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South African Labour Bulletin



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Teachers and Trade Unions
Mathan Hyslop

**Preparations for Sale: A Consideration of
Shift Work with Specific Reference to
the Tyre and Rubber Industry in
South Africa**
*Jeffy Addler**

Volume 11 Number 6 June - July 1986

South African Labour Bulletin

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The South African Labour Bulletin

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SALB Publication guidelines

The South African Labour Bulletin is a journal which supports the independent labour movement in South Africa. It is a forum for analysing, debating and recording the aims and activities of this movement. To this end, it requires contributors to the Bulletin to conform with the following publication guidelines:

- Constructive criticism of unions or federations in the independent labour movement is welcome. However, articles with unwarranted attacks or of a sectarian nature which have a divisive effect on the labour movement will not be published.
- Contributions to the Bulletin must not exceed the following lengths:

Analytical articles	8000 words
Debates, reviews, Documents	3000 words
Briefings	800 words
- Contributions must be written in language which is clear and understandable.
- All contributions to the Bulletin must be typed and where applicable include proper footnoting and references.
- Except in the case of public documents, all submissions to the Bulletin will be treated in confidence.

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Interview: Pick 'n Pay Strike

In the early hours of Tuesday May 13 Pick 'n Pay management finally reached a settlement with the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA) - for an increase of R85 per month across the board - which will cover some 13,000 of the company's employees. After three months of negotiations the union and the company deadlocked at a dispute meeting, with the union demanding R95 per month across the board increase and the company offering R52 per month. On the eve of the strike the management's offer was increased to R80, whilst the union demand was for R90.

The settlement came after a conciliation board hearing and seven days of industrial action which saw a strike develop into sit-ins, sleep-ins and shopfloor demonstrations. Some 6,500 workers were involved from 55 stores throughout the country. At the height of the action some 21 outlets were closed. This was the most costly strike to hit the retail sector up to the present. The strike will cost the company an estimated R7m. This was also the largest and most widespread workplace occupation to occur so far in South Africa. The chairman of Pick 'n Pay, Raymond Ackerman, charged the union with pursuing a political strike designed to make the country ungovernable, and to bring down the retail trade. He also accused the union of using violence during the strike. Also sections of the capitalist press charged the union with having acted irresponsibly: the amount of wages lost during the strike could not be made up by the additional increase gained by going on strike, said the Financial Mail (16.5.86).

The SALB asked CCAWUSA for its side of the story. Below we publish an interview - conducted immediately after the strike - with Jeremy Daphne, a negotiator employed by the Johannesburg branch of CCAWUSA.

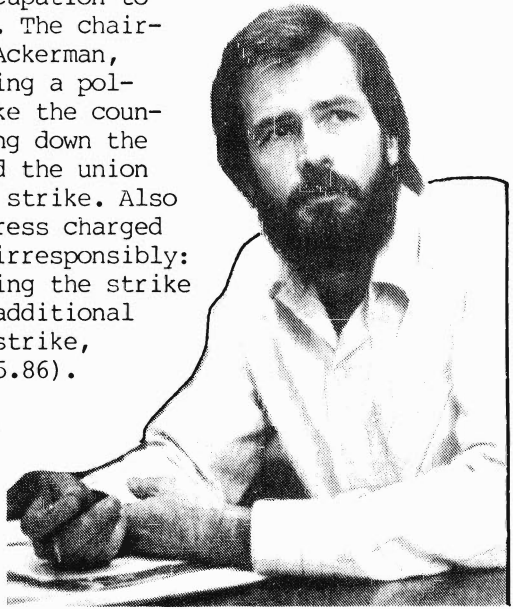


photo by Tony Naidoo (Business Day)

- Pick 'n Pay -

SALB: How do you answer the charges made by Mr Ackerman that the union used violent methods?

Jeremy Daphne: I can only refer to our union's statements refuting these charges. Thousands of our members took part in a peaceful and highly disciplined industrial action. Incidents were usually sparked off by rude and threatening behaviour by customers, vigilantes, police or management. Workers in Carletonville store were teargassed by management late one night, which led to serious friction and subsequently all members of management being suspended. Another example were the incidents at Kingsburgh, Natal - of bottles being broken and fists flying between shoppers and strikers, stoning of management's cars and company vans etc. - which all began when one white customer barged into a group of strikers. We believe that management over-reacted massively when workers decided on shopfloor demonstrations, including placards, marches, singing etc. This is certainly a new strategy - which workers themselves devised - but it is peaceful protest and we believe that such demonstrations are a legitimate and correct form of industrial action carried out in the process of persuading management to see reason. Management simply over-reacted when workers asserted their right to protest.

I think you have to remember that in the retail strike you have this extra dimension - the customer - there on the spot. Workers had to put up with racist insults, with customers phoning the police, and the fact that the vigilante element had direct access. In one Johannesburg store demonstrating workers were confronted by 12 "customers" all pointing guns at them. In a Krugersdorp store workers were physically attacked by customers.

Even after the strike Ackerman kept up the propaganda with such statements as: "Had the strike not been resolved, stores would probably have been set alight and lives lost". We repeat that the workers have conducted themselves in a disciplined fashion and the union is proud of this.

Ackerman's statements were another contributory factor. His statement for example that the strike was politically motivated and so forth caused a lot of anger amongst members and definitely contributed towards making the dispute more volatile. His statements and advertisements after the settlement claiming that the strike was broken and so on very nearly started another strike and our members exercised considerable restraint to not start again.

SALB: What about the charge that this was a political strike?

Jeremy Daphne: This is more propoganda. Ackerman has spoken about making the country ungovernable, bringing down Pick 'n Pay and of radicals. We are used to the Le Granges and Bothas attributing all problems to agitators. Now Pick 'n Pay is using the same language.

This does not mean that CCAWUSA is non-political. The union is fully committed to addressing the political issues which affect its members, and to an active involvement within the community with full links between the union and community organisations, and to participating in the broader political arena. However, our recent disputes - at Pick 'n Pay and Foschini - have been over low wages and retrenchments. The issue at Pick 'n Pay was wages - before the strike the minimum wage was R303 per month. Even now the minimum is only R388. The press has pointed out that Pick 'n Pay wages are higher than some other chains - but they are only marginally higher and they are certainly not the highest payers in the retail sector, for example we have just negotiated a R554 minimum with one firm. There is a history of exceptionally low wages in the retail trade and if management is not prepared to improve these wages through negotiation it should expect strike action.

SALB: Evenso Pick 'n Pay and Raymond Ackerman have had a very high profile "liberal" image in terms of national "reform" politics and in terms of shopfloor benefits for workers. Why then was the strike so bitter?

Jeremy Daphne: To start with we believe that Pick 'n Pay's caring liberal image is a result of a skilled public relations department and not a result of actual shopfloor conditions. It's a myth as any Pick 'n Pay worker will tell you: "Ackerman likes to go around shaking hands with us but this means nothing. We have never had the opportunity to speak out our views and management knows nothing about our shopfloor needs and problems" - is a statement often made by Pick 'n Pay workers. Pick 'n Pay might look good on TV or in the capitalist press but it is a very different story on the shopfloor. Ackerman's statements during and after the strike is typical of the kind of attitude that workers have to put up with.

The answer to the question as to why the strike was so bitter is simply that it was a reflection of workers' total shopfloor experience of Pick 'n Pay. In terms of shopfloor benefits workers are not interested in any co-determination schemes such as share own-

- Pick 'n Pay -

ership schemes, and other benefits - such as education and housing loans - are out of the reach of most workers due to their low wages. What workers are interested in is a living wage and they are still nowhere near receiving this.

I would add one thing on the company's "liberal" image. Our members have found that Pick 'n Pay managements adopted a racial response to their industrial action. White scabs particularly were brought in. Some of our members - whites, "Coloureds" and Indians were approached separately and encouraged to return to work - a clear attempt to divide workers along racial lines.

SALB: There was evidence that racial divisions did become prevalent during the strike. What is being done about this?

Jeremy Daphne: What I can say is that we have already told our members that they must be tolerant of non-strikers and they must take advantage of this victory to educate them and get them fully involved in the union. The union's future plans include a commitment to break down racial barriers and to build unity amongst all sections of the working class.

SALB: Let us turn to what actually happened during the strike.

Jeremy Daphne: This campaign posed a major organisational challenge to the union. The industrial action involved sit-ins, sleep-ins and demonstrations in some 55 stores situated all over South Africa. Only the Western Cape was not involved. Stores in as widely dispersed places as East London, Kimberley, Bloemfontein and Nelspruit were involved. Workers in all 55 stores operated in unison, starting the sit-ins at the same time and carrying out sleep-ins and demonstrations of various kinds. The union offices, nationally and in the regions, proved equal to the task but the real organisational force and coordination came from the workers themselves. This is an indication of the level of development of shop steward structures, the high degree of worker shopfloor independence and effective communication networks set up by the workers.

Our members' discipline and organisation was evident even before the strike. Originally the strike was to have started on Friday May 2, but was then suspended when the union was threatened with Supreme Court action by management. Despite the short notice postponing the strike all members held back until they were in a position to take legal strike action. Similarly, the return to

work after the strike was a strategically good decision and was unanimous and disciplined in its implementation.

At store level the conduct of the strike was in the hands of the workers themselves. They drew on their own resources - friends and families - to ensure food and supplies for the duration of the occupation. Although the basic campaign was laid down by the national shop stewards committee there was plenty of room for local initiative; the shopfloor demonstrations were one example of this. In each store sub-committees were established to deal with questions of food, safety, to send delegations to other stores and union offices etc. Daily programmes were drawn up and kept to strictly. Waking, eating and sleeping times were established and kept to. Activities of an educational nature were organised in the evenings and marshalls were elected to keep order.

There was a squad of shop stewards moving from store to store to monitor the situation. In other words the sleep-ins made huge organisational demands on us. But this was one of the gains of the strike: the union and the membership - using its own resources - was able to act in unison to conduct a major industrial action in a concerted way. This says a lot about the involvement and commitment of our membership.

SALB: The capitalist press has said that the union leadership acted irresponsibly. The company's well-being and workers' jobs were risked - all for an extra R5,00. Workers are worse off now than they were before the strike. What is your answer to this?

Jeremy Daphne: In the first place a union - unlike a company - is a democratic body. The members make the decisions - in this case there was an 80% vote for strike action. This particular battle with Pick 'n Pay was about wages - and the members decided what figure they would accept. The decision to proceed to industrial action when the parties were R10 apart was a sound one, and taken on the shopfloor. When workers are earning wages of the order paid by Pick 'n Pay then R10 extra per month is a lot of money.

The decision was taken on the basis of the low wages of the workers, the healthy financial position of Pick 'n Pay and the unreasonable attitude of the company towards the union's demands. The final outcome of the strike marks another step on the road to a living wage for all workers. The increase is a permanent one and cannot be calculated over 12 months as the Financial Mail did.

- Pick 'n Pay -

Pick 'n Pay acted irresponsibly by refusing to accede to a wage demand that they can easily afford. One only has to look at Pick 'n Pay's resources and the Ackerman family's R229,7 million stake in the company to realise that Ackerman's press statements during and after the dispute were also highly irresponsible and immature.

As in other successful campaigns conducted by workers the union and Pick 'n Pay membership also made other important gains: management now knows that they face an organised and determined workforce - and they are going to have to recognise that fact and show respect for their workers and their needs. The strike has shifted the relations of power in favour of our members.

Since the dispute we have received hundreds of new applications for membership. I have already said that the union has benefitted organisationally. Levels of organisation have been increased and workers' confidence in themselves has been boosted. A whole new layer of leadership emerged during the strike. All levels - office holders, shop stewards and members - came forward to take up their place in the struggle.

The Financial Mail - apart from being clearly biased - exhibited a very similar attitude to Pick 'n Pay top management, having little or no conception of what the real situation was on the shopfloor. Other sections of the press - such as the Weekly Mail and The Citizen - also exhibited a similar attitude, indulging in biased and shoddy journalism.

SALB: Why did the union not call a consumer boycott against Pick 'n Pay?

Jeremy Daphne: We had devised a programme of industrial action - only the first phase of which was the strike, sit-ins and sleep-ins, and this was implemented. Without a settlement action would have been escalated. In the end this was not required - although action was already being planned in Australia - with regard to Pick 'n Pay's store there.

SALB: How would you sum up the Pick 'n Pay dispute?

Jeremy Daphne: Overall, the most important aspect was the unity, commitment and courage displayed by Pick 'n Pay workers in the face of enormous opposition and psychological warfare. It was a victory for working class organisation and leadership.

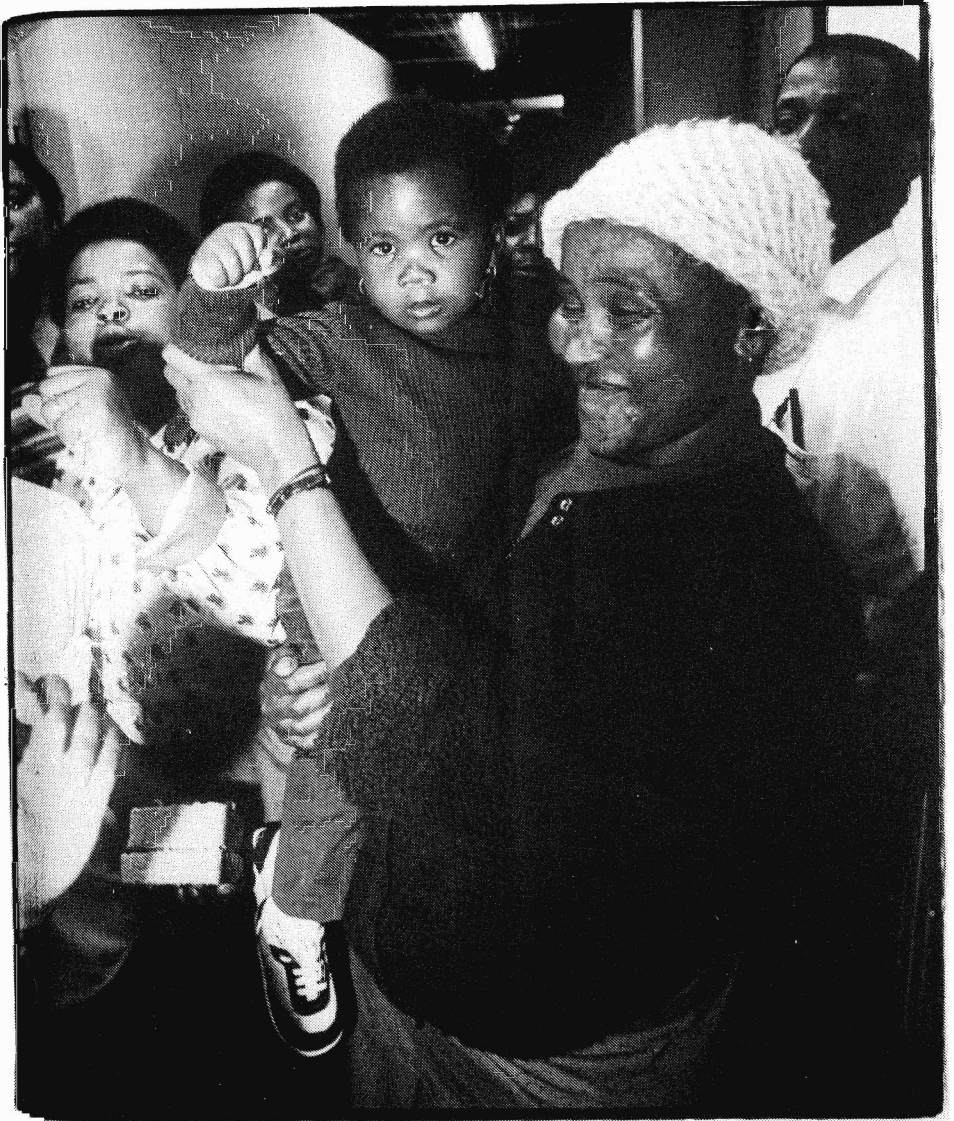


photo: worker and child sitting-in at Norwood Pick 'n Pay: part of the plan to make the country ungovernable, according to Ackerman.

Capitalism, Socialism and the Freedom Charter

The article by Fine: "The Freedom Charter, a critical appreciation (SALB 11.3); and the two by Innes: "The Freedom Charter and workers' control" (SALB 11.4) and "Worker politics and the popular movement" (WIP 41) quite correctly recognise the significance of the Freedom Charter to any consideration of change in South Africa. Both writers present a critical appraisal of the Charter. They are of the view that the document does not provide an adequate basis for socialist change. They suggest that it should either be altered, or that a new document be drawn up to put forward an unequivocal demand for socialism.

This paper is a defence of the Charter: it argues for the Charter to be understood as a set of minimum demands of the South African working class which provide the basis for the construction of a socialist programme; and so, against the attempt to alter or disregard it.

A set of minimum working-class demands

Bob fine points out that the campaign launched by the National Action Council to collect and collate demands for the Charter was not thorough, nor scrupulously democratic and that the Kliptown Congress was not conducive to much debate or detailed discussion.

This tends to obscure the fact that the Charter was enthusiastically accepted by three thousand predominantly working-class delegates from all over the country. It is wrong to imply that these delegates had no understanding of the clauses they ratified or that they were manipulated into accepting a set of demands the in no way reflected their interests. Also, the majority of demand collected were from the townships and villages. There was much less interest in the campaign in the more petty-bourgeois areas.

It is significant that the people opposed to the Charter were the Africanists, who considered the content too socialist and "un-African" and who later broke away from the mass-movement, and the liberals who were strongly linked to big capital. No significant objection to the Charter by workers or the other "dissatisfied groups" that Fine mentions is recorded. (1)

Fine insists that the Charter is not above criticism. He is correct; and de-mythologising the Charter's origins is essential to understanding some of the problems and power-plays that faced the mass-movement in the 1950s. This in no way detracts from the document's legitimacy as a set of working-class demands, and it remains the most widely discussed and representative document in the history of the South African struggle. Neither Fine nor Innes can deny this fact.

In their consideration of the Charter, Fine and Innes make no mention of its basic material demands: for houses, security, jobs, education, comfort and land. These are immediate demands of the classes that have been systematically deprived of such necessities - the working class and rural population. They locate the Charter at the root of the struggle against a system designed for making profits. A system which forces the working class - in the words of SACTU - "to organise or starve".

Capitalism, anywhere in the world, does not have a reputation for meeting such basic demands. Wherever it has been possible for the working class to force capitalism to make concessions like: higher living standards, more jobs and better services, it has been factors extraneous to capitalism that have enabled it to do so, not anything inherent in capitalism.

In the history of the advanced capitalist countries it was either the exploitation of a double proletariat (one at home and one in the third world) during the colonial period, or the boom that accompanied the reconstruction of Europe after the second World War that made it possible for capitalism to meet certain of the demands made by the organised working-class.

From the mid 1970s this has no longer been the case. The ten day general strike in Denmark in 1985 and the general strike in Sweden in 1979; the over two million unemployed in West Germany and the four million unemployed plus fifteen million on the poverty datum line in Britain, testify to the present bankruptcy of world capitalism.

No variety of capitalism, even a social democratic one, will be capable of meeting the demands put forward by the Freedom Charter in South Africa. For during the post war boom in South Africa it was only possible for capitalism to buy off the relatively small, white proletariat and win its allegiance. During this "boom", the

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black proletariat and rural population lived in grinding poverty. Furthermore, the present recession in South Africa has as much to do with world recession and capitalist crisis as it does with the internal "unrest" or the "unprofitability" of apartheid. There is no possibility of South African capitalism succeeding where world capitalism has failed.

The organised South African working class of the 1980s has expressed a range of demands; some specific to industry, others increasingly political in nature. These include: the demand for May Day and June 16 to be public holidays; demands related to civic matters and the occupation of the townships by the SADF and SAP; the release of detainees and union leaders and the unbanning of organisations.

Undoubtedly, were a set of demands to be drawn up now it would reflect the militancy and growing socialism of this working class. The Charter was drawn up when SACTU was only a few months old and despite the working class being the strength of the ANC's mass-campaigns, there was not the broad realisation of its strength that there is growing today. These facts should be taken into account when criticism of the Charter is made. Fine and Innes ignore these realities.

The Charter's specific demands for workers: full-unemployment benefits; equal pay for equal work; paid annual leave and sick leave; maternity leave on full pay; an end to job reservation; the abolition of child labour, compound labour and the tot system; a national minimum wage and a forty hour week, are minimum demands. These are central to the policy statements and shopfloor struggles of today's working class; there can be no escaping the fact that these demands reflect the views of a vast sector of the South African proletariat.

The Charter also contains demands which may be regarded as broadly democratic:

1. Universal adult suffrage
2. Abolition of racist restrictions, in particular
 - (a) in schools and official institutions
 - (b) on the ownership of land
 - (c) on land occupation
 - (d) for membership of police-force and the army
 - (e) in sport and cultural amenities
3. Free rights to trade and to enter professions

4. Freedom of speech, publication and organisation
5. Abolition of pass laws
6. Freedom of movement
7. Free and compulsory education
8. Higher education financed by the state
9. Free medical and hospital services provided by the state
10. The abolition of fenced locations - and a national housing scheme with full social amenities. (2)

The social democratic nature of these demands does not make them exclusively middle class. They are still legitimate working-class demands; particularly of a nationally oppressed working class. Furthermore the organised strength of the working class, supported by sections of the middle classes and the rural population is capable of ensuring that these demands are met.

These demands may be summed up in what is essentially a single demand for national liberation. The achieving of national liberation and the establishing of socialism are the principal tasks of the South African working class. The consistent backing of management by police and army, so obvious when Gencor sacked 20,000 workers from Impala Platinum, will make it increasingly clear to the South African working class that achieving one is inconceivable without achieving the other.

South African capitalism is built and sustained by the cheap labour that is ensured by apartheid. The recent attempts by liberal capitalists to disassociate themselves from apartheid must not be regarded as a shift towards support for a struggle by a class that is diametrically opposed to capitalist interests.

While all the demands the Charter makes are unquestionably demands of the working class, there are demands in the charter which cannot be considered as anything but socialist:

- (i) nationalisation of the mines, banks and monopoly industry;
- (ii) public control of all other industry and trade and the establishing of democratic organs of self government;
- (iii) and, the division of the land among those who work it. (3)

(i) Innes concentrates on the section that deals with the ownership and transfer of wealth. He points out that nationalisation of banks and big industry would not guarantee the implementation of a socialist system. Innes is correct here, however: the Charter correctly calls for the nationalisation of banks and big industry;

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for despite the fact that nationalisation can and does exist under capitalism, socialism is inconceivable without it.

Ben Turok, who motivated the clause at the conference, did so in these words:

It [the Charter] says ownership of the mines will be transferred to the ownership of the people. It says wherever there is a gold mine there will no longer be a compound boss. There will be a committee of workers to run the gold mines. Friends, we also say that wherever there is a factory and where there are workers who are exploited we say that the workers will take over and run the factories. In other words, the ownership of the factories will come into the hands of the people.

...Let the banks come back to the people, Let us have a people's committee to run the banks. (emphasis added) (4)

This is quite clearly a motivation for socialist nationalisation of banks and big industry. It was this form of nationalisation that was accepted by the Congress of the People at Kliptown.

(ii) Fine remarks that, "Socialism requires the extension of democracy beyond the limits allowed by liberal constitutionalism." (5) - but what the Charter envisages is hardly a replication of an untenable, Westminster-type parliamentary system.

The Charter calls for, "All bodies of minority rule, advisory boards, councils and authorities to be replaced by democratic organs of self-government." - and for public control of all remaining private industry and trade.

In South African these are not social-democratic demands; they require that power be taken from the existing ruling class and exercised by a predominantly black, proletarian population through its organisations and according to its programme.

The demand for universal suffrage, widely recognised as a basis for social democracies, would not result in a social democracy in South Africa. Steve Gelb and John Saul in The Crisis in South Africa tentatively agree with this:

One man (sic), one vote: this essential bottom line of liberal capitalist strategy in successfully incorporating the mass of the population within its hegemonic framework elsewhere in the world is perhaps impossible for capitalism

in South Africa, and in any case seems non-negotiable for the foreseeable future. (6)

Any government, elected on the basis of one-person-one-vote, would be elected on the basis of a mandate, impossible to implement under capitalism.

(iii) The division of land is always on the agenda for socialist transformations in the third-world. The principle as expressed in the Charter: "the division of land amongst those who work it", is essentially socialist. For in South Africa: "50,000 white farmers have twelve times as much land for cultivation and grazing as 14 million rural blacks." (7) Redistribution in this context is unthinkable under capitalism.

That the Charter does not say what form of government should implement the demands, is problematic for Fine and Innes. For them, this omission and others which they regard to be crucial render the document ambiguous. The bulk of their criticisms are to do with the sections they regard to be incomplete or limited in their conception of the new society.

However, there are many demands the Charter does not make: it does not demand an end to legal and social discrimination against gay people; or an end to pollution; or an end to nuclear power. Also there are many details that the Charter does not give about the make up of the future society. This is because the Charter is not a thesis or even a programme for change. The Charter is a set of minimum demands, rooted in the grievances and aspirations of the working class.

Fine complains that, "the likelihood is that where democratic demands are not explicitly articulated, they will succumb under the weight of old prejudice concerning the needs of the state." (8)

This is curious: the mere articulation of demands, explicit or otherwise, guarantees nothing. Bophuthatswana's locally celebrated Bill of Rights did not stop the massacre in Winterveld any more than ZANU-PF's uncompromisingly socialist programme prevented the anti-worker sections of its recent labour legislation. The socialist programme of the FLA in Algeria, or the lack of such a programme in Cuba when Castro came to power, were equally irrelevant to the course of events in those countries. Ultimately it is not

the nature of the expression of demands on paper that matters. What matters is the support that exists for them and the organisation that is built around them in the mass-movement.

It may well have made this debate a lot simpler, and Fine and Innes a lot happier, if the Charter had explicitly called for socialism and worker control as does the Azanian Manifesto. However, merely calling for socialism and worker control is not enough for building socialism.

The Charter is not written in stringent socialist rhetoric but the endorsing of its working-class demands and their championing by the mass-movement makes the Freedom Charter a necessary basis for building socialism.

The construction of a socialist programme

To speak of a mass-movement is not to imply the existence of a single organisation to which every member of the oppressed belongs; nor does it deny that there may be a range of political viewpoints and allegiances within the mass of oppressed people. It is to acknowledge the fact that the vast majority of oppressed people in South Africa, now, as in the 1950s, support the Freedom Charter and will rally under the banner of the ANC.

The mass-movement of the 1980s is characterised by a level of militancy and organisation unprecedented in the history of South African struggle. In considering the construction of a socialist programme, it is necessary: firstly, to understand how this militancy and organisation reflects and informs the political consciousness of the rank and file; and secondly, how it is possible to ensure that the rank and file draws socialist conclusions from the experiences of the mass-movement.

