

# New jobs, new skills, new divisions - the changing structure of SA's workforce\*

Over the last 20 years the structure of SA's workforce has changed greatly. Increasing unemployment for many workers, and more stable, skilled and better paid jobs for others, are creating new divisions in the working class. These have implications for organisation and training. DOUG HINDSON and OWEN CRANKSHAW analyse these trends, both generally and with a specific focus on the metal industry.\*\*

This article is divided into two parts. In the first we describe the changes broadly, and discuss the implications for unions, particularly in the metal industry. In the second part (see p 27) we analyse the changing structure of the workforce in more detail, using figures and graphs.

Over the last 20 years South Africa's workforce has been restructured in important ways. On the one hand, unemployment has grown massively and many workers have lost the prospect of ever

working in the formal wage sector of the economy.

On the other hand, workers who have kept their jobs, and especially unionised workers, have often gained substantially from the restructuring of employment. In the formal sectors many workers have had their skills upgraded, are more secure in their jobs and have earned rising real wages.

These changes - growing unemployment amongst some workers and more stable, skilled and better paid jobs for others - are creating new lines

of division within the working class. The racial division of labour, which characterised apartheid in the 1960s and 1970s is becoming blurred as black workers join whites in the areas of semi-skilled, routine white-collar and semi-professional work. (see box p 24)

At the same time the black working class, especially the African working class, is being split into two main groups, the employed and the unemployed. The employed black working population (African,

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Indian and coloured workers), is itself becoming increasingly stratified as growing numbers move into supervisory, routine white-collar, technical and semi-professional work.

These divisions seem set to increase over the foreseeable future. They pose a major problem - perhaps the major problem - for the democratic union movement and for the future government in South Africa.

### The metal sector

Like the rest of the manufacturing sector, there have been major changes in the structure of the workforce in the metal sector over the last twenty years.

Unskilled jobs decreased and semi-skilled, semi-professional and lower managerial jobs increased in number. The workforce in the metal industry

**W**hat do we mean by the structure of the workforce? This can be looked at from a number of different angles: skills, race, gender, economic sector. These different dimensions sometimes overlap and sometimes diverge. In South Africa in the 60s, for example, there was a strong tendency for race and skill levels to overlap. Most black workers were unskilled and most white workers were semi-skilled or skilled. Most African women were in unskilled work in the service sectors and most white women were in routine white-collar work. The structure of the workforce refers to its division in these various ways. Another way of talking about its structure is in terms of the division of labour. The workforce can be looked at in terms, for example, of its racial division of labour, its gender division of labour and so on. We will look at each of these dimensions when we turn to the metal industry. ❖

are mostly men. Whites are employed in jobs from semi-skilled work upwards. African workers are concentrated in the lowest jobs, mainly in semi-skilled and unskilled work.

The restructuring of jobs over the last twenty years has upgraded the workforce. Africans moved mainly from unskilled to semi-skilled work. Whites moved from semi-skilled to skilled artisanal,

**I**n the discussion and tables that follow, we make reference to eleven different occupational groups. The definitions of these groups are as follows:

**TOP MANAGEMENT:** This category includes only the top levels of management, namely managing directors and general managers.

**MIDDLE MANAGEMENT:** Includes all levels of management between supervisors/foremen and top management.

**SUPERVISORY:** Includes supervisors and foremen only.

**PROFESSIONAL:** Includes all occupations that require a university degree.

**SEMI-PROFESSIONAL:** Includes all occupations that require a diploma (usually from technikons). Most semi-professionals are technicians, nurses and school teachers.

**ROUTINE WHITE-COLLAR:** Includes all

occupations that involve non-manual work, and yet do not require post-matric qualifications. Most routine non-manual workers are clerks, cashiers, counter assistants and general salespeople.

**POLICING:** Includes those occupations (not elsewhere classified) that are directly engaged in the enforcement of law and order and national security. For example the police and defence force, prison warders, firemen and private detectives/security officials.

**MENIAL:** Includes non-manual, yet relatively unskilled occupations in the service sector such as porters, cleaners, waiters etc.

**SKILLED (ARTISANS):** Includes all artisans and apprentices.

**SEMI-SKILLED:** Includes all machine operators and motor vehicle drivers.

**UNSKILLED:** Includes the occupation of 'labourer' in the Manpower Surveys. ❖

supervisory, semi-professional and managerial work.

### Training needs for the future: some tentative thoughts

If the trends we have identified in the metal industry continue, it is clear where the greatest needs are for future training of metal workers. The biggest change over the last twenty years has been the upgrading of unskilled African workers, but this process is far from complete.

There are still nearly 40 000 unskilled African workers in the industry who would benefit from a training programme. Much of this training takes place within the enterprise or industry rather than in separate training institutions, so the unions are in a good position to play a part in the developing and running training courses. In fact they have already taken steps to increase their role in this arena.

There is also enormous scope for participation of African workers in skilled artisanal work. In the case of apprenticeship there is a long history of white union involvement. This is an arena the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) will now have to enter as its members seek improved training opportunities and greater control over apprenticeship. Here the training takes place in technical colleges which are autonomous from the industry and under direct government control. A struggle lies ahead to transform both the racial basis and the course content of



*Growing division between employed and unemployed workers*

*Chris Ledochowski/Afrapix*

these institutions.

