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**Focus: Workers in the
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South African Labour Bulletin

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- * employees
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Editorial Note

Dudly Horner has resigned from the Cape Town committee of the SALB in order to concentrate on research commitments. Dudley was one of the 3 longest serving members. His contributions to the Bulletin include work on Western Cape unionism and on the Wiehahn Commission Report. The Board would like to thank him for all his work.

The Board also welcomes Marcel Golding who joins the SALB as full-time research officer. His experience includes organising work in a conservative public sector union (the Public Servants League). The insights he gained there are evident in this issue of the Bulletin.

The focus of this edition is: workers in the state sector. Although the material presented is still very tentative, reflecting the embryonic state of unionisation in the public sector, a number of common themes emerge. It comes as no surprise that this is very harsh terrain for democratic trade unionism and that repression has often been the order of the day. This has not prevented workers from organising, however. What is clear is that the structure of the state sector, the centralisation of personnel functions, militates against localised action which remains isolated and fails to organise at a national level. It is argued that the growth of a national trade union movement, symbolised by the proposed new federation, provides the conditions for transcending these limitations. Above all else, it is the rising militancy of public service workers themselves, sporadic at present, which places unionisation in the state sector firmly on the agenda.

The material presented in this edition points to a very clear policy of "divide and rule" on the part of the state towards its employees. To a certain extent, black employees in the state sector may be able to minimise such divisions (see, for example, the support given by doctors and medical students in the Durban hospital workers strikes). However, there is some evidence to suggest that the black workforce in the public sector is increasingly differentiated along class lines: a minority receiving increased material bene-

- editorial -

fits in return for administering the new deal, and the majority of manual workers still subject to poor wages and conditions and wholesale discrimination. These structural divisions are reflected in the mounting class struggles within some of the older public sector unions. This issue bears on the whole question of attempting to democratise conservative unions.

The rationalisation and modernisation of the civil administration (see M Golding, "Workers in the state sector") and the attempt to co-opt black officials, to create a multi-racial bureaucracy loyal to the politics of the new deal, forms part of a much wider reform programme. This programme, Cobbett et al argue, now constitutes an attempt on the part of ruling groups to fundamentally restructure the spatial bases of economic planning, labour control policy and constitutional reform. They argue that these shifts prefigure larger transformations that could re-constitute the structures of exploitation and domination in an attempt both to "depoliticise" earlier apartheid state forms, and to pave the way for regional structures, based on economic criteria, which avoid the financially wasteful aspects of apartheid. The authors, however, have only begun to speculate about the strategic implications of these changes for opposition politics, and trade unions in particular.

SASOL Workers Regroup *

On February 1 negotiations reopened with Sasol over the union's demand for re-instatement of sacked workers. In mid-February after some hard bargaining the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) was presented with a final take-it-or-leave-it offer from management. The main points of the offer were:

1. A minimum of 70% of re-applying workers to be employed. This would include at least 16 shopstewards out of 48 originally sacked (6 were still working; and some did not re-apply). Those workers not initially taken back still retain the right to be considered. Early indications are that 75% have already regained their jobs.
2. Previous rights gained by the union are to be continued: access to hostels, access to notice boards, limited office facility in the hostel, meetings with management on a regular and emergency basis, and stop-orders.
3. Additional trade union rights negotiated. The most important item here is the recognition of CWIU shop stewards, who are to receive letters of accreditation signed by the personnel department and initialled by the individual foremen. Recognition involves:
 - a) shop stewards will represent workers in grievance and disciplinary hearings, with time off for this.
 - b) time off for a formal caucus of the shop stewards committee (1 half day per month).
 - c) report back time in working hours.
 - d) 10 days per annum for union training (5 days paid by the company) plus additional unpaid time as agreed.
 - c) access to telephones for union business.

In addition a union negotiating team of 8 (officials and shop stewards) is to be established to negotiate procedures and other matters with Sasol management.

The agreement was signed by the CWIU on March 5. Whilst this undoubtedly involved compromise on the question of numbers, Sasol's original project - to effectively smash the union - was prevented. This represents a considerable achievement

* see SALB 10.3 and 10.4 for background details

given the harsh terrain on which the union fought. A range of rights have been wrested from a powerful parastatal company; these rights provide the union with space in which to reorganise. These gains reflect the unity and organisation of the Sasol workers and the solidarity of other workers (see SALB 10.4). Also an examination of the union's conduct of the campaign, and the processes of worker control which were invoked, indicates widespread debate amongst members and massive rank and file involvement.

Worker control: democracy in action

Up till management's final ultimatum, negotiations were handled by a small team made up of the general secretary, branch secretary, 1-2 local organisers and 1-3 shop stewards (plus legal adviser). Report backs to Sasol workers were held almost weekly during the four month campaign and briefings were sent to groups of sacked workers in the homelands, as far as possible. CWIU branches, FOSATU regions and all the unity unions were given regular reports. CWIU called for debate in all its factories since, clearly, the Sasol struggle was bound up with the future course of the entire union. Shop stewards from the factories were to carry the decisions of workers to the Branch Executive Committees. From the BECs reps reported, under mandate, to the NEC.

The NEC of February 2 decided to refer the matter to the branches. It was already clear that Sasol would take a hard-line against 100% reinstatement, so BECs were asked for guidance on what final settlement would be acceptable. The NEC met again in mid-February after the final offer was made. Branches had already held their meetings, but the NEC decided that more time was required to ensure that every factory discussed the issue, so that the final decision would be truly representative of the entire union. Towards this end the NEC called the union's first National Shop Stewards Congress, in effect delegating its powers to the rank and file activists, to ensure maximum involvement and legitimacy.

On March 2, 200 shop stewards (over 50% of all CWIU shop stewards) came together to debate the Sasol question. At the end of the day the Congress decided unanimously to adopt the agreement. Arguments put forward by the workers included:

* This was an exceptional situation. The union was confront-

ing a powerful and strategic state industry.

- * At the time of the sackings the union was left with nothing. Pressure had forced the company to negotiate and produced concessions, but that was as far as Sasol was likely to go. It was necessary for the union to recognise its limitations, given the power of the company.
- * To opt for all-out war at this stage would involve a massive commitment of resources which would reduce the union's work on other fronts. There was also the possibility that the union might be excluded from Sasol altogether, for the immediate future.
- * Workers were in no doubt that the other unity unions would back them in a national demonstration strike on the issue. However, the feeling was that they should not endanger other jobs, especially in a recession, and especially when they were not convinced that this action would focus pressure sufficiently against Sasol.

The Congress concluded that CWIU should accept Sasol's offer so as to retain a strong presence within the company and to gain space to regroup; above all to look to the future.

These arguments were accepted by Sasol workers themselves at a report-back general meeting held on March 5. The 900-strong meeting included some sacked workers and a majority of working members (some of them new members). This number was a normal turnout (due to shift-working and the fact that security guard members live 12 km from the main hostels), and represents a current membership of approximately 3,000 (50% of the plant) - a considerable achievement in the face of mass sackings. Also, since November, the union has signed up, and secured stop orders for, over 50% of the 9000 coal miners in the Sasol complex. This was achieved despite problems of stabilising membership amongst a workforce with high turnover, and in the face of management harassment. It remains to explain why it was that the mighty Sasol was forced to compromise with CWIU.

Why did Sasol compromise?

A number of points can be made:

- * FOSATU was able to mobilise its international connections very quickly to unleash a massive worldwide trade union response, which coincided with the upsurge of anti-

- Sasol -

apartheid pressure in the USA. This threatens Sasol with a long-term overseas "image" problem. Questions have also been raised about companies that supply Sasol with expertise, particularly Fluor.

- * Within South Africa the tremendous response from the unity unions and the threat of national strike action sounded alarm bells. In addition these unions were beginning to pressurise their members' pension funds to withdraw investment from Sasol.
- * Within the Sasol complex management was faced with a magnificent show of solidarity and courage from miners as they signed up for CWIU in their thousands.
- * In the Secunda area the union maintained a constant presence as a core of sacked activists, shop stewards and organisers simply refused to go away, sending out a clear message to Sasol: "If you want the workers you have to settle with the union".
- * It became clear very soon that despite Sasol's contempt for its "migrant workers" they relied on those workers to maintain production. Given the sophisticated and continuous nature of production, the disruptive effects of sacking the majority of the workforce must have been costly. Further costs included transport, re-engagement and training costs.
- * The dispute undoubtedly dented Sasol's image as South Africa's modern prestige project.
- * Sasol was also isolated from other sections of capital. Amongst business commentators it was widely held that Sasol had gone over the top. Also, FOSATU factories were pressing their managements to protest to Sasol.

Future priorities for CWIU

The union is faced with a number of immediate tasks:

- * to maintain contact with sacked workers, and represent them to Sasol management. Workers see this as a necessary obligation.
- * additional resources have been allocated to the local office.
- * shop stewards (many of them newly elected) will have to be trained to meet the new situation. The shop stewards committee has to be re-established as soon as possible.
- * the recruitment drive has to continue within the Sasol plant and on the mines. On the mines, the CWIU has yet to

formalise shop steward rights and other facilities.

The experience of the Sasol struggle bears directly on the whole question of organising in the state sector. It is for the union itself to analyse the lessons of the strike and the reinstatement campaign. In the meantime we can assert that Sasol has been forced to accept the union (and by implication the politics of the stay-away). Moreover the stay-away, and the campaign that followed, has dealt a deathblow to the paternalist style which characterised every level of Sasol management. Sasol's new and more "enlightened" approach - particularly over shop steward recognition - suggests a possible restructuring of its personnel function. This is itself a direct result of worker organisation and unity. The space that this agreement gives allows the Sasol workers to regroup and begin again to push back the frontiers of dictatorial managerial control.

(SALB Correspondent, March 1985)

Workmens Compensation Follow-up

The case study of compensation for mesothelioma related in SALB 9.7 (1984) has finally been resolved. In May 1984, eight months after the worker was diagnosed as having mesothelioma, and seven months after a claim was submitted for him, he died. Eleven days later he was diagnosed as having compensable mesothelioma by the MBOD, and was sent forms to complete to "expedite disposal of the application". These again requested a full occupational history, together with any relevant records of service, certified copies of marriage certificates, identity documents, and birth certificates of dependent children. The IHRG managed to contact the worker's mother who filled out the forms and submitted them together with the relevant copied documents. In mid-January 1985, after sixteen months of struggle with the compensation authorities, born witness by a file an inch thick, the claimant's mother was granted a benefit of R13,417.

MOSA: New Regulations

The new general regulations under the Machinery and Occupational Safety Act - Regulations No R2206 of 5 Oct 1984 in Government Gazette Vol 232 No 9453 - introduces some important new rights for workers and especially for safety representatives, if these are elected by and responsible to workers on the shop floor. A full account of these new rights are included in the IHRG MOSA manual. There is however one error in the reprint of the manual in SALB 10.3 (Dec 1984): on page 51, under point 1, regulation 5(h) was left out. This regulation states that management must make sure that each worker knows about any dangers connected with his/her work. Together with Regulation 5(a), quoted under point 1, this gives the right to workers to gain information about workplace hazards.

The new regulations are quite progressive in the sense that they provide important health and safety rights that are absent in the main Act. In this regard the previous article by Myers and Steinberg (SALB 8.8 and 9.9, 1983) is out of date and incorrect. At the time there were only 2 rights for safety representatives. This position is now substantially improved. (Industrial Health Research Group, UCT, March 1985)

Bakers Biscuit Strike

During February, 1000 Bakers Biscuit Company workers at the Isando plant in Transvaal and Pinetown plant in Natal conducted a strike which lasted 12 days and 14 days respectively; the first national legal strike of its kind in the biscuit industry. In Natal this number included 200 Indian workers, the result of a 2-year struggle by shop stewards to unite all sections of the workforce. The majority of workers were members of the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAWU), a FOSATU affiliate.

The strike was the outcome of a long and bitter wage dispute with Bakers Biscuit Company, a subsidiary of Anglo-Vaal Industries and owned by Anglo-Vaal Ltd, which is part of Anglo-Vaal Holdings, in turn part of the Hersor and Menell families. Bakers Biscuit Company is the largest biscuit producer in the country and controls a number of smaller biscuit producers, and has, consequently enormous clout among producers. Its attitude to unionisation is "liberal", believing that workers should join unions of their choice, even have the right to strike, and is favourably disposed to majority unionism.

Organising the biscuit industry has been characterised, initially, by intense competition, especially in Natal, between the National Biscuit Operative and Packers Union (NBOPU), a TUCSA affiliate and SFAWU; the Food Beverage Workers Union, a CUSA affiliate, also has a small presence in the industry. SFAWU began organising Bakers workers as early as 1981 and took nearly 3 years to achieve majority membership and recognition. Many of the workers left the NBOPU because of the absence of democracy and worker control in the union, and because of its failure to secure significant wage increases, despite its participation in the Industrial Council (IC).

By early 1984, SFAWU had gained not only a majority in Bakers, but also in the biscuit industry in Transvaal and Natal. From this position the union applied to join the IC for wage negotiations in July. However its application was blocked by NBOPU, a common problem facing the emerging unions. Whilst the biscuit employers favoured negotiation within the IC, the block on SFAWU's application increased the pressure to neg-

- Bakers strike -

otiate outside, and consequently the employers withdrew, causing the collapse of the IC. An informal negotiating forum was set up with SFAWU, and which also included the minority unions.

SFAWU's demand, supported by the other unions, was for a 32% increase on the present minimum wage of R82 per week (ie. to R110 per week) as well as for other non-wage benefits of increased public holidays and annual leave. The employers' final offer was 12,5%, which meant to most workers a R10 per week increase, a real drop in wages given the inflation rate of 14-15%. SFAWU demanded mediation.

During mediation the employers offered a 12.5% increase from November 1984 to January 1985, and an additional increase of 3% for February 1985 to February 1986. SFAWU rejected the offer. An application was made to the Minister of Manpower to appoint a conciliation board in order to settle the dispute because of the collapse of the Industrial Council. When no conciliation board was set up, after 30 days, SFAWU held a strike ballot, on January 31, at the Isando and Pinetown plants. The majority of workers voted for legal strike action.

The strike commenced on 8 February in Pinetown and 11 February in Isando bringing both plants to a standstill. Bakers' response was most interesting. There were no mass dismissals nor any attempt to employ scab labour. Instead Bakers embarked upon a "trial of strength" in an effort to starve workers into submission. Although workers were financially hard pressed and needed an early settlement, they nevertheless held out. Unity in the face of employer intransigence was imperative not only for Bakers' workers but the entire industry. While the Bakers workers were on strike for a 32% increase, NBOPU members in Cape Town, employed by Baumans Biscuit, and in Port Elizabeth, employed by Pyotts (both owned by Bakers) - were preparing to settle for 10%, below even the mediation offer of 12.5% in the Transvaal and Natal. The final settlement for these workers was a 10% rise for November 1984 to January 1985, and a further 2,5% for February 1985 to February 1986.

During the strike SFAWU also appealed to the International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) for aid. A significant feature of the strike was the mass meeting arranged by SFAWU with Bakers workers and their families, where

the reason for the strike was explained. This was done to prevent family friction and well over 1000 people attended. Throughout the strike, morale remained high and in the Isando plant NBOPU workers supported the strike. If anything it meant the deathknell of the NBOPU there and its last outpost, in Cape Town, is likely to come under attack as workers realise the wage discrepancies in the industry.

During the strike the most pressing concern for SFAWU was to maintain organisation and secure close links between all striking workers. According to Transvaal SFAWU officials, it was important, given the recession, not to keep workers out on strike for too long. Also a national strike requires much more co-ordination if it is to be successful.

After 14 days a settlement was reached which included a 12,5% increase (R92 per week) for November 1984 to January 1985, plus an additional 5% for the period February 1985 to February 1986, part of which was an incorporated attendance bonus, giving a new basic wage of R98 per week. While this was well short of the original demand, it represented a relatively good advance, whilst leaving the organisation still intact. From this strengthened position the union can move to organise the rest of the biscuit industry.

(SALB Correspondent, February 1985)

Health & Safety – Grain Workers in Cape Town

Many diseases of the lung are caused by breathing in harmful substances in the workplace. The four main kinds of occupational lung diseases are caused by:

- * mineral dust (eg. coal dust or kaolin)
- * gases or fumes (eg. ammonia or chlorine)
- * organic dusts (eg. grain or cotton)
- * substances that cause lung or pleural cancer (eg. asbestos or plutonium)

Many studies of these diseases have been done overseas, but very few have been done in South Africa. Therefore the Department of Medicine at UCT and the Industrial Health Research Group (IHRG) decided to look into the extent of the problem.

Grain dust was chosen as the area of study for these reasons:

1. There are many grain workers in South Africa, with a fair proportion in the Cape Town area. The Erasmus Commission in 1974 estimated that nearly 22,000 people were involved in the milling of grain at major mills and a further 56,000 people worked in bakeries in South Africa. Many thousands more are involved in the cultivation, handling, processing and distribution of grain. Therefore a study of the hazards in this industry would have important practical implications for a large number of workers.
2. The milling industry is dominated by four management groups that are represented in the Chamber of Milling.
3. The milling industry is strongly organised by A/FCWU.

In the initial planning stages both the union and the management were approached and both agreed to support the study subject to certain ethical conditions:

- * workers were to be clearly informed of the study, and informed consent was obtained from all the workers
- * the workers were assured that their individual results would be kept confidential
- * follow-up meetings with all parties concerned would be held to explain the implications of the group results
- * no worker would be victimised (for example by losing their job) as a result of any test. In particular, no worker would be disqualified from the provisions of any medical

aid or pension scheme as a result of the tests.

The lung diseases caused by grain dust

1. Grain fever - this is an allergic condition caused by breathing in mouldy grain. Workers complain of fever, chills, aches and pains, loss of appetite, cough and shortness of breath. Their lung functions when measured are found to be decreased. It is not thought to result in permanent damage to the lungs.
2. Asthma occurs in grain workers because of a reaction to grain dust. When grain is harvested, other things get harvested along with it. A study has shown that besides grain, grain dust contains silica, fungi, insects, hairs of rodents, feathers of birds and chemicals like pesticides. Many of these things can cause asthma.
3. Chronic bronchitis is more common in grain workers than in the normal population. It is irreversible and causes chronic disability.

Besides these lung diseases, grain dust can also cause irritation to the eyes and nose.

The grain study

The study was designed to compare chest problems in 582 grain mill workers with 153 workers who are not exposed to dust in their workplace (a packaging company). All the workers responded to questionnaires about their work, how dusty their work was, their smoking habits and their chest problems. All of them had their lung functions tested before work on a Monday and after work on a Thursday. They were also given a dose of medicine that is given to asthmatic people to open their chests, and then the lung function test was done again.

The main results of the study showed that:

- * More grain workers (47%) suffer from chest problems than the packaging workers (30%)
- * Grain workers in the dustiest departments (raw material intake and the silo department) suffer more from chest complaints than workers in the less dusty departments.
- * More grain workers (23%) showed a significant decrease in their lung functions over the working week than the packaging workers (9%)

- grain study -

The results were reported back to both the workers and the management. Recommendations were then drawn up from discussion of the findings for submission to the Chamber of Milling.

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for further research:

- whether there is a high turnover of workers in the grain industry because of health problems. This is important because some studies have not shown either an increase in asthma or in chronic chest disease in the grain industry as one would expect. Some people explain this as workers leaving the work soon after starting because they begin to have chest problems.
- study of agricultural workers, as this has not yet been studied in South Africa.

2. Recommendations for the mills:

- dust level measurements in the mills
- proper maintenance of existing ventilation systems
- an independent engineering assessment of the ventilation systems based on dust levels
- improved ventilation where needed
- masks only used as a short term option until engineering controls are corrected
- regular health checks for workers should include lung tests

3. Recommendations for the state:

- a dust standard for grain should be set and enforced based on the available literature. At present the standard recommended in the USA is 4 mg/m³ because studies have shown that it is only at this low dust level that grain workers do not suffer more from chest disease than other workers.
- occupational asthma should be a compensable disease. This is the case in Germany since 1961, and Britain since 1982.

So far the union has negotiated access with one of the milling companies for a medical officer and an engineer to do dust measurements and assess the ventilation systems. The recommendations that come out of the study will be used in negotiation between union and management.

(Industrial Health Research Group, Cape Town, Dec 1984)



Maternity Rights: CCAWUSA Shows the Way

The struggle to prevent discrimination against women took a further step forward this month when CCAWUSA signed a Maternity Agreement with Metro Cash 'n Carry. The agreement provides for a wide range of protective measures and rights for working mothers, including the country's first health and safety agreement for pregnant and nursing mothers.

The agreement probably provides the largest package for working mothers yet negotiated. The most important aspects of the agreement are the following:

- * 12 months maternity leave with the guaranteed right to return to work
- * 7 of the 12 months are paid at 33% of normal salary; with UIF payments this amounts to 78% of salary for 6 months, and one month at 33%
- * paid paternity leave for the father of 3 days during confinement
- * R100 worth of baby goods free at any Metro Store
- * time off to facilitate nursing and to attend ante- and post-natal clinics
- * a comprehensive health and safety section
- * a clause stating that pregnant applicants will not be turned down on the grounds of pregnancy
- * a commitment to health and safety education for pregnant and nursing mothers.

Another important aspect to this agreement is that it is very flexible and has few preconditions:

- * It is the choice of the worker as to when she wishes to take leave and claim the 7 months paid leave, provided this is not sooner than 4 months before and not later than 8 months after confinement
- * If less than 7 months paid leave is taken then the balance will be paid out on returning to work
- * There are no preconditions to qualifying, with the exception of women arriving pregnant and those who fall pregnant during their first month of service, who will not qualify for paid leave and the free baby goods, but will otherwise

- maternity -

be fully covered by the agreement (including 12 months unpaid leave).

Proposals given to Metro were the result of lengthy preparations and research into the whole area of maternity. (See SALB 10.2 for the initial proposal submitted to Metro.) Special attention was paid to the health and safety of pregnant and nursing workers and their children and a medical doctor who is an expert in the field of occupational and child health was included as an advisor in the CCAWUSA negotiating team for part of the time.

The agreement is also significant in that Metro Cash 'n Carry is a major employer belonging to the Kirsch Group of companies which also includes Checkers. Negotiations are now about to begin with Pick 'n Pay, Checkers and Frasers Ltd. The union has already negotiated maternity agreements with OK Bazaars (which was the first full maternity agreement negotiated in South Africa), Woolworths, CNA and Makro. The union intends bringing these agreements into line with the Metro agreement.

CCAWUSA sees the fight against sexual discrimination, of which maternity agreements are a large aspect, as an important and valid part of the overall struggle for improved conditions of work and for increased workers' control in the workplace.

(Jeremy Daphne, CCAWUSA, February 1985)

Potchefstroom Municipality Workers Strike

The smashing of the Johannesburg Municipality workers' strike in July 1980 demonstrated the state's attitude towards democratic unions organising in the public sector. The struggle of the Potchefstroom municipality workers to join a union of their choice met similar resistance. 258 Potchefstroom municipality workers were arrested by police, on February 20 this year, for striking. This strike was the climax of a bitter struggle, lasting 2 years, waged by the South African Black Municipality and Allied Workers Union (SABMAWU) for recognition and shop steward representation.

SABMAWU, a breakaway from the Black Municipal Workers Union and a CUSA affiliate, began organising at Potchefstroom Municipality in 1983, obtaining majority membership among the 700 workers employed there. According to Philip Dlamini, the general secretary, the union had to first contend with the management created "liaison committee":

Once we were able to get rid of these dummy structures we had to wage a long struggle to get recognition. But the municipality used delaying tactics and promises but was simultaneously undermining the union.

Victimisation of active shop stewards and harassment of union members by municipality officials was the order of the day in a desperate effort to disorganise SABMAWU and demoralise the workers. As part of this well-orchestrated attack a shop steward was suspended, in August last year, for allegedly "stealing". The case dragged on till January when the shop steward was proved innocent and subsequently reinstated. Repeated requests by SABMAWU for a recognition agreement and negotiations over grievance and disciplinary procedures failed because of the municipality's disagreement over the name of the union and its constitution. Dlamini explains:

They did not like the "Allied" in our name and wanted to know what it meant. The strike clause in our constitution they also wanted removed. We told them that it is the workers who decide the constitution and the name, and not the municipality. They wanted both changed before negotiating.

At a meeting on 9 January 1985, the Municipality again refus-

ed to accept SABMAWU's bona fides. The report back to workers caused immense bitterness. The municipal officials sensed an explosive situation was at hand and circulated a document in an effort to diffuse the tension: "reaffirming its preparation to negotiate." However discussions were postponed twice during January, and when they were resumed, on the 29th, the town clerk, Du Plessis, according to Dlamini wanted to negotiate with the president and the general secretary only, and not with shop stewards. This was rejected by the union. Meanwhile the campaign against active shop stewards continued unabated with disciplinary action against a senior shop-steward for a minor offence. This action by the municipality was the catalyst for action, and workers decided to force the town clerk to speak to them.

