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PCWU · YCW · May day · Spar  
Ford Strike · Brazil · Denmark  
Bolivia · Sudan · Triomf · MAWU  
Boycotts · Boilermakers · Review  
Working Class Culture

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**New Technology in the  
Clothing Industry**  
*David Kaplan*

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**Continental China Strike**  
*Marcel Golding*

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**Mass Dismissals on the Mines**  
*The Workers' Story*

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**Volume 10 Number 7 June 1985**

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# South African Labour Bulletin

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**Volume 10 Number 7 June 1985**

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## **The South African Labour Bulletin**

4 Melle House, 31 Melle St, Braamfontein, South Africa  
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## Guidance for the People at the Top

On the day when the unknown dead soldier  
Was buried among gun salvos  
At the same midday hour  
From London to Singapore  
Between twelve two and twelve four  
For a full two minutes, all work stopped  
Simply to honour  
The dead Unknown Soldier

But all the same  
Perhaps instructions should be issued  
For a ceremony at last to honour  
The Unknown Worker  
From the great cities on the teeming  
continents  
Some man from the tangle of traffic  
Whose face no-one noticed  
Whose mysterious character was  
overlooked  
Whose name was never heard distinctly  
Such a man should  
In the interest of us all  
Be commemorated by a substantial  
ceremony  
With a broadcast tribute  
"To the Unknown Worker"  
And  
A stoppage of work by the whole of  
humanity  
Over the entire planet.

Bertolt Brecht

## **Death of a Militant: Andries Raditsela 1956 - 1985**

Andries Raditsela died under "mysterious" circumstances at Baragwanath hospital on Monday 6 May 1985. He was detained by police in Tsakane township on Saturday morning, 4 May. He was seen by a family member at 10.30 am. lying unconscious on the concrete floor of the Administration Board offices in Tsakane. He was only admitted to hospital that evening at 5.45. On Monday he died of severe brain injury. Before his detention he was in good health. Those responsible for his death must be brought to justice.

### A tribute from union comrades

Andries Raditsela became an active member of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union in 1982. He was instrumental in recruiting workers at the Dunlop factory in Benoni where he worked. In early 1983 he was elected as a shop steward, and from there as the senior shop steward in the plant. He became a member of the CWIU Branch Executive Committee that year and the following year was elected vice-chairman of the Branch and member of the National Executive Committee of the union.

He was a very active senior shop steward and led many battles in Dunlop - battles for higher wages; against the unilateral imposition of an unpopular shift system; battles for women's rights. For example he waged a campaign against sexual harassment in Dunlop and was recently involved in the drawing up of a maternity agreement to be negotiated with management.

In addition to his work in the Benoni Dunlop plant he was elected chairperson of the national CWIU Dunlop Shop Stewards Council, involving the plants in Benoni, Ladysmith and Durban. In the major Dunlop strike of 1984, Andries was involved in the co-ordination of support action in all the plants. He was recently involved in national negotiations for a new Provident Fund to replace the current unsatisfactory pension scheme.

His organisational abilities and commitment to the workers' struggle were recognised by the unions in the Transvaal. He was elected chairperson of the FOSATU Region in 1984. At elec-

- Andries Raditsela -

tions in 1985 he was elected vice-chairperson. He made a very active contribution to regional affairs - finishing work in the factory at 4.45 pm. and from there attending evening and weekend meetings. He was recently very active in conducting the May Day celebrations and was the FOSATU delegate to the May Day Co-ordinating Committee. He was detained before being able to attend the local celebrations of 4 May.

Because of his position in the region he became a delegate to two national FOSATU bodies - the Executive Committee and the Central Committee. Andries worked tirelessly for the union movement. Many of his earlier activities he gave up to devote himself to the struggle - for example he was a good tennis player and also a member of the church choir.

The CWIU and FOSATU mourn the death of our comrade Andries Raditsela, and send condolences to his family.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### MESSAGES OF SUPPORT

We join with you in expressing our grief and anger at the death of Comrade Andries Raditsela. Let us build a monument to Comrade Raditsela by building a powerful and united trade union movement able to fight for workers' rights throughout South Africa.

General Workers Union

We learnt with dismay of the mysterious death of our comrade, Andries Raditsela. We pledge total support to you in this struggle.

Fedcrow

Deeply shocked. Strongly protested to President Botha for this wanton murder.

CISL (Italian Trade Union Federation)

Together with all workers and democrats we mourn the death of Andries Raditsela at the hands of agents of the minority Apartheid regime. We appeal to all workers and progressive trade unions to rededicate themselves to the ideal of building strong and united worker organisations capable of protecting fellow-workers against state inspired violence. Victory to the working class! New Unity Movement

A WORD OF ADVICE TO OUR FELLOW BROTHERS  
AND SISTERS IN THE STRUGGLE



### JOB FOR SEX

This is something being done in many factories by personnel officers and training officers to our sisters, girl-friends, and wives. Managements know about it, but they don't do anything about it since it does not affect them as much as it does us workers. We keep on complaining about it, but do nothing ourselves, since our very sisters are not willing to help us out. They are afraid of victimisation and scandals. But we can still do it on our own.

How do women get trapped? Usually women get employed at factories outside working hours, even weekends. During lunch-times you can find the personnel's office locked. But after lunch you will see a lady coming out of the very office which was locked.

At DUNLOP we realised that the training officer sold jobs for sex. From there we planned to catch him in action with workers who could walk around the offices and watch him.

He employed one lady on a Friday, and by Tuesday the following week at about 13 hrs he called the lady to his office. One of our union members rushed to the door a few minutes later to test if the door was locked or not, and found it locked. He phoned another member, who phoned one of the managers.

The training officer was caught, and got fired on the spot. The woman did not get fired.

This was far better than allowing workers to assault him as they wished. We just refused, and promised them that we would solve the problem. And now they are all happy.

*(Signed)*

SHOP STEWARD AT DUNLOP

Extract from: Working Women, Sached/Ravan, Johannesburg 1985, p64:  
the "shop steward at Dunlop" is, of course, Andries Raditsela.



- Andries Raditsela -

Please accept our condolences and rest assured that this latest crime by the Apartheid regime will only serve to strengthen our efforts to support your struggle to bring about free trade unionism in a free South Africa.

Canadian Labour Congress

The student struggle cannot be separated from the workers' struggle. The death of comrade Andries Raditsela was caused by the fascist, rascist, and imperialist regime of South Africa: let it stop its criminals patrolling our locations. We are moving forward to a non-racial democratic South Africa where the people shall enjoy all the demands of the Freedom Charter.

Congress of South African Students Regional Committee (Tvl)

On this tragic occasion the DGB assures you once more of its fraternal solidarity in your fight for trade union freedom and rights in South Africa.

DGB (German Trade Union Federation)

We mourn brother Raditsela as a brave campaigner for freedom and human dignity and offer our sincere condolences to his family and colleagues. We further pledge to redouble our efforts to bring an end to Apartheid and injustice.

Public Services International, France (representing 10 million workers in the public sector)

We are calling on affiliates to associate themselves in the mourning of their courageous brother and to give further impetus to the struggle against apartheid and for trade union and human rights in South Africa so that his death will not have been in vain.

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions

On behalf of 725,000 chemical and energy workers of ICEF-JAF we express regret over the death of brother Andries Raditsela and strongest protest against the South African Government.

ICEF-JAF, Tokyo

The International Federation of Chemical and Energy and General Workers Unions representing 6,500,000 workers expresses outrage and horror upon the death of our brother Andries Raditsela - a martyr in the cause of the struggle for free trade unions and against Apartheid. As one of our own we shall not

let him be forgotten.

ICEF, Geneva

This tragedy only reinforces our rejection of a cruel and inhuman system.

CFDT (French Trade Union Federation)

Please extend on our behalf TUCSA's sincere condolences to the family of Mr Andries Raditsela. We extend our deep sympathy at the loss of a young and talented leader, who so obviously had before him many years of service to the union movement and the people of South Africa.

Trade Union Council of South Africa

We are deeply shocked by the death of Andries Raditsela and have made our views clear to the South African authorities.

British Trade Union Congress

We convey our grief and anger at the death of Andries Raditsela. It is a reminder of the violence by which workers in South Africa are ruled. We commit ourselves to carry on the struggle by building a united trade union movement.

Food and Canning Workers Union

He was a leader who was not thrust upon the workers. He rose from the ranks of the workers themselves. He inspired them and helped them build confidence in themselves - and to see the need for the oppressed workers to link hands and struggle together as one. He will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

Cape Town Municipal Workers Union

He was an inspiration to us all. We grieve at the loss of a comrade in the struggle.

National Automobile and Allied Workers Union

Our organisation wishes to express its solidarity and sympathies on the death of comrade Andries Raditsela. Let his death be an inspiration to all of us who are engaged in the struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed people in this country. Forward to an anti-racist Socialist Republic of Azania.

Azanian People's Organisation

We share your anger and demand for justice and sympathise with the family of the deceased.

Bakery Union

- Andries Raditsela -

Our deepest sympathy and outrage at the death of comrade Andries Raditsela. We salute his strength and courage.

National Union of Textile Workers (W Cape)

Shocked at news of tragic death of comrade Raditsela.  
Phambiu Womzabalazo Wabasebenzi.

Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union (W Cape)

We express sympathy and solidarity with your union and the family of Andries Raditsela whose struggle continues.

Detention Action Committee, Cape Town

We shall remember him in the morning and in the sunset we shall praise his deeds for the struggle. Oneness is a reality, suppressed by evil mentality, your heart yearns for love and your mind cries for peace and happiness. For there is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not enough in the world for everyone's greed! So put your shoulders to the wheel. Your comrade in struggle.

Mafete Lucas Mokhawane (dismissed Sasol Worker)

\*\*\*\*\*

#### THE FUNERAL

On Tuesday May 14, 30,000 (BBC figures) gathered in the tiny East Rand township of Tsakane to mourn the death of Andries Raditsela. This included an estimated 14,000 organised workers who stayed away to attend the funeral, mostly from the Brakpan/Springs area, but also from as far afield as Brits. Thousands walked from Kwa Thema to attend. Delegations from a wide range of unions attended to pay their respects and register a protest: CWIU, MAWU, NAAWU, SFAWU, NUTW, PWAU, TGWU, FOSATU, CUSA, NUM, SEAWU, SACWU, CTMWA, FCWU, CCAWUSA, BAMCWU, OVGWU, UMMAWSA (from evidence of t-shirts and banners). Also present in large numbers were members of COSAS and the Tsakane Youth Congress. The funeral was a dignified and disciplined occasion. Speakers condemned continued repression and called for unity against the common enemy.

Chris Dlamini, president of FOSATU, proclaimed that, in refusing to clearly condemn Andries' detention and subsequent death, the employers were clearly exposed as part of the system. Indeed, for the capitalist press, the funeral was an occasion to peddle platitudes about reform and then condemn the

trade union movement for taking action. In sections of the press there was a clear attempt to downplay the magnitude of the protest action taken. For the record, over 100,000 workers took some form of protest action (a quarter of the total membership of the emerging unions) - and at two days notice!

The size of the protest

The CWIU provided the following breakdown of actions taken by its members in the Transvaal:

CWIU: full day stoppages to attend the funeral

<u>Company</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>members</u>	<u>involved</u>
Ciba-Geigy	Spartan	180	
Colgate	Boksburg	300	
Dunlop	Benoni	650	
Rolfes	Elandsfontein	400	
Reef Chem	Boksburg	130	
Gillette	Springs	150	
Chesebrough	Wadeville	250	
Triple P	Edenvale	40	
Union Liquid Air	Germiston	20	
Reckitt and Colman	Isando	230	
Vulco Latex	Johannesburg	230	

Partial stoppages

Pilkington	Springs	175
Burmah	Isando	70
MRR	Wadeville	200
Durgenton	Wadeville	120
Recycling Plastics	Elandsfontein	100
Plate Glass	Germiston	350

In addition the following factories sent delegations to attend the funeral: Plate Glass, Durgenton, MRR, Hi-Pack, Sasol II, Sasol III, Sasol Mines, G & W Base, Plastmould, Fedgas, Abecal, S&CI, Revetex, Burmah and Recycling.

Labour Monitoring Group Survey

The LMG estimated that approximately 107,500 workers took some form of commemorative protest action on May 14 - rang-

ing from a stay-away to a stoppage or lunch time meeting. These results are drawn from a survey of unions and firms:

Results:

(i)	Transvaal	55,000*
	Natal	22,500
	E. Cape	17,500
	W. Cape	12,500
	Total	107,500

\* 22,000 of these were mineworkers who took action at 24 hours notice.

- (ii) In the Transvaal some 14,000 workers secured the day off to attend the funeral.
- (iii) The total number involved - 107,500 - represents approximately 25% of the membership of the emerging unions.

Comment

- (i) Many factories sent delegations to the funeral, usually shop stewards and then took no further action. This was due in part to local conditions, but also to confusion over the call for actual protest action to have taken place on the 14th.
- (ii) Unlike a stay-away, where it is often alleged that workers are subject to pressures in the townships, a stoppage at work is a relatively open and voluntary form of protest. This makes the action a significant expression of organised anger.
- (iii) Most employers seemed to recognise the significance of this organised power in the factories, and either gave workers time off to attend the funeral or allowed time to stop in protest at work. However, employers failed to publicly condemn the detention that led to Raditsela's death. This reinforces workers' perceptions that employers are part of "the system".
- (iv) The size of the protest was comparable to that in February 1982 over the death in detention of Neil Aggett.
- (v) The scale of the protest would probably have been even larger had there been more time to prepare. During the previous week there had been intense debate over the appropriate action to take. On the 7th, FOSATU Region called for a regional stay-away. This was superseded by a call for a national two-hour stoppage made by a

wider meeting of Johannesburg unions together with the political organisations. The final call, from FOSATU national executive, was for Transvaal workers to attend the funeral; for employers to pay bereavement leave; and for workers unable to attend the funeral to take some form of protest action. This call was made only the weekend before the funeral (Tuesday).

\*\*\*\*\*

## **FCWU: Unity is Strength**

At the NEC meeting of 30.3.85 of Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU) and African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU) it was decided that the two unions should amalgamate as FCWU. This decision is in accordance with the 1984 Conference mandate and the policy of the union since its inception, that it should operate as one irrespective of race.

The situation of having two unions was forced on us by the government's policy of not recognising union rights for Africans. When the government finally changed its policy and decided to recognise unions for African workers it did so on terms not acceptable to us. The two unions remained separate in law whilst acting as one in practice.

When forming one registered union the following was taken into account:

- (i) We no longer consider it justified to continue as two unions in name and one in practice
- (ii) In deciding whether to be registered or unregistered, we had to recognise that only slight differences exist between the two and the benefits of being registered are greater than the disadvantages of not being registered, while the benefits of not being registered are less than the disadvantages of being registered.

(FCWU communique, April 1985)

## May Day 1985

This year again May Day was celebrated in all parts of the country. In the many speeches and resolutions a number of themes emerged: the need for unity, for workers control and to build the new federation. A number of concrete demands also emerged: that May 1 be made a paid public holiday; for maternity rights; for a living wage; for adequate support for unemployed workers and for a 40-hour working week.

### In the Transvaal

Over 500 people attended the May Day celebration at Khotso House organised by the May Day Co-ordinating Committee of the Transvaal. In a display of worker unity all trade unions co-operated to make the lunch hour meeting a success. A huge banner declaring: "Workers of the World Unite", together with the individual trade union banners provided a colourful decor. The singing and chanting which punctuated the speeches created an electric atmosphere. Speakers from OCAWUSA, FOSATU, CUSA, AZACTU and UDF unions all spoke of the need for worker unity, and condemned capitalism as the cause of workers' problems.

Jethro Dalisa, regional chairman of TGWU and chairman of the meeting, read out the aims and objects of working class organisation to the approval of the audience:

- \* to secure social and economic justice for all workers;
- \* to strive for the building of a united working class movement regardless of race, colour or creed;
- \* to encourage all workers to join trade unions and to develop a spirit of solidarity among all workers;
- \* to secure just standards of living, social security and fair conditions of work for the working class as a whole;
- \* to facilitate education and training of all workers so as to further the interests of the working class;
- \* to change, advance or oppose any law, action or policy of the government or any other grouping in the interests of the working class.

During the meeting a large contingent of riot police - armed with guns; batons and dogs - cordoned off the area. As people left the meeting singing and chanting, the police forced them

back inside allowing only a few to leave at a time.

\*\*\*\*\*

Members of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union at PG Glass had already won a paid half-day holiday for May 1. They celebrated the occasion with a meeting at Morena Stores (Katllehong) - attended by 400 workers from PG Glass and some dismissed workers from Litemaster (MAWU members). After the meeting - addressed by shop stewards and officials - workers held a braai. The proceedings were concluded with a film.

That evening CWIU members were again to the fore with a mass meeting of Sasol workers, held in eMbalenhle. In a massive show of strength, 2000 workers packed the community centre. Many more were left behind at the mines because of lack of transport. Also present were members of OCAWUSA and TGWU from Evanda and Secunda. The hall was decked with banners which declared: "Workers of the World Unite - Workers Solidarity in Action"; "Forward with the Workers Struggle"; and "An Injury to One is an Injury to All". The meeting was entertained by the CWIU choir of Vulco Latex and the SFAWU Choir from Kellogs (the "K Team"). Workers heard reports on the situation in the mines and the Sasol plant. The meeting was addressed by shop stewards, officials and by Chris Dlamini, president of FOSATU. A message of solidarity was read out from the social security workers section of Force Ouvrier, the French trade union.

Other May Day meetings took place at the weekend: at Regina Mundi (Soweto), Katlehong, Alexandra, Sebokeng, Pretoria and Daveyton. Also meetings were held by NUM members on some mines.

### In Cape Town

About 3,000 people attended this Year's May Day meeting in Cape Town at Rocklands Civic Centre in Mitchells Plain. Organised by the seven unions in the Western Cape who are party to the planned new trade union federation - NAAWU, PWAU, GWU, NUTW, OCAWUSA, FCWU and CTMWA - it was one of the biggest worker meetings Cape Town has seen. Workers came from as far away as Malmesbury, Tulbagh and Grabow. Amandlas punctuated the speeches and there was jubilant dancing in the crowded aisles. Workers from General Workers' Union put on a short play, showing the difference between organisation and individual struggle. In countless songs, workers committed themselves to further struggle for a new, non-exploitative South Africa.



- May Day -

Backed by vibrant union banners, John Ernstzen, of the 14,000 - strong Cape Town Municipal Workers Association, said he was proud to be there because he was a worker, involved in the workers' struggle. He added:

Not that it's nice to be a worker. Its hard. But I'm proud because workers in South Africa have decided to get up and fight. Thousands of workers have decided to finish with waiting. History has taught us that nobody can better the workers' lot, only workers can do this.

May Day is different from other special days, such as Christmas. People say Christmas is a day of forgetting and forgiving. For us May Day is not a day of forgetting but of remembrance. To the people of Cradock, Crossroads and Uitenhage we say: your struggle is ours. To the ruling class we say: the children you shot in Langa and Crossroads are not just children at Langa and Crossroads. They are all our children. You can't divide us anymore. We have built unity. If you touch one worker, you touch us all.

He said workers had to strengthen their unions and build the new federation so that they could strengthen their struggle:

The federation is not a pretty ornament. It is not there for show. It is a vehicle to transport us to victory.

Part of our long-term struggle, comrades, is to fight for a new society where there is no exploitation and poverty. The struggle is for workers to control their own destiny. Why is it that workers produce the wealth of the country but can't have a say in what happens to that wealth?

He said that the workers had to continue the fight for:

- \* an 8 hour day
- \* May Day as a paid public holiday
- \* the right to organise freely and picket in support of demands
- \* decent housing and schooling
- \* an end to pass laws, homelands and colour discrimination
- \* to support the mine and Sasol workers.

Messages of support were received from: the South African Woolworkers Union (who recently broke away from TUCSA), the Unemployed Workers Movement, South African Chemical Workers Union, Cape Action League, United Democratic Front, Congress

of South African Students, Federation of Cape Civic Associations, Inter-School Co-ordinating Committee and the Western Cape Youth League.

Meetings were called by the Cape Youth Congress, the Clothing Workers Union and the Atlantis Residents' Association on the same night to discuss unemployment.

### In Natal

In Durban some 5,000 workers assembled at Currie's Fountain to celebrate May Day. Many - particularly MAWU members - had taken the day off work to attend. The programme included the band, Abafana Bomoya, worker choirs and some new worker plays including one performed by dismissed OCAWUSA members which dealt with the struggle at Spar. Resolutions were adopted dealing with maternity rights; for May Day to be a paid public holiday; and calling for an 8 hour day. The main speaker - Maxwell Xulu, vice-President of MAWU - spoke on the theme of worker control, class struggle and the need for workers to organise independently. He also had some words to say about black capitalists:

In South Africa very unfortunately it has become common that the employer is known to be white. We never think of black employers. And the reason that we can't think of it that way is because they direct us to looking into racism rather than the class struggle. They build organisation, they lead organisation, and they tell us "We are with you in the struggle". They tell us "You must fight for your rights. You must fight for workers rights." Yet back in their own businesses workers are working more than 8 hours.

But the very same black employers are leaders of certain struggles for the liberation of the black workers in this country. So, therefore I cannot see how you can say you are going to lead me into liberation when you yourself have not liberated your own employees. How can you tell me I am being exploited by my employer when you are exploiting fellow workers?

\*\*\*\*\*

In Pietermaritzburg 4,000 packed the Lay Ecumenical Centre. There was a large turnout from MAWU and NUTW factories, again with many taking the day off. Ten buses were required to bring striking Sarmcol workers from Howick. Shop stewards

- May Day -

gave reports on their efforts to negotiate time off for May Day. Resolutions dealt with hours of work, unemployment and the living wage (R3.50 per hour). Miriam Mkize of Prestige spoke on the need to link union and community issues. The programme included a talk on the history of May Day, the Prestige choir, a children's choir and a performance of the play, "Hobo the man", by Kaba Mkize.

Successful May Day meetings were also held at Escourt and Ladysmith.

### In the Eastern Cape

For Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage a May Day rally was organised by the unity talks unions - despite problems in securing a venue. The Gelvandale Community Centre was refused by the Director of Housing, Eddie Samuels, who was supported by the Coloured Management Committee. In the end 1,000 organised workers packed into a local church hall. The theme of "One union - one industry" was stressed and talks were given on womens rights, worker control, worker unity and the new federation, trade unions and the community, workers and students and, what is a union? A series of resolutions was passed:

- (i) solidarity with the NUM's struggle;
- (ii) condemning the Firestone Tyre Company in its refusal to negotiate with the Firestone workers in Sao Paolo, Brazil and expressing solidarity with Brazilian workers;
- (iii) support for the student demand for independent elected SRCs;
- (iv) support for the establishment of the new federation under worker control;
- (v) condemned detentions for political beliefs;
- (vi) to campaign for the following:
  - (a) May 1 as a paid public holiday
  - (b) an end to exploitation and apartheid
  - (c) maternity rights
  - (d) for a living wage determined by the needs of workers
  - (e) reasonable unemployment pay.

On the following Sunday, a May Day meeting was held jointly by MACWUSA and the Parents Committee. The aim was to give the Parents Committee an opportunity to contact workers as parents. 2,000 attended to hear speeches on: the meaning of May

Day; the role of workers in the struggle; the relationship between workers and the community; and workers as parents. The meeting was addressed by members of MACWUSA, Pebco, and the Crisis in Education Parents Committee.

\*\*\*\*\*

In East London, local unions - SAAWU, OCAWUSA, AAWU, FCWU, GWU (and later NAAWU) - formed a steering committee to prepare for May Day; the Domestic Workers Union also attended one meeting. The theme was unity, with unions agreeing to work under the banner of the steering committee, and not to promote their own interests. It was agreed to approach local management's for half to one hour off work on May Day. On 29-30 April, 12,000 pamphlets and 250 posters were distributed.

On May 1, mass meetings were held in factories to launch the campaign for a paid public holiday. On Sunday 5 May, 600 workers attended a rally at the Duncan Village Community Centre. The different unions presented talks on May Day, the history of South African trade unions, union unity and factors affecting trade unions in South Africa. The talk on union unity, by a SAAWU member, sparked considerable discussion. He argued that the Feasibility Committee should intervene to help general unions industrialise themselves, and that the present organisation of the general unions should not be an obstacle to unity. He said that whilst there were reservations about registration this should not prevent unity.

The meeting was also addressed by a striking SAAWU member from the East London Abattoir. The meeting unanimously supported the 150 dismissed workers and the call for a red meat boycott.

In its assessment the steering committee called for a more permanent form of co-operation amongst unions in East London. Towards this end unions were asked to get mandates to negotiate local demarcation. As a minimum, unions were asked to report to each other on the areas where they are organising; and, where more than 1 union was involved, any conflict should be resolved. On this basis unions can go forward to organise the unorganised workers.

(SALB local correspondents, May 1985)



## YCW International Week - An Evaluation

The 25th of April to the 1st of May is the "International Week of the Working Class Youth" - a special event in the life of the Young Christian Workers (YCW) internationally. All the national movements take up this activity as a means to develop international class identity and common militant action.

