SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

Mike de Klerk — Maize Farm Employment

DEBATES: — Unions/Political Organisations

Volume 9 Number 2
November 1983

SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

Volume 9 Number 2

November 1983

THE SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN
4 Melle House
31 Melle St
Braamfontein
South Africa
P.O. Box 31073
Braamfontein
2017
South Africa

Phone 3398133

Published since April 1974. Eight issues yearly. Guidelines for contributors and subscription form on back page.

SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

Volume 9, Number 2, November 1983

CONTENTS

Briefings		page
Doug Hindson	Unity Meeting	1
Bob Garland	Unemployment Centres	4
Alan Mabin	Operation Solidarity	14
Articles		
Mike de Klerk	Maize Farm Employment	19
Interviews, Statements, Debates		
GWU	On the UDF	47
MGWU	On the UDF	62
M Mbothwe	Where are the Workers?	75
UDF	On Unions	77
CCAWUSA	Political Organisations	84
CUSA	Political Organisations	85
Ismail Mohammed	TUCSA	87
Review		
Bill Freund	Modern Africa	99
Obituary	Morris Kagan	101

MORRIS KAGAN

Morris Kagan, a founder member of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union, died in September at the age of seventy four.

Kagan was born in Latvia where from a young age he was active in the underground youth movement against the right wing dictatorship in the country. He emigrated to South Africa in the 193Ø's and worked as a bus conductor in Cape Town. He was dismissed from this job for organising fellow workers.

He began his life's work organising shop workers after taking up his next job, as a clerk in a shop. During the 195Ø's and 196Ø's he assisted The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and unions associated with SACTU. He continued to be active in the National Union of Distributive Workers. Due to the influence of Kagan and others the NUDW remained out of TUCSA for some six years after it was formed.

Although Morris Kagan's official positions were in the established registered unions, he was instrumental in forming the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers' Union (CCAWUSA), originally a "black" parallel union (to the NUDW). Unlike many other established unionists, Kagan fostered workers' control of the union.

Kagan's funeral was attended by a large CCAWUSA delegation, representatives from the Federation of South African Trade Unions, the Council of Unions of South Africa as well as employers and members of established unions.

UNITY INITIATIVE FALTERS

The outcome of the most recent unity talks, held at Khotso House in Johannesburg on the 8th and 9th of October, was disappointing. After two days of discussion with no real progress a further meeting was arranged for November.

It had been agreed at the feasibility committee meeting in July that all unions would submit information on the areas where they were organised and also their proposals for the new federation (See SALB Volume 8, Number 7). However not all the unions that had agreed to this fulfilled their commitments. The unions which failed to submit information on the areas where they were organised were the General and Allied Workers Union (Gawu), the South African Allied Workers Union (Saawu) and the Motor Assembly and Components Workers Union of South Africa/General Workers Union of South Africa (Macwusa/Gwusa). Other unions and union groupings present at the meeting were the Food and Canning/African Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU/AFCWU), the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA), the General Workers Union (GWU), the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA), the Municipal and General Workers Union of South Africa (MGWUSA), the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu) and the Council of Unions of South Africa (Cusa).

The meeting agreed that demarcation had to be discussed as a matter of priority. This was followed by a heated exchange between a number of unions over cases of poaching and disruption of organising activities. Saawu was accused by the GWU of disorganising dock workers in Durban and East London and by CCAWUSA of organising a branch which formed part of a chain in which it had achieved majority representation.

Two questions arose out of this conflict: how to resolve the problem of organised workers being

disorganised, and how unions should go about organising unorganised workers. The FCWU proposed that unions should not attempt to organise workers in a factory where a union already had majority representation. This was agreed to in principle by all the unions, but several expressed doubts that it would be adhered to in practice. On the question of unorganised workers the FCWU proposed that demarcation should be on industrial lines and that the unions should commit themselves to accepting that a union which had achieved majority representation in an industry, sector or under a company should be enabled to organise the unorganised there. Fosatu proposed a commitment to industrial unions with the purpose of achieving "one union, one industry". Neither of these proposals were accepted by the meeting as a whole.

The attempt to settle the question of demarcation was hindered by the fact that some of the unions had failed to produce information on where they were organised. Those which had supplied details were unwilling to have them circulated at the meeting until the other unions produced equivalent material. Pressure was brought to bear on Gawu, Saawu and Macwusa by FCWU, Fosatu, Ccawusa and Cusa to produce this information by the morning or leave the meeting.

The next morning these three unions gave general information about the sectors and areas in which they were organised but the inadequacy of their contributions plus the uneveness of the information submitted by other unions prevented the unions from circulating detailed information. The effect of this was that no further practical discussion of demarcation could take place and little progress was made for the rest of the meeting. It was agreed that a coordinating committee should be formed comprising two delegates from each union (willing to submit detailed information) to discuss the overlap between unions organising in the same sectors.

The meeting ended with a discussion about the banning of Saawu in the Ciskei and the position of

other unions in the area. It was agreed that all unions should provide information on this issue to international bodies and publicise it in their own organisations. It was also agreed that a memo should be sent to the Minister of Manpower.

While the outcome of the meeting was disappointing it made evident the difficulty of combining unions with conflicting organising strategies; those which cross-cut sectoral divisions and attempt to draw all workers in a specific locality into a single organisation, and those which cross-cut regional boundaries (and the racial, language and legal divisions which correspond with different regions of the country) to combine workers within the same sector or under the same company. Serious consideration of the implications for unity of these different methods of organising is needed before the talks between industrial and general unions can advance.

Given that the general unions are organising on all sectoral fronts, it is inevitable that they will come into competition with industrial unions, and also, if they extend beyond their original localities, with other general unions. Industrial demarcation for these unions means dismantling their organisations, except where they have adopted an industrial focus, as in the case of the GWU. Since regional demarcation is practically no longer an option, given the size, national spread and strength of the industrial unions, it seems that this is in fact the hard reality that the general unions must face if they are to continue to play a part in the the initiative to unite the independent trade union movement and extend the organisation of South Africa's working class.

Postscript: The unity meeting scheduled for November 13th did not take place.

(Doug Hindson, Johannesburg, November, 1983)

TRADE UNIONS, UNEMPLOYED CENTRES AND THE ORGANISATION OF THE UNEMPLOYED

The Background to Centres for the Unemployed

At the Trade Union Congress of 1980 in the United Kingdom, a motion was passed which expressed concern at the rapid rise in unemployment which had started in the previous year, and for the quality of life for those out of work. The resolution went on to "instruct the General Council to consider ways by which the interests of the non-employed could be represented on the basis that the "social wage" should be a matter for negotiation by Congress, and to report back to the next Congress".

By January of 1981 the direction had been established and guidelines for the setting up of Centres and the activities they should engage in were laid down by the General Council. These activities were to include the following:

1) Information and Counselling
2) Education
3) Social and Recreational activities
4) Local campaigning on behalf of the unemployed to assert their dignity as citizens. For example to achieve concessions.

The guidelines stated that the unemployed should be encouraged to be on the Management Committee of the Centre and involved in its day to day running, and local organisation be given its head to develop according to the perceived needs of the local unemployed. It was stressed that one of the main aims of the centres should be to bring unemployed people together to eventually provide a means for bringing them closer to the employed section of the Trade union Movement.

The objectives were more clearly defined at a later stage as follows:

<u>Advice and Counselling</u>

1) To provide unemployed persons with information and advice about opportunities and assistance for training and mobility and more generally about help available to them.
2) To channel requests for assistance from individuals in need of representation before tribunals, to the official of which they are a member.

Contact

1) To provide a focal point in the community where unemployed people could make contact with each other and have the opportunity to become involved in a wide range of activities, including educational classes.
2) To assist the newly unemployed to maintain or establish links with the trade unions.

Representation

1) To help promote schemes for the unemployed under the Manpower Services Commission (M.S.C.) programme.
2) To seek discretionary concessions for the unemployed in relation, for example, to recreational services, transport etc.

The Growth of Centres for the Unemployed

Although the first of the recognised Centres for the Unemployed was established in 1977 in Newcastle it was not until 1981 that the Centres started to really get under way. Nearly all the centres were started as a result of Trades Council initiatives as the rise in the rate of unemployment was at its steepest. In the summer of that year a Labour Research Department survey showed that 70 centres were in operation, a minority having full-time workers. By March of 1982 there were 130 recognised TUC Centres spread across the country, the majority having at least one worker financed under the M.S.C. Community Enterprise Programme (C.E.P.). By December 1982 the number had risen to 160, with from two to four full-time employees sponsored by local

authorities as a typical set-up.

Advice is sought for and given on a wide variety of subjects, including national insurance benefits, supplementary benefits, appeal tribunals, redundancy payments, industrial tribunals, rent and fuel debts, homelessness, housing problems, removals, money problems, Youth Opportunities Program jobs and how those in them can get organised, marriage stress caused by unemployemnt and mental problems associated with boredom.

It is a very rare Centre however, which can provide expert advice on all these problems, especially one which has only recently been established. Some tackle this question by volunteer specialists who they can refer to, although many have appointed part-time specialists such as Welfare Rights Officers. The ability to be able to point people in the right direction is very important - TUC advice is that Centres should not duplicate services provided elsewhere. Provision of leisure/recreational facilities is a common feature in nearly all centres, with many also achieving special concessions for users of local authority sports facilities.

A variety of subjects have been covered by educational classes in centres including Womens' Studies, Computing, Writers' Workshop, Video, Painting, Music, History of and Responses to Unemployment, Drama, Woodwork, Keep-fit, Homebrewing, Poster Design, Numeracy, Employment Law, Health and Sewing. Classes in welfare Rights however have proven to be the most popular. Another worthwhile development in many Centres has been the production of newsletters and newspapers put together by users. Some examples have been very lively and provocative and the medium obviously represents a good means of communication, both to employed and unemployed people. This is particularly true where a large free distribution has been achieved. The possibility of attracting local authority or M.S.C. interference however, is a factor which may inhibit content.

Centre Funding

The fact that the vast majority of Centres have staff who are paid using M.S.C. money, means in practice that Centre activities are subject to monitoring by that body. The original M.S.C. position under the Community Program Scheme was that no activity should be carried out which was in support of a particular political party. Following a series of visits by M.S.C. staff to Centres after the T.U.C. Day of Action in support of the health workers pay dispute, it emerged that new guidelines had been drawn up. The position now was that there should be no activity in support of a political party, nor organisation of or participation in marches or demonstrations of any kind, or the use of scheme premises for these purposes or any action taken to intervene in industrial disputes. It also excluded the undertaking of printing or distribution of posters, leaflets, booklets etc. in connection with the above activities.

These all-embracing provisions clearly leave any Centre with staff or users with political views they might wish to express in a difficult position. To take a hypothetical case, a contibutor to a Centre newspaper might produce an article which professes support for workers resisting a local redundancy. If the article is published, the M.S.C. might, if the article were brought to their attention, decide that this represented action in support of an industrial dispute and that Centre activities should be curtailed.

There have been reports from some centres of intimidation and interference notably at Southampton and Guildford, where the full-time staff experienced difficulties after taking a day's holiday on the Health Services Day of Action. In contrast, among the minority of non-M.S.C. funded centres, a number were able to report campaign activity taking place including support for the Health Workers dispute and against unemployment, particularly based around the TUC People's March for Jobs.

TUC organisers report however that in their experience, those centres which started with independent funding have struggled to maintain a consistent flow of income to enable them to function on a regular basis. They point to hire of premises as a particular financial obstacle and state that most centres which started independently have found it necessary to acquire M.S.C. funding ultimately.

Self-Organisation of the Unemployed

A heated debate is presently taking place around the ability of the Trade Union Movement to adequately represent the interests of the unemployed. The TUC strategy is being called into question both within the trade unions and by numbers of unemployed who have organised themselves into various groups. Those have as their priority the advance, or more currently the defence of, the interests of their employed members. They believe that the position of unemployed members of the craft unions will always be secondary to that of their employed brothers and sisters, that "he who pays the piper calls the tune".

It is also argued that young people do not see joining trade unions as a logical step for them to take and it is clear from many surveys on the subject that youth, employed or unemployed, have in the main a very negative attitude to the unions.

Among the more active unemployed who do not see a solution for themselves within the traditional trade union movement are groups who have set up local organisations such as Claimant Unions, Welfare Rights Groups, as well as those who are busy trying to establish a regional or national level of organisation. Among the most prominent of these is the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) which has the same name as the successfully organised and well-recognised national organistion which was established around 1920.

It is worth examing the policies and action of the old NUWM and its' relations with the unions. In

fact the NUWM was pro-union and included among its demands the call for a reduced working week and no overtime. At the NUWM's annual conferences of 1922 and 1923 the demand was for "Work or full maintenance at trade union rates". In support of their demands they used tactics such as raids on factories working overtime and occupying workhouses. They were particularly active on community issues, organising rent strikes and defence committees against evictions.

During the early twenties the NUWM and the TUC co-operated fairly well and an `Unemployed Workers Charter' was produced which received broad support. However following the General Strike of 1926 the TUC broke off joint activities and instructed its' affiliates to do the same.

Throughout the Second World War the NUWM remained a militant organiser of the unemployed. The TUC response following the war was to set up several unemployed associations but these were not as successful as the NUWM and remained under strict TUC control.

The TUC position today is of opposition to autonomous unemployed organisations. They argue that it would be too expensive to fund a national unemployed organisation, that the resources are not around, that if the trade unions turn their backs on the unemployed that they will organise autonomously which could lead to conflict. They believe that the unemployed should be drawn into the existing unions and that this policy is the most responsible approach to the problem.

A recent regional trade union workshop on organisation of the unemployed concluded that there was "a need to strengthen links rather than contemplate the establishment of a separate section. It is important that in providing services for the unemployed there should be opportunity to identify the unemployed with the trade union movement". It was reported that there was "a warm welcome for TUC efforts to encourage unions to retain and, in appropriate circumstances, recruit unemployed

members, and that it was necessary to extend this process. Direct and positive links were needed which could, by virtue of using specialist expertise, be of benefit both to the unemployed and to trade union members". It is also concluded that the relationship with the M.S.C. should be retained.

It is clear however that serious apprehension exists among some sections of the movement about the effectiveness of TUC policy and also some sceptism about the motives behind it. The coming months will undoubtedly see moves to challenge the TUC position.

It is interesting to note that the TUC is also vigorously opposed to independent resource centres as was evidenced by their threat to expel Birmingham Trades Council for their part in supporting the efforts to establish such a centre in the West Midlands. Attempts in other areas with progressive local authority initiatives have been met with TUC instructions to affiliates not to get involved.

Trade Union Involvement in centres

Although as mentioned above, most Centres were established following Trades Council initiatives, a common complaint from Centre users and staff alike is that there is too little support from trade unionists. In terms of financial support from union branches in the locality, Centres have had reasonable responses when specific appeals have been launched but actual physical support and liaison is generally lacking. Donations, provision of premises and arrangements such as paying running costs and overheads are typical examples of financial assistance from branches and Trades Councils, with more recently, in some areas, developments to arrange wage deductions at source as a method of ensuring a more regular income.

The relationship between some Trades Councils and Centres has been reported as deteriorating, however, since increased reliance upon M.S.C. funding has become the order of the day. Attitudes to the

unions from Centre users range from hostility through sceptism to indifference. Only a minority of Centres are able to report constructive visits from trade union officials, with users often lukewarm towards talks given by officials. Where invitations have been sent to union organisations to provide speakers they are infrequently taken up.

In spite of the negative responses to the unions reported by Centres, there are many amongst Centre users and staff, particularly those with experience as active trade unionists, who recognise the critical role that the unions play in the overall struggle to combat unemployment and its effects. A Centre at Cumbernauld in Scotland, in a district experiencing around 22 per cent unemployment and dealing with a weekly turnover of nearly 1000 unemployed workers, employed two full-time staff both of them ex-shop stewards. The success of the Centre has been attributed to their trade union commitment and experience. Organising and negotiating skills are essential and as they can be found amongst trade union activists, this represents a good practical reason for trade union involvement in Centres.

Some union groups have seriously considered what their position should be towards organisation of the unemployed. An example from Merseyside, one of the areas worst affected by unemployment, serves as an illustration. The policy of the Transport and General Workers Union region No. 6 includes:

1) The need to retain unemployed members and to provide facilities for them.
2) To recruit the unemployed, especially school-leavers.
3) To develop special branches for the unemployed, for example, the 6/612 branch of the Merseyside General Workers Trade Group.
4) To run education courses to promote trade unionism amongst the unemployed.
5) To provide support for Centres as bases for campaigns.

They point out that a levy of 5 pence per trade

union member across the country would negate the need for M.S.C. funding, and that it would be constructive to contain a trade union resource centre and a Centre for the Unemployed in one building.

A Centre in Liverpool lists its priorities as uniting and organising workers on the M.S.C. Youth Opportunities Programme (a temporary job scheme), organising unemployed into the T.G.W.U. and launching a campaign for jobs. A local campaign was initiated around the demand for the building of public works by the currently unemployed.

Conclusions

It could be argued that the short-term objectives defined by the TUC have been fairly successfully met, in terms of the establishment of Centres for the unemployed. Certainly the growth of Centres has been quite dramatic and the services they have provided, particularly welfare rights information and in achieving a variety of concessions, have made a significant contribution to improving the conditions of many unemployed individuals.

As far as the objective of assisting the unemployed to maintain or establish links with the trade unions goes, it is apparent that little progress has been made. If the longer term aim of bringing the unemployed closer to the employed section of the trade union movement is not moving nearer to realisation however, then the criticisms of those who say that the Centres divert resources from other attempts at resolving the problems gain more credence.

The concern expressed amongst trade union activists at the increase in negative attitudes to the Movement held by unemployed people and at the political restraint on Centre activities, accompanied by the relative growth of autonomous unemployed organisations, is leading to increased pressure upon the TUC and individual unions to reconsider their policies.

The negative attitudes prevalent amongst the unemployed, witnessed by the voting pattern in the recent General Election, need to be examined closely, as do the attitudes of trade unionists, if improved strategies are to be adopted. Perhaps part of the problem lies in the attitude prevalent amongst trade union leaders and members alike, that the unemployed represent primarily a threat to them, as a force which undermines their own positions in society. The emphasis appears to be on organisation for the unemployed in order to control the threat. Can the movement fund it's own Centres? Should joint trade union resource/unemployment Centres be the approach or is it much more a question of changing attitudes and increasing activities within the movement itself? If so, how can this be achieved? Whatever arguments emerge, a serious reappraisal of existing policies towards organisation of the unemployed is essential. The coming year will undoubtedly see an intensification of debate at all levels on this major problem before the Movement.

