

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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Social Mobilization and Racial Capitalism
in South Africa, 1928-1960

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by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Below is a list of commonly used abbreviations for political organizations and institutions mentioned in the text.

<i>AAC</i>	<i>All African Convention</i>
<i>ANC</i>	<i>African National Congress</i>
<i>ANCYL</i>	<i>African National Congress Youth League</i>
<i>Anti-CAD</i>	<i>Anti-Coloured Affairs Department</i>
<i>APDUSA</i>	<i>African Peoples' Democratic Union of Southern Africa</i>
<i>APO</i>	<i>African People's Organization</i>
<i>CATA</i>	<i>Cape African Teachers' Association</i>
<i>CLSA</i>	<i>Communist League of South Africa</i>
<i>CNETU</i>	<i>Council of Non-European Trade Unions</i>
<i>COD</i>	<i>Congress of Democrats</i>
<i>CPSA</i>	<i>Communist Party of South Africa</i>
<i>FIOSA</i>	<i>Fourth International Organisation of South Africa</i>
<i>FRAC</i>	<i>Franchise Action Committee</i>
<i>ICU</i>	<i>Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union</i>
<i>IS</i>	<i>International Secretariat (Left Opposition)</i>
<i>NEF</i>	<i>New Era Fellowship</i>
<i>NEUF</i>	<i>Non-European United Front</i>
<i>NEUM</i>	<i>Non-European Unity Movement</i>
<i>NLL</i>	<i>National Liberation League</i>
<i>NRC</i>	<i>Native Representative Council</i>
<i>PAC</i>	<i>Pan Africanist Congress</i>
<i>PF</i>	<i>Progressive Forum</i>
<i>SACPO</i>	<i>South African Coloured Peoples' Organization</i>
<i>SAIC</i>	<i>South African Indian Congress</i>
<i>SOYA</i>	<i>Society of Young Africa</i>
<i>SWL</i>	<i>Socialist Workers League</i>
<i>TLSA</i>	<i>Teachers' League of South Africa</i>
<i>TARC</i>	<i>Train Apartheid Resistance Campaign</i>
<i>WIL</i>	<i>Workers' International League</i>
<i>WPSA</i>	<i>Workers' Party of South Africa</i>

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation demonstrates the existence of a broad and varied socialist movement in South Africa and examines its attempts to mobilize a social base across color lines in a rigidly divided society. South Africa's industrial capitalist system and urban working class would seem to provide the basis for the development of a proletarian-based socialist movement, but historically there has been no sustained working-class mobilization on a socialist program. This study considers various hypotheses concerning segmented and divided labor markets to identify those factors which illuminate the policies and practices of South African

socialist groupings.

The study begins with an historical analysis of the origins and development of the racially-divided working class. It challenges functionalist explanations which attribute racial policies and practices to the influence of particular classes or groupings, demonstrating instead that the roots of the racially-divided working class lay in the racial pattern in which the processes of proletarianization and urbanization unfolded. This racial pattern of development laid the basis both for the turbulent labor struggles of the early twentieth century and for the racial policies promoted by different social classes, notably white labor and capitalists, and institutionalized into state policy.

The study then focuses on the interaction between socialist theory and practice and the movements for non-collaboration, black unity and African self-reliance which flourished from the 1930s through the 1950s, and it examines their internal class dynamics to explain why radicals failed to maintain the initial mass support mobilized by these movements. It analyzes the theoretical frameworks which socialists used to explain the articulation of class and color and compares them to the actual conditions of working class development and political consciousness in South

Africa. The study concludes with a comparative overview of Communist and Trotskyist strategies and tactics in the face of common objective constraints.

PART I

Le présent serait plein de tous les
avenirs, si le passé n'y projetait déjà
une histoire.

André Gide

Effects, in their turn, become causes...

Marx, Capital, Volume I,
Chapter XXV, Section 3

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is concerned with the development of a socialist movement in South Africa. It argues that the complexity of South Africa's social conditions, notably its extremely fragmented working class, has proved a major stumbling block for South African socialists, whose ultimate goal has always been to unite the working class across color lines.

Although there is a substantial literature exploring the nationalist tradition in South African politics, little attention has been given to the socialist movement. To the extent that socialist influence in South Africa has been addressed, attention has focussed primarily on the South African Communist Party (SACP), reflecting (a) its long association with the African National Congress (ANC), (b) an interest in the nature of Soviet influence in South Africa, and (c) the predominance of studies written by members or former members of the SACP.ⁱ This study demonstrates that South Africa has a broad and varied socialist tradition which extends far beyond a single organization, and that socialist groups have had an influence on the national democratic movement that transcends their quantitatively small size.ⁱⁱ

Nonetheless, while South Africa's industrial capitalist system and large urban working class would seem to provide the basis for the development of a proletarian-based socialist movement, historically there has been no sustained working class mobilization on a socialist program. This dissertation considers various hypotheses concerning

segmented and divided labor markets, focussing especially on the articulation of color and class, to identify those factors which illuminate the policies and practices of South African socialist groupings.

As noted, South Africa's socialist movement has been largely neglected by academic analyses of South African politics.ⁱⁱⁱ While this focus reflects the historical predominance of the national democratic movement over explicitly socialist tendencies in South African politics, it also has theoretical roots in the plural approach which dominated the study of South African politics until the early 1970s.^{iv}

Plural theory views a society or social system as composed of autonomous subsystems like economy and polity; its units of analysis are plural groups defined by racial, religious, cultural, ethnic or national criteria. Politics, in this conception, is the competition of plural groups for political power, which resides in the state. The unequal distribution of political power stems from the differential incorporation of plural groups in the state, laying the basis for socioeconomic class differentiation.^v But because plural theory focuses overwhelmingly on domination of and by plural groups, it tends to underestimate other forms of social domination, like class, and it does not offer a structural explanation for the existence of sociopolitical movements, like socialism, which cut across plural groupings.

By the 1970s plural theory was being challenged by numerous studies of political and social relations throughout the African continent which pointed out that plural cleavages in Africa could be

traced historically to colonial domination and the penetration of capitalism in Africa, and in this sense, had to be understood in terms of the capitalist developmental process.^{vi} The radical revisionist school of South African studies tackled the problem of the racially-divided working class and its relationship to the capitalist system through a class analytic approach. This literature has indeed pushed the analysis of capitalist development and class structure in South Africa much further than previous plural approaches, illuminating capitalism's peculiarly racial nature in South Africa.^{vii}

This dissertation, although following in the wake of the revisionist school, makes a break with it along methodological lines. For, despite its strengths in conceptualizing capitalist development in South Africa, a significant weakness of this body of literature has been its approach to social class and class consciousness. The revisionists begin their analysis of South Africa's class structure and class struggle with a framework based on the work of structuralists like Poulantzas and Althusser, which posits an abstract, a priori definition of class. This abstract conception of class, in turn, lays the parameters for their understanding of political consciousness and practice. Thus the revisionists assume that because of its common proletarianization, the underlying tendency of the working class is to unite against capital. Following these assumptions, they explain the reality of South Africa's racially-divided working class by means of factors which are external to that class, notably, the efforts of capitalists to divide the working class. Hence, they suggest, the

rigidity of working class divisions stems primarily from the struggles between white labor and capital in the early twentieth century which led to white labor's defeat and incorporation into capitalist state structures.^{viii}

The 1980s has seen the development of an influential social history approach to South African studies, much influenced by writers like George Rude and E. P. Thompson, and concerned to write history from below, capturing subjective experiences and perceptions.^{ix} As both Mike Morris and Martin Murray have shown, some of this literature uses a methodology which presumes that a sum of individual experiences, or an aggregate of micro-level studies, by themselves, are able to explain macro-level patterns and phenomena. This is what Murray calls the montage principle. But Morris, for one, argues that it is the broader processes of economic development and class relations which provide the structure in which individual experiences occur, and he points out that the social history school's inadequate attention to conceptualizing capitalist development in the South African countryside is a serious omission.^x

This dissertation proceeds from the position that any class analytic approach seeking to explain developmental processes must be historically rooted.^{xi} Social classes and political consciousness, I argue, can only be understood from an historical point of departure which examines the process of their development. In this view, concepts and definitions of social phenomena must be derived by analyzing their social evolution, in contrast to ideal type categories whose historical

determinants have been removed in the process of abstraction.^{xii} The limitations of the radical revisionist school is that their analytical categories, like class, are not historically derived. This study, by contrast, draws on the nuances and insights of recent social histories, while attempting to develop conceptual insights into South Africa's racial capitalist path of development and demonstrate the political implications for socialist mobilization. Thus, my concern is to illuminate the structure and inner dynamics of South Africa's socialist movement, manifested by its mergers and schisms, as well as the external sociopolitical developments which gave the movement shape and direction.^{xiii}

Neville Alexander has argued that the introduction of historical materialism in South African studies suggests the need to reconsider concepts like race, ethnicity and nationalism which are associated with the liberal paradigm.^{xiv} Indeed, an historical approach explaining South Africa's racial system by reference to capitalist development illuminates the nature of the social categories classified by the government as African, Indian, Coloured and European (white) under its population registration system. As No Sizwe has argued, these are neither races, which presume a biological foundation, nor ethnic groups or nations, which presume cultural and political attributes and aspirations culminating either in federation or national independence. Rather, these state-imposed and fostered categories are a type of color-caste, hierarchical groupings whose membership is ascribed at birth.^{xv} Recent work has demonstrated that these categories are social

constructs, not pre-existing nations or the product of natural evolution.^{xvi}

The socially-constructed nature of these groupings in no way implies that they are not part of popular South African consciousness, just as the fact that the concept of "race" lacks scientific validity does not negate the reality that racial ideology - the belief that there are races, equal or unequal - is one of the most pervasive beliefs of the capitalist epoch. Members of color-castes in South Africa share common legal, social, political and economic disabilities, and flowing from these, common elements of lifestyle and consciousness. This caste consciousness is not in itself a national consciousness manifested in demands for national autonomy. Instead, the predominant political aspirations of these groupings have been for political incorporation in some form of democratic South African nation. South Africans have typically shown various combinations of caste, color, racial and national consciousness.^{xvii}

Research Methodology and Sources

The principal research techniques for this dissertation have been archival and library research of primary political documents, newspapers and secondary literature and interviews. I have used interviews primarily to provide insight into the perceptions and viewpoints of some of the principal figures in South Africa's socialist movement and have endeavored to corroborate them with other evidence where I have used them as a source to establish specific historical events.

Scope

This study concerns socialist theory and practice on the national and land questions, issues which have been the key areas of debate among South African socialist themselves.^{xviii} It begins with the Communist Party's 1928 Native Republic thesis, which set the stage for the subsequent Communist-Trotskyist split and concludes in 1960 at the close of the non-violent phase of liberation politics. Its geographic focus is the Western Cape and the Transvaal, historically the two main centers of socialist activity in South Africa.

Previous scholarly studies of the left in South Africa have focussed predominantly on the Communist Party and, to a lesser extent, the Trotskyist tendency.^{xix} To my knowledge, there is no English-language study encompassing a comparative analysis of both tendencies. I have been particularly concerned to document the development of the less well-known Trotskyist tendency and to situate it within the broader context of South African socialist and national democratic politics. This has required the construction of written history directly from primary documents, many of which have not been published before, and has proved one of the most daunting tasks of this project.

Contents

The study is divided into two parts. Part I, comprising Chapters 1 and 2, concerns the articulation of racial discrimination and capitalist development and the implications for working class

consciousness in South Africa. Part II presents a detailed study of the socialist movement and its theory and practice. Chapter 1 begins with a brief exposition of the views of South African socialists, whose work I will be addressing in the remaining chapters. I contrast these with both radical and liberal analyses of the problem of the racially-divided working class, but I challenge the functionalist assumptions underpinning a number of these works which attribute racial policies and practices primarily to the influence or interests of particular social classes or groupings. Moreover, because South Africa's racial structure can only be understood as part of a developmental process, I suggest that studies which begin their analysis of South Africa's working class with abstract definitions and concepts are not able to explain the relationship between class structure and class consciousness.

My own approach unfolds in Chapter 2 which addresses the origins, development and nature of the racially divided working class, focussing particularly on the transition from pre-industrial to industrial capitalism and the effect of this transition on the possibilities of working class unity across the color line. I interweave political economy and historical sociology to explain how racial divisions and patterns were structured into South African political economy during the developmental process. This analysis provides a basis both for understanding the extreme differences in black and white working class political consciousness and for evaluating the development of the socialist movement and its various programs, strategies and tactics outlined in the subsequent chapters. The chapter demonstrates that the

roots of the racially-divided working class lay in the racial pattern in which the processes of modernization, like proletarianization and urbanization, unfolded. It shows that the proletarianization of black and white followed different trajectories and that these were carried over into the pattern of urbanization and the creation of a labor force. These racial divisions in turn laid the basis both for the turbulent labor struggles of the early twentieth century and for the racial policies promoted by different social classes, notably white labor and capitalists, and institutionalized into state policy.

Part II addresses the implications of these findings for socialist mobilization within the working class and national democratic movements. While the 1970s literature addressed the failures of socialists to break down the racial consciousness of white workers, there has been insufficient attention to the social and political mobilization of the black working class in this racial capitalist system. My own work addresses this problem. It situates the socialist movement in the context of other social movements in South Africa. It focuses particularly on the interaction between socialist theory and practice and the movements for non-collaboration, black unity and African self-reliance which flourished from the 1930s through the 1950s and examines their internal class dynamics to explain why radicals failed to maintain the initial mass support mobilized by these movements. I compare the theoretical frameworks which South African socialists used to explain the articulation of class and color to the actual conditions of working class development and political consciousness in order to explain why

socialists typically failed to develop a sustained relationship with working class movements during the period of this study.

Chapter 3 concerns the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and its Native Republic thesis of the late 1920s. It examines various approaches to national self-determination, a concept which underlay the Native Republic thesis, and whose modern offshoot, colonialism of a special type, is the dominant paradigm for discussions of South Africa's national question today. It examines the impact of the thesis on CPSA practice in South Africa and discusses its potential for popular mobilization in the context of South African political economy, class structure and black working class movements in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Chapter 4 deals with the early Trotskyist movement in South Africa, whose roots lay in the divisions created by the Native Republic thesis, and its attempts to build a working class party. The chapter discusses the continuities and discontinuities between the CPSA and Trotskyist groups and the theoretical debates and practical endeavors of the early Trotskyists. It seeks to explain the organizational fragmentation of these groups in the context of South African political economy in the 1930s.

The fifth chapter concerns the rise of black united fronts, which dominated the political landscape in the late 1930s. This chapter demonstrates that this was a period of political reawakening following the retrenchment of the Great Depression. It explains the rise of black united fronts as a new political form, and it examines their internal

dynamics to explain why socialist groupings and radical leadership failed to maintain the initial mass support mobilized by those organizations.

Chapters 6 and 7 trace the changing relationship between socialist and national democratic organizations and the working class struggle in the post-war apartheid period. The chapters examine the disbanding of socialist groups as they withdrew from explicitly socialist politics and sought to integrate themselves into the national liberation movement and the corresponding efforts of national organizations to mobilize a working class base. The sixth chapter addresses the relationship between the CPSA and the Congress movement and examines how Communists sought to lay the foundations for a socialist movement through the national struggle. The seventh chapter deals with the relationship between Trotskyist groupings and the Non-European Unity Movement and the attempt to lay the foundations for a socialist movement premised on an alliance of landless peasants and workers. The study concludes with a comparative overview of Communist and Trotskyist strategies and tactics in the face of common objective constraints.

i. The main studies addressing the Communist Party of South Africa include Edward Roux, S. P. Bunting: A Political Biography, Cape Town: The African Bookman, 1944; Edward Roux, Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1964; H. J. and R. E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969; Sheridan W. Johns, "Marxism-Leninism in a Multi-Racial Society: The Origins and Early History of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932, Ph.D. Harvard, 1965; Alan Brooks, "From Class Struggle to National Liberation: the Communist Party of South Africa, 1940-1950," M.A., University of Sussex, 1973; and Martin Legassick, "Class and Nationalism in South African Protest: the South African Communist Party and the 'Native Republic,' 1928-1934," Eastern African Studies, XV, July 1973.

ii. The membership of the Communist Party of South Africa, South Africa's largest socialist grouping, fluctuated dramatically over the decades which this study addresses. It reached a peak in the late 1920s when S.P. Bunting maintained that it had 1750 members in 1928, including 1600 Africans, a remarkable increase over the 200 African members of the previous year. At its seventh annual conference in January 1929 it claimed almost 3000 members. But membership dropped precipitously in the early '30s, to roughly 150, mostly whites. At the outbreak of World War II its membership is estimated to be 280, and it grew during the war. There are no figures for Trotskyist groupings, but Trotskyists may have numbered one or two hundred during the years of this study. See Roux, S. P. Bunting, 95 and 104; Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 255 and 269 and Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945, London: Longman, 1983, 28.

iii. Studies of national organizations and movements in South Africa include Leo Kuper, Passive Resistance in South Africa, New Haven: Yale, 1960; Peter Walshe, The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: the African National Congress 1912-1952, Berkeley: University of California, 1971; Gail Gerhart, Black Power in South Africa, Berkeley: University of California, 1978; Lodge, Black Politics; and Francis Meli, A History of the ANC: South Africa Belongs to Us, Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University; London: James Currey, 1988-89. The four-volume From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964, ed. by Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter, Hoover Institution, Stanford University: Stanford, 1977 is an outstanding documentary collection which concentrates primarily on the major national liberation organizations but has significant material on socialist groupings.

iv. See, for instance, Pierre Van den Berghe, South Africa: A Study in Conflict, Berkeley: University of California, 1970; Heribert Adam, Modernizing Racial Domination: the Dynamics of South African Politics, University of California, 1971 and Heribert Adam, "Legitimacy and the Institutionalization of Ethnicity: Comparing South Africa," in Paul R. Brass, ed., Ethnic Groups and the State, London: Croom Helm, 1985, 262-302.

v. For a general discussion of plural societies see Arend Lijphart, Democracy in Plural Societies, New Haven: Yale, 1977. Leo Kuper and M. G. Smith apply plural theory to Africa in Pluralism in Africa, Berkeley: University of California, 1969. See also Crawford M. Young, The Politics of Cultural Pluralism, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1976; and Ali A. Mazrui and Michael Tidy, Nationalism and New States in Africa, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1984. In this discussion I draw on Kuper and Smith's conception of plural societies, characterized by unequal incorporation of groups in the polity, as opposed to pluralist societies, where access to resources is diffused because of the cross-cutting nature of plural groups into the polity. For a critique of plural theory which gives structural primacy to class cleavages

see Ronald A. Kieve, "Pillars of Sand: A Marxist Critique of Consociational Democracy in the Netherlands," Comparative Politics, April 1981, 313-337.

vi. Bernard Magubane, "Pluralism and New Conflict Situations in Africa: A New Look," African Social Research, 7, June 1969, 529-554; Bernard Magubane, "The Evolution of the Class Structure in Africa," in Peter C. W. Gutkind and Immanuel Wallerstein, eds., The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa, Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976; Jeff Guy, "The Destruction and Reconstruction of Zulu Society," in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone, eds., Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa, London and New York: Longman, 1982, 167-194; Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in The Invention of Tradition, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1983, 211-262.

vii. See inter alia Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid," Economy and Society, 1, 4, 1972, 425-456; Martin Legassick, "South Africa: Capitalist Accumulation and Violence," Economy and Science, 3, 3, 1974; and Frederick A. Johnstone, Class, Race and Gold, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976. Daiva K. Stasiulis, "Pluralist and Marxist Perspectives on Racial Discrimination in South Africa," British Journal of Sociology, 31, 4, December 1980, 463-490 offers a literature review of plural and radical approaches and a Marxist critique of plural theory.

viii. See particularly Robert Davies, Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa 1900-1960: An Historical Materialist Analysis of Class Formation and Class Relations, Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1979; Howard Simson, "The Myth of the White Working Class in South Africa," The African Review, 4, 2, 1974, 189-203; and Harold Wolpe, "The 'white working class' in South Africa," Economy and Society, 5, 2, 1976, 197-240. See also Louis Althusser, For Marx, New York: Random House/Vintage, 1969 and Nicos Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Classes, London: New Left, 1973 and Nicos Poulantzas, Classes in Contemporary Capitalism, London: New Left, 1975.

ix. See Belinda Bozzoli, "History, Experience, and Culture," in Belinda Bozzoli, ed., Town and Countryside in the Transvaal, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983, 1-47 for a discussion of the social history approach in South African studies. See also George Rude, Ideology and Popular Protest, New York: Pantheon, 1980 and E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, New York: Vintage, 1966.

x. Mike Morris, "Social History and the Transition to Capitalism in the South African Countryside," Review of African Political Economy, 41, September 1988, 60-72, especially 61-63 and Martin J. Murray, "The Triumph of Marxist Approaches in South African Social and Labour History," Journal of Asian and African Studies, XXIII, 1-2, 1988, 79-101, 84.

xi. For examples of historical methodology in the social sciences see Barrington Moore, Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966 and Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University, 1979. Moore identifies social class alliances as an independent variable which, depending on historical development and the specific combination of class alliances, leads to different political systems and paths of development. Skocpol uses comparative historical examples in her argument for inductive social science. See also Michael Burawoy, "Two Methods in Search of Science: Skocpol versus Trotsky," Theory and Society, 18, 1989, 759-80; Victoria E. Bonnell, "The Uses of Theory, Concepts and Comparison in Historical Sociology," Comparative Studies in History and Society, 22, 2, 1980, 156-173 and

Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," Comparative Studies in History and Society, 22, 2, 1980, 174-197. No Sizwe, One Azania, One Nation: The National Question in South Africa, London: Zed, 1979, 5-8 discusses the relevance of a historical approach to Marxism in South African studies.

xii. Ronald A. Kieve, "The Absolutist State: Base and Superstructure in the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism," Paper prepared for presentation at the Conference on State Change, University of Colorado, Boulder, May 25-27, 1988, p. 18, contrasts different methods of abstraction.

xiii. Similarly, in German Social Democracy 1905-1917: The Development of the Great Schism, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1955, Carl E. Schorske examines the "...internal dynamic[s]...and external political and economic pressures..." leading to the split in the German Social Democratic Party (vii). He notes that his method and scope was determined by his aim of explaining how a single sociopolitical movement in turn gave birth to two opposing political tendencies (viii). For a theoretical elaboration of a dialectical historical approach see Ronald A. Kieve, "The Hegelian Inversion: on the Possibility of a Marxist Dialectic," Science and Society, 47, 1, Spring 1983, 37-65, especially 43 and 58-60.

xiv. Neville Alexander, "Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism in Social Sciences in Southern Africa," paper delivered at the fifteenth annual congress of the Association for Sociology in Southern Africa at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 3 July 1984, in Neville Alexander, Sow the Wind: Contemporary Speeches, Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1985, 126-153.

xv. No Sizwe, One Azania, One Nation, 132-163. For a scientific debunking of racial ideology see Stephen Jay Gould, The Mismeasure of Man, New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1981.

xvi. On the construction of social identities in South Africa see Ian Goldin, Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa, London and New York: Longman, 1987; Ian Goldin, "The reconstitution of Coloured identity in the Western Cape," 156-181 and Maureen Swan, "Ideology in organised Indian politics, 1891-1948," 182-208, especially 183, both in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, eds., The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa, London and New York: Longman, 1987.

xvii. In this study the term "racial" refers to racial ideology, and the expressions "racial capitalism" and "racially-divided working class" denote the salience of racial ideology as a factor which interacts with the processes of social and economic development in such a way that it actually shapes and directs the pattern of development. While I use the term "black" to refer to all South Africans denied political rights on the basis of the government's population classification, I use the terms Africans, Indian and Coloured when it is necessary to denote the material and ideology reality of these castes.

xviii. I do not address other significant social issues, like women's rights, a problem which has been largely ignored in South African socialist theory and practice, possibly reflecting the absence of an autonomous women's rights movement there. See Cheryl Walker, Women and Resistance in South Africa, London: Onyx, 1982 and Lodge, Black Politics, 150-151.

xix. For studies of the Trotskyist tendency see Franz J. T. Lee, "Der Einfluss des Trotzkismus auf die Nationalen Befreiungsbewegungen in Sudafrica," Ph.D., Johan

Wolfgang Goethe-Universität zu Frankfurt am Main, 1970; Franz J. T. Lee, Der Einfluss des Marxismus auf die Nationalen Befreiungsbewegungen in Südafrika, Frankfurt am Main: Selbstverlag, 1971; Franz J. T. Lee, Südafrika vor der Revolution?, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1973; and Roy Gentle, "The NEUM in Historical Perspective," B.Soc.Sc. Hons., University of Cape Town, 1978. My thanks to Ronald Kieve for translating these texts and other documents cited and quoted in this dissertation from the German.

CHAPTER 1

APPROACHES TO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND WORKING CLASS DIVISION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The peculiarity of South Africa's political economy lies not only in its highly developed racial system but in the persistence and intensification of this system in the industrial era, despite expectations to the contrary.¹ The explanation of South Africa's peculiarly racial political economy has bedevilled social scientists and political activists throughout this century. The entrenched, seemingly unshakable, racial structure has often appeared insurmountable to those struggling to create a non-racial society. More pointedly for socialists, whose ultimate aim is to unite the proletariat against capitalism, are the implications of South Africa's rigidly divided labor force for working class mobilization across the color line and for socialist mobilization. This problem, together with disputes over the class nature and consciousness of South Africa's rural and migrant labor population, has plagued the South African socialist movement for decades. Various theses have attempted to explain the origin and political significance of South Africa's racially divided working class and of divided or segmented labor forces generally. This chapter discusses several approaches to the

development of South Africa's divided working class. It points to the limitations of functionalist approaches which attribute racial divisions primarily to the influence of particular groupings or classes whose objective existence and consciousness are defined by reference to their function in a division of labor.² It suggests instead that an historical analysis of South Africa's political economy can best explain how racial divisions were structured into the working class as capitalism developed. Chapter 2 then develops an historical analysis of racial capitalism and addresses the implications of racial capitalism for working class consciousness, arguing that political consciousness cannot be imputed directly from an abstract conception of class which focusses solely on the status of proletarianization, since working class consciousness in South Africa has been mediated by the color divide. This finding forms the basis for understanding the complexity of South Africa's social questions and for evaluating the programs, strategies and tactics which socialists have developed over the decades to address these issues.

South African socialists and South African political economy

Historically, South African socialists tended to view South Africa's racial system as an integral component of its

political economy. But, working from differing conceptions of capitalist development, they construed racial discrimination and the racially-divided working class variously as pre-industrial remnants or as the product of colonialism or imperialism or some combination thereof.

The colonialism of a special type thesis favored by South African Communists rests on a notion of articulating modes of production and draws on plural theory's conception of African society as a system of multiple dualisms in the political and economic spheres.³ Thus, two South African Communists, H. J. (Jack) Simons and Ray Alexander, stress that South Africa's racial order stems from the collision of imperialism and colonial remnants. The coercive polity, they argue, has entrenched pre-industrial social relations which economic development would otherwise have eroded.⁴ Colonialism of a special type, with its assumption of articulating modes of production has important implications for political strategy. If the political struggle is within a single, capitalist mode of production, this suggests a class struggle, presumably under working class hegemony. If the struggle is between modes of production, this suggests an anti-colonial struggle, but one in which the political or class nature remains unspecified. As long as the class nature of the anti-colonial struggle is ambiguous, the

political implications are utopian, harking a return to some unspecified pre-capitalist past. The cheap labor thesis lends itself to a two-stage process of social transformation based on a strategy of a multi-class, multi-racial alliance for national liberation as a preliminary stage before socialism.

South African Trotskyists draw on Trotsky's notion of combined and uneven development.⁵ Rapid imperialist penetration following the discovery of diamonds and gold, they maintained, lay the basis for compressing several stages of economic development while accentuating the country's uneven regional development. They rejected the colonial analogy and emphasized what they saw as British imperialism's role in refashioning pre-capitalist remnants to its ends and fragmenting the population with the color bar, the complex of laws enacted to divide black and white along myriad social, economic and political lines. M. N. Averbach, a leading voice of the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa (FIOSA), called the color bar "...the iron hoop which binds together the whole structure of imperialist-capitalist exploitation and oppression," distorting the country's class structure, dividing the working class and impeding a deracialized capitalism. It prevented the formation of an African peasantry and a stable

urban African proletariat, while ensuring a permanent supply of cheap migrant labor, keeping the majority of Africans socially atomized in a constant state of flux.⁶ This analysis led the FIOSA to conclude that the struggle against imperialism in South Africa must start with the struggle against the color bar; hence, FIOSA's support for the democratic movement as a means to weaken capitalism.⁷ The Workers' Party of South Africa (WPSA), the country's other Trotskyist grouping, similarly believed that imperialism was responsible for pre-industrial, and even feudal, remnants in the countryside. It saw the land question as South Africa's fundamental social problem: backwards social relations in the countryside retarded economic development, impeding the formation of a stable urban proletariat needed to lead a socialist movement. The Workers' Party believed that African landlessness was due to the lack of political rights; hence, the land question could be solved through a political program uniting black workers and peasants in a common democratic movement like that of the French Revolution. Such an alliance prefigured a future revolutionary movement of all workers and peasants against capitalism, following the tradition of Russia's October Revolution. Both strands of South African Trotskyism merged in their strategic support for a democratic movement as a

catalyst for social revolution.

Later, in the 1950s, W. P. Van Schoor of the Teachers' League of South Africa linked the consolidation of the color bar, as a form of the pre-existing policy of divide and rule, to South Africa's industrial revolution. The political economist Kenny Jordaan, whose work, in my view, has been unjustly neglected, demonstrated more precisely that the roots of the color bar which divided the working class lay, paradoxically, in the economic integration of the industrial period.⁸

Despite their differences, Communists and Trotskyists have looked at racial discrimination as integral to the South African political economy where capitalism either preserved or transformed pre-capitalist remnants. The social historian William MacMillan, who wrote during a period of rapid black and white proletarianization, likewise explained South Africa's racial society by reference to capitalist development, focussing on the land question.⁹ But liberal economists and historians have generally believed that racial discrimination impeded capitalist development, that, as Horwitz suggests, the polity "...moved against the market."¹⁰ Recently, Merle Lipton has argued a variation of this position: that while capitalist development may have been possible under a system of racial discrimination

imposed largely by the political influence of white labor, increasingly, apartheid constrains economic development. Lipton characterizes South Africa's reserves, bantustans and tied labor force as feudal-like, pre-capitalist remnants which, because they now impede economic development, give capitalists a stake in apartheid's erosion.¹¹

Functionalist approaches to racial discrimination

In the past few decades functionalist assumptions have permeated both radical and liberal explanations of working class racialism, seen in the diverse writings of Reich, Gordon and Edwards, Harold Wolpe and Merle Lipton.¹² These works focus on the class or group interests and the structures which sustain capitalism rather than approaching capitalism as a continuously changing and contradictory system.

Radical writers of the 1960s and '70s disagreed with the view that racial discrimination and capitalism were fundamentally incompatible and rejected explanations which attributed racial discrimination solely to ideology or to the prejudices of white workers. These writers approached racial discrimination in terms of its instrumentality for capital. In this view, forms of racialism operate to stabilize the capitalist system. For example, Reich, Gordon

and Edwards have argued that in the United States, labor force segmentation arose during the transition from competitive to monopoly capitalism at the turn of this century, a product both of the conscious efforts of capitalists to divide and control an increasingly militant working class and of systemic forces associated with the rise of monopolistic corporations. Labor market segmentation, Reich et al. conclude, is functional to capitalism, dividing the working class, limiting its aspirations and legitimizing social control through sexual and ethnic stereotypes.¹³

A similar perspective pervades the South African radical revisionist school, which was strongly influenced by the structuralist work of Althusser and Poulantzas, and which developed as a critique of plural theorists and neo-classical economists who argued that racial discrimination was irrational for capitalist growth.¹⁴ Revisionists countered that racial policies accorded quite comfortably with profit maximization. Much of this revisionist work explains South Africa's racial policies in terms of the common interests, competition and alliances of mining, farming and manufacturing capital. Thus, in his seminal article on "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power," Harold Wolpe argued that the migrant labor system used by monopoly

capitalist gold mining divided the South African working class by ensuring a supply of cheap African labor whose costs of social reproduction were subsidized by the reserve system.¹⁵

The cheap labor thesis posits a conservation-dissolution conception of capitalist development. It maintains that the development of the mining industry, from the 1870s to the 1930s, depended on preserving pre-capitalist modes of production to subsidize the reproductive costs of unskilled labor. In peripheral areas, Wolpe argues, social reproduction still takes place mainly in pre-capitalist modes, enabling capitalists to avoid paying the entire costs of socially necessary labor time. But while the early stage of capital accumulation depends on the preservation of pre-capitalist modes, capitalism simultaneously penetrates and breaks down these pre-capitalist economies, undermining their capacity to subsidize social reproduction. This process threatens the cheap labor system.¹⁶ Apartheid, Wolpe contends, is a means of extending and intensifying social control to hold down labor costs as the allegedly pre-capitalist production in the reserves is undermined by post-war industrial development.¹⁷

The theoretical problem of the cheap labor thesis concerns the transition from the articulation of two (or more) modes

of production to a capitalist mode of production. The argument does not specify under what conditions or when this transformation would take place, thus we are left with the problem of how to determine whether and when such a change will occur. In South Africa, this ambiguity is linked with Wolpe's assertion that African labor will never be completely separated from the means of production in the reserves, suggesting that South Africa is still divided into two modes of production.

This theoretical problem can be solved by an historical examination of whether, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, production in what came to be the reserves was already subordinate to the capitalist economy. As I hope to show in the next chapter, the socioeconomic basis of the pre-capitalist Khoisan and Bantu-speaking societies had by then been destroyed through trade and wars, and the reserve system and the repressive social conditions in the countryside were off-shoots of capitalist development, not pre-capitalist remnants. By the late nineteenth century African labor and production was subordinated to capitalist social relations, either through the sale of labor power or, despite the retention of traditional productive techniques, through commercial agriculture.

Marian Lacey offers another attempt to explain the racial system in terms of class strategies or policies. She attributes the racial division of labor directly to the bourgeoisie and the state, which she gives a prominent role as mediator and balancer of the interests of the capitalist sectors. Racism, she argues, was a state strategy to control and exploit the labor force. Fortuitously, Lacey believes, the color division accorded well with capital's need to divide the working class.¹⁸

Other revisionists explained the rigid racially divided working class as a function of the capitalist class struggle. Typical of this school is O'Meara's statement that "...the racial division of labour between skilled and unskilled was finally laid down by the intense class conflict [of] 1890-1922."¹⁹ Both Johnstone and Davies concur that the class conflict between white labor and capital laid the basis for the intense racialism and protectionism of white workers as well as for their subsequent cooptation into the state apparatus. Although Davies admits that few white workers ever sympathized with blacks before 1922, he nonetheless maintains that the smashing of the 1922 Rand Revolt was critical in determining that the polarization of class forces in the social formation proceeded, broadly speaking along racial lines....through the final subordination

of the "white labor movement" and the emergence of white wage earners as a fully supportive class for the form of state, the racial polarization of class forces was made much firmer.²⁰

In other words, the class alliance of white labor and capital and white labor's relationship to the state was the crucial determinant for the intensification of racial hierarchy. Here, as in Reich et al., the bourgeois policy of divide and rule is understood as a reaction to earlier working class activity. In explaining working class division by reference almost entirely to the bourgeoisie, this approach leaves the nature of the working class out of the equation. It overlooks the possibility that division and conflicts within the working class are not necessarily consciously imposed by another class but spring from its own systemically determined internal dynamics.

Lipton has likewise propounded a view of apartheid's functionality, not for the bourgeoisie, for whom, she believes, it is irrational, but for white labor. The very phenomenon which early South African socialists had put at center stage in their analysis of the racial system - dispossession from the land, poverty and the overbearing state - for Lipton are simply aspects of modernization. In other words, her conception of the racial system abstracts away many of the massive social dislocations which, in the

view of those who link apartheid and capitalism, underpin the racial system. The origins of apartheid are found instead, Lipton argues, in the laws and customs which the colonies and republics brought to the Union of South Africa in 1910.²¹ But apartheid's development and endurance as a set of policies and practices, she contends, rests on its economic instrumentality for white labor:

...white labour's support for social apartheid was sui generis, not contrived by capital. The reasons for this support were never purely ideological or 'irrational'; social apartheid was functional, securing for them status and privileged access to scarce urban resources, as well as gratifying their racial prejudices.²²

The above works view racial discrimination as a product of class struggle or plural competition. In this they share the common view that racial discrimination is a policy implemented by a coalition of forces rather than an aspect of the developmental process itself, and accordingly, immanent to capitalism, as many early socialists believed. Hence, even radicals like Davies suggest the possibility of deracialization through a change in the class alliance controlling the state which would modify the racial division of labor, curtail the traditional privileges of white labor and allow some upward mobility for blacks.²³

Alternative perspectives on working class division

Edna Bonacich's split labor market theory attempts to explain working class segmentation and ethnic antagonism in terms of proletarian competition engendered by the capitalist system. Her argument shifts the focus from the bourgeoisie back to the working class. Business, she argues, prefers the free competition of labor and tries to cut the price of labor irrespective of its ethnic origins.²⁴

The split labor market contains two or more groups of workers whose price of labor, which Bonacich defines as its total cost to employers, differs for the same work or would differ if the groups performed the same work. Split labor markets occur when sections of the labor forces differ in terms of the economic and political resources and motives which they bring to the labor relationship.

Initial price differentials of labor follow ethnic lines, Bonacich suggests, when the wage agreement is made in a national context, i.e., at the new labor population's point of national or ethnic origin rather than at the point of production, or when the resources that workers bring vary according to national or ethnic lines. This is particularly so when the groups have lived and developed separately before their common incorporation into the labor force. The ensuing ethnic struggles, she argues, mask the underlying

class nature of the conflict.²⁵

Ethnic struggles amongst workers reflect the uneven resources of the various groups in the labor pool and occur as higher-priced labor seeks to protect itself from potential competition and undercutting by a cheaper pool of labor through exclusion or caste systems. Exclusion movements prevent a split labor market by keeping cheap labor out of the employment area altogether, Bonacich argues, and points to Australia, where the Labour Party's white Australia policy represented a successful exclusionary movement in the first two decades of this century. By contrast, she defines castes as a type of labor aristocracy in which higher-priced labor is able to exclude cheaper labor from particular work. Because the different groups do different work, there appears to be a single labor market; but if the two groups performed the same tasks, their pay would be unequal.²⁶

Bonacich argues that apartheid was a movement from the early industrial caste system to exclusion of the African workforce. But here, her interpretation misses the heart of apartheid: while apartheid aimed at social and political exclusion, it was premised on the incorporation of Africans into the labor force as cheap, unskilled and predominantly migrant labor. In this sense, according to the terms of the

split-labor market theory, apartheid represented not a movement of exclusion but an intensification of the caste system within the labor market, a white reaction to the growing organizational strength of the African working class in the war years.²⁷

In her reorientation to the role of the working class in racial discrimination Bonacich avoids the tendency of many radical writers to idealize the proletariat by overlooking its contradictory nature under capitalism. Yet, while Bonacich describes the factors leading to the development of the split labor market, she does not explain how and why they arise. Her argument is static: she does not integrate these factors into an explanation of capitalist development. She fails to pose the problem of why working class competition follows pre-existing, historical plural cleavages just at the very historical moment, the transition to industrial capitalism, that the processes of proletarianization and urbanization should be breaking down plural cleavages and homogenizing the proletariat. As Selim Gool notes, the split labor market theory deals with the price of labor but, he emphasizes, its price is determined by the historical conditions in which it develops.²⁸ Hillel Ticktin explains the timing of this proletarian competition but, likewise, does not explain why this

competition followed the pre-existing black/white cleavage. Racial discrimination requires a labor force that is potentially homogenous in terms of skills and thus exchangeable across industry, Ticktin argues. This explains its entrenchment in South Africa precisely when unskilled black and white workers came into the labor market as potential competitors.²⁹ Ticktin rejects as instrumentalist the argument that apartheid is a system promoted by the capitalist class for cheap labor and high profits.³⁰ Instead, he argues, racial discrimination is a rational alternative to other forms of social control, like the welfare state, in world conditions where a declining capitalist class was forced to make concessions rather than lose its political economic hegemony. South Africa's white labor policy is derived from white labor politics of the first two decades of this century which aimed to prevent the competitive threat of black workers; the bourgeoisie adopted this policy for dividing the working class because of its own international weakness during a period of revolutionary working class upheaval.³¹ This political concession to white labor had economic ramifications: racial discrimination prevented the development of abstract labor, i.e., the social homogenization of labor needed to create and maintain a fluid, competitive and flexible workforce.

This runs counter to the drive for capitalist accumulation. Hence, the bourgeoisie faces a conflict between its political and economic interests in South Africa.³²

Like the structuralists Ticktin sees 1922-24 as the critical turning point which halted the development of a homogenous labor force. In principle, he maintains, black workers could have joined with whites before 1922. Had the bourgeoisie not entrenched racial discrimination after 1924, the tendency of capitalist development would have equalized and homogenized the work force, eroding distinctions based on color, an argument which had wide currency amongst the South African left in the 1930s when the effects of the Great Depression were sweeping poor whites into the cities.³³ But since 1924, Ticktin argues, part of the surplus-value produced by black labor has been diverted to white labor by conceding it some control over the labor process. This gives white labor a stake in the racial discrimination which typifies South African capitalism. Ticktin's assumption that the tendency towards the homogenization of labor would have driven white wages down to the level of black omits countervailing historical tendencies in South Africa which led to different wage rates.³⁴ There is no reason to assume that the wages of whites, a minority of the labor force, would have

necessarily fallen to the level of black wages. To the contrary, when unskilled Afrikaners joined the mining labor force in 1907, their wages were dragged upwards by the high rates of white craft workers. Chapter 2 aims at demonstrating that it was the skill hierarchy, not the color hierarchy, which was being eroded by industrial development. But Ticktin's assumption leads him to conclude that the racial pattern of proletarian competition was largely accidental, an outcome of the decision of the capitalist class to choose color rather than tribal divisions as the main line of working class cleavage.³⁵

Ticktin's conceptualization abstracts capitalism from the social conditions in which it was born and nurtured, and which gave it its very character. The point is precisely that the bourgeoisie could not just as well have selected another line of social cleavage to exploit. As I hope to show in chapter 2, the racial pattern pitting white against black was already interwoven into the developmental process by 1922 to such an extent that deracialization as a policy was not a feasible option. In other words, the bourgeoisie's "rational choice" was imposed on it by the racial capitalist system.

Labor in capitalism has a contradictory, dichotomized nature: while there is indeed a tendency towards the

homogenization of labor and the development of abstract labor, this conflicts with its existence as concrete labor.³⁶ Industrialization tends to homogenize labor, breaking down skill differences through deskilling, promoting task mobility within and across industries and geographic mobility within and between countries. Yet, while capitalism subordinates pre-existing forms it does not necessarily transform them in a manner which homogenizes them. Capitalism's combined and uneven development means that at any particular time labor around the world has myriad concrete forms, fragmented not only by productivity and skills, but by the social effects of color, nationality and gender. These social differences, in turn, are reflected in the development of working class consciousness. Labor's dual nature constitutes its dilemma under capitalism; this is why workers of all nations cannot unite under capitalist social relations.

An historical analysis of South African political economy

The need for an historical analysis of capitalism is suggested by Gool, who notes that in South Africa increasing proletarianization has not been matched by a corresponding tendency towards working class homogenization as a cultural and political collectivity. The analysis of South Africa's

racially divided working class, he maintains, must center on what Marks and Rathbone have called the "faultlines of race." It must do so, however, not on a liberal, but rather on a materialist basis.

For Gool, the failure of the revisionist school to examine the pre-industrial social formation prevents them from adequately explaining why racial cleavages were so open to manipulation. The racial polarization of labor-capital struggles in the early twentieth century, he argues, can only be understood in the context of earlier social struggles associated with colonization and dispossession. In underestimating the impact of these historical experiences on the development of political consciousness, the revisionist school has tended to underplay the impact and longevity of racial consciousness in the working class.³⁷

The explanation of South Africa's racially-divided working class and the problem of socialist mobilization demands an historical analysis of how capitalist development in South Africa shaped the working class, both in its internal dynamics and its relationship with capital. Much radical revisionist literature has tended to analyze South African society by breaking it down into its component parts. Thus, where it addresses the working class, it has focussed either

on the relationship of African labor and capitalism, in the case of the cheap labor thesis, or on the relationship of white labor and capitalism. Consequently, it has tended to bypass analysis of the working class as a whole, with its divisions and internal contradictions, and in a sense, actually replicates the fragmentation of the working class.

Influential radical and liberal works have explained racial discrimination as a class strategy or policy. But South Africa's peculiarly racial development and its rigidly-divided working class cannot be explained solely by reference to either capitalist or working class strategies; such explanations omit the social structure in which classes and social aspirations develop. Rather they must be understood through an approach which explains class struggle and class strategies as aspects of capitalist development. The analytical question is not whether racialism is functional or dysfunctional to capitalism - both polarities assume a model of a self-regulating, self-perpetuating system - but the open-ended question of the nature of the relationship between the racially-divided working class and capitalist system.

1* A combined version of chapters 1 and 2 was presented to the Yale University Southern African Research Program seminar, New Haven, Connecticut, September 12, 1990. I wish to thank the members of the seminar for their insightful comments.

. A number of writers stress the long-term incompatibility of apartheid and capitalism. Ralph Horwitz, in Expand or Explode: Apartheid's Threat to South African Industry, Cape Town: Business Bookman, [1957?], makes a plea for progressive, economic integration instead of apartheid and disintegration. In The Political Economy of South Africa, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1967, Horwitz writes, p. 427: "Economic rationality urges the polity forward beyond its ideology." D. Hobart Houghton, The South African Economy, Cape Town, London and New York: Oxford University, 1973, p. 254, hopes to ensure economic growth through a form of government in which "racial groups" can live equitably and harmoniously. More recently, Merle Lipton, Capitalism and Apartheid: South Africa, 1910-1984, Aldershot, Hants.: Gower/M. T. Smith, 1985, argues for the future incompatibility of continued economic growth and apartheid.

2. The Simonses write in Class and Colour, 617: "A social class in Marxist theory comes into existence when persons who perform the same function in the production process become aware of their common interests and unite to promote them against the opposing class." This functionalist definition posits a direct relationship between class and consciousness. Similarly, Robert H. Davies, Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa 1900-1960: An Historical Materialist Analysis of Class Formation and Class Relations, Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1979, p. 7, writes: "It is the objective place of a class in the social division of labour which establishes its objective class interests and thereby marks out of the boundaries of its class practices." See 7ff and compare also, Howard Simson, "The Myth of the White Working Class in South Africa," The African Review, 4, 2, 1974, 189-203. By contrast, this study defines class as a social category whose members share a common position in the process or organization of economic production, which typically includes a common relationship to the means of production. This definition differs from the above definitions in stressing social relations to the means of production and other social categories rather than function. See also Maurice Dobb, Studies in the Development of Capitalism, New York: International, 1963, 1-32.

3. The conceptual similarity between colonialism of a special type and plural theory is particularly clear in Pierre Van den Berghe, South Africa: A Study in Conflict, Berkeley: University of California, 1970, chapter 8 and especially p. 96, where he writes: "Politically, South Africa is an antiquated White-settlers' democracy, ruling as a colonial power over 80 per cent of the population...the South African brand of tyranny is that of an obsolete, nineteenth-century colonial state. The same dual character of the South African polity is reflected in the economy.

The country is at once an underdeveloped colonial area and an industrial power. As a late-comer in the industrial race, South Africa presents most of the characteristics of European nineteenth-century capitalism."

4. H. J. and R. E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969, especially 10 and 610.

5. Unevenness characterizes human social development generally, but this becomes accentuated under capitalism because of the system's potential for rapid growth in response to specific investment opportunities. Combined development refers to the compressing of different stages of capitalist development. For example, industrial development in economically backwards or newly developing countries often outpaces that in earlier industrialized countries, like Britain, because it is financed by massive investment with access to the latest techniques. I use the terms combined and uneven development both in relation to the rapid development of South Africa's gold mining industry in a pre-industrial society and in relation to the new social relations, notably proletarianization, which was spawned by this British imperialist-financed industrialization. Leon Trotsky elaborates these concepts and processes in The History of the Russian Revolution, Vol. I., London: Pluto, 1977, 27ff. See also Alexander Gerschenkron, Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective: A Book of Essays, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1962.

6. A. Mon [M. N. Averbach], "The Colour Bar and the National Struggle for Full Democratic Rights," Workers' Voice, Theoretical Supplement, 1, 2, November 1944, 7-10; 9.

7. Mon, "The Colour Bar," 10.

8. W. P. van Schoor, "The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa," [Teachers' League of South Africa, A. J. Abrahamse Memorial Lecture, 1951], Cumberwood, South Africa: APDUSA, 1986, especially pp. 17 and 20; K. A. Jordaan, "A Critique of Mr. W. P. van Schoor's 'The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa,'" Discussion, 1, 3, June 1951, 13-42, especially 28ff. Jordaan is mentioned as a contributor to intellectual discussions of the 1950s by Christopher Saunders, The Making of the South African Past: Major Historians on Race and Class, Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1988, 136 and by Bill Nasson, who subsumes him under the Unity Movement tradition, in "The Unity Movement: Its Legacy in Historical Consciousness," Radical History Review, 46/7, 1990, 189-211, 206. See also, Baruch Hirson, "A Question of Class: The Writings of Kenneth A. Jordaan," Searchlight South Africa, 2, February 1989, 21-35 a posthumous discussion of Jordaan's work. A study of Jordaan's theoretical contributions to the analysis of South African political economy, particularly the land question, remains to be done.

9. W. M. MacMillan, The South African Agrarian Problem and its Historical Development, Johannesburg: Council of Education,

Witwatersrand, 1919; Hugh MacMillan and Shula Marks, eds., Africa and Empire: W. M. MacMillan, Historian and Social Critic, London: University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1989.

10. Horwitz, Political Economy of South Africa, 311.

11. Merle Lipton, Capitalism and Apartheid, 2.

12. Michael Reich, David M. Gordon and Richard C. Edwards, "A Theory of Labor Market Segmentation," in David M. Gordon, ed., Problems in Political Economy, Lexington, MA: Heath, 1971, 108-113. For a comparative survey of approaches to the divided working class in the United States see "The historical transformation of labour: an overview," in David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards and Michael Reich, Segmented work, divided workers: the historical transformation of labor in the United States, Cambridge, London and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982, 1-17. Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid," Economy and Society, 1, 4, 1972, 425-456. Merle Lipton, Capitalism and Apartheid.

13. Reich, Gordon and Edwards, "A Theory of Labor Market Segmentation," 109-110.

14. See Louis Althusser, For Marx, New York: Vintage, 1969 and Nicos Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Classes, London: New Left Books, 1973.

15. Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power." See also Martin Legassick, "South Africa: Forced Labor, Industrialisation, and Racial Differentiation," in Richard Harris, ed., The Political Economy of Africa, Cambridge, Mass: Schenkman, 1975, 229-270 and Robert Davies and David Kaplan, "Capitalist Development and the Evolution of Racial Policy in South Africa," Tarikh, 6, 2, 1979, 46-62.

16. Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power," 432.

17. Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power," 450.

18. Marian Lacey, Working for Boroko: the Origins of a Coercive Labour System in South Africa, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1981, 7-8. Roseinness Phahle questions Lacey's position that racism was instrumentalist only for the bourgeoisie and not for white labor in "Review of Working for Boroko," Race and Class, XXIV, 2, 1982, 198-200.

19. Dan O'Meara, "White Trade Unionism, Political Power and Afrikaner Nationalism," in Eddie Webster, ed., Essays in Southern African Labour History, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1978, 164-180, 169; emphasis in the original.

20. Robert Davies, "The 1922 Strike on the Rand: White Labor and the Political Economy of South Africa," in Peter Gutkind, R. Cohen and J. Copans, eds., African Labour History, Beverly Hills and London: Sage, 1978, 80-108, 105. Frederick A. Johnstone, Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South

Africa, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976 argues that white labor protectionism was not solely a question of prejudice, but a response to its "structural insecurity" in the capitalist system in the face of competition from cheap, black labor.

21. Lipton, Capitalism and Apartheid, 16-17.

22. Lipton, Capitalism and Apartheid, 221.

23. Davies, Capital, State and White Labour, 365.

24. Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: the Split Labor Market," American Sociological Review, 37, October 1972, 547-559, 552, n. 5.

25. Bonacich, "Ethnic Antagonism," 553.

26. Bonacich, "Ethnic Antagonism," quotes 555.

27. Bonacich, "Ethnic Antagonism," 556-557.

28. Selim Gool, Mining Capitalism and Black Labour in the Early Industrial Period in South Africa: A Critique of the New Historiography, Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1983, 18.

29. Hillel Ticktin, "The Political Economy of Racial Discrimination and the Class Character of South Africa," unpublished ms., Glasgow University: Centre for Socialist Theory and Movements, July 1989, 9.

30. Ticktin, "Political Economy of Racial Discrimination," 2-3.

31. Ticktin, "Political Economy of Racial Discrimination," 15.

32. Compare with Jordaan's argument in "A Critique of van Schoor," 29ff.

33. Ticktin, "Political Economy of Racial Discrimination," 22-30.

34. Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, vol. 1, edited by Frederick Engels, New York: International, 1967, 559-563.

35. Ticktin, "Political Economy of Racial Discrimination," 9.

36. A theoretical basis for the notions of abstract and concrete labor is found in Marx's discussion of the two-fold character of labor in commodities. Abstract labor would be the quality of labor producing the value which makes a commodity exchangeable with others; concrete labor would be that quality of labor producing use-value. Concrete labor is the form by which abstract labor is realized. See Capital, vol. 1, especially 41-46 and 58.

37. Gool, Mining Capitalism, 18.

CHAPTER 2

RACIAL CAPITALISM AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN WORKING CLASS

Capital needs other races to exploit territories where the white man cannot work. It must be able to mobilise world labour power without restriction in order to utilise all productive forces of the globe--up to the limits imposed by a system of producing surplus value. This labour power, however, is in most cases rigidly bound by the traditional pre-capitalist organisation of production. It must first be 'set free' in order to be enrolled in the active army of capital. The emancipation of labour power from primitive social conditions and its absorption by the capitalist wage system is one of the indispensable historical bases of capitalism.¹

The history of European dealings with African labour is of a constant struggle to resolve the paradox of actual shortage in presence of the deceptive appearance of plenty.²

Very early in her career, South Africa came to be regarded, not as a supplier of goods, but as a supplier of labour, first to feed a predatory pre-capitalist subsistence economy, and then the mines, capitalist agriculture and industry.³

A. The development of a racially-divided working class

This chapter examines how racial divisions and patterns

were structured into the South African political economy with the development of capitalism. It seeks to demonstrate that the roots of the racially-divided working class lay in the racial pattern in which proletarianization and urbanization unfolded. It traces the different trajectories of black and white proletarianization and shows how these were carried over into the process of urbanization and the creation of a labor force. It then assesses the impact of this racial division on working class consciousness.

The origins and development of racial capitalism

The clue to understanding the peculiarly racial form of capitalist development in South Africa lies in the extreme rapidity with which British imperialist penetration followed European colonial conquest and settlement there. The historical timing of imperialist penetration and the pre-existing conditions on which it developed, I suggest, are critical in understanding the way that black/white divisions were structured into the proletariat. The combined nature of South African development lay in the extremely rapid transition from a pre-industrial economy slowly developing around a commercial market in the nineteenth century to an industrial society financed by British investment capital. The unevenness of its development lay in the fact that intensive industrialization in some areas was coupled with

and premised upon backwardness in the countryside.⁴ Imperialist-fuelled industrialization followed a period of military struggle, dispossession and slavery, one characterized by marked regional variation, and with racial supremacy as its main ideological pillar.⁵ In turn, the rapid development of the gold mines gave way to more military struggles. British capital "discovered" South Africa and its mineral wealth before a significant proletariat existed; thus, it faced the critical problem of securing a labor force. Both the state and capitalist class made various attempts to induce and coerce labor, finally settling on what appeared to be a policy of halting proletarianization by combining the colonial reserve system with the use of migrant labor.⁶ The unevenness of capitalist penetration and proletarianization was manifested regionally, temporally and in the method, degree and brutality of proletarianization. In South Africa, capital has obtained labor through slavery, importation of indentured and contract labor, indirect economic dispossession, and direct forced dispossession through the colonial Wars of Dispossession and the imperialist Anglo-Boer War. In these aspects, the creation of a labor force followed both a national (Afrikaner/English/African) and color pattern, and the racial divisions premised on white supremacy arose out of this particular pattern of combined

and uneven development in South Africa.

Although the South African proletariat is largely a product of the rapid industrial development sparked by the mineral revolution, its antecedents can be traced back to the colonial era. In the Cape, for instance, the slave tradition of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries contributed to the modern racial order, by fostering a coincidence between color and class. The racial hierarchy engendered by slavery protected poor whites from the competition of free black labor, albeit in a period where proletarians of any color were a minority of the Cape labor force. The modern South African proletariat without doubt arose from the pores of the pre-existing social order.⁷

The problem of labor scarcity bedevilled the colonial administration, landed bourgeoisie and Boer pastoralists of the region throughout the nineteenth century. MacMillan notes that an official Report of 1876 asks the Government of the Cape Colony

...to survey mankind from China to Peru, in the hope of creating a class of cheap labourers who will thankfully accept the position of helots and not be troubled with the inconvenient ambition of bettering their condition.⁸

The mineral discoveries in the last quarter of the nineteenth century gave a new intensity to capital's need for labor. The content of the labor question evolved as

industrial capitalism developed. Initially, both in commercial agricultural production and in mining, the labor question concerned supply, the intense labor demands of the mining industry necessitating the rapid creation of a class whose production was subordinate to the capitalist economy. As the supply problem began to ease in the early twentieth century, the labor question shifted to a struggle between capitalists and producers over the content of the labor relationship, leading to an intensification in the control and exploitation of producers. Finally, in the 1930s and '40s, but particularly after the Second World War, the labor question shifted to control of the movement of the labor force, especially the pace of proletarianization and urbanization. The waves of anti-African legislation in the twentieth century reflected these struggles.

Imperialist industrial development and the land question

British imperialism's quest for diamonds and gold set off a chain of reactions throughout South Africa. Imperialism's point of entry into the South African political economy was the mining industry on the Witwatersrand, but its search for labor and its impact on social relations was felt throughout the country, indeed, throughout the Southern African region. The mineral revolution precipitated an agrarian revolution, as

agricultural production, due to the needs of rapidly expanding urban and industrial areas on the Witwatersrand, came under the domination of the commercial market. This had dramatic social consequences.

In 1919 MacMillan described the shock of the old social relations, forcefully confronted with the new, comparing the transformations of rural South Africa with the social changes wrought by the industrial revolution in eighteenth-century Britain. Before the mineral revolution, he argued, agricultural production was predominantly subsistence, despite the existence of the commercial market. But "...the trouble to-day," he wrote,

...arises from the necessity imposed upon the rural population, by the natural growth of the population, together with the great development of competition since the advent of mining, of passing in the course of one generation or less, from the life and farming methods handed down from the semi-nomadic eighteenth century to the stress and strain of the twentieth.⁹

In its broadest outlines, the penetration of capitalism into the countryside affected the rural population, both black and white, similarly. Black and white producers alike were pressured to produce for the market in order to retain their hold on the land, and small cultivators lost their access to land in the face of intense competition and land speculation. Therein the similarity stopped. As the

following sections show, the rapid development of agrarian capitalism in the imperialist period followed a distinctly racial pattern in its interaction with the pre-existing colonial conquest society.

"Poor whites" and the development of a white proletariat

MacMillan's pamphlet, The South African Agrarian Problem and its Historical Development, addressed the "poor white problem," a problem which first appeared in the 1890s as the effect of the mineral revolution began to be felt in the countryside, and which MacMillan traced back to the land question. The eventual social and political response to this group reflected the prevailing racial hierarchy and the solidarity of whites who, imbued with racial ideology, insisted on remaining socially distinct from the black majority. But as well, poor whites became a social issue because the development of this group was an unplanned, unexpected consequence of capitalist development in the countryside. Poor whites represented an emergent proletarian group for whose labor there was little demand at the turn of the century. In the countryside, landowners preferred the more productive African tenant farmers to Afrikaner share-croppers known as bywoners; in towns and on mines employers preferred cheaper black labor to unskilled white. The unplanned nature of Afrikaner

proletarianization, occurring largely through the workings of the market, although accelerated by the Anglo-Boer War, contrasted sharply with the coercive social engineering used to create a black proletariat and carried profound implications for the development of political consciousness and mobilization of these two sections of the South African proletariat.

The points of penetration for the new social relations which led to Afrikaner proletarianization were the contradictions of the old social structure. Thus, in new conditions premised on production for profit, the Boer inheritance custom of subdividing land to the point where it became unusable for commercial production led to widespread landlessness, on the one hand, and facilitated the rise of a new class whose existence was premised on consolidation of landholdings for commercial production, on the other. MacMillan underlines the difficulty of small Boer cultivators in adapting to new commercial and financial conditions. This reflected the fact that finance capital in South Africa penetrated into agricultural production before productive techniques had expanded sufficiently, leading to intense speculation in land, rapid turnover in landownership and landlessness.¹⁰ Once the expanding landowners had ousted the pastoral bywoners, they often found that traditional agricultural techniques and practices were not

productive enough to pay the return on their investment in land, and they, in turn, lost their land. As MacMillan

observed:

...farms became valuable for profit as well as for subsistence. Merely human relationships are giving way, as they did in Europe in the 16th century, to a cash nexus.¹¹

New socioeconomic relationships, accelerated by the development of the railroad, closed off the traditional livelihoods of Afrikaner bywoners, like surveying, fencing and farming. Drought and disease made the position of sharecroppers, stockowners and labour tenants increasingly precarious. By the 1890s, Keegan argues, sharp class divisions had replaced previous distinctions of status and wealth amongst Afrikaners, with the poorest becoming a lumpenproletariat.¹²

The Anglo-Boer War intensified Boer vulnerability to capitalist penetration, boosting Afrikaner national identity against British Imperialism. Afrikaner concentration camp survivors were typically unable to start over in their old rural occupations, and they drifted to unemployment in towns.¹³ After the war, the rural sector came more firmly into the capitalist orbit which stimulated the growth of a market in land. Both agricultural production and property relations came under the domination of finance capital. The post-war boom was accompanied by overtrading,

overspeculation, and overextension of mercantile credit, and the depression of 1904-8, with its fall in agricultural prices, saw an increase in rural indebtedness and land alienation, especially to foreign owners. These years brought increasing poverty to rural Afrikaners, pushing many into towns.¹⁴

Black cultivators and black proletarianization in the countryside

Capitalism's penetration into the countryside and its primitive accumulation, the separation of producers from their means of production on the land, affected blacks very differently, albeit with marked regional variations and class stratification.¹⁵ The Western Cape wheat farms and vineyards had a tradition of slave labor dating from the seventeenth century, and Natal sugar plantations imported indentured Indian labor from the 1860s. In the Eastern Cape, servile and migrant labor worked the wool and ostrich farms; elsewhere in the Cape, small-scale cultivators were pushed into migrant mine labor.¹⁶

In the interior of the country, blacks labored on capitalist farms as squatters and tenants. While bywoners rapidly lost their hold on the land, African cultivators gripped the soil tenaciously. In the late nineteenth century this posed no immediate threat to capitalist farmers and landowners on the

Southern Highveld; indeed their economic prosperity depended on black producers who were not completely proletarianized. The productive capacity of small cultivators who retained their means of production in the form of tools and cattle, were experienced at commercial cultivation, and who, unlike bywoners, used the labor of women and children family members, was important for the typically undercapitalized farms, and landowners relied heavily on sharecropping and tenant labor for commercial production. Black cultivators were not always as devastated by the Anglo-Boer War as Afrikaners, and the post-war years sometimes found them in a position of relative economic strength vis-a-vis bywoners and landowners, reflected in various economic arrangements between blacks and whites and even in white dependence on black producers, as the more productive black tenants outcompeted whites. Consequently, landowners often preferred black tenants and sharecroppers. Labor-intensive farming methods typically remained more profitable than capital-intensive ones well into the twentieth century.¹⁷ Did the temporary economic vitality and tenacity of black producers vis-a-vis bywoners mean that economic development in the countryside could have moved along a deracialized path? On the contrary, capitalist landowners and farmers had to bring these independent black producers under their economic dominion, and the growth of capitalist agriculture

was marked by an intensification of labor repressive methods over black producers. Greenberg has identified these bondage conditions with an extended transitional phase to agrarian capitalism, dating the final coming of mature capitalism in the late 1960s, with the advent of mechanization and demise of labor tenancy.¹⁸ But repressive labor conditions in the countryside were clearly a result, not of retarded development, but of the accelerated growth of the rural commercial market in this century. Landowners' consequent intensified need to compete on the market demanded greater control of labor and its output. Like the mining industry, capitalist farmers devised strategies to extract surplus value from producers who still retained some access to the means of production.

In the early years of the commercial market in agriculture, following the mineral revolution, the primary labor problem for capitalist landowners concerned extracting labor and produce from the largely self-sufficient black squatters. A wave of protest greeted independent African farming communities which had settled on white farms after the alienation of their land. These producers were brought under control through various laws giving farm owners and employers extreme powers over black tenants and workers.¹⁹ After the first decade of the twentieth century, as the economic pressure on landowners to produce competitively

intensified, the labor question became a struggle over the content of the labor relationships, of increasing the degree of exploitation of tenant labor. Both the Master and Servants Ordinance of 1904 and the 1913 Land Act were formulated with this goal. By defining black tenants as servants rather than contractual wage laborers, the 1904 Master and Servants Ordinance reduced their legal protection against landlords. The 1913 Land Act represented the culmination of a wave of anti-black agitation and pushed black agricultural producers into ever more servile and exploitative relationships with landowners. Its two-fold purpose, Jordaan has pointed out, was: "...[t]o arrest the growth of an African peasantry and transform cultivators into labourers."²⁰ It did this by prohibiting land sales to blacks outside reserved areas and increasing the control and exploitation of black tenants. By outlawing sharecropping and squatting, the Land Act reduced the economic independence of African cultivators, making labor service the only legal means by which black tenants could pay rent. This effectively increased the amount of labor time which black tenants had to provide landlords.²¹ Even before it was enforced, the 1913 Land Act provided landowners with the pretext for increasing labor service and forcing many blacks off their farms. Often, the more prosperous, stock-owning African tenants were hit hardest by

the mass evictions of 1913, poignantly described by the writer Sol Plaatje.²² These evictions pushed more Africans into the reserves. The 1913 Land Act was followed by the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 which aimed to reduce congestion in the reserves by allocating them more land, although this was never done. By the 1930s, poverty in the reserves and other rural areas had reached such proportions that Africans were flooding into towns, and the 1937 Native Laws Amendment Act tightened controls on African movement into towns.²³ But war-time industrial development in towns continued to attract impoverished rural blacks, who settled in squatter camps, and after 1948 the National Party passed yet more laws against black labor mobility and urbanization. Yet these laws never fully halted the exodus of blacks from the countryside or completely stripped those who remained of their meager means of production. Even in the 1940s, capitalist agriculture depended on a labor-intensive productive system in which producers retained some means of production. Only when capitalist investment in agriculture shot up dramatically following the Second World War did agrarian capitalism's long-term reliance on labor-intensive production disappear, as the tractor displaced tenants' ploughing oxen.²⁴ By the mid-50s, Jordaan observed, labour tenancy was an anachronism due to the spread of modern farming techniques backed by state policy. Although

the practice continued in some parts of the country it had already vanished from the more mechanized Cape Province.²⁵ Morris has sought to explain the development of agrarian capitalism in South Africa by reference to the Prussian path where the transition to rural capitalism was accomplished as elements of the traditional land-owning class, pulled into the orbit of Western Europe's commercial grain market, used labor repressive methods to force a relatively independent peasantry into commercial production, creating what looked like a "second serfdom." On this basis he suggests that, like Prussia, capitalism in South Africa penetrated the rural sector from above through the agency of capitalist farmers and landowners who used repressive measures to slowly proletarianize the small producers who remained on the land. This contrasts with other, freer paths to agrarian capitalism based on the competition of numerous, small producers in the absence of large landowners.²⁶ The Prussian analogy has its limits. In Prussia, the critical element was the expansion of merchant capital, which, while pulling production into the capitalist orbit, was not on its own able to dissolve pre-existing feudal relations and effect changes in authority patterns.²⁷ In South Africa, the long existence of merchant capital had slowly, over centuries, pulled various agrarian sectors into the world market, on the basis of servile labor forms like

slavery. Nonetheless, elements of the pastoral economy and subsistence production remained even in the nineteenth-century. But, unlike Prussia, imperialist penetration after the mineral discoveries revolutionized social relations in the countryside, leading to the concentration and centralization of agricultural production. It completely transformed the relationship of black producers to other social classes and to their means of production. The pockets of prosperous black cultivators which existed early in the century were too negligible to contest the political and economic strength of white landowners. This germ of an African peasantry was effectively eliminated by the 1913 Land Act, leaving no intermediary black class to counter the weight of landowners, backed by the state, against masses of impoverished sharecroppers and labor tenants. In these circumstances, class struggle in the countryside was played out largely along color lines. While Prussian cultivators were tied to their means of production, Africans were deprived of theirs. Sometimes, they were tied to particular farms through the pass system, unable to leave their place of work without authorization. At other times they were forced into labor reserves or fled to the cities. This was hardly a second serfdom, but a rapid, brutal process of creating a dependent wage labor force and a reserve army of labor.

Keegan has argued that Morris' use of the Prussian analogy does not take into account the specificities of South Africa's land question. In contrast to Morris' attempts to conceptualize capitalist development in the countryside in terms of scientific, discernable laws of development, Keegan rejects any notion that South Africa can be understood by reference to systemic laws of capitalist development. He suggests that white domination in the agrarian sector reflected far more the interests of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie than those of industrial and finance capital. The success of this petty bourgeoisie in promoting its own agenda was not an outcome of any structural developmental process, he argues, but rather "...the result of countless individual assertions of a powerful social ideal," assisted by a powerful state.²⁸ Sharecropping, in this view, was a compromise between whites with land and blacks with productive resources, a bridge to a white dominated rural capitalism. The transition from sharecropping to labor tenancy reflected the long-standing opposition to any degree of black economic independence. It was, he argues, a rational solution to problems of labor supervision where blacks still retained some means of production and labored on isolated farms, although its advantages declined with mechanization.²⁹

That a developmental process is complex, as Keegan's

detailed study clearly demonstrates, does not in any way imply that it does not follow an inner logic pushing it in a particular direction. Compare Keegan's picture of myriad seemingly accidental but coincidental changes with Marx's argument that accidental changes become transformed into changes that occur according to patterns open to scientific analysis: "Effects, in their turn, become causes, and the varying accidents of the whole process, which always reproduces its own conditions, take on the form of periodicity."³⁰ Keegan omits the evolving structural framework in which changes occur. Thus, his use of the term "compromise" suggests a level of equality between bargaining parties which was clearly lacking between black and white even when producers possessed their means of production. And while Keegan observes that blacks lacked "alternative access to land" he does not incorporate this structural inequality into his analysis. Yet it is precisely the acceleration of this structural inequality as the working of finance capital in the countryside concentrated landholdings in fewer and fewer hands which forced black cultivators to accept increasingly unfavorable and repressive conditions. The pace and duration of these intertwined processes of proletarianization and industrialization in the countryside reflect both the tempo of urban industrialization which pulled the rural areas and black resistance to

proletarianization. The overwhelming success of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union in rural areas in the late 1920s and '30s, for example, indicates the scale of black resistance to proletarianization. Nonetheless, these social movements were unable to halt this long-term tendency as South African agriculture became increasingly industrialized and centralized in response to the industrial demands of post-war South Africa.

