

# **SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN**

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of African Trade Unions.**

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(The views expressed in the articles are not necessarily those of the editorial board).

COMMENT.1. WE WELCOME .....

- \* The Government's decision to scrap the Masters and Servants laws,
- \* The United Party's decision to support the policy of full trade union rights for all South Africans,
- \* TUCSA's decision to open its ranks to all south african trade unions, and,
- \* Anglo - American's decision in principle to recognise african unions.

Even four swallows do not a summer make, and some of these swallows have yet to fly. As is stated in the TUACC statement printed below, the real problem for african trade unions remains their relationship on the practical level with individual, registered trade unions. And employers so far have proved more ready to recognise the principle of trade union rights for Africans than to recognise the african trade unions organising in their own factories. But yet these decisions are signs of a gradual civilising of this dark corner of the dark continent.

"The Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council which represents the five unregistered unions in Natal with a total membership of 14 200 workers, together with the National Union of Clothing Workers in the Transvaal with a membership of 21 000 workers:-

believe that the inclusion or non-inclusion into TUCSA of unregistered unions is not the fundamental problem faced by the workers of South Africa. The real problem lies in the present and future relationship of individual unions in TUCSA with the existing unregistered unions. We call on TUCSA to convene a special conference to examine the present area of operation of registered and unregistered trade unions in the same industries with special regard to resolving any differences that do exist, and also to evolve a joint strategy towards the Industrial Council and employers in general.

In the interim we call on TUCSA unions not to enter into any Industrial Council Agreement without first having consulted and reached prior agreement with the unregistered unions in the same industries."

2. WORK AND PROPERTY.

The recent spate of 'Land Deal Probes' in the press has concentrated on trying to discover where certain individuals got the information which enabled them to make enormous profits through

land speculation. But it is also worth reflecting on the size of the profits made.

One headline states that "Bester stands to clear R66m" on land deals associated with Iscor developments in the Newcastle area. The same firm is reported to have bought land in Richards Bay for R625 000 which it will shortly be able to resell for R7m. There are reports of a farm at Saldanha Bay bought for R65 000 and almost immediately resold for R300 000; of a town site in Newcastle appreciating from R60 000 to R300 000 as a result of planning changes; of farm land bought for R200 per acre which, once it has been reclassified for township development is worth up to R12 000 for a third of an acre.

Commenting on the allegations that many land purchases had resulted from illegally acquired information, Dr. M. D. Marais, a director of Iscor, said, "I am still a great supporter of the capitalist society. I believe that you must work for your money and not in ways or means which are unacceptable to the community. We cannot tolerate anything of that nature in either the public or the private sector".

That people should work for their money is a good principle. But a textile worker earning R15.00 per week earns R30 000 in a working life of about 30 years; rather less than is 'earned' in perhaps as many minutes by the owner of an acre of land as a result of a planning decision made by the community. Whether the profit is made by a speculator who has bought an option as a result of obtaining information, or whether it goes to the original owner, the principle is still the same. The value of the land has increased as a result of a community decision. The fruits go to an individual who has done no work to warrant it.

Because these vast prices are usually paid by public bodies with seemingly inexhaustible funds there seems to be something magical about the money. Like a win on the footballs, the money seems to be conjured out of nowhere. But money is what you can buy with it. If somebody is gaining R66m profit, that unearned money is a lien on R66m worth of goods that workers have made by working. If somebody who has done no work is getting the goods, those who have done the work are not getting them.

And if the goods are not there the result is inflation. Workers striking for higher wages are accused of fuelling inflation. But the biggest wave of strikes which South Africa has ever seen, in Durban last year, cost industry some R5m a year in wages. This would seem to pale into insignificance next to the profits from land speculation. Yet land speculation of this sort can easily be controlled by legislation. It results only when private individuals are placed in a privileged position as a result of public planning and zoning decisions. There are many ways in which this could be ended. One way is to place a 100% tax on all extra values



which result from planning decisions. Another way, which would probably have a more direct and desirable impact on rents and the cost of living, would be the municipalisation of all building land.

The fact is that in the face of unearned incomes like these, it cannot be expected that workers will place any limits on their wage demands. Nor can workers be expected to believe that they have some sort of moral duty to work harder. In Britain, the Labour Government's 'Social Contract', stupidly mocked in our press, flows from an understanding of just this point. In a society where there is no visible relation between work and reward, everybody is going to try to get what they can for themselves, and to hell with inflation. Only if the grosser inequalities, resulting purely from property ownership rather than work, can be done away with, are the workers likely to be willing to co-operate in restraining wage demands.

Whether the Labour Government can in fact produce satisfactory reforms remains to be seen. In South Africa such a situation is still not even on the horizon. Apart from property speculation, property ownership is a major and unquestioned source of income for the most privileged group. In a recent paper a natal economist made the following estimates of the relation between wage incomes and property incomes for South Africans of the different race groups:

For Africans	property income	is	19%	of	work	income,
For Asians	property	income	is	67%	of	work
For Coloureds	property	income	is	12%	of	work
For Whites	property	income	is	119%	of	work

That means that Whites as a group get more of their income from the property they own than from the work that they do. And even within the white group, property ownership is highly concentrated. It becomes a little difficult to tell workers that they have a duty to 'society' to work harder.

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### 3. THE ICU.

The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union was the first and the biggest of the open trade unions in South Africa. Founded in Cape Town in 1919 by Clements Kadalie, it soon absorbed a number of other nascent worker organisations in other centres, and became a national organisation. During and after the first world war, there was a rapid expansion of industry, and of the industrial work-force. The ICU satisfied a need amongst these workers for a new kind of organisation, and it grew rapidly. When it reached its high point in 1927 it was by far the largest worker organisation in South Africa, with a membership variously estimated at from

100 000 to 250 000. Whatever its paid-up membership, its following was huge. It began to broaden its attention from problems of the work-place to other matters affecting its black members, such as influx control and land shortage in the reserves. It became a mass black political movement as well as a trade union, but at the same time became embroiled in political disputes. Internally it was weakened by conflicts between communists and anti-communists. Faced with increasing threats from the state it found itself torn between policies aimed at conciliating employers and the state, and militant policies aimed at maintaining the support of the workers.

By 1927 the strains were already beginning to tell. It had also probably expanded too fast for its own good, and organisational weaknesses were developing. These were made worse by personal conflicts, particularly between Kadalie and the Natal leader A.W.G. Champion. There were also financial problems, resulting partly from the poverty of the members, and partly from lack of training and sometimes the dishonesty of the officials. In 1929 the ICU, with the backing of its new British advisor, William Ballinger, sacked Kadalie. But the only result of this was to split the union even further. By 1930 it had splintered into a number of separate regional organisations of declining strength and influence. Kadalie himself kept a section alive in East London until 1950.

The ICU gave many African and coloured workers their first experience of workers' organisation. It helped to found a tradition of worker militancy. As such, it is very important to understand both its achievements and its failings. Conditions are in many ways different from those in the 1920, yet the main problems which faced the ICU then are once more facing the African trade unions today. These include problems of organisational strategy, as well as questions of organisational efficiency. Should African workers organise on an industrial basis or in one general union? How should unions handle the complex question of the relation between the problems of the work-place and the problems of politics? How can problems of corruption, inefficiency and leadership conflict be avoided?

As a contribution to this debate, this number of the South African Labour Bulletin, is devoted largely to the ICU. We reprint some original ICU documents, and later statements by two of the leading figures in the organisation, Champion and Kadalie, and two articles which discuss specific aspects of the ICU.

We would particularly like to thank Mrs. Eva Kadalie for permission to reprint the last chapter of her husband's autobiography, "My Life and the ICU" (published by Frank Cass and Co., London 1970).

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CHAMPION, THE ICU AND THE PREDICAMENT OF AFRICAN  
TRADE UNIONS.

Trade unions emerged in the early stages of european industrialisation out of the 'spontaneous' attempts by workers to bargain collectively with their employers. The primary purpose of these unions was to maintain and raise wages by limiting competition between workers, preventing undercutting, and applying organised pressure on employers. The trade union is the means whereby the workers can combine to exercise some power over their lives. Through their representatives they can bargain with management. By pooling their limited individual funds they can employ full-time organisers and can equip themselves with the necessary information to bargain more effectively with management. The ultimate weapon the worker has in collective bargaining is the right to withdraw his labour, that is to strike, which if it is to be effective, includes the right to picket.

The usual pattern of growth of trade unions in the early stages of capitalist industrialisation is that a small section of the working class - usually craft unions of skilled workers - use the apprenticeship system to create and maintain their scarcity value. This group are sometimes referred to as a 'labour aristocracy' to emphasise the wide gap within the working class. We find that the classical period of the labour aristocrat in british capitalism was the last half of the nineteenth century, when a group of workers emerged who were able to make their labour artificially scarce by restricting entry to their trade. However, the development of capitalism was to diminish their relative scarcity. In particular, the more they increased their wages in relation to unskilled workers, the more economical it was for employers to introduce mechanization techniques needing less-skilled workers, thereby rendering the skilled craftsmen redundant. At a certain point the material interests of the craftsmen change, and, to prevent being undercut by cheaper, less skilled labour, they now have an interest in raising the wages of these workers. According to H.A. Turner, "An important motive in the expansion of the (British) Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) downwards from skilled engineering mechanics, to recruit lower-skilled engineering operatives, was that the standards of the former were threatened by the lower wages of the latter and by the increasing technical possibility of replacing skilled by less-skilled labour"(1). The consequence was that the differential between skilled and unskilled wages was narrowed, but it was done by raising the wages of the unskilled workers, without harming the position of the skilled. We find therefore, that this 'labour aristocracy' began to merge, at the beginning of the century, into the broader trade union movement incorporating the unskilled section of the british working class.

In South Africa the process began in a similar way. The idea of a trade union was introduced from Britain by skilled workers recruited to the diamond and gold mines in the late nineteenth century. They were essentially craft unions, as being skilled was virtually synonymous with being 'white'. In these early decades of industrialization intense and bitter industrial conflict took place between employers, particularly the mine-owners, and the

white workers before the latter were able to win recognition for their trade unions. The problem of large differentials, especially in the face of rising mining costs, soon began to encourage employers to attempt to replace these workers with less-skilled workers. The high water mark in this struggle was the bloody and protracted strike in 1922 on the Witwatersrand, when the mine-owners tried to cut their gold mining costs by reducing the number of highly paid workers (white) and replacing some of them with Africans. The white workers resisted this attempt by going on strike. The army was called in to crush the strike. The demands that the white workers had failed to achieve through strike action were won at the polls in the 1924 General Elections, when the Smuts Government was defeated by a coalition of Labour Party and the afrikaner National Party under General Hertzog. It was this government which was to introduce the Industrial Conciliation Act which excluded Africans from the collective bargaining process and secured a virtual monopoly of highly paid skilled jobs for the white worker. Thus the usual pattern of development was distorted by the fact that whites had exclusive access to political power and they were able to use the issue of race to entrench their position of privilege.

What had happened was that race had been used in the wider conflict between labour and capital. The white worker, rather than identify himself with a working class overwhelmingly consisting of what he had been taught to believe as an 'inferior' race, preferred the rather reluctant acceptance he had been given at the lower ranks of white society. Within white society class conflict has been substituted for class collaboration and although sharp inequalities remain within white society, white workers have been able to benefit in a wider way from the exploitation of cheap black labour.

Thus if 1922 was the decisive point in the conflict between white labour and the mine-owners, it also marks the terminal point in the parting of the ways of the white and african worker.

It was against this background of antagonistic, white labour activity, that black labour protest emerged after the First World War. Faced with rapid inflation and an average wage for unskilled workers of 2/- to 2/6 per day, african workers began to act spontaneously in defence of their interests. In 1918, 152 'bucket boy' sanitation workers struck for a small rise in pay. In 1920, 40 000 mine-workers went on strike. An abortive attempt at organising african workers into the Industrial Workers of Africa was made by a group of white socialists in Johannesburg. In Bloemfontein Selby Msimang, an african politician, turned his energies to african labour.

The catalyst for the first successful african trade union was the apparently chance meeting in Cape Town between Clements Kadalie and a sympathetic white socialist, Batty. In January 1919 it was



decided to form a union with the name Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU). Support for the ICU grew when, contrary to an understanding with the white trade union, white workers scabbed on an african dock-workers' strike in Cape Town. In 1920 a conference of black trade unions was held in Bloemfontein and Kadalie put forward a new constitution for the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa (ICWU) as a nation-wide union. The purpose of the new organisation was to:

"bring together all classes of labour, skilled and unskilled, in every sphere of life whatsoever.... to obtain and maintain equitable rates of wages and reasonable conditions of labour, to regulate the relations between employer and employed and to endeavour to settle differences between them by amicable and conciliatory means, and to promote co-operation, insurance, sick and out of work benefits and old-age pension".

