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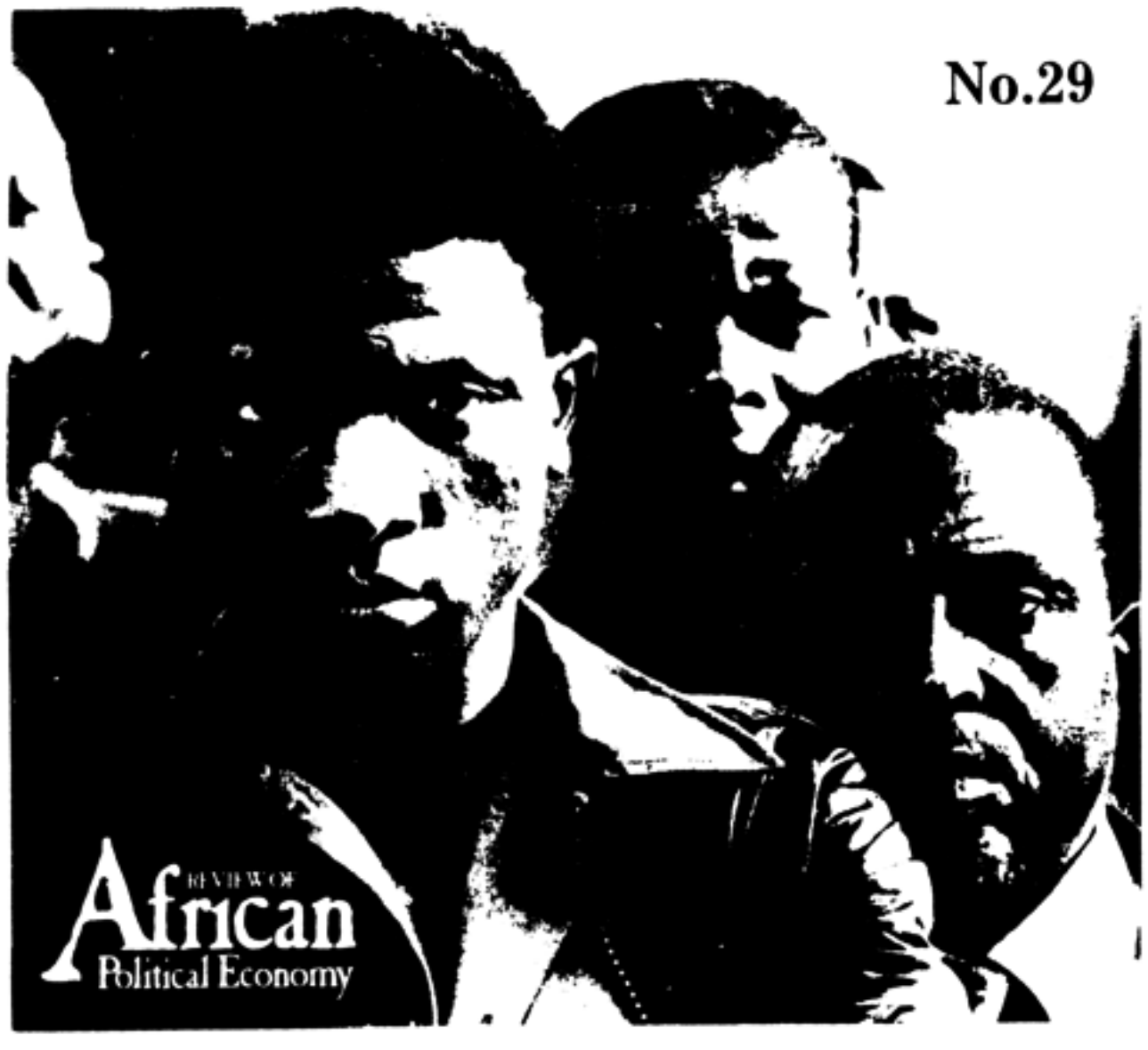

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October-November 1984

Editorial Note

In this edition we focus on forms of trade union organisation in the Western Cape. A more comprehensive survey would require a detailed examination of the African Food and Canning Workers Union, the largest independent union in the region with a rich history of struggle. Rather we have focussed on "oppositional" strategies adopted by groups of workers attempting to organise in industries where older, conservative and bureaucratic trade unions still hold sway. Three different oppositional styles can be identified: (i) establishing wholly new unions in opposition to the existing union, such as CLOWU and RAWU (see SALB 10.1). Both have adopted a high profile confrontationist strategy. Both are sustained by their broader community and UDF links. (ii) attempts by members to regain control of their own unions. This strategy has a long if unsuccessful tradition in the clothing industry. The history of the CTMWA demonstrates that such a strategy can be highly successful. (The case of the CTMWA is doubly significant. It was a victory for democratic trade unionism in the 1960s, a period of extreme state repression when SACTU, for instance, ceased to function, or was forced underground.) The report of the Groote Schuur strike indicates similar pressures for a more democratic trade union amongst public service workers. (iii) attempts by national unions with a strong presence elsewhere to expand into the Western Cape. This strategy also has a long tradition and is reminiscent of the Garment Workers Union of the Transvaal in its radical phase. The NUTW has sustained a fledgling organisation in Cape Town, whilst on the ground NUTW organisers move methodically to organise textile workers, factory by factory.

Photo: Groote Schuur workers strike under the watchfull eyes of security

- editorial -

Detentions

Since the beginning of 1984 31 trade unionists have been detained under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act.* The following are still being held: Xolani Nduna (Chemical Workers Industrial Union), Zanemvula Maphela (Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union), Amos Nkosi (Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union), Ntsikeldo Qaku (African Food & Canning Workers Union), Boy Nkese (South African Allied Workers Union), Andice Xintolo (SAAWU),Jerry Kau (National Automobile and Allied Workers Union), Themba Nontontane (Municipal & General Workers Union of South Africa), Themba Mbandluna (MGWUSA), Zola Sekele (MGWUSA), Edward Manxiwa (MGWUSA), Gilbert Binda (United Metal, Mining & Allied Workers of South Africa),Isaac Lehoko (UMMAWSA) and Glen Malela (UMMAWSA) . Under the terms of their detention they can be held indefinitely without access to lawyers, family or friends. Their continued detention without trial is cause for concern and calls into question the much heralded new labour dispensation. Jerry Kau's fellow workers at Renault registered their feelings by striking in protest.

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* details supplied by DPSC and SAIRR

SIMBA QUIX: The Chips are Down

> Management at Simba has exploited workers for a long time. They were used to exploiting us. Now the union is here it is difficult for them.
>
> A Simba shop steward

A boycott of Simba Quix products (chips/crisps particularly) has been called by workers dismissed from the company's factory in Isando. Simba is part of the Fedfood group which in turn is linked to Federale Volksbeleggings and Sanlam (Financial Mail 26.10.84). The 393 workers involved are demanding their jobs back.

The workers' union - Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union (SFAWU) - has held majority membership at Simba since 1982 when it secured a recognition agreement. Since then the union has negotiated an increased minimum wage from R40 to R97.50 per week. At the end of 1983 the union secured the dismissal of the production manager for victimising workers. Since then relations between the union and Simba have deteriorated - with management crudely asserting its "prerogative to hire and fire". In April a worker was dismissed for "damaging company property" (ie. throwing a potato to a fellow worker). In May 2 workers were dismissed for refusing "to carry out lawful instructions" (ie. refusing to perform a double job). When challenged by the shop stewards and in subsequent meetings, the management simply refused to discuss matters relating to "management prerogative". At the final meeting between shop stewards and the company, management even refused permission for shop stewards to report back to workers during work time. On the next day - Friday 10th August - management announced via the notice board that the decision over dismissals was final and there would be no more discussion. Angered by management attempts to undermine the shop stewards the workers struck. At the same time workers received notice that management intended taking disciplinary action against 2 further

workers, including the chairman of shop stewards. Workers were told to report at 8.00 am on Monday instead of the usual shift time of 6.00 am.

On Monday morning workers from both shifts gathered at 6.00 in the canteen. At 7.30 shop stewards met with management and were issued with a final ultimatum. As the shop stewards were reporting back to the members, the personnel manager arrived outside the canteen with a loudhailer to inform the workers that they were all dismissed. This was despite the inclusion of a 72 hour "cooling off" clause in the recognition agreement (management chose to include the weekend in their calculations). At this stage the union's president, Chris Dlamini, intervened. He was told by Simba management that the agreement was terminated; moreover, as they could not communicate with Africans Simba, would in future be employing "Coloureds"!

Boycott

None of the dismissed workers have since found permanent jobs. The workers, most of whom live in Tembisa, met immediately and decided to launch a boycott of Simba Quix products. They formed 3 committees - for fundraising, publicity and organisation; printed stickers and leaflets; and contacted traders and student organisations on the East Rand. From the start it was the workers themselves that initiated the boycott. They meet up to 3 times per week to keep up morale and to receive report backs from supporting organisations and groups. Workers who are active in the campaign have been intimidated; materials have been confiscated by the police; and the chairman and secretary of the shop stewards committee have allegedly been assaulted by the police.

On 1st September the executive of SFAWU met and resolved to support the legitimate struggle of the dismissed Simba workers. This stance was endorsed by FOSATU (to which SFAWU is affiliated) on 22nd September. Since then every section of the labour movement has declared

support for the boycott, as well as student, community and political organisations. Area committees are being set up in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and the East Rand which are linked to a co-ordinating committee in Johannesburg. There are support committees in Daveytown, Wattville, Tembisa, Actonville, Lenasia and Reiger Park. The majority of the newly-employed "Coloured" workers live in Reiger Park. Some have already resigned upon hearing of the earlier dismissals. Through trade union structures news of the campaign has now reached most parts of the Transvaal. In many townships traders have agreed not to stock Simba products. Katlehong and Tembisa Chambers of Commerce have co-operated from the beginning. The Western Cape Traders Association, representing 2000 traders, has pledged its support. Almost certainly the present political climate has contributed to this level of support. Internationally, the International Union of Food and Allied Workers Associations has given its support to the Simba struggle, and it watching the situation closely.

In response to these developments, and one week into the boycott, the company agreed to meet the union. Although no settlement has been reached, the fact of continued negotiations has probably diluted action on the boycott front. But, on the other hand, in addition to the threat to sales, Simba may well be experiencing reduced productivity due to the existence of an inexperienced workforce. There are hints that work is being transferred to the Natal factory. Meanwhile the union has applied for a conciliation board to put its case for reinstatement. Simba is alleging that the union is involved in a "unfair labour practice" - since the boycott threatens the job security of the company's present employees and constitutes a restraint on trade. The boycott, however, is clearly not the work of the union but of the dismissed workers themselves.

Previous boycott campaigns - Fattis and Monis, Red Meat, Wilson-Rowntree - provide some lessons for present strategy. These include: the need to promote active participation; to build support structures; to

provide co-ordination and an adequate flow of information; to target specific products to be boycotted; to target particular groups for support (in this case traders and students); to ensure that the campaign remains under worker control. The problem of worker control, which arose after previous campaigns, has been highlighted by some who fear that a broad boycott campaign will jeopardise the independence of the workers' organisation. In particular the decision to approach black business organisations such as NAFCOC has been criticised. Working together with such pro-capitalist bodies must obscure the class nature of the conflict. The prevailing position, that of those supporting the present boycott campaign is that they are responding to the requests of the workers themselves; that the primary task is to mobilise pressure for immediate reinstatement, and that they want support, they are not asking for political alliances.

The workers themselves remain convinced that the boycott will succeed. They believe that most Simba products are bought by blacks; they are not essential foods; and there are other brands of chips on offer - so this is an easy product to boycott. The workers are confident, united and determined to win:

> Do not lose hope. The management will take advantage of your plight. Always remain strong and don't show any sign of remorse. We are operating on a strong base. People from this area and far away from here have made our problem theirs too. We see through their actions, that "an injury to one is an injury to all".
>
> A Simba shop steward addressing workers

(SALB Correspondent, October 1984)

International Solidarity with British Miners

After eight months the strike of the British National Union of Mineworkers is still solid - despite police intimidation and the interference of the courts. Attempts to declare the strike illegal and threats of imprisonment and confiscation of union assets have not deterred the NUM in its fight for jobs. For the ruling class it is essential to beat the miners into submission and to break the power of the organised working class - in order to maintain profits. Already the strike has cost the Thatcher government nearly R4,000 million - more than it spent on the Malvinas (Falklands) War.

The long strike has seen an escalation of police activity. Hundreds of people collecting money for food for the striking miners have been harrassed or arrested and charged with public order offences. In September, in what has become known as "Bloody Wednesday" - police besieged the whole town of Armthorpe in South Yorkshire and hunted down everyone who looked like a miner. Armthorpe is a mining community which has solidly backed the strike and where pickets have been active to prevent strike breaking. In an operation which resembles the occupation of Sebokeng, thousands of heavily equipped riot police with dogs moved in. Doors were smashed in, windows broken, every male who looked like a miner was a target. Several were hospitalised. But the people were not cowed by this 2 hour reign of terror. Bonfires were relit and picketing restarted with renewed energy.

In the last issue of the South African Labour Bulletin it was argued that only solidarity from other workers would ensure the victory of the British miners. Since then the Annual Conference of the British Labour Party has pledged total support to the miners. A further development has been the 82% vote for strike action by the 17000 strong mine supervisors union (NACODS). This

was provoked by the highhanded actions of management in refusing to pay wages to NACODS members who did not cross picket lines, and also reflected unease over pit closures. In the end the government was willing to allow substantial concessions to this group of workers. Indeed so determined is the Thatcher government to isolate and smash the militant NUM that the unpopular Chairman of the Coal Board, McGregor, was pulled out of the negotiations with NACODS to help ensure a settlement. This potential area of support for the NUM has been cut off the time being. But the task of extending solidarity action remains. In the days to come the support of rail workers, seamen and transport workers will be crucial in preventing the movement of coal stocks. Meanwhile international support for the miners' struggle is growing:

West Germany British miners toured for ten days at the end of May raising support for their struggle, particularly among the engineering workers of IG Metall and the print workers of IG Druck und Papier who were on strike themselves in support of the 35-hour week. Trade union activists and support groups of the 35-hour struggle organised meetings for the miners in Berlin, Hamburg, Duisburg, Karlsruhe and the town of Lordi where the workers had occupied their plant in support of the 35-hour strike. The miners addressed the workers there, stressing the common struggle against Kohl in Germany and Thatcher in Britain. Three thousand rand was raised during the tour. More recently the two-million strong I G Metall has donated DM1.3 million to the NUM to alleviate hardship and has opened a fund for the miners to which all members, branches and districts of I G Metal are invited to contribute.

Sweden Activists and rank and file trade unionists are trying to set up a broad based trade union committee to fight the government's austerity measures. They have invited some dockworkers from Denmark and some miners from Britain to address them.

The Netherlands Miners' wives, Katherine Slater and

Lynn Bennett completed a tour at the end of August. The tour was organised by the Women's Union, FNV-Vrouwenbond. The women started off in South Limburg which used to be a mining area and where some ex-miners still live, many of them unemployed. The groups which they formed ten years ago to fight pit closures in the area still exist today and gave the women a warm welcome. About 200 people attended a meeting addressed by the women. They raised R6000. Even bingo-halls in the area pledged an evening's profits to the British miners! The women also visited Amsterdam where they raised R4000 at a 300-strong meeting supported by, in addition to the Women's Union, many other unions and political parties. The youth sections of the trade unions are also organising support and the squatters' movement has already organised holidays for 30 miners' children. The Women's Union is continuing to organise solidarity up and down the country and has drawn up a list of factories and workplaces where collections can be organised. The FNV, the country's biggest union confederation has collected R200000 for the miners; the Socialist Party has sent R50000 worth of food; the Independent Confederation of Factory Organisations has collected R25000. The solidarity movement in the Netherlands is now well underway with petitions, pamphlets, rallies and collections in many parts of the country.

France A delegation from the Bold branch of the NUM met miners from the CGT (General Workers Union) in Carmaux and Gardannne. In a visit to the steel-producing areas one of the delegation spoke on the same platform with Henri Krasucki, the leader of the CGT. A miner's wife in the delegation also addressed women at a meeting at the Paris women's centre. The tour raised R4000.

Belguim Dockers in Ghent have pledged to stop all movement of coal. At a meeting of trade unionists R500 was raised for visiting miners.

Switzerland Thatcher could not get away from the miners' strike even while on holiday. Members of the

- solidarity -

Swiss socialist youth organisation, dumped 300 kilos of coal on the drive to her holiday home.

Australia The miners, dockers and seafarers unions have already started an embargo following a visit of miners' leader Malcolm Pitt of Kent NUM. The support of the dockers and seafarers internationally will be vital in the coming months to stop the movement of coal.

New Zealand Support is beginning with the seafarers and the engineering unions each sending R4000 to the miners. Also a telegram from the ship "Toki Arrow" pledging R500 was sent to the miners. Dave Morgan, of the New Zealand seafarers union, explained in the union journal that, "a supreme effort is required. This is probably the most important fight of the decade and every assistance is needed. Support the British miners in every way you can."

Nicaragua A message of solidarity was received by the NUM from the gold miners of El Limon. Their union is affiliated to the Sandinista Workers Confederation.

Soviet Union The Russian miners' union recently provided holidays on the Black Sea for families of striking miners; and contributed to the hardship fund.

Republic of South Africa Messages of support have been sent by unions including the South African NUM and FOSATU:

> "The Federation of South African Trade Unions fully supports the NUM in its fight against pit closures. With the formation of a wider federation of South Africa's independent trade unions next year, we hope in future to be able to offer you more concrete support. The fight for the right to work is particularly understood by South African workers and supported by our Federation. We believe that your victory will be a major step forward in the worldwide workers' struggle for job security and for a rational society. Amandla!"

NUM First Legal Mine Strike

South Africa's first legal strike by black miners in September harshly illustrated the contradictions of labour reform in an apartheid society. Accompanied by a wave of unofficial industrial action, action against strikers left at least 10 miners dead and hundreds more injured. Yet it was seen as a major step by the mining industry into the country's new era of labour relations opened up by reforms which have brought black workers into the country's official bargaining system. Mr Rupert Gush, chairman of Anglo's Gold and Uranium division, described the settlement which ended the legal strike as a "victory for collective bargaining" - a process which is being painfully introduced after more than a century of unilateral employer "rule".

But while the right of black mineworkers to join trade unions has been belatedly recognised, the industry still rests on conditions that are not compatible with a modern industrial relations system. The "scheduled persons" definition in the Mines and Works Act is a racial job bar which protects white workers and blocks any upward mobility for blacks. The vast majority of workers on the mines are migrants who are brought in as labour units separate from their families and communities and returned to the rural areas of Southern Africa when their labour is no longer required.

For a century labour relations on the mines have been dominated by patronising mining houses regarding their black workers (living inside compounds which the kindest comparisons have likened to boarding houses) as children. The lack of adequate channels of communication has meant that crisis and conflict on the mines has almost inevitably led to compound riots, which have been put down forcibly by police and accompanied by mass deportations to the homelands. In July 1982 100 miners were killed and thousands deported when the mining industry was hit by a series of strikes and

riots over pay increases. It was these events that were instrumental in propelling the industry into the new era of labour relations, and which indirectly led to the formation of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) a few months later.

It was with these events in mind that some observers viewed the dispute and the steady moves towards a legal strike, which was on the cards as early as May, with some trepidation. Their fears were added to when a black miner was shot dead on June 26 when workers went on strike at Anglo American's Vryheid Coronation Colliery, also in dissatisfaction with the pay increases. The central question before the September 1984 strike began was: How much has the traditional pattern of labour relations on the mines been changed by the unionisation of a large section of the workforce since 1982?

In retrospect it would be fair to say the strike was both a glimpse into a possible new future of labour relations on the mines as well as being rooted in the past. The painstaking four months of negotiations which preceded the strike, the use of all legal avenues (even though the value of this was open to question), the emergence of the NUM from the fray intact and stronger than ever - all these were precedent-setting. However, the accompanying violence was disturbing evidence that much has not changed on the mines.

Unlike the British coalminers strike which has seen only two fatalities in eight months, the South African strike lasted a week and cost at least 10 lives. And unlike the daily television coverage of the strike in Britain, the violence in South Africa was sealed off inside the compounds, away from the prying eyes of the press and the public. The mining houses have said there are to be no public inquiries into the causes of the violence and so all one knows of what actually took place are the conflicting claims of management and workers interviewed at the time.