On the morning of February 20, approximately 700 workers gathered at the engineering department, peacefully demanding to see Du Plessis. Although he was in the vicinity he refused to make an appearance, and instead a large contingent of police arrived armed with batons, dogs and guns. The police presence was provocative and their arrival turned a peaceful action into violence. Dlamini describes the scene:

The police gave the workers a few seconds to return to work. But before workers could even move some of the shop stewards were identified and arrested. Then chaos broke out. Workers were baton charged and bitten by dogs. Many were badly beaten - young and old - and 258 were arrested and spent a night in jail.

Hastily convened courts were arranged and according to reports some workers were forced to plead guilty (Sowetan 21/2/85) to charges of attending an illegal gathering. Bail was fixed at R200 each and the case postponed. Many of the workers were paid off whilst in jail and faced repatriation to bantustans. One month later 88 of the workers were tried under the Internal Security Act (for convening an illegal gathering). They were each fined R400 or 12 months' imprisonment - with R220 or nine months of each sentence suspended conditionally for five years, which means each worker has to pay R180. (City Press 24.3.85) Despite this setback, support for the union is still strong, but it is going to be an uphill battle to secure recognition.

(SALB Correspondent, March 1985)

Dairy Maid Boycott – A Postscript

Following meetings with Dairy Maid management on 13 and 14 February, Food Beverage and Allied Workers Union issued a press statement announcing its settlement with the company:

- * the company has agreed to reinstate immediately 80 workers involved in the dispute, by 21 February 1985
- * the company has agreed to pay R70,000 to the workers in full settlement
- * the company has undertaken to recognise the union once representivity has been established
- * the union has therefore agreed to inform the community to discontinue the present boycott against Dairy Maid products.

Consumer boycotts prompted by labour disputes are suddenly back in vogue. Hard on the heels of the Simba Quix boycott came the news that CUSA had launched a national boycott of the ice-cream company, Dairy Maid, which fired 90 members of its Food, Beverage Workers Union after a strike in Pretoria in February 1984. (See SALB 10.4 for background) In theory, this boycott had an even greater chance of success than that at Simba. Ice-cream is hardly a staple food and boycotters would not have to make an undue sacrifice. The company is also part of the Barlow Rand group; which meant that a boycott had far more potential for embarrassing that company than the Simba action which, much to the pleasure of Federale Volks, was never connected with them.

However favourable the circumstances, effective boycotts need to be extremely well organised. The question was whether CUSA had the ability to organise such a boycott and whether other unions would swing their weight behind the call to forgo Dairy Maid's frozen delicacies; as Moses Motsuenyane said in his letter of appreciation to supporters:

UNITY IS STRENGTH!!!

An injury to one worker is an injury to all workers. United worker action proved in the Simba Quix boycott and the recent stay-away that we can achieve worker goals if workers are united and stand firm.

(CUSA communique, 11.3.85)

A/FCWU: Harassment in East London

The East London branch of African/Food and Canning Workers Union (A/FCWU), suffered a major blow when its offices were gutted by fire in the early hours of Saturday, February 11, this year. According to reports the fire was started inside the union's offices around 2.00 a.m., and by 2.30 a.m. everything was destroyed. Arson is suspected.

The independent unions have experienced enormous difficulties in organising workers in the Eastern Cape. Confronted with a hostile triple alliance of management, the state and Ciskei bantustan authorities, the unionists have had to weather continued harassment, surveillance and detentions.

Despite a small local membership of approximately 2,500 A/FCWU has become a significant union in the area. The union began organising in 1980 in East London and throughout this period has had difficulties in finding offices. Repeated harassment and eviction by landlords has forced the union to move premises on at least 2 occasions.

The fire destroyed all union records and important documents. According to Jan Theron, general secretary of A/FCWU, the damage is incalculable. The East London branch faces a very difficult period getting things back to normal.

(SALB Correspondent, February 1985)

DEBATE: Working Class Culture and Popular Struggle

In the July 1984 South African Labour Bulletin Kelwyn Sole challenges the cultural workers aligned to the non-racial democratic movement in South Africa to take a clear stance on working class culture. He uses Medu Art Ensemble, "a group formed by South African artists in exile in Botswana" as his main example of these cultural workers.* He claims our efforts demonstrate a vague populism, similar to black consciousness in that "...the phrases the people or the struggling masses are substituted for blacks or black people; but the level of generality remains in many cases much the same." He warns that without clarity on the role of working class culture "there is a possibility that their populist conceptions will actually obscure some dimensions of social experience and struggle."

Before responding to this challenge, we should first explain what Medu's perspective actually is at this time. Medu is a community organisation of cultural workers. We do not use the term "cultural workers" in some kind of attempt to fool the masses that by calling ourselves "workers" "...politically orientated writers and performers of a more privileged class become unproblematically joined to the people again", as Sole suggests. Rather we believe it to be an accurate description: we work in the field of culture. It is time to rid ourselves of the elitist concept of the artist creating great works of inspired genius in some isolated garret, probably under the influence. Cultural work requires skill and technique and equipment and a lot of hard work - as does carpentry or motor mechanics; and very few cultural workers own the means of production necessary to mass-produce their work, to bring it to their audience (publishing houses, printing presses, theatre, recording facilities, often even good sound systems). Indeed we see a need for unions for cultural workers to enable us to deal collectively with the owners of such

* We prefer in this paper to continue the debate on working class culture rather than to correct several misconceptions Sole appears to have acquired. But Medu is a Botswana organisation, including Batswana, expatriates and Zimbabweans as well as South Africans.

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means of production. Thus we see Medu itself first and foremost as a cooperative for producing art work.

Our aim, as cultural workers, is to build the culture of resistance of the people of Southern Africa. Throughout Southern Africa - in Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Lesotho and Namibia as well as South Africa - years of colonialist oppression and South African aggression and repression have shaped our culture; we know now that to survive, we must resist. Thus, in one paper that Sole quotes (as an example of our "populism"), we talk about building a "culture of liberation" out of the "culture of oppression" and the "people's struggle." In Mozambique and Angola we look to the resistance traditions and expressions of the peasantry, of the cotton workers, of the guerilla struggle of the MPLA and FAPLA; from these traditions we can talk of developing a new society, based on the as yet infant working class. The Mozambique Minister of Culture explained in 1979:

The Mozambican personality is the product of resistance that our people always showed to occupation, exploitation and oppression. Such resistance is fundamentally cultural. At any given moment it takes a political, economic and armed form, so as later to be transformed into people's revolutionary war.

Throughout this transformation the Mozambican personality assumes new values, the values of the worker and peasant class...At this stage in the People's Republic of Mozambique, we are fighting for the triumph of worker/peasant power, at the level of state apparatus, the economy, education and society.

In the more industrialised South Africa, the main demand of the oppressed population - workers, peasants, students suffering under bantu education, women with broken families facing starvation in the bantustans - remains the call for a non-racial democratic and just society. The long and historic tradition of struggle behind this demand lies at the cultural roots of the people of South Africa, workers as well as others. It is from these roots that we address the challenge Sole directs at us: what do we see as the role of "working class culture" in South Africa.

Since the development of cultural activities linked to the emergent trade unions, the question of "working class cult-

ure" has received some quite positive and potentially fruitful focus. The Fosatu Education Workshop gave some very welcome exposure to worker choirs and plays; the July and November Labour Bulletins have begun a debate on the subject. But encouraging as this tendency is, we find it disturbing to see "working class culture" discussed as if it were a new concept among the democratic forces (which seems to be the approach of both Kelwyn Sole and Richard Harvey). The South African working class is the largest in Africa, with a history of oppression and resistance stretching over a century; expressions of this awareness and resistance have long been an internal part of the "culture of resistance" and this is where we must look to find "working class culture".

Before looking more closely at this statement, however, it would probably be useful to clarify what we mean by "working class culture". There are two basic approaches used today. The approach advocated by Western sociological theory is to define "working class culture" as any cultural activities engaged in by the working class, from tribal dancing on the mines to chibuku drinking to trade union choirs. Sole, for example, defines working class literature and performance "...in relation to 4 factors: author(s), content, audience, and proletarian world view", and limits what he is willing to call "working class" to plays by trade unionists about shopfloor situations. Even one of these plays, he describes as "problematic" and "unspontaneous" in its class nature because it had been workshopped by the "petty-bourgeois" Junction Avenue Theatre. The class background of the author and the subject matter appear to be his basic criteria.

The problem with such an approach is that in capitalist countries the main cultural institutions - newspapers, the educational system, film, radio, television - are controlled by the ruling class. It cannot surprise anyone that many of the ideas and behaviour soaked up from these sources by workers are in direct contradiction to their objective class interests. The commercial media encourages elitism, individualism, the profit motive; they portray workers as helpless cogs whose only escape from their class oppression is by individuals joining the ruling elites.

In contrast, progressive cultural workers have distinguished between imposed culture forced upon the working class by the

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bourgeoisie, on the one hand; and the developing strands of "working class culture", those expressions which actively promote the workers' consciousness of their objective conditions of existence, on the other. Thus we prefer to define "working class culture" as cultural activities that build and direct the workers' awareness in the best interests of the working class.

In a society composed of classes irreconcilably involved in conflict, each class has its own perspective on that society. Each class responds to its position in the political and economic system by creating new cultural expressions, describing and advancing its own point of view within the framework of that society's culture (history, language etc.). As the oppressed class begins to resist, as it begins to develop the organisations and institutions of struggle, it must find its own cultural position - remember its history, identify its heroes, write new songs and sing them, start newspapers, literacy circles, theatre and discussion groups.

Again, we re-emphasise that the working class does not at this stage control the major institutions of culture; indeed it has been deprived of even light and space and leisure and such basic skills as literacy. Developing working class perceptions and awareness under these conditions must be a continual struggle. Thus working class culture cannot be taken as a "culture" in the sense of an isolated and self-contained system, but rather a direction within the society, built out of the particular understanding of the workers of their position within the economic, political and social structure.

To descend from this rarified air of theory to the hard South African dirt; the perspective of the working class in South Africa today is that of a labour force within an increasingly industrialised economy, created and reinforced by a complex system of national oppression. The working class grew out of sections of the colonised African population combined with imported Indian labour and skilled European workers; it was born under the heel of influx control, the apartheid laws, the bantustans, the townships. This national oppression and the need to resist it has been a basic element of working class experience in South Africa since its birth. And as workers developed an awareness of their class position, the consciousness of this experience has informed their cultural

expressions as well as their political acts.

Even a passing glance at the culture of the South African working class shows this fundamental interrelation with the culture of the democratic movement. History is a major aspect of culture, for instance, Fosatu Worker News pointed to the May Day tradition in South Africa - celebrated by white workers in the early 1900s, marked in 1950 by an 80% successful national stay-away organised by the national resistance movement against the Suppression of Communism Act; repressed by the government, and celebrated yet again this year by emergent unions and community organisations.

Heroes of the working class count also as heroes of the popular struggle. We look at J B Marks, at Neil Aggett, at Billy Nair and Francis Baard and Oscar Mpetha. In terms of "cultural products", we can recall the songs of the potato boycott, called in 1959 by the nationalist movement to protest the atrocious conditions of farm labour. We can cite the photographs of Eli Weinberg, a union organiser (before he was banned); much of the photographic record of worker struggles in the 1930s, 40s and 50s comes from his lens.

And at the apex of working class culture in South Africa stand the songs and poetry of Vuyasili Mini. Mini was a union organiser from Port Elizabeth in the 1950s and early 1960s. As a cultural activist Mini was not content to write songs and poetry. He formed a highly successful cultural club under the auspices of the union. He used his songs as an organising tool with tremendous effect at union meetings and demonstrations. In November 1964 he was executed, with fellow unionists Wilson Khayinga and Zinakile Mkhamba, for alleged sabotage and complicity in the death of a police informer. They went to their execution singing one of Mini's compositions: "Nants indoda nyama Vorster" ("beware, Vorster, the black men are coming") - now a standard "folksong" of the people's resistance.

Indeed, the largest body of working class culture within the culture of resistance lies not in written literature but in song. Freedom songs live wherever mass resistance lives, from funerals to union meetings. And these songs unmistakably carry the musical style and forms developed by the working class, without electronic equipment, using the structures of

work chants. Sole has complained that in his view progressive culture tends to appear in written English, and thus miss the African working class audience; he ignores the fact that the most effective and widespread cultural expression of resistance is indeed not in English, or written.

Thus the South African working class has a long tradition of resistance to the conditions of their oppression, culturally even as politically. To ignore this tradition is to cut ourselves off from the mainstream of working class culture in South Africa. Sole demands that we "...show how the cultural expression of the working class is going to become an integral part of the popular culture/black culture (we) advocate." To use the phrase "is going to become", he must presume that working class culture is not already an explicit part of progressive culture. On the contrary, as we have said, working class culture already exists and indeed dominates within the culture of the democratic movement.

Sole however categorises all of the "culture of resistance" as populist and thus not "working class culture". But South African culture dealing with worker resistance to living conditions, to influx control, even to migrant labour, is unquestionably part of the national resistance culture. Thus in the end Sole only accepts within his definition of "working class" those plays specifically about the workplace. He admits "...in England at any rate, a great volume of what is called working class literature" goes beyond the factory floor to cover problems about family life (abortion, father/son conflict, etc), unemployment and homelessness and other facets of working class experiences." And he also admits that in South Africa "...when people go home at the end of the day or at the end of a contract, they do not enter a completely separate sphere of existence: workplace and domicile experiences and identities exist in a relationship of interconnectedness and influence." But having admitted this in theory, he cites Serote's short story "The Mosquito" as an example of populist "urban-rural solidarity", with presumably little to say about the worker's position. This despite the fact that "The Mosquito" tells of organising a work stay-away against the rural removals; the main organiser, "the timer", is a worker, a migrant from Sekhukuneland where the removals are to take place.

Sole fails to mention "Sizwe Bansi is Dead", one of South Africa's best-known plays, although it deals with a worker, in and out of the workplace, confronting the conditions of his oppression from a worker's point of view. Plays and literature that deal with worker's perceptions and struggles against the oppression of their communities, against those forces intent on keeping workers in their place, have flourished throughout community groups in South Africa. Yet Sole can only find a "paucity" of working class literature.

But to point to the already existing working class content in progressive culture may not fully answer Sole's difficulty. We suggest there is a danger that whatever elements of working class culture there may be will be "obscured" and "confused" by the petty-bourgeois culture he seems to believe predominates in the non-racial democratic movement: "Nevertheless in South Africa up to this time the dominant populist discourse among oppositional political groups hides the paucity of black literary expression with a knowledge of, or by, black workers; a paucity easily forgotten in the prevalent rhetoric about popular or mass-based literature."

Sole of course here primarily looks at cultural forms which are labelled "Art" by the society around us. Writing requires skills which tend to belong to the more privileged sections of this society, theatre demands time and skills and space. No one would deny that cultural workers in these fields at this point in time usually do not have working class backgrounds. But even in terms of "Art", explicit working class orientation - a "proletarian world view" to use Sole's term - has long been a conscious concern of progressive cultural workers. We can mention the conscious introduction and production of working class symbols and images in posters like "Boycott Red Meat", "Defend SAAWU", "United in Action", "The Workers Footsteps Will Crush Exploitation"; we can watch the film of the Neil Aggett funeral; we can cite "The Marabi Dance" and "Sizwe Bansi is Dead". That these are conscious directions can be seen in the Medu position paper "Opening the Doors of Culture" (adopted by a Medu AGM in 1982):

Present in our cultural preoccupations must be those incipient manifestations of the proletarian culture of the future...our primary task is to foster those already existing elements of culture which are representative of the democratic future for which we are striving.

In other words, there has been a conscious effort by progressive cultural workers to use symbols and imagery that reinforce the awareness and direction of the working class. A resolution of the national launch of the UDF proclaims "the leadership of the working class in the democratic struggle for freedom"; this principle dyes the cloth of all progressive culture.

But beyond ideological commitment, it is essential that we also create institutions and structures that will reinforce and build upon this strong working class culture already present within the people's culture. In particular, with the tremendous strides in South Africa in organisation of workers at the point of production, it is important to look at ways of expressing the experiences and awareness gained in these organisations, standing upon the proud traditions of working class resistance. We see this happening in a number of ways:

First, cultural work should be done directly for the organisations of the working class, both at the workplace and in the community.* Thus we must work more consciously and consistently on the cultural content of posters, of banners for union meetings, of songs and performances with a direct use for such organisations. As cultural workers we greet with joy the signs that this is already being done, in the banners used in the 1984 May Day meetings, in graphics and poetry in community and union newspapers; in t-shirts and photographs; in plays like "Illanga" and "Time to Act". This cultural work again cannot occur in a vacuum, but rather only in full association with the organisation concerned. And, as a minor point, our own experiences show that the personal opinions of the cultural worker concerned become less and less significant in the final cultural product as it is more and more

* This principle of organisation is not restricted to South Africa. Along these lines, Medu has long been actively involved in community art projects in Gaborone; teaching art classes in the local "low income" areas, painting murals in a creche in Naledi, a squatter township, and in a local cooperative sorghum mill; bringing theatre and puppet performances to the community; working with a cultural group from a local co-operative. Obviously where trade unions are a dynamic force these would be very effective places to develop cultural groups.

collectively discussed within the organisation in question. Workers also "know what they like" and are quite competent and willing to identify elements in style as well as subject that they feel fail to represent their ideas and positions and emotions. But the cultural worker must humble himself, must ask for criticism. We must know that skill in execution gives no special say whatsoever over content, and that collective criticism is a basic requirement of cultural work, without which it is faulty.

Secondly, not only must cultural workers produce work for and with organisations of the working class, but there must be continued and stronger efforts to develop structures within the workers' community and workplace organisations to actively produce culture. Much cultural work requires skill, technique and equipment which are not made available to workers by the institutions of this society; we must find ways to make them available. Community and worker organisations should begin to control the means of producing culture; presses, music, theatre; and to educate their members in this production.

Thirdly, if working class culture is the expression of awareness of class position, deepening and extending that awareness is a major prerequisite of cultural development. Emerging community and worker organisations must find ways to educate people out of the passivity bred by the state.* Literacy circles and discussion groups are one of the most effective means of doing this, to expose history and current events, to teach basic literacy linked to developing new knowledge, to encourage participation and control over our own lives. The best way to ensure that "petty bourgeois" ideas do not dominate in the people's culture is to ensure that workers think for themselves, that workers build their

* The present educational system, controlled by the state, is structured to create a workforce to fit this system's needs: passive, receiving what knowledge is needed but not encouraging participation in producing or comprehending that knowledge (except for a small elite); ignorant as to our own proud past and achievements; leaving many without even basic literacy with which to find their own knowledge. As the students protesting Bantu Education have underlined, no knowledge is value free.

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own awareness, express their own ideas.

Linked to this need for worker education is the need for newspapers from emergent union as well as community groups. Workers need to know of similar experiences of other workers, of how other people conducted the struggle against their oppression, and the lessons of these struggles. Newspapers can form the basis for discussion and participation. Thus, we welcome the publication of the history of working class formation and resistance by Fosatu Worker News. We rejoice in the great expansion in trade union newspapers and the increase in directly worker-related content in community newspapers. Again, we also welcome the use of such papers for publishing poetry and writing by workers.

But above all we must remember that working class culture cannot thrive when control of the major educational and cultural institutions remain in the hands of a small ruling elite. It cannot thrive without the basic freedoms of the right to speak and publish. It cannot thrive without decent living conditions and leisure time and good education, for all the population. The demand for democracy lies at the heart of all working class culture; the fact that all progressive sections of the society also reverberate with this demand in no way swamps its crucial importance for the working class. The poet Agostino Neto in 1972 called for a popular state; "By popular, I mean democratic, where the people can participate fully, with assemblies and all the other organs that allow the people to express their opinions." The principle that "the doors of culture shall be open" is an absolute prerequisite for a blossoming working class culture. Until such conditions prevail, we are only sowing the seeds of working class culture.

But we are not starting with empty hands. The working class in South Africa has a long and honourable tradition, a massive cultural foundation upon which to build. Workers know the songs, they know their heroes, they are making their history now, today. In a future non-racial and democratic South Africa this working class culture will come to fruition.

(Naledi Writers Unit / Medu Art Ensemble, February 1985)

The Struggle for Trade Union Democracy: The Case of the JMCEU

The attempt to wrest control from the conservative leadership of the Johannesburg Municipal Combined Employees Union focused attention, once again, on the position of workers in TUCSA unions. Although this article will deal with issues associated with state sector workers, the primary focus will be on the organising strategy of the group of workers who attempted to democratise the union. The article will concentrate on the context of this struggle, the demands of the reform group, and conservative leadership's response to this initiative.

The union operates within the Johannesburg Municipality, and by virtue of a closed shop agreement, represents all Indian and Coloured workers in the employ of the Johannesburg City Council (JCC), except for a minority of workers in the transport department. Other unions such as the Johannesburg Municipal Employees Association represent white workers; while the majority of the African workers are either unorganised, belong to the unrecognised Municipal and General Workers Union, or are members of the recognised, but conservative, Union of Johannesburg Municipal Workers.

JMCEU was largely the invention of the JCC which felt the need to negotiate conditions of employment through a union. Thus, in 1961, certain employees were approached and steps were taken to form a union. Under the leadership of these founder members, the union served to perform little more than implement the decisions of management. This situation changed somewhat when, in 1971, George Huntley and Dennis Venter took control of the union. This new leadership saw a change in the union's dealings with the City Council. Whereas, in the past, the union simply accepted everything that the JCC decided, the union was now actually involved in negotiations over wages, grading and other conditions of employment. Racism too became a bone of contention. These changes, however significant, should not be taken out of context. With increasing worker militancy in the country, and changes in the industrial laws, the JCC was quite open to introducing changes designed to secure industrial peace, and which were

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in any event becoming commonplace. Thus, for example, in 1980 salary and grading structures were integrated, using the Paterson system, into a unitary ("non-racial") system.

Union structure and lack of democratic control

Several factors influenced the modus operandi of the union:

- 1) The majority of the union's leadership occupied managerial positions.
- 2) The lack of an organic link between the executive and the broader membership.
- 3) The almost equal distribution of blue collar and white collar members.
- 4) The fact that the membership were relatively unexposed to an alternative kind of trade unionism.

The failure to mobilise its membership limited the union's ability to press its demands in negotiations. The only option open to the union for applying pressure on the JCC was legal (conciliation board) action, a threat the union successfully used in 1974 around a wage negotiation.

Possibly the most conspicuous contradiction in the JMCEU was the position of George Huntley and Dennis Venter (Venter resigned in 1982). These two men alternated the positions of chairman and vice-chairman between them. Both had worked their way up to the position of township officer, a job which placed them in control of literally hundreds of workers, who were also members of the union. Huntley claimed that when he negotiated on behalf of the union he abandoned his ties with the JCC and conducted himself in the interests of the union. This conflict of interests often manifested itself and a good example occurred at the 1984 AGM when, in justifying a meagre increase that the union had agreed to, Huntley argued that JCC had a budget and could not be expected to spend more than this budget allowed. A more stark example of such conflict occurred when Huntley, in his capacity as township officer having to discipline a worker, had to ask another executive member to defend the worker. On another level, having to relate to the union's leadership as their bosses for the better part of the working day made it impossible for the vast majority of workers, blue collar workers especially, to perceive the union leadership as equals and fellow members. It therefore comes as no surprise that some workers

failed to distinguish between the union and the council.

The wide gap existing between the executive and the membership extended beyond the personal traits of individuals on the executive, and manifested itself in a more general alienation of the membership, typical of many TUCSA unions. Apart from the few individual grievances which found their way to the secretary's desk, the only other form of consultation that existed was the AGM. The AGMs, however, served as a poor example of democracy. Almost year in and year out, these meetings served only three purposes: adoption of minutes, acceptance of the proposed budget and election of the executive. The number of candidates nominated for election was, until 1980, usually just sufficient to fill the executive positions available. This fact clearly underlines the alienation of executive from membership, and also explains why Huntley and Venter were allowed to dominate for such a long time. The overall effect of this state of affairs was that the executive could frequently make decisions without a mandate, and almost certainly gain ratification for their actions at the following AGM.