References

Unemployed Workers' Centres - A Labour Research Department survey: Oct 1981 Vol 70 No 10.
Unemployed Worker's Centres - A Labour Research Department survey: Feb 1983 Vol 72 No 2.
Unemployment Special Issue - Workers' Education Association: Vol 8 30/7/82.

(Bob Garland, Hemel Hampstead, England, October 1983)

OPERATION SOLIDARITY

Broad front organisations working to defeat government programmes are common results of the present attacks on working people in many parts of the world. In Canada, Operation Solidarity, an organisation set up to oppose and to defeat the heavy attack launched by the British Columbia provincial government, has carried out demonstrations of fifty to sixty thousand people in Vancouver. A series of confrontations between provincial government and trade unions as well as other organisations had been going on in various Canadian provinces.

In Quebec, the nationalist government of the Parti Quebecois, which came to power with enthusiastic working class support in 1976, passed laws last year which bypassed collective bargaining and rolled back the wages of about 325 000 public sector workers. Sporadic strikes and massive demonstrations as well as mass arrests of workers culminated in legal action which helped to soften the effects of government attacks. But public sector workers have been badly hit, and support for the government has fallen dramatically.

Meanwhile, on the other side of Canada in British Columbia, the right-wing Social Credit Party was returned to power in an election in May and immediately set about attacking not only workers and unions, but education, health, human rights, tenants and social services too. British Columbia has had one of the most "social democratic" government structures in North America, partly as a result of the New Democratic Party (NDP) government of 1971-75. But the over-confident NDP, seemingly unable to offer working people anything really attractive, narrowly lost the election this year (rather like the Labour party in Britain). The right-wing government proceeded to launch an extraordinary attack on the people of the province.

Tenants, for example, lost protection against eviction without cause, and rent control has been abolished. The Human Rights Commission, which enforced the anti-discrimination legislation, has been abolished, making racist and sexist practices by employers much more difficult to fight. Hospital fee increases range up to 150%. The budgets for social services like legal aid and welfare payments have been slashed. Over 3000 teaching positions are to be eliminated, while taxes are increased.

But the most threatening assault is on the unions. One new Bill will have the effect of legislating out of existence any negotiated agreement in the public sector regarding hours of work, shift work, overtime and various other forms of protection. Another Bill provides that, despite the provisions of other labour relations laws, "a public sector employer may terminate the employment of an employee without cause" and makes severance pay subject to government whim. This incredible piece of legislation removes the most important protection the unions can offer - unless, of course, workers are strongly enough organised to enforce their rights.

The origins of the government's attack are not hard to find. Before the provincial elections, in March, the Employers' Council (which consists of representatives of big capital in British Columbia) was urging a tough anti-union line on the government. Members of the Employers' Council include representatives of companies with large trade and investment interests in South Africa.

Despite wide differences and disputes, affiliates of different Union Federations (CLC and CCU) and independents have come together in Operation Solidarity (a name reminiscent of another large and embattled organistion in Europe, especially when written in the red and white colours chosen by its originators). On August 10, Operation Solidarity

held a rally at the Empire Stadium in Vancouver which was attended by 50000 people.

Unions in the private sector, not directly affected by some of the earlier assaults, had to wait until August 18 to learn about some of the proposed changes to the Labour Code, the law which affects them most directly. Not yet published, it seems that the provincial government's Bill to amend the Labour Code will reduce rights to picket, widen the meaning of "illegal strikes", give power to government to prohibit strikes in "essential services" - so widely defined that they could include any workers - and tilt the Labour Relations Board firmly in favour of management. In addition, the easing of employment standards legislation means that unions which do not have agreements covering the areas of safety, hours of work and so on which previously came under the law are now without that protection.

Not only those who have lost protection are involved in Operation Solidarity. At unemployed Action Centres, discussion of tactics have helped to mobilise support for the big rallies. The second rally, held on October 15 outside the hotel in which the governing party's conference was being held, drew a crowd of 60000. Local committees of Operation Solidarity have organised demonstrations on the lawns of cabinet ministers' houses. They have also provided support for campaigns within some of the large unions for strike votes.

On November 1, the 30000 member Government Employees Union (BCGEU) plans to be on strike if the government goes ahead with plans to fire the 1600 workers it has said it will on October 31. If it is joined by some of the larger unions in the lumber industry (the IWA) and the Teachers' Union (BCTF), the calls being made by some groups within Operation Solidarity for a general strike against the provincial government's programme might be met.

But despite these strong attacks on the unions, it seems that a general strike or other really effective action by Operation Solidarity remains unlikely. Operation Solidarity has come under the control of the bureaucratised leadership of the Federation of Labour, which is not likely to risk its own position through really militant action. Ordinary union members are not in control of the Federation, still less of Solidarity, so it seems that unless the improbable happens, workers in British Columbia face a future at least for a few years of much reduced rights, and much greater insecurity.

(Alan Mabin, Vancouver and Johannesburg, September/October 1983)

briefings

MAIZE FARM TECHNOLOGY AND EMPLOYMENT

Mike de Klerk*

To date, little research has been done in South Africa to assess the nature and strength of the link between technological change, employment and unemployment. The study on which this article is based had four main objectives: to determine

1. the extent to which mechanisation has occurred on maize farms and how this has changed the production process,
2. the extent to which mechanisation has brought about changes in the level of employment and in the characteristics of farm workers,
3. the causes of mechanisation,
4. whether any decline in employment on farms has led to a rise in unemployment.

A survey(1) was conducted of 61 maize farms in six magisterial districts of the Western Transvaal: Coligny, Delareyville, Koster, Lichtenburg, Schweizer-Reneke and Wolmaranstad. Maize production almost certainly generates considerably more employment than any other branch of agriculture in South Africa, and the Western Transvaal, in most years, produces more maize than any other region. Information was gathered about harvesting, delivery of the harvest and weeding for the years 1968-1981. In 1968, these were the last three tasks for which large numbers of seasonal workers were still employed. The technology of all three has changed radically in recent years.

---

*M.J. De Klerk, School of Economics, University of Cape Town. This paper is based on research undertaken for Mike de Klerk's dissertation entitled **Technological Change and Employment in South African Agriculture**, M.A. Economics, University of Cape Town, 1983. A longer paper is to be published by the Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit, University of Cape Town.

1. Changes in the Technology and Structure of Farming

The annual agricultural cycle on maize farms in the Western Transvaal starts with the first spring rains, usually in October. The moisture softens the rock-like winter ground making it easier to plough. Ploughing and planting have to be done quickly before the moisture evaporates or drains away, leaving the soil unworkable again. So spring planting is a time of concentrated activity, with farmers and workers often using tractors and planting equipment from before day-break until well into the night. But because this is largely a mechanical operation nowadays, there is no call for large teams of seasonal workers. Nor are they needed for the less hurried activities that follow soon after - the spraying of chemical weed-killers and the spreading of fertilizer.

Only when the khaki-bush, the castor-oil bush and the wild oats - which are resistant to most weed-killers - appear in December or January do farmers think of calling in seasonal workers. By February or March most weeding is over. The maize has started to lose its greenness and little needs to be done until it is dry enough for harvesting in May or June. If the ground-nuts or sunflowers or sorghum have been planted harvesting activities start a month or two earlier.

So, if they are lucky, seasonal work-seekers may find almost continuous employment from December to August. But it is not until the maize has ripened that most activity begins. Then, as in the planting season, work starts early - as soon as the frost has begun to melt - and goes on until darkness falls, and often later for combines with lights. This is the time when almost every farmer hires seasonal workers whether it is for the full traditional range of harvesting activities - reap, thresh, bag, and deliver (a rarity nowadays) - or to glean after the combine has done its work. There is haste. The sooner the harvest is in the sooner farmer and worker get paid, and the shorter the season the

earlier the ploughing that completes the cycle can be done.

1.1 Harvesting Technology

Harvesting maize involves both reaping - that is, picking the "head" or "blaarkop" from the stalk - and threshing, or removing the seeds from the head. Both can be done by hand or mechanically but it is many years since maize was last threshed by hand in the Western Transvaal. The basic alternatives are therefore: reaping by hand and threshing mechanically - called "hand-harvesting" - or reaping and threshing with the same machine, i.e. "combine-harvesting". In both cases a number of variations are possible.

Until 25 years ago, all maize was reaped by hand. Hand reapers walk down the rows breaking the heads loose from the stalks and putting them into a container which they carry with them. The work is tiring and makes heavy demands on one's whole body.

Typically, a team of seasonal workers, anything between ten and two or three hundred strong, is employed to reap. The tractors and trailers used to transport the "blaarkoppe" from the fields to the threshing machine, vary in number between one and a small fleet and are driven by permanent workers.

To operate a threshing machine, two men are needed to feed the "blaarkoppe" into the hopper - a dirty and tiring job - and one to control the tractor which powers the machine. The task of catching and handling the outflow of threshed grain is described in section 1.2.

The combine-harvesters which appeared in South Africa in the 1950's presented farmers, for the first time, with a choice between fundamentally different harvesting techniques. The first generation of combines were pulled by tractors and like threshing machines took their power from the propeller shaft of the tractor. For this reason they are often called "PTO" (power take-off) combines. By comparison to the later self-propelled

combines, they are simple, robust, reliable, well-suited to smaller farming units, and relatively inexpensive, so it is not surprising to find that the majority of combines currently in use in the Western Transvaal are still of this type.

In the late 196Ø's a second important change in the range of harvesting techniques occurred with the marketing of the first self-propelled ("SP") combines. These, as the name implies, were no longer drawn by tractors but were equipped with their own engine. They also had a considerably greater intake capacity which made it possible to harvest the same area with fewer machines and drivers. But relative to PTO combines, they are more complex, temperamental, suited to larger farming units and expensive to buy and maintain. The mechanical process is similar for both types of combine, and the threshed grain is collected in a tank in the combine which is emptied periodically into a truck or trailer.

Opinions vary as to the relative efficiency of combines and hand-harvesters, but even farmers most convinced of the superiority of machines still employ seasonal workers to supplement them. Gleaning - that is, picking up the blaarkoppe left behind the combine - is almost universal.

At a stroke, combines have eliminated much of the toil and grime of the harvest season. Gone is hand reaping, and gone is the handling of "blaarkoppe" in transport and threshing. But gone too are most of the jobs. For seasonal workers, generally, only employment in gleaning remains - where, though the work is less arduous, the number of jobs is far smaller. Also, with the change from hand harvesting to gleaning, it has been possible to replace men with children. Women have always made up the greatest part of seasonal teams.

1.2 Delivery Technology

The farmer's final task is to deliver his crop to a co-operative depot. There are two ways in which

this may be done: in sacks or in bulk.

If the crop has been reaped by hand, it is passed through a threshing machine and emerges from an outlet chute into sacks. When a sack has been filled, the flow is cut off momentarily, by closing the chute, and the full sack is removed and replaced by an empty one.

All delivery sacks nowadays hold 70kg of maize, though in days gone by, the standard weight was 200 lb (90kg). When a bag is full it should contain about 70kg, but the exact weight needs to be checked before it can be sealed. So from the threshing machine or trailer sacks are moved to a scale and are topped up or emptied a little as need be. With the weight correct, they are sewn closed, ready for loading onto a truck or trailer.

Handling 70kg sacks is not an easy task, especially when it has to be done all day and sometimes well into the night. Only young, able-bodied men are employed to do this. Normally four men - one at each corner of the sack - are assigned to loading, and another two on the truck itself for stacking and helping with unloading at the depot. Even for moving the sack from the threshing machine to the scale, two are needed, and another two to move it off and seal it. So usually at least ten men would be involved in the delivery process at the farmer's end. Then, of course, each truck or tractor towing a trailer needs a driver, and, unless the farm is small, two or more vehicles are used to ply between the threshing machine and the depot.

At the depot the sequence is : weighing the trailer with its full cargo, sampling the delivery for grading, off-loading, weighing the empty trailer, and stacking. So the same heavy job of shifting the sacks by hand has to be performed twice over again. For these tasks, workers from farms are joined by a team from the depot.

From the point of view of workers delivery in bags represents a substantial number of jobs: from the point of view of farmers, on the other hand, it is a time-consuming and expensive operation. It is

not surprising, therefore, that since the early 1960's, co-operatives in the Western Transvaal have invested millions of rands in bulk handling and storage facilities.(2) The towering concrete silos that one can see from so far away in the flatness of the Western Transvaal are the most obvious manifestation of these.

Handling and storing grain in bulk certainly substitutes a relatively simple process for a more complicated one. On farms the output of the threshing machines or combine is allowed to flow directly into a bulk trailer. Hand-labour is required only to spread the flow evenly with a shovel. The need for filling and weighing each individual sack is eliminated, not to mention the sweat of handling thousands of sacks.

At the depot, the weight of the load is again determined by weighing the entire truck or trailer, first fully loaded and then empty. Off-loading is simply a matter of stopping the trailer on top of a grid below which is the hopper for the silo's grain elevator, letting down the sides of the trailer and shovelling the load into the hopper. Or, if a specially-built V-shaped bulk delivery trailer is being used, all that is necessary is to open the sluices in the bottom of the truck. Also, sampling for grading no longer requires the opening of sacks. These changes have almost totally eliminated the need for seasonal labour.

1.3 Weeding Technology

Having planted, the dryland farmer must simply wait for the main ingredient of success - rain. But there are two important ways, independent of nature, in which he may encourage the growth of his crop: fertilizing and weeding. Both can be done mechanically while the plants are still small enough to use a tractor without causing damage, but this is possible later only if the rows have been planted 7 feet or more apart. For weeding, the procedure is simply to uproot the unwanted growth by ploughing

lightly. Early weeding has for many years been done in this way.

Later weeding on farms where the row width is less than 7 feet, has until recently, had to be done by hand. Hoes must surely be the most ancient of agricultural implements still in use today in an unchanged form. And for a good reason: they are very effective. But they also require long hours of work. In recent years, chemical weed-sprays have offered a labour-saving alternative to the traditional part-hand, part-mechanical method.

Hand-hoeing needs little description. The work is not as tiring as hand-reaping snd so is generally done by women and children. Nor is it as urgent. In contrast to reaping which must be done as soon as the crop is ripe - this often occurs simultaneously on farms in the same district - hoeing can usually be done when workers become available and does not need as many workers. For both these reasons, most hand-hoeing has been done by the families of permanent farm workers, living on "white " farms.

Weedicides are usually sprayed onto the soil during, or shortly after planting by a tractor towing or mounted with a tank and spraying equipment. Because spraying is not effective against all weeds, it is normally followed in mid-summer either by hand-hoeing or by part-hand, part-mechanical hoeing. Hand-hoeing teams employed for this work are considerably smaller than if the entire weeding operation is done by hand or part-mechanically.

1.4 Changes in Wages, Farm Size and Yield

Besides technology, the three factors on which employment patterns appear to depend most are wages, the surface area of farming units and the yield or output of maize per hectare.

The connection between changes in technology, wages and output per hectare and changes in the level of employment needs no explanation. Between changes in farm size and changes in employment, the

link is not so obvious. Farm enlargements increase potential economies of scale, i.e. they create the opportunity to lower the average cost of production. This generally involves either purchasing more or larger labour-replacing machines, which it would not be profitable to use on smaller areas of land, or using existing machinery and labour on an enlarged area. The second of these options is frequently chosen: farmers are reluctant to retrench permanent workers who have worked for them for some while but who have become redundant as a result of mechanisation. However, there are no such personal ties between farmers and workers employed on other farms. So when additional land is bought or rented, the workers who were previously employed on that land are often not re-employed.

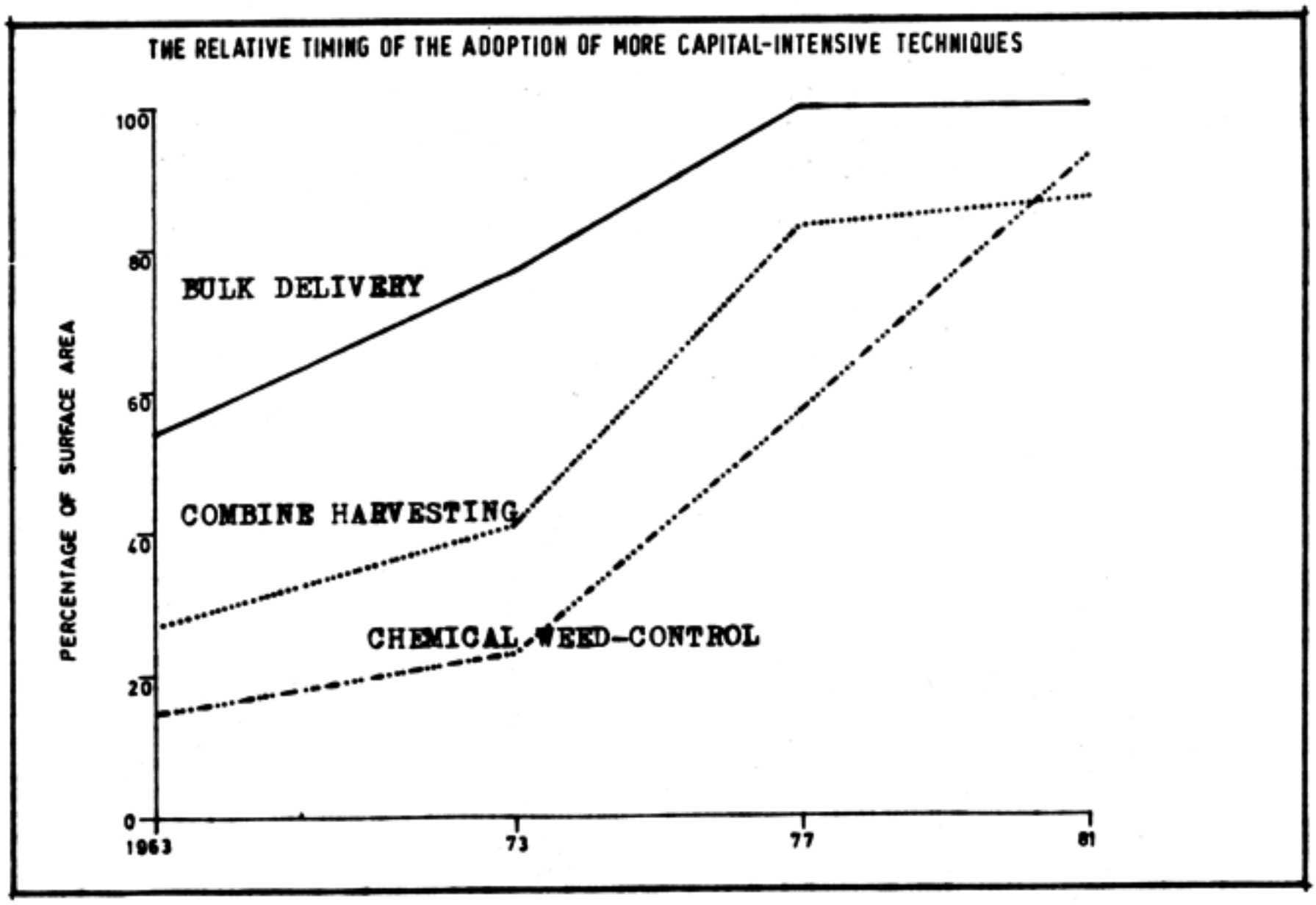
1.5 The Extent of Changes in Technology and Farm Structure

At the start of the data-collection period, in 1968, between 25 and 3Ø percent of the area planted with maize was being harvested by combine. By the end of the period, in 1981, this had risen to about 95 percent. The greatest part of the change-over took place between 1973 and 1977. The most popular machine used was the smaller, tractor-drawn PTO combine. (See figure 1)

The adoption of bulk handling and storage techniques was more advanced in 1968: by that stage, more than half the crop - 54 percent - was already being delivered in bulk, and by 1977 virtually the entire crop was reaching silos in this way. (See Figure 1).

