to permanent staff" (*Ibid.* 97). Detailed studies of these factors should yield productive research returns. Of great interest should be the illumination of the process whereby agrarian capital circumvents labour legislation through the engagement of casual and seasonal labour on a rotational basis. It might even reveal that employment in agriculture had not fallen to the posited levels! Whereas the trend on most plantations and estates in the 1970s was the localization of labour supplies and the stabilization of the workforce, agrarian capital has adjusted to increased wages by replacing retired and retrenched workers by casual and seasonal labour whose wage and working conditions are considerably worse off than those of the permanent workforce.

In spite of the erosion — as a result of inflation — into the minimal gains of agricultural labour, there has emerged a consensus within the large commercial agricultural sub-sector and the state that wage increases adversely affected the fortunes of the subsector and therefore employment opportunities! The socio-economic review for 1980 – 85 published by the Finance and Economic Planning ministry concurred that in the agricultural sub-sector, increases in minimum wages "appear to have exacerbated the falling trend

in employment" (*Ibid.* 101). An assessment of the impact of minimum wages on employment in the tobacco industry concluded that the higher price of labour encouraged farmers to utilize their remaining labour more intensively (Blackie et. al. 1982: 78). Thus the claim that improved wages and working conditions for agricultural labour resulted in declining employment seemed to have gained some currency; with the onset of a severe drought in 1986/87 it assumed sinister overtones.

Smallholders, Inputs and Technology

It is therefore to smallholder agriculture that the government increasingly is seeking for opportunities to expand jobs. The Chavunduka Commission advised that:

"it is primarily to the smallscale commercial and communal farming sub-sectors that the government must look to improve employment opportunities. However, success will be achieved only by narrowing the gap between employed workers' incomes and those of communal farmers" (Chavunduka, 93).

The Five Year National Development Plan (FYNDP) projected that during the Plan period (1986 – 1990) employment in the agricultural sector as a whole would increase at an average annual rate of 2,2 percent mainly in sub-sectors using labour-intensive production techniques such as horticulture (FYNDP, 1986:25). The falling trend in agricultural employment in the large commercial farming sub-sector underlined the need for policies which enhanced production by smallholder producers, influenced the crops grown, enhanced the resettlement exercise and formation of cooperatives where larger numbers could be employed (Zimbabwe Government, Socio-Economic Review, 120).

This is the context in which recent developments in smallholder agriculture may be examined. A survey of labour conditions and processes in the sub-sector could not ignore increasing productivity amongst certain strata amongst smallholders. That productivity has been underlined by increased sales of such commodities as maize and cotton to state marketing boards. There is a direct correlation between the enhanced productivity as well as marketed output and access to such crucial inputs such as hybrid seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and in some instances, herbicides. While prior to 1980, the peasant sub-sector's delivery of maize to the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) never exceeded 80 000 tones per year, deliveries in 1985 accounted for about 45% of total maize sales to the GMB (FYNDP, 25). In the 1984/85 season, smallholders together with small-scale commercial farmers and state farms contributed 47% of the total cotton output.

The development of productive forces in this hitherto neglected sub-sector has contributed to what has been termed Zimbabwe's agricultural "success

story". If the accolade referred basically to national food self-sufficiency, it retains some validity. However, whatever success has been achieved in Zimbabwe has been limited to those few smallholders in agro-ecological regions endowed with better soils, rainfall, extension services and marketing infrastructure. (Moyo, 1986). In the less endowed agro-ecological regions, the "success story" has not been replicated.

The utilization of new production inputs and crop technologies by those smallholders in better endowed-ecological regions has entailed the adoption of more specialized labour processes. Several studies have assessed the spread and effects of those inputs and labour processes. In his survey of the Gokwe and Murewa communal areas, de Swart established that maize seed sales were now well in excess of seed sales amongst large-scale commercial farmers which indicated that the smallholder sub-sector was "now purchasing more hybrid seed than large commercial farmers. They therefore constitute a major market for the seed industry" (de Swart, 1984:47). Much of the hybrid seed consisted of short-season hybrid varieties (R201, R213 and R215); the cotton seed principally the Alba variety which was supplied by the Cotton Marketing Board to selected producers for production under strict supervision and controls (*Ibid.* 49). Access to inputs was unequal: in Murewa, non-users of fertilizer were also non-cattle owners. This stratum produced a significantly lower output, had 50% of their arable land fallow and possessed significant less inputs such as credit (*Ibid.* 51).