The creation of a migrant proletariat

It is a paradox that any discussion of the labor question in South African industry must begin with the land question: the historically recent dispossession of Africans from their land and the development of the reserve system. This paradox, however, demonstrates the essential unity of the South African political economy, despite its apparent fragmentation. Industrial capitalism's need for labor entailed a transformation in Africans' relationship to the land.³¹

The mining industry faced a two-fold labor problem: to secure a massive unskilled labor force and a small stratum of skilled workers. The first problem characterized all colonial or peripheral areas where capitalist relations had not yet developed sufficiently to separate most producers from their means of production. Colonizers and imperialists

confronted independent producers who stubbornly fought all attempts to strip them of their means of production. In such conditions, "[t]he law of the supply and demand of labour falls to pieces."³²

Within South Africa, most of the migrant labor force for the gold mines came from the Cape, and the difficulty of obtaining unskilled mining labor persisted throughout the decade following the Anglo-Boer War due to the capacity of small-scale African producers to intensify their productive efforts. Colin Bundy has sought to demonstrate that a black farming class had developed in the Eastern Cape before the mineral revolution, but was decimated by the mining industry's need for cheap labor. But Jack Lewis, pointing to the class contradictions of African society prior to imperialist penetration, has indicated that such a farming class comprised only a small minority of African cultivators well before the advent of gold mining. By 1861, significant stratification in the reserves meant that the majority were extremely vulnerable to economic fluctuations, although as late as the 1880s most rural cultivators preferred to superexploit themselves rather than sell their labor-power to the mines. Initially, blacks only went to the mines as a last resort and on a temporary basis, returning to the land during planting season to plant the next year's crops.³³ A combination of economic and political processes began to

separate the bulk of the population from their means of subsistence on the land. In the Orange Free State and Transvaal, wars against the Basutos and Zulus in the 1870s brought these peoples into the capitalist system. Their

complaint was of land hunger, Jordaan noted:

As a result of the wars between the Free State Boers and Basutos, the latter were reduced to landlessness and forced to go out to work. From no other territories did they go out in greater numbers. Over 6,500 passes were issued for Basutos in 1874. Many could come home for only short periods and then go out again. Not enough could be grown to feed them, to pay their fines and taxes, buy ploughs, saddles, blankets or pay for imported merchandize. Their small allotments made pastoral farming well-nigh impossible. "Our greatest want is space, room to live in," complained a Basuto chief. "At present our cattle herds have to stand all day huddled close together round the gardens; there is no room for the stock - no open pasturage."³⁴

MacMillan reports that Africans were forced into the new mining labor system through destruction of their food supplies, recounting an item in the Cape Times of 1897 that "...labour had been very 'short' after the rebellion, but a patrol had lately destroyed some crops and natives were now 'coming in better.'"³⁵

As elsewhere in Africa, the law was used to great effect. From the 1870s, a series of laws curtailed African squatting

on white farms, so that they had to sell increasing amounts of their labor-power to survive. In the Cape, as throughout the continent, the introduction of private property accelerated the process of proletarianization. Most Africans could not afford to buy property, and many became landless as a small stratum competed for a restricted quantity of land. Individual land tenure, Jordaan writes, "...was welcomed by the [Cape] colonists as it promised to end 'the give and take protective system of tribal life'."³⁶ The government instituted various forms of taxation to draw Africans into the labor force. But at the turn of the century black cultivators could still pay taxes through their agricultural production, despite widespread poverty. Hence, the Chamber of Mines, with government assistance, began using a variety of recruiting strategies with direct coercion to obtain masses of unskilled labor.³⁷ Slowly and spasmodically, over the next decades, they developed a stable, though costly, system of labor recruitment. Up to the early twentieth century, when the reserves were still economically viable enough to provide bare subsistence, the cheap wages offered by mines were not sufficient to draw labor from the reserves. It is precisely in those years when production in the reserves was viable that the mines had to rely heavily on foreign labor. The industry's dependence on foreign contract labor from

Southern Africa and China was particularly acute during the first decade of the twentieth century, before the supply of black South African labor had stabilized. The migrant labor system only became regularized in South Africa when the reserves were no longer able to provide for African subsistence. It became most effective only when economic pressures - depression and a series of agricultural disasters - compelled Africans in the reserves to seek wage labor on a regular basis.³⁸

The cheap labor thesis posits that a pre-capitalist mode of production subsidized the early mining industry, but by the late nineteenth century African labor and production was subordinated to capitalist social relations, either through the sale of labor power or, despite the retention of traditional productive techniques, through commercial agriculture. The socioeconomic basis of the pre-capitalist Khoisan and Bantu-speaking societies, based on pastoralism and shifting cultivation, was destroyed by the late nineteenth century through two interrelated processes: first, the gradual extension of merchant capital through trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; second, the expansion of the frontier through the century-long series of wars between British and Boers, moving north and east, and Africans. As the amount of land available to Africans diminished, new types of social relations

developed. Some Africans turned to commercial commodity production. But the shortage of land and the actual process of conquest forced many into various forms of labor service on white farms.³⁹ As Jordaan writes:
With the expansion of Boer territory, his labour needs increased. After every war, indeed, the Boers willingly took the impoverished tribesmen as farm hands.
The land wars were also labour wars.⁴⁰

The reserve system and the repressive social conditions in the countryside were off-shoots of capitalist development. The reserve system, in which certain areas of land were set aside for African occupation, came from British colonial policy, pioneered in the Cape Colony location system. Following the unification of South Africa in 1910, the Native Land Act of 1913 attempted to promote a uniform policy for the reserves.⁴¹ MacMillan explains that the Cape colonial government "...systematically planted its Africans in 'reserves'," but spent little money to develop them, so that by the early twentieth century poverty was pushing Africans into the migrant labor system.⁴² The system was, in Jordaan's view "...an administrative measure for exploitative ends," whose purpose was to procure a steady supply of black labor as needed.⁴³ The reserves rapidly became labor reservoirs for the mines and capitalist farms. The bondage elements in the South African countryside are not pre-capitalist remnants. Pass laws restricting freedom

of movement, which dated from the eighteenth century, were reformulated this century to ensure that most Africans remained in the countryside working as cheap migrant labor on farms or mines; in effect, a captive reserve labor market.⁴⁴ Unlike Europe's feudal period in which peasants were tied to specific plots of land and their surplus production expropriated directly by the manorial lord, South Africa's reserve dwellers are allotted such tiny plots that they must seek work elsewhere to survive. The value they produce is expropriated indirectly through the sale of their labor-power on the market.⁴⁵

While state policy promoted capitalist interests, it led to stagnation in the reserves. MacMillan has explained that the "one man, one lot" principle made famous by the Glen Grey Act of 1894, premised on the liberal ideal of individual land tenure and formulated with the hope of providing rural subsistence for as many Africans as possible, was in fact economically unviable. The limitations on the size of land holdings prevented the development of a real African farming class in the reserves and at the same time led to loss of landholdings and landlessness for many.⁴⁶ These contradictions manifested themselves first in the Cape, where the reserve system had begun, and which, after 1908 was the main area of mine labor recruitment in South Africa.⁴⁷ By 1925 the process of

proletarianization was in many places virtually complete in essence, if not in appearance. At Herschel, MacMillan

baldly notes,

...local production came nowhere near maintaining the people....Their chief export by far was labour; the final estimate being that 75 per cent of the adult male population was absent at work outside the district at least six months of the year.⁴⁸

The entrenchment of a racial hierarchy in industry

The mining industry's two-tier division of labor reflected its dual needs for large numbers of unskilled workers and skilled craft workers. Initially, as is well known, color and skills merged, reflected in a large wage differential: cheap unskilled black labor and expensive skilled white labor. The roots of this particular combination of color and function in the labor hierarchy lay in the different socioeconomic conditions which determined the value of black and white labor-power, like social expectations, the cost of living and of training workers, the proportion of the population in productive labor, their retention of any independent means of production, and labor productivity, and in the collision of these very different conditions and levels of labor in the market.⁴⁹

The roots of cheap African labor date from the late

nineteenth century when wages supplemented agricultural production rather than the reverse: African men initially turned to temporary migrant labor to pay fixed expenses, like taxes and marriage fees, while women farmed. The contingent nature of wage labor for Africans before the turn of the century operated to prevent the normal workings of supply and demand of labor through the wage system. Because of the continuous supply of temporary workers ready to accept low pay the overall scarcity of permanent workers did not drive wages up.⁵⁰ But starvation-level poverty, due to excessive fragmentation of landholdings, overgrazing and overpopulation - in short, land scarcity - undermined the productive capacity of the reserves, and began driving black men into low-paid migrant labor for longer periods of time. Now, "...the stress under which people lived set the standard and kept it as near bare subsistence level as it was possible to be." As Africans became more economically dependent on the wage, going to the mines in larger numbers, their real wages fell. In three decades the basic wage rate paid to African mineworkers barely rose.⁵¹ Skilled labor, by comparison, existed in very different conditions. In the early days of the mining industry, before the turn of the century, skilled labor from overseas had to be induced to perform dangerous work in a foreign country, and they commanded wages far higher than unskilled

indigenous labor precisely because their skills were a scarce commodity in South Africa. Moreover, white wages were established under conditions of complete proletarianization and urbanization and had to cover the costs of white workers' social reproduction in cities.⁵² As Bonacich has sketched, the coincidence of color and skill gave the initial appearance that black and white wages were set in a single, national wage market. But even in the early industrial period, two wage markets were operating along color lines, although the vast majority of both groups were now unskilled. Wages of white unskilled labor were set by reference to the very high wages of white skilled workers. Although after the First World War unskilled Afrikaners took over posts which had formerly been the domain of skilled British workers or "Uitlanders," white wages showed an upward stickiness, indicating the persistence of racial ideology in determining wages, and accentuated by the war-time shortage of white labor.⁵³ Urban black proletarians, by contrast, did not receive wages equivalent to those of comparably skilled white proletarians. Rather, their wage levels were set by the larger numbers of blacks migrating back and forth between the mines and reserves. Different social standards of what was acceptable for whites and blacks lay behind this dual wage market; black workers could be forced to live in

conditions considered socially unacceptable for whites.⁵⁴

The fact that black labor was cheaper than comparably skilled white labor at all levels - including unskilled Afrikaner labor - meant that the racial hierarchy was not merely a result of the law of supply and demand as it applied to skills. Wages no longer reflected the skill differential which existed in mining's formative years. This color-based, dual wage market reinforced the pre-existing racial division of labor and racial antagonism on the mines, as it meant that mineowners preferred cheaper, unskilled black labor to unskilled whites. The vigorous debate and social pressure to hire unskilled Afrikaners to solve the "poor white problem" intensified after the Anglo-Boer war, yet the Chamber of Mines insisted that only cheaper black workers perform unskilled labor. In 1903, not surprisingly, the Transvaal Labour Commission refused to use unskilled white labor due to its expense.⁵⁵ Moreover, although some black mineworkers had acquired skills, protectionist white unions excluded blacks in order to restrict the potential pool of skilled labor, thereby maintaining their high wage-rates. This suggests the salience of racial ideology, both for the direct interests of capital and white labor, and as a mechanism operating to preserve a particular class system.

In the craft era, white labor privileges had corresponded to

skills and color. But in the industrial era, the dependency on craft skills lessened as the mining labor process was restructured, and the skilled/unskilled division of labor, which had originally corresponded to color, began breaking down. Yet the racial division of labor, stemming from pre-existing racialism of a colonial conquest society, and charged by the initial racial characteristics of the skilled/unskilled division of labor, continued, transformed, into the industrial period.

Working class competition in the industrial era

The racial domination of the pre-industrial colonial period became racial competition in the industrial capitalist era, a competition suppressed by segregation and protectionism.⁵⁶ This transformation was not only ideological, but reflected a change in the nature of social relations in the two historical periods. In the pre-industrial period, expropriation of surplus production was often through direct, coercive means, although in the more developed Cape, expropriation took place through the market. Slavery, and indentured, apprentice and servile proletarian labor were typical forms of black labor. In the industrial period, by contrast, the intense competition and protectionism of white labor vis-a-vis blacks was due to their potential equivalence in the labor market.

On the land, several sets of competitive relationships emerged, first, between white bywoners and black tenants; second, between white landowners and capitalist farmers, on the one hand, and the few prosperous black cultivators who might have aspired to capitalist farming, on the other. Both classes of whites, landowners and bywoners, shared a common concern to restrict the development of a black farming class. Black cultivators were caught in the middle between an increasingly exploitative landowning class, both foreign and South African, and populist agitation by white cultivators in an economically tenuous position. The mid-1890s saw the rise of a militant Boer populism with a strong anti-black and anti-foreign landowner content, clamoring for state intervention in white agriculture, and waves of racial ideology peaked again around 1908-13 and in the mid-1920s.⁵⁷ These waves of anti-black protest, which Keegan links to periods of economic prosperity, show a rough correspondence with white mining protests.

In cities, racial competition emerged as blacks and whites swarmed into the ranks of an unskilled proletariat. As

MacMillan archly commented,
For years it had been settled policy to persuade
or induce these neglected and untrained
tribesmen to leave their kraals and take
to wage-earning. The wheel had come
full circle. The supply of Native
labour was now a flood, adding immensely
to the difficulty of placing the

whites.⁵⁸

In the mines, the industrial development which led to the deskilling of production, together with the growing experience of black workers laid the basis for competition between black and white. This competition intensified during World War I, which saw a massive rise in the proportion of Afrikaners on the mines, as the English left. As long as production was based on craft skills, unskilled black labor could not be substituted for, and hence was not a threat to, skilled white craft. But once unskilled Afrikaners became the majority of white workers, they were vulnerable to replacement by a similarly skilled but far cheaper African workforce.⁵⁹ Afrikaner protests against this

The industrial era saw the entrenchment of the racial system, not deracialization. Capitalism developed on the pre-existing racially-hierarchical social relations and intensified them to such a degree that the color line became a principal means of exploitation. The process and pattern of proletarianization followed color lines. Once this framework was established, class interests played themselves out along racial lines, reinforced by racial ideology. In the countryside, the tiny layer of prosperous black cultivators was wiped out by the 1913 Land Act; unlike other African countries, an intermediary black farming class never

developed as a buffer between white imperialist and landowning interests and the masses of black producers and workers. Within the critical mining sector, the skilled/unskilled division of labor became fluid but the white/black hierarchy never lessened. Mining capital, for its part, sought to replace skilled and semi-skilled whites with cheaper black labor, but it never tried, in the early industrial period, to equalize black and white wages and showed no interest in moving blacks into supervisory roles after the job color bar was invalidated in 1923.⁶⁰ While white labor and capital fought over the terms of the color bar, their common interest lay in its retention. In the virtual absence of an intermediary black class, imperialist interests aligned with the white working class and petty bourgeoisie to control the recently conquered and recently proletarianized black majority.

B. Political consciousness in a racially-divided working class

An understanding of working class consciousness begins from an approach which examines the conditions of working class development rather than an abstract approach which assumes that consciousness flows directly from class or any other social category. In South Africa, working class consciousness has been bifurcated, like the class itself,

reflecting the contrasting and conflictual histories of black and white workers. In their collective action, the demands of black and white workers were both economic. But to the extent that the demands of black workers were for equality as workers, their demands and aspirations could conceivably embrace all workers and indicated a potential to coincide with a vision of working class unity. By contrast, white workers showed a different type of proletarian consciousness which sought to retain its privileges and control of working conditions at the expense of black workers. In essence their demands could only prevent the integration of blacks into the working class on an equal basis.

The beginnings of collective black working class protest

The first wave of black collective working class action swept the country in the 'teens, moving from Cape Town to Natal to the Rand as far north as current-day Namibia, from the docks to the sugar plantations to the mines and industries. Each protest and set of demands fed and reinforced the next. In all their demands black workers indicated their consciousness as workers seeking to sell their labor power freely and competitively: higher wages, equal treatment, an elimination of the job color bar on the mines, the abolition of pass laws, and of migrant and

indentured labor. In Natal, Indian workers struck in 1913 against renewal of their indentured labor contracts, provoking a movement which culminated in Gandhi's passive resistance movement against discriminatory laws. That same year, the first strike of black mineworkers followed the white miners' strike; and in 1915-16 and 1918 protesting black mineworkers used industrial action and boycotts. In 1919, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) organized a strike of black dockworkers, and Johannesburg municipal workers or "bucket boys" struck after the example of a successful strike by white power workers. The same year the African National Congress (ANC) and ICU inaugurated a campaign to abolish pass laws and migrant labor.⁶¹ Historically, migrant labor protests have been at the crossroads of urban proletariat and rural protest. The first two major waves of collective black working class protest in South Africa culminated, at the end of both World Wars, in massive strikes by migrant labor at their point of production in the mines. Both strikes were ruthlessly squashed by the government, which in turn initiated a spate of anti-African legislation to restrict the organization and movement of black labor. The background to migrant labor strikes was the always growing economic distress in the reserves. But the strikes were directly precipitated by the high level of urban trade union organization and protest

which preceded them. These episodes raise strategic questions about the class nature of migrant labor and its relationship to the urban proletariat and rural majority.⁶² In the first decade of the twentieth century migrant workers protested their conditions of labor largely on an individual basis, through desertion. By the second decade, economic deterioration in the reserves meant that for most families, the mining wage was the main source of income rather than a supplement to rural production.⁶³ The transformation of protest from individual to collective forms in the 'teens coincided with the stabilization of the supply of unskilled migrant labor from 1911-12, indicating that participation in migrant labor was no longer a question of individual choice, but a social necessity.⁶⁴ A series of protests by black mineworkers in the late 'teens reflected the fact that despite significant wage gains for white miners during the post-war inflationary boom, black wages fell in real terms. These protests culminated in 1920 when black mineworkers' struck against falling real wages and the job color bar. Although this strike has received far less attention by historians - and socialists of that period - than the Rand Revolt two years later, it paralyzed the industry, lasting longer and involving more workers than even the 1946 African Mineworkers strike. The demands of black workers indicated their desire to integrate themselves as equals in the mining

workforce. In marked contrast, white mineworkers opposed the strikers, the all-white South African Mine Workers' Union (SAMWU) calling its members to scab and defend the color bar, demonstrating its desire to maintain its own privileges and power vis-a-vis black workers, an action which could only impede unity of the entire class.⁶⁵ With the strike's defeat, the state initiated a two-pronged strategy to control black protest: laws like the Native Urban Areas Bill aimed at black labor and programs like the Joint Councils, geared to coopt the black petty bourgeoisie. Mining companies began to discuss plans for modifying the job color bar for semi-skilled blacks as a means to defuse the frustrations of this potential leadership strata.⁶⁶

With the relative dormancy of urban black working class organization in the late 1920s, an outcome of the repressive laws and tightening labor controls under the Pact Government, the focus of black struggle shifted to the countryside. The ICU represented a movement whose strongest support came from labor tenants in regions of rapid rural transformation in the Eastern Cape, Eastern Transvaal, and parts of Natal and Orange Free State to prevent their further proletarianization. Its support was weakest among those rural dwellers whose cash income was not derived mainly from the land, such as reserve-dwellers engaged in migrant and contract labor.⁶⁷ The ICU's decline has been

explained in terms of the dilemmas of a leadership which never resolved the problem of organizational structure, intensified by poor administration.⁶⁸ But the underlying reason for its decline as a rural social movement was the erosion of its social base as a class. As a movement which in part was against rural proletarianization, it was unable to halt the social consequences of capitalist penetration in the countryside.

Paradoxically, while the ICU began as an urban working class movement, it never moved to link urban and rural proletarian struggles. Instead, it was the ANC which linked town and country in the late 1920s. The ANC's organization of rural farmworkers in the Western Cape demonstrated the extreme difficulty of organizing black labor on white farms, but it also indicated the potential for mobilizing urban and rural proletarians around common working class demands.

Initially, rural proletarian protest in the Western Cape had occurred, like the early stages of migrant labor protest, largely on an individual level. But by the late 1920s, like migrant mineworkers the decade before, farmworkers began expressing their grievances collectively. The ANC organized farmworkers on the basis of their daily needs and problems, using militant collective tactics favored by urban workers, like marches, demonstrations, pass-burnings and strikes. Through this work, the Western Cape ANC became a largely

working class organization which transcended the African-Coloured divide.⁶⁹

Urban black working class protest revived during the war years, culminating at the war's end in a massive strike of African mineworkers. That it was migrant labor which brought this period of working class upheavals to a close suggests a structural relationship between black struggles in town and country. Like its predecessor in 1920, the 1946 African Mineworkers' Strike was preceded by a number of years of intense working class organization and protest. Between the two strikes, the urban African population trebled, indicating the increasing difficulty of survival in the countryside, with close to one quarter of the African population living in towns by the mid-'40s. The growing proportion of African women in towns indicated that this was a permanent population. African urban employment increased dramatically, too, with more and more workers in manufacturing and secondary industry, as opposed to mining. Although migrant labor constituted the entire black mining workforce, in 1946, by then it was a small and declining portion of the African workforce overall. Despite this, the 1946 strike was, after the 1920 strike, South Africa's largest in terms of sheer numbers.⁷⁰

The 1946 strike reflected the long-term pressure of reserve poverty, intensified under the impact of government

intervention in the late 1930s, and catalyzed by war-time industrial protest which defied government laws against African strikes. Due to continual proletarianization in the reserves, migrant labor continued to increase from the 1920s through the mid-'40s, even though real wages fell. By 1946, roughly 30% of the reserve population was landless; a similar proportion had no cattle, and over 60% had a handful or less. Some migrant workers saw their long-term interests in the countryside; earnings from migrant labor was the means to accumulate land and stock as they grew older. But the most militant mineworkers were from the lowest, landless class in the reserves, those with few options to accumulate land and for whom migrant labor was a permanent way of life.⁷¹ In fighting as a collective at the point of production for control over the terms and conditions of labor, subjectively they demonstrated a self-consciousness as a type of proletariat. The first generation of black mineworker strikes marked a development in social consciousness as protest moved from the individual to the collective level in recognition that wage labor was no longer a supplement but a necessity for survival. Likewise, in 1946 the demands of black mineworkers indicated their desire to stabilize their positions as workers and to end the migrant labor system.⁷² That these men fought for security as workers, does not negate the possibility that

their families in the reserves, also struggling for security, would fight to retain any meager holdings of land or cattle, or that a strata in the reserves did aspire to peasant status.

The class stratification in the reserves, and the effective proletarianization of the majority, mean that struggles against the government-initiated Rehabilitation Scheme and other government interventions cannot be seen simply as a movement of essentially conservative aspirant peasants as some South African Trotskyists believed. The Rehabilitation Scheme aimed to increase rural stratification by creating a permanent class of completely proletarianized migrant labor based in the reserves and simultaneously fostering a tiny African farming class. In protesting these measures, Africans were united first and foremost in a political struggle for self-control and self-determination. Future research may indicate that the content of self-determination reflected the various class interests and aspirations of the reserve population. For some, probably a minority, it meant being able to develop into a landed, stock-owning peasantry. For others, it meant being able to live where they chose as permanent urban workers with opportunity for job mobility.

From white labor to white working class

The turbulent white labor struggles of the first two

decades of this century marked a significant transformation in white labor's political consciousness. A manifestation of the pressure of industrialization on the early mining racial hierarchy, and sparked by cost-cutting efforts to increase the supervisory workload of white miners to reduce the total number of whites employed, the strikes were white labor's defence of privileges derived from its color and its former monopoly of scarce skills. During these decades the mining production process was continually reorganized; industrialization led to deskilling of productive tasks which diminished the skill differential between black and white. Industrial development, in other words, threatened the traditional hierarchy of skills. As Johnstone and Davies have demonstrated, skilled white labor was, as a consequence, increasingly vulnerable to the threat of competition by unskilled and semi-skilled labor, both black and white.⁷³

Yet these strikes cannot be understood through the paradigm of class struggle between white labor and capital suggested by the revisionist school. Although many of the demands for workers' rights and safe job conditions raised by white labor in its 1913 Workers' Charter coincided with the demands of workers around the world, white workers showed a striking lack of consciousness about the working class as a whole.⁷⁴ While this series of protests began as a

protectionist move against the decline of privileges, they transformed white labor into a self-conscious political grouping whose position in the labor hierarchy was premised on the subordination and control of black labor.

The 1907 strike and the 1922 Rand Revolt marked two turning points in the development of white labor and its struggle to protect its privileged positions in the mining labor hierarchy. The political impact of the 1907 strike was considerable, although virtually unrecognized.⁷⁵ At one level, the strike marked the decline of craft unions and consequently of that strata of workers whose privileged position in the labor hierarchy was based on their monopoly of scarce skills. More importantly, it marked a turning point in the nature of white labor and its relationship to black labor. Before 1907 white supervision of largely unskilled blacks rested in part on their position as skilled workers, as well as on the racial ideology whose roots lay in the colonial conquest period and which prevented any equality between black and white. 1907 marked the formal recognition of a process in which, hand in hand with industrialization on the mines, the privileged position of whites in the labor force was based less and less on skills and increasingly on their supervision of black labor in the industrial capitalist system.

In 1907 skilled craft workers, still formally dominant in

the labor hierarchy, went on strike against the mining companies' efforts to increase their supervisory workloads. Management broke the strike by replacing skilled white workers with cheaper, unskilled Afrikaners, brought onto the mines to supervise blacks. The substitution of unskilled for skilled whites was possible first, because deskilling and restructuring was eliminating the need for skilled craft workers, and second, because skilled and semi-skilled black workers, classified and paid as unskilled black labor, could take over many of the functions previously done by skilled whites.⁷⁶ Until 1907 unskilled Afrikaner labor had been used only on a short-term, experimental basis. This strike marked their incorporation into the mining labor force on a permanent basis.

Before 1907, skilled English-speaking labor performed supervisory tasks, and English and Afrikaner stood in potential competition to each other as skilled and unskilled labor in a period of deskilling. White unity, paradoxically, emerged out of their earlier competition. The strike's defeat signified the formation of a white working class, in which color overrode distinctions of skills and nationality, where English and Afrikaner, skilled and unskilled, were united in their common supervision of -or potential to supervise - black workers. The strike marks an important step in the structuring of white

supremacy into the industrial capitalist system, as white labor, on the basis of color, became a representative of mining capital at the point of production, with a stake in the control of black labor. The 1911 Mines and Works Act formalized this relationship by restricting skilled labor to whites.

Industrialization on the mines had a contradictory effect on white labor. Deskilling opened up opportunities for unskilled 'poor white' Afrikaners. But it also meant that those whites were potentially open to competition from cheaper black labor capable of performing equivalent tasks. The 1907 strike intensified the belief of many mineowners that the industry should begin to modify the strict racial hierarchy allowing cheaper black labor to perform semi-skilled and skilled work, thereby replacing more costly white workers. Although social pressure had heretofore prevented any decisive move in this direction after World War One, in response to serious cost constraints, the Chamber of Mines began moving to modify the color bar.⁷⁷ The next few years saw intense protest by white workers against the threat of black competition, and unskilled white labor relied heavily on the color bar to protect its privileges as their potential for replacement by black labor increased.⁷⁸

The 1922 Rand Revolt

The 1920 black mineworkers' strike and the 1922 Rand Revolt by white workers were the culmination of a period of challenge to capital's control of labor in South Africa during and after World War One. The South African government was confronted by a series of upheavals to which it responded brutally: the 1920 black mineworkers' strike, the Bulhoek Massacre of 1921, the Bondelswart Revolt and finally, the 1922 Rand Revolt.⁷⁹ These nationwide uprisings and the state's violent response must be viewed against the backdrop of working class challenge to capitalist hegemony after the war around the world; the ripples of the Russian Revolution were felt as far away as South Africa by both imperialist interests and organized labor. Both capitalists and Communists of the time likened the Rand Revolt to a Bolshevik-inspired Revolt.⁸⁰

As with the 1920 black mineworkers' strike, economic crisis, which affected blacks and whites differentially, was the backdrop to the Rand Revolt. A post-war inflationary boom was followed by global recession which hit South African farming and gold mining. The world market price for South African agricultural commodities fell, and between 1920 and 1922 the premium gold price dropped significantly. The social composition of white mine labor changed dramatically between 1907 and 1918: deskilling, which allowed the

replacement of craft labor with cheaper, unskilled Afrikaners, coincided with the departure of English workers for the war, and by the war's end, 80% of the underground white labor force were South African-born Afrikaners. During and immediately following the war, white labor had been in a strong bargaining position due to the exodus of the English: the government met the 1913-14 strike with restraint, wages were rising, and in 1914 the Chamber of Mines recognized the South African Industrial Federation (SAIF), marking the entry of industrial as opposed to craft-based trade unionism on the mines. In 1918 the Chamber of Mines conceded to a Status Quo Agreement retaining the prevailing ratio of white to black mine labor and ceasing the replacement of whites by blacks in specified jobs.⁸¹ But as the recession deepened, the Chamber of Mines sought to cut its labor costs by abrogating the Status Quo Agreement and replacing whites with cheaper black workers, catalyzing the strike.⁸² The 1922 strike, MacMillan points out, was the first major white mining strike after the entry of unskilled Afrikaners into the mines, and accordingly, the first mining strike led by the SAIF, rather than the craft unions which had until then remained aloof from the industrial unions. Just as craft workers had felt the threat of semi-skilled blacks and unskilled whites in 1907, so these newly proletarianized

workers, "...fresh from the farms," felt their vulnerability to replacement by cheap black labor if the color bar were modified, and they were the most militant.⁸³

The protest moved swiftly from strike to armed resistance and a general strike call to government retaliation. Strike leaders had urged moderation and the strikers were militarily unprepared for the government's reaction. To Communist S. P. Bunting, writing shortly after the strike, the "...strikers never had a chance to get so far as a revolution."⁸⁴ The greatest obstacle, in his view, was discord across the color line. But even amongst whites, with the exception of mineworkers, he saw little solidarity between English and Afrikaner workers, despite their common interests against black competition. "[T]he general strike call," Bunting reported, "was received scabbily."⁸⁵

Contrary to the hypothesis that the racially-divided working class was epiphenomenal to the struggle of white labor and capital, this chapter suggests that the racial division of labor in town and countryside developed long before the 1922 Rand Revolt, and in fact, laid the conditions for the Revolt. It had its roots in the rapid proletarianization sparked by the mineral revolution which followed a differential pattern for blacks and whites and which developed out of the social relations of the pre-existing colonial conquest society. The subsequent polarization of

class forces and of working class competition along racial lines reflected this underlying racial pattern of development in the industrial and finance capitalist era.

The Rand Revolt appears first and foremost as an anti-black struggle, veering towards a direct, armed confrontation with the South African state only insofar as the mining companies, backed up by the government, refused for reasons of profit to protect white labor against black competition.⁸⁶ While there was an issue of working class control vis-a-vis capital motivating the Revolt, the type of control which white labor sought was one based on the subordination of black labor. As one sympathetic account argued, the key issue was "...whether free European labour should be displaced by the extension of Negro slave labour on contract at the unfettered discretion of the Chamber of Mines."⁸⁷

Far from being class conscious, white labor's consciousness was of its particular interests as a stratum against those of workers as a class. It sought to protect itself from what it perceived to be the main threat to its livelihood: cheap and increasingly skilled black workers and the mining bosses who wished to employ them to undercut white privileges. Its goal was to prevent working class unity.

Although its form of struggle was the strike against production, the intent of those strikes was not to challenge

capital as an opposing class but to protect white labor against black competition. Indeed, the only banner seen at demonstrations on the Rand bore the notorious slogan,

"Workers of the World Fight and Unite for a White S.A."⁸⁸

The South African Mine Workers' Union (SAMWU), adamantly refused to accept black members, and both the SAMWU and the SAIF made it clear that their struggle was "... 'to protect the White race', 'to maintain a White standard of living', and 'to preserve White South Africa'."⁸⁹ Ultimately, this attitude led to violent assaults on blacks.⁹⁰

Not surprisingly, MacMillan rejected the idea that the Revolt converged with socialist objectives. Far from being forward-looking, he maintained, the Rand Revolt looked back to an idealized past of Afrikaner self-sufficiency before

British domination:

The Rand strike of 1922 was to outward appearance, a rising of the extreme Left. Two or three of the more obscure but vocal leaders were known as 'Communists', and there was certainly much talk of a Republic - ostensibly a Workers' Republic. There is no doubt, however, that the Republic dreamt of by the men who actually took up arms was the Boer Republic of former times.⁹¹

Such "Republican" ideology would, indeed, appeal to men under the threat of replacement by lower-paid workers. The earlier Republics were societies where, before the commercial economy undermined their position on the land,

Afrikaner bywoners had a stable and independent means of subsistence. The imagery evoked by MacMillan coincides with the anti-black, anti-"Uitlander" ideology of Afrikaner proletariats who had only recently been forced to leave their rural origins, and is born out by the strong rural support for the strikers:

...the call to preserve a White South Africa swept through the rural areas where the strikers, not vainly as it proved, had hoped for moral and material support. Food and promises of further aid began flowing in from the Platteland. Ons Vaderland reported that the strikers were receiving cattle from the farmers as outright gifts or as purchases on deferred terms. Shopkeepers were allowing them generous credit.⁹²

If the black mineworkers' strike of 1920 demonstrated the urban-rural link which developed out of the migrant labor system, the Rand Revolt showed the strong solidarity between newly proletarianized Afrikaners and their kin back on the farms. Many Afrikaners working in towns still aspired to return to the countryside, using their wages to reinvest in the land. In marked contrast to Africans, whose women remained in the countryside while men went to towns, Afrikaner families often sent their daughters to work in towns to forestall proletarianization of the entire family.⁹³

The defeat of the armed uprising inaugurated the process of

white labor's formal incorporation into the racial capitalist state, a process supported by a number of accommodationist unions. This system operated through the 1930s, to be intensified in the post-war years. The South African Trades Union Council replaced the South African Industrial Federation which had fallen apart after the Rand Revolt. White trade unions were severely restricted. In the key mining industry, mine owners assumed far greater control over production, no longer recognizing shaft and shop stewards. Strikes and direct shop floor involvement in negotiations were prohibited. The 1918 job reservation agreement was annulled, and in 1923 the color bar regulations of the Mines and Works Act were declared invalid. Through the introduction of new technology, whites were restricted to supervisory duties. The Chamber of Mines reduced white wages, increased the ratio of black to white workers, and replaced whites with skilled and semi-skilled blacks at black wage rates. White wages were reduced by 25-50%; by 1925 black wages were driven down to close to pre-1920 rates. While these laws curtailed white labor militancy, government reconstruction efforts stabilized white labor through housing and employment schemes.⁹⁴ The years 1922-24 are often seen as a turning point in the political consciousness of white workers. The Simons see 1922 as a transition point between the early class

consciousness of white workers and their subsequent degeneration into color consciousness. For Davies, who seemingly equates militancy with progressive class consciousness, 1922 marked the "...disorganisation of white wage earners as an independent and militant social force," allowing the entrenchment of a racial hierarchy in the mining industry.⁹⁵

Such conclusions assume that political consciousness and practice are determined by function in the division of labor. In this view, as long as white labor was in autonomous trade unions, it remained working class. Hence, trade union activity, especially militant trade unionism, is equated mechanically with class consciousness. But, revisionist writers have argued, once white workers moved into state structures, they became white wage earners, part of a new petty bourgeoisie which included workers, supervisors and other intermediary strata.⁹⁶ This same functionalism permeated South African socialist thought in the 'teens, '20s and again in the '30s: Communists saw white labor as the proletarian vanguard because of its early history of trade union organization and its monopoly of skilled and industrial positions.

In fact, white labor's racial consciousness displays striking continuity. The strikes of 1907, 1913-14, and 1922 and the racial policies of the Pact years are the twists and

turns in the protectionist road taken by white labor to maintain its privileges vis-a-vis black workers. The protectionism of white craft workers in 1907 was transformed in subsequent years into the protectionism of white industrial workers threatened by the potential of competition from cheaper labor of equivalent skills. Racial ideology was a thread connecting the craft and industrial periods.

The failure of white labor's militant use of the strike weapon led to a tactical change. White labor turned to electoral politics and accommodation with the bourgeois state. The 1924 Pact electoral victory marked the formal incorporation of white labor representatives into state structures so that their interests became formally tied to the preservation of the capitalist state. Practically, there could be no harking back to the Boer Republics. The development policies pursued by the state after 1924 had tremendous significance in structuring white supremacy into state-sponsored industrial development.

Although white labor's movement to control the subordination of black labor for its own interests and on its own terms, was violently crushed, the movement for white labor protectionism was not destroyed. Communists who, like Bunting, believed that the "...1922 experience will induce white organised labour to repent of its previous rejection

of communist advice and to respond to such native advances [as wage increases]," were quite off the mark. Instead of working class unity, racialism increased in the next few years, laying the basis for the class alliance of white workers and landowners which formed the social basis of the Pact Government.⁹⁷

Analysis of South Africa's class structure and class relationships which begins with abstract definitions leads to a conclusion about the nature of the working class that is contradicted by historical evidence. In order to explain white labor's racist practice and its lack of anticipated class consciousness, much revisionist literature of the 1970s has even sought to redefine white labor as a means of demonstrating that it is not part of the working class.⁹⁸ But political consciousness and practice cannot be explained solely by reference to either social class or function in the division of labor. The effect of such functionalist assumptions is to deflect analysis from the contradictory nature of the working class in capitalist society, and specifically, the racist nature of white labor in South Africa. An historical analysis of South Africa's class structure as part of the broader processes of capitalist development lays the basis for an explanation of intra-working class conflicts in the early twentieth century and the development of working class consciousness divided along

color lines.

C. Socialist mobilization and the racially-divided working class

South Africa shows in microcosm the difficulty of working class unity under capitalist social relations. This chapter has suggested that political consciousness and social aspirations are critical intervening variables between objective conditions and political practice which cannot be inferred in a direct manner from objective conditions or political conflict. Both black and white workers organized on economic grounds to gain control over their working conditions. Yet despite their common proletarianized condition and consequent vulnerability vis-a-vis capital, the contradictions within South Africa's working class manifested themselves in a black working class consciousness seeking equality as sellers of labor-power and a white labor consciousness seeking to maintain its privileges by keeping the working class divided through the control of black labor. In the countryside, black struggles were aimed at self-determination, whose precise content reflected the class aspirations of the stratified reserve population. In this context, the early Communist appeal for working class unity across the color line was utterly utopian. The call for black workers to join white labor

showed not just an ethnocentric bias, but a functionalist view that white labor was more politically advanced merely by virtue of its longer tradition of trade union organization and its monopoly of skills. The appeal to white workers by the Industrial Socialist League, precursor to the CPSA, that

If we do not open our unions to them now, when
 "The Day" arrives we shall find the
 natives fighting for the boss out
 here...⁹⁹

was painfully off the mark, blind to the role of white labor in sustaining capitalism through its supervision and control of black labor. Ironically, MacMillan's assessment of white labor consciousness during the Rand Revolt was far more accurate than that of Communist C. F. (Frank) Glass, who began his memorial article on the 1922 uprising with

The Rand Revolt of March, 1922, will ever be
 remembered as one of the most glorious
 episodes in the proletarian struggle in
 South Africa if not, indeed, of the
 world,

yet makes no mention of white racialism!¹⁰⁰ Communists did not grasp that the political content of white labor struggles pitted them in opposition to black labor.

The following chapters examine the phases of South Africa's socialist movement and its relationship to the working class and national democratic struggles.¹⁰¹ The challenge facing South African socialists has been to penetrate the working

class with socialist ideas in a country where capitalist social relations have been overshadowed by racial oppression. Reflecting capitalism's combined and uneven development, South African socialism arose from the traditions of British labor and Eastern European exiles, and this has made the task of mobilizing a working class fractured along many lines even more difficult.¹⁰² South African socialist groups have continuously, if unevenly, engaged in educational and organizational activities to promote socialism among black and white workers. Yet, although they periodically mobilized popular support, they consistently failed to sustain a mass working class base.

Intense sectarianism across the Trotskyist/Communist divide has had a debilitating effect.¹⁰³ But South Africa's socialist movement shows some common characteristics which override this political division. Both Trotskyist and Communist tendencies draw from a common set of theoretical arguments, and there has been much overlap in their analyses.

The Bolshevik, May 1920

The socialist movement has tended to emphasize the centrality of objective factors like class structure over subjective factors like consciousness, strategies and tactics. The birth and development of collective black working class action and white labor's right-wing turn in the 1920s forced socialists to confront the significance of the national question for socialist struggle. Because of the tiny black proletariat, socialists generally stressed the need for political alliances with other urban and rural social classes. In the 1930s Communists turned to white labor which they believed would be radicalized by economic pressures stemming from the Great Depression. Most Trotskyists turned to the black petty bourgeoisie, either as an intellectual vanguard, reflecting traditional Trotskyist concern with developing a socialist vanguard, or an aspirant peasantry in the countryside. Their tendency was to believe that the combined numerical predominance of the oppressed workers and the landless rural populace would push the national democratic movement along a revolutionary path.

In the post-war period socialists continued to stress objective social conditions like class structure over clearly articulated strategy and tactics in their evaluations of South Africa's revolutionary potential. Both tendencies emphasized the role of the black petty bourgeoisie as a needed ally of the black proletariat.

Nonetheless, Communists, who endorsed national liberation as a stage to socialism, and Trotskyists, who saw in the democratic movement of workers and peasants the basis of a Permanent Revolution, believed that the absence of a black bourgeoisie made it likely that black majority rule would be a worker/peasant state. In this, socialists retained a mechanistic assumption of a direct relationship between class, consciousness and revolutionary potential. That, as the following chapters demonstrate, circumstances have not born out these assumptions and aspirations, suggests the need for a new look at the relationship between social conditions in South Africa and socialist theory and practice.

1. Rosa Luxemburg, The Accumulation of Capital, New York and London: Monthly Review, 1968, 362.
2. W. M. MacMillan, Africa Emergent: A Survey of Social, Political and Economic Trends in British Africa, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1949, 171.
3. K. A. Jordaan, "The Land Question in South Africa," Points of View, 1, 1, October 1959, 3-45, 10.
4. K. A. Jordaan, "A Critique of Mr. W. P. van Schoor's 'The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa,'" Discussion, 1, 3, June 1951, 13-42, especially 21ff. discusses combined and uneven development in South Africa.
5. Referring to the emancipation of the Khoikhoi and slave population between 1828 and 1838, T. R. H. Davenport notes that "...the habit of class and colour differentiation in the outlook of the socially dominant groups, and the tendency towards abjectness on the part of those accustomed to bondage, could not be legislated out of existence, and survived as social attitudes liable to be reasserted in times of stress." See "The Consolidation of a New Society: the Cape Colony," Chapter VI in Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson, eds., A History of South Africa to 1870, London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1982, 272-333, quote 273.
6. Crawford Young discusses the forced creation of an African proletariat in comparative perspective in "Ethnicity and the Colonial and Post-Colonial State in Africa," in Paul R. Brass, ed., Ethnic Groups and the State, London: Croom Helm, 1985, 57-93.
7. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee, "The origins and entrenchment of European dominance at the Cape, 1652-c.1840," in Elphick and Giliomee, eds., The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840, 2nd ed., Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1989, 521-566, especially 542.
8. W. M. MacMillan, The South African Agrarian Problem and its Historical Development, Johannesburg: Council of Education, Witwatersrand, 1919, 8.
9. MacMillan, The South African Agrarian Problem, 41.
10. MacMillan, The South African Agrarian Problem, 21.
11. MacMillan, The South African Agrarian Problem, 63; emphasis in the original.
12. Timothy Keegan, Rural Transformations in Industrializing South Africa: the Southern Highveld to 1914, Braamfontein: Ravan, c. 1986, 22; Charles van Onselen, Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914, vol. 2, New Ninevah, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1982, 126ff. describes the impact of this rapid proletarianization on Afrikaner consciousness.
13. MacMillan, The South African Agrarian Problem, 62.

14. Keegan, Rural Transformations, 46-47.
15. On primitive accumulation see Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, vol. 1, edited by Frederick Engels, New York: International, 1967, 713-716.
16. Timothy Keegan, "The Dynamics of Rural Accumulation in South Africa: Comparative and Historical Perspectives," Comparative Studies in Society and History, 28, 4, 1986, 628-650, 631.
17. Keegan, Rural Transformations, 30 and 197.
18. Stanley B. Greenberg, Race and State in Capitalist Development: Comparative Perspectives, New Haven and London: Yale, 1980, 71ff and 387.
19. Keegan, Rural Transformations, 13.
20. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 18.
21. Jordaan, "The Land Question, 18-19 and Keegan, Rural Transformations, 182-4, 192-3.
22. Solomon Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa, ed. by Brian Willan, Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1987, especially 49-66. Keegan, Rural Transformations, 184.
23. Francis Wilson, Migrant Labour, Johannesburg: South African Council of Churches and Spro-Cas, 1972, 161; Jordaan, "The Land Question," 19.
24. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 25; Keegan, Rural Transformations, 190-206.
25. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 26.
26. M. L. Morris, "The Development of Capitalism in South African Agriculture: Class Struggle in the Countryside," Economy and Society, 5, 3, August 1976, 292-343; Mike Morris, "Social History and the Transition to Capitalism in the South African Countryside," Review of African Political Economy, 41, September 1988, 60-72.
27. Ronald A. Kieve, "The Absolutist State: Base and Superstructure in the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism," paper prepared for presentation at the Conference on State Change, University of Colorado, Boulder, May 25-27, 1988, especially 31-39.
28. Keegan, "The Dynamics of Rural Accumulation," 649-65, quote 650.
29. Keegan, "Dynamics of Rural Accumulation," 639-645.
30. Marx, Capital, Vol. I, 633.
31. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 18-19.
32. Marx, Capital, vol. 1, 765-769; quote 769. On primitive accumulation see 713-16.

33. Colin Bundy, The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry, Berkeley: University of California, 1979; Jack Lewis, "The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry: A Critique," paper presented to the Africa Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, April 1983.
34. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 17.
35. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 170-171.
36. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 16. Emphasis in the original.
37. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 16-17.
38. Alan H. Jeeves, Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy: the Struggle for the Gold Mines' Labour Supply, 1890-1920, Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University and Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University, 1985, 12, 15-16, and 55; Levy, Foundations, 34-35. Saul Dubow, Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-36, Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: MacMillan, 1989, 53-55, challenges an assumption of the cheap labor thesis that labor migrancy was the cheapest and fastest route to capitalist development in South Africa. Mine owners were far from unified regarding how to develop and stabilize the labor supply, and some hoped to establish stable African communities near the mines. The migrant labor system evolved through trial and error and experimentation, and in its early days was the means by which mining capitalists adapted to conditions in which most people retained their means of production on the land. This undermines the notion of an omnipotent state with the foresight and means to ensure a stable flow of labor as needed.
39. Monica Wilson, "Co-operation and conflict: the Eastern Cape Frontier," in Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson, eds., A History of South Africa to 1870, London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1982, 233-271, especially 234-256.
40. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 11-12, quote 12. Emphasis in the original. See also MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 130.
41. Edward Roux, "Land and Agriculture in the Native Reserves," Chapter VII in Ellen Hellmann, ed., Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa, Cape Town, London and New York: Oxford University, 1949, 275-291, especially 171-172.
42. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 122-132; quote 120.
43. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 22 and 12-13 respectively.
44. Ellison Kahn, "The Pass Laws," Chapter XII in Hellmann, ed., Handbook on Race Relations, 275-291.
45. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 22.
46. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 125-126.
47. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 122-123.

48. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 123.
49. Marx, Capital, vol. I, 559.
50. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 172.
51. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 172-173; quote p. 172.
52. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 308-9; Levy, Foundations, 163.
53. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 309.
54. Levy, Foundations, 165.
55. Levy, Foundations, 177-190.
56. This periodization of racial discrimination is influenced by Ticktin's work discussed above.
57. Keegan, Rural Transformations, 204.
58. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 317-18.
59. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 309.
60. Robert Davies, "The 1922 Strike on the Rand: White Labor and the Political Economy of South Africa," in Peter Gutkind, R. Cohen and J. Copans, eds., African Labour History, Beverly Hills and London: Sage, 1978, 80-108, 97.
61. W. H. Andrews, Class Struggles in South Africa: Two Lectures Given on South African Trade Unionism, Cape Town, 1940, 23-36 discusses the entire turbulent period; see 27-32 on black strikes. See also, Simons, Class and Colour, 220-243, especially 226-28, 233-34 and 241; P. L. Bonner, "The 1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike: a preliminary account," in Belinda Bozzoli, comp., Labour, Townships and Protests: Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1979, 273-297; and Maureen Swan, "Ideology in organised Indian politics, 1891-1948," in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, eds., The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa, London and New York: Longman, 1987, 182-208, esp. 199. On Namibia working class protests in the late 'teens and '20s see Gillian and Suzanne Cronje, The Workers of Namibia, London: International Defense and Aid Fund, 1979, 78.
62. For an overview of migrant labor in South Africa see Wilson, Migrant Labour.
63. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 308. Selim Gool, Mining Capitalism and Black Labour in the Early Industrial Period in South Africa: A Critique of the New Historiography, Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1983, 200, shows the interdependence of mining wage labor and rural production in the Southern African peripheries from which South Africa has historically drawn much of its migrant labor. On the one hand, income from wage labor was a precondition for buying agricultural implements and cattle to begin domestic production; on the other, domestic food production subsidized the meager wage. Thus, when South Africa began

restricting its inflows of migrant labor from surrounding countries, this had grave effects on both subsistence and cash crop production in those areas.

64. Jeeves, Migrant Labour, 28-29.

65. Simons, Class and Colour, 229-231; Bonner, "1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike," 283; see also, The Bolshevik, 1, 6, March 1920, 4.

66. Bonner, "1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike," 274, 286-288.

67. Helen Bradford, "The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa in the South African Countryside, 1924-1930," Ph.D., University of the Witwatersrand, 1985.

68. Sheridan Johns, "Trade Union, Political Pressure Group or Mass Movement? The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa," in Robert Rotberg and Ali Mazrui, eds., Protest and Power in Black Africa, New York: Oxford University, 1970, 695-754, esp. 749ff.

69. Willie Hofmeyr, "Agricultural Crisis and Rural Organisation in the Cape: 1929-1933," M.A., University of Cape Town, 1985.

70. Dan O'Meara, "The 1946 African Mine Workers' Strike and the Political Economy of South Africa," Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, XIII, 2, July 1975, 146-173, 150; see also South African Communist Party, "A Distant Clap of Thunder: Fortieth Anniversary of the 1946 Mine Strike," 1986.

71. My thanks to Phil Bonner for pointing out to me some of the implications of social stratification amongst migrant laborers.

72. O'Meara, "1946 African Mine Workers' Strike," 151, 159. I am using O'Meara's statistics for the Ciskei which he states are representative for other reserves.

73. Davies, "The 1922 Strike,"; Frederick A. Johnstone, Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976.

74. Elaine N. Katz, A Trade Union Aristocracy: A History of White Workers in the Transvaal and the General Strike of 1913, Johannesburg: African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1976, 324.

75. Howard Simson, "The Myth of the White Working Class in South Africa," The African Review, 4, 2, 1974, 189-203, insists on the continuity in black - white labor relations on the mines during this period on the grounds that before and after the strike white labor had a supervisory relationship to blacks. Yet in stressing this continuity, he fails to see that the nature and basis of white supervision of blacks was transformed. Van Onselen, Studies in the Social and Economic History, vol. 2, 138-144, emphasizes the conflict between English workers and Afrikaner unemployed before and after the strike. Most other accounts see 1922 as the

fundamental turning point for white labor. See Robert Davies, "The White Working-Class in South Africa," New Left Review, 82, November-December 1973, 40-59; Davies, "Mining Capital, the State and Unskilled White Workers in South Africa, 1901-1913," Journal of Southern African Studies, 3, 1, October 1976, 41-69; Harold Wolpe, "The 'white working class' in South Africa," Economy and Society, 5, 2, 1976, 197-240; Davies, "The 1922 Strike;" and Davies, Capital, State and White Labour.

76. Jeeves, Migrant Labour, 69 and 23.

77. W. P. Van Schoor, "The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa," [Teachers' League of South Africa, A. J. Abrahamse Memorial Lecture, 1951], Cumberwood, South Africa: APDUSA, 1986, 20-22; Jordaan, "A Critique of van Schoor," 28; Jeeves, Migrant Labour, 70-71.

78. Jeeves, Migrant Labour, 70.

79. Simons, Class and Colour, 252-5, 271-99, and 303.

80. Norman Herd discusses this misconception by the pro-mining press and Communists, in 1922: The Revolt on the Rand, Johannesburg: Blue Crane, 1966, 19-20.

81. Davies, "The 1922 Strike," 93-95; W. M. MacMillan, "The Truth about the Strike on the Rand," The New Statesman, xix, 474, 13 May 1922, 145-146, esp. 146.

82. S. P. Bunting, "The Rand Revolt: Causes and Effects," unpub. ms., Cope Papers, A953/6a, 3-6, By permission of Department of Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand Library, Johannesburg. Despite white labor's prosperity relative to blacks, the conditions of white mineworkers which Bunting described, p. 4, were still precarious: "...the living of the average white worker is far from luxurious. Even artisans from England often say they live no better in Africa than at 'Home'; and many white miners are in some respects worse off than, until recently, their fellows in Wales, who at least escape the deadly South African 'miner's phthisis', and are not so directly liable to be displaced by the advance of cheap non-european labor." See Simons, Class and Colour, 271 for a slightly less sympathetic Communist view.

83. MacMillan, "The Truth about the Strike," 145.

84. Bunting, "The Rand Revolt," 10.

85. Bunting, "The Rand Revolt," 21; MacMillan, "The Truth about the Strike," 145.

86. Here I disagree with Bonner's hypothesis that the Rand Revolt was both a protest against the replacement of whites with cheaper blacks, and "...in part a defence against a move by mining capital to buy off another section of the working class." See "1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike," 288. The Simonses compare white labor attitudes to black workers in 1920 and 1922 in Class and Colour,

299.

87. "The story of a crime, being the vindication of the Transvaal Strike Legal Defense Committee in connection with the Great Strike on the Witwatersrand in 1922," 28 May 1924, quote p. 18, Box 37, folder 683, African Collection (South Africa), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

88. See Through the Red Revolt on the Rand: A Pictorial Review of Events, January, February, March, 1922, compiled from photographs taken by representatives of The Star, Johannesburg: Central News Agency, 1922, 1st and 2nd editions.

89. Simons, Class and Colour, 278.

90. Herd, 1922, 47-48; Simons, Class and Colour, 294. The SAIF and strike leaders warned against attacks on blacks. The Simonses point out, p. 272, that both the Chamber of Mines and government recognized the explosive potential of any erosion of white labor privileges.

91. MacMillan, Africa Emergent, 310. For an insightful discussion of MacMillan's views on the Rand Revolt see "William MacMillan and the working class," in MacMillan and Marks, eds., Africa and Empire, 60-68.

92. Herd, 1922, 31; MacMillan also describes the close relationship between the new Afrikaner proletarians and their rural kin and communities in "The Truth," 145.

93. Charles van Onselen, Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914, vol. 1, New Babylon, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1982, 146. I wish to thank Phil Bonner for pointing out to me these patterns of proletarianization.

94. Davies, "The 1922 Strike," 95-98; Andrews, Class Struggles in South Africa, 37ff., esp. 40-41; and Bunting, "The Rand Revolt," 16-17. On the drop in black wages see Bonner, "The 1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike," 289 and Bunting, 17. Bunting speculates that the drop was due to greater recruitment from surrounding regions outside South Africa, where labor was cheaper.

95. Davies, "The 1922 Strike," 105. Simons, Class and Colour, 617-618.

96. See Davies' discussion in Capital, State and White Labour, 4-5.

97. Bunting, "The Rand Revolt," 23; Simons, Class and Colour, 303-4.

98. See, for instance, Simson, "The Myth of the White Working Class in South Africa"; Davies, "The White Working-Class in South Africa" and Capital, State and White Labour; and Wolpe, "The 'white working class' in South Africa."

99. The Bolshevik, 1, 6, March 1920, 4. On the heritage and early history of the CPSA see Sheridan Johns, "The Birth of the

Communist Party of South Africa," The International Journal of African Historical Studies, IX, 3, 1976, 371-400.

100. C. F. Glass, "March 1922," The International, IX, 408, March 14, 1924, 5.

101. This study uses the expression "national democratic" movement or struggle to refer to the political movement of South Africa's oppressed and exploited people, often called the national liberation movement or today the mass democratic movement. Both historically and subjectively, in popular consciousness, the national question and the struggle for democratic rights, i.e., the struggle to complete the democratic revolution, are South Africa's major social problems. Jordaan has argued that South Africa's national fragmentation occurs through the denial of democratic rights to a portion of the population. In this sense, the two struggle converge, as the solution to the national question lies in completing the democratic revolution, and a democratic revolution would provide a solution to the national question. In and of itself, the expression "national democratic" leaves the class content of the solution open. See Jordaan, "The Land Question."

102. On the Russian and European heritage of South African socialism see Johns, "The Birth of the Communist Party of South Africa," especially 373-5 and 399-400; Taffy Adler, "Lithuania's Diaspora: The Johannesburg Jewish Workers' Club, 1928-1948," Journal of Southern African Studies, 6, 1, October 1979, 70-92, especially 70-74; Taffy Adler, "The Class Struggle in Doornfontein: A History of the Johannesburg Jewish Workers' Club, 1928-1950, University of the Witwatersrand: African Studies Seminar, August 1976; E. A. Mantzaris, "Radical Community: the Yiddish-speaking Branch of the International Socialist League, 1918-1920," in Belinda Bozzoli, ed., Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987, 160-176. On the relationship between political economy theory and combined and uneven capitalist development see Marx, "Afterword to the Second German Edition," Capital, vol. I, 12-20.

103. In his South African memoirs, the writer Peter Abrahams describes the effect of this sectarianism on two black leaders, Goolam Gool and Johnny Gomas: "...both Gool and Gomas were bitterly opposed to racialism, and both were sincere and honest in their strivings for non-European emancipation. And each was all that was untruthworthy to the other. Labels had conquered the men..." See Tell Freedom: Memories of Africa, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954, 328.

PART II

...those who become princes through their skill acquire the principality with difficulty, but they hold on to it easily; and the difficulties they encounter in acquiring the principality grow, in part, out of the new institutions and methods they are obliged to introduce in order to found their state and their security. And one should bear in mind that there is nothing more difficult to execute, nor more dubious of success, nor more dangerous to administer than to introduce a new system of things: for he who introduces it has all those who profit from the old system as his enemies, and he has only lukewarm allies in all those who might profit from the new system. This lukewarmness partly stems from fear of their adversaries, who have the law on their side, and partly from the skepticism of men who do not truly believe in new things unless they have actually had personal experience of them. Therefore, it happens that whenever those who are enemies have the chance to attack, they do so in a partisan manner, and those others defend hesitantly, so that they, together with the prince, are in danger.

It is necessary, however, if we desire to examine this subject thoroughly, to note whether these innovators act on their own or are dependent on others: that is, if they are forced to beg or are able to use power in conducting their affairs. In the first case, they always end up badly and never accomplish anything; but when they lean on their own resources and can use power, then only seldom do they find themselves in peril. From this comes the fact that all armed prophets were victorious and the unarmed came to ruin.

Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter VI

CHAPTER 3

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF SOUTH AFRICA AND THE CLASS NATURE OF THE NATIVE REPUBLIC

The 'nation' should have the 'right' to self-determination. But who is that 'nation' and who has the authority to speak for the 'nation' and express its will?¹

It would be a radical mistake to think that the struggle for democracy was capable of diverting the proletariat from the socialist revolution or of hiding, overshadowing it, etc. On the contrary, in the same way as there can be no victorious socialism that does not practise full democracy, so the proletariat cannot prepare for its victory over the bourgeoisie without an all-round, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy.²

The peculiarities of a country which has not accomplished or completed its democratic revolution are of such great significance that they must be taken as the basis for the programme of the proletarian vanguard. Only upon the basis of such a national programme can a Communist party develop its real and successful struggle for the majority of the working class and the toilers in general against the bourgeoisie and its democratic agents.³

The dominant paradigm on the national question in South Africa is that of colonialism of a special type or internal colonialism, embodied today in the Freedom Charter, with its conception of a multi-national society. Colonialism of a special type posits a dual society in which an advanced, industrialized white South African nation has colonized and exploited the indigenous black nation. Unlike most colonial relationships, the colonizer and colonized reside in the same geographic boundaries. The dual polity - democracy for whites and colonial status for blacks or what Trotsky described as a dominion for whites and a slave colony for blacks⁴ - rests upon a dual economy based on cheap black labor. The cheap labor concept provides the link between the racial system and the capitalist economy.⁵

Harold Wolpe argues that by linking the system of racial domination with capitalism, specifically, with the process of capital accumulation, colonialism of a special type is an advance over those views which see race and class as polar opposites, positing either a "pure" national struggle, based on an alliance of all blacks, or a "pure" class struggle, based on an alliance of black and white workers.

Nonetheless, he notes, the ambiguity of the thesis allows for conflictual interpretations. Some interpretations see socialism as an integral part of national liberation, while

others view the national struggle from a classless perspective. For Wolpe, this ambiguity stems from the fact that the thesis focusses on the subjective rather than objective aspects of politics. It addresses "...political concerns or the object of struggles" rather than political structures.⁶

The historical basis for colonialism of a special type, Wolpe points out, dates back to 1910. Then, South Africa's political unification and independence from Great Britain established a political system that, with the partial but significant exception of the Cape Province, institutionalized racial exclusivity in the polity.

Colonialism of a special type encompasses the two interrelated political currents of African nationalism and anti-imperialism, with their respective goals of national liberation and socialism.⁷ But long before the present-day thesis of colonialism of a special type was articulated, these two political currents found expression in the Comintern's Native Republic thesis, formulated in 1927-28 to address the question of national self-determination in the imperialist era for a nation which had not yet completed the democratic revolution. The final version of the Native

Republic thesis read:

A South African Native Republic, as a stage
towards a Workers' and Peasants'

Government, with full protection and equal rights for all national minorities.⁸

Likewise, the polarity in current interpretations of colonialism of a special type - either a deracialized capitalism is the first step towards further transformation or the overthrow of white domination occurs simultaneously with the socialist revolution - is foreshadowed in the debates amongst the Comintern and South African Communists over the Native Republic thesis.

On the right of nations to self-determination

The theoretical roots of the Native Republic thesis lie in the Marxist discussions on the national question which took place in the first two decades of this century. The two main contributors to this discussion, who established the framework for subsequent Marxist discussions of the national question, were the Polish revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg, and V. I. Lenin. Their differences turned on two points: which social class or classes could represent the nation and how national self-determination could be achieved.

Essentially, Luxemburg argued that "the working class had only an indirect interest" in the national struggle, which was potentially reactionary in that not only the

bourgeoisie, but the landed nobility, a remnant of the feudal class, could take leadership of the movement and divert the proletariat from its own class struggle. To speak of "the rights of nations" assumed that the "nation" was a homogenous social and political entity. But the antagonistic class interests within nations, she maintained, prevented any collective or uniform national will. Thus, instead of national self-determination, she called for working class self-determination.⁹ Lenin, by contrast, accented the democratic content of the slogan and believed that insofar as the bourgeoisies of oppressed nations which had not yet completed their democratic revolutions fought for this right, they had a progressive potential. With the October 1917 Russian Revolution, the paradigmatic solution to the national question became that advocated by Lenin, expressed in the slogan, "the right of nations to self-determination." As Lenin defined it, the slogan meant political self-determination through independent statehood.¹⁰ This was not a demand for a particular secessionist solution, but for the right to choose and agitate for such a solution.¹¹

Lenin based his secessionist interpretation on the Eastern European path of national development, in which nation-states were formed from the break-up of larger empires.

Luxemburg, by contrast, believed the prevailing route to state formation in the modern period to be through the unification of pre-existing nationalities or other social formations. The continuous destruction of peoples, nations and even entire continents and the rise of world powers, she argued, condemned small nations to political impotence and impeded economic development. Nor was formal independence equivalent to national self-determination, she pointed out. American independence was premised on the national dependence of the indigenous people, while American imperialism reduced other nations to dependence. Likewise, India's multinational society was masked by the simplistic slogan of the "rights of the Indian nation."¹²

National self-determination in Africa

At issue is whether this right, as formulated, can provide a universal solution to the worldwide problem of national oppression in its historically diverse forms and simultaneously promote working class interests. Africa's colonial and imperial legacy raises a host of complex issues about the political meaning and practical implementation of national self-determination. As Neuberger has argued, the dominant type of self-determination struggle in modern Africa, and one which has the widest legitimacy, has been

the anti-colonial struggle. Such struggles have rarely been coterminous with national self-determination struggles because colonial-imposed state boundaries have arbitrarily cut across pre-existing nations and other social formations.¹³

Yet established African political leaders have overwhelmingly accepted the sovereignty of colonially-drawn boundaries, seeking to construct new nations, often by amalgamating numerous smaller ones, on the foundations of those states. With some exceptions, Neuberger points out, the paradigmatic route to nation-state formation in post-colonial Africa has been from state to nation, rather than from nation to state or through secession.¹⁴ For the Organization of African Unity, national self-determination is premised on the recognition of and respect for the territorial integrity and political autonomy of member states.¹⁵ African governments have generally equated secessionist efforts with a balkanization process leading to small, weak and unstable polities, much as Rosa Luxemburg concluded that

A general attempt to divide all existing states into national units and to re-tailor them on the model of national states and statelets is a completely hopeless, and historically speaking, reactionary undertaking.¹⁶

Nonetheless, two minority political tendencies raise alternative perspectives on national self-determination in Africa. Secessionist movements have arisen from the contradictions of the artificially carved nation-states, which have spawned fissionary tendencies in that subjectively-perceived nations are often not coincident with state boundaries. Despite the OAU's rejection of the right to secession, these movements have, at times, received official state support.¹⁷ The pan-Africanist movement sees post-colonial states as a barrier to the regional and continental unification needed for economic development. From this perspective the solution to national oppression and to national self-determination lies in regional or continental unification.¹⁸

All of these views on national self-determination have been voiced in South Africa, where there has been a long debate over who constitutes a nation and the road to and forms of national self-determination. Is a nation defined by color, birthplace or state fiat? Is South Africa composed of two nations, as the theory of colonialism of a special type suggests, of four national groups, as the Freedom Charter assumes, numerous nations as the bantustan system assumes, or one (embryonic) nation as many socialists and Black Consciousness adherents believe? The right of nations to

self-determination has even been twisted in the South African context to obscure national oppression. As Neville Alexander has pointed out,
...the Afrikaner National Party used ethnic theories in order to justify bantustan strategy whereby it created bogus 'nations' and forced them to accept an illusory 'independence' so that the working class would agitate for political rights in their own so-called 'homeland'.¹⁹

The bourgeoisie in Africa has typically sought to maintain existing, colonially-derived, national boundaries. In South Africa, by contrast, the dominance of the Anglo-Afrikaner bourgeoisie is associated with the perpetuation of national fragmentation. In such a context, socialist groupings have generally, with a few exceptions, tried to mobilize the majority on a conception of national self-determination based neither on secession or federation, but on national and even supra-national unity.

The Native Republic thesis was the Comintern's attempt in 1928-29 to apply the principle of national self-determination to South Africa. This experience, with the intense debates over the meaning of national self-determination which it engendered, shows the complexity of applying a principle derived from European historical conditions to a society where class categories have their

own historically-based content and where national self-determination may have practical implications quite different from those in Europe.

The Native Republic thesis and the right to national self-determination

In a crucial respect the Native Republic thesis represents a break from earlier Marxist discussions and preceding Comintern policy. All previous formulations spoke of the right to self-determination - as opposed to national self-determination, per se - as a democratic principle: nations which had suffered national oppression should be free to decide their own destiny rather than have a particular policy imposed upon them. The Native Republic thesis did not speak of a right to national self-determination or even a right to choose a particular form of black republic. Instead it offered a particular solution to the South Africa's national question: majority rule. In the late 1920s most South African Communists interpreted this to mean majority rule in a unified state, although S. P. Bunting argued that South Africa had already achieved national self-determination in the Leninist sense with its formal independence from Britain in 1910. But in 1934, indicating the extent to which the content of national self-

determination is open to debate, the Communist Lazar Bach argued for national self-determination through a federation of independent native republics, based on the formal, political independence of the pre-colonial tribal groupings, an interpretation which proved a non-starter for most Communists.²⁰ Much of the animosity that the slogan initially aroused concerned the perception that the Comintern was trying to impose its own solution on South Africa. But hidden behind this controversy over method were two other significant issues: first, the class nature of the solution offered by the Native Republic; and second, whether the slogan was an advance over previous Communist solutions to South Africa's national question.

South African Communist Jimmy La Guma played a pivotal role in raising the question of national self-determination for South Africa within the international Communist movement. At the 1927 League Against Imperialism conference in Brussels, La Guma met with other anti-colonial leaders to discuss the national question. The conference adopted two resolutions of relevance to South Africa, representing the anti-imperialist and African nationalist currents to which Wolpe referred. The first, submitted by the South African delegation, called for "[t]he right of self-determination through the complete overthrow of capitalism and imperial

domination." The second, a general resolution on the Negro question, demanded "...full freedom, equality with all other races, and the right to govern Africa."²¹

Later that year when La Guma visited Moscow, he and the Comintern's Nikolai Bukharin reformulated these resolutions into a draft resolution on South Africa which omitted mention of the right to national self-determination and called for "...an independent Native republic, as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' government." This draft was submitted to the South African Communists for discussion. A variation was adopted by the Comintern at its Sixth Congress in Moscow, and the CPSA later endorsed the slogan at its seventh annual conference in December 1928.

When the draft resolution was first submitted to the South African comrades, the majority immediately rejected it as anti-white and anti-internationalist. It was strikingly close to Marcus Garvey's "Black Republic" and "Africa for the Africans" slogans which the CPSA had campaigned against for several years.²² The Garvey movement, a worldwide movement which attempted to imbue blacks with a common sense of national and racial identity, was vigorously opposed by Communists for its racial exclusivity and nationalist orientation, and most Communists saw the Native Republic thesis in the same light. This response did not follow

color lines: a number of black Communists, notably T. W. Thibedi, and initially Johnny Gomas, firmly opposed the slogan.²³

In a 1928 pamphlet titled "An Independent Native Republic for South Africa" South African Communist S. P. Bunting criticized the thesis, counterposing it with: "All power to the soviets of workers and peasants - black and white." He pointed out that by the late 1920s the CPSA's work in African nationalist organizations had come to a dead end. Equating the Native Republic with a secessionist option, Bunting argued that far from calling for secession, Africans preferred British rule to Afrikaner. Were a secessionist movement to develop, he contended, it would further unite English and Afrikaners, who had recently come together in the Pact Government. Blacks resented white overlordship but were reconciled to white participation. Indeed, such participation was necessary: the white working class was potentially more revolutionary than the virtually nonexistent black bourgeoisie. The slogan, by equating all whites with imperialism, would neutralize the prospects of working class unity across the color bar and forestall the prospect of a socialist struggle.²⁴

In effect, Bunting and other critics were arguing for a combined movement of black and white proletarians. The

Comintern, by contrast, presumed a peasant-based anti-imperialist struggle as a preliminary stage before socialism. It assumed, wrote then-Communist Eddie Roux, that

The country was a colony or semi-colony of British imperialism. The Bantu, like the Indians and Chinese and other colonial peoples, were suffering national oppression. They were being deliberately kept in a backward condition by British finance capital and its South African ally (Boer imperialism), in order that super-profits might be extracted from them.... It was clear therefore that the main task of the revolution in South Africa was to overthrow the rule of the British and Boer imperialists, to set up a democratic independent Native republic (which would give the white workers and other non-exploiting whites certain "minority rights") as a stage towards the final overthrow of capitalism in South Africa.²⁵

In the 1920s and '30s, the overwhelming majority of Africans did live and work in the countryside. In the mid-'30s, approximately 62% of African males and 87% of African females worked in agriculture and forestry. Most rural-based Africans lived in the reserves where they had access to small plots of land. They could not be neatly categorized as self-sufficient peasants, however. Men based in the reserves were contract or migrant workers on farms or

mines. Typically, in the 1930s, a third of the total male population was absent from the reserves. In some areas, like the Ciskei, this reached close to 100% of the adult male population. Outside the reserves, the rest of the rural population worked on mostly white-owned farms as wage workers, squatters and tenant farmers.

There was an African urban proletariat. Of the total number of workers employed in private manufacturing in the late 1920s, for example, 81,233 or 44% were Africans, who performed unskilled, manual labor, while 69,757 or 38% were white, typically performing skilled or supervisory work. Coloured and Indians were intermediary strata, performing unskilled, semi-skilled, and especially in the Western Cape and Natal, skilled artisanal work.²⁶ But there was no African bourgeoisie able to accumulate capital by exploiting the labor-power of others, and less than 1% of Africans could be described as formally-educated and trained professionals.

The Sixth Comintern Congress and the Native Republic thesis

Bunting and Roux put forth the Party's majority view at the Comintern's Sixth Congress. Bunting emphasized the proletarian character of colonial peoples, which, he maintained, the Comintern's colonial theses and the Native

Republic thesis overlooked. Africa was not a continent of proletarians proper, Bunting acknowledged, although its peasantry was exploited by imperialist interests. South Africa, however, had its own peculiarities: neither a pre-capitalist or peasant society, but a white settler society with an imperialist-financed gold industry, as well as iron and steel industries. Its peasantry was actually a migrant labor force, he maintained. On the basis of South Africa's class development, Bunting argued, the struggle there was not only an anti-imperialist one against foreign capital, as the Comintern assumed; it was anti-capitalist as well. Indeed, this was the case for many colonial countries. The African workers of South Africa, and the colonial labor force more generally, were not merely a component of a nationalist, anti-imperialist force, but were an important force in the struggle against capitalism. Yet the Comintern's draft program, Bunting complained, "...relegated [the colonial proletariat] to inactivity." Is it good politics to say that the function of every colony, irrespective of circumstances, is the same everywhere, and that its ONE AND ONLY task is to revolt against imperialism? What of the colonial proletariat, why is it that they are thus dismissed? There is no reference in the draft programme...to the class power of these colonial workers....²⁷

To the extent that there has been a South African movement against British Imperialism, Bunting continued, it has historically been one of Afrikaners. That movement has now atrophied, achieving only nominal independence from Britain. While the development of a black nationalist movement should not be opposed, Bunting urged the Comintern to support first and foremost the proletarian movement of both black and white workers, who had the combined strength to fight capitalism and imperialism.

To Bunting, the Comintern's talk of "colonial masses," counterposed to "European proletarians," reeked of the same racial chauvinism as white South African labor. "The 'prejudice' of the white worker," he argued, "...is not that he wants to kill the black worker, but that he looks upon him not as a fellow-worker but as native 'masses'." He rejected the argument that the European proletariat was necessarily more politically advanced because of its longer tradition of working class organization. Colonial workers were certainly as potentially anti-capitalist as Europeans: ...we are exploited down to the bone under the capitalist system and we have got the fight and determination to resist; what more do you want? We did not have to wait for capitalism to develop; it has been thrust [sic] upon us "fully armed", fully developed.

Communists must come to terms with the proletarian

nature of the colonial working class so that it can take its place in the international proletarian movement. We must abolish this subtle form of colour prejudice, or 'colour bar'. Uncouth, backward, illiterate, degraded, even barbaric you may call them if you like; they cannot read or write, most of them; but they work, they produce profit, and they organise and will fight. They are the great majority, they have the future in their hands, and they are going to rule not only in the colonial countries, but in the world. We are going to see not 2 or 3% of non-European representatives in this Congress, but 80 or 90% representing the real strength of the entire colonial working class.²⁸

Roux, similarly, argued for a socialist struggle which he counterposed to a bourgeois democratic struggle. The Comintern's proposed slogan, he said, suggests that the Native Republic will not be a proletarian dictatorship, but rather a stage towards a workers' and peasants' government. Yet it does not specify the form of this transitional government:

If it is an independent, democratic, bourgeois native republic it presupposes the existence of a native bourgeoisie. If all the natives are workers or semi proletarian peasants, the distinction between a native republic and a native workers and peasants' republic is meaningless.

In countries where there is no indigenous bourgeoisie,

the Comintern has assumed one will develop. The proposed thesis does not admit

The possibility of the complete telescoping of the bourgeois nationalist revolution and the development of the proletarian revolution in the absence of a native bourgeoisie....²⁹

Imperialism's rapid penetration into the African continent, Roux continued, has broken up tribal society, creating proletarians and peasant proletarians aligned against white landowners and industrialists, but little or no literate, politically conscious black intelligentsia. In South Africa, the color bar means there is even less chance for a black bourgeoisie and intelligentsia to develop than in other parts of the continent. The absence of such a leadership stratum means that while there is mass revolutionary potential, ...nothing appears on the surface. Where leaders appear the revolutionary movement flares up suddenly, only to die down again when the leaders go to a new district or fail "to deliver the goods".

But in South Africa, this leadership role devolved to the Communist Party, which had worked steadily to build the black proletariat movement. Indeed, Roux boldly and optimistically declared, It is not an exaggeration to say that the native labour movement owes its existence very largely to the efforts of white

communists....It is conceivable therefore that the Communist Party of South Africa if it succeeds in training the necessary number of capable native organisers will grow into a mass party in a very short time and will even be able to lead the native movement of the African continent as a whole. There is no particular reason why the Party should first set about the building of a nationalist movement.³⁰

The CPSA hoped to overcome white labor's racial chauvinism and build on its militant tradition by appeals to its class interests with the slogan : "Not a white South Africa, but Africa for the workers, black and white."³¹ The Native Republic thesis would negate the Party's previous efforts to build working class unity, hence, Roux suggested as an alternative:
an Independent workers' and peasants' South African republic with equal rights for all toilers irrespective of colour, as a basis for a Native majority government.³²

This formulation, Roux reports, was rejected by the Comintern without discussion. This is hardly surprising: despite its seeming similarity to the version finally endorsed by the Comintern, the two formulations start from opposite points. Roux's version assumes that the road to democracy lies through a socialism built by a united black and white proletariat; the Comintern's, that socialism lay

through democracy based on majority rule.

In his final address Bunting reiterated that the proposed Native Republic slogan applied the Comintern's general model for colonial struggles - that of a peasant-based, anti-imperialist struggle - to South Africa's specific conditions. But in South Africa the class struggle of black and white workers was more revolutionary than a purely national or racial struggle.

Since its Second Congress, Bunting pointed out, the Comintern had recognized the existence of two distinct class movements in colonial countries, that of the indigenous bourgeoisie and that of the masses of workers and peasants. The Second Congress stipulated that the Comintern's priority was to develop the class consciousness of the colonial working masses. Now, Bunting went on, the Comintern was addressing an area of the world where the indigenous bourgeoisie was either embryonic or non-existent. Throughout Africa, but particularly in South Africa, there was no indigenous bourgeoisie; hence, there was no question of two social movements, one led by the black bourgeoisie, but only of the movement of workers and peasants.

Accordingly, Bunting explained, in South Africa ...the class struggle is practically coincident and simultaneous with the national struggle. The object is the same in each case -- the removal of all

oppression (including all special oppression applying to members of the subject race as such) and the gaining of liberation and power for workers and peasants; the parties are substantially the same, and the weapons and methods of the struggle also. Hence there is no very great point or virtue, even where there is no exploited European class present (as there is in South Africa) in emphasising the national aspect of the struggle as MORE FUNDAMENTAL than the class aspect; rather the reverse is the case.³³

The agrarian struggle was not the nexus of the South African struggle, Bunting contended. South Africa's white population included an exploited working class and peasantry, with the former displaying the most militant behavior. Similarly, he asserted, the rapidly increasing black proletariat has shown greater militancy than the black rural population.