By comparison, chemical weed control was not nearly as widespread in 1968. Only 15 percent of the area planted with all crops was being sprayed with weed-killers at that stage. But the pace of advance was quick and by 1981 weed-killers were being used on roughly 95 percent of the total crop surface area. (See Figure 1).

FIGURE 1.



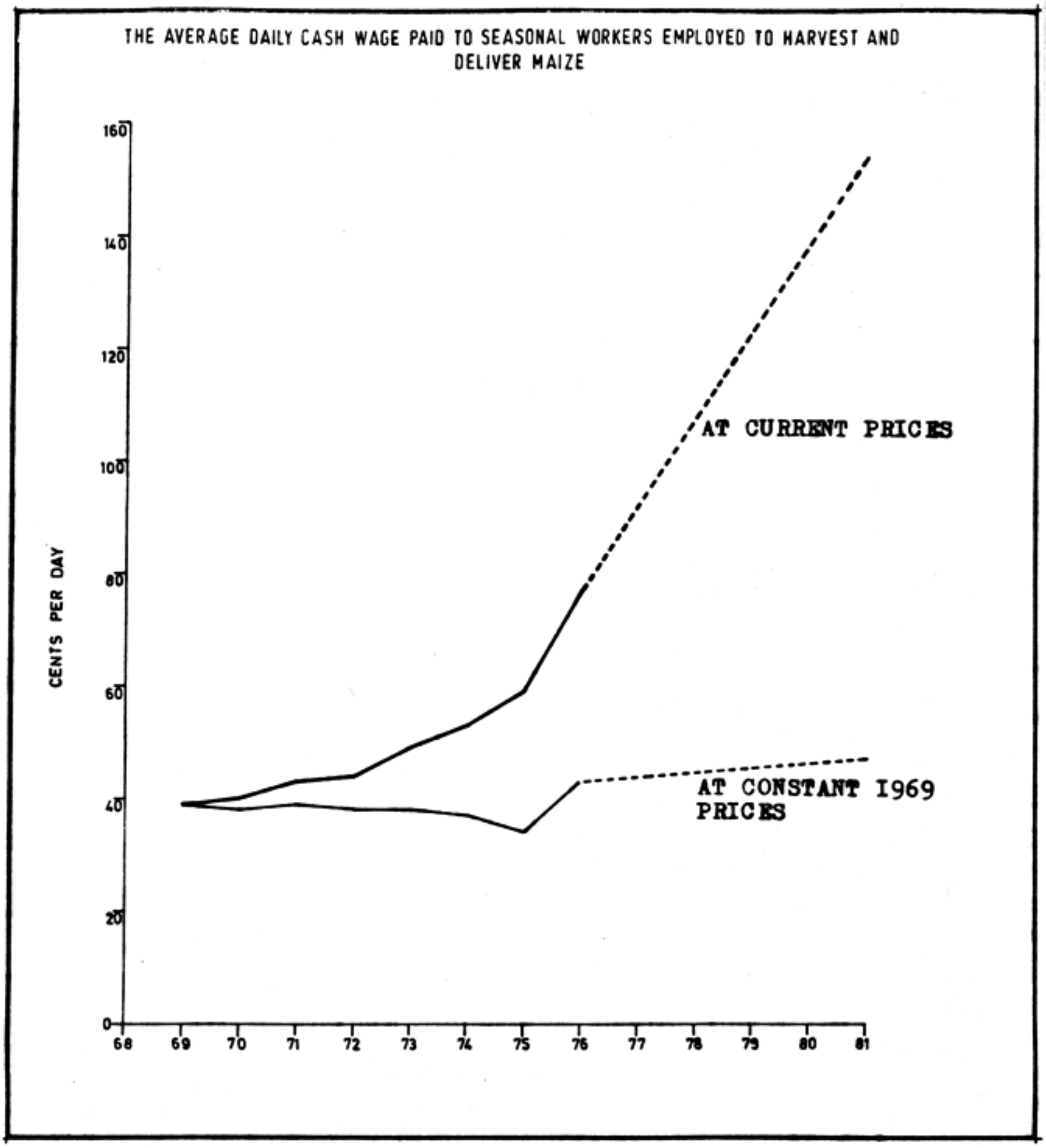
Between 1969 and 1981 the average current cash-only (3) daily wage of seasonal workers increased about four-fold, from 39 cents to R1,54 for roughly a 10-hour day. On the other hand, the average all-inclusive (4) annual wage of permanent workers rose almost eight-fold between 1970 and 1981 - from R220 to R1737 (or from about 60 cents to R4,75 per day). However, when the rise in the cost-of-living is allowed for, the real rise in seasonal wages is no more than 20 percent, i.e. from 39 cents per day in 1969, the real 1981 wage rose to only 47 cents in 1981 (at 1969 prices). In net terms, the gain for permanent workers was more tangible: real wages increased steadily from R220 per year in 1970 to R551 in 1981 (or from 60 cents to R1,50 per day (at 1970 prices). (See figure 2 and 3)

Over the 13 years, the average gross surface area of farming units in the survey grew by almost 75

articles

percent from 664ha in 1968 to 1155ha in 1981. No less than two thirds of the increase came about in the period 1973-1977. These changes should be seen

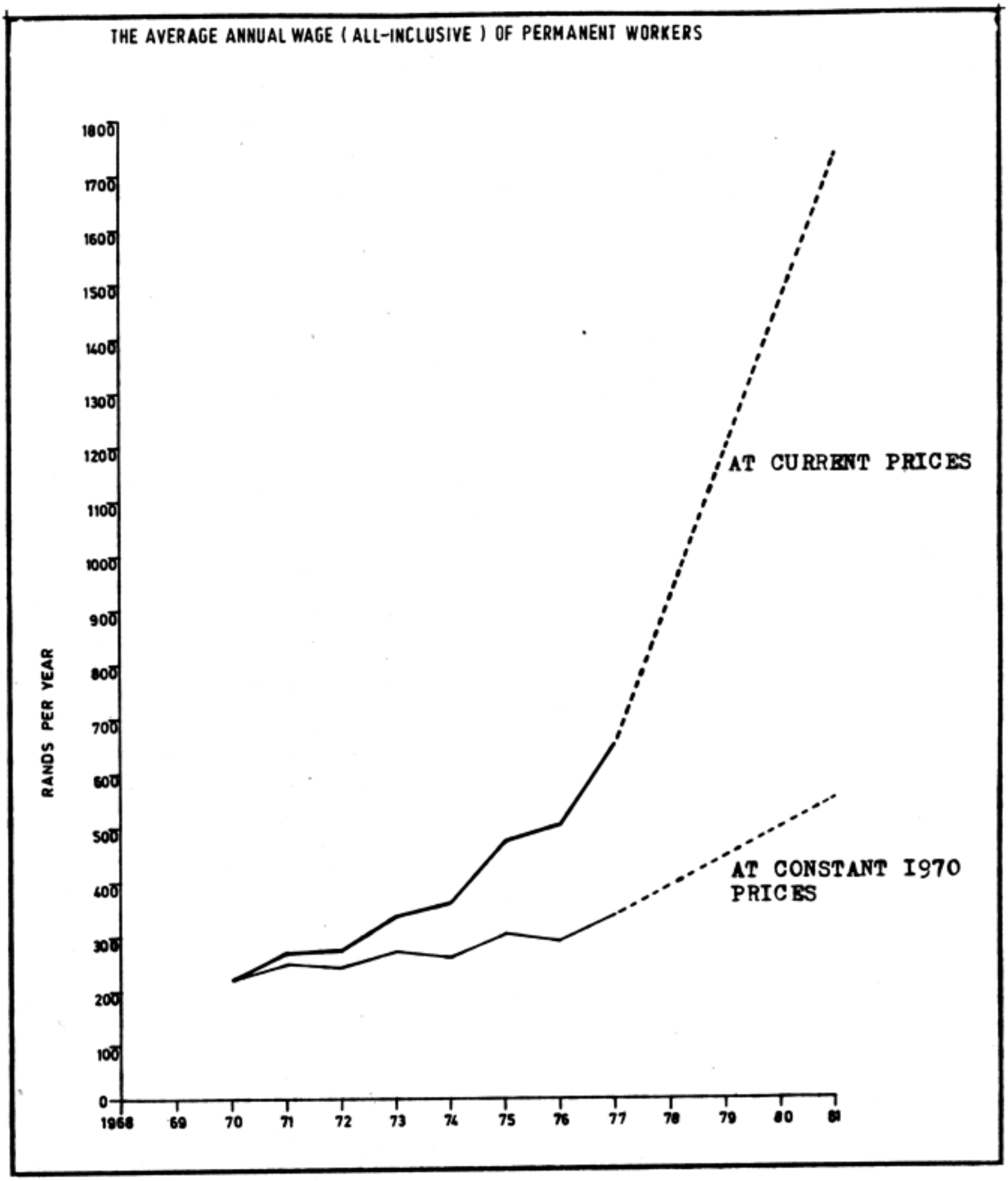
FIGURE 2.



against the background of a near-constant total area planted with maize, and therefore indicate a substantial increase not only in the size of farms

but also in the degree of concentration of ownership or control.

FIGURE 3.



Finally, despite some sharp fluctuations in the

middle 70's, the trend of output per hectare was firmly upwards. On average, the expected yield grew by a little short of 6,25 per annum, resulting in a total rise of almost 120 percent between 1968 and 1981.

These changes in technology, wages, farm size and yield were accompanied by profound changes in both the level and the composition of employment.

2. CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

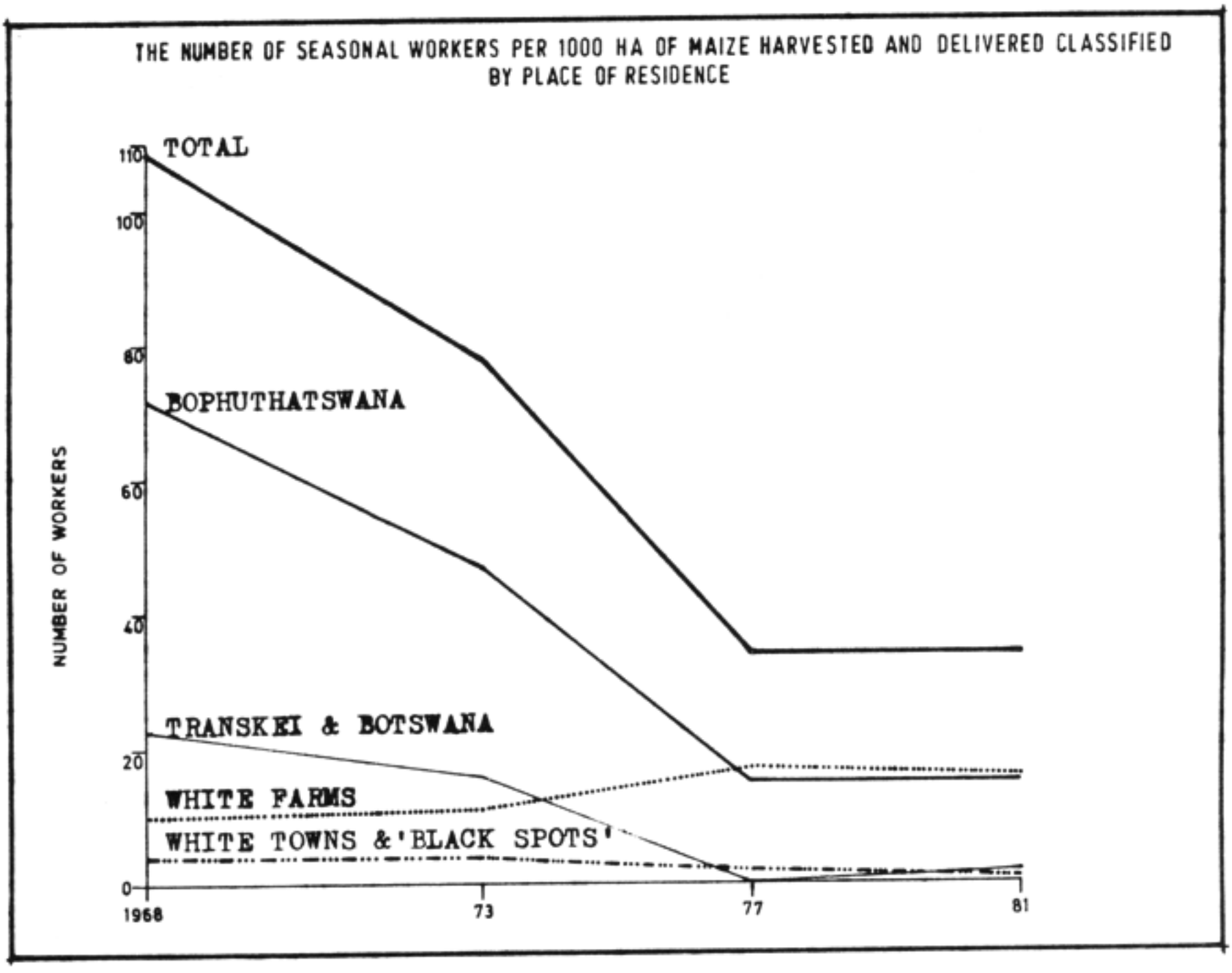
2.1 The Level of Employment

Between 1968 and 1981 the average number of seasonal workers per farming unit engaged in harvesting and delivering the maize crop fell by about 50 percent. For permanent workers, the fall was restricted to 20 percent. However, when the increase in the average size of farming units is taken into account so that employment is measured on a constant (per 1 000 hectares) basis, the decline in the number of jobs is seen to have been almost 70 percent for seasonal and 50 percent for permanent workers. Because the total area planted with maize in the Western Transvaal changed little over the 13 years, these estimates give the best indication of the percentage change in the actual number of workplaces in harvesting and delivery. See `total' trend line in Figure 4.) In addition to the fall in the number of seasonal workers employed, the average period of employment fell noticeably, from about 10 to 8.5 weeks per farm.

In the other major form of seasonal employment - weeding - the adoption of new techniques also led to a contraction in the number of jobs. The number of seasonal workplaces per farming unit fell by between 25 and 30 percent over the 13 years. On a constant (per 1 000 ha of arable land) scale, the contraction turns out to have been much greater - about 60 percent. As in the case of harvesting, this gives a reasonable indication of the fall in the actual

level of seasonal weeding employment available in the Western Transvaal. Also in common with harvesting, the period of sharpest decline occurred in the mid-7Ø's - between 1973 and 1977. The average duration of seasonal weeding employment also shortened, from about 8.5% to 8 weeks per farm.

FIGURE 4.



The actual number of workers who found seasonal employment in weeding and/or harvesting cannot be calculated accurately. However, in the six magisterial districts covered by the survey, it appears to have been approximately 1Ø5 ØØØ in 1968 and 4Ø ØØØ - 45 ØØØ in 1981. Although the number of permanent workers per 1 ØØØ ha harvested fell by nearly 5Ø percent, because harvesting, delivery and weeding are only three of the full annual range of

activities for which permanent workers are required, census data shows the number of permanent farm workers employed in the region to have fallen much less than proportionately - from about 30 000 in 1969 to 26 000 in 1978 (the latest year for which census data is available).

Of the total decline in seasonal employment between 1968 and 1981, about 37 percent can be ascribed to the replacement of hand- by mechanical-harvesting, about 32 percent to the adoption of chemical weedsprays, about 24 percent to the re-organisation of hand-harvesting(5) prior to techniques, and less than 1 percent to the replacement of tractor-drawn by self-propelled combines.

