

## REVIEW ARTICLE: SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR STUDIES

Roger Southall\*

D. du Toit, *Capital and Labour in South Africa: Class Struggles in the 1970s*, (London and Boston 1981), pp.xii and 495.

K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, *Working for Freedom: Black trade union development in South Africa throughout the 1970s*, (Geneva 1981), pp.118.

D. Hauck, *Black Trade Unions in South Africa*, (Washington, Investor Responsibility Research Center 1982), pp.73.

B. Fine and L. Welch, *A Question of Solidarity: Independent Trade Unions in South Africa*, (London, Socialist Forum for Southern African Solidarity 1982), pp.41.

M. Plaut and D. Ward, *Black Trade Unions in South Africa*, (London, Spokesman pamphlet No. 82 1982), pp.31.

J. Haarlov, *Labour Regulation and Black Workers' Struggles in South Africa*, (Uppsala, The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies 1983), pp.80.

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The reassertion of working class challenge to apartheid, and the associated transformation of the industrial scene in South Africa wrought by the rapid growth of Black trade unions, is inevitably giving rise to an expanding literature. Even so, the new trade unionism remains something of an unknown quantity, not only because it is so new, but also because the sources of information upon which

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\*Prof Southall, the Institute for International Development and Cooperation, Univ of Ottawa.

I The New Labour Studies

analysis is based are very largely secondary. Hence one feature of so much of the most informed current writing is its dependence upon the SALB. Indeed, without the Bulletin the outside world would know far, far less about what is going on within and around the new trade unions, and even the most dedicated externally based writers would be reduced to *even greater reliance than at present* upon "press clippings" analysis! Nonetheless, such a dependence carries with it the inevitable cost that not a few overviews of the current union situation bear a marked similarity to each other and to their original source!

Yet it would be misleading to suggest that all analyses of the contemporary labour situation in South Africa cover the same ground. The six studies featured here are of varying length and complexity, and further, written from varying perspectives, they each present reality and the likely developments that they envisage rather differently. More critically, because the political visions which inform them vary significantly, the policies which they commend for the working class movement and its international allies also differ markedly.

The "new labour" literature is highly committed politically and makes no pretension whatsoever to "neutrality" as if workers and employers play equal but different roles in the unending process of capitalist production. It is unashamedly partisan on behalf of workers in struggle; and further, in the case of South Africa, it views the non-racial trade union movement as a major vehicle (but not necessarily the preeminent one) for radically transforming relations between capital and labour in the workplace and between oppressors and oppressed in the polity.

Having said that, there would be some who would

question whether David Hauck's - Black Trade Unionism in South Africa - would qualify as "new labour studies" on account of the socially ambiguous nature of the mandate of its publisher, the Washington-based Investor Responsibility Research Center. Against this, however, as an American work on South African trade unionism (and unusual in being that) it does offer important insights. Further, it is imperative to recognise that the constraints imposed upon the anti-apartheid lobby in the USA are much more severe than elsewhere in the western world, and that the framework within which mainstream solidarity work operates is necessarily directed towards propelling US business towards "social responsibility" rather than South Africa towards socialist democracy. Hence even if such efforts are inherently limited it is vital to recognise the progressive impact which pressures against either the form or fact of US investment in South Africa could make as the struggle against apartheid intensifies.

Hauck's coverage is extensive, highly informed and economical. It is further distinguished by being based very largely upon primary data gathered by the author on a six-week visit to South Africa in 1981, and hence leans rather less heavily than some of the other works under review upon SALB. In brief, after a description of the labour relations system which existed until 1979 and an elaboration of the recommendations made by the Wiehahn Commission, Hauck proceeds to an examination of the responses of the government, business and trade unions to the Commission's report. Thereafter, he surveys the diverse labour groupings through which black workers' struggle is waged (i.e. the white-dominated Trade Union Council of South Africa, the black-oriented Council of Unions of South Africa, the non-racial Federation of South African Trade Unions and, not least, the other independent unions). He does not however seriously assess the role of the South African Congress of Trade Unions, the labour wing of

the African National Congress, which - whilst not formally banned - has no option but to operate outside the law.

Having discussed the policies, practices and goals which characterise these movements and the responses to them of business and government, he also explores the relationship between trade unionism and political change. For Hauck black trade unionism could lead to an erosion of the apartheid labour system and its transition to a non-racial, capitalist equivalent - but not to any transformation of the political arena. The unions he perceives are too hemmed in by a multitude of constraints.

In contrast, Jens Haarlov argues, in his *Labour Regulation and Black Workers' Struggles in South Africa*, that an analysis of the mass strikes of the 1970s and the trade union struggle suggests that there is a revolutionary consciousness amongst black workers which could lead to "the reorganisation of the power bloc" (p.73). Basically, what Haarlov does is to provide an analysis of the 1973, 1976 and 1981 strike waves, and then to propose that in response the government "reform" programme constituted a simultaneous attempt to repress and co-opt the black trade union movement.