Although from the very beginning the delegates made clear that they rejected 'political' action in favour of conventional trade union activities, the peculiar position of the african worker, doubly exploited both because of his class and because of his colour, made such a distinction difficult in practice. "Let us realise that we are oppressed, firstly as a race, and secondly as workers", Mahabeni told delegates to the 'non-european' TUC in 1942. "If this were not the case we would not have to put up so bitter a struggle for recognition of our trade unions". Sheridan Johns has summed it up in these words:

"From the first national meeting of the black trade unions in Bloemfontein, it was clear that the leaders of the discontented black workers did not merely want wage increases. They questioned not only the practices of white business and the protectionism of white trade unionism, but also challenged the network of government-supported measures which held the black, particularly Africans, at the bottom of the economic pyramid. The claim of the ICU to represent all black workers, not merely Africans or Coloureds, gave it a potential base of support greater than that of other black organisations which appealed to the numerically small middle-class elements of one black racial group. Any sustained effort to realize the programme of the ICU seemed bound to transgress the apolitical limits which the union had imposed upon itself" (2)

This was, and remains, the predicament of african trade unions - in order to achieve the aims of a conventional trade union, they are drawn into the political arena. (Of course, in a sense, all industrial relations are political but here I am using the term 'political' to mean action which challenges the basic power-distribution in society). The biography of Alison Wessells George Champion demonstrates this clearly. Born in 1893 in the Lower Tugela, Champion was brought up by the American missionaries after whom he was named. He attended Adams College until the age of 20, when, as he says, he was 'hurled out' for playing a leading part in student politics. He found employment for a short while as a 'Native Constable' on the Crown Mines, and then later as a clerk. He seems to have been both popular and successful as a clerk. In 1922 he was 'Chief Native Clerk' and President of the Transvaal Native Mine Clerks Association. He used to visit regularly the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg and attended the first meetings of the Joint Councils. It was at these gatherings that he met leading white liberals such as Rheinallt-Jones and Pym, as well as communists such as Bill Andrews and Sidney Bunting. There are conflicting versions of how Champion first met Kadalie. Kadalie writes that:

"It was during this time (at the 5th annual conference of the ICU in Johannesburg in 1925) that I first met Champion .... He then arranged to show me the Crown Mines on an agreed date one bright Sunday morning. Champion introduced me to many Native miners, including some african clerks who were very much interested in me, as they had already read in the papers of my activities. This act of Champion proved that he was an able and brave man. It was at this time that he was offered work in the ICU which he willingly accepted, resigning from the Crown Mines"(3).

Stanley Trapido records that Champion has a different version of how he and Kadalie met and how he came to join the ICU. He was asked by the General Manager of Crown Mines to attend ICU public meetings and report on them to management. He claims that these reports were to be sent to the Chamber of Mines. Kadalie, at his meetings, Champion recalls, attacked the mines' system of recruiting african labour, of paying the african mine-workers very low wages for arduous and dangerous work, and compelling them to live in grim all-male barracks. According to Champion, he was at home one day when Kadalie paid him a visit. "I was very much surprised", Champion reflects, "because Mr. Kadalie was not supposed to come into mine property..... He must have taken courage, and he came into mine property, and greeted me as Comrade Champion .... Kadalie informed me that he had come to appeal to me to join him in the big work he had undertaken to do, that of organizing the

workers of my nation". Champion states that he was uneasy about giving up a comparatively well-paid post with a free house, and asked Kadalie if he could have time to consider the offer. When Kadalie returned the following week Champion agreed to become a full-time official of the ICU. (3).

The dilemma that Champion was placed in must not be underestimated. He remarked to me that his wife had been opposed to his leaving Crown Mines. This is not surprising. He had a comfortable and, status-wise, an important job. Most african unions were still fly-by-night affairs and the state and employers were clearly hostile to them. On the other hand, by 1925 the ICU claimed to have 39 000 members - it was to reach its peak of 100 000 a year later - and this was a period of growing proletarianization of Africans. For a man ambitious for a public career it was, if precarious, at least a logical calculation to leave the safe confines of clerical life for that of union organizer.

By all accounts the ICU in Natal was the most successful of its branches. Kadalie records that "Natal, with Durban as its headquarters, had now attained the role of leadership, both numerically and financially. It was here that the authorities feared upheaval in view of the Zulu nation's past history" (4). "There is no doubt that Champion was a good organizer, for during his term as provincial secretary for Natal the ICU attained great influence among the Zulu workers, thus creating fear among the powers that be" (5). Besides the head office of the Natal branch in Durban, the ICU had branch offices in Pietermaritzburg, Escourt, Ladysmith, Newcastle, Dundee, Vryheid and Eshowe. All these offices had a branch committee and the union's income came from the 2/- male and 1/- female subscription every month. Champion seems to have been able to use the courts with particularly effective results. In each town the ICU had a lawyer whom they instructed on behalf of their members. There were two areas of action; one was among farm labourers and the other was his famous victory over the Durban Corporation bye-law which made the 'dipping' of Africans compulsory. Cowley, a lawyer in a well-known legal firm, handled much of the legal work of the Natal ICU, and dealt with this case. It is worth recording Kadalie's comments on it.

"It was customary in Durban at the time that any African coming to the city for the first time was subjected to dipping with his or her belongings in disinfectant as if he or she were an animal. The result of the test case in the Supreme Court was successful. Thus another bye-law in the leading city of Natal was squashed. This victory Champion exploited to the utmost and it helped to swell the ICU membership in Durban and throughout Natal... Young men, particularly teachers,



flocked to the ICU, where they occupied remunerative positions in various branch offices at better wages than they received as teachers. In many cases... these young men were not all well equipped or trained for elementary trade union work. At this time in the offices of the ICU in Durban alone there were employed about a dozen clerks, who used to work as late as 9p.m. as well as receiving membership dues which sometimes ran into hundreds of pounds daily" (5).

In 1927 Kadalie went to Europe to try and gain international support for the ICU and to help him gain respect from white labour within South Africa. In Kadalie's absence Champion acted as National Secretary and it was at this time that rival factions came to a head in the National Union. To add to the ICU's difficulties the Government had in 1927 responded to the ICU by embodying in its Native Administration Act a 'hostility clause' which was directed at the ICU's activities. The implicit intention of this Act was to restrict criticisms of apartheid and thus curtail african unions. The ICU received a further blow to its prestige following a libel suit which Champion instigated against a durban member, George Lenono, who had accused him of using ICU funds for his own purposes. The judge who heard the case found that Lenono's accusations were justified. Champion, in his defence made three points. Firstly, he claimed that the irregularities were the result of inefficient accounting rather than the deliberate misuse of funds. Secondly he pointed out that although the funds were used for a private club registered in his name, this was because he was one of the very few natal Africans who could own property in a white area. Thirdly, a point which is omitted in Kadalie's autobiography, is that the report of the auditors did not find that the missing money was in the hands of Champion. The Supreme Court found the acting provincial secretary in Natal, Sam Dunn, guilty of misappropriating ICU funds.

There is a danger in taking too legalistic an attitude towards these allegations. It is important to remember that white society was overwhelmingly hostile to african unions and they were only too ready to find any weak-spots in these unions to damage their credibility among their members. From the very beginning Champion had met strong opposition from the Durban Corporation and he was confronted with a range of restrictive regulations. But perhaps the best way of putting into perspective the allegations of 'corruption' is the fact that Champion's standing with his members remained high even though he was suspended from his position while a further investigation took place. His suspension was not accepted by his following and the durban branch seceded from the national organisation. This secession was followed by other natal branches and Champion was invited to become the Secretary of the ICU of



(Yase) Natal.

This was the beginning of the end of the ICU as a national organisation - it gradually petered out in factional squabbles. In 1930 Champion was ordered out of the durban area. When he returned, the ICU Yase Natal was a spent force. He had first taken out a licence as a general dealer in 1926 and when he returned to Durban he devoted his energies to his new work as an african trader and later a prominent figure in the ANC.

The 'white left' in the 1920's were critical of the ICU - the liberals because it was not a conventional trade union based on different industries and the communists because it was not radical enough. They were too ready to impose on it artificial questions about the necessity for it to make up its mind as to whether it was primarily a trade union concerned with collective bargaining or primarily a political party concerned with changing the laws affecting blacks. But as Thomas Hodgkin has written in the context of trade unionism in Africa - "the natural tendency of those who promoted the first unions was to regard them as multi-purpose organisations, which should attempt to meet the whole range of the workers' needs rather than seek to copy contemporary Western European models" (6).

The ICU was a mass organisation of diverse occupations and social groups - teachers, domestic servants, dockers, farm labourers and even small traders. For a black in South Africa to demand the right to sell his labour where he pleases is to make a political as well as an economic demand, as the ICU found when they challenged the pass laws in 1928. At times the ICU seems to have been aware of the interrelationship of political and economic issues. Thus we find Kadalie arguing, at the time of their anti-pass campaign, that "... every economic question is, in the last analysis a political question". At other times, as when he returned from Europe in 1927, he seemed to want nothing more than to be a conventional trade unionist.

White South Africa too was ambiguous, vacillating between recognising the need to regulate the african workers through some form of worker organisation on the one hand, and fearing the threat to whites' political power that was implicit in an organised african working class, on the other. At times as recommended in the Botha Commission in 1951, there were powerful reasons for arguing that the interests of white South Africans could best be served by recognising heavily circumscribed african unions. But this was never a major voice and the dominant view in white South Africa is that the suppression of the african working class is necessary in order to maintain the privileges of the white worker and the cheap black labour for employers. Thus over the years the state has passed laws such as the Industrial Conciliation Act (1950), the Bantu (Settlement of Disputes) Act (1953) and now the Bantu Labour Relations Amendment Act (1973), that have in diverse ways made it very difficult, although never illegal, to organise african

unions.

However, with the re-emergence of african trade unions in recent years white South Africa is once again faced with the dilemma of suppressing these unions or attempting to incorporate them by giving them official recognition as institutions of collective bargaining. Any discussion on this issue ought to begin with an analysis of the pioneering example of this african working class organisation.

REFERENCES.

- 1) The Durban Strikes - IIE
- 2) Sheridan Johns, Race 1964.
- 3) My Life and the ICU - Clements Kadalie.
- 4) *ibid.* p89
- 5) *ibid.* p165 and p145
- 6) Thomas Hodgkin "Nationalism in Colonial Africa".

Eddie Webster, Lecturer in Sociology, University of Natal,  
Durban.

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REFLECTIONS ON THE ICU (f).

The Industrial and Commercial Workers' union of Africa (ICU) was a trade union movement which was started in Cape Town as far back as the year 1919 by white friends and coloured and african dock-workers in order to make representations to the South African Railways.

When their representations were not attended to by the railways, they decided to strike. This they did to help the white railway employees. A European by the name of A.F. Batty interested Clements Kadalie in organising the black employees. He had other centres at East London and Port Elizabeth which organised the workers on the same lines to claim for increases in wages. We find in those early days the names of Mr. Selby H. Msimang and Mr. Samuel Masabalala.

I was in the Transvaal at the time employed in the gold mining industry as a clerk in the compounds where our workers slept.

I first met Mr. Kadalie at the beginning of 1925 in Johannesburg. I attended his propoganda open-air meetings. It was here that I began to be interested in this movement, because I was the President of the Transvaal Mine Clerks Association which improved wages and working conditions of our members as well as housing.

Mr. Clements Kadalie one day came to my place of residence to ask me personally to join him as one of the organisers of the ICU. His appeal interested me so much that I decided to resign from the mines position as clerk which meant that I should also resign from the Clerks Association. Our association of clerks was recognised by the Chamber of Mines and also the government. Our membership fees were deducted from our pay sheets. We had the closed shop.

It was in April 1925 that I started my work as the organising secretary of the union in Johannesburg. In June I had to go to Bloemfontein. It was in September that I was transferred to Natal, arriving in Durban on the 29th of that month to take over from my predecessor, Mr. A.S. Maduna. My first public meeting was on the 11th of October at Cartwrights Flats.

It was here that I encountered many difficulties. I was an African who was a complete stranger in Natal, more so in Durban. My predecessor had failed to appeal to the workers successfully. The town of Durban had many restrictive regulations. Curfew regulations required all african workers to leave not only the streets but to be in their places of sleep before 9 p.m. Employed workers had what was the 'character column' in the registration of document passes. If you quarrelled with your employer, he spoiled your name endorsing your pass as cheeky, insolent, bad. With such endorse-

f This paper was delivered by Mr. A.W.G. Champion at a seminar arranged by the Institute for Social Research in 1973 on "Labour in South Africa".



ment, the registration officers ordered you to leave the town. Employees were not allowed to sleep in their friends rooms. New-comers who came to seek work had to buy the specials to seek for work, or as visitors they were required to submit to a cleansing process, known as 'dipping of natives' before they were registered. Our people were not far removed from slavery in my opinion. There were no entertainment halls.

My first concern was to get premises where I would have an office and the premises to reside with my family. No Africans were allowed to reside in the urban area of Durban. I was a complete stranger not known by landlords. It so happened that I was an exempted African, holding letters of exemption under Law 28 of 1865. This gave me the right to rent premises in town for residence and business purposes. This was not known by the officials of the Native Affairs Department of the Durban Municipality.

I was lucky to get a gentleman who knew me and had a business in Durban to introduce me to an indian merchant who had at that time a warehouse empty at No. 11 Leopold Street. We entered into agreement with him and took possession of the premises. It was here that I began my work earnestly and in many cases successfully. We attacked successfully and even compelled employers to give notice before sacking our members. We challenged the character column successfully in the Supreme Court. In fact almost all the restrictive regulations. We even applied for the Wage Board to come to investigate wages paid to employees employed by the stores.

We were faced by the non-recognition of the trade union. The curse still stands in our way against all the efforts to organise our people in this country. We have as everybody knows NO bargaining powers. The successive governments have stood in our way for no good reason. We have done everything in our means to get for our people the necessary recognition but failed.

But the ICU did assist our workers to have their position improved. Personally I was the first to be ordered to leave the greater part of Natal under the Criminal Amendment Act of 1930 giving such powers to the Minister of Justice.

I must point out that the work of my union was not confined to the urban areas. We had members working on the farms. We had the Chiefs on our registers. We served anyone who was our member. We became defenders of our members by employing lawyers to defend our members not only in the urban areas but also in the rural areas.

It is known that the ICU had troubles of its own when Natal left the union and formed themselves as Yase Natal in 1928. It was after this that Natal became very active to the extent of closing beer halls, causing even bloodshed in the centre of this town of Durban. Also losing landed properties that had been bought by us in the name of the ICU of Africa.



There were certain causes that forced Natal to leave the ICU of Africa. The important one was the arrival of a Mr. W.G. Ballinger who was brought to this country by Mr. Kadalie. We found this gentleman not an experienced trade unionist. If he did not come here we would not have had that useful union killed. That was even why these landed properties were lost. He finally fell out with Mr. Clements Kadalie, the man who had asked for his services from the British trade union movement.

