

SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

THE MINEWORKERS' STRIKE

CAROLE COOPER

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ARI SITAS

**THE MWU AND THE DEFENCE
OF THE COLOUR BARRIER**

CHARLES METH

TRADE UNIONS AND SKILL SHORTAGE

SALB

INTERVIEWS WITH TRADE UNIONISTS

**VOL. 5 No. 3
OCTOBER 1979**

SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

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October 1979**

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Comment - The Re-alignment of the Registered Trade Unions

In the context of the Wiehahn Commission and the subsequent introduction of new labour legislation, the registered trade union movement in South Africa is passing through a period of change and re-alignment. This edition of the Labour Bulletin focusses on the structural transformation underlying this process and the way in which various registered trade unions have responded to these changes.

An article by Sitas examines the changing labour process in the mining industry and its effects on the white miners' control over their jobs, while Meth is concerned to assess the general importance of the exclusive access of whites to artisanal work. Cooper, on the other hand, traces the course of events during the white miners' strike early this year as an effect of the process of structural transformation currently taking place. The interviews of van der Watt, Malherbe and Mvubelo reflect a somewhat different response by registered trade unions to changing conditions.

Thus different wings of the registered trade union movement are broadly following two divergent courses. The Mine Workers' Union (MWU) and a number of unions affiliated to the Confederation of Labour have coupled the principle of job reservation and opposition to the advancement of Africans with the practice of bargaining for higher wages by releasing certain job categories to Africans.

The loosening up of control over access to jobs has given rise to a new concern for control over dismissal. Unions belonging to the Confederation were party to an amendment to the Iron and Steel Agreement (S35) which restricted lawful dismissal to cases of redundancy and breaches of discipline. In order to ensure the acceptance of the repeal of job reservation by the white unions, the state has established an Industrial Court, which will use the 'unfair labour practice' clause to protect whites from being replaced by cheap African labour.

Negotiations in the mining industry have, therefore, centred less on the principle of African advancement than on the question of who controls the process and tempo of change. In the short term this strategy has yielded handsome returns. In the long term, however, it has gradually eroded the white workers' strategic position in the production process and thereby weakened

their bargaining strength. As the Cooper article shows, the governments response to the strike indicates its reluctance to act in support of the white miners. On the contrary, the Minister of Labour made it clear that the state would tolerate neither such spontaneous action on the part of workers (i.e. 'wildcat' strikes), nor the involvement of labour organisations in issues which are considered to be external to the 'employer employee relationship'. Such action is viewed by the state as constituting a threat to the new industrial relations system, now being formulated.

The Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) has, since its formation in 1954, adopted a more defensive, yet ultimately a more realistic policy. Its problem, as John Rutherford, second president of TUCSA observed, was not concerned with the existence of 'white protectionism', but rather the most effective method of protecting white workers' interests. "An offer was therefore made to the Minister of Labour to allow us to keep our organisation intact, so as to be able to co-operate with the Minister in devising ways and means of preventing the ever increasing Native labour force from continuing to menace the European standard of living". (Letter from Rutherford, quoted by Mr. Steyn, MP in the debate over mixed unions in 1954).

Their solution was to accept the penetration of Africans into white jobs, but only on the principle of equal pay for equal work, to control the dismissal of registered union members, particularly whites, and to promote parallel unions for Africans where necessary. Control over dismissals has become an increasingly important aspect of this strategy although, it has not been practised exclusively by TUCSA as discussed above.

The major distinction between the TUCSA and Confederation strategies is the absorption of African trade unions into registered trade union structures, primarily through the organisation of parallel unions. TUCSA at its last Conference in September this year, stressed the importance thereof. This strategy now falls in line with state labour policy. As the Wiehahn Commission reported: Africans "are no longer, from the point of view of unionisation, 'mainly unskilled': the possession of skills apart, they have achieved a far greater degree of employment stability and industrialisation". (Para. 3.32) Maintaining the 'rate for the job', as Africans penetrate skilled and semi-skilled positions, requires for TUCSA the organisation of African workers into parallel unions that will subscribe to the principle of 'rate for the job'. Government legislation enabling the registration of African unions has spur-

red TUCSA on to organise parallel African unions with a degree of vigour not observed before in the Council's 25 years of existence.

A disquieting aspect of TUCSA's organising drive is that it seems to have embarked on an offensive against the existing independent African trade unions. In its drive to organise parallel unions, it appears to be intent on recruiting African workers at factories irrespective of whether or not independent African unions have membership in the factory concerned.

The recent TUCSA Conference provides evidence of this policy. The second part of a resolution proposing that TUCSA refrain from organising African workers where existing trade unions were already established was withdrawn after Archie Poole (from the Engineering Industrial Workers' Union of SA) had opposed it. That this policy is to be directed against the independent trade union movement is further confirmed by the overt attack made by former TUCSA president Ronnie Webb on the Food and Canning Workers' Union. Charges have also been levelled at certain TUCSA unions for encroaching on factories already organised by independent unions. (See Sunday Express 30 September 1979)

All this foreshadows a re-alignment in the relationships between the TUCSA unions on the one hand and employers and the government on the other. TUCSA, which was previously spurned and even threatened by the government is now entering into an era of collaboration with both the government and employers in a strategy to unionise African workers. This strategy is confirmed once again by Archie Poole who stated at the TUCSA Conference that employers had invited him to organise workers in their factories.

There appears to be a fundamental re-alignment of forces in South African trade unionism. TUCSA, which has always been out in the cold, has now become crucial for the working out of state labour policy. It has moved closer to the Confederation: their interests and mechanisms of protecting the white worker coincide. This is further evidenced by TUCSA's recent rejection of a resolution attacking the MWU for its strike over the employment of coloured workers. TUCSA's increased attacks on the independent African trade union movement presages an era of member poaching and acute inter-union rivalry.

The Mineworkers Strike

Carole Cooper

General Background to the Strike

The white mineworkers' illegal strike which lasted from 6th to 13th March can be seen on a number of levels: firstly it was in sympathy with the O'-Okiep workers' legal strike over a job reservation issue; secondly it was a protest in principle against the threat to the protected position of the mine-worker arising from the progressive relaxation of job reservation in other sectors during 1978, as borne out by statements to this effect by P.J. Paulus, general secretary of the MWU. In this sense the strike must be seen to have broad political connotations. Although Paulus denied that the strike had anything to do with the Wiehahn Commission, this was probably an added factor, given the fears expressed by the MWU about the setting up of the Commission and the expectation that it would recommend a further relaxation of job reservation. At this level the strike was interpreted as a warning to the government and employers of what they could expect union action to be if the Wiehahn Commission's recommendations threatened the security of white mineworkers even further, thus underscoring its political nature.

The action taken by the MWU must be seen in relation to its perception of the changing role of the state *vis-a-vis* the white working class and the appearance of divisions in that class itself. Over the last year the MWU has come to see itself as the last home of the white worker, especially the mine-worker, as the support of its traditional allies, the government and other white unions has become less certain. P. J. Paulus interpreted the government's willingness to appoint a commission to re-examine labour laws as an indication of a growing distance between the interests of the state and white worker. He has stated that the white workers' feelings of insecurity were aggravated by the commission's appointment.

The union's concern over the threat to miners' jobs may be gauged from its strong reaction to newspaper reports which stated incorrectly, in April 1978, that the Minister of Labour had said that all jobs would be thrown open to people of all races. Mr. Botha repudiated this interpretation in Parliament and gave assurances to the MWU that changes in the mining industry would only be implemented after consultation with the employers and

employees concerned. Paulus welcomed the statement, placing on it the interpretation that no recommendations of the Wiehahn Commission would be implemented without the union first having been consulted.

The MWU's concern over the challenge to job reservation and its determination to fight this challenge is revealed in a number of conflicts arising between it and various white union bodies over the last year. It strongly condemned a statement made by the Underground Officials' Association ¹ that the Association was prepared to compete on the labour market with persons of any colour, provided the competition was fair, which was made in response to an Anglo American document on possible changes in labour patterns in the industry. The growing split between the MWU and UOA is to some extent explained by the different positions members of the respective unions hold on the mines. Members of the MWU do not have the protection of artisan training and are in the next category above black mine-workers. Any job advancement by blacks would, in the first instance, be to their level. Thus the threat to their positions is more immediate and real than that facing the officials who comprise the higher level shift bosses and mine captains. The officials, in fact, are probably closer to management than to workers and certainly their role in the strike bears this out.

The MWU also condemned those unions which had been party to the 1978 SEIFSA agreement ² which opened up artisan-level jobs to Africans, feeling that they had sold out the interests of the white worker. So too, it condemned a decision by the white Electrical Workers' Association ³ to open apprenticeships in the electrical industry to people of all colours, and to form a separate black union until mixed unions were allowed.

Traditionally relations between the MWU and mineowners have been antagonistic and the fear and mistrust white miners have of their employers was heightened by the appearance of a number of Anglo American documents ⁴ in which Anglo discussed possible changes in the traditional patterns of labour on the mines and the eventual recognition of African trade unions.

In response to these challenges to the white workers protected status, the MWU has attempted to establish itself as the 'home' of the white worker. To this end workers of other unions were invited to join the union, which reported as well that many workers had spontaneously asked to

join. The ability of the MWU to represent other miners is limited by the closed shop agreement which operates between the Chamber and the Council of Mining Unions, where membership of the different mining unions is restricted to prescribed occupational categories. Moreover the MWU, in terms of its scope, cannot represent non-miners, although such workers are free to join the union. Iscor, where the MWU has been most active, has indicated that there is no ban on their members joining the MWU, but that they have to belong to one of the steel industry's unions if they wish to work at Iscor, as it does not recognize the MWU for bargaining purposes. ⁵

The importance of the O'Okiep issue in the sequence of events was that it directly and immediately affected white miners and, as became the catalyst for the mobilisation of workers on all mines on the job reservation issue. The fact that the workers went on strike also demonstrates perhaps that union fears regarding possible changes in the industry, post-Wiehahn, were not entirely allayed by the Minister's assurances that the MWU would be consulted if changes were to take place.

Background to O'Okiep ⁶

The dispute at O'Okiep had its origins in a demand that the MWU made to management in 1978, that no skilled coloured workers should be employed at the company's NababEEP mine in Namaqualand but, that they should be restricted to work on the company's other mine, the Rietberg mine situated at Concordia in a coloured settlement area. The company refused this demand. This issue, along with a wage dispute, was discussed at a conciliation board meeting in October 1978, the wage issue being settled.

At further conciliation board meetings no agreement could be reached on the coloured labour issue. The transfer of three coloured artisans to NababEEP from the Rietberg mine in February 1979 further exacerbated the issue and precipitated the holding of a further conciliation board meeting on 13 February at which no agreement could be reached. The union saw the employment of the artisans as the abrogation of a gentleman's agreement it had with the mine owners that coloured artisans would not be employed on the NababEEP mine. Mr. Paulus interpreted the company's refusal to accede to their request as a **volte face** in policy as the company had agreed to re-transfer a coloured artisan to the Rietberg mine in 1967.

The reasons for this change in policy are unclear. The fact that the company stated during the strike (see below) that its policy is to eliminate discrimination may suggest pressure on it, from its holding company.

As a result of the stalemate the union held a strike vote on the 22nd February with 83,7% of the 223 MWU members (total white labour force 270) voting in favour of the strike. The decision was authorised by the MWU's executive on the 25th February and the strike commenced at the evening shift on the 5th March.

Daily Events ⁷

Monday 5th March:

Miners on the 8 p.m. shift went on strike..

Tuesday 6th:

The company stated that the extent of the strike was unknown.

Wednesday 7th:

Paulus stated that 187 men had signed the strike register on the 6th to qualify for payments of R20,00 a day from the union's strike fund.

Friday 9th:

Mr. Peter Philip, general manager of the mine, stated that the vacant posts created by the striking miners were being filled by coloured miners, and that production was being continued at the scheduled rate. He also stated that the striking miners had been dismissed and would be considered individually on merit if they wanted their jobs back. He held that he had never been officially informed that the MWU was unhappy about the employment of the three coloured workers. He reaffirmed that they would not accede to the MWU's demands because they were contrary to the company's labour policy which is to eliminate discrimination on the basis of colour, religion and sex. The company had distributed a circular when word of a possible strike was received, that there were not enough whites to fill all jobs and that it was necessary to train and employ blacks in addi-

tion to whites.

Tuesday 13th:

A spokesman for the O'Okiep copper company said they were still prepared to consider individual reapplications from strikers but that it was highly unlikely that every dismissed miner would get his job back. They were prepared to talk to the MWU but it was up to the union to make the first approach.

Wednesday 14th:

On the 14th, the day the illegal strike ended, the MWU put proposals to the company in a first move to end the strike.

It is interesting to note that whereas the MWU had made representations to the Chamber regarding the illegal strike, no approaches were made to O'Okiep management until after the decision to end the illegal strike. A mass meeting of miners was held to discuss the situation. Mr. Frank Brandt, regional chairman of the union, stated that the general feeling was that they would like to return to work. He said they had made a point, but did not think they had won or lost the issue.

Thursday 15th:

Local union leaders met with management. It was reported that the strikers requested that certain privileges which they lost when they were dismissed be reinstated. The company apparently took a hard line, treating the strikers as former employees and refused to negotiate with them as a group. Mr. Philip stated that management was contemplating asking miners to vacate their houses which he held would be needed for the workers who were employed to take their places.

Friday 16th:

It was reported that the strike seemed to be crumbling with miners re-applying for their jobs against the wishes of the union. By midday 109 miners were reported as having returned to re-apply.

Monday 19th:

Mr. Philip stated that about 10% of workers had not reapplied and that some miners would not get their jobs back as some key positions had been filled during the strike. He gave the assurance that those taken back would not be penalized when salaries were reviewed.

Daily Events of the Wildcat Strike ⁸

28th February:

MWU executive took a decision to call branch meetings of the union for 6th March. The meetings were to discuss, **inter alia**, the O'Okiep issue and Wiehahn Commission.

Monday 5th March:

Members of the MWU at the O'Okiep mine went on strike starting from the 8 p.m. shift over the employment of three coloured artisans at the mine.

Aftermath:

After the strike, action was taken by management against the union when it terminated the closed shop agreement the union had with the company and stopped collecting union dues and paying them over to the union in a lump sum.

Paulus announced in response that he would apply under the Industrial Conciliation Act to the Minister of Labour for the company again to deduct union fees and pay them over to the union. By the first week in June management had agreed to do this. However, no agreement on the reinstatement of the closed shop had been reached. ⁹

Tuesday 6th:

Branch meetings were held on the 6th March in a follow up to the executive decision of the 28th February. The meetings dealt with the O'Okiep strike and Wiehahn Commission. Paulus held that branches spontaneously decided to strike in sympathy with the O'Okiep workers.

Wednesday 7th:

About 6 500 white miners who were members of the 16 800 strong MWU went on strike at approximately 70 mines throughout the country, including coal, platinum and copper as well as gold mines. Areas not affected throughout were the East Rand and Evander mines. After the outbreak of the strike, a Chamber spokesman stated that it did not appear to be directed against employers - as they were unaware of any dispute which could have given rise to the strike - but rather against the government. They assumed it had to do with the awaited recommendations in the Wiehahn Commission's report. Mr. Bartmann, Rustenburg organiser of the MWU, stated at a meeting of striking miners in Rustenburg that the cause of strike was the take-over of white jobs at O'Okiep by coloured labour and that whites were feeling threatened. In a statement on the strike Paulus said the miners were holding a one-day stay-away in sympathy with the O'Okiep miners. He later enlarged on this statement saying it was a strike over the principle of job reservation. He has denied strongly that it was their intention to make a statement in connection with the then pending Wiehahn Commission report.

From the outset Paulus held that the strike was spontaneous and that he had no prior knowledge thereof. On the 7th he telephoned the Minister of Labour to inform him of the strike and to ask for the Department of Labour to intervene. This stand on the spontaneity of the strike was questioned by the Chamber, which reported that the strike had been preceded by branch meetings of the MWU in various mining areas, and that it was well organised.

Thursday 8th:

The Chamber in a press release, stated again that the strike was well-planned. It said 'There is evidence that shaft stewards told men that the strike plan and date of the strike had been unanimously agreed upon at a meeting of the MWU Management Committee on 28th February - 7 days before the start of the strike. The leaders of the union are fully aware of the financial losses and losses of benefits that result from strike action in terms of long standing agreements. Mine managements were given no warning by the union and as a result of picketing and other intimidatory action, were not given the opportunity to explain to the men the serious consequences of such strike action'. It also reported that operations on the mines had been reorganised with the outstanding co-operation of all employees who have not participated in the strike .¹⁰

The Chamber decided to take a hard line on the strike, a policy they stood by throughout. After a meeting of the Gold Producers' Committee (GPC) later in the day, the Chamber stated that the unions had gone on strike illegally, without resorting to the procedures laid down in the IC Act. As a result, in terms of the agreement between the MWU and Chamber, they had terminated their employment by their own actions and had been signed off the books by the mines concerned. The agreement states that contracts are automatically terminated if miners hold either a **legal or an illegal strike**. Furthermore, in terms of the agreement they had also forfeited accumulated benefits under their old contracts for the duration of the strike and would have to apply for re-employment under new contracts when they returned. They would also have to leave company houses within seven days if they remained out.

The benefits to which the Chamber referred included medical aid benefits, leave pay, membership of the death benefit fund which would cease after 30 days, employer contributions to the pension fund and provident fund which would stop immediately on dismissal. Leave qualification for 3 month's continuous service would also be forfeited as well as miners' rockbreaking bonuses. Stope development is measured at monthly intervals and miners are paid bonuses according to progress made. Striking miners would lose bonus pay for all rock-breaking since the previous measurement which could amount to R1 000 each. (See attached addendum for a full list of benefits).

Mr. Cor de Jager, president of the MWU, retaliated by saying that the strike was originally intended to be a one-day stoppage in sympathy with O'Okiep workers but as a result of the Chamber's stand they would continue to strike until they could return to work without losing their benefits. He called on the Chamber not to enforce the miners' service agreements but to negotiate the conditions of their re-employment with the union 'if it is at all concerned about the economy of the country'.

Constant appeals of this nature were made to the Chamber throughout the strike, with the Chamber standing by its decision not to negotiate until the miners returned to work. The issue of benefits thus became one of the foci of conflict in the struggle for victory between the Chamber and MWU.

The government's position on the strike was given by the Minister of Mines, Fanie Botha, when he stated in Parliament¹¹ that he would not inter-

fere, a stand maintained throughout the course of the strike. In the same speech Mr. Botha commented that when people strike they should have the object of the strike clearly in mind. He also expressed the hope that the Wiehahn Commission's report, due to be published, was not the cause of the strike as had been reported. He commented that Paulus had made a telephone call to him informing him of the strike which was 'both uninvited and extraordinary' under the circumstances. Mr. Paulus stated that he knew nothing about the strike and was shocked and surprised that something of that nature had happened. The Minister stated he would believe Paulus although he did not know who else would do so.

Mr. de Jager criticized Mr. Botha for his decision not to intervene and called on him, as the Minister responsible for issues surrounding the strike, to become involved. This appeal, as well as others made by the MWU to the government to intervene, was unsuccessful.

A further issue around which the conflict between the Chamber and MWU centred was that of the level of production attained during the strike. The Chamber's claim that up to the 8th, the strike had had very little effect on production, was hotly contested by the MWU. The Chamber, in an endeavour to minimize a fall in production, had brought in mining officials to fill the positions vacated by the striking miners. Doc. Coertze, secretary of the Underground Officials' Association, was quoted as saying that he expected his men to help by doing miners' work when they were asked, in order to keep the industry going for the good of the country. The other white unions remained aloof from the strike but did not help break it by filling vacant positions.

Conflict between the Chamber and MWU also focussed on the degree of solidarity amongst the miners towards the MWU as both shown by the members on strike and those returning to work daily. On the 8th, the Chamber reported that the absentee rate on the gold mines was between 60% and 80%. Mines along the West Rand, in the Free State and Randfontein reported that small numbers of workers were returning to work. However, workers at the Rustenburg mine were holding out with only 2% returning. Negotiations at Klerksdorp's Buffelsfontein mine reached a deadlock with miners rejecting management's requirement that they re-register. Miners refused to return until given the assurance that they would not lose any benefits.

A Chamber spokesman said there was confusion regarding returning workers

with some signing new contracts, while others went underground without having done so. This was apparently so because some surface officials had not been properly briefed about turning strikers back until they were under new contracts.

Friday 9th:

The issue of whether the strike was spontaneous or not come to the forefront. A document of the Witbank branch of the MWU was published in **Die Transvaler**, stating that a decision had been taken at an executive meeting of the MWU on 28th February, that all members on day shift must stop work on 7th March to protest against the take over of whites' work by coloured people. Mr. Paulus stated that the document issued by the Witbank organiser was based on a misunderstanding, and he denied 'categorically' that there had been any executive committee decision or a general council decision to hold a one-day work stoppage. He explained that branches of the union had met on the 6th in response to a MWU executive decision taken on the 28th February. The branch meetings were to have coincided with the start of the O'Okiep strike, which was originally planned for the 6th. However, the strike had been advanced to the 5th.

He stated further that the meetings dealt with matters arising from the O'Okiep strike and his annual report, in which he expressed fears about the Wiehahn Commission's report on labour legislation. The branches had then spontaneously decided to withhold labour in sympathy with the O'Okiep miners. He stated that he had informed the Minister on the Wednesday that he had heard about the stoppage and had appealed for the Department of Labour to act as a mediator.

During the day it was reported that the strike had begun to crumble, with increasing numbers of miners returning to work. Later, the Chamber stated that 4 631 of the estimated 9 000 miners employed on the mines were back at work on the 9th; a claim which was strongly disputed by Arrie Paulus on the 11th. He stated that the picture was not as favourable as the Chamber was trying to present. Paulus' criticism was not unfounded, as there were obvious areas of resistance with an increase in numbers out on Anglo American's gold mines and 100% still out on the Rustenburg Platinum mines.

The Chamber reported on the 9th that miners wanting to return to work were being intimidated as they went through picket lines, and were threa-

tened with violence to their families, cars and houses. The Chamber interpreted this as indicating that the strike was not spontaneous. These claims were strongly denied by Paulus. The union, on the other hand, accused the Chamber's member mines of 'acting harshly' by calling the police out against peaceful pickets on the 9th and over the weekend. A police spokesman confirmed that police had been called out but that no action against the miners had been taken as the men had stated they were not picketing but informing miners going to work of the issues involved.

