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Gerhard P. Maré

INTRODUCTION.

African workers in South Africa have a long history of industrial experience. Africans first began to work in non-agricultural activities in the 1870's, with the development of diamond mining, and then later gold mining. With the growth of secondary industry, especially from the 1920's onwards, the range of African worker activity broadened. The 1950 figure of approximately 1 000 000 African workers engaged in the non-agricultural sectors of mining, manufacturing, electricity, construction, commerce and finance, and transport had almost doubled by 1970 and in 1973 certainly exceeded 2 000 000 (Hobart Houghton p. 242 RR. 78/73). About 40% of the total economically active african population are now employed in these sectors.

During this time Africans began to organise themselves to protect their own interests using the methods of industrial workers in other countries: the trade union and the strike. African trade unions have existed since the First World War, although their membership has fluctuated. In the 1920's membership of the giant Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU), African-led with a predominantly African membership, reached over 2 000 000 at one stage. In 1927 its strongest and best organised branch in Durban claimed a membership of 26 000. The ICU expanded too fast, and finally collapsed, partly under its own weight. Its career, policies, problems and final fate were very similar to those of the "Grand National Consolidated Trade Union", (Pelling pp. 38-42), the first mass union in Britain. During and after the Second World War there was a resurgence of African trade unionism, and by 1945 African union membership again reached 150 000, (Horrell p.8), but in better organised industrial unions. Continued Government harrassment and repressive legislation made it difficult for these unions to operate successfully, but in 1961 they still had over 60 000 members (Horrell p. 61). In the following decade, nearly all the African unions disappeared and by 1969 only 13 unions with a combined membership of 16 040 remained (Horrell p. 145).

Successive Governments have taken action against African workers and African strikers and African unionists under a variety of different acts, of which the most important are: the Masters and Servants Acts, dating from the 1850's and still in force; the Riotous Assemblies Act, first passed

in 1913; the so-called "Hostility Clause" of the Native Administration Act of 1927, which was used against trade union organisers on the grounds that they were "provoking hostility between Black and White"; War Measure 145 of 1942, which introduced harsh penalties against african strikers and remained in force until 1953; the Suppression of Communism Act, which was used to restrict many trade union officials; and the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act, which laid down heavy penalties for striking.

In spite of the fact that until mid-1973 strikes by African workers were illegal, they occurred regularly. The first small African strikes on the mines occurred before the First World War, and after the War in 1919 - 1920, there was a spate of strikes, one a well organised stoppage by over 40 000 miners. The first of these post-first World War strikes involved 152 night-soil bucket removers in Johannesburg, who wanted an extra 6d a day in wages. They were all arrested and sentenced to two months imprisonment. The magistrate, in sentencing them, said "While in gaol they would have to do the same work as they had been doing and would carry out the employment with an armed escort, including a guard of Zulus armed with assegais, and White men with guns. If they attempted to escape, and if it were necessary, they would be shot down. If they refused to obey orders they would receive lashes as often as might be necessary to make them understand that they had to do what they were told" (Walker and Weinbren p.277). This attitude is not atypical of what has been the normal reaction of those in authority to strikes by African workers. However, such strikes continued, with another surge after the Second World War. In 1946, 74 000 african mine workers, earning a basic rate of 2s 3d. per shift, wages which were, in real terms, lower than they had been in 1911 (Wilson (1) p.65), went on strike for higher wages. The State intervened decisively: "Strike leaders on all the mines involved were arrested, police surrounded the compounds and, when stoned at one mine, fired on the miners. In another mine a baton charge was made and in another the men were driven underground from their compounds at bayonet point. Seventy men were dismissed, nine were killed, and more than twelve hundred injured", (Ibid, p.79). The strike was broken within four days. The then United Party Prime Minister, General Smuts, said that the strike "was not caused by legitimate grievances but by agitators", who were "trying to lead the Natives and the country to destruction".

During the 1950's strikes continued, although by the end of the decade the State was beginning to take effective control. The following table gives the number of strikes and subsequent legal actions (Horrell, p.73) :

Year	Numbers of Strikes	Number of African workers involved	Prosecutions and convictions of workers
1955	82	9 479	340 prosecuted 314 convicted
1956	92	6 428	524 convicted
1957	113	6 158	539 prosecuted 274 convicted
1958	64 and 1 lock out	7 128	588 prosecuted 453 convicted
1959	36	3 462	822 prosecuted 211 convicted 1 case pending
1960	33	2 199	364 prosecuted 294 convicted 1 case pending

Between 1962 and 1968 the number of Africans involved in officially reported strikes does not seem to have risen above 2 000 per year, but since 1969 there has been a slight increase. At the end of 1971 about 13 000 Ovambo workers in South West Africa went out on a long and partly successful strike against low wages and conditions of service. In 1972 there was an increase in strikes in South Africa itself. One of the most important of these strikes was that by over 2 000 stevedores in Durban's docks in October 1972.

It is against this background that we have to assess the significance of the Durban strikes of January-March, 1973. African workers had previously struggled to use the trade union and strike weapons of the industrial proletariat, but had failed, both because of repressive State action and because of certain crucial social factors, in particular, the fact that many of the workers were unskilled labourers

and easily replaceable by the large numbers of unemployed. The Durban strikes are different in two important ways. Firstly the State did not intervene in strength. No force was used against strikers. The arrests that were made were of groups of workers marching through the streets who were fined minimal sums, and no violence was used to force workers back to work. Secondly, the strikes were largely successful. The workers did not have their initial demands satisfied, but nearly all of them did gain appreciable wage increases.

The strikes have been widely recognised as a major event in South African social history. But precisely what was their significance? Does the fact that the strikes could occur at all indicate that the role of African workers in the economy has changed qualitatively? Does the mild Government reaction, and the widespread sympathy shown by the Whites in Durban, indicate a fundamental change in the attitudes of Whites towards Blacks in South Africa? From the point of view of the social scientist investigating the strikes from this perspective there are many problems. Firstly, the ramifications and implications of the strikes are extraordinarily complex. It is necessary to attempt to assess their impact on a wide range of different publics, and, therefore, also to attempt to understand the overall social and political relations between those publics. Secondly, it must be assumed that in order to break the law in large numbers, people must be unusually strongly motivated, and one cannot understand the reasons for this without reference to the whole politico-legal framework in which they operate. Finally, in the absence of any workers' organisations which might have called the strikes, organised them, and managed the negotiations, it is very difficult to find out what actually happened. The strikes either came about through some quite complicated underground organisation (of which there is no evidence), or else they came about as a result of a large number of independent decisions by unofficial leaders and influential workers in different factories. Similarly, the decision to return to work must in each case have been the function of different decision-making procedures dealing with different sets of immediate problems. The total number of firms affected by strikes in the Natal region probably exceeded 150. Thus an adequate account of the strikes would have required us to interview hundreds of participants, and the whole process would have been complicated by the illegality of the strikes. The people whom it would have been most interesting and useful to interview, those who took the initiative in each

enterprise, are precisely those people who would have the most to fear from police or employer action.