A case in point, which is worth recording at length,

is Johannesburg Consolidated Investment's Western Areas mine just outside Johannesburg. JCI blamed the deaths on faction fighting among workers. But mine workers interviewed within hours of the violence said it was the result of heavy handed action by both the police and mine officials. They said their action, which affected the 4 am shift due to go underground, was peaceful. "Trouble started at about 3 am when the personnel manager arrived with the mine security staff at the gate where we had gathered", one worker said. "We told him we wished to see the general manager, to discuss our grievances with him. He refused to listen to us and instead ordered security to fire teargas at us." Workers said police with dogs and accompanied by the general manager arrived at the gate at about 7 am. They were ordered, through a loudhailer, to return to their hostels and elect five representatives to talk to officials. After they refused to do so, the mine workers said, the general manager walked away and told police to "shoot". "The police fired teargas at us and we fled, some out of the mine premises. Police surrounded the fleeing workers with their vehicles and ordered us back into the compound. Police fired more teargas and chased after workers. Angry workers then started breaking into the beerhall and cafes, looting and burning. Violence escalated at about 9 am when police started shooting. At least six of our colleagues were shot dead and scores of others wounded. While some fled to the surrounding hills, others picked up the dead in wheelbarrows and carried the wounded to the mine clinic where they were later carried by ambulances to hospital."

Mineworkers interviewed at other mines told similar stories of harsh treatment - all of which were denied by police and mine management. Anglo American said at their mines, where more than 250 were injured, it was only when it became clear that NUM officials were unable to cope with the pickets and "intimidation" and unrest appeared inevitable that police were called in to "disperse people".

Cyril Ramaphosa, general secretary of the NUM, blamed management for all the incidents of violence for having provocatively invited police into situations which were capable of being controlled by their strike committees. Ramaphosa says the union will seriously reassess its willingness to call legal strike action because of the violence used against its members.

Apart from the violence, the failure of the legal strike action to provide protection against dismissal, has also led the NUM to question the value of using the legal procedures. In the week before the strike miners employed by Gold Fields of South Africa were handed pamphlets warning them that management would not tolerate a strike and strikers would be dismissed whether or not the strike was legal. The pamphlet warned that work was scarce and "those who are dismissed will find it very, very difficult to find alternative employment and their families and dependents will suffer if they're unemployed. "If a fired worker is lucky enough to get another job on the mines he'll have to stand at the bottom of the promotion ladder." At other mines strikers were actually fired or threatened with dismissal if they did not return.

Dismissals are a sore point in the industry because South Africa's half-a-million black mineworkers are drawn from a huge labour reservoir. The position of strikers has traditionally been undermined by firing them en masse and shipping them back to unemployment in the homelands and neighbouring states. According to a spokesman for the Chamber of Mines' recruiting arm, Teba, there were some 300000 unemployed people who could have been brought in toreplace striking workers if it became necessary. It is in this respect that the migrant labour system most profoundly undermines the future of black unions on the mines.

Despite all this the strike was an important milestone for the NUM who gained membership and credibility from their first major battle with the Chamber of Mines and emerged intact. Before the strike began their potential

support was questioned by the Chamber and they were forced to prove themselves to mining employers, who never before had had to take a black union seriously.

Last year, the first time a black union had ever negotiated wages with the Chamber, the NUM settled for increases which it later realised the Chamber would have granted anyway. This year the union had to steer a difficult course between gaining credibility as the voice of South Africa's mineworkers and not overstepping the mark and being crushed at a still early stage of their development. This was made even more difficult by the widespread belief that some of the mining houses were spoiling for a fight with the NUM, to cut them down before they could develop into a real threat in later years.

The ballot which the NUM held the week before the strike convinced the Chamber that the NUM meant business and, in the long run, saved the union from having to pull out all its members to show the employers the extent of its support. Within 24 hours of the announcement of the ballot results, which showed that some 50000 workers favoured strike action, the Chamber had made its revised offer to the NUM in a last-minute bid to stave off the strike. In the sense that the Chamber was at last taking the NUM seriously it was a major turning point for labour relations on the mines - perhaps the beginning of real change.

For a modern industrial relations structure to emerge on the mines, a credible trade union for blacks is needed, and with the September 1984 strike the NUM seems to have reached that status. But there is still a long way to travel for the NUM, which now claims a membership of only about a fifth of the country's black miners and has only been in the field little more than two years. Ramaphosa is confident: "In 1983 we only had 4% of the workforce in the industry. This year we had 20%. Next year we will have an even stronger army with which to take on the bosses. The bosses, having been forewarned and aware of the muscle black

miners are starting to flex, are not going to make it easy.

1984 MINERS STRIKE: A RECORD OF EVENTS

May 17: Pay talks for NUM's gold mine members in certain categories on eight recognised mines open. The mines are Anglo American's Elandsrand, three divisions of Western Holdings, two divisions of Vaal Reefs, President Brand and Gold Fields' Kloof. From the beginning there is a wide difference between NUM demands of 60% and a Chamber of Mines offer of less than 8%, NUM later drops its demand to 25%, Chamber increases offer to between 9,5% and 10,9%.

June 2: Six-hundred NUM delegates meeting in a special mini-conference in Klerksdorp to discuss the issue reject the Chamber's offer outright. Workers decide they are not prepared to accept below 25% until the Chamber gives a final, increased offer.

June 4: Pay talks between NUM and Chamber for union members on five coal mines begin. NUM declares "unfair labour practice" dispute with the Chamber for its refusal to make an offer at the first meeting.

June 18: NUM and the tiny Federated Mining Union go into dispute with the Chamber over goldmine wages after they receive a final offer of increases ranging from 13,3% to 14,4%. NUM asks Chamber not to unilaterally increase wages, but Chamber says it will go ahead anyway. Majority of workers in the industry, says Chamber, are not NUM members and are expecting an increase.

June 20: NUM goes into dispute with Chamber over coalmine wages. Increases on offer range from 13,4% to 14,1%.

June 25: One miner shot dead, four others injured by "unknown persons" when 1750 workers at Anglo American's Vryheid Coronation Colliery go on strike and protest against the increases which are due on July 1. Seventy-

seven workers arrested and charged with public violence. No one held or charged for shooting of the workers. Colonel S J van der Merwe, of the Newcastle division of the SAP, says those who did the shooting - believed to be white miners - had "all the necessary reason". Not clear whether there is union involvement in the strike. NUM warns that the strike is just the beginning of the mineworkers' struggle for a "living wage".

July 2: As Chamber implements pay increase, more than 200 workers at Anglo's Goedehoop and Kriel collieries in the Eastern Transvaal stop work for two days in protest against the increases.

July 4: More than 3000 workers from Rand Mines' Douglas colliery near Witbank strike in protest against the increases. They return after three days. In both strikes most of the workers are NUM members.

July 4: About 1700 workers at the Griqualand Exploration and Finance Company's (Gefco's) Penge asbestos mine in the North Eastern Transvaal go on strike over their wage increases which are related to the Chamber's increases. The workers are all sacked, but continue to occupy their hostels. Most of the workers are members of the Black Allied Mining and Construction Workers Union (BAMCWU). The company wins a case in the Pretoria Supreme court ordering the workers to get out. After holding our for three weeks, the workers leave voluntarily while the company ships in replacement labour.

July: NUM goes into dispute with the Chamber over wages for workers at the Rand Refinery, the Johannesburg depot of Teba and the Rand Mutual Hospital. NUM also declares wage disputes with Rand Mines at two non-Chamber collieries, Duvha and Rietspruit.

August 10: NUM's conciliation board talks with Rand Mines over wages at Duvha end in deadlock with union demanding 40% increase. This is the first of the NUM's seven disputes to reach the stage where a legal strike is possible.

August 13: NUM's conciliation board talks with the Chamber over goldmine wages end in deadlock. Chamber offers certain improvements to fringe benefits, which are rejected by NUM. Growing grassroots support for strike. Technically, a legal strike is now possible.

September6: Following report-back to members, NUM announces that its goldmine members are to strike on September 17. A strike ballot will be held first to prove to the Chamber popular support for the strike.

September 14: More than 43000 miners on six of the seven Anglo mines affected by the wage dispute vote for legal strike action. The NUM and the Chamber settle their dispute for coalmine wages. NUM accepts revised Chamber offer shortening the working fortnight from 96 to 94 hours. This would have the effect of pushing up overtime pay.

September 16: Chamber makes last-minute offer to NUM in a bid to head off the strike. The Chamber's revised offer is an amendment to the leave scheme on the seven affected Anglo mines which amounts to a 2,3% increase on the total wage bill. NUM in desperate bid to convey the offer to its members who are due to go on strike from 8 pm shift. The message only reaches the Elandsfontein mine near Carletonville. Four out of seven shafts go out on strike at Western Holdings, all shafts at Vaal Reefs East and West, and two out of four shafts go out at President Brand.

September 17: More than 40000 miners strike legally on Anglo mines on the Free State and Transvaal, though many start returning as the offer reaches them during the day. By nightfall only about 10000 still out, chiefly at Vaal Reefs near Klerksdorp and Western Holdings no. 7 shaft. More than 250 workers hurt in incidents of violence. NUM alleges that attempts by their members to engage in peaceful legal industrial action severely interfered with by police intimidation and harrassment. More than 4000 workers at Rand Mines' Durban Roodepoort Deep mine go on strike. The workers

- many of them members of BAMCWU - say they are striking in solidarity with the NUM and to demand recognition of their union. More than 120 of them are hurt, some seriously, as police fire rubber bullets and teargas. They are given an ultimatum to return to work or face dismissal. More than 16000 workers bring Anglovaal's Hartebeesfontein mine to a standstill, demanding recognition of the NUM. Teargas is fired at workers. Workers at Gencor's Unisell mine in the OFS go on strike as well.

September 18: At least eight workers shot dead and hundreds injured at Johannesburg Consolidated Investment's Waterpan mine, which is part of the Western Areas complex. Night of violence after police are called in leaves millions of rand damage to hostel property as workers have to carry the dead and injured in wheelbarrows. NUM settles with Chamber ending the legal strike. Western Holdings no. 7 shaft is the last to return. Anglo claims settlement is a "victory for collective bargaining", NUM says the strike proved once and for all the union had the support of the workers. Workers return at Durban Deep where about 80 are dismissed and repatriated. About 250 fired at Western Areas, while Unisell fires several hundred as well. Workers continue to strike at Hartebeesfontein.

September 19: Under threat of dismissal, night shift at Hartebeesfontein returns after further clashes. USA government condemns "lethal toughness" with which miners treated at Western Areas mine. NUM calls strike ballots at Duvha and Rietspruit (slight majority of NUM members at Duvha vote to strike, large majority vote to strike at Rietspruit).

September 21: Two miners shot dead by police and about 160 injured during strike by about 1000 workers at Gencor's West Rand Consolidated mine near Krugersdorp, NUM says it is going to sue Gencor.

October 1: More than 2000 coalminers at JCI's Tavistock colliery near Witbank strike over pay. About 1100

of them are fired for failing to meet a company deadline, but later re-employed.

October 8: More than 1100 workers at Gencor's Marievale gold mine near Springs strike demanding that their pay be brought into line with the deal negotiated between the Chamber and the NUM. Return after two days.

October 13: Deadlocked wage dispute between NUM and Chamber for wages at Rand Mutual Hospital referred to arbitration after mediation fails.

October 15: About 220 NUM members at Rand Refinery strike for one day after conciliation board talks deadlock. They strike again a week later, but return to work after accepting the Chamber's wage offer.

October 24: NUM members at the Johannesburg depot of Teba go on legal strike but return the following day, threatening to strike again at any time.

(Phillip van Niekerk, October 1984)

PUTCO Bus Drivers Victory

Towards the end of last year, negotiations broke down between PUTCO and the two independent unions which jointly represent PUTCO workers: the Transport and Allied Workers Union (TAWU) and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU). The main business of PUTCO, a privately-owned company, is operating buses from the various black townships (mainly in the Transvaal) to the urban centres (Johannesburg in particular) where the black workers have their jobs but are not allowed to live. PUTCO has been granted a monopoly of this operation by the South African government - which controls the fares that PUTCO charges and subsidizes the company if it fails to make a prescribed level of profit.

Bus drivers in South Africa work under tremendous pressures - buses are overcrowded, time schedules are extremely tight, roads in the townships are bad (very often untarred and unmarked by road-signs) and the condition of the buses is generally poor.

The company took the position that it could not afford to pay what the unions were asking. The collective agreement provides for the arbitration of grievances, either internally or through the Industrial Court, and the parties eventually opted for the Industrial Court. The unions' counsel took specialist advice which satisfied him that the company almost certainly had the money to pay, but the unions' second argument was of course that even if the company could not meet justified demands, the workers should not be those to suffer the consequences of an under-financed operation.

On 27 June 1984, the Judge handed down the arbitration decision that all workers would receive a 15.5% increase backdated to 1 January 1984 and to be paid with interest of 3% - leaving a period of six months unaccounted for. The TGWU and TAWU immediately commenced

negotiations with the company regarding this period and eventually settled two days later on a 6.75% increase for the period July to December 1983, to be paid with interest of 9%.

The union's success can be measured against the employers' final offer when negotiations broke down of four to five per cent, plus their insistence that they were unable to pay anything more. The case has had trememdous significance on two counts: first, that the employers have been forced by the Court to disclose information of the most comprehensive and intimate kind; and, secondly, that the plea of "inability to pay" has been spectacularly rejected - something which South African unions in the service industries particularly will be able to seize on to increase their bargaining strength in the future.

The outcome was hailed enthusiastically by the unions' members, many of whom had keenly followed the case all through, attending whenever their shifts allowed. On the day of the award itself, about three hundred and fifty workers packed the Court and broke into speech-making and song at the conclusion of the proceedings.

(ITF Newsletter No 6/7 June/July 1984)

Union Combats Pesticide Poisoning

In July, a factory organised by the African/Food and Canning Workers Union reported that a large number of workers had become ill at work, complaining of sweating, nausea, vomiting and tremor. The local doctor who saw them told the union doctor when she telephoned to inquire about the workers not to worry, it was just a case of "mass hysteria". Without a union presence, that would have been the end of the story. But the A/F&CWU asked the Industrial Health Research Group to investigate the incident. The information available seemed to point to pesticide poisoning, so we drew up a questionnaire and made arrangements at Tygerberg hospital for urine analyses.

The following day, we went out to the factory. The workers were back at work, even though some of them were still sick. A total of 24 people came to see us in their canteen on the factory premises. We were told that two days previously, a fumigant firm had come to the factory to fumigate the sorted and stacked dried fruit. The pesticide they used was methyl bromide, a highly dangerous chemical. Apparently fumigation takes place about once a year, when the weaker pesticide routinely used is ineffective against a problematic pest. The boxes of dried fruit are in the same working area as the workers, and this is where they were fumigated. The workers said the pesticide had escaped and made them sick. Their symptoms occured a few hours to one day after fumigation took place.

The first person got sick the same afternoon. He was told by management to drink some milk, and when this did not help him, he was sent to the doctor. That afternoon and evening 6 further workers became ill, but only the following day did the majority (18) have symptoms. At this point management closed the factory and drove the worst affected to the doctor. The others had to walk there. The doctor gave them all an injec-

tion, cough syrup and pills with no name on them. He did not put them off work. In the meantime, management had got the fumigant firm back to the premises. They installed extraction fans overnight and the following morning the factory reopened. The workers had to come back to work despite the fact that some were still ill.

The results of the questionnaire confirmed that the workers had been exposed to methyl bromide. Four of the workers were shown to have bromide in their urine.

Methyl bromide

This is a powerful insecticidal fumigant which can be inhaled or absorbed by the skin and is very poisonous to humans. It is a colourless gas that is difficult to smell, so there is no warning of poisoning. It becomes more dangerous with each exposure. It is known for its delayed action. Onset of symptoms may take 1 to 48 hours after exposure:

* Early symptoms: malaise, frontal headache, nausea, vomiting, skin burns, visual disturbances and pulmon-ary oedema (water in the lungs which can be fatal).
* Late symptoms: shaking, loss of balance, confusion, fits. Also kidney damage and pneumonia can develop.
* Poisoning at low levels for a long period of time: nervous damage, which can be permanent.
* It is also suspected to cause cancer.

An exposed person must be removed immediately from the environment and given oxygen. If the reaction has not been severe enough for hospitalisation, he or she should be put off work and rest in bed for at least two days. Otherwise treatment is symptomatic.

Because it is so toxic, methyl bromide should be handled with extreme care. Protective clothing is essential, and because methyl bromide penetrates rubber and leather, PVC gloves should be used by conveyor belt workers, and full suits and respirators by those who carry out fumigation.

Piperonyl butoxide and pyrethrins

The weaker pesticide used is: Piperonyl butoxin 0.4% m/v, and activated pyrethrins 0.5% m/v. The workers are even more exposed to this as fumigation takes place around them as they work, despite the fact that it states quite clearly on the drum that it must not be inhaled or come into contact with the skin in any excessive amount. Piperonyl butoxide is possibly a cancer agent. The pyrethrins are thought to cause nervous kidney and liver damage with prolonged exposure.

Points arising from the investigation

* Firstly, it is a matter of luck that the workers are all still alive. If they had been exposed to slightly higher concentrations, they might well have developed fatal pulmonary oedema.
* The local doctor's attitude towards a potentially disastrous event is very worrying. It is also surprising as the Department of Health constantly asks country doctors in the fruit-growing areas to look out for cases of pesticide poisoning, and to notify them. Workers had no say in the choice of doctor.
* By law, cases of pesticide poisoning must be notified to the health authorities. The problem is that the doctor must recognise and diagnose them before he can do this. So if the factory had not been organised, the law would have been ineffective.
* The pesticides should only be used in enclosed areas where the fumes cannot escape, or if they do, where they will not come into contact with workers.
* The workers have been told that they must not eat the fruit and they must wash their hands before they eat to protect themselves from the poison. However, they are not given gloves or other protective clothing, and it is well known that pesticide can penetrate the skin.
* The union is now formulating demands to be negotiated with management.

(Dawn Garisch, Industrial Health Research Group)

SAAWU Consolidates

The South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) is at present in the process of negotiating a recognition agreement with Da Gama Textiles in East London. SAAWU official, Boyce Meletafa, who concentrates on organising among textile workers feels that this constitutes a major victory since Da Gama, which employs over 1500 workers, is one of the largest factories in East London. It also means that the union has established a firm foothold in East London's dominant industry: over a third of the total industrial labour force is involved in textiles.

The first attempts at unionising the factory took place in 1979. During the following year, despite opposition from management, membership grew rapidly. However, retrenchments in 1981, which seemed to have contained a disproportionate number of union members, as well as an organiser, marked the beginning of a retreat. The mass dismissals and anti-union propaganda which followed the wave of strikes that occurred throughout East London at that time created a difficult climate for the union. While SAAWU managed to con-solidate its organisation in some factories, in several others, such as Da Gama, the workers' fears of being dismissed turned them away from the union and undermined the gains of the preceding years.

Not until the latter part of 1982 did SAAWU begin to reassert itself at Da Gama and membership again start to grow. This trend continued into last year. Then, at a meeting in March 1983 the union received a mandate from the workers to approach management. Among the demands were an end to victimisation and the right to hold factory meetings. Management seemed to concede and indicated that it accepted the principle of free association. At the subsequent report back large numbers of workers joined the union.

Yet again further progress was to be delayed. The onset of the bus boycott created a number of problems. Several union organisers, including Maletafa were detained, and SAAWU's access to all halls was completely cut off. Only in January of this year, after the release of SAAWU's officials, did organisation in the factory begin to advance again. The boycott henceforth facilitated the process since it contributed to the level of militancy. The trains also became a convenient avenue of mobilisation. After a succession of small departmentally based meetings at the union offices, SAAWU again received a mandate to negotiate with management.

A dispute about the representivity of SAAWU at Da Gama followed. While on the one hand management refused to accept union membership as an indication of representivity, it also appeared unwilling to stage a referendum. However following a two and a half hour work stoppage, it was agreed to hold a referendum. From this the union emerged with a 73% majority. Formal negotiations on a recognition agreement are now due to start. The recent introduction of industrial relations training for management at Da Gama indicates that they are already gearing up for the new situation.

A recognition agreement at Da Gama represents a significant advance for SAAWU in East London. In 1981 SAAWU gained formal recognition at Chloride, Johnson & Johnson, K S M and Waco Distributors, and de facto recognition at a number of smaller factories. Since then a number of factors, and in particular detentions, have delayed further progress. But it seems that a turning point has now been reached.

This is further evidenced by the fact that SAAWU is at the moment also in the process of negotiating formal agreements at a number of other smaller plants in the area. In some of these, such as Nairn Industries and Nampak, where SAAWU has had some form of de facto recognition since 1981, a process of consolidation is underway. But there are also some more recently organised

factories such as Beckett and Castellano on the list.

