

LABOUR UNREST IN PORT ELIZABETH AND UITENHAGE

by M. Roux

Modern Capitalist society is characterized by an apparent separation of the economic and the political. The effect of this is that it has made possible the fragmentation of class conflict into industrial and political conflict. Giddens argues that the institutional separation of class conflict in the industrial and political spheres is the form which class conflict takes in Capitalist Society. He says "The separation of industrial and political conflict once the incorporation of the working class has proceeded a considerable way, is merely symptomatic of the generic character of Capitalist Society as predicated upon a fundamental separation of economy and polity".¹ It is only when the separation of the economic and the political has therefore become recognized not merely as a formal principle, but as an institutional reality that class conflict takes this form. However, in a society in which the active incorporation of the working class within the citizenship state is resisted, worker organisations will be closely integrated with a political movement.

In South Africa the black trade union movement has struggled for over 60 years for existence against employers and the state. In a recent publication based on a project undertaken by four Wits. students² it is suggested that the movement has involved three major thrusts of activity: the Industrial Commercial Workers' Union which in its peak in the late 20's had 100,000 members; the Congress of non-European Trade Unions which by 1944 had a membership of 158,000 in 119 trade unions; and in the late 50's and early 60's the South African Congress of Trade Unions and the Federation of Free African Trade Unions with a combined total of approximately 90,000 members. However, legislation which sought to exclude black workers from the collective bargaining process and suppress the activities of black unionists prevented each of these movements from crystallising into permanent organisations. Repressive legislation had the effect of "leaving black workers voiceless and with no means of protecting what limited rights they had."¹³ Under these conditions it was inevitable that eventually there would be widespread support for black national movements.

Against a background of industrial development the 50's and early 60's was a period of intense African National activity. The issues that were given prominence by the Congress Alliance were political rather than economic. The struggle was perceived in racial or national terms and with black trade unions weak, any attempt to emphasize the class content was doomed to be a failure.

According to Webster there was in the course of the 50's a general drop in wages. This gave rise to a range of popular resistance, but SACTU was not organised enough to channel or direct the resistance apart from utilizing its limited factory organisation during stayaways. The stay-away was used as a key tactic, focussing around political issues with the emphasis on general rather than industrial, disabilities.⁴ However, the clampdown on political resistance which came in the early 60's changed the direction of the struggle.

From 1972 onwards there was a rapid rise in the rate of inflation, resulting in a drop in real wages and the rate of growth of employment in manufacturing declined. This gave an impetus to what was now commonly called the struggle at both the economic and political levels. In February 1973 in Durban between 60,000 and 100,000 black workers went on strike. Bonner and Webster point out that "as a sign of their growing political maturity black workers chose, instead of a boycott, to strike at their workplace, winning wage increases and suffering hardly any dismissals or prosecutions."⁵

It is argued that this strike gave rise to a new wave of African trade unionism out of which five distinct trade union groups emerged. However, with less than 100,000 members, many of whom belong to non-militant parallel unions, Nicol claims that both in terms of numbers and organisation the African Trade Union movement is weak. According to him "the militant struggle of the dominated classes since 1973 have in each case been characterised by spontaneity. Leadership of these struggles has not been taken up by the workers and their representative organisations, but by the black petty bourgeoisie".⁶

To a large extent African Trade Unionism has during this period seen itself largely in economic terms, thereby giving recognition to the economic and political as separate areas of bargaining encounters. In part this may be accounted for in terms of the close security surveillance under which black trade union organisations are kept. Some trade union officials in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage contend that it is only possible for black trade unions to survive in South Africa if they stay away from political issues. "This is the lesson black trade unionists have learnt from the experiences of their predecessors", said one of them.

On the whole union officials in the Port Elizabeth area showed an orientation towards economism. They were of the opinion

that trade unions should focus on the industrial disabilities to which black workers are subjected. They must address themselves to the bargaining process and as far as possible attempt to redress the imbalance in market power between workers and employers. Few, however, mentioned that this would not be possible without changing the subordinate position of black workers. To achieve this involves not only an economic but also a political struggle.