Faced with these problems, and with our own limitations of money and personnel, we had, therefore, to concentrate on certain specific aspects of the whole situation, and it is important that the readers should be aware of our choices. In our interviews with workers, trade unionists, employers and others we did not attempt to uncover new facts about what actually happened. We were more interested in the way the various groups perceived what had happened, and in the ways in which this might have affected their thinking. For our actual description of the strikes we have relied mainly on press reports, fleshed out here and there by our own observations or by information obtained in the course of our interviews. The result of this method is that we have to remain to a certain extent at the level of generalisations. It is, for example, possible to isolate the major general causes of the strikes, but it would also be important to know what it was that led a particular group of workers in a particular factory on a particular day to react to these general causes by stopping work. But this we were unable to investigate.

A second problem, and one which is always involved in a work of this nature, is that one is writing for several different audiences at the same time; for "posterity", for other social scientists, and for the interested public. For posterity one wishes to produce a record which can be used without having to refer to memory or to old newspaper clippings. Other social scientists are interested in methodological problems, and, often, in the careful verification of what most other people take for granted. The interested general public wants a footnote-free account which neither assumes too much, nor assumes too little ... a very difficult balance to keep. We have, doubtless, successfully fallen between the three stools.

CHAPTER 1THE STRIKES.A. DURBAN.

The city of Durban is the third largest in South Africa and is the major port. Population figures (1970) for the Durban metropolitan area (Durban/Pinetown) are as follows:

African	-	395 396
Coloured	-	45 014
Indian	-	329 872
White	-	264 310
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		1 034 602
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According to estimates by Bantu Administration officials, (NM, 5/4/73) the figure given for the African population is far too low and the Durban/Pinetown area now has an african population of nearly 1 000 000. The same article said that there are more than 161 000 Africans employed in Durban alone, and, though there appear to be no accurate statistics for the whole industrial complex, there may well be over 200 000 Africans employed. Wilson estimated that in 1971 there were at least 100 000 migrant workers in the complex, "And these figures make no allowance for all those working illegally in Durban and for the tens of thousands of squatters, not all migrants - living outside Durban's boundaries in such places as Inanda" (Wilson (2) p.59). Thus about one in two of the Africans working in Durban are probably migrants; that is, workers brought in from the rural areas on an annual contract basis. But most of these are "permanent migrants" who in fact work all their lives in the city on regularly renewed contracts but are legally considered to be rural, and have no permanent residential rights in the urban areas. At least 30 000 employed in the Durban/Pinetown area are domestic workers.

Strict residential segregation is practised. The most important african townships are Umlazi to the south of Durban, Kwa Mashu to the north and Clermont outside the New Germany/Pinetown area.

The Durban/Pinetown area is the second most important industrial area in South Africa with a share of some 12% of net national manufacturing output during the early 1960's. This figure has probably not changed appreciably. The fastest growing industry groups in the Durban/Pinetown area are food, textiles, clothing, paper and printing, non-metallic mineral products (i.e. bricks and tiles, crushed stones etc), electrical machinery and chemicals and petroleum products, (Natal Regional Survey vol.14, part 2).

The other major industrial area that will be mentioned in the survey is the Hammarsdale complex. Hammarsdale is situated about 40 kilometres west of Durban and has about 14 established factories. These are mainly clothing and textile firms and are located adjacent to an African Reserve in pursuance of the Government's "border industries" policy. The Mpumalanga township at Hammarsdale has a population of about 32 000 but workers come from as far as 30 kilometres away. The wages in the "border industrial areas" are on the whole considerably lower than in those industries situated in the urban areas.

B. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE STRIKES.

The wave of strikes began at the Coronation Brick and Tile Company, a brickworks in a minor industrial area on the northern outskirts of Durban. Here the entire African work force, nearly 2 000 workers, went on strike on the morning of 9 January, 1973. Their demand was for an increase in the minimum cash wage from R8,97 to R20,00 per week. Before long this demand escalated to R30,00 per week. A weekly cash wage of R8.97 is clearly low. However, in terms of general wage levels, it was not startlingly low - certainly not low enough to explain why Coronation employees, a relatively isolated compound-housed group, were the first to down tools. Two supplementary factors, both relating to expectation of wage increases, may offer some explanation.

The first was an investigation into the brick and clay industry carried out by the Wage Board, the Government-appointed body which sets minimum wage rates for workers not otherwise covered. This had been conducted in the early part of 1972, but at the time of the strike no report or recommendation had as yet been made by the Board.

The previous minimum had been in effect since 1967. The majority of workers were probably unaware both of the fact of the investigation and of the considerable delay in the revision of minimum wages for the industry, although at least some workers may have become aware of a pending revision through the action of the Durban Students' Wages Commission, which had compiled evidence on the industry for presentation to the Wage Board.

The second factor was a speech delivered to the workers by Paramount Chief Goodwill Zwelithini, during his visit to the factory in the latter part of 1972. It is not clear whether the Prince had merely indicated a willingness to negotiate on behalf of the workers or whether he had indicated actual management agreement to increase wages. In any event, there is little doubt that his speech had left many workers with a more or less firm expectation that the new year would bring higher wages.

Workers on the Number 1 plant report that the strike began when they were awakened at 3.00 a.m. by a group of their fellows and were told to gather at the main football stadium, instead of reporting for work. An informal deputation went from this main plant to outlying depots in the neighbouring suburb of Avoca and persuaded the workers there to join with the main body at the stadium.

A high-spirited and positive response marked this early phase of the strike. Not one man from the main plant ignored the call to strike; workers from the Avoca plants marched to the stadium in two long columns, with a rather stirring disregard for the heavy traffic and legal restrictions. When they finally surged through the stadium gates, they were chanting "Filumuntu ufesadikiza", meaning "Man is dead but his spirit still lives".

The only reported incident of intimidation was of minimal proportion. A group of five workers apparently attempted to leave the stadium during the course of the first morning of the strike. Some threatening gestures were made by the workers near them, and the five promptly reseated themselves (RDM, 10/1/73). Nevertheless the initial reaction of the management was to blame the whole thing on "agitators" and "intimidation". These themes were embodied in a notice put out to the workers by the Coronation management on the day before the strike. It essentially made the following points:

- (a) that the talk of a strike on the following day was the work of Communist agitators;

- (b) that loyal workers who routinely came to work would be protected from intimidation;
- (c) that the ringleaders would be severely punished.

The notice was angrily rejected by the workers. One of these went so far as to claim, "We would not have gone on strike if this notice had not called us 'Communists'", (DN, 9/1/73). The immediate consequence of the clause concerning ringleaders was that workers who had proved themselves, in the course of the strike, to be reasonably articulate and confident were reluctant to coalesce into a readily identifiable group. Nor were they prepared to assume an ongoing individual prominence. The Coronation notice exemplified a management stance that could be described as threatening. It is within that context that one needs to assess subsequent claims by management and others that African workers, especially in a strike situation, were inchoate and impossible to negotiate with.

Despite the "ringleaders will be punished" notice of the 8th, the acting general manager of Coronation declared himself, on the evening of the 9th, neither willing nor able "to negotiate with 1 500 workers on a football field", (NM, 11/1/73), and insisted that the workers elect a committee. One worker responded: "Our terms are quite clear. We don't need a committee. We need R30,00 a week". In short, the fear of victimisation by employers appears to have been a more pronounced feature of the strike than the much publicised "fear of intimidation".

Efforts by the Bantu Labour Department to break the impasse were no more successful. When the Bantu Labour Officer for Durban enjoined the massed workers to form a committee, he was met with a thunderous "No, never". This showed the difficulties facing a White government official particularly in a time of stress attempting to win the trust of black workers sufficiently to represent their interests to management. This early display of the workers' lack of confidence in the Bantu Labour Officers was to be repeated time after time as the wave of strikes spread through Durban.

