

THE MAKING OF AN AFRICAN WORKING CLASS
PORT ELIZABETH 1925 - 1963

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

JANUARY 1992

Abstract

The thesis examines the 'making' of an african working class in Port Elizabeth. It offers an alternative interpretation to conventional histories which emphasize continuity both in the idea of a strong industrial working class, and in a tradition of militant and effective worker organisation. At the same time it posits the idea that there was a working-class movement which developed among Port Elizabeth's african community in the late 1940's and 1950's.

Chapter 1 examines population growth in Port Elizabeth, the growth of secondary industry, and employment opportunities for africans. It is argued that limited opportunities for african employment in secondary industry affected the forms of working-class organisation that emerged.

Chapter 2 examines the situation of the urban african population in the 1920's and 1930's, looking at factors which influenced its organisation and consciousness. The low wages paid to african workers were not challenged effectively in this period by the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union which had declined by the mid-1920's, or the Trades and Labour Council which did not organise african workers. However, the permanently urbanised status of the majority of the african population laid the basis for a militant community consciousness.

Chapter 3 analyses attempts to organise african workers during the Second World War. It focusses on Wage Board determinations, the first african trade unions formed by the Ballingers and Max Gordon, the organisation of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions and the Trades and Labour Council, and the organisation of railway workers. It is argued that these attempts at organising african labour were largely unsuccessful in building strong industrial unions with an african leadership.

Chapter 4 looks at the rise of the 'new unions' in the post-war period, when african workers were drawn into manufacturing on a large scale, and an african working-class leadership began to emerge. The response to this from the state, capital and other trade unions is examined through looking at the struggles of workers in four sectors: stevedoring, laundry, textiles and food. These sectors are contrasted with the tertiary sector where organisation of african workers was weak.

Chapter 5 examines the politics of reproduction of the african working class between 1945 and 1960. It looks at changes in the nature of the African National Congress and the Communist Party of South Africa, and at innovative strategies around issues of reproduction. The role of womens organisation and their struggle against the extension of pass laws is highlighted, and it is posited that a working class movement developed in this period.

Chapter 6 analyses the application of influx control in Port Elizabeth in the 1950's, and the conflict of interests over the implementation of the labour bureau system. It examines the divisions in the african working class between migrants and non-migrants, and the response of different sections of the working class.

Chapter 7 looks at the role of the South African Congress of Trade Unions. It is argued that the integration of point-of-production struggles with community and political struggles was the outcome of the position of african workers in industry combined with strong political organisation in the 'sphere of reproduction'. Changes in the structural position of african workers combined with political repression led to the collapse of this working class movement in the early 1960's.

Acknowledgements

Thanks firstly to Alan Hirsch, my supervisor, who provided constructive criticism and invaluable direction despite the difficulties of 'long-distance' supervision, and to all at the now-disbanded Economic History Department at UCT, especially Ian Phimister for his encouragement.

Thanks to all my colleagues who share my interest in the history of Port Elizabeth, and who provided me with information, sources and comments on drafts: especially Glen Adler, Gary Baines, Marian Lacey, Thembeke Orie, Jenny Robinson and Bev Taylor.

Thanks also to the 'old guard', who gave me their time, interest and inspiration: Alven Bennie, Gus Coe, Lilly Diedericks, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba and Ray Simons.

Thanks to the staff at the Cullinan Library, University of the Witwatersrand and the Jagger Library, University of Cape Town, who were always extremely helpful; and to my mother and Karl Von Holdt, for their hospitality in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Thanks to my father, the University of Cape Town, and the Human Sciences Research Council, without whose financial assistance I would not have been able to complete this research.

Lastly, special thanks to Ken Pinchuck, who not only provided his technical and linguistic skill in the production and proof-reading of this thesis, but who also gave unstintingly his time and emotional support.

This thesis is dedicated to the workers of Port Elizabeth, a few of whom I have had the privilege to know.

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Abbreviations used in the text and endnotes

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
AFCWU	African Food and Canning Workers Union
AGWU	African General Workers Union
ANC	African National Congress
AP0	African People's Organisation
ASW	Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers
ATWIU	African Textile Workers Industrial Union
BWIU	Building Workers Industrial Union
CB	Conciliation Board
CFTU	Cape Federation of Trade Unions
CNETU	Council of Non-European Trade Unions
CoC	Chamber of Commerce
COD	Congress of Democrats
COLA	Cost of Living Allowance
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPC	Coloured Peoples Congress
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
ELK	East London/King Williams Town
EPTC	Eastern Province Trades Council
FAK	Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings
Fedsaw	Federation of South African Women
FCWU	Food and Canning Workers Union
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
FWP	Fine Wool Products
GM	General Motors
GWU	Garment Workers Union
IC	Industrial Council
IC Act	Industrial Conciliation Act
IC Agreement	Industrial Conciliation Agreement
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
IDC	Industrial Development Corporation
IRJSA	Industrial Relations Journal of South Africa
LC	Local Committee
LKB	Langeberg Kooperasie Beperk
MB	Margaret Ballinger (endnotes)
MCI	Midland Chamber of Industries
MoH	Medical Officer of Health
NAC	Native Affairs Committee
NAD	Native Affairs Department
NAWTM	National Association of Worsted Textile Manufacturers
NEC	National Executive Committee
NEMWU	Non-European Municipal Workers Union
NOC	National Organising Committee
NUDW	National Union of Distributive Workers
NUMARWOSA	National Union of Motor and Rubber Workers of South Africa
PE	Port Elizabeth
PEICWU	Port Elizabeth Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
PE LC	Port Elizabeth Local Committee
PECC	Port Elizabeth City Council
PECoC	Port Elizabeth Chamber of Commerce
PEM	Port Elizabeth Municipality
PENEMWU	Port Elizabeth Non-European Municipal Workers Union
PEU	Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage

PWV	Pretoria/Witwatersrand/Vereeniging
SA	South Africa
SAAME	South African Association of Municipal Employees
SACOD	South Africa Congress of Democrats
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACPO	South African Coloured Peoples Organisation
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAEWA	South African Electrical Workers Association
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SALB	South African Labour Bulletin
SAMAD	South African Motor Assemblers and Distributors
SAR&H	South African Railway and Harbours
SAR&HNESA	South African Railway and Harbour Non-European Staff Association
SAR&HNEWU	South African Railway and Harbours Non-European Workers Union
SAT&LC	South African Trades and Labour Council
SATU	South African Typographical Union
T&LC	Trades and Labour Council
TMA	Textile Manufacturers' Association
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
TWIU	Textile Workers Industrial Union
UDF	United Democratic Front
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
ULPP	Urban Labour Preference Policy
WB	Wage Board
WB	William Ballinger (endnotes)
WD	Wage Determination
WM	War Measure

INTRODUCTION

Michael Moore's film *Roger and Me* shows the city of Flint, Michigan - 'home' of General Motors - fall into depression in 1989 as the first General Motors plant closes and 30 000 people are left jobless. In Port Elizabeth, in 1985 and 1986, a similar event occurred with the closure of the Ford plants. Ford had established the first motor assembly plant in Southern Africa in Port Elizabeth in 1924. Between 1982 and 1986, when the last Ford plant closed, 6 000 motor industry workers in Port Elizabeth were retrenched.¹ The final closure of Ford, and its effect on the motor component industry in the area, left approximately 10 000 people - mainly african workers - jobless.² Port Elizabeth was dubbed 'the Ghost on the Coast'.

Although not devastating on the same scale as Flint, the economic crisis in Port Elizabeth in the mid-1980's coincided with an upsurge in militant political activity in the african community. A hard-hitting consumer boycott of white-owned businesses, political stayaways supported by the majority of the african workforce, and running battles between the police and the african youth who effectively closed down the schools, contributed to the climate of insecurity, depression and crisis.

Unemployment, specifically african unemployment, has risen to socially disastrous heights since the mid-1980's, after the departure of Ford. In 1985, a Vista University survey showed an unemployment rate of 56% among africans (men and women) in the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage (PEU) metropolitan area.³ Further surveys in 1987 and 1988 showed that the unemployment rate had remained around 50%.⁴ The high rate of urbanisation, combined with the lack of expansion of job opportunities in the formal sector due to the failure of secondary industry to expand, are the immediate causes of this problem.⁵

The african population of the PEU area increased by 229% between 1970 and 1985, from 205 700 to 471 300.⁶ At a 7% per year increase during the 1980's, the african population at present must stand at over 700 000. A study on black migration to Port Elizabeth in 1981 showed that the vast majority of migrants are coming into PE from rural areas, intending to stay in the urban area and find employment: 65,8% of migratory moves to PE are classified as 'primary metropolitanisation', with the majority - 78% - giving family and employment as reasons for moving to the area.⁷ Yet the employment capacity of manufacturing industry in the region did not grow at all between 1970 and 1987, remaining at 59 000 according to the Midland Chamber of Industries.⁸

This failure of expansion is due largely to the overdependence of the local economy on the motor and component industry, which has contracted in the area as costs became higher. The main cause of this was local component legislation which made the Rand, centre of the steel industry, a more viable site for the motor industry. The lack of a local market for vehicles and the highly competitive nature of the industry were also contributory factors.

It is agreed by most economists that Port Elizabeth has been historically overdependent on the motor industry. A lack of diversification of secondary industry in a place which is dependent on secondary industry, not having any primary industry, is seen as a major source of concern.⁹ Popular wisdom in the city cites as possible solutions increased tourism and trade, better use of the port facilities, or greater integration of production with agricultural produce made possible by the Orange River water scheme.¹⁰ However, there is little investment of capital in secondary industry; the long-gone footwear industry shows little sign of returning;¹¹ the food industry is not expanding; and the motor and component industry has strong economic incentives for continuing its departure from the area.

While *Financial Mail* claimed in October 1991 that Port Elizabeth had 'survived the crisis years', it acknowledged that "socio-economic backlogs due to years of apartheid neglect and an unemployment level brushing 60% of economically active blacks seem like insurmountable problems."¹²

While the structural problems of industry in Port Elizabeth are the underlying causes of the unemployment crisis, others blame lack of capital investment in recent decades on the reputation of extreme militance of african labour. The Heyl report of 1982 on the Economic Growth Potential of the Greater Algoa Bay Area claims that 'labour problems' are seen as a *major* problem among opinion formers and potential investors.¹³ The commonly held assumptions of commerce, industry and local government in Port Elizabeth are that PE has been a highly successful industrial area in the past; that the liberal policies of the council and of industry have meant a stable and contented workforce; and that sanctions, black trade union militance, political agitation and the 1980's depression have, over the last fifteen years or so, put paid to this idyllic situation. Yet, as Finnemore has argued in her MA on the mobilisation of black workers in the motor industry, the reputation of black militancy is based on strike figures for the early 1980's; there is no evidence to support this reputation within the labour movement over the previous two decades of the 1960's and 1970's.¹⁴

The other side of the argument, from a working-class perspective, is that the level of militance and the increasing demands of african labour are the laudable achievements of a remarkably cohesive,

militant african working class, gaining steadily in industrial influence and organisational experience. They would argue that the militant traditions of labour in the 1930's to 1950's laid the foundation for the current traditions of labour militance, specifically the close integration between political allegiances (primarily to the African National Congress) and black trade union organisation; and that repressive state policies in the 1960's crushed this tradition, only for it to re-emerge later. But whereas it may be valid to argue the ideological linkages, it is questionable whether the structural position of the african working class in earlier decades made possible the growth of strongly organised industrial unions of african workers. As Finnemore notes, it was in the 1970's that the manufacturing sector in PEU became increasingly dependent on black skilled labour; and the power base of black workers increased until its peak during the boom of 1980/81.¹⁵ Roux van der Merwe also disputes this perception of the militance of labour in the Eastern Cape, claiming that workers have already gone through the 'learning curve' and are an asset rather than a liability to industry.¹⁶

In this thesis I will argue that there is an historical basis for the african unemployment crisis of today in the pre-1960 period of industrialisation: in the growth of an urban african working class with limited, mainly unskilled, employment opportunities in the manufacturing sector; in that manufacturing sector becoming less diverse and increasingly dependent on the motor industry; on the relatively recent absorption of african labour on a large scale and in more skilled positions in the motor industry, after the industry's potential in the area had been curbed by local component legislation; and in a tradition of militance not based primarily on strong labour organisation in the manufacturing sector.

The tradition was one of a cohesive african working class community which, being deprived of influence in the main industrial sector in the early years of manufacturing industry, turned to forms of organisation other than industrial unions to further their interests. It was only after the Second World War, when larger numbers of africans were drawn into industrial employment, that industrial unions started to show their muscle in the late 1940's. The relative strength of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) in PE was based on its two affiliates in the food and textile industries, which developed in the post-war period and were the mainstay of african labour organisation in the 1950's. Yet it was a short-lived strength, as both the food and textile industries were to decline in importance relative to the motor industry in the late 1950's and early 1960's. In this light, it is more accurate to argue that the militant tradition of union organisation is remarkable in the context of the structural weakness of the african working class. The role of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and later the African National Congress (ANC) in initiating and encouraging african union organisation was substantial, and is examined in Chapters 4 and 6.

There were africans employed in industry, of course; and in the period under review the numbers increased dramatically. It needs to be asked, though, whether they increased not just quantitatively but relative to employment of other race-groups and relative to the increase in the african population; and at what skills levels. These questions are examined in Chapter 1. There were also african trade unions; but the only two which approximated the militant industrial unions of today were in the food and textile industries. Interestingly, the food industry was the only one which employed a high percentage of african women, and textiles the only other industry to employ african women to any significant extent.¹⁷ It may be that the relative urban security enjoyed by african women in PE, as distinct from other major urban centres, and the threat of influx control in the 1950's, was a major contributor towards the significant role played by women in both trade union and political organisation in PE in the period. This point will be analysed below in Chapter 5. Prior to the 1960's, african workers played little role in the motor industry in Port Elizabeth, and were not organised in this sector in any significant way. The unemployment situation and the militant reputation of african labour must thus be traced back to the earlier periods of industrial development; to the policies of capital and the local state, and the organisation of african workers in previous decades. The effects of the closure of Ford were dramatic because of the increasingly dominant position of the motor industry in the area; yet the militance of african workers in the motor industry is a recent phenomenon, occurring long after the organisation of previous decades in other sectors was crushed through a combination of repression, state policy and the decline in relative importance of those sectors.

The aim of this thesis is to try and develop a picture of the growth of Port Elizabeth's african working-class in the period 1925 - 1965. Rather than a conventional labour history which examines the growth of trade unions among all workers in the city, it is focussed on the african working-class community. While the concept of 'community' is not examined here, it is important in the descriptive sense - not only in restricting the boundaries of the research to a particular racial group as defined by the South African state, but in defining a particular geographically-located group of people who had something in common. This 'something' was determined by race, by location, by urban status, by employment, by ideology; despite divisions of class, gender, occupation and migrant or urban status, there emerged a working-class community which 'belonged' to Port Elizabeth. Thus, while it is argued that one cannot view the labour history of PE in a 'linear' way, and that the structural position of african workers changed over time and profoundly affected the nature of labour organisation, at the same time the existence of a working-class community is posited. Thus, while the african labour movement is examined in most depth, the thesis also touches on other major influences on this working-class community. Controls over residence and urban rights, gender divisions, and struggles around reproduction issues all contributed to the 'making' of the african working-class in Port Elizabeth.

The time period chosen is based on the period of growth of secondary industry in PE, roughly from the mid-1920's, until the early 1960's. The cut-off point is of course not an indicator of the end of such growth, but is a turning-point in the organisation of the african working-class. These three or four decades were the period in which a 'true' african proletariat emerged.

The focus is not on theoretical or historiographical debates; rather, a primarily empirical study is used to combine two approaches in South African historiography under the discipline of economic history. While theories of the South African economy are not addressed in depth, the growth of Port Elizabeth's urban working-class is situated within a structural analysis of the local economy. This is the framework within which a 'social history' or 'history from below' of the african working-class is written. The emphasis, as in most social history written from this perspective, is on the human agency of the oppressed and exploited in 'making their own history'. It is hoped in this way not to become too parochial in approach, nor to focus on the forms of social or political organisation outside of the structural constraints of the society in which they were operating. The thesis also aims to touch on the multiplicity of influences on the growth of the urban working-class, including ideology, gender and culture; and issues around reproduction imposed from 'above' by central and local government - such as influx control and residential segregation. These are not the primary focus of the research, but through including them it is hoped to provide a more complex picture of the emergence of the african working-class than would be present in many labour or political histories; while attempting to overcome the dichotomy between 'structuralist' and 'social' history.¹⁸

Notes to introduction

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- 15.*Ibid.*, p. 1.
- 16.Quoted in *Development Issues in the Eastern Cape: A Review and Assessment*, Institute of Social and Economic Research Working Paper No. 25, Rhodes University, Grahamstown 1986, p. 79.
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CHAPTER 1
THE HISTORICALLY 'STUNTED' GROWTH OF THE AFRICAN WORKING CLASS
IN PORT ELIZABETH

1.1. Introduction

It would not be too challenging a task to write a history of black labour organisation in Port Elizabeth, listing chronologically the formation and demise of various trade unions, and lauding their achievements.¹ While such a traditional 'labour history' might successfully provide inspiration to the working-class movement of today, and in addition supply a useful documentary record for historians of a previously unexplored area, it would not help greatly in analysing the past in order to face the challenges of today.

The situation in Port Elizabeth today, of acute unemployment combined with a high level of militance in black trade union organisation, may seem both contradictory and dangerous. The gap between the minority of african workers who are employed in industry and represented by strong unions, and the majority who are marginalised, unemployed or ununionised, is growing. An analysis which focu#ses on labour organisation *per se*, ignoring the working-class as a whole, is bound to misrepresent the situation in this context. As Hobsbawm wrote:

...institutional labour history...tends to replace the actual history of the movement by the history of the people who *said* they spoke for the movement. It tends to replace the class by the organised sector of the class, and the organised sector of the class by the leaders of the organised sector of the class.²

If the contradiction between the unemployed and the organised industrial workers is to be explained, an historical account of the black trade union movement in Port Elizabeth must be situated within an analysis of the structural conditions of the working class.

In this chapter, the growth and nature of working-class organisation in Port Elizabeth will be situated in the context of industrial and demographic developments, the growth and nature of the urban proletariat, and policies of industry and the state which determined the nature of this proletariat. Divisions of skill, race, gender and urban status all affected the nature of organisation that emerged among the working class. Particular attention is payed to employment patterns - in other words, the racial, gender and skills composition of the Port Elizabeth proletariat will be outlined.

While the focus of the thesis as a whole is on Port Elizabeth as a city, secondary sources of data for the area often include Uitenhage, a small industrial town some 20 kilometres outside of Port Elizabeth. As with Durban/Pinetown, for example, analyses of industry in the area tend to treat the two places as part of one industrial complex. Where it is appropriate, for example in comparing the output of the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage (PEU) industrial area with other major industrial centres, or when presenting general trends in population changes in a national context, such figures for the PEU area as a whole are included. However, Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth have distinct differences in terms of employment practices and labour organisation, and these are outlined later in this chapter.³

1.2. Population

PE has consistently had one of the highest population growth rates in the country; a growth rate not based on a high birth-rate, but on immigration from surrounding rural areas. It is not proposed to examine the changes in agriculture in the Eastern Cape in the period under review, and how they affected urbanisation: suffice to say here that in certain periods, for example the 1930's, PE had the highest urbanisation rate in the country.

It is necessary to look at the development of industry in PE in relation to the growth in the PE population and its changing racial composition over time. We are concerned here with the period between 1920 and 1960, when PE was being transformed from a commercial port to a large industrial city; when urbanisation was extensive, employment in industry was growing, and a large black working class was developing. The population breakdown of the whole PEU area according to race is shown in Table 1:⁴

	White	Coloured	Indian	African	Total
1921	38 400	20 400	1 500	22 000	82 000
1936	67 600	35 200	2 700	46 300	151 800
1946	83 400	43 900	3 800	72 000	203 100
1951	102 500	56 300	4 700	101 000	364 500
1960	124 800	84 300	4 700	161 900	375 700

Table 1. Population breakdown of the PEU region according to race.

The feature most significant for the purposes of this study is the steady and dramatic increase in the african population over the whole of the study period, even during the 1950's when influx control started being applied. Between 1921 and 1960 the african population grew at an annual

average rate of 5,3% - compared with annual average growth rates of 3% for whites and 3,6% for coloureds and indians combined.⁵ The white population, initially the majority, steadily decreased relative to other groups; while the coloured population was relatively stable, gradually decreasing in relation to the african population. Thus between 1921 and 1960, the african population grew from 27% to 43% of the total population of the PEU area; the white population decreased from 47% to 33% of the population; and the coloured population remained relatively stable, decreasing slightly from 25% to 22%. There has never been a large indian population, remaining under 2% over the period. These trends are shown in Figure 1 below:⁶

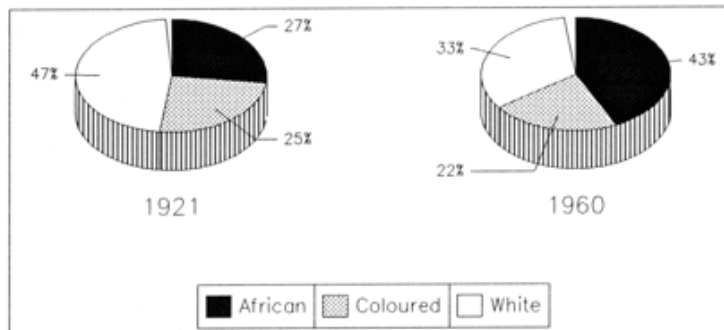


Figure 1. Change in population according to race in the PEU region.

Thus while during the study period all races in the population grew in absolute terms, the most important feature of the process was the replacement of whites by africans as the largest group. Up until the 1951 census, whites were the largest population group in the PEU area. This crossover is shown in Figure 2 below:⁷

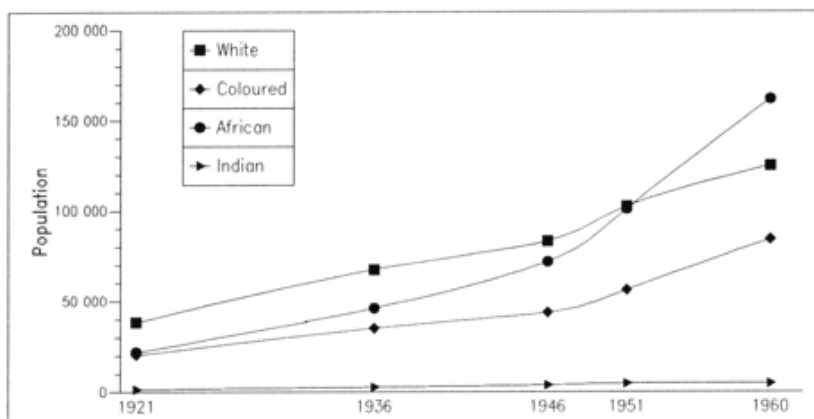


Figure 2. Population growth by race, PEU region.

Despite the implementation of 'apartheid' measures, the change in the racial composition of the population of the area from 1951 was irrevocable, as is shown in figures from 1951 to 1980. From 38,7% of the population in 1951, whites decreased to 26,8% in 1980. During the same period the african population increased from 38,2% to 48,8%, while the coloured population remained roughly the same, increasing slightly from 21,3% to 23,4%.⁸

The black, especially african, population growth rate was consistently higher than that of the white population in Port Elizabeth throughout the study period - even during the depression years of 1921-36 when the growth rate for PE's white population was also very high (in that period the white population of PE grew by 123,3%, while the african population grew by 150,9%). While Table 2 below is drawn from census data and thus reflects unequal periods of time, it usefully compares the growth rates of each race group within each time period:⁹

	White	Coloured	African
1921-36	4,5	4,3	5,7
1936-46	1,8	2,2	4,6
1946-51	3,5	4,9	6,1
1951-60	1,9	4,4	6,1
1960-67	3,0	6,0	2,8

Table 2. Annual average growth rate of population by race in Port Elizabeth.

While drought, depression and declining access to land drove both black and white into the cities in the 1920's and 1930's, in Port Elizabeth the newly-formed motor industry was encouraged to employ only white labour. Lack of access to employment in industry did not deter the process of african urbanisation, however. Only after 1960 did the african population growth rate fall below that of other race groups in PE - 20,4% as opposed to 21,7% for whites in the 1960-1967 period; and significantly lower than coloured population growth (49,5% in the same period).¹⁰ It is significant that the highest annual average growth rates of the african population were in the 1950's - when influx control began to be implemented. Even though between 1953 and 1957, over 17 000 unregistered or unemployed africans left PE in terms of influx control regulations,¹¹ it was too late to 'turn the tide'; the african population continued to grow.

African population growth was largely as a result of immigration rather than high birth rates.¹² The low figure after 1960 confirms this, as it was probably at about this time that influx control measures which had been introduced in 1953 began to show up in general population trends in Port Elizabeth. When immigration was curbed (to some extent, and not totally effectively) by labour

bureaux and the whole gamut of regulations controlling the movement of african people, the population growth rate for africans in PE dropped - but only temporarily.

The drop after 1960 indicates that it took some years for the effects of the system to show up in statistics; even so, the drop in population growth after 1960, explicable in terms of influx control, may not be accurate as thousands of the africans who continued to enter the city during the 1960's were not registered and thus did not show up in the population censuses.

The 1940's and 1950's were thus clearly crucial decades for the african population in PE, both in terms of overall population growth, and in terms of growth of opportunities in industrial employment. How were these opportunities utilised, at a time when, simultaneously, capital was demanding semi-skilled labour, and the state was implementing apartheid policies such as influx control which had never before been rigidly applied in PE?

Davies' conclusion was that the coloured population was the 'most dynamic' in PE, with a consistent growth rate and a growing percentage of employment in industry.¹³ Moreover, influx control being applied to africans in the 1950's, and the application of coloured labour preference in the 1960's, meant a trend towards a concentration of, or preference for, coloured workers in the manufacturing sector. This coincided with the motor industry overtaking the textile industry in the early 1960's, with its need for more skilled and semi-skilled workers. Thus, despite the dramatic growth in the african population of Port Elizabeth throughout the study period, it was not a 'dynamic' population in the sense of access to employment opportunities, educational opportunities and access to skills. As will be outlined below, despite the fact that africans were a majority of the population of the city by the 1950's, and were a relatively stable urban population, the african working class was 'stunted' in terms of its access to the local economy.

In summary, Port Elizabeth's population has been characterised over the study period by the dramatic growth in the african population, the relative decline in the white population, and the stability of the coloured population. Population growth did not correlate with employment opportunities for each racial group. The african population 'overtook' the white population during the 1950's, when apartheid laws were implemented. Yet the implementation of these laws, despite indicating a drop in the african growth rate after 1960's, did not reverse the general population trend which had become established in 1951: the african population was the majority in Port Elizabeth.

1.3. Industry: characteristics

Bill Freund argues that in early South African industry, there was a lack of integration both in the structure of different sectors, and nationally:

Each centre was relatively isolated and differences in industrial speciality, labour force recruitment sources, wage rates and cost structures were very substantial.... the point needs application to each region; studies of SA industrial development need to avoid simply looking at the economy in the aggregate and to develop an improved sense of local regional consciousness.¹⁴

Below, some of the regional characteristics of the PEU area are outlined.

1.3.1. Commercial to industrial capital

Port Elizabeth, like East London, was initially a centre of commercial capital, centred around its port and its servicing of inland agricultural interests. In the latter half of the 19th century, it was known as the 'Liverpool of the Cape'.¹⁵ However, in the 1920's the transformation to a centre of secondary industry began. The footwear industry had already been established during World War One (1914-18). From 1924 the motor assembly industry was established in Port Elizabeth because of its port facilities, combined with its central location and rail links to the rest of the country. Tariff protection policies from 1925 encouraged the establishment of component and related industries such as glass and batteries. As the city's industry and population expanded, the clothing and building industries also developed to meet their needs. Unlike East London, both the local state and capital encouraged the development of secondary industry in the 1920's and 1930's; and in addition PE took over from East London as the premier wool port, which gave a boost to the textile industry.¹⁶ The opening of the new harbour in 1935 further facilitated the development of industry, and after World War II another industrial growth spurt occurred.

What distinguishes the PEU industrial area is that private manufacturing industry was the dominant force in terms of economic growth;

Primary activities such as mining, agriculture, forestry and fishing have not constituted any significant nucleus for growth, and other activities, for example public services, education, research and tourism have been incidental to, rather than responsible for, the general development of the area.¹⁷

This dominance of secondary industry is significant both in the reality of employment practices, and in the perception of PE as the 'prototype industrial city'. These perceptions - on the part of capital and the local state that PE was a 'progressive' city; on the part of urbanising african workers that jobs were to be found in factories in PE - clashed with the reality.

1.3.2. Dependence on manufacturing

In terms of regional employment per sector, the PEU's higher dependence on secondary industry at the end of the study period is shown in Renders' figures: in 1960, 33% of the economically active population were employed in manufacturing, and 28% in the service sector-as opposed to Durban with 26,8% in manufacturing and 36,4% in the service sector; compare also with 17% in manufacturing in East London/Kingwilliamstown; 26% in the Western Cape, and 21% in the PWV-as shown in Figure 3 below:¹⁸

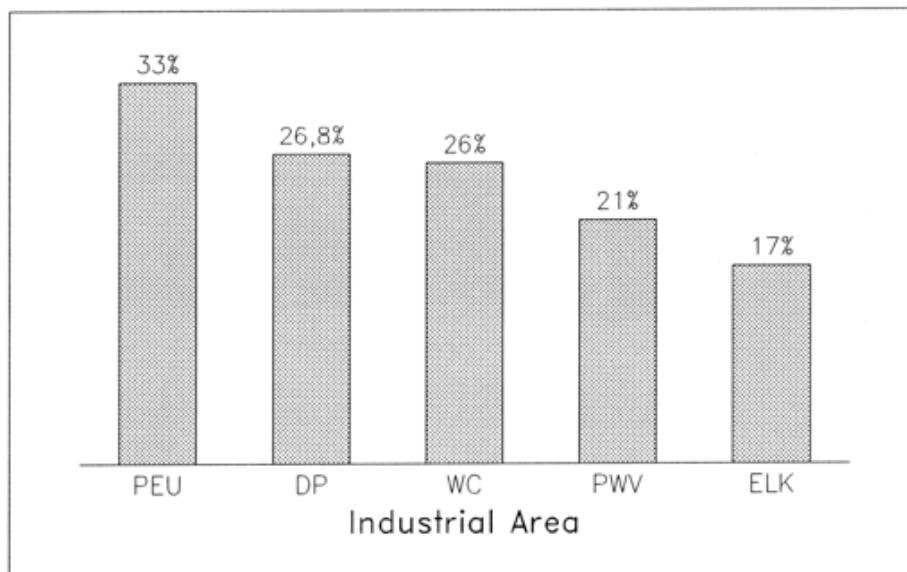


Figure 3. *Percentage of economically active population employed in manufacturing in PEU relative to other major centres, 1960.*

Industrial employment as a whole in the PEU area grew from 5 000 in 1921 to 53 000 in 1963/4 - the most rapid rate of increase in the country. The numbers employed in secondary industry during the study period were, according to industrial census statistics, 12 000 in 1935/6, 19 000 in 1945/6; 31 000 in 1949/50; and 40 000 in 1961/2.¹⁹

Thus Port Elizabeth developed a reputation as an industrial city; this, combined with the large, urbanised african population, contributed to the impression of a 'highly developed' african working

class. Yet, these impressive statistics need to be qualified if we are to develop an accurate picture of the structural position of the african working-class in Port Elizabeth.

1.3.3. Qualifications to high employment in manufacturing

While the racial divisions in employment will be addressed in a later section, there are three other qualifications which need to be made to the impression of PE as a major industrial city. Firstly, PE remained a small contributor to the national economy: in terms of net output of industry, it contributed steadily between 5% and 8% of total industrial output between 1925 and 1960, while the Southern Transvaal increased its share from 33% to 46%, and the Western Cape decreased from 24% to 17%; Durban Pinetown staying at about 12%. Industrial employment remained at 5-6% of the national total throughout the same period.²⁰

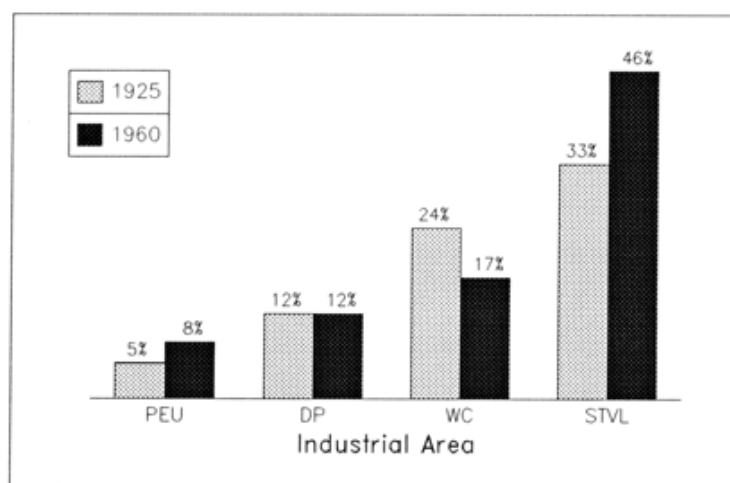


Figure 4. PEU's net output in industry compared to other major centres during the study period.

Secondly, although increases in industrial employment were in themselves impressive, they must be measured next to population growth and total employment/unemployment figures. If the above figures for employment per sector are reinterpreted taking into account unemployment levels within the economically active population, the PEU's percentage of employment in manufacturing is 5% lower. While it is also lower for other centres, it is not changed as much, as unemployment in PEU was higher. Thus in 1960 PE had 28% of its economically active population involved in manufacturing as opposed to 24% in Durban/Pinetown, 22% in Cape Western and 20% in Southern Transvaal. While not substantially changing the analysis that PE had a higher dependence on manufacturing than other industrial centres, it also had the highest unemployment rate: 15% in 1960, as opposed to 13% in Durban/Pinetown, 11% in Cape Western and 9% in the Southern Transvaal.²¹

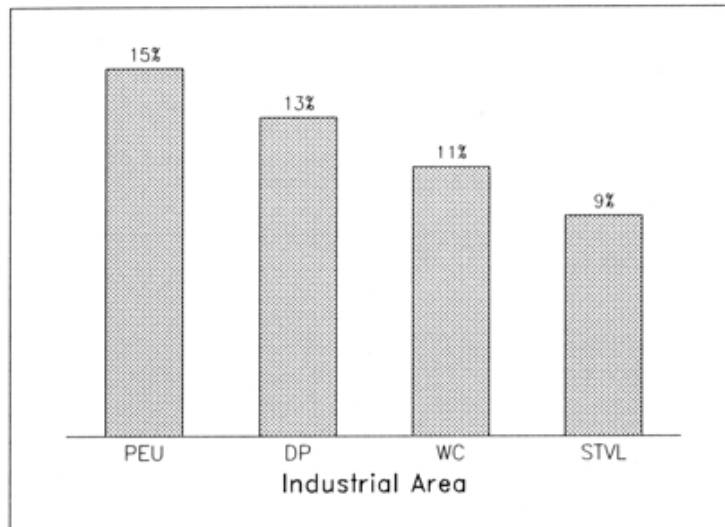


Figure 5. *Unemployment in the PEU compared to other major centres in 1960.*

Thirdly, figures from after 1960 tend to skew the picture: it was in this period that PE experienced its third and most significant industrial 'spurt', when the motor industry transformed from assembly to manufacture with the introduction of local component legislation. Employment, especially in the motor industry, increased dramatically during the 1960's, so figures showing employment in secondary industry after 1960 should not be taken to represent the situation in previous decades.

1.3.4. Structural changes within the manufacturing sector

Within secondary industry, important changes took place over the study period. De Coning and Phillips outlined the most important structural changes in secondary industry in the PEU industrial area: in 1920/21 textiles and footwear (34% of industrial employment) and food (28% of industrial employment) accounted for two-thirds of all industrial activity. By 1935/6 textiles and footwear accounted for 43% of all industrial employment, being labour-intensive relative to the motor industry (transport equipment sector). The "relatively abundant and inexpensive supplies of labour" was given as a locational incentive for these industries. However, although textiles was the largest industrial employer, it declined in importance relative to the transport equipment sector which had been established in the 1920's and by 1935/6 accounted for 37% of net output in industry. The motor and food industries each accounted for 15% of industrial employment - about 3 600 workers.

By 1949/50, textiles and footwear was still the largest employer - accounting for 31%, or some 9 700 workers; motor had risen to 16% and food declined to 14%. By 1963/4, however, motor had surpassed textiles, despite it being a high-wage sector and textiles depending on cheap, unskilled labour. Motor accounted for 29% of employment; textiles 27%; and food and metals both

13%. In summary, between 1920 and 1960, secondary industry in the PEU was dominated by three or four sectors: textiles and footwear, which showed a decline over the period relative to the motor industry, which expanded; food and beverages, which declined steadily; and metal, significant in the later years of the period.²²

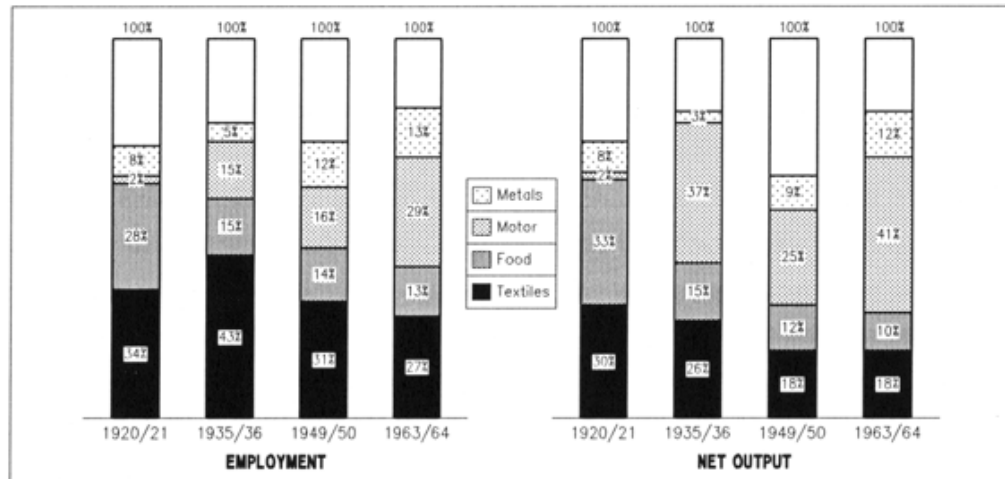


Figure 6. Employment in industry per sector in the PEU over the study period.

The implications of the increasing dependence on the motor industry as illustrated in Figure 6, and the lack of diversification in manufacturing in the PEU, were to become increasingly serious for employment in the area. While the 1960's 'boom' hid the effects of this lack of diversity temporarily, it has become apparent in recent years that the unemployment crisis in PE stems back to this concentration on the motor industry.

Freund argues that the 'cheap labour theory' - that South African industrial development depended on the 'ultra-exploitation' of african labour - applies best to the mining and agricultural sectors, which were dependent on migrant labour. The early phase of secondary industrialisation was not reliant on african male labour until after 1933, and more particularly in the post World War II phase. Before this, the workforce in industry was 'variegated' and relatively highly paid.²³ In trying to determine the position of african labour, "we need to explore the conditions under which social reproduction began to take place in the urban landscape".²⁴ It will be useful to explore the position of the african working class in Port Elizabeth in this light, bearing in mind the need for analysis of regional and local specifics of labour recruitment.

What was different about industrialisation in Port Elizabeth? There was no primary industry, mining being practically non-existent, and agriculture having little influence. The 'cheap labour' theory did not apply to Port Elizabeth in the same way that it did in Johannesburg, as there was little

dependence on migrant labour. In fact, the african population of PE was a stable, urbanised, detribalised population relative to other major industrial centres (see Chapter 2). Given the relatively high dependence on employment in secondary industry illustrated above, and the focus of this study on the african working class, the relation of the one to the other must be established. Where was african labour employed, and were wages relatively high for africans in industry as part of this variegated workforce in the early period? Freund states that wages for africans in coastal towns were generally higher than on the Rand in the inter-war years;²⁶ at the same time coloured workers were entrenched in the ranks of skilled workers in coastal towns.²⁶

It will be argued here that in Port Elizabeth, the early emphasis on white industrial labour, and the later preference for coloured labour, meant that african workers were only integrated into semi-skilled and skilled positions in industry at a later stage, and to a lesser extent, than elsewhere. Yet at the same time, the urbanised nature of the african working class made possible certain gains in wage levels, in particular industrial sectors which were reliant on unskilled labour. The nature of the labour organisation involved is outlined in Chapter 4. First, racial and skills divisions in the working class need to be outlined in more depth.

1.4. Employment practices

In writing this history of a particular section of the working class, the focus is not on the inner workings of industry, or the decisions taken by capital and their reasons for such decisions. Instead, the nature of employment is questioned: where did people work, what type of work did they do, and how did this affect their ability to organise both in the workplace and outside of it?

In South Africa, because race has played such a dominant role in the division of the working class, the position of workers of different 'race groups' (as defined by the South African government) in different industries is outlined below. These differences in employment opportunities in industry are integrally related to skills divisions and gender divisions, which will also be outlined. The employment of africans in Port Elizabeth will also be compared to East London and Uitenhage, so that the situation of african workers in PE itself can be more closely defined.

The object is to try and outline the *general* shifts and trends in employment in industry in the period 1925-1960, so that the development of an african working class can be analysed within the context of its structural position.

1.4.1. The employment of africans post 1960

Where were africans employed in Port Elizabeth? If we start in 1967, we see that in the whole PEU area, the industrial workforce was divided roughly evenly between the three main race groups (excluding indians): of a labour force of 53 174, 33% were white (17 737), 35% african (18 677) and 32% coloured (16 760).²⁷

Phillips and de Coning identified the main employment characteristics in 1967 in secondary industry in the PEU: transport equipment, printing and machinery employed predominantly white labour; clothing, footwear and miscellaneous employed mainly coloured labour; and food, textiles, paper, non-metals and metal employed mainly african labour, employing over 50% african labour in each of these sectors.²⁸ The main industrial employers of africans are given as textiles (62%); non-metals (58%); food (57%); metals (56%) and paper (55%).²⁹

Calculating on the average number of african workers per firm times the number of firms, gives a total of approximately 3 600 african workers in the textile industry, 3 400 in food, 4 500 in transport equipment, 1 600 - 1 700 in metals, 900 - 1 000 in non-metals, and 800 in paper - a total of some 15 000 workers. Other sectors would bring the figure up to the 18 000 mentioned above. Note that although the transport equipment sector does not employ a majority of african labour, it employs the highest number of african workers.

These figures are used by Phillips and de Coning to show the increasingly important role that black workers in general, and african workers in particular, have played in the economy of the PEU area. While this is undoubtedly true as a general statement of fact, such figures should not be read ahistorically to indicate a strong african working-class 'presence' in manufacturing which was, in reality, more limited than it would appear by a cursory reading of statistics.

There are two factors in the above figures which may be skewed when analysing Port Elizabeth's african population in the period under review. Firstly the above figures refer to the PEU region, but in the case of the textiles industry, as pointed out in the section on Uitenhage, the Uitenhage textile plants accounted for a higher proportion of the african labour force in this sector. Uitenhage motor plants also favoured african labour. Secondly, considerable industrial expansion took place in the early 1960's, whereas we are concerned with the period prior to 1960. More specifically, the increase in employment of africans in the transport equipment sector during the 1960's was significant, so pre-1960 figures are necessary in order to ascertain the extent of african employment in industry in PE in the study period.

The above points are illustrated by the fact that in 1967 in Port Elizabeth, 28% of the economically active african population were employed in manufacturing.³⁰ In 1960 the same figure was 22,5% - showing the increased employment of africans in manufacturing during the industrial boom of the 1960's.³¹

Further, what may be a fairly high percentage of the labour force in secondary industry is not necessarily a high percentage of the african population as a whole.

In 1960, when the population of PE was 43,7% african, 33,7% white and 22,6% coloured, a higher percentage of other race groups were employed in manufacturing: 22,5% of africans compared with 33% of whites and 36,7% of coloureds. Thus, despite the african population being by this time nearly twice as large as the coloured population of PE, a much smaller percentage of the african population was employed in manufacturing.³²

Of the economically active african population, 5,1% was employed in the food and beverage sector; 3,8% in textiles, clothing and footwear (where 15,7% of coloureds were employed); 3,6% in wood, paper, furniture and printing; 1,7% in chemicals and non-metals; 5,2% in machinery and metals; and 3,2% in transport (which was still white dominated - 12,9% of whites being employed there; and 6,8% of coloureds).³³ These figures are for Port Elizabeth only: the percentage of africans employed in manufacturing in Uitenhage was significantly higher. Not one of the main industrial sectors employed more than around 5% of the economically active african population.

It must also be borne in mind that most figures quoted reflect only those africans registered at the time with the Department of Native Affairs. Given the implementation of influx control in PE during the 1950's, and that despite this the african population continued to increase, there must have been many unregistered or 'illegal' africans. While a high percentage of the african population may seem to be employed in industry, it may in fact be a smaller percentage of the actual, as opposed to registered, african population. Given the problems the local state had in implementing the labour bureau system and getting employers to register their workers (see Chapter 5), this is likely to have been the case.

The same qualification applies to the question of 'full employment'; while through the 1950's it was claimed that unemployment was not a problem, employment opportunities for african women were extremely limited. After african women's rights to live in the urban area were curtailed, those who were illegally living in Port Elizabeth were probably not reflected in most of the statistics of employment in the area. These figures must also take into account the rapid growth in the african population, which by the 1960's had overtaken the white population, and was by 1970 three times

larger than the coloured population of Port Elizabeth.³⁴ Finally, 22% employment in secondary industry is low for an area where there is little primary industry, indicating that the majority of africans were employed in the tertiary or service sector.

1.4.2. Changes in employment over the study period

Further analysis of employment statistics show the historical dominance of key industrial sectors by race groups other than african: whites in the transport sector and coloureds in clothing, footwear and to some extent textiles. While the transport equipment (motor and component) sector was growing in the 1950s, it was only to offer employment on a large scale to africans in the 1960's. At the same time, the footwear industry was declining. By 1957, there was only one significant footwear factory in PE, employing a weekly average of 621 workers, almost entirely coloured and white males: no african men or women were employed, nor coloured women.³⁵ The footwear industry thus ceases to be a major factor after the mid-1950's; yet it can be assumed that the coloured and white labour displaced from that industry were absorbed into other industries in preference to african labour. And while the textile industry, with its preference for low-cost unskilled labour, was a large employer of african workers, it began to decline in the 1950's.

By the early 1960's, white labour had dropped to 51% in the motor industry, though still a majority; coloured labour had increased to 53% of textiles, 63,8% of miscellaneous, and 35,3% of furniture. African employment had increased to 53% of food, 50% of wood, 46,7% of non-metals, and 43,3% of metals and machinery.³⁶ The greatest structural change was in the textiles and footwear industry, from white dominated to coloured (and to a lesser extent african) dominated.³⁷ The overall structure changed from in 1935 one of coloured and white labour in the textile industry, and white labour in transport and food industries (accounting for 60% of total industrial employment), to in 1963 the main components being whites (15%) and coloureds (8%) in transport, coloureds in textiles (14%), and africans in food (7%) and textiles (8%) accounting for 52% of industrial employment. If metals and machinery are included, employing whites (5%), africans (6%) and coloureds (2%) these four sectors make up 65% of industrial employment. Yet the only major sector employing a clear majority of african workers is food; africans are also a slight majority in the metal and machinery sector, where whites make up nearly as high a percentage. The metals and food sectors together make up only 26% industrial employment. This is shown in Figure 7 below:³⁸

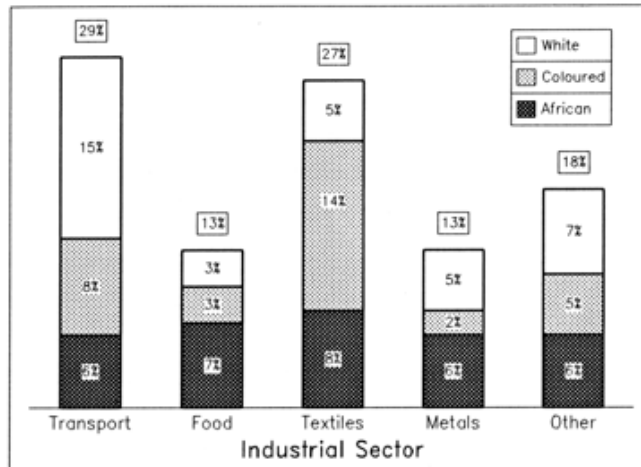


Figure 7. Employment percentage by race per major industrial sector, PEU 1963/4.

From Phillips' table of industrial employment by race and industry, I have taken the sectors which employ over 2 000 workers, and which employed more than 1 000 africans in 1963 - which is all sectors employing over 2 000 workers in total, excluding printing which continued to employ less than 1 000 africans; and rounded the figures off to the nearest 100.³⁹ The changes in employment in these sectors between 1935 and 1960 are shown numerically in Table 3, and represented graphically in Figure 8:

		Textiles Footware	Food	Non-metals	Transport	Wood	Metals Machinery
1935	White	3 700	900	100	1 700	200	300
	Coloured	1 000	600	200		200	100
	African	500	300	500	100	200	200
	Total	5 200	1 800	800	1 800	600	600
1960	White	2 400	1 500	600	7 900	400	2 600
	Coloured	7 500	1 500	900	4 500	700	1 200
	African	4 200	3 500	1 300	3 000	1 100	2 900
	Total	14 100	6 500	2 800	15 400	2 200	6 700

Table 3. Number of workers per industrial sector by race.

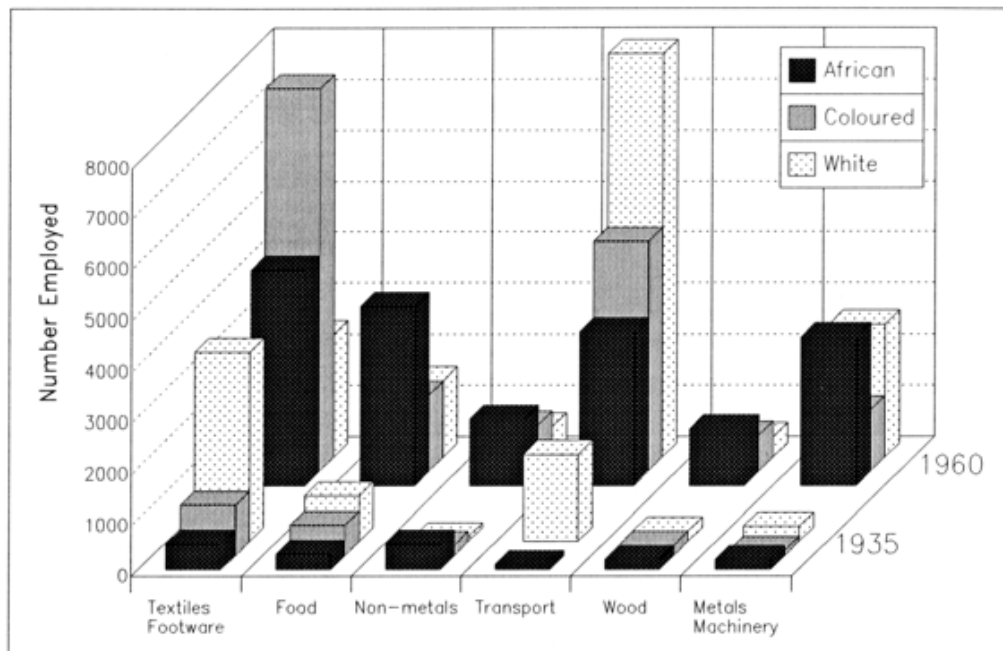


Figure 8. Number of workers per industrial sector by race.

What can be drawn out from the above figures? The two largest sectors - transport and textiles - although among the biggest employers of african labour by the 1960's, were employing significantly more coloured labour (53% coloured in textiles as opposed to 30% african; 30% coloured in transport as opposed to 20% african). These figures include footwear with textiles, footwear being a larger employer of coloured labour; yet the decrease in importance of footwear means the significance of coloured labour in textiles was still greater than african. The non-metals and wood sectors - the two smallest employers in this category (over 2 000 employees) both had a majority of african labour (46,7% in non-metals, 49,9% in wood). This is a relatively small number overall, however. The two 'middle' employers - food and metals, each with around 7 000 employees - also employed a significant majority of african labour in 1963 (53% in food and 43,3% in metals and machinery).

However, by 1967 transport had risen to 40% of industrial employment; food had fallen to 12%, textiles to 11% and footwear to 8%. All other sectors together only represented 29%.⁴⁰ Of these sectors, in terms of racial composition, the 'white intensive' industries were transport, the 'african intensive' were food and textiles, and the 'coloured intensive' footwear and clothing. African labour was 'trapped' in the declining food and textile sectors.

1.4.3. Employment in the motor industry

Particular mention here must be made of the motor industry, for it is commonly perceived that, being the backbone of the PE economy, it has been a major source of employment of african labour for some time. This is not the case; during the study period, the motor industry was remarkable for its non-employment of african workers.

De Coning and Phillips' figures quoted above - 4 500 african workers employed in 1967 - for the transport equipment sector reflect the situation after the 'employment explosion' of the 1960's; and even here, african labour rose from 21% in 1964 to 23% in 1967 of labour employed in the sector.⁴¹

In 1961/2 there were four motor vehicle assembly firms in the PEU, three of which were in PE (General Motors, Ford and Rover). Volkswagen, the 'latecomer', was established as SAMAD in Uitenhage in 1949. These four companies were the 'core' around which the transport equipment sector revolved, with other companies producing components.

A considerable amount of expansion in this sector and in metals took place in the period 1960-1964 as a result of the introduction of local component legislation. This legislation ruled that a certain percentage of the component parts of vehicles assembled in South Africa had to be locally manufactured. C.B. Ferreira states that until 1960 the motor industry in SA was assembly based; only after 1960 were fiscal measures introduced which turned it into a "true manufacturing industry", with a resultant increase in production of component parts. By 1964 there were 21 firms in the transport equipment sector. Whites constituted 50% of labour employed, or 5 987 workers; coloureds 29% (4 666) and africans 21% (3 232).⁴² Moreover, the size and number of firms in the transport equipment sector increased dramatically: in 1950 the average size of a firm was 425 employees, growing to 714 in 1955, 705 in 1961, and increasing dramatically to 1 270 in 1964 and 1 447 in 1967.⁴³

In the early decades - the 1920's and 1930's - of the motor industry, notably in the assembly plants, there was a reliance on fluctuating white unskilled labour from rural areas. As the industry 'settled down' in the post-war period, a more permanent skilled and semi-skilled labour force developed.⁴⁴ Up until 1960 the motor industry relied on relatively skilled high-cost labour, usually white and increasingly coloured, on the assembly lines; with africans employed only in the most menial levels, such as sweeping and loading. After 1960, when the production of local components expanded, an increasing number of african workers were employed in the transport equipment

sector. By 1967 african employment in the sector had grown to 4 901 or 23%; coloured employment grew to 31% while white employment decreased to 46%.

The 'lateness' of development of the workforce in the motor industry is demonstrated by the lack of unionisation in the study period for all workers in the industry. Trade unions were only recognised in the motor industry in the 1960's, and an Industrial Council was established as late as 1966. At Volkswagen, the most 'progressive' company in the PEU area, with a higher proportion of african labour, a form of representation for african workers - the 'Bantu Liaison Committee' was established only in 1972, and the training of african and coloured workers in technical skills was begun in 1976.⁴⁵

The point that is being illustrated here is the rapid growth of the transport equipment sector in the early 60's, with a concomitant increase in employment of african labour. Before the 1960's, during the study period, the transport equipment sector was not a significant employer of african labour. Even Volkswagen employed mainly white labour initially; by the mid-1960's only 30% of labour at Volkswagen was black.⁴⁶ Even so, a far higher proportion of the increase in african labour was in the Uitenhage rather than PE factories in this sector: in PE 16% african labour as opposed to 50% in Uitenhage in 1967.⁴⁷ The differences between PE and Uitenhage are analysed in more depth below: what is noted here is that the expansion of opportunities for africans in the transport equipment sector were relatively limited even in the 'employment explosion' of the 1960's. During the study period, they were extremely limited.

The main periods of industrial growth in the PEU area were the initial spurt in the late 1920's, the post World War II period (1945-1950), and 1961-67. 50% of all industrial firms in the area were started in the latter two periods.⁴⁸ Leaving aside the 1961-1967 period which has been dealt with above, we should look at the development of industry up to the 1950's.

1.4.4. The domination by white labour of industrial employment in the pre-Second World War years

Freund notes that during the PACT period after 1924, white men in secondary industry were mainly skilled - with the 'important' exception of Port Elizabeth, where the motor and footwear industries were dependent almost entirely on white male workers - both skilled and unskilled in the motor industry; unskilled and semi-skilled in the footwear industry.⁴⁹ The "heartland of Poor Whiteism in the Cape Midlands" led to the application of the 'civilised labour policy' to a significant degree in Port Elizabeth - in contrast to the Rand where white men were 'overwhelmingly' in skilled positions; however, as Freund notes, "[the] economic history [of PE] remains to be written."⁵⁰ It

is argued here that the predominance of white labour in industry was a significant factor in the 'stunting' of the african working class.

Bureau of Statistics sources show the marked predominance of white labour in industry in the early phase of industrialisation, and the relatively small percentage of african labour until the 1940's. In comparison with the rest of South Africa, the percentage of white labour in industry was huge. The percentage of white as opposed to black (coloured and african) labour in the PEU area was 52% in 1925/6, rising to 65% in 1935/6 and declining to 49% in 1945/6. The same figures for the percentage of white labour in the rest of the country were 36% in 1925/6, 40% in 1935/6 and 32% in 1945/6.⁶¹

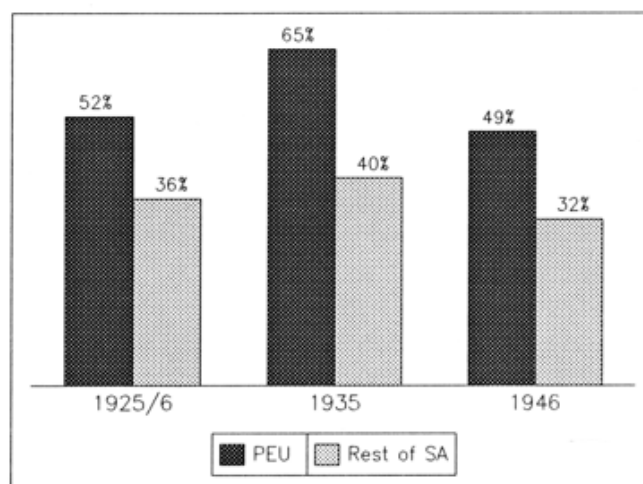


Figure 9. *Percentage of whites in industry in PEU area relative to the rest of the country during the study period.*

The dramatic increase in the 1930's was in line with the trend noted by Freund of the national increase in white industrial labour during the depression years;⁶² but was more marked than other centres as a result of the stricter application of the civilised labour policy and the growth of the motor industry where this policy was followed most rigorously. The dependence on white labour in industry is startling when compared to the Southern Transvaal and the Durban/Pinetown areas, where almost the reverse ratios of black to white labour existed:

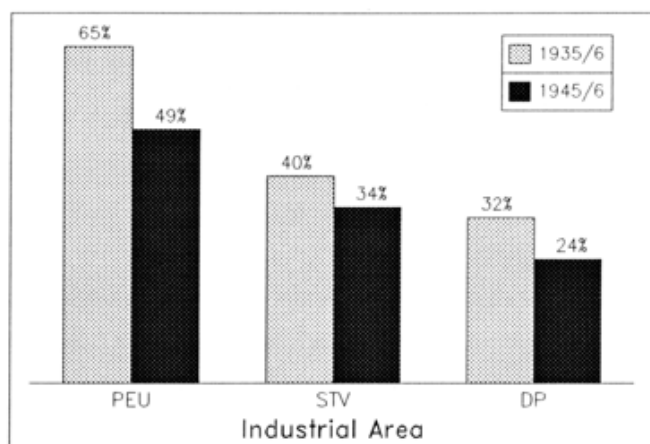


Figure 10. *Change in percentage of white labour employed in industry in PE compared to other main industrial centres.*

While the percentage of white labour in industry in PE decreased between 1935 and 1945 - reflecting the increasing employment of blacks in industry during the war, as elsewhere in the country - it was still very high compared to the other major industrial centres.⁵³

In Port Elizabeth, in 1935 more than 50% of industrial employment was white; and 93,1% of employment in the motor industry was white. At this stage, 71,3% of textile and footwear employees were white, and nearly 78% of printing employees.⁵⁴ Most sectors of industry relied heavily on white labour. Coloured and african employment was roughly equal, with a higher proportion of coloured labour in food (30,9%) and furniture (31,1%) and a higher proportion of african labour in non-metals (58,5%) and wood (40,1%).⁵⁵

This tendency towards employment of white labour is illustrated by the motor industry in the PEU area. Up until the post-war period, the motor industry relied for its manual labour on unskilled whites from rural areas urbanising in Port Elizabeth. "From its inception", writes Adler, "automobile assembly work had been the exclusive preserve of white males."⁵⁶ This changed during the 1950's, when unemployment among whites declined, and apartheid legislation ensured technical training and supervisory or skilled positions for white factory workers. Between 1949 and 1954, the percentage of 'direct workers' employed in motor assembly who were white declined from 82% to 54%. By 1963 white direct workers had dropped to 41,7%.⁵⁷ These are figures for the industry as a whole, which "mask...even more dramatic changes within particular firms....White production workers were concentrated at three firms, GM, Ford, and SAMAD".⁵⁸ Newer automobile firms in other parts of the country employed a far higher percentage of black (both coloured and african) workers.