In the case of professional and semi-professional work of various kinds, the problems of union control or influence over training are going to be more difficult since much of it takes place outside the industry in technikons and universities. In time NUMSA will need to look into these institutions and the courses they offer, with a view to reshaping them to suit the needs of workers and the industry.

Another important question is that of the deracialisation of supervisory and managerial work. At present decision-making and hence real power lies in the hands of top managers, while middle managers and supervisors put the decisions of top managers into effect.

Deracialisation of these levels has different possibilities: it could lead to co-optation of blacks in managerial positions or it could lead to changing the relationship between management and workers in a progressive direction. Union policy and initiatives in these areas could be important in breaking down not only racial barriers but also the massive divide between the working and managerial classes.

### Some organisational implications of the changing employment structure

From its re-emergence in the early 1970s the democratic union movement concentrated most of its energy on the organisation of black unskilled



*More and more black workers have become skilled or semi-skilled operatives*

*Photo: Cedric Nunn/Afrapix*

and semi-skilled workers. The unions showed relatively little interest in the emerging new middle layers of the working population.

This was understandable given the size of the unskilled and semi-skilled strata, and the need for organisation among them. But union success in organising these strata has not been to the unambiguous advantage of the working class as a whole.

In the context of deepening economic crisis the growing power of the union movement on the shop floor has induced management to adopt the general strategy of retrenching, while upgrading and paying higher wages to a smaller but more skilled workforce. Thus, against their intentions, the power of the unions has accelerated the restructuring of the working class and deepened the division between the

relatively privileged employed workers and the impoverished unemployed workers.

The greatest challenge facing the union movement today is to adopt an approach which, while defending and advancing the gains of its membership, at the same time promotes employment opportunities for the growing masses of unemployed workers.

But our work suggests that there is a further problem that has been neglected: the emergence of stratification within the working class and the growth of new middle layers within the workforce, especially in the service, financial, commercial and state sectors. Not only have these strata grown enormously, but management relies on them both for expertise and controlling the rest of the workers.

Through its policy of upgrading and promotion management constantly draws the most skilled and able workers into the better paid positions which require greater responsibility and command greater authority in the workplace. Often such workers are drawn from union membership and especially from within the ranks of its office bearers, because the qualities needed by management are often the qualities that make for good union leadership.

The state too, has made these middle layers the focus of its attentions. Since the late 1970s the state has focused its resources and energies on the new black middle strata of the population.

But it has not succeeded in winning over the black middle strata politically; on the other

hand, management has been more successful in developing a stratum of economically advanced blacks in the workplace. This is accompanied by a growing individualistic and consumerist culture.

The unions and their membership are thus flanked by two great groups of the non-unionised: the rising middle classes and the increasing un-

employed and impoverished. There also remains a large non-unionised employed working class, mostly in the lowest paid sectors and occupations. Grave dangers lie ahead for the union movement, and indeed for all the democratic forces in South Africa, if attention is focused on one of these large social strata at the expense of the other. ❖

been collected on a sectoral basis. This is a great pity as it means we can only analyse changes sector by sector up until 1985. We expect that the trends we have identified have gone much further in the same direction over the last 5 years, but we are not in a position to show this at the moment.

### Employment: sectoral shifts

The structure of employment in an economy does not usually change fast. The changes we are looking at took place over some 20 to 30 years. During that time the South African economy passed through three main periods. From the early 1960s to the mid-1970s employment grew rapidly. From the mid-1970s to late 1970s the growth rate slowed and the economy moved through deepening recessions. This decline was interrupted by a boom between 1978 and 1982, after which the economy fell into its most serious phase of decline and employment growth became negative. Despite short economic upturns, the economy has not yet fully recovered from the deep recession of the mid-1980s.

Over the period of long term decline from the 1970s onwards, the structure of the economy began to change. Agriculture and mining became less important as a source of employment and manufacturing, commerce, finance and

## The changing structure of the workforce: 1965 - 1985

In this article we only discuss how the employed working population in the formal wage paying sectors of the economy is being restructured. We do not look at the unemployed, the informal sector or the unregistered small business sector, nor do we look at agriculture. Our discussion is restricted to manufacturing, mining, commerce, the services (government and private) and the financial sector. We begin by looking at the overall picture in these formal sectors and then we focus on the met-

al industry.

The statistical source we have used for our analysis are the Manpower Surveys.\*

These surveys were initiated by the Department of Manpower in 1965 and conducted bi-ennially until they were taken over by the Central Statistical Service in 1985.

Prior to 1985 employment was recorded for each economic sector. Since the CSS has assumed responsibility for the survey, occupational information has not

\* Our discussion is based on surveys of businesses done by the Department of Manpower every two years. These figures are not completely accurate, there are problems in the way jobs are defined in the surveys, and there are problems in the way the information is reported by business and in the coverage of the surveys. The occupational groups presented in the Manpower Survey Reports are based on occupational and sectoral criteria. Quite often the sectoral distinctions bear no relationship to occupational differences (for example, the distinction between sales, service and transport workers as well as workers in the various manufacturing sectors.) In order to overcome this, we have grouped the whole range of occupations into eleven groups, based purely on occupational criteria. Some inaccuracies will also have come in here because it is not always clear which job belongs in which occupational group. Despite all these problems, we believe the data gives us a reasonably good picture of how things have changed in broad terms over a long period of time.