But the presence of a white proletariat complicates the political struggle, although both black and white exploited fight the same capitalist master. The class and national movements do not coincide automatically.

It is almost inevitable therefore that the nationalist movement of the natives will clash with their class movement [which includes white workers]. Similarly the white exploited, finding their race being attacked AS SUCH by a native nationalist movement, are predisposed by their superior economic and political position to side with the masters

nationally and forget their class
struggle.³⁴

The particular conjuncture of class and race in South Africa requires special tactics, Bunting went on, in order to harmonize the class and national struggles and correct white racial chauvinism. As there was then no indigenous bourgeois national movement in South Africa, the ANC's demands were not national, but democratic. As democratic demands, they coincided with those of the CPSA. In this sense, the Party was actually or potentially capable of leading the national movement.

The black proletariat needed the support of white labor both to maintain the principle of labor solidarity and for practical purposes, Bunting explained. If white labor could be won to a position of neutrality rather than antagonism vis-a-vis blacks, it could act as a shield in circumstances where the black working class movement borders on illegality. The Black Republic thesis would alienate white workers, exacerbating the contradiction between the class and national movements, even pushing some whites towards fascism. The majority of South African comrades, consequently,
...while standing for proletarian equality and for majority rights and all that that implies, [are] against the CREATION of any special nationalistic slogan at all for South Africa, except of course the

liberation of the native people from all
race oppression and discrimination and
separation from the British Empire.³⁵

The debate within the CPSA

Back at home, the Party's internal controversy over the
slogan had reached destructive proportions. Bunting

complained to Roux that

The differences over the slogan had led to general
bad blood: [the] Woltons and La Guma
versus all the rest, but some of the
rest also versus Thibedi; the branches
are bewildered at this excess of
partisanship at head office, and the
Trade Unions quite paralysed especially
by disagreements between La Guma &
Thibedi.³⁶

The political climate was changing. The 1920s were years of
militant black struggle. The late teens and early 1920s had
seen a spate of urban collective protest. Subsequently, the
locus of struggle shifted to the countryside under the
banner of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union and
the Western Cape ANC. But by the end of the decade, the
tide was turning against this wave of black militancy. In
1929 the Pact Government was reelected on a "Black Peril"
campaign, and the state intensified its attacks on black
organizations. In turn, the ANC and many black leaders
moved defensively to the right, with Gumede losing his 1930

reelection bid to the conservative Pixley Seme. In this context, black radicals began to consider the idea of a black united front to fight white racism.³⁷ And Johnny Gomas, who had originally opposed the Native Republic slogan, changed his views. As the repression of blacks increased, he found Bunting's and Roux's insistence on placating white labor unacceptable. In 1930 he was writing: We demand complete equality for blacks. Because of the preponderating [sic] majority of blacks we put forward as a guiding slogan in the present stage, the demand for a black majority government -a Native Republic.³⁸

La Guma, too, insisted that white labor chauvinism should not be appeased. White workers had consistently fought against black equality, even fighting in 1922 "...to perpetuate our serfdom.'" Should the Party now tell blacks: Yes, you will be allowed to march into the promised land at such time as it can be considered without wounding the susceptibilities of the "Baas".³⁹

Moreover, La Guma argued, the attitude of the non-european masses is becoming sharper with the instalment after instalment of oppressive and discriminatory laws and threats of further oppression

and blacks were developing a national consciousness. Pointing to Egypt, La Guma insisted that national movements

against imperialism were inherently revolutionary, no matter what their class leadership:

To be revolutionary, a national movement in conditions of an Imperialist yoke need not necessarily be composed of proletarian elements, or have a revolutionary or republican programme or a democratic base.⁴⁰

Despite their differences, the views of Bunting, on the one hand, and Gomas and La Guma, on the other, represent two paths which accorded blacks an important political role in contrast to the position of Communists like Frank Glass and W. H. Andrews who worked primarily with white labor and still saw white workers as the vanguard.⁴¹ On the one hand, Bunting argued that the road to democracy lay through socialism won by joint black and white proletarian class struggle, believing the white working class to be potentially more revolutionary than the non-existent black bourgeoisie. On the other, La Guma argued that the road to socialism lay through a form of democracy based on black majority rule established through national liberation. In recognizing that the black majority had to be programmatically acknowledged as a significant social force both views represent an advance over the majority Communist position only a few years earlier during the Rand Revolt. Socialists were now beginning to discern empirically the

social class development of the black majority. Nonetheless, they did not project this trend into the future: neither alternative accorded the then tiny urban black proletariat an independent or vanguard role. Bunting, like Roux, eventually accepted the Comintern's decision and succeeded in having the resolution adopted by the CPSA at its seventh annual conference in December 1928. His pamphlet, "Imperialism and South Africa," contained, in his view, his best efforts to come to terms with the slogan's anti-imperialist thrust and to explain the slogan's basis in South African political economy.⁴² In January 1929, he wrote Roux that we got over our crises at our Conference....We agreed on interpreting the slogan as meaning much the same as a (predominantly and characteristically native) Workers and Peasants republic, and not meaning a black dictatorship....⁴³

But this slogan - essentially a black workers' and peasants' state - reflected the position of South African Communists, not that of the Comintern. The final South African consensus was an effort to combine majority rule and socialism in one stage, in contrast to the Comintern's call for black majority rule as a stage towards socialism. As the Party explained in its report on the seventh annual conference, the Native Republic thesis

...implied, by whatever stages, a workers and peasants Republic, but with the necessary stress on its overwhelmingly native character; for practically all natives are workers and peasants, and again, probably only a workers' and peasants' victory can achieve such a republic.⁴⁴

The Party's program itself read:

If we are to achieve real labour unity we must first remove the greatest obstacle to it, viz, the unequal, subjected, enslaved status of the native workers and people. Hence race emancipation and class emanacipation tend to coincide. Hence too the conception and realisation of native rule merges into that of the Workers' and Peasants' Republic, non-imperialist, non-capitalist, non-racialist, classless and in effect Socialist.⁴⁵

The virulent white racism of those years broke Gomas' belief in the possibility of working class unity across the color line.⁴⁶ But the ultimate goal of most Communists remained the unity of the proletariat across the color line, believing always that such unity was the only road to socialism. But they came to accept the argument that racial inequality obstructed such unity. Thus, the Native Republic thesis was seen as a means to eliminate racial inequality and promote working class unity. Paradoxically, it was their continued belief that white workers must be part of the socialist movement that finally led South African

Communists to adopt a position which put black majority rule at the top of the agenda.

The Native Republic thesis and the national democratic struggle

The Native Republic thesis centered on the anti-imperialist struggle. But this was an imperialism defined not by its capitalist essence, but by its colonial aspect. Hence, the Comintern's resolution on "The South African Question" began by classifying South Africa as "...a British Dominion of the colonial type." The Comintern recognized South Africa's industrial development and the consequent impact on social relations, pointing to the speed at which the black majority was being incorporated into the working class:
The characteristic feature of the
 proletarianisation of the native
 population is the fact that the number
 of black workers grows faster than the
 number of white workers.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, it added:
...this does not alter the general colonial
 character of the economy of South
 Africa, since British capital continues
 to occupy the principal economic
 positions in the country (banks, mining
 and industry), and since the South
 African bourgeoisie is equally
 interested in the merciless exploitation
 of the negro population.⁴⁸

The Comintern classified South Africa as a colonial society

based on the criteria of foreign and racial domination, although it simultaneously referred rather ambiguously to "...the semi-colonial character of the country." Its slogan, "...an independent native South Africa" incorporated recognition of the struggles against both types of domination.⁴⁹

From its emphasis on the seemingly colonial character of South African society, flows the emphasis on the peasantry and aspirant-peasantry as the "moving force" of the South African revolution - since the Comintern recognized that "...there [was] no negro bourgeoisie as a class." Hence, the land question, and the Comintern's solution - restoration of expropriated land - lay at the heart of the matter:

The country was seized by violence by foreign exploiters, the land expropriated from the natives, who were met by a policy of extermination in the first stages of colonisation, and conditions of semi-slavery established for the overwhelming majority of the native masses. It is necessary to tell the native masses that in the face of existing political and economic discrimination against the natives and ruthless oppression of them by the white oppressors, the Comintern slogan of a native republic means restoration of the land to the landless and land-poor population.⁵⁰

In its aspirations, the Comintern believed, this black rural

majority was a peasantry, hence, it argued: "...the basic question in the agrarian situation in South African is the land hunger of the blacks.." It concurred with the CPSA's current call to expropriate large estates for distribution amongst landless blacks and whites, with the caveat that satisfaction of black land hunger was paramount.⁵¹

The Comintern's rural orientation reflected the influence of the influential Soviet theoretician Nikolai Bukharin who believed that anti-colonial peasant revolutions could challenge international capitalism by depriving it of vital raw materials and markets and who foresaw the possibility of anti-imperialist alliances between the colonial peasantry and the Soviet Union.⁵² Like the Russian peasantry in 1917 this rural majority was to be an ally of the tiny

proletariat:

The black peasantry constitutes the basic moving
force of the revolution in alliance with
and under the leadership of the working
class.

The national question, in turn, was rooted in the land, in the colonial expropriation of South Africa's indigenous majority.⁵³

These notions of colonial and racial struggles merged in the Native Republic thesis as the struggle for national independence from Great Britain became identified with the

struggle for racial independence or racial equality. The use of the term "natives," with its now pejorative connotation, reinforced the colonial conception. The conquered nation is defined in terms of race, as are the imperialists and South African bourgeoisie who constitute the conquering race. The Native Republic is a solution to South Africa's national question premised on a racial conception of nationhood. South African Trotskyists were to be critical of the tendency to define the national question in this manner, but their critique of the Native Republic thesis and their own conception of the national question reflected a similar problem.⁵⁴ This problem lay in the conception of the relationship of the democratic and national struggles and their relationship to the socialist movement.

South African Communists clearly saw the potential of the democratic and national slogans to mobilize a mass movement: ...the slogans that will rally the main mass of rural and urban natives behind the Party will be "racial equality", "natives in parliament", "land for natives", etc., that is to say nationalistic slogans, the slogans of the democratic revolution in South Africa, the slogans which culminate eventually in the demand for a native republic.⁵⁵

But, like the Comintern, they never explicitly posed the relationship between South Africa's democratic and national

struggles. The Comintern's fleeting reference to the democratic struggle was a request to the South African comrades to "...combine the fight against all anti-native laws with the general political slogan" of the Native Republic.⁵⁶ The Native Republic thesis speaks of equal rights for national groups as a consequence of national self-determination, making no mention of individual democratic rights. Essentially, the Comintern believed that promoting the democratic struggle furthered the struggle for a black republic, which, in turn would ensure equal rights for all national groups.

South African Communists tended to equate democracy with bourgeois democracy and bourgeois nationalism in South Africa, juxtaposing them with socialism. For Roux, the democratic struggle coincided with the national struggle, and the solution to the democratic question was the formal one of majority rule and national independence, reflecting

his growing proximity to the Comintern's position: The demands of the democratic revolution in Africa (the franchise, abolition of passes, equal land laws, free education, abolition of the indenture system and forced labour, right to ride on the trams, walk on the pavement, use the public libraries, enter the city halls, etc. etc.) are demands of the natives as natives. They are demands for things which the white workers already have. On the political field these demands

culminate historically in a single[,]
final slogan - national independence,
i.e., complete freedom and independence
for the native race, complete political
power to the natives. As the natives
are not a scattered racial minority like
the Jews but a compact majority
inhabiting a single country, national
independence means quite literally a
native republic.⁵⁷

Democracy, for Roux meant bourgeois democracy; hence his continual juxtaposing of socialism and bourgeois democracy. But Roux never developed his own conception of the transition from classically democratic to national demands or why a democratic movement necessarily becomes a movement for national self-determination in the Leninist sense of formal independence. Do these democratic demands become national by virtue of the fact that they are demands of a rightless majority or a people subjected to foreign conquest? If white South Africans have these rights, is it a question of a national revolution or of completing the democratic revolution? Are whites part of the nation? If the struggles are identical, as Roux and Bunting suggest, then the basis for that identity needed to be explained.

Although South African Communists sensed the social potential of the democratic and national struggles, they considered them to be potentially revolutionary in a negative sense: by virtue of the absence of a black

bourgeoisie. Even Bunting's seemingly permanent revolution perspective that the achievement of democracy was possible only through socialism was not due to a belief in the revolutionary nature of the democratic and national struggles in South Africa, per se, but because he thought that the absence of a black bourgeoisie prevented any alliance with imperialism. Hence, in response to the query: "Won't your black republic fall under Imperialist influence?" Bunting writes:

The answer is, that this language about "stages" represents ideological rather than chronological sequences (though I think it was dictated by the analogy of a bourgeois democratic native revolution in China, but of course I couldn't say that) as really no black republic in SA could be achieved without overthrowing capitalist rule. And in fact I think the "stage" part of the formula is verbiage. My idea is to carry on as best we can with the slogan and see how it goes, emphasising about the "minorities" so as to escape the N. Au. Act [Native Authorities Act], but to concentrate rather on agitation and indignation as heretofore.⁵⁸

And six months later, after extensive debates in the Party on the black republic thesis, Roux reports that Bunting ...still thinks of and emphasises the "telescoping" of the bourgeois-democratic and proletarian revolutionary movements in S. Africa. I think he exaggerates the amount of telescoping that will take place.⁵⁹

The revolutionary potential of the democratic and national movements could be realized, many Communists believed, only through an eventual alliance with the white working class. They insisted on including the anti-democratic white working class in their socialist program, refusing to relinquish a color-based conception of socialism in which whites had to be part of the socialist vanguard despite their backward politics. But they also seriously intended to struggle for black democratic rights, and Roux insisted that

We have got to put forward definite race demands
on behalf of the natives, demands which
we must fight for in the face of
opposition from all sections of whites,
even the white workers.⁶⁰

But this hoped-for unity of the black democratic movement with anti-democratic whites was premised on a contradiction which made it impracticable. Although seemingly non-racial, their theoretical premise of the necessity to include whites in a socialist movement was itself a concession to white labor's anti-democratic and racialist tendencies. The logic of Bunting's original position suggests that a white-led proletarian socialist revolution could pave the way for democracy, and even later he hoped that white workers would join the democratic movement. But if a socialist struggle omitted democratic rights from its program or compromised on racial equality to appease whites, how could it solve the

democratic question after a presumably white working class-led revolution? How could an anti-democratic minority either lead or work as equals with the majority?

Bunting argued that by neglecting and alienating the white proletariat the Native Republic thesis offered a color-based solution to South Africa's national question. Yet after complaining that the Native Republic "...in spirit if not in letter will exclude all whites," he, too, equated nationality with color when he concluded that the "the slogan will have to be re-drafted on less nationalist lines if it is to avoid giving that impression [of being anti-white]." Here he accepts the implicit racial or color-based definition of the nation inherent in the thesis.⁶¹

None of those so concerned with seeking white working class support, like Bunting, Roux or Glass, developed a strategic argument explaining why white proletarian support was necessary for the socialist struggle or how white racial chauvinism could be reconciled with the democratic struggle of the majority. Their reasons for conceding to white labor were tactical and expedient:

In the present weak condition of the native movement every foothold in the white trade unions, every little bit of white support must be utilised to the fullest extent, in order to maintain the legality of the native movement, to prevent pogroms and the danger of lynchings, and to secure the rapid

development of a cadre of native Communists. I think it is fairly plain that we cannot afford to go underground at the present time.⁶²

There were unsuccessful attempts to mediate the contradiction between the black majority and the white working class. Roux, for example, argued that the Native Republic slogan should be modified to "...appeal to the racial consciousness of the oppressed Bantu..." and simultaneously promote trade union unity across the color line.⁶³ But historically and politically white labor protectionism could not be reconciled with the democratic movement or the black trade union movement: white labor adamantly refused to support the struggle for democracy in South Africa.

Rural movements and Communist practice in the countryside

Colin Bundy has suggested that the CPSA's urban orientation in the late 1920s led it to neglect the agrarian struggle.⁶⁴ However, the intense debates on the Native Republic thesis between 1927 and 1929, and the Party's eventual endorsement of the thesis demonstrate that Communists were willing to reexamine the land and national questions, albeit under pressure. The adoption of the thesis led to more practical work on the land, despite the difficulties of penetrating

the white-owned farms and reserves. Although some Communists still emphasized the role of white workers, the focus on urban trade union work was not solely racially motivated. While the Party had overemphasized the white proletariat, by the late 1920s the Communists were making significant strides organizing black trade unions. Bunting was quite correct in recognizing imperialism's exploitation of rural cultivators throughout the African continent and in simultaneously criticizing the Comintern's neglect of the proletarian movement in South Africa. But his contention that "[t]he native agrarian masses as such have not shown serious signs of revolt....[and] a live agrarian movement has still to be organised in South Africa" was seriously off the mark in the late 1920s. By then South Africa had seen numerous serious rural uprisings, starting with a wave of rural anti-tax protests, moving on to the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union's anti-proletarianization movement, and culminating with the struggles of Western Cape farmworkers at the end of the decade. The South African Communist Albert Nzula described many of these, like the 1921 Boelhoek uprising in the Cape Province, which he characterized "...as the first attempt by the peasantry to seize and occupy land." In that case, Africans took over unoccupied government land and refused to

pay taxes, inspiring a wave of tax revolts across the Cape, which only ended when the government called in the military.⁶⁵

Clearly, Nzula's own work and his collaborative efforts, written in the early 1930s, were an ex post facto effort to justify the Native Republic thesis. Thus, he depicted the South African peasantry as the pivotal force in a struggle not against capitalism, per se, but against foreign imperialism:

What drives the peasants to struggle against imperialism? The determining factor behind the various forms of agrarian movement is the expropriation of peasant land by the imperialists. This gives the movement an aggressive anti-imperialist character. On the other hand, the unbearable burden of taxation and other types of exploitation of the peasants by the imperialists and their lackeys make worse the intolerable position of the peasant masses. The common theme of all peasant complaints [throughout Africa] is 'more land, less taxes.'⁶⁶

In South Africa, Nzula continued, this exploitation occurs chiefly through the reserve system, which makes agricultural subsistence impossible for the black majority. And outside the reserves, Nzula estimated the conditions of the roughly two million African squatters and farm workers in the early 1930s to be worse than those of any other section of the

African working population due to the labor contracts binding them to farms and the feudal-like tenancy arrangements.⁶⁷ The concentration of landholdings and the landlessness of the majority were barriers to economic development through peasant farming. Hence, he argued, "...the land question is the most serious question in the politics of South Africa today." Nzula admitted the presence of a well-developed proletariat, but nonetheless reiterates that "...the struggle for land and national independence takes central importance."⁶⁸

Nzula articulated a two-stage conception of the South African revolution which closely follows the model outlined at the Comintern's Sixth Congress:

The first task of the revolution is to take the land from the landowners, eradicate all pre-capitalist, feudal and serf-owning relations and in so doing clear the ground for the free development of peasant farming....In South Africa the subsequent course of the revolution will proceed through a gradual development of this national agrarian bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution...⁶⁹

That this is a model from which critical social forces have been abstracted, rather than an analysis of actually existing social forces, is seen in Nzula's dismissal of the South African working class as even a potential social

vanguard and in his description of the democratic revolution as bourgeois-led. In stressing the revolutionary potential of an anticipated national movement, regardless of class leadership, Nzula's view parallels that of La Guma a few years earlier, in contrast to Bunting's argument at the Six Congress. Nonetheless, his discussion of rural protests shows an awareness of the social power of South Africa's rural population in all its dimensions - farmworker, labor tenant, reserve dweller and migrant worker.

Indeed, in 1928 when Bunting dismissed rural movements, the ICU had just passed its peak. Although no longer active in urban working class organization, and despite its expulsion of Communists in 1926, the ICU was giving voice to black sharecroppers and labor-tenants seeking to retain possession of their meager means of production. In the Western Cape, those Communists expelled from the ICU moved into the ANC to organize rural farmworkers. That both the Western Cape ANC and its radical successor, the Independent ANC, were decimated by the early 1930s reflects the harsh reaction of white farmers and the state towards any attempts to organize black farmworkers.⁷⁰

Bunting's polemical exaggeration was corrected in practice as the Party increased its work in the reserves, inspired by the Native Republic thesis. Cape Africans still had the

vote, and Communists ran two candidates in the 1929 parliamentary electoral campaigns: Douglas Wolton in the Cape Flats, and Bunting in Tembuland in the Transkei. The Buntings and Gana Makabeni addressed large, receptive crowds and were able, despite continuous police harassment, arrests, and intimidation of African voters, to gain a small number of votes.⁷¹ The campaigns were geared to national and democratic rights; the Simonses note: "[t]he programme should have appealed to any voter who resented racial discrimination."⁷² This was the Party's first foray into the Reserves, wrote Roux:

The Communist Party until now had been a party of the large towns and smaller urban locations. In places like Potchefstroom contact had been made with a number of Bantu farm labourers and labour tenants. But in no instance hitherto, except perhaps in the visits to the Basutoland Lekhotla la Bafo (League of the Poor), had the red flag been carried into the Native reserves.⁷³

Yet the de facto proletarianization of reserve dwellers who, despite being domiciled on the land, depended on wage labor, strengthened Bunting's argument against the Comintern's conception of a "peasant-based" revolution. As he told his comrades:

More than ever we can see how completely these territories, with all their officials and paraphernalia, are to-day mere appurtenances of the Chamber of Mines.

The people have just so little land per family, and are taxed just so much, that they can only subsist by sending their men to the mines. And the whites simply batten on the couple of pounds brought home by each mineworker after his dreary contract has expired.⁷⁴

The League of African Rights (LAR), which Communists established in August 1929, was another attempt to organize the countryside. In both structure and goal the LAR was a precursor to the black united fronts of the next decade: organizationally, it was composed of affiliated local structures around the country, drawing in representatives of the ANC and ICU, and it aimed to unite Africans in direct opposition to the proposed Hertzog bills to curtail their economic and political rights. In Roux's words: It must be remembered that existing native organisations are weak and have a very small membership, the main mass of natives throughout the country being completely unattached politically. To sweep into political activity the vast mass of unorganised natives is the main task of the League.

Hoping to mobilize Africans on the basis of their democratic and national aspirations, the LAR drew up and circulated around the country a petition combining democratic rights with the national slogan, "Mayibuye!" (Let Africa Return!): Like the "Great Charter" of the XIX Century in England, the petition embodies certain elementary, popular demands of the

democratic revolution. Together with the slogan "Mayibuye!" ("Return to us our country!") it forms a programme of immediate demands on which we hope to unite the whole of the African people.⁷⁵

The League, Roux reports, was "...a big success from the start. Political fever among Africans was still running high." But by this time the Comintern had zigzagged to its ultra-left third period line and anticipated a crisis of capitalism and sharpening class conflict around the corner. Accordingly, a year after the LAR's formation, the Comintern ordered it disbanded on the grounds of possible fusion with reformist organizations or leadership.⁷⁶

But in the repressive late 1920s, the petition, as the Communists themselves explained, was hardly reformist. Introducing the petition to a community entailed mass meetings and discussions, activities which threatened the white establishment and from which moderate black leaders generally remained aloof. "In fact," Roux wrote to the Comintern, "the reformists have already taken fright at the petition and are boycotting it accordingly." The League was a practical way of spreading Communist influence, "among the native peasantry and toilers in the small towns and country districts," particularly important in the likely event the Party was banned. It could, moreover, provide the foundation for the federal unification of existing,

potentially anti-imperialist national organizations. Despite its obvious value and initial success on the ground, Communists disbanded the League in late 1930 at the Comintern's insistence.⁷⁷

Announcement of a Mass Meeting, League of Native Rights,

August 25, 1929

Bunting Papers, by permission of Department of Historical
Papers, University of the Witwatersrand Library,
Johannesburg.

The "Native Republic" as a mobilizing slogan

Bunting's initial insistence that blacks could not be mobilized on a nationalist, anti-British imperialist slogan was wrong. The late teens and early 1920s was a period of urban black working class militancy which in turn radicalized the black petty bourgeoisie. In this climate Garvey's African nationalist movement struck a resonant chord amongst black South Africans with its calls for a "Black Republic" and "Africa for the Africans".⁷⁸ When the black working class was on the move, as in the early '20s, this political demand for self-determination supplemented concrete working class demands, demonstrating their self-confidence to call for a new form of government. The quest for self-determination which Marcus Garvey's "Black Republic" slogan encapsulated, and which anticipated the Native Republic thesis in its twin goals of African self-determination and independence from British imperialism, was such a threat to the white establishment that it countered in 1921 by setting up the Joint Councils of Europeans and Africans "...to restore the greatly diminished confidence of Africans in British overlordship."⁷⁹

The ANC and ICU rejected this defiant stance, a reflection of the repressive and conservative times. In 1926 the ICU expelled its predominantly black Communist membership, and

it subsequently refused to cooperate with the ANC, claiming it was sympathetic to Communists. By 1927 radicals in Congress were under pressure as well, and amongst the increasingly cautious black petty bourgeoisie the slogan was a non-starter. Far from rejecting British Imperialism, the ANC looked to Britain for support against Afrikaner nationalism, with the Cape ANC reaffirming its "faith in the Union Jack." In 1930 the then-radical Gumede was ousted from the national ANC leadership, replaced by the conservative Pixley Seme.⁸⁰ In this conservative climate, it is not surprising that, as Bunting reported, the ICU was "inclined to repudiate" the thesis and the ANC remained silent.⁸¹ In 1930, the South African Garveyite, James Thaele, who had a few years before captured the rural proletarian upsurge in the Western Cape, expelled two leading black activists, Bransby R. Ndobe and Elliot Tonjeni, neither of them Communists, for "bolshevistic tendencies." Ndobe and Tonjeni went on to form the the Independent ANC, which spanned the Cape Province, which organized farmworkers for better wages and work conditions under the banner of a "Native Republic" and "Africa for the Africans."⁸²

The Native Republic thesis pushed South African Communists to reexamine the land question. Yet the solution to South

Africa's land question which the Native Republic thesis provided meant, as Nzula wrote, the elimination of all those social relations on the land which restricted the development of a black farming class. While this would mean the formal dismantling of the reserve system which restricted the amount of land available to black cultivators, it did not address the needs of the vast majority of virtually proletarianized reserve dwellers whose livelihood depended, as Bunting had observed during his Tembuland campaign, on migrant wage labor and who probably could not afford to buy land, even if a legal option. Nor did the thesis, in its focus on the peasantry, address the needs of the Cape's large agricultural proletariat organized by the Western Cape ANC and Independent ANC, although Communist organizers continued to use the slogan as a defiant rejection of white domination. By and large, Hofmeyr has shown, farmworkers responded to those demands specific to their needs as a proletariat seeking control of their working conditions rather than to the demands of an aspirant peasantry. While the Native Republic slogan could mobilize blacks in a period of popular upsurge, working class blacks had to rely on concrete demands to express their class interests.⁸³

Conclusion

In the 1920s socialists saw several paths to social revolution in South Africa. Until 1924, most Communists thought that a white working class vanguard would lead the socialist movement. Subsequently, Communists like La Guma stressed the revolutionary potential of an anti-imperialist national movement. Another argument, foreshadowing a permanent revolution approach, stressed that the color bar had prevented the emergence of a black bourgeoisie. Accordingly, they believed, the combined numerical supremacy of the black proletariat, migrant labor force and small cultivators, meant that the democratic and national movements would gravitate towards socialism. The path which Bunting and Roux eventually followed maintained that blacks were the motor force for the democratic and national revolutions, but that only together with white labor could they build a socialist movement. Their insistence that white labor as such was integral to a socialist movement reflected both a functionalist assumption about the revolutionary potential of organized labor and a conception that South Africa was composed of fixed plural groups. Although commonly misconstrued as a classically Marxist position, this path was utopian, not scientific, in that

white labor would never, in prevailing conditions, support democracy. To do so would have meant its own self-destruction as a social grouping. The idea of a predominantly black working class movement in which democratic whites could join on a non-racial and individual basis only emerged decades later.

As a slogan for national self-determination the Native Republic thesis challenged the prevailing white minority authority by calling for a new form of government. In that sense, it was part of a democratic movement. The Comintern's Native Republic was a special form of black republic reflecting a colonial analogy, indicated even in the choice of "native" rather than "black," for which there had been a historical precedent in Garvey's Black Republic. The thesis was premised on a peasant-based colonial model which differed in important respects from South Africa of the late 1920s, and it had several drawbacks. First, it offered a specific solution rather than proclaiming the right of oppressed South Africans to determine their own solution. Second, its implicit concept of the South African nation was a racial or color-based one, derived from a colonial model and superimposed on a post-colonial, racial capitalist society. It presupposed national self-determination for a predominantly agrarian black colony

conquered by white foreigners. Finally, it failed to link the national and class struggles except in a mechanical, linear manner. It was ambivalent on the working class struggle and the class nature of the projected society.

Objective social conditions in the 1920s and '30s, especially the absence of a black bourgeoisie, raised the possibility that the national democratic movement might move in a socialist direction, i.e., that the weight of the working class and impoverished rural masses would push the national democratic movement towards socialism. But this did not happen: in South Africa there has been no automatic convergence between objective conditions and subjective goals. This suggests that South African Communists might well have insisted on an alternative slogan which addressed both the national and class questions. The Native Republic thesis reinforced national and democratic aspirations but obscured the class issue.

The Native Republic thesis avoided the question of whether capitalist development in South Africa was creating conditions for a nation whose identity was no longer found in the period of white colonial conquest of blacks. This is a weakness of all color-based formulations of nationality and, hence, of any black republic slogan. If the nation is a historical phenomenon, do social and economic developments

create conditions for a South African nation whose identity is not based on color? What is national self-determination in that context? Who constitutes the nation? Only in the late 1930s and '40s did socialists in the Workers' Party of South Africa, closest to the Native Republic thesis in seeing the land question as the alpha and omega of the South African struggle, begin to address these questions and reject a color-based determination of nationhood.⁸⁴

Despite these drawbacks, the Native Republic thesis was, historically, a significant advance in South African Communist thinking. For the first time Communists put South Africa's great social problems, the national and democratic questions, at the top of their political program. In focussing on the land question the thesis addressed a central concern of the overwhelming majority of rurally-based South Africans. The thesis offered a practical democratic solution to South Africa's national question even if it did not explicitly address working class interests. South African Communists reconciled the slogan with their various scenarios for social revolution. The racial legislation and repression of the late 1920s pushed many socialists who had initially rejected the thesis to accept it. As Musson has pointed out, its accent on black unity foreshadowed the black united front movements of the next

decade. Trotsky, too, while criticizing the slogan's lack of class content, recognized its strength, when in 1935 he responded to South African Trotskyists raising the very objections which Bunting and Roux had made the decade before. South Africa's population was predominantly black and oppressed; hence the national question would be the steam which powered the social revolution. In that sense, any democratic republic in South Africa, whether socialist or bourgeois-democratic, would, after all, be a black republic.⁸⁵

1* I wish to thank Neville Alexander for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter which helped me to clarify a number of ideas.

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2. V. I. Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (Theses)," in V. I. Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question; The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971, 98-111, 99.

3. Leon Trotsky, "The Permanent Revolution," in Trotsky, The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects, London: New Park, 1982, 130, emphasis in the original.

4. "The South African possessions of Great Britain form a Dominion only from the point of view of the white minority. From the point of view of the black majority South Africa is a Slave Colony." Leon Trotsky, "Remarks on the draft theses of the Workers' Party of South Africa," April 20, 1935. Reprinted in Leon Trotsky, "On the South African Theses: to the South African Section," Writings of Leon Trotsky: 1934-35, New York: Pathfinder, 1974, 248-255.

5. Harold Wolpe, Race, Class & the Apartheid State, Paris and Addis Ababa: Unesco, 1988, 29-30.

6. Wolpe, Race, Class & the Apartheid State, 24-35, quote 35. On the various interpretations of colonialism of a special type see 32-34.

7. Wolpe, Race, Class & the Apartheid State, 28-30.

8. Edward Roux, S. P. Bunting: A Political Biography, Cape Town: The African Bookman, 1944, 103, reprinted from S. A. Worker, November 30, 1928. Reprinted in "Editorial Note," in [South African Communist Party], South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980, London: Inkululeko, 1981, 89. For other discussions of the Native Republic thesis see Roux, S. P. Bunting, 85-100; Eddie and Win Roux, Rebel Pity: the Life of Eddie Roux, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, 73-78; H. J. and R. E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969, 386-415; Martin Legassick, "Class and Nationalism in South African Protest: the South African Communist Party and the 'Native Republic', 1928-34," Eastern African Studies, XV, July 1973; Baruch Hirson, "Bunting vs. Bukharin: the 'Native Republic' Slogan," Searchlight South Africa, 3, July 1989, 51-65; and Doreen Musson, Johnny Gomas, Voice of the Working Class: A Political Biography, Cape Town: Buchu, 1989, 43-58.

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10. Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," in Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question, 39-97, especially 41-45.
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12. Rosa Luxemburg, "The National Question and Autonomy," especially 129-133.
13. Benjamin Neuberger, National Self-Determination in Postcolonial Africa, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1986, 117.
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15. C. O. C. Amate, Inside the OAU: Pan-Africanism in Practice, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986, 61 and 476; and Neuberger, National Self-Determination, 72.
16. Luxemburg, "The National Question and Autonomy," 134. Neuberger, National Self-Determination, 95-104 and Benjamin Neuberger, "The African Concept of Balkanization," Journal of Modern African Studies, 13, 3, 1976, 523-529.
17. Neuberger, National Self-Determination, 74-80 and Neuberger, "State and Nation," 203-204.
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20. Simons, Class and Colour, 473; Legassick, "Class and Nationalism in South African Protest," 52. See "What is the Native Independent Republic?," unpub. ms., [1934], Ralph Bunche Collection, box 62, Special Collections, University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, for the prevailing CPSA position in 1934.
21. Simons, Class and Colour, 389. See also David J. Mason, "Race, Class and National Liberation: Some implications of the policy dilemmas of the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1915-1931, M.Sc., University of Bristol, 1971, esp. 25-36.
22. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 89. See also Simons, Class and Colour, 396.
23. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 101 and 105; Bunting's letter to Roux, January 9, 1929, Bunting Papers, A949, By permission of Department of Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand Library, Johannesburg. On Gomas' response see Musson, Johnny Gomas, 48.
24. S. P. Bunting, summarized in Simons, Class and Colour, 395-397.
25. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 88-89.

26. Sheila T. van der Horst, "Labour," Chapter V, 109-157, especially 112-118 and Department of Economics, Natal University College, "The National Income and the Non-European," Chapter XIV, 306-347, especially 312-313, both in Ellen Hellmann, ed., Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa, Cape Town, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1949.
27. S. P. Bunting, "First Address to the Sixth Comintern Congress," Moscow, July 23, 1928, Bunting Papers, 180-186; quote 185-186. Note that two pages of this speech have double numbers: 183-184 and 185-186. See also Eddie Roux's discussion of Bunting's address in S. P. Bunting, 92-93.
28. Bunting, "First Address," quotes 185-186, 185-186 and 187 respectively. My emphasis.
29. E. R. Roux, "Thesis on South Africa," Sixth Comintern Congress, Moscow, July 28, 1929, quotes 1 and 2 respectively, emphasis in the original, Bunting Papers.
30. Roux, "Thesis on South Africa," quotes 4-5 and 5 respectively, Bunting Papers.
31. E. R. Roux, "The New Slogan and the Revolutionary Movement among White Workers in South Africa," Sixth Comintern Congress, Moscow, July 30, 1928, 4, Bunting Papers.
32. Eddie Roux, letter to [Douglas Wolton] General Secretary, CPSA, September 5, 1928, Bunting Papers; and Roux, S. P. Bunting, 103. The formulation recorded in Roux's Comintern address, "Thesis on South Africa," p. 6 is a shorter version: "An Independent Workers and Peasants Republic with equal rights for all toilers." Along with this slogan he raises the demand for national independence.
33. S. P. Bunting, "Address of 20 August 1928," Sixth Comintern Congress, 38th session, Moscow, 4, Bunting Papers. See Roux's discussion of this speech in S. P. Bunting, 95-98.
34. Bunting, "Address of 20 August 1928," 6.
35. Bunting, "Address of 20 August 1928," 10-14; quote 14.
36. Letter from Bunting to Roux, December 5, 1928, Bunting Papers.
37. Musson, Johnny Gomas, 50 and 71.
38. Umsebenzi, September 26, 1930, quoted in Musson, Johnny Gomas, 54.
39. James A. La Guma, summarized and quoted in Simons, Class and Colour, 409.
40. La Guma, quoted in Simons, Class and Colour, both quotes 398.
41. Musson, Johnny Gomas, 34. On Andrews and Glass see R. K. Cope, Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W. H. Andrews, Workers' Leader, Cape Town: Stewart, n.d. and Baruch Hirson, "Death of a Revolutionary: Frank Glass/Li Fu-Jen/John Liang 1901-1988," Searchlight South Africa, 1, 1, September 1988, 28-41. Hirson's

biographical account of Glass is at times highly speculative, particularly concerning Glass' relationship with the ICU, p. 34.

42. Letter from Bunting to Roux, December 5, 1928, Bunting Papers; Simons, Class and Colour, 386, 410-411.

43. Letter from Bunting to Roux, January 9, 1929, Bunting Papers.

44. "'Our Annual Conference - An Inspiring Gathering,' report in The South African Worker, January 31, 1929," Document 43, in South African Communists Speak, 97-100, quote 99; my emphasis. See also the Simons' summary of the program adopted at the CPSA's seventh annual conference, Class and Colour, 410-411.

45. "Programme of the Communist Party of South Africa adopted at the seventh annual conference of the Party on January 1, 1929," Document 44, South African Communists Speak, 100-106, quote 102.

46. Musson, Johnny Gomas, 49-50. Not surprisingly, Gomas would become a leader of the black united fronts of the next decade, even though in the mid-1930s, he followed the Party's new anti-fascist line, calling white workers to "Wake Up" and unite with blacks, p. 71.

47. "Resolution on 'The South African Question' adopted by the Executive Committee of the Communist International following the Sixth Comintern Congress," Document 42, South African Communists Speak, 91-97, especially 91-92; quote 92.

48. "Resolution on 'The South African Question,'" 91.

49. "Resolution on 'The South African Question,'" 92.

50. "Resolution on 'The South African Question,'" quotes 91 and 94, respectively.

51. "Resolution on 'The South African Question,'" 96.

52. Baruch Hirson, "Bukharin, Bunting and the 'Native Republic' Slogan," 57.

53. "Resolution on 'The South African Question,'" 94.

54. I am indebted to the late Kenny Jordaan for this idea and for directing me to this line of argument.

55. Letter from Roux to C[entral] E[xecutive] CPSA, September 25, 1928, 3, Bunting Papers.

56. "Resolution on 'The South African Question,'" 93. See also "Extract dealing with South Africa from the main 'Thesis on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies' adopted at the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow in August and September 1928," Document 41, South African Communists Speak, 90-91.

57. Letter from E. R. Roux to General Secretary, CPSA, September 5, 1928, 2, Bunting Papers.

58. Letter from S. P. Bunting to E. R. Roux, December 5, 1928, 4, Bunting Papers.
59. Letter from E. R. Roux to Victor [Danchin?], March 6, 1929, Bunting Papers.
60. Letter from E. R. Roux to [Wolton] General Secretary, CPSA, September 5, 1928, 2, Bunting Papers.
61. Bunting, "Address of 20 August 1928," 10, Bunting Papers; my emphasis. See also Roux, S. P. Bunting, 96.
62. Letter from E. R. Roux to General Secretary, CPSA, September 5, 1928, 3, Bunting Papers.
63. Letter from Roux to General Secretary, CPSA, September 5, 1928, 4, Bunting Papers.
64. Colin Bundy, "Land and liberation: popular rural protest and the national liberation movements in South Africa, 1920-1960," in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, eds., The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa, Longman: London and New York, 1987, 254-285. On the Native Republic thesis see 259-263.
65. A. T. Nzula, I. I. Potekhin and A. Z. Zusmanovich, Forced Labour in Colonial Africa, ed. and intro. by Robin Cohen, London: Zed, 1979, 208.
66. Nzula, Potekhin and Zusmanovich, Forced Labour, 104.
67. Nzula, Potekhin and Zusmanovich, Forced Labour, 201.
68. Nzula, Potekhin and Zusmanovich, Forced Labour, quotes 199 and 162 respectively.
69. Nzula, Potekhin and Zusmanovich, Forced Labour, 163.
70. On the Western Cape ANC and Independent ANC see Willie Hofmeyr, "Rural Popular Organisation Problems: Struggles in the Western Cape, 1929-1930," Africa Perspective, 1983, 26-49 and Willie Hofmeyr, "Agricultural Crisis and Rural Organisation in the Cape: 1929-1933," M.A., University of Cape Town, 1985; Nzula, Potekhin and Zusmanovich Forced Labour, 210-211, describes violent clashes with police after series of strikes in 1930 by agricultural workers in the Western Cape.
71. On the Tembuland campaign see Roux, S. P. Bunting, 105-112. Laurens van der Post's novel, In a Province, London, The Hogarth Press, 1934, 309-334, describes a fictional campaign in Bambuland (Tembuland) by a socialist trade union organizer which government provocateurs turned into a riot.
72. Simons, Class and Colour, 411-413; quote 411.
73. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 106.
74. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 108.
75. Both quotes from [E. R. Roux], Letter from CPSA to ECCI,

[October?] 1929, Bunting Papers. See also Roux, S. P. Bunting, 113-115 and Edward Roux, Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1964, 226-227.

76. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 113-115; quote 114. On Comintern history in the 1920s and '30s see Fernando Claudin, The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform, Part One, New York and London: Monthly Review, 1975, especially 71-102.

77. Letter from CPSA to ECCI, [October?] 1929. See also, "A League of African Rights Petition with a million signatures," and announcement of "A Mass Meeting, League of Native Rights," Bunting Papers.

78. Robert A. Hill and Gregory A. Pirio, "'Africa for the Africans': the Garvey Movement in South Africa, 1920-1940," in Marks and Trapido, eds., The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism, 209-253; Philip Bonner, "The Transvaal Native Congress, 1917-1920: the radicalisation of the black petty bourgeoisie on the Rand," in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone, eds., Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa, London: Longman, 1982, 270-313.

79. Hill and Pirio, "'Africa for the Africans'," 226-228; quote p. 228.

80. Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 237-238; Simons, Class and Colour, 393.

81. Letter from S. P. Bunting to E. R. Roux, December 5, 1928, 3, Bunting Papers.

82. Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 236-243; Hofmeyr, "Agricultural Crisis and Rural Organisation," 155ff. and 320ff. See also Hill and Pirio, "'Africa for the Africans'," 230-234.

83. Hofmeyr, "Agricultural Crisis and Rural Organisation" 321-328.

84. No Sizwe, One Azania, One Nation: The National Question in South Africa, London: Zed, 1979 examines the evolution of these discussions on nationality in South Africa.

85. Trotsky, "On the South African Theses," especially 249.

CHAPTER 4

THE ORIGINS OF TROTSKYISM IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE ATTEMPTS TO BUILD A WORKING CLASS PARTY

The Native Republic episode signalled the prominent role which the Comintern began to play in the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) from the late 1920s, as it did in Communist Parties around the world. The political struggles in the Soviet Union between Stalin and the Left Oppositionists grouped around Leon Trotsky spilled into the international arena and in South Africa led to a series of defections and expulsions from the CPSA.¹ By the early 1930s these former Communists were loosely grouping themselves under the banner of Trotskyism.

This chapter examines the problem of organizational development in South Africa's socialist movement during the 1930s and '40s. It focusses on the attempts of the new Trotskyist tendency to achieve organizational unity in the form of a working class party. This goal, together with that of developing a political program, preoccupied South African Trotskyists in those decades, reflecting the weight which European and Russian revolutionaries had placed on the organizational question and the suggestions of Trotsky and his comrades in the international Left Opposition, precursor to the Fourth International. The chapter traces the origins and schisms in the Trotskyist tendency and its theoretical and practical efforts to grapple with the problem of organizational unity.

Socialists and the organizational question

The Western revolutionary tradition placed great emphasis on

the organizational question. Lenin and Luxemburg, among others, pointed to the critical link between organization and the development of the working class struggle. Writing years before the 1917 Revolution, Lenin argued that organizational weaknesses made the Russian socialist movement vulnerable to state repression and impeded its success at social mobilization. Because each new wave of political organization was largely spontaneous, rather than the product of "...a systematic and carefully thought-out and gradually prepared plan for a prolonged and stubborn struggle," the state could repeatedly smash them. The movement lost popular credibility because its leadership appeared careless. The means to transcend this cycle, Lenin maintained, was through organizational continuity, enabling socialists to learn how to avoid police repression and function without interruption. The movement could then engage in the systematic, continuous practical work necessary to develop a sustained relationship with the working class.²

Luxemburg similarly argued that the socialist movement, while seeking to move beyond capitalist social relations, arises out of and thus reflects capitalist conditions. Socialism's innate tendency towards centralism flows from capitalism's own movement towards economic and political centralism, she maintained. Subjectively, in its political goals, socialism strives to promote the interests of the entire working class and to fight all forms of particularism. Thus,

it follows that Social Democracy has the natural aspiration of welding together all national, religious, and professional groups of the working class into a unified party.³

Luxemburg saw the socialist movement as a component of the

working class struggle whose tasks were organization and political education. In her view, the solution to the organizational question lay in the conditions and political needs of the proletarian movement at a particular historical period. In Russia, for example, where absolutism masked bourgeois class rule, the working class struggle needed a united socialist opposition. The organizational task of Russian socialists, accordingly, was

...how to effect a transition from the type of divided, totally independent circles and local clubs--which corresponds to the preparatory, mostly propagandistic phase of the movement--to an organization such as is necessary for a united political action of the masses in the entire state.⁴

South African Trotskyists, following a similar line of thought, saw organizational unity as a precondition for mobilizing a social base in a society fragmented by class and color, where racial oppression overshadowed the class system. In their view, the state maintained capitalist social relations by perpetuating the historically-rooted fragmentation both of the working class and the black majority. Trotskyists, accordingly, sought to build unity amongst these groups. Reflecting the fragmented social conditions, however, the socialist movement itself contained multiple fragmentations. Politically, it was debilitated by the Communist-Trotskyist schism; organizationally, it was fragmented into numerous, regional groups; and, in its theory and practice it followed the racial division of the working class. In the 1930s and '40s it was unable to transcend its fragmented state and develop the organizational continuity upon which to base a sustained relationship

with the oppressed working class. This problem was particularly acute in the Trotskyist movement. Yet despite its organizational weakness and tiny size, the Trotskyist movement would have a significant impact on South African politics. Trotskyists were able to promote and popularize the principle of non-collaboration, which, through the efforts of the Non-European Unity Movement in the 1940s and '50s, would provide a significant counter to the influence of the African National Congress and allied groups.⁵

The CPSA was held together by centripetal force, its inner turmoil masked by the Comintern's strong hand and intolerance of differences. During the 1930s and '40s the CPSA strove to transplant Comintern policies on popular and anti-fascist fronts, and after 1941, the war effort, onto South African soil.⁶ Communists made practical working class gains, establishing trade unions in the Western Cape and Natal in the 1930s and '40s and playing an active role in trade unions on the Witwatersrand in the '40s.

But abrupt policy shifts, intense faction-fighting and expulsions, rooted in Comintern politics, hampered practical work. The Party was hardly characterized by continuity: its policies swung back and forth in response to domestic political pressures and Comintern zigzags. At several points in the 1930s and '40s, its membership and influence were virtually decimated by this turmoil, and it had to rebuild itself from scratch. With the Party's ultra-left turn in 1930, the Native Republic thesis went into eclipse as Communists repudiated popular work in national organizations in an effort to streamline and bolshevize the Party. By 1933, on the eve of Trotskyism's birth in South Africa, Roux puts its membership at no

higher than 150.⁷ The Native Republic thesis was revived in 1932-1934, again the subject of intense debate and different interpretations, indicating the degree of dissension within the Party.⁸

Despite the Comintern's destructive impact, members sought its advice in mediating internal differences, often using its policies to support their own arguments. The Party's abandonment of the League of African Rights, for example, just as it was gaining momentum reveals the degree to which it followed the Comintern.⁹ Even Johnny Gomas, who hoped to reform the Party from within, looked to the Comintern for direction.¹⁰ And S. P. Bunting, even after his expulsion in 1931, "...strongly urged [the newly-formed Lenin Club] that there should be no revolutionary party outside the C.P. and he said he would not assist in forming one."¹¹ Nonetheless, those individual efforts at internal reform were not strong enough to promote a South African-based strategy to give direction to an organization buffeted by domestic class forces and international political pressures.

In contrast to the CPSA's strong internal control of factions, Trotskyism in South Africa has been characterized by a centrifugal tendency. As a political tendency capable of disseminating socialist ideas and challenging what it saw as the CPSA's reformist practice, its own self-imposed challenge in the 1930s was to develop the programmatic and organizational unity necessary to lay the foundations for a working class party. For a variety of reasons, it failed to do this. At the end of the decade it was organizationally fragmented, and the Trotskyist tendency had still not developed a

unified program of action and a common set of tactical slogans based on a concrete analysis of South Africa conditions. This continued in the 1940s, and at the war's end Cape Town and Johannesburg Trotskyists stood on opposing sides in trade union disputes. By contrast, while the CPSA was periodically depleted by political vacillations and internal disputes, it was able to recoup organizationally and to align itself, in the post-war period, with the influential Congress movement.

Underlying the political and ideological disputes in the early Trotskyist movement, and its difficulty in achieving organizational unity, were regional differences stemming from capitalism's combined and uneven development superimposed upon a variety of pre-capitalist conditions. On the one hand, the capital investment which followed the mineral revolution sparked off long-term industrial and agricultural growth with effects throughout the country. Railroad construction and agricultural production for the domestic market accelerated the country's economic unification in the inter-war years. The growth rate, along with urban employment, continued to climb after the Great Depression.¹² The 1930s saw the rapid development of secondary industries like food, canning and clothing manufacturing, in urban centers around the country. Although the corresponding increase of the unskilled workforce did at times result in trade union solidarity across color lines, the differential incorporation of blacks, whites, males and females into the labor force very often pitted these groups against each other, reinforcing racial and gender divisions.¹³ This pattern was superimposed on regions with markedly different socioeconomic histories. The rigid

political and socioeconomic stratification across color and gender lines, and the migrant nature of much of the industrial African labor force, meant that ideas of working class unity did not fall on fertile ground, even though the ranks of the urban working class were swelling.

Proletarianization on the Witwatersrand was spurred by mineral discoveries in the late nineteenth century, and in addition to the Afrikaners from the countryside, very often women, who swelled the ranks of white workers, a tiny black urban proletariat developed alongside a large migrant labor force. Capitalist relations of production had penetrated the Cape far earlier than the interior regions, and were reflected in its relatively developed class structure.¹⁴ The Western Cape, especially the Cape Peninsula, which would become a stronghold of Trotskyist influence, had its own pattern. In the countryside, most blacks worked on isolated, white-owned farms under servile conditions in which the tot system of payment for labor by alcohol still operated. But Cape Town was both a point of international contact and the country's political center, home of Parliament. By the 1930s Cape Town had a long-settled, predominantly Coloured, black working class, often employed on the docks or in building trades, an established artisan class, and a black intelligentsia with a tradition of political involvement. Cape Africans had a history of electoral and political participation, and the Cape was the only region in the Union of South Africa where Africans still had a qualified franchise.¹⁵ In many ways, Cape Town set the political pulse of the country. The African-American social scientist Ralph Bunche captured some of this vibrancy in his

observations of Cape Town's Parade, a central meeting area:

...too many representatives of the Liberation League holding forth from a soap-box with a small audience. Preaching working-class ideology. Not far away was a young Garveyite (formerly an African National Congress member) preaching race chauvinism to another small group....At fruit stall end of Parade was a Dutch Reformed Church troupe of men and girls with guitars, led by a mulatto preacher who looked a lot like Elder Michaux and who was talking the same hokum. I've never seen any white speakers on the Parade.¹⁶

Urban centers in the Eastern Cape and Natal had a different profile. Port Elizabeth developed into an industrial center around the sea trade, and leather and motor industries. It, too, saw rapid industrial development in the '30s, and with active trade union organization in the late 1930s, became an ANC and Communist stronghold in the 1940s and '50s.¹⁷ The novelist Laurens van der Post evokes the political turbulence arising from the rapid socioeconomic transformation and influx of labor in his account of fictional Port Benjamin (Port Elizabeth) around 1930:

Daily, trains came in from the north, bearing loads of bewildered and unsophisticated black people to augment the local labour supplies. Every set-back in farming released hundreds of destitute, unskilled, uneducated white families into the town....At night the public squares were filled with shabby, hungry, bewildered, heavy-hearted crowds, listening hopelessly to glib exponents of the latest social panacea. Clashes between workers,

mostly black workers, and police became more and more frequent.¹⁸

A regional pattern could probably be traced in the CPSA, but the very recent development of South African Trotskyism as a political movement very likely made it more susceptible to regionalism, which reinforced its organizational fragility. Reflecting these regional differences, Cape Town Trotskyists are known for their intellectual contributions. Rival Trotskyist factions competed for the support of the black intelligentsia, which they saw as a means of disseminating political ideas to the urban and rural masses. Urban Trotskyists tended to argue for the significance of the proletariat, while I. B. Tabata, from the rural Cape, stressed the weight of the peasantry. On the Witwatersrand Trotskyists were far more active in trade unions than those in the Western Cape, where trade union organization in the 1930s was the province of Communists.¹⁹ Each Trotskyist group had a perspective colored by specific regional peculiarities; each focussed on aspects of South African social reality, but none developed a comprehensive picture of capitalism in South Africa. Despite their common concern for the national struggle, which would mature in the 1940s into support for the Non-European Unity Movement, none developed a national perspective in their theory or practice of socialism.²⁰

Yet regional peculiarities alone do not explain the failure of South African Trotskyists to develop a unified organization or program of action by the end of the decade. The timing of Trotskyism's origins in South Africa was also a factor in its tentative relationship with the emerging black proletariat. Born in a period when the black protest movement had recently been crushed

for its first efforts at collective class action in the late 'teens and 1920s, and when the socialist tradition in South Africa was still unstable, Trotskyists had difficulty developing a systematic and sustained relationship with the black working class, as did the CPSA through most of the 1930s. Organizational instability accentuated this problem. Trotskyists were caught in a vicious circle: on the one hand, their intense theoretical discussions of the 1930s reflected their search for a political program of action. But their relative isolation from working class struggles limited their ability to develop a concrete analysis and eventually led them to elevate theoretical abstractions to a programmatic level.

The origins of Trotskyism in South Africa

Trotskyism's immediate organizational roots in South Africa are found in the conflict between Comintern politics and the CPSA in the late 1920s. The 1920s had been a decade of industrial and rural upsurge amongst South African blacks, typified by the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) and the Western Cape African National Congress (ANC). But in 1929-30, when this mass movement was in a period of decline, the Comintern directed the Party to cease work in so-called reformist organizations and to adopt an openly agitational stance. Over the next few years the Party was wracked by internal faction fighting stemming from the effect of this sharp swing to the left. From 1929, the Party and affiliated organizations suppressed internal criticism and purged dissidents. Between 1929 and 1934 it expelled members of varying political hues based on a variety of allegations.²¹ These expulsions formed the nucleus of the early

Trotskyist movement.²²

The principal differences between the Party and those it expelled concerned the Comintern's expanded role in internal policy, the lack of internal democracy and disputes over the Native Republic thesis. Trotskyists, like some Communists a few years earlier, argued that the thesis subordinated black working-class interests to those of the peasantry and aspirant peasantry and presupposed the existence of a black bourgeoisie, while simultaneously reinforcing racial divisions in the labor force. Instead, they argued, socialists should strive to unite the working class across color lines.²³

Despite these differences, many continuities remained between early Trotskyists and Communists. At a structural level, both socialist tendencies in the early 1930s were victims of the repressive social conditions which had crushed black protest in the late 1920s. The CPSA entered this period already weakened by its own internal dynamics of extreme policy swings and purges. In its difficulty in gaining a foothold in the working class movement, the Trotskyist movement reflected the period of retrenchment in which it was born.

By the late 1930s and '40s, a number of leading Trotskyists were black, often drawn from Cape Town's growing black intelligentsia. Usually first-generation students and intellectuals from working class backgrounds they began making their mark as thinkers and orators in the New Era Fellowship. This was a radical discussion and debating society formed by Goolam Gool in 1937 to provide a forum for young black students at the University of Cape

Town who were isolated from the university's all-white intellectual life, but which also drew in blacks from outside the university as well as political activists. Together with the Lenin Club and the Communist Party's October Club, the New Era Fellowship gave Cape Town in the late '30s a rich and exciting climate for radicals.

Nonetheless, European exiles predominated in the first few years of the Trotskyist tendency, as they did in the CPSA, a manifestation of the uneven pattern of political struggles around the world. South African socialism arose from the traditions of British labor and Eastern European exiles, and their social and national origins continued to permeate the political orientation of these socialists.²⁴ Certainly in the early 1930s, Communist and Trotskyist politics in South Africa still tended to reflect Russian and European struggles as opposed to being integrally part of, and emanating from, the South African struggle. Russian and European problems, rather than programmatic issues reflecting South Africa, were the point of departure for expulsions and splits. Russian and European political economic conditions were generally the measure of South African political economy, and European historical conditions and classes, including notions of feudalism and peasantry, were at times mechanically transposed to South Africa and assumed to fit. In other words, both socialist tendencies worked with abstract conceptions of social classes and class struggle which had not been developed from a study of South African conditions. They continued to believe in the necessity of working class unity across color lines, and, in line with European conditions, characterised South Africa's rural population as peasant.²⁵

Organizational development of Trotskyism

Those socialists who rejected or were expelled from the Party, quickly turned to the international Trotskyist tendency for programmatic assistance. C. F. Glass and Manuel Lopes were in contact with Trotskyists overseas by 1930; that year their letters appeared in The Militant, organ of the Communist League of America (Opposition). Both criticized the CPSA's lack of internal democracy and its position on the national question in South Africa.²⁶ Glass acknowledged white labor's role in perpetuating the rigidly-divided working class through the color bar, but nonetheless believed that long-term social and economic factors were tearing down racial barriers. This viewpoint had widespread currency amongst the left after the Depression, and characterized Trotskyist thought and, in fact, most socialist perspectives until the 1960s. In Glass' opinion,

The artificial color-bar raised by the whites has for some time shown signs of relaxing. It has been found that measures such as these do not stem the advancing tide of the cheap native workers. Europeans' wage standards were definitely endangered when by a court decision, the color-bar in the gold-mining industry, which debarred natives from skilled occupations, was declared ultra vires the constitution and upset. The European workers then lent readier ear to the message of the Communist Party, bidding them assist, if for no higher motive than self-interest, the native to secure higher wages and thus eliminate competition based on differing wage-standards.

He argued that the Party's Native Republic thesis counteracted this tendency toward black-white unity by increasing black animosity towards whites, and blamed this for the fact that

*the Party is now completely isolated from the white section of the proletariat--the most advanced, the most intelligent, the most class conscious, whilst the old racial antagonism has revived in active form.*²⁷

*The Johannesburg-based Communist League of Africa, the first-known organization seeking affiliation to the international Trotskyist movement, expressed an entirely different position on the racially-divided working class. The Communist League of Africa was atypical of subsequent groups: most, if not all, of its members were Africans, although little else is known about them.*²⁸ *T. W. Thibedi, expelled from the CPSA in 1930, formed the League in 1932. Thibedi, who worked closely with Communist S. P. Bunting, had been a socialist from the days of the International Socialist League. He had organized the CPSA night school in the 1920s, the Non-European Federation of Trade Unions from 1929-31 and the African Mineworkers Union in 1931.*²⁹

At a time when Glass still believed in the vanguard role of white labor, and the CPSA and most Cape Town Trotskyists were emphasizing the centrality of the land question, the Communist League of Africa focussed squarely on the black proletariat and the national question. The racially-divided working class, they wrote to the Communist League of America in 1932, was the greatest obstacle to socialist mobilization in South Africa. They, themselves, were an all-black group not by choice, but because of the paternalistic attitudes of white South African socialists.

...do not...think that we are purposely refusing to unite with European comrades, no we are not....The color question makes organizing difficult. Negro workers are generally considered inferior even on such matters as revolutionary organizations, and

as usual European workers are considered superior.³⁰

In the first international Trotskyist exchange on the national question in South Africa, both the American socialists and Trotsky agreed that within revolutionary parties no distinction should be made between black and white. Trotsky was explicit on this point and cautioned on distinguishing between the oppressed and privileged sections of the working class, a theme reiterated in his correspondence with subsequent groups:

...if the proletarian group works in a district where there are workers of various races, and in spite of this, it consists only of workers of a privileged nationality, I am inclined to regard them with suspicion: are we not dealing with the workers' aristocracy? Isn't the group poisoned by slave holding prejudices active or passive? It is quite a different matter when we are approached by a group of Negro workers. Here I am ready to consider beforehand that we are achieving agreement with them, even though this is not yet obvious; because of their whole position they do not strive and cannot strive to degrade anybody, oppress anybody or deprive anybody of his rights. They do not seek privileges and cannot rise to the top except on the road of the international revolution.³¹

The Communist League of Africa published a single issue of Maraphanga, then flickered out of existence. According to the Bolshevist Leninist League of Johannesburg, which appeared on the scene two years later, it

...finally collapsed through lack of experience, of political leadership and of perspectives. Our comrades made an attempt to revive the group. At first this was not successful but we did establish a training class for African workers....

The Bolshevist Leninist League contained a number of individuals expelled from the CPSA in 1934. Some members actively followed the

trade union movement; probably trade unionist Max Gordon was associated with it. In 1934 or '35 this group merged with the majority of the Cape Town-based Lenin Club to form the Workers' Party of South Africa.³² Thibedi receded to the background of Trotskyist politics.³³

In contrast to the Communist League of Africa, the Lenin Club, formed a few months later of several socialist groups in Cape Town, provided the typical pattern for South African Trotskyist groups until 1960. The core of the Lenin Club were anti-Stalinists expelled from The Gezerd, a predominantly Jewish, Yiddish-speaking CPSA organization meaning "Go Back to the Land," following the 1932 visit of Comintern representative Gina Medem. The Marxist Educational League, a study group formed from a faction of the Independent Labour Party, and which had incorporated the International Socialist Club, subsequently joined the Lenin Club. Reflecting Cape Town's class and color stratification, the early Lenin Club consisted of Jewish intellectuals and workers, some Coloured professionals and workers and a number of radical intellectuals from the University of Cape Town. I. B. Tabata, who later led the Non-European Unity Movement, started attending meetings around 1933 with Goolam Gool and was the only known African member at that time.³⁴ In September 1932 this group contacted the International Secretariat of the Left Opposition in Berlin, which advised them of the existence of Thibedi's group.³⁵

In 1934 the Lenin Club organized a May Day Rally, producing its only known publication, "Workers of South Africa, Awake!" The Lenin Club rejected both the Labour Party and the CPSA, and called for a new workers' party, claiming that

...all the work of the Communist Party of South Africa has been a passive carrying out of instructions from above. Lack of initiative, lack of analysis of the real situation in South Africa, and bureaucratic arrogance...absence of any right of discussion, of any party-democracy, and the ruthless expelling of the best brains of the Party for the refusal to follow blindly, reduced the one-time influential Party to a mere shadow of a party, of almost no significance.³⁶

Although sensitive to the Party's lack of internal democracy and subservience to Moscow, practices which by then had decimated Party membership, the Lenin Club's theoretical differences with the CPSA were often rhetorical, as Southall has demonstrated. Thus, while it rejected the Native Republic thesis on class rather than color grounds, pointing out that 'peasants' could not play a vanguard role in any South African revolution, like Frank Glass, it fell back in line with the CPSA's conception of abstract unity among black and white workers. Its argument was identical to that made by Bunting at the 1928 Sixth Comintern Congress. The Native Republic thesis, wrote the Lenin Club, ...is in complete contradiction to Marxism-Leninism, for it places at the head of the Revolution the backward Native peasantry, which is by far the dominating element in the Native population, instead of giving the sole leadership in the transition period to the Working Class, black and white alike. The Communist's cry for a 'Native Republic' would doom the Revolution beforehand to failure, for never in past history have the peasants alone been able to carry a revolution to a successful issue.

These early Trotskyists did, of course, recognize the strong racial, economic and political divide between black and white workers, but they believed, as Glass did, that this could be overcome by appeals to the long-term economic interests of white workers:

This degradation of the Native cannot but have an injurious effect on all of the workers of South Africa. The low standard of living forced on the black workers will eventually drive the white workers down to the same level, unless the white worker takes his courage in both hands and assists the Native to a position by his side.³⁷

Attempting to bridge its distance from the black working class, a few Lenin Club members ventured into black townships.³⁸ However, the group's main contribution was to establish a tradition of

intellectual debate. Unlike the CPSA in the 1930s, the Lenin Club encouraged political debate, holding regular open meetings at which both current and theoretical issues were discussed. Yet, this very same contribution is, paradoxically, symptomatic of the fragmentation and consequently the weakening of South African Trotskyism as a social movement: the intense theoretical discussions among Trotskyists in the 1930s reflect their efforts to forge a programmatic unity based on an analysis of South African political economy, yet, unable to achieve such unity, Trotskyist groups ended up splitting over theoretical issues which often had no programmatic implications.

The theoretical basis of organizational splits

Like the CPSA's expulsions of Trotskyists and other dissidents, the early splits among Western Cape Trotskyists reflected political struggles and debates then taking place in Europe, or theoretical disputes, rather than programmatic differences regarding South Africa. The precise reason for the initial division in the Lenin Club remains uncertain, although a former member contends it was inspired by the 1933 "French turn," which caused splits in Trotskyist organizations worldwide.³⁹ The majority of the Lenin Club, under the intellectual influence of the little-known Burlak, an exile from Eastern Europe, broke and formed the Workers' Party of South Africa (WPSA), which subsequently merged with Trotskyists in Johannesburg and elsewhere. This new group took over publication of The Spark, the first issue of which had been published under the auspices of the Lenin Club. The minority faction reorganized itself in 1935 as the

Communist League of South Africa (CLSA) and published Workers' Voice from 1935 to 1936, but continued using the Lenin Club throughout that year as a forum for public lectures and discussion. Its leading theoretician was M. N. Averbach.⁴⁰

Neither Anthony Southall nor Franz Lee, in their analyses of South African Trotskyism, have challenged the presumption that there was a political basis for the split between the two factions of the Lenin Club. While indicating the broad theoretical similarity between Communists and early Trotskyists in South Africa, Southall nonetheless stresses the differences rather than similarities of the two Trotskyist factions. Lee compares the Lenin Club's split to that of Russia's Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. This, however, overlooks the different historical and social conditions in the two countries: the differences between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks involved programmatic issues of strategy and tactics developing out of decades of prior socialist initiatives. By contrast, South African Trotskyism, then in its infancy, lacked a tradition of working class activity, and the issues which divided the Workers' Party and Communist League of South Africa were largely theoretical, rather than problems of immediate practical concern necessitating programmatic divergences or an organizational break.⁴¹

In fact, the theoretical similarities of the two organizations, and of all South African Trotskyist groups in the 1930s and '40s, far outweighed their theoretical differences. Rejecting Stalinism as the political manifestation of a degenerated workers' state, both agreed on the validity of the permanent revolution thesis for South Africa, and in the late 1930s called for a new international socialist order,

a Fourth International. They concurred that the major social questions in South Africa, the land and national questions, had a common root in British imperialism; that, consequently, the struggle to solve these problems must be unified, and that the task of socialists was to demonstrate this common struggle to black and white urban workers and rural poor. Both believed that while the rural population would play a critical supporting role, only the urban working class could provide revolutionary leadership. Like Frank Glass a few years earlier, they believed that South African capitalism was heading towards a crisis which would force the bourgeoisie to break its historic pact with the white working class; that white workers and bywoners would be forced down to the economic level of blacks, and that it was the task of socialists to mobilize those groups for a common working class struggle, rather than letting poor whites succumb to fascist ideology. Consequently, like Bunting and Roux in 1928, they rejected the Native Republic thesis on the grounds that it would alienate the white working class. In its critique of the thesis, the WPSA wrote that

...by stressing national liberation and ignoring the white workers, the C.P.S.A. excludes the possibility of a united revolutionary working-class, and only such can lead the revolution.

Similarly, the CLSA contended that the thesis

...will certainly repel large numbers of militant white workers. And a revolution which does not include the white worker as well as the black is doomed to failure....It is obvious that a slogan must express the interests of all sections of the revolutionary working class, and this most emphatically the slogan "Native Republic" does not do.⁴²

The real difference between the two groups boiled down to one of emphasis on the nature and degree of peasant consciousness amongst the rural population and the degree of black proletarian development. The Workers' Party believed that social mobilization must be based on people's perceptions of their problems. The Communist League and its offshoot, the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa, argued that socioeconomic trends like proletarianization and urbanization should be the guideline for developing strategy. These two perspectives are not necessarily incompatible. The difference in emphasis and perspective stemmed from the fact that the two groups were focusing on different aspects of the same broader phenomenon during a period of rapid socioeconomic change in which social classes were in a state of flux.

The Workers' Party and the land question

In its 1934 draft thesis on "The Native Question," the Workers' Party placed the black population, as direct producers, at the center of South Africa's political economy, arguing that cheap black labor split the working class. Anticipating that economic forces would push white wages down to the level of blacks, the WPSA urged whites to join blacks in the struggle to raise black wages.

The agrarian problem was at the root of the "Native Question." The WPSA took as its point of departure the distorted social relations on the land. This was, it argued, the material basis for the oppression of blacks, for the racial division of the working class and for South Africa's economic stagnation. The skewed racial distribution of landholdings meant landlessness for the majority of

blacks, forcing them to labor on mines and white-owned farms. This huge pool of ultra-cheap black labor in turn was used to threaten white job security and push their wages down. Finally, the extremely low level of economic development of the majority restricted the domestic market and stunted industrial development. The WPSA characterized the rural black population, even the agricultural proletariat, as a landless peasantry, and contended that blacks' land hunger would be the mobilizing force and the pivot of a permanent revolution, which must be led by a united black and white working class:

Only the Revolution can solve this agrarian question, which is the axis, the alpha and omega of the revolution. The pauperisation of the Natives, the pauperisation of the small white farmers, the Native Problem and the Poor White Problem, not only hamper but bar the way for the development of the country. There is no place for industrial development and growth, until the internal need is studied and supplied, the level of internal consumption is raised, the whole internal market systematically developed....It must be made clear to the workers and intelligentsia of South Africa, that the Native Problem, the Agrarian Problem, is their problem, that the liberation of the Native is their liberation.⁴³

Although the Comintern's earlier rationale for the Native Republic thesis was similar to the Workers' Party position on the land question, the Workers' Party rejected the Native Republic thesis arguing that it pandered to a black nationalism which would impede working class unity:

The calling for "Native Republics" involves subordinating the class struggle to the national struggle. As Umsebenzi says, "The Bantu Republic" will be a "democratic people's government"....In short, it means

that the revolution will be a national,
bourgeois, democratic revolution.

Drawing an analogy with the national question in Russia, it
continued:

National liberation in Russia did not precede
the October Revolution. National liberation
was a result of the proletarian revolution.
A man needs first of all bread, and then
liberty. The Native needs first of all land,
and then national emancipation. The national
question is not the fundamental problem of
our revolution; the agrarian question is and
will remain the basic task.

Following this separation and prioritization of struggles, the
Workers' Party suggested "Land to the Natives" and "Every man has the
right to as much land as he can work" as slogans to mobilize the
black majority. In this way, it wrote,

The unconditional active support of the
peasantry will thus be assured to the
proletarian revolution. By popularising
among the workers the needs of the peasantry,
and vice versa, the Bolsheviks succeeded in
their revolution. So also can our revolution
succeed. By uniting and defending in
combined effort the common aims and interests
of the workers and peasants, black and white,
the revolutionary movement can bring about
the overthrow of Capitalism and the
establishment of a Soviet South Africa.⁴⁴

The African population was indeed overwhelming rural in the
1930s, as the tables below indicate. Over 62% of the men and 86% of
the women worked in agriculture and forestry, and close to 83% of all
Africans lived in rural areas, either in reserves or other areas
scheduled for Africans, or on white farms.

TABLE 1

Distribution of African population, 1936

(rounded to nearest thousand)

Rural Areas

	<u>All Provinces</u> (Cape, Natal, OFS, Transvaal)	<u>Transkei</u>	<u>Zululand</u>	<u>Total</u>
All Rural Areas:	3,965	1,141	349	5,455
Reserves/African Areas	1,538	1,107	315	2,963
White Areas	2,154	28	13	2,195
Other	273	6	18	297

Urban Areas

1,126	13	3	1,142
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Source: Department of Economics, Natal
University College, "The National Income and
the Non-European," Chapter XIV, Ellen
Hellmann, ed., Handbook on Race Relations in
South Africa, Cape Town, London and New York:
Oxford Univ., 306-347, Table I.

TABLE 2

African occupational structure by gender, 1936
(persons over 10 years of age)

	Males	Females
Agriculture & Forestry	62.4%	86.5%
Mining	17.1	
Manufacturing	9.1	0.2
Transport & Communications	3.9	
Commerce & Finance	0.3	
Public Administration, Defense, Professions, Sports & Entertainment	0.8	0.2
Personal Service	4.9	12.7
Other	1.5	0.4

Source: Sheila T. van der Horst, "Labour,"
Chapter V, Ellen Hellmann, ed., Handbook on
Race Relations in South Africa, Cape Town,
London and New York: Oxford Univ., 1949, 109-
157, Table I, 113.

Nonetheless, this in itself did not mean that their
consciousness or aspirations were fixed in the countryside, given
that the population was in a state of flux because of the migrant
labor system. The Workers' Party thesis suffered from an overly
quantitative and abstract analysis, overemphasizing the agrarian
struggle because the black population was still predominantly rural,
and overemphasizing the role of white labor because of its
quantitatively greater role in urban industry. In the view of Dubois

(Ruth Fischer) of the International Secretariat (IS), precursor of the Fourth International, they mechanistically applied an oversimplified model of the Russian Revolution to South Africa. Dubois was quick to point out that the Workers' Party draft thesis failed to target what many in the IS saw as the central political task in South Africa, namely to attack British imperialism. The land question, and all strategy and tactics, she wrote, must be subordinated to the goal of weakening British imperialism in South Africa. The slogan "Land to the Natives," correct in itself, was inadequate because the Workers' Party did not base it on any other political slogan except the abstract "South African October." In effect, she maintained, their conception of the agrarian revolution lacked political content because it neglected the national question. The agrarian revolution, Dubois wrote,

poses and resolves, at the same time, what one calls the national question of this country. This is why the two questions are inseparable. The thesis, instead of indicating the connection, neglects it, separating the two sides of the same question quasi-independently of one another. This is why this thesis remains lifeless, not giving tactical indications and only teaching an insufficient and abstract propaganda.⁴⁵

Dubois contended that the WPSA's simplistic belief that the Russian proletariat and peasantry, once they had become aware of their mutual interests, united and made the revolution, was used to justify their rejection of the Native Republic thesis. If their goal was a South African October, i.e., a socialist revolution, then they needed a slogan which could mobilize mass support to fight British imperialism. The seemingly nationalist Native Republic thesis, Dubois maintained, might not be antithetical to the socialist movement, given the absence, in the 1930s, of a black bourgeoisie.

