

## **The Organisation of Parallel Unions \***

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, This paper attempts to paint a more vivid picture of the organisations which constitute the parallel trade unions and their 'parent' bodies. It will look at the day-to-day practices and the structures of TUCSA and the Confederation of Metal and Building Unions (CMBU) as well as the attitudes and perspectives of the leadership. It will be shown that an investigation at this concrete level is particularly instructive in terms of the current strategy adopted by these organisations.

#### **The Rank and File on the Shop Floor**

The parallel unions which were researched in the Transport, Banking and Motor Industries (i.e. The African Transport Workers Union (ATWU), the South African Bank Employees Union (SABEU), and the Motor Industry Workers Union of South Africa (MIWU) have no shop steward system. Indeed, research indicated the absence of any shop floor organisation. Mr. Wallis of the Johannesburg Municipality Transport Workers Union summed up their attitude towards the notion of rank and file activity on the shop floor when he said, 'We deal from the executive level, you know' <sup>1</sup>. In this case, all complaints come to Wallis at the office, and only he deals with them. He keeps two 'shop stewards' at the two outlying depots so that if there is any problem, they can phone him for assistance. The same is true of the parallel ATWU. The absence of shop floor structures, was in fact queried by the manager of a large transport company in Vereeniging, when he saw that the constitution made no provision for shop stewards. His comment was that they would have to give some serious thought to a shop steward system if they desired to have any credibility with the workers. <sup>2</sup>

Most complaints are, therefore, dealt with entirely by the ruling executives of these organisations. In the case of the banking industry, where there are 3 unions, all 'minor' complaints are dealt with over the 'phone by the general secretary for all three unions, Mr. Malherbe. In an interview he indicated that he had established a close working relationship with the bank employers to the extent that he often advises them about personnel problems of which they are not aware. In this way, he operates effectively to keep the machinery of the industry turning without any unpleasant interruption. (3

It would, however, be a mistake to generalise such tendencies to other

parallels investigated. The National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW), the Garment Workers Union (GWU) and the Electrical and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (EAWUSA) all place much emphasis on the role of shop stewards in the management controlled bargaining procedures. This is illustrated by the activities of EAWUSA at S.A. General Electric where a union representative, a Mr. Oliphants, reportedly told workers that they should not fight in the factory because the trade union and employers are working together through shop stewards on the Liaison Committee.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, it can be argued that the way in which these unions operate is closely related to the composition of the workforces in these industries. The study from which this paper draws has argued that there exists a conflict of interests between the employers and the high cost artisans. While the employers seem to be, by and large, against the very idea of trade unions, the study has argued that in order to protect their interests, the artisans have begun organising black workers in unions under their control.

The threat posed by black workers to the (predominantly white) artisan class has been that of wage cutting. In the Electrical Engineering Industry, for example, job fragmentation and deskilling has continued into the 1970s and, as a consequence, black workers have been increasingly employed in semi-skilled work as assemblers of electrical equipment.