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Industrial Sector	Absolute Employment Figures			
	1960	1970	1980	1985
Agriculture	1 687 486	1 447 899	1 306 442	1 179 590
Mining	614 852	680 384	836 359	743 065
Secondary	947 772	1 548 438	2 005 380	2 028 571
Tertiary	1 984 611	2 831 924	3 731 179	3 664 256
Total	5 234 721	6 508 645	7 879 360	7 615 488

Industrial Sector	Relative Percentages			
	1960	1970	1980	1985
Agriculture	32	22	17	15
Mining	12	10	11	10
Secondary	18	24	25	27
Tertiary	38	44	47	48
Total	100	100	100	100

**Table 1.**  
**The Sectoral Composition Of Employment, 1960-1985**

The agricultural sector includes forestry and fishing; the mining sector includes quarrying; the secondary sector includes manufacturing, electricity, gas and water and construction; and the tertiary sector includes commerce, finance, transport, communication and services. Agricultural employment in 1980 is estimated on the assumption that employment fell at a constant rate between 1960 and 1980 (*South African Statistics, 1986, p.7:5*). ❖

African workers declined.

So one crucial feature of the period of economic decline of the 1970s and 1980s is that whites, Indians and coloureds were not nearly as badly affected by it as Africans, taking each of these groups as a whole. Even now, when most whites are beginning to feel the economic decline, they are cushioned from its worst effects because they are employed in economic sectors which have declined the least.

services became more important (Table 1).

These changes in the different economic sectors were important in a number of ways. Firstly, sectors which shrank or grew slowly were also the ones with many unskilled African workers - especially agriculture and mining. This meant that African workers suffered most from economic decline. It also meant that at the end of the twenty years there were far fewer unskilled jobs (in relative terms) and many more semi-skilled and skilled jobs.

Economic decline and the changing sectoral structure of the economy had different effects on different racial groups within the workforce. While African unskilled workers suffered, white, Indian and coloured workers often improved their positions. The reason for this was that the economic sectors that grew fastest - such as manufacturing, commerce and services - were also sectors which

employed high proportions of whites, coloureds and Indians. The sectors that declined - especially agriculture - were ones with large proportions of Africans.

The effect of these changes on the share of the different racial groups in total employment is clear from Table 2. Between 1960 and 1985 the share of white, coloured and Indian workers in total employment increased and that of

Industrial Sector	Relative Percentages			
	1960	1970	1980	1985
	W C I A	W C I A	W C I A	W C I A
Agriculture	7 7 1 85	7 8 1 85	8 12 1 80	8 15 0 77
Mining	10 1 0 89	9 1 0 90	11 1 0 88	12 2 0 86
Secondary	31 14 4 51	25 16 5 54	25 16 5 54	25 18 5 52
Tertiary	32 10 3 55	32 10 3 56	32 19 3 55	34 12 4 51
Total	21 9 2 68	22 10 3 65	24 11 3 62	25 13 3 59

KEY: W = whites, C = coloured, I = Indians, A = Africans.

