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DEBATING LIBERALISM IN THE 1980s

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Contents

DEBATING LIBERALISM IN THE 1980s:

a critique	4
a response	9

INTERVIEW

Kader Hassim on the African Peoples' Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA)	14
---	----

INTERVIEW

Sydney Mufamadi on the General and Allied Workers' Union (GAWU)	19
---	----

BUS BOYCOTTS, MONOPOLIES

AND THE STATE	23
---------------	----

LABOUR ACTION

Negotiations in the metal industry	38
Transvaal strikes	40
Natal strikes	45
The National Union of Mineworkers and the mining industry	49

Cover by Kevin Humphrey

Editorial

The Accord of Nkomati was signed by the Mozambican and South African governments on 16 March. Prominent among the mutual obligations imposed by the Nkomati Accord are the following:

- * Forbidding and preventing the organisation of irregular forces, armed bands or mercenaries in the two countries;
- * Eliminating from the territories bases, training centres, places of shelter, accommodation and transit for anyone contemplating terrorism.
- * Taking appropriate steps to prevent the recruitment of people for terrorism.
- * Preventing the transit of would-be terrorists from either country to the other, or to any third state which has a common border with either South Africa or Mozambique.

Some have interpreted the signing of the Accord as an indication of crisis in Mozambique. President Machel points out that the war waged against Mozambique - principally involving the South African-backed MNR - has had devastating effects. 'Our people had their property looted, their houses destroyed, their granaries raided, their crops pillaged and flattened, their cattle stolen and killed, their tools burnt and destroyed. The communal villages and co-operatives, the schools and clinics, the wells and dams built by the people with so much effort and sacrifice, became targets for the enemy's criminal fury...840 schools have been destroyed, affecting more than 150 000 schoolchildren. Twelve health centres, 24 maternity clinics, 174 health posts and two centres for the physically handicapped have been sacked and destroyed. Nine hundred shops have been destroyed thus hampering sales and supplies for about four and a half million citizens'.

While AZAPO saw the Nkomati Accord as a betrayal of the liberation struggle, and a 'marriage of convenience', Machel argued that it had its progressive side. The Accord 'crowned our socialist policy of peace with success', and was a defence of 'the first state

of workers and peasants in the (southern African) region'.

Within South Africa, the UDF viewed the Nkomati Accord as an indication of the crisis facing South Africa's ruling group, while the National Forum saw it as 'a temporary set-back for the liberation struggle'. According to the National Forum, the struggle would now shift into the internal arena. Exile liberation groups would be forced to change their tactics, and black people relying on the exile movements for their liberation would now have to identify with 'the national liberation movement'.

The ANC acknowledged that the Accord was a setback, saying that it would help perpetuate white minority rule in South Africa. But, argued an ANC spokesperson, 'the people of southern Africa know from their own experience that there can be no peaceful co-existence between freedom and independence on the one hand, and colonialism and racism on the other. We are confident that the masses, their parties and governments...will remain loyal to the cause and firm in their resolve to stand with our people until victory is won'.

It is difficult to know exactly what Nkomati is: a 'betrayal of the liberation struggle' or a 'defence of socialism'; the result of crises in South Africa, or Mozambican weakness. But the signing of the Nkomati Accord indicates a profound change in South African politics; it places internal political organisation at the forefront of any attempt to transform South Africa's racially-based capitalist society

Debating Liberalism in the 1980s

a critique

What is liberalism? And what is its place in current resistance politics? CEDRIC DE BEER responds to Daryl Glaser's analysis of these issues, which appeared in WIP 30.

Daryl Glaser's article in *Work In Progress* 30 ('Liberalism in the 1980s'), takes the reader on a guided tour of recent political developments in South Africa. Most guided tours have two flaws: they try to show you too much; and while they look at interesting sights, they do not give you the chance to investigate the deeper realities. So it is with Glaser's article.

In a few pages, the 'Liberalism' article looks at three important topics:

- * the differing strategies of those groups which, while attempting to reform South Africa, want to retain the structures of exploitation and domination intact;
- * the nature of liberalism in South Africa today;
- * the different class interests of those who have at least one goal in common - the transformation of South Africa into a single non-racial political system which allows the majority of citizens access to political power.

The third of these topics is the most interesting and important for WIP readers. It touches on the nature of class alliances; the political struggle of the working class; and the relationship between oppression and exploitation. It is also the shortest section, covering just one page of a six-and-a-half page article.

This division of Glaser's article is my own, rather than the author's. He presents his argument as if he was only looking at the middle theme: an analysis

of liberalism in the 1980s. The analysis of so many different political positions under the catch-all term 'liberalism' is the major deficiency of Glaser's article. His failure to define liberalism results in confusion, and what follows is an attempt to clarify some of the issues he raises.

THE NATURE OF LIBERALISM

The rise of liberalism as a political doctrine closely corresponds to the emergence of the capitalist class in Western Europe, and particularly to the rise of industrial capitalism.

To create political conditions conducive to capitalism, the rising bourgeoisie needed to break existing feudal power. This was held by the aristocracies and monarchies which governed the societies where capitalism was struggling to take root. Their rule, regional in nature, was based on peasant or feudal economic relations. It was passed from generation to generation, and so excluded the capitalist class from the power needed to transform society.

The political battles that were fought to dislodge the aristocracy from power gave rise to a set of political principles according to which each state should have a single constitutional form of government. The individual was placed at the centre of the political universe, with political rights and duties. Individual liberty was guaranteed under the law. Economically, individual 'freedom' was assigned a more limited, but nonetheless critical meaning. Pre-capitalist economic forms tied most producers to the land. But industrial capitalism needed an urban work-force. This had to be created by 'freeing' direct producers

from the land (their only means of subsistence), and allowing them the 'freedom' to work as wage labourers in the new factories.

Liberalism has certain clearly defined ideological components. Formally, all people are born equal, and are free to exercise this equality within a political system. This guarantees individual rights to the extent that they do not infringe on the rights of others. These 'civil rights' include freedom from discrimination, freedom of speech, freedom to choose where to live and work and, importantly, the right to elect a government which represents 'the wishes of the majority'.

Classical liberalism was committed to the logic of the market place, the rationality of competition, and the belief that individuals are rewarded according to their merits. But this faith in the capitalist economy and a minimum of state interference has not gone unchallenged, and no longer holds the dominant position in the spectrum of liberal beliefs. A new school of thought argued that political rights and capitalism were not enough; that, in addition, it is necessary for the state to provide for the well-being of all citizens. This involves eradicating the worst poverty and providing essential services and care for those who are unable to look after themselves. This position is reflected in the modern welfare state - 'capitalism with a human face'.

Before returning to Glaser's article, two points need to be made about the relationship between liberalism and capitalism:

* Liberalism was forged out of the political struggles waged by the emergent capitalist class. It is also a reasonable description of the political system existing in the advanced capitalist countries. But this does not mean that liberalism and capitalism are linked in all cases. Indeed, many capitalist states in Latin America, Africa and Asia employ totalitarian and anti-democratic political systems to guarantee the continued existence of capitalist relations.

* It is quite possible to hold liberal political beliefs without having a specific commitment to capitalist economic relations. Concepts like 'freedom', 'equality', 'individual rights' and 'universal franchise'

have acquired sufficient autonomy to have no necessary relationship to an economic system based on wage labour and private ownership of the means of production. Indeed, it is one of the tasks of radical activists to win to their cause liberals whose prime commitment is to political democracy, and to show them that their commitment is inadequate if it does not also incorporate democracy in the economic sphere of relations of production.

LIBERALISM AND REFORMISM

Glaser's article provides us with no definition of liberalism. It seems to include almost everyone who expresses a commitment to any kind of change in South Africa - except the forces of the ultra-right. Under the title of 'liberal' are included such diverse positions as supporters of National Party reforms, and those whose liberalism 'consists in their vague and tendentially social-democratic definition of socialism, and in their failure to articulate a clearly defined anti-capitalist position'.

The inadequacy of this definition is revealed in Glaser's analysis of the white vote in the recent referendum. We are told that PW Botha's ability to rally a substantial 'yes' vote for what he portrayed as a mandate for change reflected the 'profound divisions currently rending white politics in general and South African liberalism in particular'. But this is inaccurate. PW Botha's constitution united South African liberals as they have seldom been united before. No one espousing any of the basic liberal doctrines could have considered voting for a constitution which:

- * excludes the majority of South Africans from the political process;
- * is based on ethnic identity rather than the value of the individual;
- * is based on laws which restrict where people may live and what jobs they can seek;
- * requires undemocratic laws and authoritarian practices to ensure the survival of the state in its present form.

The constitution has attracted the support of many who wish to see limited

changes introduced into South Africa. Many of these are business people whose commitment to minor reform is premised on their desire to see the capitalist order strengthened and protected against the rising tide of popular resistance. But to deduce from this that they are also liberals is a step which defies all logic.

Debate and the vote in the white referendum show that many PFP members and others who oppose the National Party voted 'yes for reform'. What the referendum did was to divide out liberals from reformists. This process has nudged the more militant of these liberals, and those with a less conscious commitment to capitalism, towards the popular democratic groupings most substantially represented by the UDF. This is something that should be welcomed and encouraged. The fear that it might somehow threaten working class interests is something that will be dealt with later on in this article.

If we ignore this woolly use of the term 'liberalism', the bulk of Glaser's article is unexceptionable. It provides a brief survey of the positions occupied by a number of different groups who are interested in reform. What calls for a reply, or rather for expansion, is the last section of the article.

In summary, Glaser's argument is this: 'radical liberals' found in large numbers in the UDF represent the interests of the petty bourgeoisie and are committed to a unitary democratic South Africa. They are 'more than willing to mobilise and consolidate a proletarian base in pursuit of their goals'; indeed, 'the popular democratic politics they espouse enjoys considerable working class support'. What is uncertain is whether the 'proletarian social base' will force popular democratic politics into a 'socialist project' or whether liberals will guide it in a reformist direction.

This is fair enough as far as it goes, but we are back on the guided tour, seeing the sights but not asking any of the interesting questions. Firstly, what is the basis for the class alliance (potential or actual) between the petty bourgeoisie and the working class? Secondly, what will determine which of the two classes will dominate such an alliance?

THE BASIS FOR CLASS ALLIANCE

The answer to the first question can be found if we ask ourselves (using Glaser's terminology) why there is substantial working class support for popular democratic politics with its vision of a unitary democratic South Africa.

Those espousing popular democratic demands have no specific commitment to capitalism. Indeed, Glaser tells us elsewhere in his article that 'they are prepared to push reform to the outermost social-democratic limits compatible with capitalism or even beyond'.

The political programme of these democrats is reflected in the Declaration of the UDF. It aims at 'the creation of a single, non-racial, unfragmented South Africa; a South Africa free from bantustans and Group Areas'. The target is quite clear - the destruction of apartheid in all its forms and the end of 'all forms of oppression and exploitation'.

The question before us can now be rephrased: why should this programme, 'tendentiously social democratic in nature', enjoy considerable working class support?

On one level, the answer to this question is simple. It is the working class, and particularly the African working class, which suffers most at the hands of the apartheid state. Lack of access to political power; the effects of bantustan fragmentation, especially the loss of citizenship; the rigid control over where people live and work through contract labour and group areas; the indignities and brutalities of influx control and population removals; these are essential components of apartheid, and have a profound effect on the quality of life of the working class.

This assault on the well-being, and sometimes even the survival of individuals within the proletariat, is sufficient reason for the working class to be committed to destroying apartheid and to supporting any democratic movement which has this destruction as its major goal. However, it is the task of political analysis to take us deeper than the level of what people experience, and how they feel about

it. This brings us to the point of examining why those who are committed to what Glaser calls 'a socialist project' should be interested in 'popular democratic' anti-apartheid struggles.

This question involves the relationship between capitalism and apartheid. They are not the same, and exist at levels which, for the sake of analysis, can be separated. Capitalism is an economic system - a way of ordering the production and distribution of commodities and the relationship between different classes involved in this process. Apartheid, on the other hand, is a way of ordering the political and social relationships between population groups. While capitalism and apartheid are not identical, they are very closely linked. Racial discrimination, segregation and apartheid played a vital role in establishing capitalism in South Africa. They continue as factors maintaining the conditions necessary for the survival of the capitalist system. By the same token, the needs of capitalism have played a crucial role in determining how racial politics has been structured in South Africa, and the development of monopoly capitalism in South Africa is a major factor in the restructuring of apartheid currently taking place.

In the decades after the discovery of diamonds and gold, various Land Acts (which laid the basis for the present bantustans) drove large numbers of Africans off the land, so contributing to the work-force that the mines needed so badly. The existence of rural 'homelands' provided both the opportunity and the justification for the low wages paid to these early workers. The profitability and survival of the mining industry depended on the low wage structure that resulted.

In the history of South African capitalism the three pillars of apartheid - bantustans, influx control and migrant labour - have given critical support to capitalist development. They have ensured the smooth flow of cheap labour to industries of dubious profitability; they have made it possible to keep to a minimum the cost of housing the work-force by allowing only the worker and not his family into the towns; they have allowed the reserve

areas to be turned into rural ghettos into which the vast army of unemployed can be dumped, there to be controlled by the surrogates of the central state. Residential segregation, another essential feature of apartheid, has made it easier to crush militant opposition to the social order amongst permanent urban residents.

Finally, racial classification has facilitated the process whereby inferior and cheaper health, educational and social service facilities are made available to different groups. Services are provided up to the point that is required to maintain a literate and able bodied work-force, rather than an educated and healthy community.

It is possible to conceive abstractly of some far distant time in which South Africa might have a form of non-racial capitalism. Such theoretical bubble blowing is of little concern to the present argument. What is of concern is that capitalist relations have been built on racial domination, and that the structures of exploitation continue to be inextricably bound up with the political system that is apartheid.

It is this which creates the objective basis for an alliance between the working class and other oppressed class fractions engaged in a struggle for political democracy. It is, for the same reason, essential that any 'socialist project' must incorporate a strategy to end the political system which ensures the continuation of capitalist relations.

The organic link between oppression and exploitation in South Africa provides a major reason for socialists to oppose apartheid. But it is not the only one. Apartheid does not exist only in people's heads. It has concrete effects, and structures the institutions of society in its own image. In particular, it is dangerous to believe that segregation and the bantustan policy have not created and consolidated real ethnic divisions, and real conflicts of interests between rural and urban communities; and between those who are included in, and those excluded from, the new constitution.

These conflicts may be secondary to the fundamental capital-labour contradiction. They will, nonetheless, prove to be a substantial obstacle to any attempt at building socialism

which involves rational planning in a single, co-ordinated political entity. As such, it would be naive for socialists to believe that these conflicts can be dealt with after the more fundamental contradiction has been overcome: this is a kind of 'two stage theory' in reverse, where questions of national divisions and conflicts are postponed until the economic structure has been transformed.

THE BALANCE OF FORCES

The final question raised in Glaser's article is that of the relative balance of forces within a democratic class alliance. Before turning to this, it would be as well to clarify the meaning that is being assigned to 'working class'. Glaser nowhere comes to grips with this problem. He avoids it by talking about the 'organised working class' by which he means workers at the point of production and the unions into which they are organised.

Any 'socialist project' must aim at eradicating the deformations and distortions created by capitalism. As such, it must have a broader conception of the working class. It must, for example, include the women who provide free services to capitalism by maintaining male workers and ensuring the reproduction of the working class. And it must include those three million or more people rendered jobless by being excluded from the production process. These sections of this more-broadly defined working class are precisely those who suffer most from apartheid. Many of them are confined to the death-like conditions in the bantustans. In the case of women, they are trebly oppressed: as women, as blacks and as part of the working class. For them in particular, the struggle against apartheid has an immediacy which cannot be defined away as being of secondary importance.

We are now in a position to come to terms with Glaser's fear that in a democratic class alliance, the interests of the working class will be subordinated to the petty bourgeoisie. We know:

* that a national political struggle for democracy and against apartheid

is in the interests of the black petty bourgeoisie who are certainly an oppressed group.

* that any socialist project must have, as an essential goal, the termination of apartheid. This leads directly to two further propositions:

* that it shows a naive misunderstanding of politics to believe that the petty bourgeoisie will not wage a political struggle against apartheid, and try to mobilise all other oppressed classes, including the working class, into this struggle.

* this being the case, the only way to ensure the dominance of working class interests in political struggle is if the proletariat does what it must in any case do if it is to end economic exploitation: enter wholeheartedly into the national struggle against the political system which guards and protects that exploitation.

It is of no use to bewail the fact that 'petty-bourgeois elements' dominate, or might dominate, the democratic movement. If they do so, it can only be by default - because the political leadership of the working class is not meeting its responsibilities.

There is a final ambiguity in Glaser's article that needs to be clarified. It involves the relationship between trade unions and the popular democratic movement. He implies, rather than states, that because unions are organised at the point of production, they are more likely to represent the political interests of the working class. In this context he states that the 'radical liberals' in the UDF fail 'to articulate a clearly anti-capitalist position'.

On referendum day last year, FOSATU encouraged union members to display slogans calling for 'one-man, one-vote'. This is a most typical liberal slogan, containing not the slightest social-democratic tinge. But one cannot conclude that FOSATU is liberal in character, nor that it is soft on capitalism. It merely demonstrates that organisations should not be categorised by their political pronouncements, but by their overall programme.

It should also be borne in mind that unions, by their nature, do not organise the unemployed or the spouses of workers. There will even be times

when the short term interests of the unemployed may be at variance with those who have jobs. In short, working class politics must incorporate both organisation at the point of production, and a programme aimed at establishing a democratic political order.

