



The Grapes of Wrath:

A History of Farm Worker
Struggles in the Wine Sector



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Introduction

Farm workers in the wine sector face very bad work and living conditions. They are among the lowest-paid of any workers in South Africa. In the workplace, basic labour laws are regularly violated; illegal deductions are made to wages; workers are often not paid overtime and workers are indebted to farms' stores – which in reality lowers the value of their wages.

In addition, the wealthier farms are mechanising, and reducing the need for permanent workers. Indeed, more and more casual, contract and migrant workers are being used, and as a result hundreds of thousands of farm workers and their families have been driven out of worker housing on farms. Many former worker houses have become cottages for tourists, and most workers in the wine sector now live in townships and informal settlements.

Where farm workers and their families remain housed on the farms, the standard of their accommodation is often very bad. Houses sometimes lack ceilings; walls are often cracked; roofs leak; and most houses have broken windows. In some cases, housing and accommodation even lack piped water, and if they do have piped water it could come in the form of unfiltered dam water.

Where workers do stay on the farms, owners and managers have a large degree of control of the workers' and their families' lives. They can, and do, withhold transport, access to health care and electricity to punish workers. Farm owners and managers also, at times, threaten to take away housing to ensure that workers are compliant – or even to extract extra labour out of them. Farm owners and managers can legally turn out family members of farm workers who are over 18 – and they often do so, breaking up family and support systems in the process.

Farm owners also continue to be paternalistic, treating farm workers as children in order to maintain control. This has a negative impact on workers' mental well-being. Indeed, the aim is to break workers, so that they comply and are obedient.

Over and above this, workers face verbal or physical abuse at the hands of farm owners and managers. Racism is rife on many farms in the wine sector. Sometimes this racism is

overt, but it can also be in the form of the paternalistic relationships the bosses and managers exercise over workers on wine farms.

Working conditions and living conditions are hard to the point that the average life expectancy of a farm worker is far below that of the rest of the population. In short, conditions for farm workers in the wine sector – whether they are casual, contract, or permanent – tend to be appalling and are defined by both overt and subtle forms of oppression.

Farm workers have, however, resisted these conditions and have not always been helpless victims. In 2012/13 a massive strike took place – including in the wine sector – that saw some major gains which included an increase in wages. Workers in the wine sector have faced a class war from bosses and managers who have tried to pay as little as possible, have spent as little as possible on workers' housing and have driven workers and their families out of farm-based housing. Yet, even under these attacks workers have resisted, and it is here that hope lies.



Exploitation.

Capitalism is based on exploitation.

Because bosses and/or the state own the factories, banks, mines, etc. the working class have to sell its labour to the capitalist bosses for a wage. The bosses are interested in squeezing as much work out of workers for as little wages as possible so that he/ she can maintain high profits. The more wages workers get, the less profit the bosses make. As a rule, **workers never get the full value of their labour back in wages**, and bosses keep the rest as profits. So a worker can make thousands of shoes in a week, which can be sold by a boss for R5000, for example, but the worker will only get a wage of maybe R900 — the boss keeps the rest of the money for himself. This is what is called exploitation. So workers produce everything, but the bosses — because of laws, such as property rights — gets to keep all these products and sell them, and then workers are only given a small portion back of what they produced in the form of a wage.



Oppression.

To oppress people is to use power and authority over them in an unjust, cruel and often brutal way, so that they cannot exercise their human rights.

Capitalism.

Capitalism is an economic, social and political system in which the means of production are owned by the private sector and exploited for profit.

Why this booklet

In order to understand why farm workers face bad conditions, exploitation and oppression, we have to look at the history of the wine sector in South Africa, for only by looking at the past can we understand how we came to be in the situation we are in today. While workers in the wine sector have always faced harmful conditions and have relentlessly been exploited, some changes have come about because workers have struggled and – at some points in history – have been inspired by political ideas and have fought for better conditions and, in some cases, even equality and freedom.

This booklet traces the history of the conditions workers have faced in the wine sector, from its start in South Africa until the present day. It also considers the forms that struggles by workers have taken. By looking at this history we are able to understand the context, to learn from the past and to use it to find a way forward for workers' struggles in the wine sector in the future.

The booklet is divided into chapters that set the basis for understanding how labour and conditions changed for workers and how only through struggle were some improvements won.

Chapter 1 looks at how and why the wine sector was founded in 1652 at the Cape, and the relations that defined it until 1700. These years were dominated by the Dutch East India Company/Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), which used various forms of unfree labour, including slaves. The chapter looks at the lives of these workers and how they resisted during this period.

Chapter 2 covers the changes that took place between 1700 and 1800, the lives of workers and their resistance. During this time in the Western Cape, a rich elite class arose whose families came to own and control wine farming. Like the VOC, they used unfree labour, usually slaves, but also seasonal and day labourers drawn mostly from the Khoikhoi and San.

The third chapter examines the period of 1800 to 1838. It looks at how workers on wine farms – including slaves, Khoikhoi, San and European soldiers and sailors – became influenced by revolutionary developments of the time and even worked together to carry out a rebellion at the Cape. The chapter considers how this contributed to the ending of slavery on wine farms in the Cape.

Chapter 4 focuses on the years from 1838 to 1900. Although slaves won their freedom, during these years wine farm owners and the state undertook various measures to limit that freedom and, indeed, tried to maintain unfree labour although not outright slavery. The aim of this was to have a pool of cheap labour. Workers resisted, and changes to a truly capitalist economy meant that workers in the Cape had options

to move; the chapter tells the story of how the state and wine farmers worked together to try and block this. Chapter 5 focuses on the period 1900 to 1994. Apartheid laws – many of which had originated in the 1800s – had a major impact on wine farm workers in the Cape. During this period, the capitalist wine farmers linked to the National Party consolidated their power with state backing and formed the Koöperatieve Wijnbouwers Vereniging (KWV). KWV guaranteed the prices farmers could get for wine, and protected the industry from international competition.

Chapter 6 is about the period from 1994 until the present day. It outlines how massive changes have taken place in the wine industry, largely to the benefit of very wealthy capitalist farmers and corporations that have come to dominate the wine sector, taking over smaller competitors. Indeed, the international market has opened up to the capitalists and they have found new ways to squeeze down the cost of labour. In this chapter we observe how this has affected workers and their families. We will also, though, look at resistance (including the farm worker uprising of 2012/13), to the attacks that capitalist farmers have made on working and living conditions..

The final chapter looks at what changes will probably happen in future, and at how we need to build on the history of struggle in the wine sector, along with developing a vision and self-organisation based on progressive principles, practices and values to try and win freedom in the future for ourselves as workers in the wine sector.







Chapter 1

1652-1700

From 1652 to 1700, the VOC directly dominated the economy of the Cape. Until 1700 there were very few private farmers and the few that existed were small-scale or subsistence farmers. The VOC, therefore, had the largest number, by far, of farm workers.

The wine industry in South Africa had its beginnings when the VOC colonised the Cape Peninsula in 1652. To understand why the wine industry began in the Cape under the VOC, we need to consider the background of the VOC. It was a multinational company with headquarters in The Netherlands and operations in Europe, Africa, Sri Lanka and East Asia. It had been established in 1602, by the Dutch state, as a monopoly over the spice trade between Holland and East Asia. By the early 1600s it had publicly traded shares on the Amsterdam Stock Exchange, making it one of the first modern corporations.