Moreover, she pointed out, the WPSA did not suggest concrete political slogans opposing the Black Republic thesis which could mobilize the black majority.

The thesis gave disproportionate weight to the white working class, Dubois continued. The simple, schematic conception of black/white equality neglected the qualitative differences between black and white workers, the latter representing British imperialism. But their discussion of white workers failed to raise the strategic and tactical questions of what should be done with and for the white proletariat. For instance, Dubois thought, their call to develop class consciousness seemed to refer to black workers alone. Yet the sign of any development in the consciousness of white labor would be its willingness to fight British imperialism and white privileges, to place blacks at the head of the struggle and to call for the right to separate from the British Empire.⁴⁶

Dubois' argument represented one pole within the IS, which in 1935 described the "two clashing viewpoints" its members held on the South African question. This first position endorsed the slogans "Africa for the Negroes" and "Independent Negro Republics." Since, in this argument, all whites directly or indirectly exploited black labor, the national struggle would inevitably unfold along color lines. While conceding that the black movement might be dominated by nationalist ideology, in all probability, it thought, the class structure of the black population would push the movement in a socialist direction. But it maintained that a black nationalist solution was far less dangerous than white nationalism, which was essentially imperialism.

The other viewpoint, which converged with the CLSA in its main

accent on uniting the proletariat, argued for "...the undiluted Marxist idea of the class struggle (the exploited and the oppressed against the exploiters and the oppressors)." South Africa's white proletariat, it maintained, distinguished it from colonial countries like India or China. Although it was a labor aristocracy, white labor was nonetheless vulnerable to capital. Accordingly, black and white workers must unite against black and white nationalism on the basis of an agrarian revolution.⁴⁷

Neither position of the International Secretariat captured the nuance of class and color in South Africa. The first position underestimated the development of class forces amongst black and white South Africans. Given the extreme level of racial oppression in South Africa, the black majority, largely land-hungry rural cultivators and laborers, would gravitate towards a political program couched in terms of national self-determination rather than class struggle. Nonetheless, this did not rule out the possibility of mobilizing slogans which linked the national and class issues. Moreover, while the argument correctly anticipated that white workers would remain antagonistic towards blacks, it based this conclusion on an economistic argument which underestimated the significance of racial ideology. The argument was too insistent that all whites benefitted economically from the exploitation of blacks, given the extent of white poverty and unemployment in the 1920s and '30s. Its emphasis on British imperialism underestimated the strength of the already existing white South African bourgeoisie and its capacity to mobilize the white working class on a South African nationalist program. The combination of white supremacist ideology and South African nationalism meant that while white labor benefited from a

British-imperialist financed capitalism, it also had distinct anti-imperialist and anti-black sentiments.

The second IS position, while recognizing the existence of an indigenous white working class whose interests were not necessarily synonymous with those of British imperialism, did not analyze South Africa's national and racial oppression historically and in conjunction with capitalist development. It did not grasp that the racial divisions within the working class were structurally imbedded, and then reinforced by racial ideology. This underlay white labor's refusal to support any movement for black equality. Thus, the argument's call for a united black and white proletariat and its equation of black and white nationalism as equally harmful to working class unity remained purely idealistic.

The Communist League: fighting the color bar

While the Workers' Party anticipated that continued rural stagnation would retard industrial development and proletarianization, the CLSA had a closer grasp of the process of economic change, recognizing that economic development was actually hastening proletarianization. But like the WPSA, it optimistically maintained that these objective processes would translate into a class consciousness that would transcend color divisions. Thus, it wrote:

In the factories black and white work together. Capitalism in South Africa is -- producing a large native proletariat of which is rapidly becoming class-conscious[.] More and more these class-conscious sections are realising that their interests are one and the same. More and more, the workers, both black and white, are beginning to realise that they have only one enemy in common - the Capitalist Class.! Moreover, every technical

advance where a skilled worker is replaced by a labourer, displaces a white worker by a black worker, thus tending to force to the European worker to the same low standard of living as the non-European.⁴⁸

The ruling class' attempt to forestall working class unity by increasing racial oppression, the CLSA continued, would only increase the revolutionary potential of the black majority. The color bar was the foremost threat to the working class because it prevented a united anti-capitalist movement. Consequently, this became the focal point for the League's slogans and plans for practical work, as it urged socialists to organize black workers and fight the color bar in existing trade unions. If white labor would not admit blacks, then black labor would organize independently.⁴⁹

Like Dubois, the CLSA took British imperialism, by which it meant principally the large mining companies, as its point of departure. British imperialism's need for labor, wrote the CLSA, caused it to tax and squeeze Africans off the land and placed them in "...the oppressive and unendurable role which they occupy in the economic structure of British Imperialism in South Africa."⁵⁰ This economic domination, in turn, meant that

British Imperialism is able to, and does, play the leading role in directing the different political currents of the country. Any one of the major political parties, when in power...can only function as the political executive of British Capitalism....

In the years leading up to the Second World War, the CLSA continued,

The chief political expression of British Imperialism [in South Africa]...is the Fusion Party....[which] insure[s] "peace" internally, while British Imperialism is engaged in a bloody struggle to maintain its world supremacy.⁵¹

The solution to South Africa's domestic oppression and to the

impending international conflict lay not in agrarian revolution, as the Workers' Party proposed, but in the direct overthrow of British imperialism. As Bunting had, the CLSA downplayed the progressive potential of rural blacks, arguing that the peasantry was politically backwards and "...has not once succeeded in offering resistance to the cruel oppression of the white slaveowners."⁵² The proletariat, it stated, was by far the most militant and organizable section of the black population. Nonetheless, urban workers needed the support of the countryside, and it envisioned that the Afrikaner peasantry would play an important anti-imperialist role due to its historic, anti-British sentiments. Since the national (Afrikaner) bourgeoisie had an interest in fighting the domination of British Imperialism, their social base, "...the anti-imperialist sentiment of the countryside..." must be used to overthrow British rule.

The Malanite section of the Nationalist Party represents the small agrarian interests, the small or middle farmer, the bywoners[,] poor whites, etc. It also represents the minor industries...which it seeks to protect from "foreign" competition by means of heavy tariff barriers. The Malanites carry on a demagogic campaign against Imperialism, which must be exploited to the full by the Communist League. While utilising Malan's Anti-Imperialist programme for its own revolutionary ends, the Communist League must make it clear to the toiling masses, that when in power, the Malanites can only act as the lackeys of British Imperialism....That the power of British Imperialism can only be broken by the revolutionary action of the toiling masses, and the setting up of a workers' and peasants' Government.⁵³

In its hope for a progressive role for Afrikaner nationalism, the CLSA underestimated the potential that the Afrikaner struggle against British imperialism would be diverted to a purely reactionary path due to its historic anti-democratic stand regarding blacks.

Thus, despite the CLSA's apparent rejection of the Workers' Party's stress on the land struggle as the pivotal point of the revolution, it in effect came to a similar position when it concluded that the the rural anti-imperialist struggle against British imperialism

is the first stage of the struggle. Once, having got rid of the biggest bandit, we can turn our attention to the lesser bandit - the local capitalist class. We can then rally the workers of South Africa for the final struggle, the overthrow of capitalism and the setting up of workers' rule."⁵⁴

Aside from the particular reference to the Afrikaner peasantry and bourgeoisie, this passage is remarkably close to the Native Republic thesis in its conception of an initial national, rather than class-based alliance against imperialism! In effect, both Trotskyist factions endorsed a two-stage revolution.

These theoretical arguments, which provoked acute political divisiveness, stemmed from the different vantage points and conceptions about the speed of economic development adopted by both groups in their analyses of South African political economy. The arguments of both groups rested on conceptions of 'proletarians' and 'peasants' mechanically transposed from Russian conditions, rather than derived from an observation of social classes in South Africa. While the CLSA overestimated the ease with which black workers could be organized, the WPSA hardly discussed the issue. The CLSA's assertion that the black peasantry was backwards and had never offered significant resistance was contradicted by the fact that the major social upheavals across South Africa in the late 1920s had been rural protests: squatters and labor-tenants resisting proletarianization as well as agricultural workers fighting for better working conditions. Indeed, the ICU was not only an

organization of the industrial workforce, as the CLSA claimed, it was a rural mass movement.⁵⁵ By the same token, the WPSA's assumption that the Africans were predominantly a landless peasantry to be mobilized on the basis of land-hunger was probably too one-dimensional even in the 1930s, given the existence of an African proletariat, the rapid pace of industrialization and urbanization and the impoverishment on the reserves which was forcing people to accept wage labor as their chief means of livelihood. Finally, in the 1930s neither group had yet addressed the socioeconomic and political implications of the state-imposed social categories within the black population.

Both worked from a similar conception that economic development would eventually break through the fetters of racism. Their stress on the need for a united working class movement of black and white workers, a viewpoint with which all socialist tendencies, including the CPSA, concurred, underestimated both the enduring racism of the white working class and the material basis for that racism. Poor and working class Afrikaners were indeed willing to break their formal links with British imperialism, but they steadfastly refused to give up the possibility of continued white privileges to align with black workers: in the mid-1930s, while both groups were writing, white labor refused to associate with organizations which even called for black democratic rights. No socialist tendency went beyond rhetorical calls for racial unity to offer a practical program for working class mobilization which rejected racial concessions to whites. In other words, socialist efforts to mobilize white workers always involved concessions to white chauvinism, whether it meant separate organizations and meetings for black and white or deleting

any mention of black democratic rights in programs geared to attract white trade unions.⁵⁶

Trotsky's letter: uniting the land and national struggles

By 1935 both factions, seeking programmatic unity, were asking the international Trotskyist movement to help mediate their differences.⁵⁷ Trotsky's response to the draft theses of the WPSA discussed political principles and methods of struggle. Trotsky began his letter noting the dual nature of the South African polity: a dominion for whites and a slave colony for blacks. It is this social contradiction, he suggested, which gives the mass movement for democratic rights its revolutionary potential. The proletarian party, one with a working-class base representing the distinct class interests of the proletariat, must give full support to all the democratic demands of the oppressed people. Rejecting an earlier argument of South African socialists that the national struggle was not their domain, Trotsky wrote: "On the contrary, the proletarian party should in word and in deeds openly and boldly take the solution of the national (racial) problem in its hands." The national liberation movement and the proletarian party were, he underlined, mutually interdependent: on the one hand, the democratic demands of the majority could be solved only through socialist revolution; on the other, the proletarian party could seize power only with the help of the oppressed majority. What distinguished the proletarian party from reformist organizations like the ANC, Trotsky maintained, was that its solutions were based upon working class independence and the method of class struggle. While the proletarian party could cooperate tactically with populist organizations and must support

them against state repression and racism, including the racism of white trade union bureaucrats, it must retain its own programmatic independence, showing the populace that reformist organizations cannot even achieve their own reformist goals.⁵⁸

The solution to the quest for democracy, and to the agrarian problem as well, Trotsky continued, lay in the overthrow of imperialism. However, he took a firmer position on the class nature of the struggle against British imperialism than did Dubois, arguing that the proletarian party must propose solutions to these major social problems based on the method of class struggle, as opposed to the 'classless' anti-imperialist bloc then being advocated by the Comintern. Indeed, he stressed, "The historical weapon of national liberation can be only the class struggle." Trotsky's criticism of the Native Republic thesis lay precisely in the fact that the slogan was premised on a multi-class alliance. Yet, he cautioned, the thesis was not analogous to the call for a white South Africa raised by white labor: "Whereas in the latter there is the case of supporting complete oppression, in the former there is the case of taking the first steps towards liberation." In the sense that revolution entailed the political awakening of the black majority, the overthrow of racist social relations and a political role for blacks proportionate to their numbers, the new state would for all practical purposes be a black republic: "...thus far will the social revolution in South Africa also have a national character."⁵⁹

The international Left Opposition

While Trotsky stressed principles and methods of struggle, the concerns of the International Secretariat of the Trotskyist movement

were more explicitly programmatic. The IS strongly encouraged the building of a Trotskyist movement in South Africa. With the approach of World War Two, it believed, social upheavals in the colonies and dominions could undermine British imperialism and capitalism.

Pointing to the impact of the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) resistance struggle in the fight against Fascist Italy, it wrote:

...the early stages of the Italian war of robbery against Abyssinia shows in embryonic form the type of great revolutionary possibilities that exist even in the "dark continent."⁶⁰

South African capitalism seemed stable in the 1930s, but the volatility of the international situation could quickly turn things upside down, it argued, and South African socialists could be in a position to make a major impact on the continent's politics.

The International Secretariat's chief concern was the tendency of the young South African Trotskyist movement to fragment. This tendency, it believed, would weaken attempts to build a working class base. The 1935 unification of Trotskyists in Cape Town and Johannesburg into the Workers' Party masked the real meaning of the Lenin Club's break-up into the Workers' Party and the Communist League of South Africa. Whereas the CPSA demonstrated its intolerance of democratic debate and differences through expulsions, Trotskyist groups demonstrated theirs through splits. Almost from its inception the movement was displaying the traits which were to characterize it throughout the next few decades. Trotskyist factions and groups elevated themselves to a position above the mass movement, using theoretical differences which had no programmatic implications and which would have been tolerated, and even welcomed, in a democratic and dynamic socialist organisation, as a pretext for

continuous splits. These splits weakened the movement's ability to do effective practical work. Thus, despite sporadic intersections of the Trotskyist movement with popular upsurges, the movement was often isolated from popular struggles.⁶¹ This deadlock was evident to the International Secretariat as early as 1935 and was the subject of their communiques with their South African comrades. In response to the discussions within the Lenin Club which presaged the formation of the Workers' Party and its formal departure from the Lenin Club, the IS wrote:

The comrades of the Cape Town Lenin Club have asked us to intervene immediately in the discussions now taking place. The majority of the Bolshevik Leninists of South Africa...are in the process of founding a party upon theses which the minority of the Lenin Club condemns....The IS reaffirms its first communication. While rejoicing about the unification, the IS is not of the opinion, in view of the very weak membership of South Africa and in view of the insufficiently mature conditions of the elaboration of the fundamental principles, that the present moment is propitious for constituting itself as a party. But whatever the differences may be, the IS advises the comrades of the minority to preserve the unity of our ranks in South Africa, not to split over differences on the proposals of a party which is yet to be created, and to seek a solution of the conflicts in the ranks of the organization itself.⁶²

Just as Lenin had recognized that the formation of parties represented a process of political development, so the IS emphasized that parties could not exist merely by proclamation, but had to be built up over time through theoretical and practical work.⁶³ Making a distinction between 'league' and 'party' as sociopolitical phenomena, the IS unanimously condemned the WPSA's break from the Lenin Club as politically premature. It argued that since South Africa's young Trotskyist movement had not yet developed a working class base, a

socialist league was more appropriate than a party, which presumed an organization that had been "...generally acknowledged, supported, and tested by the proletariat." It continued:

...the illusion should not remain, that just because a group of revolutionaries gives itself the name "party", that it is a real party, much less a revolutionary and communist one.

Cautioning: "...your political differences can under no circumstances justify a break between your organisations. Many of the questions raised remain open to international discussions," the IS advised both Trotskyist groups to strengthen their organizations through coordinated activities as a step towards forming a party.⁶⁴ It suggested establishing a joint action committee, creating an internal discussion bulletin, building up The Spark as a political propaganda organ with pages addressing the concerns of rural and urban blacks in Bantu languages, and maintaining regular contact with the international Left Opposition. After several months of joint work, the IS continued, the South African Trotskyists would be in a position to prepare for a party conference and develop a common program of action.

The response of South African Trotskyists

Trotsky's letter, published as a pamphlet by the Workers' Party, had a significant political impact. By 1930 the Communist Party had dropped its Native Republic thesis, but from 1932-34 it briefly resurrected it with a new interpretation: a workers' and peasants' government. This interpretation assumed a single native republic, but a minority position put forth by Lazar Bach and L. L.

Leepile argued for a federation of independent Native Republics of the Sotho, Tswana, Swazi, Zulu and Xhosa peoples.⁶⁵ In this context, the initial reaction of the Workers' Party to Trotsky's letter was that by stressing national self-determination it followed the Soviet model too closely. In South Africa, they believed, a similar practice of national self-determination would reinforce national fragmentation and impede the building of an anti-imperialist socialist movement.⁶⁶ But over the next decade the letter provoked intense discussion within both Trotskyist factions in Cape Town, and they used it as a basis for reevaluating the relationship of the land and national struggles to the class struggle. From the late 1930s, all Trotskyist groups placed increasing emphasis on building a national movement for black unity and democratic rights, seeing that as a starting point for building a socialist movement. First, it was a means of mobilizing the black majority along transitional demands which could form the basis for a permanent revolution. Accordingly, the Workers' Party modified its original slogan "Land to the Native" to "Land and Liberty," reflecting the close interrelationship of the land and political struggles. And the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa (FIOSA), heir to the CLSA which had downplayed the role of the black rural majority, now admitted the significance of the land question for social mobilization. Almost a decade after Trotsky's letter, M. N. Averbach of the FIOSA explained how the struggle for democratic rights, especially property rights, was a turning point leading to a permanent revolution. Since implementing the right to own land entailed the expropriation of large landholdings, it was part and parcel of the socialist struggle.

...in the scientific sense of the term
"realising the tasks of the bourgeois

democratic revolution", the struggle for "democracy" embraces the struggle...not merely for the right to the land, but for the actual division of the land....since the land cannot be won except through a struggle against imperialism and the South African capitalists, and since the land can be divided only after it has been expropriated from the big landowners, farmers and land-companies, the struggle for land, as part of the struggle for the realisation of the tasks of bourgeois democracy in South Africa can be won only through the socialist revolution....⁶⁷

Second, both Trotskyist factions continued to think that white workers were strategically necessary for a socialist struggle because of their position in the urban industrial workforce. But white workers could only be pulled from their alliance with capital to join black workers when they believed the latter to be strong enough to challenge the bourgeoisie. In this sense, building a movement for black democratic rights was a prelude to building a socialist movement:

In order that the greatest section of the White workers should turn towards socialism, it is absolutely essential that the great bulk of the South African population...the non-Europeans....should itself become an active, forward-striving, political movement, an independent force to reckon with. Only then will a real possibility be given to the White worker to help materialise socialism on a sound basis...⁶⁸

The influence of Trotsky's argument is apparent as well in the Ten Point Programme (10PP) of the Non-European Unity Movement, founded in 1943, in which black members of the WPSA played a pivotal role. Whereas the early Workers' Party saw the land question as the key to the political revolution ("bread...then liberty"), the Ten Point Programme, whose formulation was strongly influenced by members of the Workers' Party, presumed the political question, specifically

the franchise (Point One), to be the key to the land question (Point Seven). Hosea Jaffe has argued that Trotsky's influence on the 10PP is seen in its accent on the national question; in its stress on the relationship between the national and land questions; and in the link between British imperialism and the Afrikaner bourgeoisie, as opposed to the early Communist League argument that the Afrikaner peasantry and aspiring bourgeoisie could be a progressive, anti-imperialist force.⁶⁹

But at the practical organizational level, neither Trotskyist faction systematically followed the International Secretariat's recommendations for unity. By the late '30s the Workers' Party had gone underground and the Communist League of South Africa had disappeared, and a new short-lived Trotskyist group, the Socialist Workers League (SWL), precursor to the Workers' International League, had appeared in Johannesburg. Despite its strident criticism of the CPSA and Workers' Party, the SWL's own theoretical position was quite close to both.⁷⁰ All Trotskyist organizations in Cape Town and Johannesburg were in contact with each other and knew of each other's activities: they criticized each other in their newspapers and correspondence and periodically tried to open unity talks.⁷¹ Yet aside from the notable exception of their united front activity in the late 1930s and '40s, Trotskyist organizations tended to work independently of each other despite parallel activities in trade unions and discussion clubs. At times their relations were even antagonistic.

Practical efforts at unity

The following sections examine the practical steps Trotskyists

took to promote tactical and organizational unity and to develop working class support. These included their involvement in the protest against Italy's invasion of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), their work in black united fronts and other propaganda and organizing efforts.

Italy's invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935, following the failure of League of Nations and international diplomatic efforts, sparked massive protests in South Africa, where, Roux writes:

It was the only political event that had roused the Africans for many years. Many realised for the first time that there existed in Africa an independent country where the black man was master and had his own king. They were inspired by the idea of black men defending their country against white aggressors.⁷²

The International Secretariat saw the Abyssinian struggle as an opportunity for South African Trotskyists to strengthen their movement and urged the two Cape Town factions to unite against both British colonialist and imperialist influence and Italian military intervention in Africa:

We...advise both groups once again and with all seriousness, to set aside the dividing differences and place attention on the current tasks that both have in common. The current tasks are characterized by the complications taken on by the Abyssinian-Italian conflict as a result of the position taken by the British....This imposes upon the genuine communist groups everywhere, but in particular in Africa, the obligation to collect all their powers in order to lift their voices in a clear unambiguous and unanimous manner in order to make organizational gains, in order to clearly explain that in addition to the white oppressors there also exist white revolutionaries who proclaim the right of every people to sever their ties to the imperialists, and emphasize to those in Africa, that the white oppressors have no business in Africa.⁷³

Both Communists and Trotskyists gave their active support to black dockworkers' refusal to handle goods destined for Italian troops. The worldwide campaign to support Abyssinia was then employing two types of sanctions against Italy: workers' sanctions, where workers withdrew their own labor to hinder Italy's war efforts, and League of Nations-endorsed economic sanctions designed to prevent Italy from receiving specified war-related goods.⁷⁴ Trotskyists saw workers' sanctions as a means of encouraging working class independence and vigorously counterposed them to League of Nations sanctions.⁷⁵ By controlling the use of their own labor, they believed, black workers would become conscious of their class power. In October 1935 the CLSA explained that

The war has aroused intense feeling among the coloured and Native workers and there is a great danger that they will be mislead [sic] by the combined propaganda of the Stalinists, the Churches, the S.A. Labour party and the Imperialist press into supporting the war aims of Great Britain. All these organizations support "sanctions" and place their faith in the League of Nations. We have put forward the slogan "BOYCOTT FASCIST ITALY" and it is meeting with some success among the working class....Our last two open air meetings broke all records. Last week, over a thousand workers listened to our views on the Italian-Abyssinian war, and this week nearly two thousand workers were present.⁷⁶

The CLSA's boycott policy was carried in the Workers' Voice, which cried out:

Italian emissaries are in this Country seeking to place contracts for food supplies to the Italian troops, in East Africa. THE WORKERS MUST REFUSE TO HANDLE FOOD DESTINED FOR THE ITALIAN TROOPS. DEMONSTRATE AGAINST ITALIAN AGGRESSION [sic] AGAINST ABYSSINIA!⁷⁷

This was echoed by the Workers' Party organ, The Spark, which, in November, posed the choices as: "Independent working-class policy or

Collaboration with the ruling class," and called on workers to continue their protests.⁷⁸

Black workers were doing just that. From June through August 1935 dockworkers in Durban and Cape Town refused to load goods on Italian ships. Massive demonstrations against the invasion continued through 1936. Socialist groups attracted popular interest and reaped huge propaganda gains from their support for and coverage of the Abyssinian struggle. Blacks were hungry for news of the war. Sales of the Communist Party organ, Umsebenzi, shot up to 7,000 a week; The African Defender, a monthly establishe by Ikaka labaSebenzi (Labour Defence), associated with the Party, sold out at 10,000 an issue. But Italian troops entered Addis Ababa in mid-1936, and by the year's end resistance had fallen apart. Once news of its defeat reached South Africa, popular interest in the Abyssinian struggle waned.⁷⁹ While left-wing newspapers captured popular imagination, they were often echoing what workers were actually doing. When blacks lost hope about the possibility of ousting the Italians, socialist groups had no practical alternatives to keep their interest. So, despite the popular appeal of their position on Abyssinia, Trotskyists were unable to translate their propagandistic success into organizational gains. They, themselves, did not draw close enough on this issue to build organizational unity. Indeed, the inability to build unity around this issue was the scourge of the left. In 1935 three leading Communists, John Gomas, Moses Kotane and Eddie Roux "...sent an urgent telegram to Moscow stating that the sectarian leadership was splitting the Party just when the Italian attack on Ethiopia made unity of the left movement essential." Like Trotskyists, Communists were experiencing their own organizational problems, indicated by

continual policy swings and expulsions.⁸⁰

Tactical unity in black united fronts

Trotskyists, and militant socialists generally, also had problems forming an effective opposition within the black united front organizations which blossomed in the late 1930s. The All African Convention (AAC), National Liberation League (NLL) and Non-European United Front (NEUF) were all formed in the late 1930s to mobilize blacks across class and sectional lines against the Fusion Government's repeated efforts to curtail their economic and political rights. In their early days these organizations inspired mass support, indicating, like the groundswell for Abyssinia, the speed with which black South Africans could be mobilized when an issue captured them. Nonetheless, the organizations tended to lose steam in the face of intra-left leadership struggles, which pushed them towards moderation.

The National Liberation League, formed by black Cape Town radicals Jimmy LaGuma, Johnny Gomas and Cisse Gool in December 1935, fell prey to left-wing schisms turning on the question of strategy and tactics.⁸¹ Undoubtedly some of its radical leaders hoped it would function as a left-wing pole within the AAC, which had been established the same month as an umbrella organization to fight the proposed Hertzog Bills to curtail African voting rights. The NLL's anti-imperialist stance, its emphasis on black leadership, solidarity and militancy, and its self-conscious distancing from overtly socialist goals bore the stamp of the Native Republic thesis which LaGuma had so actively promoted in the late '20s. The League quickly attracted a working class base: the occupations listed in its membership roster include a large number of laborers, hawkers, garment, laundry and other factory workers, tailors, bricklayers and housewives, as well as teachers and municipal employees, and its organizational affiliates comprised community groups, trade unions and political organizations throughout the Western Cape. Peter Abrahams, then a struggling writer in Cape Town, gives an eyewitness account of the League's early popularity under the charismatic Cissie Gool, "...champion of the miserably poor," and daughter of the well-known leader of the (Coloured) African Political Organization (APO), Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman.

Her organization, the National Liberation

League, was thrustful and young. Coloureds from all walks of life flocked to it....[The APO] had never been popular with the mass of the ordinary Coloured people. But they had followed its lead at election times because there had been no other lead. Now all were for the Liberation League.⁸²

The League's intention was to organize blacks on the basis of their local needs and link these with broad democratic demands like the abolition of the color bar, poll taxes and pass laws. A manuscript on "How to work among urban Africans" argued that the once-mighty ICU and ANC had declined due to their failure to develop local structures like trade union branches and residents' associations with which to begin fighting for immediate demands.⁸³ Dr. Waradia Abdurahman formed a Women's Bureau in the attempt to draw women into the League, but this gave little indication of feminism.⁸⁴

But as early as 1936 disputes arose over the League's methods of struggle. Under the leadership of Cissie Gool, then in the South African Socialist Party and strongly influenced by moderate Communists, the NLL restricted its work to petitions to government authorities for local reforms. By March 1937 Cissie Gool was ousted by the NLL's left-wing, which included Trotskyists like Goolam Gool of the Workers' Party, Herman van Gelderen of the Communist League, and militant Communists like LaGuma and Gomas. This faction, whose views are found in The Liberator, a monthly which ran from March to September 1937, saw in Cissie Gool's tactics a dilution of the League's original principles. In 1937 and '38 the League established several trade unions, through the efforts of veteran activists LaGuma

and Gomas; NLL Secretary Hawa Ahmed organized a Laundry Workers' Union. But the Goolam Gool faction had trouble maintaining the NLL's initial level of mass support, indicated by the fact that none of the League's 12 branches sent delegates to its April 1938 conference. In explaining this, this faction was already demonstrating the feeling of intellectual superiority to the masses which came to dominate this tendency in the 1940s:

Dr [Goolam] Gool ascribed this to a lack of [popular] political awareness, suggesting that the League establish 'Educational Political Groups' to remedy the matter. Gomas, however, ...blamed it on the failure of the 'intellectuals' to 'do some spade work' and to 'tackle the immediate demands of the people'.⁸⁵

Nonetheless, the Goolam Gool faction did recoup organizationally, reestablishing itself in 1938-39. Through the formation of the Non-European United Front (NEUF) in April 1938, with Cissie Gool as its President, the NLL took a leading role in the struggle against the government's move to eliminate Coloured rights. In the late 1930s black radicals were increasingly aware that despite their differential status as Coloureds, Indians and Africans, they all shared a common lack of democratic rights and were all victims of the government's respective attempts to cut back their limited rights even further. What had been done first to the Africans, was now being done to the Coloureds and Indians. Hence, the formation of the NEUF to fight the proposed Stuttaford Bills to enforce segregation in public and residential areas.⁸⁶

While NLL leaders were bent on building Non-European unity, their own organization did not escape the effects of color-caste and class divisions on the political consciousness and aspirations of its

members. Ralph Bunche, who observed little contact between Coloureds and Africans outside radical circles, noted:

...much of [NLL] membership still thinking in terms of special status for colored, many now hope for development of non-European business as a way out, are emphasizing the stronger economic position of the American Negro....Too highbrow and above the masses.⁸⁷

Abrahams insightfully describes the nuances of Coloured/African politics. When the All African Convention was formed in 1935,

One or two of the more far-sighted of their leaders had called on the Coloureds for joint action and had warned that the Coloured vote would go, after the African vote. A miserably small handful of Coloureds, chief among them Goolam Gool, had shown interest and tried to work with the Africans. The rest had been indifferent.

A few years later, the government, having successfully struck at African rights, now attempted to remove Coloureds from the common voting rolls. The newly-formed NEUF, based on a black united stand against the color bar... wooed the African organizations. In spite of the earlier Coloured indifference, the two big African bodies gave moral support. Perhaps this was largely due to the part Gool had played in their struggle. And quite a surprising number of lesser African organizations came into the United Front.⁸⁸

In the late 1930s Coloureds were still likely to be mobilized on the basis of "Coloured rights" rather than black unity and practical support for Africans. Nonetheless, the success of the NEUF in affiliating African groups indicates that neither it nor the NLL can be dismissively stereotyped as "Coloured."

The Liberator, organ of the National Liberation League

September 1937

The NEUF's first major Western Cape campaign culminated in March 1939 in a march on Parliament against moves to implement residential segregation. Like the struggle for Abyssinian liberation, the campaign's popularity showed how easily South African blacks could be mobilized on social issues. While Lewis argues that the protests against residential segregation appealed mainly to a petty-bourgeois Coloured elite, who as homeowners had the most to lose from attempts to move them, Abrahams' personal account suggests that the issue struck an emotive chord amongst working-class people as well. Anti-segregation protests took place around the Cape, and

Delegates poured into Cape Town from all corners of the province, and from farther afield. The streets of District Six seethed. The office of the Liberation League was crowded....Delegates made fiery speeches.⁸⁹

The problem facing socialists, as Lewis has suggested, was what practical steps to take to retain popular interest once the initial groundswell had receded.⁹⁰ In Abrahams' account:

The monster demonstration was a seven-day sensation throughout the country....Some papers revived talk about the 'Black Peril.'....Questions were asked in Parliament. The proposed bill was postponed. For many days police vans haunted District Six. Whites did not come near it. Coloureds did not venture far from it. In the end, excitement died down. The League seemed to have exhausted itself in that one giant effort.⁹¹

The potential strength of the crowd was convincing enough to temporarily make the government back down. In that immediate sense, the NEUF was a success, and contrary to Abraham's perception, the NLL and NEUF reaped organizational gains through the new affiliates which sprung up around the country, although they lost vitality as the war progressed.⁹² In April 1939 two Communists, Dr. Yusuf Dadoo and Dr.

H. A. Naidoo were elected to the NEUF's National Council representing Johannesburg and Durban respectively. Dadoo played a leading role introducing the strategy and tactics of passive resistance to the NEUF, an influence which would filter into the 1950s Defiance Campaign. The extent of Communist influence in the NEUF is seen in its switch from an initial anti-war stance to an endorsement of the war effort following the Soviet Union's entry into the war.⁹³

In mid-1939 Goolam Gool's faction was ousted from the NLL in a fight over the color composition of leadership. LaGuma argued for black leadership, but the motion was defeated.⁹⁴ Behind this color question was the visible presence of moderate white Communists.

Despite its

partiality, The Spark's commentary illustrates how political factions could manoeuvre behind parliamentary techniques:

The oldest and most active members of the league left the conference in protest and disgust because the manoeuvres of the People's Frontists, who packed the hall with delegates from 'branches' formed on the very eve of the conference, were too much for them. The victory of the People's Frontists leaves them with the shell of the League but without the body, for its main force, the Cape Town branch, is definitely against them.⁹⁵

From then on, again under Cissie Gool's leadership, the NLL, minus a number of its key black activists, concentrated mainly on Communist electoral campaigns.⁹⁶ While the NLL had a political stance, it lacked a strategy. It maintained its radical rhetoric, but by 1942 it was approximating the moderate APO in its practice, using the Cape Town City Council to campaign for local issues, even backtracking on the principle of black unity by calling for quotas for skilled Coloureds.⁹⁷ By that time Trotskyists were looking

elsewhere for a mass base.

*Fifth Annual Conference of the National Liberation League
Officials for 1940-1941.*

Courtesy of Doreen Musson.

Propaganda and trade union work

In Cape Town, the WPSA's practical work was largely propagandistic. The group's secrecy and reticence undoubtedly limited its ability to develop a working class base. Clare Goodlatte, secretary of the Cape Town branch, described it as "...our tiny Party."⁹⁸ In its short public life it diligently published The Spark and organizing a discussion circle called the Spartacist Club, which attracted a number of African members. In contrast to the public, open-air meetings of the CLSA's Lenin Club, the Spartacist Club appealed to a smaller audience. As Roux recalls:

...in practice it was to be observed that most of the 'intellectuals,' university people and so on, went to the Spartacist Club, while the others who wanted to hold street-corner meetings stayed with the Lenin Club.

The Spartacists produced a number of didactic plays, yet their potential to provide a creative, cultural propaganda was never developed before a mass audience. The plays were performed to small Cape Town audiences rather than brought to the townships.⁹⁹

Its efforts to reach factory workers were also propagandistic. This was in marked contrast to the work of Cape Town Communists like Ray Alexander. Communists were responsible for a spate of industrial trade union organization in the late '30s in the Western Cape and Natal, reflecting the post-Depression and war-time expansion of secondary industry which pulled in blacks and whites, including Afrikaner women. Sometimes black and white were in the same unions; in other cases Communists organized parallel black and white sections, unable to bypass the strict color bars which many unions had. This was a period when black trade union organization grew tremendously.¹⁰⁰ Prompted both by the large proportion of Coloured

workers in Cape Town, for whom Afrikaans was their mother tongue, and the rapid movement of newly-proletarianized Afrikaners into factory work in the 1930s, in 1937 the Cape Town Workers' Party produced an Afrikaans translation of The Communist Manifesto, commemorating the ninetieth anniversary of its writing, with a preface by Trotsky.¹⁰¹

Clare Goodlatte and fellow-member Paul Koston explained that

...revolutionary literature is not yet to be found in the Afrikaans language, which is the language of more than half the white population and of a large proportion of the people of mixed descent, so that this effort will open up a whole new field of propaganda for Marxism and the Fourth International.¹⁰²

And to Trotsky, Goodlatte idealistically wrote:

We have hope of the revolutionary movement developing among the factory workers, of whom the Afrikaans-speaking are the most numerous. As yet we are too few to make much progress; but, if the movement can once gain a footing in the factories, even this land of oppression and repression will yet produce a worthy section of the Fourth International....¹⁰³

Initially, the Workers' Party had hoped to translate the Manifesto into other South African languages, like Xhosa and Zulu, but this was never accomplished due to the difficulties of translating the vocabulary and concepts of the Manifesto into the appropriate idiom.¹⁰⁴

In contrast to the Cape Town group's concentration on propaganda, the tiny Johannesburg branch made more attempts at industrial organization. Fanny Klenerman was a former Communist and

trade union activist who later joined the Workers' Party in Johannesburg. In the 1920s Klenerman had been active in the Clothing Workers' Union, forerunner to Solly Sachs' Garment Workers' Union, and had organized the first union of women workers in South Africa. She ran classes for workers in the ICU and, later, the Jewish Workers Club.¹⁰⁵ Klenerman commented on the difficulties of setting up the Johannesburg WPSA section:

The C.T. comrades began to suggest the setting up of branches and were not really successful, except for one branch which opened in Johannesburg, with a few members....This movement did not thrive. We did not attract large crowds to join us....there had never been a large Comm. Party, so when a group was set up in opposition to the Communists, people were not politically aware enough to understand the issues and differences between us & the Communists.¹⁰⁶

The group described the arduous process of building a socialist movement in South Africa's backwards conditions. In the West, it argued, the working class had already been exposed to political ideas and discourse through the normal workings of democratic political systems. But in South Africa, the tiny layer of black intellectuals, lacking access to a wide range of ideas and viewpoints, could easily be influenced by relatively sophisticated propaganda efforts organized by bourgeois interests. The low level of mass education made socialist propaganda work a difficult and time-consuming task. To the International Secretariat it wrote:

Our efforts have been bent mainly on the task of surrounding ourselves with the beginnings of a proletarian party. With agonising slowness we have added to our circles one by one and this has meant direct personal propaganda. Where in other countries a kind of clearing has been effected by the liberal bourgeoisie, by reformists, by Stalinists, we are in this country faced to a large extent

by virgin jungle. Those who have already had some grounding in political theory make up altogether only a tiny handful - among natives only a few intellectuals have the necessary grasp of the language to be reached by our written propaganda and these few are subjected to an ideological bombardment from the churches, the Chamber of Mines, the bourgeois nigrophiles and the African nationalists, not to mention the privileges which Imperialism is enabled by its incredible super profits to dole out to submissive [sic] native leaders....¹⁰⁷

In Klenerman's view, the WPSA's largely middle-class social composition impeded its efforts to reach workers. Of the few Johannesburg members, she writes,

One was a doctor educated in S. Africa....A few students belong, & one or two professional people, a doctor and a lawyer - but we made no impact on workers whatsoever -there were only intellectuals in this group....We had very few contacts with working people, & therefore could not influence them.¹⁰⁸

Nonetheless, its fundraising efforts and public meetings eventually attracted some workers:

We did get some worker members, some of which were miners; they came to our public meetings (we were not permitted to go into the workers' compounds.)¹⁰⁹

The attendance of mineworkers reflected the importance which the Johannesburg branch attached to organizing black mineworkers. As it explained to the international Left Opposition,

The main task that confronts the proletarian party...is the organising of the totally unorganised native miners....The native miners union, given revolutionary leadership[,] is the battering ram that will smash down British Imperialism in South Africa.¹¹⁰

The Johannesburg section took practical steps to reach black mineworkers in the late 1930s. One member, Heaton Lee, a mine surveyor, sold The Spark on the mines in the late 1930s. And a far

more significant figure, Max Gordon, was certainly the leading trade unionist on the Rand in the 1935-40 period. He had organized mine clerks into a General Workers' Union in order to relaunch the African Mine Workers' Union established by Thibedi and Bunting in 1931. The WPSA's Johannesburg organ, Umlilo Mollo, on which Ralph Lee and C. B. I. Dladla were involved, was geared to an African audience and contained a number of letters from mineworkers and metal workers. However, it disappeared after a few issues in late 1936.¹¹¹

The group's work was not sustained. In part this reflected objective difficulties. As the group had recognized, organization of black mineworkers proved to be a daunting task. Former Communist Gana Makabeni and C. B. I. Dladla confided to Ralph Bunche in 1937 that almost no organizing being done in the mining compounds, where African workers were housed, because of the difficulty organizers had in gaining entry.¹¹² Yet the group also saw in these conditions the potential for rapid social mobilization:

The native miners....are almost out of reach of propaganda, not only through ideological difficulties (language, illiteracy, political inexperience and backwardness) but also through physical difficulties - they are virtually imprisoned in the "compounds" under police guard most of the time they are above ground. On the other hand, the intense concentration of numbers ensures the rapid spread of militant revolutionary doctrines once they are introduced. The experience of past movements (the African National Congress, the I.C.U.) has demonstrated that a revolutionary platform propagated by a determined band of agitators finds enthusiastic support among the miners....There are the first signs now of a revolutionary upsurge among the native workers (isolated spontaneous strikes, an increased confidence to the trade revival and the diminishing of unemployment).¹¹³

Moreover, political activists faced real harassment from the

some creative first steps. Its difficulties in continuing the

Its views on the need for underground activity had been one of practical work of members like Gordon, Dladla and Klenerman, as well as the failure to establish a joint program of action with other Trotskyist tendencies, impeded its ability to build a socialist cadre in townships and at places of work. By 1939, in fact, the work as long as possible, although suggesting that a legal small public face of the Workers' Party was veiled. organization be complemented by an illegal apparatus which could

carry on underground work, if necessary. In actuality, he argued, socialists working in mass organizations like trade unions often had to operate semi-legally in the sense that such work had to be done with extreme caution in order to bypass the trade union bureaucracy, whose interests lay solely in reformist, rather than revolutionary, work.¹¹⁹ The Workers' Party was not convinced. In June 1939, fearing that South Africa was on the verge of fascism, it ceased publishing The Spark and went underground, never again speaking openly of socialism. Nonetheless, its influence on black intellectuals in Cape Town would continue through its close relationship with the New Era Fellowship.¹²⁰

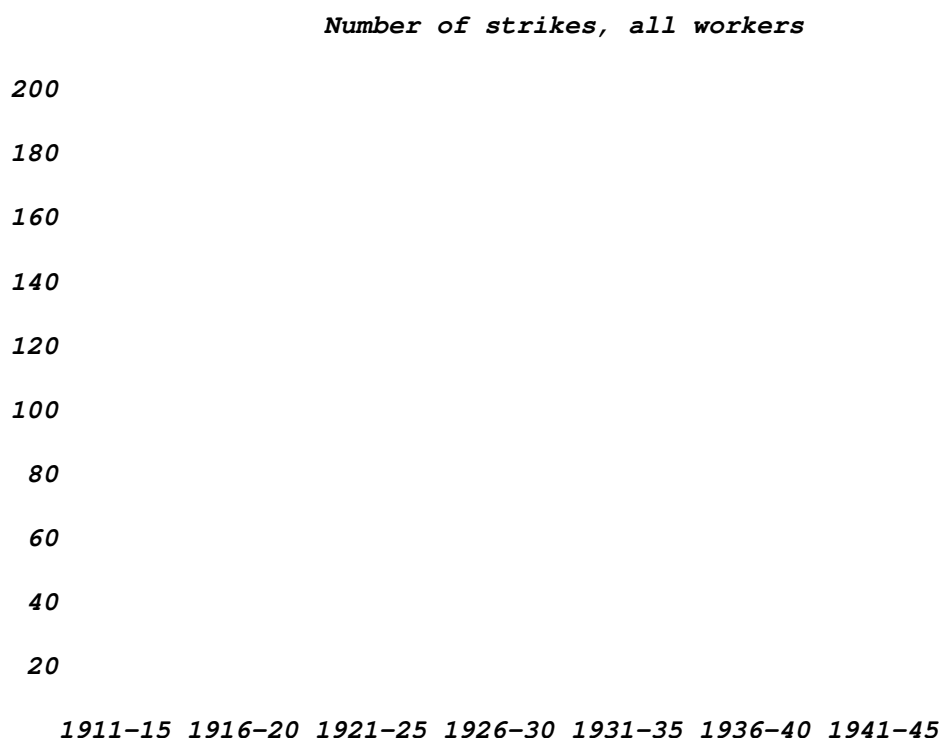
The Communist League of South Africa also failed to sustain its practical and editorial activities. Like The Spark and Umlilo Mollo, its organ, Workers' Voice, disappeared after 1936, to be revived in the 1940s by a new generation of Trotskyists in the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa (FIOSA). The League's public forum, the Lenin Club ceased functioning as a discussion club in the late 1930s. The Communist League's tiny core was active in the mid-1930s in trade union and propaganda work. Several members organized in Langa, an African community on the outskirts of Cape Town and were vocal delegates to the All African Convention, National Liberation League and Non-European United Front.

But the efforts of this first generation of Trotskyists to lay the groundwork for organizational unity in order to mobilize a working class base dwindled during the early war years. In part this reflected government harassment and the clampdown on political activity during the war. But their actions formed a pattern typical of many South African socialists: short bursts of intense activity followed by withdrawal. Some members retired from politics at this time; others emigrated and became involved in Trotskyist groups overseas.¹²¹ In the 1940s, former Workers' Party member Ralph Lee picked up the Trotskyist thread on the Rand, establishing the Workers' International League, an organization with a strong trade union orientation, from remnants of the Socialist Workers League. In the Cape, the now-underground Workers' Party redirected its energies to promoting a radical agenda within educational bodies like the Teachers' League of South Africa, and national liberation organizations, like the All African Convention and the Non-European Unity Movement. Although the CLSA's principal theorist, M. N. Averbach, remained at the center of its successor organization, the FIOSA, there was little other continuity in membership between the CLSA and its offshoot.

South African Trotskyists, especially those based in the Cape, were out of sync with popular protest during the war. Ironically, the Workers' Party went underground and the CLSA's popular work dwindled just as the black working class was beginning a militant upsurge in the late 1930s. While the Workers' Party chose to cease public political work in anticipation of fascism and the Communist League of South Africa disintegrated, black South Africans openly challenged state repression and protested harsh living conditions.

*The late 1930s and the war years were a period of intense working class and trade union militancy, especially on the Witwatersrand.*¹²²

FIGURE 2



Source: H. J. Simons, "Trade Unions,"
Ellen Hellmann, Handbook on Race
Relations in South Africa, Cape Town,
London and New York: Oxford Univ.,
1949, 158-170, 167.¹²³

South African Trotskyism's
distance from the working class showed
itself in difficulties discerning
issues of programmatic significance and
in tactical miscalculations and
misjudgements on the nature and timing
of their activities. Trotskyists
elevated theoretical issues not then
crucial for formulating a strategy of

political action and building a working-class base to programmatic significance. In other words, rather than taking practical steps to unite and lay the foundations for developing a working class base, they split over issues which were not then significant for working class mobilization.

This left the Trotskyist tendency ill-prepared to combat Communism's moderating influence on the black trade union movement during the '40s. The graph below indicates the rapid increase in strike activity throughout the war. The Rand was the most volatile centre of trade union activity during those years. There, workers' insurgency in the 1940s had been preceded by years of organizing. While Communists had organized many black trade unions on the Rand in the late 1920s, the Party's rapid policy swing and expulsions in the early '30s left those unions severely weakened, and the CPSA only reinvolved itself in trade union work there in 1940.¹²⁴ In 1941, following the Stalin-Hitler Pact, the CPSA renounced its anti-war stance in favor of government war efforts and used its influence to restrain worker militancy. Throughout the war it resisted illegal protest activity.¹²⁵ Simultaneously, the government's war policy put the trade union movement under increasing pressure, and in 1940 it interned the anti-war Max Gordon. Nonetheless, rank-and-file militancy escalated. The government met the 1942 strike epidemic with War Measure 145, making all strikes by Africans illegal, but this failed to stop the wave of organized and spontaneous strikes.¹²⁶

The contradiction between rank-and-file militancy and the

Communists' attempts to contain it hindered broader trade union unity. Within a few years the newly-formed Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) was divided between a Communist-influenced leadership urging moderation and the more militant, although bureaucratized, Progressive Trade Unions faction in which Dan Koza and Trotskyists in the Workers' International League (WIL) figured prominently. But the WIL and the Cape Town-based FIOSA found themselves on opposite side of the CNETU dispute, having failed to achieve organizational unity despite the virtual identity of their programs.¹²⁷ In the midst of this division, the African Mineworkers' Strike of 1946 erupted without adequate preparation when union leaders could no longer control workers' militancy. The strike's defeat aborted the war-time insurgency.¹²⁸

The voluntary disbanding of other socialist groups after the war suggests that neither socialist tendency solved its organizational question, which began with determining the political needs of the working class movement during the war years and in the repressive Apartheid era. Faced with the prospect of increased state repression, no socialist organization offered a way forward. One by one, socialist groups withdrew from open political struggle. The WIL voluntarily disbanded shortly after the African Mineworkers' Strike and the FIOSA dissolved itself a few years later, hoping to unite with members of the Workers' Party in the NEUM. But Trotskyists in the NEUM resisted calls for militancy and class struggle. The CPSA dissolved itself in the face of the Suppression of Communism Act.¹²⁹ The South African left never even formed a united front to challenge the Suppression of Communism, Group Areas and Mixed Marriages Acts which the government introduced in 1950. A former member of the

FIOSA commented at the time:

*The Acts were introduced and are being enforced without any resistance whatsoever. The impression of the invincibility of the State this creates in the minds of the people leaves them more apathetic and indifferent than ever. If the leaders do not pass out of this infant school of politics, our road will be longer and more bitter than necessary.*¹³⁰

Conclusion

The organizational fragmentation of the early Trotskyist movement reflected the fragmented social conditions of the 1930s and '40s, which made the development of any socialist tendency a tortuous task. Nonetheless, Trotskyists did, at times, resist coming to terms with the problems of political and organizational unity. The political fragmentation of the Trotskyist tendency impeded the efforts of activists to develop a sustained relationship with the black working class and to build a social base upon which to organize a party, their own self-professed goal. The experience of Trotskyist theory and practice in these years illustrates the close, reciprocal relationship between organization and social movements.

1. Baruch Hirson, "Land, Labour and the 'Black Republic,'" unpublished ms., n.d., p. 20 estimates that over 2000 Communists were expelled from the CPSA in the 1929-34 period.
2. V. I. Lenin, "What is to be Done?," [1902] in Henry M. Christman, ed., Essential Works of Lenin, New York: Bantam, 1966, 53-175, especially 92 and 129-131; quote 129.
3. Rosa Luxemburg, "Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy," in Dick Howard, ed., Selected Political Writings: Rosa Luxemburg, New York and London: Monthly Review, 1971, 283-306, 287.
4. Luxemburg, "Organizational Questions," 285.
5. Trotskyist influence in the national democratic movement is explored in detail in Chapter 7.
6. The application of the Comintern's People's Front in South Africa is discussed in detail in chapter 4.
7. Edward Roux, S. P. Bunting: A Political Biography, Cape Town: The African Bookman, 1944, 123-124 and 126. Roux, discussing the party's status in 1933, writes: "Two years of intensive bolshevisation had narrowed down party influence and membership almost to vanishing point....On the Witwatersrand the only sustained activity was work among the African unemployed." It had functioning branches in Cape Town and Johannesburg and some scattered underground groups. Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1964, 269. See also Alan K. Brooks, "From Class Struggle to National Liberation: The Communist Party of South Africa, 1940 to 1950," M.A., University of Sussex, 1967, 25 and Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945, London and New York: Longman, 1983, 28.
8. One interpretation of the Native Republic thesis, presumably the majority position, is found in "What is the Native Independent Republic?," unpublished ms., [1934], Ralph Bunche Collection, box 62, Special Collections, University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles. Lazar Bach and Moses Kotane put forth variations. On Bach's views see H. J. and R. E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969, 473. On Kotane's views see "Letter calling for Africanisation in the Party from Moses M. Kotane in Cradock to Johannesburg District Party Committee dated February 23, 1934," Document 55, [South African Communist Party], South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party, 1915-1980, London: Inkululeko, 1981, 120-122.
9. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 114.
10. Doreen Musson, Johnny Gomas: Voice of the Working Class - A Political Biography, Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1989, 79; Roux, S. P. Bunting, 155.
11. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 146.
12. Ralph Horwitz, The Political Economy of South Africa, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967. Horwitz describes the integrating and unifying effects of the mining industry on the South and Southern African economy, especially 58 ff. On black and white proletarianization on the Rand see 66, 125, 140-41. Luli Callinicos, Working Life: 1886-1949, vol. I, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987 provides an overview of the impact of industrialization on the formation of a working class in this period.
13. Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, "The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism," in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, eds., The Politics of Race, Class & Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa, London and New York: 1987, 1-70.
14. R. Ross, "The Origins of Capitalist Agriculture in the Cape Colony: A Survey," in William Beinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, eds., Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986, 56-100, especially p. 56-58.
15. A. Odendaal, Vukani Bantu! The Beginnings of Black Protest Politics in

South Africa to 1912, Cape Town: David Philip, 1984, especially 1-29.

16. Ralph Bunche Collection, box 64. By permission of Special Collections, University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles. Bunche's field notes were speedily written, often in transit, and thus have some typographical errors which I have not corrected.

17. Lodge, Black Politics, 48-50; Iain Edwards, "Recollections: the Communist Party and Worker Militancy in Durban, Early 1940s," South African Labour Bulletin, 11, 4, February-March 1986, 65-84; Vishnu Padayachee, Shahid Vawda and Paul Tichmann, "Trade Unions and the Communist Party in Durban in the 1940's: A Reply to Iain Edwards," South African Labour Bulletin, 11, 7, August 1986, 50-66.

18. Laurens van der Post, In a Province, London: The Hogarth Press, 1934, 168-169.

19. Simons, Class and Colour, 458-459.

20. For an overview of the differences between the Communist League of South Africa and Workers' Party on South African political economy see "We Smash this Bogey," Workers' Voice, 1, 3, October 1935, 9 and "A Preliminary Discussion on the Native Question," Workers' Voice, 1, 6, February 1936, 6. Some copies of Workers' Voice from the 1930s and '40s are available at the South African Library, Cape Town and the British Library, London. The break between the Johannesburg-based Workers' International League and the Cape Town-based Fourth International Organisation of South Africa in the early 1940s had a regional basis, sparked off by disagreements between the balance of local and regional news in their publication, and exacerbated by the difficulties of long-distance communication and personality conflicts. Interviews with Baruch Hirson, London, March 1987 and Kenny Jordaan, Harare, December 1987.

21. On the CPSA's expulsions see Roux, S. P. Bunting, chaps. 16 and 17; Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 256; Simons, Class and Colour, 421 and 425; Brian Bunting Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary, London: Inkululeko, 1975, 68-9. The brief histories of the League of African Rights (LAR) and the African Federation of Trade Unions (AFTU) illustrate the abortive effect of the Comintern's abrupt policy shifts on CPSA politics. Chapter 2 discusses the LAR. The AFTU disintegrated due to the Party's emphasis in the early 1930s on militant agitation rather than shop-floor organising. See Simons, Class and Colour, 444-46, 457.

22. A. J. Southall, "Marxist Theory in South Africa until 1940," M. A., University of York, 1978, 33; Roux, S. P. Bunting, 145-6; Background on the early Trotskyist movement is drawn from an interview with Charles van Gelderen by Baruch Hirson and Brian Willan, 1974, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, tape 837 and interviews with Solly Herwitz, Cape Town, March 1988 and Herman van Gelderen, Cape Town, September 1989.

23. Trotskyist rejection of the thesis did not follow color lines. T. W. Thibedi's discontent with the Native Republic thesis is suggested in a letter from E. R. Roux to Victor [Danchin?], 6 March 1929, Bunting Papers, A949, Department of Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand Library, Johannesburg. See also Musson, Johnny Gomas, 41. C. B. I. Dladla also rejected the thesis. For his view see "C. B. I. Joins the Workers' Party," Umlilo Mollo, September 1936, 1, 1, 2.

24. Sheridan Johns, "The Birth of the Communist Party of South Africa," The International Journal of African Historical Studies, IX, 3, 1976, 371-400, especially 373-5 and 399-400; Taffy Adler, "Lithuania's Diaspora: The Johannesburg Jewish Workers' Club, 1928-1948," Journal of Southern African Studies, 6, 1, October 1979, 70-92, especially 70-74; Taffy Adler, "The Class Struggle in Doornfontein: A History of the Johannesburg Jewish Workers' Club, 1928-1950, University of the Witwatersrand: African Studies Seminar, August 1976; E. A. Mantzaris, "Radical Community: the Yiddish-speaking Branch of the International Socialist League, 1918-1920," in Belinda Bozzoli, ed., Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987,

- 160-176. On the relationship between political economy theory and combined and uneven capitalist development see Karl Marx, "Afterword to the Second German Edition," Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. I, New York: International, 1967, 12-20.
25. Southall, "Marxist Theory," 1978, 33-34 and 37-38 discusses the theoretical continuities between the CPSA, the Lenin Club and the Workers' Party of South Africa. Theoretically, the early Trotskyists had a conception of South African political economy that was broadly similar to that of the CPSA. Compare, for example, Nzula's analysis of the land question with the Workers' Party of South Africa, "Draft Thesis: The Native Question," typed ms., [Cape Town, 1934] and R. Lee's analysis, "The Native Question in South Africa," The New International, May 1935, 110-11. Copies of the draft theses of the Workers' Party of South Africa and Communist League of South Africa are in my possession. The Southern African Archives at the Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York, has copies of some of these theses. Moses Kotane criticizes the CPSA's Eurocentric orientation in "Letter calling for Africanisation in the Party."
26. C. F. Glass, "The Labour Movement in South Africa," The Militant, III, 13, March 29, 1930, 5 and "The Durban 'Raid' in South Africa," The Militant, III, 15, April 12, 1930, 5. Manuel Lopes, "A Tribute from a South African Militant," The Militant, III, 22, June 7, 1930, 4. For biographical material on Glass see Baruch Hirson, "Death of a Revolutionary: Frank Glass/Li Fu-Jen/John Liang 1901-1988," Searchlight South Africa, 1, September 1988, 28-41 and Simons, Class and Colour, 325-6.
27. Glass, "The Labour Movement," 5.
28. Aside from Thibedi, one member, Rapalana J. Tjekele was probably the Jacob Tjelele who had been elected to the CPSA's Central Executive in 1927; another, Alphies Maliba was very likely the Alpheus Maliba who subsequently joined the Party. See Bunting, Moses Kotane, 29, 119-20, 149.
29. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 118; Bertram (Baruch) Hirson, "The Making of an African Working Class on the Witwatersrand: Class and Community Struggles in an Urban Setting, 1932-1947," Ph.D., Middlesex Polytechnic, 1986, 235-6.
30. Letter from T. W. Thibedi to Communist League of America, 26 April 1932, Trotsky Archives, item 15533. By permission of The Houghton Library, Harvard University.
31. Leon Trotsky, "Closer to the Proletarians of the 'Colored' Races," June 13, 1932, printed in The Militant, July 2, 1932, 1. Excerpted and retranslated in George Brietman, ed., Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, New York and Toronto: Pathfinder, 1978, 84-85.
32. Letter from Bolshevik Leninist League of Johannesburg in International Bulletin of the International Communist League, New Series no. 2, Sept. 1934, 7.
33. Hirson, "Making of an African Working Class," 235-6.
34. Van Gelderen, Interview, London, 1974; see also Southall, "Marxist Theory in South Africa," 34.
35. Letter from International Secretariat to Cape Town Comrades, 23 October, 1932, Trotsky Archives, item 14385.
36. Lenin Club, "Workers of South Africa Awake!," 4, British Library, London. Southall dates this pamphlet as 1934; the Workers' Voice, 1, 3, October 1935, p. 9 says it was produced for May Day 1933.
37. Lenin Club, "Workers of South Africa Awake!," quotes p. 4 and 2 respectively; cf. Southall, "Marxist Theory in South Africa," 33-34.
38. "Langa Meeting--Police Present," Workers' Voice, 1, 2, September 1935 describes a well-attended talk by CLSA (Lenin Club) representatives on the Hertzog Government's proposed legislation for Africans.
39. Van Gelderen, Interview, London, 1974; On the French turn see Leon Trotsky, "A Program of Action for France," June 1934, 21-32; "The League Faced with a Turn," June 1934, 33-38; and "The League Faced with a Decisive Turn," June 1934, 39-44, all in Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1934-35, New York: Pathfinder Press,

1974.

40. Interview with Charles Van Gelderen by Baruch Hirson and Brian Willan, London, 1974; Minutes of International Secretariat of the International Communist League (B.L.), 7 May 1935; "The Lenin Club," Workers' Voice, 1, 3, October 1935, 9 announced bi-weekly open meetings. A. Mon (M. N. Averbach), "A Comment on Trotsky's Letter," Workers' Voice: Theoretical Supplement, 1, 3, July 1945, 6-11 calls the group forming the Workers' Party the minority tendency. However, both the draft theses sent to Trotsky and the above-mentioned minutes of the International Secretariat suggest that the Workers' Party faction was the majority tendency. Copies of some of the draft theses are available at the Southern African Archives, Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York.
41. Southall, "Marxist Theory in South Africa," 33-38; Franz J. T. Lee, "Der Einfluss des Trotzkismus auf die Nationalen Befreiungsbewegungen in Sudafrica," Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universitat zu Frankfurt am Main, Ph.D., 1970.
42. [Workers' Party of South Africa], "Draft Thesis. The Native Question," [Cape Town, 1934], 4, author's possession and [Communist League of South Africa], "A Preliminary Discussion on the Native Question," Workers' Voice, 1, 6, February 1936, 6-8, quote 6-7.
43. [Workers' Party of South Africa], "Draft Thesis. The Native Question," 6. *Emphasis in the original.*
44. Workers' Party, "Draft Thesis: The Native Question," quotes pp. 4, 6 and 6 respectively. *Emphasis in the original.*
45. "Afrique du Sud: Sur quelques questions tactiques; Remarques du Camarade Dubois," Bulletin Interieur de la L.C.I., no. 2, May 1935, pp. 1-2 and 15; quote, 15. Translated from the French.
46. "Afrique du Sud: Sur quelques questions tactiques."
47. Minutes of International Secretariat, International Communist League, (B.-L.), April 23, 1935, 2-3.
48. Lewis Wade, "Smash the Colour Bar!," Workers' Voice, 1, 5, January 1936, 11. All grammatical errors in the original.
49. Wade, "Smash the Colour Bar!" and Shop Steward, "The Trend of Events in the Trade Union Movement," Workers' Voice, 1, 5, January 1936.
50. Communist League of South Africa, "A Preliminary Discussion on the Native question," 7.
51. [Communist League of South Africa], "Draft Thesis - The War Question." [Cape Town, 1934], 3, author's possession.
52. Communist League of South Africa, "A Preliminary Discussion on the Native Question," 8.
53. Quotes from "We Smash this Bogey," Workers' Voice, 1, 3, October 1935, 9 and Communist League of South Africa, "Draft Thesis - The War Question." 3.
54. [CLSA], "We Smash this Bogey," 9. *My emphasis.*
55. On the development and transformation of the ICU see Helen Bradford, "The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa in the South African Countryside, 1924-1930," Ph.D., University of the Witwatersrand, 1985.
56. Simons, Class and Colour, 456-57, 471, 480-81; Southall, 1978, 54-55 discusses Trotskyists and the white working class. The Socialist Workers League, short-lived Johannesburg-based Trotskyist group, possibly an offshoot of the Workers' Party and precursor to the Workers' International League, gave its rationale for separate organizational work amongst black and white in its Statement of Policy and Programme of Work and Rules and Regulations of the Socialist Workers League submitted for joint discussion, [Johannesburg, 1938/39?], Trotsky Archives, item 16596, 4-6. Chapter 4 discusses the CPSA's relations with white labor during the late 1930s in more detail.

57. The minutes of the International Secretariat of the International Communist League (B.-L.), 7 May 1935 acknowledge receipt of theses from both Trotskyist factions in Cape Town.
58. Leon Trotsky, "On the South African Theses," 20 April 1935, Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1934-35, New York: Pathfinder, 1974, 248-255, 250.
59. Trotsky, "South African Theses," quotes 250, 250 and 249 respectively. Emphasis in the original.
60. Letter from International Secretariat to Workers' Party and Communist League of South Africa, 24 July 1935, Trotsky Archives, item 14386. Translated from the German.
61. Chris Madapata, "Trotskyism in Revolutionary Movements: Sri Lanka in an Asian Context," South Asia Bulletin, 7, 1 & 2, Fall 1987, 23-38, describes, p. 26, a similar situation amongst the small organisations composing the Sri Lankan socialist movement in the 1920s: "...differences of approach were linked to an almost pathological level of personal conflict between the various leaders and groups, which was itself the product of the isolated nature of the small Communist groups in the first period. This in turn was a serious obstacle to the setting up of the party and to the sinking of roots in the mass movement."
62. Minutes, International Secretariat, International Communist League (B.-L.), April 23, 1935, 1-2.
63. Lenin, "What is to be Done?," 69.
64. Letter from IS to Communist League of South Africa and Workers' Party of South Africa, 24 July 1935, Trotsky Archives, item 14386. Translated from German. Emphasis in original.
65. "What is the Native Independent Republic?," especially 19-20 and Simons, Class and Colour, 473.
66. Interview with R. O. Dudley, Cape Town, April 1988.
67. A. Mon [M. N. Averbach], "A Comment on Trotsky's Letter," Workers' Voice, 7.
68. A. Mon [M. N. Averbach], "The Colour Bar and the National Struggle for Full Democratic Rights," Workers' Voice, 1, 2, November 1944, 8.
69. Hosea Jaffe, Interview, London, February 1987. See also Leon Trotsky, "Le probleme national et les taches du parti proletarien," in Leon Trotsky Oeuvres Janvier 1935-Juin 1935, intro. by Pierre Broue and Michel Dreyfus, Paris: Institut Leon Trotsky/Etudes et Documentation Internationales, 1979, 242-52, note 18.
70. Socialist Workers League, Statement of Policy, Trotsky Archives, item 16596.
71. On Trotskyists' attacks on each other (and Communists), see the WPSA's apology for "...the making and publishing of certain false and defamatory matter...against the honour and integrity of the members of the General Council of the National Liberation League," The Spark, 5, 5, 4; also, Socialist Workers League, Statement of Policy, especially p. 2. The Communist League of South Africa accused the WPSA of slander and characterised it as "...a small group of self-styled 'intellectuals,' who confined their revolutionary (?) activity to heated debates within the four walls of an obscure room..." in "We Smash this Bogey," Workers' Voice, 1, 3, October 1935, 9. As well as the unification efforts between the WPSA and CLSA, the letter from the Bolshevik Leninist League in International Bulletin of International Communist League alludes to attempts to initiate discussions with the Lenin Club. In the 1940s unity talks between the WIL and FIOSA broke down, despite their common allegiance to the Fourth International and the virtual identity of their programs. See "4th International Conference," Workers' Voice, 3, 1, 1st February 1944, 5. Also, Workers' International League, "Draft Letter to F.I.O.S.A. adopted by P. B. 3/1/45 for League Discussion," Internal Bulletin, 1, 6, January 1946, 26 and "Unity with the Workers' Voice Group" in the same issue, 27-30, in Karis and Carter Microfilm Collection, 2:DW2:85/1.

72. Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 302.

73. Letter from International Secretariat, International Communist League (B.-L.) to Workers' Party and Communist League of South Africa, 12 October 1935, Trotsky Archives, item 14387. Translated from the German. Emphasis in the original.

74. On Italy's invasion of Ethiopia see Alberto Sbacchi, Ethiopia under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience. London: Zed, 1985; see also Basil Davidson, Let Freedom Come: Africa in Modern History, Boston and Toronto: Little Brown, 1978, 181. League of Nations sanctions depended upon the support of member nations and were ultimately unsuccessful in curtailing Italy's war capacity because some major powers refused to endorse them. Sbacchi, p. 230, describes their ineffectiveness: "Cautiously, the League imposed limited economic and financial sanctions. These sanctions were meant to wear down Italy's fighting capacity over the two years it was estimated the war would run. But sanctions were limited, slow to work, and only partially supported. The United States never joined the boycott. In the short run, stockpiling and strict regulation of the economy allowed Italy to absorb these irritations without damage to the African campaign. Mussolini played on British and French fears in his threat of a European war should sanctions be extended to oil."

75. But within the Comintern, the issue of workers' sanctions became controversial. See C. L. R. James, World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International, London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1937, 387-389. According to James, then a Trotskyist, in August 1935 the Comintern came out for League of Nations sanctions at the International Federation of Trade Unions Congress in Brussels and sidelined the issue of worker sanctions at its Seventh Congress, even before internal Ethiopian resistance had fallen. Nonetheless, in South Africa, Umsebenzi, continued to endorse dockworker protests in September 1936 despite the Comintern's shift, although the CPSA's League Against Fascism and War later joined the international call for League of Nations sanctions against Italy. See "Refuse to Ship Goods to Abyssinia! Defend the Last Independent Native State in Africa from the Attacks of Italian Imperialism! An Appeal to the Harbour Workers of South Africa," Umsebenzi, June 22, 1935, Document 57, and "Native and Coloured Workers' Anti-war Strike -Refuse to Load Italian Ships at Durban and Cape Town," Umsebenzi, September 7, 1935, Document 58, both in South African Communists Speak, 123-124 and 124-125 respectively.

76. "Extrait d'une lettre de la Communist League of South Africa du Octobre 1935," Press Service, International Secretariat of the International Communist League (B.-L.), 15 Novembre 1935. For a more detailed explanation of the CLSA's critique of the CPSA position, see "United Front with God," Workers' Voice, 1, 3, October 1935, 6-7.

77. "The Drive Towards War," Workers' Voice, 1, 2, September 1935.

78. The Spark, November 1935.

79. Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 302-303; see also R. K. Cope, Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W. H. Andrews, Workers' Leader, Cape Town, Stewart Printing, n.d., 328; Simons, Class and Colour, 474; and Baruch Hirson, "Not Pro-War, and not Anti-War: Just Indifferent. South African Blacks in the Second World War," Critique, 20-21, 1987, 39-56, especially 41.

80. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 155; The Simonses, Class and Colour, 475-477 discuss the impact of the Comintern's 1935 right-wing swing on the CPSA. This entailed a fight against "left sectarianism" and "counter-revolutionary" African Nationalism, leading to a number of expulsions and suspensions in 1935, including Jameson Coka, H. Sacks and Issy Diamond, p. 664, n. 35. See also Ralph Bunche's 1937 interview with ex-Communist Grey who strongly criticized the leadership at the time. Bunche Papers, box 65.

81. For other discussions of the NLL and NEUF see Mary Simons, "Organised

- Coloured Political Movements," in Hendrik W. van der Merwe and C. J. Groenewald, eds., Occupational and Social Change among Coloured People in South Africa, Cape Town: Juta, 1976, 202-237, especially 221-223; Maurice Hommel, Capricorn Blues: the Struggle for Human Rights in South Africa, Toronto: Culturama, 1981, 65-71 and Gavin Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African 'Coloured' Politics, Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1987, 179-206. Information is also available in the A. Abdurahman Family Papers, especially the papers of Mrs. Zainunnissa Gool, University of Cape Town Archives.
82. Peter Abrahams, Tell Freedom, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954, 326-327. For biographical material on Cissie Gool see Elizabeth Everett, "Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool 1897-1963: A Biography," B.A. Honours, University of Cape Town, 1978 and "Gool, Zainunnissa 'Cissie,'" Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter, From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964, vol. 4, Political Profiles, 1882-1964, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1977, 34.
83. [National Liberation League], "How to work among urban Africans," box 4, A. Abdurahman Family Papers, University of Cape Town Archives.
84. Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall, 180-181. Hawa Ahmed's speech, "Address Delivered at the Inaugural Meeting of the Non-European Women's Suffrage League," Cape Town, 24 August 1938, Abdurahman Family Papers, box 6, folder 6 concerned chiefly the issue of black unity. Jimmy LaGuma gave a lecture on "Our Women and the Liberatory Movement," Cape Town, September 12, 1937, advertised in The Liberator, 1, 5, September 1937, as part of the NLL's Sunday evening political education lecture series.
85. Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall, 186-7, quote 187.
86. Hommel, Capricorn Blues, 67-68.
87. Bunche Collection, box 64.
88. Abrahams, Tell Freedom, 331-332; quotes 332. Laurens van der Post also describes the nuances of racial hierarchy and its articulation with gender in In a Province, 136: "The half-caste girls, highly conscious and proud of their European blood, had given themselves a privileged position in the household, and each one's behaviour was subtly calculated to remind the black men constantly of their racial inferiority. The girls used any dispute as an excuse to call out jeeringly: 'Naked Kaffirs!' Knowing the strict taboos the black men had in their own country controlling the relations between men and women, and the undisputed priority of man over woman, van Bredepoel was not surprised that the men resented it strongly."
89. Abrahams, Tell Freedom, 332.
90. Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall, 188.
91. Abrahams, Tell Freedom, 335-336.
92. Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall, 194 and Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 357-358. Hommel, Capricorn Blues, 81 notes that in the early 1940s neither the NLL nor NEUF were able to form an effective opposition to the government's proposed Coloured Advisory Council, a move to curtail Coloured voting rights. Thus the formation of the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department movement, which I discuss in chapter 6.
93. Maureen Swan, "Ideology in organised Indian politics," Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, eds., The Politics of Race, Class & Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa, London and New York: Longman, 1987, 182-208, especially 200-202; Simons, "Organised Coloured Political Movements," 223; "Arms for Non-Europeans." Flyer issued by the Non-European United Front of South Africa, March 18, 1942, Document 71, 389 and "Non-European Peoples' Manifesto." Adopted at Non-European Conference convened by the Non-European United Front, June 18, 1942, Document 72, 390-391, both in Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter, From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964, vol. 2, Hope and Challenge 1935-1952, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1973.

94. Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall, 195. Hommel, Capricorn Blues, 69 offers a different interpretation of this split.
95. The Spark, 5, 5, (50) May 1939, 3.
96. Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall, 204.
97. Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall, 204-206.
98. Letter from C. R. Goodlatte to Trotsky, 4 January 1938, Trotsky Archives, item 1585. For a biographical account of Goodlatte see Baruch Hirson, "Spark and the 'Red Nun'," Searchlight South Africa, 2, February 1989, 65-78.
99. Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 312.
100. Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 329-331; Callinicos, Working Life, 155. Bunche interviewed a number of trade unionists including Max Gordon, Solly Sachs, Gana Makabeni and one of the Cornelius sisters.
101. Trotsky's preface, "Ninety Years of the Communist Manifesto," is translated and published (except the last paragraph) in Isaac Deutscher, ed., The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology, New York: Dell, 1964, 285-295. A copy of the Workers' Party pamphlet is in the Communist Party of South Africa Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA. Unfortunately there is no information as to how many pamphlets were actually produced or how widely the Workers' Party was able to distribute them.
102. Letter from WPSA to IS, 11 April 1936, Trotsky Archives, item 14482, Houghton Library Harvard University.
103. Goodlatte to Trotsky, 4 January 1938, Trotsky Archives, item 1585.
104. Interview with R. O. Dudley, Cape Town, April 1988.
105. Information on Fanny Klenerman comes mainly from her unpublished memoirs. I wish to thank Rose Zwi for access to these memoirs. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 132-134 notes that Klenerman was expelled from the CPSA around September 1931 as part of the purge of the "right opportunist Bunting clique," along with W. H. Andrews, C. B. Tyler, Solly Sachs and Ben Weinbren, and later on, J. Pick and Jimmy La Guma. Klenerman's work in the Clothing Workers' Union is mentioned in Ivan L. Walker and Ben Weinbren, 2000 Casualties: A History of the Trade Unions and Labour Movement in the Union of South Africa, Johannesburg: South African Trade Union Council, 1961, 11.
106. Fanny Klenerman, "The South African Workers Party," in her unpublished memoirs.
107. "Afrique du Sud," Service d'Information et de Presse de la L.C.I. (B.L.), no. 4, 20 July 1936, 27.
108. Klenerman, "Political Groups," Memoirs.
109. Klenerman, "The South African Workers Party," Memoirs.
110. "Afrique du Sud," Service d'Information et de Presse de la L.C.I. (B.L.), no. 4, 20 July 1936, 27-28.
111. Mark Stein, "Max Gordon and African Trade Unionism on the Witwatersrand, 1935-1940" in Eddie Webster, ed., Essays in Southern African Labour History, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1978, 143-157; Klenerman, "Max Gordon and the S.A. Worker's Party," Memoirs; Hirson, "The Making of an African Working Class," 236. On the African Mine Workers' Union see Simons, Class and Colour, 512.
112. Bunche Collection, box 65.
113. "Afrique du Sud," Service d'Information et de Presse de la L.C.I. (B.L.), no. 4, 20 July 1936, 27-28.
114. Simons, Class and Colour, 498-499.
115. Bunche Collection, box 65.
116. Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 326-334; Stein, "Max Gordon and African Trade Unionism."
117. Peter Abrahams, Tell Freedom, 306-7.

