

SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

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COMMENT

1

TWO EDGED RED HERRINGS

Defence R948 million
Bantu Administration and Development
(Homeland Development) ... R385 million
African Education R 69 million
European Education R214 million

At first sight the enormity of these figures is such as to render all comment superfluous. It seems so obvious that the only thing threatening South Africa is internal disturbances sparked off by the failure to allocate money to provide decent conditions for black South Africans. Why spend money on arms when the same money spent on development could make a large army unnecessary?

Opposition spokesmen and newspapers have highlighted this paradox. So it seems superfluous for us to repeat what has already been well said.

Nevertheless, it is worth pausing a moment to consider an important question: If it is so obvious to you and to us that money spent on development would do more for South Africa's safety than money spent on arms, then why is it not also obvious to the government? After all Mr. Voster and Professor Horwood are not unintelligent men.

The fact that the budget allots R214 million to white education, as opposed to R69 million on African education is at least comprehensible, if unpleasant. When there is a conflict of interest between black and white, they choose white interest. But the case of unnecessary defence spending does not seem to be connected with the direct interest of any particular social group: there is no 'military industrial complex' in South Africa. So what is the explanation?

The first possible explanation is that the government believes that the gap between black and white

is so great that not even a sum like R948 million could really remedy the situation. They might therefore argue that, from the point of view of white material interest, it is still far cheaper to rely on repression than on justice. There is probably something in this. But we do not believe that this is the whole reason. In addition there is a basic inability to understand the nature of social conflict.

In our experience even those employers who admit that their workers have genuine grievances still insist that strikes are caused by agitators. They try to solve the problem by disposing of the 'agitators' rather than the grievances. The government seems to be doing the same thing on a national scale. Just as the employers blame everything on communist agitators, so the government tends to blame South Africa's problems on a world communist conspiracy. Although occasionally Ministers let slip that the army is for keeping internal order, the more usual posture is that South Africa is threatened by external attack from the communists, and that spending more money on internal development would do nothing to remove this external threat.

It is perhaps out of place for the Labour Bulletin to enter into a long discussion of international relations. Yet the whole idea of a communist conspiracy is so clearly bound up with perceptions and reactions to trade unionism that we believe we should discuss the issue. The question is not whether communism is a good or a bad thing. The question is whether South Africa is threatened by a communist invasion from outside. And whether internal disturbances, whether strikes or otherwise, are part of this invasion process; 'subversion' rather than legitimate protest.

It is evident that the government and many white South Africans think that the answer to both questions is Yes. In an opinion survey taken among whites in Durban shortly after the coup in Portugal last year, the respondents were asked 'Who are the real leaders of the terrorists'. About 60% replied that the real leaders were 'outside communists'. That is, they saw Frelimo as being an

essentially foreign communist movement, with no real roots inside Mozambique. One is reminded of a notorious statement made in 1952 by Dean Rusk, then a senior official in the Truman administration, and later to be US Secretary of State under Kennedy and Johnson. He said:

"We do not recognise the authorities in Peiking for what they pretend to be. The Peiking regime may be a colonial Russian government - a Slavic Manchukuo on a large scale. It is not the government of China. It does not pass the first test. It is not Chinese."

The South African Government has shown considerably more perspicacity than did the US government. It has not waited 20 years to change its mind and recognise that Frelimo is indeed Mozambiquan. South Africa now accepts that all along Frelimo was a Mozambiquan liberation movement, not a foreign communist terrorist organisation. Yet there has been no change in the overall strategic analysis that underpinned the earlier assesment. While 'our Portugese allies' were fighting 'the spread of communism in Mozambique' it made some sense to arm ourselves to prepare to take part in the struggle. Now that the 'Fascist Portugese Colonialist Regime' has given way to the 'ligitimate aspirations of the people of Mozambique', it would surely make sense to drop the pretence that the 'struggle against communist aggression' is, or ever has been, a problem in South Africa.

People in power, whether in Moscow or Pretoria, or in the board room, find it difficult to accept that other people might doubt the purity of their motives and the beneficence of their behaviour. They therefore find it natural to blame 'agitators' for any apparent signs of discontent amongst the masses. It is of course conceivable that in some situations contented people are lead unwittingly into action by the cunning of agitators. This cannot be ruled out a priori. But the point is that it should not be 'ruled in' a priori. The recourse to the outside agitator explanation should only come after all other possible explanations have been considered. Let's face it, the degree of inequality and injustice in South Africa is such that one can very easily

find explanations for social conflict. Afrikaners who rebelled against British rule without needing prompting from Moscow are in a very weak position when it comes to arguing that blacks cannot do the same.

It is worth pointing out that the communist red herring is two edged. The government might believe that it discredits people when it calls them communists and bans them under the Suppression of Communism Act. But it may well have the opposite effect. When all those who work hardest for the cause of justice in South Africa are called 'communists', the most likely effect is that the black South African will develop a pro-communist mystique every bit as unthinking as the government's myth of the communist bogey. We do not need anti-communist rhetoric. What is needed is serious analysis of the complex phenomenon of communism, and its relation to social conflict.

We do not believe that there is any military threat to South Africa from foreign communist states. The idea that foreign pressure against apartheid is somehow connected with a Moscow plot to grab the wealth of the Rand is ludicrous. Frelimo was undoubtedly armed by communist countries. But for all that Frelimo is not about to hand the mineral wealth of Mozambique over to anybody. Communist governments are obviously going to aid any movement here which tries to overthrow the present South African system by force. But this is beside the point. The point is that it is necessary to change South African society in such a way as to take away the motives for wanting to overthrow it by force. Buying submarines to defend our coastline against imaginary Russian or Chinese invaders is not going to help.

RED HERRING RIDES AGAIN

Since we wrote the above comment it has been reported that the Minister of Justice, Mr Kruger said that:
 "Communist subversion in South Africa had decided to concentrate on the organization of the Black labour force they are concentrating on organizing the Black labour force with the

idea that they would misuse the organized force to stoke up large scale labour unrest which could then lead to revolutionary developments." (Sunday Tribune 20 April)

According to a further report, Mrs Lucy Mvubelo of the National Union of Clothing Workers. Mr Attie Niewoudt of the Confederation of Labour, and Mr Arthur Grobbelar of TUCSA, have promised that they will support the Minister "in stopping Communist infiltration into the country's labour force". (Natal Mercury 23 April)

The purpose of a trade union is to express the interests of its members. It is not a political tool to be used for somebody else's purposes. We would therefore always oppose any political party attempting to take over a trade union for its own ends. We would not deny that such infiltration is possible. It has certainly happened in South Africa's past. In the late 1930's and the 1940's National Party political agitators were heavily involved in the successful and unsuccessful, politically motivated infiltration of trade unions.

'Infiltration' therefore is possible. But infiltration can only take place when the trade union is bureaucratic, undemocratic or corrupt. If a trade union is democratically organised, with members trained in the principles of trade unionism and in effective control of the actions of their officials, then it is not possible to 'infiltrate' that union. Members will not allow it to be used for objectives other than their own. A comparison between the Nationalist attempts to take over the Mine Worker's Union and the Garment Workers Union is instructive. The former had become bureaucratic and corrupt with its leaders no longer serving the legitimate interests of its members. It therefore fell easy prey to political infiltration. The Garment Workers Union, on the other hand, was well organised, and had a popular and honest leadership. As a result the take over attempt failed miserably.

We believe that the best defence against political misuse of trade unions is the development of democratic structures through the proper training of union members in democratic principles. Black trade unions do not need and do not want heavy handed government action to protect them against alleged infiltration. They want and need steps by the government and by other sympathetic trade unions which will make possible their free and democratic growth.

Trade unionists, in particular, should remember that the government has provided no proof what so ever that members of the Communist Party are trying to infiltrate the trade unions. All the government has done in recent years is to use the provisions of the so-called Suppression of Communism Act to suppress trade unionists without producing an iota of evidence that these trade unionists had acted in any way contrary to the interests of the workers. A promise to support the Minister might well be interpreted as the endorsement of further such arbitrary ministerial action. At present arbitrary government action and intimidation are much more serious a threat to African trade unions than the imagined 'infiltration' of political activists of any kind. In these circumstances the first concern of trade unionists should be to protect their fellow trade unionists against arbitrary action, by insisting that the Minister abandon the arbitrary powers granted him by the Suppression of Communism Act.

A NOTE ON THE HISTORY OF
LABOUR ACTION IN NAMIBIA

by R. J. Gordon

Despite the fact that the 1920 Administrator's Report felt that the Native Question is synonymous with the Labour Question, the authoritative and influential Odendaal Commission Report dealt with labour in a single paragraph. Indeed, over the years it has become almost axiomatic for the Administrator in his end of the year review of conditions in the Territory to say that 'race relations are harmonious and the labour force is contented'. Jenny, a German commentator, says:

'I know no Bantu people in the whole of Southern Africa who the Europeans respect more than the Ovambo. Their soberness, honesty and industriousness are praised everywhere'.

The Ovambo contract labour strike is accordingly seen by Whites to be an exception rather than the rule. The strike of 1971 was certainly remarkable in terms of its wide-ranging collective action and the apparent impact it had on the Whites in the Territory, but it was most certainly not the first manifestation of labour action in Namibia as many commentators believe.

THE HISTORY OF BLACK LABOUR PROTEST

In truth collective Black labour protest against conditions imposed upon them by the colonialists can be said to have started shortly after the Territory was formally annexed by Germany and has apparently been a constant feature of the labour scene ever since. This article describes the first recorded strike we could find and then describes some of the features on the labour front between the years 1950-1970. The events reported here must be seen as only a partial assessment of the situation and the conclusions tentative since research on this topic is bedevilled by certain factors: The relative inaccessibility of official records; the fact that the White chroniclers of the Colonial era tend to view Black labour protest

as 'unnatural' and 'caused' by 'agitators'. Protests were seen as being trivial and treated accordingly. The international situation has also resulted in protests against the labour system either not being reported in the press or being played down.

THE FIRST LABOUR STRIKE

The first labour strike apparently occurred during December 1893 at the South West Africa Company mine at Gross Otavi. For a recording of this event we are indebted to Mathew Rogers, the Mine Manager who was evidently a keen diarist. It is worth quoting quite extensively from Rogers' diary because of the historical importance of this event and because it provides grounds for reflecting on how little labour relations in the Territory have changed.

Rogers conducted his mining operations during a period when the Germans had not as yet consolidated their rule and 'subdued' the various indigenous 'tribes'. Thus, while Rogers had the official permission of the German authorities, he also had to deal with the various local chiefs. This was necessary, not only with regard to the mineral rights, but also with regard to labour supply.

THE CHIEFS' REPRESENTATIVES

The jurisdiction claimed by these chiefs was in part based on their claim to have supported mining operations by supplying labour. Accordingly many chiefs sent representatives to protect their interests: to see that the labourers received proper treatment from the whites; to grant the labourers leave where necessary and to generally be responsible for the labourers' living quarters. The whites viewed these dignitaries as a glorified excuse to beg for tobacco, food, liquor and money and accordingly put them to 'work' without due regard to their status. This caused dissatisfaction and was the precipitating factor of the strike. To quote from Rogers' diary:

'We have two classes of workmen engaged with us,

those assisting the mines, who earn 30/- per month, and labourers and jobbers earning 20/- per month. It will be remembered that when Samuel Maherero, the paramount chief sent two of his men here to represent his authority, Kamabazemie also sent two men. In his letter introducing them to me, he begged me to give them work.

Consequently I gave them labourers' work, paying them the usual wages with additional presents. Evidently they were dissatisfied at this rate of wages, as they refused to take it at the regular pay. During the evening, they, the Hottentot Chiefs (who were here to collar the Berg Damaras' pay) and the Ovambos conspired together to cause a general strike for increase of wages, consequently on the 5th December, when some of the native mining force went to their work, the combined force, with threats and cudjels prevented them. They came to me and said: 'They were willing to work but were not allowed'. I informed them I did not wish to force them, but if they care to work, I would protect them..... On reaching their work I stood between the workers and the non-workers'. One of the pickets tried to assault Rogers which resulted in Rogers informing the picket that 'I could not stand that, and should protect myself and those under me, and sent for my revolver.....'