Although the VOC was established to control the very profitable spice trade through shipping, warehousing and sales, it soon diversified its operations. Until its bankruptcy in 1800 it came to have interests in ship building, textiles, tea, sugar, wine, farming and spices. It set up its own plantations, factories and warehouses in parts of India, Indonesia, the Cape and Sri Lanka. By the late 1600s it was involved in producing wheat and wine at the Cape; and textiles, tea, sugar and spices in India and Indonesia.



Genocide

Force + violence were key features of the VOC... this extended to genocide of local groups opposed to its rule or threatened its monopoly of spices, sugar, textiles or tea.

The VOC was strongly backed by the Dutch state, but it had its own army and navy which it used to invade and colonise Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Cape and parts of India. Although it was very powerful – in fact, to this day it was the most profitable corporation in history – it did sometimes lose wars and was defeated by the Chinese Empire in a battle to control parts of China. Force and violence were key features of the VOC and were central to its gaining resources. This also extended to genocide if local groups opposed the rule of the VOC or threatened its monopoly of spices, sugar, textiles or tea.

The VOC would also use divide and rule tactics, making local alliances in Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia to gain control over the trade of spices such as nutmeg. In East Asia it competed with other European countries and

companies wanting to control the spice trade – such as Portugal and the English East India Company – fighting several wars. The VOC, at times in its history, also engaged in piracy. In fact, it was piracy and the seizure of a Portuguese ship laden with cargo in Singapore in 1603 that gave the VOC a large capital injection and enabled it to begin to expand.

The VOC and labour

The VOC was run on a day to day basis at the top, in Holland, by 60 directors who oversaw operations. They were drawn from the largest shareholders and held the power to determine the long-term strategy of the VOC, but they were answerable to a type of board called a Council (the Heren XVII) drawn from 17 representatives of operations of the six cities in Holland where the VOC was based: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Delft, Hoorn, Middleburg and Enkhuizen.

In the colonies such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Cape, the VOC appointed governors, deputy governors, fiscals (judges), commanders and bureaucrats such as clerks, accountants, supervisors – and a police force. All top officials in the VOC were Europeans who formed the ruling class in Holland and in the VOC's colonies, but some of these bureaucrats were of mixed parentage (with a white father and a free black mother), and some were even slaves. At the Cape, for example, one of the forces operating as the police comprised slave convicts from Indonesia. The bureaucrats in the colonies were frequently not well paid, which led to corruption among these layers in the VOC, and to combat this the fiscal in each colony was directly answerable to the Heren XVII in Holland.

The labourers in the VOC – mostly based in the colonies or on the ships – consisted of contract workers, sailors, soldiers and slaves. The contract workers, sailors and soldiers were often drawn from impoverished people in Europe. Facing the real prospect of starving – as millions of people had been driven off the land in Europe by the ruling class, who turned common land into their private property in the 1400s, 1500s and 1600s – many poor people elected to join a company like the VOC as a contract labourer, sailor or soldier to avoid starvation. Others were homeless people picked up by labour recruiters – vagrancy was illegal in Europe – and forced into working for the VOC. Some workers and sailors were also drawn from the allies of the VOC in their colonies. The sailors and the contract labourers of the VOC were from many different countries: Holland,

“...the VOC employers – and from the 1660s the free burghers – would marry slaves, and to ensure the children were not slaves the owners would free the women before marriage. These women were usually very young, even as young as 12.”

Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland, France, China, India, Sri Lanka and parts of Indonesia.

The contract labourers, sailors and soldiers were not free – for the five-year period of their contract they could not break their contract and if they were caught running away on a ship or over the borders of the VOC colonies they would face extreme punishment: whippings, brandings and being placed in chains to work as convict labour. If they continued attempting to escape they would be put to death. Similarly, many crimes for sailors, soldiers and contract labourers could carry the death penalty which was carried out in the most horrible ways – hanging, strangling, breaking on the wheel, keelhauling and drowning. Such punishment could also be given out for the crimes of theft and murder.

The soldiers, sailors, contract labourers and slaves in the colonies, including the Cape, formed an underclass that was multinational, often shared common interests and socialised together in taverns. The contract labourers, sailors and soldiers of the VOC were very badly paid – their wages were sometimes not even enough to pay for food and many became indebted to the VOC and had to renew their contracts after five years. The other section of the underclass were slaves, imported from Mozambique, Madagascar, parts of India, Sri Lanka and parts of Indonesia. In Indonesia, local people who resisted the VOC were enslaved as labourers. The VOC would often conduct slave raids of their own to places such as Mozambique and Madagascar, but they would also buy slaves from local allies in East Asia.

The working lives of the sailors, soldiers, contract labour and slaves in the VOC were very brutal. Whipping by supervisors was routine, and outright terror was also used by the VOC to ensure compliant labour. Slaves were treated worst. If they resisted or threatened their bosses or supervisors they were beaten and could be put to death. If they ran away and were caught they would be branded on the face. If they ran away three

times and were caught they would be put to death. Slaves could also be put to death for hitting or killing their boss or supervisor, and for theft. They were given torturous death sentences that included pulling their intestines out while they were still alive, impaling, breaking on a cross and breaking on the wheel without a blow of mercy.

While slaves in the colonies, including the Cape, were drawn from outside the colony, a locally born slave population also emerged, descended from imported slaves, a slave mother and a local father, possibly a fellow slave, Khoikhoi, San or European father. The status of someone was, therefore, defined by their mother's status – if their mother was a slave then they were a slave even if their father was European. It was illegal, however, for male slaves to have sexual relations with European women in the VOC colonies – such a relationship would lead to the death penalty and for the slave it would be carried out by impaling.



Punishment

Contract labourers, sailors + soldiers were not free. If they were caught running away they would face extreme punishment: whippings, brandings or being put in chains.

Until the 1700s, the VOC employers – and from the 1660s the free burghers – would marry slaves, and to ensure the children were not slaves the owners would free the women before marriage. These women were usually very young, even as young as 12.

The VOC had the right of life and death over all people in its colonies, but the worst abuses were reserved for the underclass of contract labourers, sailors and soldiers, with slaves at the bottom. This violence left

a legacy at the Cape; it defined how labourers were treated. Even in 1973 it was legal for a farm owner in South Africa to use a sjambok to punish farm workers – a practice that had started in 1652 under slavery.

The VOC, wine and labour at the Cape

From 1652 onwards, the VOC had a permanent settlement at the Cape and, over time and through wars and violent conquest, it grew into a colony. From 1652 to 1700 the VOC settlement at the Cape was small and its aim was to supply wine, wheat and meat (which, up until 1700, was largely traded from the KhoiKhoi) to the crews of the VOC ships sailing between Europe and East Asia.

The VOC started producing wine almost from the first. Early on, soldiers were used to plant, prune, harvest and press the grapes but it soon became clear that soldiers alone could not do all the labour. In the first few years, the VOC came up with a number of plans to increase labour at the Cape. They thought of importing poor people from Europe to work on contracts of five years in the vineyards, but eventually decided against this as they felt European workers would not be used to the summer heat in the vineyards of the Cape and, also, it would be easier for European workers to escape by joining the crews of the VOC ships passing the Cape from East Asia back to Europe. Another reason for not using European workers was that despite their being on a five-year contract, their wages would have to be paid. It was cheaper and more profitable to use labour that did not have to be paid: slaves.