118. Hirson, "The Making of an African Working Class," 62.
119. Trotsky, "On the South African Theses," 255. Interestingly, the WPSA did not include these concluding remarks when it published Trotsky's letter. The CLSA scorned the WPSA's position on illegal organization in "We Smash this Bogey," Workers' Voice, 1, 3, October 1935, 9.
120. "The Workers' Movement Faces a New Road," The Spark, 5, 6 (51) June 1939, 1-5. See also Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 312.
121. Hirson, "The Making of an African Working Class," 61-2. The political career of Dr. Murray Gow Purdy typifies this phenomenon. Purdy had been in the Johannesburg Workers' Party but in the late 1930s left South Africa, finally settling in India where he formed a succession of tiny Trotskyist groups. See Charles Wesley Ervin, "Trotskyism in India, Part One: Origins through World War Two (1934-45)," Revolutionary History, 1, 4, Winter 1988-89, 22-34, especially 25ff. The influx of South African Trotskyists to Britain is mentioned in Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, The War and the International: A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain 1937-1949, London: Socialist Platform, 1986, 2-3.
122. See Hirson, "The Making of an African Working Class," and Lodge, Black Politics, 11-20 for discussions of working class protest during these years.
123. Although the number of strikes during this period surpassed those in the volatile 'teens, the aggregate number of workers involved and workdays lost was far greater in the earlier period.
124. Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 326-9, 332-4; Stein, "Max Gordon and African Trade Unionism."
125. The CPSA's pro-war stance can be seen in 6 Point Communist Programme, [1941], Communist Party of South Africa Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA and Freedom, no. 9, April 1942 in Kenneth M. Glazier, "South Africa: A Collection of Miscellaneous Documents, 1912-1962," Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1963, reel 5; See also Baruch Hirson, "Not Pro-War, and not Anti-War: Just Indifferent. South African Blacks in the Second World War," Critique, 20-21, 1987, 39-56, especially 51-2 and "Editorial Note," South African Communists Speak, 162.
126. Roux, Time Longer than Rope, 328, 330-31.
127. Within the WIL there was much internal criticism of its top-down approach to the trade union movement via the PTU secretaries. This suggests that WIL's strength at the rank and file level remained weak, despite its support for the pro-strike sentiment of the rank and file. See the articles on WIL's relationship to the PTU in Internal Bulletin, 1, 6, January 1946 and 1, 7, February 1946, in Karis and Carter Microfilm Collection, 2:DW2:85/1. For participants' views on the PTU and CNETU, see "The Transvaal Conference of Non-European Trade Unions," Inyaniso, May (1945?), 1-2, in Glazier, "Collection of Miscellaneous Documents," reel 5; Socialist Action, 2, 5, July 1945, 1 and 2, 6, August 1945, 1; and Workers' Voice, 4, 7, September 1945, 4.
128. Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa, 20; Hirson, "Not Pro-War, and not Anti-War," 52-3.
129. On the Workers' International League, Hirson, Interview, London, March 1987 and John Blair (pseud.), "The Trotskyist Movement in South Africa," unpublished ms., 1977, supplement, 1. On the CPSA, see Lodge, Black Politics, 34; On the FIOSA and its remnants, Jordaan, Interview, Harare, December 1987 and Discussion, organ of the Forum Club, especially "Editorial," 1, 2, [December 1950?], 1-3.
130. A. Davids, "A Critical Analysis of I. B. Tabata's Book - The All-African Convention, Cape Town: Forum Club, reprint, [1950?], 19-20, quote 20.

CHAPTER 5

BLACK UNITED FRONTS, PEOPLE'S FRONTS AND NON-COLLABORATION

*In the future it seems we shall have one right.
When all other freedom is taken away,
The right to get drunk on a Saturday night.
And lie in the gutter till break of day.*

*The Congress is broken and I.C.U. dead
And Bunting deported across the foam
And everyone who's the least bit red
Is spending his time in a "government home;"*

*Tho you've taken our vote in the Cape, and tho
with tear gas bombs you're collecting your fines
It will thrill dear old liberty doubtless to know
We still may get drunk on South African wines!¹*

The years 1935-45 have been called "...the pivotal period..." in modern South African politics, one which saw the birth and convergence of the major political tendencies shaping the liberation movement.² The mid-1930s saw the beginnings of the first long-term alliance of the black petty bourgeoisie, working class and rural masses in South African history, one which attempted to cut across the color-caste divisions imposed by the state. Proportionately, the black petty bourgeoisie was tiny. Its meager ranks included a few small shopowners, merchant traders, struggling artisans and teachers in which Coloureds and Indians predominated. In 1936, 0.3% of all Africans were engaged in commerce and finance, compared to 6.6% of Coloured men, 1.0% of Coloured women, 27.3% of Indian men and 19.4% of Indian women. Whites dominated virtually all professions, aside from teaching and religion, and in 1936 less than 1% of all medical practitioners, advocates, attorneys, dentists, chemists, architects and engineers were black.³

TABLE 3

Breakdown of professionals by racial classification, 1936

Whites	9,090	99.323%
Asian	25	.273
Coloured	23	.251
African	<u>14</u>	<u>.153</u>
TOTAL	9,152	100.000%

Source: Sheila T. van der Horst,
"Labour," in Ellen Hellmann, ed.,

Handbook on Race Relations in South

Africa, Cape Town, London and New York:

Oxford Univ., 1949, 109-157, 123.

Nonetheless, the black petty bourgeoisie's relative access to education and restricted voting rights had heretofore given it predominance in black political organizations. Now, its movement towards the working class reflected the growing power of urban black workers, a power manifesting itself in militant collective protest. Organizationally, this class alliance took the form of black united fronts like the National Liberation League, the Non-European United Front and the All African Convention.

Alongside the emergent black mass movement, urban and rural whites struggled against unemployment and poverty as the Depression swept rural Afrikaners off the farms and into the cities. In essence, this meant defending their privileges vis-a-vis blacks. But in the 1930s, the urban white working class, smashed and coopted in 1920s, was economically ravaged.⁴ Afrikaner nationalists and fascists sought to capture this social base; socialists, especially Communists, hoped to counteract this.

The emergence of these movements and alliances raised questions concerning the political content of class alliances, the relationship of the working class struggle to the democratic struggle, and the organizational forms, programs and methods of political struggle. The very recent development of collective black working class action meant that a struggle over the political content of class alliances was taking place for the first time. The growing weight of the urban black working class posed again the issue of working class unity in

South Africa. The absence of a black bourgeoisie in the 1930s and '40s meant that the class alliance of the oppressed majority turned entirely on the relationship between petty bourgeoisie and proletariat and raised the possibility that this alliance could take an anti-capitalist direction. However, the political struggle between the black petty bourgeoisie and proletariat remained muted to the degree that the political content of their relationship was never clearly articulated at a popular level. This chapter examines how socialist organizations interacted with and influenced the political movements and alliances which arose during these years. Communist policy and practice attempted to unite white workers and poor peasants with the black democratic movement into a broad anti-fascist People's Front. Trotskyists directed their efforts to the black united fronts.

The foundations of black unity

The movement for black unity which straddled class and color-caste had both socioeconomic roots and political motivations. Since the late nineteenth century, the black petty bourgeoisie had organized for democratic rights within organizations which followed the sectional framework of the South African polity: the African National Congress (ANC) formed by prominent Africans in 1912 shortly after the establishment of the Union of South Africa, catered in its early years to the interests of chiefs and the minute African elite; the African Political Organisation (APO) represented the interests of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie; the Transvaal British Indian Association (later the Transvaal Indian Congress) and South African

Indian Congress (SAIC), founded in 1919, were dominated by the Indian merchant class. But by the 1930s the struggle for political incorporation using established methods like petitions and deputations had come to a dead-end, unable to achieve even minimal reforms.⁵ Confronted with an onslaught of racially discriminatory laws which accelerated in the 1930s under the Fusion Government, blacks began to organize across sectional lines, forming alliances and organizations based on Non-European unity.

The socioeconomic underpinnings for the petty bourgeoisie's recognition of the need to gain working class support and of the movement for black unity lay in the impact of the penetration and development of capitalism on those classified African, Indian and Coloured. Although their histories began in different parts of the world, and the paths leading to their incorporation into the working class were very different, South African blacks were slowly and spasmodically being equalized through the processes of proletarianization, urbanization and industrialization. This process had the longest roots in the Western Cape, comprising the conquest of the Khoisan and the importation and subsequent emancipation of a slave population from Malaysia and other areas of Africa. To Ralph Bunche, observing the urbanized proletarians of the Western Cape in the 1930s,

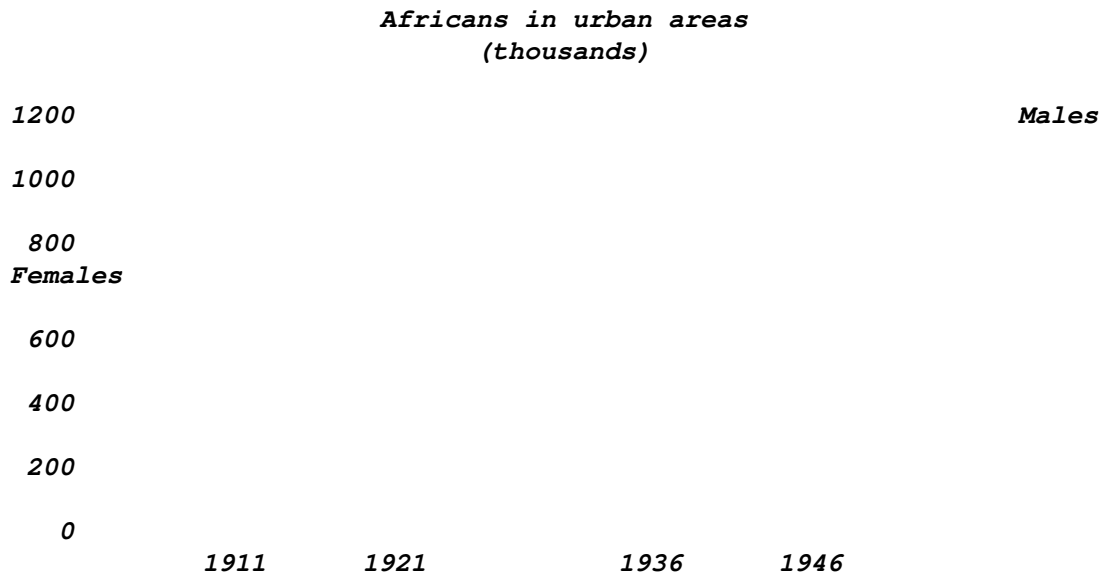
It would appear that the vast majority of the colored population live in dire poverty and squalor. En masse, economically they are worse off than the natives, who living at their kraals, on the locations and reserves,

are at least more certain of getting sufficient food. The colored group is completely at the mercy of the white, because it must work for the white in order to get food. The natives, on the other hand, need work for whites, only to be able to pay poll taxes. The colored group has no economic foundations at all--it is suspended--between white and black.⁶

The African population was still predominantly rural in the 1930s, and compared to the obvious proletarianization of the Coloured population, the nature and extent of African proletarianization was masked by remnants of labor-tenancy on white farms and by the reserves system, which gave the appearance of ensuring most Africans a minimum access to the means of subsistence, while restricting the development of a peasantry. In 1936, roughly 57% of all Africans were based in the reserves. But even in the 1920s, the ability of the reserves to ensure African subsistence was illusory, particularly in the Cape.⁷ Africans were increasingly proletarianized and forced to sell their labor-power in the market.⁸

The war years saw rapid urbanization. During 1936-46 African urbanization increased by 48.81%, white, by 32.25%, Coloured by 26.61%, and Indian by 27.28%. Moreover, African women's rate of urbanization surpassed that of African men, indicating the unviability of subsistence production in the reserves and turning the African urban population into a more stable, settled one.⁹

FIGURE 3

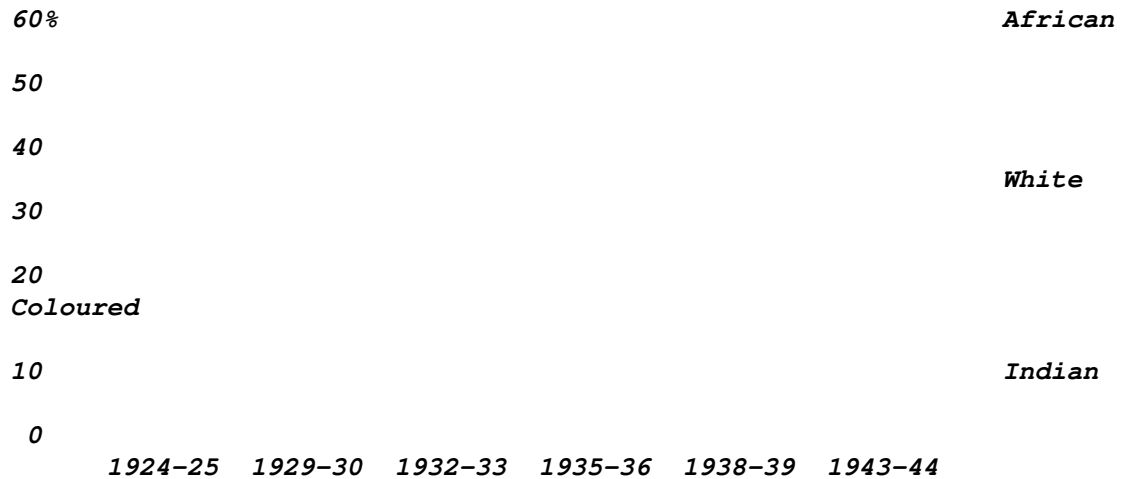


Source: Ellen Hellmann, "Urban Areas,"
Chapter XI in Ellen Hellman, ed.,
Handbook on Race Relations in South
Africa, Cape Town, London & New York:
Oxford Univ., 1949, 229-274, 239.

This pattern of urbanization was reflected in the composition of the industrial workforce. African workers were a growing presence in primary and secondary industry. The following graph indicates the growing proportion of Africans in private manufacturing from the 1930s, paralleled by the decline of whites, who first moved into state enterprises and later left for the war.

FIGURE 4

Percentage of people by racial classification
to total employed in private manufacturing
in the Union of South Africa



Source: Sheila T. van der Horst,
"Labour," Chapter V in Ellen Hellman,
ed., Handbook of Race Relations in
South Africa, Cape Town, London and New
York: Oxford Univ., 1949, 109-157,
Table V, 117.

The political basis of black
unity in South Africa lay in the common
lack of democratic rights. Government
proposals to eliminate the Cape African
franchise in 1936 and to include all
Africans through indirect
representation under a Native
Representative Council lessened legal
differences among Africans. With the
abortive attempt to introduce the

Stuttaford Bills in the late 1930s and the subsequent efforts to institutionalize the Coloured Affairs Council and Coloured Affairs Department in the 1940s, the government began chipping away at the few political rights of Coloureds, pushing them towards the same political and economic level as Africans. Similarly, a series of laws in the 1930s and '40s, like the 1943 Pegging Act, segregated and restricted the property rights of South Africans of Indian descent.¹⁰ Both the decline of the ICU and ANC as the mass protest organizations of the late 1920s and the failures of separate sectional political struggle laid the basis for new organizational forms and methods to fight the racial oppression of the Hertzog period. The emergence of black united fronts as the distinguishing organizational form of the 1935-45 period reflected this.

Nonetheless, this was a double-sided process. The gradual erosion of socioeconomic differences occurred alongside a simultaneous attempt by the government to strengthen color-castes. Thus, while black rights were similarly curtailed, the government sought to channel blacks into segregated and inferior political

structures: the Native Representative Council was instituted to represent Africans; the Coloured Advisory Council for Coloureds; Indians fell under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner for Immigration and Asiatic Affairs and the Minister for the Interior. Political segregation reinforced social residential and occupational segregation. There was, in this period, an extremely high correlation of occupation and color: whites performed professional, supervisory and skilled work, and Africans unskilled labor. Coloureds and Indians were an intermediary strata. Most were unskilled workers, but some performed skilled, semi-skilled and artisanal work, especially in the Western Cape and Natal.¹¹ In popular consciousness, color-castes were very much a reality, and the movement for black unity was initiated and led by a radical minority seeking to break down this consciousness. Nonetheless, urban and rural poor flocked to these black united fronts, and their overwhelming predominance in them made these organizations a base which socialists hoped to influence.

The Comintern and the People's Front

South African Communist policy and practice in this period showed the strong influence of the Comintern's People's Front strategy, unveiled at its Seventh World Congress in 1935.¹² The People's Front reversed an earlier Bolshevik position regarding working class leadership of political alliances, in effect removing socialism from the political agenda in those years. Its architect, George Dimitrov, envisioned it as a national movement to break the class alliance of peasants, workers and finance capital which, in his view, underpinned fascism. The People's Front rested on the

proletarian united front, which sought "...unity of action by all sections of the working class, irrespective of the party or organization to which they belong."¹³ Dimitrov argued that the proletariat must build an alliance with the petty bourgeoisie and peasantry by appealing directly to their class interests. Strategy and tactics should exploit the heterogenous nature of the petty bourgeoisie and the contradictory interests within its political organizations, in order to divide landless peasants from rich, and petty shopkeepers from big businessmen.¹⁴ Dimitrov even suggested that Communists penetrate fascist organizations in order to draw away the peasants and workers forming fascism's social base. Such organizations, he wrote,

...can and must be made our legal or semi-legal starting point for the defence of the day-to-day interests of the masses. To utilize these possibilities, Communists must win elected positions in the fascist mass organizations, for contact with the masses, and must rid themselves once and for all of the prejudice that such activity is unseemly and unworthy of a revolutionary worker.¹⁵

The historical roots of the People's Front may be traced to Lenin's conception of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry." This formulation, however, did not address the relationship of the two classes within the alliance i.e., it did not specify which

social class would play the leading role in determining the program, organizational forms and political methods of the alliance. By 1917 Lenin accepted Trotsky's permanent revolution thesis that since the proletariat had crystallized as a distinct class whose interests were in direct opposition to those of the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie was no longer capable of playing a leading or even an independent role during revolutionary periods.¹⁶ Accordingly, despite the significance of the peasantry in relatively non-industrialized countries where the land question was fundamental for most people, any alliance between proletariat and peasantry hoping to overthrow capitalism had to place the proletariat in a leading role.¹⁷

The drawbacks of the People's Front become apparent in its application in South Africa. Its ambiguity as to which class interests should dominate any alliance of proletariat and petty bourgeoisie led to the submergence of black working class interests to those of the petty bourgeoisie. Moreover, Dimitrov's conception of the proletarian united front ignored the possibility of contradictory interests between different sections of the working class and opened the possibility for concessions to politically backwards groups of workers. Thus, the CPSA dropped its demands for black democratic rights in order to attract white labor into its People's Front.

The People's Front in South Africa

The impact of this Comintern policy is directly traceable in the activities of the CPSA, although Brian Bunting argues that domestic factors took primacy over Comintern policy in the Party's return to mass politics in the mid-'30s.¹⁸ By 1933 the CPSA's isolation from popular organisations was indeed being challenged internally, by Communists like Moses Kotane, who, the following year, 1934, called for the Africanization of the Party, as well as for "... 'a conference of African radicals throughout the country...to consider the question of a united front.'"¹⁹ But other members had been unsuccessfully challenging the ultra-left wing policy of the early 1930s for several years, and it was the Comintern's new policy which finally allowed the internal factions pushing for popular involvement to become dominant in the CPSA.²⁰

The intense turmoil which accompanied the Party's reorientation towards more popular work between 1932 and 1934 occurred as rival factions fought to control the Party's political direction. Lazar Bach and Douglas and Mary Wolton, critical of what they saw as reformist efforts to work in national organizations, strove to maintain a bolshevized party, while Kotane and his supporters pushed for more popular work. These disputes coincided with a revival of debates over the Native Republic thesis. As Edward Roux has aptly noted, the Native Republic thesis was based on an analysis of the relationship between the African masses and imperialist forces, and this relationship underwent no fundamental change in the early 1930s. Yet, in 1932, under the influence of a visiting Comintern

representative, the Party adopted a new interpretation of the thesis. The original 1928 thesis had seen the Native Republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' government. Now, it was identified as a workers' and peasants' government on the grounds that the achievement of Native Republic depended on an alliance of those two classes.²¹ The Party identified an African bourgeoisie, described as "...those who in one form or another exploit the Native toilers and make money out of them," like businessmen owning five or six houses for rental, one or two transport buses or a restaurant.²² No African nationalist organization was then raising the slogan of a Native Republic, it pointed out, and the Party insisted that this African bourgeoisie's anti-imperialist interests were overshadowed by their potential to exploit black workers and peasants. In fact, black workers and peasants had more in common with white workers and poor peasants, who also suffered from imperialist exploitation, than with this African bourgeoisie.

While being democratic for the workers and peasants, this government will be a revolutionary dictatorship against the white bourgeoisie remaining in the country and against the resisting tribal chiefs and the Native bourgeoisie, inasmuch as it will have to suppress their resistance. Such a government is called a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.²³

By 1934 Kotane was also interpreting the Native Republic as a workers' and peasants' government, while emphasizing the need for a

broad alliance of blacks. But the continuing struggles within the Party's Political Bureau are indicated by the fact that in September 1935 the Bach faction gained a majority on the Political Bureau and expelled a number of individuals who supported Kotane in the move towards more popular work. Very shortly thereafter, the Comintern's new People's Front policy made its impact in South Africa, setting the tone for a reorientation towards popular work in black organizations.²⁴

Kotane's own conception of the class alliance needed to advance the South African struggle at that period was strikingly close to Dimitrov's, echoing Lenin's early position on the democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants.

The Independent Native Republic which in essence means a bourgeois republic, but which the S African (owing to the objective conditions), must necessarily presuppose a democratic workers and peasant republic, has different premise, language and attitude to that of the proletarian dictatorship and socialist revolution and it is precisely here where the crux of our argument necessarily revolves. It is from this premise that the author bases his arguments, that the general propaganda for a democratic workers and peasants republic cannot be identical with that for the dictatorship of the proletariat. The identity or the identification of the two different historical stages is nothing but

rank opportunism, a minimisation of our present task.²⁵

Here he alludes to the need to mobilize the black majority on the basis of democratic demands, counterposing a republic based on the alliance of workers and peasants operating under capitalist social relations to a socialist society produced by proletarian revolution. For Kotane, a black republic based on an alliance of workers and peasants would solve the democratic tasks through a democratic revolution; yet it could not solve the socialist tasks put on the historical agenda by the presence of an industrial proletariat. His support for this type of workers and peasants alliance coincided with the Comintern's People's Front policy and explains his subsequent sanguine attitude towards the compromise of working class interests in the All African Convention over the next few years.

Dimitrov's speech itself was well-known in South African political circles: Naboth Mokgatle, who joined the Party in the late 1930s, refers to the singular impact which the speech had on his own political development.²⁶ The People's Front policy had an immediate effect on the CPSA which "...acknowledged its own sectarian errors of the past and sought to ally itself with other anti-fascist and anti-racist elements amongst both blacks and whites in South Africa."²⁷

Umsebenzi published and endorsed the decisions of the Seventh Congress, calling in September 1935 for "'...the forming of a broad people's united front against imperialism, fascism and war.'"²⁸ In the South African context, however, this initial conception of a single front broke down in practice into two fronts which developed along racial lines.

Dimitrov's conception of the proletarian united front provided the theoretical underpinnings for the Party's reorientation towards white labor. In practice, the Comintern's proletarian united front and people's front policies reinforced the development of two separate movements in South Africa: one, the white anti-fascist movement to protect the existing democratic rights of white South Africans; the other, the movement to gain democratic rights for blacks, represented by the All African Convention, in which, aside from a few radicals, whites were virtually absent.

The proletarian united front, as the CPSA conceived it, was color-blind. In this respect, it represented a continuation of the Party's attempts to organize black and white unemployed workers during the Depression. Those efforts demonstrate the problems of organising joint black-white political action in a racially unequal society and foreshadow the subsequent difficulties of building a united front in the 1930s. Roux notes that

The problem was always to get white and Native unemployed to march together in a demonstration. A meeting of the whites would be held outside the Labour Exchange while African speakers went to tackle the crowd of Bantu near the Pass Office. At some time, pre-arranged, the two meetings would be brought together to form a procession to go to various authorities and demand relief. These marches began well but by the time they arrived anywhere it was found that most of the whites had vanished. Only a handful of white supporters remained to give some semblance of united action.²⁹

The practical problems created by the lack of a program to develop non-racial unity intensified with the proletarian united front policy. The intensification of capitalist relations in the countryside in the 1930s pushed both Afrikaners and blacks into the

cities. Small-scale Afrikaner farmers lost their farms and took up factory work, or sent family members to town to stave off complete proletarianization. The CPSA, like Trotskyist tendencies in South Africa, anticipated that these poor Afrikaners would realise their mutual interests, as workers, with blacks, and that white and black workers would struggle together against the common enemy of fascism. The Party began publishing "Die Arbeider en Arme Boer" ["Worker and Poor Peasant"] in 1935 to tap this potential audience. But its increased attention to white workers meant less attention to black workers and less practical work in black organisations. The new approach was reflected in the Party paper: in 1936 Umsebenzi was renamed The South African Worker, and ran the slogan "For a United Working Class Front Against Imperialism and War." This new version of the Party paper curtailed Bantu language news coverage.³⁰

At its April 1936 Plenum the Party sketched out its first efforts to entice South Africans, particularly whites, into a broad multi-class organization, through a proposed

"Farmer-Labour Party which will have for its object to organise politically the working

class, affiliated, through their trade unions and other workers' organisations; also the political organisation of the intellectuals, poor farmers and the struggling petty-bourgeoisie." This party was to be "a means to bring about unity of struggle in the ranks of the white toilers, in particular against the capitalist offensive, against fascism and war and for the repeal of all oppressive laws."

The Farmer-Labour Party never materialized, but Bunting points out that the idea formed the basis of subsequent attempts at anti-fascist, anti-war fronts organized around the white Trades and Labour Council and left-wing Labour groups in these years.³¹

In October 1936, as part of its goal of building a People's Front against Fascism and War, the Party participated in a United Front Conference convened by the South African Trade and Labour Council. Neither the executive of the Labour Party nor the Cape Federation of Trade Unions participated. The Conference, comprising 35 organizations, agreed on the name People's Front. The CPSA's movement to electoral politics and its focus on drawing in the most backwards elements of the white population was clear. Communist W. H. Andrews stated that

the main purpose of the People's Front Conference, the kernel of the movement was combating Fascism and fascist legislation in South Africa....A real People's Front would

sweep the United Party into oblivion at the next elections....the main task of the People's Front was to go out to the platteland and show the poor farmers the emptiness of the Greyshirt-Blackshirt policy and win them over to a real support of democracy. The fascists were already actively propagandising among the Afrikaners, and the farming community which was being broken up and forced into industry had not the experience of Trade Unionism and active work was very necessary among them if fascists were to be prevented from gaining ground.³²

A. A. Moore, President of SATLC and Chairman of the Conference, stressed the need to defend existing rights, essentially a concern of whites. And while Hyman Basner did raise the issue of black democratic rights on behalf of the Communist Party, proposing several additions to the Conference's draft program on the Native question, a report in the South African Worker suggested that black rights were not a high priority for the Conference:

After considerable discussion the proposals were referred to the drafting committee which recommended that the additions be included under the various headings in the programme and that the special item Native policy be deleted.³³

The CPSA's movement towards white labor went so far that for a short while in 1936 the 1920s debate on whether black or white labor constituted the working class vanguard resurfaced, with some CPSA members calling for an all-white front and others contending that an organisation of both black and white was impractical. In contrast to trade unionists Solly Sachs' and Bill Andrews' belief in the revolutionary potential of white labour, Eddie Roux continued to push for the Party's involvement in the black struggle.³⁴ The following year, 1937, Party members and sympathisers Eddie Roux, Sam Kahn, Harry Snitcher and Edwin Mofutsanyana, then a CPSA branch secretary, all confided to Ralph Bunche that the Party's overemphasis on whites led to the neglect of blacks.³⁵

Eventually, under the influence of a Comintern representative visiting South Africa, the CPSA settled on a "compromise" in which it saw itself as a link between two wings of a broad front of organizations, each specialized along color lines, the black All African Convention and the white People's Front. Brian Bunting explains that

It was the hope of the Party that the black united front and the white united front could eventually be brought together and housed under one roof, thus effectively uniting the black and white workers in South Africa against fascism and war and for liberation and democracy in South Africa; but this was not to be.³⁶

In practice this 'color-blind' approach was far from non-

racial; it ignored the economic, political and social conflicts of interests between the black and white working class which gave white labor a stake in promoting its own interests at the expense of blacks. In the second half of the 1930s, white workers still refused to work in organizations which called for democratic rights for blacks. Nonetheless, the Party continued working in all-white popular fronts, trying unsuccessfully to attract white labor. Even in 1940, the Party continued to argue that Afrikaners could be mobilized on an anti-imperialist, anti-war platform, and throughout World War II it directed itself to the white electorate.³⁷

The CPSA was not alone in its belief that the participation of white workers was a necessary component of a socialist movement and that rapid proletarianization and economic impoverishment would provide the conditions for the radicalization of Afrikaner workers. All Trotskyist tendencies in the second half of the 1930s concurred with this assessment. The Spark, for instance, organ of the Workers' Party of South Africa, idealistically urged all workers, both labour aristocracy and lumpenproletariat, to "...realise the identity of their interests and unite in a revolutionary struggle against their common enemy - the bourgeoisie."³⁸

But the Socialist Workers League, a short-lived Trotskyist group based in Johannesburg in 1939, charged the Workers' Party with black nationalism and the CPSA with "white chauvinism and opportunism," The Spark, it argued, was

...carr[ying] on in a splendid and futile
isolation from the white workers, addressing
itslef [sic] solely to the native oppresses

*[sic] and basing its strategy on the
national-revolutionary struggle for
liberation instead of on the class struggle.³⁹*

*And despite the Socialist Workers League criticism of the CPSA, its
own programme for "non-racial" working class organisation was
strikingly similar to views expressed by the Party's right wing in
mid-1936:*

*Our road can only lie in the steady and
patient organisation in parallel lines of
both sections of the population, drawing them
ever closer as objective conditions make this
possible, and in the steady spread amongst
both sections of our revolutionary propaganda
and agitation on the basis of the class
struggle.*

*It justified this proposal on the grounds that "...we are compelled
to compromise in our tactics of approach [to white workers] in order
that we may at least get a hearing, that we may be able to put our
point of view."⁴⁰ But in taking racial separation as the basis of its
own practical work, the Socialist Workers League, like the CPSA,
confused a mechanical non-racialism, i.e., separate practical work
among both black and white, with a principled non-racialism, i.e.,
organizational work premised on no concessions to white chauvinism.*

*The CPSA could not devise a program able to attract both
privileged and oppressed workers. Thus, in practice it was unable to
build a working class base that did not defer to white privileges.
Largely separated from the black movement for democratic rights,*

aside from the efforts of individual black Communists, the Party's orientation towards white labor reinforced the movement towards electoral politics and participation in government structures. Given the racial structure of South African electoral politics, in which the electorate was white and blacks could participate in the political system only through separate, inferior structures, participation in the electoral system reinforced racial divisions.

Socialists and black united fronts

By 1935 black resistance had recovered from the setbacks of the early 1930s as black protest now channelled itself into new organizations to fight a new onslaught of discriminatory legislation proposed by the Fusion Government and to resist the state's attempt to coopt the tiny but growing black petty bourgeoisie. Neither the ICU or ANC could lead this movement. The ICU was in a state of decay and fragmentation, despite some localized support in Natal, and the ANC, virtually defunct. From 1930 the ANC had moved to the right, backing off from its earlier cooperative relationship with the CPSA which had developed under the presidency of J. T. Gumede. Its new conservatism was reflected in the election of Pixley ka Izaka Seme as president. Seme had been inspirational in 1912 in welding together the ANC as a national organization of chiefs and commoners. But in the 1930s the ANC's popularity dwindled as Seme, in Lodge's words, encouraged "...the welfare of an aspirant African commercial class" and sought closer ties with chiefs, whose traditional authority was being eroded by the government. Even his followers eventually accused him of "'culpable inertia.'"⁴¹

*African National Congress Procession,
Cape Town Region, c. 1937*

*Ralph Bunche Collection, by permission of Special Collections,
University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles*

Now, Africans of all political stripes drew together and, building upon the tradition of the first Non-European Conference in 1927, sought to form a united front, as Kotane had proposed in 1934, to fight the proposed Representation of Natives Bill and the Native Trust and Land Bill. The first bill, while curtailing the Cape African franchise, called for the creation of a Native Representative Council (NRC) with solely advisory status on so-called Native issues.⁴² The second reasserted the restrictions on black landholding rights to scheduled areas. In May 1935 Reverend Z. R. Mahabane, then a former ANC president, called for a national convention, and in December Pixley Seme and Professor D. D. T. Jabavu convened the first conference of the All African Convention (AAC).⁴³

The left gave its enthusiastic support. Socialist groups adamantly rejected the government's proposed legislature, particularly the attempt to abolish the African franchise and replace it with the NRC. The CPSA scathingly described the NRC as a step towards fascism:

This council will be a mere puppet council, with no real powers or authority. It will not even be representative of the Native people....This new bill must be fought tooth and nail. The Communist Party calls upon all Native national organisation and upon the Native people as a whole and the white workers to rally to mass demonstration of protest against this new fascist measure.⁴⁴

While recognizing that liberation

organizations would have differing strategies and tactics for fighting racial oppression, the CPSA hoped to draw them into a United Front of the People against Imperialism and urged blacks to ...put away the difference of the ways toward national liberation. All of us have one common cause, requiring the unity of our efforts, and however different we regard the solution of the question of national liberation, it is clear for all of us that in the interests of national freedom we cannot allow that the imperialists should tighten more and more the rope around our necks, that our last political rights should be taken away. The fight against national oppression and exploitation, the fight for the immediate, most necessary needs of the people—that is the basis for the united action of all the Native organisations, irrespective of their political differences. That is why we greet warmly the proposal to call a joint convention.⁴⁵

In the existing organizational vacuum, radicals hoped to make the newly formed AAC into a permanent organisation. The CPSA resolved at its April 1936 Plenum "...that every effort be made by the Party to bring the Convention on to a permanent organisational basis on the lines of the Programme of the National Liberation League

as started in Cape Town.'" Similar views were expressed by Trotskyists.⁴⁶

The Johannesburg branch of the Workers' Party, which had three representatives at the July 1936 Convention, recognized the political potential of the AAC as a mass movement, but foresaw the practical implications of the People's Front policy. It commented that

There is a movement afoot to transform this Convention into a permanent national organisation "representing the interests of the native people". In the growth of this movement there are distinct possibilities for a revolutionary wing. The Communist Party has already committed itself to a people's front policy of collaboration with the native reformists. Thus it is upon our grouping that the task falls of providing the core of the left wing in name as well as in actuality.⁴⁷

Trotskyists saw in these black united fronts an opportunity to promote the working class independence which Trotsky had discussed in his 1935 letter to South Africa. Trotsky counterposed the method of class struggle for national liberation with the class-collaborationist people's front:

The historical weapon of national liberation can be only the class struggle. The Comintern, beginning in 1924, transformed the program of national liberation of colonial people into an empty democratic abstraction

that is elevated above the reality of the class relations. In the struggle against national oppression, different classes liberate themselves (temporarily) from material interests and become simple "anti-imperialist" forces. In order that these spiritual "forces" bravely fulfill the task assigned to them by the Comintern, they are promised, as a reward, a spiritual "national-democratic" state.⁴⁸

In the late 1930s, the black population was composed overwhelmingly of a working class and a migrant labour force whose income was supplemented by subsistence farming. There was no black bourgeoisie and only a tiny petty bourgeoisie. Because of the class structure of the black population there appeared to be a convergence between black united fronts and the revolutionary alliance of workers and peasants which formed the basis of the Russian revolution. Many Trotskyists saw these organizations as a special South African form of this alliance.

Because of this coincidence of class and color Trotskyists saw non-collaboration with the government's racial institutions as a means to fight class collaboration and promote working class independence. As political activist Neville Alexander has explained:

The policy of non-collaboration was conceived

of as a strategy to keep out of the politics of the national movement of the oppressed any ruling-class influence whether from the right or from the so-called Liberal left.⁴⁹

By the 1930s many blacks were challenging the validity of color-caste categories as the point of departure for political mobilization. Non-collaboration with racial structures signified a break from the preceding political tradition and a rejection of the state's intensified efforts to coopt black leadership into government-created racial political structures. By confronting state authority, which in South Africa assumes a racial form, the non-collaborationist response raised the possibility that the working class could establish its own institutions and challenge the state through dual power. By contrast, those who participated in the government's racial political institutions in the 1937-46 period ended up compromising militant working class struggle.⁵⁰

Radicals in the AAC pushed non-collaboration onto the political agenda. They were not the first to raise this as a method of struggle: the Western Cape ANC had proposed a boycott of racial elections at the Second Non-European Conference in 1930.⁵¹ But from the mid-'30s, non-collaboration was raised systematically by

Convention radicals who saw the boycott of the NRC as a means to resist the government's systematic exclusion of blacks from national political institutions and their segregation into powerless advisory bodies. I. B. Tabata argued that

...the Boycott is directed against those political institutions that are created for our own enslavement....in the case of the political institutions, there is nothing to force us to operate the machinery, if we don't choose to do so. Those who operate it do so of their own free will. It is because the Boycott exposes this voluntary acquiescence on the part of the quisling-intellectuals that they direct their venom against it.⁵²

Yet the early hope that black united fronts could promote the interests of the black working class through non-collaboration proved illusory. The purpose of these united fronts was to unite blacks across class and sectional lines on the basis of their common lack of political rights in order to build a democratic movement. But precisely because different social classes propose different solutions to the democratic question, such a movement would tend to break down as the various class strategies begin to crystallize. While there was no black

bourgeoisie at the time, there was a tiny, but influential, aspirant bourgeois strata, eager to develop black business, which actively promoted its own class interests in all its political activities. By 1937 many socialists were aware that leadership of the united fronts was being hijacked by a group that eschewed militancy for petitionary methods and ended up participating in government structures. Yet they were powerless to stop this right-wing drift.

From its inception the AAC embodied a variety of class and regional interests. Formed to fight the curtailment of the African franchise in the Cape, Convention's base was strongest where it represented those people directly affected by the proposed legislation. The comments of one of Bunche's Durban informants, a Reverend M'Timkulu, indicate the degree to which the history of uneven political and economic development across the country affected political consciousness and presented material barriers to black unity and the development of a national consciousness. According to Reverend M'Timkulu, Bunche recounts:

...Natal has not supported the African Convention because of feeling that the Convention is attempting to usurp the position of existing organizations, such as the I.C.U., which is still strong and active in Natal. He points out that the Convention developed around the Cape franchise question

and the Native Rep. Bills, and that Zulus are not interested in the franchise because it is foreign to their experience; their thinking is entirely in terms of land and more land--they think that if they can get more land their problems will be solved. But they aren't interested in buying any land--they think it must be given to them--because they say the land belonged to their fathers and they wish it to be given back to them.⁵³

The momentum for forming the AAC was supported by white liberals from the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Joint Councils of Europeans and Natives, and the black petty bourgeoisie who frequented these groups had a longer and stronger history of class conscious organization than did the black working class in that decade.⁵⁴ The class divisions among those facing common color discrimination were apparent at Convention's inaugural meeting in December 1935, when it resolved

...that a civilisation test, such as was contemplated at the National Convention in 1909-1910, is equitable; but that the criterion of race or colour, which is implied in these Bills, is contrary to democratic government....⁵⁵

Nonetheless, in its unanimous opposition to the Hertzog Bills, the AAC began on a non-conciliatory note, and there were suggestions of a militant course of

struggle. Goolam Gool, then in the Communist League of South Africa, moved that the organisation "...lay the foundations of a national liberation movement to fight against all the repressive laws of South Africa."⁵⁶

This idea was endorsed by Communist John Gomas the following year when he wrote that the Convention should be "...a mighty force which must decide to work out a programme for organisation and action of an all-in National Liberation movement with the general slogan 'Equality, Land and Freedom!'"⁵⁷ The CPSA concurred, as well, issuing a statement in September 1936 that

The immediate task of the Party...is not only to actively participate in the All-African Convention, but to do everthing in its power to strengthen it. The All-African Convention which is the embryonic state of the United Front consists of the African National Congress, ICU, Communist Party and other Native organisations and must be welded into a powerful anti-imperialist liberation movement embracing millions of Native people.⁵⁸

Workers' Voice, January 1936

A Trotskyist view of Hertzog's Native Bills. The African National Convention in the illustration refers to the All African Convention, first convened in Bloemfontein, December 1935 to fight the Hertzog Bills.

Yet, at its second conference in June 1936, Convention was still undecided as to how to protest the Hertzog Bills, which had since become law, let alone forge an anti-imperialist liberation movement. Conflicting political strategies and tactics were apparent at that Conference. Reflecting the class interests of an aspirant bourgeoisie, D. D. T. Jabavu, Convention's president from 1936-1948, called for black economic self-upliftment:

We should burst our way into the vocations
that create wealth among our
communities....Let us learn how to support
our own traders, however humble they may be,
out of a patriotic spirit of African
nationalism....we could multiply the number
of our humble shoemakers, tailors, grocers,
taximen, bus contractors, butchers, farmers,
cooperative stores, adopting a scheme of
self-upliftment to counter the Government's
anti-Black and repressive "Civilised Labour"
policy.⁵⁹

Similarly, Selby Msimang, a leading figure in both the ANC and AAC, suggested "...a complete segregation on a fifty-fifty basis to enable us to establish our own State and government wherein to exercise our political, economic and social independence...." Counterposed to these approaches to political change, Convention's left-wing proposed the boycott of all racial institutions.⁶⁰

It was clear that reformist tendencies had the momentum to dominate this parliamentary-type organisation. Between June 1936 and December 1937, major Convention leaders, including many ANC and some

CPSA members, decided on their own to participate in the NRC. In the June 1937 indirect elections for the 12 seats in the newly established NRC, half were won by members of the AAC executive. Within two years of its formation an organisation which had originated as the mouthpiece of all Africans, with a mandate to reject the NRC, became the mouthpiece of NRC representatives. The policy statement adopted at its third national meeting in December 1937, while on the one hand claiming opposition to all forms of segregation, on the other hand endorsed racial structures, noting that

All the candidates returned as members at the elections held during June 1937 under the 1936 Representation of Natives Act are hereby recognised as the accepted mouthpiece of Africans in their various representative State Chambers....These representatives will be expected to attend the plenary sessions of the All African Convention at Bloemfontein for the purpose of ascertaining the opinion of African views on various questions, securing a mandate for expressing African views on matters arising from time to time, and of giving an account of their stewardship.⁶¹

The class nature and political direction of the AAC was even more cemented by December 1937. The most visible change at that meeting was the active participation of six white delegates representing Africans in the new system of Native Representation.⁶²

To Ralph Bunche, an observer at this meeting,

The role of the European reps. is a dangerous one--they are now counselling extreme moderation among the natives so as not to offend the Afrikaners and thus make their task more difficult in Parliament.⁶³

Senator Malcomess, Bunche noted,

...says he wants natives for next few months 'to be moderate,' to keep natives question from being injected into the coming election. Councils [sic]: 'have patience.' Says nat. rep. (Europ.) task is to educate white people.

And when Selby Msimang reported on the slavlike conditions of farm labor and proposed that the AAC organize a Farm Labourers Association, Bunche continued, Malcomess

suggest[ed] that convention withold action on Msimang's report until Government Farm Labour Committee issues its report and then European reps. of natives and native councillors should be called in conference on the recommendations in the report.

This motion to withhold action was voted on and carried almost unanimously. "Tactics of delay," Bunche underlined, "European influence strong."

One effect of white influence was seen in the attempt to keep the AAC an African-only body through financial pressure, an attempt which reinforced the efforts of some African leaders. Just as a

strand of Coloured chauvinism, intertwined with the interests of a Coloured middle class, infected the NLL, so a strand of African nationalism sought to make the AAC an exclusively African organization. Bunche wrote that

In answer to a question as to whether the Bantu Welfare Trust contribution is for natives only, Rheinold Jones sayd [sic] 'yes, ' ; thus implication is that A.A.C. is for natives only if it accepts the contribution and this was clearly defined by one speaker. Motion carried to leave the provision as it stands--a grave mistake and a victory for bigoted, black chauvinism which plays directly into the hands of the divisive policy of the government. There was very vigorous discussion and much wrangling over this issue. Mrs. Ballinger syas [sic] Convention could not possibly have carried Gool's motion; that colored themselves are in large part responsible for this attitude, and that Convention would sell out on this issue for the L50 from the Bantu Trust.

Indicative of the bourgeois class aspirations of some of the leadership were the numerous calls to stimulate African business through capital investment and traders' associations. Alex M. (Max) Jabavu, brother of the Professor and recently elected to the NRC, argued that "affluence wins respect." Margaret Ballinger, who would become a Native Representative in 1938, pointed out that segregation

could actually enhance the development of African trading interests.

Bunche commented on the lack of organizational democracy, describing Professor Jabavu as "...a regular dictator, telling people on the floor to 'sit down', etc." He notes "A surprising amount of levity in the Convention. Jabavu always leads the laughter." Goolam Gool "...upbraided Godlo and the Convention for not bringing up on the floor of the last convention meeting the question of support for the National Rep. Council [sic], instead of boycotting it. He said had the question been submitted to the meeting it would have been voted down." Gool had been removed from Executive Committee for his opposition to Convention's support of NRC. At one point Gool "...suggested that time is ripe for another pass-bearing campaign and it met only with unreserved mirth throughout the audience."

While the left-wing was quite aware of this conservative movement, they were uncertain and divided as to how to stop it. Some socialists, like C. B. I. Dladla and Gana Makabeni, both former CPSA members, were disillusioned early about the possibility of working in the AAC. Makabeni informed Bunche that he was not going to either the AAC or ANC conference which were to be held in December 1937. He described the latter as "...an attempt to revive a dead organization," and argued that the best action at that time was to organise black workers into trade unions. He "...emphasized the corruption of educated native leader[s]--mentioning Seme, Kdale [sic], etc." Bunche reports that Dladla, who had since joined the Johannesburg branch of the Workers' Party,

says there are no real revolutionaries in
South Africa....He is bitterly critical of
African leadership--says men like Jabavu...

Seme...are hopeless. Says left wing faction in African Convention tried to get the Native Representation Act boycotted....But Jabavu, et al said this was a big step toward solution of the native problem and supported the scheme....[Makabeni and Dladla]...said the corrupt and conservative leaders 'pack' the conventions of native organizations and make it impossible for progressives to do anything.⁶⁴

In October 1936 Dladla had represented the WPSA at the Transvaal section of the AAC conference. There he criticized the lack of a program and the leadership's inability to specify the goals of unity. He argued that the peaceful, constitutional methods which Convention leaders urged would fail and disillusion the masses. Characterizing the Union Parliament as a mock parliament representing only a small minority of the population, he called for a boycott of the NRC, and urged the establishment of ...a separate independent Parliament, a council of delegates elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage. A campaign must be inaugurated to bring to the consciousness os [sic] the masses of voteless, rightless Africans the necessity for a constituent [sic]

Assembly to express their needs, their national unity, their revolt against their present slave status....It is the task of the African people to transform this mockery into a real Parliament by the creation of a body of their fellow citizens elected by ballot and given mandates to speak on behalf of the masses of the people.

*However, this resolution was rejected, leaving Dladla to criticize those Communists who "...defended the [AAC] 'leaders' against the criticism that had been justly levelled against them of failing to produce any programme whatsoever and so leading the Convention to inevitable collapse."*⁶⁵

*By 1937 organizational differences between the AAC and ANC were coming to the fore, despite their ideological proximity, which was indicated by the fact that leading ANC figures occupied high posts in the AAC. Reverend Mahabane, for example, was then both ANC president and AAC vice-president. In essence, the ANC, a unitary body based on individual membership, feared being swallowed and overshadowed by Convention's federal structure. Convention had been conceived as an umbrella organization to act as a Parliament for all Africans, but many ANC leaders came to see the AAC as a rival body and began trying to revive the ANC. The competition between the two bodies became apparent in the debate over how often Convention should meet. Bunche observed that "...Convention seems to degenerate [sic] toward the end of the afternoon session of the third day--especially when the question of whether the Convention is to meet annually, biennially, or every three, four, or five years."*⁶⁶ *Moses Kotane, representing*

the CPSA, interpreted the decision to convene the AAC every three years as a compromise with ANC supporters and Professor Jabavu, who had sought to "bury Convention" by having it meet only every five years. By ensuring that Convention met only once every three years and that it endorsed the NRC, ANC leaders effectively restricted its potential to represent the African people. Nonetheless, Kotane concluded optimistically on December 18th that "The Convention was a moral success though theorists might be holding a different view on this. It put the Congress, with its 'Jubilee publicity stunts,' in the shade."⁶⁷

Other leftists who continued to fight for a radical agenda inside Convention were far more critical than Kotane of the move to the right. Trotskyists, particularly, took a critical view of the leadership's internal maneuvers. Thirty people, including Trotskyists and Communists, attended the left-wing "Rump Parliament" of the AAC, which met on December 14, 1937, after the regular session had been adjourned, and criticized Convention's inactivity among the masses. Yet the comments of Jimmy La Guma, who was part of this left-wing caucus, echoed those of Dladla. La Guma, Bunche wrote,

says there seems to be some undercover sabotage going on at the Convention--evidenced in the attitudes expressed by men such as Alex Jabavu on the question of other non-European groups than native, the fight of some to put off the next meeting of the Convention for five years, etc. This he attributes to the Nat. Rep. Councillors and the European Nat. Reps., who fear that the

Convention will develop into a native mass organization and get out of hand.⁶⁸

Parliamentary procedures proved incapable of promoting a radical agenda against this political manipulation; when Convention leadership finally decided to support the NRC, Goolam Gool was removed from the Central Executive for his opposition. Gool contended that had AAC leaders brought the issue of participation in the NRC to the Convention floor, it would have been rejected.⁶⁹

Although the Communist Party had been whole-hearted in its early endorsement of the AAC, by late 1936 it was supporting the ANC's competition with Convention.⁷⁰ As the Party was then concentrating the bulk of its organizational efforts on white labour, it hardly resisted the movement towards participation in the NRC, aside from the efforts of individuals like Johnny Gomas. On the contrary, possibly influenced by Dimitrov's call that Communists use all available platforms for propaganda, the Party ran its own candidates for the NRC. By 1937 it had completely reversed its 1935 position on the NRC. Southall has pointed out that "...just as in its work amongst whites [the CPSA] retreated on its advocacy of full democratic rights for blacks, so within the national movement it backed down to those leaders like Jabavu whom it had so recently denounced." He goes on to describe the Party's stance vis-a-vis the issue of participation in the NRC.

The first Congress of the AAC...had called for a total boycott of this 'dummy' representation and the CP had fervently backed the demand. When the AAC leaders had however manoeuvred in collaboration with the

government to back down on this commitment,
no protest came from the Party press.

Umsebenzi merely printed a factual
account....In the crucial period leading up
to the second convention of the AAC...the
paper contained a number of articles on
this....Not one of these articles took a
position on what was manifestly the central
tactical question facing the organisation.
When the election came, CP members
Mofutsanyana and Basner stood for the NRC and
the Senate respectively.⁷¹

Moses Kotane took a sanguine approach to Convention's problems.
Writing to his comrade Johnny Gomas on December 14, Kotane mentioned
the poor coordination and noted that the

...agenda is atrocious, full of
ommissions [sic] and badly arranged....The
leaders are scared out of their wits. The
Presidential Address...mentioned nothing
about the activities of the Executive since
the last meeting of the Convention and this
item appears no where in the Agenda. The
Western Province dele[gat]ion made a stink
about this, but they were overruled. There
is very little enthusiasm here.

Nonetheless, three days later, on December 17, he wrote to Gomas
indicating his greater concern for Convention's organizational
structure than its political strategy:

*I am not disappointed with the Convention at all. Be it what it may it has come to stay. It now has eleven affiliated and officially registered organisations, and many more give the impression that they are going to affiliate soon. 'Revolutionaries' may be disappointed but those who have a little knowledge of Africans and African affairs and attitude[s] have ground to be optimistic....You will unmistakably see or notice that the Convention is moving towards the right. However, not too bad. There is, in it, a strong tendency and willingness to organise.*⁷²

Edwin Mofutsanyana also called for an active organizational approach on the grounds that

*...there will never be any change through a Convention that merely meets periodically 'to pass pious resolutions.' The only solution must be the organization of the masses of people. The Convention is known to the people and is their only hope, but it must be organized beyond its present skeletal form. There must be branches in every locality which will deal with the day to day activities of the people.*⁷³

Yet Mofutsanyana, himself, who had a seat in the NRC, meekly suggested that Convention appeal to white NRC members to seek repeal

of the repressive labor laws. Kotane added his defense of the white Native Representatives, arguing that "...Convention has found a scapegoat today in the European reps. of the natives upon whom all burdens are being placed."⁷⁴

As the Convention turned to the right, its mass support dwindled. Bunche noted that "the radicals...take [the] view that convention, by accepting the Native Representatives [sic] Act, instead of boycotting the elections, has destroyed public interest in the Convention. They point out that the attendance at the [December 1937] Convention is now meager (about 100) and attribute it to public disgust at the Convention's compromises." Jabavu himself, Bunche continued, "...pointed out how the Convention has steadily lost ground in public support: there were 700 present at the first Convention, 400 at the second, and only 100 at this one."⁷⁵

A political meeting in the Ciskei, c. 1937. Some of the whites are probably Native Representatives.

*Ralph Bunche Collection, by permission of Special Collections,
University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.*

Although many of Convention's leftists anticipated the withdrawal of the masses as Convention lost its potential for militancy, their own organizational fragmentation impeded them from building a sustained relationship with the black working class, as the experience of the National Liberation League showed. By the close of the 1930s, none of the united or people's front organizations were actively involved in black working class struggles. The CPSA had turned its efforts to white labour, which refused to support demands for black democratic rights, and to the black petty bourgeoisie then participating in the government's racial institutions. The black united front organizations, the AAC, the NLL, and the NEUF, abstained from sustained involvement in working class struggles, becoming electoral machines or resolution-making bodies. The black working class, seeking political direction, had rallied behind the black united fronts until it became clear that acknowledged black leaders could not offer political guidance but instead accepted the state's racial framework. Then, in the early 1940s, it turned instead to direct protest over its daily needs of housing, transport and wages.

The non-collaboration movement

The struggle over the political content of class alliances spilled into the 1940s, fuelled by the upsurge of working class protest. The early 1940s saw intense working class self-expression as the war economy spurred industrial development and blacks poured into the urban industrial workforce. The underlying thrust of working class and popular activity in the 1940s reflected a militant practice of non-collaboration. This is seen in a number of areas:

the refusal of rank and file labor to support the war effort, despite the pro-war efforts of much of the Communist trade union leadership after 1941; the boycott of the NRC; and in the countryside, the mass rejection of the Rehabilitation Scheme in the Transkei. The working class continually broke away from organizations and movements which proved repeatedly unwilling to engage in militant working class struggles. Despite its militancy, however, the black proletariat did not articulate a political program reflecting its own class interests. Thus, while it pressured and pulled political organizations and its presence as a social force was acknowledged by a political leadership which reflected petty bourgeois interests, the working class did not challenge the petty bourgeoisie ideologically.⁷⁶

Having lost some of their earlier interest in the AAC and ANC, both of which, as the 1940s began, were participating in the NRC and eschewing militant action, the black working class protested its working and living conditions through strikes, boycotts and squatters' movements. Political leaders followed the mass upsurge, reflecting a growing dynamic between the two classes: in 1943 the ANC Youth League, African Democratic Party, and Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) were all formed to capture this social base, and the AAC was captured by a radical leadership which sought to push it in a non-collaborationist direction.⁷⁷ But like their counterparts in the 1930s, these organisations were sporadic in their support for working class issues. They sought to gain the following of the black proletariat behind goals and programs which they articulated, rather than represent its class interests. This distance was reflected even in the radical petty bourgeoisie's non-collaboration, which was theorized and practiced in a manner which removed it from day-to-day

struggles for survival.

Socialist practice continued to revolve around political alliances. In 1943 Trotskyists in the underground Workers' Party captured the leadership of the AAC and formed the NEUM as an umbrella organization based on a federal structure with the goal of uniting all black organizations on a minimum democratic program based on non-collaboration. The AAC affiliated to the NEUM. Using this structure, they hoped to form a national alliance of black workers, peasants and intellectuals. Intellectuals, especially teachers, were to be the lynchpin of this alliance, transmitting political ideas to workers and peasants around the country. These Trotskyists saw a strong, united black democratic movement as a precondition for winning the white working class from its alliance with the bourgeoisie and building a united working class movement.⁷⁸

Although the NEUM and the AAC functioned in a formal, top-down manner, their non-collaborationist stance gave voice to social protests around the country and reinforced popular pressure on the ANC and its newly-formed Youth League to boycott the NRC. The NEUM's non-collaboration policy increased the gulf between the AAC and ANC. By 1946 the NRC's demonstrated failure to achieve democratic reforms was fuelling popular demands for new, more militant strategies and tactics of political change. Despite the participation of some well-known African leaders, popular feeling against the NRC remained widespread a decade later, and even many NRC representatives recognized the institution's inability to achieve even minor gains for Africans. The impetus for NRC representatives to adjourn finally came in August 1946 after the brutal squashing of the African Mineworkers' Strike. Yet this decision was adopted hesitantly and

only reaffirmed six months later, in May 1947, after General Smuts had showed himself unwilling to consider or concede any of the NRC's demands.⁷⁹

The dialectics of pro- and anti-boycott politics in the ANC and CPSA echoed those in the AAC a decade earlier. Hardly had the boycott of the NRC been endorsed by the Transvaal branch of the ANC, which called on all advisory boards to adjourn in support, when Paul Mosaka and Hyman Basner of the ADP and William and Margaret Ballinger began an anti-boycott movement. Basner was a Native Senator for Africans in the Transvaal and Orange Free State, as William Ballinger would become in 1948. Margaret Ballinger had been a Native Representative for the Eastern Cape since 1938.⁸⁰ By December 1947 ANC leadership joined this movement, beginning a formal retreat from its earlier boycott decision. In his January 1948 presidential address to the ANC, Dr. Xuma, long-time opponent of separate representation, broke from the boycott decision adopted at the National Conference a month earlier, proposing a two-step boycott:

We must not abandon the boycott as an ideal,
but we must return the present councillors as
a second step in our strategy to organise our
people for the final stage-the complete
boycott of elections.⁸¹

However, popular support for the boycott of the NRC remained high, as Youth League members clearly recognized. The NRC's nickname, "toy telephone," signified the widespread perception that it was completely unable to provide any real communication between Africans and the white Parliament. At the December 1947 meeting of the Transvaal ANC, Nelson Mandela had criticized the leadership's retreat

from the boycott:

*If African leaders do not want the African people to fight for their rights they can say so, but the masses of people all through the country are in favour of the boycott. There is still time before the next elections to organise the boycott.*⁸²

Just as they had ten years earlier, socialists at the ANC's 1947 annual conference in Bloemfontein criticized the leadership's backsliding as well. Gana Makabeni remarked that

*The people who were so eloquent for the boycott last year are fighting it as eloquently this year. The people are being deliberately misled.*⁸³

The CPSA continued to endorse the boycott throughout the second half of 1947. In June 1947 Dr. Yusuf Dadoo, chair of the CPSA's Johannesburg District Committee, wrote that

The call for the boycott and generally the resentment against co-operation with the existing machinery, which has only helped to oppress them, is an indication of the Non-Europeans' reaction to the present deplorable situation in South Africa....There may be defects in the boycott plan, but that is no reason why it should be abandoned. Let all of us who recognise the Fascist danger co-

operate wholeheartedly and without reserve to
make the boycott plan a huge success and so
make everyone in South Africa realise
democracy for all can save South Africa from
conflicts, chaos and fascism.⁸⁴

In January 1948 Communist J. B. Marks, a member of the ANC National Executive, criticized Xuma for "individual" statements which contradicted Congress policy. Marks posed the idea of a "boycott ticket," contending that Xuma's appeal to return all members of the NRC en bloc violated the spirit of a boycott ticket. From this point, as Congress leaders gave serious attention to the possibility of participation in the NRC, Communist policy began to shift from a boycott position to a policy of campaigning for seats in the NRC on a boycott ticket platform. Just as it had reversed its position on participation in the NRC in the mid-1930s, so it did now, following the lead of Xuma and other ANC leaders.⁸⁵

At its National Conference in January 1948 the Party resolved to focus its energy on electoral politics as a means of fighting the Nationalist Party, which it viewed as a representative of fascism. It formally announced its intention to support candidates for the NRC:

The N.R.C. cannot achieve any useful purpose
and the African people's efforts must be
directed towards its abolition. In the
forthcoming election to Council, Conference
resolves to work for the election of a bloc
of candidates pledged to repeal the [Native
Representation] Act, the introduction of a

universal franchise and the recognition of
the right of all Africans to sit in
Parliament.⁸⁶

Mofutsanyana, then campaigning for the Transvaal and Orange Free
State seat, counterposed this new CPSA position to that of a "total"
boycott:

But we also all agree that a total boycott
can only be achieved when sufficient
organisational work has been done in the
country. The people to-day are not ready as
one man to abstain from going to the polls.⁸⁷

Essentially, the Party was taking up Xuma's "two-stage"
approach to the boycott. Despite Mofutsanyana's and Marks' continued
reference to boycott candidates, neither explained how to distinguish
boycott candidates from non-boycott candidates or how boycott
candidates could actually fight the system of racial structures.⁸⁸ By
May, Moses Kotane, then General Secretary, was asking black voters
not to boycott elections, despite popular support for the boycott
among Africans and Coloureds.⁸⁹ In effect, the Party was continuing
its popular front policy of appeals to white voters and to the
sections of the black petty bourgeoisie which sought to work in
separate institutions.

The mass support for non-collaboration, despite the
countervailing movement of the ANC and CPSA, is seen in resistance
movements in the Transkei and Western Cape.⁹⁰ The Pondo activist
Anderson Khumani Ganyile describes the boycott of the government's
Rehabilitation Scheme by the Xesibe at Mt. Ayliff, Transkei in 1946.
Men expected to participate in the Rehabilitation Scheme by

castrating their own cattle applied the boycott by sending women and children, who according to custom were not considered capable of performing the operation, in their place. In a boycott against Bantu Education, People's Courts were set up in the Transkei to try those deemed to supported Bantu Education by their participation on School Boards and School Committees.⁹¹

So pervasive was the non-collaborationist movement in the Transkei that in April 1948 two major political organizations, the Transkei Organised Bodies and Transkeian Voters' Association,

repudiate[d] the authority of the new Native Representative Council to "speak on behalf of the people who have on several occasions declared they do not wish to participate in any elections under the 1936 Act".

Those members contesting seats in the NRC were expelled on the grounds that

by seeking election to the council they flouted the decision of every meeting held in the Transkei on the boycott question. These associations urge[d] Africans to intensify the campaign to implement the boycott resolution.⁹²

Despite this widespread rejection of the NRC, its members refused to resign and it limped along until November 1950. The government had the final word when the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 abolished the Council.

Conclusion

In the 1930s and '40s the black petty bourgeoisie was seeking the support of a militant and increasingly organized working class. The prospect of such an alliance raised the question of the political relationship of these classes. Although few in number, some members of the petty bourgeoisie were pursuing policies which suggested an aspirant bourgeois consciousness. In seeking to make the AAC an African-only body or to use the NLL to promote Coloured rights and interests, their actions reinforced racial categories and color-castes. The socialist movement, which sought to penetrate and organize the working class, was divided in its response to the question of political alliances. Trotskyists and Communists endeavored to promote working class interests within black united fronts and People's Fronts.

Both types of alliances foundered on their own contradictions, eventually losing popular support. The alliance based on color, or black unity, succumbed to contradictory class aspirations, and the alliance based on proletarian status, or working class unity, neglected the political and socioeconomic differentials within the working class. Black united fronts, in which Trotskyists played an important role, represented an alliance of black petty bourgeoisie and black working class. In this sense, paradoxically, they were an extension of the Native Republic thesis promoted by the Comintern a few years earlier. Within these united fronts the rival non-collaborationist and incorporationist tendencies were premised on contradictory class interests and in practice could not be reconciled in a single movement. Every alliance in this decade between the

incorporationist elements of the black petty bourgeoisie, the proletariat and the rural masses broke down. The black working class turned away from its established leaders each time they chose to participate in state structures or collaborate with government policy, engaging in direct activity around specific working class issues or directly challenging collaborationist policies through a militant application of the boycott.

Trotskyists saw non-collaboration as a means to prevent class collaboration within national liberatory organizations and alliances. The success of Trotskyist practice of non-collaboration lay in its intersection with explicitly political protests like the Anti-Rehabilitation movement in the Transkei and, later, the Anti-CAD protest in the Western Cape. In the war years Trotskyists of the Workers' Party did not link up their practice of non-collaboration to other, seemingly economic or reformist working class struggles. In effect, the Trotskyist intelligentsia remained outside the working class during these years rather than becoming part of the class.

South African Communists attempted to unite black and white workers on the basis of common anti-fascist interests. But the People's Front could not reconcile the conflicting interests of black and white labor. As white labor strove to protect its privileged status vis-a-vis black labor, refusing to support demands for racial equality, practical efforts to unite black and white workers invariably led towards concessions to white racism and the compromise of the struggle for black democratic rights. The People's Front strategy led the CPSA to move against the mass boycott current, trailing some members of the petty bourgeoisie into the NRC. Communist policy and practice strengthened the collaborationist

tendency.

The People's Front left the socialist movement in a state of disarray by the beginning of the apartheid era. Conflicting socialist strategies weakened the working class movement, at times, through the influence of the Communist Party, temporarily derailing it onto a collaborationist path. At the outset of the apartheid era in 1948, socialism was in eclipse and the petty bourgeoisie at the helm of the national struggle. The black working class tended to pull out of alliances which submerged their own class interests to those of other classes and compromised their democratic interests to white supremacy. But in the late 1940s it was still groping, "...still only seeking a mode of expression...",⁹³ and far from developing a self-conscious, strategic political practice.

1* A version of this paper was presented at the Africa Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, August 1988. I wish to thank Neville Alexander and David Binns for their comments.

. Poem by Eddie Roux on the South African tot system, Ralph Bunche collection, box 64. By permission of Special Collections, University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

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3. Sheila T. van der Horst, "Labour," in Ellen Hellmann, ed., Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa, Cape Town, London and New York: Oxford Univ., 1949, 109-157, especially Table I, p. 113 and 122-123.

4. See W. M. Macmillan, South African Agrarian Problem, Johannesburg, 1919.

5. Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945, London and New York: Longman, 1983, 1-3; Edward Roux, Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa, Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin, 1964, 53-77; Maureen Swan, "Ideology in organised Indian politics, 1891-1948," Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, eds., The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa, London and New York: Longman, 1987, 182-208, "192.

6. Bunche Collection, box 64. Bunche's field notes were speedily written, often in transit, and thus have some typographical errors which I have not changed.

7. W. M. Macmillan, Africa Emergent, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1949, 122-23; Edward Roux, "Land and Agriculture in the Native Reserves," Chapter VII, in Ellen Hellmann, ed., Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa, Cape Town, London and New York: Oxford Univ. 1949, 171-190, 175.

8. Macmillan, Africa Emergent, 125-26.

9. H. Sonnabend, "Population," Chapter II, 4-26, 23 and Ellen Hellmann, "Urban Areas," Chapter XI, 229-274, 239, both in in Hellmann, ed., Handbook on Race Relations.

10. Maurice Webb, "Indian Land Legislation," Chapter IX in Hellman, ed., Handbook on Race Relations, 206-213 and Swan, "Ideology in organised Indian politics."

11. Edgar H. Brookes, "Government and Administration," Chapter III, 27-40, especially 31-34 and Sheila T. van der Horst, "Labour," 109-157, especially 109-114 and 118, both in Hellman, ed., Handbook on Race Relations.

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14. Dimitrov, "The Fascist Offensive," 34-36.
15. Dimitrov, "The Fascist Offensive," 48.
16. Leon Trotsky, "The Permanent Revolution," [1930] in Leon Trotsky, The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects, London: New Park, 1962, 3 and 126.
17. Trotsky, "The Permanent Revolution," 70 and 104-105.
18. Brian Bunting, Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary, London: Inkululeko, 1975, 68.
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20. Bunting, Moses Kotane, 76; A. J. Southall, "Marxist Theory in South Africa until 1940," M. A., University of York, 1978, 66-70; H. J. and R. E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969, 465-6.
21. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 126 and 152-153; Simons, Class and Colour, 453; Martin Legassick, "Class and Nationalism in South African Protest: The South African Communist Party and the 'Native Republic', 1928-34," Eastern African Studies, IV, July 1973, 51-52.
22. What is the Native Independent Republic?, [1934], unpublished ms., Ralph Bunche Collection, box 62, Special Collections, University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, quote 16.
23. What is the Native Independent Republic?, 21. In a variation of this position, Lazar Bach and L. L. Leepile, clearly influenced by the Soviet model, spoke of a federation of native republics, along tribal lines, under a workers' and peasants' government. See Simons, Class and Colour, 473.
24. Roux, S. P. Bunting, 153-155; Simons, Class and Colour, 476.
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26. Naboth Mokgatle, The Autobiography of an Unknown South African, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1971, 1971.
27. "Editorial Note," South African Communists Speak, 125.
28. Bunting, Moses Kotane, 76.
29. Eddie and Win Roux, Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, 131.
30. Simons, Class and Colour, 471, 479; Bunting, Moses Kotane, 78-9; "Editorial Note," South African Communists Speak, 125; South African Worker, in Kenneth M. Glazier, "South Africa, A Collection of Miscellaneous Documents, 1912-1962, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1963, reel 5.
31. Resolution of CPSA Plenum, April 5-8, 1936, quoted in Bunting, Moses Kotane, 78, my emphasis.

32. "Towards the People's Front - Conference Against Fascism and War", report in The South African Worker, October 16, 1936, Document 61, South African Communists Speak, 128-130.

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34. Simons, Class and Colour, 477-81; Southall, "Marxist Theory in South Africa," discusses the CPSA's turn to white labour, 67-70.

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36. Bunting, Moses Kotane, 78.

37. Simons, Class and Colour, 478-80; Bertram [Baruch] Hirson, "The Making of an African Working Class on the Witwatersrand: Class and Community Struggles in an Urban Setting, 1932-1947," Ph.D., Middlesex Polytechnic, 1986, 126 and 135.

38. "The Poor Whites," The Spark, 5, 6 (51) June 1939, 8.

39. Socialist Workers League, Statement of Policy and Programme of Work for South Africa, [1939?], Trotsky Archives, item 16596, p. 6. By permission of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

40. Socialist Workers League, Statement of Policy, quotes p. 5 and 4 respectively. According to I. B. Tabata, during the war, the underground Workers' Party briefly tried meeting in racially-divided groups as a means of bypassing the problems of travelling to and meeting in residentially segregated areas, but this policy was quickly abandoned. Interview with I. B. Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, December 1987.

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43. Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 4 and 13.

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46. Bunting, Moses Kotane, 78; "Afrique du Sud," Service d'Information et de Presse de la L. C. I. (B.L.), no. 4, 20 July 1936.

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51. Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall, 110.
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57. Doreen Musson, Johnny Gomas: Voice of the Working Class, Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1989, 53.
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63. All quotes on this and the next three pages are from Bunche's field notes on the All African Convention at Bloemfontein, Bunche Collection, box 64. Emphasis in the original.
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66. Bunche Collection, box 64.
67. Moses Kotane, letters to John Gomas, December 23 and December 18, 1937 respectively. Courtesy of Doreen Musson.
68. Bunche Collection, box 64.
69. Bunche Collection, box 64.
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91. On the first episode see Anderson Khumani Ganyile, "Notes on the Pondo Struggle Against Bantu Authorities. The Background to Resistance," typed ms., 38 pages, n.d., Ruth First Collection, 9.1.2, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London. On the second, see Ganyile, "The Insurrection." typed ms., 21 pages, First Collection, 9.1.2. Ganyile suggests that the 1946 Xesibe revolt against the Rehabilitation Scheme and cattle culling represented a militant, popular, presumably spontaneous application of the boycott, rather than the AAC's style of boycott, which he considered mechanical. For further background on the Transkei protests see Colin Bundy "Land and Liberation: Popular Rural Protest and the National Liberation Movements in South Africa, 1920-1960," in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa, London and New York: Longman, 254-85, especially 266-75.

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CHAPTER 6

THE CONGRESS MOVEMENT AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

*It rests largely with the Europeans, because they have a monopoly of political rights, to decide whether the struggle is to be peaceful, or whether it will involve all South Africa in bitter, costly and violent conflict. It is the responsibility of every European to rid South Africa of the reckless, place-seeking and unscrupulous politicians now in power, to stop apartheid, and to give the country the opportunity for peaceful, harmonious development.*¹

*The most vital task facing the democratic movement in this country is to unleash such [mass] struggles and to develop them on the basis of the concrete and immediate demands of the people from area to area. Only in this way can we build a powerful mass movement which is the only guarantee of ultimate victory in the struggle for democratic reforms.*²

*Our struggle is an unfolding one, one campaign leading on to another in a NEVER-ENDING STREAM -- until independence is won.*³

The squashing of the African mine workers strike in 1946 is often thought to have inaugurated a new stage in the national liberation movement. For the Simonses, it marked the beginning of a period of mass struggle when the class struggle merged with the national struggle. And for O'Meara, "...the aftermath of the strike saw the merging of most elements of African opposition into a class alliance articulating a radical nationalist ideology." So complete was this merger, O'Meara continues, that alongside

...the development of the ANC into a mass

nationalist movement, the purely class organisation and mobilisation of the African proletariat, which reached its peak in 1945-46, began to decline as proletarian discontent was channelled increasingly into political opposition in the ANC.⁴

This chapter examines the attempt to merge the class and national struggles within the Congress movement, which in addition to the African National Congress (ANC) included the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the South African Congress of Democrats (COD), formed in 1952 and composed of white Communists and liberals, and the South African Coloured Peoples' Organization (SACPO), later the Coloured Peoples' Congress, formed in 1953. In 1956 these organizations joined with the South African Congress of Trade Unions to form the Congress Alliance.⁵

Communist policy to integrate itself into the national democratic movement was part of a broader socialist pattern in the post-war era. In the 1940s, but particularly after the Suppression of Communist Act in 1950, South African socialists ceased their independent organizational activity and attempted to integrate themselves into national democratic organizations. Trotskyists had already formed the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) in 1943, and throughout the 1940s and '50s, Communists allied themselves with the ANC and other Congress organizations. This policy was formalized at the Party's last national conference before its dissolution in 1950:

The national organisations, to be effective,

must be transformed into a revolutionary party of workers, peasants, intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie, linked together in a firm organisation, subject to a strict discipline, and guided by a definite programme of struggle against all forms of racial discrimination in alliance with the class conscious European workers and intellectuals. Such a party would be distinguished from the Communist Party in that its objective is national liberation, that is, the abolition of race discrimination, but it would cooperate closely with the Communist Party. In this party the class-conscious workers and peasants of the national group concerned would constitute the main leadership.⁶

Most socialists believed that the post-war alliance between the black working class and black petty bourgeoisie would necessarily reflect the growing weight of the proletariat. The tendency of economic development was toward further urbanization and proletarianization, and the urban black population was overwhelmingly working class at the war's end, as Table 4 below indicates. By contrast, the tiny black petty bourgeoisie was weak and vulnerable, comprising only a few percent of Africans. They received no benefit from the exploitation of African workers; indeed, their lack of political rights was bound to the oppression and exploitation of the African working class.⁷ All classes

and strata of Africans and blacks generally found themselves under attack by Apartheid.

