South African Labour Bulletin

Focus: State of the Unions

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Labour Monitoring Group (Natal)

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The South African Labour Bulletin

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Editorial Note

The SALB welcomes the establishment of the new federation, apparantly to be called COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions). Although this is certainly the largest and most representative worker body in South African history, we are mindful that important groups of organised workers remain outside the federation. The Bulletin will attempt to cover all independent union activity.

To coincide with the launch of the new federation, the Bulletin conducted an in-depth survey of the progressive union movement to establish the current strength and depth of organisation. (The survey was co-ordinated by Estelle Randall.) On all fronts the movement has grown since two years ago, the last time a comparable survey was undertaken. Our survey report and briefings show how this growth has transformed the labour scene - thrusting the established conservative unions to one side.

Since our last edition, Marcel Golding, our research officer, has left to work for the National Union of Mineworkers. During his time with the Bulletin, Marcel made a significant contribution to our understanding of trade unionism in the state sector and on the mines. Our loss is NUM's gain.

SALB Research Officer

Requirements: some research and writing experience; willingness to travel; ability to work collectively; and a commitment to the independent labour movement; to start as soon as possible.

The Job: includes producing topical briefings; collecting interviews and documents; as well as undertaking longer term research projects; some administration.

Please send relevant details and reasons for applying to:
SALB, Box 31073, Braamfontein 2017.

FCWU: Annual Conference

From August 30 to September 2 the Food and Canning Workers Union held their 45th Annual National Conference in Athlone. The conference was attended by about 250 delegates and officials, representing over 130 factories where the union is organised. The Conference was preceded on the Thursday evening by a supper to celebrate the opening of the FCWU's own new building in Woodstock.

Several motions relating to the present state of political and economic crisis in the country were passed:
(i) that the government immediately lift the state of emergency;
(ii) detainees should be released;
(iii) police and army should get out of the townships;
(iv) there should be one person one vote for all South Africans in one parliament.

Conference futher resolved to support the consumer boycott in support of these demands. It also especially deplored the banning by the government of COSAS. The jailing the previous week of 74-year old Oscar Mpetha, formerly a General Secretary and National Organiser of the union, was deplored.

Conference approved substantial amendments to the constitution of the union. These amendments, which had been widely discussed over the previous few months, provided for a changed regional structure. The change was necessary because of the growth, expansion and consolidation of the union in new areas over the last few years, which has shifted the former predominance of the Western Cape. The amendments were also drafted so as to facilitate a merger with the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union once the new federation is formed. It was reported that talks were proceeding well with Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union. Delegates from SFAWU attended the Conference as observers, and participated in discussions, while over the last few months representatives from FCWU have attended the National Conference of SFAWU as well as regional training courses.

New office bearers elected were: Irwin Pereira, a worker of Cape Town Branch, elected President; Peter Malepe, a worker of Kempton Park Branch, elected Vice-president; Jan Theron, elected General Secretary; Eddison Stephen, elected Assistant General Secretary; and Abeeda Kahn, a worker of the Paarl Branch, elected Treasurer.

Edgars Workers Combat Racism

In mid-September shop workers at Cresta (part of the Edgars Group) in Blackheath staged a sit-in strike in protest at being "subjected to humiliating and racist motivated harrassment by their supervisors led by the now notorious racist store controller" - who was accused of using insulting language to a woman worker. When their union, the Federated Council of Retail and Allied Workers (Fedcraw), took the matter up with Edgars top management their demand that the store controller be transferred was refused. Management accused Fedcraw of failing to use normal industrial relations procedure and 27 workers at Cresta were fired. There followed solidarity sit-ins at 20 other Edgars stores. The company replied by dismissing some 800 workers.

In negotiations that followed Fedcraw made only two demands: for the transfer of the controller and the unconditional reinstatement of all dismissed workers. Edgars offered to reinstate all workers with a final warning - a next "offence" would lead to instant dismissal. The workers now took their struggle on to the streets. On September 17, Fedcraw members staged protests throughout Johannesburg, picketing and pamphleteering outside Edgars, Jet and Sales House stores during the lunch hour. At about 1.30 pm police with dogs arrived in Eloff street and started bundling workers into the vans. The detained workers shouted slogans and black bystanders joined in, clenched fists raised in solidarity. Sixty-two workers in all were arrested. Twenty six were charged under a by-law with pamphleteering and released. Those holding placards were first charged under the Internal Security Act. This was changed the next day to "attending an illegal gathering" and they were released on R100 bail. There are reports of harrassment elsewhere with workers being interrogated in stores at Alberton and Bloemfontein.

Undeterred the Fedcraw workers now sought the support of other unions, and political and community groups to build a boycott campaign against the Edgars Group. Management by now had embarked upon its own campaign of counter-propaganda - claiming, for instance, that outside "experts" had investigated and cleared the Cresta store controller of charges of racism! Fedcraw was charged with breaking normal grievance procedure. Fedcraw replied that the "normal" procedure in this case was that when

workers and stewards raised complaints they were met with racist arrogance and disrespect and told "this is bullshit". Management tried to slur the union: it was an unregistered break-away union "Since when", Fedcraw replied, "have the capitalists cared for the unity of the workers."

At a mass meeting of dismissed workers on September 25 the following resolution was carried:

> To approach Edgars management with observers from FOSATU [This was to counteract inaccurate press reports emanating from management]. In the event of failure to reach an agreement we shall:
> (i) intensify the boycott of Edgars, Sales House and Jet;
> (ii) appeal to the community, political organisations and fraternal unions to support our struggle;
> (iii) continue with picketing and demonstrations;
> (iv) put all forms of pressure on Edgars management to bring them to the negotiating table and finally acceed to our reasonable, just and fair demands.

Demands for the removal of the store controller and the unconditional re-instatement of all dismissed workers were reiterated.

Offers of support were already arriving from CUSA, NUM and FOSATU Spokespersons from the CUSA union Hotelica addressed the September 25th meeting: "What hurts Fedcraw hurts us. We stand fully in support"; and from the Black Domestic Workers Association: "We fully support the struggle of workers here. Our freedom, our liberation is in the hands of the workers - the vanguard of our struggle. Do not lose hope."

The next day, with the tide of solidarity rising, at a meeting with management, also attended by a FOSATU representative, Edgars finally capitulated. All workers were reinstated unconditionally. The store controller was put on six weeks probation, during which time his behaviour will be monitored by management and the union.

According to a union spokesperson there were four main reasons for their victory. First, most important was the solidarity amongst Edgars workers themselves. Second, the dismissed workers did not remain passive but waged a propaganda campaign which was building the basis for boycott action. Third, the union successfully appealed for support from casual workers. Fourth, the union was beginning to mobilise support from the wider democratic public. "Solidarity built up in struggle must be intensified."

TUCSA: 31st Conference

In his presidential address to the 31st Conference of the Trade Union Council of South Africa, Mr Robbie Botha affirmed that despite some present difficulties, TUCSA remained committed to the "new direction" which was outlined at the 1984 conference. These good intentions were marred, however, by his strong opposition to the disinvestment campaign, a position which will not bring TUCSA any closer to the independent labour movement.

Characterised as a "leftward shift", (Financial Mail 20.9.85) TUCSA's position is seen to be one which is increasingly concerned to rid itself of a pro-government image, a greater willingness to express itself on major public issues, and to establish closer contact with other trade union groupings.

Whilst this marks a break with tradition for TUCSA, some important qualifying statements were made. Firstly, TUCSA committed itself to the retention of those provisions in the Labour Relations Act which require the registration of trade unions with the Department of Manpower together with their scope of registration and representativeness as the main criteria for registration. However, an open resolution (no vote taken) on the issue of registration suggests that TUCSA may be relaxing its position on this issue. The alternative under discussion involved less stringent requirements than those presently in force, doing away with both proof of representation and powers of veto by other unions. Secondly, TUCSA saw its role in the "reform process" as one of co-operation rather than confrontation with the state. However, TUCSA warned that it would not be prepared to lend credibility to institutions which it saw as unviable.

While it is true that in contrast to the conferences of previous years, a greater number of specifically political resolutions were adopted, the majority of these resolutions had in fact been adopted as long ago as 1982. Resolutions previously adopted, but reaffirmed at this conference included calls for the abolition of influx control, the stopping of removals and the establishment of freehold rights for all races, and the abolition of bannings and detention without trial. For the first time, a resolution calling for the abolition of the Black Labour Act was put before conference and unanimously adopted. Although previously adopted at the

28th Annual Conference, a resolution calling for the prohibition of the dismissal of workers involved in legal strikes was also unanimously accepted. A proposed amendment to this resolution submitted by the National Union of Leatherworkers which called for the prohibition to also include illegal strikes, was mooted.

The guest speakers chosen to address this conference are well known for their leading roles in the "reform" initiative; Dr R Lee of the Urban Foundation, Dr B Marais of the Human Sciences Research Council and Prof N Wiehahn of the School of Business Leadership, UNISA. In his address on "The role of a dynamic housing process in South Africa", Dr Lee spoke of the urgent need for reform, specifically on the question of influx control, and called upon TUCSA to lend its support to a "reform alliance". Dr Marais and Prof Wiehahn both spoke about the positive role of trade unionism in South Africa, both in the past and in the new reform era. Clearly, unions, and TUCSA particularly, are viewed as potential allies for capital's reformist project.

Despite these initiatives within TUCSA, the very cause of the Council's crisis, the severe decline in affiliated membership shows no sign of recovery. From a total of 478,420 members in 57 unions in 1983, TUCSA's membership dropped to 379,620 in 47 unions by 1984, and this year declined further to 340,464 in 45 unions. With rumours of other withdrawals [Garment Workers Industrial Union of Natal (50,000) and the Transvaal Leather and Allied Trades Industrial Union (2,900) - since denied], a further decline is possible. The fact that the new federation will be launched at the end of November with a signed up membership of some half-a-million underlines the changing balance of forces within the sphere of organised labour.

This decline in membership reflects the disenchantment of a major grouping of unions located in the metal and auto industries; in particular, the South African Boilermakers Society, Motor Industry Combined Workers Union and Engineering Industrial Workers Union. (see SALB 10.3) These unions have been attracted to an "economistic" alliance with the emerging unions in the form of the South African Co-ordinating Council of the International Metalworkers Federation. It may be that this body will prove a staging post for at least some of TUCSA's unions on the way to closer organisational unity with the new unions. MICWU is currently involved in discussions about amalgamation with two FOSATU unions - Metal and Allied Workers Union and National Automobile

and Allied Workers Union - to form a massive 100,000 strong metal and auto union. Alternatively, of course, the very success of the SACCIMF in furthering the economic struggles of workers might draw these unions away from the political terrain.

So what remains of TUCSA? The Council now appears to consist of an alliance of two major occupational groupings: on the one hand associations representing white collar, professional and supervisory workers such as building society officials, municipal employees, mine surface officials, bank officials and technical officials; on the other hand industrial unions representing semi-skilled workers in the textile, leather, and especially the garment industries. Workers in the second grouping tend to be low-paid and overwhelmingly black. The formation of the new federation may provide an alternative for these workers which would more clearly meet their economic interests, as well as political aspirations. Such a re-alignment, however, would probably depend on the outcome of internal political struggles in the unions concerned.

Tensions between TUCSA unions was manifest in the elections for the National Executive Committee (NEC). Norman Daniels (Textile Workers' Industrial Union) and Freddie Swartz (Transvaal Leather and Allied Trades Industrial Union), considered to be the "left-wing" of TUCSA, (Business Day 19.9.85) were not elected to the NEC. The results of the elections were: President, Mr R Botha (Mine Surface Officials Association - re-elected); 1st Vice-President, Mr N van der Merwe (Artisan Staff Association); 2nd Vice-President, Mr L Petersen (Garment Workers Union of South Africa - in the Western Cape); 3rd Vice-President, Mrs C du Preez (African Tobacco Workers' Union). These results confirm the alliance of the professional associations with powerful conservative leaders of some of the industrial unions.

During 1984 a TUCSA discussion paper mapped out one possible role for TUCSA: to promote itself as a federation of "professional" bodies. But such a project would exclude half its present constituency. For the time being this seems to have been shelved but points to one possible future scenario. However, such a strategy would not be without problems. Given "black advancement" and the growing politicisation of trade unionism, it is not at all clear that the professional strata would gravitate en bloc towards TUCSA. Moreover, this strata will first have to defeat attempts by the state and employers to draw them into "company" unions.

Sasol: Year of "Victory and Tragedy"

On November 6, over 1,000 workers gathered at the Embalenhle Community Hall to celebrate the 1984 stay-away and discuss the union's progress since then. It was exactly one year ago that 5-6,000 Sasol workers - members of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union - were dismissed for taking part in the two day stay-away in support of educational demands made by the now banned COSAS.

The evening's proceedings began with a play staged by the workers entitled "Victory and Tragedy": the stay-away itself was a victory and so was the re-instatement campaign; the tragedy was that 1,000 workers were not re-instated. One interesting point was that the majority of actors in the play were from Sasol's coal mines although the miners played no part in the stay-away. Things have clearly changed in the last year.

In that time, over half the 6,000 plant workers have rejoined the union whilst 5,500 of the 9,000 miners have joined for the first time. Organisation has been rebuilt; there will soon be a full complement of shop stewards and shop steward training has begun. There were some successes during the year: the union had opposed hostel committees; Sasol's offer of a R30 per month increase had been increased to R75; and they had, so far, held down bus fares which were due to rise in September. Management now knows that if they want to change conditions for workers they must negotiate with the union. The union had also taken a leading role in the community, opening its meetings which are attended particularly by the students.

Over the past year the union has been defending - reacting to management's initiatives, said one speaker. In 1986 the union must go on the attack - drawing on its combined strength in the mines and the plant to push for improved conditions.

The evening was also a time to remember fallen comrades, particularly Andries Raditsela, the Dunlop shop steward killed as a result of police action earlier this year. The national organiser spoke on the need for solidarity which goes beyond the union. He discussed the new federation and announced that it was to be called COSATU - Congress of South African Trade Unions. Workers resolved that 1986 would be a strong year.

SACLA: Friction on the Right

At one time optimistic of becoming the largest trade union federation in the country, the South African Confederation of Labour has been in organisational decline for the past ten years. The beginning of this decline can be dated to 1974 when the seven railway unions represented in the Federal Consultative Committee withdrew their group affiliation to the Confederation. This move reflected long-standing divisions among the white trade unions between apartheid hardliners and the more pragmatic union leaders who had never been convinced of the long-term tenability of job reservation and the bar on registered unions for African workers. The state's acceptance of the Wiehahn recommendations in 1979 completed the process of cracking the Confederation's credibility as the sole authentic representative of white workers interests. From a high-point of 25 union affiliates with some 200,000 members in 1975, by 1984 the organisation's support had dropped to 12 unions with a membership of 124,000. (Membership of the Confederation has always been a loose affair and in 1980 membership rose temporarily to 240,000.) The major disaffiliations from the Confederation were three of the railway unions, one mining union (the Technical Officials) and the large South African Association of Municipal Employees. In 1985 the number of affiliated unions dropped to 9, representing 100,000 white workers. (The Mine Workers Union recently disaffiliated, a course of action which it has taken before, when it did not get its own way.)

More generally, "whites only" trade unions have been on the decline in recent years. The number of such unions fell from 56 (representing 384,766 members) to 46 (representing 275,572) between 1983 and 1984. (National Manpower Commission Report for 1984)

Adding to the Confederation's problems has been its inability to sustain a strong organisational structure. Unlike its rival TUCSA, for example, it has never instituted a full-time secretariat offering a range of services to affiliates. Perhaps the major incentive for affiliation to its largest affiliates (South African Iron and Steel Trades Association, Salstaff, the white Building Workers Union, and, until recently, the MWU) in recent years has been the representation on statutory bodies which it still enjoys by virtue of its size and relative standing in the eyes of the government.

The Confederation remains committed to its role as a representative of white labour only. Within this policy stance, differences of commitment and tactics are however discernible. The remaining railway unions and Iron and Steel have steered clear of open confrontation with the state, however distrustful they might be of the Wiehahn reforms. At the other pole, the Mine Workers Union, under Arrie Paulus, has pushed for outright opposition to changes in labour policy and made overtures to the extreme right in politics. The general secretary of the white Building Workers Union, Gert Beetge, is a leading member of the Herstigte Nationale Party. The recent right-wing revival in white parliamentary by-elections cannot have gone unremarked in the ranks of the Confederation, particularly in view of the strong showing by both the HNP and the Conservative Party in urban constituencies with a significant white worker presence.

Tension between the loose factions of right-wing labour is, however, probably at its fiercest over a more mundane issue than ideological and tactical nuances. Since 1982 the Mine Workers Union has systematically enlarged the scope of its registration to include, among other areas, white workers at Iscor and Escom. In so doing Paulus has thrust his union into the recruiting territory of the Iron and Steel Trades Association, thus provoking a bitter competition for members. As part of this conflict, Paulus has recently attacked Iron and Steel in the union's paper, The Mineworker, for being too tame in negotiations with Iscor management, and called on Iscor workers to join the MWU. Since the Iron and Steel Trades Association is not only the Confederation's largest affiliate, but provides that organisation's President and Secretary, the Mine Workers' assault may not only further undermine the Confederation, but shift the focus of right-wing white labour to other forums. The MWU has, for the time being, resigned from the Confederation with the intention of going it alone.

(Jeff Lever, November 1985)

Functional Federations and Consultative Councils

Apart from the four major trade union federations which have attracted most public attention (CUSA, FOSATU, SACLA, and TUCSA), a number of inter-union bodies exist at the present time which deserve at least a mention in any overview of formal union organisation in South Africa. The common basis of these other bodies is that of functional specialisation - on an industrial/sectoral or occupational basis. Not too much is known by way of public documentation of these bodies, and their real significance insofar as union behaviour is concerned varies enormously. Some may operate more or less on paper only. Others, however, have considerable vitality. In the case of certain so-called "unaffiliated" unions (the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the South African Electrical Workers for example), these "functional" federations appear to take the place of affiliation to an organisation such as TUCSA.

The lowest common denominator of these organisations is that they provide a forum for similarly situated unions to meet, discuss common concerns and exchange information. In cases where the unions share a common employer or industrial council, moreover, these federations may also act as wage caucuses where joint union strategy is worked out preceding negotiations with employers. Finally, some of these organisations are concerned with issues of policy beyond the workplace, and may make representations to the appropriate government authority on specific matters.

One of the most striking aspects of these functional federations is that, by and large, they represent the interests of the established unions, together with some "parallels". With one major exception (to be referred to later) no "independent" union has yet joined one of these federations. Either the industry is such that an independent has not yet entered the field, or the complexion of the federation is such as to make the independents sceptical of the utility of affiliation.

* CONFEDERATION OF METAL AND BUILDING UNIONS (CMBU): The CMBU is the successor to the Mechanics Unions Joint Executive, and as the name indicates was formed around the leading artisan-dominated unions in the engineering, mining and construction industries. Affiliates include the AEU, SAEWA, Woodworkers, Ironmoul-

ders, Boilermakers and Engine Drivers. Union officials of the CMBU's affiliates meet regularly, and the organisation is perhaps the leading union wage caucus in the country. Some unionists in the CMBU would like to see this body taking a more prominent public role along the lines of TUCSA. The CMBU's importance lies not only in itself, but in a number of other federations or councils which are its virtual offshoots. These latter include:

* FEDERATION OF MINING UNIONS: members - AEU, Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, IMS, SABS, SAEWA, and Woodworkers.

* ESCOM UNIONS JOINT EXECUTIVE: members - AEU, Woodworkers, AUBTW, SAEWA, and Engine Drivers.

* EXPLOSIVES AND ALLIED JOINT EXECUTIVE: members - AEU, Woodworkers, AUBTW, SABS, SAEWA, Engine Drivers, and Cape Explosives Industrial Workers Union.

* PULP AND PAPER INDUSTRIES JOINT COMMITTEE: members - AEU, Woodworkers, SABS, and SAEWA.

* RAND WATER BOARD UNIONS JOINT COMMITTEE: members - AEU, SAEWA, and Engine Drivers.

Together with the Mine Workers Union and the Engine Drivers, the Federation of Mining Unions forms also the -

* COUNCIL OF MINING UNIONS

A marked contrast with the conservative character of the CMBU is provided by the -

* SOUTH AFRICAN CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE OF THE INTERNATIONAL METALWORKERS FEDERATION: The history of this body has been described by Webster. (SALB 9.6, May 1984) It is indeed exceptional in its membership, including the "established" Boilermakers, together with MAWU, NAAWU, EIWU and other smaller unions. The IMF has acted to some extent as a wage caucus, and has also attempted to spell out a broader role for itself in South African unionism, inter alia, by way of a declaration of intent on economic and political issues. Its attempt to promote co-operation between emerging and established unions has, however, lately come under strain as a result of a dispute between SABS

and MAWU over alleged intimidation of the former's membership during a recent strike. It appears to be the only union organisation of this kind with a full-time secretary.

* FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN TRANSPORT SERVICES: This body, formed in 1984, is in effect the old Federal Consultative Council of railway unions, with the resignation, however, of the Railways Police Association, and the affiliation for the first time of the three Railway Staff Associations for coloured and African workers. Having "opened up" its membership, the Federation has recently joined the World Federation of Transport Workers (FOIST). Its main role is to debate resolutions on service conditions and negotiate with the administration of SATS.

* FEDERATION OF SALARIED STAFF ASSOCIATIONS: Formed in the 1960s, FEDSAL does not appear to have led a very active existence as a federation of white-collar workers. However, the South African Society of Bank Officials, (now an "open" union) recently indicated interest in joining up with the previous affiliates (Motor Industry Staff Association, Underground Officials Association, Vereeniging van Gesalarieerde Nywerheidspersoneel, Nedbank Staff Association) which would give FEDSAL representation of over 100,000 white-collar workers. Also as regards the white-collar stratum, SASBO, Nedbank Staff and Building Societies Officials are pursuing the idea of a Consultative Committee of Finance Sector Workers.

* FEDERATION OF ELECTRICAL TRADE UNIONS: This "federation" was in fact constructed as an umbrella body for the SA Electrical Workers Association and its two coloured and black parallels. With new and militant leadership in the second of these unions, this federation seems dormant if indeed not headed for dissolution.

* SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF TRANSPORT WORKERS: This body consists of seven unions in passenger transport and road haulage (ie. mainly bus and truck drivers and associated workers). The Council holds annual cinferences to debate affiliate's resolutions.

* SOUTH AFRICAN FEDERATION OF LEATHERWORKERS: The federation consists of the two leather unions and two small affiliates. It acts as a wage caucus and holds annual conferences.

* FEDERATION OF MUNICIPAL TRADE UNIONS: Members of this body are

- functional federations -

the nationally-based South African Association of Municipal Employees and the two whites-only Municipal Associations for Durban and Johannesburg. The federation meets regularly to discuss matters of common concern, but it is not a wage caucus.

* NATIONAL UNION OF LIQUOR AND CATERING TRADES EMPLOYEES OF SOUTH AFRICA: Affiliates of this body include six unions in the hotel and catering trades in the Cape, Natal and Transvaal.

* GARMENT WORKERS UNIONS CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE: A forum for the three registered clothing workers unions.

* SOUTH AFRICAN FEDERATION OF BAKERY AND CONFECTIONERY TRADE UNIONS: A registered trade union federation according to the latest report of the Director-General for Manpower; no further details could be obtained by the writer.

This overview of functional federations is confined to employee organisations eligible for trade union status under the Labour Relations Act. Thus no reference is made to similar organisations in, for example, the civil service. Finally, a small number of federations (in furniture, distribution and mining) which seem to be dormant or dissolved, have been omitted.

(Jeff Lever, November 1985)

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Researcher for Trade Union Servicing Research Project

The applicant will be required to undertake in-depth union-related research projects as requested by trade unions. The researcher will be required to be based in and operate from the University of Natal Sociology Department. Salary will be in the range of R1,000 per month. Applicants are to write to: The Trade Union Research Project, Sociology Department, University of Natal, King George V Avenue, Durban 4001.

Applications must state background, experience, academic qualifications and two referees. Closing date for applications is 10 December 1985.

Workman's Compensation: Changing the Rules

Occupational lung diseases like asbestosis and silicosis, caused by workers breathing in asbestos or silica dust at work, are compensable, under the Workman's Compensation Act (WCA), for workers in most factories. Occupational lung diseases in mine workers are covered by the Occupational Diseases in Mines and Works Act (ODM&WA). These diseases are called pneumoconioses. A worker submits a claim for compensation to the Workman's Compensation Commissioner (WCC) who sends the medical particulars of that worker to the Director of the Medical Bureau of Occupational Diseases (MBOD). The Director then decides whether that person is suffering from pneumoconiosis or not, and if so, what the level of resulting disability is. The Workman's Compensation Commissioner then decides whether the worker should be compensated for the disease according to the WCA which details which diseases are found in which industries.

The old disability classification

Until September 1985, pneumoconiosis was compensated as follows:

Disability grades for pneumoconiosis assessed by the MBOD	% disability paid
I: 20% to 50%	35%
II: 50% to 75%	70%
III: 75% to 100%	100%

This meant that: (1) for a worker to be diagnosed as suffering from pneumoconiosis all that was required was that the chest x-ray showed abnormalities that were consistent with pneumoconiosis, there was a history of exposure to the relevant dust that is known to cause such a pneumoconiosis, and that other obvious causes of the worker's illness could be excluded.

(2) all cases diagnosed as pneumoconiosis on the discovery of x-ray abnormalities were considered to be at least 35% disabled by the Commissioner, and were entitled to a life-long pension. This pension was worked out as the percentage disability assessed by the WCC multiplied by 75% of the basic wage at the time of diagnosis. This amount would be paid out monthly to the disabled worker. If the worker died, and it could be proved that death was due to the certified occupational disease, the dependents would be entitled to receive a proportion of this pension.