2.2 The Composition of Employment

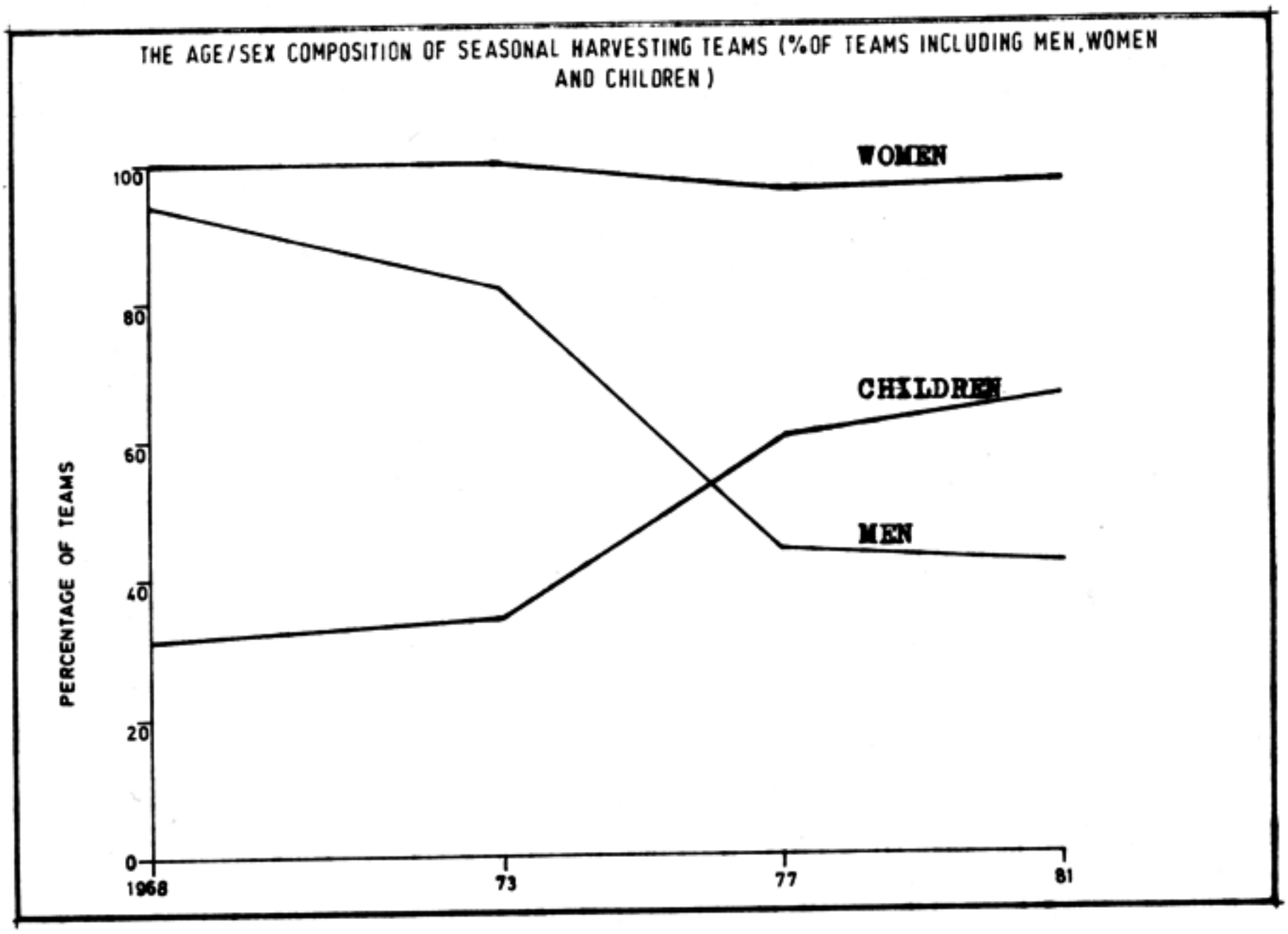
At the start of the period 66 out of every 100 seasonal harvest workers came from Bophuthatswana. By the end, no more than 44 out of every 100 did. All of the balance and more was taken up by the families of permanent farm workers, whose share of seasonal harvest employment increased from about 10 percent to almost 50 percent during the 13 years. People from the Transkei, Botswana, white towns and "black spots" were also employed, but in comparatively small numbers.

When the pattern of residence is superimposed on the pattern of falling harvest employment, it is found that whereas in 1968 workers drawn from "external" sources, i.e. Bophuthatstwana, Transkei, etc., could count on about 100 workplaces per 1 000ha of maize harvested, by 1981 the number was less than 20. Even those from "internal" sources, i.e. who lived on white farms, whose share of employment had grown so much, benefitted little in net terms: from 10 jobs per 1 000ha in 1968, the actual number increased only to 16 in 1981. Figure 4 illustrates.

Almost all "external" seasonal harvest workers came from rural communities, and, though few had

their homes in "black spots", the majority lived in areas where people from "black spots" are known to have been relocated. The data collected does not allow one to estimate the number of relocated people who found seasonal work on white farms, but there are several indications that it was small.

FIGURE 5.



Women formed the backbone of almost all seasonal harvesting teams, and appear always to have done so. Men, on the other hand, made up a declining, and children a steadily rising, proportion. Whereas in 1968 all but a few teams included men and only 30 percent included children, 13 years later only about 40 percent had adult male members as against about 65% which incorporated children (See Figure 5). Teams from external sources were most likely to include men, and those recruited internally, children. Children were most likely to be called on

to glean behind a combine, and men to harvest by hand.

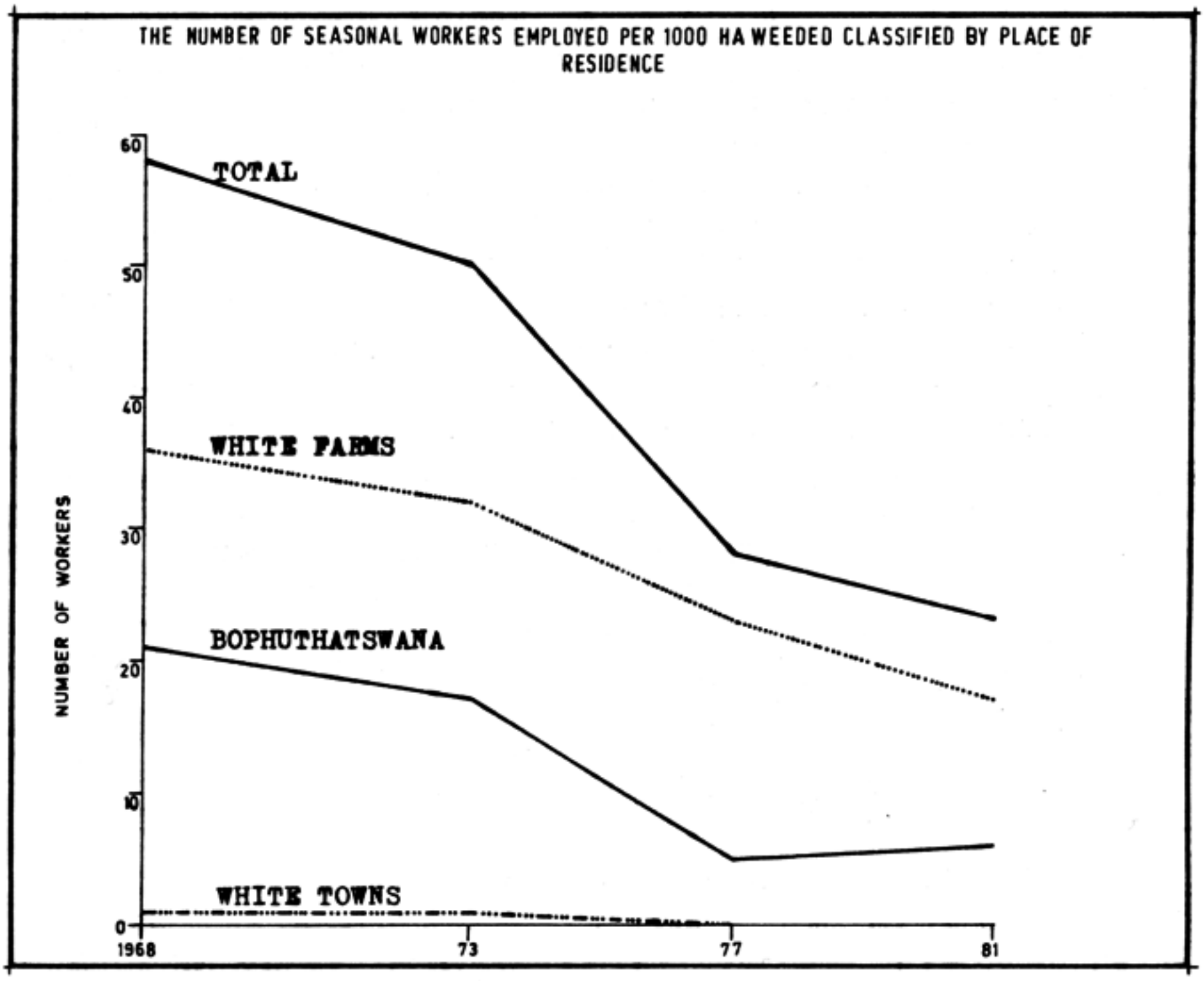
If one were to try to sketch a profile of a typical seasonal harvesting team, at the start of the period when most harvesting was still done by hand and most delivering in sacks, the team would be comparativly large - about 50 strong - would be recruited from a black rural area - most probably Bophuthatswana - and would consist of men and women in more or less equal proportions and a few children. In contrast, at the end of the period, when most harvesting was done mechanically and most delivering in bulk, the typical team would be comparatively small - about half the size it was 13 years earlier - would be drawn from the families of permanent farm workers and would be composed rather more of women than of children with perhaps a sprinkling of men.

In keeping with mechanisation, the greatest part of these changes occurred between 1973 and 1977.

For seasonal workers employed to hoe, the picture is noticeably different. Even in 1968, between 60 and 65 percent of workers were recruited from the families of permanent workers, and by 1981 this had grown to between 70 and 75 percent. In terms of the number of workplaces per 1 000 ha weeded, while places were available for 36 internal and 22 external workers in 1968, in 1981 the respective numbers had dropped to 17 and 6. (See Figure 6.)

As in the case of harvesting, almost all external weeding workers came from rural communities, although, from the mid-70's, very few came from localities into which people are known to have been moved in terms of the State's relocation programme. Again, it was women who were in the majority in hoeing teams, though throughout the period 2 out of every 3 teams included children. Men played a relatively small and diminishing role. Almost all children came from white farms, while most teams from "outside" sources included men. On average, hoeing teams were considerably smaller than harvesting teams in 1968, having about 30 members,

FIGURE 6.



but their numbers seem to have been much less nóticeably reduced by the adoption of more capital-intensive methods: in 1981 the size of the average hoeing team was still between 2Ø and 25, almost the same as for harvesting. Once more, the period in which the characteristics of weeding workers changed most was the middle 7Ø's.

Over the years the likelihood of both harvesting and weeding being done by the same workers increased steadily. As early as 1968, nearly 6Ø percent of harvesting teams shared some workers - mostly seasonal - in common with weeding teams. By 1981 this had risen as high as 9Ø percent. Together with the shift of seasonal jobs from external to internal workers, this suggests that the contraction of

seasonal employment during the last decade or so has been accompanied by a considerable increase in what one could call "the degree of concentration of job occupancy". The consequence of both trends is that fewer and fewer households are sharing the income generated by agricultural production.

Except in one respect, little information was collected about the characteristics of permanent workers. The great majority appear to have been men who lived with their families on the farm where they were employed. At harvest time in 1968, a little more than half operated machines, while the remainder performed manual work. Surprisingly perhaps, the proportion of machine operators hardly increased in the following thirteen years, and in 1981 roughly 60 percent of permanent workers were machine operators and 40 percent manual workers. Mechanisation reduced the number of harvesting jobs for both - by between 45 and 50 percent for machine operators per 1 000 ha, and by about 55 percent for manual workers. Once more, most of this change came about between 1973 and 1977.

3. CAUSES OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

When questioned about their reasons for mechanising harvesting, farmers mentioned the following factors (in descending order of importance):

1. labour unavailable
2. combine harvesting quicker
3. labour unreliable
4. combine harvesting cheaper
5. combine harvesting easier to control
6. bulk handling made combine harvesting easier
7. wages became too high

3.1 Labour Shortage

From the first, third and seventh of these factors, it appears that farmers perceived a shortage of reliable labour at wage rates that they were prepared to pay, as one of the most important

reasons for harvest mechanisation. But complaints of difficulty in finding workers have been a feature of capitalist agriculture in South Africa for many years, so this explanation should not simply be accepted at face value.

In particular, in the case of seasonal workers such complaints should be treated with caution. As has been pointed out in an analysis of seasonal employment on Californian farms,

> ...the farmer's incentives are entirely in the direction of more intense demand (for harvest-labour) than crop or climate require. Here is the explanation or the persistent reports of labour shortage while no crops spoil. The farmer's demand (for harvest labour) is more or less as he states it. He can, by and large, provide some employment for most of the workers he calls for. He could also harvest the crop with many less. So long as the cost of recruiting additional labour remains negligible and the cost of unemployment is borne by the community, and so long as the piece rate system prevails, the farmer will continue to demand a larger number of workers for a shorter period of time in preference to a smaller number of workers for a longer period of time.(6)

Nevertheless, there is a good deal of evidence to support the farmer's complaints. During the crucial years of the early and middle 1970's, when most mechanisation was taking place, the real wages of permanent farm workers did rise. (see Figure 3.) At the same time, permanent employment on farms fell. This combination of events does suggest that men were more reluctant to take permanent farm jobs.

Also although Figure 2. does not show any increase in the average wage of seasonal workers, it is likely that such a rise did actually occur. The reasons for this are both that women and children were progressively replacing men in seasonal teams, and that an ever-increasing number

of seasonal workers were employed to glean rather than harvest by hand. Since it is likely that women and children were paid less than men, and it is certain that gleaners were paid less than hand-harvesters, an unchanged average real wage implies that women and children employed to glean were, in fact, paid more than previously. So the same combination of events - a rise in real wages and a fall in employment - can be identified for both permanent and seasonal workers.

Further support for farmers' complaints is to be found in developments elsewhere in the economy in the early and middle 1970s. While real farm wages rose in absolute terms, relative to real wages in mining, manufacturing and construction - the industrial sectors which were the main alternative sources of employment for men from rural areas - they actually fell. And, during this period employment opportunities in these sectors expanded rapidly. In other words, for men employed on farms urban jobs became increasingly attractive. It does, therefore, appear that, to a significant extent, mechanisation on farms took place in response to an increasing "urban labour pull".

3.2 Economies of Scale

The second and fourth of the farmers' reasons for harvest-mechanisation concerned the relative quickness and cheapness of combine-harvesters.

The greater the initial fixed outlay for a particular method of production, the greater the potential for lowering the average cost by increasing the level of production. This is often referred to as "economies of scale". More capital-intensive techniques, therefore possess greater potential economies of scale than less capital-intensive techniques. To realise this potential, it is necessary, first, to have a range of techniques of varying capital-intensity, and second, that the scale of production be increased sufficiently.

In the case of maize-harvesting in the Western

Transvaal, the first of these conditions was fulfilled in the 1960s, when combine-harvesters became generally available. The degree of fulfilment of the second condition varied from farm to farm, but was given a considerable boost in the late 60s and particularly in the early and middle 70s, both by the rapid increase in the average size of farms and by the marked, if a little unstable, rise in crop yields. In the survey 23 percent of the purchases of additional land were accompanied in the same year, or followed in the next year, by the purchase of a combine.

When costs are calculated, it is surprising to find that the critical harvest tonnage above which it was cheaper to use combines was only 250 tonne. Only 2 or 3 percent of farms in the sample handled tonnages which were below this in 1976. And even in 1968 when the average harvest tonnage was considerably smaller, and the relative cost of hand-harvesting lower, no more than about 10 percent of farms in the sample would have found it cheaper to harvest by hand.

This is a crucial finding because it shows that on all except the smallest farms, the switch to combine-harvesting was merely a question of time and of a suitable stimulus, from the time that combines first became generally available. The growing reluctance of men to take farm jobs and the simultaneous rapid increase in the size of farms in the first half of the 70s appear to have provided the stimulus but in the end it is chiefly to the development of new technology abroad that harvest mechanisation should be ascribed. This suggests that the reduction in farm employment was due mainly to a "rural labour push" rather than to an "urban labour pull".

3.3 Increasing Farmers' Control Over the Labour Process

It is clear that control over the labour process was an important reason for harvest mechanisation, and

also for the introduction of weedicides.

> Experience has shown that farmers tend with the greatest eagerness to accept ... a new implement if it offers possibilities for making the task or life easier for them...(and are) inclined to think of the economy of the matter after (they have) decided that the particular implement is ... the one (they) would like to have.(7)

Although "combine harvesting is easier to control" ranked only fifth in the reasons given by farmers for harvest-mechanisation, almost all of the seven main reasons given by farmers can be seen as attempts to increase their degree of control.

The many tasks performed by hand which were subsequently taken over by machines represent only one aspect of control. The composition of seasonal teams is another. Recall that the size of seasonal teams shrank considerably. Also, while women were always the mainstay of seasonal teams, children to a large extent replaced men and residents of white farms tended to replace resident of black rural areas. Fewer workers are certainly more readily controllable than many; women and children less fractious than men; and the families of permanent farm workers living at or near the site of operations a more accessible and dependable source of labour than independent communities living far afield. To this one can add the appreciable shortening of the harvest period.

There is a further consideration: When attributes such as physical strength and stamina are indispensible for tasks such as reaping by hand and handling sacks, and they are in short supply (at the wage rate on offer) then there is a sense in which they qualify as "skills". While the traditional techniques were still in use, farmers had no option but to go to the "reserves" and negotiate for the men they needed in substantial numbers. With the introduction of mechanical harvesters and bulk

handling, these "skills" were no longer essential, and the bargaining position of communities in black rural areas was undercut. In this sense "deskilling" can be said to have occurred, and the balance of power and control shifted more firmly into the hands of farmers.

However, there is another side to this. Many machine operators who remain - mostly drivers of combines and heavy duty delivery vehicles - have acquired new, less abundant ("genuine") skills, some of which are in demand in urban areas. Though the "training school", Boskop, in Potchefstroom is regularly over-booked and most farmers approved of its courses in principle, many expressed reluctance to send workers employed on their own farms for training - particularly, in the driving and vehicle maintenance courses - because of the tendency of such workers to leave farms soon after training. For workers, driver's licences and maintenance skills create more than a little leverage, as is reflected by rising real wage rates for permanent workers. Organising labour - which many farmers expect in the near future - may be less difficult in these circumstances.

3.4 The Cumulative Nature of Technological Change

The sixth reason given by farmers for the purchase of combines was that "bulk handling made combine-harvesting easier".

Without bulk delivery and storage systems, the manual handling of 200 pound sacks would still have remained. This required the presence of men, who could be recruited in sufficient numbers only from the "reserves". It was the prior introduction of bulk-handling on most farms that opened the way for combine-harvesting to phase out seasonal teams from black rural areas.

To a lesser extent, combine-harvesting in turn played the same catalytic role in the adoption of chemical weed sprays, though the process was rather different. In contrast to harvesting, hoeing seems

generally to have been allocated to the families of permanent farm workers, as a matter of tradition. So there was relatively little scope to switch labour sources. However, with the spread of combines, there was a tendency to plant maize in 3 foot rather than 7 foot rows, although this was more than just for harvesting convenience. Between 7 foot rows a tractor can plough lightly, which is the normal preliminary to hand hoeing. Between 3 foot rows, this is no longer possible, and even wielding a hoe is difficult, one the maize is a foot or two high. So weed sprays applied at or shortly after planting were a natural complement to the use of combines fitted with 3 foot intakes.

While it would be wrong to suggest that there is a simple chain reaction in the process of technological change, these two examples do serve to demonstrate the presence of an important cumulative, inter-dependent element.

3.5 Institutional Factors

State policy on farm labour and on the cost of farm inputs in general, perhaps unexpectedly, does not appear to have been a notable cause of the technological changes considered here.

Though the "population relocation" policy was in full swing during the 197Øs, the rural areas of the Western Transvaal were less affected than most. Labour tenancy appears never to have been widespread in the region, (8) and there are only a few instances recorded of black families being removed from white-owned land. (9) In addition, though many "black spots" were "cleared", only a very small percentage of workers on white farms had their homes in these areas, as figure 4 shows. Nor is there any evidence that the activities of (farm) Labour Control Boards were important.