The South African YCW was no exception. There was a co-ordinated effort by all the regions. The movement adopted a common programme, the major aim of which was: "Awareness of the international dimension of the workers' struggle".

The starting point was the process of formation at group level - reflection and action. The militants analysed the situation of long working hours they experienced; forced overtime, unpaid overtime, etc. They looked at the effects and causes of the situation as experienced by them, their friends and families. Unemployment and ill health amongst others came into focus as a result. Also how multinationals control workers lives; and retrenchments.

In the YCW, reflection always ends with action to challenge the situation. It happened when militants reviewed or planned their actions around working hours - May Day is discovered through a concrete experience, not just in the air. Through this the YCWs easily place their small actions as part of the worldwide struggle against the exploitative system of capitalism.

### Formation area days

These days were planned to reach out to the mass of young workers. This is where a wide range of video tapes and films were shown. They varied from region to region but had one thing in common - bad working and living conditions: for example in the films on the steel and textile industries in America; the struggle for an 8 hour day; the coal miners struggle in Britain. Workshops were used so young workers could

express what struck them from films or video tapes.

### Discoveries

One common interesting response from many young workers is that they were surprised to learn that workers in other countries - especially Europe - experience similar working conditions to workers in South Africa. Since the problem of workers is one, their struggle is also one and therefore we need to help one another at an international level. There is a possibility of victory if workers organise themselves and carry the struggle forward.

A relation between the worker struggle and the new reading of the Bible was also expressed. An example of Sasol workers was cited as a struggle of faith by workers refusing to be slaves.

### International Day's Pay

The event was also an occasion of financial campaigns and education. Militants explained the IDP, what it means, why it is important for the workers' movement. "We must show our financial commitment to the worker struggle...we must finance our own actions...", one regional treasurer said. Each one of the YCW militants contributed a regional standardised amount of R10 as a day's pay. It is through these contributions that the South African movement affiliates internationally.

### Word of thanks

We thank all our brothers and sisters in the labour support groups, who helped to provide us with much needed educational material. Your assistance has contributed to the success of our "International Week".

(YCW communique, May 1985)

## Women Workers Win Job Evaluation Battle

The long struggle of women sewing-machinists at Ford (UK) for skilled status, which has gone on for more than a decade and a half, has ended victoriously. Their strike late last year led to the creation of an independently-chaired job evaluation committee on which their union (TGWU) was given equal status with management. The committee's report, which both Ford and the machinists had agreed to abide by, was delivered in April and recommended the regrading of the women and giving them skilled status. Their wage will increase by over R14 per week.

The struggle for regrading has demonstrated the negative effects of gender prejudice upon class struggle. For the machinists were forced to fight not only their management but many male trade unionists, particularly in the AUEW, as well. The prejudices which kept the women unskilled in status also blocked the struggle of other skilled workers at Ford: their combativeness was markedly reduced by the presence of even more exploited workers below them. The regrading of the women has now liberated these men for struggles against management. As The Times (26.4.85) has noted: "Now Ford faces the possibility of leap-frogging pay claims because the machinists pay puts them ahead of other skilled workers".

Ford, however, will be facing much more than this. The unions in its North American and European plants are in close contact with one another and the regrading of the machinists in Britain may lead to struggles for their regrading elsewhere. Further, the job evaluation committee won by the women, represents an important step towards the right of workers to judge the worth of their own work. It provides a model which workers can struggle for and beyond. (For further details, see SALB 10.4)

The decisive blow against management during the long struggle was struck by the women in their five-week strike in 1984. Coming just before Christmas, there was pressure on the women (from their ten thousand fellow-workers who were laid off because of the strike) to end their action. But the women held firm, closing down the production of all cars at Ford's main UK plants. 276 women cost Ford half a billion rand in lost production, about 10% of which would have been profit. (Jeremy Krikler, May 1985)



## Spar Boycott Ends in Reinstatement\*

During the period December 7-11 CCAWUSA (Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union) members in Spar (Natal) took strike action to demand the reinstatement of 2 sacked workers; union recognition and a wage increase. They were dismissed. Since then, the workers have waged a determined boycott campaign against Spar and its parent company. On May 21, after 4 weeks of negotiations, the following agreement was reached between CCAWUSA and Browns Retail (the parent company of Spar):

- (i) all dismissed workers to be re-engaged
- (ii) their service is to be treated as unbroken, provided they re-instate the pension fund (favourable loans will be made available for this.)
- (iii) they will receive jobs of similar status, and at no lower pay than their original positions
- (iv) the workers will be re-engaged in two stages:
  - (a) the first group of 80 will be re-engaged over a period of 4 months from June 1 in the areas in which they worked originally. During this time and until they are re-engaged they will receive 10% of their former salaries.
  - (b) a second group of 60 will be re-engaged over a period of 6 months from October 1, where vacancies arise in the broader group. They will receive 1 month's pay during this time. (Given the Christmas trade, the union expects all members will be re-engaged by December).
- (v) Alternately, workers who do not wish to take up a job with the company, will be entitled to compensation at the following rate: 2 weeks pay per 6 months worked up to a total of 3 years, and thereafter an additional 1 weeks pay per 6 months worked up to a total of 5 years.
- (vi) The union is to receive stop order facilities (which also provides means of verifying membership); a recognition agreement is to be drawn up on the basis of those stores where the union has a certain percentage of membership; other rights and facilities are to be negotiated.

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\* For background details see SALB 10.4



## Assessment

Since 1981 there have been a number of consumer boycotts in the retail trade, but this is the first to successfully achieve a negotiated settlement. This in itself is significant for the future. In the process CCAWUSA has learnt some lessons about mobilising community support. The union established a number of support committees around itself in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Hammersdale and Johannesburg. They were supported mainly by the unity unions, the political groups and local community organisations where relevant. In addition the international union organisations - IUF and FIET - were contacted for support, although little international pressure was possible in this case. CCAWUSA maintained a stream of propaganda throughout in the form of leaflets and stickers.

The union was unable to ascertain the exact impact of the boycott, although traders on the South and North coasts of Natal, Port Shepstone and Empangeni, were especially supportive in boycotting wholesale outlets. Certainly the independent retail Spars in the townships seem to have been affected. It may be that during a recession, when profit margins are already narrow, any interruption in custom is harmful.

Above all it was the sheer determination of the workers themselves that forced Spar to compromise. Workers decided at the outset that no-one would sign off, no-one would look for a job, until either victory was won, or they went down in defeat. During this time money given by supporters kept them alive. The workers were held together by weekly meetings and report backs; each was assigned tasks - picketing, pamphletting, addressing other workers etc. Demoralisation was combated by workers and the union regularly discussing their situation and analysing management shifts.

Despite harassment, the dismissed workers constantly signalled their presence to management, taking the boycott even into the rural areas - and arousing considerable interest in unionism. During this time some unionists were assaulted by unknown customers; several pickets were arrested and two have been charged under the Internal Security Act. The union is to lay a counter-charge of assault against 2 policemen.

(SALB correspondent, May 1985)

## Anglo's Labour Practices in Brazil

The rapid expansion of the Anglo American Corporation's investments in Brazil over the last few years has received much publicity. What is less well known is the fact that the corporation has been accused of employment practices which contradict the "liberal" image which it likes to project.

Brazil is poised to become one of the world's largest gold producers, and if it can raise production (13 metric tons in 1980) to 400 metric tons in 1990, it will overtake the Soviet Union as the world's second largest supplier (283 metric tons in 1983). Anglo has not been idle in acquiring interests in Brazil's major deep level gold mines situated around the town of Nova Lima. Originally worked by a British company using slave labour from 1830, and after abolition importing miners from Spain and Portugal, the mines fell into disuse by 1960, owing to seemingly insurmountable technical problems.

Through Brazilian intermediaries and joint ventures, Anglo obtained important holdings in the mines by 1975, and effectively administers them today. Its expertise in deep level mining has helped to raise production substantially. A huge investment programme has been undertaken, disused shafts have been brought back into production, and new technology applied. In an interview with Reuters press agency in August 1984, the Corporation's chair, Gavin Relly, expressed "great optimism" about its future growth in Brazil.

Conditions in Nova Lima itself are extremely poor. A company town since the early nineteenth century, it displays the legacy of a segregation reminiscent of apartheid, in which British company officials and their families were housed, educated and socialised separately from the mineworkers and their families. The latter were crowded into company-owned housing linked to the job. Today one still finds single men's hostels. The company accepts no responsibility for the squalor and poverty characteristic of living conditions in the town, nor for any of the acute social problems experienced by its community. Such problems are passed on to inadequate local and state institutions. In an interview, Nova Lima's mayor disclosed that the company had failed to assist the municipality with the

provision of any social services. He alleged that none of the taxes paid by the company reach the municipality. In his office there is a daily queue of local supplicants in search of relief - many are miners, or their families or widows.

According to union officials, wages are between R145 and R220 per month for underground workers, depending on overtime worked. (This is the equivalent of between two and three times the "official" minimum wage of R72,70 calculated as at 9 April 1985.) Because of the deep level of the oldest part of the mine, there are substantial refrigeration problems. Very high temperatures force the miners to abandon clumsy and stifling safety masks and clothing. Instead they work in shorts and sandals and with scarves over their faces. Because of the drilling, fine silicon dust enters their respiratory systems. The high incidence of silicosis (one in three workers are affected according to union officials) testifies to the poor working conditions.

The Corporation claims that through the introduction of more modern technology it is "devoted to improving working conditions and safety, and reducing health risks and environmental pollution" (Optima, December 1984, p 162). Yet it has closed down its hospital and workers depend on their union and inadequate state provision for medical services.

The union itself has a history of militant struggle against the former British mineowners. Led by radical christians and members of the Communist Party, it succeeded in forcing the company to accept its proposal for a health and safety committee in the 1940s. The introduction of Mussolini-style corporatist labour laws attempted to bureaucratise the union and bring it under closer state control. Gradually the state was able to pick off the the radical leadership, but even so, when the military intervened to topple democracy in 1964, the miners of Nova Lima were one of the few groups of workers in Brazil to stage an anti-coup strike. The strike was used by the state to smash the union and to appoint Labour Ministry officials to run it. Today, although the leadership is more authentic, it is tied by the myriad of restrictive labour laws, and cannot challenge Anglo's labour practices very effectively.

Apart from the Nova Lima mines, Anglo is also involved in the

Jacobina gold mine in the north-eastern state of Bahia. There the mine was entirely developed from scratch by Anglo and its partners. Also an underground operation, the mine was opened in November 1982.

The miners of Jacobina have complained about dangerous working conditions, bad transport facilities, and inadequate food. There is no danger pay or social security supplement. Wages are lower than at Nova Lima. Normal shifts last ten hours, and with overtime, the 800 workers earn just over the minimum wage. According to testimonies of workers recorded by Professor Mauricio Tragtenberg, the company has attempted to cover up the cause of a worker's death in a mining incident, in order to avoid having to compensate the family. The company has also threatened workers with dismissal for attempting to form an association. (Noticias Populares, 8 September 1982).

In Brazil there are no codes of practice for multinationals. Little monitoring of local conditions takes place and foreign companies are less accountable for their actions. The Brazilian government, in attracting mining companies, is unlikely to enforce any stringent application of fair labour practices. In fact, by continuing to retain the corporate labour legislation codified in 1943, it weakens the development of strong trade unions able to protect the basic interests of their members. This legislation has yet to be abolished by the civilian regime which took office in March 1985.

Meanwhile the Anglo American Corporation continues to take advantage of the restrictive labour laws and the low wage system in Brazil. While it claims to address questions of social responsibility in South Africa, it should also be reminded of its responsibilities to the impoverished Brazilian communities in which it operates.

(Sao Paulo correspondent, May 1985)

## Denmark: Workers Fight Back

The wave of strikes during March and April this year marks the greatest class struggle in Denmark for 30 years. For those who argue that the European working class has been co-opted, these recent events show that workers are prepared to fight back. At the roots of the conflict lies the economic recession, and the government's attempt to make workers pay for the crisis.

The unions demanded a 35-hour week, a minimum wage, and wage increases to offset a 10% inflation rate. Negotiations with private employers collapsed on 21 March and the main union federation, the Landsorganisation, called a strike for the 25th. 300,000 industrial workers struck. When 200,000 public sector workers threatened to come out in support, the conservative Schluter government declared the strike illegal. This led to a series of massive demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands of workers. Some workers remained on strike for up to 3 weeks. They were supported by a series of sympathy strikes involving public sector workers. On April 10, 200,000 marched through Copenhagen, bringing the capital city to a standstill in the biggest mobilisation since 1956, when Danish workers struck to reduce the working week from 48 to 40 hours.

The strike movement witnessed an upsurge of militancy and organisation amongst the rank and file. The April 10 demonstration was preceded by a mass meeting of 4,000 shop stewards from the Copenhagen area. However the traditional labour leadership were not willing to risk an all-out confrontation with the government and workers were allowed to drift back to work.

During the strike police attacked a demonstration in the city of Odensee, putting sixty people in hospital. When police attacked a picket line at the main railway station in Copenhagen, train drivers, who are legally prohibited from striking, protested with the first work stoppage since 1945. Across the country workplace activists and shop stewards have been fired. A campaign is now underway in support of those victimised. Whatever the immediate setbacks, the strike movement forged a new layer of union militants prepared to defend workers' interests against the present ruling class offensive. (SALB correspondent, April 1985)

## General Strike in Bolivia

On March 4 1985, about 50,000 people demonstrated in La Paz, including more than 10,000 miners who arrived in the city by truck that morning. They had come for a direct confrontation with the People's Democratic Union (UDP) government, which they had helped to power by overthrowing the military dictatorship in 1982. The miners, the backbone of the Bolivian Labour Confederation (COB) were joined by massive contingents of La Paz workers and in particular by contingents of the housewives committees. These committees were to play a vital role in the 16 day general strike, organising popular canteens and distributing 20,000 meals per day. Students and white collar workers also collected funds for the strikers.

The general strike was called to demand wage increases of up to 500% and cost-of-living adjustments to meet the hyperinflation that is rocking the Bolivian economy. For the past four years Bolivia has been in the midst of an economic crisis, during which the country's total production has dropped by a third, and inflation is currently running at 2000%. The crisis was sparked by declining prices and demand for Bolivia's raw material exports and rising prices for the manufactured goods and food which the country needs to import. Bolivian governments have tried to bridge this gap through borrowing from foreign banks. Now the foreign debt has risen far beyond the country's capacity to repay, leaving Bolivia at the mercy of the International Monetary Fund and foreign banks.

For the workers the consequences have been falling living standards, unemployment and hunger. A recent United Nations survey showed 80% of the people to be living in poverty. Bolivia's ruling class has attempted to solve the economic crisis by forcing down the wages and living standards of the working class and small farmers. Before 1982 massive trade union resistance prevented the military from implementing such a programme. This convinced the military to turn power over to the UDP coalition, which initially even included the communists. Attempts by the UDP government to impose its own austerity programme on workers were met by general strikes, five since 1982! Significant gains were made: the government gave majority representation to workers' delegates in the man-

photo: Bolivian workers protest in La Paz



agement of the state-owned mining company. Similar gains were made by the United Confederation of Working Farmers. Unable to control the workers' movement the Bolivian bourgeoisie is now calling for the replacement of the UDP government by one of the right-wing parties.

On March 24 the miners returned to work with only a partial victory: an increase of 400%, partly payable in food tickets. But with inflation running at 2000% per year this will not maintain the workers' buying power. The workers and their allies were not politically organised to challenge the power of the government. The bourgeoisie made certain gains during the strike: the power of the miners was temporarily checked and the role of the military was gradually expanded.

In the final analysis the results of the general strike on the economic front were negative, since the wage increases won are small compared with the rate of inflation and in relation to the size of the mobilisation. But there were also gains in terms of the lessons learnt, the experience gained, and in the raising of political consciousness.

(SALB correspondent, April 1985)

## **Sudan: General Strike Brings Down the Government**

On April 6, the Sudanese army took power, ending 16 years of dictatorial rule by Marshall Numeiri. But it was a general strike organised by the trade unions which forced the Army to move against the regime. On March 27-28 spontaneous protests broke out against the removal of food subsidies. The security forces fired on the crowds, killing 8 demonstrators. Many more were wounded. The doctors launched a protest against the ill-treatment of victims in the hospitals. Then work stoppages began. Next the unions, led by the white collar ones such as the lawyers, doctors and teachers called for a strike. On April 3, the general strike in Khartoum was 80% effective. On April 5, the government rescinded the price rises on basic foods. On April 6, the Army took over.

The ousted Numeiri held power for so long by playing on internal divisions. Initially Numeiri had been prepared to negotiate with the particularist movement amongst the non-Muslim population in the South, granting a degree of local autonomy. This was ended in 1983. Also, originally, Numeiri came to power in alliance with the Communist Party. At this stage Numeiri also identified with the radical arab nationalism of Nasser's Egypt. Once established, however, Numeiri turned against his more radical allies in a bid for US economic aid. Sudan was to become a pillar of US influence in the Middle East and East Africa. However, Sudan's increased links with the west also resulted in a rising foreign debt. It was the IMF-dictated austerity measures which finally sparked the popular revolt which brought down the government.

Increasingly alienated from broad sections of the population, in 1983, Numeiri turned to the Islamic fundamentalists for support. He introduced the "Sharia" (Islamic law) and a range of barbaric punishments, eg. mutilations. The fundamentalists of the Muslim Brotherhood remain a powerful force, backed by a considerable financial organisation.

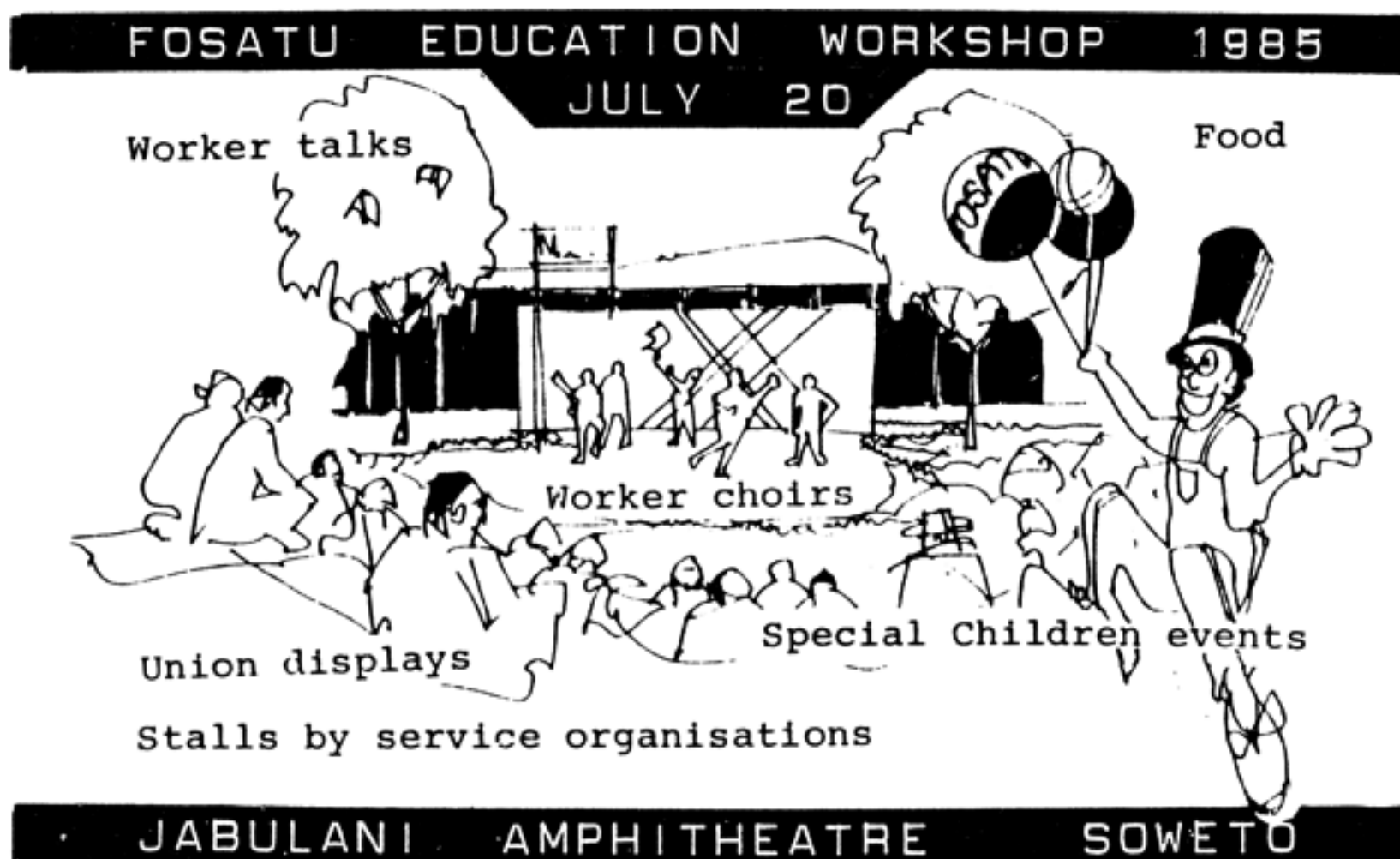
The fall of the Numeiri regime was followed by an explosion of political debate and trade union and political organisations: some 28 parties appeared in the first week. Under pressure from the masses, General Ad-Dahab's new military



junta has dismantled Numeiri's "security apparatuses": 3,400 functionaries were arrested and 30-40,000 informers dismissed. Daily, mass assemblies of 5-20,000 meet to debate their situation.

But Sudan's economic problems remain. And at a political level, a number of forces threaten the gains that have been made the Muslim Brotherhood, the Army, the bourgeois parties and their foreign allies. The debate and experience on the left in this period, however, will be very important. It is likely to influence the socialist and workers movement and the movements of national liberation in the Middle East for some time to come.

(SALB correspondent, May 1985)



## SACWU: The Struggle at Triomf

Early in 1981, the South African Chemical Workers' Union (SACWU) started organising Triomf workers to become members. After gaining substantial membership, the union approached the company for a recognition agreement. Triomf delayed until mid-1982, when it went on a recruitment drive to the Ciskei to sign on contract workers. On November 1, 1982, the company re-trenched workers who had become members of the union, including the entire branch executive committee. This happened just seven weeks after employing workers from the Ciskei.

SACWU then took up the case with the Industrial Court. The company asked that it be settled out of court and the union agreed. Thereafter, a recognition agreement was signed on September 30, 1983, followed by wage negotiations during late November 1983. The negotiations ended in deadlock after a court finally asked the company to increase its wages from R180 a month to R350, which the company flatly refused. A Conciliation Board between the two parties was set up, paving the way for a legal strike which took place early in 1984. The company's director, Louis Luyt, intervened by promising workers a year-end bonus - if the company produced good profits. The company finally increased its wages from R180 to R260 in the lowest grade. The relationship between Triomf and SACWU deteriorated from this time.

On the morning of April 12, 1984, workers were subjected to a breathalyser test. Not all the workers were tested. According to the policeman carrying out the test, he was told by his supervisors to test the workers who start work from 8.00 am. Most of the local committee members fall into this group. Solly Matthews, one of the committee members asked that his head of department be present during the test. This was the usual procedure. The supervisor told Solly to stand aside. Eight workers came and joined him. Their supervisors never responded to their requests to be present. At about 10.00 am. the workers in the company, seeing their leaders outside, stopped work and appointed three workers to go to management and ask them to listen to the request of those outside. Management answered that those outside could wait there until Xmas if they wanted to. Thereafter, police arrived and work-

ers inside the company were given an ultimatum to start work which was read out by a policeman. The workers then left to hold a meeting. It was agreed to return to work the next day.

On April 13, when workers came to work, police were everywhere. Three workers were arrested. At about 7.30 am. four committee members went to management concerning the return to work. They were met by a policeman who asked them what they wanted. The local union chairman replied that they wanted to speak to a management representative. Instead a man from the security police came and instructed the policeman to take away the chairman, Mr Mounakwa. More members were then arrested and a charge of "victimisation" was laid against about 19 workers. The case was later dismissed because there was no evidence about who was victimised, where, when and by whom.

On April 14, 1984, SACWU approached Triomf to reinstate the dismissed workers. The company said that it could only take back 300 out of 463 workers and that the rest had to go (including the branch shop stewards). SACWU then took up the matter with the Manpower Department, which also justified the company's mass dismissal.

The union still tried to persuade the company to reinstate all the workers and a meeting was then arranged with senior management for January 18, 1985, but there was no agreement at the meeting. The company stated they could only hire 33. The meeting was then postponed to January 24, where Triomf came with a new proposal of selective re-employment on the basis of performance record, disciplinary record and personality. SACWU opposed selective re-employment of workers because the action taken on April 12 was not an individual, but a mass, action.

The number of workers employed by Triomf was 523. The company dismissed 463 workers of which 462 were union members. The company's strength consists of 111 urban workers and 412 contract workers. Scab contract workers are now being employed and SACWU members have now been out of work for over a year. The union is exploring means of mobilising local and international pressure on the company to re-employ all the workers.