The new disability classification

This long-standing arrangement is now being changed by the WCC to a new classification consisting of four categories:

Disability grades for pneumoconiosis assessed by the MBOD			% disability assessed by WCC
I:	20%	(x-ray abnormality only)	20%
II:	40%	(x-ray abnormality + respiratory symptoms + slight lung function abnormality)	40%
III:	70%	(x-ray abnormality + symptoms + moderate lung function abnormality)	70%
IV:	100%	(x-ray abnormality + symptoms + severe lung function abnormality, mesothelioma, or cancer)	100%

What this means is that: (1) the group of workers who in the past needed only an abnormal x-ray in order to be eligible for a pension has now been split into two. Those who only have abnormal x-rays will be assessed at 20% disability and will no longer be eligible for a pension. They will receive instead a small one-off lump sum. To receive the life long pension they will now be required in addition to have loss of lung function.

(2) there will then be a problem of how this loss of lung function will be measured. The Commissioner has never made public the way in which he assesses disability. Loss of lung function is measured by the difference between the results of lung tests done on workers and expected normal standards of reference values for these tests. Of the many sets of normal standards that are in use, those for blacks are lower than those for whites. This means that fewer black workers will be compensated than white workers at the same level of abnormality on the chest x-ray if racially discriminatory standards are used. Hence in addition to the fact that it is now more difficult for blacks to get a pension for occupational lung disease, it may be more difficult still to show that they really have loss of lung function when they are tested against these standards.

(3) a further problem arises from the fact that in the early stages of pneumoconiosis, it is very likely that only x-ray abnormalities will be present. Most cases picked up during health screenings or surveys will be mild, with few people having more severe degrees. Hence the new ruling will discriminate against the majority of cases of pneumoconiosis, which

will then fall into the new 20% disability category. They will no longer receive a pension, but only a small one-off lump sum payment. That will be the end of their compensation any follow-up.

Management gains

The exclusion of the majority of cases from pensionable disability under the new classification:

* may be a direct incentive to management to increase the turnover of workers. There is nothing in the law to stop workers diagnosed as pneumoconiosis sufferers from being fired. It may be cheaper for management to get rid of workers found to have early cases of pneumoconiosis before they become eligible for pensions. Any cases that progress after dismissal are very likely to go undetected due to the lack of follow-up services.
* will save the WC Fund directly, and management indirectly, a considerable amount of money. Most workers who are compensated on the new basis will receive a small lump sum payment only, as opposed to a life-long pension. As less money will be paid out of the fund for workers' claims, more will be repaid to management in the form of the periodic rebates from the WCC.

Workers' loss

At the same time the change will be at the expense of workers with pneumoconiosis because:

* the market value of the worker would be permanently reduced as a result of a 20% disability assessment. It would be difficult to obtain a new job with an abnormal chest x-ray.
* many cases of pneumoconioses get worse even after the worker has been removed from the dusty work. This is because dust trapped in the lungs causes scarring which gets worse as time passes.
* there has never been a compulsory system of review of cases of pneumoconiosis in South Africa. Workers who are compensated are not recalled for review by either the WCC or industry. Therefore, if a worker's condition deteriorates, or if a worker with asbestosis gets cancer, it is very unlikely that this will be attributed to work exposure.
* if the new ruling is retrospective, workers will lose even more. Those already receiving pensions for x-ray abnormalities only, could have their pensions stopped. In those cases where unions have won make-up pay from management to bring the WCA pension up to 100% of the last wage, this extra benefit might disappear along with the loss of the WCA pension.

Society's loss

* the state is in effect providing a disincentive to management to prevent hazards because it is much cheaper to have workers paid small sums of compensation money than to provide adequate engineering controls for the control of dust created in the workplace.
* inadequate compensation means that - in a society with few social services - the victims of these diseases, and especially their families, must carry the burden of supporting those who become ill, die, and leave dependents.

Improvements in compensation

This backward step comes at a time when there should rather have been improvements in compensation. For instance, lung cancer is still not compensable. In the asbestos industry, workers exposed to asbestos dust have been known since the 1950s to suffer a considerably increased death rate from lung and other cancers. In particular, those who have been diagnosed and compensated for asbestosis have a massively increased death rate from lung cancer. A British study of state compensated asbestosis cases shows that 30% of them die from lung cancer! In the light of these facts, the absence of recall re-examinations and the one-off lump sum payments amount to a considerable worsening in the terms of just compensation for those with asbestosis.

The Workman's Compensation Commissioner does not publish statistics of cases submitted, compensated or rejected. However, it seems that very few blacks suffering from pneumoconiosis have made claims for compensation in the past under the WCA. Most of those compensated in the past for pneumoconiosis have been mine workers who fall under the ODM&WA which pays very poor financial benefits to black workers for loss of function and death resulting from occupational lung diseases. The maximum amount in the case of the fatal cancer mesothelioma for an African mine worker is R1,641.

Historically, compensation benefits have been quite good for white workers, especially in the mining industry. White workers were numerically much smaller than black workers, and they have wielded substantial political power. Labour-related legislation is being de-racialised at the moment, and organisations of black workers are looking more and more seriously at the welfare needs of their members. It would seem that the compensation authorities are worried about the large increase in costs that would arise from

blacks applying for benefits that previously were largely aimed at the numerically smaller group of white workers.

This is clear from the Niewenhuizen Commission Report in 1981. The commission sat to find ways of rationalising the ODM&WA and the WCA that cover compensation of occupational diseases on the mines and in industry. The commission's report expressed the intention to tighten up on compensation benefits when racial inequalities in compensation are eventually dropped from the Occupational Diseases in Mines and Works Act. Tighter criteria would then also apply to workers falling under the WCA when the two acts are rationalised.

Over the last few years the independent trade unions have been involved in several case-finding surveys for pneumoconiosis (asbestosis in asbestos-cement and transport industries). Many difficulties have been experienced. For example, a study of General Workers' Union members exposed to asbestos in the transport industry resulted in a small number of claims for asbestosis being forwarded to the WCC. Around 32 of these cases were certified by the MBOD as having asbestosis more than one year ago. A small number of these were then accepted by the WCC and compensated (received pensions), while the majority of claims (24) were held up by inexplicable delays. After persistent inquiry it transpired that the WCC was waiting for a "ruling to be made". Perhaps if the new system of disability classification becomes official, these halted claims will not resume their slow and troubled journey through workman's compensation appartus. Many of these workers might now receive very little in the way of money (lump sums) as a result of the new classification.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that the recent and sudden appearance of numbers of cases resulting from the increasingly health and safety conscious activities of independent unions have led to this move to change the disability classification. It is hoped that such a wide-ranging change in the implementation of the WCA will at least be subjected to a process that allows objections and suggestions for improvements. This is the case, for instance, when new regulations are passed under the Machinery and Occupational Safety Act. Perhaps the WCC will publish the new disability classification for comment, and invite representations from interested parties. There are clearly many such interested parties, beginning with the independent trade unions and people working in the occupational health field.
(Industrial Health Research Group, University of Cape Town)

New Labour Studies Conference

Some 50 people attended the October 25th conference convened by the TAG-Sociology Research Project. Roughly equal numbers attended from trade unions, service organisations and academic institutions. Papers presented dealt with health and safety issues; trade unions and political action; regionalisation; management strategies; and economic alternatives. The keynote speech was delivered by Eddie Webster who had recently made a survey of "labour research" being conducted in South Africa. He saw four different kinds of research currently being pursued: that conducted by the state; that initiated by capital; traditional "industrial relations" research in some universities; and finally, what he called the "new labour studies". The first three variants, Webster argued, were firmly situated within the status quo, despite claims to "neutrality". Consequently, the results of such research is often of limited value - even to the initiators. This, he argued, was true despite the availability of large amounts of resources for this kind of research.

By contrast the new labour studies makes no claim to impartiality. It is unashamedly partisan and committed to the struggles of the working class. Its characteristics are: (i) it sees labour as a social force, not as a commodity; it challenges the separation of theory and practice; seeks to popularise academic work; offers practical support; and is concerned with comparative work on labour elsewhere in the world; (ii) it is concerned also with broader social relations beyond the workplace to include issues of reproduction and working class culture; (iii) it emphasises democratic structures and workplace control; (iv) it draws on the experiences and oral evidence of people, whose history is not recorded in official accounts; and (v) it is inter-disciplinary.

In the final plenary session the point was made that "popularisation" and practical work were not enough. It is also necessary for intellectuals to challenge the dominant ideologies at every level, including in theoretical work. Indeed this constitutes a major reason for the launching of the journal, Transformation. The conference brought together people with a common concern for labour issues from different areas of activity. The hope was expressed that similar events be held in future to provide a forum and stimulate new work around the new labour studies.

Industrial Councils and "Deregulation"

Statutory minimum wages and the industrial council system are one of the targets of a government and big business initiative to assist the development of the "small business sector". In June 1985, the State President asked the President's Council to advise him on:

> ...all regulations, standards, licensing obligations and conditions as well as cumbersome administrative procedures and red tape [rompslomp] that may hamper economic development in general and the small business sector in particular.
>
> (Government Gazette, 28 June 1985)

Minimum wages certainly hamper the development of that sort of business (small or large) that draws its profits from the super-exploitation of workers. Long hours and low wages, with unhygienic sweatshops and a slave-driven pace of work, have been the foundation of many fortunes. Professor Brian Kantor told Cape Town businessmen that:

> ...job creation was being discouraged by the industrial council system which was designed to protect established labour from low-wage competition. (The Argus, 23 July 1985)

The system of course, also protects responsible employers against unfair competition from unscrupulous wage under-cutters.

Seventeen industrial councils operating in the Western Cape have condemned any move to exempt "small" businesses from industrial council agreements. The councils stated in a submission to the President's Council:

> It is our considered opinion that such a step might well promote small business development, but that this would then occur at the expense of the employees concerned, other large employers, industrial and labour stability and, finally, even socio-political stability. (Memo: Cape Chamber of Industries, n.d.)

The government's intention to exclude small businesses from broad areas of wages, factory and health legislation has not been addressed with much concern by the trade union movement. There is little appreciation that what starts out as an effort to "deregulate" small business may prefigure a move to deregulate industry as a whole.

The Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) numbers amongst its shareholders the largest and most powerful companies in South Africa, from General Mining, Rembrandt, Anglo and the Old Mutual to Pepkor, Everite, Tongaat-Hulett and Nedbank. The SBDC recently paid for a Survey supplement to the Financial Mail in which all private sector shareholders are listed along with the extent of their "commitment". This totals R68 million.

The SBDC also submitted recommendations to the President's Council. It has "practical experience of the need for law reform, deregulation and the adoption of realistic standards." (Supplement to the Financial Mail, 27.9.85) "Realistic standards", of course, mean as few as possible:

> [The SBDC] identifies the matters which most urgently need to be rectified as the unnecessarily high building standards, health and safety regulations, the Group Areas Act, restrictive business hours and licensing requirements, inflexible zoning, transport regulations, inflexible industrial council control and unrealistic minimum wage enforcement and measures particularly hindering informal sector activities.
>
> (SBDC Supplement, p34; our emphasis)

Big business is clearly trying to use the SBDC as one of the elements in its campaign for "free enterprise". The SBDC seeks to undermine standards for workers that trade unions have fought for over sixty years.

Minister tires of Industrial Councils

The campaign against minimum wage regulation has entered a new phase with the intervention of the Minister of Manpower. He is reported as being tired of "paying the political bill" for inflexible and unrepresentative industrial councils. (The Argus 28.9.85)

A memorandum from the Department of Manpower has been circulated which asks whether the present policy is in line with:
(a) individual freedom of choice;
(b) voluntarism;
(c) consultation and co-operation; and
(d) minimum state intervention.

In particular, the Minister is reviewing his policy towards the customary extension of industrial council agreements to non-

parties. Refusal to extend agreements to non-parties would sound the death knell for many industrial councils which are not substantially representative. There would be an exodus from employers' organisations if non-membership freed companies from the obligation to observe industrial council agreements.

Already, the Minister is believed to have refused to publish more than one industrial council agreement where the parties are not representative. In some cases it is the union, and in others the employers' organisation which is unrepresentative.

The response of the labour movement

Many unions who have chosen to stay out of the industrial council system may look upon these trends with indifference. Some non-IC unions operate in industries in which an unrepresentative council exists, unilaterally extending its "agreements" to apply to the whole industry and providing employers with an excuse to avoid plant-level bargaining. These unions may welcome the move to close down poorly representative councils.

But the current dissatisfaction that many progressive unions feel with the industrial council system should not blind them to the need for the trade union movement to defend vigorously the principle of enforcible protection for wage standards and conditions of work.

(SALDRU, Labour Research Service, Quarterly Bulletin, Third Quarter, 1985)

Gencor and Chile: Comrades in Arms

Below we reprint an extract from Gencor's house journal, Gencorama (June 1985). It is not surprising that Gencor should feel at home with Chile's military junta which overthrew a democratically elected government and has imprisoned, tortured and murdered thousands of trade unionists and socialists. (Citizen 29.10.85) Afterall it is the Gencor mines which have most vigorously opposed NUM's efforts to improve the conditions of its miners.....

The close cooperation of industrial companies within the Gencor Group was to the fore recently with the second consignment of steel and manufactured items being shipped from the Sandock-Austral Dockyard in Durban to Chile. The 1,500 ton cargo, which will be used in the construction of a new shipyard and recovery slipway near Punta Arenas - a joint project by Sandock and the Chilean government - was carried on a Unicorn lines vessel.

A key figure in the Sandock-Austral project in Chile is Lt. General Jack Dutton, executive director, exports. Before joining Sandock last year, he was the South African Ambassador to Chile. He also served in the defence force for 35 years. Gencorama spoke to Lt. General Dutton: "Chile is very pro-South Africa and considers us [SA] a very good friend. We have good relations both politically and economically and trade between the two countries has grown considerably over the last five years."

"Chile is one of the least volatile countries in South America and one of the most stable. Although it has a non-democratic government, it is well run and has an economy which is much sounder than many other countries in South America. By far the biggest industry there is copper mining and we [Sandock-Austral] are making ourselves known there so that we can qualify as a supplier. I also believe there is scope for involvement by other Gencor companies in that vast copper mining industry."

Lt. General Dutton also said that Sandock hoped to become involved in shipbuilding in Chile. Fishing is the second biggest industry there. There is also a strong possibility that Sandock, which also specialise in the manufacture of armaments for the SADF, could expand in this field in Chile. "The export of any armaments from South Africa is of course controlled by Armscor."

Irish Shop Workers Boycott South African Goods

On Friday September 13 Ruari Quinn, Irish Minister for Labour, announced an agreement for the phased withdrawal of South African produce from the four major supermarket chains in the 26 counties of Southern Ireland. The statement noted that the action may be extended over some time because of an apparent difficulty in finding a replacement supply. This announcement comes as a direct result of a 14-month struggle waged by a small group of Dublin shopworkers, who are members of the Irish Distributive and Administrative Trade Union (IDATU). While welcoming this announcement, the strikers noted that they will not return to work until there is a total ban on South African produce in Dunnes' Stores, the chain with which they are in dispute, where management has warned that they will not be exempted from handling South African produce, while a new supplier is being sought. Below we trace the history of this heroic and exemplary strike.

On July 19, 1984, Mary Manning, a young Dublin shop assistant, was dismissed for refusing to handle South African fruit. Mary was working at a city centre branch of Dunnes' Stores, the largest multiple chain store in Ireland. Twelve of the other 17 full-time workers at the store walked out in support of Mary's action and since then 11 workers have maintained a picket on the store.

This, the most sustained strike in support of the oppressed black masses of South Africa, began when an individual worker followed a standing recommendation of her trade union. In remaining on strike for 14 months these 11 young workers (ten of them are women) have taken a firmer stand on the question of a trade boycott of the racist South African state than any European government.

The workers have received support from large numbers of Irish workers who refuse to pass the picket line, but, more importantly perhaps, they have also increased popular consciousness of the situation in South Africa. Popular support for the strike has also been motivated by news coverage of the events in South Africa over the last year and the Irish people's own direct experience of imperialism and racism at the hands of the British.

The leadership of the Irish trade union movement acknowledged the principled position of the strikers by placing an Irish Congress

of Trade Unions (ICTU) picket on the store. Activists and local trade union branches have organised collections for the strikers and/or joined the picket lines at the store. Earlier this year the strikers approached Dublin dock workers who had been handling Dunnes' goods. The response of these workers in support of the strike forced the Dunnes' management to import South African produce through the northern port of Belfast.

The strike at Dunnes' Stores has also highlighted the Dublin government's tardiness on the issue of collaboration with the South African ruling class. Many individual members of the Fine Gael-Labour ruling coalition have spoken out in support of the courageous stand of the strikers. Others have vacillated on this issue by questioning the validity of the boycott tactic because of the possible effect it could have on the living standards of Black South African workers, a stance which ignores the fact that the call for a boycott originated in the Black South African community.

A key point in the strike was reached in July of this year when, approaching the first anniversary of the strike, some of the strikers set out on a tour of South Africa on the invitation of Bishop Tutu. On arrival at Johannesburg airport the strikers delegation was turned away by the South African authorities.

The strikers themselves admit having become more politically aware during the course of the strike and they now insist that no matter what course their union (IDATU) or the ICTU takes on the boycott, they will never handle South African produce again. Thus their minimum demand has been for the inclusion of a "conscience clause" into employment contracts with Dunnes', whereby shop workers will be allowed to refuse to handle South African goods as an act of individual conscience.

The political maturity of the strikers has been underlined by the fact that they have led this strike through 14 morale-sapping months during which the Dunnes' management's response has been to point out that the strikers may not be employed again by Dunnes' Stores. In this historic struggle 11 young workers from one of the lowest paid sectors of the Irish work force are leading a fight on behalf of the entire Irish trade union movement against an intransigent management, who are exploiting the inactivity of the Dublin government.

Palestinian Workers: Migrants in their own Land

Since the invasion of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, a massive migrant labour force has been developed by the Israeli state and Israeli capital. Officially the numbers reached 75,000 in 1982, that is, one third of the government-acknowleged working population. However, as long ago as 1975, the Israeli paper, Davar, estimated the true figure to be between 120,000 and 140,000, a figure with which the International Labour Organisation (ILO) concurred in the early '80s. The vast discrepancy arises because official figures only recognise registered, legal migrant workers, not those engaged in "black work". Deliberate underestimation of the size of the Palestinian population further exacerbates the problem of finding a trustworthy figure. However, it is evident that migrant work on such a scale generates dependence on the occupying economy.

The living and working conditions of migrant workers are atrocious. Those working in Israel legally, via government work offices, are subjected to 30-40% taxation for which they receive little, if any, benefit. They are obliged to pay tax towards the maintenance of the army which occupies their refugee camps, towns and villages. They get no unemployment benefit and their health insurance is next to useless. They are frequently paid below the minimum wage and can be sacked with ease. Interviews conducted in 1984 revealed child workers supporting families of nine or more.

Those engaged in "black work" have no rights. Their status is similar to that of South African workers who lack passes. Because officially they do not exist, they are paid as little as the employer cares to give them, often as little as R5,00 per day. They have no appeal against redundancy and are rarely taken to hospital when injured at work. Some are frequently not paid at all, being beaten and threatened with guns if they protest. Unregistered workers form around one third of the migrant labour force.

Liberal Israeli circles sometimes refer to Palestinian migrant workers as "drawers of water and hewers of wood". The term is appropriate. A sectoral breakdown of 74,000 legal workers showed 48% engaged in construction, 22% in industry, 13% in agriculture (excluding seasonal workers) and 17% in other work. In all sectors the tasks allotted to migrant workers are usually manual.

- palestinians -

The Israeli economy is now in deep crisis with inflation running at 380% over the last twelve months, a $23 billion foreign debt, and US aid consituting 12% of GNP. A recent US Senate Foreign Relations Committee report said that without this aid, the balance of payments deficit would be "unmanageable". The Israeli government is beginning to implement spending cuts and in the racially-divided job market, it is Palestinian migrants who suffer first. Histadrut, the Zionist labour federation established under a "Jewish labour only" slogan, will acquiesce to this.

In September 1984, Zionist workers at the Vulcan plant in Haifa demanded that Palestinian workers be dismissed before Jewish and Druze workers. In October, the director of the Hadera-Samaria labour exchange bemoaned the fact that he had to hire Palestinians for manual work because Jews refused to do it. The pressure on jobs is now so great that many see the sacking of migrant workers as the only solution to rising unemployment. It is worth noting, for example, that within 24 hours of the announcement that Ethiopian Jews were being airlifted to Israel, several southern Israeli towns announced that they would not accept them - the growing economic crisis is further stratifying the Jewish population itself, intensifying discrimination against black Jews.

As well as the coincidence of recessionary pressures and racist employment practices, the continuing seizure of Palestinian land and the return of Zionist troops from Lebanon further increased the migrant labour reserve. The only possible escape from grinding poverty becomes emigration which, even a few years ago, was 16.4 per thousand per annum. But emigration means submitting to the Zionist project of creating "a land without a people".

Even those trade unions in the Occupied Territories which are recognised by the Israeli state are not permitted to represent migrant workers. Despite this, the two West Bank labour federations continue to recruit these labourers.

When the Histadrut threatened a general strike this July, it was given world press coverage. Recently some Palestinian migrants have dared to take industrial action. This significant development, and the gradual building of a movement committed to workers' rights and national liberation under extremely repressive conditions, is something the world press prefers to ignore.

(International Labour Reports Sept-Oct 1985)

Zimbabwe: the Agro-Industrial Strikes

From August to October, 1985, Zimbabwe experienced the first serious wave of strikes since the period immediately following Independence. The strikes, caused by a dispute over government announced wage increases for agro-industrial workers, exposed the precarious balance that the government maintains between capital and the working class. On June 5, four weeks before the general election, Frederick Shava, Minister of Labour, Manpower Planning and Social Welfare, announced general wage increases of around 15% for low income workers with effect from July 1. While the minimum for agricultural workers rose from $65 (R100) to $75 (R115), workers on citrus, timber, tea and sugar estates, previously classified as agricultural workers, were awarded a minimum of $143,75 (R220), the same as industrial workers. It was unclear whether those doing normal agricultural work on estates should be paid as farmworkers or agro-industrial workers.

The employers were obviously appalled at this increase of over 100%. At the end of July, the first time that the new wage rates were applicable, most employers simply ignored the ruling and paid all workers $75. On timber estates, only those who worked in sawmills received $143,75. There was an immediate reaction when 150 timber workers in the midlands refused to accept their $75 pay packets, demanding the new agro-industrial wage. They were only persuaded not to strike by officials of the General, Agricultural and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ). There were disputes at other timber estates as well as at a poultry farm outside Harare, where GAPWUZ officials had to be called in to persuade workers to accept the lower wage.

Employers' representatives argued that the new wage put jobs in jeopardy and called on the government to have the wage withdrawn. On August 26 discussions started between the Labour Ministry, GAPWUZ and the Agricultural Labour Bureau, representing the employers. This type of three-way forum has been the most common way of settling difficult disputes since Independence. Four days later the Deputy Labour Minister announced that the new agro-industrial wage would be suspended and that a new rate, still to be agreed on, would be backdated from July.

The next day 1,000 workers in the Anglo American owned Mazowe

citrus estate just north of Harare went on strike after receiving their August pay. According to one report the strike was ended by the Labour Minister himself when he threatened the workers with immediate dismissal unless they went back to work.

The Financial Gazette, the employers' mouthpiece expressed relief that "sanity" had been restored in the Labour Ministry. On the same day,however, Shava, the Labour Minister, announced that the $143.75 wage was still in force. Exemptions could be applied for by individual concerns when supported by both management and workers. A few days later Prime Minister Mugabe himself intervened in the dispute, claiming that the Deputy Minister had been speaking in his personal capacity only.

By the end of September, the third month on the new wage rates, it was clear that Mugabe's words had gone largely unheeded. On October 5 it was reported that 4,000 tea estate workers in the Eastern Highlands region were striking for $143.75. At a government owned estate senior managers were held hostage for four hours, and at one stage the police used teargas to disperse strikers.

The tea estate owners then went on a propaganda offensive: tea growing would be uneconomical at the $143 wage and 10,000 workers would have to be retrenched. Senior local ZANU politicians then intervened and organised meetings between management and worker representatives. On October 15 it was reported that a compromise wage of $85 (R130) had been agreed in several estates. Workers would also receive detailed accounts from management, showing the financial problems faced by the industry. A spokesman for the Labour Ministry said they did not recognise the agreement and that $143.75 was still the legal minimum. By the end of October there was still no agreement between the Ministry and employers.

The dispute has been an important test of the government's industrial relations strategy. The basic principle underlying the new Labour Act is that of virtually unlimited power for the Labour Minister or his officials in all aspects of industrial relations, especially in the settlement of disputes. Notwithstanding the greater power the government will have in a one party state, the agro-industrial strikes have called into question the prospect of maintaining "industrial harmony" - through state intervention - between militant workers and intransigent bosses.

(Zimbabwe correspondent, November 1985)

International Solidarity

France: September 3 French dockworkers at the port of Fos refused to unload 98,000 tons of South African coal. This was the third such action by transport workers, members of the Confederation Generale du Travail (CGT). On August 25 a ship carrying South African coal was occupied at La Havre by CGT members and anti-apartheid banners were flown from the ship's stern. When the ship tried to re-dock at Rouen it received a similar reception.

The CGT argues that the importation of cheap South African coal results in unemployment in the French coal fields and reinforces the exploitation of black workers in South Africa:

> South African coal is cheaper. But what is the cost of the suppression of human rights in South Africa? There is a close link between solidarity with the workers of South Africa and defence of the interests of French workers.

One week later dockerworkers in Bordeaux prevented the unloading of Outspan citrus fruit and urged all other French ports to follow suit. Workers refused to operate cranes, invaded the bridge, and threw crates of fruit overboard.

September 26, workers at Orly airport attempted to stop all flights to Johannesburg.

Italy: In September Italian trade unionists held a week-long boycott of South African ships and aircraft using Italian ports and airports. A joint statement by the three big confederations - CGIL, CISL and UIL - said they were protesting at Pretoria's regime of "blood, violence and terror".