These two elements are both separate and closely linked. The most difficult question facing progressives is how they can be united in a single programme. It is a difficulty rooted in

the complexity of South African society and in divisions imposed by political and economic structures.

To simplify and sloganise these difficulties is unhelpful. They are not a matter of union officials' distrust of petty-bourgeois liberals, nor of political activists' dislike for 'workerists'. The problem is how mature progressives can wield together an effective force to end both economic exploitation and political oppression.

a response

Continuing the debate on liberalism, DARYL GLASER considers some of the criticisms of his WIP 30 article raised by Cedric de Beer.

THE DEFINITION OF LIBERALISM

The question central to both Cedric de Beer's article and my own (WIP 30) is: what is the definition of liberalism? Whereas my article (wrongly) utilised an unstated definition, de Beer set out (correctly) to make his definition of liberalism explicit. It is in the interests of the debate as a whole that the meaning of 'liberalism' be clarified.

In this regard it is interesting to note that de Beer's main concern is to establish the alleged distinction between 'liberalism' and 'reformism'. He argues that the white referendum 'neatly' separated 'liberals' from 'reformists'. This, he says, is because 'no one espousing any of the basic liberal doctrines could have considered voting for a constitution' of the type proposed by the Botha government. I shall take issue with this shortly. On the other hand, de Beer is quite happy to accept the basic proposition about 'radical liberalism' advanced in the WIP 30 article: in de Beer's words, the referendum debate 'has nudged the more militant of these liberals, and those with a less conscious commitment to capitalism in the direction of popular democratic groupings most substantially represented by the UDF'. His only point of difference with my article is that he stresses the positive implications

of this process whereas I emphasise its ambiguous (not its negative) implications.

Liberalism is notoriously difficult to define because the term is used variously to describe several different kinds of state forms and political philosophies. The first of these philosophies, associated with the ascendent bourgeoisie in early capitalist Europe, is **classic liberalism**. This asserted individual rights in opposition to feudalism's exactions; the market and meritocracy in opposition to feudal monopolies and hereditary privilege; and national and market unification in opposition to the feudal parcellisation of society along dynastic and religious lines. It sought a codified legal system to regulate competition in the **economic** market, and the separation of powers, a plurality of parties and the franchise to regulate **political** competition. Classic liberalism is associated with the **classical liberal state** of the type forged after the French and American Revolutions.

The second state form, the creation of which required a further elaboration of classic liberal philosophy, is the **bourgeois-democratic state**. This is the state whose inter-party competition is regulated by a universal rather than restricted franchise. Far from being a part-and-parcel of the classic liberal state - which sought to restrict the vote first to the propertied and then to males - the 'universal franchise' state was established in Western Europe, North America and Australia only in the twentieth century and only after a long series of popular struggles, wars and

other ruptures.

Thirdly, there is **welfare liberalism**. At first sight, this appeared a paradox: how could liberalism, with its emphasis on free competition and its opposition to state interference, include a welfare dimension? The paradox is resolved if we understand that, just as universal franchise amplified the principles of universalism and liberty contained in classic liberalism, the **welfare state** proved compatible with the liberal idea that competition and individual acquisitiveness need to be regulated in the interests of wider harmony. It should be added that the welfare state concept originated with the un-liberal Bismarck regime in nineteenth century Germany; it was only later welded to the liberal state both via explicitly 'liberal' parties (eg the British Liberals, the US Democrats), and via the parties linked to the working class (Britain's Labour Party, West Germany's SDP). Though at times portrayed as superseding capitalism - especially by social democrats - it has been shown that the post-war welfare statism of the advanced centres is compatible with the reproduction of capitalist relations. Its essential effects have been to extend the scope of state intervention to include the maintenance of the working class and the management of capitalism's economic and social crises.

The definition of liberalism is further complicated by the existence of hybrids. In Latin America, liberalism often refers to the philosophy of landed oligarchies opposed to state interventions designed to serve independent industrial development.

The matter is compounded also by the fact that liberalism can be classified along a qualitatively different plane, according to its degree of willingness to reconcile with the existing order, versus its determination to transform it. In the French Revolution, for example, constitutional monarchists faced the opposition of more militant Republicans. The liberalism which began to sprout in Germany after 1848 was conservative enough to be neutralised by Bismarck through the co-optation of its adherents with growth-promoting economic measures. By contrast in Nicaragua the liberal-democratic bourgeoisie tried to take the lead in the struggle to overthrow the Somoza dynasty in the late 1970s. A

great deal depends on the strength or the extent of grievances present in the urban-based bourgeoisie, which in turn usually provides the main support for liberal political and economic reform. This need not, however, be the decisive factor, as the more radical liberals may sever their ties with the bourgeoisie altogether, and cement alliances with the masses.

Finally, it should be mentioned that 'militant' or 'radical' liberals may be **coherently** and philosophically liberal (and inter alia 'anti-communist'), or may have an **ambiguous** attitude to socialism (this is true especially of social democrats). This ambiguity is notably present in the 'progressive nationalism' of many third world movements (including ZANU in Zimbabwe). One may wish to question the analytical wisdom of treating **European** social democracy - committed as it frequently is to 'socialism' and linked to the unions - as 'liberal'. The label, however, has much greater resonance in third world contexts where social-democratic currents have traditionally not been linked to working class movements, and have concentrated on 'universal' demands for 'democracy' and

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so on. European social democracy is, by contrast, often quite 'workerist'.

LIBERALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

It is not easy to apply these categories of liberalism to the South African context. The original categories used in WIP 30 - Establishment, Independent-Establishment, Bourgeois-Democratic and Radical Liberalism - do not fit easily into any of the 'pigeon-holes' just discussed, but incorporate elements of each. To be schematic:

South Africa:

Establishment Liberalism	=	(i) conservative reformist (ii) classic liberal
Independent Establishment Liberalism	=	(i) somewhat less conservative (ii) classic liberal
Bourgeois Democratic Liberalism	=	(i) strongly change-oriented (ii) bourgeois-democratic at the level of politics, undefined, though always anti-socialist at the level of economics.
Radical Liberalism	=	(i) militant (ii) tendentially social-democratic, welfarist.

In terms of class alliances, Establishment and Independent-Establishment Liberalism are supported by the bulk of South Africa's capitalist class. Bourgeois-Democratic Liberalism receives the support of the more enlightened bourgeois and professional strata. It also has links with quasi-mass organisations (like Inkatha). Radical Liberalism is treated with fear by a bourgeoisie which is concerned to avoid the disruptive and radicalising effects of mass action. Radical liberals have allied themselves instead with the popular classes. They should be clearly distinguished from other elements aligned to the masses, notably left-wing (socialist) activists, who are found in

the same organisations.

Organisationally, Establishment and Independent Establishment Liberalism find expression in the conservative Sunday newspapers, the employers' federations, the right of the PFP, etc. Bourgeois-Democratic Liberalism is dominant in the PFP, and is strongly represented in church hierarchies, the Black Sash and the South African Institute of Race Relations. Radical Liberalism is one of a number of philosophical world views present in the UDF and the National Forum. The National Party is not liberal (the reference to 'NP liberalism' in WIP 30 is a misprint). Though its current economic and racial policies have a sympathetic audience in Establishment Liberals, the NP includes, alongside a liberal current, a proto-fascist component (authoritarianism, anti-parliamentarianism, 'remnants' of white populist racial chauvinism). At the other 'extreme', the UDF, too, is not liberal, since it includes left activists and, in important instances, assertive grass roots structures. Liberalism is, however, a definite current within the UDF (as de Beer would agree).

ON POPULAR FRONTS

De Beer's emphasis on the positive implications of Popular Frontism rests on his tendency to stress the common opposition of blacks of all classes to apartheid, and on the close and organic link between racism and capitalism (the notion of a non-racial capitalism being relegated to the realm not so much of logical impossibility as of, in de Beer's words, 'theoretical bubble blowing'). Presumably de Beer also has in mind the more thoroughly transformative achievements of mass-based radical nationalism (eg Mozambique and Viet Nam). His position is probably also informed by reflections on the disasters associated with the 'workerism' of the Third International in the late 1920s and early 1930s - disasters which culminated in fascism and the obliteration of working class organisations in much of Europe.

These arguments and factors all deserve serious attention. They should not, however, blind us to the fact that a strong case can also be made for

emphasising the ambiguous implications of Popular Front formations. Such a case could rest on the less encouraging experiences of 'progressive nationalism' (from Mexico in 1910-20 to Zimbabwe in the 1980s), and on the repeated upstaging of the combative sections of the working class during the anti-fascist popular frontism of the 1930s and 1940s. Apart from this, a very strong case - which we do not have the room to elaborate here - could be made for rejecting the functionalist claim that a non-racial political order is incompatible with the reproduction of capitalist relations in South Africa.

Whatever their merits or demerits, these arguments - and the problems they pose for Popular Frontism - cannot be dismissed as lightly as de Beer occasionally implies. His article seems to suggest that the marriage of Popular Frontism and socialist objectives can be consummated just as soon as the political leadership of the working class recognises, and carries out, its historical 'responsibility' to rise above trade unionism and 'enter wholeheartedly into the national struggle against the political system'. It was precisely the 'political leadership of the working class' which, under the rubric of various kinds of Popular Frontism - anti-fascist until 1945, and thereafter anti-monopoly - helped rescue Western and Southern European capitalism from the most active social and political crises.

This does not mean that the organisations of the working class should confine themselves to simple trade unionism, nor that they should avoid alliances with the representatives of non-proletarian classes and strata. It is rather to reassert what should be an obvious point: that the mere presence of socialists and combative workers within the terrain of popular opposition politics is not enough to guarantee a sustained challenge to the authority of capital. Surely, at a minimum, it is necessary to note **both** the possibilities and the dangers associated with Popular Frontism - and to concede that the mere entry of the working class and its leaders into fronts is not sufficient to obviate the risks entailed? In this light, de Beer's singular emphasis on the 'positive' value of fronts as weapons of socialist transformation appears one-sided.

REFORMISM VS LIBERALISM?

De Beer's conceptualisation of frontism in South Africa is not unconnected to his definition of liberalism. On the contrary, it depends upon an understanding of the latter which allows him to demonstrate liberalism's ready compatibility with socialist objectives. This involves a two-fold argument, the combined effect of which is to shift the locus of the definition of liberalism to the left and to thereby blur the boundary separating it from socialism.

In the first place, de Beer distinguishes between reformism and liberalism. The former label he pins to the Botha regime and those sympathetic to its initiatives; the latter designates only those who oppose the new constitution on the grounds of its incompatibility with basic liberal concepts (freedom, political equality, nationhood, etc). Thus, in de Beer's analysis liberalism begins where support for the constitution ends. It is difficult to see how such a rigid criterion can be applied without depriving liberalism of any meaning in the South African context whatsoever. For it would exclude from the liberal camp not only the **Sunday Times** and **Anglo American**, but all those abiding by the PFP constitution - a document which does little to hide its concern to preserve (via the minority veto, federalism, and so on) white political and economic privileges.

The fact of the matter is that the liberal commitment to universal nationhood arose primarily in the context of struggles to weld linguistically and, to some extent, culturally homogeneous European populations into single nations. When liberal social anthropologists and sociologists discovered the third world, however, their conception of nationhood was in many instances modified to accommodate 'ethnic' and cultural differences - 'pluralist' theories being one expression of this tendency. Moreover, we have already noted that liberalism was originally committed neither to universal franchise nor to mass-based democratic politics; these were the product of later elaborations of liberalism. It therefore seems quite unjust to exclude what I

have called Establishment Liberalism from the liberal camp simply because it does not conform to a 'pure' model of liberalism as defined by de Beer.

Botha's reformism is itself not liberal; its authoritarianism, its continuing obsession with ethnicity, and its bureaucratic interference in the labour market, are together sufficient to disprove its liberal credentials. However, given the context of a conservative-reformist bourgeois class - and an Establishment-Liberalism ready to take whatever it can get from the 'recalcitrant Nats' - an unhappy marriage between the regime and the right wing of liberalism becomes conceivable.

ON 'LIBERAL' RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

If de Beer's one concern is to define a whole section of the 'reformist' opposition out of the liberal camp, his other is to offer a definition of liberal values which allows a marriage of liberalism and socialism to appear relatively uncomplicated. Concepts like 'freedom', 'equality', 'individual rights' and 'universal franchise', we are told, 'have acquired sufficient autonomy' to have no necessary relationship to capitalism; they can, in consequence, be given a real socialist content. Were this not so, FOSATU's advocacy of universal franchise during the referendum would indicate that it is liberal and thus 'soft on capitalism'. Instead of judging movements on the basis of their pronouncements we should, de Beer concludes, examine their overall programme.

Everything here depends on how one formulates this argument. A socialist is perfectly justified in demanding a political order which respects universal franchise, party competition, civil liberties and so on. Indeed, the uneven record of 'actual socialism' in the twentieth century has led many in the European left to conclude that no democratic socialism is possible without such basic freedoms. De Beer's error is to portray these as 'liberal freedoms' when in fact liberalism has never enjoyed an exclusive claim on them. In the late nineteenth century it was the working class movement which demanded full civil freedoms and universal

franchise, and the bourgeoisie which resisted. The liberal - and therefore capitalist - appropriation and monopolisation of these concepts since roughly the Second World War is perhaps one of the most dramatic developments of the second half of this century. If these concepts are to be recaptured by the left, it can only be on the basis of their disarticulation from liberal discourse. Liberalism is indissolubly linked to capitalism; libertarianism is not. Absorbing liberals into socialist-oriented political alliances ultimately requires not that their liberal but that their libertarian principles be given coherent socialist content. It requires that they should eventually cease to be liberals. It is because he ignores the necessity for this qualitative break that de Beer is able to present liberalism as a political partner which socialists can court without danger ■



PSYCHOLOGY IN SOCIETY

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Interview: Hassim on APDUSA

APDUSA (African Peoples' Democratic Union of Southern Africa), the most prominent affiliate of the Unity Movement, has been revived. Free-lance journalist and researcher Yunus Carrim recently interviewed KADER HASSIM for WIP, to get some sense of the meaning of APDUSA's revival. Hassim (49) was the first accused in the 1971-2 APDUSA trial in which 14 people faced Terrorism Act charges. Sentenced to eight years on Robben Island, he was subsequently struck off the lawyers' role, and presently works as a legal clerk in Pietermaritzburg. Kader Hassim is chairman of APDUSA's Pietermaritzburg branch.



WIP: When was APDUSA formed?

Hassim: The first official conference was held in Cape Town in 1962, though the initial idea of forming a political wing of the Unity Movement was sounded out at a meeting in 1960.

WIP: Why was APDUSA formed, and what was its relationship with the Unity Movement?

Hassim: The Unity Movement was a federal structure of different organisations - civic, cultural, teacher, sports, youth and other. But there was no specific political organisation which an individual could join directly. If he wanted to join the Unity Movement he had to do so through its affiliate organisations which were not political in the direct sense. So we formed APDUSA as a specifically political affiliate of the Unity Movement, with the object of recruiting people directly on a political basis.

WIP: What is the programme of APDUSA?

Hassim: The programme of APDUSA is the Ten Point Programme of the Unity Movement formulated in 1943. It

basically calls for universal franchise; free education; inviolability of person; freedom of expression; freedom of movement and occupation; racial equality; and the revision of the land question, the civil and criminal code, taxation, and labour legislation.

Now of course things have changed since 1943 and aspects of the programme obviously need to be reviewed. We mean to do this soon. But basically APDUSA subscribed to the Ten Point Programme - except that it stressed in its constitution that 'the democratic aspirations of the workers and peasants shall be paramount in both the short-term and long-term orientation of APDUSA'. And by African we mean all those who live in Africa and who advance its cause.

WIP: How do you understand the differences between the Unity Movement and the Congress movement?

Hassim: The Unity Movement believed that an organisation must have a set of non-negotiable goals that give it direction. But the Congress movement was always hesitant to commit itself to a clear set of goals. It had different programmes and charters and working documents every now and then, but nothing principled. For us, however, a

programme was both a means and an end - and we judged others by the yardstick of our programme. The Ten Point Programme was a programme for nothing less than human rights. What France achieved in 1789. There's nothing unreasonable about it. So we insisted on the programme as a minimum basis on which to work with other organisations.

But the Congress had no such principle. They were prepared to work with any organisation for a specific objective. During the 1958 general election, for example, they wanted to form an alliance with all anti-National Party forces, including the United Party, so as to defeat the Nats. It's happening again today. The Congress tradition has been characterised by these Popular Fronts which bring together antagonistic classes and groupings. Now when you do that sort of thing your basis for coming together must be extremely wide to accommodate everybody, and so you have to compromise on your programme. We in the Unity Movement were not prepared to do this.

The Congress, you must understand, was under the tutelage of the liberals - and it was they who were largely responsible for the failure of the two movements to arrive at an understanding. But a further matter that divided us was non-racialism: whereas the ANC was confined to Africans and the various Congresses were constituted along racial lines, the Unity Movement accepted people of all colours.

Of course a fundamental difference between the Unity Movement and Congress was over the question of non-collaboration. The Unity Movement refused to take part in dummy institutions and government structures, but the Congress leadership participated in these government bodies, such as the Native Representative Councils.

WIP: Some clarity on a point. Are you drawing an analogy between the attempt at an anti-National Party alliance by Congress in 1958 and the United Democratic Front of the moment?