(CUSA, Izwilethu April 1985)

## NUM: Food Boycott at West Vaal Hospital

Over 180 workers, all members of the National Union of Mine Workers, have boycotted food at the West Vaal Hospital since 27 February this year. The hospital, situated outside of the town of Orkney in the Western Transvaal, is owned by Anglo American Corporation and serves the nearby mines. The workers involved in the food boycott include nurses, nurse assistants, physiotherapists, cleaners, domestics and labourers.

According to a shaft steward the food boycott started in protest against the 11% increase in board and lodging and the increase in food fees. There has been no simultaneous wage adjustment, drastically reducing workers' incomes. Single rooms went up from R97 to R108 per month while a double room increased from R85 to R96 per month. In addition food at R2,00 a plate is a heavy burden for workers.

According to the workers they brought the quality of food and exorbitant board and lodging fees to the attention of the hospital superintendent way back in 1983. Although promises were made of an investigation and improvements, this never materialised. The latest struggles are linked to 4 issues:

- \* to draw attention to the quality of the food;
- \* to highlight workers' inability to afford the board and lodging and feeding fees without wage improvements;
- \* to have wages raised on a par with other hospitals;
- \* to implement the pay as you eat system.

Although only 55 workers reside in the hospital complex, they have been supported by the rest of the workforce, many of whom reside in the nearby townships at Jouberton in Klerksdorp, Kanana in Orkney and those living at Vaal Reefs married quarters. Attempts to negotiate with the medical superintendent have been futile and workers remain resolved to continue till their demands are met.

The protest action has been extremely successful, serving to conscientise a workforce often seen as passive. The NUM was introduced in early 1983 by a very active nurse who explained to workers, on an individual basis, the importance of a trade union. Amongst other things that had to be combatted - besides

- food boycott -

fear - were management attempts to foist a liaison committee on the workers. This was decisively rejected. Her patient and persuasive organising work bore fruit when, in March 1983, a shaft stewards' committee of 7 was elected from all sections of the workers.

The shaft stewards are active in the Western Transvaal region of the NUM. A shaft steward explained why workers, "professional" and general, joined the NUM:

We had many problems. Nurses and workers were often discharged and victimised without their cases being properly investigated. The attitude of the floor supervisors was biased and they treated workers badly. They are more spies than supervisors. In addition, black staff were searched by the security every time they leave the hospital while the whites are exempted. Also there is a lot of job discrimination. Here whites, whether they have the experience and qualifications or not, will be appointed floor supervisors

Since joining the NUM confidence and consciousness has been raised. And because the hospital is small, close relations have been built up between professional and general staff. Because the hospital serves the nearby mines, nurses are exposed to the horrors of mine injuries and have clearly identified themselves with the mine workers' struggle. While they might enjoy relatively better wages and a professional status they are nevertheless also confronted with discriminatory practices which require organisation and struggle if they are to be eradicated. For this reason they are squarely with the union in the struggle against job reservation. Although some have made contact with the Health Workers Association, to broaden their contact with other hospitals, it is with the NUM that their future belongs if they wish to wage a battle against the mine bosses.

(Klerksdorp correspondent, May 1985)



## South African Boilermakers' Society Conference

About 100 delegates attended the April triennial conference of the South African Boilermakers Society (SABS). To date SABS has ensured its "independence" by adopting policies and affiliations which often seem contradictory. The Society withdrew from TUCSA in 1983 because of the Council's inability to adjust to changing conditions in the labour movement. Since then SABS has played an active role in the South African Coordinating Council of the International Metalworkers Federation. SABS's simultaneous membership of the conservative Confederation of the Metal and Building Unions (CMBU) has resulted in a resolution requesting the executive committee to investigate continued membership of that body. This individious position is often compounded by pressures from below, especially its growing black membership. The SABS's increasing concern with broader issues was reflected in the resolutions on black education and against influx control. More controversial, in terms of mainstream opposition politics, the SABS came out strongly against the disinvestment campaign, and the ICFTU's support for it.

Probably the most important decision at the conference was the constitutional amendment which entrenched the "multi-racial" (as opposed to non-racial) structure of the union. In effect this means, "that all race groups comprising its membership will have equal representation on the executive to ensure that no interest group can dominate the others". The Society's outgoing president, Mr Fred Athrends explained this division of the society into interest groups along racial lines in his address:

It so happens that these divisions at present exist and the representation is designed to create dialogue so that separate racial interest groups may soon become something of the past - we foresee that the interest groups will be based on industrial lines.

Despite these reassurances, this means that, for the time being, representation will be on "racial lines" to provide substance to the organisation's "multi-racial" philosophy.

(SALB correspondent, Johannesburg, April 1985)

## MAWU Takes to the Streets

About 50 members of the Metal and Allied Workers Union, including union organisers Moses Mayekiso, Bernie Fanaroff and Maggie Magubane, were arrested on 30 April when they picketed outside the Johannesburg City Hall where the industrial council negotiations for the metal industry were being held.

The talks with the Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa take place amid mass retrenchments in the recession-hit metal industry. Mawu members organised a peaceful march from the union offices in Harrison Street through the city centre carrying placards saying: "Stop retrenchments" and "MAWU demands a living wage". Demonstrating workers were confronted by riot police and, after a heated exchange, forcibly loaded onto 2 police vans and driven to John Vorster Square.

They appeared in the Johannesburg Magistrate's court on May 1 and were released on bail and the case postponed. After leaving the court, friends and relatives of the unionists joined them in a march back to the union office. As a result 41 were arrested for attending an illegal gathering. Twenty-nine unionists were released on R50 bail and warned to reappear, while the rest were given R100 bail. The arrested unionists were: Mr Moses Rykdom, Mr Hilton Mashigo (36), Mr Johannes Mbatha (31), Mr Norman Maila (27), Mr Mathews Mhlango (32), Mr David Mohlaban (39), Mr Bethuel Dishego (41), Mr Frank Ratshilovhi, Mr David Silhanga (32), Mr Simon Metseleng (28), Mr Silas Adams (31), Mr Richard Ntuli (41), Mr Peter Dentjie (24), Mr Sikhumbuzo Molefe (21), Mr Philemon Khumalo (37), Mr Richard Peege (27), Mr Bernard Fanaroff (37), Mr Samuel Nyambi (39), Mr Happiness Giva (35), Mr Johannes Mbatha (31), Mr Frank Boshielo (40), Mr Moses Mayekiso, Mr Reginald Doobazana (33), Mr Sonnyboy Njokwe (32), Mr Mack Masilela (44), Mr Joseph Lutshethu (33), Mr Lucas Tabane (44), Mr Stanley Mbombo (44), Mr Weston Kgabaye (33), Mrs Lydia Kompe, Mrs Maggie Magubane (40), Miss Nkomakosi Maseko, Mrs Susan Shabangu (27), Miss Emily Mokoena (21), Mr Elias Novela (42), Mr Zacharia Sithole, Mr Monkawili Singana (33), Mr Jabulane Motshweni (25), Mr Johannes Malee, Mr Mogisi Moloko and Mr Tshepo Malebatsane.

(SALB correspondent, May 1985)

# Survey of Health Workers at R K Khan Hospital

Below we print extracts from a report compiled by the Chatsworth Health Committee (CHC) on the position of unskilled workers in R K Khan Hospital. The Report throws further light on the Durban Hospital strikes reported in SALB 10.5. The CHC is an association of professional health workers.

## Background

The R K Khan Provincial Hospital, which serves a major section of the so-called Indian population in the Durban and surrounding areas, has been in existence for approximately 16 years. A major contribution to the effective running of the hospital is made by the porters, cleaners, gardeners, kitchen staff, security, etc - who are collectively labelled the Non-Classified Workers (NCW), +/- 278 in all. As the hospital is situated in Unit 5, Chatsworth, it draws on the ready supply of labour from the surrounding township - being complimented by workers from Merebank, Shallcross, Clairwood and Phoenix.

From the inception of the hospital, the workers have not been consulted on a regular basis on basic issues of wages and conditions. Around 1979 a pseudo "Workers Committee" was formed comprising of members from the Administration as well as the NCW. This committee has "closed shop" meetings without effective communication with the workers. The majority of the workers feel that this committee is unrepresentative and ineffective in taking up their problems.

The main grievance of the workers has been that their salaries have not kept up with the continuing rise in the cost of living. The Administration has repeatedly claimed that they have taken up this issue by writing numerous letters to the relevant authorities. The failure of such feeble attempts has frustrated the workers. Thus on 7 September 1984, over 200 workers went on a work stoppage to demand increased wages. Although the stoppage lasted only 45 minutes, this marked the end of fifteen years of quiet acceptance by the workers. The somewhat surprised Administration reacted with varied feelings. While they promised to make "serious" representations to the Natal Provincial Administration on behalf of the work-



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ers, they also threatened some workers with dismissal if they persisted with the work stoppage.

In October 1984, the CHC called a meeting of interested workers to discuss possible ways of improving the plight of the NCW. A Workers Adhoc Committee, under the auspices of CHC, was formed. Some of the aims of this committee were:

- (i) to unite all NCWs
- (ii) to focus attention on the plight of the NCW
- (iii) to increase the interaction between different sectors of health workers in the hospital
- (iv) to relate to fellow health workers in other hospitals
- (v) to enlist the support of interested organisations.

As the workers had still not received an increase in salary, the Workers Adhoc Committee called for a boycott of the annual Christmas dinner (20/12/84). The new aim of the boycott was to highlight the plight of the NCW to the hospital authorities, other health workers and the community at large. The Administration reacted viciously by threatening the workers with dismissal and victimising certain members of the Workers Adhoc Committee. This hostile response by the Administration to the planned boycott intimidated many workers into attending the dinner. The Christmas dinners held in other provincial hospitals in Durban were also boycotted.

In February 1985, a mass meeting of NCW from all the provincial hospitals in Durban was called by the Health and Allied Workers Union (HAWU) - an affiliate of the National Federation of Workers - to discuss the issue of low salaries and plan a co-ordinated programme of action. The workers unanimously decided to go on a work stoppage on 4 February 1985 until a significant increase was made to their salaries.

On the morning of 4 February, the workers at R K Khan Hospital reported to work but did not assume their duties. They were confronted by members of the Administration and the hospital security who intimidated and threatened the workers with immediate dismissal and this scared them into returning to work.

At the King Edward Hospital, the NCW (including the hospital security) were resolute in their unity and the strike had lasted five days. All strikers were dismissed and charged for trespassing. Through negotiations between the shop stewards,

HAWU and the Administration (PMB) all the workers were reinstated, all charges for trespasses were dropped and a 15-20% increase in salary was won.

### The survey

This report aims to clarify, and provide evidence for, the reasons why the workers at R K Khan hospital went on strike. In the latter part of 1984, faced with spiralling inflation and no substantive salary increases, workers met and began formulating a strategy to ensure that something would be done about their plight. As these workers were at the bottom end of the salary scale, they were hardest hit by the increases in GST, fuel, housing, and so on. One worker summed up the impact of inflation on NCWs as follows:

When they give us a small increase, they give us according to our grade, but when they put up the bread price, fuel prices, GST, they put up for everybody just the same.

As a result of the concern expressed by workers, the CHC decided to interview the NCWs and determine the exact nature of their work conditions, living conditions and grievances in the work situation. In order to ensure that the full range of attitudes of NCWs was covered, a fairly large sample of NCWs was randomly selected. A variation of "quota sampling" was used and in all a random sample of 179 NCWs selected and interviewed in their homes. These 179 NCWs represent 64% of all NCWs at R K Khan and allow us to be confident that the results presented below reflect the views and characteristics of all NCWs at R K Khan.

### Characteristics of the sample

The worker's salaries were very low with 3 out of every 4 NCWs earning less than R220 per month. At the same time, these workers had served the Natal Provincial Administration very well with the majority having spent most of their working life with the N.P.A. One would be hard pressed to find comparable "work-service" records in other industries. Not only had these workers been employed for a long time, but the number of hours worked by each was high: 99% of the NCWs worked for more than 45 hours per week. For our purposes, then, these descriptive statistics suggest that the NCWs are not paid very much relative to the number of hours they work

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Table I: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Sex	Male	83 (46%)
	Female	96 (54%)
Education	None	50 (28%)
	Up to Std. 5	85 (48%)
	Std. 6 to Std. 10	43 (24%)
Age	Less than 29 yrs	31 (17%)
	30-39 yrs	35 (20%)
	40-60 yrs	100 (56%)
	Greater than 60 yrs	12 (7%)
Service to N.P.A	Less than 5 yrs	66 (37%)
	6-10 yrs	36 (20%)
	11-20 yrs	52 (29%)
	Greater than 20 yrs	25 (14%)
Nature of work	Cleaner	102 (57%)
	Supervisor	7 (4%)
	Remainder non-supervisory	70 (39%)
Present Salary per month	Less than R160	61 (34%)
	R160-R219	71 (40%)
	Greater than R220	47 (26%)
Rent	Less than R80	66 (37%)
	R80-R99	58 (32%)
	Greater than R100	55 (31%)
Transport costs	Less than R15	120 (67%)
	Greater than R15	59 (33%)
Hours worked per week	Less than 45	3 (2%)
	45-49	114 (64%)
	Greater than 50	62 (35%)

and, collectively, they have an outstanding work record.

Finally, note must be made of the general living conditions experienced by the workers (see Table 2). On average, NCWs

live in six-person households where at least two people are permanently employed. Of the 1,050 people living in the households of these 179 NCWs, there was an even split among the sexes, and about 43% were of school-going age.

Table II: HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

Sex	Male	522 (50%)
	Female	528 (50%)
Age	Less than 5 yrs	92
	6-9 yrs	64
	10-18 yrs	269
	19-29 yrs	266
	30-39 yrs	103
	40-60 yrs	223
	Greater than 60 yrs	44
Total Household Income	Less than R400	62 (35%)
	R400-R799	64 (36%)
	Greater than R800	53 (29%)

### Worker grievances

In compiling the questionnaire the CHC attempted to provide the means for determining precisely those issues about which workers were aggrieved. Thus, they asked the NCWs to identify their specific problems. Table 3 indicates the responses to these questions.

Table III: WORKER GRIEVANCES

Grievance	Yes	No	Not Applicable
Transport to work	75 (42%)	104 (58%)	
Maternity benefits	7 (4%)	24 (13%)	148 (83%)
Creche needed	176 (98%)	3 (2%)	
Salary	172 (96%)	7 (4%)	
Working hours	49 (27%)	130 (73%)	
Fringe benefits	105 (59%)	51 (29%)	23 (13%)
Working conditions	27 (15%)	144 (80%)	8 (5%)

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Most important grievances

(1) Wages and salaries stand out as the issue of most concern to NCWs. First, the most important concern of workers is that their wages are extremely low and do not keep pace with inflation, and that in fact the necessities of life (food, shelter and clothing) take a very large slice out of one's pay packet. This point may quite easily be demonstrated through an analysis of the costs of housing and transport to work. If we compare the cost of accomodation and transport to work with the salaries people earn the following situation is found:

Table IV: COST OF ACCOMODATION AND TRANSPORT

Income Group	Ave. Wage (1)	Ave. Cost (2)	(2) as % of (1)
Less than R160	R138.00	R100.70	73%
R160-220	R197.60	R111.85	57%
Greater than R220	R238.93	R120.72	51%

Note: The average costs are only those for rent and transport to work and do not include food, cloths, education, health et

In other words, almost all the NCWs are paying out the major proportion of their salary on housing and transport to work. While one recognises that such a table ignores the fact that most households have two wage earners it is nevertheless staggering as these "worker-households" must still find money for food, utilities, clothing and so on. At the same time, one should realise that these workers are highly dependent on public transport (buses and trains) for getting to work and are thus more susceptible to the vicissitudes of inflation.

(2) Workers showed a certain amount of concern with the criteria used for upgrading their posts. In fact, there appears to have been almost no vertical mobility amongst these NCWs. In brief, the salaries earned by NCWs fall into three grades. These divisions cause uncertainty and dissension for a variety of reasons. On the one hand, there is no evidence that these grades are linked to either a worker's length of service or their education.

On the other hand, there appears to be almost no chance of vertical mobility. For example, given that cleaners tend to be on the lowest grade, one would expect that those who have longer service would not be cleaners. However, this is not the case: there is the same proportion of cleaners in each "length of service" category. At the same time, there is no evidence that those who have been working for the N.P.A. for a longer period of time get paid more. In fact, the evidence is that after six years service there is no appreciable increase in one's salary. For example, the average wage of those employed with the N.P.A. for between 6 and 10 years is R222 per month whereas the average wage of those with greater than 10 years experience is only R228 per month.

- (3) A further major issue of concern to workers revolves around the provision of child care facilities. As mentioned before, NCWs come from households where at least two people have to work, and thus children have to be provided for. The survey provides evidence that at least 30% of NCWs who have children have to leave them to their own devices when they go to work! The remaining 70% are forced to rely on relatives to care for their children. The issue of child care provision could easily be overcome at R K Khan Hospital, as presently, the children of trained nurses may go to the hospital creche, but not the children of "domestic" workers.
- (4) Another area of concern to workers revolved around the payment of their Provident Fund. Eighty-eight percent of the NCWs wished that their Provident Fund was paid to them as a lump sum and were dissatisfied with the present system whereby these monies are paid on a monthly basis.

#### Other important issues

- (1) A significant number of workers voiced concern over the poor fringe benefits available for them at R K Khan Hospital. In particular, NCWs expressed concern that the services of the hospital creche, maternity benefits, and housing subsidies were denied to them. Furthermore, those NCWs who were injured on duty were not eligible for benefits in compliance with the Workmen's Compensation Act.

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(2) A significant area of concern to workers was the problem associated with getting to work. Eighty-eight percent of the workers relied on either buses and/or trains to get to work. The cost associated with such services and the irregularity of the service were seen as major problems.

### Lesser grievances

Finally, we need to note that this survey of NCWs indicated that working conditions, working hours and maternity benefits were not considered to be major problems by the workers. The response given for the maternity benefits could be due to the fact that the number of people affected is relatively small and of limited duration, only during a woman's child-bearing years. It is difficult to interpret the responses on the working conditions and hours. It was obvious in conducting the survey that the workers were uninformed of their conditions of employment and their rights as workers, eg. many were unsure of their number of sick leave days per year.

### Attitudes towards worker organisation

As mentioned previously, there exists at present at R K Khan Hospital a Non-Classified Workers Committee. However, it is not held in high esteem as a problem solver. In fact, 71% of the NCWs were unhappy with it as it does not take up their grievances. At present the NCWs feel that supervisors deal more effectively with worker problems and 62% of the workers suggested that action is taken when they raise a problem with supervisors. While supervisors may take up minor problems on behalf of the workers, their ability to deal as a collective bargaining agent is severely restricted. Thus, the NCWs were almost unanimous in calling for an organisation which would ensure workers' interests are represented to the authorities.

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# politics and Working Class Culture: A Response

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In their response to a previous article of mine, (1) the Naledi Writers' Unit argue against my "populist" definition of both Black Consciousness and "progressive" literature in the last decade and a half. They say:

Our aim, as cultural workers, is to build the culture of resistance of the people of Southern Africa. Throughout Southern Africa...years of colonialist oppression and South African aggression and repression have shaped our culture; we know that to survive, we must resist...we talk about building a "culture of liberation" out of the "culture of the oppressed" and the "people's struggle."

In Mozambique and Angola we look to the resistance traditions and expressions of the peasantry, of the cotton workers, of the guerilla struggle of MPLA and FAPLA; from these traditions we can talk of developing a new society, based on the as yet infant working class.

and they go on to describe the cultural initiatives Medu Art Ensemble (to which Naledi belongs) is taking and to clarify their position on the relationship of working class culture to the "culture of resistance" they advocate.

Dismissing the approach which looks at all cultural activities engaged in by the working class as that of "Western sociological theory", Naledi argues for a determinedly political and vanguardist approach to working class culture. Workers, they say, are often corrupted in their behaviour by the bourgeois culture they have picked up from newspapers, the educational system, television, radio and so on, but "progressive cultural workers have distinguished between imposed culture forced upon the working class by the bourgeoisie...and the developing strands of "working class culture", those expressions which actively promote the workers' consciousness of their own objective conditions of existence". Therefore they argue that working class culture can best be defined as those cultural activities that build and direct the workers' awareness in the best interests of the working class. They emphasise the need for purposeful cultural activism in order to



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achieve this goal: "beyond ideological commitment, it is essential that we also create institutions and structures that will reinforce and build upon this strong working class culture". In addition, they stress the building of a culture that will forge a unity of the "oppressed class", who will in turn come to "remember its history, identify its heroes, write new songs and sing them, start newspapers and discussion groups and literacy circles and theatre groups".

I would like here to briefly further address the question of working class culture. My response will not only try to answer Naledi's ideas, but will extend the debate by bringing up points which I think are essential to consider further. Thus, not all of the following are aimed at Medu or Naledi. Neither are any comments made in the course of my argument an attempt to belittle or deny the considerable achievements that organisation has made in the cultural sphere in the last eight years: rather, what is meant is a free and open discussion. Furthermore, in the process of discussion I will confine my remarks to South Africa. This is because my knowledge of the culture of other Southern African countries is extremely limited, and because South Africa has its own political, socio-economic and cultural specifics - such as a much larger and better established working class, and the virtual absence of any sort of independent peasantry. (2)

### The question of populism

Despite their political differences, the two most important contemporary opposition movements inside the country (the UDF and National Forum) are structured at this point in time as popular fronts of various organisations. These popular fronts comprise a coalition of different classes united in their opposition to apartheid. Therefore, when I describe them as populist, it is meant as a widely descriptive term of the language in which both movements tend to mobilise and speak about ideological struggle. (3) When speaking about culture, both often use terms which do not refer specifically to class. When Naledi says, for example, "we talk about building a "culture of liberation" out of the "culture of the oppressed" and the "people's struggle", it seems to me indisputable that they are using a cultural definition based on populist language.

However, both the UDF and the NF state that in their popular

fronts the working class must come to play a leading role, although it is arguable that the leadership of both movements is at the moment weighted outside of the working class (ie. is in the main petty bourgeois). Obviously both movements have a significant political presence in South Africa today. But their use of populist language can blur (and even disguise) several crucial political distinctions of a class nature, which have a bearing on cultural activity. These distinctions deserve to be highlighted as they are important to questions of leadership and democracy.

### The "conscience" of the people

There is a similar attribute to be found in a great deal of the work of both Black Consciousness and progressive cultural activists - the desire to act as the "conscience" and "spokespeople" of all those oppressed (with increasing attention being paid to the working class). This belief is very clear in writers of a Black Consciousness bent. The poet Maropodi Mapalakyane, for instance, says:

We, the writers/artists and educationists, are the people who must play a major role in the liberation of our people's minds. (4)

A similar attitude can be seen from these (generally) urban writers with regard to those people who still live in rural South Africa. Here, rural people and migrant workers tend to be seen as the mere recipients of political exhortations supplied by black writers: which will then enable these lower class people to act as a kind of "protest fodder" for already decided political ends. Risimati j'Mathonsi, commenting on the indigenous/english language question, says for example:

Let those who write in foreign languages do so; but they should not scorn their brothers who are battling to bring the peasants abreast with what is going on. By so doing the masses can contribute. (5)

It seems to me that Naledi Writers' Unit would probably stress a more dynamic interaction between cultural activists and lower class people - activists have as much to learn as to teach in such a relationship. Nevertheless, their reply is not entirely free of the above type of formulation, although I am sure they would disagree with its elitist tone. For instance, they make statements like, "cultural work should be

done directly for the organisations of the working class, both at the work place and in the community" (my emphasis); they speak of the need for "a conscious effort by progressive cultural workers to use symbols and imagery that reinforce the awareness and direction of the working class". In such statements, it is made clear that working-class culture can, and should, be directed by politicised activists of other classes,

Outside of Medu, many other progressive commentators also agree that cultural and political activists should play a directive role in forging links between work place and community struggles on the one hand and the national struggle on the other: in fact, that they should act as a type of linking-up and unifying mechanism for popular front politics. The musician Barry Gilder is an example of this when he puts forward music "as a form of education and mobilisation, as a form of uniting different communities and struggles into one irrepressible whole". (6)

While the attempts of cultural activists from other classes to reach the working class and incorporate working class experiences and issues at the moment must be seen as relevant and important, what is more dubious is the concomitant tendency at work to downplay the ideological and political limitations class positions place on people. While they point out that each class has a rather different perspective on and set of assumptions about society, Naledi does not follow through the logic of their argument. Members of different classes in South Africa do not necessarily have the same everyday experiences, or the same perceptions of what their political goals are. This is true even among black people who are in some ways uniformly oppressed by apartheid laws. Thus, petty bourgeois activists need to be careful when they think they can, through an act of will or commitment, easily speak for the working class. The notion of "class suicide" is often used to justify this identification with the working class by activists in Africa: I would argue that in itself the term does not satisfactorily solve the problem it tries to, as there are very real material difficulties involved that an act of will cannot easily overcome. This is not to suggest that economic determinism is all that exists, and that human will plays no bearing on politics and history. But still, "class suicide" often remains at the level of gesture.

The presence of working class culture

Naledi correctly points out that the "culture of resistance" they advocate contains strong elements of working class culture, especially in more oral forms such as dance and song. However, this culture of resistance is a popular culture, in the exact sense of the phrase. It stresses the solidarity of all those - of whatever class - who are oppressed by apartheid (as in Black Consciousness) or who oppose apartheid (as in the progressive movement).