RETURN TO WORK

Rogers writes that the Blacks eventually all returned to work 'when they saw my determined attitude'. 'I am glad the strike ended as peaceably as it did, but.....There is still, however an undercurrent of feeling, and they may break out again at any time, and because of this, some believe the late fire to be the result of an incendiary'.

On the 20th December there was a further strike which resulted in a total work stoppage for a few days. This strike was broken by cutting the food

rations *in toto* and by sending away the 'leaders of the agitators'.

WORKER CONSCIOUSNESS OR TRADITIONALISM?

Was this strike the result of 'worker consciousness' or of traditionalism? Rogers felt that it was the latter. He blamed the Hereros (Kama - bazemie's men) : "Doubtless, these Damaras (Hereros) were disappointed at receiving the same pay as others doing the same work, thinking themselves big men". He could not accept that they were dissatisfied with wages at the time of the strike: "I might remark that, never in my experience has the rate of pay amongst native coloured races been so high as it was here."

WHITE IDEOLOGY AND REALITY

In order to resolve this issue, one needs to examine some earlier entries to Rogers' diary. Rogers apparently had continual 'problems' with his labour force, 'problems' which have a familiar ring about them even today, 'problems' which are still manifested in white ideology. He found the blacks to be lazy, unreliable, and drunkards. So 'bad' were they that: "*The only thing I can do under the circumstances is to cultivate that estimable virtue, patience, and in this country there is plenty of scope for its exercise*". He writes that: "These natives are so slow as to make it impossible to work with any degree of speed". Not only were they 'slow', but they were also 'lazy', taking frequent work breaks (unauthorized) and being absent from work. This was manifested in and attributed to the fact that "they have not sufficient stamina for continuous manual labour and hence frequently give in, complaining they are sick, which only means they are tired and sore from their exertions". However, a few months earlier, Rogers had written: "Throughout the months we had been passing through a rather severe ordeal of sickness. Fever and ague prevailed to such an extent among the native population and especially among our employees as to assume epidemic form". Dysentery, bronchitis, diarrhoea, malaria, ophthalmia and influenza were common

afflictions and rampant in the mining camp.

Rogers was apparently subject to incessant complaints about the lack of food, notwithstanding the fact that his workers received five pounds of meat and meal per day and two pannikens of sugar per week. Later, however, reflecting on the strike he notes: "As I have frequently remarked, the food our men get is ample for themselves, but there is always a large following surrounding them, that, doubtless, when divided among so many is not sufficient for all".

THE WORKERS' AWARENESS

The following excerpts from the diary indicate how aware the blacks were of their roles as mine-workers. The blacks could not be depended upon "or in their continuous working, (they) being almost suspicious that they are not being paid sufficiently for this labour". Another entry notes the "great risks" under which black labour was employed: "If an accident occurs (and accidents will appear under the most careful management) we shall be held responsible and shall be held responsible and shall have to pay heavy damages in some way or another, if not with our lives. To employ only all Europeans brings us under the stigma of wishing to strengthen our position for hostile purposes".

POST WORLD WAR II PERIOD

Having shown how old the tradition of labour action is, we now turn to an examination of the post World War II period until events immediately preceding the 1971 strike. Our information is derived from the files of a Windhoek newspaper, "Die Suidwes-Afrikaner".

The conditions which gave rise to the Great Strike of 1971 have existed for a long time and the Ovambo have been aware of them for a long time. A letter of 20 November 1952 from "Ovambo Male Okuga Jepongo of Ondangua, Cvamboland" complains about the serious malnutrition and underdevelopment in the 'homeland'.

An important factor in contributing to this situation being that "The whole Ovambo-tribe is a fixed property of SWANLA (a human trade firm) and are the cheapest labourers for all the employers". The letter concludes with the statement that "The poor Ovambo tribe has not got a mouth piece to interpret its unsolved problems". Indeed, formal channels for the airing of grievances have been practically non-existent and where they have existed, the Ovambo workers have considered them ineffective.

'DESERTION'

Ovambo contract workers have thus resorted to other means of communicating and transcending their grievances. Probably the most commonly resorted to method was 'deserting'. 'Deserters' as a topic features consistently at the annual Congress of the S.W.A. Agricultural Union. So wide-spread and common was deserting that the farmers apparently nicknamed their contract labourers 'inspectors' because they came to the farm on a contract, 'inspected' the farm and then deserted. So often did deserting take place that most farmers felt that it was not even worth their while to lay charges with the S.A. Police. Despite the fact that in 1958 it was estimated that the farmers were short of 10,817 labourers, they felt that higher wages would not improve the situation. Instead, it appears from the newspaper files that farmers increasingly resorted to coercion in order to maintain their labour force. Thus at the Congress immediately prior to the 1971 strike farmers openly admitted that they resorted to '*bush justice*': when a labourer deserted they personally tracked them down and dealt with the labourers themselves and proudly proclaimed that "they will not desert again". Another method resorted to was to with-hold wages until the end of the contract.

An indication of how bad conditions were on the farms, and the success of the Ovambo strategy can be seen in that at the 1955 Congress a motion was tabled requesting that the contract workers on the way to take up contracts with farmers should be

accompanied by guards right to their destinations since they were deserting even before they took up employment.

In 1962 farmers noted with concern that there was 'increasing organized deserting', while SWANLA reported that there were certain districts to which contract workers refused to go. At the same Congress, a farmer mentioned that in Windhoek alone, there were over 2,000 uncontracted Ovambo. Another report dated 4 June 1965 stated that in the small fishing village of Luderitz there were over 600 'illegal' Ovambo and only 220 'legal' Ovambo resident there.

COMPARATIVE EASE OF DESERTION

In comparison to South Africa, it was relatively 'easier' to desert. It was only in July 1970 that legislation was passed making Population Group Classification compulsory. Prior to this there was no general registration of the population and consequently no-one had to carry an Identity Card (with photograph); neither was the registration of African births compulsory, thus officials had difficulty in disproving a man's claim to having been born in an urban area.

By law all blacks are compelled to carry an 'I.P.' (Identification Paper) in which an individual was identified by his often illegible 'thumbprint'. Since no official was going to take the time to check thumbprints except in exceptional cases, the 'I.P.' often proved ineffective; for example, while no Black man could be issued with a railway ticket without showing his 'I.P.', Ovambo bypassed this problem by either borrowing an 'I.P.' or asking a friend to get the ticket for them. Likewise, this strategy was often used in order to obtain a 'visitor's pass', a 'temporary work pass' or a new name; in short, a new identity for those Ovambo who wished to remain in the urban areas.

POPULATION GROUP CLASSIFICATION ACT

The implementation of the Population Group Classification Act from the end of 1970 did much to close this avenue of identity switching, since photograph identification cards were now made compulsory. This act thus did much to heighten the sense of injustice the Ovambo workers felt and probably was a major factor in creating the necessary degree of worker consciousness needed for the 1971 strike to be as wide-spread as it was.

These efforts to desert were mostly individually organized attempts, although there were the exceptions: thus a white construction foreman on 9 October 1964 expressed his surprise that his 21 contract-workers had deserted *en masse* because he would not accede to their request that they only be allowed to work 8 hours a day. Two other similar cases were found in the newspaper files.

COLLECTIVE PROTEST

Our examination of newspaper files brought a total of 43 collective actions by Ovambo contract workers in the white-controlled industrial milieux to light. While desertions can be seen as having the effect of *beating* the 'system', the primary focus of these collective actions was as a *protest* against the 'system'.

The following serves to summarize in a very brief and rudimentary way the emergent pattern of labour unrest in Namibia.

The scenes of these actions tended to occur in the larger towns or where large concentrations of Ovambo were housed. Thus Windhoek had 11, Tsumeb 10, Other Mines 12, S.A. Railways 5, Walvis Bay 5 and Luderitz 2 collective actions. The distribution of these actions is probably more a function of where the newspaper had a correspondent than a reflection of the actual situation.

The number of people involved in these actions ranged from 11 contract workers at the J.G. Strydom Airport who were charged with refusing to obey an instruction and being absent without leave when they went on strike because a Policeman had arrested a colleague for 'deliberately' dropping packages, to over 2,000 Ovambo who on 30 September 1948 went on strike at Tsumeb when a 13 year-old white youth shot and killed a fellow worker. The average number of contract workers involved per action was 313.

THE ISSUES AT STAKE

The issues at stake varied from Police raids on 'kaffir' beer brewing sites (6), to dissatisfaction with a specific white, usually a first-line supervisor (7), to protests about working conditions in general (6), to the wage issue in particular (8), and to what the contract precisely entailed (3). A number were also directed against black policemen or supervisors for what can best be regarded as 'improper interference' (7). Overall, there appears to be a historical change in frequency from actions directed towards individuals and arising from specific acts towards broader, more general issues such as wages or working conditions. This is closely reflected in the actions taken by the workers. Initially actions tended to be more violent and oriented towards individuals. How 'emotional' and 'irrational' these actions were is however subject to interpretation. For example, the workers in the Windhoek Compound (17 May 1966) ran amok in protest against the bad food, and stoned a police-van, but when police reinforcements arrived on the scene they found the 'situation' quiet. It is suggested that the workers had a clear conception of when the odds were in their favour and when they were not.

ACTIONS BECOME MORE ORDERED AND SPECIFIC

These actions became noticeably more ordered and specific. Perhaps the best example of this is the 1968 strike at the Walvis Bay fishing factories when over a 1,000 contract workers went on strike

because they wanted the night shift to be reckoned as overtime. This strike dragged on for three or four weeks before the strikers were eventually repatriated. During the whole period of the strike no damage to property was reported. (It is interesting to note that a short while after the Walvis Bay strike Ratledge, the Manager of Tsumeb Mine, officially denied that there was a strike at Tsumeb. He said however that contract workers had had numerous small group discussions and that he had been approached by a deputation which had requested significant wage increases. He had turned down their request and they had peacefully returned to work). A further incident can be mentioned to illustrate the 'rationality' of the workers while under the stress of a collective action: On 8 June 1954 the S.A. Police made one of their regular raids on a 'kaffir-beer' brewing site in a maize field near the Tsumeb Compound. They left their vehicle in charge of a single white constable and proceeded on foot. The constable saw a group of contract workers and decided to arrest them. The workers however, decided otherwise, and by diligent prodding with sticks they marched the constable into the compound and locked him up in a room for a few hours before releasing the 'redfaced' constable.

COUNTER - ACTION

Counter-action by the authorities was almost always harsh and in most cases the police were called in. Four contract workers were fatally shot and at least six were wounded as a result of these measures. Where the workers were compound based, the almost invariable official reaction was to raid the compound a day or two after the strike in search of illicit alcohol and weapons.

Workers were generally charged under one or two of three headings: Public violence; the Masters and Servants Ordinance or the Mines and Works Ordinance. Where the workers were found guilty, in addition to gaol and/or fine they were repatriated back to Ovamboland. It should be noted that arrestation appears to be selective: where the organization stood to be paralysed if all the strikers were

arrested, only the 'agitators' or 'belhamels' were taken into custody. Sometimes this took place at the strike but often these arrests were made a few days later when the situation was defused. The fines these workers faced were, if viewed against the prevailing wage rates of that period, rather severe. For example, the 55 Otjiwarongo Railway construction men who struck in January 1960 were fined between £1 and £5 the equivalent of between 4/5 month's and 4 months' wages. Not surprisingly, they rather went to gaol for sentences ranging from 14 to 30 days. The Ovambo who went on strike in Windhoek for a similar reason - refusing to work under a specific white, were fined R30.00 or 90 days in 1962.