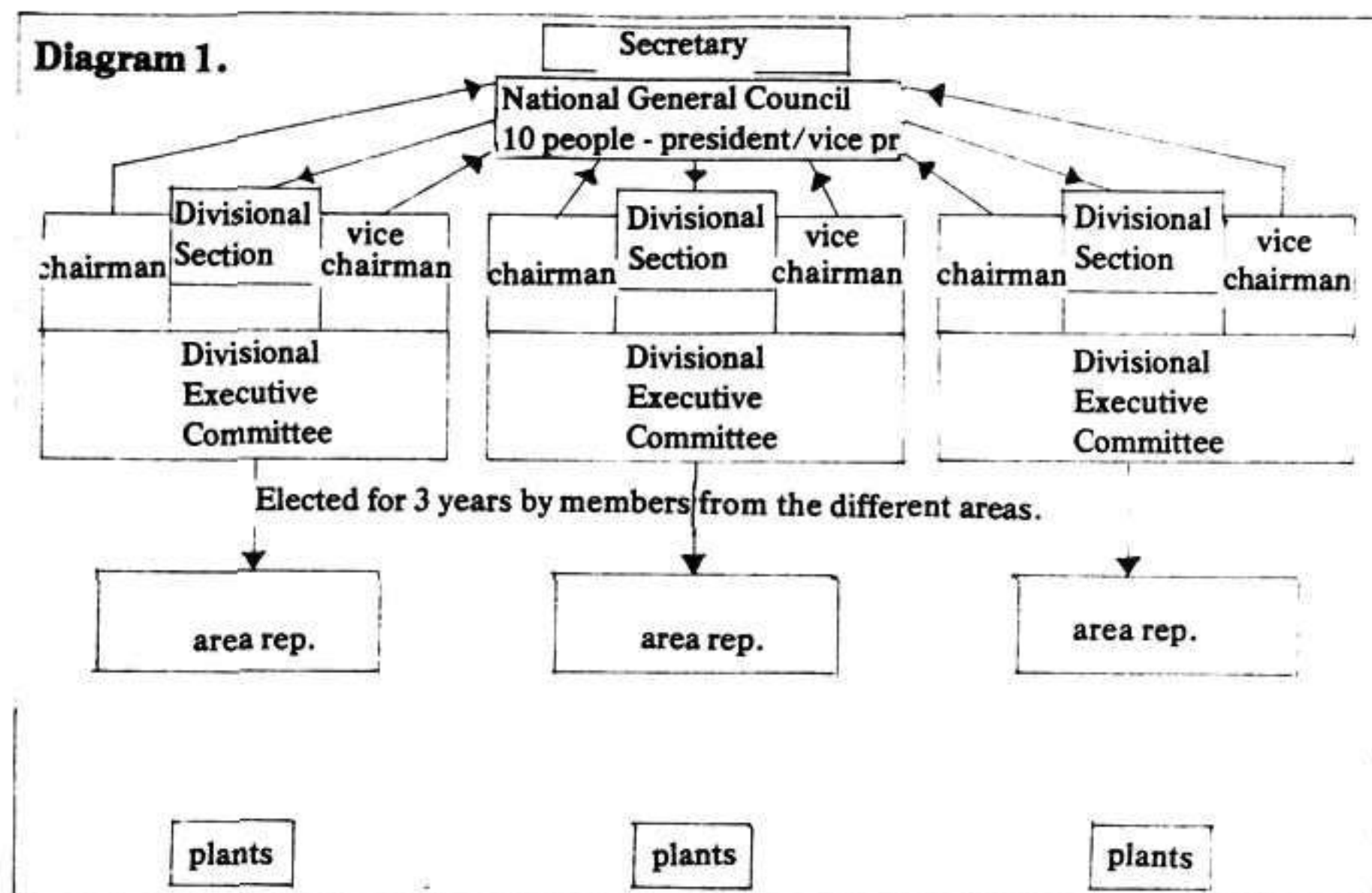
This conflict between the employers and these parallel unions was manifested by the parallels' lack of enthusiasm for and sometimes outright condemnation of the committee and works council system, the forms of negotiation preferred by management. However, as the study has argued, despite this conflict there has been a convergence of interests in the face of the threat posed, both to the employers and the skilled artisans (by the black workers). This is revealed by the fact that these parallel unions are prepared to tolerate the committee system, providing that they get union members elected and making it an extension of the union. These unions, however, do not significantly alter the *modus operandi* of these committees and in many cases they continue to function as they always have - in the interests of the employers.

## **Decision-Making Structures**

### **The Motor Industry**

The Motor Industry Workers Union of South Africa (MIWU) is not at present operating as an independent organisation and it is only in the Transvaal

that it has a properly constituted committee. It is, nevertheless, instructive to examine the decision-making structure of the 'parent' Motor Industry Combined Workers Union of South Africa (MICWUSA), as it intends to create a similar decision making structure in the parallel union.



From the diagram, it is evident that there are no in-plant union committees. At a very basic level, therefore, the union is distanced from its constituency. Mr. East of MICWUSA explained that objective conditions within the motor industry constrain effective in-plant participation in union activities: the union organises in over 1 000 small establishments with only one or two employees at every garage. He explained that for similar reasons, there were no shop stewards. Formal rank and file activity takes place only at a provincial level at members' meetings (there is one AGM and one ordinary members' meeting annually). At the AGM, members elect 7 representatives to the divisional executive committee for a period of 3 years. The quorum for general members' meetings is 5% of all members in the municipal area where the meeting is being held.

It can thus be seen that a remarkably small percentage of membership is able to influence elections. Once elected, an office bearer holds office for 3 years (although the rank and file is able to remove unpopular office bearers, Mr. East did not explain how this procedure would be carried out). In addi-

tion to these constraints on democracy, there is a secrecy clause in the constitution which prohibits all committee members from discussing the content of committee meetings. The chairmen and vice-chairmen of the divisional executive committees automatically become representatives on the National General Council which employs all senior staff. (i.e. divisional secretaries, the general secretary). No paid official has the vote. Nevertheless, as the official stated 'because we work in the union everyday, we are in fact the people who formulate policy'.<sup>5</sup>

### **Transport**

Similarly in the case of the ATWU, there are seldom meetings at local firm level. The National Executive Committee is elected by ballot when necessary. So far, there have been no elections because it is normally the case that the number of people nominated is equal to the number of members on the committee (i.e. 12 members). Members meetings take place every 4 months. Each executive member serves as a union representative in a particular industrial area (for example, there are two representatives for over 200 workers at Reilly and Stuttafords). All decision making is, therefore, in the hands of the NEC. Even in the case of workers trying to evict an unpopular office bearer, they have to petition the NEC, which has the final say.<sup>6</sup>

### **Banking**

The 3 unions in the banking industry also have no committee structure at firm level. General meetings of rank and file are held once a year because, according to Mr. Malherbe, there has seldom been anything of such major importance to warrant meeting more frequently. There are, however, branch committees all over the country and they meet once a month. In addition, there is a General Council, which meets once a month. All elected officials hold post for 1 year. The General Council consists of bank officials from all levels of the managerial hierarchy.<sup>7</sup> It is clear from the constitution of the governing bodies of these unions that management wields a powerful influence.

