

SENA SUGAR ESTATES AND MIGRANT LABOUR

by

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In the central region of Mozambique, delimited in a general way by the frontiers of modern Zambezia Province, a plantation sector developed which required for its growth an abundant supply of cheap labour. This article uses the example of Sena Sugare Estates — which was representative of the sector for various reasons, among them for having been the largest private employer of labour in the colony — to analyse the methods of labour mobilisation and the objectives which it served. Although it touches on the evolution of the political economy of Zambezia during the whole of the colonial-capitalist period, the article will focus primarily on the period 1930-1960. It will analyse in more detail the ways in which the State and SSE were able to benefit from the institutionalisation of migrant labour.

The founder of the companies which were to become Sena Sugar Estates, J.P. Hornung, arrived on the Zambezi in the 1880s. His initial aim was to study the possibilities of producing opium in the region. After various false starts and misfortunes Hornung turned his attention to sugar and, having won financial support for the venture in London, established his first plantation in Mopeia. The difficulties were numerous. Not only was there no infrastructure but the Zambezi region was in a state of general rebellion. In addition there was not enough labour available on the **prazos** (estates leased to companies and individuals) comprising the plantations. Thus further **prazos** were leased in order to acquire the labour service of the men resident on them. Other workers were recruited from Nyasaland.

The plantation however, prospered and expanded, helped by the protectionist policies introduced by the Portuguese colonial regime. In 1924 SSE opened its fourth sugar factory at Luabo. The opening of the Luabo estate was conditional on the provision of a guaranteed labour force. In a contract of 1921 the High Commissioner for Mozambique agreed to provide 3000 men annually from the lands under the direct administration of the state for SSE's plantations.

The period between 1890 and 1930 was one of repeated failure from the point of view of the colonial regime. Unable to administer Zambezia effectively, still less to develop production, the colonial state was forced to encourage the entry of foreign capital into the Province in the hope that some agricultural development would ensue, strengthening both the metropolitan economy and with it Portugal's claims on the colony. Most of the capital attracted was speculative and most enterprises failed. The division of the region between the state and private capital compounded the problem. Labour was scarce because men were able to migrate between **prazos**, from state lands to **prazos**, or to areas beyond the control of either. However, the imposition of a monetary tax, labour legislation designed to force men into regular wage work, and the imposition of compulsory unpaid labour, established the parameters of a system which only required rationalization. Recognizing the weakness of Portuguese capitalism, the colonial government, through the Hornung contract in 1921, confirmed its role as a labour-selling enterprise — a role which was systematically to be extended after the 1930s.

THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF MIGRANT LABOUR

The Salazarist coup and the change of regime in Portugal coincided with the world depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Much stronger protectionist measures were introduced to save the Portuguese economy and colonial production from the effects of competition by stronger producers. On the whole these measures were not strong enough. Agriculture and industry entered into a general recession and in Zambezia SSE was forced to close two of its factories permanently. The new regime did, however, impose a uniform administration and labour policy on the colony and the anomalies of the previous period were ironed out. The system by which labour was mobilized was rationalized.

In 1930 the prazos were abolished and shortly afterwards a uniform administrative regime was imposed on the whole of Zambesia by the state. The Province was divided into Circumscriptions and Posts. An administrator was appointed to run the Circumscription, and his subordinate, the 'Chefe de Posto', administered the Post. As both administrators of predominantly African areas and agents of the Native Affairs Department, administrators and their subordinates were responsible for everything concerning 'native affairs': census-taking, tax collection, the implementation of the labour laws, supervision of peasant agriculture and punishment of infractions of the law.

The Portuguese administrative officials were assisted by a hierarchy of African chiefs and headmen responsible for the day-to-day administration of areas within the circumscriptions and posts. Although not direct state employees, these were appointed by the Portuguese. They were exempt from taxation and forced labour and received a fee for assisting with census-taking/tax collection and labour mobilization. Together with African policemen, administration Interpreters and guards, the Chiefs and Headmen formed a privileged stratum amongst the African population. This stratum acted as the lowest level of the colonial administration. Its continued privileges depended on rigorously carrying out the repressive policies of the regime.