Nevertheless, the bulk of industrial conflict during this period has been confined to economism, thereby obscuring the connections between political power as such and the broader political subordination of the working class within the economic order.

In this period when black consciousness grew there was little connection between the two movements. This clearly reflected the separation of the economic and the political. The 1976 revolt was political rather than economic. The target of mass action was seen to be the State and the institutions representing it, such as Bantu Education and the Bantu Affairs Administration Boards. One of the possible reasons why it failed was lack of economic anchorage among the proletariat.

The last two years have seen interesting changes in the direction which struggles have taken. There has been a tendency among the working-class to perceive a tie-up between the work-place and the community. Work-place issues are no longer seen in isolation but as part of a larger pattern. This trend was evidenced in the recent Fattis and Moni's, Ford and Meat workers' disputes. If it continues it will present a serious threat to the institutional separation of economic and political conflict.

Research in Port Elizabeth suggests that divisions within the trade union movement reflect the differences in ideology between workers who no longer accept the economic, political dichotomy and the leadership who continues to define the role of trade unions in narrowly economic terms. During the Ford dispute the black union leadership was challenged by the highly politicised workers on strike. Attempts to replace the executive with persons of their own choice have failed and the rift continues. The feeling among certain workers is that these leaders have abdicated any role in 'the struggle'.

Nicol is probably correct when he argues that the State is not concerned about the African Trade Union movement as it has existed throughout most of the 70's. He points out that the task of the Wiehahn legislation is to forestall the development of a democratic trade union movement which is either controlled democratically by the working class or led by radical elements of the petty-bourgeoisie. One of the central functions this legislation performs is to "seek to entrench reformist political practices in the African trade union movement. It attempts to draw them into an industrial relations system which pre-disposes unions to become bureaucratic and hence allows a petty bourgeoisie leadership to remove control over the Union's affairs from the working class".⁷ Such bureaucratically organised unions which focus on narrow short-term ameliorative demands are co-optable and do not threaten the status-quo.

The State has responded to the deepening of economic and political action among the growing African urban population in a number of ways. It is firstly trying to co-opt a section of the black population into support for the limited changes envisaged. This section includes the black middle-class and the skilled sector of the working-class. The home ownership schemes, the setting up of community councils and the granting of municipal status to black urban communities

are aimed at these groups. One of the objectives of legislation is to divide the working class, and if successful will also exclude alliances and contact with other classes, thereby restricting working-class conflict to the industrial sphere and preventing it from spreading to other sectors in the community. The new approach attempts to prevent future class struggles under the hegemony of the manual working class; hence the necessity of creating new skills and ideological symbols.

Secondly, the State through institutionalizing industrial conflict among the permanent black working-class seeks to narrow down conflict to economism, thereby reinforcing the economic, political dichotomy.

In recent months the State has speeded up the process of the registration of black unions and has even urged negotiations with some unions before registration has been gazetted. The Minister of Manpower Utilization warned employers against refusing to deal with representative unions. "Management should deal with whatever leadership group holds credibility among the workers. To impose a group favoured by management but not by those they are supposed to represent will lead to disaster".⁸ In this way the State wants to defuse industrial confrontation with its possible extension to the political sphere especially in the prevailing atmosphere of mistrust.

It is against this background that the Port Elizabeth—Uitenhage workers struggles should be reviewed.

PORT ELIZABETH AND UITENHAGE: THE INDUSTRIAL SETTING

As one of the major industrial complexes in South Africa and an important centre for the motor manufacturing, wool, textile and footwear industries, the Port Elizabeth — Uitenhage region is today an essential part of the manufacturing sector in this country. The rapid growth in the region since the 50's is attributable mainly to the motor manufacturing and allied industries. Not only has the motor manufacturing industry attracted component manufacturers, but traditional industries such as tanneries and textile firms also provide many of the materials required for the finishing of vehicles, thereby resulting in their further expansion. However, the Port Elizabeth — Uitenhage area is dominated by multi-national secondary industries and as such it sets the pattern for industrial development in South Africa. This area Whisson argues "is rapidly outgrowing its demand for unorganised migrant labour."⁹ In other words it requires a stable resident workforce.