Both the MWU and Gold Producers' Committee held meetings during the day. The outcome of the 11-hour session by the MWU's executive was a call to miners to extend the strike to all mines. This was in response to the Chamber's decision to enforce the miners' service agreements under which they could lose their accumulated benefits. Mr. Paulus stated that 'the stoppage will continue until we can go back without loss of benefits, whether by announcement or through negotiation'. The union would consider paying members from its strike fund and would also apply for a court interdict if any members were evicted from mine houses. The executive also decided to act against any members who returned to work before the conflict had been settled. All shaft stewards countrywide were informed of the executive decision.

Paulus said the decision came after efforts by the union at talks with the Chamber and Minister of Labour had failed. Paulus had phoned the Chamber in the morning requesting such negotiations. However, he refused to deal with the Chamber's industrial relations adviser who was prepared to meet him, and stated that he would only deal with the Gold Producers' Committee. Mr. von Wielligh, the president of the Chamber of Mines, reiterated that the Chamber would not negotiate with the union before its members had returned to work. Paulus stated that the Minister of Labour had again indicated that he did not wish to interfere, after a further appeal by the union to him to solve the dispute in the national interest. Furthermore, attempts to secure an interview with the Prime Minister had also been unsuccessful.

At a meeting held from 4-11 p.m., the Chamber's Gold Producers' Committee decided to communicate directly with the miners to explain the facts of the situation. At a conference on the weekend, Mr. Liebenberg, labour adviser for the Chamber, said that the reason for this decision was that he was not sure whether shaft stewards had informed members at the meet-

ing on the 6th, that by participating in a stayaway they would in fact be striking illegally. This was one of a series of moves in which the Chamber appealed directly to the miners to persuade them to return.

Saturday 10th:

The response to the MWU's all-out strike call was not successful, according to the Chamber, which held that the opposite was happening. The Chamber also made moves to counter Paulus' threat that the executive would consider expelling from the MWU any member who did not obey the strike call. Expulsion from the union would effectively prevent a miner from getting a job on the mines, due to the operation of the closed shop agreement between the Chamber and Council of Mining Unions. At a press conference the Chamber announced that according to their legal adviser the strike and calls for its extension were illegal in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act and the MWU's own constitution, and that the union **could not** expel members who wished to desist from illegal action.

The Chamber maintained its stand on the union's appeal for negotiations stating that there would be none until the strike had ended. Mr. Liebenberg stated, moreover, that the union had no basic grievance with employers. This must be seen as a counter to Paulus' statement on the 9th that the stoppage originally in sympathy with the O'Okiep miners was now aimed solely at the Chamber for its decision to enforce the striking miners' service agreements.

The Chamber also claimed that the striker had strong links with the Herstigte Nasionale Party and that the 'blackmail' tactics being used by Paulus and others should not be allowed to stand in the way of the removal of discrimination in the workplaces of South Africa.

Sunday 11th:

The Chamber committed itself to its interpretation that miners who refused to strike could not be expelled from the MWU. The president stated¹² that the industry would take legal action to protect miners who continued to work or returned to work. This decision was announced on television, in the press and personally to the miners. Mr. Liebenberg was later to hold that this public commitment was the turning point in the strike, as it gave union men a possibility of real protection against the MWU

if they returned.

Monday 12th:

The mines stated that a steady stream of men were applying for re-engagement and that 757 had returned by 8 o'clock in the morning.¹³ Anglo reported a slight improvement on the group's gold mines, Anglovaal said that striking miners went back to work on the ETC, Associated Manganese and Prieska mines, while there had been a slightly better turnout on the Hartebeesfontein and Loraine mines. The Chamber also reported that MWU members on the Evander mines and the East Rand had refused to participate, and that coal miners had ignored a strong weekend call by the MWU for them to join the strike.

Contrary reports were made about attendance on JCI's Rustenburg mine with the company reporting an improvement in numbers at work, while Bartmann, the regional union organiser, claimed that the miners were still 100% out. Solidarity was obviously strong in a number of areas.

Union Corporation held that there had been no improvement on their Impala mine and no change in attendance on their Free State mines where miners were on strike. Anglo reported that the strike had spread to a third mine out of its 16 coal mines, but that the effect was slight.

During the day Paulus addressed meetings of 2 000 workers at Klerksdorp, 2 500 to 3 000 at Westonaria and 1 600 at Rustenburg where he claimed that motions were adopted to the effect that the members would stand together. A meeting at Carletonville was also attended by well over 1 000 miners. The Rustenburg meeting passed a motion of no confidence in the Minister of Mines and one of full confidence in Arrie Paulus and the executive of the MWU. They decided to continue the battle to the bitter end if the Chamber did not give back to the men all the benefits lost as a result of the stoppage.

The MWU's renewed request for an interview with the Prime Minister to secure government intervention in the strike was refused, and the union was referred back to the Minister of Mines. Later the Minister of Mines appealed to the Chamber and the union to normalize the situation as quickly as possible. This followed a discussion with the union president, Mr. de Jager, at which the Minister stated he would issue an appeal to the two parties but would not intervene. The Chamber, however, still refused to

negotiate with the union until workers returned to work.

The Chamber continued with its strategy of supporting individual miners who wished to return to work by promising that any miner experiencing harrassment or threats of disciplinary action by the MWU should report to his mine management or the industrial relations adviser of the Chamber.

Tuesday 13th:

Conflicting claims about the strength of the strike continued to be made by the Chamber and Paulus. The Chamber estimated that 5 481 members of the MWU were back at work. Paulus contested the claim made by the Chamber that miners were returning in large numbers, pointing as evidence to the strength of the turnout at the meetings at Rustenburg, Klerksdorp and Westonaria on the 12th. The Chamber conceded that there had not been much change in these areas.

Attempts to introduce negotiations were continued by the MWU, with an appeal by de Jager to von Wielligh for discussions between the Chamber and the union in the light of the statement made by the Minister of Mines the previous evening. Mr. von Wielligh, however, stated that the Chamber would adhere to its stand, not to meet the union until the strikers had been re-engaged.¹⁴ The Chamber also informed miners that they would be charged an economic rental for their houses, roughly R6 per day as against R15 per month if they stayed. The Minister announced in the Senate,¹⁵ that he had appealed to the mining companies to be as accommodating as possible, as he believed the strike was not precipitated mainly because the miners wanted it, but because advice was given from outside which landed them in trouble. During the course of his speech he was handed news of the end of the strike. The Minister welcomed its termination and said he would ask the Chamber for the best possible deal for the returning miners. He warned, however, that he would not allow 'wildcat' strikes of this nature to escalate.

The MWU's executive voted by 17 votes to 2 to end the strike after a meeting which lasted from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Paulus said the decision was taken in the light of the repeated calls to the union to do so by Fanie Botha. The Chamber, in commenting, stated that the MWU called off the strike as it was, in any case, ending and that only 40% of men were still out. Mr. Paulus challenged this claim, citing two mines where the numbers of strikers were double the official figures.

Wednesday 14th:

Striking miners countrywide returned to work. The capitulation of the miners was hailed as a victory for the Chamber and for the removal of job discrimination. Asked to comment, Mr. J. Zurich, president of the Railways Artisan Staff Association, stated 'this test of strength has shown that job protection is a lost cause'. Mr. A. Grobbelaar, general secretary of TUCSA, stated that the miners knew the issue was one over job reservation and by failing to give the support their leaders expected, they showed that they recognized that change was necessary. Paulus, on the other hand, stated that the strike had been a worthwhile exercise which showed the world that the miners would stand together. He said the M VU would continue to seek the re-instatement of the miners' lost benefits.

Thursday 15th:

The Chamber announced ¹⁶ certain concessions to the miners before any official meeting over the reinstatement of benefits took place. The concessions included:

The right to take leave immediately instead of three months after re-engagement; the right to choose between leave and leave vouchers in certain cases; the payment of housing allowances; the maintenance of seven days notice instead of 24 hours notice applicable for the six months after engagement; the payment of *ex gratia* money in cases of hardship arising from hospital bills; the re-engagement of all strikers without exercising the right to refuse their employment. (See attached addendum)

Monday 19th:

The Chamber issued a thank you message to the 'thousands' of mineworkers who had remained loyal throughout the strike. The message - a half page spread - appeared in the Argus group's newspapers.

23rd March:

A meeting was held between a union delegation and the Chamber to discuss the question of benefits. No agreement on the issue was reached. In a press release the Chamber stated that the representatives of the MWU had advanced no reasons in the course of the discussion that could justify a change in the Chamber's position of not compensating the miners for loss

of pay, direct earnings, bonuses or leave entitlements arising directly from the men's action in terminating their service. ¹⁷

28th March:

The 19-member executive council of the MWU met for the first time since the strike. The Council expressed its disappointment that no agreement was reached on the 23rd of March, on the restoration of benefits and confirmed the decision to declare a dispute against the Chamber and apply for a conciliation board meeting,

The union's executive called on the Minister to use his influence to settle the dispute. Paulus stated that a strike ballot would be held if the conciliation board failed to resolve the dispute.

The executive also decided to pay R10 a day to all miners who had stayed out on strike from Wednesday March 7 to Tuesday March 13, and nothing to those who returned to work before then.

In addition Paulus stated that the forfeited benefits restored by the Chamber immediately after the strike had ended were 'virtually nothing'. Leave benefits had only been restored because otherwise the mines' leave rosters would have been disrupted. The main benefits he wanted restored were contract earnings and leave pay.

The conciliation board failed to settle the dispute and at the time of writing it was anticipated that a strike ballot on the issue would be held.

Comment

The main effect of the strike has been to provide a perspective on the complex nature of the relationship between the State, a part of the white working class (i.e. white miners) and capital. The fundamental issue which emerged during the strike and which highlights this interrelationship is the question of the nature of the strike. In examining this issue two levels of interpretation may be isolated: the one dealing with the legality of the strike and the way in which this question formed the locus for the power struggle between the MWU and the Chamber; and the other dealing with the objectives of the strike. In relation to this latter as-

pect it seems that the strike was both about an issue in the workplace i.e. employment of coloured artisans at O'Okiep and a larger political issue - that of the threat in general terms, to the protected position of the white miner and other white workers, by black job advancement. Paulus' statement that the strike was one **in principle** against job reservation must be seen in this context.

It was in view of this latter aspect, i.e. the strike as a political statement, that the Minister of Labour voiced a warning to the MWU both during and after the strike. At the time of the strike, and probably in the interests of an early settlement thereof, the Minister stated he was not prepared to comment on the possibility of it being political, but confined himself to making an attenuated warning to the MWU by questioning the validity of the strike; whether its objective was a 'correct' one, i.e. that it arose out of a dislocation in the employer-employee relationship and not from an issue outside this relationship; and by cautioning the MWU against striking over the Wiehahn Commission. He also stated, in his speech in the Senate, that wildcat strikes would not be tolerated and that he intended examining legislation to ensure that such a strike would be averted in the future. Once the strike had ended Botha issued during his labour vote and mines vote, a much more direct warning to Paulus not to create his own brand of 'mine politics', and he reiterated that if such strikes became a pattern for the future he would change legislation to put a stop to them.¹⁸

This response, together with the state's policy of non-interference in the strike, provides a basic indicator of the changing relationship between the state and sections of the white working class. The growing distance between them is a function of the state's desire to bring South Africa back into the international labour arena, making it essential for the state to demonstrate that discriminatory labour patterns are changing and that manpower is being used more effectively. Its ability to pursue these two aims in any real sense depends largely on the extent to which it can take the electorate along with it. Steps in this direction have been facilitated by the growing divisions in the white working class and by the upward movement of a large sector of its power base to form an entrepreneurial class. The fact that it no longer depends solely on the white working class for support facilitates the introduction of change. Secondly, the fact that certain sectors of the working class in opposition to the MWU have adopted a more conciliatory response to controlled change has made it possible for the state to move in directions which the MWU condemns. While it would be incorrect to

see the state as being antagonistic towards the MWU (Botha has stated that his 'door is open' to Arrie Paulus at any time) nevertheless Botha has shown the state will not in the future, countenance action which is designed to place pressure on it at a political level, such as the strike.

It has been seen that one of the main aspects in the power struggle between the MWU and Chamber during the strike was the conflict over the loss of the miners' accumulated benefits. This conflict is predicated on the difference in interpretation between the groups over the definition of the nature of the action undertaken by the miners.

The MWU's contention throughout was that the strike was a spontaneous stayaway, and had not been organized by the MWU executive. Individual branches had decided of their own accord not to work, in sympathy with the O'Okiep workers. The Chamber, however, contended that it was an illegal strike and accordingly the miners had been automatically dismissed and had lost their benefits.

An examination of the workstoppage in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act reveals that it falls into the category of a strike as defined in the Act in section (1)(a) and (b). This section states that workers are prohibited from committing, taking part in, or instigating any act or omission which constitutes the following:

- (a) the refusal or failure by (workers) to continue to work (whether the discontinuance is complete or partial) or to resume their work or to accept re-employment or to comply with the terms or conditions of employment or the retardation by them of the progress of work, or the obstruction by them of work;
- or
- (b) the breach or termination by them of their contracts of employment, if:
 - (i) that refusal, failure, retardation, obstruction, breach or termination is in pursuance of any combination, agreement or understanding between them, whether expressed or not; and
 - (ii) the purpose of that refusal, failure, etc., is to induce or compel any person by whom they or any other persons are or have been employed to agree to their demands or those of others to refrain from giving effect to changes in employment, or to employ or, suspend or terminate the em-

ployment of any person.

The stayaway constituted a refusal to continue with work - a breach of contract which falls within the scope of both (a) and (b).

The strike is also shown to be illegal as the procedures necessary for its declaration - in this case the establishment of a conciliation board and the holding of a strike ballot - were not followed.

There is little doubt, however, that the MWU's intention was to hold a one-day 'stayaway'. The Chamber, however, chose the course of confrontation in an apparent desire to discipline the union by stating that the miners had automatically dismissed themselves and therefore lost their benefits. It thus used as its weapon in the conflict, the letter of the law in terms of which the MWU action was an illegal strike. The MWU, faced with a conflict over the definition and nature of its action, was thus forced to switch the stated basis of the strike from one of sympathy with O'Okiep workers to one against the Chamber over the reinstatement of benefits. In standing against the Chamber the MWU held to its statement that the strike was a spontaneous stayaway. Both sides justified their actions throughout the strike in terms of their differing interpretations, and held to their respective positions both during and after the strike. The establishment of a conciliation board on the issue of benefits was a continuation of this aspect of the struggle.

A further aspect of the power struggle between the union and Chamber to emerge during the strike, and one which is fundamental to the position of the miners, was that concerning levels of production attained during the strike. The Chamber contended throughout that the strike had not affected production significantly due to the aid given by officials and the general efforts of the miners, both black and white, who remained at work. It held that the gold quarterlies in April bore this out. That of the Chamber showed that production had increased in March this year over March 1978, the figures being 59 390 kg and 59 282 kg respectively. Paulus repudiated the Chamber's claims about production levels, and further held that the gold quarterly figures were incorrect. He stated that the full effect of the strike would not have shown up in the first quarter's figures and that no new ore had been mined during the strike but that already broken ore had merely been taken to the surface. Behind Paulus' contentions lies a concern to demonstrate that the miners are indispensable to the mines and that without them production would suffer severely.

The truth lies perhaps somewhere between these conflicting claims. It is common knowledge that black miners have picked up skills 'unofficially' on the job as well as through official training. The maintenance of production was no doubt due to this factor as well as the help given by underground officials. However, it is also true that the mines were pushed to their limits to maintain production and that development suffered. It seems likely that both development as well as production would have suffered severely if the strike had not ended when it did.

The conclusion to be drawn is that the mines at present cannot do without the white mineworkers for any length of time without production and development suffering, but also that white miners' fears of the threat to their jobs by black miners is a real one given the increasing official and unofficial acquisition of skills by this group and the general pressure for change by some mining houses within the industry.

Crucial to the MWU's future as a strong force capable of standing up to the Chamber is the question of the degree of solidarity amongst the rank and file and leadership. Firstly there is the question of general solidarity with the union and secondly solidarity over a particular issue and the choice of action on that issue; and finally the relationship between these levels, i.e. the extent to which a lack of solidarity on a specific issue undermines solidarity for the union at a more general level and *vice versa*.

Paulus claimed that the strike showed that members of the union could and would stand together. An examination of the truth of this claim is rendered problematical by the lack of coverage on miners' feelings and by the particular bias of press reports when this coverage was given. A number of points on the issue need to be made. Firstly, there seems little doubt that there was solidarity between the miners over the inroads into job reservations that were taking place and which they anticipated could affect them in the near future. Less certain is the degree of consensus amongst miners about the holding of a strike on the issue. Paulus held that the number of strikers was an indication of the extent of support for this course of action - he is not, however, prepared to release figures on the exact numbers involved.¹⁹ The Chamber, on the other hand, claimed that the miners were coerced into striking and thus implied that numbers out did not necessarily reflect the degree of support for the strike. This argument has some validity in view of the MWU executive's statement that miners who disobeyed the strike call would be penalised, but the degree to which it was a real factor

is unclear. From the reports which appeared, there did seem to be some dissatisfaction over the handling of the strike, (although again the bias in press coverage, i.e. pro-Chamber, must be taken into account), as shown in the variable response from region to region. The considerable degree of solidarity on the Rustenburg mine might reflect the strong fears miners there hold about job security, due to the mine's situation in independent Bophuthatswana. The lack of support on the East Rand is accounted for by the local union organiser's refusal to take the men out on strike. He later resigned from his position.

Without further research it is not possible to explore responses in other areas in any meaningful way. That dissatisfaction existed was also contended by Mr. Wessel Bornman, general secretary of the Iron, Steel and Allied Industries Union, who stated that he had received requests from the MWU rank and file and from executive committee members for admission to his union. This claim was strongly contested by Paulus who not only dismissed it as nonsense, but who stated that many workers would choose to join his union if its scope were widened to allow for recruitment of other workers. Perhaps, however, the more important indication of some dissatisfaction lies with the recent splits in the MWU ranks, with Mr. Maurice Meiring, a shaft steward of the MWU at Impala Platinum, an MWU stronghold giving notice of his intention and that of other miners to sue the MWU for losses they suffered as a result of the strike.

What is important is the extent to which dissatisfaction, if it is present, would affect the miners' general commitment to the union. It has been claimed that if the MWU called a strike on an issue which has a direct relationship to their working conditions, they would come out fully in support of such a call. Against this must be pitted the recent reports mentioned above of disaffection with the MWU leadership over the handling of the strike a sentiment which could undermine concerted support for any future strike call by the union. This is of direct relevance, as Paulus has stated that the holding of a strike ballot on the issue of the reinstatement of benefits is imminent. The deadlock between the Chamber and union over this issue persists, since the conciliation board has failed to end the dispute.

The resolution of dissatisfaction depends on the ability of the present leadership to meet the challenge to its position and to reunite the union. If this fails, and given the impossibility of a breakaway due to the closed shop, the union will be in a constant situation of internal strife, then resolvable

only by the creation of a new leadership structure capable of containing the splits. It hangs on the scale of disaffection - which is not possible to gauge with any precision at present.

A related issue in terms of solidarity which bears mentioning is the attitude of the other mining unions to the strike.²⁰ According to leaders of some of these unions - both artisan and non-artisan - one reason why they did not join the strike was that the Council of Mining Unions had not been approached. The usual procedure, if a union wishes support for a strike, is for it to present the issue to the Council which then takes a decision on the matter. If a union fails to do this and goes on strike, it is regarded as that union's domestic affair. This follows the Council's policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of member unions. The leader of the Boilermakers' further stated that the strike did not have his support as it was against coloured artisans and his union represented such artisans.

The feelings of the rank and file of these unions on the issue are hard to gauge due to a lack of evidence. It is worth noting that according to Mr. du Preez, leader of the only other non-artisan union on the Council, i.e. the S.A. Engine Drivers', Firemens' and Operators' Association, there were no requests from his members for the union to join the strike. These workers are, as are the MWU members, at the interface between blacks and other white artisans and officials, and therefore more directly threatened by black advancement, thus feelings of solidarity for the striking MWU would be expected. The most likely explanation seems that if such feelings of solidarity existed, either the rank and file did not judge it opportune to strike, or the union leadership was able to contain any such move. The division in approach between the MWU and S.A. Engine Drivers might also reflect present divisions in the Confederation of Labour, of which both unions are members.

A final word needs to be said on the cohesiveness of views amongst the mining houses within the Chamber. In hailing the end of the strike as a victory for the Chamber, the general opinion was that the way for change within the industry lay wide open. This view fails to take into account the diversity of views held by the different mining houses on a wide range of issues. Whereas the Chamber might have acted as a single body on the strike issue, it is doubtful whether an easy agreement could be reached, for instance, on the issue of black trade unions. Indeed the Chamber failed to present a single common view in its evidence to the Wiehahn Commission on a number of aspects. Thus although the Chamber may have 'won' the strike

there is no automatic implication that it will as a body press for widespread labour reforms in the industry in the immediate future.

The strike is probably one in a number of future conflicts between Chamber and union. The outcome of these future struggles will depend very much on the state of the union, and the extent of cohesion in views between the mining houses.

Addendum

Disabilities of Striking Miners

The benefits outlined under each category are those which miners automatically forfeit by going on strike. They have been organized under headings according to concessions announced by the Chamber. (The full list of disabilities was provided by the Chamber).

Disabilities enforced:

1. Loss of wages
2. Loss of bonuses
3. Period of strike does not qualify for leave
4. Rock breakers contracts must be renegotiated
5. Loss of UIF benefits

Disabilities conceded by Chamber :

1. Loss of housing allowances
2. Leave may not be taken until 3 months after re-engagement
3. Men who before striking were on 7 days notice will be re-engaged on 24 hours notice for 6 months.
4. The right (by the mines) to refuse to re-employ workers.

Benefits not affected in this case :

1. Membership of death benefit fund ceases after 30 days.
2. Contributions to Pension Fund.
3. The employee has to vacate his mine house after seven days, and will have to pay the prescribed rental until he vacates. (This did not apply as strike ended on eighth day).
4. Loss of continuous service for group gratuity purposes with possible loss of group life insurance cover. (Each group will decide individually on its own course of action)

Benefits under dispute :

1. Loss of continuous underground service for the purpose of qualifying for holiday pay at 125% (an extra 25% applies in excess of 624 shifts of continuous service).
2. In terms of the piece-work agreement, the contractor will lose contract earnings from commencement of piece work agreement or date of last measurement whichever is the later. For this period the contractor will be paid as a general miner without receiving the general miner's bonus.

Sources**1. Newspapers:**

- (a) Rand Daily Mail
- (b) Star
- (c) Post
- (d) Citizen
- (e) Financial Mail
- (f) Transvaler
- (g) Rapport
- (h) Beeld
- (i) Mineworker.