Britain: In Britain trade unionists and Labour MPs pledged support for the South African NUM strike. At its annual congress the British Trade Union Congress passed resolutions supporting the liberation struggle in South Africa.

In July-August Southampton dockworkers - members of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) - prevented the export of a Berox milling machine - used for servicing military aircraft - which was destined for South Africa. The TGWU and the National Union of Seamen (NUS) are members of the Maritime Unions Against

Apartheid - which was set up by unions to enforce United Nations sanctions. At the end of October NUS hosted an international conference to discuss measures to prevent oil reaching South Africa.

In October, local government trade unionists held pickets outside the London headquarters of BTR. This was in solidarity with MAWU members locked out since May by BTR Sarmcol, Natal.

Dockworkers in the Welsh port of Swansea voted to stop unloading South African coal. Their union - the TGWU - has called for similar action from other ports.

Finland: Transport workers have declared an indefinite blockade of all South African trade. Postal unions decided to boycott South African mail from November 15.

Norway: Transport workers refused to handle South African goods.

Denmark: Transport workers have refused to handle South African imports and exports from November.

Sweden: A group called Metalworkers Against Apartheid has been set up to launch an educational campaign within their union.

In November dockworkers began a two month boycott of South African imports. This was planned to extend to other tranport workers. The Swedish Transport Workers Union has called on the International Transport Workers Union (ITF) to co-ordinate a world-wide boycott of South African trade.

USA: September 17, the New York Anti-Apartheid Co-ordinating Committee was established at a meeting called by the United Auto Workers District 65 and involving representatives of several trade unions in the city.

Netherlands: The FNV, the main trade union federation, has established a solidarity fund for independent unions in South Africa.

West Germany: Shop stewards and factory council members of the Daimler-Benz factory in Mannheim passed the following resolution:

1. to make contacts directly and quickly with South African brother and sister trade unionists working at the East London factory of Daimler-Benz in order to enable us to react immediately to firings and jailings;

2. to inform ourselves thoroughly about the oppression of Blacks but also about Daimler-Benz's activities in South Africa;
3. to call on workers representatives in the Supervision Council (a co-management body) to demand an investment boycott;
4. to better inform the workforce through an assembly of the shop stewards, an exhibition in the local union offices, and perhaps a South Africa week in the plant;
5. to organise regular trips by workers from Mannheim to South Africa and to invite colleagues from East London to Mannheim. Representatives of the East London plant are to be invited to an assembly in the Mannheim plant.

Australia: Dockworkers in Sydney refused to handle South African cargo from the Safocean container ship, Mildwa, in protest against the state of emergency and detentions.

Dockworkers in Freemantle refused for 24 hours to supply tugs to bring in to port the Safocean cargo ship, Nederburg. After it had docked, workers continued their campaign of harassment. The final straw for the ship's owners was when the union demanded improvements to the Nederburg crew's working and living conditions before they would let it sail.

From October 21 Australian unions placed an indefinite ban on mail services with South Africa. Telecommunications workers are refusing to repair equipment in South Africa's embassy, its consulates and offices of the South African Airways. SAA flights have been disrupted by airport workers, whilst waterfront unions have placed a ban on imports and exports to and from South Africa. Trade unions are drawing up blacklists of South African products in the shops and in the building industry.

International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Association: denounced repression in South Africa and called for the immediate withdrawal of security forces from the townships, an end to harassment of workers and students, and the release of all detainees. The IUF also called for sanctions and reaffirmed solidarity with IUF affiliates in South Africa and "with the emerging trade union movement which has been in the forefront for democratic rights for all people of South Africa."

ICFTU: met trade unionists from South Africa in early November to discuss boycott action against South African Airways.
(SALB correspondents, November 1985)

Dispute at Cheseborough Ponds

Workers at Cheseborough Ponds (Wadeville) have demanded the resignation of the Personnel Manager. Wage negotiatons have been postponed until the matter is settled. Workers have a number of grievanceds which, they claim, got worse since his appointment a year ago. At a monthly meeting with shop stewards he was asked to explain why relations had declined. He said, "because I am not a fool". Workers took this to imply that they were the fools. He refused to withdraw the statement. Other grievences include:

1. In wage negotiations he has made "final offers". Workers do not see this attitude as conducive to negotiation. Housing loans and scholarships awarded through the personnel department are denied to most black workers. Workers allege favouritism.

2. Cheeseborough Ponds (SA) does not follow the policy of the parent company, Cheeseborough Ponds (USA) - eg. Labour Day is recognised by the US company as a holiday but May Day is not recognised in South Africa. Workers are only given 15 days leave per year in South Africa instead of 20, as in the USA. Workers in South Africa work from 7am to 4.30pm instead of from 8am to 4.15 pm, as in the USA. Cheeseborough Ponds (SA) has consistently refused to sign the Sullivan Code claiming that its own employment code was better. Workers deny that this is true. The company recently did sign the Code (October 25) but workers claim this was due to pressure from overseas and not out of any concern for their workers. Workers were not told that the company had signed the Code. They claimed that a number of practises at the comany in fact contradict the Code:
   * Black managers do not have company cars like white managers;
   * wages and conditions of work do not match those of similar workers overseas, ie. no equal pay for equal work;
   * Blacks do not enjoy the recreational facilities of white employees, eg. sponsored membership of golf and tennis clubs;
   * Blacks are not invited to company social events.

3. The compaany has threatened to close down and retrench the workers if they continue to make demands.

The dispute has resulted in a drop in production. Workers have refused to work overtime, and they now boycott the personnel department, referring all grievences to other levels of management.

The Freedom Charter and Workers Control*

Duncan Innes

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak today because I think the Freedom Charter is a crucial document in the liberation struggle and it is imperative that people discuss its significance as widely as possible. The broad aim of the Charter is to offer a vision of what a democratic South Africa might look like. To this end it touches on a wide range of crucial issues covering political rights, civil rights, trade union rights, land reform, education, welfare, etc. In my address today I do not intend to look in detail at all of these issues, but rather to focus on the question of the ownership and control of wealth as envisaged by the Charter.

My reason for choosing this issue for discussion is because it is one of the key elements in the formation of a new society and should give us some indication of what form of society is envisaged by the Charter. In fact in its Preamble the Charter explicitly states that it seeks to bring prosperity and freedom to all the people of South Africa and that this is to be achieved through "a democratic state based on the will of the people".

The clause in which the issue of the transfer of wealth is raised is entitled "The People shall share in the country's wealth". This clause is intended to point to the way in which the country's economic resources are to be harnessed to bring prosperity to the people of South Africa. The clause reads as follows:

> the national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people.

This will occur in the following three ways:

1) The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole. [ie, will be nationalised.]
2) All other industries and trade shall be controlled to assist the well-being of the people.
3) All people shall have equal rights to trade where they

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* This is the text of a talk to a meeting organised by the Student Action Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand, 16.10.85.

> choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions. [ie. this sentence calls for an extension of the market.]

What the Charter envisages then, on the one hand, is public ownership - nationalisation - of the key productive industries so that the wealth being produced in those industries will be channelled through the state into promoting the welfare of the community, while on the other hand the private market will be expanded to create employment and wealth in the non-nationalised sectors

One question that arises here is whether this is a capitalist growth strategy or a strategy for socialist growth? The only answer is that, as presently formulated, it is not a socialist strategy - though with modifications and additions it could become such. Let me explain:

Were the nationalisation section to be expanded to include, for instance, worker control of the mines and industries it would shift the formulation towards socialism. Without such an addition the reference to nationalisation on its own is not necessarily a socialist demand. Nationalisation is quite compatible with capitalism. In this country, for instance, we currently have a number of nationalised industries, such as ESCOM, ISCOR, SATS, etc. - and nobody here would seriously want to argue that South Africa today is a socialist state.

Nationalisation of mines and industries, therefore, is not necessarily incompatible with capitalism and in fact can co-exist quite comfortably with capitalism. The recent year-long mine workers' strike in Britain is a case in point, since that strike occurred within the nationalised coal mining industry. There it was the Chairman of the Coal Board, Ian McGregor, a government-appointee acting with the full support of the state, who took on and defeated the mine workers and their union. Clearly, this is an example of capitalist nationalisation, not socialism.

But, equally, it must be said, nationalisation of key industries and economic sectors is a crucial pre-requisite for any socialist economy. So one is confronted with a situation, then, in which nationalisation occurs under both capitalism and socialism. The critical question then becomes: how do we distinguish between the two; between nationalisation under capitalism and under socialism?

There are various ways that can be done but the key issue in my view is that of which class controls the state which carries out the nationalisation programme. If the government involved is under capitalist control, as is this government and the Thatcher government in Britain,' then the nationalised industries clearly fall under the ambit of capitalist control. If, on the other hand, the state is under working class control then those nationalised industries would be at the service of the working class - and we would have a socialist environment. The key issue then is not nationalisation per se, but the form of state which controls the nationalisation process.

On this issue (of the form of the state) the Charter puts forward a number of important democratic demands:

- Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for, and stand as a candidate for, all bodies which make laws.
- All the people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country.
- The rights of the people shall be the same regardless of race, colour or sex.
- All bodies of minority rule, advisory boards, councils and authorities shall be replaced by democratic organs of self-government.

Now these are important popular democratic demands but, again, they are not necessarily socialist. They could function effectively within a democratic capitalist system. To become part of a socialist system this clause should have to refer to the role the working class is to play within these democratic institutions.

This brings me to what I regard as a very important issue: namely, the way in which the Charter is often misperceived both by some of its critics and by some of its supporters. It is clear, I think, from the sections that I read out from the Charter that many of the formulations it contains are very abstract. This leads to a large measure of ambiguity in the document as a whole - an ambiguity which lends itself to different political interpretations, with some people wanting to interpret it in a capitalist direction and others in a socialist direction - whereas the truth is that the Charter itself does not specify precisely what political-economic system should be established in South Africa.

What it does first, is to lay down certain ideals for a future South Africa: ideals of non-racialism and democracy, a sharing in

the wealth of the land, ideals of job security, housing for all etc. Secondly, what it does is to put forward certain broad guidelines about how these ideals are to be achieved: through nationalisation, equality before the law, re-division of the land, trade union rights, unemployment benefits, equal education, rent control, free medical care, etc.

While such ideals and guidelines are important, they do not in themselves answer the question of which political-economic system will meet these demands. In terms of the guidelines either a capitalist social democratic system or a socialist system could theoretically meet these demands. The Charter - deliberately, I'm sure - leaves this question of the precise nature of the political system open.

At one level this is, of course, a strength. At the time of its adoption in June 1955 the Charter was intended to be a statement of principles around which a variety of groups and classes could coalesce. It was formulated in broad terms precisely so that it could be supported both by socialists and non-socialists. It was therefore an important weapon in the armoury of the oppressed. But at another level this same ambiguity is also a weakness because it means the document lacks clarity on precisely those issues where clarity is most needed: that is, on the issue of what kind of system is to replace apartheid?

The question which next presents itself is this: if we are going to demand greater clarity from the Charter on this issue or if we demand a new Charter which clarifies things further, will it not be at the cost of dividing the people? Will the cost not be precisely to destroy the popular unity the Charter has helped to forge? This is an important question and one which cannot be answered completely at a theoretical level. It needs finally to be tested in practice, in struggle. But what we can say is that economic, political and social conditions in South Africa today are not what they were thirty years ago when the Charter was formulated. Much has changed.

For one thing, the Black working class is today a major force in our society - a force far in excess of that which existed thirty years ago. And that class is making crucial advances, even to the extent of winning some of the demands which the Charter calls for.

Black workers have already won the right - which is called for by

the Charter - "to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers." They are also currently making major advances in other areas specified by the Charter, such as "paid annual leave, sick leave and maternity leave". Clearly, the victories that have so far been won in these areas are as yet only partial, but they do reflect the growing strength of the black workers' movement. But as that workers' movement grows and advances through struggle, it also begins to raise new questions - question of what kind of society workers want to build in this country in the future? That question is being raised by workers within their movement today!

It is, of course, not an easy question to answer. The Charter provides no clarity here. The working class movement itself has disagreements on this and many other issues. Some organisations have argued that the guidelines provided by the Charter are sufficient for the moment as indicators of what a future South Africa should look like. Others have argued that the Charter is insufficient; that more clarity, more detail and especially more of a socialist direction is required.

Despite these disagreements, if we look at one aspect of the working class movement - the trade union movement - we can see major advances being made. Various trade union groupings, which have a long history of separateness and even rivalry, are now coming together to form the largest trade union federation in this country's history. This new federation to be formed at the end of November represents a great consolidation of working class power - the forging of a new and larger unity within the ranks of the workers' movement. And this unity is coming about despite disagreements over particular issues.

In other words, although workers are debating among other things the question of the relevance of the Charter to their struggle, that debate is not preventing unity among them. On the contrary, I think one should argue that real unity is often forged <u>through</u> debate - and not by avoiding debate.

But, it might be argued, that, yes, that is true of the working class: unity can be forged within their ranks, despite disagreements, because they have other interests in common. But what of the question of class alliances? The working class, on its own, so the argument runs, cannot bring about fundamental social change in South Africa. It needs to form alliances with other

classes. If one pushes the Charter towards socialism one will scare off other classes, such as the black petty bourgeoisie which is currently allied to workers. In other words, by putting forward more left-wing demands one will destroy the alliance among the oppressed classes.

Let me say at the outset in replying to this point that from a strategic point of view it is absolutely crucial that the working class does enter into alliances with other classes. Not to do so - to cut itself off from other oppressed classes and go it alone - would be a fatal error. But the question I want to raise is: would the formulation of demands which are more explicitly socialist in orientation than those in the Charter - would putting forward such demands necessarily destroy the alliance?

Certainly it would frighten off some elements within the ranks of the nascent black middle class but that does not mean the collapse of the alliance. Already we have the situation where black unity is not complete. The Matanzimas, Mangopes and Sebes have long sided explicitly with apartheid in return for 30 pieces of silver. Our police force, which guns down our children in the townships, is comprised not just of whites. Those that inform and provide the police with information are not just white. Not all those who exploit black workers in South Africa are white. The storm-troopers of Inkatha, who pillage and destroy, they are not white. So in fact the unity among the oppressed is far from complete. Would it be such a severe setback to the liberation struggle if a few more opportunists were to desert that struggle?

Certainly, if that were the only cost I would have no hesitation in saying that one should definitely insist on greater clarity on the nature of the system espoused by the Charter. Because the advantages to be gained for the movement from introducing such clarity far outweigh the disadvantages which the loss of a few opportunists involves.

But, again, can we be sure that it will just be a few opportunists that we will lose? How can we know that we will not jeopardise the alliance of oppressed classes? If we put forward demands which are not in the interests of all such classes would some of them not be justified in breaking away? Again, we can never be absolutely sure until the issue has been tested in struggle. But there are a number of points that can usefully be injected into the debate. These relate to the issue of what we mean by a democ-

ratic society in which workers' interests predominate.

In my view the issue of what form such a society should take can be posed in a manner which is not threatening to the progressive elements of the black middle class. It all depends on how one defines such a society. First, if it is defined as a system which is intended not just to further the interests of the working class, but also to further the interests of other classes presently oppressed by capitalism, such as the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie, it need not necessarily threaten the interests of progressive members of those classes. They, too, may well have an interest in such a system.

How would this system, work out in practice?* To return to the Freedom Charter: nationalisation of the mines, banks and key industries - yes. But it must be a form of nationalisation involving an element of workers' control through such institutions as independent trade unions and enterprise based workers' councils.

Secondly, the Charter envisages an extension of the market - the right of all to trade and produce. Such an extension of the market need not necessarily involve a return to wholesale exploitation so long as it occurs under state and workers control. In other words, the middle class may be given the right to set up industries - but their activities will be constrained both by the state and trade unions. Yet here certainly is room for the petty bourgeoisie to grow - and at the same time to contribute positively to the new society.

As regards the land question, one can envisage a system of private land ownership co-existing with co-operatives and state farms all functioning under the general guidance of a national economic plan and accompanied by the extension of trade union rights, and where possible workers' councils, to agricultural workers.

In this situation the notion of a national economic plan becomes pivotal. Such a plan will be needed to steer the economy along its chosen path and to co-ordinate the public sectors, with the co-operative and private sectors. Such a plan would need to be

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* The ideas presented below are derived from a paper delivered by Stephen Gelb and myself to the ASSA Conference in July 1985 entitled, "Towards a Democratic Economy in South Africa". I alone am reponsible for the presentation here.

formulated by the state in conjunction with trade unions, workers' councils and other interest groups. It would set annual targets for growth and indicate to each area of economic activity what their role within that is to be.

Such a plan would also need to outline what kind of commodities are to become the priorities for production: commodities which will meet the needs of the people and not be dictated solely by market forces. Thus, for example, those in the private manufacturing sector, will be encouraged to move into those areas of production which have been designated as priorities - always, however, constrained by phenomena like a national minimum wage, trade unions to see that these are enforced, and price controls to prevent soaring inflation.

In such ways, through a national plan and related devices the state can guide the economy in a particular direction. But of course to do so effectively the state itself must be democratically constituted at the national, regional and local levels. At all these levels it is imperative, not just that the right to vote should be guaranteed, but that the principle of accountability and the right to recall those in office should be established.

Thus what is envisaged here is a democratic form of society, based on universal franchise and democratic participation, in which workers' interests are defended and advanced through independent trade unions and workers' councils which function in collaboration with the state. Yet within such a society the interests of other classes are also catered for, though within limits. In other words, what I am saying is that the issue of a worker-oriented democratic society can be presented in such a way that is not divisive, but can in fact enhance the unity among the oppressed. I would not want to pretend that this approach will not have problems associated with it, but so does every approach. Nor do I think that one needs to rush into this issue.

I raise these points now as a contribution to a debate which has already started in South African and which can only grow in the future. In my view, it is the extraordinary growth of the working class movement over the last 10 years or so which has placed these issues on our political agenda. The continued and accelerated growth of that movement will ensure that such issues remain on the agenda in the future.

INTERVIEW: South African Congress of Trade Unions*

SALB: On the eve of the launch of the new federation, what message would you give to the workers of South Africa?

SACTU: Fellow workers, comrades, we welcome the achievement through determined struggle of the trade union movement to form one united trade union federation. The importance of the coming federation and its significance for our struggle for national and social emancipation cannot be over-emphasised. We firmly believe that the future of the people of South Africa is in the hands of its workers. Only they, in alliance with other progressive minded sections of our community can build a life free of unemployment, insecurity, poverty, free of racial hatred and oppression, a life of vast opportunities for all people. But this requires a united and strong trade union movement, which will effectively satisfy the demands for higher wages, better working conditions as well as ultimately achieving complete emancipation.

SALB: What in your view, are the main tasks of the new federation?

SACTU: The prime task of the federation is to ensure the existence of this national non-racial trade union co-ordinating body to bring together all workers of our country, both black and white. We believe that the new federation must and shall be a truly democratic centre, a real centre for all who oppose the present oppressive and exploitative system. This should therefore include all unions that have broken their ties with TUCSA. All democratic unions should participate in the creation of an industrially based national trade union federation so as to organise the millions of unorganised workers to fight for higher wages, better working conditions, health and safety at work, to oppose victimisation, detentions and killings of trade union activists, workers and patriots, to oppose discriminatory labour legislation, pass laws and all forms of racial discrimination, to demand the right to work for all, and to demand the right to vote in a united, undivided, democratic South Africa.

At this moment in time, the working class, the trade unions, all opponents of the oppressive apartheid regime, recognise that our

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* conducted by post with a representative of SACTU.

country is experiencing a tremendous change in attitudes, race relations and class forces. Our country is being misgoverned under emergency laws. Unprecedented press censorship has been clamped on reporting of events in order that the outside world should not know of the over 800 women, children and men who have been killed this year. Every day in townships and city centres, heavily armed racist police and soldiers are controlling and occupying working class quarters of urban centres, shooting protesters, assaulting them with teargas, harassing them with trained vicious dogs, beating them with whips as did the slave owners of old.

This should concern all of us. These are the conditions that should be the main concern of the founding conference, of delegates to the conference. The working men and women want an end to tyranny, race discimination, exploitation and national oppression. The progressive labour movement should demand votes for all and an end to minority racist rule.

SACTU's policy has always been to oppose race discrimination in all shapes and forms, to demand equality of opportunity and treatment and to reject so-called reforms that leave the substance of power in the hands of the white minority. It is for these reasons that SACTU came into existence and accepted the responsibilities and risks of political struggle in the Congress Alliance. This new federation is being formed at a time when the apartheid regime is in its deepest political and economic crisis and our people are acting in open defiance and resistance to the system. The federation can only meet its grave responsibilities if it acts in unity, discipline and devotion to the struggle for national liberation and social justice for all.

The democratic trade union movement has played an effective role against the deaths in detention of Andries Raditsela, Neil Aggett and other outstanding leaders of our unions, the fraudulent tri-racial parliament election in August last year, in support of the November 6 and 7 stay-away in the Transvaal, the effective consumer boycott in support of Fattis and Monis strikers, the red meat workers' strike, Simba Quix, BTR Sarmcol and other consumer boycotts, in supporting the campaign for re-instatement of Sasol workers, in supporting the African miners struggles led by NUM for higher wages, better working conditions, and against job reservation and police brutality as well as against dismissals.

SALB: Given your view that the new federation must play an active

political role, how do you view the relationship between the working class, the trade unions and the national liberation movement?

SACTU: Trade unionism in South Africa has always had a strong political dimension. In this respect it follows the tradition of the British labour movement and not that of American trade unions. The earliest trade unions in South African participated in Labour Party politics, for the most part in defence of white workers' claims to sheltered employment.

That tradition was broken with the emergence of the Communist Party (SACP) which identified itself with the struggles and aspirations of the black working class. Party members were instrumental in organising black workers in secondary industries and carried out the pioneering work in the organising of African miners. After the banning of the Communist Party in 1950 and the ANC in 1960, the political struggles of black workers came to be identified with the struggle for national liberation. During the past quarter century, the political aspirations of the oppressed nationalities have been voiced and developed by the ANC and its allies. SACTU believes that there should be a harmonious working relationship between the trade unions and the liberation movement.

The national and class struggle are mutually re-inforcing. National oppression is the institutional framework in which all black workers are economically exploited. In this context, it is impossible to separate national oppression from economic exploitation. Our struggle is firstly a national liberation struggle in which the class struggle of the working people constitutes a basic and core component. Within our struggle, the trade union movement has a specific role to play, namely the organisation of workers into trade unions to fight the issues that affect us at the workplace and also the broader national issues such as pass laws and our rights as citizens of the country of our birth. The ability of the national liberation movement to safeguard the interests of the working class is ultimately dependent on the majority participation by members of the working class in the liberation movement.

SALB: If the unions are to play a role in wider political struggles, what do you see as the appropriate structures to facilitate this and to enhance working class leadership and democratic accountability?

SACTU: Already, workers are enthusiastically participating in the

fight against rent increases, in support of transport and consumer boycotts and against detentions. The workers are participating in all structures set up in their communities wherever they live and this should continue and be increased.

Working class leadership is ensured through the participation of the workers in united action with the community in matters affecting the entire people. Trade union stalwarts such as Oscar Mpetha, Zoli Malindi, Curnick Ndlovu and Billy Nair give expression to working class leadership. Leadership of the working class is manifested by the actions taken and leading role of the working class in day-to-day struggles. Rents, boycotts, stay-aways are not just student or petty bourgeois issues, but worker-related issues. Since all decisions to act on issues are discussed and decided upon in rallies and other meetings, with pamphlets used to mobilise the masses, democratic principles are applied. The state of emergency, with its draconian laws, is making it difficult for organisations to function democratically, but ways and means have to be found to ensure democratic accountability by holding factory meetings and meetings in residential areas.

SALB: Given the severity of the present recession on the one hand and the increasing power of working class organisation on the other, it has been argued that the time has come to put forward an explicitly socialist programme. What for you is the correct relationship between such a socialist project and the struggle for national democracy?

SACTU: A socialist programme was put forward in our country 64 years ago with the formation of the Communist Party in 1921, the oldest Party on the African continent. The SACP's programme adopted in 1962, the South African Road to Freedom, clearly outlines the relationship of the socialist and national democratic revolutions. It is the South African communists who initiated the call for a black republic which meant that, unless blacks liberated themselves from their colonial bondage, no true socialist state could be built. Inside the country, leading communists, such as Dora Tamana, until her death, played a prominent role in present struggles.

SALB: What do you think should be the response to, and the demands from the trade unions, in the present recession?

SACTU: Millions of rands are being squandered in maintaining a

corrupt racist army and police force which is not only massacreing our own people inside the country, but destabilising the entire Southern African region. It is the regime which is financing bandits like the LLA in Lesotho, MNR in Mozambique, Unita in Angola, etc. Trade unions should demand the withdrawal of racist troops from the townships, from Namibia and Angola and an end to destabilisation. The existing economic crisis that has shaken our country originates firstly in the worldwide crisis of capitalist economies and secondly from the political revolt of our oppressed people. Political resistance is the major cause of the internal economic collapse. The first step towards restoring the health of the economy is to satisfy the people's demand for political rights.

SALB: Turning to SACTU iself, can you give us a brief history of its main phases of activity since 1955?

SACTU: After our formation in March 1955, SACTU participated in organising the Congress of the People, at which the Freedom Charter was adopted, to which SACTU is also a signatory. Many SACTU leaders were charged for high treason in the 1956-61 Treason Trial. We organised the campaign against job reservation in 1956. SACTU launched the pound-a-day campaign in 1957, demanding a national minimum wage for all workers, black and white. We supported the boycotts of potatoes and cigarettes. We participated in the protest day strike in 1958, in the anti-pass campaign in 1959, the all-in conference in 1961. The severe harassment, detentions and killings of its activists, injected into trade union activists the spirit of solidarity and unity. At all times, our trade union veterans encouraged and assisted the re-organisation of the trade unions. Through our official journal, Workers Unity, our Radio Freedom programmes, leaflets and other forms of propaganda, we tell the workers what is happening in the world of labour, urge them to build strong unions industrially, to bring about trade union unity in the mining, metal, food, textile and other industries. SACTU initiated the observance of May Day after many years and during this year, the 30th anniversary of SACTU was observed throughout the country.