Finally, the tax provision which enabled farmers to write off the entire cost of new machinery in the year of purchase, thereby reducing both their tax liability and the cost of new machinery, was

introduced only in 1977. By this time, as can be seen from Figure 1, the greatest part of mechanisation had already occurred.

4. UNEMPLOYMENT

What happened to the workers who left the farms? The way in which the research was undertaken did not provide a direct answer. However, from national and regional wage and employment statistics, it appears that the fall in farm employment was to some extent compensated for by a rise in industrial employment.

For men, the main alternatives to farm work were jobs in mining, manufacturing and construction. During the economic boom in the first half of the 197Øs, employment (1Ø) and real wages in these industries increased rapidly. This suggests both that jobs in these sectors became more attractive and that many men previously employed on farms were able to find work in urban areas. In the second half of the 7Øs, the number of jobs and real wages in these industries rose more slowly, and actually fell in some instances. But during this period, the number of permanent workers on farms seems to have remained fairly constant, and even risen slightly. So most men who could no longer find employment in agriculture, or who no longer wanted it, were probably able to find work elsewhere.

For women employed on farms, on the other hand, the only significant avenues of alternative employment were in urban domestic service and in the "informal sector". There are no records of informal employment and wages, but it is clear that there was no appreciable increase in either employment or real wages for domestic workers. In contrast to men, therefore, most women made redundant by technological change on farms - and they made up the bulk of those whose seasonal jobs were phased out - would probably have found it difficult to get other work. For those who relied on seasonal or domestic work on farms merely to supplement regular income from other family members, this would have been

unfortunate. But for those with no such stable sources of income, it would have been disastrous. It is women living in black rural areas who have borne the brunt of technological change on farms.

5. SUMMARY

Extensive mechanisation has taken place on Western Transvaal farms during the 1970s. This has been accompanied by a substantial reduction in employment, mainly of seasonal workers; by the transfer of seasonal jobs from workers living in black rural areas to those living on white farms; and by the replacement of men by women and children in seasonal teams.

Among the most important consequences have been

- an increase in the income of households whose chief breadwinner has retained his/her job in agriculture or has, found alternative urban employment; but unemployment and a fall in income for many households in black rural areas who have relied chiefly on female breadwinners.
- an exodus of black families from white farms to black rural areas and a consequent increase in the incidence of oscillating labour migration between rural and urban areas.
- an increase in the degree of farmers' control over the harvesting, delivery and weeding processes, but paradoxically greater potential perhaps, for labour organisation.

Footnotes

1) It was not possible to collect the sample on a statistically random basis. However, the sample was matched closely to the overall characteristics of the population in terms of farm size and geographical distribution as recorded in censuses. The findings should not be unreasonably biased.

2) There are, of course, other reasons why silos

were built, e.g. the storage life of grain is prolonged.

3) Insufficient data was collected to calculate an all-inclusive wage for seasonal workers. A rough approximation of the average daily value of food supplied (free) in 1981 is 50 cents.

4) This is based on calculations made annually by the Department of Agriculture (from survey data), and on data collected on the same basis by the author in 1981. Items included are weekly or monthly cash payments, payment in the form of bags of threshed maize, cash bonuses, food, housing, clothing, grazing and cultivation rights, medical assistance, paid leave and free schooling.

5) In the 1960s, before the general adoption of combines, farmers re-organised threshing in a way that saved a considerable amount of labour without the purchase of additional machinery. This was done by having one central threshing machine from field to field. This part of the calculation is based on time studies conducted by the Department of Agriculture.

6) Fisher, L.H. **The Harvest Labor Market in California** (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts) 1953, p.11. Not all of Fisher's assumptions apply perfectly in the Western Transvaal, but the analogy is close enough to be highly relevant.

7) Republic of South Africa **Commission of Inquiry into Agriculture** (chairman: M.D. Marais) Second Report, Government Printer Pretoria, RP 84/1970, p. 165.

8) Of the six magisterial districts in the survey, only one was affected by Abolition of Labour Tenancy notices published in the Government Gazettte. Farmers confirmed that labour tenancy had never been widespread in the region.

9) See**Surplus People's Project** (Publisher:Surplus People's Project, Durban 1983), evidence on Western Transvaal. Again farmers' reports confirm this.

articles

1Ø) Total employment in mining changed little. But recruitment of black mine workers in South Africa increased substantially. In Bophuthatswana, the number increased from 6 ØØØ in 197Ø to 33 ØØØ in 1976.

GWU ON THE UDF

The SALB interviewed the General Workers Union on it's attitude to the United Democratic Front. The following preamble from the GWU explains the context in which it felt it necessary to clarify its views publicly. The preamble is followed by the interview.

Amidst the controversy surrounding the position of many unions with regard to the UDF, the GWU feels that it is important that our position and views on this issue are clear. In addition, we believe that debate of this nature is healthy within and between progressive organisations.

This controversy has involved much criticism. we do not see criticism as necessarily negative. Some criticism may be based on a detailed understanding of and disagreement with - our reasons for not affiliating to the UDF. This merely reflects the fact that, quite predictably, different outlooks on political issues do exist within the democratic movement. some criticism have, however, been based on a distortion of our position. Perhaps this is due in part to the fact that there has not been enough detailed publication of our reasons for not affiliating to the UDF.

We take issue with claims and resulting criticisms that we do not support the UDF or that we are "not interested in politics". The interview with our General Secretary answers these allegations in detail. We stress again what we have repeatedly and publicly stated: that we support any organisation opposing the new constitution and other laws which deny the majority of South Africans democracy. Our support obviously extends to the UDF. We have stated our willingness to participate jointly in campaigns and give our general support in a variety of ways.

Neither do we say "we will never join the UDF", a view attributed to us in some reports. We do have real difficulties, however, and explain these, in affiliating as a single workers' organisation to the UDF. One possible scenario for the future mentioned in the interview is that of a national union federation affiliating to a national political body. It must be emphasised once again however, that we are an organisation which acts on mandates from our membership. As such this kind of unity would have to be one called for by the rank-and-file members. As stated in the interview, a national union federation may provide workers with the necessary support to participate in a multi-class organisation. Participation of workers on the ground rather than through an alliance merely "at the top" would still be imperative.

We put our views forward in the hope of clarifying the present misunderstanding and encouraging discussion.

Why has the General Workers Union decided not to affiliate to the United Democratic Front?

The first point, which we've stated repeatedly, is that we are committed to supporting any organisation which opposes the constitutional proposals and the Koornhof Bills and the UDF would obviously be primary amongst those organisations. We are also committed to the idea of joint campaigns with the UDF in opposing the Bills and the constitution. But we don't see our way clear to affiliating to the UDF. Our difficulties there relate to two broad areas, two broad issues. The first concerns the structure of many of the other organisations that are affiliated to the UDF, relative to the structure of a trade union. These structures are very distinct and critically different. Our second major area of difficulty relates to the essentially single class nature, working class nature of trade unions, relative to the multi-class nature of the UDF, and of many of the organisations affiliated to the UDF.

What do you see as the essential differences in structure between the General Workers Union and other trade unions, on the one hand, and many of the organisations affiliated to the UDF, and why do you think those differences present obstacles to affiliation to the same organisation?

The answer to that question is long and complicated. It's relatively simple, difficult as that has proved to be in practice, for one union to affiliate to another union, because trade unions to all intents and purposes have identical structures. they all have factory structures, branch structures, and national structures, so that one union can fairly easily lock into another union at all levels of both organisations. This is simply not the case with a great many of the organisations united under the banner of the UDF. To take two concrete examples from the Wesern Cape: the Ecumenical Action Group called TEAM, and the Detainess Parents Support Committee. The former is a grouping of progressive priests, and the latter is a grouping of individuals dedicated to opposing detention, and providing support for those in detention. Let me be clear from the outset that both of these are laudable and necessary ventures, but neither bare any similarity whatsoever to the structure of a union. The same can be said in varying degrees of a great number of other organisations affiliated to the UDF, all the youth and student bodies, for example. The critical feature that all these organisations have in common, as far as we can see, is that they are primarily organisations of activists. To say they are organisations of activists is not intended as a slight in any way, and we believe that there is a great need for this type of organisation in South Africa. But we still insist that they bear no similarity in their structure or organisational practice to a trade union. This problem has been recognised by the UDF, in the Western Cape , where some organisations, referred to as mass-based organisations, have been given a certain number of

delegates. Other organisations, those that we would primarily refer to as activist organisations, have been given a smaller number of delegates. While this recognises that differences do exist, we believe that it is an inadequate recognition. The difference between an acitivist organisation and a mass-based organisation is not one of size, and therefore of the number of delegates to a central body, but rather of the entire structure and functioning of the organisation.

As we see it, an activist organisation is essentially a grouping of like-minded individuals, who are brought together by a common political goal. Their acitivity consists in propagating their ideas amongst a constituency which they themselves define. Activists grouped together in this way, in an organisation of this sort, have a great deal of freedom of manoeuvre in the extremely flexible parameters in which they operate. They don't represent members in a strong sense. They propagate ideas amongst a certain constituency, or in a certain area, and as such play a very important political role. Unions, on the other hand, are not organisations of activists, and union leaders are not activists in the same sense at all, because they are representatives in the strongest sense. Union leaders don't claim to rpresent the views of the working class. They represent the views of their members. Church or student activists, can claim to represent the broader social aspirations of church congregations or student bodies and it doesn't really matter whether they are actually mandated by the broad mass of students or church goers, or whether they are not. By propagating their ideas or their line they attempt to make students or church goers aware of their broader interests and their social role. A union leader, on the other hand, can't go to a factory and claim to speak for the working class. He has to be mandated by workers in a factory, and he has to be reasonably sure that the particular workers who have mandated him back up his mandate. In a union situation there is no

alternative to working in that way.

The critical upshot of this is that a union representative has to go through a long and very arduous process of receiving mandates and constantly ensuring that the mandates are backed. Union leaders don't derive their position from discussing ideas from amongst a small group of comrades, and then propagating these ideas widely. They derive their position from the members whom they've organised, and who send them forward with a specific mandate. Unquestionably union leaders can influence the mandate that is given by discussing issues with the rank and file, but ultimately they are very tightly bound to the specific decisions of members. This is, as far as we see, what a mass-based organisation means. It's got nothing to do with the size of the organisation, its got to do with the difference between organisational politics and activist politics. The structure of a union derives from the relationship between the shop steward committee and the members in a particular factory. It is undoubtly at that level where the mandated relationship is the strongest, but it works in that way all the way up to the top of the organisation, all the way up to the national conference, and we cannot, change our hats to suit different occasions, and still retain our character as representative organisations. We have to go through the process of getting these mandates, we have to know that our members are willing to back the mandates and what they are willing to do. If we don't do that our participation is either meaningless, or even worse than that, our participation could be construed by our members as being in violation of the most basic trade union principle, namely the principle of representivity. Those considerations simply don't apply to a large number of the organisations affiliated to the UDF. Most of the organisations affiliated to the UDF have as their legitimate political task, to appeal to the masses "out there". We have as our task the representation of the workers **inside** our organisation, and the painstaking

process of drawing more and more members into the formal and disciplined structure of a trade union. This is a major reason why we've found it difficult to envisage fitting into the structure of the UDF. We've experienced huge difficulty in explaining to our members how we would fit into the UDF as a union, yet conversely we have found it very easy to explain to our members how we would fit into a trade union federation. The difficulties that we have don't arise from the issues which the UDF has been set up to tackle. These have been discussed in the union, and they are very broadly appreciated. But affiliation has aroused very little interest.

There's one additional point that I want to emphasise. We've stated repeatedly that we'll encourage our members to join the UDF. Well, given the federation structure of the UDF, that's impossible, but we'll encourage our members to join organisations that are affiliated to the UDF. Should one of our members rise to become even a leader of the UDF, we would not view that as inconsistent with union policy in the slightest. In fact it would probably be a source of great pride to the union, just as it's a source of great pride to us whenever any of our members become leaders in their progressive community organisations. But we do not see our way clear to representing our members as a union in the UDF.

You referred earlier to problems in the relationship between the union as a single class organisation, and other organisations affiliated to the UDF which are multi-class organisations. Could you elaborate on that?

It's not even primarily a question that the union is a single class organisation, but that the union is a working class organisation, and a working class organisation only. A union by definition is open to workers only. This is not to say that there are never divisions in a trade union. There obviously are. There are a group of people in a trade union

who are not workers, namely all the full time officials, and their interests have always to be subordinated to the interests of the members. There are also divisions within a union on the basis of the skill categorisation of workers in a factory. In South Africa there are also the inevitable racial differences and potential divisions between section 10 people and contract people. It's these divisions which the constitution and the Koornhof Bills have been set up to widen. They are divisions that we always have to work on, that we always have to work at overcoming. But notwithstanding these divisions, all our members are working class. They are all factory members, and they are all members of the broader society. This means that they identify, quite correctly, as their source of oppression, the bosses and the state. That has bearing on the question of our affiliation to the UDF. For one thing, we will inevitably be organisations that incorporate a great diversity of political views and affiliations. We'll have within our ranks members with militant political views, and we'll have in our ranks members with fairly conservative political views. We'll also have within our ranks a great many members who have few political views at all, people who have joined the organisation purely to fight their bosses. With a certain degree of tension now and again, those diverse views can all be contained within an organisation, because they are all held by workers.

To a certain extent this could also be said of any other mass-based organisation. It could be said of student organisations where these are mass-based, it could be said of womens' organisations where they are mass-based, it could be said even of a community organisation. It is conceivable that a woman joins a womens' organisation to fight womens' issues. Such an organisation should be able to contain within it a fair diversity of general political views as well. But there are two key differences. The first is that student and community organisations, and, although not necessarily

correctly, womens' organisations, tend to identify the state as their source of oppression. This means that they are inevitably more clearly politically defined, and their membership is more clearly a politically based membership. They don't have the bosses to intercede in the struggle in the same way that workers in a trade union do. Secondly, the fact of the matter is that in South Africa, most non-trade union progressive organisations, tend to identify themselves quite strongly with one or another political tendency.

This of course involves particular problems in Cape Town. I don't know if these problems are the same everywhere else. But here the community organisations are divided quite clearly into two groups. There was a possibility that affiliation could jeopardise the unity of, if not directly our union in Cape Town, certainly of some other unions in Cape Town. This is also especially sensitive when we've identified as a priority the formation of a trade union federation, with the even greater diversity of views that are contained therein. Just as we wouldn't want to do anything that would jeopardise the unity of the whole trade union movement. I'm aware that opens us up to what has become a currently fashionable charge, namely that we are economistic. Although it's not always clear from those levelling the accusation, I take this to mean that we concentrate our activities exclusively on wages and working conditions, that we're not concerned with political struggle, that the only basis of our unity is the struggle in the factory. Its as such, a unity that makes little positive contribution to the national democratic struggle. There are two answers to this: the first is that a union must inevitably carry within it the tendency towards economism. A factory-based organisation by definition sets itself certain limits, and the General Workers Union has never made any claim to mystically transcend these limits. The second answer to the question is that the accusation reflects a very narrow, formalistic notion of what

politics is, and that's what really brings us to a point pertinent to the question of the class composition of the union. It has to be acknowledged that workers are a very special group in society. They are the class, unfashionable though that term might be, that produces the wealth of the country. As such they are the most exploited and oppressed members of society. This special place of the workers in society is currently recognised in a very peculiar and inverse way by other groups in society. The way in which it's recognised in South Africa is by frantic attempts by other groupings to eliminate the differences between themselves and the working class. What you have ranges from the laughable assertion made some years ago to the effect that all blacks are workers, to more serious assertions made by community leaders and very often trade union leaders today, to the effect that the community are the workers and the workers are the community, or student activists who are the workers of tomorrow, or women's organisations who are the wives and daughters of the workers. All these assertions have a kernel of truth, but to be a worker of tomorrow is not to be a worker of today.

More pertinently it doesn't go any way towards transforming a student organisation into a workers' organisation. To say that workers constitute the majority of any black community in S.A. is obviously true, but it doesn't mean that workers constitute the majority of community organisation, of organised community organisation, of organised community members. In fact, it's lamentable, but nonetheless true, that community organisations have had relatively little insertion into the ranks of contract workers, for example. In those rare cases where, the majority of a particular community organisation are in fact working class people, its possible that these working class members will have little influence at the top of the organisation in the decision making structures of the organisation.

I want to be clear about one thing: when we say that workers are the most oppressed and exploited

members of society, that means, at the general level that workers do not have access to the means of production, and that to be workers, they have to be deprived of the possibility of turning themselves into bosses. This, even at that general level, is not necessarily true of other groups in society. It's not for example necessarily true of students. But what it means at a more specific level, a level more specific to our problems with affiliation to the UDF, to a multi-class organisation, is that workers as a class are necessarily denied access to skills and education, other than those that are directly required by the bosses in production. They are denied the skills of articulation and language, of literacy, numeracy, in fact of the whole culture and short hand which a smoothly functioning organisation seems to require. This is not to mention the fact that workers also have very little time at their disposal, or at any rate the time at the disposal of workers is very rigidly controlled. It is in fact control that is a key defining element of what it means to be a member of the working class. Every minute of a worker's time is controlled, he's told when and how and where he'll work, he's told when and where and how he'll sleep, he has no control over whether he is employed one day and unemployed the next day. All workers have, in a sense, is their unity. This is why workers tend so naturally to take and implement decisions en masse, and conversely why other groupings in society are so comfortable with taking decisions individually or in small groups, even, which is very characteristic of student organisations, to break up large gatherings into small groups to facilitate decision making and discussion.

The point of this digression isn't to say that workers should never co-operate, never work together with organisations of non-workers, or organisations in which non-workers are also members. We would expect this of our members. But we wouldn't be surprised, and nobody else should be surprised, if when our members do work in this way, they insist on

carrying into these organisations the culture and demands of the working class, and the culture and demands of a working class organisation. Because, and this is where I really do want to answer the charge of economism to some extent, unquestionably the democratic union movement in South Africa has won substantial economic gains, and to be sure we've spent a major part of our time and energy in making these economic gains. But in the democratic unions, the workers have also in addition won a new pride and dignity, a self confidence in their ability to take and implement decisions. This is really the key aspect of unions' political work. The acquisition by our members of an awareness of their own power, an awareness of their ability to participate in their own way in the most complex and difficult decisions. We don't claim for one minute that this should or does represent the totality of our political work. Nor do we make the claim that this is sufficient to democratise South Africa. But we are absolutely certain that the level of organistion of workers in South Africa has reached a stage where they simply won't settle for any less than the right to participate fully in any political or community organisations that they form, or that they join. This is especially so if they join these organisations in their capacities as union members. They won't be satisfied with formal symbols of power, nor will they be satisfied with power where the ability to exercise that power resides with the more skilled and educated union bureaucrats, where they become in a sense silent but nevertheless muscular participants in the whole process.