2. Chamber of Mines press releases.

3. Parliamentary documents:

- (a) Assembly Hansard, 8th March, 1979
- (b) Senate Hansard, 13th March 1979
- (c) Assembly Standing Committee Debate, Vote 6, Labour, 30 April 1979
- (d) Assembly Standing Committee Debate, Vote 7, Mines, 27th April 1979.

4. Interview with P. J. Paulus.

5. Telephonic conversations with spokesmen from Chamber of Mines and O'Okiep company (Mr Gordon Parker, Director).

Footnotes

- 1. The Mineworker, 15 February 1978.
- 2. *ibid*, 19 July 1978.
- 3. *ibid*, 30 August 1978.
- 4. *ibid*, 1 February, 15 March 1978.
- 5. *ibid*, 22 November 1978.
- 6. *ibid*, 27 September 1978, 21 March 1979 and from information provided by P.J. Paulus. O'Okiep is an American concern, the holding company being Newmond Mining in the USA.
- 7. Unless otherwise stated, this record of the sequence of events was drawn from press reports of the various newspapers. (See Sources)
- 8. Unless otherwise indicated, information was taken from press reports of the various newspapers. (See Sources)
- 9. Information supplied by: Paulus.
- 10. Chamber of Mines press release 8 March.
- 11. Assembly Hansard, col. 2081-2084, 8 March.
- 12. Chamber of Mines Press Release, 11 March.
- 13. *ibid*, 12 March.
- 14. *ibid*, 13 March.
- 15. Senate Hansard, cols. 723-730, 13 March.
- 16. Chamber of Mines Press Release, 15 March.
- 17. *ibid*, 22 March.
- 18. Assembly Standing Committee Debate, Vote 6, Labour, cols. 243-244, 30 April and Assembly Standing Committee Debate, Vote 7, Mines, cols. 95-98, 27 April.
- 19. Interview with Paulus.

20. The 7 unions belonging to the Council of Mining Unions are:

- (a) Amalgamated Engineering Union of S A (artisan union)
- (b) Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers and Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers (artisan union) (these two have amalgamated)
- (c) Iron Moulders' Society of S A (only 4 members work on the mines) (artisan union)
- (d) Mine Workers' Union (non-artisan)
- (e) S A Boilermakers' Iron and Steelworkers', Shipbuilders' and Welders' Society (artisan union)
- (f) S A Electrician Workers' Association (artisan union)
- (g) S A Engine Drivers', Firemens' and Operators' Association (non-artisan union)

Rebels without a Pause : The MWU and the Defence of the Colour Bar

Ari Sitas

On the first of February 1979, after a heated conference of the Mine Workers Union (MWU), 'Arrie' Paulus, the General Secretary was reported to have said that the union was entering a new phase of struggle and that he did not care much whether it ended up as another 1922. Was he wrong to believe that the mineworker was the focus of pressure and attack from all sides and that his position of privilege in the mining industry had to be defended? Not really. The statement hit out at 'black encroachment' into white jobs, and at the actions of both the Chamber of Mines and the South African State.¹ Here are the elements; The Chamber of Mines, the South African State, the African worker, the Colour Bar and the MWU.

Theoretical considerations aside,² it will be argued here that beneath the appearance of a timeless repetition of the same conflict, substantial changes have been occurring in the powers that are organised around the mining industry in South Africa.

The latest outbursts of conflict have their antecedents well rooted in previous configurations of conflict starting from the 1960's; changes that involve the alteration of the **content** of the 'colour bar' in the mining industry, that involve a change through intra-union struggles within the MWU concerning its direction and policies and finally, through changes in the mining industry's production processes, an explosive situation is achieved whereby the 'colour bar' is once more 'threatened'. What, in other words, will be attempted here is a recounting of the struggle which is linked to 'African job advancement'. In order to examine the intensification of this struggle in the 1970's, it is necessary to provide a brief historical background.

I. The Colour Bar 'Status Quo' in the 1960's

The colour bar in the mining industry is focussed around a certificate of 'competency' granted to 'scheduled' workers. The Mines and Works Act of 1956 (with minor exceptions) considers workers of the white pigmentation group as 'scheduled' workers and therefore certificates of competency are granted to white miners only.³ Furthermore, this certificate is none

other than a 'blasting certificate' which a miner acquires through the Government Miners Training College. Through this he is placed in charge of a gang; a privileged position from which African workers are precluded.

It is the responsibility of the ganger/miner to inspect all working areas which fall under his control and to make them safe. This means that no person other than a shift boss or an official of higher rank can enter a working area, whether at the commencement of the shift or after blasting, unless he receives a definite direction from the ganger who is directly responsible for the safety of the area. Before work is resumed underground, the ganger must take the responsibility for the areas in which blasting has taken place, as well as any area that has not been worked for a period longer than six hours. Before drilling is commenced, he is supposed to wash down with water, the face and adjoining surfaces, in order to reveal any misfired holes or sockets. He is also responsible for subsiding roofs and rolling stones. He must ensure that his working place is effectively supported. Then, he must indicate to each driller working under him, the position and direction in which each hole must be drilled. He is personally responsible for the loading of the holes and he must take all reasonable precautions to safe-guard against accidents, the persons who assist him with the preparation and firing of explosives. The regulations also provide that the mine manager shall not, in any circumstances, permit a ganger to exercise supervision over workers scattered over more working places than can be reached by him in 40 minutes, without undue exertion.⁴ In addition, none other than a scheduled person, or one directly under the supervision of a scheduled person, may handle or be in control of explosives.

The ganger or miner works under the immediate control of a shift boss who is required by the regulations to carry out an inspection, at least once in the course of a shift, at that section of the mine which has been entrusted to him. He must be fully aware of conditions relating to ventilation, sanitation, the pressure of gases, the conditions of roofs, floors and walls and the prevention of dust.

The ganger or miner is deemed skilled and ready for productive work after working 312 training shifts and after obtaining a blasting certificate.

What do the Union men do? Who are they? Firstly, they are **Developers** and **Stoppers**. The former is in charge of the drilling and personally responsible for blasting in development ends such as drives, cross cuts, rains,

slides, winzes, shaft stations and machine rooms. His responsibility can also be the removal of loose ore, the laying of pipes and tracks. He is usually employed on a piece-work basis and in addition to his wage per shift he receives a wage based on the total number of fathoms of ore produced, or the footage of development work completed. The stoper breaks the ore in the stopes, and, therefore in the case of gold mines, is the most important producer of gold bearing ore. In addition to ensuring satisfactory production, he must take care of the supporting and general safety of the stope. Blasting is done by him personally (the drilling and removal of ore being under his direct supervision). He is also employed as a 'contractor', a piece-wage earner.

Together, the Developers and the Stopers constitute the most important white miners, and it is their existence in the productive unit and their control of the blasting certificate that determines all or most of the other jobs. Through the 'blasting certificate' other white miners are distributed in a host of other job categories.

The **shaft sinkers, helpers and platform overseers** form the specialised team which sinks inclined and vertical shafts. The first two have to possess a blasting certificate, the third need not, yet it is preferred that he possesses one although he is a shaft carpenter. On this basis, their bonus scale is agreed between the MWU and management. The **Equipper** who installs pipes, tracks, etc., also does a measure of rockbreaking. The **Day's Rockbreaker** is a type of a stoper who does not enter into a contract for piece-work. The **Pipes, Track and Ventilation Ganger**, also a holder of a blasting certificate, installs underground tracks and compressed air pipes and ventilation pipes. The **Construction Ganger** installs heavy tracks and permanent pipe haulages. He need not have a certificate, but one is usually demanded. The **Mine Carpenter** who supervises the erection of wooden and other supports underground also needs a blasting certificate. The **Shaft Carpenter** as mentioned above does not need a blasting certificate, although such a certificate is usually demanded. **Sweepers and Reclaimers** too need blasting certificates. Then, there are the **Haulage Men** and **Salvage Officers**, jobs that are usually taken over by miners of an advanced age, whilst the **Cocopan Overseer** jobs go to trainee miners. Finally, the **Onsetter** who is in charge of the conveyance of persons and material in hoists, needs an **on-setters** certificate, issued under the Mines and Works Act of 1956, and therefore, to 'scheduled' persons only. The **Banksmen**, similar to Onsetters and **Skipmen**, who are at the loading boxes near the shaft bottom, also need the same certificate. ⁵

What is initially evident is that the blasting certificate is the umbrella of skill and protection of the white miner, member of the MWU: Through that certificate, a host of other jobs can be kept 'white' and management keeps the jobs 'white' as long as the 'certificate' exists. If one does away with the blasting certificate through abolishing blasting, one can abolish the protection of almost the entire **nexus** of white-jobs. If one gives the blasting certificate to African labourers, the effect is the same. That is why, as we shall see, the white miners persist in maintaining "their" colour-bar. It was⁶ and is an important defence line, and it defines their vulnerability.

II. MWU Before the Storm

The control of the MWU by Afrikaner Nationalism, via a group of reformers within the Union after a protracted struggle, has been discussed elsewhere⁷ as has the ability of the Nationalist Party to gain hegemony over a cross-section of classes and particularly the white Afrikaner working class which gave them the essential six seats for their victory in 1948.⁸ For the historical period under consideration, suffice it to say that the Union, under the leadership of Daan Ellis, the 'reformer' leader, had strong links through Afrikaner Nationalism with party politics.

Furthermore, out of the realignment in the 'white' trade union movement brought about by the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1956, the MWU came to be on the side of the Confederation of Labour with its policy of White worker protection, or what is known as the 'separationist' strategy, which relied on the State's policies for exclusion of African labourers according to apartheid policies.⁹

In the 1960's, the MWU appeared to be state co-opted, bureaucratic and protected.¹⁰ Daan Ellis died in July 1963 and was succeeded as general secretary of the Union by Eddie Grundling. Grundling was nothing if not a dynamic, methodical man bathed in the fire of Afrikaner Nationalism. He was also a man who in the name of religion and the nation, managed to combine big business, civic leadership and trade unionism. He owned four dry cleaning shops on the West Rand, a hotel at Carletonville and, as the Rand Daily Mail reported, 'several other valuable properties'.¹¹ He was deputy mayor of Westonaria in 1950 and mayor of Carletonville from 1959 to 1961. In 1939 he entered the Crown Mines Training School and after various underground jobs and after the 1947 strike¹², he decided to 'trim' the politics of the white mine workers. His civic leadership arose out of white miner commu-

nities. At the same time he began to take a keen interest in business; he studied office administration and economics and invested in property in Carltonville, where he was at that stage one of the biggest property owners.¹³ He joined the MWU in Krugersdorp in 1955.¹⁴

Although the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 reinforced the sectionalism of South African 'registered' unions, the mining industry, by entering into a 'Closed Shop' Agreement on the 29th April 1937, solidified the division for the foreseeable future.¹⁵ The workers on the mines are at present represented by the following unions: the Amalgamated Engineering Union of South Africa, the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers of South Africa, the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers of South Africa, the Iron-moulders' Society of South Africa, the Mine Workers Union, the South African Boilermakers, Iron & Steel Workers, Shipbuilders' and Welders' Society, the South African Electrical Worker Associations and the South African Drivers', Firemens' and Operators' Association. Approximately 35% of the white workers on the mines are members of the MWU.¹⁶

These unions are grouped into two federations, according to 'skill'. The six 'craft' unions form the Federation of Mining Unions; the MWU, the South African Drivers' etc., form the Federation of Mine Production Workers. The difference lies in the fact that the former "are skilled artisans who have served a course of apprenticeship and who can go anywhere in the Republic or outside its borders to work at their trade", whilst the latter are "a large body of men who are able to earn good wages with less formal training". A miner, for instance, is legally capable of taking full charge of work underground after 312 training shifts and after obtaining a blasting certificate.....engine drivers can obtain their certificates after a course lasting three months, the members of these two unions are in effect 'operators'...

Together, the two federations constitute the **Council of Mining Unions** which negotiates collectively over issues that affect all unions. Side by side with the above, stand the Official's Associations, also with a 'closed shop' agreement. These are the Mine Surface Officials Association, the Underground Officials Association and the South African Technical Officials Association.¹⁷

Evidence of the complacent 'co-option' referred to above is found in **The Mineworker**, the official organ and mouthpiece of the Union which, in the period 1963/1964, consisted of 60% advertisements, 25% comic encounters of everyday life, while only 15% concerned matters that affected the

Union. The editorials did not fail to mention now and again, the threat of communism and liberalism. A typical example reads as follows: "The communist agitator is clever and sly...." a "fox", that unrest is lurking in the country's 'non-white' unions. "Members of the MWU must therefore be alert. Be sure that (they're) not fooled, be warned, the internal and external enemies of White workers in South Africa have **already decided** that 1964 (would) be a year in which a vicious attack (would) be made on the so-called 'protected' position of the white workers of South Africa".¹⁸ Ironically, however, during the same year the 'vicious attack' came from where it was least expected.

The journal reads like a eulogy of the excellent achievements of its sound, responsible and immaculate leadership.¹⁹ A leadership that was looking after the interests of its workers. After heated negotiations, the leadership could in fact declare that: the time was approaching that members of the MWU should be placed on a monthly salary basis for the sake of stability in the profession.²⁰ And again in April, eulogies of unity: "The year 1964 would probably be remembered in the history of the mining industry as the year in which unity was achieved in the MWU".²¹ Indeed, it **would** be remembered in the history of the mining industry. In June 1964 an action committee was formed and a number of protest meetings were held. There was discontent over negotiations between the Union and the Chamber over the monthly wage issue. In addition to this, rumours that low interest loans had been made from the funds of the Union to allow certain people to buy hotels, had begun to circulate.²²

Still, according to the 'Mineworker', the reef rebel leadership, consisting of F. Short and J.W.T. Roodebick for Western Areas, J.J. van der Schyff for Durban Rand Deep, N.P. Bossof and P.J. Paulus for Luipardville and D.G. Paulus for Ventersport²³ kept on making 'unrealistic' statements, calling the Union 'traitors'.²⁴ "Although they are a small group of men on the West Rand that apparently are not satisfied with the MWU, MWU is in the process of gaining high esteem through the length and breadth of the country".²⁵

The year ended on the same note; "1964", stated Grundling, was the "year of real successes. The year in which a large number of things were tackled and completed. The year of revolutionary changes, so will the year 1964 be remembered in the future".²⁶ The Union also transmitted its best wishes to the hand that fed it: "greetings to the Honorable, the Prime

Minister Dr. Verwoerd and the whole cabinet, especially to the Honorable Sam Haak, Minister of Mines and Senator A.E. Trollip, Minister of Labour..”

²⁷ The successes of the year included (a) negotiations on the miners service years; (b) monthly salaries; (c) five day week discussions; (d) discussion on Republic day being a paid holiday; (e) Pneumoconioses compensation and (f) the main bone of contention, the ‘experiment’ agreed upon by the Union and the Chamber: a re-organisation of the labour process.

III. The Mining Experiment and Conflict

The implementation of the experiment commenced in August 1964. Originally, it was introduced in one section on each of four mines, viz. Luiparadvlei, Hartebeesfontein, Rand Leases and Randfontein Estates. At the end of 1964 a section of President Steyn was added to the experiment. ²⁸

In view of its ‘success’, the MWU and the Chamber requested the Government Mining Engineer to grant exemptions to more mines so that all of the more important gold fields and all the mining groups could put the re-organisation to the test. By June 1965 it was taking place on twelve mines. ²⁹

The nature of the experiment consisted of the easing of the underground colour bar so that African mineworkers could perform traditionally white work underground. Whites would be compensated by being placed on fixed monthly salary and by healthier working conditions. As Grundling often stated, it was never the intention to appoint Africans to higher posts. ³⁰ The two parties approached the Inspector of Mines and the Government Engineer, who ‘after careful consideration’ concerning ‘safety and health’, granted the exemptions applied for. ³¹

Competent ‘non-scheduled’ persons were to perform work, which in terms of the provisions of the Mines and Work Act, could only be performed by ‘scheduled’ whites. It was expected that the reorganisation of work would increase production and would decrease the number of scheduled persons in employment. ³² As Grundling stated, “I would rather have 9 000 persons with a reasonable wage than 16 000 persons dying from starvation” ³³

In the sincere belief that this would have come about, monthly pay coupled with improved conditions of employment was introduced for persons participating in the experiment. ³⁴ The Chamber of Mines stated in a memorandum that it was an experiment to ensure European miners, who are members of the MWU a monthly wage and at the same time to enhance their status..”

Table 1. Mines taking part in the "experiment" June 1965

Whole Mine	Group	Area
1. Rand Leases (Vogelstuisfontein) Gold Mining Co. Ltd.	Anglo-Transvaal Cons. Investment Co. Ltd.	Central Rand
2. Randfontein Estates Gold Mining Co. Ltd.	Johannesburg Cons. Investment Co. Ltd.	West Rand
3. Luipardsvlei Estates & Gold Mining Co. Ltd.	Goldfields of S.A. Ltd.	West Rand
4. Hartebeersfontein Gold Mining Co. Ltd.	Anglo-Transvaal Cons. Investment Co. Ltd.	Klerksdorp
One Section of Mine		
5. Lestre Gold Mines Ltd.	Union Corporation Ltd.	
6. East Geofield Mines Ltd.	Union Corporation Ltd.	East Rand
7. Durban Roodepoort Deep Ltd.	Rand Mines Ltd.	Central Rand
8. Venterspost Gold Mining Co. Ltd.	Goldfields of S.A.Ltd.	Westonaria
9. Doornfontein Gold Mining Co. Ltd.	Goldfields of S.A.Ltd.	Carletonville
10. Buffelsfontein Gold Mining Co. Ltd.	General Mining & Finance Corporation	Klerksdorp
11. St. Helena Gold Mines Ltd.	Union Corporation Ltd.	Orange Free State
12. President Steyn Gold Mining Co. Ltd.	Anglo American Corp. Ltd.	Orange Free State

Source: Commission of Inquiry into the Experiments on Certain Mines 1965.

The 'non-scheduled' persons would become 'competent' after a certain amount of training, to wit, six shifts (so much for the scheduled competency). The fact that many were illiterate was not important for "they (were) experienced mine employees (and therefore had) very little difficulty in learning and remembering their duties point by point".³⁶ They were selected from 'boss-boys' with at least five years experience in mining, of which at least three years must have been served in the capacity of 'boss-boy'.³⁷

The 'competent non-scheduled person' was permitted (a) take his own gang from the waiting area to the working place; (b) inspect the working place and to make it safe if no blasting was done there; (c) let the gang commence with work, over which he must exercise supervision in accordance with the instructions issued to him; (d) assume responsibility for the duration of the shift, for the safety and activities of all 'Bantu' persons in his gang; (e) exercise supervision over explosives in unopened boxes and convey them where required, (f) ensure that every member of his gang had left the working places before blasting is done therein, and (g) inspect his gang at the end of the shift and report to the miner in charge.³⁸

What he was not allowed to do was; (a) take a gang into a working place where blasting was done and which had not yet been made safe by the miner; (b) examine sockets or mark a hole which is to be drilled; (c) start a drill before the miner had personally examined the sockets and marked the holes; (d) change holes; (e) handle explosives except when contained in unopened boxes; (f) exercise in any way, supervision of blasting.³⁹ The white miner had, furthermore, to lead his gang to a working place that had been blasted, to visit the non-scheduled persons' working areas at least once during a shift and to give 'clear instructions'.⁴⁰ But finally, the drawback, i.e. provisions in the regulations in terms of which a miner shall not be placed in charge of employees spread over more working places than can be visited by the miner in a period of forty minutes, without unduly exerting himself, were relaxed. In terms of the exemption, employees may be spread over more working places than can be visited by the ganger or miner in a period of forty minutes without undue exertion, **as long as he can inspect all his working places thoroughly and with ease during his shift.** Furthermore, a shift boss was required to visit the working places where a 'non-scheduled' person leads his team, once in the course of every **two shifts**, not once every **one shift**.⁴¹

Let us use a hypothetical example to illustrate what is implied. Suppose that mine X has 36 'gangs'. Without 'undue exertion' a white miner could, in the space of 40 minutes, have controlled 3 'gangs'. Therefore 12 white miners plus 36 'boss-boys' (one per gang) would be adequate to set the production process in motion. This, let us suppose, was the mine regulations **status quo**. With the new exemption for the mine experiment and the comforts it implied, the miners' control span drops to two gangs over 80 minutes. However, in an 8 hour shift, the miner could very easily control 6 teams per shift. Therefore, the mine owners could employ 6 miners to 36 boss boys: a drop, in other works, of 50%. Similarly, the number of shift bosses could be halved since they need not inspect and supervise a working area once every shift, but once over two shifts. Whichever the case, the extra 50c⁴² per 'boss-boy' gives an extra expenditure of R18 (36 boss boys). The reduction of 50% in the number of white miners, at R9 a shift effects a saving of R54 a shift. The 40-45% wage increase per white miner, will add another plus/minus R24 to expenditure. Total savings of R12 per shift are possible even if the original number of shift bosses is maintained. Knowledge of the number of 'gangs' in operation in the mining industry, makes possible a calculation of total savings per time period. Given the then internationally fixed price of gold of \$35 an ounce, the experiment represented an important cost-reducing, i.e. profit raising exercise.

Secondly, with the experiment 'porosity' times are decreased, i.e. more actual work is done per hour than before: "In view of the fact that large numbers of Bantu employees are taken down, before the beginning of every shift, in skips which can accommodate only a limited number of persons at a time, it follows that some of these employees are underground long before the actual commencement of the shift. They proceed to the waiting places which are provided for them near their working places where they await the arrival of the ganger or miner in whose charge they are".⁴³ Even more time is lost due to the fact that the miner has more than one team to lead to the working places, make-safe, etc. If, let us say, the first team delays 20 minutes until the miner arrives and another 15 minutes are required to organise the shift's activities, the third team would be delayed by an extra 30 minutes (i.e. 50 minutes loss). With the competent non-scheduled persons being authorised to start the work except in those areas where blasting has taken place, porosity time is indeed increased, as are profits, because remuneration is fixed.