A number of elements have played a role in making this possible. Firstly, it seems that certain employers in East London have been pressured into a revaluation of their earlier intransigent stance towards the union. Secondly there are indications that SAAWU's organising strategies and methods have developed. Finally the bus boycott, which has entered its second year, has left a legacy, firmly impressed on management of the potential tenacity and determination of the working class.

There are nevertheless considerable difficulties which still confront SAAWU in its attempts to extend its presence. The Da Gama case highlights one of these. The company controls two other factories in the area, and in particular the massive Good Hope plant with a labour force of some 6000 workers at King Williams Town. Unfortunately, the factory, which should have been relatively easy to organise, lies inside the Ciskei, an area where SAAWU is effectively banned.

(Andre Roux, September 1984)

Black Consciousness and Trade Unions

The black conciousness trade union movement has certainly grown over the last two years. The formal announcement in August this year of an alliance of independent black unions is evidence of this. The alliance was the result of months of behind-the-scenes discussions which started in February 1984. The unions party to the alliance are: Black Allied Mining and Construction Workers' Union (BAMCWU), African Allied Workers' Union (AAWU), Insurance and Assurance Workers' Union of South Africa (IAWUSA), Amalgamated Black Workers' Union (ABWU), Black General Workers' Union (BLAGWU), National Union of Workers of South Africa (NUWSA), Black Electronics and Electrical Workers' Union (BEEWA). The Black Health and Allied Workers' Union, the Orange - Vaal General Workers' Union, the South African Scooter Drivers' Union and the South African Domestic Workers Union have all given their support to the alliance, although have not formally joined.

On May 17th, a declaration of intent was adopted which stated amongst other things:

* That the unity of black workers is paramount in all efforts directed at the eradication of all forms of oppression, exploitation and discrimination.
* That it is the inalienable right of all worker organisations to organise themselves into a solid structure that will be capable of defending the rights of workers.
* There is a need to come together to co-ordinate resources as a means towards the fulfilment of black workers' objectives.
* The need for joint action on matters of common interest.
* The need to encourage the spirit of solidarity and unity within the black working class and black community.
* The need to promote, develop and maintain

authentic black working class leadership.

At the same meeting an interim committee was elected to examine how administration, fund-raising, and effective utilisation of personnel and expertise could be co-ordinated.

Giving reasons for the establishment of the alliance, co-ordinator of the interim committee and general secretary of BAMCWU, Mr Phandelani Nefolovhodwe said:

> All the unions in the alliance were not invited to the original unity talks initiated by FOSATU and CUSA, among others. Nor were we invited to subsequent talks. We in the alliance faced common problems such as lack of finance, resources and training projects. By pooling resources and expertise and by building the unity of black workers it will be possible to create more solid unions. Also, the ideological orientation of the unions is to provide black worker leadership.

History of black consciousness trade unionism

The South Africa Students Organisation (SASO) was for many years the driving force of the black consciousness movement. In 1972, SASO and the Black Peoples Convention (BPC) were instrumental in the launching of the Black Allied Workers Union (BAWU), a trade union to organise black workers exclusively. During the 1977 clampdown, which included the banning of SASO and BPC and a host of other organisations, BAWU somehow survived. With the formation of AZAPO in 1978, and the increasing reexamination by black consciousness activists of the nature of South African society, the unionisation of workers was placed high on the agenda. Labour clinics were arranged by AZAPO's labour secretary with activists and workers. It was here where assistance was given to workers and where many of the unions, which form part of the alliance today, were first discussed.

BAMCWU for example, was launched in 1982, after AZAPO labour secretary, Letsatsi Mosala assisted workers on

strike at Ready Mix Concrete (Pty) Ltd. in resolving their wage dispute. Today the union claims a membership of 20000 in the cement, quarry, construction and mining industries. According to union officials the union is growing rapidly with over 400 workers coming to the offices weekly. Although one cannot confirm the figures, BAMCWU's involvement in the Penge Asbestos Mine dispute, and the recent mine workers' strike at Rand Mines Durban Deep indicate substantial support in this sector. Its position in the alliance is crucial for at least two reasons: the strategic industries it organises and its numerical dominance in the alliance.

While some unions started at the labour clinics, others were the result of breakaways from bigger unions. At least two were the result of splits from BAWU, namely ABWU and AAWU. Both organise generally. In fact the alliance has four general unions, the others being BLAGWU and NUWSA. "Because only a small fraction of South Africa's working class has been organised, there is still a lot of work to be done. There is sufficient space for all the unions", said Nefolovhodwe.

Although it is difficult to ascertain the exact industrial distribution of membership of the general unions, it seems a variety of workers have been unionised. ABWU, for example, have concentrated on small engineering enterprises, the retail sector and also nursing homes. AAWU, according to the SALDRU trade union directory, are concentrating on the food and construction industries, while NUWSA have organised security guards, nightwatchmen and the cleaning staff of office buildings.

Competition with other unions is not considered a problem. Instead it is seen as "healthy in drawing and maintaining membership". The alliance envisages that demarcation on industrial lines will have to take place. When and how is still unclear. Although it is difficult to confirm the numerical support of the alliance, some officials have put it at between 60000 and 70000 workers. How many of these are fully paid up,

no one is prepared to say.

Strikes

All the unions have decided not to register because "registration is an inroad by the state into workers' organisations". Employer hostility to unregistered unions has remained a major problem. Their reluctance to recognise and negotiate with the unions has in a number of cases resulted in strikes.

BAMCWU has been involved in a number of significant strikes, not always successfully. One which has certainly captured the attention of the trade union movement was the wage strike at the Penge Asbestos mine in the Eastern Transvaal. Seventeen-hundred miners struck after refusing the 12-13% wage increases announced by the Chamber of Mines and instead demanded recognition of their union and a minimum increase of R10.00 per shift. The Griqualand Exploration and Finance Company, owner of the mine, dismissed the workers and applied to the Supreme Court to have the strikers evicted from the mine's hostel. Workers had been on strike for three weeks and although bleak prospects faced them in Lebowa, they refused selective re-employment at the mine. Their support for BAMCWU has throughout remained steadfast.

Another important strike, by an alliance member took place at Tempest International Radio Manufacturers, led by the BEEWU. This action centred around recognition and wages.

One of the most interesting strikes, by an alliance member, has been at Liberty Life involving members of IAWUSA. The strike, which started in July 1983 and involved 150 IAWUSA members, was over recognition of the union. The strike was characterised by a number of pickets in front of Liberty Life headquarters and the boycott of its subsidiaries. There were also serious divisions among workers over the direction of their campaign. The boycott and the strike (over a year) are still theoretically in progress and there is another

legal battle pending against Liberty Life.

Unions in the independent labour movement have organised predominantly "blue collar" workers. Very little thought has , it seems, been given to "white collar" workers. IAWUSA is certainly pioneering in this respect. Since its inception in 1982, IAWUSA has signed up 1500 members nationally in the insurance, financial and related institutions. The union's involvement in the Liberty Life strike, which received international attention, indicates the uphill battle that it is going to have to wage in order to gain recognition.

How to establish firm labour traditions in this sector of the economy will be closely watched. Joe Rokgoadi, general secretary of IAWUSA and a former employee in the insurance industry, sees the future of organising clerical and administrative staff in the financial sector, as not only vital to the alliance, but to the trade union movement generally: "They form part of the black working class, and they must be unionised".

Organisation and democracy

The alliance shares the commitment of building democratically controlled unions with the rest of the independent labour movement. To what extent this has been structured and practised in the different unions is difficult to say, because many of the unions have existed for less than two years, and given the role of intellectuals in the founding of these unions. But this problem is recognised by the intellectuals working in the unions. Nefolovhodwe, however, emphasises that the intellectuals are subject to the control of the workers. "Without workers controlling the union, a worker leadership and democratic union become virtually impossible", he added.

The unions in the alliance emphasise the building of shopfloor structures because this is where their strength lies. This has meant patiently organising workers into democratic workers' committees with shop

stewards from different sections of the factory or enterprise. Emphasis is firstly placed on gaining majority support at the workplace, before efforts are made to gain management recognition. Nefolovhodwe stresses that the workers' committee always obtains mandates from the general membership and reports back regularly before any action is decided upon. "There is a close relationship between the union officials and the workers on the shopfloor, but the decisions come from the workers, not the officials", added Nefolovhodwe. In the disputes and strikes mentioned above, this certainly does seem to have been the case.

On the other hand, there are a number of union executive officials who occupy positions usually reserved to worker representatives. For example, Rev Joe Seoka is president of IAWUSA, while Letsatsi Mosala, a former AZAPO secretary, is president of BAMCWU. Both are not workers in the industries in which the unions operate; Joe Rokgoadi, general secretary of IAWUSA:

> Rev Seoka played a very important part in the formation of the unions. His commitment to the workers' struggle and his sacrifice was noticed by the workers. They felt they wanted him to lead the union, and he was elected. But, like all democratic structures, we exercise collective leadership.

In the case of Mosala, his historical role in the formation of AMCWU also had a lot to do with his election as president. Exactly what influence is wielded by the president, as a non-worker on the general direction of the union, is not very clear.

The alliance unions are attempting to establish a national presence, but except for IAWUSA, BAMCWU and AAWU, the unions are predominantly based in the Transvaal.

The Alliance and AZAPO

The alliance is not content to merely engage in shopfloor politics. The unions have joined the National Forum in order to participate in the national political

struggle. They have consequently adopted the Manifesto of the Azanian People. The need to have strong links with the community is seen as indispensible. "Workers come from the community", said Nefolovhodwe, "and the link between community struggle and factory struggle must be made, if we are to promote a working class struggle to eradicate all forms of oppression and exploitation."

Although AZAPO played an important historical role in the formation of some of the unions, they are by no means dominated by AZAPO. The unions certainly share a common ideological orientation, but consider their priorities differently. "AZAPO is a national political organisation. The unions are, fundamentally worker organisations, and we are independent", added Nefolovhodwe.

White participation and self-reliance

The rejection of white participation has been fundamental to the black consciousness movement. Often accused of being racist, the black consciousness organisations have attempted to explain that their position is a "historically evolved one". Explanations why whites cannot play a role in the organisations of the oppressed and exploited, are given with varying subtlety, depending on who one speaks to, but what is emphasised is that "only the oppressed can liberate themselves". Nefolovhodwe elaborated:

> ...for genuine freedom to be accomplished it must be under the command of an independently organised black working class. This is a task to be tackled by blacks, without white interference.

The alliance considers liberalism, in all its shades and disguises, to be the biggest danger.

On the role of whites in the political struggle, Nefolovhodwe said:

> We do not reject white participation. It depends where they participate. We believe they have a role to play in their own communities in order

to prepare them for change. Why do they want to organise blacks? Surely we can do this on our own?

From remarks made by the officials of the unions, it seems self-reliance means "independence and non-interference of social agents not part of the oppressed and exploited masses". Ultimately, for the alliance it means the right to chart the course of the unions without white interference. "To suggest that we are racist because we want to decide for ourselves, without white interference, is ridiculous," said one official, in reply to critics of black exclusivism.

Conclusion

Whether the alliance is to develop into a federation is unclear. It seems a likely prospect. But, Nefolovhodwe remains adamant that the alliance is committed to the broadest possible unity of South Africa's black working class, but, "no unity for unity's sake, it must be based on clear principles." At this stage given their non-participation in the unity talks and the fact that they reject white participation, it seems the alliance will be forced to go it alone. The possibility of tactical unity against intransigent bosses or the state is the best one can hope for in the future.

What is significant about this development on the trade union scene is that the black consciousness organisations are not merely content with talking about organising the working class. They have got down to doing it. The future of the alliance and its influence on developments in the labour movement should not be underestimated. With only 12% of South Africa's working class organised, the indepedent union movement still has an enormous task to organise public workers, farm workers and the rest into the mainstream of the labour movement. Although the alliance is small in relation to the "emerging federation" it may well become a force to be reckoned with.

(Marcel Golding, October 1984)

PWAWU: Organising Mondi

In January 1984 a national Shop Stewards Council was set up for the Mondi Group. This achievement was the result of five years of organising by the Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union (PWAWU) in the face of management opposition and attempts to divide African and Indian workers.

The Paper Wood & Allied Workers Union (PWAWU) was formed in 1973 in the Transvaal and became part of the Consultative Committee, a small federation of Transvaal -based unions espousing a black consciousness ideology. In 1979 PWAWU, the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union and the Glass & Allied Workers Union left the Consultative Committee to join the new Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) which was being formed. The other Consultative Committee unions went into the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), which was being formed at the same time. From this time PWAWU started to be more systematically organised, aiming for majority membership and introducing proper shop steward structures, etc. As a result the union started to show considerable growth in 1980/1. In 1982 a branch was opened in Northern Natal (north of the Tugela) and in 1983 a branch was opened in Natal, south of the Tugela.

Mondi

The Mondi Paper Company is a subsidiary of the Anglo American Corporation. Mondi's first factory was built in Merebank, Durban, and started operating in 1969 with approximately 1500 workers. It was the biggest and most modern paper factory in South Africa, very capital-intensive and producing fine paper (newsprint and writing paper) as opposed to kraft or board. In 1981 Mondi started expanding. They bought S A Board Mills with its three factories at Springs, Umgeni and Bellville, and they bought Huletts' two paper factories at Piet Retief and Felixton. These 5 factories formed

- Mondi -

a new division of Mondi Paper Company called Mondi Board Mills, with a total of approximately 2000 workers. The Board Mills factories manufacture kraft or board. Mondi also started construction on a giant new factory in Richards Bay, which is due to start Phase I of its operations at the end of 1984. Mondi was by now producing 54% of the total amount of paper being produced in South Africa.

Unionisation of Mondi

In the beginning Mondi was largely non-unionised. The S A Boilermakers Society, S A Electrical Workers Union and the Amalgamated Engineering Union, all party unions to the Pulp & Paper Industrial Council, had some members in Mondi Paper Co. (Merebank) but their combined membership never amounted to more than 200 in the whole factory. In 1975 there was an attempt by the Transport and General Workers Union to organise workers at Mondi Paper Co., but this did not come to anything, and the vast majority of workers at Mondi remained outside of any Union.

Felixton

In June 1981, PWAWU started to organise at Huletts Paper in Felixton near Empangeni. This factory had nearly 400 workers, and by September the union had a majority and approached the management for recognition. Lengthy negotiations followed towards a recognition agreement. The main issue of contention was that management insisted on the right to negotiate wages at plant level. After three weeks of full-time negotiation, PWAWU eventually won and a draft agreement was prepared which included a clause allowing for annual wage negotiations at the plant, to run concurrently with the annual Industrial Council wage negotiations. Eventually the recognition agreement was ready and was to be signed in December. One week before the appointed date, the mill management informed PWAWU shop-stewards that the company was being bought by Mondi, and so the recognition agreement would have to be

checked over by Mondi management before being signed. The meeting for signing the agreement was cancelled, and the months dragged by.

As a result of pressure from the union, the mill management eventually conceded after 6 months that Mondi had no intention of signing the recognition agreement, "for fear of setting a precedent". The mill management, however, promised faithfully to stick by all aspects of the unsigned agreement, including wage negotiation. The workers demanded that they prove their good faith by writing a letter stating this, signing it and posting it on the notice boards of the mill for all to see. Management refused.

In September PWAWU started making preparations for the wage negotiations. A letter was then received from the Mondi Board Mills Group Manager stating that not only could Mondi not allow wage negotiations to take place at the Felixton Mill, but in addition, PWAWU officials would no longer be allowed to attend meetings between the shop stewards and the management.

The workers were furious. Numerous meetings were held with management over this. The Group Manager came to one meeting, the Managing Director was summoned and he also attended one meeting. But management refused to budge. Eventually the workers decided to stop their shop stewards from having any dealings with management, saying that they would not allow Mondi to turn their shop steward committee into a liaison committee. All dealings with the workers would in future be carried out through general meetings between management and the entire workforce in the canteen. Management pleaded with the workers not to do this, saying that the relationship between them would be damaged. The workers stood firm, management rushed to report this development and after a week they informed the workers that it had now been agreed that union officials would continue attending meetings as before. They also reported that Mondi management was prepared to negotiate a new recognition agreement with the union in the new year.

- Mondi -

Merebank

In March 1983, PWAWU held a recruitment campaign at Mondi Paper Co. in Merebank. Help was enlisted from organisers and shopstewards of MAWU, SFAWU, GWU and AFWCU. In the first week of the campaign, 550 members were signed up. It took another month to sign up another 150 and reach 700 - a majority - and to approach management for recognition.

PWAWU's majority membership at Merebank caused great consternation to Mondi and at the Industrial Council, mainly because two-thirds of the workforce at the plant are Indian, and nobody expected PWAWU to have such great success in signing up large numbers of Indian workers. The South African Boilermakers Society, in particular, despite its low appeal to workers of all races in the paper industry, regarded the Indian workers as their terrain, and were incensed to hear that not only had over 400 Indian workers joined PWAWU, but about 90 of their own members resigned to join PWAWU.

Management immediately gave PWAWU stop order facilities, but decided to stall on granting recognition. At the same time intimidation of PWAWU members, particularly Indian members, was going on inside the mill on a large scale. Union members were being watched closely, Indian members were being told that they had joined an African union and that they would lose their jobs to African workers by joining the union. Management was openly favouring the S A Boilermakers Society, and made it clear that they were stalling on recognition of PWAWU because PWAWU was not a party union to the Industrial Council.

The situation became intolerable and PWAWU started to initiate the necessary steps to take Mondi to the Industrial Court for an unfair labour practice - i.e. refusing to negotiate with a majority union. PWAWU also publicised this in the press. Mondi gave in just before the Industrial Court proceedings were initiated. Shopsteward elections were then held inside the fact-

ory and negotiations for a recognition agreement were started in November 1983.

Umgeni, Piet Retief and Springs

In the meantime PWAWU was recruiting at Umgeni, Piet Retief and Springs. In December 1983, majority membership had been achieved and de facto recognition had been granted to the union at each of these factories.

At Umgeni where there were 250 Indian and 300 African workers, PWAWU found itself organising against the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU), which was organising along racial lines in the mill and causing a lot of division and confusion among the workers. However, despite the difficulties caused by this situation, PWAWU achieved an overall majority by October 1983, and this majority is increasing.

At none of the other Mondi factories does PWAWU have any serious competition from any other unions. The only factory which had not been organised by PWAWU at that stage was the Bellville factory since PWAWU did not then have a branch in the Western Cape. In December 1983 PWAWU had therefore joined up +/- 2200 of the +/- 3300 workers in the Mondi group as a whole.

Wage dispute

During 1983, PWAWU and Mondi negotiated a recognition agreement at Felixton, but were unable to agree on two points: (i) minority union rights and (ii) the right to negotiate wages and conditions at plant level. A complete deadlock was reached on these items and so eventually members at Felixton agreed that the agreement should be signed leaving these things out altogether, and the Company and the union would continue to fight it out. Once any agreement has been reached on these points, additions could be made to the agreement. When negotiations were started at Merebank, the company and the union deadlocked on the same two points (and some others).

- Mondi -

In December 1983 the Pulp and Paper Industrial Council awarded increases of 8% to 10%, thereby bringing up the minimum wage from R1,25 to R1,38 per hour. PWAWU members in all the Mondi (and SAPPI) factories were disgusted with these increases. Workers at Merebank planned to strike. They put in a demand for additional increases and a minimum wage of R3,00 per hour. Manage-ment said that they had no authority to consider this demand, and so shopstewards demanded to meet with the managing director Mr Reg Donner, who clearly did have the authority. Donner ignored this demand, and as a result a brief partial stoppage took place.

In response the management indicated that they may be willing to give an increase to the lower grades, and asked the union for a detailed wage proposal. The union, believing that this was an indication of will-ingness to negotiate, consulted with members and sub-mitted a detailed proposal of increases for the diff-erent grades. However, once management felt that the threat of a strike was over, they went back to a posi-tion of refusing even to discuss wage increases.

As a result of this, negotiations on the recognition agreement deadlocked. Management clearly hoped that the same thing could be done as at Felixton, i.e. to sign an agreement which left out any reference to issues such as plant-level negotiations. The workers at Merebank, however, insisted on a clause allowing plant-level negotiations, in the light of their dis-pute with management over wage increases.

In the meantime workers at Umgeni had put in a demand for increases and a R2,50 minimum wage; at Felixton workers had demanded a minimum wage of R3,50 and at Piet Retief workers had put in a demand for an across-the-board increase of R1 per hour. At Umgeni and Felixton it was not the first time the shop stewards had brought up the question of wage increases, and as before management informed them that they would have to refer their demands to the head office, but that they did not hold out any hope of these demands being

considered. It was clearly necessary to confront Mondi on a national scale.