You would be interested to hear from me as to what killed the ICU - a trade union that was loved by many thousands of workers, the union that did a lot to help all classes of people of goodwill.

I have mentioned the name of Mr. Ballinger who came to assist but was responsible for encouraging the division that took place. When he came he found that I had lost a civil case against one George Lenono on the grounds that the books of the ICU were not audited by the chartered accountants.

The books were then audited by the accountants who failed to find fault with me, but found that one of our secretaries, Mr. Sam Dunn, had misappropriated some of the funds. He was convicted. If he knew that it was not me who had done so, Mr. Ballinger could not have encouraged that audit and that case.

Another important cause which interfered with the ICU was that certain so-called friends of the workers criticised the ICU constitution because we enrolled all men and women whether employed as domestic servants or clerks in the offices. This was criticised. Some believed that if we organised our members according to their classes of work the government would recognise the unions.

Different craft trade unions were organised from those who expected to succeed the ICU. Some organisers worked in opposition against the ICU. Some joined European trade unions.

It was at this time that the government took the step of forcing me to leave the province after I had been officially warned to resign. An official from Pretoria (Col. Lendrum) was sent to warn me. This came after the government had sent the Native Affairs Commissioner to investigate the causes of unrest in Natal, more particularly in Durban. The report of the Commissioner recommended that because I was exercising a big influence, it may be necessary to remove me from Durban. It was done on September 24th, 1930.

After three years I came back and found that the ICU was very disorganised. I tried to resuscitate it but my joining the Congress closed a chapter of the ICU. I accepted a call from the African National Congress as President in Natal, a position which I held from 1945 - 1951, when I was succeeded by the late Chief A.J. Luthuli.

I am glad to see that the seed that we planted grew up and I am satisfied in my own mind that we succeeded to do our best for our members and the general public. We were responsible for the establishment of the Municipal African locations or townships, the establishment of the Bantu Advisory Board, the Native Representative Council, the representation of Africans in Parliament (by of course Europeans) and the establishment of the township of Clermont where Africans are allowed to purchase freehold properties.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. A.W.G. CHAMPION.

The following is an interview with Mr. Champion conducted in 1964 by Mr. Stanley Trapido, Lecturer at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Oxford.

S. Trapido: Mr. Champion, why do you think the ICU was so strong in Natal?

A. Champion: The reason was that the native workers and those who were on the rural farms under european farmers, as well as those in the native reserves were suffering under many harsh restrictive regulations. In Durban, for example, a native had to submit to the dipping process; he had to be dipped like a beast. Also, when you visited Durban you had to buy a permit to allow you to be there. Therefore when the ICU came, we had to challenge these regulations, these bye-laws. In many cases we were successful.

S. Trapido: How did you go about organizing the ICU in Durban and Natal?

A. Champion: We established branches in every magisterial district of Natal and Zululand. The head office was in Durban, and we had offices in Pietermaritzburg, Estcourt, Ladysmith, Newcastle, Dundee Vryheid and Eshowe. All these offices had a branch committee the officials of which were paid from the subscriptions of two shillings a month for a male worker and one shilling a month for a female worker. We had to retain lawyers in every one of these towns to take matters to court. When a native worker who was our member was dismissed without any valid reason, we demanded notice for a month or six months. One interesting case we had was in the sugar plantations where they recruited labour for six months. Sometimes the employers would not pay these people for at least three or four months. There was a case against an employer where the judges decided that once you have broken the terms of contract by not paying your employee monthly, this person has a legal right to demand the total amount of money for six months. We forced this employer to pay all his recruited labour for the next three or four months without any worker having done service. We were disliked. This is how we increased our membership by leaps and bounds.

S. Trapido: Do you think that the fact that most of the members of the ICU were Zulus, or that Natal was the only place where Zulus lived, had an effect on the membership of the ICU? Would you say it was stronger than other provinces?

A. Champion: I don't think that that was the reason. Also, I don't think we were stronger in Natal than in any other province. We had members here in Natal who were Indians, Coloureds and Basutos. But it was the first time our natives were organized in the province of Natal. The effects of harsh restrictive administration provided a sort of fertile soil, unexplored by any other organisation.



S. Trapido: Would you say that the ICU was primarily a trade union organisation, or do you think it was a political organisation as well?

A. Champion: It is not a question of thinking, it was, in terms of its constitution, a trade union organisation. But like all other trade union organisations, it did deal with politics. You find it even today among the sports; they are dealing with matters that concern politics.

S. Trapido: Why do you think the ICU declined in the 1930s?

A. Champion: Firstly, there was a difference of opinion between myself and Mr. Kadalie, my chief. I submitted to conference that we should turn to buying land for our members, because most of our members on the farms became wanderers. Even in the native reserves a class of people were bred who were not wanted. Mr. Kadalie did not see eye to eye with me. Then he left for overseas to attend a conference at Amsterdam International, and when he came back he found that there was trouble between me and the government. There had been rioting in Durban, bloodshed. I was in the bad books of the government, so much so that in 1930 I was served with a notice by the Minister of Justice, Advocate Pirow. This gave an opportunity to our enemies to exploit the situation by forming a multiplicity of craft organisations which was contrary to our organisation because we wanted everybody to come into one union. That caused the decline of the ICU terribly.

S. Trapido: How did the ICU organise agricultural workers?

A. Champion: We organised people who were squatters, people who make their living by ploughing the land and who give money - part labour - to their employers. The employers, that is the farmers, exploited these people to such an extent that they joined the ICU. They got their membership tickets from their nearest town. Take for example Dundee. Dundee town is surrounded by a farming community, most of whom were members of the Agricultural Union. Our members used to come into town to bring their complaints. We took many farmers who were members of the Agricultural Union to court. This is how we organised the agricultural workers' union under the ICU. It is interesting to note that the Agricultural Union once sent a letter to me, inviting me to address their conference, but when I disclosed that I was not a European, nor a Coloured, but that I was a pure Zulu, I received a letter saying that they had not known that I was a native and that their constitution did not allow a native to address their conference.

S. Trapido: Mr. Champion, what was the relationship between the ICU and the African National Congress - if there was, in fact any relationship between the two organisations?

A. Champion: There was no formal relationship, but the officers of the ICU as well as other members were allowed to join the ANC



in their own areas. For example, I became the Minister of Labour of the ANC at the time when the Rev. Z. Mahabane, J. Gumede and Dr. Xuma were the presidents. I had the qualification of knowing everything about trade unions and about workers throughout the Union. So in order that the Congress be kept informed about industrial questions which affected the natives as a whole, they appointed me as Minister of Labour.

S. Trapido: Was there ever any conflict between the two organisations?

A. Champion: There was never any conflict, except that the ANC was in the good books of the government of the day and the ICU was never in the good books of any government. Before General Hertzog took over the government, he was friendly towards Mr. Clements Kadalie's organisation, the ICU, to the extent that he helped him organise the native workers. However, the moment he took over the government, as Prime Minister, he turned a somersault. The ICU forced him to dissolve the government in order to reform his Cabinet without Mr. Madeley the Minister of Labour.

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PREAMBLE TO THE 1925 REVISED CONSTITUTION (f).

Whereas the interest of the workers and those of the employers are opposed to each other, the former living by selling their labour, receiving for it only part of the wealth they produce; and the latter living by exploiting the labour of the workers; depriving the workers of a part of the product of their labour in the form of profit, no peace can be between the two classes, a struggle must always obtain about the division of the products of human labour, until the workers through their industrial organisations take from the capitalist class the means of production, to be owned and controlled by the workers for the benefit of all, instead of for the profit of a few. Under such a system he who does not work, neither shall he eat. The basis of remuneration shall be the principle from every man according to his abilities, to every man according to his needs. This is the goal for which the ICU strives along with all other organised workers throughout the world. Further, this Organisation does not foster or encourage antagonism towards other established bodies, political or otherwise, of African peoples, or of organised European Labour.

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ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PROGRAMME  
FOR 1928. (f)

Opponents of the ICU have frequently asserted that the organisation is not a trade union in the sense that the term is generally understood in South Africa, but that it is a kind of pseudo-political body. The ground on which this assertion has been based is the fact that the ICU has concentrated its attention on matters in which the issues involved have not been 'purely economic' whilst these 'purely economic' issues have been very largely neglected.

The new constitution, which was adopted at the Special Congress at Kimberley in December last, definitely establishes the ICU as a trade union, albeit one of the native workers whose rights of organisation are only now earning recognition. In these circumstances it has become necessary for the organisation to have a clearly defined economic programme, corresponding to the interests of the membership at large. At the same time it must be clearly understood that we have no intention of copying the stupid and futile 'non-political' attitude of our white contemporaries. As Karl Marx said, every economic question is, in the last analysis, a political question also, and we must recognise that in neglecting to concern ourselves with current politics, in leaving the political machines to the unchallenged control of our class enemies we are rendering a disservice to those tens of thousands of our members who are groaning under oppressive laws and who are looking to the ICU for a lead.

In the past, the officers of the ICU in the field have had no definite programme to follow, and this has resulted not merely in confusion of ideas, but it has led to the dissemination of conflicting politics. This being so, I make no apology for introducing the subject of an Economic and Political Programme for the organisation at this stage. The ICU is a homogeneous national organisation. As such it must have a national policy, consonant with the terms of its constitution, which will serve as a programme of action by which its officials will be guided in their work. The framing of such a policy or programme is essentially the work of the Congress, and I propose to give here the broad outlines of such a programme. In view of what I said above it will be realised that it is not necessary to divide the programme into political and economic sections, the two being closely bound up with each other.

I will further preface the proposals I have to make by remarking that our programme must be largely of an agrarian character, for the reason that the greater proportion of our membership comprises rural workers, landless peasants, whose dissatisfaction with conditions is with good reason greater than that of the workers in the urban areas. These conditions are only too well known to you to require any restatement from me. The town workers must

f This paper, presented by Clements Kadalie at the 1928 ICU conference, is taken from Vol.1 of "From Protest to Challenge" edited by Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter.



not however, be neglected. More attention must in the future be given to their grievances, desires and aspirations if their loyalty to the ICU is to be secured. At the present stage of our development it is inevitable that our activities should be almost entirely of an agitational character for we are not recognised as citizens in our own country, being almost entirely disfranchised and debarred from exercising a say in state affairs closely affecting our lives and welfare. Our programme will therefore be almost entirely agitational in character.

I now detail my proposals as follows:-

1. **WAGES:** A consistent and persistent agitation for improved wages for native workers must be conducted by all branches of the Union. The agitation must be Union-wide, and regard must always be had to local conditions and circumstances. Improvements, however small in themselves, must be welcomed and made the basis on which to agitate for further advances. Every endeavour should be made to enter into friendly negotiations with farmers' associations, employers' organisations and individual employers in the towns, with a view to securing improvements. If no results are obtained branch secretaries should, wherever practicable, invoke the aid of the Wage Board. In this connection a study of the Wage Act, 1925 is urged.

As an immediate objective, a minimum wage of £5 per month (plus food and housing in country districts) should be striven for. The reasonableness of this claim cannot be disputed by anyone. The attainment of this admittedly low rate, which it must be said few native workers are receiving, is not to be regarded as an end in itself, but as a stepping stone to the ultimate achievement of the full economic rights of the native workers.

2. **HOURS:** Insistence should be made on a maximum working day of eight hours and a working week of 5½ days for town and country workers alike. This demand will have the support of all right-thinking and justice-loving people, and members who refuse to exceed this working-time should be given every possible support and encouragement.

3. **ILLEGAL PRACTICES:** Illegal practices by employers, such as withholding wages, seizing stock, etc. should be reported to the local Magistrate and Native Affairs Department, with fullest particulars. Any refusal by these officials to deal with complaints or failure to secure satisfaction for the members concerned should be reported to the Head Office of the organisation for submission to higher authorities.

4. **THE FRANCHISE:** The proposal of the present government to withdraw the very limited franchise granted to Natives in the Cape Province should be unequivocally condemned at every public gathering of the ICU. Further, on the principle, 'No taxation without representation' an extension of the franchise to Natives should be

demanded. We would suggest that a monster petition be organised by the ICU against the present reactionary proposal and presented to Parliament during the present session.

In the event of the Bill being passed and the franchise being withdrawn a protest should be made by means of a mammoth petition calling into question the necessity and legality of taxing and legislating for a section of the population and citizens without granting them the same representation as provided for the Europeans, at the same time asking for tangible and unbiased reasons why the Natives should not refuse to pay taxes without representation.

5. PASS LAWS: The Pass Laws are a legal expression of Native enslavement, corresponding with the dark days of Tzarist Russia. They manufacture criminals and possess no moral or ethical justification. It is therefore the duty of the ICU to oppose them by every possible means at its disposal. I would propose that the government be petitioned to suspend the Pass Laws for, say, a period of six months. If, during that period it is found that there has been no increase of lawlessness among the Natives, but that they are just as law-abiding without passes as with them, then the government should be asked to repeal the Pass Laws in their entirety as there will no longer be any reason or justification, either real or imaginary, for their continuance.

In the event of the government refusing to comply with such a petition, Congress should fix a day of national protest against the Pass Laws, to be marked by mass demonstrations at which all natives should be asked to hand in their passports, the same to be burned in public, at the demonstrations. In addition, those assembled should be pledged by solemn resolution to refuse to carry any further passports or to give any further recognition to the Pass Laws.

6. LAND: The total area of land set aside for exclusive native occupation in the Union is notoriously inadequate. Parliament should be petitioned through one or more of its members to increase the native reserves so as to make provision for the landless native farmers. The assistance of labour organisation overseas should be invoked in this matter. In addition, an agitation should be started against the laws prohibiting native squatting.