Hassim: Up to a point. The concept is the same - except that the UDF hasn't invited the Progressive Federal Party to join. I don't suppose they'll want the homeland parties to join. But they are in fact trying to create a spurious unity of antagonistic classes and

groupings. In fact, they even had to jettison the Freedom Charter in establishing a basis for their broad unity so as to accommodate organisations like the Black Sash, NAFCOC and the Islamic Council.

WIP: How do you see the Freedom Charter?

Hassim: The Unity Movement did not in the first place have any confidence in the Congress leadership that initiated the idea of the Charter. But also we had our own programme formulated a good 12 years before the Freedom Charter, which the Congress was invited to commit itself to, but refused to do. As for the Charter itself, it envisions a democracy - which we welcome. There are socialist elements in it - but I don't know how serious Congress is about that. But the main objection we have to the Charter is the four-nation thesis and the protection for minorities that it endorses. This is in total opposition to the concept of a single South African nation that the Unity Movement espouses.

WIP: You say Congress should have supported the Ten Point Programme. But surely any unity between Congress and the Unity Movement could only have been on the terms of Congress, as it had an echo amongst the masses while the Unity Movement did not. In fact, the Unity Movement is often seen as having been little more than a small coterie of intellectuals whose fondness for abstract discussion was matched only by their distaste for any concrete practical activity. What is your response to this?

Hassim: It's a smear tactic to refer to the Unity Movement as a small coterie of intellectuals. It's a falsification of history. In fact, during the 1940s the Unity Movement was a mass organisation. The long list of organisations represented at the 1945 conference, for that matter, belies the claim that the Unity Movement was little more than a small band of intellectuals. The Anti-Segregation Council, for example, which later took over the NIC, was originally in the Unity Movement. In the 1940s the Unity Movement was the largest political organisation in the country. If you

look at the minutes of the 1946 Annual Conference, you will see that, at a conservative estimate, the membership of the Unity Movement through its affiliates was put at 60 000. It was only in the 1950s that the Unity Movement was eclipsed in terms of numbers by the Congress.

WIP: The Unity Movement claims to have had mass support amongst the peasants in the Transkei. What substance is there to this?

Hassim: The strategy of the Unity Movement was to link the struggle for national liberation with the solution of the agrarian problem. This was so because at that time the vast majority of the population were landless peasants - people who had aspirations to a life of peasantry. The other political organisations put all their eggs in the working class basket and ignored the peasants. Point 7 of the Unity Movement programme called for a new division of the land; and with the fight against the rehabilitation schemes from 1947 onwards, and the opposition to the Bantu Authorities Act in the countryside, the Unity Movement became deeply involved in the struggles of the peasants. One of the Unity Movement's strongest affiliates was the Cape African Teachers' Association, and it was the teachers who were often our link with the countryside.

WIP: You said earlier that a fundamental difference between the Unity Movement and Congress was over non-collaboration. But the Unity Movement is often criticised for fetishising the boycott, for making a principle of what is really a tactic that should be used only after taking account of all the contradictions in a situation. What is your response to the charge that the Unity Movement subscribes to abstract boycottism?

Hassim: Non-collaboration is not a principle. It's a policy, a long-term strategy. Essentially it is based on the view that an oppressed people cannot be ruled for long unless they are prepared to participate in institutions designed for their own oppression. There is no direct link

between the ruling class and the oppressed people, so ruling class ideas permeate through liberals to the black intelligentsia, who in turn pass them on to the oppressed. So the intelligentsia is used as the tool of the ruling class to carry out its plans. Non-collaboration is therefore designed to snap this link between the ruling class and the oppressed; it is meant to show that there is a wide chasm that separates these two groups which in fact have diametrically opposed views. Non-collaboration seeks to clearly define the relationship between oppressor and oppressed, to clearly draw the battle lines.

Non-collaboration is not simply boycott of government institutions. It's a whole philosophy where you turn your back to the ruling class and you face the oppressed. You see no salvation in the ruling class but in the oppressed. But this doesn't mean that you boycott for boycotts' sake. No, the boycott is selectively used. It is used only when it concretely advances the struggle. There is nothing abstract about it. For example, when Bantu Education was introduced in the 1950s, we felt that the people should not participate in it, not by boycotting schools which would be self-destructive, but by the pupils, teachers and parents coming to fully appreciate what the aims of Bantu Education are and to refuse to simply submit to these aims. We have also refused to support certain economic boycotts - like some of the consumer boycotts in the 1950s - while on the other hand we supported the boycott of meat during the strike in 1980. So we have been very selective in the use of the boycott.

WIP: Turning to the present: APDUSA recently distributed leaflets in Pietermaritzburg and Durban calling on people to boycott any referendum among Indians over the new constitution. This was in opposition to the Natal Indian Congress which called for a referendum so that Indians could register their rejection of the constitution. Why did APDUSA call for a boycott of a referendum? And wasn't this being divisive?

Hassim: In fact it is those who called for a referendum who stepped out of

line, and it was they who were being divisive, not us. They know full well that the masses have unequivocally rejected participation in dummy institutions and government structures. So our call for a boycott was entirely consistent. To have taken part in a referendum, which is a process of the new constitution, would in fact have been to take part in the new constitution. Moreover, it would have been an ethnic referendum - it was in fact a decision by the NIC to take part voluntarily in a racial process, and we wanted to have nothing to do with that.

And of course we were not the only ones. AZAPO would never have supported the referendum, nor would have SACOS and perhaps the unions. So you would have had the situation where some of the people who opposed the constitution would have said 'no' in the referendum, while others would have boycotted the referendum. And it might well have been the case that the majority of those who did go to the polls would have said 'yes' to the constitution. I can remember, for example, in 1958 the Congress put up Piet Beyleveld as a candidate for the election of a Coloured Representative to parliament. His opponent was one Abe Bloomberg, a United Party type. The Unity Movement called for a boycott of the elections, and there was a massive stay away from the polls with the result that Bloomberg got in. Now of course that was an election, which is not the same as a referendum - but there's a lesson in it anyway.

WIP: Now that there's not going to be a referendum for Indians and coloureds, and all sections of the democratic movement are committed to a boycott of elections to the tri-cameral parliament, would you be prepared to work with other organisations calling for a boycott?

Hassim: We would be happy to work with other organisations like AZAPO, SACOS and some of the unions because they have a set of principles by which they act. Not so Congress. In 1981, for example, a broad Anti-SAIC front was established, made up mainly of the NIC but also including other forces opposed to the SAIC. The campaign was a huge success. But it was NIC alone which claimed the credit for it all. Not that

Congress didn't do the lion's share of the work, but the other forces should have been acknowledged too. So we are very wary of any alliance with the NIC. What we are interested in is disciplined, principled alliances - and this we won't be able to establish with the NIC or other organisations in the UDF.

WIP: So what is your relationship with AZAPO? And do you see a role for APDUSA in the National Forum which seems to aim at some sort of coalition of all progressive forces outside the UDF?

Hassim: We have a warm and happy relationship with AZAPO. We work together whenever we can, and we regard them as a very significant section of the liberatory movement. But the National Forum is simply a forum. One doesn't know if it's ever going to crystallise into an organisation. We are not prepared to join the Forum because of the liberals associated with it. We do not want to rub shoulders with liberals, whatever their colour. But we welcome dialogue with the progressive sections of the Forum.

WIP: But do you have any serious theoretical differences with the Draft Manifesto of the National Forum?

Hassim: Given the brevity of the Manifesto, there's not much I can say. Nothing is spelt out in it. It's much too general and vague, and it's difficult to assess what it really means. But crucially missing from the Manifesto is an appreciation of the dominating role of liberalism in its various forms, the paramount importance of political power through the full franchise, and the demand for civil liberties. But until I'm able to lay my hands on documents which spell out in detail the various facets of the Manifesto, I don't think it's fair for me to say anything further.

WIP: Returning to the elections for the tri-cameral parliament, how do you hope to carry the campaign forward?

Hassim: We have begun going house to house to discuss the new constitution with the people, but at the moment this

is still on a small scale. We have distributed leaflets, and we intend to produce more pamphlets, stickers and placards. We will also hold public meetings if necessary. We would also consider entering into alliances with other organisations which oppose the constitution, provided it does not compromise us in any way.

WIP: So what is the present strength of APDUSA?

Hassim: We are just reviving. We had to contend not only with the set-backs that all the organisations suffered in the early 1960s, but also with the severe blow we received in 1971 when over 200 of our activists were detained and the rudiments of our structure destroyed. At the moment we have branches in Cape Town, Kimberley, Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and we are trying to revive the old branches and create new ones elsewhere. We are small in numbers, but we have a very determined membership, and we have a perspective. With our programme being right and our strategy being correct, we are sure to grow in strength.

WIP: Finally, how do you see the present phase the country is in, and what do you think of the prospects for fundamental change in South Africa?

Hassim: I feel that today more than ever before the oppressed people of this country are in danger of their aspirations being betrayed. South Africa has become more than ever before a battle ground for the super-powers. And the West is determined not to lose its hold in South Africa. Imperialism wants to preserve its interests here at

all costs and is more and more pretending to be a friend of the people. The oppressed must be on their guard against the designs of imperialism and especially its agent, liberalism. In particular, attempts to divide further the people - coloureds and Indians from Africans, urban workers from migrants - must be vigorously resisted. The basis for this already exists in the resurgence of mass resistance since 1976. This must be intensified. And the independent trade union movement must play its role too. Perhaps the most striking feature of the struggle in recent years has been the growth of the trade union movement. But the unions must become more involved in the wider political struggle - otherwise they can become reformist, and this would represent an enormous defeat for the working class.

A few words on the Nkomati Accord. I think Mozambique had no choice. It was a question of survival and the preservation of the gains of the Mozambican revolution. I just cannot understand how some organisations can criticise Mozambique for having betrayed us. It's nonsense really. These people who attack Mozambique - do they know a day of hunger or the devastation of war or the responsibility of governing a country where famine stalks the land? Really, if there's any criticism to be levelled at all it is at the FRELIMO leadership simply for underestimating the power of the South African state and overestimating the capacity of the Soviet Union to come to their aid. But the Accord does not represent a defeat for our struggle. It is simply a reflection of the contradictions we find ourselves in in the Southern African sub-continent at the moment. But I have every confidence that these contradictions will be ultimately resolved in favour of the people ■



Interview:

Mufamadi on GAWU

Trade union unity and relations with the UDF are two of the most difficult issues which trade unions have had to face recently. **WIP** interviewed **SYDNEY MUFAMADI**, general secretary of the General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU) on these questions.

WIP: How does GAWU see the relationship between working class and popular or national struggle in South Africa?

Mufamadi: There is no question that the essential problem which people in South Africa have got to address is the question of economic exploitation, which is capitalism. But there is a specific form which capitalism in this country has taken. This involves national oppression, where the African working class experiences national oppression, which is meant to maximise profits. Because of that, we see a link between the issues which workers are organising themselves around - on the factory floor and in political oppression. Workers have to address both these questions in an organised form.

WIP: Some unions argue that at this moment in South Africa's history, it is important for the working class to organise distinctly and separately from other class influences. At a particular stage, according to this view, the political and organisational confidence of the working class becomes such that it is able to move into alliance with other classes. This ensures that real and meaningful working class leadership emerges. How do you respond to this approach?

Mufamadi: We see things differently. Some want to perceive the working class as only found on the factory floor.

Our view is that even those people who are not behind machines on the factory floor can be said to be waging a working class struggle if the issues which they take up in their various sites of struggle, and the way in which they take those issues up, serve to undermine the class relations upon which the present society is built.

If we go, for instance, to the community where we find our people living in squalid conditions, these questions can be addressed in class terms. The workers cannot say that they have nothing to say about that kind of situation. Because that is the situation they are faced with. People can wage a working class political struggle around those issues which affect them, and trade unions can play a role in instilling working class consciousness.

There are people in rural areas, and we as trade unionists have limitations which we have to contend with. Our sphere of operation is the factory floor, but we need to address ourselves to those who are; for instance, in the rural areas. We don't have the necessary infrastructure as trade unions. Even if we come up with one union federation, we still will not have the infrastructure to reach people in those areas. We think, and this has been proven in practice, that the UDF does offer that kind of infrastructure. And we think that working class consciousness can be instilled into the masses of our people through this available infrastructure.

WIP: GAWU has joined the UDF. What do you see as the best form for an alliance between working class organisations and popular or community organisations in the two struggles you've outlined?

Mufamadi: All the organisations that have affiliated to the UDF have done so because they are in full agreement

with the UDF declaration. We want to see those organisations as equal partners in this united front. Ideologically speaking, we are saying that we are involved in a national democratic struggle wherein we put special emphasis on the leadership role which has to be played by the working class. If you look at the UDF declaration, there is nothing there which negates the interests of the working class. We feel that we as a trade union have got room in the UDF as much as any other progressive form of organisation, be it operating in the community, at a student level or in the women's front.

WIP: What would satisfy you that working class leadership was a fact in the struggle you spoke about, and what form should this leadership take?

Mufamadi: It is not important whether the majority of people on the UDF executive are from a trade union or not. That would be a wrong understanding of what working class politics or struggle entails. If the programme of action, which is guiding the UDF, ensures that the interests of the working class are safeguarded; and if whenever there are UDF meetings where important policy decisions are taken there is participation of representatives of the workers' organisations, that ensures that workers are represented in that sort of a front.

But we are not envisaging in an alliance of this nature that one section of the alliance will dictate to other sections what is to be done in the front. We believe that this involves some kind of common perspective of issues which has got to develop in the process of common struggles. These common struggles can only be waged if people are willing to fight together in an alliance like UDF. Working class leadership has got to emerge in that kind of process.

WIP: Let's move on to the question of GAWU's relationship to the trade union unity talks. At the March unity meeting in Johannesburg, certain unions including GAWU left the talks. What happened?

Mufamadi: There are two aspects which are central to this question: industrial unions, and progress. GAWU has long been committed to the formation of industrial unions. We see this as the form of organisation which guarantees efficiency compared to the way in which we are structured at the moment. We committed ourselves to this even before the idea of union unity talks. When the idea of the unity talks came about, we welcomed that move. Unions saw the need to unite against the onslaught from the state and against the problems that we face on a day-to-day basis on the factory floor. Our participation in a series of meetings confirms our commitment to the question of unity.

At an inter-union level, we came to realise that if we are to form one progressive trade union federation, all the unions participating will have to restructure themselves. Some are currently operating as general unions, while others are already organising themselves along federal lines.

We came to that realisation, and a commitment was made to restructure ourselves along distinct industrial lines. But no deadlines for this were set. We thought this was proper, because there is no way in which we could assert deadlines in establishing industrial unions. Setting deadlines would presuppose that we are operating in a normal, interruption-free situation. But we experience a lot of interruptions, one of them being state intervention in the running of our trade unions. Given these kinds of interruptions, and other problems which relate to material and human resources, we realised that restructuring the general unions along industrial lines would be a long process.

It is unfortunate that some of our fellow participants in the unity talks were already operating as industrial unions. Some of them were in a relatively advanced stage, and were a step ahead of other unions. But what we thought they should have done was to accommodate us in the process of forming industrial unions. If some unions are lagging behind others because of the way they were established, we saw it as our collective responsibility to work together in the transition from the present state of affairs to the end envisaged.

WIP: You have previously suggested that trade union unity is being imposed from above, not built from below. Presumably this relates to GAWU's commitment to the regional solidarity committees as a process in building unity. Had these regional solidarity committees been meeting regularly prior to the March feasibility meeting in Johannesburg?

Mufamadi: Yes, in some areas, and no with regard to other areas. The idea of the regional solidarity committees was initially mooted at our first unity conference at Langa in mid-1981. This committee did not meet much immediately after that, because of the state clampdown which came immediately after that conference. But one of the efforts of the regional solidarity committees were the one-hour stoppages called to observe the death of comrade Neil Aggett. We thought that if people could meet in that spirit, a lot of issues could be dealt with by the workers themselves. We were thinking about a situation where, for instance, shop stewards from various unions would come together and discuss common issues which affect them factory floor, and try to formulate common strategies at regional level to deal with them.

But I must say that, even though we have been meeting in the Transvaal, some of the unions never turned up. And even those unions that did meet did not meet as often as they could have done.

WIP: Did GAWU, Municipal and General Workers Union, and SAAWU walk out of the March unity meeting, or were they expelled?

Mufamadi: We did not walk out of the unity talks. Some unions felt that we were delaying the formation of a federation because we were taking too long to restructure ourselves. This was in spite of the practical problems that we tried to highlight at the unity talks. They decided that they were in a position to go ahead with our exclusion, and felt that we should be given observer status. This was totally unacceptable at that point in time: when we went to those talks we had a clear mandate to be full participants. We found ourselves in a dilemma. We could not change our status without a mandate to do so from our membership.

When we brought that to the other unions' attention, they felt that all we needed to do was to go back to our membership and give them feedback on what transpired at the talks, tell them that we had been offered a new status, and seek a fresh mandate.

WIP: Does GAWU intend to seek a different mandate from its members on the question of union unity?

Mufamadi: Not necessarily. What we have already started doing is to report to members what happened at the unity talks. The mandate they gave us is still the same at present. Our membership will have to look at the new status we have been offered, and see what kind of mandate they can give us in the light of that.

WIP: In terms of GAWU's commitment to restructure along industrial lines, what areas will you be concentrating on in the future?

Mufamadi: Historically we are a general union. GAWU emerged as a breakaway from BAWU, which was itself a general union. A lot of BAWU members decided to break away with the group establishing GAWU. That's how we became a general union.