Thirdly, a new structure of authority, discipline and control is created,

which undermines the role of the white miner underground. The Government Mining Engineer reported that in 1962, 1963 and 1964 respectively, there were 102, 134 and 75 prosecutions instituted against 'scheduled' persons on all mines, including coal mines, for having permitted 'non-scheduled' persons to perform work which was supposed to be performed by scheduled persons only. These included; African labourers being placed in charge of explosives, charging holes with explosives, giving warnings, operating electrical machines in mines, drilling near sockets which had not been examined, indicating or marking the positions of drill holes, being in possession of cases of explosives that were not locked, entering working places that had not been inspected and exercising supervision.⁴⁴ If these were the cases of "inefficiency" discovered the number of undiscovered cases could have been of an alarming magnitude. The obvious solution was to increase the responsibilities of the 'boss-boys', giving them **de jure**, more policing or surveillance functions. This would extend the scope of the white miner's supervisory and co-ordinating functions so that, **de facto**, these fall within the scope of the 'boss-boy' jobs. The 'boss-boy' could then be given a rudimentary six shift training. By keeping the white miner responsible for blasting, and by extending over a whole shift his gang duties, it would be possible to get more 'blasts' out of him. Due to the decrease in numbers, large savings become possible. Part of these savings could be used to enhance his status and employment conditions.

As a response, to this African job advancement scheme, the 'rebel' Action Committee demanded that Mr. Grundling should resign and that the experiment be terminated. As the discontent grew, wildcat strikes became more frequent. Matters did not improve when, in March 1965, Grundling ensured the public that the white miners were happy with their new improved status and that the experiment was to be extended to the coal mines.⁴⁵

In April, the Action Committee approached a Dr. 'Ras' Beyers to become the legal advisor for the rebels.⁴⁶ Beyers, a doctor of laws from Leyden, an extreme right-winger, a cattle-rancher, a member of the O.B. during the Second World War and an avowed racist, was to become the mouthpiece and chief activist of the rebels. That same month, he had gone on record as saying that it was time miners broke the backs of the 'Oppenheimers' and that 'Kaffirs' should be stopped from pushing out whites from the industrial life of South Africa.⁴⁷

Grundling retaliated with a show of strength. He called for a 24 hour strike on

collieries in support of the extension of the experiment. The Cornelia, Clydendale, Witbank and Kilbracken collieries came to a standstill. There were threats that the protest would be carried on until the country's power supplies were jeopardised. The Action Committee sarcastically boasted that they would leave their goldmines and go and dig the coal themselves.⁴⁸ Moreover, the State's response of appointing a Commission of Enquiry into the experiments was viewed as support for the MWU leadership and the Chamber of Mines.⁴⁹

Strikes on goldmines continued, as a show of strength by the 'rebels'. Furthermore, under the leadership of Dr. Beyers, discontented rebels tried to take over the union's offices at Odendaalsrus, Klerksdorp, Carletonville and Krugersdorp. The police had to intervene in order to restore order. In July the same year, Dr. Beyers is said to have led a march on the Union's head office whilst the executive committee was in session; again police protection was sought.⁵⁰

To avoid chaos and restore peace to the goldmines, the State appointed a Commission of Enquiry into the 'experiments' which heard, for the first time, the grievances of the rebels. Their rallying cry was "to protect the European miner against intrusion of the Bantu in the mining industry at the expense of the European miner".⁵¹ They protested that, (a) as a result of the experiments, Europeans had been replaced by Non-Europeans;

(b) the status of some Non-Europeans had been enhanced; (c) in its purpose, the experiment made an inroad on the traditional **colour bar** and (d) if the re-organisation was accepted, it would create unrest and economic problems.

⁵² They demanded its immediate termination. The 'rebels' asserted: "by entrusting work that was previously performed by scheduled persons to non-scheduled persons, it (was) possible to put rock-breakers in charge of bigger sections of the mine and larger gangs and to allocate more duties to them. Less rockbreakers (would) inevitably be required to maintain production at the same level as before. Because it (was) left to non-scheduled persons to make certain working places safe, less of a certain type of day's pay employee (would) be required. The scope of employment of scheduled persons in the mining industry (would) be decreased drastically".⁵³

One thing the Action Committee was **not** against though, was the employment of white miners on a salaried (monthly) basis. They were not, however, prepared to make concessions to retain this benefit.

The Commission found some substance in the rebel's claims and in the name of 'industrial peace', the Government decided that the experiment would endanger the colour-bar and therefore should be terminated and thus it was terminated.⁵⁴

The pro-experimentalists began a work-to-rule campaign in order to compel the Government to reinstate the experiment. They also threatened further strikes but their efforts failed, due to lack of support from other mining unions which refused to co-operate.⁵⁵ Equally disconcerted was the Press and especially the Financial Mail: "What was ultimately on trial in the mine-worker's experiment was not the efficiency of a system, nor even the future of White labour underground, but the Prime Minister's political courage. It failed".⁵⁶

The dismissal of anti-experimentalists led to renewed strikes against the MWU. On the 21st September only four of the 11 Free State Gold Mines were in full operation. New demands for an election in the Union were made with an accompanying threat that a day-long strike would take place every week until their demands were heeded. The Minister of Labour intervened again and convinced Grundling to agree to an election in the near future. This defused the situation and reduced the threats to strike.

At the same time, talk of the formation of a Worker's Party started gaining publicity with rumours that trade unions were actively organising to put as many candidates as possible in the field of working class constituencies. There was talk of the Conservative Labour Party, which put up as many as four candidates in 1961 against the Nationalist Party in Mayfair, Langlaagte, Germiston and Jeppe being re-organised to contest elections. It was rumoured that a party was **already** being formed as a result of the grievances of mineworkers.⁵⁷ In addition, independent worker candidates were standing for Stilfontein, Carletonville and Welkom.⁵⁸

IV: The Rebels and Power

It was in 1966 though, that things came to a head. The militancy of the Action Committee increased and was directed against the mine executives and in particular against Mr. E. Grundling. The refusal once more of the MWU General Council to hold elections in March or April that year, did not help matters either. Furthermore, the insistence by Mr. Grundling that things were under control, and the attempts to re-negotiate the 'experiments'

he favoured, aggravated the 'rebels'. The Financial Mail reported that Dr. Ras Beyers, the 'rebel without a pause' and the 'notorious' Committee were at it again, causing trouble.⁵⁹ This time the campaign seemed thoroughly organised and the rank and file response quite swift. In February they started calling for a strike each day at a particular shaft at a particular mine, a tactic that caused serious concern in mining and governmental circles. Indeed, the day after strikes started at President Steyn, the Minister of Labour ordered an immediate Industrial Tribunal investigation into the grievances of the mineworkers. The 'rebels' paused during the day on Tuesday as soon as the Minister intervened, but continued that night, when 50 miners refused to go underground at Western Deep Levels. Their grievances were firstly, the irresponsible 'sell-out' attitude of the general council; secondly, the mines experiment that Grundling still favoured and thirdly the refusal of the MWU general council to hold elections.^{60,61}

After a strike at Free State Goldfields where 115 mineworkers were discharged, the situation looked gloomy - in terms that is, of industrial peace. There was a flurry of activity on behalf of the Action Committee, which continued to organise grass-root meetings and to level accusations against the executive. There were rumours of 'something big' on the agenda.⁶² They had previously agreed to wait for the Industrial Tribunal's verdict before any further activity. But when, by May 1966, there were no signs of a general election, the Action Committee decided on a general strike commencing on the 20th June and continuing until such time as was agreed to.⁶³) Via the mediation of the state and the Industrial Tribunal, the threatened strike was averted, but the militant mood prevailed.

Once elections for the welfare of all and the national interest were agreed upon,⁶⁴ speculation ran rife, especially in the English-speaking press. In fact, it seemed that they were running Grundling's election campaign side-by-side with 'The Mineworker'. According to the 'Financial Mail' "the difficulty the rebels have in following the abandonment of the experiment, is that many White miners who loathed African advancement in the industry, loved the monthly pay which the mineowners gave them.....in return for the experiment. Both were scrapped, the attitude of the owners having been that there would be no improved employment conditions in the industry without improved efficiency on the mines".⁶⁵ Nevertheless the rebels continued with their own campaign. The flamboyant and militant style of Dr. Ras Beyers became one of the colourful aspects of the whole conflict; 'If they don't want to listen we'll make them listen', an arrogant Beyers

was reported as stating. "We'll show them what happens when we Boers turn trade unionists; the miners will go on strike at a moment's notice".⁶⁶ The 'rebels' had their own scheme as against Grundling's, and the Government was called upon for support on the grounds that the scheme was in direct conformity with apartheid ideology.⁶⁷ African 'boss-boys' would be given greater responsibility, but in this case under the direct supervision of a white miner. In practice this meant that at the start of a shift a white miner would appoint an African 'boss-boy' to take the rest of the gang into the part of a working area which had been blasted, provided that this area had been made safe the previous day. Since the miner was to be the one who appointed the 'boss-boy' and this for 8 hours only, there could be no fear of redundancy of the White miner as with the ill-fated Grundling and Chamber scheme.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the Action Committee demanded a R300 per month minimum for beginners as opposed to the existing rate of R156: an increase, in other words, of 90-100% in wages. The 'Financial Mail' expressed doubt about the sincerity of their proposals and asked whether it was merely electioneering on behalf of the 'rebels'.

The Industrial Tribunal reported in August and concluded that both the Action Committee and the Union to a lesser extent, relied on 'declarations', 'trivialities' and 'unfounded rumours' which caused misunderstanding, ill feelings and a chaotic situation among members. Most important, it found Grundling a competent and devoted secretary. This countered allegations by the 'rebels' about misappropriation of funds, loans for buying hotels, etc. It also found that strikes took place as a result of 'personal feuds' among members. All in all, the rank and file suffered through the distortion of facts and insidious power playing.⁶⁹

Grundling having been cleared, surged forward to ensure victory for his supporters in the forthcoming shaft steward elections due to take place on October the 10th, for his supporters.⁷⁰ Renewed strikes broke out after allegations by the Action Committee that the MWU was responsible for irregularities in connection with the nominations for the elections. The State, in the person of the Minister of Labour, immediately responded by threatening to press for legislation forbidding strikes, on the grounds that the internal affairs of the Union should be handled by the miners without harassing the accumulation processes of property-owners. The 'rebels' responded equally aggressively: they threatened to paralyse the majority of the gold mines. The State became their enemy too; after all, the Minister of Labour was now siding with the Chamber of Mines.⁷¹

As the election of shaft stewards approached, new rumours spread and new allegations were made concerning 'politics' and especially the 'politics' of the rebel committee. The latest rumour spoke of substantial financial help to the rebels by the 'Hertzogites'.⁷²

After the election of shaft representatives, followed the appointment of the General Board, with both sides vociferously proclaiming victory.⁷³ Beyers announced sarcastically that he would join the Progressive Party if Grundling was re-elected. Irrespective of whether the 'rebels' gained power, he warned that the mining industry was about to face one of its biggest upheavals. "We are on the warpath", he stated. "We have nothing to lose".⁷⁴

The rebel view was that the white miner had been grossly exploited by the State and the Gold Producers Committee, and his interests neglected by the MWU executives. It was considered appalling that white miners, especially those on pensions, lived in a state of poverty and misery.⁷⁵ They demanded 100% wage increases, better pensions and a statutory limit of 20 years on a miner's working life. An important point was that the Government's share in the industry's profits was considered to be exorbitant.

⁷⁶ Grundling was, however, equally adamant. He had no intention of resigning as General Secretary of the MWU. Because of the MWU strength, he went on to add, political opportunists had been trying to gain control of the Union ever since it had been founded and the position of the General Secretary had long been looked upon as a political football. Concrete evidence of this was the rebels' latest announcement that they had formed a new political party.⁷⁷ To the accusation that he was a Nationalist party and Broederbond stooge, he replied that "although I'm a Nationalist....you'll agree that the job experiment which I fathered is not strictly along Party lines...."⁷⁸

At stake, of course, was the election of the executive committee. On the 25th November, Maurice Meiring, Action Committee leader, was elected president of the MWU with a majority of 29 to 13. After that, the Action Committee quickly obtained a majority on the new executive committee.⁷⁹

Until the constitution of the union was revised so that 'democratic elections' could be held, Fred Short, who with P.J. 'Flip' Coetzee was the founder of the first cell of the Action Committee, was elected interim General Secretary. Short had been a white worker militant since 1935. He led the 1946 strike against Union secretary B. Broderick.⁸⁰ He was also actively involved in the 1949 strikes which cost him a year's unemployment. In 1965 after a thirty year career in mining, he retired, but continued his membership of the union.⁸¹

Grundling was summarily dismissed. The next day he announced in 'The Mineworker' that the union was being taken over for political purposes. He stated that a new political party would be formed after the new regime became entrenched in the Union. It would be called the 'Democratic National Party'. He was right. Rumours about the party had been going on for some time.⁸² The rebels were in power after a protracted struggle which was militant, anti-Nationalist Party, anti-Broederbond, anti-Chamber, anti-Black job advancement, determined and resolute. Their range of activities, speeches and statements all defied the status quo. They threatened to take away from the Nationalist Party, the rank and file miner support that brought them into power in the first place. The bonds that had held the Afrikaner urban bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and workers on more or less the same road, were clearly weakening and their paths began to diverge.

Yet more provocation was to follow; Short took his oath as General Secretary with an alarming piece of prose influenced by none other than the Ku Klux Klan prototype: He vowed that he would resist with all his might "the onslaught of Kaffir, Moor and Indian on the White working community". He undertook to fight Communism and all other forms of liberalism and leftism with all the means at his disposal. Short declared that he was not and would not become a member of the Broederbond or any secret organisations, and that he would resist penetration of the union by the Broederbond and any other secret organisation.⁸³ Alarm was expressed by the press about the Ku Klux Klan heritage of the oath, but even more displeasing was the introduction of that ideological form into South African politics. Meiring had been, after all, a candidate for the 'Republican Party' in opposition to the Nationalist in the Stilfontein Constituency in the previous general election.⁸⁴

Dr. Beyers was appointed legal advisor to the Union: an influential position in terms of decision making. As a 'servant of the executive' and chief ideologue of the 'rebels' in power, he immediately started toning down his rhetorical statements, primarily because a lot of discontent was brewing. It was decided to leave politics out of the union's agenda. But what would take place was a campaign to rid the Union of the Broederbond. This was agreed to by all concerned.⁸⁵

Discontent was indeed brewing. Grundling made an urgent application to the court over his suspension by the newly appointed executive committee, demanding to be re-instated.⁸⁶ But most important, new rank and file

discontent loomed on the horizon. 'At' van Wijk, a militant member of the Action Committee, led the malcontents in the Orange Free State. The majority of the Free State mineworkers, he stated, wished to protest against Dr. Beyers' appointment at a 'fantastic salary'. Emergency meetings of shaft stewards were organised in Odendaalsrus and Welkom. The miners were also shocked "by this Ku Klux Klan oath which the executive had taken". They felt they had been misled "by the men who have won power".⁸⁷

The discontent spread to the West Rand, where Cor de Jager (who from 1967 onwards was to be the president of the MWU) was named as the leader of the new faction within the rebel body. Beyers, the focus of attack, lashed out at van Wijk, intimating that van Wijk's failure to obtain the coveted post of General Secretary was the reason for his discontent. Beyers averred that he had no connection with any political party, but furthermore, he knew that van Wijk did. Beyers stated that he had offered his services gratis, but that the managing committee of the union had refused his services on this basis and had offered a sum of R19 600. He claimed nevertheless, that he was ready to accept Union wages.⁸⁸

Van Wijk replied that the mere fact that Beyers had had hidden aims in taking the job was in itself problematic, and that Beyers had admitted to him that he was approached to lead the new Democratic National Party.⁸⁹ In the meantime the court procedures began unfolding with Grundling riding the wave; he accused Beyers of being a man who would endanger the national interest; of having been expelled from the Pretoria Bar Council as an advocate due to his activities; of having organised strikes, demonstrations and the storming of buildings. Grundling alleged that Beyers was an atheist, an anarchist trying to gain control of the Union a dictator of the Union; of being an anti-Semite, anti-English and anti-African; possessed of the most dangerous of racial hatreds and of the most irresponsible nature. He accused him of being 'against' the employees in the mining industry and of having no respect for the Union's constitution. He accused him of being a National Socialist who had served as legal advisor to the Ku Klux Klan.⁹⁰ Fred Short was labelled incompetent and a danger to the Union's finances; in short a puppet of Dr. Beyers. Grundling pleaded to be re-instated, for the 'powers' that had taken control of the Union would split the trade union movement by creating further chaos.⁹¹ The judge ordered that Dr. Beyers should not involve himself in the affairs of the Union and that he may not enter the union offices. He ordered Short not to carry out his duties as

General Secretary. However, he did not grant Grundling's application for reinstatement as General Secretary.⁹² The judge gave no reason for his judgement, deciding it was inopportune at the moment to do so.⁹³ Thus Grundling was not re-instated, Fred Short was dismissed and a Mr. Murray was appointed as temporary General Secretary.

The State adopted a tough stance. The Minister of Labour at the time, Mr. Marais Viljoen, called in the executive committee for a pep-talk on 5th December.⁹⁴

The Union executive responded in a low-key which could be termed 'defensive'. They assured the Minister that politics would not interfere with the Union administration. Meiring assured the Minister that the new executive would act in a responsible manner and Murray assured him that there was no question of the Union turning into a political body, since, after all, 90% of the members were Nationalist Party supporters and that this would militate against the formation of a new political party.⁹⁵

The Union executive had more immediate worries: they had to regain rank and file support. for the van Wijk/der Jager faction was splitting the Union apart regardless of Meiring's claim that the fraction lacked significant support.⁹⁶) The general council meeting on the 12th December endorsed the sacking of Mr. Grundling and decided to reject outright the proposals of the Gold Producer's Committee of the Chamber, for a new labour rationalisation scheme. The council asserted that these new proposals would undermine the white worker to an even greater extent than the original mine experiment. Furthermore, the council made known its determination to press for a minimum starting salary of R300 a month for beginners.⁹⁷

According to the Union, the new scheme would degrade half of the shift bosses to mineworkers and half of the mine captains to shift bosses. The mineworker would perhaps gain a higher status but would, to all intents and purposes, become a supervisor of a selected group of 'boss-boys' who would be allowed to do the work of shift workers. The proposed wage increase of R120-R220 would only benefit a very small group of mineworkers and it would have signified a reduction of the mine wage-bill and a consequent profit of R55 million for the mines.⁹⁸

The Rand Daily Mail was quick to publish an article on the difficulties of

goldmining, i.e. fixed prices, marginal mines and high milling costs. Yet the "most worrying element", they wrote, was that which had gained control of the MWU, an element that was 'tough, impulsive and lacking in experience'. It was pressing for a doubling of wages and was resisting any proposals for increasing productivity that involved whites handing over to Africans some of the less skilled functions they have hitherto performed. "Without such redistribution of duties, it is hard to see how the industry can afford material wage increases".⁹⁹

"Toughness, impulsiveness and lack of experience" was manifested yet again by Meiring. The removal of Beyers and Short was argued to be of benefit to the Chamber of Mines, therefore, "the management committee decided that we won't have further discussion with the Chamber of Mines or bargaining over productivity until the court order has been lifted. The court order bans our two key men from office which means that they cannot be in on the negotiations".¹⁰⁰

The Grundling\Beyers case was reopened in January 1967, with Mr. Trollip presiding, to finalise Grundling's application.¹⁰¹ The defence of Beyers and Short stated that if an interdict was to be granted to Mr. Grundling, great unrest would occur.¹⁰² Simultaneously, Meiring and another 201 mineworkers were to be charged in another court with incitement to contravene the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Act. This was the sequel to further work-stoppages by miners at three Transvaal mines; a show of strength by the new executive.

New 'chaos' was expected. The MWU executive decided that a strike levy was to be imposed for a general strike later on in the same year.

The 'bogey-man' of 'politics' and 'workers party' re-entered the vocabulary of the Union's executive. Minister Viljoen responded by issuing a warning to the Union. The executive remained intransigent. The remainder of the unions making up the Federation of Mining Unions voiced their discontent, so the MWU decided to go it alone, declaring an aggressive 'all or nothing strategy' was aimed at uniting the discontented rank and file.¹⁰³

When the Chamber of Mines proposed a new rationalisation scheme later the same month, the union again rejected it as "fragmentation of skilled work".¹⁰⁴

These moves paid dividends; the day after the rejection of the new rationalisation scheme, the Minister of Labour announced that he was deeply dis-

turbed that the Attorney General had found it necessary to prosecute the mineworkers under the Industrial Conciliation Act. He also regretted that workers had been jeopardised by what he vaguely called "irresponsible actions". He stated that the government, despite rumours to the opposite effect, was eager to maintain goodwill between itself and the Union which was important to the country's welfare and industrial life. The Minister indicated that contrary to speculation, the government recognised unequivocally the new executive. Finally, the Minister summed up state policy as follows. (a) that a satisfactory wage regulation for the mineworkers had to come into operation as soon as possible; (b) that the colour bar must be retained in the case of mineworkers and (c) a strong and sound mineworkers union was desirable.¹⁰⁵ On these grounds the MWU accepted a government offer of assistance in the negotiations between the Union and the Chamber.¹⁰⁶

In the meantime, Justice Trollip ruled that Beyers' and Short's appointments were invalid in terms of the Union's constitution: Short's because he was not a full member of the Union and Ras Beyers' because he was obviously an official of the Union and the constitution did not provide for a full time legal advisor. "He was obviously to be a full time, paid official of the Union".¹⁰⁷ He also ruled that the sacking of Grundling was constitutional and legitimate: "My conclusion", stated the Judge, "therefore, is that neither the executive committee nor the general council was obliged to give Grundling a hearing before respectively dismissing him and confirming his dismissal".¹⁰⁸

New proposals by the Chamber to allow black workers to perform more responsible work, failed to make much headway. The proposal that each white mineworker control three chief black workers, who would in turn each have 15 black workers in their charge, was deemed unacceptable. It would have resulted according to the union, in a reduction of 60% in the white labour force.¹⁰⁹

An attempt will now be made to place the struggle discussed above within the wider context of developments in the mining industry especially coal and gold mining.¹¹⁰

The 1960's was a period of rapid growth during which the economy was structurally transformed, in part through the inflow of foreign capital and technology.¹¹¹

This growth led to an increased demand for energy, steel and more directly, coal for the rapidly expanding manufacturing industry.¹¹² As both ESCOM and ISCOR are dependent on the production of coal, this led to increasing attempts to make coal mining more productive. The old pillar and bord methods were duly revolutionised. After the Coalbrook disaster of the 1960's¹¹³ a major research programme was initiated to study all aspects of bord and pillar mining in order to avoid a similar occurrence. The results were available in the early 1960's, so that as soon as coal mines planned expansion, the scientific basis for this was available.¹¹⁴ Other coalmines started using non-explosive methods to break the ore from the working face, and 'continuous mine machines' were introduced.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the use of trucks, loaded by hand and hauled out of the mine on rails had been supplanted by trackless mechanical loading and transport equipment and conveyor belt systems.¹¹⁶ The Petrick Commission notes that 'proficiency is such that production costs are among the lowest in the world...'¹¹⁷ Although some Natal collieries began experiencing problems as they neared the end of their life span, the Transvaai collieries were on the upsurge.