### **Metal and Allied Industry**

Spokesmen for these unions have argued that, as a result of the objective conditions within the banking, motor and transport industries, these specific forms of organisational structures have arisen. The same undemocratic structures can, however, also be found in the manufacturing sector. In the Iron, Steel and Metallurgical Industry, the Engineering Industrial Workers

Union (EIWU) likewise has no committees or branches at individual factories in spite of the fact that there are shop stewards in these factories.

The National Union of Engineering Industrial and Allied Workers (NUEIAW) only has an elected black National Executive and no branches as such. It will probably develop along the same structural lines as EIWU. In the latter case, branch general meetings take place. Representatives from each branch to the NEC are elected by members through a ballot every two years. The shop stewards meet every 2 months and form a structured group who are probably closest to the rank and file. 8

The Radio, Television, Electronic and Allied Workers Union (RTEAWU) operates with a local factory committee structure. Nevertheless, the parallel Transvaal Radio, Television, Electronic and Allied Workers Union (TRTEAWU) has no real organisational infrastructure as yet and its members may attend the sister union's meetings as observers only. 9

### **Leather and Tobacco Industries**

Although the African Leather Workers Union (ALWU) has formally been in existence since 1936, for 39 years it had no organisational structure. Only recently, the first black organiser was employed 10 . General meetings and shop steward meetings used to take place, but it was only in 1975 that the first black executive committee was elected. While the organisational structure seems to be grounded in the shop steward committees in the plants, questions must be raised about the long period when the African union had no real structure.

It is suggested in the study that the formal establishment of an executive committee in 1975 was part of the overall TUCSA strategy of establishing parallel unions.

Unfortunately, the organisational structure of the African Tobacco Workers Union (ATUWU) remains under-researched. In this connection, however, an article from the Financial Mail throws into question the viability of this parallel union.

'The other paper union is the African Tobacco Workers Union. Here the secretary is supposed to be a Nicholas Hlongwane. Hlongwane, however, tells the FM that he is only an organiser and that Christine du Preez, secretary of the registered union, runs his union. He says that the union has 300 members and that he has been an organiser since 1951.

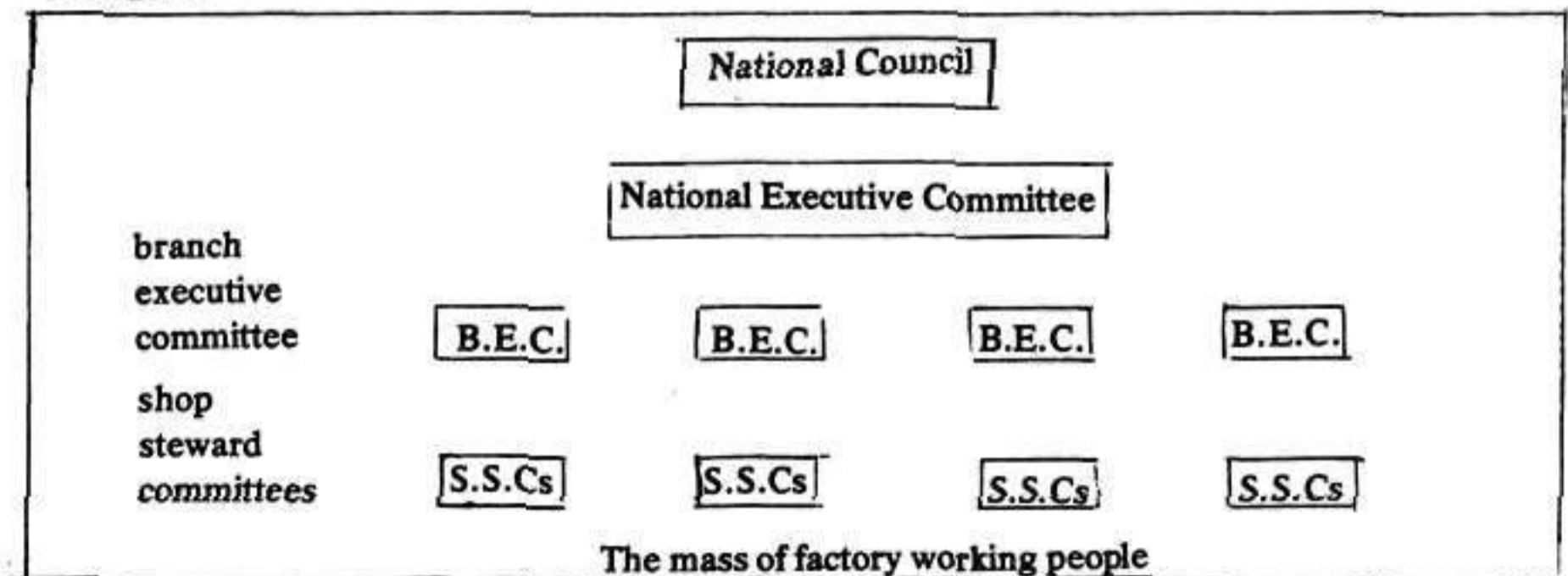
Independent unionists say, however, that they believe that Hlongwane

