

"FOR FREEDOM WITHOUT HUNGER" : ASPECTS OF THE  
SOUTH AFRICAN CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS WITH  
REFERENCE TO THE WESTERN CAPE

BY  
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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation focus's on some of the organisation and struggles of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) with a particular focus on the Western Cape. SACTU became a member, soon after its formation, of the Congress Alliance. It worked closely with the other organisations of the Congress Alliance and was important in the mobilisation of people for the various campaigns. Because of this close relationship, SACTU is more often regarded as a member of a political alliance than as a trade union co-ordinating body. The latter will be the focus of the first chapter in this thesis where I hope to convey a picture of SACTU as a co-ordinating body of affiliate unions. The chapter describes the formation of SACTU, its policy and the organisational structures which it set up. Although the dissertation attempts to draw particular attention to the Western Cape, the national policy, the structure and the national campaigns were applicable on a national level rather than a regional level and <sup>are</sup> dealt with as such. This does not imply that there was homogeneity between all regions or that campaigns were taken up in the same manner in all the regions. The different material conditions and organisational dynamics of the different regions are not dealt with in this dissertation but some of the distinctions both in conditions and the way campaigns were taken up in the Western Cape are referred to.

The second part of the first chapter is a profile of some of the activities of SACTU in the Western Cape , both

the organisation/....

the organisation of SACTU as a co-ordinating structure and the organisation of the individual unions.

In the second chapter I focus on industrial disputes in which some of the SACTU workers were involved, on the El'a day campaign and on the 1958 and 1961 stayaways. I have attempted to present a profile of the course of events and an account of struggles in these sections. I have also attempted to present an assessment of these struggles in the light in which those involved assessed them. I make some tentative comments on the political educative aspect of the strikes, the campaigns and the stayaways which were part of the political struggles of the proletariat in the period of heightened mass activity of the fifties and early sixties.

The final chapter is a reference to SACTU's activities outside of the factory. SACTU discarded the phrase 'No politics in the trade unions' at its Inaugural Conference. But what did they mean by politics? This chapter entitled 'Trade Unions and Politics', attempts to answer this question both at an abstract level and by focussing on SACTU's concrete participation in the Congress Alliance.

There were a number of problems which I encountered in the course of my research and presentation. I set out with the task of writing up an aspect of the people's history - the history of the struggles of the popular classes. ~~yet~~, I have found difficulty in focussing on one aspect of a series of complex and interlinked struggles. One cannot capture these complexities in the written word. One cannot capture either the dynamic aspect of people's history. The men and women who were involved in the struggles described in this paper

are using/.....

are using their experience in their political practice today. They are always building on that experience and so their interpretations of struggles are modified as lessons for the present are drawn from them. The use of their own history and political experience to inform their practice today is something which I was unable to capture in this form and can only be conveyed orally.

A sub-thesis to the account of the struggles is the extent to which the organisations and campaigns of SACTU changed the consciousness of its members. I pose the question of the extent to which the political education of those involved was furthered through the campaigns and the extent to which working class consciousness was developed. There has been extensive debate around the concept of working class consciousness which I will not go into here but will rather present a working definition of working class consciousness for the purposes of this dissertation. Hence, working class consciousness is a consciousness on the part of workers of their common position in relation to the means of production and their ability through collective action to challenge the relations of production. The political educative aspect of the campaigns, organisation and lecture programmes must be assessed in relation to the extent to which they contributed to the development of working class consciousness.

Having set out to do this one faces particular problems. It is difficult to assess the effect of individual campaigns, strikes, stayaways and organisations. They all formed part of numerous interrelated struggles all contributing in some way to the political education of the masses. To focus on a single aspect in the course of the struggle for socialism and to quantify its contribution to the struggle, is not possible. Further by focussing on one organisation and one region of that

organisation/.....

organisation, one ends up with a distorted view.

The organisation appears stronger and more important than it would if placed in a national context and in the context of the struggles of the popular classes as a whole (1). Thus the difficulty in writing history of the political struggles of the dominated classes is that one cannot capture the complexities of the dynamics of organisation and the interrelated struggles in this form.

Another problem encountered in the presentation was in the assessment of campaigns. The criteria upon which I based these were:

- 1) To assess on the basis of the interpretations and assessments of those involved in the struggles.
- 2) To assess the struggles and organisations on the basis of what those conducting the struggles set out to achieve.
- 3) To assess campaigns not as a success or failure but as part of the ongoing process of struggle. Moreover the campaigns must be assessed according to the material conditions prevailing at the time and in relation to the overall organisation and mobilisation of the popular classes.

I have tried to present some picture of organisations on a day to day basis but found this particularly difficult. Day to day activities are not on the whole reflected in the minutes and documents of the organisation nor are they reflected in the progressive newspapers consulted. Thus the only source for some details were the interviews and what information there is, is due to the excellent memories of those who were interviewed. However, over a period of 25 years some of the details have been forgotten. In these cases I relied on the written material with the consequent limitations and distortions. An example where this problem manifested itself was the section on the £1 a day campaign. Because the

bulk/.....

bulk of the information was from the Minutes of the Annual Conferences, the conferences appear as highlights in the campaign, which they were not. They were points at which assessments of the campaign were made so there appears to be a break in the campaign at these points. However one must view the campaign as an ongoing process with lessons learnt on a day to day basis, on a continuum, but the lessons are only recorded annually.

There are a number of further gaps and shortcomings, as a result of gaps<sup>in</sup> research but also as a result of the nature of the sources which I will deal with in this section.

Overall the information specific to the Western Cape in the dissertation is seriously lacking. This problem becomes evident in both chapter one and chapter two. In chapter one, the information on the different unions is uneven. In chapter two the way in which the £1 a day campaign was taken up in the Western Cape and the specific problems or strengths of the region is very brief. In the case of the £1 a day campaign, I had to rely to a large extent on the written sources. They all contain more information on the overall national aspect of the campaign and regional detail that there is, is about the activities on the Rand. The question which must be raised in this regard is, why there is so little information on the Western Cape in the official records and progressive newspapers. Was this because of an unequal concern about the Western Cape and the developments there? Or was it simply inconsistent communication? Most of the written material originated and was produced on the Rand. Reports from the Western Cape might have been mislaid on the way, might not have been sent, might not have been produced. If this was the case then the problem was not a different attitude to the Western Cape but simply an absence of records and a long distance from where the recordings were made.

A further/.....



A further gap is the involvement of the specific unions in the campaigns and the nature of this involvement. The result of this is that there is no connection or integration between Chapter I and Chapter II.

The structure of capital and the specific state policies in the Western Cape are not discussed. Research has been undertaken in these spheres and I refer the reader to Bloch, Verbeek and Schreiner. Two brief comments should be made here however as they were conditions to be taken into account by the trade unions.

In the post war period substantial growth in the manufacturing industry in the Western Cape took place so that by 1949, Cape Town was the second most important industrial centre with 13% of all industrial establishments and 16,5% of all industrial employees in South Africa (2). In the early fifties there was an increase in the concentration of capital in the Western Cape as many small undercapitalised and uncompetitive concerns disappeared because of the larger more capital-intensive firms. However, although the number of establishments decreased, the number of people employed did not (3).

By the 1960's manufacturing capital in the Western Cape was undergoing a process of concentration. A trend towards mechanisation resulted in changes in the predominant technical division of labour. Clothing and textile, food, beverage and tobacco, printing and paper and footwear and leather industries dominated the structure of industry (4).

The policy of the state towards labour allocation in the Western Cape differed from other areas. The Coloured Labour Preference policy, first formulated in 1955 declared the Western Cape below the Fish River to be an area where African labour could only be employed where no Coloured Labour was available.

The policy was shown by Verbeek (5) to serve ideological and political functions in a coherent way but resulted in contradictions at the economic level. It threatened the availability and low cost structure of labour and was opposed by capital from its inception. However, it was enforced by the early sixties and by designating 'Coloured people' as a separate racial group served as part of the attempts of the state to divide the working class along racial lines.

Notes/.....

Notes on Sources  
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1. New Age and Workers Unity. New Age was the weekly newspaper of the Congress Alliance. Workers Unity was the official organ of SACTU which was published <sup>monthly</sup> but changed its format and was published every three months from August 1961.

While useful in the portrayal of the events of the period and for an account of the struggles, they do not provide a complete record. Firstly, they do not provide details of day to day organisation as mentioned above. Secondly, they were tools of organisation themselves, used for the mobilisation and politicisation of the popular classes. As such struggles were represented with this task in mind and might have been distorted.

2. Documents and Minutes

These provided essential details of structures, forms of organisation, motivation for campaigns, the nature of campaigns as well as assessments of those campaigns. They also convey SACTU's concerns with issues outside of the factory and its practical relation with the Congress Alliance.

These sources however must be seen in the context of the way in which the organisation functioned. They are often brief because of organisational pressures and may not reflect the entire situation. On the whole they do not reflect regional details nor do they reflect daily problems and difficulties at <sup>any</sup> length.

3. Oral Sources/.....

### 3. Oral Sources

These are an invaluable source to complement the newspaper and documentary sources. Those interviewed were able to interpret details as they appeared in the newspapers, documents and minutes, and were able to provide details about the Western Cape which on the whole was lacking in the other sources.

FOOTNOTES

1. For example, the Congress Alliance was never a strong force in the Western Cape. This dissertation in isolation makes it appear stronger than it was.
2. Schriener, 1982 p26
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Verbeek, 1981

## CHAPTER ONE

'An injury to one is an injury to all!': The struggle for higher wages and better working conditions

Formation, Policy and Structures

Differences continued to exist within the South African Trades and Labour Council (SAT&LC) despite the withdrawal in 1950 of a group of right wing trade unions who formed the South African Federation of Trade Unions. With the introduction of the Amendment to the Industrial Conciliation Act, many of the registered unions wished to form a co-ordinating body of registered unions only. Such a body, they thought, would be afforded greater recognition from the employers and would wield greater influence with the government.<sup>1</sup> The left wing unions denounced the amendment as an attempt to divide the trade union movement and reaffirmed their commitment to the non-racial tradition of the SAL&TC.

During 1954, two 'unity' conferences were held at the initiative of the SAL&TC to work out a response to the proposed Industrial Conciliation Bill. At these conferences the differences between the unions crystallized as the right wing unions became increasingly open in their desire to control and subordinate African workers in the collective bargaining process.<sup>2</sup> The left consistently called for non-racial unity.

Although the constitution of the SAL&TC upheld the principles of non-racial unionism, in practise it had become increasingly paternal in its approach to African trade unions. With the successive banning under the Suppression of Communism Act of most of the left wing unionists on the executive and within the Council, the interests of the more privileged section of the working class came to dominate. This was reflected, for example, in the refusal of the SAL&TC to oppose the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act, on the pretext that it did not affect white workers.

It was definitively reflected in the resolution tabled and adopted at the second Conference of 1954 which 'for the sake of unity' resolved to exclude African trade unions. The SAL&TC dissolved and the remaining members of the National Executive Committee (NEC) were empowered to wind up the organisation. In its place a new trade union centre with a colour bar constitution - the South African Trade Union Council (SATUC) was formed.

Fourteen unions voted against the dissolution of the SAL&TC and against the exclusion/.....

exclusion of African trade unions. The following day thirteen of these unions met, seeking a new basis for unity. An interim Trade Union Co-ordinating Committee was established for the purpose of convening a conference to establish a new trade union body. The Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU), a body with twenty-two affiliates was invited to participate in the Trade Union Co-ordinating Committee. <sup>4</sup>

In the following months the Trade Union Co-ordinating Committee revised the constitution of the SAL&TC to fit the needs of the new body. The draft constitution was circulated and a call went out through leaflets and pamphlets for unions to elect delegates to attend the conference to be held in the Trades Hall in Johannesburg on 5 and 6 March, 1955.

A pamphlet issued by the Cape Workers Council of Action <sup>5</sup> called on unions "to discuss at your factory and your union meetings, the foundation of a new trade union centre that should be able to speak on behalf of all workers irrespective of race, colour, nationality or sex."

On 5 and 6 March, 66 delegates from 33 unions gathered in the Trades Hall in Johannesburg. As soon as a motion to form a new trade union centre was passed, one trade union leader after another rose to announce the affiliation of his or her union to the centre. <sup>6</sup>

With those announcements they were affiliating their unions to a centre whose objectives were :

- " a) To co-ordinate the activities and interests of workers in The Union of South Africa;
- ' b) To assist trade unions morally, financially or otherwise, as circumstances may dictate;
- c) To organise the unorganised workers into trade unions;
- d) To oppose any discrimination in employment and to fight for the right of all workers to do any job provided the the minimum wage rates are applied;
- e) To promote, support or oppose any legislation as might be in the interests of the workers and trade union movement;
- f) To advance the democratic rights of all workers.
- g) To do all other things not inconsistent with this constitution to promote the interests and welfare of trade unionism. " <sup>7</sup>

The Declaration of Principles which were unanimously adopted stated that

We/.....

"We resolve that this co-ordinating body of trade unions shall strive to unite all workers in its ranks, without discrimination and without prejudice. We resolve that this body shall determinedly seek to further and protect the interests of all workers and that its guiding motto shall be the universal slogan of the working class solidarity : An injury to one is an injury to all! "

The non-racial principles dictated the policy to white workers :

"The interests of all workers are alike, whether they be European non-European. African. Coloured. English. Afrikaans or Jewish." <sup>8</sup>

There were white members of SACTU affiliates. It was recognised that there was a split of the working class but that this was a result of government legislation. 'There was a feeling that white workers would be part of the struggle. We felt that unity was possible.' <sup>9</sup>

Also unanimously adopted was the principle of trade union political involvement. The Declaration expressed that the role of the trade union movement was to serve the immediate interests of the workers, of higher wages and better conditions of work and life, alongside the ultimate objective of freedom from unemployment, poverty and oppression.

In his address, the newly elected President, Piet Beyleveld, stressed:

"You cannot separate politics and the way in which people are governed from their bread-and butter, or their freedom to move from places where they can best find employment, or the houses they live in, or the type of education their children get ... the trade unions would ... be neglecting the interests of their members if they failed to struggle for their members on all matters which affect them. "

An important question to pose is what SACTU's understanding of politics was. Did 'politics' extend from the struggle against unemployment, against the pass system and against oppression, to a struggle against the economic and social system?

The SACTU leadership, many who had been trained in the Communist Party,  
perceived/.....



perceived that the struggle extended beyond the fight for better wages and working conditions. They were concerned also with 'the way people were governed', the pass-laws, labour legislation, high rents and transport costs. But taking up struggles around these issues does not in itself constitute politics. It is the manner in which these issues are taken up, whether they be in the factories or in the townships, that is important. Did SACTU in raising these issues, link them to class domination? Were these issues raised in such a way that the struggles around them posed a challenge to the relations of production?

The Acting General Secretary in 1962 explained that

"SACTU conducts a fierce struggle against exploitation. Capitalism thrives on profits derived from workers, on the exploitation of workers and the deprivation of human rights ... our field workers provide constant explanations to workers of the root cause of their suffering. Thus SACTU develops the initiative of working people far beyond action for increases in their pay packet. " 10

Piet Beyleveld, in his address, urged

"It is your responsibility during the discussions here today and tomorrow to lay the foundations of a trade union centre which will lead workers to the realisation of their own potential. The body that we are going to form here today must firmly establish the principle of unity, not on a racial basis, but on the basis of common interest, on the basis that all workers have the right to share in the wealth of this country of ours. "

These extracts give some indication of SACTU's concern to link the issues which they took up to political (class) domination. SACTU's perception of politics is a concern of this dissertation and will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Three.

The discussion over the following two days of the conference highlighted the multiple concerns of the trade unionists in SACTU. Resolutions discussed and adopted ranged from resolving to organise the thousands of unorganised workers into trade unions and to educate them about their common problems as workers, to proposing active opposition to the Industrial Conciliation Bill, The Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act, the colour bar, and forced removals.

The constitution and structures for the efficient functioning of the body were drawn up. The highest authority was to be the conference of delegates from affiliated unions. Between conferences, the affairs were to be conducted and administered by the NEC, consisting of the president, two vice-presidents, treasurer, general secretary and one member for each 3 000 affiliated members. The NEC was to meet at least once every three months. Between meetings of the NEC, affairs were to be conducted and administered by a Management Committee, consisting of the president, two vice-presidents, treasurer, general secretary and eight members elected by the Annual Conference. The Management Committee was to meet at least once a month. In future years, the election of national leadership was to be discussed extensively before the conference. Each union was to recommend to conference who they thought should be elected to the national leadership. <sup>11</sup>

Unlike the Declaration of Principles and the constitution, which were unanimously agreed upon, the name of the body became a contentious debate. A delegate at the inaugural conference proposed that the body continue under the name of SAL&TC, motivating that

"The intention was and always has been that this body when formed should not only adopt the purposes of the old SAL&TC but should carry them out. The fault was that the SAL&TC was not able or prepared to carry out the purposes for which it was formed. Instead of cursing and turning aside a name that has a real tradition, we should keep it." <sup>12</sup>

He was swiftly responded to :

"The speaker has said that the T&LC did not look after the rights of African workers. If this is accepted then the name of the SAL&TC does not correspond with our objectives. I think that this name, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) is fitting and proper for the present time. " <sup>13</sup>

One of the first tasks of the Executive of the new body which became SACTU by a small majority of seven votes, was to establish Local Committees. The local committee was the structure which would 'conduct local activities in accordance with the aims, objects and decisions of the SACTU and shall be responsible in its area for the carrying into effect the objects of the Congress.'