Militancy implies more than the defensive and frustrated violence of rioting mobs, or the necklacing of collaborators, that has been so widespread since Sebokeng in September 1984. Militancy reflects the consciousness that fighting is the only response to the repressive state machine. This militancy is reflected in the revolutionary songs and chants at mass funerals and meetings and the display of Congress and South African Communist Party (SACP) flags. The popularity of the SACP and the red flag are to be understood in the widespread association of these symbols with revolution and worker control, however inaccurately this may

represent the SACP's position.*

The mock-drilling and battle formations with wooden AK47s at Eastern Cape funerals, and the recent shootings of policemen with not-so wooden AK47s in Alexandra and Guguletu, vividly illustrate the growing militancy in the country. Umkhonto we Sizwe is the most popular symbol of this militancy, young cadres place hope in the hidden arms caches and there are clear calls by many youth and worker activists for guns. These developments reflect the beginnings of a revolutionary consciousness around the ANC and the Charter, whether Fine and Innes choose to recognise it or not.

The tasks the movement faces are: the channelling of this militancy into organised local militias and defense committees to defend the community from vigilantes and police action; and the generalising of these developments towards the building of the movement to carry out the socialist transformation of society.

Only well developed organisational structures will be able to harness and direct this militancy, structures that are developing at local level: like village committees in Sekhukhuneland and the Eastern Cape and the street committees in Mamelodi, Alexandra, and Port Alfred. These structures reflect a growing understanding of the basics of socialist organisation; a participating rank and file and an accountable leadership. Again, Fine and Innes choose to ignore these facts.

People participating in these structures will have a strong idea about what is meant by the "democratic organs of self government" that the Charter calls for. One can argue they have begun to put the Charter into practice. This link with the Charter must be made and developed if the Charter is to be implemented and defended by the movement as a basis for socialism.

There have been a number of developments in the mass-movement

* In fact, the historic position of the SACP leadership has been strict adherence to a two stage theory of revolution (the first explicitly excluding workers control) and a policy to nationalise only multi-national corporations, this would indicate a position far different from militant workers and youth in the mass-movement. Militant workers and youth see their struggle as a struggle for power not merely as a lever to be used by the leaders to negotiate a liberal capitalism in South Africa.

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which reveal an embryonic socialism and illustrate the potential for the construction of a socialist programme.

1. Most of COSATU's shopsteward locals, consisting of all shopstewards in a particular area are taking up community struggles. The direct involvement of union structures in community struggles and the reciprocal community support for striking workers in some areas, as in Atteridgeville during the ASEA strike and Katlehong during the Haggie Rand sit-in, are essential if the link between capital and the state is to be made.

The developments in the National Union of Mineworkers towards setting-up hostel and shaftstewards committees and COSATU's consolidation of the shopstewards locals indicate a conception of working-class struggle that goes beyond shopfloor issues. The relationship between these locals and the civics and resident's associations must be strengthened and developed.

2. The mass-actions of the movement have revealed an increasing strength, this is apparent in the overwhelming support of up to two million workers, for the May Day stay-away. The November 1984 stay-away - organised jointly by unions, the RMC and the student and civic associations - was successful only in certain areas in the Transvaal.
3. The consumer boycotts, co-ordinated by consumer boycott committees, especially those in Pretoria and Port Elizabeth, have evinced highly political demands; as have the successful stay-aways in Warmbaths and Witbank. This reveals a conception of struggle limited neither to the state nor capital, but one encompassing both; and a growing realisation of the strength of united and co-ordinated working-class action.
4. Crisis committees, established to cope with the deteriorating situation in the townships, have developed in many areas. The Soweto Parents Crisis Committee (SPCC), in response to the situation in the schools, hosted a conference at Wits University in December last year. This led to the formation of the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) and a nationally co-ordinated initiative to implement People's Education in the schools.
5. People's Education has been taken-up by youth congresses and parent-teacher-students' associations all over the country.

TRASCO, the newly established Transvaal Students Congress, was active in campaigning for a workers' week in the schools around May Day to educate students about the workers' struggle. This is reciprocal to COSATU's involvement in the NECC and campaign for a national stay-away on June 16, in solidarity with youth and the national struggle.

There is no longer a marked distinction between labour struggles, community struggles and youth/education struggles. The organisations that have emerged in the last few years have the potential to understand the complexity, yet singleness, of the problem and the broad unity essential for its solution.

The problem is the bosses and the state, capitalism and apartheid: the growing awareness in the movement is that the anti-apartheid and anti-capitalist struggles must be waged and won together.

COSATU, launched last year and currently representing 650,000 workers reflects this awareness most strongly:

We the Trade Union representatives here present firmly commit ourselves to a unified democratic South Africa, free of oppression and economic exploitation. We believe that this can only be achieved under the leadership of the united working class. (9)

Thus COSATU addresses itself to winning national liberation for the majority of South Africans and acknowledges that this can only be done on the strength of a socialist programme.

Working-class hegemony is to be achieved firstly, through the establishment of socialist structures (with an accountable leadership and a participating rank and file) in all aspects of working-class life - the shopfloor, the community and the schools; and secondly, through a strong and independently organised COSATU.

The construction of a socialist programme will depend on the conscious intervention of socialist ideas. It is in the educational programmes of the unions, through people's education in the schools and communities that the Charter must be discussed and interpreted. Starting with the Charter, a workers' plan for the economy and a programme for the socialist reconstruction of our society must be developed.

The Freedom Charter will be constantly re-interpreted in the con-

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text of the struggles and organisation of the mass-movement. It makes little sense to discuss the absence or presence of socialism in the document as it stands on paper and in isolation from this movement.

But to what end this building of socialism on the basis of the Charter? Only to this: The minimum working class demands of the Charter require a revolution for them to be met.

In South Africa: universal adult suffrage, democratic government and nationalisation under an ANC government are revolutionary demands. The simplicity of "one-person-one-vote" holds no minority guarantees of either reserved seats or powers of veto for whites; "government through democratic structures" allows no privilege for the wealthy or previously powerful; the transfer of wealth to the people holds no guarantee of moratoriums or payment for nationalisation or any compensation for land.

Thus the implementation of the Charter after a negotiated settlement is inconceivable: as any negotiated settlement must represent a retreat from the Charter. For the Charter to be implemented it would require a complete surrender of power and wealth by the status-quo. This would require a complete dismantling of the police and army under the present system. A settlement is impossible - the Charter allows for no negotiation, only unconditional surrender. The prospect of the present government surrendering is as inconceivable as the prospect of any negotiated settlement.

Further mitigating against a negotiated settlement is the growing strength of the rightwing. The AWB has threatened to fight to the last man should the ANC come to power. They will. Botha could only come to the negotiating table on the strength of a defeat of the rightwing and a major split in the Afrikaner volk. The ANC also stands to lose its support, and credibility as a revolutionary movement, among youth and worker militants if it comes to the table while the SADF and police remain intact (and possibly even in the townships). Negotiation under these conditions will represent a defeat for the ANC.

There can be no escaping the fact that power will have to be taken in South Africa. The construction of a socialist programme must proceed on this understanding.

The great strength of the Charter is that its demands reflect the

aspirations of the working class. Any achievement of these aspirations is inevitably tied to the need to build a socialist South Africa. The Charter's demands are also those of sections of the oppressed middle class and rural population. These classes must be won to the mass-movement on the strength of a socialist programme that will guarantee their rights to work the land and participate in small trade and industry.

Innes, in view of the necessity for class alliances, remarks that the "workers charter" must be drawn up in such a way that it does not alienate sections of the middle class and rural population. The Freedom Charter does this already. (10)

In keeping with the strict non-racialism of the Charter it must be argued here too, that even sections of the white working class must be won to the mass-movement. To make no attempt to do so would be to abandon them to the encroaching fascism to which they will turn as their living standards drop lower and lower.

The organised South African working class is not only divided racially: it is ideologically split into Congress* and Black Consciousness federations. There is also a "worker party" lobby with some support and a new threat from the anti-worker Inkatha's UWUSA. High level debates with sectarian officials and leaders who have no real interest in a united working class, or a single mass-movement of the oppressed under the hegemony of that class, will lead to nothing. Only the strength of COSATU on the shopfloor and socialist structures within communities will in time bring all workers into the mass-movement.

The Charter provides an excellent basis for the construction of a socialist programme. The persistent attempt to redefine it on paper is an exercise in idealism not materialism. What is needed now is not an abstract redefining of the Charter's content but the movement which upholds the Charter. This is the task for socialists.

(Hugh MacLean, May 1986)

* While there may be objections by some, to the regarding of COSATU as a "Congress Federation", there can be no denying that COSATU is part of a mass-movement which is strongly Congress. The issue of Independent Organisation is an important one which cannot be gone into here.

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Footnotes:

- 1 T Lodge, Black politics in South Africa, Ravan, Johannesburg, 1983, pp70-74
- 2 D du Toit, Capital and labour in South Africa, Kegan Paul International Ltd, London, 1981, p201
- 3 op.cit. p202
- 4 G Carter, G Gerhart and T Karis, From protest to challenge, Vol III, Hoover, Stanford, 1977
- 5 B Fine, "The Freedom Charter: a critical appreciation", SALB 11.3, p42
- 6 J Saul and S Gelb, The crisis in South Africa, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1981, p44
- 7 J Lelyveld, "I love your shadow" extract in Weekly Mail 16-22.5.86
- 8 Fine, op.cit. p41
- 9 COSATU: Resolutions, taken at launching Congress, Durban, 1985
- 10 D Innes, "Worker politics and the popular movement", WIP 41.

Workers and the Politics of Consumer Boycotts

"Our buying power is going to be the thing that is going to decide the future of our country", Mkhuseleli Jack, leader of the Port Elizabeth Consumer Boycott Committee, on the eve of the recent reintroduction of the consumer boycott in P.E. (New Nation 26.3.86)

Since July 1985 boycotts have proliferated across South Africa. Comments like Jack's are now common among the leaders of township and national anti-apartheid organisations. But the energy being put into organising boycotts has rarely been matched by careful assessment of the boycott as a general tactic, and more specifically of the different ways in which boycotts can be organised.

An early assessment of consumer boycotts in the major metropolitan areas was provided by Obery and Jochelson (WIP 39, October 1985), and more recently White (SALB 11.5, May 1986) has theorised the tactical and especially the strategic objectives of the consumer boycott. But these studies have not explored in detail the variety of forms of the consumer boycott, how these are linked to different objectives, and how they can transform the local as well as

national political terrain. This article explores these themes, and specifically seeks to examine the implications that consumer boycotts have had for workers and unions in South Africa over the last year. Whilst boycotts can potentially be used to advance both the short and the longer-term interests of workers, they can also have a regressive effect.

The consumer boycott mobilises township residents around the issue of spending rather than earning, and organises them primarily in the township rather than in the workplace. The consumer boycott therefore raises many of the questions that ordinarily face workers when considering their role outside of the workplace. The nature of their role in contemporary South Africa is the subject of considerable debate. I do not intend to engage in this debate but to examine the specific problems posed by the consumer boycott.

This is an especially important task at present. Not only are boycotts proliferating in number and in perceived importance, but also the form of some recent boycotts contrasts with their historical antecedents. Although, as has been noted, "the consumer boycott tactic has a long tradition in South African protest politics" (Obery and Jochelson, p9), boycotts in the recent past were generally organised by unions in support of workplace disputes. They have included boycotts of Fatti's and Moni's, Red Meat, Colgate, Simba Quix, Wilson-Rowntree, Spar, and Dairy Maid. More recent boycotts have, however, generally involved blanket boycotts of white businesses, have been primarily organised around non-workplace grievances, and in some cases unions have not been involved.

Consumer boycotts: strategy, tactics, and class alliances

White discusses in detail how the consumer boycott can be employed as both a tactical and a strategic weapon. Tactically, the local state (through pressure on local capital) and even the central state (through the cumulative effect of widespread boycotts) can be pressurised into conceding to certain demands. Strategically, divisions in the ruling bloc can be accentuated, particularly through destroying its ideological cohesiveness and alienating the state from some its constituencies. Also, the boycott can mobilise, politicise, and unite oppressed classes.

Unfortunately, White's discussion of this latter strategic aspect of the boycott fails to identify the importance of the form which consumer boycotts take. The concepts which White uses, including

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"mobilisation", "politicisation", and "class alliance", are neither monolithic nor unambiguous. To take a very obvious example, it is crucial whether a Durban worker is mobilised and politicised in terms of his alleged (Zulu) heritage within Inkatha or UWUSA, or in other terms within a COSATU or CUSA union. The content of mobilisation and politicisation, and the terms of class alliances, are often as important as the process itself.

A crucially important question is the alliance of the working-class with the emerging black capitalist shop- and taxi-owners ("lumpen-capitalists"). White argues that these lumpen-capitalists are drawn into support for the boycotts through both "economic" and "ideological" factors. While "it is undoubtedly the case that they stood to make a lot of money from the boycott of white shops", in P.E. at least, "the economic motive has been transformed into a far more ideologically-based commitment to the aims and goals of the progressive movement".

White briefly refers to the terms of this class alliance. "While one of the great strengths of the consumer boycott is that it has given impetus to a deepening of a class-alliance with black traders, it is crucial that in order to minimise any ambiguity or opportunism the democratic movement forges such alliances on its own terms". Obery and Jochelson also pay some attention to this problem. Derrick Swartz of the Eastern Cape UDF expresses a critical concern over this class alliance. "We should never misunderstand [traders'] motives for supporting the boycott. Their role remains determined by their class position." (Obery and Jochelson, p11)

The relationship between the working-class and lumpen-capitalists must be examined, as Swartz says, in terms of their respective interests. Defining a "working-class politics" is certainly no easy task (see Jochelson et al, WIP 41), but it is clear that working-class interests involve not only reducing workplace exploitation, and reducing rents and consumer costs, but also increasing in both the short and long term working-class control over both their work- and living-place in order to end oppression. Any form of protest has implications for questions of control. The involvement of lumpen-capitalists in the class alliances generated through consumer boycotts should not be understood simply through reference to immediate profit levels and a vague "ideologically-based commitment", as White does, but also in terms of control and organisation. This is especially important as the growth and coherence of the class of lumpen-capitalists is underestimated.

Emerging township capital, grass roots organisation
and consumer boycotts

Lumpen-capitalists have interests in certain forms of consumer boycotts beyond making high immediate profits. These can be divided into questions of the demands posed and the form of organisation.

Lumpen-capitalists can be expected to favour national level demands. In so far as there are constraints on the opportunities for accumulation, these are primarily determined at a national rather than local level, so requiring national rather than local pressure. Secondly, an emphasis on national and political rather than local demands distracts protesters' attention from specifically local grievances and concerns. Thirdly, national demands generally require a more nationally-orientated organisation, which can militate against the growth of grassroots democratic structures. One reason for this is that national and explicitly political demands are often beyond the control of local capital and the local state. The pursuit of local demands would generally lead to negotiations with these groups. Whilst negotiations lead to the construction of democratic structures, and the involvement of the local state can ensure the space to do so (through a reduction in levels of repression), an un-negotiable strategy based on protest alone without the close possibility of negotiation can weaken rather than strengthen structures.

On this question of organisation, it is clear that progressive organisations at national and regional levels are campaigning in the interests of the working-class in their demands concerning repression, education, and political rights. But, as is widely acknowledged, national and regional organisation should be constructed from strong grass-roots organisation. The practice of the consumer boycott is, in many areas, constructed on such a base. This base comprises "peoples power" structures of street and area committees, which represent the extension into the living-place of the kind of democratic workplace structures developed by the independent trade union movement from the 1970s. However, there is a temptation to organise boycotts even in areas where people's power is at most an idea. If this happens, the construction of people's power can be retarded as organisational energies are not directed to the grassroots but to a higher level.

The arguments presented by White would seem to suggest that the mobilisation and politicisation generated through boycotts provides

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the impetus to grassroots organisation. But this need not be the case. As White notes at the start of his paper, boycotts emerged in many areas because state repression precluded other forms of protest. But the boycott "is relatively impervious to brute repression" precisely because it requires little organisation, and because of this it need not generate any organisation either.

Thus whilst there might not be a clash of material interests at the time, the structures that have been set up can militate against the emergence of democratic structures at a later date. This should be of particular concern to workers.

Consumer boycotts also necessarily bring organisers and township capitalists into relations of increased mutual dependence. The former require the latter to make boycotts viable, and more especially require them to lower their prices in order to ensure that price differentials between town and township do not provoke unnecessary hostility to the boycott. Capitalists in turn depend on organisers for the maintenance of sales levels as well as to promote their explicit demands and implicit interests. The more mutually dependent they become, the more responsive they become to each others "needs" or interests. Whilst this means that traders become more supportive of progressive positions, it also means that progressive organisations can become more tolerant of the position of traders.

What evidence is there concerning the involvement of lumpen-capitalists? Unfortunately some of the evidence there is is ambiguous. For example, police have harassed township traders in several areas. In parts of the Eastern Cape, traders have been detained and their businesses closed. In Mamelodi, three leading township residents detained in connection with the consumer boycott in December 1985 owned at least one chemist's and two supermarkets between them (Star 18.12.85). But is this harassment aimed at boycott organisers, who might include traders, or is it an attempt to intimidate traders and prevent them supplying township consumers? In Daveyton, police prevented delivery trucks from supplying township stores to force consumers to buy at white shops. The precise role of traders in each area can only be identified through a detailed study of locally specific patterns of politics.

The case of bus boycotts provides some ominous lessons for progressive organisers. The divergent interests of the lumpen-capitalists and worker-commuters on a crudely material level is indicated

in the outcome of the Empangeni bus boycott in Natal. The burden of the boycott was shouldered by the commuters, and officials of the locally dominant union, Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), provided the initial organisation through the boycott committee. MAWU organisers recognised that one way of lowering fares was to break Empangeni Transport's monopoly, creating opportunities for small-scale transporters. The emerging black capitalists in the area are represented in Inkatha, which secured representation on the boycott committee. Finally, the Inkatha representatives were able to negotiate an end to the boycott on the basis of breaking the monopoly, with no necessary provisos for reducing fares. (McCarthy and Swilling 1985; McCarthy 1985)

Consumer boycotts have not been the preserve of progressive organisations. The position of NAFCOC (National African Federated Chamber of Commerce) leaders on boycotts provides a warning. They have consistently supported calls for boycotts since the 1970s when the calls came from Black Consciousness leaders. In late 1983 NAFCOC themselves called for a boycott of Afrimet stores. Gatsha Buthelezi and Lebowa's Cedric Phatudi have both threatened to use blanket consumer boycotts. Phatudi clearly envisaged that they could be used to strengthen the bantustan system. There is nothing inherently progressive about the consumer boycott, despite it being based on mass black action.

Other organisational problems with boycotts: the youth

Different groups of residents are clearly differentially involved in and affected by consumer boycotts. This raises potential organisational problems. The youth - meaning both the young unemployed and students - have played a major role in the organisation of many boycotts, and women, as consumers, have been especially affected.

The role of the youth has, unsurprisingly, been emphasised in the media. White cites a survey done in Grahamstown and suggests that the media has consistently exaggerated the level of coercion involved in boycotts. Two comments need to be made. First, the level of coercion needed is inversely proportional to the support for boycotts in the township, and therefore reflects on the organisation of the boycott. Secondly, in some areas the enforcement of boycotts by the youth has provoked violent conflict.

The general relationship between youth and the working-class is

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problematic. Unemployed workers can easily be considered members of the working-class. Education, especially in South Africa, can be seen as a process of socialisation for labour, making students future workers (or, increasingly, unemployed members of the working class). But education can also be seen as a route leading to opportunities for capital accumulation. Whether students and workers have either compatible or contradictory material interests remains unclear.

But it is the case that the political and especially organisational practices used by youth in many areas until recently contrast with those that further working-class interests. For example, some youth congresses are organisations of active (young) residents only, whilst civics (and some unions in the workplace) are organisations embracing both active and more passive residents.

But youth have also played a major role in advancing working-class interests in many areas. In the Eastern Cape, the construction of people's power can be attributed in large part to the efforts of youth, both in destroying earlier state structures and in building popular and democratic alternatives. I discuss this further below.

Consumer boycotts can unite township residents. They can also divide. Dissatisfaction with the way in which consumer boycotts were organised and conducted in Crossroads was one of the key factors behind the violent conflict that broke out in January 1986. Groups known locally as "amadoda" (men) or "otata" (older men) fought and forced into hiding many "magabane" (comrades), "some but not all of whom [were] linked to community organisations with a political orientation."

Residents interviewed said that "there had been increasing dissatisfaction on the part of many residents with the way in which the "magabane" had "monitored" the consumer boycott. They gave an example of how domestic workers... were forced to throw away groceries they had been given by their employers as it was assumed that the goods had been bought at "white" shops. Others in the community had been forced to eat raw meat, detergent etc...It seems that the failure of the "magabane" to explain the nature of these campaigns led to a conservative reaction on the part of some sections within the community." The police, unsurprisingly, encouraged and supported this conservative reaction. Nonetheless, it seems that the "fathers" cannot be considered police puppets, but rather emerged out of divisions in squatter camps, divisions which

US Solidarity for South Africa

A boycott of Shell products recently announced in the United States has the potential for the most widespread local organising and education on South African apartheid yet conducted within the American labour movement. The boycott until Royal Dutch/Shell and its subsidiaries withdraw from South Africa was announced in January, and is now being organised at the local level in cities throughout the US.

National organisations endorsing the boycott include:

- * The United Mine Workers of America, an independent union which has increased its links with the South African National Union of Mineworkers in recent months and which recently concluded a bitter 15-month strike against AT Massey Coal Co., a Shell subsidiary.
- * The AFL-CIO, which said it was responding to requests by black unions in South Africa to boycott companies which are involved in the energy sector as well as companies which do not respect trade union rights.
- * The Free South Africa Movement, a loose grouping of civil rights activists who led the protests at the South African embassy in 1985 and who now are targeting the role of multi-national corporations in South Africa.
- * The National Organisation for Women, perhaps the leading feminist group in the US.

Except in the case of the United Mine Workers, the national endorsements do not appear to mean a substantial commitment of funds for local organising. They do, however, create a national umbrella under which local organising can take place.

Already, local coalitions are asking consumers not to buy gasoline or other products from Royal Dutch/Shell's American subsidiary, Shell Oil Co., to turn in their shell credit cards, and to pressure businesses and government agencies not to use Shell products.

The local organising campaigns could prove interesting for a number of reasons. First, boycott supporters are making a conscious effort

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The exigencies of organisation under the dual conditions of repression and poorly developed grass-roots organisation that characterise most townships outside of the Eastern Cape, militate against women's organisational involvement. Boycotts will generally be organised by representatives of the different township organisations, which are generally based on specific constituencies, for example, youth, students, and workers at particular factories. Women are possibly the least organised group of township residents, despite (indeed because of) the fact that they face specific problems, stemming from the sexual division of labour and their "triple oppression", as women, as workers and as blacks. Women are therefore likely to be under-represented in all township organisations except for specifically women's organisations, such as the Zakheni Women's Club, based on a sexually-defined constituency. As a result women will be poorly represented on consumer boycott committees.

Does this matter? I would suggest that it does. I would hope that the objective of a democratic post-apartheid society must embrace women as equally as men. More immediately, women's support for boycotts is essential if the boycott is not to be based on violence. Democratic grass-roots structures involving and mobilising women are, I believe, a necessary condition for the unambiguous advancement of the interests of the South African working class as a whole.

Boycotts in practice

In many townships the lumpen-capitalist class have either secured partial control only or have in fact been subordinated to representatives of the working-class. But, especially in larger townships outside of the Eastern Cape, the form of boycott organisation may not involve the full subordination of lumpen-capitalists' interests. The effect of these boycotts remains ambiguous.

The available literature on consumer boycotts includes examples of both of these scenarios. The best examples in the first group lie in the Eastern Cape. Another example would seem to be the boycott in Pietermaritzburg. This was organised around local demands, concerning the re-instatement of workers and a union recognition agreement, and the initiative for the boycott came, unsurprisingly, from FOSATU (LMG Natal 1985; Carrim 1985).

The larger the township, the more difficult it becomes for consumer boycotts to be organised in the full interests of the working-class. This follows from (i) the relative heterogeneity of classes

in the large townships, especially Soweto, Mamelodi, and Kagiso; and (ii) the problems of constructing democratic grass-roots structures which generate working-class oriented boycotts. Boycotts in these larger townships have been characterised by increased importance being attached to national demands, with national or regional political leadership (drawn from unions as well as civic organisations). Unfortunately these boycotts attract disproportionate attention as their leaders have the best contacts with journalists and researchers alike.

The importance of the form of the consumer boycott is best demonstrated through more detailed case-studies, suggesting how tensions in the form have been resolved in practice. Examples drawn from outside of the Eastern Cape reveal possible pitfalls in the form of boycotts when they are not based on mass participatory and democratic grass-roots structures.

Boycotts in a small town: Tumahole

In Tumahole, outside Parys in the northern Free State, two total consumer boycotts have been held. Both involved primarily local grievances. Both were organised by township-based organisations reflecting the close relationship between workplace and living space that informs organisations in many small towns.

Class relations in Tumahole have been shaped by the deployment of the (selective) boycott weapon, and the threat thereof, against township lumpen-capitalists. In July 1984, the Mayor's supermarket and butchery were boycotted, with the demands that he oppose the planned massive rent increase, and resign from the community council. The call for a boycott came from members of the Tumahole Students Organisation (TSO). The boycott was "supervised" by youths, but it seems that intimidation was unnecessary, as the Mayor's role in rent increases had earned him widespread hostility. The Mayor resigned after the combination of the boycott, police violence at a previously peaceful protest march, and the death of a youth in police custody. Later in 1984 residents boycotted the taxi of another councillor, who also resigned. Other township traders have since been threatened with boycotts. In each case, they have acceded to the demands made of them.

Selective boycotts were important in Tumahole for three reasons. First, they have been a major factor in the subordination of lumpen-capitalists to the township organisations. Secondly, they

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accustomed residents to the boycott as a potentially non-violent and successful weapon. Thirdly, they were initially deployed in circumstances where they gave expression to very widespread grievances. These factors help explain the success of the first total boycott of white businesses in Parys, in August 1985.

On August 1, residents stayed away from work for the funeral of three youths killed by the police after an earlier funeral. A number of workers were dismissed for failing to turn up to work. Five dismissed by Vaal Glass (glass merchants) and two by the local Riviera Hotel, reported this to members of the Tumahole Youth Congress (TUYCO).

The TUYCO Consumers Sub-Committee, chaired by a former CWIU (Chemical Workers Industrial Union) shop steward from Secunda (dismissed after the November 1984 stay-away), proposed a boycott. The chairman's Secunda organising experience was of crucial importance. A Co-ordinating Committee was established, with representatives from the Tumahole Civic, TUYCO, the Womens Organisation, COSAS, the Parents Committee, and local trade unions (including CUSA and FOSATU unions and CCAWUSA). There were even some non-unionised domestic workers. Besides providing a forum for broad participation in the organisation of the boycott, the Co-ordinating Committee was also formed "so as to make the police lose trace of what organisation is doing what", as one member put it. The Committee was chaired by the former CWIU shop steward.

