

THE APARTHEID CITY AND ITS LABOURING CLASS:  
AFRICAN WORKERS AND THE INDEPENDENT TRADE UNION  
MOVEMENT IN DURBAN, 1959-1985

by

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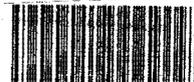
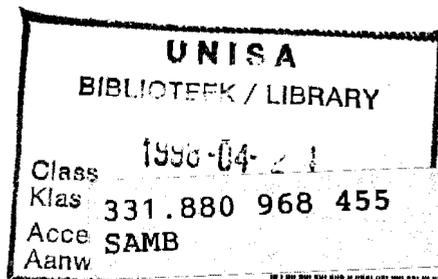
## Declaration

I declare that *The apartheid city and its labouring class: African workers and the independent trade union movement in Durban, 1959-1985* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed:

Date:

NT Sambureni



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*This thesis is dedicated to my son, Blessing Takudzwa, and my wife, Verna, for their support and encouragement.*

## Summary

This thesis examines the emergence and development of the African working class in Durban between 1959 and 1985. It begins with an analysis of Durban's economy, which significantly changed the lives of Africans. It shows how, during an era of economic boom, of intensive state repression and unparalleled social engineering, the state intervened in the shaping of the African community and created the oppressive setting of the African working class, which was to pose the greatest challenge to the established order.

The forced removals of the underclasses to the newly established apartheid townships during the late 1950s and early 1960s had a profound influence on the social and political history of this working class. Once African trade unions had been crippled and formal oppositional politics crushed, South African industrial relations enjoyed relative "peace" which was disturbed by the covert forms of worker resistance.

In the 1970s the economic position of Durban's African working class was rather tenuous, as earnings had remained static since the 1960s despite the booming economy. Because of this, urban workers felt social and economic pressures from both apartheid and capitalism and responded in a way that shocked both employers and the government.

In January 1973 Durban was rocked by strikes, which broke the silence of the 1960s when the South African Congress of Trade Unions declined and the African National Congress and Pan-African Congress were banned. The outbreak of the 1973 Durban strikes marked a new beginning in the labour history and industrial relations of Durban and South Africa in general.

A new blend of African independent trade unions emerged with their distinctive style of organisation. They focused on factory-based issues which reaped benefits for the workers in the long-run and managed to sustain pressure from both the state and employers. During this period, however, the African working class paid a high price, enduring miserable conditions, earning wages below the poverty line, experiencing a breakdown in family structure, and living with crime and violence, police repression and the criminalisation of much social and economic life. By 1985, these unions had established themselves so firmly that the state regarded them as a serious challenge. Indeed, the making of Durban's African working class was no easy task and its history shows suffering, change, mobility and accomplishment.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The collection of material for this thesis was made easier and more manageable through the assistance of archivists and librarians at the Natal Archives, the Killie Campbell Africana Library, the Don Africana Library, the William Cullen Library of the University of the Witwatersrand, the Durban Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce Library, the University of Natal, Natal Room, and the Durban Local History Museum Collection. I am very grateful to Dr David Hemson and the Durban Local History Museum for permission to reproduce photographs.

Some portions of this thesis have appeared as articles in various journals and have been largely reproduced here. I gratefully acknowledge the useful comments given by various anonymous referees.

I am also grateful for financial assistance from the University of South Africa, History Departmental Research Fund.

To you all, my profound and heartfelt thankfulness for having shown an interest in my thesis.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	- African National Congress
ANCWL	- African National Congress Women's League
BAC	- Bantu Affairs Commissioner
BAD	- Bantu Administration and Development
BAWU	- Black Allied Workers' Union
BF	- Benefit Fund
BWP	- Black Workers' Project
CASS	- Centre for Applied Social Sciences
CBAC	- Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner
CWIU	- Chemical Workers Industrial Union
DCC	- Durban Chamber of Commerce
DHCP	- David Hemson Collection and Papers
DSLSC	- Durban Stevedoring Labour Supply Company
FAWU	- Furniture and Allied Workers' Union
FCI	- Federated Chamber of Industries
GDP	- Gross Domestic Product
GFWBF	- General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund
GWIU	- Garment Workers' Industrial Union
HLP	- Historical and Literary Papers
ICA	- Industrial Conciliation Act
ICU	- Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
IDC	- Industrial Development Corporation
IIE	- Institute for Industrial Education
ISR	- Institute for Social Research
ITGLWF	- International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation

KCAL	- Killie Campbell Africana Library
KCAV	- Killie Campbell Audio Visuals
MK	- Umkhonto we Sizwe
NA	- Natal Archives
NCI	- Natal Chamber of Industries
NP	- National Party
NR	- Natal Room
NTC	- National Transport Commission
NUTW	- National Union of Textile Workers
PAC	- Pan-African Congress
PDL	- Poverty Datum Line
PNAAB	- Port Natal Affairs Administration Board
PUTCO	- Public Utility Transport Company
RNLB	- Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau
SACP	- South African Communist Party
SACTU	- South African Congress of Trade Unions
SACTWU	- South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union
SAIRR	- South African Institute of Race Relations
SALB	- South Africa Labour Bulletin
SASO	- South African Students' Organisation
SCF	- Strictly Confidential Files
TUACC	- Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Council
TUCSA	- Trade Union Council of South Africa
TWIU	- Textile Workers' Industrial Union
TYFMA	- Textile, Yarn and Fabric Manufacturers' Association
UBC	- Urban Bantu Council

- UCT - University of Cape Town
- ULPP - Urban Labour Preference Policy
- UND - University of Natal, Durban
- WCL - William Cullen Library

ILLUSTRATIONS

*Maps*

The greater Durban area

The Durban region in its wider setting

Industrial establishments in the peripheral zone of the Durban region, 1965

Industrial establishments in the core area of the Durban region, 1965

Employment totals in the principal industrial areas and clusters of the Durban region, 1965

Major industrial establishments in the core area of the Durban region, with insets for establishments in the peripheral zone, 1965

Industrial land in the core area of the Durban region, 1971

(Map number 1 reproduced from Maylam, P and Edwards, I (eds), *The People's City: African Life in Twentieth-Century Durban* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1996), and the rest from Young, B.S, "Industrial Geography of the Durban Region (University of Natal, unpublished Ph.D, 1972).

*Photographs in their order (Chapter 8)*

Durban City engineers workers marching in the streets

Coronation workers at the Sports ground

Frame's textile workers outside the mills

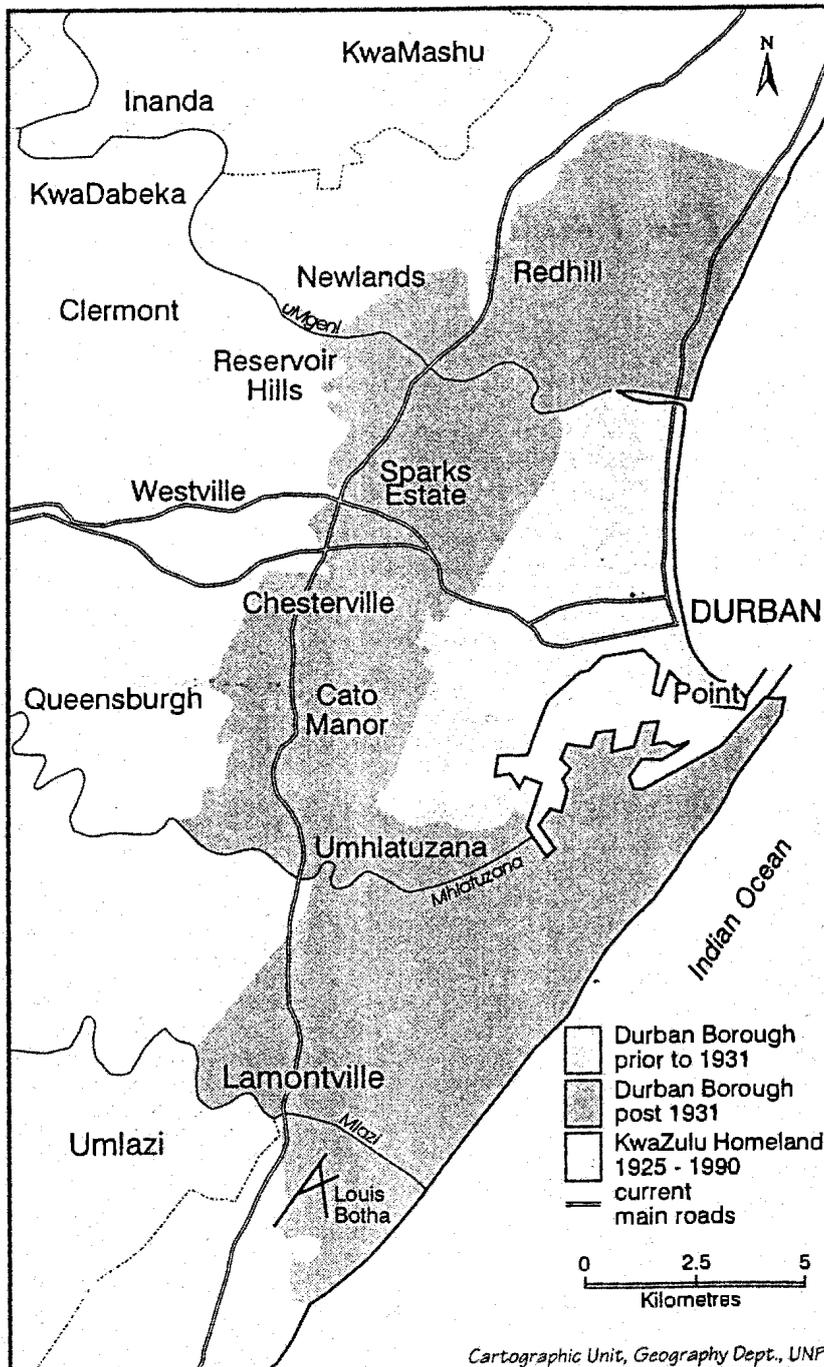
Coronation workers marching in the streets

Durban City engineers workers marching and escorted by the police

Durban's acting mayor addressing engineers workers

Frame's textile workers on strike and led by the KwaZulu Community Affairs Councillor, Barney Dladla (1974)

White volunteers unloading vegetables at the market during the 1973 strike.



Cartographic Unit, Geography Dept., UNP

The greater Durban area

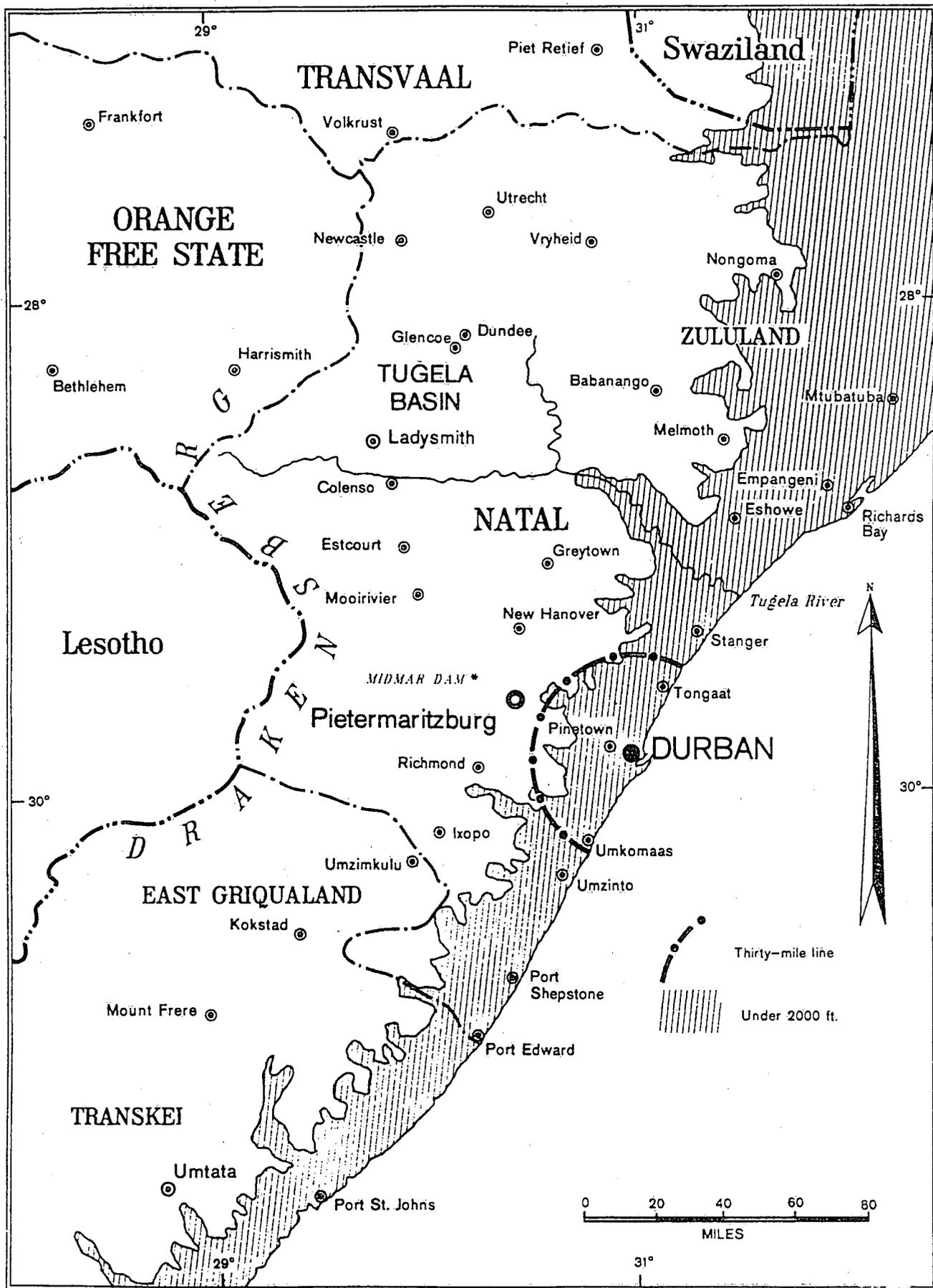


Figure 1 The Durban Region in its wider setting

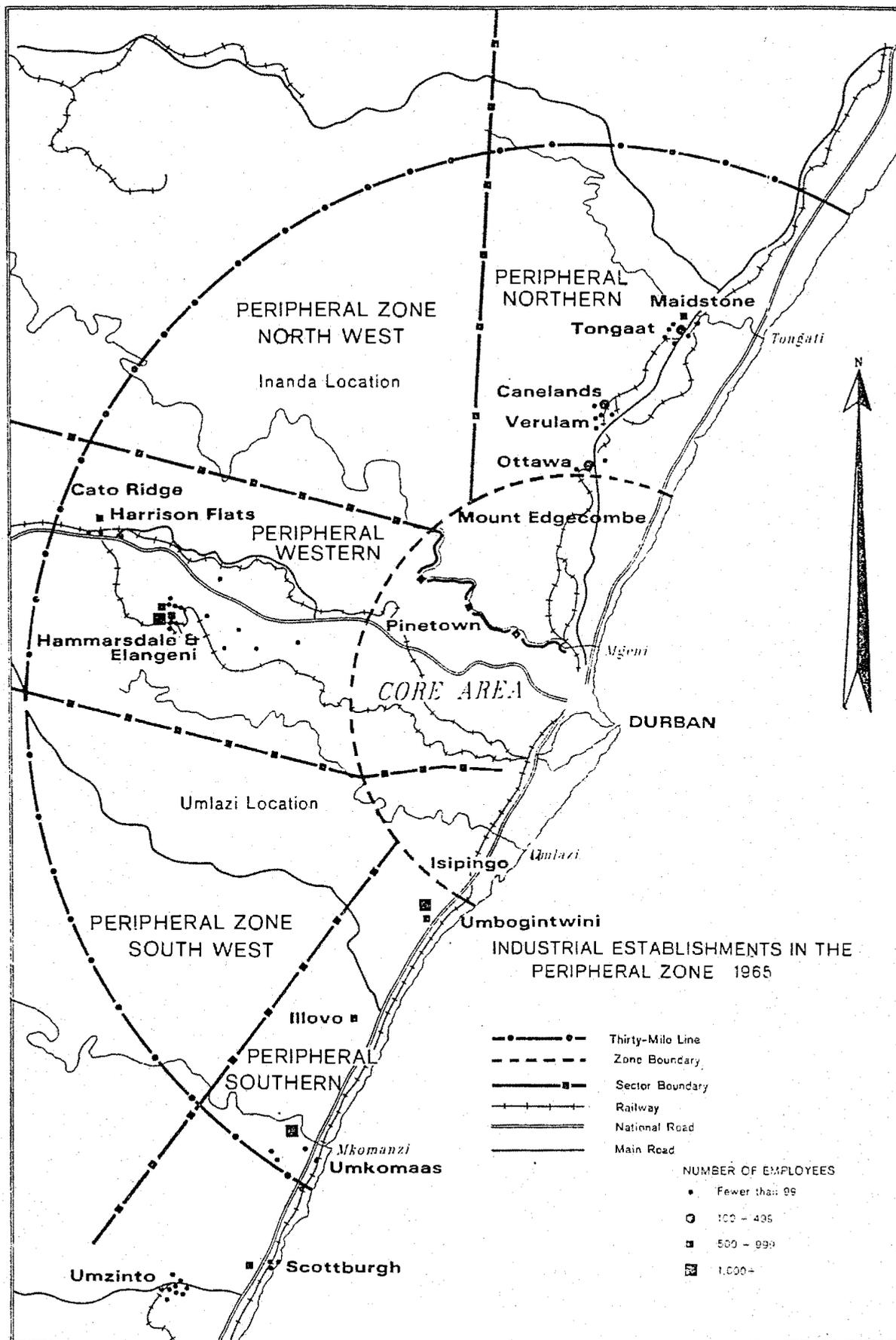


Figure 2 Industrial establishments in the Peripheral Zone of the Durban Region, 1965

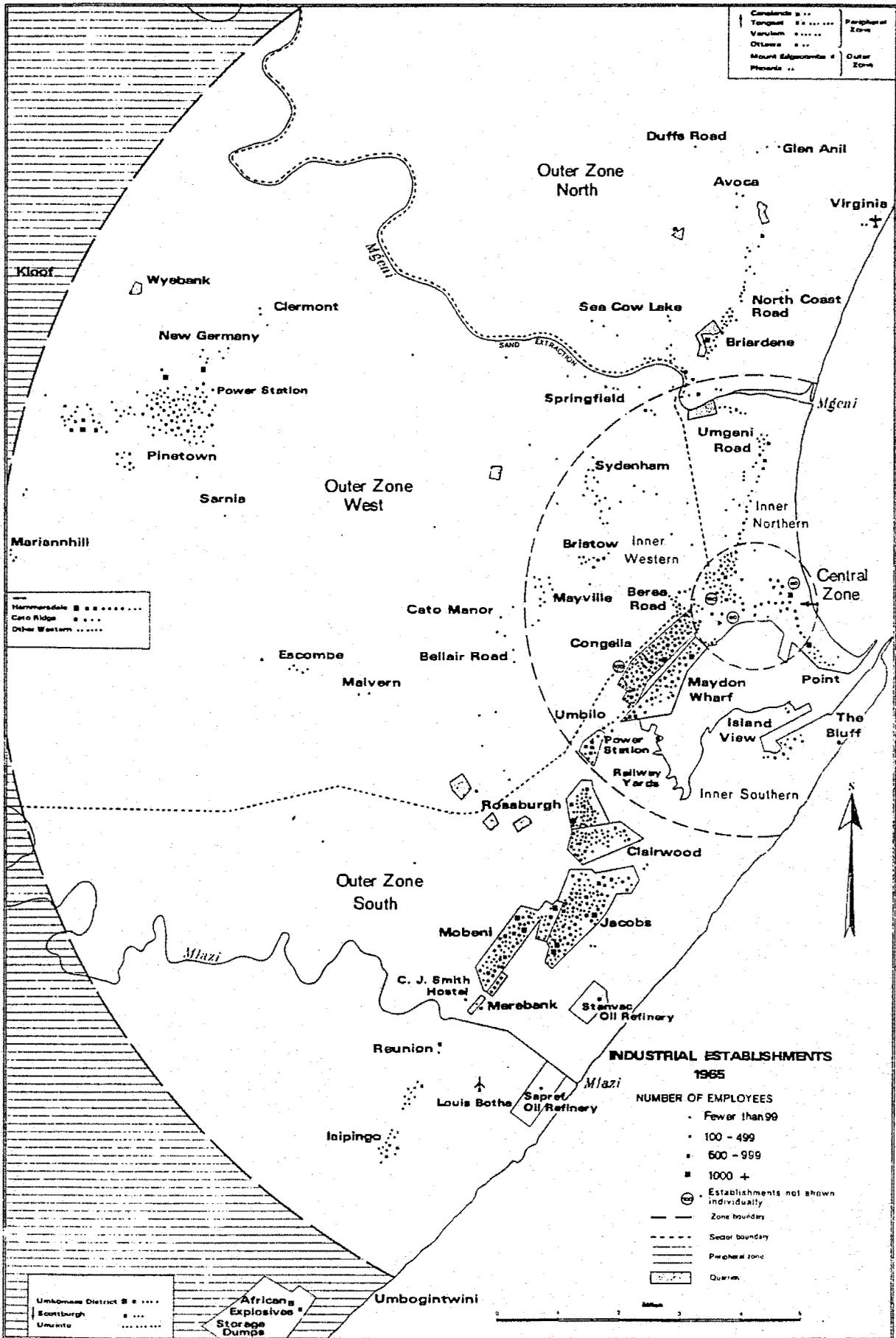


Figure 3 Industrial establishments in the core area of the Durban Region, 1965

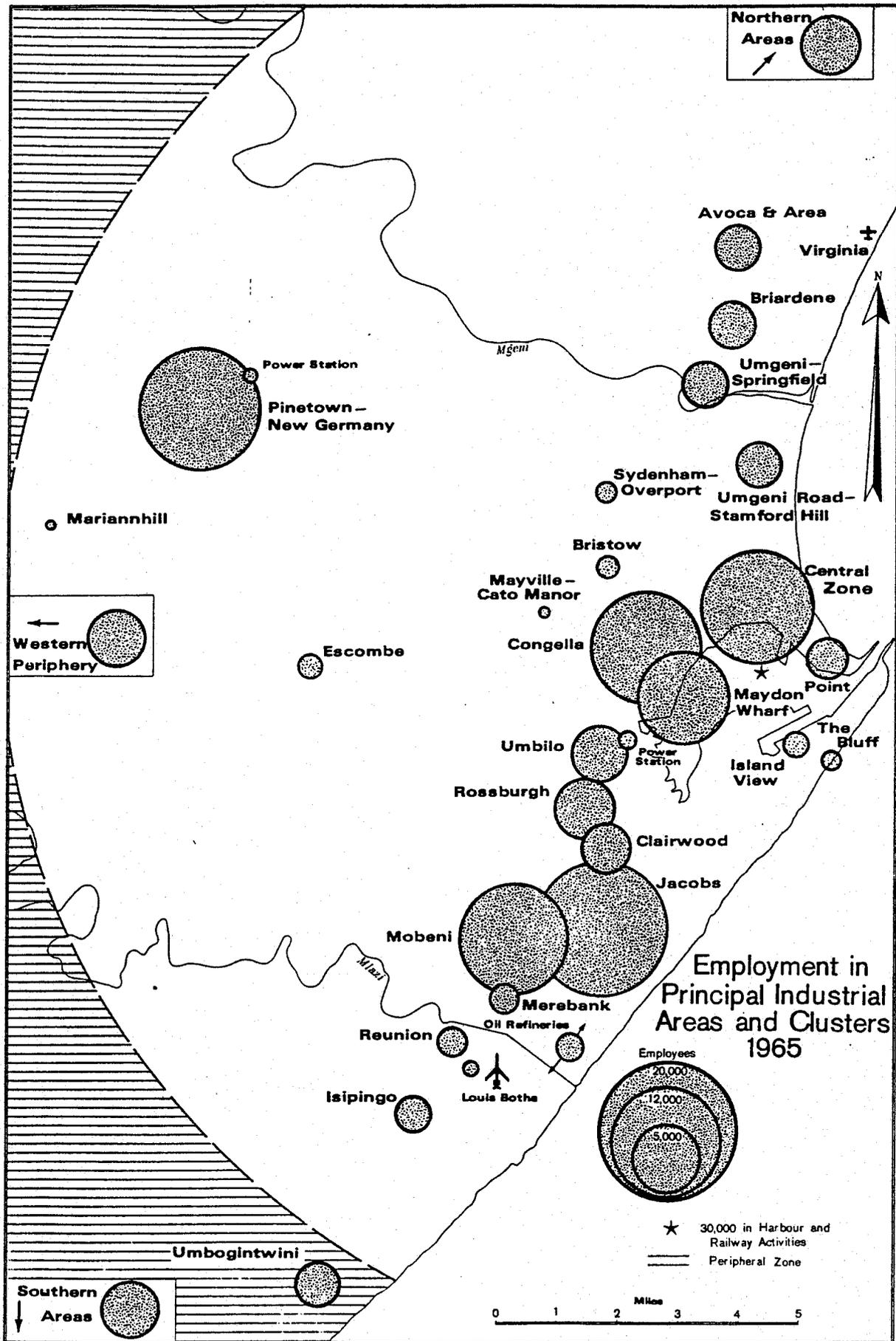


Figure 4 Employment totals in the principal industrial areas and clusters of the Durban Region, 1965