SALB: What is the present role of SACTU, and how is SACTU currently constituted and organised?

SACTU: We need firstly to understand that trade unions in a capitalist country like ours have two closely related functions. Firstly to promote, improve and defend workers' conditions and

raise their living and cultural standards. Secondly, to conduct a struggle against the capitalist system, which oppresses workers as a social class, and to replace it with a higher socio-economic system free from exploitation. We must not fall prey to the "workerist" or "economist" delusion that freedom can be achieved only through trade union struggle. To develop the political consciousness of workers, trade unions must strive to link up the workers' struggles with the general struggle for liberation. In our situation, trade unions must participate fully in the struggle for freedom, democracy and justice for all.

SACTU's main role at this stage is to give guidance and leadership to the trade unions inside the country, which we do through our propaganda material. This is the only means of safeguarding that a strong trade union movement will exist and develop in our country. The struggle for unity of democratic trade unions has remained the policy of SACTU since its inception. SACTU has a vital role of linking the work of the trade unions to the national liberation movement.

Internationally, SACTU played and is playing a vital role. It was responsible for the biggest ever trade union conference against apartheid in June 1973 in Geneva, Switzerland. Ever since, the international trade union movement has become aware of the evil of the racist regime. Thus SACTU regards it as our duty to inform our workers and unions of who our friends and foes are internationally. Particularly, we have to expose the role of the African American Labour Centre (AALC), which is a creation of the CIA.

SALB: Can you give us a profile of the SACTU Executive, and how it is elected?

SACTU: Stephen Dlamini, president: Moses Mabhida, vice-president; John K Nkadimeng, general secretary; Kay Moonsamy, national treasurer; Aaron Pemba (Alven Bennie), co-ordinator for international department; Mark Shope, co-ordinator for education department; Zola Zembe (Archie Sibeko), co-ordinator for Western Europe; John Pule Motshabi, Ronnie Press and Solly Smith. There are six other members of the NEC, which was elected in 1983 when the NEC convened a meeting attended by elected delegates from all areas. The NEC serves for three years before the next election.

SALB: Would you comment on the rumours current this year that SACTU would re-establish itself publicly in South Africa?

NEC member: The 30th anniversary of SACTU gave us an opportunity to tell our workers of SACTU's principles and aims. Our aim was to popularise the principles and policies SACTU stands for and to make SACTU a household name. We are helping to build the federation of trade unions.

SALB: Most of the emerging unions see the importance of international solidarity with struggles inside South Africa. What do you see as the appropriate links to be made with overseas trade unions and other organisations by the new federation?

NEC member: Like workers in other countries. South African workers correctly feel a strong urge to unite and build ties of co-operation and friendship with the workers of other countries. In the present day context of complete absence and denial of any democracy, it is only possible for unions to cement relations with other unions in capitalist countries. There is no freedom of choice. We therefore urge that, at this stage, the federation should not seek international affiliation. Affiliation would only divide and weaken the labour movement, undermining the very purpose of a united trade union federation.

SALB: What does the future hold for SACTU? How do you see SACTU's role changing in relation to the new federation and the continuing growth of the internal trade union movement?

SACTU: Having dealt with the role of SACTU earlier, we are sure you can see that our tasks have not yet been accomplished. Therefore we do not see any contradiction between our existence and the federation. Our tasks cannot diminish - millions of workers have still to be organised, sanctions have to be imposed against the regime, liberation still has to be fought for vigorously.

Our struggle continues. Victory is certain!

Is There Life After Bureaucracy? – TUC and AFL-CIO

Nigel Haworth

The traditions of the British Trade Union Congress and the US American Federation of Labour - Congress of Industrial Organisations have much in common, despite the different circumstances in which they were formed. The TUC was established in 1868 as the first national trade union co-ordinating body in Britain. The AFL-CIO was formed in 1955, when the affiliates of the AFL and the CIO agreed that these bodies should merge to give US labour one indisputable voice. The basis of the newly-formed TUC was craft unions, representing the powerful and highly-respectable skilled workers of mid-Victorian Britain. The basis of the AFL-CIO was different. The unity created in 1955 was between skilled sectors in the AFL and unskilled/semi-skilled workers in the CIO. These groups had fought against each other before the merger, and unity was created only when many of the conflicts had been resolved. The TUC also had to respond to similar conflicts when unskilled and semi-skilled labour unionised in the late nineteenth century, but the problems were eased by the existence of one central union body.

I THE TUC TRADITION

The contemporary structure of the TUC has evolved greatly since 1868. Change has been impelled by many factors. The wave of mass unionisation in the late 1890s not only brought greater numbers of workers into the TUC, but also politicised issues with syndicalist and socialist ideas. The British Labour Party, formed in 1906, was a direct consequence of socialist pressure within the TUC. Later, in 1920, the TUC was substantially reformed under the influence of socialist, syndicalist, industrial unionist and workers' control ideas. Close links with the Labour Party were reinforced by the creation of joint administrative committees. However, these links were badly strained after the failure of Labour governments in the 1920s, and the 1926 TUC constitution established the organisational autonomy of the TUC from the Labour Party. This constitution is essentially still in force. In particular, it commits the TUC to support of nationalisation, public and municipal ownership, and worker participation in the control of production. It gives the TUC a coordinating role in solidarity action for mem-

ber unions, but leaves ultimate authority for action to individual unions. It has been interpreted - especially after the fiasco of TUC action in the 1926 General Strike - as committing the TUC to constitutional forms of action which are firmly within the law.

After the disasters of 1926, the TUC increasingly came to act as the voice of "responsible" trade unionism in discussions with employers and the state. Tripartism - the organisation of industrial relations through negotiation and consultation between state, employers' organisations and union bodies (especially the TUC) - became the norm after the Second World War. Issues closely related to collective bargaining became the focus of TUC attention. Government policies on wages and incomes, and on the role of trade unions in the economy, increasingly attracted TUC efforts. From the early 1960s, growing economic crisis has meant that wage-levels have come under attack in a variety of ways. The TUC has seen its role as representing a general union interest in the face of this attack, with a greater or lesser degree of success. For example, the Social Contract agreed between the TUC and the Labour Government in the 1970s collapsed under the strain of union militancy, highlighting the inability of the TUC to impose its will over member unions. In contrast, the TUC has been able to represent the Labour Movement with a degree of success in relation to issues such as health and safety, sex and race discrimination and trade union education. It also undertakes a number of important technical functions relating to matters such as inter-union demarcation disputes.

The history of the TUC has defined its functions in terms of policy-making rather than initiating and controlling action. Its strength has always been in maintaining union unity under the TUC umbrella, a feat which requires substantial diplomatic skills. The TUC is effective only to the extent that its member unions are willing to abide by TUC decisions. It is financially dependent upon levies - 17p (R,65) per union member per year - drawn from its union base, which further establishes its dependency upon its membership. It must operate by consensus, and cannot impose its own will upon member unions. Although it can claim to represent around 50% of workers in Britain (between 9 and 10 million), effective power is guarded jealously by individual unions.

The organisation and structure of the TUC

The structure of the TUC reflects the reality of its dependency

upon constituent unions. An Annual Congress is held, at which more than a thousand delegates debate the issues of the day. Delegates are allocated to each member union on the basis of one delegate for every 5,000 members, or part thereof. Motions are submitted to the conference by member unions and by the TUC General Council. Motions are submitted to a complex procedural process designed to rationalise the work of the conference, though on occasions this process has been used to deflect concern from delicate issues. The procedural aspects of the congress are handled by a five-member General Purposes Committee. The make-up of the delegations to the congress depends on individual union preference. Some unions tend to send full-time officials rather than rank-and-file members; others mix full-timers with union executive members and regional or industrial representatives of the rank-and-file. Whether such representatives are elected or not is again a question for the individual union. The proceedings of the congress are generally dominated by the general-secretaries and senior figures within the union movement, and, usually, by these representatives of the bigger unions. It is fair to portray the TUC Congress as an event in which might tends to be right. The TUC structure between congresses reinforces this image.

The Annual Congress elects a General Council of forty-four members which governs the TUC between congresses. The method adopted for the selection of the General Council is important. Affiliated unions are grouped into eighteen Trade Groups, each broadly bringing together workers with a common industrial base. Each trade group is allocated a certain number of General Council seats, and unions in each trade group nominate candidates for these seats. Often, elections are not necessary. Where agreement is not reached, the whole congress is permitted to participate in the election. The election is conducted, as are all votes at the congress, on the basis of bloc-voting, ie. a union delegation casts its vote in a single bloc for one candidate. The aim of the trade group structure is not to establish a mathematically correct representation of unions on the General Council; rather, it is to achieve a balanced representation of all sectors of the union movement in its highest council. It is open to a number of criticisms. In particular, traditional and now declining sections of the labour movement have a disproportionate representation on the Council. It has also been accused of clumsiness, and a smaller, full-time executive committee has been mooted but so far rejected as a way of streamlining decision-making. The General Council meets once a month in order to carry out Congress decisions, respond to issues

concerning unions as they arise, and act as defender of union unity.

Much TUC business is conducted through its various sub-committees. These standing committees concern themselves with a wide range of issues - Finance and General Purposes, Education, Employment Policy, International and so on. The members of standing committees are all General Council members. Another category of sub-committees - the Joint Committees - include both General Council and other trade union members, and, often, invited experts. The Race Relations Advisory Committee is such a Joint Committee. A third committee structure was established in 1970 when nine Industry Committees brought together the unions in key industrial sectors. More functional than the old Trade Groups, which now only play a part in General Council elections, the Industry Committees are the focus for inter-union discussions about issues of mutual concern within industrial sectors. They also provide a basis for the resolution of inter-union conflict within broadly similar workforces. Such Industry Committees currently operate in Construction, Fuel and Power, Health Services, Hotel and Catering, Local Government, Printing, Steel, Textile Clothing and Footwear, and Transport.

At national level, the work of the TUC is underpinned by a large and highly-skilled staff working in the London headquarters under the overall control of the General Secretary and his senior colleagues. Staff are allocated to service the different committees, and are also responsible for a wide range of research and educational tasks. The professionalisation of TUC services has been a major development since the Second World War.

The regional structure

The TUC has developed a regional structure based on two institutions - the venerable Trades Council network and eight, more contemporary regional councils. The Trades Councils are in many ways relics of a nineteenth century tradition of union organisation. Each town would create its own central union body, which became the legitimate local representation of the TUC. Although there are today nearly 450 Trades Councils dotted throughout the United Kingdom, their influence is small in TUC councils. They continue to bring together local union representatives, and they are the source of pressures well to the left of the TUC, but their power has waned with the years. TUC Regional Councils are similarly relatively weak. Established in 1973, the Regional Councils have a small secretariat, limited powers and a paltry budget. They bring

together unions and Trades Councils, but power rests firmly with the centre, the congress and national committee structure.

There are exceptions to this weakness in regional emphasis. The Scots and the Welsh have their own national TUCs, bringing together unions within these nations. Their existence reflects the importance of strong national feelings within the UK, but the TUC still carries greater weight than these peripheral organisations.

II TRADITIONS OF THE AFL-CIO

Unity in the US labour movement is a recent phenomenon. The AFL-CIO was created in 1955 out of the AFL and the CIO, union federations which have fought against each other for much of US labour history. In the period up to 1955, the US labour movement was bedevilled by a number of problems, many of which obstructed effective union unity. Until the early 1920s, the US labour movement grew in numbers and political sophistication. In the early part of this century the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW or "Wobblies") gave leadership to a movement which was militant, increasingly well-organised and politically dynamic. The 1920s saw both the defeat of this militancy and a massive loss of political commitment. The defeat was due to many factors. Amongst them were the divisions between craft and unskilled workers, the union-busting tactics of business, the connivance of the state, and the logistical problems caused by trying to unite a relatively new industrial working class across vast distances. In place of the militancy of the early part of the century grew union-management co-operation around productivity, the tradition of "business unionism" which continues to today, an overtly anti-political attitude within union leadership, and an explicit anti-socialist perspective. Gains were made - the mass production industries giving birth to Fordism and similar management philosophies were successfully unionised, for example - but the labour movement staggered under the weight of labour legislation designed to constrain unions in bargaining and in politics. A crucial consequence of this chequered history has been the relatively small numbers of workers drawn into union organisations. At its best the organised labour movement represented some 20% of the national workforce (approximately 22 million out of 100 million) and today, as an effect of the current world recession, the figure has fallen to approximately 16%.

By 1955, the CIO had lost its radicalism and became closer in spirit to the AFL. The Cold War and the support it received with-

in US labour's leadership cemented the union. The effect was to create a unity which was inherently conservative, and determined to maintain a close relationship with state and employers.
It should also be noted that the AFL-CIO has faced difficulties in bringing all unions under its umbrella. The Teamsters (transport workers), miners and auto workers are all groups that have been or are currently outside the AFL-CIO. This is evidence that unions can survive and prosper outside the AFL-CIO, and that the federation has limited power to impose its will on member unions.

One further historical aspect of AFL-CIO activities warrants attention. Since the Second World War, the federation has waged an incessant struggle against communism at home and abroad. Through a variety of agencies (ORIT, AIFLO, ICTFU etc) and under the virulantly anti-communist George Meany, the international work of the federation has focused on the creation of "free" trade unionism especially in the Third World. These policies have brought the AFL-CIO into a close relationship with the US state and employers. For example, the direction of the AIFLD is tripartite, with State Department, major corporations and the AFL-CIO all represented.

The structure of the AFL-CIO

Over 100 unions are affiliated to the AFL-CIO, representing the vast majority of the 77,400 "locals" (branches) which make up the US organised labour movement. The AFL-CIO conducts its activities around its convention which meets every two years. Each national union is permitted to send one delegate, and unions with more than 4,000 members may send further delegates in proportion to their size. As in the case of the TUC conference, the choice of who should be the union delegate is left to each participating union. Senior officials tend to dominate the proceedings, a consequence of both delegate choice and committee structure within the AFL-CIO. Bloc-voting is the method adopted at the convention, which inevitably means that the larger unions will carry greater weight in decision-making. Again echoing the TUC annual conference, the convention is a highly-structured event. Efforts are made to prevent tendentious issues appearing on the programme in a way which might exacerbate divisions within the movement. Much time is spent ratifying committee reports and debating relatively non-contentious issues. The most apparent difference between the TUC conference and the AFL-CIO convention is the razzmatazz associated with the latter. The AFL-CIO convention is in many ways more brashly orchestrated than the somewhat downbeat deliberations of the TUC.

In this the importance of media presentation in the United States may be seen, and hence the need for a polished rather than polemical image for the convention. However this is not to say that important issues are not discussed at the convention. AFL-CIO policy is debated and ratified in its proceedings, and the bodies which implement AFL-CIO policies between conventions are elected.

There are five institutions which dominate AFL-CIO activities between conventions. These are the Executive Council, the Executive Committee, the General Board, a series of Standing Committees, and a number of Constitutional Committees. The Executive Council comprises the two senior full-timers (the AFL-CIO president, and the secretary-treasurer) and 33 vice-presidents of the federation. Elected at the convention, the vice-presidents are usually presidents of the biggest affiliates, again emphasising the power of the "big battalions" of labour. The Executive Council meets at least three times a year, and acts as the highest level of decision-making in the inter-convention period.

The Executive Committee is perhaps the most powerful body within the AFL-CIO, acting between conventions as an "inner cabinet". The Executive Council chooses six of its own number to meet with the president and secretary-treasurer every two months to provide support to the full-timers, and take on a key advisory role. Although responsible to the executive council and, ultimately, to the convention, the Executive Committee possesses great powers of decision-making in its own right. Postures struck at this level have great influence in the deliberations of the Council and the convention, and may substantially determine the judgements of the more representative bodies. In many ways the Executive Committee highlights the dilemma faced by big union federations - delegation of decision-making to smaller bodies may be more efficient, but at the cost of effective participation by the rank-and-file. Needless to say, there is a body of union opinion in the United States which believes that the AFL-CIO has over-centralised its decision-making procedures, and is campaigning to extend more democratic forms of organisation within the federation.

The General Board is designed to act as a watchdog over the decisions of the Executive Council. Meeting at least once a year, the Board consists of all members of the Executive Council plus a senior member from each national union and each Constitutional Department (see below). In practice this means that the Board is made up of all the affiliated unions' presidents plus the Consti-

tutional Department representatives. In comparison with the make-up of the Council, the Board is essentially "more of the same". It can play an important watchdog role, yet may be expected to reflect many of the attitudes and priorities expressed in the Council. Hence, the Board tends towards organisational and technical assessment rather than critical political criticism. In this it reflects the general approach of AFL-CIO bodies. The traditions of "business unionsim" have excised much that is political from the deliberations of the AFL-CIO. Such political discussions as take place are broadly confined to electoral strategies around Presidential elections, and broad human rights issues. Rarely do the Left-Right debates which crop up in the TUC surface in the AFL-CIO councils, a consequence of the rabid anti-communism of many of the federation's leading members.

Standing Committees, presided over by a union president and comprising active trade unionist, fulfil many of the same functions as TUC standing committees. They focus on a wide range of issues broadly relevant to US trade unionism, such as housing, education, civil rights, health and safety and international affairs. They have proliferated since 1955 as the AFL-CIO has involved itself in issues which often extend well beyond the strict boundaries of collective bargaining. The Standing Committees have at their disposal substantial resources for research and propaganda. In this respect, the AFL-CIO appears to be well in advance of the provisions made by the TUC. The federation's budget is large, and many funds are devoted to sophisticated research and publications.

The Constitutional Departments were mentioned above in relation to the General Board. They number 9 - Professional Employees, Building and Construction, Maritime, Metal Trades, Union Label, Railway Employees, Industrial Union, Public Employees, Food and Beverage Trades - and unite unions with common interests. They undertake a number of roles which vary from discussing bargaining issues, resolving membership problems fostering the purchase of union-produced goods (the Union Label department) to direct involvement in bargaining in the case of the Railway Employees and Metal Trade Departments. They therefore fulfil much the same role as the TUC's Industrial Committees. The main difference lies in the financing of the Constitutional Departments. Member unions are obliged to pay a levy on top of their AFL-CIO fees in order to belong to their appropriate Department, giving the Departments a degree of financial autonomy and resources to carry out an effective job.

AFL-CIO regional structures

US labour traditions have not established the network of Trades Councils which provided the TUC with regional representation. In many ways the far more fragmented basis of US union organisation exacerbated the problem of building a regional structure. In a situation where geographical factors demanded an effective national network of local union facilities. The AFL-CIO has attempted to remedy the problem by constructing state-wide and city-based union bodies. Each state has its own state-wide body (51 in all) and there are some 750 city centrals throughout the country. In a sense these bodies have been imposed from the centre rather than springing up in the manner of the British Trades Councils. They are therefore less "organic" structures created by local demands than a recognition by the centre that such demands may arise. Membership of the state and city bodies is dependent upon the union local belonging to a national union affiliated to the AFL-CIO. The regional bodies are firmly AFL-CIO agencies; local union bodies do not set them up or run them in their own right. This has been interpreted by some as evidence that the AFL-CIO wishes to maintain a firm control over both centre and periphery within the US labour movement, particularly where rank-and-file organisation or overtly political issues may offer a challenge to the established AFL-CIO order. This is perhaps not surprising in an organised labour movement which has in the past exhibited paranoia in the face of radical ideas.

The powers of the regional bodies are limited. They cannot impose decisions or policies upon member unions or locals. They do not engage in bargaining or in the organisation of activities associated with bargaining. Their functions are primarily educational and political. Both at state and city level, regional bodies provide training and education for unions in a wide range of subjects. This is linked to the extensive educational facilities provided by the AFL-CIO from its central resources. Regional union bodies also pull out the union vote in local elections, following the AFL-CIO tradition of supporting broadly pro-union election candidates. Finally, local union organisations are also very committed to wide community activities, such as charity work, youth groups, sports provisions and the like.

III ASSESSING THE STRENGTHS

Though the traditions and organisation of the TUC and the AFL-CIO

differ, they have much in common when their ability to mobilise and control their national labour movements is considered. Both organisations present two faces: one towards their affiliates and individual members, and one towards employers, government and the non-union public. To the latter they appear as powerful central bodies, able to call on massed ranks of organised labour for support. Both have fostered this image to some extent in order to negotiate with governments and employers' organisations on equal terms. In turn, governments and employers have expected that both the AFL-CIO and the TUC will be able to impose their will on affiliates. Popular understanding of the role of the central bodies has emphasised their size and power, and media coverage promotes a similar image of authority and status.

However, the other face - that turned towards affiliates and rank-and-file - is very different. As stressed above, neither central body has the power to impose decisions on affiliates. The only sanction available to them is expulsion, very much a last resort, and a policy which carries with it many problems. Apart from this ultimate sanction, both organisations must rely upon persuasion and diplomacy in order to maintain a united union front. This applies to internal matters - membership poaching, affiliation, structures of organisations - as much as external matters such as negotiations with employers and governments, presentation of national union policy, conduct of national union campaigns and the like. Neither the TUC nor the AFL-CIO has executive power when it comes to affiliates. Hence any action they call for must be accepted by member unions, who will have the final say in decision-making. Both organisations therefore search constantly for a consensus and the widest possible action without the support of the TUC or the AFL-CIO and these bodies can do very little other than negotiate or expel. On the other hand, the TUC and the AFL-CIO find it very difficult to undertake any action which does not have the support of the majority of its affiliates. It is therefore the case - despite popular mythology - that the ability of both institutions to mobilise support and initiate action is wholly a function of the willingness of affiliates to participate, and it is in facilitating that participation that the TUC and the AFL-CIO find their roles.

SURVEY: The State of the Unions

Jon Lewis and Estelle Randall*

The last time comprehensive surveys of South African trade unionism were undertaken was some two years ago. (1) The results indicated massive gains in the preceeding period: between 1980 and 1983 total union membership rose from 974,977 (808,053 in registered unions) to 1,545,824 (1,288,748 in registered unions) and African membership rose from 223,661 to 741,194. (2) This was despite the onset of recession in 1982. At the heart of this process were the independent unions. Their membership increased from 70,000 in 1979 to 200,000 in 1982 to 400,000 (over 500,000 according to SALDRU) by the end of 1983. (3) Numerical growth was accompanied by increasing organisational depth reflected in the number of shop stewards (6,000); the spread of shop steward councils and locals; the number of agreements, particularly recognition agreements (420); the ability to wage successful strikes (at least until the recession began to bite in mid-1982); and a growing challenge to management prerogatives which substantially shifted the frontier of control on the shopfloor over issues such as arbitrary dismissals. By the end of 1983 Barlow Rand was complaining that the emerging unions were challenging management's very right to manage.

There were also less optimistic indicators for South Africa's fledgling unions. The recession heralded a major management counter-offensive, signalled by the defeat of the 1982 strike wave in the metal industry on the East Rand. Wholesale dismissals after a strike at Scaw Metals brought to a close a period of mass militancy and rapid growth for the Metal and Allied Workers Union. By this time the rise in real wages of African workers was tapering off, and retrenchments and unemployment were the order of the day. (4) These conditions placed enormous pressures on trade unions as the heady days of militancy faded and they were faced with the need to consolidate organisation in the face of intransigent managements.

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* This report and survey could not have been completed without the assistance of other Bulletin editors and the many trade unionists who gave of their time and knowledge.

Unions had to adopt new strategies in order to adapt to the harsher economic terrain. This involved greater use of industrial relations machinery. Some unions, such as MAWU and the National Union of Textile Workers, joined industrial councils seeking to protect their members' interests at the level of national bargaining. Most unions made increased use of conciliation boards, arbitration and mediation services, and there was a sharp rise in the number of applications to the Industrial Court, particularly over "unfair" dismissals and retrenchments. At one level the Wiehahn strategy was being realised: to channel industrial conflict through the bureaucracy of the industrial relations system. The dangers of co-optation, increasing separation between union "bureaucrats" and the rank and file were recognised by the unions. However, such strategies were necessary in order to gain time to consolidate and extend organisation and to avoid the kind of all-out confrontations which, in the present conditions, might incur serious setbacks to organisation.

Despite their massive growth the new unions were divided amongst themselves and still overshadowed by TUCSA which took a reformist stance. At the end of 1983, FOSATU and CUSA each had a membership of under 100,000. TUCSA had sharply increased its membership since 1980: from 283,387 to 478,420. (5) This included 139,567 African workers many of whom automatically became members of TUCSA unions by virtue of the closed shop. For their part the new unions had been engaged in "unity talks" since 1981. The death of Neil Aggett in detention gave a new impetus to these talks. However, divisions remained over registration and the appropriate relationship to community issues; and around organisational questions: industrial unionism versus regional general unionism.

Also with the formation of national political organisations - the National Forum and especially the United Democratic Front - all trade unions were confronted with the necessity to define their relationship to the wider political struggle. For some, such as SAAWU, this involved affiliating to the UDF; CUSA affiliated to both NF and UDF; whilst the remaining industrial unions espoused an independent working class position. (6) Trade union unity and the formation of the new federation was to be delayed until the end of 1985 (losing the CUSA unions along the way). The question of the relationship of the trade unions to the political struggle has now become central, although the precise form this should take remains a matter of debate.

In the remainder of this report we will look first at the main parameters within which trade unions have been forced to operate in the present conjuncture: in particular, the effects of the recession, of township and political struggles, of management strategies and state policy. In the second section we shall analyse the development of trade union structures and strategies since 1983. This section will draw on data collected in an in-depth survey of the independent trade union movement. (Union profiles will appear in a future edition.)