The Committee wrote to Vaal Glass and the Riviera Hotel, warning them that a consumer boycott would be implemented unless the sacked workers were reinstated. Neither employer even replied. The Committee also wrote to all the Parys retailers to get them to pressurise Vaal Glass and the Riviera Hotel.

Township shopkeepers were asked to lower their prices. This would lower the temptation to break the boycott, and so lower the likelihood of youths being shot at or prosecuted for "supervising" the boycott. The shopkeepers were also asked not to serve policemen and their families, and to stock up (so as to avoid shortages if police stopped delivery vans entering the township).

But shopkeepers were not involved in organising the boycott. According to one of the boycott organisers, "we didn't trust them". Finally, pamphlets were distributed, listing the demands, primarily the reinstatement of the dismissed workers, but also reduced

rents and other local demands.

The boycott commenced on Monday August 12. In the first few days, it was enforced by the "14s" (teams of youths), who confiscated some groceries. Although there appears to have been a substantial solidarity behind the boycott, organisers acknowledge that "some people didn't buy in town as they were afraid". The organisers were unable to mobilise the people from nearby farms, who continued to shop in town. The (black) NGK minister, who opposed the boycott, organised the bussing of pensioners into town after they collected their quarterly pensions, and a SAP escort back into the township. Nonetheless, the boycott had a substantial effect. For example, Checkers were forced to reduce their prices to encourage custom, and later to dump large quantities of fresh food.

In the township, some shopkeepers did lower their prices. Others were intimidated by the police or were just plain greedy, and kept their prices up, losing some custom. One shopkeeper refused to sell cigarettes to some policemen. The SAP captain came and told him if he didn't serve the police, his shop would be promptly closed and his license wouldn't be renewed. The shopkeeper consulted with the boycott organisers, and decided to continue to refuse the police. Nothing happened to him.

In the third week of the boycott, Vaal Glass sent the police to tell his former employees to return to work. Other employers who had sacked workers, in several cases unknown to the boycott organisers, also re-instated them. The boycott was therefore called off, and residents were told in the taxi-ranks and the buses. The organisers were reluctant to issue pamphlets lest the police copy them in a future boycott, and were unable to hold a mass meeting because of a ban on meetings. The organisers clearly demonstrated the end of the boycott by buying groceries in town themselves.

The township shopkeepers made large profits because of the boycott. They subsequently offered to contribute at funerals, and for transport, bail money, and so on. Even two former councillors cooperated.

In November 1985 TUYCO activists proposed another consumer boycott. Although all of the demands were local, specifically an end to the arrests of rent defaulters, the release of detainees, the dropping of public violence charges against students, and reduced rent, the call for a boycott was undoubtedly influenced by the nation-wide call for a "Black Christmas. Unfortunately, some of the leading

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organisers of the earlier boycott had been forced into hiding by local vigilantes.

This second boycott was unevenly supported with a correspondingly reduced effect. It was inadequately organised, and could not count on any wave of indignation or common resolve among residents as in August. Furthermore, the boycott was planned for a set length, rather than until demands were met, which reduced residents' sense of control. In the event, none of the demands were met. There was inadequate consultation with township shopkeepers. Leaflets announcing the boycott were mistakenly distributed early. The "14s" again tried to enforce the boycott, but, despite some intimidatory "punishment" of shoppers, they were unable to compel compliance.

Local capital in Parys devised novel boycott-breaking tactics. ARWA, the second largest local employer, gave their employees vouchers entitling them to buy groceries at half price at Checkers. Apparently, some people used these vouchers.

The organisational structures underlying the boycotts were the same. In each case, TUYCO activists were the organisers. There were no grass-roots structures in the township. But in December the call for action did not originate from the residents as in August. In this situation, organisers were unable to ensure the boycott's success either in tactical or strategic terms. Demands were not met, local capital was, if anything, made more confident of its power to break boycotts, and residents were not politicised along constructive lines, but were possibly even slightly alienated from organising and protesting. Specific organisational mistakes compounded the problem.

The boycott tactic has constituted a class alliance with the lumpen-capitalist class very much subordinated to representatives of workers and the unemployed. The demands have been concerned with worker or student grievances, rather than non-local demands with populist rhetoric. It can hardly be said of the Tumahole boycott organisers that they either "see it as merely a more developed form of protest action designed to make big business aware of its political responsibilities,... [or] as a direct challenge to the country's economy" (Obery and Jochelson, p9). But, despite all this, the second boycott cannot be considered a significant success.

Boycotts and people's power

poverty of organisation can itself serve to advance the interests of the lumpen-capitalists, and so, in the long term, disadvantage the working-class. This can even be the case where lumpen-capitalists are formally subordinated to the representatives of the working-class, as in Tumahole.

In many areas, until recently, unions have had greater organising power than township-based organisations. 1985, however, saw the construction of "people's power" in many townships in the Eastern Cape, and during 1986 democratic and mass-participatory structures are being established in townships in the Transvaal. Now, township-based organisations frequently marshal much greater democratic organising power than unions.

"People's power" is the key to avoiding the potential pitfalls involved in consumer boycotts. Not only is it possible to ensure that the material interests of lumpen-capitalists are subordinated to the needs of the working-class, but more fundamentally control over the form of protest is vested in the working-class - including, one hopes, women.

Consumer boycotts are once again proliferating throughout South Africa. The Port Elizabeth consumer boycott was reintroduced on April 1. The East London consumer boycott was indefinitely reintroduced on March 3. Mamelodi's boycott was resumed in April, although it is due to be called off soon, and a widespread boycott is taking effect in the Northern Transvaal. Comments like Jack's above are frequently expressed.

Boycotts have undoubtedly brought major successes. In Alexandra boycotts, in conjunction with rising and sustained levels of protest, led to the resignation of the remaining councillors.

Efforts have been made to achieve national coordination in the pursuit of primarily national demands and objectives. National issues are not unimportant. After all, unions have increasingly grouped together into CUSA, FOSATU, AZACTU, and now COSATU, the biggest federation ever in South African history. National legislation, especially the legislation prompted by the Wiehahn Commission and national-level court decisions, have brought major gains to workers. And workers are of course subject to many of the same restraints - that can only be corrected at a national

- debate -

level - as other township residents. But the pitfalls involved in employing the consumer boycott tactic remain and workers and their unions need to ensure that the structures, practices, demands, and objectives, are in the long-term interests of the working-class.

The consumer boycott should not be abandoned. On the contrary, it is a powerful weapon. But the direct and indirect implications need to be fully considered and necessary precautions taken.

The experience of the Eastern Cape demonstrates the potential power of the consumer boycott weapon. But the strength of the weapon does not inherently lie in the weapon itself, but rather is the result of the level of organisation underpinning the boycotts. "Buying power" is not going to determine how South Africa is reconstructed out of the debris of apartheid. Rather, it is the mass mobilisation of the working-class in democratic grass-roots organisations, ie. people's power, that is going to determine victory in the struggle.

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I would like to thank all those who helped in the preparation of this paper.

(Jeremy Seekings, Department of Political Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, May 1986)

Privatisation: No Answer for the Masses

On May 1, while workers staged South Africa's largest stay-away yet, businessmen and bureaucrats met in a conference in Johannesburg's Carlton Hotel to discuss the merits of privatising state functions. The organisers of the conference, the Free Market Foundation and the Greater Soweto Chamber of Commerce, obviously underestimated the importance of May Day, especially in the present political climate; 150 black delegates could not be there, apologised FMF executive director Leon Louw, due to the "unfortunate political circumstances of today being May the first."

The central irony of the event was that while workers' rallies country-wide called for their fair share of state power, speakers at the conference were looking for ways of shifting state control of services and institutions into the private commercial sector.

Privatisation it was argued, would allow three main advantages: greater efficiency in providing goods and services, faster growth of employment opportunities for (both black workers and entrepreneurs), and the de-politicisation of a number of politically contested areas (eg. education, health services, and transport). Said Louw, "Government ownership and control is the biggest single source of conflict in South Africa". Privatisation in this context was "the easiest, most popular way to create the opportunities for political reform".

This, then, was the conference's political agenda - to support an economic strategy which would allow greater (especially entrepreneurial) involvement of blacks in the economy, and in this way to try and bolster a black "middle class".

A similar approach was proposed by Eustace Davie, FMF administrative director, to solve the education crisis. His solution was the handing over of schools to parent's committees whose funds would come mainly from school fees, supplemented by some form of "tax-credit" or voucher scheme run by government.

Spurred on by the glowing, or at least optimistic, accounts of privatisation in the UK and USA provided by guest-speakers Madsen Pirie (President, Adam Smith Institute, UK) and Robert Poole (President, Reason Foundation USA), the local speakers tended to

- privatisation -

lose touch with the reality of both demands of South Africa's popular movements and the huge economic inequalities between and among black and white people. The political struggle is precisely over the control of state power, and not how to diffuse that power into other spheres, equally inaccessible to the country's majority. What the privatisation prescription neglects to notice is that this diffusion will only shift political domination into the area of economic inequality.

These strategies are part of the broader movement (in the UK and USA especially) towards a stricter "free-enterprise capitalism" with as little government involvement in the distribution of goods and services as possible. In attempting to cut back on government in Britain, for instance, Margaret Thatcher has sold off previously government-owned enterprises (or parts of them) to the private sector. As Pirie said, the policy is one of "if you can't control the public sector, sell it". This has, he said, been or is being done, for example to the telephone service, the airways, the gas service and council houses.

Pirie was convinced that "privatisation is increasing exponentially and shows no sign of slacking". In fact, he said, "the government is hooked on privatisation, rather like heroin; they have to take a larger dose each year to get the same thrill"!

In South Africa, however, the call is for a legitimate government (not a weaker one), which by virtue of its representativeness will take greater (not less) responsibility for the well-being of the people. We will probably be hearing a lot more about privatisation and its role in the state's policy of reform; and it is likely that black business organisations will increase their support for the strategy. But the fairness of the market's distribution of wealth is an absolutely controversial point, and advocates of privatisation will have their time cut out explaining away the role of racial oppression in South Africa's brand of capitalism.

(Paul Crankshaw, May 1986)

Sit-ins: A Management Perspective

The following is a summary of a talk given at the Institute for Industrial Relations by Andre Lamprecht - Group Legal Advisor for Barlow Rand - on the subject "The legal implications of sit-ins". Mr Lamprecht began by stating that his perspective was that of a businessman and of an industrial relations manager, and not a purely legal approach. He went on to make the following points:

1. Different responses are possible to the same issues. In these early days of building an industrial democracy there will be excesses. But should management simply react by curbing these or try to deal with the circumstances which cause the excesses?
2. Part of the task of promoting an industrial democracy is to promote collective bargaining. Sit-ins are preceded by situations where collective bargaining has broken down due to resistance to collective bargaining or lack of experience.
3. Any discussion of sit-ins must be within the context of a growing industrial democracy which includes the right to strike. Drawing on USA experience, Mr Lamprecht, argued that there was a right to withhold labour and to try to stop production - thus the right to picket is essential. However, this does not amount to an absolute right to prevent management attempts to maintain production. There must be checks and balances.
4. Sit-ins need to become part of the collective bargaining process. The sit-ins will continue but they can be regulated if unions and managements bargain about what is permissible. If this is done the courts could then be used only in exceptional circumstances: eg. where there is disregard for property, access is denied to management, or sabotage takes place.
5. We should therefore distinguish different types of sit-ins: where workers merely maintain a presence on site as against an actual seizure of the plant with a view to preventing access.
6. Methods for dealing with sit-ins depend on circumstances.
 - (a) First there is a fundamental difference between a strike/sit-in which takes place in breach of procedures and one which occurs only after procedures have been exhausted. In the second case the workers have a right to take action.
 - (b) Except in extreme cases - where there is danger to life or property - the police have no place in industrial relations.
 - (c) Court interdicts should be used sparingly. A frequent use of court orders - especially where workers have gone through

the procedures and feel a genuine grievance - will engender disrespect for the law. This will not aid the process of moving towards democracy. It is also important to provide opportunities for communication. Management should give unions notice of their intent to apply for an interdict. Moreover, it is important that a temporary interdict be sought to give the other side a chance to reply before a final order is made.

- (d) Dismissals must not be used to undermine the right to strike and should be used exceedingly sparingly at this time in the history of South Africa. Business cannot isolate itself from what is happening in the wider society. Dismissals should be used only where there is the most fundamental breach of procedures.

Mr Lamprecht made the following points during question-time:

- (i) Managements should push for the removal of impediments to picketing.
- (ii) For management the sit-in at least has one advantage: workers' representatives were available for negotiation and the union side could make immediate report backs to members.
- (iii) Managers had to take what measures were necessary for the long-term well-being of the plant. In some cases, especially where the union has acted correctly in terms of procedure, this may mean closing down production for a while in order to maintain good industrial relations. In other cases, for example in a continuous process such as in the foundries, then production has to continue even if this means bringing in scabs. But in the present abnormal period managements should, where practical, "forgive" rather than react to these situations.
- (iv) Mr Lamprecht pointed out that unions had made gains under the system of collective bargaining - they could not exist outside of it and they had as much of a stake in the collective bargaining system as did management.
- (v) Mr Lamprecht reiterated that the issue of sit-ins must be seen within the broader context of a developing industrial democracy and that all sides must commit themselves to the collective bargaining process - and this means scrupulous attention to procedure in an attempt to win moral superiority in order to exert a moral pressure over the other side.

(SALB correspondent, May 1986)

SACWU in the Western Cape: the Plascon Strike

The South African Chemical Workers' Union has firmly established its presence in the Western Cape. A measure of this union's strength can be found in its recent protracted strike over wages at Plascon Paints in Cape Town. Four Plascon plants in the Transvaal and two paint factories in Cape Town, one a Plascon subsidiary, came out in support of the strike, which lasted six weeks.



The strike at the Cape Town plant also indicated the union's past successes in its battle to protect workers on legal strike. Unlike the national legal strike at AECI two years ago, where workers were driven back to work by threats of dismissal, the Cape Town Plascon workers, whose strike was legal, not only kept their jobs after a six week strike, but gained significant wage increases, albeit substantially lower than their initial demand. Their success was an indication of the way in which not only SACWU, which is affiliated to the Council of Unions of South Africa, but other unions as well like the National Union of Mineworkers and the Metal and Allied Workers Union, have fought to protect workers on legal strike from management reprisals.

A total of 141 workers at Plascon Paints in Epping went on strike on February 7 this year, the day after they held a ballot. Wage negotiations had deadlocked on December 20 last year, with the company offering a R50 a month across the board increase and the union demanding R200 a month. The union followed legal channels, and when the Minister of Manpower failed to appoint a conciliation board in January, the way for a legal strike was clear.

SACWU has been organised at Plascon in Cape Town since September, 1983 and has 141 members out of about 200 factory workers. The total workforce at the Epping plant in Cape Town is about 300.

A further attempt at mediation on February 23 failed when the workers refused to accept a revised wage offer by the company of R65 a month. At that stage, the union had reduced its demand to R150. However, the workers decided to suspend their strike and returned to "consider other methods of winning their demands", according to SACWU branch secretary, Patricia de Lille, who is

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also a laboratory assistant at Plascon.

National solidarity

SACWU has majority membership at five out of seven Plascon plants, four in the Transvaal and one in Cape Town. The COSATU affiliated Chemical Workers' Industrial Union is organised at the Plascon plants in Port Elizabeth and Durban.

Against SACWU's wishes, annual wage negotiations at Plascon are carried out on a plant and not national level. Although negotiations were going on around the country simultaneously, the Epping workers were the only ones to declare an official dispute and then embark on a legal strike. However, shortly after the legal strike in Cape town started, workers at the four Transvaal Plascon plants, and one Cape subsidiary decided to take solidarity action and express their demand for a similar wage increase. In addition, about 60 workers at Vadek paints, a Cape Town factory organised by SACWU but not connected with Plascon, demonstrated briefly in support of Plascon workers' wage demands.

Three days after returning to work and suspending the strike, the Epping workers heard that 462 workers at Plascon Parthenon in Luipardsvlei near Krugersdorp had been dismissed following a stoppage. The workers had been staging a go-slow in support of the Cape Town workers until a shop steward in the warehouse was suspended. The workers downed tools in protest and after ignoring a two hour ultimatum to return to work were dismissed on February 25. About 90 workers at Polycell, a Plascon subsidiary in Alberton also downed tools and were also dismissed. On Thursday February 27, the Plascon workers in Epping began a go-slow and the following day "downed tools completely" in support of the dismissed workers, according to de Lille. By March 2, a total of 5 factories had come out in support of the dismissed workers of Luipardsvlei and Polycell in Alberton. Apart from Epping they were Plascon Evans, Doornfontein, Inmont SA (a Plascon subsidiary) in Johannesburg and Cape Town and National Importers and Packers in Wadeville, Germiston.

"We explained to the management that this was a sympathy strike and had nothing to do with our (legal) wage strike, which we had suspended," said de Lille. However, the management at Plascon was initially not keen to separate the issues. "When we returned to work on March 3 we were locked out. The company said we must first sign a wage agreement before allowing us onto the premises. We

said they were mixing the issues and we refused to do this," said de Lille.

Workers from Vadek, a relatively small company staged a march at this time in support of the locked-out workers. Inmont who, in spite of being a Plascon subsidiary, held separate wage negotiations, stayed out with the Plascon workers until March 18 when they had negotiated a settlement.

Settlement

The Plascon workers in Epping at this stage, then, had two major demands: the one revolving around wages, the other around the reinstatement of the dismissed workers in the Transvaal.

On March 9 a conciliation board, with a chairman appointed by the Department of Manpower, met again in an attempt to resolve the primary wage dispute. The union was somewhat taken aback, according to local organiser Sizakele Mahluthana, when it was informed that in terms of an amendment to the Labour Relations Act, the board was not empowered to discuss wages or hours of work. However, as a result of the meeting, the union entered direct negotiations with Plascon.

"The whole thing then became a bit tricky," recalls de Lille. "The management said that if we in Cape Town resolved the wage dispute then they would reinstate the Transvaal workers. They also came down in their offer of R65 to R52. It was clear they were trying to use the situation in the Transvaal to pressurize us into accepting their wage offer. We then came down in our demand to R60 a month from January and a further increase of R30 a month from July. We couldn't agree and the workers decided to stay out."

The ten days between that failed meeting and actual settlement of the strike saw intensive community and political support for the strike in the Western Cape. According to SACWU, the United Democratic Front was at first a little wary of assisting the workers because of their ties with CUSA but subsequently changed its position after appeals from the workers. The tiny Clothing Workers Union produced pamphlets, the Media Workers Association helped provide food for the strikers and the Call of Islam, the Western Cape Traders' Association and the Western Province Council of Churches also provided aid.

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On March 18 new negotiations began and a settlement was reached. Workers finally agreed to a R52 wage increase and a R24 travelling allowance per month, making a total of R76 which will be implemented in full from July 1. The Transvaal workers were reinstated and they too won a R76 a month increase, although the division between the travelling allowance and increase was slightly different. The Plascon workers in Cape Town also negotiated five days extra leave after five years of service, improved maternity benefits and better overtime rates.

From July 1, the minimum wage for Plascon workers will be R513 a month. "We felt this was a very big achievement for us," said de Lille. "With wage negotiations and fighting dismissals, we manage to satisfy our members." Asked what she thought had contributed to the solidarity during the strike, de Lille said that shop stewards had said "only a worker could free a worker."

SACWU, with a membership of about 1,500 in the Western Cape, aims to consolidate its position in the paint industry in the region by the end of the year, said Mahlutshana.

There are five major paint factories in the Western Cape, four of which are organised by SACWU. The union also has a strong presence at nine chemical factories, including the giant AECI explosives factory at Somerset West and the AECI cyanide and plastics factory. "Our aim is also to start negotiating on a national level in companies where we have national representation," said de Lille

The only other major independent trade union in the chemical industry is the COSATU affiliate and former FOSATU affiliate, the Chemical Workers Industrial Union, which has a strong presence in the Eastern Cape, Natal and the Transvaal. The Plastics and Allied Workers' Union operates in the Western Cape, but has only about 500 members. It has been co-operating closely with the SACWU branch in the Western Cape. Evenso, PAWU has decided to merge with CWIU and thus join COSATU.

(Pippa Green, May 1986)

May Day Courage in Northern Natal

About 3,000 workers in the Northern Natal township of Esikhawini attended a May Day meeting at the local township stadium. While the number might, on the surface, compare unfavourably, with a number of other May Day meetings, particularly the vast King's Park rally to launch the new Inkatha union, it is nevertheless a significant indication of support for the Congress of South African Trade Unions in the region.

The May Day rally in Esikhawini was banned by the Inkatha town council several days before it was due to take place. The Inkatha town council have the power to withhold venues for meetings and unless meeting convenors have approved venues, the local magistrate is unlikely to grant them permission to hold their meeting. As it happened in the case of COSATU's planned May Day meeting in Northern Natal, the unions were refused magisterial permission to hold it. The council has refused COSATU and its affiliates permission to hold meetings in Esikhawini since the beginning of March.

According to Northern Natal COSATU regional secretary, Jerry Ntombela, workers were incensed by the banning of their meeting. "They do not see why they should be the only workers barred from holding a meeting to commemorate May Day," Ntombela said, explaining their determination to go ahead with it.

The workers in Esikhawini, a large township between Richards Bay and Empangeni, thus pressed ahead with their decision to hold their meeting. Tensions mounted early on May Day as a large contingent of Kwazulu and South African Police took up positions in the township. There were also fears of reprisals from Inkatha supporters in the area, although that threat was not immediate as several busloads of supporters had gone to King's Park in Durban for the launch of UWUSA.

To the workers' surprise and relief the rally went off without incident. The fact that it did, is perhaps some measure of the type of support which COSATU has in Esikhawini, which is situated in the middle of an Inkatha stronghold. Moreover, three prominent UWUSA leaders - D J Mtiyane, general secretary Simon Conco and organiser, M P Gumede are based in the area.

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COSATU members in the nearby township of Mandini, who were also barred from holding a meeting, tried to join workers in Esikhawini, but were unable to arrange transport. According to Ntombela, a substantial number of them made their way to the COSATU May Day rally at Curries Fountain in Durban.

The build-up to May Day in the region was marked by increasing tension between COSATU and the new Inkatha-backed union. There are 10,000 COSATU members in the region, according to Ntombela, and many of them are Inkatha members. However, evidence at present indicates that union members, who are Inkatha members also are disturbed at Inkatha's attempts to divide workers by setting up a rival union. One sign of this evidence is the May Day meeting at the Esikhawini stadium. "We have got members of Inkatha here who are strongly saying they will leave Inkatha rather than leave COSATU," said Ntombela.

In an incident which has shocked workers in the area, Jeffrey Vilane, former Metal and Allied Workers Union president and a shop steward at a large aluminium smelter in Richards Bay was attacked about a week before May Day. His house and car were burnt and he received bullet wounds in his arms and chest. Vilane has always been a prominent Inkatha supporter, but has taken a strong stand against UWUSA, so incurring the wrath of the new union's backers.

Gumede, organiser of UWUSA, who is also a member of Esikhawini Town Council, said he thought the council had banned COSATU meetings "because there have been so many criticisms against the Chief Minister [Buthelezi] and Inkatha". He added, in reply to a question, that he did not think that the council would ban UWUSA meetings in the township, but that the new union had not yet asked. (Pippa Green, May 1986)

May Day Briefs

- * Most Black farm workers stayed away in the Steelpoort area.
- * The National Productivity Institute calculates a permanent loss to the economy of R150 million as a result of the stay-away.
- * In some CUSA factories workers took up the National Forum call

for 4 days of action and stayed away on Friday May 2 as well.

International

USA: In Boston on May 1, the Massachusetts Labor Support Project, the Boston Free South Africa Movement and the Massachusetts Labor for a Free South Africa held a "Freedom and Solidarity Day" to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the eight-hour struggle and to focus on the Shell boycott (see SALB 11.5).

Philippines: For the first time in 21 years, all the trade union federations took part in a single May Day celebration, with the left wing May First Movement (KMU) strongly represented. The demonstration was earlier attacked by supporters of the deposed president Marcos.

Nicaragua: Nearly 200,000 people took part in May Day activities called by the Sandinista Workers Federation (CST). In mass rallies speeches called for sacrifice and commitment to defend the gains of the Sandinista revolution against US aggression.

Who is paying for UWUSA?

Rally expenses, for most organisations, are likely to run into the tens of thousands. But because of their sheer magnitude, it is difficult to put a figure on UWUSA's expenses for their rally in King's Park, Durban. Clearly transport was a major component. According to M P Gumede, UWUSA organiser, the new union hired 17 trains at a cost of R27,955 each. In addition, hundreds of buses were hired to ferry supporters to the rally.

There is some confusion about the trains, however. A SATS spokesman confirmed that while it did indeed cost R27,955 to hire a train, Inkatha had not chartered trains. "We laid on the trains at their request and they (the rally goers) paid the normal passenger fares," he said. An UWUSA spokesman in Durban, asked to clear up the matter, could not throw any further light on it.

The other major expense must have been the T-shirts. Tens of thousands of UWUSA T-shirts, bearing the UWUSA slogan, "Jobs, not hunger", were sold at R1 each. (Standard price is closer to R6.)

UWUSA has not been exactly forthcoming about their source of funds, although Gumede said a large proportion of the rally costs had been borne by Inkatha.

Merger To Form New Transport Union

The independent trade union movement in South Africa has taken an important step on the road to "one union, one industry" with the merger of two unions in the transport sector. The merger, between the Transport and General Workers' Union and the Cape Town based General Workers' Union, took place in Pietermaritzburg on May 24 and 25. It is the first merger within the ranks of the COSATU and falls within the federation's aim, announced at its launch in December last year, of "one union, one industry" within six months. Unions in the food sector will merge at a conference to be held on May 31/June 1. Inter-union talks in the metal sector are also reported to be at an advanced stage.

The new union is called the Transport and General Workers' Union and bears the old GWU logo. It will have about 24,000 signed up members, of which about 22,000 are paid up. The general secretary is Jane Barrett, former general secretary of the old T&GWU. The president is Jerry Ntombela, COSATU regional chairman in Northern Natal and a Richards Bay coal terminal worker, the first vice-president is Frederick Gona, formerly the GWU president and a worker at Everite in Brackenfell, the second vice-president is Alfred Ndlovu, a bus driver with KwaZulu Transport and the treasurer is Vivian Zungu, a Putco driver from Springs.

The old T&GWU, which was affiliated to the Federation of South African Trade Unions before COSATU's formation, brought about 14,000 signed up members, of which about 11,000 are paid up, to the new union. About 6,000 of T&GWU's membership were municipal workers and about 2,000 were cleaning and security workers. The union also had 6,000 members in the goods and passenger transport sectors. At present, the municipal workers will stay in the new union until a new national municipal workers' union gets off the ground. About 1,000 of these municipal workers are employed in the transport sector of municipalities anyway, and will thus probably stay permanently in the new union.

T&GWU (the old one) has been organising municipal workers in the Transvaal and Natal for five years and has recently won recognition and stop order rights at the Johannesburg municipality. Jane Barrett reports that sector meetings with other COSATU affiliates organising municipal and local government workers have

been "productive, although co-operation on the ground has been slow." One of the last National Executive Meetings of the old T&G passed a resolution recently expressing the union's commitment to establishing a new national municipal union.