This situation created a bureaucracy which was particularly alien to blue collar workers. The distinction between blue and white collar workers has serious implications for any grouping trying to oppose the current leadership and nurture an alternative type of trade unionism. Probably because of the very nature of municipalities, workers from a broad spectrum of occupations are thrown into one trade union. In the case of JMCEU, with its Indian and Coloured membership, there exists an almost equal number of blue collar and white collar workers. It is no secret that the white collar workers often see themselves as being above blue collar workers. Moreover there exist real differences in priorities between blue and white collar workers. Also, the rigid and formal meeting procedure and language tended to alienate blue collar workers particularly. In the absence of a serious union education programme and a more flexible attitude towards different categories of workers, the union continues to play more of a controlling role in the lives of blue collar workers. Under these circumstances it is not surprising to find that workers, whose wages border on the fringes of subsistence, find themselves giving approval to the executive's requests for unwarranted subscription increases, land speculation (at a

price of R50,000), a secretary's salary of R18,000 per annum, and the purchase of furniture befitting a thriving business venture rather than a union comprising 800 members.

A service organisation?

The union does perform certain services, amongst which the most prominent are the provision of burial insurance, a nominal death insurance, a loan scheme and assistance in solving individual disputes. The most controversial of these is the loan scheme. While offering a service, by its very nature, it is available mostly to members in the upper income bracket, those whose salaries ensure expedient repayment, rather than those most in need of loans.

Insofar as the handling of individual disputes is concerned, Huntley has repeatedly stated that the executive can only act on grievances that are brought before it. Even then assistance is not guaranteed. In 1983 a group of traffic officers were refused any assistance from Huntley, after being told by management to resign for allegedly having received bribes. In this instance all the traffic officers chose to resign as the best course of action. The union, without investigating the case at all, refused to defend the members concerned at a disciplinary hearing. One other example concerning a reform group member will be discussed below.

This being the state of affairs in the union, it will come as no surprise to find that, in 1980 when BMWU (Black Municipal Workers Union) went out on strike, the JMCEU did not offer the slightest support. Indeed workers in the housing department, following the example of the JMCEU leaders, actually scabbed. This act precipitated the formation of a "reform group" and led to a number of attempts to oust the leadership of the union.

The 1980 BMWU strike

Previously, although there was discontent, this was never constituted into a more organised effort to reform the union. The secretary, Monty Narsoo, did attempt to get individuals to participate in the union and some even participated in the executive. The 1980 BMWU strike, and the fact that the the union encouraged its members to scab, brought together

the secretary and a group of dissident workers, almost entirely from the library department. This group submitted a petition calling on the chairman to resign in view of his role in the strike. The inexperience of the group was indicated by the fact that they gave the petition to the press a few hours before the executive received it. This was to provide Huntly with a great deal of ammunition with which to blast the group at subsequent AGMs. Of more significance is the fact that little contact had been made with the broader membership. The end result was that the group raised the issue of the union's role in the strike at a poorly attended AGM. The majority of the members present did not feel strongly on the issue, and at the end of the day only two, of the four people from the reform group who had stood for election, ended up on an executive committee, in which very little could be achieved.

The reform group never really consolidated itself as an opposition group at AGMs and failed at a more fundamental level to forge sufficient links with the members in general. The 1981 AGM saw a few individuals from the group once again elected onto the executive, while the group basically ceased to exist, as such, up until about April the following year, when attempts were once again made to reorganise the group. During this lull, Monty Narsoo had resigned as secretary of the union and was detained for eight months. This, along with the handling of the BMWU issue helped Huntley to label the group as "political". This factor was significant in determining the limits to the support the group could expect to establish amongst the white collar workers, many of whom were not prepared to involve themselves in anything as dangerous as politics.

The 1982 AGM

From about April 1982 attempts were made to get together all people who were dissatisfied with the union leadership. The process was tedious with problems of providing transport for workers distributed over a large area. Nevertheless several new people were brought into the group: individuals from the housing department (the largest concentration of members), the health department, the meter readers, in addition to the librarians who had remained the dominant part of the group. Significantly, some blue collar workers were brought in and

nominated as candidates.

In an attempt to project the group amongst workers, a letter was written by Terry Jeevanantham which highlighted some of the problems that workers, particularly blue collar workers, had with the union. This was distributed by the reform group. While the majority of blue collar workers saw the letter as confirmation of their feelings, a large group of workers, notably, nurses and some in the housing department, saw the letter as an attempt to cause trouble in a union that had otherwise been quite peaceful and happy. The letter nevertheless did serve its purpose in creating links with the most exploited section of the membership, who certainly construed the letter as an expression of their own grievances.

Apart from the letter attempts were made to popularise the reform candidates for the executive elections. Workers were addressed at various centres, and at their homes, where the group's manifesto was discussed. This course of action forced Huntley, for once, to go around from centre to centre addressing workers too. In addition the executive mandated Huntley to write and distribute a response to Terry Jeevanantham's letter. This proved to be libelous, for which Huntley was later to apologise to Mr Jeevanantham. Preparations for the AGM, although not in the end sufficient to oust Huntley and his supporters, created the atmosphere for one of the liveliest AGMs in the union's history. The reform group had prepared several issues to highlight at the AGM: the union's proposed property investment, increased subscriptions, the lavish farewell party for Venter who had resigned some months earlier, and the purchase of expensive office furniture.

Although these issues had support amongst the majority of blue collar workers, who were the support base of the reform group, the dynamics of a formal AGM did much to undermine this support. Huntley, in spite of varied and concerted attacks, was in a position to prevent people from having their say; even threatening to throw people out of the meeting if they persisted in trying to speak. The attacks by the reformers were received in two ways: the daily paid workers revelled in the attacks; but it would seem that a considerable faction of the white collar workers were indeed won over by talk of investment in property and the establishment of a posh union office.

The 1982 AGM showed the limitations of trying to win control of the union simply through the AGM. When the reform group addressed the blue collar workers in smaller groups, they showed a clear understanding of the issues, and also an obvious dislike for Huntley, yet at the AGM many would vote in favour of motions proposed by Huntley or his supporters. This phenomenon can be explained in terms of the alienating ritual of the AGM and because of the limited contact between the reform group and the blue collar workers. While such contact certainly went well beyond what the union leadership had ever embarked on, the reformers seemed to have had difficulty in meeting with blue collar workers on a regular basis. The result was that the kind of unity needed to sustain a bid to take over the union was never built to a sufficient level. When it came to the ballot, charismatic personalities rather than the issues decided matters.

Evenso, at the end of the day, the reformers secured five of the ten executive positions, Huntley being re-elected as chairperson. This meant that the reform group was technically in "control" of the union, since the chairperson had only a casting vote. However, the reform group did not mobilise to defend their gains, and were systematically out-manoeuvred. The efforts of the conservatives to regain control of the executive reached outrageous proportions when the votes were privately (and unconstitutionally) "recounted" in an attempt to oust one of the reform members from the executive. The ensuing legal battle, however, ruled in favour of the reformers. This victory, important though it was, did not mean that control of the executive was in the hands of the reformers. On the contrary, by virtue of Terry Jeevanantham's suspension (for the letter he distributed) the first, and indeed, the most crucial executive meeting saw the reformers in a minority. Terry Jeevanantham's re-instatement as a member of the union did not prevent the continued dominance of Huntley at executive meetings. The inexperience of the reform group was felt, more than ever, around the boardroom table, where they were almost totally, and quite often unconstitutionally out-manoeuvred. In the end a major setback occurred when the City Council terminated the contract of one of the reform members on the executive, Ms Gail Adonis. The executive, under the chairmanship of Huntley, refused to assist Ms Adonis. With the termination of her contract she was no longer considered a union member. Huntley's major objection

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co assisting Gail was that she "refused to greet him". The conservatives eventually gained a majority and it became impossible to sustain the program for change that the reformers had outlined. Within the reform group matters seemed to have reached a dead end; people lost enthusiasm and there was a general lack of consistency which plagued the group from that point on.

The period 1983-84

The reform group continued to contest elections on a somewhat smaller scale. Campaigning efforts scarcely took on the proportions displayed around the 1982 AGM. In fact, the group basically only constituted itself around the AGMs, instead of consistently strengthening links with the membership as a whole. The outcome of the AGMs subsequent to 1982, predictably, showed a progressive strengthening of the position of the conservatives again. The 1984 AGM in fact saw the conservatives re-establish total control of the executive.

An Assessment

In trying to assess the failure of the reform group to oust the conservative leadership the following points need to be made:

- The enormous diversity of the workforce in terms of skill occupations and locality.
- The fact that the leadership of the union was primarily middle management, and unskilled workers tended to be intimidated by this. Additionally the leadership received support from white collar workers who benefited most from the services and benefits provided by the union. A further factor is that white collar workers in the state sector are seen to be carrying out state policy. They tend to be alienated from their communities and therefore more conservative.
- Because of their status as middle management, the leadership are closely linked with the employers, and it appears co-operate closely with the Municipality.
- The inexperience and youth of a large proportion of the reform group acted against them; both in terms of how the older workers saw them, and in their inability to counter some of the manoeuvres of the union leadership.
- The campaigns were largely issue-bound, directed towards

the elections, and no sustained alternative organisation was developed.

- The resources of the reform group were extremely limited.
- The undemocratic way the union was structured and the manipulation of these structures and meetings was extremely difficult to counter, particularly given the general apathy of workers in bureaucratic unions. This was somewhat countered by the courts and by press publicity.
- The harassment of reform group members and the shenanigans of the union leadership lowered the morale of the group and its ability to oust the conservative leadership.

Despite its failure, the reform group displayed a great deal of resourcefulness and creativity. In a hostile terrain, and with limited resources, it showed the resilience to continue fighting over a period of 4 years. It forced the conservative leadership to be more accountable and to be more aware of workers' grievances. It also showed members that the leadership can be challenged and rattled, and this alone probably vindicates its decision to work within the union. The lessons learnt during this period will, no doubt, inform struggles yet to come.

(SALB Correspondent, March 1985)

Workers in the State Sector: the Case of the Civil Administration

Marcel Golding

"In the state information is confidential not secret."
- Regional Director of the
Commission for Administration

This statement sums up the problems in obtaining detailed information about internal state strategies with respect to its employees. Even an examination of the annual departmental reports only reveals the tip of the iceberg. The circulars and directives which daily pass through departments are the hidden details of what is really taking place. (1)

Public sector employment strategies have received very little attention or research. Exactly how the state organises its agents in the bureaucracy, how it establishes internal coherence and co-operation, how it disorganises and neutralises disruptive tendencies within its workforce, and at the same time maintains the entire society under racist conditions of domination/subordination, are important questions which this article attempts to address, albeit it in a very general manner.

In particular the article focuses on the changing employment conditions and strategies of the civil administrative apparatuses of the state, that is, branches of the state which fall directly under the Commission for Administration. The article is divided into four: an examination of the employment structure in the civil administration; the class struggles within the state which gave rise to this structure; the co-optive mechanisms used by the state to foster consensus within the civil administration and the divisive and discriminatory policy applied to other sections of workers; and finally, the implications for public sector unionism.

I The structure of employment in the public sector

Defining the exact boundaries of the public sector is extremely difficult. As a working definition it can be said that

the public sector refers to all those enterprises, departments or institutions which either produce goods or provide services and which are totally or partially owned or controlled by the state. (2) These apparatuses could be national, regional or local. Presently in South Africa there are 3-tiers of government: central state, provincial state and local state. Although there is a "relative autonomy" in decision making in that each level has legislative powers, the regional and local levels of government cannot conflict in policy with the central authorities. The provincial administrations and the local municipalities usually pass ordinances which supplement parliamentary legislation, in order to meet specific requirements. Services such as roads, hospitals, traffic police, sanitary and other services are handled by regional and local levels of government. (3)

In their employment practices, conditions of service and salaries the provincial authorities follow the central state far more closely than do the local municipalities. Both the central state employees, as well as the provincial authorities' employees, have their conditions of employment determined by the Commission for Administration.

Cutting across the central and provincial levels are vertical divisions which could be described as follows:

- (a) civil sector - includes both "permanent" and "temporary" employees
 - (i) primarily administrative and clerical, eg. personnel officers and messengers
 - (ii) health service employees
 - (iii) productive employment, eg. forestry workers
- (b) parastatals or public enterprise - here we should distinguish between the South African Transport Services and the Post Office on the one hand, and enterprises such as Iscor and Sasol. There are at least three differences:
 - (i) SATS and the Post Office are central state apparatuses
 - (ii) different structures of accountability
 - (iii) Iscor and Sasol are involved in production whilst SATS and the Post Office are services.
- (c) uniformed sector - army and police. (4)

This paper, is mainly concerned with the practices taking

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place in the civil sector, although possibly some of the observations made may apply to the other sectors.

Background

The creation of an independent national state in 1910, although still part of the British Commonwealth, had important effects on the policy that was pursued with respect to state personnel. As early as 1909, provisions were made in the South African Act whereby the Governor-General-in-Council appointed an "impartial" Commission directly responsible to the legislative authority. (5) Parliament gave effect to this injunction in the Public Service and Pensions Act 1912 (Act 29 of 1912). The establishment of an independent body - the Public Services Commission - was in order to "depoliticise personnel relations" and develop an efficient and competent administration. (6) The 1912 Act was amended in 1923 and again in 1957. After repeated recommendations to the cabinet to extend the powers and the sphere of activities of what became the Commission for Administration, revised legislation was introduced in 1984: the Public Service Act (Act 111 of 1984) and the Commission for Administration Act (Act 65 of 1984).

The present Commission for Administration consists of 3 members who are appointed by the State President for a period of 5 years. With a staff of 261, the Commission is responsible for the state's employment code; co-ordinates personnel used by departments; handles grievances not resolved at a departmental level and plays an important planning function on personnel matters. (7) It is this body which attempts to create uniformity and regulate employment practices within and between state departments. In order to accomplish these objectives, powers are delegated to the Commission and the types of action taken include: furnishing of informal advice to departments; making formal recommendations to departments; issuing formal directions to departments. (8)

The exercise of state power requires apparatuses and personnel and a division of labour which ensures accountability. This is an important function of the Commission. According to its annual report, its major objectives are:

1. The establishment of suitable structures and processes for execution of government functions by the rational

distribution of functions among different levels of government; suitable organisation design; effective control of establishments; design of rational procedures and the effective utilisation of computers and other aids.

2. The establishment of sound management practices and managerial self-sufficiency for departments and other government institutions.
3. The promotion of sound personnel and inter-personnel relationships in public management amongst the independent Bantustans, various sectors of the public sector, government institutions and the public, and between the state as employer and its employees. (9)

It is, however, important to note that, although the Commission can make recommendations, they have to be approved by a second party, usually a Cabinet Minister.

Employment in the civil administration

The civil sector has been an important area of both manual and clerical employment and has steadily grown over the last few years. It is likely to increase even more with the new tri-cameral system, and the creation of the departments for general and own affairs. (10) Since 1973, the growth in the authorised allocated posts in the civil service has been substantial, as the figures indicate: 1973 - 142,705; 1976 - 162,178; 1979 - 179,362; 1981 - 229,938; 1983 - 253,562. (11)

For decades, in the civil administration job reservation and preferential treatment of whites has been prevalent. Blacks who were employed mainly occupied temporary positions and performed menial tasks. This has now changed drastically. Recent state initiatives to make the public service an attractive employment area are designed to increase the number of blacks willing to play a role in the administration of the National Party's political objectives, as part of a national strategy of incorporation and co-option.

There are basically 3 types of employees in the civil sector:

- (a) "officials" who occupy permanent posts - includes administrative officials, clerical employees, professionals (such as engineers and lawyers), artisans and all those who have a specific technical skill or qualification, "General A Division" (usually engaged in supervisory

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activities, eg. matrons, inspectors and storemen), and prison staff. (12)

- and the following two "non-classified" grades - usually manual workers:

(b) "employees" or "temporary workers"

(c) contract workers. (13)

The statistics for the various posts, over the last five years, are as follows:

	1978	1980	1983
<hr/>			
I OFFICIALS			
<hr/>			
Administrative			
White	6310	7080	8709
Other		23	328
<hr/>			
Clerical			
White	14555	16002	17281
Other			275
<hr/>			
Professional			
White	8970	9409	10615
Other		259	1281
<hr/>			
Technical			
White	8138	8781	9037
Other			136
<hr/>			
General A			
White	1966	1951	1960
Other			138
<hr/>			
Services			
White	8716	8200	8699
Other	6807	7620	8490
<hr/>			
II NON-CLASSIFIED			
<hr/>			
White	5149	5419	6207
Other	21293	22157	28780

General B			
White	28561	30429	31536
Other	11923	13874	17264

III EDUCATION*

White	6028	8168	10584
Other	41695	66467	92238

Total 170111 205840 253562

SOURCE: Commission for Administration, Annual Report 1982-1983.

* figures for education include both permanent and non-classified workers

II Struggles within the state:
rationalisation and occupational differentiation

Since the mid-70s, especially after the Soweto uprising, which resulted in the virtual collapse of the educational state apparatuses, the National Party has begun to seriously examine the administrative mechanisms of the state. The increasing dissatisfaction among public workers over salaries and conditions of employment, as well as the effects of the "information scandal", which rocked the National Party, made it imperative to reorganise inter-department relations as well as provide an image of competent and clean government. Added to this was the increasing dissatisfaction that was being aired by senior officials concerning the moves towards a new form of political rule in the tri-cameral system.

These aspects must be seen against the backdrop of increasing concentration and centralisation of capital, resulting in monopoly capital's dominance in the strategic areas of the economy: mining, secondary industry, agriculture and the distributive sector. Whilst there has been economic concentration, the political aspect, especially the civil administrative dimension has lagged behind. This was most clearly seen in the criticisms, by capital, of government spending and overstaffing. Recent monetarist critiques argue that the

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burgeoning state salary bill will lead to disaster. Heavy taxation on big business without attendant political securities required that the civil administration be re-organised.

In 1979, after a fierce battle with Connie Mulder, P W Botha assumed the premiership and one of the first measures announced was the rationalisation of the public sector. It meant streamlining state departments, increasing centralisation and improving the image of the state, while also re-evaluating and reorganising employment practices. The number of departments were, for example, reduced from 39 to 22. Responsible for the supervision of this programme of rationalisation was the Public Service Commission (now the Commission for Administration) under the chairmanship of Dr P S Rautenbach. The area of investigation included all state departments, 1,000 agencies and commissions, 1,950 laws and 16,000 proclamations. (14) The hidden agenda of the Commission was to identify areas, and even personnel, which would obstruct the new direction the state was taking under the Botha government. The early (forced) retirements of well known conservatives in senior positions - in the old Coloured Affairs Department, Plural Affairs etc. - were indicators of the verligte/verkraampte conflict. It was a process of neutralising verkrampste civil servants who were critical of the "consensus politics" Botha contemplated.

Added to the rationalisation was a programme of occupational differentiation. (15) As part of the twin-strategy, occupational differentiation (OD) was designed to ease the transition (to centralisation) and maintain a loyal civil force in the wake of the impending socio-political changes. It meant devising an occupational and professional system which made civil employment attractive, secure and competitive with that of the private sector. Beneath the guise of the technical objective of "improving the quality and quantity" of the public services rendered, was the political and social objective of winning over civil servants to the state's new political orientation through improved material benefits and opportunities. It meant substantial salary restructuring, and a general package of improved housing subsidies and loans, pension provisions and other perks.

The occupational differentiation strategy had two objectives: on the one hand, it was an attempt to increase the number of

blacks entering the civil service - thereby making them active agents in the implementation of the new deal - and on the other hand, through incentives, it attempted to draw increasing numbers of academically trained personnel from the private sector, to undermine the conservative and, now, disruptive tendencies among civil servants, critical of the state's new initiatives. Although this did not necessarily abandon the previous employment and promotion practice of "coming through the ranks", it certainly did undermine it and reflected a decided shift from the past. Jobs were now increasingly advertised in newspapers, and journals, and even employment agencies, a practice not previously contemplated. Added to this was the high profile public relations work done by the Commission for Administration in getting new recruits. (16) Inter-department circulars were previously the only form of advertisement and it usually meant an experienced official moving from one department to the next.

Occupational differentiation which has taken place since 1981, is therefore a complete package spanning the entire personnel administration spectrum: from the provision of posts, recruitment, selection, appointment, remuneration, training and merit assessment to the termination of service. In the 600 occupational classes identified in the public service, the ruling National Party hopes through its programme of rationalisation and occupational differentiation to develop a professional layer of civil service workers - drawn from all population groups - not merely committed to public sector employment but to the very political objectives of the state. (17) This was most clearly expressed by the former Chairman of the Commission for Administration in an address at the inaugural meeting of the Public Servants Union:

If we were to examine our role as officials, we could do no better than consider the basic expenditure set forth in the preamble of the Constitution Act...In short, the preamble refers to the achievement of a society which is safe, orderly and decent. This is the prime goal of the state and thus the prime goal of every official employed by the state. In striving after this high ideal, let us give our full co-operation to all others who are engaged in the same pursuit, be they appointed officials or political office bearers. Without the sustained effort of the officials it will be well-nigh impossible to achieve the quality of life we so earnestly seek. All officials

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are important cogs in the wheels of government and administration and much is expected of them. In the face of tides of change and development, they provide stability and security and reassurance to all the peoples of our country. (18)

The effect, therefore, of rationalisation and occupational differentiation was that departments, and for that matter a number of statutory bodies which embodied and represented the interests of those classes and class fractions hostile to the new state direction were slowly beginning to lose their influence and political impact within the overall state network. An example was the break-up of the Department of Information which was brought under the control of Foreign Affairs. Consequently, rationalisation brought centralisation and concentration of departments, whilst occupational differentiation ensured a loyal body of personnel to serve the new alignment of forces.

The reform strategies were also to be reflected in the public union structures and their internal battles. Presently there are three unions (staff associations they are called): the Public Servants Association (PSA) is exclusively for white civil workers; the Public Servants Union (PSU), established recently under the wing of the PSA, is for Indians exclusively; and the Public Servants' League of South Africa (PSL) which is non-racial - its membership is predominantly Coloured, but also includes a large component of African workers. Whilst the PSA and PSU have their base in, and are led by, permanent officials, the PSL has its base mainly amongst temporary workers; the leadership, however, is predominantly permanent officials. This has been contested, however, particularly over the last two years at regional and national congresses, as well as in the workplace. The internal battles have been over the direction of the union and over forms of representation. Other contested issues have been the attempt to relinquish African membership in order to meet the state's racial recognition criteria; the rejection of the state's new tri-cameral deal; workers' control and democracy and over where organising should be directed (ie: towards permanent or temporary workers). The struggle has been primarily between the co-optable section (mainly officials), sympathetic to the state's new deal, and those committed to union democracy and workers' control (mainly temporary workers) who are critical

of the state's initiatives.

On the whole, the leadership of the 3 organisations are conservative and bureaucratic and are favourably disposed to the new deal in varying degrees. Their function it seems is to regulate state-worker relations. In the case of the PSA and PSU it seems this has largely been achieved. Within the PSL it remains an arena of struggle.

III Personnel strategy and employees' grievances

There are two different strategies applied to civil workers. On the one hand, the co-optation strategies directed at permanent officials who are vital to the state and play an important function in the implementation of the new deal. The material incentives that are offered, and the ethic of loyalty which is fostered, ensures a functional civil apparatus in the face of enormous opposition by the oppressed classes. On the other hand, a divisive, disorganising and discriminatory employment policy is pursued with regard to temporary workers in order to stifle united action. The grievances of these workers have been important mobilising issues for organisation.

The 3 categories of employees identified earlier (ie. official, temporary and contract) have entirely different conditions of employment. Not only do the skilled-unskilled mechanisms play a role, but colour and gender are also vital in determining conditions of employment. Although the state declares that job reservation is not its policy, in practice this has been the case. Although there is a decided shift towards increasing the numbers of blacks entering the civil service, the numbers involved will be relatively small, and they are likely to be confined to the departments of own affairs. (19)

Whilst permanent officials have received increased benefits the temporary and contract workers have received no real material improvements. The thousands of unclassified, temporary workers have had to bear the brunt of low wages, bad service conditions and very few privileges. Even worse off are the contract workers with absolutely no benefits. They are usually employed for specific tasks or projects (eg. building dams) and once these projects are complete their contracts automatically expire. Job insecurity is, consequen-

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tly, a sceptre which haunts the contract workers.

Wages

All the unclassified staff are remunerated according to the Local Wage Rate System (LW). The history of this system is not clear but has been present for at least 2 decades. It is based on the principle that the cost of living in various parts of the country differs, (20) and consequently, conditions of employment and salaries ought to differ. It also incorporates an element that so-called Coloureds and Africans have different material requirements in these different areas.

South Africa is divided into 6 regions. In each region, there are 5 categories of employees, namely Local Wage Categories 1-5. Each local wage category depends on the type of work performed or specific qualifications required. For example, LW1 might include a worker who works with elementary equipment such as a broom or spade which requires no training or responsibility. A LW2 worker will on the other hand use an electric saw which requires training. If both LW1 and LW2 workers live in region A (which includes say Cape Town) they will receive more wages for their respective jobs than workers performing the same tasks in say Region C (say George).