In this regard what does appear interesting, although the data are insufficient to warrant anything more than a suggestion, is that since 1962 the punishments for striking have become increasingly less severe. This can probably be attributed to the changing international relationships with regard to the territory. Up to 1962, no striker had much choice and generally went to gaol, after 1962 it appears that more and more strikers managed to pay their fines.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing, a brief and often elliptical description of recent labour action by Ovambo contract workers has been given. For want of proper and sufficient sources its tentative nature must be stressed. However, it does serve to illustrate two important points: firstly, that labour action has played an important, if on the surface somewhat unsuccessful role in the territory's labour history, especially when viewed against the territory's sparse population and limited industrialization. Secondly, labour action forms a significant part of the Ovambo contract workers' oral traditions and thus played an important role in determining the form and content of the great Ovambo strike of 1971.

Robert Gordon
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OPEN AND CLOSED UNIONISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Stanley B. Greenberg

(EDITOR'S NOTES :

This article is the third section of a longer paper entitled "The Bounded Working Class". In Vol. 1 No. 8 we printed sub-section A: "Trade Union Orientation", and B: "Trade Union Practices". Here we publish sub-sections C and D and the paper's conclusions. For definitions see No. 8.)

SECTION C: LABOUR PROGRAM

South African labour unions operate within a highly structured legal environment. Since the massive disturbances in 1922, the government has not permitted white labour-management conflict to escalate into industrial unrest. Labour and management meet across a negotiating table largely shaped by the Industrial Conciliation Act. Their decisions are influenced by Labour Department representatives and Ministerial review; their disputes go to government sponsored arbitration. The Apprenticeship Act establishes a framework for training and certification of artisans. Trade union jurisdictions, membership and even occupational eligibility are determined by law and government edict.

Government involvement in labour-management relations unquestionably protects labour interests and advances traditional union goals - reduced uncertainty, job control and increased wages. Indeed, many of the trade unionists reflect the sentiment of the Boilermakers, "It's one of the best apprenticeship acts in the world;" or that of the Iron Moulders: "We have the best industrial legislation in the world." But it is also true that many trade unions discouraged government interference with collective bargaining and continue to oppose limitations on trade union eligibility. The division, as with previous issues, cuts a rough patch between the open industrial unions and the remainder of the labour movement. But unlike other issues, sharp

divisions exist within the ranks of the closed unions, leaving the TUCSA and unaffiliated unions to one side and the Confederation unions to the other.

FOR INCORPORATION

The open industrial unions fall, as they did on previous issues, on the side of incorporation. All the unions want to represent African workers and support changes in the Industrial Conciliation Act that would permit it. Without exception, they fought against the imposition of job reservation. They opposed it as a draft bill, in the courts and before the Industrial Tribunal; they are opposed to it not simply because government and industry have allowed determinations to fall into disuse. Finally, they support amendments to the Apprenticeship Act that would open up the trades to African workers. (Having very few artisans in their ranks, this is a costless commitment.)

The commitment to change, evident with each open industrial union, is heartfelt and unequivocal. "Definitely," the Leather Workers' officer responds.

Why can't they let - they're people like me - why can't they belong to their trade unions? Why can't they belong to our trade unions? I prefer them to be in our trade union rather than on their own.

"ONE BIG UNION"

The Transvaal garment union demands and hopes for a return to the policies of an earlier period when all garment workers belonged to "one big union."

Because as far as we are concerned, we feel and we are almost certain and we are sure that we are going to get - if you don't get the government to do by voluntary, we are sure of the African workers are bound to - get a membership (for Africans) and we believe that there should be one union. We don't believe in a black union or a white union or a mixed union and another union and we think that the trade unions of all

workers of South Africa will force the issue of African workers and coloured and white people will be able to belong to the same trade unions and then everything will be again as it was before.

The Cape Garment Workers union was one of the first to institute court proceedings against the amended Industrial Conciliation Act and continues to seek exemption from its provisions. In the last TUCSA meetings, the Natal Garment Workers union led the call for African unionization.

That's right and do you remember that I qualified that resolution at the time. I said, "Don't vote for it if you're not going to do it because I'm going to do it. Don't wear a mask for the outside world." I mean, I, you know, I know if somebody who taped it, played it back to me but I know what I've said, and I've said it on a million other occasions.

OPPOSED TO CHANGES IN PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION

The Confederation unions, particularly among the closed artisan group, remain steadfast, opposing any but the most minor changes in the country's protective legislation. Job reservation (despite its diminishing scope) and the Apprenticeship Act (despite the massive shortage of skilled labour) remain sacrosanct features of job control. African trade unions, in this view, spell the end of white civilization. "You can't give a sharp knife into the hands of a child," observed the Bouwerkers' officer,

He'll not only hurt himself, he will hurt you too. But you must realise is that the Bantu in South Africa, the black man, he is a child. He is a child. If you listen to the utterances of these so-called black prime ministers. The speeches that they make ... These are the thoughts of a child.

The 'Yster en Staal' union's officer expresses similar concerns.

You can't put a dangerous weapon in the hands of a child and expect him not to have an accident. This would have led to an exploitation of the Bantu worker. The Bantu worker would have been the first hurt. You would have had a revolution among the white workers and you would have a bloody economic catastrophe.

While many of the unions, even some of the Confederation unions, have turned away from formal job reservation, the 'Bouwerkers' and 'Yster en Staal unie', along with the Mineworkers, remain firmly committed to it. Their vehemence places them apart, but their sentiment has broad support among other Confederation unions. Job reservation, in this view, is ineffective because the government or the white trade unions show insufficient vigilance or because employers operate outside the law. The 'Yster en Staal' union's officer observes:

I believe in it. On its own, it is never a success. Without a salary attached to the job, it can never work. We've had jobs reserved but they are paid the minimum rate. The rate is so low the employer couldn't get the white. So he applies for exemption and he gets it. But it should be maintained. It provides control, time to negotiate. It enables us to negotiate at leisure. It's very, very necessary. The principle is right.

To the Mineworkers, job reservation is no longer a rigid colour bar because the white unions fail to stand by the white workers and press their case with the government. The Chamber of Mines, for example, could seek exemptions "for now and forever", but the government would never grant their requests. The employers and the government know the strength, unity and determination of the Mineworkers.

THE MODERATED POSITION

There is a substantially moderated position that dominates opinion among the closed unions and, to some extent, among the exclusive industrial unions.

Its adherents include a few of the Confederation unions, a number of TUCSA affiliates and nearly all the unaffiliated unions. These unions want to avoid an influx of African workers, maintain the white worker's protected position, and expend few, if any, resources on organizing African workers. But their position is flexible and responsive to changing circumstances, without necessarily abandoning the general principles embodied in protective legislation. They are cognisant of the skilled labour shortage, the shifting of black labour, and the endemic African work stoppages. They will consider changes in union and work practice, excluding, of course, any fundamental change in the South African labour pattern. Never having played a decisive role in formulating government policy, these unions are, for the most part, free to abandon archaic or dysfunctional practices.

LIMITED AFRICAN ORGANISATIONS

For the open industrial and the militant Confederation unions, African trade unions are the key to industrial conflict and social change. Whether South Africa goes the route of full incorporation or entrenched white rights hinges on the growth, leadership, and recognition of African unions. But, from the moderated position, African trade unions pose less serious alternatives and fewer complications for the existing trade unions. In this view, African workers' organizations need not be fully developed vehicles for collective bargaining, nor must they compete with the existing registered trade unions. Workers' organizations can and do serve limited needs, including communication and contact with management. These unions would emerge, ideally, as racially distinct bodies, governed by 'moderate' leaders, under the guidance of the white unions or the government. The position is clearly presented by the Underground Officials:

I don't think they'll call them unions but I do feel that the Industrial Conciliation Act should allow organization so as to create consultation and communication channels with the non-European.

To me it is not to their advantage to think of the union as a multi-racial problem because the intimate contact that must come about will lead to the exact position which in our national life has led to what they call petty apartheid. Within the union ranks, if you have a multi-racial affair, you will get that same friction developing and the union will be more busy trying to smooth the difficulties between members instead of fighting their employer or the state.

Some of the railway unions prefer the existing liason committees but if they prove unacceptable to African workers, would accept other means of communication. The Footplate Staff officer comments:

I'm not going to say a trade union as such, as we know it in the Western sphere of civilization, is not necessarily the solution. The reason I say that, his background, the way he looks at it from his point of view. We don't know his attitudes. Every worker should have the right to organise. But we never had similar views from the Bantu himself. On the whole, we don't know his exact views on this matter, if they want it.

(Should these unions be separate?) Separate unions, of course, the fields of work are different. The situation differs so much. If he wants a union and feels it is the solution to his own problems, let him have it. But let it be his own. Don't let white people, coloured and Asians get mixed up in it.

The Motor Industry employees, fully protected under existing legislation and trade union practice, support a limited form of recognition.

I believe there should be communication. I believe there should be consultation. Whether fully fledged unions are going to be the answer, I would hate to guess at this stage. I think it would depend entirely on whether those in charge of the union or at the head of the union are responsible people. This is as far as I would like to go.

PRAGMATIC POSITION ON JOB RESERVATION

Consistent with the moderated position on recognizing and organising African unions, these unions adopt a pragmatic position on job reservation and amendments to the Apprenticeship Act. If job reservation is applied spasmodically and no white apprentices are to be found, then allow these practices to be modified or to pass into obscurity. The Motor Industry Employees union, while themselves barring coloured apprentices in the Transvaal, view imposed reservations with indifference.

I don't think it is necessary in our industry. Quite frankly, I think it's one of those over-rated things. It is not as serious as people think it is. I only have to give you our agreements to show you how the various racial groups are willing to see, are getting the necessary opportunities. And as far as the actual wages are concerned, quite obviously, that is an employer matter.

The Electrical Workers are anxious to see Africans trained under the Apprenticeship Act, as long as they are trained to work in African areas - "White servicemen don't like to go in these townships".

AN APPARENT ANOMALY

The more intractable analytic problem emerges among the closed unions that desire genuine changes in the protective framework. They do not view African trade unions or membership in registered trade unions as simple communication or consultation, confined to a corner of the industrial complex, while the real bargaining is carried out on center stage. "We want them all members of this one union," the Typos' officer declares. "Our argument is that we have been a mixed union for so long - white, Coloureds and Asians - that we can accommodate the Bantus as well and have one printers' union." The Building Trade Workers look to union membership as the hope of progressive trade unionism: "That is our only salvation." Without real trade unionism, the African worker is

footloose, his spokesmen "responsible to nobody". But "you take him into trade unions, then he can be protected and we can see what is going on."

This apparent anomaly - closed unions desiring incorporation - is subject to two opposing interpretations. First, these trade unions are indeed functionally closed and fully willing to take advantage of the colour bar. But they are also realistic enough to recognise the imperatives of economic development. An expanding economy, even when constrained by a bounded working class, brings increasing numbers of black workers into jobs formerly held by whites. The transition, without unionization, means the undercutting of union rates, replacement of union by non-union labour and the inevitable decline in union bargaining position. A realistic defence of union interests, consequently, requires that they breach the colour bar and attempt racial incorporation within a closed union orientation. The move comes not from any natural inclination on the part of unions, but from contingencies imposed by the economy.

The alternative interpretation suggests that, in some instances, there is no necessary affinity between closed unions and the colour bar. Racial barriers emerge not out of trade union logic, necessarily, but from a rational adaptation to circumstance. In a society that denies full union rights to black workers, exclusory policies (eg. job reservation, negotiated job barriers) are necessary to the maintenance of the union. The Iron Moulders' officer declares,

The trade union movement in this country reserves to itself the right to its own occupation whilst a position exists for persons who cannot determine their own destiny can come in and undermine the destiny of others. He can't accept it. But it does not mean that we don't do everything in our power to uplift and bring to our standards, the African. He is entitled to as much clothing, food and housing and free old care as we are. We believe that. It was the powers that be says he can't have it. He can't undermine my job and

my membership. It is as simple as that.

If the legislative bar to full union membership were lifted, the union would have no need to impose other forms of racial exclusion. Indeed, the unions that find racism abhorrent would prefer a healthy, closed unionism that operated without reference to race.

The alternatives are equally plausible and, unfortunately, the data does not permit us to choose between them. In the next section, however, we can at least assess where these unions devote their energies - whether to the colour bar policies described in the previous section or to labour and social programs.