I STRATEGIES AND RESPONSES IN THE PRESENT CRISIS

The South African economy has remained in recession since early 1982, despite tentative signs of recovery in the second half of 1983. The results have been seen in retrenchments, mass unemployment, a falling rand which fuels internal inflation and threatens the balance of payments, and high interest rates which have prevented new investment and recovery. For the state the effect has been to provoke a major fiscal crisis which in turn restricts its ability to finance "reform". The economic crisis has gone hand in hand with a crisis of political legitimacy as the products of the state's new dispensation are systematically rejected by the oppressed: the vast majority of Indian and coloured voters boycotted the elections held for the new tri-cameral parliament in 1983. The Black Local Authorities system is now in ruins as a result of mass resistance: in 1983 34 BLAs were set up; by the end of 1984 there were meant to be 104; by mid 1985 only 3 were still functioning. The crisis has been met by unprecedented levels of mobilisation and resistance in the factories and communities: the highest strike levels in South African history, rent strikes, bus boycotts, consumer boycotts, anti-constitution campaigns and stay-aways became a permanent feature of the political terrain in 1984 and 1985. The unions were to be influenced by these conditions and in turn to help mould responses.

1. State strategies and the trade unions

(i) Industrial relations: While the growth of shop floor unionism in the 1970's and the factory struggles that accompanied this were clearly a necessary condition for the state and management to search for a different form of control to that of the liaison committee, they were not a sufficient condition. This was provided by the outbreak of urban unrest in 1976.

The experiment began in 1977 when the government set up a commission of inquiry to investigate labour laws (the Wiehahn Commission) and a commission to examine the use of manpower (the Riekert Commission). When these commissions eventually reported 2 years later, the solution involved the deracialisation of the established industrial relations system. It would be better, Wiehahn concluded, to allow African unions to register at an early stage, in order to control the pace of union development. The other side of the incorporative strategy involved the redivision of African workers not exclusively along racial lines but between those with permanent resident rights and those without (the Riekert solution).

The Wiehahn solution was clearly contradictory. The intention was to control the emerging unions, by drawing them into the established industrial relations structures, in particular the industrial councils, thus pre-empting the unions' attempt to establish a shop floor presence. This required giving these unions state recognition, enabling them to win space in their attempt to move beyond the struggle for recognition to direct negotiations at shop floor level. Recognition at plant level was not won without struggle, but in the years immediately after Wiehahn a new frontier of control was being defined as recognition agreements at plant level became increasingly common in all sectors of the economy.

The evolving strategy of the new unions in response to the state's incorporative strategy was the outcome of considerable debate. Two issues in particular surfaced as divisive at the time. The first of these was registration. Some unions responded to the state's incorporative strategy by refusing to register on the grounds that this ceded too much control to the state and contradicted the principle of worker control and constituted the first step on the road to co-optation. Others adopted a more fundamental stance, opposing any contact with any state machinery. On the other hand, CUSA and FOSATU chose to register. FOSATU spokespersons argued that registering allowed unions to exploit concessions made by the state in order to create further space. These differences were resolved in the process of struggle: the unregistered unions survived without official recognition; those that registered were not co-opted. Today the issue of registration is seen by most as a tactical one.

The second issue was that of industrial councils. Until about 1981 almost all the emergent unions rejected the IC system. They felt that they were dominated by the minority white unions, had

been set up without the consent of the majority of workers and essentially served the interests of the skilled workers. As a result most unions refused to join ICs. As the emergent unions grew, some began to change their positions on ICs. They began to realise the advantages of negotiating at an industry-wide level. As a result many emergent unions joined the ICs but also retained shop floor structures and their principles of worker control.

As the emergent unions have started to use the industrial relations system to their own advantage, the state and employers have tried to regain control and in some cases change the system so that it will once more suit their interests. Two examples illustrate this strategy. In spite of the consistent demand on the part of the emergent unions for plant level bargaining, the Industrial Court has refused to order plant level bargaining. In the case of MAWU vs Hart Limited, the Industrial Court ruled that Hart's refusal to bargain at plant level appears to be reasonably justified under the circumstances and does not therefore constitute an unfair labour practice.

The second example relates to the IC system. As a result of emergent unions effectively using ICs to their own advantage, employers and the state are now trying to change the IC system. The Department of Manpower has expressed concern that ICs are often not representative of employers and employees and therefore in some cases exemptions should be allowed. Clearly the aim of the state here is to enable employers to pay poverty wages in rural areas where unions are not strong. They have suggested further that anti-union dispute clauses and compulsory productivity clauses be introduced. This present offensive by the state is another attempt to undermine a system which has now begun to be more favourable to unions. This can clearly be seen in the state's evolving regional strategy.

(ii) Bantustans and regional strategy: Regional policy in South Africa in the mid-1980's is in a state of flux and its likely influence on union activity is far from clear. Nevertheless it is possible to identify broad trends and to discuss some of their implications for the unions.

As regards its regional development policy South Africa appears to be in the middle of a phase of transition from traditional territorial apartheid to a policy of economic (and possibly pol-

itical) re-integration of the bantustans into a single national economic planning framework. The geographical basis of this evolving planning system comprises eight or nine development regions which cover the entire land space of South Africa and cross cut, or encircle existing bantustans, whether self-governing or independent.

The aim of territorial apartheid was eventually to establish economically independent and politically sovereign states in the bantustans. In preparation for this the State President, in 1970, repealed the Industrial Conciliation Act (now called the Labour Relations Act) and made wage determinations under the Wages Act non-applicable to the homelands. (7) Coupled with this policy was a system of exemptions to the Industrial Conciliation Act which were used to weaken union activity and promote lower wages and labour intensive industries in industrial decentralisation areas near to the bantustans.

Only two bantustans have passed legislation providing for trade unions - KwaZulu and Bophuthatswana. In the latter case, the laws prohibit the activities of unions based in "South Africa" and include a conciliation process which makes the holding of a legal strike virtually impossible. KwaZulu's amendments to the Labour Relations Act in 1979 were on much the same lines as the South African legislation (although there is doubt about the status of trade unions given that this act was repealed in the bantustans in 1970). KwaZulu has recently fully adopted South African labour relations legislation.

More important than industrial relations laws in inhibiting unions within bantustans is their security legislation and the operation of their repressive agencies. Until full independence a homeland cannot pass its own security legislation and remains subject to the direct control of the South African security police. All independent bantustans have passed their own security laws, which in some cases give even greater powers to the police than do the South African laws. The Transkei and Venda refuse to accept trade unions within their borders. The Ciskei has not enacted specific legislation, but uses other laws to suppress union activity. Thus SAAWU was banned in 1984.

It is estimated that over 50% of the economically active workforce of the bantustans are employed within South Africa either as migrant workers or commuters. A far greater proportion of their ind-

ustrial workers do so. Hence in terms of the overall functioning of South African unions, control measures within the bantustans have relatively less impact insofar as the organisation of workers within the factory is concerned. (8)

Since the late 1970's the policy aim of establishing independent bantustans has met with increasing resistance and a counter trend towards the economic integration of the bantustans into planning regions centred on the major metropolitan regions of the country has become evident. This has profound implications for union activity, both in terms of its impact on the labour markets in which they operate and in terms of the industrial relations framework in which they operate.

One of the effects of the pursuit of territorial apartheid was to protect urban labour markets from the competition of rural workers, thereby creating a relatively secure labour market for urban workers - particularly white, coloured and asian workers, but also black township dwellers. The Riekert strategy of dividing the urban workforce into insiders and outsiders gave further impetus to the tendency of urban labour markets to be sealed off from rural competition, just at a time when industrial relations reforms gave vent to the growth of union organisation.

The evolving regional development strategy, implemented since the early 1980's attempts to reverse this process, to open urban labour markets to outside competition and dismantle wage and industrial relations machinery and thereby subject privileged urban workers to fiercer competition on the labour markets. (9) The major trends in evidence are:

(a) Opening of labour markets linked to housing and employment strategy, in which planning takes place within the framework of development regions. The whole area of a region is seen as a single labour market, including people in bantustans. (10) For example, the PWV area (region D) will include parts of Bophutatswana.

(b) Promotion of small business and informal sector activities in which industrial relations and minimum wage laws will not operate and in which health and safety standards may be downgraded or simply not enforced. (11)

(c) Attempt to decentralise industrial relations structures so as to allow for the differentiation of terms and conditions of work and prevent the gains of strong unions from being automatically spread to other workers in other areas. In this

regard the National Manpower Commission has tried to use the idea of plant-level bargaining and workers control to undermine nationally determined working conditions. (12) This involves dismantling the industrial council system and national wage determinations under the Wages Act. (13) The ostensible aim is to increase employment.

2. Recession and retrenchment

Trade union gains in recent years have been made against a background of retrenchments and rising unemployment. The Central Statistical Service provisionally estimated that 8,000 jobs would be lost each month during 1985. The effect on trade unions has been considerable: by the beginning of 1985 the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union, for example, had lost 3,000 members through job loss. Most are on short-time and NAAWU estimates 10,000 workers in the auto and related industries will lose their jobs as a result of the Ford-Amcar merger.

Moreover, these cyclical movements merely intensify the effects of growing structural unemployment. Thus, as Keenan has shown, even during the 1978-81 boom unemployment amongst Africans continued to rise. (14) Starting from Charles Simkins' estimates of unemployment in the mid-1970s (original estimate: 2,000,000; revised estimate: 1,000,000) and using the government's own estimate that the number of new workers coming onto the labour market each year is 250,000, Keenan estimates total unemployment by mid-1984 at between three and four million. This was at a time when the total number of Africans in paid employment - excluding those in agriculture and domestic service - was 2,816,713. (15) (These figures are for mid-1984, before the effects of government austerity could be felt.) Finally, if anything, the full implications of rising unemployment have been cushioned over the last decade as the mines reduced their complement of foreign workers from 763,675 in 1974 to 301,758 in 1981.

Four recent surveys in areas like Bophuthatswana to the north and north west of the Witwatersrand, where access to employment is better than most bantustan areas, reveal an unemployment rate of over 40%. (16) These surveys also show that the duration of unemployment is increasing and becoming more "permanent". In 1977 the average duration of unemployment of poeple in the Rustenburg areas who had once held jobs was around 2 years. By 1984 this had risen to 5 years 7 months. In 1977 approximately 4% of women and 8% of

men had been unemployed for more than 2 years. By 1984 these percentages had risen to 54% and 36% respectively.

3. Management responses to the recession

For capital the recession represents a period of falling profits; a failure of the mechanisms of accumulation. Beyond this it is also a period of restructuring - in part spontaneous, as weak firms go to the wall, leading to concentration and increasing domination by those remaining. But it is also a period of intense, and conscious, class conflict as employers struggle to push back the frontiers of control in the factories - taking advantage of the weakened position of labour organisation - and capital attempts to restructure on its own terms the "social structures of accumulation" (ie. the totality of systems of control - legal, political, economic, technological, within the labour process and the division of labour, the system of industrial relations, within education and culture - all of which reflect and make possible the continued dominance of capital). (17)

In particular capitalists are trying to maintain their profits by reducing the total wage-bill and by attacking the power of the trade unions. This involves the following strategies:

(i) union-bashing: The Scaw strike announced that employers had decided to take advantage of the recession to curb union militancy and to re-assert managerial prerogative. Retrenchments and mass dismissals were used to discipline workers as at Veldspun textile factory in the Eastern Cape (owned by Barlow Rand), at Frame Textiles in Natal, at the B and S plant in Brits; and most spectacularly at Sasol after the November 1984 stay-away and after the mines strikes of 1985.

The state and employers have tried to impose company unions; the old liaison committees, the newer works councils and - particularly in the state sector - staff associations. In the last resort strikes have been supressed by physical force as in the case of the mines strikes in September 1985. Similarly, when trade unions have strayed too far onto the political terrain, in the state's view, detentions and harassment have been used.

(ii) ideological control: Too much repression is dangerous: workers become further politicised, they fight back, and this reduces productivity and profits. This is why it is important for capital-

ists to influence the way workers think. Traditionally this took the form of paternalism: trying to gain workers' loyalty by doing things for them (if they behave themselves). Thus workers receive "free" milk or bread and Christmas hampers, or the company provides sports facilities.

Recently more subtle techniques have been employed. Firms are introducing Quality Control Circles in order to bring workers together with management to discuss problems which arise in production and ways of solving these. Workers are treated as equals for once and made to feel important: after all, who knows the job better than they do? Quality Circles draw on the knowledge and effort of workers to solve problems and increase productivity. In addition, they have an "ideological" role; to foster a joint management-worker "team spirit" and to get employees to identify with the goals of the company. It also gives management a way around the union to make direct contact with workers on the shop floor.

In South Africa this ideological component has assumed greater significance recently because of the depth of the crisis of legitimacy for racial capitalism. This has led at one level to expensive academic studies such as "Project Free Enterprise" which calls on management to educate their workers towards the free enterprise system - summarised in the Star: "Bosses of South Africa unite and educate or your workers will rush into the arms of socialism". (Ideological forms of control, it should be added, are much less prevalent amongst small employers who oten still rely on more basic methods.)

(iii) bureaucratic control: Ideological influence has its limits, however. Where the interests of workers and employers conflict - particularly during recession - management still needs to obtain co-operation from workers to ensure stable production. At factory floor level management faces the task of establishing forms of "bureaucratic" control in order to confine workers' struggles to narrowly defined channels, to minimise interruptions in production, and to draw worker leaders into formal structures removed from the rank and file.

This is especially true now, in South Africa: the rise of black worker power has broken the authority of the white supervisor and with it this racist and dictatorial form of workplace control. In its place employers have had to negotiate new "rules of the game" - such as grievance procedures, disciplinary procedures and coll-

ective bargaining machinery. These represent real gains for workers - but management will always try to use these formal procedures to impose limits on workers' struggles.

Job evaluation systems, which are the vogue amongst South African managements, represents one extension of this strategy. Trade union representatives can be drawn into evaluation committees away from the direct control of the workers, taking up much of their time in a structure designed to individualise wage bargaining. Job evaluation tends to freeze existing differentials under a veil of "scientific management". Thereafter wage negotiations are supposed to take place within the agreed wage structure - preventing the correction of present inequalities. Thus job evaluation tends to divide workers into different grades, systematically maintaining hierarchy within the work process.

(iv) introduction of new technology: one way that capitalists can increase their profits is to replace human workers with machines. The new micro-electronic technology greatly reduces the number of workers and the amount of wages paid; (18) it reduces the power of trade unions because there are fewer workers, management controls more of the production process and because the new systems make possible tighter control and monitoring of individual workers. Already in South Africa approximately 80 industrial robots have been installed. Uses include welding and spraying in the auto industry, and for automated warehousing. (19)

(v) relocation: Modern transport and communications and new technologies which require mainly unskilled workers in the actual production process have enabled firms to take advantage of a world-wide reserve of cheap and non-unionised labour. "Free trade zones" exist in the bantustans where South Africa's industrial legislation is suspended, hours of work and wages are not controlled, and trade unionism is discouraged or surpressed. As workers in the urban areas organise to improve their conditions so companies - including multinationals such as Tidwell and Bata have located themselves within the bantustans. Only nation-wide trade unionism and the development of international links with other unions can prevent this process.

(vi) intensification of work: During the recession employers have sought to increase productivity and profits by simply reducing the workforce and making the remaining workers work harder. Thus in the present period "work study" has once again become very

popular amongst managements. In part its function is ideological: to legitimise retrenchments under the guise of "scientific management". It also provides management with the means for reorganising production in the interests of the firm. Of course intensification of work often takes a much cruder form. Obery sites a typical example from an interview with an employer:

> I had four people doing tea in the admin. complex. One broke his leg and another took a week off so I fired him. The two left are working better than the four did. In the factory we previously had four people to pick up a piece of metal off the machine, we now have one who just drags it and puts it down and he is working better than all four of them. They used to sit and talk and the metal used to pile up. (20)

4. Trade union responses

The deteriorating economic conditions have not prevented continued trade union growth and militancy. Jaffee and Jochelson argue that countries with a longer history of industrial relations machinery, usually based on tripartite discussions between government, unions and employers, have been able to absorb any potential conflict resulting from increased unemployment within established parameters. (21) This was not possible in South Africa where the industrial relations system is still in the process of being created. Moreover, the absence of social security for black workers means that unions have been less ready to collaborate in economic policies which result in further unemployment. The lack of political rights for blacks and the failure of the TUCSA reformist tradition to attract black workers precludes any co-option of these workers and their unions on a large scale.

The militancy of black workers and the ability of their unions to defend wage levels is reflected by the continued increase in nominal and real earnings during the recession (nominal increase: from R228 to R364 per month between 1981 and 1984; real increase: R111,3 to R126,3 per month compared with the base year 1975). (22) However, Keenan points out that this rise is largely accounted for by increases in medical aid and pension contributions which do not go directly into workers' pockets.

If we turn to look at household incomes the picture is even less optimistic. From 1975 the annual per capita income has increased from R155,82 in real terms to only R185,14 in 1984 (The latter figure is for mid-1984 and would have certainly fallen with the

general state of the economy since then). In other words the rising numbers of unemployed have to be supported by those workers in employment. Looking at the economy as a whole, Keenan estimates that the African share of Net National Income has increased from 11.1% in 1975 to only 13,3% in 1984. (Even this increase would be less if the decline in the number of workers in agriculture and domestic service was taken into account, along with the employers' contributions to pension funds).

The recession has caused unions to adopt defensive strategies in certain circumstances. It has also opened up the possibility of a conflict of interests between unionised workers and the unemployed. (23) However, it has not undermined trade union recruitment (eg. FOSATU's signed up membership increased from 68,886 in 1982 to 135,917 in 1984). Unions not only survived but consolidated and grew stronger during this period. They succeeded, in some cases, in changing or modifying retrenchment practices and in so doing further challenged management prerogatives. In part this was done through the Industrial Court which has established the following guidelines:

(i) employers must investigate alternatives to retrenchment
(ii) employers must consult with workers' representatives
(iii) the criteria for selection of those to be retrenched must be fair and objective [eg. LIFO]
(iv) the employer must give sufficient warning. (24)

In addition, where unions are strong they have forced new rights from employers such as the disclosure of financial information as in the dispute between OK Bazaars and CCAWUSA and that between Foshini and CCAWUSA during 1985. Unions have also sought to minimise the number of redundancies and to motivate for less onerous alternatives. CUSA's Food and Beverage Workers Union was successful in getting Coca-Cola to reduce the number of planned retrenchments from 203 to 63. The remaining workforce agreed to a rolling-leave system taking unpaid leave every sixth week. The company also agreed to no new employment, no overtime, no casual labour, early retirement and a limited freeze on capital expenditure. In the case of OK Bazaars, CCAWUSA won an agreement which allowed workers to choose between layoff and retrenchment. With less success CCAWUSA tried to resist the introduction of part-time work for 230 employees of Pages Stores, arguing that short-time for the workforce as a whole was preferable.

In other cases unions have won the right to preferential re-

employment for retrenched workers, further challenging management's right to hire and fire at will. Where unions have been unable to prevent retrenchments they have secured much improved severance packages as in the case of Alpha and the retrenchments arising out of the Ford-Amcar merger. Not surprisingly trade unions have concentrated on fighting retrenchments rather than organising the unemployed. However, the Industrial Aid Society, in co-operation with unions, drew up plans to establish Unemployed Workers Committees. The IAS, advice bureaus and some unions also drew up a memorandum dealing with the problems associated with UIF and issued a Benefit Charter which included demands for a radical reform of the UIF system. FOSATU also drew up its critique of UIF and concluded that the system was inadequate and that a state-financed comprehensive system of social security was needed.

Most emergent unions provide for unemployed members to retain their membership for a short period. In addition, preferential rehiring clauses (and a retrenchment benefit scheme in the case of NAAWU) allow unions to maintain contact with unemployed workers. In a few cases unions have assisted dismissed or unemployed workers to establish co-operatives as in the case of the B and S workers, Sarmcol workers and two projects initiated by CUSA. Other strategies include negotiated lay-offs to take advantage of UIF entitlements; for greater worker control over the investment policy of pension funds; and the demand that retrenched workers should be paid both the employers' and their own pension contributions. Unions identify government policy and the capitalist economic system as the final causes of unemployment. Thus the 1984 May Day Demands were for immediate social security and full employment policies, as well as for fundamental social transformation in the interests of the working class.

So far we have discussed retrenchments and union strategies in an undifferentiated way. If we look at trade union growth on a sectoral basis very different patterns emerge. What is particularly striking is the continued growth of trade unionism on the mines and in the retail sector during the recession. NUM, established in 1982, had signed up approximately 230,000 members by the end of 1985. CCAWUSA's membership grew from 5,000 to over 50,000 between 1981 and 1985. The gold mines have survived the recession largely unscathed because of the relative buoyancy of the gold price in combination with the more recent fall in the Rand. (Since the gold price is set in US$ the Rand value of gold has soared.) Similarly the large food chains such as OK Bazaars and

Pick n Pay have weathered the recession because people still have to buy food. Even so, the retail sector - especially non-food retailing - is being hit by the recession. One result has been an attempt by some retailers to undermine working conditions by substituting part-time and casual labour.

More seriously affected have been the motor and metal and engineering sectors. According to NAAWU some 11,000 motor workers have lost their jobs in the last 3 years and a further 20,000 in related industries have suffered the some fate. 20,000 jobs were lost in the engineering sector between November 1981 and May 1983. (25) Currently retrenchments are running at about 2,000 a month in the engineering and metal industries. Union organisation has nonetheless survived remarkably well. It has been a period of consolidation and even growth: for example, over the period 1983-5 MAWU's paid up membership has increased from 20,500 to 35,000. Part of the reason has been the recession itself, workers have joined unions for protection against retrenchments: "The quid pro quo obviously was that the union should deliver the goods". (26) Whilst unions may have negotiated retrenchment agreements, they have been severely constrained by the economic situation in winning further gains. One result has been to sow disillusion and foster divisions within unions as in the case of SAAWU and MAWU during 1984. The fact that nevertheless trade unions have survived and grown is a tribute to sound factory floor organisation. The recession has also provided a powerful impetus to trade union unity talks. "When the recession lifts, if not earlier, the South African working class will be in a stronger position than ever before."

II THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

1. The strength of the unions

It is extremely difficult to arrive at a fully reliable figure for the total membership of the independent union movement. Many unions are loath to disclose details about membership which could be used against them by management. (For this reason, the identities of the unions which co-operated in our survey have not been disclosed.) Those that do disclose figures, issue two sets of figures - for paid up and signed up membership - neither of which is independently verifiable. However, for members of the new federation, it would seem that their membership claims have been subject to greater scrutiny. The figure for paid up membership is important as it gives some indication of consolidated

organisation. We would estimate a total paid up membership for the entire emergent trade union movement of the order of 520,000. But signed up membership is also an important indicator of union influence and future trends. (Also it should be mentioned that for unregistered unions "paid up" membership is more difficult to calculate and is less meaningful as such unions are usually denied stop-order facilities). Largely on the basis of claims made by the unions themselves we would estimate the total signed up membership of the independent unions to be as follows: the new federation 565,000; CUSA 150,000; AZACTU 70,000; and other unions 10,000; giving a total of 795,000. (We emphasise that this signed up total may be exaggerated, and only by time will false claims be exposed.)

These figures compare with a total registered trade union membership of 1,406,302 for the end of 1984. (28) We would estimate that the independent union movement accounts for one third of that figure. (In terms of its total signed up membership, registered and unregistered, the independent union movement is rapidly moving to overtake the total combined membership of the traditional unions.)

These figures for total union membership amount to only approximately 15% of the economically active population of 12 million.(29) However, as SALDRU argues, the economically active population is not a particularly good yardstick for measuring trade union membership. (30) Rather they compare union membership against an "organisable population" of some 6 million (excluding professional, adminstrative, agricultural and domestic workers; excluding much of the homelands; but including commuters). Using the same figure of 6 million (assuming no significant growth in employment since 1983) total trade union membership at present stands at approximately 30% of the "organisable population". Independent union membership accounts for 12% of this organisable population.

Of course size of membership and strike statistics are not everything. In trying to gauge the maturity and organisational depth of union organisation in 1983 Webster also surveyed shop steward organisation and agreements. We have followed his example. All emergent unions were requested to fill in a detailed questionnaire. This exercise was not well timed from the unions' point of view since many of them were busy preparing for the new federation. Even so, 23 unions responded. This sample included most of the largest industrial unions. 14 of these unions are party to the new federation; the other 9 belong to CUSA or AZACTU or have remained unaligned. Together they represent a paid up membership of

363,000 (out of a total paid up membership of 520,000 for the independent union movement - ie. 70%). The results of the survey on organisation are given in table I.

Table I: Trade Union Organisation

	For 23 unions in our sample	1983 all unions*
No of shop stewards	12,462 (1 per 42 paid -up members)	6,000
No of shop steward councils/committees	1,443	-
No of paid officials	306 (1 per 1,186)	-
No of agreements	450 (?)	420
No of workplaces organised	3,421 (?)	756

SOURCE: SALB Survey; *E Webster, "New force on the shop floor", in South African Review II, Johannesburg, 1984.

Most importantly, over the last two years the total number of shop stewards (or equivalents) has nearly tripled. This development has been crucial to the consolidation of union growth, especially in view of the relatively small number of paid full-time union officials. The other survey results require further explanation.

The figures for shop stewards councils/committees do not differentiate between different types of bodies: plant-based committees; multi-plant company councils; sectoral shop stewards councils; national negotiating councils; and area-based councils (or locals). This whole area requires further research. In the meantime, we can point to the establishment by FOSATU, by the end of 1984, of 22 area-based locals. These locals will be greatly expanded and increased in number as they are merged into the new federation.

Figures for the number of agreements and organised workplaces are also undifferentiated. Thus, for example, a handful of agreements in the retail trade cover hundreds of establishments (in fact, the rapid spread of organisation in the retail trade is the major factor accounting for the dramatic increase in the number of organised workplaces); one agreement with Anglo-American covers

100,000 workers; another agreement may cover a few workers in one small plant; etc. In addition, the content of agreements varies: recognition, discipline and/or grievance procedures, maternity and health and safety agreements - or any combination of these. For these reasons, our estimates for all emergent unions are unreliable. This whole area requires more detailed work. For instance, there is a trend amongst some unions towards provisional agreements which leave more room to maneouvre than do full recognition agreements.