The second idea was to enslave the Khoikhoi and San in the Cape, but the VOC also decided against this. One reason was that the Khoikhoi and San still had their own societies outside of the Cape Peninsula that they could easily run to if they were enslaved. Another reason

was that in the 1650s there was at most 200 people (including soldiers and contract workers) at the VOC settlement in the Cape whereas the Khoikhoi and San communities near to the VOC settlement numbered around 20,000 people. To enslave the KhoiKhoi and San a major war would have to be fought and in the 1650s the VOC realised they could not wage such a widespread war (that would come later, when the VOC had enough soldiers at the Cape, but would be war to gain land). The third reason was that until the 1700s the VOC relied on trading with the Khoikhoi to get meat for the ships of the VOC that visited the Cape.

The VOC finally decided to use slaves from other parts of Africa, Madagascar and Asia. It was more profitable to use slaves than wage labourers. Slaves from other parts of Africa and Asia could not run away because they had no connections to the Khoikhoi and could be more easily identified than Europeans if they tried to stow away or join the crew of a ship. The first slaves brought to the Cape were imported in 1658. They had been on captured Portuguese slave ships on their way to Brazil from Benin and Angola. These were the only slaves brought to the Cape from West Africa. The main source of slaves for the VOC at the Cape were Madagascar, Mozambique, parts of India, parts of Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Slave ships would sail to these areas and either capture people as slaves or trade goods with local elites for slaves.

Work in the VOC vineyards

The first vineyards planted by the VOC were in the area of the Company Gardens in Cape Town. From 1658 until the period ending in 1700, these vineyards were planted and pruned by the slaves of the VOC who would also work on wheat-fields at other times of the year. Most of the slaves at the Cape were men. At first, slaves were housed in the old fort, but from 1679 onwards they

Ruling class.

The class of people in a society that has the power to determine, preside over and carry out that society's political, economic and social development.

“...European workers would not be used to the summer heat in the vineyards of the Cape. It was cheaper and more profitable to use labour that did not have to be paid: slaves.”

were housed at the Slave Lodge in Adderley Street (which still stands today). Overseers, often trusted slaves called madoors, would under the direction of white supervisors from the VOC physically oversee the slaves working on the planting, digging and pruning of vineyards. The madoors could use a sjambok on lower ranking slaves they thought were not working properly or were disobeying their orders.

At harvest time, the labour of the slaves would be supplemented by the VOC with low-ranking soldiers and any Khoikhoi and San who would work for the company (until 1700 most would not, as their societies were still independent). They worked during this period in the same conditions as slaves and under military command, under bad conditions and the constant threat of violence by overseers. The pressing of grapes was also done by soldiers and slaves tramping on them in large vats.

Along with the threat of violence, the VOC used wine to try and control the workers in the vineyards. The slaves – and Khoikhoi and soldiers during harvesting – would be provided with tots of wine in the morning, at lunch and in the afternoon. This left a legacy in the form of the dop system and the widespread addiction to alcohol even today among some farm workers. Indeed, the VOC encouraged the use of alcohol; they seemed to believe that giving slaves wine would make them more compliant and willing to follow orders. The working hours were very long, from sunrise to sunset – in summer, the day in the vineyards could be 15 hours. The hard work, along with a poor diet and punishment, meant that most slaves lived short lives (even today agricultural workers have a shorter life expectancy than the rest of the population, because of the harsh nature of the work).

After work at the slave lodge, rations were given to the slaves. Meat was provided at times, but in the form of offcuts, and the slaves were always close to starvation. Life in the slave lodge was very harsh, and fellow slaves who were trusted by the VOC, madoors, would be

charged with policing at night. One section of the slave lodge was also used as a hospital for sick sailors and soldiers who had contracted diseases such as smallpox. Another section housed political prisoners from Indonesia banished by the VOC to the Cape because of their resistance. The ailing underclass, political prisoners and slaves were housed together. At night, the slave lodge was also used as a brothel by sailors, soldiers, local farmers and VOC bureaucrats. Women slaves – who also did manual labour and were used as washerwomen – were used as sex slaves.

The VOC and control of the wine trade

From 1652 until its bankruptcy in 1800, the VOC had a monopoly over the wine trade at the Cape. It alone could legally supply taverns and passing ships with wine and it set the prices for wine even for private farmers. Until 1700 most private farmers at the Cape were small-scale and most sold any surplus wine they had to the VOC. Some did smuggle wine to ships and taverns, but even they were only small producers. Thus, for the first 50 years the VOC dominated wine production at the Cape, largely with slave labour.

Resistance by VOC vineyard workers

The slaves working the VOC vineyards, along with the seasonal workers in the form of some Khoikhoi and soldiers, would resist by collectively agreeing to work slowly. Another collective form of resistance involved sailors, soldiers and slaves running away together. These runaways had two options: they could try escaping to friendly Khoikhoi who might allow them to join their community but this was dangerous as the VOC would offer the Khoikhoi rewards for returning runaways. While some Khoikhoi would accept the runaways, others would not, and sometimes hunted them down. The second option was to raid and steal from the small

Slaves.

A slave is a person who is the property of an overlord and who has to obey all orders – including working without any monetary remuneration.

private farms that existed on the edges of the colony and/or to raid and steal food from the Khoikhoi (which is also why some Khoikhoi were hostile to runaways). This was also dangerous. The VOC and private citizens would work together to send out commandoes to recapture slaves. If caught, the runaways – especially slaves – faced torture or execution.

Running away, however, was a popular form of resistance. The first runaway slaves were a group of seven from Angola who tried to get back to their homeland overland in 1658. It is not known what happened to them as they were last seen by a Khoikhoi group near Saldanha Bay, travelling north. Another form of resistance involved slaves building a life outside the control of the VOC at the Cape. They may have maintained some of their own religious practices outside Christianity. Certainly, they socialised together on their days off (Sundays and Mondays), including on the outskirts of Cape Town. Low ranking soldiers, sailors and slaves also drank and gambled together. The VOC was very fearful of these types of socialising because (although the VOC encouraged the dop system) drinking and gambling outside of its direct control was seen as dangerous and viewed as resistance.

There were also more individual forms of resistance. Many individual slaves would try and burn down VOC property and the houses of free burghers in the Cape. Some would steal from the VOC and the free burghers as a form of resistance – and even to survive. One form of resistance was assaulting or even murdering VOC overseers and bosses despite knowing that such an action would lead to torture and execution.

The conditions for the slaves who worked the vineyards at the Cape were violent and harsh. This harshness brutalised some individuals of the underclass – slaves, Khoikhoi labourers, white contract labourers, sailors and soldiers – and there would often be violence among them. But the underclass was not docile and it did resist, as a multiracial class that challenged the mainly white VOC ruling class (a small minority of officials were of 'mixed' descent, but they were very few, for if you did not have at least 50 per cent European descent from your father's side and a free mother you could not be a high ranking official in the VOC colonies). As workers, and farm workers in particular, we should remember that resistance to oppression and exploitation in South Africa began with the very first vineyards and wheat-fields.

WOENSDAG
9 JANUARIE
IS DIT VAS.
ONS GAAN
NIE 'KAK' VATI

BOER
IN VAS







Chapter 2

1700-1800

From 1700 to 1800 the VOC still played a dominant role in the Cape. Its top officials – who now identified themselves as exclusively white – still formed part of the ruling class. Nonetheless, some private farmers who were free burghers/citizens (not working directly for the VOC) owned land originally granted by the VOC (but not owned by the VOC). They could accumulate wealth and had become an important part of the ruling class at the Cape. Most of these farmers produced both wheat and wine, but some produced wine exclusively.