7. FREE SPEECH: Vigorous propaganda must be carried on against those provisions in the Native Administration Act which place restrictions on the right of free speech. Ostensibly these provisions are designed to prevent the stirring-up of hostility between the white and black races. Actually they are intended to limit the opportunities for trade union propaganda and organisation among the native workers. These provisions must therefore be strenuously fought against and their legality challenged where wrongful arrests are carried out. In this connection, no opportunity must be lost of stressing the fact that the ICU is not an anti-European organisation, and that where it has occasion to criticise Europeans it



is on the grounds of their actions (usually as employers of labour) towards the natives and not on account of the colour of their skins.

8. PROPAGANDA: Members must be kept fully informed of the activities of the organisation and of all happenings affecting their interests. For this purpose regular members' meetings must be called by Branch Secretaries and the speeches made thereat must not, as heretofore, be of a vague or general agitational character but must deal with concrete and immediate problems. Every endeavour must be made to stimulate a direct personal interest in the affairs of the organisation and to this end questions and discussions by the audience must be encouraged.

The 'Workers' Herald', our official organ, must be further popularised among the members. If every member bought the paper its circulation could be easily quadrupled and more. The paper could be made to possess an interest for each district if Branch Secretaries would take the trouble to contribute notes concerning local happenings with their comments thereon.

9. NEW RECRUITS: There are large numbers of native workers to whom the ICU is scarcely known. I refer to the workers on the Witwatersrand gold mines, the Natal coal mines and the railways. Branch Secretaries in these areas should make every endeavour to rope these men in as members of the ICU as they would be an undoubted source of strength. The good work commenced some years ago among dock-workers has unfortunately been discontinued very largely. Renewed efforts must be made during the ensuing year to bring the strayed ones back to the fold.

10. REPRESENTATION ON PUBLIC BODIES: It was decided at a previous Congress that advantage be taken of the laws governing Provincial Council elections in the Cape to run official ICU candidates. Native parliamentary voters are qualified to enter the Cape Provincial Council, and definite steps should be taken to select candidates to stand on behalf of the ICU in Cape constituencies where there is a possibility of securing a fair vote at least. An instruction should be issued to the National Council accordingly and full preparations should be made by the branch or branches concerned for a thorough election campaign in the next Cape Provincial Council elections. Propaganda must be the main consideration, although every effort must be made to secure the return of any candidates put up.

The question of candidates in the Parliamentary General Elections forms a separate item on the agenda.

In submitting the above outline, I trust that delegates will see with me the urgent necessity for a national policy for the organisation. Once a policy is adopted, and a programme arranged, it must not be allowed to remain on paper, and every official will be expected to do his utmost to translate the same into practice.



Only in this way can the organisation grow and become an effective agency for liberating the african workers from the thraldom of slavery.

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THE ORGANISATION AND COMPOSITION OF THE ICU.

There seems to be no extant copy of the first constitution of the ICU, that of 1919. All that survives is a fragment:

"The objects of this union shall be to protect and regulate the conditions of work in the trade; to promote the general and material welfare of the members of the union; to co-operate with workers of other callings for the advancement of the whole working class".

This corresponds to a passage in the rules of the British Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the union to which A.F. Batty, who was associated with Clements Kadalie in the foundation of the ICU, belonged. It is curious that the fragment speaks of a single trade, when it is known that the union was open to "all persons employed in industry or commerce", and it may well be that, despite its name, the Industrial and Commercial Union (the original title of the ICU) was at first confined to waterside workers.

The remainder of this first constitution must have been a simplified version of the long and detailed rule book of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. Tom Mann, the veteran english labour leader and founder of the Workers' Union, who opened the ICU conference of 1923, found that it corresponded "in nearly every particular with the rules of unions he had been closely connected with for more than forty years of his life".

The only known amendment was the addition of a resolution passed by the conference of 1921, when the ICU decided to

"dissociate itself from any political body whatever, but ... solely to propagate the industrial, economic and social advancement of all the african workers through industrial action on constitutional lines, and ... not foster or encourage antagonism towards other established bodies, political or otherwise, of african peoples..."

Measures to "promote the general and material welfare of the members" included death benefits, which were paid to the family of a deceased member, but evidently not sickness, unemployment or old-age benefits. The only other material advantage in being a member was to enjoy moral and legal support in disputes with employers. The ICU is known to have taken up individual grievances having on occasion recourse to legal action.

In the early days of the ICU, when it did not extend beyond the Cape Peninsula, Kadalie, as secretary, was the only paid official, the servant of an unpaid general executive council, presided over by a chairman or president, the members of which were elected by the annual conference. After the ICU amalgamated with the Native and Coloured Workers' Union of Port Elizabeth, there

were more paid officials - a general secretary, Kadalie; an organiser-in-chief, Samuel Masabalala; and an assistant general secretary, James La Guma, who came to Cape Town in 1923 to take charge of administration and release Kadalie for propaganda work. When, in December, 1924, Masabalala was dismissed for 'negligence and carelessness', the number of salaried officers, at least at headquarters was reduced to two. These paid officials at the head of the organisation, together with the general president and the assistant general president, were ex officio members of the board of arbitration, a sort of inner cabinet, responsible in the first instance to the general executive council.

At the branch level there were elected secretaries, who were responsible to their branch executives, at least in theory. Some branch secretaries were paid. There were also shop-stewards, whose function seems to have been merely the collection of subscriptions, for which they were paid a commission. Some branches were grouped together in districts under district secretaries. In the beginning the branches, which enjoyed a large measure of autonomy, managed their own funds, only remitting a capitation fee to head office, but as this led to abuses, the 1924 conference resolved that all the money collected by the branches should in future be centralised.

The early ICU was essentially a Cape organisation. At its 1923 conference all thirty delegates came from the Cape Province, with the exception of one from South West Africa, where there was a weak branch at Luderitz. The three major branches in the first years were Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London. There were others from 1924, at Kimberly and King William's Town, and De Aar had an active one for a time. The remaining dozen or so were grouped for the most part around Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. Then in January 1923, the ICU conference in Cape Town decided upon a nationwide publicity campaign to get Africans "to organise themselves into one Big Union" and some months later the first branch outside the Cape (other than Luderitz) was founded at Bloemfontein. The following year Kadalie extended the movement into Natal and the Transvaal and branches were started at Durban and Johannesburg. One result was that the 1925 conference of the union was held in Johannesburg, but even then ten of the fifteen branches represented were still situated in the Cape.

Naturally, with these widely scattered branches, the membership of the ICU was very mixed. For most of its existence the union had its staunch following among the Cape Town stevedores and there was a fairly substantial and loyal group of supporters among the railway workers. Another considerable group was made up of agricultural workers in the Eastern Province. Adelaide, Bedford, Somerset East, Cathcart and King William's Town must have been branches with a strong or even predominant, agricultural membership. Otherwise there were all sorts; unskilled workers in every type of employment - laundry workers, employees of the oil companies, municipal labourers, domestic servants and miscellaneous



factory workers.

On the Rand, although the ICU made some converts among mine workers, chiefly it would seem, among those living outside the compounds, and although the iniquities of the recruiting system became a staple of conference denunciation, there seems to be no evidence for assuming significant penetration of that semi-enclosed and largely impermanent labour force. The fact that the union resolved at its conference of April, 1926, to make a special effort to organise the mine workers would indicate that, in its eighteen months on the Rand, it had made little progress in winning them over. More revealing is the admission contained in Kadalie's Economic and Political Programme for 1928:

"There are large numbers of native workers to whom the ICU is scarcely known. I refer to the workers on the Witwatersrand gold mines, the Natal coal mines and the Railways. Branch Secretaries in these areas should make every endeavour to rope these men in as members of the ICU, as they would be an undoubted source of strength. The good work commenced some years ago among Dock workers has unfortunately been discontinued very largely. Renewed efforts must be made during the ensuing year to bring the strayed ones back to the fold".

In 1925 the ICU adopted a new constitution, which fixed the union's name as the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa. Section 2 was the famous preamble based on that of the constitution of the radical Industrial Workers of the World, which was introduced under the influence of the Communist Party and which some ICU members, notable A.W.G. Champion, found rather an embarrassment. At the same time the 1921 decision to dissociate itself from political organisations was abandoned.

The objects of the union according to the new constitution included the regulation of wages and conditions of labour, "irrespective of sex", the provision of legal assistance, the establishment of clubs, debating societies, etc., and the publication of "pamphlets, newspapers, or any other literature that may be deemed necessary ... for the material and spiritual welfare of the members". Two clauses are of particular significance:

- "d) To take shares in any syndicate .. and to establish such commercial enterprises as may be deemed necessary for the progress of the Organisation and its members.
- f) To become attached to, or to federate with other Unions, and to be represented on public bodies or other Unions".

The former is an indication of the tendency among the union's leadership to sink money in co-operative and land settlement schemes and business enterprises, while the latter clearly looked forward to the forging of links with the white labour movement.

The union offered its members "sick, unemployment, old age and death benefits". While stipulating explicit conditions for valid claims for death benefits, the constitution has nothing to say about the other benefits, which seems to suggest that, in practice, they were never paid out. There is even some doubt about death grants. Sam Dunn, an ICU official sent to prison at the end of 1927 for stealing union money, described them as a 'hoax'. Indeed, it is unlikely that many joined the ICU for the social insurance services that it offered. Yet the financial obligations of the members were heavy; an urban enrolment fee of two shillings for men and one shilling for women, the weekly subscription being six pence for men and three pence for women, and a rural enrolment fee of one shilling for both men and women, the weekly subscription being three-pence. In addition the executive of the union was empowered to impose levies.

As far as the administration of the ICU was concerned, the most important change made by the 1925 constitution was the abolition of the old general executive council and the establishment of a national council, composed of the chief officers of the union. These were the president, the senior and junior vice-presidents, the national secretary, the general secretary, the financial secretary, three trustees and provincial secretaries, all chosen by the annual conference from among those who had been members of the ICU for at least three months. The board of arbitration, composed of seven members of the national council elected by conference, was at first left in being, but after the headquarters of the union was shifted from Cape Town to Johannesburg (April 1926), it was replaced by a smaller national council executive bureau, an executive committee of the national council. The latter, was required to meet once a year, prior to the annual conference, but could be summoned at other times should it be necessary. It exercised authority within the union, with disciplinary power over officials and branches, having the right to appoint, suspend or dismiss the former and the right to investigate and override, or even close the latter. It could impose fines and other penalties upon members violating the union's rules and it alone had the right to call strikes, fix standard wages and conclude industrial agreements. However, ultimate authority was, of course, vested in the conference, to which each branch was permitted to send one delegate for each two hundred paid up members, with a maximum of four delegates.

The president of the union (J.G. Gumbs), the senior vice-president (A.M. Jabavu) and the junior vice-president (M.E.G. Johnson) were unpaid. The chief paid officer was the national secretary (Clements Kadalie), and his duties were mainly "to propagate the policy of the Organisation, to convene and address



meetings on any public platform with a view to protect and to further the aims and objects and interests of the Organisation". His administrative duties were defined somewhat vaguely: the supervision of branches, the presentation of an annual report, and the hearing of appeals from the decisions of provincial secretaries. The main work of administration and control of head office staff fell to the general secretary (James La Guma until the expulsion of the communists in December 1926), who was supposed to keep a statistical register of members and a record of the proceedings of the national council and the board of arbitration. It was his principal task to supervise the union's finances, to submit a financial statement to the national council and to supply all the information required by the auditor who was supposed to be appointed every year. The financial secretary (E.J. Khaile, also expelled in 1926) was merely a bookkeeper. The three trustees were not concerned with financial administration, except that the signature of one of them was required for cheques. Their position was honorary and their function was to hold ICU property in trust.

Financial administration bulked large in the constitution. The income of the union came chiefly from the enrolment fees and contributions by the members, which constituted the 'general funds'. Contributions were paid either to a branch office or to shop stewards or collectors chosen by the branch executive. Shop stewards were required to record every subscription received on the member's contribution card and to hand in all money collected within forty-eight hours of receiving it. It was the duty of the branch secretary to bank all money coming under the heading of 'general funds' within forty-eight hours of receipt, for transfer to the head office account, and all the financial needs of the branches had to be requisitioned from head office. Branches, however, were permitted to maintain 'reserve funds', derived from social functions and approved business ventures and subject to periodic review by head office.

Each branch had an elected chairman, vice-chairman and secretary, who, with eight others, made up an executive that was supposed to be representative of the different sections of workers in the branch. Branch secretaries could be put on salary (paid by head office) if their branches were sufficiently prosperous. Their functions, other than their financial duties, were left vague. They were required to draw up a monthly financial statement to be approved by a three man finance committee (including the chairman) of the branch executive and sent on to the general secretary.

The provincial secretaries constituted a new intermediate level in the administrative hierarchy. Their only clearly defined duty was the submission of monthly reports and statements of expenditure of money requisitioned from head office. Otherwise they were "to propagate the cause of the Organisation in their respective provinces" and to keep watch on the branches within their area.



There is no shortage of evidence to show that the constitution was frequently disregarded. The general secretary, reporting in March 1926, on a tour he had made of the branches, complained of "inefficiency, dishonesty and unconstitutionality" at all levels of the organisation and took Kadalie, who was supposed to be the servant of the national council, to task for acting without its authority.

The Cape branches were the mainstay of the organisation until 1925, but after that support in the province declined and Natal came to the fore. Whereas as late as April 1926, two-thirds of the ICU branches were still situated in the Cape, by 1927, although the Cape still had nearly a quarter of the branches - which were then more or less equally shared among the provinces (Cape-19, Natal-24, OFS-22 and Transvaal-23) - in terms of income to head office, it was the least important province. In 1927 only 3.6% of head office revenue came from there, compared with 9.1% from the Orange Free State, 26.1% from the Transvaal and as much as 61% from Natal. This decline in importance of the area where the union had gained its first support was accompanied by a pronounced shift from the town to the country in relative significance. Until 1926 the organisation had a discernible urban bias, with 40% of its branches in the eleven biggest (measured by size of the European population) towns in South Africa. Speaking of the ICU leaders, the Commissioner of Police in his report for 1925 said:

"It is noteworthy that these pseudo-enlightened natives confine their attention to the towns, probably because they would get very little sympathy or encouragement from the kraal natives".