For obvious reasons the unions given the most prominence in this area are those concerned with the motor manufacturing and allied industries. The origins of the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers of South Africa (NUMARWOSA) dates back to 1967. By March 1968 the Union had received registration and was given representation on the Industrial Council in September 1970. It is for Coloured workers only.

Since the early 70's NUMARWOSA, under the auspices of the International Metal Workers' Federation has concerned itself with the organisation of African workers in the motor manufacturing and affiliated industries, into trade unions. After lengthy deliberations with members of African workers' committees in the various plants, it was decided to call a joint meeting in the Port Elizabeth — Uitenhage areas with the purpose of establishing a union for African workers in the motor assembly industry.

In September 1973 the United Rubber and Allied Workers' Union (UAW) for African workers, was formed and has since established branches in the other centres. In August 1980 the UAW had members at 10 companies in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage. Ford, General Motors, Volkswagen, S.K.F., Goodyear Tyres, Borg Warner and Willard Batteries have an agreement with the UAW, whereby union dues are deducted from the wages of its members. In the remaining companies agreements are still to be negotiated. It would appear that the Union does not represent 50% of the workforce in these companies but is still recruiting.

As an unregistered union the UAW has no negotiating rights on the Industrial Council. There is, however, close co-operation between the registered NUMARWOSA which is party to the Industrial Council, and the UAW. No decisions are made unless they are acceptable to both these organisations. They share offices, in some cases they share organisers and both unions have members in the same industries. According to Maree the UAW can be classified as an independent parallel union of the registered NUMARWOSA.¹⁰ At the request of the black Union the General Secretary of NUMARWOSA also serves as technical advisor to the UAW. This is resented by some of the black workers, who feel that the UAW is controlled by the Coloured Union. One of them commented that the UAW was dominated by coloured leadership.

Both NUMARWOSA and the UAW belong to the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). In contrast to the policy followed by most of the FOSATU unions, the UAW has until recently worked through liaison committees. They have elected their own members onto these committees, in this way attempting to take over and bring them under their control. In most cases workers' representatives on liaison committees are also members of the relevant plant's Union Branch Executive and nominated by the Union.

During the 1979 dispute at Ford, workers ignored the liaison committee and the Company was unable to use it in any meaningful way. The workers regarded the committee as being non-representative and management orientated.

At Ford a shop stewards' committee is to be formed in each of the plants. This is to replace the liaison committee which disintegrated during the strike. In addition to these committees there are to be full-time shop stewards. NUMARWOSA supported by the UAW proposed and Ford agreed to the appointment of these officials their salaries to be paid by the Company. They will be selected by union members and will be ex-officio members of the BEC. It was recently announced that Ford is to employ 5 full-time and 15 part-time shop stewards. These shop stewards who were to take up their positions on Monday, 8th September would be paid at the rate for the job they were doing before they were elected to these positions. This was suggested by the unions as it was felt that shop stewards should retain their status as hourly paid workers. This would ensure that they maintain satisfactory identifications with workers' interests and do not aspire to become company men.

The Director of Industrial Relations said "their employment will, we hope, go a long way to resolving any labour problems that might arise".¹¹

The Ford works' committee which was formed during the Ford unrest when the union was by-passed and arose from the Port Elizabeth Black Peoples' Civic Organisation (Pebco), claims that the workers were not sufficiently consulted on this proposal to have shop stewards devoting their whole time to labour relations and being relieved of all productive work, though still on the firm's payroll.

The Committee does not accept the scheme as it would appear the Union negotiated the plan with management before consulting the mass of members and thrashing out with them the implications of such an innovation. They are fully aware of the role conflicts to which these officials will be subjected with divided loyalties and further see the plan as a move by management to increase its influence. These strains are felt by personnel officers who are wholly company employees but nevertheless are supposed to present workers' viewpoints. How much more strain will there be on these new shop stewards, employees of the company but definitely union men.?

It seems the lack of prior consultation is delaying introduction of the scheme and at the same time giving the works' committee another fact for reinforcing the split from the UAW.