It is worth noting that a works committee was reportedly in existence at Coronation at the time of the strike.

(DN, 12/1/73). Its complete ineffectiveness in terms of representativeness, activity or conflict-resolving power is another indication of the inadequacy of the official dispute settling machinery.

It was finally the intervention of a traditional Zulu figure which broke the deadlock of the first day of the strike. This was Paramount Chief Goodwill Zwelithini, whose previous contact with the Coronation workers has already been mentioned. There are conflicting reports as to precisely how the Paramount Chief became involved in the dispute. Early reports that he had been called in as a mediator by the Department of Labour were later categorically denied by the Department. Other reports stated that he had intervened on his own initiative. In the event, there is no doubt that both the Department of Labour and the Coronation management were happy with the results of the Chief's address to the workers. This took place on the afternoon of the second strike day. In an hour-long talk the Chief appealed to the workers to return to work, and undertook to negotiate with management on their behalf.

The Paramount Chief's proposals did not elicit a very enthusiastic response from the 2 000 workers then gathered on the field. A central reason for this might have been that a decision on their wages would only be made the following Wednesday, one week hence. They felt, as one worker said, that "You cannot extinguish fire by words, but by action", and feared that if they agreed to return before a settlement was reached, the initiative would be lost. The Chief's proposals were accepted only after his representative, Prince Sithela Zulu, reminded the workers "that if they could not trust in the Chief's word, this would 'lower the dignity'" (NM, 11/1/73.)

The "dignity" aspect was referred to by Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, head of the KwaZulu Executive Council, who advised the Paramount Chief not to become involved in controversial issues in case the image of the Zulu Royal House should be tarnished. Possibly Chief Buthelezi was concerned also to preserve the authority of the Executive Council on matters such as labour disputes involving its citizens. A minor flurry of exchanges between the two Chiefs followed, with no explicit conclusion. A tacit agreement on role delimitation may, however, have influenced the Paramount Chief's decision not to meet the Coronation directors on Wednesday, the 17th, as planned; instead he would attend the opening of the 1973 session of the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly. This development was

announced on Sunday, the 14th. On the same day an eleven-man wage delegation was elected by the workers. It was headed by Nathaniel Zulu, who had emerged as a prominent spokesman during the strike, despite the possibility of victimisation. There were, however, no reports of meetings between management and the full committee. The committee leader was apparently called to the office of the acting general manager early on Monday, but other members of the committee and the workers in general remained unaware of this move. One presumes, therefore, that workers enjoyed rather limited representation in any bargaining process that did occur. The Coronation management, then, although seriously affected by the strike itself, appears to have acted fairly autonomously in the revision of wage rates.

Nonetheless, the worker body in general indicated its resistance and determination by rejecting the company's first offer, on the Tuesday afternoon, of a R1,50 per week increase. On the next day, a second offer of a R2,07 increase (bringing the minimum to R11,50 per week) was grudgingly assented to.

Tight security arrangements accompanied this second offer. The workers were kept isolated on a plant basis and company officials moved from one plant to the next, making their offer. This tactic was obviously designed to prevent the likelihood of another mass rejection on the football field. The officials were escorted by a considerable force of police in land rovers and riot trucks. Although all plants accepted the offer, it was clear that extensive dissatisfaction with the new rates remained.

Although the Coronation workers themselves were relatively isolated in the Company compounds the strike was widely reported in the local press. Banner headlines were accompanied by photographs of the workers massed on the football field, or marching down the road carrying a red flag - for traffic control, rather than as a sign of political allegiance. This strike, with its relatively successful outcome, must have influenced the later events.

Even before it had been resolved several minor strikes had broken out elsewhere. The first of these was an apparently brief and unsuccessful stoppage at the transport firm of A.J. Keeler on the 10th January, the morning after the Coronation strike began. This strike

was triggered by what the workers considered to be a derisory pay-offer of an increase of 50¢ per week. The manager blamed the strike on agitators and the workers were back within 45 minutes. On the following day a more sustained strike began at the small tea-pacing firm of T.W. Beckett and Co. Here about 150 workers went on strike, demanding an increase of R3,00 per week. The management reacted by calling in the police and dismissing all those who refused to return to work. There were no negotiations. According to one of the workers "We were given ten minutes to make a decision", (RDM 12/1/73). About 100 workers decided not to return to work. However, the following Tuesday the management let it be known that they would consider reinstating the dismissed workers, although still at the old pay-levels. The Managing Director issued a press statement in which he said that his company tried to provide good labour conditions, and that they had had no inkling that anything was amiss: "I believe that our wages are competitive by prevailing Durban standards, and although we are governed by a wage determination which is three years old, our minimum starting wage is R10,00 compared with the R8,50 stipulated", (RDM 16/1/73). Most of the workers nevertheless remained out, and finally, on 25th January, two weeks after the strike had begun, the firm announced a R3,00 per week increase for all workers. Most of the workers were reinstated, but, according to the company, "We took this opportunity to weed out what we considered bad material".

In this dispute it seems to have been the Department of Labour which encouraged the firm to take an initial hard line. According to a press report it was on the Department's advice that the strikers were paid-off in the first place (RDM 25/1/73). The Divisional Inspector, Mr. G. Jackson, pointed out that the workers could be prosecuted for having deserted their employment (RDM 13/1/73). However in the event no such action was taken.

Whilst the Beckett strike was in progress, African ships painters at several firms, including J.H. Akitt and Co. and James Brown and Hamer had also gone on strike. These workers were earning R2,60 per day, but claimed that they often only worked three days a week, and so needed an increase of 90¢ in their daily wage. These workers stayed out for several days, but it was not reported whether they finally received an increase. One or more of the companies involved considered the possibility of replacing

them with convict labour in order to complete urgent contracts. A spokesman for James Brown and Hamer said, "I don't know who mooted this idea first, but it is worth looking into. We would otherwise have to get white workers, who use sprays - but this work is difficult in windy conditions. It is worth looking into the idea of using convict labour - they are used by the Railways to clean the harbour area", (DN 16/1/73). Fortunately for all concerned this idea was taken no further.

Although at this stage there were still only scattered strikes, even these were considered a sufficiently remarkable phenomenon in South Africa to occasion a wide range of comment. Both the Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, Rapport, and the SABC called for improvements in Black wages. A number of prominent Black and White trade unionists predicted further unrest. Chief Buthelezi attacked low wages and called for full trade union right for African workers. He strongly criticised employers who met strikes with dismissals: "Firing people in these circumstances points to the insecurity of black people in general. This kind of insecurity is dangerous because blacks might ultimately ask themselves what have we to lose" (S.Times 14/1/73).

The police also commented on the strikes, and in particular on the allegations that they were the work of agitators. On the 18th January the Natal security police head, Colonel Steenkamp, said "So far we have no evidence to indicate that there is anything organised" (NM 18/1/73). Three days later the Sunday Express claimed that senior police officers "had not ruled out" the possibility of overseas involvement in the strikes, but also quoted a further denial from Colonel Steenkamp that there was any evidence of organisation.