Thus, while in the 1940's the percentage of black labour was growing in Port Elizabeth as elsewhere in South Africa, the percentage in PE was only slightly more black to white labour: as opposed to a significantly higher proportion of black labour elsewhere.

1.4.5. Growth of coloured employment in the 1940's and 1950's

During the 1940's there was a dramatic increase in african and coloured employment in the PEU industrial area. The percentage of each group remained roughly equal through the 1930's and 40's, except in 1949/50 when african labour was greater than coloured. At the same time, white employment in industry was rapidly decreasing, until in the mid-sixties all three population groups were roughly equal in terms of industrial employment.⁵⁹ During this period, it is clear that in Port Elizabeth itself, coloureds were employed in manufacturing to a greater extent than africans.

This is illustrated by Davies' analysis of the nine employment categories in Port Elizabeth in terms of race:

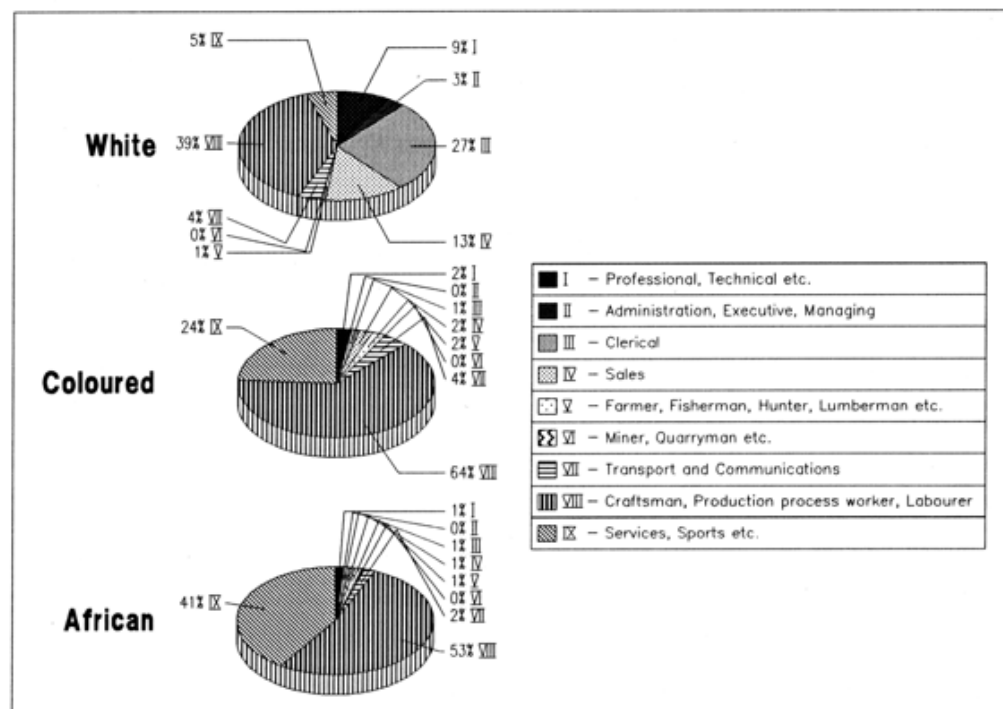


Figure 11. Distribution of employed persons by occupation and race 1951.

A very small percentage of africans (3%) were employed in categories I - IV (professional or white-collar employment), whereas 42% of whites, 68% of coloureds, and 55% of africans were employed in categories VII and VIII (transport and manufacturing).⁶⁰ Davies' point is the high concentration of coloured and african workers in manual labour, and the small numbers of blacks

in professional or white-collar work. While this is no doubt the case, as it generally has been in South Africa, what is interesting for this study is the higher percentage of coloureds than africans in categories VII and VIII. Africans have a significantly higher percentage in the service category, IX. The following table derived from Davies' table illustrates the higher proportion of coloured labour in manufacturing and the higher proportion of africans in the service sector over the whole period:⁶¹

	Coloured				African			
	1936	1946	1951	1960	1936	1946	1951	1960
VIII	49,5	56,3	63,7	61,7	53,5	49,7	52,8	58,4
IX	33,9	29,3	24,0	21,6	37,3	42,5	40,7	30,0

Table 4. *Percentage of coloureds and africans employed in manufacturing and service sectors in PEU over the study period.*

1.4.6. Race and skills divisions

The correlation between race and skills divisions in employment has been particularly strong in Port Elizabeth, with the broad trend being for whites to be employed in skilled, coloureds in semi-skilled, and africans in unskilled positions. This applies across employment sectors, as well as within the manufacturing sector.

As has been seen above, white workers were favoured in the early decades of industrial development, specifically in the motor industry. As happened elsewhere, under apartheid laws white workers gained skills or moved into supervisory positions, becoming 'white-collar' workers. Although coloured labour preference was only applied to Port Elizabeth in 1967, it would seem that many industrial employers replaced semi-skilled or skilled white labour with coloured labour. This applied particularly in the clothing, footwear and transport sectors. Africans were employed in the sectors reliant on unskilled labour - the 'heavy' work in the metals, non-metals and transport sectors; and in the food and textile sectors. Moreover there was a strongly adhered to conventional wisdom that coloureds 'wouldn't do dirty or heavy work'. Given the population structure of PE, increasingly more coloureds could be drawn into the semi-skilled jobs, while there was a large pool of cheap african labour available for the unskilled manual work. As the number of whites employed as 'blue-collar' workers in industry dropped, coloured workers became more dominant. This is illustrated in Figure 12: By 1967 coloureds were 38% of skilled, 55% of semi-skilled, and 23% of unskilled workers in industry, while africans were 9% of skilled, 23% of semi-skilled, and 71% of unskilled workers in industry.⁶²

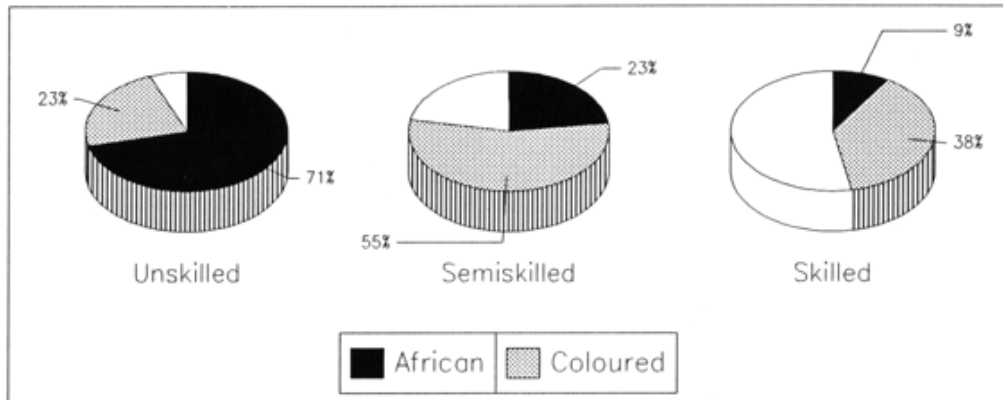


Figure 12. *Percentage coloured and african workers in different skills levels in industry, 1967.*

The relative increase of coloured to african labour, as white manual labour decreased, is illustrated as well in the case of the motor industry. In 1954, coloureds constituted 25% and africans 21% of the labour force in the industry as a whole; by 1963, coloureds had increased to 40,6% and africans declined to 17,7%.⁶³

Even by 1967/8, when more africans had been brought into the transport equipment sector, white and coloured labour accounted for 99% of skilled and semi-skilled labour in this sector, africans for 58% of unskilled. In manufacturing industry as a whole, whites and coloureds accounted for 91% of skilled and 77% of semi-skilled labour while africans accounted for 71% of unskilled labour.⁶⁴

The exceptions to this race/skills division trend are the food and textile industries, as illustrated in Figure 13 below:⁶⁵

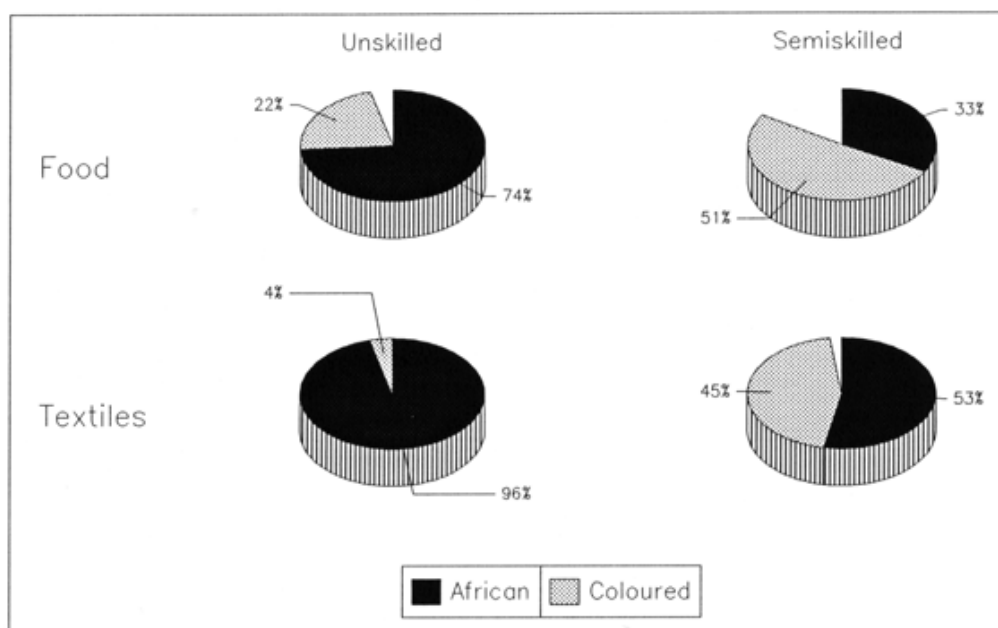


Figure 13. Food and textile industries by race and skills level.

In the food industry, unskilled and semi-skilled coloured and african women were employed. While the semi-skilled:unskilled ratio still favoured a coloured/african division, with a large majority of unskilled workers being african and a slim majority of semi-skilled workers being coloured, what is significant is that 33% of semi-skilled workers were african. In the textile industry, a similar situation existed, with the vast majority of unskilled workers being african. Here, however, a majority of semi-skilled workers were also african. It was in these two sectors, therefore, where african workers were able to gain some level of skill - mainly women in the food sector, and men in the textile sector. This particular skills composition was to have a strong influence on labour organisation in these industries.

If we look not only within the manufacturing sector, but compare skills levels between employment sectors, the same race/skills division is clear.⁶⁶

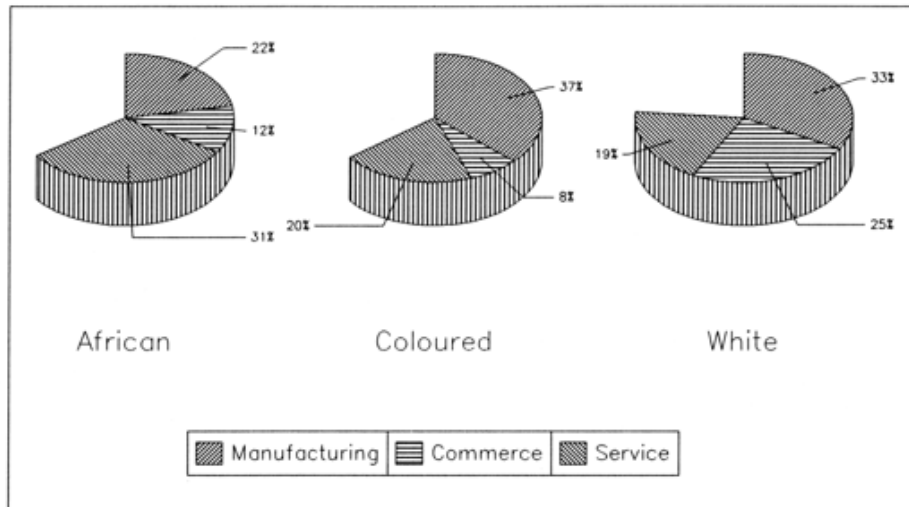


Figure 14. *Employment: economically active population of PE, 1960.*

The figure for the service sector includes nearly 20% of the economically-active african population in domestic service. Thus, despite the increase of african employment in industry in the 1950's in the PEU, as reflected in Phillips' figures, the percentage of africans in industrial employment in Port Elizabeth was by 1960 still a relatively small percentage of the population, with a higher percentage employed in the service sector.

This skills division between coloured and african was to affect profoundly the forms of organisation emerging from the working-class in Port Elizabeth. The effective denial of skills to african workers and the 'favouring' of coloured workers combined with other factors to reproduce a racially-divided working-class. Legislation introduced in the 1950's exacerbated an already existing skills division. Such apartheid measures included the Bantu Education Act, which deprived african residents of PE of their access to education in private, racially-integrated schools in areas such as Korsten, and provided inferior and inadequate education in the townships; and the residential segregation of the coloured and african communities, most significantly Korsten which was integrated until 1956. Labour legislation which directly reinforced the racial division of labour were the 1953 Native (Settlement of Disputes) Act, which prohibited african workers from striking; and the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Act which excluded africans from the definition of 'employee', thereby denying them the right to join registered trade unions and participate in the Industrial Conciliation machinery. Thus trade-unions emerging in the motor industry, for example, organised white and coloured labour; africans only became organised in the late 1970's. Where the pattern of skills division differed, for example in the food and to some extent textile industries, non-racial trade unions emerged in the 1940's and 50's. These developments are outlined in Chapters 3 and 4.

Another implication of the extremely small number of africans in skilled or professional positions was its effect on the politics of the area - with a tendency towards a more militant, working-class leadership in the 1950's in the african townships. This militance was greater both in relation to the coloured working class in PE, and in relation to other urban centres where a larger african middle-class had developed.⁶⁷

1.4.7. Gender divisions in industrial employment

Throughout the period under review, Port Elizabeth had a higher proportion of african women in its population than other industrial centres. This was due to the lack of influx control and the lack of emphasis on male migrant labour. The african female population increased significantly in the period under review. During the 1950's 10% more african women than men moved into the area, and by 1968 there were 8% more african women than men in the PEU.⁶⁸ Up until this time, the african female population had been slightly lower than the male population - but reflecting a more normal gender balance in the population than in other urban centres.

As elsewhere, the vast majority of african women found employment in the service sector, as domestic workers or in the informal sector. The low level of employment of african women in industry in Port Elizabeth also contributed to the 'stunting' of the african working-class. The increase of industrial employment of african and to a lesser extent coloured women in the 1940's and 1950's was significant. Between 1939 and 1963, the average annual increase in the employment of African women was 13,8%. (compared to 9,1% for coloured women, 7,1% for coloured men, 6,6% for african men, 3,9% for white men and 1,3% for white women).⁶⁹

Of the african male population, 31,6% were economically active in 1936 and 31,3% in 1951. The same figures for the african female population are 27,2% in 1936 and 28,8% in 1951. By 1960, however, african males in this category had fallen to 25%, while females were slightly higher than males at 27,7%.⁷⁰

The relatively higher increase in the african female (as opposed to male) population, and the higher economically active proportion of african women, can be seen as a direct result of the labour bureau's establishment in 1953, and the registration of service contracts from 1955: these measures affected male migrants first, whereas passes were only extended to women at a later date.⁷¹

During the 1950's, while the number of economically active african men was decreasing, the number of african women employed in industry in PE was increasing. It was a short-lived increase,

as passes for women were introduced towards the end of the 1950's, but for a period the influence of african women in industry increased:

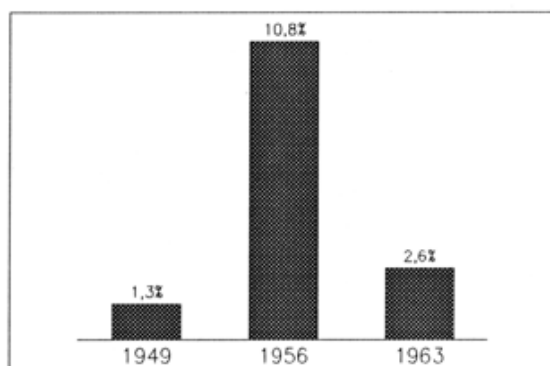


Figure 15. *Change in percentage african female employment in industry in PEU in the 1950's.*

African female employment as a percentage of total industrial employment in the PEU increased from 1,3% in 1949/50 to 10,8% in 1956/7, decreasing thereafter to 2,6% in 1963/4.⁷² The figures for 1956/7 exclude the motor industry, which means the decrease in african male labour from 33,8% in 1949/50 to 18,4% in 1956/7 is exaggerated. As there were almost no women employed in the motor industry, the figures are somewhat skewed - if the motor industry were included, african women would be a smaller percentage of the total. However, what is clear is that while the percentage of women of other race groups in industrial employment were declining, the percentage of african women was increasing in the 1950's.

These women were drawn into the food and textile industries, as stated above: by 1967/8, the ratio of african men to women in the food industry was 65% to 35%; in the textile industry it was 78% to 22%. These were the only two industries to utilise african female labour to any extent.⁷³ The rise in african female employment in these industries in the 1950's was to impact on the organisation of trade unions in Port Elizabeth, and is dealt with in more depth in Chapters 4 and 5.

These figures for the growth of the african female population, and the short-lived period of greater african female employment in the 1950's, cannot be equated with growth in industrial employment as a whole. African women remained, for the most part, only a tiny proportion of the industrial workforce. Most african women were employed in domestic work and in the service sector, for example the hotel industry; and many created their own employment in the informal sector. The implications for this study are that for a specific time during the study period - when african women were less restricted in terms of urban residence, and were being absorbed into positions in industry to a greater extent - the ability of african women workers to organise increased.

1.4.8. Employment - summary

The purpose of the above section has been to identify trends in employment of african workers in Port Elizabeth during the study period, so that forms of organisation can be analysed within the context of the structural position of african labour.

In general, african workers were employed in unskilled positions in the local economy. Two major trends emerge: the majority of african workers were unskilled labourers for most of the study period; and relatively more african workers were employed in the tertiary sector (services) than other workers of other races, while relatively more white and coloured workers were employed within the secondary sector (manufacturing industry). Because the primary industrial sector was (and is) so small, it offered little employment to any race or skills group.

If secondary industry - the most significant employer in Port Elizabeth - is analysed over the study period, it emerges that white labour had a significant advantage in the early period (1920's and 1930's). While there was a significant increase in black labour in industry in the post-war period (1940's and 1950's), in Port Elizabeth coloured workers were favoured in terms of employment in semi-skilled and skilled positions.

There was a rapid rise of employment of africans in secondary industry, but not in the key growth sector of the motor industry in the post-war period, where white labour continued to dominate, with increasingly more coloured labour gradually being brought in. The shoe and clothing industries tended increasingly towards coloured labour. The areas where african labour increased most were in the food and textile sectors, which were more labour-intensive and relied on cheap, unskilled labour. They were also the sectors which declined in importance relative to the motor industry in the late 1950's and 1960's. The other sectors to absorb african labour were the non-metals (primarily brick-making), again a labour-intensive, low-wage sector; and to some extent metals and chemicals - again in the heavy unskilled job-levels in these sectors. Moreover, african workers in these sectors were spread out over a number of small firms. The largest employers were in the service sector: the municipality, the railways, the Divisional Council, and the domestic and catering services.

African women workers made up a tiny percentage of the total industrial workforce. The vast majority of african women workers were employed in the tertiary sector, in domestic work - where labour is fragmented and notoriously difficult to organise. During the 1950's, however, when there were opportunities within the textile and food industries, the number and influence of african women workers grew.

After 1960, the rapid industrial growth of the early sixties saw a shift in this pattern: by 1963/4 the proportions of labour employed in secondary industry were roughly equal for white, coloured and african.⁷⁴ The early 1960's were a time of rapid expansion for Port Elizabeth industry; yet by 1968 the Financial Mail was warning against expectations of a continuation of such 'spectacular' growth.⁷⁵ Substantial opportunities for african workers to advance into semi-skilled positions thus came very late in the development of the local economy - in fact, after the end of the study period. The sectors where african workers had opportunities to advance into semi-skilled positions in the 1950's - the food and textile sectors - were declining relative to the motor industry. By this stage the local economy was highly dependent on the motor industry - where african workers had had fewest opportunities.

1.5. Differences with Uitenhage and East London

Significant for this study are the differences between Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage, and between Port Elizabeth and the East London/Kingwilliamstown industrial area. In studying the 'conditions of social reproduction' of the african working class, and its ability to organise, there are distinct differences between the structural position of african workers in Port Elizabeth and the other two areas.

1.5.1. Uitenhage

Uitenhage is generally considered as a small part of the PEU industrial area, accounting for 16% of employment as against Port Elizabeth's 84% of the total PEU area.⁷⁶ While recognising that this is a small percentage of the total, there are significant differences in employment practices in Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth, with Uitenhage having a higher proportion of african labour in manufacturing. Thus in 1968, 46.5% of all registered african workers in Uitenhage were employed in industry, as opposed to 28% in Port Elizabeth.⁷⁷ In 1967/8, while in Port Elizabeth the three racial groups were roughly equally spread over industrial employment (white 33,6%, african 31,1%, coloured 35,3%), with white and coloured both larger than african, in Uitenhage africans formed 56,6% of the industrial labour force, with 32,2% whites and 11,2% coloureds.⁷⁸

While Uitenhage accounted for only 16% of industrial employment in the area, this was even more concentrated in the textiles and transport sectors, which accounted for 87% of all industrial employment (as opposed to 44% in PE). Both these major sectors 'favoured' african labour, employing a higher ratio of african to coloured labour than Port Elizabeth. The textiles sector in

Uitenhage was a slightly bigger employer than in Port Elizabeth - accounting for a large proportion of the african labour employed in that sector in the PEU area as a whole (3 050 workers as opposed to 2 750 in PE).⁷⁹ Moreover, in all sectors except metal, Uitenhage employed proportionately more african labour than Port Elizabeth; and in all industries except for wool, clothing and printing, african labour constituted over 50% of the total labour force.⁸⁰

In the motor industry, when the shift from white to black labour took place, the Uitenhage plant (Volkswagen) employed african labour, while the two Port Elizabeth-based plants (General Motors and Ford) favoured coloured workers.

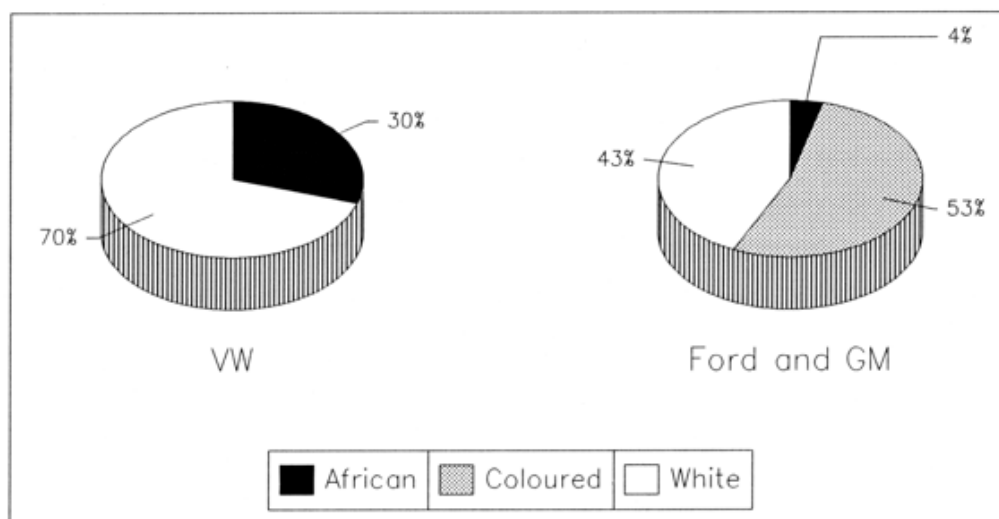


Figure 16. Racial division of labour at major motor companies in PE and Uitenhage, 1962.

By 1962, Volkswagen employed 70% whites and 30% africans; in 1961 GM and Ford together employed 53% coloured workers, 43% white workers, and under 4% african workers.⁸¹

This is highly significant, as it is clear that in the study period (up until the early 1960's), the motor industry in Port Elizabeth employed just about no african workers, despite the general post-war shift towards employing africans. Where white labour was replaced with black, coloured workers were employed. This contrasts with Uitenhage, where the newer Volkswagen plant employed african workers - although the majority of the workforce were still white.

Figures which consolidate employment statistics for PEU as a whole obscure this difference, and may give the impression of a larger african workforce in Port Elizabeth than is the case. Moreover, political and labour organisation in Uitenhage has shown significant differences with Port Elizabeth,

arising from the greater african employment in industry combined with the residential integration of the coloured and african communities until recently. Stayaways, for example, have consistently shown a higher level of coloured participation in Uitenhage than in Port Elizabeth.⁸²

1.5.2. East London

East London/Kingwilliamstown differs from Port Elizabeth in three main respects: firstly, the far smaller manufacturing sector; secondly, the higher dependence on african labour; and thirdly, the relatively lower level of proletarianisation of the african working class in East London.

Port Elizabeth and East London had similar origins as 'port cities' and commercial centres. Yet Minkley argues that in the 1920's and early 1930's commercial capital, through the city council, opposed large manufacturing industry in East London. The council also intervened to keep the african working class in a temporary, segregated, migrant status.⁸³ This was unlike Port Elizabeth, where the local state and capital encouraged industrial development in the 1920's and 1930's, with the city council to some extent seeing itself as the champion of industry - offering services, and creating new industrial townships in the 1930's through the first partial clearance of the Korsten slum. While East London resisted the motor industry, Port Elizabeth became its 'home' from 1924, and took on a strong 'industrial city' character. While East London did reverse this attitude in the 1930's, Port Elizabeth had already established itself as the stronger industrial base.

This first point, the smaller manufacturing sector in East London, is illustrated by the following figures: In 1960, 17,2% of the economically active population were employed in manufacturing in East London/Kingwilliamstown, as opposed to 33% in PEU;⁸⁴ in 1961/2 PEU accounted for 6,8% of net output in manufacturing industry in South Africa, with East London/Kingwilliamstown accounting for 1,6%.⁸⁵

In East London in the 1920's and early 1930's, the black workforce was "far from fully proletarianised" according to Minkley; they were " 'segregated' temporary residents with no ties of reproductive responsibility";⁸⁶ - although attempts to keep african residents few and semi-urbanised were reversed by the mid-1930s. Contrast the claimed stability of the Port Elizabeth african population in the 1920's and 1930's (see Chapter 2) with evidence of the ideological influence of ties to the land on East London workers in the late 1920's and early 1930's.⁸⁷ Wages for african workers in the East London/Kingwilliamstown area were to remain constantly lower than those paid in Port Elizabeth - probably indicating the assumption (on the part of capital) that some portion of the costs of reproduction of labour were being met by subsistence farming.⁸⁸

The third main difference between the two industrial centres is the greater 'dominance' of white labour in Port Elizabeth, and the greater opportunities for african labour in East London.

By the late 1930's white workers in industry in East London were being replaced by black workers. As the coloured population was much smaller than that of Port Elizabeth, a higher proportion of african workers were employed. Thus although initially a more migrant african population, they had opportunities for employment in industry earlier than in Port Elizabeth, where whites and then coloureds tended to dominate. This is significant in relation to access to opportunities for skilled and semi-skilled employment, where african workers in East London had more access than in Port Elizabeth.

In PEU, 33% of the labour force in manufacturing was white as against 18% in East London in the 1960's; and a third of the labour force in manufacturing was african, as compared with 72% in the East London/Kingwilliamstown area.⁸⁹ East London therefore differed markedly from Port Elizabeth in the structure of racial employment, offering greater opportunities for african labour to participate in secondary industry even though it was a far less significant sector than in Port Elizabeth.

1.5.3. Conclusion - differences with Uitenhage and East London

Port Elizabeth, the largest industrial centre in the Eastern Cape, differed from East London and Uitenhage, the two smaller centres, in its employment practices. Both East London and Uitenhage offered more opportunities for african labour to enter semi-skilled positions in industry at an early stage than Port Elizabeth. Industry in Port Elizabeth 'favoured' white and then coloured labour. This employment practice, combined with the greater stability of the african population, had implications for the organisation of the african working class.

1.6. Wages

The racial and skills divisions in employment in Port Elizabeth were also reflected in the earning capacity of different sections of the labour force. Wage differentials between industries were also a key factor affecting the position of african labour in Port Elizabeth. As the motor industry increased in importance, the textile and food sectors decreased in significance. Thus by 1963/4, textiles provided 27% of industrial employment, but only 20% of industrial wages paid; while the motor sector had increased to 29% of industrial employment and 39% of industrial wages paid.⁹⁰ This reflected the higher labour cost structure of the motor industry, partly because of the more skilled labour involved, partly because of the employment of predominantly white labour.

However, the decline in white labour did not mean an equivalent decline in share of the wage bill - as illustrated in Figure 17 below:

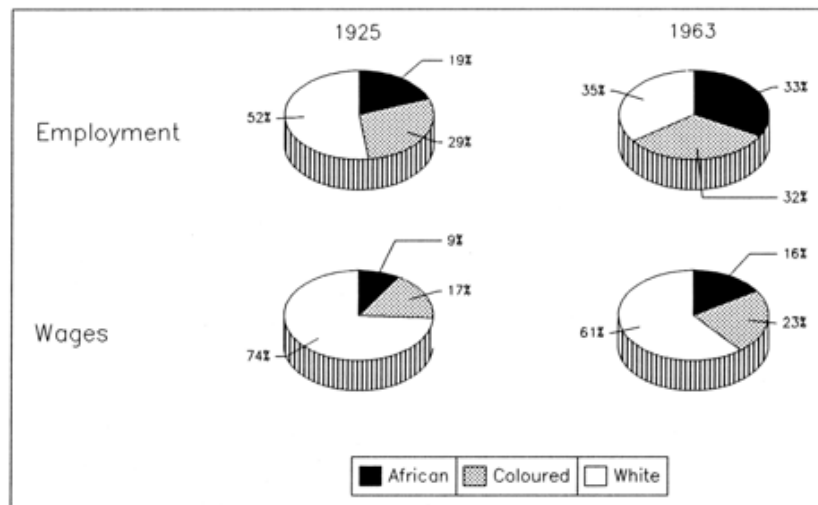


Figure 17. Share of employment and wages by race, 1925-1963.

Thus while in 1925 employment was 52% white, 29% coloured and 19% african, the division of the wage bill was 74% white, 17% coloured and 9% african. By 1963 the employment structure was 35% white, 33% african and 32% coloured, but the wages had decreased to 61% for whites, increasing to 23% for coloureds and 16% for africans.⁹¹

In summary, while white employment dropped by 17%, their share of the wage bill dropped by 13%. Coloured employment increased by 3%, with their share of the wage bill increasing by 6%, while african labour increased by 14%, yet their share of the wage bill only increased by 7%. While there was a general 'levelling' in the sense that black workers gained the 13% of the wage bill lost by white workers, the inferior earning power of african workers is still clear. Two trends can be identified: white workers retained a privileged position in industry, as their share of the wage bill did not drop as much as their share of employment. Secondly, the more favourable position of coloured workers is indicated by the fact that the smaller increase in coloured labour had gained the relatively larger slice of the wage bill.

This reinforces the trend illustrated above towards employing coloureds in semi-skilled positions in the workplace at higher wages. Some of the ways in which african workers attempted to influence their low-wage status are examined in Chapters 3 and 4 below. It can be seen in Chapter 3 how african workers attempted to raise wages for unskilled workers through the mechanism of the Wage Boards; and in Chapter 4 how, where african and coloured workers were employed in

semi-skilled positions in the textile and food industries, they were able to organise collectively and improve wages for both groups.

1.7. Implications for labour organisation

Much of the above data may seem overly concerned with racial categories in industrial labour. Yet the concept of 'non-racialism' or cross-racial working class interests in the organisation of labour, which is of particular interest to analysis of the contemporary situation, must be contextualised in the racial divisions which were strongly entrenched in Port Elizabeth. They were entrenched in employment (white = skilled; coloured = semi-skilled; african = unskilled), and reinforced by state policies: in the earlier period the 'civilised labour' policy which drew white workers into industry in Port Elizabeth to an even greater extent than any other industrial centre; in the later period the first unofficial, and later official, 'coloured labour preference' policy, as well as influx control mechanisms (which often went against the interests of capital). These were combined with a local state policy of residential segregation, reinforced after 1948 and implemented particularly harshly in the late 1950's, when SACTU's 'non-racial' trade-unionism was having some success; and with racist education policies which limited the opportunities of africans to enter skilled employment.

In the early period, Port Elizabeth was noted (with the Western Cape) for its 'non-racial' trade unions: the traditionally skilled white unions which admitted coloured members. African labour was left out in the cold, and was always treated as a specific 'problem' by the liberal interests of the time: the Native Welfare Societies, the Joint Councils, even the Midland Chamber of Industries and the City Council to a lesser extent, were concerned about the low level of 'native wages'. Some of the predominantly 'white' unions of the Trades and Labour Council in the 1940's also showed some concern for organising black labour. Yet, in general - like most other parts of the country - in the age of apartheid the white unions consolidated their own positions. The coloured unions consolidated in the clothing and footwear industries, and later in the motor industry. There arose a situation where in the 1970's organisation in the motor industry grew strongly, yet by the early 1980's great tensions arose between the coloured, 'workerist' union and the african, 'populist' union. This was further born out in stayaways which in PE initially drew vast support from african workers, but little support from coloured workers.

Besides demonstrating the successful segregation of the working class by apartheid policies, these contemporary events underline the earlier exclusion of the african working class from the ranks of semi-skilled industrial labour and industrial unionism, and their turning therefore to other forms of organisation to express their interests; and the relatively greater incorporation into 'traditional'

labour organisation and state institutions of the coloured working class. This has affected the markedly different politics of labour organisation in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage respectively as described above, because of the higher level of integration of semi-skilled african labour in industry in Uitenhage, (especially in the motor industry), combined with residential integration until much more recently, which produced a stronger non-racial brand of industrial unionism.

Interesting exceptions to this were in the 1950's, in sectors where coloured and african workers were both organised in the strong SACTU unions of the time: food and textiles. This was made possible by the employment of africans in semi-skilled positions in these industries. Moreover, in the food industry in particular coloured and african *women* were employed together: african women being 30%, and coloured women 41%, of unskilled labour in this sector.⁹² By all accounts, the Food and Canning Workers Union was definitely the strongest in the area, with a proud history; but unfortunately the food industry was already a declining sector of the PE economy by the 1950's. Textiles, the site of the other strong union with an african majority, was to some extent overtaken by the problem of undercutting by the border industry in Kingwilliamstown. The organisation of workers in these sectors is analysed in Chapter 4.

Another interesting example of non-racial organisation is the attempt at organisation in the service sector, specifically the Port Elizabeth Municipality, recognised by unionists as the major employer of unskilled labour and to some extent a trend-setter as regards wages. Again, organisation was non-racial for coloureds and africans (the official municipal employees union represented only the white employees), but represented only a small proportion of workers. Municipal 'liberalism' meant the recognition of, and negotiation with the union, but the union was in a weak position to engage in strike action and never had very dynamic organisation. Yet some gains were made, particularly in the use of the stayaway weapon, which will be outlined in Chapter 6. A two-edged situation existed, where the Port Elizabeth Municipality was known as a liberal institution, working in the interests of industrial capital, and 'setting an example' in some ways: yet municipal wages were used as an 'excuse' by other industries not to pay higher wages, despite the municipality employing more migrant or newly-urbanised labour than industry.

Apart from the food and textile industries, attempts were made to organise african workers dispersed as unskilled labourers in other sectors of industry. Most important were railway and harbour workers - which had a turbulent, but not very successful, history of organisation. Attempts to organise domestic workers - the largest single category of african women workers - were unsuccessful. African workers in the metal and motor sectors were not successfully organised until the 1970's.

Thus the structural position of african workers in the local economy provides a crucial background to the history of organisation of african workers which is analysed below. The significant constraints on african labour, combined with their relative stability (see Chapter 2), were to favour certain forms of organisation and political consciousness.

1.8. Conclusion

It is possible, therefore, to posit the idea of a 'stunted' african working class in Port Elizabeth: fully-urbanised, yet not drawn into skilled or semi-skilled employment in industry on a large scale until the 1960's. While not affected by influx control or similar mechanisms until the 1950's, and not by formal application of coloured labour preference until the late 1960's, the tendency of capital was to favour initially white and then coloured labour. The variegated workforce was divided quite rigidly into semi-skilled or skilled white and coloured labour, and unskilled african labour. The structural position of african workers was to influence profoundly the forms of organisation that emerged, and to set the limits and possibilities within which the african working class attempted to improve ^{its} ~~their~~ situation.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Whatever racial terminology was used in source material for this and other chapters I have replaced with the consistent use of the terms white, coloured and african to refer to the three main 'racial groups' in Port Elizabeth. Black refers to coloured, african and indian together. All 'racial groups' are referred to in lower case letters for the sake of consistency.

2. Eric Hobsbawm quoted in Bozzoli, B. (ed), *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1987, p. 1.

3. Extensive use is made here of Industrial Census reports, and the analyses of these reports made in the University of Port Elizabeth Institute for Planning Research Reports No 2: *Secondary Industry in PE/Uitenhage: A Structural Analysis* by De Coning and Phillips, 1969 and No 3: *Secondary Industry in the PE/Uitenhage Region: An Employment Study* by Phillips, 1969. My interpretation of the data places a different emphasis on the position of african workers in Port Elizabeth.

4. Phillips, *op. cit.*, Table III, p. 36.

5. De Coning and Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

6. Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

7. Davies, W.J., *Patterns of Non-White Population Distribution in Port Elizabeth with Special Reference to the Application of the Group Areas Act*, Institute for Planning Research Special Publication No 1, University of Port Elizabeth 1971, Figs. 12 and 13, pp. 44-46.

8. Maasdorp, G., quoted in *Development Issues in the Eastern Cape: A Review and Assessment*, Institute of Social and Economic Research Working Paper No 25, Rhodes University, Grahamstown 1986, p. 77.

9. Davies, *op. cit.*, Table 6, p. 54.

10. *Ibid.*, Table 5, p. 47.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

14. Freund, B., 'The Social Character of Secondary Industry in South Africa, 1915-1945' in Mabin, A. (ed), *Organisation and Economic Change - Southern African Studies Volume 5*, Ravan, Johannesburg 1989, p. 81.

15. Baines, G.F., *The Port Elizabeth Disturbances of October 1920*, unpublished MA Thesis, Rhodes University 1988, p. 13.

16. Minkley, G., 'To Keep in Your Hearts': *African Class Formation in East London 1900-1935*, unpublished paper, University of Cape Town 1986, pp. 2-3.

17. Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

18. Phillips, B. and Renders, V., *Industrial Change in the East London/King Williams Town and Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage Regions: 1960-1970*, Institute for Planning Research Information Bulletin No 10, University of Port Elizabeth 1976, p. 13.

19. De Coning and Phillips, *op. cit.*, Table 8, pp. 54-55.

20. *Ibid.*, Table 10, p. 57.

- 21.*Ibid.*, Fig. IX, p. 77.
- 22.*Ibid.*, pp. 59-67.
- 23.Freund, *op.cit.*, pp. 79-80.
- 24.*Ibid.*, p. 79.
- 25.*Ibid.*, p. 84.
- 26.*Ibid.*, p. 86.
- 27.De Coning and Phillips, *op cit.*, p. 115.
- 28.*Ibid.*, p. 115.
- 29.*Ibid.*, Table 39, p. 116.
- 30.*Ibid.*, Table 20, p. 79.
- 31.Davies, *op.cit.*, p. 193.
- 32.*Ibid.*
- 33.*Ibid.*
- 34.*Ibid.*
- 35.Townsend, A.C., *Absenteeism in the Footwear Industry in South Africa*, Leather Industries Research Institute, Rhodes University, Grahamstown 1967.
- 36.Phillips, *op.cit.*, p. 30.
- 37.*Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 38.*Ibid.*, Table XIV, p. 47.
- 39.*Ibid.*, Table XIII, p. 46.
- 40.*Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.
- 41.Ferreira, C.J., *An Analysis of the Effects of the Motor Vehicle Industry in PE and Uitenhage on Industrial Growth in the Eastern Cape*, unpublished thesis, University of Port Elizabeth 1969, p. 147.
- 42.*Ibid.*, Table 39, p. 147.
- 43.*Ibid.*, p. 153.
- 44.See Glen Adler's draft thesis, 1991, Part III Chapter 6, pp. 35-36, for an explanation of the changing nature of the motor industry in South Africa and the changing labour needs.
- 45.Volkswagen of South Africa, *A History of Volkswagen of South Africa*, Uitenhage 1976.
- 46.*Ibid.*
- 47.Phillips, *op.cit.*, p. 83.
- 48.De Coning and Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

- 49.Freund, *op.cit.*, p. 111, Note 81.
- 50.*Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 51.Phillips, *op.cit.*, Table VI, p. 39. Phillips' study of employment in the PEU is based on Industrial Census reports. As the motor industry was excluded from the IC reports between (not including) 1949/50 and 1963/4, many of his calculations exclude this period, as inclusion would skew the figures.
- 52.Freund, *op.cit.*, pp. 89-90.
- 53.Phillips, *op. cit.*, Table VI, p. 39. I have adjusted the figures where the calculations are inaccurate.
- 54.Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
- 55.*Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 56.Adler, G., *op. cit.*, Chapter 6, p. 37.
- 57.*Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 58.*Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 59.Phillips, *op. cit.*, Fig. 2, p. 22.
- 60.Davies, *op. cit.*, Table 15, p. 60.
- 61.*Ibid.*
- 62.Phillips, *op. cit.*, Tables 12, 13 and 14, pp. 72, 74-75.
- 63.Adler, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
- 64.Phillips, *op. cit.*, Tables 12, 13 and 14, pp. 72, 74-75.
- 65.*Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.
- 66.Davies, *op. cit.*, Table 55, p. 204.
- 67.Lodge, T., *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1983, p. 55.
- 68.Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 18: Quoted from Eastern Province Herald 19/8/68.
- 69.*Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 70.Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
- 71.*Ibid.*, p. 57.
- 72.Phillips, *op. cit.*, Table VIII, p. 41.
- 73.*Ibid.*, Table 8, p. 58.
- 74.*Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.
- 75.De Coning and Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
- 76.Phillips, *op. cit.*, Table 18, p. 81.

77. De Coning and Phillips, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.
78. Phillips, *op. cit.*, Table 19, p. 83.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
81. Adler, *op. cit.*, Chapter 6, p. 55.
82. Parfitt, J., *Industrial Relations Unit: Stayaway surveys*, University of Port Elizabeth, Industrial Relations Unit, 1987 to 1990.
83. Minkley, *op. cit.*
84. Phillips and Renders, *op. cit.*, Table C, p. 13.
85. *Ibid.*, Table 10, p. 38.
86. Minkley, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
87. Beinart and Bundy (eds), 'The Union, the Nation and the Talking Crow', *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1987.
88. Phillips and Renders, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
90. Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
91. *Ibid.*, Table VII, p. 40.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

CHAPTER 2
AFRICANS IN PORT ELIZABETH DURING THE 1920'S AND 1930'S
STABILITY, DEPRESSION AND SPONTANEITY

2.1. Re-examining Port Elizabeth's labour history

The african workers of Port Elizabeth can lay claim to the first strike in South African history - a strike by Mfengu beach labourers in 1846.¹ The demand of the PE Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (PEICWU) for a minimum wage for african labourers, reinforced by the threat of a general strike, led to the shooting of 22 people in October 1920, and further contributed to the reputation of Port Elizabeth as a centre of militant labour organisation.² This reputation was further enhanced in the 1950s, with SACTU claiming Port Elizabeth as one of its strongest local committees, "distinguished by disciplined and militant trade unions".³ And, as stated above in the Introduction, this reputation has been reinforced in the 1980's, with the rise of militant trade unions in the motor industry, and the particular success of the stayaway tactic in the area.⁴

It is necessary in this light to examine the growth of african labour organisation in Port Elizabeth in the earlier period, to see in which ways patterns were set for the militance of the 1950's. Later chapters will challenge the above linear understanding of labour history, and present a critical analysis of labour organisation in the 1940's and 1950's. In this chapter, the position of the african working class in Port Elizabeth in the 1920's and 1930's will be examined. It is argued that on the one hand, african workers were excluded from positions in industry where point-of-production organisation was viable. On the other, the african population as a whole was remarkably stable, and able to organise - even though to a limited extent, during the depression years - around community issues, or issues affecting the reproduction of the african working class.

To recap from Chapter 1: Port Elizabeth experienced a very high rate of african urbanisation in the 1920's and early 1930's, yet it was also, and only, during this period that the white population increased at a comparable rate: by 150% for africans, 123% for whites. Despite the substantial growth of secondary industry in the period, with the footwear industry being established during World War I and in the immediate post-war years, and the motor industry in the mid-1920's, employment opportunities in manufacturing were almost exclusively for whites.

The Port Elizabeth City Council and the Midland Chamber of Industries (established in 1924) actively promoted PE as an industrial city. The 1920's saw the development of an infrastructure to provide for the expansion of industry; after a long battle between the Chamber of Commerce

and the government, based on PE's trade and industrial potential, the proposals for an enclosed harbour were accepted by the government in 1924; the new harbour was finally opened in 1933. This concern was to expand in the early 1930's with a municipal policy of providing land for industry, and providing housing for workers of all races.

This housing policy, which was remarkably liberal when compared to Johannesburg and Cape Town - although not without its 'control' side - was linked to the policies of local government around influx control. Influx control was not applied effectively by the Port Elizabeth Municipality in the early years of industrialisation, leading to the establishment of a settled urban african population. Industrial interests were a powerful pressure group in the Council, and did not wish their abundant labour supply to be controlled. The absence of a mining industry with its need for migrant labour contributed to this attitude. Attempts at residential control - for example the removal of africans from Korsten in the 1930's - did not stop the constant flow of africans to Port Elizabeth in search of employment. The local state's efforts were focussed on relocating the residents of informal housing outside of its boundaries, to formal housing within the official locations; there was no real attempt to reverse the tide of urbanisation itself. In the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's there is little indication that capital needed to use the migrant labour system: there was a sufficient pool of urbanised african workers in Port Elizabeth to meet the need for unskilled labour, and the city boasted of its 'inexhaustible supply' of cheap labour.⁵ This is not to say that there were not preferences on the part of capital in some instances for migrant or newly-urbanised labour, which were to be affected by the application of influx control (see Chapter 6); but in the early decades of industrialisation employers in PE were certainly not dependent on the migrant labour system.

Port Elizabeth was thus characterised, from the 1920's, by its urban african proletariat. The term 'proletarianised' is used to describe the process whereby people have been denied access to land or to any independent means of subsistence, and have become totally reliant on wage labour. In South Africa, employment in primary industry - mining and agriculture - meant that african people, although dependent on wage labour, became for the most part a migrant or rural proletariat rather than an urban proletariat. In the case of Port Elizabeth, however, the african proletariat was primarily an urban proletariat - describing african workers who live with their families in the city, maintaining no links with rural areas, whether or not there are means of subsistence there. The relative stability of family life among africans in Port Elizabeth made possible the development of a strong sense of community.

Lodge suggests that it was the imminent application of the labour bureau system in Port Elizabeth, and the threat of curbs on the relative freedom of african residents, that provided the impetus for the mass struggles of the 1950's.⁶ This argument is borne out in Chapters 5 and 6, yet it will be

argued that women were most deeply affected and took up the pass law issue most vehemently, while men increasingly entrenched themselves in industry, fighting for their rights as urban workers at the point of production rather than focussing on the local state. And, as elsewhere in South Africa, the pass laws could not stop people 'voting with their feet'; urbanisation was an economic necessity. Despite the vigorous application of influx control after 1960, thousands of 'illegals' continued to stream into PE from the small towns and white farms of the Eastern Cape, as well as the Ciskei and Transkei.⁷

2.2. The permanence of the african working class in Port Elizabeth

While the permanent nature of urbanisation in Port Elizabeth is now accepted as fact, it is also important to examine the perceptions of urbanisation, both on the part of the authorities and on the part of those who became urbanised. Studies of the development of the South African working class have often focussed on both the perceptions and the reality of this process of proletarianisation, and the contradictions which often emerged: the need for labour in the cities, yet the refusal to acknowledge such labourers as residents of the cities or to provide for them, which generated ongoing tensions within the ruling class - between the needs of different 'fractions of capital' at different times, and between them and the state.

Such perceptions played themselves out around issues such as the provision of housing, the administration of townships, the application of pass laws, and the influence of capital on local authorities in determining its labour needs. They also played themselves out in the 'history from below' which emerged as South Africans urbanised, in the forms of organisation of urban workers and residents. The perceptions of ordinary South Africans of 'belonging' or being 'outsiders' affected all forms of organisation - religious, gender, labour, political, cultural or even criminal organisation. Many of the generalisations made about South African history, such as those that stress rural linkages or forms of consciousness, are not applicable to specific urban areas. Much of the 'history from below' that has been written in recent decades has been centred on the Witwatersrand; as the economic centre of the country it provided the starting point for analysis of the economy and the working-class. This led to a stress on the migrant labour system, and a focus on the consciousness and culture of migrant workers.⁸

It is argued here that, in contrast to many of the approaches to Witwatersrand history, what developed in Port Elizabeth was a strong urban consciousness and a cohesive sense of community; a sense of 'belonging' to the city and having the right to make certain demands of it. The impression of a permanent as opposed to a migrant african working class is strong in the minds of

capital, labour and the state: indeed, Port Elizabeth is notable for its rhetoric of africans being "part of the city", despite the high levels of unemployment and their structural disadvantages in the labour market.

In Port Elizabeth, the dual processes of urbanisation and proletarianisation were still in process, of course; and continue to this day. Yet even in the 1920's, "The proportion of permanent african residents, many of whom were second or third generation by the 1920's, was possibly unparalleled elsewhere in the Union."⁹ From the turn of the century, africans were able to acquire property in Korsten, which fell outside of the control of the Port Elizabeth Municipality until 1931; Kirk describes how the small african middle class who owned property there fought for the right to have some say in the Village Management Board which was established to administer Korsten in 1904.¹⁰ While New Brighton was established as the first official location for african residents of Port Elizabeth in 1902, this small african middle class was able to retain its access to property in Korsten until the late 1950's. Independent churches and mission schools further contributed to the stability and sense of community experienced by africans in Port Elizabeth.

Throughout the intense urbanisation process of the 1930's, those who came to Port Elizabeth generally broke more completely with their rural background than those in East London (see comparison with East London in Chapter 1). Although maintaining a consciousness of where they came from, and where their parents were, africans arriving in PE from the rural areas tended to urbanise with their families; or to marry in Port Elizabeth and raise families there. By 1921 there were almost as many women as men resident in the townships of PE - "The fact that the proportion of women amongst Port Elizabeth's african population by the 1920's was comparatively higher than other major urban centres confirms a greater degree of permanency."¹¹ Those who were urbanising through the decades under review came not only from the relatively independent access to land of the Ciskei and Transkei, but also from freehold farms which were 'bought out' by whites,¹² and from the white farms of the Eastern Cape which, as they became mechanised ousted the african workers who had lived there for generations. This process is still continuing: last year, every one of four unemployed workers in a literacy class in the squatter camp of Veeplaas related that they were 'first generation urbanised', and that their parents had been farm labourers on white farms in the neighbouring districts of Alexandria, Hofmeyr and Humansdorp.

As far back as 1931, a Port Elizabeth Magistrate giving evidence to the Native Economic Commission emphasized the stability and detribalisation of the african population of Port Elizabeth.

He stated that

For more than a century this place has been an active and fast-expanding market for unskilled Native labour. The more energetic have drifted here from the kraals under pressure of over-population; almost all of these readily found work; acquired fixed places of abode; married and begat families; the latter never having seen a chief.... A proportion of the local natives have holdings in Reserves in other Districts, but they seldom return there to live. The natives here live entirely on European lines, excepting the custom of lobola.

Emphasizing the point, he notes that

In this district there is not the faintest shadow of any tribal system. The local natives consist of Fingoes, Xosas, Gaikas, Gcalekas, Tembus, Basutos etc. all inter marry freely, both by Christian and Native rites....No Native Chief ever resided here.¹³

The above point suggests another strong influence in the development of Port Elizabeth's african working class: the ethnic homogeneity relative to other major centres, especially Johannesburg. All the 'tribes' quoted above are Xhosa-speaking, with the exception of Sothos, who were a tiny minority of the population. The homogeneity of language certainly contributed to the breaking down of ethnic consciousness among african residents of PE, and provided no basis for the 'divide and rule' strategies employed on the mines and in hostels or townships where workers were divided according to 'ethnic origin'.

In support of the above was Archibald Linton's testimony to the same Commission. He was Chairman of the Native Welfare Society of Port Elizabeth which conducted a survey, distributing 300 questionnaires to "leading natives and to Europeans interested in the matter". It is unclear whether the "leading Natives" filled in the forms, or whether they were delegated to get them filled in by other 'natives'. Seventy-three male africans returned the forms, and from this (not very scientific) sample it came out that

Five only of the seventy-three males have been in Port Elizabeth less than five years, and only six of them confess to owing property in the Native territory. Some have been thirty, forty and fifty years away from native territory, some say 'never been there', and many state they were born in Port Elizabeth. This confirms the view that the great majority of the Natives in this area are completely detribalised and industrialised, and have to be administered on the basis that this is their home, their services being necessary for the economic life of the City and district. There is, of course, an influx of raw natives from the surrounding districts, but it is small in comparison with the number of settled inhabitants.¹⁴

G W Tshangana, also of the Native Welfare Society, testified that

the town natives have outgrown the old days of tribal life and communalism and that they have entirely lost all that was in tribal life through coming in contact with modern European life and civilisation.

He gave the reasons for the influx of Natives into the towns as being the Native Land Act of 1913, the closure of the five diamond mines in Kimberley, and congestion in the 'territories' which forced natives to come into towns as they found it impossible to make a living on the land.¹⁵

The various liberal institutions which emerged in Port Elizabeth in the 1920's and 1930's and concerned themselves with the situation of african people all reflected this perception. The Native Welfare Society, the Joint Council of Europeans and Natives, the Friends of Africa, the Distressed Areas Committee - all these bodies accepted the permanence of PE's african population, and attempted either to pressurise various authorities into improving their lot, or to engage in direct welfare work of their own. Capital also favoured a large, stable pool of unskilled labour; and the local authorities themselves held a similar attitude, not implementing pass laws and from time to time engaging in housing schemes for residents of the municipal townships. The interests of capital were strongly represented on the City Council and encouraged this policy of an unrestricted pool of labour as being one of the main attractions of the city to potential investors. The Council held the view, up until the mid-1950's, that

good housing and no passes had produced a 'very law abiding african community' and a 'very happy relationship' between the council and the inhabitants of New Brighton.¹⁶

This perception, although contradicted in practice by the failure of the Council to provide adequate housing and services, and its attempts to control the african population through removals, was an indication of the ideology which was hegemonic in PE until the 1950's. It was an ideology which recognised the permanence of the african population, and gave them a 'stake' in the city.

In 1944, when a half-hearted attempt was made to impose some system of pass laws, the Communist Party led a broad-based campaign of opposition. The extent of support for this campaign is indicated by the fact that even the Native Advisory Board, which was generally a conservative body, gave its backing to the campaign. While unfortunately there are few sources available to provide detail on this 'anti-pass campaign', it is evident that neither industry nor the City Council, on which industry was strongly represented, wished influx control to be strictly enforced.¹⁷ Thus, until the turbulent 1950's, the african population of PE both perceived itself, and was perceived, to be a permanent fixture of the city. This can be considered a major

characteristic of the PE african population distinguishing it from the other urban centres of Cape Town and Johannesburg, and validates many arguments put forward that the stability of Port Elizabeth's african population was an important factor contributing to its high level of political organisation.

The issue of pass laws and influx control in the 1950's is dealt with in some detail in Chapter 6, because it can be seen as one of the major influences on the forms of resistance that emerged in that decade. Because of lack of restrictions on urban residence in the early decades, when implemented in the 1950's a grave threat was posed both to material aspects of urban access - work, education, consumer goods - and to people's consciousness of themselves as city dwellers. The relatively high proportion of women living in the city influenced the forms of organisation that emerged, and women's involvement in struggles in the townships around 'reproduction' issues was highly significant. Moreover the non-migrant status of most workers, combined with their employment in the service sector and in unskilled work in industry, meant that the place of residence became a focus of organisation.

2.3. Labour organisation in the late 1920's: the end of the ICU

The 1920 shootings mentioned above "dealt a harsh blow against the Port Elizabeth Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (PEICWU) from which it never really recovered."¹⁸ The first trade union for african workers in Port Elizabeth was inactive from the mid-1920's, having been able to achieve little for workers since 1921; and by Baines' account, it was a 'spent force' in Port Elizabeth by the end of the decade. Clements Kadalie visited PE in 1934, seemingly in an attempt to revive it. He was distinctly unsuccessful, however: his meetings in Korsten were poorly attended, and "A meeting for dockworkers was not attended at all".¹⁹ The Port Elizabeth branch of the ICU had not been able to sustain an organisational base, and the workers of PE were suspicious of an 'outsider' like Kadalie. However, the struggles of the ICU in PE for a living wage, which culminated in the 1920 shootings, did express some of the elements which were to become characteristic of the organisation of the african working class in the area. The nature of the ICU in PE, as elsewhere, reflected a concern not so much with factory-floor organisation as with the mobilisation of the poor in the community - a 'militant populism' with a working-class base. While the ICU could not sustain this type of mobilisation during the 1920's and 1930's, it was to resurface in the 1940's. Additionally, Baines argues that the ICU was able to mobilise african and coloured workers in PE on a non-racial, populist basis - given the lack of residential control and the racially-mixed nature of townships such as Korsten.