This split, which as mentioned above, came from the workers with the claim that the Union did not consult, nor was it in touch, with workers especially in the Cortina plant. While the Union saw its role as being confined to work conditions, pay issues and limited welfare, the Committee claiming to represent workers, saw the role of the Union calling for involvement in far wider issues and therefore expecting the unions to take up issues such as those raised by Pebco. This would mean full support of Pebco in their fight for wider social changes involving participation in decision making at local and national levels; full South African national citizenship and the rescinding of legal discrimination based on race.

These two viewpoints highlight two differing orientations to trade unions. The UAW confines its activities to economic issues, even though workers claim they have not been active enough in this sphere; the Works' Committee sees the economic and political as being inseparable although of late there has been a shift towards emphasizing workplace issues.

As a result of the workers claim that the union was ineffective even in the work context, at a meeting in February, they passed a vote of no confidence in the Union. By this time there was no Cortina representation on the BEC, the representatives having lost their seats due to absences from meetings. These absences demonstrate the lack of confidence in the Union.

The workers at the February meeting inspired by the Works' Committee voted in a new Union branch executive. The incumbent Union officials, because of the by-passing of required procedure, declared the election invalid.

At this time, September 1980, there exists a position of stale-mate. Calls have been made by the Works' Committee for a members' meeting, and new elections. The UAW have not responded to any of these calls, nor has it called any meeting since the February one, which it declared unconstitutional. This supports the workers' claims of neglect of their interests.

The Ford Cortina plant was established in 1973 and drew 700 new black workers who in attitude differed considerably from that of the workers in the adjoining Engine plant. Compared with the Engine plant, workers at Cortina are on average younger and better educated. Many of these workers come directly from schools where they have been exposed to the bitter struggles against the system of Bantu Education which emerged during the 70's and has been, and continues to be, particularly intense in the Eastern Cape. These already highly politicized workers were ready to reject any union they perceived not to be involved in the struggle.

Favis points out¹² the UAW was aware that there were differences between the respective experiences of trade union struggles at Engine plant and Cortina plant. On entering the factory Cortina workers found in existence a union already established through a long process of shop-floor struggle involving mainly Engine plant workers and focussing mainly on industrial matters. Cortina workers joining the union had obviously a wider concept of the functions of a union.

From the start Cortina plant workers were thoroughly opposed to the liaison committee and made a "mockery of the elections".¹³ Only the weakest and the most inactive workers were prepared to serve on this Committee. Not only were these incumbents not representative of the Cortina workers, but they were also unable to stand up to management. Research in September 1977 showed rank and file members to be totally apathetic in their attitudes towards the UAW. Some of the workers expressed the viewpoint that they could see no benefits in belonging to the union. At the time of the strike there was a lack of an active and democratically organised union. The Works' Committee met the requirement.

The Works' Committee has since its inception, continued to draw support from the Cortina plant workers. To a lesser extent there is also according to the Works' Committee representatives, some support for the Committee from the Engine plant.

The Works' Committee presented a list of grievances so wide as to blur major issues. The grievances ranged from petty issues to serious charges of victimisation and unfair practices on the part of management.¹⁴ This was also evidenced in their statement on the implementations of the Sullivan Codes to be submitted to the S.A.C.C. and other concerned bodies.

It would appear that the leadership has up to date been unable to articulate short-term demands within an adequate understanding of the overall system of industrial relations. Unrealistic wage demands may well encourage employers to lessen their dependence on the labour force, through increased technology. This also enables employers to dismiss employees they see as redundant and unco-operative. In the long term this could well contribute to the process of marginalization. Their demand for a minimum wage of R2,50 per hour was such an unrealistic request at this time.

This Works' Committee now transformed into the Motor Assembly Components Union of South Africa (MACUSA) has begun to organize workers at Ford and General Motors. Representatives claim that there is wide-spread support for this union not only at Ford, but also at General Motors. The UAW leadership at G.M. is weak. Union members serve on the liaison committee and it would appear that no success has been achieved with regard to the establishment of a Factory B.E.C. Of the 15 members on the P.E. Branch Executive only two are from G.M. Even though the black workforce at G.M. is considerably smaller than at Ford, research suggests that union leaders have not kept in close touch with workers in the factory.