The last of the minor strikes began on Monday 22nd. January. 200 African convoy drivers employed by the Pinetown firm of Motorvia went on strike and organised a picket. They were demanding an increase to R40,00 per week. Management and workers put out conflicting statements about their current wages. Managers claimed that the wage varied between R20,00 - R25,00 per week, but some of the drivers claimed that they were only guaranteed R15,00 per week, and sometimes did not even earn that. The management called in the police, and on the following morning dismissed 250 workers after they had refused the first offer made by the company. A further offer was made. The workers remained on the premises through the Tuesday and the Wednesday.

They made a new demand for a guaranteed R15,00 per week, and a minimum of R5,00 per convoy driven. They also elected a five-man delegation who lodged a complaint about the firm with the Pinetown Bantu Administration Department. Desultory negotiations continued via the indunas (African foremen), and the managers once more threatened to dismiss the already dismissed workers if they did not accept his last pay offer. Many of the workers agreed to return to work, but nearly 100 were dismissed on the 25th.

It was on Thursday the 25th that what had been a trickle of strike action began to turn into a wave, when a series of large factories in the Pinetown-New Germany industrial complex were closed down by strikes. The move began at the Frametex textile factory in New Germany, where, according to trade union officials, there had long been dissatisfaction with wages and conditions. At 8.00 a.m. that morning the workers left their machines and gathered in an open yard in the factory. They were invited by loudhailer to elect a negotiating committee, and return to work pending a settlement. They laughed at this, and refused. Their demand was for R20,00 per week, in comparison with the R5,00 - R9,00 per week that they claimed they were getting at the time. As in most other cases, management and workers made contradictory claims about current wage levels, but it is clear that these workers were receiving particularly low wages. By the following day, Friday, the strike had spread to all the other Frame Group factories in the area, and affected about 6,000 African workers, as well as many Indian workers. The workers were offered a small cost of living increase, but rejected the offer. On the Monday there was a mass meeting at which a further offer of increases, ranging from R1,75 to R3,00 was made. The workers accepted this and returned to work. Meanwhile, however, the strike had spread to workers at two other large Frame factories, including Natal Canvas and Rubber in Durban itself, and also to several other factories in Pinetown and New Germany.

The picture was complicated further by widespread rumours of a forthcoming transport boycott. The first report of a possible train boycott had appeared on 27th January. It was stated that a number of firms had phoned the Daily News and/or the Railway Police to say that some of their African workers had told them that there would be a boycott of the trains on 1st. February. The police announced the following day that they were investigating the rumour, and there were also reports that pamphlets calling for a boycott had been

distributed in one of the main African residential areas, Umlazi. By the 31st the rumour was receiving wide publicity and, in the heated atmosphere, caused speculation of all kinds. The police were already taking action to "protect commuters against intimidators". On the night before the boycott many firms were reported to have made preparations for their workers to sleep on the premises, and the Durban Corporation decided to waive the curfew regulations which make it illegal for Africans without permanent accommodation in the city, or special permits, to be in white areas between 11.30 p.m. and 4.00 a.m. On the morning itself, the police engaged in a massive show of strength in the african townships.

The Natal Mercury reported in Kwa Mashu "more than 400 policemen started patrolling at 2.00 a.m. Police vans were at most bus stops and a strong force of police was on duty at railway stations. A convoy of fast mini-riot trucks was on constant patrol in the streets". Although this drama delayed the start of the early morning rush, there was no boycott. Nevertheless, the incident almost certainly strengthened the strike movement, even if only by spreading the idea of direct action. From the 31st. the strike wave gathered momentum, and began spreading into all parts of the Durban/Pinetown industrial complex.

On the 31st. work stopped at another major Frame factory, Consolidated Textile Mills (CTM), in the south Durban industrial area of Jacobs-Mobeni. The Department of Labour's Bantu Labour Officer, Mr. J. Skene, appealed to them to return to work. Their negotiating committee was also asked to get them back to work while negotiations were in progress, but refused to do so. They sang Nkosi Sikelele iAfrika, and were finally locked-out and sent home, but not before they had encouraged workers at the neighbouring Consolidated Fine Spinners and Weavers, and Consolidated Woolwashing and Processing Mills (CWPM) to join them. A number of smaller firms also came out on the same day, and as the strike spread even further on Thursday the 1st. the day of the rumoured transport boycott, the press gave up the attempt to give detailed coverage of each strike. The Natal Mercury printed a list of 29 firms which had been affected by strikes during the month of January.

By this time the strike wave was the major daily new story in nearly all South African newspapers, and it was evident that it could develop into a major confrontation. Employers' representatives from Durban had flown down to

Cape Town, where Parliament was assembling for the new session, to hold urgent talks with the Government. On the 2nd, the Minister of Labour issued a statement implying that the strikes were the responsibility of agitators: "The strikes in Natal follow a pattern from which it is clear that it is not merely a question of high wages There is every indication that this is a planned action and strikers are being used to achieve more than an increase in wages The action and unwillingness of the workers to negotiate shows undoubtedly that the agitation for trade unions is not the solution and is merely a smokescreen behind which other motives are hidden.." (NM 2/2/73). Other people had different theories. Most of the english-language newspapers attacked the Minister's statement. The official organ of the Natal National Party, Die Nataller, laid the blame on "shocking wages" paid by Natal industrialists, and headlined "Employers Must Take Full Blame". But it did add that there were "certain undermining elements" who "have spotted the favourable climate for their activities and are busy to exploit it" (DN 3/2/73).

The General Secretary of the Building Workers' Union (an all-White union), blamed former Cabinet Minister, Theo Gerdener, and unspecified White apostles of the left, but most spokesmen for registered trade unions blamed the strikes on the employers. However, the director of the S.A. Institute of Personnel Management blamed the strikes on the registered unions, for not having consulted management (Star 31/1/73). The President of the Durban Chamber of Commerce said that it was the fault of the "incredible" slowness of the statutory wage adjusting machinery, (DN 31/1/73). On the whole, the english-language press in Natal blamed the employers for the situation and were particularly critical of the textile magnate, Mr. Philip Frame. They reported the strikes with a great deal of sympathy, carrying many interviews with individual workers who expressed their grievances freely. By the beginning of February, as it became clear that the strikes could spread even further, the newspapers began to counsel caution to the workers. The Daily News wrote on the 1st: "the confrontation between management and labour in the Durban area has driven home a number of valid points. Now is the time to cool it Now is the time to get off the escalator and begin the less exciting but more rewarding task of fundamental reform."

Throughout the first two weeks of February, strikes were

breaking out and ending all over Durban. On Monday, the 5th, the most tense and dramatic period began when 3,000 African workers employed by the Durban Corporation stopped work, affecting road and drain works, the cleaning department, and the electricity department. They were demanding a R10,00 per week increase on an average wage of R13,00. This strike spread rapidly to other Corporation departments involving 16,000 workers despite an offer of a R2,00 increase made by the Corporation on Tuesday morning. In some departments Indian and African workers work in separate gangs, while in other departments they work together, under white overseers. In both cases many Indian workers joined the strike, while others, according to the Corporation, were sent home for fear of "intimidation". Although their wage scales are not necessarily the same as those of their African fellow-workers, they all get very low wages. In some types of industry, Indian workers do have the right to strike under certain circumstances but this is not the case in the Municipal service. This is classified as an essential service, and as such is excluded from those provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Act which permit strikes. This means that both African and Indian workers were acting with equal illegality.