is actually an office worker, employed by the registered union. They say that they have invited him to meetings, but are told that he is always busy making tea or fetching the post. Hlongwane was loth to discuss the union with the FM.' 'We don't want to attract government attention. Please leave us alone'.<sup>11</sup>

### Clothing Industry

In the Clothing Manufacturing Industry, a high proportion of the workers have been deskilled so that there is now a high concentration of workers at the point of production. This seems to have generated the need for what appears to be a democratic structure. Nevertheless, on closer examination, there appear to be certain anomalies. Committee members are elected once every three years by ballot. According to one worker the level of worker education is very low and most people who are members of the NUCW do not even know the meaning of 'stop orders' and 'registration'. Given the low level of conscientisation with little being done to educate workers, it seems that elections take place very much along the lines of typical parliamentary elections where the electorate delegates its powers to a leadership which possesses a monopoly of knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Diagram 2<sup>13</sup>



A recent case between the Financial Mail (FM) and A. Scheepers has also raised doubt about the degree to which NUCW workers are in control of their organisation. Scheepers sued the FM in 1977, claiming that she had been defamed by several remarks, which the FM reported, had been made against her. These allegations were

that Scheepers 'virtually vetoes NUCW decisions if she does not approve of them' and that 'she calls the (NUCW) executive in and lectures them like grade school children and then tells them to go back and reconsider'.<sup>14</sup>

that despite the fact that the African union had been under the tutelage of her union for 50 years, Scheepers had confirmed that she still negotiated on their behalf and had said,

'To tell the truth, the African union's negotiating ability is not up to standard';<sup>15</sup>

and that Scheepers had threatened the NUCW with eviction from its offices in Garment Centre (a building which is owned by her union) if it refused to join TUCSA (which it subsequently did).

In the settlement, the FM acknowledged that Scheepers did not make the threat (point 3) and paid the damages for this single aspect of the remarks made about her. It stressed, however, that it had only withdrawn the one allegation, implying, therefore, that the other two allegations still stood.<sup>16</sup>

## **Worker Education**

Nearly all the trade unions examined have no special worker education programme of their own. Their education programmes are conducted by TUCSA and the Institute for Industrial Relations (IIR).

The fact that only senior union officials participate in education programmes breeds an elitist attitude towards rank and file.

'If we feel that at any time we want a lecture on any subject we send them to TUCSA. The executive in this set up don't need all that much training'.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, Mr. East, from MIWUSA, said that 'if our office bearers felt that there was anything to gain...then again the divisional executive committee would decide which representatives would take the course. The need to educate rank and file has never arisen'.<sup>18</sup>

The aim of the IRR courses, according to Mr. Malherbe, is not to teach workers the art of organising, but the technicalities of running a union, negotiating, settling disputes and discipline procedure in the factory. There are also joint courses for union members and management with the emphasis on the partnership between employers and employees.<sup>19</sup>

This evaluation of the IRR is also borne out by an ex-organiser of CCAWUSA who attended a course. He felt that he could not be entirely open to them about the way CCAWUSA was functioning because the institute

might adopt a negative attitude towards its position. Furthermore, he was given the impression that there was no place for rank and file on these courses.

'They assume that you are a veteran in trade unions. They conduct a seminar merely to correct your mistakes'.<sup>20</sup>

The courses offered by TUCSA and the IIR can, therefore, only foster the growth of elitism and bureaucracy, as rank and file do not have access to them. The fact that management has played a major role in setting up the courses and that they lack any genuine worker involvement, merely tends to entrench this elitism.

### **Parental or Independent Parallel Unions**

The study distinguishes between independent parallel unions and parental parallel unions. The distinction lies in the fact that while, in the first case, the relationship is one of support, in the second it can quite easily degenerate into one of control. In the case of independent parallel unions, 'the 'parent' recognises that their interests may conflict at times, but allows their resolution to take place through offering support rather than control of the parallel union leadership. It recognises the need for blacks to develop an independent power base if equality of bargaining is to take place. It encourages independent shop floor organisation and a leadership which is responsive to this'.<sup>21</sup>

However, in the case of parental parallel unions, 'the established union assumes the role of 'parent' and controls its counterpart, preventing it from developing an independent leadership or power base. It either denies the existence of conflicts of interest between white and black workers or tries to suppress their articulation....Wherever there is potential competition for positions between white and black, it is quite likely that one will find the parent union using its position as 'parent' to maintain the dominant position of its members'.<sup>22</sup>

In most cases, the unions investigated in the study are examples of parental parallel unions. The extent to which the unregistered unions are influenced in policy making by the registered union and the extent to which office bearers of the latter are also office bearers of the former, cements this subordinate dependent relationship.