The solidarity pamphlet, *Black Trade Unions in South Africa*, makes no pretensions to comprehensiveness, and is provided as a brief introduction to its subject for British trade unionists. As such, it provides a thumbnail sketch of black worker organisation, from 1854 to 1981, followed by equally compressed accounts of the contemporary state response to the growth of trade unionism, the major union groupings, the prospects for independent union unity, the upsurge in strikes and the government's resort to repression. Finally, it ends with a description of various solidarity actions taken by such bodies as the International Labour Office (ILO), the International Confederation of Free Trade

Unions (ICFTU), the International Trade Secretariats, and the Trades Union Congress (TUC). "Solidarity action taken by British trade unions..." concludes the study, "can be of crucial significance" (p.26). However, written by Martin Plaut and David Ward, (members of the International Department and the Africa Committee of the British Labour Party respectively), the utility of the study is undermined by the coyness of its efforts to specify the links between the South African and British economies and its failure to surmount description of past acts of solidarity action by specifying alternative courses of action. Thus although the booklet does not bear the official imprint of the Party, its shortcomings appear to be a product of the ambiguities of the Labour hierarchy towards the entire question.

Of a somewhat more systematically radical genre is Ken Luckhardt's and Brenda Wall's *Working for Freedom: Black Trade Union Development in South Africa throughout the 1970s*, which smacks of an authorised version of current developments as perceived by SACTU, its somewhat liturgical flavour being enhanced by its publication by the Programme to Combat Racism of the World Council of Churches. However, if truly Catholic in this sense, it is arguably sectarian in a rather more fundamentalist way on behalf of SACTU, and this leads to a number of problems in its analysis. Nonetheless, based as it is upon a detailed reading of SALB as well as secondary sources, its value is its compression of the growing data and scattered literature on individual unions struggles, strikes and strategic issues into a highly readable account which is appropriately packaged for a popular audience.

The text offers an account of the revival of black trade unionism which is located within the context of the acute crisis that presently confronts South Africa's system of "racial capitalism". Basically, what Luckhardt and Wall argue is that historical

circumstances have forced the apartheid regime to alter superficially the rules of oppression and exploitation, a major component of this defensive programme being the "reform" of the industrial relations system so as to allow the cooption and control of the emergent black trade union movement.

The authors place the development of contemporary non-racial trade unionism into historical perspective by sketching out the continuities between the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa (ICU) during the 1920s and movements such as the Council of Non-European Trade Unions during the 1940s, the African Mineworkers' Union which organised the 1946 strike, and of course, the emergence of SACTU in 1955. Basing its policies upon the two basic principles of non-racial and political trade unionism, SACTU is correctly depicted as having challenged not only the power of the state but also the acquiescence of the registered (e.g. TUCSA) coordinating bodies until it was driven underground in the early 1960s. The subsequent lull in African working class activity from the mid-60s until the early 1970s is then explained as a result of heavy repression.

Following a summary of the Durban (1973) and subsequent strikes, the authors highlight the resurgence of worker organisations, which led to a major reassessment by the capitalist class of its labour strategy. The major substantive result of the Wiehahn Report - the legal recognition of african trade unions - is portrayed as an attempt to control and/or eliminate independent trade unions which the state felt it would be unwise to ban. That is, by admitting africans to the status of employees and by making independent unions eligible for registration, the state offered certain advantages in exchange for such unions submitting themselves to control, whilst those declining to register would, by implication, be subject to harassment. In brief, after useful survey of the small print of the Wiehahn legisla-

tion, it is concluded that the "reforms" were a "total sham" (p.47). Thence forward, the work proceeds with a detailed review of the formation and composition of FOSATU and CUSA, and how these bodies differed in their strategies towards the post-Wiehahn legislation from both the independent unions which eschewed any affiliation as well as the TUCSA parallels which unambiguously opted for collaboration. Those unions which adopted a strategy of total non-compliance with government legislation by not registering are deemed as recognising the indissolubility of economic and political struggle as proclaimed by SACTU.

The penultimate chapter poses the question whether diverse elements of the international campaign against apartheid constitute complicity with capital or solidarity with black workers, and, basically constitutes a critique of the various Codes of Conduct. Devised by overseas governments and international investors to proclaim their determination to eliminate discrimination, these are characterised as an effort to modernise apartheid and "to create new structures and ideologies necessary to the maintenance of white domination" (p. 99). As far as SACTU is concerned, therefore, (and the authors have no hesitation in endorsing its stance), total isolation and boycott of the regime is "the only effective way to assist the struggling people in achieving their liberation from racial capitalism". (p.101)

In sum, Luckhardt and Wall proclaim that, to the extent that the non-racial unions avoid any form of involvement in the official industrial relations system, they eschew a misguided economism and adopt a correct path which sees no distinction between economic and political struggle; and further, in so far as they adopt this line, they reflect both the consciousness of the most advanced elements of the South African masses, together with the traditions and contemporary influence of SACTU, which they

argue to have a major underground presence.