The new union MACUSA claims to concern itself with the totality of workers' lives and stresses that one cannot separate work from the non-work sphere, particularly in South Africa, where blacks occupy a subordinate position in all spheres of life. Representatives from this Committee for example, felt that the Union should have taken a stand on the school boycotts. One of them claimed "The worker is a parent and as such directly involved. These issues can-

not be divorced from one another". Discussions with workers also revealed that they were clearly aware of their inferior education and their consequent inferior position in the economic sphere. However, it would appear that the leadership is not fully aware that the dispersion of energy over too wide a field can be counter-productive.

In contrast to the gulf between Union and workers in Port Elizabeth, in Uitenhage the Union hierarchy and workers were closely connected and thus events have taken a different road. Union leadership reflected the workers' feelings and forcefully presented the workers' demands at Volkswagen negotiations. The General Secretary of NUMARWOSA and technical adviser to the UAW, considers Uitenhage has "possibly the most powerful group in our whole Union".¹⁵

At Uitenhage the Union is far more democratically orientated which accounts for its close involvement with the mass of workers. In addition to the liaison committee, there are factory committees sometimes called factory B.E.C.'s. These committees are elected by union members on the shop-floor and cover both black and coloured workers.

The Uitenhage leadership responds to democratic requests for meetings, workers are consulted and there has, therefore, been no need for any breakaway leadership such as the P.E. Ford Works' Committee, which arose from the authoritarian distancing of the P.E. Union leadership from the mass of workers.

The very structure of the Union leadership in P.E. has led to the confusion of the very necessary national bureaucratic organisation with the day-to-day Union business. In addition in P.E. there is coloured/black antagonism under the surface.

The National Secretary of NUMARWOSA is in P.E., he is also technical adviser to the UAW and ex-officio a member of the local Branch Executive of NUMARWOSA. National affairs absorb a great deal of his time and this possibly contributes to the lack of involvement with local issues.

Being involved with National Affairs means much closer contact with employers with the inevitable accusations from workers that their secretary is too employer orientated. Separation of the two roles of National Secretary and local organizer would avoid this.

The offices of National President of the UAW and local shop-steward and membership on the B.E.C. are held by one individual, contributing to a seemingly authoritarian control — especially if meetings of workers are not held regularly, as has been the case in P.E. In any organisation the holding of too many portfolios lead to authoritarian leadership. Workers are fully aware of this.

In Uitenhage the workers feel that the Union is local and theirs and that they are in control. There is no confusion with National Officials.

A contrast between coloured and black relationships in Uitenhage and P.E. has been drawn. It should be noted that at Volkswagen coloured and black workers are incorporated into one factory, whereas at Ford they are separated in different plants. This may well contribute to the differences described in the two areas.

THE POLITICAL SETTING

According to Whisson the political heart-land of black South Africa lies in the Eastern Cape. "There political skills were learned the hard way in the Frontier Wars and the negotia-

tions which punctuated them. There rose the educational institutions of Lovedale, Healdtown and Fort Hare in which many leaders of liberation struggles learned the essential techniques of communication".¹⁶ In the 60's there was active support in the Eastern Cape for the A.N.C. Approximately 2,000 alleged supporters were tried and sentenced in this area for belonging to this banned organisation. In the 70's the black consciousness movement with its headquarters in the Eastern Cape arose out of the ashes of the A.N.C. This movement fed into and provided ideological and organisational inputs for the urban centres in this area. Evans points out that this area witnessed some of the most violent repression in the post-June 16, 1976 unrest which unlike the "rest of the country continued in P.E. well into 1978."¹⁷

Following the banning of leaders in the Black Consciousness movement in 1977 there was as Evans stated a lack of effective leadership in P.E. "It was into this vacuum that the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (Pebco) stepped".¹⁸

Pebco has its roots in community organisation and arose out of the dissatisfaction of the residents of Zwide and Kwa-Ford Townships over a new system of water metering which they felt was making people pay exorbitant sums for water services over and above already excessive rentals. During that period the rentals had risen from approximately R14,00 to R36,00. The tackling of these problems led to a link-up with residents' associations in New Brighton, Kwazakele and Thembaletha which were dealing with similar problems, and in Walmer where the residents had repeatedly been threatened with removals to Zwide, 22km away.

