

# BUILDERS OF THE NATION

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## INDENTURED LABOUR

More than a hundred years ago English-speaking land owners in Natal set up a sugar industry but could not get sufficient workers to develop it. In the 1860s they recruited thousands of workers from India, a British colony at the time. They were contracted to work for nine years.

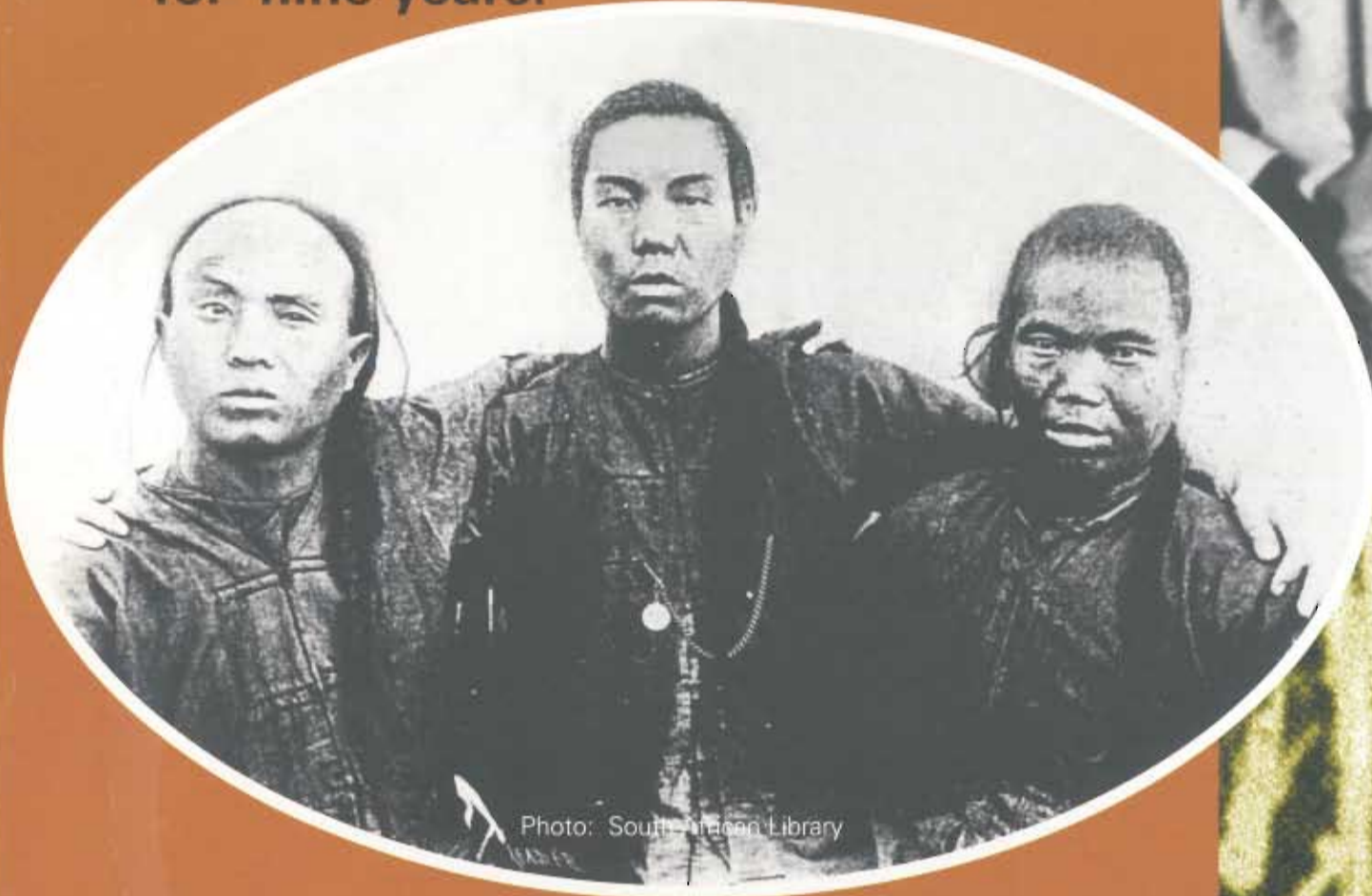
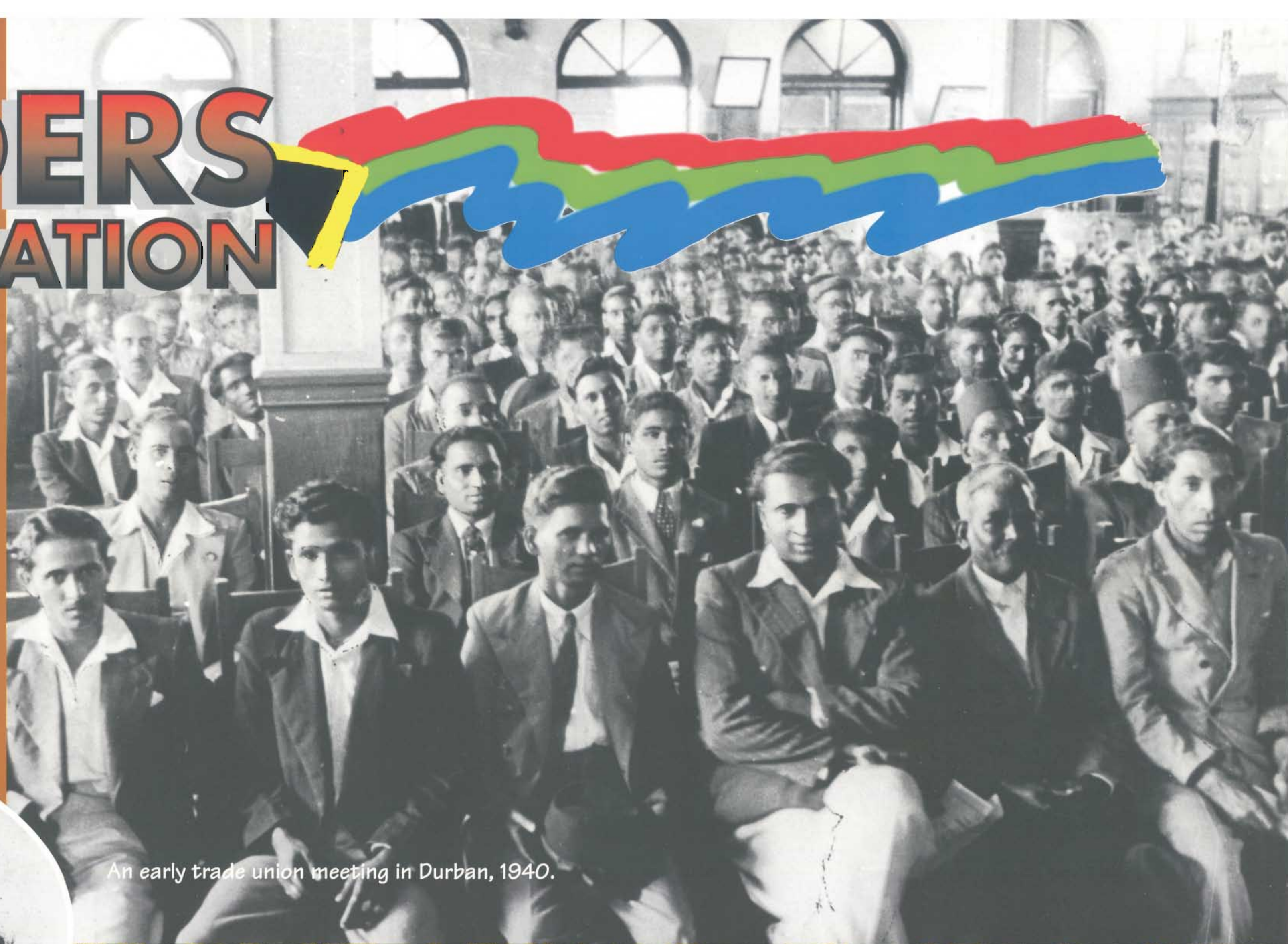


Photo: South African Library

From 1904 to 1908 nearly 100 000 Chinese were brought to work in the gold mines. White workers opposed the scheme, as they feared they would lose their jobs to them, and so these indentured workers were sent back home. The South African Chinese community of today are descended from men and women who came to South Africa at their own expense.



An early trade union meeting in Durban, 1940.



Indentured workers from India working on the sugar plantations of Natal more than a hundred years ago.

Plantation workers lived in shocking conditions and earned next to nothing. At the end of their contracts, many entered the service industry as waiters and cooks, and often became active in organising their fellow workers. Others became coal miners, tailors or fruit and vegetable sellers.

Like other black communities, Indian workers suffered from crude racial discrimination. Until the 1980s, Indians were forbidden to live or work in the old Orange Free State. From 1907 to 1913, Mahatma Gandhi (later to become leader of the independence movement in India), led Indian workers and traders in a campaign against heavy taxes imposed on Asians. During this campaign, hundreds of Chinese as well as Indians were imprisoned.

Through most of this century, Indians and Chinese had to endure racial discrimination and hostility. In the process, many Indians in particular became active in resisting apartheid, some as leaders in our most militant trade unions. We salute their courage and determination.

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