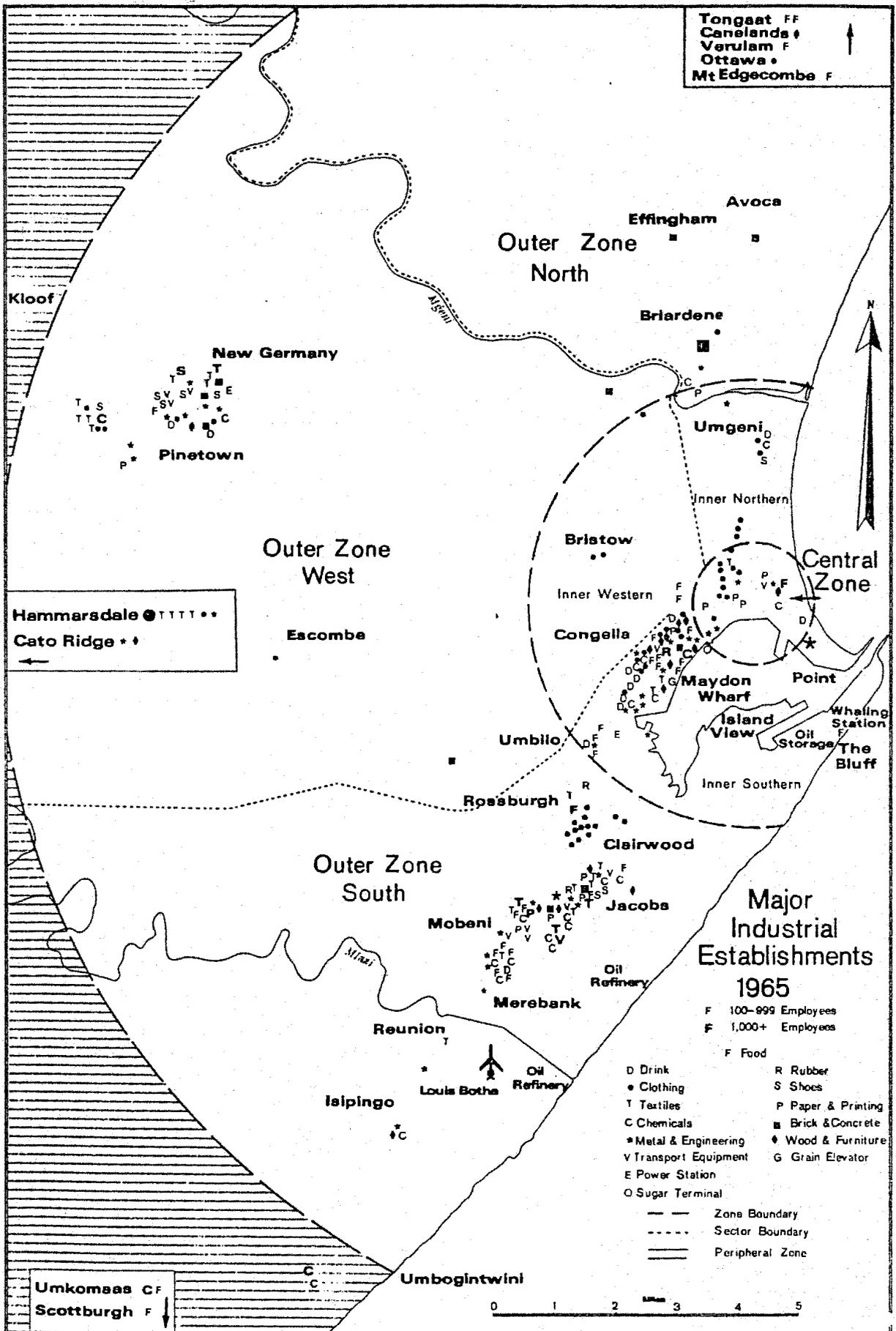


Figure 5 Major industrial establishments in the core area of the Durban Region, with insets for establishments in the Peripheral Zone, 1965

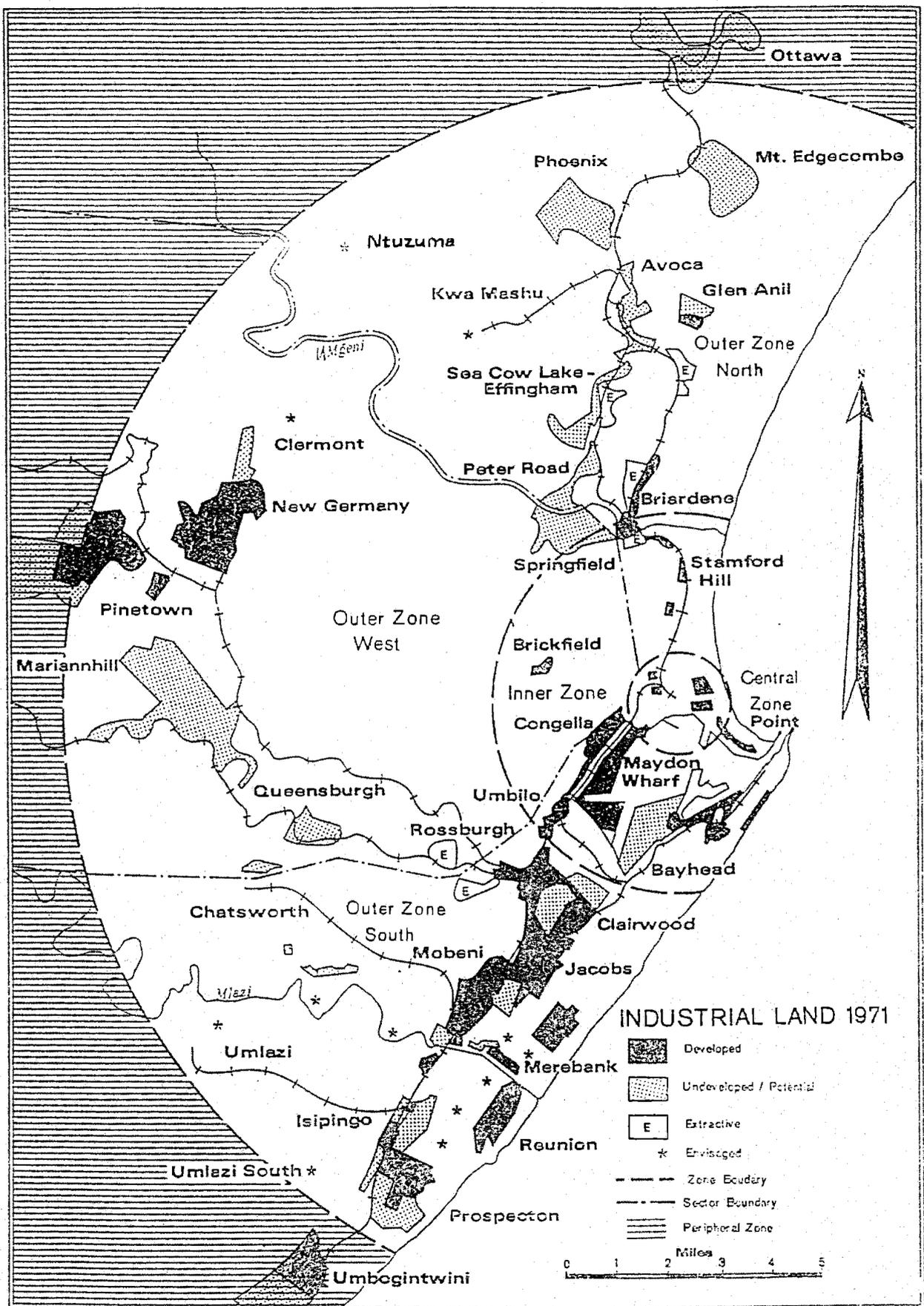


Figure 6 Industrial land in the core area of the Durban Region, 1971

## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### Introduction

During the past few decades South African history has broadened to include a range of specifically socio-economic studies. Since the 1970s there has been an enormous outpouring of works focusing on the relationship between capital, the state and labour. Such studies, particularly those written in the 1970s by radical scholars, were not supplemented by regional or urban case studies, but tended to remain at a high level of generality. Numerous works during these years concentrated largely on the relation between capital, the state and labour, and were notable for one main hypothesis: capital and the state were viewed as monolithic entities. The conventional picture of an "all powerful capitalist class using an omnipotent state to mow down all that stood in its path" was portrayed.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1980s there was a methodological shift and change of focus in this historiography. A number of academics began to articulate the role played by workers and the community at large in making their own history.<sup>2</sup> Historians also began to

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<sup>1</sup> S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds), Industrialisation and social change in South Africa (London, Harlow, 1982), p 13.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, C. Van Onselen, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, 1886- 1914: vol.1: New Babylon; vol.2: New Nineveh (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1982); B. Bozzoli (ed), Town and countryside in the Transvaal: capitalist penetration and popular response (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983); and W. Beinart, "Worker consciousness, ethnic particularism and nationalism: the experience of a South African migrant, 1930-1960", in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), The politics of race, class and

move away from concentrating on broad themes and tended to examine historical themes in specific regions at particular times. Such case studies are important in that they explore regional variations and show the varied responses of African workers to capital.

My thesis is concerned with struggles between the state, capital and labour within the industrial and commercial landscape of Durban from 1959 to the mid 1980s. It examines the relationship between the state and labour, between capital and labour, between strikers and unions. Having been integrated into the capitalist economy, the African workers' struggle became intensified around the production line itself.

The period in question is important to developments in South Africa because it revived African resistance to apartheid policies after almost a decade of "silence", especially when the state had managed to crush "open" political and trade union resistance during the early 1960s. The 1970s and 1980s are crucially important in that they marked the birth of a new political order in African urban politics.

## 1. Historiography: aspects of the apartheid-capital debate

Significant to my period of study are issues concerning the relationship between apartheid and capital. What follows is, however, not a comprehensive survey of this debate but an outline which raises important issues in the debate with relevance to the study of African urban labour between 1960 and 1985.<sup>3</sup>

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nationalism in twentieth-century South Africa (London, Longman, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> For further details of the debate, see for instance D. Posel, "Rethinking the race-class debate in South African historiography", Social Dynamics, vol 9, no 1 (1983); M. Legassick, "Legislation, ideology, and economy in post-1948 South Africa", Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS), vol 1, no 1 (1974); and D. Hindson, Pass controls and the urban African proletariat in South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan

### (a) The liberal perspective

The debate, which originated in the 1970s, focused on the primacy of class and/or race in explaining the relationship between South Africa's economic development and apartheid policies, and the question of whether apartheid was functional or dysfunctional to the industrial expansion of the 1960s. The liberal modernisation theory articulated the view that apartheid was completely independent of, and indeed conflicted with, the logic of capitalism. The incompatibility took two forms. First, apartheid policies retarded the full growth of the economy. Second, despite this retardation, it was argued that the economy was growing and that with the passage of time this growth would gradually erode and dismantle the apartheid system as its economic irrationality became more apparent. Apartheid, according to liberal theory, tended to hinder the economic growth of the country by limiting training skills and hampering the mobility of labour. The liberal theory also noted a contradictory, dysfunctional relationship between capitalism and racial domination.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most interesting aspects of the liberal debate on the relationship between apartheid and capital is the analysis of influx control mechanisms employed by the state. According to R. Horwitz (a prominent early liberal historian), the apartheid state was economically myopic, in pursuit of political power without any consideration of economic costs.<sup>5</sup> Because the state's political agenda resulted in the implementation of some labour policies which retarded the economic expansion of the country, Horwitz argued that South African industrialists were faced with "a hopelessly wasteful and crippling[ly] costly system of labour use".<sup>6</sup> The curtailment

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Press, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> M. Lipton, Capitalism and apartheid (Cape Town, Claremont, 1985), p 141.

<sup>5</sup> R. Horwitz, The political economy of South Africa (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), p 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p 11.

of any free labour movement and the denial of the right to sell labour freely in the market were enforced upon African work-seekers by influx control restrictions. According to the liberal modernisation theory, such a situation retarded economic growth in as far as "the lack of competition for white workers led to slackness on the job, high turn-over and absenteeism, while the barriers to job advancement were a disincentive to hard work, motivation and commitment among blacks".<sup>7</sup> Thus the liberal theory, based on classical laissez-faire economic theory, saw apartheid as dysfunctional to the economy. As for the second incompatibility, some liberals argued that as the economy grew and expanded it would eventually lead to greater racial interaction and integration.

#### (b) The radical position

Radical scholars in the 1970s, armed with the Marxist paradigm, built a critique of the liberal modernisation theory. It is important, however, to point out here that radical theory did not necessarily supersede liberal theory. In many senses they coexisted.<sup>8</sup>

South African Marxist literature, particularly that of the 1970s, characterised the relationship of capitalism and apartheid as mutually dependent on one another.<sup>9</sup> F.A.

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<sup>7</sup> Lipton, Capitalism and apartheid, p 145.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, D. Yudelman, "State and capital in contemporary South Africa", in J. Butler, R. Elphick and D. Welsh (eds), Democratic liberalism in South Africa (Cape Town, 1987); D. Yudelman, The emergence of modern South Africa: state, capital, and the incorporation of organised labour on the South African gold fields, 1902-1939 (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1983); and Lipton, Capitalism and apartheid. Merle Lipton wrote in the 1980s, so did David Yudelman.

<sup>9</sup> See M. Legassick, "South Africa: capital accumulation and violence", Economy and Society, 3 (1974); F.A. Johnstone, "White supremacy and white prosperity in South Africa today", African Affairs, 69 (1970); H. Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid", Economy and Society, 1 (1972); R. Davies, Capital, state and white labour in South Africa, 1900 -1960 (Harvester Press, 1979); and J. Slovo, "South Africa - no middle road", in B.

Johnstone, a Marxist scholar, contended that there was a link between capitalism and racism and that the latter could be destroyed only with the demolition of the former. To Johnstone, the liberalising power of economic growth did not threaten to bring apartheid to its knees but rather "the relations between capitalist development, apartheid policies and the core structure of white supremacy are essentially collaborative ... quite contrary to the prevailing thesis, white supremacy is continually being reinforced by economic development".<sup>10</sup>

While liberals saw capitalism as a beneficial modernising force, Marxists saw it as a class-based exploitative system. In fact, Marxists such as Johnstone posed a set of key questions:

Who owns what? Who does what? Who gets what? Who does what to whom? Who does what for whom? How are who does what and who gets what linked to who owns what and who controls what? How is all this linked to what is going on in society and history?<sup>11</sup>

To Marxist scholars, the functional compatibility of apartheid with the development of capitalism needed closer examination. They therefore argued that apartheid was designed to boost industrial expansion and that the apartheid state was an instrument developed by capitalist classes to serve their interests.<sup>12</sup>

Central to Marxist analysis was the impact of influx control, the workings of labour bureaux, and the pass system, which intensified in the 1960s during the period of high

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Davidson, J. Slovo and A.R. Wilkinson, Southern Africa: the new politics of revolution (Penguin Books, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> Johnstone, "White supremacy and white prosperity." See also T.R.H. Davenport, South Africa: a modern history, (Southern, 3rd ed., 1987). p 574.

<sup>11</sup> F. Johnstone, "Most painful to our hearts: South Africa through the eyes of the new school", Canadian Journal of African Studies, 16, 1 (1982), p 8.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, R. Davies, Capital, state and white labour in South Africa, 1900- 1960 (Sussex, Harvester Press, 1979).

apartheid and the industrial boom. M. Legassick, a leading Marxist scholar, saw the use of influx control mechanisms as an extension of the migrant labour policy to manufacturing industries in urban areas and as a way of supplying cheap African labour to urban industries.<sup>13</sup> In his view, African labour was cheapened because workers had "...a limited time to get a job [and were] faced with exclusion from urban employment altogether should [they] get fired".<sup>14</sup> Such an interpretation was further extended by H. Wolpe, also a Marxist scholar, who characterised apartheid as a specific mechanism meant to "...guarantee a cheap and controlled work-force under circumstances in which the conditions of reproduction of that labour force are rapidly disintegrating".<sup>15</sup> These scholars emphasised official rhetoric about the intended aims of influx control policies, which led them to view the entire process as a "...monolithic, smoothly functioning and effective system of labour distribution and control".<sup>16</sup>

In most Marxist works, the liberal paradigm that saw capitalism as "...a liberalising and progressive force which has been hampered in its work by the external imposition of racial rule and ideology" was completely rejected.<sup>17</sup> Marxists argued that "the economy determines and produces those racial structures and practices which are conducive to its expansion and reproduction".<sup>18</sup> Consequently, racism was perpetuated in the economy and "...only the economic determination of

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<sup>13</sup> Legassick, "Legislation, ideology and economy", p 9.

<sup>14</sup> Legassick, "South Africa: capital accumulation", p 276.

<sup>15</sup> Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power", pp 430-31.

<sup>16</sup> Hindson, Pass controls, p 3.

<sup>17</sup> H. Wolpe, Race, class and the apartheid state ( Paris, UNESCO Press, 1988), p 16; Also see Charles Simkins, "Agricultural production in the African reserves of South Africa, 1918-1969", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.7, no.2 (1981).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp 16-7.

politics and its economic functions" was advanced. In line with Wolpe's assessment, "politics and the state are merely the means to economic ends".<sup>19</sup> Pre-eminent in Marxist literature are terms such as "exploitation", "dominant" and "subordinate classes", "onslaught", and "accumulation of capital", which are sometimes misleading. Certainly, Marxist writings often portray South African society as divided into two or more insulated worlds, inhabited by self-contained classes, who are essentially connected only in the process of material production and exploitation. The Marxist mode of approach, however, like that of the liberal theory, has proved inadequate for an overall analysis of such a complicated period as the 1960s onwards.

The early Marxist writing were largely determined by the developments that took place during the 1960s, the complete impasse of the reform promised by the liberal paradigm and in fact its very opposite; the crushing of movements for change and the installation of the granite period of apartheid. During that decade, South Africa experienced unprecedented economic growth. Similarly, it was during that time that repressive state policies were intensified. Apartheid, viewed from this angle, was thus a monolithic, smoothly functioning system that catered for both the needs of state and capital.

During the 1980s, however, there were some significant shifts in the debate and the context also changed. Both the liberals and radicals began to re-define their positions. These shifts were most profoundly influenced by the political and economic developments of the 1980s.

## (2) Significant shifts of the 1980s and 1990s

A distinctive contribution to the historiographical debate was made by S. Greenberg, a radical thinker, in his book *Race and State in Capitalist Development*, in which he demonstrated how segregationist measures benefited, more or less, different capitalist classes at different times. He argued that the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p 17.

racial order which developed between 1890 and 1960, and in particular the various policies that were put into effect to control African labour, had to do with the development of the mining and farming sectors.<sup>20</sup> White farmers often benefited from successive governments' policies towards African labour. Quite significant was the view that for several decades measures were passed to assist white farmers in their quest for particularly labour and land. However, as Greenberg showed, farmers became more mechanised in their agricultural production and less dependent on official repressive labour mechanisms. As Greenberg explained, segregation and apartheid never served the needs of industrial capital to the same extent as they did those of the mining and farming sectors. Thus, some industrial capitalists have at times shown hostility to apartheid labour policies, although they have generally tried to accommodate the racial order. Greenberg's analysis, further extended in his book *Legitimizing the Illegitimate*, made a distinctive contribution from a materialist perspective, which has been utilised by D. Hindson and D. Posel (both critics of the neo-Marxist paradigm) in their studies.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, Greenberg showed how different capitalist sectors benefited from apartheid.

In Hindson's view, influx controls were instituted deliberately by the state to prevent the dispersal of farm labour to the urban areas.<sup>22</sup> Influx control, he argued, was adopted as a mechanism to ensure that the reserve army of African labour could be removed from apartheid cities and confined to the bantustans. Hindson saw influx control as a means of accommodating the interests of urban capitalists in a differentiated labour market.<sup>23</sup> In the words of Hindson,

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<sup>20</sup> S. Greenberg, Race and state in capitalist development (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1980).

<sup>21</sup> Hindson, Pass controls and the urban African proletariat and Posel, The making of apartheid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p 7.

<sup>23</sup> Hindson, Pass controls, pp 10-12.

...cheap labour was giving way to differentiated labour power, and the reconstruction and extension of influx control barriers under the Urban Areas Act [of 1952] were a means of securing the reproduction of differentiated forms of labour power in the cities in the face of the incoming tide of surplus population from the rural areas.<sup>24</sup>

Hindson's work, which attempted to explain the differentiated labour market only in terms of the interests of manufacturing capital and government institutions, failed to analyze the concept of capitalist interests in terms of its different aspects. Moreover, Hindson's account treated African labour as a docile, passive victim of state labour regulations. The implementation of pass and labour bureau legislation during the 1960s and 1970s was problematic and complicated. A series of pass and influx control laws (although the latter were a response to a very different situation than that which existed when they were introduced) were promulgated, and bureaux and courts were established, but these were resisted by both employers and prospective workers. As a disciplinary measure, influx control failed dismally to stop the trend towards urbanisation, but it did provide an apparatus of control which generally was effective for a whole period in policing and controlling the movements of the African working class. It was far too explicit and coercive. In a situation of extensive repression and grinding poverty in reserves, breaking the law offered better rewards than observing it. Hindson's work paid little attention to the struggles, such as those in Durban, which played an important role in shaping employment patterns.<sup>25</sup> In spite of these criticisms levelled against Hindson, his work nonetheless remains of considerable importance.