It would be a mistake to try and completely separate popular from working class culture (or believe either of them can be completely isolated from capitalist culture). But it would be mistaken to completely identify the two as Naledi occasionally tends to do. For instance, they use the songs of trade unionist Vuyisile Mini as an example of the working class voice within resistance culture. However, they go on to say that the freedom songs used in the culture of resistance "unmistakenly carry the musical style and forms developed by the working class, without electronic equipment and instruments, using the structures of work chants". This is only partly true. They forget the extent to which the makwaya style in which many of these songs are performed is the result of the conscious reworking of Christian and traditional styles by, amongst others, middle class composers such as Caluza, Tyamzashe and Mohapeloa in the early part of this century. (7)

It is true that working class cultural forms and content have constantly injected vitality into the culture of resistance. It is also important to consider, though, that these forms have often been used by a middle class leadership to further their own interests. The "African National Culture" debate of the 1930s remains a classic example of this type of appropriation:

There is no objection to war dances, provided they are staged by the enlightened Bantu. When they are staged by the uncivilised, it is a sign of retrogression, because... he has no inducement to progress. (8)

It is very difficult in these circumstances to isolate a working class culture from a wider popular culture, when looked at historically. There has generally been a great deal of cultural interconnectedness and influence at work, as well as a ten-

dency for people to be socially mobile across class lines during their lives. Modikwe Dikobe, author of The Marabi Dance, is an immediate example of this: during his life he has been employed in such different jobs as hawker, clerk, nightwatchman, domestic worker and schoolmaster. Nevertheless, there have been class forces at work that make it impossible to simply remain at the level of popular culture and be accurate. Middle class black people in the 1930s, for instance, constantly denigrated the marabi culture of the slumyards and extolled the eisteddfords and other forms of "civilised" recreation: mine workers of an earlier era took the amatimiti of black mission ladies and radically changed these tea parties to suit their own male, working class needs. Popular types of cultural activity, therefore, are often used differently to suit different material circumstances and class needs.

### Working class leadership

Commentators from various political positions seem to generally agree that the black petty bourgeoisie has had a political coherence and importance in South African history far outweighing its numerical strength. (9) A great deal of black political organisation in this country has historically been centred around nationalist and populist demands, and political leadership has often (but not always) been the prerogative of the more privileged classes. These demands have, in the context of the apartheid state, been in the interests of the black lower classes; but they have seldom been organised or articulated by these lower classes. It must be remembered too, that working class interests go beyond the destruction of apartheid to the transformation of the social and economic system as a whole. If working class forms are appropriated in the cause of the national struggle, this does not necessarily mean that working class cultural hegemony in the nation itself is assured. Thus, for Naledi to speak as if working class political and cultural demands have constantly been to the forefront of the national struggle is too quick a judgement. (10)

In my opinion, the admiration activists feel for lower class forms of culture is a relatively recent phenomenon. Consider the more oral, rurally-derived cultural forms used by the black migrant workforce, at present one of the largest and most militant sections of the working class. As recently as the early 1970s, many activists dismissed these forms as mere

"folklore" and "caricature". Therefore we get amazing statements like this one, made about black cultural life in the 1970s: "the traditional cultures had long since ceased to be capable of sustaining or developing artistic forms". (11) Now, ten years later, a working class poetry based on and transforming traditional historical and praise poetry is finally becoming visible. (12)

For a long time after the upsurge of trade union activity in 1973, a belief also persisted among some black writers that the working class was "depoliticised". In the black literature that has actually been produced during the 1970s, one can see more privileged class perceptions at work. A great deal of this literature came from a radical petty bourgeoisie - and there is very little of it which deals with or uses shopfloor experiences, or everyday working class community issues of an immediate nature such as rents and housing. (13) And it was this very literature which saw itself as "political" and tended to regard the black working class as in need of political education about their oppression!

While the need for the working class to form political alliances with other classes at times when it is advantageous for them to do so cannot be questioned, and while the working class must strive to present a democratic social alternative attractive to sympathetic members of the intermediate classes in order to combat capitalism, it is difficult to see how these goals will automatically be achieved without making working class leadership a reality rather than a principle, and without taking note of working class forms of culture. Not only should institutions and structures be set up to promote working class culture: the working class should be allowed to do this task for themselves. It is in the grassroots organisations of the working class (trade unions, factory committees, tenants' associations etc.) where this is perhaps most immediately possible. It is noticeable that in the list of activities Naledi gives at the end of their article, many are artifacts which can be created outside of a community and brought in - t-shirts, posters, plays, banners etc. This type of culture, as they themselves point out, cannot take predominance over a democratisation of culture to allow as many people as possible to participate.

There is, however, a general tendency at work in South Afri-

can political life today to enshrine this notion of working class leadership and to romanticise working class culture. Working class leadership should not be seen as an abstract principle: what is important is the structures of participation and forms of democratic organisation which will enable this leadership and hegemony to happen. (14) Neither should the working class be romanticised as having some sort of moral superiority to other people. Rather, the working class is important in social transformation because it is one of the two major contending classes in capitalist society with access to the means of production, and the only one structurally in a position to alter the relations of production.

Problems of cultural and political leadership in South Africa today are not easily solved. It would be utopian to believe that the black working class can generate a leadership and hegemony spontaneously and without education and organisation. It would be just as foolish, however, to believe that working class hegemony can be guaranteed by individuals and political organisations in which the working class does not have an active leading role, as a type of "act of faith" by middle class activists. In the latter approach, it has been observed:

Power would devolve to the workers' own organisations only after the workers were fully trained and competent...in this approach the proletariat is locked into a sort of nursery school of history where, whichever way it turns, it is always the student "who does not know" of one educator or another. (15)

### Objective class interests

The view that the political role of cultural activists is to inject the working class with a true idea of its objective class interests is closely related to the view that working class interests can be advanced and guaranteed by a political party which has these interests at heart. Obviously, this process is open to a variety of different actions and interpretations. Sometimes the process of middle class activists working in the field of working class culture can be fruitful. But there is an implicit assumption often found in this type of thinking that only those cultural manifestations which advance the "objective class interests" of the working class are worth considering. Working class culture becomes simply functional to political programmes, and activists who should

have better things to do spend considerable time and energy agonising whether forms like mbaqanga are "suitable" or not. (16) Furthermore, an assumption is made that writers and performers must be exemplary in their political conduct and allegiances, as others look up to them and might follow their political mistakes. (17) (Such a point is arguable: I would argue that it overemphasizes the immediate and direct political relevance of many forms of culture.) The obvious questions to ask in response are: who decides what the "objective class interests" of the working class are at any point in time? Who can accurately decide beforehand what is politically and culturally expedient to achieve these interests?

There is possibly a distinction that should be made when one looks at this type of middle class cultural activism. There is a difference, it seems to me, between injecting political ideas wholesale into the working class, and giving shape and direction to the working class perceptions that are found. (18)

The idea of "objective class interests" embodies a belief that socialism is the essential ideology of the working class - therefore, if the cultural expressions of working class people do not conform to this standard, they are a form of "false consciousness". It presents a curiously linear, teleological view of the way working people think and act. Its failure is "the assumption that everybody knows exactly what socialism is, knows that they want it and knows how to get it". (19) The general idea seems to be that certain activists and "advanced" workers lead and prod the rest in stages along an already fully-determined political path by education and organisation from the outside, until true socialist consciousness is achieved once and for all. But consciousness is not a linear process: once people are politicised, they do not necessarily stay that way once conditions alter. Cultural activity among working class people usually accelerates during strikes and other times of conflict - the Frame play, Ilanga and (outside of a union context) the play by women of Crossroads Imfuduso were all generated in such a manner. Such plays seem to have been used for building up awareness and consolidating organisation around political issues.

Workers' consciousness of necessity contain a variety of identities, not all of which are class-specific. These identities - of sex, of race, of region and ethnicity - help make up



the way they perceive the world. While black workers share some of their identity with their middle class counterparts, they often have different and more oppressive experiences of life. In the self-identities of the migrant workers of Vosloorus Hostel on the East Rand for example, "Zulu and race metaphors, the land question and Christianity, but also a working class position are all enmeshed." (20) The nationalist and popular symbols and traditions that make up part of the identity of black workers are available for a variety of political ends, not all of these in the eventual political interests of the working class (the fate of white workers in South Africa is an immediate reminder of the ambiguity of militant nationalism directed from above). Furthermore, these identities will of course persist in (one hopes) a transformed manner once "socialist consciousness" has been achieved: the recent war between China and Vietnam should be a reminder that the advent of socialism doesn't mean the withering away of nationalism. (21)

Cultural activists and intellectuals can have some effect on the rearrangement and use of such symbols and identities for progressive ends - but an acceptance of socialism cannot be ensured once and for all by such vanguardist means. I would suggest, then, the following definition of working class culture as being more useful than the one Naledi offers:

By proletarian culture we understand those ways in which the working class actively and consciously seeks to shape its own social identity as a class and, by so doing, differentiates itself from the values and principles of the dominant class. (22)

Such a definition allows us to recognise forms which are not so obviously "political" as working class culture. Moreover, while in South Africa such a definition would need to take into account the variety of identities which go to make up workers' consciousness, it does not blur these identities completely with, say, similar formulations adopted by the radical black petty bourgeoisie within the context of a national struggle. It recognises the self-definition of the working class when faced with other classes, and highlights the conscious activity of the working class itself. However, one of its problems is that it does not make clear enough that working class culture cannot exist in isolation in capitalist society.

### Commercial culture

Naledi is possibly too dismissive of the potential that lies within some cultural forms of a more commercial nature. They argue that consumer culture and the electronic media are tainted past saving by bourgeois ideology. True, much of this culture is controlled by huge corporations and magazine and newspaper syndicates (SABCTV, Nasionale Pers, Ster-Kinekor, Egoli Films, the Argus group etc.) with enormous power and obvious ideological interests. But it is still possibly more productive to see some of these commercial cultural forms as areas to contest, rather than just give up. (23)

Blacks and whites alike are treated by commercial culture as consumers. Nevertheless, it is the one area where some sort of "non-racial" identity of any dimension seems to be emerging within South Africa itself. Music and sport, for example, are no longer areas of absolute racial separation (witness the recent pop concert at Ellis Park attended by 110,000, and the popularity of bands such as Juluka, Hotline and Brenda & the Big Dudes among black and white audiences alike).

Naledi strongly puts forward the building up of a counter-culture, and puts rather too little emphasis on transforming the existing types of culture. These are written off as massive, negative forms of control. However it seems to me that the single most negative feature of commercial culture is its treatment of people as passive receivers. Surely it is to the point to use cultural forms people are already interested in, and to get them actively involved in the process of creating culture?

This would obviously be a process where one could have few prior guidelines which are correct once and for all. Indeed, the debate on working class culture seems to fluctuate between two extreme positions, both visible in the USSR just after the Revolution. On the one hand, the Leninist position believed that the working class must wholeheartedly appropriate and democratise bourgeois culture; on the other, the Proletcult advocated the development of an autonomous proletarian culture by extensive self-education of the working class and the use of working-class perceptions and traditions. This cannot be dismissed as a cultural debate between a small group of mad artists and a huge mass movement, either: in 1920 the Proletcult and the Bolsheviks had roughly the same number of

members. (24) The resolution of this crucial debate was, unfortunately, cut short by the Bolsheviks when they later forced the Proletcult to disband. (25)

### The politics of criticism

One cannot separate culture from politics: culture is not a separately determined force, but one which is constantly present in people's consciousness during political struggles. Neither can it be denied that the struggle to achieve a free, democratic society "opens up new avenues, helps to enrich art and culture, and in the course of the...struggle finds new forms of expression". (26) There are nevertheless, many ways in which political concerns can be culturally expressed. At the moment a lot of emphasis in both the trade unions and the national movements seem to be on forging unity and a feeling of solidarity. Naturally this unity and the need to put forward cultural values denigrated by racism and capitalism are important. But this could, in some circumstances, lead to and overstressing of the need for a unified culture of resistance and an understressing of the simultaneous need to allow cultural variety to flourish, and for critical comment and democratic discussion. A political art and culture is not necessarily one which denies contradiction and exhorts people to stick to a political line: it is one which makes available to people the means to critically examine their own lives and take control of their own futures. In fiction, the Angolan novel, Mayombe, seems to me an example of a work of political literature which encourages debate. (27) Sources of cultural conflict and political argument must be squarely confronted. Only in this way can a democratic, dynamic and participatory culture be developed in South Africa.

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# SAAWU in the Western Cape – The Continental China Strike

Marcel Golding

On Monday 25 March 1985, 450 jubilant Continental China workers at the Blackheath plant returned to work ending their two week strike for a wage increase and recognition of their union, the South African Allied Workers Union. The strike was the second to hit the Continental China Group – the first was in October 1984 at the Rosslyn plant 22 km north of Pretoria. (1) The strike was a traumatic experience which Bill Paverd, managing director of the Continental China Group, characterised as a "baptism of fire". For the majority of the workers the strike was the first prolonged industrial action in their working lives – they were traversing unchartered territory.

The strike was part of an ongoing acrimonious battle between SAAWU and Continental China which started in September last year. The successful action by Blackheath workers has established a new "balance of power" in the company. The strike is interesting for several reasons. It heralds SAAWU's arrival in the Western Cape. In this instance, it marks a clear attempt by SAAWU to organise along national industrial lines, in contrast to their traditional style of general unionism. The strike was also in solidarity with the Rosslyn workers who were dismissed after a strike in October last year; as such it represents united action by so-called Coloured and African workers against a common management.

## Continental China

Continental China, the major ceramic tableware manufacturer in South Africa, was established in April 1959. Initially it started with 80 people at the Blackheath plant producing 20,000 pieces per month and with know-how supplied by the world famous firm, Rosenthal Porzellan of Germany (2). Capital was provided equally by German and South African sources. The company expanded in the 1960s establishing 3 more plants: the Huguenot Porcelain plant at Rosslyn in the Transvaal, a border area development which produces 1.5 million pieces of crockery

per month and originally employing 700 workers, now dramatically reduced since the strike; Grahamstown Potteries plant which manufactures approximately 1 million pieces per month of cups, saucers and coffee mugs and employs over 100 workers; and the Continental Stoneware plant in Atlantis, a decentralised area north of Cape Town, established in 1978, taking advantage of the decentralisation incentives, the plant has the capacity to produce 300,000 pieces of stoneware per month and employs 250 workers. The four plants now yield a total of close on 4 million pieces per month with a workforce of approximately 1,700. The Continental China Group is now wholly South African owned, a subsidiary of Federale Volksbeleggings with the only other shareholder being the Industrial Development Corporation, although it still maintains links with Rosenthal for technical know-how, research and development. (4)

The product range offered by the 4 plants includes dinnerware for everyday use as well as more sophisticated ware; custom designed caterware for international hotels and restaurants well as more functional caterware for catering and industrial uses (eg. hospitals and military). (5) The monthly production of 4 million pieces covers 14 complete ranges of dinnerware, 5 different shapes in cups and saucers and coffee mugs and accessories - in total more than 500 different articles.

Most of the production is for the local market and Continental China is the leading supplier with a small export range to Australia, Greece, USA and United Kingdom among others. Although it is the major South African producer and supplier it does not have a monopoly of the market. Bill Paverd, managing director for the past 8 months, explains:

Japan, Taiwan ... the east generally produce crockery much cheaper than we do and flood our local markets with commodities. Dumping has taken place on a large scale, and although we can compete it is at a disadvantage.

The ceramic tableware industry is very small in South Africa and Continental China's major competition is from imports. The company has, however, been able to secure a third of the market with the vast majority of its products directed at low to middle income brackets.

#### Blackheath plant

The Continental China Blackheath plant is one of the largest

factories, after Leyland, in the Blackheath industrial area, 20 km outside Cape Town. The workforce of 460 is predominantly female, virtually all "Coloured" with an African male force of about 50. All the workers are drawn from the nearby townships of Strand, Kuilsriver, Bellville, Stellenbosch and Blackheath.

The industry is labour intensive and employs mainly skilled and semi-skilled workers. According to Otto Kramer, technical director of Continental China, the dominance of women in the industry is accounted for by the nature of the work: "production requires careful handling, dexterity and nimbleness. Women have proved far better in this type of work, acquiring the ceramic skills, than males."

There are three production departments: cups; flat and round articles, and casting. The factory is divided into two plants for raw production and whiteware production - each having different compartments in the manufacture of crockery. The division of labour in the production process is extensive and very specialised. Decorators, for example, would only perform certain tasks in a range of decorating skills as compared to a designer-decorator employed in a factory in Europe, where an apprenticeship has to be served. (7) Here the tasks are simplified to routines requiring only limited skill and experience.

Production is mechanised or automated depending on the range of the products and the quantity required. Research and development are constantly undertaken to evaluate trends and patterns of ceramic ware production. In this regard Kramer stresses that the basic infrastructure of the plant, flow of production, and individual work places are equal to and virtually the same as enterprises in Europe and elsewhere. Plants are designed by German engineers to the same standards.

### Working conditions

The industry is labour intensive. Although work is not too heavy, it is extremely tiring and monotonous as workers spend hours doing the same tasks, eg. fitting handles or flipping a saucer. Injuries do not often occur but in certain areas there are hazards, eg. in the sorting and grinding compartment workers complain of chips flying around or articles breaking during handling. (8) Breakage is a major loss for the company and because enormous care is required in the handling of products,



supervision is extremely close. Supervisors are abusive, say the workers:

All they want is production and more production. They keep us on our toes. And very often they use foul language when they talk to us.

Blackheath's staff turnover has not been very high. The majority of workers have over 5 years' service; some have up to 20 years, with the average service being 8-10 years. Wages have been the major source of dissatisfaction. The minimum rate is R1,40 per hour. One worker who has worked 19 years at the company explains the paltry wages he receives:

I started in 1966, when I was 19, in the casting department. I'm still working there today. I started with R7,00 per week. Today I earn R86,00 per week. After deductions it is sometimes as low as R62,00. How are we expected to survive? I have 6 children!

Workers' complaints brought little improvement, mainly because they were dominated by a liaison committee, a management creation, which acted as a rubber stamp.

### The strike at Rosslyn

SAAWU had successfully organised the Rosslyn plant by September 1984, after workers rejected the company's liaison committee. Until the end of 1983 workers received regular increases and bonuses. In July 1984, under pressure from workers, management granted an increase in hourly rates. To offset this, the management reduced the working week from 45 hours to 40 hours, thus maintaining the total wage bill at its original level. Any increase in demand was to be met by overtime working. From reports workers were extremely annoyed with the measure but at least felt that there was no immediate wage drop.

In September 1984, a new managing director, Bill Paverd, was appointed and came to the company with a reputation for a more aggressive style of management:

When I came here this company was in a mess. We had already lost R6 million and something had to be done if we were to save the company and the industry.

One of the first measures introduced was to revert to a 45 hour working week. According to Paverd, "the fight for survival was explained to every worker throughout the company. Our

personnel managers explained to the workers how the free enterprise system worked." This meant workers were working more hours for the same wages. In addition, the workers were informed that no Christmas bonuses or any other increases would be given, until the company's financial situation improved.

With the festive season approaching and management inundated with orders, workers were under pressure to intensify production. Meanwhile SAAWU's organising efforts were directed at securing recognition, and workers, as a pressuring tactic, refused to work overtime until the union was recognised. SAAWU met the Continental China management on 16 and 23 October. Management's explanations of the company's difficulties did not satisfy the workers. Instead it set the stage for a protracted period of stoppages and strikes. Workers at the Rosslyn plant drew up a petition demanding:

- \* a return to a 40 hour week
- \* a wage increase in December 1984
- \* a bonus in December
- \* a minimum wage of R2,00 per hour (9)

To enforce these demands workers staged a work stoppage on October 29. Continental China's refusal to accede to workers' demands immediately transformed the work stoppage into a strike which lasted until 31 October. Management responded by dismissing the workers. Although negotiations took place no settlement was reached on the demands. Instead Continental China agreed to reinstate the entire workforce without prejudice on the following conditions:

- \* workers accept the working conditions of September-October (ie 45 hours) with a minimum rate of R1,38 per hour
- \* no wage increase in December
- \* no bonus
- \* to work overtime when absolutely necessary in consultation with shop stewards (10)

Virtually all the workers agreed to go back on November 5 although they were not happy with the state of affairs. High unemployment and generally workers' financial commitments played a role in their decision to return. What could also have affected this decision was the fact that they could wield more effective pressure during November when the company would be hard-pressed to meet delivery deadlines.

For the first week production was normal, although workers' organising efforts were intensified. Continental China then received an urgent order and requested the decorating department to work one hour overtime, every night, for a week. Their request went unheeded because workers felt that the procedure of consultation with the shop stewards was not followed. On Friday November 16, management again requested workers to work overtime on Saturday 17 to meet the deadline for the order. Again workers ignored management's request. On Monday November 19, the 120 decorating workers received a final warning and were again asked to work overtime. Their refusal led to dismissals on November 20. In solidarity with the 120 workers the rest of the workforce also refused to work, demanding unconditional reinstatement for their comrades. This show of support and shop floor unity posed a major challenge to the management who issued an ultimatum to workers to return to work by 7.30 am.

The return-to-work deadline was ignored and by 8 am. all the workers were summarily dismissed. The union was informed that the factory was to be closed. The work stoppages and strikes of the previous 2 months had caused major disruption to the flow of production. Orders and deadlines could not be met resulting in the company losing millions. According to Paverd serious thought was given to reducing Continental China's operations. The strike had severe repercussions for both the union (ie. organisation was virtually smashed) and Continental China, which conducted a feasibility study on the re-opening of the Rosslyn plant with a reduced workforce.

The feasibility study envisaged a staff cut of over 150. Negotiations between SAAWU and the Continental China dragged on for a month. Management suggested that before the plant was re-opened and workers re-employed, objective tests had to be conducted in order to identify the most efficient and productive workers. The National Institute of Personnel Research skill tests were used to "insure no victimisation" took place. Under the guise of technical objectivity was a hidden management agenda. Firstly the test would be a process of grading personnel and only those with the most skills would be re-employed. Long service to the company would not be taken into consideration. Secondly, because the union had no control over the tests there was no guarantee that the most active union members and shop stewards would be given employment.

Management informed SAAWU that they intended opening the plant on 2 January 1985 and that staff selection would take place between 17 and 22 December 1984. (11)

SAAWU, already complaining of police intimidation, objected to the tests on the following grounds:

- \* tests should not be the sole criterion of selection
- \* there was no provision for monitoring tests
- \* the tests were based on educational level.

Instead SAAWU demanded that Continental China reinstate the entire workforce and then consider retrenchment of workers they did not require. Exactly what SAAWU's rationale for this demand was remains unclear. Workers on the whole seemed generally reluctant to take the tests. Continental China decided, after informing SAAWU, that if workers did not respond, they would start employing on the open market. Eventually the new labour force comprised 34 workers who did not join the strike, 108 who returned, 69 new recruits and the rest workers who had previously, at one time or other, worked at Continental China. (12) Over 300 workers were not re-employed. The employment of scab labour made possible the re-opening of the plant. But it also added a new dimension to the ongoing struggle between SAAWU and Continental China. (13)

It is against this background that the Blackheath strike should be viewed because it forms part of a national industrial struggle against Continental China. The initial closure of the Rosslyn plant affected the Blackheath workers in that they were under enormous pressure to intensify production and meet orders which Rosslyn could not.

#### Organisation at Blackheath

SAAWU moved down to the Western Cape in September last year, a measure explained by Zuzile Ramncwana, branch organiser, to "organise the unorganised in the area." (14) Continental China was one of the first factories they organised in Cape Town and is presently the strongest one. SAAWU's move to the Cape was viewed with some scepticism in some trade union circles. But they were determined to establish a base, whatever. Albert Whittles, education officer for the Western Cape explained:

When we came down here we heard from everyone that it is difficult to organise "Coloured" workers, they were not very aware and lacked militancy. Our Continental

- Continental China -

China strike has proved that Coloured workers are not passive but very conscious.

From union reports it took them 1 month to recruit the majority of the workers at Continental China, although workers initially were cautious of the union. "The majority of us were new to unions and did not know what SAAWU could do, but just went along with the rest. Many were very scared. But there was a core who were very committed and encouraged the rest of us," said one worker.

The first major struggle of the workers was against the liaison committee which management had established in 1979. One worker expressed the common view as follows:

It is a "ja baas" (yes boss) committee. It did nothing for workers. If there were changes for us it was mainly for the benefit of the management. The committee had no teeth to fight management.

Successful organising resulted in the establishment of a shop stewards committee of 11 workers from the following work compartments: workshop, mould making, sorting and grinding, bisque sorting, glazing, under glaze, on glaze, set packing, millet and clay, flatware, cups, platter press and silkscreen. Elected from the shop stewards was a workers committee of 5 to directly negotiate with management.