The cleaning and security workers are likely to remain permanently in the new T&GWU. "We have always pushed quite hard that they should come in with the transport workers, because they, too are part of the services sector. The cleaning and services sector is also very competitive and thus wages are low and the workers are vulnerable," according to Barrett.

The organisational backbone of the GWU has been its national strength in the stevedoring industry. The majority of its 4,000 transport sector members were stevedores. It is this control of a waning, but strategic industry that has made the union disproportionately powerful in relation to its numerical strength. (see M Morris in SALB 11.3 and 11.5)

The union also has over 4,000 members in the building supplies industry, about 800 in the engineering and metal sectors and about 1,200 in the services and local government sector. The engineering and local government workers are concentrated in the Western Cape. However, in the building supplies industry, the union has every major firm in the Western Cape, as well as Corobrick in Pietermaritzburg and Empangeni, and two asbestos-cement manufacturing plants, Everite and Turnall, nationally. GWU organisers said before the merger that "while we are really committed to the policy of one union one industry, we are not going to hand over our building supplies workers to a non-existent union." There has, as yet, been no consensus on the question of their eventual union home, but at the moment they will remain in the new T&GWU. "There is no other union that has substantial numbers of building workers and we are very definite about keeping them in our union until a proper building workers' union gets off the ground," said GWU official, Di Cooper.

The new union will be organising principally in a sector which employs some 400,000 people. About 75 percent of all workers in the transport sector are employed by South African Transport Services (SATS), which raises important questions about the union's future direction. Organising the railway workers will be a crucial challenge which the new union will have to confront. It is an awesome prospect, not only because of the size of the SATS

- merger -

operation, but because of SATS' proven hostility to independent trade unions. There are few who will forget the valiant, but in the end unsuccessful, battle that the GWU put up against SATS in the Port Elizabeth docks in 1982. After its defeat, in spite of strong organisation, the GWU realised that railway workers could only be successfully organised under the protection of a large federation.

The two merging unions have been in agreement that railway workers should come into a transport union. However it is a matter of some controversy within COSATU itself. The South African Allied Workers Union, which has some SATS members, believes railway workers should be organised separately into a railway workers' union - a practise in some European countries.

Constitutionally, the merger has not posed major problems. A crucial difference in the two unions' constitutions is that GWU office-bearers are elected at an Annual National Conference, comprising representatives from all the regions and factories in the union. The highest decision making body in the old T&GWU has been the National Executive Committee, which was elected by branch committees. The T&GWU delegation accepted the Annual National Conference as part of the new constitution. Likewise, the GWU accepted a T&G clause that places finances under national, rather than branch control. A new addition to the constitution for both unions, is the establishment of an office-bearers' committee which will meet on a monthly basis. The office-bearers are thus expected to take on a great responsibility in the day-to-day running of the union.

There will be six regions in the new union: three in Natal, Coastal, Northern and Midlands; one in the Western Cape, one in the Eastern Cape; and one in the Transvaal. Each region will elect four delegates to the NEC, except where there are over 5,000 members in the region, in which case six delegates will be elected. The union also has the embryo of a branch in the Orange Free State among bus drivers recruited by the Retail and Allied Workers Union.

Before the merger, the two unions said they were confident that the amalgamation would be a merger in the truest sense of the word. "Neither union will end in a real sense," said Cooper. "The new union has T&G's name and our logo. We have also brought almost equal numbers of members to the merger." Quite apart from the new union's strengthened presence in a critical sector of the economy, the merger stands as a landmark on the road to industrial unionism. (Pippa Green, May 1986)

EAWTUSA: Under State Attack

The Electrical and Allied Workers Trade Union of South Africa was launched in March 1986. It was formed after talks which started in 1983 led to a merger between Electrical and Allied Workers Union and the Electrical and Allied Trades Union. These two unions originally acted as "African" and "Coloured" parallel unions under the control of the conservative white-run South African Electrical Workers Association. The black workers, however, refused to accept subordinate status. The union they have created represents 25,000 workers in the electrical industries throughout South Africa.

Even before the new union was officially launched trade unionists in the old electrical unions were under attack: the Cape Town offices were ransacked in September 1985; Raymond Khoza, union president had his home in Mamelodi petrol bombed; four Cape Town unionists - B Williams, C Theys, M Bam and R October - were detained in terms of the State of Emergency; union member Andrew Odendaal was charged with arson; and Transvaal organiser Phillip Ndaou was allegedly assaulted by police.

Recent developments

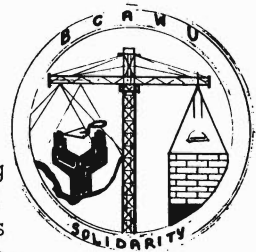
Now five Cape Town unionists - Brian Williams, Michael Bam, Gavin Cloete, Chris Appollis and Stan Croeser have been charged under the Internal Security Act - because they tried to attend the funeral of fellow union member, Moses Landane, who was shot and killed by police in Atteridgeville in September 1985. The case is due to be heard in July.

More sinister still, the union's advocate, J Strauss, has learnt that the state wants to secure a conviction so that the trade union activities of the five, and in particular of Brian Williams, can be terminated. Advocate Strauss has since sent a memo to the Attorney-General outlining these allegations. (For further developments phone Cape Town 419-1154; 21-7675)

(from an EAWTUSA communique, May 1986)

Postscript: Despite harrasment, the members of EAWTUSA have continued to struggle for improved conditions. In May labourers in the electrical contracting industry secured a 35% increase (58c per hour), their largest rise in 12 years.

BCAWU: On Site



As well as organising in factories producing building materials (see SALBs 10.5 and 10.3) the Building Construction and Allied Workers Union also organises building workers in construction. This is a notoriously difficult sector to organise due to the seasonal and economic fluctuations in the industry and to the fact that there are no fixed workplaces - sites close after the completion of a job and workers move on. In South Africa the high number of construction workers who are migrant contract workers adds a further dimension to the picture.

Concor Construction

Some 7-800 Concor construction workers - employed on the Matimba power station near Ellisras in the north-western Transvaal - stopped work on Saturday April 19 to protest at the dismissal of a shop steward. The management responded with mass dismissals and repatriation of the workers to the various "homelands". Some of the workers took their protest to the head offices of the company in Johannesburg - using for transport the very buses provided by the company for their deportation!

Prior to these events the workers had started to organise into a union - the BCAWU which arrived on site earlier in the year - and had elected 5 shopstewards to represent them. The principal grievance was wages - the basic rate is 97c an hour. The workers formulated the demand for an increase of R2,00 an hour across the board and the shopstewards approached management. The workers' demand was rejected - according to management because workers had already received an increase of 7,7% in March. At this stage, say the workers, one of their shop stewards was dismissed. A stoppage ensued - but it was on a Saturday when the workers felt they had every right to withdraw from overtime working. Management's response was to dismiss workers. They were instructed to report on the Monday to receive outstanding wages. On the Monday the police were present, seeking to break up the workers into small groups in order, according to the union, to intimidate them back to work. At 4.00pm the buses arrived and the deportations commenced. But management had not considered that workers might have their own feelings on the matter: "workers control" was established on some

of the buses and the drivers instructed to make for Crown Mines where 400 workers spent the night outside the Concor headquarters. At this stage union officials also became involved in order to represent the workers. However, the company did not respond positively, say union officials.

Since then the union has continued to press the workers' case. Many of the dismissed workers have now been re-employed. The union, however, says it was not possible to contact all the workers dispersed to the homelands. Moreover, they say that Concor is re-employing selectively, and they fear that union activists will not be taken back.

Murray and Roberts

The building industry has been hard hit by the recession. But when Murray and Roberts Transvaal Services (Elandsfontein; employing 300) and Murray and Roberts Engineering (Carltonville; employing 250) decided to retrench 57 workers they did not even consult with the workers' union, the BCAWU.

At the time the union was still negotiating for a recognition agreement - and there were no laid down procedures. The union nonetheless prepared an action against the company under section 43 of the Labour Relations Act. At this point the company asked for an out of court settlement. The retrenched workers were re-instated and the company subsequently signed a recognition agreement. The union views this as an important victory which will ensure greater respect for workers' rights.

David Beckett Construction

The David Beckett Construction Company (Bryanston) which employs about 70 workers, dismissed 9 when they arrived late to renew their call-in cards in January this year. The BCAWU charged the company with failing to take account of the problems associated with the contract labour system. Workers receive leave once a year, they return to the "homelands", and sometimes there are matters which have to be attended to immediately - since they cannot be at home for the rest of the year.

The union took the matter to the Industrial Council but were not satisfied with the outcome. Initially the company had seemed ready to settle. But after the Industrial Council members hearing the

case had caucused separately with the company, according to union representatives, the atmosphere changed. The company's attitude hardened and they refused to address the issue of re-instatement.

This attitude did not surprise the union which has already been refused a place on the Industrial Council which is effectively governed by an alliance of conservative employers and conservative "craft" union. The employers' response, said one union official, "was in line with usual practices in construction of dehumanising workers."

The union has since made an application to the Industrial Court under section 46 of the Act for permanent re-instatement. The company has since requested an out of court settlement, paying lost time to the dismissed workers and re-instating them. A union official warned that building employers should "respect workers' rights while time still allows. Workers are getting impatient over prevailing conditions."

Bilhard Construction

In 1984 two shop stewards were dismissed by Bilhard Construction (Kempton Park; employing 220 workers). When the workers committee tried to get the two re-instated, a third shop steward was sacked. Workers responded by striking in solidarity. The police were brought in and another 8 shop stewards were arrested for trespass. The management refused to discuss the matter with the workers and the shop stewards remained in custody for 1 week.

From there the BCAWU pursued the matter through their lawyers. During 1985 the company requested an out of court settlement which involved compensation and re-instatement for the dismissed workers. The union is currently negotiating for a recognition agreement.

Postscript: In the last week of May 290 Concor workers at sites in Amalgam, Johannesburg and Westonaria were dismissed after an illegal two-day strike. Workers demanded a minimum wage of R2,30 an hour (presently R1,56), an additional 70 cents across the board, and free protective clothing. The company's position was that no increase would be considered before September. Meanwhile union members at Concor concerns in Klerksdorp, Olifantsfontein, Welkom and Carletonville threatened solidarity action. After meeting with the union, Concor offered workers their jobs back, and agreed to provide free protective clothing.

Womens Stay-away in Port Alfred

The rape of an elderly woman sparked an all-women stay-away in the Eastern Cape seaside town of Port Alfred. It is believed to be the first stay-away of its kind in South Africa. Domestic workers and women employed on the municipality's job creation scheme embarked on a week-long stay-away in protest against the police's failure to arrest the rapist, who residents said was clearly identified by his victim.

But when police responded by detaining 14 community leaders, and white business leaders halted negotiations with community leaders, residents started boycotting shops again. It was a predictable escalation of events in a township where the see-saw of detention and boycott has become familiar. A member of the Port Alfred Womens Organisation (PAWO) said: "We tried to make Port Alfred normal again, but some people don't want it. Instead of helping us, they arrested us."

It all began on May Day, when a 58-year-old resident was taken from her home by a township resident, and taken to the stadium where she was raped and stabbed repeatedly. She was then left there by her assailant, and was only found the next morning by a young girl. The police and ambulance service were alerted, and in the meantime a large group of residents collected, including the alleged rapist. The woman pointed him out, and police took him away. His victim was taken to hospital.

Coincidentally on the same day, a group of young people singing in the street to mark May Day were dispersed by the police, and five young women arrested. They were detained under section 50 of the Internal Security Act, which provides for 14 days of preventive detention.

According to the police, the alleged rapist appeared in court the next day and was released "pending further investigations". The same evening his house was burned down. Residents of the township, which has no name, were incensed. Community members said the man had a history of assaults on women, including rape, but they believed he had been released because he was a friend of the police. Two days after the incident, a PAWO member said, he had been seen riding around in the police van reading a newspaper.

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It was decided to embark on the stay-away to put pressure on the police to take action against a man perceived to be a danger to women in the community. "We decided to stay away from work so that they can catch him," said the PAWO member. It was seen as unfair that a rapist was being allowed to go free, while five young students were being detained.

From Monday, May 5, Port Alfred was empty of women workers, while their menfolk were at their jobs as usual. Asked why men had not been called on for their support, the PAWO member said: "Why should we, he wasn't going to rape them, he was going to rape us."

The stay-away lasted until the end of the week, and on the following Monday some women started going back to work. By the next day, all women were back, except some domestics whose employers had fired them. However, on the same day the police stepped in and detained about 16 community leaders, including the chairperson of PAWO, Mrs Kolekha Nkwinti and her husband, prominent community leader Gugile Nkwinti.

The consumer boycott was soon in place, and seems to have prompted the early release of Gugile Nkwinti. He was freed some four days before his 14 days' spell of detention was due to end. It is not the first time he has been released early after a consumer boycott was launched. During an earlier spell of detention last year, massive pressure was brought to bear on local police by local business leaders, and this secured an early release.

The other 13 were freed on the day their 14 days ended, May 26. However, the consumer boycott has remained in place because of the breaking off of talks by businessmen, organised in the Port Alfred Employers' Federation.

People's power

Port Alfred's township is a highly organised community. Although the PAWO is a relatively new organisation, having been formed only about one and a half months ago, it joins a range of well-established bodies united in the Port Alfred Residents' Civic Organisation. The others include the Nonzamo Student Guardian Association; a parents' body; the Port Alfred Workers Union, affiliated to the South African Allied Workers Union; the Port Alfred Youth Congress and the Port Alfred Pensioners Association.

Coming into the township, one is struck by an impression of people's power at work. There is a cheerful roadblock at the entrance, kept by youths who interrupt their soccer game every now and again to check a car for goods bought in defiance of the boycott. Right at the entrance is the old East Cape development board building, part of which has been taken over by the community for a creche.

But community leaders rejected suggestions it was a liberated zone. "It can't be as long as the police still come in periodically to make arrests, said Mr Gugile Nkwinti, although police did not "camp" in the township like they did elsewhere. "We are partially in control of some aspects of our lives, we are effectively nullifying institutional control over us," he said.

One example of this was that the Nonzamo Student Guardian Association (Nonzamo is the name of the secondary school) had gained a direct say in the running of the schools, including the hiring and firing of teachers. As far as general administration of the township is concerned, the ECDB is practically defunct, and no rents are being paid.

The Civic Organisation consists of both the interest groups, such as the workers, pensioners and other bodies, and area and street committees. The base line is the street assembly, a meeting of all residents in a particular street. The executives of the four interest groups make up the Central Committee which meets once a month.

The Central Committee elects an Executive Committee, which meets weekly. Any proposal from one of the interest groups will be passed on to the area and street committees for discussion, who will pass back their feelings to the Executive Committee. It takes two weeks to take a decision: "What we are practising here is democracy," said Mr Nkwinti.

Examples of decisions taken were one that shebeens should close at 8 pm. Another important decision taken recently was on a code of punishments for people not prepared to adhere to decisions taken by the community organisations. These include cleaning the building, housing a creche and an advice office known as the "Information Centre", cleaning the old cemetery, a directive to come for political education and the most severe punishment, being isolated from the community. "We do not believe in Peoples' Courts in our situation. Our strength is in education", Mr Nkwinti said.

- womens stay-away -

Port Alfred Womens Organisation

The aims of PAWO are to fight for the rights of women in all spheres. Besides their campaign over the rape issue, the women have embarked on a programme of speaking to students in their schools about the importance of discipline. The drive has already borne fruits, residents said. Also, women have joined together to help people faced with a death in the family, either through police action or otherwise.

PAWO has not yet applied for membership of the umbrella civic, but this is seen as just a matter of time.

(Franz Kruger, May 1986)

Technical Change and Union Organisation The Closure of Epol in Cape Town*

At the end of October 1985, Epol closed its animal feeds factory in Maitland, Cape Town. Some three hundred workers were made redundant and the Food and Canning Workers Union lost one of its best organised factories.

Organising Epol in Cape Town began in 1982 when a number of African contract workers approached the union. By June of that year, over 70% of the workers voted to have the union represent them. The African contract workers remained the core, but support for the union was soon far more widespread as "Coloured" and white workers joined. In the plant, jobs were differentiated on racial lines with most Africans doing primarily unskilled manual work eg. bag handlers, most Coloured workers occupying semi-skilled positions eg. drivers, and whites performing skilled or supervisory work eg. mechanics. According to workers interviewed, management constantly

* This paper is based on interviews with management and technical personnel in a number of companies in the animal feeds industry, as well as union officials and workers in the Epol plant.

looked at what expertise was required and what facilities were required and we thought we would come to the rescue [of these disaffected workers] and help them develop a muscle.

SALB: Mr Conco, you are setting up an infrastructure and administrative facilities for this new union before there is a membership paying subscription. Who is funding the new union? Is Inkatha funding it?

Conco: What we are doing, is providing office facilities if they need them.

SALB: And if there's an organiser's salary that needs to be paid?

Conco: We are offering them all facilities.

SALB: Do you have a target, say, to organise a factory in Northern Natal, or a region, and then get stop orders so the union can start paying for itself?

Conco: Mr Gumede will be able to answer that one.

Gumede: In fact, not. We are not targetting a particular region. We are based in Natal and the Transvaal. We will try to get a majority at any factory.

SALB: I'm sure you must know, Mr Gumede, that there was always a tension between the unions that organised along industrial lines and those which were called the "UDF unions" like Saawu, that organised on regional lines and I would have thought you had less in common with those unions but it seems you might be organising on a factory floor level in the same sort of way. Could you possibly comment on that?

Gumede: Really, I was trained when I was working for Fosatu and have been for ten years now in a strategy of organisation and I would still follow the same direction.

SALB: So would you get one factory, organise it properly and then move on?

Gumede: Yes. But if another factory comes first and says we can organise ourselves, then we would just go there and address them and get someone to handle the stop order facilities, then we just

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There are a number of significant features of the industry. Firstly, as with many industries in South Africa today, the balanced animal feed industry is dominated by a number of South Africa's largest corporate groups. Epol is part of the Premier Group and hence connected with Anglo American. Meadow Feeds is part of the Tiger Group and hence connected with Barlow Rand. Fed Foods also operates in the industry and it is part of Federale Volksbellegings and hence connected with Sanlam. There are also food processors who are part of the large cooperatives. As part of South Africa's largest corporate groupings, the food processors have access to funding should they decide to modernise their plants.

Secondly, because transport costs render it uneconomic to produce from a single source, plants are located throughout the country and serve the regional market. Regional economic fluctuations therefore are significant for the industry.

Thirdly, a number of the large corporations who dominate the production of balanced animal feeds also have significant interests in factory farming, especially in chickens both for meat and eggs. As a result of this vertical integration, the feed producers have something of a "captive market" in so far as they supply a related company. The extent to which this occurs varies considerably, but at Epol in the Western Cape this was particularly high. In the order of 60% of production was for the corporation's chicken subsidiary, Farm Fare.

Finally, old and new plants coexist within the industry. Epol's plant in Maitland was over 30 years old and dates from the time when the factory farming, especially of chickens, was only just beginning. Meadow Feed's Paarl plant came into production in 1978. There has been significant technical change in the industry as the nature of the product changed and also as more automated processes connected with microelectronics became available. So long as market demand was growing and there was limited excess capacity, the older and more costly plants could remain in production. But, problems began when the recession hit and the demand for animal products, especially chickens and eggs, declined. This was particularly significant in those regions where the decline in demand was greatest.

The closure of Epol's plant in Cape Town

Epol's plant at Maitland in Cape Town was designed for the contin-

uous production of a limited number of product lines. However, advances in factory farming, particularly of poultry, have increasingly required a greater variety of products as a more varied diet is fed to the chickens at different stages in their growth cycle. At the same time, the market demand for chickens and eggs, which grew rapidly for several years, slowed down considerably recently, resulting in excess capacity in the industry as a whole. In order therefore to maintain volumes and keep the plant operating at close to capacity, Epol were forced to expand their product lines. By the time the plant in Cape Town closed, Epol were producing over 120 different products.

The principal problem then encountered was that the frequent switching to produce the different products was extremely time consuming, requiring a number of manual operations, from changing of dies to machine cleaning. Management estimated a 50% downtime. This was confirmed by one of the workers who stressed that the amount of downtime in the plant had been increasing steadily over time. In the more modern plants, those built over the last ten years or so, change over to new feed products is effected electronically. There is a computer card for each product. This is inserted and the requirements are read, the appropriate instructions conveyed and any re-setting of machines is effected automatically. This reduces downtime greatly and at Epol's modern Isando plant, for example, downtime related to product changes is said to be less than 5%. Given the high value of the ingredients, automatic and more accurate electronic weighing integrated with computerised stock control are important additional advantages enjoyed by the more modern plants and absent from Epol in Cape Town.

There were other problems too. When the plant was designed, little consideration was given to problems of contamination as between feeds, since few toxic substances were used. However, this has changed and special precautions have to be taken to prevent contamination occurring in the older plants. At Epol in Cape Town, however, the chicken feeds had recently contaminated the horse feeds and the company was facing large claims from race horse owners as a consequence. A number of the plant's senior management had been recently dismissed as a result. Some workers believe that the insurers refused to re-insure Epol following this event, and that this was a principal factor in the plant's closure.

The plant was also very labour intensive. Management attempts to cut down the labour complement were opposed by the workers' comm-

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ittee. The union's success in securing higher wages also exacerbated the disadvantages of labour intensity for management.

As the demand for feeds stagnated or declined and the industry had greater excess capacity, producers started cutting prices in order to maintain their production volumes and profit margins fell. The net result was that the Epol plant was unprofitable, and increasingly so. On September 30, Epol management notified the union of their intention to close the plant. At the same time, management notified the union of their intention to build a new plant to be operational in three years time. Management were not prepared to accept any of the alternatives put forward by the union. These included short-time working until the new plant became operational and a reduced scale of operations to supply Farm Fare only.

The union argued particularly strongly for the latter option. They argued that by remaining in production for Farm Fare, the company would avoid becoming dependent on supplies from Meadow Feeds and hence vulnerable to their principal competitors. Management countered that the costs of production at Epol would still be unacceptably high and that Farm Fare was itself losing money and would not be able to pay the higher prices. Moreover, there would still be quality problems at the plant and these would continue to affect Farm Fare adversely. They were confident that Farm Fare would be able to secure a contract at favourable prices for the supply of feed over the period of time that Epol would be closed even if this meant that the contract was placed with a principal competitor which also had interests in poultry and egg production.

The Epol plant closed on October 31. The premises have since been used only as a depot for company products manufactured elsewhere and about fifty workers are still employed. Recently management has given notice of its intention to retrench even further. A three year contract for the supply of the Premier Group's Farm Fare chicken operation has been secured with the principal competitor, Meadow Feeds of the Tiger Group.

Terms of retrenchment

With management refusing to consider any alternatives to plant closure, discussion focussed on the terms of retrenchment. There was an existent retrenchment agreement which provided for 1 weeks pay for every year of service up to 5 years, and one week for every two years of service thereafter. The union raised its demand

for 2 weeks pay for every year of service and management eventually acceded to this. Management undertook to freeze all hiring in Premier Group companies until the end of 1985, in order to give preference to ex-Epol employees. In addition, contract workers were to be paid the unexpired portion of their contracts and were allowed to remain in the company hostel until the end of the year. Management undertook to give first option of employment in the new plant to those who were retrenched.

The final settlement was, in South African terms, a generous one. Moreover, it was considerably better than the existent agreement. Most of the workforce had accumulated many years of service. Moreover, a large number of workers had only recently renewed their contracts and they were paid out in full. Thus, many workers actually opted for retrenchment rather than remaining on to work in the depot. However, any assessment of the settlement as generous must be qualified in a number of ways.

Firstly, the closure of the plant was very abrupt, leaving the union little room to negotiate. Precisely one month elapsed between the time that the workers were informed of management's intentions and the actual closure of the plant. Secondly, management only acceded to worker demands for two weeks a year after considerable pressure and only after the workers had discovered that this was to be given to administrative staff. The workers' committee demanded that equal treatment be accorded to all employees.

Thirdly, the undertaking to freeze all hiring in the Premier Group until the end of the year and to give preference for all vacancies to ex-Epol employees had a limited effect. Only an estimated twenty workers were re-employed in other Group companies. According to a worker interviewed, vacancies did arise but when workers went to apply they were rejected on specious grounds. One of the companies, for example, suddenly demanded that bag handlers should be able to read and write. Many of the firms in the Premier Group were non-unionised and it would seem that, whatever the intentions of Head Office, local management were keen to exclude union members.

Fourthly, the promise to re-employ workers when the new plant opens may not amount to a great deal. A new plant will certainly employ many less workers. Moreover, the skill requirements (see below) may differ and this provision of re-employment is explicitly subject to workers meeting the skill requirement. But, most

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significant of all is whether or not a new plant will be built. Management have always insisted that it will. However, they have always qualified that by saying simultaneously that this decision is subject to the economic climate and that if things remained depressed then they would have to reconsider. Management in some of the competitor firms were very sceptical that Epol would ever re-open and pointed to the fact that even with Epol's closure, considerable excess capacity remains in the industry. On the other hand, workers pointed to the fact that Epol were still taking delivery of new trucks in excess of their present needs at the depot as evidence that there is an intention to re-open.

However, were Epol to re-open a new modern plant, this would cause immediate difficulties for the other producers. All of the managements spoken to stressed that a new Epol plant would have to be on such a scale as to "take market share from the competition" and that this would particularly threaten the older and more labour intensive producers. It is in these older plants that the union is best organised. In the words of an Epol worker interviewed:

I am sure that Epol will re-open. What worries me is that if they do, for sure Koeberg and Victory Mills will close... and these are our guys too.

This raises issues of the appropriate response and organising strategy of the union in such an industry.

Conclusions: the closure of Epol

In concluding, we first wish to draw out some points specific to the animal feeds industry, and then to raise, tentatively, some general issues about technical change and union organising which are more widely applicable.

The difficulties in transporting animal feed products from one region to another results in a regional segmentation of the market. Consequently, a more technically efficient company in any one region may not be the most efficient company in any other region. There will therefore be an incentive to make behind the scenes deals whereby company A might agree to close a less efficient plant in one region in return for a similar action by company B in another region where company A possesses the more technically efficient plant.

This is what appears to have happened with Epol and Meadow Feeds. Epol was the most technically efficient plant in the Eastern Cape

while Meadow Feeds was the most efficient in the Western Cape. Hence the segmented regional market in a situation of a significant technological gap between plants and declining demand, produced a trade off. Meadow Feeds closed its Eastern Cape plant while Epol closed in the Western Cape. If market demand contracts in other regions, similar patterns may be expected to occur.

