

SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

WORKING FOR FORD?

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Worker leader Assassinated

Samson Cele 1953 – 1980

Samson Cele, an experienced NUTW shop steward at Frametex in Pinetown, was shot dead at point blank range by a hooded gunman on Friday night, July 18. Workers claim he was assassinated.

Samson was first elected to the Frametex Liaison Committee in April 1976 and was re-elected in '78 and again in '80, because 'he really represented workers interests' Another shop steward who had worked closely with him said,

"Samson's not afraid to speak to management. He was a very brave man. During the strike he just told management straight, 'management, you caused this trouble. You must say waht you are going to give.' When he was arrested and charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act, he just asked a question to Lieutenant Du Toit straight – 'Who told you we forced workers out?' Du Toit got angry and shouted, 'Don't ask me questions.' This showed me he's a brave man. He told me he's not afraid if he gets fired after the strike, 'I will go to another factory and organize the union there,' he said.

Another thing why Samson impressed the workers was he refused promotion. He didn't want any privileges for himself, even though he had to support his mother who was suffering. His father died a week before the strike. For him everything must be done on a majority basis. Politics must be fought fully on a union front."

At the age of 15 he began as a domestic before moving on to work in a bottle store, then as a labourer for a contractor. He started at Frametex in 1974 where he was a weaver until his dismissal soon after the recent strike. He married in '75 and has two children, aged four and one. In addition to supporting his own family on below subsistence wages, he sent money home, for since his father had been sick and unable to work after 1966, they relied on his regular contribution.

Frametex workers collected R300 for the funeral expenses, despite management threats of dismissal for anyone found collecting. Workers allege that they were warned not to attend the memorial service.

A huge gathering of workers participated in the memorial. As the speakers revealed, Samson Cele, committed and fearless, lives on in the collective consciousness. The individual may appear defeated, but not the cause he served.

COMMENT

Ford - what kind of organisation?

This edition of the Labour Bulletin focuses on the industrial conflict at the Ford Motor Company in Port Elizabeth. A pioneer of mass production in South Africa during the 1920's, the Ford Motor Company has remained a pace setter. Under pressure from its headquarters in Canada, it was one of the first companies to recognise an unregistered black trade union. Ford has developed a highly sophisticated co-optive policy to deal with its industrial relations problems, as is reflected in Industrial Relations Director F.H. Ferreira's paper to the Urban Foundation, published in this edition. The major dispute that erupted in November last year, which was to receive local and international attention, has revealed the cosmetic nature of Ford's policies. It is clear that the dispute was, in part, provoked by racially discriminatory practices tolerated by the Company.

The dispute poses a central question for trade union leadership in South Africa: what is the nature of the relationship between workplace issues and wider community and political struggles in a period where the level of struggle is intensifying? For workers, particularly African workers, whose living and working conditions are controlled by the same influx control regulations and state institutions, the connection between exploitation in the workplace and deprivation in the community is immediate at the level of experience. Analysis of South African society reveals this inextricable linkage. (For discussion of these issues in the context of struggles of the 50's and 60's, see Lambert's review of Feit's book) When workers perceive this linkage, what then is the appropriate relationship between workplace organisation (trade unions) and a community-based organisation (such as Pebco)?

We explore these questions by examining the different roles played by the United Automobile Rubber and Allied Workers Union (UAW), the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (Pebco) and the Ford Workers' Committee (FWC). The relationships between these organisations are explored from different perspectives, often bringing to bear differing interpretations of events and the roles played by those involved in the dispute. Through the critical nature of the articles presented, the Bulletin hopes to stimulate reflection and debate within and among these organisations with regard to their involvement in the dispute.

The UAW is shown to have failed to mobilise Cortina workers in the plant because it lacked a democratic shop floor base. As Maree has argued, in the absence of shop floor support, the UAW could not give direction and leadership to workers during the height of the conflict in November 1979. Its inability to do so arises out of an inadequate understanding of how to organise on the shop floor. It appears from the interview with Mke and Simandla that in Cortina the UAW itself was not sufficiently clear as to what was required to build a worker leadership. The contrast of subsequent developments in Uitenhage is instructive. Here the UAW, with a stronger shop floor organisation, was able to seize the initiative and present manage-

ment with strong, unified demands. But in the Ford case, its inability to develop a leadership with the support and confidence of the workforce, combined with its lack of understanding of the militant nature of this workforce as having been profoundly influenced by both the upsurge of political struggles in the Eastern Cape and the political leadership spurned by those struggles, led the UAW to surrendering any leadership role during the dispute.

On the other hand, for Cortina workers the input from Pebco, while clearly providing the necessary support to enable them to win certain demands, could generate neither the ongoing organisational basis nor the specific skills and experience necessary for advancing workers' struggle in the factory. This would also explain why the agreement reached between the Ford Workers' Committee and the Company contained a number of loopholes, later exploited by management: (see FWC document on reinstatement). The Ford dispute has demonstrated that workers' action inside the plant must be backed up by strong democratic shop floor organisation which has the capacity to deal with the intricacies of industrial relations.

This is not to deny the interrelatedness of workplace and community issues for workers. It is however to assert that differences exist between the forms of organisation appropriate to workplace and community respectively. The two forms cannot be superimposed one on the other. However, workers have the right to determine the role and scope of their own organisations.

This stands in direct contradiction to the state's policy of laying down narrow rails on which trade unions, as worker organisations, must run. There are two dangers here: first if trade unions conform to the role that the state sees for them and fail to advance vigorously workers' interests, attempts will be made by workers to bypass them. Second, these attempts may fail to entrench long term structures in the factory. Geschwender's book review by Makalima illustrates this in the case of Detroit's black workers. Favis's account shows that the FWC runs a similar risk.

Daily Events of the Wildcat Strike

Marianne Roux

30th October 1979

Thozamile Botha, leader of the Port Elizabeth Civic Organisation (PEBCO) and a trainee draughtsman who joined Ford in February resigned after he was told that he was absent from work too often. Botha said that a Ford official warned him that he would either end up in jail or lose his job. The official told him that members from other departments had also complained about his outside activities. In an interview with Botha he expressed the viewpoint that he was being victimized for his activities as leader of the black civic organisation.

A Ford spokesman said that the company dissociated itself with these alleged remarks. If they were made by a Ford official this was done in his personal capacity. It was not Botha's political activities, but his frequent absences from work that concerned the company. "I have no hesitation in saying his absence from work interfered with his performance" said Mr Dunbar Bucknall, Ford's Public Relations Officer. (Daily Dispatch Nov. 1, 1979.)

The inaugural meeting of the black civic organisation, held in New Brighton on the evening of the 30th, was attended by thousands of township residents. A number of speakers condemned the actions of Ford, and Botha himself spoke strongly against multinational companies. The meeting decided unanimously to employ Botha as full-time organiser for the organisation.

Wednesday 31st October

The entire African work-force of nearly 700 workers at Ford's Struandale Cortina plant walked out in sympathy with the resignation of Botha. During the morning, pamphlets were distributed demanding that Botha be allowed to go back to put forward his case. "If he is not here at noon today, tools down everybody for three days." the pamphlet read.

Manual and white-collar workers started gathering on a lawn at the plant from 11.30 a.m. By noon hundreds were seated on the grass and production at the plant came to a standstill. Workers in the plant requested an interview with the plant manager to explain what they regarded as the forced resignation of Botha. The plant manager would not see them. Instead they were addressed by Mr D Pieterse the labour relations manager. He was accompanied by Mr J Mke, the vice-chairman of the Liaison Committee and chairman of the United Automobile Workers Union, who advised them to return to their jobs. Both Pieterse and Mke were greeted with 'boos' and black power salutes. Mke's actions on the day of the strike have been severely criticized by the workers involved. One of the workers and a PEBCO supporter said that Mke was approached when there was a deadlock. "People were sitting on the grass; all he did was to carry out the instructions of management and order the people to go back to work."

Shortly after 1 p.m. the entire Cortina workforce marched out of the gates of the plant, with much shouting and saluting, after management had apparently refused a request that Botha be brought back to address the workers. Botha held that if the company had allowed him to address the crowd none of this would have happened.

A Ford spokesman confirmed that Botha had not been contacted; neither, he claimed, had the police been called in. He also said that there was no indication that the strike would spread to the other Ford plants in Port Elizabeth.

Thursday 1st November

A meeting was called between Botha, trade union representative J Mke and Ford supervisors and industrial relations staff. It was agreed that Botha's resignation was the result of a misunderstanding. Ford released a statement saying that he had requested to withdraw his resignation.

Hundreds of workers gathered outside the factory gates after 7 a.m. demanding to be addressed by Botha. They left after 10 a.m. when a trade union representative informed them that he would speak to them the next day.

Friday 2nd November

Botha addressed the workers at an open-air meeting outside the plant gates. He told them that he would not lead them into the plant until management withdrew a statement that he had asked to withdraw his resignation. Botha outlined the circumstances which led to his resignation. He said he was back because management had approached him and because it was what the workers wanted. A Ford management team led by the General Manager, Mr Pitt, confirmed that Botha had been reinstated. They expressed regret for an earlier Ford statement in which it was claimed that he had requested to withdraw his resignation. The company also accepted all workers back without fear of victimization. It was further agreed that the question of pay while on strike would be negotiated between the Company and Union representatives, and that the workers would be told the result when they returned to work on the following Monday.

Shortly after 10 a.m. the meeting ended and Botha was hoisted on the shoulders of cheering, saluting and singing workers. It was reported that the strike in sympathy with Botha served to enhance the township leader's stature by winning him and his organisation national and even international coverage.

Monday 5th November

The return of Ford workers ended the three day wild-cat strike of Ford's Cortina plant. The Industrial Relations Director, Mr Fred Ferreira announced that the strikers would be paid for the time they were off work. The pay agreement was reached between Ford management and representatives of the Union.

In an interview afterwards Mr Botha held that the situation at Cortina remained tense.

Thursday 8th November

At a meeting held at the Prince Alfred Hall in Sydenham, more than 200 white

workers threatened to go on strike over a wide range of grievances. The workers were addressed by Mr Henry Ferreira, Deputy General Secretary of the South African Iron Steel and Allied Industries Union (ISAIU). White workers complained about black hostility to whites in the Cortina plant. The company was accused of capitulating to irresponsible black demands.

Mr Kitching, a foreman, complained that he no longer had any power to control black workers. He complained that there was no discipline at Ford. When whites complain about their behaviour they are told "go away you white pig" (Oosterlig 9-11-1979). Mr Kitching said that it was unfair that the strikers had been paid, even though they had not been to work for three days.

Mr B van Eyk said that the Port Elizabeth newspapers had put Mr Botha on a pedestal. "It was a huge victory for the anti-South African element" he continued. Since the strike, he had seen black workers sticking fingers into the faces of certain foremen and when they got angry shouting "Cool it, cool it."

It was felt that the whites' position at Ford had deteriorated and a dispute should be declared if the matter was not rectified.

Mr Minnaar said the Union must show its teeth and demand the reappointment of two white employees who had recently been retrenched.

Mr Sampson said that "the white man had got Ford to where it was today."

Miss Holt, a computer employee said coloured men had made remarks about pregnant women "and I feel we are not safe at the moment".

The crowd became rowdy and terms such as "hell", "opdonner" and "Kaffer" were used. Speakers from the floor accused blacks of misusing locker rooms, toilets and canteens. They complained that since discriminatory signs had been removed at Ford, black workers had unnecessarily dirtied toilets, showers and canteens. A Ford employer expressed the viewpoint that it will shortly be necessary for a white to carry firearms to the toilet should they not want to be stabbed by knives.

Answering questions from white employees, Ferreira said it was Government policy to do away with discrimination. However, the Union believes there should be separate facilities for those workers who want to use them.

It was also said that whites were being discriminated against as blacks got bigger discounts when buying Ford cars.

The meeting called for the reinstatement of a white foreman who was to be retrenched at the end of November because of staff reductions. Ferreira said that if management did not reinstate the white foreman the matter would be taken to the Industrial Council, and if necessary to the Industrial Court. However, he appealed to the white workers not to strike, saying that he would put the complaints to the Industrial Relations Director Fred Ferreira the following day. He warned: "However, if I receive no co-operation from management I must not be held responsible if white workers strike. It is an explosive situation. People must remain calm."

Friday 9th November

H Ferreira in an interview said that Ford was "very sympathetic" and was taking the problems between white and black workers "very seriously" (E P Herald

10-11-1979). A factory level investigation in the presence of Union shop stewards and Mr Pretorius, Secretary of the Port Elizabeth branch of the ISAIU would be held on the following Monday. On the Tuesday talks between the Union and senior management were planned.

Tuesday 13th November

Several hundred black workers at the Cortina plant downed tools, bringing production to a standstill. This came while Ford management was holding separate meetings with black workers and white workers, both of whom were dissatisfied. The immediate issue seems to have been the allocation of urgent overtime work to certain sections of the plant, but it is clear that this action was fuelled by the racist position adopted by the white workforce.

Black workers warned that they would continue to boycott canteen facilities until white workers retracted the derogatory statements previously made.

Wednesday 14th November

During the afternoon, work at the engine plant, adjoining the Cortina assembly plant, came to a halt when 300 workers gathered outside on the factory lawn to discuss their grievances. Permission for this meeting had been granted by management which also participated in the discussions. Thereafter workers dispersed in an orderly fashion.

Production at the assembly plant was resumed, but the canteen boycott, now supported by engine plant workers, continued. Workers at Cortina agreed to work overtime, and a Ford official said that it seemed the workers had misunderstood the reasons for having to work overtime. It was reported that, in the meantime, black workers planned to elect an 'action committee of 10'. They also called for the transfer to another plant of two assembly plant foremen who had allegedly insulted black workers. The complaints, apart from those concerning the remarks made about them by white employees, also concerned an allegation that they got no bonus for the past year, and that an unqualified white foreman had been appointed.

Thursday 15th November

Plants were working and parallel discussions with black and white worker representatives continued. A white foreman previously retrenched was reinstated and his full salary made up.

Friday 16th November

At a mass meeting, the the Cortina plant, workers formulated demands relating to bonus pay, the employment of allegedly unqualified white foremen and the canteen facilities. A memorandum was handed to management with an ultimatum for the resolution of these grievances by Wednesday the following week. (Post 17-11-79)

Tuesday 20th November

At the Struandale assembly plant sixty paintshop workers downed tools after a

disagreement about overtime. It appears that because of an imbalance in production the paint shop was to continue while other sections went off. The workers left with those going early.

Black workers were threatening to walk out again if their complaints were not met by the following day. Workers were told that any one leaving his post or refusing to work reasonable overtime would be considered to have terminated his services.

Wednesday 21st November

About 700 workers at the Cortina plant were given an ultimatum to work or leave. All 700 walked out, bringing production at the assembly plant to a halt. Three hundred workers at the adjacent engine plant considered a work stoppage: all but three resumed work. They were to be paid off the next day with the seven hundred. Among those who walked out was Mr Thozamile Botha, Chairman of PEBCO.

At this time, considerable numbers of police were on standby at a distance. They had not, according to a Ford spokesman, been called in by the company.

Thursday 22nd November

Apart from the Cortina plant, conditions were normal at Ford's other plants. The company announced that new workers would be recruited from the beginning of the following week. It was stated that all applications would be considered. In addition, Fred Ferreira announced to the press that the company would be reviewing its industrial relations organisation, though he still believed that Liaison Committees and Union representatives were effective basic negotiating instruments (Evening Post 22-11-79). Canteen boycotts continued.

Ford workers together with workers from General Tyre (now also on strike in support of an acceptable worker representative body) attended a meeting addressed by Botha. They denied that their walk out had terminated their services. They would return to work when their complaints were met and all workers reinstated. They would not negotiate with management through Liaison Committees.

Friday 23rd November

The 700 workers who had walked out were paid off. They refused to continue collecting their pay when three vanloads of riot police arrived. However, they eventually collected their pay slips in a nearby carpark. Bonuses were not paid. Workers considered this shabby treatment. They also claimed that they had not walked out voluntarily on the previous Wednesday, but had been ordered out by management before the Liaison Committee was able to report back to them.

A meeting of approximately half the paid-off workers then decided under the chairmanship of Botha to form a PEBCO affiliated committee to negotiate with the company for their reinstatement and they unanimously approved a motion by Botha that they would not return to work until the 700 were reinstated. Botha pointed out that PEBCO could not negotiate as a trade union, but that a committee of 7 be formed to do this and that it be affiliated to PEBCO.

Saturday 24th November

Mr George Manase, National Organiser of the UAW, warned that the establishment of a PEBCO affiliated committee to represent the interests of dismissed Ford workers could cause serious problems, and warned PEBCO members that this undermined the authority of the Union. The Union had at no time been asked directly by the workers at Ford to hold discussions with management, but it had held unofficial discussions with management (Evening Post 24-11-1979).

Monday 26th November

A letter signed by Botha on behalf of "Ford workers" was addressed to Manase as Secretary of the Union, denying any involvement of PEBCO in undermining Union dealings with management. He wrote on behalf of the committee of Ford workers which invited Manase to address a mass meeting on the following topics:

- 1) Employee benefits in times of dispute and procedures to be followed by workers to achieve such benefits.
- 2) What the Union is doing towards the reinstatement of all workers.
- 3) The registration of the Union under the industrial relations system.
- 4) Channels of communication with management.

Ford Company began the engagement of workers to replace the 700 workers who were dismissed because of the walkout. Fred Ferreira stated that all applications would be considered including those from employees paid off the previous week. The Company might not employ the full number as, in any case, the plant has been on short time.

Wednesday 28th November

The Evening Post reported that officials from the United States Consul's office in Cape Town and Embassy in Pretoria had talks with all the parties to the dispute. These included Botha, Union officials and Ford executives. This was done as Ford subscribes to the Sullivan Code. It was also reported that the Union had initiated steps towards representing all the dismissed workers. A Ford executive confirmed negotiations with the Union, although negotiations were also being conducted by the workers' committee headed by Botha.

There was a slow trickle back of dismissed workers and about 85 of the 210 applicants accepted were former Ford workers. Preferential consideration was also given to former employees. A Ford spokesman said up to the previous evening 165 positions had been filled, approximately 50 percent of which were taken by former employees.

At a general meeting, workers dismissed from Ford, together with those dismissed from General Tyre and Adamas paper mill, discussed ways of collecting money for families and dependents. They established a "Save the Workers" Fund which was to be administered by PEBCO. Botha also reported that an appeal for assistance had been sent to the South African Council for Churches, the Soweto Committee of 10, Azanian People's Organisation and all professional and business people in Port Elizabeth. He called on workers to unite, but to refrain from molesting those who had decided to go back to work.

It was decided to send a letter to Ford headquarters in Detroit, stating that

workers will return to work only if their grievances are met. Letters were to be sent also to the United Nations Organisation and the Rev Jesse Jackson.

A side light of the dispute was a report that the Western Cape Traders' Association threatened a boycott of Ford spares unless all workers were reinstated. The Association represents 87 garage owners and 145 spare parts dealers in the Western Cape.

Thursday 29th November

Botha claimed growing support for PEBCO.

Ford management said they regarded the Union as the official channel of communication with workers, but would hold discussions with any other body representative of workers, provided the Union also participates.

Friday 30th November

Ford reported that job offers had been made to 232 workers of whom 155 were previously employed at the Cortina plant. Ford would not re-employ the full 700, but would return to a five day week.

At 2.30a.m. 22 fired workers were detained by the Security Police. PEBCO cards were confiscated. Botha said that this intimidation was aimed at preventing people from joining PEBCO, which then had more than 3 000 registered members. The Herald of 4 December stated that it believed this to be the first time Security Police had taken such action in a strike situation.

Monday 3rd December

At a meeting, a number of workers reaffirmed that they wanted reinstatement and not re-employment. Manase told them that Ford was prepared only to re-employ, not reinstate, and as some workers had already returned to work it made negotiations very difficult. Botha urged the workers to remain united. Ford had by now re-employed 283 of whom 177 were former employees.

Tuesday 4th December

A meeting attended by 450 dismissed workers made a sharp attack on the 177 who had gone back to work at Ford. Speakers threatened the returned workers and Botha appealed to all workers not to go to work the following day. Workers left the meeting without making any firm decision, thereby dashing the hopes of the Union and the company that they would mutually resolve the dispute.

Mr Fred Sauls of the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers, urged that objectives would be gained if workers applied as a group for jobs, whereas Ford was engaging workers only as individuals. Other speakers recommended remaining as a bloc outside Ford and pressuring the company into accepting their stand. The Union's lack of progress was attacked, but Botha urged workers not to criticize the Union at this stage.

Wednesday 5th December

Negotiations between Ford and the Union continued over the reinstatement of the 500 workers still boycotting employment offers. Ford continued to offer

re-employment on an individual basis.

At a meeting of the Zwide branch of PEBCO, Botha said that the Security Police had confirmed that 21 people were still detained under the General Law Amendment Act. He blamed those that had returned to work for the arrest of the 21, now branded as inciters (E P Herald 7-12-1979).

Monday 10th December

A further seven dismissed workers were detained, while eight were released. This brought the number held for questioning to 20. The Port Elizabeth head of Security Police said that all of them had been Ford workers and were being held because of complaints of victimization made by other black workers.

Ford extended its agreement with the two black unions made the previous week to employ only dismissed workers for another five days until the Christmas shutdown. The agreement was also to hold from January the 2nd to the 4th 1980. But from January the 7th employees were to be engaged as the applications were received. Dismissed Cortina individuals would be able to apply. By this time 304 workers had been engaged, 189 being former workers.

Tuesday 11th December

At a PEBCO meeting Botha said he had telephoned Mr Andrew Young and Mr Jesse Jackson, both of whom agreed to put pressure on Ford in Detroit to have all workers reinstated. In Washington, Jackson met the South African Ambassador, suggesting a delegation investigate the situation. He also said that he had met with Ford officials in Dearborn, Michigan and had threatened to initiate a boycott of Ford products if Ford ignored the request for workers to be reinstated with backpay.

Friday 14th December

The year-end shutdown began with the dispute still unresolved. The dismissed workers received widespread moral support from organisations such as the Soweto Committee of 10, the Azanian People's Organisation and the South African Council of Churches, the latter offering relief assistance, but being told by Ford management it was unnecessary and there was no dispute.

Monday 7th January 1980

Ford's Cortina plant resumed work with 357 workers, 244 being former employees.

Tuesday 8th January

The police reported that the houses of two Ford workers suffered petrol bomb attacks. Botha condemned the attacks.

Numbers employed rose to 377 of whom 264 were from the dismissed employees.

Wednesday 9th January

At a meeting between senior Ford officials, representatives from Ford Cortina

Workers Committee, officials of UAW and at which the United States Consul-General in Cape Town was present, Ford agreed to the mass reinstatement of former employees. Reinstatement was to be at the same rate of pay previously received; pensions, medical aid and sick pay were to remain as before. Holiday pay also to be calculated as before.

The company undertook to complete its re-instatement programme during January 1980, subject only to availability of suitable positions. Assuming that former Cortina plant workers would return to work immediately, no persons other than former Ford workers were to be hired during the month of January.

The Divisional Commissioner of Police urged workers to go to work on the following Monday and to ignore PEBCO's stay-away call. This call preceded the agreement reached during the morning.

Thursday 10th January

Botha, Mr Mono Badela, a journalist and Mr Phlalo Tshume, PEBCO's secretary were detained. It should be noted that they were also concerned with the housing disputes in Walmer. The situation in the Township was tense and during the evening buses were stoned.

In the meantime, workers were being re-employed at the rate of 25 to 30 per day, not always in their former positions, and possibly at other Ford plants. None, however, were re-employed at lower rates.

Monday 14th January

Ford reported that former employees applying for work each day i.e. at a rate of 25 was not satisfactory. As the company was unable to place them on criteria of specific skills, they could process 45 per day. It was reported that a meeting of Ford workers agreed to send 50 men a day to reapply.

Saturday 19th January

The Weekend Post reported complaints by Ford workers that the company was not carrying out the terms of the agreement, but the workers themselves would take no militant action. They complained of having to sign rehiring forms, and they were forbidden to wear the badge with the map of Africa and black fist symbol. There was also some dispute over the 1979 bonus. Ford and the Security Police denied allegations that there was a Security Policeman in the hiring office.

Wednesday 13th February

The last seventeen of the 700 workers dismissed from Cortina plant were reinstated.

Mr G Zini, Chairman of the Ford Workers Committee, addressed the workers at a meeting in Kwazakele. He urged them to join the UAW.

Monday 25th February

The UAW announced that it had recruited 111 new members from Cortina plant, bringing membership at this plant to 469. According to Union officials, 70 percent of the workers in the plant are Union members.

Wednesday 27th February

At a meeting, the reinstated workers were told that they would not lose the residential qualifications they enjoyed before the dispute. The Ford Workers Committee had approached Pieterse, the Labour Relations Manager, who had talks with the Eastern Cape Administration Board.

Major grievances centred on the appointment of coloureds to posts held at Cortina plant by the reinstated workers before the dispute. They asked that these workers be transferred to the other plants and that they be given the chance to return to their previous posts. The Workers Committee informed the workers that they had taken up the matter with management. In an interview Zini said that the workers who had been given posts at the other plants were feeling bitter about not being reinstated at Cortina plant. "This plant is a heritage to them, many have worked there since the plant started." He made it clear that black workers felt no resentment towards their coloured counterparts. They would, he argued, have felt the same had the workers who displaced them been Africans. been Africans.

The workers also appealed to the Committee to ask management to provide new company record cards. The old ones were regarded as "spoilt" as they contained remarks like "do not hire, walked off the job" after the workers were dismissed during the dispute.

Thursday 6th March

The Workers Committee negotiated the reinstatement of 14 of the 17 workers dismissed from Engine Plant during the dispute. The three workers not reinstated have been employed elsewhere.

The 1979 Port Elizabeth Strikes and an Evaluation of the UAW

Johann Maree

Introduction

On 31 October 1979 seven hundred workers at the Ford Struandale Cortina assembly plant walked out in protest over the forced resignation of Thozamile Botha, president of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organization (Pebco). This heralded the start of industrial conflict at Ford and other companies in Port Elizabeth that was only finally resolved three and a half months later. The strikes also involved fundamentally important industrial and political issues in South Africa and pulled in almost all the major actors in the arena.

The aim of this article is to analyse these events and the organizations most closely involved with the African workers, the Ford Workers' Committee that emerged in the conflict, and the United Automobile Rubber and Allied Workers' Union (UAW).¹ In particular, the role of the UAW in the disputes will be carefully analysed and evaluated. In order to do so, it is necessary to consider its history and methods of organisation first.

The United Automobile Rubber and Allied Workers' Union (UAW)²

The origins of the UAW date back to 1971 when the new leadership in the registered National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa (NUMARWOSA) took a decision to co-operate with African workers on the Industrial Council. The following year the union held discussions with African workers and in September 1973 the UAW was founded. The union struggled hard to survive in its first few years of existence until it obtained stoporder payments of members' subscriptions from Ford and General Motors in Port Elizabeth and SKF in Uitenhage. The union has grown rapidly since then and has become a national union with branches in Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, Pretoria and Durban. It also has members in East London who are serviced by the Port Elizabeth organizing secretary of the UAW, George Manase. In January 1980 the union had members at 6 factories in Port Elizabeth. Three of the factories had paid-up members whereas no dues were collected from the remaining three factories because they were still in the early stages of organization.

The UAW has retained close links with the registered NUMARWOSA and can be classified as an independent parallel union of the registered union. In some cases they share organizers and in all except one of the factories they organize in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage both unions have members. Freddie Sauls, general secretary of NUMARWOSA, serves as technical adviser for the UAW at the request

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of the union. Although, in the words of Manase, 'Sauls is straight and doesn't beat about the bush', he maintains that there is no control over the UAW by the National Union. Co-operation between the two unions also extends to the Industrial Council where the UAW managed to gain representation through liaison committee representatives on the Industrial Council.³

Well before the Ford strikes commenced the UAW claimed to be concerned with community affairs. Along with NUMARWOSA it had a Community Action Programme Committee which was started up around the beginning of 1979 and dealt with issues such as housing, transport and gangsterism in the community. It made representations to Ford about numerous township concerns and recreational facilities.⁴

Structurally the UAW has a National Executive Committee with representatives chosen from all the different regions. It meets half-yearly. Below that the union has elected Branch Executive Committees (BECs) that meet monthly. The union BEC in PE has 15 members and attempts are made to ensure that all factories have elected members on it. At the time the conflict commenced the composition of the BEC was as follows: 7 members from the Ford Cortina assembly plant, 6 from the Ford engine plant and 2 from General Motors.⁵

The exact method of organization of the union in each factory is difficult to determine because different accounts were given and the terminology used by the union is potentially confusing. One version is that when the union comes to organize at a factory it calls a general meeting of workers at that factory where the role of the union is explained to them. The workers also elect a Steering Committee that has the task of organizing members in the factory. When this task has been carried out a general meeting of the union members in the factory is called where they elect a Branch Executive Committee (BEC) whose members have representative functions in the factory. More or less each department has a representative, but care is taken not to 'overcrowd' the committee. This factory BEC is distinct from the union BEC with representatives from all the PE factories that performs executive functions in the union. The factory BEC is constitutionally required to meet once a month, but in practice it meets twice a month. A general meeting of all the factory members is held every three months.⁵

Another version is that the Steering Committee is the only form of union representation in each plant. In the early days the union could use volunteers and members recommended onto the Steering Committee by the union BEC. It meets once a month when the organizing secretary is always present.⁶

The UAW policy towards liaison committees is different from the policy of most other unions in the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) to which both the UAW and NUMARWOSA belong. Instead of trying to isolate and destroy the liaison committee and subsequently replacing it with a factory BEC, the union takes it over and brings it directly under its control. The union calls a general meeting before a liaison committee election and decides who should be elected onto the committee. Usually most of the elected liaison committee members are drawn from the factory BEC.