Linked to the new administrative organization of the Province was the labour legislation of the Salazar regime. The 1930 **Regulamento do Trabalho dos Indigenas** covered every aspect of 'native' employment. Its most important sections, however, dealt with the wage-labour obligations imposed on the peasantry, the administration of contract labour and the punishment of infractions of the law.

The RTI made it obligatory for all but a small minority of men to take up wage work for six months of the year. All men were required to carry a pass. The pass recorded, among other things, the date of their last tax payment and the date of the last contract. Without a valid pass and permission from the Authorities, men were unable to leave their residential areas. Thus the pass system effectively controlled the physical mobility of peasants. It also facilitated tax-collection and labour mobilization.

Men could fulfil their labour obligation by working either for the state or for a private employer. Private recruiting organizations were registered by the Provincial Authorities and allocated reserves

within the province. Local Administrators were responsible for supervising their activities and for supervising the contracts made between private employers and workers. Most contracts were signed in the presence of the Administrator.

Administrators were also responsible for supervising the employment of contracted workers on the estates. They were given wide powers to define illegal acts committed by workers and to punish them. Any man who incited indiscipline at the workplace, spread rumours about firms or recruiters to discourage men from entering a contract, was habitually drunk, disobeyed the orders of the boss, failed to work hard, acted immorally or left work without permission was liable to correctional labour. Men condemned to correctional work were employed by the Government or local municipality for the duration of the sentence. They received between 30% and 60% of the legal wage in force.

The effect of this legislation was the development of a system of close collaboration between administrators and private company recruiters to engage labour. Indeed, the most common recruiting method was the so-called 'concentration'. Company recruiters were requested to attend a meeting at the Administration Office where men liable for contract labour were presented to them.

At the provincial level, the reports on the labour supply situation which administrators were mandated to send to the higher authorities at regular intervals and the designation of Zambezia as a labour reserve for employers within it enabled the state to distribute labour rationally between the various employers in the region.

Both the state and private capital benefited from the institutionalization of migrant labour. In turn, the reciprocal benefits which ensued strengthened the links between them and ensured the smooth functioning of the system.

BENEFITS TO THE STATE

By organizing the labour supply the state was able to generate revenue without entering directly into production. Firstly, with the exception of individuals employing domestic labour, almost all employers were obliged to request permission to recruit labour. Recruiting licences of various types were granted. However, holders of all types of licences were required to pay an initial deposit for the licence and an annual tax to retain it. Furthermore, private recruiters were required to pay a fee to the state for each man contracted.

The fees depended on the type of contract and were increased over time. An additional fee was collected for each worker employed, which was intended to cover administrative costs and remunerate the 'native authorities'.

Secondly, the legal wage in force was always related to the 'native' tax in force. Indeed, the RTI laid down the proportion to be maintained between the two. As in the earlier period, taxation of the African population seems to have been the single most important source of direct revenue in the Provincial budget. Administrators were therefore concerned to collect the tax for its own sake. They were also well aware of its importance as a lever forcing men into wage work.

Ensuring that men took up a contract was one way of guaranteeing the payment of the tax. Recruiters were encouraged to give an advance on the tax when men were contracted. Indeed, one of the reasons volunteer labour was not forthcoming in large numbers, even though volunteers were paid at a higher rate than contracted men, was that administrators were reluctant to issue passes to eligible men. Once a man had left his home district it was more difficult to make sure that the tax was paid. Where the tax had not been paid in advance, the administrator was able to deduct it from the accumulated wage he was responsible for paying in the man's home district at the end of the contract.

Thirdly, by furnishing cheap labour to the plantation sector, the state ensured continued accumulation in this sector. Through its protectionist policies, which had more effect after the world crisis ended, it also ensured that the commodities produced on plantations were directed towards the Portuguese market, bolstering the metropolitan economy and aiding capital accumulation within it. In addition, through property taxes, currency regulations, export taxes and the like, the state was able to siphon off part of the surplus produced in the plantation.