SECTION D: SOCIAL PROGRAM

The burden of a genuine critique of the racial order falls upon the open industrial unions. Their interests and functions are clearly associated with a breakdown in exclusive practices, whether practiced in the labour sphere or society at large. One officer, for example, sees the entire social arrangement as a conspiracy of business and government interests.

Why don't they (the employers) want to fall out with the government? Because it is their government. Make no mistake about it. This government suits the employer class. It suits the profit-makers. A divided working class is easier to handle. You can play off one race against the other like they did with the African union by switching their preference to them, which didn't work out.

In formulating a legislative program, their concern, and the concern of most trade unions, is with adequate social welfare programs (eg. social security and medical benefits). For the open industrial unions, however, these programs are part of a more general program encompassing relief for low paid workers, education for Africans, Coloureds and Indians, recognition of African trade union rights, and the elimination of petty and

general apartheid. Indeed, TUCSA's preoccupation with general, as opposed to union specific interests, is due to the prodding of its open industrial unions.

The open industrial unions do not operate in isolation. A number of closed unions (primarily members of TUCSA) support the open industrial unions' critique and program. Their approach, however, is more restrained and their program less radical. Apartheid indeed undermines trade union interests; it divides workers and creates unnecessary social conflict. But a program for social change must remain sensitive to established mores and the consequences of instability. The Boilermakers' officer notes:

I'm fully convinced that apartheid is on its way. Except that we'd be left with something like you've got in the United States, a sort of apartheid that would be applied by the people, not by legislation or anything like that.

The Typos' officer, while insistent on change, emphasises the need for patience.

Well, of course, it undermines trade union interests. But at the same time to do away with it overnight, I think it would have dreadful complications in this country. I think it is something that has grown for so long, the breakdown will have to be gradual. I can't see them do away with it overnight.

The 'liberal' closed unions support a program for social change, emphasising apartheid laws and African trade unions. Their record within TUCSA, however, rapidly dispels any notion that their endorsement represents a major push for reform. Within TUCSA, the demand for social change comes entirely from the open industrial unions and, to a lesser extent, the National Executive Committee. In the last seven conferences (beginning in 1967), artisan unions are responsible for only four resolutions: one was a technical matter affecting only registered unions, two were questions of general business practice, and only one issue was

of general importance for industrial workers.

The thrust of closed unionism is to emphasise how little trade unionism and apartheid have to do with one another. "It's not detrimental to the workings of the union," comments the Footplate Staff officer. "I can't see a field where it would affect us." His views are shared by the Motor Industry Employees officer.

As far as we as trade unions are concerned, we don't suffer in any way because of the system. Our membership is growing yearly and the benefits are growing.

The principle concerns of closed unionism fall outside questions of race policy and center around social welfare issues. In recent years, they have pressed the government, with little success, for improved coverage under the Workman's Compensation Act and, above all, the institution of a national, contributory provident fund.

It should not be surprising that the exclusive industrial unions, whose interests center around industrial separation (as opposed to job separation), are fully supportive of apartheid. For them, apartheid is not some distant social philosophy that operates on the peripheries of industrial practice; it represents the social support that makes their brand of unionism possible. National and industrial separation are viewed as a single process, creating employment opportunities outside the white areas and creating controlled, segregated opportunities in the cities. The Postal Association officer declares, "(it) has been my association's policy, right from the start, many years ago, is that non-whites should serve their own people and not whites." On that principle, they and the other unions have ordered their organizations, and would choose to order industry and the society.

CONCLUSION

The image of South African trade unionism was as we expected - divided, bizarre and, above all, exclusive. Indeed, few people in or outside of

South Africa question the distinctive imagery of race and labour. The substance of trade unionism - the goals, approaches and programs - is a different story. Stripped of their outward trappings, South African trade unions reflect the prosaic and conventional in labour organization. The unions and their members desire little more than workers elsewhere. They adopt well-worn approaches to organization and strategies for advancing working class interests.

What makes South Africa distinctive is not trade unionism but the bounded, racially divided, working class. Within its constraints trade unions follow conventional logic to explicable, but distinctive labour forms. The forms may be unique; the logic is traditional. Closed unions exclude black workers from labour organizations and specific protected occupations. They frequently advance their members' interests at the expense of black workers. We could expect little else of closed unionism in a bounded working class. Open unions follow divergent paths. In areas of traditional white employment, open unions attempt to limit the workforce. They demarcate areas of black and white employment; through apartheid, they seek to exclude blacks from industrial employment entirely. Under the circumstances, can we really expect the open union to do otherwise? In well-integrated, mass production (or unskilled) industries, open unions represent all workers. They oppose imposed or negotiated job reservations, support African trade unions and the general reform of racial policies. In a sense, the integrated labour pattern frees these open industrial unions from the constraints of a bounded working class.

South African trade unionism is a logical consequence of trade union theory and practice. The fact that most union behaviour falls within this pattern does not mean all union behaviour, no matter how racist, follows this logic. Separate changing rooms, bathrooms, eating and work areas have nothing to do with trade unionism. Important tenets of apartheid, including parallel development within an industry or company, undermine the union's bargain-

ing position and wage rate. These practices are distinctive and controversial features of South African race relations. They certainly impinge on union practice; but they are not central to it, nor derived from it.

Exclusive unions in South Africa demonstrate little interest in altering traditional labour patterns. Indeed, exclusive practices, such as statutory and negotiated job reservation, are the essence of their approach and program. What little interest emerges in social reform gives way to the reality of industrial practice and the widespread support for apartheid policies. Open industrial unions are an important, if isolated force for change. They act to break down racial barriers on the factory floor and in society at large. In addition, the evolution of industrial practice is bringing black workers into increasingly responsible positions, creating, in effect, the kind of integrated industrial situation conducive to open industrial unionism. Under ordinary circumstances, labour organization would respond to opportunity; the base for reform would be greatly expanded. But the South African context does not pose ordinary circumstances. Trade unions reared in a bounded working class do not respond warmly to new bases of organization. The government, sensitive to such developments, has assured by law that no new industrial unions will achieve recognition.

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WHITE TRADE UNIONISM, POLITICAL POWER

AND AFRIKANER NATIONALISM

A review of: Louis Naude, 'Dr. A. Hertzog, Die Nasionale Party en Die Mynwerkers' (Pretoria, Nasionale Raad van Trustees, 1969)

by Dan O'Meara

The years between the formation of a coalition of the Nationalist Party of General Hertzog and the South African Party of Smuts in 1933, and the wafer-thin electoral victory of the "Reunited" Nationalist Party coalition in 1948, were of the most significant in South African labour and political history.

Not only were they a period of enormous economic growth, with the final emergence of a genuine industrialised economy; not only did they witness the emergence and political victory of a more thorough going and militant Afrikaner Nationalism than the rather woolly brand practised under General Hertzog, but more fundamentally, they were also a period of intense social and political conflict at all levels over the nature of South African society and the pattern in which it should develop. During this period, as perhaps in no other, the basis of social conflict in South Africa was laid bare and the class nature of the system of exploitation and racial exclusion revealed. A strong and militant African trade union movement developed to seriously challenge the structure of exploitation and was broken only by sustained and ruthless force. While the registered trade unions did little to assist the African movement, and in most critical areas actively opposed it, white workers were still organised and mobilised along class rather than cultural lines. The depoliticisation of *class interests* amongst white workers and their mobilisation in *cultural terms* and the seizure of key Unions in the Trade union structure, was *the essential*

step to secure a Nationalist victory.

NAUDE'S HISTORY

In this context Naude's is a fascinating and important, though thoroughly cynical history. It tells of the organised and cold-blooded assault by a small clique of petty bourgeois politicians on a key group of white workers and their all white trade union during the late Thirties and Forties. The cynical manipulation of miners' grievances against the hopelessly corrupt Mine Workers' Union for petty bourgeois ends. The attack on and takeover of the MWU had the explicit, and eventually successful, goal of breaking the solidarity and power of the organised white working class, and in particular its two key organisations, the South African Trades and Labour Council (SAT & LC) and the still powerful South African Labour Party (SALP). It put into power a class alliance which through making a few concessions to the white fraction of the working class, forever ended its independent political power, and set out to thoroughly suppress the interests of black workers. It entrenched the political power of elements of the petty bourgeois as a means by which they were able to transform themselves into a fully fledged bourgeoisie; a capitalist class pure and simple.

HERTZOG'S POLITICAL TESTAMENT

At the same time, this book is quite blatantly Dr. Albert Hertzog's political testament. Published by one of the many powerful pressure groups controlled by him (Die Nasionale Raad van Trustees) at a critical stage of the vicious conflict within the Nationalist Party just before the Herstigte split, it is clearly designed to justify his position, and in particular, his view of the class basis of the Nationalist Party. The message to an ungrateful party leadership is quite clear, and suitably decoded reads "look what I did for you lot. If it wasn't for me you'd still be in opposition, so beware!". The issues it raised within the Nationalist Party have still not been settled within the Party, (despite the Herstigte split) and remain

important areas of conflict.

DISTORTIONS AND OMISSIONS

The book is in fact badly written, and the chapters constructed in such a way as to be deliberately misleading. For instance, Naude hints on page 106 that the withdrawal of financial support for the Hertzog organisation by the Ekonomiese Instituut of the F.A.K. in 1944, left it virtually penniless, while 8 pages later we are told that by this stage the Pieter Neethlingfonds was providing them with a steady £3,000 p.a. The time dimension is similarly distorted. The reader is offered almost no guide to even the approximate dates of important events and decisions. The author is guilty too of very serious and deliberately misleading omissions, and in a few instances of outright falsification. Two examples will suffice. Quite incredibly, given the fact that it was behind the entire operation, the Afrikaner Broederbond is mentioned only once, and then in quoting the 'Rand Daily Mail'. Secondly the corruption of the leadership of the Mine Workers' Union is repeatedly, and quite correctly, emphasised, yet the Hertzogite successor as Secretary of the MWU from 1948, Daan Ellis, is praised to the skies for his ability, strength and integrity. No mention is made of the fact that in 1952, this valiant Hervormer was found guilty of the gravest corruption and sentenced to eighteen months hard labour. Released on a legal technicality he continued in his post till his death in 1963. Other anomalies must be mentioned. Naude attacks, often very movingly, the poverty, humiliation, deculturalisation and naked exploitation of the mineworkers' by the Chamber of Mines aided and abetted by a docile government

Yet not once in 284 pages are the migrant Africans, who comprise over 90% of the mining labour force, even mentioned. Let alone their appalling working and living conditions, desperate exploitation and ruthless oppression by Chamber and government, aided and abetted by white miners. There is also a long, sick, passage (pp. 78-82) in which the author describes the glorious, innocent, and

apparently quite legal enjoyment the Bloemfontein Blackshirts found in beating in the heads of the (largely Afrikaans-speaking) female members of Solly Sach's Garment Workers' Union with "verskillende wapens". Sachs was the red rag to the Nationalist bull in that he (as a Jew, none the less) found the secret of utilising Afrikaner cultural symbols for effective class mobilisation. That of course was the ultimate threat!

THE CENTRAL THESIS

Yet, despite all this, the central thesis of the book is sound! But for the sustained attack on the trade unions by Albert Hertzog and his associates in Die Nasionale Raad van Trustees, the by then largely Afrikaans-speaking, white fraction of the working class would have continued its long tradition of support for the Labour Party. The Nationalist Party would not, for the first time ever, have won the six working class constituencies on the Rand which put it (in coalition with the Afrikaner Party) into political power with a Parliamentary majority of five on a minority vote in 1948. So despite its pathetic quality as serious history, its tendentious nature and myriad faults, this is an important book, because of both the conjuncture and class view it represents. It is full of direct and indirect clues on the role of the Broederbond in South African politics; the changing nature of that role; and the particular class concerns of the so called "ethnic" ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism. Though notable more for what is left unsaid than said, it illuminates and raises most of the critical questions about the specific type of industrial society which developed in South Africa. Particularly issues relating to the control of the working class, white and black; the role of the state in relations between capital and labour; the development of a racially divided working class and the changes affected by Afrikaner Nationalist rule in the relationship between fractions of this class and the state.