It is, in fact, the ambiguities of the official SACTU position, especially with regard to the issue of international assistance, that is taken up by Bob Fine and Lawrence Welch in *A Question of Solidarity*. The principal issue which this provocative pamphlet addresses is how British workers can most effectively express their support for the workers' movement in South Africa. In turn, this leads them into a critique of the Anti-Apartheid Movement which, in giving primacy to armed struggle combined with pressure for international sanctions against South Africa and support for the ANC, has faithfully urged the SACTU line upon some British trade unions and has, in consequence, led to a reluctance on their part to contemplate direct links with the independent unions.

Fine and Welch are, in fact, rather more critical of the policy pursued by the TUC, whose international department has developed direct links with independent unions but, they argue, in a highly compromised manner which seeks to restrain the most progressive elements within the new black unions. Yet the thrust of the authors' critique is what they consider to be the baleful influence of SACTU internationally and the impact of its uncompromising boycott posture which, they aver, has had the practical effect of isolating the growing trade union movement from international support.

SACTU, the ANC (and the South African Communist Party, too) come in for a much more extensive critique in D. Du Toit's *Capital and Labour in South Africa: Class Struggle in the 1970s*, which provides an analysis from an independent socialist perspective of the workers' movement, the organisations which seek to guide it, and the counter-revolutionary positions adopted by capital and the state. As such, it goes well beyond the terrain covered by the other works under review and in fact pays rather



little attention to the emergent trade unions (FOSATU obtains one mention, CUSA none at all), for central to the analysis is the argument that trade unions in South Africa are in no position to develop a revolutionary programme. Rather, a revolutionary campaign capable of defeating the state and thereby establishing the basis for mass democracy can only succeed if its foundations are underground and if it operates illegally.

Du Toit proceeds from the basis that the most critical contradiction in South Africa is that between capital and unfree labour. Given dependence upon foreign investment, an inability to capture a significant share of the world market for industrial products and the lack of a sizeable internal market, S A capital has remained dependent upon low average rates of wages. Consequently, colonial labour conditions - which obtain for the black majority segment of the working class - have been prolonged into the modern industrial state via migrancy (inhibited proletarianisation), the compound system and oppressive labour laws and practices. Indeed, a key aspect of du Toit's thesis is his insistence upon the rationality of racism from the perspective of capital and free labour. To obtain the skilled labour that it required, capital had no alternative but to concede trade union rights to the workers whom it imported from Britain and elsewhere. Thus, whilst the division of the working class into free and unfree segments has enabled capital to maintain the low average of wage rates, white workers have equally come to appreciate that their standard of living remains dependent upon unfreedom for the black majority. As a result, the struggle for a wholesale change of the system of industrial relations passed long ago from the white workers (who had organised first) to the african masses (with indians and coloureds, on the whole, playing no independent role).

Du Toit further argues that, despite its failure,

the ICU established the possibility of mass organisation among black workers, this being borne out by successive cycles of upsurge of struggle by african workers and repression by the state. Critical to the latter, of course, are laws designed to prevent the unfree working class from organising in such a way as to materially change its position. If liberalism favours not a transition to a "free" labour market but rather a more sophisticated form of oppression whereby white working class material interests are subordinated to the development of a black middle class and the extension of bargaining rights to skilled black labour, then it is indisputably hostile to independent working class organisation. Correspondingly, the nationalist platform adopted by the ANC and supported by the SACP is ultimately ambiguous in that its two stage programme (whereby the national democratic revolution is seen as preceding the transition to socialism) mobilises upon a basis of racial oppression rather than class, and thereby accords black middle class elements disproportionate influence. In contrast, du Toit argues that the numerical preponderance of workers as opposed both to the declining peasantry and the small petty bourgeoisie means that the ANC's Freedom Charter should be considered "not simply as a 'democratic programme' but as a basis for a working class movement supported by sections of the middle classes and the rural population" (p.250).

There is a lot more which du Toit observes about ambiguities and inconsistencies in the ANC/SACP programme. Suffice to say here that, in a wide ranging analysis, he contends that the growing strength and maturity of the unfree working class has made capital less and less willing to maintain its compromise with free labour and more and more willing to contemplate "liberal" alternatives. Yet notwithstanding the extent to which the new unionism displays the growing determination of the masses to overcome their unfreedom, there is a need for ideas

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and organisation which will carry the workers' movement forward. He thus concludes with a call for clarity in the South African labour movement about the limitations which attend the mobilisation of workers by above ground trade unions as well as the necessity for the ANC to resolve its ambiguities about race by a consistent adherence to class analysis. This, he concludes, will lead to an emphasis upon armed struggle by workers as opposed to the current almost exclusive reliance upon guerrilla warfare waged from outside.