Mondi Shop Stewards Council

On 28 and 29 January 1984, about 45 shop stewards from all five Mondi factories organised under PWAWU met and formed a national Mondi Shop Stewards Council. Also present were some shopstewards from SAPPI. At this meeting it was agreed that the wage disputes in the different Mondi factories must be fought jointly. It was agreed to formulate a new uniform wage demand (minimum R3 per hour) and to demand company-level negotiations between the Managing Director and representatives from the Mondi Shop Stewards Council.

Shortly after this the Bellville factory - consisting of half "Coloured" and half African workers - was also organised by the union.

In May this year PWAWU took a decision to join the Industrial Council. With 4000 members out of the 10000 workers in the industry against a combined membership of 1500 for the other unions on the Council - PWAWU is the first emerging black union to achieve majority status on an Industrial Council. Representing 6 out of 9 factories organised by PWAWU - the Mondi national Shop Stewards Council is expected to play a leading role on the Industrial Council.

In June increases were negotiated at plant level thus resolving the dispute over wages with Mondi. The increases were across the board and larger than usual. Four out of 6 factories achieved a R2 per hour minimum (the other 2 factories are in rural areas).

(Pat Horne, PWAWU, July 1984)

Cape Town Municipal Workers Association

The Cape Town Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA) represents the 11400 black workers of Cape Town City Council. Below we print extracts from two interviews conducted by Debbie Budlender with John Ernstzen - the general secretary of the CTMWA since 1965. When he first started working for the Council in 1962 he found a union there which barely deserved the name. Today the CTMWA is generally considered to be among the more progressive and democratic trade unions in South Africa. The extracts below relate to the takeover of the union by rank and file members in 1964.

SALB: How did you become involved in trade unionism?

John: Before entering the Council's service I was an artisan in the furniture industry. I became involved within the union there at a very early age. Then in 1958, while I was still an apprentice, there was a strike in the industry. And this strike had a very important bearing on my whole attitude and outlook towards things. I was only 18 at the time, but I was elected shop steward during the strike and was nominated to serve on the executive committee. Because of my role I found myself without a job, and together with others who were regarded as the instigators I was blacklisted.

Another very important event occurred just subsequent to the furniture workers' strike and prior to my coming into the Council service. That was the period of 1960, of Langa, Sharpeville. Can I ever forget working in a factory that was in the shadows of Table Mountain and particularly De Waal Drive, and looking to the slopes towards De Waal Drive one saw thousands of people walking towards Cape Town. That picture remains an indelible part of my memory and of my formative process. So that when I came to the City Council in March 1962 it was with that kind of background.

SALB: How did the union takeover in 1964 take place?

John: I found a body here called a union but not in my mind performing any of the functions that a union should fulfil. I met with others. I found a tremendous dissatisfaction. I even found fear among workers. They were reluctant to attend meetings because nothing less than gangsterism prevailed at the time. Were you to attend a meeting and you voiced any opposition to those in authority, you stood a very serious chance of being forcefully thrown out of the meeting. You would be denied access to the office, even though you might have had action taken against you by the employer.

In fact coming to this office the very first time I found just what was taking place inside. No-one seemed interested in the disabilities which workers were suffering. For example, I came as a qualified artisan to the council, yet I had to start as a labourer again. I was told it was expected of "non-whites to start at the bottom and work yourself up". I was totally dissatisfied with that kind of approach because white workers who came in were appointed foremen and to other managerial positions even though they had no understanding whatsoever of the nature of the work being performed. This led me to feel that something should be done, not just as an individual but in cahoots with others as well.

I realised, as others did at the time, that it would be a very difficult task. It was a big union. It was a divisive union in more senses than one. We were kept apart. The bureaucracy of the union themselves didn't really encourage people to attend meetings. And we were divided by a City Council structure which broke departments up from and amongst themselves, and which broke the departments up into branches and branches into depots. Then in the depots we were broken up into different designations. All along one could see a policy of keeping workers apart from one another.

I then went to my first union meeting, in 1963, in

the Rondebosch Town Hall. It was on the wage question. It was a total shambles. Instead of workers being asked to decide on an increase I found that although ostensibly this was being done, a decision had already been taken, in conjunction with the bosses to implement their wage increase. The audience was resisting the attempts of those in control of the union to get them to accept a penny per hour increase. A motion was passed rejecting the offer. Yet when I opened the newspaper the very next day I found that workers had accepted the offer. I coundn't understand which meeting they were referring to. It was certainly not the same meeting which I had attended.

This led to some of us getting together and discussing our common disabilities, firstly as workers of the City Council and secondly as rightless people in a union that should really belong to us as such. We already had so many disabilities as part of the oppressed and here we found that in a union of our own we were being denied basic rights.

We raised our voices at general meetings. We asked for the right to address members. We were invariably shouted down. Attempts were made to remove us from the hall. Some of us found ourselves outside a particular hall after one meeting. We were very unhappy and dissatisfied with the manner in which those in charge were handling the union's affairs. We decided that we should meet and try to find out whether there were other people like ourselves who might feel similarly and therefore assist us in our struggle to rectify what we considered to be wrong within the union.

We embarked on a programme of trying to get to the members. We met together. We were earning very, very little at the time, but we clubbed together. We started preparing our own circulars in which we explained to members what we felt was going wrong within the union. Some people came forward.

Those in authority effectively got the City Council

to debar us from the use of Council premises. We then hired loud hailers. We would meet in the streets outside the depots where people were working. Here and there the police were brought in to scatter us and get rid of us. But we persevered. We started what we called "huisbesoek". We observed at general meetings who else voiced their dissatisfaction. We followed that person up. We asked whether we could visit that person. Or whether that person would like to visit us at a central point. From a central group of five or six eventually we were something like 50 to 60.

We asked for access to the books of the union. This was denied us. We applied pressure at a general meeting for permission to examine the minute books and financial position of the union. Four of us were in the union's offices on a Saturday when some of the office bearers brought a gang along. We were four compared to eight to ten hefty "bodies". All the notes we had made were torn up. We were physically beaten up right there in the office - one with a bloodied nose and in addition our shirts were torn. We were beaten up in the true sense of the word.

We went to the police station. We asked for charges to be preferred. But it appears that they had already been in cahoots with the cops, because when we arrived there we were treated in a very shabby manner. We were called communists and told to bugger off out of the police station, to put it bluntly. So then we thought that there is only one way, and that is via the shop floor, via the rank and file. In other words, in the field. There were no short cuts and we had to suffer the consequences of a rather lengthy battle.

Meanwhile I was working as a labourer in five different playgrounds, including the one in the area where I went to school. I started with R7.12 per week, after I had been earning R48 per week as a qualified artisan. So you can appreciate it was quite a struggle at the time. But I used the opportunity to improve myself. Working in the playground gave me the opportunity to

study De Kock's "Industrial Laws of South Africa", which I did very thoroughly. I acquainted myself well with the Industrial Conciliation Act in particular and other related acts. I started questioning the definition of employee and why Africans were excluded from the collective bargaining process, etc. I supplemented my reading in other directions, wanting to know more about workers and workers' struggles in other countries.

I was encouraged by certain people who were doing degrees up at university. And I was virtually smuggled into Jagger Library on their cards. I had no formal academic education, but I met with many of those with more progressive attitudes who were studying at the time and they helped to give me an understanding from an academic point of view. Then I had to apply practically a lot of what I had gained theoretically.

We worked at night to find contacts at the depots or the branches or wherever they might be working. So that 50 or 60 was not a very true reflection of our strength because each one of us had another group of supporters around that individual. This led to what you refer to as a historic year in the life of the union, 1964, where our AGM in April of that year took place and where we had planned a massive campaign to remove those who were in charge of the union affairs and to replace them with people who would have their perspectives more in the interests of the workers. Not only the workers of the Council in Cape Town, but workers in general, but particularly, because of our stage of development at that time, the members of this particular union.

A shock was to await us. The four of us who had been beaten up were singled out. In the week preceding the Annual General Meeting in April we each in turn received a telegram to advise us that we had been summarily expelled from the union. No reasons were advanced. No charges were preferred against us. We were never afforded the opportunity of being heard. There was no right of appeal.

We then had to weigh up very quickly again what action to take. While we realised the limitations of legal action, and utilising lawyers and law courts, because of the time period we had no choice. Papers had to be prepared. The Saturday night preceding the meeting we had to go to the home of a judge, Justice Watermeyer, who examined the situation. We were fortunate in obtaining an order restraining them from keeping us out of the meeting. But we realised that was very short termish, so to speak.

However that kind of action on their part was to have counter-productive results for them because we were able to use our telegrams in the meeting to show what bureaucracy is capable of and how people flouted their own constitution to the disadvantage of those who spoke against them.

They didn't interfere with us at first at the meeting. We allowed the minutes to be read, and then we started questioning. I remember standing at the mike encouraging people to take a keener interest in the affairs of the union and to ask for facts to be produced. Then the same gang who had beaten us up, but with more "bodies", came into the meeting. They had chains. They had knives. I remember using the microphone and shouting to people not to be intimidated, to stand together, and that was the kind of thing that these people would resort to, because they were dishonest, bureaucratic, they weren't working in the interests of members. I made allegations. And then I took the butt of the mike and kept swinging it round and round to protect myself because they were attempting to remove it from me.

Then an amazing thing happened. The 350 to 400 members present encircled the gang and fighting broke out. I saw fear being exchanged from the members to the gang. The crowd was angry and notwithstanding its weapons, the gang was beaten right out of the meeting.

The result was that on that day all existing office bearers were suspended by decision of the meeting.

However, none of us were elected shopstewards at that stage. In order to be on the executive, you must first be a shopsteward elected at the depot. So we asked the meeting to agree to elect what we called a "caretaker committee", with a mandate to investigate the functions of the union and how it had been run, and to report back as soon as possible to a general meeting.

The caretaker committee was seven persons. From among the committee we elected our own chair, vice-chair, treasurer, to comply with the basic necessities of running the union. Again I found myself in the fortunate position, notwithstanding my youth at the time, of being elected to the caretaker committee. I was a child among giants. I found myself swamped not only by people much older in age, but very experienced persons. And I owe a great deal to them right up until today because I learnt from them.

SALB: How many of these people had experience of other unions?

John Only one or two of these people had experience of other unions. Basically their own experience was related to their employment within the council. They had years of service. Many of them had experienced the wrath of the bureaucracy. Some of them had been suspended during the previous years. But even those who had been involved entirely in this union had been in contact with other unions. Whilst they might not have come from another factory or another work situation, they had seen the importance of contact with other workers. So that their basic concepts did not only relate to the workers they were involved with.

We met for a year on end, every night of every week, including Saturdays and Sundays. It was one of the most trying periods. Many of us suffered a lot. There were people whom I was working with on that committee who were nearly out of their homes because they saw their families so very seldom. One of these people lost his job because he fell asleep while on duty from

pure exhaustion. We used to come straight from work here and leave at one or two in the morning.

We discovered an amazing situation, where the union was virtually in the red. There were no proper books of account being kept. We were so determined that the union was taken to court. The magistrate who examined the evidence of the then bookkeeper commented very adversely on the state of affairs. We wanted criminal charges to be preferred against those people who we felt were misusing workers' money - the money of streetsweepers, refuse collectors and the rest. But we weren't successful. The court ruled that we should try to clean up our house. The Department of Labour also hardly wanted to move its backside. Perhaps we were not the kind of people they would have liked around.

In the next two-year period I and many others tried to do things properly. When I was working in the Parks and Forest branch I stood as shop steward. I was duly nominated and seconded. The election was to take place on a Sunday morning in the Mowbray town hall. When I arrived there, there were others who had been nominated from other branches throughout the service. Two cleansing trucks pulled up. Again we had this huge gang of intimidators - "skollies", I'll call them, nothing more and nothing less. Some of them are still members of our union today, but they have changed a lot. We have taken them along with us, because they were used at that time and didn't understand. They have become very good members now, but at that time they belonged to gangs that were roaming the streets of Cape Town.

When I went into the hall I brought my chaps along whom I had canvassed - their vote would be private. These "skollies" came along and chained me. They put a chain around my neck and I was marched by a group of them, with knives being prodded into my back, from Mowbray town hall, down to the station. Of course I lost the election for Parks and Forests at the time. But these were the methods being employed.

We found ourselves being summonsed very regularly to the Department of Labour. We told them in no uncertain terms that this was our affair, our union, that it was the members who had to decide. They didn't like our attitude. The industrial registrar became involved. Many of us were questioning the wisdom of registration. But we felt at that stage it was not in our interests to rock the boat and that we could look at the matter again as the situation unfolded. But some nine months after we had come into office the registrar ruled that we were unconstitutional and illegal, and that all decisions taken by us and the union were to be declared null and void. They were going to call elections.

We responded to the challenge. Democratically we stood to be elected and opposed the other people who had been there. Of the 68 seats available at the time for shop stewards, we gained 67. The one we lost was to the suspended president of the union. He had this gang who tried to beat us up and also had a very strong following at the abbatoirs. But we were able to make his life a complete misery at the very first meeting.

Then we, in turn, in a proper manner laid charges against the former office bearers. We gave them the right to answer the charges. They were heard and found guilty by the general council, the shop stewards. They were sent letters. Their rights were explained to them - that they had the right of appeal before a general meeting and would be permitted to state their case. Two of them decided to appeal. The general meeting found them guilty and confirmed the sentence that had been imposed. They were expelled.

During that time we placed a lot of emphasis on what people commonly refer to as "bread and butter" issues, whilst not neglecting the political issues of the time. People were earning pittances at the time. I am not saying that now they are earning a wonderful wage but we have been able to persevere through the years to at least improve their earnings. Needless to say this struggle is still continuing.

We refused to serve on what was then called the Staff Advisory Committee of the Council. We didn't want to serve on dummy committees that still had to report up. We wanted to serve on the committee that really mattered. Our rather hard line eventually paid dividends. Today - and we take pride in this - the Staff Advisory Committee has been scrapped completely.

We took a time to convince our membership that our attitude was correct. Our meetings at first might have been attended by 80 people, or 100, but by the early seventies we were having 1000 people and more attending meetings.

Our methods have also become more sophisticated from an administrative point of view. We obtained the address of every single member of our union, and we purchased an addressograph. We didn't just put notices upon the notice board any longer. We took a pride in personal invitations. Our shopstewards played a major role in this respect as well. We communicated in writing to our members, explaining our shortcomings, but also explaining that we were trying, that we were prone to make mistakes, but that we would continue to persevere in our efforts. This brought forth a lot of good results and we were then able to consolidate.

By today we have been able to advance quite substantially. We have a very useful administration,a staff of some eighteen, nineteen people. We have diverse activities. For example, we have an autonomous medical benefit fund with a membership of some thirty thousand odd people, including husbands, wives and dependents. We have a bursary scheme to help in the education of members and their children. This has been extended to the children of other workers as well. We have a scheme whereby if any of our members are on sick leave without pay, we will pay them for the full duration of their period of absence from work. We make ex gratia payments at the time of death to help defray funeral expenses. And we don't have special subscriptions for any of these different schemes other than

for medical. It all comes from the monthly membership levy, which is on a sliding scale according to the wage, but up to a maximum of R1 per month.

We were virtually in the red when we took office in 1964. There was a property which had been bought in 1959, but it was heavily bonded. In three years, through tremendous sacrifice and with the co-operation of members, we were able to liquidate the bond.

SALB: what is the structure of the union today?

John: We have a very large shop steward complement, of approximately 100 shop stewards. We believe it is necessary to establish as much communication as possible between the leadership and the membership and we thus have a shop steward in every single depot in every branch. We maintain contact even with the small gangs which work out on the roadways. We keep members informed of developments and activities, and members assist the shop stewards in a variety of ways.

A properly structured shop steward representation together with sub-committees which focus on various aspects such as wages and education are central to the disciplined unity and effective operation of the union. How else would we be able to work with a membership of 11400? There must be contact and discussion and a means of acting when problems arise. The divided and decentralised structure of the City Council makes unity more difficult to achieve than the situation prevailing in a factory for instance. However the shop stewards have developed into the strong backbone of the union. And with this firm basis we have been able to further extend our scope to encompass all the broad issues affecting workers today - the Koornhof Bills, tricameral parliament, as well as more local issues such as the recurrent bus fare increases. And together with other unions we are now in the process of building a stronger united worker movement in the form of the proposed new federation.

NUTW in the Western Cape

The National Union of Textile Workers Union (NUTW) has been organising in the Western Cape since 1982 - often in the face of opposition from the TUCSA union (TWIU). Earlier this year the NUTW was sufficiently entrenched to establish a branch in the area. On the 12th September 1984 the SALB interviewed the Branch Secretary, Virginia Engel.

SALB: Can we begin by discussing the factories which the NUTW has organised in the Western Cape. Why is SANS (South African Nylon Spinners) such a strategic company for you?

Virginia: SANS supplies most of the textile industry with yarn nationally. A lot of the factories we are organising presently are dependent on the yarn from SANS. It is one of the biggest employers here in the textile industry in the Western Cape. And it is the most sophisticated company in terms of machinery and a leading exporter. It is the most important company for us in the Western Cape.

SALB: And have you had problems organising it?

Virginia: We have organised there fully - at one point we were 81%. But over the last couple of months management has employed so many more people because they are expanding. We still have a big majority there amongst the clock employees but when you include the staff category - which is +/- 400 out of the total +/- 1300 that brings down our figure to 63%. We negotiated wages last year and will do so again this year for 1985.

SALB: Has management tried to co-opt union members?

Virginia: I would say the past history of SANS is that it was one of the best employers in the Western

Cape in that they paid the highest wages. But over the last few years, and with a change in management, that is changing. Workers have lost in 1982, just before the union came, a lot of the benefits they used to have - like paid free days. These they lost when management set up a works committee. They tried to compensate people: increasing wages and reducing other benefits. So the working conditions have become tougher at SANS and people are waking up to this now, but it will take time to correct the so-called good image SANS enjoyed in the past. People see it more realistically now - although it is still one of the highest payers, but then it has the ability to pay - it is part of AECI.

SALB: Table Bay Spinners was the first company the union organised in Cape Town. What is the situation there?

Virginia: The workers approached the FOSATU office. They were disillusioned with the Textile Workers Industrial Union, the TUCSA affiliate. They believed that the union was not serving their interests and they quoted instances - for example when workers took complaints to the management, the union official would wink at the management whilst they were discussing it. On occasions when workers called union officials to the factory about a complaint they would go and hear management's side of the story first and then the workers' side. This has built up over years. Workers felt they were paying subs and benefit money for that organisation and getting nothing in return. As a result of that they felt they wanted another organisation to represent them. Those workers made it clear to us that if we at any point behaved in a manner which resembled the TWIU they would not hesitate to leave our union also. They were a very strong group of workers and very together.

SALB: What is the membership there?

Virginia: We have 95% membership but we don't have

some elementary trade union rights at this factory - like stop orders - because of the company being part of the Industrial Council. The Industrial Council says only the TWIU is entitled to stop order rights. So we lodged a court case at the Industrial Court. We lost. The TWIU union opposed us despite the fact that they have only 9 members out of the 426 at the factory. They told the Industrial Court that it would set a precedent which would undermine the entire Industrial Court structure. We have now referred the matter to the Supreme Court.

SALB: How does that influence the union's policy towards the Industrial Council? Is it thinking of joining or is this not on the union's agenda?

Virginia: No it is definitely on the union's agenda. We will have to debate that very seriously in our organisation, and very soon. As we organise more and more cotton factories particularly in the Western Cape we will need to come to terms with such a decision. If we are refused membership of an Industrial Court it produces a dilemma since we can then be denied stop orders.

SALB: Have there been any strikes?

Virginia: There have been two work stoppages at Table Bay Spinners in the time we have been involved there. The first one was about wages mid-last year. The second one was about the behaviour of a TWIU shopsteward towards one of our members. And the workers demanded that he should be dismissed or disciplined, as he was abusing his position as a shopsteward of the other union and in that he was a foreman at the factory also. We have also had stoppages at Franz Falke and BKB.

SALB: What was the outcome of those strikes?

Virginia: I would say that they were satisfactorily resolved. We have always been able to negotiate with the Table Bay Spinners management in particular.

They have been fairly open to the union.

SALB: Can we talk about Franz Falke. You have recognition there but they are a difficult employer, I believe?

Virginia: It is difficult to describe in words the kind of struggles we have had at this factory. I think that Franz Falke Textiles has made up its mind to crush the union. If they could succeed in reducing our support below 50% they would feel in a stronger position. But to date they haven't been able to, despite the most flagrant violation of any kind of labour relations. They haven't been able to crush the union there. It has been a bitter struggle for one year and nine months now. It's reached its lowest ebb now. We are in complete deadlock with management. If one looks at the turnover of employees just over the last two months in the printing section, for instance, there are 12 workers only - 9 out of 12 workers have been dismissed. There is a fairly high turnover in the textile industry generally, but it doesn't come near to Franz Falke.