**SABEU, EAWUSA, TRTEAWU, ALWU, ATWU, NUEIAW and MIWUSA**



share the same administrative facilities with their parent unions <sup>23</sup> . The general secretaries of the registered parent unions in all of these cases, hold the same position in the parallel unions. More importantly, registered unions collect subscriptions for the parallels, help recruit their members and organise their meetings and training seminars (if these are held at all). In the case of the leather workers, the relation of subordination and dependence also extends to two other unions: the Trunk and Box Workers Union (TBWU), which is registered, and the parallel African Trunk and Box workers Union (ATBWU). The TBWU is very small and one could say that it operates as a parallel to the Transvaal Leather and Allied Trades Industrial Union (TLATIU)

A veteran trade unionist explained the role of these unions as follows: '...the idea of a parallel union is to keep the union tame, under their control, under their tutelage. And some of these TUCSA leaders go farther than that. They want the union completely under their supervision so that not only will they be kept tame, but they will be directly controlled, not even indirectly. For instance, when a particular person started the black union in the baking industry, I had occasion to speak to him and I said: 'But how can you justify being secretary of a black union. It should be led by a black man. He said to me, "You mean to tell me that we are going to pay R10 000 and let them do what they bloody well like? They will jolly well do what we want because we're going to get value for our money!" This is what he said to me. "We haven't spent all this money just that they should run away with it themselves and start becoming friends of the ANC, oh no," he says, "when I am secretary then that union does what I say". This is the purpose of parallel unions'.

### **Benefits**

Many of these unions place a lot of emphasis on the need for benefit funds for their members. In the absence of real struggle there seems little else that they can offer. Mr. Charles (RTEAWU) feels that it is unfair for people like Freddie Sauls (NUMARWOSA) to criticise the registered trade unions for being little more than benefit organisations. 'But what good is it if you are not of benefit to the people in times of need?' <sup>25</sup>

The TLATIU has, for example, a supplementary fund which also covers the workers for dental care, spectacles, hearing aids and contact lenses. <sup>26</sup> Clearly, these items are not high up on the priority list of contract workers employed in the leather industry. The TLATIU is not, however, attempting to organise these workers, but rather the urban-based workers. The study has argued that the attempt by the state to make certain concessions to people with urban rights is intended to place a section of the work-

force in a relatively privileged position. Because these workers are more likely to feel the need for the above mentioned benefits, it is suggested that the role of benefits is a co-optive one.

The Electrical and Allied Workers Union of S.A. (EAWUSA) also stresses benefits. In addition to unemployment insurance from the state and pension funds from the industry, the union established a life coverage system (payment to widow on death of member (dependant), a sick pay scheme (the owner makes provisions), long term gratuity (to encourage the union member to remain with the union); and legal resources for any particular problem. The union does not organise contract workers, but mainly semi-skilled assemblers and skilled black artisans.<sup>27</sup>

Given the all round deterioration of conditions for black workers and the fact that in many industries migrants and urban workers labour under similar conditions, it is questionable whether these benefits will win any meaningful support for passive trade unions even from urban people.

## **Perceptions of Industrial Relations**

### **Perception of relationship between employers and employees**

The ideology or world view underlying an organisation has its roots in objective, material conditions in which the organisation functions. An ideology, furthermore, is never neutral, but operates to further the interests of a specific class or social grouping. We are interested here in understanding the nature of TUCSA's world view and the way this functions to advance particular interests. Here the perception of the relationship between employers and workers is of central importance.

The president of TUCSA regards the bank employers as men of very high integrity. He says that there is a real factor of trust between him and the bankers.<sup>28</sup> Anna Scheepers welcomes the multi-national corporations because, 'they provide work for our black masses'.<sup>29</sup>

This support for the employers is justified by pointing out that they provide work for the masses, thus enabling them to survive.

'I am not in favour of boycotts. I am not going to put that type of pressure on employers. It is to the detriment of the workers. If you boycott the products of a particular firm you bring the firm to its knees and they have to close up and cut their staff'.<sup>30</sup>

Mr. East stresses that the unions and the employers do not sit on opposite sides of the fence. The well-being of the industry is what both have in common. All make their living from the industry and if the employer falls, so do the workers.<sup>31</sup>

Miss du Preez of the ATWU gave one of the most interesting examples of how the workers and the employers could 'co-operate';  
 '...you know, there's a terrific anti-smoking campaign....it won't have any success....there is a common ground between the workers and the employers, because if the people don't smoke anymore, there won't be any (cigarette) factories,...there won't be any work and they'll be unemployed. Now that's an example of co-operation'.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Employer's Role in Recruiting**

On the one hand, these unions have shown support for the employers. On the other hand, it is in the interests of the employers to have these types of parental parallel unions in order to defuse the threat from black workers. The employers can, therefore, be expected to actively support them.