It is not true that the ICU in its early years was exclusively urban and it has already been noted that in the Eastern Province of the Cape it had a following among wage labourers on the farms, who were badly paid even by South African standards. Nevertheless, by mid-1927 the rural support had been greatly enlarged and extended to other provinces. Contemporary observers were well aware of the change that overtook the union. "While the movement was confined to the towns comparatively little notice was taken of it", wrote a correspondent of 'The Times'. "With its spread among farm labourers it caused a great stir". It was among the wage labourers and labour tenants that ICU propaganda gained most response. While it is true that subsistence farmers depended to some degree upon cash earnings, dissatisfaction with the amount of money that could be earned was in their case an industrial rather than a rural problem, since they derived their cash incomes mostly from contract labour in the mines, factories, railways and docks. The ICU was affected only to the extent that it enjoyed support in such industries. Within the tribal areas themselves it encountered the conservatism of people and chiefs.

There were instances, here and there, of chiefs adhering to

the union, such as Chief Diniso Nkosi of Barberton in the Transvaal, who was said to have brought nearly two thousand members into the ICU and who took to the 1927 conference in Durban, the greetings of nine other chiefs from his part of the country. Elsewhere the chiefs, either because of the pressure of the authorities or because of their personal distaste for glib young men from the towns, were suspicious and hostile. The paramount chief of the Zulus, Solomon ka Dinuzulu, denounced the ICU in 1927. Another chief, speaking of the union's officials, said, "I heard that there are people who go about to see what they can pick up. They are thieves and have got their knowledge from other thieves. Who the original thieves were I do not know". As a rule, the ICU failed to gain a firm footing in the reserves, perhaps because of the attitude of the chiefs, perhaps because of the persistence of communal land holding, perhaps because of the absence of large numbers of migrant workers. Whatever the reason, there was only one branch in Zululand, at Eshowe, none in the Transkei, apart from one at Kokstad in Griqualand East, one in the Ciskei reserves, and only late and feeble ones in the Orange Free State reserves. Nor did the union penetrate into the northern Transvaal, where Africans pursued on white-owned land a way of life that dated back to before the European conquest.

The 1925 constitution underwent two revisions, in 1926 and 1927. The 1926 revision seems to have made changes only in wording, though it may have then that the national council executive bureau was set up. In 1927 there were two major changes, both of which had the effect of increasing the power of A.G.W. Champion, the provincial secretary in Natal, who acted as national secretary during Kadalie's absence in Europe in 1927. For, on the one hand, the offices of general secretary and financial secretary were abolished and their duties transferred to a new official, the assistant national secretary (Champion himself); and, on the other hand, provincial secretaries were given power to use general fund money, which had hitherto been centralised, for certain specific purposes, thus strengthening the hand of Champion, who retained a tight grip upon Natal affairs even after his promotion to assistant national secretary.

While he was in Europe, Kadalie, in consultation with a British trade union official, Arthur Creech Jones, devised a new constitution and this was accepted after his return by a special conference that met at Kimberley in December, 1927. One of the important changes was the dropping of the innovations made earlier in the same year. The office of financial secretary was revived and given more important duties, taking over, in fact, much of the work of the old general secretary. There was no longer an assistant national secretary, but an officer called the organising secretary, who was second in command to the general secretary, as the national secretary was renamed. In other words Kadalie reverted to the title of general secretary and his deputy, Champion, became the organising secretary. Two other important differences that were made were, firstly, the omission of the I.W.W. preamble, and

secondly, the introduction of sectionalisation of members; that is they were supposed to be grouped according to their occupation - agriculture, building, mining etc. Apart from those changes, the differences between the old 1925 constitution and the new 1927 constitution seem to be slight. The objects of the union remained much the same as before and the government of the union also remained largely unaltered except for the changes in the titles and functions of the chief officers. The powers of the national council were somewhat strengthened and a national council sub-committee was set up corresponding to the old board of arbitration. A larger number of provincial secretaries was envisaged and each of them was to be obliged to acquire "specialised knowledge of one or more of the main industrial sections enrolled in the union".

By the time the new constitution was adopted the union was on the brink of collapse. Already bankrupt, it was soon to experience schism. In July an adviser, W.G. Ballinger was imported from Britain. He tried to improve administration and tighten financial controls. For a brief period he and Kadalie worked together amicably and there seemed to be some chance of restoring the ICU to its former strength. It was not to be. Kadalie came to regard Ballinger as dictatorial, while he considered the general secretary irresponsible. Champion had gone his own way just before Ballinger arrived, so that, when Kadalie and his adviser parted, in February 1929, the ICU was left in three fragments, none of which enjoyed much support. At the height of its influence at the end of 1927, it had claimed a membership of 100,000, a claim that was not wildly exaggerated. However, it remained on this peak for only a few fleeting months. Many explanations have been put forward for its downfall. Whatever else caused the crash, it was not lack of organisation and rules. The trouble was, if anything, too much organisation and not enough to show for it. As for the rules, they were admirable - in theory.

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WHAT OF THE ICU? (f)

..... The ICU was inaugurated early in January 1919, as the aftermath of the first Great War. Africans, as well as other non-Europeans, had just returned from the war more disillusioned than ever. The war was supposed to have been fought to make the world safe for heroes. Unemployment was raising its ugly head. The rising cost of living was making the necessities of life unobtainable. While leaving insufficient at home, these commodities were exported overseas. Amidst this uncertainty we witnessed the formation of the first trade union of the non-Europeans of South Africa.

In Cape Town there was a considerable number of west indian Negroes at that time. Some of these men were highly cultured, and most of them were employed at the docks as stevedores in various occupations such as shipwrights, foremen; etc. The second chairman of the ICU, James King, was a Negro, and a good tradesman, while J.G. Gumbs, another Negro, and third chairman, who afterwards occupied the ICU presidency from 1924 until his death in 1929, was a qualified chemist, as well as a rigger at the Cape Town docks. On the executive committee of the union we often had three or four of these Negroes. When the Marcus Garvey movement was at its height, these Negroes in South Africa tried their best to use the ICU as an auxiliary of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, but just as was the case with the Communist Party of South Africa, I became the stumbling block against their machinations, since I abhor serving two masters at the same time. I did not believe in the slogan of 'Africa for the Africans' which was popular during the post-war period among the oppressed peoples of african descent throughout the world. I believed, as I believe now, that the salvation of the Africans in this country will be brought about through their own sweat and labour.

The ICU could never have flourished easily in the country if economic hardships of the non-European had been satisfactorily redressed by the powers that be. Notwithstanding the high cost of living, there was no corresponding adjustment of the wages of the african workers. The feeling of frustration was soon evident. In the northern provinces passes were forcibly loaded on the african people. Nowhere was there a silver lining to show the masses the way to human freedom. In this hopeless frustration the advent of the ICU was like a beacon of light on the horizon. There was a great desire to find the way towards human emancipation, and the advent of the ICU promised the only way. It was in this atmosphere of discontent that the ICU spread from Cape Town like a veld fire over South Africa, with Port Elizabeth and East London, seaport towns first, then to the country districts of the central and eastern provinces, then to Natal province, the Orange Free State and finally to Johannesburg and the Transvaal. But the ICU did not confine its activities to the Union of South Africa only; we had branches at Lüderitzbucht and Keetmanshoop in South West Africa, whence came James La Guma (Assistant General Secretary).

(f) This is the last chapter of Clements Kadalie's book, "MY LIFE AND THE ICU".

Our destination was the 'ICU of Africa'. In pursuance of this designation we had two branches in Southern Rhodesia, at Bulawayo and Salisbury. At the end of 1927 the ICU had spread its wings throughout the sub-continent of Africa. Is it not a wonder that the exploiters of african labour saw the writing on the wall when they witnessed this new evolution of once down-trodden people on the march! .... The ICU (made efforts) to approach the South African Trades Union Congress with the object of presenting a united front against 'the arbitrary and unlimited powers of capitalism'. A few joint meetings were held between us and the Trades Union Congress, but the split in the union, coupled with the advent of Ballinger, brought about the suspension of this worthy consultation. There is no gainsaying that if this consultation had continued, a revolutionary change for good could have taken place in the industrial world of South Africa.

.... With the rapid rise of the ICU which attracted people of various upbringings, the question of rivalries between leaders was bound to come. For a time the president and I were able to keep together the various elements that were antagonistic to each other, but as time went on, I was in turn marked out for attack, owing to my being born outside the Union of South Africa. When Champion broke away, the fact of my birth was used by him to rally the Zulu workers around his leadership. Following my resignation, the ICU leaders were more or less aligned tribally. It is a fact worth recording that the majority of the ICU membership lacked political knowledge. The rank and file mentality, being African, was to follow the 'chief', whether right or wrong.

Many causes can be cited for the disintegration of the ICU. First of all we have to realize that the union was organised on the same lines as the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in Great Britain in the early stages of the trade union movement there. Most of our secretaries were drawn from the teaching profession. These men had never in their lives studied the trade union movement or even politics in general. They were attracted to the ICU, which offered them higher pay than they could earn as teachers. The ICU offered them wages ranging from £8 to £15 per month in the case of provincial secretaries. The morals of some of these young men were definitely not suited for public appointment. Some of them indulged in intoxicants freely. The membership of the union was drawn from all classes of our people, and the great mass of the Africans are religiously minded. It is obvious that many of our members did not approve of the behaviour of the secretaries. Some of the secretaries in Natal were grossly incompetent, and they disobeyed orders in regard to handling monies belonging to the Union, with the result that the organisation was thrown into confusion and distrust grew among our supporters and members.

The bad financial management of the affairs of the union in Natal hastened its doom. The withdrawal thereafter of the Natal Province following the lead of Champion, brought about the decline of the union from its former glory. The Natal situation could



have been retrieved, because the breakaway movement was at first strictly confined to Durban. The northern portion of Natal solidly adhered to the mother body. With the advent of W.G. Ballinger as our new adviser, the rift between the rest of the union and Durban widened. At this particular time our adviser, we think, had not gained enough experience to understand the african mind. By his methods, Ballinger put many of us at loggerheads one against another thus making it very difficult for us to compromise for the good of the movement we all loved and some of us suffered for. With a wiser and more experienced adviser I am sure that the ICU could have been saved from shipwreck.

.... The story of the ICU, which is closely interwoven with my own struggles and triumphs, ... unfolds the difficulties with which the pioneers of african trade unionism had to contend with in its infancy. The many trade unions of the african workers which have now sprung up in all big cities of the Union of South Africa owe their existence to the pioneering work of the 'mother ICU' which blazed the trail in the industrial field. For my part I should like to borrow a phrase from the late Booker T. Washington, and say:

"To me the history of African Trade Unionism seems like the story of a great adventure, in which for my own part I am glad to have had a share. So far from being a misfortune, it seems to me that it is a rare privilege to have taken part in the early struggles the plans and the ambitions of over eight million people who are making their way from industrial serfdom into a place in the social and political system of our South African nationhood".

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THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ICU - A CASE OF  
SELF DESTRUCTION?

The early 1920s were a period of great ferment among black communities in South Africa. Wartime industrialisation, post-war inflation, increased pressure on rural subsistence, and accelerated labour migration, together disrupted african society and brought a new surge of popular action aimed at accomodating and channelling the dislocations of change. Millenarian movements sprang up in the eastern Cape, predicting airborne liberation by black Americans, and captured the imagination of thousands of Transkeians. A rash of strikes spread through industrial centres, and reached their climax in 1920, when forty-thousand african mine-workers downed tools on the Witwatersrand in demand for higher pay. And new resistance was kindled among farm workers throughout the country in response to the tightening restrictions with which they were now being faced. Most important of all, and bridging this entire spectrum of reaction was the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa. Founded in Cape Town early in 1919, the ICU spread in the mid-twenties throughout South Africa until by 1927 it could boast a membership of one hundred thousand - the largest trade union ever to have taken root in the continent of Africa.

If the 1920s opened in an atmosphere of expectancy, they closed on an entirely different note. Dislocations undoubtedly persisted, but the hope of profiting from them had all but gone. In the Transkei and Ciskei, the millenium never materialised, and its prophecy brought only suffering to nearly three hundred Israelites shot down at Bulhoek in 1921. On the Witwatersrand mine workers achieved nothing, except being driven back down their mines at bayonet point by government troops. And in the rural areas conditions steadily deteriorated as a new wave of evictions got underway in the mid-twenties. As for the ICU, it proved the greatest disappointment of all. Despite a huge membership, its formal achievements were negligible. Labour conditions registered little improvement; wages remained more or less stationary; and a whole new range of discriminatory legislation was placed on the statute books. By the end of the decade, in reaction to failure, the Union began to crumble, and by 1931 it was more or less a spent force. The question this brief essay concerns itself with is why an era of such promise faded and why a movement of such potential withered away.

At a superficial level, the ultimate disintegration of the ICU can be traced to financial instability, personal conflicts, weakness of central organisation, and so on. In a sense though, this does not explain a great deal. Had these been so serious, then the ICU would never have got underway in the first place, or at any rate would not have been able to function successfully for eight years. Considerably more important were underlying weaknesses of analysis and strategy. The strategic objectives of the ICU it should be emphasised were clear enough; they wanted a fundamental redistribution of economic and political power. Less clear in their minds was how this should be achieved. In particu-

lar what the ICU leaders seem to have lacked was any systematic theory of how economy and society functioned in South Africa, and this in turn prevented them from evolving any adequate strategy to promote change. As a result, for the best part of a decade, they mistook protest for pressure and numbers for strength, ignoring all the while that there had to be some way for pressure to be brought to bear for it to have any effect.