The Local Committee Bye-laws laid down that the Local Committee was to

confine itself to consultative, organising and co-ordinating work of the unions affiliated to SACTU in the area and 'shall not usurp any of the functions or authority of its associate unions or interfere in the domestic affairs of such unions.'<sup>15</sup> The Local Committee could not make decisions of national importance but could make recommendations to the NEC. It was however expected to act as the 'official voice of the trade union movement in the area of jurisdiction'' and as such would carry out work in the area on behalf of SACTU. Reports were to be submitted to the NEC at least four times a year and the Local Committee was expected to inform the NEC on all matters with which they dealt. The activities of the Local Committee were to be conducted between General Meetings by an executive committee consisting of a chairperson, vice-chairperson, treasurer, secretary and any other members which the general meetings may have determined. Each industry was to be represented by at least two delegates. At the First Annual National Conference a resolution was taken to employ a national organiser and full time organisers in each area for the purpose of strengthening the Local Committees.

In the Western Cape a Local Committee was established shortly after the Inaugural Conference, in accordance with the organisational form described above. All SACTU activities in the Western Cape were conducted by this Local Committee and its affiliated unions. These will be dealt with at greater length but it is necessary first to discuss the other organisational forms which SACTU adopted. They were developed in the course of SACTU activities, either through campaigns or in response to particular issues. National Organising Committees were set up in the course of the organising of the unorganised campaign, General Workers' Unions were also set up to aid this campaign and Unemployed Workers' Unions were initiated in response to the problems of the growing number of unemployed.

#### National Organising Committees 16

SACTU identified the agricultural, mining, transport and metal sectors which employed large numbers of workers to be crucial areas to organise. Thus special attention was given to workers in these fields. In 1958, National Organising Committees was set up for the metal and transport industries, in 1959 for mining and agriculture.

The Committees which employed full time organisers for each sector were central to the growth and establishment of unions such as the South African Railways and Harbour Workers Union (SARSHWU), Metal Workers Union and Mining Workers

Unions in all centres, and central to the establishment of a Farm, Plantation and Allied Workers Union in the agricultural sector.

The organisers co-ordinated the activities of the unions, gathered information for memorandums and for use in organisation, trained workers and organisers within the unions, and engaged in organisation on the ground.

#### Unemployed Workers' Unions

In 1959, the Minister of Labour reported that 27 079 whites, coloureds and indians, and 95 000 africans were unemployed.<sup>17</sup> At their Fourth Annual National Conference held in March 1959, SACTU addressed themselves to the problem of growing unemployment. They called on the government to halt the trend in the economy which was heading for a depression by taking the following measures : placing constraints on the 'huge profits being made'; immediate increases in wages for all workers with the view of increasing their purchasing power; not to burden the workers with further increases in the cost of living; abolish the use of convict labour; scrap job reservation; bring wages in the Reserves in line with those in urban areas; and pay increased unemployment benefits to those paid in the past.

The Conference saw measures which workers could themselves take and called on 'all unemployed workers to organise themselves into a union of unemployed workers with the view to agitating for the above demands' and instructed all Local Committees to assist in the organisation of unemployed workers.

The two major developments in this regard were in Durban and Johannesburg. The Durban Local Committee established a Union of Unemployed Workers and it was largely due to their efforts that SACTU in 1961 was able to force Parliament and employers organisations to admit the gravity of the problem.

The Unemployed Workers Union felt that unemployment had become a national crisis and sought a meeting with the Minister of Labour. Unemployment was estimated to be between thirty and forty thousand unemployed indians, seven thousand unemployed coloureds and one hundred thousand unemployed africans. The delegation travelled four hundred kilometers to Johannesburg but the Minister refused to meet them. This response, although not unexpected, was disappointing to the workers, but highlighted to them the government's failure to take responsibility for unemployed workers. This experience exposed workers to the fact that a representative of a state which purported to

have/.....

have their interests at heart was in practice unconcerned with their problems.

In Johannesburg a group of white unemployed workers approached SACTU for assistance. Through the help of SACTU organisers they formed themselves into the Council of Unemployed Workers. They later became a Welfare Organisation but after consistent persuasion by Special Branch to have nothing to do with SACTU they broke all links.

In Cape Town the problem of unemployment was no less acute. In 1956, New Age reported the number of unemployed workers in the Western Cape to be 4 800.<sup>20</sup> African workers were the hardest hit with 2 417 unemployed. In addition many workers in the building, furniture and metal industries were on short time, for example, the majority of the 1 500 to 1 600 unskilled workers in the metal industry and four hundred workers in the furniture industry.<sup>21</sup> New Age reported that many employers had started to reduce their cost structures by sacking higher paid workers and replacing them with learners whose starting wages were lowered. Many factories across the board were reducing the number of people that they employed - in some cases by fifty percent.<sup>22</sup> One factory in the metal industry went bankrupt. The slump in the building and garment industries added to the level of unemployment.<sup>23</sup>

In 1959 there were 5 183 unemployed workers in the Peninsula and 1 500 african workers reported daily to the Labour Bureau in Langa looking for jobs.<sup>24</sup> Many had been unemployed for as long as six months. SACTU in the Western Cape urged that efforts be made to organise these workers. No union was ever formed due to the shortages of SACTU organisers but meetings of unemployed workers were held and the plight of unemployed workers were given attention at meetings of the Congress Alliance, particularly in the anti-pass campaigns. In May 1959, african unemployed workers in the Peninsula elected their own delegate to the Anti-Pass Conference held in Johannesburg. Their elected delegate, Welcome Zihlangu, told New Age that 'pass laws conferences and campaigns are important for us as it is the pass laws which are aggravating the unemployment.'<sup>25</sup>

#### General Workers Union

At the fifth Annual National Conference held in 1960, a new organisational form was adopted to facilitate the campaign of organising the unorganised. The Conference called for the establishment of General Workers Unions in all areas. The Management Committee introduced the idea to the conference and recommended that General Workers Unions should be launched with as much publicity/.....

publicity as possible in each area. They hoped in this way to attract unorganised workers to SACTU.

The Management Committee proposed that departmental committees be formed for the different industries and their activities co-ordinated by a central committee. Factory Committees had already been formed in certain industries and should become part of the General Workers Union until they were in a position to be established as separate unions. The policy was that all workers that were recruited into the General Workers Union should be organised into separate unions as soon as possible. The control of each General Workers Union was to be vested in the SACTU Local Committee.

In Cape Town, the position with a General Workers Union was similar to the position with unemployed workers. The establishment of such a union would require a full time organiser. Experienced organisers and finance were limited. The officials of the affiliated unions tried to deal with the workers that came into the offices but this was not enough for the establishment of a General Workers Union. The feeling of the organisers was, however, that it was more important to concentrate on industries than to establish a General Workers Union. <sup>26</sup>

In the discussion at the Annual National Conference in 1961, a Cape Town delegate reported that a General Workers Union was being formed outside of SACTU. It transpired, however, that it had been set up by a group of Congress activists well known to the SACTU organisers, and was largely just a name rather than an adequate structure for organising workers. <sup>27</sup>

#### The SACTU Local Committee in the Western Cape

The task of this chapter is to convey some sense of the aspects of the organisation and activities of SACTU which continued during and between high profile events.

The day to day organisation of SACTU took place at two levels. Firstly SACTU was a co-ordinating body of trade unions drawn together into a central structure. I will be examining some of the joint activities of the unions within this structure and some of the advantages of being part of such a structure. The areas I focus on are not exhaustive, but I try to highlight through the issues covered, both the long term and the immediate advantages of the SACTU Local Committee (hereafter referred to as LC). For example, the joint education projects equipped organisers and advanced

workers to make the links between the struggles fought at individual factories, and the system of class domination and exploitation, constituting a long term advantage. Swapping knowledge and research on regulations of safety at work or discussions on the common problem of the victimisation of union members helped in the short term day to day organisation.

Secondly, extensive organisation and activities took place within the individual affiliates. Thus an examination of SACTU requires a focus on these affiliates. This will be discussed after the following section on the LC and some of its activities.

At SACTU's first Annual Conference in March 1956, delegates representing the Cape Western Province LC were present from the following unions :

- \*Food and Canning Workers Union, African Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU and AFCWU)
- \*Textile Workers Industrial Union, African Textile Workers Industrial Union (TWIU and ATWIU)
- \*National Union of Laundry, Cleaning and Drying Workers, African Laundry, Cleaning and Drying Workers (NULCDW and ALCDW)
- \*South African Tin Workers Union
- \*South African Canvas and Rope Workers Union
- \*Bag Workers Union
- \*Metal Workers Union
- \*South African Railways and Harbour Workers Union (SAR&HWU)

By 1963, the LC had a further four affiliates :

- \*Garage and Motor Workers Union
- \*Building, Cement and Quarry Workers Union
- \*Hospital Workers Union
- \*Commercial and Distributive Workers Union

The LC<sup>28</sup> although the first to be formed only gained strength after 1961. The organisers had difficult problems to overcome. The majority of the unionised workers in the Cape Peninsula who were coloured were members of craft unions which although independent of any co-ordinating body were relatively conservative. The African labour force was small in comparison to areas such as the Witwatersrand and the Eastern Cape. Severe restrictions were placed by the Coloured Labour Preference policy on the entry of Africans into industry. Furthermore, the majority of African workers were migrant workers. As such they were in the urban area only as long as their contracts lasted. They were therefore at risk of losing their jobs and their/.....

their rights to be in the urban areas. Thus they were reluctant to join trade unions. The task of establishing and building trade unions under these circumstances was particularly evident. Added to this was the fact that most of the experienced leaders had been banned even before SACTU was formed.

Despite the problems, the unions which existed, both the weak and strong unions, organised themselves into a LC and doing so was to prove extremely helpful in the face of these difficulties.

Meetings of the executives of all the unions affiliated to SACTU in the Western Cape were held weekly where the week was reviewed, difficulties encountered were discussed and ideas for overcoming these difficulties were exchanged.<sup>29</sup> 'Lessons for one's own organisation were learnt from the experiences of other unions as well as the experiences of other factories.'<sup>30</sup>

As most of the unions had offices in the same building in Plein Street, or nearby in Queen Victoria Street, interaction and support occurred on a day to day basis between the organisers as well as the workers. 'SACTU offices were always open and workers streamed in,' one organiser remembered, 'One felt at home and happy in the SACTU offices.'<sup>31</sup>

A very useful factor for the progressive trade unions in the Western Cape was the close relationship with the political and womens' organisations. Once a week volunteers from the African National Congress (ANC) and the Federation of South African Womes (FSAW) helped the SACTU officials and volunteers in their organisational drives. Volunteers participated in a course on trade unionism and then,

"Every Tuesday, all the organisers from SACTU and volunteers from the Fed and the ANC met in an industrial area, say Paarden Eiland. We would spend the whole day discussing SACTU with the workers there, when they were at the gates, when they had their lunch, when they went to the shop, when they went home. We would tell them about trade unions about SACTU, where the offices were and encouraged them to join. When we felt we had covered Paarden Eiland, we would move to Bellville and so on. "<sup>32</sup>

The ANC held mass meetings regularly in the townships and at these meetings workers were always urged to join SACTU. At the end of the meeting two

tables/.....



tables were set up for members to sign up - one for the ANC and one for SACTU. The signed up SACTU forms were given to the organisers who then sought out the workers at their factories, inviting them to join the union, where a union existed, helping them to form a union where one did not. This made the process of entry into a new factory far easier. For many of the unions, workers from new factories approached them, saving them the trouble of creating ingenuitive methods to reach workers at a new factory.

On one occasion, ten workers, the entire workforce of a chicory factory signed up to join SACTU at an ANC meeting. With only ten workers, they could not afford to set up an office at the factory. The SACTU organisers helped them, however, and they worked from the SACTU offices.<sup>33</sup>

This ease of access to workers did not apply to organisation at factories where workers were accomadated on the premises. These workers were often unable to attend meetings held in the townships. The organiser, in these cases, faced the task often of secret meetings in bushes or, as in the case of the SAR&HWU, illegally dressed in the overalls worn by the railway employees.

Also beneficial to union organisation was contact through SACTU, with unions in other centres. National Conferences were held once a year which delegates from all the organised factories attended. Resolutions were discussed prior to the conference at all factories and union meetings. Report backs were held after the conference at every factory, at all union meetings as well as in every area. Thus the benefits of national contact was not limited to those workers who attended the conference.

Discussion at conferences revolved around the immediate trade union affairs, but also extended beyond day to day union organisation. It was in this regard that national contact was so important. A worker from the Glen Cairn Quarry or a packer at O.K.Bazaars were exposed to working class struggles on a national scale. They found that factory workers at LKB Fruiteries in Port Elizabeth, farm workers from the Bethal or mine workers in Klerksdorp were facing similar problems of their own. They also faced high rents, could not afford bus fares or education for their children, worked long hours and were injured at work. Their supervisors were also racist and their bosses lived in luxury. They were also put in jail because they did not have passes, were baton charged and fired on by police and the army. Workers received a practical insight into the commonality of their oppression, their exploitation as workers, their alienation from the means of production.

Education programmes and lectures supplemented the practical experiences of workers, lectures were held by the LC on a regular basis. Organisers and more advanced workers attended day long lecture programmes which were held at SACTU offices, once or twice a month.<sup>34</sup> These lectures were reproduced in the factories, particularly where workers stayed in hostels on the premises and it was difficult for them to get to the lectures. Workers who attended the lectures were encouraged to reproduce as much as they could at their place of work and in their place of residence.

The content of the lectures ranged from explanations of workers position in society, to how profits are made, to the role of trade unions, to more practical topics like how shop stewards should work in the factory, and how to form a workers' committee.<sup>36</sup> In a discussion at the First Annual National Conference, a delegate expressed his view on the purpose of the trade union lectures:

"Besides training classes for active trade union work, rank and file workers must be educated and must be taught that their fight was not only for higher wages and better working conditions but for freedom."<sup>36</sup>

Education was stressed at every National Conference, both for organisers and for rank and file. Lectures were compiled by the NEC and distributed to the different centres. In 1955, a National School lasting for two weeks was held where a rigorous lecture programme was delivered. Those who attended should have come away with a thorough understanding of capitalism, the role of trade unions, the international trade union movement, the history of trade unions in South Africa, tasks and organisational responsibilities of a trade unionist, trade unions and the struggle for liberation. No delegates from the Western Cape attended this school but the lectures were reproduced and circulated in all the centres.<sup>37</sup>

Education slid into second place after the hectic day-to-day organisational work as the following resolution from the Sixth Annual National Conference hinted. The NEC regreted having to inform Conference that

"No specific arrangements have been made (since the last conference)

- 1) To hold a national school for trade union officials
- 2) To bring out a set of lectures on trade unionism for factory committees. "<sup>38</sup>

More regular in the task of providing education was the monthly and later quarterly <sup>39</sup> publication which SACTU produced - Workers' Unity. It came out regularly from 1955 until 1962, except for six months in 1960 when it was suspended due to lack of funds, and was acclaimed as one of the most useful educational mediums. <sup>40</sup> The content was discussed at conferences, and suggestions were made by delegates, for example, it was suggested that preference be given to stories from factories, articles should be run in all three languages, and regular space should be allotted to individual unions. Many of the suggestions were acted upon, resulting in an increase in circulation. Workers' Unity was able to reach workers even where there was no organisation. It also played a crucial role during the national campaigns.

In the Western Cape, a regular feature after 1957 was the lectures held after mass meetings,

" When an issue arose, it didn't end at mass meetings, lectures were given all over and all around to popularise the issue. " <sup>41</sup>

Greater support for campaigns would result from a greater understanding of the importance of the issues being focused on. The lectures which followed high profile meetings provided many with this understanding. The success of the £1 a day campaign was attributed to this practise. <sup>42</sup>

For those activists and workers who were members of other organisations of the Congress Alliance or of FSAW, the education they received through SACTU was supplemented by the programmes run by the other organisations. A worker who lived in the townships could attend lectures of the ANC, FSAW and SACTU. Many did and in the process were able to reach a clearer understanding of working class struggle.

But it was ultimately through practice rather than through propoganda that consciousness was developed. Industrial strikes, national campaigns and stayaways were crucial formative factors. <sup>43</sup>

SACTU was not only concerned with education and high profile campaigns. The majority of its work revolved around the day-to-day issues affecting the working class. At every conference resolutions relating to the following grievances were discussed : poverty wages, working hours, unemployment insurance, cost of living allowances (c.o.l.a.), workers compensation, and safety at work. These struggles were taken beyond discussion and resolution.

That/.....

That SACTU actively fought around these issues is illustrated by the following examples.

SACTU affiliates or LCs regularly presented memoranda or oral evidence to Wage Boards. The demand for a £1 a day always constituted part of this evidence, thus linking up to the intensive national campaign for a £1 a day. The attitude to the Wage Boards was that they could never adequately replace the advantages of direct negotiations between the employers and worker elected representatives. Wage increases were secured through the Wage Boards, although the workers' power to influence the determinations was limited. This was not always the case. SACTU's attitude to the wage boards was not uncritical. However, a more thorough evaluation should have been made of the advantages and disadvantages. A great deal of time was required to complete memoranda and to submit them with oral evidence to the Wage Determination sittings, quite often with no effect.

All negotiations between the unions and employers demanded a 40 hour week. The inclusion of african workers into the Unemployment Insurance Fund was urged by the Unemployed Workers Union, as well as by the National Organising Committees. The lists of unclaimed Workers Compensation which appeared in the Government Gazette, often had over 4 000 unclaimed amounts. The Workmen's Compensation Commissioner claimed that they could not be traced. SACTU replied:

"(We) find it remarkable that all trace of african workers is so easily lost when money is due to them in spite of the fact that they are so heavily tagged by passes, thumb prints, identity numbers and all the other type of red tape of apartheid. If an african worker does not pay his poll tax he is found easily." <sup>45</sup>

Several unions took this task up and many workers were located in this way. <sup>46</sup>

Related to Workers Compensation was the question of safety at work, which SACTU responded to by firstly attempting to educate workers about their rights under the law, and secondly by fighting for protective clothing.

The organisers who were active in the Western Cape, whom the writer interviewed, identified the main problems which workers faced to be low wages, bad conditions at work and at home, living in compounds, high transport costs, long hours overtime without pay, and no protective clothing. These issues along with, for example, high rents in the townships, the £1 a day campaign, and school

fees/.....

fees were raised at LC meetings. But it was the individual affiliates rather than the co-ordinating body that took up these issues on a day-to-day basis. Thus in order to get an idea of the extent and content of union organisation in the Western Cape, one needs to look more closely at the individual affiliates, which I do in the next section.