Such a policy towards liaison committees is potentially risky. The organizing secretary appears to have allowed himself to become dependent on the liaison

committees at the early stages of organization. He explained that

'When we start organizing a factory, we keep in touch with the liaison committee to find out what is happening.'⁶

A second risk is that union members serving on a liaison committee could be co-opted by management. By its very nature and structure a liaison committee is management dominated and its elected members could start identifying with managerial goals as opposed to worker interests because it is the most reasonable way of maintaining a working relationship with management. If the liaison committee members are well treated and given perks by the company then the likelihood of co-optation is even greater. This appears to have been the case at Ford where leave of absence was granted to attend the TUCSA Conference in 1974 to an elected representative of the liaison committee who was then also national secretary of the UAW.³

The union technical adviser firmly rejects the contention that union office-bearers had been co-opted through serving on the liaison committee. The frequent leave of absence given to Johny Mke, vice-chairman of the liaison committee in 1979 and national president of the UAW, was to attend Industrial Council and International Metal Federation meetings. Such concessions were due to the influence that the registered union, NUMARWOSA, together with the UAW, brought to bear on the company to grant the UAW the same rights that the registered union held.⁵ Although this might well have been the case, the problem of explaining the serious mistake by the union's president right at the outset of the strike still remains.

The Strike from 31 October to 2 November 1979

The first strike at Ford's Struandale assembly plant on Wednesday, 31 October, was due to the resignation of Thozamile Botha from Ford on the grounds that he was being pressurised by the company because of his political activities. The company claimed that he was away from work too often and that it 'interfered with his performance'.⁷ Although it has been suggested 'that the strike was neither initiated nor anticipated by Botha',⁸ there were indications that Pebco utilized his resignation as an opportunity to mobilize African workers at Ford's assembly plant (where Botha worked) to demand the right for Botha as a Ford employee to play an active role in a politically pertinent African organization. Pamphlets were distributed the morning of the strike at the assembly plant saying

'if he is not here at noon today, tools down everybody'.⁷

When the strike commenced 700 African workers from the Cortina assembly plant gathered on the company's lawns and had given a time limit of 12 noon by which Botha had to come and address them.⁸ It was on this strategic occasion that the union's president made a mistake that must have lost the union a great deal of support from workers and made it seem as if it was on management's side. The mistake was made by Johny Mke who works at the Ford Struandale engine plant. His own account of what happened⁹ is that Dirk Pieterse, Labour Relations Manager from the Neave plant, phoned him to say that he was coming to pick Mke up at the engine plant to go to the assembly plant. So they went together in

management's car to where the striking workers were sitting on the grass. As soon as Mke opened the car's door workers shouted to him that he was not Botha. He quietened them and explained that he was the president of the UAW. Some workers questioned 'What is that union? We don't know that union.' Then Pieterse talked to the workers through Mke who was interpreting. He told them, and Mke repeated it all, that with the way they were going on they would not get Botha. They had to go back to work and negotiate through Mke. In addition Mke said the way they were carrying on things would not come right. If they were not prepared to work they had to get off the company's premises and go.

Although Mke stresses that he was repeating to workers what Pieterse was telling him to say, the workers perceived him arriving in a company car with a manager and they heard him giving them managerial instructions. In addition Mke distanced himself from the striking workers by referring to the strike as their thing.

Nevertheless, the UAW organizers and technical adviser, Freddie Sauls, played a supportive role at this stage of the Ford dispute. Sauls publicly expressed his concern on the second day of the strike over the attitude adopted by Ford that Botha was made to choose between his job and his involvement in community affairs.¹⁰ After the strike was ended on Friday morning, 2 November, with the unconditional reinstatement of Botha, it was the UAW that negotiated full pay for the striking workers for the two and a half days that they were out on strike. The negotiating role that the UAW played during the early periods of the conflict was however facilitated by Ford's policy of negotiating only through the union.¹¹

The Strikes of 13 and 14 November 1979

The next overt move that stirred up the Ford dispute came from white workers in the company. At a meeting of their union, the South African Iron, Steel and Allied Workers' Union, on 8 November, over 200 white Ford workers threatened to strike. According to Henry Ferreira, deputy general secretary of the white union, the main 'stirring factor' at the time was 'the lack of discipline among black workers'.¹² He also said white workers had complained of alleged antagonism of whites by an African shop steward, sharing of toilets, canteen and other facilities, and pay for the 3 days they were away to African workers who had walked out in sympathy with a civic leader. In turn they demanded to be paid extra for the time they worked during the strike and called for the reinstatement of a white foreman who was to be retrenched at the end of the month.

The underlying reasons for the white Ford workers' reaction is to be found in the threat to their privileged position resulting from the company's adoption of the Sullivan Statement of Principles and, to a lesser extent, the recommendations of the Wiehahn Commission. The Iron and Steel Union's secretary in Port Elizabeth, H.L. Pretorius, had stated that Wiehahn had gone too far and that white workers would have to fight to protect their interests.¹³ The Labour Relations Manager at Ford thought that white workers 'felt that the carpet was being pulled from underneath their feet'¹⁴ due to Ford's attempts at implementing the Sullivan principles. In particular, white workers were afraid of losing effective control over the supply of trained artisans, a crucial scarce resource to the company.

Consequently they were strongly opposed to the company's apprenticeship programme for training African artisans.¹⁵ Even though Ford's implementation of the Sullivan principles was lacking in many areas and the black unions felt that the company and the white union ganged up together against black workers,¹⁶ the white workers felt their position of privilege to be threatened, an impression that must be valid in the long run.

A particular source of irritation to white workers appears to have been what they perceived as a breakdown of discipline over African workers in the Ford plants. According to Dirk Pieterse, the Labour Relations Manager,

'discipline on the shopfloor began to disintegrate after the first strike. African workers purposefully started to mock authority and challenge overtime and short-time. Between 31 October and 13 November when the second strike took place, there were a whole series of small strikes. Discipline had disappeared – African workers were rowdy when they wished, swore at a white foreman and went to the toilets as they pleased.'¹⁴

Behaviour such as that must have been infuriating to white workers who probably all grew up with traditional racist attitudes and expected subservience from African workers. At the Iron and Steel Union meeting on 8 November there was racist talk of 'kaffers' and 'baboons' which the press underplayed in their reporting.¹⁷

Allegations were also made that blacks were abusing the integrated canteen and toilet facilities. This was deemed to be the final provocation that caused a one-day strike by African workers at the assembly plant on Tuesday, 13 November.¹⁸ About the same time they commenced a boycott of the canteen facilities. The following day, Wednesday, 14 November, 300 African workers at the engine plant downed tools and gathered on the company's lawns for discussions amongst themselves and with management.¹⁹ They resumed work the next day. Once again the racist attitudes and remarks by white union members at their union meeting and the allegation that Africans were abusing facilities incensed African workers at the engine plant and was the prime cause of their strike.⁹

A list of grievances was drawn up by a group of workers at the request of management. Among the key grievances were dissatisfaction amongst workers with the bonus system and bad relations with certain white foremen. According to Dirk Pieterse many of the grievances were trivial, but the substantial ones were given immediate attention.¹⁴ Ford management could not have been all too successful in resolving these grievances because the African workers gave them an ultimatum to resolve the grievances by Wednesday, 21 November, or else they would take further action.²⁰ However, before the ultimatum expired the industrial conflict in Port Elizabeth spread beyond the confines of the Ford motor company.

Spread of Strikes and Dismissals: 19 to 27 November 1979

General Tyres

Major industrial unrest also spread to General Tyres and Adamas Paper Mill. The first incident occurred at General Tyres when their 625 African employees

started boycotting the company canteen on Tuesday, 13 November. Although it seems likely that the boycott was connected with Pebco as it commenced on the same day as the Ford canteen boycott, it arose from a genuine labour-management dispute at General Tyres. Management claimed that from June to beginning October the company had lost 1494 forks, knives and spoons. They held a special meeting and decided to put security people outside the canteen, but still lost cutlery.²¹ A meeting was called with the liaison committee and a message was transmitted to the workers that they had to choose between being searched or not using the canteen, so they chose the latter.²²

The canteen boycott lasted throughout the week when the dispute deepened and African workers went on strike on Monday 19 November, after lunch. They gathered in the cloakrooms where they drew up a list of 24 grievances that they presented to management. A major grievance revolved around the prior dismissal of two African workers, Eric Maki and Welcome Ngabase. Workers felt that they had been unfairly dismissed due to vindictive and unfair white foremen. An African worker employed at General Tyres at that time, said

'management had been doing this kind of thing for a long time and people decided they could not work under these conditions.'²²

Work conditions at General Tyres are tough. An unpleasant smell pervades the factory which is uniformly dirty. Sections of the plant are extremely hot especially where tyre moulding takes place under high temperature. African workers are compelled to wear overalls which adds to their discomfort. These conditions stem in part from managerial policy at General Tyres which is characterised by authoritarianism and racist attitudes.

Management had instituted a liaison committee for African workers at their plant. Members of the committee could propose topics they wanted on the agenda, but a manager had the power of veto over any topic. African workers came to feel management ignored the liaison committee and consequently rejected it during the dispute, preferring to negotiate through their own elected worker representatives. From July to November 1979 the company went on short-time. The decision to do so was explained by management to the foremen only and not to African workers because it was not company policy to do so. The Industrial Relations Manager described most of the workers' substantial grievances as 'ridiculous' and shrugged off African workers' complaint of defamation of character by being called 'kaffer'. The grievances included complaints of fluctuating wages from one week to the next due to working short-time, having only one tea-break per shift, and the fact that workers who qualified for annual bonus payments could lose their bonuses if they were dismissed any time between October and December. It is noteworthy that there were no grievances over low wages because General Tyres was, according to a survey by the Department of Manpower Utilization, amongst the three highest wage-paying companies in Port Elizabeth.

General Tyres management took an uncompromising stand towards the striking African workers. On Wednesday, 21 November, the third day of the strike, the two dismissed workers were brought to the factory for discussions, but management refused to re-employ them.²³ They were supported in their decision by a Mr

Lowens, an inspector from the Department of Manpower Utilization. On the same day the Managing Director of General Tyres in Johannesburg, R. Nicholson, warned that striking African workers would be replaced unless they returned to work soon.²⁴ The following day, Thursday, 22 November, General Tyres management fired all 625 striking African workers thereby administering a crushing defeat to the workers. Management indicated that they would re-employ the dismissed workers as from Monday, 26 November, at management's discretion. By 11 December they had re-employed all except 33 former employees whom they considered to be 'more militant'.²¹ The re-employed workers lost their annual bonuses, although they were taken on at their former rate of pay, retained their pensionable services and received holiday pay.

From the African workers' point of view at General Tyres they made no advance on any front: their major grievances were not resolved nor did they improve their method of representation. They made attempts during the strike to get management to negotiate with UAW organizers, but recognition of the union was not seriously pursued since the union had only started recruiting members at General Tyres during the strike. The union exploited the worker discontent to sign on members and gained around 50 percent to 80 percent membership.²³ At the end of January 1980 the union claimed to have 600 signed up members at General Tyres although none of them were paying union dues.⁶

The question arises why General Tyres management was able to win the struggle so decisively when, according to their Industrial Relations Officer, it would have taken them 6 months to get their production back to normal again with a new labour force. Why did the striking African workers not use their bargaining power? There appears to be three reasons why management aggression was successful.

Firstly, the high level of unemployment considerable weakened the striking African workers. Two episodes narrated by the Industrial Relation Manager capture the situation faced by many African workers in Port Elizabeth.²¹ During the strike the company employed an African to work in the boiler room, but they warned him he might have his throat cut for working during that time. The strike-breaker's reply was that it didn't matter,

'I have not been working for 18 months and I'd rather have my throat cut than not work again.'

On the first day the company started re-employing workers again there were 500 aspirant applicants clamouring at the gate and it took 5 people to push the gate shut after letting one person through each time. A newspaper report confirmed the existence of many unemployed workers in Port Elizabeth. At General Tyres and Ford nearly 900 workers turned up to apply for the jobs created by firing the striking workers while only a small number of the job hunters were involved in the previous week's disputes.²⁶

Secondly, the strikers had no organization they could rely on for financial support to carry them through a prolonged strike. Neither Pebco nor the UAW was able to assist them financially so that they could hold out long enough to force management into a more compromising stance.

Thirdly, management had the backing and support of the state throughout

the period of conflict. This would have given them confidence to act aggressively. They stayed in constant touch with the Security Police and received support for measures they took from the Department of Manpower Utilization. In return the company covered up a mistake made by an official in the Department who advised the company to write 'strike' on the Unemployment Insurance cards of fired workers who had not been re-employed by General Tyres.²¹ The company covered up the fact that the mistake was due to faulty advice from the Department, advice which would have subjected the dismissed workers to yet further victimization.²⁷

As a result of their self-confidence General Tyres management learned very little from the dispute. They seem to be blithely unaware of the lack of confidence the workers have in the liaison committee and have therefore not abolished it. The only change they brought about as a result of the conflict was to replace an African interpreter with a white interpreter in the liaison committee meetings. The purpose of this switch was for management to be assured that what they, the managers, said to workers was being correctly translated into Xhosa and, conversely, that the workers' replies would also be accurately translated. It seems that General Tyres management perceive the cause of the conflict to have been due to poor communications.

Adamas Paper Mill

At Adamas Paper Mill the first public rumblings that all was not well occurred on Wednesday, 21 November, when it was confirmed that management had held talks with a number of workers over several grievances, possibly after workers had briefly downed tools.²⁸ Two days later on Friday, 23 November, as many as 450 African workers refused to go on shift in protest over low wages, a rejection of liaison committees, a demand for union representation, and complaints of no bonuses being paid.²⁹ The major issue was over pay although the general manager, C. Malkin, admitted that the liaison committee had been dead for a very long time.³⁰

Adamas management also appeared to take an aggressive stance towards the striking workers. On Monday morning, 26 November, 100 of the 170 workers in the first shift resumed work, while the remaining 70 were fired in keeping with a company ultimatum.³¹ In total about 400 workers returned to their jobs, but they no sooner returned before about 100 downed tools again after receiving reports purporting that their families would suffer and their homes be burnt down if they did not stop working.³² The following day, Tuesday, 27 November, management dismissed a further 150 African workers who had downed tools in sympathy with fellow workers who had been dismissed for failing to report for work.³³ On Wednesday turnout at the mill was only 40 percent,³⁴ but strikers went on retreat the next day when 80 of them were re-employed.³⁵ By Monday, 3 December, this figure had increased to 170³⁶ and matters appear to have returned to normal fairly soon afterwards.

It is unclear whether the industrial dispute at Adamas Paper Mill was related to Pebco or to the disputes taking place then at Ford and General Tyres. In contrast to the other disputes it arose primarily over a demand for higher wages.

A minor dispute during this time also occurred at Red Lion Hotel when hotel workers walked off their jobs. Some were arrested for loitering by the police when they returned to fetch their cheques and eleven subsequently paid admission of guilt fees.³⁷

Ford

Ford Management also commenced to take a more aggressive stance. On Tuesday, 20 November, a day before the Struandale workers' ultimatum expired, management gave workers notice that anyone who left his post during hours or who refused to work overtime would be considered to have terminated his services.²³ That afternoon a dispute also arose at the Struandale assembly plant in the paint shop sections. The paint shop workers were 'asked' (in the words of a Ford spokesman) to keep working overtime while other sections went home. However, the 'request' was rejected and 60 paint shop workers walked out when workers from other sections left.²⁴

On the day their ultimatum expired, Wednesday, 21 November, African workers from the assembly plant walked out before their deadline of 12.00p.m. This was in protest against management's dismissal of 9 African workers a day or two before Wednesday. Workers perceived their dismissal as victimization which it clearly was. According to the Labour Relations Manager the company identified people who were intimidating others and 'stirring up trouble', so management fired them. He maintained

'they were undoubtedly ringleaders who made life awkward for us.'

A dismissed worker was accused of preventing management from talking to workers by running around the plant shouting at workers not to attend group meetings called by management.¹⁴

By lunchtime every African worker at the assembly plant, but only three from the engine plant had walked out.²³ For the first time police were introduced onto the scene. Scores of them arrived in eight cars and four anti-riot trucks were introduced when the 700 striking workers were informed that they had lost their jobs and Ford announced that they would start recruiting labour the following Monday, 26 November. The events that followed the new hard-line policy of Ford highlighted the tensions between the UAW and Pebco and saw the emergence of the Ford Workers' Committee.

Tensions between UAW and Pebco³⁸

In order to understand the nature of the relationship between the union and Pebco it is necessary to review the earlier period of the conflict. At the time of the first strike, 31 October to 2 November, there was, according to Sauls, no divisions between the leaders of Pebco and the unions.

The reason why the UAW did not play a leading role at the commencement of the conflict, Sauls maintains, was because the union representatives in Ford accepted that Pebco members in Ford were seen as leaders in the community and should take over the leadership role.⁴ They were also afraid to take over leadership because of the high standing of Pebco in the community which they believed they could not

challenge as trade unionists. This was a mistake, he said, because the union representatives lost contact with workers on the shopfloor. The problem was considerably worsened by the fact that the 7 assembly plant members on the union Branch Executive Committee no longer identified with the union because of Mke's role in the strike. They vacated their union posts and merged into Pebco instead.⁵

The UAW Branch Executive Committee had another strong reason for taking a back seat. They asserted with anger and resentment that the grievances that emerged were ones that they had been raising on the liaison committee for years and years without any effect. They were angry with management for ignoring their representations and giving workers the impression that it was the first time they had heard the grievances:

'they gave the workers the impression that we as liaison committee only sit and drink coffee with management.'⁹

As a result the liaison committee sat back and let Pebco deal with grievances because management was paying attention to them.

Although these reasons for the union's low profile in the early stages of the dispute have some validity, there can be no doubt that the blunder by Mke at the assembly plant on the first day of the strike turned many workers against the union. Therefore the union had no option other than to play a secondary role throughout most of the dispute during which time an uneasy relationship developed between the union leadership and Pebco. This was in part due to the fact that Pebco challenged the union's authority and representativeness in its own stronghold, the Ford shop-floor, and in part due to strong ideological and political differences between the two organizations.

After the strikes of 13 and 14 November at the Struandale assembly and engine plants the workers decided that they would elect 'Committees of Ten' at both plants to represent them.³⁹ As it turned out, these committees were not elected and the list of grievances submitted to management was drawn up by a group of workers. The UAW met with management over the grievances a number of times, but kept a very low profile because workers had said that they did not want the union to represent them.⁵

Strong tensions between the union and Pebco emerged after the dismissal of 700 assembly plant workers on Wednesday, 21 November. At a meeting in New Brighton of about 300 of the dismissed workers on Friday afternoon, 23 November, they decided to call in union assistance to help with their claim for bonuses. A number of workers also criticised the union for failing to take a more active part in assisting during the strikes.⁴⁰ They also decided to elect a Pebco-affiliated 'Committee of Seven' to negotiate with Ford for their reinstatement. Even though Thozamile Botha said that Pebco could not act as a trade union in negotiating with management and urged the workers to go to the union where possible because it was their only defence against management,⁴¹ the decision to negotiate through a Pebco-affiliated committee was perceived by the union organizers as a direct challenge. George Manase warned in a press statement that the establishment of a Pebco-affiliated committee to represent the interests of the workers could cause serious problems. He charged Pebco members at Ford including Botha with having

undermined the authority of the union in its dealings with management⁴² and drew a distinction between political and shopfloor issues. He said that the union regarded the strikes from 19 to 23 November as political and its move to have union members re-employed was 'to keep politics out of the factory'.⁴³ Manase and Sauls also asserted that the strike at Ford was not a union issue, but was politically inspired.⁴⁴ With these statements the union organizers displayed a limited conception of trade unionism and excessive sensitivity. However, the real threat to their representativeness and authority was to come from the 'Committee of Seven' which was to become known as the Ford Workers' Committee.

The Ford Workers' Committee

The five representatives on the Ford Workers' Committee who were interviewed were all skilled workers such as quality control technicians and inspectors and a production foreman. Because they were well qualified and potentially capable of managerial occupations, they deeply resented 'job reservation in the company'.

Although the committee members were drawn from, and acted on behalf of, the dismissed Ford workers, they were structurally intertwined with Pebco. Botha was at the head of both Pebco and the Workers' Committee and all its members belonged to Pebco as did most of the dismissed Ford workers whom they represented.⁴⁵ Botha announced at the outset of the Committee that it was affiliated to Pebco.⁴¹ but it soon operated as an independent representative of the dismissed Ford workers and over time it became identified as such. During the strike they met twice weekly with dismissed workers. They acted on instructions of workers, but also used their own initiative. In particular they had to exercise discipline over workers by discouraging the use of violence at all times and encouraging solidarity instead.⁴⁵

One of the Committee's first tasks was to raise funds to help the affected workers and their families. On Sunday, 25 November, Botha announced at a mass meeting that the South African Council of Churches and the Soweto Committee of Ten was to launch a fund to support the striking workers.⁴⁶ Three days later a Save Workers Fund was launched at a mass meeting in Kwazakhele.³⁴

As a result of the decision taken by dismissed Ford workers at the meeting on 23 November a letter, signed by Thozamile Botha on behalf of 'Ford Workers', was written to George Manase. In it they claimed that the workers were entitled to the benefits of the union and invited Manase to present his case at a meeting on Wednesday, 28 November, to explain his accusation that Pebco members at Ford were undermining the authority of the union. In particular, the items they wanted him to clarify included the employee benefits in times of dispute and the necessary steps to be followed by workers to achieve such benefits, the action taken by the union for the reinstatement of all dismissed workers, and the conditions for registration of the UAW.

Manase's response was to ignore the letter because 'there was nothing to be replied to'.⁶ Sauls' explanation for not responding was that the union did not deem the letter to come from workers, but from 'another committee that wanted to use the union as a whipping boy'.⁴ Such a blatant rejection by the union of an approach that they assumed to come from the Ford Workers' Committee which,

at that time. was meeting twice a week with the dismissed Ford workers, could only have reinforced the workers' impression that the union was remote from them and did not have their interests at heart.

After receiving the rebuff from the UAW the Ford Workers' Committee approached management directly, but management insisted that the Committee should approach them through the union.⁴⁵ The union organizing secretary had in the meanwhile taken up the misguided stance that it would only make representations to Ford for union members and not other dismissed workers.⁴³ However, union organizers decided to seek a mandate from the dismissed Ford union members to take up their case and to clarify whether the union should represent all the dismissed workers or only the union members.⁴⁷ On Sunday, 2 December, the union organizers were mandated to operate on behalf of all the strikers⁴⁸ and negotiations with Ford management were entered into the following day.

UAW Negotiations Rejected by Workers

On Tuesday afternoon, 4 December, Freddie Sauls and George Manase reported back to dismissed Ford workers at a meeting in Gelvandale. A few dismissed General Tyres and Adams Paper Mill workers were probably present as well. At this meeting workers hostile to the union gave free expression to their frustration and anger.

The proposals of the union organizers after their negotiations with management seemed to be out of touch with the workers' feelings and situation while being more in harmony with managerial interests. Sauls and Manase said that the workers had to decide whether to return and fight their battle inside the plant as the union advised since there could be no pressure brought on Ford from outside⁴⁹ or stick to their original decision to refuse to go inside unless reinstated. The union's advice ignored the cost of the strike to the company by slowing down production and the pressure this would be exerting on the company to reach a settlement. Ford, the organizers maintained, was not willing to reinstate the remaining dismissed workers, but was prepared to rehire some of them.⁵⁰

By rehiring was meant that workers would return to the same jobs at the same rates of pay with continuation of medical schemes and pension benefits. If the company felt there was somebody who should not be rehired, the union wanted full discussions with management with the reasons and all the information being made available. The union could also give workers the legal guarantee that they would receive their bonuses if they were in the employ of the company before shut-down day.⁴ The company also agreed to observe a moratorium on Wednesday and Thursday, 5 and 6 December, during which period only former assembly plant workers would be considered individually for employment at the plant.⁵¹

The union came in for strong criticism at the meeting. Speaker after speaker said that the workers should refuse to go back.⁵⁰ Some of the criticisms were that the union never replied to workers' letters, that the union was invited to meetings, but did not attend them, and that Johny Mke, the president of the UAW, was evil and should be kicked out. Manase claimed the militant radicals would not let them speak. In his words he said 'they howled us'.⁶ Sauls maintained that criticisms all boiled down to ignorance of the union. Speakers compared the union to Community Councils or to a government body to control workers. He said the union

organizers used the meeting to explain the role of a union in negotiating with Ford. He maintained that a majority would have accepted the union's proposals if they could have had a vote, but militants persuaded workers not to decide there and then but at a meeting the following day.⁴

At the follow-up meeting on Wednesday, 5 December, more than 500 dismissed workers, most of whom were from Ford with some from General Tyres and Adamas Paper Mill, rejected the union's proposals and reaffirmed their stand of staying away from work unless all fired workers were reinstated.⁵²

Complete solidarity did however not exist amongst all the dismissed workers. On the day before the decision to stay away was taken, Ford had already re-employed 263 workers of which 177 were former employees (i.e. dismissed workers), Adamas had re-employed 170 workers and General Tyres was already in full production.⁵³ Attempts at achieving worker solidarity were frustrated by the intervention of the Security Police who arrested 21 dismissed Ford employees during raids on houses in the African townships. According to a newspaper the detentions were for intimidation after the Wednesday meeting where threats were levelled at the 177 Ford workers who went back to work at the assembly plant.⁵⁴ More dismissed workers were subsequently detained and others released, but the net result was that 24 dismissed workers were charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act for allegedly intimidating other workers on 5 December. The trial dragged on for 6 more months.⁵⁵ The workers were finally allowed to pay admission of guilt fees of R60 each.

Ford's Moratorium and Ascendency of the Ford Workers' Committee

On 12 December Ford released a statement revealing that a communication had been sent to the unions advising them that the moratorium to re-employ dismissed Ford workers had been extended from 6 December 1979 to 4 January 1980.⁵¹ The reasons for the company's switch of policy on rehiring workers are unclear. It has been suggested that Ford management simply thought that dismissed Ford workers would be in such dire straits after being unemployed for more than a month that they would be only too willing to return to the company under any condition. There is however good reason to believe that the Ford head-office in Detroit put pressure on local management to reach a conciliatory settlement with the dismissed workers. This could have been due to Ford's investments elsewhere in Africa, namely Nigeria, which makes their involvement in South Africa a politically sensitive issue. Representations made to the Ford parent company in Detroit could also have played a role. Pebco took a decision at a mass meeting to write a letter to the mother-plant in Detroit.³⁴ The UAW in Port Elizabeth also sent a telegram to the International Metal Federation on 6 December to take up the issue. As a result the director of the Ford Department of the UAW in the United States of America saw Ford management in Detroit and pressed for the reinstatement of the dismissed workers at the same rate of pay.⁵ Appeals were also made by Thozamile Botha to Andrew Young and Jesse Jackson on 10 December to get former Ford workers reinstated.⁵⁶

Ford management continued to make further concessions because very few dismissed workers returned after the expiration of the moratorium on 4 January.