Throughout the organising drive, organisers tried to link the struggle of Rosslyn workers with Blackheath and arranged meetings where Rosslyn shop stewards addressed workers. At one meeting on February 25, attended by 350, a decision was taken to support the re-instatement of the Rosslyn workers. In addition the meeting demanded the scrapping of the liaison committee and the recognition of SAAWU; the immediate return of the Blackheath worker who was sent to Rosslyn to train scabs and lastly, the R2,00 per hour minimum wage demand. From reports, spirits were high at the meeting - singing, chanting and solidarity were evidence of worker determination.

On 28 February 1985, SAAWU presented these demands to management and an answer was demanded by March 4. Management's reply, that they could only meet one demand, the scrapping of the liaison committee, did not satisfy workers and it became the "talk of the lines what should be done." On Monday, March

4, a small incident occurred which was possibly the initial demonstration of defiance by workers. When Keith Hulse, factory manager, conveyed Continental China's response, it was done only in English and Afrikaans. When he told workers to go back to work, the African workers stood still and told him they did not "understand". He then promised to repeat what he had said the next day in Xhosa.

On Tuesday 5 March, Hulse again addressed workers and explained the financial problems of the company. But workers were not interested in this elaborate explanation. Instead they shouted that he should stop lying and stop making promises. One worker explained the exchange that took place at the meeting:

Hulse kept on repeating about financial difficulties. He said the company had no money. We then asked why they buy new machines and combis everytime if they don't have money. We were angry. We said why don't they use that money to pay the workers. Instead they only pay large bonuses to foremen. They also told us Rosslyn's dispute has nothing to do with Blackheath. But we replied ... an injury to one is an injury to all ... that shocked them!

Hulse was, from all reports, clearly upset at the slanging match in which he came off second best. The courtesy usually accorded management was discarded. Instead a militant mood developed and the shouts of, "jy lieg!, jy lieg!" (you lying; you lying) echoed in the factory. The extent of workers anger and their unity was a shock to management who had, to date, never contended with any major industrial action at Blackheath. When Hulse told workers to go back to work, the majority ignored him. Some even shouted back ... "we won't!"

"That is how the strike started. After lunch no-one went back to work. We told the supervisor to switch off the machines," said one worker. Enquires by foremen were met with the terse reply, "the management is lying, they always lie." Workers assembled at the clay compartment and just stood around. Second-line management and Hulse were milling around pleading with workers to go back to work, but were ignored, while others, more courageous, retorted, "why don't you do the work!"

With no machines running the situation became desperate. Bill Paverd, managing director, then intervened: "It was the first

time we saw this man ... we've always heard of him. He asked what the problem was ... he said the company had no money ... he said we should go back to work ... we ignored him," was the way one worker described events late in the day.

The union was called and addressed workers in the plant at 4.00 pm. But the workers were clear. They would not return until their demands were met. A meeting was arranged for the next day between the union, the workers committee and management. The day's events were a test for both parties. Workers felt threatened that they would lose their jobs. But because the mood was so militant no-one dared step out of line.

### Wednesday

On 6 March workers came to work as usual, clocked in and went to their work benches, but refused to work. The meeting between the union and the management lasted the whole day with no agreement reached. (15) The report-back meeting to the workers by the union and management was a rowdy affair. If anything it was a display of just how confident workers had become since the previous day. The union's report was greeted with shouts of "amandla" (power). But Paverd received a hostile reception. An excited worker explained what happened:

Paverd said we should think before we do anything. We should not be like sheep that stand in deep water. We replied that we were sheep before - to have taken all his nonsense! - but not now! We told him our eyes were opened, and we know what is right and wrong. The workers shouted at him, "Jy lieg! Jy lieg! Talk the truth" - but Paverd merely smiled and shook his head.

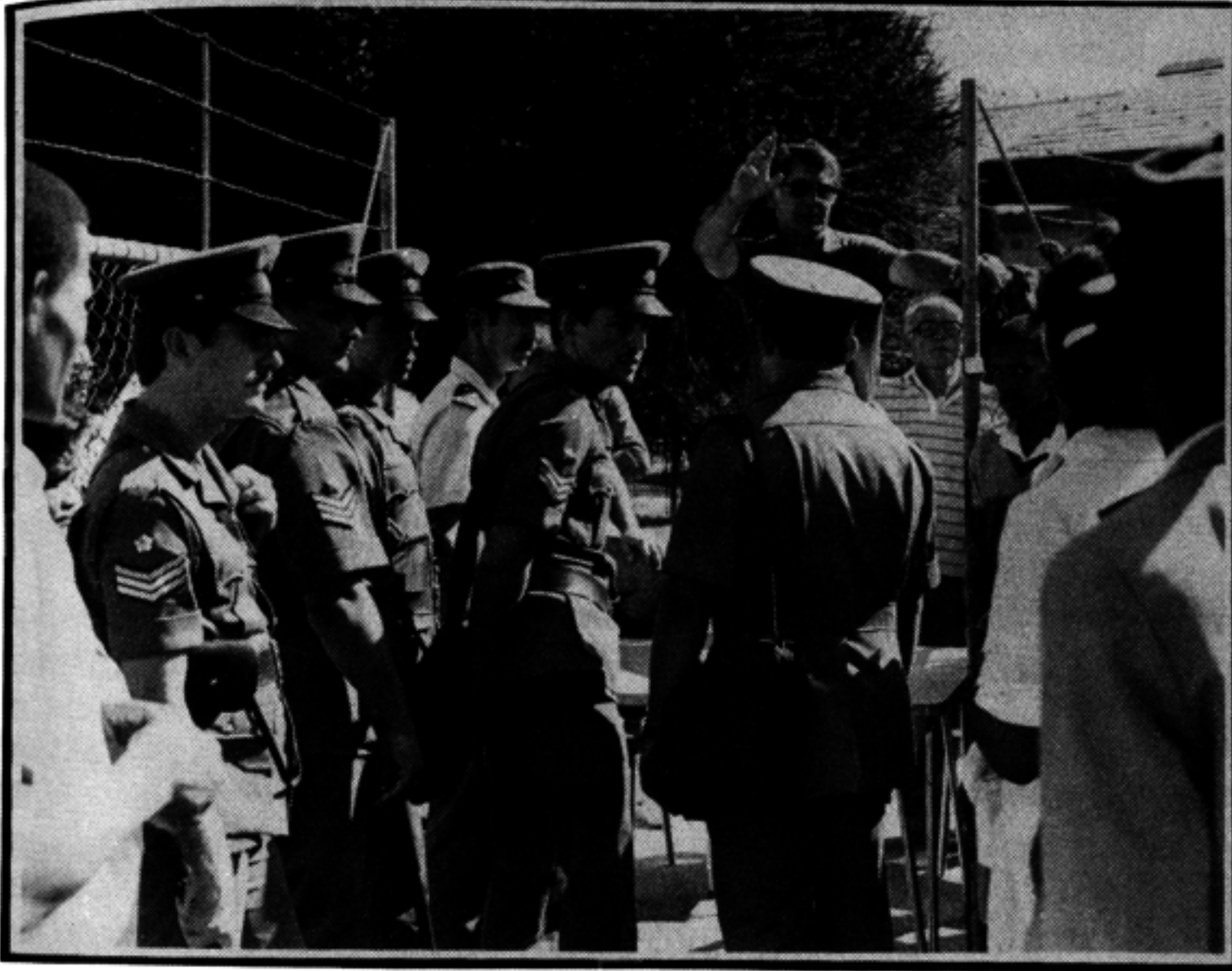
The chant "Jy lieg!" had become a war cry symbolising everything management stood for. Tension developed amongst the workers - especially towards those who were not union members. One worker, for instance, was almost beaten up for asking publicly, "where her children would get food if she lost her job". One worker explains why they responded in this fashion:

How could that women ask such a question in front of the bosses. We all have children and we are all workers. We are all suffering while on strike and we need to stand together.

Although management tried to use the situation to increase the

divisions it did not succeed. With no settlement on the first full day of the strike, the stage was set for a two week battle which was characterised by threats to close the factory.

photo: police arrive at the factory gate

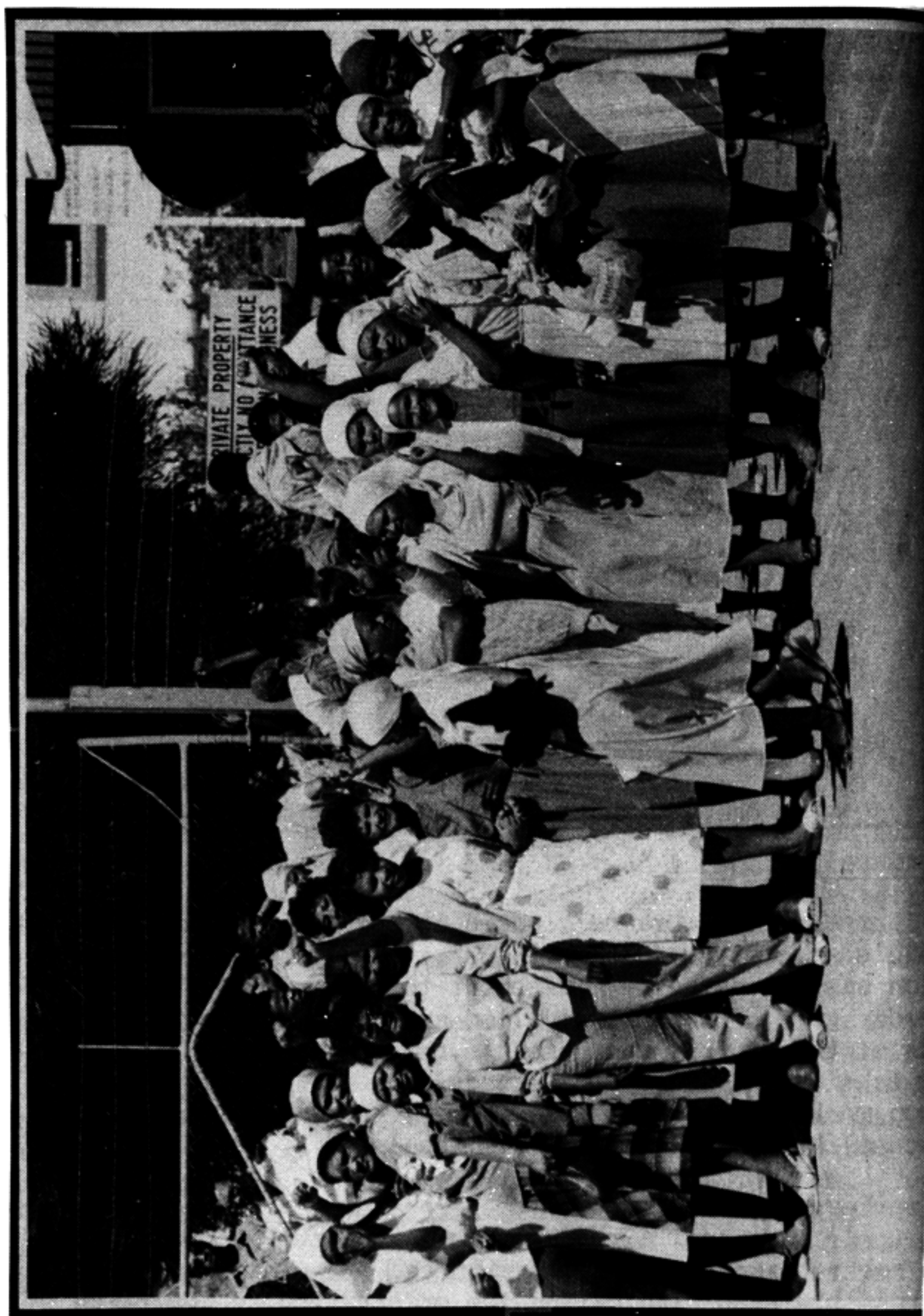


### Dismissal

On Thursday 7th, workers clocked in but again refused to work. SAAWU's attempt to talk to the shop stewards failed and the union was requested by management to leave. (16) Throughout the day groups of workers milled around discussing the progress of the strike; management's intransigence and the growing tension between union members and the minority of non-union members. At lunchtime, workers held a mass meeting to discuss the rumours of mass dismissals.

As workers left the factory they were handed notices terminating their services. Already visible were the security police who hovered around the factory gates. The management released a press statement indicating its preparation to negotiate wages, but stressing that the company could not meet the R2,00 per hour SAAWU was demanding. The statement added that the re-





employment of Rosslyn workers, previously dismissed because of strike action, could not take place under the present economic conditions. Lastly, they had decided to close the factory because of workers' refusal to work until their demands were met.

### Lockout

On Friday 8 February workers arrived for work, but were not allowed through. Police in private cars watched the scene closely. By 7.30 am. all the workers had arrived; the majority standing near the gate while the rest sat on the opposite side of the road. The lockout by management was designed to pay off workers with the objective of possibly selectively re-employing or recruiting entirely new staff. By 1.00 pm. the workers were joined by a large contingent of uniformed police, carrying teargas and batons. Management called them, "to enable the pay out, scheduled for 3.30 pm, to proceed smoothly."

Workers demanded to see Paverd but he did not make an appearance. Instead they were told to collect their pay packets which included a pamphlet informing them that the Continental China factory was closing and where they could be contacted if the factory decided to re-open. One or two strikers went to examine what the pay out entailed. According to their reports each worker was given 2 packets, one containing the wages and holiday money, and the other containing their unemployment card. (17) They decided not to collect their money. As far as they were concerned, they were still employees of Continental China: "We explained to the workers why they should not collect their wages, but some - mainly non-union members - insisted on taking the money," said a worker.

They were, however, in the minority (about 50), but it certainly exacerbated divisions between those committed to the strike and the 4 demands, and those who sympathized, but were not prepared to take the risks. Police tried to silence workers who were giving advice to those who were uncertain of what to do. But workers quickly turned the tables and started questioning police and their role in the strike: "They told us if we don't take our money we should go home or else we were going to get hurt. If we did not listen we would be teargassed," said one agitated worker. And it seemed the threats were serious. On the advice of the union, workers left at 5.30 pm. after deciding to meet the next day to evaluate developments.

- Continental China -

On Saturday the 9th, 400 workers held a meeting at Mfuleni Stadium. They were addressed by veteran trade unionist, Oscar Mpetha, who "encouraged workers to continue the fight for their rights." The purpose of the meeting was to reassure those who were worried about the future and the general uncertainty which prevailed. It was drummed home that "unity was most important at this time." On the whole the meeting was successful in raising spirits again; the mood was confident from the tone of the songs and chants. The song which became a part of the strike reflected workers bitterness at their exploitation, their desire for non-racial worker unity and a better deal. Sung in Afrikaans it was filled with anger:

Daai geld, daai geld is onse geld,  
maar die boere verdien dai geld.  
Hulle sit op hul gat, hulle maak die wette,  
Die "swartes" and die "bruines" werk ewe hard,  
maar die boere verdie daai geld.

[That money, that money is our money  
but the whites (bosses) are earning the money.  
They sit on heir backsides, they make the laws,  
The "Africans" and the "Coloureds" work just as hard  
but the whites (bosses) are earning the money.]

On this high note workers entered the second week of the strike, although anxious to reach a settlement because many were already beginning to feel the financial pinch at home. But everyone was suffering and to complain would only assist the bosses.

On Monday 11 March, negotiations between SAAWU and Continental China were re-opened but according to a SAAWU official, Whittles, "nothing constructive took place ... discussions were up in the air." According to the management press release, SAAWU refused to negotiate before all the workers were re-employed. On the other hand, management was not prepared to re-employ without an agreement that, once re-employed, the people would work. Throughout the day workers sat at the factory gates to ensure that no scab labour was employed. After the negotiations the union reported back to the workers.

The deadlock necessitated much more pressure on management than hitherto, and SAAWU decided to approach prominent community spokespeople like Oscar Mpetha and Allan Boesak to phone or send telegrams to management requesting a speedy settle

ment. But Whittles emphasised that, "we did not rely on them to bring a settlement, but only to add pressure. We could only rely on the unity and strength of the workers." (18) Also approached was the Western Cape Traders Association (WCTA) who threatened the company with a boycott of its products if workers' demands were not met. (19) The initial meeting between Paverd and the WCTA, where the Continental China's books were scrutinised, resulted in Cassiem Allie and Mr H Eshack being asked to act as mediators in the dispute. The WCTA had previously been involved in the Fattis and Moni's boycott, Simba Quix and also Dairy Belle. The organisation, comprising 2,000 small and big traders, is an affiliate of the UDF and according to a spokesperson, "the involvement in boycott campaigns is to flex our buying power in order to drive some sense into the managements' minds."

On 13 March, SAAWU, Continental China, with WCTA as mediators, re-opened negotiations. Pressure on SAAWU to settle was evident as complaints were streaming in to the workers committee: "no bread, no milk ... no food ... my baby needs this or that urgency of the situation but wanted to see how far they could push management. Their hostility was however clear as they refused to accept management's offer of tea and sandwiches because "our brothers and sisters are starving outside." To break the deadlock management made an offer of R1,80 per hour with a 15% minimum increase, but they were not prepared to negotiate on the Rosslyn issue. (20) They insisted that the Blackheath dispute and Rosslyn strike were different and that the issues should be separated. The increase was a significant departure from their previous stance. At face value the wage increase seemed reasonable, but the workers committee first had to report to the workers.

Meanwhile the workers gathered at a Catholic Church Hall in Eerste Rivier where they ironed out differences amongst themselves about the strike. At the meeting were also the non-union members who tried to justify why they took their wages. This discussion and criticism session, followed by union songs, assisted in consolidating unity and brought the non-union members nearer to the rest of the workers. Workers were not happy with management's offer and instead proposed that the wage demand be R1,90 per hour plus 15% minimum increase backdated to 1 March and that strike pay be paid to the workers. They also insisted on the reinstatement of the Rosslyn workers. (21) But

management refused and no settlement was reached on 14 March.

Paverd was throughout the strike in close contact with the Continental China Group chairman and shareholders, but denies he was under pressure to settle. SAAWU met the workers again over the weekend. Although workers wanted all the demands met, the financial pressures at home, the fact that a wage increase was given and the fact that the Blackheath worker sent to train new employees at Rosslyn was to return shortly, were all given serious consideration. Moreover a settlement was imperative if they were not to suffer the same fate as the Rosslyn workers. When negotiations re-opened on Monday 18 March, with WCTA again as mediators, a settlement was reached. The major points of the agreement were:

- \* Re-employment of all employees dismissed on Thursday 7 March with effect from 25 March without loss of pension or service benefits
- \* A minimum rate of R1,80 per hour with a minimum increase of 15% from 1 April 1985. The company undertook to negotiate a further increase to a minimum of R1,90 per hour during August, providing that profits permit
- \* No strike pay will be paid
- \* Workers undertake to work on return
- \* The management and SAAWU agree to negotiate the Rosslyn issue at Rosslyn
- \* Management undertakes to bring back the Blackheath employee from Rosslyn by 25 March. (22)

### Assessment

The strike was not a wholesale victory for the workers. But neither was it a defeat. With 3 of their demands met and the re-instatement of the Rosslyn workers still to be negotiated, they made considerable advances. In recessionary conditions, with high unemployment and rampant inflation, unions involved in strikes require enormous flexibility in their tactics. Protracted and unresolved strikes present management with an opportunity to smash unions. SAAWU's defeat in Rosslyn is a case in point. To adopt a hardline before fully consolidating courts disaster. Under the prevailing conditions pragmatism is necessary to protect and consolidate organisational gains and so as not to discourage the unorganised from joining unions. From reports, many workers in Brits are very cautious of unions since the SAAWU strike at Rosslyn.

Although strikes have not subsided in the recession, the possibility of outright victory for workers is reduced. Concessions are inevitable - as at SASOL and Bakers (23) - as managements try to maintain profit levels and use every excuse to retrench staff. Similarly, SAAWU's handling of the strike at Blackheath was more realistic and sensitive, probably reflecting the sheer pressure from workers - financial commitments, unemployment etc.

The Bakers' Biscuit strike, earlier this year, had two lessons that are relevant here. In a recession particularly, workers' extended families are under greater financial pressure. They need to be informed of the reasons for the action taken, and involved by the union in order to minimise domestic pressures on strikers. Nationally strikes are becoming longer and more bitter. (24) However, it seems that there is a cut off point for workers in terms of the hardship they can endure; and for management the point is reached where costs are such that a more fundamental reorganisation is contemplated, perhaps involving rationalisation beyond the particular plant. In other words a point may be reached where it is essential for the union to reach a compromise if it is to prevent its organisation in the plant being smashed completely.

Whether the threatened boycott by WCTA of Continental China was really a major issue is unclear. Management lost an average of R40,000 per day during the strike. At that rate it meant severe problems for the Group as a whole. A settlement was necessary. Engaging an entirely new workforce would have involved high training costs and would have probably reduced output for months. Had management remained intransigent, it could very well have meant the closure of the factory.

SAAWU has already started organising the other two Continental China plants in Grahamstown and Atlantis. Atlantis and Blackheath have mainly "Coloured" workers and their organisation by SAAWU represents an important departure. SAAWU's strategy in this case - its national organisation of workers in a particular industry - is a major shift from its usual strategy of regional general unionism. Whether this is the exception or the beginnings of a more sustained process of industrial demarcation remains to be seen.

Footnotes:

- 1 Memorandum 1: "Major events in relationship between Continental China and SAAWU", 1984
- 2 Continental China Group, History of growth and company structure, January 1981
- 3 Ibid
- 4 Otto Kramer, "Continental China shapes up for the future", Brief: Industrial Ceramics Vol 2, 1984, pp6-8
- 5 Ibid
- 6 Continental China, Leaders in the tableware market, brochure 1984
- 7 Interview 22.3.85: Otto Kramer, industrial engineer, technical director of Continental China Group
- 8 The Management disagree that the work process has any major occupational or industrial hazards
- 9 Memorandum 1
- 10 Ibid
- 11 Ibid
- 12 Interview 22.3.85: Bill Paverd
- 13 Continental China, press release 6.2.85
- 14 SAAWU is organising generally and this is likely to cause problems later especially if they move into industries organised by the "unity unions"
- 15 Continental China, press release 7.3.85
- 16 Memorandum 2: "Major events in the relationship between Continental China Blackheath and SAAWU"
- 17 Cape Herald 11.3.85
- 18 Boesak did send a telegram
- 19 Interview 22.3.85: Cassiem Allie, secretary of the WCTA
- 20 Memorandum 2
- 21 Ibid
- 22 Continental China, press release 18.3.85 and Cape Herald 23.3.85
- 23 See SALB 10.5, March-April 1985
- 24 RDM Business Day 11.3.85

Postscript: On April 10, police arrested 241 dismissed workers picketing outside the Rosslyn plant. They are to be charged with intimidation. SAAWU organiser, Mrs Tshini Mlondo, said the campaign against Continental China had been postponed earlier this year after management indicated a willingness to negotiate the reinstatement of the sacked workers. A boycott campaign is now contemplated.

# New Technology in the Garment Industry

David Kaplan

The whole object of introducing these new machines is to replace operators and to deskill the operation as much as you can

- production manager, Cape Town clothing firm

The manufacture of garments has, until very recently, defied any significant attempts at automation. The industry is highly labour intensive and reliant upon the ubiquitous sewing machine which has undergone only modifications since its invention in 1830. As a result, labour processes in garment making, whether in a large or small plant, whether in advanced capitalist countries or in the Third World, are very similar.

However, under the impact of "microelectronic related innovations" (MRIs), (1) the industry is presently undergoing significant changes. Moreover, there are indications of far more fundamental changes in the near future. This article briefly outlines how microelectronics is affecting changes within the garment industry internationally and, in more detail, the South African garment industry and suggests some likely future developments. The central concern is with the factors affecting the diffusion of microelectronic technology and the implications of this technology for employment and job content.

## I Microelectronics and the production process in garment manufacturing

The production process in garment manufacturing can be divided into the following stages: (2)

the design and engineering stage includes the preparation of working drawings; the choosing of designs; costing and specification of how the cloth is to be cut and the garment manufactured. A variety of MRIs are available to aid these activities. Pattern design systems (PDS) allow designing to take place on a computer screen. This can be integrated with "product costing" packages which generate immediate costings for



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all the different design configurations. Other packages generate optimum "cut order planning" and "production scheduling";

the pre-assembly stage entails generating a set of graded patterns corresponding to the different sizes and fits from the master pattern (pattern grading); arranging the pattern parts on the material so as to minimise cloth usage (marker making); laying out the material on a cutting table (spreading) and finally cutting. Computerised processes are available for all these different activities. Moreover, computer aided grading and marking have been successfully integrated with computerised cutting. MRIs have had their most significant impact upon the labour process in this stage;

the assembly stage includes the transporting of cut cloth to the operator; the joining together of the different cut pieces and small parts assembly (eg. pockets, belt loops); and finally pressing, inspection and packaging. There are computerised processes available for all these different activities. Given the concentration of employment in sewing activities (typically two-thirds of total factory employment), there is a correspondingly strong incentive to computerise.

## II The international garment industry and the diffusion of MRIs

There has been a pronounced relocation of garment making internationally. The industry has experienced steady, and in some cases, spectacular declines within the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries and a concomitant rise within some LDCs (Less Developed Countries) - notably the Asian NICs (Newly Industrialised Countries), especially Hong Kong and South Korea. (3) The comparative advantage enjoyed by the latter countries is, of course, almost wholly a result of cheaper wage rates. MRIs, since they economise on labour and utilise skills and capital in short supply in LDCs, have been seen by many to be the panacea for developed country garment manufacturers, reversing the comparative advantage presently enjoyed by the lower-wage countries.