The career of Clements Kadalie, General Secretary of the Union, illustrates many of these shortcomings. Though reputedly an able organiser Kadalie spent most of his time touring round the country and giving speeches. Industrial organisation was neglected; sectionalisation by industry ignored; and scarcely any effort towards union recognition was attempted. Instead Kadalie pinned his hopes on implausible political solutions. On occasions, as will be seen, this might have some limited justification. On others, as with his flirtation with Hertzog, it was manifestly absurd. Hertzog at this time had just allied his Nationalists to the South African Labour Party, and hoped by associating himself with Kadalie to gain the Cape African vote in the coming election. The Smuts Government was admittedly in bad odour in African circles for the Bulhoek massacre and other similar incidents, but there were little grounds for expecting that a party whose labour wing had coined the slogan 'Workers of the World Unite for a White South Africa' would behave much better. Still more damning is that Kadalie took absolutely no precautions to ensure that they should do. No concessions were extracted, and Kadalie seems neither to have sought nor gained any assurance on even the question of recognition. One can only conclude that Kadalie was taken in by Hertzog's honeyed words; that tiring of stalemate he fell into the trap of mistaking dialogue for progress and of assuming that any movement at all must be better than none.

In his pursuit of such pipe-dreams Kadalie resembled certain of his rural followers, who expected supernatural deliverance on purchase of an ICU card. The same facet of his personality was exhibited still more vividly in his expectations of international trade unionism. Within limits some sort of connection with world trade unionism would have been beneficial. It would have extended expertise and resources to the ICU, together with the psychological reassurance that it was not entirely alone. As the 1920s wore on however, Kadalie began to see this more as a substitute for local action than a supplement to it. In a way not altogether unfamiliar today he seems to have despaired of internal action and to have relied increasingly on pressure from outside. Recognition from international trade union organisations was applied for and affiliation to the British Trade Union Council was sought, with the idea in each case of using their leverage to extract concessions from government and white unions at home. By 1927 when Kadalie left to set up links with Europe, this had become the pivot of ICU strategy, and the mainstay of all their hopes.

Even so, when Kadalie set sail for Europe in June 1927 the



ICU appeared on the crest of a wave. Membership was soaring, branches were springing up everywhere and the organisation was fast becoming the symbol of black resistance throughout the Union. Appearances however were highly deceptive. Rather than attracting industrial workers during this period, ICU expansion was made up predominately of labour tenants working on white farms, who were on the point of facing the rigours of new labour legislation. This notoriously unorganisable group soon proved themselves the achilles heel of the ICU. Scattered across thousands of square miles of countryside they were virtually impossible to protect, and quickly soaked up their own financial contributions and more in legal actions against unlawful eviction. Even then these were no more than drops in an ocean. In a situation where thousands were being evicted and where mere membership of the ICU was an invitation to victimisation, the problem was too enormous to be handled. As a result the euphoria of 1927 gave way to the recriminations of 1928. Membership slumped, finances were shattered and the organisation went into sharp decline.

A similar crisis of expectations was precipitated among the Union's urban membership. Here again the problem was one of attracting membership in an apparently random fashion, and in such a way as to preclude effective industrial organisation of action. This aspect of ICU activity had been evident almost from its inception, but it was exaggerated in 1926 by the expulsion of communists from its ranks. They at least had been prepared to use the strike weapon, if often only for premature political ends. With their departure however, the very idea of striking fell into disuse. The penalties of neglect were not long in making themselves felt. When a flurry of strikes hit Durban and Johannesburg in 1927, the organisation was neither willing or able to lend support. Instead, at the insistence of Ethelreda Lewis they counselled restraint and return to work. The impact of ICU inaction proved enormous. Confidence was undermined among many workers, and the Union's credibility lost. Coinciding with its rural decline, moreover, it put new strains on the organisation which it was unable to sustain. Regional rivalries and personal tensions which had been papered over in time of growth broke open with fresh acrimony when it entered decline, and by 1930 the ICU had effectively fallen apart.

It is sometimes argued that it was Kadalie's absence in Europe in 1927, together with his decision to import the British trade unionist, Ballinger, on his return, that tilted the ICU into crisis and decline. In practice, as has been shown, the malaise went deeper than that. Although Kadalie's absence in 1927 may have deprived the organisation of firm leadership at a critical time, and although Ballinger's attempts at reorganisation may have intensified feuding within the ICU, the real problems were the long-standing ones of a lack of analysis and strategy. To say this however merely begs the broader question of why no sounder analysis or strategy developed, and for an answer to this it is necessary to look more explicitly at the character



of the leadership and the constraints of the situation in which they operated. In a sense the ICU's leaders are not entirely to be blamed for their organisation's collapse. For a long time the pitfalls of loose thinking were obscured by the spectacular gains that were achieved from projecting precisely the sort of diffuse appeal. With the African National Congress confining itself largely to elite concerns, it sufficed for the ICU simply to voice mass grievances for it to become the principle vehicle of african discontent. The inherent dangers of this approach scarcely need elaboration; what mattered was not so much numbers as their relationship and ratio to the object under attack. And when that object was broadly political, the scattered following of the ICU could have little success until organised on some more effective basis to confront the state.

Even here the leadership has some defence. They could and did claim that political and economic issues were inseparable; that in the face of measures like the Pass Laws and the Industrial Conciliation Act, both had to be confronted at the same time. The obvious weakness of this line of argument was that it confused the diagnosis with the cure. Political and economic issues might be intertwined, but since the only available power base was the organised working class it was this that had to be used. The word 'organised' is of some importance here. Agricultural labourers, as we have seen, were virtually unorganisable; so too, it can be argued were those in the reserves. Clamped into a system of tribal control and insulated administratively from outside, the ICU could never easily have achieved penetration there - whatever the merits of organising migrant labour at its rural end. Nor in fact did they really try. All this left, therefore, was the urban working class; and it is in their failure to organise this group that the ICU can chiefly be criticised.

The ICU's comparative neglect of urban workers was in some measure a reflection of its leadership calibre. While they may have been correct in adopting a political strategy, they were mistaken in pursuing it prematurely, and in not developing a trade union strategy as a platform for their political goals. The reason for this negligence can be traced to their elite or bourgeois background. Whereas in European trade unionism, trade union leadership had developed organically from the working class, in the ICU the movement had been created and a leadership imposed more or less from the outside. From the outset, therefore, the movement was characterised by the cult of the personality, and by contradictory bourgeois aims. Both Champion, the ICU's Natal leader, and Kadalie bear this stamp. Each relied more on charisma than on organisation, and each saw the standing of the Union as being synonymous with his own. This was damaging, not only because it substituted populism for trade unionism, but because it also gave rise to a series of personal vendettas which ultimately split the organisation apart. In the case of Champion because he believed one had to be a man of property to be a man of standing, and because he saw the stature of the Union as a re-

flection of his own, he felt no qualms about mingling official union finances with those of his own. While this was not necessarily disastrous from the narrow financial view it was from a broader political one. Regional conflicts became personalised, and political opponents could and did level accusations of corruption for more general political ends. Once decline and financial stringency set in, disintegration almost automatically ensued.

Leadership deficiencies were therefore critical. But some nagging questions still remain. Why did a more adequate leadership never develop? Or did the ICU in fact get the leadership it deserved? Was the situation appropriate for trade unionism, or was it impossible for effective organisation and leadership to emerge? Certainly a case can be made for this last argument. Unlike today for instance only a fraction of the black working population was absorbed in the industrial working force, which left a reservoir of untapped labour in theory available to undercut union demands. Unlike today the large majority of African workers were effectively migratory in the sense that they could supplement urban wages with rural subsidies, and hence were not totally committed to their industrial milieu. Unlike today there were only a handful of large-scale industries to serve as bases for authentic industrial unions. Unlike today, in short, it can be argued no viable alternative to populism existed, and no other breed of leader could have emerged.

But this again seems to paint the picture too blackly. In 1921, for instance, the black and coloured work force in urban areas numbered 837 000, a growing proportion of which was becoming stabilised. For much of the following decade, moreover, economic growth was sufficiently steady to mop up the excess of labour supply and largely erase the threat of competition from any reserve army of unemployed. Lastly, among black labour generally there had developed a sense of worker consciousness, of which the post-war strikes were the more visible form. The potential for some sort of trade unionism, therefore, clearly existed. Whether it was enough to sustain much more than the ICU, is of course, a different matter. In the opinion of this writer it was, though the implications of greater success may have been politically ambiguous; others will disagree even with that. For the moment it seems it must remain an open question.

To conclude, what was the legacy of the ICU? Obviously to the extent that it disintegrated it was one of failure. But that failure was not as complete as is often assumed. Local leaders and linkages did not simply vanish, but remained ready to be taken up when new organisations emerged. Similarly, worker consciousness, though battered, was also hardened and prepared for action of a more disciplined form. In a sense the very memory of the ICU was to prove instructive, an encouragement and a warning to all who followed on.

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THE COTTON WORKERS' STRUGGLE CONTINUES.

The strike of some 1 500 textile workers employed at two Frame group factories in August 1974 has again shown that very little has changed in labour relations in the cotton textile industry. The strike of workers at Consolidated Fine Spinning and Weaving and Ultex (adjoining factories in Mobeni) was characterised by a fierce bitterness among the workers and intransigence by management.

The strike also brought out the negative role of the Department of Labour, the failure of negotiations through liaison committees or through direct intervention by the KwaZulu Government officials, the unsatisfactory nature of the cotton wage order imposed by the manufacturers and the state, and the necessity for new forms of labour relations.

The strike was the second in 1974 and the third major strike following the general strike of January-February 1973 by textile workers employed by the Frame Group. The Frame Group was subsequently accused by the textile unions for creating 'intractable labour situations' which lead to widespread labour unrest among workers.

In the early 1960s the registered Textile Workers' Industrial Union had organised virtually all indian workers at Consolidated Fine Spinning and Weaving and had attempted to negotiate Conciliation Board agreements with management. Frame management, however, refused to meet the Union to discuss workers' demands. Mr. Frame insisted that the other manufacturers be approached and the Union (with hindsight, it can be said, rather foolishly) dropped the proceedings towards getting a Conciliation Board established. Members became disillusioned with the lack of achievements of the Union and resigned or left the industry after an unsuccessful strike in 1962.

The National Union of Textile Workers, representing african workers in the textile industry, did not have a large number of members in the two factories, but as in the case of other strikes, the workers turned towards the Union for authentic assistance and advice.

The strike broke out on Monday, 12 August at the two factories which are the most important cotton textile mills in Durban. The dispute had arisen, the workers said, because through the liaison committee management had promised workers an increase of 75c a week earlier in the year, but the actual increase paid had only been 50c. The strikers rejected all previous management offers and demanded a minimum wage of R25 which approximates the poverty datum line for the Durban area.

Management's response to the demands was typical of the Frame Group. Mr. A. Berman, director of the two factories, flanked by a large contingent of police with sten guns, rifles, tear gas and batons, told the workers: "This is an illegal strike. The gates

will remain open for anyone wanting to work. They must do so now. Those who do not come to work at 6 p.m. or 6.45 a.m. tomorrow will have breached their shift (sic) and will be paid off. Those who are paid off must call to collect their pay on Wednesday morning. According to the Factories Act they will lose their leave pay. Long service employees also run the risk of losing long service pay".

Management's threat of the ultimate industrial penalties backed by possible prosecution for striking, inflamed the workers. Mr. Berman's address was greeted with jeers and shouts of 'that's alright'. The workers, a minority of whom were at that time members of the National Union of Textile Workers, demanded that Mr. Solomon Ngobese, KwaZulu urban representative be brought in to negotiate on their behalf with management.

This demand was rejected by the Department of Labour and an official told the workers: "Mr. Ngobese is not a member of the Government of this country and may not negotiate for you". The same official said that the "position in the textile industry is not so good and management will be forced to lay you off if you don't return to work." A labour officer for the factories, however, later told workers that the factories were so far ahead on production that "It does not matter to us if you stay away for a month".

The obstinacy of the Department of Labour and the inflammatory statements made by management increased workers' militancy and the night shift of both factories refused to listen to Mr. A. Berman who attempted to address them and they turned away workers walking towards the factory.

By Tuesday morning the strike was unanimous and production had come to a standstill. Hundreds of workers gathered outside the factories in the rain to maintain an unofficial picket and to wait for some response from management. Mr. Berman again told the workers they would all be dismissed and said: "This is my last address to you on this subject. There is no point in you hanging around if you do not want to return to work." He promised police protection for strike breakers over the jeers of the workers.

On Tuesday morning an unusual incident took place which demonstrated the absurd lack of effective communication. A Security Branch officer who refused to identify himself addressed the strikers in a ham-handed manner: "I am not from management. I am a member of the CID and I am making an investigation. What do you want?" The strikers shouted, "We want money!" and the Security Branch officer suggested that they send a deputation to see management. This the workers refused to do as they remembered concrete examples of victimisation in the past.

In the afternoon large numbers of workers now angry with the



lack of response from management and the refusal of the Department of Labour to call Mr. Solomon Ngobese came into Bolton Hall. The meeting got off to a difficult start because of the intimidating presence of a number of Security Police in the hall. Another meeting on Wednesday provided a forum for the crystallisation of precise demands, a platform for the ventilation of grievances, and a basis for cementing solidarity in the face of monolithic hostility from employers and the state. The strikers demanded a R10 across the board increase in weekly wages from R14.05 for men and R10.50 for women, that the 20c an hour night shift allowance be increased, that there should be no victimisation of the strikers and that everyone be taken back, and that workers be allowed to choose their own form of representation.

A 14 member delegation was elected, to be accompanied by two KwaZulu representatives and trade union officials to negotiate the claims of the workers with management. Management, however, made it quite clear that they were not prepared to negotiate with either Mr. Ngobese or trade union officials. Department of Labour officials refused to address the workers at Bolton Hall.