2. National industrial unions

In his article on union unity, at the end of 1983, Doug Hindson concluded that it was unlikely that the regional general unions and the industrial unions would be able to combine in the same federation. (31) That debate has now been resolved in favour of the principle of "one union, one industry". The industrial unions - concentrating their organisation in strategic sectors - were best able to survive the recession and consolidate their membership. It should also be mentioned that SAAWU particularly was severely hampered in its attempts to consolidate by state repression and continued detentions. Industrial unionism is now one of the pillars of the new federation. The general unions are already defining their areas of operation by industry, and merger talks are well advanced between FCWU and SFAWU, TGWU and GWU, and between MAWU, MICWU and NAAWU.

The General Workers Union (32) is a case in point. Although, as its name suggests, it was originally intended as a general union, from 1979 it began to set up local committees for each industry. In recent years it has carefully limited its sphere of activity, to mainly stevedoring, engineering and the building materials sector.

Equally important in recent years has been the geographical expansion of unions to constitute themselves as truely national unions. The tendency towards increasing concentration of ownership in the economy meant that unions also needed to organise in all the plants belonging to a particular firm, and indeed throughout the sector, in order to maximise their bargaining strength and to prevent undercutting or relocation to non-unionised areas.

Again, the evolution of the GWU from a regional into a national union demonstrates the point. The union's inability to win the red meat strike - one of the longest and best organised strikes

in the history of the South African labour movement - reflected the limitations of its regional base: "the logic of joint plant committees within a single industry in a region impelled the union into national industrial unionism". (33) After the destruction of the union's base amongst the Western Cape meatworkers, GWU moved rapidly to organise stevedores throughout the country. The same tendency towards national industrial unionism exerted itself throughout the labour movement. According to our survey out of 23 unions, 3 organised in 1 province only, 6 in 2 provinces only, 10 had branches in the 3 major provinces (Transvaal, Natal and Cape), and 4 were present in all 4 provinces.

3. Strikes and disputes

As table II shows, strike action fell during 1983 but picked up again in 1984 surpassing the previous record set in 1982. Nearly all these strikes were "illegal". It should also be remembered that these official figures do not include political strikes and stay-aways. Even for industrial strikes the figures are very conservative since they include only reported strikes.

TABLE II: Strikes and Work Stoppages in South Africa 1980-1984

	Number of strikes	Number of employees involved		Man-days lost	
		Total	African workers	Total	African workers
1980	207	61,785	56,286	174,614	148,192
1981	342	92,842	84,706	226,554	206,230
1982	394	141,571	122,481	365,337	298,256
1983	336	64,469	61,331	124,596	120,964
1984	469	181,942	174,897	379,712	365,096

SOURCE: Report of the National Manpower Commission for 1984, p288.

Again, as in 1983, the major cause of strikes in 1984 was wages and conditions, and trade union and disciplinary matters - according to government statistics. (Table III) In our survey we asked unions to list the most important disputes and strikes of 1985 and the issues which caused them. Whilst our survey was not comprehensive, the results in table IV do suggest a rather different set of priorities. Basic battles over recognition, dismissals and victimisation are still seen to be very important.

TABLE III: Reasons for Strikes and Work Stoppages, 1984

Reason	No of strikes	No of workers involved
wages	164	83,286
wages & another reason	17	13,729
union matters*	47	33,004
disciplinary	97	18,454
working conditions	44	9,214
other/unknown	100	24,255
Total	469	181,942

SOURCE: Report of the National Manpower Commission 1984, p289.
* "union matters", we assume, would include the category "recognition", used in table IV.

Table IV: Reasons for Strikes and Disputes during 1985

Reason	No of times mentioned
recognition	13
wages	13
dismissals	13
retrenchments	8
victimisation	6
working conditions	5
other	2

SOURCE: SALB Survey.

The NMC notes that over half these strikes lasted for 1 day or less. (34) They also comment that in 1984 the number of dismissals arising out of strikes increased. (35) A far higher proportion of strikes ended in defeat for workers and their unions than in 1983 (36) - reflecting the harsher conditions of the recession.

Andrew Levy noted that there was an increase in strike action by independent unions outside of FOSATU and CUSA during 1984. (37) He also calculated that the number of man-days lost for 1984 was nearer to 500,000 - than the NMC figure of 379,712. The Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union headed the strike league in 1984.

Department of Manpower statistics for the first 9 months of 1985 (up to September 12) reveal a new trend. The total number of strikes is down to 174 (469 in 1984) but the number of man-days lost has increased to 383,864 (compared with 379,712 for the whole of 1984). (38) This reflects the fact that on average, each strike has involved a far greater number of workers due primarily to increased activity on the mines. Almost two-thirds of man-days lost occurred in the mining industry. Other estimates calculate the number of man-days lost for the first nine months of 1985 to be as high as 750,000.

The major area of strike activity was the PWV region. (Table V)

TABLE V: Strikes and Stoppages by Area, 1984

	Number	No of workers	man days lost
Cape Peninsula	31	6,254	11,308
Eastern Cape	29	9,385	25,534
Durban-Pietermaritzburg	92	22,887	65,827
PWV	179	60,507	133,828
OFS Goldfields	2	5,585	5,915
Rest of RSA	136	77,324	137,300
Total	469	181,942	379,712

Source: Report of the National Manpower Commission for 1984, pp289-90.

Webster noted for 1983 that, apart from Auto Plastics, most strikes tended to be single factory disputes. This has begun to change in the last two years with nationally co-ordinated disputes taking place at Dunlops, AECI, Corobrick, Continental China and on the mines. Also during the second half of 1985 the Metal and Allied Workers Union has been laying the groundwork for a co-ordinated major confrontation with the leading engineering employers.

At the end of 1983 Mike Rosholt of Barlow Rand complained that demands by certain unions for worker control threatened the private enterprise system itself. Certainly unions have continued to push back the "frontiers of control" demanding access to company figures (successfully in some cases); curbing management's right to hire and fire (especially in the case of retrenchments); and winning new rights around retrenchments, health and safety, mat-

ernity, the right to strike without being dismissed (enshrined in some recognition agreements) and May Day as a paid holiday. More recently unions have adopted tactics such as sit-ins and factory occupations which further develop the concept of worker control whilst simultaneously pressurising management over immediate economic demands. In this connection, worker co-operatives should also be mentioned. Thus far they have been set up largely in situations where large numbers of workers have been retrenched or dismissed after a strike. These developments - occupations, sit-ins and co-ops - implicitly raise issues about industrial democracy and workers' control.

4. Industrial relations and collective bargaining

Despite the continuing strike record of the emerging unions, the National Manpower Commission Report for 1984 praised the high level of industrial peace and felt "gratified" that black employees were "increasingly aware of the philosophy and principles underlying the country's labour relations system", (39) and pointed to the increased use of statutory machinery. This optimistic view of an increasingly institutionalised labour movement sits uncomfortably with another of the NMC's concerns: it was "regrettable that the field of education (school boycotts) and the workshop (the stay-away campaigns) were exploited for purposes of socio-political agitation thereby impeding the achievement of manpower policy objectives." (40)

Nonetheless it cannot be denied that there has been a substantial increase in the use of such statutory bodies. Most noticeable has been the increase in the number of cases referred to the Industrial Court: 20 in 1981, 41 in 1982, 170 in 1983, and 400 in 1984. It would seem that unions have used the Court to establish certain rights - eg. over fair procedures for retrenchments - and in order to avoid, where possible, an all out "trial of strength" at a time when conditions - recession and unemployment - do not favour the unions. The same trend is evident in the number of conciliation board applications: 21 in 1981, 60 in 1982, 119 in 1983, and 279 in 1984. By the end of 1984 staff shortages at the Department of Manpower were leading to delays in processing applications for conciliation boards. (41) More recently IMMSA - an independent mediation and arbitration service has appeared on the scene. Between February 1984 and October 1985 IMMSA completed 91 mediations and 16 arbitrations.

- survey -

From our sample of 23 unions, interviewed in depth, 10 sit on industrial councils, 14 had used the Industrial Court, 13 had applied for a conciliation board and 12 had used mediation. (17 of the 23 unions were registered). However, when asked as to whether they were broadly satisfied with the results, these unions were by no means unanimous. According to our survey: 5 were satisfied with their dealings with the Industrial Court, 7 were dissatisfied and 2 were ambivalent; as far as industrial councils were concerned 3 were satisfied and 7 were dissatisfied; and for conciliation boards 3 were satisfied, 7 were dissatisfied and 3 were ambivalent. Mediation comes off best with 9 expressing satisfaction and only 3 being dissatisfied.

This dissatisfaction with statutory bodies is in part a result of increasing restrictions placed on the Industrial Court's powers since 1982, particularly regarding the hearing of unfair labour practice cases. (42)

In general terms one result of the recession and the growing power of the emergent unions has been to intensify pressure on national bargaining units. 1985 witnessed a major division in the Chamber of Mines in response to NUM demands; the destruction of the industrial council for the paper industry; and the beginnings of a major campaign by MAWU for the right to bargain at plant level outside of the Industrial Council. (MAWU has refused to sign an industrial council agreement since it joined the council 3 years ago.) (43)

Finally, a comment on the issue of registration. According to the NMC, in 1984, there were 230,000 African workers organised in 58 unregistered unions as against 597,316 in 42 registered unions (the first figure probably includes unions which have since applied to register; the figure for registered membership includes TUCSA unions). (44) As far as the emergent unions are concerned almost all see the question of registration as a tactical one - and it has certainly not prevented unity and the formation of the new federation. Our survey confirms this: for 11 unions it was a non-issue; 9 found registration useful; and 3 remain opposed. This is summed up in the words of one respondent: "It was a useful tactic in order to consolidate union gains. It should not become an issue now since it has not led to the co-option of those who registered."

During 1984 the registration question was revived in a new form.

The NMC recommended in its report on collective bargaining that a simpler form of "certification" be introduced. This should be mandatory and organisations not so certified would be guilty of an offence and liable for prosecution. These recommendations were met with universal condemnation from the emergent unions - registered and unregistered - and by industrial relations practitioners. These recommendations have not yet been taken up by the government.

5.Problem areas: small towns, border areas and bantustans

As the labour movement has expanded outward from the main industrial areas and into new sectors - such as mining - unions have been faced with new organisational problems. We have already noted the disabilities under which unions operate in the bantustans. In small towns, racist practices and police attention are particular problems. (45) The problems experienced in border areas are similar to those in the bantustans. In addition workers in these areas tend to lack developed community organisations (The Labour Monitoring Group saw this as one reason for the failure of many Brits workers to participate in the November stay-away). (46)

Table VI: Problems for Trade Union in Small Towns, Border Areas and Bantustans

	small towns	border areas	bantustans
low wages	4	2	2
harassment by authorities	5	3	7
reactionary managements	7	3	2
lack of legal recognition	-	2	6
lack of venue	3	1	1
racism	2	-	-
dismissals/unemployment	1	1	1

SOURCE: SALB Survey

According to our survey, 19 unions organised in small towns, 11 in border areas and 10 in the bantustans. The main problems and the number of times they were mentioned are listed in table VI. Overall the main problems were harassment, reactionary managements, low wages and, in the bantustans and border areas, the absence of legal protection for unions.

6. Unions and politics

One of the main reasons given by the Wiehahn Commission for granting trade union rights to Africans was in order to prevent the politicisation of work relations and to maintain a separation between the economic and political spheres. Thus militant wage battles could be tolerated, at least in the short-term, while the new unions became accustomed to industrial relations machinery: registration, industrial councils, conciliation boards, the Industrial Court, mediation, arbitration, etc. In the meantime the state would introduce "reform" in order to pacify black political aspirations. Herein lay the fundamental contradiction at the heart of the reform process: the "liberalisation" of industrial relations without meaningful political rights for blacks. On the one hand the space now existed for a rapid advance in organising the working class. On the other hand, continued political exclusion of the black masses and the rising tide of resistance in the townships and schools began to impinge directly on the workplace. This was most dramatically demonstrated in the November 1984 stay-away in the Transvaal when up to 800,000 workers - and 400,000 students - stayed away from work for 2 days. For the NMC this was a "regrettable" qualification to the generally optimistic picture painted of industrial relations in South Africa.

The question of political action has been vigorously debated within the emergent trade union movement since its inception. Significantly, differences over political line, over the correct relationship to community struggles and over affiliation to political bodies, has not prevented unions uniting into the new federation. (It should, however, be said that differences over "non-racialism" versus "black leadership" prevented CUSA and AZACTU unions from joining the new federation.) Moreover, there is now clear evidence that all emergent unions not only accept that they have a political role to play, but are willing to act accordingly. In our survey - out of 23 unions, 20 took action on political or community issues: 13 mentioned that they participated in stay-aways; 15 had supported boycotts; and other forms of political action were pursued by 7 unions.

7. Trade union federations and future perspectives

The launch of the new federation on November 30 (1985) brings to an end four years of discussions on trade union unity. The federation will have a paid up membership of 400,000 and a signed up

membership of many more. It brings together the most organised workers in strategic sectors of the economy. Initially all the emergent unions attended the unity talks. Progress was slow in the early days because of differences over registration and the correct relationship to community struggles. Later divisions were over organisational structure: general versus industrial unionism. However, by 1984 there was agreement, in principle, for unions to demarcate their areas of interest by industry. But there was no agreement on the means or time-scale for achieving industrial demarcation. As a result the March 1984 meeting of the feasibility committee decided to proceed to create the new federation without the general unions (such as SAAWU, GAWU, MGWUSA, and GWUSA/MACWUSA. These unions are also affiliated to the UDF).

By the end of 1984 three distinct groupings had emerged within the independent labour movement: the core of the "unity talks unions"; the unions affiliated to the United Democratic Front; and the emerging black consciousness unions in AZACTU (Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions, an affiliate of National Forum), which had never participated in the unity talks, mainly because many had been established only after the unity talks were initiated. The core "unity unions" were distinguished by the fact that they were industrial unions and, with the exception of CUSA, refused to align themselves to any political tendency. (CUSA dealt with the matter by participating in both UDF and National Forum.) By contrast the majority of the UDF and National Forum aligned unions were general unions and unregistered.

In May 1985 the talks were again thrown open. A partial unity was finally achieved on the basis of five principles: non-racialism; one union one industry; worker control; representation on the basis of paid-up membership; and co-operation at a national level in the new federation. Major disagreement emerged over the issue of "non-racialism" leading to the withdrawal of AZACTU and the CUSA unions (except NUM which disaffiliated from CUSA).

The CUSA-AZACTU grouping will continue to represent approximately 100,000 - 150,000 paid up members. The organisational strength is in CUSA, concentrated mainly in their industrial unions: chemical, food, construction and transport. It has since been suggested that AZACTU and CUSA may amalgamate to form a distinct black consciousness trade union grouping.

We noted earlier that in 1983 TUCSA was by far the largest trade

union federation representing 478,420 workers. TUCSA's position has declined rapidly since then: its present membership is something over 300,000, and there are rumours of further disaffiliations. Nonetheless, the majority of the members are black workers, many in semi-skilled occupations, including some 100,000 (overwhelmingly female) workers in the textiles and clothing sectors. The relationship of these workers, and of TUCSA itself, to the new federation will be an important indicator of the power and attraction of the new federation. On the right-wing, the white South African Confederation of Labour has been halved in size over the last 10 years to just 100,000. (The white Mine Workers Union has continued to grow by transforming itself into a general union, campaigning to preserve the privileges of white workers, and aggressively poaching members from other unions.)

Clearly then the new federation - the largest and most representative worker body in South African history - has transformed the labour scene: the right-wing is fragmented and disorganised; and TUCSA's reformist traditions have not been foisted onto the African workers and TUCSA itself is shrinking and under pressure from the left. The established federations are indecline, unable torepresent their members interests, which role has increasingly fallen to "non-political" "functional federations". (48) Meanwhile, relations between the new federation and the CUSA-AZACTU grouping remain cordial: indeed the present political and economic crisis provides the objective conditions for united action by the two groupings.

The new federation is being established, but the arduous task of integrating the various unions and traditions remains. In the immediate future, at national level, industrial demarcation, mergers and amalgamation will occupy a lot of the time of the federation. Meanwhile developments in the locals and the regional congresses will be crucial. It is here where workers power can be mobilised and developed. These organs will be under the immediate and direct control of rank and file workers and shop stewards. It is here that the ideology of the new federation will be created and popularised, loyalty engendered and consciousness of a wider unity built. The present crisis in the townships, the schools and the economy suggest that even whilst organisational work proceeds the new federation will play an important role in the wider political struggle. The precise form this involvement will take will depend on debate and the course of the struggle itself. The new federation combines two major traditions of opposition: the one class-

based, the other linked to the national liberation struggle: the one will ensure that the federation does not withdraw into a narrow economism; the other will guarantee the interests of the working class for immediate economic gains and long-term social transformation.

Footnotes:

1 E Webster, "New Force on the shop floor", in South African Review II, Johannesburg, 1984; SALDRU, Directory of South African Trade Unions, UCT, 1984
2 SALDRU, Directory, p2, table I. The SALDRU calculation includes some very optimistic, claims especially by BAWU and SAAWU. The figures for registered (ie. registered with the Registrar of Trade Unions, a procedure which bestows certain additional legal rights) union membership are from the Report of the National Manpower Commission for 1984, p283
3 Webster's lower figure is probably closer to the truth. Both sets of data show the same general trend and the phenomenal growth of African trade union membership
4 G Jaffee, "The Retrenchment Process", in South African Review II, p125
5 TUCSA Handbook 1984-5, pp10-11
6 A position particularly associated with GWU, FCWU and elements in FOSATU: See SALB 7.8, July 1982; SALB 9.2, November 1983
7 A Lawyer, "Homeland labour relations laws", SALB 8.8 & 9.1, September-October 1983
8 C Cooper, "Bophuthatswana Industrial Conciliation Act", SALB 9.5, March 1984
9 W Cobbett et al., "Regionalism, federalism and the reconstruction of the South African State", SALB 10.5, March-April 1985
10 ibid; President's Council Report on a strategy for urbanisation for South Africa, 1985
11 National Manpower Commission Report on the small business sector, 1/1984
12 NMC Report on levels of collective bargaining, 3/1984
13 NMC Consultative Memorandum on industrial council agreements, 20.9.85
14 J Keenan, "The recession and its effects on the African working class", in South African Review II, p138
15 Central Statistical Service
16 J Keenan, "Black (African) living standards and their effect on workplace performance", mimeo, 1984/5
17 See D M Gordan, R Edwards and M Reich, Segmented work, divided

workers, Cambridge, 1982
18 See J Lewis, "New technology", in SALB 10.7, June 1984
19 Technology Today May 1985
20 I Obery, "Recession and retrenchments in the East Rand metal industry", in SALB 10.1, August-September 1984
21 G Jaffee and K Jochelson, "The fight to save jobs", forthcoming in South African Review III
22 The statistics in this section were prepared by J Keenan
23 See Labour Monitoring Group, "Stay-aways in the Eastern Cape", SALB 11.1, September 1985
24 See H Cheadle, "The law and retrenchent", SALB 10.1, August-September 1984
25 P Bonner, "Black trade unions and the current recession", ROAPE Conference, 1984
26 ibid
27 ibid
28 NMC Report for 1984, p283
29 SAIRR, Race relations survey, 1984, p243
30 SALDRU, Directory, pp7-8
31 D Hindson, "Union Unity" in South African Review II, p104
32 See M Morris, "The stevedoring industry and the GWU", forthcoming in SALB
33 ibid
34 NMC Report for 1984, p112
35 ibid, p107
36 Financial Mail, 21.12.84
37 ibid, 6.4.84
38 ibid, 18.10.85
39 NMC Report for 1984, p125
40 ibid, pxxiii
41 Star, 8.11.85
42 SAIRR, Survey, 1984, pp324-5
43 See SALB 11.1
44 NMC Report for 1984, pp104-5
45 eg. see SALB 10.8 for CCAWUSA in the Free State
46 in SALB 10.6
47 Star 5.11.85
48 J Lever, "Functional federations and co-ordinating councils", SALB 11.2, October-December 1985

Monitoring the Sarmcol Struggle

Labour Monitoring Group (Natal)

"We have built the country by fighting" - this was the cry of the 950 striking BTR-Sarmcol workers as they arrived for the May Day meeting at the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre (ELEC) outside Pietermaritzburg. The May Day celebrations by such large numbers of workers in South Africa were in themselves an important statement after many years during which the economic actions, never mind cultural events, of the working class had been suppressed. For the Sarmcol workers this day had an additional significance: they had just gone on strike and the support they were receiving from fellow workers, but also from the Mpophomeni community, was heartening, if not overwhelming.

For the communities of Mpophomeni and Howick West in turn, tremors and conflicts at Sarmcol had a direct bearing on their welfare. The company being the largest employer in the area could inflict unbearable strains on community life. At meetings in both townships it had been decided that a boycott of white-owned shops in Howick should be implemented. It was felt that, apart from these pressures on Sarmcol to negotiate with its workers and the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), it would also register their protest against shopkeepers' attitudes to black workers. Although for many shopkeepers black consumers were their main customers, they had supported Sarmcol management during an earlier boycott of the factory canteen by black workers: they had refused to open their shops before 07h00 to allow boycotting workers to buy provisions on their way to work.

On May 3 though, management dismissed all striking workers and proceeded to replace them with "scab" labour primarily from remoter areas. From then on, the conflict in Howick started escalating to become a major confrontation between black workers and communities, and employers in the entire Pietermaritzburg region. This conflict led to one of the most successful stay-aways in recent times. Before long, this tide of opposition to Sarmcol's unilateral decision spilled over into a trade boycott of white businesses in the Pietermaritzburg area.

- Sarmcol -

The LMG (Natal) decided to monitor the stay-away and follow up its monitoring of the event through in-depth interviews with some of the main participants in the dispute. This preliminary report purports to do the following: to provide a brief socio-economic background in order to contextualise the events in the Pietermaritzburg region; outline the history of the dispute between MAWU and Sarmcol management and, after the strike, the process of mobilisation which culminated in the stay-away, and to report the monitoring group's findings. It concludes by discussing some of the implications of the stay-away in the context of the current socio-political crisis.

Pietermaritzburg: the economic background

Pietermaritzburg has for long been an important commercial and administrative centre in Natal. Over the last decade it has become an important industrial centre as well. A gradual tendency for some sectors of industry to decentralise from the main metropolitan areas - such as Durban and the Southern Transvaal to places like Pietermaritzburg was further enhanced in 1982 when it was declared an industrial "deconcentration point" under the Government's industrialisation policy. This rewarded firms with subsidies and concessions once they undertook production in the area. In turn, Pietermaritzburg experienced an increase in industrial growth.

By 1984 its manufacturing sector employed approximately 20,000 workers, or 35,000 together with Howick, Hammarsdale and Richmond. Compared with nearly 200,000 in the Durban/Pinetown complex and with 3,4 million as a national total, its industrial significance is limited.

Three broad sectors dominate Pietermaritzburg's industrial life: firstly, metal, engineering and related factories account for approximately 30% of total employment; secondly, the leather and footwear industry employs a further 25%. This sector is particularly important for it produces approximately 50% of South Africa's total output; finally, a timber, wood and paper sector employs 20% of the workforce.

A significant incentive for firms to either decentralise or begin operations in Pietermaritzburg is undoubtedly access to abundant labour supplies - a factor which is repeatedly stressed by the city's industrial promotion campaign. The black population of the

area around Pietermaritzburg has been swelled by a substantial immigration from various parts of KwaZulu and from the surrounding white-owned farms which have evicted labour tenants. The severity of the drought in recent years has increased this flow. Of late, in addition to the formal townships of Edendale, Imbali and Sobantu, there has come into existence a sprawling peri-urban area, which borders the city on its western side. The official figure for the Pietermaritzburg/Howick area's African population stands at 35,000. (The Mpophomeni township is located in the Vulindlela magisterial district, about 15km from Howick.)

photo: Sarmcol strike meeting, June 1985

Here too, as in the rest of South Africa, unemployment and underemployment present serious problems for black communities. For example, in the Vulindlela district 20% of the working age male population is unemployed according to a conservative estimate. This is exacerbated by the current recession which makes the area a victim of two simultaneous dynamics: on the one hand, rapid inflation, high interest rates, chronically depressed levels

of employment, major lay-offs and constriction of output ravage many industrial enterprises. On the other, Pietermaritzburg's attraction as a "deconcentration" point stimulates employment creation. The second dynamic though has been seriously offset through dramatic lay-offs in the area.

Most of the major firms have substantially reduced their workforce between 1982 and 1984. Feralloys, Dick Whittington Shoes, and Sarmcol, have shed between them over 2,000 jobs. The net result has been an almost static level of industrial employment despite continued in-migration and population growth. It is significant that the Sarmcol dispute occurred at a time of austere economic conditions which in their own right, as shall be outlined below, accelerated class conflict in the area. Yet, before the conflict between the union and Sarmcol is addressed, it is necessary to shift attention 27km away from Pietermaritzburg to provide a profile of the main participants in the Howick area.

Sarmcol and Mpophomeni

Sarmcol's significance is related to the following: firstly, alongside Huletts Aluminium and some of the factories in the footwear sector, it is one of the major employers. Prior to the strike it employed about 1,300 workers. Secondly, its prominence also stems from its long history in the area: it was established in Howick in 1919. Consequently, it has been a protagonist in shaping the area's labour market. Thirdly, it is controlled by a multinational company and could come to dominate South Africa's rubber products market. Its parent company, British Tyre and Rubber (BTR) has recently acquired control of the Dunlop Group in the UK. However, Sarmcol and Dunlop SA have postponed merger plans in the present local financial climate.

Sarmcol's workforce in the last decade has declined to about 30% of its former size. A process of intensive rationalisation, involving mechanisation and in part semi-automation has reduced the labour force from 4,500 in the early 1970s to 2,600 in 1980 and currently 1,300. The company moved swiftly away from labour-intensive jobbing work to processes with long production runs, only manufacturing conveyor belts and hoses. The impact of this rationalisation process on Howick West and Mpophomeni has also been significant.