One example of this is in the banking sector. Both Barclays and Standard have written to their employees asking them to join the union (SABEU) saying they would oppose a rival union in the banks.<sup>33</sup>

Recently, Anna Scheepers approached the Rembrandt Group for permission to organise distillery workers. She stated that they 'have the highest regard for me' and that they gave her the go-ahead because they regarded the GWU as a 'proper organisation'.<sup>34</sup>

Lucy Mvubelo gives an example of her relationship with the employers.

'I had an employer here yesterday from the management side. He came to see me because he wants me to go and address the sugar workers in a Durban....sugar factory. A man concerned with his workers. He wants his workers to get a solid foundation of trade unionism...He was a sort of liaison officer in Zambia for many, many years'.<sup>35</sup>

Last year, the management of Non-Ferrous Metals in Durban was seen distributing forms to its workers. The forms were from EIWU and signed by Archie Poole himself (general secretary of EIWU). Management told the organiser of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) that it preferred the other union to MAWU.<sup>36</sup>

*Mr. Freddie Swarts (from TLATIU) summed things up very well when he unwittingly said,*

'If a new firm should open up, you will find that in many cases, either the employer or the workers will approach the union and say: 'Please come and organise and let us into the union'. So we don't organise in the true sense of

the word'.<sup>37</sup>

This collaboration with the employers entails a form of deception and cynicism which is most clearly displayed by Mr. East (Tvl. secretary of MIWUSA) when he says, 'Well, in some companies it works for us, in others, against us. It depends on the attitude of the workers in the particular establishment. For instance, there are some factories, some organisations where one can sense the mood of the workers and you then don't let them know that you are in that firm with management permission. The moment you do that, they say your are a stooge and they don't co-operate'.<sup>38</sup>

### **Cultural conception of Black Workers**

The TUCSA world view attempts to 'explain' the conflict between management and workers in the workplace as a result of a difference in culture between white and African.<sup>39</sup> Implicitly in this view is a 'stages-of-growth' theory, which argues that as industrial development takes place, Africans pass through stages of development until they are ripe for trade unionism. That 'stage' seems now to have been reached.

Van der Walt exemplifies this 'stages-of-growth' argument when he says.

'When other unions were being formed in Europe we were trekking here with ox wagon looking at our donkeys and our goats. Now they want us to compare with them. I'm not concerned about what these people think. Sure there must be a black bloke there, who doesn't know the ropes so that the employers can choke him. It'll take another twenty years to fix the agreement'.<sup>40</sup>

Lucy Mvubelo, ignoring the rich history of black trade union struggle in South Africa, regards black working class organisation as being in an infantile stage of growth.<sup>41</sup>

Mr. Bailey (Transvaal organiser of EIWU) also assumes the notion of stages of growth when he 'explains' the current situation facing parallel unions. 'If there is no white available, then the coloured is next in the queue and he takes his place up from the queue. He doesn't work anybody out of it, you see. The coloureds have been standing in the queue for quite a while now. And when these jobs become available and there is no European, naturally the job must be done and the coloured is the next best one. We had to stand in the queue. Now, at the bottom layer is the black worker coming in'.<sup>42</sup>

This is a purely descriptive assessment expressing narrow sectional interests. The study has argued that because of this inability to explain the pro-

blems of African workers as being specific to their location as workers in the national economy, these unions are unable to articulate the grievances of the workers as the workers perceive them. This inevitably places grave limitations on the effectivity of these organisations to represent the interests and aspirations of these workers.

## **Education**

The broad strategy of TUCSA trade unions is that on no account must action by workers be political in its content, though even here one finds variations on this theme. Malherbe rules out any form of political content to labour action, even if this is not explicit. (i.e. political in a broad sense and not linked to the programme of any political organisation)<sup>43</sup>. On the other hand, there is a view put forward by Mr. East who sees the primary role of TUCSA as a vehicle for fighting the housing dispute on behalf of his coloured members.<sup>44</sup> While Mr. Malherbe refused to support the Fattis and Monis workers because the boycott had lent a 'political connotation'<sup>45</sup> to their struggle, both the GWU and the NUCW did offer support.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, in the latter case, both unions' secretaries stressed that, in order to survive at all, African unions had to be a-political. The EIWU eschewed party political issues, but not issues like housing and the Group Areas Act.<sup>47</sup>

It appears that where there is some political content to the practices of these unions, it is confined entirely in the interests of the skilled stratum and those workers who have urban rights. These demands pose little, if any, threat to the state and the employers. In fact, they are quite consistent with the proposals of the Riekert Report.