“...wealthier ruling-class farmers used overseers called knegts. The knegts were responsible for the day-to-day discipline of slaves and KhoiKhoi labourers on the farms. Corporal punishment to enforce discipline was routinely used by owners, and by knegts in particular.”

The VOC still had monopoly over the sale of wine to passing ships and the taverns in Cape Town. All farmers were, therefore, legally obliged to sell wine not produced for household consumption to the VOC. It was legally considered smuggling if farmers sold wine directly to taverns or passing ships, and the VOC would fine them for doing so.

By 1700, a small group of farmers had become large landowners. Some of them, like Simon van der Stel who owned a massive farm in Constantia near Cape Town, were VOC officials who had used their positions to acquire land and wealth. Others, like Martin Melck, became free citizens after being soldiers in the VOC. Upon his release from the VOC, Martin Melck bought farms in the Stellenbosch area, and through marriage he also gained farms across the Cape, becoming one of the richest people in the colony in the mid to late 1700s.

By the 1700s, farms producing wine existed all along the slopes of Table Mountain, the Stellenbosch area, Tygervalley and Franschoek and, by later that century, even the Langeberg. By then, while the VOC still had its own vineyards, most wine in the Cape was produced by private farmers – with a small elite owning most of the vineyards after buying out less productive rivals.

Wine farms and labour

Most of the labourers on private farms were slaves and, during peak seasons, KhoiKhoi people. All of the wealthy landowners who were part of the ruling class owned slaves. Most of these farms had about 20 slaves each (some had more, but poorer farmers had far fewer slaves and some could not afford any slaves at all) so the number of slaves on each farm was far below the number of slaves on the cotton plantations and sugar plantations in North America.

The slaves would live permanently on the farms, usually in a slave 'house' akin to a barn, but also sometimes in

the house of an owner. The slaves would work on both wine and on wheat production and would be busy for most of the year with preparation and harvesting. During harvest periods owners would also hire their slaves out to other farmers for a fee. In fact, slave owners in Cape Town during harvest times would even hire slaves out to farmers around the slopes of Table Mountain. A few slave owners made their income from hiring out slaves to farmers, and did not farm themselves.

There was also a market in the Cape where slaves could be bought and sold. While some slaves were born in the Cape, many were still imported from Madagascar, Mozambique, Sri Lanka and, to a lesser degree, Indonesia and India. This, as in the 1600s, could include slaves being acquired through local allies in Asia and Mozambique or by raiding expeditions to Madagascar.

By the 1700s most of the KhoiKhoi groups had been conquered through warfare by the VOC, and their land seized so that many were now forced to work as paid labourers (not slaves) by the elite white section of the ruling class in the Cape. The KhoiKhoi still tended to avoid long-term contracts and would mainly be used as seasonal labour during harvest periods.

Sailors and soldiers were still part of a multiracial underclass in the Cape, but few now worked as farm labourers (they mainly did urban labour such as building and woodcutting). In Cape Town itself the lives of low ranking soldiers, slaves and KhoiKhoi were still very similar and they still socialised, had relationships and formed part of one class. But in the rural areas the slaves and KhoiKhoi did most of the labour and were the rural underclass.

Poorer farmers managed their farms themselves, while wealthier ruling-class farmers used overseers called knegts, mostly the children of white farmers but who were not in line to inherit land from their family and so worked for wealthier farmers. Some were also ex-soldiers of the VOC. A small minority were the

descendants of free blacks, slaves who had managed to gain their freedom. The knegts were responsible for the day-to-day discipline of slaves and KhoiKhoi labourers on the farms.

Life of wine farm workers in the 1700s

Life for slaves on the farms of the Cape in the 1700s was bad. Hours were still sunrise to sunset. Corporal punishment to enforce discipline was routinely used by owners, and by knegts in particular. Beatings were the norm. Slaves and KhoiKhoi were given dops daily (usually at the start of the day, during a break and at the end of the day), either as a reward or due to the belief that this made workers compliant. Thus, alcoholism was encouraged by farm owners among slaves and KhoiKhoi labourers.

While all farm owners encouraged knegts to use beatings to maintain discipline, most stopped short of killing slaves or KhoiKhoi workers. In

the case of slaves, this was not due to any nicety on the part of farm owners – rather, it was about profit as if a farmer killed one of their slaves it would mean a loss of money. Some wealthier farm owners were very brutal because they could afford the cost of killing a slave. One particularly harsh farm and slave owner in the early 1700s was Michiel Otto who had a number of farms that produced wine, including Vergelegen, Kliene Zwart River and Kromme River. If a slave had committed an offence in Otto's eyes he would be tied to a pole or tree, covered in honey and stung by bees, on occasions even to death.

The role of the VOC in punishing privately owned slaves

Farm owners and knegts had a right to beat slaves with sjamboks, planks and sticks. They could legally beat slaves to near death, but it was considered illegal to kill a slave although in cases where a slave was beaten to death, or killed by an owner, the charge was not murder or manslaughter – the VOC would charge the owner with excessive punishment. If he was found guilty, all the owner would face was a fine which was very small: one fourth of the fine for someone caught smuggling wine.

The VOC – through the landrosts (magistrates) and the police in rural areas made up of convict slaves from Indonesia – were officially in charge of punishing privately-owned slaves who ran away or committed any crime, including hitting or killing an owner or a knegt.



The VOC could flog and brand runaway slaves and could, and would, put them to death in horrific ways if they were convicted of a serious crime.

The resistance of farm labourers in the 1700s

Like VOC slaves, privately-owned slaves and seasonal KhoiKhoi labourers on wine farms resisted their oppression in various ways. They could work slowly, and in serious cases some attacked owners, especially knegts, if they felt they were being treated too harshly. Some slaves would also try and burn down farmhouses as a form of resistance. This happened a lot and is one of the reasons why old Cape houses have gables – their function was to stop burning thatch roofs from collapsing over doorways, leaving an escape route open.

The most favoured way to resist during this period, however, was for slaves to run away. In the 1700s, slaves doing so sometimes tried to get to the Nama or even the Xhosa. This was difficult as the distances were far and the slave owners in the 1700s set up the commando system where white farm owners would come together as a militia to protect farms and hunt down runaway slaves. The commando system has a very long history – indeed, it lasted until 1994 and was even informally revived by farmers in the Western Cape during the 2012/13 farm-worker strike.

During the 1700s, however, some runaway slaves resisted by forming groups and communities. They would often run away together – for example, in 1712 a group of 23 slaves ran from Constantia. In one case, one of these communities of runaway slaves was quite large – up to 50 people – who lived together for many years as a community in the remote coastal area and mountains of Hangklip on False Bay. This type of community of runaway slaves who created a new communal life existed in many places around the world where slavery was practised. They were called maroon communities. The Hangklip maroon community of runaway slaves formed a major challenge to the VOC and the ruling class at the Cape. It began in 1725 and early on it was under the leadership of a runaway slave called Leander Bugis, originally from Indonesia. Although the runaway slave community at Hangklip did band together, Leander Bugis had a very violent

temper if his leadership was questioned and he killed people he saw as rivals in the community. Nonetheless, the Hangklip maroon community did resist slavery. They would regularly steal clothes and food from the farms belonging to the owners they had run away from. The group was also well armed as they had a number of muskets and would get flint and ammunition from fellow slaves in Cape Town.