As regards the impact of future technical changes within the industry, the area most likely to be affected is the bag handling and bag cleaning/repairing sections. This is a highly labour intensive activity utilising jute bags which are repaired and cleaned before being filled again. Modern plants in the advanced capitalist countries mostly transport feed in bulk and, where it is bagged, non-returnable/non-re-usable paper bags are used. The latter process is also highly automated. One can therefore expect that future plants in South Africa will utilise disposable paper bags. It is therefore very likely that the newer plants will utilise significantly less labour, particularly heavy manual labour, as the older bag handling processes are transformed. In this regard, it is significant that the majority of workers employed in Epol's Western Cape plant were in the bag handling sections. If Epol really does build a very modern plant in the Western Cape, it will certainly automate labour intensive processes, in particular bag handling. The overall employment prospects are therefore not very favourable. Moreover, the skill profile of the workforce manning the more automated plant will be drastically different from the skill profile of the ex-Epol workers.

The dilemma of technical change

The Epol case indirectly demonstrates the general dilemma increasingly facing trade unionists confronted with major technical changes. If a union accepts the need for these changes, then workers will often be made redundant or, at best, those waiting at the gate may not find employment. If it resists these changes, then the prospect of plant closure looms ominously on the horizon. There are no easy solutions to this dilemma. It is, however, possible, on the basis of the Epol example, to make a number of more generally applicable points for unionists confronted with significant technical change in recessionary times.

The Epol case demonstrates the importance of technical change and the need for the trade union movement to develop appropriate strategies to cope with it. Age of plant and relative technical

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levels in periods of market contraction are obviously critical for the continued existence of union organisation. Major technical changes will give the newer plants a pronounced advantage over the older less technically advanced plants. This may not be crucial in times of boom - although it will undoubtedly affect the firm's ability to meet certain union demands - but, in recessionary periods when market demand contracts, the pressure on less advanced firms is likely to be severe.

Lessons for union organising

Hence, the first conclusion for unions is that they cannot afford to organise in a hit or miss fashion. Understanding the technical profile of an industry and its market structure, both nationally and in particular regions, is extremely important. This information must be utilised in order to seriously target firms and plants and then to give organisational priority to those targeted. Organisational strength in a firm or plant teetering on the brink of the competitive abyss is simply not the same as being strong in the technically most efficient plant. Nor indeed does this give the union much strength in the industry or in the region. If the slogan of industrial unionism is to be given real substance then the union has to adopt a wider perspective that incorporates an assessment of these factors.

In the Epol case, the FCWU lack of a presence in the most technically advanced plant in the Western Cape, namely Meadow Feeds in Paarl, was not due to any lack of trying to organise that plant. The limited extent to which Meadow Feeds utilised African contract workers made the union's task more difficult as did a major wage increase given by management at the time, combined with broad hints that a union was not necessary to the welfare of the workers. Both factors, the more limited use of contract workers and the willingness of management to grant wage increases rested, of course, in the more technically advanced nature of Meadow Feed's Paarl plant. The union failed to organise the plant for a number of reasons, but the point being made here is that the consequences of the failure to organise a plant with such a competitive advantage can be severe. Prioritising a plant in terms of these sort of criteria, enables a union to judge more accurately when the level of resources being injected into organising a plant are justified by the consequences of not organising a particular plant.

The nub of the problem is that tying up all of the older plants in

a region can, in fact, jeopardise a union presence in these very plants if the advanced plant/s are not included. By so doing the union is putting economic pressure on the older plants on behalf of its members while, at the same time, the technological gap between the older plants and the newer plants is putting even greater pressure on the ability of the former to meet these demands. We are not suggesting that the unions should not organise these older plants, but rather that organising the older plants, while leaving the newer technically more advanced plants, may prove to be a self-defeating exercise.

Targeting and prioritising plants according to technical efficiency will also change the various priorities that a union will be concerned with in its negotiations with management. In the older firms, it is important to negotiate retrenchment and redundancy agreements at a time when workers have the possibility of securing a more favourable deal rather than when the threat of closure looms. In addition, a redundancy or retrenchment agreement should contain retraining clauses for workers made redundant by technical change. In the possible event of any new plant being built, retraining should allow for the acquisition of skills pertinent to employment in such a plant.

Finally, it is apparent that promises and agreements to employ workers in other plants and firms within a single company are largely toothless unless the union has the ability to bring some pressure to bear on the parent company and/or local managements to ensure that such agreements are acted upon. This requires the ability to monitor employment in other plants and firms and company hiring of retrenched workers. There seems to be only two methods of achieving this: (i) an Industrial Council type agreement restricting employment to union members or retrenched workers from the industry; or (ii) the active operation of industry wide or company wide shop steward councils. Their task would be to monitor and enforce agreements in their own plants, as well as to ensure co-operation and the flow of information across plants.

(David Kaplan, Economic History UCT, and Mike Morris, Sociology University of Natal Durban)

PE Auto Industry – The End of an Era (1)

"People here no longer talk about the scarcity of jobs, but the non-existence of jobs." - Ford shop steward.

"We don't see that the social and economic changes that are necessary to bring about increased employment in this area will find favour with the Government." - Fred Sauls, general secretary, National Automobile and Allied Workers Union.

When Ford closes its remaining assembly plant in Port Elizabeth in June it will immediately put 950 workers on the streets. Relatively generous retrenchment benefits, however, do not seem likely to dull the bitterness of Port Elizabeth motor workers, who do not believe that the benefits will tide them over until they find new jobs. They do not believe there will be new jobs.

The withdrawal of Ford from the region raises two important issues: one is the future for trade unions in the motor industry, particularly the Motor Assembly and Component Workers Union (MACWUSA) whose strongest (and some would argue, only) base in the PE motor industry was in the Sierra plant at Struandale (previously the Cortina plant). The June closure of the Sierra plant will affect close on 800 MACWUSA members, about one third of their current claimed membership in the Eastern Cape. The National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU), the largest in the COSATU stable in the Eastern Cape, with over 11,000 members, has also been hard-hit by the recession in the motor industry and particularly the withdrawal of Ford from the region which so far has cost it 2,200 members. The question of a merger, between not only the motor unions, but other unions in the metal industry is now high on the agenda. The other issue, of course - and a more complex one - is that of disinvestment. Is Ford's withdrawal from the region and its merger with the Anglo-American owned Amcar a step to disinvest and, if so, how are the unions reacting to it? We begin with an examination of the crisis in the South African motor industry.

Missing consumers

"Many US companies have stayed in South Africa waiting for the black market to take off. It hasn't. Blacks simply haven't become the consumers everyone was hoping for." - David Hauck,

Southern African specialist with the Investor Responsibility Research Centre in the USA.

Since 1982, over 6,000 motor industry workers in Port Elizabeth have been retrenched. Nationally, over 35,000 workers in the motor assembly, components and retail industries have lost their jobs in the past 18 months.

Employment in the motor assembly plants, which peaked at 50,000 in 1982 during the mini-boom in the industry, had dropped to fewer than 39,000 by 1985. The Motor Industries Federation estimated then, too, that the motor retail trade had shed about 15 percent of its workforce in one year, while the National Association of Automobile Components Manufacturers estimated that 10,000 jobs had been lost in 1985. (2)

Both the component and assembly industry have been operating at greatly reduced capacities in the past year. The components industry is operating at about 32 percent of its capacity, according to one estimate, while motor assembly workers have been hard-hit, not only by retrenchments, but by short-time, plant closure and forced extended holidays.

Motor car sales have shrunk by 33 percent in the past five years - from 301,000 in 1981 to 200,000 by the end of 1985. Declining car sales seem a peculiarly South African phenomenon, not reflected in world-wide trends. Car sales in the UK increased in the same period from 955,000 to 987,000, in Japan from 6,9 million to 7,4 million and in Australia, which has a market size comparable to South Africa, from 358,000 to 402,000. The motor industry in South Africa is geared to produce 700,000 cars a year. Even in a "good year", it has been able to sell only half that amount.

Industrialists blame the crisis in the industry on the "overcrowded market" in South Africa, while some also attribute blame to "rising labour costs." There are 11 motor manufacturers in South Africa, they point out, operating in a shrinking market to sell 250 different versions of passenger cars and 120 variations of light commercial vehicles. (4)

It is clear, though, that one of the major problems is, as Hauck would put it, the "economic constraints of apartheid". More bluntly, most of the South African people are simply too poor to provide any market for the motor car manufacturers. Statistics last

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year indicated that blacks own approximately one tenth of the number of cars owned by whites in South Africa. White car ownership is 450 per 1,000, while the concentration of black car ownership is about 40 per 1,000. (5)

About 75 percent of motor sales in the past have been to companies - sales which have now been badly affected by the perks tax. The market for cars in South Africa has not only not grown, contrary to US companies' expectations, it has declined. The standard of living for most people in South Africa does not accomodate privately owned cars, and the profit realisation of the automobile companies has become seriously threatened.

Ford Motor Company - 60 years in Port Elizabeth

"On paper Samcor - 60 percent owned by the mighty Anglo-American, 40 percent by Ford of Canada - is doing all the right things, painful though some may be in the short term." - Finance writer, The Star, 19.12.85.

"When the issue of closure was clarified, the workers just said to hell with Ford, we just want our money then let them fuck off." - Fred Sauls, NAAWU general secretary.

The story goes that in 1905 the Ford Motor Company picked the name of a Port Elizabeth hardware merchant out of a catalogue and asked him whether he would distribute Fords for them in South Africa. In 1924, Fords began to be assembled in PE with parts coming from Canadian Ford subsidiaries.

Until the early 1960s, local content of vehicles produced at the PE plant was about 15 percent. After that legislation required that South African assembled cars comprise at least 66% of locally manufactured components. The Neave plant, which closed down at the end of last year, was built in 1948 and originally comprised the whole of Ford's South African operation. Before closure it assembled Granadas, Escourts, Ford one tonner Cargo trucks, tractors and Bantams. The Struandale complex, situated near the African township of New Brighton, consists of an assembly plant and various parts and services warehouses. The Cortina plant was established in 1973 and originally employed about 700 workers.

When the company announced its merger with the Anglo-American owned Amcar at the beginning of 1985, the total workforce was

4,720, of which 1,975 were employed at Struandale (Sierra) assembly plant and engine plant. At that point Ford SA ceased to exist as a separate company. Ford Canada now owns 42 percent of the South African Motor Corporation (SAMCOR), while Anglo-American owns the rest.

The company announced that the Neave and truck plants would close during the year, but assured workers and the public that the Sierra plant would remain in operation "for some six or seven years" (6), as would the engine plant. The Neave closure was expected to cost about 1,700 jobs at the time. It was a bitter blow for the motor unions in Port Elizabeth, particularly NAAWU, which had lost most of the 900 workers retrenched from Ford the previous year. "Painful... in the short term", as a financial journalist wrote, is one way to describe the loss of 2,200 jobs and the impending loss of a further 950. NAAWU and MACWUSA both vowed to fight the merger "on the factory floor" (7) while Les Kettledas, of NAAWU, accused Ford and Anglo-American of "acting in a completely irresponsible manner towards the social responsibility that they espouse."

NAAWU had learnt of the merger on January 30 - the day before it was publicly announced - "but now we learn that negotiations [between Anglo and Ford] have been going on for a whole year," Kettledas said. (8) "What Ford does not seem to realise," Kettledas said later, "is that it will not be 2,000 employees out of work but 2,000 families living without an income."

A year after the merger was announced, Fred Sauls, NAAWU general secretary recalled: "We started off trying to get the company to talk to us [about the possibility of the merger] but they said nothing was confirmed. The only time they wanted to talk to us was when the announcement of the merger had already been made. We couldn't mobilise around the issue. We then warned our membership that if they were moving Neave to the Transvaal, in terms of logic the engine and Sierra plants would also move. Then, when the issue was clarified, the guys said: To hell with Ford. We just want our money then let them fuck off."

The Neave plant closed at the end of the year leaving about 1,300 people without jobs. About 150 at the Sierra plant also lost their jobs, because Ford retrenched according to the last in, first out (LIFO) system and some Neave workers were shifted to other plants. The Sierra workers who survived the December retrenchment returned

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to work from the Christmas break, only to be told a week later that the Sierra plant was also to close, in spite of several assurances to the contrary.

A MACWUSA shop steward at the Sierra plant, Siphso Dubase, said he believed the decision had taken even the local management by surprise. "The managing director [of SAMCOR], Spenser Sterling, came down and they arranged for hush-hush meetings with the superintendent and told them of the decision of the company to close down the plant by the second half of this year. Then they called us to a meeting and it was just a matter of informing us, not discussing it. It was just a matter of take it or leave it. The workers were disappointed and angry at the same time. They were disappointed because management had made a promise to workers who had survived the December retrenchment that they had not intended to keep. We had opened new accounts, thinking we were going to retain our jobs, but when we came back from holiday we got this shocking news."

"They were angry too, but they felt powerless, so just had to contain their anger. After all these years of working for the company, the company was just pulling the mat from under their feet. It seemed not to care about the welfare of its workers. Moreover, the closure was not something that was decided overnight. They told people at the eleventh hour and were not considering the fact that people had serious commitments and were planning for their children."

Severance pay negotiated between Ford and MACWUSA, which had a substantial membership at the Sierra plant, and NAAWU, which has been hardest-hit by the Ford closure, are generous by most standards, Mr D P Pieterse, Ford's Employee Relations Manager, confirmed workers would receive 50% of their earnings for a minimum period of twelve months, up to a maximum of 18 months, depending on length of service. UIF payments will supplement income for the first 6 months. But in the context of Port Elizabeth in 1986 this is no more than a stop-gap measure. Significantly, part of the retrenchment agreement was that the company donate R50,000 to the Port Elizabeth School Feeding Fund "to ensure that scholars who go to school without enough to eat as a result of their parents being unemployed will have something to eat." (9)

Newspaper headlines in the local press daily proclaim the disasters of unemployment in the region: "Desperate Plight of PE Starving" and "How do you cope when the City of Promise become the City of

Despair" read two in the space of a week in February last year. No one can quite put a finger on the size of the unemployment problem in Port Elizabeth, but estimates range as high as 56%. (10)

Last year, Livingstone Hospital in Port Elizabeth reported that 41% of children under the age of five admitted to hospital were underdeveloped due to lack of nutrition. (11)

Dubase summed up the situation: "The future here is very bleak. When Ford leaves, many of the small engineering firms, the tyre companies, the windshield makers and the headlamp makers are definitely going to close down. Other industries will also be affected, like furniture and consumer goods and these workers are going to lose their jobs. People here no longer talk about the scarcity of jobs but the non-existence of jobs."

Two unions

Unity amongst the motor workers in Port Elizabeth has been bedevilled by the existence of two unions in the automobile industry. The rapid collapse of the motor industry, particularly in the Eastern Cape, has put questions of union consolidation firmly on the agenda. A merger between NAAWU and MACWUSA, now both Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) affiliates, does not seem to be on the cards. However, the local unions of the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) are holding talks to establish a combined metalworkers' union, which will include the motor workers.

It is no secret in the labour movement that there has been little love lost between NAAWU, an affiliate of the former FOSATU, and MACWUSA, often described as a "UDF union", since the latter was formed six years ago. MACWUSA's backbone of support in the Port Elizabeth motor industry was in the Sierra plant at Ford, where it had between 700 and 800 members.

MACWUSA was in fact born at the Sierra plant (then the Cortina plant, originally established by the company in 1973). The labour force was on average younger and more educated than the other Ford workers, and was drawn mainly from the surrounding African townships. (12) Writing a year after the strike at the Cortina plant, when workers downed tools to demand the return to work of PEBCO leader, Thozamile Botha who had resigned under some pressure, Favis reminds us of the "bitter struggles" these workers had experienced against the system of Bantu education and their exposure

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to the ideology of black consciousness.

The then United Automobile Workers Union (UAW) an African union set up under the auspices of the registered National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers Union (NUMARWOSA), "had already established through a long process of struggle a strong presence and substantial support in the adjoining engine plant." Although more than 50% of the workforce at Cortina was signed up in the next six months, the UAW itself admitted that its contact with the workers was "relatively superficial and formalistic". When 700 workers at the Cortina plant downed tools in October 1979, it was clear that the union was taken by surprise and that a serious rift had developed between itself and the workers. It was a situation for which the union was heavily criticised and which probably cost it the majority of workers at the Cortina plant.

However, MACWUSA failed to substantially expand from the Cortina plant, while NAAWU (as it became shortly after the amalgamation of UAW and NUMARWOSA), through strong shop-floor organisation, rapidly became the most powerful union in the Eastern Cape and among the most militant. It was NAAWU who conducted a sustained and militant shop-floor campaign for a living wage in 1982 and, even in the face of the recession, has addressed the issue consistently. There were further tensions between MACWUSA and NAAWU when MACWUSA workers scabbed on 10,000 striking NAAWU workers (that is, they clocked in, although they could not do any work because General Motors, Ford and Volkswagen had closed down their plants during the strike). But MACWUSA members, although in a minority at most of the factories, managed to man the Cortina and engine plants at Ford until NAAWU had negotiated a procedure for its own members to return to work. One of the reasons given by MACWUSA for not supporting the strike was the fact that the workers had downed tools after Industrial Council talks had broken down and that MACWUSA rejected the Industrial Council "as an apartheid vehicle geared to please management." (14)

The Sierra closure will seriously affect MACWUSA's base in the motor industry. MACWUSA national organiser Fikile Kobese, said in an interview that after Sierra closed, the union hoped that its main sources of strength would be at General Tyre and Firestone, where the union claims 250 and 650 members respectively. MACWUSA claims 3,100 members in the PE/Uitenhage regions at present, while NAAWU, after the loss of more than 2,000 Ford workers, has 11,581. With the exception of the Sierra plant and possibly the Firestone

plant in PE, MACWUSA's members are scattered in seven other motor assembly or component factories. At Firestone the union claims 650 members and Kobese said MACWUSA was discussing a recognition agreement with the management. MACWUSA, he added, also planned to launch an Unemployment Association to cater for retrenched workers.

"The main object of the Association will be to keep up the morale of unemployed workers and to enlighten them about the economic situation in the country, to explain that the reason why the jobs are not there is that they are not keen to create them." Asked whether unemployed workers could expect any material benefits to be won through the planned Association, Kobese said it would try to assist "those desperate families. But we don't want to put it forward as a priority, because it will raise a lot of peoples' hopes and there is a lot of unemployment. But we will explain things like the badness of scabbing."

But because of its size and its responsibility to countless members who have lost their jobs, the major burden of developing strategies against retrenchment and unemployment rests on NAAWU's shoulders. A clear priority for the beleaguered motor workers is union consolidation, a fact which both unions acknowledge. But it is unlikely to be a direct merger between NAAWU and MACWUSA.

"Our policy is - and has been for some time - that we are struggling for one metal union in South Africa, incorporating both the motor and metal industries. To have one metal union is the only way in which we can consolidate a position against monopoly capital in South Africa. We have been holding talks with the Motor Industries Combined Workers Union (MICWU) and the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) and our relationship within the IMF South African branch and the International Metalworkers Federation is already at an advanced stage," said Sauls.

The talks had started before the formation of COSATU and union executives were addressing the question of the structure of the new national organisation, Sauls said. Tyre and rubber workers within NAAWU would hold discussions with the union in the chemical industry. NAAWU believes that the solution to the problem of MACWUSA members in various motor industry plants in the PE/Uitenhage region would best be resolved at a local level between the shop stewards of various factories.

The fight against unemployment in the region will involve an inter-

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vention at a much deeper and broader level than union resource can presently cope with, NAAWU believes. "A union cannot create jobs. Not even a national federation like COSATU can do that at the moment. Employment creation has to come from the government and thus there has to be political pressure on the government. I don't believe the government will give us a hearing, but we have spoken to employers to try to highlight the crisis in the community," said Sauls.

Disinvestment or relocation

"If Ford was pulling out to contribute to things politically, then it's O.K., but it's not for making more money and it's unacceptable," said the Sierra shop steward, Dubase. "When we talk with these companies we realise they haven't any social responsibility. When you talk to Ford, they'll tell you they're in this business for making profits. So they'll go where they go to make more money.

Ford agrees with Dubase that it is not withdrawing from the region for political reasons: "The primary reason for the transfer of Sierra production from Port Elizabeth to Pretoria is admittedly based on economic realities. In order to be as cost effective as possible and reach the optimum economy of scale, it is in the interests of the company to centralise all its production in one location," said Employee Relations Manager, Pieterse in a letter to the writer. "The shop steward... is correct in saying that the withdrawal from Port Elizabeth is not due to political reasons," Pieterse continued. However, he considered the criticism of Ford as having no social responsibility as being "rather harsh and subjective", as the company had negotiated "generous retrenchment benefits" with the unions (outlined above) as well as providing a training programme for people who wished to be re-skilled, a free medical service, an outplacement centre to help retrenched workers seek alternative employment and the opportunity for workers "to purchase a vehicle at a considerably reduced price".

The issue of disinvestment has become a particularly pertinent and complex one for the independent labour movement. COSATU passed a resolution at the launch of the federation supporting disinvestment as a form of pressure on the South African regime. It also, though, committed itself "to ensuring that the social wealth of South Africa remains the property of the people of South Africa for the benefit of all and further commits ourselves to the prin-

principle of international working class solidarity action as the most powerful form of solidarity action with our struggle."

An important question is whether the Ford-Amcar merger constitutes disinvestment. Ford, itself, is quick to deny it: "The merger... granted the opportunity for both companies to strengthen their combined market share in an ailing South African motor industry. Ford still has a 42% shareholding in Samcor, while, Anglo-American holds the balance of the shares. It was not a disinvestment motive on the part of the Ford Motor Company." (15) Others, however, are more sceptical. "Disinvestment denied, but it's second fiddle for Big Brother Ford," said one Sunday Times article which pointed out that Ford had brought along more to the merger in terms of market share and smaller losses, but had emerged with only a 40% holding in the new company. "At the end of the day Ford has a minority stake in Samcor where it once had a wholly owned South African subsidiary." (16)

There is no clear evidence at this stage that Ford actually sold 60% of its holdings to Amcar, only that it now owns a minority share in the new company. Nevertheless, there might be political significance attached to the fact that Ford Motor Company, as an entity, no longer exists in South Africa. One lone report, that was neither followed up nor expanded on, said that anti-apartheid activists welcomed the merger because they saw it as proof that Ford was responding to their pressure. (17)

While less political attention at home might be an unexpected benefit of the merger, there is little doubt in either the minds of worker representatives or Ford itself that the merger was not motivated by a desire to disinvest from South Africa on either moral or political grounds. When Alfa-Romeo announced its decision last year to withdraw completely from South Africa, it received few accolades from the Transvaal branch of NAAWU who pronounced it a "stab in the back for workers who were a short time before assured that Alfa would not pull out of South Africa." There was little doubt in the union's mind, or indeed from Alfa's own statements, that the withdrawal was motivated by the inability to accrue sufficient profits in the local auto industry.

Worker representatives in Port Elizabeth say now that Ford's withdrawal from the region, even if it cannot be considered disinvestment at present, raises issues about disinvestment policy. There is uniform anger at Ford for abandoning workers to a jobless city

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for "making more money". However, one shop steward from the Sierra plant expressed the feeling that Ford's withdrawal from the region would have positive political effects in that it would jolt re-trenched white workers out of their complacency about apartheid. "We've got white workers who don't see eye to eye with us, but when Ford pulls out completely they are going to experience the same problems as us. Then those whites will make a cry to the government to make a change. They are going to want to know why Ford went away. Then we'll definitely see eye-to-eye. They [white workers] will realise the only way they will be getting new jobs is if the Government changes." (18)

Kobese said MACWUSA had a "feeling" that Ford's move to Pretoria was the start of withdrawal from the country. He said the union had asked the company if it had political reasons "for escaping from the city" - a notion it had predictably denied. If Ford wished to disinvest, Kobese proposed, it should negotiate the terms of disinvestment with the trade unions. "We might say its OK, but you must leave this, that and the other. We want to negotiate the terms of disinvestment. That is why Ford did not say they were disinvesting. But they are running away from conditions here."

NAAWU is cautious about commenting on its position on disinvestment and the various ways in which it occurs at this stage, but it is discussing the forms of disinvestment within the union and has said it will raise the question within the COSATU forum and will discuss the interpretation of the COSATU resolution.

Ford's withdrawal from Port Elizabeth, which will cost the city 8% of its economic output (19) has raised a number of important questions for the trade union movement. The questions no longer involve simply fighting retrenchment, but examining the problems in a region where the industrial giants that invested there - the motor companies - have also become its Achilles heel, leaving the job prospects of thousands in tatters. It has raised questions of economic planning and changes at a social and political level that are necessary to salvage the region from its increasingly gloomy economic fate. And although motor workers are in a defensive position at present and battling to survive, a clear impression gleaned from interviews with shop stewards and union officials, is that unions are undertaking this task with increasing seriousness.

(Pippa Green, May 1986)

Footnotes:

1. Much of this report was based on information obtained in interviews with Siphon Dubase, a Sierra shop steward, Thompson Zumani, a worker at the Sierra plant, Fikile Kobese, MACWUSA national organiser, Fred Sauls, NAAWU general secretary and Les Kettledas, NAAWU regional secretary. I am most grateful to them for their assistance and co-operation, as well as to Glen Adler for helpful ideas on the background to the crisis in the industry. I am grateful to Ford Employee Relations Manager, D P Pieterse, for answers to written queries.
2. Business Day 19.8.85
3. Business Day 16.9.85
4. The Argus 19.8.85
5. Financial Mail 20.9.85
6. Evening Post 31.1.85
7. Daily Despatch 1.2.85
8. The Argus 31.1.85
9. Quoted in The Star 2.12.85
10. Professor Michael Levin, campus director of Vista University made this estimate in July 1985, based on a survey of 500 households in seven townships near Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage. In July 1985, the Midlands Chamber of Industries estimated that unemployment in the PE/Uitenhage regions had risen by 88% in the past three years. Numerical estimates made over the past year and reported in various newspapers hover between 75,000 and 130,000. Official unemployment statistics recording the number of those who register as unemployed are useless because many people, especially Africans, do not register. Official figures record a total of 17,222 unemployed in January 1986, in September 1985, 13,750, in March 1985, 11,304 and in January 1985, 11,107.
11. Sunday Times 10.2.85
12. See M Favis in SALB 6.2&3
13. See J Maree in SALB 6.2&3
14. P Green in The Argus 30.7.82
15. Letter to the writer from D P Pieterse, Employee Relations Manager, Ford, 6.3.85
16. Sunday Times 3.2.85
17. Rand Daily Mail 2.2.85
18. Siphon Dubase and Thompson Zumani, interview, Port Elizabeth, February 1986

May Day Stay-away 1986

1986 is the year in which the workers of South Africa - with the support of the students and community organisations - put May Day on the list of public holidays. In the largest stay-away in South African history, a minimum of 1,500,000 workers celebrated the hundredth anniversary of International Labour Day, and were joined by thousands of students and community members nationwide. The call for May Day as a public holiday was a demand that emanated from the broad union movement, and was given added impetus by the support of hundreds of organisations attending the NECC (National Education Crisis Committee) conference in Durban in March, as well as by National Forum. This unity in action will again be demonstrated over June 16, when the workers will be in the supporting position to the students and community organisations on the 10th anniversary of the nationwide uprising which began in Soweto.