## II The Differing Perspectives on Black Trade Unionism

### The Reform of Industrial Relations.....

The limitations of "solidarity" writing is illustrated by Working for Freedom, which chooses to focus almost exclusively upon the pre-emptive intentions and defensive inadequacies of the state-sponsored reform of the industrial relations field to the virtual exclusion of a serious analysis of whether or not it extends the creative capacities of capital. Thus while Luckhardt and Wall do a valuable job in demonstrating that reform is designed to modernise apartheid rather than to liberalise it, their insistence that there is no substantive content to the reforms is problematic for instance they argue that because the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act of 1979 (which introduced the Wiehahn reforms) "in no way changes the position of the black worker in the apartheid system of labour exploitation" (p.54), for black unions which opt to register under the new state control, whilst those which refuse to register will be smashed (p.55). There is little prospect, apparently, that by registering a union will be able to carve out for itself more space wherein to operate or, conversely, that by not registering a union will be able to survive the onslaught of the state.

It may be argued that the reviewer is able to make this criticism not only with the benefit of hindsight but also with the advantage (which the authors did not have) of access to the debate which took place in SALB during the period 1980-82. If this is true, it remains the case that Luckhardt and Wall's approach to the contemporary labour situation in South Africa is somewhat mechanical and, flowing from this, populist rather than marxist. This stems from the limitations inherent in their conflation of apartheid with capitalism: "Capitalism", they assert, "cannot erode apartheid" (p.97). Because capitalism and apartheid have grown up together, the liberation process entails the elimination of both (p.96); indeed, "racial capitalism and the entire edifice of the apartheid system cannot withstand the growing popular resistance" (p.4 ). "South Africa's black working class is indeed on the march, and the masses will not stop short until victory is complete" (p.93).

This argument is a widespread and popular one, yet it is not always that its proponents spell it out. And so in this case, for Luckhardt and Wall nowhere clearly specify the relationship between capitalism and apartheid in sufficiently clear terms to persuade that they are historically inextricable. Thus although the evidence they amass which points to the inability of the present regime to stabilise the system is convincing, it would not seem to preclude a far-reaching restructuring of the present order. Ironically, however, the interest which observers exhibit in the "reformed" industrial relations system and the capacities of the emergent black trade unions to push beyond it revolves very much about this point. In other words, whilst the authors do succeed in exposing the limitations of the reforms, they do not squarely confront the saliency of the state's counter-revolutionary campaign, just as they do no more than assert the inevitability of popular triumph without specifying the relationship of the new unions to the revolu-

tionary movement.

In contrast, David Hauck's interpretation of the new unionism is much closer to the ground and stresses the open ended nature of the developing situation. In essence, he argues that in introducing its reform, the Government has opened Pandora's Box; allowing for the possibility that black trade unionists would be able to force substantive concessions. Indeed, his major argument is that the organised black workforce has in varying degrees sought to set up an alternative industrial relations structure which would sharply reduce the government's role in labour issues and simultaneously increase direct union contact with management. Hence, to the extent that the new unions have accepted registration, it has been with the intent of reforming the industrial relations system from within (CUSA) or conditional upon the government making yet further concessions (FOSATU). More significant however, has been the resistance by most unions to joining industry-wide bargaining at industrial council level, and their insistence that management deal with labour on the shop floor more directly via recognition agreements. Likewise, whereas the effect of the established industrial council system was to insulate union officials from their members, the new unions have actively implemented a shop steward system which provides direct contact with the rank and file.

What Hauck clearly demonstrates, therefore, is that black workers have forced the state and management to concede much more than they had originally anticipated. We must be cautious, therefore, of accepting Haarlov's implied antithesis between reformist and revolutionary struggle (p.7), for - as Fine and Welch propose - "the fight for immediate reforms is not counterposed to the overthrow of the state" (p.11), so long as this is integrally linked to a working class political perspective.

Nonetheless, if the implication of Hauck's study is

that the alternative industrial relations system is developing its own viability, then the message of du Toit is that this process has inherent limitations which cannot be overcome save by a revolutionary transformation. His starting point is that liberation of the unfree working class implies destruction of the capitalist labour market, for from the employer's point of view the immediate result would be a colossal rise in costs and a disastrous decline in profits. Employers cannot concede african workers full union rights, he maintains, for this would mean their playing a decisive role in collective bargaining. "The existing wage structure would collapse...(and) unions of free workers would be forced to come to terms with the unions of unfree workers." (p.58)

Despite these dangers, the 1970s compelled capital to re-think its compromise with free labour and forced the state to acknowledge that representative organisation of workers cannot be entirely suppressed. The initial result was the liason and works committee system. However, once the period of mass strikes had begun, and african workers were reaching for organisational weapons on a major scale, this was shown inadequate to its task, and the subsequent Wiehahn reforms were designed to encapsulate emergent african trade unions through registration and refurbished state control.