#### Affiliates of the Western Cape Local Committee

In this section I discuss some of the unions which were affiliated to SACTU in the Western Cape. As I mentioned above, the day-to-day organisation of SACTU continued between and during the high profile activities. Thus to accurately reflect SACTU's organisation, one needs to examine alongside the high profile activities of the LC, the activities of the individual affiliates.

A thorough investigation of the affiliates of SACTU would require extensive research beyond the scope of an Honours dissertation. I present, however, the information about the individual unions which was gathered in the course of my limited research. This information is lacking, however, in several ways which I pose below along with additional questions which I would have liked to answer.

My intention was to examine the unions according to the following structure:

- i) the organisational methods
- ii) structures within the union
- iii) the strengths and weaknesses of the unions
- iv) the priorities they saw for themselves
- v) the establishments where they organised and the strengths of each of these
- vi) membership
- vii) repression of the unions and harrasment of the members
- viii) strikes they were involved in
- ix) the extent to which the union participated in the SACTU LC activities, campaigns and stayaways
- x) the contribution made by the union to the SACTU LC
- xi) the advantages for the union from its involvement in the SACTU LC.

However none of the unions were examined according to this structure. There were discrepancies in the amount of information available, thus the discrepancies in presentation. Some of the causes of the shortcomings are as follows:

- 1) In the case of <sup>some of</sup> the unions, the organisers have left the Western Cape

gone/.....

gone into exile, are serving sentences on Robben Island, or have died (two in detention). Some of the organisers who are still in the Western Cape were detained and banned, thus cut off from the union and unable to remember the precise details of the activities which they were removed from. Much of the information I do have is due to the remarkable memory of those who were interviewed.

- 2) The availability of documents and minutes from the unions is extremely limited except in the case of FCWU. Possibly with further research, documents and minutes of the other unions will be located.
- 3) New Age and Workers Unity, while carrying some information on some of the unions, focussed largely on the more high profile activities and not on the details required for this section.
- 4) Previous research on all but two of the SACTU unions in the Western Cape is absent.

If more information had been available, I would have attempted to answer the following questions : Did SACTU emphasise certain industrial areas more than others? What were the areas of priority which SACTU saw? Why were the industries where they organised chosen? What overall effect did SACTU have on the position of workers in the Western Cape? What was the combined effect of organisation at the factory and organisation around high profile campaigns on the consciousness of the working class as a class?

#### Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU) and African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU)

The FCWU , which was established in 1941, was strong from the mid-fifties to the early sixties and provided the backbone for the SACTU LC.<sup>48</sup> During this period the strongest branches of the union were at Paarl, Worcester, Wellington and Groot Drakenstein. Yet the decade from 1954 to 1964 was marked by the bannings and restrictions of union leaders and organisers. Despite these attacks, the union maintained a high level of organisation in an industry characterised by a high turnover of workers. A full time organiser was employed for FCWU and for AFCWU.<sup>49</sup> During this period, new leaders speedily and ably filled the positions left open by the bannings.

The affairs of the union were administered by a Management Committee which met once a week. These meetings would be reported back to the workers committee set up at each factory during their weekly lunchtime meetings.

The FCWU and AFCWU worked very closely together with negotiations at factories taking/.....

taking place jointly. The unions refused to negotiate separately.<sup>50</sup> The employers' attitude to the union varied. The management at LKB, the organisers felt, were the most difficult employers.<sup>51</sup> At Lamberts Bay where almost all the factories were owned by the same person, the branch secretary was dismissed. A bitter strike ensued after which she was re-employed. The managers' attitude to the union changed dramatically and on occasion he complained to the General Secretary that she did not visit the branch often enough. At factories where the managers were resistant to union organisers coming to the factory to meet with workers, strategies were devised.

"When we came to meetings, we usually got permission from the employer. If he didn't want to give permission they never refused a Medical Benefit Fund meeting. When we were finished discussing the Medical Benefit Fund then we would bring out the things we really wanted to discuss." <sup>52</sup>

At some factories, where permission was blanketly refused, meetings were held at a house of one of the workers.

The vast bulk of the grievances experienced by the workers were dealt with at a branch level. The most common complaints besides low wages and bad conditions were unlawful deductions, miscalculations of Unemployment Insurance Fund, Workmens' Compensation, and confinement allowances, downgrading of union members, inadequate protective clothing and the employment of children.<sup>53</sup>

The union made considerable gains on the wage front through submissions to Conciliation Boards. In 1956 wage increases of between 3/- and 6/6 per week were secured after a sitting of the Conciliation Board for the Fruit and Vegetable Canning Industry was attended.<sup>54</sup> Wages did not only go up however. In 1957, wages were reduced by a Wage Board appointed by the Minister of Labour for the food industry. Employers had called for wage cuts and longer hours which the board granted.<sup>55</sup> Strong protests by the union followed. Gains were again made in 1960 and 1961. Wage increases were secured for all categories of workers in 1960 as a result of negotiations at a Conciliation Board meeting by seven representatives from the FCWU. Several categories of work were upgraded, overtime rates increased, workers were to get an extra paid holiday on Ascension Day. The union also secured the right for shop stewards to collect subscriptions at factories.<sup>56</sup>

The wage increases which were won were as follows : Those earning up to £2 basic received an increase of 2/9d, on c.o.l.a. those earning between £2 and £3 got 3/3d extra, £3 to £4 received 3/6d extra, over £4 received 4/6d extra.<sup>57</sup>

In 1961 workers at Frosted Foods in Cape Town received further increases ranging from 2s9d to 19s9d per week as a result of further Conciliation Board agreements between the company and FCWU. <sup>58</sup>

The organisation of fish workers was never very strong because of the irregularity of work. Fish workers who were seasonal workers 'had to languish for nine months of the year without unemployment benefits.' <sup>59</sup> They received no pay during these nine months but were still on their employers' pay roll and so could not claim UIF benefits for this period. The union attempted to win UIF benefits for these workers through several means. They approached the Labour Department with the demand for benefits during the nine unemployed months and demanded that the Department recommend to employers that they discharge workers so that they would be able to draw UIF benefits. These demands were rejected by the Department of Labour. The union then approached the managements of several fish factories with the proposal of a fund jointly funded by management and workers' contributions. Management seemed favourable, but in the process of negotiations, Mpetha was arrested for breaking his banning order and nothing came of the proposal. <sup>60</sup>

The union was also active in struggling for better living conditions. Lights were put up in Paarl townships as a result of AFCWU efforts. <sup>61</sup> On another occasion the union protested to the Department of Defence that workers were losing sleep due to the local commandos mortar bomb and gun fire manouvres during the night. The Department of Defence responded favourably to the union's request that this activity should be discontinued. <sup>62</sup>

The AFCWU and FCWU provided SACTU with very active participation by its members (as mentioned above). It was also characterised by rigorous report backs within the union of SACTU activities. Discussions were held at all branches and all factory committees, thereby gaining understanding and support for SACTU activities and campaigns. <sup>63</sup>

National Union of Laundry, Cleaning and Drying Workers (NULCDW) and African Laundry Cleaning and Drying Workers (ALCDW)

In 1942 a national union of laundry, cleaning and drying workers was launched comprising of branches in Johannesburg, East Rand, Rustenburg and Cape Town. In 1955 the national union for african workers was formed. <sup>64</sup>

Two members from Cape Town were elected to the Executive Committee of the national union which affiliated to SACTU on the basis of a membership of



2 000.<sup>65</sup>

The ALCDWU soon ran into difficulties, however. The organiser was banned, leaving no-one to visit the newly organised factories which were still weak. Expanding to other factories was, of course, out of the question. The union was also experiencing financial difficulties, reporting a total of £12 in their bank account to the NEC.<sup>66</sup> The problems of the Cape Town branch were discussed at the NEC meeting in April 1956 and it was decided that the General Secretary, L. Massa, would spend the month of May in Cape Town. This visit never materialised, however, as he was unable to leave his work on the East Rand and Johannesburg.

The situation improved after June of that year. Firstly, the Johannesburg branch agreed to subsidise the Cape Town branch for a period of six months, enabling the employment of a new organiser. She shared offices with the registered union. Efforts were made by the organisers of the registered union, Ben January and Mrs. Kulsen, to help build the african union, and Mrs. Kulsen visited all the factories with Elizabeth Pharela, the new organiser.<sup>67</sup>

The registered union suffered financial problems but was one of the strongest unions affiliated to SACTU in the Western Cape. Their membership stood at 900 at the end of 1955 and organisation expanded to the areas of Strand, as well as further afield to Wellington, Worcester and Malmesbury.<sup>68</sup>

The union participated in the Cape Industrial Council where it fought for african representation. I was unable to determine whether this was achieved but it was reported at a NEC meeting in 1955 that the employers had promised to discuss this matter, together with the question of subscription deductions for African workers.

A Sick Fund was run, through which members had access to a panel of doctors. The Sick Fund suffered serious setbacks, however, due to costs and structure. As a result the whole structure was revised.

The union was active in the SACTU LC. The Secretary and organiser of NULCDW were on the NEC of SACTU and on the executive of the LC. Ben January, the Secretary, was chairperson of the LC.<sup>69</sup>

#### Building, Quarry and Cement Workers Union<sup>70</sup>

The first workers to be organised into this union were from the quarry on  
the/.....

the national road in Parow. The union, which began in 1960 through the efforts of one full time organiser soon began organising at another seven quarries and factories in Bellville, Eerste Rivier, Lyndock, Stellenbosch, Observatory and Durbanville.

The approach was always the same. The organiser began by establishing friendly relationships with one or two workers at the quarry. She explained to these workers about the union and arranged to meet the following week, urging them to bring one or two more friends. These meetings in the bushes behind the quarry continued until there were about fifteen workers who understood the need for a union and committed themselves to establishing one 'by working from inside'. When there was sufficient support for the union a general meeting of the workers was called which the organiser would attend. At the first quarry in Parow, a meeting was called for Sunday morning at the workers' barracks, a few months after the organiser had first approached the workers. All five hundred workers from the quarry came to the meeting.

At the general meeting a factory committee was elected which would administer the affairs of the union at that factory. The organiser continued to visit every factory and quarry once a week. Grievances were to be channelled through elected shop stewards. They were also responsible for the weekly collection of subscriptions for further organisation at the factory.

An executive of the union was elected which consisted of the organiser and representatives from each factory. They met once a week to co-ordinate the organisation at the different factories. Members from each factory began travelling around with the organiser, helping with organisation at other factories.

All the workers at the quarries were contract workers and lived on the premises in barracks or compounds. They were migrant contract workers and could lose not only their jobs through union activity but also their accommodation and their temporary rights to be in an urban area. However the conditions in which they worked and lived were so severe that the risk was overridden by the possible advantages of unionisation.

Wages were extremely low with the Wage Determination for the industry set below the average minimum wage. The barracks or compounds in which workers

lived/.....

lived were overcrowded and were described by the organiser as 'not fit for men'. Other major grievances were the compulsory purchase of a uniform and long hours without overtime pay.

The low wage levels were always the first issue raised by the workers when approached and thus the central issue which the union negotiated with management when a meeting was secured. In 1961, the union submitted a memorandum to the Wage Board for the Cement Products industry.<sup>71</sup> A deputation of workers from each factory and the organiser submitted oral evidence to the Wage Board sitting. Wages were increased.

The union was a channel for contact with the community for the workers who lived in the barracks and were isolated from the townships and the struggles being fought there. The organiser explained :

"On Sundays I used to brew beer, and workers from the different quarries came to my house. They discussed with each other and with workers from other factories their conditions and lessons they had learnt. It gave workers contact with the community. They started to feel part of the community. "

The appalling compound conditions and the compulsory purchase of uniforms were grievances which the union was addressing when the organiser was detained. She went on her weekly visit in June 1963 to the quarry at Glen Cairn. When she got there the workers told her to leave immediately as the Special Branch had been there. She left but was detained at midnight that night, was placed in solitary confinement for five months and was then on trial for seven months with forty four others. All except five were acquitted of the charges of sabotage. She was released but was banned for five years and could not continue working for the union. The union had continued to operate with difficulty while she was in detention but became progressively weaker without a full time organiser and did not withstand the general attack on SACTU over the following year.

#### Commercial and Distributive Workers' Union 72

The Commercial and Distributive Workers' Union began towards the end of 1956 and organised workers employed at firms involved in 'buying and selling' eg OK Bazaars, Gardner & Williams. The work which they did was packing, delivery and cleaning. As many of the companies in this sector amalgamated or were/.....

or were bought by bigger companies in this period, the number of workers employed at each firm was quite large.

The membership of the union was approximately 2 000.

"Our union was well known, so it wasn't difficult to get workers to join",

the organiser explained. The union was publicised at meetings and workers came forward to join. There was never any difficulty in establishing an inroad into the different firms.

A large amount of the organization was done by the full time organiser. Shop stewards were elected at each firm but their job was only to organise meetings of the workers and to channel complaints. The union had an executive committee which met once a week to co-ordinate the activities of the union. The organiser on the whole undertook negotiations with management. At all the firms where the union organized the attitude of management was favourable (until 1964). The organiser who visited the firms weekly was always given access, even during working hours. 'Management were aware of the union and recognized it.' Stop order systems for subscriptions were arranged at all the firms. The issues which most concerned the workers, according to the organizer were victimization, protective clothing, working conditions and pass raids.

#### Garage and Motor Industry Workers' Union 73

Garage workers were extremely difficult to organise because they were so spread out. The biggest garages employed fifteen to twenty workers but most employed only three or four workers. The Garage and Motor Industry Workers' Union began organizing in 1960 by holding meetings on Saturday afternoons and Sundays at the SACTU offices in Queen Victoria Street. Later meetings were held at venues in Athlone and Kensington. For petrol attendants who worked long hours, even these meetings were difficult to attend.

The most difficult working conditions were faced by the petrol attendants. They worked long hours with no lunch breaks and low wages. They had to work two out of three shifts a day. At night and in bad weather they were completely exposed. 'They had no shelters like they have today. Those shelters were something we fought for.'

In November/.....

In November 1960 the union drew up a memorandum which they submitted to the Motor Industry Employer's Association. The union proposed that the basic wages be increased from £2.5.3 to £3.7.0 per week and the cost of living allowance from £1.2.3. to a minimum of £2.3.0. The memorandum showed that the wage of labourers was £14.12.6, well below the poverty datum line of £23. The union proposed that fifteen types of work be upgraded to the semi-skilled category and that workers doing these jobs be paid a minimum of £4 per week. 74 Other demands in the memorandum included the right to send a spokesperson to meetings of Industrial Councils, twelve days sick leave per year, a forty hour week and a limit on overtime, a scheme to train Africans as skilled workers in the industry and insurance for petrol pump attendants against death or injury at the hands of hold up men. 75

The view of the organiser, was that the union was beginning to establish itself and hold successful meetings regularly, when both organisers were banned. As they had been central in the organization of the union, all efforts came to a stop.

"Just when we were getting going we were banned, so the union never really got off the ground."

#### Other Unions of the SACTU local committee

There were a number of other unions in the Western Cape LC which are discussed briefly in this section. I was unable to interview anyone involved in these unions and had to rely on the limited written material available. The information is presented here but must be read with its limitations in mind. 76

The Textile Workers' Industrial Union was one of the unions which opposed the dissolution of the T & LC and participated in the TUCC. As was the case with FCWU, many of its leaders had been banned before the formation of SACTU, but similarly were replaced by new but able leadership. Most outstanding in the history of TWIU in this period was the strike by 900 workers at the Hex River Textile Factory in Worcester. 77 This strike was characterised by the high level of unity between African and Coloured workers laying a basis for unity in the area. TWIU along with FCWU and NULCDW was responsible for the establishment of a LC in the Worcester area.

The union/.....

The union challenged the low wages received by workers in the industry through Conciliation Board negotiations and Wage Board determinations. In 1955 and 1956 Conciliation Board negotiations which had lasted for fourteen months ended in deadlock. The union demanded wage increases of 10 to 15%. The employers were only prepared to offer long service bonus' of 1s per week after five years service.<sup>78</sup>

In 1957 the employers recommendations to Industrial Council led to a reduction of wages for a number of workers in the Blanket Industry. The union called on all individual branches to petition their bosses in protest against their recommendations. Meetings were held at individual factories to find out what the workers wanted.<sup>79</sup>

The union whose membership Luckardt & Wall estimate to have been 1 300 in TWIU and 600 in AFTWIU by 1960<sup>80</sup> was able to secure agreements with a number of firms.

The Bag Workers' Union began in the second half of 1956 through the efforts of a number of women from the Boston Bag Co. and they approached SACTU for assistance in organising their factory. Ben Turok acted as Secretary of the union but was banned soon after the first meetings at one of the workers' homes. The SACTU-LC Secretary Archie Sibeko continued helping the workers to organise a structure for their union and to compile their demands to present to management. This they did, but the reception was hostile. A strike which ended in court but led to increases in wages ensued.<sup>81</sup> The strike fortunately strengthened organization and the Bag Workers' Union affiliated to SACTU that year.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly the Timber Workers' Union which was established in the same year was involved in a strike as it was beginning. The strike at a box factory in Retreat also ended in court with the 300 workers being charged with striking illegally and the organisers charged with incitement.<sup>83</sup> The strike ended in defeat for the workers but the union was able to recover and affiliated to SACTU that year.<sup>84</sup>

The SA Tin Workers' Union was also one of the unions at the Inaugural Conference of SACTU. It was formed in Durban in 1937. The Cape Town branch was established/.....

was established after the war. Soon after a national union was formed with the branches from the Transvaal and Port Elizabeth.<sup>85</sup> The union had also been subjected to the removal of leadership through bannings. In February 1955 the SA Tin Workers' Union sparked off an incident which provided a prelude to trade union solidarity in the Western Cape. A meeting to discuss wages was to be held at Ndabeni in an open field. The union received notice that they could not hold the meeting from the City Council. The General Secretaries of fifteen trade unions signed a petition which they presented to the mayor for the right to hold meetings in the open. This resulted in a victory for the union and the meeting was held.<sup>86</sup>

New Age in June 1958 reported that the union had taken up the case of 70 retrenched workers at a tin factory in Ndabeni. A petition was circulated amongst the workers asking for short time for all the workers rather than 70 losing their jobs. The union Secretary approached the manager on behalf of the workers, putting their demands for short time to him, but without much success. He insisted that reorganization on this basis would not pay the firm and suggested that the workers, some of whom had been working for him for twenty years, should make use of the UIF scheme.<sup>87</sup>

In 1955 union delegations gave evidence to the Wage Board in Durban, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg and Cape Town. When the Determination was published the following year wage increases ranged from 6s to 10s to 15s. It was an improvement in wages although not to the extent that the workers had demanded.<sup>88</sup>

The union won further increases in May 1960 when all workers in the tin industry received increases ranging from 5s to 8s9d.