Ray Simons confirms Baine's analysis of the weakness of black labour organisation after the decline of the ICU, saying that during the depression years of the early 1930's PE was 'severely depressed' and there was little union organisation.²⁰

2.4. African wages and the cost of living: the depression years

The position of africans in the city at this time was a source of concern. The extensive influx of africans into the city as a result of the decline of the reserves caused some anxiety, but few steps were taken to stem the tide of urbanisation. The main employers of african labour at this stage were in the tertiary sector: the municipality, the South African Railways and Harbours (SAR&H), and the Divisional Council which were all concerned with the development of Port Elizabeth's infrastructure, and which relied on cheap, unskilled labour; and to some extent the building industry which combined white and coloured artisanal with black unskilled labour. Concern about the problem of an influx of africans to the city was combined with a paternalistic attitude towards those who were already there, and seen as "part of the city". This concern expressed itself in a conference of employers of "native labour" in November 1929.

In September 1929 a deputation of "native employees" met with employers together with the magistrate and Native Commissioner, Mr A.B. Herold. The circumstances of this meeting are unclear - how it was initiated, and which african workers took part - but it was to discuss the question of 'native wages'. At this meeting Herold was requested to convene a further meeting consisting only of employers of african labour, which he did in November. It was a remarkably representative meeting, with delegates from the Midland Chamber of Industries, the PE City Council (including the Mayor and the Superintendant of New Brighton), the Chamber of Commerce, the Master Builders Association and the EP Cement Company, and the systems manager of the SAR&H.

The meeting resolved that

a minimum wage of 3/6 per day be paid to all unskilled, non-European labourers of 18 years of age and over, throughout the Magisterial District of Port Elizabeth, from and after the 1st December 1929; and a minimum wage of 4/- per day from and after the 1st June 1930.²¹

Both the MCI and the Builders Association were sympathetic to the increase, reflecting the higher wage structure in industrial employment. The current rate for unskilled workers in the building trade was 3s per day. The City Council, though eventually supporting the increase to 4s per day, urged careful consideration as it would mean a cost to the ratepayers of over £5 000 per annum. Out of

its workforce of "over 1 000 boys", over 900 were paid 3s 6d - 4s 3d per day. The Divisional Council paid 3s 3d per day, with certain benefits which "was quite equivalent to 3/6 per day", and "The natives were also very contented". The SAR&H, however, was excluded from the operation of the resolution: it argued evasively that casual labour was paid 3s 6d per day on the highest grade; those on the permanent staff started at a lower rate (3s) but after 21 months rose to 4s per day, and after 3-5 years service could go up to 4s 6d per day. Together with rail travel concessions, they considered "the natives in the employ of the Railway administration were well-paid in comparison with others outside the service". They omitted to mention that the vast majority of railway workers were casuals, in grades where they were paid less than 3s 6d. While accepting the 3s 6d per day rate, they would not accept a further increase to 4s after six months, as they had to "take the wages paid in other towns into consideration". Moreover, they "would deprecate any allusion in the press to such a proposed increase".²²

While the 'liberal' nature of the council and industry was clearly shown up at the meeting, two other issues were brushed over rather quickly. The first was the statement by the township superintendant, J.P. McNamee, that "a married man with a family of two or three children could [not] live properly on less than six pounds a month". While the Mayor conceded that "the cost of living had increased and today the native generally was not adequately paid", the proposed increase would bring wages in six months time to only 96s, or £4 16s per month. A wage of 5s per day would be necessary to bring the wage up to the required £6 per month, taking into account that most workers would have been permanent residents in the city, and probably with a family of five or six. The SAR&H and to some extent the Municipality may have been exceptions in regard to employing more single men who were migrant labourers. By the conservative standards of the location administration, however, both the existing and the proposed wage rates were inadequate.

The second issue raised (but not dealt with) was the fear of an increasing influx of africans into the city. The EP Cement Co. representative "felt sure there was a surplus of labour in the City, and if the rate was raised there would be an influx of natives". The Mayor also raised the point that "an increase of wages in the City would probably lead to an influx of natives into the City". The Chamber of Commerce representative "feared that an increase would bring labour from the farms"; and "thought the principle of allowing a native to come into the City for fourteen days to seek employment should be discontinued". There was a fear that higher wages in PE would mean PE would be undercut by other centres; and it was suggested that "an appeal be made to the natives to prevent their people from accepting a lower wage than that laid down as above." The magistrate promised to convey the outcome of the meeting "to the natives, and would impress upon them the necessity of adhering to the scales proposed and preventing as far as possible an undue influx of

natives into the city." It was further decided only to advise the natives of the resolution, and not make the minutes of the meeting available to them; the same should apply to the press.²³

There was no problem of a shortage of labour, and in fact the opposite concern that too great a labour supply would allow employers to break the agreement of 1929 and undercut those who adhered to it, was felt: and was later to be proved correct. The Council, however, did not act on these concerns to prevent further influx into the city.

This meeting thus set the scene at the beginning of the 1930's: an underpaid and dissatisfied african workforce, absorbed only as unskilled labour in industry and in the service sector; their weak position compounded by the lack of an organisation to represent their interests; and a clear collusion of interests between local commercial, manufacturing and local state interests in keeping wages low. Concessions granted were limited in view of the cost of living at the time, and were granted as a result not of pressure but of paternalism.

2.5. The 1930's: spontaneity and the Trades and Labour Council

After the decline of the ICU in the 1920's, the 1930's were something of a 'vacuum' in terms of african worker organisation. The low level of african labour organisation in Port Elizabeth in the 1930's is commensurate with the low level of integration of african labour in industry and the resultant weak bargaining position of african workers. There were some instances of spontaneous labour action: Simons and Simons cite O. Huiswood as referring to "spontaneous strikes and revolts of Africans" on railways and docks in Durban and Port Elizabeth, and in the townships of Cradock and Middelberg, in 1931/2; he decried the leadership of trade unions for not being involved in such instances of worker resistance.²⁴ In 1934, Dr Abdurahman of the African Peoples Organisation and J.T. Jabavu called together africans and coloureds in Port Elizabeth with the proposal of boycotting firms which employed only whites. Gomas, a communist trade unionist, alleged that the decision was "sabotaged" by the moderate Abdurahman.²⁵ Although it failed as a strategy, it was an acknowledgement of the exclusion of black labour in Port Elizabeth at the time when the 'civilised labour policy' was being implemented rigorously.

At the same time as blacks were considering such a strategy to protest ^{against} their exclusion from employment, white labour was considering the same strategy to protest against the antagonism of some employers in PE towards any form of trade union organisation. While workers in the artisanal trades were organised into trade unions in the 1920's, the newly-established motor assembly plants did not encourage unionisation among its all-white labour force. In 1939 the

Eastern Province Trades Council (EPTC) was to consider calling a national boycott of General Motors if it did not change its attitude towards (white) trade union organisation, which it fiercely resisted.²⁶

The 1930's were dominated, in the labour field, by attempts to establish a district committee of the South African Trades and Labour Council (SAT&LC). This involved a fair amount of competition and rivalry among existing unionists, but did not address the question of african labour until the 1940's. A number of unions in PE were proudly claiming their 'non-racialism', in their organisation of coloured alongside white workers; yet they excluded african workers. This was understandable given the skilled or craft orientation of these unions; and it is significant that skilled coloured workers were included, rather than excluded, in a number of instances. This may have had repercussions on the question of preference for coloured labour over african, and on the more reformist ideology of the coloured working class.

Some of these unions had been formed in the 1920's: skilled workers in the building trade - masons, bricklayers, painters and plasterers - were organised into 'open trade unions' which enforced 'full rates' for the coloured workers who were the majority of members in some cases.²⁷

Other unions of this type emerged in the early 1930's. Typical examples were the PE Tramway and Bus Workers Union, and the PE Bakers and Confectioners Union. The latter (also called the Operative Bakers, Confectioners and Conductors Union, PE) was formed in 1931; was a registered union and was open "to workers of all races"; in practice it organised white and coloured male and female workers.²⁸ The Tramway and Bus Workers Union grew out of a labour dispute which took place between 1933 and 1936, and was formally formed and registered in 1937. It organised white and coloured males, not africans. The union was formed in a situation where the PE Electric Tramway Company had taken over private busses in PE in 1932, and "the conditions of service of the employees were the lowest in any section of Road Passenger Transport Service in the Union of South Africa."²⁹ In 1933, wages were 1s 5d, 1s 6d and 1s 9d, or a weekly wage of £3 8s, £3 14s and £4 4s. After applying for a Conciliation Board, the union waited two years before asking the SAT&LC for assistance. The T&LC secretary succeeded in negotiating an agreement with the management in June 1935, but after they reneged on the terms of the agreement the workers came out on strike in January 1936. After a further five days of negotiations an agreement was reached and the workers returned. The strike was seen as a victory for the union, which had gained wage increases as well as shorter working hours and other improvements in working conditions.³⁰

This victory spurred the T&LC in PE, which was "to all intents and purposes defunct" in 1936, to efforts at reorganising.³¹ It would seem that the two above unions were the initial 'mainstays' of the T&LC, and a campaign was begun in 1936 to 'organise the unorganised'. The committee was reformed and renamed the Eastern Province Trades Council, and two new unions were established in the same year - the Hotel and Liquor Trades Union, and the PE Commercial Employees Union. Other unions which had previously kept their distance from the T&LC became involved in the local committee, including the Typographical Union, the National Union of Leather Workers and the Building Workers Industrial Union. Some of these unions, such as the Leather Workers, were affiliated to the Cape Federation of Labour Unions and thus would not commit themselves to the T&LC as a national structure.³² The limits of trade union organisation in PE were acknowledged by the Chairman's address to a meeting in November 1936:

A great number of the workers were entirely unorganised and those who were organised were receiving the lowest wages of any large centre in SA. The reasons were largely lack of organisation, and PE seemed to be the shank end of SA.³³

The co-ordination of trade union work through the council would hopefully result in PE "not going to be an 'Employer's Paradise' any longer". One of the focuses of these early meetings was the organisation of the unorganised motor workers at General Motors, who complained that "GM advertised a 100% white labour but it was a 100% white slavery."³⁴

In April 1937 the communist trade unionist Solly Sachs organised a branch of the Garment Workers Union in PE, and led a vigorous struggle against what were the lowest wage rates in the garment industry in the country. An agreement was reached in August, which raised wages somewhat although they were still 20% to 50% lower than Transvaal standards. However, a Kingwilliamstown firm refused to accept the new wage scales set; and the failure of the T&LC to act in this situation to pressurise the Minister of Labour to extend the agreement to Kingwilliamstown, brought Sachs into extremely bitter conflict with the T&LC nationally.³⁵

In the same year a strike by building labourers was settled with assistance from the EPTC; claims were made by workers, of disease from stonecutting and the use of high-velocity drills. The National Secretary of the T&LC reported to the BWIU General Secretary that the strike had had a 'satisfactory outcome'.³⁶ However, strikers were prosecuted; after pressure from the T&LC the Divisional Inspector in PE was told not to proceed against any strikers against whom summons had not already been issued.

These struggles of garment and building workers involved both white and coloured workers, and illustrate instances where one section of the black working class were able to make some gains

through their membership of registered trade unions, and their participation in the industrial conciliation machinery. African workers, on the other hand, were excluded from such opportunities because of their unskilled status.

In the late 1930's the issue of fascism, and struggles between communists and Afrikaner nationalists dominated the predominantly white unions in PE, as they did elsewhere in the country. By 1939 the EPTC was taking an increasingly left-wing position, and being predominantly white, became caught in the battle between the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings (FAK) and the non-racial tradition of many of the unions involved. At a meeting of all trade unions of PE convened by the EPTC in May 1939, for the first time african workers were represented by the African General Workers Union which had been formed in 1937 (see Chapter 3). The Garment and Distributive Workers Unions (the latter had now become a branch of the National Union of Distributive Workers) dominated the meeting, which called for an anti-fascist rally in PE. Saxon of the Liquor and Catering Union noted that

The Trade Union movement was being attacked by reaction. The spirit of racialism was endeavouring to get into the Movement and in addition they were facing attacks on their elementary liberties which smacked very much of Nazism. It was time the movement woke up and resisted these attacks.³⁷

Eli Weinberg, another communist in PE at the time representing Garment Workers, outlined the attacks being made on the GWU by the FAK. A heated debate followed between the women of the GWU and a Mr Lange of the IMS, who felt that Solly Sachs was "causing race-hatred and anti-religious feeling"; while the GWU organiser, Miss Meyer, in defence of Sachs explained that

...she had been attacked because she helped to organise non-European workers. She was proud of her activities in that connection, because she considered that non-European workers must live a decent life.³⁸

The GWU, she continued, "would have been able to gain further improvements for the workers of PE" but for the divisive actions of Mrs Bekker of the FAK. The meeting resolved to go ahead with a rally in the Feather Market Hall.³⁹ The meeting was claimed by the EPTC to have been "a huge success", and the hall had been full.⁴⁰ A report in an Afrikaans newspaper, however, claimed that "Werkers wil nie deel hê aan klassestryd - Kommunistiese betoging in PE het min sukses", and that the Leather Workers Union had dissociated itself from the rally, which was 'communist inspired'.⁴¹

At the same meeting where the rally was hailed as a success, the issue was raised of an appeal from "a central committee called 'non-European Trade Unions'. This committee was appealing for funds for the Non-Europeans to be organised into trade unions, and for these unions to have funds for their "large premises". It was felt that the Trades and Labour Council should be asked for more information; and it was put to the meeting that the existing unions should include non-Europeans and "not allow them to set up different unions" which would have the potential to undercut the existing unions by negotiating lower rates of pay.⁴² The progress made by african workers during the war years is outlined in Chapter 3.

This, then, was the situation of labour organisation in PE at the end of the 1930's: a number of 'non-racial' unions were in existence, organising coloured and white workers together. They were consistently threatened by the 'pure white' unions of Afrikaner nationalism, yet were holding out on their non-racial principles; the influence of communists like Sachs and Weinbren had been significant in the formation of some of these unions. However, at the same time the issue of 'native labour' was arising, and was to cause further disruption in the early 1940's. The EPTC was to split into two factions, which were reunited in 1946. One faction was to provide assistance to the emerging African unions, and prioritise the organisation of the unskilled and low-paid workers. These developments are analysed in Chapter 4.

2.6. Political organisation and community struggles in the 1930's

PE in the 1930's was characterised by extensive urbanisation, both black and white; limited growth of industry, with most employment opportunities going to whites; the growth of large urban slums such as Korsten, and extreme poverty.

Given the absence of organisations representing african workers in the workplace, what were the other forms of organised expression of african working-class interests in the 1930's? While little research has been done on early political or civic organisation of the black community in Port Elizabeth prior to the 1940's, Baines' work on the ICU in the 1920's and the New Brighton Advisory Board in the 1920's - 1950's, and Robinson's research on the administration of New Brighton, are two recent valuable contributions.⁴³

While accepted as 'part of the city', little housing was built for africans between 1902/3, when the first wood and iron dwellings in New Brighton were built, and 1938, except for some small-scale projects in the 1910's. In 1938, McNamee township was built as 'an exercise in slum-clearance' to complement the partial removals from Korsten location, which fell outside the municipal

boundaries until 1931. These removals were termed the 'Plague Removals' by residents of Korsten, because of the bubonic plague which provided the pretext for moving african residents to New Brighton.⁴⁴ Despite intense unhappiness with the brutal process of removal, there was no organised resistance to the actions of the PE Municipality. However, this attempt at urban control proved completely ineffectual, as during the rapid urbanisation of the 1940's, without the application of influx control, Korsten burgeoned again into a sprawling slum.⁴⁵ While class divisions between the property-owning class and the newly-urbanised slum-dwellers were to come to the fore when Korsten was finally destroyed in 1956, for a time the relative freedom enjoyed by the population of Korsten provided the context for the growth of a militant community consciousness. This was only to find expression in the late 1940's and 1950's, however.

In New Brighton, the formal african location, more attempt was made by the authorities to control the population. While an Advisory Board had been established in New Brighton before 1920, it was viewed with suspicion by many of the residents. After the administration of New Brighton was transferred to Municipal control in 1923, three members were elected by residents and three nominated by the superintendant and approved by the PE Municipality.⁴⁶ During the 1920's, 1930's and early 1940's, the residents of New Brighton were represented on the Advisory Board by a handful of aspirant middle-class africans. It was an ineffective institution, unable to represent the interests of the majority of working class residents of the township. Those who served on the board were also those involved in other levels of political activity in the city; A.Z. Tshiwula, for example, who served on the board in 1935, was one of the first to try and organise african workers (see Chapter 3). He, like F. Mokwena, were members of the South African Native Congress - at this stage an inactive and largely middle-class body. Others on the board were active in the Native Welfare Society, which functioned during the 1920's, its successor the Joint Council of Europeans and Natives which was established in Port Elizabeth in 1931, or the New Brighton Vigilance Committee.⁴⁷ Many of those who served on the board were ministers of religion, and the board consequently concerned itself with being "the guardian of public morality and an upholder of 'civilised' values in New Brighton" - intervening in religious disputes and evicting rent defaulters and liquor traders. While on occasion the Advisory Board was used as a vehicle for putting forward more radical demands around wages, education and political rights, and "contributed in some measure to the formation of a strong popular political movement in New Brighton,"⁴⁸ it was viewed for the most part with distrust by the majority of residents. It was only in the early 1940's that the composition of the advisory board was challenged, with first Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) members, and later ANC members, contesting elections.

While the ANC before the 1940's was 'moribund', there were instances in the 1930's of the type of community organisation which was to emerge so strongly in later years. It was during this period

that residents became active in voicing their grievances, organising public meetings and approaching township authorities to protest about living conditions. Residents periodically demanded representation on the PE City Council, or bypassed the Advisory Board and approached the Council directly with their grievances. On one occasion they established a 'New Township Committee' to deal with problems of McNamee, the newly-built housing scheme.⁴⁹

Women played a leading role in these 'politics of reproduction' in the communities of New Brighton and Korsten. Robinson argues that in the case of New Brighton, women were considered by the location administrators in the 1920's and 1930's to be "especially vocal and determined".⁵⁰ While middle-class african men dominated the formal structures of political expression in the 1930's, working class african women began to organise around the conditions under which they lived and reproduced their families: rent, electricity, and the price of food and transport all became foci for delegations and protests. An acknowledgement of the influence of women residents was made in the strategy employed by the Council of employing women housing supervisors in McNamee township.⁵¹ The changing class composition of the ANC in the early 1940's, and the growing influence of african trade unions, was to provide even greater space for african women to organise.

While there has been little detailed research into these demands, they indicate the consciousness which township residents had of 'permanency', or being 'part of the city' and able to demand representation in the running of the city. During the 1940's the residents became more assertive, with CNETU, CPSA and ANC members participating in the Advisory Board and then leaving it; at the same time, residents continued their demand for direct representation on the Council, with mass organisation taking place around the cost of food and the increase in rentals.⁵² These struggles around the reproduction of the african working class are examined in more depth in Chapter 5.

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CHAPTER 3
INITIAL ATTEMPTS AT AFRICAN INDUSTRIAL LABOUR ORGANISATION
THE WAR YEARS, 1939 - 1945

3.1. Conflicting claims of industrial unionism

This chapter will analyse the development of african labour organisation in Port Elizabeth during the Second World War. Conflicting claims exist about the extent and significance of african labour organisation in this period. Baines argues that the crushing of the ICU following the 1920 shootings "dealt a body blow to worker organisation which only became resurgent in the 1950's";¹ and Govan Mbeki confirms that african trade union organisation "didn't really grow" until "efforts to organise african workers were stepped up in the late 1940's and 1950's".²

On the other hand, Hirson claims that Max Gordon "set up seven trade unions and established contacts with workers in three further trades, before handing the unions to local organisers" in 1940.³ In regions other than Johannesburg, Hirson writes, "workers ...responded just as readily when unions were formed"; in addition to the seven unions, Gordon also "set up workers' committees and a trade union centre" in Port Elizabeth.⁴ Lodge claims that these seven unions - in the cement, soft-drinks, food and canning, engineering, leather and distributive sectors - "were to provide the backbone of industrial struggle in the 1940's". These were "the first serious efforts at trade unionism since the collapse of the ICU fifteen years before", given impetus by the "wartime expansion of the African industrial workforce." By 1945, CNETU claimed a membership of 30 000 in Port Elizabeth; Lodge notes that "This was obviously an inflated figure given the size of Port Elizabeth's workforce, but it was nevertheless evident that trade union membership amongst Port Elizabeth's African workers was unusually high."⁵ SACTU puts the success of the Port Elizabeth local committee in the 1950's down to the 'veteran trade unionists', such as Tshume, Mhlaba, Matie, Coe, Bennan and Mbeki, who had been involved in registered unions in 'earlier years': they ran study classes, trained the "new core of militants" in the late 50's, and helped to organise the unorganised.⁶ Yet, despite quoting the same figures as Lodge for CNETU unions (19 unions, 30 000 members), in Luckhardt and Wall's overview of trade unions in the 1930's and 1940's there is no mention of Port Elizabeth.⁷

Other analyses of the history of the South African labour movement, less sympathetic to the ANC and SACTU, lay emphasis on the strength of the african labour movement during the war years, and its 'defeat' after 1946. Lewis mentions the "post-war decline of the independent African trade union movement"⁸ while Friedman analyses the war years as a 'lost opportunity' for the african

trade union movement, which grew enormously in strength and then "frittered away its [Indian] summer" by not consolidating on the gains made after the war. The defeat of the african mineworkers strike of 1946 signalled the beginning of this decline; however, CNETU was seen as the "first African union movement to create a local leadership".⁹ Davis and Fine take this analysis further, arguing that "The conjunctural defeat of the labour movement in the 1940's was accompanied by a more profound and lasting defeat of socialist ideas as a material force within the working class."¹⁰ While the question of the 'defeat' of the african working class in Port Elizabeth will be challenged in Chapter 4, it is premised on assumptions about the strength of african labour organisation during the war years. While african labour was brought into industry in great numbers during the war, and a powerful labour movement may have developed in other industrial centres, it is argued here that industrial unions for african workers in Port Elizabeth were far less influential than is assumed from superficial analyses.

Few of the claims made about strong industrial unions for african workers in Port Elizabeth in the early 1940's are substantiated by more in-depth analysis of the nature of these unions, and of the gains they made, or failed to make. However, the relative 'success' or 'failure' of these unions, and the individuals involved, must be situated within the structural position of the african workers in the city and its industries. It is argued in Chapter 1 that african workers in Port Elizabeth were integrated to a lesser extent, and in less skilled positions, than in other areas in the post 1933 period; yet there was a more stable and cohesive african community than in many other industrial centres.

Fine's argument that "the social weight of the proletariat as a force for democratic change was as yet insubstantial", and that "It is...likely that the labour movement would have lost this round of the class struggle whatever policies its leadership followed,"¹¹ is applicable to Port Elizabeth in this light. In the analysis of labour organisation in this and the following chapter, it is argued that this structural position influenced the extent and nature of union organisation.

Labour history cannot be viewed in isolation from the position of the working class as a whole, and historical evidence of the existence of unions (Lodge's and Hirson's quotes are good examples of this) does not necessarily imply that labour organisation was either the 'dominant' form of organisation of the working class, or that it was particularly successful.

It is argued below that in Port Elizabeth, labour organisation in the late 1930's and early 1940's was weaker than it appeared to Lodge or Hirson. While agreeing with many of Lodge's conclusions around the success of the defiance campaign in PE (see Chapter 5), Lodge argues that on the one hand, a relatively small proportion of africans were employed in manufacturing and most in the

tertiary sector, and on the other that trade union membership among african workers was "unusually high" in the 1940s and that there was by 1950 a "powerful african trade union movement" in a "sizeable african industrial workforce".¹² What do these generalisations - 'unusually high', 'sizeable' and 'powerful' really mean? PE's industrial workforce was still small, and its african industrial workforce even smaller, relative to other major industrial centres. Strong trade union organisation grows, according to theory, where workers are concentrated at the point of production - *i.e.* in factories; specifically, in manufacturing industry, where they gain some level of skill and are able to use this as a weapon in collective bargaining; semi-skilled workers in specialised industries are more difficult to replace than casual unskilled labour in the service sector. Organisation in the tertiary sector is generally more difficult; and in South Africa, the racist policies of such government-controlled bodies as the South African Railways and Harbours (SAR&H), which dominated the transport sector, made organisation even more difficult. This is graphically illustrated in this and the following chapter: the strong unions to emerge in the late 1940's were those in the food and textile industries; while attempts to organise transport and laundry workers met more often with failure. Given the structurally weak position of african workers in PE, struggles around reproduction were to have more impact on the african working class in the 1930's and 1940's, as outlined in the previous chapter. It was only in the late 1940's that a strong 'point of production' organisation began to emerge, related to the incorporation of africans in manufacturing. The strength of the organisation of the working-class in the community was to influence the way in which labour organisation developed in the 1950's, and the nature of the African National Congress which developed a 'working class character.' However, the extent to which early union organisation built an african working-class leadership, or posed effective challenges to capital, is questionable.

3.2. The early 1940's: competition in the labour movement

According to William Ballinger, in 1940 the organisation of black workers, especially africans, was "very little developed"; and he was including in his assessment the African General Workers Union which he had advised when it was established in 1937. He put the weakness of unions down to the general weakness of white unions; except for the Leather and Tramway unions, he claimed "there is no real trade union activity in this city except among organisations with craft and overseas connections".¹³

In the late 1930's and early 1940's a number of competing forces came into play, with different agendas behind their intentions of organising african labour. A 'top-down' approach was evident in most of these attempts, with a range of intellectuals - liberals, communists and trotskyists,

assisted in one case by an african 'petty bourgeois',- along with some of the existing white unionists - competing to become the 'voice' of african workers. It is a story filled with extraordinary individuals, wild claims, patronage and corruption. The names of A.Z. Tshiwula and the Ballingers (William and Margaret), Mohammed Desai, Max Gordon, and other EPTC unionists recur frequently in documentation of the time. Yet it will be argued below that few gains were made by the african workers after the Wage Board determinations of 1940/41, and few durable trade union organisations with their own leadership were established, before the emergence of a different kind of unionism in the late 40's. The exceptions were the African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU) and, to a lesser extent the Non-European Municipal Workers Union (NEMWU) - which followed a somewhat different trajectory and had an interesting history of its own. Both unions survived, but were organisationally weak throughout the 1940's. Little was seen of the 'organic' working class leadership which was to characterise the PE labour movement of the 1950's, until about 1948. William Ballinger, husband of Margaret Ballinger and organiser of the 'Friends of Africa', a liberal society concerned with african workers, was instrumental in using the Wage Board to bring about a raise in african wages. Even he was to note with regret that unions were often started in the aftermath of Wage Board determinations, and were not usually instrumental in making gains for the workers.¹⁴

Below, the various strands which made up this nascent african labour movement will be outlined: The Wage Board determinations of the early 1940's; Max Gordon and the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) role in 1941; the Ballingers' and Tshiwula's attempts to organise general and railway unions, and the liberal and communist opposition to this; the role of the T&LC; Mohammed Desai, CNETU and the Municipal Workers Union. The emergence of the 'new' unions among food, textile, laundry and dockworkers in the post-war period will be examined in the following chapter.

3.2.1. Wage Board determinations

Freund's point that wages in coastal towns were higher than those inland in the interwar years was true in the case of PE and Cape Town (see Chapter 1). The relatively high wages paid to unskilled labour in PE are illustrated in William Ballinger's report of 1938 which shows that wages for african workers in industry and trade were consistently higher in PE than in East London, Durban/Pietermaritzburg, Pretoria and the Witwatersrand between 1924 and 1935; the only area that paid higher wages throughout the same period was the Western Cape.¹⁵

William Ballinger noted in an article in 1941 that the Wage Boards tended to fix wages for unskilled workers in large industrial centres at higher levels than most Industrial Councils. For example, prior

to 1939 the Wage Board had fixed wages for unskilled workers in the distributive and commercial trades at minimums of £1 10s per week (£6 per month) in Cape Town and PE, and £1 7s 6d per week (£5 10s per month) in Johannesburg. At the same time, small towns like Kingwilliamstown had minimum wage levels of 18s per week, rising to £1 a week after 12 months.¹⁶

The Wage Board investigation into the commercial and distributive trades in 1939/40 fixed the minimum wage at £6 10s per month in PE and Cape Town, again slightly higher than Johannesburg which was fixed at £6. For PE and Cape Town this did not represent much of an improvement, as the minimum would "continue to be what it has tended to be", but no objections to the award were raised in PE and Cape Town. Wages in Durban, East London, Uitenhage and Pietermaritzburg continued to be substantially lower.¹⁷ Another Wage Board investigation was requested in 1942 by the African Commercial and Distributive Workers Union in Johannesburg, and was supported by the Eastern Province Commercial and Distributive Workers Union in PE.¹⁸

The Wage Board enquiry into unskilled wages in 27 trades in PE in 1939/40 was the next major development, which was to establish a general minimum wage for African workers in PE. In examining the gains made by those who made representations to this Wage Board investigation, it is important to note that while it resulted in an initial limited improvement in wage levels (which had previously been set by the 'gentleman's agreement' of 1929), it may have in effect kept wages low until the end of the decade when some unions were more effectively able to challenge them.

A.Z. Tshiwula's African General Workers Union (AGWU - see below) asked the Department of Labour to appoint William Ballinger to the Wage Board, but the Secretary for Labour preferred Ballinger as a witness; so he told Tshiwula to withdraw the union's request, asking Ballinger to be their spokesman instead, as with the commercial and distributive trades. The T&LC assisted in financing Ballinger to come to PE for the board hearing.¹⁹

The EPTC initially called for a minimum wage of £8 per month for all unskilled workers. The AGWU memo, presented by Ballinger, called for a more moderate sum of £6 10s per month, to bring wages in other trades up to the level of the commercial and distributive. The EPTC later withdrew its recommendation to fall in line with the AGWU request.

The intention of those making representations to the Wage Board - including Ballinger on behalf of the AGWU, and the EPTC on behalf of unskilled workers in PE generally - was to establish minimum wages not less than those established by the commercial and distributive trades Wage Determination. They failed: the employers put up the argument that higher minima should not be established in PE and Cape Town than in other centres; and the recommendations gazetted in

October 1940 provided for a scale of £1 4s 10d to £1 7s per week (£4 19s 4d to £5 8s per month) - as against the commercial and distributive's £6 10s per month. Despite objections to the recommendations, the employers' fear of being undercut by Durban (where wages were much lower) held. The argument of the workers' representatives in opposition to this was that Durban wages should not be a basis for comparison, as the majority of the african workforce in Durban lived in the 'reserves'; while in PE, the majority of unskilled workers lived in town with their families. They either had no stake in the reserves, or retained some contacts but maintained their families in town. A 'family wage' was thus needed. The employers argument that competition from Durban - especially at the port and in the wool industry - was fierce, proved to be the deciding factor;²⁰ and the recommendations came into force in May 1941.²¹

The 'union' recommendations were supported in theory by the Interdepartmental Committee of Inquiry Concerning Economic, Health and Social Conditions of Natives in Urban Areas, the government commission of 1941. Evidence to the commission in Port Elizabeth revealed that transport and rent costs were too high in relation to wages paid; and that africans were malnourished. Evidence from the City Council confirmed that 80% of the africans employed in the PE municipal area were resident with their families in town; and that the only seasonal fluctuation in the labour market concerned workers in the wool trade.²²

The moderate nature of the demands presented by those claiming to represent african workers is further illustrated by the fact that the Medical Officer of Health for PE estimated that the minimum living wage for an african family of five in PE was £6 12s 2d per month. This figure represented the essential minimum, and was based on pre-war costs, without taking into account the increase in food and fuel prices.²³

The result of the above two Wage Board determinations - despite the failure of the latter one to bring wages in line with the former - were seen by those who gave evidence as an important improvement for unskilled workers in PE. Ballinger called them "an advance towards a living wage for africans which must be the objective of wage regulation in SA".²⁴ He claimed that despite the lack of african trade-union organisation, the Wage Board determinations had resulted in an improvement in conditions for PE's workers "to a greater extent, over a wider field and in a shorter space of time than in any other centre in the union." These were brought about through Wage Board activity "inspired by whites", including the PE City Council, the Friends of Africa, and the PE branch of the Labour Party. PE would soon be able to claim that most industries were regulated either by Industrial Council agreements or Wage Determinations. The minimum wages established of £1 4s to £1 12s 6d per week were "the highest minima so far established in the Union".²⁵ The

exception was the SAR&H, where wages were still 2s 6d to 3s 9d per day, in comparison with wages in the private sector which were being established at around 5s per day.

By 1942 Ballinger was having some problems with the Wage Board determinations. The Interdepartmental Committee on Health, Social and Economic Conditions of Urban Natives had found that £7 14s was the minimum living wage for a family of five in any of the larger urban areas. Most africans were experiencing a gap between wage levels and the cost of living. The more recent Wage Determinations had proved disappointing, setting wages for unskilled workers less than the level set by the commercial and distributive trade in 1940, except for Cape Town which had set wages of 40s to 45s per week for Municipal workers - 10s higher than the best wages for unskilled labourers set by other Wage Determinations. The unevenness in the Wage Determinations had also created problems, setting wages at 18s to 22s for Durban and Pietermaritzburg, 27s to 30s for PE, and 40s to 45s for Cape Town. The Wage Boards also took a long time; taking the ability of industry to pay into account, and taking two years to set minima, the cost of living had often risen above the levels set by the Wage Boards.²⁶

Friedman's analysis, that unions in the 1930's were dependent on particular individuals and reliant on the Wage Board, applies particularly well to PE in the 1939-1942 period.²⁷ While gains for african workers were certainly made through the use of the Wage Boards, they proved to be short-lived as the cost of living rose after the war. The wages achieved by the Wage Board determinations were cold comfort to african workers in PE in a situation where they still fell far below the family living level.

Once again, the problem of the 'conditions of reproduction' of african labour become clear: the distinguishing feature of PE's african working class was its permanently urbanised status, and their priority was for securing a wage which could support a family, without the support, however limited it may have been, of rural subsistence. In this respect PE was at a disadvantage compared with other industrial centres, especially Durban/Pietermaritzburg. While african labour was employed primarily in unskilled positions, there being a large supply of white^{and} coloured labour to draw on for more skilled jobs, there was little incentive for capital to acknowledge the advantages of this permanent african labour force, and provide it with training. At the same time, the relatively high cost of unskilled labour in PE meant that certain industries were increasingly to favour other industrial areas - Durban in the case of footwear, and the Border area in the case of textiles, where cheap labour was ensured by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). While wages for unskilled labour were not sufficient, in PE, to ensure the reproduction of the family, the structurally weak position of the african workforce made organisation demanding improvements in wages difficult, as unskilled workers were easily replaced.

3.2.2. A.Z. Tshiwula and the Ballingers: initial organisation

The initial two trade union organisations of african workers since the demise of the ICU in PE were organised among railway and harbour workers, and among general workers, by A.Z. Tshiwula. He was an educated and aspirant petty-bourgeois african politician in PE, a lawyers' clerk, liberal in outlook, extremely suspicious of communists, and wary of the ANC although he was a member. His participation in the New Brighton Advisory Board in the 1940's was to come into conflict with ANC policy. He was Margaret Ballinger's electoral agent in the Native Representative Council elections of 1937, and was paid a stipend by her which enabled him, encouraged by William Ballinger, to involve himself in trade union work. William Ballinger's interest in african labour no doubt extended itself particularly to PE because of his wife's electoral constituency of africans being the Eastern Cape. She was to be re-elected as 'native representative' in parliament for this area from 1937 until the system was scrapped in 1960. 'Friendly relations' existed between Margaret Ballinger and the EPTC, which assisted in organisation 'of sorts' of SAR&H workers before 1939. Ballinger claimed that workers turned to the Association (Friends of Africa) for assistance "not only in Cape Town and Johannesburg where coloureds have given the lead, but in PE, Uitenhage and East London where africans have led the process of organisation."²⁸

The African General Workers Union was formed by Tshiwula after Margaret Ballinger's 1937 election campaign, under the direction of William Ballinger. Mr Ballinger then presented the case of the AGWU to the Wage Board investigation into unskilled workers in the Commercial and Distributive trades, as outlined above.²⁹ The union led a 'precarious existence', according to its advisor William Ballinger. It relied initially on reclaiming wages after the determinations; Tshiwula reported that the union was "being successful in recovering sums of arrears wages for members under Determination 70 (for Commercial and Distributive Trades), from 2 to 20 pounds", in cases where the employers had failed to implement the determination in January 1941. The Department of Labour was co-operating with the union in enforcing the Wage Determination, he reported, and the union's success in this regard was encouraging an interest in unions among other workers in PE.³⁰

The limits of this strategy were recognised by Ballinger, as he noted that african trade union organisation "seems likely to follow rather than to precede wage regulations", and that trade union organisers failed to establish themselves as negotiators of agreements, appealing for Wage Determinations instead.³¹ These comments are interesting in the light of Hirson's allegation that the Ballingers intended to channel african union organisation into this 'reformist' path, rather than building strong unions which could act on their own initiative.³² This may have accounted for the Ballingers' opposition to Max Gordon's visit to PE (see below); however, it may also have reflected

a concern for building local trade union leadership. Whatever the Ballingers' intentions, William was proved correct in his analysis of reliance on Wage Determinations and the failure to develop strong local leadership during the war years.

This was illustrated in another instance of attempted union organisation: A Mr Duna, another of Margaret Ballinger's supporters, attempted to organise a Domestic Servants League in 1943. He appealed to her for financial assistance as he could not pay the office rent, and had no telephone; members would not pay their subscription fees, and they could not hold meetings because of the black-out. Moreover, an attempt to get a Wage Board Determination for domestic workers had failed. Mrs Ballinger sensibly refused to assist, believing that such organisations should be self-sufficient.³³

The Ballingers' essentially liberal attempts to stimulate trade union organisation were met with hostility by other liberal elements of PE society. R.P. Hannam, the leading light of the New Brighton Benevolent Society and later the Joint Council of Europeans and Natives in PE, was to write to Margaret Ballinger in 1944:

For heaven's sake drop your trade union ideas for the natives. You are twenty years ahead of the time and you are going to make bags of trouble, and you are going to do your friend, the Bantu, a tremendous injury because the remedy you propose to supply is undoubtedly worse than the disease you set out to cure.³⁴

His chief problem seemed to be the influential position of Mohamed Desai, who had come into his own after Max Gordon left him in control of a number of the newly-formed unions in 1942 (see below). He ended the letter "I know you won't listen to me and will have it your own way. Well, good luck to you."³⁵

The Ballingers and the Gordon/Desai groups were certainly not close; yet they tended to avoid interference with one another, with William Ballinger warning Tshiwula not to concern himself with Desai's affairs. During the rent struggles of 1945 he wrote to Tshiwula:

It was inevitable that Desai's efforts on behalf of the 'coloured' and non-European who have been disenfranchised should complicate the position in New Brighton...but you must not get tangled up in Desai's troubles, and unless his activities react on Africans you must not take sides against him.³⁶

On occasion the Ballingers assisted attempts of the 'radicals' at union organisation; for example, William Ballinger intervened in the Boxes and Shooks dispute, arising from the 1942 strike when

Gordon was in PE (see below). Ballinger arranged an interview between Desai (secretary of the union) with the Minister of Labour, and Desai requested the Minister to appoint an arbitrator in terms of War Measure 145.³⁷ And despite the Ballingers' opposition to 'outside' interference in PE, it was claimed that Ballinger used part of his SAIRR grant to pay Max Gordon for organising 'various groups of Native workers'.³⁸

On other occasions, however, the Ballingers' liberal agenda came into sharp conflict with the views of the socialists Gordon and Desai - these are illustrated best in the case of the organisation of railway workers, outlined below.

The Ballingers' main contribution was to obtaining the initial Wage Determinations at the beginning of the 1940's; and their intervention did not lead to lasting union organisation of african workers.

3.2.3. Railway and harbour workers

The SAR&H had been exempted from the 'gentleman's agreement' among employers of unskilled labour in PE in 1929; and it was unaffected by the Wage Determinations for unskilled labour of 1940 and 1941. Pay reductions of between 5% and 20% in the 1932 depression had not been restored to pre-depression levels by 1939.³⁹ In 1938 a deputation was sent consisting of Native Representatives in Parliament, and the T&LC, to the General Manager of the Railways, to complain about the 'deplorably low wages'.⁴⁰ Where specific wage rates for the PE area were laid down, the minima in other industries were sometimes higher than the maximum paid by the SAR&H. However, in line with general trends, railway wages were lower in PE than in Cape Town, but higher than in Johannesburg or Durban. Wages for unskilled labour on the railways in 1937 were as follows:

Durban:	1s 8d - 2s 4d per day
Johannesburg:	2s 0d - 2s 9d per day
Port Elizabeth:	2s 9d - 3s 6d per day
Cape Town:	3s 6d - 4s 0d per day ⁴¹

Wages on the railways in PE were therefore in some cases half of that paid by the private sector, as the private sector was establishing a minimum wage of around 5s per day. Conditions were 'deplorable', and industrial trouble threatened; the Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) which had been introduced - 2s 6d per month for unmarried, 5s per month for married labourers, was insufficient to meet the cost of living.⁴²

The COLA was a compulsory allowance paid by employers to supplement the income of workers, introduced by the government to supplement wages during the war years when prices of basic foodstuffs rocketed. It was introduced in terms of War Measure 43 of 1942, but after the war it was deemed necessary to maintain the compulsory payment of COLA. Employers were in some instances to use the COLA payment as an excuse for keeping wages low - as in the example of municipal workers in Chapter 4.

By 1941 the SAR&H Workers Union (Non-European) with headquarters in Cape Town, had been established. In a letter to Members of Parliament they explained that 8s per day was the minimum required to bring up a family, yet the railways paid 2s per day in rural areas. Increases of 2d, 4d and 6d had been granted to 16 000 of the black railway workers, but the remaining 37 000 had been granted no increase. Moreover, travel concessions granted to workers applied only to those who worked at least 15 days per month; whereas the majority of the casual workers were able to obtain work for only 12 days per month.⁴³ The system of casual (i.e. day to day) employment was to be one of the key issues around which railway workers organised in the following decade.

In the same year, evidence to the government Commission of Enquiry into Conditions of Natives in Urban Areas by the Mayor of Port Elizabeth revealed the extent to which the SAR&H set wage levels for other industries. Other employers resented the exemption of the SAR&H from the Wage Determinations; the mayor said that

it was the opinion of the City Council and large employers of Native labour in this city that while the Government introduced legislation forcing employers to pay higher wages to Natives, the Government itself was exempt. He said that the Government was the largest employer of labour, and should set an example for the rest of the country. The government was the worst employer of labour, and he gave particulars of the wages paid by the railway administration ...which were below the rates paid by private employers.⁴⁴

In 1943 the harbour engineer reported to Margaret Ballinger that "the rates of pay are so inferior that I as harbour engineer cannot keep any efficient staff of workers", as he always had the "riff-raff of the market".⁴⁵ The labourers had to wade in filthy mud up to their waists, but no special allowance was paid for such work. Other problems, which affected both railway workers employed by the SAR&H, and labourers employed on the docks by the private stevedoring companies, were the use of white foremen (instead of the 'native induna' system used elsewhere); the problem of housing, with the SAR&H wanting the PEM to build sub-economic hostels in New Brighton for railway workers, in effect to 'subsidise' low wages; and the casual status of the majority of workers which left them with very few rights.

The Ballingers took particular interest in the wages of SAR&H workers, and encouraged organisation there. While organisation 'of sorts' existed in 1937, William Ballinger claimed that he had strengthened this organisation in his periodic visits to PE in connection with the Wage Board investigations. In 1939 he reported that he had been assisted by the Leather Workers Union in meeting the executive of the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union (SAR&H WU), a branch of the registered union with headquarters in Cape Town and a branch in Johannesburg. His problem with the union was that the executive was made up of coloured workers, and the union did "not appear to pay sufficient attention to the incorporation within its ranks of African Native Railway and Harbour workers, who are by far the largest section of the work force."⁴⁶ Ballinger also noted that the union was involved in a 'feud' with another union with a similar name in Cape Town. He noted that these seemed to be ideological differences around the position of white officials, and the political status of the unions - whether 'reformist with no political outlook', or 'communist adherents of Stalin'; and commented with scorn "in the meantime while these European Stalin and ~~Trotsky~~ ^{Trotsky} adherents make propaganda for their ideologies, within these non-European trade unions the parlous conditions in regard to wage rates and conditions of employment for non-European railway workers in particular is temporarily forgotten and unity is a mirage."⁴⁷ The one gain obtained was a pension scheme of sorts for black railway workers, brought about with the revision of the Railway and Harbours Pensions Amendment Act of 1941 which extended pensions and travel benefits to black staff; but conditions remained 'deplorable' and he saw the necessity of a national union of railway workers.⁴⁸ He felt that it was difficult for an 'outsider' to intervene in the divisions within the unions, but suggested that the unions in Cape Town, PE, East London, Durban and Johannesburg should be autonomous branches with a co-ordinating general secretary who would arrange four national meetings a year to review national questions.⁴⁹

A SAR&H memo in 1942 argued against the recognition of african workers unions, on the grounds that the black staff, all unskilled, were divided between coloureds, africans and indians, and between migrants and urban workers; that it was illegal for african workers to join unions; and that they had limited experience of trade unions and collective bargaining. The unions were organised by 'professional agitators' rather than workers, and there were divisions between the unions. They proposed that there should be an investigation into the present unions, and one union for each racial group excluding africans, who were not 'employees' in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act (IC Act), and who should work under the Induna system. Margaret Ballinger commented that the difference between urban and rural african workers was overemphasized, given the rapid urbanisation and detribalisation taking place; and that the government had acceded to african worker organisation: there were now more than fifty such unions of african workers, which were 'de facto' recognised. If african workers were excluded from the IC Act, she argued, the government services were not prevented from making their own industrial reconciliation

arrangements. She proposed that there be one national union, registered and recognised, for all 'non-european' workers; the existing branches would provide the foundations, and shop stewards should be recognised rather than indunas.⁶⁰ Despite this progressive position, the Ballinger's involvement in supporting Tshiwula as organiser of the railway workers was to cause division and ultimately weaken the position of the railway workers in Port Elizabeth.

Tshiwula organised the african railway workers into a union in 1943, and by January 1944 it was registered and a part of the SAR&HWU (NE) with its head office in Cape Town. The systems manager of the railways wrote to Tshiwula in January 1944 inquiring as to the status of the union. He said that they could not negotiate with the union as it was "not organised exclusively by railway servants", and that its standing "as a representative body still needs to be determined". He inquired as to whether it had applied for registration, and whether it was affiliated to the SAR&H Workers Union with Head Offices in Cape Town, or the Railway and Harbour Workers Union (PE) whose registration had been cancelled that same month, or the National Non-European SAR&H Workers Union, which was registered to represent coloureds. Tshiwula clarified that his union had joined the Cape-Town based union in November 1943 at their conference. It would seem that the coloured workers previously organised were members of the 'coloured' union in competition with the SAR&H WU.⁶¹

Tshiwula claimed that the management were 'sympathetic' to the union, and stopped convict labour after he wrote to them; and that they recognised the union after Margaret Ballinger intervened with the Minister of Transport.⁶²

Lodge, emphasising the strength of communist influences on african trade unions in PE, writes that

The communists were also successful in reducing the influence of Tshiwula among railway workers, and by 1944 he had to content himself with leading a white-collar staff association.⁶³

While Lodge is correct that the CPSA gained considerable influence among railway workers (A.P. Mati, one of the 'veteran' trade unionists in PE and a communist, was at one time secretary of the union)⁶⁴ the outcome was not as he portrayed it. While Tshiwula certainly lost influence, the CPSA was not successful in building a union more able to represent the interests of the workers.

The SAR&H administration's strategy was to recognise the newly-formed union on condition that it amended its constitution and became a Staff Association. This was a national strategy on the part of the management, clearly aimed at crushing the newly formed black unions. The SAR&HWU had been set up in 1937, and in 1944 sent a memo to the Ballingers on the problem of the staff

associations. The management had employed people to look into the question of establishing staff associations, and they travelled around the country 'disrupting unions.' The union expressed alarm at this 'company unionism', and sent a delegation to the Minister of Transport. He stated that the policy of the SAR&H was one of administration-approved constitutions of non-political unions with no affiliations to any other trade union bodies. The unions should be dissolved and substituted with regional staff associations, split on racial lines. The staff associations were then given facilities as 'bait'. While the unions rejected these proposals at their 1944 conference, the administration arranged another conference where the staff association was 'foisted' on the workers.⁵⁵

In Port Elizabeth, the communist-led union set up in opposition to Tshiwula was forced to amalgamate with the staff association, despite vigorous opposition. Tshiwula and the Ballingers supported the management's strategy, presumably under the misconception that any sort of recognition would result in better conditions for workers than existed at the time. When the East London branch of the union asked for assistance from Margaret Ballinger in resisting the attempts of management to set up a staff association, she responded that they were under communist influence; she felt they should accept recognition under the terms proposed by management, and be 'non-political'.⁵⁶

Tshiwula described how a Mr Sonwabo had set up the alternative union, assisted by A. Louw, general secretary of the Cape Town union (a communist according to Tshiwula) who came to PE "and tried to put a wedge between the rank and file,...[but] has so far not succeeded"; although "the story is long", he summarises, "we had to battle with him until we smashed him by a big majority".⁵⁷ In June 1944 the two unions amalgamated, and the 'Sonwabo group' had to deliver its books and assets to Tshiwula's office. Three african shop stewards - all active members of the CPSA - failed to bring in their collectors' books. Despite attempts by *The Guardian*, the CPSA newspaper at the time, to build the communist-led union, Tshiwula claimed "We don't care a bit what the Guardian published against us. Our people don't read the Guardian, very few of them do."⁵⁸

Once the association was established, Tshiwula wrote to the manager, describing their problems which were mainly financial. They had complied with the amended constitution, and abolished an entrance fee of 1s per member and reduced subscriptions from 1s to 6d monthly; they hoped that stop-orders would be introduced shortly. He wanted stop-orders without the written consent of the workers because they were illiterate. He complained that some of the members were being "deluded by the propaganda of the local Communist Party, because most of the coloured workers are attached to this Party and they keep on disturbing our african members who are unfortunately less intelligent and less literate".⁵⁹ He requested a closed shop for the association, as most of the

black foremen and sorters were not members and were opposed to the staff association; they discouraged the rank and file from joining because they "believe the Communist propaganda".⁶⁰ The staff association made demands for travel facilities for the organiser of the association; transport allowances, protective clothing, and better housing for workers; the restoration of the sick benefit fund and the issuing of pay envelopes; and - interesting in the light of the dock workers strike in 1948 (see Chapter 4) that black foremen be in charge of hiring casuals. The association pledged itself to the "maximum unity of members and the desired co-operation with the administration in all issues of common interest to its members and is determined to throw off once and for all Communist parasites in the PE harbour."⁶¹

By November the staff association held its first conference in PE. It was opened by the Superintendent of the SAR&H, and the association was recognised by management as the only one which could make representations on behalf of black workers. Some limited improvements were reported: 500 black workers were now permanent in status; pensions had improved; travelling facilities had been granted to the secretary; and convict labour had been reduced. These had occurred in the context of the "arduous task of building the union in the midst of strong opposition."⁶²

The SAR&HWU continued to exist, with the secretary A.S. Mfecane writing to Margaret Ballinger asking for her assistance with the problem of the staff associations, and assuring her that it was a 'company union; "A. Z. Tshiwula is travelling up and down this system with second class free pass offered by the administration to organise the staff association",⁶³ he claimed, but the Ballingers were unsympathetic, despite letters from Louw appealing for assistance, and letters from branches of the union in Addo, Durban and Worcester complaining of intimidation of the union. In 1945 William Ballinger wrote to Tshiwula asking about the strength of opposition to the staff association, and claiming that the SAR&HWU in Cape Town was losing ground. He promised assistance to Tshiwula in administering the association.⁶⁴

The continued influence of the communists was illustrated by Tshiwula complaining in the same year that he could not take up the issue of casual labour, as the 500 'regulars' at the PE harbour had not joined the staff association, preferring to support other unrecognised unions.⁶⁵

The next issue with which the staff association was confronted was the problem of rents. While rent in New Brighton was to be raised through a change from monthly to weekly payments - so that residents paid for 52 instead of 48 weeks of the year - the SAR&H was at the same time instituting a system of monthly payment of workers. Workers, especially railway workers, were understandably unhappy with the rent increase, but the SAR&H manager reported to Tshiwula that

representations to the municipality had been unsuccessful, and that they had refused to make exceptions for railway workers. Mohamed Desai, a CPSA member, was at the forefront of protests against the rent increases, and threatened strike action. Tshiwula reported that "meetings after meetings are held by different sections of the residents when resolutions are passed which contradict each other. We do not want our members to be poisoned by such meetings".⁶⁶ The staff association, under Tshiwula's leadership, took the position that railway workers were happy with the monthly pay system. Tshiwula had to be 'set straight' by William Ballinger who explained to him that all over the country the demand was for weekly pay, as low-paid workers could not afford to wait a month; this was being included in all wage determinations. Ballinger's attempts to influence the association were straightforwardly put when he wrote

May I again make it clear that your agitation relative to weekly rents should concentrate on:
1. No weekly rents as long as wages are paid monthly. 2. If weekly wages granted then weekly rents to be assessed on the basis of annual total divided by 52.⁶⁷

He went on to chide Tshiwula for addressing the System Manager as 'your obedient servant'. Even if Ballinger realised at this point that he had 'backed the wrong horse', the chances of building a strong union with bargaining power on the railways in PE had passed, and the staff association grew in strength relative to the independent union - although it had little power to improve anything for the workers.

In 1946 Margaret Ballinger wrote to Tshiwula, Secretary of the SAR&H Non-European Staff Association that

I am very glad to know that things are going so well with your organisation. Conditions of non-Europeans on the railways are certainly improving.⁶⁸

Tshiwula responded that

the railways are doing their best to meet us half-way in all our demands...My old opponents begin to realise that the Staff Association is the proper channel that can make proper demands for non-european workers. They are all joining our ranks and are becoming faithful colleagues.⁶⁹

In 1947 Tshiwula investigated the question of unemployment insurance on behalf of the staff association, and produced a paper called *Ndavela* where he published things like Margaret Ballinger's speech on the railways in the budget debate in parliament. He complained about the lack of remuneration for trade union work and the time it took, but his main concerns seemed to be

issues like the New Brighton Advisory Board and the royal visit to PE. The CID raided the office of the association to ascertain their relationship to the CPSA, and Tshiwula feared that they would be 'jumped on' every time the police visited the CPSA offices. At the same time he was an ANC member, attending their conference and fearing the railways would act against him for this; yet at the conference the ANC leaders accused his association of dividing the people, which he put down to 'jealousy'.⁷⁰ At the end of that year he was dismissed from the association because he signed a promisory note on behalf of the association without instructions from his committee. He denied the allegation, but admitted that the management approved of his dismissal because he had invited the Inspector of Labour to 'umpire' at one of the meetings without their knowledge. He claimed that he was not allowed to defend himself at the staff association conference, although 'outside branches' supported him.⁷¹

The following year in 1948 Tshiwula wrote to Mrs Ballinger that he had left the railways and that he was 'fed up' with the Staff Association which was breaking up. "Let us forget the Staff Association", he wrote, "and tell Mr Ballinger to forget it too because I am no longer interested in it".⁷² He claimed that he was still approached by railway workers for advice, but had decided to organise other unions; this was difficult, however, as he could not get offices. He did not get re-employed by trade unions; in 1950 he wrote that he still could not get an office, otherwise he would organise 'some workers in some industries'.⁷³ The Staff Association remained in existence, however, and the President wrote to Margaret Ballinger in 1951 asking for a copy of Hansard - which she refused, saying he must get one from Tshiwula.⁷⁴ Tshiwula then set up an estate agency in 1955, but by 1957 was working at a dry-cleaners, while still maintaining ANC links.⁷⁵ He died in 1958.⁷⁶

3.2.4. Max Gordon and the SAIRR

The role of Max Gordon in establishing industrial unions for african workers in PE is particularly interesting in the light of the claims made by Hirson and Lodge. In 1941, the EPTC requested the assistance of the SA Committee on Industrial Relations - a sub-committee of the SAIRR - in the organising of african trade unions in PE. The response to this request was a proposal to send Max Gordon to PE, which was opposed by the 'Friends of Africa' (the Ballingers) on the grounds that arrangements had been made "for a local African to devote his full time to trade union organisation. They considered it unnecessary and undesirable to send an outside person to PE".⁷⁷ The committee confirmed that he was needed by writing to the EPTC, Mr Tshiwula (the Ballingers' 'local African'), and Mr Kaplan (a lawyer who was legal adviser to the EPTC) who had requested Gordon's help. Saffery, secretary of the SAIRR, enquired personally in PE and spoke to Solly Sachs who was in PE at the time; they both attended a meeting with the secretary of the EPTC and

others. Following these consultations, Saffery ignored the Ballingers' objections, and decided to send Gordon to PE, to work under the supervision of an "Advisory Committee on Non-European Trade Union Organisation."⁷⁸

Gordon was in PE from 18 January to 3 April 1942. The situation he found in January was two unions existing 'on paper'; presumably these were Tshiwula's AGWU and the railway workers union; but "actually they were almost moribund and had to be completely reorganised". The advisory committee collected funds, set up a central trade-union office, bought equipment, printed handbills and leaflets, and held meetings. Gordon, however, was clearly central to the initiative, and "did the detailed work of five unions without assistance" while he was trying to find and train suitable secretaries. By the time he left, there were 'useful' committees functioning in all the unions established, two full-time secretaries had been found, and the unions were "practically self-supporting" by mid-March, according to his reports.⁷⁹

These unions included the EP Commercial and Distributive Workers Union, with a membership of 92 out of a potential 1 200; the Wool, Hide and Skins Workers Union, with a membership of 328 out of a potential 1 500; and the Boxes and Shooks Workers Union, which had been organised since November 1941. This union embarked on a strike while Gordon was in PE, and he "was called in by the workers, to try and settle the dispute as none of the Union's officials were available. The secretary and other officials were all at work, not one of them being employed in the industry." Gordon negotiated a return to work pending an arbitration under the emergency regulations (presumably War Measures), "on the understanding that the workers would get a 2s 6d per week increase". A new committee was elected of officials (except the Secretary) from workers in the industry; and membership rose from 150 to 300. Management was to be approached for deduction of subscriptions and a closed shop agreement with the union, after all members signed stop-orders. The demands of the workers were drawn up, and when Gordon left PE a memorandum was in the process of being formulated to send to arbitration. A Non-European Engineering Workers Union was also formed; it was planned that the union would include the 600 or so casual workers employed by engineering firms at the docks. There were only 150 permanent workers in the industry. The union organised a membership of 80, and proposed an agreement for the industry to the Minister of Labour, unskilled workers not being covered by any existing agreement or Wage Determination.

The Laundry and Dry-Cleaning Workers Union was launched in March, with a potential membership of 300; and a provisional committee elected of workers in cement factories. Other contacts were made by Gordon in milling, tin and sheet metal industries, and municipal services. It was intended

that the executives of the new unions were to meet regularly and establish a co-ordinating committee to work in co-operation with the Advisory Committee.

None of the above unions were strong, however; their membership was a tiny proportion of the african workforce, and their dependence on a particular individual continued in many cases, with Desai taking up where Gordon left.