Apart from the increased sophistication of pillar and bord methods, longwall mining started being implemented. This method is used for mining continuous faces of coal that range in length from 28 to 200 metres. The Coal Mining Research Controlling Council started experiments at Durban Navigation Colliery and the Sigma Colliery in the Orange Free State (a direct supplier to ESCOM). The Sigma Colliery experiment was abandoned, but it was agreed that although longwall mining equipment costs more than that required for bord and pillar mining, the benefits 'lie in the size of the labour force required'.¹¹⁸

Although opencast mining started in 1964 at Hlobane Colliery, Natal, this was nothing in comparison to open-cast activities that were about to begin in the 1970's.¹¹⁹ Opencast mining has been practised for many years in Europe on a large scale, recovering soft coal from thick seams covered by an overburden of soil, sand and friable rock. The conditions there led to the development of large excavating machines of the 'bucket wheel type', capable of removing the overburden and the coal, via direct attack without resorting to blasting operations. In the USA and the Republic where the overburden is of a more difficult nature and has to be fractured by explosives before it can be removed, excavating machinery of a different kind was necessary, the most favoured under the circumstances being a machine known as the 'walking dragline scraper'.

This method is akin to quarrying and is also known as strip-mining. It involves trenching from the surface down through the overlying soil and rock to expose the coal which is then mined concurrently with the further stripping of the overburden, but as a separate operation.¹²⁰ The Commission also notes that: "When a thick seam is shallowly overlain the opencast method has obvious advantages but its economic attractiveness diminishes as the depth of the seams and the ratio of overburden thickness to coal thickness increases. The higher the ratio, the higher the capital cost of the larger and more highly specialised machines that are required and the higher the working cost in recovering each bit of coal".¹²¹ Yet when the conditions are suitable, there is a 90% recovery of coal.

The cost of a "walking dragline" is so high, due to its specialised design for particular coalfields, that it is economically unfeasible to have a stand-by machine. More often than not, the entire opencast operation centres on the uninterrupted functioning of this single machine.¹²²

For the purposes of this paper, the most important implication of the introduction of these machines has been the impact on the labour process. In a sense, the mining industry has outflanked the MWU; on the new open-cast coal mines, **all drivers of earthmoving equipment are Africans.**¹²³ This in turn clearly reflects the predicament of the white miner: if the bulk of the skills of the industry are controlled by capital, whilst only one skill is controlled by the white miner, namely blasting and that **de jure** as the outcome of worker struggles, the benefits from the introduction of new skills arising out of new technologies will undoubtedly accrue mainly to the mine owners. Thus, in contrast to the gold mines, the modern coal mines are indeed practicing black advancement, but in the process, the white miner is bypassed. The monopoly of blasting still allows the white miner to exercise some degree of control in the labour-processes of some of these mines, for as mentioned above, opencast mining in South Africa, due to rock formation in the overburden, often requires this operation. Thus the labour process has been transformed. The productive unit consists of a mixture of complex operations which contains remnants of the old gang system, paced by the rhythm of work of the dragline scraper operator teams which in essence, determine the cycles of production.

These changes are also reflected in the transformation of the African labour force, whose domain was the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs performed by some 70% of oscillating migrant labourers in the 'traditional' collieries.

In the opencast mines only 20% of the labour force perform these jobs.¹²⁴

In the diminishing sphere of their domain, the MWU has made further concessions for 'black advancement': (a) that the miner in charge be permitted to instruct African team leaders to carry out the full initial examination at the start of the shift except in respect of places blasted but not examined by the miners on the preceding shift; (b) where multi-shift work is being conducted, workmen should be allowed to changeover with their counterparts at the **face**, subject to the condition that the first duty of the miner assuming charge, shall be to examine the section and where necessary, make safe; (c) that the miner in charge only need mark the first shot-hole or hole to be drilled for support purposes, if a suitably designed 'hole director' is provided to locate and direct the remaining holes required; (d) that in Natal collieries suitably experienced and competent Africans be allowed to supervise timber drawing to let down the roof, provided that the miner in charge is present.¹²⁵

Gold mining was experiencing problems of a different order. The opening of the Free State Goldfields, the new 'bonanza', was not without difficulties for capital. The fixed price of gold and the increases in the cost structure meant that higher grade ore had to be mined, thus decreasing the life of the richest mines, whilst making the low grade ones too costly to mine.¹²⁶ The State helped by amending fiscal legislation.¹²⁷ which from 1962 onwards decreased the burden on the mineowners shoulders somewhat. However, demands by certain factions within organised labour, in the case of the MWU for substantial wage increases and a breakaway from the piece-wage/bonus incentive to productivity, led them to oppose the 'experiments'. As discussed above, introduction of the methods tried in the 'experiments' would have permitted substantial decreases in costs, thereby allowing all mines to be reworked far more efficiently.¹²⁸ The outcome, though, was the opposite of what was intended: a more militant leadership which blocked changes in industrial authority over the labour-process and staunchly defended the colour-bar.

By the end of 1967, the leadership of the MWU had changed. The new president of the Union was none other than Cor de Jager, the leader of the West Rand dissenters. As General Secretary, a figure who would help shape events in the mining industry to an unprecedented degree,¹²⁹ P.J. Paulus, also a member of the Action Committee from 1964, came to power. Political overtones of the Union subsided. Attention was concentrated on 'bread

and butter' labour issues, wages, pensions, compensation, better working conditions and the preservation of job reservation. **The Mineworker** was transformed by the new executive. The contrast with the Grundling era was strong. The journal now placed worker issues at the forefront, at the expense of advertising and 'brights'. The new executive gained the reputation of being hard-bargainers on behalf of the workers they represented.

Concessions over 'black advancement' were made in the gold mines without threatening the control of the white miner's position in the industry. These involved: (a) increasing the maximum distance at which the ganger may supervise charging from 15m to 30m and allowing blacks to charge up their development ends simultaneously under the general charge of the certificated ganger; (b) provision for a general miner in charge of not more than four miner's sections to instruct black team leaders to enter, examine and make safe, places which have been blasted; (c) that the travelling time from the shafthead to the working place be extended from 30 minutes to 60 minutes per shift.¹³⁰ What these concessions signalled though, was firstly the partial success of gold capital's attempts to decrease porosity-time. Teams could now enter 'blasted' areas without the white miner; secondly, blasting duties of the white miner were decreased.

Conclusion

The focus of unity of the mineworkers, which at the same time is the source of their vulnerability is the 'job colour bar'. As we have seen so far this is slowly changing as the privileges secured by the blasting certificate, are whittled away. This engenders new relations with the mining industry, with the African workers and with the State. Relations are structured around a fragile equilibrium which is always ready to explode.

The mineworker would like mining capital to continue its reproduction process without tampering with his 'privileges', but the intensity of mechanisation on the mines, the insistence of mining capital on labour rationalisation schemes and the creation of a stratum of skilled African labourers, constantly places him in a relationship of opposition. Furthermore, the mineworker depends on the State to honour the legislation underpinning the job colour bar and to intervene on their side if capital tries to change the technical division of labour in mining via changes in the labour process.

Events such as their struggle for a five-day week, the 1979 strike and the pub-

lication of the Wiehahn Commission Report, suggest that State support for the white miners may become increasingly tenuous in the future.

The mineworkers also depend on the African labour force remaining as it is; cheaply paid, productive, migrant, docile. Consequently he relies on both mining capital and the State to perpetuate these conditions. At the same time however, it is precisely these attributes which make African labour attractive to mining capital and thus a threat to the white miner. The extremely violent ¹³¹ conflict that erupted on the mines, with African mineworkers as the main actors, brought about from 1973 onwards, changes which further threaten the white miner. The Chamber of Mines' decision to grant substantial increases in wages for the African workers, plans for mechanisation on the gold mines as well as for the stabilization of the workforce and the creation of an African 'labour aristocracy' ¹³², present a new terrain of antagonisms.

This position is becoming increasingly hard to defend. During the recent strike, the African labour force kept the mines working, the Chamber maintained an intransigent position and the State merely looked on from a distance as the white miners trickled back to work. They now have to go it alone.

Footnotes

1. **Rand Daily Mail**, 1 February 1979
2. For a theoretical discussion on the issues involved, See A. Sitas **Rebels without a Pause: The White Miner, Changes in the Labour Process and Conflict 1964-1978**. Unpublished B. A. Hons. Dissertation.
3. See **Mines and Works Act of 1956** - ch.8 for a discussion of these statutes.
4. **Ibid.**
5. See **Commission of Inquiry into the Experiment on Certain Mines**, Annexure VI. Department of Mines 1965
6. For a discussion of the blasting-certificate as the colour-bar of the Transvaal Miners Association (later MWU) See E.N. Katz: **A Trade Union Aristocracy**, pp. 55 ff. African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand 1977.
7. See D.O. 'Meara, 'White Trade Unionism. Political Power of Afrikaner Nationalism' in E. Webster (ed) **Essays on Southern African Labour History**, Ravan Labour Studies, Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1978.

8. **ibid.**
9. See E. Webster 'Introduction - Section 5' in E. Webster (ed) **op cit.**
10. On the co-optation of 'White' trade unionism and particularly on this point see R. Davies: **The Class Character of Industrial Conciliation Legislation** in E. Webster (ed) **op. cit.**
11. **Rand Daily Mail**, 25 November 1966.
12. D. O'Meara, **op cit.**
13. **Rand Daily Mail**, 25 November 1966.
14. **Rand Daily Mail**, 15 June 1965.
15. R. Davies, **op cit.**
16. M.A. du Toit, **South African Trade Unions**, Johannesburg 1976.
17. **The Franszen Commission** pp 14-15.
18. **The Mineworker**, 10 January 1964.
19. **The Mineworker**, 24 January 1964, 7 February 1964.
20. **The Mineworker**, 21 February 1964.
21. **The Mineworker**, 3 April 1964.
22. **Grundling vs Beyers and Others** (Johannesburg Local Division) 1966-1967.
23. **The Mineworker**, 12 July 1964.
24. **The Mineworker**, 24 July 1964.
25. **The Mineworker**, 19 August 1964.
26. **The Mineworker**, 23 December 1964.
27. **ibid.**
28. **Commission of Inquiry into the Experiments on Certain Mines**, (hereafter Commission of Inquiry) p. 28 Department of Mines 1965.
29. **Commission of Inquiry**, pp. 30-31.
30. c.f. M.A. du Toit, '**South African Trade Unions**' p.68, Johannesburg 1976.
31. **Commission of Inquiry** p.14.
32. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.16.
33. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.30.
34. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.16.
35. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.5.
36. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.25.
37. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.26.
38. **ibid.**
39. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.27.
40. **ibid.**
41. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.23.
42. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.26.
43. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.19.
44. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.25.
45. **Financial Mail**, p.600, 12 March 1965.
46. **Grundling vs. Beyers and Others**, **op. cit.**

47. **Financial Mail**, p.271-2, 30 April 1965.
48. **Financial Mail**, 21 May 1965.
49. See M.A. du Toit, *op. cit.*
50. **Rand Daily Mail**, 2 December 1966.
51. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.46.
52. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.44.
53. **Commission of Inquiry**, p.48.
54. See Conclusion of **Commission of Inquiry and Financial Mail**, July 1965 issues.
55. M.A. du Toit, *op. cit.*
56. **Financial Mail**, p.357, 6 August 1965.
57. **The Star**, 9 August 1965.
58. **Financial Mail**, p.174, 15 October 1965.
59. **Financial Mail**, p.329, 11 February 1966.
60. *Ibid*, p.529.
61. **The Mineworker**, February, March and April issues.
62. **Grundling vs. Beyers and others**, *op. cit.*
63. M.A. du Toit, *op. cit.*
64. **The Mineworker**, July, August and September issues 1966.
65. **The Financial Mail**, p.78, 8 July 1966.
66. **The Financial Mail**, p.222, 22 July 1966.
67. **The Financial Mail**, p.222, 22 July 1966.
68. **The Financial Mail**, p.273, 22 July 1966.
69. **Industrial Tribunal Report**, 1966 Department of Labour.
70. **The Mineworker**, September, October issues
71. M.A. du Toit, *op. cit.* p.64.
72. **Cape Times**, 13 October 1966.
73. **The Mineworker**, October and November issues.
74. **Financial Mail**, p. 420, 11 November 1966.
75. **The Financial Mail**, p.421, 11 November 1966.
76. *Ibid*.
77. **The Financial Mail**, p.529, 16 November 1966.
78. **The Star**, 25 November 1966.
79. *Ibid*.
80. See D. O'Meara, *op. cit.*
81. **The Star**, 25 November 1966.
82. **The Star**, 26 November 1966.
83. *Ibid*.
84. **The Star**, 27 November 1966,
85. **Rand Daily Mail**, 28 November 1966.
86. **Rand Daily Mail**, 28 November 1966.
87. **The Star**, 26 November 1966.

88. **Rand Daily Mail**, 29 November 1966.
89. **The Star**, 26 November 1966.
90. **Rand Daily Mail**, 2 December 1966.
91. **The Star**, 27 November 1966.
92. **The Star**, 15 December 1966.
93. **Sunday Times**, 4 December 1966.
94. **Rand Daily Mail**, 6 December 1966.
95. **ibid.**
96. **Rand Daily Mail**, 7 December 1966.
97. **Rand Daily Mail**, 15 December 1966.
98. See M.A. du Toit, **op.cit.**
99. **Rand Daily Mail**, 21 December 1966.
100. **Rand Daily Mail**, 21 December 1966.
101. **The Star**, 15 January 1967.
102. **Rand Daily Mail**, 14 January 1967.
103. **Star**, 17 January 1967.
104. **The Star**, 27 January 1967.
105. **Rand Daily Mail**, 28 January 1967.
106. **ibid.**
107. **Rand Daily Mail**, 10 February 1967.
108. **Grundling vs. Beyers and Others. op cit.**
109. M.A. du Toit, p.70, **op. cit.**
110. See A. Sitas, **op. cit.**
111. **ibid.**
112. See D. Hobart Houghton, **The South African Economy**, O.U.P. 1974.
113. Department of Mines, **Annual Statistics**, 1960.
114. **Petrick Commission** 1975, ch.8.
115. **ibid.**
116. **ibid**, pp. 80ff.
117. **ibid**, p.81.
118. **ibid.**
119. c.f. **The Franszen Commission**, 1977.
120. **Petrick Commission, op.cit.** p.84.
121. **ibid.**
122. **ibid.**
123. J.B. Knight 'Black Wages and Choice of Technique in South Africa' p.20, mimeo, 1978.
124. **ibid.**
125. **The Franszen Commission, op.cit.** pp.27-28.
126. c.f. T. Greers, **The World of Gold**, London 1968.
127. c.f. **Franszen Commission, op. cit.**
128. **ibid.**
129. For details of the 1970's conflict, See A. Sitas **op.cit.**
130. **ibid**, p.27.
131. See A. Sitas, **op. cit.** for a more detailed and thorough discussion of all the above.
132. **ibid.**

Trade Unions and Skill Shortages & Enterprise

Charles Meth ★

In this paper, an attempt is made to look beyond the conventional wisdom that restrictive trade union practices, specifically the creation of artificial barriers to upward mobility of black, and more importantly of African workers, is responsible for the skill shortages which are said to plague the South African economy.

This entails an examination of the economics of apprentice training, since willingness to provide training is an important indication of the level of demand for skilled manpower. By comparing the performance of the two sectors employing artisans and training apprentices, namely the private and public sectors, and by examining the shortages of these two groups of workers at a particular point in time, it is hoped that a fresh view of this hardy annual, may be obtained.

Introduction

Reservation of particular jobs for particular groups of workers is a common feature of many economies. Admission to the group concerned is by way of some qualification, ability or characteristic or a combination of these. The right of admission to the group confers varying degrees of control over the supply of labour and hence over conditions in the workplace.

Probably the most common example of this practice is the 'closed shop' agreement negotiated by a trade union, which stipulates that new workers may only be employed by an enterprise if they are already members of the trade union (pre-entry), or that they become members of the trade union within some agreed period of commencing employment (post-entry).

Trade unions can also, if they are sufficiently powerful, negotiate agreements in which the employers are required to maintain certain proportions or ratios between workers performing different tasks. Typical examples of this are artisan/apprentice¹ or supervisor/labourer ratios. 'Ratio' and 'Closed Shop' are both common in this country.

★ I would like to thank my colleague Jill Nattrass for her extensive and valuable criticism of a difficult draft.

One cause of the almost universal opprobrium earned by this country is the vicious twist given to the standard practices described above, by the overt or covert introduction through statutory measures, of race as a qualification for entry either to recognised trade unions or to certain specified occupations.

Over the past 30 years or so the South African economy has undergone a vast transformation. One aspect of this transformation is the separation of the manual from the intellectual aspects of production. Technological progress (much of it imported from overseas capitalist countries) has considerably reduced the relative demand for highly skilled manual production workers and simultaneously the process of 'dilution' has whittled away at the stranglehold of craft control over the production process, giving rise to the emergence of a large class of semi-skilled operators. At the same time there has come into being a small, highly trained group of technicians who help to devise, maintain and control the complex instruments of production.

As industry after industry has undergone the process of 'modernisation', whites and sometimes coloureds and Asians, whose jobs have been threatened, invoked the protection of job reservation, possible in terms of Section 77 of the Industrial Conciliation Act.

Africans have been excluded from many jobs occupied by whites (and to a much lesser extent by coloureds and Asians) by perverting the closed shop agreements. In terms of the Industrial Council agreements the performance of certain jobs is restricted to members of registered unions only - since Africans could not join registered trade unions, they were effectively prevented from aspiring to those positions. These measures were selectively applied and because of the pressure of demand for labour arising from a period of sustained economic growth over the years, wholesale exemptions and shifts in the job colour bar occurred. It has been argued that as *quid pro quo* for the monopoly rental which white workers have been able to extract by maintaining artificial scarcity, they have permitted increasing fragmentation or dilution of trades.

Because of rising internal and external pressures in recent years and the waning influence of the relatively declining group of 'skilled' white workers, the tussle between unions and employers has entered a new phase. There are certain trades, particularly those which contain a substantial 'diagnostic' element where union control remains secure. However, many other trades are highly vulnerable both to fragmentation and to the threat of obsole-

science through technological development.

One is entitled to ask, is South Africa's experience in this area unique or are there other forces at work here, similar to those which lead to similar problems being experienced elsewhere?

The following passage from the Donovan Commission Report² shows clearly the sorts of difficulties which arise in the UK, where the apprenticeship system is still strong; '....precise and rigid boundaries between....craft and semi-skilled grades of labour can be settled only on an arbitrary basis.... the knowledge that they have virtually committed themselves to a craft for life makes men alert to guard what they consider to be their own preserve... In the context of technological change the drawbacks of the craft system become even more marked. It is unreal to assume that the demand for any particular range of skill will be constant. If the only normal method of entry into the craft is via an apprenticeship, supply will respond slowly and inadequately to the demand. Thus the definition of skill as based on the craft system is found inadequate and arbitrary, the defensive stance against change is seen as virtually guaranteed because of it, and supply and demand are likely to be in inequilibrium because of the existence of the apprenticeship system'.

Several complex questions on the nature of skills and of technological change are raised here, but one thing is clear and that is that the very existence of a group with relatively static aims interacting with another group who control a dynamic technology, a technology constantly being revolutionised, guarantees permanent disequilibrium in the labour market in the UK no less than in South Africa.

It may be argued that what has occurred in South Africa is that the 'quality' rather than merely the 'quantity' (or possibly, in addition to the quantity), has suffered as a result of artificial scarcities spawned by racist legislation. As far as 'quality' of artisans in the UK is concerned, Hall and Miller³ argue that training scheme wages are so structured that the apprentice may well be convinced that the 'quality of work to aim for is the minimum one can get away with'.

In addition, the actual content of training is very often left, in the UK, to the discretion of the firm, unions concerning themselves not with the adequacy of training but rather with the issue of the 'skilled ticket' which hopefully,

will provide lifelong job security.⁴

'Quality of workers' relates both to the nature of production processes, i.e., to required skill levels in production and to the relevant characteristics of the workers themselves. Both of these aspects need to be considered in an analysis of 'worker quality'. As far as the former aspect is concerned, it has become common cause among analysts to assert that the levels of worker skills in modern manufacturing are rising and it is equally common cause to attribute the development of modern labour saving (and often capital saving) technology, at least in part, to a shortage of workers with the requisite manual skills. Needless to say, these claims are hotly debated.⁵ At this point it is simply necessary to state that changes in technology and real or imagined conditions in the market place for labour are linked and that to understand the nature of that linkage it is necessary to understand the causes of 'skill shortages'.

Before attempting to discover the causes of such shortages, some comments on the system of apprenticeship in South Africa will be made.

Apprenticeship in South Africa

The apprenticeship system in South Africa is regulated by the Apprenticeship Act No. 37 of 1944 as amended in 1951, 1959 and 1963. In terms of the Act, a National Apprenticeship Board, chaired by the Registrar of Apprenticeship and consisting of 13 members representing the different groups concerned with apprentice training, advises the Minister of Labour, who administers the Act, on matters such as designation and definition of trades, conditions of apprenticeship and other matters. Regional committees set up in terms of the Act, serve local interests in all areas of the country.

At the local level, the parties concerned with training the apprentice include:

- (a) the apprentice himself and the employee organisations, i.e., trade unions,
- (b) the employer and employee associations;
- (c) the Department of Manpower Utilisation (formerly Labour), through the Registrar;
- (d) the Department of Education, which provides off-the-job instruction

through the Technical Colleges and which also administers the Central Trade Testing Authority at Olifantsfontein.

Given the large number of interest groups it would indeed be surprising to learn that serious differences did not exist.

Much apprentice training is undertaken privately by firms and is supposed to be in accordance with schedules of practical training prescribed by law. Apprenticeships, except in a few highly skilled trades, are normally of three years duration. In many trades, an apprentice may take a voluntary trade test after 93 weeks of practical training, if he has achieved a minimum technical educational qualification of N 2. Failing this, the apprentice undergoes a compulsory trade test at the end of his third year. If he fails this he serves a further year and may become an artisan by effluxion of time. The system of apprentice education is discussed briefly, further on in the article.