The Hangklip Community was a very real threat not only to farmers, but also to the VOC and Cape Town. In the 1730s on three occasions, members of the Hangklip community tried to burn the city down. On one occasion, a member of the Hangklip maroon community whose name was Batjoe also tried to poison Cape Town's water supply by dropping the bladders of poisonous toadfish in it. The attempt did not work.



Resistance

Running away, building a life outside of the control of the VOC at the Cape, theft from the VOC, burning houses, murder / assault of VOC bosses were all forms of resistance against slavery.

The authorities at the Cape tried to crush the Hangklip maroon community several times by sending out commandos of VOC soldiers, white farm owners, and also KhoiKhoi. The maroon community resisted and sometimes the commandos were repelled as the community was armed. Leander Bugis's group was eventually defeated by one of these commandos. Soon afterwards, a new group of runaway slaves formed a new maroon community at Hangklip which lasted until after slaves were freed in 1838.

By the 1700s, the leading wine farmers were free citizens who identified themselves as white. These farmers formed part of the ruling class and most slaves were owned by this wealthy elite (although the VOC still was the largest single slave owner). The lives of the slaves and seasonal KhoiKhoi workers was dreadful as they were under the close control of owners and knegts – but resistance by slaves was growing.

By the 1700s... the lives of the slaves and seasonal KhoiKhoi workers was dreadful as they were under the close control of owners and knegts – but resistance by slaves was growing.





Chapter 3

1800-1838

From 1800 until 1838 the wine industry underwent many changes. In 1795 Britain took control of the Cape from the VOC. After briefly handing the Cape back to the Dutch, the British took permanent control of the Cape in 1806.

From 1800 until 1838 many people of the underclass – sailors, soldiers, slaves, white and Khoikhoi labourers – were influenced by revolutionary ideas of freedom and equality. Indeed, people of the underclass in many places across the world had undertaken successful or failed revolutions. There had been the French Revolution that started in 1789 when people in France rose up and overthrew the royal family. There had been the Revolution in Haiti that started in 1791 when slaves overthrew the French colonial state and the slave holders, and freed themselves. There had also been an attempted revolution by workers and peasants in Ireland. We often think that people at this time were isolated in different places in the world. They were not. Through shipping and trade, members of the underclass around the world had contact with one another, and ideas of freedom and equality spread, including to the Cape.

Wine farming under British rule

With the British taking over the Cape, from 1800 until slaves were freed in 1838, wine farming underwent a boom. The British colonial state, unlike the VOC, allowed wine farmers to sell their wine directly to the ships passing the Cape, and to the taverns in Cape Town. This saw wine farming on its own starting to become profitable. Bigger and more successful farmers bought out the farms of smaller competitors, and wine farms started to come into the hands of fewer and fewer owners. Some farms also stopped producing both wheat and wine and focused just on wine because of the market to ships and taverns opening up.

Along with permitting the sale of wine directly to ships and taverns, the British state lowered the taxes of Cape wine being exported to Britain, and an export market for Cape wine was created. In fact, much of the wine produced at the Cape from 1800 to 1838 was exported to Britain. This also led to an elite of wine farmers becoming increasingly wealthy.



Influence

From 1800 to 1838, many people of the underclass - sailors, soldier, slaves, white and KhoiKhoi labourers - were influenced by revolutionary ideas of freedom and equality.

Labour on the wine farms from 1800 to 1838

Labour conditions on the wine farms were still similar to those of the 1700s. Slaves continued to be the permanent workers on farms and Khoikhoi the seasonal workers. Beatings with sjamboks continued to be how owners and overseers maintained discipline.

What did change is that during this period, the British state – under pressure from the threat of possible revolutions in its colonies – banned the importation of slaves. Farmers could still own slaves, but they could not buy new ones through importing them, so most of the slaves on farms during this period had been born at the Cape from slave parents who had been imported during the late 1700s – mainly from Mozambique and Madagascar.

The British also abolished torture as a form of punishment for runaway slaves and runaway slaves were no longer branded on their faces if caught. They were still, however, arrested and put into chain gangs to work for the colonial state at the Cape, building roads and improving the harbour at Cape Town. The British colonial state did keep the death penalty for crimes such as murder. The death penalty for everyone, including slaves, was hanging and the brutal ways the VOC put slaves to death were ended. This was a gain

“...During 1800 to 1838, the British state – under pressure from the threat of possible revolutionaries in its colonies – banned the importation of slaves. Farmers could still own slaves, but they could not buy new ones through importing.”

for slave farm workers at the Cape that came about through the threat of revolution.

How farm workers resisted

From 1800 to 1838, farm workers who were slaves and/or Khoikhoi sometimes continued to resist on an individual level, including occasionally through attacking farm owners and overseers who had beaten them or by trying to burn farms down. They also still tried to run away if they felt farm owners and overseers had treated them badly. This, though, was getting harder and harder as the Cape became more populated and farms stretched further into the hinterland. The only real option for slaves was to try and reach Hangklip or the Xhosa in the Eastern Cape, who had also been driven further east by the expanding colonial state.

The reality that slaves, Khoikhoi, sailors and low-ranking soldiers were becoming class conscious because of the revolutionary times was seen in an attempted, but failed, revolution that took place in 1808. A slave, Louis van Mauritius, living in Cape Town, worked at a wine merchant. During his free time, he would socialise with other slaves, sailors and labourers. On one of these occasions he met two people from Ireland, James Hooper and Michael Kelly, who had been sailors but were working as labourers in Cape Town. They discussed ideas about the revolutions that had been taking place, including how slavery was banned in Europe and how slaves had won their freedom in Haiti. Out of this, they started to plot a slave rebellion in the Cape and were joined by six other slaves from Cape Town. The idea behind the plot was that the group of eight would travel to the farms in the interior and recruit the slaves and Khoikhoi labourers on the farms to undertake a revolution; the slaves would rebel on the farms, free themselves and march on Cape Town to overthrow the colonial state, end slavery and implement freedom and equality.

The eight conspirators set off for the area of modern-day Malmesbury. They dressed Louis as a Spanish sea captain and the seven other members pretended to be his servants, so as not to raise suspicion and, if need be, for Louis to use his 'authority' to tell slaves they should be free. On 27 October 1808 they reached the farm of Gerhadus Louw. The next morning they recruited the slaves and Khoikhoi labourers on the farm and then together they went from farm to farm. In the process, 360 slaves and Khoikhoi workers joined the rebellion. They seized the wagons and guns on these farms, took some of the farmers captive (some were beaten and there was some violence, but no one was killed), and some farms were burned. The 360 armed rebels then marched on Cape Town. The idea was to fight for freedom and raise the red flag. On 30 October they reached the outskirts of Cape Town. The colonial state sent out cavalry to stop and capture them. At Salt River the two sides fought a brief battle, but the colonial troops won, capturing 326 of the rebels. Of those, 47 were put on trial and found guilty of treason. Louis van Mauritius, James Hooper and 11 others were hanged. The rest were given less harsh sentences and some were sent to Robben Island. Although the rebels lost, their fight for freedom was inspiring and shows that if people collectively come together they can develop the power to fight for freedom.