We don't here want to get into a detailed critique of the UDF as such. But the UDF has to ask itself whether its's style and tone, whether the language spoken, whether the pace at which it's developed, whether it's programme, facilitate the fullest participation by working-class people. Our members simply do not feel that way. They've never, for example, appreciated the need for the sophisticated structures which the UDF have

introduced. This is not because they are backward or stupid, but because they are advanced leaders of their own organisation, an organisation which has been in existence for ten years. We've never in the ten years of our existence found the need to set up single sub-committees, let alone a highly sophisticated and complex structure. The workers have not felt that they've had the time to participate in the endless debate surrounding the setting up of the UDF. This is not because they are uninterested in politics, but because they do arduous fulltime jobs and they believe unlike activists generally, that meetings are only necessary, when the meetings have a very clear and defined objective, and when there's the possibility of that objective being fulfilled at the meeting.

We encouraged, for example , our members to attend the launching of the UDF. A fair number attended, but the vast majority of those who attended didn't understand the meeting, because it was in English. Principally the workers don't understand what programme of action is envisaged by the UDF, and this is obviously very critical. Given the above, there is a feeling on the part of the workers that they will not be able to participate fully in the decisions that lead to a programme of action, and this is anathema to an organised worker. They are not going to be drawn into an organisation in which they feel that they will have to take action blindly, without having participated in the decision making. Those are really the key aspects of the class composition of the organisations: firstly, that we draw in our membership from a very wide and diverse range of political views, unlike most of the other organisations participating in the UDF, and secondly, that our members are working class people, and as a working class they come from a culture that is very distinct from that of other more privileged classes in society.

There has been a lot of talk about the importance of working class leadership in national political

organisation. Are you saying that working class leadership does not amount to the presence of individual members of the working class within national politically oriented organisations, but rather that the working class should have a leading status, within national political organisations?

I think that I mean both. It is essential that working class individuals occupy leading positions in national political organisations, inside the country. It's important because I believe the second to be true as well, that workers must have a special status in multi-class organisations. Workers must have the opportunity to lead the pace and style and tone and language - in fact the whole discourse - of the organisation. The reason why it's important, and the reason why I think that it's important to examine the questions raised with respect to the UDF, is that democracy in this country is inconceivable without the fullest participation of workers in the national democratic struggle. This is not merely because the working-class is the largest and most muscular group in society. Simply put, they are the only social grouping with a class interest in democracy. Other social classes or social groupings might have an interest in relative or partial democratisation of society; other individuals might have a moral interest in a thoroughgoing democratisation of society. But the working class which has every aspect of it's life - it's economic life and it's political life, it's working life and it's leisure life, very rigidly controlled, is the one class in society that has an interest in a thoroughgoing democratisation of the economy and the polity. Working class organisation in South Africa has developed to the stage where workers insist on the right to participate fully, in the structures of any organisation of which they are members.

The participation of Western Cape trade unions in the Disorderly Bills Action Committee (DBAC) last

year, seemed to be an unsatisfactory experience, not only for the trade unions, but for other organisaions participating in the DBAC. Very little was achieved after a long series of meetings. To what extent do you think this has discouraged workers and trade unions in the Western Cape from participating in the UDF, which is seen as some bigger form of the DBAC?

In the initial stages of the formation of the UDF, our experience of the DBAC definitely did influence our feelings about participation in the UDF. The experiences on the DBAC were uniformly negative, in the sense that we found ourselves in the middle of extraordinary squabbles. Sometimes they seemed to be squabbles based on straight power plays, straight questions of dominance between the two factions of the community organisation in Cape Town. The upshot of that was nothing got done, with respect to the Koornhof Bills. I recall a laughable situation on one occasion - I myself wasn't present there, but our representatives reported - where in the same week that the Koornhof Bills were withdrawn, the DBAC met. They sat through an entire three or four hour meeting without once mentioning the Koornhof Bills. The DBAC seemed to be set up for some other purpose altogether. The purpose seemed to me for one grouping in the community to achieve domination over another grouping in the community. This did colour our participation in the UDF at first, but it doesn't anymore. We, like I imagine other groups who were equally disappointed with their experience of the DBAC, have shaken off the ill effect of that experience. Where it does still colour our decision is that particularly some unions draw their membership from one of these groupings in the community, and there are sometimes members of other community groupings in the union. We would not wish these differences in the community to intercede in the unity of a trade union, both of the grouping of trade unions in the Western Cape, and also of particular individual trade unions.

You talked earlier about the fact that the General Workers' Union supports the development of other progressive organisations in the community, and that it encourages participation of General Workers' Union members in those organisations. In what concrete ways has the General Workers' Union supported the development of these organisations, and how does it aim to do so in future?

The primary way, in which we attempt to facilitate the development of broader community organisations is by taking up broader issues in our union. This we've always done, and we continue to do. The issue of the Koornhof Bills and the constitution has been very substantially discussed in the union right from the beginning, before many of the organisations that have been specifically set up to oppose the Bills were even conceived of. This is really the primary way in which we support other organisations.

We would also support them, and we've said this repeatedly, by encouraging our members to join these organisations. We've fairly consistently been asked to give our members to other organisations. Well, our answer to that is that our members are not locked in concentration camps, our members are in the community, in the townships. They must be organised, and we would certainly encourage them to join those organisations.

What is the union's current relationship with the United Democratic Front, and what possible future developments do you see?

On the question of our current relationship to the UDF, we definitely see a role for ourselves as a union relative to the UDF. We've said repeatedly that we are prepared to engage in joint campaigns with the UDF, and that we are prepared to support UDF campaigns. We hope to be informed of UDF activities, of UDF meetings, to enable us to encourage our members to go to these meetings. Both

of a local or regional nature. We hope that we will receive UDF newsletters and information sheets and that we will be able to hand these out to our members. For example, in the very near future in Cape Town the UDF are holding a meeting to discuss what is going on in the Ciskei. We see what is going on in the Ciskei as critically important to us, obviously. We also see it as a critically important expose of the constitutional proposals, and therefore legitimately within the UDF's ambit. We would certainly support them in that campaign.

As to the future, that's a little bit hypothetical at the moment, I can't ever envisage the General Workers union affiliating to the UDF. Although obviously I can't speak for any other union, I can envisage a situation where a formal relationship develops between a national/political/community centre like the UDF, and a national trade union centre. I should say on that score that there is a precedent for this in South Africa, for a relationship between a national explicitly politically based centre and a national trade union centre.

It's often been said by the unions that their priority is the formation of a federation, and that is the case. The reason why it's a priority, or the reason why that priority influences our decision with respect to the UDF, is not that we are spending so much time in forming a federation that we don't have time to devote any resources to affiliating to the UDF. Rather we see that as part of a national trade union centre, the workers would have the necessary support, the necessary base, from which to participate in a multi-class organisation. That is a possible development. Obviously it would be a highly complex development, and one that would require a broad agreement in the trade union movement. But certainly it's a possibility, it has been done before, I don't see why it shouldn't be done again.

MGWUSA ON THE UDF

The Municipal and General Workers' Union of South Africa's response to this issue must begin by outlining how we see the present political situation. This is because our decision to join the UDF was made as part of our response to certain political events. These events directly affected us both as a trade union, and as people who identify ourselves with the struggle for a free and just South Africa.

There are four main political issues that effect workers today. These four are:

a) The increasing push towards Bantustan Independence for all the homelands - and therefore the forcing of Bantustan citizenship on all Black people.

b) The attempt to push through new Pass Laws that will tighten up the control of all workers. The lives of all workers - but more especially contract workers, will become very difficult if this new law is passed.

c) The Community Council elections that will be held later on this month. This issue is linked to the problem of high rents, high electricity bills and high transport costs.

d) The "New Deal" being pushed by the government in the forthcoming constitution. This issue must be seen as a part of the issues spoken of above. All four of these issues are linked. They are all part of the attempt to ensure that the Apartheid capitalist system can continue to exploit workers by continuing to oppress all black people. We will explain what we mean by this in more detail below. First we will look at why these four issues are so important to black workers.

Bantustan Independence

All black workers are faced with the fact that they and their children are being **forced** to become citizens of one or other homeland. As these homelands become independent - the situation of the workers from that homeland deteriorates. They are no longer seen as citizens of South Africa but as **foreigners** coming into South Africa to get a job. The government has made it clear that it hopes to eventually have no more black citizens of South Africa. All black people will be foreigners who can come into South Africa to work if there are jobs for them. If there are no jobs then they will be sent to the homelands to starve.

The Bantustans are governed by people who are **junior partners** in the oppression of the black people of South Africa. These governments are there to make sure that the large numbers of unemployed and hungry people in the homelands are kept under control. These governments survive only because they are given money and guns by the Botha government. They exist only to oppress the people, and to keep them from rising up against their oppression.

All black workers are faced with the threat of being sent off to rot in a homeland. All black workers must unite to say NO to these Bantustans.

The New Pass Laws

The pass laws have always been the way in which the government of South Africa has made it easy for the bosses to exploit black workers. The pass laws control the movements of black workers. These are the laws which make it possible for the government to get rid of any workers who are not needed in the urban areas. These are the laws that have made it possible for the government and the bosses to **force** black workers into jobs they would never choose to do - on the mines or the farms. But the problem is that the very high numbers of unemployed people and

the starvation in the homelands has resulted in people defying the control of the pass laws and coming to town illegally to look for jobs. So the government has decided to **tighten** up the pass laws in order to make sure that people do not come to the urban areas unless they are needed by the bosses.

The government has also decided that the best way of doing this is to try and **divide** the workers. The people who have jobs and houses in the urban areas will be given a **little** more freedom - and all others will be **booted out** into the homelands. No rural people will be registered for jobs if there is an urban person who does not have work. Anyone who tries to defy these laws by coming to town illegally will face a large fine and/or a long period in jail. Anyone who gives accommodation to an illegal worker will also face a large fine and/or a long period in jail. Any employer who hires an illegal worker (because he can pay the worker less money) will be fined R500000. (This is because the government feels that the problem of control over all black workers is more important than the extra profit that a few bosses can make by employing "illegals").

Even though the urban workers with housing will be given a bit more freedom, their situation is also uncertain. This is because they could lose their position as permanent urban workers and end up in a homeland. The only way forward is to resist the government's attempts to divide workers and unite against these new pass laws.

All black workers are oppressed and controlled by the pass laws. All black workers will be affected by these **new** pass laws. This is why we must all unite to say NO to the "Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill".

The Community Council Elections

The Community councils are another attempt to confuse people about who the enemy is. This is done by putting stooges into power in the community councils and then oppressing the people through

these stooges. When the Bantu Administration Boards were the people in charge, it was clear who the oppressor was. The U.B.C.'s had so little power that it was clear to everyone that they were the dummy bodies. The government then decided to give them a bit more power, change their name, and try to fool the people in this way. But the real power still lies in the hands of the government through the B.A.A.B.'s (Bantu Affairs Administration Boards).

This means that a whole lot of extra money is spent without any benefits for the people. These community councillors have to be paid high salaries, they need buildings to meet in, cars to ride around in - all in order to carry out the government's dirty work. The workers who live in the townships have to pay for all this. The government not only puts up stooges to do its dirty work for it - but it also tells the people that now that they control their own affairs - they will also have pay for it all by themselves - no more money from the government. This means that higher rents, higher electricity bills, dog tax and all sorts of other expenses will be forced upon the workers.

If the people complain, then the reply is that they are now in control of their own townships. They must complain to the people they elected. The government is also moving towards giving these councillors the power to oppress the urban people if they resist too much. Community guards - a type of police under the control of the community council - are being spoken about.

All black workers must unite to prevent the situation in the townships becoming like a mini-homeland. We must all unite to say NO to the community council elections.

The New Constitution - No More Apartheid?

Botha's "New Deal" is being spoken about as a move away from Apartheid. The idea is that now Indian and Coloured people are being "included", and that

this is a step in the right direction. But if we look at this from the position of the black workers, we can see that this "new deal" is just the same old apartheid - the same old oppression. The government is speaking of a new non-racial democracy coming about with this "new deal". This can only make sense if we first do away with all black people in South Africa. If there are no black South Africans (only Transkeiens, Vendas, etc) then suddenly the whites are in the **majority.** Suddenly it becomes possible to include Coloureds and Indians in the government. So this "so-called" **move away from Apartheid** is only possible thanks to the ultimate result of Apartheid - the banishing of all black South Africans to the Bantustans.

In this way we can see how this "New Deal" is very closely linked to the other issues spoken of above: the "Independence" of the Bantustans - the tightening up of the pass laws - and the new self-government of the townships. The government is hoping to win over the Coloured and Indian people in order to tighten up the oppression of the black people - and most especially - the black workers.

This "New Deal" is trying to **divide** the oppressed people. This "New Deal" is trying to make sure that the black workers remain under the control of the government. This "New Deal" will make sure that the black workers are still at the mercy of the bosses.

All black workers and other oppressed people must unite to say NO to this new constitution. We must unite to say NO to the whole package - **the Constitution and the Koornhof Bills.**

Who else is affected?

We have spoken of the way in which black workers are affected by this "package deal". We can see that the Apartheid capitalist system in our country is fighting to survive. The people are resisting and all sorts of problems are surfacing. This "New Deal" - and the Koornhof Bills - are attempts by the

government to face the challenges made by the people's resistance. We have seen how this tightening up of Apartheid laws will make it easier for the bosses to continue the exploitation of black workers. The government is passing these laws in order to make sure that the black working class is tightly controlled in the urban areas - and kicked out to the homelands when workers are no longer needed.

But these laws are also part of the Apartheid system that oppresses many people from other classes and other communities. All black people - and Indian and Coloured people - are oppressed by these laws. The black workers are the largest and most oppressed group. This is why black workers will usually be the most dedicated and hardworking people in the struggle. But black workers are not the only oppressed people. We must stand together with all people willing to fight for a free and just South Africa. We must unite to oppose this "New Deal" and the Koornhof Bills. Only in this way can we mobilise the widest possible grouping of people to reject continued oppression.

We must recognise that within this broad unity of people - there will be differences of approach - different levels of understanding - different ideas about the kind of society we are fighting for. This does not matter. We are united in our opposition to Apartheid and its effects on all black people. The black workers will put all their might behind a thrust to do away with Apartheid and the injustices and inequalities that it has resulted in.

We believe that this cannot be done without a total change in the type of society that has been created by the Apartheid capitalist system in South Africa.

Trade Unions and the Struggle

Our stand on these issues is clear - but how can we oppose them effectively? Trade Unions are not political parties. Trade Unions are organisations

of workers - uniting to fight for the rights of workers and to defend these rights on the shopfloor. Our Trade Unions are also committed to fighting for a society in which all workers are free. But we cannot pretend that all our members are politically-conscious people who would wholeheartedly get involved in the struggle. Our strength lies in our ability to unite in the workplaces with the possibility of stopping production. This happens mainly around some of the immediate problems facing workers in that workplace. The structures of our unions exist to enable workers to deal with problems in the workplace as they arise. Because union structures bring workers together to discuss problems - it becomes possible for political issues to be discussed. However, it is very difficult for a trade union to launch and control political campaigns - as well as function effectively as the first line of defense of the workers. This is why it is very difficult for us - as trade unions - to respond effectively to political issues. While admitting all this, we must say at the same time that it is our duty as trade unionists in South Africa to be part of the struggle for freedom and justice. Our problem is therefore to find the most effective way of doing this - despite the limitations of our organisations. This brings us to the need for alliances with other organisations.

Alliances

In South Africa, the main political organisations are banned. We are thus faced with finding ways of responding - together with other groupings of oppressed - to the main political struggles occuring inside our country. Many other organisations - like student groupings or community organisations - have a similar problem. The are formed to fight some of the basic problems that occur amongst people they are organising. They are not political parties. If they spent all their time functioning as political groupings - they would lose touch with their base.

Ordinary people have to be drawn into the process of struggle - they do not come rushing in by themselves. Ordinary people need to learn - through the process of struggling to change some of the immediate problems around them - how and why these immediate problems (like high rents, bad teaching, etc.) are part of broader political problems. In this sense - the difficulties these groups have in responding effectively to political issues are similar to those faced by the unions. This is why we have all responded so eagerly to the formation of the UDF.

The UDF and the Crisis

Everybody today seems to be talking about the crisis. Well, the reality is that the present system of domination and exploitation is not working too well. So the government has a crisis on its hands. The "New Deal" and the Koornhof Bills are the government's attempt to resolve this crisis by bringing in a shiny new model. This new model is supposed to make sure that the crisis becomes a thing of the past and that domination and exploitation live on ... happily ever after. It's up to us to make sure that this does not happen.

This means tht the present political situation demands a far greater and more united response than we have managed for a very long time. By ourselves - whether we are unions, community organisisations, students or whatever - we will achieve very little. The present situation calls for the kind of united response that can bring together the strengths and talents of as many different groupings of people as possible. Churches, unions, community organisations, students, youth groups, women's groups and groups of activists - committees of all kinds - all of these should unite to resist this new "package deal".

The problem then becomes how to bring all these different types of organisations together. Herein lies the strength of an organisation like the UDF.

In the real sense of the word - the UDF is not an organisation at all. It's a rallying point. It's the focus of a range of different types of energies. It represents the pooling of resources; the co-operation of a range of very different, autonomous organisations. It is a form of unity in action - but not in structure/form or detailed policy. It is an attempt to create the broadest possible **unity in opposition** to this **specific** political situation. It serves as a means of bringing people together. It serves as a forum to sort through the differences that may arise between these groupings - but only those differences that may serve as a stumbling block to this united opposition. All other differences are irrelevant to the project of the UDF.

The UDF also serves as a **symbol** of our determination to oppose oppression to the end. The election of presidents and patrons should be understood for their **symbolic** value - rather than as a set of very complicated **structures.** The individuals involved were chosen because they are symbols of our struggle - symbols of **determination:** of **courage** and **of the history** of our struggle. It is in all these ways that the UDF is a **United Front** of a broad range of organisations and **not** a unitary (or even a federal) structure.

As far as the operation of the UDF is concerned, this means that the programmes of the UDF must be carried out primarily through the organisations that identify themselves with the UDF. The shared planning process, the pooling of resources and the employment of a number of full-time personnel by the UDF: all these things ensure that member organisations of the UDF receive a lot of support in the process of carrying out these programmes.