There again, an African worker doing the same job will receive less than Coloured and Indian workers although they may all be in the same region. The objective of this remuneration system is to obtain workers at the lowest wages possible and also to foster tension and suspicion among the workforce. This preferential treatment promotes racism and disorganisation within the ranks of black workers. It has been a source of immense dissatisfaction. And although various actions have been taken over the years, for example go-slows, and here and there work stoppages (at forestry stations and hospitals particularly), they have been infrequent and brought little, if any, meaningful change to the system. This is not to say that change is impossible. But unlike the private sector, where an individual and competing firm is usually confronted, workers in the public sector are up against the entire state network.

According to reports, the Local Wage System is to be scrapped, which would certainly be welcomed by workers. (21) But

it seems unlikely that wage determination will be the subject of negotiation between worker organisations and the state. No democratic or independent trade union has hitherto established a significant presence in the civil sector with the result that sweetheart staff associations have remained unchallenged. It has been the prerogative of the state, through the Commission for Administration, to decide, without consultation, what it considers to be a "reasonable and decent wage". Notwithstanding the scrapping of the local wage system, it seems that the fundamental principles of racist determination and geographical division are likely to remain. At best, there is the likelihood of streamlining and reducing the number of work categories.

Pensions

At present there are two pension schemes. One is for permanent officials, the Government Service Pension Fund, and the other is for temporary workers. No pension provisions exist for contract workers. For officials entry into the fund is automatic with a 8% deduction. Gratuity and annuity are provided. Should the official die, prior to his retirement, a widow's pension, plus all the other benefits, is provided. In the case of temporary workers, in particular black workers, it was a long battle to secure pension provisions. (22) It was only in April 1967 that a Temporary Non-white Government Service Pension Fund was established. But entry was not automatic. It required a qualifying period of 5 years before a worker could contribute. What this qualifying period means is that if a worker started employment in a government department in say 1948, only 17 years' pensionable service has accrued, although the worker's service is actually 32 years. Initially, provision was made for the payment of a gratuity.

In October 1979 a new scheme was introduced called the Temporary Employees Pension Fund. The qualifying period was reduced to 2 years and contributions were to be 5% with the state's contribution being twice that of the employees. It also made provision for workers to buy back pensionable service years at specific rates. Many workers viewed the new pension provisions with suspicion. Although they agreed with pension contributions, they did not agree with the qualifying period. With the state's attempts at freezing pension pay-

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ments, workers viewed this as a ploy to increase control over them. Workers are now, for example, not paid a gratuity if they have more than 10 years' pensionable service. Instead, an increased annuity is paid in the form of a monthly pension. This measure caused a lot of tension, and in many areas of the civil sector, temporary workers threatened action; a very weak threat given their disorganisation. But it remains a major problem and certainly one which can be used to galvanise workers. The encouragement to workers to buy back pension is designed to shift the burden of expenditure onto workers. Should workers, for instance, buy back sufficient pensionable service, then their monthly pension would increase, and if this figure were to be higher than the civil pension, they would forfeit any claim to a civil pension.

Housing loans and subsidies

Housing loans and subsidies have usually been thought to be a major incentive for working in the government sector. Although theoretically all state employees are entitled to apply for housing loans and subsidies, it is really only "officials" who enjoy these benefits. The vast majority of temporary workers live in council houses, share houses or use makeshift accommodation. Consequently this places them outside the scope of this "benefit". Where workers have been able to purchase a house, acquiring a loan and subsidy is still not automatic. Workers must be over 21 years and be contributors to the pension fund before they can apply for the loans and subsidies. In practice, temporary workers will have to wait at least 3 years (2 years for qualifying and at least 1 year as contributor) before they can even reach the first stage of applying. Secondly, the loans are pegged to salaries. Consequently, because wages are low, loans and subsidies are usually very small. The procedure is protracted and many workers have been frustrated in their efforts to obtain loans and subsidies. In any case, for ordinary workers even raising the initial deposit is usually impossible. Thus the loans and housing subsidies are virtually the preserve of the permanent officials.

Another problem, for example in Cape Town and surrounding areas, is that many Coloured workers reside in areas such as Mitchells Plain and have purchased their houses. But because the council and/or government has declared the area a "devel-

oped township", workers cannot apply for loans or subsidies to assist them. The same applies to African workers who, until recently (ie. with 99 year leasehold), were not eligible for housing loans and subsidies.

Where these benefits are made available, they become control mechanisms. Workers who are fortunate enough to obtain a house and enjoy the benefit of the subsidy are extremely cautious about union organisation and engaging in worker action. It makes for passivity and reinforces control at the workplace.

There are other grievances which workers have: job promotion, improved training, injuries on duty and hours of duty, all of which would require a detailed department examination. None of these problems have, to date, been addressed by the independent trade unions which have managed to gain a small presence in the civil sector (General Workers Union; the National Federation of Workers). A possible reason is because public workers, like farm and domestic workers, are excluded from the Labour Relations Act, thus not much organisational attention has been paid to them. This has not, however, prevented workers from organising themselves.

IV Implications for worker organisation

The dynamics in the public sector are vastly different to those of private industry. At a formal level, public departments are similar to productive enterprises in that they are independent of one another, are individually responsible for specific projects/policies/services and attempt to be as "productively" efficient in the handling of their services, with the least amount of outlay. The hierarchies of control, the supervision of the labour process and its mechanisation to improve efficiency and productivity, constantly receive attention. Competition, although not necessarily in the open, does take place between departments - to secure better personnel, extend spheres of influence (not in the market, but politically) and to improve budget allocations.

There the similarity ends, because branches of the state (departments) are essentially political structures through which the ruling class exercises state power. They are the structures which regulate and administer the political auth-

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ority of the dominant classes, success depending on the balance of forces. In South Africa, the agenda and priorities are determined by the National Party, the ruling party of the dominant alliance of classes. Consequently workers struggles within the state do not so much affect productivity and profitability, as they do in industry, but have direct ideological/political effects. This is particularly true in the case of action by typists, messengers, filing clerks and health workers, although forestry workers' action can more directly affect profitability.

The institutional framework of the civil apparatus is, therefore, the outcome of struggles. These struggles are waged over 3 areas: the struggle within the state between departments over resources, personnel and influence; at the workplace over forms of control, supervision, discipline and production/efficiency, and between employees and the state over the general conditions of employment.

The last struggle obviously affects officials and temporary workers in different ways. To minimise militant action by temporary workers, disorganisation and isolation through tightly supervised workplace control takes place. In addition divisions along lines of gender, colour and region are promoted, making united action difficult. Moreover, defending workers' rights is difficult because of the masked nature of domination. For example, wages at a hospital, forestry station or administration department are not determined by the medical superintendent, forester or director. It is the Commission for Administration (or Provincial Council), not easily identifiable and somewhat removed from the immediate scene of conflict, which decides wage rates. The effect of this centralised decision-making is to obscure the source of power and deflect workers' struggles. There is no tradition or concept of departmental bargaining. Consequently workers struggles have to be directed against the state as such.

Labour relations have been relatively peaceful in the civil administration. This situation can be ascribed to the largely unorganised state of the black workforce, the stifling and disorganising effect of the sweetheart unions, and the fact that workstoppages are prohibited. The tactic of favouring staff unions is likely to continue in order to ensure "exclusive representation" and to prevent workers from joining

unions of their choice. In effect these staff union bureaucracies are assisting the state to control and disorganise workers - making real concessions extremely difficult to obtain. Even with the recognised sweetheart unions the scope for bargaining is limited. A wide range of issues such as work rules, procedure, hours etc. are simply not discussed.

The situation has dramatically changed over the last 3 years. Despite the non-recognition of trade unions, some organising has been done by independent trade unions, although it remains at the initial stages. The workers most receptive to unionisation are the unclassified temporary and contract workers. They bear the brunt of low wages and bad working conditions. By contrast the co-option of black officials means they are unlikely to be sympathetic to the workers struggle. Despite the absence of unions, workers have increasingly taken matters into their own hands. But worker action remains isolated and sporadic, with no sustained project. But even these actions have revealed, in no uncertain terms, the state's likely hard-line response to unionisation or the disruption of services. It has become reasonably clear that organising in the public sector, to be successful, must take place on a national basis because isolated struggles have too often led to defeat and demoralisation. The General Workers Union dispute with SATS is a case in point. Because of the diversity of the public workforce, organising would need to be on a national, "departmental" basis; for example, as forestry workers, hospital workers or water workers.

The arena of the civil administration is still to be tested; the opportunities for unionisation and its limits. With no established democratic non-racial trade union tradition, public sector workers still remain outside the mainstream of labour activity. Despite this, their militancy during the present period destroys the myth that public workers are passive. This, together with the imminent establishment of the new federation on a national basis, suggests that public sector organisation must be placed firmly on the agenda.

Footnotes:

- 1 It is usually in confidential department memoranda that explanations are given for why certain policies or practices are pursued, how they are to be implemented, when

- state workers -

- and where. Consequently my examination is tentative.
- 2 International Labour Organisation, Management Series Geneva, 1983, p7. This is an adaption of the position taken on public enterprises.
 - 3 With the new local authorities legislation it is not clear how these services are going to operate.
 - 4 There are 2 other structures which must be accounted for, the judiciary and the educational apparatuses.
 - 5 The Commission for Administration, Annual Report 1981-2, pp2-4
 - 6 The Commission for Administration, Annual Report 1982-3, p5
 - 7 Ibid, p10
 - 8 Ibid
 - 9 Ibid, pp9-11
 - 10 Sunday Express 3.3.85
 - 11 The Commission for Administration, Annual Report 1982-3, pp20-5
 - 12 Public Service Act (Act 111 of 1984)
 - 13 Ibid
 - 14 Work in Progress 11, February 1980, p11: a broader analysis of the monopoly capital and military link is given.
 - 15 This strategy was discussed as early as 1978-9 but was only implemented during 1981 with the final phase completed late 1984.
 - 16 The previous methods of recruitment and promotion usually entrenched conservative bureaucrats. The new methods are significant, no matter how superficial they may appear.
 - 17 This I think applies not only to the civil administration but to the entire state network.
 - 18 J van der Merwe, Chairman of the Commission for Administration, at the launching of the PSU, a union for Indian civil workers, 30 November 1983.
 - 19 Sunday Express 3.3.85. According to document: "Employment and utilisation of the various population groups in the public service", a process of controlled appointments to general affairs departments should take place.
 - 20 Exactly how this is determined is unclear.
 - 21 This was rumoured when the "occupational differentiation" programme for permanent officials was introduced.
 - 22 Information obtained from two documents: "Pensioenfonds Vir Tydelike Werknemers: Vordering van Bydraes" (no date); Department van Bosban, "Aanstelling in 'n Permanente Hoedanigheid" (no date).

Hospital Strikes in Durban

Marcel Golding*

Over 1,000 workers at Durban's major hospitals, King Edward VIII and Wentworth, struck on 4th February after rejecting a wage increase of R13 offered by the Natal Provincial Administration (NPA). The week long strike, the longest to date in the health sector in South Africa, crippled both hospitals and represented a major step forward in the struggle of hospital workers for trade union rights and improved wages and conditions. They were joined on the first day by R H Khan hospital workers who staged a 3 hour work stoppage. Although all the workers' demands were not met - 15 workers have not been reinstated and the final wage offer was less than the original demand - to have staged a full-scale strike in the harsh repressive environment of the public sector, where strikes are illegal; and in a recessionary period to have made gains of R36-R46 per month in a sector notorious for low wages - was a remarkable achievement.

Public sector workers, including hospital workers, are excluded from the Labour Relations Act and together with domestic and farm workers are denied trade union rights. Strike action is illegal. However this has not prevented workers from building organisation and engaging in militant action. In fact public sector labour relations have changed dramatically in recent years with frequent strikes by public workers at all three state levels - central, provincial, and local. Unions have emerged especially at municipality level with a small but significant presence and militant posture. (1)

Strike action at King Edward VIII and Wentworth hospitals follows closely the strike by 800 Groote Schuur hospital

* My sincere thanks to the worker committees of King Edward VIII and Wentworth hospitals for their patience in answering my questions; to Magwasa Maphala of NFW for making the arrangements at short notice and to Billy Paddock for all his assistance.

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workers in Cape Town in August 1984, and the strike by Hill-brow hospital workers in Johannesburg on 11 November 1982. In each of these strikes promises were made of immediate wage increases, which were later retracted. The contrast makes the Durban hospital strikes all the more important. Firstly, the NPA negotiated directly with the workers' committee although they refused to recognise the union. Secondly the immediate R36-R46 increase was given to all hospital workers, a concession which cost the NPA over R9 million. Thirdly, mass dismissals and arrests of workers was followed by the dropping of charges and reinstatement, without loss of benefits, for all but 15 workers. These gains were made for all Natal's hospital workers from a relatively weak organisational base; only 3 hospitals out of 7 have any worker organisation. Finally this victory challenges the traditional view of public sector employees as reluctant to engage in action.

Conditions of employment

Hospitals have been a major area of female employment. "African" and "Indian" women with long years of service work at Durban's major hospitals. Turnover of staff is not very high, especially amongst older employees, with many having 10 to 30 years service. Wages are generally low and have been eroded by rising prices. Recent figures show that average wages are below R200 per month. There are three grades of unclassified workers employed at the NPA hospitals: (3)

PRE-STRIKE

	bottom end of wage scale	top end of wage scale
Grade I	R196,75	R269,50
Grade II	R183,25	R251,25
Grade III	R143,00	R233,50

POST-STRIKE

Grade I	R233	R316
Grade II	R215	R292,15
Grade III	R169,75	R269,50

Grade I is the highest category of unclassified workers and usually includes storemen, chefs and maintenance assistants. Grade II includes most messengers, porters and long service supervisory kitchen staff. Grade III includes all ward cleaners, gardeners and junior security personnel.

photo 1



While low wages remains the most burning issue, other grievances include inadequate pension provisions; abusive matrons and supervisors; harsh arbitrary discipline; continued temporary classification for workers even with long years of service; and night duty without any allowances. Work is also generally monotonous and tiring, and injuries often occur on duty. For the workers of King Edward VIII and Wentworth hospitals, it was an uphill battle to have their grievances addressed. "Talks" brought very little improvement. It required a week long strike to shake the hospital authorities and usher in wage improvements.

Organisation

The Health and Allied Workers Union (HAWU), an affiliate of the National Federation of Workers (NFW), began organising in early 1983 at King Edward VIII, Wentworth and other Prov-

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incial Administration hospitals. (4) However the union's presence was minimal with only pockets of workers organised. According to Tholakele Nkombela, vice-chairperson of the workers committee at King Edward VIII hospital "only 200 workers had been organised by September 1984 out of a potential of 800, with only 120 possibly members of HAWU".

Wage grievances, working conditions and pensions had been brought to the attention of management with very little success. According to Zinti Nsele, chairperson of the King Edward VIII hospital workers committee, organisation only accelerated between September and October:

Regular meetings were held and we tried to convince all the non-classified staff that our salaries were not good enough. At this stage there was already talk of having a work stoppage or a go-slow, but this did not occur because our organisation was too fragile.

The issue that was to consolidate organisation at King Edward VIII and Wentworth hospitals was the boycott of the Christmas party. The party was an annual event for the non-classified staff; an occasion to display the harmonious relations between management and the workers. On 15 December 1984, on the initiative of King Edward workers, all hospitals were invited to send delegates to a meeting to discuss the wage question as well as the impending party, and possible action by workers. At the meeting attended by Clarewood, Wentworth, Addington, R H Khan and King Edward VIII representatives, the decision was taken to boycott the party. Nsele explains:

It would have been immature of us to celebrate "their" Christmas party while our children, the people we are working for, are hungry at home. Also, the authorities had promised an increase but nothing was done about fulfilling the promise...We were invited to a party while our lot has not improved.

At this stage there were suggestions for a work stoppage in December, but the majority of the representatives felt this was premature. Exactly how it was to be co-ordinated, how long it should last and what demands to make, remained unclear. Instead, worker action was postponed till January. HAWU officials also began to preach caution, insisting that the majority of the hospitals had to be organised. Magwasa Maphala, a HAWU and NFW official, explained:

It was pointed out to workers that they should reject the liaison committees at hospitals such as Addington and Clarewood, and consolidate where they have organised. It required also that all the hospitals be informed of any action. Workers agreed with our suggestion.

At the same meeting the living wage demand of R700 per month as a minimum for all non-classified staff, was raised. (5) On 17th December workers at King Edward VIII hospital held a report back meeting where the workers committee explained the outcome of Saturday's discussions with other hospital representatives. Nsele:

They were jubilant when I brought them the news of the boycott and that other hospitals would join us.

I went to all other hospitals and assisted them to elect workers committees. All we said was Amandla!...Power is ours!...and all the workers understood.

photo 2



The boycott of the party was 100% at most of the hospitals. "We sent back their food, we did not want it", said one worker. The workers displayed a unity and discipline throughout the day which reinforced confidence about the organisation and leadership. For the workers and union officials what was

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most strange was that the "authorities" never even investigated why the workers boycotted the party.

The organising and campaigning was done by the workers themselves. The most striking feature of the action was that despite little experience of unionisation and given the hostile labour environment of the public sector, the hospital workers demonstrated considerable initiative and creativity in their struggle. This does not negate the very supportive role played by the union officials who have, since then, continued their recruiting efforts. For them too, public sector organising was new and the action of workers required rapid adjustment.

The success of the boycott increased worker confidence and was the spur to inter-hospital organisational consolidation, through the development of a Branch Committee of the union on which all hospitals had representatives. Although the committee was formally linked to the union its constituency went far beyond HAWU's small membership at the time.

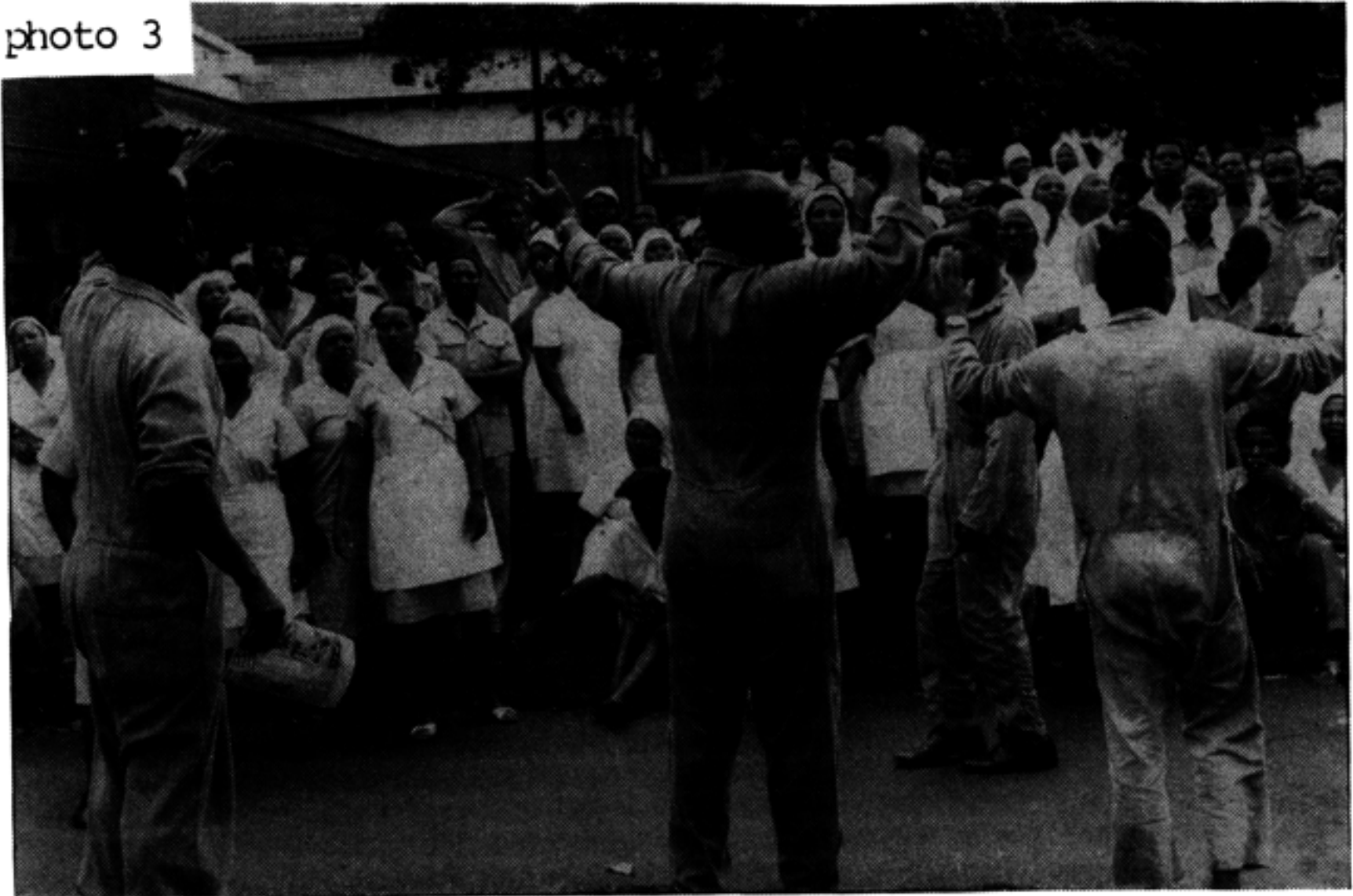
After the boycott, another meeting was held by the hospital representatives where it was resolved that if there was no wage increase a strike would take place. The demand was now raised for a R100 increase across the board for all non-classified staff. (6) Between mid-December and January organisation at various hospitals - particularly King Edward VIII, Wentworth and R H Khan - was intensified. Dates for worker action were continually switched, indicating some anxiety on the part of the hospital workers. The hospital management at King Edward VIII hospital was well aware that workers were dissatisfied and apparently heard that action was pending.

4th February: the strike begins

On February 1, the medical superintendents at King Edward VIII, Wentworth and Addington hospitals informed their unclassified staff that the Natal Provincial Administration had decided on an increase of R13 per month (one notch on their salary scale) from the beginning of February. Workers, were not satisfied. (7) On February 2, three hospitals - King Edward, Wentworth and R H Khan - met at the Ecumenical Centre in Durban and resolved that on February 4 they would stop work until the Director of Hospital Services of the NPA met

with the workers representatives. The demand was raised for R700 per month or a R100 across the board increase. "We decided that the day had arrived. We had to take action. The time was right. We could not wait any longer", said one worker, who had been 17 years at King Edward.

photo 3



The duration of the strike, the involvement of workers, and administration responses differed between hospitals, reflecting the uneven state of workers' organisation. It was at King Edward where most of the activity was concentrated and where organisation was strongest. Workers arrived as usual, well before 7 a.m., donned their working clothes, (the familiar pink tunics and white aprons with a white hood for the women and khaki or blue outfits for the men), and went to their usual posts. But they refused to work. All non-classified staff: domestic workers, porters, junior security workers, workshop and ward messengers stood at their posts but refused to carry out any instructions. Doctors, nurses and the clerical staff (all classified) did not strike. (8) "The nurses and doctors were shocked. They wanted to know what was happening," said one worker.

At 8.45 a.m. the medical superintendent, Dr Morfopolous ass-

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embled workers and wanted to know what was going on. "He asked us why we don't go back to work because we received R13 increase", said Tholakele. "The workers shouted back at him that they wanted to see the Director of Hospital Services and that they had nothing to say to him. They also said they wanted a R100 increase", she added.

The demand to see the Director of Hospital Services was important since the local medical superintendent, has limited powers concerning employment conditions. It was a clear identification by workers of where "power resides" and where decisions are actually made. General conditions of employment are determined by the NPA in collaboration with the Commission for Administration - the state organ which co-ordinates and regulates employment practices nationally in the central and provincial state apparatuses. (9) By demanding to see the Director of Hospital Services, King Edward VIII's hospital workers were shifting the terrain of their struggle from a local, internal dispute, to a terrain which would affect all hospital workers. This is important because any decision made by the Director would automatically affect all hospital workers whether they participated in the strike or not.