**Table 2: The Racial Composition of Employment By Sector, 1960 - 1985**

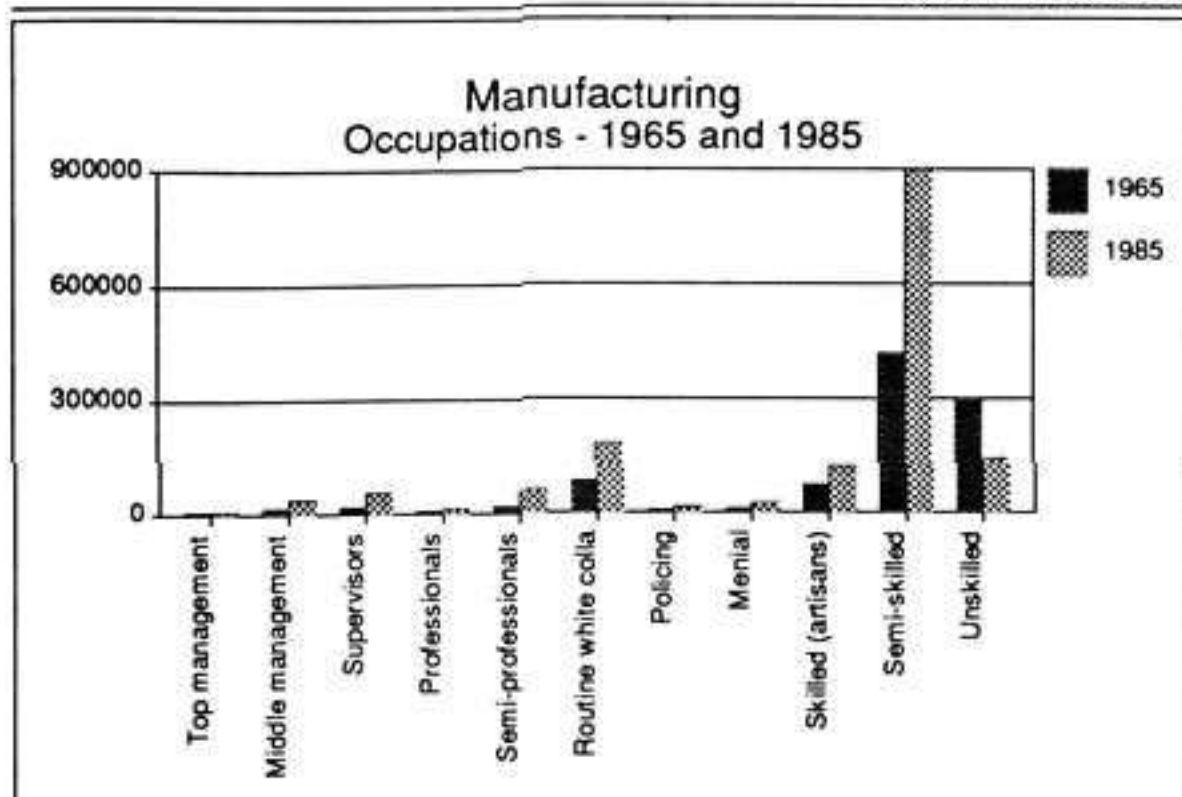


Figure 1: Occupational structure of the Manufacturing Sector, 1965 and 1985

### 3. Changes in the Occupational and Racial Division Of Labour

Another reason why white, Indian and coloured workers suffered least from economic decline was that the kinds of jobs they occupied were ones which grew in number over the period, whereas the kinds of jobs occupied by Africans were ones which declined in number or grew only slowly over the last 20 years. We can see this, especially in the case of manufacturing industry, as in Figure 1.

Unskilled jobs actually declined over the period from about 300 000 to under 200 000, while semi-skilled jobs increased from about 400 000 to over 800 000.

The groups which lost out from this development were unskilled African workers, many of whom became permanently unemployed. Other African workers gained through the growth of semi-skilled work, increasing job security and higher real wages.

Apart from semi-skilled work, other job categories that grew fast were supervisory work, routine white-collar work, and semi-pro-

fessional work of various kinds. The sections of the workforce which benefited most from this were white, coloured and Indian workers.

Despite the fact that the African workforce as a whole suffered from rising unemployment and deteriorating living standards, a sizeable number of African workers also advanced their position over the 20 years. This can be clearly seen in Figure 2 which compares the occupational structure of African men employed in

1965 and 1987 in all the formal non-agricultural sectors.

The biggest change in the occupational and racial structure was the movement of African workers from unskilled into semi-skilled jobs. In 1965 most African workers were unskilled. In 1987, most African workers (in the formal sectors) were semi-skilled.

Important increases also happened in supervisory, policing, semi-professional and routine white-collar jobs. Nevertheless, by far the greatest majority of employed Africans in 1987 were either semi-skilled or unskilled, despite these shifts in the employment structure.

One important effect of these changes is that racial and occupational divisions began to cut across each other over the 20 years. In the 1960s by far the majority of Africans, coloureds and Indians were either unskilled or semi-skilled workers and most whites were either skilled workers or above. By the mid 1980s this was no longer the case. Each racial group has become increasingly stratified occupationally.