There was a final reason why the institutionalization of migrant labour indirectly benefited the state. By imposing six months' wage labour on peasants each year, men were released for agricultural work during the remaining six months. This was important not only because the peasantry produced most of the foodstuffs used to feed the labour force, but also because, as compulsory cash-cropping spread, additional burdens were placed on the peasantry.

BENEFITS TO PRIVATE CAPITAL

The institutionalization of migrant labour benefited the plantation sector in three major ways. Firstly, by using seasonal migrant labour, plantation management was able to reduce labour needs in the slack period of the agricultural year. Secondly, capital was able to buy labour-power below value. Thirdly, it was able to accumulate through the appropriation of absolute surplus value and to increase this appropriation over time.

The agricultural year at Sena Sugar Estates was divided into two main periods: the harvest or 'crop' from May to the end of November, when the main field jobs were cane-cutting, loading cane on to trucks attached to locomotives to be transported to the factory, and gleaning; and the period of the 'off-crop', which was further subdivided into two periods. The first period included the vital months of December, January and February when the land was prepared and new seed planted, when ratoons (secondary shoots) were weeded and pests controlled. The second period, from March until the beginning of the 'crop', was the time when weeding, drainage, the making of mounds around the cane to encourage secondary shoots, and the building of fire barriers to defend the crop, took place.

Despite the spread of agricultural work to ensure optimum utilization of labour in the fields, the harvest still absorbed a greater number of workers than the off-crop, and labour needs were at their lowest between March and the beginning of the crop.

Land preparations and ploughing were mechanized from before the 1930s, as was the transport of the cane from the fields to the factory. However, all other field operations were manual until the latter years of the 1950s.

By employing seasonal labour, estate management could adjust its labour needs to the agricultural cycle. It avoided carrying unproductive labour when there was little work to be done and could take on additional local labour on short contracts when labour needs were highest.

As Wolpe and others have pointed out, the use of seasonal or migrant labour drawn from the peasantry diverts part of the reproduction costs of labour to a mode of production outside the orbit of capital. This allows labour-power to be bought below value. Migrant labour served a similar purpose in the central region of Mozambique. The wage paid to the worker only covered the period he was em-

ployed. Furthermore, most of the accumulated wage paid at the end of the contract went to pay the annual tax. Thus not only was the worker's family responsible for sustaining itself through agricultural production while the man fulfilled his contract; it was also responsible for sustaining him during the six month 'rest' period. Besides part of the immediate reproduction costs of labour, the peasantry was also responsible for the long-term reproduction costs, namely the costs involved in bringing up children and supporting elderly and incapacitated workers.

Capital was, however, responsible for the day-to-day reproduction costs of labour. While men completed their contract, plantation management had to provide them with food and shelter. The food provided was composed largely of cheap flour, available at controlled prices from the peasantry. The diet, as a result, was unbalanced and nutritionally inadequate. SSE resisted implementing changes in the diet designed to improve its quality. It also attempted to reduce both the quality and the quantity of food given, over time.

Similarly, the housing provided by the company was overcrowded and unhygienic. Migrant workers lived in compounds, five or six men to a hut measuring 12' x 12'. For most of the period washing facilities and lavatories were not provided. There were no kitchens and recreational facilities were completely non-existent.

The state was responsible for maintaining the flow of cheap labour to the estates. The designation of Zambezia as a labour reserve and the rotation of labour through the six-month contract system meant that, theoretically at least, the supply of labour was endless. A constant supply of cheap migrant labour allowed the plantation sector to appropriate absolute surplus-value. It also allowed the sector to increase this appropriation over time. As one man completed his contract he would be replaced by another. Thus each man could be pushed to his physical limits. The working day could be extended and the intensity of labour increased within it.

All field workers were required to complete a specific task. Only on completion of the task was the worker handed a disc entitling him to payment for the day's work. The payment disc also entitled him to his daily rations. The law stipulated that men were not to work more than nine hours a day. At the end of nine hours they were supposed to receive payment whether or not the task was completed. SSE ignored the law. Tasks often took longer than nine hours to complete. The company also ignored the payment ruling. Failure to complete the task resulted in loss of wages. It also resulted in loss of

food. Thus SSE was able to appropriate unpaid labour (since partial completion of the task did not count towards payment). It was also able to reduce the cost of labour by withholding food.