SALB: And what is organisation like at SPH Cottonmills?

Virginia: I would say its fairly young still. We have had only three meetings with management over the last 2 months and the attitude of management seems to be fine. We got an interim recognition agreement in the shortest space of time at this factory - we can build on this. It hasn't been put to the test yet as we have not been involved in taking up grievances there. There are no procedures set out yet. The interim agreement mentions four aspects - access of union officials to members during their lunchtime at the factory; access to factory notice boards; stop order facilities and the election of shop stewards. That has been signed by management and the election of shopstewards is in process.

SALB: Nettex has also been newly organised?

Virginia: Yes we are in the process also of negotiating a recognition agreement there. We also have the same kind of clauses tied up as at SPH and we've just completed the election of shop stewards there.

SALB: What is the position at BKB (Boeremakelaars Kooperaties Bpk)?

Virginia: We are in the process of negotiating a recognition agreement with that company. It has dragged on for some time. It is difficult to pinpoint the reasons. The TWIU was there. The workers decided to resign and asked to join our organisation. Again our relationship has not yet been put to the test.

SALB: Are Table Bay Spinners and BKB the only two plants where TWIU had a presence before you started organising?

Virginia: I would say that at SPH the management revealed that the TWIU has been trying to organise there for the last 4 years and they had not succeeded in organising a majority. The company's policy was to recognise the union which succeeded in gaining a majority. Despite trying to recruit outside the gates for the TWIU - the workers did not wish to belong to that organisation.

SALB: Twistex we haven't mentioned so far. What is the situation there?

Virginia: Twistex is partly owned by Franz Falke Textiles and Romatex. The situation has been very much dependent on and tied to the struggle at Franz Falke. We have stop order rights, and the right to go in and speak to members. But because of the small workforce - they are very insecure. They have not elected shop stewards for fear of being victimised.

SALB: Now lets look at the overall picture of the

union. Are you still growing?

Virginia: The union's employees are few. If we could afford to employ more we would have grown at a much more rapid pace in the last 2 years. We haven't done too badly. We have already over 2000 members in our branch. We have had to delay organising certain factories, in order to cope with the growth of the organisation - since we are so few in the branch office.

SALB: Has the presence of the TWIU been a problem for you?

Virginia: Yes, certainly it has been an organisational problem. Particularly the Coloured workers have had no other experience of trade unions but this union - and they do not distinguish between the union and management, but see them as related. They feel very insecure, that they will lose their jobs if they wish to join another union. In general the TWIU and the whole TUCSA structure is viewed in a particular way by workers with the result that any union which comes along and tries to put forward a different way of working - more democratically, with workers participating in the organisation - this is not understood easily by workers because of the idea they have of the union as being run by paid officials and they are mere spectators. All they have to do is pay subs and fill in a membership form and that is the end of it. They don't feel that they have to take responsibility for their organisation - and they have really got the wrong idea about unions.

SALB: Do you have many African members? Are there many African workers in the textile industry in the Western Cape?

Virginia: The majority of workers are Coloured. In SPH there is a significant number of African workers - about half and half. At Falke there are a few, about 10-15. At Table Bay Spinners there is also quite a

number, about 80 - 100. The African workers are very clear about which organisation they choose to belong to and that is why the TWIU could never make headway at SPH and why Table Bay Spinners workers could take the decision to move out of the TWIU - because there is a more united feeling amongst those workers. And they are very clear about the way that the TWIU operates and that they do not accept that style of organisation. They have experience of different organisations operating differently.

SALB: Is the TWIU able to stop you getting recognition from management in the Western Cape?

Virginia: No. That tactic is imminent at the one Frame factory - Waverley - in the Western Cape. Because of the long battle between our union and Frame, I don't think we are going to get recognition lightly at this factory.

SALB: Can you say something about the NUTW's "brown lung" campaign?

Virginia: We have had a full-time medical officer co-ordinating the campaign. Workers at SPH had heard of the campaign before we started organising - from other workers. That was one reason why they wanted our union to represent them. They were concerned at the number of employees leaving the factory annually with chest ailments. Since they worked with cotton they now feel it may be brown lung that existed. At Table Bay Spinners we tested workers and found two who had brown lung - and we have applied for workmen's compensation for them. We have concentrated on brown lung - although there are other problems like over noise. But we don't have the capacity to deal with this right now. There are also the elementary cases of workmen's compensation for injuries which the union undertakes for members. We have had some successes here. On the management side there are a few firms which take a vigorous interest in health and safety. But there are others who are very non-

chalant; unguarded machinery, open blades and so on.

SALB: What is the difference in organising style between NUTW, and CLOWU for instance?

Virginia: We took specific areas in which to concentrate organisation. We started in the Bellville area where many of the textile factories are located and we organised for a long period of time at each of those factories, so that we consolidated our organisation there and had a base from which to work. We didn't use a lot of outside publicity. We depended just on the contacts we had with workers themselves. In that way we have built up a base for ourselves. We are now looking for other areas in which to organise. There is just one small factory left in the Bellville area which is not organised yet - which we could pick up very easily. Also in the Epping area we have organised BKB and SPH. We have to plan our next stage of work very carefully now. But if you work in an area you have to set up an office in that area - and that is a drain on the funds of the organisation. Our branch is only just financially independent as a branch. To start with we depended on the national union to support us.

CLOWU went on a much broader campaign trying to conscientise workers more generally about the possibility of democratic organisations - rather than concentrating on the problems of workers in a particular factory, slowly making small victories in order to build up confidence of people in themselves to be together in a democratic union. We have not used much outside support in our struggle. Ninety-nine percent of our work is concentrated within our organisation. When we organise new factories we take along shop stewards from organised factories. We think that is important in order to build up the worker leadership which is required to take the union forward. The workers themselves must have the confidence and the feeling that this is their organisation and that they are in control of it.

Trade Union Education and Culture: A Response

I CULTURE

The July SALB provided a useful review of current thinking and practice in trade union circles about worker education and culture. However it did not provide a theoretical framework for discussion.

The rule of thumb seems to be that "working class" plus "culture" gives you "working class culture" But this begs the question, since it allows the concept of culture to stand ready-made, thus we continue to see culture as products: songs, theatre, sculptures and so on. This robs culture of its active principle, its task as organiser of human relations in specific social formations; and in this way the essentially political nature of culture is concealed.

Every mode of production has means of reproducing itself; and culture is nothing but a generalised term for the practices that serve as relay between material production and reproduction of the social relations in which production takes place, cycle after cycle.

We tend to be confused by the fact that what we commonly recognise as culture is not functional in the way I have described. Tribal dances at Simmer & Jack on Sundays clearly are a cultural expression, but lifted out of time, away from the hurly burly of society. We shelve cultural things in museums, art galleries, theatres and so on - the Cubists called them "morgues". The whole point about tribal dances however, and about all preserved cultural events, is that they were once necessary in social relations, but are no longer so. Indeed, it is partly because they don't have a complex, living, social function any longer, that we see their edges and can identify them as "culture".

There is the danger that working-class culture may

There is the danger that working-class culture may come to be seen in this way, as events and performances in an enclave surrounded by (but not swamped by) unfriendly capitalist society. But working class culture is in no way analogous to the culture of previous, subsumed societies. To be strictly accurate there is no such thing as working class culture at all. The working class is part of the capitalist mode of production, and shares in the one culture that serves this mode - capitalist culture. I say "one culture", but this is not to say that it is a homogenous culture, or that it is free from contest, challenge, trouble. Being a class system, capitalism is deeply riven by class struggle, and its culture seethes with conflict. Precisely because culture is an aspect of the organisation of human relations, when these are in conflict the conflict is registered culturally.

Now it is also because the two classes in capitalism are not only divided, but ultimately irreconcilable that the term "working class culture", though incorrect, nevertheless serves a purpose: its use being to indicate those practices of the working class that have been developed in full consciousness to challenge and take ground from the dominant class. In this way the term working class culture designates forms of struggle within capitalist culture, naming those apparatuses of the working class that cannot be assimilated into capitalism, but which remain like splinters in its flesh.

We must oppose the idea that working class culture is what the working class does during its leisure time. That notion is a product of capitalist ideology, and is indeed, to the extent that it is accepted, part of capitalist culture. It is based on a two-fold mystification - that work and leisure are "opposites", and that culture relates to leisure rather than to work. In such ways the dominant class tries to prevent the working class reaching a synthesis in their understanding of their social reality.

It is, on the other hand, precisely this synthesis in understanding, exercising the heads of the workers, that may be called working class culture. The term must be used exclusively to refer to deliberate action taken against "mass culture", the culture of capitalism.

Any such practice can be likened to a "liberated zone", gained by struggle and maintained under seige, and only finally validated when the entire battle is won. This is very different from the concept of an "enclave", which suggests peaceful occupation with the willing consent of all around. Any cultural activity that is allowed by the capitalist system is at least harmless, probably advantageous to that system. There are very many practices that appear to belong to working class culture, but which have long been recuperated by capitalism and now serve it effectively: beer drinking, lobolo/bohadi, football!

Culture is not something for Sunday afternoon. In its nature as a reproductive mechanism, it is probably least active on Sunday. In turn working class culture (i.e. the culture of struggle) must not allow itself to be channelled into Sundays, but must make itself unwelcome to capitalism every day of the week.

With these general principles in mind, I want to turn to the subject of union newspapers.

II THE PRESS

There are practical reasons for a union to publish its own newspaper. It is a way to reach workers in the mass, "to educate, to inform them." It is also a way to restore some balance in national reporting, which is blinkered towards worker experience.

But there are problems. For one thing, almost nobody reads these worker newspapers, while on the other hand commercial papers continue to be popular and influential.

The implication of this is apparently missed by the publishers of worker papers, though it actually brings their entire practice into question. If at all it is felt that a worker paper can ignore the commercial press, this is precisely the way working class culture becomes insulated from its real context and takes up an enclave position.

Properly considered, a workers' paper is justified only to the extent that it creates a state of tension between itself and the commerical press. Its project (unless it is prepared to assist in the reproduction of the working class as subject to capital) can only be one of opposition to "mass culture" and to the definition of reality constructed by commercial papers. If we are to be serious, we must require a workers' paper to weaken the commercial press; to take readers away from it; to re-define the concept of "news"; inoculate readers against advertising; to refuse the categories of the mass papers - sport, womens page, international news etc. If the workers' press does none of these things, if it does not see itself in a combat situation, if it does not realise that it operates within a context of mass culture, and if it does not face squarely up to the massive presence and skill of the commercial press, then it might as well be abandoned.

The commercial press

The kind of paper we are here calling a working class, or union, paper actually belongs to an old tradition of pamphlets that were circulated long before the commercial press developed. The essence of such papers is that they address a certain class or community, and have a quite definite point of view. They are not impartial; they make no pretence at being "objective". They seek to clarify ideas for their readers; and both the ideas and the clarification are understood to be partisan. Such papers are class instruments.

paper began to emerge. Because of a growing number of literate adults, and because of improved distribution networks (canals, railways), publishing began to be profitable, and hence papers were produced as commodities, that is, with the aim of making profits. A commodity combines two kinds of value: "exchange-value", which is the price it can be sold for, and "use-value", which is the usefulness it has to the person who buys it. Only if it has use-value can something have exchange value.

In the case of the pamphlets or newspapers that I have called class instruments their use to readers lies in the relevance of the text. For which reason, their circulation is confined to readers for whom the text is valuable. Such papers are not produced for the "market in general". Their use-value sets limits to their exchange value.

In contrast, commercial papers are disinterested in the reader, and aim quite simply to make money on behalf of the owner/shareholders. The limitation on exchange value therefore has to be breached.

I spoke earlier of the use-value of a newspaper to readers, residing in the text from which they derive information and the stimulation of ideas. But there is also a use-value to the publisher, who gains access to readers on whom he is able to exert his influence. It was by turning this "access to readers" into a capitalisable use-value that newspapers were able to realise significant exchange value and so become massively important and conspicuous as commodities. How is this done?

A political or social text does not directly involve itself in the circuit of capital, and hence has no way to bring in revenue. Advertising, on the other hand, which seeks access to readers with the aim of seducing them to consume, is a functional part of the capital's circuit and does earn revenue. By granting priority to advertisers, who pay handsomely

for the use-value papers have for them in securing victims, newspaper publishing groups broke into the big time.

Papers that make money from advertising do not maintain responsible contact with their readers. There is a necessary duplicity in their approach, such that, while they encourage readers to think that they are getting the news, in reality it is the news that is getting them. The readers' text (reports comics, features etc.) aims first and foremost to gain circulation, on the basis of which advertising rates are calculated. The reader is now regarded as prey.

Because it is in the nature of capital to expand, and because papers are in competition with one another for readers and advertisers, an important objective of publishing companies is to make their product appeal to as wide an audience as possible. This leads them to elide class differences, so that they come to address not the specific interests of a class, but everybody, conceived as the "public". Class differentiation is erased and the reader depoliticised. This is achieved by a general relaxing of the reader's critical motives and faculties. The paper truly becomes a leisure product; shallow, easy, entertaining, irrelevant, nothing to confuse, or to make someone scratch his brains. And to achieve this armies of supremely talented writers and photographers are engaged whose utmost efforts are exerted to produce texts that are instantly forgettable.

In this way the commercial press helps to construct a reader who is without class consciousness, who is passive, who does not answer back, who is at leisure, who consumes, who reads in private, who adopts the view of the paper as if it corresponded with reality.

The use value the paper now has for readers is one that they have been coached for. People are habituated to passive reading, in the same way that they are habituated to consume. In the end, there is little

difference between the readers' text and the ads. In fact, many people would now reject a paper if it was not 50% advertising.

This massive and successful project of capitalist culture is the context you cannot dodge when planning a working class paper. Yet surprisingly few people realise that there is more needed than just to alter the content, to give being to a paper in opposition to the commercial press. Thus, instead of writing about Barlows making a profit again, they would report that a strike has been won at Dunlop. And this, they think, makes it a workers' paper! Meanwhile the worker goes quietly to the local cafe and buys himself twenty Camel and a copy of the Sowetan. Apart from which this self-same workers' paper has itself fallen under the spell of the commercial press: it uses the same size of headlines, the same neat and narrow columns, the same style of action photographs; it is put together by the same invisible editor, it makes the same assumption that there is such a thing as "news", and it hopes to attract a greater number of readers by advertising itself on posters! The only quality it cannot match is the talented writing that the commercial press, but not the workers, can afford.

Towards a workers' press

We have seen that the power of the commercial press lies in its construction of the reader as consumer, that is, as an individual without social effectivity except as purchaser/owner of things. It should then be clear that the task of an oppositional paper is to construct a different reader, one who is active, alert, class conscious, critical, vocal and who impels himself into social life with energy. And a paper cannot start this task unless it is able to develop a different relationship between the producers and the readers of the paper. In other words, its main task is to work, not on the content of the paper, but on what may be called the terrain of reception.

How? This is a daunting question. It is of the essence, however, that if the working class is to be active rather than the passive consumer of mass culture, the production as well as the reception of newspapers must be founded on groups, whether these be within factories, in township neighbourhood committees or in political parties. Active social groups opposing in their practice the construction of mass consent to capitalism, are the nuclei of another culture, which is working class culture now, but will be hegemonic at some future point in time.

III EDUCATION

This is another branch of culture that is discussed without clear theoretical foundations. It seems taken for granted that it is a function of subject content so that the question most often addressed is: what should workers be taught?

I want to emphasise that it is a mistake to look at cultural practices as a matter of content. In the case of education, this tendency derives from an idealist view that somehow education has value "in itself", that it can be politically neutral. But education is inseparable from the general cultural project of a society, having a special function in social reproduction. It is not a philosophy of education that we need but a political economy of education.

Education and capitalism

One can get a clearer grasp on the nature of education by looking at schooling or the school system, for here the social apparatus surrounding it is still visible. Contrary to what is commonly assumed, schools are not intended as kitchens of ideology. It is probably true to say, in fact, that schools avoid ideology as far as possible. Thus syllabus or subject content are quite subsidiary to schools primary purpose, which stated baldly, is to distribute new workers to where they are needed in social production. Not only subject

are needed in social production. Not only subject content, but teachers, too, ought to be understood in relation to this function. It is quite misleading to base a critique of schools on the "authoritarian" role of the teacher. Whether he is authoritarian or anything else, in the end his task in the school is the same.

The key mechanism by which schools serve capitalist society is the pass/fail system. The appearance of exams is that they serve to test pupils attainments; which they do by ranging each pupil against his class-mates. Given this apparently impartial judgement on his brains, pupil and parents accept school results as decisive. What then becomes of a young person appears to be the result of his own achievement or failure. Bad grades are not usually blamed on the school.

Yet the true purpose of exams is not to provide comparisons, but simply to act as the rationale of the pass/fail device. In any school year some pupils pass, others fail and the cut off point is unconnected with the grading principle, and has no objective educational standard. Such a thing would be impossible. The device is a filter. There is no logic connecting exams with the pass/fail system. And what determines the number passed and failed, is the market for new labour.

Racial capitalism of course has a particularly gross model of schooling, but it is on the same lines as other capitalist states. Farm schools strand pupils where they are wanted as agricultural labourers; the urban schools standard 6 bottleneck isolates masses of pupils who will have to find their way onto the job market for unskilled industrial workers; JC or Matric siphon off artisans, low-level supervisors; the college technicons and university allow through as many pupils as are needed in banks, as teachers and so on.

The mechanism can be quite finely tuned, so that Africans will be more likely to fail matric than whites,

even if their attainments are the same; and Afrikaans students will be more likely to see higher grades than their English-speaking peers in matric, and thus get access to bursaries, and enter their chosen courses more easily. It has been found that when the new black universities opened (Vista, Unitra, etc) there were higher percentages of matric university passes from black schools, to feed these institutions. In such ways, the pass/fail principle shapes the supply of school leavers to the needs of social production.

Now in fact this is a necessary function of school in any form of society, and it is the basis of education in general. It is in this context, therefore, that we must situate a discussion of worker education.

Worker education

Let us assume that it is not the objective of worker education to reproduce workers for capital. It cannot, then restrict itself to minor (or even major) changes in subject content, because, as I have suggested, it is not what is learnt that is the central principle of education, nor does it much matter within capitalist culture whether someone learns Biology or Das Kapital so long as they ultimately consent to do a certain job of work, where they will be effectively disciplined by themselves.

Worker education must base itself on a different principle of adapting people to the needs of social production. The main objective of its critical attack should therefore be the pass/fail system and the teachers blind administration of it. In a society where workers are not selected for production by the arbitrary effects of an exam, the method of choosing and training producers can only be by social discussion and social choice. The basis of worker education then, must again be worker groups which initiate and monitor any and every aspect of the education they involve themselves in. Who is to learn, what they learn, who

these decisions must be placed in the hands of workers themselves. For any teacher to offer a syllabus derived from abstract principals of education, however useful or good, or for any organiser to initiate courses based on what he thinks workers don't know, is to restore education to capitalist culture again. (Readers should examine carefully the third of Marx's theses on Feuerbach).

As with worker newspapers, all one can suggest here of a practical nature, is that education be based in worker groups, location committees, shop steward councils etc. Their activity in shaping education enables one for the first time to speak of worker education.

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Education is not separate from newspaper production. The nuclei of self-education and the nuclei of media production are one and the same. A newspaper is already something appropriate to working class culture when it is seen as an aspect of education: education is already something appropriate to working class culture when it is seen as active and productive, and that it takes place while communicating with others in the form of texts and reports.

What most threatens capitalist culture is not by itself a new conception of media or education, but an organisational structure that these new conceptions bring into being to realise themselves, and which will be able to mobilise people against mass culture.

(Richard Harvey, October 1984)

Groote Schuur Hospital Workers Strike

Marcel Golding*

Strikes have very rarely occurred in the public sector. In fact strikes are prohibited. And when strike action is taken, the workers involved face the likely prospect of prosecution if their actions are considered to have endangered the security of the state. For this reason, public sector workers are extremely cautious. The state's response in the Johannesburg Municipality strike, which involved 10000 workers of the Black Municipal Workers Union and the recent South African Transport Services' dispute with 1000 members of the General Workers' Union must surely haunt state workers considering go-slow action and stoppages let alone a full-scale strike. But very often workers are left with no alternative, especially when they receive nothing but endless promises with very little tangible results.