The Metal Workers' Union was established in Cape Town in 1956 organizing workers in an industry where employers were well organised into SEIFSA. For the first year of the union's existence there were strikes at factories where it was organizing, protesting over the delay by the Department of Labour to grant a Conciliation Board.<sup>90</sup> The Conciliation Board was granted the following day.<sup>91</sup>

The union was able to make inroads into the larger factories in the Western Cape, although were seldom recognized by management. The workforce was largely unskilled with a high turnover of workers. The inconsistent workforce posed/.....

posed difficulties for union organization. The membership of the union however grew to 370. <sup>92</sup> Ben Turok was the General Secretary of the union until he was arrested in 1956 and was replaced by Mary Turok. The union had lost all its leadership by 1964 through bannings and detentions.

In 1960 workers in the industry won an increase of 6d per hour bringing their wages to a total of £3.10s9d per week. In 1962 the branches of the union submitted evidence to Industrial Council for the industry demanding a minimum wage of 25c an hour in all divisions, and equal pay for men and women, a Medical Benefit Fund, a 40 hour week, three weeks annual leave, height allowances for workers working at excessive heights, holiday bonus and Death Benefit Fund. <sup>93</sup>

Other important unions which were part of the SACTU local committee were the SAR & HWU, SA Canvas and Rope WU and the Hospital WU. No information about any of these unions was gathered in the course of my research.

SAR & HWU was one of the stronger unions of the local committee. Thus an absence of information poses a severe limit to the overall picture of union organization.

The National Union of Distributive Workers and Garment Workers' Union were also affiliates of SACTU. The Garment Workers' Union withdrew however to join SATUC. NUDW also withdrew because they felt they could not align themselves with any political groups as SACTU had done. NUDW also joined SATUC.

#### Further attempts at organisation

New Age reported in May 1955, that a Sweet Workers' Union had been formed and was registered under the Industrial Council. <sup>agreement</sup> to cover sweet workers in Cape Town and Bellville. By 1956 it had 800 workers who had been disgruntled with their previous union which had negotiated a reduction in wages on their behalf. The secretary of the new union explained that negotiations with employers for a new wage agreement and a sick fund were underway. <sup>94</sup>

Attempts/.....



Attempts at organizing a Pottery Workers' Union were halted at a crucial stage. 100 workers, half the total number of employees at a pottery factory were dismissed due to slackness of trade according to the boss. Yet it was at a time when the workers were organizing themselves into a trade union. They were dismissed shortly after they had drawn up a list of grievances which they planned to submit to management. These included the low wages that they received and the long hours, a 46 hour week. In the moulding department the workers were paid piece rates. They received 4½d per 100 saucers and 4½d per 100 plates and were paid 4d extra for 1 000 articles produced over their quota. 'But we never see it, we seldom made our quota'; no overalls were provided to work in, no tea breaks and workers could not afford transport costs which came to more than 20% of their weekly wage. <sup>95</sup>

Another SACTU union which glimmered was the Wine and Spirits Union. New Age reported on the first general meeting held at <sup>the</sup> Trades Hall of this union which was organizing workers employed at the three distilleries in the Peninsula. <sup>96</sup>

### Repression under any name

The repression which was meted out against SACTU had its prelude in the early 50's with the attack on the progressive trade unions under the Suppression of Communism Act. The attack continued through the decade and intensified in the early 60's leading to the decline of SACTU, and the subsequent decision to go into exile. The repression came under many guises.

### The Suppression of Communism Act

The Suppression of Communism Act introduced in 1950 was used by the state in a concerted attempt to weaken the trade union movement. Union leaders and organisers were banned with regularity and all the Presidents and General Secretaries of most unions were banned between 1950 and 1964. When SACTU was formed 46 leading trade unionists were already banned and <sup>the</sup> Suppression of Communism Act was to claim many more in the following decade.

The banning of leaders was only one aspect of the continuous harrassment against the progressive trade unions. Those banned were further harrassed. Becky Lan and Oscar Mpetha, officials of the FCWU were charged in February 1955 with breaking their banning order. <sup>97</sup> Lan was parked in a car a short distance/.....

distance from the venue where a FCWU meeting was being held. Mpotha was similarly charged and was additionally charged after being tricked into addressing workers by the management of a fish factory in St. Helena where the union was organizing. <sup>98</sup>

#### General Harrassment

Police raids of offices and homes were regular. There were periods when union offices were raided by Special Branch once a week. They often spent the whole day searching the offices and confiscating any material which they came across. <sup>99</sup>

Homes of the unionists were raided whilst they were out. They received threatening messages from callers claiming to be from Ku Klux Klan. <sup>100</sup> They were always charged, where strikes had taken place for incitement. In one case two FCWU organisers Louise Kellerman and John Motloheba were charged for inciting to strike at Messrs. Kaapslandse Ham en Spekfabriek because they spoke to workers at the factory. The charge which was brought eight months after the strike had taken place was dismissed in court as the only evidence were notes taken by the Special Branch of speeches that the accused had made. <sup>101</sup>

Attacks via repressive legislation were made on SACTU activists, and on leaders and members of the Congress Alliance. The Cape Town branch of the Defence and Aid Fund in 1962 compiled a list showing the extent to which political leaders had been subjected to persecution in the Western Cape in that year. Of 83 people charged with crimes, ranging from the incitement of a strike and carrying out activities of banned organizations, to intimidation and public violence. only five were convicted. 78 were acquitted or had the charges against them withdrawn. <sup>102</sup>

Attacks were also made indirectly. Pass arrests in the Western Cape increased dramatically in the early 60's. Another strategy, was the Special Branch placing pressure on employers to dismiss Congress leaders who were then endorsed out of Cape Town. A meeting was held on the Grand Parade on 1 April 1962 to protest this attack and devise a defence. Speakers urged worker unity as the only answer to victimization tactics. It was decided to send deputations to individual employers urging them to resist Special Branch pressure to dismiss certain employees. <sup>104</sup> This strategy

failed/.....

failed to take into account the likelihood that employers were willing to bow to Special Branch 'pressure' as it was in their interests to have 'agitators' off their payroll and out of their factories.

The persistent harassment gave way to naked repression when the state began perceiving the resistance of the working class as a test to their strength. From the display of brute force, the extensive mobilization and use of repressive forces against the people one could assert that the Nationalist Party felt that this 'test' was a challenge to the authority of the state itself. <sup>105</sup>

In Cape Town five people were killed and an unknown number injured in a violent clash between the people of Langa and the police on 21 March 1960. <sup>106</sup> 6 000 people had gathered at Langa flats in a response to a meeting called by the PAC the course of the anti-pass campaign. Police baton charged the crowd and then fired. The people's response was to stayaway from work for a period of fourteen days. <sup>107</sup> The fighting continued as police went door-to-door in Langa beating up people who refused to go to work. <sup>108</sup>

The effectiveness of the police in enforcing the laws and policies of the state was severely challenged through the 'street fighting' of March 1960. The response of the state was further repression. It sought to restore order through force. A State of Emergency was declared at the end of March under which meetings and gatherings were banned, thousands were detained and publications were suspended. Influx control regulations were applied more rigorously and many were arrested under the pass laws. The Unlawful Organizations Act was sped through Parliament in all three stages and the ANC and PAC were banned under this Act.

#### The Three Month Ban on SACTU

In 1961 the state fearing a further challenge to its authority around the establishment of the 'Republic' placed a three month ban on meetings of SACTU.

Discussion on the recognition of African trade unions at the Sixth Annual National Conference was interrupted by a delegate from the NUALCDW who objected to the presence of six members of the Security Police who were listening/.....

listening in. He asked whether they were workers and if so were they organised? Were they paid overtime pay when they worked at night? <sup>109</sup>

Their presence was in anticipation of the three month ban which was to come into effect at midnight, that night, the 31st March 1961. The Sixth Annual National Conference was to have been held from 1st to 3rd March. Head Office and all the delegates from Johannesburg had left for Durban for the Conference when the press phoned the SACTU LC in Durban to inform them that they had just received news of the ban. Most of the delegates from the Cape Province had already arrived. Plans were made to start the conference immediately, before the ban came into operation. The business at hand was dealt with as swiftly as possible. Delegates expressed their anger at the ban. A member of the SAR & H union asked: "Why was this conference banned? All we have done here is to tell the Government that we are starving?" A delegate from the Pietermaritzburg LC also asked why the Government had banned this peaceful meeting. "Do they say this is the law?" he said, "where were the workers when this law was made?" <sup>110</sup>

The Secretary of the African General Workers' Union in Kimberly offered the following explanation for the ban: "This ban is from March to June, with May in the middle when the Republic will be established. The Government wants to enjoy this freely without any flies spoiling the pudding." <sup>111</sup>

Delegates from Johannesburg arrived an hour before midnight and were given a standing ovation. A delegate from the Johannesburg Furniture, Mattress and Bedding Workers' Union urged the affiliates of SACTU to intensify their work in the face of the ban. The Assistant General Secretary then explained that only meetings of SACTU had been banned and not of the affiliated unions and that the task lay before all unions to intensify their organization during the period to demonstrate their refusal to be intimidated. The final speaker, a delegate from the SA Tin Workers' Union followed on in this spirit: "We must not think that we are illegal. We are a legal organization. We are oppressed and we must act." <sup>112</sup>

At midnight a squad of armed uniformed police entered the Conference Hall and stood guard at the doors, while six members of the Special Branch took the names and addresses of all delegates and seized all documents, reports, resolutions and messages of support. <sup>113</sup>

The following/.....

The following day, two delegates from the NULCDW arrived in Durban from Cape Town after travelling for four days by train. They missed the Conference as did the delegate from Port Elizabeth. <sup>114</sup>

### The Treason Trial

The trial of 156 activists from the Congress Alliance and from SACTU, on charges of high treason lasted for four and a half years. All the accused were acquitted on the day before the imposition of the three month ban on SACTU. The treason trial as it became known was not able to claim anyone on charges of treason but claimed valuable working time of the leaders who had to attend court proceedings and claimed valuable money collected by the treason trial defence fund, a total of £163 000 by the 51st month. <sup>115</sup>

When the SACTU officials were arrested, circulars were immediately issued to all the LC's and affiliated unions advising them that the work of SACTU must continue and urging them to convene meetings to discuss the arrests. A resolution recording full confidence in the Congress leadership was tabled at the Annual Conference after the arrests and workers were urged "to stand by our leaders by contributing to <sup>the</sup> defence fund and by joining their respective trade unions and congresses". <sup>116</sup>

Central to the evidence led against the SACTU officials in the trial were the lectures from the National School held in 1958. According to the evidence led by the Crown, amongst the treasonable acts committed by the accused were, "Teaching that ownership of property means control of political power"; "Teaching that under capitalism the labourer does not share in the profit made on the market price". <sup>117</sup>

### Sabotage Act

The final stage of the strategy against the activities of the popular classes was the General Laws Amendment Act of 1962 dubbed as the Sabotage Act. This Act modified, covered all the loopholes and supplemented the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), Public Safety Act (1953), The Criminal Procedure Act (1955) and Unlawful Organizations Act (1960). Sabotage was given a sweeping definition and any person committing a crime under the Act could/.....

ould receive the death sentence. The minimum sentence was five years. The Sabotage Act also widened the powers of the banning of publications and of people. Newspapers could no longer, once banned appear under a new name as they had over the last few years. Banned persons could no longer be office bearers or members of any organization and could no longer be quoted. 118

In 1963, the General Laws Amendment Act provided for the detention of people for 90 days for the purposes of interrogation. The General Laws Amendment Act of 1965 extended this to 180 days. Most of the key organisers of the Western Cape unions were detained for periods of 90 days or longer. 119

The concerted attack on SACTU through the Suppression of Communism Act, the treason trial, Sabotage Act and the day to day harrassment and victimization of officials and workers led ultimately to the decline of the organization. One of the organisers in the Western Cape felt that the attack on SACTU was because of its concern with broad political issues. 120 An organiser from an important union in the LC felt that the severe repression of the unions came at a time when organization was beginning to grow, "Just at a time when we thought we were doing well, when we thought we would achieve the organization of all workers the government really started hitting us". 121

### SACTU declines

The collapse of SACTU in the Western Cape was due to several factors. Workers constantly faced intimidation, they feared the loss of employment if they were union members. There were cases after 1961 where union members were fired at factories which had granted recognition to those unions. The attack on leaders whether banned, arrested or put on trial particularly hampered organization. The prohibition of funds from overseas led to financial problems for the unions. Money which was received had to be spent on the day to day organization of union affairs and unions were unable to pay salaries to the organizers. They eventually had to get other jobs to survive, 122 leaving little time for union organization. Fake pamphlets were a regular feature of the last years of SACTU. - "We would organize a meeting at the City Hall but a pamphlet would come out saying it was at Maitland, so we would sit with no workers at a meeting." 123

A factor/.....

A factor identified as crucial to the collapse of SACTU in the Western Cape, besides the attack on leadership was the 'attack on offices'.<sup>124</sup> The LC was thrown out of the offices they had in Plein Street since their inception. They moved to Queen Victoria Street where they had offices in the Provincial Administration Building, but this was not for long as Special Branch instructed the Provincial Administration to evict the SACTU LC. Without a base to work from activities became disparate and the LC declined.<sup>125</sup>

The last Annual National Conference of SACTU was held at the YMCA in Durban in 1965 under heavy Special Branch intimidation. The entrance to Beatrice Street, where the YMCA was, was barricaded by Police patrolling with dogs. The Johannesburg delegates who arrived late had to use the back entrance.

Despite this the Conference was attended by more than 300 delegates. The new twelve person executive which was elected was all banned, immediately after the Conference. It was then decided that 'no more workers would be sacrificed internally but that SACTU should continue externally'.<sup>126</sup>

In Cape Town, almost all the organisers of the SACTU affiliates were banned by 1965. 'There was a great shortage of people to run the unions so in 1966 we decided to amalgamate the unions and formed The Amalgamated Workers' Union.<sup>127</sup> This union continued until 1969 trying to continue as much of the work in the different industries as possible. They were continuously harrassed however and decided to discontinue the work, 'we thought it advisable to step down before we were all banned'.<sup>128</sup>

## F O O T N O T E S

1. Interview 8
2. Goode, p78
3. Minutes, 2nd Annual National Conference
4. CNETU was formed in 1941. It grew rapidly during the war with the expansion of capital, but declined after the war. Soon after the Inaugural Conference of SACTU, on 5 May, 1955, CNETU dissolved and merged with SACTU.
5. The Action Councils were set up in each centre by CNETU.
6. New Age 10.3.1955
7. From the SACTU constitution
8. From Declaration of Principles
9. Interview 1
10. Report of Acting General Secretary to the Annual National Conference
11. Interview 11
12. Minutes, Inaugural Conference
13. Ibid
14. From Local Committee By-laws
15. Ibid
16. The NOC's arose in the course of the £1 a day campaign which is discussed below.
17. Workers Unity; July 1959
18. See Minutes, 4th Annual National Conference
19. Ibid
20. Minutes, 7th Annual National Conference
21. New Age, 29.9.1956
22. Ibid
23. New Age. 19.7.1956
24. Ibid
25. New Age, 4.6.1959
26. New Age, 28.5.1959
27. Interview 3
28. Ibid
29. Separate Local Committees were formed in Paarl and Worcester in 1956
30. Interview 3



31. Interview 1
32. Interview 3
33. Ibid
34. Interview 1
35. Interview 3
36. Ibid
37. Minutes, 1st Annual National Conference
38. From programme for the National School, Karis and Carter microfilm
39. NEC report to 6th Annual National Conference
40. The format changed and was produced quarterly rather than weekly.
41. Minutes, The Annual National Conference
42. Interview 1
43. Ibid
44. Rob Lambert makes this point in regard to industrial strikes: 118
45. Minutes, Annual National Conference
46. The claims were listed according to industries
47. Interview 2
48. Goode, 1983, p188
49. When Mpetha was banned, the AFCWU was without an organiser for a few months during which time, Liz Abrahams, the organiser for FCWU did all the work.
50. Interview 4
51. Interview 1 and 6
52. Interview 6
53. Interview 1 and 6
54. Goode, 1983, p102
55. Ibid
56. New Age, 6.10.1960
57. Ibid
58. New Age 23,2.1961
59. Interview 1
60. Ibid
61. Interview 6
62. New Age 27.4.1961