The law further stipulated that men were to receive a meal in the fields and an hour's rest at midday. SSE ignored this aspect of the law too. Men were expected to work continuously from dawn until the task was finished, without a break. By denying workers the break to which they were entitled by law, SSE was able to appropriate additional surplus labour at the rate of six hours per week per man for over thirty years.

Tasks were not defined by law. They were set by field supervisors on the basis of their past experience and the conditions in the fields. This system had the obvious advantage that tasks could be changed and increased. Over time tasks were increased on the estates. Sometimes they were increased by direct decision of the field managers. At other times more subtle methods were required. There was, for example, the use of target setters. The first group of men recruited from a particular area and for a particular job would be given a task which subsequent groups were expected to meet. Another tactic was to increase the tasks when men were transferred between the various estates.

For historical reasons, SSE's labour force was drawn from different areas where different wage rates and contract lengths operated. Firstly, the plantations were situated in both the Territory of the Mozambique Company (which became Manica and Sofala Province after the area passed to the state in 1942) and Zambezia Province. The minimum wage in force in the Mozambique Company Territory was always higher than in Zambezia. The Company obliged SSE to employ labour from its area. Secondly, in Zambezia itself, prior to 1930, labour from the **prazos** around the estates was employed for three periods of two months at a higher rate than labour furnished by the state from areas under its control, which worked a continuous period of six months. Thirdly, the company had leased **prazos** in modern Tete province. Men resident on them were recruited for work on the estates. These men worked for a year at a time. Together with a number of 'volunteer' workers from all the areas from which SSE recruited labour, the workers from Angonia were the highest paid section of the labour force. Whereas 'volunteer' workers received a higher rate because the company saved on recruiting costs and could assume a fairly lengthy period of service, men from Angonia in Tete received high wages because competi-

tion for this labour from Rhodesia forced SSE to keep in line with the wages being offered there.

SSE'S WAGE POLICY

To avoid paying the higher minimum wage in force in the Mozambique company's territory, SSE followed a policy of transferring cheaper labour from Zambezia to its plantations in that area. In 1942, however, the Governor of Zambezia insisted that men from Zambezia working in Manica and Sofala were to receive the basic wage in force in that area. SSE resisted the increase. The company argued that the tax in Zambezia was much lower than in Manica and Sofala. The effect of a wage rise to men from Zambezia would be to reduce the number of days they needed to work to pay off the tax. This would not only create a disparity in wage-level between the men from the two provinces but it would also increase 'laziness'. Men from Zambezia would be less inclined to work. SSE was eventually forced to increase the wages of the men from Zambezia working in Manica and Sofala by 33 1/3 per cent, which was still less than the basic wage in force in the Province. When, later, the basic wage was raised in Manica and Sofala, the company introduced a productivity/attendance bonus for men from Zambezia working in the Province. Although the bonus was still less than the new wage in force, by completing every task of the contract and working every day, that is by increasing their output, men from Zambezia could again receive the 33 1/3 per cent increase established in 1942.

Men from Angonia not only received higher wages than all other workers except volunteers, but those working in Manica and Sofala received a higher wage than those doing the same job in Zambezia. This had the predictable effect that all men from Angonia wished to work in Manica and Sofala. To standardize wages and thus resolve the problem, SSE introduced a scheme whereby men from Angonia working in Zambezia received the basic wage in force **plus** a weekly attendance/productivity bonus, whereas men from Angonia working in Manica and Sofala received the basic wage in force in that province **minus** the weekly bonus they had been receiving until then. This bonus was still paid, but it became an advance on wages and was thus deducted from the accrued wage paid at the end of the contract.

The transformation of bonuses into advances on wages was also applied to other sections of the work force to counteract increases in the legal wage imposed by the authorities.