As a result of these linkages, Pebco was formed on the 10th October 1977. The main objectives of this organisation as outlined in its constitution are to fight for equal civil rights for all people of Port Elizabeth, and to oppose all legislation at the local and government levels, perceived to be discriminatory. It also seeks for participation in decision-making on all matters affecting the people of South Africa, the right for blacks to buy land in any place of their choice and finally, to resist any attempts to deprive blacks of their South African citizenship.

Pebco refuses to negotiate with the P.E. Community Council which it sees as a tool of E.C.A.B. It sees itself as providing an alternative to the Council for dealing with civic matters which pertain to blacks in P.E. Evans argues that this focus essentially limited Pebco to the organisation of those with Section 10(1) (a) or (b) rights. However, this does include the overwhelming majority of P.E.'s approximately 350,000 blacks.¹⁹

Under the charismatic leadership of Mr Thozamile Botha the movement could at the time be described as populist in that it had widespread support among black workers.

The leadership was and still is, dominated by professionals and others not from the factory floors. Supporters of the UAW have accused Pebco of having no workers on its executive. However, the strong radical confrontationist approach adopted by the leadership generated support among all sectors of the black population.²⁰

The strike at the Ford Cortina plant on the 31st October 1979 was political in the sense that strikers were responding as workers to what they perceived to be the victimization of their leader because of his involvement in the community. This is not to deny that economic grievances existed at Ford.²¹ They, amongst others, centered on the short working week and the consequent low wages.²²

This strike is significant in that workers recognize that civic and work issues are inseparable, both having a political

aspect. They stress the importance of close working relationships between work and civic organisations. Thozamile Botha as leader of the civic organisation felt that it was his duty to keep in close touch with the workers, and that the problems of individuals as workers and residents cannot be divorced.

However, at no stage did Pebco want to usurp the rôle of a trade union. It recognized the practical necessity of separating work-place and community struggles, even though these are connected. The UAW by focussing almost totally on narrowly defined work-place issues largely negated this connection. This was as previously noted, one of the reasons why the workers rejected the Union. Instead they elected their own committee to handle the dispute. The Works' Committee functioned as an independent committee although affiliated to Pebco. This point is succinctly made by Evans when he argues that Pebco merely lent "moral support to propagate the dispute and to help raise funds for the workers."²³ It also generated support within the community as a whole "as the solidarity which emerged made it extremely difficult for Ford to employ any scab labour from the black township".²⁴

This identification of economic and political issues makes the repressive State action which followed explicable.

The banning of the more radical leadership of Pebco in February 1980 has dealt this organisation a heavy blow and since then it has become relatively inactive.

In retrospect it would appear that Pebco over-extended itself.²⁵ At one time it planned six forms of protest which it was unable to carry out. This suggests that the issues of short-term goals within the framework of an overall progressive policy were not carefully thought out. As a result, Pebco was also unable to successfully overcome the difficulties of creating an alliance between its middle-class leadership and the working-class. This was particularly the case after leading members of the original executive were banned. The importance attached to home ownership to the extent of including this as a major objective in the constitution, clearly reflects the class interests of the leaderships. This is something that many of its working-class members are aware of as their chances of owning a house are very slim.

It would seem that the more moderate leadership has increasingly come to be alienated from the bulk of the working-class. The new Union plans to act as an autonomous body until such time as the Pebco leadership becomes more worker orientated. This will, among other issues, necessitate the inclusion of members more closely connected with the working-class on the executive.

In recent times the leadership has been severely challenged. Attempts to unseat the president have been successful. Complaints directed at the leaders are that they have violated the Pebco policy by negotiating with local authorities such as the E.C.A.B. and the Community Council; that they have also failed to act during the school boycott and over the rent issue.

With the removal of restrictions on mass meetings it is probable that there will be a revival of interest in this organisation. However, the leadership faces a difficult task. To gain renewed support requires clearly defined objectives and this necessitates not only involved leadership but a clear understanding on their part of the parameters within which short-term goals are realizable without, at the same time, bringing down the wrath of the State.