The Labour Monitoring Group was able, for the first time, to mount a national monitoring exercise. LMG units were in action in the PWV, Durban/Pinetown, Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage, Grahamstown and Cape Town - and reports from each area are presented below. In all, a total of 870 firms were surveyed nationwide. For the manufacturing sector, a random sample survey was used. In the smaller sectors, or where the sample was not available, a purposive sampling method was employed in an attempt to capture the greatest number of workers with the least number of phone calls.

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In the manufacturing sector, where our information is most complete, the extent of the black stay-away was better than 79 percent overall. In our sample 38,264 out of 48,167 black workers in 183 manufacturing concerns did not come to work on May Day. African workers stayed away in much higher proportions than did "Coloured" workers: 84 percent versus 30 percent. In our sample 37,095 African workers out of a workforce of 44,227 stayed away while 1,169 Coloured workers out of a workforce of 3,940 stayed away on May Day.

In the commercial sector, where our data is based on a smaller sample, we found that the overall extent of the black stay-away was 87 percent. The figure for African workers was much higher than the figure for Coloured workers: 98 versus 26 percent.

Of those firms in the public sector that responded to our inquiries, the overall extent of the black stay-away was 38 percent. So few Coloured workers appear in the sample of this sector that it is meaningless to calculate separate rates for Africans versus Coloureds. Overall 14,535 out of 38,235 black workers stayed away in our sample of the public sector.

In the mining sector it is always difficult to obtain a clear picture, because of the geographical dispersal of the mines, the shift system and, in some cases, a reluctance on the part of the management to discuss action taken on their mines. Nonetheless, we were able to gauge that substantial action was taken, and most noticeably where union presence was strong. On Anglo American mines, which is a stronghold of the National Union of Mineworkers, Anglo itself estimated an 80-85 percent stay-away on the gold mines, with a 50% stay-away on the coal mines. It is also interesting to note that where members of the Chamber of Mines had mines that were outside of the Chamber's ambit, their response was markedly more flexible. In total, it would appear that at least 209,000 miners took a holiday on May 1. (The NUM puts the figure at nearer 300,000 for the mines as a whole.)

Unions and the stay-away

While the success of the stay-away at particular factories did not seem to be directly affected by the unions approaching the management to negotiate, a better deal was sometimes obtained by workers in plants where the union had approached management and negotiated in advance. These negotiations took a number of forms: sometimes there appeared to be (at least as seen by management) genuine negotiation while in other cases there had simply been notification by either the union or employees that workers would not be coming in on May Day. In perhaps a quarter of the cases in the sample management claims to have been approached in one way or another. In far fewer cases there was actually a negotiated agreement between management and unions or management and employees without the involvement of unions (once again according to employers).

Managerial responses to the stay-away

Overwhelmingly the most common response by management to the stay-away was "no work, no pay." This was the official position prior to May Day of the large employer organisations such as the FCI, ASSOCOM and SEIFSA, and this was the most common managerial res-

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ponse to our query as to what action they would take against workers who stayed away. It is important to note, however, that significant variations exist within the broad response of "no work, no pay." A sizeable number of employers added that their policy was "no work, no pay" but also "no other penalties." Employees of such firms would not lose production or attendance bonuses or be otherwise punished. In other cases employers said nothing about such sanctions while in a small number of cases employers specifically stated that employees who had not showed up would be penalized by having their absence count against bonuses.

A substantial minority of employers thought that workers had a right to May Day as a holiday while the majority of managers that responded to this question thought that May Day was an appropriate subject for negotiations between management and labour. Many managers expressed the opinion that there should be a governmental review of statutory holidays and that May Day ought to be considered within this context. It was also understood that several existing public holidays might be seen to be offensive to blacks. Even in some cases where managers did not believe that workers had a right to May Day, they thought that their firm might be willing to swap May Day for another holiday. The most popular choice of holidays to swap among those managers who responded to this question was Kruger Day followed by Republic Day.

NATAL: DURBAN/PINETOWN

To gauge the impact of the national stay-away call we interviewed, on May 1, a third of all manufacturing firms with over 100 employees in Natal. Of these, 67% were located in Durban/Pinetown, 18% in Pietermaritzburg, 8% in Natal's and Kwazulu's North and South coasts and 6% in Newcastle, Ladysmith, Estcourt and Hammarsdale. A total of 165 firms were interviewed.

The Durban/Pinetown survey covered 58,766 workers in 101 firms (there were 10 refusals by employers to cooperate. Of these workers 35,517 stayed away or 60,4% of our universe of workers. The stay-away affected 71% of the factories interviewed. Assuming that our findings can be used as a basis for projective generalisation, we conservatively estimate that 81,694 workers stayed away in Durban/Pinetown manufacturing sector. This stay-away was by far the largest organised stay-away that has ever taken place in Natal.

We "guesstimate" also in our sample that 24,151 African and 11,350

Indian workers stayed away (African workers make up 68%, whilst Indian workers make up 30% of those who stayed away). This guesstimate is based on a smaller sample of 46% of the firms interviewed. Our reliance on this was made necessary by the fact that not all firms interviewed were willing or able to give us a "racial" breakdown of their employment figures. Furthermore, some who did, could not give us a racial breakdown of those who stayed away.

The sub-sample covered 19,602 of whom 16,139 stayed away which reflects a higher rate than our global figure. 86,3% of all African and 74,3% of all Indian workers stayed away. This sub-sample then could only be used to test rates and proportions of participation of workers in "racial" categories. On this alone, the sub-sample provides evidence that there were high rates of participation in the stay-away irrespective of whether workers were designated "African" or "Indian".

Particularly high was the rate of workers staying away in the rubber/mineral industries (97,42%) and metal industries (97%) amongst African workers. Indian workers participation was at its highest in the clothing industry (96,74%). Particularly low was the participation of African workers in the wood and paper and footwear industries (45,83%, 37,83%). Amongst Indian workers the chemical (30%) and textile (2,24%) industries were the lowest.

Our North and South Coast industries' survey covered a total of 6,621 workers. There, 50% of the factories were affected by stay-aways involving 5,250 workers. Most of these were registered in the Northern Natal/Kwazulu Coastline and particularly concentrated in the lower Umfolozi/Richards Bay region.

A common feature in 80% of the factories affected by the stay-aways was that trade unions or shop stewards approached management beforehand to negotiate such a stoppage of work. In all but two cases where INKATHA/UWUSA negotiated for workers to take off May Day - all stay-aways involved prior discussion between COSATU unions or the Garment Workers' Industrial Union (TUCSA affiliate) representatives and managements. Thus, the eager linking of the stay-away itself to the King's Park rally (as the sole or primary cause for the stay-away) by local journalists is highly problematic. The stay-aways in industry followed their own logic: they were primarily a response to COSATU's national call (for which a prior two year build-up within FOSATU unions is important to note) with, locally, the Garment Workers Industrial Union adding its weight.

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Save in the case of one employer who threatened dismissals, most (70%) of those affected applied the "no work, no pay" principle. Irrespective of whether they were affected or not 50% of all employers were not against negotiating with trade unions over May Day becoming a public holiday. This figure rose to 80% if the unions were to concede a "swop" between an existing holiday and May Day.

PIETERMARITZBURG

Our sample for Pietermaritzburg was made up of 19 firms taken from the IMG national survey (not all of which could be traced), supplemented by a further 26 firms chosen by random sample. This was done in order to obtain a more representative picture of the local response. A stratified sample comprising 38 firms in all was used. All firms were contacted by phone and no refusals were recorded.

Findings

1. The 38 concerns interviewed employed 5,120 workers which accounts for 18% of the total workforce employed in both the manufacturing and commercial sectors.
2. Of the 5,120 workers, 2,702 stayed away, ie. 53% of the workers included in the sample. The racial breakdown of the workforce who stayed away is as follows: Africans - 68%, Indians - 43%, Coloureds - 37%, and whites - 2%.
3. 74% of the concerns contacted were affected by the stay-away. A breakdown of the concerns affected reveals that 79% of the manufacturing sector and 60% of the commercial sector experienced stay-aways.
4. Half of the firms interviewed had entered into an agreement with workers. The nature of the agreement as it affected workers was as follows: unpaid leave - 21%; workers would have to work an alternative day - 21%; paid holiday - 16%; loss of pay - 42%. This means that 84% of the workers had, in one way or another, been subjected to the "no work, no pay" policy.
5. Although 50% of the firms interviewed did not enter into an agreement with workers, 95% of them adopted a "no work no pay" policy. Only one firm indicated that workers would lose their jobs. However, this firm was not affected by the stay-away.
6. 47% of firms who had 100 employees or more are unionised. 88% of these firms had entered into an agreement with workers. Of these firms 33% would not lose a day's pay. The remaining entered into a "no work, no pay" agreement.

PORT ELIZABETH/UITENHAGE

The May Day stay-away in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage was the largest worker action in the region in the contemporary period. The unity demonstrated by workers on May Day, as well as during the recent Langa Memorial stay-away on 21 March, contrasts strongly with historical divisions between Coloured and African workers in both cities. These divisions were especially sharp in the stay-aways during the "Black Weekend" and following the Langa massacre in March 1985. (see SALB 11.1)

The stay-away among African workers was near total across all sectors in both cities, while among Coloured workers support reached 45 % in Port Elizabeth and 79% in Uitenhage. Coloured support was strongest at COSATU organised factories and in manufacturing.

31% of the companies surveyed believed that workers had a right to May Day as a paid holiday, while 49% did not. 44% of the companies said they would be willing to swop May Day for another public holiday, while 33% were unwilling to do so.

The total number of workers covered by the sample in Port Elizabeth was 24,480 and 11,306 in Uitenhage giving a total of 35,786. The representativity of the sample in all sectors cannot be assessed as there is no reliable estimate of the total workforce in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage.

The stay-away was virtually total among African workers in both cities across all sectors. In Port Elizabeth only 3 out of 13,340 Africans reported for work (99,9% stay-away) while in Uitenhage 11 out of 7,562 reported (99,8% stay-away). 45% of all Coloured workers in Port Elizabeth stayed away, while in Uitenhage the Coloured stay-away reached 79%. Among white workers, the stay-away was virtually nonexistent in both cities. The only whites who were absent were those employed in companies which had closed for the day by prior agreement with an independent trade union, thus it is impossible to assess the extent of support amongst these workers.

Regarding the African stay-away, it is difficult to assess whether workers heeded the call out of commitment to COSATU or community organisations, as the African response was total irrespective of sector of employment or whether African workers were members of unions or not. Undoubtedly many African workers at COSATU organised workplaces responded to the federation's call. But the massive

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size of the African stay-away, even at workplaces organised by non-COSATU unions or in unorganised factories lends strong support for the claim that the major mobilising force for the action came from community organisations in the townships, especially for the emerging street and area committee networks.

Among Coloured workers in Port Elizabeth, the 45% figure is considerably larger than either the recent Langa-Sharpeville memorial action on 21 March where 25% of all Coloureds stayed away, or the "Black Weekend" stay-away of 1985 when Coloureds worked as usual.

In Uitenhage, the 79% Coloured response rivals the recent 82% stay-away on 21 March 1986 and is far greater than the 16% stay-away registered after the Langa massacre on 21 March 1985. It is worth noting that unlike the 1986 stay-aways, the 1985 actions were not supported by the then-FOSATU unions.

The union influence

Not only is the Coloured stay-away larger than any previous action, but support generally follows union lines. In Port Elizabeth, of all Coloureds organised in COSATU factories, 84% stayed away from work, while only 19% stayed away in factories organised by rival unions or which are unorganised.

In Uitenhage the Coloured stay-away was strongest at COSATU organised workplaces, where 90% of all Coloureds stayed away, while at non-COSATU factories the response was 66%. The Coloured response in Uitenhage was far greater than in Port Elizabeth, at both COSATU and non-COSATU factories.

Thus the results support the argument that in Port Elizabeth the COSATU unions are at present the most powerful force in mobilising Coloured workers, but that the power does not extend beyond those factories where the federation is organised. In Uitenhage, COSATU clearly demonstrated its ability to mobilise its Coloured members. But the strong response among Coloureds at non-COSATU factories indicates that they either identify more closely with COSATU, or are more sympathetic to more militant trade union activity than their counterparts in Port Elizabeth.

The sectoral pattern

As stated previously, the African stay-away was near-total across

categorised in terms of their ideologico-political positions into two broad groupings:

- (a) those committed to the progressive movement and its objectives
- (b) those who are ambivalent with respect to the progressive movement.

In the first case (eg. members of the Western Cape Traders Association, a UDF affiliate) where traders were, for example, giving financial and other assistance to progressive organisations before the CBs were ever thought of, the effect of the CB has undoubtedly been to broaden and deepen this trend of solidarity. This has been due as much to the fact that the CB by its very nature involves and embraces the oppressed community as a whole and takes it into direct conflict with the ruling bloc as it has been to any purely economic motive.

In the case of (b) - the "ambivalents", who probably form a majority of the commercial petty bourgeoisie - it is undoubtedly the case that in many instances their support for the CBs derived from the fact that they stood to make a lot of money from the boycott of white shops. But it is not as simple as this. In Port Elizabeth, for example, where some of the traders have been detained and allegedly beaten, the economic motive has been transformed into a far more ideologically-based commitment to the aims and goals of the progressive movement. Thus - as is evidenced in the cases of (a) and (b) as they have occurred nationally - far from the role of the black petty bourgeoisie being mechanistically "determined by their class position" in the narrow economic sense, (24) a whole other range of factors are important in determining the kind of political role they will play. The CBs and developments surrounding them have exacerbated the structural alienation of black traders from the apartheid state. In many cases (notably among the coloured community in the Western Cape, and among Indian and African communities in the Eastern Cape) the boycotts have made traders far more inclined to identify their interests with the interests of the mass of the oppressed and to go along with the democratic movement.

But while one of the great strengths of the CB is that it has given impetus to a deepening of a class-alliance with black traders, it is crucial that in order to minimise any ambiguity or opportunism the democratic movement forges such alliances on its own terms. Two ways in which this has been done is to have township shops lower their prices (which amounts to financial assist-

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be seen, however, whether the unity of purpose demonstrated between these groupings can be maintained, especially for actions which have less direct appeal to Coloured workers.

THE EASTERN CAPE TOWNS

In the Eastern Cape hinterland, a total of some 70,000 workers celebrated May Day. There was a total African stay-away in the larger towns such as Grahamstown, Queenstown, Cradock, Graff Reinet, Somerset East, Fort Beaufort, Humansdorp, Port Alfred, Stutterheim, and King Williams Town. Aliwal North was the only town with an African population in excess of 10,000 where no action was taken on May Day.

Many smaller towns also celebrated May Day including Adelaide, Bedford, Hofmeyr, Tarkastadt, Steinsbergh, Burghersdorp and Cathcart. Exceptions were Middelburg, Sterkstroom, Alexandra, Kirkwood and Steyteville.

In some towns Coloured workers also came out in support of the May Day demand. Partial Coloured stay-aways occurred in Cradock, Graff Reinet, and Adelaide. Comprehensive Coloured stay-aways occurred in Cookhouse and Port Alfred.

Most stay-aways were initiated by community organisations only, due to the absence of trade unions in smaller towns. However, in some cases they managed to arrange public meetings where worker representatives explained the May Day demands. In other areas - most notably Grahamstown - where a public meeting was not allowed, the street committees mobilised people around a successful cleaning campaign.

The LMG survey included employers from local government and private commerce. All of the representatives of local government stated that a policy of "no work no pay" was being followed - and that they did not believe in the need for May Day.

The attitude among private employers was diverse: 20% paid their workers on May Day; 10% would allow another day to be worked in exchange; 70% adopted a policy of "no work no pay". Of those interviewed, in excess of 40% thought May Day should be a paid public holiday, while 30% disagreed.

Most employers believed that the reason for the stay-away was

"intimidation". A bogus pamphlet issued in the name of the UDF and COSATU which undertook to compensate workers for any loss of earnings was widely distributed through the Eastern Cape and was understood by employers to be one reason why workers stayed away.

THE CAPE TOWN REGION

Cape Town region experienced a May Day stay-away considerably lower than that of the rest of the country, with only 15% of all black workers in our sample staying away. African workers heeded the stay-away call to a much greater extent than did Coloured workers - 51% in the firms surveyed as opposed to a figure of 2% for Coloured workers.

Information on 79 workplaces, employing a total of 41,974 workers, was gathered. The workplaces surveyed for which full data was available employed a total of 22,284 black workers. These comprised 18,267 Coloured workers - of whom 16,892 were at work - and 4,017 African workers, 1,971 of whom attended work. Extrapolating from our sample, this would indicate that 71,000 workers stayed away in the greater Cape Town area. This figure does not include 11,000 workers employed by the Cape Town City Council, who were given May Day as a public holiday.

Workers organised by COSATU-affiliated unions responded to the May Day call in much greater proportions than did other workers. 92% of African and 31% of Coloured workers stayed away in workplaces in our sample organised by COSATU affiliates.

There were marked differences by industrial sector, with stay-away rates in construction high, those in manufacturing close to the average and in commerce and catering generally low. Although construction workers are not generally unionised in the Western Cape, stay-away rates in this sector were well above average at 39% for Coloured and 55% for African workers.

51% of African workers in manufacturing stayed away but only 5% of Coloured workers did so. This may reflect dominance in the garment industry and the tight hold on its workers of the conservative Garment Workers Union of the Western Province.

The limited response to the stay-away call was despite the fact that employers were not unsympathetic to it. Only one employer intended to dismiss workers who stayed away and in 51 workplaces

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the policy was one of "no work, no pay". A further 15 employers intended only to warn workers, or to take other measures (in at least one firm, workers were given the option of taking paid or unpaid leave).

Agreements on May Day were negotiated by trade unions in 17 workplaces in our sample. Most of these agreements (13) granted workers authorised unpaid leave. Employers surveyed were divided on whether workers have a right to a paid holiday on May Day, with 26 for and 31 against, but the majority favoured the exchange of another public holiday for May Day - 35 for and 17 against.

The Cape Town figures raise questions about the extent of organisation in the Cape by the emerging unions, as well as about the nature of community organisations in the region. The dominance of Coloured workers in Cape Town, and their very limited response to the May Day call, suggest that the very nature of consciousness and organisation among the workers should be examined.

BLOEMFONTEIN REGION

The IMG does not have an Orange Free State branch, but were nonetheless able to obtain a picture of the effect of the stay-away in the Bloemfontein region. While these impressions were given to us by the local COSATU officials, the magnitude of the stay-away has been corroborated with non-union persons. The stay-away in Bloemfontein was the first such action for five years.

Bloemfontein is mainly a service-oriented city, with a limited manufacturing base. The effect of the stay-away was therefore most noticeable in the city centre, amongst the retail sector. The union estimate for the Bloemfontein stay-away is in excess of 80%. Certainly, it would appear that Bloemfontein was deserted on the day, with many stores not opening or closing very early. Those that remained open were manned by white and Coloured workers.

After having been refused the use of the stadium, the people of Mangaung crowded into Rocklands New Hall, with an estimated 3-5,000 people attending the overflowing meeting. A taxi and bus boycott was very successful, while the only sour note of the day was the police firing teargas in Mangaung in a futile attempt to disrupt the holiday.

In nearby Botshabelo, residents report that the SADF paratrooped

soldiers in on the April 30, and then moved in with a fleet of Casspirs to erect an army camp which remained for six days. There are also reports of military jets doing tree-level swoops over the huge township in an obvious attempt at intimidation.

CONCLUSIONS

The size of the 1986 May Day action ensures it a prominent place in the history of resistance in South Africa. Through the success of the stay-away, the working class of South Africa have clearly demonstrated the strength of feeling in support of a day that celebrates the labours of its workers. It remains to be seen whether this day will officially be recognised as a public holiday, or whether it will be necessary to again enforce an unofficial holiday through united action.

However, the response of management to the stay-away suggests that there is implicit non-worker tolerance for the celebration of International Labour Day. With the majority of employers adopting a non-confrontationist policy of "no work, no pay", they indicated that the space clearly exists in industrial relations for a workers holiday.

The extent of support for the May Day 1986 action is the continuation of a pattern that had its roots in the Transvaal stay-away of November 1984. The 1986 stay-away is, however, quantitatively and qualitatively different. It is a tangible demonstration of the new pattern of resistance politics in South Africa, as the old distinctions between "populists" and "workerists" are increasingly being blurred in the common struggle against apartheid and capitalism.

One clear conclusion to be drawn from the evidence presented above is the effect of the trade union movement. While small towns in the Eastern Cape took action even without the existence of a strong union movement in the area, a definite pattern emerges in the larger towns where the unions have made significant inroads - where there is a union, the support for the stay-away is markedly greater to where the workers have as yet to be organised.

(Labour Monitoring Groups from the Universities of the Witwatersrand, Natal-Durban, P.E., Grahamstown, and Cape Town. Compiled by William Cobbett and Mark Beitel, May 1986)

Teachers and Trade Unions

Jonathan Hyslop

Are teachers workers? And can they be organised in unions? With the recent signs of political radicalisation amongst black teachers, these have become important questions for the labour movement. This article seeks to stimulate some debate on these issues, and to shed some light on them through a brief exploration of the history of African teachers' organisations in this country.

The question of whether teachers are workers in the same sense as industrial workers is a difficult one. (1) On the one hand, they are reliant on wages for their subsistence and some would argue that therefore they are simply part of the working class. On the other hand, they have far more control over their work than do industrial or ordinary clerical workers, enjoy generally better wages and conditions, and are generally seen as professionals with some social status. On this basis, some contend that teachers should be seen as middle class or "petty bourgeois". Neither of these approaches seem totally satisfactory to me. I would suggest that the teachers are best understood as occupying a position in society which is between that of the working class and that of the petty bourgeoisie. Workers are defined by their dependency on wage labour and their lack of control over the conditions in which they work. (2) The petty bourgeoisie on the other hand, are defined by their own means of production - thus they do not need to work for a wage, and can control the circumstances in which they work. The position of teachers is such that like the small property owners they have a significant degree of control over their own work, and because they do not work for capitalist employers are not directly subordinated to the needs of capital in the way that workers in capitalist enterprises are. Thus they should be seen as occupying a contradictory class position, in which they stand between the working class and the petty bourgeoisie, and are subject to the political pressure of both groups.

What kind of organisation teachers develop therefore depends on whether, in a particular situation, the interests they share with workers come to the fore, or their aspirations to be part of the middle class predominate. Where teachers see that linking up with

popular and workers' movements can be a successful strategy for improving their economic position and addressing their grievances, that can lead to the development of a militant teachers trade unionism. On the other hand, where the pull of middle class aspirations is strong, the result is likely to be the strategy of "professional" organisation. (3) Here teachers will put forward claims to better conditions based on the argument that they ought to be rewarded for their special knowledge and qualifications. They will ignore political and social issues, and stress their claims to professional status: they emphasise what differentiates themselves from other workers. But, I would argue, professionalism is a doomed strategy. Gradually, teachers are losing control of their work as they are subject to tighter and tighter bureaucratic regulation, and are also losing some of the status they once enjoyed. The current political crisis, and the failure of existing "professional" teachers organisations to serve the needs of their members, is creating a major opportunity today for the emergence of a new form of militant teacher organisation.

A history of African teachers organisations

The history of African teachers organisations in South Africa is one of conflict between "militant" and "professional" perspectives. (4) In the 1940s and 1950s the more radical types of organisation predominated: with their defeat a conservative professionalism established an iron grip on teachers. It is only now that that grip is beginning to be broken. Although African teachers associations were founded in all four provinces during the early part of this century, until the Second World War they were not particularly significant. They sent delegations to government and arranged for legal representation of their members interests, but without very notable results.

This situation changed dramatically during the 1940s. Teachers had been subject to severe wage cuts during the depression of the 1930s, and when these were followed by the high inflation rates of the 1940s, a powerful sense of economic grievance developed. In 1941, the Transvaal African Teachers Association (TATA), launched a very active propaganda campaign, led by a committee that included significant figures such as David Bopape and AP Mda. The campaign culminated on May 6, 1944, when a mass demonstration of teachers, parents, and school children in support of the teachers wage demands was held in central Johannesburg. The march, which drew 12,000 people, swept aside police attempts to obstruct its

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way, and culminated in a mass meeting addressed by Dr Xuma, President General of the ANC. However a combination of partial concessions by government on the wage issue, and a failure of TATA's leadership to follow through the campaign led to a rapid collapse of the new militancy.

But the rise of urban working class struggles began during the decade, and the new African nationalist political activism reflected in the rise of ANC Youth League (ANCYL), began to have an even more fundamental effect in changing teacher politics. During this period numbers of young teachers came into the profession who had been influenced by the ANCYL or the Unity Movement, and who sought to change the forms of teacher organisation.

In the Transvaal this was reflected in 1949, when the TATA leadership was captured by a group of urban radicals. The change became even more apparent in 1951, when a group of young Orlando teachers, including the future author Zeke Mphahlele, and the future PAC leader Zeph Mothopeng took over the leadership. When, during that year, the Eiselen Commission report, which laid down the blueprint for "Bantu Education" was published, the TATA leaders perceived its political implications and launched an energetic campaign of meetings across the province to denounce Eiselen's recommendations. In 1952, Mphahlele, Mothopeng and a third TATA leader, Mathlame, were sacked from their jobs at Orlando High School - a clear case of victimisation. This resulted in a well organised school boycott movement at Orlando High, strongly supported by parents and students and including the establishment of an "alternative" school. TATA mobilised broad support from teachers for the three. But eventually police action and exhaustion defeated the boycott, and in 1953 TATA dropped its young leaders.

In the Cape, the new radicalism was reflected in the 1948 decision of the Cape African Teachers Association (CATA), to affiliate to the All African Convention, a Unity Movement front. CATA members became particularly active in the rural Transkei, and conducted propaganda campaigns amongst the local peasantry on the effects of "Bantu Education", "Bantu Authorities" and "Land Rehabilitation". When the implementation of Bantu Education began in 1955, CATA participated actively in attempts to prevent the establishment of planned school boards and committees, helping to violently disrupt attempts to set them up in Cape Town, and in the Eastern Cape. While CATA's effectiveness was certainly limited by sectarian hostility between the Unity Movement and the ANC (CATA refusing for

example to support the ANC's 1955 school boycott campaign), CATA did at one stage organise half the African teachers in the Cape, and its activities represent a high point in teacher militancy.

Even in Natal, where teachers were generally quiescent, in the late '50s the Natal African Teachers Association (NATU) showed its hostility to Bantu Education, and began to express African nationalist sentiment.

"Radicals" versus "Professionals"

Thus during the '40s and '50s militant forms of teacher organisation, having some affinities with trade unionism, tended to be dominant. But at the same time there were groups of teachers who did not hold with such an orientation. These were people who felt that militant tactics and political radicalism imperilled teachers self interest. Consequently, during the 1950s they established conservative breakaways from the existing activist organisations. In the Transvaal, the more conservative, rural teachers split from TATA in 1950, creating the Transvaal African Teachers Union (TATU). With the defeat of the Mphahlele/Mothopeng leadership in TATA, some of the militants in TATA began arguing that a priority ought to be bringing TATA and TATU together, for the sake of black unity. The result of this however, was that a conservative leadership took control of TATA, and rejected any participation in political action. In 1958 TATA and TATU united in the Transvaal United African Teachers Association (TUATA).