Apprenticeship training in this country, commendable in some respects, has been severely criticised by many commentators. The weaknesses of the system derive from its original attempts to provide industrial training on the one hand and to solve the poor white problem on the other. Hutt⁶ argues that,....“The Apprenticeship Act (1922) was genuinely believed by many, including some well-meaning educationalists who helped draft it, to have had the purpose of encouraging white youths to acquire industrial skills. In practice, the Act has probably had the opposite effect. Certainly, administered in the spirit of the ‘civilised labour policy’ it has assisted in reserving the better remunerated employment for the whites, but in such a way that it has weakened the incentive for self-improvement among them. Thus, whilst it developed facilities for training in technical colleges, and made attendance compulsory for apprentices, it never insisted upon them passing the examinations in order to qualify. Consequently, the majority have never treated seriously the expensive facilities provided; they became journeymen merely by the passage of time”.

De Waard’s 1963 paper ‘Apprentice Education’⁷ spells out in stark and pessimistic terms, the apparently unbridgable gap between desired and achieved educational levels. If Junior Certificate had been enforced as an entry qualification in 1962 in the Durban area, fully 80 per cent of the indentured motor mechanics and 72 per cent of the general engineering apprentices of the time would have been ineligible for apprenticeship. Of 267 apprentices who attended College for at least 3 years, 37,5 per cent never

passed any trade theory subject and a further 32,5 per cent passed only NTC I Trade Theory.

The practice of granting wholesale exemptions to whites who had not attained the very modest entry qualifications necessary for entry to a trade, coupled with the exclusion of suitably qualified Africans, coloureds and Asians, throws into sharp relief, the inequities of the present system. The building industry, picturesquely described as having gone 'black' provides an example of the first practice. Gibson ⁸ quoting the Master Builders and Allied Traders Association (Durban) Report for the year ended 31 December 1969, shows that 94 per cent of 'non-white' apprentices (466 out of 496) could meet the entrance qualification of Std. VII whereas 50 per cent of the whites (85 out of 170) had to be exempted.

The dismal catalogue above may be partly explained by the gap between the expressed aims and aspirations of people on the one hand and their 'ability' and achievements on the other. A survey into white manpower resources in this country, undertaken by the NIPR ⁹ in 1962, showed that a mere 10,4 per cent of the sample wished to work in the three lowest grades in the job hierarchy, i.e., supervisory, manual, responsible manual and service duties; semi-skilled operative and unskilled labourer, as opposed to the 25,4 per cent of the total white workforce, which according to the Census actually occupied these positions in 1951. However, 24 per cent of the sample indicated a desire to work in skilled manual occupations, a category which employed only 18,5 per cent of the economically active whites in 1951. The 'ability gap' for the NIPR was indicated by the fact that 16,5 per cent of the white males in the sample had only passed Std. VI and a further 17 per cent, Std. VII. ¹⁰ The authors, noting the increased participation of blacks in industry and the increased 'automation' expressed doubt as to whether a sufficient number of low-grade jobs could be found to occupy these people, many of whose occupational intentions they found to be "clearly out of keeping with their unwillingness, inability or both, to acquire some vocational qualifications". ¹¹

This observation is interesting. However, there is no **a priori** reason why a plasterer or a bricklayer or a welder should have higher educational qualifications. Although there appears to be a correlation between trade test results and educational level attained, ¹² the matter is far more complex than it appears and the use of educational standard as a surrogate for ability may be very misleading.

The problem of wastage should be mentioned. This is frequently described as a major source of loss to firms training apprentices. It is by no means clear exactly what the difficulties are, since the cause or fault may lie either with the apprentice or with the firm. Department of Labour Reports are not of much help here ¹³, the usual reasons given for rescission of contract are simply 'mutual agreement'.

Wastage occurs when an apprentice fails to sign a contract after it has been prepared, or when he rescinds from the contract some time after having signed it or when he simply absconds. Wastage also occurs when newly qualified artisans take up other occupations. If wastage rates become very high, it is true that they can become a major cost. Published figures, however, need to be treated with some care. Wastage rates calculated simply by expressing the difference between the year's intake and output as a percentage of the year's intake, can seriously overstate the problem. Even if 'averaging' is used it need not necessarily overcome the difficulty caused by the fact that a 3-4 year lag is operating in the system. Allowance should be made for the time taken for apprentices to qualify, in order to iron out the bulges which result from year by year fluctuations in the size of the intake.

An indication of the seriousness of the problem and at the same time of the sensitivity of the estimate to the assumptions used is given in Table I below.

Table I Estimation of Apprentice Wastage Rates [%] by differing methods - selected industries

Industry	'Lagged' Method	'Unlagged' Method
Building	7,4	5,1
Metal(Eng)	23,7	9,7
Motor	23,3	18,1
SAR & H	19,9	10,8

'Unlagged' rate-Average No. of Contracts registered annually 1969-1977

-Average No. of Contracts terminated annually 1969-1977

-Average No. of Contracts registered annually 1969-1977

'Lagged' rate-Average No. of Contracts registered annually 1968-1974

-Average No. of Contracts terminated annually 1971-1977

-Average No. of Contracts registered annually 1968-1974

Sources: RP93/1970, RP92/1973, RP110/1975, RP98/1976 and RP62/1978. Tables XV to XVI or XVII.

The Supply of Training

Apprentice training, as noted above, is undertaken on a substantial scale, in both the private and public sectors in South Africa. Since the motives or goals of these two groups frequently differ in significant ways, the results of their attempts at training are likely to do so as well.

Factors which affect the willingness of firms in the private sector, to train, will not be considered.

The conventional approach to the economics of training is provided by Becker's well-known human-capital theory.¹⁴ This theory has been extensively criticised¹⁵ but several useful hypotheses, in a predictive sense that is, may be drawn either from Becker's theory or some of its many variants. Briefly, the theory distinguishes 'general' from 'specific' training, general training being defined as that which is "useful in many firms besides that providing it", whereas specific training is "that which has no effect upon the productivity of trainees that would be useful in other firms". The implications of this are that the cost of training will be borne by the trainee in the case of purely general training and by the firm, in the case of purely specific training. The burden will be shared for mixes of general and specific skills. Woodward,¹⁶ noting that apprentice wages are not strictly geared to productivity, points out that the firm may earn a return (profit) on training by exploiting a differential that may exist between the predetermined apprentice wage level and the value of his contribution to production.

In order to maximise this contribution, the firm will have two sets of objectives which in the UK may, and in South Africa almost certainly do come into conflict. These objectives relate to production and to learning.

Productivity is obviously related to learning, but the amount of learning necessary to acquire a craft skill varies enormously. Hall & Miller observe that in the UK, it is not infrequently the case that "real learning is completed within the first few months of apprenticeship"¹⁷ The apprentice is then exploited by being placed on skilled work, and what is more, is aware of this exploitation.

Several trades, however, do not readily permit the process described above to take place and in these instances, the objectives of production and learning may be in strong conflict with each other.

Clearly the more rapid the learning process, the longer the firm can appropriate the gains which flow from the increased productivity. It is, of course, also the case that in some trades, fragmented jobs, normally done by operatives, can be handed to apprentices who have had very little learning.

In the UK, as Woodward shows,¹⁸ the potential for conflict between the objectives of production and of learning, may be reduced in the traditional on-the-job training situation by placing the apprentice in a low-skill occupation such as artisan's mate, where he serves as an alternative to the unskilled labourer who would normally occupy this position. At the same time, the apprentice learns the rudiments of the craft, developing skills which enable him to be switched to more 'productive' tasks.

This is possible in the UK because of the structure of wages for manual workers. Typical ratios of wages for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the UK would be in the region of 100:85:81. Apprentices in their first, second, third and fourth years, earn respectively 38%, 46%, 65% and 80% of the skilled man's wage.¹⁹

In South Africa, the possibility of reconciling the conflicting motives discussed above is considerably reduced by the existence of cheap black (mainly African) labour. An examination of the current Metal (Engineering) Industries Main Agreement²⁰ shows why this is so.

The schedule of wage rates in this group of industries for the period 1 July 1978 to 30 June 1979, is given below:²¹

Rate Classification	Rate per hour
Rate A and A1 (Skilled Artisan Rate)	R2,50
Rate AA	R1,97
rising to R2,10 after 12 months continuous employment with the same employer	
Rate AB	R1,83
Rate B	R1,75
Rate C	R1,70
Rate D	R1,65
Rate DD	R1,27

Rate DDD	R1,05
Rate E	R0,96
Rate F	R0,83
Rate G	R0,75
Rate H	R0,70
Rate I	R0.70

Job categories for which the rates A to D inclusive are payable were reserved for trade union members (S23.1), except where exemptions are granted in terms of Section 35.

Apprentices were paid according to the following schedule.²²

Per 45 hour week	cents per hour	As % of Rate A
(a) In three year trades		
First Year.....	87,5	35%
Second Year.....	100	40%
Third Year.....	125	50%
(b) In five year trades		
Fourth Year.....	150	60%
Fifth Year.....	219	80%

In addition to this, apprentices are paid an extra weekly allowance for educational attainments, ranging from R2,25 for Group I qualifications (e.g: Std. VII - ordinary - with 4 Std. VIII credits) to R20,25 for National Diploma for Technicians. It is unlikely that many apprentices attain much more than Group 3 (an extra R7,20 per week) or Group 4 (an extra R8,55 per week).²³ Notwithstanding this, however, of 3 638 apprentices whose contracts were registered in 1977, 2 922 had passed Std. VIII or better,²⁴ suggesting that a fairly large sum is paid out each year in education attainment allowances.

Another factor which increases the cost of employing apprentices, is the compulsory block release system of technical education where the apprentice usually spends 11 weeks during the first and a further 11 weeks during the second year of his apprenticeship receiving full time off-the-job instruction in trade theory and related subjects, during which time he must be paid his full wage by the firm. This effectively raises the cost of the apprentice to the firm by about 30 per cent per annum.

It is interesting to examine the numbers of job categories for the different rate classifications in the Metal (Engineering) Industries Main Agreement. Table II below, shows the approximate distribution at the lower end of the hierarchy.

Table II: Metal[Eng] Industries - Job Categories paying low wages

Schedule	Total No. of Job Categories	Rate DD No. of Job Categories	Rate DDD No. of Job Categories	Rate E No. of Job Categories	Rates F-I No. of Job Categories
G	345	10	14	6	146
M	117	1	1	1	77
D	1644	48	48	46	1076
E	126	4	4	0	71
Total	2232	67	67	53	1370

Source: Government Notice No. R 1112 of 2 June 1978 Gazette No. 6036.

It seems unlikely that first year apprentices can be used competitively in any job category for which the rate DDD or lower is applicable. Apprentices in their second year, it would appear, might need to be employed in jobs to which rate DD or higher applies.

In any event, the schedules of training laid down in the conditions of apprenticeship are so detailed and specific, the most recent agreement gives the recommended numbers of hours to be spent at each task, ²⁵ that the employer who can adhere to the conditions and yet earn a profit on a first or second year apprentice must have an organisational capacity approaching genius.

One characteristic of general training is that it is transferrable between firms; artisan training clearly embodies a large transfer element. Hall & Miller observe that 'if training is truly general then it would be patently unfair to expect a particular firm to pay for all such training of a person'. ²⁶ To help overcome this problem in the UK, the Industrial Training Act of 1964, fostered the establishment of training boards in industry, whose role was to supervise the whole range of training and 'to levy firms above a certain size on the basis of the firm's payroll or on a per capita basis and then pay back grants in relation to the actual training of the firm's personnel. This power to

levy was severely curtailed in 1973 and is in due course to be phased out'.²⁷

Similar schemes operate in this country, an example being the Metal and Engineering Industries Education and Training Fund. A Levy of R7,80 per month per employee on Rate A work (or work in designated trades, work under exemption and employees serving under Journeyman's Recognition Scheme contracts) is collected through the Industrial Councils.²⁸

Grants are paid on the basis of a formula to employers for each apprentice or technician or supervisor who qualifies.

The present value of the grant is R3 200 if the apprentice passes his trade test and R2 400 if he becomes an artisan by effluxion of time, i.e., he serves 4 years for a nominal 3 year apprenticeship. According to Table IV, on average roughly 70 per cent of all apprentices in the metal (engineering) industry fail their trade tests. One may therefore question whether the R600 per annum is sufficient to cover all of the costs of those firms which make a serious attempt to adhere to laid-down training schedules.

In the UK, they can afford the luxury of abandoning the levy and grant system, but in this country it looks as if the implications for training of scrapping the grant and levy scheme could well be crucial. It is strange that the scheme was only introduced in October 1970, 25 years after it became known that skill shortages were going to be a serious and continuing problem. However, it has been said that great difficulty was experienced in persuading all firms in the association to join. Many firms apparently take the view that it is cheaper to pay a premium rate for artisans, rather than subscribe to a collective effort to solve the problem.

Rising Black Wages - Implications for Apprentice Wage

Wages of African workers have been rising more rapidly in recent times than those of whites. This is in line with expressed government policy of reducing the 'wage gap', as a means of reducing social pressure.

Table III shows how minimum wages, average actual wages and average earnings for fitters and turners (artisans) and African labourers on the Witwatersrand have changed.

In columns 11, 12 and 13 of the table, skilled/unskilled differentials, as ref-

Table III Minimum & Average Actual Weekly Wage Rates, Average Weekly, Earnings (Rands) Engineering Industry, Witwatersrand

Year	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10		11		12		13					
	Fitter &/or Turner												African Labourer																	
	Minimum Weekly Wage	Average Actual Wage	Average Weekly Earnings	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Minimum Weekly Wage	Average Actual Wage	Average Weekly Earnings	7	8	9	10	11	12	13					
1969	43,20	59,36	79,42	1,37	1,84	8,55	11,66	41,24	1,36	1,67	5,05	5,09	5,58																	
1970	47,25	66,87	88,06	1,42	1,86	9,45	12,96	15,67	1,37	1,66	5,00	5,16	5,62																	
1971	47,25	71,78	97,47	1,52	2,06	9,45	14,00	17,34	1,48	1,83	5,00	5,13	5,62																	
1972	47,25	75,69	100,60	1,60	2,13	9,45	15,12	18,58	1,60	1,97	5,00	5,01	5,41																	
1973	60,75	85,73	118,14	1,41	1,94	10,80	15,81	21,57	1,46	2,00	5,63	5,42	5,48																	
1974	78,75	108,86	141,82	1,38	1,80	17,55	20,84	26,31	1,19	1,50	4,49	5,22	5,39																	
1975	85,50	122,45	160,18	1,43	1,87	20,25	25,83	33,16	1,28	1,64	4,22	4,74	4,83																	
1976	94,50	136,98	165,82	1,45	1,75	24,75	31,28	35,93	1,26	1,45	3,82	4,38	4,62																	
1977	98,10	155,48	176,59	1,58	1,80	26,55	33,62	38,80	1,27	1,46	3,69	4,62	4,55																	

Sources: Labour Statistics Report 01-20-02 Table 2.1 Department of Labour Report 01-20-05 Table 2.1 Department of Labour

lected in minimum weekly wage, average actual wage and average weekly earnings, are given.

Most noticeable is the increase in minimum wages for labourers and the corresponding decline in the differential between that group and the skilled workers.

One interesting side effect of the increases in African wages is that they appear almost to have made white apprentice employment into a paying proposition. This was probably not the case in the past, as Table III suggests. If it is difficult to employ apprentices productively now whilst still providing adequate training, in the period before 1970 this must have been even more so. Apprentice wages were approximately 37%, 46%, 55% and 65% of the Rate A minimum wage in 1970 i.e., R17,55; R21,60; R26,10 and R30,60. The first year minimum apprentice wage is well above the average African weekly earnings (including overtime).²⁹

By calculating the growth rates of minimum and actual wage rates for the two groups, the workings of two completely different sets of forces may be exposed. Both minimum and average wages for labourers are rising faster than those of the artisans, which probably reflects official policy.

In the case of the labourers, minimum wage is growing faster than average actual wage whereas for the artisans the reverse is true, which apparently reflects market forces. These effects are noticeable over the 8-year period, they become even stronger over the period 1973-1977. If, as is presently being mooted in some quarters of the industry, apprentice wages are in future simply maintained as fixed percentages of the Rate A minimum wage, then the trend discussed immediately above could further affect the relative attractiveness of artisans and labourers. It appears from an examination of Col.4 in Table III that in the case of the skilled workers, wage settlements have a ratchet-like course. Whenever the ratio actual average wage/minimum wage, becomes too high, minimum wages receive a healthy boost. Thus an increasing gap between the actual and minimum wages will push up apprentice wages as well.

The importance of spreading the burden in an economic system where the rational pursuit of individual ends helps to produce the sorts of difficulties discussed above, appears to be becoming increasingly obvious to other sectors of South African industry as well. The most recent prescription of con-

ditions of apprenticeship in the building industry³⁰ goes even further than the Metal and Engineering Industry Fund in that it makes provision for full-time off-the-job practical training of 12 weeks in the first year and 3 weeks per year thereafter. This training is to be provided by the Building Industries Recruitment and Training Fund (funds obtained from levies on member firms) and whilst the apprentice is receiving training, the fund, **not** the employer pays his salary. The training period is in addition to the period spent at the technical college on 'block release'.

Past experience has shown quite clearly that intensive off-the-job training, improves markedly the quality of training received by apprentices.³¹ Although such moves have not been unanimously welcomed, they appear to be a significant improvement on the sit-by-Nelly methods of training, reportedly in common use.

Quality of Training & Trade Test Results

The quality of training provided by employers in different sectors, as measured by trade test results, may be used to obtain some indication of the importance which the employers attach to the learning as opposed to the production aspects of apprentice employment. If the private sector has little financial incentive³² to train, then one might reasonably expect public sector results to be better than private sector, primarily because public sector firms and institutions are not bound by the same constraints as are firms in the private sector.

Success rates for the major trainers of apprentices are given in Table IV; there are striking differences between the performance of the different groups.

The constancy of results in the building industry from 1964 onwards obviously invites comment but defies explanation for the moment. The relatively good results achieved by the motor industry apprentices, apparently contradicts the hypothesis that the private sector will provide lower quality training than the public sector. However, the motor trade is unusual in that the number of designated trades is much lower than that in any of the other major trainers. Apprentices are also concentrated in far fewer trades than any of the other sectors examined (see Table VII in this article). In 1977, 61 per cent of all the artisans and 66 per cent of all the apprentices were employed in the trade of 'motor mechanic',³³. This suggests that it is a simple matter

Table IV Summary of Trade Test Results, 1963 - 1977 : Selected Industries.

	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977
Building	* 25 ** 437 *** 104	34 431 146	35 358 126	38 301 113	35 284 98	35 334 118	36 717 255	37 906 338	39 1 094 426	36 1 049 378	35 1 204 422	34 1 666 569	35 1 401 497	37 940 344	33 1 064 356
Metal (Engineering)	* 25 ** 1 116 *** 277	37 1 191 442	39 1 415 534	28 1 478 412	22 1 697 377	27 2 070 552	26 2 515 655	25 2 606 664	27 3 536 958	29 2 708 789	31 2 849 897	31 3 284 1 009	31 3 172 986	36 3 221 1 166	35 4 107 1 422
Motor	* 28 ** 876 *** 247	53 611 325	46 868 401	56 878 492	47 974 457	44 1 175 515	46 1 479 673	44 1 356 596	48 1 773 858	51 2 096 1065	56 1 754 979	52 2 114 1 094	49 2 158 1 060	50 1 785 890	47 2 092 976
South African Railways and Harbours	* 40 ** 533 *** 215	43 518 224	36 642 229	32 793 251	30 848 253	28 874 249	34 1 432 480	34 1 781 605	37 1 580 1 86	44 1 375 609	45 1 364 616	43 1 312 570	48 1 627 773	51 1 594 815	59 1 491 872

Sources: RP 65/1966, RP 68/1968, RP 93/1970, RP 92/1973, RP 110/1975, RP 98/1976 and RP 62/1978 - Table XIX in each case.

* Percentage Pass Rate.

** Number Entering.

*** Number Passing.

to provide adequate training in the industry.

However, the most interesting contrast is between the SAR & H apprentices and the Metal (Engineering) Industry apprentices. Over the 15 year period under examination, nearly 37 000 apprentices from the latter industries entered and a mere 11 100 or so passed, whereas about 17 800 SAR & H apprentices were tested of whom over 7 300 passed.

It is possible that the introduction of the levy and grant scheme in the metal industries is responsible for the improvement in the results after 1970, however, the improvement in the SAR & H results is even more striking. The pass rate in the Metal (Engineering) Industry is given a boost by the presence in its midst of the large state-owned steel producer, ISCOR. This corporation contributes more than proportionately to the quantity of training supply by the industry³⁴ and its apprentices achieved markedly better trade test results as Table V clearly shows.

Table V

Comparative Trade Test Results in the Metal (Engineering) Industry

	Total Metal(Eng)	Iscor	The Rest
No. Entering 1976	3221	776	2445
1977	4107	797	3310
No. Passing 1976	1166	385	781
1977	1422	432	990
Pass Rate (%) 1976	36,2	49,6	31,9
1977	34,6	54,2	29,9

Source: Table III + Information supplied by Iscor

These results seem to bear out the widely-held belief that public sector apprentice training facilities and programmes, are in general superior to those offered by the private sector.

Labour Turnover & Apprentice Training

There appears to be a connection between labour turnover and excess demand for artisans, which, might help to explain some of the serious shortages of apprentices reported in the past.

Turnover can affect the notional 'establishment' level of artisans and hence of apprentices in three ways. Firstly, there is the problem of wastage, already

referred to, in which trained men are lost to the industry. The extent of this problem is not known, but it is said to be serious.

Secondly, lost time between jobs increases the number of men required to perform a given amount of work, and thirdly, time spent acquiring specific skills is wasted, raising further, the number of workers required to do a given amount of work. If artisan occupations required perfectly general skills, and there was no lost production due to lost manhours during the job changes, the only costs to firms and to the economy would be the administrative one. However, the likelihood is that all jobs embody some specific skills - to the extent that this is true, firms suffer increasing losses through labour turnover, especially if the need to pay premium rates for artisans limits their ability to pass on the cost of the specific training to the artisan.