The Ford dispute cannot be described as a victory in material terms. The workers sacrificed three months wages and had

to involve themselves in a hard struggle to obtain the bonuses which they lost last year. However, the workers have come to recognize the value of community support in their workplace struggle. This community support and consequent absence of scab labour has made management aware of the difficulties of replacing a skilled work-force both in bargaining and in skills.

The continuing splitting in Unions can only be to the detriment of collective bargaining. MACUSA requires the administrative and procedural experience which the UAW leadership possess, whereas the UAW needs to democratize its structures possibly as suggested by the separation of rôles.

In Uitenhage an organisation focussing on community struggles, the Uitenhage Black Peoples' Organisation (Ubco) came into being two weeks after Pebco was formed. Ubco in its constitution subscribes to the same aims as Pebco. Like Pebco it emerged from the residents associations. The townships linked through Ubco are Kwanobuhla, Mc Naughton and Kabah.

Unlike Pebco the leadership is also working-class. Close and amicable linkages exist between the UAW and Ubco with executives serving on both committees. The UAW also had very close community support during the 1980 June - July unrest, without the inter-organisational strife so evident in P.E.

Ubco has, over the past year, experienced a steady growth and has at present over 2,000 members. To qualify for membership a person must occupy a rented house. In effect this means that those who do not have section 10(1) (a) and (b) rights are excluded. This restriction could well reinforce divisions between the permanent and migrant workforce thereby unwittingly promoting the aims of the Riekert recommendations.

Like Pebco, Ubco takes a stance of non-negotiation with bodies such as the E.C.A.B. and the Community Council. Ubco also deals with issues such as rent and service charge increases.

The residents of Kabal Township have in recent times been threatened with removals to a new extension in Kwanobuhla. Families moving to this new area will be expected to pay much higher rents. Ubco has legally contested both the removals and this rise in rent from approximately R15 to R35. The E.C.A.B. are now to employ a means test whereby rents will be determined according to income; the range of variation is to be between R25 and R41 per month. Ubco is not prepared to accept this decision and a meeting is to be called in the Kabal Township.

The leaders of Ubco are fully aware of the process of marginalization taking place in this area. They argue that many workers are insecure in their jobs. "This week a man may be taking home R50, but next week he may be without a job. So how can you make him pay a rent based on his present wage". These leaders have clearly made the connections between these basic civic problems and the broader economic ones. They involve struggles which cannot be divorced from the wider political issues.

Ubco was initially not involved in the Schools' boycott. In August 1980 a Parents' Committee was established. This committee is, however, not recognized by the authorities.

The approach which this committee adopted was that scholars should return to school with obtainable short-term demands about better facilities, the shortage of teachers, free text books, etc. These short-term demands should not be regarded as ends in themselves but as means towards the

realization of the long-term goal of equal education and one department only covering education. It is, however, recognized that this goal cannot be achieved overnight. This approach suggests that there are close links between the Parents' Committee and the Uitenhage Student Committee and through the latter with the Congress of South African Students (C.O.S.A.S.)

Since the schools in P.E. and Uitenhage have been closed by the authorities, the Parents' Committee has adopted a more aggressive stance. It has appealed to parents to refuse to have their children re-registered, thereby challenging the directives of the educational authorities.

It is clear that Ubco has developed in a different direction to Pebco. While Ubco has maintained a low profile it continues to be a dynamic organisation intensely involved in community issues. Even though its membership is almost exclusively working-class, it sees the necessity of obtaining support from students and other groups. Ubco thus acts as a unifying channel for the expression of the aims of these groups, all seeking the liberation of those suffering under discrimination.

Ubco now faces the problems involved of obtaining wider support. It would like to have the support of those professional and small businessmen who also favour an end to discrimination, but the leadership wants control to remain in working-class hands. The leadership of Ubco is very conscious of the extent to which the Pebco leadership has, since the bannings in February, become isolated from the workers and wants to avoid a similar situation from arising in Uitenhage. They are also aware of the difficulties of overcoming differences in class interests; hence their caution with regard to establishing alliances with other groupings.

The leadership is also considering extending to the coloured community, but here they are faced with similar problems. In addition, there is a status problem, and consequently there is always the danger of this group assuming a position of domination within the organisation and defining goals at the expense of black working-class interests.