State response

The Director of Hospital Services, Dr Vorster, arrived at 12 o'clock to address workers. His presence indicated how seriously the NPA took the work stoppages. However he failed to diffuse the situation. His handling of the stoppage, in the initial stages, was extremely arrogant. One worker explained the sequence of events:

Someone arrived who called himself the Director. He said his name was Dr Vorster. We did not know who the Director was or how he looked. Anyway he asked what we wanted. We said we wanted more money. He said: "What do you know about money? Why do you want more money? Where do you think it comes from?" We told him that food is going up, that all prices at supermarkets are rising. We said that we cannot live on the little money we receive. The negotiations with him were very negative and in vain. He simply said workers should only decide when they are going back to work because he does not want to keep people who are not working in the hospital. He also said he is not running a supermarket but hospitals and therefore

does not care how much we are expected to pay at the supermarkets. He was reluctant to listen to our grievances. He then left us in a huff and went to Wentworth Hospital to repeat his story!

By 2.30 p.m. the hospital was in chaos. Only essential operations were handled and all other services, including the intake of patients, were curtailed. Nursing staff, especially the trainee nurses, and maintenance staff began doing the work of the striking workers. The physiotherapy department had taken over the kitchen and were peeling potatoes and cooking food. (10)

photo 4



Although workers had elected a committee, they were extremely suspicious of the hospital management, fearing reprisals, and insisted that negotiations take place with the mass of workers. By 4 p.m., chief medical superintendent, Morfopolous admitted a hopeless situation had developed. "We have lost all contact and negotiations have proved fruitless. I am disgusted that the workers are prepared to strike in a hospital situation", he told news reporters. (11) He threatened workers with dismissal if they did not return to work. This announcement was to be a prominent feature of the strike - almost

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ritually recited for 4 days - but proved useless in the face of a united, disciplined and confident workforce. Throughout the day the workers were in control of the situation, although at stages uncertainty prevailed as to how long they should stay out.

At this stage management hoped "the strike will last one day, as this would be tolerable". (12) The week-long strike by a fully determined workforce was to be a major shock.

Support action

On the first day of the strike HAWU approached sympathetic doctors at King Edward VIII hospital for support. The doctors, mainly members of the National Medical and Dental Association (NAMDA) (13), together with the medical students of the Natal Medical School were to be the major allies of the workers during the strike. A spokesperson for NAMDA explained: When we were approached for assistance and advice by the union we stressed that we were prepared to give assistance and support as far as possible, but that the workers should control the strike. We would pressurise the authorities to negotiate with the union.

While NAMDA did apply pressure, and assisted the workers, its role was limited, reflecting the professional nature of the organisation, its small base and its somewhat contradictory interests to those of the workers. It seems that whilst support was forthcoming, the ethical issues of patient care remained paramount. (14) The pressure applied by the organisation was limited to petitions, issuing press statements and holding meetings which denounced Morfopolous's handling of the dispute. Medical students were, on the other hand, more militant and held marches.

The strikes at Wentworth and R H Khan

The workers at Wentworth Hospital started organising amongst themselves in October 1984 but experienced enormous difficulty. After some months they elected a workers committee of 4 from the kitchen, steps maintenance and gardens and were able to muster the majority of workers behind the committee. They developed close relations with the workers committees at King Edward VIII and R H Khan hospitals and also used the

Christmas party to mobilise workers and consolidate their organisation. Addington and Clarewood hospitals were initially involved but organisation was not so developed as elsewhere.

The Wentworth hospital workers had been party to the decision to strike and the majority came out as planned on 4th February. Workers at Wentworth also insisted on speaking to the Director of Hospital Services. He arrived after 10 o'clock and repeated the performance he had given for King Edward workers. His return to work ultimatum was ignored and workers pressed on with their demand for R700 per month or R100 across the board. "Money is our problem. We earn very little. And talking seems to do very little. Action, only united action makes the bosses sit up", said Bhekumunto Makhanye, chairperson of the workers committee.

photo 5



The organisation at R H Khan was reasonably good but management was able to intimidate workers to return to their posts. Their stoppage, involving over 200 workers, lasted until 10 a.m. Medical Superintendent, Dr Naidoo, admitted that a stoppage took place: "Among the domestic workers this morning there was a problem but I explained that they would have to

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face the consequences of their actions so they went back to work." (15) R H Khan was the weak link in the chain, and it was broken with hardline measures and threats.

On the whole, the day was successful, given the fragile organisational structures. For both the workers and the union it was to prove an important test which would point out, albeit generally, the possibilities for successful worker action in the health sector. The day-long strike at 2 hospitals and the 3 hour stoppage at another was an important landmark in the struggle of hospital workers.

5th February: the struggle continues

The next day the workers committee at King Edward met Dr Morfopolous and the wage issue was again discussed. Promises were made to increase workers wages in line with those of Department of Health employees which the hospital committee thought were higher than the NPA rates. There was clearly unease on the issue and many rejected, out of hand, any increase which was not related to their original proposal of R100 across the board or R700 per month.

The first sign of doctor and student support was at a lunch-time meeting called by NPMDA. Attended by approximately 250 doctors and students, the meeting was later flooded by workers interested in the proceedings. (16) A resolution was adopted urging Morfopolous and the NPA to negotiate with the workers committee and emphasising that workers demands were just. Although a decision was taken not to scab this did not prevent strike-breaking. Matrons were ordering trainee nurses and other paramedical personnel to do scab work. These developments divided the medical staff; between those who were clearly sympathetic to the workers' struggle and those who thought a strike was not the way to have workers' grievances redressed. On the whole, however, the pressure applied by sympathetic doctors did not significantly alter the balance of power.

At Wentworth Hospital events proceeded very much along the same lines, with some uncertainty about exactly where the strike was leading. Makhanye, chairperson of the workers committee explained: "ripples of division among workers began to develop and the pleading by the medical superintend-

ent to return to work did cause panic". As the strike continued it became increasingly urgent to find a resolution to the dispute without losing sight of the original demands.

6th February

On day three of the strike Morfopolous reported that Department of Health employees received less wages than the NPA hospital workers. In the light of this the NPA offered to increase wages by a further notch on top of the already announced increase of R13. (17) This final offer of R36-46 per month, depending on grade, was rejected by workers. (18)

photo 6



By this stage of the strike the hospital services were barely functioning. Cleaning and other chores continue to be done by nurses and other paramedical personnel. One worker explained their attitude towards scabbing: "We really had hard feelings about nurses doing our work. They were breaking our struggle. The classified staff [ie. doctors, clerks and nurses] were sympathetic but did not support us fully. We were angry." Another worker added bitterly: "The patients supported us. They knew our demands were just. When we raised our fists and shouted slogans they shouted with us, al-

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though it was detrimental to them...But we don't understand why the nurses did our jobs. They broke our power."

The sentiments of the workers were understandable and reflected conflicting interests between the "professional" staff and general workers. They risked a lot to take on the NPA and saw their efforts undermined by fellow hospital employees. Whilst they also appreciated the ethical dimension of health worker struggles, they had little option if they were to improve their appalling conditions of employment. Trade union organisation is not recognised and no organised dispute procedure exists for the resolution of conflict between state employees and the departments. The channels of communication which do exist are heavily in favour of the state. Workers have no recourse to the Industrial Court and there is no concept of an unfair labour practice in the state's personnel code.

Workers started mounting pressure to meet the Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) in charge of the NPA hospital services. This was agreed and arranged for the next day.

At Wentworth hospital support began to dwindle although the core of the strikers remained loyal to the end. There was no supportive action as at King Edward where medical students were active.

7th February

When workers arrived at King Edward on the fourth day they were met by police armed with guns, batons, dogs and teargas. (19) It was a clear sign that Morfopolous and the NPA had lost control of the situation and strong arm tactics were to be used to crush the strike. With the South African Police Reaction Unit to back him, Morfopolous repeated his return to work ultimatum for the last time. At approximately 9.15 a.m. he addressed the workers through a loudhailer [photo 1]:

This is a sad day for me and you. I requested yesterday at our last meeting that you return to work or dismiss yourselves this morning. This hospital is disturbed right now by the intimidation of staff and the disruption of services which you are causing and my interest is to protect my staff and patients.

His administrative assistants then start handing out termination notices which workers refuse to accept. They sit or stand passively as the notices are thrown at them. [photo 2] After Morfopolous completes his speech, the riot police move closer. Warrant officer Haupt, also speaking through the loudhailer, orders workers to leave the hospital premises or face arrest. Workers shout their disapproval. A few workers call for calm [photo 3] and they all move closer to the tree to discuss the situation. [photo 4] One worker suggests they all go back to work. Another gets up to say: "the struggle must continue", that workers cannot go back now. The mass of workers shout their approval...Amandla! Amandla!...and raise their fists...The mood is once again militant.

photo 7



At 10.15 a.m. the police announce that their time to return to work has lapsed. [photo 5] Workers respond with chants of "Amandla!" [photo 6] One worker is arrested, then another. [photo 7] The police with batons in hand start surrounding the workers as the trucks arrive at the entrance. The workers respond with songs, and chant as they are ordered into the vehicles. [photo 8]

261 men and 281 women were arrested and taken to Umbilo

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Police Station where they were given an option of paying a R20 admission of guilt fine for trespassing or appearing in the Durban Magistrate's Court. The workers left behind at King Edwards decided to march down to the police station to join their fellow workers. They spent virtually the whole day there, but no-one paid the admission of guilt fine. Workers were then charged and released and informed that they should collect their wages from the offices of the Port Natal Administration Board.

At Wentworth Hospital the workers decided to go back to work at 12 p.m. after hearing of the arrests of their comrades at King Edward VIII. They conditionally accepted the proposal offered by the NPA. This retreat by the workers committee was probably a wise tactic as more workers were becoming despondent as no immediate response was forthcoming to their demands. In this way the workers committee ensured the co-operation and support of those on strike till the end with minimal damage to their structures.

Students demonstrate

After the workers were arrested mass meetings were called by sympathetic staff and medical students to denounce Dr Morfopolous' handling of the strike. (21) He was accused of being directly responsible for the arrest of workers and calls were made for his dismissal. Instead, students were banned from King Edward VIII hospital, a measure, Morfopolous thought, that would undermine student support for the workers. His accusation that students were "intimidating" workers remained unproved. The MEC of the NPA, Dr Clarke, Director of Hospital Services, Dr Vorster, and the Dean of the Medical School, Dr Kallichuran, came out in support of Morfopolous. (22)

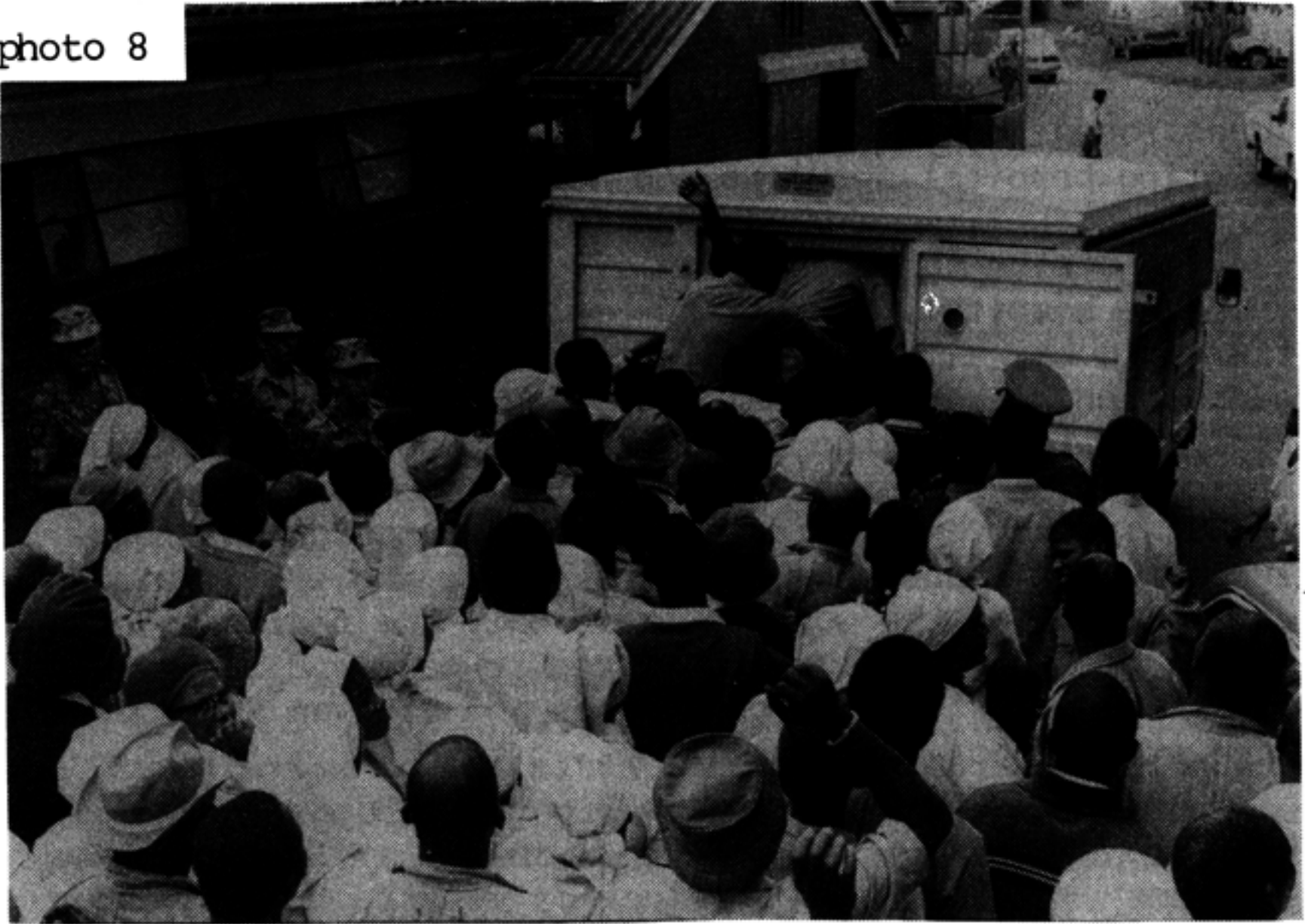
Workers committee meets NPA

Meanwhile the workers committee were on their way to meet Dr Clarke of the NPA in Pietermaritzburg. Only in the late afternoon did they receive news of the police presence and the arrests. After protracted negotiations with the NPA a settlement was reached which included:

- * 20% increase in salaries (effectively the R36-46 offered on the Tuesday)
- * unconditional reinstatement of all workers

- * all charges withdrawn against workers
- * agreement that all workers report back to work on Monday (11.2.85). (23)

photo 8



Under the circumstances this was a necessary compromise, one which at least secures the organisational structures and retains the support of workers. On the 8th, the workers committee reported back to the general membership of King Edward VIII hospital. (24) Although some workers felt more could have been achieved, especially on wages, the majority accepted the compromise on condition that the workers committee continues negotiations with the NPA on the wage question. They reaffirmed their commitment to fight for a minimum of R700 per month for all unclassified staff. According to HAWU official, Magwasa Maphala, "the workers are confident and still expect their demand of R700 to be met." He added that the HAWU will intensify efforts to organise all Natal's hospitals to press for this demand.

11th February: the return to work

Workers returned to work on Monday 11th February and were given re-employment forms to sign. (25) Although it had been

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agreed to re-instate all workers, Dr Morfopolous decided to selectively re-employ. In fact the MEC, Dr Clarke, informed reporters that he could not guarantee all the workers their jobs back, thus reneging on the original agreement with the workers committee. After pressure from the workers, everyone was taken back except 15 security guards. They were extensively questioned about their affiliation to HAWU and accused of disrupting hospital services and not staying at their posts.

Since the strike there has been extensive re-organisation within the hospital. Workers re-employed were shifted to different jobs, a measure designed to disrupt the workers' organisation. Also supervision and discipline is being more harshly applied. But the 15 security guards remain confident that they will be re-instated and this remains the most pressing issue. The hospital only began functioning "normally" again on Wednesday 13 February. For the NPA it was a great relief. For the workers it is only the beginning of a long campaign, now from a more secure base and on somewhat better terrain, with more confidence and with an awareness of the strength of the opposition.

Assessment

On the whole the strike was a success. The wage increase and the reinstatement of the staff were considerable gains in the context of stringent austerity measures in the state sector. It also demonstrated clearly that hospital workers are prepared to engage in militant action. The ethical issues were not ignored by the workers but remained subordinate to the economic needs of their struggle. Here there were certainly differences between the workers and the doctors who considered the patient health-care aspect more important. This probably accounts for the absence of a demonstrative work stoppage by sympathetic doctors. Instead it remained at the level of denouncements and petitioning; a useful pressure group. Whether more could be expected is debatable given the structural location of doctors and nurses; their professional ethos etc.

What the strike did reveal was that hospital workers want unionisation, and that it is on the non-classified manual workers that democratic independent unions will have to focus. But organisation in the public sector will be diffi-

cult. With the economic crisis public sector employees are the first to experience cutbacks, usually differentially applied in order to increase disorganisation.

Another issue on the state's agenda which is likely to gain momentum is the privatisation of hospitals and contracting out of services. Such a project is in line with current monetarist thinking and would have the effect of diffusing the potentially explosive growth of public sector unionism by attempting to depoliticise struggles at the workplace. State apparatuses - whether central, provincial or local - have increasingly become areas of struggle, especially waged by manual workers over wages and working conditions. To organise these workers into democratically controlled unions is vital to ensure that bureaucratic and state sweetheart unions do not continue to disorganise and disarm this important section of the working class.

The HAWU is a small union and intends consolidating its position in Natal's hospitals. Whether the union will successfully capitalise on the situation remains to be seen, but its profile has improved amongst workers. The gains made by the King Edward VIII and Wentworth hospital workers for all the other workers is likely to assist the union in its recruitment. But this is only the first phase of the battle. The struggle for recognition, and against the anti-worker Public Staff Code, which regulates labour relations in the hospitals (and the public sector generally) is the next stage of what will be a long struggle. The workers at King Edward VIII and Wentworth hospitals have shown through the strikes, by their tenacity, that they are ready to begin this "long march".

Footnotes:

- 1 Eg. South African Black Municipality and Allied Workers' Union, and Cape Town Municipal Workers Association
- 2 See M Golding, "Groote Schuur Strike", SALB 10.2, Oct-Nov 1984
- 3 Daily News 7.2.85
- 4 The National Federation of Workers (NFW) is one of the many breakaways from the old black consciousness union, Black Allied Workers Union. It was established in September 1980 as a federation of industrial unions and has 10 affiliates. For more details refer P Lundall et al,

- hospital strikes -

Directory of South African Trade Unions, SALDRU, UCT, 1984.

- 5 It is unclear why R700 was chosen. But it seems that it was a long-term objective of the workers, although some felt that it should be implemented immediately. For some it would have meant a 200% increase on their present wage.
(Workers memorandum)
- 6 Workers memorandum
- 7 Ibid
- 8 NAMDA memorandum
- 9 Refer M Golding in this edition of the SALB: "Workers in the state sector: the case of the civil administration"
- 10 NAMDA memorandum; Daily News 4.2.85
- 11 Daily News 14.2.85
- 12 Ibid
- 13 Critical Health Vol 9, May 1983, p16: the NAMDA was formed in Natal in September 1982 with the "intention of exploring the inter-action between health and economics, health and politics, and health and social organisation". The organisation's membership is exclusively open to doctors and dentists.
- 14 NAMDA memorandum
- 15 Daily News 4.2.85
- 16 NAMDA memorandum
- 17 Workers memorandum
- 18 Ibid
- 19 Ibid
- 20 Daily News 7.2.85
- 21 Mercury 9.2.85; also NAMDA memorandum
- 22 Daily News 8.2.85
- 23 Workers memorandum
- 24 Ibid
- 25 Ibid

The Forestry Workers of La Motte

Marcel Golding*

There are well over 30 thousand state forestry workers in South Africa living in isolated communities. Many of these forestry stations house over 500 workers, while others have as few as 50. The majority of the workers remain unorganised. Where organisation has been established it is bureaucratic and favours the forester and the state. The story of La Motte forestry workers is the story of the majority of state forestry workers.

La Motte, a controlled forestry station of the Western Cape Forestry Directorate, lies approximately 70 km from Cape Town, and is situated in the heart of Franschoek Winelands. The village, housing 141 workers, is surrounded by Mattopi, Koekemoer, Dasberg and Perdekop as the villagers call the nearby koppies. The serenity which prevails in this Drakenstein district belies the hardships faced by the forestry workers and their families. And these conditions are not peculiar to La Motte but face all forestry workers in the Western Cape.

The area monitored and worked by the forestry workers of La Motte stretches from Grabouw in the south to Hawequa in the north, Jonkershoek in the west and Thelwaterskloof in the east. The indigenous forest, plantation and mountain catchment totals 4063 hectares. (1) This is the largest area covered by any one station in the Western Cape's 29,793 hectares of forest, of which 7,034 hectares are privately owned and 22,759 hectares are state owned. (2) La Motte, which forms part of the Drakenstein Forest District is 1 of 15 forestry stations grouped into 4 districts. All but one of these stations were established between the 1880s and the 1930s.

The predominant tree species in the Western Cape area are: conifers, eucalyptus, other broadleaved species and acboreta.

* My thanks are due to the workers of La Motte for their hospitality and patience in answering my questions.

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The village and its people

La Motte forestry village is situated in a lush valley. There are 145 neatly constructed pine houses. A population of over 500 inhabit the village. The workforce of the station is 141, predominantly coloured labourers. There are five African workers, all of whom have worked more than 20 years at the station. The average age of the workers is 35 years and most have worked an average 8-10 years. There are however, many workers who have spent three quarters of their lives at this forestry station and have seen successive foresters come and go. Their wrinkled faces and hands and stories bear testimony to the years of hardship and suffering. Tradition has also resulted in some families having more than one in the household employed at the station. Isolated from the Franschoek regional centre, the community is a closely knit one.



The houses are well constructed. Some have three bedrooms, while others have two. Many of them are barely furnished, others display old furniture pieces that must have passed through many generations. All the houses have coal stoves; there is no electricity. Although workers are satisfied that they have a roof over their heads, there are complaints:

In winter the houses are extremely cold, while in

summer they are extremely hot like ovens...
and we have no electricity. But the donkeys have lights
in their stables...So they are better off than us.

Forestry workers consider themselves part of the rural work-
force. But like their urban fellow workers, they also com-
plain that wages are low, work is heavy, unhealthy and ex-
tremely dangerous, pension provisions very bad, advancement
virtually non-existent and relations with supervisors or
foremen aggressive.

Wages

Wages in the rural areas are generally low. On the surround-
ing farms, workers, especially the old hands, earn between
R20-30 per week depending on the season and type of work per-
formed. So forestry workers consider themselves a bit better
off, but not at all happy. The state's "temporary employees"
come under the Local Wage System, commonly called "die plaas-
like lone stelsel". (3) There are 5 categories depending on
the type of work, responsibility and formal educational re-
quirements. The majority of the workers at La Motte are in
Local Category 1, although many are qualified, through ex-
perience, for a higher category. But that depends on the
availability of posts and the favour of the foreman.

In Local Category 1 wages start at R183 per month, rising to
R269 after six years. Once they reach the maximum, salaries
can only be increased when there are general increases for
all public workers. The only other possibility of an increase
is to be shifted to a different local wage category. This
very seldom happens because very few posts are created. Work-
ers sometimes receive long service increments for 10 and 15
years service, but these are merely token.

Many workers complain that the state does not take previous
experience, or broken service into consideration. One worker
explained:

I worked for the Department for six years. When I left I
went to work on a nearby farm for two years. When I re-
turned, to start my job, they started me as a new recruit.
It will now take me six years to reach my maximum.

There are three discriminatory elements in the local wage

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system: race, gender and region. African workers will, for instance, earn less than Coloured workers, although they might do the same work. One worker in the Western Cape will earn a different wage to that of another worker, doing the same task in another region. And women earn less than men. Although the "Coloured labour preference" has been scrapped, the forestry department has not significantly changed its employment patterns. Only a few Africans have been employed, usually on contract and housed in single sex quarters. Some workers have been able to acquire a heavy duty driver's licence but there are no jobs for them. All trucks are driven by whites. So the best they can do is to operate the tractors or power saws which place them in higher wage categories.

Investigations are presently in progress which will, say some sources, end the pernicious local wage system. The forestry workers do not share this optimism. As one worker put it:

Sure there'll be change. They will now call it by a new name, change a few categories here and there. But in the final analysis it is the old principle and package in a new wrapping.

Farm work

Because of the low wages, the wives of the workers of La Motte are forced to do casual labour, on the nearby farms, to make ends meet. This applies to the majority. During the fruit season, everyone is working, including the children "so that they can pay for their uniforms for the new year," said one woman. Another added: "we have no alternative. Our husbands earn far too little and we must assist."