From 1800 to 1838 there was substantial change in the Cape. Wine farming became more specialised and new markets, both locally and internationally, opened up. Some wine farmers – off the backs of the labour of slaves and Khoikhoi workers – became rich. The conditions for slaves and workers did improve a bit in terms of the law, but they still could be beaten at work by farm owners and overseers. But the underclass of slaves, Khoikhoi workers and even some white workers resisted, influenced by new revolutionary ideas. This saw an attempt by the slaves and Khoikhoi workers at the Cape to try and achieve freedom through revolution.





Chapter 4

1838-1900

There were major changes in the wine industry between 1838 and 1900. To begin with, in 1834 slaves in the Cape were legally freed (actual, freedom had to wait another four years as ex-slaves were forced to work for their ex-owners as so-called apprentices).

With the freeing of slaves, wine farm owners experienced a problem getting enough cheap labour. They came up with various schemes and were helped by the state, but a labour shortage existed until 1900 on the wine farms of the Cape. At the same time, Britain ended its low tax rates on wine imported from South Africa, which created a crisis for many farm owners. Into this, stepped major capitalists and politicians like Cecil John Rhodes and John X Merrimen – and they snapped up many farms beginning in the 1880s, becoming some of the biggest wine farmers in the Western Cape.

Wine farming from 1838 to 1900

By 1838 the low taxes on imported Cape wines had been ended by the British state. In Britain, therefore, Cape wines had to compete with wines imported from countries such as France. The wines from the Cape tended to be of poor quality, and the Cape wine industry began to slump, many wine farmers going bankrupt as their main market, Britain, was no longer viable.

Beginning in the 1880s, big capitalists in South Africa – who had made fortunes out of diamond and gold mining in the modern-day Northern Cape and Gauteng – began buying up wine farms in the Western Cape. Cecil John Rhodes, for example, came to own a number of such wine farms, including the large farm of Boschendal, and the prime minister of the colonial state at the Cape bought wine farms, including Rustenberg, in the late 1800s.

These big capitalists also began to implement true capitalist relations of production in the wine sector, introducing capitalist initiatives like the mechanisation of grape pressing, and they soon out-competed farmers who did not. They began treating farms purely as capital – private property that is only owned to be productive and ensure profits – whereas older wine farmers had seen the farm as a place of residence and a family business.

Labour on wine farms from 1838 to 1900

In 1838 slaves were freed in the Cape. Many of them tried to leave the farms because of the brutal conditions and treatment. Until 1860 they could try to join a mission station and acquire a small piece of land. Many former slaves did so, and merged with the Khoikhoi communities at these mission stations. While Khoikhoi and ex-slaves (who would become defined as one group, so-called 'coloureds', by the Cape colonial and later apartheid states) did gain access to some land on the mission stations, most could not make a living all year round and to survive they still often had to work on wine farms on a seasonal basis.

Another option was finding work in Cape Town. Again, former slaves and the



remainder of the Khoikhoi peoples became defined as one racial group, 'coloureds'. The work most of them got in Cape Town was building the harbour and roads that the colonial state was undertaking. From the 1860s there were other options: they could go to Kimberley or Johannesburg to try and find work on the mines.

For those who stayed on the farms the conditions remained harsh. Working from sunrise to sunset was still the norm. Wages, if farm workers received them, were very low. Many farm owners tried to decrease the wages of farm workers by paying, in part or wholly, with wine and food. The use of child labour continued and the children of farm workers had to work for the farm owners until the age of 21. Punishment still included beatings despite workers being wage labourers and not slaves. The laws, known as the Masters and Servants Acts, that were passed from the 1840s until the end of 1900 made this legal. These laws were not repealed fully for farm workers until 1974.

How farm owners tried to recruit and control labour, 1838 to 1900

After the end of slavery in 1838, wine farmers had a problem getting enough cheap labour all year round. Seasonal labour was available from mission stations, but most of the wine farmers felt that the rates were too high. Some ex-slaves and Khoikhoi remained working on the farms, even after 1838. From the 1840s, the state stepped in to help find a source of cheap labour for wine farmers and to keep wages as low as possible.

In 1833 to 1841, the Cape colonial state, working with the Children's Friend Society in Britain, tried to fill the labour gap left by former slaves leaving the wine farms. Under this scheme, poor British children or orphans would be imported into the Cape to work on wine farms. Some children were imported, but by 1841 there was public outrage in Britain at this scheme with many arguing that exporting children from Britain to the Cape amounted to a form of slavery – indeed, there was an outcry that this was 'white slavery'. Because of protests, this scheme was ended.

The colonial state passed a number of laws between the 1840s and 1870s to ensure that Khoikhoi and ex-

slaves were tied into working on farms. These laws stated that it was a criminal offence for farm workers to break labour contracts and that strikes by farm workers were illegal. Trade unions were illegal and farm workers could be criminally punished for disobeying instructions or for negligence. All of these laws were passed to keep the wages of Khoikhoi and ex-slaves on the farms as low as possible.

Despite the Acts, there was still a shortage of labour. Another scheme, started in the mid-1800s, was to import migrant labour from what today is Namibia. These workers were secured through middlemen, including chiefs. Some labourers from other tribes came from other parts of South Africa, usually to earn enough money to buy cheap guns so that the resistance to the expansion of the colonial state could be furthered.

From the 1850s, another source of labour for wine farms in the Western Cape was secured by the wars the colonial state waged on the Xhosa in the Eastern Cape and the hut taxes and poll taxes on the Xhosa people to force them into labouring on the gold mines, diamond mines and farms. Linked to this, a scheme was established to recruit migrant labour from the Eastern Cape to work on the wine farms.

Despite all these attempts by the state to create and ensure cheap labour for wine farms, there was still a shortage of labour. To attract permanent workers, wine farm owners in the 1800s began building accommodation for workers and their families – these are the origins of the worker houses that are still found on some wine farms today. These houses were slightly distanced from those of the white owners and managers and tended to be built on low ground that could be easily watched to ensure discipline. As it had done under slavery, paternalism also played a role in disciplining workers; farm owners treated workers as 'children', and even though they provided small houses to workers after 1838 they always used the threat of taking the houses away as a form of discipline.

Worker resistance, 1838 to 1900

The main way workers resisted was, as in the past, through individual acts like working slowly. The

problem, however, was that the colonial state had become far more powerful and its reach began to extend into the everyday lives of workers. The state could legally punish workers for forming unions or going on strike, and workers on farms did not yet have the collective power to push back.

The most effective way workers could resist was that once their contracts ended they could leave to seek work on the mines or at the public works department in Cape Town where jobs were easily available. Some, who lived on mission stations, were able to avoid permanent contracts, and only worked on the farms seasonally (on the other hand, the mission stations were also where colonial ideology and loyalty to Britain were spread among workers).



Wages

Wages, if farm workers received them, were very low. Many farm owners tried to decrease the wages of farm workers by paying, in part or wholly, with wine and food.

“... The main way workers resisted was, as in the past, through individual acts like working slowly. The problem, however, was that the colonial state had become far more powerful and its reach began to extend into the everyday lives of workers.”

Despite all the attempts by the state to create and ensure cheap labour for wine farms, there was still a shortage of labour.





Chapter 5

1900 onwards

From 1900 onwards, the laws that came to define apartheid in the Western Cape began to be implemented. The 1913 Land Act legally enforced the ownership of wine farms by a small white elite (not the white working class).