TABLE 4

Occupational structure by racial classification, 1951
(by percentage)

	Whites	Coloured	Indians	Africans
Agriculture, hunting & fishing	14.8	24.1	13.7	40.3
Mining and quarrying	5.8	0.9	0.6	14.4
Manufacturing	18.6	17.4	23.3	7.3
Construction	6.8	9.6	2.4	4.3
Electricity, gas & other services	0.7	0.4	0.2	0.5
Commerce & finance	18.2	6.2	24.5	3.2
Transport, storage & communication	11.5	3.5	2.6	2.4
Domestic services	0.4	18.9	2.0	18.2
Government services	7.0	2.1	2.2	1.8
Community & recreational	13.4	6.6	13.6	3.8
Unemployed and other	<u>2.8</u>	<u>10.3</u>	<u>14.9</u>	<u>3.8</u>
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: reprinted, by permission of the
publisher, from Muriel Horrell, comp., A
Survey of Race Relations in South Africa,
1959-1960, Johannesburg: South African

Institute of Race Relations, 1961, 197.

Nonetheless, this merger of class and national movements was an uneasy one, made when organized proletarian strength was at its nadir. After the war trade union membership declined drastically and the Council of Non-European Trade Unions fell apart from the pressure of a wave of failed strikes and internal political struggles for control of the federation.⁸ The black petty bourgeoisie had strong class aspirations and exerted a preponderant influence on organized political struggle in the 1950s, both in the Congress Alliance and in the NEUM. During the war the black working class had pursued its own class path, using explicit working class action like strikes and militant forms of non-collaboration and boycott. The 1950s move to mass struggle in the ANC and Congress Alliance was typified by the use of passive resistance, a form of protest symbolizing a class alliance in which the working class took the back seat. As the

decade unfolded, the Congress organizations shifted from passive resistance to a polarization between a reorientation towards electoral politics in the Congress Alliance and mass demonstrations of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC).⁹

The political tensions of this multi-class alliance culminated at the end of the decade in organizational splits across the entire liberation movement. It is no accident that these splits occurred at a time when the black proletariat was beginning to reassert itself through a wave of strikes, which followed a period of unrest in the countryside.¹⁰ Although not usually clearly articulated, at the root of these splits were class conflicts. The often vituperous debates over the national and land questions which occupied the national liberation movement in the 1950s and the blueprints and programs which organizations formulated reflected the varied social class interests which had developed in this racial capitalist society.

Despite their different and at times conflicting political trajectories, social forces were pushing liberation organizations in a similar direction. The new generation of emerging leaders responded to the challenge of war-time working class militancy by trying to revive, reorganize and redirect organizations like the ANC, the SAIC and the All African Convention (AAC). The intensification of racial oppression under apartheid had contradictory effects. On the one hand, apartheid

legislation made South Africa's color-caste groupings even more rigid; laws like the Coloured Labour Preference Policy and Influx Control of African labor pitted sections of the working class against each other along sectional lines. But paradoxically, in eroding the remnants of Coloured and Indian rights, racial laws laid the basis for equalization of black oppression. Apartheid laws hit both working class and petty bourgeois blacks, designed to neutralize working class militancy and to prevent any further development of a black middle class.

After its marginal electoral victory in 1948, the Nationalist Party began its tenure with the test case of the extension of train apartheid to the historically liberal Cape peninsula.¹¹ Thereafter, a series of laws codified separate racial development and suppressed political dissent. In 1950-51 the racial classification was tightened through the Population Registration Act, segregation through the Group Areas Act and, like the qualified African franchise years earlier, the Coloured vote was neutralized through the Separate Registration of Voters' Bill. After its 1953 reelection, the Nationalist Party intensified its control over working and middle class Africans in towns and reserves. Influx controls, labor bureaux and restrictions on African trade unions curtailed the strength of the urban African working class. From 1963 African women had to carry passes. At the Reserve end of the urban-rural nexus, the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act empowered Tribal Authorities to control the black labor supply. The black petty bourgeoisie was pushed into an evermore "defensive posture": black businesses and property owners were targeted; urban Africans and

freeholders were resettled in townships. The Criminal Law Amendment Act invoked heavy penalties for civil disobedience.¹²

In the 1950s all liberation organizations felt pressure from their constituencies for a militant response to apartheid. This pressure provoked practical and theoretical discussions and conflicts within and amongst organizations over the blueprint for building democracy. The theoretical content of these debates concerned the national and land questions in South Africa. The blueprints which various political tendencies proposed ranged from the Freedom Charter's call for nationalization, a path taken by the aspirant African bourgeoisie in post-colonial states throughout the continent, beginning with the Afrikaners; to the NEUM's debate over China and India as possible models for South African development; to the PAC's conception of pan-African unity; to the CPSA's two-stage approach to socialism. The land question was of particular concern to the NEUM and its Trotskyist critics because of the NEUM view that the majority of reserve dwellers were a landless peasantry. The point of convergence of the national and land questions was the nature of South Africa's working class and migrant labor.

With many of its own class organizations demolished, the black working class moved towards nationalist leadership for direction. The idea and practice of socialism went into eclipse: socialists had not been able to offer a sustained and viable alternative to the national organizations and socialist groups either disbanded or went underground to avoid the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950. Building the nation replaced uniting the working class as the first item on the agenda of

the new generation of black radicals. The decade saw a number of attempts in both Congress and the Unity Movement to mediate the class contradictions stemming from the alliance of an historically petitionary petty bourgeoisie and a burgeoning working class. Within the Congress tradition the ANC Youth League attempted to bridge the petitionist and non-collaborationist tendencies. Within the Unity Movement, I. B. Tabata tried to bridge the anti-activist and non-collaborationist tendencies by forming organizations such as Society of Young Africa and, a decade later, the African Peoples' Democratic Union of Southern Africa. But by the late 1950s these contradictions were far from resolved: both major political movements, Congress and the Unity Movement, had split, liberation politics was increasingly sectarian and, by and large, the left remained as isolated from the majority of the black working class as ever. These schisms were carried into the next decade, reflected in the manner in which South Africans approached and conceptualized armed struggle.

Apartheid was reflected in political organization. The immediate post-war years saw the breakdown of the efforts to form all-black united fronts across color-caste barriers which had characterized the 1935-45 period. As the preceding efforts at black unity broke down, the questions of the basis of political unity and of political alliances were fought out in practice, manifested in new political coalitions as well as in schisms and fragmentation across all liberation tendencies. Despite the contributions of the Congress Alliance in the 1950s, the concept of mechanically linked national groupings, or multinationalism,

was a historical step backwards from the earlier efforts to move beyond the socially-imposed color-caste divisions. As well, the NEUM's federal structure, conceived in 1943 as a means of bridging these divisions, was by the 1950s as mechanical a solution to the problem of color-caste and class divisions amongst the oppressed as the Congress Alliance. Left-wing critics perceived it both as a barrier to real non-racial unity and to building a militant mass movement.

The debate in the ANC which catalyzed the formation of the Congress Alliance in the mid-'50s and the breakaway of the PAC in 1959 concerned the national question. Externally, the the NEUM pressured the Congress movement to reevaluate its historical position on African nationalism as opposed to broader black unity. Within the Congress movement there were twin pressures linked to class issues. On the one hand, many turned to tactical alliances along sectional lines, an approach which assumed that South Africa was composed of four national groups, as the government propounded. In turn, others feared that whites, a group with both class and color privileges vis-a-vis working class Africans, had a disproportionate and moderating influence on ANC and Congress Alliance policy.

The ANC Youth League and the national question

The ANC Youth League (ANCYL) was formed in 1944 to redirect the ANC away from its old, petitionist methods of protest towards an active practice of non-collaboration, recognizing, A. P. Mda pointed out, that

Conditions were ripe for the rise of powerful

mass people's movements. Granted a new clear-cut outlook, a clear program of struggle, and the development of new methods of struggle, the African National Movement could make unprecedented steps forward.¹³

The ANCYL represented a distinct break from the ANC tradition, both in theory and practice. Theoretically, the ANC had never broken from the dominant social paradigm that South Africa was a multinational society and that the route to racial equality lay through incorporation in the existing political and socioeconomic system. This approach, reform through incorporation, corresponded to the ANC's historical reliance on petitionary means of political pressure.

While the ANCYL accepted the dominant paradigm that South Africa comprised four national groups, it also reformulated the conception of the South African nation. For the established ANC leaders known as the "old guard," Gail Gerhart has explained, building the nation meant uniting Africans across tribal groupings. Against the prevailing ideas of a multinational society or of an African nation within a larger South African nation, the Youth League counterposed the idea of a single nation created on terms established by the indigenous African majority.¹⁴

In this conception of South Africa as a single nation, African nationalism plays a mediating role between theory and the practice of mass mobilization. Nation-building becomes the means to build a mass liberation movement which could in turn seize power under the ANC's guidance. Yet the Youth League's conception of the South African nation contained an ambivalence which foreshadowed the developing tensions both within it and between it and the ANC. In some ANCYL writings, nationhood is determined by right of birth and shared geographical and social experiences; in others, it is based on color.

The Youth League's philosophy of African nationalism and its relationship to socioeconomic development was set forth in its manifesto, "Basic Policy of Congress Youth League," issued in 1948. The next year the ANCYL made its mark on the ANC when Congress adopted the Programme of Action, and Youth Leaguer Walter Sisulu was elected Secretary General of the ANC. The Programme of Action marked a distinct break with the ANC's traditional petitionary protest and with its recent efforts to work in the NRC. Basing itself on the right of peoples to self-determination, the Programme's goals were national freedom and political independence through African nationalism. Its strategy and tactics, premised on non-collaboration, were to employ boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience and stay-at-homes.¹⁵

The ANCYL's nation-building project was strikingly similar to that of the NEUM, whose slogan was "We build a nation." The ANCYL's goal was a nation built through "...the creation of a single powerful African National Front...;" the NEUM's was of a nation founded by a

democratic movement of all blacks, united by a federal structure. The ANCYL saw the development of a strong African nationalist movement as a precondition for future alliance with other social and political groups; the NEUM saw the development of a black united front as a precondition for drawing white workers from their historical alliance with the bourgeoisie into the ranks of the democratic movement.¹⁶

Both organizations believed that the creation of a non-racial nation was possible only through the practice of non-collaboration with racial institutions. Even while he was a student at Fort Hare, Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe had pushed to include a strong boycott position in the both the Cape and national ANC programs:

We claim the right of direct representation in all the governing bodies of the country (National, provincial and local) on a democratic basis. And we resolve to work for the abolition of all differential institutions specially created for Africans, e.g., Local or District Councils, Advisory Boards, NRC and the present form of Parliamentary representation. This means the adoption for active application of the policy of boycotting.¹⁷

Sobukwe's view that the boycott should be used as a means of political education clearly reflects the NEUM's influence. I. B. Tabata, a leading NEUM theorist and activist, defined the boycott as ...a practical application of the policy of Non-

collaboration at a specific time. It is particularly applicable at those moments when quislings are engaged in the very act of luring the people into putting the noose around their neck. The boycott has the effect of not only arresting the hand that carries the rope, but of holding it aloft for all to see.

An effective boycott campaign, he stressed, is not a passive tactic, but an active means to develop popular political consciousness. An organization which advocates the boycott, he wrote,

takes upon itself the duty of going out to the people and carefully explaining to them why they must boycott a particular institution or elections to it....It calls upon the people to bestir themselves, throw off their lassitude and intervene in their own fate. With a consciousness arising out of a clear understanding of the issues involved, the masses take the positive step of boycotting.¹⁸

Compare those words with Sobukwe's argument for the boycott at the 1949 Cape Province ANC conference:

We are not so much concerned with the complete negative abstention of the people [from voting] as with the creation of a state of mind. The boycott is an appropriate weapon of the

moment;...[it] will work tremendously on the mental state of the people.¹⁹

Tabata recognized the close philosophical proximity between the All African Convention, as he conceived it, and the Youth League. Arguing that the ANCYL represented a response to modern conditions which distinguished it from its traditional parent body, particularly in regards to non-collaboration, he wrote to Nelson Mandela that

Politically it does not belong to Congress....If the League followed its political principles to their logical conclusion it would land itself outside the fold of Congress...²⁰

Yet neither did the ANCYL belong to the NEUM. The Programme of Action suggests an active practice of non-collaboration based on militant mass protest; by the late 1940s the NEUM's practice of non-collaboration in the urban areas was increasingly limited to electoral boycotts of racial political structures.²¹

But Tabata astutely recognized that the ANCYL's principled endorsement of non-collaboration and boycotts did not fit easily into the Congress tradition. The approach of the old guard to the boycott was purely pragmatic. Initially, many Congress leaders thought African voters would be unable to understand the point of a boycott. Later, they rejected participation in the Native Representative Council (NRC)

because it had proved ineffective.²²

The ANC's acceptance of the Programme of Action in 1948 symbolized a temporary convergence of the old guard's tactical adoption of the boycott and the ANCYL's principled non-collaboration. But by the late 1950s, through the influence of an African petty bourgeoisie willing to work within state structures and the white Congress of Democrats, the ANC had backtracked on its earlier boycott position, a shift which foreshadowed the organizational split in 1958-59.

The ANCYL and the NEUM differed markedly in their approach to non-European unity. For the NEUM, nation-building began with Non-European unity through a federal structure which would allow the different groups some autonomy while uniting them under a common program. For the ANCYL, the first step in building a new nation was to strengthen and develop its African core. The ANCYL did not reject Non-European cooperation in principle. Such cooperation was, however, a historical problem, to be determined by the degree of African political development. Indeed, the view which Youth Leaguer Anton Lembede expressed in 1946 concerning political relations between Africans and other South Africans would prove completely compatible with the conception of Non-European unity found in the Congress Alliance a decade later:

Cooperation between Africans and other Non-Europeans on common problems and issues may be highly desirable. But this occasional cooperation can only take place between Africans as a single unity and other Non-European groups

as separate units. Non-European unity is a fantastic dream which has no foundation in reality.²³

Hence, in 1945 the Transvaal ANCYL rejected affiliation to the Progressive Youth Council, explaining to its secretary, Communist Ruth First, that

...we maintain that Africans can only co-operate as an organised self-conscious [sic] unit. Hence co-operation at the present juncture or stage is premature. It can only result in chaos, ineffective action and mutual jealousies, rivalry and suspicion.²⁴

The claim that African unity was a precondition for strategic or tactical alliances with other social groups had a historical basis in colonial conquest: the European defeat of Africans was due not only to African military inferiority but because Africans fought as tribes rather than a united nation. The historical experience of colonial conquest was also the basis for the ANCYL's claim that Africa was "...the Blackman's Continent," yet they realized that "hurl[ing] the whiteman to the sea" could not solve South Africa's national question.²⁵ In Mda's words,

*Ours is the pure Nationalism of an oppressed
people, seeking freedom from foreign oppression.
We as African Nationalists do not hate the
European--we have no racial hatred:--we only
hate white oppression and white domination, and
not the white people themselves!*²⁶

*Despite this historical experience, the NEUM and Trotskyists from
the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa grasped that
capitalism was developing in such a way that the African nation which
had begun to emerge at the close of the colonial conquest period was
already being superceded by the movement towards an even larger South
African nation, spurred by rapid industrial development, and the related
processes of proletarianization and urbanization.*

*The differences between the ANCYL and the NEUM reflected South
Africa's uneven social development. On the one hand, Africans were the
most oppressed plural grouping with a distinct historical recollection
of their recent conquest by armed force and suffering distinct forms of
oppression such as the pass system which restricted their movement and
forced them to inhabit reserves. But on the other, all Non-Europeans
lacked democratic rights. This was the commonality in their oppression,
despite variations in form and degree. Both the radical Youth Leaguers
and radicals of the NEUM grasped important aspects of a rapidly changing
social reality. Both, too, were able to see that this historical
development would have great implications for the development of the
South African nation.*

The development of the Africanist tendency

It was precisely on the issues of Non-European unity and unity with whites that internal tensions in the ANCYL began to manifest themselves. From its inception the ANCYL embodied contradictory tendencies. As early as 1952 Nelson Mandela denied reports of an impending rift in the ANCYL.²⁷ But these only emerged at the practical level and began to take organizational form over the issue of political alliances with other national or racial groups. These contradictions would germinate until they came to organizational fruition first with the formation of the Congress Alliance in 1956, then with the expulsion of ANCYL Africanists and the founding of the PAC in 1959. The ANCYL's "Basic Policy" shows elements presaging the formation of both organizations. The document recognizes two streams of African nationalism, a radical Garveyist stream and a moderate, Africanist stream. Although the ANCYL identifies itself with the latter, its conception of nationhood certainly reflected the influence of Marcus Garvey's "Africa for the Africans" movement and the belief in African self-determination. The moderate Africanist approach outlined in the "Basic Policy" is so broad that later both the Charterists and PAC could claim to be its true practitioners:

We of the Youth League take account of the concrete situation in South Africa, and realise that the different racial groups have come to stay. But we insist that a condition for inter-

racial peace and progress is the abandonment of white domination, and such a change in the basic structure of South African Society that those relations which breed exploitation and human misery will disappear. Therefore our goal is the winning of National freedom for African people, and the inauguration of a people's free society where racial oppression and persecution will be outlawed.²⁸

Both ANCYL tendencies recognized that whites were part of South African society and both sought harmony across the color line. Their differences would crystallize over the nature and timing of political alliances in the national democratic movement. The tendency which went into the Congress Alliance argued that multinational harmony could be built through tactical alliances within the liberation movement, and in 1955 it gave a programmatic basis to that unity through the Freedom Charter. The Africanist tendency, which later formed the PAC, maintained that building the African nation through self-reliance was a precondition for racial harmony. By contrast, the NEUM and Trotskyists saw black unity from a strategic,

not tactical view. Both ANCYL tendencies took as their point of departure that South Africa comprised four national groups. Yet the position of those who joined the Congress Alliance was static. In its conception that liberation politics should be practiced through the formal alliance of the oppressed, organized along sectional or color-caste lines established by the government, this ANC tendency consistently maintained what No Sizwe has called the four-nation approach, without grasping the continuous historical evolution of South African social relations. The Africanist tendency, by contrast, strove to go beyond the four-nation approach, grasping that South Africa was evolving towards a single nation despite efforts of the state to prevent this.²⁹

These contradictory tendencies which would eventually manifest themselves in the formation of two organizations sprung from deeper ambiguities in the ANCYL's conception of nationhood and national development. The first problem lay in their ambiguous conception of, in the NEUM's words, who constituted the South African nation: at times ANCYL writings suggest that African nationhood is determined by birth, or geographic or cultural factors; at other times color is clearly the determining factor. A second problem concerned the pace of development

of the African national movement which was to determine the timing of cooperation between Africans and other groups. In the mid-'50s both ANCYL tendencies were asserting either the readiness or non-readiness of the assumed African nation to rally with other groups; yet neither explained the basis for their assessments.

Finally, underlaying the question of the timing of such sectional cooperation was that of the terms on which political alliances and unity were based. This issue had profound class, color and political implications. Underpinning the dispute over whether Africans were ready to cooperate with other groups was the material conflict stemming from South Africa's uneven social development, particularly the fact that the formation of an African bourgeoisie had been retarded by government policy. This underlay the dispute concerning the early tactical unity of the South African Indian and African National Congresses and of the Congress Alliance. Although usually expressed in terms of color, not class, the Africanists who finally broke with the ANC perceived that the social class interests of those representing the SAIC and the COD, comprised chiefly of Communists and liberals, were irreconcilable with the working class interests of the majority of Africans. Sobukwe explained the class dimension behind the concern over multinational politics at that stage. SAIC politics were dominated by Indian 'merchant class' leadership which, concerned with its own economic enrichment, sought to prevent African economic boycotts that might hurt their profits. By comparison,

The down-trodden, poor 'stinking coolies' of

Natal who, alone, as a result of the pressure of material conditions, can identify themselves with the indigenous African majority in the struggle to overthrow white supremacy, have not yet produced their leadership. We hope they will do so soon.³⁰

Africanists like Sobukwe believed that in the 1950s any cooperation between the masses of working class Africans and the politically influential Indian merchant class and prosperous white petty bourgeoisie would be on terms set by the latter two groups. ANCYL radicals complained quite accurately about the disproportionate weight given to Indians and whites in the Congress Alliance; the wording of the Freedom Charter's national clause, "All national groups shall have equal rights!", suggested a possible entrenchment of disproportionate representation through the notion of group rights.

But such clear discussions of the relationship between class and color were rare among Africanists. In the 1950s, Mda was unusual amongst Africanists in his attention to the class question. Just as Africanists tended to discuss class conflict amongst these color-caste groupings in terms of color instead of class, so they tended, at the

theoretical level, to neglect the possibility of developing class conflict amongst Africans. Like the NEUM at the public level, Africanists rarely addressed the question of class conflicts among Africans directly. They discussed political conflicts amongst Africans in terms of collaboration and non-collaboration, with the minority of collaborators versus the masses who rejected racial institutions. Generally, they believed that the interests of all Africans could be merged or united under the banner of African nationalism without an explicit articulation of possible and growing class conflict amongst Africans.

Social mobilization through defiance

In the late 1940s these contradictory theoretical and political undercurrents were dormant, grouped together in a fragile alliance under the ideology of African nationalism. Africanists saw ideology as a basis for mass action. But most Youth Leaguers, Gerhart indicates, were pragmatists, concerned to oust the old guard not for the principle of African nationalism, but because their petitionist approach to political change had proved ineffective.³¹

The mass struggles of the 1950s catalyzed these contradictions into the open. The Defiance Campaign, which began in June 1952, was conceived as a national protest against six apartheid laws: the pass laws, Group Areas Act, Separate Representation of Voters Act, Bantu Authorities Act, Rehabilitation Scheme and Suppression of Communism Act. Its planners envisioned several stages, beginning in the major cities and eventually fanning out into dorps and towns around the country.

Political mobilization occurred through the separate Congress organizations, rather than on the basis of Non-European unity, establishing the pattern of the future Congress Alliance. In the hopes of minimizing violence the tactics involved carefully regulated civil disobedience; strike action was rejected at the outset although the possibility was left open for its use later in the campaign.³²

In using small, well-orchestrated bands of volunteers to protest apartheid regulations the Defiance Campaign reflected the influence of the satyagraha movement practiced by South Africans of Indian descent in Natal and Transvaal in the early twentieth century.³³ Gandhi defined satyagraha as a soul force in which opponents were defeated through one's own suffering. Although similar in tactics to passive resistance, satyagraha was premised on non-violence, while passive resistance, in Gandhi's view, was compatible with the use of force.³⁴ According to Maureen Swan, satyagraha saw people as independent agents capable of controlling their own lives. But this potentially radical conception of human nature, she argues, was modified by Gandhi's acceptance of the legitimacy of state power and authority, so that in South Africa satyagraha had a reformist, not a revolutionary thrust. Communists and activists in the SAIC adapted the tactics used by Gandhi and his followers to the protests of the 1940s and '50s. The Communist Yusuf Dadoo was particularly influential in promoting passive resistance both as a means to fight specific anti-Indian laws like the Asiatic (Transvaal) Land and Trading Act and the Asiatic Land Tenure and Representation Act (the "Ghetto Act"), laws which hit the merchant

traders particularly hard, and to express discontent at segregation and discrimination generally.

But the passive resistance movement never became a mass movement. Gandhi's satyagraha efforts in the 1908-13 period only bore fruit in 1913 with the strike of Indian sugar plantation workers, which spread through the entire Indian workforce in Natal. And when Dadoo used passive resistance in the late 1930s and '40s, the subsequent 1946-48 campaign against the Ghetto Act, in which Communists played a large role, only mobilized about 2,000 volunteers. This number included about 1,000 of the 22,000 Indians organized in trade unions. Swan argues that while passive resistance had a broad ideological appeal to both Indian merchants and workers, its limits at mobilization and failure to sustain their support lay in the fact that it did not address the specific grievances of these social classes.³⁵

The Defiance Campaign showed marked regional characteristics. Once it began, political support in the Eastern Cape rapidly outpaced that in the rest of the country. The Eastern Cape had a history of strong response to Congress campaigns, and its strength there was linked to a militant trade union movement. By contrast, popular support in Natal and the Western Cape was minimal, despite the fact that the latter region had been the main area of organized political activity in the few years preceding the Campaign. In Natal, Lodge speculates, the recent failure of an earlier passive resistance movement may have turned people against the concept of the Defiance Campaign. More importantly, he points out, the 1949 riots between Indians and Africans in Natal

prevented any real solidarity between the two groups so soon thereafter. In the Western Cape, Johnny Gomas thought, the campaign's failure to take off was due to rivalry amongst the leaders. But the strong influence of the NEUM there, and the failure of the 1948 fight against train apartheid a few years earlier, in which Communists tried to introduce passive resistance techniques, probably underlay the leadership problem.³⁶

The Campaign peaked by September 1952, drawing support in all major cities and even in the countryside, but it never turned into the anticipated general strike. From October the campaign wound down, and in its main centers, Port Elizabeth and East London, tensions between blacks and police erupted in riots. In Port Elizabeth, the people protested the police clampdown which followed the Campaign with a highly successful stay-at-home, reflecting the extent of working class participation.³⁷

Within the Congress movement political tendencies began crystallizing around the Campaign's strategy and tactics. The Youth League's Africanists gave critical support, but they were concerned with the campaign's ideological ambiguity and restrained tactics.³⁸ Likewise, Naboth Mokgatle, a former Communist, complained that the organizers' restrained use of volunteers dampened the movement's militant potential. The small groups of volunteers favored by the organizers, he argued, would not seriously trouble the government or "...break the Apartheid machine...", an argument made by other critics of passive resistance, like the NEUM.³⁹ Practice led rank and file

supporters to similar conclusions. The obvious failure of civil disobedience to repeal the apartheid laws, the government's swift imposition of the Public Safety Act, empowering it to declare a state of emergency, and the Criminal Laws Amendment Act, imposing harsh punishments on civil disobedience, together with the outbreak of riots in two major cities pushed many people to consider the strike tactic. Lodge remarks that "[b]y February 1953, rank and file feeling at both the Cape and Transvaal provincial conferences was clearly in favour of continued 'industrial action;'" however, the campaign collapsed before a strike was called.⁴⁰

One conception of Non-European unity.

Spark, [Congress movement], June 6, 1952.

Despite its regional limitations and its failure to achieve its goals, the Defiance Campaign stimulated the rapid growth of the Congress movement in the 1950s. It gave the ANC a heightened visibility, and branches multiplied around the country, especially in the Cape. Before the campaign, Congress had fourteen Cape branches; in 1953 it had 87 branches, many in rural areas. In contrast to the ANC's traditional petitionary image, its new leadership, symbolized by Chief Albert Lutuli's election as national president in 1952, showed an increased willingness to engage in mass action. Indeed, for Karis the campaign was "...the culmination of movement in the ANC from moderation to militancy" which formed the ANC into an embryonic mass movement. Whatever the strategic and tactical limitations of the Defiance Campaign, it showed that the ANC leadership was susceptible to popular pressure for active protest, despite its efforts to avoid explicitly working class tactics like strikes.⁴¹

The Freedom Charter and the multinational conception

But criticisms of the Defiance Campaign's strategy and tactics raised concerns about the ANC's political direction. Under internal pressure from ANCYL elements for ideological clarity and external pressure from the NEUM's formulation of the Ten Point Programme, ANC leaders began discussing the idea of a democratic program to guide the entire Congress movement, much as the Ten Point Programme guided the NEUM. The first proposal for a Freedom Charter was made in August 1953 by Professor Z. K. Matthews who called for "...a Freedom Charter for the Democratic South Africa of the Future," an appeal which did not

initially attract support from either the SAIC or the COD, formed by whites in 1952 to support the Defiance Campaign. Matthews envisioned the national convention at which this charter would be formulated to be truly non-racial, unlike the all-white national convention of 1908-09 which had established the Union of South Africa, or the all-black national conventions of the mid-1930s.⁴²

Like the Defiance Campaign, the Charter's formulation was conceived as a three-stage process which would draw in larger and larger numbers of "Freedom Volunteers" throughout the country, linking up with the ANC's Western Areas and Bantu Education campaigns.⁴³ The plan was conceived as a means to involve all South Africans in drawing a blueprint for a future South Africa. Provincial committees were to establish committees in every locality and workplace, which would elect delegates to draft the Charter.⁴⁴

But the three-stage process was never followed through. Some provincial councils were set up, but the second stage, Lodge writes, "...the formation of local committees, never really got off the ground," despite the fact that many people did send in suggestions for the Charter. As the campaign went on, the high-profile role of COD whites became more apparent, both intimidating and angering many blacks. The seemingly disproportionate influence of COD whites, coupled with the Charter's multinational conception of the South African nation which to Africanists denied the African majority their rightful possession of the land, further exacerbated tensions between them and the rest of the ANC.

Sonia Bunting, however, points out that while the actual writing of the Charter may have been done by a small group, it was done after

careful scrutiny of the demands sent in by people around the country. She herself recalls visiting numerous factories and unions in the Cape Town area, like the Tea and Coffee Workers' Union at Paarden Eiland, to canvass ideas and demands for the Charter.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, a number of reports and eyewitness accounts suggest that once the document was formulated it was not subject to democratic debate or revision. As Lodge concluded,

...the formulation of the Charter involved only a limited amount of consultation: certainly popular demands were canvassed but the ultimate form the document assumed was decided by a small committee and there were no subsequent attempts to alter it in the light of wider discussion. The forum provided by the Congress of the People was scarcely suited to any kind of debate.⁴⁶

The Charter's adoption by all Congress organizations at the Congress of the People in June 1955, before its acceptance by the ANC, intensified tensions in the ANC. Karis and Carter point out that once the entire Congress of the People had endorsed and begun to publicize the Charter, some ANC members found it difficult to consider amending it, even though others wanted to do so. For instance, in October 1955 the Natal ANC provincial council passed a number of resolutions which they hoped

to incorporate in the Charter, and which foreshadowed criticism by Africanists and socialists. The Natal amendments called for "'critical scrutiny'" and discussion before the ANC endorsed the Charter, maintaining, among other things, that its national clause emphasized racial distinctions rather than nation-building. Yet, when it was finally ratified in 1956, despite reservations by both Africanists and delegates from Natal, the Natal amendments were not incorporated.⁴⁷

The evidence suggests that, although popular demands were initially canvassed, the Charter was pushed through both the Congress of the People and the ANC without adequate discussion and opportunities for revision. Yet the actual formulation of the Charter probably had as much popular input, if not more, than the Youth League's Programme of Action or the NEUM's Ten Point Programme.⁴⁸ Underlying the question of the methods used to develop and ensure the acceptance of the Charter is the question of its political content. Although process and content cannot be separated, a more enduring method of evaluating the political content of any charter, manifesto or program is whether it embraces the democratic demands of a rightless population and what class interests and social vision it promotes. Like the NEUM's Ten Point Programme, the Freedom Charter's endurance as a political document will depend on how effectively it continues to capture popular demands and aspirations.

The left and the national question

The question of whether South Africa constituted one or many nations was one of intense debate amongst the left in the 1950s. Often these debates occurred in the left discussion clubs which flowered in the major cities, like the Johannesburg-based Left Book Club and, in Cape Town, the Africa Club, Modern Youth Society, Forum Club and New Era Fellowship, all of which catered to a radical intelligentsia. The Communist-inspired Africa Club and Modern Youth Society and the Trotskyist-oriented Forum Club were formed in the 1950s to promote theoretical work which had been seriously hampered by the recent disbanding of socialist groups and by Suppression of Communism Act. This Act intimidated people from openly discussing socialism and lay behind the CPSA's disbanding.⁴⁹ Moreover, many socialists saw open discussion and debate as a means to combat the increasing sectarianism of liberation politics which prevented joint practical work across political tendencies. As Enver Marney and I. O. Horvitch wrote:

Our movement suffers not only from sectionalism (racialism), but is also ridden by a crippling sectarianism which puts the interests of sects above the interests of the movement, and is the main obstacle in the way of vigorous discussion and the achievement of theoretical clarity. In the absence of discussion sectarianism thrives and the best interests of the whole movement are sacrificed.⁵⁰

The 1950s saw growing recognition that socioeconomic forces were uniting South Africa's historically fragmented nation, an idea propounded by the NEUM since the '40s. Yet, the adoption of the Freedom Charter suggests that within the Congress movement a multinational approach to South Africa's national question prevailed over the view that South African society was inherently a single nation. The Charter codified a view of South Africa as a multinational state, raising the possibility that its national problem could be solved in the future through entrenching and protecting a system of group rights. Its later endorsement by the South African Communist Party suggests, too, that a similar or at least compatible approach ultimately prevailed in the Party.⁵¹

That Communist political strategy and the class interests of the aspirant black bourgeoisie could both be reconciled within the Freedom Charter's vision of a future South Africa is hardly surprising. During and immediately after the war the Popular Front strategy found expression in policies of alliance and national unity. In 1947 Soviet thinking swung to a left-wing "two camp" approach which saw world politics polarized between anti-democratic imperialist forces and democratic, anti-imperialist forces. Initially, the two-camp approach ruptured the earlier alliances between Communists and the national bourgeoisies or aspirant bourgeoisies of oppressed or colonial countries. But recognizing that some countries outside the Soviet camp were non-imperialist, Soviet theorists developed the concept of People's Democracies as transitional forms to socialism. This pushed the Soviet Union towards a rapprochement with oppressed national bourgeoisies and

to support what became known as National Democratic movements premised on a broad alliance of bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and working class. The Soviet Union finally jettisoned the two-camp approach in the 1950s.⁵²

The Soviet scholar I. I. Potekhin, who became Director of Moscow's African Institute in 1956, was advocating such a rapprochement even at the time of the two-camp thesis, insisting that anti-imperialist struggles in oppressed nations entailed a revolutionary alliance of all classes. In sub-Saharan Africa such alliances were led by the national bourgeoisie and intelligentsia.⁵³ Potekhin's mimeo, "Extract from 'The Formation of the South African Bantu into a National Community, '" written around 1953, was circulated amongst the South African left; its influence can certainly be seen in the Freedom Charter.⁵⁴

Potekhin relied heavily on Stalin's descriptive traits of language and culture as an index of nationhood, and No Sizwe has pointed out the limitations of this model for South Africa's complex national question.⁵⁵ Potekhin maintained that national consciousness was not a fixed or abstract ideology, but reflected the aspirations of the social classes to which it was tied. The bourgeoisie and proletariat each imbue national struggles with different political content. For the working class, he wrote,

...national self-consciousness is only one of the facets of an ideology of internationalism, the characteristic features of which are a mutual respect for national differences and interests, friendship and reciprocal support.⁵⁶

In South Africa, Potekhin argued, African national self-consciousness was developing in difficult, contradictory conditions. Africans comprised a proletariat and a bourgeoisie which was permeated by anti-white race consciousness rather than the national consciousness necessary for self-government.⁵⁷ But working class and Communist influence in liberation politics was growing in the post-war period, as the influence of the bourgeoisie waned.⁵⁸ Two tendencies, consequently, were developing in the African national liberation movement: first, a movement towards a united anti-imperialist front; second, a movement towards a united African national consciousness. However, Anglo-Afrikaner imperialism artificially preserved feudal remnants in the form of tribes or "territorial-administrative units." This impeded the development of single African nation; moreover, the linguistic basis for such unity did not yet exist. Despite the post-war efforts at joint activity by Africans, Indians and Coloureds, South Africa was developing into two separate nations, with additional national groupings:

To-day in the Union of South Africa the process of forming two national societies continues, that of the Bantu and of the Anglo-Afrikaner. There are no grounds for assuming that one nation can be formed which would embrace the Bantu, the Coloured and the Anglo-Afrikaners. The Coloureds could not at the present time become a component of the national Bantu group, they do not know the Bantu languages and in language, cultural forms and self-consciousness

they tend to identify themselves with the Anglo-Afrikaners. The Indians are a completely separate group.

Potekhin advised Africans to form one national front and organize against national oppression with other sectional groups, a suggestion markedly similar to the path taken by the Congress Alliance.⁵⁹

Potekhin's argument that the influence of the African bourgeoisie on liberation politics was waning is rather problematic given the absence of such a bourgeoisie even in the 1950s! This reflects a mechanical class analysis rather than an analysis of South African conditions. He assumes that the juridical and socioeconomic categories according to which the South African state classifies people are historical nations analogous to those in the USSR. Potekhin's contention that South Africa was developing into two nations, an Anglo-Afrikaner imperialist nation and an African nation, echoes the colonial conception of the Native Republic thesis and is seen later in the colonialism of a special type paradigm.

For a short period some debate on the national question took place within the Communist Party, chiefly through the efforts of Lionel Forman, an iconoclastic Communist who believed that broader discussion was the starting point for formulating a strategic policy on the national question. Forman's position drew upon both Stalin and Potekhin. The key criterion for evaluating the political content of a nationalist movement, he argued, was whose class interests it served, and he distinguished between people's nationalism, based on the country's existing and aspiring national groups, and the oppressive

"rich man's" nationalism. He rejected the term "race," which, he wrote, assumed the existence of separate, unequal groups and pandered to government propaganda. Yet, Forman's attempt to promote an open discussion on the national question using the pages of Advance provoked a harsh rebuke from fellow Communist Yusuf Dadoo who derided the idea of a newspaper engaging in theoretical gnat-chasing at the expense of, in his opinion, covering daily, tactical struggles⁶⁰ But Forman defended the need for theory and strategy. The struggle against national oppression, he argued, necessitates a policy:

Because of this same profoundly popular, profoundly revolutionary national feeling in South Africa we must set about, without delay, in taking the foundation which has been laid and building on it principles to guide our own demands on the national question.⁶¹

This public discussion continued the next month at a joint symposium of the Africa and Forum Clubs on the national question. There, Forman and Jack Simons reflected two poles of thought on the national question within the Communist Party. Despite the clear influence of Stalin and Potekhin on Forman's thought, he rejected the two-stage paradigm that had dominated Communist policy during the war. The rapid growth of the black proletariat, he believed, raised the possibility of a "people's

movement" along Chinese lines. South Africa, Forman argued, comprised both nations and aspirant nations. The latter he defined as ...a stable community which has existed for a long time, speaks the same language, has a common psychology manifesting itself in a common culture, and which, lacking its own territory and economic cohesion, aspires towards them.⁶²

Working class policy, he maintained, must guarantee these nations their right to territorial and administrative autonomy. This would not be another form of apartheid, Forman explained, because national autonomy would be combined with individual freedom of movement, starting with elimination of the pass system.⁶³

But Forman was in a minority in the Party on this issue, the prevailing position being that to speak of many nationalities in the South African context when the government was moving towards a bantustan policy raised the danger of encouraging separatist tendencies.⁶⁴

Indeed, as many in the Unity Movement tradition have argued, and as recent research by Ian Goldin has suggested, the state's color-caste and racial categories were the product of social engineering.⁶⁵ Even though most blacks had imbued this subnational consciousness, it was probably an overstatement to suggest that they wanted separate national and territorial independence along those lines, as South African blacks had historically striven for political incorporation not secession.

Jack Simons offered another Communist view, elaborating an interesting variation of the colonialism of a special type or internal

colonialism thesis which blended elements of the Comintern's colonial approach with aspects of Trotskyist analysis on the color bar.⁶⁶ As both No Sizwe and Wolpe have demonstrated, the colonialism of a special type thesis obscures class conflict by viewing the South African struggle as a primarily national or plural struggle and, hence, leads to a two-stage struggle.⁶⁷

However, Simons incorporated a class approach into his argument. South Africa's special features made its national question unique, Simons argued. Unlike most African and Asian colonies, where the imperialist state and colony are geographically distinct, in South Africa, imperialism and its colony co-exist in a single, political and geographic region, divided by the color bar, which simultaneously fragments the working class and prevents real class differentiation amongst the oppressed. Hence, the South African national question is not one of autonomy, self-determination or secession, the traditional demands of oppressed nations, which in South Africa's case would resemble apartheid. Indeed, he cautions us to

...examine carefully and even suspiciously any theory, no matter how well-intentioned, that savours even if only superficially, of the Nationalist formula: "development along own lines". That, certainly is not what the movement for national liberation wants in any shape or form.⁶⁸

The national question in South Africa, Simons continued, is one of legal and social equality. Although the national liberation movement

limits its demands to legal equality, South Africa's social class structure, shaped by the color bar, suggests the working class will play the dominant political role. It is important to underline that Simons, like most socialists at the time, believed that apartheid would continue to stifle the development of a black bourgeoisie:

...the influence of the exploiting element in the South African national liberation movement is likely to decline because of the effects of the colour bar, which is designed to stifle the growth of social classes above working class level in the African, Indian and Coloured communities. While the "middle class" grows very slowly or even declines, the number of urban workers grows rapidly because of the rise of industry. We may therefore expect to find that the national movements acquire a definite working class character.⁶⁹

Simons' nation-building approach stemmed from his analysis of the color bar which, in his view, distorts African class development by preventing the development of a bourgeoisie. The strength of the African proletariat, counterposed to the weakness of the African bourgeoisie, reinforced South Africa's tendency to develop into one nation rather than a multinational society, Simons maintained.

Working class Africans, Simons argued, were engaged in building a nation. A national movement led by the working class would be less likely to focus on national group interests than other social classes and would be based on the common interests of all workers, black and white.⁷⁰

Kenny Jordaan, then in the Forum Club, argued that South Africa's national question was not one of conflicting nations within the same borders, but of peoples of the same nation oppressing other peoples. He rejected a definitional approach to South Africa's national question, especially one which assumed the "artificial Herrenvolk" racial divisions. South Africa's national question did not concern an international or multinational dispute, but centered on domestic social relations, specifically, the majority's struggle for equality with the minority. Hence, like Simons, he believed that the national question could not be solved through formal independence but through the struggle for democracy:

...the solution to the national question is at one and the same time the solution to the question of democracy. More concretely: our movement is national because it aims at the overthrow of the oppression of peoples by other peoples within the same nation; our movement is democratic because the overthrow of such oppression automatically leads to the extension

of democratic rights possessed by one-fifth to four-fifths of the nation. Ours is, in short, a truly national democratic movement.⁷¹

Jordaan pointed out that while South Africans perceived themselves as comprising four national groups, these were scarcely aspirant nations. They showed no movement for autonomy, but considered themselves to be part of the South African nation. South Africa's combined development - the rapid development of industry and proletariat - precluded a distinct cultural and historical tradition by any national group. South Africa's case was not analogous to India's, he explained, where national groups had a long history as distinct cultural groupings, although this did not preclude granting demands for autonomy if they should arise after democracy had been achieved.

Jordaan sketched how the democratic struggle could lead beyond capitalism. Unlike France, India or China, where the bourgeoisie had led democratic struggles, in South Africa, the color bar had stifled the development of a black bourgeoisie and blacks were overwhelmingly workers or impoverished rural cultivators. Reflecting this uneven class development, he argued, like many Communists, that leadership of the democratic struggle must fall to the proletariat. Its aspirations could only come into conflict with the capitalist system. For example,

The abolition under capitalism of the laws regulating land ownership will in fact place all the land in possession of the moneyed classes and leave the landless more landless. The abolition of the colour bar in the economic sphere will not satisfy the aspirations of the proletarian majority in the national movement to enjoy the fruits of their own labour.⁷²

Consequently, Jordaan concluded, South Africa's national democratic struggle could only be solved through an uninterrupted permanent revolution.

This joint symposium on the national question marked the only formal cooperative theoretical effort by Communists and Trotskyists. In the CPSA, as well, discussion of the national question was shelved once the Party tacitly accepted the Freedom Charter. Forman's vision of a multinational society was considered too controversial and divisive. Here, prevailing Communist sentiment that existing national groups were developing into a single multiracial nation coincided with the ANC's multinationalism. The Freedom Charter's national clause, with its emphasis on group rights, omitted any question of national development or integration and thus was open-ended enough to lend itself to a variety of interpretations.

Forman suggested that the Party critically evaluate its own history in order to develop a programmatic guideline. In 1959 he called for a policy to unite rural blacks under proletarian leadership in a combined struggle against national oppression and capitalism. His

argument bore a striking resemblance to the Workers' Party's thesis on the land question. While the urban working class and petty bourgeoisie were already highly conscious and active, Forman contended, the rural masses on farms and in reserves were not. These people would be mobilized into an alliance with urban workers on the basis of national, not class slogans, he argued, and in that sense, the national question was then primarily an agrarian question. This was so both in terms of the content of mobilizing slogans and their form: organizational work in rural areas needed the use of each particular national idiom and culture. In the past, Forman noted, progressives had feared that promoting separate nationalisms would play into the government's hands. But he queried whether working class leadership of people's nationalism within a multinational framework was a cause for concern, as this might be the most effective way to organize in the countryside. The meaning of the Freedom Charter needed to be clarified, he pointed out, anticipating many of the questions asked today. What did the Charter mean by 'national group'? And did the national clause mean one legislative house per national group or universal franchise? While the vanguard party could draw up suggestions, he pointed out, the answers to these questions could only be decided by all South Africans at a national convention.⁷³

To have clarified the ambiguities which Forman noted might have jeopardized the Charter's ability to unite several politically significant tendencies around common demands, the basis for its popularity. First, its appeal to "national groups" and the protection of group rights mediated the potential competitive antagonism between

the aspirant African bourgeoisie and Indian merchant class by conceding to their sectional class interests, while soothing the fears of the white petty bourgeoisie. Its appeal to "the people" mediated the class contradictions amongst blacks. The Charter's demands also coincided with the Soviet policy of endorsing the bourgeoisie or aspirant bourgeoisie of oppressed national groups as leaders of national liberation struggles, thereby linking up with the long-term Communist project of national liberation as a precondition for a later transition to socialism. As Mandela so lucidly explained, the Charter's force lay in its democratic appeal to all classes and strata of the oppressed.

The workers are the principal force upon which the democratic movement should rely but to repel the savage onslaught of the Nationalist Government and to develop the fight for democratic rights it is necessary that the other classes and groupings be joined. Support and assistance must be sought and secured from... [migrant mine workers and farm workers] and from the millions of peasants that occupy the so-called Native Reserves of the Union. The cruel and inhuman manner with which they are treated, their dreadful poverty and economic misery, make them potential allies of the democratic movement. Non-European traders and businessmen are also potential allies for in hardly any other country in the world has the ruling class

made conditions so extremely difficult for the rise of a Non-European middle class....To each of these classes and groups the struggle for democratic rights offers definite advantages.⁷⁴

Yet, Mandela continued, the Charter was not simply a list of democratic reforms, but a revolutionary mobilizing device

...precisely because the changes it envisages cannot be won without breaking up the economic and political set-up of present South Africa. To win the demands calls for the organisation, launching and development of mass struggles on the widest scale.⁷⁵

The Charter's economic clause, "The people shall share in the country's wealth!", " has provoked much debate as to whether people's nationalization spells a capitalist, socialist or transitional political economy.⁷⁶ But in this demand, the Charter was following the path historically taken by the aspirant African bourgeoisie throughout the continent to develop their class interests in post-colonial society, the Afrikaners being the first to pursue this path of development. Precisely because the Charter addressed the needs of all classes, Mandela argued, it was not a socialist document:

Its declaration "The People Shall Govern!" visualises the transfer of power not to any single social class but to all the people of this country be they workers, peasants, professional men or petty bourgeoisie. It is

true that in demanding the nationalisation of the banks, the gold mines and the land the Charter strikes a fatal blow at the financial and gold-mining monopolies and farming interests....But such a step is absolutely imperative and necessary because the realisation of the Charter is inconceivable, in fact impossible, unless and until the monopolies are first smashed up and the national wealth of the country turned over to the people. The breaking up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous Non-European bourgeois class....and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before. To destroy these monopolies means the termination of the exploitation of vast sections of the populace by mining kings and land barons and there will be a general rise in the living standards of the people.⁷⁷

That nationalization was the route by which the aspirant black bourgeoisie could develop its own class interests and simultaneously allow the possibility for popular socioeconomic reforms in a post-apartheid South Africa was clearly understood by some ANC leaders in the mid-1950s.

The Africanist critique of multinationalism

The rise of this multinational approach to liberation politics was not unchallenged. A number of critical tendencies evolved in the Congress movement in the 1950s, the best known being the Africanist tendency, forerunner to the PAC. The Africanist strand began to crystallize during the course of the Defiance Campaign, as Youth Leaguers like A. P. Mda, while giving their critical support, argued that it did not follow the Programme of Action's nation-building or non-collaborationist approach. The Bureau of African Nationalism, which Mda formed in the early 1950s in East London, sought to promote the goals of the Programme of Action and embodied a left-wing African nationalism in contrast to Seloape Thema's right-wing ANC National-Minded Bloc.⁷⁸

For ANCYL theoreticians like Lembede, Mda, and Sobukwe, ideological development was a necessary part of building a mass movement. Like those in the Unity Movement and Trotskyist traditions, Mda looked to the black intelligentsia as a means of influencing and inspiring the masses and saw the ANCYL as a means of training black intellectuals to influence the ANC as it guided the masses to action. "The 'Africanistic Movement must gain intellectual conquest of [the] African intelligentsia,'" he wrote. Hence, Mda was particularly concerned to "capture" Fort Hare students from the traditional hold of the AAC. Indeed, from 1948 Fort Hare students were increasingly attracted to the ANCYL's promise of a more militant struggle against racial legislation than the AAC was then offering. Sobukwe, then a Fort Hare student, played a critical role in this initiative.⁷⁹

If Anton Lembede's analytical focus was the psychological

component of nationalism and political mobilization, Mda's was the social factor, and his thought provided the foundation for an anti-capitalist African nationalist movement. The national question, Mda argued, was the key to social revolution. In 1942 Mda was strongly anti-Communist, although the reason for his opposition to the CPSA's growing influence amongst Africans around Johannesburg is unclear. In order to combat the Party's highly organized presence Mda was then arguing to resuscitate the Catholic Workers' Union, an organization formed in 1926 to combat Communist influence in black trade unions.⁸⁰ But by 1949 Mda was on a socialist trajectory, writing of the two-pronged task of liberation: first, ending white domination; second, safeguarding the democratic revolution for the masses rather than the African elites. In a statement anticipating the deepening class contradictions between the African bourgeoisie and proletariat, and which strikingly foreshadows current left-wing fears of talks about negotiations unfolding in South Africa today, Mda foresaw that liberation

might under certain circumstances very well mean that the African middle class joined hands with the European, Indian and Coloured middle class in order to impose further chains and to exploit the black peasants and toiling millions....The African masses are their own Trustees. We are inclined to suspect those who talk of Trusteeship [of leaders for the masses] on our side, of holding out a hand of friendship to the

European middle class. It has happened before
in many Colonial territories even in Africa. It
must not happen here.

Only a militant African nationalism with strategic and political clarity
could prevent the cooptation of the liberation movement:

In order to keep the movement constantly
progressive and mass-based, we shall have to
begin now setting our objectives clearly before
the African intellectuals and the vast mass of
toilers and peasants. It is important for us to
realize that the tasks of the movement will not
end with the winning of African National
Freedom. In the course of our forward advance
to National Freedom there will be created the
democratic forces which will ensure the
establishment of a true democracy and a just
social order.⁸¹

Mda's discussion of the relationship between national liberation
and socialism is presented in a document called simply "The Analysis,"
of which, unfortunately, only fragments remain. Written in 1951, "The
Analysis" was a critique of the Defiance Campaign's move away from
nation-building. Anticipating increased repression, Mda argued for
building a nationalist underground cell structure to link both rural and
urban areas. His contention that the rural areas would ultimately be as
important as the cities in overthrowing white supremacy, closely
mirrored that of the AAC's: he stressed the need for building

"'revolutionary basis in the reserves'" and for the "'careful cultivation of revolutionary leadership from the ranks of the [rural] intellectuals,'" in which he included clergy, lawyers, teachers and progressive farmers and traders. In the cities, Mda emphasized the vanguard role of the proletariat: "[t]rade unions should be given an Africanistic orientation, and...the workers should be regarded priority number one in all industrial areas."⁸²

Despite sharing a common socialist commitment with Communists and Trotskyists, Mda criticized the practice of those organizations:

They do not believe in mass action -- As long as they can draw up a magnificent programme, this salves their conscience even if it has no relation to the mass struggle. Now a programme must relate to the masses in as much as it is the masses that are going to free Africa, and not a narrow clique of intellectuals sitting in their drawing rooms.⁸³

Like many black socialists, he was uninspired by the December 1937 conference of the All African Convention, the same one criticized by Makabeni and Dladla. "As he saw it," Gerhart wrote,

communists were shackled by their association with whites, and Trotskyists limited their activities to passive theorizing. Only African nationalists had the potential to blend correct theory and practice into a powerful alliance of leaders and masses.⁸⁴

But he disassociated those who claimed the mantle of Trotskyism in South Africa with Trotsky the revolutionary, about whom he had at least a cursory knowledge. For him, Conventionites only had "...pretensions to Trotskyism":

...I refuse to associate them with Trotsky.

Leon Trotsky was a man of action: he was a doer, a thinker, a theoretician and an orator. But these so-called Trotskyists are passive, inactive hangers-on, whose only virtue is their facile pen, and their vile lies and slander.⁸⁵

Nonetheless, while criticizing these left groups and seeking to preserve a clear African nationalist movement, Mda admitted common interests with the left:

If we allowed members of all political parties to join the Youth League we would soon have an amorphous body with no clear-cut political orientation and with no proper direction, because it would endeavor to accommodate all conflicting groups....But this attitude is further qualified in two ways. The Communist Party, the Unity Movement, the Trotskyist Group, the A.D.P. etc. are all bent on fighting oppression. We are therefore not hostile to any of them as long...[line missing]⁸⁶

Yet Mda's socialist vision and program was never realized in

either ANCYL tendency, although the PAC came momentarily closest, both its identification with the most oppressed and through the commitment of its early thinkers to democratic African socialism, as opposed to what they saw as foreign or white Communism. Those Youth Leaguers veering towards the Congress Alliance moved away from the doctrines of African self-reliance and non-collaboration. The underground cell structure outlined in "The Analysis" was considered far too dangerous in the early 1950s even for discussion.

The Africanist critique of the ANC in the late 1950s focussed on multiracialism, the extensive role of whites, collaboration and the ANC's lack of internal democracy. By the mid-50s some ANC members were once again participating in the government's racial structures, despite the Programme of Action's call for a boycott, and playing to the white electorate. Those advocating participation in structures like local Advisory Boards argued that they offered the Congress movement and Communist Party a platform for propaganda at a time when other opportunities for political mobilization were being curtailed. The potential propaganda gains, they argued, outweighed the risk of losing popular support, especially since Africans did not have as strong a boycott tradition as Coloureds.⁸⁷

Africanists were not alone in their opposition to these practices. Outside the Congress movement the NEUM continued to mobilize for boycott, and in the late 1950s activists in AAC affiliates like the Society of Young Africa effected successful boycotts of advisory boards in Soweto and Sharpeville.⁸⁸ Within the Congress of Democrats, the tiny Socialist League of Africa tried to provide an internal left critique

against what they saw as the moderating influence of Communists, although with little visibility or effect.⁸⁹ One member, Baruch Hirson, argued that COD members had disproportionate influence on the electoral policy of Congress Alliance affiliates. For example, he pointed out, at the December 1957 Multiracial Conference in Johannesburg, COD members sidelined issues of class and resisted the demand for immediate, universal franchise. They used the organs Fighting Talk and Liberation to raise the possibility of electoral participation, and their slogan "The Nats must Go!", effectively diverted the black democratic struggle into white electoral politics.⁹⁰ The COD also played a central role, Hirson added, in reversing the decision taken by SACPO in 1957 to boycott the Parliamentary elections of "Coloured Representatives."⁹¹

But the COD's ability to effect a formal reversal of SACPO's boycott decision at the top-level of the organization opposition hardly affected popular opposition to racial institutions. Johnny Gomas, who retained formal Party membership despite having steadily distanced himself from it over the years, damned the institution of white representatives for blacks, otherwise called "Dummy Representation." Gomas pointed out how it reinforced black peoples' own sense of inferiority:

I believe that when the non-whites accept and support white representation and leadership, they doom their own future for advancement. For by so doing, they reject the possibility of ever being qualified to represent their own interests....Therefore should the coloured

people operate and support the Separate Representation Act...to vote for white candidates, it will only mean setting in motion a process for further self abasement....Should we reject the separate representation of candidates and boycott all elections run on the basis of a separate Coloured Voters' roll for Parliament...we will gain our own self respect and win the respect of decent people in South Africa and throughout the world and strengthen our morale in the fight for full democratic rights.⁹²

The majority of so-called Coloureds heartily agreed. In the Western Cape the Coloured population was so firm on the boycott that even though SACPO endorsed Piet Beyleveld of the COD as "Coloured Representative" potential Coloured voters overwhelmingly refused to vote. And of the less than 20% of eligible voters who did vote, the majority rejected SACPO's candidate. It was, Alexander has noted, "...a disastrous defeat for SACPO and a resounding victory for the boycott."⁹³

The Africanists continued to call for a boycott of racial institutions, as did the NEUM, and a reorientation to black politics. What distinguished Africanists from the mainstream ANC was the former's principled and unwavering opposition to all participation as opposed to the latter's tactical approach to the boycott.

The anti-democratic bias which Africanists thought inherent in multiracialism was shown in practice late in the decade when the ANC was

torn by internal turmoil. The top, most experienced, layer of Congress leadership were unable to continue their political work because of their involvement in the Treason Trial, and many other activists were banned during this period as the state put more and more obstacles in the way of open political work. Stripped of experienced cadre, democratic practices began to break down as banned leaders sometimes directly appointed people to replace them. Disputes were especially intense in the Transvaal, an Africanist stronghold, where 1957 saw a severely contested attempt by the provincial executive to get itself reelected en bloc.⁹⁴ But even in January 1956 before the Treason Trial began, Dr. Xuma complained, in a letter which was not read at the ANC conference, of authoritarian and even totalitarian behavior which until the past few years, he claimed, had been foreign to the ANC: "Many who dare to criticise the hierarchy have been expelled or 'liquidated' individually or en mass [sic] without a democratic hearing." The ANC, he went on, had turned its back on nation-building, but there could be "...no internationalism without nationalism." In 1946 Congress had argued that Non-European national groups should cooperate by maintaining separate but integrated identities. As Xuma explained,

This was intended to make each organisation play its full part in the struggle and bear the necessary sacrifices. It was to avoid the danger of sections using others without making sacrifices themselves.⁹⁵

In the late '50s ANC elections were pre-arranged, rank and file criticism stifled, and dissenters expelled, practices which the NEUM was

similarly being accused of by numerous critics.⁹⁶ These practices were deplored even by loyal Congressmen. An article by "Banned Leader" pinpointed lack of trust and teamwork, individualism and lust for power as some of the organization's working problems and argued that its most pressing tasks were to raise the theoretical level in the liberation struggle, promote Congress ideology and expose backwards and un-democratic tendencies:

There is complete lack of theory, not aimless or abstract theory, but a theory which can give confidence and understanding of issues which the people in the liberatory movement are faced with; and a lack of the appreciation of unity of theory and practice, which would enable people to understand not only how and in what direction the liberatory movement is moving at the present time, but also how and in what direction it will move in the near future.⁹⁷

The Transvaal Africanists were acutely sensitive to these organizational problems and, pointing to the failure of the ANC's 1958 election stay-at-home aimed at the white electorate, contended that ANC leaders were out of touch with grass-roots feelings. Ben Turok suggests that the Africanists may have sensed before the Congress Alliance the widespread disillusionment with past methods of struggle

that had not achieved positive gains but only increased the level of repression. The government was then clamping down and reducing the scope of activity in which political activists and trade unionists could manouver to such an extent that progressive organizations, especially trade unions, lacked the personnel to organize meetings and activities.⁹⁸

The decision to form the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) was one which Gerhart describes as "...neither wholly spontaneous nor wholly premeditated." Most Africanists, including Mda, had hoped to turn the ANC away from multiracialism from within, and only reluctantly broke from the ANC which, with its decades of tradition, remained the leading African nationalist organization.⁹⁹

The split was precipitated by events at the Transvaal ANC conference in November 1958. Africanists had formed an Anti-Charterist Council to fight Congress Alliance influence inside the ANC. By November, relations between Charterists and Africanists were so tense that at the Transvaal conference Charterists disputed Africanist credentials, even threatening violence to keep them from entering the conference hall. The Africanists withdrew and subsequently formed their own organization.

Although Africanist-Charterist animosity was most extreme in the Transvaal, tensions were felt around the country. The Cape ANC had two rival executives that year. Most Africanists split from their parent body following the Transvaal split, and the PAC was formed in April

1959.¹⁰⁰ Generally, PAC organizers did not try to penetrate traditional ANC strongholds. In the Transvaal its strength was in Alexandra, Orlando and Vereeniging; it also developed a base in the Cape Peninsula where the ANC was traditionally weak. Outside these regions, Lodge reports, PAC did little systematic grass-roots work.¹⁰¹

The PAC and the national question

The first PAC statements showed a theoretical advancement over earlier Africanist writings. PAC's conception of an African nation with a potential to include people of all colors on a non-racial basis showed more sophistication than did ANCYL writings of the 1940s. As Sobukwe declared at the organizations inaugural conference in 1960,

We aim, politically, at government of the Africans by the Africans for Africans, with everybody who owes his only loyalty to Africa and who is prepared to accept the democratic rule of an African majority being regarded as an African. We guarantee no minority rights, because we think in terms of individuals, not groups.¹⁰²

The ANCYL's original multinational conception was transformed to such an extent that by 1960 Africanist leaders were arguing that white supremacy could only be destroyed by rejecting all forms of racial ideology, including multiracialism. By then the

Africanists had refined their critique of multiracialism, which, they argued, negated democracy by promoting group rather than individual rights, giving disproportionate representation to whites while denying the indigenous majority their rightful possession of the land. Sobukwe explained that

To us the term "multiracialism" implies that there are such basic insuperable differences between the various national groups here that the best course is to keep them permanently distinctive in a kind of democratic apartheid.

That to us is racialism multiplied, which probably is what the term truly connotes.¹⁰³

But more than its inverse relationship to individual democratic rights, Sobukwe suggests that multiracialism was linked to class interests:

It must be confessed that the Africanist view of democracy must be startling and upsetting to all those who have been bred and fed on the liberal idea of an African elite being gradually trained, brain-washed, fathered and absorbed into a so-called South African Multiracial Nationhood, whilst the vast masses of Africans are being exploited and denied democratic rights on the grounds of their unreadiness, backwardness and illiteracy.¹⁰⁴

The extreme socioeconomic disparity between black and white prevented any fundamental unity between them at that time, Sobukwe insisted.¹⁰⁵

Sobukwe spoke of an African Socialist Democracy "...guaranteeing the most equitable distribution of wealth."¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, PAC's anti-Communist rhetoric cannot be interpreted as a rejection of socialism. Rather, it reflected a frequent perception of township blacks that the CPISA was a white party whose members always went home to the white suburbs. Communist tactics, some charged, reflected white interests: blacks were encouraged to defy apartheid laws by sitting in white areas and when arrested would then have to pay white lawyers to defend them!¹⁰⁷

Rejecting the vision of a society where political interests were represented through sectional or racial organizations linked by an alliance or federal structure, PAC spoke of a unified nation to be fought for on the basis of one mass political organization. The movement towards a single mass-based organization was coming to fruition as the problems of the earlier federal-style or multi-racial style organizations were coming to the fore. Yet, as No Sizwe has pointed out, there were inconsistencies and contradictions between the PAC's theoretical conception of a non-racial society, expressed by its leading intellectual, Sobukwe, and its practice. While PAC spoke abstractly of Africans in non-racial terms, it initially excluded South Africans of Asian descent and so-called Coloureds. Nor did it make any provision for the possible incorporation of whites.¹⁰⁸

The PAC and social mobilization

The PAC saw itself as a catalyst whose task was to inspire a mass

upsurge. Its 1960 anti-pass campaign, its second and last campaign as a legal organization, was designed to inspire blacks through a non-violent protest, sparking off a nationwide and indefinite general strike which would culminate in independence in a few short years.¹⁰⁹ The campaign did, in fact, begin a national protest that posed probably the most serious challenge to the South African state since the 1922 Rand Revolt. But leadership did not serve as a catalyst here; pressure for the campaign came from below. Months earlier, Sobukwe had organized a Status Campaign which showed both Unity Movement and Congress influence. The Status Campaign aimed to instil self-confidence and eliminate the pervasive slave mentality of black South Africans, as did Unity Movement boycott; in practice it resembled the ANC's consumer boycotts in Port Elizabeth. But the Status Campaign struck little mass resonance, and popular pressure pushed the PAC to confront the pass system's socioeconomic control of black labor.¹¹⁰

Like the Status Campaign the anti-pass campaign aimed to eradicate slave mentality by a "mental divorce" from the pass system. The campaign's immediate goal was to provoke mass arrest for violation of pass laws. Although based on non-violent passive resistance, it departed from the Congress Alliance practice of defiance using small, well-organized bands. Africans were to stay away from work, with the men presenting themselves to police stations in contravention of the pass laws and women remaining at home. PAC demanded the abolition of pass laws, a minimum wage and no victimization of campaign leaders. Campaign organizers hoped to paralyze the economy and administration through a gradually expanding protest movement. Its vision of a mass

strike that would bring down the state compared to that of the NEUM, but while the latter placed this uprising in the far-off future, PAC saw it coming right around the corner.¹¹¹

Behind the PAC's aim and demands was a vision of South African political economy and the role of black labor as a social force which had never before found practical expression in the national democratic movement. PAC leaders argued that large-scale arrest of Africans would deprive industry of labor. Brought to a standstill, industry would pressure the government until it conceded to PAC.¹¹² This was not conceived as a single-issue campaign to abolish the pass system as an end in itself, but as a strategic campaign which recognized the integration of the pass system in the South African political economy. On the one hand, the move to abolish restrictions on black labor followed capitalist economic pressures for the free movement of labor; on the other, this demand, together with the call for a living wage, would lay the basis for free organization of labor.

In contrast to the ANC, PAC's approach to its anti-pass campaign was premised on the recognition that the productive power of black labor was the lynchpin of the political economy, although it still saw black labor as a lever to pressure the government. This was the first time, Jordaan has argued, that any national liberation organization had linked the pass system and wages as two interrelated aspects of working conditions and control over black labor.¹¹³ Despite its numerous anti-pass and minimum wage campaigns, the ANC had never linked these issues simultaneously. Jordaan has suggested that the linking of these two issues indicated that PAC saw migrant labor as a proletariat seeking to

exert control over the sale of their labor-power rather than as an aspirant peasantry. That PAC sought to link these two issues indicates the weight of migrant labor in its social base and the growing influence of migrant labor in towns.

PAC's organization of migrant labor in towns capitalized on the groundwork of the Society of Young Africa, an AAC affiliate which organized migrant workers in townships based on their needs as a newly urbanized workforce.¹¹⁴ By contrast, another AAC affiliate, the Cape African Teachers' Association, organized migrant labor as part of a rural community in the reserves. Migrant labor was an important link between urban and rural protest. For instance, rural resistance to the Bantu Authorities scheme was fed by migrant labor returning to Thembuland from Cape Town and to Pondoland from Natal; later, migrant sugar workers laid off the previous year due to overproduction played a leading role in the 1960 Pondoland uprising. Their grievances concerned not only Bantu Authorities, but unemployment and pass laws, suggesting a population whose consciousness was increasingly focussed on their social class as sellers of labor-power.¹¹⁵

Now, PAC was preempting the ANC's simultaneous anti-pass campaign, which relied on its traditional use of demonstrations, deputations and appeals to whites, who were to form a "second front." Like earlier Congress campaigns, industrial action was kept on the sidelines for future consideration. Although women were at the forefront of anti-pass protests in the 1950s, fighting the extension of passes to themselves, Congress officials spoke of mobilizing female support through prayer meetings, a method of mobilization which hardly touched women's largely

untapped political potential.¹¹⁶ The NEUM, meanwhile, criticized both the ANC and PAC for political adventurism. It continued to insist on a formal affiliation of trade unions and working class organizations to it as a first step in the fight for political rights. In a misreading which contradicted Tabata's earlier overtures to the ANCYL in the mid-'40s, the NEUM claimed to see no real differences between the PAC and the ANC with the exception that the PAC was more racialistic and adventurist.¹¹⁷

Just as this was not a single-issue campaign in its relationship to the political economy, neither was it in its relationship to the continent-wide movement for African liberation. Hence, Sobukwe envisioned a continuous movement spreading beyond South Africa culminating in a United States of Africa:

Our struggle is an unfolding one, one
campaign leading on to another in a NEVER-ENDING
STREAM -- until independence is won.¹¹⁸

PAC's early approach to social change, expressed in the writings of Sobukwe, shows a striking resonance with Trotsky's Permanent Revolution thesis, although aside from Mda's earlier admiring reference to Trotsky, there is no evidence of Africanist familiarity with Marxist or Trotskyist writings. The Permanent Revolution, as Trotsky outlined it, is permanent in three respects. First, it is temporally permanent in that social change does not proceed through stages but develops continuously, albeit unevenly and in a combined manner. Second, it is structurally permanent in that the interconnection of all struggles against social oppression based on their common reproduction through

capitalist social relations means that the resolution of one struggle flows into and shapes the outcome of others. Finally, it is permanent in that capitalism's international system means that social revolution in one nation is immanently part of an international struggle; national struggle spills over into the international arena.

PAC's approach converged with a Permanent Revolution approach in several dimensions. First, PAC stressed the centrality of black labor power in the political economy, and the decision to attack the pass laws was premised on the recognition of their regulatory role over black labor. Second, its characterization of the struggle as an "unfolding one" coincided with both the temporal and structural aspects of the Permanent Revolution thesis. Finally, the conception that the national liberation movement would break through South African borders is consistent with the international component of the thesis.

In its conception of a non-racial South Africa, of the centrality of black labor in social change and its ideological commitment to an African socialist democracy, the early PAC clearly showed a potential to articulate with South Africa's socialist movement. This was a radical populist movement whose dominant social base was the increasingly proletarianized migrant labor force, but which spoke to the urban African proletariat as well. In this sense, PAC emerged as an indigenous response to South Africa's distinctive type of proletariat and, more than any of the tiny socialist organizations that dotted the political landscape in 1959 and '60, it demonstrated an ability to mobilize a mass movement. PAC in those years showed the potential for transforming South Africa's socialist tradition into a revolutionary

mass movement which could rival the ANC.

However, weaknesses in PAC's strategy and tactics limited its short-term potential as a mass-based movement. The belief that leaders could ignite mass protest through an African nationalist ideology led the leadership to stress the development of popular consciousness as a preliminary to organizational groundwork. In one form or another this idea was held by most South African political tendencies, reflecting the uneven class development of the black population where historically the development of the intelligentsia preceded the emergence of the working class. Overemphasizing its own role as a catalyst for political protest, the leadership underestimated the organizational question. Lodge has suggested that the practical inexperience of Africanists in earlier Congress campaigns contributed to their lack of systematic groundwork to develop the infrastructure needed to withstand the government's repression during and after Sharpeville. Instead, anticipating waves of arrests and repression, they focussed disproportionate attention on organizing different strata of leadership as opposed to organizing the social base.¹¹⁹ The uneven attention to grassroots organization alienated some popular support. In Alexandra, for instance, its support was divided when the popular Africanist Josias Madzunya repudiated PAC, accusing its "tea-drinking, intellectual" leadership of inadequate preparatory work for the anti-pass campaign.¹²⁰

Despite these weaknesses, PAC's anti-pass campaign precipitated a nation-wide struggle which indicated the potential of social movements drawing on the combined forces of the urban proletariat and migrant labor. In the Transvaal the campaign was immediately aborted by the

Sharpeville massacre of March 21, but it continued and accelerated in Cape Town, even though Africans were a minority of the population there. PAC capitalized on the weakness of the ANC and AAC in the Western Cape, where the ANC had been torn between Charterist and Africanist strands and the AAC, having concentrated its attention on the Transkei, had little base amongst African in Cape Town. PAC drew support both from the settled urban African population and from migrant workers, whom it actively organized and who showed signs of growing politicization. The student Philip Kgosana organized migrants in the "batchelor quarters" of Langa, an African township on the outskirts of Cape Town.¹²¹

By the campaign's second week 95% of the African workforce around Cape Town was on strike. So widespread was support that ANC president Chief Albert Lutuli called for a National Day of Mourning on March 28 for the victims of Sharpeville and Langa. By contrast, NEUM support, an activist recalls, occurred against the advice of leadership. In the rural town of Worcester, where Coloureds and Africans had been organized in the same trade unions, Coloured workers supported the strike; in Cape Town, they did not.¹²²

By March 26 the upsurge had forced the government to suspend the pass laws. This suspension, Kgosana recalls as a symbolic victory for the PAC. By March 30, the government's control had broken down to such an extent that it declared a State of Emergency and raided Langa township. This provoked the great march of 30,000 on Cape Town, the peak of resistance, which ended outside Parliament. There, in order to disperse the mammoth crowd, the Minister of Justice conceded to a meeting with PAC representatives, another symbolic victory in Kgosana's

eyes, even though this concession led to the crowd's dispersal. Intense, continuous repression finally smothered this nation-wide upsurge in early April.¹²³

At one level the march on Cape Town was a spontaneous outburst against police brutality in Langa, an outburst that took even PAC leadership by surprise. Yet, seemingly spontaneous social events reflect people's experience of prior protest efforts, and in that sense they are not spontaneous, but an aspect of social development open to examination and analysis. Here, migrant labor, whose protest activity had heretofore been through reserve-based protests or the withdrawal of labor, either at the point of production in the mines or factories or through stay-at-homes in their batchelor quarters, now undertook, together with urban workers, an explicitly urban, political form of activity: a demonstration at Parliament.¹²⁴

More than other forms of collective action, as John Berger has so eloquently argued, mass demonstrations symbolize popular potential to transcend the given social order. Strikes emanate from the socially-given production process even as they simultaneously conflict with it. But a mass demonstration "...congregates in public to create its function, instead of forming in response to one." Instead of assembling by necessity at work, people at a demonstration assemble by conscious choice.¹²⁵ In Berger's words,

The more people there are there, the more forcibly they represent to each other and to themselves those who are absent. In this way a mass demonstration simultaneously extends and

gives body to an abstraction. Those who take part become more positively aware of how they belong to a class. Belonging to that class ceases to imply a common fate, and implies a common opportunity. They begin to recognise that the function of their class need no longer be limited: that it, too, like the demonstration itself, can create its own function.¹²⁶

In their choice of civic or national rather than strategic or military centers, Berger points out, mass demonstrations are "a symbolic capturing of a city or capital," manifesting people's potential to capture it in the future. By stepping out of their traditional or accepted role and presenting themselves to authority as targets or potential victims, demonstrators simultaneously challenge authority to attack or to back down. And in making this challenge, the demonstrators show their potential to challenge the power of the state itself.