We decided, even before the unity talks started, to assess what areas we are relatively strong in. When we feel we have the necessary human and material resources we will establish an industrial union in those particular industries. That is our objective. But the circumstances we are operating in change from time to time. For example in 1982 we realised that the Municipal and General Workers Union was organising in the railway sector, and we were also organising there. We felt that we should combine our respective membership and come up with one union for railway workers. This has since been established.

WIP: Are there other areas where GAWU is close to the establishment of industrial unions?

Mufamadi: If one looks at the extent of our organised presence in the metal industry, we think we can come up with an industrial union. But we decided to

shelve that idea because although we've got a strong presence, there is already an established union - MAWU - in that industry. MAWU is one of the unions participating with us in the unity talks. When the idea of bilateral discussions between unions organising in the same industry was raised, we felt that we could come together with MAWU and look at the possibility of a merger. This would facilitate the formation of a unified trade union federation.

WIP: So you are saying that in relations with MAWU, you have been a positive participant in the question of demarcation?

Mufamadi: Yes. We did commit ourselves to the question of industrial demarcation, and we saw it as an obligation on our part to sit down with any union organising in an area where we were also organised. Even the consideration of a merger was positive.

WIP: Have you signed your members in the metal industry over to MAWU?

Mufamadi: No, but that is one possibility we were toying with. Unfortunately, we were then asked to take a new status in the unity talks, and that status does not enable us to discuss that question with MAWU at the moment. But when unions were asked whether they could commit themselves to meeting with other unions where they overlap in areas of organisation, we indicated that we would be prepared to sit with MAWU in as far as our membership in the metal industry is concerned, and also with the Food and Canning Workers Union.

WIP: What are GAWU's long-term plans on trade union unity, given that you've now been offered observer status only, and that you're not able to accept that?

Mufamadi: We still see ourselves as very much part of the unity talks. That is why we see the coming mandate which our members will give us as very crucial, and something which cannot be hastily decided on. We need a lot of

discussion within GAWU itself.

We have no ill feelings towards those still participating in the unity talks. When we get a mandate, we will see how those participating in the unity talks can accommodate whatever mandate we have been given. We don't think that the doors for co-operation with those unions, either individually or collectively, have been closed. We are still trying to co-operate with them as ever before. All possibilities are still there for us to work towards unity with them.

WIP: One final question on GAWU's strength: how many signed up and paid up members does GAWU have?

Mufamadi: One cannot be categorical about this. It's a fluctuating position. Last year, for example, we experienced recession, and this affected organisation. Our current estimate is that our signed up membership is 30 000; and paid up membership in the region of 18 000



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Bus Boycotts, Monopolies and the State

Transport is an area of crucial concern for the African working class. The Alexandra bus boycott earlier this year showed the nature of conflict between working class commuters and the transport monopolies. Events around the boycott also demonstrated the links between state and capital in an evolving transport policy. JOHN PERLMAN examines the Alexandra bus boycott, and analyses changing transport policy in South Africa.

On 16 January this year, the vast majority of Alexandra township's 36 000 bus commuters refused to board PUTCO buses. This three-week long boycott provides a good example of how police, traffic officers, security policemen and the bus company combine together and use a wide range of methods to break a boycott and force commuters back to the buses. The boycott also highlights important features of the African bus transport system - monopoly control over bus transport; increased fares in spite of the rising cost of living for commuters and rising profits for bus companies; protection of bus company interests and stifling of commuter opposition.

Bus transport serves the interests of the state, bus companies and employers in particular ways. This 'alliance' of interests is not a straightforward one as their interests do not coincide in every respect. Steps which each party take produce both the desired results and give rise to other forces which contradict their aims. African commuters have struggled against this situation. Consequently the government set up the Welgemoed Commission to look into some of the strains and tensions in the bus transport system. The Commission will affect bus transport for African

commuters - who provides the transport, who pays for it and what spaces are left for people to press demands for affordable efficient transport.

The boycott was sparked off by a 12,5% increase in fares on the Witwatersrand. In August last year, PUTCO announced that a reduction in the price of diesel fuel of 3,1 c per litre would save the company R2,6-m a year. This saving would be passed onto the commuters. Shortly thereafter, PUTCO's application for a 12,5% increase in fares was approved. PUTCO public relations officer Pat Rogers said the company would honour its earlier promise. It would however have to go through the same procedures to decrease the fares as it had to increase them.

Although the fare increases were approved in August 1983, they were only introduced in January 1984. Members of the Alexandra Commuters' Committee (ACC), set up to co-ordinate the boycott, criticised the timing of the fare increases. They said January was an especially difficult time because most people had been 'cleaned out' by the holiday season. Children had just returned to school and parents were faced with expenses for fees, books and clothing. The ACC contacted a PUTCO representative before the boycott started and asked for a postponement of the increase. In a statement to the press, Pat Rogers said PUTCO had no way of being sure when the new fares would be introduced. The timing of fare increases is referred to an interdepartmental committee. The police, security police, Department of Co-operation and Development (CAD) and town councils are consulted as to whether boycotts or other protests would be likely. A senior PUTCO official said the timing of fare increases was a 'politically sensitive issue': 'For instance, June 16 ... would be a very bad day to increase bus fares.' An ACC spokesperson felt the timing of the increases had worked against them. The

holiday break made it difficult to hold meetings and organise commuters in opposition to the increase.

ALEXANDRA COMMUTERS' COMMITTEE AND THE BOYCOTT

The ACC began as an ad-hoc committee, consisting largely of people from existing organisations in Alexandra such as the Congress of South African Students (COSAS); Alexandra Youth Congress (AYCO) and the newly formed Alexandra Civic Association. This committee decided something should be done about the fare increases and called a meeting for Thursday, 12 January. Pamphlets were issued calling people to a second meeting on the Saturday, where the ACC was formed and a decision taken to boycott buses from the beginning of the week. The following day a van with a loudhailer travelled through the township calling for support for the boycott. Messages were also sent to ministers to read out in church.

The first day of the boycott was undoubtedly a success. Buses leaving Alexandra in the morning were empty. Some people walked to work while others battled for places in taxis or private cars. Large numbers of people were reported to be stranded without transport. A PUTCO statement said Alexandra passenger loads were 'only a fraction of the normal carry'. This they claimed indicated 'successful intimidation rather than a successful boycott'. A commuter had a different view: 'The bus fare increases have been so large that we cannot afford them. PUTCO must think when it implements increases: we are not people who earn fantastic wages. How are we going to afford rent and food when such a large amount of our wages goes on travelling expenses?' (Star, 16.01.84). Hundreds of commuters used the buses to return home but disembarked at the Wynberg terminus on the edge of the township. A strong contingent of police, some in camouflage uniforms, was present. Some buses which entered the township in the evening were stoned and nine were damaged.

On the second day of the boycott PUTCO claimed 30% of the commuters were back on the buses. A press report said the number of passengers was 'a little higher' than the day before. Buses were withdrawn from the main terminus inside the township in the early morning. During the afternoon police escorted buses into Alexandra.

On day three, the Star said the boycott was easing off but members of the ACC felt it was still 60% effective. Buses again operated from the main terminus in 15th Avenue, while uniform and plain-clothes police stood by. On return journeys, few passengers journeyed all the way into the township. Commenting on the police escorting and dispatching buses, an ACC spokesperson said it 'was an act of provocation' because police were 'interfering in a situation which does not concern them. We would like to come to terms with PUTCO and not with the SAP'. PUTCO acknowledged there had been a marked passenger fall-off during the first two days. A PUTCO official said buses were withdrawn from Alexandra after 7 pm as several had been stoned.

On the fourth day of the boycott reports said peak hour buses were leaving the township near-empty and collecting only partial loads on the outskirts. Police kept a watch on the main 15th Avenue terminus, where bus shelters stood empty and commuters stood a short distance away waiting for taxis. Some residents boarded buses at Wynberg.

At the end of the first week PUTCO said revenue figures indicated passenger carrying was 'nearly back to normal - about 10% down on the usual figure.' A newspaper report however said few peak hour buses left the township fully loaded. Nonetheless the ACC called for a meeting on the weekend in view of the police presence and a 'weakening of the boycott because of police interference and harassment'. They did however insist that the boycott was still on and had the support of commuters. Pat Rogers said: 'A boycott means a spontaneous resistance and what we have had here was intimidation to our passengers. This intimidation now appears to be over and our buses are running normally ...'.

If Rogers thought it was all over someone else didn't because early in the morning on 23 January, the seventh day of the boycott, five members of the ACC were taken from their homes by plain-clothes policemen. They were ACC chairperson Mike Beea, vice-chair Mack Lekota, AYCO publicity secretary Naomi River, ACC organiser Obed Bapela and Patrick Banda. Police also raided the home of Rev AP Moleleki, a Methodist minister in whose church the weekend meeting had been held. They confiscated a typewriter and a duplicating machine, saying they had been used to print the bus boycott pamphlets.

Reports said the boycott picked up again after the weekend. Commuters at the meeting had voted unanimously to continue with the boycott. Press reports said buses left the 15th Avenue terminus virtually empty, but picked up some passengers at Wynberg. That night a bus was firebombed while travelling in the township and four passengers were admitted to hospital.

Further detentions followed those on Monday. Reverend Moleki, Constance Hlatshwayo, AYCO secretary Vusi Vilakazi and Robert Mhlambi were detained on 26 January. There had also been detentions during the first week. On the first day of the boycott seven people including two press photographers were arrested and later released. The following day the president, secretary and treasurer of AYCO, Paul Mashatile, Jacob Mtshali and Nesto Kgope were all detained. Most detainees were released after a few days, but nine were charged under the Intimidation Act and released on bail of R500 each.

An ACC spokesperson said the boycott was still 50% effective at the end of the second week. PUTCO said the situation was 'back to normal'. Once again, the actions of the state raised doubts about PUTCO's claims. On Tuesday, 31 January, the Johannesburg Traffic Department, the Road Transportation Inspectorate and the SA Police set up roadblocks at all entrances into Alexandra. At the end of the day, 44 of the 56 registered taxis in Alexandra had been forced off the road and their drivers jailed. Drivers were given tickets for various 'offences'. One driver was given 32 tickets. These offences included not having an emergency exit window, not carrying a fire extinguisher, rear view mirrors which were 'too small', overloading and using the 'wrong routes'. Hundreds of commuters were stranded. One woman said: 'We are really left stranded. They have taken the taxis away, and now they tell us to go to the buses'. This assault extended beyond



registered taxis and included private vehicles.

The blitz continued the following day. A spokesperson for the Sandton Traffic Department said the Johannesburg Transportation Board had asked them and the SAP to assist in checking illegal taxis. 'Our roadblocks had nothing to do with the bus boycott', he said. A spokesperson for the board said: 'It is part of the Board's and the Traffic Department's duties to ensure that all taxis operating throughout the country are legal.' Petrus Monamela, chairperson of the Alexandra Taxi Association (ATA), said some of the offences under which taxi owners had been fined were ridiculous as they only applied to buses and minibuses. These included fines for not having a 'standing passenger handle', and for having mirrors which were too small to see all the passengers in the taxi. An ACC spokesperson said residents were continuing with the boycott 'although they are being forced out of the taxis by police and traffic officers and ordered to catch buses'.

Claims that the roadblocks had nothing to do with the boycott are difficult to believe. This strategy of interfering alternative transport has been a feature of all bus boycotts. During the 1957 Alexandra bus boycott 500 people were arrested for breaching minor traffic regulations. In 1983, a spokesperson for the Transport Department described how a massive vehicle check-up by the Pietermaritzburg City Traffic Department helped break a bus boycott in Sobantu: 'Many kombi operators were charged for operating faulty vehicles while others had their kombis taken off the road. This might have caused a decrease in the number of kombis running in Sobantu and commuters seemingly chose to rise on buses rather than walk...'

ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF TRANSPORT

Access to transport other than the buses of the company being boycotted is a crucial factor in a boycott. The state clearly recognises this. The availability of trains for at least part of the journey to work was a big factor in the success of the recent boycott in the Ciskei. Boycotters of PUTCO in Durban were able to make use of close on 200 small bus companies in the area. In Alexandra, PUTCO has a complete monopoly of bus transport,

and there is no railway line to the township. The options available to boycotting commuters were taxis or walking. Workers from Alexandra are more spread out now than they were in 1957, when boycotters walked long distances to work for days on end. Workers are now employed not only in Johannesburg but in Germiston, Benoni and elsewhere on the reef. Johannesburg itself has grown and many domestic workers travel long distances to work.

The ACC put a lot of energy into overcoming the problem of alternative transport and ensuring commuters made it to work. A meeting was held with the ATA. An ACC member said: 'The taxi people should help us in this boycott as PUTCO is not only after commuters. Their existence is also threatened, what with the looming introduction of midi buses. They will be calling on us to support them ...' (Sowetan, 17.01.84). The ATA agreed to reduce fares from R1 to 70 cents. There was some confusion initially when some drivers charged the old fare, but this was nevertheless an extremely important gesture of support. Mr Monamela said: 'We find it hard to avoid (this kind of gesture because we are part and parcel of the community' (RDM, 13.01.84). There have been previous instances where taxi drivers have taken advantage of bus boycotts and raised fares.

PROBLEMS OF THE BOYCOTT

There were many difficulties involved in organising alternative transport, particularly to distant places such as Randburg. It was almost impossible to co-ordinate return journeys. Nevertheless owners of private vehicles were asked to transport commuters and extra taxis were brought in from Soweto to help out. Much of the success of this aspect of the boycott depended on the efforts of ACC members. The detentions during the second week undermined this.

In addition to these specific repressive steps, there was also a more generalised form of intimidation during the boycott. There was a strong police presence in the township from the start. Police constantly ordered people to move away from the entrance of the Wynberg terminus. Press photographers were told not to take pictures. Several people were reported to have been injured during a police baton charge on the first day. Boysie Sebothe

(29) was allegedly shot and injured, although police would not confirm this. On 31 January a group of commuters went to the offices of the Alexandra Town Council (ATC) and claimed police had forced them out of taxis and ordered them to use buses. A Council spokesperson said the matter would be investigated. The fact that commuters went to the ATC at all indicates the disorganising effect which the detentions of ACC leadership had on the boycott. ATC head Sam Buti said the boycott was not their affair as they had not been invited to participate. The large-scale police presence at the bus ranks made it difficult for organisers to approach commuters openly. Commuters caught up in the blitz on taxis during the third week told reporters police had demanded their reference books and taken their names and addresses. They also claimed police told them they could 'expect visits' at any time.

The ACC's work was made more difficult by the problems they faced getting venues for meetings. Earlier, in December, a meeting to launch the Alexandra Civic Association had to be cancelled after the venue was withdrawn. The person in charge said he had been pressurised to do so by the ATC and by the church council. The questioning and subsequent detention of Rev Moleleki in whose church the first ACC meetings were held has already been mentioned. Police asked him why he allowed meetings to be held in his church. A midweek meeting during the third week of the boycott had to be called off for lack of a venue. An ACC member pointed out that for maximum effectiveness they needed a number of venues. The Methodist church was too far away for some commuters to attend meetings. Regular open-air meetings were crucial to the success of the 1957 boycott, as were the informal 'meetings' held on the trains between Mdantsane and East London. Both provided a means of informing commuters of developments and for gauging opinions and support.

The ACC officially called the boycott off at the end of the third week, at a weekend meeting. They said commuters were finding it difficult to get to work and were afraid of losing their jobs. The ACC was not intending to fold up at this stage. A petition was launched to show that Alexandra residents were opposed to the fare increases, and to present certain demands to PUTCO. The grievances listed in the petition included high fares, bumpy roads, untidy buses and lack of toilet

facilities at the Wynberg rank.

A month later, the ACC warned that another boycott would be called if PUTCO did not improve conditions. They said nothing had changed since the boycott, and if anything conditions had got worse. The prosecution of nine people under the Intimidation Act - Beea, Lekota, Mashatile, Kgopa, Emmanuel Maake, Solomon Motsepe, Daniel Shilambe and two 17 year-olds has interfered with the ACC's ongoing activities. They were forced to raise large amounts of bail money and the accused were unable to address public meetings until after the trial.

PUTCO never disassociated itself from any actions taken by the police or by the Road Transportation Board. Allegations were made that PUTCO officials were present at the roadblocks, taking down the numbers of taxis. It refused to negotiate with the ACC during the boycott. The only approach the company made was to send a PRO to the ad hoc committee before the boycott started. The PRO said she was sent to explain certain things the committee was not informed about, such as the fact that PUTCO was running at a loss and couldn't afford to take advantage of the drop in the petrol price. Apart from that, PUTCO's only response was constant allegations of intimidation, in spite of the ACC's insistence that their methods were peaceful. Once the boycott was off, Rogers said the company was prepared to meet any committee representing residents on transport matters. He said some of their grievances concerned local authorities however and were 'outside PUTCO's scope'.

FARES AND PROFITS

The Alexandra bus boycott and the state's response to it raises a number of questions about bus transport for Africans. Why are bus fare increases granted when commuters cannot afford them? How and why is control of bus transport concentrated in the hands of a few companies? Why do the state and the bus companies go to such lengths to stop bus boycotts?

A bus company wishing to increase its fares applies to either the National Transport Commission (NTC) which regulates the entire transport industry or to one of the Local Road Transportation Boards (LRTB) which fall under it. The company has to support its application by submitting details of its current and expected running costs. This application is

published in the government gazette and objections to the increase have to be lodged within 21 days. A public hearing is then held.