For the period October to January, local farm lorries fetch the womenfolk at 6 a.m. and bring them back at 6 p.m. Earnings are R20 per week. Only when piece work is done do the women stand a better prospect of improving their wage. "Sometimes I'm lucky, and with the help of my children, I can make R40-50 per week. But then I really have to work. And for the entire day you are in the sun", said one woman who has done this seasonal labour for the past 10 years. She added income, although only temporary, is appreciated by the workers. But it still does not always cover all their expenses:

The court messenger is probably the most regular visitor

to this place. You never know when it is your turn. Because, to be honest, my debts force me to pay one month, and skip the next, so that I can pay something else. And these are not luxury items, but essentials.

Living in the rural area is not just fresh air, sunny skies and braaivleis, it is tough. Commodities are expensive. A snap survey revealed that workers at La Motte all have more or less the following basic monthly expenses:

Rent	-	R 5,50
Sanitation	-	5,01
Wood	-	0,70
Medical & Insurance*	-	37,73
Food	-	over 150,00

		198,94**

* Regular sickness and injury and the burden of funeral expenses make this a necessary item.

** This excludes all other items, for example, clothes, furniture and luxuries.

The stories told by some of the people reflect the general situation in the Drakenstein area. According to many, bread has to be baked because they cannot afford to buy shop bread. Foodstuff is also generally expensive at the nearby shop. Because many of the children of the village are at school parents see education as a priority. "Hopefully when they get a better education, they will not have to live like us", was the optimistic remark of one worker.

Working conditions

Work starts at 7.18 a.m. and stops at 5.30 p.m. The workers are divided into 8 groups of 20-25 men each. Gang 1 is responsible for handing out of tools, filling tractors and lorries with diesel and petrol, and controls the store, nursery and office block. The sick, the old or injured are usually given these "light" jobs.

Gangs 2 and 3 are responsible for the planting of trees, marking of trees, maintaining of trees and ensuring their growth is not hindered. Most of the work entails weeding and cultivation and workers are mainly in the plantation.

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The work is heavy. Tasks are usually set in the morning by the foreman and workers have to finish them before they go back home. One worker explained:

When you are in the plantation you have no time to raise your head. Once the tasks are set and there is a rush to complete it. At head office, they have designed these time and motion studies. So they "know" what we are capable of doing. If we do not finish on time the truck does not leave until we have.

Gangs 4, 5 and 8 are responsible for clear felling of trees, debranching and the preparation of logs for the saw mills. Like gang 2 and 3 they have specific targets to meet. They also engage in a bit of thinning, pruning and slashing. Power saws are usually used and the work is extremely dangerous. (The longterm effects of this work is to cause nervous tremours.) Injuries occur regularly. Legs or hands are often trapped between logs, and falling branches injure eyes and the face. Sometimes, depending on accessibility, either donkeys or tractors are used to drag logs to a central point for them to be taken to the saw mills. Workers remark that sometimes 350 logs have to be felled per day per gang and if a donkey is used as transport, the figure can be increased. The labour process is not too complex. Each member of the gang has a specific task. There are markers, hookers, debranchers and tractor drivers and power saw operators who work tightly together. Co-operation is vital if the target is to be reached.

Supervision by the foreman is usually abusive. Racist terms and foul language often characterise the instructions.

"What can we do," asks one worker, "I have a family and I need the job. If I back-chat I'll be fired immediately. I'm only a temporary worker. And if you complain, the foremen and foresters cover up for one another. We have already raised the matter collectively. But when it comes to practice the foremen continue their bad language."

Another worker said:

You must understand, a forestry station is a small and closed community, usually isolated from the rest of the community. Here the forester is king and rules his kingdom as he sees fit. As they say in the kingdom of the blind, the person with one eye is king."

The metaphor sums up the harsh realities. With few job opportunities in the surrounding areas, the foresters and their white foremen decide how things are done. In fact it is no different to the general conditions on farms. The forester personifies baaskaap - on the forestry station he represents the authority of the state. The feeling among the workers is that some of the foresters are more concerned about plants and trees than they are about people.

Gang 6 is responsible for nature conservation, while Gang 7 is responsible for transport of the logs to the sawmills. Nature conservation includes building firebreaks, maintaining them, keeping the roads cleared and building new roads to ensure easy access to the plantations. This work is very important because fire prevention can save thousands of hectares of timber. This gang's work is usually in the hot sun, or in rainy conditions, because these preventative measures must be taken. The area which one worker has to clear in a day is approximately 100 metres in length and 20 metres wide, using elementary tools such as hoe, rake and 3 pronged fork.

The gangs have different pressures placed on them. Supervision is close and aggressive. In winter, even when it rains, workers are forced to work. Covered in rainsuits, which make work extremely uncomfortable, workers are still rushed to complete tasks. The year is basically divided into seasons, where certain tasks must be completed. During May, June, July and August, trees nurtured at the nursery are planted. September, October and November, especially after the winter rains, clearing work is done to rid the plantation of invader vegetation (which include Hakea, cluster pine and Acacia). Also during October, early November there are daily shifts of watchmen to monitor the outbreak of fires. December, January, February, March firebreaks are maintained and if necessary increased, depending on wind conditions.

Fires

Besides the injuries in the plantation work, fires remain the most dangerous occupational hazard for forestry workers. Fires have been known to destroy thousands of hectares of timber and taken the lives of many in the process. In 1981-2 there were 9 large fires causing incalculable damage. (4) Tighter controls reduced the figure to 4 during the period

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1982-3. The most recent, and certainly one of the most costly in lives, was the fire which raged over a ragged line of more than 30 km from Wemmershoek Dam over Groot Drakenstein and Hottentots Holland range through to Tweewaterskloof. It was estimated that over 37,000 hectares of mountain veld were destroyed killing 9 forestry workers in the process. (5) Many workers escaped near death when they were rescued from mountain ledges by helicopter. The fire was the largest in size since the disastrous fire of 1958 which burnt from Gordons Bay to Franschoek Pass. During the recent fire strong desiccating south-east winds fanned the flames and the fire lasted 12 days. This fire shocked the community of La Motte. All the workers were involved in the intensive fire-fighting operation. Not all are fully trained in the techniques of fire-fighting, although courses are run. But when a fire breaks out, they are forced to engage in the fire-operation, trained or untrained. One of the wives of the forestry workers explained her fears:

When fires break out and our husbands go off we really don't know whether they will come back alive. Sometimes for weeks they are away and there is no communication. And when they lose their lives, the compensation is pathetic. Just look at what the dependents of those killed in Villiersdorp got?

The workers share their fears:

You know, the fires have flames sometimes raging 15-20 feet high, and the sudden change of winds can mean death if you are not trained and prepared for any eventuality. Very often we go to areas we don't know and this obviously increases the danger. After every successful stint, we are just happy to be back with our families.

With total departmental expenditure on fire prevention standing at under R1m, (7) the most important instrument used in fighting fires is the slasher, a long stick with a leather flap attached to one end. Increasingly helicopters are also being used for reconnaissance work, airlifting of fire-beaters to strategic points as well as dropping of water buckets. But it seems it is still workers armed with slashers and the use of controlled burning and fire breaks that is most reliable, because at "R2,000 per hour for dousing fires with water-buckets by the helicopters, makes this a dubious method". (8)

Pensions

Because the majority of the workers are classified temporary, pension provisions are not very good. Prior to 1 April 1967, no pension provisions existed for forestry workers. With the implementation of the Non-white Temporary Government Service Pension Fund, workers still had to wait 5 years before contributing to the Fund. Since 1979, with an amendment to the Act, the period has been reduced to 2 years and a number of new elements added. These include a provision that the retirement gratuity now falls away in return for an increased monthly pension and a widow's pension. Workers were extremely dissatisfied with these measures. Although there was some resistance, it was weakly demonstrated. One worker explained:

Because we are a small workforce and because unemployment is high, organisation has proved difficult. We can easily be replaced. Our work is not too highly skilled except for those who do more technical jobs. If you step out of line, you lose your job and your house.

Organisation and representation

This has not prevented organisation. On the contrary, workers are reasonably well organised but their power is limited. The fear of losing their jobs in the struggle for adequate rights of representation seems acceptable. But to have one's family ejected from the house with no alternative accommodation is a sacrifice too great. The forestry workers of La Motte have been building an inter-forestry station contact committee with Grabouw, Highlands and Nuweberg and Lebanon. Many of the workers belong to the PSL (Public Servants League of South Africa), a union organising predominantly central state workers. But they are generally disillusioned with the union, its bureaucracy, and its orientation:

We know we must organise. We read in the newspapers and we hear stories from other people about other workers - how they got higher wages. Our union does very little.

The forestry workers of La Motte also have to contend with the liaison committee, established by the forester to regulate village relations and express the opinions of the villagers. But virtually everyone is critical of the committee, even some of the members who serve on it. "It is basically a dumb body. We want a democratic committee, elected

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by the workers and accountable to the workers. Not a body appointed by the forester", said one worker.

Resistance to this liaison committee, foisted on villagers, is strong. Some of the workers say that those who serve on the committee are only looking after themselves. Adequate representation is a burning issue. To the workers it is central because through a democratically elected voice the aspirations of the workers can be heard. But as one wise man put it: "how do we transform demands into gains. At the moment, the forces against us are very strong, we are not only fighting the forester but the whole state. What chance do we have?" This is the rub of the matter, not only for forestry workers, but for all public sector workers. Workers are not confronting an individual and competitive enterprise which determines their conditions of employment and wages. Instead they are confronting a power network, not easily identifiable, but whose effects are virtually all pervasive. This has not dampened workers' enthusiasm to organise, but they are very cautious. Although the forestry workers are an isolated community, they know that organisation is vital if their conditions are to improve. They have regular contact with other workers in Paarl and hope to establish democratic structures to secure their aspirations.

Footnotes

- 1 Department of Environmental Affairs, Annual Report 1982-3, p255
- 2 Ibid, p247
- 3 See M Golding, "Workers in the state sector", elsewhere in this edition.
- 4 Department of Environmental Affairs, Annual Report 1982-3, p176
- 5 Public Servant (official organ of the Public Servants Association), May 1984, p6; and Cape Times 23.1.84
- 6 The reported amount received by workers' dependents was apparently below R2,000. But this was not confirmed.
- 7 Department of Environmental Affairs, Annual Report 1982-3, p271
- 8 Public Servant May 1984, p7

Regionalisation, Federalism and the Reconstruction of the South African State

William Cobbett
Daryl Glaser
Doug Hindson
Mark Swilling

It is widely agreed that South African capitalism has faced a sustained crisis of political legitimation and economic accumulation since the early 1970s. (1) The intensification of this crisis in the 1980s has generated a new sense of urgency within the ruling groups. The state's short-term response to the current crisis, and indeed its longer term reform programme, are directly subject to the changing balance of forces in society. However, even as the state and oppositional groups do battle on a "tactical" field of conjunctural action, elements within the ruling groups, both inside and outside the state, are attempting to map out a longer-term "strategic" terrain of action within which they hope to con-fine future battles. These more advanced reformers are look-ing to solutions that go well beyond those associated with Wiehahn/Riekert, the "Koornhof Bills", the new Constitution, and the confederation of ethnic states: that go beyond, in other words, the package of ruling group initiatives commonly referred to as "Total Strategy".

This paper will focus on one dimension of this process of reformulation: the search for new spatial co-ordinates for the restructuring of South African capitalism.

Ruling groups have indentified two major obstacles that need to be overcome before a capitalist form of state can be legitimated in South Africa and the process of capital accumulation rejuvenated. Firstly, the politicisation of social relations resulting from "excessive" state intervention in the provision of goods and services, coupled to the racially structured form of this provision and of the wider system of domination. Secondly, the "negative" economic effects of the interventionist and apartheid aspects of the capitalist state - effects which include the fiscal crisis, inflation and the

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inefficient utilisation of resources.

It is against this background that a consensus is now emerging amongst the most powerful elements in the state and capital over the importance of the following objectives:

1. The depoliticisation of society through a narrowing of the range of social issues subject to political contestation. This has two aspects:
 - a) The reduction of state involvement in the creation and distribution of wealth, employment and welfare. Both the state and capital currently argue that market forces can allocate resources more efficiently than the state.
 - b) The deracialisation of these state interventions and of certain formal institutions of political domination.
2. The decentralisation of policy formulation and implementation including the devolution of authority over welfare expenditures to regional and local government, and as far as possible the privatisation of such services.
3. The continued centralisation of powers concerned with the maintenance of order, as well as the retention of the capacity for "pragmatic" economic intervention by the central state to correct market failures.

As part of the search for more developed solutions, sections of the ruling groups have begun to explore the possibility of demarcating new spatial units of planning, administration and representation that cross-cut or by-pass existing, highly politicised spatial units - such as the bantustans and group areas. These existing spatial units have been identified as a source both of economic inefficiency and political instability. The purpose behind identifying new spatial forms would therefore be to disorganise oppositional groups that have challenged existing spatial boundaries and the systems of political representation predicated upon them; and to provide the spatial framework for a renewal of capital accumulation. A new set of "depoliticised" spatial concepts - like development and metropolitan regions - and new approaches to political representation predicted on these spatial forms - like federalism - have gained dominance in the strategic thinking of the ruling groups.

The objective of this paper is to analyse the ways in which the ruling groups - in their planning forums, academic institutions and commissions - are re-conceptualising spatial

forms, in order to facilitate and manage the development of new patterns of domination, exploitation and social reproduction. In addition, we will identify areas in which the restructuring of spatial forms has already begun. The post-1981 regional economic development package; evolving systems of local and regional government; labour and urban policy; even the confederation of states represent a substantial departure from the ways in which spatial boundaries were conceptualised under traditional apartheid. We will argue that these changes, and the conceptual reformulations informing and being informed by them, potentially constitute the beginnings of a wider-ranging reformist project.

The ruling groups and regional-federalism

The crisis and questioning of the spatial assumptions of traditional apartheid is occurring across the entire field of state intervention in South Africa. Whether in the context of political representation, labour control and settlement policy or spatial economic planning, sections of the political elite have begun to organise opposition to existing policies, and to debate alternatives.

After 1979 reformers both inside the state and in the wider verligte and liberal communities, began to recognise that the Verwoerdian vision of parcelling South Africa up into independent ethnic states was unrealisable. It had become obvious that the bantustans - the essential pillars of apartheid - were unable to achieve either economic autonomy or political legitimacy. Economically impoverished and reliant on the South African economy, their re-integration into a common economic planning and political framework was increasingly seen as inevitable - notwithstanding the granting of independence to Venda in 1979 and Ciskei in 1981.

Publicly, the government has conceded to no more than the possibility of an ethnically based confederation - in effect an international agreement between supposedly independent ethnic states and South Africa. (2) However, important interests located inside and outside the state system have argued vigorously for a federal-type (3) state based on spatially reconstituted political units which would cross-cut, by-pass or supersede the provinces and bantustans.

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Amongst the various forms of federalism in discussion one conception, which we regard as particularly important, visualises the construction of the second tier on economically defined spatial units. The eight development regions (see Appendix A) presented by the state at the Good Hope conference in 1981 are being seen by many as the most suitable units for this purpose. (4) In this approach to federalism, development planning and administration within these regions - particularly controls over the spatial location of industrial and residential areas - would be tied in to the second and third tiers of government, and the fiscal systems corresponding to these levels. The installation of a regional-type federal system is regarded by its advocates as necessary both to resolve the crisis of african political incorporation and to re-establish conditions favourable to economic expansion.

Influential groups who are known to be pressing for federalism in one or another form include English-speaking reformers, several bantustan leaders, certain Afrikaner verligtes and organised mining and commerce.

The concept of federalism has a long lineage in the English-speaking reformist community. (5) The Progressive Party, associated since its inception with big business, advocated a federal formula as far back as 1962, following the recommendations of its internal Molteno Commission. The United Party (UP), adopted a federal programme in 1972, and its successor, the New Republic Party, has advocated a federal/confederal option for South Africa. (6) Both parties view african urbanisation as inevitable and accept as a corollary that sections of the african population must eventually be politically accommodated in some way within central political institutions. Backed by big business, both oppose the policies of influx control and state-induced industrial decentralisation as traditionally conceived and implemented by the National Party.

Impatience with the lack of substantial constitutional restructuring in the late 1970s led some English-speaking liberals to consider a regional-type solution for Natal/KwaZulu. The Buthelezi Commission, which reported in 1982, favoured a consociational (7) rather than federal framework as an interim solution for Natal/KwaZulu and South Africa. It argued for a regionally-based administration for Natal/KwaZulu superseding existing provincial and bantustan areas of jurisdiction. (8)

The report hinted that a federal system, in which Natal-KwaZulu made up one of a number of regional units, provided a better long term solution to the question of national political representation than did the consociational model. (9)

If ethnic confederalism has any natural supporters, they are the black elites in the bantustans. Indeed, some bantustan leaders - for example Sebe of the Ciskei and Mphahlele of Venda - have supported ethnic confederation and have resisted the idea of a spatially re-constituted federation in which bantustan independence would lose its "Verwoerdian meaning". (10) For a confederation to succeed, the central state would require that almost all bantustan leaders - and particularly strategically powerful ones like Buthelezi - accept independence and then agree to enter into an international arrangement binding them to South Africa. Such agreement has not been forthcoming and leaders of both "self-governing states" (KwaZulu, Lebowa, Kangwane, Gazankulu and Qwa Qwa) and at least one "independent" bantustan (Transkei) have openly rejected Pretoria's schemes for confederation - in favour of a federation. In July 1983, the leaders of these bantustans issued a declaration of intent in which it was stated that, in the event of their opting for a constitutional arrangement, they would structure it on a regional, non-racial and non-ethnic basis. (11)

As regards Afrikaner verligte reformers, there is at present considerable ferment, both within and outside the National Party. Although the term has come to embrace a wide range of groups, it is primarily those attached to the NP who concern us here: it is they who have most effectively used the apparatus of the NP to secure "change from within", and who enjoy the backing of Afrikaner-speaking and, in growing numbers, English-speaking big businessmen.

Within this group there is a debate between those favouring a broadly confederal solution for South Africa and those advocating a spatially re-constituted regional-type federation or even a unitary state. (12) A landmark in the conceptualisation of regional-type federalism within verligte circles is the Lombard Report, commissioned by the Natal Sugar Association to investigate alternatives to the consolidation of KwaZulu. This report recommended the establishment of a three level authority system within Natal/KwaZulu, the building

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blocks of which were to be "natural constituencies" defined as "collectivities of people with a high degree of shared values about matters which have political implications". The three levels are: 1) self-governing economically viable, local authorities; 2) three sub-regional authorities comprising KwaZulu, the "White-Rural Corridor Area" and the Durban-Pinetown area; 3) an integrated Natal-KwaZulu authority with legislative powers vested in an assembly elected from the three sub-regions. (13)

Associated with these different positions over the appropriate form of state is a dispute between those who see industrial decentralisation in traditional terms (as a means of propping up bantustans perceived as the future members of a confederation), and those who advocate the dispersal of industry as part of a regional development strategy (aimed at securing viable economic bases for the regional political units of a future confederation or federation). (14)

More recently, this debate has focused on the issue of influx control. On the one side are those who adhere to the Riekert formulation whereby influx control is used to divide Africans in white South Africa from those residing in the bantustans. Those favouring a regional approach argue for a policy of "planned urbanisation" in which the entire workforce of a region is treated as part of a single labour market, albeit one segmented on both an intra-metropolitan and urban/rural basis. Population movement within and between these regions should, in this view, be regulated by means of industrial and residential deconcentration rather than traditional influx and pass controls. (15)

Planned urbanisation and industrial deconcentration measures, as conceived in this approach, imply vigorous state economic intervention to restrain the tendency for industry, commerce and people to concentrate in South Africa's metropolitan centres, and to encourage a more even geographical distribution of jobs, income and welfare. (16) Indeed, the reduction of extreme regional inequalities is seen to be an essential prerequisite for successful introduction of racially inclusive decentralised political structures because the persistence of regional economic inequalities would, in this view, fuel the demand for central state redistributive interventions which could threaten economic efficiency and profitability.

For its part, big capital, after some initial enthusiasm following the Carlton Conference announcement that the state was replacing traditional decentralisation policy with a focus on deconcentration, has become increasingly sceptical about the scale and form of industrial deconcentration policies implemented since 1982. (17) In late 1984 organised big business and commerce launched a campaign against the system of influx control, arguing that the consequences of unregulated african urbanisation can be more effectively dealt with within the metropolitan areas than in terms of either direct or indirect state controls aimed at keeping people out of them. (18)

Bitter opposition from black people to the tri-cameral elections of 1984, and the unabated urban turmoil since then culminating in the November 1984 stay-away, (19) has induced big capital to break with tradition and publicly call for african political accomodation within a unitary system. (20) This it now sees as an essential pre-requisite for long-term economic and political stability in South Africa. While it has not publicly backed a specific political blueprint, organised capital has privately voiced support for some form of federal solution. Some elements within capital see in the development regions the possible basis for an evolving second tier in a federal-type system, drawing on the USA as a model. Their conceptions differ markedly from the formulations discussed above in that they conceive of these regions as mutually competitive, and not as the objects of costly decentralisation policies designed to ensure a geographically even spread of population, employment and welfare. (21)

In conclusion, the call for federation could become the cornerstone of a new and wide ranging consensus amongst those favouring a reformist solution in South Africa. There is growing conformity between longer-range constitutional visions of certain reformers in the state, the English-speaking opposition, the conservative coloured and indian parties and some bantustan leaders.

This convergence could herald, firstly, the gradual elimination of differences between the advanced verligte wing of the NP, the NRP, the right-wing of the PFP and sections of the opposition press; secondly it is likely to intensify internal debate and conflict between those in the reformist opposition

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favouring closer co-operation with the NP and those favouring an independent and radicalised stance; and finally, it could signal a shift within the NP towards a much bolder path of political and administrative restructuring than we have hitherto seen, albeit that the path leads through the minefield of South Africa's endemic social instability and has an uncertain destination.

It is the combination of the political ascendancy of the verligtes, and the relative stability of the mechanisms of state power over which they preside, that allows powerful reformers to engage in what some have interpreted as a politics of deception and of "hidden agendas". This should not imply that ruling group tactics are governed by a carefully worked out battle plan: ambiguities in policy usually have more to do with genuine indecision or internal disagreements among policy makers than with conscious strategies of deception on their part. Moreover, there is no single agenda but several, and the precise outline of the agenda that finally prevails will be determined by the balance of forces in the ruling groups and society; it cannot be anticipated in advance here. What this paper does is examine processes already in motion and expose some leading, still largely hidden, currents in reformist thinking. In this task we have one unifying concern to examine the practical restructuring, and still embryonic reformulation, of the spatial organisation of the state and political economy.

Federalism and political restructuring

The constitutional planning branches of the state have already commenced the task of constructing decentralised political structures within parts of the state system. While at present these structures remain fairly tightly bound to the over-arching framework of territorial and residential segregation, there is evidence of a concern within ruling groups that these structures should constitute building blocks of a future political order informed more fully by the logic of federalism.

Until recently the basic organising principle of constitutional planning was the President's Council's (PC) recommendation for a "consociational democracy" for whites, coloureds and indians, existing alongside separate "homeland states"

for each african ethnic group. It was hoped that the political aspirations of africans would be satisfied by linking up the tri-cameral parliament to the bantustans through the ethnic confederation that began to take shape after 1979. This was designed to be a loose "international" alliance of states that would co-operate at the centre, while retaining sovereignty vis-a-vis their own territories. The imagery of the European Economic Community was invoked to give credibility to this vision. (22)

The ethnic-confederal solution, however, proved incapable of meeting two fundamental political challenges currently facing the state. Firstly the burgeoning trade union movement and mass based national political organisations (United Democratic Front [UDF] and National Forum [NF]) succeeded in making unviable the new constitutional dispensation and the bantustan-based confederal solution. By mobilising the workers, students, unemployed youth, and communities around the demand for political rights within a common South African nation-state, these organisations have forced elements in the state and capital to acknowledge that meaningful negotiations with the internal and, more especially, the external extra-parliamentary opposition cannot take place within the apartheid framework. Particularly urgent is capital's concern to depoliticise workplace struggles by the granting of political rights.

Secondly, the unprecedented depth of the 1984-5 urban crisis has brought home to the state and capital that, 1) urban blacks will not accept political rights at the local level without central state representation; and that, 2) black local authorities cannot be fiscally viable given that their only taxable bases are poor, largely working class, communities.

The Black Local Authorities (BLA) Act and the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill were designed to create a privileged class of african "insiders" who could eventually participate in some way in the confederation. How this was to be made operational remained extremely unclear. State planners repeatedly rejected the idea of a fourth chamber for urban africans and toyed with the notion that african urban areas could become "city-states" with confederal links to the bantustans. The paralysis of the black local authorities brought about by the opposition of the urban social movements in 1984/5 (23) has greatly compounded the difficulty of

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resolving the issue of urban african political rights within the framework of ethnic-confederalism and racially separated forms of local government.