The increased reliance on inputs by the more successful smallholders provided an important market for such multinationals as Shell, Union Carbide, Ciba-Geigy and Windmill. Increasingly, their control of inputs and their application was being extended towards the actual supervision of the labour processes of the smallholders. The agricultural extension services of the multinationals basically promoted the adoption of their inputs on loan schemes underwritten by state capital. Rohrbach observed that the multinationals played an important role in the Chibi and Mangwende communal areas in stimulating "technological change (by influencing) adoption timing, the consistency of input use and rates of application. They include input supplies, farm credit agencies and extension agents" (Rohrbach, 1987: 176 - 177). In Kohwa Pakuru smallholder schemes organized by Ciba-Geigy corporation, it was observed that "for the first time in agriculture in Zimbabwe a real attempt had been made to combine the aspects of finance, inputs, extension and distribution of inputs through cooperatives" (*The Farmer*, 11th February 1985).

The role of jointly organized extension services of the government and multinationals has therefore been crucial in the diffusion of both inputs and

labour techniques. Some of the techniques such as the application of herbicides were definitely intended as labour-saving technology. In general, the use of such inputs as fertilizers and pesticides require greater skills and specialization. In that respect the labour processes in smallholder agriculture will necessarily have to become more sophisticated. Unequal access to inputs and specialized skills will become more and more marked as a consequence of social differentiation. It is however unlikely that the smallholder sub-sector will provide significantly increased opportunities for employment as the strata of successful producers is small and not a big employer of rural labour.

Labour Processes in Agro-Based Industry

Agro-based industry in Zimbabwe includes the processing of such commodities as sugar, tea, fruit, vegetables and maize. During the past 20 years or so it has emerged as an important growth industry. As is the case with agriculture, multinational companies possess a significant stake in agro-industry in terms of control and ownership. The trend towards increased mechanization was discernible in the food processing industry: there had been recourse to imported machinery and other equipment to speed up canning and packaging processes (Sachikonye *et. al.* 1984). The processing of sugar cane on Triangle and Hippo plantations utilized fairly advanced technology; extraction was by diffusion processes which achieved high recoveries. National Foods, the major Anglo-American-owned milling company diversified into the processing of maize germ oil using imported technology from Italy. In its tobacco factories, British American Tobacco (BAT) has installed the latest generation cigarette-making machines. Rothmans of Pall Mall, another multinational tobacco company has phased out its labour-intensive equipment by installing electronic machinery which 3 instead of 10 workers as before operated to pack and box 6,000 cigarettes per minute. The main thrust of increased mechanization has generally been the displacement of labour.

In food-processing, the strategy of capital had been to retain a core of permanent, skilled workers to operate the technology while relying on predominantly female casual and seasonal labour for the more menial tasks which did not require any particular skills (Sachikonye *et. al.* 1984). In a study of the working conditions of female workers in food processing, it was observed that they were largely confined to the peeling or cutting of fruit and vegetables for canning or filling, the manual filling of cartons and containers, weighing and hand labelling (*Ibid.* 24). The predominance of casual and seasonal female labour in these labour processes was explained by its comparatively low cost; it was easier and cheaper to dispense with such labour when it was no longer needed.

The relatively low cost of female labour should be linked to its generally meagre skills which was the direct consequence of the blockage of training and promotion opportunities for it. Instructively, the sexist basis of the allocation of labour tasks in the canning industry was justified in several ways. One factory manager who had placed both male and female workers in the labelling section observed that female workers were four times faster than their male counterparts because of their "more nimble fingers" and the fact that they became "bored less easily than men" (*Ibid.*: 25). The patience of women in concentrating on boring and repetitive tasks and "their creativity to make such dull tasks interesting" was frequently cited by companies for the sex-ordered task division in the canning industry. As a consequence, female workers were largely restricted to the more monotonous labour processes at the bottom of the occupational ladder. Indeed, the exclusion of female workers from the operation of machinery was, with one exception, a notable feature of the food canning companies surveyed (*Ibid.*: 26).