Since the bulk of wage costs occur in the sewing operations, microelectronic automation here is seen to be vital if large parts of the clothing industry are to be viable within the developed countries. Automated sewing machines are being aggr

ressively marketed as ensuring substantial labour savings. Yet MRIs, now fairly widespread in the design and engineering and pre-assembly stages, are only diffusing slowly within the assembly stage. Microelectronic equipment in the assembly stage is still exceptional - in 1980, surveys showed that the percentage of firms using or planning to use MRIs in the US garment industry were below 10% (4)

Why, especially in the context of sharpening international competition, has the garment industry in the developed countries shown such reluctance to adopt the new microelectronic technology? A number of reasons have been advanced, the most important of which are:

(i) the clothing industry is dominated by a very large number of small firms. These firms are often undercapitalised and possess a paternalistic and conservative management which cannot easily assimilate the new technology. There is a problem therefore of affordability and of management assimilation. It is the smaller firms which are particularly slow to adopt new technologies;

(ii) this is an extremely risk-averse industry given pattern and style changes. This is particularly true for small firms, many of whom are sub-contractors to larger firms and who have contracts which are renegotiated every season. They are therefore generally averse to investment with long payback periods and inclined to adopt the conventional sewing machine which is extremely versatile and cheap. The costs of changeover on a microelectronic sewing machine are high since, unlike with metal cutting and forming machines, for example, mechanical changes are also necessary given fabric differences. Short runs, particularly true in fashions, render such changeovers uneconomic;

(iii) there are, of course, technical problems with many of the new innovations. The major problem is in material handling which accounts for a large part of the productive process and determines the labour intensity of the industry. The problems revolve around the use of "limp" fabrics which have hitherto been resistant to mechanical handling methods. Thus, the human operator cannot be easily dispensed with and their continued use sets limits to the productivity of any new machine;

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(iv) the industry has traditionally done very little inhouse research on development - averaging about 0.05% of sales. Thus, very few innovations specifically developed within an operating environment are made available and few resources exist to adapt innovations embodied in new equipment supplied by equipment suppliers to the industry. Also few technical personnel are available to clothing industries who might adequately evaluate the potential of new technologies;

(v) the equipment suppliers who have generated most of the technical changes in the industry in the form of new machinery have, given the overall structure of demand, been slow to introduce fundamental innovations. They have also been slow to incorporate the new microelectronic technology in the equipment they supply since their expertise is primarily in mechanical engineering. They have tended to favour incremental changes in existing models. This is compounded by the fact that parts and servicing represent a large part of sales and would be threatened by complete obsolescence of product lines.

But there are definite indications that the situation is beginning to change. Firstly, there is evidence of a growing importance within the industry of large firms - this for a variety of reasons, but also linked precisely to their more rapid take-up of the new technologies which offer substantial productivity improvements. The growing importance of large firms thus both reflects and encourages the diffusion of MRIs. Secondly, the technical problems of material handling are not insuperable. A large number of private and some semi-governmental research efforts are now being directed at resolving this problem and important incremental changes are already reducing material handling costs substantially. Although there are many technical problems in handling limp fabrics, as opposed to metals, these are not seen to be insuperable and robotic handling is seen to be likely in the very near future. (5) Thirdly, as the pace of change quickens, there are indications that more in-house R & D is being done, more personnel with technical expertise are being brought into the clothing industry and MRIs which grow out of an operating environment within the industry are becoming more widely available. Finally, a number of firms with experience of MRIs in other sectors are now directing attention at the clothing industry while the traditional equipment suppliers to the industry are rapidly acquiring expertise in the area of microelectronics.

### III The South African garment industry and the diffusion of MRIs

In 1981, there were 1,141 firms in the clothing industry employing 127,124 persons - 8.66% of employment in all South African manufacturing industry. The ethnic composition of the labour force was 5% White, 23% Asian, 33% African and 38% Coloured. (6)

The industry is, as elsewhere in the world, highly labour intensive - involving an investment of R6,000 - R7,000 per job. Thus it is a haven for the small employer and concentration ratios are generally far higher here than in other sectors of manufacturing industry. However, there are a number of larger firms within the industry and their importance within the industry seems to be growing. In 1976 there were 34 firms out of a total of 1,220 which employed more than 500 workers (2,7% of the total firms in the industry) - they accounted for 32,3% of total industry employment. In 1979 there were 42 firms out of 1,304 which employed more than 500 workers (3,22% of the total firms in the industry) - they accounted for 37% of total industry employment. Similarly, the number of firms whose gross output exceeded R4m has increased in importance within the industry.

According to the National Productivity Institute, labour productivity has been improving - in cutting by 15% since 1977, sewing of bulk products such as shirts by 31% since 1976, ladies fashions 18%, men's trousers 8% and men's jackets only 1%. (8) Much of the improvement in productivity is probably due to better capacity utilisation and better application of existent techniques. However, it is also likely that MRIs have already had a significant effect on productivity, even though their diffusion has been limited, particularly in the assembly stage. (9)

The evidence on MRIs within the South African garment industry presented below is drawn from interviews. (10) With the exception of MRIs in the pre-assembly stage, where it was possible to obtain exact information, (11) the data below should be seen as indicative of trends rather than a precise tabulation.

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(1) Design and engineering

Pattern Design Systems (PDS) allow the designer to utilise a database of patterns and/or instantly modify any existent pattern. PDS uses the same equipment as required for computerised grading and marking. Although 13 South African firms now have computerised grading and marking (see below), none utilises PDS. Utilising the computer as an aid in product costing is more widespread, but computerised cut order planning and production scheduling are still not universal, even among the medium and larger firms. The prime incentive to adopt PDS is to improve the productivity of pattern designers. The principal advantages of PDS are:

- (a) saves cardboard piece cutting
- (b) instant modification of designs
- (c) storage of designs
- (d) can be linked to an automatic costing of patterns.

The greater speed with which new patterns can be generated and existent patterns modified allows for a substantial reduction in lead times - extremely important in fashion.

However, there are two major problems. First, technical problems with the software which is very complex and second as a result of the unwillingness of designers to work on PDS. A production manager explained:

The problem is deeper than the software. There has always been resistance from the design side. These designers have, or should I say create, their own mysteries. They're a bunch of arty crafty people and they simply don't get on well with computers. In the UK where I worked, we had bloody sabotage there.

The "solution" advanced presently is for the designer to remain designing on a screen, with a newly created "post", viz. a pattern engineer entering the designs on the system. South Africa has hitherto lacked pattern engineers. Moreover, to a considerable extent, South African firms have simply copied overseas designs. Thus, those firms which have computerised grading and marker making systems (see below) have found it more beneficial to utilise their systems solely to produce markers. However, as pattern engineers are trained and as the software improves, PDS is very likely to "take-off" in the South African clothing industry. Of the firms interviewed,

three said that they were seriously thinking of introducing PDS within the next year.

Since, in South Africa, information regarding the garment is not generated in digital format at the design phase - which would allow automatic costing of the different design configurations - where the computer is utilised in costing, it simply performs the role of a sophisticated calculator. Computer analysis of orders, and the translation of these orders into an optimal cutting programme, is now undertaken by a number of the larger firms. Computerised production scheduling is more widespread. According to one of the principal firms which designs in-house programmes, production scheduling, of varying degrees of sophistication, has become commonplace with large and medium sized firms and is now utilised by a number of smaller firms. Computers here function primarily as managerial aids altering cutting and production schedules rather than affecting the labour process per se.

## (2) Pre-assembly

Computerised grading and marker making systems have been purchased by 13 firms in the South African garment industry. The information generated in grading and marker making is in digital format and can therefore be linked directly to the cutting operation. However, only two South African firms have integrated their grading and marker making systems with a micro-electronic cutter. Automated spreading machines are far more widespread and are now utilised by most of the medium and large sized companies.

The prime incentive to adopt a computerised grading and marker making system is fabric saving. Fabric saving comes about for a number of reasons including:

- (a) greater accuracy and a lighter and neater marker
- (b) ease of manipulation of the marker on a screen rather than on a long table
- (c) easier adjustment for variations in material width and imperfections
- (d) only one cut line required.

The extent of the fabric saving varies considerably according to a number of factors but particularly according to the type of product and the system in operation prior to the introduc-

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tion of computerised grading and marker making. The responses of firms interviewed are summarised in column 1 of Table I. For a firm with a fabric turnover in excess of say R10m per annum, a saving of 2% will allow for a payback period of one year on an initial investment of some R200,000. (12) (Of course, the issue is much more complicated than this, there being, on the one side, many additional costs - of maintenance, servicing, updates, retraining of staff and a lengthy learning period, to name only the most important (13) - and, on the other side, other potential benefits - principally reductions in labour costs.)

Labour saving - see column 2 of Table I - is certainly an important factor. In every case interviewed, the number of markers and graders had been substantially reduced after computerisation. However, for the manufacturer, this is a secondary motivation and of less significance than the saving in fabric. Wage rates in South Africa, by comparison with those prevailing in the advanced countries, are low, while, again by comparison, material costs are high. In the proportions of labour to material costs, South African garment manufacturers lie somewhere between the developed countries and the Asian NICs. (14) Whereas the primary motivation overseas is often said to be labour displacement, in South Africa it is fabric saving. In each of the firms interviewed, purchase of the grading and marker making system had been cost-justified in terms of potential fabric savings.

Reductions in sewing costs through greater efficiency of the marker and the rapid turnaround time, given that modifications to existent patterns can be automatically regraded on the system, are important additional advantages secured. The large clothing firms in South Africa tend to produce for a wide spectrum of the market, largely as a consequence of the restricted size of the market overall. The greater variety of the final product and hence the greater variety of grading and marker making required, places a particular premium on rapid turnaround time in these operations. In every case the grading and marker making system was producing a very wide variety of output, and thus some of the diseconomies of non-specialisation were reduced.

Purchase of the computerised grading and marker making system is strongly correlated therefore with firm size and especially

TABLE I: BENEFITS OF THE MICROELECTRONIC GRADING AND MARKER MAKING SYSTEM: RESPONSES OF SIX FIRMS INTERVIEWED

Company Specified by Principal Product	(1) Extent of Fabric Saving	(2) Extent of Labour Saving	(3) Time Taken to Make a Marker	(4) Other Advantages
1. Ladies' Outerwear	3-4%	20 graders, now reduced to 6 15 markers, now reduced to 4	Varies - but generally less than one-quarter of the time required previously	Accuracy. Rapid turnaround time essential
2. Men's Outerwear	2%	56 markers, now reduced to 8	Suit markers reduced to less than one-seventh of the time taken previously	Rapid turnaround time. Introduced a night shift so reducing overtime
3. Fashion Shirts Briefs T Shirts	2-3% 10% ,8%	Markers and Graders reduced by four-fifths	-	Abolition of the skill factor: markers and graders in short supply in border area where located
4. Men's Trousers	2,5%	Markers and Graders reduced by one-third	Average reduced from 4 hours to half-an-hour	Reduction in turnaround time especially important in modifying designs
5. Men's and Women's Outerwear	2-4%	Markers reduced from 20 to 2. Saving on graders cannot be assessed since they run a "bureau" for a number of factories in the group	-	-
6. Full range of outerwear	1-3%	Markers and graders reduced by one-half and volume of production doubled	-	2 shift working Savings on the factory floor



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fabric turnover. The key lies in the relationship between fabric price and the price of the system. While fabric prices are unlikely to fall, the systems are certainly coming down in price. The reduction in system prices will continue for two major reasons. Firstly, the growing sophistication of the "chip" is leading to a constant reduction in the prices of electronic components. Secondly, specific to this product, up to fairly recently a single company, Gerber Garment Technology, (GGT) a subsidiary of Gerber, has had something of a world-wide monopoly after buying out their major rivals, CAMSCO, some years ago. A number of new firms are now entering the market, and this is forcing a reduction in price.

Thus far, marker-grader systems have only been purchased by firms with large fabric turnovers and few of the 1,300 plus garment manufacturers are in this category. However, as the price of the systems fall, demand will increase substantially as the much more numerous clothing producers, located in the medium fabric turnover spectrum of the market, will be able to justify the purchase.

The electronic cutter is similarly a product of GGT. The cutter was invented in 1968 and is said to be between 3 and 8 times as fast as a manual. The key advantages of the cutter are:

- (a) saving in labour costs. This is the key factor. Comes about through a substantial reduction in the number of cutters required - typically 3 were said to do what a dozen were doing previously - and a deskilling of the cutter's job which is now largely reduced to that of monitoring;
- (b) quality of cutting. The cutter has a sensor and a self-correct to the angle of the knife so that all pieces are exactly cut. This is not so with manual cutting. The greater accuracy of the cut product results in productivity savings in the sewing operations since cutting accuracy leaves no doubt as to the sewing path required. Productivity rises for sewing operatives has been considerable;
- (c) cloth saving. Comes about through greater cutting accuracy as the seam allowance can be exactly specified whereas with manual cutting a "margin" had to be left for manual cutting error. Likely to be 1% or less.

The cutter is extremely expensive and not all operations can be electronically cut. Initial costs are well in excess of

R500,000. With relatively few cutters being employed in a plant (although cutters have always been amongst the highest paid operatives in a factory) and with low wages prevailing for sewing labour, there are few South African firms that can justify expenditure on a cutter. The limited number of long-runs makes for less heavy lays and this reduces the advantages of electronic cutting. Production for a wide spectrum of the market means that there are a number of very short-runs which are more economically cut by hand.

However, once again, the price of the cutter is likely to fall substantially in the near future. GGT have ensured their monopoly with a series of patents. The most crucial of these - covering the vacuum compressor system coupled with the bristled cutting table surface - expires in 1986, and all the indications are that a large number of suppliers are waiting to enter the market. In any case, GGT has only registered patents in 5 key countries and a competitor has emerged - a Spanish company which is selling locally a similar product including the vacuum compressor and bristled cutting table surface (since GGT patents do not cover South Africa) at a lower price. Again, the net effect must be to increase market penetration very substantially.

Automatic spreading machines are now widely used in the larger factories. The advantages are fabric saving, due to exact positioning and tensing of the fabric, and particularly labour saving since, even with aids such as flotation tables, manual spreading is labour intensive. However, they are confined to the larger factories with large fabric turnovers and even here manual spreading is still frequently resorted to particularly where short-runs make manual spreading more economic. Manual spreading also has the advantage of allowing simultaneous fault detection in the material and the consequent reorganisation of the marker. The development of computerised fault detection systems integrated with computerised spreading systems is now under way and their successful development should do much to facilitate future diffusion of automated spreading. (15)

### (iii) Assembly

While MRIs in the South African garment industry are utilised in only limited numbers in sewing and pressing, and not at all in transport and handling, the potential significance here is

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enormous. Firstly, unlike design and engineering where systemisation is the key incentive to use MRIs in the assembly stage it is overwhelmingly a reduction in unit labour costs. Secondly, it is with respect to the assembly operations, especially sewing, that the major efforts are now being made to advance microelectronic automation.

Once the material pieces have been cut, like pieces are tied together and manually transported to the required operator. However, a computerised overhead rail system is now available which moves the individual pieces, placed in baskets or on a hanger, automatically, to the most appropriate location. The computer simultaneously monitors the performance of each operator so that it is able to ensure that the operator only receives material pieces which require the operation at which he/she is most proficient. Similarly, the operator receives only pieces that accord with the colour thread being utilised at the time. Finally, the computer can provide an immediate statement of an operator's efficiency relative to some standard allowance and the corresponding running total of an operator's output.

Thus, utilisation of a computerised rail enormously facilitates a piece wages system. Almost every employer interviewed spoke of the introduction of a piece wages system in the South African garment industry as a prerequisite for any substantial increase in productivity on the factory floor. Secondly, the overhead rail will generate substantial savings in work-in-progress - throughput time may be reduced by as much as 85%.

A number of such systems are now employed in Europe and the USA. (16) As yet, as far as could be ascertained, only one South African company - a producer of lingerie - has an overhead rail on order. A medium sized manufacturer of ladies outerwear is seriously considering installation and is being encouraged to do so by its overseas parent which has a number already in operation. According to one of the suppliers, a number of South African companies have made enquiries and are considering purchase. The system is, however, currently expensive - approximately \$5,000 per work station.

There are a wide range of automatic and semi-automatic pressing machines - many of which are computer controlled. Some of the most sophisticated handle several garments simultaneously

and pressing is done against an air balloon representing the human shape. The operator selects a number of process variables which are generally specified on the production ticket.

The job is thus almost completely deskilled. Labour saving has been assessed at about 50%. (17) A number of factories visited had automatic pressing equipment. This was especially true of the large factories and of those producing men's trousers. Not all pressing is automated - particular garments and touch-ups are still performed manually and the old hand-held iron is to be seen alongside the most modern presses. The key motivation is labour saving and, to a lesser extent, quality improvements. Most of the pressers are men earning higher wages, whereas sewing is exclusively a female preserve. The presses are expensive - upward of R25,000 each, but demand is definitely increasing.

Assessment of the potential impact of the MRIs on the sewing operation necessitates a brief summary of the position that has prevailed hitherto. (18) Up to now, technical change has been primarily incremental - modifications of the sewing machine rather than any fundamental technical transformation. Sewing speeds have been greatly increased; work aids have been developed to facilitate material handling and some small parts assembly has been mechanised by the development of dedicated machines performing more than one operation. MRIs have generally tended to follow the same path of incremental change.

There are three types of microelectronic applications in sewing. First, dedicated machines utilising dedicated microprocessors to control operations such as small parts assembly or repetitive sewing, eg. belt loop attachers or pocket welters. Second, preprogrammable convertible machines which convert conventional machines to different sewing tasks by use of preprogrammable data input devices. Third, operator programmable machines whereby the operator undertakes the required operation manually and at the same time programmes the machine functions required to perform the operation, eg. raise presser foot, back tack, etc. These instructions are converted into an optimum sewing programme that can be exactly repeated.

The productivity gains through using MRIs in sewing are substantial - of the order of 45% on average. (19) However, MRIs are more inflexible than conventional machines. Thus, product-

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ivity gains are often offset by the need for greater flexibility. In addition, MRIs are far more expensive than their conventional equivalents, of the order of magnitude of 5-7 times. Moreover, the total range of activities for which MRIs are currently available is still very limited. A recent survey of firms in Europe and the US found that the largest number of electronically controlled machines in any individual firm amounted to only 6% of the total number of machines. (20)

In South Africa MRIs for sewing operations are to be seen in all of the medium and large sized factories but, as yet, in relatively small quantities. They are to be found where firms have high volumes and repetitive styles and in certain basic lines such as men's shirts and trousers. For example, at a clothing factory in Tongaat which produces a wide variety of mens' and womens' wear, and is in the trade recognised as the most automated and modern in South Africa, a number of such machines were in evidence but mostly in mens' trousers and shirts. In some cases there was only one operator feeding up to three machines. The company is planning to set up their own R and D department to examine new automation techniques and how they could be applied within the factory. One of the largest clothing firms in the Cape, producing primarily mens' outerwear, has automatic embroidery machines, a few electronic machines for stitching sleeves and automatic pocket flap attaching machines on every jacket production line. Another large Cape factory, producing a wide range of clothing, has most of its automated machines on the trouser floor which is now quite highly automated. Elsewhere they have pre-programmed machines to stretch a sleeve and a number on order, and a small number of dedicated MRIs to do pocket setting and some other functions. The middle sized companies tend to have fewer MRIs. One Cape company making ladies' outerwear has two new machines which can be programmed to do operations such as tacking. Another Cape company making work and leisure wear had only very recently acquired its first MRI - an automatic pocket setter.

In every case where MRIs have been introduced, the principle motivation has been labour saving. This accords with findings abroad. The extent of saving clearly varies with the operation in question. The automatic pocket setter, acquired by the Cape company making work and leisure wear in the example above, will be replacing six pocket setters. This appears to be the

average for the dedicated machines which combine more than one operation. Labour saving on other MRIs is more difficult to calculate for the one machine/one operator configuration is generally retained.

Apart from labour displacement, the introduction of MRIs is generally accompanied by a process of deskilling. The operator's role is confined to starting the operation and feeding in the material. According to the Chief Mechanic at one of the largest Cape factories: "On our electronic machines the girl only introduces the material and switches on. As far as craft goes, it does not come into it anymore". The authoritative Bobbin Magazine, surveying mechanised sewing machines, stipulates the category of operator required and in the vast majority of cases, this is "low skilled". (21) The lower level of skill required and the consequently shorter training period involved is seen by employers here as a considerable advantage for labour turnover rates are very high - on the factory floor, as much as 100% per annum in some cases.

The presence of MRIs in the sewing process is likely to increase. Firstly, more machines are being developed covering more operations. Secondly, these machines are becoming more proficient as new advances are made in microelectronics and, very importantly, more flexible, necessitating less expensive changeovers. Thirdly, and most significantly, there are indications that microelectronics will generate radical technological changes which will fundamentally alter the process of material handling and sewing. Robotic feeding and single machines which combine more and more operations for example, are increasingly being introduced. But, even more radical breakthroughs are possible in the near future. There are a number of important research projects currently under way which aim at the development of far more mechanised plants where human labour plays a minimal role in direct production. (22) South African garment manufacturers will not remain unaffected by these developments. Most companies interviewed stated that they were planning to increase their use of MRIs on the factory floor in the near future and many had new machines on order. According to suppliers, demand for MRIs was increasing steadily - mostly on the part of the larger factories.

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#### IV Factors affecting the further diffusion of MRIs in the South African garment industry

There are a number of factors, local and international, affecting the rate at which microelectronic technology will diffuse within the South African garment industry in the near future.

Firstly, there is the question of labour costs. Although, with respect to applications in design and engineering and pre-assembly, labour saving is not the key motivation, it is still significant - especially in pre-assembly. In assembly, labour saving is the overwhelming motive. Microelectronic automation is increasingly being referred to as the employers' answer to rising wages and/or worker militancy. However, microelectronic automation has advanced in the clothing industry in a situation in which strikes have been virtually non-existent and where, in many cases, real wages have been falling. In fact, with respect to pre-assembly where MRIs have advanced most rapidly, markers, graders and cutters have, over the last decade, experienced reductions in real wages of between 16 and 18% - the highest for any of the categories covered by Industrial Council determinations for the clothing industry. Any substantial increase in wages for sewing operatives will speed the pace of microelectronic automation in the assembly stage.

In one respect though, microelectronic automation may indirectly preserve some existent jobs, since it makes it less likely that clothing firms will relocate to the border areas/Bantustans. According to manufacturers interviewed, the new computerised grading and marking systems place a premium on skills which are virtually non-existent in these areas. This is particularly true of maintenance for delays in service or breakdowns can be enormously costly. Moreover, MRIs generally, and in the assembly operations in particular, reduce the overall labour input which is the primary attraction of these areas, as far as clothing manufacturers are concerned. This will strengthen the attraction of the established urban areas overall, or alternatively lead, as already has occurred in a number of cases, (24) to a situation where the less labour intensive operations in design and engineering and pre-assembly are located in the "white" urban areas and the more labour intensive processes of assembly, in which heavy reliance upon sewing operatives will continue for some time, are located in the border areas/Bantustans. Just as microelectronics will decisively

affect the international location of industry, so too will it affect the location of industrial activity within South Africa.

Secondly, the factor which has both impeded the introduction of microelectronics generally into manufacturing industry in the advanced countries and simultaneously shaped its final configuration and application, is the reaction of workers whose jobs are affected. In South Africa, MRIs have, thus far, affected relatively few workers in the clothing industry and often those who possess skills which are in short supply and who can therefore find alternative employment. Resistance has thus been muted and where it has surfaced, it has generally been individualised. If, as is being suggested here, succeeding stages of microelectronic automation affect a much larger number of operatives, this might elicit a very different and more organised response. In the clothing industry specifically a number of managerial persons interviewed reported some unhappiness with the introduction of microelectronic grading and marker making systems and cutters, but not on any serious scale that might have delayed implementation. This lack of resistance is partly to be explained by the absence of any combative organised union presence throughout the industry, but also that since all of those introducing such systems were dynamic and growing companies, they were able to relocate any displaced workers to other functions in the factory. "Nobody will lose their jobs" is the persistent message given to workers affected prior to the system's introduction.

However, as microelectronic technology advances in the South African clothing industry into more labour intensive activities and spheres, particularly as this starts to alter labour requirements and job content on the factory floor, and also as this technology is diffused to smaller and less rapidly expanding firms, such relocation becomes much less likely. Might technological change be at least one element in advancing a more combative worker organisation in the industry?

Thirdly, as noted earlier, large garment manufacturers are tending to become more predominant in the South African garment industry. (25) This may well accelerate with the more widespread diffusion of microelectronic technology and also a consequence of tie-ups between manufacturing firms and large retail outlets. Since it is overwhelmingly the larger firms who adopt MRIs this will facilitate their further diffusion.



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The fourth factor is the effect that the new technology will have upon the competitiveness of the South African garment industry in its existent markets. Presently the industry is primarily directed at the local market where it is overwhelmingly predominant, imports averaging about 5% of local sales. (See Table II) Unlike the NICs, South Africa has not succeeded, except in a few cases, in building up a substantial export market in garments.