The Corporation strike inevitably had the most dramatic impact on the life of the city. Rubbish began to pile up, the gravediggers were on strike, and by Wednesday the market porters were no longer handling goods. The abattoir also stopped work, and it became clear that the supply of all perishable foods was threatened. White volunteer "black-legs" were also at work in the market, unloading 80 railway truckloads of fresh produce. According to a press report, "Durban's Mayor, accompanied by a number of city Councillors, made an on-the-spot inspection. Also on the scene was a truckload of policemen in camouflage uniforms, swinging batons in one hand and bags of fruit in the other. Striking African workers looked on in amazement as the volunteer workforce turned the market into a scene from My Fair Lady with singing and jokes. Market agencies supplied the volunteer force with beers for their efforts". Meanwhile the Corporation was asking the state to provide special services to bring essential food supplies to the city if the strike situation worsened.

By Wednesday there were an estimated 30,000 workers on strike, including the 16,000 municipal workers. It seemed possible that the movement might develop into a general strike of all workers in Durban, and strikes were also beginning to occur in other parts of Natal, such as

Pietermaritzburg and Port Shepstone. The possibility of violence also seemed to be increasing. Many bands of municipal workers marched through the streets near the city centre, and there were eye-witness reports of minor cases of intimidation. One group stopped a refuse-removal truck and chased the African workers on it. Crowds are also reported to have threatened to burn down the City Engineer's labour office if the African clerks there did not stop working. Helicopters were used over the city, apparently to monitor the progress of marching workers. A contingent of riot police in camouflage dress had been flown in from Pretoria on the previous day, and were now patrolling the industrial areas. Although the police had been on hand at most of the strikes, they had as yet taken no action. On Tuesday the officer in charge, Brigadier T.M. Bisschoff, told a reporter: "The police have nothing whatsoever against people demanding higher wages - provided they do not break the law". He listed four possible offences: striking; holding a public meeting without a permit; carrying dangerous weapons; and creating a disturbance. However, it was clear that the police did not intend to take any action against strikers, but would confine themselves to attempting to prevent the other offences. Brigadier Bisschoff also stressed that instructions had been given to use force only if absolutely necessary, and then only the minimum force necessary.

The first incident of this sort occurred on Tuesday. According to press reports, about 1,000 Corporation workers, many armed with sticks, marched from the City Engineer's labour office towards the City Electricity Department, both of which are situated near the centre of Durban. The marchers were surrounded by a large posse of police, armed with sten guns, FN rifles and batons. They failed to disperse when ordered to do so. The police made a baton charge, which the workers did not attempt to resist. Most of them escaped, but 106 were arrested. These appeared in Court the following day and were convicted of "causing a public disturbance". They were fined R30,00 or 30 days, but of this, R25,00 or 25 days was suspended. Later a group of about 150 African building workers, who were moving from site to site in the Durban shopping and business centre, were also arrested. They also received very light sentences. On other occasions, police stopped marching groups and asked them to surrender their sticks, but took no other action. The sticks were to be returned when the march was over.

The only other significant clash occurred in the nearby border industrial area of Hammarsdale. Here all the 7,000 workers employed in 12 industries came out on strike on the Tuesday. They were demanding increases of between R3,00 and R5,00 per week. The employers' joint initial offer of R2,00 was rejected, but negotiations continued. The following morning there was a mass meeting of the 7,000 workers near the bus depot, outside the industrial area. They were chanting and waving sticks. On two occasions groups broke away and marched towards the factories. They were intercepted by the police, and on the first occasion were only dispersed with the aid of teargas. No arrests were made after either of these incidents, but later a man was arrested after a group of workers allegedly attacked two women strike-breakers.

On Wednesday the Deputy Minister of Police issued a statement in which he said that as far as the police were concerned the situation in Durban was in hand. He thanked the Black workers of Durban for their co-operation, and added that "the police are only there to safeguard the people of Durban from any illegal acts".

Nevertheless, the situation was still explosive. The municipal workers had refused a 15% pay increase. The number of individual factories affected was still increasing, and most of the textile workers were still on strike. In the case of the textile workers, there had been a greater degree of co-ordination than usual, partly because there is one major employer in the industry, and partly because this was the only major series of strikes in which a registered (i.e. non-African) trade union intervened to try to resolve the issue. The first mass meeting of striking textile workers had taken place at the Textile Workers' Industrial Union (TWIU) headquarters on the previous Saturday afternoon, the 3rd. February. A meeting of 300 African and Indian workers, representing nearly all the strikers, formulated a joint demand for a R5,00 per week increase. One worker told the meeting, "Although I make blankets for Mr. Philip Frame, I can't afford to buy blankets for my children". Another elderly worker claimed "We are here today because we have tried to meet our employer, but he doesn't want to talk to us". This was confirmed by Mrs. Harriet Bolton, Secretary of the TWIU, who said, "He is content just to sit tight and stare the workers out -- with tacit government consent. The African workers want to negotiate with him, but he refuses to meet them. Then he refused to see me when I asked for talks" (S.Tribune 4/1/73).

By Wednesday many of the textile workers had been out for 7 days. A new meeting at Bolton Hall, attended by 800 workers, re-affirmed the call for R5,00, and one speaker who suggested that they should be willing to accept less was shouted down. But the meeting coincided with a meeting of the Industrial Council for the Textile Industry, at which it became clear that the Frame Group was not willing to increase its initial offer of approximately R2,00. After discussing this further, the mass meeting finally agreed to return to work on the following day.

At the same time the Corporation workers were given an ultimatum either to accept a R2,00 across the board increase, or else to be dismissed. On Thursday nearly all the municipal workers also returned to work, and by Friday it was clear that the strike wave had broken. There were still many minor strikes in progress, particularly in the furniture industry, which were associated with the fact that a new industrial council agreement was being negotiated at the time. Scattered strikes continued into the following week. In March there were a total of 14 strikes in Natal, involving some 6,000 african workers, and strikes are continuing into 1974 at what would previously have been an unprecedented rate.

C. STRIKES IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY.

The above account gives the sequence of events, but does not give any clear idea as to how individual strikes proceeded. Although the main demand was always for improved wages, there were also frequent complaints about working conditions, fringe benefits and employment practices. These need to be looked at in some detail. We have mentioned employer reactions briefly, but these also need to be more carefully analysed. We therefore decided to undertake a more thorough investigation of the strikes in one particular industry. We chose the textile industry for two main reasons. Firstly, the strikes in this industry were of a relatively long duration, and played an important part in spreading the strike wave. Secondly, this was the only industry in which the registered trade union played any role in trying to settle the strikes. Officials of the TWIU were present at most of the key happenings, and were able to provide us with much information. The account which follows is based almost entirely on lengthy interviews with these officials. Unless otherwise specified, all the incidents mentioned were reported by them. Of course it is probable that their perceptions of the events differ significantly from

management perceptions, and the reader should bear this in mind. Nevertheless two of the officials are also trained social scientists and are, we think, reliable observers. We also interviewed managers from four textile factories, who co-operated with us fully. These interviews dealt with more general aspects of the situation, and are included in our general analysis of employer attitudes.