In considering a bus company's application for increased revenue, the NTC has first to determine what an economic fare would be, i.e., what it would cost the company to provide that service. This is based on the operating costs of the company, and allows for depreciation or replacement of buses, and for a 'a reasonable profit percentage'. According to the Welgemoed Commission, 'allowance is made for a profit margin of up to 20% on revalued capital before interest and after tax, that is to say on what it would cost to replace the bus concerned. Owing to the present inflation rate historical capital is no longer used in the calculation of a profit margin ...' Thus the NTC makes generous allowance for the problems bus companies face with inflation.

The 'right' of bus companies like PUTCO to make profits is clearly an important component of increased bus fares. It is therefore important to look at the extent of these profits, particularly in the light of public statements which the companies make. PUTCO explained their application for the 12,5% increase by saying that earnings return on capital employed had fallen steadily from 11,46% in 1980 to 7,3% in 1981 to 6,7% in 1982. Moreover the company was expecting a loss for the first six months of the next financial year. The reasons for this were a 12,39% increase in operating costs since June 1982 and a

steady decline in the number of passengers carried per bus. Another PUTCO statement claimed that in the 1980/81 financial year the company made a profit of R5,5-m. This required an investment of R126-m and therefore returns were less than 5%.

Yet the same statement gave a clue to understanding PUTCO's seemingly difficult financial position: 'This does not mean that PUTCO is doing badly and that its shares are not a good buy, for profits are not the only way of measuring success. Because nearly all PUTCO's profits are put back into the company every year to pay for expansion, the value of what it owns is steadily increasing' (PUTCO News April 1982). The net worth of PUTCO has grown enormously in recent years. Thus between 1980 and 1983 the net worth of PUTCO has shown 35% compounded growth annually - R46 209 000 to R113 713 000.

Large amounts have been invested in depots, buses and maintenance facilities. Thus the profit percentages given by PUTCO are misleading. Further confusion is created by the kind of accounting which PUTCO uses, called inflation accounting. This involves setting aside money for the replacement of buses each year, at values which take into account the rising cost of the assets. This sounds reasonable and sensible, but the difference is that these replacement reserves are charged against current income. A comparison of this procedure with more conventional accounting procedures makes this clearer:

	PUTCO	OTHER
Net income for the year	1 000 000	1 000 000
Additional depreciation	500 000	-
Disclosed net income for the year	<u>500 000</u>	<u>1 000 000</u>
Tax charge	400 000	400 000
Income available for distribution to shareholders	<u>100 000</u>	<u>600 000</u>

With this hypothetical example, PUTCO's disclosed net income looks smaller but the net wealth of the company is not affected. This practice is made easier by the dominant position that one family, the Carleo's hold as PUTCO's majority shareholders. In the year to June 1983 therefore, PUTCO's profits were R7 315 000 without the replacement reserve transfer, but R12 389 000 when this was added in.

The enormous growth of PUTCO and other bus companies has given them further opportunities to understate their profits. PUTCO has set up a number of subsidiary companies which service the bus transport operations. These include Crown Body and Coach which repairs bus bodies, Africa Body and Coach which supplies buses, and Carleo Head and Associates which provides insurance. Thus some of PUTCO's increased running costs are paid to other branches of the same company. PUTCO is itself a subsidiary of a large holding group, Carleo Investments. This corporation also owns Rapid and General Services which provide fuel and workshop space and Carleo Diesel Services which owns the property used by PUTCO's southern division. Increased costs in these areas could effectively result in a transfer of profit between different sections of the same corporation. The net worth of Carleo Investments at June 1983 was R121 052 000 and the income for that financial year was R12 389 000.

The state is not deceived by these manoeuvres into thinking that bus company profits are as low as they claim. This is indicated in the Welgemoed Commission which said: 'It is necessary that bus services whose passengers are subsidised operate... complementary activities in such a way that they do not lead to a distortion of costs or to a questionable flow of funds between companies'. PUTCO's public statements are used to justify fare increases to the commuters. The state is prepared to accept that their profit margins are larger. In 1982 an accountant commissioned by PUTCO told an NTC hearing on fare increases that the company was making a 60% profit annually. Profits had increased from R21-m to R47-m over the past four years. In spite of that, PUTCO was given the go-ahead to increase fares.

Once the NTC has decided on a revenue increase for a bus company, the Department of Transport then works out what proportion of this should come from commuters, and what from government subsidies. Amongst other things, the

decision to grant subsidies takes into account the operating costs and efficiency of the bus company, and the ability of commuters to pay the fare. Commuters' ability to pay increased fares is consistently overestimated. Bus fare increases, like increased rentals, are expenses which people have no choice but to pay. People must have housing and transport to work. If the cost of these increase, consumers are forced to cut into the money they spend on food, clothing, health care, education and fuel. The lower income groups in South Africa have been hit hardest by rising costs. In 1983 the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 10,7%: for every month except one the CPI for lower income groups was higher. According to the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut, the real earnings of Africans actually declined between 1981 and 1982. This pattern looks set to continue in 1984 with a number of crippling price rises on the way: GST from 6-7%; brown bread up by 16,6%; and maize up by 25%, to name a few.

Perhaps the most graphic indication of commuters' inability to pay fare increases has been the large number of bus boycotts, and particularly the extreme hardships which commuters have been willing to undergo. The 1957 Alexandra boycott over a penny increase in fares lasted three months, during which time thousands of African commuters walked to work. In 1979, residents of Ezakheni in Natal refused to pay a KwaZulu Transport Company increase, and walked the 25 km to work in Ladysmith every day for a month. African commuters are not just dissatisfied with bus fares. In every transport struggle - boycotts or fare increase hearings - commuters have articulated a large number of grievances. The buses are often described as overcrowded and dirty. Buses arrive late and workers are forced to spend extra money on taxis or risk arriving late for work. Terminuses are often far from people's homes, leaving them prey to muggers. Amenities such as toilets and bus shelters are hopelessly inadequate. Different transport systems are poorly co-ordinated. When buses break down, commuters are often not given refunds.

The long distances African commuters are forced to travel to work as a result of state policy are at the heart of African commuter grievances. This is

especially true of bantustan commuter townships such as Mndantsane, KwaMashu and Ezakheni, where distances are even greater and bantustan 'citizenship' is used as a further basis for stripping away rights to work, welfare, and so on. The majority of bus boycotts in recent times have occurred in commuter townships. One press report on the 1972 Mpumalanga bus boycott commented: 'This boycott is something of a disturbing nature. It is a manifestation of deep resentment and chilling in its obstinacy and persistence. It suggests a permanent dissatisfaction in the lives of the residents of Mpumalanga township'.

STATE SUBSIDIES AND TRANSPORT

The state has provided subsidies which, although paid directly to the bus companies, are aimed at keeping the transport costs of commuters down. Subsidies are drawn from two sources, a transport levy paid by employers, and additional funds voted by parliament.

The state first imposed a transport levy on employers of African workers in 1952. This can be attributed in part to the increased distances which Africans were forced to travel to work as a result of removals under the Group Areas Act, and to considerable resistance to fare increases in the 1940s by commuters in Alexandra. In 1957 the Black Transport Services Act transferred responsibility for African transport subsidies from the Department of Native Affairs to the Department of Transport. In 1972, levies were imposed on employers of Indian and coloured workers. In November 1982 employers' contributions were increased from R1 to R3 a month. Employers of domestic workers who did not provide them with accommodation were also required to contribute R3 per month. The minister of Transport was empowered to increase this amount at notice of 12 months, a move which was strongly criticised by organised industry and commerce. Nonetheless, the most recent figures show that commuters pay 50% of the economic fare, the state 37% and employers 13%.

Subsidies do not however benefit all commuters. African bus transport has been described as a 'service to employers rather than commuters', whose

principle purpose is to get workers to the work-place. This is clearly reflected in the way subsidies are implemented. The subsidy is the difference between the economic fare and what the commuter pays. It is only applied to weekly or monthly tickets (clip-cards). Clip-cards are much cheaper than one-way cash fares. A single fare from Alexandra to the Noord Street terminus in Johannesburg costs 50c, while a six day clip-card (12 trips) costs R3,50. The clip-card has to be used on consecutive days, ie it is only valid for one week. Clearly it will be bought almost exclusively by workers in daily employ, and not by shoppers, people doing piece-jobs, and unemployed workers looking for jobs. There have been many complaints about the clip-card system, and not just from commuters who cannot benefit from them. Workers who fall sick or have days off on public holidays lose out on that day's fare.

PUTCO's response to these complaints shows the interests of the state and employers in granting subsidies: 'There have been some suggestions that weekly workers' tickets should be made "open" so that they can be used on any route and should not become "finished" daily. Now, these tickets are cheaper than cash tickets because they are subsidised - that is, government pays part of the cost. It does this from taxes and from a levy paid by employers to help the working man...The request to "open" the weekly ticket is really a request to subsidise also the non-worker. But this would have to come from the workers' subsidy - and they would then have to pay a higher fare. This would defeat the purpose of the subsidy arranged by the government as trustee for the employer and the taxpayer who has to provide the money' (PUTCO News, April 1982). The state also uses subsidies to serve some of its other interests. A bus company which 'serves an illegal squatter area' is not granted subsidies.

The way bus services are principally directed towards delivering workers to the work-place is also reflected in the running times and the routes which the buses follow. There are very few buses which provide travel for social purposes within the townships. There is no regular and reliable transport service in the evenings and over the weekends: 'We are prisoners in the areas where we

live, released only when it's time to go to work'.

Apart from subsidising fares, the state's other important intervention in African bus transport has been to facilitate monopoly control over the industry. This process began as early as 1930 when the Motor Carrier Transportation Act forced bus owners to operate according to specific criteria. Road Transportation Boards were set up to issue certificates and limit competition. Many African bus companies and taxis were squeezed out of business. At present a small number of bus companies monopolise the industry. These include private companies like PUTCO, Tollgate Holdings and United Transport Holdings; parastatal bodies like the Corporation for Economic Development (CED); and local authorities like the Johannesburg Municipality and the Durban Metropolitan Transportation Board. The Department of Transport claims monopolies are the most efficient and economical way of running public transport.

A new company wishing to run a bus service in a particular area or on certain routes has to submit an application to the LRTB. This is published in the government gazette and objections are called for. A public hearing is then held. The incumbent companies automatically object on the grounds that they are providing an adequate service. Their objections are always upheld.

The state does a great deal to protect and further the interests of bus companies. In the 1982 financial year bus companies received 25% of their income in the form of subsidies. In spite of taking full advantage of the opportunities created for them to make profits, however, bus companies deny any responsibility for the actions of the state. Not only do they say the Group Areas and Urban Areas Acts have nothing to do with them, but they also say the provision of shelters and toilets at bus stops is the job of local authorities.

The interests of commuters, by contrast, are given little or no protection. African commuters (and African people) have no representation in the Department of Transport, the municipalities, the board of PUTCO or City Tramways, and indeed in the central government as a whole. Fare increase hearings are the only formal channels

open to African commuters. A wide range of organisations have opposed fare increases at hearings, such as FOSATU, the Natal Indian Congress, the Durban Housing Action Committee, and the Witwatersrand-based Commuters Watchdog Association. A number of supreme court actions have temporarily halted increases on the grounds that PUTCO and the NTC did not follow the correct procedures. These brought only temporary relief.

Commuters have met with little success at the hearings themselves. Extensive documentation of PUTCO's profits and of the inability of commuters to pay the increased fares have invariably failed to impress the NTC or LRTB. There seem to be considerable limits on what the hearings consider to be 'admissible evidence'. In a 1980 hearing, the Legal Resources Centre representing the objectors asked PUTCO to reveal its audited profit and loss accounts to June 1980, the time period relevant to the hearing. PUTCO refused, arguing that the matter before the Board was a 'hearing' and not an 'inquiry'. PUTCO's refusal was upheld. The hearing revealed that the company had increased its profits despite increases in the price of fuel. Objectors can appeal to the NTC against increases granted by the LRTB. In recent years however most hearings have been heard by the NTC which allows for no appeal. This followed a ministerial directive and was an attempt to limit the use of this forum for opposition.

Bus companies have complained that suspension of fare increases by court interdicts costs them 'millions of rands'. In 1980 the state tried to counter this by amending the Road Transportation Act so that increased fares would remain in effect until a final court ruling had been given. An interim interdict could therefore not be used to block a fare increase as it had in the past.

The only other tactic available to dissatisfied commuters is to boycott the bus service. There have been many boycotts in South Africa, particularly since the early 1970s. Most have involved Africans living just within the borders of bantustans but commuting daily to jobs in 'white' areas. Some boycotts have led to reductions in fares and changes in the running of the bus service. The recent bus boycott in the Ciskei led to a partial reduction in

the fare increase, and the bus company - partially owned by the Ciskei government - was put up for sale.

Most boycotts, however, have ended with commuters being forced back to the buses, often after a long and bitter struggle. This has been a result of the inflexible attitude taken by the bus companies, and the repressive actions of the state - clampdowns on taxis, detentions and arrests, and intimidation of commuters by a large-scale police presence.

Boycotts usually severely dent profits of bus companies. The state can however give bus companies special subsidies to help them through boycotts as they did for City Tramways in Cape Town during 1981.

Not only do the bus companies lose out on fares during boycotts, but also on subsidies, as fewer weekly tickets are sold. Nevertheless, they usually hold out for a long time against boycotts. This is not just their decision, but also that of the state. The political significance of boycotts cannot be underestimated. They constitute an open, legal and easily demonstrable response to conditions of life which people find intolerable. In some cases, such as the recent Durban bus boycotts, organisational forms set up during the boycott have persisted and been used to take up other issues and campaigns. The state and the bus companies cannot however give in to this. They cannot allow popular action and organisation to meet with success.

For the state, successful action and organisation by African commuters poses a political threat. For the bus companies, action by African commuters threatens the strong position they have to set fares and control the way transport is provided. Throughout boycotts, they have refused to meet with commuter organisations, usually claiming that they do not exist, and blaming 'intimidators' for the boycott. In the Ciskei, the Committee of Ten which represented the commuters requested a meeting with the Ciskei Transport Company. This was refused, and committee members were eventually detained. Similarly, PUTCO refused to meet with the ACC until the boycott was over.

Boycotts have also caused concern amongst employers as industry and commerce are disrupted. Organisations

like Chambers of Commerce and Industry have invariably tried to intervene in boycotts, and 'mediate' the conflict.

THE WELGEMOED COMMISSION REPORTS

The picture drawn shows how the interests of the state, bus companies and employers are compatible in many ways. Bus transport for Africans has been provided in a way which serves these interests as far as possible. In spite of this, the transport industry is facing a number of serious problems. The state is becoming concerned about the rising cost of subsidies. Employers are complaining about increases in the transport levy. Bus companies claim the number of passengers is declining and forcing them out of business. Commuters continue to resist fare increases. Employers, the state and the bus companies are very concerned at what they call the 'politicisation of transport', and at the political and economic costs of bus boycotts. The Welgemoed Commission was set up in 1981 to look into these problems.

Welgemoed recommended streamlining and centralising the government bodies responsible for transport. Co-ordination responsibilities should be centralised with the National Transport Commission which would also have final powers in determining transport planning and policy. The NTC should improve regional co-ordination of transport by forming and directing new Regional Transport Co-ordinating Boards (RTCB) and Metropolitan Transport Advisory Boards. These new transport regions would conform to the regional demarcations set out in the state's current decentralisation policy. They would also be compatible with the second tier of government envisaged in the constitutional proposals.

Welgemoed considered evidence in favour of establishing a national bus transportation corporation, either privately owned or state controlled. The Commission concluded that state ownership in bus transportation undertakings should be eliminated as far as possible. The state should only be involved in the regulation and co-ordination of transport. Some of the objections to a state-controlled bus corporation included:

- * the transport industry would become even more politicised;
- * large amounts of money would be needed to buy out existing operators;
- * there would be a possible decline in the quality of service and a likely rise in costs.

The Commission felt that private ownership of bus companies should be encouraged. Much of the criticism of bus companies as regards profits, ownership and efficiency was 'unjustified and without substance'. This was particularly so when tariff increases were applied for and fares adjusted. Public bus transportation should be declared a strategic industry and the government should do everything in its power to stimulate and expand the industry. Funds should be made available and used in co-operation with bus operators to promote greater use of bus transport. Municipalities should take responsibility for providing and controlling facilities for bus passengers in their own areas. The initial capital costs for these facilities should come wholly or partly from government funds, and subsequent running costs from 'rent' from the bus service. In other words, bus companies would be absolved from providing these facilities, with the financial burden falling on local authorities to some extent, and the rest onto the commuter.

Welgemoed does not propose any encroachments on the huge space given to bus companies to run profitable operations. If anything, the report has tried to extend this space. With regard to the calculation of fare adjustments, the Commission recommended changing the formula from profit rates in relation to historical capital to profit rates in relation to total revalued capital. This would effectively disguise profit margins as seen in the case of PUTCO's use of inflation accounting.

ACTION AGAINST TAXIS

Perhaps the most far-reaching of Welgemoed's attempts to protect the bus companies is the proposed clampdown on the use of kombis and minibuses as taxis. Commuters use minibuses for various reasons. They are much less crowded than buses and offer a quicker trip into town. They are more flexible

than buses in the routes they follow and often drop people off at their homes. This avoids many of the pitfalls of public transport mentioned earlier, even if it does cost the commuter more. There are an estimated 13 000 minibuses operating on the Witwatersrand, carrying between 300 000 and 500 000 passengers a day.