The main success story among these newly-formed unions was the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU), which organised 406 out of the 450 workers in the one canning factory in PE. The membership was made up of coloured women and african men, and "a very active committee is functioning and Mr Desai has been elected Secretary". Grievances relating to factory conditions were addressed, and the union was to become part of the Cape Town-based FCWU. This union had negotiated an agreement with the Canning and Packers Association, raising wages from 5d/6d per hour for women/men to 6d/7 ½ d per hour; raising machinists wages from 35s to 50s per week. The problems encountered were that 50% of the workforce were seasonal; and some employers refused to adhere to the agreement. An arbitrator was appointed to settle the dispute (see Chapter 4). The origins of the FCWU in PE are the subject of some argument: Ray Alexander, at the time secretary of the Cape Town-based union, claims that it was on the initiative of the Cape Town office that Gladstone Tshume was asked to assist in the formation of the union; Desai only came in later. Other records indicate that Gordon set the union up, and Desai was immediately elected secretary.⁸⁰ Whatever the truth, it was the one union which survived and developed its own leadership. It was able to do so because it had, on formation, joined the Cape Town union and was to draw for many years on the experience of Ray Alexander, Oscar Mpetha and others.

Reports received from Kaplan, the chairman, and the secretary of the Advisory Committee, as well as from Tshiwula and Gordon, convinced Saffery that Gordon had done "an exceptionally fine job", "laying the foundations for efficient trade union organisation among africans in the area".⁸¹

Meanwhile, a conflict had arisen between Gordon and the PE Department of Labour, which complained that Gordon had 'bypassed' them. Saffery ascertained from Kaplan that Gordon had interviewed the Divisional Inspector of Labour and other officials and informed them of his plans; that he referred complaints to the Department for action; that in two disputes (which he did not cause) one resulting in a work-stoppage, Gordon kept the Department informed of events; that he gave dismissed workers letters to employers demanding leave pay, and referred these cases to the Department when employers failed to respond; and that the manager of the African Canning and Packing Corp. Ltd had shown Gordon and Desai over the factory, and they had requested rubber boots for certain types of work.

After the complaints were received, the Advisory Committee sent a deputation to the Department of Labour, which then denied complaining about Gordon. The Divisional Inspector "indicated that his Department is not only willing to co-operate with african trade unions which have been formed by Mr Gordon, but welcomes their formation, as he considers that they will assist his inspectors in supervising the Determination in respect of unskilled labour."⁸²

In 1942 the SA Committee on Industrial Relations considered a proposal for the training of african trade union officials. This involved two possible methods: the organising of a national course or 'training centre', and the sending of an experienced unionist to areas of 'little activity' to train people 'on the spot'. It was considered that this latter method had been tried already in Max Gordon's trip to PE, and although "Mr Gordon did a very fine piece of work and that the experiment was highly satisfactory and fully justified", the 'on the spot' training was considered to be a problem, as it was a slow method, involving training at the same time as establishing unions. However, where trade-union advisory committees had been set up, such as in PE, these could assist in the selection of 'pupils' for further training, in courses which would run under the joint auspices of the SA Committee on Industrial Relations and the CNETU.⁸³

There is no evidence that the newly-formed PE unions did receive such assistance with further training. The primary reason why the Committee on Industrial Relations did not follow up Gordon's pioneering work was that Saffery resigned from the SAIRR, and the institute ended its programme of active support for african trade unions.⁸⁴ However, the failure to consolidate these new unions also indicated the problem of setting up a number of unions in a short space of time, with few linkages to other trade unions and little administrative 'back-up'. The individualistic style of the trotskyist Max Gordon was repeated by the communist who took over administration of some of these unions - Mohammed Desai.⁸⁵

3.2.5 Mohammed Desai and CNETU

By 1944 Desai was acknowledged by the 'white establishment' to be the communist leader of the black trade union movement. His other position as a City Councillor made him particularly hated by the 'liberal' faction in PE. R.P. Hannam, chairman of the New Brighton Benevolent Society, wrote to Margaret Ballinger that

...he is an Indian, and he is the leader of the trade union movement here among the New Brighton Natives. He is a pure and simple Communist and he is agitating those 22 000 people into being the cause of lots of trouble. Trade unionism is his chief work.⁸⁶

Desai was a particularly interesting character. Hirson claims that the unions founded by Gordon in PE were 'taken over' by Communist Party members during the war.⁸⁷ Desai was clearly one of those referred to; Raymond Mhlaba, who became active in the Laundry Workers Union, was another. While widely known as a communist, Desai's relation with the CPSA was unclear; according to Mhlaba he was a Party member, but his trade union activities did not seem to be part of a more broadly-initiated Party strategy. Certainly by the time the CPSA was banned in 1950 he was no longer consulted by other communists in PE. He worked very much as an individual, and was something of an empire-builder. When Max Gordon left PE in 1942, he left Desai as secretary of two of the newly-established unions - the FCWU and the Boxes and Shooks Workers Union. He was greatly admired in the early days of the FCWU: Lilly Diedericks, the secretary of the FCWU medical fund in the 1950's, did not know Desai but knew of his reputation:

My sister and my mother knew about him. My mum worked with him when she was still working...in the canning factory... He was a sellout in the end. The last I saw him, he was a broken old man. But for his period, when he came up, he came up strongly with the workers. Very strongly. It was just this as they said then, he took money from the union dues. That is where he went wrong. But Desai - you speak to people who were workers when he was in office - they praise him to the hilt. He was one of those chaps who didn't mind what he said - he had the workers behind him. His downfall [was] the financial side of it. But Desai - having heard about him - he was a leader. He had prepared the ground for the other trade unions here in PE with africans. Then, they were not recognised; they couldn't come onto the IC. So they had to be apart, even in negotiations over wages and all that, they couldn't be present. It always had to be the registered trade unions. Like the Food and Canning, which was a registered union - the african workers had to ride on the backs of the registered unions.⁸⁸

Other sources confirm his popularity in New Brighton, where he was active beyond the trade union field: he addressed meetings in New Brighton, and was active in the rent protests of 1945/6 when he was arrested (see Chapter 5).

In 1946, when the EPTC and its rival body the PE and District Local Committee of the SAT&LC were resolving their differences (see Chapter 4), the status of potential affiliates had to be clarified. The acting secretary of the PE and District Local Committee sent a list of the union secretaries to the Johannesburg head office. This list included "Mr M.M. Desai (about 7 unions)" with offices in Queen Street, PE; and the Shoe and Leather Workers with another secretary (a Mr Gory) at the same address. None of these eight unions were affiliates of the T&LC, and application forms for affiliation were enclosed when the secretary wrote back requesting more details of the above unions. No further details are noted, but when a new committee was elected in July 1946 for the

PE District of the T&LC, Gus Coe of the NUDW was vice-chair, and Desai of the FCWU a committee member. At this time the PENEMWU and the Shoe and Leather Repairer Workers Unions had not affiliated, and were urged to do so by the national office; they affiliated in December, and were accepted as well as the Timber Workers Union. The latter had 100 members; the Shoe Union had 36 members, and the PENEMWU 257 members.⁸⁹

Desai then represented the PENEMWU at the T&LC in 1947. He moved that the council protest the proposed Industrial Conciliation (Natives) Bill on the dubious grounds that it would allow "native unions to make agreements which would undercut semi-skilled and skilled workers to the detriment of all". It was agreed to investigate this further, as

we could not allow the Government to interfere in the internal affairs of Unions. It was time we told the Government and Ministers where they 'got off' and we should call a big protest meeting.⁹⁰

In July 1947, although nominated, Desai was not elected onto the T&LC committee. He then played no role in the T&LC until April 1948, when he re-appeared at the AGM representing the FCWU, and was elected onto the committee again;⁹¹ he appealed for unity and called for a May Day meeting, which, although the committee was in sympathy with the idea, "were not optimistic about the support it would receive." It was agreed that a meeting should be held at which Desai, Mr Pillay and a Mr Wanless (if available) would speak. It was at this meeting that Desai appealed for assistance for the laundry workers' strike (see Chapter 4).

By August 1948 he was representing the Laundry Workers Union at the T&LC General meeting. Although the FCWU and the PENEMWU were not represented at the meeting, it was noted by the secretary that Mr Desai had been replaced by another representative of the PENEMWU.⁹² The PENEMWU was at this stage involved in a protracted dispute of its own, and appealed to the Council for help.⁹³ Conflict arose between Coe and the laundry strike support committee as she had refused them permission to use the NUDW duplicator as she was 'afraid of repercussions over the strike leaflets'.⁹⁴ At the same meeting Mr Pillay's credentials as a representative of the Laundry Workers Union on the Executive Committee were challenged. Desai clarified that Pillay was a member of the Bakers Union which was affiliated to the National Union of Bakers; but was also assistant secretary of the CNETU 'at one time' and had been nominated as a representative by the laundry workers. Desai was opposed by other unionists who claimed that Pillay was a baker and not a laundry worker and Pillay's union was not affiliated to the T&LC; that the Laundry Workers Union was not paying affiliation fees, and therefore could not represent other unions which were fully paid up; and that Desai himself had said that the Laundry Workers Union was not functioning and therefore did not have a right to be represented on the committee. Desai then pointed out that

"he did not say it was not functioning but that it was not representative. He had just been asked to submit the names of the Executive Members of his Union to the Department". It was referred to the NEC for a ruling⁹⁶ and the NEC ruled that unions had the right to nominate anyone they liked to represent them.⁹⁶

In 1949 two of Desai's old unions, the Timber Workers Union and the Tinsheet Metal Union, reappeared in T&LC records but disappeared again. FCWU was by then represented by other delegates, and Desai continued to represent the PENEMWU on occasions - although often someone else represented the union.⁹⁷

It becomes clear that Desai, although a communist and a charismatic organiser, had very little organisational base. Personally identified with a range of unions whose influence was very limited during the 1940's, he vacillated between the SAT&LC, onto whose committee he was periodically elected, and claiming to represent the CNETU. Moreover, he clearly had no working relationship with Coe, the other Communist on the T&LC; and in fact it was she who took over the FCWU when he was dismissed.

By 1949 his corruption was apparent. Ray Alexander's intervention in PE ousted Desai and prevented the FCWU from collapsing (see Chapter 4). This occurred at the same time that he came into conflict with the T&LC over the formation of CNETU: extraordinary claims of trade union membership reveal on closer inspection that CNETU consisted of a number of tiny unions, most of them administered by Desai, who was no doubt benefitting from the affiliation fees which each union paid. Confidential correspondence from Alexander, general secretary of the FCWU, to Forsyth, secretary of the T&LC, in which she revealed that the PE branch of the FCWU was "giving us a real headache", asked for Forsyth's opinion of Desai's administration of the union. Forsyth replied that he had spoken to Desai, who revealed his 'disturbing' intention of breaking away from the FCWU and forming a separate organisation. Desai was at the time secretary of about ten unions or branches of unions, all members of CNETU. Forsyth describes CNETU as "a most remarkable set-up". The member unions consisted of the FCWU, the PENEMWU, the National Milling Workers Industrial Union, the SA Tin Workers Union, the National Union of Laundry Employees, and Broom and Brush Workers Union, the Cement Workers Union, The Shoe and Leather Repairers Union, the Mineral Water Workers Union, and the PE Timber Workers Union. All these unions were administered by Desai, and paid CNETU a monthly fee, "presumably for secretarial services". The total was £129 a month, paid to Desai personally. These unions had achieved little since their formation, with the exception of the FCWU and the laundry workers strike of 1948 described in Chapter 4. The whole set-up was considered to be a problem by the T&LC; indeed, many of the unions claimed to be CNETU unions were at the same time affiliates of the T&LC - including the

PENEMWU, FCWU and the Laundry Workers Union; and others which were inactive, like the Timber and Tin workers unions. "How can one person efficiently run all those organisations", said Forsyth, having urged Desai to put his unions in order to avoid criticism. He further told Desai that the T&LC would have launched an investigation if it were not policy not to interfere in the domestic affairs of affiliates.⁹⁸

CNETU's ineffectivity in this period comes out more clearly in an honest letter from CNETU to Margaret Ballinger in 1947. The letter admits that african trade unions are 'not flourishing'; that 'some years ago', progress was made and 'tens of thousands of africans' joined trade unions. Now some of these unions were defunct, and others were struggling for survival. There was a need to reorganise the existing unions, build new unions, and 'place CNETU on a sound footing'. For this they needed a 'technical advisory committee' with the Native Parliamentary Representatives on it.⁹⁹

Problems with Desai's role in the FCWU were not limited to corruption: the weakness of the PE union meant that national negotiations of the union were jeopardised (see Chapter 4).

The PE branch was functioning contrary to the constitution, and Ray Alexander reluctantly took Desai to court.¹⁰⁰ Desai retreated to the NEMWU, where he stayed as secretary over the next decade; but there is no further evidence of CNETU activity in PE. The secretaryship of the FCWU was taken over by Gus Coe, a CPSA member, who found the affairs of the union in an appalling state - with a bank balance of £2 13s 9d. Her experience was largely among white workers, as secretary of the NUDW branch in PE, but she had had a great deal of experience as secretary of the EPTC.¹⁰¹

3.3. Conclusion

The war years were notable for the growth of employment opportunities for african workers in South African industry. While this also applied to PE, the initial attempts at organising african workers into industrial unions in the early 1940's were in most cases not able to provide a basis for lasting organisation. The Wage Board strategy made limited gains in raising wages for unskilled african workers, but workers lost the 'golden opportunity' to consolidate their organisation, and the Wage Board determinations were to work against them later in the decade.

The analysis that the war years saw the high point of african working class organisation, after which it was 'defeated' following the 1946 mineworkers' strike, is not an accurate reflection of

the situation in PE. The numbers involved in the new unions which were established were small, and while Friedman is correct in his analysis that it is better to consolidate a small union than recruit a large number of workers into a weak organisation, it is clear that the estimates of CNETU's strength in PE were grossly exaggerated.¹⁰²

The primary reason for the failure of these unions to consolidate was that those involved in organising african workers either did not attempt to build, or were unsuccessful in building, an african working class leadership in the unions. This was combined with both a lack of administrative capacity, and more importantly, a lack of strong organisation at the factory level. Few of the unions in PE in this period managed to organise the majority of workers at any one factory. This weakness of organisation is further borne out in the unions' dependence on the Wage Board, which as Friedman said, relies on 'experts' to give evidence;¹⁰³ and the inability of the unions to engage in negotiations with the strike weapon being used to reinforce demands. There is little evidence of strike action being taken by the unions formed in PE during the war. Corruption, personal motivations, and ideological conflicts between the liberals, communists and trotskyists who were instrumental in establishing these unions, contributed to this failure.

Notes to chapter 3

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- 28.Saffery Papers, D1, Friends of Africa Report, September 1939.
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- 31.*Ibid.*
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- 33.Margaret Ballinger papers, University of the Witwatersrand, BCZB 81/76 - 81/98, B 2.5.30, letter from Duna to MB, 15/3/43.
- 34.Margaret Ballinger papers, *op. cit.*, B 2.5.39, letter from Hannam to MB, 7/3/44.
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90.*Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of special meeting of affiliates, PE and Uitenhage district committee, 22/5/47.

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92.*Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Secretary's report to General Meeting, 26/8/48.

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94.*Ibid.*, Da 4.3, SAT&LC PE&U District Committee, Minutes of General Meeting, 26/8/48.

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98.*Ibid.*, Dc 2.10, SAT&LC correspondence with FCWU, 1949-50.

99.Margaret Ballinger papers, University of the Witwatersrand, BCZB 81/76, B 2.9.2, Industrial Conciliation, correspondence, CNETU to MB, 13/2/47.

100.Interview, Ray Simons, 1/2/91.

101.Interview, Gus Coe, 14/2/91.

102.Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

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CHAPTER 4

THE 'NEW UNIONS' IN THE LATE 1940'S AND EARLY 1950'S

4.1. The post-war context in the PEU

Analyses of the South African labour movement which stress the strength of black labour organisation during World War II, and understand the post-1946 period as a 'defeat' for working-class interests, cannot be applied to the african working-class in Port Elizabeth. As shown above, initial attempts to organise african trade unions during the war years were not to build lasting organisation with an african working class leadership. The immediate post-war period was crucial in the 'making' of this working class: it was in this period that a new style of militant african trade-unionism emerged.

As outlined in Chapter 1, PE's second big industrial growth spurt took place in the immediate post-war period, from 1945-1950. It was at this time that african workers were drawn into manufacturing industry on a large scale, for the first time into semi-skilled positions. This occurred specifically in the food and textiles industries; by 1949/50 textiles was the largest employer of labour in the PEU area, accounting for some 31% of all industrial labour. Food accounted for around 14%. (see Figure 6). It was in these two sectors that african and coloured workers entered both unskilled and semi-skilled positions; and it was in the food sector, for a short period, where african women were employed on a large scale. By the end of the 1950's, however, both these industries had declined in importance relative to the motor industry - which was still employing a high proportion of white labour. This, then, was the period when the african working class took advantage of its relatively greater influence in secondary industry, and organised strong industrial unions. While there was some measure of repression in this period, the full force of apartheid policies did not hit PE until the mid-1950's; and by this stage the structural position of african workers in these industries was weakening.

The new style of african labour organisation which emerged in PE in the post-war period coincided with the development of militant community politics, which began to be expressed at the end of the war, but which after 1948 revolved increasingly around the threats which apartheid posed to the stability of the african working class (see Chapter 5). The new style of the unions which developed was one that was directed by conscious political intentions; and one in which the linkages between political and community struggles were to emerge as the dominant forces. The strong organisations of african workers were those which maintained close linkages to the ANC and the CPSA/SACP. This chapter will analyse the development of this tradition by looking at the

organisation of african workers in four sectors: stevedoring, laundries, food and canning, and textiles.

4.2. The role of the SAT&LC in the late 1940's

The role of the Eastern Province Trades Council (EPTC) is of significance to this study of african trade unions, as the registered unions had a substantial advantage in terms of legitimacy and resources which, on occasion, they used to assist the emergent organisation of african workers.

The Eastern Province Trades Council, an informal body formed in 1937, was an ineffectual and deeply divided organisation for much of its existence. It had never become part of the SAT&LC, as some of its members were SAT&LC affiliates and some were Cape Federation of Trade Union (CFTU) affiliates; in addition it had become divided into nationalist (FAK) and 'non-racial' factions in 1939/40 as outlined in Chapter 3. This division, which became to some extent a division between skilled, racist white unions, and semi-skilled non-racial unions, eventually split the SAT&LC completely in the 1950's.

The EPTC was not very active in the early 1940's, and in 1945 a group of unions decided to split from the EPTC and form a District Committee of the SAT&LC, in line with the Western Cape where a District Committee had been formed. The argument given was that "The SAT&LC was a very powerful body with legal as well as moral standing", while "The EPTC was not a registered body". The EPTC was "not defunct, but was in financial difficulties"; the issue had been raised for discussion at a meeting of the EPTC but ruled out of order. The Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers (ASW), the SA Typographical Union (SATU) and the Building Workers Industrial Union (BWIU) had disaffiliated before the last meeting of the EPTC, and the SA Electrical Workers Association (SAEWA), the SA Association of Municipal Employees (SAAME) and the National Union of Distributive Workers (NUDW), "as well as the majority of the Non-European Unions had pulled out since." There was thus a need for co-ordination between the 'major unions' in PE which had disaffiliated from the EPTC.¹

At a further meeting of union representatives in October 1945 an interim committee of the District Committee was elected. The unions represented were the Plumbers Association, the ASW, the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), the SAEWA, the NUDW, the SAAME, and Mr Desai representing five 'non-European' unions: FCWU, PENEMWU, Mineral Water Workers Union, Tin and Sheet Metal Workers Union, and Shoe and Leather Repairers Union. A number of unions had responded in writing to the proposal to establish a District Committee: SATU was "100% in

support of the suggestion", but the Brewery Employees Union referred the matter to their Cape Town office and were not in favour, considering the EPTC to be "functioning in a satisfactory manner"; and the Motor Industry Employees Union were not in favour, being affiliates of the EPTC. The Garment Workers Union and the Leather Workers Union, two of the strongest PE unions, also held out in favour of the EPTC.²

The majority of members of the interim District Committee were white unionists of the old school; but Gus Coe, a CPSA member, was elected, as was Mohamed Desai.³ The committee then requested the national office of the SAT&LC to send down an organiser with the necessary powers to formalise the establishment of the District Committee.⁴

De Vries, Secretary of the SAT&LC, came down to PE in February 1946. While supporting the formation of the District Committee, he could not offer finances for an organiser from the National office; and he urged that the remaining EPTC unions, to which he had spoken, be brought into the District Committee in the interests of trade union unity.⁵ De Vries reported later in 1946 that the interim District Committee was "not functioning effectively", and the SAAME and SATU were not active; the meeting he had attended in February had been 'unsuccessful' as so few unionists had come. The EPTC represented 11 unions, and he considered it unviable to have two local trade union centres; however, the EPTC was "not representative of the local trade unions", and moreover

It had failed....to live up to trade union principles. The organisation of the lower income groups of unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled labour had not been considered dealt with. The field that had to be tackled was the organisation of the weaker exploited and inarticulate labour in this city. It was not a question of pouring oil on troubled waters; it was an active body that was required, and a strong committee was needed in PE.⁶

The unions that had broken away from the EPTC had been the most active unions, and had "chafed at its impotency". There could be "no compromise", and "this committee (*i.e.* the newly formed District Committee) must carry on in the interests of the lower income group and trade union principles and opposed to exploited labour."⁷ These sentiments indicated the pressures beginning to be felt by the organised labour movement from, on the one hand, the increasing conservatism of skilled white workers, and on the other, the fact that african workers could no longer be ignored.

De Vries was successful in bringing the two groups back together; a combined meeting of both was held in August 1946, where it was decided to dissolve both bodies and form (another) Interim Committee with the aim of reconstituting one body. The committee consisted of representatives from the sweet, motor, leather, garment and tramwaymen's unions from the EPTC side; and the distributive, typographical, engineering, electrical and wood unions from the interim District

Committee side. The new committee was extended to cover the Uitenhage area, and until the SAT&LC split in 1951 it operated as the PE and Uitenhage District Committee of the SAT&LC. The divisions remained, however; in 1947 there were indications that the AEU and the SAEWA were not participating actively in the T&LC; their status as craft unions of skilled white workers conflicted with the emphasis on organisation in the T&LC at the time.⁸

The history of the T&LC itself is of little organisational interest to this study, except inasmuch as it dealt with the interests of black workers. As noted above, many of the unions organised coloured workers along with white - notably the Garment Workers Union and the FCWU which came from the EPTC side. Two trends emerged in this latter period of the T&LC. One was the strong influence of Gus Coe, a white communist woman who, while secretary of the NUDW, was also secretary of the T&LC for the period 1947 - 1948. She also played a role in the organisation of textile and chemical workers in this period, and became secretary of the FCWU in 1950. The other was the role played by the other communist on the committee, Desai, who at various stages represented various 'black' unions which had come in from the District Committee side (except for FCWU). Although CNETU formally dissolved in 1955 when SACTU was formed, it had no separate organisational presence in PE in the early 1950's, and the unions which were ostensibly CNETU affiliates were also affiliates of the District Committee of the SAT&LC. The unions in which these two communists were involved were to form the basis of the 'new unions' of african workers in the late 1940's and 1950's.

In 1947 Coe noted at a meeting that the Textile Workers Industrial Union (TWIU) based in Cape Town was organising the 300 or so workers employed at the Uitenhage textile factory. It was agreed that the local committee should assist the workers there, and Coe agreed to write to the TWIU organiser to find out when he would be returning. She reported later that the organiser had come up from Cape Town and had held meetings and 'fixed up their financial organisation'; she would attend an executive meeting of their union. By 1948 Reg September and a Mr G. Kika had replaced two white unionists as delegates from the TWIU to the T&LC in PE - Kika being the first african unionist to represent a union.⁹ September spoke at a general meeting of the T&LC in PE in August, saying that he had come up from Cape Town to organise the textile workers, and "was amazed at the industrial growth of Port Elizabeth", suggesting further organisation in the tyre and motor industries, and motivating for a full-time organiser for the T&LC.¹⁰ The T&LC District Committee supported the new union, and by 1949 was providing office premises for the TWIU.¹¹ J.H. Robertson, also an NUDW unionist who took over from Coe as organising secretary of the T&LC in 1949, provided further assistance in 1950 with the organisation the textile and railway workers.¹² The gains made by the TWIU are outlined below.

Coe also reported that during 1947 a branch of the Chemical Workers Union of Johannesburg had been formed, but so far only 75 workers in two factories had joined. After the union achieved little success, she asked the T&LC committee for permission to approach employers as Secretary of the T&LC to show that she had the backing of other unions, which was agreed.¹³ Hospital workers also approached her for assistance.¹⁴ She and Mr Robertson compiled a list of all the organised and unorganised workers in PE and Uitenhage; and she also initiated a May Day meeting in 1947 in the City Hall.¹⁵ However, as secretary of both the NUDW and the T&LC she carried a large administrative burden; and there were constant complaints to the National Office that they needed additional finances. The Chairman noted that there were complaints (presumably from the national office) about "our inactivity in organising the unorganised", but that there was nobody to perform this task.¹⁶ Again in 1948 it was noted that

the position was very bad here as the workers were crying out for organisation but there was nobody to keep them going once they had been organised...it took at least two years to get a Union properly established and able to look after itself.¹⁷

The PE T&LC also gave support to the Transvaal building workers strike in 1947, which again forced the issue of african workers onto the agenda. African workers were excluded from unemployment insurance because of the wording of the IC Act; and whereas "originally demands had been made for the Africans ...they were advised to exclude them as it might affect their chances of getting a Conciliation Board."¹⁸ The PE T&LC collected money for a Strike Fund to support the building workers,¹⁹ and Mr Desai was to take up the issue of the extension of the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) for africans in PE in the following year, asking the T&LC for assistance.²⁰ Further concern for 'native trade unions' was shown when Coe noted that a "draft proclamation on the so-called protection of natives against people collecting money from them was a threat to the native trade unions", and it was agreed that if the proclamation affected african unions it would be taken up with the NEC.²¹

By 1949 the ANC was calling on the T&LC for 'active support' in the issue of transport to New Brighton, and the T&LC responded sympathetically by submitting a memorandum to the PE Municipality "requesting the Council to bring into existence a reasonable, regular and efficient bus service for the African residents of New Brighton."²² When the national executive of the SAT&LC circulated a memorandum on the cost of living in 1947, the PE District Committee discussed how publicity could be given to this issue. The memorandum noted that the Retail Price Index had risen by 35% for all commodities, and by 41% for food, between 1941 and 1946. The NEC suggested "special relief measures for natives and other needy people particularly in urban areas where drought has created much distress".²³

By the end of 1949 the issue of african workers was splitting the T&LC. The source of this lay in the changing status of african labour: the increased employment of african workers in secondary industry during the war, especially in the food and textile industries in PE; and the rise of the 'new unions' which expressed this situation. Unions such as FCWU and TWIU both began organising african workers into their ranks, and became strong 'non-racial' unions although formally divided into african and non-african sections. Along with this process came conscious attempts by the ANC and the CPSA to build african union organisation, and an african working class leadership began to emerge which expressed different material interests and different ideological affiliations to the traditional white unionists of the T&LC. The dock workers and laundry workers strikes in 1946 and 1948 were to illustrate this new situation, and the tensions they caused within the T&LC were an indication of the different styles of unionism and the political linkages which were to characterise black unions. Although the T&LC did support these strikes, the tensions within the T&LC were apparent. The strikes and the rise of these 'new unions' is described below; here it is to be noted that this was part of a broader process that was affecting the trade union movement nationally, and would result in re-alignments in the 'apartheid era'.

In 1949 it was reported to a special general meeting of the T&LC in PE that a 'Special Conference' in Durban had discussed "our relationship towards the African Worker", which "seemed to be risking solidarity". The conference decided to appoint a sub-committee to look into the question of establishing parallel unions, hoping that "this would stem the tide of other unions from disaffiliating".²⁴ In PE, the Engineering Union and the Typographical Union had disaffiliated by this stage. While this special meeting stressed that unity was important, and that "we are not controlled by any political party"²⁵, attempts to maintain unity were futile. The T&LC was to split up under these pressures in 1951.

4.3. Dock workers: the service sector, solidarity, and the emergence of african leadership

The first indication of the 'new unionism' among african workers, apart from the FCWU which organised mainly 'coloured' workers in the early stage, was the Dock Workers Union dispute of 1945-1946. This union tackled the organisation of one of the most fragmented, exploited and difficult to organise labour forces in PE: the african stevedores. Attempts to organise the SAR&H workers at the harbour and on the railways had begun in the 1940's (see Chapter 4) and the outcome of these struggles are dealt with later in this chapter. The SAR&H maintained a high level of control over wages and conditions of work at the harbour, and set precedents for issues such as racial division of the workforce, non-recognition of african unions, and the setting up of 'dummy'

staff associations. Moreover, the majority of 'labourer' class SAR&H workers were employed on a casual basis, making organisation very difficult.

Similar conditions existed for the stevedores, who were employed by five different private companies at the PE Harbour: Messina Brothers, Coles & Searle Ltd, Union Castle Mail Steamship Co., Palmer Womersley & Co, and Port Elizabeth Stevedoring Co. Workers were employed on a casual basis, as in the SAR&H, and were lucky if they could get employment on sixteen days in a month - or four days a week. Unemployment made the competition for casual daily employment fierce, and the union described a situation where

the foreman comes out to the hungry workers with a pile of tickets and the workers would crowd him and grab tickets out of his hands and he has to kick and use rough methods in order to defend himself. As a result of that the foreman cannot get his choice consequently workers who have been working here for years do not get preference.²⁶

Employers argued that this insecurity of tenure from day to day was an insoluble problem; the shipping business was by its nature spasmodic, and matters were made worse by the mailships which had been regular but were now disrupted because of the war. Labour was needed to discharge and load ships only when they were in dock, and according to law casual labourers must be paid at the end of each day. Registration of casual labour had been tried, but was a 'hopeless failure'.²⁷ In PE, all the stevedoring workers except six were casuals, although 15% of them had worked for the companies for 15 - 20 years.²⁸

The vast majority of the labourers at the docks were african, and wages were low, as for all casual african labour: 6s 4d per day, including COLA. If a stevedore was lucky enough to work for 16 days a month, he would earn £5 1s 4d; while the cost of living in 1942, according to the Smit Economic Committee, was £7 4s 6d for an urban african family of five. The cost of living had increased between 1942 and 1945, and even the government COLA had been increased from 2s to 6s per week for incomes between 20s and 30s; moreover the Smit Committee had budgetted 6s 6d per month for transport, whereas the cost of transport for PE workers had risen to between 11s and 26s per month.²⁹ The employers argued that they had to pay the cost of damages occurring during loading; but the union argued that "the margin between the charges to the importers or exporters and stevedores launch proprietors does allow the employers to pay increased wages."³⁰

These two issues - low wages and casual status - were the two around which organisation of the stevedores took place. Although the Dock Workers Union was founded in 1938, it functioned 'irregularly' during most of the war. The Maritime Union of SA, with headquarters in Cape Town,

assisted in reviving it in 1944, and it became the Dock Workers Branch of the Maritime Union, had a membership of 400 among the stevedores in PE (which was high, given the irregular nature of the work), and 'functioned consistently'. The key person behind the union was Gladstone Tshume, organising secretary, who was later to become secretary of the African Textile Workers Industrial Union (ATWIU). Tshume was a member of the Communist Party; he had been involved in trade union organisation for some time, having corresponded with and met with Ray Alexander in the early 1940's, and asked for assistance in organising african workers.³¹ The sophistication of the memoranda put out during the dispute indicate that this was not a spontaneous strike; and the strategies adopted during the strike indicated a departure from the 'tame' unionism that the Ballingers had promoted among SAR&H workers. The large membership and the focus on action indicated an 'organic' leadership emerging, in contrast to the limitations of Desai's unions, with their scattering of few members across a range of industries.

The dispute began with the submission of a memorandum on wages and conditions of stevedores to the four or five companies involved, as well as to the Labour Department, in April 1945. The memorandum for adequate wages, citing government reports and commissions, argued that poverty, ill-health and inefficiency resulted from the existing wages. The demand was for a 10s per day wage for labourers, excluding COLA; 12s for more skilled workers such as gangway men, stowers and winch-drivers; and 14s for serangs (gang leaders). In addition they demanded an allowance of 1s per day for workers handling commodities demanding protective clothing, and in reconstruction; and an allowance of 1s 3d per day for workers loading and unloading perishable goods in the refrigeration section. These demands were not unreasonable when compared with the wages of stevedores in Cape Town, where all labourers were paid 9s or 10s per day, irrespective of race. Other demands focussed on abolition of the system of hiring casual labour: a rotational system should ensure the workers equal chances of employment; a forty-four hour week should be worked, with Factory Act meal breaks and overtime rates; weekly pay, with all weekly workers getting three weeks paid annual leave; serangs should hire their own gangs, which should consist of not less than nine men; each hold should have a serang, and preference should be given to union members and more experienced workers. In addition, the union demanded recognition of itself and its shop-stewards, and asked that a stop-order system to be introduced.³²

The response to the memorandum by the employers was to refuse to negotiate directly with the union, and refer the matter to the government. The Divisional Inspector of Labour then chaired a meeting on 1 June 1945, at which the employers admitted that wages and conditions were bad but were not prepared to consider the union's demands which were too high; nor were they prepared to put forward their own proposals. At the following meeting on 8 June the SAR&H administration was represented, and their official warned of the dangers of 'non-racialism' in wages

as proposed by the union, as it would have "serious repercussions on the workers employed by his administration." According to the union, at this point "the attitude of the employers immediately hardened, and they refused to accept any responsibility and stated that the matter should be referred to the Government."³³ The result was that the matter was referred to the Department of Labour to apply for an arbitration under War Measure 145. The arbitration was apparently 'blocked' by the Department, and by 18 July the workers, 'exasperated by the continual delays,' threatened strike action if nothing happened within two weeks. This was published in the press, and the union sent a letter to the employers "urging them to send a telegram to the Minister of Labour to expedite matters and to grant concessions provisionally in order to avoid the stoppage of work, pending the arbitration."³⁴

The employers once again refused to take responsibility; the Department obtained information from the union which was necessary "before the Minister [was] able to appoint an arbitrator", and warned the union that "it would not be advisable for the workers to take matters into their own hands". However, when nothing further was heard, the workers came out on strike at the end of the two-week period as planned, on 1 August. Attempts to break the strike by threatening recruitment of scab labour, involving the New Brighton Superintendent, the District Commandant of Police, and the Divisional Inspector of Labour, failed to intimidate the workers. Moreover, interference by the SAR&H, which sent an official from Johannesburg to meet with the Divisional Inspector, and tried to persuade their own labourers to break the strike by working at the docks, also failed: in a significant show of solidarity, given the battles going on in the SAR&H Non-European Workers Union at the time, the workers "did not wish to interfere in the dispute" and "showed ...that they understood the issue at stake and refused to be used for the ends which the officials desired".³⁵ The stevedoring workers stayed out on strike for three weeks.

Ivan Walker, Controller of Manpower, was then flown into PE, and met with the union's executive. He assured them of an immediate award if they returned to work, but the executive insisted on first consulting the workers before taking a decision, as they had no mandate. After consultation, they decided to return to work on certain conditions, which they did the following morning, but were 'not accepted' as the employers claimed that Walker had not accepted their conditions. Walker then persuaded the workers to return to work unconditionally, so that he could start negotiations immediately; he promised to arrange a meeting between the workers' representatives and the employers the following day. The workers returned, but Walker reneged on his agreement: he did not arrange a joint meeting, but drew up an award unilaterally and left the city. The secretary of the union received a copy of the award on the following Monday.

The Award provided for a 9d increase in daily-paid labourers' wages, for those who worked more than three days in a week; but decreased weekly-paid labourers' wages from £2 to £1 10s. No alteration in the hiring system was made, and working hours were set at nine per day. The union did not consider the dispute settled, and repeated their demands in another memorandum to the employers in September. Here they included a demand for a pension fund, and in the first of a series of sophisticated political diatribes, they appealed to employers to

honour the pledges for a better post-war world...where a higher standard of living will prevail as has been envisaged by all the declarations of the World's great Statemen.....It is for the employers in the Stevedoring trade to rise to the spirit of the present period in World History, and re-examine the workers' demands without heeding outside interference.³⁶

The workers also called a meeting and protested strongly against the unfairness of the award.³⁷ A circular was then sent by the union "To all trade unions and Progressive Organisations", appealing for support. Following the award, the workers had initially decided to continue the strike, but reconsidered and postponed action 'for a favourable opportunity'. The union suggested to employers

that the two parties concerned each appoints an assessor and the assessors could discuss the dispute under the chairmanship of the Divisional Inspector of Labour with the object of coming to an agreement that will bind both parties.³⁸

They appealed for support in "pressing the adoption of this suggestion" through talking to employers and raising the issue in the press. Such support would assist not only the union, but "the City as a whole". Attempts to bring the employers to the negotiating table failed, however, and four months later the union decided to re-embark on strike action. This in itself was proof of the successful organisation of the union, for after the first setback the organisation could well have collapsed.

300 workers downed tools on 15 January 1946, and a pamphlet was issued on the same day, in both English and Xhosa. Again, an appeal was made on the basis of the post-war situation:

REMEMBER! that with the cessation of hostilities production for destruction has ended. We must go forward to a higher standard of living.

The pamphlet appealed to individual workers in the community as well as to organisations and liberal sympathisers:

You can help us by telling your friends not to allow themselves to be used as 'scab' labour on the docks. You can help us by sending a donation to the Strike Fund...to help those families who are not in a position to resist. If you are a member of an organisation call a meeting and explain to your fellow members what is required of them. Funds will be urgently needed!

The pamphlet ended with the slogan

A VICTORY FOR THE STEVEDORING WORKERS IS A VICTORY FOR THE COMMUNITY.³⁹

This time around the response was more vicious: the railway police, the police, the traffic department and the PEM all came to the assistance of the employers in trying to break the strike. The T&LC local committee in PE sent a telegram to the T&LC in Johannesburg saying that police were being used to patrol the streets and recruit scab labour. The T&LC also protested to the Minister of Justice about the use of police, but the Minister refused to take responsibility, replying simply that he had passed on the information to the Minister of Transport. The Municipality lent its traffic department and its loud-speaker to assist in the recruitment of scabs, and by the end of January the situation had become very tense. Clashes between railway police and strikers ensued, in which sticks and knobkerries were used; five african workers were injured and hospitalised, and several were arrested and charged.⁴⁰

The union appealed to the T&LC for financial assistance, which it does not seem was forthcoming; given the uncertain status of the T&LC local committee in PE at the time, this was not surprising. However, they did intervene in the strike. One suggestion made by the acting secretary, D. Samuels, was that the government should take over the loading and unloading of ships in the PE harbour;⁴¹ a solution which would hardly have been supported by the union given the actions of the SAR&H administration during the previous strike. The T&LC local committee did protest against the strike-breaking, and were especially incensed by the municipality loaning its equipment and staff without charge; they also protested against the employment of juvenile labour ("youths from 14 - 16 are recruited for the heavy and dangerous work of unloading. Serious accidents occur and some are maimed for life"), and agreed that "the conditions of service for casual skilled labourers are deplorable". They requested assistance from the national office of the SAT&LC.⁴²

De Vries, National Secretary of the SAT&LC, then came to PE and together with two members of the PE local committee interviewed two of the stevedoring employers on 1 February. The

employers refused to budge on the question of casual labour, and on the issue of serangs hiring labour: their racist assumptions were clearly spelt out in their insistence that in PE the 'European' was in charge; that "the serang here is not superior to the ordinary Native in [the] matter of intelligence", and to give the power of hiring to serangs would be "subject to abuse by bribery". When asked whether this would not also apply to Europeans, they answered "definitely no".⁴³ They argued against a wage increase as they had now based contract charges for the year on the Walker award of August 1945, and would face losses as they would not be able to pass the increased costs on. The T&LC pleaded for an increase, saying that the union would accept 10s per day including COLA; whereas their original demand had been for 10s per day excluding COLA. It seemed as if the employers present were prepared to consider an increase, and that the strike had been effective: they expressed 'disappointment' over the Walker award being turned down, and did not want any more 'labour trouble' until the award ended. If they did offer an increase, they wanted an assurance that there would be no further strikes until the award expired in July 1946. One of the employers promised an increase if the strikers went back, but de Vries refused to consider this, knowing the union would not accept it. He suggested an immediate 'moderate' increase as a 'gesture' to the strikers, so that they could call off the strike pending a possible revision of the Walker award; he suggested that the issue of stevedores throughout the country should be considered before the award expired in July. The employers hedged again, saying that they needed to consult before agreeing to an increase; and wanting an assurance that any further contract would hold good until the government examined "the whole general question of stevedoring before the present Walker agreement lapses". The T&LC was hopeful that an increase on the Walker award would be given, but were disappointed. The employers wrote to De Vries and to the T&LC local the following day, saying that at a meeting of all the stevedoring and shipping companies to discuss the strike, they had refused to accept de Vries' proposal, and decided not to make any offer. They felt that the Walker award should be honoured by both parties until its expiry, or until a government inquiry into the employment of stevedores. They requested that de Vries bring the matter before the authorities in Johannesburg.⁴⁴

As there are no further records, it can be assumed that the strike was ended at this time, possibly on the promises of an increase or a revision of the Walker award. De Vries' opinions did not hold much water with employers in PE at the time, as the local committee of the T&LC was not yet established, and had little bargaining power.⁴⁵ The T&LC thus failed in its attempts at negotiations on behalf of african workers, which would not have raised its credibility either with the workers concerned or with employers. Moreover the T&LC disapproved somewhat of the dockworkers' union, as it was not registered; they expressed themselves in favour of registered coloured and african trade unions, which could be controlled, and wage agreements respected under the 'proper supervision' of the T&LC.

It was a significant strike, however, in a number of respects. It demonstrated the strong organisation of african workers in an extremely difficult-to-organise sector of the workforce, and the repressive response from the police, local state and government departments which was to characterise the apartheid era. The solidarity expressed by the SAR&H workers, and the difficulty experienced by the combined response of the above forces in breaking the strike, showed the emergence of a militant working class consciousness. The stevedoring companies' recognition of, and negotiation with, however reluctantly, an unregistered union led by african workers was also significant, while the contradictory role played by the T&LC epitomised the tensions it faced around the issue of organising african workers. The style of organisation and the strategies employed by the union signified a break with the dependence on Wage Boards of african unions in the early 1940's: the clear demands articulated, the insistence on report-backs and obtaining mandates from the membership, and the entering into negotiations as an independent force were all signs of a growing maturity in african labour organisation. The appeals for community support, and the use of Xhosa in the pamphlets indicated the relationship between african dock workers and the broader working class community of which they were part. The style of the pamphlets issued reflected the post-war ethos, where communists had gained considerable legitimacy, and reflected a combination of populist, working-class and internationalist sentiments which was to characterise the PE african working class movement.

Lastly, the intervention of the SAR&H administration in the dispute was significant for the future of all the workers at the railways and harbour. Clearly it would be difficult for the stevedoring workers to make gains in the future if the SAR&H workers were not organised, and the repressive tactics of the SAR&H administration made the union very aware of this. In their second memorandum to the employers, in September 1945, the union made clear its concerns and pleaded for 'normal' labour relations without government interference:

It will have been noticed...that the SAR&H administration was extremely interested in the dispute...The Union views this interference with alarm for it has established a dangerous precedent. First it has destroyed the principle of free bargaining between workers and employers, which should be the basis of industrial relations. Secondly, there has been outside interference by the most notoriously bad employer in the country. It has to be remembered that the Railway Administration lays down certain fundamentals to be incorporated in all Constitutions of Unions of its own employees which conditions put their employees in a very bad bargaining position. Further, it has divided its employees into many different organisations making united action almost an impossibility. As soon as a body of non-european workers freely decided to form a union, the administration sponsored a different body which would be under their control and thus be powerless to obtain any concrete improvements that did not have the prior sanction of the administration, while conducting

a campaign against the democratically formed body. It is with these methods that the Railway Administration has managed to keep the wages of its own labourers on a very low level, a level roundly condemned by various investigators from the Smit Committee to 'Industry and Trade'...Thirdly, and most serious of all, is the fact that this award is operative for twelve months, and by that time the SAR&H administration will have completed the proposed compounds in New Brighton. The workers, knowing what an extremely useful weapon compounds can be, and knowing that the SAR&H administration is interested in keeping the wages of stevedoring workers at the lowest possible level, feel that pressure will be used within a year not only to maintain the present admittedly unsatisfactory position, but even to undermine it to the detriment of the workers...It is obvious that a government department, the SAR&H not only ignores the pledges its own government makes concerning an increased standard of living, but actively fights against it. A representative of the SAR&H said at a joint meeting that if employers accede to the union demands it would have serious repercussions on the Railways. The employers need not fear being blamed for having caused 'serious repercussions'. These can only amount to improvements of wages and conditions on the SAR&H itself, which will be a most notable contribution to the welfare of South Africa...the past events prove how damaging the interest displayed by the SAR&H can be to industrial relations, particularly when the Department of Labour was influenced as well.⁴⁶

The concern about hostels is notable in the light of the rent struggles which occurred during 1945 and 1946, where struggles by the SAR&H workers and the New Brighton community focussed on the issue of unaffordability of the new rent system which had to be paid weekly. The building of hostels was clearly seen as a solution by the railways, and as a direct means of keeping wages low. Moreover, at the same time a struggle was going on within the SAR&H between the staff association and the union which had come under communist influence; and the 'dummy' Staff Association was desiring to extend its influence to the stevedores employed by private companies, and to "throw off once and for all Communist parasites in the PE Harbour"⁴⁷ (see Chapter 3). The pleas of the dockworkers were to go unheeded, and when the nationalist government came to power two years later the trend, already evident, of smashing independent african unions, was to be exacerbated.

4.4. The laundry workers' strike: legality, community solidarity, and another taste of repression

Fine, who sees the working class as having been 'defeated' in 1946, acknowledges that the 1948 PE laundry workers strike was evidence that "the base for mass struggle was still extant".⁴⁸ While the strike was an example of 'mass struggle', Fine has taken it out of the context of the growth of african working class militance in PE at the time. Rather than evidencing the end of mass

struggle, it was part of the building of a militant tradition in PE which had begun with the dockworkers' strike.

The laundry workers' battle was fought around the question of the legality of a strike in terms of the IC Act. This strike, as in the dockworkers' strike, involved african workers; yet there was no questioning of the legality because they were african. While the african leaders of the time note that the IC Act prevented the recognition of african trade unions, in some cases using this as an explanation for the lack of union organisation, in practice this did not affect the non-racial unions in the late 1940's. The dockworkers, laundry workers, municipal and textile workers - all predominantly african unions - frequently used the IC machinery to enter into disputes and sometimes negotiations with management. The days of reliance on Wage Board determinations were over, and african workers began to test their strength through strike action. The PE ANC in the late 1940's encouraged trade union organisation, and efforts were 'stepped up', according to Govan Mbeki.⁴⁹ This was to find fuller expression in the 1950's, in the organisation of study groups and street committees in New Brighton which 'fed into' trade union organisation (see Chapter 7).

The laundry workers strike of 1948 was interesting also in that it showed the re-emergence of one of the Gordon/Desai unions of 1942. Again, the emergence of an african working-class leadership was apparent, the most prominent example being Raymond Mhlaba, who had come to PE in 1942. He was a CPSA member who started working at a laundry, and was invited after six months by the coloured women workers to assist in organising a non-racial union. He was ANC chairman in PE at the time of the 1948 strike. He was one of the organisers of the strike, and was charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act.⁵⁰ The issue of leadership was complicated by Pillay representing the Union at the T&LC where his credentials were brought into question (see Chapter 3); and Desai who, although representing the FCWU on the T&LC, was obviously also involved in the laundry workers strike.

The strike occurred after a deadlock in Conciliation Board negotiations over wage demands. The Conciliation Board had been granted after a 'considerable period' of trying to negotiate with the employers, who were paying wages according to a Wage Determination of 1944. Wages were between £1 and £1 17s 6d per week. While some employers claimed that they were paying wages higher than the old determination, the union wanted the increases to be legalised and enforced on all laundries. The union - a branch of the National Union of Laundering, Cleaning and Dying Workers - initially demanded an increase of 10s per week, but during negotiations reduced this to 5s and then 2s 6d per week. The employers were only prepared to offer 1s per week. The union accepted this offer for those workers earning £1 per week, and scrapped demands for workers earning over

£2 per week; however it would not go below 2s 6d for other workers earning below £2. After the third Conciliation Board meeting on 22 April, deadlock was reached, and the workers came out on strike on 23 April after holding an emergency meeting. The union had intended only to bring workers at Atlas, the largest and most intransigent firm, out on strike, while workers at the other three companies negotiated; but workers at the others followed suit. The strike involved nearly 200 workers; initially coloured women workers, and then african workers came out in sympathy.

The T&LC Local's response was divided: some felt that the union should have reported to the T&LC first and asked for help with negotiations, and they questioned whether the national office of the union supported the strike. Desai assured them that the Head Office had been kept informed, but that the PE branch had 'full autonomy' to take such action; while Pillay said that the strike had been 'a spontaneous decision of the workers'. The T&LC then agreed to support the strike, and to try and arrange a meeting with employers through the MCI.⁵¹

The strike generated an enormous amount of publicity, probably because it occurred at five or six small firms around the city, caused inconvenience to the white public, and involved picketing and fighting with police and scab labour in the city centre. In addition, the position of Desai further complicated the matter: while the five laundries on strike were white-owned, there were another six indian-owned laundries which were not on strike - leading to allegations that the strike was 'nationalistic' and anti-white. Desai's explanation was that these laundries together employed only 60 workers, who were not in the union; they had not been deliberately left out, and the union had tried to organise them as they paid very badly, but they were 'difficult to organise' and the workers had been intimidated. However, the Conciliation Board had agreed that the agreement should be extended by the minister to cover non-parties; if it was not, the union should withdraw its demands.⁵² Despite the impression of extreme militance generated by the press, the T&LC saw the union as reasonable; they had tried to arrange a meeting with the employers through the MCI, but were informed that the employers were not interested in further negotiations; the Divisional Inspector of Labour, who thought that the union was 'patient', and the employers 'most unreasonable' promised to arrange a meeting but only one of the employers was prepared to negotiate further. He said that the strike was illegal 'but admitted that it was a technicality.' A meeting with employers did then take place, where they put the position that they would make an agreement with the union if they could victimise (*i.e.* not reemploy) certain workers; this was obviously unacceptable to the union. The employers agreed to have further discussions with the MCI, but meanwhile the burning of an Atlas dry-cleaners van led to the bosses breaking off negotiations on the pretext of 'sabotage by strikers'.

The T&LC local committee came out in support of the strikers, although they were rather hesitant. Various unionists intervened to arrange negotiations - including Mr Gelvan of the Sweetworkers Union; his wife Katie Gelvan of the Garment Workers Union who was also a city councillor, and Mr Rehm, president of the Motor Industry Employers Union. Gelvan felt that "the workers had no right to come out", and that

when they [the T&LC] took over the negotiations...other people had been messing about with the negotiations. The strike was illegal but as the workers were involved they must help them...if it had been handled better it could have been over on Saturday morning. The fight wasn't worth it for a paltry 2s 6d per week. However, right or wrong they must assist. Public sympathy was with the strikers.⁵³

The reluctance of the T&LC was further expressed in a question as to why no report had been made to the T&LC about the dispute prior to the strike; to which Desai replied that "the laundry workers were being demoralised with such questions. They asked for help now and they would take all the criticisms afterwards."⁵⁴ Gus Coe of the NUDW, and T&LC secretary, ran the strike support fund, although she was wary of the strike and refused to let the NUDW duplicator be used for support pamphlets. The substantial sum of £347 pounds was collected, and workers received £1 a week strike pay. She claimed that the picketline incidents were 'not as bad as the press made out', and that the allegation of a worker burning the van was a 'deliberate fabrication': a press report that a union member was caught 'red-handed with a revolver' after setting fire to the van, was wrong; a union member had been arrested in bed at 12.30 p.m., while the fire had happened at 11.45 p.m. Moreover, four picketing strikers had been stabbed or beaten by scabs, and the police had used truncheons.⁵⁵

Over 6 000 strike support pamphlets were issued, and many were distributed in the white suburbs of PE: in the Cape Road, Mill Park and Summerstrand areas. Four strike bulletins were issued, to counter the press which issued reports largely in favour of the employers, emphasizing the illegality of the strike and sensationalising the violence on the picket lines. The bulletins appealed both to a 'working class consciousness' and to the general public:

The workers need the support of the public and the working class to achieve their aims...Increased wages for any section of the working class means increased prosperity for all...Workers of Port Elizabeth, tomorrow it may be your turn to fight for your rights, for better living conditions and wages sufficient to meet the soaring cost of living...The laundry workers apologise for any inconvenience caused to the public but the continuation of the present strike is not of their seeking. The public can help to bring this strike to a successful conclusion by carrying out the above suggestions. THANK YOU!⁵⁶

After two weeks, the strike had made no progress; the employers were getting scab labour using police protection, and the high rate of unemployment made scabbing difficult to stop. While other unions had responded well with financial assistance, they were weak when it came to action; the struggle centred increasingly around picketing to prevent scab labour. The employers obtained an exemption from the Transportation Board to bring labour in in their vans, and the vans were 'prepared to run down the strikers in order to get through'. Other unions were requested to send people to the picket lines to prevent this. The union's resources were clearly stretched, and while the T&LC supported the strike, there were 'few experienced people to help' the laundry workers.⁶⁷

Betty du Toit, National Secretary of the Laundry Workers Union, then came to PE in an effort to resolve the situation. She had legal advice that the illegality of the strike was in question: it was a 'moot point and had never been proven', and the union had a strong case as it had gone through the whole process of the conciliation board. She said that the government had given an assurance to the trade union movement that africans involved in a legal industrial dispute would not be arrested.⁶⁸ The stepping up of picket activity resulted in police intervention, however, and du Toit was proved wrong when strikers were arrested on 17 May under the Riotous Assemblies Act. Meanwhile the Department of Labour ruled, after three weeks, that the strike was in fact legal. The police withdrew after pressure from the T&LC (and CNETU) nationally, and the union laying a charge of assault against the police.

Negotiations proceeded with all employers except Atlas; the union called off pickets to facilitate negotiations, and the Department of Labour arranged a conciliation board which reassembled on 19 May. The employers refused to go to arbitration; and the T&LC District Committee requested the national office to put pressure on the government to impose compulsory arbitration. Forsyth, national secretary of the T&LC, responded that the government could not force arbitration as laundry was not an essential service; however, the PE Divisional Inspector was urged to persuade employers to settle. 'Most effective' picketing was recommenced when the Conciliation Board was unsuccessful; a tentative agreement accepting the unions demands was then reached, the workers went back to work, and the Conciliation Board hammered out the final settlement on 24 May.⁶⁹

The T&LC in PE initially saw the outcome of the strike as a victory, and something which had benefitted the T&LC locally through building its credibility as a negotiator and as a co-ordinating body for strike support work. However, it became apparent that although the wage demand had been met, the employers had actually won in another respect: they succeeded during the strike in getting rid of many of the union members, including some of the 'agitators' like Raymond Mhlaba.

About 80 of the 190 strikers who had come out were not re-employed; the employers argued that they had lost business during the strike, and could not re-employ all the workers. The negotiator of the final agreement, Rehm, was hopeful that some would be reabsorbed within the following few weeks, and recommended interim assistance to the workers who had now run out of money. However, the NEC of the T&LC could not afford to send more money; they had advanced £400, £306 of which had been raised in PE. The T&LC was left the unenviable task of trying to raise more money from affiliates when the strike was already over, and Coe saw the outcome of the strike as 'disappointing'.⁶⁰

A number of relevant points are illustrated by this dispute. Firstly, the question of the strike's legality centred not around the participation of african workers, but a technicality; the workers had come out on strike before the Department of Labour had submitted a report on the breakdown of the Conciliation Board. While both the employers and the T&LC had assumed the strike to be illegal, it was ruled legal by the Department of Labour. Secondly, the intervention by the police in breaking the strike, and the use of the Riotous Assemblies Act, caused the T&LC and CNETU nationally to come out in support of the strike, and register strong protests with the Minister. Public opinion also turned against the police, and the police had to withdraw and drop charges against the strikers. Thirdly, the non-racial nature of the strike itself, and the tone of the strike bulletins, indicated the emergence of a working class consciousness which was not 'Africanist' in nature; a position which was to characterise the militant Port Elizabeth unions of the late 1940's and in the SACTU period. Lastly, the appeals to the public integrated 'point of production' issues with broader political issues, and the imminent threat of a Nationalist government. One of the bulletins asked "Is this an election stunt?", and, questioning the incongruity of the employers' attitudes and the belligerence of the police, answered its own question by stating that

The key to the puzzle lies in the fact that the electorate consists of the employers and employing classes for the most part. With the General Election barely a fortnight ahead, the bureaucratic personnel controlling Government Departments are in a sheer funk about their jobs. Whoever gains power their actions can at worst be condoned by the United Party, at best encouraged by the Nats...If today the precedent is established that Government Departments such as the police and the Transportation Board, supposedly provided for the protection of the people, are used to attack them, tomorrow YOU may be the victims of their attack through your own short-sightedness. Demand that these abuses of your democratic rights cease immediately!⁶¹

The strike reflected the tensions within the T&LC as well, and foreshadowed a departure from the old era of labour relations. The T&LC's cautiousness, its belief in the existing Industrial Conciliation channels, and the 'politeness' with which labour disputes were conducted in PE was to be

overcome in the 1950's by the simultaneous rise of a militant african working class movement challenging the undermining of its rights, and an aggressive attack on the non-racial union movement by the new apartheid government.

4.5. Food and canning: weakness and expansion - women take control

While the laundry and dock-workers' strikes were evidence of a new style of african unionism, they were not able to make significant gains for their membership. In manufacturing industry, the unions which developed were able to consolidate and use the existing IC machinery to raise wages for their members. This organisation took place in the food and textile industries, where a large number of african workers were employed.

The other union to 'come up' during the 1940's, and one which was to play a crucial role in the 1950's was, as elsewhere in the Cape Province, the Food and Canning/African Food and Canning Workers Union. Its early history in PE was a somewhat stormy one, however, marred by corruption, infighting and later, banning of officials. In the 1940's it did not display the militance and african leadership associated with the other labour disputes in this section, and it was only in the late 1950's that it came to be seen as the 'vanguard' of the union movement. Its early history is worth examining briefly, though, for despite its problems it was the one union to survive right through from the early 1940's until the 1970's. Having survived the repression which forced many other SACTU unions to disband, it closed down because of the closure of the food factories in PE.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the FCWU was formed in 1942 as part of Max Gordon's organising drive in PE. There was one large canning concern in PE at the time, the African Canning and Packing Corporation, a fish canning factory employing mainly coloured female labour. The union was formed in February 1942 and was the one established by Gordon to attain a majority membership at the factory; 350 workers joined the union within the first few weeks, and by the time Gordon left PE over 400 had joined. The problem was that the membership was not 'solid' as the number of workers fluctuated according to whether they were seasonal or permanent. Initially the union signed up all workers without distinguishing between the two categories, but soon realised the problem: at peak times the factory employed seven to eight hundred workers, but many of these were not permanent; the permanent workforce was around 450.