On the whole, the levels of mechanization and automation had not reached a stage where labour-intensive processes could be dispensed with completely. The situation might not, however, remain static. As we observed above, some enterprises were in the process of importing new technology to meet certain export specifications in the meat industry; others to speed up the processing of tomatoes. With the entry into the agribusiness sector by such multinationals as Heinz and Dalgety and the introduction of varieties of tomatoes and peabeans specifically adopted for mechanized processing, the mechanization trend in agro-industry seemed bound to gather momentum. The combination of increased wages for agro-industrial workers and fiercer competition between multinational companies could accelerate the process. At the same time, however, the existence of loop-holes in labour legislation which allowed casual and seasonal labour to be hired at relatively cheap rates to supplement a core of permanent workers had not yet undercut the profitability of labour-intensive agro-industry. Thus, as in agriculture, the decline in the employment of permanent workers in sub-sectors of food-processing was matched by a corresponding increase in hired casual, seasonal and female labour whose reproduction costs were much lower than those of the permanent ones.

Labour's Response

The measures introduced by agrarian and agro-industrial capital to localize the recruitment of labour and to stabilize have already been referred to. It would be misleading to provide the impression that the introduction of those policy measures was a painless, smooth process. It was explained that the objective of their introduction was to enhance productivity, profitability and labour "discipline". For that purpose, the concept and practice of scientific

labour management — as enshrined in the so-called Zammit Plan at Triangle Sugar Estates — centred on the procurement of consistent and abundant supply of the best available labour; the maintenance of conditions of service and labour to ensure its retention and its utilization to achieve the maximum productivity (Clarke, 228).

Scientific labour management entailed a more intensive supervision and therefore exploitation of labour. Response to the new regime of intensive labour control provoked industrial action both before but particularly after independence in 1980; in 1972 sugar plantation workers at Hippo Valley had gone on strike. In 1980 and 1981, the plantations as locations of a greater concentration of workers were in the forefront of prolonged strikes. The sugar and tea plantations were some of the prime targets of strikes. So intractable and endemic were the stoppages that the Labour Minister personally mediated in the disputes on the plantations to defuse the situation.

Most of the disputes were sparked by abysmal working conditions and wages as at Hippo Valley sugar estate, Ratelshoek and Southdown tea estates. Other disputes were caused by what was perceived as abusive and bullying manner of plantation managers. Thus the terms on which the scientific labour management system was premised were being openly challenged in the post-independence period. It became imperative for the companies to establish machinery for pre-empting and defusing industrial action. One major tea company in committing itself to “establishing sound industrial relations programmes” sought to establish a National Industrial Council and a tea plantation workers’ trade union (Tanganda, Annual Report, 1980: 6). The creation of a trade union solely based in the tea plantation would have undermined the cohesion of the existent agricultural and plantation workers’ union. As a project, it never came off the ground due to opposition from the workers. The company’s attempt at sponsoring such a union nevertheless underscored the changing subtle tactics of capital to exert its control where the scientific labour management techniques had failed to do so.

The delicate situation on the plantation in the post-independence period was again upset in 1985 with the introduction of differential pay scales for plantation and agro-industrial workers. A labour relations crisis blew up when companies insisted on paying workers in agriculture and in processing different minimum wages to workers employed on the same premises. The refusal of employers to pay plantation workers the new minimum wage led to strikes on tea and coffee plantations in Eastern Zimbabwe and on fruit and poultry estates in other parts of the country. According to the July 1985 wage guidelines, workers in agro-industry were entitled to a new minimum wage of 143 Zimbabwe dollars a month. Workers engaged in purely

agricultural tasks interpreted the new wage guidelines, as applying to them as well. It was therefore when the plantation owners insisted that the new minimum wage was payable only to workers engaged in various aspects of processing that the workers felt piqued by the discriminatory scales. Quite spontaneously, the workers who were paid less than the stipulated minimum participated in stoppages. State-owned agro-industrial enterprises and plantations in Eastern Zimbabwe were also affected in the second half of 1985. For their part, agro-industrial enterprises and plantations pleaded their inability to award the minimum wage: imminent bankruptcy was cited by the multi-nationals, state-owned enterprises and individual farmers as an excuse. The labour relations crisis was not entirely due to the wage dispute. The induced differentiation between the workers on the basis of the different labour processes that they were engaged in was at the heart of the dispute. Some of the plantation labour possessed reasonably high levels of skill and experience. The attempt to divide the working class in the industry on the basis of their participation in specific labour processes was therefore bound to encounter the resistance which it did.