The study by Posel has shown that state intervention in the sphere of the urban African labour supply was based on the

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<sup>24</sup> As cited in Posel, The making of apartheid, p 16.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, L. Schlemmer and H. Giliomee (eds), Up against the fences: poverty, passes and privilege in South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1985).

Urban Labour Preference Policy (ULPP).<sup>26</sup> The ULPP was meant to deny urban employers access to migrant labour if local or resident urban labour were available. This policy, Posel argued, was geared towards reducing the size of the urban labour reservoir and creating virtually full employment in urban areas, "so as not to cheapen African labour".<sup>27</sup> Posel explained that the policy of influx control was brought into question by labour bureau officials who failed to deter employers from recruiting migrant workers from the distant reserves. However, Posel noted that from 1959 to 1961 the policy of influx control was toughened by curbing the growing demand for migrant labourers by urban employers, thereby hindering the process of economic integration.<sup>28</sup> Posel's views about cheap labour differ from Hindson's and she criticises him for neglecting popular responses.

During the 1980s, the discussion on whether apartheid has been functional or dysfunctional to capitalism radically changed as South Africa continued to experience socio-economic and political crises. From the mid-1970s, as rightly pointed out by the economic historians J. Saul and S. Gelb, South Africa was moving towards a deepening economic and political crisis.<sup>29</sup> The economy experienced problems: a falling growth rate; rising unemployment and inflation; and a shortage of skilled labour. On the political front, the government was beset by its own internal divisions, a rising tide of African militancy and reforms in labour legislation from 1979, the Soweto uprisings of 1976, violence (particularly in Natal), the 1980 KwaMashu school boycotts, and mounting international

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<sup>26</sup> Posel, The making of apartheid, Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p 84.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p 228.

<sup>29</sup> See J. Saul and S. Gelb, The crisis in South Africa (London, Zed Books, 1986).

pressure.<sup>30</sup> By the 1980s, the apartheid system was no longer functioning as it had in the 1960s. Seemingly, because of these events, radical scholars began to see some aspects of the dysfunctionality and contradictions of the apartheid system. Methodologically, there was also a shift in historical writing among radical scholars. During the 1970s they had concentrated on the broad structures and had neglected local case studies, which examined the specificities of time and place.

### (3) Placing urban studies in perspective: "history from below"

Major works of the 1970s, which concentrated on the apartheid-capitalism debate<sup>31</sup> undermined in many ways the significance of struggles from below, which had played an important role in challenging apartheid. With the emergence of a new approach to history-writing in the 1980s, spearheaded by a new generation of social historians, detailed case-studies which emphasized the role of the rank and file, proliferated. Such works show how "ordinary" people managed to resist apartheid policies and capital in various ways. Workers, as social historians have argued, were not simply victims of apartheid policies and capital: on various occasions, workers challenged the state and capital through open and, what the social historian C. van Onselen termed, "silent and unorganised responses".<sup>32</sup> Van

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<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, T. Lodge and B. Nasson, All, here, and now: Black politics in South Africa in the 1980s (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance the major protagonists of the debate, M. Legassick, "Legislation, ideology, and economy in post-1948 South Africa", Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS), 1, 1 (1974); F.A. Johnstone, "White supremacy and white prosperity in South Africa today", African Affairs, 69 (1970); and H. Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid", Economy and Society, 1 (1972).

<sup>32</sup> C. Van Onselen, Chibaro: African mine labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933 (London, Pluto Press, 1976), p 244.

Onselen's work contributed significantly to a fresh approach to labour history which examines history from below and which does not separate workers' responses at work from their culture.

This approach is vital in the sense that it distances itself from the theoretical abstractions that had been dominant in the 1970s, and instead emphasizes the perceptions of ordinary people.

Once serious cognisance has been taken of experience, it proves impossible to sustain the sort of Marxism which seeks only to generalise or perhaps even reify on a large scale and at a high level. To identify 'the working class' in South Africa, or to discover the nature of 'the state', 'the ruling class' and 'the reserve economies', becomes an impossibility.<sup>33</sup>

As argued by E.P. Thompson, workers' "aspirations [are] valid in terms of their own experience".<sup>34</sup> He further wrote that "...all men are philosophers, [and] experience...arises because men and women...are rational, and they think about what is happening to themselves and their world".<sup>35</sup> The picture painted by Johnstone of a "downtrodden Black labour army", one that is characterised by "rightlessness, powerlessness" and that is a victim of the state and capital, is overdeveloped.<sup>36</sup> However, this was hardly a period of African worker initiative and the state and employers seemed to have a crushing weight for a whole period.

This social-history approach, spearheaded by the "History

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<sup>33</sup> B. Bozzoli, "History, experience and culture", in B. Bozzoli (ed), Town and countryside in the Transvaal: capitalist penetration and popular response (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983), p 17.

<sup>34</sup> E.P. Thompson, The making of the English working class (London, 1963), p 11.

<sup>35</sup> As cited in Bozzoli, "History, experience and culture", p 7.

<sup>36</sup> F.A. Johnstone, "The labour history of the Witwatersrand in the context of South African studies, and with reflections on the new school", Social Dynamics, 4 (1978).

Workshop" organised at the University of the Witwatersrand, has its points of strength; for instance, its willingness to break the bonds of both "economic Marxism" and perhaps also a romantic nationalism.<sup>37</sup> Particular emphasis has been placed on local issues or case studies, which tend to be factually detailed - a process that sociologist B. Bozzoli describes as "the cultural forms of the grassroots".<sup>38</sup> Such an approach is evident in numerous "History Workshop" papers and in *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935 -1962*, edited by P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel.<sup>39</sup> More importantly, the interdisciplinary nature of the social history tradition has produced exciting new insights into the South African past, in particular that of the marginalised groups.

In spite of its significant achievements, the "History Workshop" genre of scholarship has certain limitations which are derived from what participants define as "the grassroots": "Such a history should resonate with the lives of ordinary people rather than reflect the deliberations of the ruling classes or the theoretical concerns of structuralist abstractionism."<sup>40</sup> To concentrate on the grassroots to the exclusion of the ruling classes does, however, raise concern. The reason for their exclusion is the notion of "struggle", which Bozzoli has described as "...that culture [that should] be viewed from a perspective which ties it inextricably to the conflicts between classes; the attempt by some to dominate others; and to the responses of the subordinated to these attempts".<sup>41</sup> The impression created by Bozzoli's analysis is that members of the ruling classes are not "philosophers", and they do not express their thoughts about themselves and their

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<sup>37</sup> Bozzoli, "History, experience and culture", p 42.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p 19.

<sup>39</sup> P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel (eds), *Apartheid's genesis, 1935-1962* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> Bozzoli, "History, experience and culture", p 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p 22.

world in any interesting or meaningful way.<sup>42</sup> Theirs is a different form of thinking - quite distinctive from ordinary people's perceptions, experiences, and the values of those engaged in resistance. The "History Workshop" has, undoubtedly, created certain assumptions: a conflictual model of society has been assumed and, secondly, unequal social relations have tended to be attributed to the actions of one group of society, which dominated others. In spite of these criticisms, however, the History Workshop's approach is indispensable, particularly for its contribution to the new thrusts in mainstream South African historiography. The approach's "incorporation of indigenous people into the analysis, not only as forces resistant to the designs of ... capitalist masters but as actors who go through their own social, political and cultural processes" and which "portrays Africans as enterprising and independent social agents whose lives and activities cannot be reduced to their responses to the initiatives taken by others",<sup>43</sup> remains a useful analytical tool in the study of the African past.

Quite convincingly, "history from below", as articulated by the "History Workshop" participants, offers a way forward and can make an important contribution to the understanding of the underlying dynamics of African labour (though it may sound controversial to give preference to one particular section of society). In this study, however, the deliberate silence on the ruling classes (with the exception of Posel and Adam Ashforth's works<sup>44</sup>) will be broken; in fact, the approach to be utilised will be a normative one which analyses all social actors involved in the making of history. Certainly, the analysis of labour history calls for open-mindedness, which

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p 13.

<sup>43</sup> R. Greenstein, "The future of the South African past", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol 22, no.2 (June 1996), p 327.

<sup>44</sup> See Posel, The making of apartheid; and A. Ashforth, The politics of official discourse in twentieth-century South Africa (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990).

should take into account struggles from both above and below.

There are, indeed, a number of stimulating works on urban and labour history: studies such as P. Maylam's analysis on urban apartheid,<sup>45</sup> P. Bonner's work on African independent trade unions,<sup>46</sup> G. Wood's account of the 1973 Durban strikes,<sup>47</sup> D. Hemson's pioneering doctoral thesis on African dockworkers of Durban,<sup>48</sup> Posel's research on influx control<sup>49</sup> and P. Harries's meticulous work on Mozambican migrant workers.<sup>50</sup> Recently, a new and perhaps the first book on Durban's African underclasses, edited by P. Maylam and I. Edwards, was published.<sup>51</sup> Indeed this book offers a nuanced history of the African underclasses who suffered during decades of urban segregation and apartheid in twentieth-century Durban. These works and numerous articles published and presented from the 1980s onwards, offer rich perspectives on the dominant and the dominated. Classic research works by Hemson and Edwards<sup>52</sup>, in particular, influenced my interest in the history of Durban's Africans.

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<sup>45</sup> P. Maylam, "The rise and decline of urban apartheid in South Africa", African Affairs, 89 (1990).

<sup>46</sup> P. Bonner, "Independent trade unions since Wiehahn", SALB, 8, 4 (1983).

<sup>47</sup> G. Wood, "The 1973 Durban strikes: of local and national significance", Contree, 31 (1992).

<sup>48</sup> D. Hemson, "Class consciousness and migrant workers: dockworkers of Durban" (University of Warwick, Ph.D, 1979).

<sup>49</sup> D. Posel, "Influx control and urban labour markets in the 1950s", in Bonner, Delius and Posel (eds), Apartheid's genesis, 1935-1962.

<sup>50</sup> P. Harries, Work, culture and identity (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1994).

<sup>51</sup> P. Maylam and I. Edwards (eds), The people's city: African life in twentieth-century Durban (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1996).

<sup>52</sup> See Hemson, "Class consciousness and migrant workers"; and I. Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home: a history of African shantytown society in Cato Manor farm, 1946-1960" (University of Natal, Ph.D, 1989).

This research's focus on African labour history reflects the influence of Durban's historiography which has been modelled by the racial composition of Durban. Histories of Durban have tended to restrict themselves to "white", "Indian" or "African" studies.<sup>53</sup> It is an unfortunate scenario and, regrettably so, that past and present historians have failed to bridge the gap and integrate all Durban's workers into a single political economy. This work will, however, only concentrate on Africans because of their distinctive past as the most exploited and oppressed group. Furthermore, since the 1960s the African working class has been extremely important in the socio-economic history of Durban and indeed, have remained relatively important since that time.

#### (4) Why study Durban?

In Durban as elsewhere, ordinary people (although with the problem of divisions and conflicts) have always been the pillar of African resistance to white authority and have been in the forefront of the struggle for freedom; during the 1949 and 1959 riots<sup>54</sup>; in the 1973 Durban strikes and the subsequent formation of the African independent trade union movement<sup>55</sup>; the 1976 student uprisings; and in the violence of the 1980s and 1990s. Durban has always been an important locus of African resistance and it remains a city of both worker resistance and political complexity. It is, moreover, an important area to examine in detail because of its

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<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, an Indian example by B. Freund, Insiders and outsiders: the Indian working class of Durban (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1995).

<sup>54</sup> See, for instance, I.L. Edwards, "Mhkumbane our home: African shantytown society in Cato Manor farm, 1946-1960" (University of Natal, Durban, Ph.D Thesis, 1989); and S.L. Kirk, "The 1949 Durban riots: a community in conflict" (University of Natal, Durban, MA Thesis, 1983).

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, J. Baskin, Striking back: a history of COSATU (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1991); and S. Friedman, Building tomorrow today: African workers in trade unions, 1970-1984 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987).

importance in the rise of an independent trade union movement in the 1970s.

What is interesting about the new African trade unionism which arose in Durban in the 1970s is that it tried to avoid alignment with any banned political movement. During the 1970s, African trade unions in Durban organised themselves from the bottom up, industry by industry; indeed, it was not long before a strong shop floor structure was in place. Furthermore, trade unions of the 1970s clamoured for individual recognition in each particular industry rather than seeking any broad agreements across industrial barriers. In many respects this approach strengthened the independent trade union movement, unlike the broad industrial mass movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s, which had aligned itself to Congress Alliance politics. However, the early 1980s saw the re-emergence of the debate over the relationship between trade unions and politics. Some independent unions felt that high-profile involvement in national politics was inappropriate and detrimental to union organisation. Others were in favour of populist nationalist politics, arguing that unions should fight for their members' interests beyond the factory floor. Precisely because of these divergent views, independent trade union officials failed to develop an integrated policy on the role of unions in politics.

Natal was central to worker resistance during the 1970s, which spilt over into the rest of the country. During that period Durban was vital, because as G. Kraak (labour historian) contends, in the national economy, it "...contained the largest concentration of manufacturing industry outside the PWV area".<sup>56</sup> Durban had become an industrial and manufacturing city of sizeable proportions in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. It was in Durban particularly that worker activities became widespread, and the city became a "...stimulus to the re-emergence of independent trade unions with majority African membership, mostly formed in the areas

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<sup>56</sup> G. Kraak, Breaking the chains: labour in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s (London, Pluto Press, 1993), p 128.

around Durban...".<sup>57</sup> It is therefore appropriate to examine African trade unions of the 1970s, since worker resistance of the time marked a turning point in the labour movement in South Africa.

Natal can be regarded as a historically distinct region in South Africa because of the tenacity of pre-capitalist social and economic structures that survived on a larger scale and perhaps for longer than elsewhere in the country. The continuing role played by the *Usuthu* royal house in the province was a factor which led to the development of a powerful Zulu ethnic chauvinism. With the formation of Inkatha as a political movement in 1975, the political situation in Natal changed. This was further complicated by the severance of links between Inkatha and the ANC-in-exile in 1979, which exacerbated relations between Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi and the militant youth.<sup>58</sup> The result was conflict and violence beginning in the 1980s.

The processes of urbanisation and proletarianisation of Natal's African people - a byproduct of what A. Sitas, an industrial relations expert, described as the "demographic upheavals pioneered by agrarian capitalism and apartheid policies of relocation which lashed them [workers] into wage-labour in the last two decades"<sup>59</sup> - resulted in a conflict between a "traditional" consciousness and popular organisation (mainly reflected by Inkatha) and a more militant consciousness (reflected by trade unions and other popular movements). Natal then becomes an interesting region to study and very different from the rest of South Africa because of its long-term history, short-term urban history, the nature of its political organisations (strength of traditional leaders) and particularly the nature of its industry.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> See G. Mare, An appetite for power: Buthelezi's Inkatha and South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987); and B. Temkin, Gatsha Buthelezi: Zulu statesman (Cape Town, Purnell, 1976).

<sup>59</sup> A. Sitas, Notes in the Natal Room, 1986, p 93

This thesis attempts to reconstruct and record Durban's extremely complex African labour history from 1959 to 1985. It differs from my previous research not only because of the extended period of study but also because it provides a detailed historical account of the shaping of the African labouring class, the new industrial relations system established and the emergence of African independent trade unions in Durban and their struggles at the shop floor. Of the four famous unions established in Durban after the 1973 strikes, namely the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU), the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) and the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union (CWIU), this thesis will only examine two selected case studies: the NUTW and CWIU. The two were unique in that they eschewed involvement in politics and concentrated on shop floor structures; they were pioneers in the development of strong plant level organisation and the building of shop steward structures, which were adopted by the emerging unions in the 1980s and 1990s. Furthermore, prior to 1985, the two formed the backbone of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) from its inception in 1979, and became symbols of opposition to alliance politics in the federation.

This thesis begins by examining the development of the African working class and its resistance to the apartheid policies of the 1960s, which eventually led to the Durban strikes of 1973. These shook the apartheid state that had enjoyed relative industrial "peace" from the time it banned the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress and had assumed greater powers of coercion. The Durban strikes were unique yet were also emblematic for country-wide worker resistance in the 1970s and later. The explosion of industrial unrest which began in Durban ignited a series of responses which, for almost two decades, the apartheid state was unable to control. It also marked the birth of a new brand of independent trade unionism which forced the state to institute labour reforms and contributed to the eventual collapse of the

government. It would be misleading, however, to say that the collapse of apartheid was a process forced by the worker resistance movement alone. Rather, the demise of apartheid was a byproduct of its own internal contradictions and conflicts, of the widespread popular resistance which began in Durban in 1973, and of escalating pressure from the international community. Nevertheless, Durban has not always been at the vortex of change, the peculiarities of its "backwardness and isolation" and sudden centrality are not quite adequately explored.

My thesis consists of twelve chapters divided into two parts. Part One deals with the formation and restructuring of Durban's African working class and community from 1959 to 1973. It examines the covert forms of resistance during that period. Part Two begins by analysing the 1973 Durban strikes which played a major role in the formation of African independent trade unions. It evaluates the new industrial relations system and formation of independent trade unions, their organisation and activities at the plant level; the issues they faced in the 1970s and early 1980s; and the industrial conflict and strikes in which unions were involved up to the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in November 1985.

The year 1985 marked a turning point in the history of KwaZulu-Natal, which has been characterised by widespread violence and, more importantly, the birth of one of the strongest federations of unions in South Africa, COSATU. This thesis, therefore, provides a social, political and economic framework for labour issues prior to this date. The pre-1985 context laid a crucial foundation for the future of labour history in this volatile region.

*PART ONE*

**Creating an African Working Class and Popular  
Struggles**

## Chapter Two

### Durban's Economy, 1960-1985

#### Introduction

The years immediately following the Sharpeville massacre and the banning of African political organisations in South Africa witnessed unprecedented economic growth. The boom conditions which prevailed throughout the world and in South Africa in particular were mirrored in Durban where the rate of industrial expansion was second only to that of the southern Transvaal. B. Freund notes that "the growth of Durban was more rapid, for the first time since World War I, than that of South Africa as a whole".<sup>1</sup> In Durban, the textile industry was the major item in this boom. Despite this boom, the growth and structure of Durban's economy during the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s has hardly been studied, the only exception being R.T. Bell's study on manufacturing employment in Natal.<sup>2</sup> A handful of scholars, namely M. Katzen<sup>3</sup>, D.J.L. McWhirter<sup>4</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> B. Freund, Insiders and outsiders: the Indian working class of Durban, 1910 -1990 (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1995), p 77.

<sup>2</sup> R.T. Bell, The growth and structure of manufacturing employment in Natal (University of Durban-Westville, Institute for Social and Economic Research, Occasional Paper No.7, 1983)

<sup>3</sup> M. Katzen, Industry in greater Durban, Part 3, Natal Town and Regional Planning Report, vol. 3 (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1961).

<sup>4</sup> D.J.L. McWhirter, Industry in greater Durban, Part 4, Natal Town and Regional Planning Report, vol. 4 (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1961).

I. Edwards<sup>5</sup>, have covered the earlier period while a few scholars provided general surveys of the whole country.<sup>6</sup> While important contributions have been made by various scholars of South Africa's industrial development, case studies which could show the historical roots of the present economic situation have been neglected. However, such high and sustained growth of the 1960s took centre-stage in the "liberal-radical" debate. The existence of state repressive structures with an unprecedented economic growth was questioned by radical scholars who sought for a theoretical understanding of why there was no collapse and indeed a strengthening of both the apartheid state and economy during the 1960s. However, the economy witnessed one of the longest booms in South African economic history, which lasted for almost 15 years.

This chapter makes an attempt to examine the structure of manufacturing production; the racial composition and structure at the workplace; and the distribution of income among African workers. It encapsulates the general economic trend in Durban which is crucially important for the understanding of how African life was changed significantly during the boom years and thereafter. Furthermore, it is important to understand such economic trends since industrialisation, urbanisation and labour processes are closely linked to each other.

### **Economic conditions in South Africa: a brief overview**

During the 1960s, the performance of the South African economy was impressive. Manufacturing output grew at average annual

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<sup>5</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home".

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, H. Houghton, The South African economy (Cape Town, OUP, 5th ed, 1978); see also a recent publication which examines a partially-driven industrial policy by the South African government by N. Clark, Manufacturing apartheid: state corporations in South Africa (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994).

rate of well over 24 percent and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) averaged almost 8 percent. Employment in manufacturing grew rapidly and by the end of the decade, manufacturing made up almost 24 percent of GDP compared with 13,5 in the 1950s. This boom occurred despite the fact that the country was isolated internationally: from the end of May 1961, South Africa was no longer part of the Commonwealth after becoming a Republic and in 1962, the Kennedy administration in the United States banned the supply of certain arms to South Africa. Furthermore, in 1963, the United Nations called on member states to impose a voluntary arms embargo on South Africa.<sup>7</sup> In spite of these problems, the economy of South Africa boomed.

South Africa experienced an exceptionally rapid economic expansion averaging between 5 and 8 percent per annum from 1945 to the early 1970s.<sup>8</sup> Quite significantly, the period between the end of the Second World War and the early 1970s saw South Africa experiencing rapid industrial growth.<sup>9</sup> The success story of this period has been noted by various writers and scholars of different persuasions. Some scholars, for instance Hobart Houghton, speculated that in the 1960s, "The South African economy with that of Japan probably had the highest growth rate in the world..."<sup>10</sup> Such observations have been castigated by T. Moll's recent studies which refuted the

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<sup>7</sup> C. Jenkins, "Sanctions, economic growth and change", in N. Nattrass and E. Ardington (eds), The political economy of South Africa (Cape Town, OUP, 1990), pp 275-6.

<sup>8</sup> See T.W. De Jongh, "Review of the financial economic situation in the Republic of South Africa", South African Journal of Economics, vol.39 (1971); South African Reserve Bank, "Post-war growth and structural changes in the South African economy: an analysis of national accounts and balance of payments data", in the South African Reserve Bank Quarterly Bulletin; and South African Commerce and Industry [all volumes], 1960 -1973.

<sup>9</sup> T.J. Stadler, "Some aspects of the changing structure of the South African economy since World War II", South African Statistics, (1969), p 9.

<sup>10</sup> Houghton, The South African economy, p 213.

conventional wisdom and concluded that "the apartheid economy grew curiously slowly and can be said to have 'failed'..." in terms of benefiting the majority of people.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, this particular study, although confined to Durban, suggests that the period in question was crucial to South Africa's economic boom, precipitating an unprecedented growth in manufacturing, construction and service industry output, especially during the 1960s and early 1970s.

