

Dependence on the 'Dop'

— worker control on wine farms?

The 'Tot System' (Dopstelsel) is the euphemistic description given to the practice in which farmers administer large quantities of reject wine to their workers on a regular basis. It is essentially a system of institutionalised alcohol addiction — it gives the employer much greater control over his workforce who are dependant upon the liquor he can choose not to administer.

The system has been in operation for many years with missionaries agitating against it as long ago as the 1840s. In 1928 the Liquor Act limited the amount of daily wine given as wage to 1½ pints. And in 1961 it became illegal to pay workers with alcohol. However, there remains to this day no law against the free dispensing of liquor to workers.

The practice is widespread in the Western Cape especially on the wine farms even in supposedly relatively progressive areas. While the tot system has been successfully abolished on some farms, as recently as 1984 a survey of the 18 farms of one co-operative between Somerset West and Stellenbosch showed that not one of

the farms did not give 'dop' — a tot, usually a condensed milk tin or 'visblik' full of wine, or 'a bottle' the common 750 ml bottle. One farmer gave five tots and a bottle of wine to each worker per day. Six farmers gave three tots and a bottle; six gave two tots and a bottle; three gave one tot and a bottle; while two just gave the bottle each evening.

There is pressure from the South African Agricultural Union to reduce these quantities. The reject wine is generally bought from the wine co-operatives at 26c per litre. Farm labourers consume between 3% and 5% of the entire wine crop in 'dop'.

Productivity is clearly disadvantaged to an extent by the alcohol consumption, but within the existing forms of coercive management the benefits to the farmer tend to be more compelling. Withholding 'dop' is the most common and effective form of punishment, while the skills required of labourers in the vineyards are too minimal to be seriously affected by the levels of intoxication they are permitted to reach during working hours.



A Cape wine farm