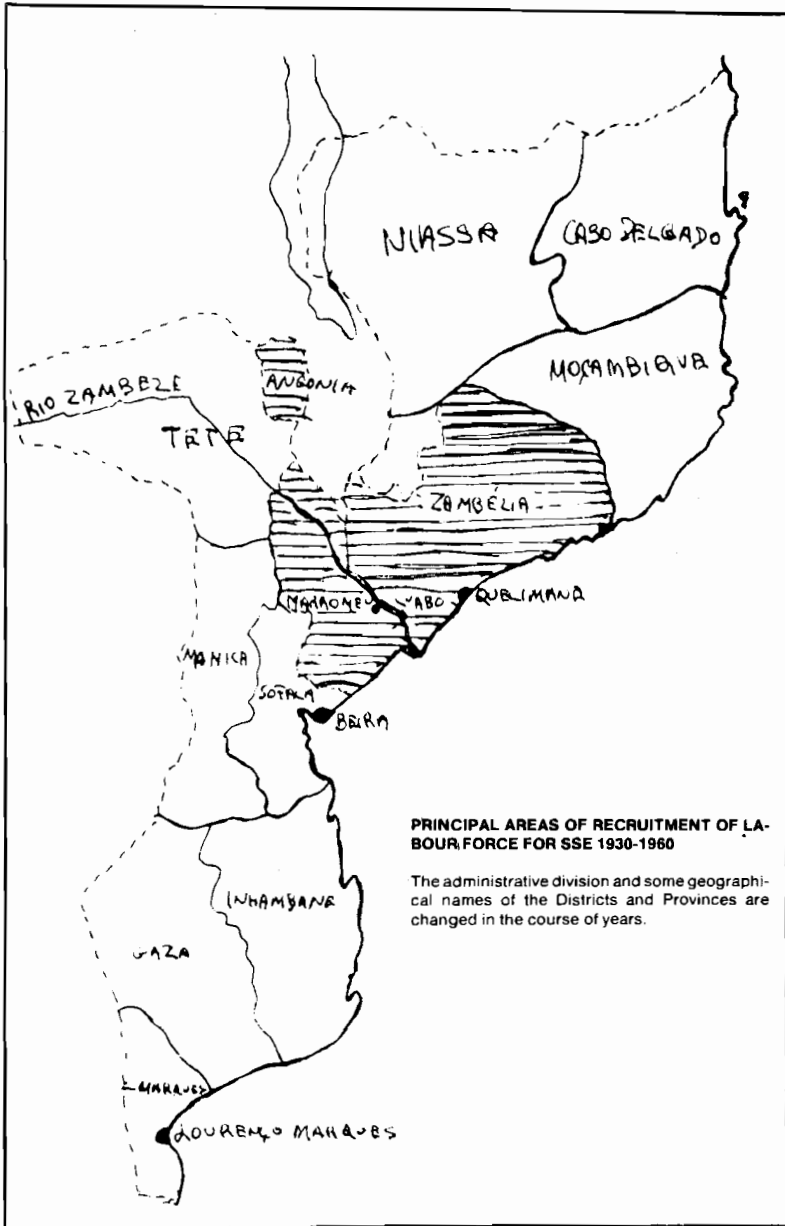
The weekly bonus was originally introduced to increase attendance and hence productivity for despite the repression exercised over the labour force absenteeism was a grave problem for management. Workers acquired a metal disc daily. The discs were handed over to the pay master at the end of the week. The number of days worked was then recorded for payment at the end of the contract. Weekly bonuses were not a very successful means of eliminating absenteeism however, because men could miss days and still acquire over time the five or six discs necessary to claim the bonus. To overcome this problem SSE increasingly adopted a bonus system which was calculated on the number of days worked per month or per contract.

Another strategy employed by SSE was to reduce the differentials between different grades of workers.

Over the years wages increased, mainly as a result of periodic rises in the minimum wage imposed by the government. However, SSE always tried to find ways of resisting the increases. Firstly, by offering bonuses instead of wage rises *per se*, the company gave itself a margin of manoeuvrability which enabled it to withdraw bonuses when a statutory wage rise was announced, or to replace them with advances on wages. Unlike the bonus, advances were deducted from the wage at the end of the contract and were thus a means by which management reduced the money wage. Secondly, by paying men from different areas at different rates, a policy which was accompanied by segregated housing and the organisation of field work on ethnic lines, SSE fostered divisions in the work force aimed at preventing united action amongst workers.