63. Interview 1, 4 and 6
64. The union separated into a registered and unregistered union according to the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Act against their wishes.
65. Minutes, Inaugural Conference
66. Minutes of NEC of NULCDW, March 1956
67. Minutes of NEC of NULCDW, August, 1956
68. Ibid
69. Luckardt and Wall, 1980, p70
70. The organiser does not remember the names of the companies. All quotes and information in this section are drawn from interview 3 unless otherwise stated.
72. All information in this section is drawn from Interview 12
73. All information in this section is drawn from Interview 2 unless otherwise stated.
74. New Age, 10.11.1960
75. Ibid
76. The reasons are stated above
77. More details of the strike are given in the next chapter
78. New Age, 17.11.1955
79. Workers Unity, Jan/Feb 1957
80. Luckardt and Wall, 1980, p242
81. New Age, 27.10.1955
82. New Age, 9.2.1956
83. Minutes of SACTU, NEC, 9, 10 June 1956, Karis and Carter microfilm.
84. More details of this strike in the following chapter
85. 25 Years Commemoration Pamphlet of SA Tin Workers Union, Wits Archives
86. New Age, 10.2.1955
87. New Age, 19.6.1958
88. Commemoration pamphlet, op cit
89. Ibid
90. Minutes of NEC, 9 and 10 June, 1956, op cit
91. Ibid
92. Luckardt and Wall, 1980, p182
93. Ibid, p186
94. New Age, 1.3.1956

95. New Age, 20.9.1956
96. Ibid
97. New Age, 29.9.1955
98. Interview 1
99. Interviews 10 and 12
100. Workers Unity, May, 1959
101. New Age, 30.1.1958
102. New Age, 24.5.1962
103. New Age, 22.2.1962
104. New Age, 29.3.1962
105. Rob Lambert makes this point in relation to the repression of the bus boycott in 1957. I think it can be made more generally about the response of the state in periods of mass mobilisation.
106. New Age, 24.3.1960
107. Ibid
108. Ibid
109. Minutes, 6th Annual National Conference
110. Ibid
111. Ibid
112. Ibid
113. Ibid
114. Ibid
115. Ibid
116. General Secretary's Report to Second Annual National Conference
117. Documents prepared for the Treason Trial in Karis and Carter Microfilm collection.
118. Luckardt and Wall, 273
119. Horrel, p22
120. Interview 12
121. Interview 3
122. Interview 12
123. Ibid
124. Interview 3 and 12
125. Ibid
126. Interview 10
127. Interview 12
128. Interview 3

CHAPTER TWOStrikes, £1 a day Campaign, StayawaysStrikes

"Industrial strikes...concentrate all the attention and all the efforts of the workers on some particular aspect of the conditions under which the working class lives. Every strike gives rise to discussions about these conditions, helps workers to appraise them, to understand what capitalist oppression consists of in the particular case and what means can be employed to combat this oppression. Every strike enriches the experience of the entire working class."<sup>1</sup>

Workers' struggles with individual employers over wages and working conditions can be useful in extending workers understanding of the conflict at their place of work to the incompatibility of their economic and political interests with those of the ruling class. Lenin identified strikes as a crucial formative factor in the development of worker consciousness. Workers' real experiences could educate them about their common position as a class more effectively than books in circumstances where strikes are illegal and meet with a response from the state. This education can include a growth in workers' understanding of the role of the state in relation to the working class. Neither occurs automatically but require more advanced workers to make generalisations from the specific struggles and help workers make the connection between their actions and demands of the capitalist system of exploitation and domination as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

Strike action in South Africa in the period under discussion always resulted in the arrest of the workers under the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act and often deportation out of the urban area. Workers were on the whole both fired by their employers and charged and deported by the state. With ruthless speed the police rushed to the scene of industrial disputes and at times not only arrested the workers but brutally assaulted them. Native Labour officials accompanying the police would inform workers that their actions were illegal and urge them to go back to work. Such actions where the state openly backed the actions and interests of the individual capitalist exposed in a concrete way, again better than books could, that struggles against individual employers are also struggles against the state.

The Native/.....

The Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act rendered the African labour force extremely vulnerable in industrial disputes. Demoralization through the lack of material support during the withdrawal of labour was increased by the possible loss of employment, deportation arrests and charges under the Act. Most often strikes which were always characterized by repressive action on the part of capital and the state ended in defeat for the workers. However while demoralizing in the short term, valuable experience as to the essential nature of capitalism and the state are gained through strikes.

"The collective experience of the proletariat is enriched through such actions." <sup>3</sup>

Strike action was a feature of working class resistance in the Western Cape during SACTU's existence. Workers went on strike for higher wages and better working conditions and in protest against unfair dismissals and victimization. Strikes occurred amongst organised and unorganised workers. In the case of unorganised workers, SACTU provided support and direction for the workers where possible. In two cases, the strikes provided the impetus for the formation of trade unions. Common to all the strikes were arrests and charges under the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act or the Riotous Assemblies Act.

Two strikes, by workers from the FCWU and AFCWU and from TWIU and ATWIU were significant for the unity displayed between Coloured and African workers.

In September 1957, 200 workers at Spekenham Food Products went on strike in demand of higher wages and better working conditions. Most of the workers at Spekenham were classed as labourers and their wages ranged from £1.12s.6d plus 16/9 c.o.l.a. for women and £2 plus 18/3 c.o.l.a. for men. <sup>4</sup>

The strike began after a Conciliation Board agreement had expired. The union insisted that workers needed wages of £1 a day, and the 200 workers came out in support of this demand. They were all fired, four Coloured workers were arrested for picketing and charged under Riotous Assemblies Act and 37 African workers were arrested under the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act for illegally striking. The Manager's attitude was uncompromising. He immediately employed scab labour and stated to a New Age reporter:

"We don't know and don't care why they are striking. Our factory is working. I have nothing further to say." <sup>5</sup>

In the second/.....

In the second week of the strike there were only thirty workers at the factory all of them scabs. <sup>6</sup> The management agreed to negotiate with the workers but shortly before the proposed meeting he withdrew the offer saying that there was no dispute. The SACTU local committee approached the Spekenham management, appealing to them to reconsider their attitude to the strike. This was backed by the Congress Alliance who sent a deputation with representatives from the ANC, SACPO, COD and SACTU to management to urge them to open negotiations with the workers.

All attempts failed however and the strike ended in defeat both at the factory and in court. The African workers were sentenced to a fine of £7.10s each or thirty days.

The union which had paid strike funds to the workers throughout the period was drained by the four week strike and the Cape Town branch suffered a severe setback.

A similar display of unity had been a feature of the textile workers strike in 1956. Negotiations at Hex River Textile Mills in Worcester for higher wages and better working conditions ended in deadlock with employers refusing to meet the workers' demands. Workers decided to press their claims by striking. 900 Coloured workers initially came out on strike while the 400 African workers, who would be arrested if they stayed out of work, went to work, with the full support of the Coloured workers. When the 900 workers were all dismissed however, the 400 Africans joined the strike. Production in the factory stopped with the 100% withdrawal of labour. 242 African workers were rounded up by the police and taken to the charge office as were the national president of African TWIU, Joe Ndomayi and executive member J. Busa. All the workers were released the next day on £3 bail except for three leaders Ndomayi, Busa and Baartman who were charged with incitement to strike and released on £50 bail. <sup>8</sup>

The Employers issued a written statement offering to grant reasonable wages and at an evening meeting held on that day, 15 March, workers agreed to return to work the following morning when negotiations were to take place. They were successful/.....

successful and wage increases ranging from 1s.7d to 5s per week were secured. Other demands that were granted were an additional 1s per week over and above the increase for all workers with five years or more employment at the factory, the establishment of a sick fund, free overalls for all workers, no victimization and the reinstatement of all workers. <sup>9</sup>

191 workers were later found guilty in terms of the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act for taking part in an illegal strike and were fined £16 each or eight days with R£12 or 60 days suspended. The trial was heard in the exhibitor's hall of the Worcester showground because of the large number of accused who all took off work to be present at the hearing. <sup>10</sup>

Ndamoyi, Busa and Baartmen were acquitted on the charge of incitement. The magistrate became impatient during the trial declaring:

"I have written 34 pages and I still have no evidence that the accused incited the strike." <sup>11</sup>

74 workers at Lystra Zip factory in Paarden Eiland came out on strike in protest against a delay by the Department of Labour in granting a Conciliation Board. After a lunch hour meeting on Thursday 31 May 1956, all the workers at the factory decided to stay out of work for half an hour in protest. The half hour had almost expired when police arrived at the factory. The workers delayed their return to work, declaring that they did not wish to return to work then as it would look as though they were frightened of the police. The police took the names and addresses of all the workers but they only returned to work after Archie Sibeko the SACTU local committee secretary addressed them. <sup>12</sup> Sibeko and Turok who had also gone to the factory on news of the strike were arrested. They were released after questioning. New Age reported that wage increases were granted to the workers. <sup>13</sup> But the most significant gain of the strike was the signing up of all the workers as members of the Metal Workers' Union, a result of the assistance Sibeko and Turok, who was secretary of the Metal Workers' Union made to the strike. <sup>14</sup>

Organizational gains were also made as a result of a strike at a Box factory. In this case, not only new members, but a new union was formed. 300 workers at a box factory in Retreat went on strike after a breakdown of a Conciliation Board. Deadlock arose when the workers demanded that they be allowed to be represented/.....

represented by Archie Sibeko. Police arrived at the factory gates on the morning of the strike and arrested twenty two of the 200 African workers who spent the night in jail before being released on £5 bail. Sibeko was charged with incitement to strike.

The ANC branch in Retreat organized in the township to prevent scabbing. However scab workers were brought in from a Stellenbosch branch of the firm to work nightshifts. The strike ended in defeat but provided the impetus for the formation of the Timber Workers Union. <sup>15</sup>

When the Chairperson of the newly formed Bag WU was sacked at Boston Bag Co., in Paarden Eiland in October 1955, workers went on strike demanding his reinstatement. The Labour Department warned that the stoppage was illegal after which the workers returned to work singing freedom songs. <sup>16</sup>

Subsequently the Bag WU wrote to the Department of Labour explaining that victimization was taking place and applied for a Conciliation Board. The Union also lodged demands for wage increases, free overalls, May Day as a paid holiday and trade union facilities, and sent a copy to the Boss.

The Boss at the factory called in the workers to sign a paper stating that they were satisfied with the conditions of employment. After twelve workers had signed the paper the others refused. The Boss blamed their refusal on the 'agitation' of the union chairperson. The workers formed an Action Committee and were determined to continue fighting for the reinstatement of the chairperson and a wage agreement. <sup>18</sup> 88 workers were charged with illegally striking. They were found guilty and sentenced to a fine of £10 or eight weeks imprisonment with £7.10s or six weeks suspended. <sup>19</sup>

In the same week a Conciliation Board Agreement was drawn up which granted substantial increases to workers ranging from 3s to over £1 a week. <sup>20</sup>  
The chairperson was not reinstated.

Two significant strikes among unorganized workers were at an AECI dynamite plant in Somerset West and a Fertiliser plant in Durbanville. They both occurred in February 1959 although were not connected. They were significant in that/.....



in that both the workforces were entirely migrant workers at risk of losing their jobs and rights to be in urban areas. Although the workforces were considerably different in size, in both strikes the withdrawal of labour was 100%.

In February 1959, 2 000 African workers at AECI dynamite factory in Somerset West went on strike for higher wages. Notices promising higher wages in January had been posted up by the management, but on payday only the higher paid workers, the indunas and clerks had received increases, raising their wages to between £17 and £25 per month. There were no increases for the majority of lowest paid workers who received only £7 per month. The workers met with <sup>the</sup> manager who said he would write to Head Office to query the situation as he could not do anything. On Sunday the workers held a meeting at their living quarters and decided to say away from work on Monday. All the workers including the higher paid workers stayed at the compound on Monday. At 11 am officials of the company came to the compound with police and officials of The Native Labour Board who instructed the workers to go back to work. The workers told the Native Labour Board officials that the poll tax had been increased that year and how did they expect them to pay the tax without an increase in wages. The official said he would investigate.

The workers refused to return to work. When they were threatened with dismissal and endorsement out of town, some agreed to go back to work. The police moved in and arrested two men and charged them with inciting the strike. Most of the workers returned to work but some left the company and returned to the Reserves. <sup>21</sup>

Twenty two workers appeared in February 1959 in the Bellville Magistrates Court on a charge of taking part in an illegal strike at Atlantic Organic Fertilisers near Durbanville. The factory employed 50 workers, most of whom earned £2 a week. They were housed in compounds on the premises sleeping on double bunks in tiny rooms with ten men in a room. Three weeks previously the workers had sent a deputation to management demanding higher wages. They were told to wait until the director returned but when he did, nothing happened. A further deputation resulted in a promised meeting for the following day/.....

day. When this did not happen the workers did not go to work. The director arrived immediately with Labour Board officials. The officials told the workers that complaints could be raised with management but that they should return to work. Some workers returned but twenty two demanded an increase before they did so. They were all arrested and fined 10s or four days. The two workers charged with inciting the strike were fined £15 or fifteen days. 22

The strikes, although not linked by SACTU to national campaigns, formed part of the collective experience of the proletariat - in a period of heightened mass activity and resistance. Along with the national campaigns, demonstrations, protests, boycotts and stayaways led by SACTU or the Congress Alliance they contributed to the development of a class aware of itself and thus able to pose a challenge to the social relations of production and the system of class domination. In the following I will focus on one of the campaigns and two of the stayaways undertaken by the Congress Alliance, but led by SACTU.

#### Forward to £1 a day

It was during the boycott of buses in Alexandria, Mooiplant and Sophiatown in the Witwatersrand, that the demand for £1 a day was first mooted. For three months in 1957, workers walked 18 miles a day in order to save twopence.

"If workers received higher wages" it was declared, "they would be able to afford the busfares."

At a mass rally attended by all the boycotters, the idea for a £1 a day took root.

"We were debating this thing you know, some of the members said, lets have five shillings a day, some of them said, "No, a pound a day". 23

Soon after a National Workers Conference was held, in February 1957, where a decision was taken to hold a one day stayaway on the Rand and Pretoria, to bring attention to the demand for £1 a day. The strike was not directed at individual factories but was to be a national protest, directed at the state, with the demand for legislation for a £1 a day for all workers. 24

The stay at home was highly successful in the areas in which it was called. In Cape Town a stay away was not called, and the protest instead, took the form of a mass rally held in the evening. This was the first action in the Western Cape in the campaign for a £1 a day which lasted until 1962, embracing many phases/.....

many phases and linked always to the drive to organise the unorganised workers.

At the Second Annual Conference of SACTU, the campaign was explained to the delegates by the NEC and was enthusiastically welcomed. The conference resolved to firstly propagate and popularise the campaign, secondly to organise workers in all industries to participate actively in the campaign, and thirdly to enrol new members into SACTU.<sup>25</sup> The resolution reflected the joint thrust of the campaign - higher wages and the extension of organisation.

By the Third Annual National Conference the campaign had entered a new phase. The need to reach more people was identified and the Management Committee drew up detailed plans to turn the campaign into an intensive mass campaign. The plans stressed the building of powerful unions and the formation of workers' committees. Through organization and collective action workers are able to assert and win their demands. Thus the fight for higher wages would be achieved by uniting workers into strong trade unions and by educating them to take united action.<sup>26</sup>

The outward going stress of the campaign, and the need to reach and draw in more workers was also on the agenda for the following year. The Fourth Annual Conference resolved to reach 20 000 new members. A delegate from the SAR & H Workers Union captured the urgency:

"I say that in order to get a £1 a day we must be like butterflies, infesting every shop, every factory and every mine and farm, agitating for £1 a day."<sup>27</sup>

The campaign had had some impact on the level of wages. During 1959 workers in the laundry, distributive, metal, textile and furniture trades won increases. Sixty percent of workers on the Rand received increases. Yet the campaign was far from over. Most workers were still receiving very low wages.

Thus the Fifth Annual National Conference stressed continued organization and an offensive strategy towards individual employers and employers' associations. The conference instructed all local committees to put demands for higher wages to employers' federations in their area. Further, SACTU demanded Wage Board investigations and called on the Chambers of Industry, Commerce and Mines/.....

Mines to have immediate discussions with SACTU on the question of higher wages.<sup>29</sup> Numerous memorandums drawn up by SACTU were sent to Industrial Councils demanding £1 a day.

There was no response from the Mines but the Chamber of Industries asked for an additional 300 copies of the memorandum as the issue was to be raised at their executive.<sup>30</sup>

The next phase of the campaign was the 7th February Campaign of 1962 which had as its central aims the total organization of all unorganized workers into the trade union movement and the demonstration of support for a National Convention.<sup>31</sup> The demand for a minimum wage of £1 a day was also highlighted through the circulation of a Draft Bill to Parliament and employers, which received national press publicity.<sup>32</sup>

Numerous activities were organized for the 7th February in every centre. Hundreds of thousands of leaflets were distributed, placard demonstrations and mass rallies were held. Many workers signed enrolment forms to join SACTU.<sup>33</sup>

The Minister of Labour's response to the campaign and the demand for a minimum wage legislation was short and not out of character:

"a national minimum wage legislation is 'unfeasible' 'impractical' and would fail to achieve its objects".<sup>34</sup>

This response was reminiscent of the response from employers when the campaign was first launched. The President of the Transvaal Chamber of Industries responded most swiftly:

"a pay rise for Non-European workers will neither be discussed nor considered".<sup>35</sup>

By 1962 SACTU had however forced the question of wages onto the agenda. The demand for £1 a day had been discussed with individual employers, employers' organizations, the Chambers of Industry and Commerce, financial houses, as well as by SACTU. The Minister of Labour had been forced to debate the matter in Parliament.

The campaign for a £1 a day was one that captured the imagination of the workers and organisation on the part of SACTU ensured that it became an issue with the bosses.

Yet/.....

Yet the popularity of the demand or the extent to which wages were increased do not alone make the campaign a success. Although they must be evaluated it must be hand in hand with an examination of the planning and organization of the campaign and an evaluation of the extent to which organization and plans took root and were carried out.

The second part of the question will be dealt with in reference only to the Western Cape. Finally one needs to make an overall evaluation of the campaign. Was £1 a day an appropriate demand? It captured the imagination of many workers, but was it an issue which could be used to extend their understanding of their class position under capitalism? Was this in fact done? The campaign was overtly linked to the need to draw the thousands of unorganized workers into trade unions?