Du Toit locates Wiehahn reformism within the context of "liberal" policy, which seeks to move from racial to class domination. Consequently, he argues that legally tolerated industrial tendencies provide no basis for working class organisation (p.234) and that conditions of legality serve principally to facilitate the bureaucratisation of trade union leadership (p.266).

Developments since 1980 suggest that in reality black trade unions have more capacity for winning substantive gains than du Toit admits. Indeed,

registration per se has not proved to be the constraint that he insists it is, in large measure because the independent unions have, on the whole, maintained a democratic character and their leaders their commitment to the rank and file. At this level, therefore, the empiricism of Hauck is more convincing than the sophisticated theorising of du Toit, whose error would seem to be to overlook the existence of a grey area between legal and illegal forms of working class action. However, whether the reformist option has greater scope than du Toit allows depends very much upon the direction of the working class programme.

### The Black Trade Union Movement and the State.....

Fine and Welch subscribe to a widely held view when they proclaim that the new trade unions have "emerged as the major force for change inside the country" (p.1). Despite the consensus, however, there is some considerable difference of opinion concerning the political significance of the unions and their potential for confronting the state. This follows not only from varying judgements of the repressive capacities of the latter but also from a tendency in some quarters to so conflate economic and political, and short and longer term issues, that the new trade unions are not uncommonly assessed according to how closely they conform to an often inappropriate model of "political" trade unionism. In contrast, examination of the strategies actually adopted by the independent trade unions demonstrates a diversity of views of how to organise workers democratically and how to resist oppressions imposed by the state. In addition, there is also some considerable stress upon consolidating present gains based very much upon analysis of the perils attendant upon the overt politicisation of trade union power.

The viewpoint which is least inclined to ascribe the black unions a major political role is that of Hauck

who argues that their newly gained influence will likely be confined to the economic sphere, not only because of the caution displayed by the unions themselves but also because the government remains sufficiently in control to restrict access to the political arena. Whilst the government is certainly wary of provoking black workers by outright suppression of their unions, it possesses sufficient intelligence capacity to nip any disruptive industrial action in the bud; and whilst work stoppages motivated by political concerns will likely occur with greater frequency, the union leadership harbours few illusions about the difficulty of forcing significant social and political change through industrial action. In other words, even though the growing maturity, discipline and depth of leadership of the unions may lead to their acquiring significant political leverage, the black trade union movement is unlikely to become the dominant actor in the struggle against apartheid.

Those who would ascribe to the trade unions a proto-revolutionary role would argue that Hauck severely underestimates the extent to which black workers have now taken the offensive. Such a criticism emerges from Haarlov, who - like du Toit - sees the government's reformist option as so hemmed in by capital and white labour that the ground is being laid for "a system transcending consciousness among black workers" which will lead to increasing emphasis on "democratic or even socialist demands" (p.71).

Haarlov's approach to the different trade union groupings is much the same as that of Luckhardt and Wall, and together they epitomise what is rapidly becoming a new orthodoxy. From this radical perspective, it is commonly argued that in accordance with the principles of non-racial and political trade unionism, the independent unions may be differentiated as more or less progressive, and



hence more or less worthy of support. Hence CUSA's insistence upon the necessity of black leadership, as well as the fact that it tends to draw a working distinction between trade union and political struggles, means that it is generally seen as the least progressive of the new groupings. Further, it is seen as placing too great an emphasis upon co-operation with management at the expense of too little upon grass roots organisation of the workforce.

In contrast, FOSATU is deemed considerably more progressive in having adopted a much more mobilising line, yet it is nonetheless censured for the ambiguity of its position with regard to political unionism. Thus FOSATU is correctly credited with being non-racial and as displaying a high level of commitment to shopfloor democracy. On the other hand, although FOSATU's pronouncements and attitudes have displayed considerable awareness of the relatedness of economic and political issues, it has displayed a marked disinclination to becoming involved in issues which extend beyond the labour market. Worse still, from this perspective, was the decision by most FOSATU unions to apply for registration. Although such applications were made conditional upon the government accepting their non-racial status, the decision to register is deemed opportunistic to the extent that it was motivated by fear of competition from the parallels. Similarly, by having become engaged in the apparatus of industrial conciliation, FOSATU is seen as having unnecessarily subjected itself to state control. Finally, FOSATU's initial reluctance to becoming involved in community struggles and its vocal insistence upon remaining independent of any political organisation have both received forthright condemnation. "Far from linking the workers' struggle on the shop floor to the general issues affecting workers", proclaim Luckhardt and Wall, "FOSATU... not only distinguishes itself from SACTU and from other independent unions that operate openly in

South Africa, but also joins a list of unions which historically failed to represent the interests of the black working class precisely because of this position" (p.73). There is a danger, opines Haarlov, that "FOSATU's understanding of the relation between trade union and political work... will not match the changing political environment" (p.37).