By Monday, 7 January, only 37 additional dismissed workers had been re-engaged. This brought the assembly plant's African labour force to slightly more than half-strength with 357 workers of which 244 were former employees.⁵⁷ On 9 January Ford labour relations management met and negotiated for the first time with the Ford Workers' Committee on 'neutral territory', the five-star Elizabeth Hotel. The United States Consul-General, Alan Lukens, acting of his own volition and with the approval of the parties concerned, played an important role in bringing the different parties together. After 8 hours hard bargaining the company agreed to reinstate all former employees by the end of January 1980 at the same rate of pay 'subject only to availability of suitable positions'.⁵⁸ The UAW president and organizing secretary were also present at the insistence of Ford management, but they did not take part in the negotiations. Thozamile Botha afterwards saw the agreement as a great victory of perseverance and true solidarity, but it only became so with the continued vigilance and representation of the Ford Workers' Committee and the United States Consul-General.⁵⁹ Although the company appeared to use delaying tactics, the last 17 of the dismissed assembly plant workers were finally reinstated on 13 February.⁶⁰

It is worth noting the vastly different ways in which the industrial disputes were settled in Ford as opposed to General Tyres. One of the factors that most probably contributed to this difference is the fact that General Tyres is a wholly-owned South African firm manufacturing under licence from a foreign company. As such it is therefore not subject to directives from a parent company overseas that could face economic and political pressures if it treated its black labour force badly.

The Ford Workers' Committee kept on growing in importance as the negotiating body for workers in the assembly plant. By 31 January they were meeting with Ford management without union officials being present. Their desire was 'to move inside the union and put life into it'.⁴⁵ This decision has created a power struggle within the UAW between the Ford Workers' Committee and the existing union office-bearers.⁶¹ The final outcome of this struggle is still undecided. Such a struggle could potentially divide and weaken African workers at Ford and elsewhere. It also appears to be a lost opportunity to the union hierarchy to bring vigorous leaders with standing in the community into the union although some of the blame for this lies with the other side as well. To place this and other mistakes of the union organizers and office-bearers in perspective, their attitudes and actions before, during and after the industrial conflict are finally summarised and evaluated.

Conclusion : an Evaluation of the UAW

The foundations for the inadequate role the UAW hierarchy played at Ford during the industrial conflict were laid before the strikes commenced. According to George Manase, the organizing secretary, Ford was not well organized because the organizers did not know what was happening in the plants and union members were not well-informed.⁶ The basic reason for this appears to have been due to the fact that union representatives and organizers did not meet frequently enough with rank and file members. At best the union held a general meeting of members

in a factory once every three months which was not adequate for on-going workplace-based organization. The factory BEC met about twice a month and although this is considerably more frequently, the union still failed to set up adequate structures through which union representatives could be in touch with grievances and attitudes of ordinary workers in the plants.

A further mistake was that some union officials serving on Ford's liaison committee appear to have been co-opted by management and subsequently developed a managerial rather than a worker perspective on issues. This would explain why Johnny Mke, the union's president, effectively acted as a spokesman for management on the first day of the strike and failed to identify with the cause of the workers in the Cortina assembly plant. His stand not only alienated many workers from the union, but also turned the 7 union BEC members in the assembly plant against the union. They ceased to function as BEC members and joined forces with Pebco instead. Freddie Sauls explains Mke's role by saying that he was seen by Ford management as the union representative and spokesman because he was the union president and that he did not acquaint himself with the political developments in the townships.⁵

While the major conflict took place in November the UAW officials did not manage to keep in touch with workers from the Ford Cortina shopfloor.⁴ Their rejection of the request by dismissed Ford workers to address them on 28 November symbolised an indifference on their part towards the dismissed workers. When they finally did report back on 4 December they were confronted by hostility and suspicion of the union by workers who even saw the union as a government body aiming to control workers. Union officials and organizers only had themselves to blame for creating such worker attitudes and perceptions.

The misdirected actions of the union organizers and officials were due to several reasons. The organizing secretary held the misguided belief that a strict division existed between shopfloor issues on the one hand and broader community and political affairs on the other hand. He also held that workplace issues were strictly the preserve of trade unions while community and political concerns were for politicians. Trade unionists and politicians consequently had to refrain from meddling in each other's domains. In a press statement he said:

'We are all fighting for the liberation of the black people. The politicians have interfered a bit too much in this matter. We should operate in our area - trade unions - and politicians in theirs. We must work on parallel lines.'⁶²

When asked what the major obstacle was the union faced in organizing workers, he volunteered that it was

'political organizations coming to interfere with us - these militant radicals, this is our major obstacle.'⁶

This view was also reflected by a BEC member who maintained that Pebco should deal with civic issues and not with worker issues.⁹

Other union organizers and officials have developed an animosity towards Pebco which impaired their political judgement and caused them to act in a manner detrimental to the union. Johnny Mke was strongly anti-Pebco⁹ and Fred Sauls,

who held that it would be silly to draw a distinction between political and trade union issues, maintained that the UAW should not be involved in party politics which, by implication, was what involvement with Pebco meant.⁴ He viewed Pebco disdainfully explaining that the Ford strike was Pebco-inspired, not to achieve political or economic gains, but to boost Pebco's position, nor was it in the interest of the community, but of Pebco.⁵ The hostility towards Pebco was carried over to the Ford Workers' Committee as a result of which the union failed to seize an opportunity to improve its tarnished position in the community. Instead of welcoming the participation of the Ford Workers' Committee by reaching an accord with them and guiding them into the labour movement, the union officials whose authority and role in Ford appears to have been supplanted by the Committee have taken an opposing stance towards them.⁶¹ This has resulted in a power struggle which could be potentially crippling to the union.

The attempt of the union organizers 'to keep politics out of the factory'⁴³ were harmful to the union in other ways. Besides creating tensions between the union and Pebco, it led to the rejection of the UAW by political leaders as an organization which could make a constructive contribution in the African people's struggle for freedom. At a press conference Curtis Nkondo, president of Azapo, asserted that African trade unions were spineless if they avoided involvement in politics. Thozamile Botha concurred and claimed that the UAW was only a glorified committee because it ignored their requests to help the workers at first on the grounds that the strike was political.⁶³

Analysis

The UAW leaders' mistaken distinction between trade union and political issues rests on the underlying assumption that work and community issues are strictly separable from each other whereas they are actually closely intertwined. This is more clearly the case for African workers whose living and working conditions are in many instances both controlled by the same influx control regulations and state institutions and agents such as labour bureaux and Administration Board officials.

The interrelatedness of work and living conditions often places trade unions in a dilemma. They find themselves walking a tightrope trying to find a balance between survival on the one hand and relevance to the totality of the workers' lives on the other. Too much concentration on survival can lead a union to become too narrowly concerned with purely shopfloor issues and maintaining good relationships with management at the expense of ignoring and neglecting broader political forces which shape workers' lives. This can eventually lead to a mistaken belief that economic and political conditions are determined separately and independently from each other and that different organizations working in isolation from each other are required for economic and political changes. Too great a concentration on relevance to the totality of the workers' lives can lead a union to direct and premature confrontation with the state. The union then runs the risk that the state could use its repressive powers to destroy the union. A secondary pitfall facing a union is that it may neglect shopfloor issues at the expense of community issues.⁶⁴

The UAW balanced too far towards survival at the expense of relevance to the totality of the workers' lives. As a result they placed too much emphasis on maintaining good relationships with Ford management and antagonised Ford workers as well as Pebco leaders and members. The union organizers appear to require a deeper understanding of the interrelatedness of workplace issues and political structures. In addition they need to see the relevance of all industrial conflict to the labour movement without categorising some of it as 'political' and therefore of no relevance to the union. Finally, they should develop a concern for the totality of the workers' lives and support democratic community organizations whose operations serve the interests of workers.

FOOTNOTES

1. Although Pebco was instrumental in the first strike, it did not subsequently involve itself directly in the industrial disputes. For an analysis of Pebco and its role, see the article of Michael Evans in this **Bulletin**.
2. The information on the UAW is based on interviews with George Manase, Freddie Sauls, and the following members of the PE Branch Executive Committee (BEC): Johnny Mke, Wilson Ntuli, Amos Hanise, Mike Simandla, Wilson Monqo and Dennis Skweyiya.
3. See Fred Ferreira's article in this **Bulletin**.
4. Interview with Freddie Sauls, 31 Jan 1980.
5. Discussion with Freddie Sauls, 25 July 1980.
6. Interview with George Manase, 31 Jan 1980.
7. Daily Dispatch 1 Nov 1979
8. Brian Pottinger, 'The Botha with the Difference', *Frontline*, vol. 1, no. 4, Aug. 1980, p.7. I am indebted to Brian Pottinger for valuable information on events in PE.
9. Interview with UAW's Branch Executive Committee, 2 Feb 1980.
10. Evening Post, 1 Nov 1979.
11. Interviews with Fred Sauls and Ford Workers' Committee.
12. Rand Daily Mail, 10 Nov 1979.
13. In personal communication to Marianne Roux.
14. Interview with Dirk Pieterse, 1 Feb 1980.
15. See M.G. Whisson, M.C. Roux and C.W. Manona *The Sullivan Principles at Ford (South African Institute of Race Relations, 1979)*, pp.25, 29.
16. *Ibid.*, especially pp. 13-14, 28.
17. Interview with Brian Pottinger, 29 Jan 1980.
18. Star, 14 Nov 1979.
19. Daily Dispatch, 15 Nov 1979.
20. Argus, 15 Nov 1979.
21. Interview with Industrial Relations Manager, General Tyres, 30 Jan 1980.
22. Interview with fired African employee of General Tyres, 1 Feb 1980.
23. Daily Dispatch, 22 Nov 1979.

- 24 Daily Dispatch, 21 Nov 1979.
 25 Financial Mail, 23 Nov 1979.
 26 Rand Daily Mail, 27 Nov 1979.
 27 Post 11 Dec 1979, and Cape Times, 12 Dec 1979.
 28 Post 22 Nov 1979.
 29 Rand Daily Mail, 24 and 27 Nov 1979.
 30 In personal communication to Brian Pottinger.
 31 Star, 26 Nov 1979.
 32 Rand Daily Mail, 27 and 28 Nov 1979.
 33 Post, 28 Nov 1979.
 34 Post, 29 Nov 1979.
 35 Daily Dispatch 30 Nov 1979.
 36 Cape Times, 4 Dec 1979.
 37 Post, 21 Nov 1979 and Daily Dispatch, 22 Nov 1979.
 38 For another account of the UAW's response to Pebco, see Martin Nicol, 'Legislation, Registration, Emasculation', in **South African Labour Bulletin**, vol 5, nos. 6 & 7, March 1980, pp. 52-3.
 30 Post and Evening Post, 15 Nov 1979.
 40 Evening Post, 23 Nov 1979.
 41 Eastern Province Herald, 24 Nov 1979.
 42 Evening Post, 24 Nov 1979.
 43 Sunday Tribune, 25 Nov 1979.
 44 Rand Daily Mail, 29 Nov 1979.
 45 Interview with Ford Workers' Committee members: Dumile Makhanda, Luke Mqubela, Dennis Neer, Themba Nyoka and Government Zini, 31 Jan 1980.
 46 Daily Dispatch, 26 Nov 1979.
 47 Rand Daily Mail, 30 Nov 1979.
 48 Star, 30 Nov 1979.
 49 Post, 6 Dec 1979.
 50 Daily Dispatch, 5 Dec 1979.
 51 Post, 12 Dec 1979.
 52 Post 6 Dec 1979.
 53 Cape Times, 4 Dec 1979.
 54 Argus, 7 Dec 1979.
 55 Cape Times, 17 June 1980.
 56 Cape Times, 12 Dec 1979.
 57 Daily Dispatch, 8 Jan 1980
 58 Press Release: 'Statement by Ford Management and Worker Representatives'.
 59 Cape Times, 10 Jan 1980.
 60 Cape Times, 13 Feb 1980
 61 See the article by Michael Evans and Merle Favis in this **Bulletin**.
 62 Star, 29 Nov 1979.
 63 Rand Daily Mail, 19 Dec 1979.
 64 See the review of J. Geschwender's **Class, Race and Worker Insurgency** in this **Bulletin**.

The Division of Labour at Ford

Marianne Roux

Port Elizabeth to a large degree sets the pace of industrial development. It is a city dominated by multi-national secondary industry. The commercial and industrial sectors demand a permanent and skilled labour force. Port Elizabeth, rather than the Witwatersrand, is steadily outgrowing the demand for unorganized migrant labour.

Black workers employed at Ford all have Section 101(a) and (b) rights. The same probably holds for other multinational industries. Unlike Durban and Pretoria, the Port Elizabeth branch of the United Automobile Workers (UAW) have no migrant workers as members of the union.

Prior to the strike, one of the production managers described the work force at Ford as highly efficient and disciplined. He said that over a period of three months labour efficiency had improved by five percent. This was said to be due, inter alia, to an improvement in the expertise of the work force (The Sullivan Principles at Ford: 5). The recent unrest at Ford has, if anything, shown that the effectiveness of black workers to withhold their labour power is greater than ever before. While there is massive unemployment in the Port Elizabeth area it is easy to replace unskilled workers with any number of others, but the situation is altogether different if hundreds of experienced workers are involved. This point was succinctly made by one of the leaders. He said "The company could do nothing else but take us back; they would never have found people with our knowledge or experience."

The manufacturing activities at the Ford Company are spread over a number of facilities. Escorts and trucks are assembled at the Neave and truck plants. These plants are situated in the Neave Industrial township and employ mainly whites and coloureds. Engine and Struandale plants, where engines are manufactured and the Cortina assembled, are situated near the African township of New Brighton. The work-force at these plants consist of mainly white and African employees. Considerably more hourly paid workers are employed at Neave and Struandale than at the other plants. At Struandale Cortina plant there are approximately 700 African hourly paid workers as against 400 at the Engine plant.

While coloured and African hourly paid workers occupy similar positions in the Company (82,63 percent of the coloured and 86,5 percent of the African hourly paid workers are employed in grades 1 to 8) they have no contact with one another in the work-place. Even though the coloured and African Unions work in close co-operation with one another, there are vast differences in the forms of participation of Union members at shopfloor level. Until recently liaison committees for African workers were in operation at both the Engine and Struandale plants. Shop stewards from the UAW were represented on these committees.

The Engine manufacturing and Cortina assembly plants are situated in close proximity to one another. However, it would appear that there is little joint action or active co-operation between the workers from these two plants. Discussions with workers prior to the dispute showed this clearly.

The Company divide their work-force into salaried and hourly paid workers. However, when monitoring the Sullivan principles the researchers felt that a division into four rather than two categories would be more illuminating should one wish to estimate the progress of blacks in the Company. Hence, the hourly paid workers were divided up to grade 8 and above – a division between skilled and semi-skilled workers. The salaried staff were divided at the same level between managerial and other. The latter category includes the administrative-clerical and first and second line supervisory posts. From grade 9 upwards the posts are classified as junior, middle and senior management.

The figures for July 1979 are as follows: of the whites 295 are employed in managerial and 1 979 in other salaried positions, while 639 perform skilled and 45 semi-skilled work. The coloured employees consist of 112 other salaried, 340 skilled and 1 624 semi-skilled workers and the African employees of 33 other salaried, 160 skilled and 1 028 semi-skilled workers.

The table below gives the percentage racial distribution in these categories.

TABLE 1

	Managerial	Other Salaried	Skilled	Semi-skilled
White	100	88	56	2
Coloured	0	9	30	60
Black	0	3	14	38

A comparison with the 1971 figures shows significant changes in the structure of the work-force. In the managerial category there is an increase of 77 posts (35 percent). No coloured or Africans have been appointed to these positions. In the other salaried grades there is a decline of only 2 posts. However, the trend is towards the displacement of whites by coloured and Africans. The coloured share has increased from 0,25 percent and the African from 0 percent in 1971 to 9 percent and 3 percent respectively in 1979.

In the skilled hourly paid grades there is a growth of 440 posts (48 percent), the coloured share rising from 4 percent in 1971 to 30 percent in 1979. No Africans were employed above grade 6 in 1971. In 1979 their share in the skilled hourly paid grades is 14 percent. In the other hourly paid grades there is a decline of 417 posts (14 percent), but the increase in the African share is substantial. From 1971 it has risen from 7 percent to 38 percent. (See The Sullivan Principles at Ford: 19.)

The figures above reveal a decline in numbers in the lower half of the salaried and hourly paid grades. In the hourly paid grades the decline is substantial. Workers

most likely to feel threatened by the possibility of retrenchment are those in the hourly paid grades from 1 to 4. Discussions with African workers employed in these grades suggest that one of the major areas of concern is with job security. This was further exacerbated by the lay-off of 300 workers over July 1979, many of whom were employed at the Struandale Cortina plant. Workers here expressed disappointment that the Union was unable to negotiate an agreement with the Company on 'Separation Payment'. Separation Payment involves an agreement that an employee, whose service is terminated due to a lay-off, shall be paid a lump sum of one month's basic pay for each year of employment with the Company. A machine operator in grade 2 complained that "whites are never affected by retrenchment; it is only us fighting for job security".

There is a movement of workers from the higher hourly paid grades into the lower salaried grades in administrative, clerical and supervisory posts. Over the past two years, the number of blacks in supervisory positions increased from 26 to 47. According to Company records blacks have increased their proportion from 5 percent to 8,2 percent of all such posts. The Company anticipates that this figure will increase to 12 percent in 1980. During 1980 the Company plans to train 2 white, 17 coloured and 18 African foremen. This will result in a vast increase in the proportion of black foremen if, by the end of 1981, they successfully complete their training.

In the hourly paid growth sector of the skilled workers "the non-whites have not only shared in the growth, but vastly improved their relative position, but in the salaried growth sector the non-whites show no advancement whatsoever (with the exception of a single appointment made after the figures were drawn up.)" (The Sullivan Principles: 20)

Ford has given much publicity to its 'Non-White Advancement Program'. In 1979 the Company set up a substantially large scale programme of training, which is to be extended in 1980 to include 90 white, 138 coloured and 125 African employees. Assuming that the number of employees in 1980 will be the same as in 1979, the percentage engaged in vocational training will be 90/2058 (4,4 percent) of the white, 138/2076 (6,6 percent) of the coloured and 125/1221 (10,2 percent) of the African employees.

The Company has also established a "workshop" training programme for its African workers (23 were in training at 1 July 1979) in anticipation of permission being granted for Africans to be registered as artisans. This course runs parallel to the apprenticeship training programme for coloured and white apprentices. (The Sullivan Principles at Ford: 42) Out of 684 white hourly paid workers 55 (8 percent) are scheduled to receive training in 1980. The comparable figure for coloured hourly paid workers is 53/1964 (2,7 percent) and for African hourly paid workers 33/1188 (2,8 percent). In addition 10 African hourly paid workers are to be trained as toolsetters, thus bringing the number of African hourly paid workers to receive training as artisans to 46/1188 (3,9 percent).

At the managerial level the graduate development programme aims to recruit and train potential managers. In 1979, 9 whites, 6 coloureds and 6 Africans were included in the programme. Ford plans to expand this programme to include 14 whites, 10 coloureds and 12 Africans in 1980.

Despite the extension of training facilities to blacks at all levels in the Company, they do not seem to achieve the higher posts with the same ease as whites. The figures above show that in the critical area of artisan training, whites continue to maintain superiority in numbers both in absolute and relative terms over each of the black groups.

However, outside of the Industrial Directorate, there is a feeling among white employees that the pace of black advancement is too great. This is particularly marked among the white supervisory and hourly paid workers. Any advancement would take place at their level. Therefore, the threat to their positions is more immediate and real than senior officials in the Industrial Directorate. A strongly expressed opinion among these white employees is that African workers are not yet up to training for artisanal jobs which require an apprenticeship period. Recent research showed that there is also an underlying insecurity with regard to their jobs. A white shop steward argued that white hourly paid workers do feel threatened by the possibility of displacement of white by black workers. "To tell you the truth even I do," he said. According to these workers "the black are pushing fast enough for us to see. It is this fast pushing which the whites are reacting against."

The reactions of these workers reveal an ambivalence towards black advancement, for, however insecure they are and whatever their attempt to obstruct black advancement, there is a realisation that inevitably blacks will claim a larger share of the more skilled occupations.

For them the recent government and management policy represents a decisive shift towards economic integration. As one of them maintained "the improvement and skills of black workers had to come. The government even told us. It is inevitable. Some feel resentful, some take it in their stride. We are constantly being told by Pik Botha that we have to give and take. We are just giving and not taking" and more over "management is merely implementing government policy. I think they are working hand in glove". (The Sullivan Principles: 12)

The examples above indicate that these workers perceive a growing distance between the interests of the state and white workers. While their feelings of insecurity may have been aggravated by the government's acceptance of the Wiehahn recommendations, they are nevertheless also aware that the state is no longer prepared to intervene on their behalf. The actions taken by white workers in the dispute reflect these attitudes. While they threatened a strike after the first reinstatement of black workers, they never actually downed tools. A mass meeting was held and much hostility was expressed towards black workers, but they were prepared to negotiate their grievances with management. There were also no threats from white workers when the black workers were reinstated for the second time after the Christmas vacation. The white backlash, which was so widely publicized, was but of short duration.

On the other hand, black shop stewards are fully aware of the different interests of white and black organized labour. "The white union monopolises grades 10, 11 and 12. This is where all their members are working. We are confined to grade 1 onwards. We wanted to push up the first grade to R1.50 but the white union stopped us." (The Sullivan Principles at Ford: 14.) Both the coloured and black

unions would prefer to bypass the Industrial Council and to negotiate directly with the Company. For obvious reasons management is not prepared to comply with the union on this issue, and has resisted all attempts to bring this about.

While some progress has been made in equalising conditions of employment, the general feeling among black employees is that the company still has a long way to go. It has previously been noted that these workers recognize that production managers and supervisors are not necessarily committed to the company's "affirmative" policy which has in recent times been given much publicity. Black hourly paid workers agreed "that whatever the policy of management might be, it has no necessary impact over what happens on the production line. A black assembler in grade 2 (and with a standard 10 certificate) complained that black hourly paid workers are taken on in the hourly grades 1 and 2 whatever their educational qualifications may be. "In these grades you get on the job training and if the foreman likes you he will recommend you for further training, but if he doesn't, you never get promotion, you stay in grade 2 forever." The company policy is to provide specialized training once hourly paid workers advance to grades 3 and 4. The resources study programme identifies those who appear to have potential, but the foreman is consulted for corroboration (The Sullivan Principles at Ford: 17). It is the power of the foreman which is most resented by black hourly paid workers.

In Struandale the situation is further exacerbated by the lack of communication between black hourly paid workers and the white supervisory staff. Research suggests that a substantial proportion of the black, hourly paid workers are able to speak Xhosa only. However, as most of the supervisory positions are held by whites, who do not speak Xhosa, it is inevitable that these workers will find it difficult to bring their problems to the attention of their supervisor. This problem is acknowledged and hence priority is given to the training of African foremen in the black training programmes of the company. As a result, black hourly paid workers in the upper grades are likely to experience fairly rapid advancement into supervisory positions.

Despite the fact that the white backlash was of short duration, it was not because these workers are accepting black advancement; rather they are aware of the changing attitude of the state towards the white working class.

Coloured and African workers familiar with Ford's black advancement programme appear to be critical of the objectives of management; as one of these workers said "the Company needs more skilled workers, it has to train blacks". Union representatives at the plants claim that there is a division between the policies pursued by the Industrial Relations Directorate who may in accordance with the Sullivan Codes be committed to the implementation of fair employment practices and the practices followed by production managers and supervisors at the various plants. According to them, the Labour Relations Officials have very little control over production managers and supervisors. Commenting on the Sullivan Codes, shop stewards remarked "the top labour representatives are co-operative, but production managers, general foreman down to foreman are opposed and not implementing anything. They are only after production and do not care about us. Top men talk one thing with us, but they pressurize managers and super-

visors to increase production". (The Sullivan Principles at Ford: 15)

Research revealed a feeling among black hourly paid workers that, despite the claims made by management that the Company does not discriminate between white, coloured and African employees in the recruitment, training and placing of workers, in practice "white workers nevertheless receive favoured treatment". One of the Union officials commented that "the structure of management is white dominated and they favour workers from their own group". Some of the workers also complained that "whites are taken at the gate above the minimum". This, they argue is common practice in the Company and is known by all the workers. Moreover, "white workers are pushed up all the time. It is impossible for coloured and African workers to get the same wages as white workers".

Workers claim that even within the same grades, white workers receive higher wages than their coloured and African counterparts. The jobs in which workers perceive discriminatory wage practices to operate, are classified mainly in grades 8 and 9 – such as group leaders, repairmen, storemen, quality control inspectors etc. These are the grades in which the greatest overlap of white and black workers is found. There is also a considerable difference between the minimum and maximum rates payable in these grades. A substantial difference between the rate paid to white workers as against African workers is therefore possible. (The Sullivan Principles at Ford: 32)

Many of the workers also feel that they are not eligible for promotion to their level of worth as educational barriers operate against them. Promotion from grade 7 to 8 becomes extremely difficult for them as many do not possess a standard 8 certificate, a necessary qualification for mobility above the seventh grade. According to shop stewards, these educational barriers do not operate in respect of white workers. Interviews with white workers and shop stewards revealed that 45 percent of the sample did not possess a standard 8 certificate even though all were employed above the eighth grade. The reasons given by Ford officials for the more rapid progress of white workers into the higher grades was their exposure to a more sophisticated educational system and their longer experience of work in industry. While management practices may thus in themselves not be discriminatory, these workers see management as discriminatory in part because their work experiences are not derived entirely from their work situation, but influenced by their ongoing social experience in which they feel themselves discriminated against. (The Sullivan Principles at Ford: 14)

However, the major grievances of both coloured and African workers centered on the short working week and the consequent low wage. Ford was unable to run its plants to full capacity, and in July 1979 some 300 workers were laid off. Management and the Unions were forced to choose between laying off more workers or cutting hours down to a three day week. The decision not to lay off any more workers led to a 28 hour working week. As a result, the overwhelming majority of coloured and African hourly paid workers were taking home wages substantially below the household subsistence level (R168,36 per month for African family of 6) and far below the household effective level (R253,29). Union officials calculated that the average take home pay for workers in Grades 1–3 was approximately R110 per month. 40,3 percent of the coloured and 59,4 percent of the African

hourly paid workers fell into these categories. "Our people are starving" complained one of the Cortina plant workers.

There can be no doubt that the short working week and the consequent decline in earnings profoundly influenced the attitudes of these workers towards management. It was argued that "It is the workers who suffer when the company is in difficulty". Moreover, "The workers always pay the price when management is in trouble." Furthermore the lay-off of fellow workers engendered feelings of insecurity with regard to their jobs. The African hourly paid workers at Struandale Cortina plant expressed intense anxiety about maintaining their jobs. One informant claimed, "You are not given enough training when you are new and if you make a mistake that counts against you. This is recorded and can easily lose you your job."

At the same time these workers have become highly politicized. This can be seen in the strong support, particularly from Cortina workers,[★] for the newly formed PEBCO. The situation was therefore explosive, the resignation of Thozamile Botha, the igniting spark.

★ It would appear that PEBCO was not as well established in the Engine plant. One can only speculate as to the reasons for this – one being the closer connection of leaders with workers at Cortina plant. According to company records, the average age of hourly paid workers at the two plants differ substantially. There is also a difference in their educational standards. Hourly paid workers at Cortina plant are on average three years younger than at Engine plant, while at Engine plant their educational level is on average one year below that of the hourly paid workers at Cortina plant. On average, the hourly paid workers have been employed at Engine plant for 5 years, as against 3 years at Cortina plant.

The Ford Workers' Committee: a shop-flawed victory?

Merle Favis

The Ford strike at the end of 1979 was of crucial significance in the development of working class struggles during the '70s. It brought into focus, perhaps more sharply than previous labour disputes of the decade, two conflicting approaches to the question of factory-based struggles and worker representation. Tracing the origins of the dispute back to the establishment of the Ford Cortina plant at Struandale, the two groupings crystallised during the strike into the UAW on the one hand, and the Ford Workers' Committee (FWC) on the other. Tensions between the two broke out into open conflict during April this year when the FWC made an abortive attempt to take over the Port Elizabeth Branch Executive Committee of the UAW. Their divergent positions have elsewhere been crudely polarised as, on the one side, an 'industrial relations' conception of worker organisation (materialised in the exclusively factory-based trade union) as opposed to, a more militant, political approach which has hinged on the mobilisation of workers on the basis of extra-industrial demands. A more careful examination of the forces involved in the Ford dispute shows, however, that the problem is a great deal more complex than commentators and analysts would have us believe.