However spontaneous strikes are, there is always an element of organisation. And for any reasonable measure of success, organisation is a pre-requisite. Organising public sector workers is extremely difficult given the tight controls, security and suspicion which exist. Compounding the problems is the inevitable existence of bureaucratic, state created sweet-heart staff associations established with the express purpose of containing worker militancy and ordering industrial relations in favour of management.

The events at Groote Schuur Hospital are for this reason important. Because, despite the uphill battle in organising workers, management hostility and harassment of workers' representatives by their own union (because of internal struggles), a number of valuable

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* With thanks to the workers who readily shared their views and made this article possible.

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lessons emerge concerning the obstacles that have to be confronted and resolved if any reasonable success is to come from organising the public sector.

In particular, the question of where power resides in the public sector is raised (although not necessarily answered) and what relationship exists between "local management" and the rest of the state network. The events at Groote Schuur Hospital highlight the issue of "power relations" in the public sector.

Groote Schuur Hospital is one of South Africa's prestigious hospitals, located on the picturesque slopes of Devils Peak and overlooking the Cape Flats, the hospital is an important landmark in the Cape Peninsula. It employs a total staff of 7024 which includes 774 professionals; 626 technicians; 2461 nursing staff; 129 administrative personnel and 2233 general staff.* Apart from the nursing staff, the general staff is the largest component of the workforce. Parking attendants, porters, cleaners, messengers, laboratory assistants, filing clerks and reception officers all perform vital work in the efficient functioning of the hospital. Very often their labours go unnoticed. But for a few hours on the 21 and 22 August their refusal to work created a tense and chaotic situation.

For 2 days more than 800 Groote Schuur Hospital workers were involved in work stoppages over wages. On the first day, the workers also occupied the hospital administration building for approximately one hour. This is only the second recorded work stoppage at a hospital in the Western Cape, the first involving over 300 nurses at Somerset Hospital in September 1976.

Hospitals have for a long time been considered to have an extremely passive workforce. As part of the essential services, the ethic of social duty and responsibility has been cultivated. Drastic action,

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* Groote Schuur Hospital Group, Cape Town Annual Report 1982: p136.

by workers to make their grievances known has been considered unlikely. But the incidents at Groote Schuur Hospital have certainly broken that tradition and are likely to have major repercussions in the public sector as a whole.

History of the struggle

The build-up to the stoppage was gradual. Workers had persistently, over a period of 4 months, requested clarity on salary increases from the hospital management. The general staff (ie. domestics and labourers) together with the classified staff (ie. artisans and administrative personnel) received a general increase of 12% in January this year.

Whilst the classified staff also enjoyed the benefits of the "programme of occupational differentiation", which brought substantial salary readjustments, improved job opportunities (especially with the new tricameral deal) and improved service conditions (eg. housing subsidies and pension provisions), the vast majority of workers were still being renumerated according to the local rates of payment system (this system is apparently being investigate by the Commission for Administration).

This system, which is highly racist, determines salaries according to the local conditions and standard of living of an area. Different salary rates are paid to workers classified "Coloured, Asian and African". A further division is also made according to gender. This means, for example, that an African male working in Cape Town, as a labourer at a hospital, will earn a different salary to that of a hospital worker, doing the same work, in Johannesburg because the "local conditions of living differ". The same applies to females. Average salaries of hospital workers are between R220-R250 per month. The resulting salary structure has been a source of immense dissatisfaction among workers. Disaffection over the salaries of black workers at hospitals but also generally in the public sector has

been raging for a long time.

The organisation of hospital workers has also generally proved difficult, mainly due to shiftwork, different lunch hours, inaccessibility, tight security and general suspicion. The events of the 21 and 22 August at Groote Schuur Hospital prove that although these remain real obstacles, they are not insurmountable.

Organisatiion

A Workers' Committee was formed at Groote Schuur Hospital, at the beginning of this year, on the initiative of the Public Servants League of South Africa (PSL)*, a union organising central state workers. It took 3 months to organise the hospital. The Workers' Committee comprised 60 representatives from 20 departments, workshops and sections of the hospital. Among the departments organised were: Records Department (where all patient files are kept), Labourers, Specimans (Pathological Services), Out-Patients Department, Dark-room Attendants, Housekeepers, Gas Sterilisation Unit, Ward Secretaries, Admission Office, Porters, Domestic Staff, CPA Drivers, Stores, Engineering Section, Autoclaving Department, Postal Depot, Maternity Section, Administration Department, Micro-film Department, Theatre Workers.

Representation on the Workers' Committee was dependent on the number of workers in the department. For example, because the labourers and domestics were the largest component of the workforce, they had the majority of representatives on the Workers' Committee. Each representative was elected democratically at a departmental meeting which took place either during the workers' lunchbreak, or after work. Enthusiasm was so great that sometimes workers even held their meeting on Saturdays when they were off duty. The representatives served on the Workers' Committee which was responsible to the general body.

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*see: "Trade Union Directory", SALDRU, 1984

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Once every month workers in the department had a meeting to discuss grievances. These grievances are then taken to the supervisors or the heads of department for attention. If they cannot be resolved, they are referred to the Workers' Committee which in turn mandates the Executive Committee to discuss these grievances with the hospital management. An executive committee of 7 workers was elected to conduct negotiations with management, while each representative from the department handled local grievances. The hospital management's delegation comprises the Chief Medical Superintendent, her Deputy, the Secretary of Hospital and other senior administrative personnel.

Although not all workers joined the PSL, the Committee, nevertheless, enjoyed the support of the majority of the hospital workforce in its negotiations with management. This was clearly evidenced by the attendance and participation of between 800-1000 workers at regular meetings for mandates and report-backs. Some of the grievances regularly aired at meetings were:

* Many workers were doing work which they were not paid for, eg. some labourers were doing the work of handymen
* Victimisation and harrassment of worker representatives
* No promotion possibilities. Many workers have worked for two decades at the hospital but are still classified as "temporary" workers
* Many workers have adequate qualifications for better jobs but always receive the standard answer that "there is no post available"
* The food which workers received was sometimes "not fit for human consumption"
* The workers sleeping in the hostels complained of being treated like children with very few privileges. Lights, for example, have to be switched off at 10.30 pm.

Besides the above-mentioned grievances, it was salaries and pensions which featured high on the priority list of the workers' demands. Very often comments like

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the following were made by workers:

I've worked the best part of my life at Groote Schuur Hospital. But what can I show for all these years. I still live in bad conditions. I receive R250 a month and with all the expenses I have, there is very little for me to save. When I get old, the matron does not have time for you, because you are in the way and too slow. And the pension we receive is so little! How does the state expect us to survive?

The strike

On 29 June a general meeting of 800 workers was held where a mandate was given to the Executive Committee to discuss workers' grievances and the question of salaries with the management. Almost 2 months later, on August 21, the Executive Committee reported back to the general body on the negotiations. By this time workers were extremely agitated. The promises, made by the hospital management and the provincial authorities that the situation of the general staff would be examined, brought nothing but increasing frustration.

The mood of the workers was positive and militant. The atmosphere was tense. There were repeated calls, by the rank and file, that drastic action was necessary to demonstrate their seriousness. "Action Now!" became the rallying call and the workers decided to march en masse to the administration block. They demanded a definite answer from the management on the salary increases. To add force to their argument and show their seriousness, workers occupied the building, chanting their demands for a better salary deal.

Management responded by promising workers that they would contact the provincial authorities, concerning their grievances, but insisted that they resume work immediately. Although management phoned the police, they were warned that "more trouble would break out if the police arrived". Management then informed the police not to come.

Word spread, after the "occupation", that workers should reassemble the next day to discuss the position. The following morning workers assembled at 7 am showing clearly their confidence, support and determination to rock the hospital administration. For 4 hours they stood locked out of the recreational hall where they usually have their meetings. Closely observed by the hospital security and police, they composed and sang worker songs which were punctuated by shouts of "amandla!"

The workers' Executive Committee was once again delegated to see the management who, on the insistence of the Committee, reluctantly addressed the workers. Clearly worried and unable to give satisfactory answers to the endless complaints they, nevertheless, promised that an in-depth investigation would be made at the hospital. They also promised to have discussions with the Executive Committee on the results of the investigation.

By 11 am, the hospital was chaotic. At the reception offices, patients were irritated and bewildered. Doctors and nurses were running up and down the passages trying to cope with the enquiries. In fact the hospital lost thousands of rands, as nurses started handing out folders to patients without collecting the consultation fees.

The Workers' Committee, after a discussion with the general body, decided to go back to work and wait for a reply. The tactical retreat by the workers, although reluctantly adopted, was certainly realistic. It demonstrated the high level of organisation and discipline among the workers.

The union

Although the Workers' Committee is technically affiliated to the PSL, the union has distanced itself from the dispute, forcing the workers at the hospital to "go it alone". Consequently, workers are not only being

confronted by an intransigent employer, but also a very hostile union bureaucracy. The union seems more concerned with its "sweetheart" relations with the management and the state than democratic and accountable relations with its members. The reasons for the Public Servants League's attitude are two-fold. On the one hand, the union is racked with dissension over its internal practices. The union is being confronted by an organised tendency, predominantly in the Western Cape, which is demanding more democracy and rank and file participation in the affairs of the organisation. The union believes that the actions of workers at the hospital was the work of "dissenters" who are intent on "wrecking the good relations which existed between them and management".

On the other hand, the union is now hard-pressed by the rank and file, to deliver its long-awaiting promises of improvements. Unable to contend with the increasing militancy, and because it goes contrary to the union's own conciliatory style, the union has been forced to stay clear and deny that any of its members were involved in the stoppages. The union hopes, by so doing, that its image as an "upholder of industrial peace" will not be damaged. The effect of this has been increasing disillusionment in the ranks of the workers. Whether to stay in the union and continue the struggle against the bureacracy, or whether to break and establish a more democratic worker organisation is, at present, being discussed by the workers.

Lessons of the struggle

The struggle at the hospital has, however, highlighted a number of important issues concerning the public workers' struggle:

1. The strong non-racialism that has united the workers must certainly be a death blow to the state's divisive personnel strategy. Attempts by the state to divide "African" and "Coloured" workers by means of preferential treatment and salary discrepancies have not succeeded.

2. For workers in the public sector to succeed in their struggle will require organised unity and action of an entire state apparatus. The action of workers of one component of a branch of the state apparatus, for example a hospital, will not be sufficient to tilt the balance of power in favour of the workers. Conditions of service, salaries and pensions are not determined by a local unit or component of the state. The provincial authorities in consultation with the Commission for Administration approve these conditions of service. Consequently, the local management of a hospital is itself powerless to implement workers' salary demands. Public sector workers are therefore not only "taking on local management" but the entire might of the state.
3. Because strikes have seldom occurred in the public sector, a valuable experience was acquired by hospital workers. This has certainly strengthened their commitment and has clarified, albeit very embryonically shopfloor politics in the public sector. To consolidate and extend their struggle an interim hospital workers' committee has been established to facilitate the emergence, hopefully, of a mass-based hospital movement.
4. At another level, the workers' union (ie. Public Servants League) has also been exposed. The union's dealings with the workers have been, to say the least, unhelpful. But this is probably to be expected. The public sector is dominated by management created staff associations with a history of collaboration and conservatism. These sweetheart associations are increasingly going to experience greater pressure from rank and file members, especially to secure improved working conditions and salaries. But their inability to respond to worker needs, and their attempts to gag, stifle and disorganise progressive tendencies in their organisations, are likely to result in actions similar to that which took place at Groote Schuur Hospital. One worker explained the tremendous pressure at the bottom:

- Groote Schuur -

> "Daily prices are rising. We hear that inflation is 15%, yet we only received a 12% increase. The provincial authorities are spending millions on this new Groote Schuur project. Yet they cannot pay their existing staff a living salary. We cannot survive. And when we talk they don't listen. On the other hand, our union does very little. We are forced to take action."

The public sector remains one of the major employers of labour. The organisation of public workers into democratic unions will certainly have to feature on the agenda of the proposed new federation.

photo: Groote Schuur workers strike

Postscript

Since the stoppages, the members of the Groote Schuur Hospital Workers' Committee have been harrassed and threatened with dismissal by management. Meetings have

been banned at the hospital. According to reports, this also applies to all the hospitals in the Western Cape, the authorities possibly fearing an outbreak of stoppages. There is general consensus among the workers that the stoppages brought greater unity and strengthened non-racialism at the workplace. But they are also beginning to see the limitations of only having one or two hospitals organised; that they are not only confronting the Groote Schuur Hospital management but the entire health apparatus of the state. Nevertheless, workers remain optimistic about the future. One worker summed it up as follows:

In the workers' struggle you learn alot. You learn who your friends are and who your enemies are. Our struggle is simple. We are struggling for a better life for workers. We need all the workers at the hospitals to stand together. If not today, then we must work, to make certain that it is tomorrow. But we will reach our goal.

GROOTE SCHUUR SURVEY:

A snap survey was conducted immediately after the stoppages at Groote Schuur Hospital with 50 workers. Although the survey cannot claim any scientific representivity some of the information provides interesting reading. The purpose of the survey was to gain some general idea of where workers reside, earnings, expenditure, years of service, age etc.

Sample

34 labourers
11 domestics
5 supervisors/artisans/administrative personnel
50

Average age
50years

Average length of employment
12,6 years

Residence
15 Guguletu
16 Langa
19 rest of the Peninsula

Income
minimum = R190
maximum = 391
average = 273

Expenditure

transport	R 19-50
rent	31-00
electric/gas	29-50
food	122-00
remittance to family (usually to Bantustan)	62-00
Basic average expenditure	R264-00*

(* note: excludes expenses such as clothing, furniture etc.)

Strike at Cape Underwear

Martin Nicol

"They either steal your hearts or trample on you."
- Blanche Harricombe, Bra Section

On Wednesday 25 April 1984, a large group of workers at Cape Underwear Ltd stopped work and occupied the factory canteen. They wanted to force their employers to give them a direct response to a demand, of some weeks standing, for an all-round increase of R10 a week. The managers refused to talk. "Anyone not back at work in five minutes is dismissed," they said. Most workers returned to their work stations but 49 remained sitting in the canteen. They were escorted to the factory gates by a manager. As he turned the lock after them he said, "You dismissed yourselves." Later that day and on the following day more workers came out on strike in support of their fellow workers and the R10 wage demand. The strikers were assisted by CLOWU, the Clothing Workers' Union, which arranged a meeting place for the workers and began collecting strike pay.

CLOWU is a brand new union for clothing workers in Cape Town. It has been formed in opposition to the long-established Garment Workers' Union of the Western Province (GWU) which has some 60000 members and a friendly relationship with the Cape Clothing Manufacturers' Association. Since October last year CLOWU has covered Cape Town with over 120000 pamphlets and newsletters promoting the idea of a new union for garment workers.

Some CLOWU organisers, spoke to the South African Labour Bulletin. They were expecting the giant Rex Trueform factory to come out in support of the R10

demand the next day. They hoped the demand would ignite the industry. "We are making history" they said. Could we arrange for it to be documented?

There hasn't been quite such a buzz in the Cape Town clothing industry for many years. The industry has a reputation for industrial peace second to none. There hasn't been a proper strike in the industry (excluding political stay-aways) since 1936. And that strike was part of a battle, by another rival union, to dislodge the conservative leadership of the Garment Workers Union. History, it seemed, was not only being made - it was being repeated.

On May Day, six days into the strike, I drove to the CLOWU office in Grassy Park to meet Vanessa Matthews, a clothing worker assisting in the office. Vanessa is 21. She started work in a clothing factory at the age of 13. Her family couldn't afford to let her stay on at school. She was one of the first members of CLOWU. In November 1983 she and two other union activists were fired for agitating against the management and the Garment Workers Union. CLOWU threatened the employer with a suit for unfair dismissal in the Industrial Court. In a move that, for all its strangeness, is the legacy of the new Labour Relations Act, the management immediately re-employed all three and paid them in full for the time they had been off work. Each worker received a letter from the factory saying that workers could join whatever union they pleased. I asked Vanessa how organisation at that factory was going. She replied that it was not going well, despite the letter. "The girls are too scared."

The workers at Rex had not come out on strike in solidarity with the R10 demand at Cape Underwear - but they remained undetered; "I really hope we win this strike," said Vanessa, as we drove across to Bonteheuwel, "It will make CLOWU so strong."

CLOWU is hampered in its efforts to organise a true rival union to the GWU by a closed shop clause in the

Industrial Council agreement. This obliges workers to belong to the GWU and to pay weekly subscriptions. Workers cannot be expected to pay an additional weekly amount to another union, so CLOWU currently runs on local donations. Once the new union has recruited majority membership in a factory it may be possible to challenge the closed shop, as has been done recently in the paper and printing industries.

CLOWU had not strongly organised inside Cape Underwear before the strike began. They had handed out pamphlets and attracted a few workers to meetings, but the vast majority of strikers only joined the new union on joining the strike. On that Tuesday, 137 workers were on strike out of a total workforce of over 600.

At the church hall in Bonteheuwel, lunch was provided by a residents' association. There were about seventy workers present but their numbers were soon swelled by the return of a jubilant delegation who had been the toast of a May Day meeting on the UCT campus and an equally ebullient group who had been to the factory to speak to those still at work. Then the strike committee gathered at the front of the hall to give their report. Agnes came straight to the point. "Hulle wil praat. Hulle wag vir Zubeida (the CLOWU secretary)." The hall exploded into cheers and into song. "The union is behind us, we shall not be moved." The impression of strength, determination and solidarity was overwhelming.

Workers in search of an increase

The strike originated in a wage demand. By any standard the wages of garment workers are low. At the time of the strike the minimum starting wage in the Cape clothing industry was R36 per week. Workers' wages rose with experience so that, for example, after two-and-a-half years a "qualified" machinist earned a minimum of R54 per week. In addition to this workers could expect to receive a variable bonus

of a few rand if they met their production targets. Most garment workers are women and the industry is known for an extraordinarily high labour turnover rate. However, many strikers were the main supporters of their families and many had over ten years service in the industry.

Since 1948 there had been a long term decline in the real value of machinists' wages.(1) In recent inflationary times the practice of the Industrial Council has been to negotiate 2 year agreements which allow for half-yearly wage adjustments. In the early months of 1984, just after the December wage adjustment, workers were assailed by a specially strong wave of price increases. Sales tax rose to 7%, the prices of bread and milk rose once again and train fares were increased.

Workers at Cape Underwear heard that the next wage increase was due only in July (which was true) and that the increase was to be R1.60. This was not true. The Industrial Council agreement provided for a range of wage increases from 40c for machinists with 6 months experience to R2 for qualified machinists, to R5 for cutters. Worker dissatisfaction reached the ears of the employers through the works committee in the factory. The employers told the works committee that the "correct channel" for any complaints and queries on the wage issue was the trade union - the GWU.

In March, Cedric Petersen, assistant general secretary of the union, and the son of the long-serving general secretary, Louis Petersen, visited Cape Underwear. He addressed the workers and heard their complaints. Workers were left with the impression that he had agreed that R1.60 was too small an increase. He promised that he would try to improve the increase and have it brought forward from July.

Subsequently workers heard (and read in the GWU newsletter Clothesline) that the increase was not to be

R1.60 but R2 and would come in July. This did not satisfy them. A R2 increase on R54 was absurd. When Petersen again visited the factory he failed to resolve the confusion. Workers were extremely angry with him for having signed such an agreement. He was surrounded by workers who hurled abuse at him. Inside the factory he was booed. Petersen told workers that they received the minimum wages laid down in the Industrial Council agreement. He said that if they wanted more than this they had to ask their employer, who was free to pay above the legal minimum if he wished.

Workers remained confused. The employer had told them to approach the union. The union said they should approach the employer. They wanted clarity on the prospects for a wage increase. On 10 April there was a work-stoppage, later referred to by workers as "the half hour strike".

Tea and lunch breaks at the Cape Underwear factory are staggered. The bra, swimwear and panty sections are never off work at the same time as the larger nightwear sections. This facilitates a real division in the workforce of which workers are very aware. On this Tuesday morning, the bra, swimwear and panty (BSP) sections stayed sitting in the canteen after their tea break ended. Agnes and Gawa, two members of the works committee, went into the factory to get the nightwear sections and the cutting department to stop work and also come into the canteen. Then all the workers could together support the demand for action the wage issue. The nightwear workers were reluctant to stop their machines and walk off the job. They wanted to wait for another fifteen minutes until their tea break was due before joining the BSP sections in the canteen.

The factory managers, Tony and Salie, soon saw what was happening. They locked the gates between the nightwear sections and the canteen. Pardoe and Falconer, apparently executive directors of the firm,

came running. "Go back to work," they said. They would meet with the works committee to hear what the workers' problems were. As the nightwear sections "had to have their tea and bread" but would stay locked up in the factory until the BSP sections were out of the canteen the latter went back to work. Workers had in this period formulated a concrete demand - a R10 a week increase across the board.