TABLE II: SALES, IMPORTS AND EXPORTS OF WEARING APPAREL

Rm Sales*	Imports**	Exports**	Year
1 378,6	74,5	27,0	1981
1 441,0	69,8	28,0	1982

\* Figures for Wearing Apparel except footwear

\*\* Figures for Chapter 61 viz. Articles of Apparel and Clothing Accessories of Textile, Fabric excluding knitted or crocheted goods.

SOURCES: Bulletin of Statistics. Quarter ended March, 1984;  
Foreign Trade Statistics for Calendar Year 1982.

The preservation of the domestic market for local manufacturers has, since the industry's inception, been heavily dependent on tariff protection. There are indications that the government may be preparing to reduce tariffs - and indeed this has already occurred, in some cases. Were there to be a substantial reduction in tariffs and a corresponding increase in imports from the NICs, this might further encourage local manufacturers to invest more heavily in the new technology. The lower wages of the NICs and especially the newer entrants to clothing exports such as mainland China, as compared to South Africa, might be offset by reliance locally on more capital intensive labour processes.

A final local factor of significance is that virtually all machinery related to the garment industry is imported. There is very little local production of conventional equipment and none at all of microelectronic equipment. The size of the South African market does not warrant local production and, as a consequence, diffusion of MRIs will depend upon the

availability of foreign exchange and the Rand exchange rate.

But, it is likely to be the international factors which ultimately exercise the determining influence upon the process of technical change in the South African garment industry. The vastly more productive potential of microelectronic automated factories may leave little cost-effective choice of technique.

It is already clear that the pace of technical change is rapidly picking up momentum in the industry. This is resulting in a wider field of application for microelectronics in the clothing industry in addition to lower prices, more powerful and flexible products and products specifically developed in an operating environment. All this must exercise a profound effect and accelerate the diffusion of microelectronic technology. While the factors limiting diffusion remain powerful and predictions as to the precise rate of diffusion are necessarily questimates, (26) the advance of microelectronics within the South African garment industry is certain, bearing with it major implications for employment and job content.(27)

Footnotes:

- 1 This is a broad term encompassing all computerised applications in industry: K Hoffman and H Rush, Microelectronics and clothing. The impact of technical change on a global industry, MS April 1984, forthcoming
- 2 Hoffman and Rush, Microelectronics: I have leant heavily on this very recent study, particularly as regards developments within the clothing industry abroad
- 3 Developing country exports of clothing increased from \$1,362m in 1970 to \$14,674m in 1980. About 60% originated from Hong Kong and South Korea whose per annum increase in clothing exports in the 1970s was 21% and 30% respectively: Hoffman and Rush, Microelectronics, p2-8
- 4 American Apparel Manufacturers Association, Using the computer in apparel manufacturing, AAMA TAC Report, Arlington VA, 1980: quoted in Hoffman and Rush, Microelectronics, p5-45
- 5 "The next breakthrough will be in robotics ... and it will certainly come within the next two to ten years", John Hurrell, technical executive, Marks and Spencer in Apparel International 6.1, July 1984, p36. In a recent talk in Cape Town entitled "Automating the Clothing Factory - Why, How and When", the President of Gerber Garment Technology,

David R Pearl, said that he foresaw that robotics for positioning and placing of materials will be possible for a wide variety of processes in the very near future and that the fully automated factory would be possible even before the end of this decade: Apparel Machinery and Technology Exhibition, Cape Town, 13 June 1984

- 6 Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Textile and Clothing Industries, The policy of protection in regard to textiles and clothing, GP No.3/1983, p21
- 7 Calculated from Industrial Census data
- 8 Cited in Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Textile and Clothing Industries (1983), p23
- 9 Recording a significant increase in productivity in the South African clothing industry, the National Productivity Institute noted that "In the Cape Town area, the introduction of computer technology and the investment in sophisticated capital equipment played a significant role": Cape Argus 12 January 1982
- 10 Interviews were carried out with 10 firms in the clothing industry - 7 in the Western Cape and 3 in Natal and Transvaal - which were known to have utilised MRIs. Seven of the firms had computerised grading and marker making systems and two of these had the computerised cutter. All firms were large or medium sized - the smallest had 750 workers. Interviews were in-depth and partially structured and, where possible, combined with a tour of the plant. In addition, 5 of the principal equipment suppliers were interviewed as well as one computer consultant specialising in the industry. All interviewed were unanimous that it was the larger firms that were the principal users of MRIs
- 11 Data was obtained from suppliers
- 12 The approximate starting price of a single system of one work station including the costs of installation
- 13 The learning period is particularly crucial since it can take up to 6 months before any usable output is generated and 2 - 2,5 years before the system is fully operational and the operators have truly mastered it: interviews
- 14 Breakdown of Variable Costs of US, Asian and South African Garment Producers (%)

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	<u>US</u>	<u>Asian NICs</u>	<u>South Africa</u>
Material	60	85	70
Labour	40	15	30

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SOURCES: Figures for US and Asian NICs are for "typical US and Asian producers 1980", Hoffman and Rush, Microelectronics, p3-20. Figures for South Africa are an average for the apparel industry as a whole, derived from the industrial census data for 1979

- 15 Hoffman and Rush, Microelectronics, 4.44-4.51
- 16 At least two large clothing manufacturers - Eton Shirts in the US and Indycos in Spain - have developed their own rail systems. The writer visited the Indycos factory in Madrid. The sewing operatives on the overhead rail complained of the greater isolation since the descending rail largely cuts them off from the other operatives, and the pressure of work. On the other hand, as a result of their greater output on a piece wage system, most had higher earnings
- 17 Hoffman and Rush, Microelectronics, p5-51
- 18 Drawn from Hoffman and Rush, Microelectronics, chapter 5
- 19 *ibid* p5-24
- 20 *ibid* p5-29
- 21 Bobbin Magazine May 1982, p186
- 22 One of the most significant of these is under way in Japan. The Japanese government has committed more than \$53m to a project in which 27 Japanese companies, including the largest clothing, textile and equipment manufacturers are cooperating to build a highly automated clothing plant. At the centre will be a machining/sewing centre incorporating a dummy model against which the pieces of cloth will be clamped by a robot and where sewing operations will be done by a computer-controlled three-dimensional sewing head
- 23 The data for the Cape Clothing industry show Head Cutter (-18.1%), Pattern Maker (-18.1%), Pattern Grader (-17%) and Cutter/Laymaker (-16.3%) as the four operative grades with the greatest percentage decreases over the decade: D Budlender, D Hendry & G Young, Industrial council wage rates: a comprehensive analysis of minimum wage rates set by South Africa's industrial councils, SALDRU, 1984, p83-5
- 24 Information obtained from interviews. Some of the companies had factories in the border areas/Bantustans
- 25 A very large number of factories in the industry are extremely small CMT (cut, make and trim) operations, making up garments for the larger firms or retailers. For a variety of reasons, related to production and marketing, the larger factories have been finding it increasingly advantageous to produce more within the firm and to contract

out less work

- 26 The most detailed study of the international garment industry, concludes that the rate of diffusion of MRIs over the next decade will slowly pick up speed. By the mid-1990s, the type of technology coming on to the market will change towards more total manufacturing systems and these will diffuse rapidly: Hoffman and Rush, Microelectronics, pp7-46
- 27 The Chairman's Report presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Textile and Clothing Advisory Council held in Cape Town on September 5th 1984 provides strong confirmation of the growing trend towards automated processes in the garment industry:  
'Regrettably for our country, I do not see our industries postured for the 90s and the 21st century as making a significant contribution to the provision of new jobs. Those of us who will remain in business in clothing and textiles will be high technology, highly sophisticated and automated industries moving into the capital rather than labour intensive sector'.

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## WORKING WOMEN

A Portrait of South Africa's black women workers

Text and photographs by  
Lesley Lawson

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# Mass Dismissals on the Mines: the Workers' Story

Marcel Golding\*



The dismissal of about 17,000 black miners in the Western Transvaal in April this year was the largest action of its kind in South African history. (1) More than 14,000 workers from Vaal Reefs Exploration and Mining Company, owned by Anglo American Corporation, and 3,000 from Hartebeesfontein Gold Mining Company, owned by Anglo-Vaal, were fired on the weekend of April 26 to 28.

The workers, all members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), were bused back to the homelands and neighbouring states after a protracted struggle of 4 months. It was a major setback for the union - numerically the entire South Division was depleted and the shaft stewards committee smashed - whilst the harassment and victimisation of other shaft stewards in the Vaal Reefs mining complex continues unabated. But this has not broken the spirit or determination of the mineworkers to rebuild their organisation. As one mineworker put it: "They can kill us and remove all our shaft stewards but they will not defeat the union. Because the union is the workers."

While press publicity was given to the dismissals, the violence and brutality which accompanied them went unnoticed: a minimum of 2 dead and hundreds injured. (2) When the public relations department of AAC was approached for comment on deaths and injuries during the weekend of the dismissals, they initially denied any knowledge of either. When presented with some evidence they admitted 2 deaths, but insisted it had nothing to do with the dismissals. Errol Symons, public relations officer explained:

The deaths of 2 Vaal Reefs employees were not related to

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\* My sincere thanks are due to the workers and shaft stewards I interviewed - some 100 in all. In particular the hospitality of Salae Salae and Mahlomola Sefako was appreciated. Cyril Ramaphosa and Manoko Nchwe were as helpful.

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the dismissals. One died of a heart attack and the other in the township of Kanana. A few workers were injured but it was caused among themselves.

This is a classic case of disinformation. Investigations by the SALB revealed that many workers sustained serious injuries. This includes two interviewed workers - one with a bullet wound in the eye, the other with a fractured knee - directly related to the dismissals.

The AAC's head of group industrial relations, Mr Bobby Godsell explained their reasons for the dismissals:

Our motivation in dismissing this very large number of people was guided by one concern only, and that was to prevent any further deterioration of order on the mines ... We involve the police on our mines as a last resort and are conscious that often the involvement of the police means violence. (3)

These liberal sounding phrases mask the real hidden agenda of the mining bosses. While mine unionisation has now become an inescapable fact, the major concern of mining capital is how best to curb and neutralise this growing force in the industry. In particular the NUM has become a thorn in the flesh - its rapid growth and systematic resistance on a range of issues is constantly challenging management prerogatives. The dismissals took place just before the Chamber of Mines wage negotiations and seems a measure designed to bring the NUM into line.

#### Western Transvaal region of the NUM

There are over 78,000 mineworkers in the Western Transvaal - Hartebeesfontein has 15,000; Stilfontein 10,000; Buffelsfontein 10,000 and Vaal Reefs 44,000 - of which the NUM has organised approximately two thirds of the workers. (10) Each of the mines constitutes a branch, except Vaal Reefs where each of the divisions is a branch. In addition, the West Vaal hospital, which employs about 180 professional and general staff, constitutes a branch of the union. Recognition has been obtained at Hartebeesfontein and two divisions of Vaal Reefs, namely East and West. The NUM was on the verge of obtaining recognition at the South division before the dismissals.

The regional committee of the Western Transvaal, comprising 20 shaft stewards, is tightly knit and well disciplined. Co-operation is encouraged and regional struggles have been effectively co-ordinated. The regional committee is extremely independent and in the recent past has fought some of the fiercest battles with mine managements, pioneering ingenious tactics which have served to mobilise, consolidate and raise the consciousness of the mineworkers in the region.

The regional committee has cultivated a disciplined and well-informed shaft steward's movement. Worker control and leadership accountability are emphasised although creative work and initiative are not stifled. Shaft stewards talk endlessly about the union - what it has done for workers not only on the mines but generally in the nearby townships of Kanana and Jouberton. Mineworkers have often been viewed with scepticism but since the arrival of the NUM, and in particular since the militant action by workers, a new sense of confidence has permeated the ranks of miners. As one member explained:

The township people thought we were stupid. They thought that we were scared and did not want to fight for our rights. All this has now changed. They respect us.

It is this spirit of confidence, in the face of intransigent managements and continued victimisation of shaft steward leadership, that is most striking. The struggles at Vaal Reefs are part of a broader resistance waged in the region which has enabled all levels of leadership in the union to internalise lessons and develop coherent strategies which not only build up a specific branch committee but the entire region.

#### VAAL REEFS GOLD MINE

Vaal Reefs was formed in May 1944 to investigate and exploit an area in the Western Transvaal adjacent to the mining area of Western Reefs Exploration and Development Company Ltd, following the discovery there of the Vaal Reef in 1942. (5) Western Reefs, formed in 1933, was also administered by AAC and was involved in the Vaal Reefs company and the demarcation of its mining area in 1953. (6) By 1971, following rationalisation investigations the 2 mines were merged, with Vaal Reefs acquiring the mining assets of Western Reefs and that company becoming a wholly owned subsidiary of Vaal Reefs. (7) Vaal Reefs is today one of the biggest mining complexes in



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the world, in both scale and employment. There are 3 divisions and 10 shafts in Vaal Reefs:

West Division has shafts Nos:	6 with	2,900 miners
	7 with	2,500 miners
	3 with	4,000 miners
	4 with	4,100 miners
East Division has shafts Nos:	2 with	4,000 miners
	1 with	4,500 miners
	5 with	3,000 miners
	10 with	1,500 miners
South Division has shafts Nos:	8 with	12,000 miners
	9 with	6,000 miners

The majority of workers are migrants, housed in single sex hostels located at various shafts. There are 3 married quarters - Umuzimhle Village which houses approximately 1,000 workers and their families; at shaft No. 4 where there are approximately 40 families and at shaft No. 7 where approximately 20 families reside. A small proportion of the mineworkers reside in the black townships of Kanana in Orkney, Jouberton in Klerksdorp and Khuma in Stilfontein. Orkney and Stilfontein are the two mining towns, with Klerksdorp a regional centre. All three towns are heavily dependent on the custom of the mineworkers. Conditions in the hostels are no different to general patterns in the industry. Workers complain about the same things: overcrowding; bad food; no privacy and the indunas. (9)

### Organising begins

Salae Salae, a 29 year old former Vaal Reefs Teba employee, now regional organiser of the NUM in the area, explained how the union got started at the biggest mine in South Africa. Also extremely active since the union's inception, was Mahlomola Sefako, 35 years old with 10 years' experience as a training and development officer. He is the vice-chairman of the region and has been continually victimised by management. At the time of the interview he was appealing against dismissal.

SALB: How did you start organising Vaal Reefs workers?

Salae: I started with 7 workers from shaft No. 6 on October 1, 1982, who said they were prepared to help me. At that stage we organised house by house and very often I was chased away

by the workers. Even though workers insulted me, I kept coming back to them. Management used the indunas and the personnel assistants (PA's) to discourage the workers from joining. Workers thought the union was some type of insurance who wanted to take their money. Workers only paid 10c joining fee and 40c subscription. All they wanted to know was what they would get back. At that stage the union had no transport. I used to hike and use taxis to move from one shaft to the next and it took alot of time. But soon I was able to get a core of workers at various shafts who understood the function of the union.

Conditions were bad, as you know, and it took my colleague and I - 2 to 3 months to mobilise. All we preached was the need for unity and democratically controlled organisation. But that was not sufficient. You had to show in practice what the union is capable of. Unfair dismissals has been, and still is, a major problem. Management abuse their powers. It was this issue that became the major mobiliser. We insisted on workers getting a fair hearing and when I started assisting one worker in getting his job back he told his friends. In this way more people got to know of the union, till the NUM was known in all the corners of the mine.

SALB: What did you do to consolidate the support and structures of the union?

Salae: There were two issues in 1983 which strengthened the workers and developed their confidence in the union. At shaft No. 10, plant operators were paid extremely low wages - approximately R260 per month and were promised increases. But when the time came they were not given them. This resulted in them having a meeting and threatened to take strike action. Management responded at the last moment repaying them all the back pay. The other issue was the Hlobane Collieries' explosion in September 1983. Our head office wrote a pamphlet requesting workers to have a period of silence of 30 minutes. 75% of our members responded at Vaal Reefs. These were important occasions in which workers developed confidence and independence. They served to highlight what unity and the union can do.

SALB: What are the structures at Vaal Reefs?

Salae: By February 1983 we got recognition at the West and East divisions of Vaal Reefs. We have built effective shaft

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steward councils, that is, workers drawn from each job category who represent and are accountable to those workers. Then we have a shaft steward's committee which would have direct negotiations at shaft level. Because of the size of Vaal Reefs each division is a branch so we have at present 2 branches - East and West. All branches are represented on the regional committee which monitors the affairs of the union in the area.

SALB: Often the shaft stewards are accused of being trouble-makers or agitators by management. What do you think of this?

Sefako: Firstly, managements don't seem to understand a fundamental principle of democratic trade unions, that is, that shaft stewards are there to represent the workers and not themselves and there is usually a definite mandate. Secondly, shaft stewards don't control the workers at all. In fact if we do not do as they say we are heavily criticised or even attacked. This was clearly borne out during the 1984 legal strike when we compromised with management. The strike committee had enormous difficulty convincing workers of the need to compromise. While we preached caution the workers wanted to continue the strike until they saw significant wage increases in their pockets. This does not mean the workers are undisciplined or anything like that. It only illustrates that workers know what they want and are prepared to go into action and that shaft stewards can't dictate to workers at all. Our methods of dealing with issues are democratic not the way management acts - with threats of violence to get their way.

SALB: What were the effects of the legal strike on Vaal Reefs and the region?

Sefako: We learned alot and it proved that the union was no pushover, that we definitely had the support of the workers, although at stages after the strike support waned because we did not get all our demands. But the majority of miners began to slowly understand exactly the role of the unions. The union grew rapidly with the strike, but maybe the workers expected too much. On the whole it was an important schooling and prepared us for bigger battles. On a regional level the strike spilled over into Hartbeesfontein and the workers clearly showed where they stood. It assisted us in getting more workers involved in the union.

### Organisation spreads

By mid-1983, 2 divisions of Vaal Reefs mine complex, East and West, had developed effective shaft steward structures. The South division, although it had an interim shaft stewards committee, had not been able to mobilise the majority of workers. It took many more months. In particular the efforts of a young clerk - Nicholas Mkhwanazi, 25 years old - played an important role in getting workers involved in the NUM. Mkhwanazi, a migrant worker, is a good example of a new generation of mine workers: young, extremely articulate, fearless and confident; with a group of his comrades, he set about explaining why a union was important. He explained some of the initial problems in organising the South division:

Mkhwanazi: I worked as a shaft clerk in East division before I was transferred to South division. I arrived in April 1983 and discovered that some of the shaft stewards were not working as hard as they should. They were afraid of whites. They were promised by the whites that if they do not join the NUM they will get promotion. I realised that the NUM is our backbone. Without the union we were like an amoeba without a backbone. From room to room we went recruiting because membership was very low. When I knocked off work a few of us would be filling in forms.

SALB: What was management's response?

Mkwanazi: As usual very hostile. The hostel manager wanted to crush my colleagues and I. For example, they lodged a complaint against me for displaying placards without permission but it fell through because they had little evidence. And I was generally very careful. I always did my work properly so that they never had anything against me. But all the elected shaft stewards were being victimised.

### Start of the boycotts

By the beginning of 1985, thousands of workers were recruited in the South division and after a majority was obtained, requests for recognition were forwarded to management. Although the shaft steward structures were still fragile, close links were forged with the East and West divisions and with other branches in the region. In contact with more experienced

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shaft stewards, the South branch quickly developed skills, and their active participation in regional strategy discussions assisted the young leadership.

Boycotts started initially in November 1984 at Hartebeesfontein with taxis and later liquor outlets and concession stores. Because of the close co-operation between the branches - the ideas of boycott quickly spread through the rest of the region. It was this generalised worker resistance to "exploitation" and abuse at the workplace and outside which set the stage for 3 months of intense struggle - which included work stoppages and working to rule - culminating in the dismissal of 17,000 miners. It is vital to note that while all these issues are part of the texture of struggle - the dismissals were essentially around the legitimate reluctance of black miners to perform work which was supposed to be reserved for white miners, and for which they were not being remunerated. (11)

The boycotts at Vaal Reefs followed closely the pattern established by Hartebeesfontein. The boycotts served a number of purposes. Besides the obvious dissatisfaction with the prices, bad service, quality of food etc., the boycotts also served to inform management that workers were dissatisfied with the wages because: "they could not afford to buy commodities at high prices with their present wages". In addition these actions served to politicise workers about the issues they have to confront outside the workplace, and provided a visible demonstration of support for the NUM. The boycott of the liquor outlets and bars also had an important spin-off of a higher attendance at union meetings.

Furthermore, while the boycotts of liquor stores and concession stores were implemented at all shafts, each shaft had other very specific grievances around which they also mobilised; for example, the induna, hostel conditions, hostel managers etc. - which gave each shaft a particular focus. The resistance was consequently uneven, the rhythm and tempo determined largely by specific shaft dynamics. In addition, there were common issues around which all mineworkers in Vaal Reefs and the region mobilised.

#### The 4 hour day

The wage adjustments made by AAC and given to 1.29% of the

workforce was the catalyst which mobilised the entire Vaal Reefs complex. The January increase by Anglo-American Corporation's gold division of 10% was a market adjustment applicable only to black and white officials. (12) The corporation felt it was lagging behind other mining houses and "saw no reason or justification for any interim adjustment" with respect to other employees. (13) Their view was that wages are negotiated annually with the Chamber, and not at mine level.

Workers were upset with this measure and attempts to negotiate with local management during February and March proved futile. Although there were other demands raised by workers, some of which management acceded to - for example, the granting of office and meeting facilities; confirming that shaft stewards could represent workers as a friend at disciplinary hearings and a review of an earlier dismissal of shaft stewards, - they refused to extend the 10% pay increase to all workers. (14)

In response to this, the branch committees of East and West, together with the interim committee of South, got together to discuss a strategy to mount pressure on management. The decision to launch a boycott of concession stores and liquor outlets from 30 March, was, as one shaft steward put it, "a demonstrative act to show management that we had no money to pay for goods that were overpriced". While the boycott contained this demonstrative dimension, linked to the initial wage question, there was also the real fact that the concession stores and bars were giving workers a raw deal. Workers' dissatisfaction with prices, quality and general service were long standing grievances which had received little attention. From reports losses were reputed to be approximately R8-9,000 per day and R16,000 over the weekend. (15)

There were also calls by rank and file members for a strike over the wage question. Shaft stewards, however, emphasised that this was premature. Workers felt that some form of action, directly at the workplace, was necessary. Opinions were canvassed at all the shafts. Mass meetings were held and after thorough discussion a decision was taken at branch level that workers work a 4 hour shift as opposed to 8 hours. The rationale for the tactic was again to draw management's attention to the seriousness of workers demands for the interim 10% wage increase. On the other hand it was also an ideological statement; an action which drew attention to the exploit-

ative conditions of capitalism, where workers produce huge profits, whilst being paid appallingly low wages. By working only part of the work day, profit levels would be cut.

The 4 hour work day started on 11 March with the evening shift and lasted in total 4 days, with some shafts only doing 2 days. It started with shafts No. 9, 6, 3 and 7 and then spread to the rest of the complex. It applied to all shifts; morning, afternoon and evening. The unity and solidarity was remarkable, reflecting the depth of the grievance and the support enjoyed by the union. One worker from the South division explained what happened and how they used the tactic:

We went to work as usual. But this time we did not stay underground. After 4 hours we stopped work and made our way to the cage. All the white miners were shocked but there was nothing they could do. The workers were united and knew what they wanted. Most of us went to our rooms, ate and attended union meetings. We did not go to the bars. We all felt extremely happy because there was good support and it was effective.

The only workers who worked a full day were those who were requested to do so by the shaft stewards committees: those who worked on the timekeeping and in the wages department. The 4 hour day caused major disruptions to production. Some shaft stewards viewed the tactic as more effective than the legal strike in 1984. Less casualties were suffered and with an element of uncertainty and surprise it was extremely difficult for management to anticipate the miners' next step.

Management issued return to work ultimatums which the workers, after negotiations with management, heeded. During the negotiations workers again raised the 10% interim wage increase, but the general manager of Vaal Reefs, Mr Williams, said that he had no power, but that he would notify their head office of worker grievances and reply later. AAC remained adamant that wage negotiations was a matter for the Chamber of Mines. The union then declared a dispute with the AAC on the issue, setting the scene for a legal strike if no agreement was reached. Despite the 4 hour day, workers received full wages which was a major boost to their confidence. During the 4 hour work day there were rumours of other AAC mines coming out in solidarity, but the NUM advised against it until adequate discussions and consultations had been completed.

struggle intensifies: working to rule

At various shafts, struggles were fought over a range of issues, for example, at shaft No. 6 against a group of team leaders and an induna: management had been systematically enticing team leaders with perks (eg. not paying for lodgings) and encouraging them to join a rival union, the African Mine Workers Union - which they favoured. At shaft No. 1 there was intense struggle against the hated "piccanin" system - where workers are treated like children - fetching and carrying for the white miners.