There were other ways in which SSE increased the appropriation of absolute surplus value. Firstly, with the collusion of the authorities, the company, on one occasion at least, managed to have industrial work redefined as agricultural work and thus subject to a lower rate of pay. Secondly, the company avoided giving its workers the statutory holidays to which they were entitled by law. On at least two occasions SSE was accused of making men work on national holidays without payment and not giving men a day off in lieu of a Sunday worked.

Finally, SSE employed child labour whenever it could. It was SSE's policy to encourage workers to bring their sons to the estate with them. Child labour formed a significant part of the work force, although it could not be relied on for planning purposes since numbers fluctuated considerably.



For accounting purposes, two boys were assessed as one man. Whereas boys were paid two-thirds of a man's wages in 1942, by 1951 they were earning less than half. Furthermore, boys received less food than men. Yet boys produced more than half a man's daily output and sometimes did the same task as a man.

Thus the employment of minors represented a further way in which the company was able to increase the production of surplus value. Not only did boys receive less food than their fathers and lower wages but they also received fewer items of clothing on being contracted. Furthermore, the company saved on recruiting costs since children were not specifically recruited but encouraged through their fathers to journey to the estates. Finally, boys produced proportionately more than their fathers in relation to wages and thus constituted the cheapest sector of the labour force.

It was not only migrant workers who were exploited in these various ways. 'Mistos and Assimilados' were also subject to tactics whose effects were similar to those described above. The coloured and assimilated workers constituted a strata of permanent skilled labour. They were not subject to the Native Labour Legislation. Defined by law as 'civilized', these workers were entitled to the same pay and conditions as Europeans with similar skills. However, the law governing their situation was liable to various interpretations which usually favoured the employer. Thus, for example, employers were allowed to discount part of the wage paid to this group on the grounds that they had difficulties in finding employment.

Towards the end of the 1950s the colonial government was becoming alarmed about international response to its labour policies. There were suggestions that the wages of coloured and assimilated workers should be equalized with those of Europeans. One strategy discussed within SSE was to equalize the wages of some, while maintaining the reduction for others. Thus it was hoped that criticisms of racial prejudice would be deflected. At the same time the company pursued a policy of 'getting rid' of all those to whom it did not want to pay the increased wages.

Taken together, the work and payment system operated by SSE on its plantations represented an attempt to buy labour power below value and to wrest the maximum surplus value from the labour force. This policy was itself possible only on the basis of unlimited supplies of cheap migrant labour. As long as labour remained cheap and abundant there was no need to mechanize production. However, the 1940s and 1950s were years of an increasing labour shortage.

THE GROWING LABOUR SHORTAGE

In 1926 a decree laid down the guidelines for the development of cotton growing in Mozambique, which was intended to supply the metropolitan textile industry. Concessions of land were granted to individuals and companies. The concessionary was entitled to distribute seed to the peasants residing within the area of this concession, to supervise cultivation and to organize cotton markets. With the exception of SSE, the three other concessionaries in Zambezia were all Portuguese. Capital investment seems to have been limited to ginneries, seed, the construction of a few grass sheds to serve as markets and stores and the employment of supervisory staff to oversee and supervise production. Accumulation rested on the difference between the purchasing price of cotton from the peasantry and the selling price on the Lisbon market. Prices were fixed by the colonial government. In order to make profits, then, the companies required as large a crop as possible, and, in the absence of mechanized cultivation, as many producers as possible. Although the six-month contract system was designed to release men for agricultural work for half of the year, cotton concessionaries were soon demanding male labour for the whole year.