The new union immediately sought improvements in working conditions; after Gordon and Desai had toured the factory, protective clothing was granted to workers working in the harsh and wet conditions. Immediately thereafter the question of wages was raised with employers, and increases

of 3d for labourers and 6d for skilled workers were proposed. Because there was already an arbitrator appointed to settle the dispute in the canning industry between the Cape FCWU and employers, the employers in PE would not agree to any wage demands. However, the new Wage Award for the industry brought about as a result of the dispute resolved the newly-formed PE union to affiliate to the Cape union. The PE union demanded that the Award be enforced in PE; the employers refused as the union was unregistered and the employers and the Department of Labour refused to recognise it. The Head Office of the union made the task of the newly formed union 'considerably lighter'; for they 'expedited' the registration of the PE union, and Gordon arranged a delegation from the established unions to approach the employer. The delegation included Solly Sachs of the Garment Workers Union, the secretary of the EP Trades Council, and representatives of the building and tramways unions in PE. The management of African Canning and Packing then agreed to recognise the union; and the Award was enforced, after intervention by Ray Alexander, on all employers by the Minister of Labour. Many workers in PE received 'large sums of money' in backpay as the award was in force from February; and this "considerably strengthened the prestige of our Union and members were convinced that a Trade Union works genuinely in the interest of the working class movement."⁶²

These initial victories stood the union in good stead, but it experienced the usual problems of lack of experience, poor attendance at meetings, failure to pay subscriptions, and a 'top heavy' structure. Desai, the secretary, was relieved of some of his duties by an assistant secretary who 'also assisted [him] in overcoming [his] difficulties.' There was one african worker on the original committee, and one african shop-steward who died during the first year of the union's existence. Although Goode claims that the PE branch of the union was a 'leading part of the FCWU' because of the importance of PE as a canning area, there is little evidence of the union's activity in PE in the mid-1940's after these initial gains. Despite Desai's popularity and vociferousness, his energies were spread widely over a number of unions, all based in 'Trade Union Centre' in Queen street; moreover, he became a City Councillor, was involved in the Non-European United Front, and was active in rent protests in the late 1940's, as well as other labour disputes such as the laundry-workers' strike discussed above. His contradictory position of being involved in both the T&LC and in CNETU was described in the previous chapter; and his corruption ran to the extent of buying a building with FCWU money, transferring the building to CNETU and then into his own name. While the General Secretary, Ray Alexander, was aware that something was wrong with the situation, she did not intervene until 1949, when workers started complaining that Desai was 'in cahoots with the bosses', and that they were working long overtime and not being paid in accordance with the agreement.⁶³

Meanwhile the food industry in PE had expanded considerably in the post-war period. Total employment increased from 1 800 to 6 600 in the period between 1935 and 1963; and african employment increased from 300 to 3 500 in the same period (see Table 3). While black workers in the food industry were in a stronger bargaining position, they needed a union which would effectively represent them in negotiations and conciliation board agreements in PE.

Desai, however, actually caused the PE branch of the FCWU to jeopardize national negotiations - while weakening the situation of workers in the PE factories. In conciliation board meetings at the end of 1949, the PE branch did not co-operate with the national office, leading to a situation where two important national employers, both with factories in PE - Standard Canners and Packers, and H. Jones - were in a stronger position. The outcome was that the Conciliation Board agreement was less favourable to the FCWU nationally than it might have been. Alexander claimed that PE branch was functioning contrary to the constitution, and "our problem is how to save our branch from him [Desai]".⁶⁴ She eventually took Desai to court in 1951, after which he left the FCWU as mentioned in Chapter 3. Oscar Mpetha was sent to PE from Cape Town, and acted as temporary secretary until Gus Coe from the NUDW, former secretary of the T&LC, took over.

With assistance from the national office, the PE branch was re-organised, and with Coe as secretary began to recuperate from its financial and organisational losses. Oscar Mpetha reported that the AFCWU in PE was functioning well, although it still did not have an office and a telephone. Workers at Standard Canners and Packers, at H. Jones, and at Valorange were organised. An application for a Conciliation Board was made, and an important ruling obtained from the Department of Labour in PE, that african women were regarded as employees in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act. This was significant as the Cape Town department had not been prepared to make such a ruling. The Conciliation Board also looked into the two PE food companies which had escaped the earlier negotiations, and a new agreement came into operation in November of that year. Despite these gains, the gains made by the strong FCWU branch in Cape Town were not reflected in wages in other parts of the country, including PE which generally tended to have wage levels between those of Cape Town and Johannesburg. In 1952 labourers in the food industry in Cape Town were paid £2 12s 6d as compared to £1 18s 6d in PE, Paarl, Wellington and Johannesburg.⁶⁵

For her efficiency, Gus Coe was banned in 1952 in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act, and the union was once again disrupted. Intervention by the national office was once again required to pull the union out of the crisis. Eventually, in 1955 a conciliation board agreement was reached with the assistance of Leon Levy from the union in Johannesburg, which improved COLA, working conditions and overtime pay.⁶⁶

By the mid-1950's, with the expansion of the food canning industry in PE, a significant number of african workers were being employed, many of whom were women. While the FCWU and AFCWU worked closely together, as in other places - sharing offices and secretaries, and in practice operating as one organisation - it was in this period that the african workers in PE began to assert their interests in the union. The A/FCWU was to become the key union in SACTU in PE; in fact, probably the only union which maintained a strong factory-floor base while becoming integrated into broader political campaigns at the time. This will be looked at in more depth in Chapters 5 and 7. The point to be made here is that the union itself changed character in the 1950's, with the structural change in position of african workers and their absorption into the industry; this occurred concomitantly with the rise of a militant, african working class politics. The number of women employed in this industry, and the threatened position of women in PE in the 1950's, contributed towards this particular union coming into the forefront of SACTU. This is borne out by the organisational integration between the union leadership and the ANC Women's League which was fighting the extension of passes to african women (see Chapter 5). However, the position of strength of african women in secondary industry was short-lived. While the A/FCWU was to survive longer than the other unions of the SACTU period, and fight some of its fiercest battles in the early 1960's, the food industry was itself changing in structure and moving away from Port Elizabeth. Langeberg Kooperasie Beperk, which took over Standard Canners and Packers, closed their PE factory in 1968, and H. Jones closed theirs in 1973. Despite all the bannings of PE unionists, it was this which ultimately led to the collapse of the union.

4.6. Textile workers: competing with the IDC and 'homeland' workers

The position of african workers in the textile industry in the Eastern Cape was determined by the competition between PE textile companies, and the Industrial Development Corporation's (IDC) incentives for locating the industry in the 'Border' area. In October 1947 a meeting of all textile companies in the PEU area was arranged; those which attended were Hex River Textile Mills, Cape of Good Hope Wool Combers, Union Spinning Mills, and Fine Wool Products (Uitenhage). Here the suggestion of forming an association of worsted manufacturers was made.⁶⁷

At the same time as the textile employers in the Eastern Cape were strategising, the workers in the textile industry began organising. Textile workers had not been organised by Gordon or later by Desai as part of the CNETU unions. In 1947 the first mention is made of textile workers in the SAT&LC, where Gus Coe reported that the Uitenhage textile workers were being organised; by September 1947 the TWIU was represented at the SAT&LC meetings, but it seems that initial organisation once again focused on white - maybe coloured workers - from the names of

delegates: Wood, Jasson, Bacon, Mackenzie and Pullen.⁶⁸ The following year, however, Reg September came up from Cape Town to organise the textile workers, focussing on Uitenhage; and he and a Mr Kika replaced Miss Wood and Miss Jasson as the TWIU delegates to the T&LC.⁶⁹ September and a Mr Matjie continued to represent the TWIU on the T&LC until 1950.⁷⁰ The Uitenhage branch of the TWIU then affiliated to the SAT&LC District committee.

This observation on delegates from the textile union is indicative of a bigger shift going on in the PE working class in the late 1940's: the period 1945 - 1950 saw a dramatic increase in coloured and african employment in industry in PEU and 1949 - 1950 were the only years where african employment was greater than coloured. At the same time, white employment in manufacturing was decreasing. This was in line with general trends nationally which saw white female labour replaced with black male labour. The textile industry was a good illustration of this:

Between 1933/34 and 1950/51, the number of textile factories in the country grew from 12 to 74, and the number of workers employed rose from 2 500 to nearly 17 000. While 65% were white in 1933/34, by 1950/51 62% were african. The number of women employed decreased from 40% to 10% in the same period.⁷¹

This manifested itself in the PE/U area especially in the garment, textile and footwear industry, as outlined in Chapter 1. In 1935 there were 3 700 whites, 500 africans, and 1 000 coloureds in the industry, while in 1963 there were 2 400 whites, 4 200 africans, and 7 500 coloureds.

This development of the textile industry in the post war period included the introduction of the worsted industry, which based itself in the Eastern Cape. Fine Wool Products (FWP), the first worsted factory, was established in Uitenhage in 1946. The establishment of the IDC in 1940 was to assist this process, with the government providing financial aid to industries located in 'cheap labour' areas, and attracting foreign investment. Thus FWP was owned half by IDC, half by British capital; as was Good Hope Textiles in Kingwilliamstown. Gubb and Inggs, the woolcombing plant was established in 1949 to comb wool for FWP, and was also a British company.⁷²

To recap from Chapter 1, african workers were drawn especially into unskilled, but also to some extent semi-skilled, positions in the textile industry - 53% of semi-skilled and 96% of unskilled workers in textiles were african (45% of semi-skilled and 4% of unskilled were coloured). The Uitenhage factories employed more female coloured labour than Kingwilliamstown, which relied almost entirely on african male labour - where african workers were paid unskilled wages for semi-skilled work.⁷³ In the PE factories, as noted in Chapter 1, the tendency was to employ coloured labour in semi-skilled jobs, keeping africans at unskilled levels; and in general employed more

coloured labour than Uitenhage. These differences in employment practices may explain why militant organisation focussed on Kingwilliamstown and (to a lesser extent) Uitenhage, where african textile workers were in a slightly stronger position in terms of their skill position in the workplace, but were paid less because of the IDC's exemption from the IC agreements for the industry.

Struggles in the textile industry tended to focus on the need to bring these 'Border' industries in line with the rest of the textile industry as regards wages. This was a crucial issue for the PE workers in the industry, whose bargaining position would be undermined if the IDC companies were successful in maintaining lower wages in Uitenhage and Kingwilliamstown: not only would it limit their ability to raise their wages in the short term, but it would lead to new investments in the industry taking place in other areas, and possible relocation of factories, to where labour was cheaper. The textile industry relied on cheap labour; the advantages of PE in terms of infrastructure would be weighed up against the low-wage advantage of locating in Kingwilliamstown or other 'Border' areas. FWP in Uitenhage was an interesting case as it was classified as an IDC company, although situated in a developed industrial area, and not in the 'Border' area which drew on migrant labour from the Ciskei. African textile workers in the PEU area were disadvantaged in another way; while they were fully urbanised workers, not retaining the access to land that workers in Kingwilliamstown or East London did, they were not given the status, training and wages of semi-skilled industrial labour.

The struggles of the TWIU/ATWIU in the late 1940's and 1950's reflected this concern. The ATWIU which had its headquarters in PE, and was to be the organisational base of some of the 'new labour heroes' of the time, was involved primarily in organising and assisting workers in the factories of Uitenhage and Kingwilliamstown. While workers in the blanket section of the industry had been organised in previous decades by the TWIU, they only made up one fifth of the workforce and the workers - mainly african - who had been brought into the new cotton and worsted factories were unorganised and excluded from wage agreements. The cotton section employed about half of the total workforce, and employed 80% african labour.⁷⁴

4.6.1. Initial struggles at FWP, Uitenhage in 1948

The conflict between the IDC companies and other textile companies in PE emerged in 1948, shortly after Fine Wool Products (FWP) in Uitenhage was organised by Reg September, when the first major dispute in the industry in the area took place. The union had 'at least 80%' membership in the factory.⁷⁵ The IDC had 55% share capital in the factory, which refused to join the National Industrial Council for the textile industry. The reasons for this are clear when the wages set by the

IC are compared with the wages paid at FWP. The first IC agreement for the textile industry had set wages at between £1 15s per week (excluding COLA) for labourers, and £2 17s 6d per week (excluding COLA) for Grade 1 workers.

In contrast, FWP paid 17s 6d per week to labourers, and £1 1s per week to Grade 1 workers (excluding COLA). Including COLA, the maximum wage was £1 16s per week. This was less than the twelve-year-old Wage Determination 55, which had set wages at £1 15s to £2 5s per week. These wage levels had long been surpassed since the TWIU's efforts to have wages raised, and the establishment of the IC for the industry. FWP claimed that as the first worsted factory, they were not covered by the Wage Determination, as no worsted factories had existed at the time of the Determination. The IDC wanted the IC for the textile industry to exclude worsted factories, so that wages in its 'Border' industries could be kept low.

The newly-formed branch of the TWIU in PEU contested the validity of the IDC's argument for excluding the worsted industry. The union contended that the operations of the worsted industry were the same as the blanket industry. Moreover, the union complained that FWP violated the Factories Act, but the Labour Department did not enforce it; the Department also delayed in enforcing the Wage Determination.⁷⁶ The union's opinion was that the Labour Department's reluctance to act was because the IDC had a controlling interest in the company: it was the first case where "trade unions had come up against government interests in private industry."⁷⁷

FWP refused to adhere to the IC agreement, and refused to consider the union's demands in January 1948. The union had applied for a Conciliation Board and the possibility of a legal strike existed. The union noted the severity of the situation for workers in the industry: "if the IDC gets away with it in Uitenhage, it will try the same at Kingwilliamstown. The whole wage structure of the textile industry built up during eleven years is threatened."⁷⁸ The IDC also had over 50% shares in the Kingwilliamstown factory. The fear was that if the struggle with FWP was lost, the Kingwilliamstown factory would employ african labour with no controls at all, and thereby reduce the wage standards of all textile workers.⁷⁹

The Conciliation Board sat on 7 April 1948, and FWP and the IDC agreed to be party to the IC for the industry, but as an independent party - not part of the Textile Manufacturers' Association (TMA). The Conciliation Board adjourned for 30 days on the understanding that FWP would become a member of the TMA, and a new agreement would be negotiated in May.⁸⁰ However, the FWP refused to join the TMA.⁸¹ At the Conciliation Board meeting in May the worsted manufacturers decided to form their own association and apply to register and be a party to the IC for the textile industry. An agreement was reached whereby a 4s to 10s wage increase was granted to the FWP

workers, as well as a sick fund, night shift pay, and two extra days annual leave - to be enforced from June 1948; but it was a 'gentleman's agreement' as the worsted manufacturers were not yet formally a party to the IC. The existing wage rates of £2 17s 6d Grade 1, £2 5s Grade 2, and £1 15s for labourers, were applied to FWP.⁸² Thus the union gained an initial victory in getting FWP to adhere to the IC agreement for the PE area, even though it was not legally bound by the agreement.

4.6.2. The wool-washery strike, 1948

The position of the worsted manufacturers was to prove a problem again in the near future; but at the same time as this agreement was being reached, another issue arose: that of the Wage Board determination for the wool washing industry. The Cape Town branch of the TWIU had organised african workers in the woolwasheries of the Eastern Cape in 1947. The woolwasheries were dispersed over PE and Uitenhage, and small towns such as Cathcart and Stutterheim. In the small towns, wages were between 12s (for women workers) and 18s (for men workers) per week.⁸³ This section of the textile industry was not covered by the IC agreement, and the union applied for a Wage Board to investigate wages in the industry. The Wage Board in some cases cut existing wages which had been negotiated by the union. In PE and Uitenhage, wages were raised slightly, but the union objected to the Wage Board recommendations, using the new 'gentleman's agreement' as an argument: The Wage Board recommended that Uitenhage woolwashers wages be raised by 1s, from £1 4s to £1 5s; however, the FWP factory which was adjacent to the woolwashing factory in Uitenhage had just agreed to raise wages from between 4s and 10s, to a basic wage of £1 8s. The greatest number of workers in the industry were situated in Uitenhage, and the T&LC, supporting the TWIU, noted in its objections that the WB recommendations were 'entirely unacceptable' to them. Du Toit claims that the wages of african workers in Uitenhage were reduced by the wage board from £1 16s to £1 15s; it is unclear whether this is inaccurate or perhaps referred to a certain category of workers.⁸⁴

The WB recommendations raised PE wages from £1 10s to £1 12s 6d for male workers, and from £1 to £1 4s 5d for female workers. This was interesting in that female labour received a greater increase than male labour, whereas in East London and Durban the wages of female labour were cut substantially. Female wages in Uitenhage were also raised from 17s 6d to 18s 9d.

The TWIU had "already pointed out the feeling of these workers and if a strike were to break out the responsibility for this world would rest on the Board (sic)".⁸⁵ The union objections were even more blunt about the militance of the Uitenhage workers: in its memorandum objecting to the WB recommendations, it stated that

Our greatest disappointment is in regards to Uitenhage where the largest number of employees are concentrated and where 363 men, more than one fourth of all the workers in the industry, are going to benefit by only 1s a week....our union knows the type of worker employed here: when negotiating the agreement last week for the workers of Fine Wool Products Uitenhage, the employers of FWP also offered a 1s a week increase. The reaction of the workers was violent and the employers had the good sense to increase their offer the following day. The woolwashery workers are employed almost under the same roof as the FWP workers, and the suggestion of 1s extra is totally rejected by them. The Union had to restrain them in January from taking strike action by telling them the WB recommendations were on the way, but it will be difficult to do so again when the Board has brought them virtually nothing. The recently negotiated agreement for FWP cannot be ignored by the WB. Increases from 4s to 10s a week have been gained....It will be embarrassing to the woolwashery employers to have such contrasting conditions right next door to them. We suggest that the WB shows the same good sense as the IDC and recommend something more worthwhile having to the Uitenhage workers.⁸⁶

As predicted, the outcome of the WB Determination meant that the workers could no longer be held back by the union; they embarked on a strike which "violated all legislation including War Measure 145 prohibiting strikes."⁸⁷ The strike lasted two days; forty-three workers were arrested and prosecuted under War Measure 145, and sentenced to a £2 fine or fourteen days imprisonment.

While it is clear that the union's objections had little impact on the final recommendations of the WB, given the response to the strike, they do indicate that the Uitenhage branch of TWIU was making its presence felt: organising strongly, using their newly negotiated agreement with FWP to back up their arguments, threatening and then carrying out strike action. The other minor gain made by the TWIU in 1948 was the increase in COLA granted by the new Nationalist government. Not really a TWIU gain, but the result of SAT&LC deputations to the government, the TWIU claimed it as a victory of the trade union movement, and publicised the increases to its members.⁸⁸

4.6.3. Ongoing struggles with the worsted manufacturers, 1950-1954

In 1950 the ATWIU was established, giving priority to organising the unorganised workers in the cotton section factories in the Eastern Cape and Natal. In 1950 the cotton factories employed 6 600 workers, 87% of whom were african.⁸⁹ However, the newly established worsted industry, which grew significantly between 1948 and 1952 and was situated mainly in the PEU area, soon became the focal point of the AFCWU's organisation.

In the same year, the problem of Uitenhage worsted employers was again raised, at an informal Conciliation Board meeting in Cape Town. The National Association of Worsted Textile Manufacturers (NAWTM), formed in 1948, and the TWIU were represented, as well as the Secretary of the National Industrial Council for the Worsted Textile Manufacturing Industry. The NAWTM had decided to establish an IC for the worsted industry, separate from the IC for the rest of the textile industry. However, the Department of Labour refused registration to the Worsted Industrial Council.

This Conciliation Board was considering a dispute between worsted employers in PE and Worcester, and the union. The Department of Labour noted that this CB agreement could not be applied to any other area such as Uitenhage, as another CB (for the textile industry - as outlined above) had dealt with a separate dispute in the industry in the Uitenhage area. The Worsted Textile Manufacturers' representative pointed out that apart from FWP, there was another firm in Uitenhage which was a member of the association; and that the CB was thus competent to negotiate an agreement with the area. The Department of Labour then agreed that the CB agreement could be applied to the firm concerned, but could not commit the Minister of Labour to imposing the agreement's conditions on 'non-parties' in the area.⁹⁰

The agreement reached thus covered the worsted factories in both PE and Uitenhage, and the majority of workers gained a 3s per week increase, and free overalls; some received a 6s 7d per week increase.⁹¹ However, by 1952 the Worsted Industrial Council was still not registered. This made union negotiations more difficult, as agreements reached were not legally binding.

The union proposed a new agreement to replace the old one which expired in June 1952; they wanted a legally binding agreement and prepared to apply for a CB if the worsted manufacturers did not respond to their demands.⁹² The union, in its demands for a new agreement, argued that the worsted industry had had sufficient time to "get over its teething troubles" and the industry was no longer "in its infancy."

The union argued that workers had by now had several years experience and "many of them are the equals of workers overseas"; however, the workers have had to "bear the initial costs by accepting deplorably low wages, thus subsidising the establishment of the industry". Arguments about the industry being very young and needing tariff protection now fell away, as tariff protection had been granted to the industry; there was no excuse now not to pay better wages. The cost of living had increased, and the firms involved were now in a "sound financial position" and thus in a better position to improve wage standards. Moreover, in comparison to other industries, "in general it is correct to say that the wages paid to skilled and semi-skilled operatives in the worsted

industry are comparable or even less than the general standards prevailing in other industries for unskilled labour."⁹³ In its argument the union demonstrated the 'skills underpayment' by comparing wages in the worsted industry with the flock industry, and challenging the FWP 'Job Point Assessment' categorisation of jobs and skills levels. It is clear from these arguments that workers at the worsted factories in PE and Uitenhage were at the lowest-paid end of the textile manufacturers, despite their gains in getting the IC agreement to apply to FWP. The employers' success in establishing a separate IC for the Worsted Industry, although it was not registered, posed an ongoing problem for the union.⁹⁴ The union proposed a new wage scale of £5 per week (Grade A) through to £3 7s 6s (Grade D).

At the same time, the workers at the Kingwilliamstown textile factory, Good Hope Textile Mills, came out on strike. The PE TWIU became involved in support for the strike, sending its organisers - especially Gladstone Tshume, organising secretary - to assist. Tshume had been to Kingwilliamstown in October 1951 to assist in the formation of the branch of the union there.⁹⁵ Other unions, among them the FCWU, sent funds through the SAT&LC in support of the strike, and a letter of thanks from Arnold Selby, national secretary of the union, mentioned that "the branch in Kingwilliamstown is stronger as a result of their recent struggle and the spirit of the workers is high."⁹⁶ However, Du Toit claims that the registered unions failed to assist, and the strike "petered out" as the workers starved.⁹⁷ An application by the union for arbitration under War Measure 145 failed; and the strike itself was broken without the union being able to meet with management or negotiate any wage increases.⁹⁸ Tshume was arrested and tried along with Selby, the national secretary, and Dwane, the Kingwilliamstown organiser, with incitement and intimidation. Slovo defended them and they were acquitted; but Dwane and Tshume were both banned under the Suppression of Communism Act; and so was Gus Coe, who had briefly assisted the TWIU in 1952.

By June of 1952 there were five applications by the TWIU for conciliation boards; initially only one was granted, for Cape Town factories. This affected 2 000 workers in six worsted factories: two were in PE, one in Uitenhage, and the others in Cape Town, Worcester and Standerton. The agreement for the industry which had been established through the 1950 negotiations was due to expire; it had never been gazetted because of the unregistered status of the Worsted Industry IC.⁹⁹ In August the Minister appointed two Conciliation Boards, separating the worsted industry. One dealt with the National Association of Worsted Textile Manufacturers, while the other dealt with FWP, no longer a member of the association. While the union argued for the CB to sit in Cape Town, where wages were higher, the employers argued for PE, as the majority of factories were in that area.¹⁰⁰

An agreement was reached, which lasted to December 1953, when the union accepted the extension of the existing agreement for another two years, with new types of work included, and improved pay for overtime and night shift work, as well as the establishment of a provident fund.¹⁰¹ The textile workers of PE, as part of a strong national union, had thus made significant gains in the 1948-52 period; the focus of attention, however, was on the situation in Uitenhage and then in Kingwilliamstown. Du Toit, in her history of the Textile Workers Union, writes that between 1950 and 1953, african workers were organised into the registered union, which negotiated two national agreements covering workers in the blanket, flock and worsted sections; but that the position of african workers in Kingwilliamstown, the Eastern Cape and Ladysmith was different, and saw "dramatic struggles".¹⁰² The union was less successful in the case of Kingwilliamstown, and Minkley argues that the IDC firms were a success for capital in "constructive apartheid".¹⁰³

By 1954 the TWIU had been hit by the banning of some of its leading organisers under the Suppression of Communism Act. The union's increase in african membership became an issue when the T&LC split; the TWIU called on the SAT&LC to reject the position of excluding 'natives' from the union.¹⁰⁴ In June 1954 the ATWIU had a paid-up membership of 4 800; the increase was due to the transfer to the union of african women as a result of the coming in to effect of the Native Labour Act.¹⁰⁵

The pressures the A/TWIU was under in PE in the early 1950's were obvious: fighting for recognition by Conciliation Boards on all fronts; fighting against the IDC; stretching organisational resources and experience to the limit. A strong, non-racial industrial union had been built, however; and its influence was to continue in the late 1950's (see Chapter 7).

4.7. Railway workers: an example of defeat

In contrast to the above struggles, where militant african labour organisation developed, were two unions in the service sector. These unions - among railway and municipal workers - were products of the style of organisation which characterised the war years. They are included here as a contrast to the 'new unions' among stevedores, laundry, food and textile workers. Both their structural position - organising a large number of workers in state-controlled or local state institutions - and their legacy of 'top-down' organisation contributed to their ineffectivity and 'defeat' in the late 1950's.

The Railway and Harbour Workers Union (SAR&HNEWU) which had been established in PE in the early 1940's continued to exist throughout the 1950's. It had attended a T&LC local meeting in Port Elizabeth in June 1949¹⁰⁶; but was severely weakened by the SAR&H administration's strategy of setting up staff associations (see Chapter 3). This is indicated by the dismissal in 1952 of railway and post-office workers for participating in the stayaway of 10 November. The Ballingers 'did all they could' to get workers reinstated, and succeeded in getting the re-employment of "quite a number...on terms not so good as before the strike."¹⁰⁷

A memorandum from the SAR&HNEWU PE Branch to the General Manager of SAR&H was to outline the problems and setbacks experienced by the union. They described "rapidly increasing dissatisfaction throughout the country among non-european and particularly African railway and harbour workers"; wages were still ranging from 2s 6d to 7s 9d per day, but varied greatly from one area to another. The arbitrary transfer of workers from one area to another often meant a sudden drop in wages and the inability to support a family. Wages were described as sufficient to keep the workers and their families from starving, with no money for anything but food. Moreover, COLA was paid differentially according to whether a worker was married or not; and it was difficult to obtain proof of marriage for the railways. And casual labour was still the main problem: when workers were re-employed previous service was not recognised, and so they could not build up to a higher wage level. Even after twenty years service they could be subject to 24-hours notice; were often subjected to arbitrary dismissals, and were unclear of their rights because of their status. These problems affected the workers in PE particularly badly; as most of them maintained families in town, the problems of transfers, of married COLA, and of job insecurity compounded the problem of extremely low wages.

In addition, the conditions of work were appalling: hours of work were 46 to 60 per week, with no notice given for overtime work, and overtime on Sundays; there were frequent cases of illtreatment or assault, and complaints led to instant dismissal; no protective clothing was given, they were fined for lateness, and the pension scheme was inadequate. The union's demands were for a minimum wage of 12s 6d per day, increased COLA, payment of married COLA; uniform wages in all areas, and recognition of prior service. Most importantly, they demanded an end to the casual labour system, with a weekly contract and a weekly wage replacing it. They demanded to be made permanent after six months on a weekly contract, and to then receive one month's notice. Other demands were that hours should be 46 per week with pay for overtime; there should be three weeks sick leave and three weeks paid leave per year; all grades of work should be open to blacks; arbitrary dismissals should end, an adequate pension scheme be instituted, and UIF should be extended to include black workers.

As regards union organisation, however, the union was in no position to enforce these demands in PE. The union was still not recognised in PE at this stage. The employers not only refused to negotiate with the union, but arbitrarily dismissed all members of the branch committees in PE, Durban and East London. The Union demanded recognition, an end to victimisation, the reinstatement of dismissed union members, and meeting facilities.¹⁰⁸ They demanded the disbanding of the staff association, as it had

...not, since its formation, done anything whatsoever to fight for improvements in the conditions of the railway workers, and is regarded by them merely as a tool of the administration. They are completely and absolutely disillusioned and do not regard it as their own organisation, because of its failure to deal effectively even with individual complaints.¹⁰⁹

Victimisation of union members continued, and the union appealed to the T&LC. The T&LC requested a meeting with the SAR&H general manager in 1953, but he responded that the SAR&H did not recognise the union as a negotiating body, and did not want an interview. The T&LC protested ^{against} the non-recognition of the union given that it was registered; but it seems that it was 'deregistered' in 1954 as the union letterhead noting that it was the 'national union of all non-European railway and harbour workers, registered in terms of the IC Act' had the latter phrase crossed out. In the letter concerned the union was writing to the T&LC requesting that they pay less affiliation fees, as the union membership had decreased to 260.¹¹⁰

By 1956 the staff association had disbanded, and the union was once again pressurising for similar demands. The Union wrote to Margaret Ballinger, including a memo to the Minister of Transport, requesting her to back up their representations. The increase of 3d per day that had been granted was inadequate (although the Minister was to respond to Mrs Ballinger by stating that the increase had been 3d per day everywhere except PE, where it was 6d):¹¹¹ starting wages were 3s 3d per day, with COLA ranging from £2 1s 10d per month (single) to £4 3s 8d per month (married). A married labourer thus earned a monthly salary of £8 16s 11d, including rations; and the top level paid was 5s 6d per day plus £6 per month COLA. No black worker could thus earn more than £15 per month, even after twenty or thirty years in service; and surveys showed that the minimum family living level was £20 per month. They concluded that "we have an essential government service employing thousands of workers at starvation wages." They demanded a minimum wage of 12s 6d per day plus an increase in COLA; uniform wages; and permanent status - all demands repeated from before. They also demanded that overtime be limited to 10 hours per week, that there be an increase in overtime pay, and that they work no more than fourteen days without one days rest. The other issue again taken up was the question of advancement: they demanded the right to be trained in all jobs, and to do skilled work at skilled rates of pay, as "it is common knowledge

that in many workshops the african labourers in fact do the skilled work whilst their European bosses stand and look on;the railways are crying out for skilled artisans and trained men but the European population is too small to provide this." By this time the railway hostel in the townships had been built, and the union also complained that housing conditions were 'appalling'.¹¹²

The position of the union was no better, however; it was still not recognised, and needless to say stop-order facilities had never been granted; the authorities refused to hear their representations, and the organisers were refused entry onto railway premises. The only bitter achievement the union could claim was that the staff association had been disbanded, and that they were the sole representative of the railway workers: "Today the workers have only one organisation, the SAR&H Workers Union". They claimed that the union was growing despite these difficulties, and demanded recognition.¹¹³

The struggles between the union and the administration, between the union and the staff association, and among the different unions, meant that railway and harbour workers - one of the largest groups of african workers in Port Elizabeth - were not effectively represented throughout the 1940's and 1950's. The SAR&H administration was able to impose its heavy-handed tactics on other employers, for example through its intervention in the 1948 dock-workers strike. The re-organisation of workers in the docks and railways took place under SACTU in the late 1950's, when militant organisation began to assert itself.

4.8. Municipal workers: the largest african labour force

The one union of which Desai remained as secretary right through the 1950's was the Port Elizabeth Non-European Municipal Workers Union (PE NE MWU). The union is interesting more for its reflection on the Municipality's policies than for its organisational strength. It never represented more than a tenth of the black workers in the Municipality's employ, which was at the time the largest single employer of african labour. It is worth looking at the union in a little more detail because of this, as the PEM was a trendsetter in wages. It was prepared to recognise and negotiate with the union, and even granted it stop-order facilities, as long as it was weak and unrepresentative, and did not engage in any militant action. The PEM liked to be seen as a 'liberal' employer, but did not hesitate to clamp down when stayaway action was engaged in. The union was registered; it was a member of the EPTC and later the SAT&LC District Committee, and relied on conciliation boards to obtain gradual increases in wages; because of its unrepresentative nature and its lack of ability to threaten strike action, and its failure to contribute to SACTU politics in the

1950's, it cannot be seen as one of the 'new unions'. Along with the railway workers union, it is another example of the failure to build effective organisation among service workers.

As noted in above, the PENEMWU affiliated to the T&LC local committee at the end of 1946. At this stage its membership was around 250, out of a workforce of approximately 1 300. Although the municipality's workforce was to grow dramatically to around 3 500 in the next decade, the union's membership never increased to more than around 300. Moreover, although it recruited african workers, it did not build an african leadership, and in none of the T&LC meetings of the period did african workers represent the union, despite the fact that by 1958 only 200 of the 3 500 black workers in the municipality were coloured.¹¹⁴

The first arbitration in the municipality was the 'Greene award' of December 1945 which expired in December 1946. The PENEMWU made new demands after the expiry in early 1947. They suggested the revision of the existing wages of £1 12s per week to £1 17s per week starting wage up to £3 8s per week after 3 years service; and for those earning in the scale of up to £2 11s per week, an increase to £2 16s starting wage up to £4 7s after 3 years service. They also demanded weekly pay, and a 46 hour week. The demands were rejected by the council, and a Conciliation Board was established. After three sittings, by September it was unable to reach a settlement, and so an arbitrator was appointed. The union modified its demands to a blanket 5s weekly increase for all workers. It argued that there had been an increase in the cost of living since the Greene award, and that wages of white workers in the Municipality had been increased by the Hamber award. The wages of municipal workers were shown to be inadequate compared to minimum wages of african labourers in other industries, prescribed by recent Wage Determinations and agreements.

The arbitrator argued against differential wage scales for black workers, on the basis that all 'non-european' municipal workers were one category in that they had no training, and wage determinations classified all unskilled workers together - regardless of experience. He also argued that COLA, which was 'calculated scientifically' had been paid since War Measure No. 43 of 1942 was introduced; the rise in the cost of living should have been met by COLA, and therefore could not be seen as the basis for setting basic wage rates. Moreover the wages of black workers could not be compared with the Hamber award, because of the 'different cost' of white labour. However, he stated that there was

no room for doubt that in relation to the wages laid down for unskilled non-european labourers in respect of local industries employing a large number of unskilled employees, the non-european municipal labourers in receipt of a minimum wage of 1.12.0 per week are

definitely underpaid and that this wage is inadequate to enable them to meet the bare cost of eking out a livelihood.¹¹⁵

Minimum wages for other unskilled workers at the time were as follows:

Commercial and Distributive trade:	£1 17s 6d per week
Motor industry:	£1 18s 4d per week
Building industry:	£1 16s 0d per week.

On this basis the arbitrator argued for an increase in the minimum wage of 3s 6d per week, to a minimum of £1 15s 6d plus COLA. Daily paid workers' wages would be increased to 7s per day. While this meant that a large number of employees earning above £1 15s 6d would not benefit from the award, this was justified on the basis that the municipality was generous towards its long-serving workers, and they had greater security of employment than workers in other industries. The refusal to pay higher wages was couched in a threat of retrenchment:

An employer of labour cannot be expected to pay an employee more for his services than their economic value and that if the wages of the higher paid municipal workers were further raised the time might well arise when the municipality might decide that it can no longer retain their services.¹¹⁶

The hours of work would remain at 48 per week, despite the 46 hour week prescribed in other industries and in the Factories Act, to avoid the 'dislocation of Municipal services.' This award, the De La Harpe award enforced from October 1947 to October 1948, was to provide a precedent for years of renegotiation between the municipality and its employees. The municipality was always slightly behind other industries, reluctantly 'catching up' when forced into arbitrations, giving little opportunity for advancement by black workers who were classified as 'unskilled', and offering no training.¹¹⁷

At the end of 1948 the union applied to the Divisional Inspector for the appointment of another conciliation board, for the council had refused to consider changing wages and conditions after the expiry of the De la Harpe award. The union had tried to negotiate 'amicably', but the council was reluctant to meet with the union, and 'flatly rejected' its proposals for a further increase of 10s per week for weekly paid workers, and an increase to 10s per day for daily paid workers. The union also demanded a 44 hour week for weekly workers, and an eight and a half hour day for daily paid workers; a sick benefit fund and protective clothing.¹¹⁸

The conciliation board was not granted. In the meantime the union had organised the roughly 70 workers in the Walmer municipality, which had agreed to an increase of 5s per week for all black workers. The union resubmitted their draft agreement in March 1949, which was the same as the 1948 proposals but excluding Walmer. Again the PEM refused to consider it, the Union declared a dispute, and applied for a conciliation board. After intervention from Forsyth, secretary of the SAT&LC, who wrote to the Secretary of Labour, the establishment of a conciliation board was approved. The first meeting of the board in July failed to settle the dispute. The union argued that the De la Harpe award had brought a 10d increase for those receiving 5s; *i.e.* it brought the basic wage to 5s 10d per day for those working on a weekly basis. This was insufficient even for food, and led to disease among workers and their families.

The council now took an aggressive stand, arguing that the municipality was different from commerce and industry, which 'gave increases for the sake of industrial peace'; the previous award had cost the PEM over £17 000; and the municipal workers had job security, unlike other companies - for example Ford which had recently discharged 400 workers. After the failure of the board, an arbitrator was appointed after many delays; the T&LC once again assisted with compiling a memorandum for the union on hours of work and leave in other countries. The arbitration eventually took place, but brought little in the way of benefits to the municipal workers.

The Hamber Award of 1950 applied to all black workers in the PEM, and set wages again at 7s per day for daily workers, with an increase from 35s 6d to 37s per week for weekly workers. Hours remained at 48 per week; 2 weeks annual leave was granted, as was protective clothing.¹¹⁹ The union was to have even less success in succeeding years, as the municipality fought further arbitration awards as being too costly. The PEM approached the Minister of Labour requesting that the period of arbitration awards be extended to three years, as "much time had been taken up by arbitration proceedings in recent years with the PENEMWU"; moreover, they resented having to pay half the costs of the arbitration, which amounted to £288 in the case of the Hamber award. They inquired whether any provincial legislation existed to eliminate such arbitrations, as the compulsory arbitration provided for in the IC Act of 1937 was too costly. Although the council was prepared to meet and negotiate with the union annually, they were not under pressure to improve wages and conditions of work, and did so at their own pace.

In 1951 the union put forward a new draft agreement in preparation for the expiry of the Hamber award, again arguing for renegotiation in the light of the rising cost of living, and proposing a 5s per week increase. The union

appeal[ed] to your council to give sympathetic consideration to the draft agreement especially at this time when the low-paid workers find it increasingly difficult to maintain themselves at a civilised standard of living.¹²⁰

By this stage the PEM was employing 2 500 workers, of whom 1 854 earned the minimum of £1 17s per week. The council decided to inform the Minister of Labour that the conciliation board was 'unnecessary and takes too much time'; and the Department of Labour responded to the Union that it had decided not to appoint a board on the grounds that the union was not sufficiently representative of the employees involved in the dispute. The council then informed the union that they were not prepared to take action on the draft agreement.

In March 1952 a new draft agreement was proposed by union. The council responded by asking the union why a new agreement was needed to replace the Hamber award, given that the government had increased COLA from 1 April 1952 (Government Notice 61 of 1952); they used the compulsory payment of COLA as a means for avoiding responsibility for low wages, writing to the union that "if you consider that insufficient surely your appeal is to the government and not to the council". The union's other proposal, that a new agreement should only apply to union members, was dismissed on the grounds that the PEM should not have to be involved in checking the union's membership. The union's weakness was indicated in their requests from the council first for numbers of workers in each department (which were given), and then for the names, designations and wages of all employees, which was refused by the PEM on the grounds that it would take too much time; each department had the information, but it was not collated into one office. Once again, the council resolved not to take any steps regarding the union's proposals. It justified this on the grounds that the government was going to review COLA; and by this stage it was able to reassure itself that it would not be forced into arbitrations, as it hoped the new bill under consideration - the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act - would "assist in dealing with such matters", and abandon arbitration and conciliation procedures. The PEM's 'hardline' attitude was further expressed in its dismissals of many workers after the 1952 stayaway, and its payment of a 3d bonus to workers who did come to work. Ironically, this bonus was absorbed when the PEM deigned to offer a slight wage increase in 1954, causing the union to fight for the retention of this bonus for the workers who had not come out during the stayaway. The union, it seems, was powerless to do anything for those workers who were dismissed; and probably did not represent many of them.¹²¹

The problems with the PENEMWU were clear: it did not organise the majority of workers in the PEM, and could not therefore reinforce its demands through action, as it was unrepresentative. It was a top-heavy structure, controlled through most of the decade by Mohammed Desai, who had been discredited by more democratic unions. He relied exclusively on conciliation boards to win

wage increases for the workers, and expected the Municipality to do the work of the union by supplying it with lists of all workers. While the union made some limited gains during the early 1950's, these were largely due to the liberal paternalism of the PEM rather than the strength of the union. When the PEM's attitude hardened, after the New Brighton riots of 1952 (see Chapter 5), the union was not in a position to make further gains for the largest single number of african workers employed in PE.

4.9. Conclusion: what did the 'new unions' achieve?

These struggles in manufacturing industry and in the service sector in the Eastern Cape brought up a new, militant african working-class leadership. At the same time, the apartheid government was getting into gear; living standards were declining; and threats of repression - both of activists (Suppression of Communism Act, 1950) and of ordinary people (influx control control was introduced in 1952) - were intensifying. The effect was a strong 'meshing' of trade union and political interests; and the background of many of the Eastern Cape trade union leaders bears this out. Unlike the earlier generation of trade union leaders - the white tradition unionists or intellectuals (liberals, communists or trotskyists) - the 'new unionists' were mainly african, working class, and were drawn into trade union activity either on the factory floor, or through the ANC or CPSA. The T&LC and its old-fashioned, 'non-political' unionism held little appeal in this situation. SACTU was the logical outcome of this orientation, and its 'political unionism' was peculiarly suited to the tradition which had developed among african workers in the Eastern Cape.

The post-war period certainly did not see the 'defeat' of the working-class movement, or the submission of socialist ideas to a petty-bourgeois ideology of african nationalism. Fine claims that "The defeat and fragmentation of the labour movement...laid the ground for the rise of african nationalism in the 1950's as the hegemonic ideology of the left"¹²². Hirson, sharing this analysis, argues (writing of the 1950 stayaway): "The slogans were couched in the language of national liberation, not of workers' solidarity. This pattern was to become dominant in the 1950's, but it had been set in the 1940's."¹²³ Here, however, it has been shown how this was precisely the period in PE when a militant working class movement developed. Non-racial industrial unions grew strong in the sectors where african workers were employed, and strikes were used to back up negotiations through the existing industrial conciliation machinery. Rather than becoming subservient to african nationalism, the dominant ideology which developed was one which integrated african nationalism within a broader working class project. The ways in which this was expressed are outlined in Chapters 5 and 7 below.

Notes to chapter 4

1. TUCSA papers, University of the Witwatersrand, Part 1, SAT&LC 1915-1954, Da 4.3, Minutes of SAT&LC, PE, minutes of informal meeting of trade union officials of Port Elizabeth, 19/9/45.

2. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of formal meeting of trade union delegates appointed to consider the establishment of a District Committee, 17/10/45.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Undated minutes of meeting of delegates from local branches of established trade unions in PE.

5. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of meeting of PE Local District Committee, 1/2/46.

6. *Ibid.*, Dd 4.11, SAT&LC Executive Memoranda, Secretary's report on the position in PE, 1946.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of Executive of SAT&LC, PE&U District Committee, 24/7/47.

9. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Secretary's report to General Meeting, 26/8/48.

10. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of General Meeting, 26/8/48.

11. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of SAT&LC PE&U District Committee, 1/6/49.

12. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Secretary's circular to affiliated unions, 15/2/50.

13. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of Executive of PE&U District Committee, 24/7/47.

14. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of executive of SAT&LC PE&U District Committee, 24/7/47.

15. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of executive committee, PE&U District Committee, 24/4/47.

16. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of SAT&LC PE&U District Committee, 28/8/47.

17. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of adjourned Annual General Meeting, 22/4/48.

18. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of executive meeting of SAT&LC PE&U District Committee, 8/9/47.

19. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of SAT&LC PE&U District Committee, 22/1/48.

20. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Executive minutes of PE&U District Committee, 10/9/48.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of executive of PE&U District Committee, 1/6/49.

23. *Ibid.*, Dd 4.11, National Executive Committee, Memorandum on Cost of Living; also Da 4.3, Minutes of executive of SAT&LC PE&U District Committee, 24/7/47.

24. *Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of Special General meeting, 8/11/49.

25. *Ibid.*

- 26.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.62, PE Dock Strike 1946, Memorandum on Wages and Conditions of Stevedoring Workers, PE, submitted by the Dock Workers Branch of the Maritime Union of SA, PE to Stevedoring Companies, 1945.
- 27.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.62, Record of Dockers Strike, 1/2/46.
- 28.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.62, Appeal from Maritime Union of SA, Cape Town to trade unions, 18/1/46.
- 29.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.62, Memorandum on Wages and Conditions, *op. cit.*
- 30.*Ibid.*
- 31.Interview, Ray Simons, 1/2/91; Interview, Raymond Mhlaba, 27/11/90.
- 32.TUCSA papers, Dc 8.62, Memorandum on Wages and Conditions *op. cit.*; Memorandum on defects of the Award by the Dock Workers Union, 13/9/45; Maritime Union of SA appeal to trade unions, 18/1/46.
- 33.*Ibid.*, Memorandum on defects of the Award, *op. cit.*
- 34.*Ibid.*
- 35.*Ibid.*
- 36.*Ibid.*
- 37.*Ibid.*, Maritime Union of SA, appeal to trade unions, 18/1/46.
- 12.*Ibid.*, Circular No. 2., 'To all trade unions and progressive organisations', from the Dock Workers Union, 21/9/46.
- 39.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.62, Pamphlet in English and Xhosa: An Appeal for Support/Isicelo se Nxaso.
- 40.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.62, correspondence, SAT&LC PE Local Committee to Secretary, SAT&LC Johannesburg, 25/1/46; minutes of National Executive Committee meeting of SAT&LC, 5/2/46.
- 41.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.62, correspondence, PE Local Committee, SAT&LC, to SAT&LC national, 25/1/46.
- 42.*Ibid.*
- 43.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.62, Letter from Messina Bros, Coles and Searle to Secretary of SAT&LC, Johannesburg, 2/2/46; and Record of Dockers Strike, 1/2/46.
- 44.*Ibid.*
- 45.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.62, Record of Dockers' Strike, 1/2/46.
- 46.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.62, Memorandum, 13/9/45, *op. cit.*
- 47.Margaret Ballinger Papers, University of the Witwatersrand, BCZB 81/76, B 2.18.20, letter from SAR&H Non-European Staff Association to General Manager, SAR&H, 9/8/1944.
- 48.Davis, D. and Fine, R., *Beyond Apartheid: Labour and Liberation in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1991, p. 106.
- 49.Interview, Govan Mbeki, 26/11/90, and Interview, Raymond Mhlaba, 27/11/90.
- 50.Interview, Raymond Mhlaba, 27/11/90.
- 51.TUCSA papers, Da 4.3, Minutes of PE&U SAT&LC Local Committee, minutes of adjourned Annual General Meeting, 22/4/48.

52.*Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of Special Meeting to discuss laundry workers' strike, PE&U District Committee, SAT&LC, 29/4/48.

53.*Ibid.*

54.*Ibid.*

55.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.74, Laundry Workers 1948, Letter from Secretary of PE&U District Committee, SAT&LC, to SAT&LC National secretary, 29/4/48; Financial statement - Laundry workers strike to 4/5/48; and Da 4.3, Minutes of Special Meeting to Discuss Laundry Workers Strike, SAT&LC PE&U District Committee, 29/4/48.

56.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.74, Laundry Strike Bulletins Nos. 1,2,3 and 4.

57.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.74, Letter from T&LC PE&U District Committee to National office, 5/5/48; Appeal to all unions from T&LC PE&U District Committee, 6/5/48.

58.*Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of Special Meeting, 11/5/48.

59.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.74, Letters from Gus Coe to Forsyth, national secretary of T&LC, 15/5/48; 24/5/48.

60.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.74, Letters from Coe to National Secretary of T&LC, 5/6/48; NEC to PE&U Local 7/6/48; Appeal to affiliates 9/6/48; and Memo to NEC from Rehm, 7/6/48.

61.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.74, Laundry Strike Bulletin No. 3, 11/5/48.

62.FCWU papers, University of the Witwatersrand, AD 1175, A 1.2, Secretary's Report to the First Annual General Meeting of the FCWU, PE branch, 3/2/43. The actual minutes are dated 3/1/42, but this is clearly an error. Also see Goode, R., *A History of the Food and Canning Workers Union*, unpublished MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1986.

63.Interview, Ray Simons, 1/2/91.

64.Interview, Ray Simons, 1/2/91 and Interview, Gus Coe, 14/12/91.

65.Interview, Gus Coe, *op. cit.* and Goode, *op. cit.*

66.FCWU papers, AD 1175, A1 3, quarterly report November 1951; A1 5, Central Executive Committee meeting, September 1951; and Goode, *op. cit.*

67.Margaret Ballinger Papers, BCZB 81/76, B 2.5.29, correspondence from Kingwilliamstown branch of TWIU to A. Wanless, Durban, 7/11/47.

68.TUCSA papers, Da 4.3, SAT&LC PE&U District Committee, Minutes of Executives of PE and U trade unions, 8/9/47.

69.*Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Secretary of PE&U District Committee, report to general meeting of delegates, 26/8/48.

70.*Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of General Meeting of Delegates from Affiliated Unions, 23/2/50.

71.Du Toit, B., *Ukubamba Amadolo: Workers Struggles in the SA Textile Industry*, Onyx Press, 1978, p. 33.

72.*Ibid.*, pp. 34-36.

73.Minkley, G., *With Shouts of Afrika! The 1952 Textile Strike at Good Hope Textiles, King Williams Town*, unpublished paper, University of the Western Cape, 1990.

74.Du Toit, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

75.TUCSA papers, Dc 8.77, SAT&LC file on TWIU, 1948, letter from TWIU, Cape Town to SAT&LC, 19/2/48.

- 76.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.77, Memorandum on dispute between FWP and TWIU, 13/3/48.
- 77.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.77, Circular to affiliates of SAT&LC, 30/3/48.
- 78.*Ibid.*
- 79.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.77, Memorandum on Dispute between FWP and TWIU, 13/3/48.
- 80.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.77, letter from TWIU to SAT&LC, 20/4/48.
- 81.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.77, letter from TWIU to SAT&LC, 28/4/48.
- 82.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.77, letter from TWIU to SAT&LC, 13/5/48; and Draft IC Agreement for the Textile Manufacturing Industry, 16/7/48.
- 83.Du Toit, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
- 84.*Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 85.TUCSA papers, Dc 8.77, Memorandum of objections to the Wage Board Recommendations for the Wool Washing industry as published 7/5/48, SAT&LC Western Province local committee, 29/5/48.
- 86.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.77, Objections to Wage Board Recommendations for the Woolwashing Industry as published 7/5/48, TWIU memorandum.
- 87.Du Toit, *op. cit.*, p. 91, as told by Melville Fletcher.
- 88.TUCSA papers, Dc 8.77, 'To All Members Covered by Government Cost of Living Allowances', TWIU leaflet, 21/9/48.
- 89.Du Toit, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
- 90.TUCSA papers, Dc 8.89, TWIU 1950, Minutes of Conciliation Board, 13/12/50.
- 91.Du Toit, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.
- 92.TUCSA papers, Dc 8.99, TWIU 1952, letter from Gus Coe (secretary) to Worsted Textile Manufacturers Association, 20/2/52.
- 93.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.99, TWIU 1952, TWIU Memorandum submitted to Worsted Textile Manufacturers Association in support of its demands for a new agreement, 20/2/52.
- 94.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.99, Memorandum. The flock industry paid £1 12s 6d for unskilled labour, while worsted ('the highest branch of the textile industry') paid unskilled labour £1 10s 5d. A qualified semi-skilled operative in the flock industry received a basic wage of £2 7s 6d; but in worsted, a weaver - for which a higher degree of skill was required - received £1 16s 9d. A Grade 1 operative in the flock industry got a basic wage of £3 2s 6d; whereas a wool sorter, which called for 'an extremely high grade of skill', was only paid £2 2s. In Britain, the lowest wage in the industry, including COLA, was £3 13s 1d for female labour.
- 95.Minkley, *op. cit.*
- 96.TUCSA papers, Dc 8.99, letter from A. Selby, National Secretary, ATWIU, to SAT&LC, Cape Town, 21/10/52.
- 97.Du Toit, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-8.
- 98.Minkley, *op. cit.*
- 99.TUCSA papers, Dc 8.99, pressclipping, *Cape Times*, 28/6/52.

- 100.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.99, pressclipping, *Cape Times*, 13/8/52.
- 101.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.104, TWIU 1953, Circular from TWIU Head Office, 2/10/53.
- 102.Du Toit, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
- 103.Minkley, *op. cit.*
- 104.TUCSA papers, Dc 8.105, TWIU, 1954.
- 105.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.105, National Secretary of ATWIU to SAT&LC, 16/8/54.
- 106.*Ibid.*, Da 4.3, Minutes of General Meeting of SAT&LC PE&U District Committee, 23/6/49.
- 107.William Ballinger papers, University of Cape Town, BC 347, A8, Memorandum to general manager, SAR&H from SAR&HNEWU, PE branch, undated - but probably in early 1950's.
- 108.*Ibid.*
- 109.TUCSA papers, Dc 2.22, SAR&HU, 1952-1954, Memorandum of SAR&HNEWU, undated.
- 110.*Ibid.*, Dc 2.22, 'Open victimisation of railway workers', pamphlet, SAR&HNEWU; letters from union to T&LC, 20/3/53; 29/3/54; letter from T&LC to union, 31/3/53, and response from SAR&H 9/4/53, and from T&LC 13/5/53.
- 111.William Ballinger papers, BC 347, A 8, Letter to Mrs Ballinger from Minister of Transport, 11/2/56.
- 112.*Ibid.*, A 8. II and III, Letter to Margaret Ballinger from union, and Memorandum to Minister of Transport, 7/2/56.
- 113.*Ibid.*, A 8. III, Memorandum from SAR&H WU to Minister of Transport, 7/2/56.
- 114.TUCSA papers, Da 4.3, SAT&LC Minutes, 1945 - 1951; and PEM, 10/7, part 14, City Engineer: Non-European Affairs.
- 115.TUCSA papers, Dc 8.80, PENEMWU, 1949, Report of the arbitrator in dispute between PENEMWU and City Council of PE; Application for Conciliation Board by PENEMWU, 16/5/49.
- 116.*Ibid.*
- 117.*Ibid.*
- 118.*Ibid.*, Dd 9.45, Memoranda - disputes 1948, statement by PENEMWU in application for a conciliation board, 1/12/48.
- 119.*Ibid.*, Dc 8.80, Correspondence between PENEMWU and SAT&LC.
- 120.PEM, 10/7, 5 - 7, City Engineer: Non-European Affairs. The City Engineers Department was by far the largest employer of unskilled labour in the municipality.
- 121.*Ibid.*
- 122.Fine, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
- 123.Hirson, B., *Yours for the Union: Class and Community Struggles in South Africa*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg 1990, p. 194.

CHAPTER 5

1946 - 1960: THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION, PASS LAWS AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN.

5.1. Reproduction struggles in context

Having analysed the growth of the african labour movement in PE in the post-war years, we now need to situate this growth within the context of the african community as a whole.

Davis and Fine, in their critique of the existing historiography of the South African labour movement, argue that the black working class was numerically small and 'young' in the 1940's. The total industrial workforce expanded from 132 000 in 1932 to 422 000 in 1946, and of this workforce, the african component almost tripled from 85 000 in 1934 to over 250 000 in 1946. Despite this growth, they argue, the 'social weight' of the black working class was limited, and "what was most striking about the black industrial workforce itself in this period is how limited its numbers were" - only 250 000 out of 5 million economically active black people.¹ They note that the largest concentration of african workers was on the mines, and that the majority of africans were still living 'on the land'. They argue that on this basis one should not overestimate the strength of the african industrial workers in South Africa in the 1940's, as they were in a structurally weak position.

As has been argued above in Chapter 1, this was certainly the case in Port Elizabeth; yet, unlike the rest of the country - and specifically unlike the Rand where industrial development was concentrated - PE had neither a mining industry, nor an african population with strong ties to the land. It was a small industrial proletariat in a situation in which there was no option to be anything other than an industrial proletariat. This is using the term 'industrial proletariat' in the broad sense; meaning not strictly workers employed in manufacturing industry, but non-agricultural workers who are fully proletarianised.

Yet, if one accepts Davis and Fine's arguments that industrial growth was only just beginning, that the black working class was still in its infancy, how much more does this apply to Port Elizabeth which was (and still is) a small industrial centre in comparison to the Rand, the Durban/Pietermaritzburg industrial axis, and the Western Cape?

To recap from Chapter 1, the african population of Port Elizabeth in 1946 numbered approximately 57 000, compared with 59 000 whites and 27 000 coloureds. However, fewer than 9 000 africans were employed in industry; and only 400 of these were women. Of the men, nearly 8 000 were

in the category of 'general labourer'. Almost none were employed in agriculture or mining (261 in agriculture and 61 in mining). Most were employed in transport (2 700), services (1 900), building (1 000), public services (1 000) and commerce (2 100).²

Thus, despite the high level of african proletarianisation in the PE area, PE remained a small industrial centre, with a low level of incorporation of african labour into skilled or semi-skilled positions in manufacturing, up until the 1960's. It would seem logical that the form of working-class organisation in this situation would not focus primarily around the building of trade unions, but around struggles over the reproduction of this 'infant' working class. The large, permanent african population in Port Elizabeth, employed as unskilled labour in industry, transport and services, were concerned not with 'supplementing' an income from the land, but with establishing themselves and their families as urban residents. While denied skills and access in the workplace; while perceived by whites as menial labour - servants or service workers - as 'simple natives' from the 'reserves' - they were in fact perceiving themselves as an urban working class; as a full proletariat. And in the building of this perception, they fought for these rights of an urban proletariat: the rights first and foremost to live in the cities and to have a family life.

The situation in Port Elizabeth contrasted sharply in this regard with the perceptions of workers in cities where migrant labour was predominant; on the Rand, especially in the mine compounds, workers' perceptions were very different. Dunbar Moodie writes of the 'Moral Economy' of the mining compounds, where "Social control in the mine compounds and the work places of the South African gold mines in the 1940's was hegemonic in the sense that it imposed certain limits on what black miners ...perceived to be possibilities for change."³ What distinguished Port Elizabeth's african workers was precisely this lack of social control in the years when they began to be absorbed into the industrial workplace.

In the 1940's, these rights of an urban proletariat were not under threat and therefore were not a focus of organisation; mechanisms of social control over africans, although by no means absent, were limited relative to the major industrial centres of Johannesburg and Cape Town. Struggles of the african working class in this period focussed on other issues in the 'sphere of reproduction' - rent, housing and transport, and education predictably being the key issues. As the 1950's progressed, and influx control was enforced, struggles to maintain their position as urban residents took precedence.

During the 1950's, things changed in a number of ways. On the one hand, manufacturing industry grew, and the number of africans employed in industry increased substantially - putting african workers for a short time into a stronger bargaining position, as outlined in Chapter 4. On the other

hand, controls over african labour and urbanisation were enforced through the mechanisms of the labour bureaux and the pass laws. Industry and labour responded in particular ways to these new controls, and some of these responses are outlined in Chapter 6.

Fine and Davis argue that the working class was 'defeated' in 1946, and that the late 1940's and early 1950's were a time of 'quiescence' for the labour movement, which enabled the apartheid state to rise and consolidate. In Port Elizabeth, as will be shown below, the pattern was somewhat different. In this period capital and the local state were not unequivocal about the apartheid controls envisaged. The imposition of such controls were contested terrain, influenced by working-class actions. Evidence in the records of the PE Municipality indicate that these controls were not used as a direct method of 'controlling the struggle', and capital (as represented by the views of the Midland Chamber of Industries) was extremely ambiguous in its response to the apartheid state. Throughout this period (late 1940's and 1950's) there were instances of accommodation of both working class and capitals' interests on the part of the local state; and capital was itself prepared to make some concessions to organised labour. Jenny Robinson, in her urban geography thesis on Port Elizabeth, describes this struggle and how the central state forced the issue on local government, which was 'converted' to the implementation of influx control during the 1950's.