The most interesting result of the excitement and activity generated by the UDF so far, has been the emergence of whole range of new organisations that then join the UDF. A number of youth organisations and civic organisations have emerged throughout the

country to take up the UDF banner. These organisations exist as autonomous entities - although they have emerged as a result of the existence of the UDF. They will now be able to grow, consolidate their base, foster new leadership and continue to function long after the UDF ceases to exist. But what about unions? What kind of role should they play in the UDF?

Unions and the UDF

Unions are working class organisations. They exist both as a means to fight for the rights of workers - and as a training ground which enables workers to develop skills in organisation and leadership. The development of these skills - as well as the growing confidence that this generates amongst workers - are essential elements in the development of the working class struggle.

The main limitation of all unions is that their structure and way of operating tends to push them towards focusing only on economic issues - to the exclusion of political issues. This can only be overcome by associating ourselves - as a trade union - with the political struggles going on around us. In this way we can achieve two goals at the same time:

a) we can oppose the tendency towards economism by clearly stating our commitment - as trade unionists - to the broader struggle for freedom. This challenges all the workers that we organise to also examine their role in these terms; and

b) by actively participating in these struggles, we can influence their direction and goals. Worker leaders, emerging from the training ground of the unions, can take their places amongst the leadership of the political struggle. Workers - organised through the unions - can participate actively in the process of struggle. If this active participation occurs - the large number of

workers involved will be a tremendous boost to the political struggle **and** will help to ensure that the **aims** of the struggle are controlled by the workers.

What alternatives do we have if we reject bodies like the UDF?

Some would argue that unions are working class bodies and in the interests of working class autonomy we must "go it alone". The unions should be part of an independent initiative against the "new deal". This independent opposition group should consist only of unions. Even if we felt this to be a good idea (which we don't) we would oppose it on the grounds that we spoke of above: a union is not a political organisation and for as long as it continues to function as a union - it cannot effectively fulfill the role of a political organisation. The other alternative would be for the unions to support/encourage the setting up of a "Worker's Party" that will lead the workers in the struggle against the "new deal". This type of political grouping - it is argued - would **ensure** that the political goals of the working class are promoted. We **disagree** with this position for the following reasons:

a) No "working class party" is ever composed **only** of workers. Anyone who is prepared to fight for the kind of fundamental changes that would enable workers to be free would be welcome in any working class party. This also points to the mistake of assuming that all workers are somehow automatically committed to the struggle for fundamental change. It is true that a progressive political direction can most naturally take root amongst the working class - it is **not true** that a political leadership composed of workers is automatically progressive. Nor is it true that a political leadership composed of workers will **guarantee** that the interests of the workers are promoted by that leadership.

We believe that a truly fundamental change

in this society can only occur if the workers are actively involved in the process of struggle. This is because the workers are one of the most down-trodden and oppressed classes in our society - as well as having a very important role in the functioning of our Apartheid capitalist society. This gives workers the kind of power that other oppressed classes - like the rural people (peasants) - do not have. The question then arises - In what way should workers be involved in the struggle? This leads us to the second objection that we have to the idea of a workers' party "going it alone".

b) We mentioned - in the first part of our discussion - the fact that it is the black workers of South Africa who have suffered most under the various parts of the Apartheid capitalist system. This is because this system functions in such a way as to enable the bosses to make the highest possible profits - at the expense of the workers. Many other people have also suffered terribly at the hands of this system - the rural poor people for example. It is because we believe that the oppression of black workers is at the root of the broader oppression of all black people in South Africa - that we advocate the widest possible unity of **all oppressed people** to fight this system.

Some who will unite with us will not be prepared to go as far as we will on the road to freedom - but because it is the **same road** - we can unite and work together. Some believe that we will be betrayed by those who would get rid of racial discrimination but are not too keen to shake things up any further. Our reply to this is quite simple.

We believe that is is impossible to separate off Apartheid from the capitalist system it has fed. A truly committed opposition to Apartheid (and its

consequences) will lay the foundations for a fundamental change in the entire system in South Africa. Our present struggle does not have to be based on some abstract "ideal society" of the future. A struggle which aims to get rid of Apartheid - to get rid of the homelands - to get rid of the inequality bred by Apartheid, inequalities of wealth, land, education, etc. This kind of struggle - if taken to its logical conclusion - will undermine the foundations of Apartheid capitalism. The rest is up to us.

The importance of this kind of struggle is its ability to unite the widest possible range of oppressed people. The path of the struggle is the same for all of us - how far down the path we go will depend on our efforts. It's up to the unions and all other progressives to ensure that the organised workers are fully involved in the process of struggle - that worker leaders emerge and take up positions amongst the political leadership - that progressives unite to ensure a struggle for truly fundamental change in South Africa.

These are reasons for joining the UDF, we encourage all other progressives to do the same.

WHERE ARE THE WORKERS

This letter from a Cape Town worker and trade union member, was sent to a local community newsletter in response to a letter from a reader asking why workers and their organisations did not form an official part of the United Decmocratic Front. The letter has not yet been published in the local newsletter in question.

To RS Nyanga

My dear friend

I really appreciate what you've done. I think it is a best thing to do than going around saying bad things about us workers and our leaders. I am sure that by now your question is being answered, and in a satisfactory way by the trade unions in their statement which was published in the Cape Times of the 3Øth August.

You see, the unions or the workers are not only interested in high wages, better working conditions in the factories. Some people say we are not interested in the whole country's freedom. But we are. It is not an easy thing to organise us workers, neither to educate us, the most of us workers are uneducated, we know nothing about politics, we don't even know our history as workers, neither about democracy. Workers are from different organisations with different beliefs. Other organisations, although they claim to believe in democracy they don't practise it, and they are not even prepared to. In such organisations we always feel small because we are degraded and even forgotten, because in such organisations people are measured by education and other things, eg on the UDF launching day here in the Western Cape. All people were supposed to be there, including the un-

educated people who can't even speak English language. All the speakers there spoke in English and nothing was translated into the un-educated people's languages. The UDF, like other intellectuals organisations, had forgotten us. I am a worker, and the kind of work I do's the lowest kind. I've been to school but I just went to school up to standard five. But in the trade union movement, I and all other workers, even the workers who never been to school, feel at home.

We are not degraded or forgotten as if we don't exist. We don't measure people by education, by the kind of work a man does, neither by collar or by colour, we are all equal in the trade union, and we believe and practise democracy.

Because of these circumstances, including those ones already stated by the unions in the Cape Times, it is not wise for the unions to join any other organisation which is not a worker's organisation. Therefore the trade unions have decided to form a workers federation, even before the UDF idea. But up to this day they are still very busy with it, because they have to make sure that it is not built in the air, and is also controlled by its members.(the workers). Building up a good thing is not an easy thing, and a foundation is a very, very important thing because the whole structure has to balance on the foundation. So it needs to be a firm foundation.

This does not mean that the unions don't support the UDF and many other organisations which are also fighting for human rights. It does not even mean that the trade union members can't join those organisations, that is encourage by the unions, although those organisations are not controlled or fully-controlled by un-educated people although most of the money in those organisations may be coming from them (the un-educated people).

Yours in the struggle for a better day.

M Mbothwe, `The Dustman'.

THE UDF ON THE UNIONS

The SALB interviewed Mr Mosiuoa Lekota, publicity secretary of the United Democratic Front, at Khotso House, Johannesburg on the 13th October 1983.

What is a united democratic front?

It is an alliance of a wide spectrum of organisations: workers', youth, church, sporting organisations and so on. The UDF is an alliance specifically in opposition to the constitutional proposals and the Koornhof Bills. It is an umbrella body seeking to co-ordinate organisations previously acting independently.

Does this involve an alliance of different classes?

An alliance of classes is built into the United Democratic Front. For example workers' organisations and professional organisations contain different classes. But the United Democratic Front is essentially an alliance of organisations.

How was the UDF formed?

At the time when the President's Council proposals and the Koornhof Bills were put forward opposition to them was coming from small, unco-ordinated organisations. At the anti-SAICC (Anti-South African Indian Council) meeting in Johannesburg in January Dr Boesak suggested that a united democratic front should be formed.

The call was well received and organisations represented at the meeting such as the Natal Indian Congress, the Joint Rent Action Committee and individuals who were members of the Cape Housing Action Committee contacted their members in other regions. The idea was passed on and mobilisation took place especially in Natal, the Transvaal and

the Western Cape. In these areas UDF regions were being formed at meetings in April, May and June.

Further consultation led to the decision to launch the UDF nationally, even though not all the regions had been formed, because of the urgency of the situation. At the time of the national launch, on the 20th of August, the only fully structured regions were the Transvaal, Natal and the Cape. The other regions did their best but were not properly constituted.

Now we are organisating in the North Western Cape, the Eastern Cape and Border region and the Free State. Apart from meetings being banned we are continuing to make strides in gaining support.

The UDF took nine months to form itself whereas the union movement has taken ten years to reach its present position. How do you account for this difference?

The UDF has organised organisations, it has not had to organise individuals in the same way as a trade union, which is more difficlt and takes much longer. The strength of the UDF depends of the strength of the organisations which constitute it.

To what extent have you gained support amongst workers?

We are not satisfied that we have achieved as much trade union support as we had hoped for. But we see the participation of workers in the UDF as important. The more workers come in the closer we are to gaining a truly national character. South Africa is still under colonial conditions and the struggle against imperialism is a struggle against capitalism. For this reason the working class must provide the backbone of the struggle.

The question of sizes of organisations must be considered. For example professional organisations tend to be smaller than trade unions. In this regard organisations must receive representation

proportionate to their strength in numbers.

What do you mean by "a truly national character"?

We mean by this that we are non-racial, which means we embrace all races, and that we bring together all classes. The presence of workers and the middle classes in the UDF is well discernable, but a significant section of the working class in some major independent unions still remains outside our fold.

Do you feel, then, that whites have a contribution to make in the struggle?

Yes, for example students who were members of Nusas (the National Union of South African Students) became stalwarts of the union movement.

Does your term "national" also include all regions in South Africa?

Yes, by "national" we mean all classes, all regions and all races.

To what extent does the UDF have a presence in the Bantustans?

We need a presence in these areas, but there the repression is worst. We have a strong presence in the Ciskei, but support for the UDF there is heavily suppressed.

Is your support in the Ciskei mainly through Saawu (South African Allied Workers' Union)?

Yes, mainly through Saawu but we have other support, as was shown by the numbers at the launching of the UDF in that region.

The Transkei is very different. Our supporters there can't express their support because they fear the consequences. In Zululand Gatcha (Buthelezi)

claims that everyone belongs to Inkatha. It is difficult for anyone to show support for the UDF. But as support grows for the UDF in the urban areas amongst contract workers our message will be carried back to these areas.

What are the structures of the UDF?

The Transvaal region, for example, has a president, two secretaries, a treasurer and other executive members. Each region is affiliated to the national executive. The three regiona' presidents are also national presidents, but this is not a requirement, they just happen to have been elected to both positions. If an issue arises one of the two regional secretaries will call a regional general council. This is made up of delegates from the organisations affiliated to the UDF. The regional executive committee is elected by the regional general council. It does not include representatives from each affiliated organisation as this would make it too unwieldy. The executive committee runs the day-to-day affairs of the UDF.

In a few cases there are organisations which are national. Clause 5 of the UDF **Working Principles** provides for these organisations to affiliate nationally. The terms of their membership is decided by the national executive in consultation with the regional councils.

When an organisation has affiliated to the UDF it retains its independence. It cedes its independence only in regard to opposition to the constitutional proposals and the Koornhof Bills.

Could you briefly explain the UDF's programme of action?

We have set broad objectives, some activities may be possible in the Western Cape and others in the Transvaal. In the Transvaal, area committees are being established. There are to be workshops, door-to-door campaigns and mass meetings. The mass

meetings give people a feeling of belonging together, but the door-to-door visits are the most important because people can ask questions. We are planning a peoples' weekend at the end of October at which there will be vigils focusing on the legislation. This will be part of the build up to regional or provincial rallies on the eve of November the 2nd.

How do you see the role of the UDF differing from that of other organisations, particularly the unions?

The unions mainly handle the problems of working class people at the factory floor level. Some people have criticised unions for not taking up political issues, but the unions are not well equipt to handle political issues.

The members of trade unions can also participate in other organisations which take up other issues, for example the pass laws, bus fares, rents. Such issues require a different type of organisation.

Some unions, such as Saawu the Food and Canning Workers' Union, GWU (General Workers' Union) and others have taken up such issues in the past. With the emergence of the UDF do you see the role of these unions changing?

These unions were in the past expected to take the lead. Workers turned to the unions, but this could have jeopardised the unions. Now they can encourage workers to join other organisations which take up these issues. Some unions have done this. To link to the community organisations is not to sell out. The UDF can be used to fight issues that unions cannot directly fight.

The criticism has been made by some of the independent unions that the UDF is dominated by middle class people and that workers find it difficult to participate. The language used is

English and workers can't compete with the debating skills of the middle classes.

It is true that the middle class tends to take over leadership and dominate community based organisations. The question is whether the working class can win genuine allies from the middle classes, for example intellectuals. Workers must join not only to give the UDF numbers but also direction; to make their voice heard. Where possible workers must also assume positions of leadership. The challenge for the UDF is whether it can evolve effective democratic processes to enable every constituent organisation to participate in the running of all the affairs of the front.

The criticism is also made that decisions are taken and then put to meetings for ratification, not for discussion.

Whilst it is true that we are not without shortcomings, some of the criticisms come out of ignorance. People who do not take part in the UDF cannot know who took the decisions because they were not at the meetings. If workers are not there the decisions will be taken by those who are present. But once they join they will decide. Where the democratic processes are not followed the workers will ask, "Who took that decision?"

If the unions came into the UDF they could take up the programme of action and participate in the way they want to, but for the time being those in the UDF will decide issues.

At the national launching of the UDF some unions affiliated and others decided not to affiliate but nevertheless gave their support. This suggests that the support for the UDF is very wide amongst the independent unions, but that there are differences over the best way of giving support. Why do you feel that the unions should formally affiliate to the UDF?

Resistence to the constitutional proposals and the Koornhof Bills should not be restricted to one class. It is not merely workers who are affected but a combination of people; of classes. If the UDF creates a wider unity then the unions should join.

Some unions have said that joining the UDF may have divisive effects within their organisations because their members have differing political affiliations. It is also argued that the fact that some unions have joined and others have not is making union unity more difficult.

We have not made any union join. Every union will consider whether or not to join and the democratic processes within the unions will take their course.

The disunity amongst the unions is disappointing. We sent a letter to the feasibility committee giving our solidarity to the unions in their search for unity. We also stated that workers must be organised beyond the factory and need to form an alliance with other classes and that the UDF is the best forum for this.

It seems then that there are a number of possible ways in which workers could join the UDF: they could join as individuals or through their unions joining or through a federation of unions joining. Why in fact does the UDF see it as necessary for unions to become members?

The problem with a loose affiliation is that it is not easy to co-ordinate and to mobilise people. The situation would be greatly improved if unity on the factory floor and unity in the communities could be achieved. Combining unity at both these levels would greatly enhance the struggle. It would be easier to take decisions and to take action if the trade unions had already formed themselves into a single federation.

CCAWUSA ON POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

The Commercial, Catering and Allied Worker's Union of South Africa was to discuss the question of affiliation to political organisations at its National Conference on the 5-7th of November, but failed to complete the agenda. The following resolution was submitted by one of the union's branches to the conference.

a) Because CCAWUSA's membership consists of people who support different political organisations, conference resolves that the union should not affiliate to any particular one.

b) However, conference expresses its support for all organisations fighting for a free, equal and democratic South Africa. CCAWUSA should encourage its individual members to take part in the activities of such organisations in their personal capacities.

c) When such organisations hold meetings or have projects whose objects are in line with the principles and policies of CCAWUSA, the union or individuals mandated by the union may participate in these as CCAWUSA or representatives of CCAWUSA.

CUSA ON POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

The General Secretary of The Council of Unions of South Africa sent this resolution to the SALB in response to a request for a statement on its position in relation to political organisations.

During March and August this year the CUSA office had received a request from the National Forum Committee (NFC) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) and one other agency for its views and commitment on the Constitutional Proposals.

The three requests were put to the National Executive Committee during April. It was agreed that the matter be discussed at the Joint Executive Council (JEC) of CUSA on the 30 April 1983.

The requests together with a draft resolution was prepared for the JEC meeting. A lengthy debate took place on various aspects. Amongst other issues discussed were the following:

1) the nature and philosophy of the organisations requesting the commitment
2) the content of the CUSA response in the resolution
3) the commitment CUSA was able to provide and
4) the nature and content of the Constitutional Proposals

The following resolution was then unanimously adopted:

"Having examined the proposals of the regime on the constitution,

Having further examined the basis of the call by various organisations regarding the constitutional proposals,

Noting that the Nationalist Party is presently in disarray and that these proposals may therefore be changed to impose White rule under different

guise even through a referendum,

Knowing that the White opposition forces and parties are themselves divided and without any effect.

The Council of Unions of South Africa now therefore:

* wishes to place on record its complete and total rejection to the proposal
* pledges itself to participate in every forum to work towards the achievement of a just and democratic society
* calls upon its members to lend their individual support to all efforts of community organisations to end this foolish plan
* pledges itself to all forces and all efforts to work towards a common citizenship in an undivided democratic and just society."

Following the response of various unions and the nature of press reports together with intransigient positions adopted by some sections of the community CUSA is involved currently on an ongoing examination of its attitude and role in the UDF and the NFC.

BUREAUCRACY IS KILLING TUCSA

Introduction

For those in the labour movement who doubt that the most important problem facing workers can be the bankruptcy of their own leadership, the experience of the Trade Union Council of South Africa is worth examining. In TUCSA, more perhaps than in any other union body in the country, the voice of workers has been reduced to a whisper in the grip of bureaucracy.

Here I will examine the leadership crisis in TUCSA and suggest remedies to the problems. The history of TUCSA is well documented and will not be repeated here. However it is important to note that the current leadership of TUCSA, which includes ex-Sactu (South African Congress of Trade Unions) stalwarts like Lucy Mvubelo and Norman Daniels, for the most part have been around for a long time. It is this almost entirely white "old guard",(1) which completely dominates the leading bodies in TUCSA and, together with its allies, many of whom occupy the leading positions in the most powerful TUCSA Unions, comprises the heart of TUCSA's bureaucratic machine.(2)

The performance of this bureaucracy at TUCSA's 29th Annual Conference in Port Elizabeth (P.E.) last month (where they completely monopolised proceedings) was, despite the fact that S.A. is in the midst of one of the most turbulent periods in her history, not substantially different to previous years. Except in one crucial aspect.