It was only in the 1930s that the cotton scheme really took off in Zambezia, but almost immediately its effects were felt. Lopes Irmãos, for example, opened a concession in the Morrumbala region, which was traditionally a recruiting reserve for SSE. Lopes accused SSE of recruiting labour at gunpoint. SSE responded by saying that, far from using force, it was unable to raise any labour. This was because Lopes Irmãos' Cotton Agent was telling peasants that they were not obliged to work but only to grow cotton. He guaranteed payment of the tax in the event of damage to the crop.

Foreseeing the consequences of the spread of cotton cultivation, SSE had itself taken a concession around its estates with the explicit intention of protecting its local labour supply. On its concessions SSE distributed seed only to women, thus ensuring that men continued to take up the annual contract. Profit considerations were secondary to the need to prevent others from opening a concession in the area, thus depriving the plantations of male labour. However, SSE was unable to prevent the spread of the crop elsewhere. Its recruiting areas coincided with cotton concessions, and by the beginning of the 1940s cotton was being put forward as the major reason for a growing labour shortage.

The reorganization of the cotton zones in the 1940s and 1950s and the elimination of the patently unsuitable areas from the programme did little to improve the labour situation. One of the effects of cotton production was a growing shortage of food crops. Not only did peasant diet deteriorate but there was also a shortage of food on plantations — foodstuffs which originated, in the main, from the peasant sector. Thus, while the area under cotton cultivation was decreased, the area under food crop production was increased and peasants were obliged to sow food crops under the supervision of the cotton concessionary and/or the local Administrator.

The labour shortage was compounded by the growth of tea plantations under Portuguese control, in the Gurue region of north-west Zambezia. The labour demands of the tea planters had led to the withdrawal of one of SSE's most important reserves in 1950. SSE protested to both the temporary Governor of Zambezia and the Minister of the Colonies. SSE had been recruiting labour in the Ile region for 20 years. In the three years preceding the closure of the reserve it had recruited a total of 16,850 men and boys from the area. The company estimated that it would need two years to reorganize its recruiting operations elsewhere, and that the loss of an experienced harvest work-force would lead to serious losses during the 'crop'.

The 1950s saw further economic development of the region, and increased Portuguese settlement. Both factors contributed to the labour shortage. New tea plantations were opened in the Socone region of the Ile. Gurue and Milange were designated as areas of European settlement and thousands of hectares were set aside for development. The ban on the establishment of new Asian trading settlements saw the opening of many new commercial settlements in European hands. Small-scale European agriculture expanded as Portuguese settlers experimented with coffee, tobacco, and grains. Secondary industrial development commenced. Mining expanded in the Gile/Alto Molocue region. Increased commercial activity, particularly in Quelimane, and increased settlement in Mocuba led to the general expansion of the construction industry.

Besides the growing demand for labour inside Zambezia the higher wages and demand for labour in Micanica and Sofala was leading to a steady trickle of men leaving the province illegally.

The growing demand for labour is reflected in the labour figures. Whereas in 1947 there was a surplus of 25,718 men over the needs for labour within Zambezia, by 1957 over 93% of all men available for contract were being recruited.

RESPONSE TO THE GROWING LABOUR SHORTAGE

The response of the authorities to growing fears of a labour shortage from the early 1940s was to strengthen the labour laws and eliminate the loopholes which allowed peasants to avoid the labour obligation. In the Pebane District this took the form of sending back to the employer any man who, during the contract, had not earned enough to pay the tax and buy a pair of trousers. Such men were recontracted for a further period of six months.

In Chinde district, where men were able to meet the tax and subsist through coconut production, the Administrator organized a re-recruiting drive for SSE. Men who volunteered for a contract were allowed to work for two periods of three months. Those who were forcibly recruited were obliged to work for six months without a break. In the sub-district of Micuane, only some eighty men appeared, and of these almost all fled from the plantations. The administrator responded by recruiting all those who had not completed at least two thirds of the contract for a further period of three months.

Administrators also allowed private recruiters to use the census in their attempts to engage labour. This was extended by SSE, who started to keep its own file of workers. The company informed the local authorities when the six-month 'rest' period had been exceeded. The local authorities then rounded up the men affected. Similarly, the company sent in regular lists of men who had deserted, to the local authorities, who were responsible for capturing them, punishing them and sending them back to the estates.