Demonstrations express political ambitions before the political means necessary to realise them have been created. Demonstrations predict the realisation of their own ambitions and thus may contribute to that realisation, but they cannot themselves achieve them.¹²⁷

The demonstrations at Sharpeville and Langa/Cape Town were the culmination of a decade of mass protest by the two prongs of the Congress movement. This protest evolved from

leader-led passive resistance to a worker-led mass demonstration whose symbolic target showed a developed political consciousness. At Sharpeville, the South African government chose to dispense the crowd with violence, and in this way ensured that Sharpeville become part of our historical memory. Ironically, it was the less-known march on Cape Town which demonstrated African potential to confront state power. But there, the police could not have shot without risk of being temporarily overpowered by sheer numbers. The voluntary withdrawal of the demonstrators removed the burden of this choice. But, as a result, Langa/Cape Town is historically overshadowed by Sharpeville. One might well ponder: what if they had stayed?

Conclusion

The ANC incorporated the black working class into the democratic movement against national oppression, forging a mass movement. But the merger of class interests in the Congress movement was not nearly so unproblematic as Congressmen or Communists anticipated. Class contradictions were manifested both in antagonistic approaches to the national question and different styles of mass struggle. The 1950s saw a continuous battle within the Congress movement over social programs, strategies and tactics. The majority endorsed the Freedom Charter, with

the support of Communists. But Africanists argued that by allowing whites a disproportionate influence the Congress Alliance and its Freedom Charter promoted color and class interests which contradicted those of the African majority.

The battle over programs spilled over onto the question of strategy and tactics. Reflecting the plural conception of South African nationhood embodied in the Freedom Charter, the Congress Alliance mobilized people along sectional lines in their respective Congress organizations, using a form of passive resistance which submerged working class interests and tactics to a broad class alliance. But non-violent passive resistance resulted in more repression, and its lack of strategic direction caught Congress unprepared for the intense government repression at the end of the decade. PAC transformed passive resistance into a mass-based, national protest, but in popular consciousness, the experience of Sharpeville and Langa demonstrated the need for new forms of struggle against the armed state. The complexity of these debates illustrate that the articulation of class and color in South Africa was not simply a matter of merging the class and national struggles.

1* I wish to thank Tom Lodge for his invaluable comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

. "Fight the Fascist Menace!," Freedom, February 1, 1950, 2. Issue on main conference declarations and resolutions adopted at the National Conference of the Communist Party of South Africa, Johannesburg, January 6, 7, and 8, 1950.

2. Nelson Mandela, "In our lifetime," Liberation, 19, June 1956, 4-8, 5.

3. Pan Africanist Congress, Statement on Anti-Pass Campaign, p. 4, Karis-Carter Microfilm Collection, Reel 6B, 2:DP1:30/3.

4. Dan O'Meara, "The 1946 African Mine Workers' Strike and the Political Economy of South Africa," Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, XIII, 2, July 1975, 146-173, 167.

5. Maurice Hommel, Capricorn Blues: the Struggle for Human Rights in South Africa, Toronto: Culturama, 1981, gives an overview of the Congress Alliance, 135-139.

6. "'Nationalism and the Class Struggle', extract from Central Committee report to the National Conference of the Communist Party in Johannesburg on January 6, 7 and 8, 1950," Document 91, [South African Communist Party], South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980, London: Inkululeko, 1981, 200-211, quote 211.

7. O'Meara, "1946 African Mine Workers' Strike," 152. The African bourgeoisie which is the focus of Leo Kuper's seminal study in the late 1950s and early '60s was not a bourgeoisie in the Marxist sense of owning means of production or accumulating capital through the exploitation of labor-power. Kuper uses the term to refer to the upper occupational categories of African society, like traders, teachers, clergy and nurses - what I call the African petty bourgeoisie - and examines the relationship between their occupational status, social aspirations and class consciousness. An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class, and Politics in South Africa, New Haven and London: Yale University, 1965, xi and 3-5.

8. Baruch Hirson, "Not Pro-War, and Not Anti-War: Just Indifferent. South African Blacks in the Second World War," Critique, 20-21, 1987, 39-56, especially 49ff; O'Meara, "1946 African Mine Workers' Strike," 167; Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945, London: Longman, 1983, 20.

9. Socialist League of Africa, "South Africa: Ten Years of the Stay-at-Home," International Socialism, 5, Summer 1961, 5-14 and Socialist League of Africa, "South Africa: Once Again on the Stay-at-Home," International Socialism, 6, Autumn 1961, 12-14 evaluate the strength and weaknesses of Congress tactics in the 1950s.

10. Socialist League of Africa, "Ten Years," p. 11, argued that "...the struggles of Zeerust and Sekhukhuneland took place while the urban areas were quiet, and helped restore confidence to the working class."

11. I discuss the Train Apartheid Resistance Campaign in chapter 7.

12. Lodge, Black Politics, 39 and 67-68, quote 67; Brian Bunting, The Rise of the South African Reich, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969, 131-157; Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter, From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History, vol. 2, Hope and Challenge, 1935-1952, Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1973-77, 411; Matthew Chaskalson, "Rural Resistance in the 1940s and 1950s," Africa Perspective, New Series, 1, 5 and 6, December 1987, 47-59, especially 49-

50.

13. A. P. Mda, quoted in Gail Gerhart, Black Power in South Africa, Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1978, 77.

14. Gerhart, Black Power, 67. See also "Basic Policy of Congress Youth League," Manifesto issued by the National Executive Committee of the ANC Youth League, 1948, Document 57, Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 323-331, especially 329 regarding South Africa's national groups; and M. R. Sobukwe, "Address on Behalf of the Graduating Class at Fort Hare College, delivered at the 'Completers' Social,' October 21, 1949, Document 58, Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 331-336, especially 335.

15. "Basic Policy of Congress Youth League" and "Programme of Action," Statement of Policy adopted at the ANC Annual Conference, December 17, 1949, Document 60, Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 337-339; see also Gerhart, Black Power, 83. Interestingly, in 1950 the CPSA criticized the Programme of Action's call for the right of self-determination on the grounds that in South Africa, "The 'right of self-determination' can mean only the 'right of political secession', i.e. to set up a separate state. To be politically 'independent', to 'secede', would mean the dividing of South Africa into a 'black' and a 'white' state - would mean apartheid." See "'Nationalism and the Class Struggle', extract from Central Committee report to the National Conference of the Communist Party," 209.

16. "Letter on the Youth League from A. P. Mda to G. M. Pitje, September 10, 1948," Document 56, Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 321-323, quote 322.

17. Cape ANC program quoted in Gerhart, Black Power, 186.

18. I. B. Tabata, The Boycott as a Weapon of Struggle, [1952], Durban: African Peoples' Democratic Union of Southern Africa, quotes 23 and 24 respectively.

19. Robert Sobukwe at the Cape Provincial ANC Conference, quoted in Gerhart, Black Power, 187.

20. Letter ["On the Organisations of the African People"], from I. B. Tabata to Nelson Mandela, June 16, 1948, Document 67, Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 362-368, quote 362-363.

21. Neville Alexander, "Aspects of Non-Collaboration in the Western Cape," Social Dynamics, 12, 1, 1986, 1-14 and A. Byrnes, "The Boycott, Non-Collaboration and the Black Working Class in South Africa," Azania Worker, 11/12, 14-21.

22. Gerhart, Black Power, 80-81.

23. A. M. Lembede, "Policy of the Congress Youth League," Inkundla ya Bantu, May 1946, Document 53, Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 317-318, quote 318.

24. "Letter from the ANC Youth League (Transvaal) to the Secretary [Ruth First] of the Progressive Youth Council, March 16, 1945," Document 52, Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 316.

25. "Basic Policy of Congress Youth League," especially 326-328, quotes 327 and 328 respectively.

26. "Letter on the Youth League from A. P. Mda to Pitje, August 24, 1948," Document 55, Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 319-321, quote 321.
27. "Mandela replies to the 'Bantu World,' Spark, March 14, 1952, 4.
28. "Basic Policy of Congress Youth League," 328.
29. No Sizwe, One Azania, One Nation: the National Question in South Africa, London: Zed, 1979, 95-105 and 115-121.
30. Mangaliso R. Sobukwe, "Opening Address, The Africanist Inaugural Convention," April 4, [1959], Appendix A, in Philip Ata Kgosana, Lest We Forget: An Autobiography, Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1988, 95-102; see also Gerhart, Black Power, 163.
31. Gerhart, Black Power, 84.
32. Bunting, South African Reich, 202; Lodge, Black Politics, 41-43; and Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 415. See also Baruch Hirson, "The Defiance Campaign, 1952: Social Struggle or Party Strategem?," Searchlight South Africa, 1, September 1988, 70-102.
33. Maureen Swan, "Ideology in organised Indian politics, 1891-1948," in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, eds., The Politics of Race, Class & Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa, London and New York: Longman, 1987, 182-208.
34. M. K. Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa, [1928], Ahmedabad 14: Navajivan, 1972, 102-107.
35. Swan, "Ideology in organised Indian politics," 195 and 199-204.
36. Lodge, Black Politics, 35-36 and 60; Doreen Musson, Johnny Gomas, Voice of the Working Class - A Political Biography, Cape Town: Buchu, 1989, 109.
37. Lodge, Black Politics, 44-45. See also Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 403, 416-419.
38. Gerhart, Black Power, 124.
39. Naboth Mokgatle, The Autobiography of an Unknown South African, Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California, 1971, 306-308, quote 308. Tom Lodge suggests that Mokgatle's statement that the campaign organizers turned away "hundreds of thousands" of volunteers was probably an exaggeration. Personal communication, August 13, 1990.
40. Lodge, Black Politics, 45; see also Bunting, South African Reich, 203-204; and Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 420-421.
41. Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 403 and 426; Lodge, Black Politics, 61-2; Musson, Johnny Gomas, 109.
42. Z. K. Matthews, quoted in Lodge, Black Politics, 69; Bunting, South African Reich, 222; and Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter, From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History, vol. 3, Violence and Challenge 1953-1956, 57-58.
43. Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 3, 58. See also "Call to the Congress of the People," Leaflet issued by the National Action Council of the Congress of the People, [n.d.], Document 9, Karis and Carter, vol. 3, 180-184.
44. Lodge, Black Politics, 70.

45. Sonia Bunting, Interview, London, June 1990.
46. Lodge, Black Power, 72; see also Musson, Johnny Gomas, 116; Carter and Karis, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 3, 58; and U.S. State Department Report to Congress, "Communist Influence in South Africa," Transformation, 3, 1987, 90-99, especially 92.
47. Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 3, 65-66, quote 66. Lodge, Black Politics, 74. I wish to thank Tom Lodge for indicating to me the significance of the Natal amendments.
48. Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 3, 60, write that the Youth League's Programme of Action, was "...the end product of a protracted process of discussion at all levels of the ANC." But Tom Lodge notes that he has found no corroborating evidence other than the retroactive statements of Youth League members. Personal communication, August 13, 1990. The precise manner in which the NEUM's 10PP was formulated was unknown to most NEUM members.
49. Interviews with Ben Turok, London, June 1990; Sadie Forman, Ringmer, England, June 1990; Kenny Jordaan, Harare, December 1987; and Dawood Parker, Cape Town, November 1987.
50. E. Marney and I. O. Horvitch, Introductory Statement of the Liaison Committee, "What are the National Groups in South Africa," Joint Symposium of the Forum Club and South Africa Club, [conducted under the auspices of the South Africa Club,] Mowbray, Cape Town, May 1954.
51. The South African Communist Party officially endorsed the Freedom Charter in its 1962 Programme. A. Lerumo, Fifty Fighting Years: The Communist Party of South Africa 1921-1971, London: Inkululeko, 1971, 100.
52. Peter Hudson, "The Freedom Charter and the Theory of National Democratic Revolution," Transformation, 1, 1986, 6-38, especially 11-15. See also Jeremy Cronin, "National Democratic Struggle and the Question of Transformation," Transformation, 2, 1986, 73-78 and Peter Hudson, "On National-Democratic Revolution: A reply to Cronin," Transformation, 4, 1987, 54-59.
53. Hudson, "The Freedom Charter," 15.
54. Interviews with Sonia Bunting, London, June 1990 and Sadie Forman, Ringmer, June 1990; No Sizwe, One Azania, One Nation, 97-98.
55. No Sizwe, One Azania, One Nation, 97-98.
56. I. I. Potekhin, "Extract from 'The Formation of the South African Bantu into a National Community,'" mimeo, [1953?], 15.
57. Potekhin, "'The Formation of the South African Bantu,'" 1-3.
58. Potekhin, "'The Formation of the South African Bantu,'" 12-14.
59. Potekhin, "'The Formation of the South African Bantu,'" 15-16, quote 15.
60. [Lionel Forman], "Don't spread Malan's lie!," (Editorial), Advance, Northern Edition, April 1, 1954, 2 and Dr. Y. M. Dadoo, "Neither duty nor task of editorial," Advance, Northern Edition, April 22, 1954, 2.
61. [Lionel Forman], "Discussion of South Africa's National Question," Advance, Northern Edition, April 22, 1954, 6.

62. [Forman], "Discussion of South Africa's National Question," 6.
63. L. Forman, "Nationalisms in South Africa," paper presented at forum on "What are the National Groups in South Africa?," May 1954.
64. Interviews with Ben Turok, London, June 1990 and Sadie Forman, Ringmer, June 1990.
65. See, for example, No Sizwe, One Azania, One Nation, 55-57 and 132ff and Hosea Jaffe, A History of Africa, London: Zed, 1985, n. 38, p. 147. On the construction of subnational identities in South Africa see Ian Goldin, Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa, London and New York: Longman, 1987, especially 3-27.
66. H. J. Simons, "Nationalisms in South Africa," paper presented at forum on "What are the National Groups in South Africa?," May 1954. Simons' recognition of the theoretical contributions of South African Trotskyists to the analysis of South African political economy was reflected in his practical efforts to increase communication between socialists of different tendencies, especially via the left-wing discussion clubs in the 1950s. Interviews with Hillel Ticktin, London, May 1987 and Kenny Jordaan, Harare, December 1987.
67. No Sizwe, One Azania, One Nation, 105-111. Chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation discuss colonialism of a special type. Chapter 3 discusses its relevance for the national question.
68. Simons, "Nationalisms in South Africa," 5.
69. Simons, "Nationalisms in South Africa," 6.
70. Simons, "Nationalisms in South Africa," 8.
71. K. A. Jordaan, "What are the National Groups in South Africa? A Contribution to the Symposium," paper presented at forum on "What are the National Groups in South Africa?," May 1954, 1-2, quote p. 2, my emphasis.
72. Jordaan, "What are the National Groups," 5.
73. Sadie Forman, Interview, Ringmer, June 1990.
74. Mandela, "In our lifetime," 7-8.
75. Mandela, "In our lifetime," 5.
76. Peter Hudson, "The Freedom Charter," especially 8ff.
77. Mandela, "In our lifetime," 5-6.
78. Gerhart, Black Power, 134.
79. A. P. Mda, quoted in Gerhart, Black Power, 133; see also 126-7.
80. A. P. Mda, "Report of Communist Activities among the Natives in Johannesburg," Catholic Times, July 1942. My thanks to Gail Gerhart for sending me a copy of this article.
81. Two statements by A. P. Mda in 1949, both quoted in Gerhart, Black Power, 130.
82. A. P. Mda quoted in Gerhart, Black Power, 131 and 132.

83. Letter from A. P. Mda to G. M. Pitje, 10 November 1948, Karis-Carter Microfilm Collection, Reel 2B, 2:DA16:41/9.
84. Gerhart, Black Power, 131. Chapter 4 of this dissertation discusses the left's attitude towards the AAC's December 1937 conference.
85. Letter from A. P. Mda to G. M. Pitje, 10 November 1949, Karis-Carter Microfilm Collection, Reel 2B, 2:DA16:41/27.
86. "Letter on the Youth League, from A. P. Mda to G. M. Pitje, September 10, 1948," Document 56, Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 321-323, quote 322.
87. Lodge, Black Politics, 78.
88. Roseinnes Phahle, "Mass Politics for the NEUM in Johannesburg?," unpublished paper, 1987, 1.
89. Interviews with Ben Turok and Sonia Bunting, London, June 1990.
90. K. Shanker [Baruch Hirson], "Congress and the Multi-Racial Conference," Student Opinion, n.d., 22-27, especially 26-27; also published in Analysis, no. 1, February 1958. Hommel, Capricorn Blues, 137, points to similar reasons for the COD's undue influence on the Congress Alliance. The December 1957 multiracial conference was held in response to a call from the Interdenominational African Ministers Federation which met in 1956 to discuss the Tomlinson report; see Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 3, 76-77.
91. Shanker, "Congress and the Multi-Racial Conference," 22-23.
92. J. Gomas, "Seperate [sic] Representation -- Our Damnation," Cape Town, [1958?]. Courtesy of Doreen Musson.
93. Alexander, "Aspects of Non-Collaboration," 185.
94. Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 3, 273 and 308-309; Lodge, Black Politics, 82.
95. "Dr. Xuma's Letter Congress Would not Read," The World (Johannesburg), Saturday January 28, 1956, Karis-Carter Microfilm Collection, Reel 2B, 2:DA14:99/38.
96. Gerhart, Black Power, 173-175.
97. Banned Leader, "Problems of organisation in the A.N.C.," Liberation, 14, November 1955, 6-9, quote p. 7; emphasis in the original. Another article by "Observer," criticized both the ANC and the Africanists, pointing to the lack of concrete attention to method of struggle at the ANC conference: "The Special Conference of the ANC," Liberation, 18, April 1956, 18-20. But in the same issue the editorial statement on "Wreckers at work," 1-9, strongly condemned ANC critics like the Africanists, Liberal Party member Jordan Ngubane and Dr. Xuma.
98. Ben Turok, Interview, London, June 1990.
99. Gerhart, Black Power, 179.
100. Gerhart, Black Power, 177-181.
101. Lodge, Black Politics, 85-86, 204 ff. and 245.

102. Sobukwe, "Opening Address, The Africanist Inaugural Convention," 102.
103. Sobukwe, "Opening Address, The Africanist Inaugural Convention," quote 101.
104. Gerhart, Black Power, 190.
105. Lodge, Black Politics, 211-212.
106. Sobukwe, "Opening Address, The Africanist Inaugural Convention," 102.
107. Kwedi Mkalipi, Interview, Cape Town, March 1988. See Ben Turok's response to allegations that white Communists dominated Congress Alliance politics in "South Africa: the Search for a Strategy," The Socialist Register 1973, Ralph Miliband and John Saville, eds., London: Merlin, 1974, 341-376.
108. No Sizwe, One Azania, One Nation, 116-117.
109. Lodge, Black Politics, 84 and 86.
110. On PAC's Status Boycott and Anti-Pass Campaign see Lodge, Black Politics, 214-226.
111. PAC, Statement on Anti-Pass Campaign, p. 2, Karis-Carter Microfilm Collection, Reel 6B, 2:DP1:30/3. See also Philip Ata Kgosana, "Launching Speech," Appendix B in Kgosana, Lest We Forget, 103-107 and Lodge, Black Politics, 86.
112. PAC, Statement on Anti-Pass Campaign, 4.
113. Jordaan, Interview, Harare, December 1977. I am indebted to the late Kenny Jordaan for pointing out the implications of PAC's linking the two demands for abolition of pass laws and for a minimum wage.
114. Kwedi Mkalipi, Interview, Cape Town, March 1988.
115. William Beinart and Colin Bundy, "State Intervention and Rural Resistance: The Transkei, 1900-1965," in Martin A. Klein, ed., Peasants in Africa: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, Beverly Hills and London: Sage, 1980, 270-315, especially 308-309. The role of the AAC in the reserves is discussed in chapter 7.
116. Lodge, Black Politics, 201.
117. NEUM, "The Pan Africanist Congress Venture in Retrospect," September 1, 1960, especially p. 5, in Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, Reel 6B, 2:DN3:84/4.
118. PAC, Statement on Anti-Pass Campaign, 4.
119. Lodge, Black Politics, 204-205.
120. Lodge, Black Politics, 205.
121. Lodge, Black Politics, 210-214.
122. Lodge, Black Politics, 220ff; Neville Alexander, personal communication, April 1990.
123. Kgosana, Lest We Forget, 29-34.

124. I. B. Tabata traces the roots of the march back to the reserves, claiming that those who marched on Cape Town were not permanent residents of Langa, but migrant workers who had recently learned of state brutality to their kin in the reserves. Their real point of mobilization, he maintains, was still the reserves. It is quite possible that the ongoing protests in the reserves fuelled the PAC campaign. Nonetheless, Lodge has pointed to PAC's heterogenous social base, which included an urban constituency. This suggests that the protest was not solely an extension of rural protests. Interview with I. B. Tabata, Harare, December 1987; personal communication Tom Lodge, August 13, 1990.

125. John Berger, "The Nature of Mass Demonstrations," [New Society, 23 May 1968], reprinted in International Socialism, 34 August 1968, 11-12, quote 11.

126. Berger, "Mass Demonstrations," 11-12.

127. Berger, "Mass Demonstrations," 12.

CHAPTER 7

THE NON-EUROPEAN UNITY MOVEMENT AND THE LAND QUESTION

For us as colonial oppressed the land question is the major democratic problem to be solved by means of liberty, by means of the full franchise and full citizenship. We have to solve the national (political) question in order to begin to solve the land (economic) question. At the same time the demand for and the actual redivision of the land will make the struggle for liberty advance with seven-league boots. And so we say "Land and Liberty".¹

While Communist influence in the post-war years was felt through its alignment with the Congress movement, in an attempt to merge the class and national struggles, Trotskyist influence manifested itself on a national scale through the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM). The NEUM represented the political culmination of one strand of South African Trotskyism, that of the underground Workers' Party of South Africa (WPSA), for whom the land question had been the alpha and omega of the South African revolution. The other strand, descendant of the Communist League of South Africa and Fourth International Organisation of South Africa (FIOSA), existed now only as the Forum Club, a discussion group aimed exclusively at training an intellectual vanguard and providing a left critique of the NEUM. Like the Congress movement, the NEUM was subject to the tensions of building a class alliance around a common set of democratic demands. It, too, finally ruptured at the end of the 1950s when, under threat of increasing political and physical repression, popular pressure for militancy collided with a teacher-based

intellectual leadership cautioning political restraint.

This chapter traces the threads of Trotskyism in the 1950s. It begins by examining the common concerns and efforts of both strands to develop a political vanguard. It then examines the development of Trotskyist influences in the NEUM, which itself comprised urban and rural wings. The chapter focuses on NEUM practice in its two strongest areas, the urban environment of Cape Town, in the Western Cape, and the rural African reserve of Transkei.

Building a political vanguard

Faced with the seemingly unsurmountable task of building a socialist movement of black and white workers in South Africa's socially fragmented and politically repressive conditions, Trotskyists saw the democratic movement as a road to socialism. The FIOSA saw the fight against the color bar as the means to build democracy, unite the working class, and weaken imperialist influence. Similarly, the WPSA saw building a strong democratic movement for black political rights both as a means to build a South African nation and as a preliminary step to attract the support of white workers and effect a proletarian-led social revolution that would simultaneously solve the land question.

Both Trotskyist groupings looked to radical black intellectuals as a political vanguard of the democratic movement. This position reflected the culmination of the historical outlook of Western Cape Trotskyists since the 1930s that South Africa's class structure - its small black urban proletariat and vast, uneducated, illiterate

politically backwards rural population - necessitated the use of the thin stratum of intellectuals to disseminate political ideas. This notion bore fruit in the "teachers as a vanguard" thesis expounded by Ben Kies, a leading black intellectual in the New Era Fellowship, a radical discussion and debating society, and the Teachers' League of South Africa, a NEUM affiliate.²

In essence, the teachers as a vanguard thesis was an adaptation of Lenin's notion of a socialist vanguard to South Africa's particular conditions. In Lenin's political thought, the emergence of a proletarian vanguard both objectively and consciously self-defined was a historical development. In "What is to be Done," for example, Lenin traces three periods of the Russian Social Democratic Movement and its changing relationship with the labor movement in the late nineteenth century. The proletarian vanguard in Russia, he argued, emerged after decades of trial and error, theoretical and practical experimentation and working class struggles in the labor movement. The vanguard and the movement were mutually interdependent, and their relationship was continuously changing, advancing and degenerating. In the first period, what Lenin calls its gestation period, socialism in Russia was concerned to consolidate its theory and program in the absence of a labor movement. Subsequently, socialism developed into a political party associated with a rising mass movement, but due to political inexperience, suffered a number of setbacks. The third period was one of political retreat and vacillation amongst socialist cadre, even while the labor movement advanced.³

Trotskyists in the WPSA and the FIOSA also saw the development of socialism in South Africa from a historical perspective, seeing themselves as a vanguard whose task it was to preserve the idea of socialism while they built a democratic mass movement and, later, a non-racial proletarian movement. In the late 1930s and '40s, as the teachers as a vanguard thesis was being formulated, black teachers were very much an organic part of the working class. They were often first generation intellectuals from working class families, living in working class communities and townships.

In practice, teachers did play a vital role in conveying political ideas around the dorps and towns of South Africa, often suffering harassments like loss of jobs and banning. Nonetheless, by the late 1940s and '50s this stratum had crystallized out of the working class into a section of the petty bourgeoisie. In the Western Cape, one of NEUM's strongholds, teaching was one of the few opportunities open to educated Coloureds, and teachers earned a high income relative to other Coloured occupational groups. As a proportion of the total 1946 population, their numbers were tiny: approximately .85% of the white population were teachers, as were .18% of Africans, .31% of Indians, and .49% of Coloureds.⁴

TABLE 5

Number and racial classification of teachers
in state and state-aided schools, 1946

		White	African	Coloured	Asian
Transvaal		6873	4190	408	--
Cape Province		7437	5240	3863	--
Natal	2150	3035	108	888	
Orange Free	<u>3493</u>	<u>1356</u>	<u>72</u>	<u>--</u>	
TOTAL	19953	13821	4451	888	

Source: Reprinted, by permission of the
publisher, from Sheila T. van der Horst,
"Labour," in Ellen Hellmann, ed., Handbook
on Race Relations in South Africa, Cape
Town, London and New York: Oxford Univ.,
1949, Chapter V, 109-157, Table XI, 124.

Mary Simons and Maurice Hommel have argued that teachers' occupational status as state employees acted as a brake on any radical tendencies.⁵ In fact, the teachers as a vanguard thesis did not take into account the differential social positions of Coloured, African and Indian teachers and the possibility of conflicting interests amongst teachers that this differentiation raised. Ascription to vanguard status came to be based not on extended and tested political practice, but on occupational status. As teachers became more and more identified with middle-class respectability, particularly amongst the Coloured population in the Western Cape, the teachers as a vanguard thesis accentuated the gap between the masses and the vanguard.

The tiny FIOSA hoped to build a vanguard by training an intellectual cadre. In the 1940s and '50s FIOSA functioned as an unofficial, theoretical left opposition to the NEUM, making well-formulated critiques of the NEUM's theory and practice which addressed its federal organizational structure, its historiography and its political approach to the democratic struggle. In the 1940s it produced the highly enlightening Workers' Voice, which included a theoretical organ as well as a newspaper, and the short-lived Militant Worker.⁶

But the FIOSA suffered from the very problems it saw in the NEUM, although it may have been more self-critical than the NEUM.⁷ In the late '40s it dissolved, primarily in response to external instructions from the Fourth International overseas for a rapprochement with the Workers' Party group, but this coincided with the disillusionment and subsequent self-exile of some key members, and the rapprochement never materialized at the organizational level. In the early '50s it made some notable efforts to train a radical intellectual cadre. It organized a Forum Club of left-wing debates and lectures, and its short-lived organ, Discussion, produced probably the most illuminating and exciting radical critical analysis of the 1950s. In an effort to bridge the Stalinist-Trotskyist divide at a time when all socialists were under the common threat of the Suppression of Communism Act, it participated in a joint public forum with the Communist Party's Africa Club. These discussion clubs were boycotted by the NEUM, which accused the FIOSA of "flirting with the Stalinists."⁸ In the mid-1950s a few individuals made desultory attempts at educational work in Cape Town's townships. These efforts suffered from poor organization, lack of personnel and

funds, and petered out around 1957 as the Bantu Education Act prevented private educational endeavors and Group Areas made it increasingly difficult for unauthorized people to enter the townships.⁹

Its isolation from popular struggles was reflected in its conceptualization of its own role in the democratic struggle. This Trotskyist-influenced intelligentsia vaunted the need to develop a political vanguard at the expense of supporting the working class in its own endeavors. This gap between theory and practice and dichotomy between leaders and masses, where theory is the province of leaders, is seen in its most extreme form in the writings of Cape Town's Forum Club, an offshoot of the disbanded FIOSA:

At the present stage work in the liberatory movement means first and foremost the development, enrichment and propagation of ideas. The fundamental political task at present is to build up a democratic leadership which will guide the political struggle of the oppressed peoples. That is why the prime political task at present is to propagate many ideas to comparatively few people (propaganda) who will provide the intellectual leadership for the down-trodden masses. It is only on this basis that our day-to-day tasks of propagating a few ideas to the many backward and unenlightened sections of the oppressed (agitation) are given political content and meaning....the political

education of our leading cadres must precede our agitation and practical struggles.¹⁰

Integrating the vanguard into the democratic struggle

Yet Trotskyists sought ways to integrate themselves into the national democratic struggle in the post-war period, as Communists had sought to merge the class and national struggles. The critical problem for Workers' Party Trotskyists was how to fight for socialism when objective conditions for it seemed to be lacking: the proportion of Africans in the urban workforce was small even after World War II, and the racially arrogant and protectionist whites comprised a significant portion of the urban working class, including the most skilled strata. As its point of departure, the Workers' Party took Trotsky's assessment that South Africa's chief characteristic was its dominion status for whites and its slave colony status for blacks, a national, political division reflected in its racially divided class structure. Accordingly, the national question was the root of South Africa's other social problems, including its agrarian problem. Taking the Russian case as their paradigm, they believed that the nature of South Africa's working class at that time and the heavy weight of the rural population prevented the building of a socialist movement. Much influenced by James Burnham's vision of a People's Front and his argument that people must be mobilized on the basis of the rights they lacked, their strategy was to build a non-racial democratic movement based on the popular struggle for rights. Hence, in 1943 the Workers' Party core aligned several democratic organizations to which they belonged under a common

program within the Non-European Unity Movement.¹¹ The NEUM's federal structure was conceived as a means of linking the numerous, often ethnic and racial-based people's organizations which had developed in the heavily divided and stratified society. Its two major affiliates, the All African Convention (AAC) and the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department Movement (Anti-CAD), were themselves federal organizations. The leadership hoped that through political education the need to retain color-based organizations would decline and blacks could unite in a single, democratic movement. The Ten Point Programme, a minimum program of democratic demands implemented through the policy of non-collaboration, would be the unifying factor for the many and varied organizations in the NEUM. This program, modelled on Plekhanov's Social Democratic program, was conceived as a transitional program whose demands could not be met within a capitalist framework in South Africa. Most importantly, its first point was the franchise: the Workers' Party sought to link all other rights and struggles with the franchise, to show, following their understanding of Trotsky, that all social and economic disabilities flowed from the political.¹²

In the meantime, they sought to preserve socialist thought within a small, secret inner core. Socialism was a topic for private discussion, not for the masses. In part this reflected the WPSA's assessment that the time was not ripe to introduce socialism into the democratic movement. In part it reflected their perception of the need for caution and secrecy, first because of their fear of the fascist movement in South Africa during World War Two, second because of their fear of state harassment after the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act.

And finally, it reflected a reticence to engage in mass struggle. But for socialists to build a mass democratic movement raised another problem: how to keep a multi-class movement from being coopted by petty bourgeois and aspirant bourgeois interests? The answer of the Workers' Party socialists was through non-collaboration and political education in which the radical black intelligentsia, namely teachers, were to play a pivotal role.

This strategy was a short-term, partial success. As a growing democratic movement the NEUM flourished briefly in the post-war period, particularly in the Western Cape and Transkei, but through the 1950s it was outpaced by the Congress movement. Its top-heavy federal structure posed a number of problems. First, it never drew in an Indian pillar. In the early 1940s the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), like national democratic organizations across the board, saw an internal power struggle between conservative old guard leadership and a younger generation of radicals. The radicals, led by the Communists Yusuf Dadoo and H. A. Naidoo, wrested leadership of the SAIC from the merchant traders who had previously dominated it, but Dadoo and Naidoo moved the SAIC towards an alliance with the Congress movement rather than the Unity Movement. By 1947 this alliance was formalized with the "Doctors' Pact" between the ANC's A. B. Xuma, Yusuf Dadoo and Marimuthu Naicker, also a Communist. Moreover, the federal structure failed to wither away. Hosea Jaffe, an early critic of this organizational form, later spoke of the necessary but transient aspect of the federal organization, conceding that

...it will last a long time, this transient side

of federation, because every day the Herrenvolk
builds new and higher walls and rebuilds the
walls we break down....¹³

At the time of the NEUM's 1958 split, color-caste divisions were as real as in the 1930s. Despite its initial theoretical achievements it showed itself increasingly unwilling to examine new approaches or to evaluate critically its own practice.¹⁴ Its key political contribution, non-collaboration, was interpreted in an increasingly narrow and mechanical manner, and it came up obstinately against popular pressure for a militant response to apartheid repression.

The rapid rise and decline of the NEUM shows a regional pattern: it shot to prominence first and then ossified in the Western Cape, reflecting its failure to build an adequate base in the black working class townships, particularly amongst the urban African community. In the Western Cape, its predominantly artisan and teacher composition protected it from the social pressure which its affiliate, the AAC, was experiencing in the Transkei, and which the ANC was also feeling in the Transvaal and Eastern Cape. But the NEUM could not remain isolated from social pressure, and it split in 1958, like the Congress movement, under this impact. It is hardly accidental that it split over conflicting interpretations of Point 7 of its Ten Point Programme, which concerned the land question; the reserves, through the work of the AAC, had been the NEUM's strongest link with the oppressed African population.

A number of hypotheses have attempted to explain the reasons for the NEUM's increasingly abstentionist practice and failure to sustain its mass base. Neville Alexander, in his assessment of the Western Cape

NEUM, has argued that its abstentionism lay in the failure to distinguish between the ANC's reformist or collaborationist leaders and the working class struggles they led. Not understanding the lessons of Rosa Luxemburg's argument about the need to incorporate reformist struggles in a long-term revolutionary strategy, the NEUM tarred both the reformist leadership and the working class struggle for reforms with the same brush. Behind the NEUM, Alexander argues, the WPSA's approach was "dialectical, yet elliptical." Despite its revolutionary goal, it left out the key question of how to link strategy and tactics to achieve that goal. In explaining how the NEUM came to this approach, Alexander points to its social class base, which in the Western Cape was overwhelming a teacher-based, Coloured petty bourgeoisie.¹⁵

Trotskyist critics have offered internal critiques of the NEUM's theory, strategy and tactics. Roy Gentle, like Alexander, looks at the NEUM's class composition. He points to its focus on the presumed peasantry, explaining its failure to produce an explicitly socialist program or a socialist movement in terms of its essentially peasant/petty bourgeois social base.¹⁶ Yet, it was in the rural Transkei that the NEUM experienced the strongest pressure for militancy. Others, like Arthur Davids and Eric Ernstzen of the FIOSA, have stressed the organizational question and pointed to the NEUM's federal structure as a barrier to developing a non-racial democratic movement. Essentially, many Fourth Internationalists in South Africa believed that that by keeping the different groups separate, the federal structure was a concession to ethnic and racial chauvinism, especially Coloured prejudice against Africans. Rather than a real unity based on the

common struggle for the rights of the oppressed working class, the federal structure offered only a formal unity based on petty-bourgeois class interests.¹⁷

The Anti-CAD and social mobilization in the Western Cape

The following sections examine NEUM practice in the urban environment of Cape Town where its influence was felt primarily through its affiliates the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) and the Anti-CAD, organizations which drew their constituency largely from the Coloured population, who comprised the majority of Cape Town blacks. There, the contradiction between the NEUM's teacher-based leadership and popular aspirations to fight apartheid were becoming apparent by the late 1940s. The Anti-CAD began in 1943 as a mass movement against the government's plan to establish a Coloured Advisory Council (CAC) and a Coloured section of the Department of the Interior (CAD). This proposal, like the government's successful cut-back of African voting rights in 1937, aimed to dilute the already meager political rights of Coloureds even further. The idea and impetus for the Anti-CAD arose out of discussions in the New Era Fellowship, frequented by members of the now-underground Workers' Party. The Anti-CAD coalesced in 1943 as a federation of many smaller, grass-roots organizations, the largest being the TLSA, whose old-guard leadership, supporters of the moderate (Coloured) African People's Organization, had been ousted by a group of young radicals in 1937, much as I. B. Tabata, S. A. Jayiya and fellow-radicals would wrest control of the AAC a few years later. Together with the AAC, the Anti-CAD became one of the two main pillars of the

NEUM's federal structure.

The Anti-CAD movement was one of the most successful of all struggles in the Western Cape before the apartheid era. It promoted the idea of boycotting racial institutions both amongst Coloureds and Africans and succeeded in forestalling the implementation of the Coloured Affairs Department until after 1948 when the Nationalist Party began apartheid in earnest. Yet by 1948 the movement assembled to fight the CAC and CAD had lost steam, its leadership already reticent to fight in mass struggles. This became clear in the campaign against the imposition of train apartheid.¹⁸

The Cape Anti-CAD: in its heyday, the early 1940s, a mass movement.

Courtesy of Halima Gool.

Train Apartheid Resistance Campaign: the attempt at tactical unity

Apartheid posed in acute form the question of how separate political organizations could fight their common disability: the lack of democratic rights. The erosion of the few remaining rights of Coloureds and Indians made the basis of black unity ever more a reality. Yet the hallmark of the apartheid era has been the continuous breakdown, along organizational, class and color lines, of efforts to build united anti-apartheid fronts. This problem was posed during apartheid's first years, not only by the breakdown of unity talks between the two main African bodies, the ANC and AAC, but by the failure of established organizations to come together even on a tactical basis to fight the Nationalist Party's racial laws.¹⁹

The Train Apartheid Resistance Campaign (TARC) was South Africa's first anti-apartheid defiance campaign. Formed in late 1948 to fight the extension of segregation to trains in the Cape Peninsula, it fizzled out within six months; several months later, following their acquittal in May 1949 of the charge of incitement, the TARC leadership announced its decision to affiliate to NEUM. For Kenny Jordaan, writing shortly after the episode, "...this decision, taken by the remnants of the T.A.R.C. leadership, independent of the affiliated organisations, was the funeral oration of that movement."²⁰ On the one hand, the TARC's brief existence signalled the failure of anti-apartheid organizations to form non-sectarian tactical united fronts against the racial system, a failure which continues to plague the liberation movement today. On the other, it was a forerunner both of the Congress movement's tactical campaigns of the 1950s, which, in their use of passive resistance,

showed elements of Gandhi's satyagraha movement, and for the Anti-CAD's growing reticence to fight tactical battles. TARC signalled the NEUM's unwillingness to engage in mass action in the Western Cape.

Lodge has suggested that the extension of train apartheid affected only those blacks who had hitherto travelled in first-class compartments. But Jordaan points to TARC's significance as a test case for the Nationalist Party's future plans. Its success at implementing train apartheid would lay the groundwork for future segregatory measures. In this sense, the resistance against train apartheid was not an end in itself but "...a means of bringing in wider and wider layers of the oppressed into the orbit of the political movement, of educating and preparing them for the more important political tasks that still lie ahead of us."²¹ Moreover, Jordaan continued, the impact of train apartheid was not restricted to well-to-do Coloureds, although its direct implementation was in first class compartments:

The overwhelming support the poorest sections of the community gave to the movement and the small number of the better-paid persons in the movement testify to the fact that here we have a political struggle which affected all sections because it involved the questions of traditional rights.²²

The African People's Organization, then the CPSA and the NEUM all declared their opposition to train apartheid. Initially, the NEUM sought to link the struggle against train apartheid with the broader democratic movement under the Ten Point Programme. But lacking the

urban working class base to muster sufficient support under its own banner, it entered into a united front with other anti-color bar and anti-segregatory parties, like the CPSA and FIOSA. NEUM representatives were the majority of the TARC leadership.²³

At the campaign's start, the people were clearly to the left of the TARC leadership:

Packed meetings throughout the Peninsula and the inspiring demonstration on the Grand Parade, when hundreds, in spite of the 'do-nothing' policy of the speakers, spontaneously broke the regulations, clearly proved that the people were willing to follow a militant lead.²⁴

The leadership urged restraint from the beginning. When the inspired demonstrators nevertheless began boarding trains marked for Europeans, one Unity Movement representative on the TARC committee even reportedly tried to pull people out of the trains they had boarded in protest.²⁵

Differences of strategy and tactics began to emerge within the leadership. Taking Natal's passive resistance campaign as its model, the CPSA argued that small groups of individuals should immediately begin boarding train carriages reserved for whites. The NEUM thought this approach premature and adventurous and called for intensive organization as a prerequisite for mass action. The leaders finally agreed to begin mass boarding of trains by volunteers when a sufficient number had been enrolled, but this compromise broke down in quarrels over what constituted an adequate number. In the Communists' view, the over 400 volunteers already enrolled was sufficient for immediate

action:

If action were long delayed there was a grave risk that interest would fall off and that the people and the volunteers would lose confidence in themselves and in the sincerity of the committee.²⁶

The NEUM majority, by contrast, thought this number inadequate:

We were not prepared to send into action the few volunteers whose self-sacrifice would not make any impression on the train-apartheid issue, as their small number could only lead to their imprisonment WITHOUT anything being achieved thereby, except the fizzling out of the movement in a miserable defeat. The issue is much too big and much too important for all the Non-European oppressed, for any display of individualistic heroics. And as responsible leaders, we can think only in terms of MASS resistance, MASS action.²⁷

The Communists dropped out of TARC, and the NEUM leadership continued to stall until people began to lose interest.²⁸

Jordaan has argued that the NEUM was correct in seeking to approach TARC strategically by linking it to the broader democratic struggle but that it blundered tactically.²⁹ Tactically, Jordaan believed, the CPSA's stance articulated with popular militancy. In contrast to the Anti-CAD's assessment that "...it was not the

leadership that was found wanting, but the people, ' " Jordaan saw the main problem as "...the political cowardice of a section of the leadership who refused to go into action merely because they were not convinced that they could win."³⁰ The campaign was not only a lost opportunity to strengthen the democratic movement, he argued, it was a debacle ending in demoralisation, apathy and hostility, and

...proves that the general political movement has made little headway, particularly in the urban centres. The N.E.U.M. has no roots in Cape Town[,] no roots in the organised working-class movement. Its federal [style] of organisation militates against the building up of a mass movement, and the organisation of mass resistance.³¹

Zayed Gamiet, also from the Forum Club echoed this view, declaring NEUM to be abstentionist:

If we want to build mass resistance we must be prepared to use our existing volunteers, when reasonable [sic] organised; their action, if boldly and courageously led, will capture the imagination and admiration of their fellow non-whites.³²

The question of active participation in popular struggle was not only tactical. The NEUM failed to recognize that the strategic implications of TARC went far beyond the issue

of its formal integration, via organizational affiliation, into the democratic movement. Also at issue, as Alexander has indicated, was the NEUM leadership's willingness to engage actively in working class protest in order to strengthen the democratic movement through practical experience, which necessarily entails the risk of losing some battles, but also enables the movement to learn from its past mistakes. This gulf between the masses ready for action and leaders urging restraint was a trait not only of the NEUM, but of FIOSA, which formed part of the TARC leadership. Jordaan, then a member of FIOSA, admits revealingly that

Many of us felt at the time it would be sheer folly to call upon an unorganised people to board the trains in mass. It was only with difficulty that the leadership managed to restrain the people, appeal to them for reason and drive home the need for proper organisation and volunteers.³³

By succumbing to the fear of short-term tactical failure, i.e., of failing to stop train apartheid, the Western Cape NEUM, made a strategic mistake which was to characterize its political approach through the 1950s, to earn it the reputation of staying outside popular struggles, and cause intense internal tensions between the leadership and militant

youth who joined its ranks in the 1950s. The NEUM's strategic perception that tactical anti-apartheid battles formed part of a broader democratic movement was contradicted practically and theoretically by their seeming failure to perceive the strategic necessity of fighting tactical anti-apartheid and working class battles. Alexander has argued that TARC marked the beginning of this perceptual problem, of

...a consistent and fateful confusion of two very different questions [which] took place in the strategic and tactical perceptions of the leadership of the NEUM. Until the late 1970s, the NEUM refused to distinguish between economic, political and social struggles initiated outside of the collaborationist framework as the result of the pressures of the class struggle, and those initiated within that framework by reformist leaders....The movement failed to distinguish between the workers' and the peasants' organic struggles for reforms on the one hand and the reformist illusions of many of their leaders on the other hand.³⁴

In Ernstzen's view the contradictions of the Anti-CAD were inherent in its formation. The federal structure was a dead weight giving undue influence to organizations which had already lost popular appeal. Moreover, despite its rhetorical appeal for linking anti-apartheid struggles within a democratic program, the Anti-CAD leadership saw the fight as a single-issue campaign and rejected rank and file

appeals to address other issues. Reflecting its lack of interest in the working class movement, the leadership made no attempts to stop the CPISA from withdrawing the trade unions from the Anti-CAD and finally became loathe even to hold their originally annual conferences.³⁵

Jordaan and Alexander suggest that TARC was symptomatic of the NEUM's limited working class base around Cape Town.³⁶ Alexander points to the teacher-based class composition of the Anti-CAD as the major determinant for the failure of the Western Cape NEUM to understand and participate in working class struggles for reform. Although the younger generation which had wrested control of the TLSA in 1937 had been radicalized by their understanding of the anti-fascist struggle in Europe, once in charge of this body, they increasingly protected themselves from active political struggle, and as Alexander concludes, "...this conservative weight eventually became a brake on the NEUM's progress so that the once vibrant mass movement gradually lost the momentum of the 'forties and early 'fifties."³⁷

Their choice of battles showed a class position: keen for the democratic rights which the state denied them, they rallied to fight explicitly political discrimination like the Coloured Affairs Council and the Coloured Representatives. But they remained aloof from economic struggles which were bound to hit working class people disproportionately.

The divergent approaches to tactical struggle seen in the TARC were to characterize the 1950s, becoming so extreme that liberation organizations ceased any efforts at united anti-apartheid fronts. TARC raised bitter memories throughout the 1950s.³⁸ While the dovetailing

tactics of the CPSA and ANC were not part of a carefully planned long-term political strategy, these organizations responded to grass-roots pressures when pushed far more than the Anti-CAD. If the CPSA had tactics but lacked a socialist strategy, the NEUM had a socialist goal without tactics.

Leading members of the Franchise Action Council, c. 1951.

Seated, left to right: Johnny Gomas, Cissie Gool and Joseph Nkatlo, one-time Communist and later vice-chairman of the Liberal Party for the Cape Province. Reginald September, FRAC secretary, trade unionist and, from 1954-1961, general secretary of the South African Coloured People's Organization, is second from left, standing. Courtesy of Doreen

Musson.³⁹

The Franchise Action Committee: the breakdown of tactical unity

If the TARC debacle highlighted the twin problems of the relationship of socialist strategy and tactical participation in working class struggles, on the one hand, and building united fronts, on the other, the experience of the Franchise Action Committee (FRAC) underscored them and demonstrated the increasing sectarianism characterizing the democratic movement. Like TARC, FRAC was organized as a single-issue campaign to protest the Separate Representation of Voters Bill of 1950 which, as with Africans in 1936, placed Coloureds on a separate voters' roll. The FRAC, Lodge tells us, was

...a curious alliance involving both left-wing trade unionists and some of the most accommodationist coloured politicians, including supporters of the state-sponsored Coloured Advisory Council....it was nevertheless quite effective in organising well-supported protests.⁴⁰

Musson credits its inspiration to "...a few CPSA members" meeting in January 1951, but it was officially formed in Cape Town the following month by representatives of the APO, SAIC, ANC, community groups and trade unions.⁴¹ At its first meeting FRAC espoused a program of militant protest against the cut-backs on Coloured votes, resolving

to embark upon a series of political strikes, both local and provincial, to cooperate with other provincial and national organisations for the purpose of general strikes in defense of the

political rights and civil liberties of the non-European people.⁴²

The Communist Fred Carneson, a member of the FRAC executive, called for an active fight against the new law: "...there is nothing politically more demoralising than inaction when danger threatens." The NEUM had decided not to join the protest before the law came into effect, but only to boycott it after the fact. But this was not a practical approach, Carneson countered. The boycott, he argued, should be used when people are at the peak of militancy. The decision to form FRAC as an ad hoc committee, rather than as an affiliate of an established political organization reflected the inactivity of existing organizations. Carneson explained that

None of those who initiated the campaign were happy about the form of organisation they were forced to adopt, i.e., an ad hoc Committee, but in view of the complete inactivity of organisations such as the A.P.O., Anti-C.A.D., and N.E.U.M., there was no alternative. These organisations, which should have roused the people to militant activity, shirked the issue. The A.P.O. which previously had turned down

discussions with the S.A. Indian Congress,
remained silent; the Anti-C.A.D. and N.E.U.M.
had no plans for the present and attempted to
save their faces by talking of making the Act
unworkable after its passage.⁴³

Initially, FRAC generated a groundswell amongst the Coloured
population, just as TARC had done in its early days. In August 1951,
the militant Communist Johnny Gomas, waxed enthusiastic that FRAC

has brought the coloured people into
action as no other organisation has done in the
past, and I am sure that under the banner of the
FRAC the Coloured people will be able to play
their full part in the mass campaign which is to
come.⁴⁴

Yet, the contradictions inherent in the FRAC's ad hoc unity broke
down under the pressure to map out a program of action which in turn
raised questions about the basis of political unity. Forum Club members
criticized the FRAC for allowing people who worked in apartheid
structures, like George Golding, who had served on the government's
widely despised Coloured Affairs Council, to join the Committee when
FRAC's purpose was to fight an apartheid law! Golding had founded the
Coloured People's National Union in 1944, and his real concern,
they argued, was to use FRAC to campaign on behalf of the United Party
for the Coloured vote. But Carneson insisted that a single-issue
tactical alliance could overcome deeper political differences, even
allowing the possibility of an alliance between black anti-apartheid

groups and the United Party, which operated in the whites-only Parliament:

The disagreements amongst the various tendencies are not mere surface disagreements. The only way to overcome these divisions is to narrow the field of possible disagreement by coming together on concrete issues, e.g., the fight against the Coloured Franchise Bill.⁴⁵

The refusal of different political organizations to work on a common platform, a tendency which had manifested itself both in TARC and the breakdown of the AAC/ANC unity talks, intensified with FRAC. Carneson, for instance, was ambiguous as to whether FRAC had invited the Anti-CAD and NEUM to join its campaign; the NEUM, in turn, boycotted FRAC.⁴⁶ Ideologically, the NEUM often justified its failure to participate in popular campaigns in terms of opposition to Stalinist opportunism, eventually boycotting those who attempted to work with the CPSA even on a tactical basis.

But the very nature of FRAC's purpose was contentious. On the one hand were the Fourth Internationalists, who saw the Coloured vote - itself a qualified franchise within the Coloured population - as "anachronistic and hollow." In the sense that the Coloured vote was premised on class and color domination, a manifestation of South

Africa's racial capitalist system, even its retention could hardly be a victory for democracy. Carneson countered that retaining the Coloured vote could prevent the appointment of special Coloured representatives.⁴⁷ But the danger of a single-issue alliance to maintain existing Coloured rights was that it could inadvertently pander to anti-African prejudice amongst Coloureds. Brian Bunting's words to a Coloured audience suggest a campaign premised on protecting Coloured voting rights as Coloured, i.e., on preserving Coloured privileges vis-a-vis Africans.

If you lose your votes you will become like the African people. You will be placed in locations...you will be judged by Coloured Commissioners...if you lose your votes, you will lose everything you have.⁴⁸

Despite its early popularity amongst Coloureds, FRAC "disappeared" after a number of months, not even achieving its narrow goal. In this light, Lodge's assessment that Despite the amorphous nature of its leadership FRAC had become an effective force among working-class coloured who were most affected by new protectionist policies in favour of white workers

may be too optimistic. On the other hand, Gomas' bitter contention that the problem was "whites" ignored the critical questions of strategy, tactics and class interests which underlay black disunity and which a

tactical struggle like FRAC could not solve in practice.⁴⁹ But the Congress movement built upon FRAC's organizational structure: the Defiance Campaign and the Congress Alliance arose out of joint meetings with the ANC, FRAC and the SAIC. In March 1952 the FRAC committed itself to the Western Cape Defiance Campaign, and in September 1953 the South African Coloured People's Organisation (SACPO), later the Coloured People's Congress, was formed largely from FRAC members. The following March SACPO representatives decided to establish a National Action Council for a Congress of the People and to begin preparations for a Freedom Charter.⁵⁰

The heyday of the Western Cape NEUM and its affiliates was the 1940s, yet it made significant intellectual and political contributions in the '50s despite its infrequent participation in working class struggle. The success of the New Era Fellowship led to the establishment of a network of fellowships throughout the Cape Peninsula, like the Cape Flats Educational Fellowship and Langa Educational Fellowship, and which eventually extended to Port Elizabeth and Kimberley. The socialist Hosea Jaffe played a leading role in this venture. These fellowships were forums for intellectual training, and members were often involved in other local groups, like Parent Teacher Associations.⁵¹

In the early 1950s NEUM intellectuals produced a body of literature which provided the first major radical response to the prevailing liberal paradigm of South African politics and history. In the Western Cape-based TLSA, W. P. van Schoor produced "The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa" and B. M. Kies, "The

Contribution of the Non-European Peoples to World Civilisation." Other works in this tradition included Nosipho Majeka's *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest*, Tabata's *The All-African Convention: the Awakening of a People* and Hosea Jaffe's *Three Hundred Years*.⁵²

A meeting organized by the Non-European Unity Movement on Cape Town's Parade for the boycott of the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Celebrations, 1952. S. A. Jayiya is at the microphone. Seated, left to right are Phyllis Jordan, W. P. van Schoor, unknown, unknown, Dr. Goolam Gool, Dan Neetling and Jane Gool. Courtesy of Halima Gool.

The NEUM's effective use of the boycott as a form of political education and struggle pressured the ANC and its Youth League to adopt non-collaborationist stances. It organized the boycott of the Van Riebeeck Tercentary Celebration in 1952, one of the first effective cultural boycotts of apartheid. In 1958 it was behind the overwhelmingly successful boycott of the first elections of white Coloured Representatives, a boycott supported by more than 80% of the eligible Coloured voters in which the SACPO candidate suffered a stunning defeat. However, while the boycott was a rallying call under conditions of popular upsurge - in the early '40s and again in '58 - it ceased to rouse the public until the 1970s struggle against bantustans. After '58, it "...came to mean no more than a series of indifferently attended public meetings."⁵³

The AAC and social mobilization in the reserves

The NEUM's other significant social and geographical base was the Transkei. There, its affiliate, the All African Convention, had been organizing since the late 1930s. Pressure on the NEUM for militant action was particularly keen in the Transkei. At issue for socialist mobilization in the countryside was the objective class nature and social consciousness of the rural population. Were they peasants, rural proletarians, or both? What was the relationship between objective conditions and social consciousness: how did reserve-dwellers perceive their interests and on what demands could they be mobilized? Would these demands lead to an intensification of capitalist relations in the

countryside by promoting an African peasantry or capitalist farming class or could the demands be met in a capitalist framework at all?

State policy had long stifled the development of an African peasantry, as MacMillan noted, and economic distress in the reserves intensified in the 1920s and '30s. Nonetheless, Beinart and Bundy note, social class stratification was taking place in these decades. In the Transkei, they argue, the principal line of class differentiation was not within the peasantry or rural cultivators, but between an administrative stratum and the rest of the population, whose income came from various combinations of migrant wages and agricultural production. This administrative stratum, which included local government councillors and other officials as well as teachers and clerks, invested in cattle, ownership of which became increasingly concentrated during the inter-war period. By the 1930s, they argue, the main source of wealth was cash income from non-agricultural sources.⁵⁴

State officials were increasingly aware by then that some type of intervention was needed to stabilize the decay in the reserves in order to ensure that they could continue to sustain South Africa's migrant labor population, given state policy to limit the development of an urban African proletariat. In 1936 the Natives Land and Trust Act was passed along with the Representation of Natives Act which curtailed African voting rights. On the one hand, the Natives Land and Trust Act called for an increase in the amount of land reserved for blacks. On the other, it aimed to eliminate black squatting and labor-tenancy on white farms, and hence to increase the labor supply first on farms and later in trade and industry. By attacking black rural self-sufficiency

the Act moved to make migrant labor a permanent social class in South Africa. The following year, 1937, the Native Laws Amendment Act was passed to regulate the flow of labor into towns. Two years later the government passed the Betterment Act which Beinart and Bundy describe as an attempt to coordinate the heretofore "...piecemeal measures to arrest erosion or the limited returns from extension work." The Betterment Act, together with the Rehabilitation Scheme of 1945, only began to be implemented on a large scale after the war.⁵⁵

Despite these administrative measures, poverty drove Africans out of the reserves and into urban squatter camps to feed the war-time industrial expansion. Black urbanization increased by leaps and bounds, and in the 1946 African mineworkers' strike, migrant workers, spurred both by the strikes and social protests of the war years and protests back in the reserves, showed their face as part of the urban working class. After 1948 the Nationalist Party sought to harness the burgeoning black working class by rigid restrictions on trade union organization and urbanization. The Rehabilitation Scheme, along with influx and efflux controls, were important prongs in the apartheid program. As its name suggests, the Scheme ostensibly aimed to rehabilitate the depleted reserves by relieving overcrowding. Thus it sought to resettle sections of the population into newly constructed villages where government programs of afforestation and soil conservation would be implemented. In effect, the Scheme would create reserve-based proletarian settlements for the families of migrant laborers.⁵⁶ As the Communist ANC leader Govan Mbeki explained:

This means that the government has definitely

set its face against the urbanisation of the African workers, that it is determined...to maintain its policy of migratory labour...⁵⁷

The Scheme's effect was to redistribute resources in a manner that intensified poverty, proletarianization and class stratification in the reserves. This accentuated the overcrowding stemming from the strict enforcement of influx controls which removed Africans from towns to reserves.⁵⁸

From the 1930s, when the Land Act was passed and the first piecemeal government intervention began, through the 1950s, protest in the reserves followed anti-collaborationist lines aimed against increasing proletarianization and class stratification. Two related types of protests over survival and self-determination took place in the reserves. First were Anti-Rehabilitation Scheme protests to resist their complete proletarianization into perpetual migrant labor. These included protests against cattle-culling and enforced settlement, destruction of fences and attacks on government land surveyors. Second were the protests against Tribal Authorities who, in addition to enforcing rehabilitation measures, controlled the rural end of the labor influx and efflux control processes. Virtually all protests in the reserves during these years indicated the social class antagonisms emanating from the relationship between collaboration and capital accumulation. In the Pondoland revolt of 1960-61, for instance, people attacked chiefs both because they collaborated with the regime in enforcing these unpopular measures and because their collaboration was a means to accumulate wealth.⁵⁹

In Chaskalson's view these protests over rural conditions indicate that reserve-dwellers saw their long-term future in the countryside. Indeed, he cites the comments of popular leader Atwell Mopeli Paulus, who saw the Witzieshoek protest as an attempt to prevent government measures that "'...would bring poverty to the reserve and make it indeed a reservoir of labour for the farms and gold mines.'"⁶⁰

Beinart and Bundy make a similar but slightly revised argument, drawing upon Mettler's claim that 30-40% of the landless population in the Reserves did not support Anti-Rehabilitation struggles. They point out that migrant labor was an internally differentiated group in the 1940s and in contrast to completely proletarianized and landless migrants, "middle migrants" or "peasant migrants" had the most to lose from Rehabilitation, which would remove any peasant identity from them by reducing them to solely wage labor status. This group, they hypothesize, formed the social base of these protests:

Locked into migrant labor as they were, those who had cattle or land to lose resisted their proletarianization by mobilizing in the countryside over rural issues.⁶¹

Evidence suggests that the class consciousness of reserve-dwellers and migrant labor was far from uniform. One stratum of the migrant workforce displayed a proletarian consciousness in that their demands focussed on their needs as workers. For instance, Beinart and Bundy point out that sacked migrant sugar workers protested against unemployment and pass laws during the 1960 Pondoland uprising. These sacked workers played a central coordinating and organizing role in the

uprising through their migrant labor associations. Their demands indicated a consciousness of their need to control the sale of their labor power. Yet other reserve dwellers fought to retain their meager holdings of land and cattle, while a thin stratum continued to accumulate larger holdings.

These seemingly contradictory findings indicate that the stratified reserve population sought control over subsistence and livelihood in a variety of ways, depending on their class interests and options. Their perceptions about how to achieve this evolved historically as state development policies turned more and more of them into rigidly controlled migrant wage labor. Clearly, those reserve dwellers with land and cattle had a vested interest in maintaining social relations which would allow them to retain or accumulate such means of production and wealth. But the common denominator, as the words of Atwell Mopeli Paulus (quoted above) suggest, was not a rejection of wage labor status per se but a desire to prevent their perpetual status as a particular type of wage labor: rightless and effectively homeless migrant labor. For many, retention of some minor means of production would make them less vulnerable to the state's efforts to freeze them into total dependency on its industrial plans. The protests against influx and efflux controls were, in effect, struggles for freedom of movement and the free sale of labor-power.

Hirson observes that African leaders like Professor D. D. T. Jabavu and J. L. Dube showed a lack of understanding of the implications of the 1936 Land Act when it was first introduced. More concerned with salvaging the vote than with seriously addressing the land question,

they applauded the government's promise to increase the amount of land reserved for Africans. Convention leaders mobilized around the vote, oblivious to the fact that the majority of rural Africans were more concerned with land than with the vote. The land question, Hirson suggests, was the issue on which to mobilize the African majority.⁶² This criticism of the AAC is certainly true for the late 1930s and early '40s when Convention leaders espoused the class interests of the tiny enfranchised African elite in the Cape. But when Workers' Party radicals took over Convention's leadership in 1943, this new generation criticized Jabavu for his lack of insight into the Land Act.⁶³ For them, the land question was the heart of South Africa's social struggle. I. B. Tabata, their most prominent African member and leading organizer, was born near the farming community of Queenstown and made yearly trips to the Transkei in the late 1940s and early '50s.⁶⁴

Tabata argued the reserve policy was premised on the restriction of land as the basis of ensuring a cheap migrant workforce. Land hunger, then, was the root of the problem in the reserves. The means to rehabilitate the reserves was not to castrate or destroy cattle, as this would only intensify hunger and malnutrition, but to increase the land. Unlike many leftists who stressed objective conditions in ascertaining the class nature of South Africa's reserve population, Tabata and the Workers' Party pointed to the importance of subjective factors: consciousness and social aspiration. They believed that Africans were predominantly a landless peasantry which could be mobilized for social revolution on the issue of land hunger. Hence, the AAC organ, Ikhwezi Lomso, proclaimed:

*The demand for an equitable distribution of land among the peasant population is and will continue to be for a long time the most powerful driving force of our struggle for it touches the heart-strings of the majority of the oppressed, the African peasant.*⁶⁵

However, Conventionites believed, South Africa's land question and land hunger could not be solved in piecemeal fashion through ad hoc campaigns but only through a united political struggle. Ad hoc campaigns merely reflected the government's divide and rule strategy and were the main cause for the liberation struggle's past political failures. Unity of the oppressed must be based on a principled acceptance of non-collaboration and the NEUM's Ten Point Programme whose demands linked the land question with South Africa's other socioeconomic and political problems.

*The focus on the reserves rather than the agricultural proletariat on white farms has evoked considerable criticism by South African leftists.*⁶⁶ *Former NEUM activist Neville Alexander has suggested that the AAC's concentration on the reserves was due to the extreme - often fatal - difficulties of organizing black workers on white farms, a problem which persists to this day. But Tabata explains precisely why the Workers' Party believed migrant labor to be so critical a social force. Long ago the WPSA realized that as long as the reserves remained unorganized, migrant labor could easily be used by capitalists to break the strikes of black workers in towns:*

Already black workers were fighting for

their rights as workers; but it occurred to us that they were isolated because they were the minority at that time....Whenever the workers from the reserves asserted themselves they could be sacked and then they'd just ship in blacks from the reserves and that factor alone made it absolutely imperative to organize the peasantry as well.⁶⁷

Like M. N. Averbach of the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa, who characterized migrant workers as "tribal proletarians," Trotskyists of the Workers' Party believed that migrant labor formed the mediating link between urban and reserve-based struggles. In discussing the relationship between urban and rural militancy, Tabata recalls:

We noticed that there was some kind of a seesaw [relationship]. The workers in the towns would fight and fight and fight and the graph would go up, up, up. And the peasantry was simply down there but now when we had begun to organise the peasantry they also would be fighting against the Rehabilitation Scheme and then they would go up. Now the peasants were very slow in going up while the workers just went like that (snap) and they reached a zenith and after that they would come down. The peasants were simply going slowly up and they crossed at a point. But now the workers don't go right down to the bottom,

they hold at some point by the peasantry that's going up....The migrant labor played a part in this and therefore we began now to turn our attention to the migrant labor and organise them. And we organised them as peasants. Now they found when they came to town there were trade unions and they joined the strikes of the black workers. But they had to go back again to [the reserves] and fight Rehabilitation there...which was entirely for the peasantry. So from the point of view of organisation they go from one kind of organisation to another.⁶⁸

The work of Communist ANC member Govan Mbeki, another country-born Transkeian activist, who also characterized reserve-dwellers as peasants, is remarkably similar to Tabata's analysis of the relationship between urban and migrant labor, and urban and reserve-based struggles. Mbeki's assessment of the relationship between urban and reserve struggles was written following the Pondoland uprising. Despite their rival organizational backgrounds both activists discerned similar social patterns.⁶⁹ In Mbeki's words, ...a struggle based on the reserves had a much greater capacity to absorb the shocks of

government repression and was therefore capable of being sustained for a much longer time than a struggle based on the urban locations. The urban-based campaign, which starts on a high note after very intensive and costly propaganda work, consumes itself by the intense energy it generates to carry the masses to the climax - usually a general strike. And because, among other factors, vast masses of the workers are concentrated in a comparatively small area which is easily sealed off by the police and army, urban-based struggles are more difficult to sustain for much longer than a few days. The struggles of the peasants start from smaller beginnings, build up to a crescendo over a much longer time, are capable of pinning down large government forces, and are maintained at comparatively much lower cost.⁷⁰

Flowing from their similar comparative analysis of black protests, both men drew similar conclusions about the interpenetration of town and countryside in the nationwide insurgency following the Sharpeville massacre. Tabata applies his seesaw model to those events:

The result was now you could see the kind of thing that happened during Sharpeville....people were shot in the Transvaal, then demonstrations took place. And in Cape Town there was also a

huge demonstration that marched into town from the location. But the interesting thing...was that those people who marched to Cape Town, thousands of them, they were not resident workers in Langa, they were migrant workers in the barracks. And why did they do that? Because at home the peasantry at some point had just been surrounded by the army and shot. And so the peasantry at that time had this grievance, they were going up, up, up. So now these in town immediately found an excuse for joining the...[demonstrations].⁷¹

Similarly, Mbeki saw the social movement in the reserves as the real foundation of the national uprising after Sharpeville:

After Sharpeville and the successful strike in protest against the shootings, when the burning of passes spread through the country, all South Africa was blanketed in martial law. In the urban areas, the struggle proved to be short and sharp: the fire leapt in one place while the government tried to quell the blaze in another, but resistance could not last longer than a few weeks in urban areas where army and police might was concentrated. Yet in Pondoland, throughout the months of the emergency, resistance, far from abating, spread not only from village to

village, but also into neighbouring districts, increasing all the while in intensity. It was in these reserve areas, too, that the struggle assumed the truly mass character which it lacked elsewhere. Every peasant had to show himself in favour of or hostile to Bantu Authorities.⁷²

The first implementation of the Rehabilitation Scheme was in Libode in West Pondoland in 1947, an area until then known for the docility of its inhabitants.⁷³ Yet the extent and organization of local resistance to Rehabilitation indicate that preparations against its implementation had begun well beforehand. Indeed, AAC had been distributing Tabata's critical pamphlet "The Rehabilitation Scheme: 'A New Fraud, '" in the Transkei since early 1946.⁷⁴

The Pondo activist and ANC Youth Leaguer Anderson Khumani Ganyile downgraded the role of the AAC in the 1946 Xesibe revolt at Mount Ayliff, and he accuses Convention of having, even then, a doctrinaire approach to the boycott.⁷⁵ But by February 1947 the Libode Planning Committee was clearly concerned with the impact of Tabata's propaganda, both locally and, given the recent United Nations pressure on South Africa, internationally. However, it cautioned, direct suppression of the pamphlet would not be appropriate at that time; rather, ...intensified propaganda should be embarked

upon by officials and others to counteract its subversive results and pass on to the people the Government's true aims in regard to rehabilitation.⁷⁶

Clearly, AAC activists were important in this first Anti-Rehabilitation campaign. Tabata established links around Mount Ayliff region and in 1948 was arrested there for incitement to riot after having addressed a crowd of over a thousand.⁷⁷ Against left-wing critics who insisted that the anti-Rehabilitation protests were anti-proletarianization rather than proletarian movements and hence appealed to the potentially conservative aspiring peasantry, Tabata argued the need to mobilize people on the basis of their immediate needs and demands, using the denial of rights as the starting point for mobilization rather than abstract goals like nationalization which Cape Town Trotskyists were then expounding. In any case, Tabata pointed out, the reserves were already nationalized in that the government owned the land and merely entrusted it to Africans. The people were protesting the government's efforts to castrate their bulls and hence reduce the size of herds. Should activists allow the government to take

*the people's cattle, Tabata queried?*⁷⁸

*The local people used various forms of non-collaboration to protest Rehabilitation, suggesting AAC influence. Government-sponsored meetings to explain the policy were boycotted, collaborating chiefs threatened, government officials attacked, and livestock hidden. People "...voluntarily formed Location Committees against their headmen and Bungas [general council] to assert their right to decide how they should own their land." In 1948 the anti-collaborationist Kongo movement, which met secretly in the mountains to avoid government repression, affiliated to the AAC; the Transkei Organised Bodies, which coordinated many of the local bodies involved in the protest, was affiliated as well, although the ANC's Govan Mbeki was its General Secretary from 1943-48.*⁷⁹

Teachers as a vanguard in the Transkei

*The other significant NEUM force in the Transkei was the Cape African Teachers' Association (CATA), which affiliated to the AAC in 1948 and began campaigning against Bantu Authorities and Bantu Education. The NEUM's strength amongst both Coloured and African teachers reflected its belief in the need for education and propaganda to develop political consciousness amongst the masses, expressed in its "teachers as a vanguard" slogan.*⁸⁰ *The previous Native Education system had been premised on inferior institutions, but blacks in secondary schools and universities had used the same syllabi as white students. Now, Africans were to have their own syllabi, formulated to socialize an oppressed workforce in the Apartheid era. In the infamous words of the program's architect, Dr. Verwoerd,*

*There is no place for [the Native] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour....for that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its main aim absorption in the European community.*⁸¹

CATA played a leading role in the struggle against Bantu Education and was notable, Hyslop has pointed out, in looking at these political institutions and programs from the point of view of their role in the reproduction of labor-power:

*The aim [of Bantu Education and Bantu Authorities] is to increase the power of the 'herrenvolk' by producing ignorant, docile, CHEAP LABOUR, CHEAP TEACHERS, CHEAP GOVERNMENT of an oppressed people divided into suicidal factions and feuds amongst themselves - "Bantu Culture."*⁸²

*Through the CATA network, teachers linked up small rural dorps and larger towns. CATA members like N. Honono addressed local Vigilance Committees on the Bantu Authorities Act, and W. M. Tsotsi, later AAC General Secretary, addressed the Transkei Organised Bodies on the Rehabilitation Scheme. CATA activists successfully promoted boycotts of activities sponsored by Bantu Authorities, inspiring the development of another NEUM-affiliate, SOYA, in the Transkei.*⁸³ *In this light, Mandela's dismissal of CATA teachers as having no grass-roots influence seems unjustified.*⁸⁴ *But CATA was weak, like the Unity Movement and*

Congress organizations, generally, on the woman question. Hyslop points out that CATA activists, evidently all male, opposed equal teaching opportunities for women, and the more conservative Cape African Teachers' Union (CATU) subsequently capitalized on CATA's neglect of women.⁸⁵

CATA's hold on the reserves was weakened in the late 1950s by the conjuncture of several factors. First, was intense state repression: in 1955 the entire CATA executive were dismissed from their teaching jobs in retaliation to their struggle against Bantu Education; CATA members were harassed into the '60s, and its organ, The Teachers' Vision, a regular publication since the early '40s, was forced out of production. Second, it suffered from the internal dissension in the NEUM, collapsing at the end of the decade.⁸⁶

Hyslop argues that CATA was weakened by its failure to take advantage of the ANC's school boycott in urban areas. This meant, he argues, that CATA and NEUM missed a chance to influence urban working class struggles on educational issues. Although Mandela believed the NEUM to be opportunistic in not supporting the ANC's school boycott,⁸⁷ this was hardly the case: the two organizations had radically different, even contradictory conceptions of the school boycott. The NEUM's boycott was designed to teach people to refrain from working the inferior political institutions which oppressed and controlled them; in this way the people could weaken the racial system. But the NEUM distinguished between schools, where inferior education was better than none, and Bantu Education school boards and committees. The NEUM tended not to support long-term school boycotts on the grounds that, given the

lack of available educational alternatives on any significant scale, they hurt the students without damaging the oppressive Bantu Education machinery. Moreover, schools were arenas where students could organize along with teachers and parents. Although the ANC asked students to boycott, the organization itself participated in Bantu Education school boards and committees, the very antithesis of the NEUM position. Nonetheless, their strategic differences on the educational struggle did not necessarily preclude the possibility of tactical cooperation on educational issues but this was a rare occurrence.⁸⁸

Hyslop astutely points to a weakness in CATA's theory and practice of the Bantu Education boycott. As Bantu Education did not actually begin until 1955 this meant that CATA's only scope of activity before then was propagandistic.⁸⁹ In this it paralleled the approach of the NEUM on the Coloured vote. The importance of propagandistic work was not to be underestimated, but it does suggest that the boycott as a particular form of non-collaboration be practiced with due consideration for the need to be supplemented with other forms of activity. NEUM affiliates were indeed overshadowed by the variety of practical work used by Congress. Nonetheless, Hyslop argues that in its focus on Bantu Authorities, Rehabilitation and Bantu Education, CATA paved the way for the 1958-61 uprisings in the reserves. CATA activists had, in fact, organized in a number of districts prominent during the uprisings.⁹⁰

Social pressure from the countryside

Despite its activist role in the reserves from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, by the late '50s the AAC was trapped between pressure

from the reserves for more militant assistance against Rehabilitation and Bantu Authorities and pressure inside the WPSA and NEUM for continued propaganda and education rather than agitation and mobilization. This conflict was intensified by the generational conflict between the youth entering NEUM's orbit in the 1950s and the established leadership, and has been voiced by a number of NEUM and former-NEUM activists like Tabata, Alexander and Allie Fataar.