NEED FOR A STRUCTURAL EXPLANATION

If these important issues are to be fully grasped, it is essential that analysis transcends that of the propaganda of the actors involved and goes behind the personalities (Naude's is a personality oriented History) to seek structural explanations for the developments in white trade union politics during this critical phase in South African labour history. In this approach it is necessary to see what it was about the mining industry and the composition of its white labour force which made it the focus of the attack on trade unions.

CENTRAL IMPORTANCE OF MINING

Since the discovery of diamonds in the late 1860's, South Africa's social history has been dominated by the needs of, and the conflicts surrounding the mining industry, particularly gold mining. The historical and contemporary economic importance of the mining industry speaks for itself and need not concern us here. What is relevant is a brief outline of how the class structure, and particularly divisions within the working class, are largely a function of mining interest. From 1890 onwards, intense class conflict between fractions of Labour and Capital developed on the mines, centering almost exclusively on the question of cheap labour and the relationship between skilled and unskilled. Initially the skilled labour requirements of the mining industry had been met through the importation of experienced workers from the coal and tin mines of Britain. For a significant part of the early period of mining, the skilled work force was composed largely of foreigners. These "Cousin Jacks" as the British miners were commonly known, brought with them their habits of trade unionism, and sought to protect their interests by organising themselves into *craft* unions. The key to the power of craft unions lies in the fact that they, and not management, lay down the criteria for, and control admission to, the craft. Where craft unions are operating successfully, no person can enter these skilled trades without the consent of those already in them. Where the need for skilled labour is

strong, this craft unionism is obviously a potent weapon in the skilled workers' arsenal. It is in their interests to keep admissions to the craft low, and the criteria rigorous, to ensure strong demand for their skills and correspondingly high wages. The apprenticeship system was generally the means by which this was effected. Thus by their nature, craft unions are elitist and exclusivist, concerned primarily to protect the position of the skilled worker from competition from other less, or unskilled workers.

MOTIVATED BY ECONOMIC INTERESTS

The often vicious and bloody conflict between capital and labour on the gold mines up to 1924 centred largely on this issue - the right of the skilled workers to control admission to their crafts and exclude less skilled workers. It is crucial to note that from the outset this exclusivism was motivated by blatantly economic, rather than racial, interests. Initially at least, the Cousin Jacks' directed their concern at both the major sources of cheap labour, migrant Africans, *and* the increasing numbers of Afrikaans-speakers who had been forced off the land by the devastating economic effects of the British scorched-earth policy during the Anglo-Boer War. The initial impetus for the large scale proletarianisation of Afrikaners was, just as for Africans, conquest! Yet despite the often extreme poverty of the urban Afrikaner, there was a critical difference between the position of unskilled African and unskilled Afrikaner workers. After 1906, every white male in the Transvaal, however humble, had the vote. His interests thus became a source of political competition in which he had some say. As Afrikaners moved into the cities, those who could find employment filled low paid, unskilled or semi-skilled positions - a pattern which persisted for years. In 1939, 60.2% of all unskilled white workers were Afrikaans-speakers, as opposed to only 19.1% of artisans. The first large scale influx of Afrikaner workers onto the mines occurred in 1907 when striking British miners were simply replaced, at lower wage rates, by unemployed Afrikaans-

speaking workers. Yet these workers were at best only semi-skilled, and only a stop gap replacement. Though the British exclusivity had been broken, Afrikaans miners as a group filled the lower ranks of the occupational hierarchy on the mines. Their economic position too was precarious. The Chamber of Mines was forever seeking cheaper sources of labour, and thus these Afrikaans workers too began to act collectively to protect their position from undercutting by semi-skilled black labour. The vote was a powerful weapon in this struggle which waged for two decades culminating in the bloody "Rand Revolt" of 1922 on precisely this issue.

Thus the *racial* division of labour between skilled and unskilled was finally laid down by the intense *class* conflict 1890-1922. The development of the so-called "white labour aristocracy" has been well covered by Johnstone and others(1). The point to note for the purposes of this paper is that it was the product of thirty years of bitter and always very violent class conflict between capital and labour. Between the Chamber, interested only in cutting its steep operating costs and raising often low profit margins, and skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled white workers, interested only in protecting their positions from undercutting *from whatever source*. Moreover, and this point is crucial for the understanding of Hertzog's successful assault on the Trade Union establishment, labour was lead by skilled, organised, English-speaking workers. The leadership of the white trade union movement came from an exclusivistic, long-proletarianised group. On the other hand, the largely Afrikaans-speaking membership had been proletarianised by conquest and its economic effects, and despite their large numbers, were not represented in either the Trade Union or Labour Party leadership (at least till the fairly late Thirties). Yet, Afrikaans workers responded socially and politically in terms of their perceived economic interests, displaying a healthy interest in working class organisations, and appear to have voted solidly for the Labour Party. They made *no attempt* to organise themselves along cultural, "Christian-National" lines. On the other hand, their skilled, English-

speaking class fellows displayed a strong susceptibility to the imperialist message of the South African and Unionist Parties. The Labour Party's loss of 12 seats to the South African Party in the 1921 General Election was due to large desertions by the British miners to the blatantly jingoistic appeal of the S.A.P. Afrikaner workers remained loyal to the Labour Party, which in 1924 entered a "pact" with Hertzog's Nationalists and won the election. From this date till its eventual demise in the 1958 elections, the Labour Party lost its independence, remaining closely and cosily identified with the Nationalist till 1933, and the United Party thereafter.

THE PACT GOVERNMENT

The pact government represented a class alliance. On the one hand the Nationalist Party represented Cape and Free State commercial farming interests, nascent Cape Afrikaner Capital (Sanlam and Santam), the smaller dispossessed or severely threatened farmers of the Northern Provinces and the Afrikaans-speaking element of the urban petty bourgeoisie. On the other the Labour Party represented English speaking skilled labour and recently proletarianised Afrikaners. The groups represented in the class alliance attacked the imperialist interests of mining capital, and through the state appropriated part of its surplus (a) to allow the emergence of a national bourgeoisie based on industry and agriculture, and (b) to protect white labour in a position of privilege(2). It took important steps to establish some form of economic independence for South Africa (protection, ISCOR etc), set up statutory entrenchment for white labour's privileges and provided subsidised employment for the newly proletarianised unskilled through the "civilised labour policy". The crisis of South African capitalism during the Depression and the Gold Standard crisis in particular, broke this coalition. The Fusion between Smuts' South African Party and elements of Hertzog's Nationalist Party in 1934 weaned industry, the Free State commercial farming interests and organised white labour out of the Pact coalition into an alliance with Transvaal commercial farming,

and, more importantly, mining capital. Given the nature of the boom following the abandonment of the Gold Standard, the mining interests rapidly gained the upper hand in the United Party - just as the core of the national bourgeoisie who remained with Malan in the "Purified" Nationalist Party had predicted.

TWO REMAINING AREAS OF LABOUR UNREST

The industrial and political conflict 1933-1948 did not centre on the struggle of white workers for peripheral incorporation into the system of privilege. Rather it reflected the changing structure of production. The emergence of an industrialised economy simultaneous with the final collapse of the Reserve economies which had provided the key to the accumulation which facilitated this industrialisation. The leadership of the white trade union movement had been incorporated into the formal structures of power with the Pact government, and continued in this position under the United Party regime of General Hertzog. Confrontation between capital and organised white labour was thus ruled out.

Yet two important potential and real areas of labour unrest remained, centering on the two most recently proletarianised fractions of the working class: Afrikaans-speaking whites and Africans. The former are discussed below, but during this period an organised, militant black proletariat emerged to severely threaten the structure of exploitation⁽³⁾. Intense and bitter conflict developed centering on these two groups. In this struggle, whichever political party managed to *win the support* of white labour *and control* the militant African proletariat, was bound to achieve power. By 1948, the Herenigde Nationalist Party had managed the first (through gaining the support of a key group of white workers) and appeared to have policies which would achieve the second. The U.P. hopelessly divided by the conflicting interests of its class constituents, failed in both areas and narrowly lost the election.

STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUL OF WHITE TRADE UNIONISM

Naude's book is Dr. Hertzog's suitably edited version of the achievement of control over the strategic Mine Workers' Union. But moreover, it sheds much light on the intense struggle for the soul of white trade unionism during the Thirties and Forties. During the historic conjuncture which saw the rise and apparent fall of Fascism and the emergence of the Soviet Union as a major power, a small group of lawyers (Dr. Hertzog and Danie Malan), Academics (most prominently the ubiquitous Dr. Diedrichs), Bankers (Frikkie de Wet and J.J. Bosman of Volkskas) and cultural agitators (particularly one Dr. P.J. Meyer), decided to try and capture strategic trade unions for Afrikaner Nationalism. In 1936 they formed Die Nasionale Raad van Trustees. The force behind this group was the Afrikaner Broederbond, of which all were important members. Whilst not wishing to indulge in the conventional 'Sunday Times' type conspiracy theory of the Broederbond as a be hooded and insidious band of fanatical conspirators running the entire country, an understanding of the role of the Broederbond is crucial. The particular rationale behind its activities and its links with emerging Afrikaner capital in the North is critical to an understanding of the political forces at work during this period.

THE FORMATION OF THE BROEDERBOND

The Broederbond had been founded in 1918 by a railway clerk and a clutch of theologians as an organisation to foster "Afrikaner interests", and operated as a secret society after 1922. During the Twenties its operations were confined to the Northern Provinces, and it attracted support from petty bourgeois groups, particularly teachers and railway clerks. Until 1927 the Bond functioned as a semi-masonic organisation, but two events in the Twenties and Thirties were to alter its functions and lead to an expansion of its role.

After the 1926 Imperial Conference General Hertzog announced that the constitutional aims of the Nationalist Party had been largely achieved, to the great dismay of the many ardent Republicans in his Party. It would appear that the formation of a Broederbond clique within the Nationalist Party dates from this event, with the decision that Hertzog was no longer to be fully trusted, and the Bond was definitely reorganised during the late Twenties. Its major achievement was the formation in 1929 of a cultural front, the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings (the FAK) which soon came to dominate Afrikaans cultural life. Yet it was the shock of Fusion which provided the real stimulus to the Broederbond's activities. Given its petty bourgeois nature, the vast majority of its 2,500 members, opposed Fusion as a sell out to imperialism. It was only after Fusion that Dr. Malan joined the Broederbond, and General Hertzog claimed in a famous speech to his constituents at Smithfield that the Bond and the "Purified" Nationalist Party were one and the same body merely operating on different social planes. The Bond was again reorganised along much more vigorous lines and began to play a critical policy making and catalytic role in political and social life. Its three major areas of operation were: in the ideological and organisational redefinition of "Afrikanerdom" during the Thirties(4); the assault on the trade unions, and; the establishment and promotion of Afrikaner business interests.

CLASS STRUCTURE OF THE BROEDERBOND

The class nature of the Broederbond is the key to an understanding of its role and of "Afrikaner Nationalism" during this and subsequent periods. For much of its existence it was a petty bourgeois organisation pure and simple. The importance of clerks, which had been crucial to its growth during the Twenties, declined during the Thirties. Though designed to cover the occupational spectrum in any area in which it operated, it was dominated by professional groups after 1933, the most important being academics (particularly those at Potchefstroom), teachers and lawyers. It was mainly an *urban movement*

operating in the Northern Provinces which catered for those groups which had been moved/pushed off the land, yet did not have to sell manual labour in order to subsist. Its influence and importance among the Cape commercial farming and financial interests which remained in the "Purified" Nationalist Party under Dr. Malan was small. Indeed, Naude discusses the powerful opposition by "a large Afrikaans Trust Company" (obviously Santam) to the provision in Pieter Neethling's will which established a trust fund to finance Die Nasionale Raad Van Trustees. Santam's Chairman, Senator W.A. Hofmeyer was an immensely powerful figure in the Nationalist Party, often at variance with Northern elements. Hofmeyer virtually founded the Cape Nationalist Party in 1915, refused its offered leadership and had been responsible for Dr. Malan's appointment. During the fusion crisis, he was largely responsible for holding the Branch organisations for Malan. As the founder and chairman of Nasionale Pers, he had also established Voortrekker Pers in 1936, and was its chairman until he fell out with its Broederbond editor, Dr. Verwoerd, in 1939. His relationship with the Broederbond was always stormy, reflecting the different class bases of support for the Nationalist Party in the Northern & Southern provinces. This north/south division in the Bond's influence remains largely true today.