This chapter focusses on some of these issues and struggles. Trade union and 'point of production' struggles are not the only forms of working-class organisation. The PE african working class, though generally in a weak position in industry, utilised other methods of struggle with some degree of success. These struggles around 'reproduction' in the 1940's combined with the growth of the african labour movement in the post-war years to influence the type of politics which was to emerge in PE's black community in the 1950's. It can be argued that in the context of the structural weakness of the african working-class in PE, more was obtained for the working-class through the fusion of community, political and labour struggles acting in concert, than would have been the case if workers had operated otherwise and confined themselves to 'traditional' unions engaged solely in point-of-production struggles. Arguments such as those of Davies and Fine, and Foster, that there was never a 'working class politics' in South African resistance history have emerged from a limited vision of 'what is possible', and a narrow understanding of the variety and nature of possible working-class organisational expression.

It may be asked why, given the structural 'weakness' of african workers in PE, the focus of this research is on labour organisation, and not primarily on these struggles around reproduction. The reason is that many of these struggles have in themselves been analysed in some depth: there have been analyses of, separately, the bantu education boycotts, the rent and bus boycotts, and the anti-pass campaigns.⁴ They have, however, tended to be situated within the broader political

context of the period, within a focus on the ANC and its politics. Here the purpose is to situate them within an analysis of working-class action, and the limitations on working-class action in other areas, notably 'point of production' struggles; and within an analysis of the changing structural position of PE's african working-class. It is argued that a multi-class alliance emerged in PE during the 1950's within which working-class interests were hegemonic.

5.2. African wages and the cost of living

In 1946, a survey showed that the PE african population was the poorest of six major urban centres in SA.⁵ The situation did not improve over the following decade. The context in which struggles around reproduction in the late 1940's and 1950's took place was one in which the cost of living was increasing rapidly in advance of a rise in wage levels for african workers in the city. That problems were experienced with the increasing cost of living is born out by the fact that by 1956 the unskilled wage rate was still £1 7s per week, with Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) of 13s 9d per week - unchanged since the wage determination of 1941 for unskilled trades.⁶ While the compulsory COLA was raised periodically, and was 'calculated scientifically' it was not raised sufficiently to meet the rising cost of living.⁷ The cost of living rose by 101% between 1941 and 1956; the compulsory COLA payment only covered 50% of the retail price index increase.⁸

An additional source of hardship was the introduction of a poll tax. In 1950 it was announced in PE that all male natives of 18 years and over were to pay £1 general tax annually;⁹ police were brought in to reinforce the law on behalf of the native commissioner if employers failed to ensure the collection of taxes from their employees. In 1951/2 this new regulation must have added to the strains faced by an african population already threatened with influx control, and added fuel to the consciousness of injustice and poverty.

By the latter half of the 1950's, the PE Municipality - one of the largest employers of african workers - had raised wages higher than the existing wage determination, "as a result of arbitration and agreements between the council and the non-european employees". The council rate in 1956 was 37s per week minimum plus COLA of 18s 3d per week. This was not much less than the wages paid by the highest wage determinations in force in PE for unskilled workers: £1 17s 6d in the motor transport, milling, commercial and distributive, glass and canvas industries. African workers not working for the PEM, or not covered by other such wage determinations - for example those working for the railways - earned the minimum according to the determination for unskilled workers.¹⁰ It must be borne in mind that the vast majority of african workers were unskilled, with a high proportion working in the service sector and not covered by industrial council agreements.

The PEM, with its liberal policies, felt obliged to argue for a raise in unskilled wages in the city to meet that already established by the City Council and the higher-paying industries. It argued that the price of bread - the principal diet of africans - had increased, as had the price of all items of food and clothing.¹¹ The new Wage Determination which came into force in November 1957 set the new minimum at 37s 6d per week, 6d per week higher than the existing Council wages.¹² With COLA of 18s 6d per week, this brought the monthly income of most african workers up to £11 3s.

The new wage determination was woefully inadequate, however. A number of liberal interest groups in the city pressurised for increased wages for africans. The PE Ratepayers Association - not a radical body by any means - calculated that the minimum monthly expenditure for a family of four living in New Brighton in 1959 was a follows:

Rent:	£2 0s 0d
Tranport:	£0 18s 2d (once each way daily, one person)
Tax:	£0 3s 4d
Food:	£7 10s 0d (5s per day family of 4 - Dept. of Nutrition 1956)
Total:	£10 11s 6d

The balance of 11s 6d was considered too little for fuel, clothing, medical expenses, education and recreation. Moreover, they acknowleged that their calculation for food was an underestimate as the cost of staples had risen since 1956.¹³

The PE and District Distressed Areas Committee, a slightly more radical body, estimated in 1959 that over 70 000 people in PE were living below the poverty datum line. They made a different estimate of the essential monthly minimum expenditure for a family of 5 in PE, which was probably more accurate than the ratepayers':

Food	£20 3s 0d
Rent	£1 17s 0d
Clothing	£1 2s 0d
Fuel and Cleaning	£1 4s 0d
Transport	£1 4s 0d
Tax	£0 1s 8d
TOTAL	£25 11s 8d

Even this was a conservative estimate; the SAIRR had calculated the living wage for Johannesburg to be £25 in 1956. In other words, a large percentage of the workforce was being paid less than half of the minimum wage needed for a family to subsist. The Distressed Areas Committee calculated that 70% of people in PE were receiving under £20 per month.

People made up the deficit in their budgets by buying less food, causing an increase in health problems. The Distressed Areas Committee gave the example of people moved from Korsten to Schauder (the coloured township) who, like those moved to Kwazakele, had to pay increased rentals; there had been a marked increase in cases of tuberculosis in Schauder. Moreover, they argued that of the 1 116 patients who died at Livingstone hospital - the only hospital in PE serving the african and coloured communities - in 1957, most died of malnutrition and starvation - indicating the depth of poverty in the city.¹⁴

The SAIRR backed up these arguments in the same year, contending that the increase in african taxation had occurred simultaneously with rent increases, and had not been offset by wage increases. They estimated that over 80% of the african workforce in PE were paid below the minimum living level, and appealed to the City Council, the MCI and the Chamber of Commerce to increase the wages of their african workers immediately.¹⁵

The above figures indicate the extent of poverty faced by the african working-class in PE in the period under review - a reality acknowledged by the more liberal interests in the ruling class at the time. The ways in which organised workers responded to this situation, and the limited gains they made in terms of wage board determinations and negotiated wage increases have been analysed in Chapters 3 and 4. But given the constraints on african employment in the formal sector, there were severe limitations on the ability of african workers to change their circumstances through workplace organisation.

5.3. The politics of reproduction - PE in the late 1940's

Given the real threats to the standard of living of the working class during the 1940's and 1950's, and the new pressures faced in the form of influx control, it is not surprising that working-class communities developed appropriate responses. The contradictory situation existed where one of the most fully proletarianised african populations in the country was also one of the poorest. It is in this context that the militant tradition of community organisation in PE arose.

It is also not surprising that the ANC - which had been in previous decades in PE, and continued to be in other centres, a 'petty-bourgeois nationalist' organisation - was forced to identify with its membership, who were invariably workers or the unemployed and their families. The structural position of african workers in the PE economy, and their lack of access to skills, meant that there was little chance of an influential african middle class arising. The idea that "in the immediate post-war years the ANC was transformed by its new class base into a class-conscious movement of proletarian orientation"¹⁶ must be treated with caution. However, Davis and Fine's argument that the african working class was 'defeated' in 1946 does not accurately reflect what was, in PE, the *beginning* of a process of 'class-conscious orientation' of the local political movements. This was a process whereby the interests of the ANC, the SACP, the Women's League, and most importantly, the 'new unions' which only emerged with strength in the late 1940's, merged.

The early 1940's saw the transformation of the ANC in PE from a 'moribund' institution to a political organisation with a mass base of support among residents of New Brighton and Korsten. Baines describes how "Trade unionists supplanted traders and middle-class professionals in the ANC leadership in Port Elizabeth";¹⁷ Lodge describes the lack of influence of the african petty-bourgeoisie in PE, and how the influence of trade unionists on the ANC muted the influence of Africanist ideology which was finding expression in the ANC elsewhere; he claims that "By 1950, politics was in the hands of working-class leaders to a degree which clearly distinguished Port Elizabeth from any other centre."¹⁸ Robinson describes how "...the strength of union activity encouraged both the emergence of a distinctive working-class leadership within popular organisations and the co-ordination of community and workplace organisation."¹⁹

Forms of 'mass action' as they are called today - demonstrations, stayaways, and consumer, rent and bus boycotts - were the most accessible instrument of struggle to PE's african working class in the 1940s and 1950's. The tradition of mass action truly began in 1944-1946, although residents of New Brighton had already developed a practice of holding mass meetings and sending deputations to the City Council, demanding both political representation and improvements in living conditions (see Chapter 2).

The process began in 1943 with members of CNETU deciding to contest elections to the New Brighton Advisory Board. CPSA member Mohammed Desai initiated the process, distributing election manifestos which made demands of the Council (rather than promises of action on the part of the Board) and addressing election meetings in New Brighton, and in the 1944 elections some of the CNETU candidates were successful.²⁰

Attempts by the Council to introduce passes in 1944 met with vigorous opposition, and after the CPISA's appeal for support was backed up by other organisations, the Advisory Board "gave its whole-hearted support to the anti-pass movement".²¹ As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Council backed down, and the implementation of passes was delayed for another ten years.

The issue of unaffordable rents, combined with the price of food, was the next problem around which such action was taken. The main, ongoing struggle was among the residents of the municipal township - New Brighton - against the ~~rents~~ ^{rents} that they paid to the municipality. Rentals in McNamee township nearly trebled between 1941 when the township was built, and 1956; initially 16s per month, they rose 4s 8d per week in 1945. In 1951 they were raised again to 8s 9d per week, and again in 1956 to 11s per week excluding electricity.²² Rentals increased by 136% between 1941 and 1956 for africans in the municipal townships as a whole.²³ By 1957 it was reported that New Brighton, of all townships, contained the largest number of people in the country unable to afford any rent at all.²⁴

The increases in rental did not go uncontested. There were "massed street processions through the city centre which developed during the 1945-47 rent and food shortage protests".²⁵ The 1945 protests were based on a change in the system of payment for rental of municipal housing in New Brighton; whereas rentals had previously been paid monthly, the council changed the system to weekly, which indirectly increased rentals through residents paying for 52 instead of 48 weeks. Mass protests and threats of strike action followed the announcement, and workers in many industries were also involved in protesting the increase (see, for example, the response of railway workers in Chapter 3). Desai, at that stage a city councillor as well as a trade unionist, again led the protests, which were combined with the demand for lower food prices. As in the dockworkers' strike in Chapter 4, the legitimacy of communists at the end of the war, and the demand for a more equitable post-war 'deal' for africans, were the themes of the protests.

The outcome is unclear; Desai and others were charged and fined for contravening traffic regulations by organising the march into town; proposed rentals on 100 of the new houses in the McNamee housing scheme were reduced, but rentals for houses in the area as a whole were finally raised in 1947. A further rent increase was proposed in 1951 and implemented in 1953, despite vociferous protests once again.²⁶ The unaffordability of rents by the end of the decade is indicated by the fact that even those in steady employment could not afford to pay: in 1959 municipal workers were being evicted from township houses because of non-payment of rent.²⁷

Transport was the other main 'reproduction' issue around which township residents organised, as in other townships such as Alexandra and Evaton in the Transvaal. The 1949 bus boycott described

by Lodge²⁸ was the main example of the employment of this strategy in PE, but was by no means the only one. The bus company in PE at that stage was run by the South African Railways, and was taken over by Bay Transport only in 1954. While the key issue of the boycott was an increase in busfares, the eventual takeover of the company resulted in the employment of african drivers and conductors, which was considered a victory; so much so that when these drivers and conductors were organised at a later stage, the township came out on boycott again in support of striking busworkers' demands (see Chapter 7). While it seems that it was only the first bus boycott in 1949 which was oriented around commuters refusing to pay higher fares, the support for subsequent boycotts in the 1950's was no doubt fuelled by high transport costs; in 1956 road transport costs for africans in PE increased by 33%.²⁹

The growth of the african labour movement in the post-war period must thus be situated in the context of a general 'working-class politics' which was built around issues of reproduction in the 1940's while black trade unions were still weak. It can be argued that the basis of working-class politics in Port Elizabeth was the 'community', in the sense of a defined residential area for the majority of african workers, who shared common interests, who fought collectively against the increasingly high cost of living in the 1940s, and the majority of whom did not have effective representation at their places of work. While it seems that these struggles were not effective in containing the effects of the rising cost of living - the costs of food, rent and transport continued to rise throughout the 1950's - they did contribute to the creation of a militant tradition of community politics, which gained momentum during the 1950's as it meshed with national political issues and the implementation of influx control.

5.4. The banning of the CPSA and the transformation of the ANC

This is not, however, to idealise the role of the ANC in the 1940's, or present it as a working-class organisation with a revolutionary programme. The rent and food protests - the main example of struggles around reproduction in the mid-1940's - were short-term and 'reactive' in nature, and were extremely localised. Communists such as Desai were more prominent in leading such protests than ANC leaders; and while women were at the forefront of such campaigns, there were no women in prominent positions in the ANC until the 1950's. However, it was in this period that the leadership and composition of the ANC began to change. The ANC began to recruit membership on a large scale in New Brighton, and the 'old guard' of petty-bourgeois leaders were replaced by communists and trade unionists such as Raymond Mhlaba and Gladstone Tshume, and ordinary working-class leaders such as Edgar Ngoyi and Simon Mkalipi (who were to lead the Defiance Campaign). ANC leaders such as Mhlaba were still at this stage using the Advisory Board as a

vehicle for political expression; Mhlaba was elected in 1949 and again in 1950, but he resigned in 1951 when the ANC decided not to recognise the Board. His resignation was followed in 1952 by the resignation of all the elected members, many of whom were 'old guard' ANC members.³⁰

In addition, after the banning of the CPSA in 1950, many of the communists involved continued their political involvement through the ANC. While the CPSA had been the dominant political force in the reproduction struggles in the mid-1950's, and had assisted in building some of the african unions of the post-war years, it was reported that by 1950

At Port Elizabeth, Pretoria, East London and East Rand, the District Organisations [of the CPSA] are weak. For practical purposes they have shrunk to the status of groups calling themselves District Committees. The chief reason for this decline has been the lack of a sufficient number of cadres in the areas mentioned above.³¹

Desai, one of the more influential members of the CPSA in the 1940's, was ousted by fellow communist Ray Alexander from his position in black trade unions in PE for corruption in 1950 (see Chapter 4). Govan Mbeki recalls that there had been coloured members of the CPSA before its banning, but that they 'fell away' after 1950. Moreover, there were few white members of the Party, and those who were involved, like Gus Coe, Tolly Bennun and Arnold Latti, played a supportive rather than a leadership role.³² When the CPSA was reconstituted underground in 1953 as the SACP, some of those who had been members in PE continued to play a significant role. However, they worked *through* the ANC. Mbeki described the relationship between the SACP and the ANC as an "integral relationship", one in which individual SACP members were "very active" but "did not sit separately and strategise" as the SACP.³³ While the SACP was not an independent *organisational* force during the 1950's in PE, and certainly did not manipulate the ANC, its members - who were predominantly african - played a significant role at a leadership level within the ANC. They ensured that the nascent african working class movement in PE was not subsumed under the interests of petty-bourgeois african nationalism; they ensured that working class interests were hegemonic within the powerful mass movement that developed in the 1950's.

It would be incorrect to view the ANC as a homogeneous working-class organisation; the failure to respond, in the late 1950's, to the removal of Korsten was an indication that class divisions did exist. Yet the 'defeat' of the Korsten property-owners can be seen as the final 'nail in the coffin' of african petty-bourgeois political expression in PE. It was the end of process whereby the ANC in PE had increasingly come to represent the african working-class; the african petty-bourgeoisie was so small as to have little political influence.

5.5. Reproduction struggles and innovative strategies: the politics of the 1950's

Events in PE in the 1950's took place in the context of national political developments. The election of the Nationalist Party government in 1948 and the implementation of apartheid laws in the 1950's, and the national political campaigns in opposition to these laws, are well known to all students of South African history. In PE, this resistance had particular characteristics which distinguished it from other urban centres.

Lodge was correct in his analysis that the threats posed by apartheid structures to a settled urban african community caused the extensive support for the Defiance Campaign in Port Elizabeth in 1952. The Defiance Campaign is often emphasised in 'resistance histories' of PE, because of its numerical success. Yet it was just the beginning of a series of mass actions in the 1950's, which were almost entirely around local issues of reproduction and urban rights. This trend had begun in the 1940's in New Brighton, with the boycotts of the Native Representative Council, the bus boycott, and the rent, food and anti-pass protests. The proletarian nature of the african community (in two senses: both in having a tiny petty-bourgeoisie, and in not retaining rural linkages), yet their limited opportunities in manufacturing, made struggles around the cost of living and around threats to their urban status the logical point of action.

These struggles included transport boycotts and consumer boycotts, the latter to become a 'favourite' weapon of PE workers, resurrected in the 1980's with considerable success; struggles around rentals or provision of housing; campaigns for a living wage, and stayaways or 'political strikes' as they were known at the time. PE specialised in these 'cross-over' politics, between the point-of-production and the point-of-reproduction; co-operative action between unions and political or community groups was the norm rather than the exception, and there is no doubt that the character of the ANC was influenced by these strategies. While the ANC did get caught from time to time in the contradiction between the interests of the african petty-bourgeoisie and the working class - with the destruction of Korsten being the clearest example of this - the overriding position of the ANC was identification with its working-class base. The organisational linkages between political and labour movements, as well as the mass support evident for political actions indicated the existence of a 'working-class movement'. While class and non-class elements are present in any ideological discourse, in Port Elizabeth - as in some other areas - the interests of the working-class were hegemonic within the broader political 'project' of radical nationalism.

This 'cross-over politics' was reflected initially in the Defiance Campaign, where on a number of occasions workers came out on strike when defiers were not re-employed on their return from serving jail sentences.³⁴ It was evidenced next during the organisation around the Congress of the

People campaign in 1954-1955, where trade-union activists involved themselves in collecting workers' demands for the Freedom Charter. This was not seen as a separate political campaign, but was used by SACTU - the 'trade union wing' of the Congress movement, formed in March 1955 - to draw workers into trade unions. Care had to be taken, however, not to raise expectations unduly. Alven Bennie, SACTU organiser, recalled how workers from different industries brought their demands to the office of the PE [SACTU] Local Committee after work. The SACTU organisers responded by setting up small committees of workers to continue organising for trade unions, not only for the Congress campaign. In this way the Congress of the People campaign assisted in organising workers, who began to discuss common problems and look towards the formation of a trade union as the solution. The organisers were careful to explain the need for worker unity and representation through trade unions, and that the workers' problems would not be solved by Congress of People, for "Some workers were under the impression that the demands taken to the Congress of People would be accepted by the bosses on their return."³⁵

The 1950's saw a whole series of boycotts of different types embarked on by the congress alliance in PE - some of them aimed at local businesses or reproduction issues, such as rent and education, in PE; others were displays of solidarity with workers in other parts of the country.

1954 saw a boycott of the United Tobacco Company in solidarity with Durban workers,³⁶ as well as a local consumer boycott of specific shops. The latter boycott, called by the ANC, targetted enterprises which refused to employ africans, and was implemented primarily by the Women's League of the ANC; one resident of Korsten who was involved in the Women's League recalled the tightly-directed nature of the boycott:

In Korsten women didn't organise a boycott of all shops. Some of the shop owners didn't want to employ blacks, so we used to boycott the shops one at a time. When business was down in a particular shop, they would decide to employ black people, so we would stop boycotting that shop and go on to the next one.³⁷

1955 saw the formation of the Congress Alliance, which consisted of the ANC, the South African Coloured People's Organisation (SACPO), the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the Congress of Democrats (COD) and SACTU. In PE, neither the SAIC nor the COD had any organisational presence; and SACPO, though active, consisted mainly of a small number of trade union activists and never developed a mass base. The main force in the Alliance was thus the ANC, which in contrast to the other members of the movement, built up a tight but extensive network of organisation in the african townships. The character of the Congress Alliance, which unlike in some other areas was not strongly influenced by white, coloured or indian intellectuals, revolved strongly

around the ANC/SACTU alliance and their joint mass base of support from african working class people.

The boycott tradition took a new form in the following year, 1956, when parents in Korsten and New Brighton, under ANC leadership, took their children out of school in protest against the introduction of 'bantu education'. Again, the ANC Womens League and SACTU played a major role in the boycott, arranging 'cultural clubs' to teach children in the townships.³⁸

Another example of the PE working class organising in solidarity with other centres was the Alexandria bus boycott in 1957, which was supported by a 'sympathy boycott' in PE. This is used as an illustration of the 'well-organised working class' in PE, who came out on a two week boycott which was 90% effective.³⁹

Consumer boycotts continued with a boycott of the products of Nationalist Party-controlled companies. A list of the companies was circulated to township residents. This boycott, started in PE in 1957, became a national boycott in 1959, and was effective enough to provide a fair amount of leverage on companies such as LKB, who made concessions to avoid being included on the list (see Chapter 7). A boycott of potatoes followed in 1959, in protest against the conditions of farmworkers. Again, although the farms on which abuses were highlighted were in Bethel in the Free State and would not have been a direct issue for PE workers, the boycott was taken up strongly, and combined with efforts to organise farmworkers in outlying areas into unions. Workers on pineapple and orange farms in the Albany district were organised jointly by the ANC and SACTU. It was followed by an Eastern Cape boycott of oranges, which led to some improvements in wages.⁴⁰

Another site of 'reproduction struggle' was the process of building Municipal housing in the townships. In one unusual instance, the interests of the white artisans and the black labourers converged. In 1952 the municipality had instituted a five-day working week for the construction of township housing, as building workers (presumably white) "didn't want to work Saturdays because of the disturbances". They were referring to the mobilisation around the Defiance Campaign, and the subsequent New Brighton riots. When the PEM tried to reinstitute the six-day week the following year, they received a petition from the black workers requesting the continuation of a five-day week at longer hours; it was signed by 279 workers, the remainder being unable to write. This petition would probably have been ignored, if it had not been for the white builders who also favoured a five-day week; agreement was reached and the five day week was reinstated.⁴¹ In 1953 the building workers demanded higher wages and threatened strike action.

The provision of housing became a key issue in the second half of the 1950's, when the municipality instituted a 'site and service' scheme in Kwazakele. While the limited housing built in New Brighton in the 1930s and 1940s had deteriorated, africans flowing into PE had chosen or been forced to live in informal housing, mainly in the shack areas of Korsten. Korsten, although having been brought under the Port Elizabeth Municipality's control in 1931, was a slum area, and the place of choice for urban residents who wished to escape the controls of the municipal township. Between 1956 and 1958, the PEM implemented a major removals operation, shifting some 46 000 people from Korsten into the new site and service township in Kwazakele, adjoining New Brighton. Struggles around the removals, the dispossession of the Korsten landowners, and conditions in the new site and service scheme were all relatively muted - with the exception of the african building workers who continued to express their dissatisfaction with the Municipality's policies. In 1957 the 550 african workers on the new site and service scheme in Kwazakele complained that coloureds were replacing africans, and that there were too many white staff; they felt that the law that "Europeans should train natives to manage their work" was wrong, and that "we are not too far wrong in saying that there are people who can manage to [among] the natives".⁴²

As with Sophiatown, class divisions among residents of Korsten, and a lack of clear political leadership from the ANC, contributed to this lack of resistance.⁴³ However, the removals added to the burden faced by urban africans; being moved from Korsten to Kwazakele meant increased transport costs, with the lowest-paid workers living furthest from their workplaces. Rentals also increased. The Distressed Areas Committee argued in 1957 that the success of the site and service scheme depended on the ability of workers to pay for their new living conditions, and argued that existing wage levels could not support the new conditions. Rack-renting a shack from a landlord in Korsten had cost between 10s and 15s per month; now families were forced to pay 17s 6d per month for the same shack, moved to a new site further from town. For one of the new two-roomed houses in Kwazakele, rent was a whole pound more, *i.e.* £1 17s 6d per month.⁴⁴

In addition, african children who had been able to go to school in Korsten previously were now forced, partly because of removals but largely because of the implementation of 'bantu education', to attend schools in the african townships. In a situation where many had had the benefit of a more liberal education in multi-racial church schools in Korsten, it is not surprising that the implementation of 'bantu education' gave rise to extremely fierce resistance, as noted above. The fact that the boycott was championed by parents is explicable in the context of their removal (or imminent removal) from an area where they were not restricted by municipal controls.

5.6. Womens organisation and the pass laws

At that time there was no time to sit down, there was no time to eat or drink - all the time we were working, working, and the people were together. I would like to die when I think about it. There is still lots of work to do, but I can't do it now.⁴⁵

5.6.1. Women's role in reproduction struggles

As outlined in Chapter 1, the growth of the female african population of PE in the 1940's and 1950's was considerable; yet african women were still a tiny proportion of the total workforce in industry. Most women in PE, as in South Africa as a whole, were playing a 'primarily reproductive role', with african women being only 0,8% of the total industrial labour force in the country at the end of the war.⁴⁶

Robinson sees this gender division of labour as explaining the domination by male activists of trade union and national politics, while women dominated 'township politics' - the politics of reproduction. While agreeing that men dominated national politics, women in PE played an important role both in trade union politics and in the 'politics of reproduction'. This is partly explained by the higher percentage of women in the urban population in PE relative to other centres, as outlined in Chapter 2: in 1946 the masculinity rate was 102, as opposed to 186 in the country as a whole, and 275 on the Witwatersrand.⁴⁷ This stability resulted in women being "easier to organise politically", and "contributed to the greater political maturity they displayed".⁴⁸

Robinson argues that in New Brighton, the voice of women around township conditions, which was expressed in the 1930's,

persisted and assumed an increasingly organised form until by the late 1940's and 1950's the location superintendant was receiving frequent and ever larger deputations from women demanding council action on a number of social and physical problems experienced in the township.⁴⁹

Given that "...women...dominated township politics to the extent that one ex-administrator [of New Brighton] considered the ANC in PE to have been managed entirely by women",⁵⁰ it can be assumed that women played a significant role in the rent and transport struggles in the 1940's described above.

Cheryl Walker, in her history of women's resistance in South Africa, supports this view. While no reference is made specifically to Port Elizabeth, she notes that the 'extreme poverty' of urban africans during World War II led to many local campaigns and protests in the 1940's, especially around food prices. Women played a significant role in these local protests, rather than in national politics.⁵¹ Although the ANC admitted women to full membership in 1943, and the Womens League was established in the same year, the Womens League did not really become well-established and active until the late 1940's.

This argument is supported by the activities of the ANC Women's League and Federation of South African Women (Fedsaw) in Korsten in the 1950's, where women took up many 'small' campaigns around local conditions - the improvement of food and conditions at the Livingstone hospital is one example. ANC national campaigns, on the other hand, were not taken up so effectively, or at least not by women in the area who were more concerned with 'bread and butter' issues.⁵²

The role of women in the 1950's in PE extended far beyond these local 'bread and butter' issues, however. Women were at the forefront of enforcing the consumer and bus boycotts and stayaways, in setting up 'cultural clubs' during the schools boycott, and, most importantly, in fighting the extension of passes. Moreover, women who had been absorbed into industrial employment in the food and textile industries played a major role in trade union organisation. Women who had become involved in trade-union organisation during the 1940's were to take up prominent positions in the ANC Womens League and in the Fedsaw. In many cases, the involvement of such women in reproduction struggles in New Brighton and Korsten in the 1940's had prepared them to face the challenges of the 1950's.

The singular demographics of PE, where, unlike other urban centres except East London, there were an equal (and sometimes greater) number of african women to men, was because of the absence of influx controls, and the historical growth in PE of a fully-urbanised african proletariat. In 1946, there were 24 000 men and 23 500 women; by 1960 the proportion of women had grown; there were 59 000 men and 64 000 women.⁵³ The increase in the proportion of women in the late 1950's and early 1960's was because male residents were first affected by the influx control, and the male population dropped (see Chapter 1). The family was very important, and the threat to the status of african women in the apartheid era of labour bureaux and pass laws was to mobilise women to a high degree.

Although the vast majority of african women in PE were employed as domestic workers (6 600 out of 8 700 working african women in PE were in 'personal service' in 1946; 10 300 out of 16 400 in 1960),⁵⁴ there was a period during the 1950's when african women enjoyed employment

opportunities in industry in greater numbers, especially in the food and to a lesser extent textiles industries (see Chapter 4). As the AFCWU and ATWIU were the 'strongholds' of SACTU, it was logical that the 'meshing' between political and worker concerns should extend to the area of women's organisation. Indeed, in many of the most significant worker and political struggles of the 1950's, women were the key constituency and the key organisers - for example, in the struggles against the pass laws, the bantu education act, and the struggle against wage cuts at LKB.

Women's organisation also played a key role in enforcing the boycotts and stayaways of the time. On one occasion, the militance of women surpassed the consciousness of the male community, to the extent that women dressed as men to 'attack' male workers breaking a bus boycott. In their role as women this type of action would not be acceptable to their male comrades, so they adopted male roles in order to implement a militant tactic. One of the women involved described these events. Although she was not a trade unionist, and although she could not in memory distinguish between the 1957 bus boycott and the 1957 or 1958 stayaways, her account is interesting for its integration of the 'pound a day' call (see Chapter 7) with the bus boycott, and the militant feminism which she describes:

At that time we also organised for a pound a day, which was a living wage at that time. We decided not to go to work, and there were no buses to the township at that time. The women saw that some of the men in the organisation were very weak. Buses would wait at Sidwell for the men. Mrs Matomela and Mrs Baard came to me, and I called Mrs Mbunye, and we discussed these people who went to take buses near General Tyres. Most of the people who were taking those buses were the people who came from the homelands. At that meeting it was decided that each and every women should organise herself an overall and a stick. Then we went to lie in the open space near General Tyres, in the tall grass. We then waited there, and we saw the men coming down from New Brighton Labour (the labour bureau) with their food cans. When they were close to us, one of the women stood up, and said '*Tshisa, tshisa!*' (Beat them!) and they did not know we were women, because we had overalls and knobkieries. I could not even hit one man because I was laughing so much at these women attacking the men and the men running back to the township. That was very successful, none of them went to ride the buses and the buses were taken away from General Tyres.⁵⁵

What is also notable is that it was workers from the 'homelands' who were breaking the boycott; this feeling of urban identity, and antagonism to workers from the homelands who did not share this identity and the political consciousness it involved, is also expressed in the history of the destruction of Korsten township. In the latter case the government utilised the division to effect the removal of the township, moving first those people most newly-arrived in the city and not integrated into organisation. It is also reflected in a different, non-antagonistic way in the support

that the Fedsaw/Women's League gave to the wives of contract workers, who after the implementation of passes for women in 1956 had problems coming freely to the city. These wives used to come to PE by train from East London, and the Labour Bureau started picking up the women at the station and putting them into vans, taking them to the Labour Bureau and then to prison where they would use up the money they had saved to bail themselves out. They would then be sent home - 'endorsed out' - with no money. The ANC Women's League complained to the township superintendant about this practice, and it was stopped but only temporarily; so they took to sleeping at the station to protect the contract workers' wives.⁶⁶

5.6.2. Women's resistance to the pass laws

What was interesting about the issue of passes in Port Elizabeth was that it was taken up primarily as a women's issue. While influx control had not previously been enforced in PE to any extent, the response to the establishment of the first labour bureau in New Brighton in 1953 and the registration of all work contracts, was muted. While there is evidence that it was used as an issue to mobilise support for the 1950 stayaway (see Chapter 7), in the Defiance Campaign the pass laws - one of the unjust laws to be defied - was not a centre of defiance action in PE. Possibly this was because the full impact of passes was only to hit workers a few years later, when the Municipality implemented them with vigour - as outlined in Chapter 6.

Women workers were particularly hard hit by the implementation of passes in January 1956, as those who were industrial workers had previously been acknowledged as 'employees' in terms of the IC Act. This may explain the overlapping of leadership of the anti-pass campaigns by women activists who were mainly trade unionists from the food and textile unions. From the establishment of Fedsaw in 1954, the PE representatives were mainly trade union leaders; Gus Coe, Frances Baard and Lillie Diedericks, all of the A/FCWU, were among the PE delegates to the first Fedsaw national conference. Chrissie Jasson, a TWIU unionist, and Baard were elected onto the Fedsaw national committee, and the PE delegates addressed the conference on the boycott of oranges and rent problems in PE.⁶⁷

Women in PE participated in the national campaign against passes, culminating in the famous march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 8 August 1956. The strength of womens' organisation in PE is indicated by the way in which funds were obtained to attend this march: women divided themselves into 'clubs' of ten, and through various means including concerts, bazaars or even selling oranges, they raised the £700 needed to hire an entire railway coach for the journey.⁶⁸ This was an enormous sum, given the poverty of the african community of the time, and demonstrated the level of grassroots support that the ANC Women's League had.

In PE, the extension of passes to women was addressed not only through public meetings and deputations, but through a militant 'street politics' which involved setting up pickets next to reference book units to dissuade women from accepting passes. A delegation marched to the mayor's garden with placards and leaflets.⁵⁹ In 1958 a pamphlet was issued by Fedsaw in Xhosa, about the pass laws. In a memo on the anti-pass campaign, Fedsaw noted that 2 000 women in PE had given up a day's wages to tell the Native Commissioner "We will not rest". Without passes, they would be unemployed; but at the same time they could demonstrate to the bosses that they could withhold their labour - "no workers, either, say the women of PE".⁶⁰

The rhetoric of the campaign appealed strongly to women who had been an 'uncontrolled' community; the imposition of apartheid authority was seen as a direct threat to the dignity of women, as well as a threat to workers. Pamphlets warned women that "our bodies will be exposed, handled anywhere and anytime by thugs", and that "we will be stripped naked". They reported that girls at hostels in Humewood and Summerstrand (probably working as domestics or kitchen workers at the beachfront hotels) had been woken up in the night and made to strip. The call was: "*Asilathathi ipasi! Akuyiwa eLabour!*" (We won't take passes! Don't go to the Labour Bureau!); "We do not take the pass. We fight for the respect and dignity of womanhood."⁶¹ They aimed the campaign especially at young women over fifteen - those entering the labour market - telling them not to be deceived by promises that passes would help them to find work, or to listen to threats that they would not be accepted at high schools or colleges without passes.⁶²

The anti-pass campaign was one in which african and coloured women united in PE; the participation of coloured women, who were not directly affected, was the result of the non-racial organisation of women in the food, textile and laundry unions. Thus although the Fedsaw NEC reported that there was no regular correspondence from PE, it was reported in *New Age* that there was a "militant anti-pass campaign uniting african and coloured", and Lilly Diedericks, a coloured trade unionist, was asked by SACPO to preside over a conference on passes for african women.⁶³ She had grown up in New Brighton, and could speak Xhosa fluently, as well as English and Afrikaans. She claims that the problem of passes built support for the unions; the lack of distinction between the campaigns of Fedsaw, FCWU, SACTU and SACPO are borne out where she says:

And I think with the FCWU, the following that the union had, the majority were african, and being african, what hindered them most at that time was the pass laws...and that brought it out in them to support the union. Having people like myself and Mrs Baard, we really pulled them in.⁶⁴

5.6.3. Womens organisation, labour organisation and non-racialism

This non-racialism, however limited and sporadic, was significant in its indications of a future direction for trade unionism in PE, and the lack of a strong 'africanist' grouping within the ANC. The apartheid state successfully divided the residents of PE - especially in areas like Korsten, which was an african majority area with a significant proportion of coloured residents - in the late 1950's and early 1960's, and this segregation had a marked influence on the re-emerging trade union movement of the 1970's, with tensions between the 'coloured-led' 'workerist' unions and the african-led 'community-based' unions. It took many years and the formation of COSATU before the PE union movement became reintegrated into a coherent non-racial whole. Women's organisation, and the unions in which women workers were strongest, tended to be at the forefront of non-racial organisation in PE in the 1950's.

Women's position as non-pass bearing africans during most of the 1950's, and their resulting legal status as trade union members, also put them in a strong position to assist with union organisation. While african men had problems as pass-bearers, being arrested for trespassing at factories or identified by security police and harassed, women were able to move around the city more freely; SACTU used women organisers to go into certain industrial areas where men would be harassed. The prominent role of the FCWU in organising other SACTU unions can thus be explained not only in terms of its organisational strength relative to other unions, but to its militant core of women organisers.⁶⁵

Because of the influence of trade union leadership in women's organisation, and the nature of the threat to women's status in PE, women's organisation was also working-class in character. The issues with which women's organisation concerned itself were not 'petty-bourgeois' issues of women's rights, but concerns around wages, education, housing and transport, as well as the reinforcement of political campaigns around pass laws, stayaways and boycotts.

5.6.4. Who where these women? Two short biographies

The strength of women's political role in the 1950's is corroborated by interviews with Womens League members of the time; Frances Baard who says

The women...were very strong, very militant at that time, saying this is what we want and this and this and this. I think the women even surprised the men with how strong they were.⁶⁶

and Hilda Tshaka who feels that woman's organisations of today are not independent enough:

The women are not organised today like we were organised. They mix with men, that is why: we did not work with men, we did not want men, we wanted to work ourselves.⁶⁷

Frances Baard and Lilly Diedericks are good examples of the type of working-class woman who became involved in the politics of the 1950's. Baard was not originally from PE, but came in the late 1930's to work as a domestic worker. In the 1940's, having settled in New Brighton and had children, she went back to work at a canning factory. Previously she had not been involved in politics; however, Ray Alexander got her involved in organising the workers at the factory in 1948, and she became secretary of the AFCWU. Simultaneously she became involved in setting up the ANC Women's League in PE, organising women to join the League and tackle problems in New Brighton like rents and passes. This led to her involvement in all the major campaigns of the time: the Defiance Campaign, the Congress of the People campaign, the bantu education boycott, and anti-pass campaign, as well as stayaways and boycotts. She confirms Diedericks' perception of the integration of different organisations:

...one person, like myself, would be a trade union member and at the same time a member of the Federation, and at the same time a member of the ANC. So the same people were doing lots of work in different organisations...and these organisations worked very closely together on many of these campaigns. And we also worked together with the trade unions.⁶⁸

Lilly Diedericks illustrates the non-racial nature of organisation; a coloured woman who grew up in New Brighton, she only obtained a Standard 3 education in a school there before her family was moved out of the location. Working also as a domestic and then as a factory worker, she was also drawn into the FCWU, where she was 'identified' by Gus Coe in about 1953 because she was always asking questions. She became secretary of the union's medical fund, but also became integrally involved in SACPO, and through that, in Fedsaw and the anti-pass campaigns. Although not an intellectual, she was recruited by Gus Coe into the SACP underground during the 1950's, and was banned in 1963.⁶⁹

5.7. Conclusion

Influx control was not rigidly implemented in PE until the mid- 1950's, meaning that PE's african population was relatively more secure and stable than other centres, with a lower percentage of migrants. One important effect of this was the high proportion of african women in the community,

and an increasing (although still small) proportion of african women in the industrial workforce. This remained so during the 1950's, and even increased as african men came under pressure first from the application of influx control. As africans were getting a greater share of the industrial employment, influx control limited the possibilities, so that by the 1960's their share had decreased.

Because of the very limited employment opportunities, a very small proportion of african workers became 'middle class'. At the same time, the african working-class' stability led to its developing a sense of 'community'; they were an urban community which 'belonged' in the city. Both factors militated in favour of the development of a working-class politics in the african communities.

This chapter on reproduction struggles has not analysed the use of the various strategies employed in depth. Rather, it illustrates the point that during the 1950's, the ANC - especially its Women's League - in alliance with SACTU, formed a 'working-class movement'. High rents, unemployment, taxes and pass laws were all issues around which SACTU and the ANC jointly mobilised. The issue of pass laws and influx control was probably the single most important issue in PE in the decade, and it was women who spearheaded action in this arena of struggle. However, SACTU engaged in a range of other activities, such as assisting people in not being cheated by rent officials, calling mass meetings of the unemployed, and writing memoranda to the PE City Council. SACTU's role in such 'reproduction' struggles became even more marked after the banning of the ANC.

Notes to chapter 5

1. Davis, D., and Fine, R., *Beyond Apartheid: Labour and Liberation in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1991, pp. 13-16.

2. UG 41/1954, 1946 Population Census.

3. Dunbar Moodie, T., 'The Moral Economy of the Black Miners Strike of 1946', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 13. No. 1, 1986, p. 1.

4. See Lodge, T., *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1983, Chapter 2, 'The creation of a mass movement: strikes and defiance, 1950-1952' and Chapter 5, 'The parents' school boycott: the eastern Cape and East Rand townships, 1955', for analyses of the defiance campaign, the New Brighton riots, the rent and bus boycotts, and the schools boycott; and Walker, C., *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, Onyx Press, London 1982, for analysis of the women's anti-pass campaigns, the schools boycott and rent protests. Baard, F. and Schreiner, B., *My Spirit is Not Banned*, ZPH, Harare 1986; Luckhardt, K. and Wall, B., *Organise or Starve! The History of SACTU*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1980; and Robinson, J., *The Power of Apartheid: Territoriality and State Power in South African Cities - Port Elizabeth 1923-1972*, unpublished PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 1990, all deal with the same campaigns in various ways. Gary Baines and Thembeke Orie (history department, University of Cape Town) are involved in ongoing research into political and 'reproduction' struggles in PE.

5. Quoted in Lodge, *op. cit.*, 1983, p. 50.

6. PEM, 10/7/5, City Engineers Department, Non-European Affairs.

7. PEM, 10/7/5-7. The COLA was increased in 1951 to £39 per annum, and again in 1952 and 1953.

8. William Ballinger papers, University of the Witwatersrand, BCZB 81/89, Memorandum of PE and Distressed Areas Committee, May 1957; and PEM, 10/7/12, memorandum of City Treasurer to Town Clerk, 21/5/56. The retail price index in 1941 was 1081, in 1956 2092, giving a difference of 1011 - i.e. an increase of 101%.

9. PEM, 10/7/5.

10. PEM, 10/7/12.

11. PEM, 10/7/12, Memorandum to Finance and General Purpose Committee from Town Clerk, 23/05/1956.

12. PEM, 10/7/14, Town Clerk to Finance and General Purpose Committee, 14/11/1957.

13. PEM, 10/7/19, report in *Eastern Province Herald*, 1/9/59, report on special sub-committee of the executive of the Central Executive of Ratepayers Associations to the Council on african wages.

14. PEM, 10/7/19, Memorandum of PE Distressed Areas Committee, 1959.

15. PEM, 10/7/19, SAIRR Memorandum, February 1959.

16. Lodge, T: 'The Destruction of Sophiatown', in Bozzoli, B.(ed), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1983, p. 337. Lodge, in this instances, is criticising O'Meara's analysis of the 1946 mine-workers strike.

17. Baines, G., *The New Brighton Advisory Board c 1923-1952: Its Legitimacy and Legacy*, paper delivered to the Fifth Triennial History Workshop of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 1990, p. 21.

18. Lodge, 1983, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-55.

19. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 236.
20. Baines, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17, 19.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
22. PEM, 10/7/12, Correspondence from City Treasurer to Town Clerk, 21/05/1956.
23. PEM, 10/7/12, Report to Wage Board, 25/06/1956.
24. William Ballinger papers, University of the Witwatersrand, BCZB 81/89, National Building Research Institute survey quoted in PE and Distressed Areas Committee document, May 1957.
25. Lodge, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
26. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 244.
27. PEM, 10/7/19, Correspondence from Town Clerk to Finance and General Purpose Committee, 24/09/1959.
28. Lodge, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 52. and Chapter 7: 'We are being punished because we are poor': the bus boycotts of Evaton and Alexandra, 1955-1957.
29. PEM, 10/7/12, Memorandum from Town Clerk to Finance and General Purpose Committee, 23/05/1956, figures supplied by the PE Bus Company.
30. Baines, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.
31. *South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980*, London 1981, p. 200.
32. Interview, Govan Mbeki, 28/11/91.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Lodge, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 45; Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 246.
35. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 337.; Interview, Alven Bennie, 23/05/91; and Cronin, J. and Suttner, R., *Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1985.
36. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 274.
37. Cherry, J., *Womens Resistance in Korsten in the 1950's*, unpublished paper presented to IDASA history workshop, Port Elizabeth, 1989.
38. The education boycott is covered in some detail elsewhere; Lodge, 1983, *op. cit.*, Baard and Schreiner, 1986, *op. cit.*, and Luckhardt and Wall, 1980, *op. cit.*, all examine it. My interview with Hilda Tshaka confirms the main facts revealed about the education boycott in PE: that it was primarily initiated by parents, not students; that women through Fedsaw were at the forefront of organising the 'cultural clubs', and that SACTU also played a significant role.
39. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 203-4; 340 - 345.
41. PEM, 10/7/7.
42. PEM, 10/7/13, Correspondence from City Engineer to Town Clerk, 13/03/1957; letter from Site and Service builders to City Engineer, 12/05/1957.

43. See Cherry, J., *Blot on the Landscape and Centre of Resistance - A Social and Economic History of Korsten*, unpublished Honours dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1988; Robinson, *op. cit.*; and Taylor, B., *Controlling the Burgeoning Masses: Removals and Residential Development in Port Elizabeth's Black Areas, 1800's-1990*, ISER Working Paper No. 51, Rhodes University, Grahamstown 1991, for a more detailed examination of the Korsten removals; and Lodge, T., 'The Destruction of Sophiatown' in Bozzoli, B.(ed), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1983, for a similar analysis of class divisions and the removal of Sophiatown.

44. William Ballinger papers, PE Distressed Areas Committee, Memorandum to Wage Board, 1957.

45. Interview, Hilda Tshaka, 1988.

46. Walker, C, *op. cit.*, pp. 120,127.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

49. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

51. Walker, C, *op. cit.*, pp. 71 - 77.

52. For more detail on women's campaigns in Korsten see Cherry, 1989, *op. cit.*

53. Robinson, *op. cit.*, Table 7.2, p. 240, drawn from population censuses of 1946 and 1960. I have rounded the figures off to the nearest 500.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Interview, Hilda Tshaka, 1988.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Fedsaw papers, BCZA, 77/3. Minutes of First National Conference.

58. Baard, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

59. Baard, *op. cit.*, pp. 61 - 62; Interview, Lilly Diedericks, 13/2/91; and Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

60. Fedsaw, BCZA, 77/C1, pamphlets in Xhosa, PE, 3/2/58.

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*

63. Fedsaw, BCZA, CI, letter from SACPO Transvaal to SACPO PE, 21/2/56; and National Executive Committee minutes, 21/3/59.

64. Interview, Lilly Diedericks, 13/2/91.

65. Corroborated by Alvon Bennie, interview, 23/5/91.

66. Baard, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

67. Interview, Hilda Tshaka, 1988.

68. Baard, *op. cit.*, pp. 38 - 39.

69. Interview, Lilly Diedericks, 13/2/91.

CHAPTER 6

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INFLUX CONTROL IN THE 1950'S

6.1. The impact of influx control

As shown in Chapter 2, Port Elizabeth was distinguished from the other major industrial centres of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban by its lack of influx controls before the 1950's. The african population of PE was, for the main part, fully proletarianised and had a deep-rooted urban culture. As shown in Chapter 1, there was no primary industry to speak of in PE, and this was the sector on which the 'cheap labour theory' was based: the dependence of South African industry on a migrant labour force which, theoretically at least, had some access to means of subsistence in the 'reserves' which justified, to capital, the paying of low wages. As Hindson argues, the theory of cheap labour power explains the system of exploitation and reproduction of labour in South Africa until World War Two, especially in relation to the mining industry. It provides an inadequate explanation for influx control after World War Two.¹

In Port Elizabeth, the cheap labour power thesis did not apply even in the pre-war decades, as influx control was not enforced. While this meant that the african working-class in PE was more homogeneous and more stable than elsewhere, it did not mean that higher wages were paid. On the one hand, the local state and capital acknowledged the necessity of a stable african workforce, and consciously promoted this by, for example, the provision of family housing as opposed to 'single-men's hostels' for migrant workers.² On the other hand, various attempts at control of the african population, and at keeping the costs of reproduction of african labour-power as low as possible, resulted in ongoing resistance from the african community (see Chapter 5).

While african workers were brought increasingly into industrial labour in PE during World War Two, the cost of living grew at a rate which was not matched by wages paid. The african community was under extreme pressure by the end of the war, and, as outlined in Chapter 5, by 1946 the PE black population was the poorest of six major urban centres. The growth of industry in the post-war period coincided with the upsurge of african trade union activity, combined with resistance to the high cost of living in the form of rent and transport boycotts. These struggles also coincided with the election of the Nationalist Party government in 1948. The implications for the african working-class in PE were enormous.

While Port Elizabeth's relatively liberal city council had resisted the implementation of influx control in earlier decades, on the advice of industrial capital which was strongly represented in the council,

the situation changed in 1952. Jenny Robinson, in her urban geography thesis on Port Elizabeth, describes the process whereby the Council was 'converted' to influx control. A number of factors combined to convince the council of the necessity of implementing the new national system of influx control: the Defiance Campaign and the 1952 riots, which alarmed the white business community; the increasing number of Nationalists on the City Council; and pressure from the central state to 'fall in line'.³

The gamut of legislation controlling the movement of african people could no longer be bypassed by local authorities: the Population Registration Act, the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act, the amendments to the Urban Areas Act, and the Native Laws Amendment Act. Within a year of the latter act being passed, a labour bureau was established in Port Elizabeth. Hindson argues that in the 1950's, pass controls were used "to construct a system of differentiated labour power"⁴ which divided urban african workers from migrants, providing for the stability and reproduction of the former in urban areas while institutionalising temporary migrancy for workers in the most unskilled positions. This analysis is clearly supported in the case of Port Elizabeth, where, although migrant workers were not a large proportion of the workforce, they did fill certain positions in the labour force, and in certain circumstances were employed in preference to the existing settled population. Prior to the 1950's, there is no record of conflict between urban and migrant workers in PE. During the 1950's, after the implementation of the labour bureau, conflict between migrant and permanent resident began to emerge.

On the one hand, this is illustrated by incidences of popular resistance or lack of it - the support of the Women's League for the wives of migrant workers, or the 'attacking' of migrant workers who were breaking boycotts; and the failure of the Korsten community to resist removals as it was systematically divided into 'newcomers' and 'property owners'(see Chapter 5). On the other hand, struggles occurred between capital and the local state over the new system of labour direction and placement. Some of these struggles, and the ways in which workers were on occasion able to take advantage of this conflict of interests, are examined in this chapter.

As regards the struggles between the state and capital, Posel is right when she claims that "industrialists were more effective in imposing their interests upon the day-to-day administration of influx control policy, than on its design and legislative promulgation."⁵ This is illustrated below by the way in which local industry forced the Council to defer the enforcement of the levy. It is also shown by the ~~flouting~~^{flouting} by industrialists of the 'Urban Labour Preference Policy'. This was

based on the Native Affairs Department's intention that urban employers first utilise the existing supply of urban african labour, before employing migrants. As Posel describes:

In terms of the logic of the ULPP, if, in any given town, the collective demand was for x number of African workers and the size of the local economically active population was $x + n$, there was purportedly no good economic reason to import more labour into the area, until the growth in the local demand exceeded n . The ULPP took little, if any, account of qualitative differentiations in the labour supply (along lines of skill, experience, education) and their effects in differentiating labour demand. Urbanised workers were to be channelled into all work - skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled - ahead of migrants, irrespective of employers' particular preferences and workers' choices or aptitudes.⁶

As is shown below, there were instances where employers who preferred the 'raw' or 'tribalised' africans resisted the implementation of the ULPP.

6.2. The PEM and the implementation of influx control

Jenny Robinson's thesis outlines in some depth the 'conversion' of the liberal PE Municipality to the implementation of influx control which it had resisted for decades. She describes how "practically overnight... this adherence to a local ideology which had been under strain for some time was to vanish."⁷ The turning point was the New Brighton riot of 1952, after which the Council became involved in implementing repressive measures such as the curfew and the ban on meetings, and "the council's actions were every bit as repressive as those of the central government".⁸ While capital still favoured its 'open labour market', it was becoming more ambivalent as trade union organisation and political strikes grew in strength; the council itself feared implementing influx control because of the level of political organisation of the african townships. Forces countering this position were the change in the white population with Afrikaner nationalists becoming vociferous on the local Council; the growth in african population and the expense of housing provision; and the problem of political control emerging during the Defiance Campaign and highlighted by the 1952 riot and subsequent stayaway.⁹ Central government intervention finally swayed the balance of power: "It was only after government pressure following the October 1952 riot that the Council's decision...to postpone the consideration of influx control...was overturned by a small majority."¹⁰

It was the PEM which bore the major brunt of implementing the labour bureau apparatus - in its own departments as well as in industry in general. Under pressure from central government to conform, influx control was finally accepted by the Council in January 1953. In the same year the

labour bureau was established and urban area permits were introduced; all municipal departments had to supply information on the number of 'natives' employed. At this stage the City Engineers Dept. had 1 865 african workers. Next, each department had to fill in forms in terms of the Native Building Workers Act of 1951, giving the tribe and home district of all new employees. Pressure began to mount; in 1953 the Town Clerk instructed all departments to organise permits for their workers from the Native Affairs Department (NAD), as many african workers were in PE illegally in terms of the Urban Areas Act.¹¹ Lists of all workers in each department had to be sent regularly to the Labour Bureau, which set up a separate office. Final lists were sent in in July 1953, and the labour bureau then issued permits.¹² The Town Clerk reported in July 1953 that the population registration of natives was expected to take two years; no date had yet been set for PE to do this, but in the meantime a memo had been received by all municipalities.¹³

By 1954 the problems with the labour bureau system had become apparent both to the PEM and to private sector employers. The Native Affairs Committee (NAC) of the PEM reported that police were refusing to recognise workseekers' cards as proof of employment in an urban area; despite representations they had been unable to change the police's views. A visit of the Native Employment Commissioner had finally cleared up the matter with the police, who agreed to recognise the cards as temporarily valid.

In 1955 the registration of african workers and the issuing of passes came into force with a vengeance, making up for all the years that the african residents of PE had gone unharassed. PE was proclaimed under the Native Urban Areas Act, in effect from 1 October 1955. From 1 October, service contracts were to be registered, with a monthly registration fee of 2s for each african worker, and reference books would be issued by 'a mobile government unit' to all male africans of 16 or over, at the New Brighton police station. This did not yet apply to Walmer or to foreign 'natives' - the latter a quaint contradiction in terms used by local authorities to refer to africans of Zimbabwean or Botswanan origin resident in PE. This small but self-sufficient community of highly-skilled craftsmen and women, known as the Korsten Basketmakers or the 'Hosannas' because of their particular religious practices, were deported *en masse* to Botswana at the end of the decade, when africans were removed from Korsten.

The process of registration was expected to take several months, with up to 500 passes being issued daily. Dates were announced in the press, and employers were urged not to send their workers to New Brighton for books until they were called upon. First, workers of large-scale employers would be dealt with on a roster basis fixed with the MCI and PECC; secondly, smaller firms would be dealt with by locality; thirdly, independent contractors of african labour and others

would be handled. All africans would be medically examined at the same time as the registration of service contracts and the issuing of passes. These measures only applied to males.¹⁴

By 1958 the Native Commissioner was requesting employers to endorse reference books when african workers went on leave, which "would be a great help to a large number of natives who suffer considerable inconvenience."¹⁵ Influx control measures were again tightened up in 1959, when all departments were told that they must keep a register of all natives employed, the wages paid, and other details.¹⁶

6.3. The impact of influx control on migrant labour

6.3.1. Problems with the ULPP: the case of the PEM

While it seems that most PE employers preferred to draw from the pool of permanent labour in New Brighton (and there are claims of 'full employment' to substantiate this),¹⁷ there was a section of the PE african population who were migrants.

The largest single employer of african labour, the PE Municipality, made extensive use of labour from the Ciskei and Transkei (and even further afield). Many of these labourers, however, had been on the council's payroll for many years; it is unclear whether they brought their families to the city or not, or had independent access to land in their birthplaces. A large proportion were Fingoes (or Mfengu), a Xhosa-speaking group which developed a separate identity and gained access to certain types of employment in preference to other Xhosa speakers. A small number were from other 'tribal groups', such as Sotho and Zulu. A list of 176 workers in the City Engineers Department (the largest employer of unskilled workers) in 1951 is interesting in its reflection of the PEM's labourers' 'home areas': only 9% gave Port Elizabeth as their home area, with the rest spread fairly evenly over a myriad of small towns in the Eastern Cape, the Ciskei and Transkei - such as Middledrift, Keiskammahoek, Willowvale, Kingwilliamstown, Umtata, Qumbu, Sandflats, Kentani, Kofimvaba, Engcobo, Kirkwood and Alicedale.¹⁸

The significance of this lies in the Municipality, the largest single employer of africans and something of a trend-setter in terms of wages and conditions of work, also being the largest employer of migrant labour. The extensive employment of migrant labour made organisation that much more difficult, and thus acted as a 'downward pull' on all african unskilled wages in the city. Unlike the railways, the majority of municipal workers were not casuals; but a significant number were (630 out of 1 600 in the City Engineers Department in 1951), and this made organisation of

this group of workers still more difficult.¹⁹ Workers were considered 'casuals' until they had been in the PEM's service for 2 years.²⁰ The struggles to organise the municipal workers in the 1950's has been outlined in greater depth in Chapter 4.

This raises an interesting question about the preference for labour from rural areas above the more sophisticated urbanised african, on the part of capital and the local state. It would seem that the Municipality preferred the 'raw natives', as Municipal work was notoriously hard and dirty work; the PEM in fact had difficulty at times in recruiting enough labour, and complained bitterly about the labour bureau system when it had to implement that system in 1953.

As the municipality was a large-scale employer, it was one of the first to get passes for its workers.²¹ Its own departments began to experience labour shortages, as in the case of the Waterworks Engineer reporting in November of 1955 that the

present day non-european labour is of poor quality...previously it was possible for the Engineer to eliminate poor workers from gangs and readily replace them with good ones but today, the poor quality and scarcity of non-european labour militates against this. It would appear that pick and shovel work does not appeal to non-Europeans.²²

The City Engineer confirmed this complaint, like the Waterworks engineer blaming not the labour bureau system but a sudden suspicious distaste for manual labour. He complained that his department had problems getting enough native labour, that the NAD had tried to supply labour but there was a native "aversion to heavy manual labour" and the quality of labour was deteriorating; "according to newspaper reports other large employers of native labour, where such labour is required to carry out heavy manual work, are suffering the same difficulties."²³

His problems continued, however. During 1956 he wrote that 70 workers on the roads division had resigned to go home for the planting season, and he couldn't replace them. Towards the end of the same year he sent a desperate request to the Native Labour Bureau, the Native Affairs Department and the PEM, warning them that he would need an extra 435 african labourers in 1957, and an additional 100 later in the year. The system was not working efficiently even within the Municipality; there were instances when the Bureau sent workers to the Municipality on request, but they were told there was no work and sent back to the Bureau; leading to complaints presumably from all sides - the workers, the Engineers Department, and the Bureau. He even recommended that the PEM set up its own central labour office to co-ordinate african labour among municipal departments. By this stage his department alone (the largest employer of african labour) was employing over 2 100 african workers. The need for african labour was increasing as the labour bureau system was curtailing its availability - even to the very local state body which was

administering the system. The Labour Bureau even went so far as to accuse the City Engineers Department of not co-operating in registering its african labour!²⁴

6.3.2. Migrant workers and the case of the Walmer municipality

While such migrants were more difficult to organise into unions because of their casual status and their lower sense of 'urban consciousness' - reflected also in lack of education (see, for example, the municipal building workers who could not sign a petition in Chapter 5) - they organised spontaneously in many cases, using their preparedness to do heavy labour as a weapon to gain concessions. One example of this spontaneous labour action pressurising for concessions is the case of the Walmer Municipality sanitary workers. Walmer was a separate municipality until the late 1960's when, after much controversy, it was absorbed into the PEM.