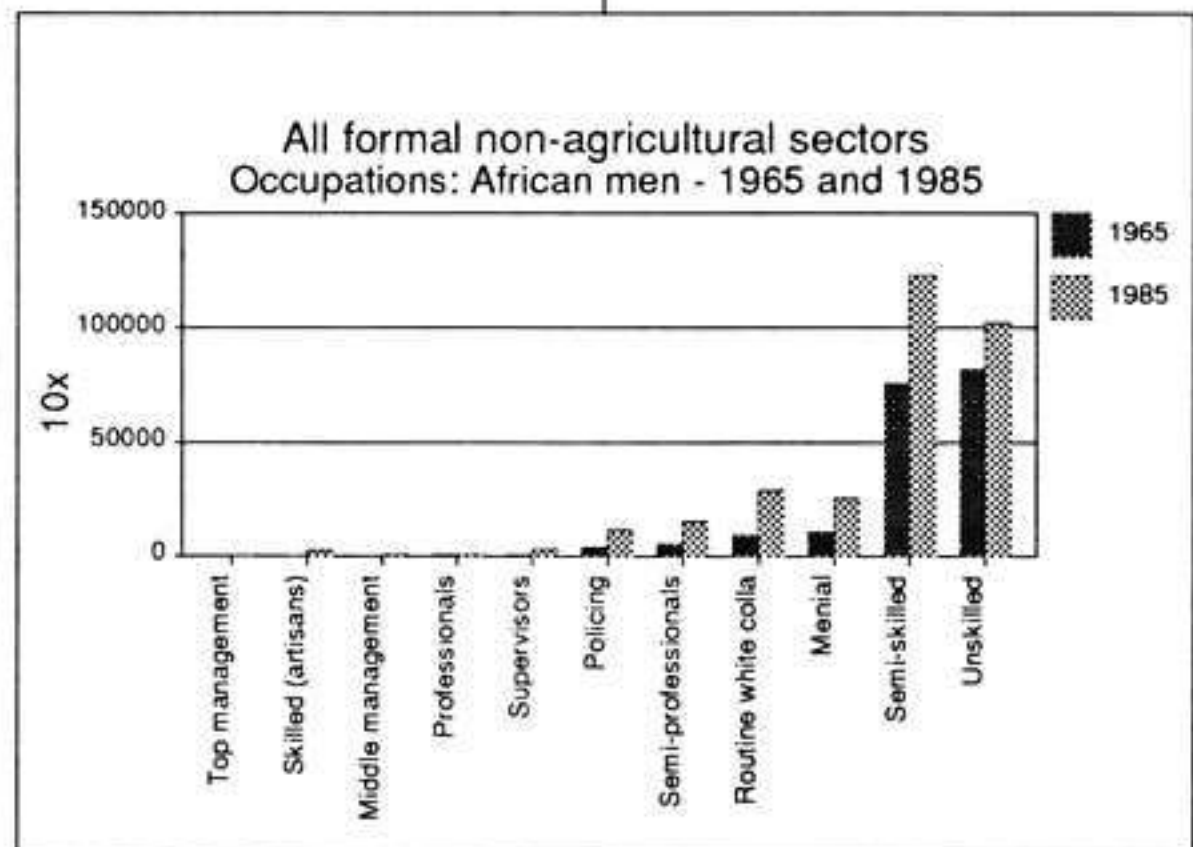


Figure 2: Occupational Distribution of African Men in all Formal Non-agricultural Sectors, 1965 and 1985

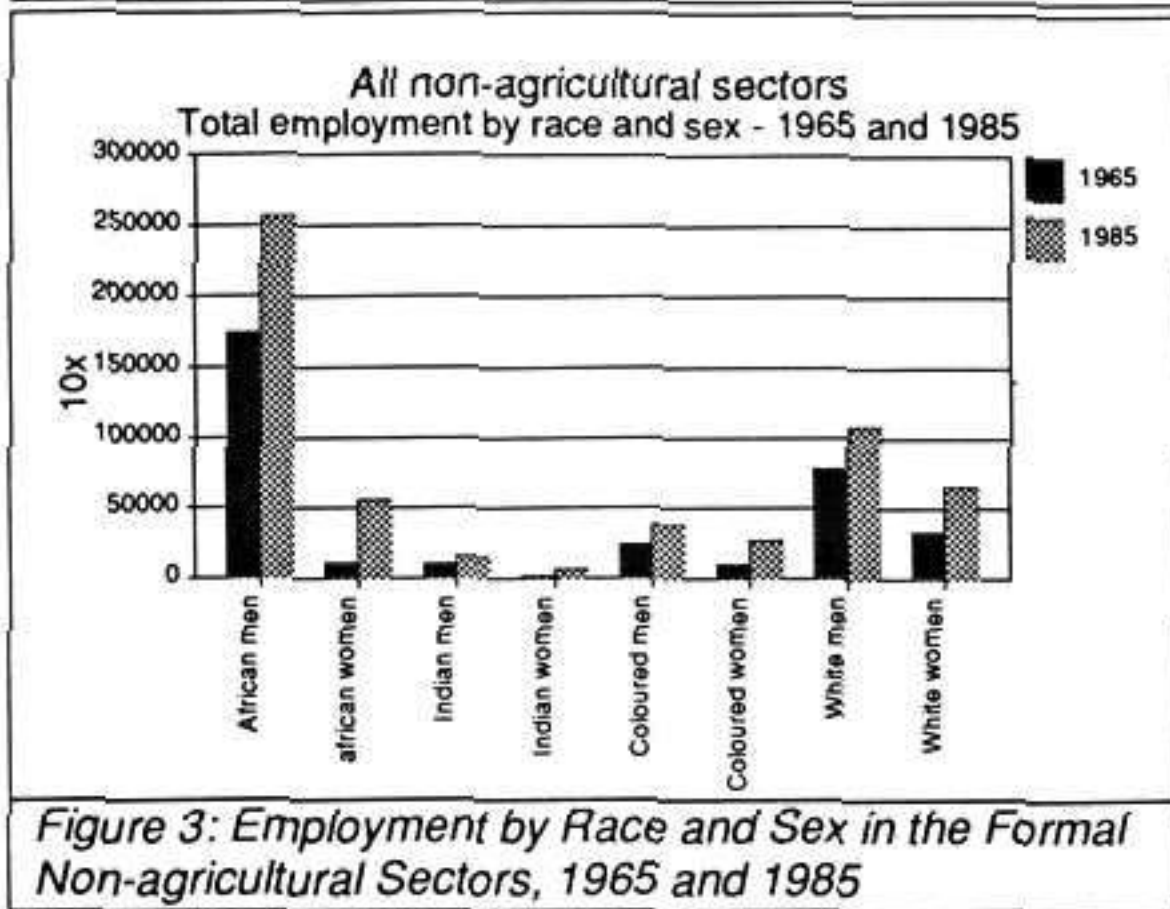


Figure 3: Employment by Race and Sex in the Formal Non-agricultural Sectors, 1965 and 1985

In the case of African workers the big division is between the employed and unemployed, though important differences are emerging between semi-skilled workers and unskilled workers.

Differences are also emerging between unionised and non-unionised workers, though our figures cannot show this. Whites are spread between semi-skilled work and managerial positions. Coloured and Indian workers are mainly in the middle levels of the occupational structure from semi-skilled to semi-professional jobs.