When the Cortina plant was established in 1973, Ford drew into its employ more than 700 new labourers. These workers were to develop an attitude towards UAW markedly different to that of the neighbouring Engine plant workers. Their suspicion of the Union, which grew into open antagonism during the strike, must be located in the context of changing objective conditions that shaped the composition of the workforce. Firstly these workers were, on average, younger and more educated than the Engine plant workers.¹ Many of them had come directly out of the schools and universities to work in Ford. Here they had experienced the bitter struggles against the system of Bantu Education which emerged during the early '70's and which had been particularly intense in the Eastern Cape. This was of fundamental importance, as these workers had been exposed to a highly critical environment which fostered a total rejection of all racist structures throughout South African society. It is to be expected that on entering the industrial situation, not only would these workers be very sensitive to all manifestations of racist ideology on the shop floor (see Roux p36), but they would also be aware of themselves as a group in opposition to management which represents the status quo within the system.

Secondly, the experiences of the youth during this period were reinforced by the resurgence of political activity in the Eastern Cape. This region has a long and intense tradition of political resistance (see Evans in this edition) and it is in this context that Black Consciousness made itself felt as a significant force during

the early '70's. Clearly, the influence of these factors bred amongst these workers a suspicion of trade unionism per se. This, undoubtedly had been further reinforced by the historical lack of support and passivity of the registered trade union movement. Their natural response was to reject such unions as part of the white power structure which was directed against blacks.

It is important to understand that Cortina workers' antagonism towards the UAW and their refusal to become involved in its activities is rooted in the historical experience outlined above. It will be shown that developments in Ford necessitated that these workers move beyond this position.

On entering the factory situation in Ford, the Cortina workers found in existence the UAW which had already established, through a long process of struggle, a strong presence and substantial support in the adjoining Engine plant. The Union had recently claimed recognition from Ford in response to its offer to negotiate with any trade union which enrolled over 50 percent of the workforce as members. UAW's claim was, however, rejected on the grounds that the majority of Cortina workers had not yet been unionised. An intense recruiting campaign followed and, six months later, the required number of Cortina workers had been signed on. By UAW's own admission² there existed an unevenness between the respective experiences of trade union struggles of Cortina and Engine plant workers; the former having relatively superficial and formalistic contact with the Union. Unlike the Engine plant, their representation was not founded on the strength derived from successful struggles on the shop floor, but rather grew out of a response to the conditions laid down by management for Union recognition. This objective gap was to grow into a full blown conflict six years later.

The UAW immediately set to work in establishing factory floor structures in the Cortina plant. An election was held to choose six shop committee representatives, one of whom was to serve on the Liaison Committee. It is clear, however, that the Cortina workers lacked confidence in the Union and were thoroughly opposed to the use of the Liaison Committee as an additional channel of negotiation.³ Driven largely by the principle of non-negotiation in management-initiated structures, the shop floor leadership carried the vast majority of workers with them in rejecting all involvement in the Union's activities. According to UAW President, Johnnie Mke, 'The Cortina people made a mockery of the election',⁴ with the result that the weakest and most inactive workers came forward as representatives. They have been seen by all parties to have failed completely in their role as representatives, with the Cortina workers on the one side refusing to take up issues with them, and the Union on the other, unsuccessfully attempting to awake in them an enthusiasm and interest in its activities. In addition, according to Mke, without the backing of the workers around them, these shop stewards were, for fear of victimisation, reluctant to stand up in the face of management.

It was not until the Ford strike in October, that a leadership in the Cortina plant came together in a body which constituted itself as an alternative to Union representation in the plant. The circumstances in which the FWC was established have been dealt with elsewhere in this edition (see article by J Maree), but it should be emphasised that the FWC did not emerge as a monolithic and unchanging force over time. It reflected the rapidly changing course of events in the townships, the

divergent political and ideological positions contained within the broad-based Pebco, as well as the dominance of certain positions during different phases of struggle. The FWC played an important role in unifying the striking workers, particularly during the period between the final walkout and the December recess. Working together with the Pebco leadership at that point, the FWC concentrated its energies on three fronts:⁵ workers who had voluntarily come forward were organised to communicate news to as broad a section of strikers as possible; machinery was set in motion to discourage scabbing and a fund to support the striking workers was launched by successfully calling on a wide range of groupings, including sports and cultural bodies as well as traders. Throughout the strike, and for some time thereafter, the FWC drew large numbers of workers to their meetings in the townships.

There can be little doubt that during and after the strike, the FWC commanded a high degree of support and influence in the Cortina plant. Riding on the crest of the militant wave generated by the mass-based political body, Pebco, the FWC was able to advance its position as the accepted representative body in the plant. This was, in fact, reinforced by the successful outcome of its negotiations with Ford over the issue of unconditional reinstatement.

It is also clear that the driving force and tactical brain behind the FWC was the central figure of Thozamile Botha. Under his leadership, various moves were made, including initiatives to win the support of the U.S. Consul General, to pressurise Ford firstly into negotiating with the FWC and secondly into reinstating the Cortina workers. Moreover, Botha was instrumental in the attempt to establish a working relationship with the UAW. Although he initially displayed a hostility towards the Unions, after the last walkout at Cortina in late November, there emerged a fundamental change in the FWC's position in this regard. A small grouping within the leadership perceived the strategic necessity of working alongside the Unions.⁶ The understanding that a community-based political organisation could not serve the function of a trade union was reflected in a statement made by Botha which urged workers to go to the Union where possible, as it was their only defence against management.⁷ At the same time, there was a noticeable upsurge in the number of workers, particularly from other striking factories, General Tyre and Adamas, rallying to join the Unions. Later on, however, other influences were to emerge which did not support this approach. During the second strike, there came forward a particularly vocal grouping from within the Cortina workforce which not only rejected all dealings with the Union, but also set itself up to attack the Pebco leadership. The latter was unable to temper this thrust.⁸ Confusion followed, with the result that no clear direction was forged with regard to relations with the Union. Following the detention and subsequent banning of Botha and other key Pebco leaders, there were clear indications that a leadership, less sophisticated both ideologically and strategically had come to the fore.

Events leading up to the dispute with UAW

For some time after the state had essentially smashed the power of Pebco, the FWC, under the leadership of G. Zini, continued to operate effectively as the representative body in the Cortina plant. Fresh from its victory in achieving reinstatement

ment, it continued to draw the support of workers, as is reflected in the large turnouts to the weekly meetings in the townships. These, according to FWC representatives, were also attended by workers from other factories. The issues that were taken up by the FWC did not demonstrate either a consistent approach on the part of the leadership, or an adequate understanding of the industrial relations arena in which they were attempting to operate. A list of grievances (see p.74), drawn up during the dispute was later submitted to, inter alia, the Africa Subcommittee of the United Nations. It raised, in a rather haphazard, unsystematic and indiscriminating fashion, complaints ranging from petty issues such as workers being denied access to scrap wood from the Company, to serious charges of victimisation and unfair practices on the part of management. Certain rather unrealistic demands were also included. For example, a R2,50 minimum hourly wage was claimed, even though there was no realistic possibility of anything like this rate being met, without a concerted wage campaign being fought. The leadership was unable to crystallise the grievances put forward into specific demands in the knowledge that there was a definite possibility that such demands could be met. Significantly enough, these demands were taken up at an international level which did not require negotiations at local factory level and did not involve a plan of action as a basis on which to fight these issues.

There was, however, an issue around which the FWC managed to focus its energies; workers were effectively mobilised on the question of bonuses forfeited on account of the strike. Ford had strongly rejected the workers claim to their bonuses. Their offer to renew the annual bonus if workers returned to the factory before the December shut down, had fallen away and management remained intransigent on the issue. But more importantly, in terms of the reinstatement agreement, the bonus issue could only be negotiated with the UAW (see p.76). Although management had previously negotiated with the FWC to end the strike, it had set upon a tactical course of isolating the Committee through its insistence on dealing with the Unions as the officially recognised organs of worker representation.

Thus the FWC found itself in a trap. It had always depended heavily on a militant mobilising approach to win the support of a large mass of workers who were highly receptive to the broad uncompromising demands being voiced. It accurately gauged the spontaneous political consciousness of the workers and carried itself along with the prevailing mood of militancy. Its success in this regard was, to a large degree, predicated on the success of Pebco as a mass-based political organisation. The FWC was not, however, able (or was seemingly unaware of the need) to harness this massive wave of energy to establish sound organisational structures **inside** the Cortina plant. And later, in the absence of a co-ordinated township thrust, it found itself forced back onto its own ground in the factory where it lacked any organisational depth. Moreover, in order to sustain the support of the workers, the FWC needed to take up the concrete demands of the workers and to devise a programme of action which would enable it to see these demands through to an ultimate short term victory. However, significantly influenced by a Black Consciousness position, the FWC had always displayed strong elements of an uncompromising, principled approach to questions of negotiation, concessions and participation in structures established by the Unions,⁹ which have offered the **potential** of developing within

the factory a solid organisational foundation capable of defending and advancing workers' struggle on a continual basis. Just as workers rejected Liaison Committees as racist – along with all other state created institutions—the Cortina leadership dismissed the UAW and NUMARWOSA as the 'babies of Ford', sponsored by the Company.¹⁰ They rejected the established grievance procedure and channels of negotiation, and with it they threw out the not so proverbial babies with the bathwater: the capacity to adopt a more sophisticated tactical approach by using certain existing structures as tools to win concessions.

When the time came for the FWC to consolidate its position, when it needed to rely on more than mass appeal it found that the means of taking up the concrete, and indeed highly emotive, issue of the bonuses were blocked: it had no real access to these means and, as was stated above, neither had it established alternative channels to facilitate this struggle. Between the period when workers were reinstated in January and mid-April, the FWC was unable to make much headway with the bonus issue. Faced with this dilemma, the FWC set upon a course of capturing the means: it initiated moves to take over the Port Elizabeth BEC of the UAW.

A general meeting set for 20 April had been convened by the UAW. Its purpose was to elect six new shop stewards onto the BEC to replace those whose positions had automatically been terminated through their absence from three consecutive BEC meetings.¹¹ According to Freddie Sauls, secretary of NUMARWOSA, 'they felt they didn't stand a chance against the Pebeo guys, so they dropped out of the union movement completely'.¹² The FWC had, in the meantime, held a meeting the previous Sunday, 14 April, at the Gelvandale Community Centre, which was attended by 900-1000 auto workers. Here a concrete strategy was devised with a view towards taking over the BEC, and a 15-man Action Committee, comprising 10 representatives from Cortina, 4 from General Motors and one from Willards Batteries, was elected to replace the existing BEC.¹³ They also planned to change the constitution to enable the Franch Committee to deal with community issues such as rents, water services, transport etc.

At the general meeting, the UAW came under heavy attack from the workers. It was claimed that the Union was pro-management, that it had failed to function during the strike and that only through the efforts of the FWC had the workers been reinstated.¹⁴ The workers then passed a vote of no-confidence in the BEC and demanded that its members relinquish their position. The BEC, however, refused to stand down on the grounds that the move was unconstitutional. According to the UAW, the meeting was specifically held to fill the six vacancies from the Cortina plant. For the whole Committee to be replaced, the members must either resign, or a ballot must be taken to vote them out of office. These conditions were not fulfilled. The Action Committee is alleged to have stated that it had no interest in the constitution.¹⁵ Criticism continued to be levelled against the BEC, until finally J Mke, who was the object of a scathing attack, was threatened and forced to leave the chair. He announced that although he was leaving, no action taken at the meeting would be deemed acceptable by the UAW. Nevertheless, the previously elected Action Committee then came forward as the new BEC.

The next day, the Action Committee members arrived at the Union offices to demand that the officials hand over Union property. This was refused and the

Action Committee announced that it would hold a further meeting of motor workers the following Sunday 'to find ways of countering the refusal'.¹⁶

At this meeting, it was decided to adopt a 'more constitutional approach' to the dispute.¹⁷ The Action Committee decided to write to the Executive giving it 30 days in which to convene a meeting with the workers. If it did not respond to the call within the given period, the Action Committee would set a date for an election of Executive members, and if the present Executive still insisted on retaining Union property, they would take legal action.¹⁸ The Union did not respond.

It was evidently not sufficient for the FWC to have mobilised and won the overwhelming support of both the majority of workers in the plant, as well as workers from other factories. The FWC leadership found it difficult to accept that it had been defeated on a legal point: 'We are not accepting that. We elected them as office bearers, so we cannot see how our demand for them to go could be unconstitutional'.¹⁹ It is also interesting to note that in its takeover bid, the FWC did not appear to consider the practical implications of going about things in an unconstitutional manner: that unless these implications were considered beforehand, the attempt was bound to fail. In the light of the FWC's failings in this regard, the real prospect of assuming control over the BEC became far more complex. Even after the initial refusal of the BEC to step down, there were no signs that the FWC intended conducting the necessary ballot. Moreover, when asked whether the FWC considered the more realistic possibility of voting six of its supporters onto the existing BEC, the chairman dismissed this out of hand.²⁰ The FWC had moved no closer to achieving its goals in this regard and remained trapped by the same forces previously in existence.

During the 30 day ultimatum period beginning 28 April, it appears that no progress was made in settling the bonus issue. On the 20th May, Ford Labour Representative, Pieterse, claimed that the issue had not been discussed for 'at least a month',²¹ and expressed surprise at the FWC's claim to be 'still negotiating' over bonuses. This claim had been made at a recently held meeting of over 200 militant Cortina workers in Kwazakele, who demanded that a strike be called over this question.²² Earlier a pamphlet calling for the strike had been distributed. The FWC, arguing that more time was needed to negotiate over the issue, managed to persuade the workers to delay their action until 29 May – the date when the FWC's ultimatum to the Union expired. Clearly, it was hoping to make some progress in seizing control over the Union as a means of forcing the bonus issue.

On Wednesday 28 May, a meeting with Ford was finally convened. Management, in the meantime, had summoned to the meeting Mke and UAW secretary George Manase, both of whom arrived not knowing the purpose behind the meeting.²³ When the FWC representatives, Zini, Makhanda and Neer arrived, they demanded an explanation for the presence of UAW officials. Management replied that as far as they were concerned – and they had heard nothing to the contrary – the Union still represented the workers. The FWC representatives disputed this, claiming that only they had the right to speak on the bonus issue, and that they objected particularly to Mke's presence. Mke then offered to leave, 'in order not to embarrass anyone'.²⁴ Ford had obviously contrived the situation, knowing full well that a confrontation would develop and hoping to use this to its advantage. Ford manage-

ment has shown itself to be quick to exploit the divisions within the worker leadership as a means of weakening the workers' struggle in Ford. Throughout the strike and thereafter, it has displayed a sophisticated strategy of playing off the one force against the other.

The FWC announced that if the bonus issue were not positively resolved by the following day, Thursday, workers would down tools at noon. In response, management offered to discuss the problem internally and come back to the Committee on Friday. It was agreed that all workers, including those from the Engine plant would be allowed to go off at 5 o'clock on Thursday in order to attend an FWC report back meeting.

At the meeting in Kwazakele, the existing state of affairs was discussed. In addition, it was noted that the Union had not responded to the ultimatum to convene a general meeting and that consequently the FWC would take legal advice with a view to taking court action.²⁵

On Friday 30 May, management again met with the FWC to give its final word on the bonus question. But when the Committee representatives returned to the plant after the meeting, they found that the workers had already been served with notices stating that they were not eligible to receive their bonuses, and that if they were dissatisfied, they should go to the Industrial Council.²⁶ The mood amongst workers was extremely volatile, but Zini appealed to them to go back to work 'as if nothing had happened'.²⁷

It is not clear why the Cortina workers did not use their power to strike as a lever to push management on the bonus issue, particularly given that pamphlets calling for a strike had previously been distributed. It appears that the workers were sufficiently militant to decide upon this course of action. Indeed, they had already taken the step of boycotting the canteen in support of their demands, although this was an ineffectual move. Instead, it seems that the FWC leadership restricted its action to gaining international and local publicity on management's 'extremely provocative and tactless handling' of the issue.²⁸ It is not known whether the leadership has in fact devised any systematic plan of action to push these demands further. On the one hand, it seems that they are able to draw on the unity and militance of the workforce – only recently Cortina paintshop workers successfully secured through a work stoppage the reinstatement of a victimised worker. However, the FWC's ability to deal effectively with industrial action can be questioned in the light of the leadership's handling of the takeover bid, and more generally, in its tendency to be strong on the side of rhetoric and mobilising workers, but to be weak when it came to consolidating its position on the basis of short term victories. It is only through an understanding of the **specific nature** of factory struggle, the organisational needs and tactical niceties specific to industrial action – and this is indeed where the Unions have demonstrated their strength – that this can be achieved. The FWC has made the mistake of relying largely on mass protest action at the expense of developing and strengthening long term organisational structures which are resilient and flexible enough to enable workers to engage in different forms of struggle according to the needs of the situation.

In broad terms, however, we can see that the emergence and development of the

FWC took place in a context where the need for a vibrant and democratic worker organisation inside the Cortina plant was strongly felt. The UAW did not meet this need. It failed initially to win the support of Cortina workers through a process of struggle. Subsequently, it was unable to make up for the ground lost at the outset by adapting its general approach and tactics to enable it to draw Cortina workers into its fold. The shop steward leadership at Ford, with an overly developed and calcified reverence for the established channels of negotiation has displayed an inflexibility with regard to action taken outside these channels, even when such action is fully backed by worker power inside the plant and contains the seed of a victory for the workers. The FWC did initially fulfil workers' needs for action. Through the process of struggle, it changed its position from outright rejection of the Union to a decision to try to redirect the Union to accommodate the demands of the workers. However its lack of experience and tactical sense, as well as the strategies adopted by management left it isolated.

Because the FWC's struggle to retain its position is still very much alive, it is clearly not possible at this stage to make a total assessment of the direction which it has taken. It remains an open question as to whether the FWC itself can move beyond its own contradictions and organisational limitations to cultivate such fertile worker power. With the politicised Motor Industry workforce unlikely to lie fallow for long, the need for a decisive and effective working class leadership becomes not only necessary, but imperative.

Sources

1. See Roux in this edition, p. 37
2. See Interview with Johnnie Mke in this edition, p. 71
3. Interview with Dennis Neer, FWC representative, 23 July 1980
4. Interview with Mke, 22 July 1980
5. Interview with Dumile Makhanda, FWC representative, 23 July 1980
6. See Interview with Freddie Sauls in this edition, p. 63
7. Eastern Province Herald 24 November 1979
8. See Interview with Sauls, p. 63
9. Interview with Government Zini, 23 July 1980
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11. Interview with Mke
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15. Interview with Mke
16. Evening Post, 24 April 1980
17. Eastern Province Herald, 28 April 1980
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20. Interview with Zini
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The Emergence and Decline of a Community Organisation: an assessment of PEBCO

Michael Evans

PEBCO (the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation) was founded in October last year in the context of a relatively highly politicised black population in Port Elizabeth. The East Cape is an area in which the A.N.C. in the 60's and the Black Consciousness organisations of the 70's drew a great deal of their active support: And, further, it is an area which witnessed some of the most violent repression of the post-June 16 1976 unrest, which, unlike the rest of the country, continued in Port Elizabeth well into 1978, a fact given little coverage by the general media.

After the country-wide bannings of October 1977, there was a lack of any effective leadership or organisation of the black people in Port Elizabeth, and it was into this vacuum that PEBCO aimed to step. Its roots lie in the residents' associations which were set up in the Port Elizabeth townships of New Brighton, Kwazakele, Zwide, Kwaford and Thembaletu early in 1979, and in Walmer later in the year. From mid-1979, these groups began to realise the extent to which the problems they faced overlapped, and the need for a coordinated thrust in this regard. There was also a general realisation that it is impossible to divorce broader political issues from these basic civic problems which the residents' associations had specifically set out to tackle - problems such as water, rents, electricity, housing conditions and the provision of recreational and sporting facilities. Hence on October 10 PEBCO was officially formed at a meeting attended by over 500 people and an executive was elected which included the three people who had initiated the discussions between the various residents' associations, Thozamile Botha (who became president), A.T. Yeko (vice-president) and Ian Sogoni (treasurer). Other prominent members included Phalo Tshume (general secretary), Lizo Pityana (brother of Black Consciousness leader Barney Pityana and vice-president of PEBCO from the time of Yeko's resignation until his banning on December 20), Wilson Skosana (later president of PEBCO), Mono Badela (executive member of W.A.S.A., the Writers Association of South Africa) and Dan Qeqe (prominent Sports Administrator in the townships).

Botha (while vice-president of the Association of Science and Technology) had been detained under the Terrorism Act for three months in 1977 partly for helping to raise money for the legal defence of more than 400 detained pupils. He was later tried and acquitted. In June 1979 he was elected chairman of the Zwide Residents Association, by which time he had already begun to conduct a door-to-door campaign in an attempt to identify the specific needs and problems of the Port Elizabeth black community. On the basis of this, he immediately led a deputation to the East Cape Administration Board (E.C.A.B.) protesting against housing conditions.

PEBCO immediately drew a great deal of support with an estimated 9000

attending the official opening rally on October 30, where the organisation's principle aims were adopted. These were:

- to fight for equal civic rights for all the people of Port Elizabeth;
- to fight all discriminatory legislation;
- to seek participation in decision-making on all matters affecting the people of South Africa;
- to fight for the granting of the right to blacks to buy land under freehold right at any place of their choice; and
- to resist any attempt to deprive blacks of their South African citizenship.

An equally important principle (although not embodied in the Constitution) was the PEBCO stance on non-negotiation with what were labelled as "dummy bodies" such as community councils and homeland governments. The Port Elizabeth Community Council was (and still is) regarded by PEBCO as a tool of E.C.A.B., as an extension of the homelands system and as completely unrepresentative of, and a burden to, blacks in Port Elizabeth. PEBCO saw itself not in opposition to the Council, but as a complete alternative in attempting to deal with civic matters pertaining to blacks in the Urban areas. This focus essentially limited PEBCO to the organisation of those with Sec. 10(1) a or b rights, although this includes by far the majority of Port Elizabeth's approximately 350 000 blacks.

The composition and ideological basis of PEBCO reflect the diversity of the support it enjoyed during the period of Botha's leadership. The leadership was (and still is) largely dominated by the petty bourgeoisie, but with the strong, radical confrontationalist line which the leadership adopted, a great deal of support was generated among students and workers. In the first few months after its founding, PEBCO rallies became characterised by the wide range of people – businessmen, professionals, students, workers and even a section of Port Elizabeth's small migrant community – that regularly attended. At the same time, both older former-ANC members as well as many who had been active in the Black Consciousness movement found a home in PEBCO. Botha's charisma and uncompromising rhetoric clearly played an important part in attracting this broad support base, as did the populist nature of PEBCO's appeal with its emphasis more on the characteristics which unite black people than on those which divide: the unity of all black people in their struggle against white domination in fact became the primary focus of the organisation. This emphasis led to a tendency to ignore and at times actively disregard the distinct class differentiation within PEBCO, something that many of the younger members (most PEBCO's support has come from people under 30) and workers are aware of. Many of them are sceptical of the sincerity of some of the more middle class members, arguing that these people have a lot to gain by supporting a mass-based community organisation, for example, they point out that the trade boycott of white business which was planned in January 1980, but never materialised, would have directly benefitted black shop-owners. On the other hand, it clearly seems necessary for an organisation of PEBCO's nature to work towards unity and actively guard against an exclusive approach in any way, thus businessmen such as Dan Qeqe, who is active in non-racial sporting bodies and is widely respected throughout the community, are seen as being capable of playing a supportive role in the liberation struggle.

Soon after its founding, PEBCO established formal contact with the newly-formed Soweto Civic Association under Dr Nthatho Motlana, and there was general agreement between the two bodies, particularly over common civic problems. PEBCO aimed to extend as far as East London and Queenstown with the eventual aim of forming an East Cape Civic Organisation. It even discussed with Motlana the possibility of holding a national conference of civic organisations some time in 1980. PEBCO further claimed the support of AZAPO (Azanian Peoples Organisation), whose ex-president, Curtis Nkondo, addressed gatherings in Port Elizabeth on a number of occasions. As regards links with the exiled movements, many allegations were made that PEBCO was merely a front for the ANC. Given PEBCO's strong political stand, Port Elizabeth's history as an ANC stronghold and the frequent statements of support for the leaders imprisoned on Robben Island, it is hardly surprising that these allegations have been made.

PEBCO has always advocated a policy of non-violence for its own members; in practice the only possible strategy for an organisation of PEBCO's nature, and especially considering the number of deaths in Port Elizabeth at the hands of the police since 1976.

The event which generated a great deal of support for PEBCO as well as national and international recognition was the ongoing labour unrest which began at Ford on 31 October last year. (See J. Maree in this edition.) Ironically, PEBCO had not planned to involve itself in a labour dispute and Botha was genuinely surprised when he heard that 700 workers had come out in support of him. That they actually walked out was entirely due to the fact that he was a dynamic and respected leader of a community organisation. Thus the strikers were responding as workers to an essentially political issue, the apparent victimisation of their leader because of his involvement in the community. This shows a marked departure from the majority of previous South African strikes where the focus has been almost exclusively on labour issues, although this is not to deny that genuine economic grievances did exist at Ford. This became particularly apparent in later walk-outs where issues such as relations with white foremen, the ineffectiveness of the Liaison Committee and the provision of an annual bonus were taken up.

It is not however, within the scope of this article to discuss the strike as a whole, but merely the part which PEBCO played in it. Press reports have tended to obscure its role by suggesting that, as a community organisation, it stepped in and took the place of the union, the United Automobile, Rubber and Allied Workers (UAW), which was regarded by many of the workers as a tool of management, as unresponsive to their wildcat action and as inflexible in ignoring the political nature of their dispute. (See Maree) That PEBCO did step in is true only inasmuch as Botha was its president and the workers almost all its members. But throughout the dispute the issue was entirely co-ordinated and controlled by the workers themselves in the form of their democratically elected, unregistered workers committee, of which Botha was Chairman until he was detained, when Government Zini took over as leader. The Committee did affiliate to PEBCO, although the latter saw its role as merely to lend moral support to propagate the dispute and to help raise funds for the workers. Nevertheless, probably PEBCO's most important contribution was the support it generated within the community as a whole : the

solidarity that emerged made it very difficult for Ford to employ any scab labour from the African townships. Only right at the end of the dispute was any active intervention proposed on the PEBCO executive, in the form of a trade boycott of white business, but this never materialised because, inter alia, the Ford settlement was reached before the boycott was due to begin. The only individual connected with PEBCO in any way who did intervene and offer to negotiate with the Ford management was former Vice-President, A.T. Yeko, but by this stage he had already resigned from PEBCO and threatened to establish his own, more moderate civic body. His moves were, in any case, rejected by Ford, the Union and the workers.

PEBCO was also accused of spreading the conflict to the General Tyre factory, where 625 workers came out on strike on 19 November. Clearly PEBCO did capitalise on the unrest at General Tyre, and mobilised a certain degree of support there, but the dispute itself, as at Ford, arose from genuine grievances. That PEBCO was not responsible for the walk-out is indicated by Botha's refusal to address the workers at the General Tyre factory on the morning of the 19th when called upon by the strikers to do so.

The end of the Ford strike on January 9, with a victory achieved by the workers in the form of full reinstatement, marked the height of PEBCO's success, but also the beginning of a number of setbacks. These setbacks which had a relatively crippling effect on the organisation, have their origins more in PEBCO's directly political, rather than labour involvements. In this connection its handling of the Walmer issue is probably most important.

The residents of the Walmer location have been repeatedly threatened since June last year, with removal to Zwide, 22 kms away. The reasons advanced by the authorities for these removals were the proposed road and airport extensions in the area and the slum conditions in the location. However, opponents of the removals have claimed that immediate extensions would effect only a small number of residents, that in any case the township could extend in another direction and that the slum conditions have arisen because of deliberate neglect by the authorities. The official reasons, however obscure, would appear to be mere justification for more important security and ideological considerations; the township being only ½km from an elite white suburb.

The removals issue had been raised at PEBCO's opening rally, but it took a new turn just before the settlement at Ford when E.C.A.B. planned a tour of the township for any "interested parties". By this stage, PEBCO's meetings had become characterised by an increasingly militant stance and by opposition not only to government-created bodies, but also to "divisive strategies" such as the creation of a black middle class. And with the leadership increasingly calling for "action rather than words", it is hardly surprising that opposition to the E.C.A.B. tour was planned. It was thus decided at a rally on January 6 to hold a one-day stayaway by all black workers on the 15th to coincide with the tour, to stage a peaceful demonstration in the township and to begin a full trade boycott of all white shops including the stores owned by Yeko (who had led the splinter breakaway). At the same meeting, it was decided to refuse to pay rents if they were increased, to boycott the buses if the fares went up, and to boycott all E.C.A.B. liquor outlets.