In the early 1970s the South African economy managed to escape from external constraints, particularly the oil crisis which resulted from the war in the Middle East. From 1970 to 1974, the manufacturing sector experienced a rapid growth and was less affected by the oil crisis, than were the advanced capitalist countries; in fact, South Africa's economy was cushioned by the sharp increase in the gold price during that period. Thus the performance of the economy during the four year period was intimately connected to that of gold. Productivity rose, manufacturing employment increased and there was a huge capital inflow into the country except in 1973 (which was largely dominated by labour unrest and unfounded speculation of further devaluation of the rand). However, from 1975 to 1977, productivity slowed down to be followed by a brief upturn in a short-lived boom from 1978 to 1984. The economy thereafter was hard-hit by one of the worst recessions though between 1987 and 1988 it had a brief upturn.<sup>12</sup> The economic fortunes and misfortunes of the period (1970 to 1985) were also marked by problems: inflation, labour shortages, labour unrest beginning in Durban in 1973 and major concerns about the slow-down in productivity growth relative to wage increases that were being granted that time.

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<sup>11</sup> T. Moll, "Did the apartheid economy fail?", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 17, No. 2 (June 1991), p 271.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, D. Hindson and O. Crankshaw, "New jobs, new skills, new divisions - the changing structure of SA's workforce", South Africa Labour Bulletin, vol 15, No. 1 (1990), p 27.

## Economic conditions in Durban: the boom years, 1960-1970

During the early 1950s the South African economy experienced a downward trend with the industrial sector of Durban suffering a "rather considerable fall in the rate of growth, particularly of net output".<sup>13</sup> The Durban-Pinetown-Inanda industrial complex (better known as the greater Durban area) contributed 12,3 percent of the country's total gross output in 1950 while southern Transvaal and the western Cape contributed 45,6 percent and 17,1 percent respectively.<sup>14</sup> The following years, particularly from 1953 onwards, witnessed profitability rising gradually for the next ten years and this trend was further facilitated by the annual rate of inflation which declined sharply and remained low until the early 1960s.

During the 1950s, industrial capitalism in South Africa was concentrated largely in the four main industrial areas, namely, southern Transvaal, the western Cape Province, Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage, and greater Durban.<sup>15</sup> In 1954-55 greater Durban had a record number of approximately 1322 establishments with a gross value of output of R166,7 million, representing 12 percent of total industrial output in the Union.<sup>16</sup> Net output of these industrial establishments amounted to R62,1 million, representing 11 percent of the Union's total.<sup>17</sup> The greater Durban industrial complex showed

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<sup>13</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 96.

<sup>14</sup> W.F.J. Steenkamp, "Labour policies for growth during the seventies in the established industrial areas", South African Journal of Economics, vol 39 (1971), p 101.

<sup>15</sup> South African Industry and Trade, vol. 56, Mar. 1960, p 101.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

a relatively consistent 11 to 12 percent share of the total Union output up to the early 1960s attaining a 13 percent contribution to the country's gross output by 1963-64.<sup>18</sup> The same period also saw an increase in capital invested in industrial machinery, redemption charges and industrial development loans.<sup>19</sup>

In a drive to encourage rapid economic growth in Durban, the City Council provided incentives to potential investors. The City Council charged reasonably low rates for industrial land.<sup>20</sup> From 1954 onwards, greater Durban tended to

<sup>18</sup> Steenkamp, "Labour policies for growth", p 101.

<sup>19</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 96.

<sup>20</sup> The Sharpeville shootings of 1960 severely depressed land and property prices and they remained relatively low for almost three years, but gradually picked up during the early months of 1963. From 1965 onwards, industrial land prices in the central area of Durban (the Old Borough North and South) were higher as compared to outskirts areas. [See Table below for comparison purposes]. In 1972 rates in central Durban were 2,25 cents in the rand and 0,25 cents on improvements; compared with 3,24 cents on land and 0,54 cents on buildings in Durban. In Pinetown and New Germany, the rates were: Land , 1,8 to 2,4 cents, and 1,25 cents; buildings, 0,5 to 0,8 cents and 0,75 cents.

Average price of industrial land in four areas.  
1965 - 1970 rates

Year	Durban Old North	Borough South	Durban South	Pinetown
1965	1,76	3,21	0,53	0,10
1966	1,86	2,68	0,67	0,13
1967	1,80	4,45	0,99	0,20
1968	2,41	4,09	1,11	0,30
1969	3,15	6,60	1,34	0,50
1970	4,92	6,49	1,80	0,90
Increase 1965 -1970				
Rands:	3,16	3,28	1,27	0,28
%	180	102	240	800

Source : City Estates Department, "Published Sales Schedules", Durban, and For Pinetown Fieldwork, as cited in B.S. Young, "The Industrial Geography of the Durban Region" (University of Natal, Ph.D, 1972), 145.

concentrate substantially on heavy chemical industries, textiles and clothing, furniture and paper and printing. Such industries which gradually replaced Durban's "traditional" industries such as food, paint and fertilizers required

large supplies of water for manufacturing processes and for effluent disposal, large numbers of operatives, as well as unskilled labourers, nearness to a port for local and export markets, and some local raw materials.<sup>21</sup>

These attempts to expand Durban's economy were not without their problems. The consumer market was still relatively small. The African people in the rural areas, who constituted about 40 percent of the total population in Durban's market area, had "but a very low purchasing power"<sup>22</sup> by then. Related to this problem was the geographical location of Durban around a major port. Instead of industries benefiting from nearness to port facilities, they tended to be disadvantaged owing to "state transport tariff rates which negated any local advantage due to harbour facilities and location".<sup>23</sup> Such a state policy long remained a bone of contention amongst Durban's industrialists; despite this the tariff rates were upheld by the state to ensure that the railway and port facilities of East London and Port Elizabeth received a share of the transportation business needs of the southern Transvaal industrial complex. In Durban port charges were deliberately increased, as were the rail tariffs between Durban and Johannesburg.<sup>24</sup>

Despite these disadvantages, Durban's industrial revolution took off in the 1960s, along the South Coast, through Congella and Mobeni (see maps). These two areas had

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<sup>21</sup> SA Industry and Trade, vol 61, Jan. 1965.

<sup>22</sup> McWhirter, Industry, p 4.

<sup>23</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 98.

<sup>24</sup> Katzen, Industry, p 30. See also Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 98.

experienced an industrial upturn in the 1930s and 1940s. Industries were expanded to Isipingo and to Umbogintwini, which were aptly described as comprising a "complex of factories and plants owned by African Explosives, then further along the Coast ... to Saiccor rayon plant at Umkomaas and to...the titanium plant at Umgababa".<sup>25</sup> Related to this industrial take-off were major developments in rail and road facilities. The opening of the Southern Freeway and the improvement of roads in the Pinetown-New Germany area, Prospecton and Central Durban went a long way to facilitating industrialisation. New railway facilities were established in Pinetown, Verulam and Prospecton. The late 1960s also saw the improvement of telephone exchanges, the extension of sewerage, electricity services and water supplies to Cato Ridge, Hammarsdale and Pinetown.<sup>26</sup> No doubt J. Martin's remarks about London, that "if one looks for the explanation of changes in the distribution of industry...in the last decade, their planning control must be treated as a major factor,"<sup>27</sup> were also applicable to the industrial development of the Durban region.

With the state policy of industrial decentralisation (which was meant to exploit African cheap labour fully while minimizing their presence in white urban areas) implemented in 1961, manufacturing industries were established in border areas such as Hammarsdale, Tongaat, Verulam, Stanger, Isipingo, Glen Anil and Umzinto, and in areas such as New Germany and Pinetown. Hammarsdale, in particular, was singled out as an important industrial developmental area between Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The presence of the railway line between Durban and Johannesburg made it possible to launch

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<sup>25</sup> SA Industry and Trade, vol.60, Apr. 1964, p 45.

<sup>26</sup> Young, "The industrial geography of the Durban region", pp 114-5.

<sup>27</sup> J. Martin as cited in Young, "The industrial geography of the Durban region", p 116.

extensive industrial development in the area. Hammarsdale was also selected due to its proximity to the Umlazi African Reserve from which migrant labour could be extracted, and because it fell in an area where there were already regulated wage agreements for the textile industries.<sup>28</sup>

Through the state's policy of industrial decentralisation, Elangeni Estates was launched by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) in 1961 in Hammarsdale to develop a township, and 163 acres were set aside for industrial development. In 1971, the IDC argued that "a well-established textile industry would have tremendous employment potential for semi-skilled operatives, which meant that it could raise the standard of living of the Bantu"<sup>29</sup>, hence the development of textile industries within the area. Notable industries set up at Hammarsdale included the clothing factory, three textile plants and a sewing machine plant.<sup>30</sup>

The tidal wave of industrialisation gathered momentum along border areas, and in 1964 Humphreys and McCrystal commented that:

The industries at Hammarsdale have been attracted there largely because of the incentives offered by the government and to that extent they are subsidised industries in the sense that the rest of the economy has to bear the burden of reducing their costs below what they would otherwise have been had it not been for the subsidies. However, the natural process of decentralisation to peripheral areas, referred to previously, is taking place in the Region, and the government's incentives are an added centrifugal force. Hammarsdale, being only about 15 miles from Pinetown, may for all practical purposes

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<sup>28</sup> SA Industry and Trade, vol. 59, June 1963, p 45.

<sup>29</sup> Industrial Development Corporation, Report...for 1971, p 57; See also Figure 2.

<sup>30</sup> Young, "The industrial geography of the Durban region", p 206.

be regarded as a peripheral area.<sup>31</sup>

By the end of 1971 there were 16 industrial establishments on the Elangeni Estates and its surrounding areas.<sup>32</sup>

Factories began to mushroom in Durban and 4 900 acres of its 94 square miles were zoned for industry; by 1965, 3 430 of these acres were already industrially occupied.<sup>33</sup> As part of its promotion drive, the City Council set aside 750 acres in 1965 to allow for industrial expansion during the following fifteen years.<sup>34</sup> The City Council allowed an extremely favourable rate structure as well: the gross ratable value of land and buildings in the industrial areas of the City on 31 July 1964 stood at R492 132 780.<sup>35</sup> Whereas the gross and net output for 1954-55 had been 166,7 million (R333,4) and 62,1 million pounds (R124,2) respectively, by 1964-65 they had risen to an annual gross output of R600 million from the manufacturing and construction industries of greater Durban, and a net output of R210 million.<sup>36</sup>

From 1967 onwards the rate of industrial growth declined. By 1968 even the textile industry, although ideally suited to the border areas, experienced a tremendous decrease in production and suffered greatly from international competition, particularly from Japan and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). In Rhodesia, for instance, factory regulations were more relaxed and labour cheaper than in South Africa. In 1967-68, the gross output of textiles for the greater Durban industrial complex stood at 12,7 percent of the Union's total,

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<sup>31</sup> Humphreys and McCrystal as cited in Young, "The industrial geography of the Durban region", p 207

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p 207.

<sup>33</sup> SA Industry and Trade, vol 62, Mar. 1966, p 128.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid; See also Figure 3 & 5.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

showing a decline in terms of real production.<sup>37</sup> Overall, the South African economy from 1965 to 1967 was characterised by a lower rate of growth. The lower rate of growth could be explained as an effect of the drought which took place in 1965 and led to lower agricultural production and exports, as well as an effect of the grossly high level of white consumer spending which affected the local price structure and the balance of payments.<sup>38</sup> Industrialists expressed concern over the slump and remained suspicious about future prospects for industrial survival.<sup>39</sup>

A major industrial sector with a substantial increase in production in Durban during the early 1960s was the textile industry. In 1963 this industry received a financial boost from the Minister of Economic Affairs who allocated the sum of R45 million for textile development, particularly in the border areas.<sup>40</sup> However, Durban's manufacturing industry during the period was also fairly extensive, embracing furniture, printing, timber, hides and skins, farm implements, industrial machinery, office equipment, beverages, fertilisers and breweries, among other industries.<sup>41</sup> The availability of sugar, timber and coal facilitated the process of industrial development in the city, and the harbour provided conditions conducive to the ship-building industry. Needless to say, it was in these industries that increasing numbers of Africans were employed at low wages. In order to maximise profit, industry relied heavily on cheap, unskilled African labour, while importing white labour for skilled and managerial positions. The textile industry, particularly the Frame Group of Companies based in the New Germany and Mobeni areas,

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<sup>37</sup> Steenkamp, "Labour policies", p 101.

<sup>38</sup> SA Commerce and Industry, vol. 24, Dec. 1965, p 165.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> South Africa Commerce and Industry, vol. 21, 1963, p 239.

<sup>41</sup> SA Industry and Trade, vol. 62, Mar. 1966, p 128.

utilised largely female, African migrant labour.

Between 1960 and 1966, productivity rose in the textile industry simply because they applied the piece-rate system.<sup>42</sup> Each piece of cloth manufactured had a price, pegged at 100 performance level,<sup>43</sup> which was what a worker should produce at a machine working at 100 percent efficiency. Some textile industries required a 102 percent loom efficiency.<sup>44</sup> At Afritex, an Andrea piece of cloth of 230 cm by 250 cm size was worth a wage of 38 cents while a Jabula piece of 100 cm by 110 cm was worth 6 cents.<sup>45</sup> Also at Wentex, a Basuto piece of 152 cm in width was paid at a wage of 34 cents per unit, while a Demon, 180 cm by 200 cm, was worth 22 cents.<sup>46</sup>

The actual pay for the day's work was determined by the number of pieces of cloth handled. At Frame, for instance, if a worker failed to attain the pre-set norm, she/he could be penalised through a deduction of wages; if the work was continuously below the norm, the worker risked dismissal.<sup>47</sup> The supervisors were there to enforce discipline and to keep

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<sup>42</sup> For an interesting account on piece-rates, see M. Burawoy, The politics of production (London, Verson, 1985), pp 167-183. Burawoy provided a detailed analysis on how the piece-rate system has been applied in some developed countries in order to increase productivity.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p 170; Bob Lange and J. Lange, "Organising piece-rate workers in the textile industry", Science for the People, vol.16, No. 3 (May -June 1984), p 12; and A. Hirsch, "Ducking and weaving: problems of worker organisation in the textile industry of Durban-Pinetown-Maritzburg" (University of Witwatersrand, B.A Hons Thesis, 1978), p 56.

<sup>44</sup> H. Dickenson, Work Study Department, 10 January 1964. Author's personal collection. Documents given by Jabulani Gwala, leader of the South African Textile and Clothing Union, Durban Branch.

<sup>45</sup> J.H.J van Leen, Afritex to Head Office, Jacobs, 19 February 1976. Author's personal collection.

<sup>46</sup> Consolidated Textile Mills Limited: Wentex Mill, Piece-Rates, January 1976. Author's personal collection.

<sup>47</sup> Hirsch, "Ducking and weaving", p 56.

production up. M. Burawoy, a Marxist scholar, saw the role of such supervisors as: "emperors, ... they hold us all in their hands. They dole out favours as they feel like."<sup>48</sup>

Supervisors could enforce discipline at work by placing recalcitrant workers on less productive machines, thus lowering their wages.<sup>49</sup>

Productivity, among women textile workers was maintained through the coerced intake of contraceptives so as to avoid work stoppages due to pregnancy.<sup>50</sup> J. Westmore and P.

Townsend commented that:

A sexual stereotype is being manipulated here: management does not want a stoppage of work due to pregnancy, but the reproduction function of women is used as a rationalisation for keeping women amongst the unskilled and low paid workers.<sup>51</sup>

Most textile firms hired women to do work that was usually done by men, simply because women were cheaper. In 1966 the woolwashing industry, for example, paid women wages which were 30 percent less than those of men.<sup>52</sup>

The textile industry in South Africa has been identified as a leading sector in providing low wages to its workers. The industry has therefore tended to locate itself where there is an abundance of cheap labour. This practice had both international and local implications. Internationally, rising wages in the major western countries led to relocation in less developed countries where cheap labour was abundant, while in South Africa, industry tended to locate in decentralised areas

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<sup>48</sup> Cited in Burawoy, The politics of production, p 177.

<sup>49</sup> Hirsch, "Ducking and weaving", p 56.

<sup>50</sup> J. Westmore and P. Townsend, "The African women workers in the textile industry in Durban", South African Labour Bulletin, vol.2, No. 4 (1975), p 24.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> The Woolwashing Industry, Report by the Research Officer of the Textile Workers' Industrial Union (SA), David Hemson, March 1973, p 2. Author's personal collection.

to take advantage of the state border industries concessions. The textile industry has consistently been protected through tariffs on imported textiles and nurtured through inflows of state capital. The fact that industries located in border areas were exempted from wage determinations and minimum wage legislation clearly shows how the government supported infant industries in the process of capital accumulation. Interestingly enough, established industry vigorously pointed out the possibilities of "unfair competition" from the emerging border area industries.<sup>53</sup> Textile industries were established in border areas where a very low-wage, usually female, African workforce could replace better-paid Indian and African men workers - a manoeuvre largely adopted by many white industrialists.

On the policy of industrial decentralisation, various industrialists clashed over the principle of establishing border industries. Even when organised industry initially opposed the policy, disagreements arose among individual members. However, "many industrialists in the proclaimed Border Areas that were able to take advantage of the concessions strongly supported the policy, as did several employers in such labour intensive industries as textiles..."<sup>54</sup> By the end of the 1960s industry was diversifying and textiles becoming one of many.

The Frame Group of Companies, with headquarters in Durban, is the largest textile manufacturing concern in South Africa. This particular company has factories stretching from Cape Town, East London, Ladysmith, and Johannesburg to as far afield as Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia. By 1964, P. Frame could rightly claim that his industry constituted the largest spinning and weaving complex in Southern Africa. In 1964 the

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<sup>53</sup> D.F. Kaplan, "Class conflict, capital accumulation and the state: an historical analysis of the state in twentieth century South Africa," (University of Sussex, D.Phil., 1977), p 320.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p 321

labour force of Frametex industries, a division of the Frame group, comprised 51 percent African men, 19 percent African women and 29 percent Indian workers.<sup>55</sup> In addition, during the 1960s and early 1970s the Frame Group of Companies operated a recruiting organisation in northern and eastern Transkei. This recruitment operation was undertaken to ensure the supply of a cheap labour force but was terminated in 1973 soon after the strikes. It was pressure from the government which led to the collapse of the system.

Although the end of the 1960s proved to be somewhat difficult for the industrialists, the boom conditions were not yet altogether over. The launching of new industries continued despite a decline in the total gross industrial output of Durban's economy, which stood at approximately 12 percent of the national gross output in 1967-68 while Natal's regional share had retrogressed to slightly less than 20 percent of the total.<sup>56</sup> During the 1960s Durban's industrial sector consolidated its operations, and returns on capital investment increased. During the period 1961 to 1970 a sizeable number of new firms entered the market so that by 1968 Durban had a record number of approximately 1 800 industries as compared to 1 500 industries in the region in 1966.<sup>57</sup> By 1971, the number of new firms had increased to approximately 2 200 while the Natal region as a whole had a record 4 168 industries.<sup>58</sup>

The period between 1965 and 1971 witnessed the

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<sup>55</sup> Frame Group Statement, Annual year review, 1964. The total number of people employed by the Frame Group in 1964 stood at ±3 600. This is not an accurate figure because some firms provided rounded figures.

<sup>56</sup> Natal Chamber of Industries, 64th Ann. Report, 1971-72, p 18.

<sup>57</sup> Natal Chamber of Industries, 61st Ann. Report, 1968-9, and see also SA Industry and Trade, vol 62. Mar. 1966, p 128.

<sup>58</sup> Natal Chamber of Industries, 64th Ann. Report, 1971-72, p 15.

establishment of 230 new firms in the greater Durban region.<sup>59</sup> However, a sizeable number of these new firms were launched in low cost decentralised areas. A number of them, for example Adorable Footwear, Newman Hender's valve shop, and Air Products, were established in the Pinetown-New Germany area. Other new firms established at Prospecton-Isipingo included Isipingo Textile Corporation, the Henkel Chemical plant, Argus Printing and Rheen's Drums, while the large new Mondi Paper Mill was established at Merebank. At Verulam, the Republic Stationery industry was established, while at Tongaat, the David Whitehead Textile factory came into existence. The Coronation Group of companies also established a new brick and tile works at Avoca, and Reindeer Toys and Shield Clothing, as well as a new textile mill were established at Hammarsdale and Umzinto respectively.<sup>60</sup> The new buildings established in the central area of Durban during this period were relatively small businesses and rented premises. Industrial expansion was thus concentrated largely on the outskirts of Durban where land and labour were cheap and readily available.

In this favourable climate, organised industry, particularly the Durban Chamber of Commerce and the Natal Chamber of Industries, made positive comments as to the industrial potential of the region, challenging Durban's manufacturing industry to become "more export conscious and export oriented".<sup>61</sup> This optimistic viewpoint was reflected in the "get out and sell" campaign,<sup>62</sup> promoted by F.W.H. Stafford of the Natal Chamber of Industries, in a bid to

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<sup>59</sup> Cameron as cited in Young, "The industrial geography of the Durban region", p 12; See also Figure 6.

<sup>60</sup> Young, "The industrial geography of the Durban region", pp 123-4.

<sup>61</sup> Natal Chamber of Industries, 56th Ann. Report, 1963-4, p 54.

<sup>62</sup> SA Industry and Trade, vol. 62, Sept. 1966, p 37.

promote export trade during a period when South Africa was facing international isolation as a result of its apartheid policies. Trade links between South Africa and Rhodesia were intensified since the two countries were facing the same fate. Rhodesia's unilateral declaration of independence from the United Kingdom in 1965 and the resultant imposition of sanctions against it encouraged the two countries to operate more closely. However, before the end of the 1960s, South Africa experienced a slight decline in the growth rate of the GDP and industrial production, particularly the manufacturing output, was poorer as compared to the first six years of the decade. Between 1967 and 1969, the textile and clothing industries were largely affected by competition from abroad and as a result these two sectors, mainly dominant in Durban, experienced a slower rate of growth which affected South Africa's industrial performance. Nevertheless, by 1970 the economy had once again picked up.

### 1970-1985: difficulties and changing economic trends

Between 1970 and 1974, the South African economy experienced rapid growth, particularly in the manufacturing sector. Durban's growth for the period 1972 to 1985 is shown in Table A.

Table A

The growth of manufacturing in the greater Durban region,  
1972- 1985<sup>63</sup>

<u>Year</u>	No. of Manuf. Establ.	Gross Output (R1000)	Net Output (R1000)
1972	1432	1052 218	407 334
1976	1766	2761 300	1010 200
1979	1985	3822 826	1406 611
1985	2346	9565 769	3778 812

From the available data, the manufacturing sector

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<sup>63</sup> Censuses of manufacturing reports for 1972, 1976, 1979 and 1985.

expanded quite significantly in the 1970s. With regard to the productivity of all sectors, the magnitude of increase was less than that of the 1960s. Productivity in the manufacturing sector increased during 1970-74 but slowed-down between 1975 and 1977, which possibly led A. Black, an economist, to refer to "South Africa's dismal economic performance since the mid-1970s".<sup>64</sup> Generally, the level of output grew in all sectors of manufacturing industry though with some periodical slow-downs during the period under investigation. Between 1975 and mid-1977, the economy declined but before the end of 1977 it had begun to recover. In 1979, for instance, the chemicals, food, textiles and clothing and footwear industries contributed about 56,3 percent of the total manufacturing gross output for the Durban region. Their contribution declined, however, to 52,2 percent in 1985.<sup>65</sup> In 1985, the gross output for these high growth industries were: chemicals (R1 844 593), food industry (R1 503 506), textiles (R940 204), and paper products (R710 018).<sup>66</sup> Fabricated metals, motor vehicles and printing were next in order of importance. Small-scale and family enterprises such as furniture and various types of repair shops, mainly dominated by Indians, also contributed about 0,8 percent of the total manufacturing value added. However, since 1985 there has been a modest decline in the percentage contribution to GDP from the manufacturing sector, which has adversely affected the economy at large.