It is for these reasons that the state's reform momentum has begun to move away from the idea of an ethnic confederation, in the face of growing pressure to consider a more politically integrated federal-type state capable of preserving minority "group rights".

Those who have advocated a federal state as a solution to South Africa's constitutional problems have argued that it is based on two central principles which, if given expression, could provide a viable political foundation for the re-stabilisation of South African capitalism. Firstly, it theoretically allows for the creation of a new nation-state by the granting of political rights to all its subjects, while at the same time entrenching the "rights" of minority groups. Secondly, the federal-type state advocated by certain verligtes proceeds from the premise that the bantustans will not suffice as units of political representation for all africans because of the geographical dispersal of the african population. This conflicts with the idea of an ethnic confederation which is based on the assumption that african political aspirations can be channelled through the bantustans, and then be expressed at a higher level through confederal structures.

In order to accomodate "group rights" in a future federal dispensation, some elements of the ruling groups wish to begin by constructing local authorities on the basis of "natural constituencies", building up to multi-racial regional authorities. In this way the mythology of a single nation-people could be constructed simultaneously with the institutionalisation of some form of "ethnic pluralism". (24)

This is not to suggest that this federalist thinking is propelling South Africa towards a pre-determined constitutional order comparable to the advanced capitalist federal states - although a degree of similarity to such states cannot be ruled out. (25) The variety of possible outcomes has been the subject of intense debates within a wide range of forums, both inside and outside the state. (26) Furthermore, the existence of a powerful extra-parliamentary opposition means that the state will not be able to implement a reformist strategy on

terrain of its own choosing. The final outcome will be crucially determined by the way in which oppositional groupings interpret and respond to state initiatives.

State reconstruction at the third and second tiers of government now underway appears to be compatible with a federalist dispensation. Certain writers have explicitly suggested that the current "reforms" in South Africa are consistent with such a dispensation, and have advised the government to gear its programme, in a coherent way towards a federal outcome. (27)

1. The third tier

The Black Local Authorities Act (Act No 102, 1982) reversed a decades long trend towards centralisation of african administration, which culminated in the formation of the Bantu Affairs Administration Boards in 1971. However, it was the impact of the urban revolt of 1984-5 that forced the state to incorporate african local authorities into the Regional Service Councils (RSCs), until then envisaged as including only whites, coloureds and indians. (28)

The RSCs will be multi-racial bodies administering "general affairs" at the level of the metropolitan region, which includes different group areas. The ethnically segregated local authorities will handle the "soft services" that go under the label of "own affairs". Since this will allow the representation of urban africans at the metropolitan level, it is expected to be accompanied by a degree of redistribution of resources from white to black local authorities. This, the ruling groups hope, will help resolve the fiscal crisis of black local government.

2. The second tier

The bulk of evidence points towards the eight development regions set out in the industrial decentralisation package becoming the basis for a second tier of government within a federalist dispensation. A substantial planning infrastructure is being built around them, including, the Regional Development Advisory Committees (RDACs), the Regional Liaison Committees (located in the six development regions that include parts of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei [TVBC states]), the planning branch of the Department of Constitu-

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tional Development and Planning (CDP), and possibly even the Development Boards (successors to the Bantu Affairs Administration Boards) (29). It is the Department of CDP which presides over the nexus between regionally based development planning and the restructuring of representation.

In July 1983 the Department of CDP wrote to all state departments requesting them to restructure their regional offices to accord, where possible, with the eight development regions (30) It is clear that the development regions, or some similarly defined spatial units, are being seen as potential rivals to the geographical demarcations presently located on the second tier, ie. provinces and the bantustans. There is also evidence that Natal/KwaZulu is being seen by many reformers as the laboratory for units of representation appropriate to the second tier within a federalist schema. The Buthelezi Commission, at first dismissed by the government, is now being seriously reappraised. (31)

3. The first tier

Until recently the government has insisted that urban africans should be represented through an ethnic confederation and not in the central state. Since then much has changed. In February 1983 the government announced the formation of a special cabinet committee to look into the question of political representation of africans outside the bantustans. In January 1985 the State President replaced the special cabinet committee with a para-statal negotiating forum. This announcement was accompanied by signals that the constitutional future of africans would not be resolved within the apartheid framework, and that non-bantustan africans would be given political rights in the central state. It may also be significant that the declaration of the intention to set up a negotiating forum was followed closely on its heels by the conditional offer to release Mandela, although the show trials now under way warn against any over-estimation of the state's willingness to bargain with leaders enjoying wide popular legitimacy.

Precisely what all this is pointing to remains unclear. The existing tri-cameral framework, representing racial groups rather than spatially demarcated entities, hardly seems compatible with any vision of a regionally based federal order;

nor can it easily be extended to encompass africans. This could mean that it will eventually be superseded by forms of central state representation more compatible with a regional-federal framework.

Two principles presently underly the construction of the three tiers of government. Firstly, the distinction between "self-determination over own affairs" and "co-responsibility for general affairs". The "general affairs" structures are intended to be "depoliticised" multi-racial bodies that would wield considerable powers without being directly accountable to an electoral base. (32) Insulated from popular pressure, they could be relatively easily manipulated by corporate and other powerful sectional interests. Direct representation would be limited to the relatively marginal sphere of "own affairs", and "politics" confined to struggles over parochial issues.

While the "own affairs/general affairs" distinction may appear to represent no more than traditional apartheid, it in fact provides a framework for superseding race as the primary formal organising principle of political representation. This it does by constructing "own affairs" structures on the basis of racial distinctions, while simultaneously transferring real power to the multi-racial "general affairs" structures. The "own affairs" structures, therefore, exist only as formal bodies whose main function is to preserve the ideology of "self-determination", without letting it become an entrenched organising principle. Replication of this framework at second and first tier levels would further ensure that race ceased to be the primary basis for reconstructing forms of political representation on federal lines. Forsyth has suggested that the "own affairs" structures could form the basis of a senate-type body representative of "group rights" at central state level, and the "general affairs" structures could provide the basis for a lower house made up of representatives elected by the enfranchised citizens of a single South African nation. (33)

The second principle is, in Lombard's terms, "the decentralisation of welfare functions, and the centralisation of order functions". (34) In order to legitimise the provision of welfare services the state is attempting to devolve control over them to local and regional authorities, while simultaneously

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extending political representation in these bodies to all racial groups. At the same time, the state is centralising control over key functions such as monetary policy, the judiciary, the military and the police, in order to insulate these order functions from political contestation.

The ruling groups hope to construct a federal system based on these two principles in order to avoid the alternative of a majoritarian unitary state. This kind of state would attempt to establish its legitimacy by introducing multi-racial forms of representation, without democratising control over regional and central state institutions.

REGIONALISATION AND CHANGES IN INDUSTRIAL DECENTRALISATION AND INFLUX CONTROL POLICIES

1. Industrial decentralisation

Decentralisation policy traditionally sought, inter alia, to give economic and political credibility to the bantustans, which were treated as development units in their own right. When, in 1975, the physical planning branches of the state divided the South African space-economy into 44 planning regions defined according to geographical and economically "functional" considerations, it was forced to take as its starting point the continued centrality of bantustan development and "homeland" policy.

Several years later, in 1981, Prime Minister Botha unveiled a development plan premised on the division of South Africa into eight development regions. This time the boundaries of the spatial planning units cut across bantustan boundaries as part of what has been termed the "soft-borders" approach. The "soft-borders" approach entailed the planning of economic development within coherent regions free of the constraints imposed by political borders. The corollary of this was the "multi-lateral" decision-making structure to co-ordinate development between South Africa and the TBVC states; the Development Bank of Southern Africa; and the setting up of RDACs to identify planning priorities within regions.

The new approach to industrial decentralisation was intended by state planners to provide the basis for the future polit-

ical and economic map of South Africa, whether defined in federal or confederal terms. As the Buthelezi Commission remarked, "through its new approach towards regional development the government is taking the economic route to power sharing rather than the political one, which is unacceptable to its constituency." (35) Moreover, the supposedly apolitically defined economic regions would thus provide one possible basis for the future construction of a federal state that transcends the bantustans.

The eight regions are not simply abstractions superimposed on the map of South Africa. Rather, they correspond to changes in the spatial reproduction patterns of capital and labour that have been taking shape since the late 1960's. The development regions define the contours of emergent labour supply and demand areas which have become interconnected through the growth of bantustan towns and informal settlements abutting the suburban peripheries of key metropolitan areas in "white" South Africa. Cross-border commuting between these supply and demand areas, and the relative decline of long-distance oscillatory migration across regions, are leading to the occupational and residential stabilisation of the african working class within such regions: in short the formation of regional proletariats.

These changes are in part the unintended result of previous decentralisation policies which, more out of practical necessity than philosophical conviction, ended up promoting suburban industrial development in places such as Hammarsdale, Brits and Rosslyn. They are also the historical legacy of the National Party's policy of limiting the expansion of african urban settlement in "white" South Africa, and promoting the growth of bantustan towns.

The metropolitan-centredness of industrial development in South Africa has generally been taken as evidence for the validity of spatially dualistic theories. In the radical literature bantustans are believed to be the product of a process of underdevelopment related to the expansion of the capitalist centres of industrial activity. Generalisations of this kind take as their starting point the notion that bantustans occupy a uniform position within a national division of labour. In reality the bantustans are highly differentiated entities, if in fact they can be regarded, economically, as

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constituting coherent entities at all. (36)

In our view, metropolitan expansion since the late 1960's has entailed a process of integration of sections of the bantustans into the metropolitan space-economy. This more persuasive interpretation allows us to grasp the border and bantustan industrial areas as locations or places within an emerging spatial division of industry and labour. (37)

The expansion and dispersal of capital has in fact involved the spatial extension of metropolitan-controlled and centred industrial activity through a process of dispersal of production which integrates new spaces into the sphere of the metropolises. The process of integrative dispersal of capitalist production, rather than having re-enforced dualist spatial differentiation by entrenching the division between countryside and town and between bantustan and "white" area, is weakening these distinctions by transforming and integrating spatially disparate production processes and enmeshing and urbanising rural populations. The outcome of these processes is the establishment of a new spatial reproductive economy.

The new industrial decentralisation policy takes cognisance of these changes. Firstly, it seeks to ensure that the growth of metropolitan regions is not unnecessarily limited, and attaches considerable importance to deconcentration points (growth points relatively close to existing metropolitan complexes both inside and outside the bantustans). Secondly, it encourages the dispersal of capital to "industrial development points" (selected outlying areas with the potential for further growth) rather than primarily to remote industrial points. (38) This policy bases itself on the notion of "balancing growth poles", which involves taking advantage of the growth potential of existing towns in the various development regions in order to counteract the historical tendency (which operated at least until the late 1960s) for employment to concentrate in certain metropolitan centres.

The new emphasis on deconcentration is one of several measures designed to encourage private sector participation in industrial decentralisation. Capital has certainly responded to the upgraded decentralisation incentives, but sections of organised industry continue to view the state's decentralisation programme as an artificial attempt to redistribute re-

sources between regions rather than allowing regions to compete freely against each other. Free inter-regional competition could, in the view of the FCI, "...lead to the revitalisation of the South African economy", (39) whereas induced dispersal is viewed as imposing intolerable costs on industries based in the metropolitan heartlands. Industrialists have recently expressed opposition to the indirect fiscal controls which the state now intends using to encourage industrial dispersal and strengthen the tax base of the projected Regional Services Councils. (40)

Bell has recently hypothesised that the recession and international competition have driven certain capitals to spontaneously take advantage of cheap labour on the industrial periphery. (41) While the state's decentralisation package would certainly be concerned to encourage spontaneous market trends of this kind, it is equally concerned to provide the infrastructure for a pattern of economic growth and political development that incorporates the principle of formal political devolution and expresses the concern to "depoliticise" welfare provision. In this respect the state sees itself as complementing rather than as superseding or blindly following the dictates of the market.

The creation of the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) amounted to the application of these principles to the bantustans. In an effort to curb the spending of these states, finances previously granted as "aid" will now be extended as loans, subject to normal private sector banking principles. The Bank will operate as South Africa's IMF, able to impose unpopular financial restraints on the bantustans, from a position of "neutrality".

2. Labour movement and settlement controls

The crisis of the traditional apartheid system of labour controls, and the aborted attempts to resolve that crisis within the framework of Riekert and the "Koornhof Bills" (notably the shelving of the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill), has forced the ruling groups to debate fresh alternatives. This has opened up the possibility of the state attempting to resolve this crisis within a framework that incorporates the principles of "planned urbanisation" across bantustan boundaries, a "flexible" approach to managing lab-

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our supplies within and around metropolitan areas, and the "depoliticisation" of labour controls. A central aspect of these changes is the demarcation of new spatial boundaries for purposes of administering and planning labour supplies. It is the metropolitan and development regions which seem to be emerging as the pertinent referents in the restructuring of labour controls. For example, the recent consolidation and redrawing of Bantu Affairs Administration Board control areas has brought them much more closely in line with the development region boundaries. (see Appendix B)

In place of influx control and traditional township policies, the notion of "planned urbanisation" is gaining ground. One concern of the policy is to de-sensitise pass controls by providing uniform identification documents to individuals, regardless of race, and substituting direct controls over movement, residence and employment with indirect incentives. This would entail the manipulation of labour movement and settlement within each development region through a policy of synchronising the provision of differentiated housing and the creation and allocation of employment. One objective of the policy would be to establish african residential areas linked to industrial deconcentration points in areas dispersed around the metropolises. The outcome of such policies would be to integrate labour supplies now confined to the bantustans into the regional planning framework, while at the same time regulating the tendency for africans to gravitate towards the metropolitan cores.

The recently adopted notion of "planned urbanisation" is consistent with the current moves to allow squatter settlements in and around urban centres to remain, but to subject them to stringent administrative regulation. In contrast to traditional township policy, the philosophy of planned urbanisation advocates the lowering of housing standards and the provision of rudimentary municipal services, in order to provide different standards of housing for groups with different income levels. This would render the provision of housing and other services, and therefore accelerated urbanisation, possible within the fiscal limits circumscribing state intervention.

The gradual decomposition of the Riekert/Koornhof package of labour controls has resulted from a number of factors, and it is worth listing some of these since they also indicate

why state attempts to formulate an alternative may proceed within the framework of the development regions.

The most obvious cause of the breakdown of the Riekert approach lies in the struggles waged against it by squatters resisting removal; by international pressure groups; and by big capitalists (for example through the propaganda exercises of the Urban Foundation). The union movement too, by organising long-distance migrants, commuters and section 10's alike has contributed to the erosion of "insider/outsider" divisions rooted in the "white" South Africa/bantustan divide. These pressures have in turn been informed and fuelled by a number of structural and conjunctural factors.

The incorporation of parts of the bantustans into the suburban peripheries of various metropolitan areas has been one of the most important structural factors underlying recent changes. It has created commuter populations that cannot be easily separated from the urban insider minority, and has been accompanied by the relative decline of long-distance (inter-regional) migration as opposed to short-distance oscillations. (42)

The distance of Port Elizabeth, the East Rand and, most importantly, Cape Town from bantustans, has rendered cross-border commuting non-viable in these areas (KwaNdebele is altering this situation in the case of the East Rand). However, the state has not been able to impose a stable system of long-distance oscillatory migration. State attacks on squatters in these areas have given rise to explosive situations - in particular at Crossroads. The resultant struggles received considerable international coverage and forced the state to accept the permanence of large and informally settled african populations in Soweto-by-Sea and Crossroads; to build new townships in "white" South Africa (as at Khayelitsha); and to grant leasehold rights in the established Western Cape african townships such as Nyanga and Gugulethu.

Organised industry's recently intensified campaign against influx control involves, in part, a concern to defuse the types of conflicts that have beset Crossroads. Capital also recognises that, in one form or another, "urbanisation" is taking place anyway, (43) and this makes the political costs of influx control appear even higher. Nor are the costs to

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capital only political: in the context of the fiscal crisis the administrative costs of influx control, and the rigidities that it introduces into the labour market, have appeared far too great.

Nor is capital fully reconciled to the alternative of longer-range intra-metropolitan commuting since it sees this as impacting negatively on productivity, and leading to the politicisation of daily transport. (44) No doubt some businessmen hope that the exposure of organised labour to the competition of surplus labour will erode some of the gains made in the years immediately following the Riekert Report, when economic expansion and intensified influx control conspired to promote labour shortages in the metropolitan centres. What is certain is that capital has called for the greater play of market forces, involving a wider, more flexible definition of "urban" and "urbanisation" policy in an effort to counter this trend.

Traditional labour movement controls in South Africa were designed inter alia, to regulate the flow of african workers from rural to urban, and from bantustan to "white" areas. The approach currently gaining ground within important spheres of the state would be to allow for greater mobility within the development regions and to intensify controls between them. The White Paper on the Creation of Employment Opportunities (1984) approved of the new regional development policy, which "...pays particular attention to the need for creating more employment opportunities and places greater emphasis on dealing with labour matters in a regional context through the Regional Development Advisory Committees". (45) Similarly the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning has expressed the view that labour supply areas should be identified with specific regions. (46) This clearly cuts right across the Riekert conception of labour mobility for urban insiders within "white" South Africa, and replaces it with an emphasis on intra-regional labour mobility and stricter inter-regional regulation.

Conclusion

In this paper we have examined various ways in which South Africa's reformist political elite, both within and outside the state, are attempting to reconceptualise and reorganise key spatial co-ordinates of the political economy. This pro-

cess, which has taken the form of a search for new spatial units for purposes of administration, economic planning and political representation has already commenced within fields of state intervention as diverse as labour movement and settlement controls, industrial location policy and constitutional reform.

This reconceptualisation and re-organisation of spatial forms, if synthesised into a coherent policy programme, as some reformers in the state and capital envisage, could provide a basis for a long-term strategic offensive aimed at reconstituting the relations of exploitation and domination in South Africa. The synthesis of policies relating to regional development planning and forms of political representation that would comprise the key elements of such a programme can best be understood in terms of the concept of regionalisation-federalism.

The reorganisation of spatial forms is not proceeding in isolation from the wider process of political and economic restructuring currently under way in South Africa. In the first place, it reflects the impressive extent to which social pressures are forcing the state to reassess the basic premises, not only of traditional apartheid but of the reforms that have become known as "Total Strategy". In the second place, the reconstitution of spatial forms is crucial to facilitating a wider process of restructuring that has as its central objectives the depoliticisation of South Africa's highly charged political and social order and the creation of conditions suited to the renewal of capitalist expansion.

In this paper we have not attempted a comprehensive account, or critique, of the totality of the process of restructuring. We have placed two limits on the scope of our project. Firstly, we have not sought to cover the entire field of state intervention or of the changes traversing the social formation. Secondly, we have focused our attention on longer term strategic questions confronting the ruling groups, and on the ways in which particular elements within them have sought to address these questions. We have not attempted a comprehensive analysis of the current conjuncture.

Nonetheless, we could not conclude this paper without making some general remarks about the broader reform dispensation.

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1. Of considerable importance is the language through which the ruling groups are presenting their objectives to their various audiences. In part this is a language of silences; secrecy and public manipulation are central to the timing and delivery of the reforms. The tight control over information about reformist intentions is designed to deprive opponents, both on the Right and in the mass based opposition, of ammunition. It is also an apolitical language framed in the imagery of the free market economy, technocrat neutrality, local democracy, consultation and consensus. As an example of double-speak we see the state telling the Right that regionalisation is mainly concerned with inter-racial co-operation in the field of urban and regional planning, while presenting it to the Left as a step towards political integration at the local and regional levels. To the Right the state wishes to deny that reform is taking place. To the Left it wishes to present reform as the outcome of negotiation with broadly-based "moderate" forces, rather than the imposition of pre-determined ideas.
2. Despite all the talk about consultation and consensus, the restructuring process currently underway is being implemented in a top-down way, with at best a small circle of influential reformers and black collaborators being drawn into some levels of decision-making. There is also an erosion of the authority of representative institutions and, indeed, a contraction of those spheres of social life subject to the jurisdiction of legitimate politics as defined by the state.
3. Federalism is a complex subject which we cannot discuss in any detail here. However, it is evident that in South Africa federalism is not seen by the ruling groups primarily as a means of guaranteeing equal social and political rights to ethnically or otherwise defined groups within a common nation-state. It has become an important frame of reference for South Africa's ruling groups because it offers a way of moving beyond formal racialism without capitulating to what is termed "majoritarianism". What the ruling groups fear is not only the possibility of a black government per se, but that such a government will attempt to redistribute resources to the underprivileged majority of its subjects in a manner which threatens the profitability and viability of the capitalist order in South Africa.

4. The state has presented the new third tier structures - the local authorities and Regional Service Councils - as an extension of political representation to africans as well as a move in the direction of local democracy. Its intention is to foster black community participation around a narrowly defined set of welfare issues, thereby providing an outlet for social tensions and institutionalising conflict at a local level. At the same time the power to make decisions about major infrastructural and welfare expenditures at the level of the metropolitan region will be placed beyond the reach of mass-based politics and party competition, and will instead be vested in non-elected administrative and planning bodies, in particular the RSCs. This involves the real decentralisation of functions within the state system, but not in a way that empowers communities.

The power to make decisions on issues of national concern - monetary policy, foreign affairs, international trade, the military and constitutional affairs - is becoming increasingly concentrated in executive organs insulated from electoral processes. The point is not only that africans are being offered political rights in residentially segregated localities in exchange for national political rights. More importantly, the process of political decentralisation serves to undermine electoral accountability, thereby making it possible for the state to entertain the incorporation of blacks into depoliticised state structures.

5. The recent decision to include african local authorities on the on the RSCs has been heralded as a means of resolving the fiscal crisis of the townships by redistributing resources from the wealthier white areas to the black areas. While this may well involve a real transfer of resources between such areas, the real intention of fiscal decentralisation is the extrication of the central state from its obligations to subsidise the reproduction of urban black communities. The transfers that do occur are likely to benefit only small sectors of the black urban population. The objective was never to remove social inequality, but rather to depoliticise it by displacing race as the primary line of social demarcation and allowing stratification to develop along class lines.
6. In a parallel way, regional economic development policies attempt to transfer resources from the wealthier to the

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more impoverished regions of the country. While this may have real distributive effects - and therefore benefit some of the most materially disadvantaged areas - it cannot, in the context of the contemporary crisis of capitalist accumulation, make significant inroads into the mounting problems of unemployment, poverty and inequality. Bell, for example, has provided evidence of rapid employment growth in non-metropolitan areas relative to the metropolitan areas during the 1970s - but in the context of the historically unprecedented growth of unemployment in both types of areas. (47)

7. Organised industry and liberal reformers have also criticised the state's industrial decentralisation policies for their minimal, or even negative, impact on black welfare. They have proposed instead the lifting of influx control - "allowing black workers to go to the jobs rather than forcing jobs to go to black workers". In fact an extended regional development programme and the lifting of influx control could work towards the same end, namely to expose metropolitan based workers to intensified competition from the unemployed, whether through migration of surplus labour to the cities or through the relocation of employment to surplus labour areas. While few will dispute the merits of abandoning influx control, on its own such a step has no more chance of alleviating unemployment and poverty than does industrial decentralisation.
8. This allows us to grasp one of the central paradoxes of the emerging dispensation; in response to advances made by the extra-parliamentary national democratic organisations and trade unions, the state appears to be extending an attenuated form of political citizenship to sections of the african population, while seeking to erode gains made by organised labour on the basis of the industrial citizenship acquired after Wiehahn. The modification of influx controls, like calls by businessmen for the abolition of minimum wage determinators, may have less to do with a concern for black welfare than with the disciplining of organised workers. Just as these measures are intended to limit the economic bargaining power of unionised workers, so the limited extension of political rights is intended to depoliticise production related struggles.

For many employers and their labour relations consultants, the central weakness of the Wiehahn dispensation was that

it extended industrial citizenship without any corresponding extension of political rights. For the unions and other oppositional groupings the task ahead is to acquire political rights of substance without allowing hard won gains in the industrial sphere to be sacrificed at the altar of the free market.