THE ORGANISATION OF AFRIKANER CAPITAL

For the Afrikaans-speaking petty bourgeoisie in the first half of the Twentieth Century, economic opportunities in the system of capitalist exploitation were limited not only by class position, but also by language. The economic system was dominated and controlled by foreign interests, and run as an appendage to the British economy. For Afrikaners who owned no land, who possessed a modicum of training which rendered them unsuitable for manual labour, and who were not prepared to assimilate to the dominant British culture, integration into the economy was difficult. The only broad avenues of available employment were the lower levels of state bureaucracy (the senior posts were long

dominated by those trained under the hated Lord Milner), education, law and the church. As an organisation explicitly designed to foster the interests of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie, the Broederbond sought ways out of this economic impasse. In the Thirties it set about organising explicitly Afrikaans capital in the Northern Provinces (again in the Cape, with the relatively early establishment of Nasionale Pers, Santam and Sanlam, the position was somewhat different). In 1934 it established Uniewinkels, and with Albert Hertzog prominent in the proceedings, set up Volkskas as a co-operative Bank. In 1939, it organised the Ekonomiese Volkskongres which led directly to the founding of Federale Volksbeleggings (with massive aid from "non-Broederbond" Sanlam), Die Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut, and numerous other concerns. One of the critical products of the 'Kongres' was the Reddingsdaadbond, the Broederbond's economic front designed to make the Afrikaner "Economically conscious". The strategy established at the Volkskongres concentrated on the consolidation of Afrikaans financial capital, rather than commerce and industry, and then the gradual filtering of ownership of the means of production downwards.

If infant Afrikaner capital was to grow in the face of tremendous hostility and competition from established capital, it was faced with a number of priorities. It had to organise the Afrikaans market by persuading Afrikaners to invest in infant and not very promising ventures when much more attractive avenues were available. But there were very few Afrikaners in the North with capital to invest, and they were largely associated with the United Party. Thus the only source of capital was the savings of Afrikaans farmers and workers. If these individually small sums were to provide the large amounts of capital needed, both groups had to be mobilised extensively. The only available mobilisational device which could unite their diverse interests was that of ethnicity, their common "Afrikaans" culture. Political power too was essential to this aim, not only because government contracts could be awarded to the "right" people, but because of the role of government in

determining economic policy and its power of appointment to the critically important advisory boards, planning councils and control boards.

THE AFRIKANER WORKERS' SAVINGS

Thus in this Broederbond co-ordinated, petty bourgeois attempt at independent accumulation, the savings of Afrikaans speaking workers were to be a major source of finance, the basis for accumulation. Higher wages for these workers, gained at the expense of either black workers, or less likely, the English-speaking capitalists who controlled mining and private industry, provided greater potential for accumulation and could be wholeheartedly supported. There was however, one serious flaw in this scheme. Despite sustained attempts at cultural mobilisation, Afrikaans-speaking workers displayed a dangerous tendency to act in terms of class rather than cultural interest. To respond as workers - admittedly protected from and therefore hostile to the aspirations of black workers, but as workers none the less - rather than as Afrikaners. The basis of this tendency was the trade union organisations, led by English-speaking artisans, and dominated by the craft unions which clearly had no interest in cultural mobilisation. Afrikaans workers thus belonged to class organisations, had their interests articulated in these terms and voted for the Labour Party. They had thus to be weaned from both. This was quite clearly the aim of the Hertzog Group's assault on the unions. As Naude writes:

"In teenstelling met die meeste Westerse lande waar die werker hom georganiseerd tot die Sosialisme gewend het in sy strewe om volle erkenning van sy regte te kry, het dit hier in Suid-Afrika presies die teenoorgestelde uitwerking gehad. As sogenaamde beskermheer van die werker het die Labour Party oor 'n tydperk van jare 'n magtige faktor in die Suid-Afrikaanse politiek geword Hierdie verband tussen die werker en die Labour Party moet verbreek word, want dan alleen sou die Stryd van Dr. Hertzog en sy klein groepie manne enige sin en betekenis kon kry. Dit was dan die

oorheesende boodskap wat van hulle uitgegaan het Geleidelik het hy (die Afrikaner werker) sy rug op die Labour Party begin keer en daardeur ook die socialistiese stelsel in Suid-Afrika vernietig" (page 257-258, my emphasis).

THE SPOORBOND

In point of fact, the MWU was not the first Union to bear the brunt of the Broederbond attack. In 1934, H.J. Klopper, the railway official who had virtually founded the Broederbond (and was later to become Speaker of the House of Assembly) set up a railway workers' union, Spoorbond. Despite initial success, Spoorbond was wrecked on the rocks of craft unionism. Interestingly enough, the final Death blow was dealt by Oswald Pirow, then United Party Minister of Railways and a self confessed Nazi. Given the role of the Broederbond in fostering Afrikaner capital and its relationship with worker organisations, another illuminating feature of Spoorbond was its establishment of a savings bank - Spoorbondkas - with an operating capital of £170,000, a mere three years after this trade union was founded. It was on the initiative of Spoorbondkas that the first Afrikaans building society was established, which, after a change of name, became Saambou.

WHY THE MINEWORKERS' UNION?

However this still leaves the question "why the Mineworkers' union?" unanswered. The strategic position of the Mining Industry has been discussed at some length. The Mine Workers' Union was a key union within the Trades and Labour Council, potentially the largest white Union, contributing a large portion of the T & LC funds. Yet after the 1922 Strike it had split, the artisans forming their own separate craft unions. By the 1930's of the 8 white unions in the mining industry, the MWU was the only non-craft union. Over 90% of the workers at the lower level of technical skills were Afrikaans-speaking, and therefore members, or potential members of the MWU. The depression began another exodus from the rural areas to the cities,

which, together with the expansion of mining after the rise in the price of gold, saw a large increase in the number of semi or unskilled Afrikaans-speaking whites employed on the mines. Yet once again the craft unions responded exclusivistically. The T & LC's delegates to the 1934 Volkskongres on the Poor white problem indignantly reported back to the T & LC congress that attempts were being made to solve the poor white problem by relaxing the apprenticeship system and other craft safeguards against labour dilution. Skilled workers, they insisted were in danger of being ousted by lower paid rural migrants, white and black. The craft unions on the mines reacted in true fashion.

At this stage the Leadership of the MWU had been captured by Charles Harris by dubious means. Harris quickly struck a bargain with the Chamber which protected his position, and like the infamous John Lewis, ran a thoroughly corrupt union which ignored the interests of the (largely Afrikaans-speaking) membership. Yet, throughout the twelve year struggle for control, it was *not cultural* but *class issues* on which the membership attacked the corrupt Harris clique, and its equally corrupt successors under Broderick, after Harris had been assassinated in 1938 by a young Afrikaner Miner. Because of the crucial position of the MWU within the SAT & LC, the Labour Party made the fatal, though inevitable, error of supporting the Harris clique against the bitter complaints of a very seriously aggrieved membership. The Labour Party had been founded to represent politically the class interests of white workers. Within the limitations of the South African social structure it had done so fairly and faithfully. But when it took the side of Harris in this dispute, it was seen by the membership to be supporting the Chamber of Mines (who backed Harris and Broderick), rather than their class interests. In a very real sense it *had sold out* its constituents to the bourgeoisie for a taste of political office: first in its alliance with the rural bourgeois in the Pact, then with the mining and industrial bourgeoisie of the U.P. regime. It thus gradually

alienated unskilled white workers whose share of the fruits of the vicious exploitation of blacks was minimal, whose economic position was precarious, and who through the workings of South African history happened to be largely Afrikaans-speaking. The evidence suggests that electorally at least these workers continued to support the SALP until 1943. However by the late Thirties they were available for mobilisation by any group which would articulate their interests, and particularly their precarious economic circumstances.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE MWU

It was on these legitimate grievances against the trade union and Labour Party Leadership that the Hertzog group fastened, and for twelve long years fought both the Labour Party and the State for control of the MWU. They formed first a rival trade union, the Afrikanerbond van Mynwerkers, and then, when Harris concluded a closed shop agreement with the Chamber (in return for a promise of industrial docility from the MWU), the "Reform" movement within the MWU. Throughout its struggle for control, and despite its Afrikaner Nationalist ideology, these Hervormers were aided by English-speaking miners. Impervious to pleas for "Christian-National" unionism, they fought for their interests which the MWU leadership clique ignored. When the Hervormers eventually won control of the MWU in 1948, their success was in no small measure due to these workers.

By 1948, Afrikaans-speaking workers in the MWU had been successfully weaned from the Labour Party and the T & LC. Their votes in six mining constituencies put the Nationalists into power. Soon after gaining control, the new MWU leadership under Daan Ellis led the Union out of the T & LC (hitherto the only co-ordinating body) to form the right-wing Koördineerende Raad. Yet despite Hertzog's success with the MWU other white trade unions with large Afrikaner membership were slow to adopt his "Christian-National" trade unionism. It was only when left-wing trade union leaders (many of them Afrikaans-speaking) were removed from office by the State under the

Suppression of Communism Act in the fifties, that the back of white trade union opposition was broken, and "Christian-National" trade union ideology made substantial progress. (5)

There are two important lessons of the struggle for control within the MWU, one obvious from a critical reading of Naude's uncritical account, the other emphasised by him, albeit indirectly.

THE MYTH OF AN INHERENT CROSS CLASS AFRIKANER UNITY

The first is the myth of an all pervasive, monolithic Afrikaner Nationalism - a mystic cultural unity which allegedly establishes a priori bonds between all members of the volk, welding them into an overriding organic political and ideological unity; whatever their socio-economic position. In this myth, class cleavages are irrelevant for social action as the ideological vision common to all Afrikaners, derived from Calvinist theology, unites them into a much broader social unity. It is obvious, but equally needs constant reiteration, that Afrikaner nationalist ideology developed historically as a *response to social change*, and is no immutable *weltanschauung*. Afrikaner Nationalism has always been articulated by a shifting class alliance, until very recently, dominated by a relatively deprived petty bourgeoisie. Indeed, the emergence of a fully fledged Afrikaans-speaking bourgeoisie has discernably loosened the ideological hold of Afrikaner Nationalism per se. It is the petty bourgeois groups over whom the ideology still holds the strongest sway. Only after 1945 were Afrikaans-speaking workers incorporated into the Nationalist class alliance, and the petty bourgeois nationalists of Die Nasionale Raad van Trustees had to work long and extremely hard to win these workers to their cause. It was class factors, sheer naked economic interest, rather than the supposedly common cultural unity, which achieved this in the end. That the myth of Afrikaner cultural unity was, and is, at its weakest among Afrikaner workers is shown by the continuing opposition of such groups, but

particularly the less technologically skilled, to elements of government policy which appear to threaten their position of privilege (eg. the 1965 refusal of the MWU rank-and-file to allow labour dilution despite the agreement between the union leadership and the Afrikaner Nationalist government). That Naude should spend 284 pages describing the twelve year struggle of the Afrikaans-speaking fraction of the petty bourgeoisie to wean just a small group of Afrikaans-speaking workers away from the Labour Party, and that it was the Hertzog group's manipulation of the day to day economic concerns of workers rather than the emphasis on cultural symbols, which finally achieved this goal, highlights the myth of an inherent cross class Afrikaner cultural, political and ideological unity.