Racial laws were also passed that made the Cape – and labour on the wine farms – a labour preference area for so-called 'coloureds'. Indeed, the South African state – which became independent in 1910 and was controlled by a local white ruling class – pushed the idea of 'coloureds' as a separate race in order to divide and rule. Whites in the Western Cape were favoured for urban jobs, and 'coloureds' on the farms as labourers. Attempts were made through the pass laws to exclude African blacks from the Cape, including even the right to work on wine farms.

The wine sector from 1900 to 1994

The South African state, whether under segregation or apartheid, provided the wealthiest capitalists in the wine sector with strong support. The state made subsidies available to the biggest wine farmers helping them to boost their profits. They also protected the wine industry through high taxes on imported wine, making it expensive and thus uncompetitive.



Conditions

...Farm owners tended to provide housing for permanent workers, the living conditions were bad. Housing tended to be in poor condition, unpainted and with broken windows. Almost all housing for farm workers under apartheid had no electricity.

Perhaps the biggest event in the wine sector from 1900 until 1994 was the formation of KWV in 1918. KWV was formed when wine farmers in the Western Cape came together to form a buying, marketing and selling cooperative for their benefit. The state helped increase the power of KWV – and hence the big wine farmers that dominated the cooperative – when it gave it the right to set the prices of wine. Indeed, KWV came to have a monopoly over wine sales to retailers, which ensured that farmers got good prices for the wine they were producing when they sold it to KWV.

Many wine farmers became increasingly rich through KWV. They usually produced very low quality wine, but

received good prices from KWV. This situation lasted until 1997.

Labour in the wine sector from 1900 until 1994

From 1910 onwards, the South African state – both the segregationist state and, from 1948, the apartheid state – wanted to limit the number of black Africans working and living in the Western Cape. For that reason, most permanent workers on the wine farms were 'coloured'. The segregationist and apartheid states strongly encouraged a 'coloured' identity to divide and rule the working class and to limit united resistance to the racist state. As part of this, the state also encouraged 'coloureds' to look down upon black Africans.

There was also a gender division on how 'coloured' peoples labour was used on the wine farms from 1900 until 1994. Men were the permanent workers. They had the right to housing. This meant that women workers could not reside in worker houses in their own right – their presence on the farm was tied to their husband or partner. Women and children were, however, used to boost the labour force during harvest times. Thus, 'coloured' women were seasonal labourers only.

Nonetheless, up until the 1980s there was still not enough labour, especially during harvest periods. The state assisted the wine farm owners by providing convict labour, and for this reason established prisons in areas close to wine farms including rural areas such as Tokai, Drakenstein and Langeberg. Some of the biggest wine farms, such as Groot Constantia, made use of prison labour up until the practice ended in 1984.

Conditions for workers

Although farm owners tended to provide housing for permanent workers, the living conditions were bad. Housing tended to be in poor condition, unpainted and with broken windows. Almost all housing for farm workers under apartheid had no electricity. Workers and their families used dam or river water as drinking water as this was not supplied by most farmers.

Work was harsh. Working hours were from sunrise to sunset. Pay was very low, and often workers were paid in food and via the dop system as a result of which generations of people were born with Alcohol Foetal Syndrome. Workplace health and safety was

nonexistent, and increasingly dangerous pesticides and herbicides were introduced to control pests in the vineyards. This caused generations of farm workers to suffer from diseases such as cancer. It was also legally still allowed, until 1974, for farm owners and managers to beat workers as punishment.

The right of farm workers to join and form unions was also denied in law. For this reason, the wages of farm workers were (along with those of domestic workers) the lowest in South Africa.

Until 1992, farm workers were not fully covered by the labour laws of South Africa. Farm owners and managers could dismiss and evict farm workers and their families at will and without being required to follow any legal procedure – and they used this power, and the threat of evictions and dismissal, to discipline workers and their families.

Worker resistance from 1900 to 1994

Although much of the resistance continued to be on an individual level, in 1919 the Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU) was formed – the second union in South Africa to be formed by black workers (the first union was the revolutionary syndicalist Industrial Workers of Africa).

While much of the ICU membership consisted of dock workers and farm dwellers, it also organised farm workers. Through the ICU these farm workers not only fought for higher wages and better working conditions, but also fought for land and against the legacy of the 1913 Land Act.

At its height, the ICU was extremely powerful and had an estimated membership of between 100,000 and 250,000. The South African state saw the ICU as a major threat and attempted to ban and suppress it. Its leader,

Clements Kadalie, was banned and arrested several times. By the 1930s the ICU was in decline and never achieved the membership and militancy of the 1920s.

It was only in the 1970s and 1980s that unions for black workers were truly revived. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, farm workers started to organise, despite having no freedom of association. Through the broader anti-apartheid struggles, the pressure that the whole working class was putting on capitalists and the state did lead to some improvements for farm workers. This is why and how farm workers came to be covered by the Basic Conditions of Employment Acts of 1992 and 1996 and the Labour Relations Act of 1994.







Chapter 6

1994 onwards

From 1994 onwards, farm workers saw some gains – at least on paper.

The working day was limited to nine hours and overtime pay was introduced. Since 1994, farm workers in the wine sector have been covered by South Africa's labour laws, and farm owners and managers have to follow a legal process before they can fire a worker.

In 2002, the state implemented a minimum wage for farm workers through sectorial determination. In theory, this was supposed to combat the worst aspects of exploitation, but it did not.

Similarly, on paper farm owners and managers had to (and have to) follow a legal process before they can evict farm workers and their families. Trade unions also now have a legal right to organise farm workers, although in practice this is undermined as farms are considered private property and unions have to have permission from owners to enter the farms and recruit workers. From 1994 until today, farm workers have gained some rights, but farm owners have tried to undermine these to keep wages as low as possible.

The wine sector from 1994 until today

From the late 1980s through the 1990s the wine sector began to undergo very big changes. In the late 1980s the standard of wines in South Africa began to improve. By 1990 the state also withdrew KWV's monopoly over the wine sector; the sector was liberalised and producers could sell their wine on the open market. Trade tariffs and laws were also changed to allow exporting wine to become easier. Gradually, after 1994, this saw more and more wine farms, cellars and corporations entering into the wine export market, especially into Europe. The bigger wine farms and producers expanded, as they were now earning income in euros and dollars, and they bought out smaller wine farms – so since 1994 there has been another centralisation of wine production under fewer owners.

Another significant change took place in 1997, when KWV was privatised and changed from a cooperative to a private company, with shareholders. This meant a total end to KWV's monopoly and many new cellars, such as Robertson Wine, sprang up from the 1990s onwards.



Rights

From 1994 until today, farm workers have gained some rights, but farm owners have tried to undermine these to keep wages as low as possible.

As more money could be earned from exporting wine, many wheat farmers began transforming their farms into wine farms. Half of all wine produced in South Africa is now exported.

Conditions for workers and their families in the wine sector

Despite their having rights on paper, conditions for farm workers remained bad from 1994 onwards. Pay has remained very low. Health and safety standards are almost non-existent and many people still face health problems from being exposed to dangerous herbicides, pesticides and fungicides. The legacy of the dop system – although it has been officially banned – remains, and many children of farm workers in the wine sector are still born with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome.

Since 1994 over 2 million farm workers and their families have been evicted from farms in South Africa. In the wine sector, many farm owners who evicted farm workers from cottages have changed these into accommodation for tourists and the former farm workers and their families have been forced into informal settlements and townships that have grown outside the white rural towns. Often when farm owners evict farm workers and their families – as happened in De Doorns – they bribe local politicians to put them at the top of the housing list, which causes tension within communities.