Bus companies claim that minibuses 'cream off' their most profitable peak-hour commuters - ie some of the workers who would otherwise use weekly tickets and thereby earn the bus company a government subsidy - while failing to provide services during less profitable times. According to a PUTCO spokesperson: 'The kombis concerned do not generally pick up individuals but wait until the vehicle is filled. They ply bus stops frequently packing the vehicles to the limit. We are looking here at an abuse of the taxi license. It is difficult to hold our fares to the minimum when the cream is being skimmed off the top by pirate operations'. This loss of passengers, allegedly due to the operations of 'pirate' taxis was one of the reasons PUTCO gave when it applied for the current 12,5% increase. The managing director of PE Tramways said if 'pirate' taxis went unchecked, Port Elizabeth would have no bus service within five years. Once buses were withdrawn, pirate taxis would charge exorbitant fares.

There is a certain irony about the complaints made by the bus companies. Their descriptions of the 'abuses' by taxis are quite a fair description of their own operations. In spite of this massive pirating of their passengers by taxis, buses are still terribly overcrowded. They too are packed to the limit to squeeze the largest possible revenue out of each trip. PUTCO and others could provide more buses to alleviate this. Following a police blitz on taxi drivers in October 1983, PUTCO increased its bus service and 'had no problems' in accommodating the additional passengers. Tramways' fear of a pirate taxi monopoly and the effect of this on fares is also ironic, given the way in which bus company monopoly has helped to force through fare increases and undermine boycotts.

The way bus companies and officials use the term 'pirate' taxi suggests a willing breaking of the law, and

disguises the true situation. Taxi drivers wishing to legalise their position have to go through a lot of red-tape. A certificate of fitness for the vehicle has to be renewed every six months by the city council. Drivers also require a public driving permit and a special taxi drivers licence. The ratio of legal to illegal taxis testifies to the difficulties involved in getting a licence. The Financial Mail estimated that of 82 000 minibus taxis in South Africa, fewer than 20 000 were licensed. Welgemoed estimated that Soweto had 1 870 licensed taxis while between 3 600 and 4 000 were unlicensed. In March last year, the Johannesburg Road Transportation Board decided not to allow further registration of kombis as taxis. Those which were already licensed could continue to operate, but only subject to an annually renewable permit. PUTCO said it welcomed the move and was in fact 'partly responsible' for it.

Welgemoed echoed the bus companies' fears regarding the 'threat to their existence' from pirate taxis. Bus companies had to provide less profitable services whereas taxis could ignore these. 'Because the bus service has less and less opportunity to operate the profitable routes and has to rely more and more on operating the less profitable part of the market, it makes less profit and has to adjust its tariffs with further detrimental effects on its efforts to counter the unfair competition from the bus-type taxis'.

With bus companies being driven into a downward spiral of impoverishment by the 'pirates', Welgemoed recommended certain remedies. Minibuses transporting 10-24 passengers should not be able to obtain permits as taxi vehicles. Presently legalised eight-passenger vehicles (laws were changed in 1977 increasing the legal passenger limit from five to eight) should be phased out over a period of four years. Taxis should be redefined as motor vehicles with a maximum capacity of four passengers plus a driver. A category of public passenger vehicle carrying between five and 25 passengers should also be introduced which would operate in the same way as buses, with fixed routes, and approved tariffs and timetables. Bus companies should be allowed to enter the market for this kind of transportation. There should be

stricter control over the unauthorised activities of taxis, such as picking up passengers at bus stops along bus routes. The extreme nature of these controls was underlined by a recommendation that lift clubs carrying more than four passengers should be registered with the LRTBs.

Bus companies seem delighted with Welgemoed's recommendations. The state also has its own interests in stifling minibus competition. Through the CED, the state owns seven bus companies with 2 492 buses and a fixed investment of R102,3-m. There have been negative responses to this aspect of Welgemoed from business and commercial interests. The FCI, ASSOCOM and even the Chamber of Mines have criticised the move. It has been described as inflationary, contrary to the spirit of free enterprise, and a possible spark for unrest. The large automobile corporations are particularly alarmed. The minibus taxi market provides Toyota, Volkswagen, Sigma and Datsun with a turnover of about R50-m a year. Last year Toyota managing director Colin Adcock said the motor industry had done a lot of planning and stocktaking on the basis of selling a large number of minibuses to taxi owners. Second hand car dealers do an even bigger business in minibuses.

There has recently been speculation that the government may moderate some of Welgemoed's recommendations for taxis. The SA Bus Owners Association (SABOA) and the SA Black Taxi Association (SABTA) made proposals for a compromise. All legal minibuses should be allowed to continue operations and to replace their vehicles with others carrying eight passengers. Future taxi permits should only be issued for vehicles carrying a maximum of four passengers. Illegal operators could either change to sedans or become midibus operators. Presently legal minibuses could also be reclassified as buses, operating on fixed routes with approved fares. These proposals have caused a split in SABTA with many members rejecting the agreement and contesting the status of the executive members who negotiated it.

While Welgemoed's recommendations have yet to be introduced, action against taxis is already underway. In March 1982, the attorney general sent a circular to all law-enforcement agencies asking them to look out for people

continually breaking certain sections of the Road Traffic Ordinance. Serious offenders should no longer be fined but arrested, charged and fingerprinted. In April an enormous crackdown on taxis in Pretoria, Soweto and on the East Rand led to scores of arrests and court appearances. After an October 1983 police blitz on Soweto taxi drivers, 104 people appeared in court. Seventy-nine drivers paid over R20 000 in fines. The conflict escalated when taxi drivers went on strike in protest against this and against the fatal shooting of a taxi driver by police a few days earlier. A PUTCO statement said residents stoned their buses and accused the company of complicity in police action. In Durban drivers also went on strike after 92 taxis were ordered off the road. There were reports of violence between police and drivers, and between police and township residents later on.

Another recent development is the introduction of midibuses in certain urban areas. Welgemoed recommended that bus companies operate these smaller services as they seemed to be profitable. Midibuses have been introduced in Mohlakeng, Sebokeng and Nigel. It was reported that stones were thrown at midibuses in Mohlakeng. The Pietermaritzburg City Council announced its intention to buy two midibuses. PUTCO denied a report that it had bought 500.

WELGEMOED AND COMMUTERS

In addition to these recommendations aimed at strengthening the position of bus companies, Welgemoed also made proposals which will affect commuters more directly. The question of subsidies was an important one for the Commission, given that the rising cost of transport to the state had been a matter of concern. The amount paid out in subsidies for bus passenger transport rose from R2,3-m in 1966-7 to R127-m in 1981-2. Of the latter amount, about 85% came from funds voted by parliament and the rest from the employers' levy.

At the same time, a number of government public transport projects have not been implemented due to inadequate funding. According to a former Transport secretary, J Driessen, government had undertaken to spend

R40-m a year on urban public transport, but had spent only R14-m.

Welgemoed felt that, ideally, passengers should pay the entire economic fare themselves. The Commission was opposed to using subsidies to 'redistribute wealth'. Subsidies should only be used for economic purposes. There was justification for subsidising commuters who could not pay their own transport costs, but phasing out subsidies was necessary in the long term.

Welgemoed consequently recommended retaining subsidies for the present time, but subject to certain conditions. Only worker commuters should be subsidised. Employers should pay workers enough to enable them to pay their own transport costs. Subsidisation of worker commuters should be phased out in the long run, in the light of the increased real wages of the commuters and the narrowing of the wage gap. This could be facilitated by a 1982 measure which empowered the minister to increase the levy in specific areas and not

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simply on a nationwide basis as before. As a result, withdrawal of subsidies could hit urban areas hardest, with either commuters paying increased fares or employers greater levies, or both.

Welgemoed also made recommendations regarding procedures for increasing fares. The Commission found that delays in the present procedure for increasing tariffs made it difficult for the Department of Transport and bus operators to follow a sound financial policy. It also resulted in tariffs having to be adjusted by large amounts at a time which aroused 'some degree of resistance' among commuters. Welgemoed recommended introducing tariff increases twice a year on a regional basis, if possible coinciding with railway fare increases.

The Welgemoed Commission was extremely concerned about what it called 'the politicisation of transport'. 'It is an unfortunate fact that in South Africa public transport, particularly public bus transport is highly political'. Bus services depend on a 'fairly sensitive balance between income and expenditure', and therefore it was understandable that they easily became 'targets for malice and political opportunism'. The Commission ascribed much of commuters' opposition to fare increases to a lack of information and understanding. 'The industry has to do with a relatively high potential for possible disruption if the parties are poorly informed or if bus services or authorities fail to liaise with the user of such services on the basis of trust'.

Welgemoed recommended a system be worked out between the RTCB and the bus operator for informing passengers of fare increases. Subsidised tickets should carry details of the economic tariff, the subsidy and what the commuter pays. While suggesting improved communications in this vague way, the Commission also proposed that public hearings on fare increases be discontinued. The hearings 'offered the possibility of creating or encouraging dissatisfaction so as to exploit tariff adjustments for political and other purposes'. Welgemoed contended that 'objectors tend to misuse this process by turning it into a political forum or a forum for general complaints'. This reflects the Commission's concern to prevent political struggle over transport at all levels. It also

reflects their narrow view of transport as having nothing to do with these 'general complaints'. As a substitute for hearings, Welgemoed recommended establishing a mechanism 'for responsible and orderly consultation to be a link between the user and the authorities, to be a forum for reports on possible problems and the elimination of grievances, and to serve the interests of the commuter...'

THE DEPOLITICISATION OF TRANSPORT?

What are the implications of Welgemoed's recommendations? The bus monopolies are clearly here to stay, if anything stronger than before. Although the state will regulate the transport industry to a certain extent, bus company profits will continue to be a central factor causing fare increases. If proposed restrictions on taxis are implemented, the monopoly position of the companies will be extended further. This will affect commuters in a number of ways. Bus companies will have an added incentive to plough profits into the expansion of their operations. They will continue to ask for increases on the basis of their 'small' cash profits. Commuters will, moreover, have even less choice of transport facilities, and boycotts will be even more vulnerable to the kinds of pressure exerted in Alexandra.

As regards the state's desire to reduce its expenditure on subsidies, it is difficult to predict how the Commission's recommendations could be implemented. Clearly it would like to shake the problem off and make it an issue between workers and employers - 'pay your increased transport costs out of your wage increases, if you can get them'. This will not work so easily, however. Employers are already opposed to the increased levies. At the same time, the state and the bus companies must know that fare increases will bring resistance, with all the economic and political costs discussed earlier. Yet even if it is difficult to predict how the state could reduce subsidies, its intention to do so should be taken seriously. This tendency to reduce the state's financial obligations and dump them onto workers has already manifest itself in other areas such as housing and pensions.

In the light of the potentially explosive consequences of some of Welgemoed's recommendations, it is strange to see the vagueness of the proposals for depoliticising transport. The Commission makes no attempt to approach the root causes of popular dissatisfaction with transport. This would seem to indicate that it is prepared to accept that repression of the kind used in Alexandra is the correct and in effect only way of dealing with the situation

* This article has made extensive use of a contribution on transport by Jeff McCarthy and Mark Swilling in the forthcoming SOUTH AFRICAN REVIEW TWO, to be published mid-year by SARS and Ravan Press.

Extensive use was also made of a Human Awareness Programme publication, BLACK URBAN PUBLIC ROAD TRANSPORT. AN ASSESSMENT, Johannesburg, 1982.



Alexandra commuters walk to work during the bus boycott

Labour Action

negotiations in the metal industry

If the first round of negotiations for the 1984 agreement on wages and working conditions for the giant metal industry is anything to go by, deadlock could arise when the Steel and Engineering Industries Federation (SEIFSA) meets metal unions again on 1 May. The talks were adjourned to that date after a meeting on 10 April at the National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel, Engineering and Metallurgical Industry.

The negotiations cover minimum pay for some 380 000 workers. They are seen as being vitally important as they affect wage levels in a number of other industries.

The unions and their demands

SEIFSA represents 56 employer associations. Some 14 trade unions are involved in the talks. They include those falling under the Confederation of Mining and Building Unions (CMBU) representing some 160 000 mainly skilled workers; the whites-only SA Iron Steel and Allied Industries Union (often referred to as the Yster and Staal Unie); and two emerging unions - FOSATU's Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU) and CUSA's Steel, Engineering and Allied Workers' Union (SEAWU).

This year is likely to be the last year in which the negotiations will be structured in this way. The revival of the South African Co-ordinating Council of the International Metalworkers' Federation, which includes the emerging unions as well as some CMBU unions, has paved the way for major changes in the future.

The emerging unions' participation in the metal negotiations is a relatively new phenomenon: SEAWU joined the industrial council in 1982, while MAWU joined last year, although with the proviso that it would bargain at plant level as well.

This year both unions have demanded significant increases for unskilled workers. MAWU has demanded a minimum wage of R2,50 an hour. SEAWU has demanded 3 cents more.

The present minimum wage is R1,53 an hour.

Other demands from these unions reflect their concern about retrenchments. About seventy thousand workers have been laid off since 1982 due to the recession. The demands are also aimed at creating better conditions for migrant workers following SEIFSA's announcement last year that migrants' contracts would be altered so that they can be retrenched with one day's notice. SEIFSA, which undertook this step after consultation with the Department of Co-operation and Development, claimed at the time that the move merely brought migrants' conditions of employment in line with those of other workers who are entitled to one day's notice.

Thus MAWU also called for:

- + a R2,50 across the board increase for all workers;
- + the working week to be shortened to 40 hours;
- + one month's notice when services are terminated;
- + a maximum of 5 hours overtime to be paid at twice the normal rate from Monday to Saturday and triple rates on Sundays;
- + stop order facilities and plant access to be granted to any union with 50% representation among workers or 500 members at a plant;

+ negotiations for a proper lay-off procedure.

SEAWU demanded:

- + increases of between 6% and 8,33% in holiday leave pay;
- + for a week to be added onto the present three-week annual leave period;
- + that workers receive 14 days' notice when redundancies are affected instead of the present one day's notice severance payments of one week's pay for each year of service;
- + that workers should be paid at least 25% of their normal rate of pay if they are temporarily laid off.

In an unusual departure from the normal practice over the years, the CMBU's demands also reflected a concern for lower-paid workers. It demanded that the bottom three work categories in the agreement be combined and that all those workers should receive a minimum of R2,00 an hour. At the top end of the scale, it demanded that the minimum rate be raised to R5,50 an hour from the present rate of R4,41 an hour. In addition, the CMBU demanded a 12% increase for all workers and that holiday leave allowances be increased by between 6% and 8,33%.

Yster en Staal submitted the same demands as the CMBU - as is customary for it to do.

TUCSA-affiliated CMBU member, the Engineering and Industrial Workers Union, made separate submissions to the industrial council.

SEIFSA's response

On 10 April, SEIFSA's response to the union demands - minimum increases ranging from 33% and 66% - started with an offer of a 10 cents an hour increase on the lower scales and 27 cents an hour on the upper

scales. By the end of the day, this had been raised to 12 cents and 31 cents respectively - an average of just below 8%. SEIFSA argued that it was not able to offer more due to the ongoing recession.

SEIFSA's offer as it now stands is far below union demands and raises the prospect that the distance between the two sides is too great to bridge. It is interesting that according to some participants, the CMBU and the emerging unions are all pushing for increases at the lower scales. This is a marked change from last year's negotiations when the CMBU was at odds with the emerging unions' demands.

The May negotiations

It is likely that the May meeting will be acrimonious. The unions will not have forgotten that SEIFSA initially asked for last year's negotiations to be delayed for six months due to the recession before finally agreeing to participate. All the unions won was a 5% to 7% pay increase. SEAWU, which had demanded a 30% rise, refused to sign the agreement and went on to negotiate individual agreements with some employers.

There are some who predict labour unrest will break out if this year's talks are not resolved to the satisfaction of the unions. After good results in the latest car sale figures were announced, some unionists are cynical about SEIFSA's claims of poverty. Others believe that although metal employers have had a tough time, there are some who have been making a healthy showing.

It is difficult to predict what the union tactics will be on 1 May when the talks continue. The present agreement expires on 30 June. The unions may decide that nothing can be squeezed out of SEIFSA, sign an agreement and approach individual employers later. On the other hand, a dispute could be declared raising the prospect of increased conflict in the metal industry ■

TRANSVAAL

Company: A&E Manufacturers and Distributers (Johannesburg)
Date: 2 - 3 February
Workers: 12
Union: National Union of Clothing Workers

Workers at A&E, which manufactures carry cots, went on strike after management turned down a request for a pay increase. The following day 12 workers were fired. A&E managing director Errol Mande claimed the workers were told on the day of the strike that anyone who did not report for work at 8.15 am the next day would be considered dismissed. He said the 12 workers had arrived at 8.40 am and were fired. A spokesman for the workers said they had arrived before 8.00 am but had found the doors locked. They were then told to return later to collect their pay. Management also called police to the factory alleging the workers were intimidating other employees. Police investigated and left soon afterwards. Representatives of workers and management met officials of the National Union of Clothing Workers who tried unsuccessfully to resolve the dispute.

A&E pays between R25 and R67 a week, and claims these wages are determined by the industrial council. An industrial council spokesman however said the minimum weekly wage was R37 for an unqualified worker and R52,50 for a machinist. According to Mande, the striking workers were temporary staff and earned R25 a week.

Company: Checkers (Sasolburg)
Date: 20 February
Workers: About 50
Union: Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA)

About 50 workers downed tools in protest against the dismissal of a deaf and dumb colleague. According to CCAWUSA's Mongezi Radebe, the worker had been fired after allegations of theft had been levelled against him. The strike was settled after eight hours when the company agreed to reinstate the worker. Radebe said the negotiations which led to the settlement were conducted by workers without any assistance from union officials.