Even the students, who at this stage were playing a very active role within PEBCO, planned to boycott the opening of the school term. However, within the week the dispute at Ford was settled (thus weakening the possibility of a stayaway) and the E.C.A.B. tour was cancelled, according to Koch because the touring party did not want police protection. Both events were proclaimed by PEBCO as victories for the organisation and the people. As a result the PEBCO executive decided to propose the cancellation of the stayaway, demonstration and boycott, but half-an-hour before the proposal was due to be presented to a mass meeting, three leading PEBCO members, Botha, Tshume and Badela, were detained. A few days later Qeqe was also detained but was released two weeks later. The other three were only released at the end of February and were then, together with Qeqe, immediately banned. Botha remained in Port Elizabeth for a further two months before leaving for Lesotho on May 5 where he is at present waiting for confirmation of his application for exile status.

In retrospect, it appears the PEBCO overextended itself over the Walmer issue. At the rally on January 6, seven different forms of protest were planned. Not only was the radical nature of the proposals (and especially the proposed stayaway by all black workers) likely to bring PEBCO into direct conflict with the authorities, but also it seems unlikely that it would have been able to carry out the proposals at that stage of its existence. The organisation had been officially founded only two months previously, and a day later had become involved in the Ford dispute. This left no time to plan strategy or to consolidate the support rapidly being established. The result was that events began to overtake it and problems had to be tackled by a leadership still relatively immature. This inexperience is reflected by PEBCO's rather rash dismissal of the 'Save Walmer Committee' – a committee comprising Walmer township residents and outsiders which had been active since the removals issue was raised in June 1979. PEBCO, with its strong non-negotiation stance publicly opposed the Committee for choosing to negotiate with Dr Koornhof. However, it later had to withdraw its statements and work with the committee since the latter seemed to enjoy much support from the Walmer people.

Given more time to analyse the situations and to plan accordingly, these mistakes may not have occurred, and the setbacks which followed may have been avoided; for example, the militant wing on the executive under Botha was aware of the threat of state repression and had planned to play itself into a lower profile rôle, allowing the more moderate members to act as the organisation's spokesmen. But with the Ford dispute occurring when it did, and with PEBCO immediately thereafter taking up issues and expanding, Botha assumed a strong high profile role, which meant that it was only a matter of time before the state intervened. What happened then was that the moderate wing (under the present chairman, Wilson Skosana) took over the leadership, but now without the presence of the militant group to help steer the direction of the organisation and maintain its dynamic approach. Furthermore, the state repression helped prevent the emergence of younger, more radical leaders.

After the clamp-down PEBCO became far more defensive. At a meeting on 27 January the acting executive took a stand against resolutions calling for the one-day stayaway, the classroom boycott and the consumer boycott. Arguments

used by the leaders were that the authorities were trying to provoke a clash with PEBCO, that it took time to organise a work stayaway, and that it was time to open a PEBCO office and pay attention to serious fund-raising. This more conservative stand led for the first time to splits emerging within the organisation. Dissatisfaction with the leadership was manifested publicly and there was even a call for a vote of no-confidence in the executive.

Since the bannings of 27 February, the organisation has been relatively inactive. Its only attempt to mobilise workers – a call for a boycott of liquor outlets in protest against the detentions – was a complete failure, partly due to its poor supervision. PEBCO has expanded to the Indian suburb of Malabar (the Vice-Chairman of the Malabar Ratepayers Association, Dr Moodliar, is currently also Vice-Chairman of PEBCO) and has made initial contact with the coloured community in Gelvandale, but in other areas it has lost support. Probably the most important of these is the student grouping, for with PEBCO's failure to make any statement in support of the schools boycott, most of the students seem to have become disillusioned, and an element of antagonism now exists between it and their organisations, COSAS (the Congress of South African Students) and the P.E. Students Committee, which was set up to co-ordinate the schools' boycott. The PEBCO view, as stated by Skosana, is that it would have been opportunistic to have entered a specifically schools issue. But the motivation behind this strategy seems as much a fear that "if we had joined with the students we should have lost control of PEBCO to the youngsters". As Skosana went on to add: "I dread the day that we are banned, for then the radicals and militants will take over, or even the communists". This view indicates a strong desire by the present moderate leadership to retain its position. Previously PEBCO saw itself as part of a parallel thrust in alliance with the workers and students, all working towards the same goal of liberation, but with each acting in its own sphere. But now it seems in danger of viewing previously complementary groups as threats to its present direction.

This direction has obviously been conditioned by the state clamp-down. Thus, the aim now is to consolidate on an individual level and through the Residents Associations, and to expand further into the coloured townships. But, without the necessary charismatic leadership, without the public statements, effective grassroots organisation, regular report backs, mass rallies (only one was held in the black townships between the bannings in February and mid-June when all political gatherings were prohibited), and without the direct challenges to government bodies, black people are beginning to feel the same void that existed before October last year. Even the PEBCO Council and executive are not meeting regularly. The only issue being tackled at present concerns the Zwide rents (the rise from R14,11 to R36,38 is at present being legally contested), but even this has been entirely handled by the Zwide Residents Association acting in a sense independently of PEBCO.

Still an issue at the moment is the question of negotiation. Under Botha, the lines was very much that history and experience have shown this tactic to be futile. Even on the civic issues, PEBCO preferred to act independently of ECAB, i.e. through the courts, through public statements or through blanket refusal to pay higher rents, bills, etc. Then the emphasis was on continual demands and

pressurisation and only individual cases were taken to ECAB. But currently, and particularly since Malabar joined PEBCO, the non-negotiation line is being reviewed. The majority of the present executive feel that while certain issues are non-negotiable (issues such as citizenship rights, rights to remain in Port Elizabeth), on specific civic issues, government bodies should possibly be consulted. While this tactic has undoubtedly attracted those older people who felt that PEBCO was previously too radical in its demands, too undisciplined in its approach and incapable of meeting the demands, it has at the same time tended to turn away those who feel that PEBCO should continue to pressurise.

While this picture of PEBCO as it is at present might seem fairly negative, that of the PEBCO-affiliated Ford Workers Committee is definitely very positive. Spurred on by their victory, the workers at Ford have become increasingly aware of their shop-floor strength. They are currently pressurising management to give them their 18 months bonus due last December when they were on strike. At present the canteen is being boycotted and if management does not pay what is owed to the workers, a strike is a strong possibility. But at time of writing it is far more likely that management will relent first, since the only reason that they are not paying seems to be a fear of losing face.

What has become apparent over the past six months is that the intense energy which previously characterised PEBCO's activities has now been re-directed towards the workers committees, the residents associations and the schools boycott. But in spite of its decline, the spirit of resistance still remains – people like Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu are widely regarded throughout the black community as the true leaders and others like Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba and Wilton Mkwayi (all currently serving life sentences on Robben Island) as those people who will specifically represent Port Elizabeth at any negotiating table. PEBCO under Botha aimed merely to fill the leadership and organisational gap, and in this it was largely successful, as tens of thousands of Port Elizabeth residents will testify. The gap is not being filled at present, but the existing structures and the general mood remain to revive the organisation, despite any attempts the state might make to prevent this.

Sources include a series of interviews conducted over June/July 1980, as well as relevant newspaper reports.

INTERVIEWS

SALB interviews Freddie Sauls, General Secretary of the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa

Q: Could you outline the history of the relationship between the UAW and the National Union?

A: We should begin with the time UAW was started. In 1971 some of us who were active in the plants were elected into official positions in the National Union. There was a direct conflict between our strategies and methods and those of the full time officials and their supporters, and this developed into an open fight. From the second part of 1971, we started to re-organise the National Union. At our first Executive Council meeting in 1972 we discussed how we were to relate and co-operate with the African workers, not being eligible to join the National Union. At that point, we had representation on the Industrial Council although it was not effective. We realised that just having coloureds there to represent coloured interests is not going to effectively challenge management. So, we developed links with the African workers in the plants: having discussions with them on an informal basis as a way of working towards participation and co-operation on issues affecting all workers.

On the Industrial Council, management saw two groups of black workers -- the coloureds represented by the National Union on the one side, and the Africans represented by the Bantu Labour Officers on the other. We did not feel satisfied just speaking for Africans, with them having no voice. But moreover, to improve the conditions of workers, we needed a unified structure. Thus, we worked for a united front, and this led to the establishment of the UAW in 1973. From then on, we had this close co-operation; sharing of resources, organisers and of offices. Whenever we went to the Industrial Council, there was also full discussion on all issues to be raised.

Also, in meetings with management, representatives from both unions attended. We wanted to get away from the purely coloured issues and this has worked. We hope that this problem will be fully overcome in the near future if we get registration for a non-racial union. But, the **practical** co-operation is as one organisation. That is straightforward, registered or not.

Q: What kind of issues were raised at this time?

A: We discussed all issues. We had shop committees and works councils where we had all the shop stewards and executives from the different factories under the unions. Meetings were about once every two months to discuss everything happening in a plant. For instance, if somebody from General Motors comes to South Africa, and there was a press statement to be made, this issue would be raised at the meetings.

Many issues were discussed including integration in the company, black advancement, training and promotion.

Q: Why did NUMARWOSA move out of TUCSA?

A: We found ourselves in TUCSA when most of the present leadership took up positions in the union. When we started looking at our relationship with the UAW and the direction in which the union was going, our affiliation to TUCSA and the IMF became important issues. In our discussions, the question arose – if the UAW does not fit into TUCSA, there must be something drastically wrong with that organisation. So we looked at what was happening in TUCSA. We had discussions with TUCSA unions at Annual Conferences to see how they viewed the ultimate bringing in of African workers into the TUCSA fold. We did not just get these views from the secretaries and the people at the top – those who knew what political answers to give. Rather we gauged the feeling from the unions themselves, and when we had feedback from this, we were really shocked; the feeling from the floor, from worker representatives was shocking. For that reason, we thought that these people had no clear objective about bringing blacks into TUCSA; if blacks were to come in, TUCSA would have to take on a new dimension, a new direction because you were bringing in people whose objectives are different to the people who are sitting in their privileged positions and these people were not prepared for such a situation as they did not understand. So we decided that we were just wasting our time in TUCSA and that we should pull out because the organisation was not going to take on a new direction and new objectives and its affiliates were not committed to the working class struggle.

Q: What, more precisely, are the points of difference between your conception of the need to organise African workers and that of TUCSA?

A: Firstly, there are clear differences of interest between the black and the white worker, if you take the different situations in which they find themselves, a white worker finds that he's got nearly everything. The black worker has got all the oppressive race attitudes and laws used against him, so that the outlook of a black worker coming into industry is not going to be passive, he's not just going to accept his wage packet every week. At TUCSA Conferences, workers seldom got up to the platform to speak. They were left completely in the dark. Whereas, in our situation, since '72, we had these meetings where the workers all come together to discuss matters affecting them. From these groupings, we developed and encouraged a worker leadership group. But in TUCSA the secretaries led at all times and no clear leadership developed from its ranks. During the period we were in TUCSA, '71–'76, there were the same people at each conference, and always the same speakers who went up to speak. The following year, you knew what that guy's going to say from what he said the last time. This was felt more clearly in our P.E. area division of TUCSA where meetings took about 10–15 minutes and it was over. Nothing was discussed that related to what affected the workers in the Eastern Cape. But when we tried to bring in relevant issues, other Union Reps would get mad at us for this. We did not believe it was any different in other areas. With our regional meetings – a complete counterpart – our two unions drew 70 people, whereas TUCSA, with its 8 or 10 unions in the area got about 7.

Q: What about TUCSA's motivation for drawing in African workers in order to protect the interests of White workers?

A: I'm not sure that I can comment on TUCSA's views for letting Africans in. But our view was clear; it was in our direct interest to unite workers to prevent management from dividing them. For us, it was completely irrelevant to control African workers so as to protect our own interests; We brought African workers in on a completely free and open basis. We made it clear from the start to management and the Industrial Council that separate representation for coloureds and Africans was completely against our principles.

Q: Were there any differences in approach as regards the use of Industrial Councils?

A: I've never addressed myself to how TUCSA sees Industrial Councils. We've only addressed ourselves to how we can use the situation, to block it and use it to our advantage. We see the Industrial Councils as a means to an end. That is all. We do not believe that the Industrial Council system has complete control of the situation. Maybe it would have been different if, in our situation in the Auto Industry, there were a lot of other unions, and we were a minority in that grouping. We could possibly then have found ourselves in a situation where the majority used the Industrial Council to control black workers. But we have made it clear that we won't accept any person speaking on behalf of our members; and have a clear mandate from the African workers. We do not see the Industrial Council as a threat or a complete obstacle, because to have centralised negotiations, is one thing, but there also needs to be bargaining on the shop floor as well. For instance, at Volkswagen where even after the Industrial Council negotiations, the committee negotiated for service bonuses and other conditions: at S.K.F. too, for the last three years they have negotiated agreements between the company and the Union, even after the Industrial Council has concluded its negotiation. We are also now discussing with Good Year — setting up structures so that more workers can meet management. This is preferable to the secretaries always being called in. In our Industrial Council for the Automobile Industry there are only two groupings: The "Yster en Staal Unie" and us. We made it clear to the employers that we represented the coloured workers but also have a mandate from the UAW and they knew that we were having these meetings with the UAW before negotiations. In short, the Industrial Council is there and we feel that it will be there for quite some time, but we have also developed structures where we have negotiations on the shop floor.

Q: Do you feel that you have built up a strong leadership?

A: Yes, though there are still some companies where we've had a weak leadership, like in Hella and Good Year. In some cases the problem was that the leadership which came into the union was very much on the level of black consciousness ideology. Then we had some problems in the Uitenhage area where the politicisation of workers was very high, especially the Black Consciousness ideology. But I think that from the last strike, the workers have learnt a terrific lesson,

especially at Good Year where they had to plan new strategies of how to overcome their problems, not just to run wild, thinking because I'm black, management is going to accept whatever we demand.

We must be clear in our minds about which way we are going, we must realise that we can also fail, we must be aware of the relationship and power of management and the state. At Good Year this was not clear, but at SKF, Volkswagen and Borg Warner the workers knew which way they were going. They had specific interests which they were pushing for and they knew if we succeed here, we are going to benefit, and it would be to the benefit of all Auto Workers. They had an elected leadership which could guide and control the workers – control to the extent that they could plan strategy that was acceptable, not in the sense of telling workers what to do. This meant planned strategy. If you relate this to what has happened at Ford, you will see a complete picture of what is happening. Whereas at Ford this was never so. It was a decision taken by a small group of black consciousness activists and put forward as if it was a worker's decision.

But overall, I feel that we have already developed strategies and a leadership in the plants to take negotiation further. We do not believe its a question of imposing structures and saying it's going to work. Its a principle that you've got to develop leadership to make it work irrespective of management's attitude.

Q: How do you deal with a leadership which does not develop along Union lines?

A: The only thing we could do is to have discussions in big groupings where everyone is free to express himself. Since '73 we have never ceased to hold these discussions on practical issues like disinvestment and how that effects us as workers. Also party politics. What is the worker's role in party politics? How do our shop stewards see it, how do we see it? We feel that discussing matters of that nature is the only way you can actually get people to accept the direction in which you are going. We do not feel that trying to convince one person at a time is really going to do it. If we have an open discussion amongst 60 or 70 people, where one worker can say "Look, I disagree with your point of view", all of us will learn from the exercise. We try to make people think for themselves about issues such as party politics, Inkatha, the Labour Party, Azapo. And I can tell you that a number of very influential people have come through this groupings with clear worker interests. That is why in Uitenhage we have possibly the most powerful grouping in our whole Union. Those who have come into the union movement may not have actually thrown away what they believe in, but at least they see that the direction in which we are going is the right one.

Q: Looking back over the past five years, which struggles stand out as being the most significant?

A: I'm not sure what you term struggles. I would rather say that the major achievement has been the initiative to get together a national grouping of workers in South Africa.

This is very important to us; that people should come together on all the common problems on a national basis, although at this point it has not reached a stage that we hoped it would reach. Also to us it is important that full time officials can sit back in the offices and concern themselves with development, studies and backup on possibly broader general issues, while leaving the factory issues to be run by the shop stewards while they don't have to call us everytime they have problems. So, the development of leadership is the most important question as far as I am concerned – even more important than the last negotiations at Volkswagen. During these discussions the decisions were taken by a group of workers. We have never allowed anyone to interfere and take over this role because we felt it was important for the workers to go through this challenge and see for themselves what they can achieve. I can name the workers in the Union who have developed this leadership ability, and this has been an achievement more so than anything else. Even then there is still a vacuum, there is still something more that must be done. But we're looking to FOSATU to meet these needs.

Q: What is this vacuum?

A: We are working with people who have developed to a certain level. We have taken them to the shop steward level where they can meet, negotiate and face management on an equal basis. But they need to develop a broader knowledge about trade union structures in the country, about national economic and political developments which relate to workers. Our grouping is too small to cater for these needs. And if you just stop at the level of shop steward exercises the workers will say, 'I've reached the limits' and things will drop from there. So, we need discussion on a higher level for these people because their interest has been aroused now. Discussions should relate to the international labour movement, the ILO, ICFTU, so that workers see their position in relation to those of workers in Sweden and Germany for instance and become aware of how political pressures affect worker interests here. What is the nature of workers' struggles in Latin America? The workers should relate to this because most of them see themselves as being oppressed only in South Africa. But for us to do that is impossible. We need a bigger organisation, and I hope that FOSATU will cater for these needs so that a group of our more developed people can be exposed to something other than what they are doing on a day-to-day basis. Otherwise they may just get frustrated.

Q: What of the victories achieved by the workers under the banner of NUMARWOSA and UAW?

A: For the National Union, apart from negotiations, I don't think there has been so much. But for the UAW, the main struggles have been for recognition. If you look at the UAW, it is the only union I know of which works on a completely national basis and it has been an achievement to get recognition as a the worker representative inside the plant. Particularly in the Eastern Cape, there's Ford, General Motors, SKF, Volkswagen, Borg Warner, Good Year, CDA is on the brink. Then in Pretoria, there's Sigma and BMW. What other

unregistered union in South Africa can claim this achievement.

But to us recognition on a piece of paper does not mean anything; It is the practical implementation of recognition. Has the shop steward got the right to facilities? Has the union officials outside got the right to represent workers inside? These are the things that are important, not a piece of paper stating: 'We are recognising your union to come to the plant'. Even then you must ask the personnel manager and if he says no, then that holds. They allow you to have shop stewards, but then the shop stewards are being victimised. For instance, at SKF they came with the argument that the shop stewards can't call the officials from outside to come in, whereas we had agreed in principle with the company, with the former managing director about that. So the workers said they were referring this to the office. We told management that we wanted to see them about this, and they replied, 'When can you see us'. The day before they had argued that we could not come in because there was no agreement on this. But there was nothing they could do because if they did not accept that the union is in the plant, they would have had problems. So to us what is important is the practical implementation of recognition and not paper recognition.

Q: Could you explain further what the practical implementation of recognition is for shop stewards, particularly with regard to the way in which worker demand, are taken up?

A: It differs from company to company depending on the size. For instance, at Volkswagen we've got 16 African Shop Stewards all serving on the Liaison Committee. Then there are 5 Coloured Shop Stewards. All 21 representatives have the same powers as Shop Stewards. Now the reason for continuing with the Liaison Committee, let us be clear on this, is that we use it to elect representatives onto the Industrial Council. Thus, the BEC Chairman in Uitenhage was elected by the Volkswagen Liaison Committee to serve on the Council, Johnnie Mke was elected at Ford, and so on. On the Industrial Council we've got 6 worker representatives and 3 full-time officials. All the local Chairmen of the Union Branches are serving on the Industrial Council. That is one structure. (So you can see our system differs from other unions and what irritates us is that people say that those guys have just been swallowed by the system, without knowing what is happening. But we have seen how we can best use all opportunities). To come to your point: in Volkswagen, for example, there are 21 representatives who all have the same power to take up any problem apart from Industrial Council negotiations. And even if they want an improvement on the Industrial Council agreement they can go ahead as long as that is decided by the Branch itself. An individual shop steward has not got that right: he can only take up any complaint from his department. The majority of cases concern victimisation, absenteeism, incorrect classifications, when the worker may be doing a Grade 6 job, but has been classified in Grade 4, and promotions – going from one Grade to another. Someone may have been in a Grade 4 for years, while a new worker has moved straight into Grade 6. We are working on that now; to try to develop a system where

we have the names of every worker in a specific grade. So we can see how long each person has worked and whether promotion is possible. Another problem that emerges is increased production – when management wants to speed up the lines. These are things which the shop stewards must take up.

Q: A lot of the problems you mention concern complaints of individual workers. Has the shop steward got another role, perhaps in conscientising, educating workers?

A: We take that just for granted you know. That is the most important task of the shop steward inside the plant, as distinct from organising. A lot of people say that you just have to organise workers. Now I would say that the strategy is to unionise **and** to conscientise the workers. It is important, but we take it for granted because most of our shop stewards realise its importance. They know that unless they get workers to stand together on the issues they take forward, they're going to be completely lost. What we have done is to adopt a strategy whereby the shop steward has a number of other workers with whom he has discussions before taking up problems. Our plants are so big – each shop steward has maybe 2–300 workers in his department, but at least he should involve a number of workers from each section, his contact people to whom he reports back. I must say, however, that it is very difficult for the guys to report back and discuss things at all times. On many occasions, management has questioned them about discussing things in this way. It's a problem if this discussion can only be done during the break periods because it means putting the case back for two hours after the particular incident.

I'm not telling you its working 100 percent. Some shop stewards think, 'I want to solve this case as soon as possible because the worker is waiting. But to us its not just a question of organising, its a question of unionising. If a shop steward cannot unionise workers in the plant, he can forget about taking up a winning case because the foreman knows that this guy is standing alone.

Q: Do you feel that the Motor Unions have had an effect on labour relations in the Eastern Cape in terms of the balance of forces present?

A: I definitely think so. They have had a tremendous impact in this area. Again, companies are multinationals, with certain responsibilities. I'm not sure if it would have been different if they were a lot of South African companies. But what I can say is that the attitudes have definitely changed. They've started these lectures at UPE in Industrial Relations, they want to teach management about unions and what unions should do. I don't think this would have materialised unless there was a need for them to come to grips with this problem – this union problem around here. And if the problem wasn't real that they could feel it, could see it around them, they would not have bothered about it at all.

What is important to me, however, is that the people around Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth have really been made aware of the role of trade unionism – not to the extent that we can sit back and feel satisfied, but at least we have put many questions in the minds of people about the unions. Even during the

strike at Volkswagen, the church people, without our approaching them, have sent circulars to some of the churches telling them that they must address themselves to the conditions under which the congregations are living and working. Now you ask yourself why has this been brought about? We didn't ask the people, even if we did ask them there was no need for them to listen or address themselves to this problem. So I can only say that it is because of the impact of the Automobile Unions in this region. First it was the Eveready Strike, then it was the Ford, now the strike at Volkswagen. Since then a lot of people are sitting up. Some to the extent that they want to run away from P.E.

Q: Yes, that is a question that does emerge: that because the unions do seem to be growing in influence and importance, that it's possibly become an area which is not so conducive to investments?

A: I don't think the unions have become that powerful that they can take over management roles. We have not reached that stage, but we've at least reached a stage where the balance of power across the negotiating table is now more or less equal; we don't have to beg or plead anymore. We realise that if we have to negotiate, the workers know the reason for this. They know what they want and the problems we are facing if we negotiate. It's not just a question of sending two people to speak on their behalf. They realise where the power is; it is not across the negotiating table. The power is in the capital of management and in the labour power of the workers on the floor. Unless they are going to compromise, there are going to be problems. Apart from that, I don't think the unions have become so militant that they can disrupt everything. If I were in management's position I would be glad for the stage that the unions have reached and the knowledge that the workers now have about their role. Okay, in any situation you will get people who will want more than they possibly get. But I think that the majority of workers realise that it's a step-by-step process. They know where they are heading, and I think management should accept and learn to live with the situation and make the best of it because it can only work in their interest.

Q: Has the crisis in the motor industry had any negative effects on the organisation of workers?

A: No, it has not had any impact, beside the effect on the economic material benefits of the workers. And we did not lose any members, very few resigned. On the one hand, during a slump the motor industry lays off people, then it picks up again and draws the same people back, unlike other areas where workers may go into various other industries and are completely dispersed.

Q: Is this because of the skills required by even the lower grade workers?

A: Yes, if you think of a conveyor belt moving and a worker having to fit something there to a certain efficiency and quality, you need to have certain skills.

Q: The unions in P.E. have been operating in a highly politicised context where

the political consciousness is highly developed. How do you see the union's role in this context?

A: I don't see us living or developing in a situation apart from what is taking place around us in the community and in the country on a national basis. What is clear to us is that we do not see ourselves being involved in party politics. If you look at political organisations operating inside or outside South Africa at this point, I don't think we need have any fears of operating as we are now.

Okay, a couple of people have come out strongly that the union must become involved in politics. But when we ask, what politics? What must we become involved in? They haven't got the answers. However, when the time comes that we must identify or work with any grouping, we will decide where we stand. But the fact is clear that we **are** involved in politics, we are working in a context where laws are operating; laws affecting us as workers where we live and where we work. So we cannot isolate ourselves from politics. You get a lot of people who make stupid statements – that politics is on one side. But what we are quite clear about is that we would not let anybody, any party political organisation come in and dominate us; it is the workers who must dominate the party political organisation and not a small handful, a group of people who come in and dictate to the masses. This is a message that comes through from the workers and we have been talking about this in group meetings since '71 when a lot of other people were scared to deal with the relationship between the union and party political organisations. We have had battles since that time with people in political parties. But no group of people are going to sit in an office and issue instructions to the workers. Rather the workers should issue instructions to those people about what **they** should do for the workers.

The workers will decide what interest is paramount to them and what should be pursued by any party political organisation. But at this point, I don't think we are operating in a dangerous area where there's a lot of politicisation, where black nationalist ideologies dominate. The people who are practical realise that to get workers united, you need to work in the union movement and our prime objective is to build solidarity and proceed step by step to improve on the demands of the workers. The danger is where, like, the Ford situation, workers can be motivated on a Party political issue, but what do they achieve and how do they benefit? At Ford the white guys said that blacks are misusing the toilet facilities, so workers went on strike, for that? What have they learned? They had to fight to get their jobs back, and what have they benefited? Absolutely nothing. Workers will remember that. I can guarantee you that if Ford workers are asked to go on strike, not even 1/10 of the Cortina workers would go out now.

For us, the present political situation is not so tense that we cannot operate. We have clarified our position and if people do not accept the way we operate, it is hard luck to them. Our membership is quite clear. If you take the strike at Volkswagen where we saw that certain things were becoming very dangerous, the Union Executive took the decision to recommend to the workers to go

back in their own interest. The workers accepted that and the fact that we could not call a meeting. These are the lessons that workers learn and that we hope the people in the party political organisations also learn.

Q: What guidelines emerged from the Ford experience to enable the unions to deal with similar situation?

A: There are two points about the Ford dispute. Firstly, workers should decide for themselves, irrespective of whether they are union members.

If Ford workers took the decision to walk out, they should know that it is their decision and they should stand or fall by the consequences. Nobody is to be blamed for their decision. Secondly, to the Ford situation there are no easy answers. A lot of people have easy answers, especially those who have no knowledge of what is presently happening in the black townships, and others who look at the problem from an academic or intellectual point of view. What is clear to us from the Ford situation is that the strike was not around worker interests. Botha was not a Union member; he never supported the Union. When he walked out of Ford, there were many channels open to him where he could have redressed his grievance. He was very powerful politically, even more popular than the mayor of P.E. He could have demanded an interview with the Managing Director of the company. He could have told them, "Look your guys there are giving me a hard time and if they don't stop there's going to be trouble, and I want you to fire the guy who's intimidating me". He could have done that, if, that is, there was a will to resolve the problem. Now, why didn't he? One must see that PEBCO at that stage was improving its image, and had reached the point where they could show the people the power of Pebco. It had a very strong following in the Cortina Plant, and they must have been assured that if they took on that challenge, it would boost Pebco completely in South Africa and internationally. And it did. Botha walked out of the plant and pamphlets were distributed stating that the following day he must be back, otherwise the workers would strike, then that night there's a meeting. If he resigned, why should there have been pressures to get him back? He was not fired, why make a big fuss about it.

Q: But Botha was saying that the problem was not his own particular grievance, but the problems of the workers in South Africa?

A: We expected a person in his position to have used strategy. So, to us it is clear that there was some sort of strategy behind this, because if he had not resigned, there wouldn't have been the big hassle to get him back. Management was not going to fire him, so he had to resign for the workers to push him to come back. What is important is that the guy goes back to work, to an unchanged situation in the very same department, with the very same people. Did management agree to change their attitude and allow him time off to pursue his political activities? The information received was that there was no such agreement. We pressurised management: "If you don't take this guy back, then you must fire the white guy too." He was not a union member, but because other workers were involved and this was managements attitude to

him, it became a worker problem. So, to us it was clear: Pebco used this to show their control over workers. And they succeeded. They could get all the workers out and keep them out for three days. On the first day, nobody was there to address the workers. The Union organisers had to be there to talk to them and tell them that if they did not want to go in, they should disperse. The next day the same thing and then Botha arrived. At the meeting where they discussed Botha's re-employment, no one asked for the workers to be paid for the time they were off. I still told the organisers that there was going to be trouble about this; management should have either paid the workers or fired the foreman who harrassed Botha.