Racism by farm owners and managers has also continued after 1994. Beatings – and even the murder of farm workers – still happen. Farm owners continue to practise paternalism and use the control over workers houses and transport to town to try and maintain discipline, with the threat of taking these away should workers challenge them.

Since 1994 there has also been a significant move to reduce the number of permanent workers on wine farms in order to reduce labour costs and thus increase profits. As part of this, the people that form the pool of labour in the informal settlements and townships in the rural are used for labour broker, casual and seasonal work. Using low paid temporary workers also enables farmers to increase profits. Farm owners and managers in the wine sector have increasingly used migrant workers from Zimbabwe, Lesotho and the Eastern Cape. The aim of using migrant labour is to ensure control –

“Increasing mechanisation has meant that the overall number of workers in the sector has declined. Rural unemployment has become a major problem.”

migrant labourers are easier to isolate as they have no existing connections to local communities. Many wine farm owners also keep the passports of migrant workers from other countries as a form of control.

In the Western Cape, xenophobia among workers has at times arisen towards migrant workers. This is a major problem as the enemy are the farm owners and managers who are exploiting both local and migrant workers. Workers are not the enemy of workers, no matter where they come from.

Increasing mechanisation has meant that the overall number of workers in the sector has declined. Rural unemployment has become a major problem.

Resistance by farm workers since 1994

Since 1994, a small section of farm workers has become unionised – a significant gain, even though the vast majority are still unorganised. A number of unions such as the Commercial Stevedore Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU) have been formed. Since its formation in 2007, CSAAWU has been through important struggles in the wine sector – including an international campaign to improve the lives of wine farm workers in South Africa – that have seen some gains on farms such as the right to food gardens, improved housing, better health and safety and better wages. This shows that collective power and organising by farm workers can win gains.

The biggest struggle by farm workers since 1994 was the strike that occurred in 2012/13 in the Western Cape. It saw farm workers (mainly casual and seasonal) self-organising to undertake a wildcat strike and protests for a better wage. At the time, the wage for farm workers was R69 a day; the workers self-organised through mass meetings in rural townships to protest and to demand R150 a day. Some unions, such as CSAAWU, joined the strike and the protests spread across the rural areas of the Western Cape. The state and police,

working with some local politicians, tried to undermine the strike. Farmers also tried to revive informal commandos to crush the strike. Police violence against strikers was widespread – because the state is an instrument of the ruling class it tries to further capitalism for its own interests and those of capitalists, and it will use the police to do so.

Eventually, the state, farmers, police and politicians were able to end the strike – partially through promises of addressing the bad working conditions of farm workers. Nonetheless, through militancy and direct action farm workers won some gains, including a wage increase to R105 a day. This shows that self-organising and collective action by workers can change conditions for the better.

Ever since the 2012 strike, however, farm owners have been trying to limit the gains that were made. Intimidation continues of workers who try to organise. Basics such as electricity or transport to town, that used sometimes to be provided at low cost or for free to workers and their families, have been rolled back as punishment. Evictions have also continued and Covid-19 has been used by farmers to try downsizing their labour force.

Coming out of the 2012/13 strike, the union CSAAWU also learned many lessons; as casual, labour-broker and seasonal workers were the main force during the strike, CSAAWU has tried to organise these workers on an area basis. This is important, as the strike of 2012/13 was organised in areas through mass meetings and committees. To try break the power of farm owners over workers, CSAAWU has also started soup kitchens so that workers do not have to rely exclusively on farmers for food. This is also a way of addressing rural poverty and rebuilding the pride and dignity that farm owners have tried to take away from workers throughout history.





Chapter 7

Into the future

Casualisation, and the increasing use of migrant labour, is likely to intensify in the future. More and more workers will become temporary workers in the wine sector. Evictions, unless successfully challenged, will also continue because providing housing lowers the profits of wine farms.

Casualisation, and the increasing use of migrant labour, is likely to intensify in the future. More and more workers will become temporary workers in the wine sector. Evictions, unless successfully challenged, will also continue because providing housing lowers the profits of wine farms.

Increasingly, workers and their families will probably live off farms, in informal settlements. Mechanisation will increase in future.

Ideas on how to fight back

The key to workers fighting back – by first winning gains such as better wages, better working conditions and limiting evictions – is through self-organising and collective action, as shown by the rebellion of 1808 and the strike of 2012/13. Unions such as CSAAWU need to organise within the townships and informal settlements, as this is where most farm workers now live. Issues beyond the workplace, such as housing, electricity and water in townships, need to be taken up so unions become a political and social force in their own right and are able to grow (the agricultural sector has the lowest union density of all sectors in the South African economy). The focus therefore needs to be on assisting casual, contract, seasonal, labour-broker and unemployed workers to self-organise through the union.

Focus should also be on breaking down the racial tensions and xenophobia that sometimes arises among workers who, because of capitalism, are afraid of competition (promoted by capitalist farm owners) from fellow workers. The reality is that workers, no matter their race, have more in common with one another

because of the experience of exploitation than they do with any boss. A sense that people are from a united working class needs to be built, along with a working-class culture.

Organising should be based on principles and values such as honesty, direct democracy, accountability, solidarity, mutual aid, anti-racism and respect. Without these, no collective force can be built to improve the lives of farm workers in the wine sector. The liberation of women is also vital, as women workers suffer the most from oppression and exploitation. Gender-based violence must be addressed and women must become integral to organising and to action – the gender relations that define rural areas must be reshaped in a progressive direction if liberation is to be achieved. Until we are all free, no one can be truly free.

The need for a long-term vision

Although fighting to win immediate small gains like better health and safety, better wages and limiting evictions is vital, so too is a long-term vision. One possible long-term vision can be built by creating relations of mutual aid, solidarity and direct democracy in unions and worker formations that could be extended to replace the capitalist state in the long run. Indeed, we need these practices in working-class organisations today, so that workers and their families become familiar with the process of governing organisations. One day this experience can be extended to running the whole of society collectively and democratically. This is called prefigurative politics and it is vital to the avoidance of

Direct democracy.

In a system of direct democracy, each person is an equal part of the decision-making process by voting on proposed laws. On the other hand, in a representative democracy elected leaders represent the citizens.

ambitious politicians becoming a new elite in a future where capitalism has come to an end.

Importantly, workers should also begin to organise and gain experience so that one day they can collectively – and with communities – take over and run farms on a democratic basis. This would be a path to solving the land question in South Africa from below. Only when this happens will the oppression, racism and exploitation that farm workers face be ended. The aim, therefore, should, in the end, be for a social revolution in which workers take over and socialise farms and land to meet the needs of all without bosses – whether politicians or farmers. This may sound unachievable, but it is not – it was done during the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the Spanish Revolution of 1936. Having such a goal also helps galvanise people. Without a vision, unions and formations can become bogged down in survival for survival's sake whereas visions also inspire people and can draw more members into formations and



Collective

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unions – along with winning small gains on a day-to-day basis. We need to win small battles today to build worker formations, but we also need to dream big so that future generations have a better world than ours. A new world awaits. If we can build a strong farm-workers movement, and if we have a vision to inspire people, then all we have to lose are our chains.



By looking at history we are able to understand the context, to learn from the past and to use it to find a way forward for workers' struggles in the wine sector in the future.