Company: CMGM Construction Company (Soweto)

Date: 30 January - 2 February

Workers: 'Scores'

Union: -

A large number of migrant workers were sent back to Lesotho, Lebowa and the Transkei after a strike over wages. Some of the workers involved said they had been promised R1,10 an hour and were 'shocked' when they found their pay was only 85c an hour. Workers had been divided about what to do after management had refused their demands. Some were in favour of accepting management's refusal, while others insisted on their demands being met. Police were called in but no arrests were made. The fired workers were given all their benefits, but refused management's offer of transport to their homes.

Company: Coca-Cola (Johannesburg)

Date: 16 - 24 January

Workers: About 2 000

Union: Food, Beverage and Allied Workers Union (FBWU)

Workers went on strike demanding a greater wage increase than management had offered, and recognition of their union, the FBWU. They were unhappy with management's offer of a 10% increase and demanded 25%. (One report said workers demanded a 58% increase for weekly-paid workers, and 33% for monthly-paid workers). On 24 January management claimed that workers had suspended their strike but had not called it off. Negotiations with the FBWU, an affiliate of the Council of Unions of SA (CUSA), had resumed. Management offered workers a 17,5% increase. Their last increase had been 10%, in April 1983. 'Our present offer would bring the minimum entry wage up to R443 a month, which we think is as fair as you'll find', said a company spokesman.

Company: Dairy Maid (Olifantsfontein)

Date: 14 February

Workers: About 400

Union: FBWU

Workers at Dairy Maid downed tools when negotiations with management over alleged assaults reached deadlock. The dispute was sparked off a week before when 15 workers went on strike in

protest against an alleged assault on a co-worker. They returned to work when management agreed to discuss the matter with FBWU representatives.

The following week they struck again when management failed to take action against a supervisor who they alleged had assaulted several workers with a sjambok. Workers demanded the supervisor's dismissal or transfer.

A company spokesperson said the workers had dismissed themselves when they went on strike. He said new staff were being appointed, but discussions were taking place. He also denied the allegations of assault. On 15 February, four armed policemen stood outside the factory where workers had gathered.

Early in March, the FBWU said it would take management to court. At a meeting in Pretoria workers said some of their striking colleagues had returned to work.

Company: Defy Corporation
Date: October 1983 (continuing)
Workers: ?
Union: Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU)

MAWU members have been staging an overtime ban since October last year. This action was taken in support of a demand for a wage increase of 50c an hour which MAWU made in March last year. Defy management initially said it could offer no increase at all, but subsequently offered 7c an hour. MAWU scaled down its demand to 25c.

In the first week of March workers staged a demonstration in the company grounds in support of their demands. Defy is one of the few companies in the metal industry which has agreed to negotiate directly with MAWU on wages and work conditions. This action by Defy workers is believed to be the longest overtime ban yet implemented by African workers.

Company: East Rand Administration Board (ERAB)
Date: Mid-January
Workers: 42
Union: -

A dispute over leave pay and leave conditions led to the dismissal of 42 migrant workers from ERAB's building section in Tembisa. Workers claimed

they returned from five weeks leave to find their January pay 'had been slashed'. They said they were fired for questioning the cut in salary. ERAB chief director FE Marx said there had been a misunderstanding about the workers' leave conditions. The men were supposed to return to work on 10 January but were given until 16 January because the building industry was still closed. The extra days were unpaid leave. Marx said the men failed to return on 16 January and ERAB was forced to replace them with other workers.

Company: Enterprise Food
(Pietersburg)
Date: Early March
Workers: 5
Union: -

Five workers were dismissed after a dispute about overtime shifts. Workers said they could not work the required overtime until 8.00 pm because the last bus to their homes left at 6.00 pm. Four of the workers live 25 km outside Pietersburg. They said they offered to work until 5.30 pm as overtime.

Company: Kohler Plastics (Robertville, West Rand)
Date: 20 February
Workers: About 220
Union: MAWU

Changes in the shift system and retrenchments led to strike action and the dismissal of the entire work-force. According to management, workers were told in mid-December that production would be rationalised by switching from a 45-hour, two shift five day week, to a 40-hour, four shift, seven day week. Workers were offered a subsidised bus service, an attendance bonus, a shift allowance and overtime for weekend work. The change was supposed to come into effect in mid-January but was postponed to persuade workers to accept it. Kohler eventually declared a formal dispute after workers refused to accept the system, and warned there would be firings if this continued the following week. When workers arrived on the Monday for the first shift, they were told 46 workers had been retrenched. They went on strike, but later returned. Subsequently 22 workers on the night shift were told they were to be retrenched. The rest of this shift

struck, as did Tuesday morning's shift. Management then fired the entire black work-force and closed the plant down.

The major grievance against management was the inadequate transport provided for workers to take them home after their late shifts. Kohler agreed to arrange for a bus to go through the centre of Soweto but was not prepared to drop workers closer to their homes. According to a shop steward, workers are attacked and sometimes killed while walking in the streets late at night. Management refused to budge on the workers' demands and told a shop steward that they were not concerned about the lives of people, but only about the factory.

MAWU representatives met with management under the auspices of the National Industrial Council for the Metal Industry. After three hours of negotiations, the workers were reinstated and agreed to accept the new system.

On 5 March, however, MAWU declared a dispute with Kohler, alleging the company broke undertakings to take the striking workers back. Kohler, which is owned by Gencor, said it was recruiting new workers, and strikers who wanted their jobs back would have to reapply for them.

Workers who reapplied were required to sign a clause to the effect that 'the company is not responsible for transport to and from work'. Only 14 workers reapplied on this basis. The others said they would rather not work than risk their lives returning to work without being provided with suitable and safe transport.

Company: Les Marais
Date: 19 January
Workers: ?
Union: CCAWUSA

According to CCAWUSA official Popi Magangwa, workers went on strike after management refused to meet their demands for better pay, improved working conditions and recognition of their union. Workers claimed they earned R72 per fortnight. Magangwa said the union had heard Les Marais had employed new staff in certain posts. She said CCAWUSA was considering legal action.

Company: Makro (Germiston)
Date: 17 - 18 February
Workers: About 350
Union: CCAWUSA

Workers at Makro wholesaler downed tools after a long-running dispute over the sacking of a worker. The worker's dismissal for alleged assault and insubordination led to a strike in early January. Workers returned after it was agreed to refer the dismissal to the appeal procedures set out in the recognition agreement between Makro and CCAWUSA.

The appeal machinery confirmed the dismissal. Workers then went on strike a second time. The union suggested settling the strike by mediation, but Makro rejected this and suggested arbitration. The union agreed to this. A Makro spokesperson explained that mediators would look for a compromise in the dispute, whereas this was 'a cut and dried issue. Either the firing was fair or it wasn't'.

The two arbitrators - Paul Pretorius for CCAWUSA and Professor PAK le Roux for Makro - decided that instead of being fired, the worker should be given a written warning in terms of the company's discipline procedure. The worker was reinstated with full benefits. This is believed to be the first time arbitrators have been voluntarily appointed by a company and a union to settle a dispute over a dismissal.

Company: Plate Glass (Germiston)
Date: 15 February
Workers: About 200
Union: Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU)

The entire black work-force at Plate Glass stopped work over the alleged maltreatment of two workers by a supervisor. They returned to work after management agreed to investigate their grievances using procedures set out in a recognition agreement with the CWIU.

Company: Poynton's Cave
Date: +12 February
Workers: 8
Union: CCAWUSA

Poynton's Cave, a Pretoria cafe, dismissed eight workers for allegedly going on strike. A CCAWUSA spokesperson said the workers intended approaching

management for better pay and improved working conditions. They arrived late for work, however, and were dismissed. CCAWUSA approached management to resolve the dispute, but the meeting ended in deadlock. The cafe manager said the workers were fired after they had arrived at 11 am and would not enter the shop. He said he was aware of transport problems, but for people to arrive all at one time and stand outside the building meant they were on strike.

Company: Promex Plastics (Wynberg)

Date: 23 January

Workers: 130

Union: MAWU

Workers at Promex went on strike after eight of their colleagues were retrenched, but returned after management agreed to meet the union on the issue. MAWU spokesperson Moses Mayekiso said management had refused to negotiate on retrenchments because they did not recognise the union. He said Promex had refused to recognise MAWU last October, despite proof that it represented a worker majority. MAWU was considering declaring a formal dispute with Promex, which is a member of the Protea Holdings group. A company source denied that there had been a strike at the plant.

Company: Southern Sun (Johannesburg)

Date: 3 February

Workers: 900

Union: CCAWUSA

The entire black work-force struck at four Southern Sun hotels - the Landdrost, Sandton Sun, Rand International and the Sunnyside Park. They were protesting against the dismissal of a colleague and against working conditions. Their grievances included unhygienic canteen conditions, discriminatory and 'bossy' management attitudes, and the designation of canteens at the Sandton Sun as 'junior' and 'senior' - the former effectively meant for blacks.

The strikers returned to work after the dismissed worker was reinstated and management undertook to discuss the grievances.

Company: Southern Sun's Landdrost Hotel (Johannesburg)

Date: 7 March

Workers: 200

Union: CCAWUSA

Workers at the Landdrost struck for the entire day in protest against the Intimidation Act arrest of CCAWUSA chief shop steward Robert Mkhize. Workers demanded the removal of the hotel manager. They said Mkhize was arrested after the manager had laid a charge against him, apparently in connection with a previous strike at the Landdrost. They also demanded to be paid for the time they were on strike.

A CCAWUSA spokesperson said this was the second time police had acted against unionists at a Southern Sun's hotel. A union leader at another hotel was interrogated in a hotel room by a man who claimed to be from the security police. A Southern Sun's spokesperson denied the company had asked police to intervene. She said several workers claimed to have been intimidated during the previous strike and had made statements to the police of their own accord. She added that the company would not pay the strikers for the day they stopped work.

Mkhize appeared in the Johannesburg Magistrates' Court on 7 March, charged under the Intimidation Act. He was released on R400 bail and the case postponed to 28 March.

The Landdrost general manager resigned soon after the strike at the hotel. According to CCAWUSA's Emma Mashinini, he had done this because Southern Sun had asked him to. She said that there had been several strikes at the hotel during which the manager had called the police, and the union was 'pleased that the company had acted against him'. A Southern Sun representative denied this and claimed that the manager had left of his own accord. The manager's resignation prompted eight department heads at the Landdrost to resign in protest.

Company: Sterkfontein Brickworks (Olifantsfontein)

Date: Beginning of February

Workers: 134

Union: Building, Construction and Allied Workers Union (BCAWU)

BCAWU planned to take action in the Industrial Court after 31 workers,

including 14 union shop stewards, were fined for protesting against the dismissal of a worker leader. At the beginning of February, the chairperson of the union's shop steward committee at the brickworks, Bernard Dlava, was dismissed. A workers committee took the issue up with management without success. While reporting back to workers in the company canteen, the factory manager allegedly told workers that any of them who supported Dlava must go to the factory gate. All the workers proceeded there, where they were told they had been dismissed, but must come back the next day. When they did this, 31 of the 134 workers were fired, including 14 shop stewards.

BCAWU, a CUSA affiliate, intends asking the industrial court for a temporary order instructing the company to reinstate the workers. The union alleges the workers were fired unfairly and the company is guilty of an unfair labour practice.

Company: Thrupps (Johannesburg)
Date: 29 February
Workers: ?
Union: CCAWUSA

The entire black work-force at Thrupps went on strike, demanding a R20 a week wage increase. They also called on management to settle grievances over working conditions. After negotiations with CCAWUSA representatives, Thrupps agreed to an increase of R10 a week. They had previously offered R7,50. Management also agreed to recognise CCAWUSA, to pay workers for the time they were out on strike, and not to victimise any workers for striking. Grievances over working conditions would also be looked into.

Company: Transpoly
Date: March 1984
Workers: 85
Union: Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union (PWAU)

The entire work-force was fired at this firm when they struck in protest against working conditions. According to a union source labour practices at this plant were 'abyssmal', and a reflection of the practices of many other firms in the industry. The union said it hoped to use the dispute 'as a warning to other companies with similar practices'.

PWAU referred the dismissals to the Industrial Court for arbitration. The company settled out of court, paying the union R35 000 in compensation. This amount is equivalent to approximately three months pay for the workers, who were also paid for the time they were on strike. Two workers who were fired before the strike for alleged disciplinary infringements have had their cases referred to both sides' lawyers. The union said it was not entirely happy with the settlement which had been a compromise for the workers.

Company: Transvaal Motor and Trade Hire (Booyens)
Date: 13 February
Workers: 19
Union: -

These workers were dismissed immediately they downed tools in protest against deductions made from their wages. They claimed that management had offered them an increase in their present weekly earnings, which varied between R80 and R100. The increase had been promised several months before, but had not been implemented.

In addition, workers claimed that they worked extra hours without payment. They worked from 5.00 am to 6.00 pm without a lunch break, and also on public holidays. They decided to strike when management deducted an additional 80c in addition to the R2,00 usually deducted from their pay. Workers said that the issue was not related to the extension of the Income Tax Act to Africans in March this year.

Company: Triomf Fertiliser (Potchefstroom)
Date: 29 - 30 March
Workers: Over 500
Union: SA Chemical Workers Union (SACWU)

Wage negotiations between Triomf and SACWU had been continuing over a long period. The union, which is recognised by the company, requested that Triomf refer the dispute to an independent arbitrator. This was after an official conciliation board appointed to settle the dispute reached deadlock. The company refused the union's request, and workers came out on strike.

A strike ballot had been held, in

which workers had voted in favour of striking, and SACWU claims the strike was legal. Triomf disputed this. Workers were given an ultimatum to return by 10.00 am on 30 March or face dismissal. They refused to do so until such time as Triomf chairman Louis Luyt or other company executives addressed them.

A Triomf spokesman claimed the strike was illegal. He said that legally workers were only entitled to strike 30 days after the conciliation board had deadlocked.

The union claimed that the minimum wage at the plant was R180 a month. A spokesman said that 'workers want a living wage and to know why Dr Luyt has money to save Ellis Park but not to pay them what they are asking'. A Triomf spokesman said wages 'are in line with those of other employers in the area'.

Management offered to increase the minimum wage to R260 a month from the beginning of April. Workers accepted and agreed to return to work. When they returned they were still demanding that further increases be negotiated for July. The company argued that because of the drought the fertiliser industry had been seriously affected. A spokesman said Luyt would be prepared to compensate workers at the end of the year if the financial situation improved.

Company: Vetsak (Isando)
Date: 27 January
Workers: Over 300
Union: MAWU

Demands for recognition facilities and wage increases were the cause of this strike on Friday 27 January. On Monday, when workers reported for work, management dismissed them and issued conditions for re-employment involving an undertaking not to strike again. Only a few of the workers accepted these conditions.

Company: Wrightech (Boksburg North)
Date: 15 - 20 March
Workers: About 400
Union: MAWU

Three workers were dismissed by this Rand Mines subsidiary. They were all members of the MAWU shop stewards council at the plant. Their dismissal led to the entire work-force downing tools and demanding their shop stewards'

reinstatement. Management refused to negotiate with MAWU and refused the union entry to the premises.

The ultimatum issued to workers on 20 March was: return to work or face dismissal. Many of the striking workers were living in houses built for them by the company in Daveyton, which they stood to lose if fired.

On Tuesday 20 March, the company carried out its threat, firing 296 workers when they failed to meet a return-to-work deadline. However, a MAWU source claimed that the workers arrived at work to meet the deadline, but that management refused to allow them to resume work. 'The gates were locked and a company official told them not to come in', the spokesman said.

An appeal hearing on the dismissal of the three shop stewards was in progress at the time striking workers were fired. In terms of the disciplinary procedure agreed upon between the union and employers, appeals against dismissals have to be heard within two days. Management had initially refused the appeal, but on Monday agreed to allow appeal proceedings and extended the time allowed to lodge it. According to management, workers chose to continue their strike even though management had told the union they would consider an appeal against the shop stewards' dismissal.

MAWU is considering legal action against the company.

N A T A L

Company: Bata Shoe Company (Pinetown)
Date: 17 - 27 February
Workers: 1 000
Union: SAAWU-affiliated Leather and Allied Workers Union (LAWU);
TUCSA-affiliated National Union of Leatherworkers (NULW)

The strike at this Canadian-owned company began in the rubber department of the Manchester Road plant. About ninety men struck after management turned down a demand for wage increases. Workers were also protesting against management's refusal to reinstate two fellow-workers fired in December 1983. They had been dismissed, management explained, because production had been low.

The wage demand was for a 25% across-the-board increase. When the news spread that there would be no increase, workers in other departments at Manchester Road downed tools followed by workers at other plants in the area (Henwood and Trotter Roads). During the first few days of the dispute about 700 workers were on strike. By the sixth day nearly a thousand workers were out on strike.

Wages initially became an issue as some workers in the rubber section who had been there for 25 years were earning R68 a week. Some of the women employed at the plant received R33 a week. The company does not provide sick pay or maternity leave. One SAAWU member said wages at Bata were lower than other wages in the area.

During the strike the demands began to include union recognition. The company refused to recognise SAAWU and is only prepared to talk to TUCSA's NULW which allegedly represents only 25% of the work-force. According to a SAAWU member the TUCSA union does not take up the workers' grievances whereas SAAWU tries to meet their needs. At the outbreak of the strike it was the NULW which management elected to talk to.

Tensions during the week-long strike were high. At the start workers blocked the road and booed management representatives. Police were present throughout the duration of the strike. SAAWU claims that they attacked workers.

It was reported that cars were stoned and that people attempting to go to work were injured by strikers. A woman was shot and injured by a company guard who claimed that he fired several shots into the air to quell an unruly mob.