On the 7th of May 1980 there was a wildcat strike of drivers at Volkswagen over wages. At the request of the Union they went back to work as the Industrial Council was sitting to consider a new wage agreement. In June a Sunday meeting was called, for the Union to report to the workers the result of their negotiation at the Industrial Council meeting. Two days before the scheduled meeting the proclamation banning all gatherings was promulgated. This provoked the workers still further and added to their dissatisfaction at what they had heard was the level of wages agreed to by their Union representatives. With no opportunity to discuss their feelings, they reported for work on the Monday morning, June 16th, and at 8 a.m. downed tools. This involved 3,500 coloured and black workers. A demand was made for a minimum wage of R2 an hour and R2,60 for drivers. The Union had agreed to R1,40 an hour at the industrial council. This was not acceptable and local union officials conveyed the demands to management. Eventually R1,45 as a minimum plus an attendance bonus was accepted by the workers and they returned to work on Monday the 7th of July.

Ubco gave full support to the Union and workers during the strike but made no attempt to intervene in negotiations.

The Volkswagen strike triggered off strikes in a number of other factories involving approximately 4,000 other workers some more organised than others. In the companies for

example, S.K.F. and Borg Warner where the Union was well established and recognized, negotiations came to a rapid and satisfactory conclusion. This was not the case in other factories where they were not well unionized; demands were unrealistic and employers antagonistic. Even in these cases Ubco did not intervene though continuing to give community support.

The history of the Uitenhage unrest clearly demonstrated to the workers the value of functionally separated organisations: closely linked but fully aware of their own fields of activity. According to Ubco and Union representatives the strikes at

other factories were primarily in support of the Volkswagen strikes, thereby indicating the solidarity created by community organisation.

What the P.E. and Uitenhage experiences have shown is that excessive intervention of political controls in the economic sphere are making workers aware of the connection between economic and political issues. As a result they welcome organisations such as Pebco and Ubco alongside their Unions. Rising skills and increasing solidarity have resulted in a more sophisticated black urban industrial work-force who will continue to combine economic and political struggles in a society which denies them equal participation in all spheres. □

- 1 Anthony Giddens; *The Class Structure of Advanced Societies*; 203
- 2 R. Barge, N. Coleman, E. Emdon, and A. van Heerden; *The Case for African Unions*.
- 3 Ibid : 5
- 4 E. Webster: "Stayaways and the Black Class Since the Second World War. The evaluation of a strategy". Unpublished paper; 13
- 5 P. Bonner and E. Webster; "Background" Focus of Wiehahn. S.A.L.B. Vol. 5, No. 2 August 1977; 5
- 6 M. Nicol; "Legislation, Registration, Emasculation". S.A.L.B. Vol. 5, No. 687, March 1980; 50
- 7 Ibid : 51
- 8 Eastern Province Herald : Thursday, 18th September 1980.
- 9 M. Whisson, "Port Elizabeth — the Future is here" Reality — May 1980 : 13
- 10 J. Maree "The UAW and the 1979 P.E. Strikes. S.A.L.B. Vol. 6, No. 283 September 1980 : 13
- 11 Eastern Province Herald : 5th September 1980
- 12 Merle Favis: "The Ford Workers' Committee and Shop Flawed Victory" Working for Ford S.A.L.B. Vol. 6, Nos. 2, 8, 3. September 1980 : 39.
- 13 Ibid : 39
- 14 See Favis : 41
- 15 S.A.L.B. Vol. 6, Nos. 2, 8, 3. September 1980 : 56.
- 16 M. Whisson : Op. Cit : 13
- 17 M. Evans : "The Emergence and Decline of a Community Organisation: An Assessment of Pebco". Working for Ford. S.A.L.B. Vol. 6, Nos. 2, & 3, September 1980 : 46.
- 18 Ibid : 46
- 19 Ibid : 46
- 20 Ibid : 47
- 21 Ibid : 48
- 22 See M. Whisson (et al) *The Sullivan Principles at Ford*.
- 23 Ibid : 48
- 24 Ibid : 49
- 25 Ibid : 50

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