So, we pushed them on this point and they gave in. They paid the workers to cool down the whole issue. But we knew we could never really push to get the foreman fired; management would never have gone that far. We are not that stupid. It was then clear that Botha was not pursuing the interests of the workers. He did not ask the question about the lost pay. He had not given a thought to the people who had come out in support of him. If we go a little further, when the workers went on strike the second time, we talked to some Pebco people and said: "You Pebco people want to run the situation in the company. We are not going to have any conflict with you, you take control. We are going to stand back completely. If you mess it up, you're going to clean it up". The very next day, the workers from General Tire and Adamas started to demand union recognition, even though they had been striking about cutlery, canteen facilities, the attitude of the foreman. There had been no question about demanding union rights. The very same people said that the Ford workers have made a mistake by bypassing the union when going out on strike again. But there was no way that they could control them.

There was thus an influence from then on in pushing the union forward and I don't think it was just one person's influence – it was a far wider influence in Pebco that was behind the whole thing. But there were other influences from the right at the time of the second strike. When Ford workers made their demands to management, they stated that "They did not want the Union to represent them". Whereas the other grouping, Adamas and General Tire wanted the union. The Union leadership did not simply accept to stand back, but to us the decision of the workers was that they did not want us to involve ourselves, so we did just that. Then, the workers were expecting a reply to their demands on Wednesday, 12 noon. But they walked off the job in the morning because management had just fired some other people at Engine Plant. Botha called on them to stay there. Why not? There was a previous decision that management should respond at 12 o'clock. He came out to the workers, spoke to them but they wouldn't listen. The workers were completely out of control. The same thing happened at one of the meetings in the township when they discussed the question of the Union: the workers rejected what Botha had to say about working through the Union. We saw it as another influence coming in. And some of the Pebco people who we discussed this with agreed with that, but it was completely out of their control.

The other point which is clear was that there were strong influences for the workers to reject the Union. But it was not a popular decision, it was not a general decision of the workers. Why did the workers continue to request the Union for advice if they rejected it? Why are all the previous Cortina workers back in the Union which they rejected? When some of the workers came here to ask for advice during the strike, we put it to them that they'd rejected the Secretariat. "You are the Union inside, the only thing you've actually said is that you don't want the secretariat to be involved, so we're staying out." To us it was more a principle, as we do not force our presence on the workers they are free to decide for themselves who should represent them.

Q: There has been much criticism that the union was put into such a difficult situation because it had not established adequate communication with the shop floor so that it was unable to gauge the feelings and mood of the workers. To what extent do you agree with that?

A: I don't agree with that at all. I think it is complete nonsense to say that the Union has been cut off from the workers. But when a party political issue like Pebco comes right into the plant, you give me any shop steward that can counter a situation like that. Blacks do not react in the same ways as whites, because they are living in a different situation. You can only get the true feeling of what it's like if you walk in the street, in the mud of a shanty town. The environment is completely different, when the colour of your skin is the only thing. So, if you bring this situation into the plant, the black man sees: "Here's a chance to free myself from the oppressive situation in which I find myself." And that is what happened in Cortina. But people keep on making the mistake that it's a matter of the shop steward having lost contact with the workers. In any plant anywhere in South Africa you'd find that party political and community issues are far more important to workers than worker related issues as workers relate their exploitation as wage earners to their political oppression. There is no union that I know of in South Africa that can propagate party political principles at present. They may believe that they are standing for these principles, but if they want to come out with support to show it, then they will just cease to exist in the present climate in South Africa. If you compare this to Volkswagen where it was a directly worker related problem and the Union could go in and negotiate. Nobody can tell me that the Black Consciousness people there, or those supporting other organisations are less militant than the workers at the Cortina Plant. But bring the political situation that the blacks are faced with into the Industrial environment and no law is going to stop it; no industrial relations procedure or strategy is going to stop it. So, if anybody wants to blame the UAW's structure in the plant, saying that we had no contact with the people on the floor, they are dreaming and pleasant dreams to them.

Q: You have been quoted in the press as saying that the union could put more pressure on Ford if workers were inside the factory, since they are stronger

inside rather than outside the plant. Could you explain what you meant by this?

A: When we looked at the Ford situation, we saw a number of things happening: firstly the ranks of the workers on strike were breaking up a number of people went back. This gave management the opportunity of further dividing the whole grouping. It also created a division among the people in the townships. They didn't know who was next in going back to work the next day. The other point is that by the workers being outside, they had no real pressures on management, except that the production lines were not rolling. That's all. But there was no real psychological pressure on management as when 700 workers in the plant just down tools and refuse to work. We felt that if workers went back and could man the machines in the same jobs, then if there was anybody outside who management wanted to keep out for being too militant, they could then refuse to work until those guys are inside. But if workers are all outside, management just continues to hire new people in the plant who break away from the old workers and begin to operate under a different psychological situation. They do not feel part of that group on strike and are prepared to work irrespective of what happens to the guys outside. Afterwards a very serious division is created which takes years to overcome. It would have been completely different if the workers could picket the factory to prevent scabs from going in. But with the present laws that is not something to think about.

Q: What do you see as the key issue for the future facing workers in the Eastern Cape?

A: Its a difficult question because what are key issues for me are not necessarily for the others. Management is going to get more clued up to developments like those taking place here. There will be more influence from the state during the interim -- more direct instructions on how to handle and prevent strikes. To overcome that it will be important for workers to re-analyse their future strategies. If they don't do that, they're just going to walk right into traps. Management is going to hold seminars to learn what trade unionism is, why workers react in certain ways and how to counter this. They are going to consolidate their position. Its for us to prepare in the same way. Its important to keep on developing our leadership and especially to get them involved with workers from other areas where the problems and strategies may be different, especially people in the Western Cape.

We should also continue with improved communications with the membership, not just on specific plant issues, but the broader issues in South Africa, so that members can see the involvement of the unions in the context of changes taking place. Also in our area we should concern ourselves more with training, maybe not just trade union training, but vocational training as a means of improving the positions of workers in the plant, and to develop the sort of commitment to the working class struggle amongst the new breed of black worker who believes he gets the opportunity to escape from the chains of industrial slavery.

SALB interviews Johnnie Mke, Chairman of the P.E. Branch Executive Committee of the UAW and Michael Simandla, Secretary of the BEC.

Could you outline the history of worker representation in Ford?

Mke: We started in the Engine Plant in 1971 after management established a Works Committee onto which workers from each department elected their representatives.

We worked with the Works Committee taking up grievances with management. Later a Liaison Committee was introduced which management preferred because the Company was expanding to the Neave site and there would be no sense in management going from plant to plant to hold meetings with different Committees. So, in order to cater for everyone the Liaison Committee was recommended. On the other hand from our side, the pressure from management was great; workers were victimised and we could not just take up a case with management without fighting very hard. So we were not in a position to challenge them on this.

We had no recognised body in Ford. Outside, we had a steering committee on which shop stewards from other departments sat. But the main spokesman was myself at that time. We were scared about one thing concerning the Works Committee; one person had to take the problems up with management. There was no protection from the other workers and you had to go alone to confront management or the foremen as the chairman of that committee. It was therefore easy to cut that person out, just as it was easy to buy him off. So we preferred a lot of people sitting and talking with management instead of one guy. Also, we reasoned that it would be hard to buy off everybody who is at that meeting instead of just one guy -- which can happen if management gets you in a corner.

Did you not rely at all on the organised strength of workers?

Mke: Lets say there was no union, we had no backing from the union. We became stronger in Engine Plant with over 50 per cent membership and we claimed recognition from management. We had pushed in Engine plant from 1973 -- 1975, but in 1974 when Cortina was opened they said that we have to get all the workers from the newly established Cortina plant as well.

How did you establish your strength at Engine Plant?

Mke: From the cases which we fought inside the factory. For example, I took up a case for someone who had to see a doctor. He was working until 5 o'clock, but he was told to work until quarter past eight. However, he was not feeling well and wanted to go off at 5. The general foreman did not allow this. I was

just knocking off at that time when the guy caught me before I left and told me about the situation. So, dressed as I was, I went to speak with him in the machine room while the operators were there. When I entered, everybody was looking at me. I had told the worker to wait in the cloakroom and not to go away, but he changed and followed me. While I was talking to the general foreman he suddenly turned round and said, 'Look there, you have come to speak to me about this, but you have already told the worker to go off without even consulting me'. So there we were trying to sort this out. Anyway, he agreed with me when I put my case. You cannot force someone to work overtime after 5 o'clock. So he said the worker could go. I turned away smiling as I left. The others were all laughing and clapping their hands in front of him. And then he called me back. He said, 'You are grinning, why?' I asked what I had done. He said, 'You are making a fool of me in front of these workers, look how they are laughing at me. I am a laughing stock because of you', and he started swearing. I said, 'No, I take exception if you use that language with me.' He said that he did not care if I went to the Labour Relations Officer, Mr Pieterse. So, I stood and questioned him. He nearly grabbed me, he was so mad that he would have done something to me. I jumped away, thinking that this would be a fight and I would lose in the end. So I promised him that I'd take the case up from there. But then, with the Labour Representative, it appeared that the foreman was complaining against me for being cheeky. Again, in front of the officer, he was swearing at me and wanted to grab me. Mr Pieterse was phoned to come and deal with the issue. It ended up with some of the power being taken away from the foreman. He had been the only superintendent right across the line. After that case, there were two others introduced as general foremen, so he had to serve only in one area.

Were there any issues you took up that were problems of the majority of workers rather than individual workers?

Mke: Yes. At that point, there was no transport for the workers. We used to work late, knock off and go and look for buses, often waiting an hour because they were full. There was no bus route near the factory. So, we fought for everyone until the Company subsidised a bus for the workers.

How did you fight that?

Mke: It was done through the Liaison Committee.

We also fought for time off to be able to get reference books. If workers needed a new one, or the old one was lost, it could take 2-3 days at the office before you could get, not a reference book, but a piece of paper telling you that they are processing your application. People lost time and money. We fought so that workers would not lose time when they went to the offices. It ended up by the Company providing a car and the Labour Representative taking the workers to the offices and sorting the matter out

directly. It was a hard struggle because the Company had to pay this person not to do its work, but our business.

We also fought for the Company to take stop orders from us for our housing. Workers were being thrown out of their houses for being in arrears, maybe at 2 or 3 in the morning.

What did you do to force management to give in?

Mke: Whenever you bring any issue forward, the Company quotes the losses which it is going to incur. 'What you are asking will cost money.' And they start giving you figures. But whenever there is a suggestion, they listen. It is not hard to convince them if you've got a genuine problem. The problem is not top management, but the foremen on the shop floor. They are only after productivity.

How did you manage to establish a presence in the Cortina plant?

Mke: We had an organising drive. The whole National Union, its organisers and the Executive which was at the Engine plant used to stand every morning at the gate before work, recruiting people, signing them on.

So just before the strike in November, what organisational structures were in existence at Cortina?

Sim: Previously if a worker had a problem, he would go to the shop steward and then the shop steward would go to the Labour Representative. If it was not resolved, it would come back to the Liaison Committee meeting with management. We then changed our grievance procedure and introduced a system whereby a grievance which was not resolved at floor level with the shop stewards and labour reps was then referred to the Union and no longer the Liaison Committee. That was introduced in 1977 after the Union was recognised by Ford. But the Liaison Committee still has a role to play because the Liaison Committee rep. who also sits on the steering committee of the Union is in each department and takes up cases from the floor.

So, it is as if the Liaison Committee operates as the Union committee inside the plant?

Sim: That's right. There is one Liaison Committee representative in each department. In Engine plant, there are 5, one out of which is elected to act for the whole plant. Same in Cortina.

Just before the strike, what kind of issues were you taking up on the Liaison Committee and more generally on the shop floor?

Sim: The issues which emerged during the strike were the same ones that we were

hammering on all the time. But management would not give us anything. They would just say that it was company policy not to go beyond that. So when the strike broke out, they listened because now they were in a bit of a dilemma.

Mke: I can give you one example: the bonus issue was not one to be discussed at the Liaison Committee, but the Industrial Council. Here, though, it was rejected completely. Then the workers raised the issue with Mr Ferreira during the strike while they were sitting on the grass. And he agreed to it just like that. He said, 'Here's Mr Mke, and if he agrees that the bonus should be given at the end of the year, that's fine! Now, the people who don't think interpreted it as if I was the one who prevented them from getting the bonus at the end of the year, because of the impression given by Mr Ferreira. It was even put up on the notice board. So the people from that day on said that I was holding their bonuses from them, even the Cortina workers are saying that now.

So many of the grievances had been taken up by the Liaison Committee before?

Sim: Yes a lot of the grievances.

And they were just stalling you?

Sim: They would just say that it is the Company policy that we do not go beyond this. Often members of the Liaison Committee did not know the Company policy; we did not challenge them to open their books and see. It was different when we took our grievances to the Union. At least those people had access to the policy.

Before the strike, did you have any plan of action which you were going to put into practice which would push them to meet these demands?

Mke: We were fighting the issues day-in-day-out, like the toilet issue, as the workers brought it to us. If it was a contravention of the Agreement, we would refer it directly to the Union. Now, the Cortina workers were generalising the issues which we were handling.

Were there problems with the Liaison Committee?

Mke: We had a problem with the Liaison Committee in Cortina; the members who were also BEC members serving on the Liaison Committee at Cortina, were not actually working as was required for shop stewards to work; taking up cases, or confronting the foremen. They were scared to speak with management. So they failed to represent the workers. But there was nothing which we could do as the Union because the very people in that department had elected them. So how could we say to them that they had elected the wrong

person. But we were hammering them, telling them every time that their operation was not up to scratch and that they must pull up their socks, that they should have attended education sessions on how to confront management.

To what extent have you been able to form a strategy to overcome the limitations presented by the Liaison Committee so as to allow you to use the Committee to advance worker interests?

Mke: In order to make the Liaison Committee functional, we had firstly to change the constitution which governed it. The Union had to change it so it worked favourably for the workers. The Company allowed this. There were additional things added: instead of recommending to management, we could negotiate on equal ground. We pushed this with management so they had to agree. The other thing was the agenda. We asked that management give us time to prepare ourselves on the agenda, so that we could discuss it with officials of the Union. We prepared who would speak about an issue. Now, the person who speaks most on the Committee is marked by the foreman, so he would be trapped. When the agenda came to the office, we planned that one man would not be the only spokesman; one person would bring up an issue, with another covering him. It was very important because when you come to a meeting, management know which person is going to bring up a particular issue. So, by the time you come to the meeting, they have all the answers to attack you. But now, when another person from a different department comes with the story, it gets them confused. And the very person who makes the kill is the one from the relevant department who will speak last.

What about report-backs on meetings to the workers?

Mke: Yes, this is very important. We get the people involved in what we discuss with management. Firstly, we had to know all the dates of the meetings for the whole year. A caucus day, to be paid by the Company, was allowed where we could sit and caucus all the reps. without management. Before we hold that caucus, we call on workers in each department, so that they give us issues to take to management. During the lunch break the shop steward rep. in the department would call workers together in order to prepare the agenda for the caucus meeting. Then we would bring it to the office. After the Liaison Committee meeting, there is a report back to the workers during our lunch break when we give management's reply. Again, when it came to Cortina, it did not work that way. The reps. failed: they were afraid of the foremen when they were meant to be getting the grievances from the workers. And what can he report back to workers if they haven't given him anything? But meantime at Engine plant it was working 100 per cent.

How were those 6 people elected, given that the Cortina workers are so militant?

Mke: They had no confidence in the Liaison Committee or the Union for that matter. They did not believe that it could function. That was the whole Cortina plant, including the intelligent guys. When the election was held, they used to make a laughing stock of it. So the people who ended up representing workers did not understand the situation.

Why was the attitude of Cortina workers so different from Engine plant workers?

Mke: The Cortina workers were not involved in the early struggles of the Union and even at the time of recruiting, they were just signed up. But at Engine plant, it was a struggle from scratch to build up the Union. It took five solid years. In Cortina it was six months. So the people at Engine plant were far more union conscious than those at Cortina. Also, the people employed at Cortina were the educated guys who left school after matric or went to university. They looked down at the uneducated people.

How do you view the offer made by Ford to employ a full-time shop steward and how would this affect the relationship between the Union and its members and the Union and management?

Sim: The idea came from the Union, not management. The problem with the shop steward is that he has to produce a day's work, as well as take up cases to the satisfaction of the people who have elected him. This shop steward would not be working in a department and therefore would not be open to victimisation. If you come to think of it this way, if there is a guy being paid full-time as shop steward in the plant, he has all the right to be militant because he knows he does not hold allegiance to a certain foreman who is his immediate supervisor. He only has to report back to the Union.

But does he not feel that he owes some allegiance to the Company because they are paying his salary?

Mke: No, you can look at it that way, but the agreement is that he will be subject to the BEC, not management. They can fire him, not management.

What is Ford's interest in having such an employee?

Sim: I don't think they like it in the first place – to pay somebody who is not working for the Company. They have not agreed to it. We are busy negotiating it. But the Company sees the shop steward as a person with a very important role to play, to try to create peace from management's side and also from the workers side. Now if that person is given a free hand to move about they see that person as solving a lot of differences on the shop floor, because there is nothing blocking him from doing his job thoroughly. The person who is to

serve in that position has to go through a Union course which will familiarise him with grievance procedure and with the labour movement in general.

How did you see your role in the strike?

Mke: During the first strike, I did not know what was behind it. I was interested to find out from the workers what they wanted to be done, why they thought they should down tools for Botha. When management 'phoned me saying that Cortina workers had downed tools, they said that they wanted me to come with them to find out what was happening. They called me in as a spokesman of the Union -- this was according to a prior agreement which they had with us. They wanted a Union person who would investigate problems as they occurred, a person whom the workers would respect. So, I took it that management was talking to the Chairman of the Union. Also, I was keen to find out what the Union could do for the people who were out. It was on that score that I went. When we arrived, management asked me if I was going to address the people. I said, 'Why should I go and you sit behind, let us go and find out together'. As I came out they howled at me and chanted: 'We want Botha, you are not Botha.' Then I told them to be quiet and addressed them by introducing myself and saying that I had come to find out what the trouble was. They said they wanted Botha. Pieterse then came down and spoke through me. He said to me, 'Tell them, Johnnie, if they want Botha they must go back to work. The Union as a recognised body will negotiate this for Botha.' They did not want to listen. Then he said, 'Tell them, Johnnie, if they do not want to go back to work, they must get out.' That's all the crowd wanted. When he said that they jumped up.

Did you not see it as a problem to be translating for Pieterse?

Mke: Then I did not think it was a problem. But when the same thing happened at Engine plant, I realised that I could not be a spokesman. They wanted me when Ferreira was there, but another guy got up and translated. Now I see that although management did not intend to use me to divide the workers, in their eyes this was the case.

Did you play a role later on in negotiations?

Mke: The Company said they would negotiate with the Union on the issue of Botha. They called in the Union when he was to present his case the following day. It was for me to see that a fair judgement was given to the guy. When the Company asked, 'How do you see it?' I said that surely there was a misunderstanding between both of them. Both parties were wrong and the best thing was for Botha to come back and forget about it. He agreed. Again, the next day Botha refused to return because they were going to lose 2½ days' pay. The Company said that this could be negotiated by the Union. I was there at the negotiations and supported that the workers should

not suffer, because they were not party to the differences between Botha and the superintendent. The Company agreed.

Later on after the first walkout, the workers stated that they did not want the Union to negotiate because they said that I sided with management.

What do you see as the key issues facing Ford workers in future?

Sim: If all the workers would adopt a body to represent them, like for instance the Union, and adhere to that, I don't see any problem. But if we are going to have sporadic cases which are taken up before going to the Union, there are going to be problems. We will not know where we are going if we have not got a body representing all workers. People should be educated about having a goal and having one true representative. If you take the Cortina strikes, they were not Union-oriented strikes. They put the Union in the position where it is not a true representative of the workers because nothing gets reported to the Union.

There was an instance where one department in the Cortina plant downed tools three weeks ago because of a misunderstanding with the foreman who apparently manhandled a worker. It was taken to the Labour Representative who, for some reason, fired him. The other workers downed tools to get him reinstated. Such sporadic misunderstandings are going to cripple the organisation because people are going to see the Unions as not functioning in the interests of the workers, whereas the workers are not reporting these cases to the Union.

Mke: I would say that the workers need to be unionised, but at the same time they need to be educated. It is useless forming a union and expecting it to function though workers do not follow it. They are not aware of what a Union can do. First and foremost, they should be educated. There is a programme to get the workers union conscious; it is seeking to rectify some of the mistakes of the Ford strike. Also the workers were not sure what sort of person they must have to represent them and they must be educated in this regard. We have started with this, but the pace with which things are going here is faster than our progress. It's hardly a breathing space after the Cortina strike and now there is this strike in Uitenhage, which also involves the same Union. To me it seems that the pace which the Eastern Cape is going is faster than the progress which we are making. We are not moving fast enough. The people who want to join the Union are more than our manpower can cope with. The workers try to get the Union which they see in the press. It has opened their eyes.

DOCUMENTS

Summary of Grievances Raised by Black Employees at the Engine Plant

1. Whites must apologise for comments that they were quoted in the newspaper as having been made.
2. Ford must take disciplinary action against the person whose photograph appeared on the front page of the newspaper.
3. The foremen have no respect for the Black workers:
 - (a) Workers are not allowed to go to the toilet 20 minutes before the end of the shift.
 - (b) If the foreman is not on the line when a worker wants to go to the toilet the worker must wait for him to return to ask permission to go.
4. Bonus be calculated from January to December and also accrued bonus should be paid out whenever an employee resigns or is dismissed.
5. Sometimes the Blacks work short time, but the Whites do not. The poorer people work short time, fall behind in their rent and then cannot get loans.
6. Blacks are compelled to work overtime when overtime is worked while Whites are sometimes let off.
7. (a) White foremen are recruited from outside the Company, while there are many Blacks who can do the job.
 (b) The position of toolsetters is in doubt after what Mr Skilton said to one of them – that he can be a labour grade 7 for many years.
8. Do foremen all possess N.T.C. III? Foremen do not know how to deal with people.
9. One worker complained that he is doing the work of two people and said he will not do this work until he is given a helper.
- 10 (a) Workers want to know the production target for the day.
 (b) When the assembly line stops engines have to be pulled aside causing a lack of working space.
- 11 Some machine operators are undergraded for the machines they are operating.

- 12 The Medical Aid Plan should be changed to do away with the 20 percent additional payment.
- 13 R. Cooper, a superintendent, approached the operators directly. This causes a disturbance. He also shouts at people.
- 14 School books be made available to children along the lines of the system in effect at General Motors.
- 15 No department should work short time while others work overtime.
- 16 Minimum wage of R2,50.
- 17 Don't want the trade union to be the spokesman of the workers. A referendum must be taken.
- 18 Employees who wish to, should be allowed to revert to the weekly pay system.
- 19 Lists of workers wanting scrap wood should be completed at each plant and daily.
- 20 There should not be a three-year waiting period for workers to qualify for loans to buy or improve homes.
- 21 When security guards at the gate ask for identification badges they show leniency towards the Whites who can merely sign a book in the office. Also, Blacks have to wait at the gate for their foreman to come and identify them; hence they arrive at their work station late and lose pay.
- 22 R2.50 charge to replace badges is too high.
- 23 Foremen should be rotated between departments so that they do not get into habits of doing things their own way.
- 24 If two Black workers fight, they both get fired. If one is White and one is Black, they get disciplined differently.
- 25 Safety shoes are too pricey.
- 26 When Black and White workers are taken to the Labour Relations Representative's office together, the Black is told to wait outside while the White puts his case forward.
- 27 Ford must make a press statement that Blacks do not get a special discount on cars purchased from Ford.

- 28 When short time is being worked, the line speed is increased.
- 29 Loans should be made available to buy houses in the homelands.
- 30 The following should not be terminable offences: continual absence through sickness; poor workmanship; old age causing inability to do the job.
- 31 When Black workers are caught stealing, their services are terminated and they are handed over to the police while Whites are merely asked to resign.
- 32 No reply was received to forms filled in applying for houses at KwaFord.

Ford Workers Committee Press Release

To: Mr Allan Lukens -- U.S. General Consul
 Ford (S.A.) Management
 Dismissed Ford (S.A.) Workers Representatives

Re: Reinstatement

In a meeting held between the above mentioned parties on the 9th January 1980 with the main aim of reducing human suffering and to contribute to the prosperity and well-being of the area an agreement was reached that Ford (S.A.) would reinstate all former employees who wished to return to work.

However, Ford (S.A.) appears to be violating the agreement according to the following report-back by workers.

1. Workers have to fill forms with a "REHIRE" endorsement instead of "RE-INSTATE".
2. Workers clock cards are written "REHIRE".
3. Plant Manager (Mr G L Berger) commands that inside the Ford (S.A.) plants the Black workers must speak only AFRIKAANS and ENGLISH, not their mother tongue, which is XHOSA : Furthermore they were even told not to wear the necklace with the map of AFRICA.
4. There were Security Police at the Personnel Office of FORD (S.A.) during the reinstatement process and some have even been allocated to the Cortina Plant.
5. The management of the Neave Plant (Mr G L Berger) bluntly tells the reporting workers that there will be no payment of 1979 bonuses because the workers are

responsible for causing the company financial embarrassment.

NOTE: At the meeting it was decided to leave the bonus issue to the United Automobile Rubber & Allied Workers of South Africa to negotiate it with the Company. The Union has since regained sound relations with the workers.

6. Ford (S.A.) requires workers to submit their reference books for new endorsement because they were now being REHIRED and not REINSTATED. Now it must please be appreciated that the workers have and in fact, intend to keep to the agreement as it is a civilised one.

But, from the above information FORD (S.A.) seems to be bent on violating the agreement and for this reason the workers are requesting that the U S General Consul, the workers representatives and the American Ambassador investigate satisfactorily in this matter, urgently.

All this attitude from FORD (S.A.) management is designed to intimidate the workers so that they may even resign under duress. Because FORD (S.A.) is an American investment, then the Americans have an obligation and a responsibility in seeing that this inhumanity to mankind must stop at once and now.

Also, the fact that the detention of our fellow worker Mr Thozamile Botha comes sudden in the wake of the FORD management – Worker representatives reinstate agreement, that has smeared enormously the image of FORD (S.A.) not only in the Black Community, in South Africa but in the whole world. The Black community of South Africa believes that FORD (S.A.) is an extension of the South African government because of her confidence in the Security Police to resolve company labour disputes that are caused by FORD (S.A.) reluctance to fairly implement the Rev. Leon Sullivan Code of fair employment practice. At FORD (S.A.) a White high school dropout has greater job opportunities than a Black high school graduate.

Collective Bargaining-Dealing with a Black Union

F. H. Ferreira

Before reviewing with you some of our experiences in dealing with a Black Union, and to give you some perspective, I would just mention that we currently employ about 5 500 people of whom 1 900 are Coloured and 1 200 Black.

Blacks are employed at all levels of our manufacturing and assembly operations, up to and including artisans, foremen and administrative supervisors. The education level of these people varies from junior primary school through Bachelor's Degrees and their average length of service is probably in the vicinity of three and a half years.

The Liaison Committee

I think, to facilitate understanding of our working relationship with the Black Union, it is necessary that we first review our history with the Works and Liaison Committees. I will try to do this as briefly as possible.

During 1971, Ford established an informal and unregistered Works Committee, consisting of 6 members, to represent its then 300-odd Black employees. The Works Committee dealt with the normal range of subjects usually handled by these Committees, but was encouraged to discuss at its monthly meetings with Management also those items to be included in the Industrial Council Agreement negotiated with the White and Coloured Trade Unions in the auto industry.

During 1973 we launched a new Assembly Plant which created approximately 1 000 additional job opportunities for Blacks and at about the same time the Bantu Labour Relations Regulations Act was promulgated. This legislation was reviewed in detail with the Works Committee and the Committee subsequently decided to reconstitute itself as a Liaison Committee. This happened after a thorough evaluation by the old Committee, and the employees, of both the Works Committee and Liaison Committee concepts offered under the Act at that time. Consequently, a Liaison Committee, consisting of 15 employee members and 5 employer representatives was established and registered with the Department of Labour in terms of Section 3 of the Act. Currently two of the five Company representatives are Blacks, and they hold the positions of Vice-Chairman and Secretary, having been elected to these positions by the Committee. Following each election of Liaison Committee members, employees also elect Shop Stewards from the ranks of the Liaison Committee members. Participation in both the elections of the employee representatives and shop stewards is normally very close to 100%.