As they bowed more deeply in the direction of big business and "verligte" government, they attacked the emerging union movement and in particular the unregistered unions. The climax of this attack was their overwhelming support for a resolution calling on the government to ban all unregistered trade unions.(3)

TUCSA'S Policy in Today's Conditions

To understand TUCSA's position, we need to grasp the conditions in which TUCSA leadership is seeking to operate. South Africa is currently in the grip of a deep social, political and economic crisis. The primary feature of the crisis is the inability of the profit system to satisfy even the most basic needs of the working class. Workers, of all colours, are under attack as unemployment grows, inflation spirals and basic necessities like housing become more out of reach.

This, coupled with state initiatives which promise to step up even further controls over black workers (virtually entirely through repression) while simultaneously eroding the democratic rights and privileges of white workers, has led to the rapid growth of support and organisation in the working class for two radical, and diametrically opposed, political "solutions" to the crisis.

To the left of TUCSA, mainly black workers have, over the last decade, built up their unions around the struggle for , generally speaking, workers' control over the decisions affecting their day-to-day lives.

To the right of TUCSA white workers are being increasingly drawn to unions like the Mine Workers' Union (MWU) and political organisations like the Herstighte Nationale Party (HNP), Afrikaanse Weerstand Beveeging (AWB) and Conservative Party (CP) which again, generally speaking, strive for the protection of white privilege and white democracy in a white state.

In the middle of this increasingly politically-charged labour movement, stand the tired old TUCSA bureaucrats reminding us that they represent 440000 workers of all "types" so "politics" must be kept out of TUCSA. And the General Secretary, Grobbelaar, who has put his name behind a "yes" vote in the referendum (along with a group of leading businessmen and TUCSA's Robby Botha, Wally Grobler, Anna Scheepers and L C Scheepers) and his ilk would

like to pretend that this position in itself is not political!

Of course, the "no politics" ploy is a weapon of the bureaucracy to try and ensure that it is their politics which continue to dominate TUCSA policy. The resolutions taken at the 29th Conference show not only that their politics still completely dominate TUCSA policy, but also that they are moving rapidly to the right, and in some cases even to the right of government policy itself.(4)

Although it cannot be dealt with in the confines of this comment, it is important to note that there is a material basis within TUCSA for the bureaucracy's reactionary politics. This base lies chiefly amongst the white labour aristocracy though also amongst the upper layers of skilled workers of other colours.

Before discussing some of the resolutions it is important to note that they have more of a symptomatic significance than anything else - they point the direction in which TUCSA is going. But the real rot in the organisation is in what is done with those resolutions, whatever their content might be. They are, in the words of Grobbelaar, "processed by the NEC". It is not unfair to say that TUCSA leadership's understanding of worker struggle is completely summed up in that phrase.

It means basically that if leadership is mandated by conference to do something about a particular issue it will consider it at an NEC meeting and decide what, if any, action to take about it. If there is going to be "action", TUCSA workers can sleep comfortably knowing that, basically, a letter is on its way to the relevant Minister about the issue concerned! And these "actions" are supposed to provide a lead to 440000 workers looking for a way forward in struggle!

Conference Resolutions

The policies of TUCSA leadership help throw light on their practical bankruptcy. They are formulated at

the Annual Conference and during the year by the NEC. Here we can only briefly comment on a few to indicate the deepening rightward political shift of TUCSA leadership.

UIF

While Unions like The South African Allied Workers Union (Saawu) and the Orange Vaal General Workers Union (OVGWU) , in particular, were organising joint-union mass meetings in their respective areas to protest against the transfer of UIF payments to the Bantustans, TUCSA leadership hailed this state measure as a great victory which they had won for black workers.

Import Controls

While internationalism has long been regarded as the basic tenet of international trade unionism, TUCSA continues to echo its conservative counter-parts in the rest of the world by supporting measures which counterpose the interests of South African workers to the interests of more exploited workers elsewhere in the world.Two such resolutions, on imported goods and state contracts, were passed virtually unanimously at the P.E. Conference. International solidarity demands the very opposite - that the interests of S.A. workers and workers in other countries are one against their respective bosses.

Shopping Hours

After decades of struggle by shop workers against the lengthening of shopping hours, TUCSA Conference resolved to let the NEC process a resolution calling for shopping hours to be in effect at the discretion of the bosses. Grobbelaar says that it is "inevitable" that current shopping hours will not be able to be maintained.

Housing

A resolution calling for a government inquiry into profiteering in housing and the housing crisis is easily defeated. The main reason seemed to be that the housing situation is not the fault of the capitalists (after all, argued a S.A. Society of Bank Official's delegate, "many of us are buying and

selling houses to make a profit") but of the government").

Detention without trial

A resolution criticising detention without trial while noting "with qualified gratification" the new code of Practice which has been condemned by all independent bodies concerned with this issue was passed.

Constitutional Reform

A resolution appealing to the Government "to reconsider the principles of the proposed new Constitution" was passed with 104,000 votes for, 50,000 votes against and 296,000 abstaining with voting on the basis of affiliation. The bureaucrats were very reluctant too have this extremely moderate resolution even discussed because it was "too political".

Freedom of Association

This resolution which in effect asked TUCSA to endorse that a worker has the right to join a union of his/her choice, was overwhelmingly defeated. Many saw it as opening the way for the emerging unions - "infant Frankensteins" in the words of Vice-President Robbie Botha - to further threaten their closed shop arrangements with bosses.

Banning of unregistered unions

This treachery speaks for itself and was again overwhelmingly endorsed amidst outbursts about the "chaos" these unions are introducing into the hitherto "ordered industrial relations scene".

These kinds of policies and practices emerge when, as in the case of the vast majority of TUCSA unions, workers have never been genuinely organised (thanks to the closed shop in most cases); when even a semblance of democratic shop-floor control has never actually existed; when despite constitutional "democratic" safeguards, leadership is a law unto itself , with a virtual free hand to control, dictate and manipulate at will; when workers united action, the most powerful means for achieving workers goals, has been completely stamped out of

the life of the unions and replaced by bureaucratic and legalistic manoeuvres way outside of workers' own experience and when things like the exorbitant meeting fees that many leaders pay themselves is an entrenched way of life of leadership.

These heavily bureaucratised practices of TUCSA leadership are the inevitable product of its reactionary policies and constitute the chief obstacle for TUCSA workers in their struggle against the bosses. Not only does leadership impede struggle, but it actively holds back and blocks workers wanting to take action.(5)

Which way forward for TUCSA workers?

There is absolutely no hope whatsoever that TUCSA's leadership can pull itself out of the crisis that it created and perpetuated itself. Its whole outlook is conditioned by its years of lobbying in Government and big business circles for "change", so that today the only things that distinguish it from government and big business circles are when it comes out to the right of these forces.

The "goings on" at the P.E. Conference are just one small illustration of this. Besides the cocktail parties hosted by the Mayor and an Insurance Company; besides the free Wilson Rowntree sweets and the paucity of worker delegates; besides the whole pomp and ceremony of the Conference which aptly matched the 5 star hotel where it took place, the Conference was treated to the Minister of Transport, Hendrik Schoeman, (remember the General Workers Union's (GWU) experience in P.E.) and the President of the Free Market Foundation, Leon Louw, as guest speakers.

True, they appear mere trifles, but taken together with the number of state bodies TUCSA leadership is represented on; the number of big business conferences and seminars TUCSA leadership participate in;(6) the "free market" ideology which is continually pumped by leadership, one gets a better picture.

TUCSA leadership is fighting for its very life. In order to maintain themselves and protect themselves from the threat of the emerging unions in particular, they need to tighten their grip over the 440000 workers in TUCSA. To do this they are being forced to the right as they cannot even begin to compete with the emerging unions on the terrain of a struggle for leadership of the mainly black working class. They have, at all costs, to maintain their hold on TUCSA while trying, by any means possible, to expand their numerical base.(7)

In this situation, where they are now on the defensive and fighting to keep control, any criticism - especially from its own ranks - is intolerable. They are forced to attack wherever dissent emerges because they have no space left to accommodate it while still keeping control of the situation. That is why, in relation to the emerging unions, they have now unambiguously opted for the strategy of attack as the best form of defence. And the case is similar within TUCSA itself.

The Boilermakers Society did not just pull out of TUCSA - they were driven out. Long before the Boilermakers' van der Watt raised his polite and fairly muted criticisms of TUCSA's direction, they were being attacked in a most hostile and arrogant manner.(8) TUCSA's private "Role in the Future" document, which pretends to offer a solution to the "stagnation and death of TUCSA" (Grobbelaar) by aping some of the worst features of the emerging union movement ("appropriate" law, economic, educational, PRO services instead of appropriate worker leadership and policies) - seemed primarily designed to head-off the Boilermaker's call for a special conference on TUCSA's future, as well as to pull in more money from affiliates. Having won that motion near the outset of the Conference, leadership confidently hit out at the Boilermakers (and any other opposition) throughout the rest of the 4 day proceedings.

They had no other choice. In a situation as volatile as the South African one today, any

bureaucratic leadership needs to stifle criticism. In TUCSA's case - where the bureaucracy is old, experienced, sophisticated and adept at manipulating things like constitutional requirements and meeting procedures, this is especially true.

So what is the way forward in TUCSA? What should be clear by now is that for workers in TUCSA to take even a tiny step forward, it will have to be taken against the existing leadership. The Boilermakers tried to do this but found the going too difficult. Pulling out became the only viable option for them. It is likely that if there are other unions which are dissatisfied with TUCSA, whether from the left or the right, they will over the next couple of years choose the same path as the Boilermakers.

But the vast bulk of the Unions presently in TUCSA will probably remain there in the medium-term. This will mean that hundreds and thousands of workers will still be paralysed by the hold of the bureaucracy, that the "dying" TUCSA will still not be "dead".

Many of these workers, especially black workers, will not know, as they have not known, any active trade union life. To all intents and purposes, they are not and will not be organised. Emerging unions could organise these workers in much the same way as they would the unorganised. This is already happening in certain sectors and is leading to the gradual eroding away of TUCSA's base in the black working class.

Still, this in itself is not likely to break the hold of the bureaucracy on TUCSA workers. Only the workers of TUCSA can do that by struggling for control of their own organisations. This is impossible without a fight to kick out the entire bureaucratic leadership of TUCSA, from the NEC down to the component unions. Anything less than this will mean the continued stagnation and eventual death of TUCSA from the gradual splitting away and erosion of its base to it being eventually completely eclipsed by events.

Workers and militants in TUCSA need to take up

the struggle to build democratic rank and file organisation in their unions; around every issue facing them to demand accountability of their leadership; to expose at every turn cases of betrayal and corruption of their leadership and, on such a basis; to carry through the fight to expell them out altogether. Otherwise the bureaucracy will kill TUCSA.

(Ismail Mohammed, Johannesburg, October 1983)

Footnotes

1) TUCSA dismisses "with the contempt it so readily deserves" the lie of "those mischief-makers who indulge in the repeated refrain that TUCSA is white-dominated" by citing its membership as roughly 26% whites, 29% blacks and 45% coloureds and indians. The point , however, is that its leadership, which dictates TUCSA policy, is almost completely dominated by whites.

2) The bureaucratic heart of TUCSA includes people like: Arthur Grobbelaar (ex-Boilermakers Society, General Secretary of TUCSA since 1965, National Manpower Commission rep., Defence Manpower Board rep., alternate rep. on National Productivity Institute, rep. on Economic Advisory Council of the Prime Minister), Anna Scheepers (Garment Workers Union of S.A., twice ex-TUCSA President, ex-Senator, rep. on Regional Economic Development Advisory Committee), Lief von Tonder (S.A. Typographical Union, 2 times ex and current President of TUCSA, rep. on UIF Board, rep. on National Training Board, rep. on Economic Advisory Council of the Prime Minister), L C M Scheepers (African Truck and Box Workers Union, Glass Workers Union, Radio, TV, Electric and Allied Workers Union, Transvaal Leather and Allied Trades Industrial Union, Trunk and Box Workers Union Transvaal, rep. on National Productivity Institute, 8 times past President of TUCSA), L A Petersen (Garment Workers Union of W.P.,

Vice-President of TUCSA), Chris du Preez (African Tobacco Workers Union, National Union of Cigarette and Tobacco Workers, Trawler and Line Fishermans Union, rep. on UIF Board), Andre Malherbe (ex-S.A. Society of Bank Officials and Economic Advisory Council of the Prime Minister and S.A. Co-ordinating Consumer Council and Trades Practices Advisory Committee - now Labour Advisor to the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce), Lucy Mvubelo (National Union of Clothing Workers S.A., rep. on National Manpower Commission, ex-TUCSA Vice-President), Norman Daniels (Textile Workers Industrial Union S.A., rep. on National Manpower Commission, rep. on Regional Economic Development Advisory Committee), Robbie Botha (Mine Surface Officials Association of S.A., alternate rep. on UIF Board, rep. on National Regional Advisory Council, nominated National Party Candidate, Vice-President of TUCSA), Other smaller fry include people like G Munsook (Hotel, Bar & Catering Trade Employees Association, Presidents Council), Ben Smith (S.A. Society of Bank Officials, alternate rep. on UIF Board, rep. on Board of Institute for Industrial Relations).

They and their leading allies are mainly drawn from the 12 unions (out of 56 in TUCSA) which comprise nearly 80% of TUCSA's total membership of +/- 440000. They are : Artisan Staff Association 24000, Engineering Industrial Workers Union of S.A. 19000, Garment Workers Industrial Union Natal 49000, Garment Workers Union of W.P. 56000. Mine Surface Officials Association of S.A. 15000, Motor Industry Combined Workers Union 24000, National Union of Clothing Workers of S.A. 23000, National Union of Furniture and Allied Workers 27000, National Union of Leather Workers 27000, S.A.Society of Bank Officials 21000, S.A.Typographical Union 44000, Textile Workers Industrial Union of S.A. 20000.

Another interesting feature of the TUCSA bureaucracy is the number of "family unions". The van der Watt family (father and two daughters) control the important African Transport Workers Union and the E.L. Transport Workers Union and Motor

Transport Workers Union. The Petersens (father and son) are the controlling force in the Garment Workers Union W.P. Chris du Preez (who is General Secretary of 3 unions) is married to Dirk Benade (General Secretary of the Tramway and Omnibus Workers Union Cape) and has a daughter (Dallis Hall) who is like her mother and step-father, on the TUCSA NEC and works for the Tobacco Unions. All of these people are right-wing and run "their unions" in an extremely rigid bureaucratic manner.

3) There have been "climaxes" before, chief of which was TUCSA's ban of African unions till 1962 which was reimposed again in 1969 under pressure from the Government.

4) The Resolutions for the banning of unregistered unions, against freedom of association , for stricter import controls, against a Government inquiry into the housing crisis and profiteering are examples of this.

5) A clear example of this cropped up at the P.E. Conference - A worker in the African Transport Workers Union was shot dead, and two others injured, by a company security guard who interfered with a union meeting outside the premises of Reef Distribution United Holdings in September. The workers naturally wanted to strike in protest against this murder. van der Walt (the General Secretary) explained that only the union could control the workers and that the bosses had to call the union in to get the strikers back to work the next day - which they did within 5 minutes.

6) Last year TUCSA leaders attended and participated in Conferences of : FCI, ASSOCOM, BIFSA, SATS, AUI, NIPR, S.A. Forum and the Urban Foundation amongst others.

7) There are numerous examples of TUCSA's leadership conniving with bosses to try and "get" workers before the emerging unions. A hitheto unpublished one concerns the security industry where van der Walts, of the transport unions, have been trying secretly to set up an industrial council for security workers before the emerging unions "get at

them". Word has it that they were too late.
8) The general tone and theme of the bureaucrats attacks is along these lines: "We have built up this powerful, united worker organisation. We are the real true fighters for everything workers want. Now we hear that all is not right with our organisation/our direction. Is not this exactly what the enemies of TUCSA in the emerging unions and elsewhere are saying when they try to destroy us? Is not this the same voice as those mischievious people who are trying to undermine the foundations of the largest worker organisation, with the proudest tradition of struggle, in the whole country...TUCSA." ... and so on, ad nauseum.

THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN AFRICA

A REVIEW OF THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN SOUTH AFRICA: STATE, CAPITAL AND THE INCORPORATION OF ORGANIZED LABOR ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOLDFIELDS 1902 - 1939, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, USA, 1983, pp. 315. (Co-publishers and stockists: David Philip. Price R46.50)

David Yudelman's new study of the State, Capital and the incorporation of organized labour on the gold fields between 1902 and 1939 (ignore the over-general title!) joins a large number of works examining the political economy of the mines and particularly the impact of the Rand Revolt of 1922 and the National-Labour Pact Government of 1924 that have come out in recent years. Yudelman tries to carve out for himself a position distinct both from Liberal and "neo-Marxist" writers. He sees three essential difficulties in the existing literature: an overly-instrumental view of the South African state which fails to recognize its autonomy from big business, an exaggerated emphasis on South Africa's distinctive brand of racism as an historical determinant and a lack of distinction between rhetoric and reality in the political assessments of various historians. Yudelman poses an alternative perspective that starts off by seeing this entire period as one of a "crisis of sovereignty arising from the contradictory imperatives of capital accumulation and state legitimation". All of these points help to form a line of argument with considerable potential. He proceeds through various phases of struggle on the Rand chronologically, makes use of some new primary material (early records of the Chamber of Mines, for instance) and continually provides interesting new insights.

He is not, however, successful in systematically

and effectively following through with a consistent new approach. If it is true that miners and capital have other issues at stake than the racial order and that black miners faced enormous problems of organization in the first third of the century, it seems impermissible to exclude black workers from his assessment to the extent that he does. Both the record of the political ferment and labour militancy among Africans after World War I which is becoming better known and the whole labour structure of mining argue against it. In rejecting cruder forms of instrumentalism while looking at the relation between capital and the state, Yudelman also fails to pose an adequate alternative and ultimately falls back on metaphors about marriage partners. What are the origins and the raison d'etre of the South African state? What is the relationship between politics and bureaucracy? These tough questions are not answered here. Indeed, Yudelman's accumulation model suggests in an underdeveloped manner that on specifics again and again it is fundamental to see that the state backs up, within limits, the needs of business. More theoretical development might have led Yudelman to spend less time tilting at the cruder structuralist formulations of the South African Left. He criticizes them quite justifiably but inconsistently and without mentioning that they belong largely to the middle 197Øs or earlier and really are no longer current. The most fascinating element in this book is Yudelman's comparison of the present South African "organic crisis" revolving relations between the state, capital and black labour and the earlier one precipitated by white labour (whose significance, especially on the mines, he now sees as minor). This fruitful analogy, as with many less sustained insights, will reward readers of this challenging, if in some respects quirky and problematic, academic study.

(Bill Freund, Research Associate, African Studies Center, Boston University, September 1983)

Sigma Press