It comes as no surprise that the new orthodoxy reserves its special plaudits for the independent unions (notably the General Workers' Union, the African Food and Canning Workers' Union and the South African Allied Workers' Union) which stood out against registration. Each of these unions is non-racial, and expresses "a class-based understanding of the social order" (Haarlov, p.38). Further, these unions all feel the need to raise both local and national political questions in their organising work, to involve themselves with community issues, to reserve the right to affiliate to political organisations and to stress the necessity of the total liberation of the working class as a basis for any meaningful democracy. It is only by linking these diverse issues, declare Luckhardt and Wall, "that the workers' struggle against class exploitation can most effectively be broadened to become an attack on the entire system of racial capitalism" (p.93). However, whilst Haarlov notes that the independent unions' stress upon trade union participation in the political struggle conforms with the SACTU line, he concludes that "there are no indications that SACTU's illegal work and its influence on the legal trade unions has increased in the early eighties" (p.70). In contrast, Luckhardt and Wall stress constantly the continuity of SACTU's guiding influence since the early 1960s, and proclaim that underground work has always been the major priority of its activity since that time.

The development of this new orthodoxy - which I believe is becoming quite widespread, particularly

amongst external "solidarity" groups - would not be so serious if it were not potentially destructive of trade union unity. Where its fault lies, I suggest, is in the simplification of what is, on the ground, a very complex and delicate situation in which different unions face varied regional, industrial and socio-political problems whose resolution does not unfailingly require an identical strategy. For instance, criticism of CUSA has reached the proportions of a "new demonology"\*. Yet it is certainly arguable that CUSA is not so naive politically as its critics make out. Moreover as economic and political issues are so closely aligned in South Africa, then we can expect that the CUSA leadership will become subject to mass tendencies from below even if it does choose to pursue a conservative line. Given, too, that it is a CUSA affiliate, the National Union of Mineworkers that is unionising the critically important black mineworkers, it becomes extremely important that CUSA be strengthened and assisted as much as possible rather than being vilified.

Of more critical concern, however, has been the somewhat naive espousal of the cause of the independents against the position of FOSATU; for instance, whatever the differences over registration, these would seem of considerably lesser importance since the passage of the Labour Relations Amendment Act of 1981, which extended a number of provisions previously applying only to registered unions to unregistered. Furthermore these unions themselves have not allowed this issue to impede the unity process.

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\* TCLSAC Reports (Toronto) August 1983, p.9: describes CUSA as one of the "relatively conservative, pro-government (sic!) unions, which accept the racist and fascist regime's rules and which refuse to support illegal strikes... CUSA is a "racial" trade union confederation based only among black workers.. in itself an almost implicit acceptance of the racist criteria put forward by the government."

Similarly, whilst the independents may take credit for breaking the link between registration and recognition, the registering unions can likewise claim to have used the registration process to cajole the state into making further concessions. Perhaps most importantly, the tendency to assert that only the independents have followed a correct political line implies, firstly, that confrontation with the state is a virtue in itself (when in fact avoidable clashes may be damaging); and secondly, (and this is a more insidious suggestion), that only those unions which earn the endorsement of SACTU may be considered legitimate representatives of the working class. In contrast, I would argue that it is the given situation which a union faces which determines its political orientation (the most notable example being the manner in which SAAWU had no alternative but to oppose imposition of bantustan "independence" upon Ciskei); and also, that whilst all working class struggles in South Africa are ultimately political, it is legitimate as FOSATU has to concentrate on industrial organisation and not to seek out confrontation with the state except to the extent that coercive impositions demand such a specific response. In other words, too overt a political thrust by unions will likely result in their suppression (with SAAWU's recent banning in Ciskei being a case in point), whereas their defence of worker's immediate economic interests can be used to increase the wider scope of workers' power. In short, even though it cannot be allowed to stay aloof from political issues, a trade union is not a political party and should not be judged as such.

The critique of the new orthodoxy (although it is not termed as such) is most explicitly developed by Fine and Welch, who note that the trade unions which emerged during the 1970s tended initially to focus purely on economic issues in order to avoid the difficulties which SACTU had earlier encountered. However, as the new unions were forced to confront the state, some four strands emerged. These were

first, so-called "apolitical" unionism; second, a "syndicalist" position, which distrusts all forms of bureaucracy, and hence espouses a militant, political line which refuses as far as possible to have any dealings with the state; third, a form of unionism which, independently of SACTU, pursues a "nationalist" line without sacrificing working class interests; and fourthly, "a working class political perspective" which argues that trade unions should provide the economic foundations for a movement which takes up the question of state power, yet should not hold workers back from making demands for immediate reforms "prior to whatever future day of reckoning is in store for the apartheid regime" (p.11).