The mounting pressure from the reserves reflected the state's extension and consolidation of the Bantu Authorities Act during the 1950s. As Beinart and Bundy write, "[t]he struggle against rehabilitation measures increasingly became caught up in resistance to the new administrative system and its local agents." The Pondoland uprising of 1960-61 showed organization in the reserves at its peak, necessitating a State of Emergency and armed state intervention to suppress it.⁹¹

The government first announced its policy of future independence for so-called tribal homelands in the 1950s. In 1955 the Bantu Authorities Act was passed by the United Transkeian Territories General Council, known colloquially as *Utata Woj' Inj' Emsini* (Father has had dog's meat blackened with smoke), and its acceptance by authorities in other reserves soon followed. The Act outlined a four-tier authority structure resting on Tribal Authorities of chiefs and headmen, who reported to District Authorities, then Regional Authorities and finally Territorial Authorities. Virtually all officials were government appointees. The Act expanded and consolidated the powers of chiefs, who came to control larger administrative areas and enjoy a greater

concentration of roles. As chiefs became the direct symbols of oppressive state power, their popular legitimacy declined accordingly. Popular participation through local elections was curtailed; public meetings of more than ten people without appropriate authorization were prohibited. Finally, fees and taxes increased significantly in the late 1950s, as did corruption.⁹²

In response, reserve-dwellers transformed their existing organizations, like the Makhuluspani (Big Team), an AAC affiliate, and created new ones. The Makhuluspani's original function was to raise funds and punish thieves. But in the late 1950s it

... 'changed its tactics and began to threaten chiefs and headmen whom it regarded as collaborating too closely with the Government.

The establishment of Bantu Authorities, in particular, saw an increase in its activities.⁹³

Mbeki details the variety of boycotts conceived and applied during the Pondoland uprising. Similar patterns of protests and grievances were seen in all the reserves as people used increasingly militant and violent forms of non-collaboration, torching the homesteads of collaborators to show their rejection of all state policies and institutions including the Rehabilitation Scheme, resettlement villages, influx and efflux controls, Bantu Education and Bantu Authorities.⁹⁴ By the late 1950s and early '60s most reserves were war zones. Troops with tanks encircled villages, preventing entry or exit, shot villagers and destroyed crops.⁹⁵

This social turmoil generated intense conflicts within the NEUM and the underground Workers' Party over strategy and tactics, conflicts which reflected various permutations of political and regional interests, exacerbated by a generational factor. In the 1950s, the Suppression of Communism Act, the Criminal Laws Amendment and Public Safety Acts and the Bantu Authorities Act made propaganda, agitation and organizing more and more risky. In consequence, a number of individuals and factions within the NEUM began pushing for a more moderate political approach. These pressures for moderation took a variety of forms and were not solely determined by organizational affiliation, geographic region or color, even though the NEUM's 1958-59 split coincided to some degree with the organizational lines of Anti-CAD v. AAC. On the one hand, Cape Town theorists did attempt to restrain rural demands for more militant protest. On the other hand, even though the AAC was a more activist organization than the Cape-Town centered Anti-CAD, a number of AAC leaders, hoping to avoid political harassment, began to interpret the NEUM's position on the land question, elaborated in Point 7 of its Ten Point Programme, in the narrow sense of the right to buy and sell land.

Within the Workers' Party these conflicts were catalyzed by a request from people in the Transkei for arms. From Tabata's perspective, the split in the NEUM reflected the internal turmoil of the WPSA in the face of rural pressure for militancy, mediated by personality conflicts. Although the WPSA had gone underground on the eve of the Second World War, it continued to meet as a private discussion group through the 1940s and '50s, at times drawing in new members from the New Era

Fellowship. In Tabata's view the conflict inside the group was between theoreticians who were not involved in the actual organization of people and those engaged in practical grass-roots activity. At issue was which individuals and which social classes were going to take the lead in the party and how the party would respond to demands from the reserves for arms and active support. Within the WPSA and the NEUM, Tabata contends, there was an increasing distinction between Coloured and African intellectuals, expressed through their respective organizations, the TLSA and CATA. Many CATA members lived in the reserves, and they faced far greater pressure than TLSA members, even accusations of collaboration, if they did not support popular resistance there. This antagonism between the TLSA and CATA, one practical manifestation of the class and color contradictions inherent in the teachers as a vanguard thesis, was reflected in the dispute inside the TLSA over whether to give financial support to those CATA teachers facing state repression and loss of employment because of their political activities.

Tabata recounts a turning point, probably around 1954, at a report-back on his one of his trips to the Transkei, in which he relayed the requests for arms. The majority of the group, including the theoreticians, was led by the shadowy Burlak, an exile from Eastern Europe who had played a major role in formulating the WPSA's original theses in the 1930s, and who still exerted a powerful intellectual pull over younger party members. Burlak felt such action premature, arguing that "...the national movement was running away with the international movement." But some members criticized the group's direction: Goolam Gool left the group in early 1956 because of this dissatisfaction.⁹⁶

Allie Fataar likewise saw the NEUM's split over the land question in terms of the increasing rural militancy. The dispute over confrontationist tactics in the countryside, he maintained, was linked to the national question through the issue of African leadership. In Fataar's view, for the WPSA to have responded to rural pressure and followed a confrontationist stance in the reserves would have meant acceptance of African majority leadership. But, he recalls, this was rejected by the dominant section of the group. Fataar believed that the majority section, overwhelmingly from Cape Town, lacked the practical experience in the reserves to correctly evaluate the land question. Hence, they couched their solution to the land question in abstract terms like nationalization and socialism, not grasping that the basic demands of reserve-dwellers were for subsistence and food.⁹⁷

But many Cape Town-based WPSA members were concerned with what they saw as a growing tendency in the AAC to interpret the land question in the narrow bourgeois sense of the right to buy and sell. In effect, they argued, this reduced the NEUM's long-standing slogan "Land and Liberty" to "Land," thus separating the land question from the political or national question. If "Liberty" were dropped as a mobilizing slogan, then on what basis could urban workers be mobilized and how could town and country be united? Urban workers, they pointed out, would not be mobilized on the right to buy and sell land but on the political issue of liberty.⁹⁸

For several years, the WPSA was able to keep the lid on this dispute, sidetracking, rather than directly denying, the demand for arms. But under continued pressure from the reserves and, in the

townships, from young people tired of seeing the NEUM sidelined by the ANC, the lid blew off at the December '58 AAC conference. The issue spilled into the NEUM's affiliates, with political relations amongst them becoming increasingly polarized and sectarian, accusations of "Cape Colouredism" colliding with those of "African Nationalism." ⁹⁹

*Dr. Goolam Gool, prominent radical in the New Era Fellowship and the
Non-European Unity Movement, c. 1952. Courtesy of Halima Gool.*

Youth and social mobilization in townships

These organizational tensions were apparent in the urban-based affiliates as well. From the countryside the AAC was squeezed by pressure from the reserves for militancy. In towns, the pressure of the urban black working class was mediated through the youth entering the NEUM in the 1950s, its last major wave of youth, who pushed for greater involvement in township struggles and for a socialist program. In that decade, as Lodge has noted, the ANC's activism did not include intellectual work; the writer Ezekiel Mphahlele recalls that the ANC "... 'never really interested itself in educational and cultural matters as an important front of our activities.' "¹⁰⁰ This left the intellectual arena open to the NEUM, and the youth gravitating towards it recognized that its theoretical analysis of the South African social system was far more advanced than that of the Congress movement. At the university level, although the ANC overshadowed the AAC at the predominantly African University College of Fort Hare, the University of Cape Town and University of Natal were NEUM strongholds amongst black students.¹⁰¹ These young people saw that the ANC outflanked the NEUM in the townships because, despite the vacillations of some of its leadership, it responded to popular pressure over working class issues. But the youth entering the NEUM in the 1950s hoped to give it a more activist profile.

Throughout the 1950s, as former NEUM-member Dr. Ismail Mohamed has argued, the AAC would find itself perilously perched between the ANC's grass-roots activity and the Anti-CAD's reticence at open political engagement. The formation of the Society of Young Africa (SOYA) in 1951 was a response to the growing pressure from youth for more township

activity and an attempt to counter the growing influence of the ANC amongst students and urban youth. By the late 1940s the newly-formed ANC Youth League had rapidly surpassed the AAC in popularity amongst Fort Hare students, due to its activist profile, and by the early '50s pressure was mounting inside the NEUM for a greater involvement in urban struggles. Hence, to compete with the Youth League, SOYA began as an African-only youth grouping geared especially to the political education of working class Africans. Even when its membership became non-racial in the mid-1950s, many of its activists maintained an Africanist orientation to political developments throughout the continent.¹⁰²

SOYA's formation was simultaneously an organizational attempt by Tabata to increase the influence of the AAC in the NEUM. The formation of and opposition to SOYA within the NEUM reflected mounting organizational tensions and rivalry. SOYA's affiliation to the AAC, rather than directly to the NEUM, suggests that Tabata was trying to increase his social base through organizational leverage, both in the Workers' Party and in the NEUM, vis-a-vis the Western Cape-based Anti-CAD. Indeed, Sefton Vutela, a Soyan activist from the Johannesburg region, contended that SOYA was originally a sectional move to counter the success of the New Era Fellowship, and Hosea Jaffe, who played a central role in the Cape Peninsula educational fellowships in the 1950s, vigorously opposed its formation.

The issue of affiliation reflected an ongoing power struggle in the NEUM, just as it does in the liberation movement today. In the late '50s, for example, young NEUM activists established the Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU) as a broad student organization. In contrast to

SOYA's political profile, many students, like Neville Alexander, wished the CPSU to remain unaffiliated in order to attract students from all political tendencies. In the early '60s, though, they lost this battle when the CPSU affiliated to the AAC/NEUM.

But underlying the initial organizational reasons for SOYA'S formation, former-Soyan Dr. Kenny Abrahams has pointed out, was the increasing urbanization of Africans and the growing urban presence of migrant labor in the post-war period. The growing weight of African workers in towns forced the AAC to address their political education, and in Cape Town, at least, their political education was not adequately addressed by the NEUM's New Era Fellowship, which attracted a predominantly Coloured, often middle-class, audience, although fellowships were established in the African township of Langa and other working class areas. Despite its African-only origins, SOYA acquired a national momentum. In the mid-50s, under pressure from Coloured and Indian youth attracted to the NEUM, and despite resistance from some members who wished it to remain all-African for tactical reasons, SOYA opened its doors and became a non-racial organization, both in theory and practice.

Soyans were active in the Western and Eastern Cape, Transvaal, Natal and even the Orange Free State, with contacts in Lesotho and Botswana. Branches were actively engaged in theoretical and practical work. They studied revolutionary history, comparing the Russian, Indian and Chinese paths of development as experiences which the South African liberation movement could draw on. In the early 1950s, their organ The Soyana responded critically to what they saw as the Youth League's

romanticism of Africanism; but by the late '50s The Soyans would become mired in the internal NEUM schisms, engaging in vituperative criticism against "Jaffeism" and the soon-to-be renegade Witwatersrand Soyans, both associated with Cape Town-based Anti-CAD intellectuals who were suspicious of African nationalism and who were seen as trying to place socialism more immediately on the political agenda.

Soyans usually worked in civic and vigilance associations in black townships rather than trade unions and, in keeping with the NEUM's educational orientation, had links with Parent Teacher Associations around the country. 1954 was a growth year for SOYA in the Western Province, which claimed about 20 members at the start of the year and roughly 50 active members by year's end, bemoaning the lack of women, whom it was evidently trying to recruit.¹⁰³ Reflecting the AAC's orientation towards the landless in the reserves, the backbone of South Africa's migrant labor force, Soyans were particularly active amongst migrant laborers in the Cape Town area, practical work which would pay dividends for the PAC a few years later. Many migrant workers already had some exposure to Unity Movement ideas through the AAC's and SOYA's work in the Transkei, and those with some degree of formal schooling had had contact with CATA teachers who had fought Bantu Education.¹⁰⁴ But whereas Tabata approached migrant labor from the reserve side as a landless peasantry, Cape Town Soyans addressed their needs as a particular type of town-dweller, just as PAC was to do. Neville Alexander recalls that

At the practical level, the Cape Town SOYA did a lot of organising amongst migrant workers,

particularly in Langa and Nyanga. In retrospect I think that we prepared the ground for the PAC, because once it shot into prominence, very often people we had been working with took the lead in the PAC. We organised on a vigilance cum rural base. What we were dealing with was getting rural migrant workers to come to terms with the problems of urban life and the lack of rights with which Africans were faced. We who were classified Coloured did not make SOYA into a concept amongst Coloured people, whereas amongst migrant workers it did become one.¹⁰⁵

PAC capitalized on the foundations laid by SOYA in Cape Town and SOYA and CATA in the reserves. A PAC activist who came to Langa in 1959 agrees that SOYA's groundwork in African townships in the late '50s allowed PAC to gain a foothold in those communities. Soyans distributed literature and actively debated ideas in the townships, and its ideological influence was felt both in the emphasis on black solidarity and in PAC's anti-Communist stance. Soyans, like all those in the NEUM and AAC, were vehemently anti-Stalinist, and their criticism of the SACP only reinforced the perception amongst many township blacks that the Party was

a white grouping whose members always went home
to the white suburbs.¹⁰⁶

On the Witwatersrand, Soyans worked in Alexandra Township and Western Native Township (now Soweto), where some of its activists were expelled CATA teachers. A number of CATA teachers, sacked because of their opposition to Bantu Education, formed a group around Sefton Vutela, making, in the words of former-NEUM member Roseinnes Phahle, a considerable impact on NEUM politics around Johannesburg. In 1952 they established a base in Sharpeville, also later a PAC stronghold, criticizing the ANC's Defiance Campaign. They vigilantly exposed the politics of township advisory board members and organized boycotts of advisory board elections and activities in Western Native Township and Sharpeville. But by the late '50s, possibly because of their geographical proximity to AAC leaders, many of whom lived around Johannesburg, or their vocal criticism, Witwatersrand Soyans were under direct pressure from AAC/NEUM leaders concerned with what they believed to be its too-activist and too-openly socialist approach to politics.¹⁰⁷

The experience of the Witwatersrand Soyans, foreshadows the growing generational and class conflict between established leaders and the growing numbers of township youth moving into NEUM's orbit in the mid-'50s, a conflict which would result in a series of splits and expulsions through the 1960s. The Wits Soyans, led by Vutela, were convinced that the AAC's President, W. M. Tsotsi, and General Secretary, Leo Sihlale, were leading it down a bourgeois democratic path. Tsotsi and Sihlale, they maintained, were interpreting the NEUM's Ten Point Programme, conceived as a minimum, transitional program, as a set of

maximum demands; working class needs were being sidelined to those of the aspirant African bourgeoisie. This African nationalist leadership, Wits Soyans argued, was taking the path of the aspirant bourgeoisie and nationalist leaders in colonial and former-colonial countries throughout the continent, ending in compromise with imperialism through multiracial accommodations and partnerships. Like other NEUM youth in the late '50s, these Soyans argued that socialism must be put directly on the agenda, and that the Ten Point Programme must be openly recognized as a transitional program to socialism.¹⁰⁸

Much of this dissension, and the reason often cited for the NEUM's split, centered around the interpretation of Point 7 of the Ten Point Programme, which read, innocuously:

Revision of the land question in
accordance with the above,
the "above," referring to the program's preceding points. The
explanatory remarks attached to Point 7 read:

The relations of serfdom at present existing on
the land must go, together with the land acts,
together with the restrictions upon acquiring
land. A new division of the land in conformity
with the existing rural population, living on
the land and working the land, is the first task
of a democratic State and Parliament.¹⁰⁹

The social base of Point 7 was in the countryside, but urban intellectuals theorized and articulated the NEUM's dispute over the land question, and, as Allie Fatar suggested, their distance from the

countryside and lack of familiarity with the immediate concerns of reserve dwellers was at times apparent in their abstract arguments. Rival interpretations of Point 7 were voiced in the early 1950s, and in 1954 a Convention leader explained to a SOYA meeting that

When we drafted this point of the Ten Point Programme, we took it for granted that it could only mean one thing and one thing only: THE RIGHT TO OWN LAND? [sic] TO BUY LAND AND TO HIRE LAND.¹¹⁰

This interpretation of point seven, iterated at the NEUM's 1956 annual conference, provoked intense reaction by the NEUM's left. The Wits SOYA, believing that their own interpretation coincided with the original intent of the formulators, wrote:

...our Land Demand is certainly not "a free right to buy the land," but a categorical rejection of both the system of Land Reserves and so-called [sic] White Areas, and a demand for "a new division of the land in accordance with the whole population that lives on and works the land." The grinding poverty of the African peasantry is self obvious, and only a treacherous aspiring middle class can ever put forward a demand for "a free right to buy the land." The land of the people must not be specially regimented to serve the labour interests of insatiable private profit makers in

the industrial centres. The people must be able to live completely by the land they live on and work, and they must be freed from any oppressive and exploitative regimentation by the land they occupy and work....we might even remind our Non-White aspiring middle classes that the colonial peoples of Southern Africa were robbed of this land in the Wars of Colonial Conquest without it ever being bought. War and robbery were the only means. At no time therefore are they required to buy it back from any body either.¹¹¹

This aspiring bourgeois nationalist leadership, the Wits SOYA continued, was aiming to shortchange the working class. Leaders like Leo Sihlale and Jane Gool, they charged, had openly declared that the national movement was not the place for class-conscious proletarian struggle. But just as the right to buy and sell land could not solve the land question for South Africa's oppressed majority, the right to buy and sell industry could not liberate South Africa's working class majority. A formal abolition of the color bar was not sufficient to express working class needs. In line with their interpretation of the Ten Point Programme, Wits Soyans called for

...a free right to move and seek work
where-ever one desires, a free right to acquire
skills, equal opportunity, equal pay for equal
work, complete protection by labour legislation
in all industries, and a free right to form

trade unions for the promotion of workers' interests; all these as minimum demands towards the establishment of complete equality between the buyer and the seller of labour, and towards the ending of all oppression and all exploitation.¹¹²

Wits Soyans accused AAC activists in the reserves of practicing formal Non-European unity by establishing "select committees" that accepted the Ten Point Programme, instead of building people's organizations. The NEUM's established leaders, they also believed, resented younger intellectuals.¹¹³

Theoretically, the Wits Soyans were closest to the Kies/Jaffe faction of the Anti-CAD who feared that Convention's statements on the right to buy and sell land, together with their statements of support for what some radicals considered neo-colonial African leaders around the continent, presaged a turn to a bourgeois African nationalism. While many NEUM leftists wanted the NEUM to take an unequivocal stance for socialism, others, both in the Anti-CAD and AAC, feared that open espousal of socialism would jeopardize them under the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act.¹¹⁴

Hosea Jaffe argued that Point 7's explanatory remarks implied a redivision of the land, which would effectively mean the expropriation of large landowners, hence, the abolition of white control of land and of exploitative practices like speculation and landlordism, and the allotment of land to smallholders. Landholdings, he hypothesized, would average about 100 morgen [roughly 200 acres] per rural family. This

would allow for mechanization and cooperative practices, which the new rural cultivators, the former migrant workers, Jaffe assumed, would have learned from their previous productive work in the mines, industry and transport. Redivision was not a maximum socialist demand, Jaffe stressed, which would mean collectivization, state farming and socialization, but a minimum democratic demand. It would be a historically progressive demand for a backwards country like South Africa, with its cheap forced labor system,

The FIRST STEP towards modern farming techniques, farms and relations, which do NOT obtain to-day in the colonial world despite the capitalist invasion and even conquest of the countryside.¹¹⁵

Redivision, Jaffe continued, was "...a classic and modern democratic demand of and for the peasants," but it does not mean the right to buy and sell land, which is raised as a demand to end discrimination in property rights, not to satisfy an aspirant black bourgeoisie.¹¹⁶ As an isolated demand, the right to buy and sell land is reactionary amongst peasants, he maintained, because it cannot begin to initiate land reform. A democratic land law would either abolish the right or grant it only after the redivision of the land. But the Ten Point Programme as Jaffe understood it, subordinated the right to buy

land to the question of equality.¹¹⁷ Hence the NEUM did not demand the right to buy land as such and even opposed the purchase of land in Group Areas like locations or reserves because this reinforced the racial system. Instead it called for "equal rights to property," but it subordinated even this to the right of every peasant, as distinct from land capitalists, to land. In other words, the NEUM subordinated the right to buy land to legal equality on the land and, in turn, subordinated legal equality to redivision of the land amongst the peasantry.

The precise means by which redivision would occur, Jaffe maintained, was "...not yet a question of practical politics." It could be through nationalization and allocation of land amongst the peasantry or through private ownership with or without the right to buy and sell, although Jaffe believed that the majority of South African "peasant-workers" would choose to settle on the land with individual titles to non-marketable land. In any case, Jaffe concluded, peasants would not have to buy land as the new division would be made by a democratic state.¹¹⁸

Jordaan responded to the NEUM's debate on Point 7 with his seminal article, "The Land Question in South Africa." The essence of his critique of NEUM's position on the land question was that it viewed the land as an object to be allocated or bought and sold, but not as an aspect of social relations.¹¹⁹ Point 7, he argued, seeks to solve the

land question through equalizing political and legal rights. The first task of a democratic parliament would be to reallocate land amongst the rural people, including farm workers, labor tenants, squatters and independent peasant farmers. Point 7 does not address the question of social relations on the land after this initial reallocation, Jordaan wrote, and hence avoids the question of whether land would be bought and sold under capitalist social relations or whether the State would nationalize it.

The mystique of Point 7 lies precisely in this dichotomy immanent in its determination of the land question, that it embraces both progressive and reactionary admixtures. On the one side, there is the progressive move to purge the countryside of bondage and obsolete conditions and place the land at the disposal of the landless. It is this aspect of their Programme that accords with the demands of social evolution. On the other side, however, there is the reactionary dream to universalise small-scale farming under an industrial regime and endow everyone with economic equality under capitalism after the manner of the Russian Narodniki. This is a chimera.¹²⁰

The AAC interpretation of Point 7 as the right to buy and sell land, Jordaan argued, addressed only the issue of reserve-dwellers,

neglecting the large numbers of farmworkers. It echoed Stolypin's land policies in turn of the century Russia, where rapid population growth and the introduction of commodity production undermined communal village subsistence. Stolypin hoped to restrain mass rural discontent by creating a yeomanry class to act as an anti-revolutionary social bulwark, a measure welcomed by Russian socialists as an advance feudal relations. But the South African political economy was not comparable with that of pre-revolutionary Russia, Jordaan contended. It was already an industrial society and lacked the large peasantry upon which to develop a yeomanry. South African capitalists relied on the superexploitation of the proletarianized mass of reserve-dwellers and would never allow sufficient numbers to withdraw from the labor market to develop as independent farmers. To call for the development of a small strata of black capitalist farmers or peasants in South Africa's conditions was not historically progressive from the point of view of the working class, although it accorded with the laws of capitalist development.¹²¹

By contrast, Jordaan continued, the position outlined by Jaffe was

purely utopian in that it subordinated the right to buy and sell land to an equitable redivision based on an assumed prior claim by Africans to the land. It assumed that Africans would abandon industry for the land. To break up large, productive capitalist landholdings only to redistribute them using a quantitative yardstick would be economically unproductive and utopian.¹²²

For Neville Alexander, looking back, Tabata's privately discussed position on the land question was the most progressive at that time because it explained how the land question could be the pivot on which the permanent revolution turned. In accordance with Point 7's general call for revision of the land question, the right to acquire land must be granted on a non-racial basis as a means of mobilizing the black rural majority who could not be mobilized on a slogan of nationalization: from their point of view the state already had trusteeship of the land. In terms of the existing capitalist social relations this would mean the right to buy and sell land. However, that such a slogan might be raised at one point in a historical struggle does not mean it would be implemented after a socialist revolution. That the majority of impoverished reserve dwellers would not be able to buy land would push them to realize that their aspirations for land could not be met under capitalism, i.e., their legal right to own land in a capitalist system could not satisfy their land hunger. The first task of a socialist Parliament would be, not a redivision of the land as Jaffe called for, but a new division of the land determined in accordance with the existing balance of class forces. It was impossible to stipulate precisely the terms of any future land settlement.¹²³

But Jaffe, too, saw the land question as the turning point in South Africa's anticipated social revolution, although he had a different twist. The political struggle for democracy led to the possibility of redivision, based on the expropriation of large-scale white farms. The social forces unleashed by redivision in turn would complete the political revolution:

...the actual redivision of the land will
make the struggle for liberty advance with
seven-league boots. And so we say "Land and
Liberty".¹²⁴

While Tabata stressed the subjective factor, the transformation in consciousness, engendered by the recognition that popular demands could not be met within a capitalist framework, Jaffe seemingly stressed the objective factor of expropriation as the catalyst for further social and political transformation.

In its method of dealing with internal criticism from its youth and its left-wing, the AAC responded in a manner strikingly similar to that of the ANC. Its December 1958 conference saw credentials disputes, accusations that the conference had been packed and finally, the expulsion of the dissident Wits SOYA and the Cape Peninsula fellowships, leading eventually to the formation of two separate Unity Movements.¹²⁵

This action did not resolve the NEUM's contradiction. Other left-wing factions were surfacing, comprised chiefly of working class and township youth entering the NEUM and its affiliated study groups. They continued to challenge the leadership in the late '50s and early '60s, resulting either in their own disaffection with the NEUM or their

expulsion.

The history of the Progressive Forum (PF) again illustrates the pressure of township youths on the NEUM. The PF was a Johannesburg-based study forum which, like SOYA, examined international events, analyzed comparative paths of development, and engaged in some discussion of Marxist theory. The PF began as a circle of intellectuals, most based at the University of the Witwatersrand; in the early '50s it was attended by radical intellectuals like Baruch Hirson, Andrew Lukele and Seymour Papert. The PF contained a wide range of political positions, and as a whole it was more overtly socialist than the NEUM; probably a third of its members thought themselves Marxists or Trotskyists.¹²⁶

Two conflicting theoretical conceptions predominated in the PF, as in the NEUM. Some thought that South Africa was still backwards, and that revolutionary potential lay in a national struggle; hence organizing on a socialist program was premature. Two reasons were commonly given to support this position: first, the white working class would not support black workers at that stage; second, the weakness of the black proletariat demanded its alliance with non-working class sections of blacks like peasants and intellectuals. Such an alliance raised the problem of how to keep the movement from being coopted. Seymour Papert recalls that the idea of those who saw the struggle from a national point of view, principally Conventionites, was to build a mass movement on a national program while maintaining a small group of theorists with a socialist perspective. They disagreed as to when socialism could be raised as a revolutionary slogan. Some felt that

socialism would only follow a period of deracialized nationalism.

Others believed that before a revolutionary overthrow, the state would start crumbling and white workers would defect.

On the other side were those who believed in a single stage revolution, a view which was strongly held by Western Cape Trotskyists, although few dared to espouse this position openly either in or out of the NEUM. Baruch Hirson, for example, recounts that when some members did try to argue this viewpoint within the PF they were marginalized. Neville Alexander recalls much discussion of socialism in private circles, but in the WPSA, Progressive Forum or fellowships there was little concrete discussion of how a Trotskyist permanent revolution might unfold in South Africa's particular conditions. The South African situation was theorized, Papert points out, on the basis of other social revolutions.¹²⁷

The PF's influence went beyond its tiny size - in the early '50s it numbered about 25, mostly blacks - and it began attracting youth from the township to its discussions. Its influence went as far as Natal, where it had a branch in Dundee and where it played a role in the growth of a pro-NEUM grouping in the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) around 1951-'52. But the NEUM's anti-Stalinist rhetoric was vehemently criticized, reflecting the long-term role of Communists in the NIC and the trade union movement.¹²⁸ Ismail Mohamed recalls that in the Johannesburg region their main practical task was selling The Torch, an organ associated with the Western Cape NEUM, and attending CATA, TLSA, AAC and NEUM conferences. He recognized that the English-language Torch was elitist in language and content; most working-class Coloureds, for

instance, spoke Afrikaans. This was symptomatic of the NEUM's distance from the urban working class.¹²⁹

The differences emerging within the PF in the late '50s over the need for grass-roots work and organization of factory workers were like those between the Wits SOYA and Convention leaders. Both these conflicts in turn paralleled the AAC's criticism of the Anti-CAD and TLSA. Mohamed argues that the AAC fell between the two extremes of the ANC and the Anti-CAD, but was closer to the ANC on the question of grass-roots work. But despite its activity in the countryside, it remained outside most township struggles. This problem came to the fore as the PF slowly drew township youths from Soweto and Alexandra into its ranks.

Pushed by the observation that the ANC was involved in urban campaigns while the NEUM remained aloof, some people suggested working on joint campaigns with the ANC, but their rival organizational histories made such cooperation difficult. From the mid-1950s there was mounting criticism of the NEUM's isolation from day-to-day struggles. Mohamed, for example, remembers becoming theoretically equipped, but simultaneously seeing the ANC leading the township struggles. The majority in the PF remained very much influenced by Tabata's argument that most black workers were migrant laborers, essentially a landless peasantry, to be organized first in the reserves. Nonetheless, there was a growing feeling that the NEUM was underestimating the significance of the urban working class. For a number, the NEUM's refusal to actively assist the 1957 Alexandra Bus Boycott was a catalyst to quit the PF. Several PF regulars from Alexandra pulled out with Vincent

Swart and Dan Mokanyane, assistant secretary of the Alexandra People's Transport Committee, and formed a South African section of the Movement for Democracy of Content.¹³⁰ By the end of the decade the PF was in fragments.

Like SOYA, the formation of the African Peoples' Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA) in 1961 by the Tabata faction of the now-divided NEUM was an organizational response to internal pressures for a militant working class approach and, externally, to the PAC's success at popular mobilization. It also sought to address the question of African leadership raised in the Workers' Party, many believing that because of language and ethnic problems, Africans were best able to organize Africans. Its core was composed of the AAC elements from the old Workers' Party. Tabata's conception of APDUSA's relation to the national movement, as with the WPSA, reflected Trotsky's influence: Tabata compared APDUSA to yeast which makes the dough of the mass movement rise. APDUSA's unitary structure and its non-racial definition of the African nation reflected a recognition of the criticisms of NEUM's federal structure which had assumed that a nation could be built by uniting the Non-European components and reflected its effort to be a viable alternative to the PAC, then moving towards a unitary, non-racial organization. Basing itself on the democratic demands and aspirations of workers and peasants, it sought to extend democratic rights to all South Africans on a non-racial basis, emphasizing political education through meetings, rallies, lectures and publications.¹³¹

APDUSA was formed as an activist organization but despite its auspicious beginnings during the post-Sharpeville political vacuum it

flickered from view after a few years, although it maintains a foothold in black townships to this day. It had some contact with mineworkers and in townships. In the Durban area, one informant recalls, it held a few well-attended mass meetings and began house-to-house canvassing; thereafter, its public profile dwindled. This he attributes to the continuity of leadership between older NEUM affiliates in the area and APDUSA; through its leadership, abstentionist attitudes and undemocratic practices were transmitted to APDUSA.¹³²

Indeed, when young intellectuals like Ismail Mohamed and Neville Alexander returned to South Africa in the early 1960s, they saw that APDUSA was already having problems mobilizing working class people and that both it and the AAC were losing their youth, many of whom moved into the small study circles and socialist grouplets mushrooming around the country, like the Workers' Democratic League in Cape Town or the Socialist League of Africa. After the failures of non-violent campaigns culminating in Sharpeville, these small groupings, sensing the possibility of renewed repression, turned away from the long-term problem building a movement, to what they saw as the immediate problem: how to seize power. There was a general mood in the air at that time, that, however it actually developed, the South African revolution would not be a two-stage revolution, but that the national movement would transform itself into a socialist revolution. For them the question was, given South Africa's racially divided working class and small black urban proletariat, how to spark off that revolution and conquer power.¹³³

Conclusion

Both the Congress and Unity Movements showed a similar pattern in the 1950s. In neither movement was the black working class the dominant political or ideological force. Nonetheless, the pressure of urban and migrant labor ruptured both tendencies. The NEUM had followed a strategy of preserving socialism through a secret, inner circle, striving to build a non-racial democratic movement based on the alliance of the black petty bourgeoisie and working class. Behind this was a variation of Trotsky's permanent revolution thesis: that democratic demands could not be met in a capitalist framework in South Africa and hence constituted a transitional program. All Unity Movement adherents concurred, following Trotsky's 1935 letter, that the solution to the land question lay in the national question. However, they tended to interpret the broad and complex national movement in a formal manner as the fight for the franchise, subordinating the many struggles flowing into the national struggle to the struggle for the franchise. Too often they sought unity through principles before committing themselves to grass-roots struggles rather than acknowledging the possibility that the principles of unity could be learnt through struggle. This strategy fell apart under pressure from reserve-dwellers and township youth for a militant program of action. That the catalyzing issue for the NEUM's split was the land question was not surprising given that people in the reserves formed the most militant section of its social base.

1. Hosea Jaffe, "The First Ten Years of the Non-European Unity Movement," Excerpts from a lecture delivered in December, 1953, Cape Flats Educational Fellowship, 25, author's possession.
2. B. M. Kies, The Background of Segregation, Cape Town: Anti-CAD, 1943; see also E. L. Maurice, "The Role of the Non-European Teacher in the Liberatory Movement," Discussion, 1, 5, June 1952, 5-15. For a FIOSA view see Zayed Gamiet, "The Role of the Intellectual in the Liberatory Movement," Discussion, 1, 5, June 1952, 15-20. Teachers' League literature includes "The aims and purposes of education with special reference to South Africa," The Educational Journal, Cape Town, August 1949, XXI, 2; "The Content and Control of Education: special post-conference number," The Educational Journal, Cape Town, August 1955, XXVII, 2; and E. L. Maurice, "The Colour Bar in Education," TLSA: A. J. Abrahamse Memorial Lecture, Cape Town, August 1957.
3. V. I. Lenin, "What is to be Done?," in Henry M. Christman, ed., Essential Works of Lenin, New York: Bantam, 1966, 53-175, especially 173-175.
4. H. Sonnabend, "Population," chapter II, 4-26, Table VI, 13 and Department of Economics, Natal University College, "The National Income and the Non-European," chapter XIV, 306-386, both in Ellen Hellmann, ed., Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa, Cape Town, London and New York: Oxford University, 1949. The 1946 census figures in Table VI, chapter II are estimated.
5. Mary Simons, "Organized Coloured Political Movements," in Hendrik W. van der Merwe and J. Groenewald, eds., Occupational and Social Change among Coloured People in South Africa, Cape Town: Juta, 1976, 202-237, especially 225-226 and Maurice Hommel, Capricorn Blues: the Struggle for Human Rights in South Africa, Toronto: Culturama, 1981, 99-100. See also Leo Kuper's discussion of the work conditions, attitudes and aspirations of African teachers in An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class, and Politics in South Africa, New Haven and London: Yale University, 1965, 167-190.
6. See, for instance, A. Davids, "A Critical Analysis of I. B. Tabata's Book - 'The All-African Convention,'" Cape Town: Forum Club reprint [Discussion, 1, 2, [December 1950?]]; Z. Gamiet, "A Declaration to the People of South Africa from the Non-European Unity Movement," Discussion, 1, 4, December 1951; and K. A. Jordaan, "A Critique of Mr. W. P. van Schoor's 'The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa,'" Discussion, 1, 3, June 1951, 13-42. Some copies of the Militant Worker are available at the Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York.
7. For example, K. A. Jordaan's article, "The T.A.R.C. Debacle," Discussion, 1, 1, [June 1950?], 8-15, criticizes both the FIOSA and the NEUM for their mishandling of the campaign against train apartheid.
8. Interviews with Kenny Jordaan, Harare, December 1987 and Hillel Ticktin, London, April 1987. According to Jordaan and Ticktin, Jack Simons at the University of Cape Town admired the theoretical work of South African Trotskyists and helped organize these socialist forums.
9. Interview with Kenny Jordaan, Harare, December 1987.
10. Forum Club, "Editorial: Our Work in the Liberatory Movement," Discussion, 1, 4, December 1951, 1-2, quote 2.
11. For other overviews of the NEUM see Farieda Khan, "The Origins of the Non-European Unity Movement," B.A. Honours, University of Cape Town, 1976; A. Clark, "The Non-European Unity Movement, 1943-52," M.A., University of York, 1977; Roy Gentle, "The NEUM in Perspective," B.Soc.Sc. Honours, University of Cape Town, 1978; Maurice Hommel, Capricorn Blues: the Struggle for Humana Rights in South Africa, Toronto: Culturama, 1981 and Gavin Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African 'Coloured' Politics, Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1987. Two novels discuss Unity Movement politics in the late 1950s and early '60s: Richard Rive, Emergency, London: Collier, 1964; and Deirdre Levinson, Five Years: An Experience of South Africa, London: Andre Deutsch, 1966.
12. On the influence of Burnham and Plekanov, Interview with Neville Alexander,

Cape Town, September 1987; on the federal structure see I. B. Tabata, The All-African Convention: the Awakening of a People, Johannesburg: People's Press, 1950 and No Sizwe, One Azania, One Nation: the National Question in South Africa, London: Zed, 1979, 112.

13. Jaffe, "The First Ten Years," 20.

14. Several short histories of the NEUM by its own members are notably lacking in organizational self-criticism, whatever their other merits. See, for instance, Jaffe, "The First Ten Years;" G. H. Gool, "The Ten Point Programme: A Review of Ten Years," paper read at the All-African Convention, Queenstown, December 1953 and Sarah Mokone, Majority Rule: Some Notes, Cape Town: Teachers' League of South Africa, 1982, both in author's possession.

15. Neville Alexander, "Aspects of Non-Collaboration in the Western Cape 1943-1963, Social Dynamics, 12, 1, 1986, 1-14; quote from interview, Cape Town, July 1987. Seymour Papert, a former member of the NEUM-affiliated Progressive Forum, argues similarly that the NEUM was trapped in a fundamental contradiction between its purist non-collaboration position and the impure nature of mass politics. Its theoretical support for working class struggles was often clouded by its non-collaborationist stance, which led it to boycott individual leaders whom they saw as collaborating with the racial system, in the belief that such collaborators would never come to power. Yet, because local struggles were often led by people who did not accept non-collaboration, NEUM ended up abstaining on specific actions. The NEUM's position, he concludes, was not feasible in South Africa at that time: it was conceived when conditions for producing revolution were not realistic. Interview, Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 1988.

16. Gentle, "The NEUM in Perspective," 69 and 109-110; Gentle evaluates the NEUM from the standpoint of whether or not it followed Trotskyist thought.

17. A. Davids, "A Critical Analysis of I. B. Tabata's Book;" E. Ernstzen, "The Last Ten Years of the Liberatory Movement," Discussion, 1, 6, December 1952.

18. Neville Alexander, "Aspects of Non-Collaboration, especially 6-10.

19. On the breakdown of unity talks between the ANC and AAC see "Minutes of the Joint Conference of the ANC and AAC, December 16-17, 1948," Document 69, 370-377 and "Joint Meeting of the National Executive Committees of the ANC and AAC, April 17-18, 1949," Documents 70a-70c, 378-388, all in Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter, From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964, vol. 2, Hope and Challenge, 1935-1952. See also Minutes of the 1948 All African Convention Conference, Appendix, in Africa Collection (South Africa), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

20. K. Jordaan, "T.A.R.C. Debacle," 8; Kenny Jordaan, Interview, Harare, December 1987; Carl Brecker, Interview, Harare, December 1987. See also Alexander, "Aspects of Non-Collaboration," 10.

21. Jordaan, "T.A.R.C. Debacle," 9.

22. Jordaan, "T.A.R.C. Debacle," 13.

23. Jordaan, "T.A.R.C. Debacle," 11-12.

24. Fred Carneson, "Short History of Betrayal," Freedom, New Series, 1, 5, November 1, 1948, 1-2, quote 1.

25. Jordaan, "T.A.R.C. Debacle," 13 and Carneson, "Short History of Betrayal," 2.

26. Carneson, "Short History of Betrayal," 2.

27. A. E. (Sonny) Abdurahman, [TARC Secretary], "The T.A.R.C. Reports," quotes in Mokone, Majority Rule: Some Notes, 66.

28. Jordaan, "T.A.R.C. Debacle," 14.

29. Jordaan, "T.A.R.C. Debacle," 12-14.

30. Anti-CAD Bulletin 176, quoted in Jordaan, "T.A.R.C. Debacle," 8; see also 15.

31. Jordaan, "T.A.R.C. Debacle," 9 and quote p. 15.

32. "Discussion on T.A.R.C. Lecture, Discussion, 1, 1, [June 1950?], 15-17, quote 16.
33. Jordaan, "T.A.R.C. Debacle," 13.
34. Alexander, "Aspects of Non-collaboration."
35. Ernstzen, "The Last Ten Years," 7-8.
36. Nonetheless, Jonathan Hyslop, "CATA and CATU: The Politics of African Teachers' Organisations in the Cape, 1948-1968," unpublished ms., 1987, suggests that through the Cape African Teachers' Association (CATA), affiliated to the All-African Convention, the NEUM did have some African working class base around Cape Town.
37. Alexander, "Aspects of Non-Collaboration," 9.
38. Interview with Ben Turok, London, June 1990.
39. On Joseph Nkatlo and Reginald September see Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 4, pp. 118 and 139 respectively.
40. Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945, London: Longman, 1983, 41.
41. Lodge, Black Politics, 40; Doreen Musson, Johnny Gomas, Voice of the Working Class - A Political Biography, Cape Town: Buchu, 1989, 108.
42. Quoted in Musson, Johnny Gomas, 108.
43. F. Carneson, "The Franchise Action Committee," Discussion, 1, 3, June 1951, 9-12; both quotes 9.
44. Musson, Johnny Gomas, 108.
45. Carneson, "The Franchise Action Committee," 11.
46. Carneson, "The Franchise Action Committee," 10.
47. Carneson, "The Franchise Action Committee," 12.
48. Brian Bunting quoted in Lodge, Black Power, 40.
49. Lodge, Black Politics, 40 and Musson, Johnny Gomas, 118.
50. Zayed Gamiet, "Comments and Observations on the 1951 Conference of the Natal Indian Congress, Discussion, 1, 5, June 1952, 47-53, especially 52; Lodge, Black Politics, 69-70.
51. Information on fellowships is drawn from an interview with Dawood Parker, Cape Town, April 1988 and from Minutes of the All African Convention Conference, Queenstown, December 1954, mimeo, 35-36, author's possession.
52. Tabata, Awakening of a People; W. P. van Schoor, "The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa," [Teachers' League of South Africa: A. J. Abrahamse Memorial Lecture, Cape Town, 1951,] Cumberland, South Africa: APDUSA, 1986; B. M. Kies, "The Contribution of the Non European Peoples to World Civilisation," Teachers' League of South Africa: A. J. Abrahamse Memorial Lecture, Cape Town, 1953; Nosipho Majeka, The Role of the Missionary in Conquest, Cape Town: SOYA, 1952; Mnguni [Hosea Jaffe], Three Hundred Years, Cape Town: 1952. For critical responses to some of these works indicating the extent to which they sparked a debate within the South African liberation movement, see Davids, "A Critical Analysis of I. B. Tabata's Book" and Jordaan, "A Critique of Mr. W. P. van Schoor's 'The Origin and Development.'" Unfortunately, this significant body of work has by and large been neglected by the academic literature of the 1970s and '80s, although Christopher Saunders discusses some of these works in The Making of the South African Past: Major Historians on Race and Class, Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1988, as does Bill Nasson in "The Unity Movement: its Legacy in Historical Consciousness," Radical History Review, 46/7, 1990, 189-211.
53. Alexander, "Aspects of Non-collaboration." See also A. Byrnes, "The

- Boycott, Non-collaboration and the Black Working Class in South Africa," Azania Worker, 11/12, 14-21, especially 20.
54. William Beinart and Colin Bundy, "State Intervention and Rural Resistance: The Transkei, 1900-1965," in Martin A. Klein, ed., Peasants in Africa: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, Beverly Hills and London: Sage, 1980, 270-315, especially 294-295.
55. Beinart and Bundy, "State Intervention," 297-298; Baruch Hirson, "Rural Revolt in South Africa: 1937-1951," Paper presented at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies Postgraduate Seminar, The Societies of Southern African in the 19th and 20th Centuries, 1977, 2-3.
56. Edward Roux, "Land and Agriculture in the Native Reserves," Chapter VII in Ellen Hellmann, ed., Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa, Cape Town, London and New York: Oxford University, 1949, 171-190, especially 189; Hirson, "Rural Revolt," 11.
57. Govan Mbeki, quoted in Hirson, "Rural Revolt," 11.
58. Matthew Chaskalson, "Rural Resistance in the 1940s and 1950s," Africa Perspective, New Series, 1, 5 and 6, December 1987, 47-59, especially 50-51.
59. Chaskalson, "Rural Resistance," 51-52; Beinart and Bundy, "State Intervention," 309-310.
60. Atwell Mopeli Paulus quoted in Chaskalson, "Rural Resistance," 51.
61. Beinart and Bundy, "State Intervention," 303, quote 311. Beinart and Bundy draw on Eric R. Wolf's argument that the middle peasant, caught between town and country, may become the most revolutionary. For Wolf's views on the peasantry see, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century, New York: Harper & Row, 1969 and Peasants, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966. R. Mettler [Baruch Hirson] wrote It is time to awake!, unpublished ms., November 1957, Carter-Karis Microfilm Collection, 2:DA 13:84/9, a left-wing critique of Tabata's All-African Convention: Awakening of a People.
62. Hirson, "Rural Revolt," 3.
63. See, for instance, the Workers' Party's early polemics against Jabavu in "The Two Native Bills," Spark, 1, 3, May-June 1935, reprinted in Searchlight South Africa, 1, 2, February 1989, 82-86 as well as the later criticism of Jabavu in "Land and National Oppression," SOYA Lecture, [1954?].
64. Nosipho Majeke, "I. B. Tabata, President of the Unity Movement of South Africa for full democratic rights," unpub. ms., 1965, African Collection, South Africa, box 48, folder 861, Manuscript and Archives, Yale University Library.
65. Quoted in K. A. Jordaan, "The Land Question in South Africa," Points of View, (Being Lectures delivered to the Cape Debating Society) 1, 1, October 1959, 3-45, 35. Tabata argued that Marxists who looked only at the objective status of proletarianization in determining the class nature of the reserve population were superficial; Interview, Harare, December 1987. For leftists stressing the centrality of the objective factor, see Jordaan, "The Land Question," and K. Cairncross' reply in "Correspondence," Discussion, 1, 3, June 1951, 5.
66. See for example Ernstzen, "The last Ten Years," 11-12 and Jordaan, "The Land Question." Also, Jordaan, Interview, Harare, December 1987.
67. Interview with I. B. Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, December 1987.
68. Interview with Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, December 1987.
69. The Socialist League of Africa expressed a similar view on the relationship between rural and urban protests in "South Africa: Ten Years of the Stay-at-Home," International Socialism, 5, Summer 1961, 5-14, 11.
70. Govan Mbeki, South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1964, 130-131.
71. Interview with Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, December 1987. However, Tom Lodge notes, personal communication, August 13, 1990, that in addition to PAC's

- migrant labor base, it also had an urban constituency, suggesting that the protest was not entirely motivated by rural unrest.
72. Interview with Tabata and Gool, Harare, December 1987; and Mbeki, The Peasants' Revolt, 128.
 73. Anderson Khumani Ganyile, "Notes on the Pondo struggle against Bantu Authorities. The back-ground to resistance," typed ms., 38 p., n.d., Ruth First Collection, 9.1.2: Resource Material: South Africa: Bantustans, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London. Mbeki mentions Ganyile in The Peasants' Revolt, 123.
 74. I. B. Tabata, "The Rehabilitation Scheme: 'A New Fraud,'" Cape Town: All African Convention (W.P.), 1945, author's possession.
 75. Ganyile, "Notes on the Pondo struggle," 23-24.
 76. Letter from Chairman of the Libode Planning Committee to the Chief Magistrate, Umtata, 8 February 1947, author's possession.
 77. Majeke, "I. B. Tabata," 3 and Minutes of the All-African Convention, 1948, 6.
 78. Interview with Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, December 1987.
 79. Beinart and Bundy, "State Intervention," 301-302; quote from Minutes of the Non-European Unity Movement Annual Conference, December 1948, 302. See also the Minutes of the All African Convention, 1948, 14-15. The Bunga or general council was an advisory body in the Transkei with appointed and elected members.
 80. Tabata discusses the role of CATA and TLSA intellectuals in The Boycott as a Weapon, 21-23.
 81. Quoted in Patrick Ncube's preface to I. B. Tabata, Education for Barbarism: Bantu (Apartheid) Education in South Africa, [South Africa: Prometheus, 1959] Lusaka and London: UMSA, 1980, 6. Tabata's book provides an excellent socioeconomic analysis of Bantu Education.
 82. The Teachers' Vision, XXII, 1 and 2, October-December 1954, quoted in Jonathan Hyslop, "CATA and CATU: The Politics of African Teachers' Organisations in the Cape, 1948-1968," unpublished ms., 1987, 14. Hyslop's paper is an informative and stimulating discussion of the role of African teachers' organizations in the liberatory struggle.
 83. Jonathan Hyslop, "Teachers and Trade Unions," South African Labour Bulletin, 11, 6, June-July 1986, 90-97, especially 92-93 and Hyslop, "CATA and CATU," 11-12. W. M. Tsotsi, "The Path of Liberation: Being the Presidential Address delivered at the Conference of the All African Convention held in December 1953," Lady Frere: SOYA, 1953 briefly mentions CATA on p. 13.
 84. Nelson Mandela, "Transkei Re-visited," Liberation, 16, February 1956, 16-18.
 85. Hyslop, "CATA and CATU," 12-13.
 86. "A Tribute to Leo Sihlale," New Unity Movement Bulletin, 3, 2, July 1989, 16; Hyslop, "CATA and CATU," 16 and 22ff.
 87. Mandela, "Transkei Re-visited," 16-18.
 88. Hyslop, "CATA and CATU," 31-33.
 89. Hyslop, "CATA and CATU," 15.
 90. Hyslop, "CATA and CATU," 36.
 91. Beinart and Bundy, "State Intervention," 304.
 92. Mbeki, The Peasants' War, 34, 40-42; Beinart and Bundy, "State Intervention," 305-6.
 93. Hammond-Tooke quoted in Beinart and Bundy, "State Intervention," 307.
 94. Mbeki, The Peasants' Revolt, 132.
 95. Interview with Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, December 1987; Mbeki, The Peasants' Revolt, 111-122.

96. Interview with Tabata and Jane Gool, Harare, December 1987.
97. Interview with Allie Fataar, Harare, December 1987.
98. Interview with R. O. Dudley, Cape Town, April 1988.
99. For an official AAC perspective see AAC (W.P.), "The wreckers of unity at work: who is the National Anti-C.A.D. committee?," Cape Town, June 1959; for the rival point of view see R. E. Viljoen, S. A. Jayiya, C. M. Kobus and B. M. Kies, "What has happened in the Non-European Unity Movement?," Cape Town, February 1959. For a brief overview of the split see Howard Lawrence, "What is happening in Unity Movement?," Contact 2, 7, week ending 4 April 1959, 3.
100. Tom Lodge, "Charters from the past: the African National Congress and its historiographical traditions," Radical History Review, 46/7, 1990, 161-188. Mphahlele quoted 168.
101. Kuper, An African Bourgeoisie, 155-162.
102. Information on SOYA is drawn largely from interviews with Kenny Abrahams in Windhoek and Neville Alexander in Cape Town, February 1988, from The Soyan and from the Minutes of the All African Convention Conference, Queenstown, December 1954.
103. Minutes of the All African Convention, Queenstown, December 1954, 34-35.
104. Hyslop mentions SOYA's work in the Transkei and Eastern Cape in "CATA and CATU," 12 and 35.
105. Interview with Alexander, Cape Town, February 1988.
106. Interview with Kwedi Mkalipi, Cape Town, March 1988 and Minutes of the All African Convention Conference, Queenstown, December 1954, 35.
107. Roseinnes Phahle, "Mass Politics for the NEUM in Johannesburg?," unpublished paper, 1987, 1; Minutes of the All African Convention Conference, Queenstown, December 1954, 32-33 and Lodge, Black Politics, 87 and 206-207.
108. National Executive Committee, Society of Young Africa, "The Maritzburg Conferences and the Tasks of the Immediate Future," 31 May 1959, 22.
109. For the full Ten Point Programme see appendix.
110. "Land and National Oppression," SOYA lecture, [1954?]; also see W. M. Tsotsi, Address on the National Situation, Anti-CAD Conference, 1954, both in author's possession.
111. SOYA, "The Maritzburg Conferences," 5-6.
112. SOYA, "The Maritzburg Conferences," 8.
113. SOYA, "The Maritzburg Conferences," pp. 28 and 4 respectively.
114. Interview with Dawood Parker, Cape Town, November 1987.
115. Jaffe, "The First Ten Years," 24.
116. Jaffe, "The First Ten Years," 25.
117. Jaffe uses "we" but it is unclear whether he means the NEUM, the Anti-CAD or the fellowships.
118. Jaffe, "The First Ten Years," 26.
119. Jordaan, Interview, Harare, December 1987.
120. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 32-33, quote p. 33.
121. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 34-36.
122. Jordaan, "The Land Question," 37-38.
123. Interview with Neville Alexander, Cape Town, July 1987; discussion with Alexander and Dawood Parker, November 1987.
124. Jaffe, "The First Ten Years," 25.
125. For two different perspectives see "Presidential Address to the All-African Convention Conference, Edendale, 14th-16th December, 1958," Lady Frere: SOYA, which criticizes the left-wing tendencies, and the Witwatersrand SOYA's

description of the 1958 conferences in SOYA, "The Maritzburg Conferences."

126. Information on the Progressive Forum is drawn from interviews with Baruch Hirson, London, April 1987, Ismail Mohamed, Johannesburg, May 1988 and Seymour Papert, Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 1988 and from Minutes of the All African Convention Conference, Queenstown, December 1954, 30-33.

127. Interviews with Hirson, Papert, Fataar and Alexander.

128. Interview with Seymour Papert, Cambridge, December 1988 and Minutes of the All African Convention Conference, Queenstown, December 1954, 30-31. On Communist influence in Natal see Iain Edwards, "Recollections: the Communist Party and Worker Militancy in Durban, Early 1940s," South African Labour Bulletin, 11, 4, February-March 1986, 65-84; Vishnu Padayachee, Shahid Vawda and Paul Tichmann, "Trade Unions and the Communist Party in Durban in the 1940's: A Reply to Iain Edwards," South African Labour Bulletin, 11, 7, August 1986, 50-66.

129. Interview with Ismail Mohamed, Johannesburg, May 1988.

130. On the Alexandra Bus Boycott see Lodge, Black Politics, 155-171. On the Swart/Mokanyane faction, Lodge, Black Politics, 159-160 and Hirson, Interview, London, April 1987. Swart's influence in SOYA and his criticism of the 10 Point Programme is discussed in Minutes of the All African Convention Conference, Queenstown, December 1954, 32.

131. African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (A.P.D.U.S.A.), Draft Constitution, n.d., 4 pages, especially 1; see also APDUSA Central Executive, "The Birth of the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa," London, March 1961 and No Sizwe, One Azania, One Nation, 114. Interview with Tabata and Gool, Harare, December 1987. Ilizwi Lesizwe (The Voice of the Nation), which began in 1961, devoted itself to Apdusa and the AAC. Vol. 1, no. 1 discusses the formation of Apdusa and the remnants of the Anti-CAD and Teachers' League of South Africa, which remained outside of Apdusa.

132. Interview with John Samuels, Cape Town, February 1988.

133. Interviews with Alexander and Mohamed. Compare with Ben Turok's impressions of the political atmosphere immediately prior to the early sabotage efforts in "South Africa: the Search for a Strategy," Ralph Miliband and John Saville, eds., The Socialist Register 1973, London: Merlin, 1974, 341-376, especially 359.

CONCLUSION

This study has looked at the development of South Africa's socialist movement and its relationship to the country's working class and national democratic struggles through an historical, class analytic approach. The conclusion highlights some of the findings of this analysis. As a social movement, socialism in South Africa is characterized by structural, temporal and political continuity.¹ It displays structural continuity despite a lack of organizational continuity. That is, its component groups show a structure of interactions, including mergers, offshoots of new groups from older ones, movements of individuals between groups and criticism of alternative socialist programs. It is also characterized by temporal continuity. While the life-span of particular socialist organizations has varied, the movement as a whole has engaged in continuous activities to change the social order since the early twentieth century. Through its theoretical and practical work it demonstrates its political intent to change the social order, setting itself in opposition to the government and state. Despite the political rigidity of its Trotskyist/Communist divide, its component groups share both a broadly similar analysis and critique of existing social conditions and social goals which distinguish it from other anti-apartheid organizations.

While international in origins, through its theory and practice the socialist movement has become an indigenous, permanent part of South African society. Its social roots lay both in the English-speaking

white labor movement and in the influx of radical, East European exiles in the early twentieth century. But over the decades, South Africa's socialist movement has slowly, unevenly and sometimes erratically responded to the growth of the black proletariat and consciously sought to address itself to both working class and national democratic aspirations. Ultimately, the development and persistence of socialism as a social movement in South Africa, its ability to root into in South African soil, stems from the contradictions of racial capitalism.

Objective constraints made the development of the socialist movement tortuous. The racial division of the working class reinforced color consciousness, linking up with caste and national consciousness. Uneven proletarianization and the perpetuation of a migrant labor system reinforced communal rather than class ties amongst black and white. While the South African population was becoming more proletarianized and urbanized over the decades, most Africans were simultaneously socially atomized, kept in a constant state of flux from the migrant labor and influx control systems. Government policies shored up color-caste divisions, especially after 1948, even as they were being eroded by socioeconomic development. This fragmentation made even the development of a national consciousness, as opposed to caste or color consciousness, a difficult project. The socialist movement, with a tiny number of cadres, had to build a social base from scratch in these difficult circumstances.

Nonetheless, despite the constraints facing working class mobilization on a socialist program in this fragmented society,

nationalist mobilization has faced the opposite problem: nationalist organizations and efforts at black unity have been repeatedly beset by class tensions. That alone indicates the salience of socialism in South Africa.

The pattern of socialist thought and activity in the face of these constraints shows a number of commonalities spanning both Communist and Trotskyist tendencies. Reflecting the intensity of South Africa's social problems, a feeling of permanent crisis permeates the society; as Ben Turok writes, "[t]his sense that an eruption is around the corner has never been far away." In these circumstances, socialist thought has been characterized by a tendency to emphasize the weight of objective conditions, in the belief, Turok continues, that "...the system itself generates an impulse for a total solution."² Both Trotskyists and Communists have similarly erred in expecting potential to become reality: that the intensity of oppression would inexorably push the majority towards revolutionary consciousness. Such optimism has not been borne out.

One such argument, which held widespread currency from the 1930s through '50s, assigned a direct link to class composition and the political direction of a movement. In this view, the overwhelmingly working class and landless peasant composition of the oppressed was expected to push those class interests to the fore in the struggle for democracy and national liberation. This hypothesis was first tested in the formation of the All-African Convention in the 1930s, where it proved inadequate to explain class relationships in political

organizations. Far from a case where a militant working class constituency pushed the leadership to the left, the rank and file dropped out in the late '30s as conservatives captured the organization, thwarting the initial mass movement against the Hertzog Bills. Working class protest during the Second World War often took place independently and outside of established political organizations, impelling political organizations, whose leadership was increasingly aware of the need for a working class social base, to follow and court this mass support.

Ironically, this argument came to the fore again in the 1950s when socialist theoreticians like Communist Jack Simons and then-Trotskyist Kenny Jordaan emphasized the role of objective conditions like the rapid war-time growth of the black proletariat in pushing the national democratic movement towards socialism, at the very same time that socialist groupings, an important element in the subjective side of the equation, had either disbanded or were completely underground. Some socialists opposed this essentially abdicationist move: the Communist Lionel Forman, for instance, believed that his Party's decision to disband would create a theoretical vacuum and impede the development of strategy.³

Alongside this class composition argument, another position was frequently voiced which also gave analytic predominance to objective conditions. This position held that social revolution was not only a question of class composition and working class struggle, but that the nature of the struggle flowing from South Africa's specific conditions gave the national democratic movement itself a revolutionary thrust.

Capitalism had developed by the denial of democratic rights, through national oppression and social fragmentation; hence, a national democratic struggle was a blow at capitalism. Variations of this position were elaborated both by Lionel Forman and M. N. Averbach of the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa (FIOSA).

The arguments which expected a socialist movement or revolution to flow directly from objective conditions have proved inadequate. Objective conditions alone have neither put the working class at the helm of the national democratic movement, strengthened working class consciousness nor built a socialist movement to the degree socialists anticipated. The discrepancy between expectations and historical development calls into question the approaches of South African socialists during these decades.

The assumptions and arguments of South African socialists were flawed in several respects. Their assumptions about objective conditions were often distorted when compared to actual socioeconomic conditions or tendencies. This is most striking in their evaluations of white labor which, as Turok has noted, is far more than a privileged stratum; it has a stake in racial domination through the direct supervision and control of blacks.⁴ But socialists often optimistically underestimated the degree and significance of white labor's political incorporation into the racial capitalist system. Thus, in the 1930s Communists and some Trotskyists trailed after the white working class in the hope that economic hardship and rapid proletarianization would translate into a working class consciousness that embraced black

workers. Even in the 1940s, the CPSA vacillated ambiguously between black and white.

Typically, socialists focussed on some aspects of South African political economy to the neglect of others. For example, many socialists presciently foresaw the development of a powerful, black proletariat, but they assumed that the growth of this class meant that working class and trade union struggles in the cities would overshadow movements in the countryside. While the Communist League of South Africa and its successor, the FIOSA, gave virtually all their theoretical attention to the urban proletariat, the Workers' Party of South Africa (WPSA) looked to a peasantry and neglected urban workers. The bifurcation between town and country was seen in the Communist Party as well. With the brief exception of the Native Republic period, Communists have typically stressed urban trade union work; a minority, like Govan Mbeki and Forman, drew attention to the land question. If the articulation of class and color has proved problematic to South African socialists, so has the relationship between town and country. This study has, hopefully, demonstrated that the relationship between town and country is a mutually dependent one and that the land question, as the WPSA strove to demonstrate, bears serious thought. Neither Trotskyist or Communist tendency developed a comprehensive picture of the relationship between town and country which integrated both sides of the equation: the relationship between urban proletariat and migrant labor, on the one hand, and migrant labor's role in the reserve system, on the other.

Despite these commonalities, Communists and Trotskyists diverged fundamentally on questions of strategy and method. The high profile of the Comintern from the late 1920s laid the basis for the Communist-Trotskyist split. But the political significance of this schism became more apparent in the 1935-45 period. This was indeed a pivotal period for the socialist movement, as the tendencies began to integrate themselves into different national democratic organizations, employing radically different methods of struggle. The Communist Party moved towards a long-term alliance with the African National Congress (ANC) and other Congress organizations, using a variety of tactics to promote national liberation as a first stage towards socialism. The majority of Trotskyists integrated themselves into the leadership of the All-African Convention (AAC) and formed the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), viewing the democratic struggle, especially the right to land, as the pivot of a permanent revolution, and basing their method of struggle on the principle of non-collaboration.

The constant feature of Communist policy and practice was its repeated and abrupt shift in response to Comintern directives. But the implementation of Comintern policy cannot be equated with strategy, a plan or method to achieve long-term political goals; nor can strategy be reduced to a sum of tactics.⁵ The absence of an overarching strategy often reduced Communist practice to a trial and error response to events, what Turok has described as "...a great deal of sheer pragmatism, trying here and then there to see where a chink in the white armour will reveal itself."⁶

The Comintern's influence on South African Communist practice began in a sustained manner in the late 1920s. Then, with the adoption of the Native Republic thesis, the CPSA reoriented itself away from white labor towards the national democratic struggle, which was then understood as a predominantly peasant movement supported by the urban working class. In the early '30s, as the ANC moved to the right, the Party followed the Comintern in a sharp left turn. Anticipating that black and white workers and unemployed had to be mobilized for a revolution that was right around the corner, the Party ceased work in popular organizations, which it now labelled bourgeois reformist. The adoption of the People's Front policy strengthened the position of those Communists who had criticized the ultra-left phase which left the Party depleted and isolated. Initially, the reorientation towards popular work coincided with the rising black united front movement. But transplanted onto South African soil, the emphasis on an anti-fascist alliance reinforced the Party's long-term, even if sometimes eclipsed, relationship with white labor. In the late '30s the Party's attempt to retain white support and prevent its alignment with fascism led it to neglect practical work in black organizations. In the post-war era the Party built up its relationship with the Congress movement. But its practice was typified by an ad hoc tactical approach which underlay the tensions culminating in the Africanist split, and whose limitations at social mobilization were evident by the late '50s: the failure of open mass demonstrations to achieve democratic reforms and the intense repression they met, meant that popular support for Congress initiatives

declined markedly in urban townships at the end of that decade.⁷

The impact of Comintern, after its dissolution, Soviet policy typically left the Party out of sync with South African realities. The People's Front policy bifurcated Communist practice along color lines. With the Soviet Union's entry into World War II, South African Communists abruptly changed their anti-war stance to one of working class moderation and support for the war effort just as black workers were reaching a peak of militancy. In the 1940s and '50s the CPSA's efforts to use segregated electoral campaigns and political institutions as propagandistic platforms went against the widespread rejection of these institutions. Moreover, the internal struggles and expulsions which typified the Party's frequent changes of direction left it periodically depleted and impeded its effectiveness.

Within the framework of the Party's close relationship with the international Communist movement, two trends emerge. While the Party showed relative continuity from the 1920s through the '50s in its emphasis on trade union work amongst black and white labor, its position on the land and national questions and its relationship to the national democratic struggle vacillated, as Forman pointed out.

Its trade union orientation and urban focus reflected its heritage as an organizational offshoot of white labor's left wing, as well as a Eurocentric view which equated the working class with organized labor and saw working class unity across the color line as a precondition for socialism. This heritage was carried forward over the decades by the practical work of Communist stalwarts amongst white workers. In a

society where most blacks remained in the countryside the Party's trade union orientation lent itself to a disproportionate emphasis on white labor. In the 1930s, the movement of Afrikaners from farms to factory work coincided with the belief that economic deprivation would force white labor to align with blacks against capital and helped revive the notion of white labor's revolutionary potential. The People's Front reinforced the predisposition towards white labor: as most whites refused to associate with blacks the anti-fascist alliance was effectively a white movement divorced from the movement for black democratic rights. Even in the apartheid era the Party devoted many resources to the illusory goal of winning over a section of the white electorate.

Within the Party there were conflicting views as to the nature and revolutionary potential of the national democratic struggle and its relationship to the socialist movement. Under the influence of the Soviet Africanist I. I. Potekhin, some Communists thought that the national movement was potentially revolutionary if placed under the hegemony of the working class. As the Simonses write: "...where class divisions tend to coincide with antagonistic national or colour groups, the class struggle merges with the movement for national liberation."⁸ In a minority, Forman believed that the national movement to be intrinsically anti-capitalist due to the fact that the main point of national oppression was not to stifle a black bourgeoisie but to control the working class. The Party underestimated revolutionary potential of the national movement, Forman thought, indicated by its periodic

distancing from national organizations and by its tendency to underestimate the contributions of nationalism to black political mobilization. Most South Africans lived on the land and were not proletarians proper who could be mobilized through class slogans, he maintained, and in this respect the land and national questions converged. The challenge, he argued was to unite rural blacks with the urban proletariat into a national movement under Communist leadership.⁹

The Trotskyist tendency had a different pattern of development. In its formative years in the 1930s, its main concern was mapping out a program which distinguished it from the Communist Party and served as a guide to social mobilization. But despite broad political consensus the Trotskyist tendency was organizationally fragmented and dispersed. This was reflected in its pattern of activities. In the late '30s the Workers' Party aimed at a working class audience, but its activities centered in propaganda, both cultural and directly political. Despite their similar concern with propaganda, the approach of the Communist League of South Africa and the Johannesburg-based groups was more agitational, and they focussed their attention on trade union organizing. The decision of the Workers' Party to go underground in fear of a possible fascist tide further weakened the movement. Trotskyism's organizational fragmentation coincided with a lack of coordination and led to competition amongst the various factions in Cape Town and Johannesburg which impeded their efforts during the war to provide a counter to Communist influence in black trade unions.

The post-war era was the heyday of nationalism, which took on a

new vibrancy as socialism went into eclipse. This eclipse was partly due to political repression, exemplified by the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950. Yet the disbanding of all of socialist groups suggests an underlying, internal lack of direction. With the disbanding of the Workers' International League in Johannesburg there was no direct organized Trotskyist influence left on the Witwatersrand, and from this point the Trotskyist tendency became, effectively, a Western Cape movement. Yet even there, the FIOSA ceased operating as a distinct grouping in the late '40s at the suggestion of the Trotskyist movement overseas that it merge with the Workers' Party, then working underground in the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM).

In the apartheid era the influence of Trotskyism was felt chiefly through the activities of the NEUM. Despite its earlier organizational fragmentation, and in contrast to the discontinuities of Communist policy, Trotskyist policy has shown a continuity in its attempt to promote a non-collaborationist approach to political struggle. Non-collaboration was formulated in the late '30s, while Communists were trying to build their People's Front. It was conceived as a means to promote working class independence in a color-caste stratified capitalist society where the overwhelming majority of blacks were workers, migrant laborers or small-scale rural cultivators. These Trotskyists saw a strong, united black democratic movement as a precondition for winning the white working class from its alliance with the bourgeoisie and building a united working class movement.

The essence of non-collaboration and its tactical application, the

political boycott, was that blacks refuse to operate the inferior, racial structures which the government devised to keep them segregated and politically rightless. In practicing non-collaboration blacks were simultaneously fighting the slave mentality fostered by unequal social conditions and demonstrating their potential to challenge state authority by rejecting its institutions. In this latter sense, the boycott set the stage for dual power, and hence was potentially revolutionary. In other words, the rejection of the state's institutions was a precondition for establishing people's institutions which would rival and eventually overthrow those of the state. Indeed, in the 1930s those in the Workers' Party envisioned the AAC as an alternative Parliament.¹⁰

Yet the practice of non-collaboration became increasingly problematic and subject to criticism in the 1940s and '50s. Despite its original intent to promote the working class struggle, non-collaboration was not usually practiced in a manner which highlighted black working class interests. Most of the NEUM's practice of non-collaboration in urban areas was limited to the periodic boycott of state-initiated racial institutions and structures. The boycott was a highly effective means of organizing and mobilizing the widespread resentment at the imposition of racial structures and procedures. Through the boycott, the NEUM capitalized on the periodic popular upsurges against racial discrimination and segregation. But once these mass upsurges died down and an election or a segregated council had been effectively boycotted, the NEUM rarely offered alternative methods of non-collaborationist

struggle or dealt with alternative issues. This left other arenas of struggle, like trade unions, to the Communists.

There was a rationale in this approach. The underground Workers' Party hoped to popularize the need to link local issues and bread-and-butter struggles to broader political demands and principles, to connect, as Trotsky had suggested, the land question to the national struggle. However, they underestimated the need to fight day to day struggles for reforms as a means to demonstrate their principles in practice. This aloofness to active struggle culminated in the refusal to participate in popular struggles unless the masses first accepted the political demands and principles of their Ten-Point Programme. Instead of integrating the struggle for working class reforms into a revolutionary framework, they too often neglected them. While the boycott addressed the racial basis of state power, it did not address the relationship between the racial system and capitalist exploitation. The NEUM did not employ other forms of non-collaboration like strikes, which could have highlighted this relationship.¹¹ Consequently, it often abstained from popular township struggles in which the ANC had a high profile, leading, in the late 1950s, to internal tensions and pressures for a more activist and explicitly socialist profile.¹²

Non-collaboration was a basis for developing strategy and tactics, but not a substitute for them. Although Trotskyists developed and promoted a transitional program and made significant contributions in the field of political education, which they saw as a catalyst for developing popular consciousness, they did not elaborate a strategy and

tactics which could flesh out and give movement to their principles. This impeded them from connecting their significant theoretical insights with practical work on a systematic basis and lay behind their oft-noted practical paralysis. In this sense, South Africa Trotskyism was, indeed, elliptical.

In South Africa, the few socialist attempts to engage in critical self-evaluation of past policies and practice were sporadic, isolated efforts rather than systematic, integrated parts of political practice.¹³ The lack of a continuous written tradition on the left reflects the general dearth of writings on socialist politics in South Africa. But it also indicates the society's pervasive repression. Socialists, often black, were denied access to formal education and subject to continual state harassment which led them to bury and even burn their own books and documents. Now, to examine critically their own history and to develop a theory, strategy and practice which builds on their past contributions to the national democratic struggle is the greatest challenge facing South African socialists.

1. For various approaches to and typologies of social movements, see Rudolf Heberle and Joseph R. Gusfield, "Social Movements," in David L. Sills, ed., International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Macmillan Company and Free Press, 1968, 14, 438-452; Lewis M. Killian, "Social Movements," in Robert E. L. Faris, ed., Handbook of Modern Sociology, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964, 426-455; Anthony Oberschall, Social Conflict and Social Movements, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973, especially 1-29; Louise Tilly and Charles Tilly, eds., Class Conflict and Collective Action, Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981, especially "Introduction" and "Conclusion;" George Rude, Ideology and Popular Protest, New York: Pantheon, 1980 and George Rude, Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century: Studies in Popular Protest, New York: Viking, 1971, 17-34.
2. Ben Turok, "South Africa: the Search for a Strategy," in Ralph Miliband and John Saville, eds., The Socialist Register 1973, London: Merlin, 1974, 341-376, quotes 372 and 368 respectively.
3. Interview with Sadie Forman, Ringmer, June 1990; for another socialist perspective on this post-war tendency of socialist groups see Baruch Hirson's letter of resignation as Secretary of the Workers' International League, 13/12/45[?], Karis and Carter Microfilm Collection, 7b:2:DW2:41.
4. Turok, "South Africa: the Search for a Strategy," 344.
5. See Bernard Brodie, "Strategy," in International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, vol. 15, New York: MacMillan, 1968, ed. by David L. Sills, 281-288, especially 281-282. Although Brodie's discussion concerns mainly military strategy, it provides useful comparative insights for the discussion of political strategy.
6. Turok, "South Africa: The Search for a Strategy," 341.
7. Turok, "South Africa: The Search for a Strategy," 352-357; H. J. and R. E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969, 622-623.
8. Simons, Class and Colour, 10.
9. Information on Lionel Forman's view of Communist strategy and practice is drawn from an interview with Sadie Forman, Ringmer, June 1990.
10. Neville Alexander, "Aspects of Non-Collaboration in the Western Cape 1943-1963," Social Dynamics, 12, 1, 1986, 1-14.
11. A. Byrnes, "The Boycott, Non-collaboration and the Black Working Class in South Arica," Azania Worker, 11/12, October 1988, 14-21 and Alexander, "Aspects of Non-Collaboration." Lenin, an early proponent of the use of political boycotts, saw the boycott as a method to prevent a popular upsurge from being diverted onto a reformist path. The use of the boycott, he argued, depends upon the state of the class struggle. Institutions are boycotted because they no longer serve working class needs. This occurs when the working class is powerful enough to create and substitute its own institutions for those of the bourgeoisie, and, in this sense, the boycott sets the stage for dual power. By contrast, when the working class struggle does not have such strength or self-confidence, then it is appropriate for them to struggle for reforms within the established institutions of the dominant class. V. I. Lenin, "Against Boycott," (1907) Collected Works, v. 13, 15-49, especially 24-25.
12. Byrnes, "The Boycott, Non-collaboration and the Black Working Class," 19-20.

13. As a comparative example of an attempt to analyze socialist strategy and practice, see George Lukacs, "Theses concerning the political and economic situation in Hungary and the tasks of the Hungarian Communist Party," [Blum Theses (Extracts)], in George Lukacs, Tactics and Ethics: Political Essays, 1919-1929, New York, Evanston: Harper & Row, 1972, 227-253. The Blum Theses examined the strategy and tactics of Hungary's Communist Party to explain the gulf between the Party's political influence and its lack of organizational growth.

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