Was the issue of a £1 a day one that facilitated this? Were the organizational structures which were set up appropriate? Did the campaign throw into question the nature of the social and economic system? Did it constitute alone with the other organization and activities of the popular classes a challenge to class domination?

The planning and organization of the campaign was thorough. From the outset an understanding of the importance of the campaign was built into the organization and every attempt was made to provide those who were implementing it with the necessary understanding of its importance and its potential.

The campaign was launched in the context of a recognition by the SACTU leadership that their:

"present rate of organization (was) too slow and not sufficient to measure up to the requirements necessary to force concessions in wages, working conditions, trade union and political rights".<sup>37</sup>

They saw as the first priority, the effective organization of workers, so that they could struggle in:

"an organised way to emancipate themselves".

They felt that SACTU had made organizational advances but that the organization of workers into trade unions had not kept pace with the growing level of consciousness prevalent among workers. Further SACTU, they felt had the vital task of organising workers into trade unions for the democratic movement as a whole. Thus a program or strategy to step up the level of organization, to achieve the growth and consolidation of trade unions had to be devised.

Following/.....

Following the decision of the workers' conference in February 1957, where the demand for a £1 a day took shape, the management committee with the priority of organization in mind drew up a plan, which could transmit to the general membership alongside the demand for £1 a day, the need to intensify organization. The plan contained both the motivation for such a task, as well as guidelines and ideas to go some way to achieving that goal.

Thus the management committee report to the second Annual Conference calling for mass action in the industrial sphere pointed to the bus boycotts as an example of what united mass action can achieve. United mass action in the industrial field requires trade union organization. Therefore the task should be the immediate mass enrolment of African workers into trade unions. The people had been aroused from their experience of mass action and were looking for a way forward. Moreover the democratic movement had the responsibility to keep the initiative and :

"prevent the mass spirit from fritting itself away in disillusionment and false paths".

The campaign to enrol 20 000 new trade union members round the slogans Asinamali, £1 a day minimum wage and an immediate all round increase in wages was proposed.<sup>37</sup> In order to succeed, co-operation between SACTU, the ANC and the other liberation movements would be required. But the campaign was to be conducted by SACTU and its central purpose was the recruitment of all workers into SACTU.<sup>38</sup>

For such a mass enrolment it was necessary for SACTU to prepare its machinery or structures. The first task was to get additional volunteers to help with organization. A simple application form was prepared which workers were to be encouraged to fill in at factories, in the townships, at all trade union and Congress meetings and at all factory meetings. At every meeting at least one SACTU speaker should speak encouraging workers to fill in the enrolment forms. Speakers notes were provided.<sup>39</sup>

As important as filling in the forms was acting upon them. Here SACTU, assisted by other organizations must divide the forms into industries and call meetings in each industry with the view of explaining the campaign and creating some kind of machinery within the industry.<sup>40</sup>

Following on from the report to Conference, the management committee drew up a pamphlet which was widely distributed, explaining the campaign in a manner accessible to rank and file workers. The pamphlet entitled 'How to organise for the/.....

for the £1 a day campaign' <sup>41</sup> explained that this was a new sort of campaign which combined two kinds of activities. Firstly, winning support for the demands and secondly getting people united. Thus the task for field workers was door-to-door work, calling meetings giving out leaflets, selling papers and pamphlets, talking and explaining at work, in the busses and trains that a £1 a day can be won. Workers must be asked to fill in SACTU enrolment forms which must be followed up by an explanation of what to do after they have filled in the forms.

The field workers must explain what trade unions are and how they work. Workers' committees should be formed in every factory. Regular meetings should be held in every area as well as at factories and should be followed up with door-to-door canvassing. Encourage people to speak to others at their place of work and to get a workers' committee elected. The campaign should be advertised through processions, demonstrations, stickers, chalking up the campaign slogans.

Running through the campaign was an understanding of the necessity of being responsive to workers needs. In order to reach workers, one must begin with issues that they recognize, complaints and grievances that they find familiar. Ask people how much they earn. How can they come out on their wages? In the process of establishing a committee it was important that one began by discussing with workers things that effect them, dirty lavatories, rude foremen or supervisors, speed ups, bad lighting, unfair rules, unfair dismissals, favouritism, corruption, dirty work with no allowance for washing up time, racialism. <sup>43</sup>

It was understood and explained that a first step in getting workers to organise themselves is to bring them together around a small complaint such as cloakroom facilities. A committee can be established to take up this grievance with the boss. The workers' committee can strengthen itself by standing together with other committees or trade unions. If they don't exist in the industry, the workers should take responsibility to encourage their establishment.

"People must wake up. This campaign must be a snowball. Every new member must get another five members. In a few weeks we can have the whole country behind us so don't waste time." <sup>44</sup>

The plans/.....

The plans and guidelines although rigorous overestimated the ability of rank and file to take the initiative. Door-to-door work was undertaken in several areas and workers were encouraged at Congress meetings to join SACTU. This however was not sufficient for the establishment of fully fledged trade unions. The campaign had popularized the demand for £1 a day but the creation of trade union structures needed more experienced organisers and more solid structures.

Thus at the third Annual National Conference, National Organising Committees were established. The motivation for these structures were twofold. Firstly, the reasons mentioned above; secondly the recognition that workers in the basic industries needed to be organized. It was workers, particularly skilled workers in the metal, transport, mining and agricultural sectors who by virtue of their importance to the economy, if organized would hold a great deal of power. Thus National Organising Committees which were to be established would employ full time organisers for each of these sectors, whose role would be the co-ordination of trade unions and workers' committees in existence and the establishment of branches of trade unions or workers committees in centres where they did not exist. The Transport National Organising Committee which was established in 1958 aided the SAR & H workers' unions in existence supplying them with technical as well as organizational help and furthering national contact within the sector. The metal National Organising Committee which was also established in 1958 did not function as effectively due to a shortage of personnel. National Organising Committees for mining and agriculture were established the following year. <sup>45</sup>

SACTU was never in a position however to provide enough organisers. Thus the process of encouraging workers to organize themselves at their places of work continued. At the Fourth Annual National Conference, the Management Committee proposed that the campaign the following year be conducted in a threefold manner. The first aspect was the establishment of National Organising Committees in the basic industries. The second aspect was the formation of workers' committees. Every Congress member was to be directed to set about organizing a worker's committee at his or her place of employment. A set of five campaign talks were drawn up for this task and were distributed to Congress members. At the same time efforts should be made by SACTU and Congress members to reach new members, through canvassing in their area or starting  
a discussion/.....



a discussion on the bus or train.

The third aspect of the campaign was to place and keep the demand for £1 a day in the public eye through press statements, memoranda, evidence to Wage Boards and deputations to employers and was to be put forward at all public meetings. <sup>48</sup>

The February 7th Campaign seized the opportunity of working with the other Congresses in the campaign for a National Convention. SACTU saw that by taking the initiative, this campaign could be used to strengthen existing trade unions, to establish new trade unions and to give a new thrust to the recruitment of members and the organization of the unorganized. On the instructions of the 7th Annual Conference, the Management Committee again drew up organizational guidelines which were circulated to all centres to aid the implementation of the campaign.

A pamphlet entitled 'National Campaign for Organizing Trade Unions' announcing the launching of the campaign on 7th February 1962, described the demands of the campaign to be as follows:

- "i) National minimum wage of £1 a day and higher wages for workers who are earning more than £1 a day
- ii) Trade union rights for all workers
- iii) Abolition of Pass laws and influx control
- iv) Abolition of Job Reservation
- v) Freedom of speech, organization and assembly  
(All factory and public rallies to emphasise and explain the demand for a national convention)." <sup>47</sup>

Once demands were to be campaigned for, in the by then familiar and popular methods, volunteers organising house to house, leaflets with enrolment forms to be filled in at houses, at factories, at stations and busstops, posters and slogans to be fixed to factory walls and other appropriate places, volunteers to wear sandwich boards, press statements to be released, a deputation was to present a draft bill for £1 a day to the Minister of Labour. The campaign was to be highlighted by consistent recruiting drives at factories on the 7th and the period following the 7th, culminating in workers' rallies on 25 February. <sup>48</sup>

A new/.....

A new feature of the guidelines was a careful explanation of the machinery to carry out the campaign. The campaign was to be directed and administered by an Action Committee which was set up, employing a full time organiser and other personnel. Decisions were to be implemented by SACTU local committees in full contact with Joint Congress Committees. Where no unions or workers' committees existed, campaign committees were to be established along with industrial area committees. <sup>49</sup>

The preparation at all stages of the campaign was rigorous both strategically and in detail. The plans and organizational details erred however in their optimism and overestimation of the initiatives which organized workers would themselves make. The extent to which the campaign was successful differed from area to area and centre to centre. I would like to focus here on some of the developments on the ground in the Western Cape in the context of all the structures and plans described above.

The workers in the Western Cape did not have the immediate experience of mass action which the bus boycott provided. For them the demand for a £1 a day had not risen organically from demanding lower bus fares to demanding higher wages. Instead the idea for a £1 a day was introduced to 300 delegates at a Workers' Conference held in February 1957. The one day stayaway called for the 26 June was not called for in the Western Cape. Instead a local conference involving nine SACTU unions was held where trade union organization and the means of implementing the campaign for £1 a day were discussed at length. <sup>50</sup> On the day of the stayaway in other centres, a rally was held in the evening on the Parade where resolutions calling for a £1 a day were adopted.

Thus the experience of workers in the Western Cape at the start of the campaign was not one of mass action or mass protest. In 1958 a series of high profile meetings around the demand for a £1 a day in preparation for the National Workers' Conference were held. Meetings at Nyanga, Langa, Elsie's River, Rylands and Paarl were attended by over 1 000 people. <sup>52</sup> Mass meetings were also held in a number of the country districts. These were followed by weekly meetings on the Parade held on Thursdays during the lunch hour which focussed on the campaign for a £1 a day and the forthcoming National Workers' Conference.

The preparation/.....

The preparation for the National Workers' Conference also included the door-to-door canvassing of workers. New Age reported on the week preceding the Conference that over 1 000 workers had been canvassed in the Western Cape and over £100 had been raised to send delegates to the Conference. A number of factories who were unable to elect their own delegates donated sums of money to help send delegates from the Cape area who would protest on their behalf.<sup>54</sup> A solidarity meeting was held on the Parade, on the weekend of the Workers' Conference which was held in Johannesburg.<sup>55</sup>

On their return the delegates to the Conference addressed several report back meetings. 400 people attended a meeting at Nyanga Emergency Camp and a similar meeting took place at Sakkiesdorp. At Langa over 700 people attended the two report back meetings that were held there. The following Sunday similar meetings were held at Nyanga 1, 2 and 3.<sup>56</sup> The resolutions of the Workers' Conference were adopted at all the meetings. In Paarl a demonstration march took place. Workers and organizers marched up and down the industrial area, wearing one pound symbols pinned to their jackets. The march ended in a meeting to explain the campaign and urged all workers to support it.<sup>57</sup>

The demand for £1 a day was discussed at all SACTU local committee meetings, as it was discussed at executive meetings of the individual unions. For the newer unions and the weaker unions the process of discussion was not taken through the whole union. Often the structures of the unions were not advanced enough to facilitate the discussion of campaigns with all the members. The FCWU Convenor carried discussions of the campaign to every corner of the union, at all management and branch meetings at all union and factory meetings the demand for a £1 a day was debated.<sup>58</sup>

The campaign was popularized successfully at Congress meetings making up for discrepancies which existed within the individual affiliates. At all the Congress meetings at the time a SACTU speaker spoke on the campaign for higher wages and the drive to recruit 20 000 members. Many workers were recruited into the unions in this way after filling in enrolment forms at Congress meetings.<sup>59</sup>

By the 7th February Campaign in 1962 several new unions had been formed (eg BQCWU, Garage Workers' Union, Hospital Workers' Union) and popularization of the campaign took place more directly through the SACTU Local Committee.

25 000/.....

25 000 leaflets were published and distributed among the workers.

The Local Committee was also responsible for presenting the Draft Bill for a minimum wage of R2 a day to the Minister of Labour, members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers. The Minister of Labour replied that he did not recognise SACTU's right to discuss such issues as legislation. He was forced however through the extensive publicity press statements and letters to other Ministers of Parliament to refer in the debate on wage policy to the demand for National Minimum Wages. <sup>60</sup>

The first fruits of the £1 a day campaign were announced in 1958. Many workers in Dry cleaning shops, offices and some building undertakings were earning a £1 a day. <sup>61</sup> By 1960 gains had been made by distributive, metal, textile and furniture workers as well. 60% of workers on the Rand received increases, wages for Natal workers had risen by 28% in the previous four years. <sup>62</sup> Wages of 11 000 African workers in the engineering industry were increased by 22% in 1961. Commercial and distributive workers received an increase from £2.18.3 per week to £4.2.6 per week. Municipal workers received increases in 1960 and again in 1961. <sup>63</sup>

"When the idea of a campaign was first introduced to us we thought it was a dream - that it could not be. If you had a £1 a day, then you really had money. But by the end some unions had won a £1 a day." <sup>64</sup>

The campaign succeeded in placing the issue of wages in the forefront. 'There was a big hullabaloo in town' about £1 a day. In some cases management increased wages in anticipation of demands for £1 a day. <sup>65</sup> 'Everywhere people were talking about £1 a day and we frightened the bosses into granting better wages.' <sup>66</sup>

However, there were many workers for whom poverty wages were still the order of the day. A general increase in wages and significant increases for certain sectors had been achieved but in 1962 at the Ninth Annual Conference, wages as low as £8 per month for railways' workers, £5 - £7 per month for certain municipal workers, £4 per month for office workers, £5 per month for metal workers and £3 per month for domestic workers were reported. <sup>67</sup> Particularly for unskilled workers, the struggle for a living wage was still on the agenda.

Another/.....

Another aspect of the campaign which must be evaluated is the drive to organize the unorganized. In Cape Town several new unions were established. Membership grew although this cannot be directly linked to the campaign.<sup>68</sup> However it is not only by the numbers of new unions organized or even by the numbers of workers drawn into them that one evaluates the organizational aspect of the campaign. One must also evaluate the kinds of structures which evolved, the appropriateness of the structures, the ability of the structures to take the campaign forward, and the organizational lessons learnt in the course of the campaign.

The most striking lesson which was built into the campaign as it progressed was precisely the need for organizational machinery and structures to carry out the campaign. When it began there was an overestimation of the ability of workers who have no previous experience of trade unions to organise themselves into workers' committees or trade unions. The stress at the beginning of the campaign was to form a workers' committee of your own to encourage your neighbours, workers in your factory, at other factories to form committees of their own. Although this happened to some extent the establishment of workers's committees was due largely to the efforts of SACTU or Congress activists. A delegate to the Fourth Conference suggested, "Not everybody is capable of organizing a trade union. We must employ an organiser and organise nationally".<sup>69</sup>

The plans for February 7th reflected the recognition of the need for carefully structured machinery to administer and carry out the campaign. Thus the use of existing machinery where it existed and the creation of machinery where none existed. This is not to say that the machinery created ran smoothly, in fact Local Committees were subject to criticism for not swinging into action quickly enough for the campaign. However at a conceptual level, the machinery required to effectively run the campaign was more than adequate.

A strong feature of the campaign in the Western Cape was the development of a strong working relationship between SACTU and other organisations of the Congress Alliance particularly the ANC.<sup>70</sup> Volunteers from the Alliance helped in the establishment of workers' committees, SACTU recruiting always took place at ANC meetings. Volunteers participated in door to door canvassing undertaken on behalf of SACTU.<sup>71</sup> The report on 7th February campaign described the co-operation in the following way:

"Members/.....

"Members of the Alliance used their influence in their organizations to stimulate full activity and canvassing for trade union members. The unity achieved in the co-operation between the Congress Alliance has brought a new level of understanding to trade union movement." 72

Finally, one needs to examine the content of the campaigns and the questions must again be asked - did the campaign contribute to the development of a worker consciousness?, were the demands linked to class domination?, did the campaign pose a challenge to class domination?

Built into the campaign was the development of an understanding of united action

"The workers particularly in their respective working places must learn to unite themselves and take united action all the time, - workers must learn to agitate for promotion of their unions and recognition of their unions if we are to win £1 a day." 73

Secondly the campaign by contesting wages on a national level, by demanding from the Government, legislation for a £1 a day, by generalising demands made at individual factories to demands for all workers, the campaign placed workers economic interests before the state as well as the employers. The campaign thus helped educate workers of their common position as a class in relation to the state and the employer. A worker at the Fourth Conference declared:

"We are being robbed by two thieves, the government and the employers." 74

In summary the campaign was one through which material gains were made as well as organizational gains. The latter were the establishment of new unions and a growth in membership, and lessons in methods of organizing. The campaign by challenging wages on a national scale, gave workers an experience beyond the level of wage demands on individual employers.

Finally the campaign was not fought in isolation but constituted part of a general offensive on the part of the dominated classes. An offensive which as a whole posed a challenge to class domination. It is difficult to quantify to what extent each aspect of that offensive contributed to the development of a working class consciousness or posed a challenge to class domination, but the £1 a day campaign formed a constituent part of that challenge.

Stayaways/.....

Stayaways

"Cold skies and drizzle. The closed shops in Market Street. The closed stalls at the Indian Market. The solitary watchman at the closed factory gate. An air of desolation hangs over the city. Not the bustling morning crowds leaving the city stations and the busstops. Not the coffee drinkers at the coffee carts. But empty trains and empty buses. The workers have stayed at home." 75

During the course of SACTU's existence internally, stayaways were called in the Western Cape on three occasions as a strategy or tactic to bring attention to demands or as a form of protest. Stayaways took place in 1958 in support of higher wages and to protest against Nationalist rule at the time of the general election; in 1960 as a day of mourning for those killed at Langa and Sharpeville; in 1961 to protest the formation of a Republic and to support the demand for a National Convention. 76

Luxembourg viewed the mass strike not as one isolated action but as a process, both advancing proletarian struggle and creating the conditions for furthering that struggle. She distinguished between demonstration strikes and fighting strikes. The latter originate for the most part spontaneously. They cannot be called at will but involve a whole period of class struggle. The demonstration strikes on the other hand require a high level of discipline, direction and political thought. 77

Luxembourg saw the mass strike as representative of the unity of the political and economic struggle. She asserted that it is impossible to separate the economic and political factors from one another, "they merely form the two interlacing sides of the proletarian class struggle". 78 Every new aspect of political mass action, leads to a mass of economic strikes. Political struggle provides the impetus for economic struggle, while at the same time intensifies the urge and desire of workers to struggle.