Fine and Welch's approval is analytical rather than critical: hence they imply rather than state that CUSA's apolitical line is inadequate. Equally they are cautious in their assessment of the syndicalist line pursued by GWU which, like the nationalist tendency represented by SAAWU, argued for boycott of the state industrial conciliation system. In contrast, they propose that the FOSATU line has been both pragmatic and principled in that, by accepting registration conditionally (in such a manner as to resist restrictions but to exploit new opportunities), it has successfully furthered working class interests.

Even so Fine and Welch propose that no particular union can claim to represent the authentic voice of the black working class, for the tendencies they have depicted cut right across the independent trade union movement and often cut across particular union bodies. Hence, by stressing the common ground held by the unions, they point the way towards trade union unity. Finally, and this is a crucial point, they argue that the new unions have developed independently of SACTU, not least because they would endanger their very existence by linking up with an underground organisation. Nor, they argue, does the

notion of an "illegal trade union" (as SACTU claims to be) facilitate democratic workers' control. Du Toit's fundamental dispute with all the works under review is his disdain for the progressive potential of legal trade unions. Registration, he argues, leads inevitably to bureaucratisation; unregistered trade unions are under constant police surveillance, and workers perceive the utmost danger in associating with them. Consequently, the question of a revolutionary programme can be dealt with only by an illegal organisation.

In contrast to the SACP and the ANC, he singles out SACTU as having developed a much clearer position on the nature of the revolutionary struggle precisely because it has always been a working class organisation, and as such, has adhered to class analysis without becoming bogged down by the ambiguities of "race". Its programme has been developed upon a revolutionary basis which argues that every means, legal and illegal, must be used to build up the workers strength. Necessarily, this demands secret organisation in every factory and area to explain SACTU policy, provide leadership, link up with other illegal groups, maintain security, draw in politically conscious workers, and so on. Associated with this, in turn, has been SACTU's development of an analysis of South African capitalism which, by pointing out the ultimate common interests which black and white workers share, can pave the way for genuine (non-racial) working class unity. However, this correct course is judged by du Toit to have been upset by a struggle within the SACTU leadership which, coincident with a move to the right by ANC leaders, has now led to the sway of reactionary influences (p.437). But whilst it is common knowledge that there was a rift within liberation circles in 1979/80 which led to the expulsion of a Marxist left wing, what du Toit does not explain is why if SACTU had developed such a clearly working class programme, it should so suddenly have lurched to the

right.

But more critical is du Toit's failure to distinguish between a trade union and a revolutionary political party. He argues for much too sharp a divide between legality and illegality, and is therefore unable to discern the political space in between which can be put to good advantage by unions which, although operating above ground, will clearly also develop semi-clandestine modes of operation. In short, although he argues that the political general strike is the highest form of struggle (p.323), he is quite unable to specify the organisational basis for such a development by reference to any revolutionary potential of legal trade unions, for this he seemingly denies. Nonetheless, the problem of how illegal organising work is to meld with trade union activity remains, its resolution necessarily having to move beyond the undeveloped position of Haarlov that the legal and illegal struggles should complement each other.

**International Solidarity.....**

The emergence of the new trade unions has given rise to a vociferous debate about the form and extent of international assistance. The response of the Western unions has been to establish direct contacts with the independent unions, although channelling their aid through national coordinating bodies which, in turn, coordinate activities through a programme of action conducted by the ICFTU, with which the International Trades Secretariats are also associated. The resulting emphasis has been upon the provision of financial and training assistance, together with direct support of the independents in their struggles with multinational companies, simultaneously pressing them to implement the various codes of conduct.

SACTU, meanwhile, has fully supported the principle of assistance for the new unions, and has endorsed

direct action against the multinationals. Yet it exhibits considerable suspicion of the Western unions' programme of action, in large measure because it regards it as being limited in commitment, opportunistic, and worst of all, motivated by a counter-revolutionary intent in that it is directed at steering the new unions away from confrontation with the state, towards a western model of unionism, whereby political democratisation is promoted as a by-product of the steady acquisition of economic power. Suspicion is further deepened by the abiding distrust which exists between the World Federation of Trade Unions (to which SACTU is affiliated) and the ICFTU, memories of Western support for the Federation of Free African Trade Unions of South Africa as a "non-communist" rival to SACTU in the early 1960s and, of course, by rank hostility to the US AFL-CIO as embodying the subversive policies of the CIA.