The Mediation by the State

The role of the state in the mediation of struggles between capital and labour on one level and in relations between international capital and smallholders on another has been crucial. Up to 1980 the predilection of the colonial state was generally to buttress the position taken by capital against labour on such matters as wages, working conditions and the repression of trade unionism. The fragmentation of unions on a craft basis was a favoured tactic of the colonial state.

It was therefore inevitable that the post-colonial state would inherit the legacy of a fragmented and therefore weakened trade unionism. Nevertheless, the simmering tension between capital and labour in mining, agriculture, manufacturing and the services was destined to erupt into some approximately 200 strikes in 1980-81 (Sachikonye, 1986). In the agricultural and agro-industrial enterprises, sustained industrial action by workers required for its defusion nothing less than high-level intervention by the Labour Minister and the ruling party ZANU-PF. At the political level therefore strikes were resolved in the "national interest" of the fledgling republic. The founding of industrial unions in each industry, workers' committees at work-places, the specification of minimum wages and employment regulations were the institutional response to the spontaneous stoppages in 1980.

That the general function of the capitalist state (and of the post-colonial capitalist state) is to ensure the overall conditions for the accumulation and reproduction of capital reasonably summarizes its primary role. In Zim-

babwe, seven years has not been too short for the state to consolidate the institutional instruments to limit the potential of organized labour action that could upset the general framework of capitalist accumulation. While the worst excesses of some fractions of capital (agrarian capital included) in their exploitation of labour might have been regulated since mid-1980, the basic relation of repression and exploitation of labour remains unchanged.

With respect to linkages between international and smallholders, the role of the state has been their facilitation in the project to step up productivity, food self-sufficiency and foreign exchange earnings. The subsequent incorporation of the smallholders into capitalist relations of exchange and the international division of labour has led to the adoption of inputs, crop technologies and labour processes which define the basis of incipient patterns of social differentiation and the consequent inequalities amongst them.

Conclusion

In this paper an attempt has been made to provide an overview of changing patterns of employment in agriculture and agro-based industry. Following a brief discussion on the significant contribution of agriculture and agro-based industry to the economy and employment as a whole, it was shown how the more intensive forms of control of labour processes under the guise of scientific labour management had provoked a labour backlash which swept much of plantation agriculture in 1980. From the capitalist perspective, the local sourcing of labour and its stabilization (in place of contract migrant labour) yielded greater profit returns in a new context in which the process of mechanization particularly in sugar production required such a permanent, skilled workforce.

The post-independence period witnessed continuity in the process of localization and stabilization of labour as the trend towards mechanized labour processes continued. It also witnessed more pronounced state intervention in the regulation of labour relations through the control of retrenchment procedures and the enforcement of the minimum wage. The trend towards mechanization gathered more momentum as capital sought to dodge these new government controls. Furthermore, the introduction of a more intensive labour regime and — where it could cut down further labour costs — the recruitment of casual, seasonal and short-term predominantly female labour were another set of its responses to increased government regulation.

The specialization which mechanized processes required in terms of skilled labour has had the effect of engendering certain groups' cohesiveness amongst the permanent work-force in agriculture and agro-industry. Industrial action over wage disputes and working conditions has become its

calculated response despite the strictures on such action by recent labour legislation.

The shortage of foreign exchange to import machinery, combine harvesters and other equipment might have served to slow down the impetus towards capital-intensity in the industry. Increased capital-intensiveness would undoubtedly render the industry even less labour-intensive than it is today. A recent Green Paper of Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU) decried among other things the foreign exchange (forex) shortage, the formidably high prices of machinery, combine harvesters and other inputs for mechanization (CFU, 1987). Thus the dilemma exists that increased allocations of foreign currency to the agro-industrial bourgeoisie could accelerate not only mechanization but the displacement of more labour.

It would appear unlikely that smallholder agriculture and resettlement areas would absorb such displaced labour. Indeed the adoption of inputs and production techniques disseminated by multinationals was beginning to tie up the smallholders in loan schemes and marketing circuits controlled by the former. These contemporary developments in capitalist agriculture, certain sub-sectors in smallholder agriculture and agro-industry pose immense problems for the Zimbabwe state. The problems of increasing unemployment and incorporation into the international capitalist division of labour should be featured prominently on the national agenda for the rest of the 1980s.

Notes

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