Luxembourg was also concerned to show that the mass strike is not an isolated act but a whole period of class struggle. It is inseparable from the revolution and cannot be called at will. 79 The initiative must be brought about some way or another by the workers. As a process of a period of class struggle, it both advances the proletarian struggle while at the same time creates the conditions for that struggle. 80

The stayaways/.....

The stayaways which were a tactic of SACTU and the Congress Alliance involved a discipline and form of organization which Luxembourg would have characterised as demonstrations rather than mass strikes. Their characteristics bear little other resemblance to the mass strike as Luxembourg envisaged (with the exception of the 1960 stayaway after the shootings at Langa and Sharpeville). However to characterise them as demonstration strikes or protests, as Luxembourg put forward is useful to the extent that stayaways must be viewed not as events but as a process. <sup>81</sup>

"Political and economic strikes, mass strikes and partial strikes ... all these run through one another, run side by side, cross one another, flow in and over one another." <sup>82</sup>

In order to challenge the existing order the working class requires a high level of political education, class consciousness and organization. These conditions are reached not through pamphlets and leaflets but through the living political school, "by the fight and in the fight, in the continuous course of the revolution". <sup>83</sup> Slogans and ideas put across in pamphlets and speeches are linked and concretised for ordinary people to the action they are taking. Thus it follows that the most important aspect of the mass strike or demonstration is not how many people stayed away or whether the demands were achieved. Rather it is the overall impact made by the campaign on the level of political consciousness of the proletariat. Even those who did not stayaway may have advanced their consciousness through the episode.

There are further general characteristics of the stayaways which can be set out.

A mass stayaway is launched to express mass dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs and to challenge the legitimacy of the status quo. They serve to harass the government and deepen its crisis of legitimacy. Thus the government is placed on the defensive which leads in most cases to the mass mobilization of the police and army. The stayaway can also serve to undermine the confidence in the government and thereby shift a section of the white population to a position whereby they challenge its legitimacy.

Stayaways not only serve to protest and challenge the existing order but also assert a positive demand, to participate in the formulation of an alternative system. <sup>84</sup>

Before/.....



Before calling a stayaway it is necessary to carefully gauge the working class mood. Are workers willing to express their grievances at the expense of a day's wages? Is there an understanding of the possible effect the stayaway could have on their wages? Do workers have any previous experience of mass action? Is the grievance one which will at the same time achieve mass support? Equally as important as gauging the correctness and timeliness of the stayaway is the preparation for the stayaway. If the time and conditions are judged appropriate for mass action, enough time must be allowed for the publication of the stayaway and the popularization of the campaign. A demonstration stayaway particularly where trade union and political organization is uneven requires a great deal of preparation, control and political thought.

The stayaways in 1958 and 1961 can best be characterised as demonstration strikes whereas the 1960 stayaway was more like the fighting strike which Luxembourg envisaged. The characteristics which I have detailed above are broadly applicable to the demonstration strikes. A framework for the evaluation of the fighting strike is far more complex, and will not be dealt with here. What I have attempted is a more thorough examination of the 1958 and 1961 stayaways.

#### The 1958 Stayaway

"If we cannot vote on a ballot paper we shall find another way to vote. Election week beginning April 14, will be a week of national stay at home protests and demonstrations." <sup>85</sup>

The National Workers' Conference held in March 1958 attended by 1673 delegates and 3 000 observers from factories and townships decided that appropriate forms of mass action for the protest week were public meetings, processions, torchlight processions and mass deputations to pass offices, Native Commissioners, employers, labour bureaux, mayors and other officials. <sup>86</sup>

The slogan, "The Nats must go" was adopted to rally people to make their demands heard at a time when white South Africa was electing a government. <sup>87</sup> But the stayaway was not only a protest against the Nationalist government. The National Workers' Conference also demanded full universal suffrage, higher wages for low paid workers and a national minimum wage of £1 a day, the abolition/.....

the abolition of pass laws both for women and men, an end to ceaseless raids and arrests, and the repeal of all discriminatory legislation. Alongside the slogan, "The Nats must go", stood the slogan, "Forward to a £1 a day victory".<sup>88</sup>

Preparations for the stayaway on April 14 began immediately after the National Workers' Conference. In Cape Town a 'Protest Week' Committee was set up. SACTU and the ANC held meetings to advertise the stay at home protest and volunteers distributed leaflets door-to-door in all the African areas.<sup>89</sup>

But as preparations were taking place, Cabinet Ministers issued threats that the Nationalist Government would use the whole force of the state to deal with the demonstrations. The whole police force, 22 000 men were reported to be preparing for the stayaway protest on April 14, 15 and 16 as well.<sup>90</sup>

In the early hours of Monday 14 April huge concentrations of police gathered in the Cape Town African townships.<sup>91</sup> Van loads of police patrolled the Langa and Nyanga areas and armed men guarded railway stations. Residents of Langa were woken up by police in the early hours of Monday and warned to go to work.<sup>92</sup> Twenty two men were arrested and were held in custody for a week later to be charged with incitement. Several people were fired as a result of their participation in the stayaway and some were endorsed out of the area.<sup>93</sup> Seven out of the twenty two Langa men who were arrested lost their jobs. The Employers informed them that they had been told by an inspector of the Labour Department not to reinstate them as they were to be deported.<sup>94</sup>

In Cape Town, the stay at home was not a success in terms of numbers who stayed away. There were scattered demonstrations on Monday by the few people supporting the stay at home but the response to the stay at home was a failure in most areas. Although 1 000's remained at home in Sophiatown and Newclare and percentages recorded in Port Elizabeth and Durban were 50 and 30 respectively,<sup>95</sup> the stayaway was called off after the first day.

The reason given as to why the stayaway was called off was the unequal response. The continuation of the campaign, it was felt by the leaders, in conditions where the majority of people had gone to work might have created tension amongst people and would have exposed them to police brutality and provocation.<sup>96</sup>

On the whole/.....

On the whole there was agreement within Congress that it would have been incorrect to let the demonstrations go on and frizzle out on their own.<sup>97</sup> There was criticism however of the way in which the stayaway had been called off. Several letters to New Age were published after the stayaway containing comment on different aspects of the campaign. Joe Gqabi, chairperson of the Building Workers' Union dealt with the decision to call off the stayaway. He criticized the manner in which the stayaway was called off claiming that proper machinery to ensure that there was constant consultation between leadership and the key areas should have been set up beforehand. This would have avoided a situation where local congresses had to rely on radio and press reports for their information.<sup>98</sup> Published alongside this letter was a circular from the Head Office of the ANC explaining how the decision had been made. A sub-committee of the National Consultative Committee of the congresses had taken the decision to call off the protest. It was an emergency decision, but an authorised decision which was subsequently ratified. Branches complained that they should have been notified before the decision was published in the press. 'This was their inalienable right' the circular stated, 'but considering the time at their disposal could not have been done. However the committee apologizes for this failing in the way the decision was conveyed.'<sup>99</sup>

Other letters from members of Congress offered explanations as to why the stayaway had failed. Many pointed to the high level of intimidation of workers by the army and police and the threat of dismissals and deportation. 'Every cunning trick was used to smash the protest',<sup>100</sup> from parades of brute force, army tanks and trucks on standby, threats from employers, the banning of meetings and leaders.

However the failure of the stayaway could not be blamed on the repression alone. Several letters suggested that the time was inappropriate for a stayaway and the level of organization or politicization was not sufficient to make it a success. Organization was seen to be the key to why the stayaway did not catch on. This point was backed by successful stayaways in areas such as Port Elizabeth, Sophiatown and the Reef where organization was the best, and particularly in the milling and textile industries in these areas where unions were strong.<sup>101</sup>

Organizational/.....

Organizational Structures, whether political or trade unions are extremely important as they allow for concrete preparation for the stayaway. One of the notes made about stayaways in the first section was the importance of vigorous organization for the stayaway. All the assessments of April 14th point to a failure in this regard. Rowley Arenstein writing to New Age suggested that, the organizational strength of the national organizations was not such that they could have carried out a successful stayaway, especially if consideration was given to the strength of the state who were out to oppose Congress plans by all means, "the lessons to be learnt for the future are that grandiose plans cannot supplant the necessity for hard organizational work".<sup>102</sup>

Tom Nkobi, ANC National Organiser described the organization both for National Workers' Conference and for the stayaway as having been done in a haphazard manner. J.D. Matlou of the ANC suggested further that the machinery to organise the campaign in a structured manner did not exist. He claimed that the call for action such as a stayaway must be based primarily on the ability of the organization to carry it out. The ANC has no right to call up a campaign, however correct and timely unless it is satisfied that the machinery is there to see it through.<sup>103</sup>

He raises indirectly a question to which others attributed the failure of the campaign : Was the campaign correct and timely? The campaign revolved around two issues, the General election and the demand for higher wages. The elections were a less effective rallying issue than wages were as far as African workers were concerned. Yet in order to pose a direct challenge to the white electorate, the campaign needed to focus to a large extent on the forthcoming general elections and the slogan 'The Nats must go'. The connection was made between Nationalist rule and low wages:

"Behind the Nats are the industrialists who are using the Nats as a weapon to protect them. Nats were supported by a highly exploited white working class also. For these reasons, the two immediate obstacles, white domination and class exploitation are singled out in The Nats."<sup>104</sup>

The connection between workers, the employers and the government was not automatically clear, particularly to workers who were unorganized and had received no previous training. The slogan, 'The Nats must go' was identified as a mistake/.....

as a mistake. It 'led' a considerable number of people to believe that Congress was in favour of the Nationalist Party coming to power. <sup>105</sup>

The stayaway, assessed by The Congress leadership as a failure was not interpreted as a loss of support for Congress policies. Luthuli in an interview in *New Age* explained that in a long drawn out struggle, it was incorrect to see one setback as a rejection of Congress policies. <sup>106</sup>

Asked if he considered the stayaway a flop he asserted:

"I think the choice of the word flop in relation to great social changes and movements is wrong. It seems to me to betray a certain superficiality in assessing the significance of the people at any stage. ... We regard the call that was made and the demands put forward to have been politically correct."

The fact that the African people 'as a whole' did not measure up to the call posed a challenge to the ANC, a challenge which they were called upon to engage in and from which lessons for the struggle ahead should be learnt. <sup>107</sup>

In the same interview, Luthuli points an objective of the campaign which was achieved. The aim of placing demands into the public eye, at a time when white South Africa was electing a government was fulfilled. Luthuli referred to the tremendous agitation in official quarters and mobilization of the entire state machinery, the Cabinet, army and police as proof that Congress had intervened effectively.

"I do not recall any elections in which a political organization was discussed as much as the ANC." <sup>108</sup>

The stayaway served to harrass the government and interrupt its normal activity.

The reciprocal aim was also achieved to an extent, that is for workers to cease regarding general elections as 'a white man's affair'. Tennyson Makiwane, a *New Age* reporter described the level of interest in the elections. At a large department store in the city, a barometer showing Nationalist Party victories shot up, "Around I saw on the faces, bewilderment, astonishment and disbelief". <sup>109</sup> He compared the feeling when the results were heard with a blue Monday,

"it was as if/.....

"it was as if the sweetness of the weekend had been snatched away. Never before have I seen Africans so interested in the outcome of the General Elections. There was talk of it everywhere. "Now they will see to it that we carry passes", a number of women were saying." 110

This raises the political educative aspect of the campaign. Many workers whose interest in the elections was raised, seem to have made the connection between Government and their oppression. If the United Party won the elections, they would no longer have to carry passes. This although possibly correct was not an indication of any analysis or understanding of the role of the state in the control of labour. Discussions and ideas however had been moved to the political terrain, to questions of government, discriminatory legislation and the right to govern. For more activists and advanced workers the placing of these issues alongside wage demands would be understood. For rank and file however the link between the Nationalist Government and low wage packets was not evident. Interest amongst workers in the election was certainly unprecedented but the call for the stayaway was not coherent enough to transform that interest into action especially in the face of severe repression. The significance of such action had not been conveyed sufficiently. One cannot assert however that no political education was achieved through the campaign. The stayaway must be seen as 'part of the fight', part of 'the continuous course of the revolution'. The class consciousness or political education of the masses is developed in this course by the living political school, of which the stayaways were a constituent part. The demands of the stayaway were not met, nor was the call to stayaway extensively observed, however as part of the living political school, the stayaway can be seen to have contributed to the political education of the masses.

#### The 1961 Stayaway

The All in Africa Conference, a conference of ex ANC and PAC leaders, the unbanned organizations of The Congress Alliance, SACTU and CPC, plus representatives of African cultural, business and religious groups was initiated by a secret meeting of the joint executives of the Congress Alliance. The Conference held in Johannesburg in December 1960 elected a National Action Council, with Mandela as secretary, to take forward the demand for a National Convention.

The demand/.....

The demand for a National Convention had first been discussed at a meeting of all the Congress executives. It was seen as an issue which would:

- 1) capture the imagination of the people around an advanced political demand,
- 2) would encompass all basic demands of the people and
- 3) could 'highlight the undemocratic character of South Africa's set up and that the people could only redress their grievances by a change of government'. <sup>112</sup>

The All in Africa conference decided to send an ultimatum to the Government demanding a National Convention which if not met by May 31st, would result in country wide demonstrations and non co-operation with the newly proclaimed Republic. Mandela in an interview, published in New Age stresses that the demonstrations were not only negative protests against the Verwoerd Republic, but were also for the positive demand of a National Convention which must have sovereign power to draft a new constitution. <sup>113</sup>

The suggestion that a call may be made to the people to withdraw their labour power as part of the demonstration was incorporated into the mandate of the All in Africa conference. <sup>114</sup>

The experience of the workers in the Western Cape, unlike in 1958, now included the experience of mass action of March 1960. A strike which <sup>had</sup> began on March 21st, spread from one factory to the next until by the end of the week, the city's industries and docks were almost totally crippled. Although directed by leadership the strike was largely a spontaneous response to the mass shootings and repression in Langa and Sharpeville.

The Congress Alliance called on all Africans to observe a day of mourning by staying away from work on Monday 28th. On this day 98% of Cape Town's African population observed the strike. <sup>115</sup> Although the response of the Coloured Community was uneven, twelve factories whose combined Coloured workforce was over 1 000 were closed and all shops in Athlone, Crawford, Elsie's River, Grassy Park, Retreat, Kensington and District Six were closed. <sup>116</sup>

In the early hours of March 30th, police entered the African townships, beat up workers and arrested almost all the ANC and PAC leaders. News of the arrests and repression, increased the level of resistance.

15 000/.....

15 000 marched from Langa to Parliament to demand an interview with the Minister of Justice. They were led by a young student Philip Kgosana who was persuaded by police to lead the march, not 30 000 people to Caledon Square. He was given assurances by the police that the Minister would grant an interview if he dispersed the crowd. He accepted this unknowingly. The interview was refused once the crowd was dispersed and he was later arrested. 117

The strike continued in Cape Town until April 4th despite the state of emergency called on 30th March and the banning of ANC and PAC under the Unlawful Organizations Bill which had been sped through parliament. 118

The greatest number of workers stayed away from work on March 30 and April 1st, an estimated 60 000 workers. Industry, Commerce, shipping and supplies of fresh food were disrupted when Malay workers joined African workers, as were building and engineering projects and state-run railways. 119

Thus the workers of the Western Cape had had the recent experience of political mass action, which in Luxembourg's view intensified the inner urge of the workers to better their position, and their desire to struggle.

The suggestion at the All in Africa conference for the withdrawal of labour power as part of the demonstration, was in the context of the experience of political mass action of 1960. The actions of 1960 had met with the brutal repressive forces of the state and further action was likely to place the government on the defensive leading to the full mobilization of the police and army.

Even before a formal call for a stayaway was made in 1961 massive countrywide police raids were launched. The General Laws Amendment Bill, with severe penalties for the organization of stayaways was rushed through Parliament in all its stages.

Despite evidence of the full mobilization of the repressive forces, the National Action Council pressed ahead with the campaign. May 29, 30 and 31 were fixed as the dates for stayaways to mark the rejection of the formation of a Republic. The National Action Council announced:

"We shall/.....



"We shall continue to work for our goal undeterred by the Government's show of force. We are not afraid of threats of imprisonment and wild talk of mobilization. They cannot make war on a population which furnishes the sinews of industry and agriculture." <sup>126</sup>

The three day stayaway was to be followed by a sustained and massive campaign to mobilize the entire African nation in a programme of non-cooperation with the republic. Thousands of leaflets advertising the stayaway were distributed in all the main centres. Door-to-door campaigning was undertaken in the African areas. SACTU organisers distributed leaflets at factories. A mass meeting was held in the Drill Hall in Cape Town, where 4 000 Moslems expresses enthusiastic support for the strike call. <sup>122</sup> The National Action Council stressed that the protest was to be peaceful, they urged all South African's to stay at home quietly, not to indulge in any form of violence, not to let themselves be provoked by the police and not to take part in any street demonstrations or processions which might lead to a clash with the police. <sup>123</sup>

As preparations for the stayaway intensified and the intended resistance to the formation of the Republic was reaffirmed, so the government's counter measures intensified. Raids and arrests, the banning of meetings, the call up of the Active Citizen forces, a new law enabling the detention of arrested people for twelve days without charge or bail were some of the defensive measures adopted by the state.