All this has meant that racial mixing in the workplace has happened mainly in the middle level jobs. At the lowest levels (unskilled, menial and semi-skilled occupations) there are few whites and at the upper levels (management and professional occupations) there are few blacks.

#### 4. The Sexual Structure Of The Workforce

One of the greatest changes that has taken place in the South African economy over the last twenty years has been the increase in the number of women in formal

sector employment. Figure 3 shows this quite clearly.

For all racial groups the rate of growth in the number of women far exceeded that of men. African women entered the workforce at the fastest rate, but the proportion of African women who are employed, compared to those who are not employed, is the lowest. This is because their employment growth took place from a very low starting point. On the other hand a higher proportion of white and coloured women have formal jobs.

#### 5. Changes in the Occupational and Racial Structure of the Metal Industry

What has been happening in the metal industry? Our study covers the three main subsectors of the industry: basic metals, metal products and machinery. The general patterns here are similar to the rest of the manufacturing sector, but there are also some special features.

The occupational structure of the metal industries changed systematically over the period from 1965 to 1985 (Figure 4).

Semi-skilled work grew enormously, skilled work (artisanal) grew relatively slowly and unskilled work actually declined in absolute and relative terms over the period. There was also very rapid growth in semi-professional, supervisory and routine white-collar work.

In racial terms the metal industry is starkly divided. It is an industry largely of African men and white men. This is clear from Figure 5. Of the total workforce of some 303 000 in 1985, 55% were African men and nearly 30% were