On Thursday morning, August 15th, the deputation tried to meet management at the factory. Against a background of two truck loads of police around the factory entrance the workers' delegation led by Mr. Ngobese, attempted to open negotiations. The management refused to see the delegation but agreed to see Mr. Ngobese on his own for half an hour. Later, realising the complete intransigence of management, the workers agreed to drop both the KwaZulu and Union officials and meet management. After a four hour meeting the negotiations reached a deadlock as management rejected all the demands of the workers.

From the beginning of the strike the management had used threats of firing, loss of seniority, and leave pay, and were backed by a large police contingent and the Department of Labour. By Wednesday management had adopted more tactical forms of persuasion with the aim of getting at least some of the looms working to intimidate the strikers. The workers who were maintaining an unofficial picket outside the factory during the meeting at Bolton Hall were approached by white managers and a black interpreter. Through a loud hailer, the workers were told to return to work as many other workers had deserted the strikers. They were told that if they refused to work, they could collect their pay (the Frame Group always holds one week's pay in reserve). A few workers went through the gates to collect their pay packets. Later three white managers approached a group of workers and asked them if they wanted to return to work. Some of the workers said they feared being attacked if they entered the factories (according to press reports). The managers assured them of police protection.

Management also tried to get the message to the workers that the strike had been broken, through the press. On Thursday, August 15th, the Natal Mercury carried an article that the workers had



'trickled' back to work. A spokesman told the newspaper that there were 'tons of workers falling over each other every day here looking for work'. Rumours also circulated that management had gone on a large-scale recruiting drive in the Inanda district (where there are large numbers of squatters without correct papers) to displace the strikers, an action apparently confirmed in the article which spoke of many young workers having reported to the factory for employment.

By Thursday the situation of the strikers was desperate. Any concessions by management were out of the question in their determination to smash strike action and to defend the cotton wage order. Workers were worried that the blacklegs would get some production going with the help of foremen and so strengthen management even further. On the other hand there was the possibility that the workers would be utterly crushed and forced to accept terms dictated by management.

In this situation, the National Union of Textile Workers' received an offer of help from the United Party MP for Pinetown, Mr. Graham McIntosh. In an extraordinary move, Mr. McIntosh flew from Cape Town in an effort to help end the strike. After having full consultations with workers and trade union officials on Friday, Mr. McIntosh then tried approaches to the Department of Labour and management. The Department of Labour refused even to discuss the situation with him. As Mr. Jackson, Divisional Inspector of Labour said later: "There is no question of not wanting to be helpful. I am quite satisfied with my behavior". He claimed to be bound by legislation requiring secrecy in industrial relations. The Frame management did agree to a private meeting.

While not optimistic of any concessions being offered by management, Mr. McIntosh hoped to open discussions again between the strikers and management and at least to secure guarantees against victimisation of strikers, the withdrawal of punitive measures, and a commitment to open negotiations with the liaison committee. Having the support of the National Union of Textile Workers' in his efforts to secure an honourable settlement, McIntosh could act as a mediator by virtually being able to guarantee an end to the strike if certain guarantees could be made by management.

After a week-end meeting with management, McIntosh received guarantees that no workers would be fired for striking and that long service increases would be retained by workers. McIntosh who is a fluent Zulu speaker addressed a meeting of about 550 workers at Bolton Hall on Monday, 19th August, and told them of his discussions with management. He advised the strikers to go back to work at the existing level of wages but to insist that the liaison committee negotiate a new agreement. He told the workers: "I believe we have at this factory a means for negotiation. The workers must also understand that management is concerned and wants to co-operate; if we strike without discussions we create difficulties for everyone". He did, however, assure workers that

they had the right to strike after exhausting negotiations through the liaison committee. "I don't want you to think I am telling you never to strike but it is better to talk first".

After this address and expressions of support from Mr. Ngobese and trade union officials, the strikers resolved to return to work for the sake of unity. The morale of the workers had been maintained. A reporter wrote in retrospect:

"As the workers streamed back into Consolidated Fine Spinners and Weavers and the adjoining Ultex Mill, there was a sense of camaraderie and a new awareness. These were not just african labourers who came crawling back cap in hand; these were men who had resolved to fight another day".

(Daily News, 21 August).

The strike was the second unsuccessful attempt by cotton textile workers to break through the wage structure imposed by the cotton order agreed among the manufacturers and published and supported by the state. Management was determined to allow no breach of the order as this would open the floodgates of demands in other areas, particularly the New Germany (cotton mills. The first strike had taken place in New Germany in January 1974 and was shortly followed by the banning of three officials of the union.

The August 1974 strike showed that the attitude of management of the Frame Group and the state has changed little over the last nine months. Management remains committed to crush all opposition to the cotton wage order and the 'Bantu labour relations system' legislated for black workers by Parliament. The Textile Unions are still encumbered with the enormous task of building up plant and industry-wide agreements in a section of the textile industry plagued with recalcitrant management and threats of wide-spread redundancies.

One's perspective on the determination of the Frame Group to maintain a wage order which legislates such low wages, must be shaped by a knowledge of the profits they make. The following figures, extracted from the Stock Exchange Handbook 1974 show the profits made over the past five years by companies which form part of this gigantic group; Natal Canvas Rubber Manufacturers Ltd., Natal Consolidated Industrial Investment Ltd. and Consolidated Textile Mills Investment Corporation Ltd., all of which have subsidiary companies.

	YEAR	PROFITS
NATAL CANVAS RUBBER MANUFACTURES LTD.	1969	R657 000
	1970	R910 000
	1971	R861 000
	1972	R1532 000
	1973	R2328 000

NATAL CONSOLIDATED INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENT LTD.	1969	R1,722 000
	1970	R1,675 000
	1971	R1,412 000
	1972	R2,534 000
	1973	R2,761 000

CONSOLIDATED TEXTILE MILLS INVESTMENT CORPORATION.	1969	R2,620 000
	1970	R3,568 000
	1971	R4,469 000
	1972	R5,026 000
	1973	R5,855 000

Harold Nxasana, Institute for Industrial Education.

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THE STRIKE AT STERLING WINTHROP.

1 925 workers at Sterling Winthrop went on strike on Friday 6th September because they were dissatisfied with the size of their wage increases. They were expecting a large increase, this being promised two months before. Instead most of them received a R1 increase, 5 received R1.50 and 5 received R2. The wages range between R17 and R20 with little grading according to service.

After meeting together to compare their increases they decided to stop work to discuss their dissatisfaction with management. They decided to demand R5. The production manager told them that the company was not prepared to pay more and that if they were dissatisfied they should all leave. The workers remained within the factory.

Later they were addressed by Mr. Skene an inspector from the Department of Labour who told them to go back to work. They said that they wanted to register their problems with management first, but rejected the committee as a means to this as it was not elected and consisted of Indunas chosen by management. Mr Skene told them that they had a right to elect their own committee to negotiate with management. He said he would communicate this to management and report back to the workers the following work-day Monday 9th.

On Monday, the workers donned their overalls and waited for Mr. Skene to arrive. They waited the whole morning. Meanwhile, Omar Badsha, the Secretary of the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union claims that from the factory gates, he observed that Department of Labour officials and members of the Security Police were inside the factory talking to management. The failure of Mr. Skene to abide by his promise appeared to workers as a sign of whose side he was representing. So they decided to ask the Indunas (the only people recognised by management and who would not be victimised) to communicate their grievances to management. The Indunas reported back saying that management refused to increase their wages, considering that they received substantial benefits, free overalls, subsidised education, low cost Kupagani food hampers and a pension scheme. (The workers reject subsidised education as a handout. They would prefer to be in the dignified position of being able to pay for their children's education with their own money earned from their own labour). Management said that if the workers were not satisfied and if they did not start work within five minutes, then they were all dismissed and must collect their pay packets on Thursday at 11 o'clock. The workers marched out of the factory and decided to meet at the office of the union the following day.

The next day, Tuesday 10th September, the entire workforce (excluding the Indunas) assembled at Bolton Hall. They elected an eleven-man delegation to negotiate with management. Since management refused to negotiate with the union, they decided to ask Mr. Ngobese, Kwazulu Urban Ambassador to intervene on their behalf. Mr. Ngobese agreed to meet management the next day with

the workers' delegation.

The next day, Wednesday 11th September, the workers congregated outside the factory gates. Mr. Ngobese and the workers' delegates tried to enter the factory, but were told by a company spokesman that management would only speak to Mr. Ngobese, not the workers' delegates. All the workers were technically dismissed and thus management would not recognise any elected committee. Only the committee consisting of Indunas, and registered in terms of the Bantu Labour Relations Regulations Amendment Act was recognised.

The workers after consulting with Mr. Ngobese, compromised by allowing him to negotiate on their behalf. He was given a mandate to ask for the reinstatement of all the workers, a guarantee that there would be no victimisation and the recognition of an elected committee which would negotiate their grievances. Feeling the intransigence of management, they wished only to retain their position and not lose anything by the strike.

After meeting with management, Mr. Ngobese addressed the workers, telling them that they were all dismissed and that if they wished to return, then they had to re-apply through the Labour Bureau. He also informed them that 50 workers were to be retrenched. If they returned then they could elect their own committee. He told them that the Department of Labour had approached management to gain information about the workers with a view to charging them for striking illegally.

Mr. Ngobese gave the workers an hour to decide on their course of action. He was told that he must go back to management and get them to accept their original demands.

After a short meeting with management Mr. Ngobese emerged and informed the workers that there would be no victimisation, no-one would be retrenched, that they could elect representatives to negotiate and that they would be paid for the time on strike, but three days pay would be deducted at the end of the year from their holiday pay. The workers decided to return to work the following day, Thursday 12th.

Throughout the duration of the strike, Security Police were present consulting with management.

On Friday, the leader of the workers' delegation, Mr. Mtembu elected during the strike, went to the public relations officer, Mr. Msomi to ask him to contact the Labour Department to inform them that the workers wanted to hold an election to form a new committee. He was told to return on Monday to learn the outcome.

On Tuesday, Mr. Msomi sent a message to Mr. Mthembu asking him to come and see him. As he was on his way, a white foreman stopped him to ask him where he was going. Mr. Mthembu told him where and why he was going. The foreman, overriding Mr. Msomi, took Mr. Mthembu to the factory manager and told him that he did not want Mr. Mthembu to speak to anyone or to see Mr. Msomi.



Most probably he had been advised to catch the leaders.

Mr. Mthembu returned to work and was approached by Mr. Msomi who asked him why he had not gone to see him. Mr. Mthembu explained and asked Mr. Msomi to inform the workers at tea-break of the occurrence as he was not allowed to speak to them; he was not allowed to be their representative. Mr. Msomi told the workers of the position.

At 4.00p.m. some workers were paid off as retrenched. The factory manager personally paid off Mr. Mthembu saying, "I am paying you off because you talk too much". Mr. Mthembu left the department, raising his pay packet to show the others that he was leaving. After he had dressed and left, the factory manager and his cohorts the Security Police, searched the change rooms for him.

About 20 workers were retrenched including three members of the delegation. The retrenchment is apparently a seasonal occurrence which unfortunately fell at the same time as the strike. Thus the leaders could be sifted out. These workers can't find jobs. The strike was given wide publicity and they have been black-listed as Sterling strikers.

On Friday, the 11th of October, management summoned a meeting, at which the police were present. A police officer spoke to the workers, saying that they had broken the law by striking, and as a result were being charged. He issued the workers with summons, demanding R40 admission of guilt fines from each worker. The police officer said that the fine was supposed to be R50. He said in addition that those that didn't pay would have to appear in court and have to pay larger sums. The workers weren't allowed to speak. The factory manager then attempted to make the proposition seem even more materially attractive by saying that those who went to court would not be paid for the days absent from work. He said that if the workers agreed to pay the fine, R2 would be deducted each week from each workers' wages and at the end of the year the final amount would be deducted from their holiday pay.

In this intimidating atmosphere, all the workers with one exception agreed to sign admission of guilt. They did not have a chance to meet together to discuss their strategy and did not have the knowledge of possible success in the courts with which to combat their sense of defeatism engendered by the strike.

Management doesn't want to compromise its absolute authority by having an elected works committee. It is even more opposed to negotiation with the trade union which makes one sceptical of the relevance of the US policy in this regard. At the TUCSA conference, Mr. Purcell, US Labour Officer for Southern Africa said that American owned companies in South Africa are urged by the US government to negotiate with registered trade unions. This



statement was confirmed by the US States Department - "The State Department is anxious that american companies in South Africa should be seen to be at the forefront of the move to improve the condition of black workers" (Daily News, 26th September 1974). Without publicity at home and in the absence of measures to enforce this policy, this remains mere rhetoric. Sterling Winthrop far from opposing Nationalist Party policy by negotiating with the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union, seems, in the eyes of the workers, to have colluded with the Department of Labour and the Security Police in repressing them. Their policy is one of 'making hay while the sun shines'.

Linda Ensor, Managing Editor, South African Labour Bulletin.

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VICTORY FOR THE FLOCON WORKERS!

On the 14th July, workers at Flocon Products stopped work (the details of the strike appear in the SALB Vol. 1 No. 1). They were charged for striking illegally by the manager. The prosecutor found them not guilty on the grounds that the state presented no proof that the workers refused to work in order to induce management to pay them higher wages. They stopped work in order to talk to management, there being no works or liaison committee to perform this function. The workers were discharged after the presentation of the states' case, there being no need for a defense.