This was put to the employers at the works committee meeting after lunch. The meeting went on until 4pm. The committee reported back that "Pardoe says he'll speak again and let us know." Pardoe asked for two weeks to consider the matter. During this time the R10 demand (no one could say where or how it originated) captured the imagination of the factory. It was echoed in CLOWU pamphlets. Petersen made almost daily visits to the factory to hand out anti-CLOWU pamphlets. But worker demands remained focused on the R10 increase.

On the Thursday before the Easter weekend, Pardoe came to address the workers in the canteen. Many workers thought that, at last, he had come to give his answer to the wage demands. They were soon disappointed. Mr Pardoe had a different treat for the workers - Hot Cross Buns! "Ladies, ladies, ladies," he began, "...proud of my girls...so well behaved...Happy Easter...enjoy your buns." "We were so surprised we just took them," said a worker later, "We were shocked he was so nice." The workers clapped Mr Pardoe and wished him a happy Easter in return.

Go where the grass is greener

The two weeks expired on 24 April, immediately after the long weekend. In the morning workers were told that Pardoe would give his answer that afternoon. There would be three separate meetings in the canteen beginning with the nightwear workers at 3.30 pm. The factory was tense with expectation. The BSP sections were called into the canteen at 4.15 pm. "Ladies,

ladies, I'll call you ladies," Pardoe began once more. He spoke of the full-time nursing sister recently appointed; of the clean, new factory buildings with pictures in the corridors; of the beautiful canteen; of the food on sale. He mentioned the coupons given to workers for a 20% discount in the factory shop; the free transport home after overtime. But about wages, he said nothing. Then he held up a copy of Clothesline, the GWU newsletter. this, he told workers, contained facts. Next he held up some CLOWU pamphlets. This, he told workers, was lies.

A worker asked him whether the R2 increase promised in the Clothesline then had to be accepted. Pardoe gave no straight answer. He said they were still negotiating. This angered workers. If the matter was being negotiated, why did Clothesline print the R2 increase as a fact? They also asked why the increases were graded - why C machinists were to get a R3 increase, cutters R5 and only R2 for the B machinists who were the majority of the factory. These machinists bought the same bread from the same shops. Why should they get less than the others? In a memorable line, repeated daily in the meeting hall of the strikers, Pardoe replied, "If you want to go where the grass is greener, you can go."

By the time this second meeting ended at 4.40 pm and Pardoe had to address the last group of workers from finishing, cutting and designing, he was very angry. He was rude and abrupt to this last meeting. The workers then went home.

Next morning, "something had to be done. They were not interested in discussing the R10 increase." Word was passed down the lines that there would be a strike. "Today Pardoe had to listen to our demands." Workers remembered that the half-an-hour strike two weeks before had failed because the nightwear section hesitated to stop work. They had then been prevented from joining the others in the canteen by locked gates. This time the BSP sections planned to

return to work after their tea break. They would work as usual until the nightwear workers went to the canteen at 10.20 am. Then they would walk out and join them.

Some word of intended action reached the ears of the directors. Pardoe and Falconer came into the factory after the BSP tea break. Falconer stood between nightwear and bras. Pardoe stalked up and down. Workers felt "unbalanced" by this. No one had the courage to stand up alone and go. The others might not follow. The whole bra section stayed working as the clock ticked on. It was coming up for 10.30 - only five minutes before nightwear finished their break. Then swimwear started to walk out. Several bras and panties left their machines and followed. They all pressed past the clocks at the front. "Tony stood there with his arms spread out as if he was ready to fly. Pardoe was waving his arms and shouting, Explain yourself! Explain yourself to Aggie." (One of the works committee.) The workers at the front hesitated at these obstacles and might have stopped but for the pressure from behind. Pardoe and Tony were pushed out of the way and the workers ran to the canteen before they locked the gates.

Agnes shouted, "Girls, we want our answer today. Sit!" Moments later Pardoe and Falconer appeared in the canteen. After the rush, they had succeeded in locking the rest of the BSP workers in the factory. Beekman, another director, was overheard saying, "I'll put the bastards out." Pardoe refused to discuss anything. He said firmly, "If you are not back at work in two seconds, you are dismissed." The manager and manageress from nightwear began to coax workers to leave the canteen. Workers lacked confidence. They had not thought of losing their jobs - they wanted an answer to their wage demand. One by one, workers returned to the factory. But 49 remained. They were given five minutes grace. Pardoe and Falconer tried to reason with them. "Do you girls know what you are doing?" "We can sympathise with

your problems." They tried to unnerve them - counting off first the minutes and then the seconds. Then they said "Get your things and get out." "They chased us like dogs to the cloakroom and Pardoe says we are dismissed and we must give in our numbers. Then he follows us to the gate and locks it."

The workers were surprised to find themselves locked out of the factory. They had wanted to strike inside the factory, as they had done before. "We thought he'll be reasonable enough to settle this without unpleasantness. We were so satisfied with Mr Pardoe and set in his ways. We didn't expect his action to be so drastic. But he had put our brains to sleep. Now we realised he was a completely different person."

Locked out

Flung out into the street, with no idea what to do next, the workers were more than grateful to meet outside an organiser from the Clothing Workers Union. CLOWU found a nearby church hall in which they could meet. "We gave it all over to CLOWU then," said Blanche, "We'd never have known what to do." After lunch they were joined by a few more workers who had earlier been prevented from reaching the canteen by the locking of the gates inside the factory.

The next morning the locked-out strikers handed out pamphlets before work began. Petersen was there, standing alone in the rain across the road with a forlorn expression on his face. Later some strikers had another shouting match with him. Ann asked him what the union was doing for the strikers. He advised her to apply to the union Distress Fund. "Why do you always tell us to go to the union," she asked, "The union must come to help us." Petersen did not appear outside the factory again. It was believed that the employers had specifically asked him to stay away as he provided a focus for agitation. This was having an effect on the workers still inside the factory.

- clothing workers -

One lunch-time, when strikers gathered at the gates, they found that the workers had been confined to the factory under lock for the lunch break. Pardoe and Falconer were waiting at "Reception". Falconer said to one of the strikers, "Put your foot over that gate and I'll have you arrested." Moments later a police van drew up. The three policemen were not amused at having been called out for nothing and were heard cursing the managers. They drove off and were seen no more.

On the Friday morning, the third day of the strike, the strikers handed out an appeal they had written to the workers inside. "We wrote it from our hearts," said Agnes. The strikers, numbering about 80, stood at the factory gates and sang "Sensenina -Wat het ons gedoen - What have we done?" a mournful and moving freedom song. The pamphlet and singing had a telling effect inside the factory. Work stopped. Workers were in tears. It is likely that a very large number of workers would have joined the strikers at lunch-time. The employers clearly appreciated that there was an enormous feeling of solidarity between the strikers and those inside - it was fear and uncertainty alone that held them back. Before the lunch break, Pardoe spoke to the workers. He took the unprecendented step of closing the factory for the afternoon and giving the workers a half-holiday. "Go home and think about it," he said.

On the Monday after the weekend a final group of about fifty workers joined the strikers, bringing their number to 137. The employers were using every tactic they could to discourage the spread of the strike. Workers in the factory were told that strikers would get a "3" on the UIF cards (indicating that they had left Cape Underwear not because they had resigned or been retrenched but for "other reasons"). The managers and supervisors said that these workers would never again find jobs in the clothing industry. Supervisors telephoned the homes of strikers to tell parents that their children were "mixed up in poli-

tics" or in danger of never again being employed. Several of the younger strikers were removed from the meeting hall by irate and worried parents.

However, as it turned out, the strikers never had to confront directly the "objective weakness" of their situation. Their attention was diverted from this firstly by a torrent of solidarity and secondly by the willingness of the Cape Underwear management to negotiate with CLOWU and the strike committee. After three weeks, when the management had implemented a R5 across the board wage increase, the strikers accepted reemployment and called off the strike.

Striker attitudes

Every day the strikers met at a church hall. They discussed the progress of negotiations, learnt all the freedom songs popular in Cape Town, went about in groups to ask black businessmen and organisations for material support, and received innumerable well-wishers. Virtually every "progressive" community and youth organisation and trade union in the Peninsula sent the Cape Underwear strikers a message of support. The churches and the Muslim community also daily sent deputations stressing the justice of the workers cause and their own wholehearted support.

In between the singing, the speeches, visits to the factory and refreshments, I interviewed workers on their perceptions of the strike and their work. Three themes emerged starkly - the confidence of the workers in the justice of their demands, their bitterness at their callous treatment by the employers and their anger at what all perceived to be a betrayal by their union - the Garment Workers' Union.

Workers knew that they needed the R10 increase. But they were clearly surprised (and emboldened) by the breadth and vehemence of the support for their cause voiced by the procession of organisations and famous people who daily paid court to them. All the visits,

the donations of food and money, boosted the morale and confidence of the strikers and were undoubtedly important in forging solidarity between workers who were being inducted into trade unionism effectively for the first time. But the emphasis that came to be placed on the justice of the workers' cause and the heroism of their participation in the national liberation struggle (for what could outsiders otherwise stress?), diverted worker attention from the objective weakness of their position - the fact that the strike had not spread further, either inside their own factory or to any others. They had faith in their supporters, faith in CLOWU and faith in themselves.

The bitterness of the strikers against the Cape Underwear managers was in a large measure the bitterness of betrayal. Workers were voluble on the unsatisfactory nature of the conditions under which they worked. The low wages, the incredible pressure of work, the appalling ventilation system, the lack of hot water in the toilets, the unfairness of the bonus system and the rudeness of certain supervisors. But workers were as eager to talk of the skilful way in which they worked; how they coped with all manner of production problems; how their application to their jobs allowed them to produce so many thousands of panties, bras and swimsuits every day.

Workers believed that the employers needed them to work in the factory. No one else could match their experience. Only they knew how to get through the maximum output of the high-quality garments required by Woolworths and Speedo. They worked hard for their bosses and made them lots of money. Beekman often referred to the swimwear section as "my gold mine". Many strikers had worked for Cape Underwear (or the Seardel group of which it is part) for over ten years. They had been in the factory when it was in Woodstock and then when it moved first to Observatory and finally to Epping. Workers had returned to Cape Underwear after leaving the industry to have children. It was the factory where they belonged. But then, when

the workers express their dissatisfaction over wages, when they ask for something more to help them cope with prices rising on all sides, their bosses try to divert the issue. When pressed again, they are rude to the workers and to their representatives on the works committee. They insult their intelligence by calling a meeting to respond to wage demands and then saying nothing about wages. They invite them to "go where the grass is greener". Finally, though aware of a generally felt need for a wage increase, they isolate a leading group of 49 workers and expel them from the factory. "We felt hurt," said Agnes, "We gave our loyalty and this is how they treat us."

The attitude of workers to the Garment Workers' Union was one of anger and disdain. Workers had never had any particular expectations of the trade union, whose role in their lives is only barely understood. Workers pay a weekly fee to the union and to the Industrial Council. Both amounts are deducted by the employer from the weekly wage packets and paid over by him to the union and the Council. Workers did not seem to understand the difference between these two bodies, who share offices in a trade union owned building in Salt River. Workers had the impression that the same people worked for the union and the Council. Before March this year, Petersen was just a name to the workers. The strike forced them to consider the union anew.

Petersen had left the workers with the impression that the wage increases he spoke of were to be grant -ed by the union. They thought it was the union that paid out wage increases from all the money the workers paid in every week over all the years. Eventually, more workers began to understand that Petersen had no power to grant wage increases himself - he spoke with the employers and then signed an agreement. This realisation that, "Mr Petersen was not giving a cent towards the increase himself," made the workers even more angry, "Where does all that money we pay go to then? How can he sign for R2 when it should be more?

How can he sign for such a rotten increase?"

The heat of the workers' anger at their low wages was thus directed at their union general secretary rather than at their employers. This suited the employers down to the ground. When workers complained about wages, they would say, "Ask Mr Petersen." Petersen, in his turn could shout back at the workers, "You are ignorant and the bosses make use of your ignorance." This response, an insult in essence, did not lead workers to abandon their attacks on Petersen. "Isn't it his job to inform us?", one worker asked. "He just insulted the girls. Not even the management speak to the girls like that." Another worker, with 17 years service, said: "CLOWU has opened my eyes. They (the GWU) are not there for the girls - they are there for the boss. The boss phones the union and Petersen goes straight to the bosses office. He doesn't speak to the girls first."

Workers were fascinated by the idea (propagated by the Clothesline as well as by CLOWU) that they were Petersen's employers! In fact their payment of subscriptions gives them no greater control over the Petersens and union officials than the payment of taxes gives them power over the government. Workers can see that they are not able to participate in the union. It is not their union in any real sense. Garment workers' view of trade unionism is restricted to their experience of this union. They do not see a need to change the GWU because they cannot yet imagine what else a trade union might be. Blanche expressed this fact when she said, on the first day I visited the strikers, "We don't want a better union than his, we only want our money." At this stage, none of the workers saw CLOWU as an alternative to the GWU. They saw CLOWU as valued friends and helpers in their struggle against their employers. "Dis tussen ons en die base. Dis niks to doene met CLOWU," a group of workers agreed. But they were extremely grateful to CLOWU because the "new union" had helped them. Without CLOWU's presence the strike would never have been

able to develop, as it did, into a powerful statement of the dissatisfaction of the thousands of garment workers with their wages and their union. However, without strong organisation (and it is clear that CLOWU's organisation was extremely weak) the strike could be no more than a statement. The direct experience of the Cape Underwear strikers and their opinions and perceptions indicate how "successful" the GWU has been in securing the disorganisation of their members. In this context, one can perhaps understand the need for CLOWU's initial campaign against the "old union". Workers can only begin to challenge the GWU once they can imagine what an alternative union might be.

The correct channels

The argument above is that the Garment Workers' Union hides from the workers an understanding of who their ultimate oppressors are and it prevents them from organising collectively to negotiate wages and conditions of employment. The Petersens would dismiss this assertion as nonsense. Their union has a democratic constitution with shop stewards, elections, meetings and report backs. Every facility is given to worker representatives to participate fully in the union - even to paying generous attendance fees for union meetings. Workers are kept abreast of all developments through the weekly Clothesline newsletter (edited by Cedric Petersen). Since CLOWU came onto the stage Clothesline has become a forceful and challenging exponent of the representivity of the union. This is an extract from the front page lead on 24 February 1984:

> "Your union and all its officials listen to you. At the simplest level, you PAY them to listen to you.
> ...Your union needs and welcomes criticisms and complaints. It's the way to improve. But criticise and complain openly. Don't just spread poison in dark corners and throw mud at people doing something useful and constructive.

Who could criticise such a union?

But this is just the appearance of things. For workers on the shop floor it is extremely difficult to participate effectively in the union. The shop steward structures, where they exist, appear to play only a formal role in the factories and in the union. The union is run by its officials. And particularly by the father and son team of Louis and Cedric Petersen.

Employers implicitly recognise that the GWU is unable to act in the flexible manner of a representative trade union. They are prepared to tolerate it because what they lose on account of its remoteness from the workers they recover with interest in the Industrial Council - where the GWU has always been pliable to the "needs of the industry". The union has sat by over the last thirty-five years as the real minimum wages of the majority of qualified workers have steadily declined. (2) But several employers have felt the need for better communication with their workers than the union provides. They have formed "works committees". These bodies operate completely outside of union structures and do not deal with wages or Industrial Council and union issues.

Such a works committee has existed at Cape Underwear since 1980. In May 1980 there was a legendary work stoppage at the Rex Trueform factory nearby. Workers there demanded wage increases to compensate them for a series of sudden price hikes. The Cape Underwear workers heard of the "strike" at Rex and also stopped work. The same day, their employers agreed to an immediate 10% increase. The Industrial Council met in emergency session and, in an unprecedented move, amended the wage agreement before its expiry date. (3)

After this "strike", the Cape Underwear employers had each section of the factory elect representatives onto a works committee. This committee met regularly to discuss non-wage issues and seems to have been an

effective communication channel between bosses and workers. The Industrial Council agreement provided for wage rises every six months and until early 1984, the wage issue was not raised by the works committee.

The Garment Workers' Union had no relationship to this works committee at all. The union had two or more shop stewards in the factory but none served any particular union function among the workers. One shop steward (Zubeiga) was said to be a "manageress" who "had no time for the girls". Another (Galiema) "never did a thing for the girls". None of the shop stewards ever reported back to the workers. Some strikers thought the shop stewards had once been elected. Others were equally certain that they had never elected them.

So in March, when workers raised questions about wages, these were not raised through the shop stewards but through the committee. When the works committee passed the message on to the factory management they were advised to use "the correct channels". They should approach the union, since the works committee did not handle wage issues. Agnes was asked by the rest of the works committee to contact the union. She telephoned the union but was told that she had no right to do so. Only a shop steward could contact the union! However, Petersen came out to speak to the workers. He met Agnes and had her inducted as a shop steward so that she could officially speak to the union on behalf of the factory. In her capacity as shop steward she attended a grand meeting of shop stewards in the GWU building in Salt River in March. She remembers hearing the R1.60 increase spoken of at this meeting. Petersen told the meeting that he would try to bring the increases forward. When Agnes reported back to the workers at Cape Underwear, they remained dissatisfied. When next Petersen visited the factory she told him of the workers' attitude. "Who knew the cost of living would go up so much," Petersen said. Agnes responded by asking why he signed an agreement for R2 if he didn't know what the cost of living

would be. She pointed out that Cape Town City Council workers (who work to a minimum wage above that of qualified garment workers) were demanding 100% or 90% increases for the lowest paid workers. Why did garment workers have to accept such a small increase? Petersen said that the factory was paying the correct wages under the agreement. All he could do was try and get the increases raised and brought forward. If workers at Cape Underwear wanted more than the agreement, they should speak to their bosses.

So once more the works committee took up the wage question with the employers. The atmosphere in works committee meetings changed for the worse. "They just tell us; the girls this and the girls that. They are very rude. They treat the works committee like children." The following week, after further rude and insulting treatment, Agnes and two other works committee members resigned from the committee.

Agnes' experiences in the works committee and with the union were known to all the workers. They shared her feelings of anger and resentment at this reward for their long service and hard work. The employers had told the workers to use the "proper channels" for their wage queries. Agnes and the workers had followed every channel they found open to them. "I even became a shop-steward to follow the right channels," said Agnes. "The boss says go to the union, the union says go to the boss. When you reach the end of the channel, you find you are at the bottom again."

Negotiations

This is the workers' story of the strike. As they described it to me, CLOWU played a negligible role in the events leading up to the lock-out of the 49 workers on 25 April. (4) Responsibility for the conflict in the factory taking this course lay with the management and the Garment Workers' Union. However, CLOWU clearly played a major role in ensuring that the work-stoppage and the lock-out developed into a

"proper" strike. CLOWU's organisation of the strikers allowed them to participate in deciding on the conditions under which they returned to work. CLOWU advised the strike committee on its tactics in trying to negotiate a settlement and its secretary, Zubeida Jaffer, attended all the meetings between striker representatives and the employers.

The Cape Underwear managers were advised by the Cape Clothing Manufacturers' Association and colleagues from the Seardel group. The employers seemed to hold all the cards and at first took a hard line. They said they would never re-employ the 49 locked-out workers. The remaining fifty to eighty workers were regarded as being "absent" and could return whenever they wished. The workers demanded that all be re-employed and that a proper response be made to their R10 demand.

Two days after the strike began, the CCMA advised its members of a meeting, "To discuss, principally, a request received from the Garment Workers' Union of the Western Province for the bringing forward of the increase due on 1st July 1984 and, indeed, an increase in the minimum worker remuneration even higher than provided for under automatic increase." (5) Following this meeting, the CCMA announced that its members could implement a minimum across the board wage increase of R4 per week from 18 May. (6) This gentlemen's agreement would become the legal minimum wage once an amendment to the Industrial Council agree-ment had been gazetted. The minimum wage for qualified machinists would rise from R54 to R58 in May instead of to R56 in July. The Cape Underwear factory voluntarily gave an extra R1 to its workforce, bringing the effective new wage for machinists up to R59.

The strikers were now satisfied that their demands had been taken into account and they instructed the strike committee to negotiate for all to return to work as soon as possible. After some hesitation, the employers agreed to take all the strikers back, inc-

luding the 49. The eventual agreement guaranteed the workers freedom from victimisation and bound them not to strike or make any new wage demand until the Industrial Council agreement expired in December 1984. The strike settlement was not between CLOWU and Cape Underwear but between the 98 workers who then remained on strike individually and the employers.