The findings of a study on the SEIFSA group by the Langenhoven & Verster³⁵ are of considerable interest. They confirm the widely obtained result that separation is most likely to occur shortly after joining the firm - in the case of artisans, 62 per cent of the job terminators left within six months of joining the firm,³⁶ precisely that period during which it seems likely that the worker will acquire those skills, if any, which are specific to the firm. The 'lost time' aspect also appears to be important: in a follow-up study, they estimated, on the basis of some plausible assumptions, that, in the case of operators, the loss to the economy due to lost time between jobs exceeded the loss due to reported shortages.³⁷

Turnover was observed to increase sharply as one descended the job hierarchy, the earlier survey revealing a chronic 58% turnover for artisans as opposed to 13,7% for engineers.³⁸ This is probably at least partly explained by what may be termed 'apathy' among workers at the low end of the job hierarchy. It was found that 'lack of aptitude and/or interest' and 'instability or unadaptability of workers' were both far more important as reason for termination at the low end (artisans and operators) whereas 'insufficient opportunities for independent action, promotion and self-realisation', were more important reasons for termination at the top end (engineers and technicians).³⁹

Excess Demand for Artisans, the supply of training and the business cycle

It has been claimed on a number of occasions that the skill shortage in South Africa is cause for anxiety. A recent example of an influential pronounce-

Table IV: Distribution of Artisans & Apprentices by Race, in Major Sectors Employing Artisans, 1977

	Artisans				Apprentices			
	White	Col.	Asian	Black	White	Col.	Asian	Black
00 All Sectors	167 980	34 892	6 175	4 668	35 986	7 478	1 848	857
05 Construction	25 671	20 193	2 244	1 322	2 174	3 632	813	178
27 Motor Trade	10 470	1 440	370	278	4 431	678	221	23
05 + 27	36 141	21 633	2 614	1 600	6 605	4 310	1 034	201
A % Total	21,5%	62,0%	42,3	34,3%	18,4%	57,6%	56,0%	23,5%
21 Metal Products	9 727	2 414	248	69	1 199	747	106	11
22 Machinery	8 395	664	85	295	1 785	201	12	-
23 Elec. Machinery	5 383	122	47	39	926	94	75	-
25 Trans. Equipment	7 370	1 083	280	18	1 199	180	3	-
21 + 22 + 23 + 25	30 875	4 283	560	421	5 109	1 222	196	11
B % Total	18,4%	12,3%	10,7	9,0%	14,2%	16,3%	10,6%	1,3%
20 Basic Metal	7 676	53	3	-	4 189	110	106	-
30 Local Authorities	3 036	453	339	282	371	11	70	90
31 Elec. Gas & Water	6 173	186	9	21	1 077	33	37	-
35 Govt. & Prov. Admin.	10 310	646	4	12	3 371	396	38	-
37 SAR & H	13 515	-	-	-	7 514	-	-	-
20 + 30 + 31 + 35 + 37	40 710	1 338	355	315	16 522	550	251	90
C % Total	24,2%	3,8%	5,7	6,7%	45,9%	7,4%	13,6%	10,5%
A + B + C%	64,1%	78,1%	58,7	50,0%	78,5%	81,3%	80,2	35,3%

Source: Manpower Survey No.12 Sector Groups. Department of Labour

ment of this sort may be found in the Wiehahn Commission Report. The Commission echoed the concern expressed in economic circles that a 'serious' shortage of artisans could exist in the depths of a depression. This phenomenon is, however, not peculiar to a developing country like South Africa. Serious shortages of artisans were reported during the recent slump in the United Kingdom.⁴⁰ Apart from which, the statistics on artisan shortages are somewhat misleadingly interpreted in the Report. Manpower Survey No.12 "All Industries and Occupations" has apparently been used to analyse the location of the shortages. The most serious shortages are stated to be in the 'metal, electrical, motor and building industries'.⁴¹ However, Table VII below, which is produced from the data presented in Manpower Survey No.12 'Sector Groups' locates the serious shortages of artisans in Sector 20 'Basic Metals'⁴² Sector 35 'Government and Provincial Authorities', and Sector 37 'South African Railways and Harbours' with the really significant shortages occurring in the latter two sectors⁴³. If 'motor industry, building industry and electrical industry' are used in their conventional sense, i.e., the sector groups in the Manpower Survey by Sector Group, then the analysis is clearly wrong. Actual shortages in these industries are trivial, as one would expect.

The distribution of artisans and apprentices by race, in the major sectors employing artisans is shown in Table VI. The most striking feature of the distribution is its whiteness, particularly in the public sector and public corporations. This appears to confirm the claims that restrictive racist practises are impeding growth. However, one is obliged to ask, how many more artisans are required and in which sectors?

Detailed analysis of trends in the occupational structure of the South African workforce is difficult because of the shortness of the period for which reliable information is available.⁴⁴ Shortages of artisans and apprentices by sector of employment is available for the year 1977 only. In spite of these limitations, however, examination of the data permits some interesting conclusions to be drawn.

Abstracting for the moment from the formidable difficulties involved in establishing the desired level of skilled worker employment in any particular industry, one may use the published data on artisan and apprentice employment as a yardstick by which to measure the relative importance of investment in training, undertaken by different employers in the economy.

Data for some of the major employers of artisans and trainers of apprentices is given in Table VII.

In any particular sector, one may use as indicators of the importance of this investment (i) the relative proportional contribution to apprentice training made by the sector and (ii) the reported shortage of apprentices in the sector. The artisan/apprentice ratio may be used to measure contribution to training. This measure, when read in conjunction with the artisan/total workforce ratio for the firm is an indication of the importance of artisans in the particular sector and also of the view on apprentice training taken by the sector - clearly a sector requiring many artisans and training a mere handful must 'acquire' its supply elsewhere.

It may be argued that the second measure given an indication of the views of the different sectors on future developments - in terms of this measure it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that the time of the last Manpower Survey, all sectors of the South African economy regarded the stock of apprentices as sufficient for the medium term, because as the data in the Survey shows, the reported shortages of apprentices are too small relatively speaking, in almost every sector except Coal Mining (Sector No.3), to be regarded as significant.

Two groupings of employers, one private sector and the other mainly public sector, train 64% of all apprentices. They are (i) Sect No. 5 Building and Construction and Sector No. 27 Motor Trade and (ii) the public authorities or corporations, namely Sector 20 'Basic Metals', Sector 30 'Local Authorities', Sector 31 'Electricity, Gas and Water'. Sector 35 'Government and Provincial Administration' and Sector 37 'South African Railways and Harbours'. The sectors in the second group are also those which reported the most serious shortages of artisans in 1977.

In Table VII it will be observed that four sectors which employ a relatively large proportion of artisans viz. Sectors, 21, 22, 23 and 25 (9,3 to 12,4% of total labour force) have high artisan/apprentice ratios (4,72 to 6,33), whereas Sectors 20, 35 and 37 have artisan apprentices ratios ranging from 1,76 to 2,88.

Sectors 21, Metal Products, 22, Machinery; 23, Electrical Machinery and 25, Transport and Equipment, are all major growth industries. Together they employed more than 359 000 workers. Of these, 6 538 were appren-

Table VII Artisan/Apprentice Ratios & Shortages in Major Sectors Employing Artisans 1977

Sector Number	05 Building & Constr.	20 Basic Metal	21 Metal Products	22 Machi- nery	23 Elect. Mach.	25 Trans. Equip.	27 Motor Trade	35 Govt., & Prov. Admin.	37 SAR & H	Total 9 Sectors	Total All Sectors
Artisans Total	49 430	7 732	12 458	9 439	5 591	8 751	12 558	10 972	13 515	130 446	213 715
Apprentices Total	6 797	1 050	2 063	1 998	1 095	1 382	5 353	3 805	7 514	34 412	46 169
Workforce Total	436 849	261 094	134 441	75 845	62 070	86 750	114 456	544 788	252 351	1 968 644	5 289 415
Artisans/Apprentices	7,27	1,76	6,04	4,72	5,11	6,33	2,35	2,88	1,80	3,79	4,63
Artisans/Workforce %	11,3%	3,0%	9,3%	12,4%	9,0%	10,1%	11,0%	2,0%	5,4%	6,6%	4,0%
Apprentices/Workforce %	1,6%	1,7%	1,5%	2,6%	1,8%	1,6%	4,7%	0,7%	3,0%	1,7%	0,9%
Shortages											
Artisans	168	931	38	87	6	88	131	3 799	2 209	7 457	9 667
Apprentices	30	9	4	12	-	26	56	109	-	246	597
Employment in Major Trades	†† 15/49	1:2	7/52	7/44	8/32	9/54	4/22	9/58	11/44		
Artisans	44 351	5 252	9 762	6 851	3 682	6 456	10 886	7 134	10 022		
% Total	89,7%	67,9%	78,4%	72,6%	65,9%	73,8%	86,7%	65,0%	74,2%		
Apprentices	6 280	3 563	1 779	1 514	676	1 176	4 948	2 958	4 931		
% Total	92,4%	80,9%	86,2%	75,8%	61,7%	85,1%	92,4%	77,7%	65,6%		
Artisans/Apprentices	7,06	1,47	5,49	4,53	5,44	5,49	2,20	2,41	2,03		

Source: Manpower Survey No. 12. All Industries and Occupations. Department of Labour and Manpower Survey No. 12. Sector Groups. Department of Labour.

Note: There are a further 8 818 Section 'C' artisans, i.e. women of whom approximately 67% are ladies hairdressers. There are also 16 959 skilled workers or learners registered in terms of the Black Building Workers Act.

† Values for shortages in the different sectors were obtained by applying a scale factor (supplied by the Department of Labour) for the shortages of White artisans to the figures for apprentices and artisans of other races. The majority of reported shortages were for White male artisans.

†† 15/49 means - the 15 largest trades of 49 designated trades in the industry employ 89,7% of the total number of artisans in the sector and 92,4% of the apprentices.

tices. The SAR & H on the other hand, employed approximately 252 000 workers, of whom 7 514 were apprentices, i.e. there were nearly 1 000 fewer apprentices in four growth sectors, whose total employment exceeded that of the Railways by far. If one adds in Sector 05, Building and Construction, and Sector 27, Motor Trade, total employment in the six predominantly private sector groups, 21, 22, 23, 25, 05 and 27, rises to over 910 000, the apprentice population rises to 18 688, whereas reported shortages of apprentices totalled a mere 128, less than 0,7 per cent. Reported artisan shortage in these groups is 518 in an artisan population of more, than 98 000, i.e., slightly more than 0,5 per cent.

The most one can say with any reasonable certainty is that at the time of the survey, apprentice and artisan shortages appear to have been a minor problem. This is hardly unexpected, as the economy was approaching the bottom point of the longest downswing in the post-war period. However, the results raise intriguing questions. The lead time on artisan training is 3-4 years. The economy was confidently expected to 'bottom-out' in late 1977. Did the private sector groups above not subscribe to this view? Did they have alternate solutions, such as increased fragmentation, in mind for the skill shortages which began to be reported soon after the upturn commenced in 1978? ⁴⁵ What kind of phenomena are these reported shortages anyway?

Employment of white, coloured and Asian artisans and apprentices in the building trades fell by 8 724 to 61 246, from 1975 to 1977 whereas the reported shortage of these workers fell by only 241 to 1 606. ⁴⁶ Why does a shortage persist when the level of employment is falling?

The explanation would appear to be linked with the cyclical changes in the level of economic activity in capitalist countries and the emergence of institutions such as trade unions, part of whose function is to protect its members against the worst results of the workings of the market.

Thus it is to be expected that intense pressure will be exerted on the skilled labour force during the upswing, with firms attempting to lower hiring standards, ⁴⁷ whereas in the downswing, it has been observed in the UK, that skilled artisans leave their trades altogether, to seek more secure positions. ⁴⁸

These forces, when coupled with the possible unprofitability of apprentice training, provide a challenge to the received truth that shortages result

mainly from restrictive practises.

Structural Change and the Demand for Skilled Workers

The problem with the skill shortage melody is that it has been played too often. Over the years, various authorities have taken it upon themselves to pronounce on this important matter. Gibson⁴⁹ for example, quotes an Education Panel prediction made in 1961 which estimated that 49 000 apprentices would have to be in training in 1965 and 110 000 in 1980, to meet the demand for artisans. With the benefit of hindsight we know that only 46 000 apprentices were in training in 1977 and we also know that shortages were negligible.

Despite predictions to the contrary, the economy experienced, in the 30 years from the end of the war, the longest and most rapid period of growth in its history. Of all the downswings which occurred in the post war period it appears that only one⁵⁰ was 'caused' by 'labour shortages' (presumably skilled labour shortages).

To say this is not to deny that serious shortages have existed from time to time. Yet, it would be extremely difficult to prove in the absence of these shortages, the South African economy could have grown much faster. In any event, since statistics have been presented on the reasons for the under-utilization of productive capacity⁵¹, by far the most important cause of under use has been the lack of effective demand.

There are many ways to increase the level of output in the firm. The simple and obvious way in a labour rich economy is to employ more men. However, when the workforce contains a large proportion of skilled manual workers, and the wage bill represents a significant fraction of total costs of production, the incentive to employ more skilled men is not high.

Hunter and Robertson⁵² draw attention to the declining relative importance of skilled manual occupations in virtually all industries in Britain, and Galbraith⁵³ remarks that:

"the industrial system reduces relatively, and it seems probable, absolutely, its requirement for blue-collared workers both skilled and unskilled....

Machines do easily and well what is done by repetitive physical effort unguided by **significant intelligence**. Accordingly they compete most effectively with physical labour including that of **no slight dexterity and skill**. Given the factor cost configuration in this country, namely cheap black operatives, expensive white artisans and relatively inexpensive machinery and equipment available on often highly competitive markets overseas, one of the simplest ways to increase output and productivity, is to mechanize.

Another way to raise output per man is by increasing the division of labour i.e., by job fragmentation, which once again given the factor cost configuration in South Africa, is entirely 'rational'. Not unsurprisingly, this process can generate intense conflict between employers and unions, the latter regarding it perhaps justifiably, as a violation of their prerogatives. A reason frequently given for urging fragmentation is 'skill shortages'. The validity of such claims is often not beyond doubt.⁵⁴ Both of these processes, mechanization and fragmentation, have been important in the post-war development spurt, but the definitive analysis of their primary causes has not yet been written. Although, lip service is occasionally paid to the notion of 'appropriate technology' most percipient analysts understand that this is a non-starter without massive government intervention to alter relative factor prices. However, mechanization as a cure to the 'low productivity' problems which are said to plague this economy, has long been advocated.⁵⁵

Unrelenting pressure to increase the wages of black workers, whose productivity it is often asserted, does not rise in proportion to the largesse now flowing their way, may lead to increased pressures to accelerate the pace of mechanization. If it is true as argued above, that artisan labour becomes relatively less important as the economy grows, then one should observe a decline in the ratio artisans/modern sector labour force! However, it appears from Table VIII that for the period for which we have data, this ratio has increased slightly over time. What is the explanation of this apparent contradiction? A detailed examination of Table VIII provides part of the answer. As economies develop and grow, the 'old' industries such as 'food, clothing, furniture, tobacco, leather products and shoes' decline in relative importance whilst the group 'basic metal, metal, products, machinery, electrical machinery and transport equipment' increases in relative importance. Of the declining group, only furniture has a high artisan/total workforce ratio, and this industry's contribution to net output is so small that changes in the relative level of output are not very significant for employment.

Table VIII Structural Changes in Employment in Major Sectors Employing Artisans, 1960 to 1976

	Number of Employees (All Races)			Rates of Growth of Employment (All Races) %p.a. Compound		
	1960	1969	1976	60-76	60-69	69-76
Total No. of Artisans		181 132	216 282			2,57
Total No. Current Apprenticeship Contracts	26 618	35 961	35 634	1,90	3,40	-0,13
Total Empl: Govt. + Mining + Mfg. + Constr + Motor trade	2 219 195	3 065 233	3 610 870	,09	3,65	2,37
Construction	130 847	314 900	446 900	7,98	10,25	5,13
Motor Trade	67 762	94 500	110 800	2,12	3,76	2,30
Metal Products	69 393	107 000	<u>123 800</u> +(5 362)	<u>3,68</u> 3,95	4,93	<u>2,11</u> 2,73
Machinery	30 035	67 900	<u>78 100</u> +(5 673)	<u>6,15</u> 6,62	9,49	<u>2,02</u> 3,05
Electrical Machinery	20 334	40 700	62 900	7,30	7,99	6,42
Transport Equipment	30 129	72 700	<u>92 700</u> +(7 731)	<u>7,28</u> 7,82	10,28	<u>3,53</u> 4,73
Basic Metal	40 306	70 400	<u>106 900</u> -(9 561)	<u>6,29</u> 5,67	6,39	<u>6,15</u> 4,74
Local Authority	151 459	176 200	228 000	2,59	1,70	3,75
Electricity	15 050	20 139	37 300	5,84	3,29	9,20
Govt. & Prov. Admin.	358 875	507 625	587 292	3,13	3,93	2,10
SAR & H	217 992	224 606	255 938	1,01	0,33	1,88

Sources: South African Statistics 1974 and 1978. Department of Statistics. Manpower Surveys No. 8, No. 11 and No. 12. Annual Reports - Department of Labour Nos. RP6 - 1961 (Table XVI p.13) RP90 - 1977 (Table XVI p.17) RP93 - 1970 (Table XVI p.207) RP62 - 1978 (Table XVI p.18)

Notes to Table VIII

1. Total employment in this table differs from that in Table I above by the exclusion of the sectors Commerce, Finance and Insurance, because of difficulty of obtaining consistent time series.
2. Total number of artisans for 1976 was obtained by averaging the 1975

and 1977 figures from Manpower Surveys Nos. 11 and 12.

3. The apparent large jump in the apprentice numbers from 1976 to 1977 (See above and also Table I) is explained by reference to the different sources of the respective figures. Those given in Table I are from Manpower No. 12 and presumably include apprentices who have not yet signed contracts. The figures in Table III are current contracts. By 1977, current contracts had declined to 33 238.
4. The series for employment in Basic Metal, Metal Products, Machinery, Transport Equipment and several other industries, is discontinuous because of a reclassification in 1970. An attempt has been made to overcome this difficulty by adding back in the number of employees removed in the 1970 change, to the 1976 figure. Two sets of growth rates are given, the upper used the amended figures and the lower the figures as they are given. The figures for employment in the Basic Metal Industry differ in Tables and because their sources (Manpower Survey No. 12 All Sectors & SA Statistics 1978 respectively) differ.
5. Some of the figures for 1960 are not available for the calendar year but rather 1959 - 1960 or 1960 - 1961. The latter figures have been used where necessary.

The group of fast growing industries all employ relatively large percentages of artisans, which helps to explain why the growth rate in the number of artisans is higher than the growth rate of modern sector employment as a whole. On closer examination it will be observed that the growth rates of employment in all of these industries was in excess, sometimes considerably, of the growth rate in the number of artisans. Growth rates in the numbers of apprentices have been below growth rates in total employment for the whole of the period and the negative growth rate for the period 1969 to 1976 has been cause for serious concern.

It is clear that the very modest growth rates in the numbers of apprentices could not possibly have maintained artisan/total workforce ratios at anything near constancy, especially among the rapidly growing group. Assuming that the figures for artisans in 1969 and 1976, shown in Table are accurate and assuming that the artisan/total workforce ratios given in Table were maintained, 63,5% of the reported increase in the number of artisans would have been absorbed by 6 sectors (Construction, Metal Products, Machinery,

Transport Equipment, Motor Trade and SAR & H), 39,4% of the total increase being absorbed in construction alone, the remainder having to satisfy the requirements of the other 32 sectors, which employed more than 50 per cent of the total number of artisans.

Conclusions

Three conclusions may be drawn. The first is concerned with the difference in both quantity and quality, of the training offered respectively by the private and public sectors. Using trade test results as a measure, the latter sector is, with very few exceptions, a vastly superior trainer of artisans (as one would expect). Judging by artisan/apprentice ratios, the public sector does far more than its share of training, yet presumably because of its less than competitive artisan salary structure, suffers acute shortages.

It is not difficult to discover reasons for this difference. An examination of the economics of training in the private sector, strongly suggests that even in those industries where a grant and levy scheme operates, it is difficult for a firm to recoup training expenses and provide adequate training. The basic reason for this is the existence of the cheap black labour force which discourages firms from using apprentices as inexpensive artisan's mates, as is the custom in the UK. Apprentice wages cannot be driven down low enough to make them competitive with the lower paid blacks. Even so, by comparison with the UK, apprentice wages in South Africa are a smaller proportion of the skilled rate, making the trades relatively unattractive.

'Wastage' of apprentices was considered and it was revealed that this important indicator of the efficacy of selection procedures or possibly of 'input' quality, is highly sensitive to the assumptions used to calculate it. Vaguely specified wastage rates can be used to make the apprentices appear to be a thoroughly shiftless lot.

Labour turnover, which is clearly connected with skill shortages and with the general level of economic activity, may be as serious a problem as skill shortages, yet is nevertheless very imperfectly understood. A large proportion of the difficulties which lead to turnover, originate in the job or work situation itself. The explanation for this could lie in the failure of the workers to identify with the goals of the firm - an entirely logical response, if one assumes that the aims of the two groups differ considerably.

The second conclusion is that the extent of skill shortages is very difficult to determine and consequently published estimates need to be treated with the greatest circumspection. The alleged shortage of apprentices is shown to be at variance with the 'facts' and what is more, the location, and hence the significance of shortages does not appear to be very well understood. As a result, vague and misleading generalisations continue to be made.

Finally it is suggested that future development in South Africa will require proportionately fewer artisans and hence that extrapolation of past trends, which leads to highly alarmist conclusions is simply bad analysis.

Competition in an economic system between two groups, one a group of privately owned firms whose interests lie in profit maximisation and hence in cost minimization and control, and the other a body of workers whose interests lie in preservation of achieved status through a degree of control over the labour process, must produce continual conflict. The skilled labour shortage is one result of this conflict. This applies wherever the craft system remains strong.