'Riekert's suggestion to achieve the co-optation of permanent residents is for the state to grant them priority in employment...Riekert also suggests that the state should attempt to improve the permanent residents living conditions. This involves easier access to housing, the right to have families present and greater mobility between cities (provided suitable accommodation is available)'.<sup>48</sup>

Lucy Mvubelo exalted Riekert's 'concessions' to urban blacks arguing that the ability of the latter to move 'freely' from one administrative board area to another was an invaluable gain for artisans and skilled workers.<sup>49</sup>

Except in the case of the National Union of Distributive Workers (NUDW), there was no understanding of the political mechanisms which control the mass of black workers. 'You can't separate the two. You can't separate higher wages from influx control, or even from such things as the franchise.

If blacks had the vote they would have it easier to get higher wages. And so these things are interlinked'.<sup>50</sup>

It has been argued in the study that because black workers face political controls, no organisational strategy which denies this will succeed in getting their support. This is vividly illustrated even in the case of the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council (TUACC) unions, who never articulated a political strategy. In this case, worker action involved a challenge to the existing state wage control system, the 'Bantu labour relations institutions' and defiance of security legislation (which defines strike action as a threat to the state).

In contrast, the limited political practices of TUCSA affiliates do not permit them to articulate the needs of the broad mass of black workers. The study has therefore concluded that their attempt to intervene in the current situation to organise these workers will probably fail.

### **Perception of the Wiehahn Commission**

Without exception, the TUCSA parallel unions enthusiastically have decided to register under the conditions laid down by the Wiehahn Commission. Anna Scheepers (GWU), for example, distinguished the government from the Wiehahn Commission. She said she was anti-government, but whole-heartedly supported the Commission.<sup>51</sup> Lucy Mvubelo (NUCW), saw registration as a way for helpless blacks to participate in the system to win freedom.<sup>52</sup> Archie Poole (NUEIAW) did not see anything wrong in the immense discretionary powers vested in the Industrial Registrar<sup>53</sup> Mr. McBain-Charles (TRTEAWU) had already been granted provisional registration<sup>54</sup>, while Freddie Swarts (ALWU) supported the idea of provisional registration as a way to sort out the people who were to become the leaders.<sup>55</sup> Mr. East (MIWUSA) supported the amended legislation as a step in the right direction.<sup>56</sup> And Mr. Wallis (JMTWU) said that representativeness had to be a criterion for selection for registration. This could only be determined from a union's membership list.<sup>57</sup>

A grave limitation imposed on the right to freely associate is entrenched in the requirement laid down by the Commission, that, instead of the union being able to serve its membership, it must be representative of workers in an industry. This representativeness is to be judged by the number of members it has on paper. As it will be the objective of unions to achieve registration as soon as possible, a union which set itself the Herculean task of perpetually having to enlist transient 'migrant' workers would do so in the

knowledge that it could achieve a sufficiently representative character only with immense difficulty. It would thus never be free of the risk of losing its representativeness.<sup>58</sup> Thus, allowing migrants to be eligible for membership does not mean that large numbers would in fact become members.

The TUCSA parallels investigated all support the notion of representativeness as a criterion for registration. Nevertheless, many of them are quite candidly not interested in organising migrant workers. These workers, forming as they do the lowest skilled stratum of the working class, present far less of an immediate threat than the semi-skilled operators who tend by and large to have urban rights. In those industries where migrants do form part of the semi-skilled workforce and therefore do present a threat to the artisan class, it is suggested that the latter will be far more willing to 'organise' them.

#### **Attitude towards non-TUCSA Unions**

The positive attitude adopted by these unions to the employers also manifests itself in the lack of support they gave to workers outside TUCSA who were involved in ongoing struggles for recognition.

Here one cannot generalise. Poole did not concern himself much with the struggle of the workers at Fattis and Monis, except to observe that it did not end in a victory for the workers - according to him they merely got their old jobs back.<sup>59</sup> Anna Scheepers, on the other hand, rejected this interpretation of the conflict, arguing that, 'the union definitely won a victory of recognition, even though it may take a year or two before the workers will enjoy the benefits. This is because the employers have learnt a lesson that they will never forget'.<sup>60</sup>

TUCSA unions have not simply adopted a passive attitude of non support for progressive worker action. Many TUCSA unionists perceive a threat in the leadership of non TUCSA unions. Mr. Poole expressed this opinion about the activity of the Western Province General Workers Union amongst the Cape Town stevedores. He regards the WPGWU as dangerous because, as an unregistered union, it is 'responsible to nobody'. He complained that one could not even check its membership list. 'If they got 50% support at the meeting its because those workers are gullible people whom you can 'om die paadjie lei, jy weet.' The WPGWU probably likes to organise these people.