### Employment patterns, 1960-1985

By the beginning of 1966, Durban enjoyed a total of 1 500 industries in the city, with an employment record of 87 500

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<sup>64</sup> A. Black, "Manufacturing development and the economic crisis: a reversion to primary production?", in S. Gelb (ed), South Africa's economic crisis (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991), p 156.

<sup>65</sup> Census of manufacturing, 1985, p 185.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

workers, of whom 20,57 percent were whites, 27,42 percent Indians, 5,14 percent coloureds and 46,9 percent Africans.<sup>67</sup> By 1967/8, greater Durban region had a total employment of 131 496 (representing 13,2 percent of South African employment), of which 16,9 percent was white, 35,2 both coloured and Indian and 47,9 percent African.<sup>68</sup> These statistics reveal the accelerated tempo of industrial growth in the Durban metropolitan area. By 1970, the total number of Africans employed in greater Durban had increased to 48,4 percent of the total workers, reaching a 50,3 percent mark in 1972.<sup>69</sup> During the 1960s, the proportion of Indian workers also increased, particularly in the low-intensity clothing, footwear, food and beverages, and furniture industries.<sup>70</sup>

The growth and structural transformation of the economy had profound implications for the growth of employment and wages and for the distribution of the labour force by sector and occupation during the 1960s. The following statistics on employment patterns in eighty-eight Durban firms are useful indicators of the position of African workers in the economy:

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid; See also Figure 6.

<sup>68</sup> Department of Statistics, Report No. 10-21-18, Census of manufacturing, 1967-8.

<sup>69</sup> See Report No.10-21-27, Census of manufacturing, 1970 and Report No.10-21-29, Census of manufacturing, 1972.

<sup>70</sup> Bell, The growth and structure of manufacturing employment in Natal, p 38.

Table B

Proportions of the total labour force within categories of employment, 1962 and 1972<sup>71</sup>

Occupational Category and Year	Race Groups			
	Afr.	Ind.	Col.	Whites
Managerial and Executive				
1962	Nil	1%	Nil	99%
1972	1%	2%	Nil	97%
Medium and Senior Clerical				
1962	2%	15%	1%	82%
1972	2%	24%	1%	73%
Low Clerical				
1962	4%	24%	Nil	72%
1972	4%	33%	Nil	63%
Higher Semi-Skilled & Skilled				
1962	14%	43%	7%	36%
1972	17%	49%	9%	25%
Lower Semi-Skilled				
1962	45%	49%	3%	3%
1972	43%	53%	3%	1%
Unskilled				
1962	88%	11%	1%	Nil
1972	88%	11%	1%	Nil

As these figures show, "the only significant advance for Africans has been in the higher semi-skilled/skilled category where the proportions rose from 14 percent in 1962 to 17 percent in 1972 (in absolute terms the numbers were 1 088 and 1 483 respectively in the eighty-eight firms)".<sup>72</sup> During the 1960s, many African workers were largely unskilled although a few managed to advance at a painfully slow rate. The Indian working class, as Freund has shown, was preferred as semi-skilled and clerical staff, particularly in the footwear and clothing industries. Freund further notes that, during the

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<sup>71</sup> L. Schlemmer and M. Boulanger, "Race and employment patterns among larger employers in Durban: a brief case study of employment policy in relation to social change", in L. Schlemmer and E. Webster (eds), Change, reform and economic growth in South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1977), p 177.

<sup>72</sup> L. Schlemmer and M. Boulanger, "Race and employment patterns among larger employers in Durban", in L. Schlemmer and E. Webster (eds), Change, reform and economic growth in South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1977), p 176.

1960s, "the Indian worker [was] generally regarded as being particularly suited to work demanding initiative and quick thinking, especially process-minding, while the African worker seems to show more aptitude for routine repetitive work".<sup>73</sup> By the late 1960s, some employers believed that the Indian worker showed "greater facility than the Bantu for skilled manipulative work and clerical employment but lacks the physical strength and stamina of the Bantu".<sup>74</sup> L. Douwes-Dekker (an industrial expert) and H.L. Watts' study on employers' attitudes towards African and Indian workers in 1973 came to the conclusion that "viewed overall the Indian worker tends to be regarded less favourably than the African worker".<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless the African worker has always been portrayed in a negative manner; the most common stereotype being that he/she lacks initiative, imagination and dexterity and therefore should be an unskilled labourer. For long, Natal Africans were viewed as "lazy Kaffirs", "a fickle race" with "unconquerable laziness",<sup>76</sup> which had to be taught about notions of work and productivity. Such crude and racist perceptions of Natal African workers were expressed by some white employers and even Indian industrialists in the 1960s, particularly in the clothing industry, who preferred to employ Indian workers rather than Africans. However, some parts of Durban economy were open to African advancement, particularly in the food, beverage, textile, rubber and motor vehicle industries. Dunlop, one of the largest employers in Durban, preferred African to Indian workers right up to the late

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<sup>73</sup> Freund, Insiders and outsiders, p 79.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> L. Douwes-Dekker and H.L. Watts, "Certain attitudes of white industrial employers in Durban towards the Indian worker in contrast to the African worker", Humanitas, vol.2, No.2 (1973), p 119.

<sup>76</sup> K.E. Atkins, The moon is dead! give us our money: cultural origins of an African work ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1834-1900 (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 1993), p 2.

1980s. In the 1980s, Dunlop also was known for ridding itself of Indian workers in order to take on migrants from Zululand. The same applied to the textile industry where African workers were given preference over Indians. The new automobile assembly industry, dominated by Toyota, largely employed Africans and avoided both Indian and coloured workers.

As industrial output increased in the greater Durban region, it meant also some structural changes in the size of firms. The relevant data is provided in Table C.

Table C

Employment in manufacturing industries in greater Durban,  
1972- 1985<sup>77</sup>

Year	Total No. Employed	Average No. empl per Establ.
1972	119 775	84
1976	186 427	106
1979	181 434	91
1985	193 093	82

Between 1972 and 1985, the number of establishments operating in the manufacturing sector almost doubled in size. The increase in the employment contribution of the manufacturing sector was mainly the result of the establishment of new industries year after year, as shown in Table A. For instance, in 1972, greater Durban had a total of 1 432 establishments, while in 1985 the number had increased to 2 346 (see Table A). The average number employed per establishment increased substantially from 84 in 1972 to 106 in 1976, while the national average number employed per establishment in the same year was 88.<sup>78</sup>

By 1978, Durban's manufacturing sector was by far the largest sector of economic activity in South Africa in terms of the value of its output, producing almost 22 percent of Natal's total of 29,7. By 1979, as Freund notes, Natal created

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<sup>77</sup> Censuses of manufacturing reports for 1972, 1976, 1979 and 1985; and South African Statistics, 1978. The average number employed per establishment is rounded off to the nearest figure.

<sup>78</sup> J. Nattrass, The South African economy: its growth and change (Cape Town, OUP, 1988 ed), p 168.

21,3 percent of manufacturing jobs in general but of 38,8 percent of jobs in clothing, 38,3 percent of jobs in textiles and 50,1 percent of jobs in footwear in South Africa.<sup>79</sup> In 1979, greater Durban was the site for 63,6 percent of the total manufacturing employment in Natal.<sup>80</sup> The data in Table D summarize the contribution of Durban's manufacturing employment to the total of South Africa.

Table D

Spatial distribution of manufacturing employment in greater Durban, 1961- 1985 (% of S.A)<sup>81</sup>

Year	Percentage
1961/2	12,7
1967/8	13,8
1970	13,6
1972	13,6
1976	13,7
1979	13,8
1985	14,7

With increasing decentralisation of economic activities along border areas in the 1970s and 1980s, Durban's contribution to employment opportunities in Natal was weakened, for instance, in 1979, it contributed only 17 percent of all manufacturing employment, but provided 32,1 percent of textile jobs and 34,8 percent of clothing jobs in the country.<sup>82</sup> Generally, from 1976 to 1984, employment growth was very rapid beyond the Durban region. Similarly, during the same period, there was a substantial decrease of over 40 000 in total manufacturing employment in the whole country. Between 1982 and 1984, many job opportunities were

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<sup>79</sup> Freund, Insiders and outsiders, p 78.

<sup>80</sup> J. Stanwix, "Capital accumulation, crisis and spatial restructuring: a study of spatial shifts in South African manufacturing with particular reference to Natal (University of Natal, Durban, M.Comm. Thesis, 1987), p 168.

<sup>81</sup> Censuses of manufacturing reports for 1961/2, 1967/8, 1972, 1976, 1979 and 1985.

<sup>82</sup> Stanwix, "Capital accumulation", p 198.

created by border industries, for example, Isithebe, which is about 100 kilometres north of Durban, accounted for 40 percent of all new jobs in Natal, particularly in newly established fabricated metal products, clothing and textile industries.<sup>83</sup> Many of these border industries were smaller and independently owned and were mainly dominated by Indian capitalists, for example, the famous Paruks and A.M. Moollas of Durban.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, large firms, mainly centred in Durban, were owned by the few industrial and financial conglomerates that have dominated the South African economy.

Some changes also took place in the racial structure of the labour force in Durban. By 1976, of the total 186 427 workers, 13,5 percent were whites, 36,7 coloureds and Indians, and 50 percent Africans. The major proportion of Indian workers were employed in clothing and footwear industries where they represented 80,6 and 69,8 percent respectively.<sup>85</sup> African workers were employed in greater proportions in textile, wood and wood products, chemicals, machinery and transport industries. By 1979, 14 570 African workers were employed in the food industry of which the total was 22 766, 2 108 of 2 956 in beverages, 19 961 of 27 565 in textiles, and 4 423 of 5 867 in the non-metallic industry.<sup>86</sup> In 1979 also, Indian workers were heavily concentrated in the wearing and leather industries where 26 249 of the total 35 296 and 5 652 of 7 948 were employed respectively.<sup>87</sup> In Durban in 1985, whites provided only 13,6 percent of the total labour force, coloureds 6 percent, Indians 30 percent and Africans 50,4

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p 197; and Bell, The growth and structure of manufacturing employment in Natal, p 68.

<sup>84</sup> Freund, Insiders and outsiders, p 80.

<sup>85</sup> Bell, The growth and structure of manufacturing employment in Natal, p 39.

<sup>86</sup> Report No.10-21-40, Census of manufacturing, 1979, p 59.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

percent. From this data, it appears that Africans, as Nattrass notes, "have been employed in greater proportions, labour costs per rand output increased in some industries and remained constant or declined in others".<sup>88</sup>

One of the biggest changes in the occupational and racial structure in industry was the upward mobility of African workers from unskilled into semi-skilled jobs. During the 1960s, quite a big percentage of African workers were unskilled, but in the mid-1980s, many of them, particularly in the formal sector, were semi-skilled as well. In other words, during the 1980s, the greatest proportion of African workers were either unskilled or semi-skilled.

### African wages

Associated with a decade of very rapid economic growth was the rise of African wages in the manufacturing sector. In the early 1960s, the issue of compulsory minimum wages for all African workers was extensively debated by economists, industrialists and other interested parties. The Wage Board, which was instituted in the early 1920s to safeguard and improve the position of the white working class, began in 1957 to be actively involved in the wage determinations of African workers. The chairman of the Wage Board in 1962, W.F.J. Steenkamp, saw "a large, rapid and general wage rise..."<sup>89</sup> as a social and political necessity. In his concluding remarks, Steenkamp called for:

a larger rise in Bantu real wages than in European real wages, but it must be a steady and measured advance rather than a sudden general rise that would be certain to affect at least certain industries and parts of the country deleteriously and would, in particular, disregard the long-term employment

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<sup>88</sup> Nattrass, The South African economy, p 175.

<sup>89</sup> W.F.J. Steenkamp, "Bantu wages in South Africa", South African Journal of Economics, vol. 30, No.2 (1962), p 114.

problem facing us.<sup>90</sup>

The call for higher wages for the African labour force came from various quarters. In the late 1950s, the African National Congress and the trade union umbrella body, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), launched a "One Pound a Day" campaign and the workers adopted the "Asinamali, Sifunamali" (we have no money, we want money) slogan.<sup>91</sup> The Durban Chamber of Commerce, the Natal Chamber of Industries and the Natal Employers' Association called for a living wage amongst its African work force although they were actually opposed to any specific wage increase.<sup>92</sup> After the Sharpeville massacre, major employers of African labour met and petitioned the government to legislate a minimum wage for their employees. Employers regarded government intervention as necessary to prevent under-cutting by those firms which did not increase wages out of choice.<sup>93</sup> The government, however, was hostile to these representations and Prime Minister Verwoerd accused the businessmen of "paving the way for black domination".<sup>94</sup> He dismissed members of the Association of Chamber of Commerce as "traitors" and for many years refused to see or receive correspondence from them.<sup>95</sup>

African workers themselves persistently demanded wage increases during the late 1950s. The period immediately following the Sharpeville massacre, however, saw the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> See, for instance, K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, Organise or starve (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980).

<sup>92</sup> See The Durban Chamber of Commerce, 1959/1960, Ann. Report of the Council of Directors: Natal Chamber of Industries, 56th Ann. Report, 1963-64, p 28.

<sup>93</sup> Rand Daily Mail, 20 June 1960.

<sup>94</sup> As cited in M. Lipton, Capitalism and apartheid: South Africa, 1910-1986 (Cape Town, David Philip, 1989 ed), p 171.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

suppression of mass political movements and trade unions, and there was very limited pressure forthcoming from political or trade union organisations to force wages up. Furthermore, strikes had declined to the extent that resistance was no longer coming directly from the workers themselves or from mass movements. Given a scenario seemingly so favourable, why did employers now support wage increases as proposed by the Wage Board?

Perhaps it was necessary for wages to be increased in order to increase the buying power of the African workers. That principle is very important if we realise that capitalists saw increases in wages as creating demand particularly for industrial products. If the consumer market remained limited, it would turn out to be, as K. Marx noted, "production for production's sake" without expanding the basis for profit.<sup>96</sup> Capitalists as a class stood to gain although some individual capitalists were opposed to wage increases.

Organised industry called relentlessly for an increase in African wages as "the most effective way of reaching optimum productivity".<sup>97</sup> In September 1963, the president of the Transvaal Chamber of Industries criticised the state policy of job reservation and maintained that:

The time has come when organised industry must state categorically that...no exploitation of labour should be allowed...and that our recommended safeguard is not to pay a man according to his colour or race but to the job he is doing.<sup>98</sup>

In essence, this proposal was meant to support the de-skilling of craft jobs to allow Africans to take over sections of the work. The rate for the job was the slogan of the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) and some liberal employers, who advocated that there should be no racial

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<sup>96</sup> See K. Marx, Capital: a critique of political economy (New York, New York Publishers, 1967 ed), pp 557-585.

<sup>97</sup> SA Industry and Trade, vol.59, Jan. 1963, p 41.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Sept. 1963, p 45.

demarcation of jobs rather a more open labour market in which job fragmentation should take place. During the 1960s and 1970s, similar complaints about the job colour bar were lodged to the government by various businessmen and organisations.<sup>99</sup>

On the extreme right, Dr Verwoerd maintained: "Don't give the poorly paid worker too much or he will become lazy and inefficient."<sup>100</sup> Despite the government's rejection of the request from businessmen to increase African wages, events of the early 1960s played a role in contributing to wage adjustments, particularly from the Wage Board. Some businessmen continued to lobby for higher legislated minimum wages for African workers. The Association for the Improvement of Bantu Wages and Productivity made several statements to the effect that African wages were rising at a painful slow-rate.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, the Wage Board increased unskilled wages as much as 20 to 40 percent between 1961 and 1964 as part of an attempt to stabilise conditions after the height of political unrest in Durban.<sup>102</sup>

Although African wages were increased substantially, such increases did not take into account the Poverty Datum Line (PDL). In 1960, the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) estimated a PDL of £24 (R48) for an African urban family of five.<sup>103</sup> The average African manufacturing wage was £16 (R32) at that time. However, by 1964, the gap between the PDL and the average African manufacturing wage had narrowed slightly. The SAIRR estimated a PDL in 1964 of R52,67

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<sup>99</sup> See Lipton, Capitalism and apartheid, Chapter 6, pp 138-182.

<sup>100</sup> SA Industry and Trade, vol 59, Jan 1963, p 41.

<sup>101</sup> SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1961, p 191; and Survey of race relations, 1962, p 200.

<sup>102</sup> See Tables showing wage increases from D.E. Pursell, "Bantu real wages and employment opportunities in South Africa", South African Journal of Economics, 36 (1968), pp 97-101.

<sup>103</sup> SAIRR, Race relations news, March 1960, p 21.

a month for an urban African family of five. At the time, the average African monthly wage in manufacturing was R43,05.<sup>104</sup>

From the early 1960s, the vast majority of African workers, whether migrant or urban residents, participated in the economy as casual, unskilled and semi-skilled labourers. In Durban there is evidence which shows that in the 1960s industry opened its gates to African workers to take up semi-skilled and skilled jobs. However, the abundance of unskilled African labour largely explains why historically the South African economy has grown through greater inputs of capital and land but without adequately improving the efficiency of these inputs. In his assessment in 1973 of manufacturing growth since 1963, the Director of the South African Federated Chamber of Industries, Dr H.J.J. Reynders, stated that "the Republic experienced a high rate of growth of total output, but the percentage increase in employment was one of the lowest in the world."<sup>105</sup>

During the 1960s there was an outcry among industrialists about the shortage of skilled manpower and most employers realized the value of utilising African labour. While job reservation was widely condemned by employers, the state saw it as a measure designed to safeguard industrial peace rather than deprive Africans of job opportunities. By the mid-1960s, the available reserves of white labour could not cope with demand of skilled labour although the government had allowed the importation of 76 481 immigrants.<sup>106</sup> Because of the shortage of skilled labour, the Prime Minister's Advisory Council recommended the use of African trained manpower, though Verwoerd insisted that such labour utilisation should

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<sup>104</sup> SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1966, p 205.

<sup>105</sup> H.J.J. Reynders, "Industrialisation and productivity", Address at the 7th AIESEC Congress, Pretoria, 5 July 1973.

<sup>106</sup> See South African statistics, 1982.

not threaten white jobs or lead to racially mixed employment.<sup>107</sup>

Against this background, we need to examine the African wage structure in Durban to see whether there was any impact at all by the Wage Board which after 1957 became increasingly interested in African real earnings (See Table E below).<sup>108</sup>

Table E

Average weekly earnings for unskilled labourers from selected industries in Durban, 1958 and 1965 (In Rand, October 1958 R = 100)<sup>109</sup>

Ind	Real Earn 1958	Real E 1965	% Incr 58 & 65	Real Min in 1965	% Incr of R min '65 over R Earn 1965
Gas	5.44	5.71	4.96	5.64	1.2
Motor	6.97	9.86	41.5	9.12	8.11
Meat	5.99	9.86	64.6	9.63	2.4
Goods	5.83	6.70	14.9	6.50	3.1
Bags	5.07	6.51	28.4	5.68	14.6
Transport	4.62	6.54	41.6	4.98	31.3
Asphalt	4.34	5.69	31.1	5.65	0.7
Grease	4.73	6.21	31.3	6.14	1.1
Shipping	7.05	9.19	30.4	8.90	3.3
Delivery	5.70	6.89	20.9	6.86	0.4
Building	5.02	5.72	13.9	5.12	11.7
Wool-Hide	4.90	5.72	16.7	5.72	0.0
Bridge Con	4.36	5.72	32.7	6.0	-4.7
Excavation	5.26	5.72	8.7	6.43	-11.04
Tanning	4.58	5.73	25.0	5.35	7.1

On a comparative basis, the real wages of unskilled African workers had remained static since the end of the Second World War, "in spite of virtual full employment and a 74 percent growth of the real national income over the period 1945-46 to

<sup>107</sup> SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1964, p 190.

<sup>108</sup> Real earnings refers to actual earnings adjusted to take into consideration inflation. Average real earnings would usually exceed the minimum real wage by definition.

<sup>109</sup> See the following reports, Report of the Wage Board, Meat Trade, Natal and Pretoria, 28 March 1966; Report of the Wage Board, Private Hotels, Durban, 13 January 1960; and Reports of the Wage Board, unskilled labour, and the relevant wage determinations. Some of these documents were obtained from Dr David Hemson's collection.

1958-59. Real wages of skilled workers [mostly whites], on the other hand, have risen steadily since the war."<sup>110</sup> The wages of the white workers rose after the war by almost 40 percent<sup>111</sup>, making them one of better paid working-classes of the world with average annual earnings well above £1 200 in the late 1950s. Yet African workers in the greater Durban area, particularly those in the manufacturing industry, experienced a decline of 11 percent in their wages between 1946-47 and 1953-54.<sup>112</sup> The Wage Board was challenged to address such disparities which existed in the economy and the distinction between skilled and unskilled work came to be "more or less identified with the distinction between the races, and the operation of market forces came in some measure to be replaced by the convention that a white man's wage was usually five to ten times the wage of a black man."<sup>113</sup>

In 1971 the Natal Employers Association conducted a wage and salary survey which indicated that 10 percent of the unskilled African workers earned less than R9 per week, 50 percent between R9 and R10 per week and 40 percent slightly above R10. About 25 percent of semi-skilled Africans earned over R18 per week while 20 percent of skilled workers earned between R18 and R23 per week.<sup>114</sup> The real minimum wage for unskilled workers in Durban, as published in the Government Gazette of 21 May 1971, was R8,95 per week which indicated an increase of R1,70 from the regulated figure of R7,25.<sup>115</sup> The

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<sup>110</sup> L. Katzen, "The case for minimum wage legislation in South Africa", SA Journal of Economics, vol 29 (1961), p 195.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, See Katzen's footnote number 3.

<sup>113</sup> Houghton, The South Africa economy, 1973, p 144.

<sup>114</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 79, Roll 61, 3 (c), Public Relations, Natal Employers' Association, Aug. 1971.

<sup>115</sup> KCAL, KCF 80, Roll 62, Public Relations, SA Institute of Race Relations (Natal Region), Minutes of a meeting of the regional committee, 7 June 1971, p 3.

salary scales for white workers were reasonably high compared to African wages. The average white fitter earned R1,50 per hour and junior clerks appointed with matriculation results earned R157 per month while those without matric qualifications were paid R141 per month.<sup>116</sup>

The sad story of African workers was that the consumer price index figures rose dramatically for all items to 107,8 while those for food rose to 108,9 which showed a 1,3 and 2,4 increase respectively in a month.<sup>117</sup> Professor Watts estimated, on the basis of figures produced by the Bantu Wage and Productivity Association, that the real minimum income for an African worker with a family in Durban in July 1971 was R77 per month which meant that a family of five would need at least R17,91 per week to sustain itself.<sup>118</sup> The consumer price index for all items in Durban had consistently gone up between 1966 and 1973. In December 1961, the consumer price index was 120,8 and by December 1971, it had gone up to 148,6.<sup>119</sup> On that same note, on the basis of research conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Natal, for KwaMashu residents, "after the deduction of expenditure on rent, transport, water and fuel, very little more than 5,5 cents per head remained for the purchase of food and other essential requirements".<sup>120</sup> The extent of such poverty in African townships was measured by the indices of health published by the Durban Medical Officer of Health. The infant mortality rate for 1969 was 103,4 per 1 000 live births as compared to 14,2 for whites. During the same year,

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<sup>116</sup> KCAL, KCF 79, Roll 61, Natal Employers' Ass, Aug. 1971.