### INFORMAL RESISTANCE.

Wherever workers are deprived of the right to participate in some measure in the decision-making process, their frustration and disaffection finds other, frequently hidden, outlets. In SALB Vol.1 No.1 it was suggested that the cumulative effect of the resulting conflict is very serious indeed. Because it is often apparently meaningless, it is virtually impossible for management to control. Because it often simply involves the 'conscientious withdrawal of efficiency', it is often not even possible for management to assess the total cost. One form which this hidden and informal resistance takes is industrial sabotage. Walton and Taylor were quoted as saying, "In functional terms we could describe trade union negotiations as taking over from sabotage and institutionalising conflict through collective bargaining. Unplanned smashing and spontaneous destruction are signs of a powerless individual or group .... our experience suggests that they principally occur in industries which are in an almost pre-trade union state" (quoted, SALB Vol. 1 No. 1 p8).

It is of course by the very nature of the phenomenon very difficult to document it. In what follows we present two different cases. The first case deals with a number of different examples of 'industrial sabotage' and 'conscientious withdrawal of efficiency' observed by a worker on a building site in Newcastle. The second case deals with the informal methods used by dock-workers to control foremen. It is based largely on press reports.

#### A NEWCASTLE BUILDING SITE.

"Everyone I met in Newcastle quite clearly understood that the labour policy dictating Iskor's construction was stupid, reactionary and wasteful" writes a worker there. "I got R2 an hour plus a black slave to carry my tool-box. He had worked for one of the erection firms for six months and he got about 24c an hour. He was a good rigger, and with a month or so training could have done my job better than I. None of the blacks I spoke to expressed any resentment at the wage discrepancies, though one day there was a row outside the site office and three men were arrested when the vans arrived. I was fitting pipes for a german firm which was paid by Iskor; R9 per man-hour per artisan, I think. So they didn't care much whether you could do the job or not. They brought out german fitters and welders who kicked the blacks and took the normal white south african journeyman's salary plus several hundred a month back in Germany. They were no better workers than anyone else.

"The blacks stood together and didn't show any resentment that I saw, even when the Germans kicked them. There was an interesting incident: one of them used to shout at the blacks because they couldn't understand German. The more he shouted and swore, the slower they worked, until two men he had working for him were almost zombies, though they smiled a lot, as though they were quite satisfied. They went to pick up a pipe. If two whites had done it, the pipes would have been in place in five minutes. But they walked slowly over to the pipe, tested its weight, made packing

to protect their hands, tested its weight, considered the heat of the day. This German watched the whole show for about 15 minutes then he ran over swearing "dog, ox, dumheit!" and kicked them. The blacks were quite pleased; they had made him reveal himself. The white south african artisans saw it as the action of an aberrant foreigner. They saw it as ineffective racism. The coloured welders - the only workers on the site - saw it without excitement as an amusing confirmation of the structural qualities of the material they worked with.

"These coloured welders I met there travelled from site to site, a couple of months at a time. They have a brotherhood and they know what jobs are where and which are best. They were the only workers at the site in the sense that, although everyone on that site from the engineers down was a migrant wage labourer, they were the only people living that life. Everyone else was trying to make a pile and get out.

"One of these coloured welders explained to me how he kept the 'Transvalers' in line. On a construction site where pipes are being fitted, welding is a more important job than pipe-fitting in the job status sense, because the welder is more highly skilled. Most fitters are white, and many of the welders are coloured. Welders are paid more. The fitter makes up the pipe according to specification of size and shape. It's very difficult to get it perfectly right, but the made up section has to fit into an existing pipe, or frequently inbetween two pipes which are already anchored in place. Picture the scene: the day is hot, the fitter has been battling in the sun, with a thousand flies trying to carry him away - they call the flies 'kaffir budgies'. The foreman has been shouting; his friends steal his tools if he doesn't lock his box. He has managed to threaten or cajole some of the black labourers to carry his extremely heavy section of pipe which he has made up in an odd but specified shape. He has probably been working to get it just right for two days. When he is standing, sweating in the sun, struggling to get his piece into place, flush at either end with the rest of the pipe-line, he has to rely on the welder to tell him when it is right. When it is exactly in place, he tells the welder 'tack' and the welder tack-welds it into place with four touches of his arc.

"The welder stands in the shade and waits for the pipe to be fitted, then he tacks it in place, then he welds it up. When he has welded it up, the weld is X-rayed to see if it will stand pressure, and if the weld isn't perfect, not to embarrass the welder with being fired, they send him back to welding school. So if the pipe isn't tacked perfectly in place, it is the welder's prerogative to tell the fitter to cut it out, regrind the face, and fit it again. Since the welder is standing by almost idle while the fitter is struggling to get the pipe into place, he can easily see when it is the right moment to tack. But if the fitter is a 'Transvaler' the welder will wait for the fitter to say 'tack'



then maybe wait for a second or two more - adjusting his mask or getting the arc to work - and tack when it is out of place again. Whose fault? The fitter knows what has happened. But it was his mouth which gave the order, 'tack'. If the fitter and welder have a good relationship, the welder holds the pipe in position, helps the operation on, gets it right. "We soon bring them into shape". There was no malicious satisfaction in the welder who told me that. To him it was technique for working material like welding rods or girder steel. The satisfaction was in knowing how to do the job well enough to look after yourself. They took pride to the point of conceitedness in being neat welders. They took the same pride in handling the foreman, and keeping themselves happy on the site looking after their friends vis-a-vis the job.

"This same welder, pointed out to me the people on the site who look after themselves the best, within the limitations. The blacks take meat and sour porridge in a bottle. At lunch-time they make a fire and eat in al fresco style. Even the best paid whites had only coke and sandwiches, or stood queue in a canteen like a timeserver".

#### THE CAR-SLASHERS.

The dock-workers have recently engaged in slashing the car-tyres of their foremen. The workers are mainly day labourers who move from shed to shed without any guarantee that there will be work then next day. They earn about R11 a week. In contrast, the white foreman earn high salaries, have a permanent job and until recently lead secure lives. The workers have no long term interest in maintaining their job, work under the close supervision and control of the foremen and thus have no interest in working efficiently.

They sleep, get drunk and pilfer the cargo on the job. When the foremen report their deeds to their 'superiors', the workers retaliate by slashing their car-tyres. 36 tyres have been slashed in the last nine months. When the workers are disciplined for pilfering, they are told who the accuser is, and they immediately slash his tyres. One foreman had his two front tyres cut. He replaced them but the next day found all four tyres slashed. Another called the police to deal with drunk, night-shift workers, the consequence of which was four slashed tyres.

The indirect consequence of this rejection by the workers of the foremen's authority and the control over their lives, was that the role of the foremen was threatened. One supervisor said, "If we report the boys we get our tyres slashed and lose a day's pay while we get them fixed, and if we don't report them, we get into trouble from our bosses for not maintaining discipline .... we just can't win" (Daily News, 30th August).

The workers said that while the conflict was most intense, the foremen reacted by being much stricter on the job. To admit the

effects of the workers' actions by attempting to be conciliatory would have been a sign of defeat, and a possible inducement for the workers to continue.

The foremen feel threatened by the situation and feel the need for protection. Unexpectedly, and to their credit, they did not interpret the conflict in racist terms. One said that the use of black labourers on a daily 'work and pay' basis appeared to be the crux of the problem because at the Point dock-yards only permanent labour was employed and there was no trouble. Another said that the workers have no interest in their job because they only work for one day.

There is no way out for the foremen. Unless the workers have a sense of responsibility, unless they control their lives and their work, (which for one thing means having no foremen) they will resort to sabotage of this nature.

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## BOOK REVIEW.

Hugh Tinker: "A New System of Slavery. The Export of Indian Labour Overseas (1830-1920)".  
IIR. Oxford 1974.

Anyone interested in the social institutions of 'unfree' labour in colonial societies is confronted by an interesting paradox; while there is no dearth of sociological and historical studies on the institutions of slavery, other institutions of 'unfree' labour are largely unresearched (1). The explanation for this paradox may well lie in the widespread acceptance of Max Weber's assertion that only free wage labour is ultimately compatible with capitalism's rational calculating spirit (2). Slavery, Weber argued, was irrational from the point of view of a productive enterprise and become, therefore, obsolete. What he failed to recognise was the possibility that other forms of 'unfree' labour might emerge in the wake of the abolition of slavery. This Weberian conception of capitalism has led scholars to obfuscate the nature of colonial labour exploitation by focussing on an extreme form of 'unfree' labour rather than its sociological variants found in other parts of the colonial world. To make your employee your legal property as in slavery, is an extreme form of labour repression; to indent him for a certain period of time to do specific things for you at subsistence wages in appalling conditions involves a difference in kind. To focus on the one to the exclusion of the other obscures the essential continuity of labour exploitation under colonialism.

With this in mind, I turned with great interest to Hugh Tinker's book with its arresting title. The connection between the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, and the need for an alternative source of cheap labour on the Caribbean sugar plantations is demonstrated in the first chapter. When the seven year compulsory 'apprenticeship' was over for 'emancipated' slaves, the sugar planters looked to India for labour. But indentured labour was to differ only in form from the previous system; the content remained essentially the same. As Sir Charles Dilke, the Radical Imperialist, discovered for himself - "After the loss of cheap labour by the abolition of slavery, the blight or the curse of the former system lay upon the planters who seemed stunned and wholly unable to strike out new methods" (p19).

It is customary to distinguish between indentured labour and slavery in two ways; firstly, it is held that indentured labour is recruited voluntarily while the slave is 'coerced'; secondly, that the indentured labourer is indented for a finite period of time whereas the slave can be held in perpetuity as a labour commodity. Tinker's evidence suggests that the distinctions between the two institutions of labour exploitation are less sharp than commonly thought. His chapter on 'The Passage' - the over-crowding, the violence and the suicide - is reminiscent of the 'middle passage' of slavery and seems to have a similar traumatic effect on its victims. Besides, to say that they went voluntarily is



largely true in the formal sense that they were not forced at gunpoint but "given the contradiction between the expectations of the wayfarers and the realities of indentured or other bonded emigration, it was necessary for the recruiting agents to present a picture of what was to come which was often distant from reality.... It was this deception - which, at the end, the Government of India was to call 'fraudulent statements made by the recruiter' - which formed a major flaw in the system .." (p 169).

This reality is well-captured by Tinker. "If the Indians were to survive, as human beings, their survival depended largely on their own powers of resilience. They devised their own past-times, recreated some semblance of the lost India in festivals and feasts. But it wasn't much, and often their attempts to forget the canefields ended only in drunken oblivion. When goaded beyond their apparently infinite endurance and patience they would try to rebel; but the protest almost always ended in repression. For many, the plantation brought sickness and premature death. For a few, it brought a chance to acquire a little power, and so by petty exploitation of one's fellows to become a little less poor, thus giving the means of getting away from the confinement of the plantation. But for most, the plantation remained the boundary of existence. Although the indentured coolie could be held in legal bondage only for a period of years, the plantation held most of them for life. The only escape was a return to India - worn-out, impoverished, in most cases - unless, as in Trinidad, there was the possibility of acquiring a few acres, as a freehold or leasehold, to set up on one's own. When at last immigration dried up in many of the colonies, the sugar-producers themselves adapted to a smallholding system. Meantime, for almost a century after slavery, the plantation imposed a total way of existence upon generations of bonded Indians" (p178-179).

This is the first comprehensive historical summary of the export of Indians to supply the labour needed in producing plantation crops such as sugar, coffee, tea and rubber, in Mauritius, South and East Africa, the Caribbean, Guyana, Ceylon, Malaya and Fiji. It underlines the extent to which colonialism was able to solve what is euphemistically called a 'labour shortage', by drawing on cheaper labour elsewhere in the world. Thus Indian indentured labourers were imported in 1860 to work on the Natal sugar plantations because of the 'labour shortage'; that is, Africans were not prepared to engage in full-time wage labour at the wages offered by the planters. Again in 1904, Chinese indentured labour was introduced onto the gold mines to meet the 'labour shortage' created by the *de facto* strike among African mine-workers following the fall in wages after the Anglo-Boer war (3).

The weakness of Tinker's approach is that he does not really relate indentured labour to the other institutions of 'unfree' labour in colonial societies. For example, if we ask the slightly different question of how a labour supply was created, then we are able to identify a continuum of 'unfree' labour insti-

tutions. In South Africa, for instance, slavery was abolished in 1834 and was immediately followed by an 'apprentiship system' which coupled with the Master and Servants Act did in fact tie labourers to employers in ways similar to indentured labour (4). In fact the Dutch use the word 'ingeboekan' - to book in- which means literally to indent (5).

To understand the creation of a labour supply in colonial societies we need to do two things; firstly, we must identify the institutions of 'unfree' labour. In South Africa this involves identifying all the institutions which surround 'migrant labour' - the pass system, the compound, prison labour etc. Then we must emphasize the extent to which other forms of labour besides free wage labour are compatible with 'rational capitalism'. As John Rex states, "What is interesting about some forms of labour used in South Africa is that they enable the employer to control a variety of forms of legitimate violence which he uses against his workers, but at the same time, do not require that he should buy the worker for life and be responsible for the worker for life. The achievement of this state of affairs represents a considerable advance in rationality over the slave system. Indeed it might be said to be the theoretically most perfect system of labour exploitation yet devised" (6).

Secondly we need to question the distinction between 'free' and 'unfree' labour, market and labour repressive economies, economic and extra-economic coercion. According to Barrington Moore, "the distinction is between the use of political mechanisms on the one hand and reliance on the labour market on the other hand" (7). That is, it is the distinction between an economy in which workers come voluntarily onto the labour market and enter into an equitable contract with employers and an economy in which workers are constrained by some or other political mechanism to work for their employer and so are not in a relation of contractual equality with them. This distinction is misleading because the market system does not operate independently of political factors - it is always embedded in a political context which defines the rules governing the use of property within that market. What we need to recognise is that there are not two distinct types of economy but rather a kind of continuum. "At one end of the continuum lies some form of slave society. At the other end lies a socialist society in which the labour market has been entirely replaced by some system in which labour is no longer a priced commodity. Whether or not that point can be reached is a matter of debate .... But short of that point there is necessarily some system which maintains the necessity for some people to sell their labour to other people who do not have to sell their labour" (8).

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