The establishment of Mpophomeni, in 1969, marked a stage in a

long history of relocation of African and Indian working people in the region for the convenience of the state and capital. Howick's shanty town Hohabe, was broken up and destroyed in 1950. Indian people were moved to Howick West. Some African people also settled there but were pushed out to Zenzele township in the '60s. After the construction of Midmar Dam, subsequent developments in the late 1960s condemned the people of this township to relocation. After the Zenzele relocation, Mpophomeni trebled in size to 15,000. Whereas the process of relocation under apartheid decrees accelerated its growth, the township has remained desperately neglected: homes have not been fenced, roads remained untarred, no street drainage was introduced; furthermore, there is one tap for every four houses, and an inefficient bucket system for sewage disposal.

photo: Sarmcol workers demonstrate, July 1985

Due to the lack of attention paid to the township, there has been sustained resistance to any rent increases. The community council, first elected in 1981, has taken up such long-standing grievances between residents and KwaZulu. Allegedly KwaZulu or the Natalia Board directed that rents would be increased as from the beginning of 1979, but the residents were not properly not-

ified. By the time they were officially notified of the increase in 1983, householders were already hundreds of rands in arrears. The council appealed to Chief Buthelezi to intervene by setting up a commission of enquiry, and a petition signed by 300 residents calling for the removal of the township manager was forwarded to Ulundi. Benjamin Ndlovu, the mayor, stressed that despite the fact that all the councillors were members of Inkatha, if no satisfactory solution was forthcoming the matter would be taken to court. In April, a KwaZulu official visited Mpophomeni to listen to residents' grievances but the issue has not yet been finally resolved, overtaken as it has been by the events surrounding the Sarmcol strike. In short, the community has not paid rents for the whole year.

Furthermore, alongside rent issues, the longer distance involved to and from work has created a strong resistance to bus-fare increases. In November 1982, community solidarity was expressed in the decision to walk the 30km daily, rather than pay 6c fare increases (from 31c to 37c) charged by the local Impendhle Bus Service. The community council supported the bus boycott alleging that the increase had been introduced without any consultation with commuters. Taxis cut their fares from 50c to 40c in support of the boycott. The majority, though, decided to walk the long distance. Despite police harassment (eg, setting up road blocks to check on "pirate taxis") a mass meeting in late December decided to continue the boycott. It was finally terminated in 1983 when Impendhle was bought out by Taros Transport.

Finally, although many residents were relatively new to the township, the united action embarked on by them over recent years has been an important factor in creating the pillars for subsequent support structures for the Sarmcol workers. If the small community of Mpophomeni was finding a sense of unity at the place of residence, a major part of it was discovering the same at the workplace. It is to this process of unionisation and conflict that we now turn.

The Sarmcol dispute

Sarmcol's attitude to industrial relations over the last 30 years could only be described as "anti-union". From the 1950s when the company refused to have any dealings with the Howick Rubber Workers' Union, a SACTU affiliate, it consistently refused to grant trade union rights to its employees.

The Metal and Allied Workers Union began organising workers at Sarmcol in 1974 and according to the union its progress was impeded by "continued police harassment and victimisation of activists by management." Sarmcol, in a recent document, asserts that MAWU's claims are misleading: MAWU was not recognised because even by 1983 it could only represent about 35% of the labour force. The union in response, points out that Sarmcol's rationalisation process gave the company ample opportunities to retrench union members. State harassment, furthermore, was expressed several times throughout the 1970s in the form of banning key union officials and members.

photo: police preparations, Pietermaritzburg, July 1985

After a decade of unionisation drives Sarmcol was no closer to granting trade union recognition and MAWU resorted to legal action to defend the rights of its members. The union proceeded against Sarmcol in the Industrial Court alleging the company had committed an unfair labour practice in retrenching workers without notice, negotiation or compensation. In an out-of-court

settlement of this case in 1983 MAWU was granted stop-order and access facilities and within one month had recruited 90% of the labour force as paid up union members. However, a further two years went by without any discernible progress towards a recognition agreement between the union and Sarmcol. After unsuccessful attempts to resolve disagreements over the recognition agreement through conciliation board meetings, the union balloted its members for a mandate to undertake a legal strike in support of their demands for union recognition. The strike occurred on April 30. By May 3 all striking workers were dismissed.

The recruitment of scab labour soon after the strike started was a clear message from management that they were not going to negotiate with the union, and that the struggle would of necessity become protracted. The workers and MAWU had to look for allies and pressure points, other than the withdrawal of labour, to bring the BTR-Sarmcol management to negotiation. Strikers went to Pietermaritzburg's neigbouring townships, to Sweetwaters and Mpumalanga, and to chiefs in the nearby KwaZulu rural areas, to canvass support and to dissuade potential scab labour. This effort led to an additional element of tension both around the factory and within the communities.

In the meantime the boycott of businesses in Howick had begun and indicated the degree of community solidarity with the strikers, but it also drew a response from the local white community that was to develop into a refrain over the next few months: Mike Meyer, president of the Howick Chamber of Commerce (HCC), said that the Chamber would not apply pressure on Sarmcol, and regretted that the dispute "had spilt over into areas where there was no involvement". Ron Robbins, the Howick Town Clerk, said that traders were, "innocent bystanders in the whole affair and they could not alter the situation at all".

Support groups in Pietermaritzburg and Durban were formed in early June. They were comprised of sympathetic individuals, answerable to the union and the shop-stewards. These groups have functioned as fund-raisers (to provide for the strikers and their families) and also assisted in convening meetings with community organisations; in Pietermaritzburg the support group undertook the bulk buying of food; in Mpophomeni a clinic was set up on a weekly basis and attended by a doctor (through the clinic a survey was undertaken to establish the health problems in the area and to monitor the effects of unemployment and hardship in the

township as the strike dragged on). The support groups were thus supplementary to union organisation - to bolster limited union resources already strained by the magnitude of the strike, its unknown duration and its distance from the union office in Pietermaritzburg.

photo: Sarmcol workers in Pietermaritzburg, July 1985

Meetings with organisations began to be held in early June. Representatives in Durban included the Natal Indian Congress, Durban Housing Action Committee, National Medical and Dental Association, Ecumenical Centre Trust, Black Students Society, University of Durban SRC, National Education Union of South Africa, South African Tin Workers' Union, South African Council on Sport, South African Youth Federation, Youth Forum, Diakonia, Congress of South African Students, Natal Council on Sport, Black Sash, National Union of South African Students, Detainees Support Committee and the Medical Students Representative Council. The range of organisations present allowed even greater publicity to be made of the workers' struggle. This publicity and also support work

was furthered by addresses made by Sarmcol shop-stewards at meetings like the June 16 rally. A slide and tape show was made to give feedback to the interested organisations on how their financial aid was being used and to publicise the plight of the workers.

Actions to publicise the dispute continued: 60 workers from Sarmcol went to Johannesburg to picket BTR's head-office and to hold a press conference. The police got to hear of the planned action and trailed the workers making the picket impossible. However the press conference was held. The frustration of the workers at what happened in Johannesburg contributed to the escalation of tension during the weekend.

The workers arrived back from Johannesburg (accompanied by the Natal branch members who had attended MAWU's AGM in the Transvaal) in the early hours of Sunday June 23. At daybreak they marched around the township, singing and chanting in order to get the community together so that they could discuss developments with everybody. Approximately 2,500 people gathered outside the community hall. Once again solidarity with the strikers was pledged; social pressure against scabs was agreed upon; and a decision was taken to continue with the boycott of Howick shops. When the people returned home they clashed with the police who had been in the township before daybreak. Police claim that they were stoned after ordering the people to disperse, and then used teargas on the crowd. Witnesses say the crowd became angry when police attempted to arrest a youth. Trade unionists and clergymen confirmed the claims that the police had provoked the people into action, and that shop stewards had maintained strict discipline amongst the crowd who had attended the meeting. Four policemen were said to have been hurt.

The next evening, Monday June 24, a crowd stopped a bus, belonging to the Impendhle service, carrying workers, stoned it and killed two workers, one of them employed by Sarmcol. Several homes belonging to scab workers were set alight over the weekend. Police were now patrolling the street of Mpophomeni and escorting buses into the township. A 21-day ban on meetings was imposed by T E Strachan, commissioner at Vulindlela. Father Larry Kaufmann, in whose Catholic parish Mpophomeni falls, made a church hall in Howick available to the strikers who could no longer meet in the township. However, town clerk Ron Robbins immediately delivered a letter to him stating that the meetings should be disbanded immediately. Robbins said that he had a duty to protect the

town's residents - "with a large group meeting like this they could go quite berserk in a matter of minutes..."

On June 29 the workers continued with their campaign to make as wide an audience as possible aware of their struggle. On that Saturday morning, a convoy of eleven buses, one carrying workers from Dunlop in Durban, who had come to demonstrate their solidarity, stopped in the heart of the commercial district of the Natal capital. This caused traffic chaos while workers handed out stickers and pamphlets. The police who had been caught unawares, initially stood by. Traffic police then escorted buses to the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Center outside the city, where a meeting was held. Community and student organisations were present at this meeting, and the idea of area representatives among the striking workers, to overcome the effects of the ban on meetings, was introduced. The shop stewards committee subsequently expanded to provide for such area representatives.

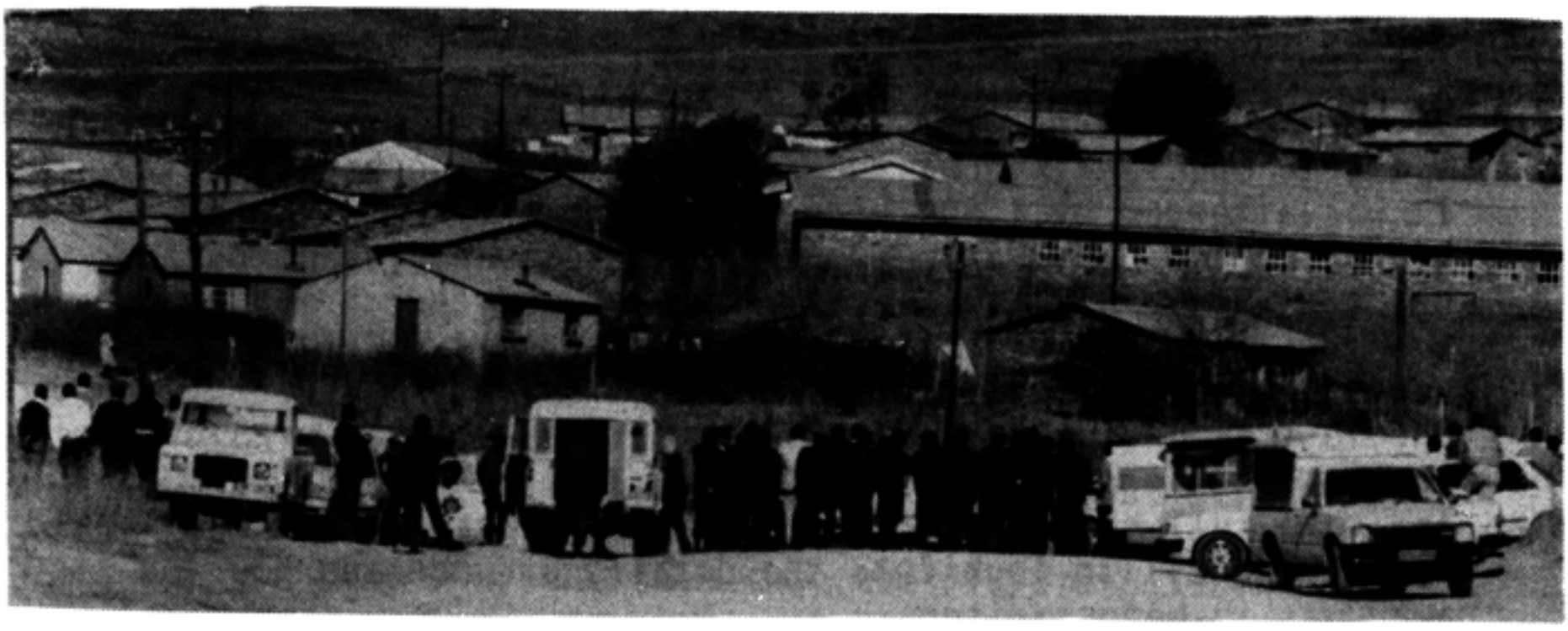

photo: police outside Mphopomeni during the July stay-away

From Edendale the convoy went on to Imbali, the largest black township in the Pietermarizburg area. The police stayed out of the township but kept happenings under surveillance. The workers' convoy went around Imbali street by street, with youths marching and chanting in front of the buses. Union banners and those of student and political organisations were carried. A COSAS member remarked that this was the first time that students had been able to march in the township in solidarity with their parents without being dispersed by the police. At intervals the procession stopp-

ed and the workers addressed the people who had gathered about the strike, asking for their support. The workers "held" the township for two hours and most inhabitants began knowing about and talking around the Sarmcol strike.

When the buses made their way back to the townships where most of the workers lived, they found the white town of Howick was sealed off by heavily armed police. Indian workers who lived in Howick West had to be dropped off near the barricades to walk back to their homes.

On June 30 the FOSATU regional congress met. Sarmcol was the main issue under discussion. The idea of a work stoppage in support of the striking workers was referred back to locals. Eventually the decision taken by FOSATU was to confine the stay-away to Pietermarizburg and build up support for the issue in the rest of Natal by holding stoppages and lunch-time meetings on July 18.

The intention to hold a stay-away was first discussed with community and youth organisations on July 4. Two days later, on the 6th, another meeting was held at ELEC. This mass meeting was publicised by workers going on house visits to all the townships in the area and seeking out the participation of other organisations. It was attended by 1,500 people. Student and community organisations, United Democratic Front and African Peoples Democratic Union of South Africa (APDUSA) members, and church leaders were present at the meeting. It was announced that FOSATU (Southern Natal Region) had decided to support the Pietermarizburg local, should they decide on a stay-away. Jeffrey Vilane, president of the MAWU national executive council, also addressed the meeting and gave full support for a stay-away. It was left to the local FOSATU council to look into the details of when and how the stay-away was to be organised.

The next week and a half was used to set in motion a process of consultation. Meetings were held between the FOSATU council and student, civic and political organisations to discuss the details of the stay-away. UDF criticisms, presented below, indicate some organisations felt that they were presented with a decision that had already been taken by the unions and had not been involved in the making of that decision. In fact, they voiced their misgivings about its success, pointing out that a poll indicated that only about 10% of Indian workers would support the stay-away.

The date of the stay-away was confirmed as July 18, a Thursday, but no pamphlet was issued. Workers, through their trade union networks, as well as students, were active in spreading the call by word of mouth. Only as late as the morning newspapers on July 17 did the stay-away call appear prominently in the press. The Pietermarizburg-based Natal Witness, in a front page story, said that disruption of services was to be expected, and that the police assured protection to buses and to workers. Department of Education and Training regional director, Peter Nicholson, said that he had not been informed of a school boycott - "Pupils will be required to attend classes because this is obviously a political thing."

The Natal Mercury of that morning publicised a joint call by the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Industries (PCI) and the Chamber of Commerce (PCC), and Sakekamer to workers to ignore the stay-away and that a "no work, no pay" policy would be followed. The statement said that people should not suffer hardship "for a matter which has no direct influence on their lives and which could be resolved by way of court procedures."

The day before (July 16) the tension that had marked the past few weeks again flared up into direct conflict. Workers who had been attending the court appearance of ten people on a murder charge and several others on intimidation charges arising out of strike-related activity, marched to BTR-Sarmcol to protest at the presence of scab workers. They were confronted by police who fired teargas and arrested 37 workers.

On the morning of the stay-away it was reported that Sarmcol managing director (Blackstock), had said the company was not to blame for the stay-away. He said that the dispute between the company and the workers was over a specific issue "and as such could not affect the lives of other workers." A Natal Witness survey conducted on the day before the action showed that many firms would simply not open on Thursday, or had advised their staff to stay at home; that taxis would not carry passengers from Edendale, Imbali, Sobantu, Eastwood, Woodlands and Northdale. Traders said that their businesses would close - one jeweller said that he had been approached very politely, and he denied claims of intimidation that were already being made.

It turned out that the closure of Indian-owned shops was remarkably successful - even cafes in Indian residential areas were

closed. While there was sympathy from the small shop-owner - the only obstacle that they saw being the possiblity of unfair competition from others who would not heed the call - bigger shops with closer ties to the PCC were more reluctant to participate.

Most bus drivers announced they would not report for work as their union supported the strikers.

Headlines on the day of the stay-away and the next day said it all: "Mass Stay-away has Capital at Standstill"; "City Factories, Shops, Experience Nearly 100% Worker Stay-away". Newspaper reports mentioned that none of the municipal transport services' 325 African drivers had reported for work, nor any of the Kwa-Zulu Transport Services workers. It was also reported that 30 municipal buses were stoned the day before at Imbali and Sobantu - incidents that were subsequently criticised by workers who said that the children who had done the stoning should have left the buses alone to allow their parents to get home, in order to participate in the stay-away the next day.

No private taxis ran on the day and the station was deserted. At BTR-Sarmcol, however, workers slept on the premises, as was the case at Huletts Aluminium. At Clover Dairies, with all 270 African workers absent, the company ran on a skeleton staff of 40 schoolboy scabs. Five municipal buses did run, driven by whites and serving only the white suburbs.

In the townships, unlike the city centre where there were no black workers and consumers for the whole day, there was a great deal of activity, much of it coming from the police and the SADF (five troop carriers carrying soldiers were reported to be active in one newspaper article). Teargas was used as police were stoned by crowds of people, including schoolchildren who had stayed away from school in their thousands. Peter Nicholson said that 17 DET schools in Imbali had not functioned that day, despite the "political thing" which was supposed not to have affected them. Indian schools were still on holiday and the stay-away was marked by some coloured schools where attendance was only 17%.

The press reported looting of shops and that administrative offices and beerhalls were set alight. Barricades were set up in Edendale, and in Sobantu 1,000 young people gathered to demand the release of four members of the Sobantu Youth Organisation. They were eventually released into the custody of their parents.

In Durban more than 1,000 workers from Dunlop and Clover took to the street on Sydney Road to show their sympathy with the Sarmcol stay-away. This tactic initiated by Dunlop was to become crucial during the bread strike in Durban a few weeks later. In Umbilo Road approximately 500 workers from Hart Ltd., and the same number in Pinetown from CI Industries, also took to demonstrating in the street for an hour. A smaller march of 300 workers from City Metal Products occurred in Jacobs. In Machadodorp, about 400 Feralloys workers went on strike over their company's refusal to send a telex to Sarmcol demanding the reinstatement of their fellow workers. This resulted in the dismissal of all workers. MAWU negotiated their reinstatement but this has spilled over into a complex legal dispute over benefits and victimisation. In short, of MAWU's 65 factories in Southern Natal an approximate 80% demonstrated their support for BTR workers through stay-aways, marches, lunchtime demonstrations and stoppages, the latter ranging from half an hour to a full day at Henred Fruehauf.

In Mpophomeni itself, property belonging to scabs was set alight. As the water to the township was cut off two days earlier (allegedly to repair a pipe) the fire department from Howick could do nothing to save the house of one worker, and the police had to use the extinguishers on their vehicles. Mpophomeni mayor, Benjamin Ndlovu, said that he feared for an epidemic in the township - no warning had been given that the water would be cut off and no water tankers had been provided. Road blocks of old cars and shit from the township's bucket system used to cover the streets prevented police from entering the area. Police used teargas and as at the other townships they made use of air surveillance to monitor the activities in the township. At about 16h00 they withdrew from the township to the jeers of the inhabitants.

On Friday the "capital came back to life again." The PCI issued a strong statement in which the union was attacked for affecting the "lives of thousands of innocent people", and said that disruption "will not be tolerated in the future." Thirty-seven people appeared in the Vulindlela magistrate's court on charges relating to the stay-away. More people were to be charged later.

In Durban the bakery workers who had been on strike for a few days allowed the Red Cross to take some of the bread that had been baked but not delivered, for distribution to starvation areas as long as some of the bread went to Mpophomeni. MAWU was threatening to take the boycott to Pietermaritzburg, a step

that was decided upon after a joint MAWU-community organisations meeting on August 1. Whether because of the stay-away or because of the threatened consumer boycott, several people and organisations entered into a series of meetings to arrange negotiations and initiate discussions. However these attempts were abortive.

The effect of the stay-away on the white population of Pietermaritzburg and the business community was probably best captured by an editorial in the Daily News the day after the event:

> When a normally bustling Pietermaritzburg central business district and its industrial suburbs can be brought to a halt for a whole day by black workers demonstrating solidarity with the employees of a factory in another town, it is clearly a matter of significance...
> If there were any remaining doubts about the degree of organisation among black workers, they have now been dispelled. Those few employers who had still believed that the old order continued - that workers making unreasonable demands could simply be dismissed and replaced by others off the street - will now be revising their ideas.

On Thursday August 15, the boycott of white-owned shops in Pietermaritzburg started. This followed on an unsuccessful meeting between the union and Sarmcol management: Sarmcol was ready to consider re-employing only 50 of its dismissed workers. The boycott call had the support of the UDF, the Imbali Civic Association, FOSATU, CUSA (Council of Unions of South Africa), APDUSA and student organisations. Thousands of pamphlets entitled "Boycotts Harm You" were dropped over the townships surrounding Pietermaritzburg on Friday August 23. This had been drawn up by commercial and industrial organisations of employers in the city. By the end of the month the PCC claimed that surveys conducted by them had shown an average fall-off in turnover of black trade of between 60 and 70%.

A meeting called by FOSATU and addressed by its president, Chris Dlamini, was attended by 2,500 people at ELEC. Police teargassed marching and banner bearing youths both before and after the meeting. A call was made at the meeting for Sarmcol to enter into negotiations through the legal representatives of both parties. In short, the dispute has become a long, protracted battle affecting everybody in the Pietermaritzburg/Howick area.

Stay-away monitor

1. Since the stay-away was initiated by MAWU, and had been discussed within FOSATU and other union structures, the monitoring activity was aimed firstly, at ascertaining the effectiveness of the stay-away in factories organised by these unions. A list of firms organised by these, mainly FOSATU, unions was drawn up for this purpose. We had no idea that the action was to be so widespread.

   In addition we wanted to ascertain the extent to which the stay-away would affect other firms - those organised by TUCSA (Trade Union Council of South Africa) affiliates and other unions, and those at which there was no union presence. In order to draw a sample that would include these firms the manufacturing census for the Pietermaritzburg areas was used.

   This census gave a breakdown of 251 firms by sector. Statistics for the size of the workforce were unavailable, hence a one-third sample of firms was drawn on the basis of the number of establishments by sector.

Of the 82 firms in our sample eight were large stores organised by CCAWUSA (Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa); 41 were factories unionised by FOSATU and other of the original "unity unions"; and 33 were factories at which we had no prior knowledge of union activity. From the interviews, however, it was found that ten of these last-mentioned firms were unionised by TUCSA-affiliated or other unions.

Our data also indicated that a large proportion of bigger factories were included in the sample, and that African workers constituted a greater than expected proportion of the workforce. Both these "biases" are due to the initial decision to monitor mainly unity union organised firms.

An interview schedule was drawn up and administered telephonically - in nearly all cases on the afternoon of the stay-away, with a few being undertaken during the next morning.

For 13 plants there were no responses. There was no reply to eight of the 13 cases, probably indicating that the firm had closed for the day. At five of these firms management or clerical personnel refused to give any information.

Not all replies were given by management - in some cases managerial staff was involved in manual tasks - but clerical personnel volunteered information. The information was, therefore, not always detailed enough to allow comparison across the whole sample.

2. Out of the 66 replies we could gather that all firms had been affected. It made no difference whether the workforce was unionised or not, or whether the plant was small or large, or which sector it was located within.

   From the 66 firms 49 gave us the following information: that they employed 7,185 workers (this seemed to exclude managerial and administrative staff in all cases); of these workers 4,663 (or 65%) participated in the stay-away; of the participants 4,293 were Africans (in other words, 92% of those who actively participated in the stay-away were African workers); there was a near total stay-away of African workers.

   Obviously this display of worker solidarity meant that the city ground to a halt, and that in many cases workers who had not participated in the stay-away actively, were either sent home or were employed in peripheral tasks for the day.

   Seven of the 66 firms said that they had used "scab" labour (such as white scholars and students, as both schools and university students were on holiday at the time). This was only possible in those cases where unskilled tasks had to be performed, and largely restricted to commercial undertakings. Some firms attempted, through "internal reorganisation", to keep activity going: secretaries made tea, clerks did stacking, and so on.

3. The question "Why do you think that workers have not come to work?" drew a predictable response of "intimidation" in most cases (see Table 1 below). This claim must, however, be put in perspective. Firstly, there was a massive police and SADF presence in the townships around Pietermaritzburg, and assurances had been given by the police that buses would run and that workers who wanted to work would receive adequate protection. Secondly, the solidarity shown by the transport workers and taxi drivers meant that workers living in dormitory towns could not easily get to work in any case. Thirdly, sympathy was shown by many workers outside of Pietermaritzburg and even

outside of Natal. There was also an almost total closure of Indian-owned shops in the city itself, many displaying posters in support of the Sarmcol strikers. Finally, the strikers, their union, and support groups, had undertaken activity to publicise the plight of the dismissed workers, the reasons behind the strike, and the activities of Sarmcol management.

4. Two-thirds of the firms who responded to the question as to whether they had had prior warning about the stay-away, said that they had been informed by the workers or the union at their plant that they would participate in the stay-away.

TABLE 1: Why do you think the workers have not come to work?

Intimidation	25
sympathy/solidarity	9
no transport	8
intimidation and sympathy	5
don't know	2
intimidation and transport	2
decision between management and union	2
sympathy and transport	1
Total responses	54

TABLE 2: What do you think of SARMCOL management's handling of the strike?

no comment	36
don't know situation	8
handled well	9
it's their problem	5
should go to court	3
badly handled	2
Total responses	50

5. Only six of the 66 firms claimed that they would be paying workers who were away, but none said that they would be taking further action against absentee workers. The "no work, no pay" position was in line with that recommended by employers' organisations in Pietermaritzburg.