<sup>117</sup> KCAL, KCF 79, Roll 61, NEA, Oct. 1971.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, Mar. 1972.

<sup>120</sup> KCAL, KCF 80, Roll 62, SA Institute of Race Relations, Memorandum presenting information relevant to a consideration of minimum wage rates for unskilled labourers in the region, Sept., 1970, p 2.

tuberculosis claimed 5,9 per 1 000 Africans compared to 0,4 per 1 000 for whites.<sup>121</sup>

Because of the unhealthy economic situation prevalent among urban Africans in Durban, the Chairman of the Natal Region of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), L. Schlemmer, commented: "Ultimately all of us will have to pay dearly for this neglect of human needs."<sup>122</sup> Similarly, in 1971, the Director of the Institute of Race Relations, F.J. van Wyk, warned of the "explosive discontent building up among urban Africans - a simmering anger, which has not yet been recognised by the Government, or if it has been, is being ignored".<sup>123</sup>

During the 1970s, the issue of wages remained one of the areas of conflict between employers and employees. Increasingly during this period, African workers in Durban showed their displeasure over poor wages by resorting to strike action. This eventually led to the great Durban strikes of 1973. However, wages alone cannot adequately explain the unpredicted, complicated, unexpected and now most celebrated 1973 Durban strikes.

It is very interesting to note, however, that during the 1970s, African wages increased by almost 38 percent. Wage increases offered an incentive to work harder: both in the passive sense that at higher wages workers will co-operate with management's attempts to raise productivity, and in the active sense that higher wages will stimulate economic growth. Indeed, the wage issue was of significance during the 1970s but one should not place too great an emphasis on it since there were other pressing issues as well. One of the major concerns of the period was that of the shortage of skilled labour, which led the SAIRR in 1971 to conclude: "Labour

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> SAIRR, A Survey of race relations, 1971, p 179.

<sup>123</sup> The Rand Daily Mail, 16 Mar. 1971.

shortages are the largest single obstacle which will in all probability make it difficult for the private sector to achieve the proposed level of investment without causing other serious problems such as inflation."<sup>124</sup> In the 1970s, the manufacturing sector (particularly clothing) and construction experienced a shortage in skilled labour. In a survey that was conducted in 1972 by the SAIRR, it was established that the greatest labour shortage was of skilled African and coloured artisans and African clerical, operative and administrative workers.<sup>125</sup> Despite these problems, the level of output between 1970 and 1974 went up in all the sub-sectors of industry.

## Conclusion

During the period 1960 to 1975, the South African economy grew at an average annual rate of almost five percent. Contributing significantly to the gross domestic product was the manufacturing sector. It was during that era that Durban became one of country's greatest industrial and manufacturing centres; it became Natal's leading manufacturing and industrial centre, and a gateway to the rest of the country. However, from mid-1975 to 1977, the South African economy experienced a sharp decline partly because of the recession, the Soweto uprisings of 1976 and international pressure. By 1978, the economy had a brief upturn; in fact, from the mid-1970s to 1985, the economy experienced both upswings and downswings.

From the mid-1980s, as rightly noted by S. Gelb, South Africa was "marked by stagnation in output growth; inflation entrenched at over 13 percent per annum; a weak rand; a permanent decline in foreign exchange reserves; and

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<sup>124</sup> SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1971, p 96.

<sup>125</sup> SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1973, p 265.

historically low personal savings ratios".<sup>126</sup> These economic developments shed some light on the liberal-radical debate on the state-capital relationship. In the following chapters, evidence will be given that shows that during the 1960s apartheid was both functional and detrimental to the country's economic growth. The relationship seems to have been complex: some capitalists took advantage of the state's economic policies and reaped highest profit margins while others were not satisfied with particular apartheid policies, for instance on job reservation, low wages, lack of skilled workers and influx control measures (discussed in Chapter 3), which contributed to declining productivity in their establishments. On the whole, the functional relationship between capitalism and apartheid can possibly be sustained for the period between 1960 and 1972, during which period South Africa experienced an economic boom. It was also a period when the cheap labour system and the securing of law and order were further extended. However, after 1972 the relationship became clearly one of open hostility since apartheid hampered economic growth as industry expanded and developed new imperatives that could not be catered for by the existing apartheid structures. Furthermore, apartheid had become too costly to maintain and rendered the manufacturing industry uncompetitive and restricted the market because of economic sanctions imposed by the international community on South Africa.

The economy is still experiencing its own classic problems and economic growth is very low, which makes the tasks of the present government difficult to achieve. While the ANC government may find it absolutely necessary to correct racial economic imbalances, economic policies and programmes should be such as not to contravene the minimum political requirements of economic growth.

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<sup>126</sup> Gelb (ed), South Africa's economic crisis, p 1.

### *Chapter Three*

## **The State Labour Control Policies and African Workers of Durban, 1960-1985**

### **Introduction**

Politically, socially and economically, the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s constitute a crucial period for South Africa. The 1960s are important to modern South African history in that it was the era of high apartheid. It was also a period of economic boom and slump, when Durban finally became an industrial and manufacturing city of significant proportions. It was also during those years that African workers were deeply integrated into apartheid's booming economy, but in ways which in the long term prevented that economy from further expansion. Furthermore, the period witnessed both the state and capital endeavouring to fashion a particular type of African worker. Consequently, the integration process brought about various conflicting and contradictory relations between the state, capital and labour over the nature of African employment in urban cities. This chapter is concerned initially with the application and effectiveness of apartheid's labour policies. Secondly, it will examine the reasons why Africans migrated into urban areas and, lastly, Durban's recruitment areas and the type of African worker engaged by employers. Certainly, the period under investigation is under-researched. This chapter attempts to throw some light on important issues, but does not claim to have covered all aspects relating to African labour in the apartheid city.

## The state labour control mechanisms

The early 1960s marked a new era in the implementation of apartheid laws and regulations. It was a notable period of both exceptionally impressive capitalist expansion and the intensification of state repressive policies. The pass control laws were tightened up particularly after 1961 and their enforcement was greatly intensified. Prosecutions increased for "illegal" entry into white towns. This was the time when the state also embarked on forced removals and pursued its policy of industrial decentralisation and relocating urban populations to the "homelands". Yet critical contradictions emerged in all urban areas of South Africa when large pools of workers emerged despite tough control measures instituted during this period. State officials in the Department of Bantu Administration and Development called for tighter influx controls and the subsequent "elimination of Bantu labour in the white areas" and suggested that, "If the white community cannot continue without Bantu labour, then it must also be assumed that the western lifestyle has an uncertain future in South Africa".<sup>1</sup> The workings of the labour framework in South Africa have produced enormous contradictions in the labour market which tended to strengthen or, at least, create some openings for the African working class in undoing the mechanisms of control.

The analysis of influx control, the workings of labour bureaux and the pass system during the 1960s and 1970s have aroused controversial debate among scholars of different persuasions. The debate is centred on whether apartheid labour policies were structured to reproduce and advance capitalist interests or limited capitalist growth. To understand the situation during this period, Durban's labour policies should be discussed and the successes and failures of control mechanisms ascertained.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Greenberg, Legitimizing the illegitimate (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1987), p 16.

As D. Posel noted, a striking feature of apartheid throughout the country during the 1950s was the "resounding failure of the state's urban labour preference policy, which ran aground due to tenacious, informal resistance from hundreds of thousands of workers and employers alike".<sup>2</sup> The urban labour preference policy could only succeed if properly implemented by the labour bureaux officials. But an interesting scenario that developed, not only in Durban, was that work-seekers and employers alike by-passed the labour bureaux. The more influx control measures were tightened up, the more they were avoided. Consequently, conflicts arose between employers and the state over labour control policies. As for state officials like W.J.P. Carr, the manager of the Johannesburg Non-European Affairs Department, the implementation of the urban labour preference policies meant "a constant argument every day of your life".<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the Botha Report of 1962 neatly summarised the situation when it wrote: "The anomaly exists, that [African] work-seekers from outside the urban areas are admitted in, despite the fact that there is already a surplus in the towns".<sup>4</sup> D. Hindson's argument that the state's control mechanisms were designed to accommodate industrialists' demands for a differentiated labour force - both semi-skilled and unskilled - rather than an undifferentiated mass of cheap unskilled labour, does not seem to hold much water.<sup>5</sup>

In a report submitted by the Grobbelaar Committee of Inquiry into rioting in Cato Manor in 1960, it was stated that

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<sup>2</sup> D. Posel, "Influx control and urban labour markets", in P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel (eds), Apartheid's genesis, 1935-1962 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1993), p 421.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p 423.

<sup>4</sup> As cited in Posel, "Influx control and urban labour markets", p 426.

<sup>5</sup> See D. Hindson, Pass controls and the urban African proletariat in South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987).

"the Committee has no doubt whatever that there is, in actual practice, no control over the influx of Bantu who have no right to be in Durban".<sup>6</sup> The year following the Sharpeville massacre saw, on the contrary, an increase in the number of people convicted in Durban of evading pass and control laws and regulations. In 1961 alone, 4 098 people were prosecuted in Durban<sup>7</sup> and by 1964, 7 721 were prosecuted for contravening those laws.<sup>8</sup> The state's key mechanism for control over African urban drift and presence was Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act of 1945. Although this section of the act forbade Africans from remaining in "prescribed areas" for longer than 72 hours without permission, in reality the state failed to control the movement of people into the urban area. Influx control seems to have been a failed exercise in Durban because the African reserves abut Durban's boundaries, compared to Johannesburg where the reserves are far-away, and in 1962 the Botha Report stated that "the existing measures do not further the purposes for which they were introduced".<sup>9</sup> Section 10, which was the key mechanism for control, was constantly challenged by African work seekers and could not operate effectively as "an instrument of control". As correctly noted by S. Greenberg, the system itself had managed to create a substantial number of African labourers who were strong enough to undo "the Berlin wall" and "to circumvent the system of labour regulations and shoot straight to Durban..."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Killie Campbell Africana Library (hereafter KCAL), Bourquin Papers, KCM 55224, Extract from report of the Inter-Departmental Committee of Inquiry..., 1960, p 5.

<sup>7</sup> Durban Corporation, Department of Bantu Administration, Annual report for 1961, p 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Annual report, 1964, p 106.

<sup>9</sup> As cited in Posel, The making of apartheid, 1948- 1961: conflict and compromise (Oxford, Claredon Press, 1991), pp 227-8.

<sup>10</sup> Greenberg, Legitimizing the illegitimate, p 53.

The work-seekers exploited a loophole in Section 10 (1) which did not impose restrictions on Africans' entry into white urban areas, but rather gave them the right to spend 72 hours in proclaimed areas without permission from state officials. Armed with this loophole, the African workers in most cases pretended to be visiting relatives and did not return to their reserves after the expiry of the 72 hour provision. The Chief Commissioner for Natal noted that "the 72 hour provision had disappeared as such". He went further to observe that the provision was no longer "... being used in Natal".<sup>11</sup> The Chief Director for the Port Natal Administration echoed a similar sentiment when he stated that "72 hours is out".<sup>12</sup>

As soon as they entered white urban areas, the workers strategically activated ethnic networks, used relatives, or sought employment directly rather than follow local labour bureau procedures. Some industrialists in favour of migrant labour, together with the work-seekers, adopted methods which were geared towards circumventing the state labour recruitment policies. It was the hostile environment which led the worker struggle to assume a distinctive characteristic. Workers adopted ways to "work the system" and confronted repression in the shadows, "in the nooks and crannies of the day-to-day work situation".<sup>13</sup> C. van Onselen's remarks about resistance on the colonial Zimbabwean mines are equally important for an analysis of African resistance to labour control framework in Durban:

Ideologies and organisations should be viewed essentially as the high-water marks of protest. At least as important, if not more so, were the less dramatic, silent and often unorganised responses, and it is the latter set of responses, which

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p 67.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> C. Van Onselen, Chibaro (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1980 ed), p 239.

occurred on a day-to-day basis, that reveal most about the functioning of the system and formed the woof and warp of worker consciousness... It was the unarticulated, unorganised protest and resistance which... the state found most difficult to detect or suppress.<sup>14</sup>

Many African work-seekers bypassed the labour bureaux and on various occasions the state pressurised Durban authorities to implement strictly influx control and afflux measures. The state urged a total control over the labour market and S.B. Bourquin, the Director of Bantu Administration of Durban, consistently argued that he was not in agreement with all rules and regulations and their methods of implementation since, as he stated, "mitigation is better than litigation".<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, Durban was the weakest area in implementing control measures though statistically the number of prosecutions tended to increase on a yearly basis. Yet this evidence of control and repression should not be equated with effective control over the labour market and the process of African proletarianization. Nor should it be taken for granted that laws enacted managed to keep down the numbers. The diaspora from the surrounding reserves of Durban brought rapid urbanisation and the birth of shantytowns. In the 1960s Durban was surrounded by a belt of squatter camps. These squatter settlements present the realities of the control problems in the city.

In its bid to strengthen influx control, the state promulgated the Bantu Labour Regulations (Bantu Areas) Act in 1968. The act paved the way for the establishment of tribal, district and territorial bureaux in the surrounding reserves. The regulations stipulated that work-seekers had to register at their home labour bureaux and could only be employed in

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> KCAL, KCAV, 987-991, S.B. Bourquin by I. Edwards, 10 September 1980, p 4.

urban areas as long as their contracts were attested there. As in the case of Durban, the legal work-seekers were those with permanent residential status in the municipal townships and those who qualified under Section 10.<sup>16</sup> From 1968 onwards, work-seekers were to be contractually engaged annually, with the possibility of their contracts being renewed on payment of R1,00.<sup>17</sup> As for the migrant workers, a new system was created in 1969 whereby those workers who took up employment with their previous employers and engaged to work in the same town were not required to re-register as work-seekers.<sup>18</sup> This procedure became known as the call-in-card system.<sup>19</sup> The major aim of this system was to make sure that migrant workers would not become urban workers; it aimed to prevent them from obtaining residence rights. Commenting on the system, the Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development noted that "the intention was surely to prevent all people signed on after April 1968 from acquiring rights under 10 (1) (b), but not those who at that date were already in service".<sup>20</sup> The call-in-card system was terminated in all urban areas in 1974 under ministerial order except in Durban. What is evident in the Durban metropolitan area is that the labour bureaux system was not effective and in fact had been bypassed by both work-seekers and employers. The employers regarded the whole system

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<sup>16</sup> Durban Corporation, Annual report, 1968.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Bantu Laws Amendment Act 42 of 1964. See also Natal Archives (hereafter NA), Port Natal Affairs Administration Board (hereafter PNAAB), 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Bantu labour in prescribed areas: placing of Bantu in employment policy 12/11/73 - 6/12/74. Secr. for BAD to Mr N.P. Smith, 5 Nov. 1973.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Secr. for BAD to all Chief Directors of Bantu Affairs Admin. Boards, 6 Nov. 1973.

as "a cumbersome exercise"<sup>21</sup> (though a majority of their employment took place on the official basis) and by May 1974 about 41 percent of African workers in employment in Durban were not legally engaged.<sup>22</sup> The control of African labour supply and demand remained a contested area between the state, capital and labour. The employees themselves preferred to be engaged "at the gate" or "off the street", rather than register and apply for work at a local labour bureau. The Natal Employers Association and the Durban Chamber of Commerce constantly reported in the 1970s that it had become a habit for employers to engage migrant workers in this manner.<sup>23</sup>

At face value, the state's labour control framework seemed like an effective state control mechanism of the labour market. During the 1960s and early 1970s a series of laws were promulgated, bureaux and courts were established and that in itself, to many, represented effective and repressive state control of African labour. Added to this form of control was the establishment of aid centres in Durban and throughout the country. These centres which came into being in 1971 were by-products of the Bantu Labour Act of 1964.<sup>24</sup> The aid centres were created to assist technical offenders from being sent to courts and prisons unnecessarily. In 1974 Durban had an estimated 80 000 new entrants in the labour market of whom

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<sup>21</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, R.F. Drew, Convenor of Subcommittee to the Chairman, District Managers, Labour Officers and the Dept. of Finance of the PNAAB, 29 Oct 1975.

<sup>22</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Box 53, 22/6/73- 5/7/74, H.D. van Wyk, Manager, North Coast District to the Control Officer, 15 May 1974.

<sup>23</sup> See for instance, NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, 1/10/75-31/1/76, G.F. Baker, Manager, Central District to the Chief Dir., 26 Nov. 1975; and memorandum submitted by the Durban Chamber of Commerce to the Hon T.R.H Jansen, Deputy Min. of Bantu Admin and Education on the laws governing the influx and employment of Bantu in white areas, 1973.

<sup>24</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, 22/6/73 - 5/7/74, PNAAB, Minutes of Ad Hoc Committee Re: Aid Centre meeting held 18 Feb. 1974.

only 2 109 were prosecuted and sent back to the homelands.<sup>25</sup> In 1975 alone over 4 000 Africans were referred to the aid centres in Durban (see table below).

Table A  
African Workers Referred to Durban Aid Centre, 1973-  
1978<sup>26</sup>

Year	Men	Women	Total
1973-4	-	-	-
1974-5	2104	427	2531
1975-6	4564	1324	5888
1976-7	7482	3893	11375
1977-8	9245	4764	14009

Justifying the establishment of aid centres in Durban, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Port Natal Administration Board observed:

Although legislation has been in effect for years to control influx into White areas and more recently, afflux from the Bantu Homelands, the desired objectives have not been attained, namely a regulation of the supply and demand of labour. The majority of engagements of labour occur on an 'off the street' basis which is indicative of a lack of confidence in the official labour bureaux system or a deliberate avoidance thereof in order not to become enmeshed with the laws and regulations until some assurance of success has been obtained.<sup>27</sup>

By 1975 the number of people prosecuted as "idle and undesirable" in Durban had dropped to 1 795.<sup>28</sup> Aid centres played an important role in circumventing "excessive" court action and had become service centres for African workers. In

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<sup>25</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Box 49, 1/2/76- 31/3/76, Inquiry from parliament from Mrs H. Suzman, MP, 22 Mar. 1976.

<sup>26</sup> NA, PNAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Box 56, W.M. Dinkele, Manager, Aid Centre, Durban to the Manager, Central District, 14 June 1976; and yearly reports from Aid Centres in Durban, 1974-1979.

<sup>27</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, 16/2/12/P, 16/8/73-11/4/75, Report of the Sub-Committee on Bantu Aid Centres, 18 Feb. 1974.

<sup>28</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Box 49, Inquiry from parliament, 22 Mar. 1976.

other words, there was a dramatic shift in the 1970s from "excessive" control and prosecution to service. The new challenge in the 1970s, particularly in Durban, was to streamline the movement, recruitment drive and processing of forms for African labour, and hence the call by R.F. Drew, the Labour Officer for Durban Central District, to establish manpower development centres.<sup>29</sup> These development centres, it was hoped, would "prepare prospective employees for employment and ... offer them guidance in respect of the identification and application of tools and implements used in different types of employment, industrial safety and hygiene, punctuality, dangers of drugs and alcohol etc".<sup>30</sup> The state's intensified effort to control effectively the labour market and African "proletarianization" undoubtedly showed that the state apparatus was not effective, and completely failed to control the African urban drift and the growing urban shantytowns and to normalise economic relations between employers and their workers.

The early 1970s not only produced strikes at the production line and disturbances in the townships but witnessed murmurings of discontent from both employers and African work-seekers. With the establishment of the administration boards and the take-over of the labour bureaux in the early 1970s, it was anticipated that the labour control system would greatly improve the necessary administration, control and labour recruitment procedures. In Durban, employers complained that tribal bureaux did not function properly, charged exorbitant registration fees and were too bureaucratic.<sup>31</sup> Employers in the Harding District noted with

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<sup>29</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, 1/6/76- 30/7/76, R.F. Drew, Labour Officer, Central District to employer organisations, 23 June 1976.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Box 51, Chief Dir. to the Deputy Director, Natal Chamber of Industries, 15 Sept. 1975.

dismay registration fees demanded from the African workers by tribal authorities. The total amount paid to register a worker was approximately R9,50.<sup>32</sup> The amount included the chief's personal fund of R3, registration fees amounting to R3,00, a monthly contribution of R1,50 to the board and R2,00 for travelling expenses for the worker. Various employers complained about chiefs who demanded excessive fees for their personal use. For instance, Chief Mageba of the Madlakazi clan demanded a payment of R1,50 from all work-seekers in order for them to be registered.<sup>33</sup> Falling into this corrupt tendency was Chief Sigidi of the Cele whose secretary demanded R2,50 from B. F. Ndayeni in order to stamp his registration book.<sup>34</sup> For the African work-seeker in the rural areas who followed regulations, the consequences were great. The chiefs wanted their share in the process although there was no law requiring such payment. As noted by one tribal recruiter: "This is Africa. You don't visit the Chief's kraal without paying".<sup>35</sup> In Durban complaints were lodged with Bourquin, the Chief Director of Port Natal Administration, by various employers particularly in the Harding area,

regarding certain levies being charged by Tribal Authorities in that district, which must be paid by work seekers before they are permitted to proceed to Harding for employment. In many instances the Bantu are not in a position to pay the relevant fee and it is thus up to the prospective employer to pay the fee in order to obtain labour.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Box 50, 1/1/75- 30/4/75, A.P. Mynhardt, Town Clerk and Treasurer, Township of Harding to the Manager, 19 Mar. 1975.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., J.P.J, Macquet, Inluku Store to the Manager, PNAAB, 20 Jan. 1975.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Mine Labour Organisation (NRC) Ltd, Rep. to PNAAB, 7 Jan 1975.

<sup>35</sup> As cited in Greenberg, Legitimizing the illegitimate, p 72.

<sup>36</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Box 50, R.G. Wilson to the Chief Dir., 21 Apr. 1975.

Such corrupt practices tended to "invite" African work-seekers to bypass their tribal labour bureaux and "shoot straight" to the urban areas, risking prosecution under the pass laws.