Finally, in 1947 the practice of employing men as unpaid labour on public works projects was sanctioned by law. In an effort to stamp out 'laziness', that is to mobilize the labour available, the government ruled that men who failed to take up a contract could be legitimately employed on the roads, without payment, for periods up to six months.

Despite these measures, and restrictions on social mobility, which meant that out of an able-bodied male population of 210,985 men in Zambezia in 1947 only 34,145 were exempt from contract labour, by the end of the 1950s the Provincial Government of Zambezia estimated that the labour resources of the Province were already insufficient for its needs.

THE MECHANISATION OF PRODUCTION

Fears of an absolute labour shortage coincided with moves within the colonial government to end the worst abuses of forced labour in the face of concerted international criticism of Portugal's policies. Already in the 1950s minor improvements in social conditions had hurriedly been implemented in an attempt to deflect criticism. Pressure was brought to bear on plantation management to improve the food and housing of migrant workers, and it was during this period that the government began seriously to consider the situation of the coloured and assimilated workers. Even earlier, some colonial officials had argued that labour would become plentiful only if wages were not artificially depressed by forced labour and administrative interference in recruiting, which had the effect of discouraging competition among employers. Opponents of this view argued that higher wages would simply lead to a shorter period worked. Wanting to keep the costs of labour as low as possible, employers were not willingly going to agree to a system whose effects would have been to push up these costs, especially since the government had shown itself only too willing to ensure that labour was forthcoming by any means. Thus forced labour remained as the basis of the system and it was only in the 1960s that significant changes in policy took place. In the meantime, in an attempt to resolve the labour crisis, employers were enjoined to mechanize production and to desist from the practice of employing more labour than was actually needed to cover absenteeism and ensure a full labour strength at the peak periods of the year.

Towards the end of the 1950s SSE started to mechanize some of its field operations. Faced with a growing labour shortage, the need to recruit labour in the Northern Districts of the Colony and an overall increase in recruiting costs which, by 1960, had reached an annual sum of £250,000, the company in the same year gave its first serious consideration to a scheme aimed at settling labour around the estates. The scheme was not implemented, mainly because increased costs in social infrastructure without guaranteed financial support from the government would have negated the reduction in recruiting costs.

THE DISMANTLING OF THE LABOUR SYSTEM

Nevertheless, throughout the 1960s, SSE's policy was directed towards decreasing its reliance on seasonal labour. It attempted to increase the contract length, to train African workers and to create an intelligent middle class of skilled workers who would eventually replace the less educated European workers. The official ending of forced labour and forced cotton cultivation (which continued in a disguised form after a short period) gave an added impetus to these changes.

Alarmed at the development of an armed struggle in Angola, internal unrest in Mozambique and the growth of a nationalist movement struggling for radical change in Mozambique, the colonial government was forced officially to condemn forced labour and administrative interference in recruiting, in the early 1960s. Immediately there was a dramatic drop in the numbers of men coming forward to sign a contract and SSE was forced to attract labour by offering greater incentives. Furthermore, fearing that low wages and poor conditions would aid the growth of opposition to the regime, the colonial government itself initiated a new policy aimed to buy off the labour force. Employers were forced to improve housing, to provide schools and recreational facilities in the compounds, to improve food and health care and pay higher wages. Cheap labour, on which accumulation in the plantation sector rested, was rapidly becoming expensive.

Nevertheless, although the eventual aim of SSE's policy was to increase mechanization until it could rely entirely on volunteer labour, expanded production and the difficulties of mechanizing cane-cutting forced it to continue to rely on seasonal labour. Thus, throughout the 1960s, the company continued to recruit labour in its historical reserves. The dramatic changes of 1974-5 reversed this policy. The overthrow of the colonial regime and the exodus of settlers led to a new abundance of labour within the region. At the same time, fearful of FRELIMO's policies, which were directed towards guaranteeing permanent employment and reasonable wages and conditions, and not wanting to be lumbered with a permanent labour force of harvest dimensions, SSE, in 1975, dismantled its recruiting operations. The labour force was casualized.

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