Footnotes:

- 1 See, for example, J Saul and S Gelb, The Crisis in South Africa; G Moss, "Total Strategy", Work in Progress (WIP), 11, 1980; D O'Meara, "Muldergate, the Politics of Afrikaner Nationalism and the Crisis of the Capitalist State in South Africa", mimeo, University of Dar es Salaam, 1980; R Davies and D O' Meara, "The State of Analysis of the Southern African Region: Issues Raised by South African Strategy", Review of African Political Economy, 29, July 1984; D Glaser, "The State, the Market and the Crisis", WIP, 34, 1984
- 2 By confederation we mean a tightly binding "agreement" between "sovereign" states. In South Africa the government has used the term to refer variously to the possibility of a "constellation" of Southern African states and, more importantly for our purposes, to an "inner constellation" (which has been expressed in a nascent form in the current "multi-lateral" decision-making structures incorporating South Africa and the TVBC states)
- 3 By federal state we mean a single constitutional unit embracing semi-autonomous states under a single centre that handles inter alia foreign affairs, military matters, monetary and fiscal policy, while devolving other functions to the constituent units. The term federal state should be distinguished from the term federalism which designates "a movement in a confederal direction or a movement towards the creation of a federal state" (M Forsyth, Federalism and the Future of South Africa, South African Institute of International Affairs, 1984, p 16). In South Africa federalism, understood in this sense (and as used in this paper), covers both existing constellation and confederation proposals and the debate within political elites over the possibility of establishing a federal state in South Africa
- 4 The most explicit statements endorsing this view are by the South African Federated Chamber of Industries (SAFCI),

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"Regional Development in South and Southern Africa", memo, 9.7.84, submitted to the meeting of the National Regional Development Advisory Council (NRDAC), 2.8.84; and the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning, "Her-siening van die Grense van die Nasionale Ontwikkelings-treke", in NRDAC op. cit. July, 1984; see also Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, Alternatives to the Consolidation of KwaZulu(Natal), University of Pretoria, (Lombard Report), n.d., 1980; and Reality, November 1984

- 5 The possibility of uniting South Africa on a federal or confederal basis was first raised in a serious way by Lord Carnarvon's confederation scheme in the 1870s, and was raised again by the proposal of Milner's Kindergarten that South Africa be united on the basis of federation rather than Union.
- 6 B Hackland, "The Economic and Political Context of the Growth of the PFP in South Africa, 1959-78", Journal of Southern African Studies, October, 1980. On the NRP, see Star, 9.3.85
- 7 Consociation is a term much discussed in those branches of bourgeois political science concerned with constitutional model building. It refers roughly to the notion of a "grand-coalition" government between different groups which retain a high degree of autonomy and enjoy proportional representation and minority veto power. Consociation has enjoyed a wide currency in South Africa's constitutional debates since it is thought to be appropriate to maintaining stability in societies "deeply divided" by linguistic, cultural, racial, ethnic or other divisions.
- 8 The Buthelezi Commission, The Requirements for Stability and Development in KwaZulu and Natal, Vol II, 4.2.1. p 76
- 9 Buthelezi Commission, op. cit., Vol II 5.4 pp 111-115 and 6.6.2, p 126
- 10 The term is borrowed from Fleur De Villiers, Sunday Times 23.5.80
- 11 South African Institute of Race Relations, Survey of Race Relations, 1983, p 316
- 12 H Zille, "Restructuring the Industrial Decentralisation Strategy", South African Review, One, 1983; and Financial Mail (FM), 23.11.84
- 13 Lombard Report, pp 49-50
- 14 Zille, op. cit., pp 66-7; and Lombard Report, passim.
- 15 FM 7.12.84, FM 8.3.85, Rand Daily Mail (RDM), 6.12.84; S Greenberg and H Giliomee, "Managing Influx Control

from the Rural End" in Up Against the Fences, eds H Giliomee and L Schlemmer, David Philip, Cape Town, 1985. See also SAFCI op. cit.

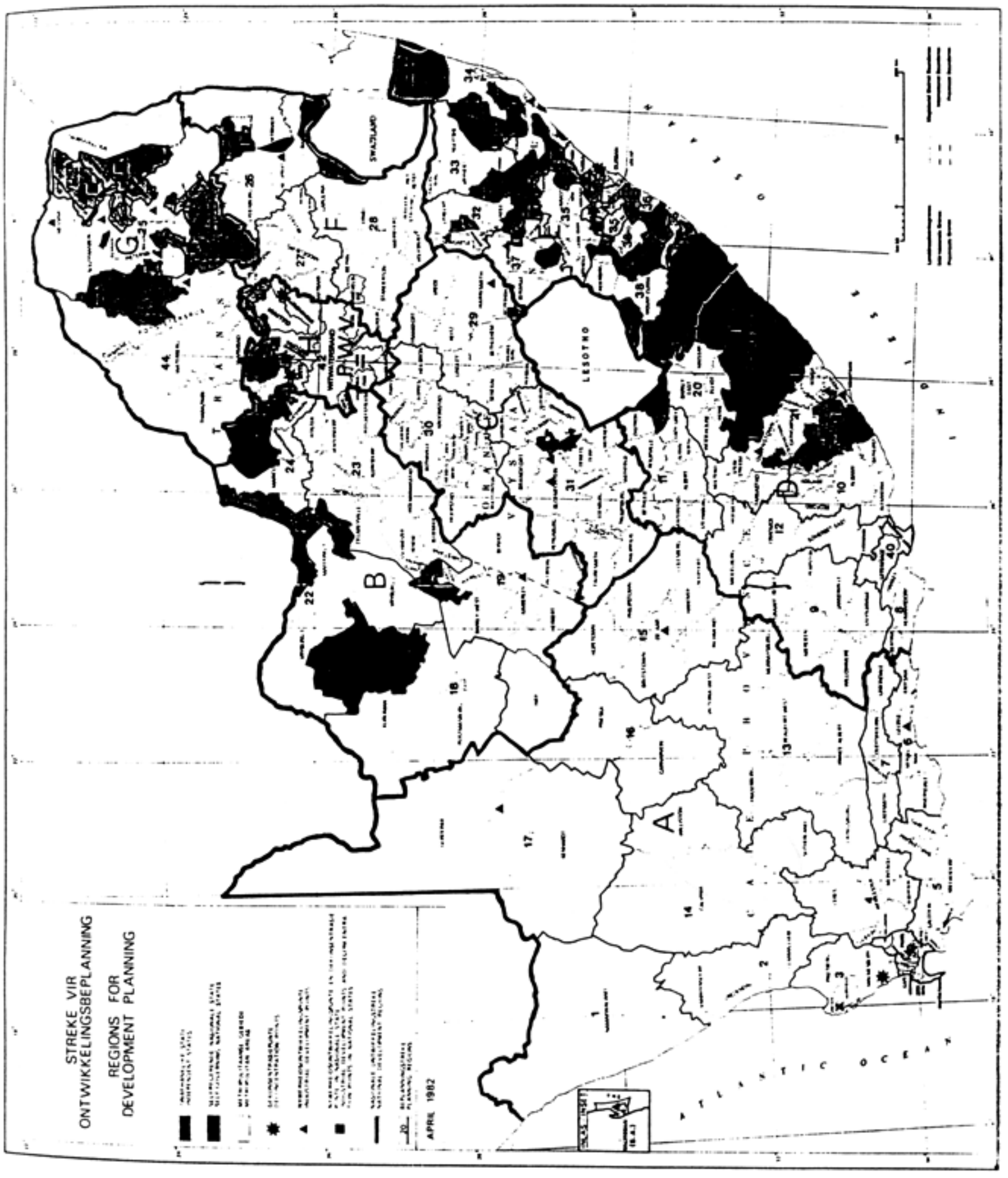
- 16 J Lombard, Freedom, Welfare and Order, Benbo, Pretoria, 1978; and Lombard Report, op. cit., pp 43-46
- 17 A M Rosholt, "Urbanisation and the Private Sector", and H Oppenheimer, "Reflections on the Government's Decentralisation Policy", in Schlemmer and Giliomee, eds, op. cit.
- 18 See, for example, Sunday Star 11.11.84; RDM 8.11.84; and EM 23.11.84, pp 38-9
- 19 Labour Monitoring Group, "The November 1984 Stay-away", South African Labour Bulletin (SALB), forthcoming
- 20 Star 14.3.85
- 21 SAFCI, op. cit.
- 22 Forsyth, op. cit., p 23
- 23 Star 16.3.85
- 24 See Forsyth, op cit., pp 10-14; Sunday Times 3.3.85 (article by Lombard); Lombard Report, op. cit., p 46
- 25 Star 23.2.85: "SA May Abandon Homelands"
- 26 See, for example, debates in Spro-Cas, South Africa's Political Alternatives, Raven Press, Johannesburg, 1973; Buthelezi Commission, op. cit.; Forsyth, op. cit.; and Lombard Report, op. cit.
- 27 See Lombard in Sunday Times 3.3.85; also Forsyth, op. cit.
- 28 The establishment of RSCs was recommended by the Joint Report of the Committee for Economic Affairs and the Constitutional Committee of the President's Council on Local and Regional Management Systems in the Republic of South Africa, (P.C. 1/1982) and also by the Council for the Coordination of Local Government Affairs (CCLGA) which was established in terms of the Promotion of Local Government Act (June 1983). Their terms of reference were to recommend new local and regional government structures for whites, coloureds and indians only. The RSC Bill went through its second reading in early 1984, after which it was referred to a parliamentary select committee. It was this committee that decided to move beyond the PC and CCLGA reports' terms of reference to recommend the inclusion of black local authorities established in terms of the Black Local Authorities Act into the envisaged RSCs. The RSCs will not be elected authorities. They will comprise nominated representatives from each local authority. Local authorities will be allowed to nominate one representative for every 10% (or part thereof) that they

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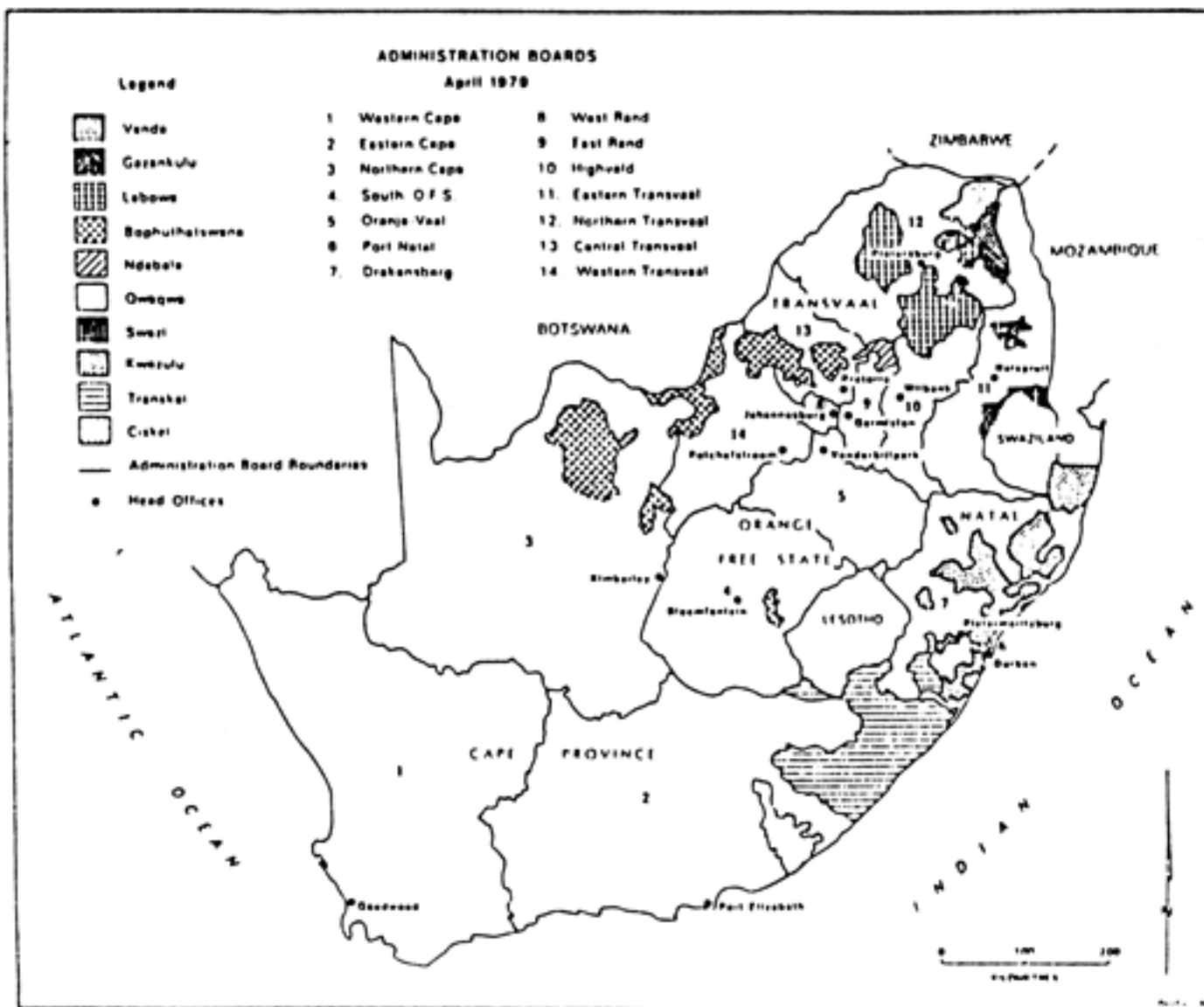
use of the total amount of services provided by the RSC. In other words, those local authorities which contain most of the industries will have the largest number of representatives on the RSC. However, no one local authority is allowed to nominate more than 50% of the RSC's personnel

- 29 As from April 1979, the number of Administration Boards was reduced to 14, bringing the boundaries of their control areas closer to those of the 8 development regions. There have been suggestions that the BAAB boundaries should eventually be re-drawn to coincide exactly with those of the development regions (see Appendix B)
- 30 See Department of Constitutional Development and Planning, op. cit.
- 31 Sunday Star 10.3.85; and D Robbins, "Natal/KwaZulu - The Road Ahead", in Reality, November 1984
- 32 See President's Council Report (P.C. 1/1982), op. cit.
- 33 Forsyth, op. cit., p 30
- 34 Lombard Report, op. cit.
- 35 Buthelezi Commission, Vol II, op. cit., p 49, 3.3.2
- 36 This point was made by J De Villiers Graff in "Homeland Function and Dependency; a Case Study of Reformist Potential", paper presented to the Development Society of Southern Africa, University of the OFS, 1984
- 37 The transformation of South Africa's spatial political economy cannot be understood by those who remain trapped within two key assumptions that, until recently, pervaded the literature on apartheid: firstly, the assumption that South Africa can be understood as a spatially dualistic society, differentiated into two coherent but radically different entities called bantustans and "white" South Africa; secondly, that these spatial entities correspond exhaustively to distinct, even if interconnected, forms of social reproduction. Liberal dualism refers to capitalist and subsistence sectors, while the marxist version of spatial dualism refers to capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production
- 38 G Maasdorp, "Co-ordinated Regional Development: Hope for the Good Hope Proposals?" in Schlemmer and Giliomee (eds) op. cit.
- 39 SAFCI, op. cit.
- 40 EM, 15.3.85
- 41 R T Bell, "The Role of Regional Policy in South Africa", Paper presented to the African Studies Institute, 24.9.84

APPENDIX A



APPENDIX B



- 42 See BENBO, Statistical Survey of Black Development (1982), Part 1, Tables 24 & 26
- 43 G Relly, "Influx Control and Economic Growth", in Schlemmer and Giliomee (eds) op.cit.
- 44 Relly, op. cit.; M Swilling, "Transport and Political Resistance: Bus Boycotts in 1983", South African Review, two, Raven Press, Johannesburg, 1985
- 45 White Paper, p11 (2.32, emphasis added)
- 46 Department of Constitutional Development and Planning submission, op. cit., p 6 (c)
- 47 R T Bell & V Padayachee, "Unemployment in South Africa: Trends, Causes and Cures." Carnegie Conference, Cape Town, April 1984; and R T Bell, The Growth and Structure of Manufacturing Employment in Natal, The Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Durban-Westville, Occasional Paper no 7, September 1983

REVIEW: Industrialisation and Trade Union Organisation in South Africa, 1924 - 55; The Rise and Fall of the South African Trades and Labour Council
Jon Lewis

Cambridge University Press, 1984, x + 246 pp, UK 25,00 pounds sterling (hardback) / SA R23,50 (soft cover).

Jon Lewis' newly-published study represents a landmark in the development of an historical understanding of the South African trade union movement. Even when his approach suggests controversy, it will likely be a reference point for debate and discussion over a long time. Much has been written about the unions of the inter-war years and after, but in general from a fragmented perspective that is more concerned with political history and the state than with the direct situation of workers themselves. Thus Edward Roux and the Simons have treated workers' struggles as one aspect of a generalised African political struggle. They, as well as other contributors to the literature such as Bill Andrews, Bettie du Toit or Solly Sachs, were powerfully motivated by their own situation as active participants, which presents both advantages and disadvantages to the reader. A more recent group of scholars have been interested in the trade union past in more rigorous analyses, notably Rob Davies, Dan O' Meara and David Yudelman. They have focussed their attention on the theme of "incorporation" in examining the relations between white workers and the state or the Nationalist Party; it is the state and national politics, not workers, which is their real object of study.

Lewis, however, centres his account around two foci, the politics of the trade union movement itself (with a subtle and sensitive awareness of its fault-lines and tensions) and the history of social relations within industry; the labour process in the context of South African industrialisation. For once, the book's title is actually a more accurate indication of the contents than the strictly academically-oriented sub-title. Although there is an able organisational study here, the rise and fall of the South African Trades and Labour Council (TLC) is really a peg on

which Lewis can hang some important ideas. On the strength of its twenty year record of survival, he defends the existence of a core of non-racial, class-conscious militant trade unionism persevering, not merely despite the hostile South African environment, but indeed actually attuned to that environment. Within the TLC, Lewis argues, one could find racism along with other manifestations of sectional interest but there also was space for those trying to organise the whole national workforce; it sheltered an effective and significant Left. As such the heritage of the organisation has bifurcated. It led historically both into the paternalistic, conservative and essentially protective TUCSA system and into the politically-charged, radically anti-racist SACTU position.

Lewis considers three distinct phases within the history of South African labour. The early trade unions, virtually all-white on the Rand but not on the coast, contained a strongly conservative logic, concerned as they were to protect the relatively high wages of their members. These unions (eg. the Amalgamated Engineering Union) were craft unions, and the skills members possessed were quite genuine and difficult for a long time to reproduce in South African conditions. Potential labour competition at first came from the ranks of unskilled whites or, more menacingly, from the capacity of capital to restructure the industrial process in a form that would deskill workers. Undercutting was not simply a question of cheap black labour. As a result, craft unions tended to be pragmatic in their choice of weapons. They were as apt to include as to exclude outsiders, whether black or white. Directly involved in the production process and only to a limited extent supervisors, they came systematically into direct conflict with bosses and developed a consistently militant consciousness of class.

The industrial boom of World War I and its immediate aftermath created the potential for a second type of union responding to the needs of "semi-skilled" operatives. This new work-force was far less well-paid than craftsmen and was extremely heterogeneous. It included members of all South African racial groups, women and minors as well as adult males. Pay-scales did not reveal the sharp differentiation according to race that characterised wages on farms or mines. In brief, these new industries lacked a cohesive

racial hierarchy. As a result, a new "industrial unionism" gained ground in various trades in which non-racial practices were often current. Solly Sachs and his garment workers form the best-known example and Lewis gives a good account of them; but he has also explored the history of early unionism among furniture workers, leather workers and other trades. He thereby de-emphasises the determinant role of Sachs and other strong personalities given elsewhere and instead tries to demonstrate that social and economic forces themselves threw up a more open and potentially more radical kind of unionism. He relates the hitherto obscure history of strikes and labour struggles of these workers as well as the potential that existed, and was occasionally activated, for co-operation across the colour line.

The TLC, formed in 1930, and its predecessor the TUC (1924), represented an amalgam of the two forces discussed above, symbolised by the crucial participation of both engineers and garment workers. Defensist craft workers and militant new industrial union members were able to forge a common front, while the first African industrial trade unionists could call on the "explicitly non-racial" TLC for practical support in various ways.

All this came under growing attack in the 1940s, culminating in the dissolution of the TLC in 1954 and the fragmentation of the South African trade union movement. For numerous authors, the villain of the piece has been the Afrikaner nationalist politician, keen to destroy the hold of the union movement on Afrikaners and to break the significance of class-based organisation in South Africa. Lewis feels that this is a very inadequate assessment and points to the limited real success of "Christian national" unionism before 1948. He prefers to emphasise instead the dramatic shifts in the labour process that came to fruition during World War II. Capital brought whites away from the point of production. Given white political strength as well as the need to create an enlarged army of supervisors to patrol the new frontiers of "scientific management" (an ideology that Lewis dissects brilliantly), the white labour force gets pulled into supervisory functions that essentially intensify a commitment to racial hierarchy in industry. This third phase witnessed the white craft unions turned into "pseudo-craft" unions, where class interest revolved crudely around the colour bar.

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In consequence, white workers increasingly rejected the TLC heritage just, ironically, as the federation leadership fell increasingly into progressive hands. A series of breakaways led to the formation of SATUC, TUCSA's predecessor, in 1954 and SACTU in 1955. Other former TLC unions moved even further to the right than SATUC, becoming emphatically racist. This was the end of a "wider, non-racial trade unionism in South Africa" for a generation.

Like most revisionists of recent years, Lewis is concerned to escape from racial prejudice as a determinant explanation in the shaping of South African society. He concludes by reiterating that "trade union divisions in South Africa have not resulted from immutable racial antipathies. Rather the roots of sectionalism are to be found in the division of labour and the general way work is organised and it is this which has placed strict limits on trade union strategy and organisation."

This emphasis does much to illuminate our understanding of the history of the South African working class. It can, however, be raised as a criticism that Lewis has gone too far to the opposite end of the spectrum from the conventional wisdom. An important racist element existed within the practice both of the craft workers and of the white semi-skilled. A recent thesis on Solly Sachs and the garment workers by Leslie Witz makes this point incisively. As Lewis recognises, Sachs was continually being forced to compromise with the racist outlook of most of his white women workers. They were prepared to accept the leftist Sachs for his excellent union work and most were also prepared to incorporate Coloured and African women into the organisation (albeit in a parallel branch/union) because it was practical. Apart from a small if impressive core of militants, however, they rejected Sachs' general political and social outlook. Loyal union members were often loyal Nationalist Party voters at one and the same time. There is, moreover, a contrast to be drawn between the extraordinarily political radicalism, violence and class hostility towards the state manifested in white worker struggles up to the Rand Revolt in 1922 and the sometimes tough but still bounded militancy, more economic than syndicalist, of the new industrial unions thereafter.

Lewis' own analysis makes it clear that white worker atti-

tudes became more racist in the 1940s even in trades where the labour process was not changing and previous workplace conditions prevailed. The only trade unions able to remain on a radical course after 1948 were those that had more or less shed their white membership. Food and canning workers were perhaps the best-known example; they became SACTU stalwarts. He himself points to the problem in briefly addressing our need to study more the "political and ideological traditions within the working class movement." Such traditions can help to explain forms of resistance and militancy but also acquiescence and exclusion of "competitive" ethnic or racial groups. Research centred around the Johannesburg History Workshop and influenced by international social historical research, which has enormously advanced in the past twenty years, has begun to enrich our knowledge of the history of ordinary South African workers; this research needs to be integrated with economic and organisational studies such as this book in new kinds of syntheses. What perhaps needs emphasis finally is that racism always exists in living and sympathetic relation to the material and work conditions of men and women; it can never be understood effectively as a disembodied force, however great its ideological weight, yet these connections should not lead us to underestimate its force.

Black union traditions, as distinct from those within the TLC, remain far shadowier in this study. Lewis points to the greatest single "unknown" in South African labour history, the story of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions that achieved such a large membership during World War II only to melt like the snow after the coming of the peace. If we knew more about CNETU, our sense of the political and organisational parameters of working-class history might well alter.

Lewis' interest in labour process change and management ideology makes this book an important contribution to South African economic history. Lewis places fundamental stress on the war years as his crucible for change. Perhaps more attention could have been given to the first six boom years before war broke out in 1939; while one wonders whether the move towards manufacture, even in engineering, was not more gradual, with older forms of production holding strong often until the 1960s.

- review -

An interesting aspect of the study by implication is that Lewis gives such fair due to the rise of secondary industry and its particular social characteristics. So much of our stereotyped view of South African labour history is based on the gold mines but most South Africans, whatever their colour, did not work on the mines at all. A mine-based determinism presents severe problems in understanding other sectors of the economy, notably secondary industry. The white underground miner notoriously did not possess remarkable skill levels despite his high pay, and his work involved a heavy emphasis on supervising "unskilled" black workers; he was early on attracted to extreme forms of racism as his best practical defense in struggles against the mineowners. Only with massive deskilling in the wake of the development of mass production did white workers in secondary industry also become "pseudo-craft" unionists, as Lewis terms them, reliant on colour bars. In challenging this stereotype and others, Lewis has opened for all of us the possibility of a far richer and sharper understanding of the history and prospects of industrial unionism in South Africa.

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