In addition, African work-seekers greatly resented medical examinations undertaken at labour bureaux, which they viewed "as being yet another instance of them being regarded as 'inferior', and even 'dirtier', than members of other racial groups who do not have to submit to such examinations at employment centres".<sup>37</sup> In the Central District of Durban, there were two centres where the African work-seeker was medically examined, "... visually to see whether he is suffering or appears to be suffering from syphilis, gonorrhoea or similar disease, bilharzia or scabies".<sup>38</sup> In the New Germany area, domestic servants and any workers who handled food were medically checked.<sup>39</sup> However, this practice was stopped in Durban in 1974 when the Port Natal Executive Board gave in to criticism, particularly from employers and discontinued such examinations.<sup>40</sup>

### Uncontrolled exodus, 1973-1985

The period 1973 to 1986 emerges as an era in which the government relaxed its labour policies towards Africans. This sudden change of attitude by the government was necessitated by a combination of factors: pressure from employers of African labour, who felt that apartheid was no longer economically viable, the international community and, most

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<sup>37</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Bantu labour in prescribed areas 12/11/73- 6/12/74, Executive Committee Agenda, Medical examination of Bantu work-seekers, 10 Sept. 1974. See also NA, PNAAB, Box 51, 12/3/74- 24/9/74, Bantu labour in prescribed areas: policy, PNAAB, Interim report of ad hoc committee on friction points labour supply and registration, 5 Apr. 1974.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

importantly, African resistance to apartheid legislation. It was during this period that the largest number of Africans migrated into Durban precisely because of its economic opportunities.<sup>41</sup>

In response to this problem, the government modified influx control measures in an attempt to curtail movement and settlement. In 1973, the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development publicly announced that wives, but not children, of key employees should be allowed to join their husbands on condition that suitable housing was available.<sup>42</sup> To that effect, the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner for Natal called for strict control (particularly on women) by using housing as a control mechanism, but further indicated that "only in very exceptional circumstances consideration be given to the admission of such Bantu females and then only from the KwaZulu homeland".<sup>43</sup> Thwarting the exodus of women was not an answer to the problem, however: in fact, thousands of work-seekers were already in urban areas and continued to stream in numbers into Durban, "our city". Commenting on the number of "illegal" migrants, the Durban Inspectorate Division stated that "the situation [was fast] deteriorating".<sup>44</sup>

The majority of work-seekers in Durban were found around the Point Road area, very close to the harbour and were largely employed by the stevedoring firms and cartage contractors. In 1974, these two major employers of casual labour were cited as notorious for "not taking proper steps in complying with the law when they engage[d] this [unauthorised]

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<sup>41</sup> See V. Moller and L. Schlemmer, The situation of African migrant workers in Durban (University of Natal, CASS, 1977).

<sup>42</sup> SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1973, p 135.

<sup>43</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, influx control policy: Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner to the Chief Director, PNAAB, Durban, 5 January 1973.

<sup>44</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 82, Roll 64, Inspectorate Division, Central District to the Manager, 5 Nov. 1974.

labour..."<sup>45</sup> The Bamboo Square of the Point Road area was a well-known gathering centre for all casual labourers. In 1974 the Labour Department had to establish an office in the area in an attempt "to control casual labour being employed by employers that utilise that category of labour".<sup>46</sup> The Labour Division had to move away from excessive control to relaxation of influx control regulations. All work-seekers in that particular area had to report on a daily basis at an assembly point, had to pay a R1 fee monthly and were issued with a card reflecting personal details with 31 boxes for stamping purposes.<sup>47</sup> The shipping and cartage employers were given the privilege of recruiting from this labour pool, which compelled Drew, the Labour Officer, to write: "Durban being a harbour city and one of the largest industrial centres, there will always be a need for casual labour".<sup>48</sup>

In order to avoid criticism from the central government over lax implementation of influx control, the Sub-Committee on Labour and Transport wrote a detailed report to the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development explaining the reasons why it was necessary to have such a labour pool and, secondly, requested condonement of temporary employment of such labour, though "illegal" and unregistered.<sup>49</sup> Some of the relevant points that were singled out for the Minister to consider when making a decision to that effect were: firstly, the work that was carried out was of national importance in bringing in foreign capital and necessitated the fast clearing of ships from the harbour; secondly, the African work-seekers

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, Central District, Labour Officer to the Manager, 7 Nov. 1974.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> NA, PNAAB, Minutes of the special meeting of the sub-committee re: labour and transport, 6 Feb. 1975.

in and around Durban were selective and not prepared to do the work, which was heavy, dirty, unpopular and unattractive; thirdly, registered work-seekers were unreliable and avoided work where possible; and lastly, that only 40 percent of the labour force which employers were granted requisitions had returned to work.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the Sub-Committee recommended, "The establishment by the Board of a labour pool in the area where all present illegal labour must report and from where employers in the stevedore and ship painting and cleaning industries must draw all their additional labour requirements and that the workers in such pool be registered as independent contractors".<sup>51</sup> The Manager of the Central District had also to make representations with the Senior Public Prosecutor "to defer cases before the courts of employers charged with the illegal employment of Bantu until after the Minister's reply has been received".<sup>52</sup> The Minister approved the Sub-Committee's requests and recommendations. For six months, there were no prosecutions on employers who engaged unregistered labour. For a while employers of casual labour were given a free hand in the labour market.

In 1975 labour pools were also launched in surrounding areas of Durban to cater for dock employers' demands of additional labour requirements. In a meeting that was held on 4 March 1975 between the KwaZulu government (which had begun to play a role in the labour question), the three administration boards of Natal and the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner it was agreed that employment service centres be established adjacent to the major cities.<sup>53</sup> It was envisaged that such centres could provide

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9- 16/2/7/P, Labour, Executive Committee Agenda, 17 June 1975

opportunity... for employers and work-seekers to meet, interviews to be conducted, selection to take place, aptitude tests to be carried out etc. It would be possible to eliminate most of the present day red tape connected with control measures whilst, by means of correlating the supply of labour with the demand, still maintaining effective control on the influx of migrant workers to the white areas and at the same time permits far greater freedom of choice and selection to work-seekers as well as to employers. The system will result in the gradual phasing out of the present local and district labour bureaux and aid centres.<sup>54</sup>

Employment service centres were thus established in areas such as Umlazi, Ntuzuma, Clermont, Umbumbulu, Ndwendwe, Umzinto, Mapumulo, Mpumalanga and Port Shepstone. After one year of establishment, the number of work-seekers registering with such centres had declined since very few of them were recruited. From these centres about 3 276 people were employed in 1976. The following table shows the breakdown according to each centre.

Table B

Employment figures from established centres, 1976<sup>55</sup>

Area	Number of work-seekers recruited
Umlazi	764
Ntuzuma	420
Clermont	405
Umbumbulu	386
Ndwendwe	381
Umzinto	320
Mapumulo	245
Mpumalanga	198
Port Shepstone	157

By 1976 the government had relaxed influx control measures: the monthly signing of reference books by employers of labour was dropped. During the same year, the Chief Director of PNAAB declared a moratorium on prosecutions of employers who engaged

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Figures from various reports of employment centres, January to November 1976. The figures for December could not be obtained.

unregistered labour.<sup>56</sup> The PNAAB failed to cope with the policing of unregistered employment and for that it blamed the shortage of staff, which comprised only seven inspectors "active in the field" for the entire greater Durban region.<sup>57</sup> Commenting on unregistered employment, a PNAAB official stated: "To be honest about it, we are not very successful about following this up".<sup>58</sup> Generally, by the mid-1970s, there was surplus labour which could not be absorbed into the economy although some sectors had some problems in filling up their vacancies. The Table below shows the number of vacancies that were reported between 1974 and 1980.

Table C

Vacancies reported (R) in the Durban area, 1974-1980<sup>59</sup>

Year	Total (R)	Men (R)	Men Filled	Women (R)	W Filled
1974	5782	5124	3204	658	566
1975	7551	6540	4620	1011	820
1976	7910	6820	5112	1090	880
1978	10702	9250	7475	1452	1265
1980	14850	12210	10642	2640	2110

The main sectors providing jobs were the wholesale and retail, construction, government and domestic service industries. About the reasons why some vacancies were not filled when thousands of registered work-seekers were jobless, Drew

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<sup>56</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, 1 June 1976 -30 July 1976, S. Bourquin, Chief Director to the Secr. Natal Agric Union, 23 June 1976.

<sup>57</sup> S.Greenberg and H. Giliomee, "Managing influx control from the rural end: the black homelands and the underbelly of privilege", in H. Giliomee and L. Schlemmer (eds), Up against the fences: poverty, passes and privilege in South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1985), p 81.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> NA, PNAAB, Labour Officers' reports to District Managers, 1974-1980; Township managers' monthly general reports, KwaMashu and Umlazi, 1974-1977; and information to the Chief Director. Some records for December (yearly) are missing.

commented:

The only explanation I can offer is that the selectiveness of the urban Bantu should not be overlooked. Attempts are made to encourage work-seekers to take the employment offered but often with poor response. Insofar as vacancies in the domestic field are concerned the urban Bantu is not interested in taking up this type of employment in spite of the fact that employers are offering higher wages.<sup>60</sup>

Employers who were mainly affected were those who followed rules and regulations and did not engage unregistered labour otherwise, as rightly noted by the spokesperson of the Sugar Cane Growers' Association of Natal, "there was no labour shortage at all...".<sup>61</sup> During this period, even those people who were reluctant to accept mine or plantation work and only accepted jobs as clerks and mine policemen or team leaders (boss-boys), were no longer choosy. Natal farmers who used to recruit from Transkei were no longer travelling long distances in order to get casual labourers but now were bothered by too many work-seekers. Claassens summarised the situation very well when he wrote:

Since it was so difficult to recruit local Zulu workers to work as cane cutters, the sugar industry set up a recruiting corporation, SILO, which recruited Pondos. However, as unemployment became more serious, individual Pondos did not wait to be recruited, but found their own way to the sugar estates. At the same time, increasing numbers of local Zulus began to offer themselves for employment on the estates. SILO, then became redundant and ceased to operate.<sup>62</sup>

Because of the over-abundance of cheap labour in Durban, the PNAAB, in 1978, made attempts to issue permits to legal

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<sup>60</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Box 56, R.F.Drew, Labour Officer, Central District to the Manager, Central District, 4 June 1976.

<sup>61</sup> A. Claassens, "The Riekert commission and unemployment: the KwaZulu case", in The Wiehahn and Riekert Reports (Workshop Reports by SALDRU and SALB editors, 1979), p 51.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

residents of nearby townships. The Lamontville and Chesterville residents were given 30 days permit, while residents from Umlazi, KwaMashu and Ntuzuma were given 14 days permit. As for the people residing in Marianhill-St Wendolins-Klaarwater areas, in Clermont and KwaNdengezi, they were no longer issued with permits from Durban but in Pinetown and were informed to search for jobs in that particular area.<sup>63</sup> This was a clear sign of confusion and no wonder the Black Sash wrote: "The PNAAB, which controls the lives of all blacks wanting work in Durban changes its influx control tactics every few months".<sup>64</sup> The first attempt of minimising the flow into Durban was a complete failure. The second attempt was to introduce a "labour zoning" policy whereby work was offered to work-seekers from the Durban metropolitan area, then to those in the neighbouring townships, then to those in the adjacent rural areas and, lastly, to work-seekers from the Transkei. This was also a failed exercise.

The occurrence of a large-scale inclination to migration, which reached a climax in the mid-1970s, when Durban possessed over 300 000 to 400 000 unemployed persons, alarmed the government.<sup>65</sup> During this period, a significant number of NP parliamentarians maintained that whites should enjoy the privilege of getting jobs in cities and "only when they are not in a position to exercise that claim would Africans be recruited for that purpose".<sup>66</sup> However, others, particularly the *verligte* element within the party, objected to influx

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<sup>63</sup> University of the Witwatersrand (hereafter UW), William Cullen Library (hereafter WCL), FOSATU, C 3.15.2, AH 1999/C4, 4.1, Dealings with non-trade union organisations, Black Sash miscellaneous, nd)

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Moller and Schlemmer, The situation of African migrant workers in Durban.

<sup>66</sup> Giliomee and Schlemmer (eds), Up against the fences: poverty, passes and privilege in South Africa, p 3.

control measures and called for a reform process.<sup>67</sup> The fear of widespread structural unemployment and, in fact, political instability created by poverty and pauperization of Africans was undoubtedly the main motive behind the appointment of the Riekert Commission of 1977. On 8 August 1977, Dr P.J. Riekert was appointed as chairperson and only member of the Commission of Inquiry into Legislation affecting the Utilisation of Manpower. In 1979, the Commission released its findings and recommendations. It made a recommendation for "the improvement, modernisation and reform of the existing official institutional and statutory framework of the labour market in South Africa, with a view to the better utilisation especially of Black manpower".<sup>68</sup> On influx control measures, the Commission noted that a "serious social and sociological welfare problem" would emerge if influx control measures were removed and the rural-urban migration was allowed to continue unchecked, and pointed out that "control over the rate of urbanisation is...an absolutely essential social security measure".<sup>69</sup>

There were some important recommendations by the Commission: firstly, Riekert advocated the use of housing and employment related measures to control migration; secondly, the imposition of fines on employers who engaged unregistered workers; thirdly, labour zoning and the establishment of assembly centres was encouraged; and lastly, the freer movement of qualified urban African residents, the "insiders" as against that of migrants, the "outsiders". Also of significance was that employers who used "illegal", unregistered workers were to be fined R500 for a first offence

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p 7.

<sup>68</sup> RSA, Commission of inquiry into legislation affecting the utilisation of manpower (Chairman: Riekert, RP32-1979), para.1.8.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, para.4.204 (d) and (f).

and a minimum fine of R500 for a second offence.<sup>70</sup> Quite significantly, the Commission recommended that workers could seek employment without being registered as work-seekers and that contracts could be registered after being employed; and in addition to this, the 72 hour provision had to be removed.<sup>71</sup>

For obvious reasons, the Riekert Report was an attempt to contain potential urban unrest arising from deepening unemployment levels by making the system more efficient. It defined segmentation of the African labour force and its strategy was to give preferential treatment to permanent urban workers and to improve their conditions. However, the attempt by Riekert to remove discriminatory measures from the legislation has to be viewed in the light of buying off international pressure and criticism of South Africa. In essence, the Report called for tighter application of influx control, particularly on migrant workers.

An important development that took place in Durban in 1980 was the attempt to implement the bantustan policy. Earlier on in 1977 urban boundaries were redrawn in a manner that disqualified all township residents (with the exception of Lamontville and Chesterville residents, who lived within the prescribed areas), from having urban rights. KwaMashu and Umlazi townships were integrated into the KwaZulu bantustan, which meant that all residents were disqualified as urban insiders. Residents of the two prescribed areas (i.e. Lamontville and Chesterville) were allowed to search for jobs in Durban without permits. From mid-1981, however, other township residents had to be registered within their townships and could no longer search for work in the city. This new set-up created discontent among African work-seekers: in 1981, the

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<sup>70</sup> S. Duncan, "The effect of the Riekert report on the African population", in The Wiehahn and Riekert Reports, p 72.

<sup>71</sup> S. Bekker and R. Humphries, From control to confusion (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1985), p 69.

Umlazi labour bureaux office was stoned, and threats of burning it down were reported.<sup>72</sup> Labour officials had to compromise: Umlazi and KwaMashu home-owners and rent-paying residents were given the privilege of seeking employment in Durban without permits, but lodgers had to be registered in the townships. Quite clearly, the compromise was not in line with influx control regulations and in 1982, labour officials made an attempt to reverse the earlier decision which once again led to violent stoning of labour offices in the townships.<sup>73</sup>

The reversal of policy was in accordance with the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill of 1982, which called for further alienation of Africans (particularly those living in the non-prescribed townships) since they could not qualify for privileges of "permanent urban Africans".<sup>74</sup> At least for a year, the labour zoning policy had to be enforced though many work-seekers managed to undermine the system. Under these circumstances, Inanda residents were also required to register at Verulam labour office except those who had lived in Durban before 1968. People who were exempted were allowed to seek jobs in the city but had to be registered at the Ordinance Road labour office.<sup>75</sup> Residents of the Umbumbulu area were in addition required to seek employment in the Isipingo/Amanzimtoti area and no longer in Durban.

Employers, who before 1980 were required to register existing vacancies in their firms for three days, were from 1980 onwards required to register for seven days. The Orderly Movement Bill of 1982 suggested an increase in the fine from R500 to R5 000 or 12 months imprisonment for engaging

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<sup>72</sup> The Surplus People Project (hereafter SPP), Forced removals in South Africa, volume 4, Natal (Cape Town, January 1983), p 188.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p 187.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p 188.

unregistered labour.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, the Bill called for the arrest of work-seekers without permits. In 1980, for instance, about 7 251 Africans were arrested in Durban for pass and influx control related matters, of which 1 785 were women and 5 466 men.<sup>77</sup> In 1981, 379 Africans were deported to homelands and a significant number of them were detained for 72 hours under Section 29 of the Urban Areas Act. In their 1982 Annual Report, the Black Sash commented thus:

[Section 29] provides for the arrest, without warrant, of any Black in the urban area who is suspected of being 'idle or undesirable' and for his imprisonment for up to 72 hours before being brought before a Commissioner. Supposedly designed to rid the white areas of unemployed criminals, it can in fact result in someone with no criminal record at all being sent off to a work colony for two years.<sup>78</sup>

There are well documented cases by the Black Sash where individual, unregistered work-seekers were arrested and sentenced to work on Orange Free State potato farms for two years instead of prison.<sup>79</sup> Some of the unregistered work-seekers who were arrested had to be sent to sugar-cane plantations where they worked for R0,50 per day.<sup>80</sup> Foreign labourers, particularly from Mozambique and Transkei, were deported to their respective countries. Any Transkeian work-seeker who had entered Durban after 1976, soon after Transkei's "independence", could no longer be registered as a

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p 189.

<sup>77</sup> Hansard, Questions 84 and 85, 25 and 26 February 1981, as cited in SPP, Forced removals, p 189.

<sup>78</sup> Black Sash, Natal Region as cited in SPP, Forced removals, p 189.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, pp 189-190.

<sup>80</sup> Discussions with Mr Ntuli, 25 October 1994. Mr Ntuli was once arrested in 1975 for not observing influx control regulations and was sent to work on a sugar plantation in Northern Natal.

work-seeker, but the system was open to abuse. Bribery was rife among migrant workers, which led to huge sums of money being paid to officials in order to be registered or, at least, become KwaZulu citizens.<sup>81</sup>

Between 1979 and 1985, there were various attempts to implement the Riekert Commission's recommendations but all were a resounding failure. For Durban, the situation deteriorated because of the dissolution of the PNAAB in 1980, which left a vacuum in the implementation of the Report's recommendations (although labour bureaux officials remained at work until 1986). The government had to disband the PNAAB because of its failure to cut down the numbers of Africans migrating into Durban. After all, its purpose as an apartheid tool had proved unworkable in the face of African resistance. This marked the end of the granite period of apartheid and the entering of the period of retreat and confusion. From 1980 onwards, in the words of Hindson:

The period was characterised by a deepening crisis of bantustan legitimacy, the exposure of desperate rural poverty, the flight of impoverished Africans from the countryside to the cities and the mushrooming of peri-urban squatter settlements inside and outside the bantustans.<sup>82</sup>

It was clear to the government that the situation of the 1980s could not continue and the only alternative was to institute reforms. In 1986, the government abolished what was then known as influx control through repeal of a network of laws, for instance, the Black Labour Act 67 of 1964 and the Blacks (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act 25 of 1945 and in particular the abolition of the passes on 1 May.<sup>83</sup> Once the Act of 1945 was repealed, it meant "therefore no influx control of

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<sup>81</sup> SPP, Forced removals, p 190.

<sup>82</sup> Hindson, Pass controls, p 85.

<sup>83</sup> J.C. Bekker, The abolition of influx control and other law reform measures (Isando, The South African Legal Rights Foundation, 1986), pp 1-5.

whatever nature".<sup>84</sup>

### African migrants

African labour in an urban industrial area can be approached from various angles and this section analyzes very briefly why Africans migrated in large droves into urban centres, especially from the late 1950s. Urbanisation has been fairly rapid in the last three to four decades and the increase was particularly marked in the 1960s. What led to increased African urbanisation in Durban in particular was the expansion of manufacturing industries (discussed in Chapter Two): as the economy boomed in the 1960s, the African population began to move from rural areas into urban centres, owing to the need in the latter for a stable African labour force and also to the desire of Africans themselves to settle together with their families near their workplace. The urban centre and its economic opportunities had a special appeal particularly for the youth and for women who came to town to find work and to improve conditions for personal advancement and for self-development. Durban, for instance, was the main employment centre for migrants in Natal in the 1970s and it offered better opportunities and wages than elsewhere. According to Moller and Schlemmer, many people migrated to Durban, popularly referred to as "our city", for "good jobs and pay".<sup>85</sup> Table D shows the reasons why people migrated to Durban during the 1970s.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p 5.

<sup>85</sup> Moller and Schlemmer, The situation of African migrant workers in Durban, p 4.

Table D  
Reasons for seeking work in Durban <sup>86</sup>

Good jobs/best money in Durban	32,8%
Friends, relatives live in Durban	16,9
Feels more at home in Durban	13,1
Low wages in White agriculture/ canefields	4,9
Fashionable/people in home district tend to work in Durban	2,7
To escape from rural life/boredom	2,7
To earn lobola/cattle for lobola	2,2
Specific job obtained in Durban	1,1
Permits/accommodation easier in Durban	1,1
Young men come to town to work	1,1
To earn specific amount of money	0,5
Other	5,5
No information	1,6

Both push and pull factors were very important in this urban drift. Specifically, economic (especially financial) motives were of first importance for the migrant.

F. Wilson's analysis of the migrant labour system resembles the typical push-pull model of migration which has been considered useful when observing rural-urban migration.<sup>87</sup> He begins his analysis by including the play of forces emanating from the migration centre and shows how the economic type of pressure can be sufficient to interpret the inter-play of forces moving migrants to the centre. His analysis incorporates the "social" type of motivation into the economic motif. However, because of the peculiarity of the South African situation which permitted the perpetuation of the labour migration system beyond the economically based duration, Wilson identifies the dominant "political" push factors as well.<sup>88</sup>

Major works on African labour migration are agreed that

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p 5.

<sup>87</sup> See F. Wilson, Labour in the South African gold mines 1911-1969 (London, Cambridge University Press, 1972).

<sup>88</sup> See Wilson, Labour in the South African gold mines for specific political push factors.

the most influential factor in bringing men and women to urban areas are the economic opportunities in town which attract labour.<sup>89</sup> The poverty that migrants experienced in their rural homes and from which they tried to escape was in many cases tied up with the myth of the urban centre with its inexhaustible resources within everybody's reach. In a study conducted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, it was noted:

The push and pull theory has general currency in explaining the phenomenon of urbanisation. According to this theory, the push comes from the deteriorating conditions in rural areas forcing migrants to seek a livelihood in towns, and the pull is exerted by the towns to attract rural migrants because of desired and increasing opportunities.<sup>90</sup>

Certainly new aspirations, coupled with these economic opportunities in the booming economy, brought people to cities and what kept them there could best be extrapolated from Wilson's remarks:

As the economy develops, the cities become richer, workers' wages rise and society is able to afford social security against sickness, accident, unemployment and old-age. Hence the economic pull back to the rural area fades away and all that is left is the "call of the wild", the spiritual pull which, without economic reinforcing, tends to vanish within a single generation.<sup>91</sup>

Various other factors, such as increasing poverty due to a rapid growth which was unaccompanied by change in

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<sup>89</sup> See, for instance, P. Harries, Work, culture and identity (Johannesburg, WUP, 1994); T. Dunbar Moodie, Going for gold: men, mines and migration (Johannesburg, WUP, 1994); and P. Bonner, "African urbanisation on the Rand between the 1930s and 1960s: its character and political consequences", Journal of Southern African Studies, volume 21, Number 1 (1995)

<sup>90</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, "Size and growth of urban population in Africa", in G. Breese (ed), The city in newly developing countries (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1969), p 143.