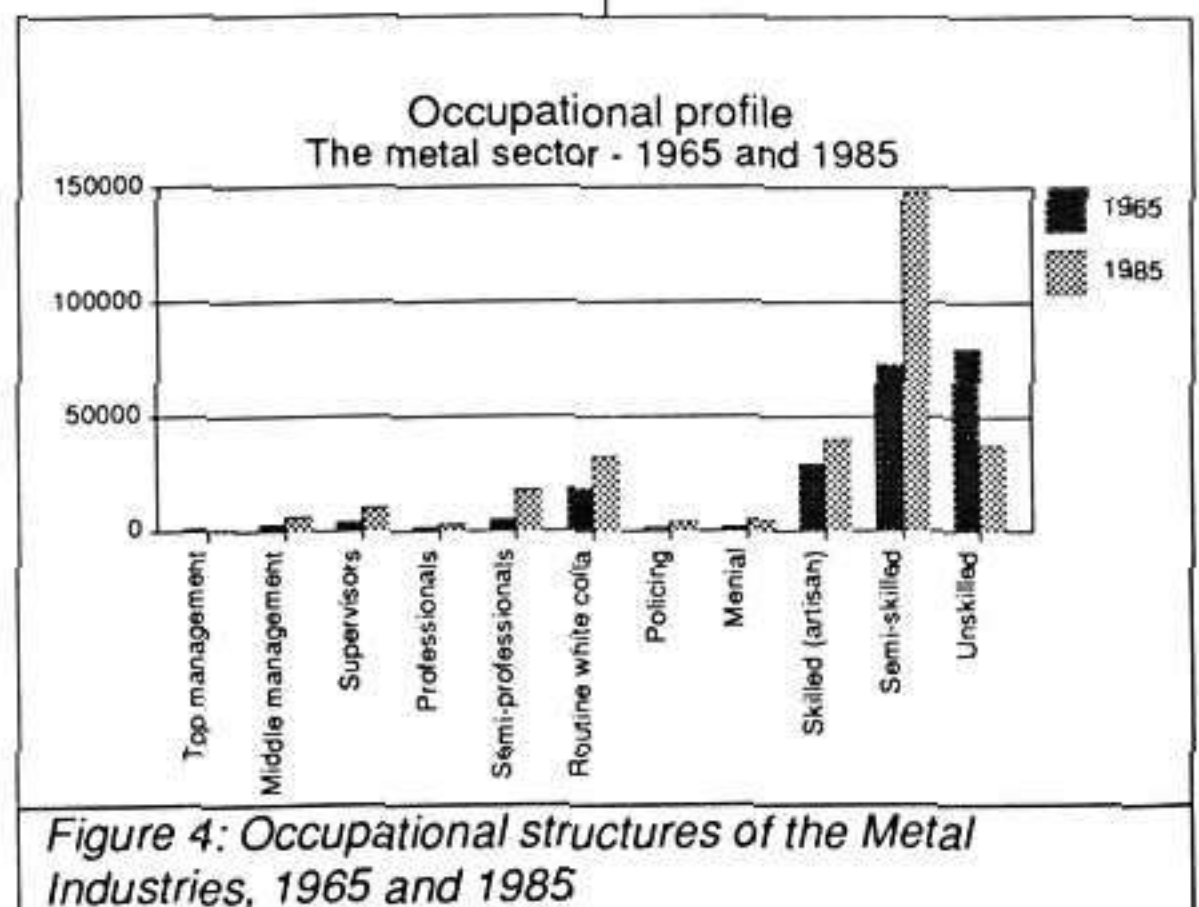


Figure 4: Occupational structures of the Metal Industries, 1965 and 1985



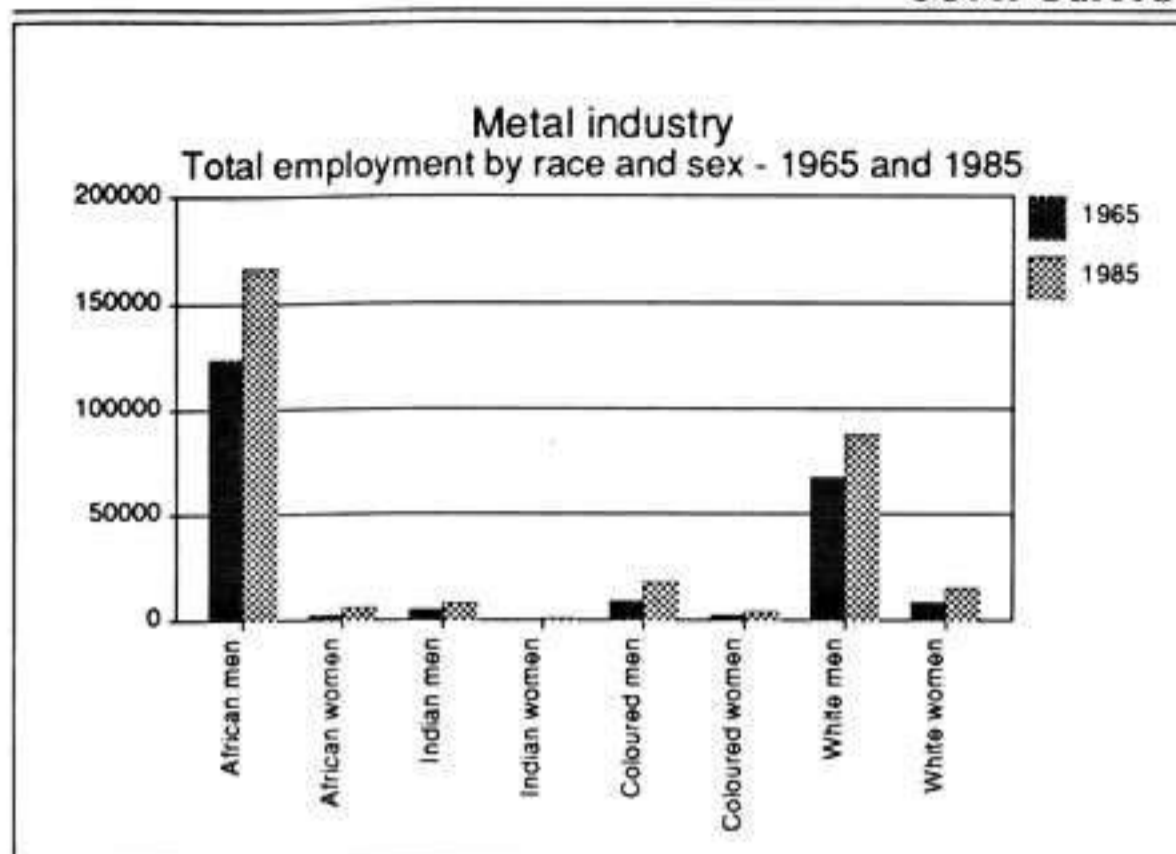


Figure 5: The Racial and Sexual Distribution of Employment in the Metal Industry, 1965 and 1985