Notes and References

1. See Hall K & Miller I, **Restraining & Tradition, the Skilled Worker in an Era of Change**, George Allen & Unwin, London 1975. They argue on p.49 that maximum numbers are the province of trade unions in so far as trade unions often put a limit on the apprentices/journeymen ratio as a technique of control. But as employers cannot be forced to take apprentices against their will, minimum numbers cannot be enforced by trade unions. Indeed it is very doubtful whether unions are much interested in minimum numbers of apprentices. They are much more concerned with preventing a glut which could lead to unemployment and a reduction of earnings, which is a perfectly understandable strategy for trade unions to follow, yet may lead to a chronic shortage of certain skills to the detriment of the economy.
2. **Royal Commission on Trade Unions & Employers Associations Cmnd 3623 (1968)**, pp.87-88, quoted in Hall & Miller *op cit*, pp. 49-50.
3. Hall & Miller, *op cit*, p.50.
4. *Ibid*, p.48.
5. There is a growing literature on this topic. The seminal work is Harry Braverman's **Labour & Monopoly Capital the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century**, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1974.
6. W.H. Hutt, **The Economics of the Colour Bar**, Andre Deutsch, London, 1964. p.74.
7. W. M. de Waard, **Apprentice Education**, Paper read to the South African Institute of Certi-

- fied Electrical & Mechanical Engineers, 1963, pp 44 & 45.
8. J. L. Gibson, **A Study of Education for Industry in South Africa and its relationship to Industrial Growth 1922-1969**, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1976, p.427.
 9. **A Survey of some Aspects of White Manpower Resources in the Republic of South Africa**, National Institute for Personnel Research, Johannesburg, 1962
 10. **ibid.**, Table 3, p.13.
 11. **ibid.**, p.19.
 12. See for example the trade test results of apprentices in the printing trades - they accept relatively few apprentices with less than Std. VIII.
 13. Formerly these reports gave reasons for rescissions, but these were not systematically analysed. Present practice is simply to give the bald statistics for contracts rescinded, by industry.
 14. Becker, G, "Investment in human capital: a theoretical analysis", **Journal of Political Economy**, Vol. 70, October 1962, Supplement.
 15. See for example Carter, M.J, **To abstain or not to abstain [Is that the question?]** in J. Schwarz, (ed) **The Subtle Anatomy of Capitalism**, Goodyear, Santa Monica, 1977.
 16. Woodward, N, "The economic evaluation of apprentice training", **Industrial Relations Journal**, Vol. 6 No. 1, Spring 1975, p.34.
 17. Hall & Miller, **op cit.**, p.50.
 18. Woodward, **op cit.**, p.34.
 19. **ibid.**, p.33.
 20. Govt. Notice No. R1112, Gazette No. 2636 of 2 June 1978.
 21. Govt. Notice No. R1319, Gazette No. 6083 of 23 June 1978.
Most of the employers in the industries are members of the association known as SEIFSA, the Steel & Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa.
 22. Govt. Notice No. R1157, Gazette No. 6035 of 2 June 1978.
 23. Govt. Notice No. R1720, Gazette No. 5296 of 24 September 1976.
 24. RP62/1978, Table XVIII.
 25. Govt. Notice No. R1720 **op cit.**
 26. Hall & Miller, **op cit.**, p.52. This, of course, is true only if the firm cannot recover its costs of training or better still, make a profit on the trainee.
 27. **ibid.**, p.49.
 28. Govt. Notice No. R1481, Gazette No. 2809 of 11 September 1970.
 29. Govt. Notice No. R828, Gazette No. 2717 of 29 May 1970.
 30. Govt. Notice No. E1875, Gazette No. 6643 of 31 August 1979.
 31. See Gibson, **op cit.**, p.425. A training centre for the coal mines was established at Witbank in 1967. In 1958, 7,8% of colliery apprentices passed their trade tests - by 1969, this had risen to 55%.
 32. If a single capitalist abstains from investing in training the consequences are not serious, however collective abstinence will clearly lead to serious shortages - thus what is rational for the individual is not so for the collectivity.
 33. **Manpower Survey No.12, Sector Groups**, Dept. of Labour, April 1977, p.177,

34. Iscor employs approx 18% of the workers in the metal (engineering) industries, (depending on which figures one uses to estimate total employment) and they train about 33% of the apprentices.
35. **Personnel in the S.A. Iron, Steel & Engineering Industry**, University of the Orange Free State, 1970, & **Follow-up Study on Labour Turnover** by the same authors, 1971.
36. **Ibid.**, (1970) Table 6, p.17.
37. **Ibid.**, (1971) p.39.
38. **Ibid.**, (1970) Table 3, p.14.
39. **Ibid.**, (1970) Table 8, p.21.
40. See Bank of England, **Quarterly Bulletin**, Vol. 18 No. 2, June 1978, p.159.
41. **Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Labour Legislation**, (Wiehahn Report) para.5.15.
42. ISCOR is by far the largest employer in this sector group, accounting for approx 60-70% of total employment.
43. Moderately serious shortages also exist in Sector No. 30, 'Local Authorities' & Sector No.31, 'Electricity, Gas & Water'.
44. Manpower Survey by Sector groups are available for 1973, 1975 and 1977 (Nos. 10, 11 & 12). However only No.12 shortages by sector group.
45. Figures for new contracts registered in 1977 show no undue increase over those for 1976 such as would lead one to suspect that firms were increasing employment in anticipation. See RP62/1978.
46. See **Manpower Surveys No. 10, 11 & 12, All Industries and Occupations**. Dept. of Labour.
47. See Reder M.W. **Wage Differentials** in McCormick & Owen Smith (eds) **The Labour Market** Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968, p.215.
48. Bank of England, **Quarterly Bulletin**, *op cit.*
49. Gibson, (1976) *op cit.*, p.378.
50. See D.J. Smit and B.E. van der Walt, "**Business Cycles in South Africa during the post-war period, 1946-1968**", **South African Reserve Bank Quarterly Bulletin**, September 1970. and D.J. Smit and B.E. van der Walt, "**Business Cycles in South Africa during the period 1968-1972**", **South African Reserve Bank Quarterly Bulletin**, June 1973. Blaug M, **An Introduction to the economics of education**, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972, p.159.
51. See South African Statistics, 1978, 1976 & 1974 Section 12 in each case.
52. Hunter L.C. & Robertson D.J. **Economics of Wages & Labour**, MacMillan, London, 1969, p.383.
53. Galbraith J.K. **The New Industrial State**, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972, p.239.
54. See Meth C.E. Are there skill shortages in the furniture industry? SALB, Vol. 4 No. 7, November 1978.
55. See **Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Export Trade of the Republic of South Africa**, (Reynolds Commission) RP69/72, p.110.

Interviews

The South African Society of Bank Officials

Interview with: Mr. Andre Malherbe, General Secretary and
Mr. Chalmers, Research and Information Officer

Mr. Malherbe joined SASBO as national organiser in 1960. Four years later he became Assistant General Secretary and in 1974 was promoted to the position of General Secretary. He became an executive member of TUCSA in 1964 and Vice-President in 1974.

Mr. Malherbe has sat on numerous committees including government bodies such as the Workmens' Compensation and Unemployment Insurance Fund Boards, the Publicity and Education Committee of the Anti-Inflation Campaign and the Trade Practices Advice Committee. He represents TUCSA on, *inter alia*, the SA Consumer Union and the Buy South Africa Committee. Mr. Malherbe is also a director of Traduna Insurance Company.

SASBO

SASBO was formed in 1916. It grew to such an extent that by 1960 it included members from Rhodesia, Zambia and Malawi. In 1961, however, SASBO split and separate unions were formed in each country because legislation in South Africa prevented Africans from joining white trade unions. Until this time it would seem that there had not been a sufficient number of African bank officials eligible for membership of SASBO to have generated the forces which led to the split.

In 1973, SASBO 'felt the time was right' for the formation of a coloured union, as the number of coloured employees in banks had increased. The National Union of Bank Employees (NUBESA) was formed. An African union, the South African Bank Employees Union (SABEU) was formed in 1975. This union now has between 450 and 500 members.

The financial position of these recently formed parallel unions is such that they do not have sufficient income to employ full-time officials. Mr. Mal-

herbe considers this to be the reason for his election as General Secretary of both unions. The two bodies share SASBO facilities.

The three unions negotiate jointly with management for the same benefits, rate for the job, etc. The only variations that arise are those imposed by government legislation, applying for example, to housing loans for Africans, who are not allowed to own property as yet.

According to Mr. Malherbe, there have never been any tensions arising out of the increasing employment of different races in skilled jobs. In fact, relations in the two banks in which SASBO, NUBESA and SABEU organise, Barclays and Standard, are particularly good because management is 'most enlightened'.

Structure

Membership is based on an area committee system, because bank officials often move to other branches, with the result that the workforce is very mobile. The area committees meet once a month. A governing body is elected annually for the committees.

Unskilled Workers

According to Mr. Malherbe, these workers are well treated in the banks, partly for security reasons, it is considered that unless unskilled workers are satisfied, they could become a 'security risk' at the bank.

The bank officials want to organise these workers, but there are certain difficulties. These workers, who are located at almost 800 bank branches, do not have banking accounts. It is for this reason that Mr. Malherbe believes it is difficult to collect subscriptions. At the moment negotiations are afoot to try to overcome this problem.

Another problem arises in the fact that a separate agreement is required for these workers whose working conditions differ from those of the officials.

Wiehahn

Mr. Chalmers, Research and Information Officer, of SASBO, considers that the 1973 strikes, the 1976 Soweto riots and increasing overseas pressure

were the major contributing factors which led to the formation of the Wiehahn Commission. He predicts that the government will agree to the registration of African trade unions and considers that some of them will remain separate from TUCSA for a period of time.

Mr. Malherbe believes that the government realised that if it wanted continued industrial peace in South Africa, changes were needed in the industrial relations system. The Wiehahn Commission was therefore appointed. He considers that TUCSA's continued insistence, for the last 24 years, that the Industrial Councils should be extended to include Africans, also had an influence on the appointment of the Wiehahn Commission.

According to Mr. Malherbe, this is the most important commission that has ever been appointed. He is confident that it will recommend the elimination of racial discrimination in the labour movement, as well as freedom of association amongst all workers. He also feels that the establishment of African unions and the encouragement of non-racial unions 'are in need of guidance'. Registration will ensure that such unions will come under the scrutiny of the Department of Labour. This will keep them on a 'labour orientated path and prevent political intervention'.

The South African Boilermakers' Iron & Steel Workers' Shipbuilders' & Welders' Society

Interview with: Mr. Ike van der Watt - General Secretary

Brief History

This union was started by the skilled workers who came to South Africa during the early days of the mining industry. The union was formed in 1898 as a branch of a British trade union. In 1916 it broke away from its British counterpart, although informal ties with this body are retained.

The Boilermakers Society was initially involved in the formation of TUCSA. Tom Murray, former General Secretary of the union, was one of the founder members of TUCSA, and became its president shortly after its formation in 1954. After Murray's death, the Boilermakers Society has found itself becoming increasingly isolated from TUCSA through the absence of formal

channels of communication. This situation eventually gave rise to various disputes, and the Boilermakers' Society left TUCSA in 1976. Mr. van der Watt, however, feels that they might reconsider their position in the future.

Structure of the union

The union has an area-branch structure, whereby each branch has 6 or 7 shop stewards on the committee, which represents the plants in a specific area. These committees meet once a month. The different branches meet once every 3 years at a General Council meeting to make policy decisions and changes for the next three year period.

The Boilermakers have found that Liaison and Works Committees cause many problems, as management favours these forms of organisation and gives the members of such committees additional training. Moreover, whereas union agreements require the consultation of shop stewards, the union and management, the committee system separates the race groups and institutes autonomous negotiations.

Relations with the Unregistered Unions

Mr. van der Watt considers that one of the major reasons for the frequent clashes of objectives between (white) registered unions and unregistered unions is that the former begin by organising the skilled workers 'from the top downwards'. The unregistered (African) unions, on the other hand, focus on the organisation of unskilled labourers and are now 'moving upwards'. He considers this to have led to a situation where these unions now have different interests and problems.

There are, however, areas where co-operation can take place and this, according to Mr. van der Watt is important. 'Council meetings', for example, should be held before Industrial Councils, in order that the representatives can hear the opinions of all workers.

Mr. van der Watt considers that the unregistered unions can legitimately say that they have no faith in the registered unions and that they have not been given enough support. However, he feels that TUCSA and his union have tried to co-operate, but it is difficult because they are approaching organisation from two different positions. Not only are their interests often

different, but misunderstandings arise since problems encountered by each group are not properly communicated.

It is with the understanding that the registered and unregistered unions have different problems, that Mr. van der Watt and his union agreed in 1973 that they would not organise the African unskilled workers in industry. They considered that conflict with the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) and the Engineering and Allied Workers Union (EAWU) should be avoided. Moreover, it was felt that the Wiehahn Commission would allow African unions to be registered, so that they could be represented on the Industrial Councils while remaining autonomous from white unions.

Job Reservation

Mr. van der Watt states that since job reservation clauses were removed from the SEIFSA Industrial Council Agreement in 1978, skilled African workers have been employed in the plants where the Boilermakers' Society have organised. A situation has now developed where the union no longer has 100% membership in the various departments. This weakens the unions position considerably.

It was pointed out that it is in the interests of the Boilermakers' Society members to have the skilled workers organised, but this should not necessarily extend to the unskilled workers. However, Mr. van der Watt feels that the unregistered unions do not at present have the facilities to organise the skilled workers. This, he says, is an example of the different problems which arise when skilled and unskilled unions attempt to co-operate. Thus arises the need to understand the different interests in order to reach a compromise.

One of the major problems he foresees is the discrepancy that may arise over the different benefits and subscriptions of each union. While the registered unions demand a R4 monthly fee, the unregistered unions request 80c per month. Skilled workers of all races, however, receive the same conditions of service, rate of pay, etc., and would therefore demand the same benefits. The unregistered union could not provide the same benefits as the registered union because if it did it would cause a split within its ranks. Moreover, Mr. van der Watt considers that the unskilled workers might perceive the participation of skilled workers as a threat, in that they may come to

dominate the unskilled members. He, therefore, suggests that two committees should be formed, one for each category, skilled and unskilled.

Taking cognizance of these problems, the Boilermakers' Society has made the following suggestions to the unregistered unions:

- (a) that the Boilermakers' Society should organise skilled African workers
- (b) that the unregistered unions should organise skilled African workers
- (c) that the Boilermakers' Society should provide funds and facilities to employ an organiser of the unregistered unions' choice, who will then organise the skilled African workers into the unregistered union.

Mr. van der Watt considers that there has been no resistance from whites to Africans being given skilled jobs, as long as they get the same pay, training, or belong to a trade union. His members are opposed to the usage of cheap African labour. Nevertheless friction is now beginning to arise, as the African training programmes are subsidised by the government. This means that employers would rather have African workers trained because it is cheaper for them. Secondly, African workers are not as likely to belong to a trade union as are whites, which again tends to make employers consider Africans as the more favourable employees.

In effect, this means that African labour is both cheaper and more favourable than white labour. Whites, coloureds and Indians are beginning to find that as Africans move up the scale of employment, so the other race groups are excluded from the more skilled jobs. This means that a form of inverse discrimination appears to be emerging. Mr. van der Watt predicts that the influence of international federations and secretariats might be such, that the pressure they bring to bear on multi-national companies will force them to recognise African trade unions in preference to white unions.

Present Problems

Mechanisation has only become a problem in the last two years. Mr. van der Watt believes that it is largely related to the size of the market which has grown rapidly during this period, and is predicted to grow more than 100% in the next three years. Thus all manufacturing enterprises will be forced to increase production and therefore mechanise if they are to com-

pete and survive.

Mr. van der Watt points out that mechanisation cannot be stopped, but the unions must ensure that the workers are compensated by a decrease in working hours.

He considers that trade unions are strong 'if they can control their membership'. In South Africa, unions have control over their members because of the Industrial Conciliation Act 'which is South Africa's finest legislation' except that all employers should be included. Mr. van der Watt believes that the difference between South African unionism and British unionism is ultimately that in South Africa the unions control the members, whereas in Britain the reverse is true. The recent wave of strikes in that country is considered to be an example of the inability of these trade unions to control their members.

One of the major problems Mr. van der Watt sees in the South African trade union movement is that of education. He has noticed with regret that once officials reach executive levels, they often consider that they do not need any training, which is often extremely detrimental to the trade union movement.

Mr. van der Watt considers the South African trade union movement to be extremely divided and feels that the Wiehahn Commission recommendations will probably serve to widen the existing gaps, as each faction will 'go its own way'. He sees the mineworkers' strike as being significant in that it was designed to influence certain members of parliament. He points out that although the Confederation of Labour and TUCSA have approximately the same number of members, TUCSA members are spread across a wide range of industries, whereas Confederation members are all concentrated in one industry. This gives the Confederation much more muscle in labour related issues than the other factions of the South African labour movement.

The National Union of Clothing Workers

Interview with: Mrs. Lucy Mvubelo, General Secretary

History

Mrs. Mvubelo was initially a teacher. She gave up this profession in order to take a higher paid job in a clothing factory. Beginning as a 'table' hand, Mrs. Mvubelo was soon promoted to machine operator - a position she held from 1942 to 1953. She considers this to have been a highly educative period when she learnt the meaning of worker unity and strength. In 1943, for example, the workers in her factory reached a deadlock with management over an issue concerning working conditions. Although this culminated in a lockout, the workers succeeded in reducing their working hours from 46 hours to 44 hours per week.

In 1944, the Supreme Court ruled that African women were allowed to be organised into registered trade unions on account of their status as non-pass bearers. Many employers were forced to back pay large amounts to those African women workers who were members of the registered Garment Workers Union and who, therefore, fell under the Industrial Council Agreement. This, Mrs. Mvubelo pointed out, was another example of what could be achieved when workers stood together.

In 1945, the Garment Workers Union decided to admit African women to its executive committee. Mrs. Mvubelo was one of five to be elected to this committee. She was returned unopposed to the committee every year thereafter until 1963 when, after the introduction of the 1953 Bantu Labour Act, the union was forced to split along racial lines. As a result of the Act, African women were prohibited from joining registered unions.

This led to the formation of a separate clothing union for African women which initiated moves to amalgamate with the African Clothing Workers Union (male). On the 4th June 1953 Mrs. Mvubelo became Secretary of the African Women's Union. She explained how difficult organisation was during this period when organisers had to walk everywhere, as the Union had no transport of its own.

Mrs. Mvubelo understands the changes in the labour movement during this period in the following way: in 1954, both the multiracial Trades and Labour

Council and the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) dissolved. The former, largely a white trade union federation, was reconstituted as the South African Trade Union Council (SATUC), while the former CNETU unions, in response to the formation of SATUC, eventually formed the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), consisting largely of African unions. SATUC subsequently changed its name to TUCSA in order to avoid being confused with SACTU.

TUCSA was open only to registered trade unions. It was for this reason, according to Mrs. Mvubelo, that the Garment Workers Union decided to join SACTU. Lucy Mvubelo was the first vice-president of SACTU.

In 1956, the second SACTU Conference was held in Cap. Town. Mrs. Mvubelo was unable to attend due to the fact that her husband had recently sustained serious injuries in an attack. This was to keep her out of trade unionism for three months. Nevertheless, 20 other delegates from the Garment Workers Union of African Women attended the Conference.

At the Conference a motion was put forward recommending that SACTU amend its constitution to become allied to the ANC. The Garment Workers delegation voted against the motion because, as Mrs. Mvubelo put it, 'politics was a death-knell to us'. She pointed out that many leaders with political affiliations had been banned and that this meant their labour organisations had to begin from scratch. Mrs. Mvubelo added that if trade unionists wished to join political organisations in their private capacity, no-one would have any objections.

During the time Mrs. Mvubelo was away from work, the NEC of the Garment Workers Union decided, together with a number of other trade unions, to disaffiliate from SACTU. These unions then formed the Federation of Free African Trade Unions (FOFATUSA). The Federation was opposed to the SACTU position that trade unionism and politics were inseparable and in terms of its constitution, affiliates to the Federation were to keep trade union activities within the bounds of worker grievances.

In 1962, TUCSA re-opened its doors to trade unions of all races. At this stage, the Garment Workers Union of African Women had amalgamated with the African Clothing Workers Union. The latter then decided to move out of SACTU and affiliate to FOFATUSA. The new Union, the National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW) became affiliated to both the Federation and

TUCSA.

In 1966, FOFATUSA was dissolved. At this time, Mrs. Mvubelo had taken over the presidency from Jacob Nyaose, who had been detained after his involvement in a PAC demonstration. This left the NUCW as an affiliate of TUCSA. However, in 1968, TUCSA once again amended its constitution to exclude African trade unions. Mrs. Mvubelo described this move as "a terrible blow to us. It was one of those decisions which made an African trade union lose confidence in TUCSA. We believed that even if TUCSA was pressurised (to make this decision), it should have stood its ground".

In 1973, TUCSA again opened its doors to Africans. Mrs. Mvubelo stated that the NUCW was undecided as to whether it should rejoin TUCSA. Eventually, in 1976 a decision was taken to re-affiliate on the grounds that "TUCSA had done a lot for the South African worker, because its policy has clearly been to fight for democracy and equal opportunities for all". According to Mrs. Mvubelo, however, many African trade unions argued that TUCSA had not done enough for African trade unionism. These unions came together in an attempt to form a large co-ordinating body for all black unions (later to be called the Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions). In opposition to the position of these African unions, Mrs. Mvubelo believes that it is pointless to continue to form other co-ordinating bodies. This, she feels, weakens the trade union movement in South Africa; instead trade unions should join TUCSA. She considers it preferable to try to influence TUCSA policy and pressurise non-African unions to organise African workers.

An example of such influence is the organisation of African workers by the Motor Industry Combined Workers Union. Mrs. Mvubelo points out that in addition the NUCW has, over the past few years, provided many organisers for new African trade unions.

Structure

The NUCW has 9 branch areas in the Transvaal. Each branch has two members representing it at NEC meetings. The NEC serves as a managing board. The Union has 400 shop stewards in total, with one shop steward representing 10 members and one representing each additional group of 50 members thereafter. There are never more than 14 shop stewards in one establishment. When feasible, a workers' committee is formed by shop stewards in the plant. Bond Clothing, which employs more than 800 workers

has such a committee.

The branch committees meet once every three months, while the NEC meets bi-monthly.

Before Industrial Council Agreements are reached, there are informal discussions with the registered trade union covering wages, conditions of service, grievance procedure, etc.

Benefits and Finding

The Union administers a Funeral Benefit Scheme which provides financial aid to the families of deceased members. In 1975, bursary and creche funds were introduced.

Mrs. Mvubelo considers it important that trade unions struggle for funds - they should never depend on outside assistance. She claims that people become lazy when they have too much money. She also feels that assistance should only be given to responsible trade unions which account for their financial spending.

As there are neither trade union training centres, nor formal training courses in South Africa, Mrs. Mvubelo considers that sponsorship for overseas trips is important. These trips provide a useful insight into the nature of labour organisations, even though not everything learnt abroad is applicable to the South African situation. Mrs. Mvubelo has been abroad 8 times.

Problems

The Environmental Planning Act, together with other Acts introduced to encourage industries to move to Border areas, had a devastating effect on the Union. Its membership dropped from 20 000 in 1976 to 16 000 in 1978. This was due to the fact that many workers were to be retrenched. Adverse economic conditions have compounded the problem, with factories closing down as a result of financial difficulties. However, now that the garment industry in the Transvaal has been exempted from certain provisions in the Environmental Planning Act, Mrs. Mvubelo considers that NUCW membership will grow once again.