In July 1957, after the labour bureau system had been implemented, some 70 workers at the Walmer Municipality Health Department approached the chief Health Inspector *en bloc* to request an increase in wages because of the increase in the cost of living.

These workers were all migrant labourers from the Baca tribe; their home was in Mount Frere in the Transkei. While they were promised an increase of 2s per week from January 1958, they expressed their dissatisfaction with the labour bureau system by bringing their wives into Port Elizabeth. This was considered 'unacceptable' by the Walmer Council. Yet the Council's hands were tied; despite the 'large numbers of unemployed in Walmer location', only the Bacas were prepared to take on the hard and filthy work of the Sanitary Depot. The NAD in Kingwilliamstown had been unable to solve their labour shortage despite repeated requests; the scarcity of labour for the sanitary depot and the council's fear of losing their source of labour forced them to make concessions. They wrote to the NAD requesting exemption of the Baca from Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act so that the labour force could be 'stabilised' and the 'considerable unrest' among the Baca, who were 'essential to the smooth running of the service', be accommodated. The Native Commissioner responded that the problem needed a decision by the Urban Local Authority. While it is unclear what the final outcome of this petition was, it illustrates the frustration caused by the labour bureau system to the very institution that was meant to implement it. The shortage of a particular kind of labour could not be met through the system, putting the workers in a stronger position to resist the pass laws and build their family life in the cities. Two months later the council reported that labour was again short.²⁵

A further example of spontaneous worker resistance involved the non-racial unity of coloured and african workers. In February of the following year, both coloured and african workers from the

sanitary depot again approached the council requesting an increase of 10s per week; their spokesman argued that as they all did the same work, they should all be paid the same wage. The council did not grant an increase this time, arguing that the Walmer workers already received more than the PEM workers (43s as opposed to 40s basic wage). They also argued that "it would have a snowball effect" and workers in other departments would also demand more. Moreover, the Native Commissioner did intervene in this case, advising that they not grant the increase as "it would have repercussions throughout the town".²⁶ They were granted a further 2s increase eight months later, however.

The bureaucracy and confusion created by the labour bureau, and attempts by workers to use this new system to their advantage, is further illustrated in a report in 1959 where Bacas channelled a complaint about not being paid for overtime through the local Bantu Affairs Commissioner in Mount Frere. They claimed that on two days a week they had to work from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., without overtime pay; when they refused to work overtime, they were dismissed. The Council responded to the Commissioner's letter that the workers concerned had been dismissed for refusing to carry out a 'special service' in the afternoon. An increasingly hard-line attitude on the part of the Walmer municipality is evident from this time; for during the ANC-called general strike of 1958, the Municipality instructed all departments to fire immediately any workers who stayed away.²⁷

While on the one hand the municipalities of PE and Walmer experienced problems as a result of the interference of the central state on their labour supply, on the other hand they wanted the central state to take responsibility for wage levels of their employees. Unwilling to grant increases to municipal workers, the PEM wanted the Wage Board to set wages for unskilled workers in PE. When the Secretary of Labour decided not to investigate wages for unskilled african workers in PE in 1953, the PEM NAC requested him to reconsider, given the "present circumstances affecting the Cost of Living" which included increased rentals for africans in the McNamee section of New Brighton.²⁸ A wage board was eventually granted in 1956.²⁹

6.4. Influx control and the labour needs of private capital

The main problem for private employers in PE was casual labour, for which the demand was very high. This demand included the 3 000 SAR&H workers; the pool of 1 000 stevedoring workers; the 2 000 seasonal workers required by the canning factories; and the large pool of casuals needed by the building and timber industries. Before the labour bureaux, much of this work had been done by newly-urbanising africans from the Ciskei and Transkei who were "arriving daily in the city".³⁰

The municipality reported in 1954 that private employers were dissatisfied, as their supply of casual labour was drying up. Many of them employed african workers 'off the streets', and this was no longer possible as they could not be registered. There were 'serious drawbacks' to the system of workseekers' cards and urban areas permits. Moreover, there were many cases of wrongful arrests to check the permits of african workers who actually were in employment. To overcome this problem the NAC of the PEM suggested the monthly endorsement of service contracts, for which employees of african labour would pay the council 2s a month.³¹

While these problems with the labour bureau were being experienced, dissatisfaction with the ULPP was also expressed. The NAC of the PEM reported that "great difficulty is being experienced in getting the urban local native to take up this work. The urban native is interested chiefly in work of a permanent nature".³² Employers concluded that the labour bureau could not supply the needs of industry for casual labour, and suggested that one pool for all casual workers be formed.

The PEM then conducted an investigation into the employment problems of private companies in PE. They reported in 1956 on their investigation into the shortage of labour "which the City is at present experiencing". They had asked all the firms concerned whether they had feeding schemes to "encourage the Natives to work". They found, however, that although most companies did have some form of 'feeding scheme', this was not what drew workseekers to their establishments.³³

It would be interesting to compare these 'feeding schemes' with similar facilities in other parts of the country at the time: were they aimed at avoiding paying higher cash wages, or were they simply necessary to reproduce productive labour in a situation of a high cost of living? The examples of feeding schemes in PE given were those of the motor and component manufacturers; GM offered one free meal a day, while Ford, Firestone and General Tyre all offered meals at between 3d and 6d each. All claimed that they did so at a loss, implying that it was an act of 'charity' for the benefit of the workers. However, the harbour (SAR&H) which had a feeding scheme from 1943, discontinued the scheme in 1955 after workers demanded the scheme be discontinued and replaced with an increase in cash wages. This was, surprisingly, agreed to; the scheme was temporarily discontinued and a general increase given to all employees.³⁴

The feeding scheme issue clearly not being the major attraction to urban workers - even those on the harbour - what was the cause of the labour shortage? The Town Clerk reported:

All the firms approached were of the opinion that their labour difficulties originated from the date of the introduction of the registration and labour bureau. By not having a large number of workseekers to choose from they were forced to engage natives who were not suitable for the job. These incompetent natives were not retrenched out of fear that it would be

impossible to obtain others in their places or even that the natives they would be able to obtain would be even more unsuitable than their predecessors. They all spoke very highly of the workseekers coming from the Ciskeian territories. Unfortunately, the flow of workseekers from these areas was considerably hindered by the Regulations framed under the Native (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act.³⁵

One response to the Labour Bureau was to employ more coloured labour: this was General Tyre's way of overcoming the problem, which they did by employing coloured casual labour at a rate 3d more per hour than african labour.³⁶

The MCI also conducted its own survey into "the problem of native labour"; they found that except for a few, most companies had no problem with permanent workers (although there had been a "decline in quality"); the problem was the shortage of casual labour. They explained that the Native Registration Officer had been trying to persuade workseekers to register as *togt* labourers, but had been "entirely unsuccessful", and the situation was now "acute". The Non-European Affairs Committee of the MCI came to the conclusion that the only way to deal with the shortage until *togt* labour was available was to "permit ordinary workseekers to accept whatever casual employment is offering, without the employer being called upon to pay the engagement and service contract fees, provided such casual work is not more than three days duration."³⁷ The system as it had been introduced was disadvantageous both to workers and to employers, the MCI argued: employers were not willing to pay the service fee of 2s per month plus the engagement fee of 2s 6d, for a few days labour; and the workers had to go back to the Bureau to get a new permit each time they got a few days work. This created bureaucracy and inconvenienced the workers, they added.³⁸

The MCI had made representations to the PEM in 1955 for the abolition of the engagement fee; the PEM had not done so but had agreed to reconsider the situation in twelve months. Now, the MCI insisted on the waiving of both the service contract fee and the engagement fee for casuals working less than three days. Moreover, the MCI added,

if a workseeker works casually for say 10 or 12 different employers in one month, service contract fees have to be paid by each employer which can hardly be the intention of the regulations. The Reference book of any such Native will also soon be filled up. Until such time as the Bureau is able to supply adequate casual labour, therefore, the Committee requests that some relaxation on the lines suggested should be permitted.³⁹

The NAC backed down and reluctantly recommended the waiving of the engagement fee for casual african workers working less than three days.⁴⁰

The issue then went back to a meeting of the Council with both the MCI and the PE Chamber of Commerce (PECoC), where the Council expressed the fear that employers might abuse the waiving of the engagement fee by employing more casuals. They argued that the railways, which drew on a pool of 3 000 casual labourers, had no trouble getting labour, and that all unemployed africans should register as *togt* workers. The Council explained that the 2s registration fee was compulsory by law, and the council had no power to alter the formalities of registration of 'native labour'; however, the 2s 6d labour bureau fee was levied by the council and could be waived by the council. But the labour bureau was running at a loss of £2 000 per year, and if the fees were relaxed, it would place an extra burden on the ratepayers of PE.⁴¹

The employers refused to back down on their argument, replying that they would not employ too many casuals because casual labour was more expensive. In the face of such coherent argument from industry, which had historically held strong sway in the Council, and supported by the Chamber of Commerce, the Council finally agreed to the waiving of the 2s 6s labour bureau fee as recommended by the NAC. The Manager of Native Affairs recommended in addition that the MCI and CoC set up their own labour pool of casuals.⁴²

The PEM reviewed the waiver after six months, and found it satisfactory. After two years, they reviewed it again, wishing to rescind their previous decision for employers not to pay the service fee. The problem, according to the PEM, was that the 'false impression' was being created among employers that they did not have to register their workers at all. The MCI had not responded to this argument, and the CoC had suggested a refund of the registration fee if labour was employed only for one day.⁴³ The issue was deferred until April 1959.

The influence of the application of influx control in the 1950's is indicated by a survey of the Midland Chamber of Industries Annual Reports for the period 1945-1965. At precisely the time when manufacturing industry was employing more african labour, both unskilled and semi-skilled, the labour bureau was established in 1952. The reports show a sudden increase in concern for african labour in the 1950's; in fact a 'Native Affairs Committee' was established specifically to address the 'problem' of african labour which had not arisen until this time.

Issues which arose were the question of influx control itself: the MCI adopted an ambiguous response at first, supporting the idea of african labour control but not the levy imposed; later it became dissatisfied with the whole system. While there was a 'plentiful supply' of permanent labour, there arose a shortage of casual, unskilled labour caused by labour bureaux. However, the MCI more often came into conflict with state policy in its desire for a stable urban workforce. It supported the implementation of national minimum wage for african labour, although realising that

such a demand would be refused by other chambers. It urged the government to raise wages, and to provide transport and housing to ensure a stable urban labour force. Industry was not prepared to bear the cost of housing, however, which it claimed should be a government responsibility. By the late 1950's, the MCI was complaining that it could not raise wages further in the absence of a national minimum being set, and mining, agriculture and domestic wages being raised. Industry would only be able to raise wages once this had occurred.

The Chamber also urged the government to "respond to economics and not ideologies in labour matters." They were set against the Tomlinson commission's findings and the development of industry in 'border areas' which would work against PE's industrial interests, by undercutting african wages. They were proved correct, especially in regard to the textile industry, where the textile union fought intense battles against low wages in Kingwilliamstown (see Chapter 4).⁴⁴

Where manufacturing industry employed african labour, it would seem that they relied more on urbanised africans - in the food and textile industries for example. By the time of Philips and de Conings report in 1969, manufacturers in the food and textile sectors were complaining of labour problems caused by government policies: influx control had created an "artificial scarcity of local labour." The textile industry reported the greatest problem with labour recruitment under the new system: they could not get sufficient unskilled african labour, and coloureds "won't do the work". The food industry complained of the unavailability of "reliable male labour"; they claimed that influx control provided "undesirable bantu labour". The long hours and night shifts were 'unacceptable' to female labour; and the "artificial scarcity of local labour" forced them to recourse to "raw reserves labour".⁴⁵ The footwear industry, traditionally reliant on coloured labour, also complained that they needed unskilled african labour which was not available. The metals industry could not afford the disruption of their supply of african labour for heavy work; likewise the non-metals sector was also being forced to recruit 'reserve' labour because of recruitment difficulties; and such labour was 'unreliable'. They preferred coloured labour but coloureds were not prepared to perform heavy unskilled work. Clothing and transport, on the other hand, needed more skilled labour, preferably coloured or white.⁴⁶

By the late 1960's, the anomalous situation had arisen where africans had been denied employment and training in skilled/semi-skilled positions in secondary industry, and where substantial unemployment existed; yet the industries which relied on unskilled african labour were forced, through the labour bureau system, to recruit from the reserves. By 1968, De Coning and Phillips pointed out that "in the light of factor immobilities in the region, labour supplies are drawn from territorial reserves".⁴⁷ Job reservation, influx control and lack of training were all seen as problems; the threat of coloured labour preference envisaged in the Physical Planning and Utilisation

of Resources Act, applied to Port Elizabeth in 1967, was seen as an even bigger potential problem. This despite the general preference for coloured labour, especially in semi-skilled work, seems to be a contradiction: yet as coloured labour was simply 'not prepared' to take on heavy manual labour, there was a considerable reliance on african labour in all the heavy, unskilled work in industry; especially in the textile sector, where labour was dominant as a cost-factor.

6.5. The implications for labour organisation

The above data would seem to support Posel's thesis that "the demand for african labour in secondary industry and commerce was differentiated between a still small but growing demand for skilled and semi-skilled workers, and a considerably larger demand for unskilled workers."⁴⁸ As shown in Chapter 1, this differentiation was even more marked in PE than in other centres, with coloured workers filling a higher percentage of the available semi-skilled positions in industry. Moreover, as Posel argues, employers preferred urbanised workers for skilled or semi-skilled work, and migrants for unskilled work.⁴⁹ This differentiation had implications for labour organisation: where africans were employed in semi-skilled positions, in the food and textile industries, stronger organisation emerged as described in Chapter 4. Where employers - for example the municipality, the harbour and the building industry - preferred migrant labour, organisation of african labour was weak.

Two further interesting points are raised by these experiences of the main employers of unskilled labour. The first is that if the implementation of the labour bureau system caused a shortage of casual labour, these were presumably migrant workers or newly-urbanising workers from the Transkei and Ciskei. If so, the already settled african population of New Brighton were either established in permanent employment, with a low level of unemployment, or felt that their bargaining position was high enough that they did not need to take on 'heavy manual labour'.

The second point is that pass laws were only extended to african men in PE in 1955; pass laws were extended to women the following year and were in force by 1957. Yet it was the extension of passes to women which caused extensive resistance. Why did men not respond in a similar way? Was it because men in the settled urban population were confident of employment and their rights to remain in urban areas - whereas women knew their rights to be threatened? Women were employed mainly as domestics or in the informal sector, and so would be less likely to be entitled to Section 10 rights. Yet the lack of opposition to the 'reference book' implementation is surprising. Another explanation combined with the above would be that because passes had been in force for

men in other areas, the issue was localised to PE; whereas the extension of passes to women affected all african women nationally, and so generated greater resistance.

The implementation of the influx control and labour bureau systems had far-reaching implications for african labour organisation. This is demonstrated in Chapter 7, where instances of the labour bureaux being used as a weapon against textile, municipal and railway workers are outlined.

In the late 1950's SACTU organisers were particularly conscious of the problems of passes. While there had not been much attention given to passes in earlier years, during the late 1950's the security police used them as a means of harassing particular individuals; according to one SACTU organiser, it was the Special Branch (as it was then known) rather than the local authorities who were particularly vicious about using the pass law regulations in this way. SACTU employed various strategies to overcome this problem where it affected their organisational work. At one stage Piet Vogel, a white communist, played an important role by 'employing' some SACTU members and signing their pass books; he also hired the SACTU offices in his name. On other occasions SACTU organisers applied for jobs in factories to gain access to workers. Whereas they could just get 'picked up' while walking around the industrial areas, and be checked for passes, they would gain access to workers if employed themselves. They would enter the yard with other unemployed workers, and even if they only worked for two or three weeks before being identified by the employers and dismissed, they would have had a chance to organise. Sometimes, however, even though they claimed they had come to look for work, they would be identified and arrested for trespassing - as in the case of organising the Bay Transport workers.⁶⁰

Notes to chapter 6

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- 3.Robinson, J., *The Power of Apartheid: Territoriality and State Power in South African Cities - Port Elizabeth 1923 - 1972*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Cambridge University, 1990.
- 4.Hindson, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
- 5.Posel, D., 'Providing for the Legitimate Labour Requirements of Employers - Secondary Industry, Commerce and the State in South Africa during the 1950's and Early 1960's', Mabin, A.(ed), *Organisation and Economic Change: Southern African Studies 5*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1989.
- 6.*Ibid.*, p. 204.
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- 8.*Ibid.*, p. 249.
- 9.*Ibid.*, pp. 249-255.
- 10.*Ibid.*, p. 259.
- 11.PEM, 10/7/7, City Engineers Department - Non-European Affairs, Departmental Circular No. 49, from Town Clerk to all departments, 11/6/53.
- 12.PEM, 10/7/8.
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- 15.PEM, 10/7/14, Departmental Circular No. 4. of 1958, 23/1/58.
- 16.PEM, 10/7/17, Departmental Circular No. 24. of 1959, 9/1/59.
- 17.Lodge, T., *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1983, p. 49; Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 244.
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- 19.PEM, 10/7/5, Correspondence, City Engineer to PENEMWU, 13/12/51 and City Engineer to Finance and General Purpose Committee, 13/2/52.
- 20.PEM, 10/7/9, Correspondence of City Engineer to City Treasurer, 4/3/54.
- 21.PEM, 10/7/11, Departmental Circular No. 85. of 1955.
- 22.PEM, 10/7/11, Correspondence, Waterworks Engineer to City Engineer, 8/11/55.
- 23.PEM, 10/7/11, Correspondence, City Engineer to Town Clerk, 2/2/56.
- 24.PEM, 10/7/12, City Engineer to Works Committee, 11/12/56; City Engineer to Native Labour Bureau, 10/12/56; City Engineer to Town Clerk, 11/12/56. PEM, 10/7/13, City Engineers Department Standing Order No. 153 of 28/5/57. PEM, 10/7/23, Correspondence to City Engineer, 27/2/61.

- 25.PEM, File 41/4/11, "Municipal Boys", Walmer Municipality, November 1956 - December 1959.
- 26.*Ibid.*
- 27.*Ibid.*
- 28.PEM, 10/7/8, Minutes of Native Affairs Committee, 4/9/53.
- 29.PEM, 10/7/11, Correspondence, City Treasurer to all departments, 1/2/56.
- 30.PEM, 10/7/9, Minutes of Native Affairs Committee, 4/2/54.
- 31.*Ibid.*
- 32.*Ibid.*
- 33.PEM, 10/7/12, Report of Town Clerk to Native Affairs Committee, 5/3/56.
- 34.*Ibid.*
- 35.*Ibid.*
- 36.*Ibid.*
- 37.PEM, 10/7/12, Letter from MCI to NAC of PEM, 4/4/56.
- 38.*Ibid.*
- 39.*Ibid.*
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- 41.PEM, 10/7/12, Minutes of meeting between PECC, MCI and CoC, 1/6/56.
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- 43.PEM, 10/7/16, Minutes of NAC, 4/8/58.
- 44.Midland Chamber of Industries, *Annual Reports, 1945-1965*, MCI Head Office, Port Elizabeth.
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- 46.*Ibid.*
- 47.*Ibid.*, p. 158.
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- 49.*Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.
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CHAPTER 7
"A LITTLE LIGHT IN THE DEEP NIGHT OF POVERTY"¹
THE SACTU ERA, 1955-1963

The previous two chapters have analysed the changing structural position of the african working class in Port Elizabeth in the post-war period, and the various responses to this: the changing nature of the ANC and the growth of a militant community politics, on the one hand, and the response of capital and labour to the implementation of influx control on the other. In Chapter 4 the growth of militant industrial unions among african workers in the late 1940's and early 1950's was described. In this chapter, we return to these unions, to see how they fared in the late 1950's and early 1960's, after the turbulence of the mid-1950's.

7.1. Debates around SACTU and the Congress Alliance

SACTU has been analysed before, and there are two main interpretations of it as a trade union federation and an integral part of the Congress Alliance. The one is the 'official' interpretation of Luckhardt and Wall, the SACP and the ANC, which tends to be triumphalist about SACTU's achievements as the 'working class wing of the national liberation movement'. The other is critical of SACTU, arguing that it was never a 'true' trade union movement, being dominated by political concerns, which were usually 'populist' or 'petty-bourgeois.'

The debate around the nature of SACTU is significant for a contemporary understanding of the relationship between labour and political movements in South Africa, and has been re-examined in some depth in the context of the rise of the independent black trade union movement in the late 1970's. The debate centred around the relationship between the political and the economic, and became represented in crude form as 'workerism' or 'populism'. 'Workerism' represented an analysis which stressed the importance of workers building strong point-of-production organisation, independent of political movements. Too close an association between the two was seen as having the potential to jeopardise the labour movement, either by 'diluting' a working-class agenda in a broader nationalist project, or by endangering trade unions by inviting state repression. A related position was one which acknowledged the need for workers to be represented politically, but which claimed that the petty-bourgeois nature of the ANC and the submission to the ANC of its ally, the SACP, rendered both organisations incapable of doing so. The 'populist' position stressed the role of the working class as an integral part of the national liberation struggle, which was seen as the immediate priority of black workers in alliance with other oppressed people of whatever class.

Differing interpretations of SACTU's history and role have been used to add weight to either of these positions.

Feit argued that SACTU could not achieve its political goals because it had not first built strong factory-floor organisation.² Ensor argued that SACTU was unable to effectively represent black workers at the economic level, independent of the registered unions within TUCSA. She argues that the 1940's was the only time when independent african trade unions were able to make 'significant' economic gains, and that the legal position of african workers after the passing of the Industrial Conciliation Act meant that they opted either - in the case of SACTU - for 'political unionism' without 'substantial concrete gains', or for 'economist' trade unionism under the wing of TUCSA.³ However, she notes that the registered unions within SACTU were the 'exception'. This is an important contradiction in her analysis, for as will be shown below, it was precisely these registered unions which, in PE, provided the organisational base for SACTU and made some gains for their membership.

While Friedman acknowledges that SACTU's organisation of workers did win some gains, he claims that "workers surrendered their power...to non-workers who sought to lead resistance to apartheid."⁴ He sees a clear conflict of interests between the Congress movement and the trade union movement, with Congress 'using' the labour movement to further its own goals:

Congress leaders did not value a worker movement as an end in itself: where unions acted in support of worker goals...they were indifferent. They valued the unions' ability to mobilise workers, but insisted that they do this to serve the Congress movement's goals: it was the Congresses' job to choose the issues and make the tactical decisions - the unions' task was to rally workers behind them. Because SACTU's leaders believed workers would only achieve their goals if the Congresses achieved theirs, they accepted these terms.⁵

Fine, in arguing the need for a specifically socialist politics in South Africa, has a similar analysis. However, he claims that SACTU had a 'dual character' - as a "transmission belt conveying nationalist politics to the working class", and as "an organised expression of working class consciousness". "In this arrangement", he argues, "working class organisation was limited to the trade union sphere, while the political struggle was conducted in national rather than class terms."⁶

His analysis is quoted at some length, as he sees this 'dual nature' of SACTU as a site of struggle:

Commentators have tended to emphasize one or other side of the dual nature of SACTU without comprehending its contradictory nature. A battle was fought out between those who sought to use SACTU as a springboard for building a working class orientation in Congress and those who sought to construct a mass base for nationalist politics through the medium of SACTU. The balance of these forces shifted significantly over time.⁷

According to his analysis, the crucial point in this shift was the 1958 stayaway; it was at this moment that those who were trying to build a working class orientation in SACTU lost this battle, and the interests of workers were subsumed under the larger nationalist project of Congress:

the stronger relationship between SACTU and Congress...signified the integration of SACTU as the workers' wing of Congress at the expense of its trade union functions and the diminution of the influence of SACTU as a bearer of working class politics in Congress.⁸

While the above writers are all critical of SACTU's relationship with the ANC, those who spoke for the ANC and SACTU praised this relationship. SACTU in Port Elizabeth is worth further examination in the light of these debates, precisely because it was seen as such a stronghold of SACTU, epitomising the relationship which was meant to exist - in the view of those who spoke for SACTU and the ANC - between the liberation movement (Congress Alliance) and the trade-union movement. This reputation is reflected in the writings of Luckhardt and Wall, in the 'official' history of SACTU.

Luckhardt and Wall's account of the history of SACTU invariably emphasises the relationship of SACTU to the other Congress Alliance organisations, especially the ANC, in Port Elizabeth; the Eastern Cape was the "most militant SACTU-Congress alliance area in South Africa",⁹ where the harmonious working relation between ANC members and SACTU were "strengthened by a long-standing militant tradition in the Eastern Cape and thus made PE a major target of state repression."¹⁰ By the first SACTU annual conference, it was reported that the PE Local Committee "works well, is most active, meets regularly and is closely associated with progressive organisations."¹¹ At the 1956 Congress Dolores Telling - a PE unionist - reported that each of the new unions formed in PE had close ties to the liberation movement,¹² and the PE SACTU was "distinguished by disciplined and militant trade unions and a close relation with ANC and CPC."¹³ The relationship between ANC and SACTU was described as 'dictating' the method of SACTU work.

This relationship was expressed sometimes as mobilising support of the workers for Congress - "the real importance of the Union's organising work was in the mass mobilisation of workers for the

congress campaigns of the early 60's"¹⁴ and "In progressive circles, the PE Local Committee came to be regarded as a SACTU stronghold because of its ability to mobilise the masses around SACTU and Congress Alliance campaigns."¹⁵

In other cases they describe the support of the ANC for SACTU work; the PE (SACTU) Local Committee's relative success in organising the unorganised is explained by the "Totally complementary relationship between the ANC and SACTU" in which ANC leaders "believed working class interests should define the nature of the struggle"; ANC and SACTU campaigns were never seen as separate, and "members of both organisations committed equal energies to all congress work."¹⁶ PE had as a result had a "high degree of class-consciousness amongst black workers [which] existed largely as a result of the efforts of the FCWU, AFCWU and on the political front, the ANC".¹⁷

This close working relationship between the two organisations is described as working best in PE and Natal, where leadership was integrated and there was a "solid working-class perspective" which resulted in minimal conflict and a "model of militancy."¹⁸

A more critical view of the relationship between SACTU and Congress, but one which stresses the potential inherent in SACTU's brand of 'political' unionism, is expressed by Rob Lambert. Lambert, while concluding (like Fine and Friedman) that SACTU's 'mistake' was to subordinate itself to the Congress alliance, does not see a contradiction between the organisation of workers at the point of production, and their involvement in political battles. SACTU's strategy, after 1958, of organising factory committees to play the role of a vanguard "that is able to make a close linkage between the economic and political demands of the working class" indicated not that working class interest had been defeated in SACTU, but that "a radically different conception of working class organisation" had been developed.¹⁹

He argues that in the Eastern Cape and Natal, rather than SACTU being a 'transmission belt' for political ideas, it was the militance of the african working class which 'swept' SACTU into political struggle. While SACTU did not underestimate the importance of factory-floor organisation, and successfully built a mass base and an experienced trade-union leadership, it did not gain hegemony within the Congress alliance. For this reason, the decision of the ANC and SACP to turn to armed struggle signalled the defeat of SACTU, which, not having maintained its independence from the ANC, was smashed in the state repression which followed.²⁰

Below, these various interpretations of SACTU, and the questions they raise, will be applied to PE: What role did the registered unions play? Were any concrete gains made for african workers? What

was the response to the 1958 stayaway? Was there a division between nationalist and working class interests? And who, finally, 'won the battle' in SACTU?

7.2. SACTU in Port Elizabeth

Lodge, in analysing the success of the ANC's Defiance Campaign in Port Elizabeth in 1952, asserts that by 1950 there was in PE a

powerful African trade union movement which deliberately concerned itself with issues well outside the scope of conventional economic trade unionism. By 1950 politics was in the hands of working-class leaders to a degree which clearly distinguished Port Elizabeth from any other centre.²¹

He sees the influence of this trade union movement on the liberation movement (the ANC) as the distinctive feature of the Congress Alliance in the area:

In contrast to other centres local leaders had successfully bridged the gap which existed elsewhere between direct community action ('the politics of the poor') and more self-conscious organised forms of protest.²²

While these observations do not refer to SACTU, they reflect the process outlined in Chapter 4 above, whereby PE became seen as a 'stronghold' of working-class politics in the early 1950's. This was the context in which SACTU was formed in 1955. As the ANC-aligned trade union operating in the late 1950's, absorbing the militant black unions which had developed in the late 1940's and early 1950's, it was the labour organisation which represented this militancy and which influenced the ANC in a working-class direction. It is argued here that the ANC/SACTU alliance in PE in the late 1950's can be called a 'working class movement'; or, at least, a mass movement in which the interests of the working class were hegemonic. The different elements which made up this working class movement are analysed below.

After the dissolution of the SAT&LC, the need for a new body to co-ordinate the non-racial trade unions became apparent. SACTU was formed in March 1955. At its inaugural national conference, the sectors with the largest representation were the textile, food and laundry workers.²³ These were the strongest industrial unions of black workers, those which had a non-racial tradition, and those which had 'parallel' african and non-african unions which in practice worked together. These were the sectors - outlined in Chapter 4 - in which organised workers in Port Elizabeth were strongest; with the exception of the laundry workers who after the 1948 strike were in a weak

position. Two months after SACTU's formation, CNETU dissolved itself and its affiliates joined SACTU, but from the history of CNETU in PE as outlined in Chapter 3, it is unlikely that it brought many unions into the SACTU local committee.

SACTU nationally prioritised the organisation of the unorganised, targetting workers on the railways, the docks, the mines and the farms. In Port Elizabeth this involved the re-organisation of the railway and dock workers, and the organisation or reformation of unions in other sectors. However, the FCWU and TWIU continued to be the 'backbone' of SACTU in PE, often 'lending' their organisers to SACTU. This was both a strength and a weakness: while extending SACTU's influence and organising workers in new sectors, the energies of existing unions were dissipated in trying to build SACTU, and engage in the political tasks set by the Congress Alliance, of which SACTU was part.

The Congress Alliance in PE, as outlined in Chapter 5, was characterised by the alliance between the ANC and SACTU and their joint mass base of support from african working-class people. The bus boycotts, the campaigns against bantu education and the pass laws, and the political stayaways of the period, were all given extensive support in PE by SACTU.

While this reflects, on the one hand, the integration of leadership in different structures²⁴ and the working-class orientation of the ANC, it also reflected an over-stretched leadership, often on the executives of three or four structures simultaneously, and seeing no difference in the tasks of each - as Lilly Diedericks of the FCWU explained,

I wasn't involved only with the trade unions, because automatically the other issues came in between...so that was how it went with the FCWU, and with all the other organisations, we were always there. When the Fedsaw was born, we SACPO were there. And I played a double role, because I was union one side, SACPO one side, and there I was, I could speak to everyone.²⁵

The effects of this integration on the unions which initially made up SACTU were profound.

7.3. The established unions: laundry, food and textiles

Before the 1960-1963 period of organising the unorganised, and attempting to set up new industrial unions, the SACTU Local Committee in PE was dominated by the established unions in the food and textile industries. All informants from the period, as well as Luckhardt and Wall,

identified these two unions as the strongest in SACTU, and indeed the A/FCWU was the only union to last out the repression of the early 1960's.²⁶

7.3.1. The Food and Canning Workers Union.

The FCWU, according to Luckhardt and Wall, was the 'pace-setter' in the 1950's in terms of wage increases, working conditions, and fights against management racism; they won wage increases in 1955 and 1957 through direct negotiations between employers and workers, which few other unions were able to do at the time, and the "union's strength paralysed the Native Labour Act". Despite consistent attacks by both management and the state on the union, they managed to stave off wage cuts in 1959.²⁷ Yet, in spite of the 'popular history' of the achievements of the FCWU for workers, and the indisputable role it played in the forefront of the SACTU/ANC campaigns of the 1950's, it was a union fraught with problems.

To recap from Chapter 4: By 1955 the FCWU branch in PE had made 'remarkable progress' since 1951, when Ray Alexander ousted Mohammed Desai, and Gus Coe took over as secretary. It had achieved wage increases through an agreement with H. Jones and Standard Canners in October of that year, and had healthy finances once again; moreover, african women had been ruled as employees in terms of the IC Act during the 1951 dispute with H. Jones, which was important for the union as a whole.²⁸ However, after Coe's banning in 1952, the union was again to experience difficulties.

During this period, the PE branch of FCWU began to combine the building of strong factory-floor organisation with involvement in broader issues. By 1953 they had organised more than half the workers at Standard Canners and Packers, and about a third of the workforce at H. Jones. By the 1954 conference, they had the entire black workforce of 1026 at Standard organised. Although they had started organising at Valorange, they reported that workers at Valorange and the three other small food companies in PE were still not organised; and there were ongoing organisational problems at H. Jones.

While building their organisation in the food industry, other activities of the FCWU indicated that its conception of trade unionism went beyond economism. It always in the forefront of organising May Day meetings, and tried to assist in the building of other unions - before SACTU came into existence and prioritised 'organising the unorganised'. The PE branch of FCWU reported in 1953 that while they had not taken part in any campaigns, they had helped to start a trade union organising committee; this had been set up as an *ad hoc* committee to raise funds for struggling

unions. By the following year this *ad hoc* committee was "defunct", and had been replaced by a Workers Action Committee, on which the branch secretary of FCWU served.²⁹

The branch repeated at the 1954 national conference that they had not conducted any campaign, but that they had added their voice to the general protests against the increase in rentals at New Brighton as well as the state of the Korsten streets.³⁰ They sent resolutions to the conference reflecting the concern of the union with community problems, especially housing. They condemned the new houses being built in the PE townships as unsuitable, and demanded that the authorities provide more and better houses; they urged the City Council to reconsider the rent increases in New Brighton; they condemned the Bantu Education Act, and demanded the withdrawal of the Squatters Act.³¹ All these concerns indicated that the FCWU in PE had made a break with the 'welfare unionism' which other branches of the union practised.

At the time of the formation of SACTU in 1955, the PE branch of FCWU was once again in a crisis. The secretary appealed to the national office, "Comrades can you give me advice what to do, as the PE Branch is dying away slowly".³² The branch at this stage was able to do no more than handle individual workers' complaints. At the same time it was explaining the issue of affiliation to SACTU to the union members. There was some unclarity here, as although the union as a whole affiliated to SACTU at a national level, it seems that they also asked individual workers who were members of the PE branch to affiliate; she reported that 101 workers at H. Jones had 'affiliated', but that they were still explaining affiliation to the workers at LKB. At the same time, during this crisis, Oscar Mpetha - Western Cape organiser of the AFCWU - was sent from Cape Town to reorganise the AFCWU in PE.³³ After training from Head Office, the situation in the union as a whole improved, and Leon Levy also came down to PE from Johannesburg to assist in bringing about the Conciliation Board agreement which raised wages for workers in the food industry. However, internal divisions began to cause problems, with the secretary of FCWU being accused of bias towards one factory. Mpetha had to return again in 1957 to assist with a Wage Board investigation, and to help with the administration of the union, in a situation of conflict where the workers were complaining about the officials. Despite the problems within the union, the workers remained militant; they reported that during the struggle for the Conciliation Board, there was singing in the factories as workers demanded higher wages. Only two workers at LKB were not members of the union.³⁴

During the mid-1950's when the union was struggling for survival, employers became increasingly hostile and used the divisions in the union to weaken its organisation. Standard Canners and Packers was taken over by LKB, a national concern under control of Nationalist Party management, and a new hard-line attitude from the management became evident. At the same time as facing this

onslaught in their most organised factory, the union became extensively involved in the political campaigns of the period, most importantly the campaign against passes for women in 1956. Many of the union leaders were leadership of the Fedsaw - including Frances Baard, Lilly Diedericks and Florence Matomela. In addition, the union was playing a key role in building SACTU as an organisation.³⁶ To add to the problems, Frances Baard was charged with Treason in 1956, which took her away from union activities for periods.

Problems continued in 1958, with LKB in other centres stopping the system of stop-orders. The FCWU called a special conference to deal with the matter, where the PE branch accused the Cape Town branch of letting LKB get away with it without informing other branches. But it was too late, and the system was stopped in PE as well.³⁶ This was a setback for the union, as the ending of stop-orders at the largest and most organised factory in PE was a blow to the financial independence of the branch. The struggle at LKB continued throughout 1959 (see below), where a victory was won; the union's involvement in and support of broader initiatives were repaid by the support it was offered by the Congress movement. But the victory was short-lived, with the detention and restriction of union officials during 1960 and the banning of some of them in 1963.

Draghoender, the secretary of the time, reported that by 1963 the union was no longer dynamic; only three out of thirteen Branch Executive Committee meetings were attended. By 1966 the FCWU in PE had collapsed, with no committee existing.³⁷

The history of the FCWU in PE is a warning against 'linear' understandings of labour history. While the PE branch was known as a 'leading part' of the FCWU,³⁸ and was no doubt one of the (few) industrial unions set up by Gordon in 1942 which became a 'backbone' of the industrial struggles in the 1950's,³⁸ it was beset with problems, both organisational and structural. After Desai had been ousted and the financial problems of the branch resolved in 1951/2, it successfully re-organised and made some gains for members in terms of wages in 1955. It became one of the leading unions in SACTU in the area, and was notable for its contribution to women's struggles, especially the anti-pass campaigns of 1956. However it was at this time that the union again experienced organisational difficulties and internal divisions, which had to be resolved by national officials. Its most important victory in the period was the victory against wage cuts at LKB, the campaign notable for its support from other organisations. Yet by 1960 it was again battling. On the one hand, although maintaining strong organisation at LKB, the largest food firm in PE, it failed to extend its influence to other smaller food concerns. On the other hand, the position of the food industry, which went into sharp decline in PE in the early 1960's, caused the union to collapse completely.

The FCWU's involvement in SACTU and in popular struggles, and the notable support given to the union by the ANC in the LKB strike, are examples of the 'symbiotic' relationship between the liberation movement and the labour movement. However, this was not typical of the FCWU union; as Goode notes, the union was primarily concerned with 'welfare unionism', and most branches existed in rural areas or small towns where there was not strong political or community organisation. The PE branch was 'unrepresentative' of the rest of the union in this regard; yet in the context of PE it had a strong influence - out of proportion to its organisational strength - on the political movement of the 1950's. This ideological influence was to carry through in the perceptions of trade unions in PE as being particularly militant and ANC-aligned - putting both working class and women's issues on the agenda of the ANC.

7.3.2. Textiles

The A/TWIU was the other 'established' union in PE with a reputation of strong organisation and militancy. Its history has also been outlined in some detail in Chapter 4. There were two branches, one in PE and one in Uitenhage, although the Uitenhage branch was the most strongly organised and noted for the gains made. The ATWIU is probably most remembered for the african union and political leadership that it produced; while the A/FCWU was the home of many of the women activists, the ATWIU had male activists such as Caleb Mayekiso and Wilton Mkwai either organising it or coming up through its ranks. Mayekiso, also a leading ANC member in PE, was the national president of the ATWIU and was on the NEC of SACTU. In 1954 he was charged with incitement to violence arising out of speech at an ANC meeting in PE.⁴⁰ Despite extensive repression, Mayekiso continued to be active in the union until 1963; in this year he and Liz Walton represented the union in a committee against job reservation. However, a significant number of women - mainly coloured women - were also employed in the textile industry, and Liz Walton and Sophie Williams were among the women leadership who emerged.

At the time of the formation of SACTU, the ATWIU was strongly organised in both PE and Uitenhage factories. The struggle at Fine Wool Products in Uitenhage, described in Chapter 4, continued. In 1956 the workers at FWP worsted again declared a dispute, which was to make significant gains. A strike of african workers against forced overtime at a rate of 1s 5d per hour resulted in their arrest and charging under the Native Labour Act. 104 were found not guilty; 31 were found guilty and fined £2 or 20 days. The union appealed, and on appeal the judgement was overturned and the convictions quashed. This was an important precedent in two ways: firstly, overtime could not be forced on workers; secondly, the strike was legal, and the Native Labour Act which attempted to outlaw all african strikes 'received a blow'. In 1957 FWP reached an agreement with the union through a Conciliation Board. Although the Conciliation Board only applied to

coloured workers in terms of the IC Act, the agreement was extended to cover african workers, including wage increases, shorter hours and protective clothing. This was seen as a victory for the union's policy of "equal pay irrespective of race or sex".⁴¹

The union maintained its organisational presence until the early 1960's; by 1960 it represented 30% of the workforce in the industry in PEU, and was still negotiating wage increases with Union Spinning Mills and Algoa Weaving in PE in 1962.⁴²

However, after the passing of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1956, combined with the banning of many unionists under the Suppression of Communism Act and the arrest of others for political offences, the union was severely weakened. Caleb Mayekiso, an executive member of ATWIU, was jailed in 1952 for three months; he became president of the union while concentrating on organising railway workers, as well as being SACTU local secretary. He as well as Wilton Mkwai, ATWIU organiser from 1955, were arrested and charged in the treason trial of 1956, which took them out of action for a number of years. Mayekiso was detained in 1961, while Mkwai left the country in 1960. Gladstone Tshume, organising secretary of the ATWIU, died in 1957.⁴³ Fletcher, the national organiser was sent to East London and Queenstown in 1957, where he met with little success in organising; he returned to the union's regional headquarters in PE, and continued to organise, trying to fill in the leadership gap that had been left. He claimed that in 1958 the Uitenhage branch was still functioning, and the workers were still loyal to the union. He also organised african workers at the PE woolwashery, demanding better wages and conditions and the recognition of the union. A refusal to negotiate led to another 'unanimous' strike of 140 african workers. When the employers asked to meet with the workers' representatives, all 140 presented themselves, fearing victimisation of representatives. The police were called, the workers were arrested and charged; some support was raised for bail from other textile workers. The strikers were released, but were convicted and fined £3 each under the Native Labour Act, and were not reinstated. They were replaced by workers from the Ciskei, demonstrating the way in which capital was able to make use of the new labour bureau system in certain instances to crush worker organisation (see Chapter 6).⁴⁴

The militance of the textile workers in PE and Uitenhage was part of a "general upsurge in militancy, where textile strikes involved large, concentrated masses of workers for sustained periods";

In the context of the increasing militancy of the working class as a whole during the 1950's, the textile industry led all industrial sectors in terms of militant strike action.⁴⁵

The strikes at Amato Textiles, Johannesburg; Consolidated Textile Mills, Durban; and at Good Hope Textiles, Kingwilliamstown, were all examples of struggles of the textile workers where SACTU and the ANC played a role in supporting strike action.⁴⁶

The response of employers and police in East London, Kingwilliamstown, PE and Queenstown demonstrated a new 'hard-line' attitude: the IC Act, the Native Labour Act, the implementation of labour bureaux in PE, and the increased powers of the police all undermined the ability of african unions to survive during the 1950's.

Thus, just as the union representing the largest african workforce in the Eastern Cape (in manufacturing) was developing a position of strength, it was crushed by the new apartheid policies which came into effect: on the economic front, the IDC and its preference for cheap, unskilled migrant labour in the Border area co-incided with the introduction of influx control measures in PE. On the political front, the application of the Suppression of Communism Act to trade unions combined with the formation of TUCSA and the conforming of registered unions to the 'apartheid requirements' of the new labour legislation.

The african 'sections' of unions like TWIU and FCWU were dependent on being part of large registered national unions; on agreements being negotiated nationally or with the assistance of national secretaries or offices; and on the experience of the older, white trade union movement. When they could no longer be accommodated in this movement, they were detrimentally affected; and many of the more progressive - often Communist - unionists were banned at the same time. While Ensor is essentially correct in her analysis that it was the african unions which were part of registered unions which were able to make the most substantial concrete gains for their members in the 1950's, in PE this was the rule rather than the exception. Given that the food and textile industries were the two in PE where substantial numbers of african workers were employed in manufacturing, it was here that the strongest unions developed, and formed the basis for SACTU as an organisation.

While the involvement of union leadership in SACTU, the ANC and later, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) certainly contributed to the collapse of the textile and food unions in the mid 1960's, this occurred in the context of structural changes in these industries in the area. The textile industry was undercut by the IDC companies and became increasingly less significant in relation to the motor industry in PE; the food industry, as noted above, declined in importance and eventually the largest companies closed down.

7.3.3. Laundry workers

The other nationally-organised union that was a strong participant in SACTU was the African Laundry, Cleaning and Dyeing Workers Union. While a laundry workers union had been formed in PE in the 1940's, it had been badly affected by the strike of 1948. A national union was formed in 1955, and the branch in PE was reorganised and affiliated. It included, as before, both african and 'registered' (*i.e.* coloured) workers; the PE branch reported in 1955 that it was organising african workers into one union with coloured workers. The militant reputation of the union was not borne out at the level of organisational strength, however; essentially involved in organising a small number of workers dispersed over a number of establishments in the service sector, there is no evidence that it became a powerful organisational force in PE.

The organising secretary was Stella Damons, another of the women unionists who were involved with Fedsaw and the anti-pass campaign; she also became a member of the SACTU NEC in 1956. Despite her commitment to reorganising the union, there is little evidence of gains being made during the 1950's. At a national meeting of the union in November 1955 it was reported that the PE branch was 'disappointing', in that it had not arranged a general meeting of workers, and development was slow; the previous general meeting in May had shown a membership of 72 workers, and recruitment was difficult since the 1948 strike, subscriptions were not paid regularly and there were financial problems. 'Reliable' shop stewards were needed. Problems were experienced particularly at Atlas Laundry, the main 'target' of the strike (see Chapter 4). An application for a conciliation board had had to be withdrawn, although it was planned to reapply later when more workers were organised.

The PE branch of the union had agreed to affiliate to SACTU in 1955, and two laundry workers were elected to represent the union on the PE Local Committee; they also sent delegates for training to SACTU in Johannesburg. By 1956 however, there was no report from the PE branch to the national union.⁴⁷ Again, there is evidence that leadership was overstretched, and involvement in SACTU and other campaigns placed strain on an already weak union.

7.4. SACTU's achievements for workers

SACTU's strategy was to set up general workers unions as a transitional stage to industrial unions. While this was seen as a success in Durban and PE, it must be noted that it was only after the 1960 SACTU conference that the strategy was employed in PE, and the few unions resulting from the general union collapsed after SACTU's being forced underground in 1963/4. The need for a general union as a transitional stage was justified by the fact that although there had been rapid

industrial development in PE after the war, 'stable industrial unions for African workers were not there' - an admittance that the history of labour organisation was not all that it has been made out to be.⁴⁸ Food and textiles were the bases for the established unions, yet even here there were problems, while the african labourers being drawn into the expanding motor and component and metal industries were not organised. Lodge's claims of the highly-organised black workforce do not mesh easily with the evidence of lack of organisation and the struggles SACTU had to establish lasting union organisation outside of the food and textile industries.

The PE SACTU Local Committee involved two 'phases' in organising the unorganised. While the intention throughout was to form industrial unions, in the first phase (1955-1959) the SACTU organisers set up or revived a number of small unions, recruiting through the Congress of the People campaign and through other methods.

7.4.1. Organising the unorganised: the first phase, 1955-1959

The initial unions that were part of SACTU in PE were the established unions among textiles, food and canning, and laundry workers, outlined above. In the first few months of its existence, the Local Committee reorganised the Tin Workers Union and the African Commercial and Distributive Workers Union, and organised an African Battery Workers Union. The SAR&HWU (see Chapters 3 and 4) also affiliated but had to be reorganised; it claimed over 600 members in 1956. The African Iron and Steel Workers Union was organised by Mkwayi in 1955 and affiliated in 1956.

The PE Local Committee then set about organising workers dispersed in other industries, and it was reported to the 1956 conference that unions had been set up among sweet, biscuit, milling, cement, stevedoring, and hides and skins workers, with each union containing between 75 and 300 workers. The affiliations of the Stevedoring and Dock Workers Union (84 members), the Sweet Workers Union (97 members) and the Milling Workers Union (156 members) were accepted by the Management Committee of SACTU. The latter was involved in a Wage Board investigation into the milling industry in September 1956; they issued a questionnaire, held general meetings, attended the hearings of the Board and submitted the workers' demands.⁴⁹

A union for Municipal Workers was also formed; according to Luckhardt and Wall it was formed 'later' and had 156 members.⁵⁰ Yet records show that a municipal workers union applied to affiliate in 1955⁵¹ and had 350 members.⁵² This was Desai's PENEMWU (see Chapter 4), which was still weak and once again ran into financial problems. It only paid 10s on affiliation, and the General Secretary of SACTU was asked to write to the PE Local Committee, asking for more information about this union, and also to write to the union itself asking for the reasons for its non-

payment. Other unions which affiliated were the Bay Transport Workers Union (197 members) which arose later out of the busworkers' strike (see below), and a tiny Mineral Water Workers Union (33 members).⁵³

Efforts to organise wood and paper workers at Novobord, and to organise domestic and laundry workers, were unsuccessful. Garment workers were also not brought under the wing of SACTU. While SACTU claimed that garment workers also needed a union that would 'fight for them', the Garment Workers Union was at this stage the 'special preserve' of Katie Gelvan, a coloured trade unionist and city councillor. The GWU had no relation to SACTU, and Gelvan, one of the 'old guard' T&LC unionists, protected her workers from political influences "like a mother her daughter."⁵⁴

The PE Local Committee was at this stage the only one in SACTU involved in actively organising the unorganised into industrial unions, for which it was praised by the national structure. These new unions in PE were also mobilised around broader worker issues, with a mass meeting of 500 workers being held to protest police raids in September 1955, and a two-day conference held to discuss the new Industrial Conciliation Bill in 1956.⁵⁵

Many of these workers were organised by a voluntary 'full-time' organiser, Alven Bennie, who was assisted by unionists from the established unions such as Vuyisile Mini, Eddie Heynes, Dan Nangu, Paulos Temba, Chris Ketani and Caleb Mayekiso. Despite the urgent need for at least one, preferably more, paid organisers, the Local Committee did not manage to achieve the financial independence necessary to employ staff. The new unions all experienced financial difficulties; by October 1956, the sweet, milling, stevedoring and municipal workers unions in PE were all in arrears with their affiliation fees, and were sent final warnings by the SACTU national executive.⁵⁶ They relied extensively on the resources of the established, registered unions, with the Local Committee and later the General Workers Union using the TWIU offices as a base, and appealing to the FCWU for donations.

Most of these unions collapsed primarily because of financial problems and lack of resources. Their organising secretaries could not earn a living through trade union work, and some of them were dismissed for using funds and 'lost to the struggle', after which the unions collapsed.⁵⁷

What strategy was behind SACTU's organisation in this first phase? While initially all workers were drawn into organisation, gradually SACTU became more focused, prioritising transport and metal workers and setting up national organising committees in these sectors in 1958. In PE the strategy was aimed at responding to the needs of african workers in the motor and component (especially tyre) factories, and the SAR&H workers and stevedores on the docks (see below); but initially the

small resources and energies of the Local Committee were dispersed in organising small groups of workers in many different industries. Most of these unions could not survive independently, and collapsed into the General Workers Union.

7.4.2. Organising the unorganised: the General Workers Union, 1960-1963

The PE Local Committee announced in December 1960 that it would shortly set up a General Workers Union, with control vested in the Local Committee, in line with a SACTU national decision. It would establish departmental committees for different industries which would be co-ordinated by a central committee, and separate unions would be established when there were a sufficient number of factories in a particular industry organised. The general union was meant to serve as a base from which transport and metal workers, the stated priorities of SACTU nationally, could be organised. Another aspect of SACTU's strategy from 1958 was the establishment of factory committees, with the aim of creating a 'workers vanguard' in factories which were not organised into industrial unions. Where factory committees already existed they should become part of the General Workers Union until a separate union could be established.⁵⁸

In this, the second phase of the Local Committee's organisation in PE, the General Workers Union brought some of the groups of workers who had been organised into the small, new unions which had collapsed, under its control. Within two years, the PE GWU had a membership of 674 workers in tobacco, leather, wine, domestic, baking, commercial and distributive, hospital, rubber, dairy, milling and municipal workers. The municipal, milling and commercial workers had clearly been absorbed after their new unions had collapsed. There were attempts to set up separate industrial unions for some of these newly organised workers, and unions were created for leather, dairy and bus workers. However, like the others, these new unions did not survive.⁵⁹

By the 1962 conference, the SACTU affiliates from PE represented at National Conference were the branches of FCWU, TWIU, and Laundry Workers Union. The Mineral Water Workers Union with 33 members and the Bay Transport Workers Union with 197 members, and the General Workers Union with 400 members, were observers.⁶⁰ In another memo of the same time, the SACTU affiliates in PE were noted as the Metal Worker Union, the SAR&HWU, and the Bay Transport Workers Union. The General Workers Union was also represented, including workers from the commercial and distributive, fellmongering, municipal, packaging, tobacco, glass and mineral water sectors - indicating that the Mineral Water Workers union had also collapsed into the General Workers Union.⁶¹

It is difficult from the above documentation to draw out a clear chronology of when particular unions were formed, and when they either dissolved back into the General Workers Union or became independent unions. What is clear is that workers were organised into SACTU itself; when the General Workers Union was formed it was stated that it should be launched with publicity, in order to recruit workers to SACTU,⁶² and it took on the character of a 'mass movement' rather than an industrial trade union. This 'mass movement' character was built through the way in which workers were organised into SACTU.

Most organising took place through house-to-house campaigns in the african townships after work, and the 'pound a day' campaign (see below) and other political campaigns also contributed. Organisers like Frances Baard from the AFCWU organised workers waiting at the bus queues in New Brighton, or arranged meetings of workers who lived in one area of the township.⁶³

At the same time, where unions did exist, the General Workers Union recruited arbitrary workers in the townships and then 'handed them over' to the appropriate union. For example, Bennie remembers organising workers at Cadbury-Fry and at Frootall, and transferring them to FCWU. He, as the General Workers Union organiser, would go to particular industrial areas, or around the township, and sign up "five workers here, five workers there"; the General Workers Union was perceived as an organising base rather than a 'specific union'.⁶⁴ The exception is perhaps the transport sector, outlined below, where a consistent effort was made to organise unions among the harbour and railway workers. The style of organisation, through door-to-door work, political campaigns and publicity, and the close relationship of the ANC to SACTU, contributed to this impression of the General Workers Union being a mass movement. The role of the ANC is outlined in more detail below. One commentator in *Workers Unity*, the SACTU newspaper, noted wryly that the people of PE were well known for their militancy in the struggle against unjust laws, but they must also organise in the factories.⁶⁵

Mbeki remembers coming out of jail after six months in 1961, and being 'absolutely amazed' to see workers queuing up outside the SACTU offices to 'join up'.⁶⁶ Many workers - and indeed some organisers - perceived SACTU as a union in itself, rather than a federation made up of discreet industrial unions; something along the lines of the International Workers of the World in the USA in the 1920's, who organised 'One Big Union' for all workers, or the ICU in South Africa in the 1920's.

As Lilly Diedericks of the FCWU explained:

With SACTU it was more like all the unions being together. SACTU had all the different unions into one. Here we had Vuyisile Mini, and Alven Bennie, and Eddie Heynes, the three of them used to go out and organise those workers who were not in trade unions, and that was how it went. SACTU was very active. So with the trade unions, the strongest one was SACTU, and SACTU found itself being the most banned trade union in the whole Republic. SACTU was one strong union.⁶⁷

There is a contradiction in the reasoning given for the 'success' of the general workers union strategy in PE. While the intention was clearly to establish industrial unions, this did not succeed in the context of repression in the early 1960's. While the General Workers Union had some success in the mobilisation of workers for broader campaigns - such as the 'pound a day' campaign and the stayaways, dealt with below - it lacked the potential to develop into strong industrial unions, given the political context, the overlapping of leadership and the lack of training. An alternative interpretation is that the potential did exist, but SACTU's efforts were too late, for by the time the General Workers Union was in a position to transform itself, the state responded to the militance of ANC and SACTU with repression which rendered the strategy ineffective. The general workers union strategy in PE can be seen as the mobilisation of workers into a 'working class movement' rather than into industrial trade unions. Thus it is claimed by Luckhardt and Wall that the PE General Workers Union "symbolised the potential inherent in this strategy of organising the unorganised African working masses" and was an important factor in making the Eastern Cape the "most militant SACTU-Congress Alliance area in South Africa", while at the same time acknowledging that only a 'small number' of separate industrial unions emerged from the GWU. This 'mass movement' character was illustrated in the ability of the General Workers Union to organise mass meetings and a cultural club for workers; Luckhardt and Wall claim that in PE the General Workers Union was more than a trade union for working-class interest, and "became an institution of and for the people".⁶⁸

7.4.3. Sectoral organisation: transport

The formation of SACTU's transport National Organising Committee (NOC) in 1958 gave impetus to the reorganisation of workers on the docks and railways of PE. As in the 1940's, the organisation of dockworkers or stevedores employed by private companies in the PE harbour could not be separated from the organisation of the SAR&H workers. While the SACTU Local Committee in PE attempted to organise both groups of workers into separate unions, the workers took action together and were crushed, as in previous years, by the joint forces of the railways administration, the state and private employers.

The Stevedoring and Dockworkers Union, organised in the 'first phase' of SACTU in PE, engaged in one of the few strike actions by the 'new unions' in the 1950's over wage demands. The demand of the stevedores was for an increase from 11s 6d to 25s per day - more than the 'pound a day' being demanded by SACTU at the time. The demands were ignored, and the stevedores embarked on a go-slow strike in 1957.

Workers on the railways joined the strike. The SAR&HWU still had a weak branch in PE (see Chapter 4); at the time of the formation of SACTU it was reported that although the staff associations were being abolished, the railway workers were still experiencing organisational problems, with workers being divided between the staff association and the SAR&HNEWU. The building of unity in one strong union was still the priority.⁶⁹ Despite this, many railway workers came out on strike in support of the dockworkers' demands. They added their own demand for an increase in wages from £4 10s to £7 per month.

With assistance from the police, the army and the Native Affairs Department, the SAR&H and shipping companies broke the strike. Railway workers were locked out and replaced with convict labour, and stevedores were replaced by labour recruited from the homelands or who had been 'endorsed out' of other areas. Workers returned to avoid replacement by homeland labour; railway workers were dismissed and their passes not signed, while stevedores who were more skilled were re-employed with wage cuts - at the rate of railway casuals. The support organised by the SACTU LC for the strike resulted in one gain - the banning of convict labour at the docks as a result of International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) pressure.⁷⁰ A SACTU circular called for financial assistance for the PE stevedoring and railway workers, who 'suffered extreme privation' at the time of the dock strike; but given the financial problems experienced by most SACTU unions, little assistance was given.⁷¹ The days of financial aid for striking workers from the T&LC, with its more established unions, were over. The weak position of african labour in the service and transport sector was now reinforced by the labour bureau system and increasing intransigence on the part of state departments during the apartheid era.

The SACTU NOC for transport attempted to assist its struggling affiliates. It distributed thousands of leaflets about conditions on the railways and the need for recognition of the unions, and funds were collected to employ an Eastern Cape organiser; the NOC also prepared a memo on wages which was submitted to the Minister of Transport and MP's. After the crushing of the PE strike, however, the main achievement of SACTU in support of the union was in working against arbitrary suspensions. Luckhardt and Wall report that legal action resulted in reduced suspensions; although whether this was in PE or nationally is unclear.⁷² Bennie, the PE SACTU organiser, recalled an instance in which daily-paid workers at Messina Brothers (one of the stevedoring firms) and the

SAR&H were dismissed; SACTU wrote a letter threatening to take them to court if the workers were not re-employed; the threat of legal action was successful and the matter did not go to court.⁷³ PE was also the only harbour in the country to be affected by the 1961 stayaway (see below).