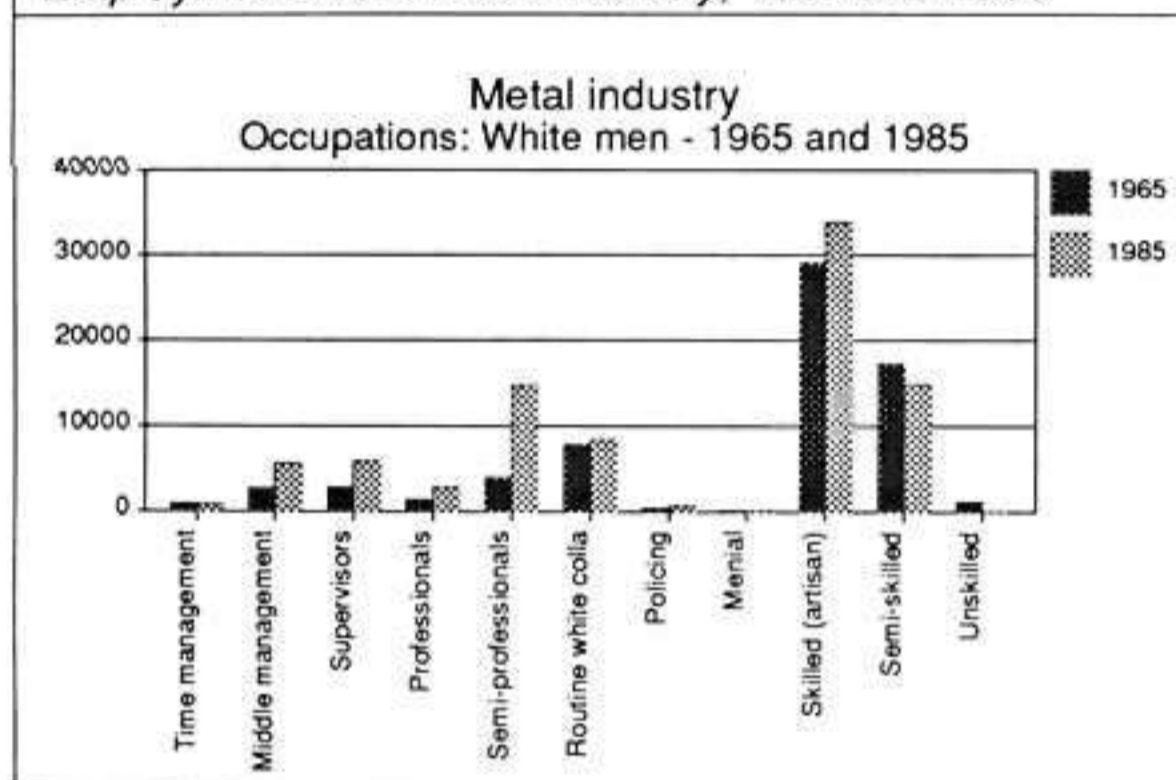


Figure 6: Occupational Distribution of White Men in the Metal Industries, 1965 and 1985

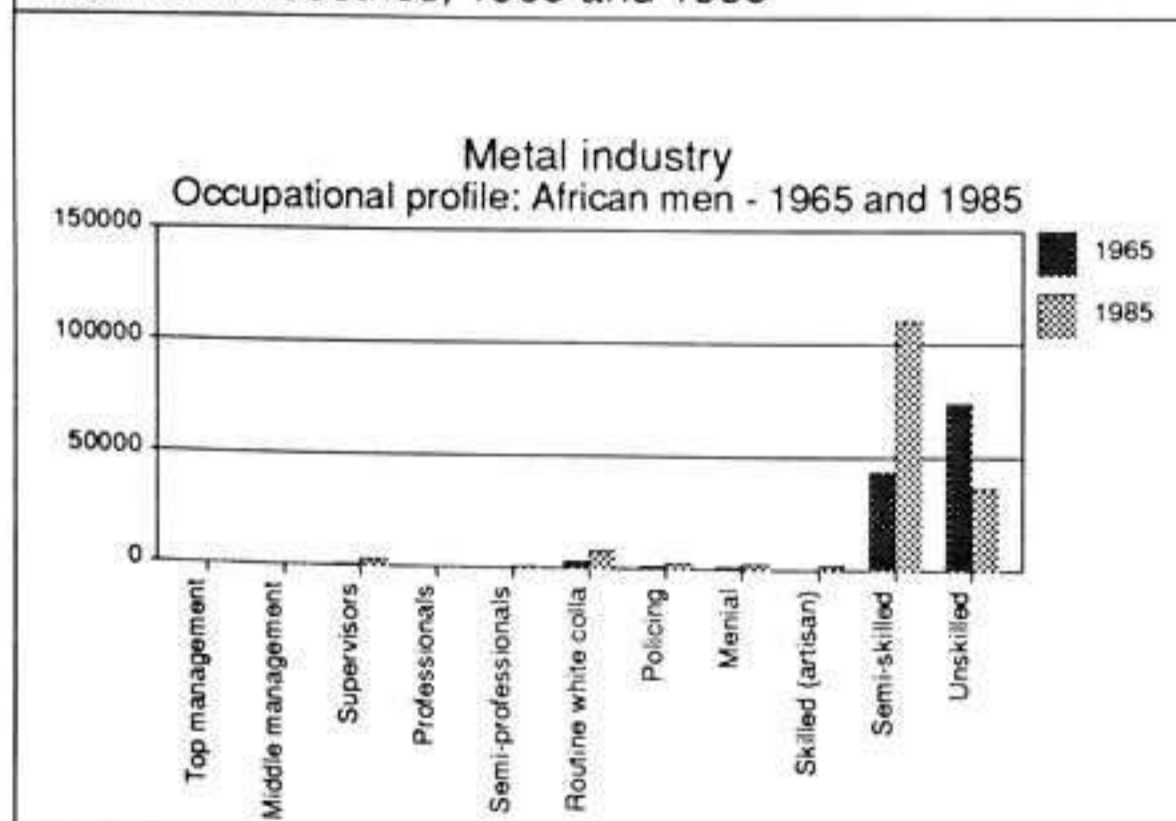


Figure 7: Occupational Distribution of African Men in the Metal Industries, 1965 and 1985

white men. There were a few coloured and Indian men and a few white, coloured, and African women, but no Indian women.

The division of labour between white and African men in the metal industry may have become even more rigid than in the past. As can be seen in Figures 6 and 7, the numbers of white men in semi-skilled operative work have declined, while African men in these jobs have increased enormously. At the same time the numbers of white men in semi-professional, supervisory and to some extent artisanal work have grown.

Most noticeable about white men in the metal industry is that they are spread right across the occupational spectrum, except for unskilled and menial work, where their numbers are small. A second feature is that the growth in jobs for white men has been mainly in the upper levels of the occupational ladder: semi-professional and professional work and middle management. The numbers of white supervisors also grew rapidly. In contrast, the numbers of white men in semi-skilled jobs declined and the numbers of white artisans have grown only slowly.

The perpetuation and possible deepening of the racial division of labour in this industry was accompanied by an astonishing transformation of the African workforce from a largely unskilled to a largely semi-skilled operative workforce over the period. There was also very rapid growth in the number of supervisors, clerks and artisans, but these increases were from such a small starting point that their impact on the overall structure remains slight. ☆