**Q;** Is there something illegal going on in that whole activity?

P: I won't comment on that. Why they have their problems I am not prepared to comment. But it seems strange to me that I haven't got problems'.<sup>61</sup>

It is against this perceived threat that TUCSA acts. '...we will give assistance to other organisations if it was in the interests of that industry and the labour movement in general. Hence our affiliation to TUCSA...Our support for other unions through TUCSA takes, for example, the form of directing the TUCSA secretariat to intervene in a dispute between the stevedores in Cape Town docks and their employers. I could well be the mover of a resolution that sees TUCSA getting involved in that dispute'.<sup>62</sup>

This emphasis which TUCSA lays on the 'partnership' between employers and employees, and its practices towards unions involved in mobilising workers against their employers, can only serve to mislead the workers under its influence. To the extent that it succeeds, it serves to maintain the balance of forces on the shop floor in favour of the employers.

## Conclusion

By examining concrete instances of the *modus operandi*, decision making structures and ideological position, this paper has tried to show how TUCSA parallel unions form an important intermediate link between the strategy of the state and the African working class. Given the rising tide of grievances from African workers and the critical state of the economy, the strategy of the state is aimed at defusing an explosive situation. Defusing this situation involves the creation of a co-opted and controlled form of worker organisation. The study has argued that this is the real meaning behind the TUCSA and the CMBU parental-parallel unions.

★ This paper is an excerpt from an academic study of TUCSA and CMBU parallel unions. The aim of the study was to examine the concrete nature of parallel unionism practised under the umbrella of TUCSA and CMBU, and to locate this practice within the context of the changing structure and dynamic of the political economy of South Africa in the 1980s.

## Notes

1. Mr. Wallis, interview 15.1.80.
2. Mr. van der Walt, interview, 21.1.80.
3. Mr. Malherbe, interview, 16.1.80.
4. From Liaison Committee member at S.A. General Electric (From FOSATU document 1979)
5. Mr. East, interview, 15.1.80.
6. Mr. van der Walt, interview, 21.1.80.
7. Mr. Malherbe, interview, 16.1.80.
8. Mr. Poole, interview, 20.1.80.
9. Mr. Charles, interview, 24.1.80.



10. Mr. Swarts, interview, 22.1.80.
11. **Financial Mail**, 19.1.76.
12. ex-shop steward CCAWUSA, 19.2.80.
13. Mrs. Scheepers, 21.1.80; Mrs. Mvubelo, 14.1.80.
14. **Financial Mail** 4.11.77.
15. **ibid.**
16. **ibid.**
17. Mr. Wallis, interview, 15.1.80.
18. Mr. East, interview, 15.1.80.
19. Mr. Malherbe, interview, 16.1.80.
20. ex-organiser of CCAWUSA 13.2.80.
21. **SALB**, 3, 4, 1977, p 9.
22. **ibid.**
23. Interviews with the respective secretaries of these unions.
24. Interview with veteran trade unionist, 2.2.80.
25. Mr. Charles, interview, 24.1.80.
26. Mr. Swarts, interview, 22.1.80.
27. Mr. Nicholson, interview, 14.1.80.
28. Mr. Malherbe, interview, 16.1.80.
29. Mrs. Scheepers, interview, 21.1.80.
30. Mr. Poole, interviews, 15.1.80.
31. Mr. East, interview, 15.1.80.
32. Miss du Preez, interview, 24.1.80.
33. Mr. Malherbe, interview, 16.1.80.
34. Mrs. Scheepers, interview, 21.1.80.
35. Mrs. Mvubelo, interview, 16.1.80.
36. From the Branch Sec. MAWU, Durban (FOSATU document, 1979).
37. Mr. Swarts, interview, 22.1.80.
38. Mr. East, interview, 22.1.80.
39. **SALB**, Oct., 1977.
40. Mr. van der Walt, interview, 21.1.80.
41. Mrs. Mvubelo, interview, 20.1.80.
42. Mr. Bailey, interview, 20.1.80.
43. Mr. Malherbe, interview, 16.1.80.
44. Mr. East, interview, 15.1.80.
45. Mr. Malherbe, interview, 16.1.80.
46. Mrs. Scheepers, 21.1.80 and Mrs. Mvubelo, 16.1.80.
47. Mr. Poole, interview, 20.1.80.
48. **SALB**, 5, 4, 1979, p 5.
49. Mrs. Mvubelo, interview, 16.1.80.
50. Mr. Kagan, interview, 2.2.80.
51. Mrs. Scheepers, interview, 21.1.80.
52. Mrs. Mvubelo, interview, 16.1.80.
53. Mr. Poole, interview, 20.1.80.
54. Mr. Charles, interview, 24.1.80.
55. Mr. Swarts, interview, 22.1.80.
56. Mr. East, interview, 15.1.80.
57. Mr. Wallis, interview, 15.1.80.
58. Wiehahn Commission, 3.58.3.
59. Mr. Poole, interview, 20.1.80.
60. Mrs. Scheepers, interview, 21.1.80.
61. Mr. Poole, interview, 20.1.80.
62. Mr. East, interview, 15.1.80.