In the Cape a similar process developed. Following splits from CATA in 1951 and 1952 the Cape African Teachers Association (CATU) was founded in 1953. Led by a Cape Town headmaster, ID Mkhize, CATU attacked CATA's political orientation, and advocated professional attitudes. It quickly received the blessing of the educational authorities. Then in the late '50s, under the pressure of systematic sackings of CATA activists by the "Native Affairs" Department, and damaged by a profound political split in the Unity Movement (in 1958-9) CATA collapsed. Thus by the end of the 1950s, organised teacher radical activism had been defeated. The way was now clear for professional types of organisation to dominate the field.

But political changes were required to allow bodies like CATU and TUATA to grow. During the '50s, teachers had suffered under the burden of the implementation of Bantu Education, which entailed double-session teaching, stagnant salaries, and loss of jobs. At

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the same time they were living through enormous popular and workers' struggles, and were thus under great pressure to identify with worker aspirations. So it is not surprising that during this period, the more conservative organisations had little appeal.

During the '60s, however, things changed drastically. The state's smashing of the African nationalist and worker movements meant that there was little prospect of structural political change, and little popular pressure on teachers. In these circumstances, the aspirations of teachers toward a petty-bourgeois status began to resurface. Organisations which offered a "practical" relationship with the authorities, through which some concrete concessions could be gained, had a strong appeal. Thus the period from the mid-'60s to the mid-'70s saw a rapid growth of the existing teacher organisations. In the '50s the various provincial teacher organisations had been to some extent united in a federal council; but this unity had been disrupted by the factional conflicts of the time. By the '60s, however, CATU, TUATA, NATU and the OFS teachers body were united in an effective national body, ATASA (African Teachers Association of South Africa). The ATASA groups grew rapidly - TUATA for example from about 5,000 in 1963 to about 15,000 in 1974. They took the view that teachers unions had no business involving themselves in politics: RL Peteni, the President of CATU told its 1968 Conference: "The movement from one part of the country to another, from one form of administration to another - these are not the real ills that beset us." (5)

The ATASA unions sought to advance their members interests by polite lobbying of the Department of Bantu Education. Any criticisms that were voiced of Bantu Education were made on "professional" or "educational" grounds, not political ones. The benefits of membership of the ATASA unions were dubious. TUATA proved unable to take action to defend members who were dismissed. The unions developed a collaboration with Atlantic and Continental Assurance, who took the opportunity to sell their policies to union members by fair means or foul. A situation developed where the leadership cliques in the ATASA unions carried out a form of control by patronage over their members, using their influence on behalf of those who proved co-operative. There was virtually no attempt to mobilise the membership around issues of common concern. Rather the leadership concentrated on diverting members energies into social activities. The most important of these were the choir competitions run by the teachers organisations, which absorbed a tremendous amount of energy and resources.

1976-1980s: Radicalisation

In the 1970s, the ATASA establishment began to come under new pressures. It was criticised by the Black Consciousness Movement, and had trouble in dealing with the growing number of politicised young teachers. The massive upsurge of labour and youth action challenged the kind of self-seeking, apolitical outlook which ATASA represented. (In fact in 1976 the ATASA offices were destroyed during the Soweto upheavals). This challenge culminated in 1977 when a movement of teachers developed in Soweto. There was a mass resignation by teachers in protest against Bantu Education and the state's response to the 1976 crisis. The Soweto Teachers Action Committee (STAC) was founded in order to coordinate this movement.

In the light of such developments it might have been expected that ATASA would collapse. But far from this happening, it managed to retain its dominance over the teaching profession, and continued to put forward its line of professional lobbying of the authorities. How is this to be explained? Firstly, no effective organisational challenge developed until recently. STAC channelled its energies into providing tutoring services for students, and thus missed the chance to lead a movement to replace ATASA. Secondly, teachers during the '70s became a key group for recruitment by industry into clerical and junior managerial positions: many teachers therefore focussed their hopes on personal career advancement rather than better organisation. Thirdly, the ATASA leadership cliques found ways of retaining control of their organisations. They had been given quasi-official status by the Department, and could use this to pressure recalcitrant teachers into paying subscriptions. Gerrymandering tactics, such as holding meetings in out-of-the-way towns were used to ensure that no untoward decisions were made. The patronage system continued with leaders using it especially to control less well paid female members. Thus ATASA survived into the '80s.

Recent events, however, suggest that there is now a serious chance of displacing the professional type organisations from their dominant position. There is a new teacher militancy abroad. This can be explained by a combination of factors. Firstly, the current mass struggles have renewed working class pressure on teachers for an alliance. Secondly the collapse of the educational system confronts teachers with basic questions about their political role, and brings them into conflict with the state bureaucracy. Thirdly, the combination of the economic crisis and the fact that there is

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a far larger pool of people with post-school qualifications has reduced the opportunities for teachers to adopt a personal strategy of advancement through getting a better paid career. Finally, current restructuring of the education system subjects teacher to ever tighter control over their work by officialdom.

These factors have resulted in a political crisis within the teaching profession. A number of signs are apparent of political questioning on the part of teachers. The ATASA unions, especially TUATA, have tried to meet the crisis by adopting far more forceful positions, and participating to some extent in community organisations. IHH Dlamlenze, TUATA and ATASA's most important leader, has become a central figure on the Soweto Crisis Committee. The ATASA unions have, furthermore, withdrawn from Department of Education and Training structures early this year and supported the May 1 stay-away. But this shift has not been accompanied by any shift toward more participatory and democratic forms of organisation within these bodies. It seems reasonable, therefore, to doubt ATASA's ability to transform itself from within. More promising in terms of the possibility of an effective national mass union movement, are three developments outside the ATASA group. In 1980, the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA) was founded, as a non-racial, campaigning education organisation. It subsequently became closely allied with the UDF. While until recently it remained a numerically small organisation, in 1985 it showed strong signs of growth, and could be an important nucleus for teacher organisation. Out of the education crisis in the Cape Town area, there arose during 1985, the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU), a mass, militant teachers organisation in the Western Cape. Finally there have been a number of smaller initiatives, at a local level by teachers seeking to found unions.

Conclusions

This historical experience points to a number of important conclusions. While teachers occupy a slightly different social position than that of workers as such, they can respond positively to militant forms of union organisation in the right circumstances. In fact it is only by going in that direction that teachers can gain effective representation of their interests. The aspiration to "professional" status is a blind alley which cuts off teachers from other sectors of the community and does not attain even its own narrow aims. The labour movement has an interest in encouraging teachers to view themselves as wage earners, having a common

interest with the working class. The more that the ideas and forms of organisation of the working class influence teachers, the better will they be able to participate in the struggle for social transformation. The logic of this position then is that teachers should see their organisations as trade unions (not professional bodies), and should seek affiliation to labour movement bodies. It is relevant to note that in Latin America a number of teachers bodies belong to union federations. The task of the present is to unite South African teachers in a single democratic and non-racial trade union, firmly linked to the labour movement.

Footnotes:

1. My treatment of this issue is derived from that of Erik Olin Wright, "Intellectuals and the class structure of capitalist society", in P Walker (ed), Between labour and capital, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1979, pp191-121, and Wright "Class boundaries in advanced capitalist societies", New Left Review 98, July-August 1976, pp3-41.
2. I am thus rejecting the position put forward by some theorists that only direct producers of surplus value embodied in material goods are part of the working class. (This view is argued by N Poulantas, "On social classes", New Left Review 78, March-April 1973, pp27-54.) The work of a service worker produces surplus value where it is sold to increase the capital of his or her employer; and in any case the distinction productive labour/unproductive labour is not one between social classes.
3. On "professionalism" see K Dougherty, "Professionalism as ideology", Socialist Review 49, vol 1, January-February 1980, pp160-175.
4. I haven't attempted to deal with the whole gamut of teachers organisations, as the ethnic segmentation of unions until the present makes this a horrendously complex task. Suffice it to say that the history of "Coloured" and "Indian" teachers organisations also shows a similar conflict of professional and militant union perspectives.
5. AAS 212 File 4.5 CATU Presidential Address 1968

Sleep for Sale

Shift Work in South Africa with Specific Reference to the Tyre and Rubber Industry

Taffy Addler*

Shift work, and hours of work in general, have not been prominent items on the collective bargaining agenda of the emerging trade unions in South Africa. This lack of interest is somewhat surprising. The majority of South African workers have for a considerable time put in more than a "normal" working day because of the travelling time imposed by residential segregation. In addition, the figures presented in this article, show that a surprisingly large proportion of workers in South Africa are in fact working shifts.

One explanation for the apparent indifference to long hours of work lies in the structure of the South African economy which is characterised by under-represented and unskilled workers in a low wage economy with high unemployment. Workers' priorities in such a situation have been the recognition of their trade unions, the improvement of wages and the security of their jobs.

The long silence on hours of work is probably also a function of the damage done to the personal and family life of black workers by influx control, deprivation of social and recreational amenities and cramped, overcrowded living conditions. These conditions were created for a black workforce whose function was to be the hewers of wood and carriers of water. Leisure time was not for them.

The development of unions in this country, however; their increased understanding of the operation of the economy and the universal political rejection of the "hewers" image, have led, amongst other things, to a wider range of demands being placed on the bargaining table. The forty hour week is one such demand. (1) While on the agenda for white workers since at least 1900 (2), it has only recently become a matter for serious negotiation. (3)

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shift work represents another similar area of latent concern. It too has been a problem for workers for a considerable time, but until recently was not considered a priority. In February 1986 a meeting of unions organising in the tyre and rubber industry, an industry dominated by a shift work pattern, discussed the problems that workers experienced. The unions present decided to take up the issue of shift work as a matter of urgency. As a result, demands concerning shift work are now being tabled in bargaining forums around the country.

This article will look at the problems arising out of shift work in general and in the tyre and rubber industry specifically. It will conclude with the demands which the workers in the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU), the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) and the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) agreed at their February meeting.

The extent and nature of shift work

Historically shifts have been worked in continuous process industries such as foundries and glass works. The technical requirements of operating a blast furnace, for example, require a continuous operation over a 24 hour period, seven days a week. Over the past 100 years, however, shift work has slowly but surely extended beyond the continuous process industries. More and more workers in the manufacturing and service industries have found themselves working shifts. A comprehensive survey on shift work done in 1975 (4) found that the proportion of workers on shift work over the whole range of industrial activities was 20% in the United Kingdom in 1964, 21,4% in France in 1963, 12% in Switzerland in 1960, 22% in the Netherlands in 1959, and in 1958, 20.4% in Norway, 17% in Sweden and 13,4% in Denmark. In the United States it was estimated in 1964-5 that 24% of workers in manufacturing industries were on shift work, while in Japan workers in 20% of all establishments were working shifts.

The extension of shift work appears to have increased dramatically over the past 15 to 20 years. In the United Kingdom, between 1968 and 1976, the percentage of manual workers on shift work increased from 19,3% to 23,2%. In West Germany, the percentage moved from 12% to 27% for all workers over the period 1970-76, while in the United States over the period 1960-75, the percentage increased from 23% to 28%. (5)

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The reasons for this extension are not hard to find. Firstly, they relate entirely to the demands of profit extraction in a situation where technology changes rapidly. As a result of technological change, machinery quickly becomes obsolete. It is therefore necessary to amortize capital expenditure as rapidly as possible. Shift work is one obvious way to do this.

Secondly, the extension of shift work seems to have coincided with the shortening of hours of work. One study, based on data from England, noted that a 6% increase in shift work took place over the same period that saw a notable shortening of the work week. (6) Shift work is thus compensation for the decrease in the hours of work which has been occurring since the turn of the century.

The reluctant acceptance of shift work by workers is another very significant reason for the extension of this pattern of working. It is no accident that the countries of the industrialised group in Europe with the highest unemployment rates (namely Britain and Belgium) also had the highest rate of shift work. (7) Structural unemployment has become a feature of the industrialised world. It can therefore be expected that workers will accept shift work employment in the absence of anything else.

Continuous process industries are also on the increase. There is a world-wide decline in the "old" industries of metals, textiles, and ship building and these are being replaced by the "newer" industries of plastics and chemicals. The latter are characterised by shift work, another reason for the increasing numbers on shift work

An important structural change in society provides a further reason for shiftwork. Urban life has increasingly moved onto a 24 hour basis. In the service sector, in particular, shifts have become common place with workers operating emergency services, shops, taxis, cinemas and electronic data processing units around the clock. Indeed in some countries, the service sector has become larger than the manufacturing sector in terms of value, output and employment. The twin forces of urbanisation and technology have ensured that the hitherto natural rhythms of human life, and the pace of industrial, commercial and agricultural activity have gradually moved out of step with each other. As a result of this divergence, the scheduling of hours of work has become one of the major problems of industrial society. (8)

shift work in South Africa

A picture of shift work in this country has proved extremely difficult to paint. No figures have been kept. The Department of Statistics has recently undertaken two unpublished surveys, one at the end of 1981, and the other at the end of 1983. These surveys were done at the request of the Federated Chamber of Industries, and the Department does not intend to do any further surveys. They appear to be the only surveys of shift work that have been done. The 1981 survey has just become available and, despite the difficulties in interpreting the figures, makes for interesting reading.

The survey covered a total workforce in manufacturing of 701,799 in 8,706 establishments throughout South Africa. The information presented does not allow for an accurate breakdown of the number of workers working on shift. It is, however, possible to give an indication of the extent of shift work based on the number of hours worked in the industries covered.

A total number of 31,104,046 hours were worked in the factories covered by the survey. Of these 6,775,101 or 21,8% were worked on shift. Of those hours worked on shift, 57% were worked by workers on a two shift system, while 43% were worked by those workers working a three shift system. 23% of the establishments surveyed were working on shift.

On the basis of these figures, South Africa, with its much smaller economy, would be well within the league of the industrial countries surveyed above. In fact, if the mining industry were taken into account, the proportion of workers on shift would probably be higher in this country than in the majority of highly industrialised countries. If shift work is so prevalent in South Africa, it makes one wonder why information on it is so hard to come by.

As previously noted, these figures are the only published figures available on shift work. They are patently inadequate. They do not satisfactorily reveal the situation in the plants where shift work is being worked. There is no indication of the daily or weekly hours worked. Information on the question of when meal breaks occur on shifts is also lacking. There is also no consideration of the problems of work related time, a crucial issue in this country, nor of the breakdown between "unsocial" hours and "unhealthy" hours. No account is given of the gender or age distribution of shift workers, nor of the length of time that a worker has worked

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on shifts. In short, the information that is currently available is of no assistance in either highlighting or combating the extensive social or the health and safety problems that face a percentage of workers in South Africa.

Such a gap in information can only benefit employers who wish to exploit the use of shift work. It is therefore one of organised labours' priorities to investigate the issue of shift work in this country so as to address the problems that shift work creates. Hopefully this article, by looking in some (and not yet sufficient) depth at the tyre and rubber industry, will contribute towards exposing the use of shiftwork in South African industry.

Let us now move on to detail the health and safety problems arising out of working shifts. An account of the social problems arising out of shift work will also be given.

The health problems related to shift work (11)

The noticeable increase in shift work over the past 15 years gave rise to a great deal of research into the health problems related to shift work. Most of the initial studies were done in Europe and the United States during the 1970s. They were concerned mainly with the immediate and observable problems arising out of shift work such as fatigue and accidents at work. A second generation of research, based on the first, has started to explore the long term effects of shift work arising mainly as a result of the inversion of the normal cycle of the body.

Where possible in this section, insights based on South African experience will be given. It is unfortunate that such information will be limited. Despite an exhaustive search for information, it appears that the sum total of research into this major problem consists of one research paper done by second year sociology students at the University of the Witwatersrand, one project done by fourth year students in the Department of Community Health at the University of the Witwatersrand, an article by an academic lawyer and a pamphlet on the health and social effects of shift work published by the Health Information Centre. The authors of the publications are to be commended on their pioneering work. Their work aside (12), this paucity of information is truly a major indictment on the concerns of the universities and health care institutions in this country. It is not the first time that a practising trade unionist has had to comment on the state of research into

health and safety in South Africa. (13) It is shocking to see that 10 years later, the same charge can still be levelled.

This point can be left for the moment with the observation that the research noted above tends to support the findings of similar work in other countries. There is, however, an urgent need for South African based research in this area. This is particularly so because some patterns of life such as eating and sleeping are culturally and historically determined. What is true of the workforce in Europe, America and Australia (where most of the research has been done) need not necessarily hold for South Africa.

Shift work results in the increasing divorce of the circadian rhythm (rhythm which makes the body work smoothly) from the pattern of work. The body's phases of high and low activity (eating, sleeping and working) are disrupted. This seems to both cause, and make worse, the other effects of shiftworking described below. In this context it is important to make the distinction between "un-social" and "unhealthy" hours of work. "Unsocial" hours could refer to those hours where the majority of people are engaged in social and leisure activity. An example here would be day work over a weekend. "Unhealthy" hours, those worked at night, in the late evening or in the very early morning, would in addition to having social consequences, also create conditions which are deleterious to a worker's health. On a continuous shift work system, it has been calculated that workers would spend 21,7% of their working lives in a situation which has serious consequences for their health. (14) Recent Australian and American research has discounted earlier proposals that the body may adapt to an alternative cycle if long periods of shift work are worked. (15) It is thus clear that this disruption of the circadian cycle has deleterious long term effects on the human body.

While shift workers may appear to have the same amount of non-working time, it is clear that they sleep less, and that the sleep that they do get is of poorer quality. This is especially true for those workers on night shift. In the South African context, one study found that 64% of the sample of women office cleaners working at night got less than 4 hours sleep. (16) This problem would be compounded by the transport problems imposed by the enforced residential segregation in this country. (17) Facilities for sleeping during the day, while most others are engaged in social activity of one kind or another, are limited. This contributes to fatigue, poor digestion and irritability.

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Fatigue is one of the reasons for the higher accident rate and poorer productivity of shiftworkers. There are more accidents at night, and they are usually more severe. In addition, health hazards such as noise and toxic substances may affect shift workers more seriously. Their resistance to these hazards is lowered as a result of the physical and psychological stress engendered by shift work. As a result of the lower resistance, the body is not able to withstand the determined maximum levels of toxic substances permitted in individual plants (the so-called Threshold Limit Values - TLVs). These TLVs would have been based on the tolerances of a person working under normal conditions.

There is a direct relationship between working shift and certain physical ailments. Shift working causes, or makes worse, gastric and duodenal ulcers, constipation and other gastro-entestinal illness. It is also conducive to obesity. As a result of more stress and strain on shift work, there is greater likelihood of heart disease. Eye irritation would also seem to be a characteristic complaint of shift workers. (18)

A worker's psychological condition and social behaviour is also affected by shiftwork. Shiftworking causes "nightworkers neurosis" with symptoms of physical weakness, insomnia, aggression and depression. There is also evidence that shift workers take more drugs and medicines to cope with work, sleep and illness. Medicines may not be as effective because of disturbed biological rhythms. Consequently more drugs are taken to compensate for their lack of effect. Shift workers tend to smoke and drink more than day shift workers, especially during hours off work, such as the weekend.

Finally, shift work seems to cause higher sickness absenteeism, especially amongst rotating shift workers. This problem seems to become more severe as shift workers get older. Shift work is obviously more physically demanding on older workers. In fact, shift work seems to induce the physical attributes of aging more rapidly.

Social problems arising from shift work

It is not difficult to understand that workers on shift work would encounter problems in their daily relationships with others. Their entire life cycle runs counter to socially accepted norms. (19) A categorization of these problems, however, reveals the extent of the strains placed upon individuals and their families and makes it quite clear why the overwhelming opinion of the union movement

is that shift work should be opposed in principle. (20)

The working of shifts disrupts the routine of family life. No longer can the shift worker participate in the main meal of the family on either a daily (eg. supper) or weekly (eg. Sunday lunch) basis. The role of mate, parent and confidant and even participant in family affairs is severely curtailed. The shift worker is forced, in part, to live independently of the family and vice versa.

The already complicated role of the woman worker is additionally complexed by shift work. (21) There can be no doubt that where a woman is expected to play the role of mother and worker, she is forced to work a double shift. In many situations South African women are the main breadwinners of a family. They thus have to provide sufficient bread, and act as both parents as well. Working shifts places a third level of strain on a working mother who is the major breadwinner. Family life, already decimated in the South African context by the effects of apartheid legislation, is further eroded by shift work. (22)

The question of equality of the sexes comes up as an important issue in this context. A frequent response to the demand that women should not work nights is that such a prohibition would create an inequality between male and female workers. A reply to this charge has been developed in discussions amongst workers in South Africa. In the first place, women point to the fact that they are socially required to look after the children. Without conceding that this is their role, this fact of life in the South African context cannot be overlooked. Secondly, it is pointed out that the demand for equality of opportunity should not be confused with the demand for protection from exploitation. The former tends to be the emphasis that middle class women, looking to move up the career ladder, would make. A working class mother would generally be looking for protection against exploitation. The struggle for equality amongst the sexes cannot be furthered by removing those protections which already exist. It was thus a backward step in South Africa when, in the name of equality, the relevant legislation was amended in 1983 to allow women to work at night. (23)

The stresses created by shift work would increase whatever other social problems already exist. Overcrowded housing for example would be made worse by the demands of a shiftworker trying to sleep during the day, while the children are at play. In South Africa, the overcrowding problem is of huge proportions. (24)

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Indeed, even those workers lucky enough to be accommodated in a regulation four roomed township house would find it difficult to sleep without being disturbed by the rhythm of daily life.

Relationships outside the family are also affected. Studies have shown that most shift workers find less time to meet with friends. They also have less opportunity to make friends. These problems relate directly to the fact that shift workers have their leisure time while others are working. Concomitant problems such as excessive drinking, drug taking and generally aggressive behaviour can be the result.

Any form of organizational work is severely limited by shift work. Shift workers find it difficult to become involved in their unions. This obviously inhibits their ability to improve their working conditions, and may have contributed to the silence on the shift work issue. Workers on shift are also generally denied the opportunity to join sports or social clubs, or to become involved in community affairs. Indeed, according to the few studies done on this area of work, shiftworkers tend to become involved in "do-it-yourself" type leisure activities, which in the European context could be gardening, animal breeding or fishing. It is not clear what such activities might be in the South African context.

A worker is always educationally disadvantaged in relation to other classes in society. Workers are not permitted the time, nor do they have the money to effectively participate in schooling. (25) Shift workers are doubly disadvantaged in this area. Not only would they be too tired to make use of "normal" facilities, they are denied the ability to attend night school. A shift worker would not be able to participate in the educational progress and advancement of his/her children. Not for them are the pleasures of helping with the homework, or attending school functions, or assisting, through those inevitably heartrending parent/child discussions, the emotional development which is part of any normal child's schooling. Shift work thus reinforces the vicious cycle of under-education which is part and parcel of any workers' life.

The fatigued shift worker also has to bear the effects of a poor transport system. This, of course, is particularly marked in the South African situation where black workers are forced to spend long hours travelling on buses as a result of the group areas legislation. This legislation has forced workers to live far from their places of work, in financially starved townships which gen-

erally have bad roads. Black workers in South Africa often spend up to three hours per day in work related travelling. (26) Overcrowded buses ensure that these long periods are often spent standing rather than sitting. The average South African worker's day extends from 9 to 12 hours in this situation. The problems of fatigue are compounded by long journeys and poor transport.

Against this background of shift work, and its related health and safety, and social problems, we can now move on to consider the situation in the tyre and rubber industry in South Africa. An attempt will be made to analyse the shift work pattern in relation to the issues raised thus far.

Shifts in the tyre and rubber industry

The Department of Statistics Survey quoted previously shows that of the sixty-six establishments surveyed in the rubber products industry, twenty three were working a two shift system while in fourteen a three shift roster was being worked. (27) Twenty nine establishments were not working shifts. As previously stated, the structure of the survey makes it difficult to indicate the number of workers involved in the shift system. However, it is possible to ascertain that 56,8% of the hours worked in the industry are worked on shift. This percentage is considerably higher than the 21,8% already noted for manufacturing industry as a whole.

This global picture is expanded by the information gained from the COSATU unions involved in the February 1986 meeting. Thirteen plants were covered. The companies were either engaged in the manufacture of tyres or of industrial rubber products. The survey is totally representative of the tyre manufacturing industry and all tyre manufacturers in South Africa are included. However, only a small proportion of the factories involved in industrial rubber production were covered. Despite this, the information presented would be representative of the conditions in that section of the industry. This is due to the structure of the industry which consists of two large corporations which account for most production, and a large number of very small plants. It is doubtful whether the Government survey got to the large number of small plants involved. The two giants of the industry - General Tyres (through its subsidiary Mining Industrial Rubber) and Dunlop South Africa (which recently merged with B.T.R.) - are organised, hence allowing for the claim that the conditions represented here are representative of this sector of the industry. It is important to

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note in passing that the conditions of work in smaller plants, are likely to be even more disadvantageous than those described here.

There are four tyre manufacturers with six factories operating in South Africa. All of them operate on a three shift basis, but only one, Goodyear, does this continuously seven days a week. Goodyear operates an additional swing shift as well. The other factories work a five day week, with the last shift coming off on Saturday morning. At the time of the survey, the shift workers worked a 37,5 hour week. In the case of security guards, hours of work varied from 72 to 45 per week, even if they work on shift.

The industrial rubber companies operated a rotating two shift system. The shifts were generally 9,25 hours each, with the weekly load being 45 hours. In the case of one plant, however, an interesting (to be generous) conflation between normal hours and overtime occurs. At MIR workers worked a 46 hour week in the form of four 11,5 hour alternating shifts between Monday and Thursday. The last shift of the week comes off at 6 am on Friday morning. As the legally permitted shift is 9,25 hours, the workers should, under normal circumstances, be paid for 2,25 hours at overtime rates. (28) In this particular case, however, the 2.25 hours are paid at normal rates plus a shift allowance of 10%.

This in fact is legal. The explanation for this apparent contradiction is that while workers work an 11,5 hour day, they work a 46 hour week. They thus work the legally prescribed weekly limit. (29) Therefore, because the weekly hours worked does not exceed the limit for normal hours, the company can get away with not paying overtime rates. This despite the fact that there are clearly an additional 2,25 hours per shift (or 9 hours per week) worked beyond what should be a normal working shift.

It should be noted that the refusal to pay overtime rates until a worker has completed the full quota of hours for the week is fairly common.

Compensation for shift work

Having described the extent of shift work in the industry, we can now look at the compensation offered to South African shift workers, bearing in mind the problems raised previously in this article. In all but one of the companies (Dunlop) a shift allowance of 5% for the afternoon shift and 10% for the evening shift is paid. At

Dunlop a 5% shift allowance is paid for both the afternoon and the night shift. The only other allowance to shift workers is in the case of Dunlop where workers on shift get an extra 2 days annual leave. There are no other concessions made to shift workers in the tyre and rubber industry in South Africa.