A number of the most important textile factories in the Durban/Pinetown area are owned by the giant Frame Group, one of the largest groups of its kind in the world. Philip Frame, who controls the Group, received highly unfavourable press treatment during the strikes. However, we believe that his style of management is not as atypical of employers in South Africa as a cursory reading of the press might imply. Although conditions in the Frame factories may have been worse in degree than conditions in certain other factories, they were not different in kind. As Frame himself said in self-defence after the strikes, "It is unfair to blame one man for what are in fact the faults of an industrial system". The account which we give of general structural tensions in the industry prior to the strikes, of the specific grievances put forward by the workers and of the way in which the strikes were handled by the employers are also relevant for an understanding of the strikes in other industries.

The textile industry in Natal, as elsewhere, is divided into two labour relations systems: the controlled sector covered by an industrial council which was established before the Second World War and which has a developed industrial relations system; and the cotton sector, which is newly established and in which no wage regulating measure existed at the time of the strikes. It is this sector in particular which has low wages, high labour turnover, and the lack of any communications system between workers and management. Before the Durban strikes took place, the Textile Workers Industrial Union (which represents Indian and Coloured workers) had its members largely in the blanket sector, although its organiser and research officer had recruited members in the cotton sector. Wages in the textile industry are approximately 20 per cent lower than those in manufacturing as a whole (C.S.I.R., 13). The depressed state of wages in the textile industry was particularly acute in Natal, where large sections of the industry were untouched by the trade union. In both

the heavy and the light section of the industry in Natal real wages were in a state of decline. Wages for weavers in the blanket sector remained at R11,40 per week from 1955 to 1962. In 1962 they were increased by 10 cents per week, and in 1966 by 50 cents. Although subsequent wage increases were larger, they did not compensate the weavers for their loss of earnings during the decade 1955 to 1965. Over the period 1955 to 1969 wages increased by about 13,2 per cent while the cost of living measured by the consumer price index rose by 40,8 per cent. Although comparable figures for the cotton section have not been made public they are considerably lower. At the extensive Frame Cotton Mills in New Germany in 1964 male workers were said to have earned a basic wage of R6,00 with apparently an attendance bonus, (Hansard 5, cols.1754-5). At the same complex of factories in November, 1972 the workers claimed that men earned a basic wage of R7,00 with R1,00 attendance bonus, and women earned R5,00 with a R1,00 attendance bonus. A survey conducted in July 1972 of about 1,000 pay slips gathered from the workers revealed that the average weekly wage at the Nortex Mill was R7,49 for men and women including all bonuses, and at Seltex Mill R6,64 a week. Many of the women were earning R3,50 basic wage.

In both sections of the industry in Natal there was very little wage drift at all. Although it is usually argued that the basic wage for weavers, in particular, is of little relevance as it is augmented by bonuses, overtime and night shift allowance, it is not difficult to conclude that real wages in the blanket section were in a state of decline. The relative importance of added earnings from bonuses in fact may operate against an actual increase in earnings as the workers claim that the bonus systems are adjusted downwards with every increase in basic wages so as to reduce the final earnings. In this way whatever the increase negotiated by the Union, the management could then adjust the production bonus rates accordingly to keep final earnings static.

Worker/management relations were at a low ebb before the February strikes. There are three elements which have to be considered:

- (i) inter-worker relationships within each plant;
- (ii) management-worker relations; and

(iii) union-management relations and the industrial relations system.

(i) Inter-Worker Relations.

Although it is clear that all workers have distinct differences with management, which can be most fruitfully analysed in class terms, it is also true that racial differences generate tension and that racial attitudes cause division within the working class.

Apparently after the 1949 race riots in Durban in which tension between the Indian and African community exploded, the Frame Group decided to employ more African workers. This, at least, is the way the Indian workers see it. The Frame Group provided large-scale employment at low wages and african workers were seen to replace Indian workers at a rapid rate. The high turnover in the textile industry generally, and in the Frame Group in particular, led to African workers, and especially African women, taking a leading role in production. From the labouring jobs, African workers soon took over virtually all spinning jobs, and then the large proportion of weaving jobs. Indian workers, in this situation, were likely to see African workers under-cutting their standards and would try to use the union to enforce conditions which would limit the degree of African participation in the textile industry, Indian workers were, however, so divided among themselves into different factions and workers spent so much of their time fighting among themselves, and even engaging in court action against union leaders, that the Union was unable to fulfill its potential for maintaining "labour standards". Obviously this situation, which lasted until shortly before the last negotiation for a new agreement in 1972, prevented any effective worker action. At this time the total membership of the Natal branch of the Textile Workers Industrial Union was 300, and a minority of Indian workers in each plant belonged to the Union. A concerted drive shortly before the agreement came into operation brought about 100 more members.

One further type of inter-worker tension is that existing between male and female workers of whatever race. An award made by the Industrial Tribunal before the agreement which expired in 1972 laid down a 20 per cent lower wage for women workers. The difference in wages between men and women could be a source of dissension among workers.

Although an African union existed in the textile industry as recently as 1970, and African shop stewards were recognised by the management, African workers were even more disillusioned with the union and unions generally than were the Indian workers. African workers perceived any unfavourable changes in their working conditions, and the lack of upward movement in wages, as being the union's fault.

(ii) Management/Worker Relations.

According to union officials, workers in the Frame Group have always disliked and even hated their managers. Workers had very little respect for any managers, despite the usual situation among any labour force where workers are highly perceptive in their appraisal of the individual qualities of particular managers. The hostility which existed between workers and management did not necessarily lead to a consistently militant policy on the part of leading workers and the union, but rather towards a pathetic grievance complex with workers reciting endlessly how this was the worst management they had ever come across. The hopelessness and helplessness of the workers, so evident to an outsider, was really an indication of bottled up hatred. This "it can't be helped" attitude towards affairs inside the factory also led to indifference about the administration of the Union, a subject which came to head towards the end of 1972.

(iii) Union/Management Relations.

Management had been openly contemptuous of the union following a lengthy period of mismanagement and maladministration and an open loss of confidence by the members in the union's key personnel.

Wages in the heavy section of the industry are laid down by an industrial council on which there is equal representation from union and management. A regional council for each Province exists. All matters relating to the problems of workers in Natal should be aired in the regional council. According to TWIU officials this rarely happened in practice. They complain that meetings of the regional council were few and far between, and conciliation in the spirit of the Industrial Conciliation Act was very difficult with a Secretary of the industrial council taking the view that disputes could only exist over matters prescribed in the

agreement. Inspections of the textile factories in Natal were rare, the industrial agent (a retired divisional inspector of the Department of Labour) only making inspections on request and deciding unilaterally whether complaints were justified. No routine inspections were being made.

The basic elements of a good relationship between union and management did not exist. Meetings with shop stewards and the mass of members were held outside the factories. Although management was bound by the agreement to permit stop orders (checkoff) for members' subscriptions, in fact members only paid a low rate of contributions because the firm claimed that not all workers had signed for the higher rates.

To sum up: the union had been seen by workers and management as peripheral to the real determination of wages and working conditions in the plants. Union leadership was seen as discredited by management. In matters of real conflict the union had been totally ignored by management in attempting to settle disputes.

Negotiations.

In July 1972 the Textile Union negotiated with the National Association of Textile Manufacturers for a new agreement. These negotiations were seen by the workers as a way of restoring their lost earning power, and the demands which were made by the union, even in its weak state, reflected the aspirations of the textile workers who had participated in the formation of demands to a greater extent than in previous negotiations.