It is significant to note that it is the one work directed at a business audience which accords international action a highly marginal role. Given, similarly, Hauck's views on the limited impact that black unions are likely to make politically, it is not entirely clear what force he sees as moving towards deracialisation/democratisation unless it be that undifferentiated combination of black labour mobility, "enlightened" employment practices and variegated international pressures which, in effect, constitutes the argument for "constructive engagement". Indeed, whether by intention or not, his work is essentially, a risk analysis designed to demonstrate that liberalisation of the labour code is more likely than repression to be productive of long term "stability".

In contrast, the stance of the Western trade union movement is clearly founded upon a notion of much more vigorous support for the new trade unions. Plaut and Ward, for example, cite approvingly the example of the strike at Volkswagen's Uitenhage plant



in June 1980 when Black workers gained a hefty wage increase as a result (in part) of pressure being applied by the West German union IG Metall against the parent company and the success of the International Metalworkers' Federation in raising a substantial strike fund. Similar actions could prove critical in the battle against apartheid with British workers in particular carrying a heavy burden of responsibility because of the extensive investment by British capital in the South African economy. Unfortunately, however, apart from a concluding reference to the incompatibility between a democratic trade union movement and a repressive state, there is no attempt to take the analysis beyond the limits of the existing ICFTU programme or to present any serious analysis of its effectiveness.

It is to the ambiguities of the ICFTU programme to which Luckhardt and Wall in large measure address themselves. To this end, they provide an incisive analysis of the codes of conduct, arguing convincingly that they are wholly inadequate as instruments of change and serve to obscure rather than to eliminate the exploitation of black workers from which multinationals profit. The Western trade union movement, they declare, has far too easily accepted the multinationals' rhetoric about liberalisation occurring as a result of their investment, with the result that it has become entangled in a form of tripartism with employers and governments rather than in uncompromising solidarity with black trade unions.

Luckhardt and Wall raise important questions - such as the likely role of the AFL-CIO - which Western trade unionism would do well to consider seriously. They also propose certain courses of action - such as internationally coordinated attack upon a strategically selected group of multinationals - which are practical and potentially likely to make a progressive impact. Unfortunately, however, their approach is so partial to SACTU - which they imply

should be the sole channel of financial and material support to black workers - that the value of much that they have to say is diminished by the realisation that it is unlikely to be accepted by the Western trade union movement, which for one reason or another is probably exerting itself far more in the case of black trade unions in South Africa than for the "free" trade unions of any other single country.

Accordingly, the key issue that is raised - albeit indirectly - is how international labour solidarity is to be successfully extended to the new unions without a continuing reproduction of ideological division. Just as SACTU has evinced ambivalence towards the emergent trade union movement because the latter has challenged its monopoly to represent black workers in international circles, so have elements within the Western trade unions embraced the new unions as non-Communist replacements for SACTU. What is increasingly needed, therefore, is first, a more honest appraisal by both the Western unions and SACTU of their motives and methods; and second, a critical analysis by Western unions of the limitations of their economistic approach to the struggle against apartheid.

The first of these issues is, in fact, addressed by Fine and Welch, the thrust of whose critique is that only direct links between workers in the Western world and black unions will effectively involve the former in the struggles of the latter whilst simultaneously compelling SACTU (together with AAM) to rethink the impact of its boycott policy - which should be solely directed at the apartheid regime and not at the black workers' organisations which are fighting against it. The democratisation of the labour movement's campaign against apartheid will in consequence challenge the bureaucratic tendencies embedded in Western trade unionism whilst similarly pushing SACTU towards a closer involvement with events on the ground.

Du Toit pays far too little attention to international pressures against apartheid and as a consequence seriously underestimates the capacity of global capitalism to unseat one ruling class in favour of another, (even though he does suggest in a tantalisingly brief reference (p.204) that external intervention could entrench a black middle class as the political power holding back a socialist transformation). This means, as Luckhardt and Wall insist, that Western unions should not attempt to direct the struggle from outside but should extend their support, not simply to the above ground trade union movement, but also to those organisations which have long gained influence as representing the political aspirations of the masses and whose stature is today steadily growing. Instead of attempting to present black trade unions as alternative vehicles of socio-political change, Western trade unions might also offer some form of worthwhile support to the traditional liberation organisations. At present, the constraints of the situation are such that this would probably have to remain both cautious and symbolic.

Events are now moving so fast that all the above works are now somewhat outdated. For instance, not a few unions have now gone beyond Hauck by joining industrial councils. In retrospect, however, it appears at this moment that it is du Toit's dismissal of above-ground trade unionism as an effective workers' weapon which is the most anachronistic. Even so, for all the present gains, and whilst apartheid remains, it would be rash to predict that there will be no future need for unions to push beyond the bounds of legality.