Demands made by the unions

It would be repetitive to detail the problems arising from shift work discussed at the February meeting of unions. Suffice to say that the problems were similar to those spelt out by the trade union movement in Europe and America. Based on these discussions, the demands which are listed below were agreed as guidelines for proposals which would be submitted to the companies.

1. Hours of work

Given that the most serious problems are posed by a three shift system, it was agreed that the three shift system should be opposed in principle. The abolition of the late night shift would overcome some of the more serious health problems associated with night work, as well as alleviate some of the social problems that arise.

It was proposed that the maximum number of hours should be 37,5 per week for a five day week, with a maximum of 7,5 hours per shift. This formulation would prevent the exploitation noted in the case of MIR above.

Any overtime worked should be on a voluntary basis. This would allow workers to decide for themselves whether the monetary incentives provided by overtime were worth the sacrifices related to increased fatigue and transport difficulties, to say nothing of the worry caused to the family in the frequent event of a worker being forced to work overtime at short notice, by not knowing that the worker will be late. Such a problem exists in the South African situation where telephones in the black townships are a rarity.

2. Financial compensation

Monetary compensation should in the first place ensure that a shift worker working 37,5 hours as opposed to 40 hours (which is the current union demand for a normal work week) should get the same pay as a regular day worker. At the moment those shift workers on a 37,5 hour week get paid for 37,5 hours, thus ensuring

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that even with the shift premium, their pay is in fact lower than that of a day worker. In the current situation where day workers work a 45 hour week, the difference between their pay and that of a shift worker amounts in some instances to almost 16%. As a result it was decided to demand a 33,33% premium for afternoon shift, and a 50% premium for night shift work.

3. Health compensation

A number of proposals address themselves to the short and long term threats to the health and safety of shift workers. As shift work does impose additional risks on a worker, it was proposed that medical aid cover should be provided entirely at company expense. In addition, the company should ensure that shift workers are regularly checked by a doctor of their own choice. A shift worker should be entitled to an additional 25% sick leave to compensate for factors such as lower resistance to toxic substances.

In order to overcome the problems of fatigue and the attendant higher rate of accidents, it was proposed that the company should pay to any worker hurt while on shift an amount equal to any amount paid out in terms of the Workmans Compensation Act. The worker will thus get double compensation for any accident occurring on shift. It was also proposed that negotiations on shift rosters should take place to allow for a greater recovery time from shifts. (31) In addition shift workers should receive additional annual leave, the proposal being that on top of the current norm of 21 days p.a., shift workers should receive an extra 14 days p.a. They would thus be compensated for the additional burdens of shift work.

In response to the long term problems imposed by shift work, it is proposed that shift workers should be entitled to 1 year off the age of normal retirement for every three years worked on shift. Their pensions should thus be the same as at normal retirement age.

4. Social problems

It is a moot point as to whether there can be adequate compensation for the essentially anti-social nature of shift work. Indeed, there has been many an occasion where workers have opposed, not only shift work, but the constant attempt by industrial capitalism to change the rhythm of society to one more appropriate to the pace of the factory. The history of opposition to a change in

hours of work is a long one, and has not yet been documented in the South African context. (33) Shift work, however, is a fact of contemporary life. The unions have therefore tabled a number of demands to meet the problems arising out of the anti-social nature of shift work.

Eating facilities are generally not open during night shifts. It is therefore imperative that adequate canteen facilities are provided for workers on shift. The digestive problems peculiar to shift workers must also be taken into account, and companies demanding shift work should ensure that special dietary precautions are taken, under the supervision of a trained dietician. It also needs to be stated that adequate meal and rest breaks are provided.

Transport to and from the factory must be provided for workers on shift. The transport system generally gets workers to and from work in the normal daily work cycle. However, public transport is unavailable after working hours. Special provision must be made for shift workers. The physical dangers bred of low wages, mass unemployment and poor living conditions in South African townships makes it imperative that transport be provided.

The difficulties presented to anyone trying to fulfil a normal family life were also discussed. In order to compensate in this area, the unions have demanded that additional compassionate leave should be permitted. This will allow workers on shift to attend to domestic duties which normally would require attention during the day time hours.

Conclusion

There is an increasingly clear (even if it is as yet an instinctive) understanding of the problems of shift work amongst the union movement in South Africa. It is also becoming clearer that a large number of workers suffer under the shift system. This understanding is now being buttressed by a more scientific approach to the shift work issue. As the knowledge develops, so workers will refuse to accept shift working under the conditions that they have hitherto. Workers in the tyre and rubber industry have taken a lead. Others will follow. (34) Employers will in the future pay more dearly for a worker's sleep.

Footnotes:

1. The 40 hour demand has been most vociferously argued by the workers in the motor industry and has been one of the national demands of the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU) since 1983. It is not surprising that workers in this industry should put such store by a shorter workweek. Employment in the car assembly industry has been cut drastically from 50,000 workers in 1982 to approximately 30,000 in 1986. In addition the motor industry has seen robotization and other technological and line function innovations such as the "Just in Time" system. The union has argued that these increases in productivity justifies a shorter workweek. A shorter workweek would also create more jobs.

The twin problems of increasing unemployment and greater productivity with less workers as a result of technological innovation have led to the adoption of the forty hour week demand by the progressive trade union movement as a whole; M A Bienefeld, Working hours in British industry: an economic history, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1972, pp142-145 and passim.

2. The first recorded strike over shorter hours was of employees in engineering workshops in Johannesburg in 1889. Their demand was for increased wages and a reduction of hours of work from 54 to 48 per week. For further details on disputes over hours of work see E Gitsham and J F Trembath, A first account of labour organization in South Africa, passim; E Webster, Cast in a racial mould, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986, pp31-31; and Republic of South Africa, Department of Mines, Report of commission of inquiry into a five day working week, R.P. 97/1977, p15 and passim.
3. According to a review of conditions of employment by the South African Labour and Development Research Unit, (SALDRU) out of 94 industrial council agreements and 61 wage determinations in operation in 1983/4, only 11 specified that the hours worked in that industry should be no more than 40. See I Schroeder and G Young, Conditions of employment. An analysis of the conditions of employment set by the industrial councils and the Wage Board, Cape Town: Saldru Labour Research Series, Volume 4, Section 2, 1985, pp1,2,19.
4. M Maurice, Shift work. Economic advantages and social costs, Geneva: International Labour Office, 1975, p4.
5. International Chemical and Energy Federation (ICEF), ICEF continuous shift work project. Resource Report, Geneva, 1985, p6.
6. Bienefeld op.cit. p209.

7. ICEF op.cit. pl3.
8. There is an extensive, and growing literature on this issue. A useful guide to this literature is to be found in the ICEF publication already quoted.
9. Department of Statistics, Particulars of workhours and/or shifts - production and related workers in 1981, unpublished survey done for the Federated Chamber of Industries, 1986.
10. These figures were extracted from the survey, Table 1.
11. Unless otherwise stated, the next two sections will be based on information obtained in the following publications: ICEF op.cit. ppl8-25; Maurcie, op.cit. chaps 3,5 and 6; M Wallace, Shift work and health. Proceedings of seminars "Overseas developments in shiftwork", Australia: La Trobe University, 1985; A A Evans, Hours of work in industrialised countries, Geneva: International Labour Office, 1975, Introduction; D Maric, Adapting working hours to modern needs, Geneva: International Labour Office, 1977, chaps 1 and 2; International Metal Workers Federation (IMF), Why we must reduce working time. Background paper to the IMF central committee special session, November 18. 1983, Geneva, 1983; and Health Information Centre, The health and social effects of shift work, Johannesburg, 1983.
12. The articles concerned are as follows: Health Information Centre, op.cit.; P Arenson and I Molzen, "An investigation into the health and social effects of shift work on women office cleaners", Industrial Sociology III research project, University of the Witwatersand, 1983; C Hartford, L Rampini, and D Feigenbaum, "Effects of nightwork on health", Department of Community Health, University of the Witwatersrand, no date; and C Murray, "Women and night work", Industrial Law Journal 5(2), 1984, pp47-60.
13. T Adler, "The prevention of occupational diseases and industrial accidents in South Africa", paper presented to a conference on the "Economics of health care", University of Cape Town, 1976, ppl79, 180 and 186 and published in F Wilson, and J Westcott (eds), Hunger, work and health Vol 2, Ravan Press: Johannesburg, 1980.
14. ICEF op.cit. p4.
15. Wallace op.cit., p7.
16. Arenson op.cit., pl7. The authors note that the average sleep of shift workers in Western Europe is 6,1 hours per day.
17. The Group Areas Act has enforced geographical segregation by race. The vast majority of black workers therefore live a considerable distance from their places of work. A report on black

rainbow. Their profits must have been enormous, for ISCOR had not given the steel contract to Keeley because its rates undercut the rest of the industry. ISCOR was paying the same rate per ton to Keeley as it paid to the rest of the industry, yet Keeley's wages were two and a half times lower than wages paid to unionised labour. It was a situation that could not prevail, but while it did, they were accumulating capital at a record rate.

Keeley workers organise

At the end of 1983 some of the retrenched stevedores from SAS who had sneaked into Keeley approached the GWU and within a few months the union was representative. There followed a long complicated battle between the union and the Keeley management. After a short strike in April wages were unilaterally raised to R1,20 an hour in the hope of forestalling the union. This only signalled to the workers that the union was the right place to be. By early May the union was recognised as being representative of the workers.

The major objective of the GWU was to bring Keeley into line with the rest of the industry. In order to avoid possible court action over their violations of the 1979 wage determination Keeley agreed to pay a flat settlement of R400 to each stevedore. There still remained the massive disparity between the wages and conditions at Keeley and the rest of the industry. At the beginning of the year, under pressure from the GWU and as a consequence of their own threatened position, the Stevedores Employers Association (SASEA) had drawn up a new wage determination in order to standardise wages and conditions in the industry again. This came into effect in late May and was similar in many respects to the wage agreement negotiated with the GWU.

The union then used this as the legal stick to beat Keeley back into line with the rest of the unionised industry. There followed a long and complicated battle as Keeley sought ministerial exemption from the provisions of the wage determination and refused to pay the rates laid down on the basis of their application for exemption. The union eventually won this battle and Keeley was forced to dig substantially into its heavily laden pockets. Each worker received full back pay owing to him - this varied between R300 to R700 for each worker. In addition wages and basic conditions of service in Keeley were equalised with the rest of the industry, eg. stevehands wages jumped from R1.20 an hour to R2.19.

This equalisation of wages with the rest of the industry was only for a limited period of time however. For at the end of the year in a national wage negotiation, between SAS Ltd (who employ over 90% of all stevedores in the country) and the GWU, wages were standardised nationally and the minimum in the four main ports became R21 per day (R2.47 an hour). Once again Keeley wages were much lower than the rest of the industry. Fundamentally the problem was that there existed no statutory collective bargaining forum encompassing the stevedoring industry on a national or port basis.

Reimposing an industry collective bargaining forum

Although wages had now been brought into line and the immediate threat posed by Keeley to the unionised industry had been neutralised the basic problem still remained. There were still small companies popping up over which the union had little control and, in Port Elizabeth, Castle Crane Hire still remained outside of the GWU's organisation. The standardisation of wages and conditions of service via the enforcement of the current wage determination was only a short term solution. The major problem was how to re-create the port wide or industry wide collective bargaining forum previously operative between the GWU and the companies?

It was clearly highly unsatisfactory to depend on the wage determination and the Department of Manpower to enforce industry standardised wages and conditions of service. Furthermore the union had no direct control over what was contained in the wage determination, and also had no control over the policing of the determination. Finally the issue of the number of casuals that a company could use and the wages to be paid to them, which was absolutely critical in the industry, could not be addressed in this way. The wage determination did not cover casuals, nor did it touch those small companies in, for example, Richards Bay that had no indunas and used casuals every day.

The stevedores therefore started to address this problem nationally by discussing alternative statutory forms of industry wide bargaining. The question of whether or not the union should consider forming an industrial council in the stevedoring industry was therefore naturally considered. But as long as the GWU remained an unregistered union the concrete possibility of such a statutory form of industry wide bargaining was precluded as an option. Indeed it became clear that any form of statutory bargaining which was enforceable over the entire industry was closed to the union by

- shift work -

- work, second edition, Oxford, 1985. A favoured pattern of shift work is now a five team system which cuts working time to 33 hours and 36 minutes. This pattern is likely to become law in some countries; ICEF op.cit. p28.
32. The trade union demand in South Africa has been that the age of retirement should be reduced to 55. For the motivations behind this demand, see Federation of South African Trade Unions, Pension panic, Durban, 1981.
33. In addition to the reference in note 18 above, Bienefeld op. cit., M Weber, The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, London, Unwin University Books, 1967; P A Sorokin, Socio-cultural causality, space, time, New York, Russel and Russel Inc, 1964; and D S Landes, Revolution in time, Harvard University Press, 1983, provide fascinating insights into a story which has yet to be told in South Africa.
34. A recent settlement of a two week strike at Asea Electrical, a plant in the metal industry, resulted in an increase from 12% to 16% in the night shift allowance.

Review: Cast in a Racial Mould

Eddie Webster, Cast in a racial mould: labour process and trade unionism in the foundries, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985, xv + 299 pp, R18.

It can be said that the development of radical analysis of South African society has had as its two premises, first, the assessment of racism and the oppression of the indigenous population of the country and, second, the discovery of class in the wake of industrialisation. The consideration of class in turn has brought an intensified interest in the trade union movement and its history, about which we now have some good, if still too spotty, information. Eddie Webster's book pushes us one step further by examining the social relations of work, the actual history of labour process itself with its power relationships and intersection of technological change and class struggle. This is what Marx, scorning the mere analysis of buying and selling that market-orientated economists made their object of study, called the "hidden abode" of

production. Webster does not actually desert the sphere of trade union studies, however; instead, his analysis is intended to deepen our understanding of why South African unions are the way they are through considering their relationship to the job and to society.

Webster brings to bear for the first time in South African studies a new theoretical literature that has been emerging in America and Europe. Its godfather was Harry Braverman, author of Labour and monopoly capital who made the history of twentieth century capitalism centre on the process of job deskilling - the bosses' response to the struggles of skilled workers over control of labour conditions. In addition to Braverman (and his critics, who see considerable worker success in resistance to deskilling), Webster makes use of the work by American radical economists on the structured segmentation of the labour market, divided through discriminatory means into sectors that differ in terms of security, skill and pay levels and of economic historians who have shown that technological innovations are very often a direct weapon in the class struggle the bosses are waging against the workers. New machinery reduces the numbers and skills of workers and re-asserts the control of the capitalists on the factory floor more effectively than any number of foremen. Nonetheless it may in turn create the basis for new forms of worker organisation and resistance.

Cast in a racial mould aims to illustrate and explain the "complex nature of the interactions between the labour process, workplace organisation, and divisions within the working class". It focusses on one industry, metal foundry work, from its origins to the present. Webster makes use of unpublished trade union records, his excellent knowledge of the COSATU unions and a set of in-depth biographies meant to bring the experiences of different strata of workers over time to life. Five exemplary individual workers' lives are examined, constituting the heart of a conclusion that makes vivid Webster's analysis.

The first part of the study looks at the old days when metal work consisted mainly of jobbing and was the province of highly skilled immigrant craftsmen. Trade union organisation focussed on the defense of craft privilege and access to skills against all comers. The relationship between craft defense and racism was important but complex and not always direct. The development of heavy industry in South Africa during the 1930s and 1940s, however, greatly changed the foundry. The white workers were no longer sufficient in number to do the work while capital became increasingly

pervasive in its efforts to institute deskilling processes that went together with mass production. White workers enjoyed considerable success in resisting these changes but as time went on, white moulders tended to be shifted from production into supervisory positions. The craft unions turned into benefit societies. This harmonised with increasingly racist trade union practices. Some of the white metal workers follow this course to the present day and Webster gives attention to Yster en Staal politics. Most, however, with the Boilermakers in the lead, have had in time to find ways to incorporate black workers into the trade union movement for their own self-defense. The Boilermakers were a force within TUCSA but have left it entirely in recent years having regenerated through the rise of shopfloor activity. Webster devotes considerable space to the efforts made by white unions to try to incorporate the growing black workforce in the 1970s: parallel unions, separate branches, etc.

The arrival of a large black semi-skilled labour force into the metal industry was at first heralded by the effective application of American-style "scientific management" principles. However, while the poverty and difficult situation of the black migrant worker at first made resistance difficult, in time the migrant condition itself bred the solidarity of a new kind of trade unionism based on shop steward action. MAWU, unlike white unionism with its roots in the past, "has taken on some of the characteristics of a social movement", notably on the East Rand, and presents the possibilities of an unprecedentedly political kind of trade union structure. This coincides with the post-Wiehahn reform process which creates a less despotic form of control on the factory floor (to use Webster's terminology) and with the township insurgencies of the past couple of years. From a socialist perspective, there is more potential for this kind of workers' movement than the older type to pursue general objectives. On the whole, this makes South Africa an interesting and important contrast to the situation in the advanced capitalist countries where something like the reverse progression has been true.

This book is very rich in ideas and approaches. Some of its approach, especially on the new union movement, requires far more critical research to be supportable without question. It is not easy to absorb because of the range of topics it touches on and not entirely integrated by the author, but it is a pathbreaking work that repays careful consideration.

(Bill Freund, University of Natal, Durban, March 1986)

Moses Mabhida 1923 - 1986



In 1973 Eddie Webster conducted a survey of unregistered trade union members in Durban. Among other things he asked workers if they could "think of a leader present or past who can or could improve the position of African workers". The four most frequently mentioned leaders were Albert Luthuli, Chief Buthelezi, Nelson Mandela, and Moses Mabhida. It is likely that Mabhida's death on March 8 in Maputo was deeply mourned among workers of a certain generation, not merely because of the causes he so ably represented but because of their own personal experience of his leadership and inspiration. At the time of his death Mabhida was Secretary-General of the South African Communist Party as well as a long-standing member of the ANC's National Executive. Within South Africa though, before his departure into exile in 1960, he was principally known as a trade unionist and a senior official in SACTU.

Moses Mbheki Mncane Mabhida was born on 14 October 1923 on a farm at Thirnville, near Pietermaritzburg. His father was a farm worker who later worked as a labourer for the Pietermaritzburg electricity department. The family was poor and Moses was unable to complete his schooling beyond Standard Seven. While at school he made friends with Harry Gwala. Gwala ran a study group for senior boys at Mabhida's school. He encouraged Mabhida to read the Guardian and probably influenced his decision to join the Communist Party in December 1942. By then Moses had left school to work first as a waiter, then a railway worker, and later as a shop worker. His first trade union experience dated from his participation in a union organised by Gwala in the Pietermaritzburg distributive industry. Like many other African communists he played an active role in the ANC and by 1952 was assistant secretary of the Pietermaritzburg branch. His main commitment, though, through the 1940s and 1950s was to worker organisation; in 1953 he was asked by the clandestine SACP (which he helped to revive) to work as a full-time trade unionist. With Gwala he organised the Howick Rubber Workers' Union (which in the course of one of its strikes produced thousands of stickers with the cryptic but effective message of "rubber burns") as well as chemical workers in Pietermaritzburg. Moving to Durban in 1954 he was to help with the establishment of unions for Dairy workers, bakery workers, laundrymen, and workers in the transport sector.

- tribute -

In May 1955 Moses Mabhida led the formation of the Durban SACTU local committee over which he was to preside for the rest of the decade. SACTU was to develop a strong organisation in Durban and the surrounding industrial region. Mabhida was involved in the brave though relatively unsuccessful efforts to build a union for railway workers and also actively supported dockworkers in their three strikes against conditions under the Togat system. He established what was to grow into a large and vigorous General Workers' Union. This was a time of considerable industrial conflict and Mabhida was an active and militant leader. He was charged with incitement after a strike at a Hammarsdale clothing factory in 1960. He was a compelling orator, eloquent, passionate, even poetic, and like his party comrade, J B Marks, (also a good Marxist) not above using a religious metaphor if it suited the purpose: "The African is crucified on the cross of gold in the Transvaal and on the mealie stalk in the Orange Free State", he said in the course of a 1957 conference.

Mabhida was a member of the ANC's national executive from at least 1956. In Natal social conditions, labour militancy, and women's protest were all contributory factors in a massive growth in the ANC's following towards the end of the decade. SACTU and the ANC reciprocally contributed to each other's strength as was evident in such joint campaigns as the potato boycott, the one-pound-a-day campaign, and the 1959 three day stay-away - the latter especially well supported in Durban was called off prematurely, against the inclinations of Mabhida and the local trade union leadership. In the course of 1959, when the ANC was at its peak of popularity in Natal, Mabhida was to work closely with Chief Luthuli and both share the credit for the effective regional political leadership. Mabhida was acting-chairman of the Natal ANC between 1958-1959.

Mabhida left South Africa at the height of the Sharpeville crisis. After joining in the pass-burning protest of 28 March 1960 he crossed the Lesotho border following a decision by SACTU that he should represent South African workers at the International Labour Organisation. He was to spend the next twenty-six years, nearly half his life, in exile. The details of his work in the external organisations of the ANC, the SACP and SACTU have only been cryptically described in such publications as Sechaba and African Communist. He represented SACTU at various conferences, most notably in 1962 at the Casablanca All-African Trade Union Federation launch when he argued against the prevalent emphasis on racially defined nationalism and "African personality". He was active in the World

Federation of Trade Unions. In 1973 he was elected a vice-chairman of SACTU. But from 1962 onwards it seems likely that he was more strongly committed to directly political work. He was re-elected to the ANC's National Executive at the Lobatsi conference of October 1962 and the following year was to work full time for Umkhonto we Sizwe. When the post was created he became the first National Political Commissar of Umkhonto. He must have been popular in the training camps; the 1969 Morogoro Conference (called partly in response to rank and file dissatisfaction) elected him once again to the ANC executive, a much curtailed body of nine men. After Morogoro he was to serve as Secretary to the ANC's Revolutionary Council, the committee charged with re-establishing an ANC presence inside South Africa. He continued to hold his post in Umkhonto, effectively second-in-command, until the death of the SACP General Secretary, Moses Kotane, in 1979. Mabhida was chosen as Kotane's successor, confirmed as General Secretary in 1981. Though seriously ill in the last year of his life he led the Party until his death. He was buried after a state funeral in Maputo.

It is premature to attempt an assessment of Mabhida's life and his work. His virtues and failings are known best to his friends and political associates; neither the SACP nor the ANC encourage personality cults to develop around their functioning leaders and the presently available details provide little more than the bare contours of his career. He was born into a generation which had to struggle, not just in the political sense, but materially, for the most modest conditions of existence. In such a context to be an activist, a trade unionist, and a communist, took not simply courage; it required huge reserves of imagination and moral strength. Mabhida himself once said, rather ruefully, when describing his early efforts to understand Marxism that "none of this... came easily". As a Party theoretician, Mabhida had the strengths of his predecessor Kotane; a good if orthodox understanding of Marxism-Leninism (which was for example, to make him fiercely critical of Eurocommunism) and a subtle approach to nationalism. Under his leadership the Party was to emphasise the possibility of social revolution occurring through the national revolution as opposed to succeeding it as a wholly distinct process. The extent to which this is likely to happen can perhaps be estimated from the slogans which are shouted and the symbols which appear at black political gatherings: Mabhida's name and the Party's banner seem to be indispensable elements in the liturgy of liberation. Even this brief outline of Mabhida's life shows us that this is deservedly so.

(Tom Lodge, University of the Witwatersrand, May 1986)

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Sources: Good biographical entries on Mabhida are in S Gastrow, Who's who in African politics, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985, and T Karis and G Carter, From protest to challenge, Hoover Institution, Stanford, 1977. K Luckhardt and B Wall, Organize or starve, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980, provides details of Mabhida's role in SACTU. Other information for this obituary derived from The African Communist, no 84, (1981), no 86 (1981), no 92 (1983), no 95 (1983); Karis and Carter microfilm collection, ref 11A 2: M2: 96; E Webster, "A profile of unregistered union members in Durban", African Studies seminar paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1979; AIM press release on the Mabhida funeral, Maputo, 29.3.86; New Age 30.10.58, 10.9.59, 11.2.60, 3.3.60.

photo: communist banners in Lebowa at the funeral of Peter Nchabeleng, Northern Transvaal UDF president, died in detention



Statistics and Economic Notes for Trade Unions

Inflation

The inflation rate is still above 18%. It has been above 18% for the last five months. Most economists expect inflation to remain around this level, and above 16% for the rest of 1986. Rob Lee of the Old Mutual expects inflation to be just under 20% in 1987. (Business Day 5.5.86)

Unions who are negotiating mid-year wage agreements should thus count on 18-20% inflation in 1986/7. This will eat away a large part of the wage increases they obtain.

	Consumer Price Index (1980=100) April 1986	Annual Rate of Inflation (% Increase over 1 year) April 1986
Cape Town	219,2	16,7
Port Elizabeth	217,1	19,3
East London	205,5	16,3
Durban	221,4	14,9
Pietermaritzburg	223,5	16,4
Witwatersrand	223,6	20,2
Vaal Triangle	229,6	19,6
Pretoria	228,8	20,2
Klerksdorp	211,5	17,6
Bloemfontein	210,1	16,3
OFS Goldfields	228,2	19,0
Kimberley	213,0	16,6
South Africa	222,2	18,6

SOURCE: Central Statistical Services; information for April 1986

Across-the-board wage increases

Some wage negotiations are just about minimum rates of pay. This is especially the case with industrial council agreements. Minimum rates are the solid ground for wage demands but problems arise

- statistics -

when some workers are paid above the minimum. The minimum rate may rise, but they don't get a cent more in their pay packet because they are already above the minimum.

This is why many agreements provide for a wage increase for all workers, whatever their wages are. This is called an "across-the-board" (ATB) wage increase.

Sometimes the ATB increase gives the same rand increase to all workers, whatever their wage. This happened recently in the Pick 'n Pay wage agreement when all workers got an R85 increase per month. This was a nice increase for workers on the minimum rate of R301 per month, they got 28% more, but for a worker who earned R600 per month, the percentage of increase was less, only 14%. This is below the rate of inflation. "Higher paid" workers often find their real wages falling if union policy is to demand equal wage increases across-the-board for all workers.

There may be good reasons why workers decide to demand an ATB in rand terms. A loaf of bread costs the same for everyone. Lower paid workers on starvation wages need and deserve a bigger percentage wage increase.

The other form of ATB increase is an equal increase in percentage terms for all workers. For example, the NUM has demanded a 45% wage increase for all mineworkers. This ensures that all workers get an increase above the rate of inflation. But this also means that the lowest paid worker, on R193 a month, gets only a R87 increase, while a category 8 worker on R600 a month gets a R270 increase. This increases the "wage-gap" between categories of workers and may make it easier for employers, at a later stage, to split the unity of workers.

There is no simple answer to these problems, but it shows there is a need for unions to monitor the effects of their demands on the whole wage structure of a firm or an industry. Why should Raymond Ackerman get away with paying less than inflation to any of his workers? What differences between wage levels do workers want to see in a firm?

(Prepared by the Labour Research Service,
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