However, the hard-line attitude of SAR&H management was not threatened by SACTU, and victimisation combined with the use of the labour bureau succeeded in crushing both unions. The SACTU NEC reported in 1961 that co-ordination with the SAR&HWU was not maintained, the PE branch of the union had not progressed, and contact was irregular.⁷⁴ By the time a national body for railway workers had been formed in 1962, SACTU was facing severe repression, and the detention and banning of the SAR&HWU's officials such as Caleb Mayekiso meant that the union did not last long.⁷⁵ At the 7th SACTU conference in 1962 it was reported that PE had 250 members in the transport industry; and it was hoped to send an organiser to PE to bring up the membership, especially to organise the railways.⁷⁶ Again, the unions formed had not been sustained, and collapsed into the General Workers Union.

The most successful strike action in PE of the SACTU era involving transport workers was the bus workers strike of 1961. Although involving only a small number of relatively skilled workers at Bay Transport, and thus not affecting the position of african workers in the city as a whole, the strike made significant gains for the workers who were involved. The most important impact of the strike was the widespread community support that it generated, which is outlined below. The strike was the main 'success story' in PE reported to future SACTU conferences, and clearly had the effect of stimulating trade union organisation and providing encouragement to SACTU organisers, as well as resulting in the formation of a union.

7.4.4. Sectoral organisation: metal and building workers

At the 7th SACTU conference in 1962 it was thus reported that the PE Local had had important achievements during the Bay Transport dispute, and that there had been a 'great advance' in trade union activity since the previous conference. Workers in metal, cement and other sectors had been organised.⁷⁷

As the metal and motor/component industries were expanding (Volkswagen being established in Uitenhage in 1956), many africans were drawn into these companies. Unlike those in food and textiles, these workers had no experience of organisation, and were almost entirely in unskilled positions. Although this sector was identified by SACTU as one of the organisational priorities, the African Iron, Steel and Metal Workers Union which had been set up in PE in 1955 focussed on

organising engineering workers - specifically at Mangold's Engineering. By 1960 there were 500 members in the union, and the NOC planned to give 'special assistance' to PE in organising workers at Ford and General Motors.⁷⁸ The NOC assisted with training organisers, getting offices and paying the wages of organisers in PE as well as Durban and Pretoria for two to four months. It was reported in 1962 that workers in the metal industry in PE supported the campaign of 7 February 1961.⁷⁹ An undated memo from Chris Ketani records the 'reorganisation' of ten workers in two iron and steel factories, and a request for the latest IC agreements for the industry;⁸⁰ and the union still existed in 1962, but beyond this there is little evidence of the existence of an independent industrial union, or of any worker action or negotiation. This impression is confirmed by the SACTU organiser, who remembers the motor industry being organised but mostly coloured, not african workers, being involved.⁸¹ The organisation of the motor industry would wait until the 1970's, when african workers were being drawn in in large numbers and trained in more skilled positions.

The organisation of building workers was also described by Luckhardt and Wall as a 'major PE LC campaign.' Its importance lay not so much in the establishment or achievements of the African Painting and Building Workers Union, but in SACTU's attempts to build a non-racial union in a sector where skilled coloured workers dominated. While not successful in gaining the support of the majority of coloured workers who would not leave their registered union, SACTU claimed that their attempts at mobilising coloured workers made important gains in building non-racial support for Congress campaigns.⁸²

7.4.5. The 'pound a day' campaign

While the strategies of 'organising the unorganised' and of forming a General Workers Union were not generally successful in building lasting industrial unions, it is clear from the above sections that many thousands of workers in a wide range of industries were 'reached' by SACTU in the late 1950's and early 1960's. This relative success of organising the unorganised in PE can be attributed to the mobilisation of workers around concrete demands, in combination with the general political militance of the working class and the working-class orientation of the ANC. The main example of this was the 'pound a day' campaign, where unorganised workers dispersed among a number of industries were mobilised into the General Workers Union. It did not generally lead to negotiations or wage increases in specific industries, but like the general workers union itself, was more of a 'mass mobilisation' strategy. The response from african workers was positive in a context where real wages were declining, and they were in the worst paid and most vulnerable positions in the local economy.

The demand for a pound a day was first advanced in PE during the dockworkers strike of 1957, and Alvon Bennie claims that it was partially as a result of this that the national campaign came about.⁸³ The 'pound a day' campaign, the main SACTU national campaign, was aimed at pressurising for a national minimum wage, and theoretically involved strategies designed to incorporate the wage demand in existing unions' negotiations, and to assist in the organisation of the unorganised - building strong unions in the metal and transport sectors, and forming first workers' committees and then industrial unions in other unorganised sectors. A workers conference was held in the Eastern Cape in February 1958, followed by a national conference in March. The focus of the campaign was initially on bringing workers from factories together to discuss demands; the worker conference in Uitenhage invited three delegates per union, and ten worker representatives from each factory. They were asked to discuss the wage demand of a pound a day, as well as the issues of job reservation, the introduction of passes for women, and conditions in the factories. They were asked "What do workers think?" and requested to bring resolutions and donations.⁸⁴ In addition other 'friends' of the union movement were invited to the conference.⁸⁵ Arising out of this the PE LC drew up a new memo of wage demands.⁸⁶

The campaign had resonance in PE because of the decline in real wages by 1957, as outlined in Chapter 5: The SAIRR estimated the essential minimum wage for a family of five in Johannesburg in 1953/4 to be nearly £24, whereas the real average income of urban african families was in the region of £16. In PE, the average wage for unskilled african labour was around £12. The campaign was aimed at exerting both public pressure, and pressure through negotiations, on employers to pay £1 per day, which would bring wages up to £20-£24 per month, the essential minimum.⁸⁷

The campaign clearly had an impact in PE, even if only at the level of mobilisation of workers, and making employers aware of the issue. Lilly Diedericks explains how workers were mobilised around the demand in the factories:

There was this one chap on the FCWU committee, he had a huge voice, and the employers feared him, because when we had a meeting, in a hall or even in the cloakrooms, he'd sing this pound a day song: "*Sifun'iPondi Ngemini*" (We want a pound a day). [then] you would see the africans singing, prancing and dancing, and even the white workers would move backwards. That pound a day, it was something. I think in PE it really shook most of the employers.⁸⁸

Because the campaign was so integrally related to the 'organising the unorganised' campaign, it is difficult to separate out the effects or achievements of the campaign in PE; the demand no doubt contributed to the workers' willingness to join the general workers union or the new unions being established, but this did not usually result in negotiations with employers or wage demands being

met. It was certainly a factor in the education of workers, and was directly used in recruitment strategies: pamphlets in Xhosa were distributed in PE calling for a pound a day, with space at the bottom for workers who wanted to join a trade union to fill in their name, address, workplace, job, and wages. While the pamphlet was produced by the national office, it was used effectively in PE, where a number of workers from Kwazakele filled in the forms. It seems that some campaigning was done on a factory basis, for the forms reflect workers at one particular company wanting to join a union; yet interestingly they all resided in Site and Service, the new scheme in Kwazakele for people removed from Korsten in the 1956-58 period.⁸⁹ Kwazakele was at this stage a new township, where the ANC was in the process of organising and establishing its structures as it had done earlier in New Brighton. The involvement of the ANC in promoting worker organisation is outlined below.

7.5. Political support for worker struggles

The idea of a working-class movement developing in Port Elizabeth in the 1950's is further borne out by the role which the ANC played in direct support for labour struggles. While SACTU's success as a trade union centre, especially in building industrial unions, was limited it cannot be argued that SACTU was simply 'subservient' to the political interests of the national liberation movement. While SACTU was certainly involved with many political or 'reproduction' issue campaigns, the opposite also occurred. While the political nature of SACTU is well documented and highlighted as either the reason for its 'success' or its 'failure', it is seldom that the 'other side of the equation' is shown, where political movements assist trade union organisation. In the early 1980's, community support for the independent trade union movement in the form of consumer boycotts and strike support work was noted as significant, but incidences of this type of action in the past are not often recounted; perhaps because of the tenuous relationship between the petty-bourgeois nationalism of the ANC, and the point-of-production issues tackled by trade unions.

In Port Elizabeth in the 1950's, this division was overcome to a great extent by the ANC, both in its support-base and leadership, and in the style and content of its political work - which were all strongly working-class in orientation. Thus while industrial unions were not strong, the ANC played an important role in encouraging and building union organisation, and in actively supporting worker action in specific instances.

This approach is borne out by interviews with leaders of the time. Raymond Mhlaba, ANC and SACP leader, sees the strength of SACTU in PE as lying in its non-racial approach of "organising workers as workers"; petty-bourgeois Africanism was not used as an ideological tool of

organisation. SACTU provided training in office administration and union organisation, and encouraged industrial unionism, with the goal of 'one industry, one union'. SACTU's achievement was in bringing about a "politically conscious trade unionism" which aimed at bringing about "radical change in society through defying the law".⁹⁰

The ANC's role in the labour movement in PE, according to Mhlaba, was to support and concretely assist SACTU: the ANC had a clear position on african trade unions, 'hammering' in mass meetings that african trade unions must be recognised by law, and publically calling upon ANC members to join trade unions. Support from the ANC went further than public statements, however; and the style of organisation of the ANC in the african townships militated in favour of building tight-knit organisation. The fact that the townships of Port Elizabeth became the one area where the 'M-Plan' was effectively implemented, had much to do with the 'bottom-up' style of organising, which contributed to building a movement closely attuned to the demands and interests of the working-class residents of the townships. The 'zoning' of New Brighton meant that in each street, a street steward had to know all the residents and introduce them; and within a cell of seven homes the cell steward would have to know the employment status, income, and other information of each cell member. This information was then fed to the SACTU organisers, who would then be able to recruit workers from their places of residence; the SACTU organisers were in many cases part of the ANC cells anyway. As Mhlaba says, this was a "different way of doing things", where one could not distinguish between trade union and ANC work; it was seen not as interference but as assistance. Both the leadership and the style of work engaged in was 'working class'.⁹¹ The ANC and SACTU had liaison committees in PE and Uitenhage, which met 'almost daily' to discuss strategies.⁹²

Govan Mbeki confirms this impression of the way the ANC worked to assist unions, and goes further to posit a conscious intervention on the part of the ANC to build unions in the late 1950's, after the collapse of the small unions initially established by the SACTU LC. He remembers that while the ANC was very strong, the trade union movement was weak among africans. Bans on the ANC holding meetings in New Brighton in 1953, and on all meetings of more than ten africans in 1957, meant that the ANC turned to the method of 'small group' meetings to build solid organisation. The ANC ran political study groups in the townships, and recognising the weakness of unions, set aside a month where study groups would hold an 'intensive focus' on union organisation. The unions which organised africans all worked closely with the ANC, and the ANC would "step in on the side of the workers" if employers were hostile.⁹³

In the period of 'organising the unorganised', and the 'pound a day' campaign, most SACTU organising took place through house-to-house campaigns in the townships after working hours.

Political campaigns such as the Congress of the People, the stayaways and the 1959 SACTU conference added momentum to this work;⁹⁴ indicating again the emphasis on using the working-class residential area as a focus for SACTU mobilisation. The Congress of People campaign was significant in that although SACTU had only just been formed, it contributed towards the collection of demands for the Freedom Charter, and its involvement in collecting demands in both factories and townships in the Eastern Cape and Natal inserted working class content into the Charter.⁹⁵

The two examples of strike action most often cited as the 'success stories' of PE unions in the SACTU era are the LKB strike against wage cuts, and the bus drivers strike for recognition, different work conditions and higher wages. These were the two strikes in which the ANC mobilised in support of worker action. Both strikes were directly concerned with worker's 'bread and butter' issues, and were not initiated by SACTU or the ANC as part of broader political mobilisation campaigns. Their success in making gains for the workers concerned was directly related to the mass character of support for the ANC and SACTU, and reflected the style of organisation of workers in the community. While examples of similar support by the ANC for worker action occurred elsewhere in the country, such struggles usually ended in defeat.⁹⁶

The LKB canning factory was the stronghold of the FCWU in PE, yet the union was in a weak position in the late 1950's. The PE branch had not paid affiliation fees for two years, and as noted above the head office had had to intervene to resolve divisions within the union. The LKB management had tried on previous occasions to weaken the influence of the union, by ending stop-order facilities in 1957, and by replacing the union committee with a 'stooge' committee in 1958.⁹⁷ The LKB struggle in 1959 was a defensive one against wage cuts, with the management determined to enforce Wage Determination 179 which would cut back on subsequent Conciliation Board agreements with the union. After attempts at negotiation had failed, the workers came out on strike, and LKB responded with a lock-out of over 1 000 workers. The strike was a significant one for the union nationally, for if it had failed, LKB would have used the same tactics in other factories around the country.⁹⁸

The Congress alliance supported the strike in a number of ways: through the threat of a boycott, through prevention of scabbing, and through public pressure. Workers brought from Uitenhage agreed to stop work when the reason for the strike was explained to them, and management could not find replacements for workers with a fair amount of skill and experience. Public pressure was exerted through a mass meeting organised jointly by the union and the ANC which was "a major show of solidarity for the workers' struggle"⁹⁹ and through the distribution of pamphlets. Two forms of boycott were threatened: one a consumer boycott of LKB products (it would be put on the 'list' of Nationalist companies to be boycotted, from which it had been exempted after

concessions had been made earlier), the other a worker boycott of handling fruit from PE. Despite the branch's failure to communicate with the head office about the strike resulting in strained relations, the combined pressures exerted were successful, and the management agreed to restore wages to previous levels in the form of a 'bonus'. They also agreed to reinstate the dismissed branch secretary and other dismissed workers, and permit the collection of subscriptions on factory premises, although recognition of the union was not immediate. The union informed the ANC of the agreement reached, and thousands of pamphlets were printed to inform the community of the victory; the FCWU extended thanks to the ANC, SACTU, SACPO and SACOD for their support.¹⁰⁰

Another interesting feature of this strike was the attempted intervention by TUCSA, which sent letters of protest against the wage cuts at LKB to the Minister of Labour and the Managing Director. SACTU's independence and relative strength in the Eastern Cape was indicated by their response, which was firstly to tell TUCSA to "mind their own business", and then to threaten to sue TUCSA for a defamatory report in which it claimed that workers at LKB were 'left in the lurch' by SACTU. As the strike had been a definite success, TUCSA had no choice but to apologise.¹⁰¹

The other example of support for worker action was the Bay Transport Company strike, the 'major dispute of 1961' in PE, and an example of the ANC "stepping in on the side of the workers if the employers were hostile".¹⁰² There was a bus workers union in PE, but it included only white and coloured workers; african workers were not unionised but were meant to be represented through a committee set up by the employers in terms of the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act. Bennie, Mini and Mayekiso were involved in attempts to organise the bus drivers as part of the campaign to organise unorganised transport workers. Mini and Bennie were arrested for trespassing on company property in the process; the case was withdrawn, but from then on they continued to organise the bus company workers at their place of residence, as all of them stayed in New Brighton.¹⁰³ Although a tiny group of workers, not yet formed into a union, they decided to take action to enforce their demands. They demanded that the agreement between the registered union and the management be extended to them; that the 'one-man system' of bus-driver/conductor be ended; and a minimum wage of £1 a day. The action they took was in the form of a 'go-slow', refusing to drive some buses, and driving some only at certain times.

The ANC - by this stage banned - supported the demand, and a boycott of buses from New Brighton was called. People were mobilised by means of leaflets, which "in those days went into every door."¹⁰⁴ The leaflets explained that Tramways were refusing to talk to the workers, and called on residents to boycott from a certain day. The residents of New Brighton sustained the boycott for forty days while negotiations proceeded. The workers approached the *New Age* offices,

where they were referred to SACTU; the LC then set up a joint committee to handle the strike. In a foreshadowing of the consumer boycotts of 1985, the Mayor, the PE Chamber of Commerce and the Midland Chamber of Industries all became involved in the dispute, arranging negotiations between both parties; and when these failed, setting up an industrial tribunal. SACTU brought in Joe Slovo as legal representative, with Govan Mbeki and later Ray Alexander as trade union representatives, on the tribunal. The forcing of Tramways to the negotiating table and the setting up of the tribunal were seen as the direct result of the boycott pressure, and the inconvenience caused to industry and commerce in the city. The result was a raise in wages, and the formation of the Bay Transport Company Workers Union as a relatively strong SACTU affiliate; it was also seen as a victory against the Native Labour Act. The banned ANC's involvement in the strike did not go unnoticed, however, and when three years later over a thousand people were arrested for furthering the aims of the ANC, they included ten busdrivers who were jailed for their part in the strike.¹⁰⁵

The strike was also a boost for the SACTU Local Committee, which reported to the 5th SACTU conference that it had come to the fore since the Bay Transport dispute, where it "gave all possible assistance to the workers and helped them achieve victory."¹⁰⁶ The dispute was "marked by the solidarity of all workers of PE who supported the bus drivers and instituted a complete boycott of Bay buses." However, they had problems with financing the legal costs of the dispute, and had had no response from affiliates to their call for assistance. It was felt that if SACTU was going to "function on a higher level", it needed its own office and organiser. Arrangements would be made for this, and for "intensive organisation" and the establishment of a GWU.¹⁰⁷

The success of these actions in support of the workers can be attributed to the strength of the ANC in the townships of New Brighton and Kwazakele, and its tight organisation. Its response to the earlier banning of meetings was to organise along the lines of the 'M-Plan' in street and block cells. In a report to the ANC National Co-ordinating Committee after a tour of major centres, the "high standard of ANC organisation in PE" was noted as "deeply impressive and unequalled in any other area"; in fact, the ban on public meetings had "failed utterly to disrupt the ANC", and "the alternatives have proved organisationally superior". The extensive practice of small meetings resulted in "close contact between leadership and rank and file."¹⁰⁸

Even after the banning of the ANC in 1960, the structures set up were able to survive for a short time, and the underground ANC was able to support SACTU campaigns, while SACTU in many cases became the public voice of the ANC. In these circumstances a successful bus boycott could be organised in New Brighton in 1961, despite the ban.

7.6. Stayaways

The PEU industrial area is now well-known as the site of the most complete and consistent response to stayaway calls in the 1980's, since the 1985 stayaway after the Langa massacre in Uitenhage. The Industrial Relations Unit at the University of Port Elizabeth has measured the extent of stayaways, and found that increasing numbers of coloured workers are participating in stayaways that were supported initially mainly by african workers. In PE, between 77% and 98% of african workers consistently supported stayaways between 1987 and 1990, with african workers in Uitenhage often having 100% stayaways. As a result, most companies have now decided to acknowledge the main stayaway days - March 21, May 1 and June 16 - as *de facto* paid public holidays, or to adopt a 'no work, no pay' attitude. Dismissals as a result of stayaways have diminished as management realised that the action was the norm rather than the exception.¹⁰⁹

The tradition of political strikes or stayaways as they are now known had been built in PE in the 1950's, and contributed to the success of this strategy when it was resurrected in the 1980's. It can be argued that the success of this strategy in the 1950's and early 1960's was due to the strength of the ANC/SACTU alliance, and SACTU's organisational style. In the 1980's, this tradition had to be rebuilt, not without conflict: the 1985 stayaway saw a conflict between the established industrial unions, and the United Democratic Front (UDF) and 'community unions', which was resolved through the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and its growing strength and influence in the liberation movement.¹¹⁰ The SACTU tradition was not something that automatically 'followed through', and the unions built in the late 1970's and early 1980's were built with african workers in a stronger position in industry, and a stronger bargaining position.

The other point to draw out relates to the position of coloured workers and the question of non-racialism in the union movement. During the 1950's, the participation of coloured workers in stayaways was erratic. The Congress Alliance was involved to some extent in the 1950's in non-racial organisation in areas such as Korsten in PE, where a significant proportion of the community ~~were~~ ^{was} coloured. However, it can be argued that the apartheid measures of the late 1950's and 1960's, which enforced residential segregation, effectively broke down this tradition. This contributed to the tensions between FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade Unions) affiliates - for example the National Union of Metal, Automobile and Rubber Workers (NUMARWOSA), whose membership was initially based on coloured motor workers - and the civics and 'community unions' of the early 1980's (the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation and the Motor and Component Workers Association) who asserted african leadership and a militant style of organisation based

primarily in the african townships. It took a few years in PE before the tensions were ironed out, and unanimity on the stayaway tactic was reached by both COSATU unions and the UDF. The merging of unions on the principle of one industry, one union, as well as the presence of the ANC in the coloured residential areas, has contributed now to the increased participation of coloured workers in stayaway actions.

The ANC stayaway in protest against the Suppression of Communism Act on 1 May 1950 resulted in the killing of eighteen people in clashes with police in the Transvaal. The Day of Protest called on 26 June 1950 to protest the killings of 1 May was most effective in PE among african workers where a 'complete stoppage' occurred according to the National Day of Protest Co-ordinating Committee. The response indicated the position of african workers in PE: unskilled labour was absent from most industries, but the most seriously affected sectors were the harbour, the municipal services, and commerce.¹¹¹ 'Emergency preparations' were needed to ensure coal for municipal power. This was the beginning of PE's reputation for stayaway action: the "PE response stands out as an example of a close working relationship between the ANC and the black labour movement typical of the area" claimed Luckhardt and Wall, and the lessons to be learnt were that one "needs to ~~gauge~~^{gauge} the mood of the working class before embarking on political mass action, and need also a national trade union body to co-ordinate."¹¹² This response from unskilled workers, despite the weakness of labour organisation in some of the most affected sectors - notably the municipality and the harbour - indicate the growth of a broader political consciousness among the african workforce - one that was not primarily the result of trade union organisation.

Why did PE's african workers respond so strongly, in this initial stayaway, to a day of protest against shootings in the Transvaal and the Suppression of Communism Act? Partly, certainly, because of the influence of the Communist Party in the trade union movement and the ANC; but mainly because, as was to characterise SACTU and the ANC in the 1950's, the stayaway was linked to the concrete demands of workers. In this case it was the question of influx control, which was about to impose restrictions on the african working class through the implementation of the Native Urban Areas (Amendment) Act. PE was the only city where stringent influx control had not been applied, and its introduction posed a major threat to african residents. As Frances Baard described,

In Port Elizabeth we didn't have this influx control law saying who can come and live and work here, and who is not allowed there. But now, at this time, they wanted to introduce this law in Port Elizabeth. So everyone in Port Elizabeth was very upset about this, and when we organised for the stayaway, we organised around this issue too.¹¹³

Even at this early stage, the relationship between the unions and the ANC was a factor in the success of the stayaway; the combination of door-to-door work in the townships with factory-based organisation characterised the campaign:

We had big meetings in the townships, some of them outside, and we went from house to house knocking on each door and telling people why they must not go to work on the 26th. It was easy for us to organise for the stay-at-home in Port Elizabeth because the trade union was very strong there, and there were a lot of us who were in the trade union and the ANC and so we talked to the workers at the factory as well as at home, and because they were already organised they understood what we were saying. So in Port Elizabeth the response to the stayaway was very, very strong.¹¹⁴

The ability to mobilise for a stayaway in support of political demands, across class and colour lines, was further strengthened in PE the following year. A national campaign of the Congress Alliance against the disenfranchisement of coloureds was taken up in PE in the form of a stayaway. The same tactic was used with partial success by the Franchise Action Council in the Cape Peninsula.¹¹⁵ In PE, the stayaway gained significant support from the african community, despite the fact that it was not an issue which directly affected them; it was supported by 65-70% of employees in PE, which presumably meant all employees of whatever colour.¹¹⁶

The next stayaway, called on 11 November 1952 in response to the imposition of the Riotous Assemblies Act and the curfew following the 1952 New Brighton riots, was also a success; it was 96% successful in the african community, and had significant support among indians, according to a SAIRR report. The support of coloured workers was unclear; Lodge claims that it was "backed by many coloured workers",¹¹⁷ but the SAIRR report notes that "the majority of the Cape Coloured people abstained." It "brought to Port Elizabeth industrialists the realisation that the African community had a power of organisation which they could not afford to ignore, particularly in such a vulnerable port as Port Elizabeth", and was indicative of a "solid general determination to resist restriction and injustice."¹¹⁸ The riots and the stayaway also brought the ANC into direct contact with the PE Municipality, where it seems a division was caused both within the PEM and within the ANC.

The ANC had met with the Mayor, and agreed to convert what had been planned as an indefinite work stoppage to a one-day protest strike. While the ANC was seemingly divided on this point - "Left-wing activists wanted the strike to be indefinite, but they were overruled",¹¹⁹ the Council was also divided, and the PEM, the single largest employer of african workers, took a hard line and dismissed the majority (1 500) of the workforce who stayed away. According to the SAIRR, "The people were telling their leaders that they had let them down, by refusing to continue with their

original plans for a strike for an indefinite period."¹²⁰ In this context, the action of the council was considered "retaliatory and provocative" as it could have sparked further strike action "if it had not been for the confidence of the Africans in their leadership."¹²¹ The Council temporarily 'blew' its liberal image, calling in police to drive away the workers as they returned, and some workers were clubbed with batons. They were replaced by workers 'drafted' from surrounding districts by the labour bureau. As a 'reward' to the 300 workers who did come to work, they offered a 3d wage bonus - which was absorbed when new wage scales came into effect two years later, ironically with much protest from the union.¹²² The SAR&H responded to the strike by replacing african with coloured workers at the harbour.

Thus, while the Mayor had been involved in discussions with the ANC, the majority of councillors "did not recognise the limitation of the protest to one day as a compromise".¹²³ According to the SAIRR, this is because the council did not wish to acknowledge the strength of the ANC, preferring to accept the assurances of "so-called reasonable moderate leaders" who said that the "ANC had no following and that only a few misguided followers would observe the protest day." However, it was apparent to the SAIRR that the "ANC leaders have complete control of the people at Port Elizabeth"; the protest had been peaceful; the ANC leaders "reasonable and willing to co-operate with the City Council", and the ANC were "the chosen leaders of the people and they must be accepted as such. Any other course can only lead to disaster eventually", and "in the future Congress is going to be the only recognised mouthpiece of the people."¹²⁴ While this is only the report of one person, the above quotes reflect an outsiders' impression of the influence of the ANC in PE in the early 1950's. Employers were to become 'used' to stayaways, and treat them with increasing leniency. At the same time, the Municipality abandoned its liberal position, and agreed finally to the adoption of influx control - as outlined in Chapter 6.

The 1952 stayaway is also significant in relation to what was happening within the ANC nationally at the time, and it indicated the working-class orientation of the ANC which at times would bring it into conflict with the national movement. In Webster's analysis of stayaways during the 1950's, he shows that the ANC did not employ the stayaway strategy between 1951 and 1957, indicating that the ANC had chosen between industrial action and passive resistance, favouring the latter as a strategy more appropriate to the class composition of Congress. This reflected the weakness of the african trade union movement at the time, and the middle-class nature of the ANC leadership.¹²⁵

In contrast, in PE industrial action was central to the national political campaigns of the time - in the spontaneous strikes of workers during the Defiance Campaign mentioned in Chapter 5, and in the use of the stayaway as a weapon against repression, also in 1952. Clearly in PE, no choice had

been made between passive resistance and industrial action; and while passive resistance was stronger than anywhere else in the country, it was reinforced with industrial action. This tendency was reinforced after the formation of SACTU in 1955.

On 26 June 1957, there was a strong response in PE to the first stayaway call around SACTU's 'pound a day' campaign. The mobilisation of people in support of the bus boycott (see Chapter 5) contributed to its success; however, the harbour workers did not come out this time, as repression was too fierce after the dockworkers strike. Luckhardt and Wall claim that as a result of these actions the government was forced to reinvestigate unskilled workers' wages, which had not been revised since 1952; and that there were new Wage Determinations for the laundry, stevedoring and meat industries which reversed the trend of declining real wages after 1957.¹²⁶

While the issue of the 1958 stayaway was a point of tension between the ANC and SACTU nationally, Port Elizabeth was once again the exception to the rule. While Luckhardt and Wall claim that relations between the ANC and SACTU improved at national level from 1959, it is clear that this relationship had been close in PE from the formation of SACTU. The overlapping of leadership in PE meant that the loyalties of ANC/SACTU leaders could on occasions be divided. The 1958 stayaway was a good example of this, illustrating how the working-class nature of the ANC in PE brought it into conflict with the ANC national leadership.

A SACTU regional conference had decided on a national strike to reinforce the 'pound a day' demand, to ~~coincide~~ ^{coincide} with the 'general' election of white voters; the three-day political strike was to be decided on at a SACTU national workers' conference in March. The ANC felt that the stayaway should not be a purely trade union affair, and the demand around 'the Nats must Go' in some areas came to take precedence over the pound a day demand. Lack of consultation by the ANC, and the confusion over two slogans, contributed to the weakness of the stayaway in other areas, and led to the ANC calling off the stayaway after the first day. In PE the decision to call off the stayaway was greeted with anger, because the stayaway had had significant support on the first day - estimated at 50% - and was gaining momentum, and they had not been consulted about the calling-off which came from the national office of the ANC.¹²⁷ Some factories did in fact continue the stayaway in defiance of the national decision.¹²⁸

The relative success of the stayaway in PE, where elsewhere it "fizzled out into an almost complete fiasco"¹²⁹ can be attributed to its primary focus on the wage demand rather than the 'Nats must Go' call. Precautionary measures were taken to avoid dismissals, such as the distribution of pamphlets in the Ciskei calling on people not to make themselves available for recruitment in industrial areas.¹³⁰ There are contradictory interpretations of how the state and management

responded to the strike. On the one hand, there was 'fierce repression' in PE, with women workers being arrested at New Brighton station, a group of SACTU/ANC leaders being arrested, and police charging striking workers at union offices in the city with holding an illegal gathering. A large number of workers, including the union executive at one of the strongholds of the FCWU, the H. Jones factory, were dismissed.¹³¹

On the other hand, the mass dismissals of earlier years did not take place; for example, the PEM, which in 1952 had dismissed nearly the entire african labour force for participating in a 'political strike', did not dismiss workers; and they were later to respond to the 1961 stayaway by agreeing not to celebrate Republic Day. Lilly Diedericks felt that SACTU's attempts to prevent victimisation were successful:

At Volkswagen or GM at that time, those workers said they have got nothing to do with all this, they are going to work. One day is enough. They only offered to stay away one day. The next day they are going to work because the unions are not going to pay them. Our argument was then 'The unions are not going to pay you, but in the long run, you'll be doubly paid by your own efforts.' And there was this complete stayaway. PE was dead. Really dead. ...and there was talk of victimisation, but the trade unions stepped in. The employers were contacted and told 'Nobody, but nobody is to be dismissed or victimised'. Then this would really be a stayaway. Maybe a few lost their jobs, but as far as I can remember the majority didn't lose their jobs. That was one of the strong points - the workers showed the government that they are serious, they want this pound a day.¹³²

Moreover, white public opinion was becoming more sympathetic to stayaways. The Walmer Ratepayers and Electors Association wrote to the Town Clerk of Walmer (which was still a separate municipality) protesting the Walmer council's threats to fire workers who stayed away. They noted that commerce and industry had agreed to 'short-pay' african workers who stayed away, and the council's threat was not only "tactically and ethically wrong in that it amounted to intimidation", but was the "type of action used by communistically-inspired organisations as evidence of ill-will against Native workers."¹³³

Along with tensions between the ANC and SACTU nationally around the stayaway decision, SACTU also felt disgruntled with the ANC because the ANC had not in many instances lived up to its earlier plans and promises. SACTU felt that the ANC had never implemented the 'M-Plan', and had not assisted with recruitment.¹³⁴ As with the stayaway, PE was the exception: the close working relationship between SACTU and the ANC had existed since SACTU's formation; the 'M-Plan' had been implemented by the ANC with some success, and ANC activists had used township structures to recruit workers to SACTU unions. Fine's assumption that 1958 was a 'turning point'

in the relationship of SACTU to the ANC, after which SACTU was 'dominated' within the alliance, is thus not applicable to PE, where the relationship between the two had been based on a different dynamic from the start.

The next national stayaway to affect PE was on 28 March 1960, called by the ANC in response to the Sharpeville massacre. Again well supported in PE, it directly preceded the banning of the ANC on 30 March. The last general strike of the Congress Alliance was called for three days, from 29-31 May 1961, as a final warning to the government. As the ANC was banned, it was called by the National Action Council, and the demand was for a National Convention. In PE, 75% of textile, clothing, docks, dairy and bakery workers came out.¹³⁶ The 1961 stayaway in PE was noted for its non-racial support, with extensive participation of coloured workers - 75% on the first day;¹³⁶ and also for its being the only area where the strike gained momentum after the first day, and the city was 'completely disrupted' and 'brought to a standstill for the remaining two days'. Municipal services were once again affected in PE and Johannesburg but not elsewhere; the response of the PEM this time was not to fire the workers, but to refuse to participate in Republic Day celebrations. Basic industries were not affected anywhere except PE, where stevedoring and railway workers responded¹³⁷ - despite the distribution of anti-strike pamphlets by aeroplane.¹³⁸

The greater support for stayaways in PE and Durban in the 1950's is attributed to the focus in these areas on 'organising the unorganised' and the general workers union strategy.¹³⁹ However, it was not just the emphasis on organisation (which was not in itself particularly lasting) but rather the style of organisation, and the relationship to political structures, which built the tradition of support for stayaways. While the stayaways were not as successful in other areas - reflecting either the ANC's unconcern with trade union organisation, or the weakness of the SACTU Local Committees - in PE they were built around the organisation of workers in the community. The implementation of the 'M-Plan' by the ANC meant that the african working class could be mobilised at short notice from their places of residence, rather than their places of work. The repeatedly successful use of the stayaway weapon in PE reaffirms the contention that although industrial trade unions were not always strong, there did exist a working-class movement.

7.7. Leadership: integration, militance and politics

Port Elizabeth has long been noted for its tradition of militant, african, working-class leadership. This phrasing needs some definition beyond the mere rhetorical sense, for it is historically significant in the light of the debates around african leadership (in the liberation movement) and worker leadership (in the labour movement). Lodge noted the overlapping of leadership between

trade unions and political organisations (the ANC, the SACP and Fedsaw), as well as the smallness of the petty-bourgeoisie among PE africans, concluding that "while Congress in other centres was led by a professional elite, in Port Elizabeth, because of the relative strength of trade unionism, working class leaders dominated African politics."¹⁴⁰

Luckhardt and Wall put the "early success" of PE SACTU down to the political education of younger activists by 'veteran' trade unionists, who had earlier been active in registered unions but many of whom were banned by 1955.¹⁴¹ The lives of some of these unionists illustrate the overlap of political and union functions.

Of the 'old guard', Gus Coe of the FCWU has been mentioned in previous chapters. She was somewhat the exception to the rule; a white woman who joined the Communist Party before becoming involved in the union movement, and who moved from 'traditional' white unionism into FCWU when it was in crisis, she was one of the first victims of the Suppression of Communism Act. Unlike others, she was not extensively involved with women's organisation or Congress politics.

A.P. Mati and Gladstone Tshume were both part of the 'old guard' of african unionists who had been involved in the 1940's. Mati was organiser of the Laundry Workers Union and the African Commercial and Distributive Workers Union, and Secretary of the SAR&HWU; he had been chairman of the PE ANC in the 1940's. Gladstone Tshume, involved in the dockworkers strike in 1946, was involved in the Defiance Campaign, and became organising secretary for the ATWIU. According to du Toit, he "always considered the workers to be the vanguard of the democratic movement and showed towards them a spirit of humility."¹⁴² Both Mati and Tshume were banned in 1953.

Caleb Mayekiso, another of PE's labour heroes, is seen by Luckhardt and Wall to be one of the 'new militants' of the SACTU era. Yet, born in 1913, it is claimed by du Toit that he was involved in trade union activities from his early twenties. Also an ANC leader, he was involved in the Defiance Campaign and was tried for treason in 1956. As a unionist he was at various times secretary of the SAR&HWU, President of the ATWIU, and Secretary of the SACTU Local Committee.¹⁴³

Wilton Mkwayi is probably the best example of the african working-class leadership produced by PE, although he was from the Transkei and was not an SACP member. He had only a standard four education, and worked as a labourer in PE for the SAR&H from 1947-50. He had joined the ANC at the age of 17, and was involved with the rent and bus boycotts of 1947, and with the general strike of 1950. He then worked at Metal Box where he lost his job after a strike in 1952; then at

Tin Plate Stores, becoming organising secretary for the Tin Workers Union in 1953, and then organiser of the ATWIU in 1955. At the same time he was ANC Volunteer in Chief during and after the Defiance Campaign of 1952, and was treasurer of the Eastern Cape ANC. He was involved in the Bantu Education campaign in 1954 and the campaign for the Freedom Charter in 1955. When SACTU was formed he became Eastern Cape treasurer. In 1956 he was charged with treason, but continued with union organisation 'during recesses'. After the ANC was banned in 1960, he went overseas to represent SACTU before returning to become Commander in Chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe, and was convicted in the Rivonia trial of 1964.¹⁴⁴

The lives of these activists illustrate that an african leadership emerged in PE which was grounded simultaneously in political and trade union struggle. Most of the leadership were of working class origin, which influenced the priorities of the political movements. Yet it cannot simply be argued that a strong trade union movement caused this working-class orientation of the political movements; as has been shown above, african trade unions were weak during the 1940's, and the rise of militant unions coincided with the rise of political militance in the african community. This militance transformed the politics of the ANC, which became the dominant political force, into a politics of the working class. The ANC then played a conscious role in building trade union organisation and supporting worker struggles.

In interviews with trade unionists and ANC members of the time, there is no perceived conflict of interests between the two movements, or any sense of the one trying to direct the other. If anything, the ANC supported the union movement, in the 1950's actually assisting concretely with trade union organisation and the building of SACTU. The intention was clearly to build trade union and general working class organisation, not merely to mobilise workers into supporting the Congress movement.

In addition, the ideological influence of the Communist Party dominated over other possible influences such as Africanism. What role did the Communist Party consciously play? There is no doubt that ANC study groups were of great importance in building this new leadership, and after the banning of the CPSA, members of the underground SACP played a central role in running these groups. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the SACP worked through the ANC, and were integrated in the ANC to the extent that they did not strategise separately or attempt to manipulate the ANC. Through the study groups, these SACP members produced the 'organic intellectuals' of the trade union movement and some of the ANC in PE; they held an internationalist perspective, yet worked actively as organisers in the concrete conditions of their townships and factories. Some of the 'old guard' who have returned to PE stress the importance of such study groups, arguing that both the ANC and COSATU would benefit from the development of such perspectives. The classes were

held in groups of seven, as meetings of more than ten africans were banned from 1952. They dealt with topics such as the history of the labour movement, and the international trade union movement. While the latter referred specifically to trade unions, their history and the relations between the international federations, the former referred to the 'politics of labour' from the *Communist Manifesto* through to the history of labour parties in Western countries. The emphasis was on understanding both trade unionism and politics. Despite the controversy surrounding the positions taken by the SACP on various international issues, it seems unlikely that such policy positions preoccupied the members of such group discussions. As the SACP was banned, the group leaders were not identified as Party members; but, as one trade unionist explained, "as someone who grew up in PE, we understood they were Party members."¹⁴⁵

Alven Bennie is another example of working-class leadership. Having grown up in New Brighton, he worked as a daily-paid stevedore at the PE docks. At the same time he attended a study group of the type mentioned above every Wednesday, which inspired him to organise workers. The dockworkers' union was very weak at the time, and he was asked by Tshume to attend meetings of the dockworkers' union, which had offices at the CNETU building. He was deeply impressed by Gana Makabeni's visit to PE in the early 1950's, and was involved in the Defiance Campaign of 1952. As a young man, 'always looking for action', he went to any strike or public union meeting - for example, FCWU or TWIU meetings which were open. When SACTU was formed he was asked by the head office to work for SACTU, which he did initially by finding employment at different places, where he would be dismissed after workers had been organised and possibly gone on strike or participated in stayaways. At one stage he found employment as a commercial traveller, and used the van to distribute ANC material - for which he was again dismissed. Then he became the SACTU GWU organiser, using the GWU as an 'organising base'.¹⁴⁶

7.8. The decline of SACTU

It is indisputable that the decline of the african trade union movement in PE in the 1960's was the direct result of the 'disappearance' of almost its entire leadership. Three factors combined here: firstly, the implementation of the Industrial Conciliation (Amendment) Act of 1956 which made it more difficult for african workers to organise, and the determination of the state to crush or control black union organisation through repressive legislation. This in itself does not seem to have been the predominant factor. The initial wave of bannings following the Suppression of Communism Act in 1953, attacking the communists within the union movement including Tshume and Coe, was a serious blow for the PE union movement but one that it survived. In the late 1950's, some unions were able to make significant gains for their members, despite the new labour legislation.

Secondly, the changing structural position of african workers in PE in the 1950's made organisation of workers increasingly difficult. The introduction of influx control was used as a weapon against african workers, and the decline of the industries in which africans were in the strongest bargaining position contributed to the collapse of the registered unions which were the 'backbone' of SACTU.

Thirdly, the overlap of leadership which was a strength and a weakness of the working-class movement in PE was to cause its downfall in a situation where the ANC was banned, and where most trade union leaders were also ANC members or leaders. The political nature of SACTU and its close alliance with the ANC precipitated the harsh state action. The Treason Trial of 1956 involved six PE SACTU leaders, and although all were acquitted in 1961, the trial disrupted union work. Four SACTU unionist were charged with incitement to strike because of their involvement in the 1958 stayaway. But the declaration of the State of Emergency and the banning of the ANC in 1960 was to be the turning point for the PE unions. During the emergency, PE unions were 'decimated by arrests', and the new unions set up as part of the 'organising the unorganised' campaign ceased to function. Mkwazi went into exile at this point, and in 1961 there was a ban on SACTU meetings for three months. Mini and Bennie were charged for their involvement in the Bay Transport dispute - as ANC members.¹⁴⁷

Repression directed primarily against the ANC turned against SACTU as it, unbanned, acted in PE increasingly as the *de facto* political movement, seen as providing a platform for the voice of the ANC and co-ordinating closely with underground ANC networks. Early in 1963 eight SACTU leaders were banned,¹⁴⁸ and Caleb Mayekiso died in detention.

The repression of unionists identified with SACTU/ANC was compounded by the establishment of Umkhonto we Sizwe, in which some of the unionists, as ANC members, became active. The most famous of these were Khayinga, Mkaba and Mini. Wilson Khayinga and Zinakele Mkaba were members of the PE LC of SACTU; Vuyisile Mini was a SACTU executive member and organiser of the PE LC. All three were hanged in 1964 for alleged sabotage and complicity in the death of a police informer.

The close relationship which had developed throughout the 1950's between the ANC, the SACP and SACTU in PE had led to an integration of leadership to the extent that the union movement could not survive independently. As the political movements were banned, SACTU's tasks became increasingly indivisible from those of the liberation movement as a whole; the implementation of the 'M-Plan' and the involvement of SACTU activists in these structures of township political organisation meant that it could not separate itself out when the ANC was banned. While there is no doubt that the african trade union movement itself was under attack from the state, the primary

focus of repression was on the ANC. In PE, where roles were more than anywhere else indistinguishable, it was inevitable that SACTU would suffer. Between 1962 and 1964, SACTU in effect ceased to exist in PE.

7.9. Conclusion

While it is true that SACTU's extensive involvement in such issues as rent struggles and education boycotts further dispersed the energies of an already overstretched trade union leadership, the close working relationship between the organisations in the Congress Alliance meant that little distinction was made between point of production struggles, and the struggles of the working-class communities in New Brighton and Korsten. Moreover, the position of african workers in PE made it more effective in some instances to challenge issues related to the standard of living of the working class through community struggles rather than unions. The historical strength of the ANC in the african community, and the relative weakness of workers' organisation in industry, further reinforced this tendency.

Joe Foster has argued that there has never been a working class movement, or a working-class politics, among South Africa's black workers; the populist struggle for national liberation has resulted in a different politics.¹⁴⁹ Davis and Fine argue that the potential for a working-class or socialist politics was 'betrayed' by the ANC and the SACP; that the structural weakness of the black working class and its 'defeat' in the 1940's was further undermined by incorrect analysis on the part of those organisations. They argue that the working class movement began to recover in the latter half of the 1950's, but that

As a class with its own independent interests, goals, methods of struggle and ways of thinking, the working class remains curiously invisible in the historiography of the period...appearing typically as the 'mass' within the 'nation' rather than as a collective actor in its own right...in political terms working class identity was obscured under the mantle of conflicting nationalisms.¹⁵⁰

They recognise, however, that working-class struggles did occur:

Beneath the surface, however, workers did reassert in practice their own class interests and needs within and without the national liberation movement. Class struggles did not manifest themselves directly in the political conflicts of the 1950s, expressed as they were in the language of race and nation, but they nonetheless remained their crucial determinants.¹⁵¹

They give as examples the struggles of women against pass laws, township dwellers against the 'costs of social consumption', and workers' struggles over wages, conditions and union recognition.

What do they mean by working-class politics? What is implied is that workers must be represented politically as workers. Yet they acknowledge that the working-class did articulate its interests through various forms of struggle. Is it only when a political party articulates these demands on behalf of workers that a 'true' working class politics is present? If not, at what stage does the articulation of such interests within a combination of trade unions, community organisations, and political or liberation movements, become sufficient to give it the status of 'working-class'?

It is argued here that in PE certain factors combined historically to produce a movement which, while not strong on the basis of factory-floor representation, was working-class in its character and its politics. This was reflected in a number of the characteristics of the Congress movement in PE in the 1950's, which went beyond the integration of leadership: the position of PE workers in industry in the 1950's, and the introduction of apartheid measures designed to control african labour, meant that the distinction between labour organisation and political work was not clearly drawn. PE was characterised by Congress support for labour struggles, and trade union support for Congress campaigns which, because of this, took on a working-class character.

SACTU's close relationship with the ANC in PE - which was to lead to its downfall - was not the result of the subsumption of working class interests within the Congress Alliance. Rather, it was the logical outcome of a style of militant organisation among african workers which had begun in the late 1940's. This was closely related to the nature of the ANC itself, which was working class in its leadership, its mass base, and its style of organisation.

If the relationship between SACTU and the ANC on a national level can correctly be analysed as a 'battle' between working-class and nationalist interests, this battle was won in PE by the working class. SACTU did not strive to become the voice of the working class within Congress in PE, because Congress was already working class. The ANC and SACTU were the key organisations in the Congress Alliance, with petty-bourgeois intellectuals having little influence. It was a two-way process: while SACTU voiced workers' demands and organised unions within Congress, the ANC was pro-active in organising workers, and intervening where SACTU was weak. In the first period of SACTU (1956-59) it can be argued that the ANC did more for SACTU than the other way round. After the banning of the ANC in 1960, SACTU was forced into the role of political spokesperson, and was crushed along with the ANC. While the decision to turn to armed struggle is debatable, it cannot be argued that it was an 'incorrect' decision imposed on SACTU, which might have

chosen otherwise if it had not been controlled by the SACP and the ANC. The level of integration in PE was too great to allow for such manipulation.

Notes to chapter 7

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3.Ensor, L., 'TUCSA's Relationship with African Trade Unions - and Attempt at Control, 1954-1962', Webster, E.(ed), *Essays in Southern African Labour History*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1978, p. 230.

4.Friedman, S., *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions, 1970-1984*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1987, p. 33.

5.*Ibid.*, p. 31.

6.Fine, R., with Davis, D., *Beyond Apartheid: Labour and Liberation in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1991, pp. 165-166.

7.*Ibid.*, p. 166.

8.*Ibid.*, p. 212.

9.Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

10.*Ibid.*, p. 211.

11.*Ibid.*, p. 277.

12.*Ibid.*, p. 232.

13.*Ibid.*, p. 227.

14.*Ibid.*, p. 210.

15.*Ibid.*, p. 227.

16.*Ibid.*, p. 230.

17.*Ibid.*, p. 335.

18.*Ibid.*, p. 368.

19.Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

20.*Ibid.*, p. 104.

21.Lodge, T., *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1983, p. 55.

22.*Ibid.*, p. 52.

23.Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

24.Lodge, T., *op. cit.*, p. 51., writes: "A vital characteristic of organised popular resistance in Port Elizabeth was the interpenetration of the trade unions and political movements of those years. Office holders of both the Communist Party and - more untypically for the 1940's - the ANC, were trade unionists."

25. Interview, Lilly Diedericks, 13/2/91.
26. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, and Interviews with Raymond Mhlaba, Alvon Bennie, Govan Mbeki, Ray Simons and Lilly Diedericks.
27. See below; and Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 229.
28. FCWU papers, University of the Witwatersrand, AD 1175, A I.5, Minutes of Central Executive Committee meeting, September 1951.
29. *Ibid.*, A 1.2, PE Branch report to 1953 national conference of FCWU.
30. *Ibid.*, A 1.2, PE Branch report to 1954 national conference of FCWU.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, A 1.2, PE Branch report to 1955 national conference of FCWU.
33. *Ibid.*, A 1.2 - 1.6.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Goode, R., *A History of the Food and Canning Workers Union, 1941-1975*, unpublished MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1986.
36. FCWU papers, A 1.2, Report on Special Conference to discuss LKB, 19/1/58.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Goode, *op. cit.*
39. Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
40. Treason Trial papers, University of the Witwatersrand, AD 1812, Ew3, *Textile Unity*, September 1954.
41. Du Toit, B., *Ukubamba Amadolo: Workers Struggles in the SA Textile Industry*, Onyx Press, 1978, pp. 95-96; also Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 230.
42. SACTU papers, University of the Witwatersrand, AD 1197, *Textile Unity*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1962.
43. Du Toit, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-133.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 101-105.
45. Lambert, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
46. See Lambert, 1980, *op. cit.*, and Bonner, P. and Lambert, R., 'Baton and Bare Heads: The Strike at Amato Textiles, February 1958', in Marks, S. and Trapido, S. (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, Longman, London 1987; and Minkley, G., 'With Shouts of Afrika! The 1952 Textile Strike at Good Hope Textiles, King Williams Town', unpublished paper, University of the Western Cape.
47. Treason Trial Papers, AD 1812, Ew 1.1, African Laundry, Cleaning and Dying Workers Union.
48. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
49. Treason Trial papers, AD 1812, Ew 7.1.1, SACTU Executive 1956; Ew 7.4.6, Membership Lists.

50. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 232.
51. Treason Trial papers, AD 1812, Ew 7.1.1, SACTU Executive.
52. *Ibid.*, Ew 7.4.6, Membership lists.
53. SACTU papers, AD 1197, A4, letter from SACTU Local Committee to FCWU, 29/8/55; also see Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 230.
54. Interview, Govan Mbeki, 28/11/91.
55. Treason Trial papers, AD 1812, Ew 7.2.2, First SACTU Annual National Congress, March 1956.
56. *Ibid.*, Ew 7.1.1, SACTU Executive.
57. Interview, Govan Mbeki, 28/11/91. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 230, give as reasons for the demise of these unions financial instability, transient labour, and victimisation.
58. Fedsaw papers, University of the Witwatersrand, BCZA 77/3-77/6, Report of NEC to 6th Conference, April 1961, covering period October 1960 - March 1961. PE delegates were not represented at the 1961 conference.
59. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-177.
60. Fedsaw papers, BCZA 77/5, F, Affiliates to 1962 SACTU annual national congress.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*
63. Baard and Schreiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-53.
64. Interview, Alven Bennie, 23/5/91.
65. Treason Trial papers, Ew 7.4.2, letter to *Workers Unity*, September 1955.
66. Interview, Govan Mbeki, 26/11/90.
67. Interview, Lilly Diedericks, 13/2/91.
68. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-212.
69. Treason Trial papers, Ew 7.4.2, *Workers Unity*, July 1955.
70. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-283.
71. Treason Trial papers, Ew 7.5, Correspondence, SACTU circular 29/4/57.
72. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
73. Interview, Alven Bennie, 23/5/91.
74. Fedsaw papers, BCZA, 77/5, F, Report of NEC to 6th SACTU Conference, April 1961.
75. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-176.
76. Fedsaw papers, BCZA, 77/5, F, Report to 7th SACTU conference, 1962.
77. *Ibid.*

78. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-186; Fedsaw papers, BCZA 77/5, F, Report on other matters handled by NEC and Management Committee since 5th conference.
79. *Ibid.*, SACTU 7th conference report, 1962.
80. SACTU papers, AD 1197, A4, Letter from Chris Ketani to SACTU national office (undated).
81. Interview, Alven Bennie, 23/5/91.
82. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
83. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 232.
84. SACTU papers, AD 1197, A4, Letter from SACTU Local Committee to FCWU, 6/2/58.
85. *Ibid.*, Letter from Secretary of PE Local Committee 'to all friends', February 1958.
86. Fedsaw papers, BCZA, 77.5, F, Report of NEC to 6th SACTU conference, April 1961.
87. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
88. Interview, Lilly Diedericks, 13/2/91.
89. SACTU papers, AD 1197, SACTU pamphlets.
90. Interview, Raymond Mhlaba, 27/11/90.
91. *Ibid.*
92. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 230.
93. Interview, Govan Mbeki, 26/11/90 and 28/11/91.
94. Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, pp. 272-277.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 335.; also see Cronin and Suttner, *op. cit.*
96. See Lambert, 1980 and 1987, *op. cit.* The strike at Amato Textiles in Johannesburg (1958) and the strike at Consolidated Textiles in Durban (1957) were both supported by the ANC, yet both resulted in defeat.
97. FCWU papers, AD 1197, Report on Special Conference, 19/1/58; also Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 229.
98. FCWU papers, AD 1175, A 1.2, PE Branch report to FCWU national conference, 1960.
99. Goode, *op. cit.*
100. FCWU papers, AD 1175, A 1.2, PE Branch report to FCWU national conference, 1960; and Goode, *op. cit.*; Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-9.
101. Ensor, *op. cit.*, p. 229.
102. Mbeki, interview, 26/11/90.
103. Bennie, interview, 23/5/91.
104. Mbeki, interview, 26/11/90.
105. Mbeki, interview, 26/11/90, and Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, pp. 293-4.

- 106.Fedsaw papers, BCZA, 77/5, F, SACTU 5th conference report.
- 107.*Ibid.*
- 108.*Ibid.*
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- 113.Baard, F., and Schreiner, B., *My Spirit is Not Banned*, ZPH, Harare 1986, p. 39.
- 114.*Ibid.*, p. 40.
- 115.Webster, *op. cit.*, Table 1. Webster makes no mention of the PE stayaway around the removal of the coloured vote.
- 116.This information is drawn from Robinsons' draft thesis - Chapter 7, page 8-10. Her source is the *Guardian*, March 1951.
- 117.Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
- 118.All these quotes from the SAIRR are drawn from two documents in the SAIRR 2 papers, University of the Witwatersrand, AD 843, As 12.20.2, 'Report by Director on Visits to PE, EL and Kimberley in Connection with the Riots', and 'Port Elizabeth Riot and Events that Followed'.
- 119.Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
- 120.SAIRR papers, *op. cit.*
- 121.*Ibid.*
- 122.PEM, 10/7/10-11.
- 123.SAIRR papers, *op. cit.*
- 124.*Ibid.*
- 125.Webster, *op. cit.*, p.3. Webster omits the 1952 stayaway in PE from his list of stayaways during the 1950's.
- 126.Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 348; and Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
- 127.Mhlaba, interview, 27/11/90; Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, pp. 352 - 354; Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 5; and Davis and Fine, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-175, 212.
- 128.Diedericks, interview, 13/2/91.
- 129.Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

- 130.Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 351.
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- 141.Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
- 142.Du Toit, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
- 143.*Ibid.*, p. 130.
- 144.*Ibid.*, Speech from the Dock, Appendix 1, p. 135; and 'Wilton Mkwayi speaks again', interview with *SALB*, Vol.14. No.5, November 1989.
- 145.Interview, Alven Bennie, 23/5/91.
- 146.*Ibid.*
- 147.Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, pp. 415-7.
- 148.Luckhardt and Wall, *op. cit.*, p. 434, 429-30; Fedsaw papers, BCZA, 77/5, F.
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- 150.Davis and Fine, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
- 151.*Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

Between 1925 and 1963, the african working class in Port Elizabeth was 'made', and through its own actions contributed to its making. While the african working class was stunted through its exclusion from secondary industry, especially in the first period of industrial growth in PE, it was characterised by a high level of stability and linguistic homogeneity. It became a full urban proletariat, while having limited opportunities to organise at the workplace.

After the decline of the Port Elizabeth branch of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union in the mid-1920's, there was a lull in the organisation of african workers during the depression years of the 1930's. Initial attempts during the Second World War met with little lasting success, as they were initiated by 'outsiders' and failed to build african working class leadership. At this time, severe pressures on the standard of living of the working class resulted in the development of a militant community politics, which influenced the nature of the black trade union movement which emerged in the post-war period. The stability of the african community meant that women played a particularly important role in struggles around the reproduction of the african working class.

The post-war period was the crucial period in the development of the african working class in Port Elizabeth. The poorest african community in the country was also the most fully proletarianised. It was in this period that Port Elizabeth's second major industrial growth spurt occurred. African workers were drawn into manufacturing in semi-skilled positions, especially in the food and textile industries. This laid the basis for a new style of militant african trade unionism to emerge.

In the 1950's, the structural position of african workers changed. On the one hand, they were brought into industry, increasingly in semi-skilled positions. On the other, the application of apartheid laws, most importantly influx control, had severe implications for labour organisation and for the position of women in the city. There was a convergence of interests: as more african workers were drawn into secondary industry, providing the basis for stronger trade union organisation, the african working class community was under threat from pass laws and other forms of apartheid control.

The militant community politics and the 'new unions' of the post-war period combined in the 1950's to produce a working class movement which resisted apartheid and capital simultaneously. Innovative strategies such as stayaways and consumer boycotts were successfully employed. The threat which pass laws posed to the position of african women, combined with a brief period when

more african women were employed in industry, resulted in women playing a prominent role in resistance politics of the decade.

This working class movement found organisational expression in the alliance between the ANC and SACTU in the late 1950's. In the early 1960's, a number of factors combined which led to a lull in african working class organisation during the third economic boom of the 1960's. These were state repression aimed primarily at the ANC; the impact of influx control and repressive labour legislation, and the decline of the industrial sectors in which african workers - particularly women workers - were strongest, relative to the motor industry where african workers remained unorganised. The racial segregation and removal of black communities combined with the disadvantaged position of african workers in industry to partially destroy the non-racial tradition which had been built.

The structural position of the african working class in PE set the limits within which african labour organisation developed. The militant community struggles or 'politics of reproduction' within the african community, especially as its position was threatened in the 1950's, influenced both the emergent african labour movement and the political organisation most influential among africans in PE, the ANC. While the history of the african labour movement is not a 'linear' history of strong and militant trade unions, there was a period in the 1950's when a working class movement developed. This was to re-emerge in the late 1970's, with african workers once again in a strong position in industry - this time in the motor industry. In the early 1980's, traditions which had emerged during the 1950's were resurrected.

This takes us back to the Introduction, with african workers in the mid-1980's once again in a weak position with the decline of the motor industry. Yet, despite massive unemployment, the militant tradition of the african working class of the 1950's was resurrected in both the communities and the factories. This time, the organised strength of the working class has been sustained, despite the depression. The weakness of non-racial organisation which had been destroyed by apartheid was to some extent overcome. Workers organised into strong unions under COSATU united with the unemployed in the community, in the use of tactics such as stayaways and consumer boycotts. The re-establishment of this tradition of the integration between the political and the economic did not come about without a struggle, however.

Yet, the african working class in PE is still being 'made', and is still 'making itself'. In this period of political transition, no assumptions can be made about the hegemony of working class interests. It is up to the african working class itself to ensure its hegemony in whatever political settlement is reached. Given the state of the Eastern Cape economy, this will not be an easy task.

A history of the african working class such as this can provide the working class in PE with no assurances about the future; to end with a quote from E.H. Carr,

...history [is] a dialogue between the events of the past and progressively emerging future ends.¹

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