THE CHANGING CLASS BASIS

Both the ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism and the class alliances which have articulated it, have undergone many changes since the formation of the Free State Nationalist Party in 1914. And they will undergo many more, precisely because Afrikaner Nationalism was the basket which historically could hold the interests of various class fractions as they were subjected to the intense economic and social pressures associated with the development of first mining and then industrial capitalism. Whether it can continue to perform this function is debateable. The interests of the groups which composed the 1948 alliance are now clearly diverging, primarily as Afrikaner capital begins to articulate its interests as capitalists rather than as nationalists. As the continuing conflict within the Nationalist Party since 1960, but particularly after 1966 would seem to indicate, it is now doubtful whether the painfully forged cultural bonds can hold the nationalist alliance together.

DIVIDING THE WORKING CLASS

The second point relates to the inherent tendency of South African capitalism to divide the fractions of the working class off from each other as the prime

means of bourgeois political control. While this is a tactic common to all capitalist social formations, in South Africa it is facilitated by the existence of various racial categories. This is not the place to begin an analysis of racialism in South Africa, but rather to point out that through the operation of the interests of all fractions of the bourgeoisie, white and black fractions of the working class have been irreconcilably divided, to the point where the economic and social position of the former rests on the economic exploitation and political oppression of the latter.

There is much evidence (eg. the recommendations of the Van Zyl Commission and the utterances of the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut of late) to suggest that similar tactics are in the offing to divide black workers, not only ethnically within Bantustans, but hierarchically as well. A small group of technologically skilled blacks would be bought off (at the same time allowing a small black bourgeoisie with limited political rights to emerge), leaving a vast, rightless army of operatives ripe for exploitation. This has long been the cherished tactic of certain industrial, financial and mining interests represented mainly in the Progressive Party. That Afrikaner capital is no longer a struggling infant to be protected from competition and in need of regular doses of nationalism to shore up its strength, but has grown into a vigorous and efficient adult, in search of higher productivity and new markets, adds to this possibility. For the first time in South African history, all elements of the urban bourgeoisie have a common interest in higher productivity, and to achieve it are prepared to invest in higher wages for limited numbers of blacks. A united bourgeois front, independent of the demands of other white groups can emerge.

Naude's book is the heavily biased yet fascinating story of one critical phase in the division of workers from each other in the interests of a fraction of the bourgeoisie. That phase is clearly over, and, as the acrimonious departure of his major protagonist from the Nationalist Party indicates,

would seem to have outlived its usefulness as the once common interests of the Afrikaner urban bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and workers diverge. The crucial questions now are:

- *How will these groups respond to the demands of black labour?
- *What political alliance will they forge in response?
- *How will black labour meet the threat of division?

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STRIKES IN DURBANJANUARY TO APRIL 1975*by John Mawbey*

INTERNATIONAL DELIVERY COMPANY

On the morning of 15 January 30 workers at the International Delivery Company refused to start work after clocking in at 7.00a.m. The company is an Indian owned concern operating from the docks area.

After receiving a R1 increase in August 1974 workers agreed to withhold further wage demands until November. In November they formed their own committee to discuss grievances and to formulate demands for presentation to management. Repeated appeals were made from November onwards but received no positive response. On a rainy 14 January frustration boiled over and all 30 workers refused to start work, demanding that the firms Managing Director be brought to negotiate with them.

First to arrive on the scene were the police, but after a short stay they left it to a Labour Department official to explain the legal implications of the workers action. They adamantly refused return to work reiterating their demand to see the Managing Director Mr. Pillay. When he eventually arrived from Pietermaritzburg they presented their demands. They demanded an increase in pay and the provision of gumboots, gloves and overalls to protect them during the loading and unloading of heavy drums. Before they took action the workers basic wage was R15 per week with overtime and a bonus of R1,50 for every night spent away from Durban. After negotiations they eventually accepted an increase of R3 per week and the provision of two pairs of overalls.

Mr. Pillay appears to have been convinced that an 'agitator' was behind the workers action and singled

out one individual as the ringleader. When asked what he intended to do about this he is reported to have said: "when there is a thorn in your side you remove it"; whether any victimization took place is unknown.

R.H. MORRIS PTY. LTD. (CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTORS)

On Monday 16 January 144 workers on the Old Mutual shopping and residential construction site near Greyville refused to start work because of a pay dispute. They claimed that they were still owed wages for the week prior to the Christmas recess.

Police patrol cars and dog handlers converged on the site shortly afterwards but the workers remained calm. A Labour Department official addresses them on the legal implications of their action but they refused to return to work. Finally at 3.30 p.m. management resorted to the now common practice of firing the workers and telling them they could seek re-employment in the morning. On Tuesday 90% of the men returned and were re-employed.

Management claimed that the stoppage resulted from a misunderstanding on the part of the workers. To facilitate the firms book keeping, workers were payed one week in arrears. Before the Christmas recess they were offered the option of being payed up to date or of receiving the outstanding weeks pay on their return. Most accepted two weeks pay immediately except some of the workers who had been with the firm for over a year. On the first Friday after their return the latter workers were payed the amount due to them. The others felt that they should also have been payed the extra amount and on the following Monday took action.

MILLER WEEDON TRANSPORT COMPANY

On March 10 42 workers at this company refused to start work and demanded a cost of living increase. Initially the police were called in but after management had decided to negotiate they left. The outcome of these negotiations was an average increase of 17% to all the men involved. This

meant that wages now stood at R16.50 per week with an outside maximum of R32 per week.

PLATE GLASS COMPANY

Workers at this concern were fired on the 10 March although they had never actually stopped work, but had merely made representations for a cost of living increase.

Before work they had organised their councillors to approach management to ask for the increase. Due to obstruction on the part of a foreman the request only reached management when the works manager arrived late to start them working. They had already begun work when management called them out into the factory yard. Workers presented their demand for a P5 increase to meet the rising cost of living. The Manager replied to the effect that they would have to shoot him first if they hoped for an increase. He told them to hand in their overalls and get out. About 40 workers responded by leaving the premises.

On Tuesday they returned to the company to be informed that they had all been fired and that others had been employed in their places. On attempting to enter the premises to collect their things they were told to get out. Finally on Thursday they were allowed in, one by one and received their notice pay.

THE DURBAN ABATTOIRS

A total of 300 workers in two departments at the Durban Abattoirs downed tools on Friday 11 April. Out of an approximate 800 cattle and 5 000 sheep which are needed to supply the daily needs of Durban, only 10 animals were slaughtered. Abattoir authorities were finally forced to suspend operations for the day. Though the city's meat supply was not immediately effected, it would appear that an extended stoppage could have substantially disruptive consequences.

First to down tools were 200 slaughterers working

for the United Flaying and Dressing Company. This effectively halted production. They had last received an increase over a year ago. In the interim they made regular representations through the company works committee for a further increase. It is clear that these requests had generally received scant attention. Never-the-less workers seem to have been persistent in attempting to utilize the works committee to communicate their grievances to management. In the past they had also attempted to control this body and make it more effective by demanding the resignation of members who were compliant towards management. Still the committee had gained little ground.

In November 1974 the committee was promised an increase in March of each year; pending ratification by the Meat Control Board. By the end of March 1975 the promised increase had not materialised and on Wednesday 9 April workers asked the committee to take up the issue. The demand was presented to management. By Friday no response had been made and the entire workforce of 200 stopped work.

Management called in officials from the Labour Department through whom they conveyed a promise to consider increases at the end of the month; if the workers would return to work. The workers refused and demanded that the officials convey their demand for a R5 increase to management. At this stage the officials became short tempered and left, forcing management to face the workers. It was finally agreed that management would present a definite statement about increases on the following Monday. On this condition workers returned to work. On Monday workers each received a slip of paper with the promised increases on it. In outline they were as follows:

Grade	previous basic	increase	new wage
Induna	R27,20	R3,80	R31
Assistant Induna	R25,28	R3,80	R29,08
Others	from R17,90 to R23,10	R3,10 R2,90	R21 R26

These increases depended on ratification by the Meat Control Board at its sitting on 22 April.

Beyond the wage grievances which workers expressed they had further complaints about their working conditions. They alleged that the pace at which they are expected to work led to frequent injury. That when injured and forced to go off work they are regarded as absent from work and pay is deducted.

In resorting to strike action these workers appear to have been fully aware of the potential power which the nature of their work gave them. That given the rate of production expected, the relation of their department to the rest of the abattoir, and the wider ties of the meat marketing network, a stoppage could cause extensive dislocation.

Taking an example from their fellows in the Flaying Department, the total workforce of 100 in the adjoining By Products Department (Durban By Products Company) downed tools the moment the others had returned. Obviously the news of the slaughterers partial victory played a part in this move. That they acted only at this juncture, however, suggests that they may have seen more advantage in creating a new stoppage rather than in joint weight of numbers. At this stage the abattoir authorities were forced to suspend production for the day.

Grievances in this department were substantially the same but their attitude to the works committee was far more cynical. They had long since given up any hope of making the committee the affective representative of their demands and had gone so far as to elect known management stooges to the committee.

Workers appear to have had little idea of the role which the meat board plays in controlling all their wages. They conceived of their struggle as one against the individual contracting companies for which they worked. On April 22 the meat board sitting took place and the wage increases were ratified.

JAMES BROWN AND HAMER

The Natal Mercury called this "the strike that never was". When asked to comment on the stoppage which had occurred management denied that there had been a strike. Apparently if workers are employed on a daily basis the precarious nature of their employment makes it impossible for them to strike. The moment they stop work they are 'unemployed', not on strike! In the very same report however management claimed that they had entered into negotiations with the workers.

A total of 300 African painters employed in the Durban Dry Docks had walked out of the premises and refused to return unless negotiations for a cost of living increase took place.

A reporter covering the action was approached by a Labour Department Official. Refusing to disclose on whose authority he was acting he prevented the reporter from photographing the scene of the action. He claimed that there was wide spread labour unrest in the harbour area and that publicity would aggravate this situation.

UNION WHALING COMPANY

When African day-shift workers at Union Whaling Company downed tools on Monday 21 April they did so in the knowledge that the night-shift was ready to back up their action and that close on 300 workers were united in the struggle. This solidarity was possible because of their compound based existence. Conceived as a means of controlling labour the compound can have the countervailing tendency of enabling workers to attain the solidarity needed for effective strike action.

The official means of gaining redress at Union Whaling is via the factory liaison committee established in 1973. Workers have used this to express a variety of grievances but have gained only marginal improvements. An improvement in compound food was effected but a more fundamental demand that a hostel be built to house their wives was rejected. A pension

fund had been established but demands for a night shift allowance were rejected. Also rejected was a demand for a day off work. Workers claim that though Saturday and Sunday are meant to be off days they often have to work on these days, or face dismissal. They regard this as forced overtime.

The last wage increase which they received was R2 per month in October 1974; mere "ice-cream money". At the beginning of April they decided to ask their liason committee members to demand an increase of R5 on their basic wages of from R58 to R80 per month. Management made no reply to the demand and on Thursday 17 April the committee members again approached management. In reply management said that they would only consider an increase in July and that in any case the demand had been formulated by the committee members and had not come from the workers. This blunt rejection of their demand and disregard for their elected representatives evoked a strong response from the workers. They decided "that we would show management who are the workers here. We would all sit down so that they could see clearly who was asking for the wage increase". Over the weekend plans were layed and the solid support of all the workers was mustered. Compound living made this comparatively easy.

The unfolding of events on the Monday is graphically discribed by the workers themselves:

"Then on Monday morning at ten past eight there we all were, sitting down. First of all came one of the clerks and one of the managers.' What are you people all doing here?' We were silent. They asked this question again. Again we were silent. So they returned to the office. Next they sent the black clerks to us, to ask what we were doing. ' We don't want to speak to you,' we told them, 'we want to speak to the Managing Director.' We were waiting there to see the Managing Director. We wanted him to see how many of us were there and to hear from us that it was in fact everybody that wanted the wage increase. The black clerks went back to the office. The next message we got was that the factory manager would be coming at twelve o'clock.

'We don't want to speak to him. We want the Managing Director,' we said. We were told that the Managing Director would not be coming till much later. 'That's alright, we'll wait,' we said.