Mr Fred H. Ferreira is currently Industrial Relations Director of Ford (S.A.)

The Company regards the Liaison Committee as a very effective vehicle for employee/employer communication and uses it for this purpose whenever it seeks employee opinion or reaction to certain Company plans or whenever it wants to disseminate information to employees on the shop floor.

The Committee has no real bargaining power and the issues we discuss are of a general nature, i.e., transportation, food services, employment practices, promotions, manpower development and the like. In fact, we do not believe that any Liaison Committee has any real bargaining power. After all, the Employee Representatives are still employees of the Company and subject to Company disciplinary codes. We do not believe it possible to effectively legislate against victimisation and consequently no employee representative could really stand up to his Foreman and challenge him on disciplinary action taken against a fellow-worker. Neither could a representative effectively challenge his Foreman on line balance or line speed or a discriminatory practice and hope not to be victimised in some way - especially if the Foreman was proved to be in the wrong.

It is for these reasons that we believe that the only way of effective employee representation is through an independent third party who negotiates with Management on working conditions.

In view of this position, we suggested during 1972 to the Coloured Trade Union in our industry that they should also attempt to represent the case of Blacks in our Company.

Black Union

The Black United Automobile, Rubber and Allied Worker Union of South Africa (UAW) was established in August 1973 under the auspices of the Coloured Trade Union for the same industry, viz. the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa. The constitutions of these two Unions are almost identical and membership is open to persons employed in the automobile, tyre, rubber manufacturing and allied industries.

Among the elected Employee Representatives of our 1973/74 Liaison Committee was the National President of the newly-formed Black Union who was also a prominent member of the informal Works Committee since its inception in 1971. The National Secretary of the Black Union at the time also served as an Employee Representative on the Liaison Committee.

During 1974, following a request from the Coloured Trade Union, we granted leave of absence to one of our Black employees to undergo training by the Coloured Union. He shortly afterwards left our employ to become the first full-time organiser for the Black Union in the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage area.

The National Secretary of the Black Union who, as I said earlier, was also

an elected representative of our Liaison Committee, was granted leave of absence to attend the 1974 National Conference of TUCSA. This individual (who, incidentally, is a university graduate), has subsequently been promoted to a fairly responsible clerical position on the Company's monthly paid staff.

From the foregoing, it should be clear that a close relationship exists between the Liaison Committee members, the Black Union and the Coloured Trade Union. A closer look at this relationship is, therefore, justified.

Blacks, of course, had no direct representation on Industrial Councils other than through the regional Bantu Labour Officer, who could - but often did not - attend all Council negotiations. In our own case, we encouraged the Coloured Union to also present the case of Black employees, which they did until 1974, when for the first time in our industry, Blacks were invited into the meetings of the Industrial Council.

The Bantu Labour Relations Regulations Act of 1973 provided, *inter alia*, for members of Liaison Committees to be co-opted onto Regional Bantu Labour Committees to attend, together with the Regional Bantu Labour Officer, Industrial Council meetings when conditions of employment concerning Blacks are negotiated.

In 1974, before negotiations commenced on a new Agreement for our industry, we approached the local Department of Labour with a request that Blacks be co-opted from the Liaison Committees in our industry to attend the Industrial Council meetings. In practice, this meant that the Employee Representatives at each of the Liaison Committees associated with the three auto companies in the Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage area, elect a representative, and these three representatives, together with the Regional Bantu Labour Officer, attend the Industrial Council meetings.

The person elected by the employee representatives of our Liaison Committee to represent the Blacks from Ford on the Industrial Council is the National President of the Black Union. The other two Black members from the other two companies are also members of this Union. We now find ourselves in the position that the Black Union, although not registered or officially recognised by the Authorities, in fact has direct representation on the Industrial Council. Initially these Black representatives sat in on Council meetings as observers only, but gradually their role changed and presently they actively participate in the deliberations of the Council.

When the Black representatives at the Council meetings started playing an active role in our negotiations, we informed the three groups of employee representatives (White, Coloured and Black) that we expected of them to have unanimity on areas of common interest and that we would not negotiate on any item or make concessions on any item on which they had not reached a common position. This action assisted greatly in the Blacks gaining acceptance as employee partners in the negotiating process and it became fairly

common practice for all three Unions to caucus together - or independently, depending on the issue under debate and the degree of interest displayed by the respective Unions. On this basis, the consensus concept has become pretty well established among all parties and, I believe, co-operation between the employee parties has become mutually accepted.

The recent negotiations in our industry to conclude an Agreement have been the third round of negotiations attended by Black representatives and already it is evident that their negotiation skills have developed and improved significantly.

When one analyses developments in the Black Union's activities in our industry, it becomes clear why they are developing at such a rapid pace. One of the objectives of this Union, as set out in its constitution, is 'to affiliate with or confer or enter into arrangements with any other Trade Union or Labour Organisation with the object of securing joint action....' No doubt toward this end, the UAW is affiliated to the International Metalworkers Federation. During the latter part of 1977, the National President of the Black Union, who, as I have said is a prominent member of our Liaison Committee and also a Shop Steward, went to Europe for a 6-week visit as a guest of the IMF. While in Europe, he attended the annual IMF conference in Geneva and also visited the TUC in England.

During the recent visit of the IMF delegation to South Africa, which included the President, Mr. Eugene Loderer, and the Secretary-General, Mr. Herman Rebhan, they were accompanied by this Black employee on some of their visits to local companies. This individual also received an invitation from the powerful United Auto Workers Union in the USA to visit the US during June or July this year and in May he attended the annual congress of the German Federation of Trade Unions in Frankfurt. Moreover, he is often interviewed by local and overseas news journalists as well as many other visiting labour and social organisation officials.

From this outline, it should be evident that the Black Trade Union has some very strong ties with a number of very powerful labour organisations. It is, therefore, not surprising to have observed the significant development that has taken place in the Black labour movement in our industry over the last two years. With this support, they could be more than confident to speak up during negotiations at Industrial Council level.

What is meant by 'Recognition'?

Our Company went on record as far back as 1973 in saying that it would recognise and negotiate with any trade union which represents more than 50% of its Black employees. We were approached on various occasions by officials from the Coloured Union to accept, on behalf of those Blacks who

are members of the Black Union, stop-orders for membership dues. On each of these occasions we stated our position which was that we would accept such stop-orders only when the number exceeded 50% of the total number of Blacks in our employ and if they could be processed in a legitimate fashion. We, therefore, set ourselves the task of devising a way of implementing stop-orders without contravening the law.

In adopting this position, with respect to Black Union representation, we recognised several potential problems, assuming that a Black Union would become a reality, namely how to involve the Blacks jointly with the White and Coloured Unions in our negotiations. We could not accept the idea of negotiating separately on the same issues, and possibly arriving at different agreements on those issues, as could well happen if we employed the provisions of the Bantu Labour Relations Regulations Act of negotiating with Blacks directly.

Furthermore, we had to have some means of monitoring the Black Union membership in order to determine for ourselves the representative character of the Union. Coupled with this, of course, is the financial aspect, namely that the Union has to have the financial means to make itself a viable organisation. Both these problems, that is, membership and union funds could, of course, be overcome if stop-orders could be accepted similar to the practice employed for White and Coloured Union members.

Another major problem was - and still is - to accomplish a successful transition from the traditional paternalistic relationship with our Black employees to the somewhat impersonal employer/Union relationship without the Company and its officers losing their credibility as a concerned group.

And finally, but not least, we had to take note of a possible White Union reaction.

During March 1977, we were presented, by the Black Trade Union, with stop-orders signed by more than half the number of the Blacks employed by our Company. These stop-orders authorised us to deduct insurance premiums from the wages of these employees for a group life policy.

As you know, it is illegal to deduct Trade Union membership fees from the wages of a Black employee.* However, it is not illegal to deduct money for insurance purposes. Before entering into this arrangement, we carefully studied the Black Union's constitution and the insurance policy, and as only paid-up union members were eligible for group life cover, we were satisfied that we could monitor union membership - and the Union could meet its financial objectives.

As soon as the Company agreed to honour these stop-orders, we were ap-

* Legislation passed under the new Industrial Constitution Act, subsequent to the publication of the Wiehahn Commission Report, provides for the deduction of trade union membership fees from the wages of African employees. -- Ed.

proached by the President of the Black Union requesting recognition of his Union. 'Recognition', as far as the Union was concerned, was that the Company should recognise it as the only body representing all its Black employees, and that the Company agree to negotiate conditions of employment with this Union. The Company agreed to this request subject to the approval of the Employee Representatives on the Liaison Committee. The matter was discussed at the Liaison Committee and after consultation with the employees, the Employee Representatives approved that the Trade Union negotiate all matters on their behalf, but that the Liaison Committee be retained. Retention of the Committee was the vehicle through which Industrial Council representation could be maintained.

We are, therefore, now in the position that all cases which are normally handled by Trade Union officials on behalf of White and Coloured employees are dealt with in exactly the same manner on behalf of our Black employees, and the rules governing the operation of our Shop Steward system as well as our formal grievance procedure which has 4 formal stages of appeal, are identical for all three race groups.

We believe that we have made meaningful progress towards improving labour relations in our Company, and that the next step towards normalising labour relations in South Africa should be to recognise that Black Trade Unions are here to stay. Based on our experience we believe the authorities should accept this and create the machinery to enable employers to deal with all employee groups on an equal basis when negotiating on conditions of employment where the desire exists.

Urban Foundation Codes Seminar
Port Elizabeth
7 November 1978.

Managerial Strategies at Ford

Marianne Roux

Ford managerial strategy is to some extent representative of a new trend in the field of labour relations in South Africa. The development of a policy of consultation is the response to both internal and external pressures and conforms with the stated policy of the Government

After the relative industrial peace of the sixties, the seventies have been marked by the emergence of industrial conflict in secondary industries and on the mines. Webster and Bonner¹ claim that it was out of the wave of working-class militancy that 5 distinct African Trade Union groupings were to emerge, one of these being the Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Council (now absorbed into FOSATU) to which the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers and the United Automobile Workers Union are affiliated. Between them the unions have fostered a sense of working-class power which has presented both management and the state with serious problems, one of them being meeting demands and granting concessions while keeping down production costs.

In the face of growing working-class pressure, one of the strategies available to management is to raise the level of mechanisation and automation. This would drastically reduce the size of the workforce and so enable employers to pay higher wages to fewer workers.

Ford to a limited extent has attempted to do this. Due to the general economic climate, however, they have not been able to raise wages sufficiently in order to meet worker demands. This is demonstrated by the failure of the Industrial Council negotiations in July 1979 to satisfy the minimum wage demands of non-white workers employed in the motor manufacturing industries in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage. There was a discrepancy of almost 33% between Union demands and the minimum wages companies were prepared to pay. At Ford the situation was further exacerbated by the reduction of the working week from 43,75 hours to 28 hours. For the overwhelming majority of black workers, this meant a drastic cut in the weekly pay packet. The effects this has had on shaping their attitudes towards management have been discussed in the previous article.

Since 1971, the size of the workforce at Ford has not shown a decline. Rather, 57 additional posts representing an employment growth of 1% have been created. Moreover, there has been a considerable increase in the number of black employees. They rise from 5,1% in 1971 to 23,4% in 1979,

whereas the proportion of white and coloured employees declines from 43,8% and 51% in 1971 to 39,5% and 39,8% in 1979.

The changes in the composition of the workforce is *inter alia* due to the establishment of two new plants at Struandale in 1973. This has resulted in the creation of new posts mainly at the managerial and skilled manual levels. Growth has, therefore, been created through the establishment of these new plants, rather than through the expansion of the market. According to company officials there has only been a marginal increase in sales since 1971.

The previous article in this edition shows that from 1971 to 1979, there has been a growth of 440 posts (48%) in the skilled hourly grades. Coloured workers and to a lesser extent black workers have shared in the growth. Their relative position *vis-a-vis* white workers has also improved. The 1979 figures reveal that 29,8% of these posts are held by coloured workers and 14% by Africans.

At the managerial level, blacks show no advancement whatsoever. The company has introduced a graduate development programme which seeks to recruit, train and place potential managers. Nine whites, six coloureds and six Africans are at present included in this training programme.² In the other salaried grades, there has been a decline in 2 posts, but with significant black advancement. The proportion of coloureds has increased to 9% and Africans to 3%.

An analysis of the distribution of workers in the hourly grades shows whites at the top with coloureds replacing them in the grades below and Africans making up the rest of the workforce. Of the African hourly paid workers 86% are employed in grades 1 to 8. Of these almost 60% fall into grades 1 to 3. These are the workers rendered most insecure by the threat of redundancy. In the past years there has been a decline in the real standard of living of all hourly paid workers. Figures indicate that they have had to work longer in order to achieve their household subsistence level. Those in the lower grades, i.e., from 1 to 3, are less than 2% clear of the household subsistence level at the end of a full month, should they be on normal working hours.

It is the stratum of semi-skilled African workers that has become aware of the power they wield by the threat of withholding their labour. That the state is aware of this threat is demonstrated by the police intervention in the dispute. This intervention was not at the request of Ford.

Like all concerns in a capitalist society, Ford has to project the credibility of capitalism to its workforce. In most organisations this task is performed by personnel management. In South Africa, with its overt racial discriminatory practices both within and outside of the work place, this function of management becomes more important than most managerial strategies. At Ford, the Industrial Relations Directorate ensures the existence of the

necessary channels of communication between management and workers. Amongst others, one of its major tasks is to keep the process of production harmonious. As such, the Industrial Relations Directorate is concerned with salaried personnel, training, labour relations and all other personnel services including medical services. It is also responsible for the implementation of the Sullivan Principles.

However, if the workers are to believe in the values and structures of the larger society, Ford has to demonstrate that this society is superior and more desirable. This is only possible if the company can provide them with the higher standards of living demanded and the opportunities of free social mobility.

The external pressures come from societies which believe that the capitalist system can meet the aspirations of all, and it is in those societies that trade unions are given full recognition. They see Apartheid as strangling the capitalist system and opening the door to what they consider much less desirable ideologies.

In the debate on investment and disinvestment, Ford obviously takes the stance that continued and increasing investment can bring about a change towards a freer society which they see in the long run as providing them with still further investment opportunities coming from an expanded consumer market. Ford are leaders in the field of reform as is demonstrated by their acceptance of the Sullivan Principles and their recognition of the African union.

An investigation into the Sullivan Principles indicate some of the problems which face top management, one of them being to translate the prescriptions of the principles into institutionalised realities. Management does not form a monolithic entity. The managerial staff is divided into different departments, performing different functions. Production managers are concerned mainly with the shortrun maximisation of output and often resent the interference of labour relations people. They would much rather see interpersonal problems resolved by the foremen who have to live with the decisions on a day-to-day basis, than the labour relations staff who are some distance from the real situation.³

Both top-management and the workers recognise that there is a contradiction between the policies pursued by the Industrial Relations Directorate and the practices followed by production managers and supervisors. The workers claim that labour relations personnel may be co-operative but that they have no control over the activities of production managers and supervisors who are only interested in production and not concerned with the welfare of the workers. 'Top men talk one thing with us, but they pressurise managers and supervisors to increase production'.⁴

Ford's industrial relations director claimed that the company has tried to establish open channels with the workers in every possible way. Ford was rated in the top twenty bracket, during the last monitoring of the Sullivan codes for US subsidiaries. In August 1979 the Company requested the SA Institute of Race Relations to conduct an independent audit of the Company's operations. A member of the work's committee said that "Ford went to extremes to advertise the Sullivan Code." This created a good impression outside, but inside the company fell far short. They raised people's expectations but failed to deliver the goods."

African and coloured workers alike were sceptical of the objectives of management. One of the Union officials described the Sullivan Codes as "not worth the paper it is written on". In fact, over the past years for the majority of hourly paid workers there has been a decline in their real standards of living. The audit on the Sullivan principles shows that while there have been increases in the hourly rates of pay, the increases have been considerably below the inflation rate, so that workers have since 1971 suffered a drop in real wages (The Sullivan Principles at Ford: 33).

Given the decline in their real wages it is not surprising that changes such as the integration of eating, comfort and working facilities are regarded as being merely cosmetic "done for the benefit of visitors and to please the directors in America, but otherwise doing little more than distracting attention from the more fundamental problems of economic and social justice in the company and the community". (The Sullivan Principles at Ford: 7).

Discussions with staff in managerial positions outside of the Directorate of Industrial Relations tend to confirm that the policy is being implemented with a notable lack of enthusiasm. A senior manager expressed the viewpoint that 'the implementation of the Sullivan Principles is not simply a policy of the Industrial Relations Directorate to be pushed by its staff wherever they may be, but the policy of the company as a whole to be pushed by all employees of the company'. He felt that this had not yet got through to the majority of lower level decision-makers in the company. ⁵

Top-management is very well aware of the possibility of their overall planning for change being negated by supervisory managers who are supposed to carry it out at a lower level. It is the foreman above all in the factory who could exercise his prejudice in having the power to hire and fire. By partly reducing the power of the foreman, the company does endeavour to circumvent possible prejudice in this critical area. The foreman can hire, but dismissals have to go through Ford's labour relations division.

It would also appear that there has been a shift in the policy of the company with regard to the handling and resolving of employee complaints, since the Industrial Relations Directorate took the initiative in implementing the Sullivan Principles. The company has laid down a standardised procedure whereby all complaints and disputes are handled by the labour relations representative at the relevant site. This policy does not command the support of either the foreman and other supervisors or of the workers. Some of

the foremen resent the interference of the labour relations officers. They feel that, if possible, issues should be settled in the context in which they occur.

Workers complained that this procedure is heavily biased towards management's interests. In trying to mediate conflicts which arise between foremen and workers, industrial relations officers tend to identify with the former. Workers perceive the procedure for handling grievances as structured in such a way as to make this inevitable. They argue that while the worker is requested to always take problems to his foreman and give him a chance to resolve it before going to the shop steward, the same does not hold for the foreman. 'When a worker is penalised for breaking a rule, the foreman reports the matter to the labour relations representative without first consulting the shop steward. It is often a contrived situation - they manufacture a case - the dice is loaded against the victim'.⁶

There is also a strong feeling that coloured and African workers are subjected to a much more stringent system of control than their white counterparts. Disciplinary action is mostly taken against coloured and African workers, while errors made by white workers are often overlooked.

The problem of power exercised by foremen and labour relations representatives is recognised and the company does endeavour to overcome possible prejudices in these critical areas. The inclusion of 17 coloureds and 18 Africans as against 2 whites in the 1980 foreman training programme must be seen as a move in this direction. By substantially increasing the number of black supervisory staff, as well as appointing blacks to positions in the labour relations department, the company feels that the significance of the race element which cannot be ignored will be diminished. In the case of Africans the company also sees this as a means of eliminating language misunderstandings.

The unions, however, fear that African supervisors when occupying these positions will not be any less prejudiced towards individual workers. If, however, it can be ensured that they are union members, it is felt the chances of more equitable treatment will be enhanced.

As a result of the substantial increase in the African workforce, following the establishment of the Struandale plants in 1973, Ford made it clear that it would negotiate with any organisation which represented at least 50% of its African workers. This the company had to do within the inhibiting government legislation, for example, union dues which Ford was prepared to deduct had to be paid to an insurance company. This was due to the fact that legislation prevented these deductions for any unregistered union. At that time, the African union could not be registered. In March 1977, this plan was put into effect.

Liaison Committees were registerable with the Department of Labour and

Ford was supposed to negotiate with them although a number of the committee members were also union members. Ford saw the liaison committee as having no real mandate or bargaining power, particularly as worker members are at the mercy of the company and supervisors. Only non-employee representatives can stand up to employers as they have no fear of reprisal or victimisation. Union officials fill this role.(7)

It would appear that close co-operation existed between liaison committee members, the African and the coloured unions. The National President of the UAW was also an elected representative of the Liaison Committee. Ford could not negotiate directly with the African union as it had no place on the industrial council, members sitting as observers only. The company, therefore, encouraged the coloured union to act as a mouthpiece for the black union during Industrial Council negotiations, again demonstrating its belief that international firms in South Africa can make some contribution to change. It is, of course, recognised that it is to the employers' benefit to have a sound union with which to negotiate in terms of South African Industrial legislation. It is one of the mechanisms of social control.

However, outside the Industrial Council negotiations it would appear that there was no negotiating body with any standing representing workers at shop floor level. This has been highlighted in the recent dispute. Union shop stewards and officials did not seem to have the vital contact with members. As a result, the civic organisation now known as the Ford Workers Committee, came on to the scene. This 'unofficial' Workers Committee is the only shopfloor level organisation presently active. All the members of this committee are PEBCO members and while they are also union members, none of them are local Union executives.

While this committee speaks for all the black workers at Ford, i.e., both at the Cortina and at the Engine plant, its members come solely from the Cortina plant. New elections are pending and it is not unreasonable to surmise that new executive members will be elected from among those on this unofficial committee and also that members of this committee will constitute the new shop steward committee envisaged by the union.

The new shop steward committee is to come into being because of the concern both of Ford and of the Union at the disintegration of the liaison committee system. In addition to these committees there is to be a full-time shop steward for each racial group. The coloured union, supported by the African union proposed, and Ford agreed to, the appointment of this official. While his salary will be paid by the Company, he will be selected by union members and will be an ex-officio member of the union executive.

The unions anticipate better relations at shop-floor level between workers and supervisors, an improvement which, of course, will be welcomed by the company. From the company's point of view, this innovation is seen as a

remedy for previously inadequate labour relations.

Some Workers Committee members are fully aware of the role conflicts to which this official will be subjected. Although selected by the workers, the latter doubt whether this role-incumbent will be able to maintain satisfactory identifications with the union's and workers' interests. It is known that personnel officers are always subject to such strains when acting as a mediator even though they are selected and paid entirely by the company. This full-time shop steward will have the greatest difficulty in meeting the very different role expectations held by the company and the union respectively.

By paying this full-time union official, the company makes the shop steward an employee of the company qua-shop steward, in contrast to the shop steward whose pay is received as a production worker. This is to change the essential function of the shop steward.

While the union, which is by no means wealthy, is relieved of the burden of this full time shop steward's pay, it is unrealistic of them to expect his undivided loyalty as his obligations are divided in a way that the worker shop stewards are not.

There is always the danger that the removal of this type of shop steward from the labour process means he will, in time, cease to represent adequately workers feelings. This step can also be seen as an employer's strategy to involve the unions in the managerial structure, thereby diminishing its efficacy.

While the company no doubt sees the appointment of this official as a progressive step towards smoother labour relations, it may have unwittingly brought into being a further area of potential friction. This shop steward is a full-time company employee. If the company wishes to dismiss him or the union wishes him to be dismissed, it is possible that a full-scale labour conflict could result.

While the incorporation of the union official into the managerial structure is intended to avoid a dispute such as the last one when shop stewards were in no position to speak for the workers, this strategy may recoil on the company if the official does not maintain close liaison with the shop stewards' committees and the workers and also could recoil on the union if their shop stewards' committee does not have the full backing of the union members.

While the full-time shop steward will be largely concerned with shop floor issues, the company must ensure that he is in a position to advise the labour relations department of issues outside of the work situation which affect workers and influence their shop floor attitudes. This will enable the company to be involved in the wider social issues, in particular the improvement of the quality of life of its workers, a professed objective of the Sullivan Code.

As a multi-national company, Ford sees the need to meet the claims that

the capitalist system can provide this better quality of life for all and thus orients its strategy to this as well as showing a profit for its shareholders. Ford is a leader in this field.

Footnotes

1. P. Bonner and E. Webster: **South African Labour Bulletin**, Vol. 5, No. 2, August, 1979, page 6.
2. M. Whisson, M. Roux and C. Manona: **The Sullivan Principals at Ford**, 1979, page 42.
3. M. Whisson, **et al: op cit.**, page 12.
4. **Ibid**, page 15.
5. **Ibid**, page 10.
6. **Ibid**, page 21.
7. Unpublished paper presented by the Director of Industrial Relations at the Urban Foundation Codes Seminar, Port Elizabeth, 7 November 1978.

BOOKREVIEWS

Race or Class?

Mlungisi Makalima

A Review of: *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers.*

By James A. Geschwender. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Dr Geschwender's *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency* (CRWI) represents a thought-provoking attempt at grappling with the theoretical and practical problems posed for social science by the stratification of the American working class that has led to its crystallisation into two racial fractions – black and white. This presents seemingly irreconcilable sets of interests and aspirations within the American political economy. Given this intra-class rupture, Geschwender finds it almost impossible to visualise a spontaneous development of a change-oriented worker consciousness (*class fur sich*) unmediated by an adequate theory and strategy unifying both black and white workers. While admitting that at a rigorously analytic level – and this he attempts to demonstrate – these differences turn out to be only apparent and contrived, a different picture of this reality tends to develop at the visible level of everyday praxis. The following statements by Geschwender (and others) reveal a manipulative and thus untenable basis of the division through an unequal distribution of scarce resources. The outcome has implications for worker-perceptions and worker-action:

“The unequal distribution of scarce resources may accord with a ‘divide and conquer’ policy in which certain groups receive more than others and consequently develop loyalty to the ruling class despite the fact that it maintains the lion’s share of the resources for its own use.” (CRWI p.5)

The basic elements of this argument are similar to those of Davies who also writes about the outcome of a structure of special privileges for certain sections of the workforce in South Africa:

“For it is clear that a section of the labour force will tend to become more fully tied to the bourgeoisie when it benefits from the extraction of surplus value, in other words when it participates in the exploitation of the majority of the working class”¹

The debate about the 'white working class' benefitting from the extraction of surplus value, cannot be entered into here. However, the key conception is 'most fully tied to the bourgeoisie' which presents a strong counter-tendency to the development of worker-consciousness across race lines.

Geschwender sees stratification by race at the work place as serving to reproduce the structure of domination of the ruling class. This is facilitated through the presence of a 'middle stratum' of workers which militates against the unified opposition to the ruling class.

Geschwender then goes on to present the outcome of the unequal distribution of resources as reflected in black-worker perceptions of the structure of white-worker privileges and its political implications:

"they (black workers) may suffer more from class than racial exploitation, but class exploitation is more difficult to observe and identify and its recognition requires more political sophistication. Black workers have no difficulty in recognizing that they are exploited, but they do not as readily recognize the exploitation of their fellow white workers" (CRWI p.183)

The issues raised by the above conception of the American black-white worker reality allow us to see Geschwender's project as being at once an exercise in social analysis and a programmatic suggestion for political action. Change oriented worker action is bound to be puny if it is based on a spontaneously given ideological understanding of society. Such action must be guided by scientific analysis. An unequivocal statement of the twofold character of Geschwender's project is contained in his other work, **Racial Stratification in America** which should be read in close conjunction with CRWI. Here he writes:

"An accurate understanding of the existing order is a key ingredient in any viable social change program"²

Geschwender opens his book (pp. 1–16) by taking a close look at the current state of 'race relations' theory in the United States which prescribe strategies to alleviate and/or eliminate black suffering. From a vast body of literature – elaborated more fully in **Racial Stratification in America** – he identifies four models, each of which has a relatively complete conceptual apparatus for comprehending the structure of race relations in the United States. These are: the assimilationist model, white racism model, capitalist exploitation or class model, and the internal colonial or submerged national model. He finds the first two models – embraced by the majority of American sociologists – unable to advance our understanding of racial stratification. Their failure lies in "their refusal to recognize racial stratification as only a special case of social stratification" (CRWI p.5). A corollary of this is an inability to perceive racial divisions as part of a strategy of 'divide and conquer'. He rejects their social psychological interpretation of this unfolding American reality and provides instead a historical sketch (pp. 1–4) of the changing structure of 'race relations' in the U.S. seen as conditioned by changes in the mode of production – from slavery, debt peonage, tenant farming, sharecropping, and ultimately wage labour. The latter became important as blacks moved North so as to find employment in industry. Racial divisions were introduced to weaken the

working class and render it more docile. This is reminiscent of Loewen's observation in a slightly different context that:

"The 'Chinaman' would not only himself supply a cheaper and less troublesome workforce, but in addition his presence as a threatening alternative would intimidate the Negro into resuming his former docile behavior"³

These first two models are further rejected by Geschwender because they are unable to point the way towards an egalitarian restructuring white-black relationships:

"if racism is the prime cause and is part of the general cultural environment, independent of exploitation, there is no leverage point It is a theory of futility."⁴

The class and colonial models, though individually inadequate, both have potential utility. The colonial model is adequate only to the task of explaining "the racial dialectic but entirely ignores the class dialectic" (CRWI p.16). This is reminiscent of Fanon's notion of the 'pitfalls of a national consciousness'. The class model "helps us understand the class dialectic but ignores the racial dialectic" (CRWI p.16). This state of things leads Geschwender to conclude that the main item on the agenda of racial stratification studies is a search for a comprehensive model adequate to the task of conceptualising the structure of black exploitation. This is necessary as a basis for developing viable lines of action to transform racial societies. His task is to "attempt the first steps toward the construction of such a model" (CRWI p.16).