On Sunday April 21, a week before the mass dismissal, workers at shaft No. 7 of the Gold and Uranium plant complained of the Sunday shift. Firstly they worked 16 hours out of 24, with only an 8 hour break. Secondly, they received no extra wages for Sunday work. Their resistance resulted in 300 of them being fired. Again other shafts in the West division wanted to come out in a solidarity strike but the shaft stewards argued that the matter be taken up legally. This was the prelude to further dismissals throughout the week. In particular, shaft stewards bore the brunt of management's attacks. Assisting them were some indunas.

On April 22, the machine operators at shafts No. 8 and 9 refused to do charging up at the rockface, insisting that they had no blasting certificates and because it was a job reserved for whites. Nicholas Mkhwanazi of shaft No. 8 where most of the activity was concentrated explained:

Mkhwanazi: It happened that one of the workers was injured whilst charging up. They then penalised him. We investigated the matter and found that it was not his job and then the rest of the shaft decided not to do the job because it was reserved for whites. The issue was thoroughly discussed in our meeting. When workers stopped charging up, production declined. They called me to the production manager's office and I took 3 shaft stewards with me. The production manager admitted that it was not the job of blacks, but because they were getting production bonuses they (blacks) decided to do charging up to assist white miners. The production bonuses were about R30 per month. He said the mine applied for exemptions for blacks to do drilling, sweeping, and charging up, while the white miner does the blasting. We told him that the train-



- mines dismissals -

ing was not adequate and that if blacks are to do the jobs they should be trained and paid accordingly. This he said could not happen. We told him we will try to tell the workers to resume normal work but we cannot guarantee anything because it was the workers who make decisions.

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Back at the hostel the shaft stewards held a meeting where all the workers attended. From reports the meeting was lively - alot of discussion. The decision of the meeting was that unless workers are paid for the job they do, they should not perform the duties.

Mkhwanazi: The meetings started at shaft No. 8 and spread to shaft No. 9 (about 12,000-16,000 workers involved). All the drillers decided not to charge up. On Tuesday when they went to work they refused to charge up. 115 were fired. We heard that the same thing happened at shaft No. 9. We then held a regional meeting for all shaft stewards on Wednesday 24 April where the situation was evaluated. We decided to refer the matter to our head office.

On Thursday, management fired 500 more at shaft No. 8. We then decided at a meeting to march to the production manager's office, over 4,000 of us. We negotiated with him to re-engage the workers. He agreed but said that he had limited powers and that we should see the mine manager, Mr Smith.

Then he said he'll accompany us to Mr Smith. We agreed to this and said we'll try to convince workers to continue working while we negotiated the matter. He then asked us to send the rest of the workers back to the hostel while he arranged a meeting for 2.00 pm. with the mine manager. This we did.

SALB: What happened then?

Mkhwanazi: When we spoke to Mr Smith, the production manager was not present. Smith was very hostile. He said he was not prepared to re-engage those who were dismissed. Instead they should take their belongings and quit the mine. Those who did not do charging up would be dismissed. Things must go back to normal, he said. He added that this was the last time he was prepared to speak to shaft stewards. I reminded him of our meeting with the general manager, Mr Williams, where it was agreed shaft stewards could make representations as friends,

but he said he was not interested. Production was down 50% and approximately R20 million was lost, he complained.

SALB: What was the response of the workers?

Mkhwanazi: Well, we went to the hostel and found the workers holding a meeting. Our report was given. Although workers were dissatisfied they still wanted to negotiate with management over the matter. But then on Friday they started firing again, but this time not only drillers but also locomotive drivers and miners' assistants - approximately 600. As the shift ended workers gathered in front of our union office. All were angry, saying, "an injury to one is an injury to all". The workers decided not to go to work in sympathy with those who were fired.

SALB: What did the workers do?

Mkhawanazi: We definitely wanted to negotiate but the management was very aggressive. So workers on all the shifts did not go to work. They sat in their rooms. Then we heard helicopters circling over the hostels shouting my name...and telling me to get the workers to work. The workers decided the action, but management was picking on the shaft stewards.

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Meanwhile the word spread that workers were fired at shafts No. 8 and 9 of the South division. At shaft No 3 over 2,000 were dismissed for solidarity action which resulted in the arrest of 5 shaft stewards for alleged intimidation. At shaft No. 6 workers also wanted to come out in solidarity but according to reports mine management had armed a group of team leaders and indunas who were stirring up trouble on a "tribal" basis. The shaft stewards were not prepared to allow this.

By this stage virtually all the shafts were ready to launch a full scale strike involving over 40,000 mineworkers, but the shaft stewards called for restraint. The NUM and shaft stewards wanted negotiations on the issues or at least an indication from management of its willingness to negotiate. But management was intransigent, primarily concerned with production and profit levels. It seems that AAC having been subjected to consistent resistance by the union, was seeking to "discipline" the union.

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On Saturday April 27 with the entire South division not working, the helicopters again circled the hostels and pamphlets were dropped informing workers of their dismissal. Mine management refused access to union officials and instead called the mine security. (16) Although management deny that the South African Police were called, workers insist they were. The hostels were surrounded; road blocks were set up; the entire area was sealed off and all entrances to the hostels of shafts No. 8 and 9 were closed. This was in preparation for a full scale attack on the workers the following day, when they would be bused back home.

Meanwhile activity escalated at other shafts. These comments were made by shaft stewards and workers:

Worker at shaft No. 6:

Because of the divisions between indunas and team leaders and the workers, we did not come fully out for a strike. But we gathered and sang...I don't remember the time but it was Saturday evening. We saw mine security and they started firing teargas and rubber bullets. I was hit on various parts of my body...people were running all over the show...the search light shone to see where we were going...The security chased some of us. Teargas was thrown in the kitchen. A cook was injured in the eye...Many others were also injured.

A worker at shaft No 3:

I just came from underground...about 4.00 am. and went to my room. I got dressed and then went to the kitchen. While passing the dressing station I saw a crowd of workers... there were white security near them...they were instructing the workers to go to work...there were also alot of workers at the entrance to the compound gate. Then all of a sudden the security ran in my direction...before I knew what was happening I felt a pain in my eye...they shot me ...they said nothing just shot. I don't remember much, just teargas all over.

Negotiations between the NUM regional officials and Vaal Reefs management were futile. On Sunday April 28 the entire South division shafts were sealed off by gun wielding mine security. (18) The dismissal of workers, announced by helicopter, was now to be carried out. Nicholas Mkhwanazi explains further:

At about 10.10 am. the mine security arrived and took off the main gate of the hostel and loaded it on a truck. They

arrested a shaft steward, on watch, when he wanted an explanation for their action. I was in a meeting with the other shaft stewards. We assembled all the workers in the arena. We could hear big lorries and helicopters arriving and orders being shouted. SAP reinforcements also arrived. From the helicopter it was announced that everyone should go to the Ernest Oppenheimer stadium. I tried to explain to workers what this all meant and what was likely to happen. I appealed to them to sit quietly - not to sing or chant. Without warning the security fired teargas and bullets and started charging into the crowd. There were thousands of workers. The teargas was overpowering and workers tried to run away. I surrendered myself to die, but some of the workers dragged me away, because I refused to run.

One of the badly injured workers - a 45 year old team leader, who has worked 10 years at the mine - recounts what happened: We had a meeting at the arena and the shaft stewards were talking to us. Then we heard an "army" truck approaching from behind the hostel. The SAP, all whites, approached us with guns and teargas. At first all the workers stood up but the shaft stewards told us to sit down.

Nicholas, the young one, was speaking. He ordered us to sit and keep quiet, not to run. Then there was teargas all over and gunfire. Then the gunfire increased and workers ran in all directions. I was injured while trying to get away from the police. They beat up some of my friends. I was dragged to a hostel room and hidden under the bed. Many were injured as the police attacked us. They started searching for Nicholas.

According to reports, at shaft No. 9 workers were subjected to the same tactics. The mine security operation lasted 4-5 hours in which at least 4 shaft stewards were arrested. They systematically hounded workers out of the rooms and drove them over to the stadium. Mkhwanazi, the target of management's attack, made an ingenious escape with the help of union comrades. He was dressed in a traditional Basotho blanket and hat and then mingled with workers as they left. Once outside the gate, he was placed in the boot of a car and driven to safety.

The workers were paid off and bused back to the bantustans

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and neighbouring states. By Sunday evening 11,000 miners had already been paid off. (19) The rest, some 3,000, were sent on Monday April 29. The injured were treated at West Vaal hospital or at the shaft dressing stations, while many were too afraid to go for medical attention. In a press release AAC announced their "regrets" at the action and "hopes to re-engage as many as possible". (20)

### Assessment

To the shaft stewards the agenda of the AAC was and remains to crush the union. Sefako put it as follows: "Management engineered all this to disorganise and demoralise the workers and to destroy the union totally here". In spite of its liberal image and "enlightened" industrial relations, AAC does not like the calibre of unions such as the NUM. Unionism they certainly want - because it provides channels to regulate industrial conflict on the mines - but very pliable types of unions.

The NUM has, through its structures and mass support, been able to mount resistance against the pernicious system of mining apartheid: against both its politics of control, manipulation, domination and white baaskap, and against its economics of low wages and bad working conditions. The pace of the struggle and the issues have been determined by the union and not by capital. This has accelerated the struggle to dismantle discrimination - although mining capital wants it done on a reform/co-option basis which would attempt to blunt the militancy of the NUM. With sufficient gold stocks in reserve, and with the Chamber of Mines wage negotiations to start shortly, the occasion at Vaal Reefs proved ideal to demonstrate management's power. With the entire South division destroyed (when on the verge of recognition); the re-opening of concession stores and liquor outlets - management hoped to teach the union a lesson.

One incident which shocked shaft stewards was when their comrade, Sylvester Mokeng, a team leader, was sentenced to four years' imprisonment for alleged "intimidation". Three others are still awaiting trial.

But the spirit of the workers remains high, their confidence unshattered. The NUM has been engraved in the consciousness

of the miners. This was demonstrated when a badly injured worker replied to the question whether he would join the union again: "The union will free us from mine slavery...we cannot retreat now from the union...it is our organisation we must fight to defend it".

### HARTEBEEESFONTEIN GOLD MINE

Hartebeesfontein gold mine employs approximately 17,000 miners, distributed over 5 shafts. The NUM started organising there in September 1983 and grew rapidly, gaining recognition for surface employees only at the beginning of this year. There are 210 shaft stewards - approximately 42 per shaft.

In 1984 Hartebeesfontein was one of the mines where the spill-over of the legal strike took place. The entire workforce participated, demanding recognition of their union. The strike lasted 2 days - 17 and 18 September - and because it was illegal 4 shaft stewards were arrested, including the present regional organiser, Salae Salae. The strike was an important union baptism. (It was the first strike since that of 1973 when only Malawian workers were involved.) The workers were attacked by police and mine security using teargas, guns and batons to put down the strike and left hundreds injured. The workers were forced back to work at gunpoint. One worker recounts:

They forced us underground. We did not even have our proper clothes on. They just wanted us to go to work although underground we just sat and did nothing.

After the strike, because many were injured, support for the union declined. It was only with the rebuilding of the shaft steward councils and the implementation of boycotts, that union support was revived. In addition, the rampant dismissals which were being patiently fought by shaft stewards also restored confidence in the union. Regular mass meetings were convened and an effective communications network established which ensured that all shafts knew what was happening.

The boycotts of taxis, bars and shops, as well as a sports boycott, were important mobilisers and set the tone for the struggles in the region.

### Taxi boycott

The taxi boycott started in November 1984 because of high fares. Taxis are a common form of transport. They are used to transport workers between shafts; to and from the mining town of Stilfontein and the township of Khuma, as well as to the regional centre of Klerksdorp. The workers complained that the R1 standard fare was too high, especially for short trips.

There are 2 taxi associations - Stilfontein Taxi Association and Buff Taxi Association. The latter, from reports, was prepared to negotiate with the shaft stewards whilst the former was unco-operative and arrogant, largely because of its close association with the mine management. After a mass meeting, the workers presented 3 demands:

- (a) a taxi fare of 50c
- (b) a change in the attitude of the drivers
- (c) free service from the station.

Initially negotiations were futile and workers simply walked to their destinations. They also demanded that no taxis be seen near the compounds. After a short boycott Buff Taxi Association accepted workers' demands but Stilfontein Taxi Association held out. They were boycotted for 3 months till eventually they also agreed to the conditions. During the course of the boycott - in December - 3 shaft stewards and a union organiser were arrested for "intimidation" but won their case.

### Liquor and shop boycott

Worker grievances were the same as at other mines: prices, attitude of shopowners, old food and, in the case of the bars, the "recreational fee" which was deducted monthly. (2) As one worker explained: "They deduct 10c from each worker for "recreation" but the money is used for the bars. We did not see why we should pay for using it when they were already charging." These boycotts proved extremely successful. Instead of going to the bars, workers attended union meetings or got involved in group discussions about the union. This was the most phenomenal aspect of the liquor boycott. Time was spent more creatively, often in ways directly related to worker organisation. The boycott served to politicise workers about their power and role. Management's attitude to the boycott was hostile and shaft stewards were subject to enormous harrassment.

Mineworkers' custom is vital for any trade in the area - whether shops or taxis. Workers realise their power and have effectively used it to negotiate better services outside work.

### Sports boycott

The sports boycott was designed to bring attention to genuine worker grievances. In March this year, workers refused to attend Anglo-Vaal's sports competition which is arranged annually against other mines in the group. The boycott was highly effective, and workers saw it as a humiliation for management.

### Dismissals

As at other mines, Hartebeesfontein shaft stewards have been repeatedly victimised and accused of stirring up trouble. On April 25, 6 were dismissed. In response all the workers, except shaft No. 5, came out on strike, demanding their unconditional reinstatement. The one day strike was smashed and workers were forced back to work at gunpoint. In the process over 3,000 were dismissed. Meetings of workers were broken up and all future meetings were banned.

On the 26 and 27 April, more shaft stewards were dismissed and others given final warnings for their participation in the strike. In addition, mine security forced workers to go to the bars and stores in an attempt to break the boycott. Shaft stewards acknowledge that for the time being the boycott is over. They are currently re-assessing the situation.

There are conflicting reports of police involvement but workers are adamant that at least 2 workers were killed and many were injured. It is difficult to give precise numbers because the workers were dismissed and sent home immediately. This swift management action is, as in the case of Vaal Reefs, designed to curb the NUM and bring it into line.

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The Western Transvaal region of the NUM has been extremely creative in its resistance campaign. The boycotts which started in Hartebeesfontein have spread to other regions such as Caltonville. The 4 hour workday is another example of selective strike action which proved highly effective.



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Buffelsfontein and Stilfontein are also strong branches, although the shaft steward structures are not as developed as at Vaal Reefs and Hartebeesfontein. There have also been food boycotts at West Vaal hospital by the 180-member staff.

Mine unionisation forms a second phase of unionism in South Africa, a decade after the 1973 strike wave. It has combined some of the most significant features of secondary industry unionism - shaft stewards and structures, recognition agreements, grievance procedures etc. However, the shaft stewards' movement is still small and much consolidation is required. This is readily acknowledged and considered a priority by the region.

Many shaft stewards believed that management was prepared to sack all 44,000 at Vaal Reefs and then selectively re-employ, whilst encouraging the management-favoured rival union, the African Mine Workers Union. But the discipline of the workers prevented this.

The unionised mineworkers have become a major force in the region. The mining towns of Stilfontein and Orkney are dependent on the black mineworkers for survival. Consequently the NUM is seen as a threat to the "stability" of the region and workers have been attacked by police. One of the most horrific examples was the regional meeting on 23 March in Khuma township. Over 3,000 shaft stewards were packed in a Church hall when they were attacked by police armed with rubber bullets, teargas and batons. Hundreds of workers were injured and the hall badly damaged.

Although the dismissals, deaths and arrests are a setback, it has not dampened worker militancy. If management believes it has won a resounding victory, with an added psychological advantage in the Chamber of Mines wage negotiations, they totally misread the situation on the ground. Although the boycotts have ceased in the region, the situation remains fluid as worker leadership re-evaluates the situation.

Re-employment terms for Vaal Reefs workers were spelt out by Godsell:

Our former employees will have preferential treatment for re-employment. We have specified 2 pre-conditions. We will hire according to operational requirements and we will

consult employment records of employees. (22)

Shaft stewards interpret this as a measure to ensure that they are not taken back. But one shaft steward added: "It does not matter who they take, the union will emerge again at South Division". This optimism and determination, on the part of workers themselves, stands in the path of these attempts to smash union organisation which remains independent and which militantly advances the interests of the working class.

Footnotes:

- 1 Although 17,000 has been given as the official figure, many shaft stewards claim that it is well above 18,000
- 2 Star 29.4.85
- 3 Sunday Star 5.5.85
- 4 Comment on press release 17.5.85
- 5 Vaal Reefs Exploration and Mining Company Ltd, Annual Report 1984, December 31, 1984, p2
- 6 ibid
- 7 ibid, p3
- 8 Statistics, all given by workers, are approximate figures
- 9 SALB 10.6, May 1985, pp 101-7
- 10 Interview: Salae Salae, regional organiser of NUM, 8.5.85
- 11 This was emphasised by workers and also clearly stated by general secretary of the NUM, Cyril Ramaphosa, at a public talk at the SAIRR, 6.5.85
- 12 Anglo American Corporation press statement, 29.4.85
- 13 ibid
- 14 ibid
- 15 It is extremely difficult to confirm these figures because management remains tight-lipped
- 16 Sunday Star 5.5.85
- 17 Rand Daily Mail 29.4.85
- 18 AAC press statement 29.4.85
- 19 AAC press statement 2.5.85
- 20 SALB 10.6, May 1985
- 21 Sunday Star 5.5.85

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

# Blind eye to mine safety

THE article in Business Times (May 5) entitled "Blacks claim blasting law broken on mines" made interesting reading especially the reported comment of Vaal Reefs' management that "work related to blasting ... complied with the Mines and Works Act".

These people must be out of touch with practice on the gold mines.

I am a mining trainee on an Anglo American mine in the Free State mines. During my training, I spent time with five different miners. All broke the law to varying degrees every day they were underground.

## Impossible

Under the contract system it is impossible for a miner to produce the results expected of him by management and remain within the Mines and Works Act.

A basic assumption of this law is that a black ("non-scheduled") person is not capable of bearing the responsibility for the safety of workers reporting to him and must be supervised in all dangerous operations — ensuring the working place is safe at the beginning of the shift and placing explosives for blasting at the end of the shift.

The Mines and Works Act and regulations say a miner (holder of a blasting certificate) must enter the working place and "make safe" before allowing any of his workmen

to enter. He must personally charge up blast holes with explosives and only he can connect the round to the central blasting system.

He must also test for methane gas at specified times and places during the shift if the mine is classified as fiery.

## Concessions

In recent years concessions have been made to the regulations which effectively try to legalise existing practices. Some examples:

- A miner can instruct his team leaders to enter a working place and make safe provided the miner visits the working place within 90 minutes.

- Trained, reliable persons may charge up a stope face if the miner is within sight of them and not more than 30 metres away.

- Trained persons may simultaneously charge up not more than two development ends at a time provided that the miner is able to visit both faces within 10 minutes.

A black is still not allowed to mark off a face — indicate the position where blast holes are to be drilled.

## Triers

I have worked with developers who blast four or five ends a day, some up to 30 minutes' travelling time from the others. Some stoppers have four or five faces to drill, charge up and blast each day.

It is physically impossible for miners to work within the regulations.

Many miners allow their team leaders to enter, make safe and mark off a face before their arrival. I have never seen a miner or team leader test for methane on my mine which is fiery. It is general practice for a miner's assistant to charge up a face and connect up without

the miner being anywhere near the face, let alone within sight of the worker.

I do not wish to condemn every miner on the gold mines. Some try hard and almost succeed in working according to the law. Others do not care for the law, but still work efficiently and safely because they are skilled at organising their labour.

Others are inefficient and negligently place their black workers in danger every working day. The whole system is inherently dangerous in that responsibility for the lives of workers is placed in the hands of people who cannot be held legally responsible.

## Hypocrisy

I do condemn mine managements, the Mine Workers Union and the mines inspectorate for turning a blind eye to contraventions of the regulations. Everyone associated with the gold mines must realise that the Mines and Works Act as it now stands is an unworkable piece of legislation. To deny that is blatant hypocrisy.

If all members of the National Union of Mineworkers worked strictly to the law, the gold mines would quickly come to a halt and radical changes in the system would have to be made — the first being an end to job reservation.

I look forward to the day when the union has sufficient strength to take this action. — Honest Miner, Welkom.

NUM gets support from white miner

# REVIEW: ANGLO – Anglo American and the rise of modern South Africa

Duncan Innes

Raven Press, Johannesburg, 1984, 358 pp, (R14,95)

South African workers are probably aware of the significant role which a few large companies play in their lives. How those companies reached their present positions of power is less well-known, and how they are linked together is a subject shrouded in mystery.

Duncan Innes's book, Anglo, deals first with the origins of Anglo American Corporation. Because Anglo American's growth was made possible in large part by its association with De Beers Consolidated Diamond Mines, Dr Innes begins with a short history of diamond mining and the development of the De Beers near-monopoly in this industry. This material provides the background for an account of the way in which the group system was formed on the Witwatersrand gold fields during the years 1886-1910. Under this system, most gold mines came under the control of a small number of mining "houses" such as Gold Fields and the Corner House group (a forerunner of Barlow Rand).

Anglo American itself was born during the first world war. The company was formed to tap American as well as other sources of finance, but its base lay in gold and coal mining groups which already owned rich properties in various areas. From the start, Anglo American was a highly profitable venture. Its rich mines allowed it to ride out problems - including the strikes of 1920 and 1922 - better than some others.

Meanwhile, De Beers faced mounting problems in the diamond market. Its difficulties increased throughout the twenties, and with the support of foreign backers, Anglo American was able to acquire effective control of De Beers at the start of the depression in 1929. With increased resources at its disposal, Anglo American was well placed to expand beyond the mining industry.

During the thirties, manufacturing industry in South Africa began to grow more rapidly. The mining houses had capital available which enabled them to participate in this expansion. Anglo American developed interests in the production of mining and drilling equipment, and through De Beers in the chemical industry (especially in AE&CI). It also began to expand its investments outside South Africa - in "Rhodesia" (ie. in both Zambia and Zimbabwe) and in Namibia particularly.

During and after the second world war, the mining houses, including Anglo American, invested heavily in the new Far West Rand and Orange Free State gold fields. As these new mines contributed an ever larger proportion of group profits, Anglo American's strong position in the new fields helped it to become the biggest gold producer of all by 1958. At the same time, its stake in other mining groups became significant. Johannesburg Consolidated Investment (JCI) fell under Anglo American control, while Anglo cemented relations with mainly Afrikaner-owned companies by assisting them to acquire control over General Mining, the central part of today's Gencor. Anglo American's position as the dominant mining house was now undisputed. New fields remained for it to conquer.

Industrial expansion was rapid during the sixties. Anglo American's presence in, for example, Highveld Steel, AE&CI, Scaw Metals, Sappi - reveals the company's interests in some of the largest plants in almost every industrial sector. In addition, the corporation acquired large stakes in property (Amaprop), construction (LTA) and publishing (Argus). Dr Innes argues that during the sixties South African capitalism became dominated by "monopoly" corporations, like Anglo American, which were able to exert a big influence over most parts of the economy. In the seventies, as economic expansion slowed down, these groups tightened their control by absorbing more and more other companies - a process termed "centralisation". An example of this is to be found in Anglo American's control over the car manufacturer, Sigma. Later named Amcar, this corporation has now merged with Ford in South Africa as well, to become Samcar. Similarly, Anglo American tightened and extended its control over coal mining, other industries and financial institutions. At the same time its foreign investments became increasingly important.

Anglo American begins its investment in other parts of the

world mainly in mining. Thus, it still has large interests in copper mines in Zambia and various mines in Zimbabwe; it owns mines in Canada and Brazil. Through control of companies registered in other countries, like Charter Consolidated (UK) and Minorco (Bermuda), Anglo American reaches into a very large number of African countries, as well as other parts of the world. Dr Innes treats these interests as the culmination of Anglo American's successful expansion programme, and relates them to the attempts of the South African government to develop closer ties with other African countries.

Financial analysts who work for stockbrokers in Diagonal Street or for business newspapers presumably know a great deal about the corporate links which give Anglo American its unique position in the South African economy. Dr Innes's book makes this information available to the rest of us. It is a useful tool in understanding how much strength lies behind the employer which workers confront, for example, at Vaal Reefs. However, the pattern of Anglo American's investments and structure changes all the time, and information needs to be constantly updated.

From the point of view of the workers' movement in South Africa, the most important questions about the giants of the economy have to do with how their parts link together. How does each company in the group relate to others? Which parts of the group are dependent on which other parts? How can the group use its resources to withstand strike action against one company? Which are the most vulnerable parts, or strategically the most important? Where are the parts of the group which are most immediately dependent on the labour of the workers, without which the entire group face severe difficulties - if any? Dr Innes's book provides a useful starting point for analysing these issues. Any group of workers who want to know more about the history of big companies in South Africa or about the Anglo American-De Beers group in particular, will find Anglo an interesting book to discuss. Such discussion will also reveal how much more remains to be done in order to understand the structure, strengths and weaknesses of capital in South Africa today.

(Alan Mabin, May 1985)

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