The Union made the Following Demands:

1. 60 per cent increase over three years;
2. an increase in bonus rates;
3. three weeks paid holiday;
4. all public holidays to be paid holidays;
5. an increase in overtime rates from time and a third to time and a half;

28.

6. a 42 hour week;
7. a holiday bonus; and
8. the removal of wage discrimination against women.

The employers offered, in response, a 20 per cent wage increase for labourers, 15 per cent for qualified spinners, and 10 per cent for qualified weavers to be spread over three years. Employers also proposed that women should be paid 25 per cent less than men instead of the prevailing 20 per cent.

Negotiations between the trade union delegates to the Industrial Council and the Textile Manufacturers Association broke down and the dispute was referred to the Minister of Labour to appoint an arbitrator. After negotiations had failed, a report back meeting was held in the Clairwood Tamil Institute Hall on 22nd March, 1972. Mr. Norman Daniels, head of the union negotiating team, told the workers, "If we had even thought of accepting these pitiful proposals I am sure you would have lynched us. You would have said we had sold you down the river and you would have been right". He promised that the union would present a watertight case during arbitration.

Following the breakdown of negotiations, all parties in the Industrial Council were confused about whether the Minister of Labour should have been approached to appoint an arbitrator. It was feared that an agreement dictated by the tribunal would have the same status as a Wage Board determination and so would displace the Industrial Council. Eventually the matter was considered by the Industrial Tribunal on the 21st. June 1972. The employers made it quite clear that, in their view, if the Industrial Tribunal made a ruling in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act, the Industrial Council would then have no reason for continued existence. This threat was a primary reason for the union calling off the arbitration.

The wage increases originally offered by the employers were eventually accepted by the union and written into the new agreement, although the workers were bitterly disappointed that the arbitration was not pursued. The cautious optimism that prevailed before the arbitration,

("once they see how bad things are they will have to give us a good increase") disintegrated. The atmosphere of bitterness and disillusion laid the basis for the conflict in February 1973.

There are about 41 textile units in Natal, 11 in the controlled section of the industry, and 30 in the cotton section. All these factories experienced strikes or some form of labour dissatisfaction, and all felt the shock-waves of the spread of the strike movement more severely than did higher wage industries. According to official statistics there were 20 strikes in the textile industry in Natal, but if we include ropes and mattings, bag and twine, and knitting in the definition of the textile industry, then there were 26 strikes. The textile industry was followed in number of strikes by the metal industry which experienced 22 strikes.

Some of the textile strikes were amongst the longest in duration. There was one strike of seven days, five strikes lasted six days, one lasted five days, three lasted four days, two lasted three days, and six lasted one day. Although by international standards these were of relatively short duration, by South African standards the strikes were protracted.

The cotton workers came out on strike on Thursday, 25 January 1973, starting in the massive Frametex plant. Then followed the other cotton mills adjacent to Frametex in quick succession: Seltex, Nortex, Pinetex and Natal Knitting Mills on the following day, Friday.

On Friday morning at Consolidated Woolwashing and Processing Mills (C.W.P.M.) in Pinetown, where the large bulk of the workers are women rag sorters, an organiser and Mrs. Bolton, secretary of the Natal Branch of the Textile Workers' Industrial Union, addressed the workers on the necessity of making their demands known through the union, and, if possible, then negotiating through the union. By this time it was hoped the atmosphere of labour unrest might have awakened management to the necessity for change, and union recognition might have been secured at the same time. The plant manager refused to discuss the issues when approached and said he was too busy. A letter was then written to the firm and the Industrial Council outlining some of the workers' grievances. In the letter the following

demands of the workers were conveyed to the management:

- (a) an immediate increase of R1,00 per week;
- (b) the introduction of an adequate long service bonus;
- (c) a drastic reduction in the qualifying period for rag sorters;
- (d) an end to clocking out to see the doctor;
- (e) that the doctor come at a definite time each day;
- (f) that the practice of women workers having to see the manager before being able to see the doctor be stopped;
- (g) that the workers be not forced to report to the factory when sick;
- (h) that the practice of workers being punished by being laid off without being fired be stopped;
- (i) that notice pay be paid for workers who are dismissed;
- (j) that the workers be provided with adequate notice of overtime;
- (k) that the clock cards of workers should not be taken from the factory and kept at the residence of the manager;
- (l) that the company ensure that proper transport be provided for workers;
- (m) that the workers' consent for being searched be required;
- (n) that the workers be allowed to leave the factory immediately after clocking out;
- (o) that the practice of keeping workers standing outside the factory if they are slightly late be stopped.

On Friday evening two senior officials of the T.W.I.U. left for a labour conference in Cape Town leaving the affairs of the union in the hands of a recently appointed organiser. On Monday, 29 January 1973, there was not one Frame factory in operation in Natal. Consolidated Woolwashing and Processing Mills, came out on strike as expected. The Union organiser tried to negotiate with management, but this was refused and the workers remained outside. The secretary of the Industrial Council had received the letter from the union but decided that since the agreement had not been violated by the management no "dispute" existed and, therefore, the Industrial Council would have nothing to do with the issue. At the cotton mills in Pinetown the strikes continued although in this case increases of between R1,75 to R2,50 a week were offered to the workers. By now there were about 8000 textile workers on strike.

On Wednesday, 31 January, the officials of the T.W.I.U. were at the factories. At C.W.P.M. the workers were milling around outside. The Indian and African women were grouped together on one side of the gate and the African and Indian men grouped separately on the other. The T.W.I.U. officials spoke to their members about the possibility of workers returning to work and about the degree of unity behind the demands. Shortly before the usual opening time (6.45 a.m.), the gate of the factory was opened and the workers were addressed by a new manager who offered wage increases. He told the workers that the company would employ those workers who accepted the offer and the others would be fired. The women workers made for the gate and the men followed. At C.W.P.M. the strike was over. During this scene the union officials were completely ignored.

On Tuesday, 30 January, the Consolidated Textile Mill plant (C.T.M.) in Jacobs, the headquarters of the Frame Group had come out on strike. The workers demanded up to R30,00 a week. In this case the union was caught by surprise and the new organiser had to make rapid contact with the T.W.I.U. shop stewards to find out the feelings of the workers. By this time he realised that an emergency situation existed in the textile industry and telephoned the officials of the Natal Branch to return from Cape Town.

At C.T.M. the strikers were in an angry mood. On Tuesday, 30 January, the police had been called and had staged a show of strength. Despite all attempts to reach the Frame management communications between the union officials and management were negligible. Since the secretary of the Industrial Council had refused to accept that a dispute existed the machinery for arbitration could not be used.

The main complaint of the workers was the low level of wages in the Frame Group in comparison with the wages paid by firms in the surrounding area. The workers stressed, in particular, the rapid rise in the cost of living, and gave specific examples, particularly of increased transport costs. Apart from their grievances in connection with lower wages, the weavers complained that they were being exploited by the piece rate system in the plant, which was changed arbitrarily by the management. They felt that they had not really had an increase for decades, as the increase in basic wages was always offset by adjustments in the piece rate system. Another grievance was that they were required to arrive much earlier than the starting time so that they could oil the looms and get the yarn for the day's production. If a worker was slightly late, they maintained, his loom was allocated to another worker and he was told to go home, even if there was some legitimate reason for his being late. It was also said that the yarn supplied for the production of blankets was inferior, and that with frequent stoppages it was impossible to make sufficient blankets to benefit from piece rates. A more general discontent was connected with the sick benefit society. Membership of this society is a condition of service and each week, irrespective of earnings during that week, deductions were made from the wages of the workers. When the workers wish to see the Doctor they have to clock out and lose time-wages, and then stand in long queues for medical attention. Numerous complaints about this system by the Union had not changed the system, the workers said.