At about twelve o'clock the factory manager came, together with another member of management. He told us that the Company was experiencing hard days. He said that there would be no increase now. We must wait until July. Meanwhile we should go back to work and on Friday the company would reply to us. We refused. 'The Union Whaling Company will fall down,' he said. 'We don't care,' we replied. 'And we are staying here. We want to speak to the Managing Director.'

At three o'clock the compound manager came. He told us that we would be getting a R5 increase in July. If this did not satisfy us, management had one other preposal. Ten workers would be fired, and their salaries shared among the others. We rejected this preposal strongly. If they wanted to fire one of us, they must fire all, we said. At this satage we all got up and began to go to the compound to get our luggage. 'Please sit down,' said the compoud manager. Then he returned to the office.

Finally at five o'clock the Managing Director came. He used the same words that we had heard from others during the day. Eventually he said: 'those of you who want to work, please stand up. Those who refuse to work can remain sitting.' On our side, not a man stood up. Then the Managing Director told us that the Company had directors in Cape Town and Johannesburg as well. He asked us to wait until Friday while he discussed our demands with them. We told him that, for our part, as he was the Managing Director we would agree to this, but there must be an answer on Friday. He agreed that workers would be paid for Monday. Because of this move on his part the night shift workers agreed to resume work. They were solidly behind the strike and would not have worked if those who went on strike were not paid."

That the workers were demanding an increase of R20 by the end of the day is an index of how angered they

were by managements stalling tactics. Initially they had no intention of engaging in a lengthy stoppage. It was the failure of the Managing Director to put in an early appearance which caused them to sit it out.

On Friday 26 April management called together part of the work force. While workers objected that all of them should be present management presented their terms. The promised July increase of R5 would be brought forward to take effect from the end of May and a further R3 would be added in July. Workers objected but were unable to discuss and formulate their alternatives because management refused to allow them to do so in the factory. They were forced to return to work.

Subsequently management has been collecting the names of selected workers thought to have been heavily involved. This is standard Labour Department policy in the case of strikes.

John Mawbey
Managing Editor
SALB

BOOK REVIEW

TONY LANE : THE UNION MAKES US STRONG

ARROW BOOKS LONDON 1974

by Foszia Fisher

There are two reasons why it is important for us in South Africa to understand British trade unionism. The first reason is that, because Britain was the first industrialised capitalist country, it was the first place in which trade unions developed. The history of trade union growth in Britain illustrates universal trade union problems. The second reason is that early trade unionism in South Africa grew directly from the British experience. South Africa is still most closely connected with Britain of all foreign countries. As a result trade union affairs in Britain receive wide press coverage. Perceptions and misperceptions of trade unionism in Britain affect the way in which many South Africans think about trade unionism in South Africa.

Tony Lane's book deals clearly and convincingly with both the history and the present problems of trade unions in Britain. His history is analytical. It is not a succession of names and dates, but an attempt to explain the pattern of trade union development through an analysis of economic and social changes. It is possible to distinguish four main stages, each linked to a particular stage of economic and political development.

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TO 1850

From the beginning of the industrial revolution until about 1850 workers struggle to find an organisational form. There are many small trade societies formed at the local level, but all the attempts at large-scale national organisation fail. Production is still on a small scale. Only a small proportion of the wage workers were actually employed in factories. Most were employed either in small workshops, or else as outworkers doing work on contract in their own homes. Even factory and mine workers were often not employed directly by the owners, but indirectly through a system of subcontracting. In this, as in the next period :

"the vast majority worked in situations where the money-bond between workers and capitalists was obscured. That is to say that where in fact the only tie between them was one of cash, that fact could be obscured by a close working relationship with the master of a small workshop who worked at the bench alongside his men, or by indirect employment through a sub-contractor or the middle-man in the domestic system" (p 65).

GRAFT UNIONS

The second-period, from about 1850-1880, was the Heyday of the craft union. Even during this period most workers were still not in factories. But a number of factors made it possible for skilled workers to build permanent national unions. The first factor was simply the improvement in transport, as a result of the development of railways. This meant that it was easier to keep in touch. But it also meant that a national market for goods replaced a series of local markets. Conditions of production were more uniform, so it was easier to co-ordinate policies between workers in the same craft in different areas.

The crudest period of capitalist exploitation was now over. A relatively large amount of capital had been accumulated, and the owning classes felt able to spread their prosperity around a little, although not too far. There were good political reasons for doing this:

"Broadly, then, ruling-class strategy towards the working class followed its realistic distinction. The articulate, literate and more prosperous part was co-opted into citizenship: it was given the vote and its great institution, the trade union, was given certain legal immunities, thus bringing it within the pale of respectability. The poverty-stricken part, showing no inclination for political activity, could be left to its own devices." (p 68)

There was a clear distinction between the skilled craftsmen and other workers. Craft unions kept up

wages largely by keeping other workers out of their crafts. Their interests were directly opposed to those of unskilled workers, whom, they feared, would "swamp" them (to use a South African idiom). Many of them were in fact employers in their own right: they were subcontractors, employing a number of unskilled assistants. As such, they felt themselves to be a different breed. As one such 'labour aristocrat' is quoted as saying:

"between the artisan and the unskilled labourer, a gulf is fixed. While the former resents the spirit in which he believes the followers of genteel occupations look down on him, he in his turn looks down on the labourer. The artisans creed with regard to the labourers is, that they are an inferior class, and that they should be made to know and keep in their places." (p 70)

The parallel with attitude of (white) South African artisans to their (black) unskilled fellows is obvious. And it was precisely this type of aristocratic craft union which was introduced into South Africa by skilled immigrant workers from Britain in the late nineteenth century.

THE PERIOD OF INDUSTRIAL UNIONS

The third period can be dated from the series of large strikes in 1889. It was characterised by the growth of industrial unions of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Britain was moving into a "factory economy", with production on a larger scale, and the growth of giant firms in certain sectors of industry. The significance of craft skills was declining as a result of new methods of production. Large numbers of non-skilled workers were for the first time being brought together in the production process, and so were able to use their numbers to counterbalance their lack of skill.

The new industrial unions which resulted were in many ways different in structure from the craft unions. They were no longer based on high dues and substantial benefits, and were largely run by the members themselves. They could only levy low

dues, and often could afford only a strike fund. But, because of their larger size and the lower level of formal education of their members, they tended to have a larger staff of permanent officials.

Tension between members and officials, and between the centre and the regions, had been present even in the small early craft unions. As the role of officials became more important, the problems posed by such tensions grew.

These new mass unions, with their tendency to use socialist rhetoric, posed a much more serious challenge to ruling-class control than had the easily integrated craft unions. While many employers, and the courts, struck back against union organisation, some of the more far-sighted political leaders of the ruling parties chose a different course. Lane comments:

"When Bonar Law told the cabinet in 1919 'Trade union organisation was the only thing between us and anarchy, and if trade union organisation was against us the position would be hopeless', he was reiterating what had been the guiding principle for nearly 30 years: co-opt the unions".

THE ERA OF SUCCESSFUL CO-OPTION

The fourth period may be described as the era of successful co-option. Lane places its beginning in 1926, after the trade union leaders called off the highly successful general strike. During this period trade union leaders and officials were drawn into the machinery of government at many different levels, and under both Conservative and Labour government. But this increased the gap between them and the rank and file :

"The trade unions became split into virtually two parts. At the national level trade union leaders became an established part of the political process: government economic strategies required the co-operation of the unions. Union leaders were therefore co-opted individually as "consultants" and collectively as participants in the auxiliary machinery of government. At

the local level workers were finding that their strength lay on the shopfloor. Union branches, district and shop steward committees were playing the market with all the vigour of nineteenth century businessmen. Thus where the leaders were trying to help governments introduce an ordered capitalism, the rank and file were following traditional laissez faire policies of taking the market for all it could bear." (p 155)

This process has often been interpreted by critics on the left in *moral* terms: cowardice, personal corruption, and a failure in leadership. Lane however insists that it must be seen in structural terms. Some leaders, admittedly, were fluttered into submission by knighthoods and a few words from the king:

"Will Thorne reassured King George V in 1917 that labour was not planning revolution: 'This seemed to relieve his mind, and he spoke to me in a most homely and pleasant way. I was very pleased'". (p 126)

But much more important was the structural situation of the trade union leader. Most trade union leaders were honest, and many were committed to the goal of the abolition of capitalism. But the interest of the union as an organisation lay in working in terms of compromises in the present. Paradoxically, the leaders could be both more and less militant than the rank and file. More militant in the sense that they could see more clearly the structural problems of the society as a whole. Less militant in that the short term needs of their organisations led them to try to establish compromise bargaining relationships with management. They had to be essentially anti-strike, because strikes cost the unions money in strike pay and lost subscriptions, because strikes could endanger the bargaining relationship with the employers, and also because the strike of one group of workers could affect the sectional interests of other workers.

The workers themselves have a 'factory consciousness' rather than a 'class consciousness'. That is they act in terms of a conflict between 'us'

and 'them' in the factory, a straight opposition to the boss. Within this framework they are more militant than the leadership, and often more militant than the shopstewards. Lane cites the official Donovan commission:

"the shop-floor decisions which generally precede unofficial strikes are often taken against the advice of shop stewards. Thus shop stewards are rarely agitators pushing workers into unconstitutional action. In some instances they may be the mere mouthpieces of their workgroups. But quite commonly they are supporters of order exercising a restraining influence on their members in conditions which promote disorder" (p 162).

He also cites another study which found that 46% of works managers interviewed thought stewards to be less militant than their members and another 38% only thought them equally militant.

Although they show class solidarity on the principle of unionism, as is shown by the widespread resistance to Labour and Conservative attempts to curb trade unions, they often come into conflict with unions in practice. On the one hand, a strike is a very rare occurrence at any particular factory, but a frequent occurrence in the society as a whole. Workers can suffer inconvenience in their role as consumers as a result of other strikes, and are subjected, like anybody else, to the continual barrage of anti-strike propaganda from the British press. On the other hand, when they do go on strike themselves the union officials usually intervene to try to get the strike over and get the bargaining process going once again:

"Most factory workers probably saw their union officials only at strike meetings - at which it was more likely that they were being exhorted by the officials to return to work" (p 187).

Lane is arguing that both leadership and rank-and-file are forced into contradictory positions. The rank-and-file are attracted to trade-unionism by the desire for immediate improvements in wages and

conditions, rather than by a desire to overthrow capitalism. Their shop-floor militancy, trying for all that they can possibly get, without consideration for interests other than their own, is quite consistent with the spirit of capitalism, but in practice threatens the orderly working of the capitalist system. Socialist union leaders, on the other hand, want to end capitalism in theory, but in practice find that to satisfy their members' demands they need to establish a working relationship with employers, and to collaborate with the state in trying to run a managed capitalist society. Lane suggests that the uneasy balance which had been established between these contradictory acts and interests broke down in the 1960's, and that no new solution has yet been found.

Lane's own solution, to which he refers briefly, is socialism. He suggests

"trade unionism was not to be equated with socialism even though, as an organisational expression of the irreconcilability of labour and capital trade unionism did point in that direction. But point was all it did". (p 25)

He claims it has done no more than point because of:

"the failure of the trade union movement to hold out to its members a longer-term prospect of a radically transformed society". (p 166)

This may be true, but as an explanation it is not very satisfactory. It is too close to the "failure of leadership" theorists whom Lane rightly rejects. He completes the picture to some extent by saying that the problem is that trade unionism is only concerned with what happens at the point of production, and so sees exploitation only as an economic fact, and not as a politico-economic fact. But then is it adequate to say that the problem could have been solved by better strategies?

Lane has given a good analysis of the problems inherent in trade unionism, but in order to give a convincing analysis of the relation between trade unionism and strategies of change towards socialism, he would have had to consider other countries in

addition to Britain. How, for example, does one explain the very different political roles of the trade unions in countries such as France or Italy? One thing, however, he does make clear. That is that the relation between trade unions and "revolution" is not as simple and direct as those on the right fear and some on the left hope.

Foszia Fisher

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