Before taking up this question it is pertinent to point up some underlying methodological and theoretical lessons that can be learned from Geschwender's analysis. These lessons are not new. But Geschwender's new look at 'race relations' theory dramatises their import.

It is possible to read into Geschwender's analysis a statement to the effect that a method of analysis that contents itself with the treatment of **visible** reality/appearances is unlikely to advance our understanding of the human reality (including racial stratification). Treating of appearances fails to deal with:

"the social reality which produces those appearances"⁵

I want to state without arguing it that for Geschwender the assimilationist (cultural) and white racism (attitudinal) models result in the mystification of reality precisely because of their tendency to limit observation – and hence analysis – to what is apparent. To a lesser extent the colonial (national consciousness-producing) model also errs in the same direction. There would hardly be any need for science if what these models do in the name of science was all that science was about. The following remarks by Geras are insightful:

"all science would be superfluous if outward appearance and the essence of things coincided"⁶

The tendency for 'common-sense' knowledge to dominate sociological theory – and which must be corrected – is explained elegantly by Geras who attempts to locate it in the internal structure of society:

“there exists, at the interior of capitalist society a kind of internal rupture between social relations which obtain and the manner in which they are experienced, that the scientist of society is confronted with the necessity of constructing reality against appearance”⁷

This injunction should serve to remind us of the important need to break through the veil which shrouds reality if we want to achieve an understanding in depth of that reality. Visible reality is always likely to be a fetishised version of true reality. Geschwender's analysis once again brings into sharp focus the flaws of an empiricist/positivistic focus.

The bulk of the book (pp. 17-186) is devoted to tracing the history of black workers in the auto industry of Detroit; their position in the UAW, the circumstances leading to the launching of DRUM and the formation and development of the League, its structure, ideology, activities and ultimate demise. He situates the collapse of the League in its inability to adopt a uniform theoretical and practical interpretation of the black experience in the U.S.

Ideological strains developed between those sections of the League which, conceptualised the sufferings of blacks in nationalistic terms and those who adopted a class analysis. These contradictions are summed up as follows:

“It is difficult to engage in principled cooperation with white radicals if all whites are defined as exploiters (colonial model --MM). It is also difficult to build a community support movement if all members of the black bourgeoisie are also defined as exploiters and enemies.” (class model --MM) (CRWI p137).

The League was unable to resolve these contradictions and much of its energies were sapped through community organisation which drifted from initially stated concerns. It became difficult to reconcile community work with production (in-plant) concerns. Thus:

“It is possible that these community programs may have value in themselves and may become sufficiently attractive that energies will be distracted from the prime focus -- workers -- to more peripheral ones” (CRWI p.142).

However, linkages with the community may make it difficult for the industries “to write off their (workers' MM) problems as the result of agitators” (CRWI p.143). It must be borne in mind that the ‘community’ embraces an ensemble of elements from the black bourgeoisie to the lumpen. This was the dilemma for the League.

Geschwender closes the book by drawing his theoretical conclusions. He spells out the significance of his analysis of the dynamics of the League for racial stratification studies and corrective lines of action. He argues that the colonial and class models provide a good starting point for analysis because each in its own way does capture part of the essence of black experiences and American society. He proposes a synthesis of the two to produce a more comprehensive model with eth-class or race-class being the key explanatory category. This links racism and exploitation to the same reality -- industrial capitalism and imperialism. It allows for the possibility of collapsing black-white worker differences and provides “a realistic basis

for a united action combining black and white workers that would benefit both race-classes" (CRWI p.221)

The power of Geschwender's analysis lies in his ability to avoid abstracting from the visible and concrete conditions of industrial capitalism which would treat symptoms as the ultimate causes. Further, he does not commit the error of treating fractions of the working class as distinct classes. Despite this, he does not wish away black and white worker differences in experiences and in their consciousness. This allows for the possibility of utilising the black and white **objective** similarities (class as **an sich**) as a starting point for collapsing **subjective** divisions through the transformation of American society.

The programme he suggests for political action disappoints. This becomes especially so when viewed against the boldness of his social analysis. He does not provide a convincing statement of how a race-class will avoid the pitfalls of the League's practice. For it must be admitted that Geschwender's analysis of the dynamics of the League does show a partial, though vacillating and unclear thought out, incorporation into its practice elements of a race-class analysis.

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Political Unionism in South Africa

Rob Lambert

A review of Edward Feit's 'Workers without Weapons: SACTU and the organisation of African workers,' Archon Books, 1978

The objective conditions of the 1950's raised the potential for the transformation of isolated, sporadic resistance, into mass resistance. In the post war period, capital, spearheaded by the rapid growth of manufacturing industry, accumulated at an extremely fast, albeit uneven, rate. An 8,3 percent annual average growth rate of the economy between 1946 and 1966, with national income increasing five fold during the period 1932-1960, gives some indication of this rapid accumulation.¹ This process is, however, contradictory in two dimensions: first, cheap labour power, and the refining of the labour control system served as the motor of rapid accumulation,² and second, the expansion of the productive forces, concentrated the proletariat in greater masses, establishing a more powerful social base for effective resistance. Such resistance does not occur spontaneously however: it depends upon political organization and leadership. O'Meara has outlined how the repression of the 1946 mineworkers strike acted catalytically on the established leadership of the ANC, leading to the effective takeover by the youth league and the forging of links between black trade unions, the ANC, the CP and the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses.³ With their adoption of the programme of action in 1949, strategy shifted from constitutional protest to the task of galvanizing the black proletariat into various forms of direct action to force concessions from the apartheid state. National strike campaigns were launched, boycotts initiated, certain laws defied and pass books burned.

Within this upsurge, a new trade union co-ordinating body – The South African Congress of Trade Unions, (SACTU) was formed, comprising the former C N E T U unions and the left wing of the Trades and Labour Council.⁴ It inserted itself immediately into the programme of action and was at the centre of 'the struggle from all oppressive laws.'⁵ Luthuli underlined this conception of political trade unionism:

'The founders of SACTU were convinced that a mere struggle for the economic rights of labour, without participation in the general struggle for political emancipation, would condemn the trade union movement to ultimate purposelessness.'⁶

National strike campaigns were the cornerstone of the strategy. Between its formation in March 1955 and its disintegration in the face of state repression after 1961, SACTU played a key role in four national strike campaigns.

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Edward Feits' book, **Workers Without Weapons**, together with a recently published official SACTU's history and to a lesser degree, Linda Ensor's **Labour Bulletin** article, 'Tucsa's relationship with African Trade Unions' are the only published works to date that deal in any detail with SACTU's development, its strategy and role in the political struggles of the 50's. Other works focus almost exclusively on developments within the ANC. For example, the Karis, Carter, Gerhart documents, **From Protest to Challenge**, Volume 3, devote three pages of a 218 page analysis to the development and role of black trade unions, and there are no Sactu statements in the 581 pages of documentation, which says something of the weight given to the trade union role in the study of 'African politics'. Other works that similarly gloss over the trade union role are the semi-journalistic accounts of Mary Benson, **The Struggle for a Birthright** and Edward Roux's **Time Longer than Rope**.

Those intent on gaining a clearer insight into the potential and limits of SACTU's political unionism will be disappointed in Feits' book, for it suffers a three-fold limitation. First, it is a limited, descriptive account at the level of organization only, which fails to locate within the movement of the working class as a whole, nor does it adequately situate trade union developments within a changing economy. A second major weakness is his sketchy, confusing, and in certain instances, non-existent picture of the history and development of individual SACTU unions. At no point does he even list all the unions that were to join SACTU. The names of unions, previously unmentioned, suddenly appear in the middle of chapters. Thirdly, he builds his central argument around a false dichotomy of the economic and the political.

Feit's limitations are inherent in his methodology. His positivism is revealed in the preface where he states 'interview transcripts added little to what was shown in the documentation, and were full of inaccuracies. This reinforces the author's doubt of the value of interviews on subjects where the recall of a contested past is in question. Further on he says '... because the story speaks for itself so often, and because so little is known, a minimum of theory is introduced.'⁷ His goal is to uncover the *facts* of the development and failure of SACTU as an organization. Interviews add no new facts and even at times contradict the documents. What Feit loses in this exclusive reliance on official SACTU documents, is the 'verstehen' dimension effective interviewing brings – the ways in which actors perceived what was happening, the manner in which this affected their thinking and thus the dynamics of the development of ideology and the process whereby tactics and strategy were formulated. Furthermore, interviewing is crucial to building a picture of the ups and downs of individual unions, since the records of black unions are in most instances, notoriously incomplete.

Despite these serious limitations, it is important for those involved and interested in South African labour struggles to read **Workers Without Weapons** for it does highlight recurring organizational weaknesses in the labour movement, as well as provoking debate around the nature of working class politics. It is this aspect which I wish to focus on in this review.

The underlying approach of Feit is to separate the economic and political levels, in his adoption of a staircase approach to struggle. His central argument runs thus:

'Political trade unionists, to succeed, must first build mass support for economic ends, and then convert this into political coin'.⁸ The thrust of the book is to detail the reasons, as Feit sees them, for SACTU's failure to develop a strong trade union base, and thus its inability to make gains on the economic front, as a step towards realizing its political objectives. When SACTU was formed in March 1955, its union base was weak. The major SACTU unions were concentrated in light manufacturing and services – textiles, dry cleaning and food and canning, while heavy industry, power, communications, transport, mining and agriculture had for the most, not been penetrated. Two major black unions, the African Clothing Workers Union and the National Union of Distributive Workers had decided not to affiliate to SACTU. Of the thirty three affiliates in 1955, apart from the above mentioned unions, the remaining unions were extremely weak.⁹

Feit argues that in the eight years of its open operations in South Africa, the position did not improve, mainly because SACTU, in becoming increasingly involved in the campaigns of the Congress Alliance, neglected the day-to-day work of building strong, independent unions. He argues that the adoption of the national minimum wage campaign for one pound a day in March 1957, was a turning point in the history of SACTU.

'From having concerned itself largely with the organization of unions, SACTU after 1957, began largely to concern itself with the goals of the Congress Alliance in the broadest sense. It had of course always associated itself with Congress Alliance goals, but now they ruled exclusively.'¹⁰

He draws attention to SACTU's self analysis of the Campaign's failure to gain momentum, in a document submitted to the third Annual Conference, which suggested that workers failed to respond to the Campaign because they were not sufficiently organized at the point of production.¹¹ At the October 1960 Conference a major stumbling block was seen to be the inaction of affiliated unions, who failed to submit demands for a pound a day to employer associations.¹² Thus it is held that despite the ANC's commitment to the Campaign 'The struggle of SACTU is that of the ANC. Their demands are those of Congress. The campaign of a one-pound-a-day is ours.'¹³ – it failed because of the weak union base.

The base was weak because of full scale involvement in broad-based, more directly political campaigns. Trade union organizers involvement in these campaigns detracted from the task of building unions. This generated a 'scatter-gun approach', whereby the meeting of a multiplicity of demands meant that organizers spread themselves thinly over a variety of tasks. These problems were compounded by an acute shortage of trained and experienced organizers, and a chronic lack of finance. It was a vicious circle. Because the union base was weak, affiliation fees were irregular, and unions were constantly in arrears. Without funds, organizers could not be employed on a scale adequate to answer needs. Feit quotes the example of Durban, where the ratio was one organizer for six unions. Those organizers employed, had to pick themselves up by their own boot straps, as most of the seasoned leadership, had been banned in the early 1950s. Fourteen key organizers were banned in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act during 1953, many having

had behind them more than twenty years experience in the union movement. This affected a wide range of unions.¹⁴ The involvement of SACTU organizers in the Congress Alliance Campaigns meant little continuity in their work with individual unions. Consequently, union membership fluctuated, since recruitment drives heightened worker expectations. Lack of follow-up meant poor shop-floor organization, the failure to take up issues with individual managements leading eventually to worker disillusionment and disinterest in the union. Over-extended organizers neglected existing unions in their eagerness to set up others.

Within the context of these weaknesses and constraints at the level of organization, attempts were made to realize a clearly formulated organizational strategy. The tenets of this strategy were: special attention paid to unorganized workers; assistance to striking workers so as to build unions out of the conflict; directing workers to the possibility of challenging corrupt union officials, thus drawing registered unions' rank and file towards SACTU, and advising workers of their rights under the law.

Local Committees were established in the major centres to implement strategy. Making contact with workers at a factory level, they were to recruit through the distribution of the SACTU newspaper, 'Workers Unity', and through leafleting. Feit maintains that evidence suggests that strong local committees developed in Natal and in the Eastern Cape, while the activities of locals in other centres were sporadic, lacking continuity or consistency. SACTU identified the problem as being created by the shortage of full time organizers. In Durban, the local initiated the formation of unions amongst railway, bakery, dairy, and metal workers. After Luthuli's call for every ANC member to join SACTU, workers joined steadily and 'the stream became a torrent after the militant struggles which began in Natal in June, 1959'.¹⁵ This inflow was initially accommodated in a General Workers Union before being organized into individual unions. In this, the Natal Committees had led the way in organizing unions, initiating strikes and in submitting memoranda to wage boards.¹⁶ The other effective local in Port Elizabeth established an active General Workers Union and successfully launched organization in individual sectors.¹⁷ In this region SACTU received widespread and massive support in all its political campaigns. Efforts in the Western Cape derived from the long tradition of the Food and Canning Workers Union.¹⁸ But it was in the Transvaal that SACTU was weakest where few new unions were formed.

Within this organizational strategy, Feit is critical of SACTU's role as the 'initiator' of strikes in many instances, claiming that these were 'ill-judged and ill-fated' having negative feedback on organization.¹⁹ SACTU, to make economic gains, had to rely on the goodwill of management. There was evidence of such goodwill in many situations. One such situation was the Frame group's, Consolidated Textile Mills, where, he claims, conditions were better than those that existed in the industry as a whole. Consolidated co-operated with both the registered and the unregistered unions, acting beyond the bounds of legal compunction, by deducting dues for the unregistered union. According to Feit, SACTU made the mistake of calling a strike to push for further concessions in 1957. The strike resulted in a retraction of the concessions management had previously granted, and furthermore, it created internal dissension which split the union.²⁰

Feit's description of the events at Consolidated, and the conclusions he draws as to SACTU's tactics, illustrates the way in which his methodology produces a distorted and inaccurate perspective of concrete historical events. In the context of the increasing militancy of the working class as a whole during the 50's, the textile industry led all industrial sectors in terms of militant strike action. Textiles relative importance grew substantially in the period since the outbreak of the Second World war, with the expansion being labour intensive in character. The Consolidated strike, far from being an isolated event, was part of a general upsurge in militancy, where textile strikes involved large, concentrated masses of workers for sustained periods.²¹ The actual events of the Consolidated strike, contrast sharply with Feit's presentation.

The strike broke out on the evening of June 3rd, 1957, when 200 skilled Indian workers from the spinning and weaving departments refused to work in response to the threat of retrenchment and wage deductions. Over a six week period, more than 200 workers had been laid off, and the employers were demanding a reduction in basic wages from £3-00 a week to £2-6s-6d because a situation of overproduction pertained.²² The retrenched workers were given only one week's notice, some having worked in the factory for over 20 years. So much for the 'goodwill of management'. After the National Industrial Council had reached a deadlock for a third time with regard to this issue, shop stewards of the registered Textile Workers Union attempted to make representations to management. When they were refused, a mass meeting of Consolidated workers was called and there was an overwhelming 75 percent vote in favour of strike action.²³ The 200 striking workers were joined by 450 day shift workers. A critical issue for the striking Indian workers was the Africans' attitude, since they comprised the majority of the workforce. According to Aaron Masonga, a SACTU member at the plant, they were reluctant to support the strike action.²⁴ The Company, through the skillful manipulation of the racial allocation of different tasks within the labour process, had maximized tensions between the two groups. Whilst most of the skilled work was done by Indians, some Africans had been trained as skilled weavers but were kept on as learners at lower rates of pay. Masonga argued:

'Management favoured the Indians. There were always many Africans waiting at the gates for employment but Indians were mostly taken. They got the better jobs.'

The law also played a role in further exacerbating racial tension. The T.W.U. was permitted to admit white, Indian and coloured members and could enter into negotiations through an Industrial Council, the agreements of which were binding on *all* workers. In contrast, the African T.W.U. was powerless in terms of the law, and had to accept wages and conditions negotiated by the T.W.U.

In the strike situation, management attempted to heighten these tensions and divisions. In a statement to the press, the Company Director warned

'hundreds of natives have been attracted to the Mill by the strike and are looking for jobs.'²⁵

The Company even organized loudspeaker-van tours of Indian residential areas, issuing similar warnings. At this point the African T.W.U., which enjoyed 80 percent membership in the factory, intervened and organizers called for solidarity with the strikers. However, only a portion of the African workforce joined the strikers. The non-racial ideology of SACTU could do little more than partially ameliorate the racial divisions and lack of solidarity.

After the ANC warned management that they would call for a total boycott of blankets, management agreed to meet a deputation that included Leon Levy, the SACTU president. Agreement was reached on June 20th, almost three weeks after the strike had begun. There were to be no wage cuts, no victimization and re-trenched workers were to be given priority over available jobs. However, when the agreement was formalized at the Industrial Council, the Management launched a new offensive. During an earlier period the T.W.U. had won the right to negotiate on piece wage rates. This they now lost, together with the Union medical benefit fund, and the right of stop order deductions. The Frame Group manipulated the Industrial Council proceedings through a Mr Wanlass, a secretary of the T.W.U., dismissed for corruption. He started a new Cotton Spinners Union with which Frame was willing to negotiate, as well as becoming Chairman of the Industrial Council with Frame's assistance. He was a key figure in the above manipulations. The final outcome was that the Company fired 175 of the 600 strikers, effectively rooting out Union leadership, despite the agreement.

Feit argues that the *strike* led to 'internal dissention that induced a split'.²⁶ His superficial description distorts by failing to analyse the structural *causes* of the strike, the tensions between Indian and African, and manner in which the Company manipulated the situation via the Industrial Council and the in-Company union. The reason for his failure to clarify the issues is his unwillingness to probe beyond a few documents, before drawing conclusions that fit his overall argument, but not historical data. In this case, SACTU is judged for 'initiating', 'ill-judged' strikes, which led to real setbacks in organization, weakening SACTU's trade union base thus limiting its political potential. Frame presented the opportunity of extending this base because of the 'goodwill of management'.

In 1958, the National Executive of SACTU established priority areas for the concentration of resources. As a result, National Committees were established to co-ordinate a drive to unionize workers in the metal, mining and agricultural industries, as well as on the railways. With the exception of the railways, which developed a strong union in Natal, these initiatives failed, due to a compounding of the organizational weaknesses outlined above, with the involvement of most key organizers in the Umkonto We Sizwe Sabotage Campaign, after 1960. In Feit's view, the constraints imposed by the non-registration of African Unions under the Industrial Conciliation Act exacerbated these weaknesses, for it limited the scope and range of Union activity, making black workers, 'Workers without Weapons'.

A major limitation of Feit's analysis is his failure to debate the potential and role of trade unionism in the politics of change. He simply implies in his argument, that were SACTU to build a strong union base to force concessions from employers, the mass support thus gained could be used to force change at a political

level. In his narrow pre-occupation with SACTU's organizational weaknesses, he makes no mention of the *process* by which these political changes will be brought about, and hence the potential of trade unionism as a weapon of change.

Ensor, in an analysis more rigorous and sophisticated than that of Feit, argues that a political role required independence from the registered trade unions, and that this inhibited the development of a strong power base making a political role impossible. The strongest black trade unions in terms of membership, financial soundness and limited economic gains won, were those that existed in close co-operation with the registered unions. The state's policy of not recognizing black trade unions denied them the ability to establish a consolidated membership, from which to engage in the political struggle. SACTU's weakness in this regard, is reflected in the repeated requests it made to TUCSA to use its influence in various matters.²⁷ Feit and Ensor's analysis of the constraints and weaknesses of SACTU's political unionism is now considered part of the conventional wisdom of the period. When, however, the development of SACTU is analysed within the general upsurge of the working class as a whole, the issue becomes more complex. In those regions where the ANC and SACTU worked together closely, and where leadership promoted unionism, a mass base developed rapidly. Thus SACTU had its strongest union membership in Natal and the Eastern Cape, where the leadership of Luthuli and Mbeki respectively, were sensitive to necessity of developing trade unions. A leading figure of the period comments 'In 1958 he (Luthuli) called all African workers, who were not members of a trade union to join one, and this led to a great increase in SACTU's membership in Natal.'²⁸ SACTU was weakest in the Transvaal, where the ANC leadership played little attention to the union aspect.

After the failure of the April 1958 national strike, the SACTU leadership developed a radically different conception of working class organization to the traditional notion of trade unionism underlying Feit and Ensor's analysis. Sisulu and Turok drew up a document which, while not negating the need to intensify the organization of workers in trade unions, stressed the central importance of forming factory committees. Turok argues 'this conception was absolutely seminal a point of departure as far as the trade unions and the Congress movement were concerned'.²⁹ The committee was conceived of not simply as a trade union committee, but as a grouping of advanced workers which would combine both industrial and political functions. Underlying this conception is the notion of an organized vanguard leadership within each factory, that is able to make a close linkage between the economic and political demands of the working class. Taking the Luxemburg position that there is a productive relation between political and economic struggles, advanced workers thus organized, are able to seize the moment to advance industrial and political demands that transform trade unions from collective bargaining agencies into mass proletarian organizations. In a period of mass upsurge and forward movement of the working class as a whole, such a vanguard would articulate bold political demands, which, because they are close to the needs of the working masses, would generate support through economic strike action.

This position rests heavily on a conception of the spontaneity of the masses.

Yet available evidence from the SACTU period suggests that this form of organization can only complement, and not substitute for, the painstaking day-to-day work of strengthening workers' trade union organization. A SACTU survey of the response to the May 1961 Republic day national strike call confirms this. Their report concluded:

'Workers who are organized into trade unions are more responsive to a political call than unorganized workers. Their trade union activity has given them heightened political consciousness and they also respond more readily when the appeal is made on a factory, as opposed to a residential basis, as they feel that there is less chance of dismissal if the whole factory is involved.'³⁰

In any event, the plans to develop factory committees were lost in the rapid onrush of events, with the militant PAC campaign, Sharpeville mass strikes and the decision to engage in a sabotage campaign against the state. In one sense it was the increasing militancy of the working class as a whole, spurred on by the political leadership, that swept SACTU, unprepared into the midst of political struggle. And here lies the essence of SACTU's failure: it was not that the leadership undervalued trade unionism or shop-floor organization, nor did failure lie in their inability to develop a mass base, rather it lay in their subordinate position within the alliance. The ANC and SACP leadership decided on the pace of events and SACTU followed as *the means* of realizing long-term strategy. SACTU had no independent leadership. At every level of the organization, SACTU members were members of ANC, and could not distinguish, in their own minds, the difference between the two forms of organization, or which had priority in achieving goals.

Because of SACTU's subordinate position, decisions to launch national strike campaigns were taken with little reference to the level of preparedness and maturity of working class organization. It was the dominance of the ANC and SACP in the alliance, that finally led to the smashing of SACTU, at the very point that it was both developing a mass base and an experienced leadership. I refer here to the SACP-led decision to embark on the sabotage campaign against the state. The campaign led to extreme repression by the state, with the ninety day Act detentions and the long-term imprisonment of the new wave of experienced SACTU leadership that had developed in the past five years. Leaderless, the less experienced layers were lost.

This is not to espouse ultra-leftism that argues for no alliances, in any circumstances, but that if alliances are formed, working class organizations must be powerful enough to establish their hegemony. There are numerous examples in history of working class organizations being used for political ends other than their own.

If SACTU had established its hegemony and independence within the alliance, it could have, within limits, dictated the pace of events and possibly steered clear of the mistakes of the SACP. Seasoned trade unionists, now wasting away on Robbin Island, could have contributed much to present day struggles.

Locating the problematic of the potential of trade unionism at the subjective

level of leadership is less determinist than Ensor, who argues that the structural position of black trade unions rendered it impossible for them to develop a mass base, without relying on the registered unions, and thus compromising on the question of political unionism. The political unionism of SACTU generated a mass base of immense potential. It was one of the ironies of history that SACTU's subordinate position in the alliance meant that this potential was not realized through setting the pace of the political challenge to the state, at the rate of the development of leadership and organization on the shop floor. Were this so, political unionism might have posed a more serious threat to the apartheid state. This period suggests that there can develop forms of working class organization and consciousness that negate the perspective that trade unions are *inherently* economic, and essentially a component part of capitalist social relations.

A genuine social history of the period, in transcending the limitations of Feit's study, could offer new perspectives on the nature of working class politics, thus defining potential of Trade Unionism in the transformation process.

Footnotes

- 1 See Duncan Innes, 'The role of foreign trade, in South African Industrial development' in *The Economic Factor*, p. 111, 1974.
2. For declining real wages during the 50's see W.F. Steenkamp, 'Bantu Wages in S.A.', *S.A.J.E.* June, 1962. See also PDL surveys published in Institute of Race Relations Yearbooks.
3. Dan O'Meara 'The 1946 Mine Workers Strike and the political economy of South Africa' *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 2.
4. A catalyst was the threat of an amendment to the I.C. Act, imposing segregation on the union movement. While SACTU emerges out of responses within the labour movement itself, there is evidence to suggest that the SACP played a key role in its formation.
5. SACTU President Leon Levy, *Fighting Talk*, October, 1961.
6. Quoted in *Fighting Talk*, April/June, 1961.
7. Edward Feit, *Workers without Weapons*, p.8.
8. *ibid*, p. 49.
9. Feit refers to the following weak unions that initially joined SACTU: Natal Aluminium Workers Union; Toy Workers Union; Municipal Workers Union; Transport Workers Union; Bag Workers Union; South African Tin Workers Union; Railway Workers Union and African Chemical Workers Union.
- 10 *ibid*, p. 103.
- 11 *ibid*, p. 111
- 12 *ibid*, p. 118.
- 13 *ibid*, p. 102.
- 14 Commercial and Distributive Workers Union; Garment Workers Union; Food and Canning Workers Union; Furniture Workers Union; Leather Workers Union; Amalgamated Union of Building Workers; Chemical and Glass Workers Union; Jewellers and Goldsmiths Union; Chemical Workers Union; Textile Workers Union; Railway and Harbour Workers Union; Sweet Workers Union.
- 15 Secretary's report, presented at the 5th Annual National Conference, October, 1960.
- 16 In response to the upsurge in worker militancy, there was a flurry of wage board activity from 1957. The Government recommended the re-investigation of the position of general unskilled workers. New determinations were drafted which reversed the trend of declining real wages.

- 17 The following unions were formed: African Sweet Workers; African Milling Workers; Stevedoring Workers; S.A.R. & H; Biscuit Workers; Cement Workers and African Hide Workers.
- 18 Ben Turok, Archie Sebeko and Zola Zembie were organizers who played a key role in union developments in this region. They formed a Metal Workers Union, Railway Workers Union, Bag Workers Union and Timber Workers Union.
- 19 *ibid.* p. 74.
- 20 *ibid.* p. 65-67.
- 21 These included a 3 day strike of 1 079 Black Workers at Good Hope Textiles, in 1951, followed a year later by an 11 day strike involving 727 workers. To attract foreign capital minimum wages were extremely low - +/- £2 a week. Amato Textile Mills in the Transvaal was the scene of militant struggles. In 1952 there was a 6 day strike involving 2 300 workers and in '58 3 800 workers struck for 3 weeks, demanding an increase in the minimum wage of £3.
- 22 There was a crisis in the Textile Industry at this point, with a slump in the demand for blankets, itself a product of the low wage structure of the economy.
- 23 Natal Mercury, 4/6/57.
- 24 Interview, 20/5/77.
- 25 Daily News, 5/6/57
- 26 *op. cit.* p. 65.
- 27 L. Ensor 'TUCSA's relationship with African Trade Unions -- an attempt at control; 1954--1962'. *S.A.L.B.* Vol. 3, No. 4. Jan-Feb. 1977.
- 28 Interview, May, '77.
- 29 Interview, December, '77.
- 30 1961 SACTU survey, based on organizers' reports.