It was alleged that by setting up the sick benefit society the company avoided paying the full two weeks sick pay required in terms of Section 21A of the Factories Act.

The Union continued to press for some response from

management, but without success. Mr. Frame was in Rhodesia and the managers in charge refused to make any decision in his absence. On Thursday, 1 February, however, the company made a press statement offering increased wages on condition the workers returned to work. Increases of R1,00 to R2,50 were offered to the workers, differing according to length of service and grade of work. The spinners and labourers were offered the higher increases. The workers rejected these wage proposals. A meeting of all textile workers was held at Bolton Hall, the new headquarters of the T.W.I.U. on that Thursday and the wage proposals were rejected decisively. It was resolved to continue the strike.

Management then agreed to bring forward a scheduled Industrial Council meeting for Wednesday, 7 February, and the T.W.I.U. hoped that at this meeting management would increase their wage offer and agree to a revision of the agreement, which was already irrelevant in Natal, in the light of wage increases offered by the employers. The Industrial Council meeting had, however, been called to consider the exemptions requested by the Frame Group for their mills in Harrismith and East London to pay wages considerably lower than the recently negotiated national increase because these were situated in "border areas". The discussion about this and other matters dragged on while the officials were aware that a meeting of workers scheduled for 12.00 would be awaiting their return. When eventually the "current situation" was reached in the meeting management was obdurate. No further offers could be made above those already made, management said.

At a mass meeting at Bolton Hall the union explained the position. The workers were not impressed: they attacked the agreement which had held them down to low wages, and made their rejection of the wage offer explicit. "The cost of living has gone so high I cannot afford to buy the blankets I make", said one worker. "We are not children, we are not on strike. We are asking for the managers to listen to our problems, then we will go back to work," said another worker. Finally, however, the workers had to face the fact that they were experiencing problems in maintaining unity. On this, the seventh day of the strike, some workers were beginning to express their fear of losing their jobs. By this time also, some of the thrust of mass action in Durban had been blunted by other workers returning to work. After a long discussion the general secretary of the

T.W.I.U. was asked to ring the Frame Group management to see whether there had been any change in their offer. After telling the management how obdurate the workers were in demanding increases above the offer of the managers, a further slight concession was made: that one day strike pay would be paid by the Frame Group if the workers returned to work on the following day, and that no workers would be fired. With these two points he returned to the meeting and advised the workers to return to work. A rather dispirited, but not defeated, group of textile workers eventually accepted that they would have to go back to work because it would be difficult to maintain unity much longer.

On Monday, 5 February, T.W.I.U. officials who were engaged in routine recruiting and collecting of subscriptions of workers at Smith and Nephew, a firm with a more progressive labour policy, were met by a crowd of workers outside the gate. The workers explained they wanted a basic wage rate of R18,00 for all workers. While the union officials were working out the wage demands of the workers, the manager of the factory arrived on the scene and told the workers not to listen to "agitators who were telling you to go on strike". After a heated exchange he then agreed to discuss the wage demands with the union. He had been working through the weekend on a new scale of wages and asked the union officials to explain that this was as far as the firm could go. This was not agreed to by the union officials but they did agree to negotiate for a quick settlement if the workers demands could be met. The management's offer was substantially lower than R18,00 a week, although an improvement on existing wages.

An interpreter was called and the wages for each grade of workers explained. This was not altogether successful as none of the workers knew what grade their job was. There was some disturbance as workers asked for the wage offered for their particular job. As the manager read off the wages grade by grade a worker shouted from the back of the crowd: "We are not potatoes". After the proposed wages had been explained and re-explained, it became quite evident that the proposals were totally unacceptable to the workers. Management left the meeting to get the wage proposals typed out for each worker. The organiser then discussed the problem of negotiation with the workers. He said he could understand any doubts they would have about his negotiating on their

behalf. This was the first time that he was in the position of being able to negotiate with this firm and he felt that if it were possible to negotiate for the workers' demands then some progress would have been made. Whatever the management offered it would still be up to the workers as a whole to accept or reject the proposals. The workers then endorsed the suggestion that the organiser negotiate on their behalf, provided he put forward the demand for a basic wage of R18,00.

The organiser then approached the managers, who were standing around the gate discussing the situation among themselves. A meeting between the production managers, the managing director, and the personnel office was called in the security room adjacent to the gate. The organiser put the case of the workers to the management and gave reasons, such as the rapidly rising cost of living, and the poverty datum line, for accepting the workers' demand outright. He was invited to remain in the discussion "to prod our consciences", but after lengthy argument amongst the managers, it became clear that they were not willing to accede to the workers' demands. The organiser returned to convey their position to the workers. One of the production managers also came out and called his men together to discuss the offer with them. The workers remained adamant that they wanted the basic R18,00 even if it meant that all workers irrespective of skill or sex be paid that amount.

The organiser returned to tell the management that the workers would refuse to return on their offer. He then put it to management that the lower paid workers should have their bonuses amalgamated with the basic wage, since these were the workers hit hardest by the rapid rise in the cost of living. For the other workers, with a potential earning higher than R18,00 the basic wage rate could remain the same, but the worker would be guaranteed a minimum take home pay over and above deductions for tax and other reasons of R18,00. Management immediately responded to this method of introducing rapid increases in basic wages and estimated the likely increase in the total wage bill for the rest of the year. In the event, the total wage bill would not be increased dramatically. Nothing more was done on Monday as the organiser insisted that every worker be presented with written wage offers and these had to be typed.

On the following day, the union officials discussed the amended proposals of the management with the workers, who were quite receptive. At this meeting, however, plain clothes police were present in force. During that day four cars followed the union cars from factory to factory. Police stood immediately behind union officials and made notes of what was being said. Their presence was particularly obstructive when the union officials tried to gauge the feelings of the women workers, both African and Indian for while the male workers were offered R18,00, the women were offered a minimum of R12,00. The workers, however, accepted these proposals and went back to work.

It was only in the textile industry that a union took any active part in negotiating on behalf of workers, either successfully or unsuccessfully. The situation was rather different in the furniture industry, where routine negotiations were already taking place and the workers' demands were channeled to the negotiating table. In the metal industry none of the unions appeared at the factories during the strikes. So from the position of the Textile Workers Industrial Union, the strikes strengthened the hand of union officials immensely. At one plant, Smith and Nephew, the union was instrumental in getting the workers' demand accepted although the women's wage still lagged proportionately behind that of the men. At this plant, union recognition, previously denied, was soon accorded. At the same time the union officials came under close scrutiny and were very exposed to the security police who were obviously attempting to find the "agitators". Some union officials were clearly affected by this pressure.

Most African workers in the textile industry cannot be immediately replaced if they go on strike, since they require both training and experience if they are to produce at the required rate. The following table shows the distribution of the weekly-paid work force, nearly 90% of whom are African, in terms of job categories at one of the largest textile mills in Durban.

Grade 1,	e.g. labourer, carrier	
	tea attendant	11%