Bata's chief of personnel for Africa flew from Nairobi to South Africa to settle the dispute. He joined the negotiations on 23 February, accompanied by a Canadian labour lawyer. Strikers were moved away from the factory at gunpoint by police that day, due to the arrival of this 'delegation'.

On Friday 24 February, workers were given an ultimatum to return on Monday or face dismissal. They agreed to return, despite management continuing to claim that NULW was the representative of the work-force. In the meantime, a SAAWU member says that the company has asked SAAWU for proof of their membership.

Company: Durban Transport Management Board (DTMB)

Date: 9 - 15 March

Workers: 156

Union: Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU)

Transport services in Durban failed to run as a result of a bus drivers' strike. This resulted in 40 000 workers being without transport for a week, and having to walk long distances each day. Workers showed their support for the bus drivers by refusing to board buses, and singing worker songs while walking to work.

About 190 drivers refused to work on 9 March. This meant that 145 buses on the Clermont run, 65 at the Ntuzuma depot which operates through Kwamashu, and another 23 at Klaarwater did not go out that day. Later in the morning about 40 drivers turned up for work.

After a meeting on the night of 8 - 9 March, it was decided that drivers would strike that day. The DTMB had been told after midnight that such a strike would occur. The decision to strike was taken because workers felt that the company was not granting the TGWU the privileges they had demanded. Management interpreted the drivers' strike as a deliberate attempt to force it to take sides in a 'power struggle' between pro- and anti-TGWU factions.

In 1983 the DTMB removed certain facilities which the TGWU had enjoyed because it said the union was no longer representative. It ceased to be representative when drivers at the Gordon Street bus depot split from workers at the Clermont and Ntuzuma depots, according to the DTMB. To replace the union, management provided for a works committee and refused to allow union shop stewards to be elected on to it.

Management refused to negotiate with the drivers until they returned to work. Deputy manager Alan Bray accused drivers of being irresponsible for having taken a course of action leaving 40 000 people to walk home after work. They were warned that if they did not return by noon on 10 March, they would be dismissed. The warning carried the very real threat that the DTMB 'did not foresee much problem in filling vacancies'.

Drivers were not prepared to call off their strike until management abolished

the works committee - seen by them as a rival negotiating body. The Board had agreed to recognise the union, but went back on this when it was realised that the works committee would have to be abolished as part of the recognition agreement. The DTMB said it had withdrawn from the agreement because of clauses demanding the dismissal of a leader of the 'rival faction' and those drivers still working who did not belong to the TGWU.

The DTMB fired the 156 strikers when they failed to return to work on 12 March. Those dismissed gathered at the Clermont depot and were later ordered to disperse by police. John Mawbey, branch secretary of the TGWU, said the drivers refused to accept their dismissal. 'We were very close to reaching an agreement with the DTMB at talks over the weekend, but the DTMB was yesterday still unwilling to negotiate a few minor amendments to a clause to pave the way for settlement', said Mawbey.

The following day the DTMB started hiring new drivers. It was estimated that the strike cost the company R90 000. The general manager said 27 new drivers were employed and 80 were to be interviewed later that day. Three of the applicants had been among the strikers; if re-employed their starting wage would be at the lowest notch (R551 a month), even if they had previously reached the maximum of R739,25. 'They breached their contracts', explained the DTMB general manager.

Trade union officials and workers called on Durban mayor Sybil Hotz to intervene. On 13 March the City Council instructed the management committee (MANCO) to meet with the DTMB to discuss the strike. The following day, when a settlement had still not been reached, crowds believed to be supporters of the sacked drivers stoned buses and manhandled passengers.

Management finally agreed to reinstate the 156 drivers. The terms of the settlement which management proposed were that the union would be allowed to elect shop stewards, and negotiations towards full recognition of the TGWU would be scheduled to begin. The works council would be replaced by a shop stewards committee.

The bus drivers returned to work after they had driven around in convoy to tell Durban workers of their success.

Company: Ninian and Lester (Pinetown)
Date: 29 February
Workers: 500
Union: National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW)

Alterations to shift-work conditions prompted a strike by about 80 workers in the knitting and warping sections of this company. The change involved a reduction in take-home pay. The new system was implemented in spite of attempts by the union to offer alternate suggestions which would have had less detrimental effects on the work-force. According to management, workers struck without participating in any further consultations, which management had offered.

Workers refused to return and were fired after two days. The NUTW called for an urgent meeting with management to appeal for the workers' reinstatement and to prevent the strike from spreading to other sections of the factory. Only a few strikers accepted dismissal and collected their pay.

On 5 March the entire work-force of 500 downed tools in support of those dismissed. Management offered to reinstate all but ten alleged intimidators, but workers refused to accept these terms.

Workers were at this stage prepared to accept the new shift system which involved two six-to-six shifts for four days, followed by three days off per week. However, they refused to return until all co-workers had been re-employed.

Workers have now all returned, and the new shift system has been abolished.

Company: Pineware (New Germany)
Date: 9 - 12 March
Workers: ?
Union: MAWU

Workers downed tools demanding that the minimum wage be increased from R1,58 to R2,00 an hour. The whole work-force participated in this stoppage. Workers were ordered to leave the premises while management had talks with MAWU.

Workers returned on 12 March after management had threatened them with dismissal. Both management and the union declined to comment on whether or not worker demands had been met.

Company: SA Fabrics
Date: 26 January - 6 February
Workers: 400
Union: National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW)

The third legal strike by African workers in South Africa occurred at SA Fabrics, the first two having been at AECI and Natal Thread. All were over wage demands.

At SA Fabrics the dispute arose over management's offer of a 4% rise in wages effective from January - July 1984. The union demanded a 16% wage increase to be implemented in three installments over this period.

Workers declared a dispute with the company, and by 26 January were legally able to strike. Ten days later workers agreed to call off the strike after the Minister of Manpower appointed a conciliation board to investigate the dispute.

Although the strike was initially over wages, management retrenched 12 workers during the strike. This became an issue for striking workers. During the stoppage management told the NUTW that it intended taking legal advice on the cancellation of the agreement between the two parties. Management claimed that the strike was a breach of the agreement. The union denied that 'unhappiness with a wage offer' could be a breach of the agreement.

Workers decided to boycott all overtime work pending a settlement of the dispute. Settlement was reached at the end of February. At the conciliation board meeting, both parties agreed to an 8% wage increase, to be backdated to January. A key point in the settlement was that further wage negotiations would take place in July. The 12 workers who had been retrenched were reinstated, and a detailed recognition and procedural agreement was signed by the union and the company. Workers agreed to work overtime for three months to minimise delivery hold-ups prompted by both the strike and a recent fire at the plant. All legal proceedings started or contemplated by either party to the dispute were abandoned.

Company: Smith and Nephew (Pinetown)
Date: 29 February
Workers: About 600
Union: NUTW
Almost all workers at this plant downed

tools demanding a weekly increase of R12,50 across-the-board. An additional grievance was the company's introduction of a productivity bonus scheme. The company was prepared to offer a R7,82 weekly increase and a R2,10 weekly productivity bonus. Workers objected to the productivity bonus as it is unreliable and discriminates against certain workers.

Striking workers returned to work when management agreed to refer the dispute to a conciliation board.

Company: Union Flour Mills (Durban)
Date: 9 - 13 March
Workers: Over 400
Union: Baking and Allied Workers Union (formed by SAAWU)

There is confusion as to how and where taxes paid by Africans will be spent. Africans are now taxed under the same Act as other groups (Income Tax Act of 1962). All taxes are now paid into the same fund, some of which is allocated to the bantustans (both 'self-governing' and 'independent'). Some employees are still paying tax in terms of the 1969 Black Taxation Act which may not have been repealed in certain bantustans. Little is known about the formula used to allocate funds to the bantustans under the new Act. This is the context in which a strike at Union Flour Mills took place.

Workers went on strike on 9 March when they received their weekly pay packets and found that tax had been deducted from their wages. Taxation of Africans under the same Act as other groups came into effect on 1 March (see WIP 30:36-7 for details).

Prior to the strike workers had refused to complete IRP2 forms for PAYE deductions in protest against the new system. The company stated that it had based tax deductions on the basis of single earnings as workers had not completed the IRP2 forms. These would have made them eligible for lower taxation based on marital status.

Workers demanded an explanation from KwaZulu authorities as they had been told that tax would be paid to the KwaZulu bantustan. They were already paying R5,00 annually in KwaZulu special taxes. The receipt for this tax is stamped in their pass books.

Union Flour Mills, a member of the Premier Group, dismissed striking

workers after three days. Workers did not accept their dismissal and warned that the company should close down. 'We are not going to allow other people to take our jobs. Our problem is not with the company. We are still prepared to return on condition that a representative of the KwaZulu government gives us an explanation'.

Management claimed that striking workers had acted in contravention of the grievance procedure agreed upon with the union. A spokesman said the company was legally obliged to deduct tax from workers' wages in terms of the new tax system. He said that a representative of the Receiver of Revenue's office had addressed workers at the start of the strike at the workers' request. But they refused to return when a representative of the KwaZulu administration arrived to explain.

On 14 March, management agreed to reinstate the dismissed workers. The company offered to try and get a representative of the KwaZulu administration to address them. Workers accepted the terms of their reinstatement which were that

- * tax would be deducted at the single rate where the company was not provided with additional information on marital status;
- * workers would agree to work overtime when reasonably requested to do so, and this would be added to the existing recognition agreement with the union;
- * Workers would follow the grievance procedure laid down in the recognition agreement and would not strike illegally if a dispute arose.

Company: Vynide (Pinetown)
Date: 14 February
Workers: 140
Union: Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU)

Workers at this AECI subsidiary downed tools in support of a demand for higher wages. The parent company had been hit by a legal strike at four of its plants earlier this year. The strike failed in its attempt to raise management's minimum monthly wage offer of R363. (WIP 30:21).

Strikers at Vinyl rejected a similar offer by management. Like their colleagues at AECI, they were forced to return to work without having their

demands met. A spokesperson for the CWIU explained that 'We accepted the offer because it was better than nothing and decided to go back to work. It was just a protest strike' ■

NUM and the mining industry

In the five months since their second annual congress the National Union of Mineworkers' (NUM) has moved increasingly into fighting mine workers' battles at the shaft face.

The strikes at Impala Platinum Refineries, Ucar, Rietspruit and Duvha are an indication of a growing militancy among mine workers and a sign that the mining industry is developing into a conflict-ground between organised workers on the one hand and employers and the state on the other.

But the NUM, which has grown into the largest black union in the country with a membership of about seventy five thousand, has kept up the pressure against employers on the legal front - the area where it scored its first major victories

The Hlobane disaster

The most notable of these has been the Hlobane case where the NUM assembled an impressive legal and mine-safety expert team to expose the gross mismanagement of the coal mine where 68 workers lost their lives in a methane gas explosion.

Hlobane was a turning point for the trade union, and for the mining industry as a whole. It inspired the NUM into taking up safety on the mines as a key issue, providing the industry for the first time with a safety-watchdog representative of black worker interests.

For almost a century the majority of victims of the hazardous conditions in South African mines have been black workers, but the accounts of why the accidents happen have been left to

government and mining industry spokesmen.

The NUM has provided a powerful voice for black mine workers. It has at once mobilised workers around an issue in their working lives which they feel very strongly about. At the same time it has challenged management and the government in a fundamental way.

The basic thrust of the NUM's argument is that accidents on the mines, which are usually portrayed by management as unavoidable 'acts of god', are often due to human error, mismanagement, refusal to incur costs for the best available safety equipment and an unreceptiveness towards advances in safety technology overseas. With a little bit of additional cost, the NUM has argued, safety can be improved, and the lives of hundreds of mine workers saved every year, not to mention the thousands of workers who are injured each year on the job.

Hlobane is the perfect case in point. Days after the disaster, the NUM issued a statement alleging gross irregularities which might have caused the blast - allegations which were pooh-poohed by management.

Yet the evidence which emerged in the Vryheid Magistrate's Court not only backed up the NUM's case, but was much more damning than even the union had initially suspected. A total of 14 out of 29 electrical machines found in the area of the blast were not properly frameproofed and could potentially have sparked the blast. The court found that the blast had been ignited by one of these machines.

A week before the explosion a report by a miner, T J Bezuidenhout that he had found explosives levels of methane gas in the sections of the mine later hit by the blast, was scored out by the mine captain.

Two days before the explosion a major holing operation was undertaken which short-circuited the ventilation system in the mine dispersing methane gas. No attempt to seal off the holing was made.

The mine's chief ventilation officer, Peter Shand, told the court that legally prescribed quantities of air regularly did not reach the working faces in the mine.

Records of the issuing of safety lamps used in the checking of methane levels in the mine, were in a 'chaotic' state and only four of the required number of ten lamps were found in the sections of the mine hit by the blast.

A dyke, a phenomenon in a mine known to release methane gas when penetrated, was penetrated twice a few days before the

blast but no steps were taken to prevent a sudden build-up of gas.

A list of a total of 21 Mines and Works Act regulations were contravened according to the evidence before the court.

The magistrate found that Bezuidenhout, the miner who died in the blast, was responsible for the blast because he failed to check for gas on the morning of the explosion. The Iscor-owned mine was responsible because of Bezuidenhout's negligence.

The NUM team was bitterly disappointed with the finding. It had built up a strong case that the company was responsible because of a failure of management to fulfill its duties right down the line. Either way it is doubtful whether most of the evidence would have come to light were it not for the NUM team.

Western Deep Levels inquiry

The NUM has made a difference at a number of other inquiries subsequent to the Hlobane disaster, the most notable being at Anglo American's Western Deep Levels mine where six workers died of asphyxiation. An inquiry found a white miner and an African team leader responsible for the deaths due to the fact that they ordered the workers to go into an area which had been sealed off because of a fire in the mine. The attorney-general is still deciding whether or not to prosecute them.

The NUM's most intriguing court battle has been with Gold Fields, generally regarded to be, with Cencor, one of the most reactionary of the mining houses.

NUM vs Goldfields

At Gold Fields' West Driefontein mine 17 workers were fired for refusing to work in an area they considered unsafe. An inquiry - requested by the NUM in terms of an almost-forgotten section of the Mines and Works Act - found the area to be 'objectively' safe. At a later Industrial Court hearing, the NUM argued that whether or not the area was safe, management had not taken adequate steps to prove to the workers it was safe.

The Court has twice extended the status quo order temporarily reinstating the workers and, if the two parties do not settle the dispute, will give the case a full hearing. The case will be a key test of the right of workers to refuse to

work under conditions they consider to be unsafe.

Withdrawal of offices

Meanwhile Gold Fields has launched a counter-offensive in the courts. At the end of February, the company was granted an urgent order in the Rand Supreme Court restraining the NUM from organising a strike at three mines. The case was brought to court 24 hours before the alleged strikes were due to begin at the Libanon, Venterspost and Kloof mines, all on the West Rand.

The dispute followed the withdrawal of office facilities from the NUM by Gold Fields at the three mines. The NUM has argued that given the compound system on the mines, the difficulty for a black union in getting offices in white towns and the routine harassment black workers are subjected to in these towns, removing its office facilities was a severe blow.

NUM workers on strike

Four actual strikes this year have changed the image of the union from one of being primarily involved in non-workplace struggles.

At the Ucar vanadium mine near Brits about 400 workers went on strike twice over the Bophuthatswana government's ban on South African unions operating in the territory. Negotiations are still underway between the NUM and Union Carbide, the American multinational which owns the mine.

At Duvha and Rietspruit, both Rand Mine Mines-owned open-cast coal mines close to Witbank, workers have struck in recent weeks over delays in the recognition of shaft stewards. At Rietspruit the company called in the police and 17 workers are facing charges under the Intimidation Act.

At Impala Platinum Refineries, Gencor fired about 1 400 workers who went on strike over the dismissal of seven workers who refused to work after a white foreman had abused and insulted a worker. The company ignored the compromise offer by the NUM that the workers would return to work pending an inquiry into the incident and discharged the entire staff.

The other leading issue which the NUM has found itself involved in is the continued existence of job reservation on the mines. At last year's conference the NUM took a strong line on the issue, accusing the government and the Chamber of Mines of racism.

The Chamber has since initiated talks with the white unions with the proposal that the definition of a 'scheduled person' which prevents Africans from taking up jobs in 12 categories on the mines be replaced with the non-racial definition of a 'competent person'. Presumably to win the backing of the right-wing Mine Workers' Union (MWU), whose members are most protected by the legislation, the NUM has been excluded from the talks.

The NUM has thus accused the Chamber of 'paternalism' for discussing a subject which has a major bearing on its members without it being present and has continued to lobby for a change in the laws.

Wage negotiations: the challenge

The NUM's biggest test lies in wage negotiations in the three months ahead when it has to take on the full might of the country's most powerful employer organisation.

Delegates to last year's conference called for a huge wage increase - a proposal which is likely to be resisted by the Chamber which will argue that the gold mining industry in particular is still badly affected by low prices in the world markets.

The NUM is angling for a general upgrading of wages for its workers in the industry. Cyril Ramaphosa, the union's general secretary, says the working conditions of mine workers are amongst the harshest and most dangerous and that mine workers should be remunerated for this. He points out that miners in other countries are amongst the best paid workers - and also amongst the most militant trade unionists.

The NUM is the only black union thus far to be recognised by the Chamber and, though they represent only a portion of the workers in the mining industry, the wages they negotiate will affect all of the industry's half-a-million black workers. Whether it can provide the muscle to adequately challenge mining employers will be tested in the months ahead. It seems certain that a major battle is looming