6. Most firms would not comment when asked about their attitude to the way in which SARMCOL management had been handling the strike (see table 2). Only two were willing to voice criticism over the phone.

Assessment

The Pietermaritzburg stay-away in support of the Sarmcol workers was in and of itself highly successful. It shut down the city. However so far the workers struggle against Sarmcol management has not been able to get the scabs out of the factory and the union in. As a result, it is necessary to consider the stay-away from a variety of perspectives.

One might start with the dispute itself. It concerned union recognition at a large factory and as such represents an issue on which workers elsewhere in South Africa have achieved signal success in conflict with management. The adamant refusal of Sarmcol to compromise significantly, despite the explosive political climate of the country in mid-1985, may reveal an assault by some firms to attempt to push back the gains of the emergent trade union movement. Many Pietermaritzburg firms contacted seemed reluctant to condemn Sarmcol, if not to actually approve its stand, in the very community where MAWU was born in 1973. Sarmcol is a subsidiary of a large British multi-national. In the context of the disinvestment issue and claims about the benevolence of foreign firms, it is very striking to note the actual performance of a British investor in South Africa, which has been eager to both reduce the size of its South African workforce in the interests of rationalisation and to destroy their chances of organising in a trade union.

The stay-away was a stage in a pattern of escalating activity on the part of MAWU. MAWU decided that the dispute was important enough, and the plight of the workers serious enough, to refuse to admit defeat following the failure of conventional trade union activities and to try through a range of creative tactics, to mobilise a community and to bring all kinds of unconventional pressure to bear as well as a boycott of white businesses in Pietermaritzburg following the failure of Sarmcol to negotiate seriously after the stay-away. They form a rich trove of experience for those who might be interested in following a similar line of attack. In other examples nationally, the most striking tactic along the lines of what we have observed has been the

consumer boycott of particular firms (eg. Simba Quix, Wilson Rowntrees, Fattis & Monis) but because Sarmcol does not manufacture consumer goods, this was ruled out. In the political climate of 1984-85, the stay-away has been a familiar, effective and available tactic.

Particularly remarkable was the mobilisation of community support by direct union activity. The ordinary members, apart from the organisers or even the shop stewards, took the initiative and campaigned extensively on their own behalf. In turn the Sarmcol issue and the workers' campaigns became the lever through which mass mobilisation became feasible in Pietermaritzburg. The core support has lain in Mpophomeni where a long history of callous treatment, relocation and resistance fed into the solidarity which the workers could tap.

There are two important issues that the dispute raises: Firstly, the company's use of scab labour, extremely bitter and divisive within communities where people are desperate for work. Fights between scabs and union members resulted in deaths, injuries, the destruction of houses and the arrest and imprisonment of workers. This, and other incidents, fed into the tension, further exacerbated by police presence. Despite all their efforts, the Sarmcol workers have not been able to prevent scabs from taking up jobs with the company, in some cases from among those men who have previously been retrenched. The second issue is the disparity in the responses of African & Indian workers. The stay-away was more successful among the African workers and while the communities mobilised around the issue, the Indian townships remained relatively untouched. While this reflects the apartheid strategy of dividing communities, it also indicates the unevenness of organising initiatives. Most Indian workers are in TUCSA organised industries and have thus remained outside of the sphere of the progressive unions. Community and political organisations on the other hand have been unable to filter down to residents and have thus made no significant impact in the Indian townships. The implications of this for Sarmcol's just under 100 striking Indian workers was that while their African comrades had the support of their immediate community, they were somewhat isolated in their township of Howick West where the community of clerks, professionals and relatively fewer workers remained unsupportive of their situation.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the stay-away has been

organisational. It marks another chapter in the development of relations between trade unions and community organisations more broadly in movements of resistance in South Africa. During the past year, the November, 1984 stay-away on the Rand marked an unprecedented degree of co-operation, particularly noteworthy between the original unity talks unions and youth organisations. By contrast, the history of stay-away action in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage in early 1985 was deeply riven by conflict reflecting a long history of problems in that area. In Pietermaritzburg, an intermediate situation occurred although the model is much closer to the Rand. Workers and youth co-operated well although there were contrasting views of organisational structure and politics between the United Democratic Front and MAWU.

Although the UDF and related organisations in the end supported the stay-away and committed their resources to it, by their own account, this followed a month of tension. For one thing, the UDF believed that its own relationship to the community demanded an earlier consulation, direct involvement in the planning, and use as the main channel of communication with the township communities. By contrast, MAWU's view was that the stay-away represented one stage in the union's struggle against Sarmcol. The direct union initiative coupled with the MAWU view that the dispute concerned the union fundamentally whilst the place of community groups lay in supporting union-made decisions, disturbed the UDF. The UDF views events such as the stay-away as an exercise in mobilising and educating people. They wanted the specific dispute to form only one in a series of broad political demands. However, in the union's view this meant abandoning the chance of actually getting the workers back to their jobs and the union into the factory. Had a broad issue stance been taken, Sarmcol management could easily have washed their hands of the protest. For the UDF, which is concerned with both the symbolic meaning and the broader content of community issues, this was less important. It reflect their belief that workers' rights will only be won in South Africa in the context of a general political democratisation. MAWU was ready to accept the logic of this position. Said one union leader: "We were not opposed to co-operating with other organisations on a broader campaign. This was not though, the issue we approached them on. We wanted to separate the two issues. If they wanted to initiate a broader campaign, we could discuss it."

This was in fact potentially the situation of the consumer boy-

cott which was proclaimed on August 15 and which lasted until September 27. It focused on the Sarmcol issue. There was talk, however, of expanding the issues on a variety of national demands, such as the end of the state of emergency, release of detainees, etc., thus following much more typically the perspective of community and populist organisations. After initial success in mobilising African consumers, it was called off after failing to achieve its objectives in pressurising the PCI and PCC to force Sarmcol to negotiate seriously.

Generally speaking, one can say that the intervention of MAWU and the Sarmcol workers into the terrain of community activist politics and the usual habitat of other organisations was not without tension. However, youth organisations in the African townships, including those affiliated to the UDF, helped enthusiastically to organise the stay-away. The union felt very positive about its relations with these groups, and to other non-union organisations such as APDUSA, which strongly backed stay-away activities. The mobilisation exercise owed its complete success to such support. It succeeded in keeping the whole campaign to a working class issue while retaining wide popular enthusiasm and effectiveness. On the appropriate forms of resistance in particular situations in South Africa, the lessons from the Pietermaritzburg Sarmcol workers' struggle are significant but ambiguous, as the UDF's critique and MAWU's retort highlights.

Endnotes:

The first part - economic background - was constructed from Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Industries Report and Membership Lists (1984); useful here has also been the Surplus People Project's vol 4 which focuses on the Natal side of Forced Removals in SouthAfrica, 1983, pp 70-83; also a "Brief history of Sarmcol and the Mpophomeni area", project by Sached was consulted. Press reports from the Echo & Natal Witness were utilised on the rent strikes and bus boycotts.

The second part was primarily reconstructed through memoranda and documents on the dispute by MAWU and BTR Sarmcol. On a brief comment about prior trade union activity at Howick see K Luckhardt and B Wall's Organise or Starve: the History of SACTU, London, 1981. This material was supplemented through interviews with MAWU officials, Sarmcol shop stewards and press reports:

- Sarmcol -

for the latter we utilised the Echo, Natal Witness, Natal Mercury, Daily News, Sunday Tribune and Sunday Times.

The assessments and conclusions were drawn from discussions with MAWU, UDF, APDUSA, CUSA and people on the support group. (The CUSA representative in Pietermaritzburg, Norman Middleton, at first disavowed the stay-away in the press although, following its success he gave it support in an interview. It is not clear from the monitor how CUSA workers responded to the stay-away specifically.)

MAWU "Egg Campaign"

It is now seven months since the Sarmcol workers were locked out by management following a strike over basic trade union rights. Since then doctors working in the area have drawn attention to the high rate of malnutrition especially amongst the children. MAWU has appealed for donations inorder to provide eggs - which are high in protein - for the strikers' families. R20,00 will provide eggs for a family of six for three months.

Send donations to: "Egg Campaign", MAWU, Central Court, 125 Gale Street, Durban.

REVIEW: Up Against the Fences

H Giliomee and L Schlemmer (eds), Up against the fences: poverty, passes and privilege in South Africa, Cape Town, 1985. (A collection of some 27 contributions from 20 authors, drawn from universities, capital and the Urban Foundation); R17,95.

> If not challenged at its root, and not merely in its legislative form, the inevitable outcome of protracted operation of the influx control and labour allocation system will be to divide further and disorganise the african working class, and thereby delay the process of progressive change in South Africa.*
>
> Let me reiterate, it is of the greatest importance from the viewpoint of the private sector that the form of urbanisation be related to our free-enterprise values and goals.
> (A H Rosholt, executive chairperson, Barlow Rand, p228)

These two quotations probably capture the concerns that underlie two approaches to the abolition of the influx control system. The first sees it in terms of the effect on the working class and the direction and pace of progressive change in South Africa. The second, on the other hand, reflects concerns within a specific sector of capital in contemporary South Africa.

The book by Giliomee and Schlemmer is concerned to point out the effects of the present system of influx control for the state and for capital. It suggests that there are other options that will not pose a threat to the interests of either, and that these options lie in the direction of "managed" or "controlled urbanisation" (terms that increasingly feature in the state's own presentation of its planning goals). The working class, struggle and power relations are remarkably absent from just about all contributions to this volume. In their stead we have terms such as control, management, cost effectiveness, expertise, technology, innovators and low wages, as the guiding concepts.

The book is specifically a political intervention with a set of

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* D Hindson and M Lacey, "Influx control and labour allocation: policy and practice since the Riekert Commission", in South African Review Volume One, Johannesburg, 1983.

recommendations arising from the suggestions that conclude nearly all contributions. Therefore this is the level at which it has to be discussed. In other words, I will limit myself in the main to comments on some broad recurring themes in the book. Up against the fences attempts a "social cost-benefit analysis" of influx control and concludes that "adjustments to the policy to make it more flexible and attuned to the varying needs of individuals are surely the minimum which is required". (My emphasis; Schlemmer, p332.) The same suggestion of a "realistic" alternative ("the minimum which is required") is put forward later, where the interests of conservative whites and of capitalists dictate the policy alternative. (p348) The costs and benefits being evaluated are largely from the perspective of whites, capital and the state (monopoly capital and a "reformist state"). (eg. see pp332, 102, 101, 17)

Dual economy

Influx control measures are mostly presented by the various authors and by the editors as effective/ineffective steps (depending on the specific argument being advanced at the time) taken by the state to prevent, or give a specific spatial orientation to an inevitable, universal, "rational" and "natural" process of urbanisation. Urbanisation is defined as "the world transition from regions dominated by rural settlements to regions dominated by urban centres... the inevitable product of a particular set of circumstances created by the political economy as a whole, and evidenced in the differential nature of urban and rural life-chances". (Bernstein, p86) These "life-chances", are in the South African case, the result of a "dual economy" - or, in the case of Nattrass, "three rather than two interlinked and dependent segments". (p16) Terms such as "core economy", "periphery", "sending areas", "Third World problems/standards/countries", "modern sector", "dualistic character of the economy", and many more abound. Variants of the dual economy approach are frequently found in literature on South Africa, but what deserves comment in this case is the near total lack of an historical examination of the exploitative links that have existed and still do exist, between the "core" and the "periphery". It is simply written off in most cases, as "being in no ways remarkable" except that in the South African instance it has been fixed in legislation. (Schlemmer p325)

This unproblematic treatment of the origins and maintenance of the relationship between the bantustans, and the state and capital, allows urbanisation to be seen as "natural", with a "labour

surplus" being attracted by the "magnet" of the industrial economy, with a "succession of never-ending targets commensurate with the raised expectations" of the contemporary period providing the push. (Nattrass, pp33-4; Bernstein, p90) It should be noted that the contributions by Greenberg and Giliomee, and by Wilson, do not deserve this criticism. It is therefore not surprising that within this scheme it should be the "risk-takers", the "modernisers" and the "innovators" that should leave to become "permanent target workers", and who should first (or mainly) "develop novel expectations and tastes for modern goods", thus perpetuating the "underdevelopment" of the bantustans.

It is in passing that the benefits of the migrant labour system to capital are mentioned. Moller mentions it, (p28) while Greenberg and Giliomee state that the "homelands no longer cheapen labour, facilitate the extraction of surplus value, or further accumulation in this narrow sense". (p69) However, they fail to expand on how in a "wider sense" capital accumulation is furthered! In a similar way, Bernstein concedes that employers "did identify advantages for themselves in the migrant labour system", but she fails to give any detail of the "significant" and "increasing" costs of the system that the same capitalists are said to be now aware of. (p95) Moller and Schlemmer, write that "it would therefore appear that rural resources are not necessarily forthcoming in old age, contrary to the popular assumptions on which the migrant labour system is based", (p164) while "labour exploitation", gets a mention in a footnoted reference to John Rex. (Schlemmer, p190) What is more often found in the various contributions is an examination of state "policy motivations" for maintaining influx control, totally autonomous from any other interests involved. (p341) There is no consideration that the system might still serve to depress demands that could be made on the "modern" economy; to "cheapen" labour even if there is no longer the "justification" of supplementary, if not subsistence, production in the bantustans.

A cheap solution and low wages

The "private sector" is called upon to "play a leading part in ensuring that the needed economic and political reforms are instituted" as the resolution of the "poverty problem" will "only be achieved through a massive effort". Even if, as is suggested, capital has been convinced of the need to tackle this problem, the question arises as to whether a "massive effort" would not serve

to scare off even the most philanthropic and long-sighted of capitalists? They are quickly reassured - "While wholesale agricultural reform is clearly beyond the scope of private enterprise and the charitable individual, there is a great deal that can be achieved on a fairly small scale". (Nattrass, p26)

That is the rural end. What about the houses and facilities that are going to have to be provided for the new arrivals in the urban areas if influx control is to be lifted, relaxed, or adapted? There is unanimity on this point, as far as I could establish: "It will... not be feasible to plan and administer all future urban developments according to First World concepts, patterns and standards. The only way to bring housing within reach of most blacks in the short term is to alter standards and thereby decrease the supply-cost of housing and infrastructure". (Smit, p115) Smit, however, does admit on the next page that whites set the frame of reference for housing and this might lead to political problems; Bernstein points out that four in ten residents in favelas "built their own homes", and that, furthermore, these people "contributed to the economy in terms of consumption as well" (p88); Schlemmer, in his discussion and advocacy of aiding "squatter" communities, mentions advantages of lower rents, supplementary economic activities, and "access to free water, firewood and wild vegetables". The idyll of rural life that occupied such a central place in the justification for low wages until fairly recently, is now to be replaced with the simple but pleasant semi-urban version. (pp180-1)

Further examples of the benefits to profitable production appear in many of the articles in this volume. For example, Relly, Anglo American chairperson, (pp299-300) who makes unions the potential scapegoat in the continued maintenance of influx control, in that they would benefit from the artificial labour shortage that is said to be created through selective admission to urban areas - a point that is also supported by the editors. (p342) Capital, on the other hand, is said to have the "national" interest at heart in wanting to move the industrial reserve army to the urban areas: "...we should recognise that workers who would increase their income at the expense of national economic growth are sacrificing their future well-being" (referring to the "privileged", unionised workers already in industrial areas). Relly argues that while the "homelands" would benefit from a decrease in population, industry would also benefit as "by far the largest and cheapest increase in productivity is that which takes place when an individ-

ual moves from subsistence underemployment to industrial employment, even in the humblest of capacities". (p300) Chapter 27, which is not attributed to any author and can thus be assumed to carry the approval of, if not written by, the editors, takes this cheap labour argument to an absurd conclusion in an attempt to expand the base of support for the lifting of influx control. It is argued that "white householders" should also add their voice as it is this group "who could recover the luxury of cheap domestic labour if influx control were to be lifted completely". (p344) Cheap facilities, cheap labour, and the undercutting of trade union power is the clearly stated motivation being offered to the readership.

How this argument ties in with the necessary rider (for alleviating white and state fears) that very few Africans will actually move into the industrial areas, is not clear. Surely the argument could as easily be advanced that if the population that would urbanise is already there illegally, this insecure status would predispose them to take lower paid jobs, accept poorer facilities, and remain out of trade unions?

If capitalists are not convinced by the short-term advantages that would accompany the lifting of influx control, then the longer-term safeguard against unrest that would flow from the abolition of the migrant labour system is offered. It is not only officials of the state who fear "the hordes at the gates" (p343), but capital should also be aware that migrants' "continued support of the capitalist system" is at issue. (Schlemmer, p331; see also Nattrass, pp26, 27; Bernstein, p101; Relly, p296) At the same time, while the continuation of influx control is perceived as a threat to "free enterprise", and "...it is of the greatest importance from the viewpoint of the private sector that the form of urbanisation be related to our free enterprise values and goals" (Rosholt, pp284, 288) - the values and goals of free enterprise are profits and stability, even if it is left unstated.

Control and stability

Of fundamental importance to most of the contributors is the maintenance of control, even while what is being advocated would seem to be the lifting of control. Thus, a central reason for the abolition of the system is that it "endenger(s) a disrespect for the law". (Steyn, p.ix) Nattrass wants to avoid the "rural crisis" spilling over into the towns (pp25-6); Bernstein repeats the warning about "disrespect for the law" (the Urban Foundation line?)

(pp100, 332); Schlemmer warns against "potential social and labour instability", (p156) and (with Moller) points out that shack dwelling has blunted "the edge of political discontent" (p156); while Giliomee (p311) takes up the idea of "safety valves", mentioned earlier by Schlemmer. (p167)

However, in case the reader (fairly conservative and white, with an interest in maintaining a specific kind of stability) gets the wrong idea from the numerous repetitions of the themes of stability/instability and control/chaos (for example, pp331, 332, 66-7, 113, 145, 149, 151, 167, 298, 301, 320, 328, 285, 295, 336, 347), there is the reassurance that while "squatters" "are not conservative people... yet, they are as little concerned with the vote as migrants (and less concerned than rural people), and give an indication of relatively masked political consciousness". (Schlemmer, p186) A further reassurance, made much of in reviews in the commercial press, is that only a minority would "urbanise".(p36)

It is asserted, therefore, that the state can make the lifting of the existing form of influx control a "vital component in any serious reform strategy in South Africa". (Bernstein, p101) This is an important component in the reform process as the "politicised middle-class people" (exactly those at whom the strategy is aimed, or is aimed at creating) feel these restrictions to be "an injury to their personal dignity and worth". (pp107, 332)

The idea of control extends to the way in which "urbanisation" is presented, namely as a technical or rational solution to a technical problem. As Bernstein writes: "It is essentially a rational process, and as such is amenable to influence by policy intervention", (pp89, 100) demanding "a positive problem-solving approach from both government and the private sector", (Godsell, p307) to ensure a capitalist urbanisation strategy.

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A few further comments need to be made. For example, the remarkable conclusion to Giliomee's first contribution ("The changing political functions of the homelands") needs to be pointed out - remarkable in the way in which the argument advanced in the first half breaks, (on p52) with a new set of "functions" with the coming to power of P W Botha. Up to that point the article had discussed the bantustan policy as "safeguarding white rule"; providing a political outlet for blacks" (with no "transfer of real power"); "deflecting international pressure"; and serving "a

rather more mundane, if not grim, function" of "dumping grounds". (pp46-50) The new "functions", however, are mild enough to allow Giliomee to write that, "with courageous political leadership the homelands could still become important elements in a more just, stable federal state. Socially the homelands have had an important impact on white South Africa as discrimination-free zones, which stand as an indictment of the racist practices in the rest of the country". (p56) Was it with Inkatha and Chief Buthelezi in mind that bannings, beatings and killings, detentions, ethnic mobilisation, should all have been ignored to allow such a conclusion? Rather the most important "social" impact that the bantustans have probably had on white South Africans has been to allow them to gamble and engage in other activities illegal in the rest of South Africa, while the excesses of Sebe and others have served to reinforce many a racial prejucice among whites.

Giliomee need only have referred to material in this book of which he is co-editor (such as pp63, 262), or even in his own further contributions (for example, pp310, 82, 69), where he describes the "nightmare" of the "homelands", "characterised by utter destitution and administrative disintegration" to have shown the inappropriateness of his conclusions.

On the other hand the contribution co-authored by Giliomee and Greenberg ("Managing influx control from the rural end: the black homelands and the underbelly of privilege") is probably the most interesting and useful article in the collection, offering a rare insight into the working and failure of the bureaucratic system that exists to enforce labour migration.

The contribution by Philip Smit stands out for a different reason. The conclusion by the deputy director of the HSRC (and advisor of the Prime Minister?) strikes a pessimistic note that somewhat sours the general excitement about the benefits of lifting influx control measures. Smit writes (p125) that "popular aspirations raised by urbanisation processes would tend to outrun the capacity of the political system to supply them" - but then he had admitted that "our knowledge of urban blacks is sadly inadequate". (p117)

Euphemisms (or the language of orthodox social science) abound in some contributions. For example, the effect on migrancy of the collapse of practically all subsistence production in the bantustans is described as a move from "intermittent target work" to "permanent oscillation" or "permanent urban target work". This

oscillation is undertaken by a migrant who "is someone whose circumstances propel him to seek a material complement to his subsistence base by working in the city". (Schlemmer and Moller, pp 126, 127, 129) In amongst these phrases it comes as a surprise to find reference to "a kind of lumpenproletariat", a term that is surely somewhat out of context here. (pp134, 178) The language of "science" extends to the standard presentation of the attitude surveys on which much of the planning and solutions are based: "...intensive investigation, using trained black interviewers, who held anonymous personal interviews on the basis of pre-prepared schedules among carefully selected samples... The studies have been conducted by the author and colleagues in the Centre for Applied Social Sciences at the University of Natal, sometimes in collaboration with the market-research firm IMSA (Pty) Ltd., which has a full-time professional team of trained interviewers with considerable experience". (Schlemmer p105; and pp129, 171 where practically the same incantation is used) The reference by Gavin Maasdorp to the existence of "less political uncertainty" in Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth (compared to East London) was unfortunate, coming as it did so soon before the killings in Langa (outside Uitenhage) on Sharpeville day. (p232)

My overall evaluation of the volume is that it has little information or argument to offer that has not been written about elsewhere in greater detail (often by the same authors). The significance of the appearance of this specific collection of articles, and the timing of its appearance, should rather be sought elsewhere. I have suggested that it lies in the interests it overtly serves and the specific intervention it wants to make in this time of "reform" to ensure a specific input into the planning of that "reform" process. It is noteworthy that according to the references (pp356-65) not one author made use of any article that has appeared in the SALB, to take but one obvious example. The interests are those of capitalism, concerned with maintaining (or re-establishing) high profit rates and control over the political direction of South Africa. The existing influx control measures have become dysfunctional to both those concerns (as they are interpreted by some representatives of large-scale capital), and where they still exist they irritate and build up resentment. Instead, new measures of control and deflection are being suggested, both as "safety valves" and as cheap (and therefore profitable) solutions.

(Gerhard Mare, 1985)

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Statistics and Economic Notes for Trade Unions

The statistics and economic data given below were prepared by the Labour Research Service of SALDRU, University of Cape Town. It is hoped that we will be able to provide this kind of information on a regular basis in future.

1. Inflation - latest information is for September 1985:

	Consumer Price Index (1980=100) Sept 1985	Annual rate of inflation (% increase over one year) Sept 1985
Cape Town	197.2	15.9
Port Elizabeth	191.9	15.9
East London	184.4	12.1
Durban	201.1	16.4
Pietermaritzburg	200.2	17.6
Witwatersrand	197.6	17.1
Vaal Triangle	202.3	16.6
Pretoria	201.8	16.5
Klerksdorp	189.6	14.2
Bloemfontein	189.4	14.3
OFS Goldfields	203.3	16.9
Kimberley	191.1	16.8
SOUTH AFRICA	197.8	16.6

In September 1985, the rate of inflation reached 16,6%. Prices are now rising faster than they have for fifty years. These high prices are destroying the buying power of workers' wages.

2. Inflation forecast

Bank economists predict an average rate of inflation for 1985 of about 15,5%. That is, in December 1985 they expect that the Consumer Price Index will be about 15,5% above its level in December 1984. Some economists expect that the annual rate of inflation will fall in 1986. But even they believe that it will still remain above 13%. Other economists say that inflation will stay above 15% and might even reach 20%.

- statistics -

SALDRU forecasts for the CPI (South Africa) and the annual rate of inflation until January 1986 are as follows:

	CPI	Annual rate of inflation
October 1985	200.0	16.4%
November 1985	202.1	16.1%
December 1985	203.9	16.4%
January 1986	206.7	16.7%

In other words, SALDRU anticipates that annual wage agreements that are now being negotiated to raise wages from January 1986 need to provide for an increase of about 16,7% just to keep up with inflation.

3. Wage settlements

Most unions are signing wage agreements that do not compensate workers for the erosion of their buying power due to inflation. In several cases, most notably in the building industry nation-wide, unions have agreed to a "wage freeze". The workers will get no wage rise for at least a year.

As prices rise every day, workers are receiving less for their work than before. In real terms, most workers will earn less in December this year than they did at the start of the year.

This fall in workers' real wages and in their standard of living has been going on now for three years. The signs are that things will get still worse. 44 new wage clauses for labourers came into effect under wage determinations and industrial council agreements between July and September. 41 of these wage clauses did not keep up with inflation. In some cases, real minimum wages fell by more than 13%.

The Barclays Bank Review has confirmed its earlier hopes that "wage and salary increases this year will be far lower than the expected inflation rate". At present, the bosses are making the working class pay for the recession by cutting wages.

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

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- Contributions to the Bulletin must not exceed the following lengths:

Analytical articles	8000 words
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