The preparations continued however and even before the strike had taken place, the National Action Council identified gains that had been made. There was fast growing recognition that change would not come from the Nationalist Party, and that the only solution was a National Convention for a new constitution and a new government.

On 29 May the response to the call to stayaway was patterned unexpectedly. The best response was in Johannesburg where the majority of African workers observed the strike on the first day. Cape Town saw little response from Africans but outstanding support from Coloured workers and many factories were completely closed down, while others worked with skeleton staff. The Building Industry was brought to a standstill with an estimated 70% stay-away amongst Malays and 40% amongst Coloureds. <sup>124</sup> The response was put 50% of/.....

at 50% of workers in Wynberg, Athlone and district areas, and about 10% in the northern suburbs from Goodwood to Bellville. <sup>125</sup> The Garment and leather industries were also seriously affected by the strike and most shops in Coloured areas were closed. <sup>126</sup> Rhodes Fruit Farm in Groot Drakenstein where the FCWU organized was closed down. <sup>127</sup>

The large scale police action and intimidation against African workers, the threat of dismissal and repatriation to the reserves by employers, plus undercover propaganda that the strike was a Coloured strike were the causes of the small response amongst Africans. <sup>128</sup>

In the week preceding the strike, hundreds of Africans were held for pass offences in mass raids undertaken in the Peninsula. Police in cars, vans and riot trucks were active at busstops and railway stations piling people into their vehicles and rushing them off to police stations. <sup>129</sup> Police loudspeakers toured Athlone and other areas on the first day of the stayaway threatening people with the consequences of stayaway. At one factory, Burlington Hosiery, where a large percentage of workers stayed away, police vans were sent to pick them up and take them to work. <sup>130</sup>

The commercial press reported that the strike was a failure, a factor described by SACTU as a conspiracy to break the strike. However, there was contrary to these reports, a total disruption of manufacturing industry in the major industrial centres. Clothing textile, building, leather, laundering and civil engineering closed down completely or remained open with skeleton staffs. Some industries were closed for all three days. Farm workers, municipal workers and office cleaners took part in this type of action for the first time. <sup>131</sup> A weakness which was pointed out in the assessment at the Seventh Annual National Conference was that the basic industries particularly the mines, docks and railways which employ compound labour were not affected. <sup>132</sup>

The assessment pointed to a number of positive results. The announcement that there would be a three day stay at home brought the country to a standstill for the entire month of May. Shares slumped, business declined and capital poured out of the country and the minority Republic of the Verwoerd regime came into being in an atmosphere of general mobilization, mass arrests, uncertainty and foreboding. <sup>133</sup>

The strike/.....

The strike had been an important learning experience for those who had participated. The organizational machinery was strengthened. Organisers and activists gained valuable experience in methods of work and distribution of propaganda material under severely repressive conditions. 134

The campaign made an important contribution to the political education of the masses. The rank and file who participated in the stayaway, some for whom it was the first experience of mass action and for those who did not stayaway (mostly because of threats of repression), were exposed to ideas of the National Convention and the right of the working class to participate in the drawing up of a constitution for the running of the country. Their immediate demands around which they were taking concrete action would be included and taken into account in the drawing up of that constitution. Again it is hard to accurately gauge the contribution made by one event to the political education and class consciousness of the masses. However the concrete experience of their actions and the combined repressive response to those actions by the state and the bosses contributed to exposing to the workers the essential nature of the capitalist system and their power as the proletariat.

FOOTNOTES

1. Lenin, Collected Works Vol.2. Quoted in Lambert, 19 , p119.  
As Collected Works Vol.2 is possession banned, I was unable to see the original article and am thus indebted to Rob Lambert who sets out in his thesis the points made by Lenin in Collected Works.
2. Lambert, 1978 , p151
3. Ibid p190
4. New Age 5.9.1957
5. Ibid
6. New Age 26.9.1957
7. New Age 15.3.1956
8. Workers Unity 3.5.1956, New Age 19.5.1956
9. New Age 22.3.1956
10. New Age 3.5.1956
11. New Age 24.5.1956
12. New Age 31.5.1956
13. Ibid
14. Luckardt and Wall, 1980, p182
15. op cit p242
16. New Age 27.10.1955
17. Ibid
18. New Age 29.12.1955
19. New Age 9.2.1956
20. Ibid
21. New Age 19.2.1959
22. Ibid
23. Interview 8
24. Ibid
25. Minutes, Second Annual National Conference
26. Delegate from ALCDW in minutes of Fourth Annual National Conference
27. Minutes, Fourth Annual National Conference
28. Minutes, Fifth Annual National Conference
29. Ibid
30. Ibid
31. The demand for a National Convention was first put forward at the All-in-Africa Conference discussed in the next section. A National Action Council was elected to administer the campaign which coincided with a protest against the formation of the Republic.
32. Minutes, Seventh Annual National Conference
33. General Secretary's report to Seventh Annual National Conference

34. Ibid
35. Lambert, 1178, p76
36. Minutes, Second Annual National Conference
37. Management Committee Report to Second Annual National Conference
38. Ibid
39. Minutes, Second Annual National Conference
40. Ibid
41. University of the Witwatersrand Archives, SACTU Collection
42. From pamphlet, 'How to organise for £1 a day campaign'
43. Ibid
44. Ibid
45. Minutes, Fourth Annual National Conference
46. Ibid
47. University of the Witwatersrand Archives, SACTU Collection
48. Pamphlet, 'National Campaign for Organising Trade Unions'
49. Ibid
50. New Age 26.9.1957
51. Ibid
52. New Age 30.1.1958
53. Ibid
54. New Age 13.3.1958
55. Ibid
56. New Age 27.3.1958
57. Interview 6
58. Ibid
59. Interview 5
60. Minutes, Seventh Annual National Conference
61. Workers Unity February 1958
62. Minutes, Fifth Annual National Conference
63. General Secretary's Report to the Seventh Annual National Conference
64. Interview 2
65. Interview 12
66. Interview 1
67. Minutes, Seventh Annual National Conference
68. See discussion of unions above.
69. Minutes, Fourth Annual National Conference
70. Interview 1
71. Interviews 1,2,5,12
72. Minutes, Seventh Annual National Conference
73. Delegate at Fifth Annual National Conference
74. Minutes, Fourth Annual National Conference

75. Quoted in Luckardt and Wall, 1980, p34
76. A stayaway was called in 1957 on the Rand and in the Eastern Cape on 26 June 1957 in support of the demand for a £1 a day. In Natal and the Western Cape, evening protests were held on the same day.
77. Luxembourg 1906,p45
78. op cit, p47
79. Ibid
80. op cit, p49
81. With the exception of the 1980 stayaway in response to the shootings at Sharpville and Langa.
82. Luxembourg, quoted in Moss 1983, p30
83. op cit, p31
84. I am indebted to Tony Karon who set out these two points in an article on the 1961 stayaway which appeared in Liberation . See Karon, 1983, pxiv
85. New Age 20.3.1958
86. Ibid
87. Luthuli, in an interview in New Age 24.5.1958
88. New Age 10.4.1958
89. New Age 3.4.1958
90. New Age 24.5.1958
91. Similar police action was reported in all the other centres.
92. New Age 17.4.1958
93. New Age 1.5.1958
94. Ibid
95. New Age 17.4.1958
96. New Age 24.5.1958
97. Luckardt and Wall in Chapter 10 claim that there was tension between SACTU and ANC on this issue. My research did not show any evidence of this in the Western Cape where the relationship between SACTU and the ANC was close.
98. New Age 8.5.1958
99. Ibid
100. Ibid
101. New Age 17.4.1958
102. New Age 8.5.1958
103. Ibid
104. Interview, Elliot Shibangu
105. Arenstein in New Age op cit
106. Interview with Luthuli, op cit

107. Interview, op cit
108. Ibid
109. New Age 24.5.1958
110. Ibid
111. Lambert, 1978 , p142
112. Ibid
113. New Age 25.5.1961
114. New Age 4.5.1961
115. Karon, 1983 p141
116. New Age 29.3.1960
117. Lambert, 1978 , p135
118. Ibid
119. Ibid
120. New Age 18.5.1961
121. Ibid
122. New Age 11.5.1961
123. New Age 23.5.1961
124. New Age 1.6.1961
125. Ibid
126. New Age 8.6.1961
127. Ibid
128. Ibid
129. New Age 25.5.1961
130. Ibid
131. General Secretary's Report to the Seventh Annual National Conference.
132. Ibid
133. Ibid
134. Lambert, .1978, p149

## CHAPTER THREE

TRADE UNION AND POLITICS

'Rejecting the slogan of 'no politics', the trade unions must enter actively into the political life of the country taking up the political demands for freedom of the workers and participating at the head of the national liberation movement. What does this imply in South Africa? It means in the first place that the trade unions must mobilise their members against the specifically anti-labour measures which hangover and restrict the workers in their attempts to organise themselves for higher living standards. It must fight against pass laws and the industrial colour bar. It must fight the Native Labour Act and the Industrial Conciliation Bill and all other laws which are designed to cripple and bleed the trade unions. But over and above this the trade unions must understand that these laws themselves are part and parcel of the whole vicious undemocratic structure of the Union, which is deliberately designed to keep labour cheap. The principal aim of the movement therefore must be the replacement of the present cheap labour colonial structure with a democratic people's structure as envisaged by the Freedom Charter (FC). (1)

This extract drawn from a lecture which formed part of the National Workers School held by SACTU in 1955 is quoted at length because it reflects the concerns of SACTU outside of the factory, which I would like to focus on in this section.

The organisation of workers at their place of work was a priority for SACTU, as were the struggles fought around wages

and working/.....



and working conditions. But SACTU saw the need to address issues and challenge structures outside of the factory as well.

Workers are not only affected by low wages and bad conditions at work. Their houses are small and overcrowded. They cannot afford rents or bus and train fares to the factory. There are no lights in their townships. Their rights to collective bargaining are controlled and restricted and <sup>to</sup> have racist white bosses. They are prevented from moving around to seek employment and are arrested and charged under the pass laws. These are the day-to-day experiences and grievances of workers which SACTU saw the need to address because they were concerns of the working class. But also because they were aspects through which the link to class domination could be made although their class nature was not immediately apparent.

The primary contradiction in a capitalist society is between producers and appropriators of surplus value. These antagonistic classes meet directly at the point of production. However, the exploitative relationship is not limited to the production process. The relationship between producers and appropriators is based on and maintained by a set of relations of production which ensure the reproduction of the exploitative relationship. But the relations of production are concealed. They are fetishised or mystified and do not appear as relations of domination. They have to be exposed for the people to become conscious of the system of class domination and to challenge it. Aspects of class domination inside as well as outside the factory must be addressed. However, addressing issues such as rent and transport costs does not constitute a challenge to class domination in itself. These issues must be taken up in a manner which exposes the relations of production which

are/.....

are maintained behind them. The way in which workers experience their oppression must be extended and an understanding of the class nature of that oppression must be developed.

SACTU made no distinction between economic and political issues but was concerned to draw out the political (class) content of all issues. An organiser explained, 'When I am asked about politics on the trade unions, I explain that I don't know where politics begins and where politics ends. I don't know where trade unionism begins and where trade unionism ends, whether they run parallel or in different directions. I don't know'.

The pass laws was an issue which SACTU took up because they posed difficulties for workers in selling their labour for a just reward, they restricted freedom of movement and led to the mass eviction of Africans from urban areas resulting in the suffering of broken homes and families. (2)

But SACTU also took a leading part in the struggle against passes because it was the working class, its members who were most highly affected by them. The pass laws were seen to be a central aspect of class domination. The link was drawn between the workers' experience of restricted movements and arrests for not carrying a pass and the contradiction between capital and labour. The pass laws were described in a resolution at the Annual Conference of SACTU in the following way: 'the pass laws are one of the most vicious weapons used by capitalist exploiters to extract labour and huge profits from African people' (3).

Another example is the struggle over the bread price. In 1961 the Western Cape L.C. participated with several women's

organisations/.....

organisations in a deputation to the Minister of Labour to protest the increase in the bread price. The deputation which was received from officials of the Ministers of Finance and Agriculture instead demanded that the bread price be reduced because the working people could not afford it (4). They asserted that it was wrong for the government to take pennies from the poor while granting concessions to the employer (5). The price of bread was linked to the expropriation of land in the development of capitalism - 'in the past Africans could produce their own food on the land, but now the land had been taken away and they were forced to come to the cities and work for starvation wages'.

Trade Unions are limited however in waging a political struggle against class domination. Unions can take up issues affecting its members both inside and outside the factory and exposing the class nature of these issues but it is unable because of its form and function to develop these issues to their full political potential. The class nature of issues can be drawn out from the way in which they are immediately experienced but to fully expose the relations of domination and exploitation, immediate issues must be removed from their specific context and must be related to the total complex of the relations of production. A trade union as an organisational form is defined in terms of the production process and cannot effectively extend its activity into other sites of struggle.

The process of fully exposing and challenging the relations of production involves the generalisation of issues specific to one constituency or site of struggle, to a level where they can be exposed as issues of class domination and exploitation. This necessitates forms of organisation that go beyond particular sites of struggle, for<sup>e1</sup> a trade union. Such an organisation must be able to draw together the struggles being waged

on different/.....

on different fronts into a unified and concerted assault on all structures of class domination. Explicitly political forms of organisation are required to expose the underlying relations of production and to mobilise against them overtly.

The task of a trade union is thus to take up immediate issues of concern to their members and to take them up in a manner which relates the issue as far as possible to class domination. The task of the political movement is to extend this process further, to expose relations of production and to concretely challenge the relations of production.

The demands of the FC focus on key aspects of class domination in South Africa and thus presents a means through which those relations of class domination can be confronted. The class nature of the FC is not immediately apparent. The section dealing with the economy calls for the land to be redivided, for the nationalisation of the mines, banks and monopoly industry, and calls for remaining industries and trade to be controlled in the interest of all the people. These demands while not a coherent socialist programme do pose a major challenge to capitalism. The Freedom Charter as a set of minimum demands allows for the mobilisation of the broadest possible sections of society. It enables the link to be made between different sites of struggle and incorporates demands which cannot be met under capitalism.

By adopting the FC, SACTU was able to extend issues beyond the domination of the factory. SACTU was concerned with struggles around working and living conditions but was concerned to expose the class nature of these issues and to expose the relations of production which ensure class domination.

At a local level, SACTU took<sup>up</sup> factory and living conditions,

while on/.....

while on a national political level it participated in an alliance with a mass based political organisation.

The Freedom Charter was adopted at the First Annual Conference (6). This meant that SACTU became a constituent part of the National Consultative Committee, a body with the aim of popularising the FC and co-ordinating the work of the liberation movement and represented by all the Congresses within the Congress Alliance (7).

SACTU participated in all the activities of the NCC which in turn supported SACTU's campaign and particularly the campaign for a fl a day and the recruitment of 20 000 members. Notice of campaigns and struggles of the Congress Alliance were circulated to SACTU affiliates and from there distributed to all the branches. In turn SACTU sent messages of support and delegates when requested, to conferences and gatherings of the other congresses. In the Western Cape meetings of the Consultative Committee took place once a week. National campaigns were discussed and details were planned for the area. During national campaigns, all the SACTU affiliates continued organising on a day to day basis in the factories while taking up campaigns in conjunction with the Congress Alliance (8).

In the Western Cape SACTU and the ANC worked very closely. Most SACTU members also became members of the ANC. Likewise it was policy of the ANC that every member must also be a member of a union (9). Workers always received ANC support for their struggles. At ANC meetings there was always a slot for a SACTU speaker.

It is in this context that SACTU stressed the importance of

organising/.....

organising the mass of workers into trade unions for the liberation struggle. Trade unions increase the experience strength and discipline of the workers making it easier for them to lead and give the main direction to the liberation struggle. The working class is the best guarantee that the freedom that is achieved will be a "freedom without hunger" (10). "The trade union movement must be the vanguard of the struggle, otherwise we will get freedom, but it won't be the freedom we require. Without the trade union movement you can fight capitalism, but capitalism will creep back " (11). It was important that workers lead the liberation movement because 'our ultimate aim and goal of socialism needs workers to lead the struggle'. Further it was felt that strong trade unions would make the Congress Alliance powerful (12). At the same time the Congress Alliance was important as it was 'speaking to all people' (13).

Thus the political movement had two important functions in which regard a trade union centre is limited. Firstly, the political movement was able to make the links between different sites of struggle so as to pose a challenge to class domination. Secondly, the linking of these different struggles through the FC allowed for the mobilisation of the broadest possible section of society. Within that broad mobilisation, SACTU held the specific role, as an organisation of the working class to provide leadership to the political movement.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has covered three different aspects of the SACTU with reference to the Western Cape where possible. It attempted to examine both the trade union activities of SACTU and its participation in the political mass action of the fifties and early sixties. The nature of the dissertation does not allow for conclusions to be drawn. Firstly, it is simply an introductory account, having only begun locating information on the area. Secondly, its focus is too narrow and its account of struggles and organisation too cursory to reach conclusions about SACTU. I have raised questions in the text and further areas to be covered in the introduction, which will be addressed if further research is undertaken. Until this is done, not conclusive analysis can be made.

FOOTNOTES

1. From lecture given at the National School held in 1955.
2. Minutes, First Annual National Conference
3. Ibid
4. New Age 20.4.1961
5. Minutes, Sixth Annual National Conference
6. Minutes, First Annual National Conference
7. The other organisations of the Congress Alliance were the ANC, SAIC  
CPC and COD.
8. Interview 11
9. Interview 2
10. Interview 1
11. Ibid
12. Delegate from Natal Dairy Workers Union at Fourth Annual National  
Conference.
13. Interview 11



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## 4. Interviews

Six interviews were conducted by the writer. I also had  
access to two taped interviews and four transcripts of interviews  
undertaken by previous researchers. All those interviewed,  
were involved in SACTU or in trade unions before the existence  
of SACTU. All were full time organisers for one of the SACTU  
affiliates and were members of at least one other organisation  
of the Congress Alliance.