In agreeing to re-employ all the workers, the Cape Underwear management retreated from their initial firm statements that the sacked workers would stay sacked. The reasons for this retreat are not obvious. The strikers were objectively in a very weak position. Cape Underwear had employed scabs in many of their places. The number of workers on strike was dwindling rather than increasing (from 117 on 4 May, to 104 on 11 May, to 98 on 18 May).

It seems that the managers of the factory were unwillingly pushed into a compromise from two sides. On the one side the Cape Clothing Manufacturers' Association, the Cape Chamber of Industries and the Seardel owners of Cape Underwear favoured a clean and complete settlement. They saw no profit in taking a hard line that would provide further scope for agitation in the industry. The agreement with the strikers would anyway stop them, the more militant workers, from fomenting further direct action in the factory for seven months. The agreement conceded no formal status to CLOWU. The Garment Workers' Union and the Industrial Council had already secured a wage increase and they could claim credit for it.

On the other side, pressing both Cape Underwear and the guardians of Cape Industry, was the threat of community action. In the second week of the strike a deputation of religious and community leaders had approached Woolworths, the major distributor of Cape Underwear, to express concern for the strikers' cause. The Cape Underwear managers first said that they would sign the agreement with the strikers on Thursday 17 May. Workers began preparations for a victory party at

Muizenberg on the Friday afternoon. But on Thursday Pardoe and Falconer refused to sign. They made excuses. "Lawyers had to be consulted", they said. They wanted CLOWU to sign a document limiting their right to pamphlet the workers. They suggested a further meeting the following week.

CLOWU saw this as a transparent attempt to break the strike and get the workers back without any agreement. Plans for the party went ahead. The press, the foreign television and all strike supporters were invited. If the employers still refused to sign, CLOWU supporters would call for boycott action against Woolworths. Dr Allan Boesak, patron of the UDF, telephoned the managers and made this clear to them. He wanted an answer by 3pm. On that Friday afternoon, the success or defeat of the strike was balanced on a knife edge. The atmosphere of the party was rather spoiled - until Zubeida and strike committee members arrived to say that Falconer would sign. The agreement was signed at 5pm. On Wednesday 23 May, after four weeks on strike, the Cape Underwear strikers returned to their layout machines and work tables.

The strike did not end in a clear-cut victory for the workers. But neither was it a defeat. The workers returned to work convinced that their actions were the real reason behind the wage increases which had been granted. CLOWU organisers clearly felt that the period of the strike had been productively used as a school of struggle to inform workers of CLOWU's aims and to introduce them to a new tradition of democratic worker organisation. The strikers all expressed their commitment to organising the rest of their factory as CLOWU members. This is the battle they now have to fight.

The Garment Workers' Union was not so charitable in its assessment of the strike. "Outsiders fail again", said the bold headline in Clothesline of 25 May:

> Out of a total of 60000 workers they persuaded 49 at one factory (which employs nearly 700) to make an illegal and ill-considered demand

> for an increase of R10, just for themselves. They were fired when they refused to go back to their machines. A few others later joined them. After three weeks of messing about those workers have been taken back with precisely NOTHING to show for it all.

The GWU may see the Cape Underwear strike as having achieved nothing. But not even the Petersens can deny its singularity. As the first strike in the Cape clothing industry since 1936, as the first undefeated strike in the industry in 67 years - it stands as a landmark in the history of Cape Town clothing workers.

Footnotes

1. SALDRU,"Industrial Council Wage Rates", (UCT 1984)
2. M Nicol, "A History of Garment and Tailoring workers in Cape Town", (PhD, UCT 1984)
3. See Garment Worker 22 (18) 30 May 1980; Grassroots May/June 1980
4. An analyst of the strike who relied only on CLOWU propaganda pamphlets would have reason to question this. However, none of the workers whom I interviewed, even when pressed, linked the strike to CLOWU activities
5. CCMA: General Circular No 15 of 83/84, 27 April 1984
6. The Argus 14 May 1984. The wage concession was not quite as generous as this. Every wage listed to apply from 1 July 1984 in the existing IC agreement was raised by R2. The minimum increase for qualified B machinists was indeed R4, but a B machinist with only 7 to 12 months experience, for example was due for an increase of only R2.40 (Government Gazette 1 July 1983; 22 June 1984)

DOCUMENT: CCAWUSA Maternity Agreement

Below we publish the proposed agreement drawn up by the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) as the basis for future negotiations with management around the question of maternity rights and benefits. The document reflects the demands, and the gains, made by women workers in many parts of the world. The proposed agreement extends far beyond the areas of job security and paid leave. It seeks to provide a package of rights for working mothers which includes childcare and the whole question of health and safety.

PROPOSED MATERNITY AGREEMENT

1. General principles

1.1 The parties agree that the objective of this Agreement is to ensure that women employees are not unfairly discriminated against through pregnancy as far as their working lives are concerned.

1.2 The parties agree that working women having children do require and should receive special protection and this should not be regarded as discriminatory or in conflict with the principle of equality of opportunity and treatment.

1.3 The parties agree that the health and safety of pregnant and nursing women is of vital importance and commit themselves to ensuring that their jobs and work environment do not detrimentally affect their health and safety.

1.4 The company commits itself to the full and healthy maintenance of women and their children whilst on maternity leave and shall endeavour to pay benefits accordingly.

2. Protection of employment

2.1 No employee will be dismissed or disciplined on the grounds of pregnancy, or any other reasons connected with pregnancy.
2.2 Women shall be protected from all dismissals from the date they fall pregnant to 3 months after the end of the period of maternity leave.
2.3 No employee may be retrenched while on maternity leave.
2.4 The company shall not exclude from employment any applicants because they are pregnant.

3. Maternity leave

3.1 All permanent female employees shall be entitled to paid maternity leave.
3.2 The maternity leave entitlement shall be 12 months. Payment shall be based on the normal monthly earnings of the employee.
3.3 The employee shall inform the company of her intention to take maternity leave as soon as practicable and at least one month prior to commencement of leave. (The period of notice may be shortened should the employee's medical situation require immediate cessation of work)
3.4 Additional unpaid leave may be taken for a period of 6 months.
3.5 The granting of maternity leave must be viewed as any other benefit the company offers and shall not be dependent on merit, work performance or length of service.
3.6 It shall be the worker's choice when she wishes to start her maternity leave but the period 1 month before confinement and two months after must be taken.

4. Paternity leave

4.1 All permanent male employees shall be entitled to one months paid paternity leave taken from the date of confinement.

4.2 Male employees shall also be entitled to one day off per month over and above normal days off for the first 6 months after the birth of the child.

5. Right to return to work

5.1 Women going off on maternity leave shall not resign from the company.
5.2 An employee taking maternity leave shall be guaranteed the right to return to work up to a period of 18 months.
5.3 The employee shall be placed in the same establishment and in the same or similar position on returning from maternity leave.
5.4 The employee shall receive a wage not less than that received before taking maternity leave, and shall be entitled to any increases awarded during her leave period.
5.5 Service shall be regarded as continuous.
5.6 The employee shall give the company at least 4 weeks notice of her intention to return to work.

6. Social security schemes

6.1 During the period of paid leave contributions to the Pension Scheme and Medical Aid Scheme shall be made as normal by both parties.
6.2 Contributions to the Pension Fund from both employee and employer wil be borne by the company during the period of unpaid leave. While on maternity leave, the member shall be covered by all Pension Fund provisions.
6.3 In the case of members, contributions to the Medical Aid Society from both employee and employer will be borne by the company during the period of unpaid leave. While on leave, the member shall enjoy usual benefits.
6.4 Disabilities caused by or associated with pregnancy, miscarriage, abortion and

childbirth must be considered temporary disabilities and treated as such under any health insurance or sick leave plan available to all employees.

6.5 No mistake of the medical advisor in estimating the date of confinements shall preclude a woman from receiving benefits from the date of the medical certificate up to the date on which confinement actually takes place.

6.6 Employees on maternity leave will qualify for staff discounts.

7. Ante-natal, post-natal, checks and childcare

7.1 All pregnant women shall have the right to time off to attend ante-natal clinics, once per month, without loss of pay.

7.2 Should an employee not exercise the right to full unpaid leave following the birth of her child, the following options shall apply on return to work:

7.2.1 Part-time work until the child is 6 months old.

7.2.2 One day off per month to attend clinics, without loss of pay, until the child is 6 months old.

7.2.3 Two hours per day to facilitate nursing, without loss of pay, until the child is 6 months old.

7.3 Should problems arise with the health of the employee due to the pregnancy or child-birth, or should problems arise with the health or care of the child, an employee shall be entitled to 15 additional days paid leave per year. Further unpaid leave shall be granted where necessary.

7.4 The above entitlements shall not be deducted from paid sick leave entitlements.

7.5 Employees shall have the right to attend clinics and medical practitioners of their own choice.

7.6 The company shall provide creche facilities for children up to 2 years in age in all its establishments employing women. Women will be able to bring their children to work and make use of these facilities.

7.7 Provisions and equipment used in childcare shall be sold to mothers employed by the company at 50% reduction.

8. Health and safety of pregnant and nursing employees

8.1 Women shall not be employed on work prejudicial to her health or that of her child during pregnancy and up to at least three months after confinement. If she is nursing her child this shall be longer.

8.2 Work falling under the provision of 8.1 covers all jobs entailing physical, toxic or mechanical risks and shall include the following:

(a) any hard labour involving:
    (i) heavy weight-lifting or pushing; or
    (ii) undue and unaccustomed physical strains, including prolonged standing;
(b) work requiring a good sense of balance or involving a strained posture, for example, climbing ladders;
(c) work with heavy and/or vibrating machines, for example, floor cleaning machines;
(d) in conditions where there is inadequate protection against slips or falls;
(e) under conditions of excessive heat or cold and poor ventilation, such as cold rooms and warehouses;
(f) jobs that expose women to the effect of harmful chemical products or other harmful substances, such as dusts,

gases or vapours. For example, vapours given off by hot wire machines cutting plastic;

(g) under conditions of high noise.

8.3 Potentially harmful work shall be indentified by the health and safety shop stewards in consultation with the shop stewards committee and female workers.

8.4 Where health and safety considerations make it undesirable for a pregnant or nursing woman to do a particular job, she will be offered suitable alternative employment on terms and conditions no less favourable.

8.5 Pregnant and nursing women shall not do night work and overtime work.

8.6 Their working hours shall be planned so as to ensure adequate rest periods.

8.7 The company shall provide the use of a quiet room for use by pregnant women during work breaks, or if they feel unwell during the working day.

8.8 Any factors that might cause loss of appetite or excessive or chronic fatigue should be avoided, for example, extreme changes in daily routine or frequent changes of shift.

8.9 Adequate seating shall be provided. Seats must be wide enough for good support and must have backrests. Footrests must also be provided. Pregnant women shall be allowed to perform their work standing or seated to enable changes in posture. The work surface height should be such that it does not change when seated and standing postures are alternated.

8.10 Special attention shall be given to the lifting of loads. Loads that involve any kind of strain must not be carried during the last three months of pregnancy. If a load lifted before pregnancy required near maximum effort, it should be reduced by 25% during pregnancy.

8.11 Pregnant women may arrive at work 10 minutes later than other staff and leave 10 minutes earlier to avoid congestion at the workplace exits.

8.12 Suitable uniforms must be provided to accomodate pregnant women.

8.13 The company shall provide foods particularly beneficial for pregnant women in staff canteens.

8.14 The company shall provide for German measles testing and vaccination for all women.

8.15 The company shall provide regular health education sessions without loss of pay, with the company nurse or by arrangement with outside health personnel.

9. Duration of agreement

9.1 This Agreement shall come into operation from the date of signature and shall be binding on the parties and continue in force for an indefinite period.

9.2 This agreement may be amended by one party giving the other party 3 weeks written notice of its intention to negotiate an amendment to this Agreement.

REVIEW: Mining Capitalism and Black Labour in the Early Industrial Period in South Africa: A Critique of the New Historiography -

Selim Gool

Skrifter utgivna av Ekonomisk-Historiska Foreningen XL, Lund (Sweden), vii + 239 pp., L6.50.

Despite the extensive literature on the history of mines labour in Southern Africa, another work aiming to provide "a critique of the new historiography" can assuredly be welcomed. The strength of Selim Gool's contribution lies in its often very clear, thoughtful and sometimes critical exposition of the writing of the past decade. He ably distinguishes the newer literature as either proposing a "new sociological theoretization of classes with class determination and class location as its major focus" or as aiming to develop through new methodological tools "a South African social history...where the working class, in the most literal sense, makes itself."

Gool accepts both these dimensions wholeheartedly (while perhaps missing out on the problems posed by such a bifurcation) but suggests certain areas where he sees limitations to the revisionist scholarship. First there is the "continued absence of an African contribution to this historiography" which has tended to conflate black workers as passive, inert and undifferentiated. Secondly, he feels that there has been too much focus on the new labour centres, notably the Rand, at the expense of work on the rural areas from which the workers came. One must concede that there is a distinct problem in the failure of most African intellectuals (Magubane and Mafeje, two exceptions that leap to mind, are interestingly both exiles) to consider so far the history and sociology of black labour. Given Gool's own characterization of the new South African social history and the impressive studies of such writers as Harries, Delius, Bundy, Beinart,

Keegan, etc. on the countryside, the other points raised here seem less justified. It is indicative that the latest History Workshop in Johannesburg included numerous papers on social change in rural South Africa.

Actually Gool raises rather more important issues. One is his point that writers on Southern African society have yet to grasp fully the problem of dependency in rural communities and what it means (particularly at a theoretical, not merely descriptive, level). In Gool's words, "we do not yet have any clear understanding of the relationship between primitive accumulation and the self-expression of capital on the sub-continent, about the relation of these processes to the world context nor of the connections between the development of capitalism in industry and agriculture."

The second, and related issue, concerns the limitations of the Wolpe thesis which captured the problem of dependency and other interrelationships in the framework of an "articulation" of different modes of production, capitalist and non-capitalist, while stressing the centrality of the availability of cheap labour to South African industrial production. Gool points out that "articulation" moves too close to a purely functional model and thus fails to help us to understand both the internal dynamic of rural societies and the internal conflicts and contradictions that have accompanied the policy of territorial segregation. Moreover by giving too heavy a focus to the cheap labour thrust (despite its undeniably great importance), Gool notes that we miss out on the process of (proletarian) class formation. It is an inherent part of the distinctive course of South African economic history that capital required an extremely differentiated labour force, of which cheap migrant labour for the mines from such territories as Mozambique was only one component.

Unfortunately Gool's narrative does not follow through from these interesting perceptions. Perhaps a bit over-

whelmed by the force of much revisionist work on the one hand and certainly because he appears to have lacked the opportunity to do new fieldwork or archival work on the other, he returns in the bulk of the book to some very well-trodden ground. This is particularly true of his discussion of Mozambican mines labour which if anything, concentrates very heavily on the well-known problems of inter-state relations and the political economy of Portuguese East Africa as it appeared to its colonial rulers. The resistance of African workers is given some attention but it is insufficiently integrated into the narrative and discussed too unsystematically; it needs to be woven much more carefully into the whole process of capital accumulation. As a result, this book is best read for its critical suggestions and its generally stimulating introductory chapters.

(Bill Freund, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand)

T V Review: "1922"

"Where does the fact end and the fiction begin?" is the question posed in the documentary, "Strike", screened after the T V series, "1922".

Script-writer John Cundill, in attempting to answer the question in the documentary, concentrated on "the creation of characters" and on the challenge of "bringing the story to a suitable climax." Significantly, he dwelled more on the dramatic problems than the historical ones.

Perhaps it is not as constructive to nail Cundill for some sinister corporate bias as it is to ask what he was attempting to do in his reconstruction of history, which appears to treat "fact" and "fiction" with an indiscriminate egalitarianism. For instance, the series opens with a potted summary of the "Rand Revolt", in which authentic photographs of the strike are haphazardly interspersed with shots of the Moody couple and other fictional characters. It is a technique commonly employed in historical drama, but there is little to suggest that the main characters are largely fictional. Even more importantly, in the series, the characters tend to overshadow the history, except when it is needed for dramatic effect.

Moreover they are not far removed from the stereotypes of popular T V drama - Julian Nethersole, the "arch capitalist", is a version of "the man they love to hate" and this serves to give both credibility and sympathy to his poor relations, the Moodys, whose position in the story is central. Mrs Moody has married beneath her; Mr Moody hasn't made it; Quentin, his elder son is determined to succeed where his father has failed; Oliver the younger son is a dreamy idealist. Kate, the daughter is totally preoccupied with a mercenary interest in the wealthy Kingsley and a more natural attraction to Afrikaner nationalist, Dion Fouche. The

relationship between Afrikaner Nationalism and the strike is about as unexplored and unexplained as that between Kate and Dion. All we learn is that they both become respectable; Dion, as the representative of Afrikaner Nationalism, defects from the strike when it becomes violent and, many years later, Dion and Kate are shown side by side at a family funeral.

The presentation of women in the series reinforces the impression that "1922" is peopled with stock characters. At one end of the scale there is silly Kate, who is the epitome of empty-headed femininity and, at the other there is sensible Iris, Quentin's girlfriend whose purity and loveliness is tainted by one dark secret - her illegitimate child. Fortunately, in the line of a long romantic tradition the strikers kill her before she is forced to reveal it.

The strikers, even as portrayed in the documentary, exist somehow beyond the bounds of normality, as an alien entity into whose camp the "good guys" sometimes stray. In the documentary, a group of charming oldies reminisced on the "bloody revolution", but not one of them was even related to a striker. It may not be realistic to ascribe this to the relative longevity of ex-Transvaal Scottish recruits compared to that of mineworkers.

The real strikers were certainly guilty of brutality. Even the argument that the notorious slogan: "Workers of the world unite for a white South Africa", was used only as an initial strategy for mobilising the white working class, does not absolve some of them from a vicious racism which, on at least one occasion was manifest in a deliberate attack on a black compound.

It would be inaccurate to portray all the strikers as progressive or even to suggest that the possibility of a great united working class movement actually existed at that point in history, but Cundill's characterisation of the strikers is shallow and selective.

There is some suggestion in "1922" that the initial negotiations foundered partly because of management recalcitrance, but the workers' case is not articulated in any concrete sense. Smut's role is relegated to that of remote mediator. His abrupt decision to instruct the owners to restart the mines and his authorisation of police to act against the strikers before the proclamation of the general strike, are glossed over. The early intervention by the government suggested by the evidence and conviction of the strikers, among them an informant, interviewed c.1980, who told Ruth Sak; "the government let it happen", is not an interpretation that is favoured. In Cundill's version it is primarily a battle between a few individual mine-owners and a handful of strikers, the latter losing because they break the rules.

The strikers, particularly Taffy Williams (an amalgam of Taffy Long and others) are allowed to counter the conventional wisdom of the mine-owners with the rhetoric of worker exploitation but the reality of industry-wide wage depression and the threat of redundancy never emerges from behind the rhetoric. Its real origins may be supposed to lie in the Bolshevik Revolution, as the introductory summary suggests and not in the appalling circumstances of the "poor whites", which are mentioned, but never directly connected to striker militancy.

The black mine-workers are seen as shadowy figures, who doggedly sing on or who are beaten up for loyalty to their bosses; the passive victims of popular mythology, with no real autonomy.

In many ways, the strike and the strikers are the foil to the central characters of the drama. Through the dilemmas thrown up by the strike, their qualities of endurance, courage and loyalty are tested.

The Moody family is torn apart by conflicting allegiances, but finally they all come out on the side of "decency". Oliver, the younger brother, who typifies

the misled idealist, recants and reverts to his studies. We see him reading Keats with the same dedication as that he once brought to his study of Marx. The implication is that his romanticism has now been channelled into a safer and more productive form. The scene is loaded with tragic irony for Oliver, who pities Keats his premature death, will shortly be sacrificed to the fanaticism of the strikers. Taffy Williams is brought to recognise the futility of the strike, not through its objective historical failure, but through the dreadful realisation that he has killed this youth, whom he loved.

In the last moments of the series we are reminded that the events are narrated through the memory of Quentin, the successful capitalist of the 1940's. We are not told anything about the strike's resolution; the strike itself has become expendable.

The series ends with Quentin's wife suspiciously enquiring after the woman, he discovers, in 1942, to be the daughter of his old sweetheart, Iris. "It is a thing of the past now?" his wife demands. "It always was", he concludes sombrely as we are shown a shot of the long road to North Africa and the War.

So, effectively, the story is confined to the capitalist brother's nostalgic reminiscences in which the events of the Rand Revolt provide the colour (usually sepia) and bring his love affair to its tragic conclusion.

(Cynthia Kros with thanks to Gail Natrass and Sue Krige for their thoughts)

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