<sup>91</sup> F. Wilson, Migrant labour in South Africa (Johannesburg, South African Council of Churches, 1972), p 151.

agricultural methods in the rural areas, also drove men and women into urban areas. The resulting land pressure and, in its extreme form, inaccessibility of arable land - as among the South African former homelands of Ciskei, Transkei and so on, induced men to migrate.<sup>92</sup> Related to poverty was the need to earn some form of cash, which was not accessible in a rural subsistence economy. Short-term migration was also a response to succession rights to land and, in other cases, the importance of bridewealth was an incentive to migrate in search for money.<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, women - unmarried, widows, divorcees and prostitutes - found scope in an urban environment away from the conservative rural setting. In other African countries, for instance in Ghana, migration was regarded as a prestigious undertaking and all men had their own expectations of at least being a migrant worker once in a lifetime.<sup>94</sup> Among the Tonga in Malawi, migration to South Africa was an acceptable way of life.<sup>95</sup> Among the Mossi of Upper Volta, labour migration was so institutionalised that "there [was] consensus as to why, how and when certain persons should migrate".<sup>96</sup> Although all these push and pull factors had an important role, the prime factor of economic improvement, dovetailing with the industrial growth, pushed men and women into the urban centre.

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<sup>92</sup> See, for instance, S. van der Horst, African workers in Town (Cape Town, OUP, 1964).

<sup>93</sup> E.P. Skinner, "Labour migration and its relationship to socio-cultural change", in Africa, vol.30 (1960), p 389.

<sup>94</sup> J.C. Caldwell, African rural-urban migration: the movement to Ghana's towns (London, Australian National University Press, 1969).

<sup>95</sup> J. van Velsen, "Some methodological problems of the study of labour migration", in K. Little (ed), Social Change in Modern Africa (London, OUP, 1961), p 236.

<sup>96</sup> E.P. Skinner, "Labour migration among the Mossi of Upper Volta", in H. Kuper (ed), Urbanisation and migration in West Africa (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965), p 66.

In the past, and also at present, the migration of countryside people to the city or to industry formed and forms an indispensable contribution of supplementary labour for economic development. Rural-urban migration, therefore, played a major part in economic expansion and in the rise of per capita income and wealth in the country. The shift of the labour force, particularly from agriculture into manufacturing industries made possible enormous increases in per capita output. As the country grew industrially, the pace of urbanisation accelerated markedly, and so did the African working class. Once the people were established in the town, the process of urbanisation seemed irreversible. An important question to answer is: where did these African urban immigrants come from?

### Durban's African labouring class

In the 1950s, the apartheid city, which evolved gradually, was beginning to take some shape.<sup>97</sup> The Nationalist Party government had a vision of such a racially divided city, one which coincided with the concerns both of many white urban residents and of municipal authorities, especially in Durban.<sup>98</sup> Aided by the pass laws, the municipality attempted to control African urbanisation by implementing the policy of deporting the unemployed and those who lived by their wits, who were defined as idle and undesirable. In order to achieve an idealised white urban image, the municipality of Durban implemented forced removals of people from "black" spots in white areas, relocating them in African townships and "bantustans", which were far removed from the central urban area, thus negating the very reason why immigrants had

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<sup>97</sup> P. Maylam, "Explaining the apartheid city: 20 years of South African urban historiography", Journal of Southern African Studies, volume 21, No 1 (1995), p 19.

<sup>98</sup> D. Hindson, M. Byerley and M. Morris, From violence to reconstruction: the making, disintegration and remaking of an apartheid city (University of Natal, Durban, CSDS, 1993), p 3.

migrated into town. Functionally, these removals benefited a minority, through rehousing (for example, the shantytown dwellers in Cato Manor), but the majority of those relocated were grossly disadvantaged through severe social and financial costs, and the loss of urban employment opportunities. Certainly, the entire process of transforming Durban into an apartheid city was hastened by the outbreak of violence in Cato Manor in 1959.

In the 1950s, African male labour originated not only from nearby rural areas such as Lower Tugela, Ndwedwe, Inanda, Umbumbulu and Umzinto magisterial districts but from as far away as Transkei, Pondoland, Mozambique, Malawi, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.<sup>99</sup> Until the end of the 1950s, from the surrounding African reserves, Durban's share constituted only 20 percent.<sup>100</sup> The African population within the immediate "native" reserves might still have been sufficiently well off agriculturally or had easy access to cash income, so that there was no need for them to seek work in the urban area.<sup>101</sup> However, the situation gradually changed in the 1960s and 1970s. Once the process of deterioration of African agriculture started (partly because of poor rains and also being driven off their land by the apartheid government's land policies), it became cumulative, since the lowered and continuously decreasing agricultural returns for the peasantry

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<sup>99</sup> Natal Archives [hereafter NA], Port Natal Affairs Administration Board [hereafter PNAAB], 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, volume 8, Box Number 49. See labour monthly returns from various Labour Officers. I acknowledge great assistance from the Director of Government Archives for having allowed me access to closed files dealing with issues in the 1960s and 1970s. These files are not arranged and are still in boxes.

<sup>100</sup> I. Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home: African shantytown society in Cato Manor farm, 1946-1960" (University of Natal, Ph.D, 1989), p 104. See also O.P.F. Horwood, "Some aspects of urban African employment in the Durban area", Race Relations Journal, vol.25 9 July-Dec.1958), p 24.

<sup>101</sup> R.H. Smith, Labour resources of Natal (Cape Town, OUP 1952), pp 56-8.

in their traditional sector forced an ever growing number of women and men into wage and therefore urban employment.

Competition for unskilled jobs increased and the majority of employers preferred Transkeian cheap labour or other migrant workers. It seems that there was a general trend amongst most employers throughout South Africa to recruit especially from Transkei. In 1968, for instance, the total number of male Transkeian workers placed in employment in the country stood at 155 329, yet by 1974 the figure had risen to 256 971.<sup>102</sup> In 1974 alone, the labour bureaux recruited 149 224 work-seekers from Transkei, who were placed in various regions, with the Western Cape recruiting 43 percent of this total while Natal recruited 10 percent of the total number, of which 10 000 were employed in Durban.<sup>103</sup> Within the latter regions, the domestic services, civil engineering, building construction and the textile industry sectors absorbed the largest proportion of migrant labour.<sup>104</sup>

Posel has shown that most employers of African labour preferred migrant workers - "particularly those newly recruited from rural areas - for unskilled work".<sup>105</sup> Migrant workers, it was assumed, were "more obedient, harder working, and more easy to satisfy and control".<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, this class of worker was thought to be less likely to be susceptible to the influence of, as Posel notes, "communistic trade unions, being supposedly unaware of industrial legislation and wage regulations [and] content, temporarily at

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<sup>102</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, vol. 7, Box No. 49, Dept. of the Interior, Transkei, Statistical labour report, 1974.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, 1/4/76 - 31/5/76, vol. 8, Box No. 49, Central District, Labour Officer to the Chief Director, 12 April 1976; and D.P. De Lange, District Manager [Western District] to the Chief Dir., 15 April 1976.

<sup>105</sup> Posel, "Influx control and urban labour markets", p 418.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

least, to submit to the stipulations and demands of the employer".<sup>107</sup>

The cost benefit of employing contract, migrant or illegal labour in the 1960s and 1970s, was fully appreciated by employers. This kind of labour was prepared to work for a lower wage than were locally registered Zulu work-seekers, and migrant labour had additional cost advantages when compared to the wage demands of local labour. Surplus capital could be generated on a larger scale through the intensive exploitation of migrant labour. Two important employers, namely the Durban Stevedoring Labour Supply Company (DSLSC) and especially the Frame group of companies, the key to the 1960s boom, were chief players who depended and prospered largely on migrant labour.

What is clear is that employers of African labour managed to keep wages and labour costs to a minimum in their struggle to maximize profits. Surveys conducted of African incomes in the late 1950s showed clearly that average earnings were below the poverty datum line.<sup>108</sup> The surveys estimated £23 to £24 per month as the minimum urban subsistence income required to maintain a family of five. In Durban, in 1959 most workers who lived in the Cato Manor shantytown earned between £11 and £12 per month.<sup>109</sup> Such wages could maintain only workers without a family. This was of course one of the arguments for the African reserves and the apartheid migrant labour system: families would provide for themselves in the reserves, thus reducing costs to business, the province, the state and the municipality. During the 1960s and the early 1970s, wages for

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> University of Natal, A survey of Bantu income and expenditure in Durban (UND, Unpub. Interim Report, Dept. of Economics, Dec.1959); and Joy de Gruchy, "The cost of living of urban Africans", SA Institute of Race Relations Journal, (1960).

<sup>109</sup> UND, A survey of Bantu income.

the African workers in Durban remained low.<sup>110</sup>

The migrant labour system was heavily entrenched on the Durban docks.<sup>111</sup> The system was facilitated by the DSLSC, a private company, which came into existence in March 1959. The main function of the company was, as its management termed it, "an organised and planned attempt to pool labour resources and to create a stable, experienced, and permanent labour force adequate to any demand".<sup>112</sup> The company depended on migrant workers drawn from far-away reserves and never recruited from established local labour bureaux. During the 1960s, the company was granted preferential treatment by the Bantu Administration Department to recruit workers in areas north of the Tugela and in Nongoma, Hlambisa, Mtonjaneni and Mahlabatini.<sup>113</sup> By the late 1960s, the company had gone even further than the original recruitment reserves, going to Pondoland, Estcourt, Mtunzini and Alfred.<sup>114</sup> Migrant workers from such distant areas were not required to follow the registration procedures demanded by the state. The company was granted immunity by the state to ignore labour bureaux laws and regulations since it supplied labour to one of the most important ports in South Africa. Secondly, workers recruited were to be accommodated in the company compounds and were not therefore a "liability" on the already inadequate housing provided in the townships.

What is important about the Durban dock workers (like the

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<sup>110</sup> For an extensive review of African wages in Durban during the 1960s, see D.E. Pursell, "Bantu real wages and employment opportunities in South Africa", SA Journal of Economics, vol 36 (1968).

<sup>111</sup> For a detailed study on the docks, see D. Hemson, "Class consciousness and migrant workers: dockworkers of Durban", (University of Warwick, Ph.D, 1979).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p 386.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p 412.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p 416.

rest) is that employers were able to extract absolute surplus profit from migratory labour. This was made possible by paying poverty wages to the workers drawn from distant reserves who settled for any wage, even below the going rate of pay.<sup>115</sup> This labouring class was exploited on the basis that it came from remote reserves where homestead production was still being sustained to enable a further subsidy to the dockers' wage and any form of wage employment was acceptable to it. Moreover, employers preferred migrant labourers largely because they were cheap and were prepared to work hard for long hours. Workers reported for duty on Mondays since it was costly for them to travel home. Local labour resisted long hours being worked during the weekends, and the rate of absenteeism on Mondays was always high following workers' prolonged visits home. Migrant labour, therefore, benefited the employer in that it was reproduced under conditions which suited the level of exploitation in the docks. Similarly, some sectors of agriculture, for instance, the Natal sugar fields, relied on migrant labour much as did the mine owners, and not on available local labour.<sup>116</sup>

Employers argued that they were forced to engage migrant and "illegal" workers as the labourers locally available were "work-shy", "selective" and reluctant to sell their labour for "heavy manual work or any domestic work and will not take on any 'dirty' work".<sup>117</sup> A sizable number of industrialists as

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<sup>115</sup> A detailed survey of the wage structure of migrant workers has been provided in Hemson's thesis. This aspect is very important for our understanding of the Marxist concept of surplus value which was created through poverty wages paid to African workers.

<sup>116</sup> See A. de V. Minnaar, "Labour supply problems of the Zululand sugar planters, 1905- 1939", Journal of Natal and Zulu History, vol.Xii, (1989).

<sup>117</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, 1/10/75 -3/1/76, G.F. Baker, Manager, Central District to the Chief Director, 26 Nov. 1975. See also Posel, "Influx control and urban labour markets", p 418. Posel says that "migrant workers, particularly so-called 'raw labour', newly arrived from rural areas, were less likely

well as farmers complained about the "selectiveness" and "laziness" of Zulu labour.<sup>118</sup> It was said that the Zulus "are either unable or unwilling to do [work]".<sup>119</sup> A case in point was the Durban municipality's Cleansing Services where Zulu speaking people did actually refuse to work, regarding it as too dirty.<sup>120</sup> Elaborating on that trend, the FCI wrote: "In the majority of cases, manual or menial work will only be accepted by Natives of the migratory type".<sup>121</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, commerce and industry expressed similar sentiments. This attitude to the "Zulu Native" was undoubtedly racist. A more likely explanation of the reluctance of permanent local Zulu labour to engage in these occupations concerns the relatively wide range of market opportunities and the ability of Zulu labourers to command relatively better working conditions and higher wages than migrant labourers could. Durban's *togt* workers in the early 1970s are a classic example. The strategy of these *togt* workers was noted by G.F. Baker, the District Manager of the Central Region of Durban, when he stated that "... a new class of *togt* workers comes into being, employed when and where it chooses, on the strength of a spurious registration certificate and his

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than city-dwellers to refuse 'obnoxious' work on the grounds of low wages or poor working conditions. If detribalised workers were 'job choosy' and 'work-shy', raw migrants were purportedly more than willing to take any available work for whatever the going rate."

<sup>118</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, 22/6/73- 5/7/74, Box 53, Natal Agric. Union, Control of Bantu farm labour, P.C Reyburn, Secr. 11 June 1974.

<sup>119</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, Roll 7, KCF 24, KwaMashu Township (c), The future control of KwaMashu, BA 2/3/3 (ii) 26/11/68- 20/5/69, Dept. of Bantu Admin., 15 November 1968. See comments by Mr Noble, the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

reference book...".<sup>122</sup> Equally affected was the building industry, which was hard-hit by the shortage of manpower particularly in the 1970s. It will be valuable to illustrate this point by examining the building sector more closely as a case study.

In July 1974, the personnel manager of Ilco Homes company, C.R. Vial, wrote a letter to the Chief Director of Port Natal Administration complaining about the "extremely unsatisfactory conditions prevailing as regards the availability of suitable labour for the building industry".<sup>123</sup> The manager complained that labour supplied through the Port Natal Administration Board labour offices in Durban, Pinetown and Queensburgh, was "not prepared, even for highly competitive wages, to undertake the necessarily strenuous manual work required by the very nature of our business".<sup>124</sup> At one point the company was allocated eleven workers by the labour office and seven of these eleven people refused on their first day to dig foundations.<sup>125</sup> Of the four who remained working on that day, three absconded the following day leaving the company on the third day with only one worker.<sup>126</sup> Faced by such a situation the company demanded that they be allowed to recruit on an "off-street basis" or "at the gates", or that they be allowed to engage migrant labourers from outside the surrounding areas of Durban. In this way migrant workers became the most favoured class of workers in the textile and construction industry of Durban. Essentially, the demands of capital for labour

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<sup>122</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour Box 51, Central District, Manager to the Chief Dir., 22 Aug. 1975.

<sup>123</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, 1/7/74-31/12/74, Box 53, Personnel Manager to the Chief Dir., 18 July 1974.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

actually conflicted with state policy: capital wanted any worker who could do the work, while state preferred Zulu-speaking work-seekers. Possibly, this is in conflict with the much held view that capital has always been in apartheid's pocket and co-operative. Here is testimony that this was not so; in fact, apartheid skewed an open labour market.

With the establishment of labour bureaux in all urban areas, the state's intention was to control the distribution of labour and restrict the movement of Africans into white urban areas. Industrialists were now urged to make use of labour bureaux which drew recruits from the seven major reserves as recruitment areas, and from the townships of Umlazi and KwaMashu where labour offices were established. In Umbumbulu reserve, work-seekers were registered by the ten "Tribal" Authorities.<sup>127</sup> During the early 1960s, while the recruitment drive for the majority of Durban's African labour force was concentrated in rural areas of Natal and Zululand, recruitment in the textile industries was slightly different. A similar pattern to that developed by the DSLSC and Dunlop Rubber company was put into effect.

At Dunlop, African migrant working class was clearly an important feature which had developed especially during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>128</sup> A study by J. Kelly of the employment patterns at Dunlop, for example, showed that the majority of its employees in the 1940s and 1950s were migrant workers. These were recruits from Ixopo, Port Shepstone, Estcourt, Mapumulo and Nkandla.<sup>129</sup> The company established a recruiting network through its factory *indunas* who engaged mainly their "homeboys" and relatives.

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<sup>127</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Box 51, Labour Officer, Prospecton to Manager, South Coast District, 8 Sept. 1975.

<sup>128</sup> J. Kelly, "Durban's industrialisation and the life and labour of Black workers, 1920 -1950" (University of Natal, Durban, MA, 1989), p 42.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

Some industrialists, vigorously opposing government control over their recruitment practices, responded by employing largely migrant labour from outside Natal. During the 1960s and early 1970s the Frame group operated a recruiting organisation in the northern and eastern Transkei. By 1971, of the Frame group's female labour force of 2 855, 80 percent were recruited from the Transkei.<sup>130</sup> This practice of recruiting labour from the Transkei continued until the mid 1970s despite the continued effort by state officials to limit the practice. The situation worsened in the 1970s, as migrant labourers began to reject employment with Frame as a result of their low wages. In 1973, soon after the Durban strikes, the Frame group's recruiting organisation was disbanded although 20 percent of their labour force was still made up of Transkei citizens. The Acting Manager for the Western District of The Port Natal Board, G.F. Baker, noted that "an employer of this magnitude was encouraged to establish his industry within the confines of a Metropolitan area...and as an economic enticement was granted a carte blanche with regard to the importation of labour".<sup>131</sup> P. Frame never followed the procedures and regulations stipulated by the state for the local District Labour Bureaux. Baker summarized the situation neatly when he noted that:

... the local District labour Bureau operated by the Bantu Affairs Commissioner's office far from acting as a deterrent actually connives with the illegalities that have taken place in the sense that a call-in-card is issued and the Bantu re-engaged without him having to return to his homeland at the expiry of the 12 month period- the Frame group is and has been the only culprit, but since it is the largest single employer, the effects are probably more damaging.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, Box 53, 22/6/73- 5/7/76, G.F. Baker, Manager Western District to the Chief Dir., 26 Mar. 1974.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

While Frame recruited freely in Transkei in spite of state policy, the work-seekers of Transkei in 1973 were in turn given the right by the state to by-pass the labour bureaux and take up employment on the sugar farms. A temporary measure was adopted to cover the period between 1 April 1973 and 28 February 1974 whereby the authorities did not stick to the labour bureau procedures being followed by the Transkei work-seekers and their prospective employers were allowed to register them without any requirement.<sup>133</sup>

A portion of Frame's work-force was made up of migrants from areas of Natal and KwaZulu and those with permanent residence status in Clermont and other local townships. Amongst the migrants there were relatively few from areas close to Durban such as Umzinto and Inanda, and a significant number frequently commuted some 55 kilometres from Mpumalanga near Hammarsdale. Generally speaking, Frame's labour force originated primarily from Transkei and the reserves far distant from the city. It was this migrant class of African workers who played an important role in the economic history of Durban and the massive 1973 Durban strikes. On 9 January 1973, about 2 000 workers, mainly migrant, at the Coronation Brick and Tile Works of Durban were on the streets demanding a wage increase. It was this incident which sparked off a three month long spontaneous mass action by an estimated 100 000 African workers in Durban. Migrant labour, it has been argued, was docile and retarded class consciousness. Such perceptions are challenged outright in this work.

Given a wave of work-place unrest staged by migrant workers in the 1970s on the one hand, and the development of widespread institutionalised labour migration on the other, it seems plausible to speak of the emergence of migrant workers as a social and economic class. S.B. Stitcher, a liberal historian, argues that migrants can be defined as a social

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Natal to the Secr. SA Cane Growers' Ass., 25 May 1973.

class:

...migrant labour is a distinct form of labour use congruent with labour-intensive, low-wage, low-skill production. The individual migrant is partly involved in two different modes of production. It follows that migrants are in a particular class position, different from that of fully proletarianized workers...<sup>134</sup>

However, any study dealing with this particular class of workers has to examine "the wider economic, social and cultural world of the migrants", embracing not only work but also life, not only town but also the "countryside."<sup>135</sup> What was perhaps most striking about migrant workers in Durban was that they made their presence felt in the urban industrial situation, and the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s saw an interesting conjuncture of the advent of mass "labour migrancy" and heightened migrant workers' collective consciousness. Yet it would be a serious mistake to consider Durban as an emerging "town of migrant workers". The process of "full-scale proletarianization" of a major section of the urban community had already taken place and the African population of Durban comprised both migrant and urban residents.

## Conclusion

As the economy expanded in the 1960s, Durban experienced a rapid drift of African work-seekers who threatened the existence of the apartheid city which whites sought to control as their own. In response to that urban drift, the state called for tighter pass and influx control laws in all urban centres. Such control mechanisms conflicted with the interests of certain sectors of capital which preferred to have a free

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<sup>134</sup> See S.B. Stichter, Migrant labourers (Cambridge, CUP, 1985), p 191.

<sup>135</sup> This particular study does not examine such notions, although it recognises the importance of such notions. However, the best book to read on this particular subject is by P. Mayer, Townsmen or tribesmen (Cape Town, OUP, 1961).

hand in the labour market. The labour needs of industrial capitalists conflicted radically with official rhetoric, and compelled them to evade the law in an attempt to utilise cheap and unskilled labour. Similarly, African work-seekers adopted methods of circumventing state labour policies. Such state labour policies created conflicts between the central state and some sections of capital, between African labour and the state, and between the local state and the central government, especially over the implementation of apartheid labour policies. Undoubtedly, the relationship which existed between capital, labour and the state was both conflictual and complementary. It is clear that the state sometimes failed to achieve its goals - goals, moreover, which were resisted by employers, employees and, to a certain extent, local authorities.

The period 1973 to 1986 was not only an era of decline in the labour market, but witnessed escalating African resistance -the outbreak of the 1973 Durban strikes and widespread labour unrest and strikes that took place thereafter, the Soweto uprisings of 1976, school boycotts of the 1980s, the formation of strong African independent trade unions and a growing underground organisation in the townships of KwaMashu, Lamontville, Clermont, Umlazi and in the immediate shantytowns. In the end, the state lost control of the urban drift that had been underway since the 1960s, and the three decades of escalating state repression and intervention were a total failure though the state had succeeded in delaying revolution by 30 years. Obviously, African resistance had become stronger during the 1980s because state controls weakened after 1977, however, weakening of controls, in turn, was in response to needs of economic growth and as well as internal resistance plus international pressure.

## Chapter Four

### Apartheid's Forced Removals and the Outbreak of Violence in Durban, 1959-1963

#### Introduction

The late 1950s were a watershed in African popular resistance and protest, especially in the shantytown called Cato Manor, fittingly described as "one of the largest and most horrifying slums on the continent",<sup>1</sup> in Durban. The African National Congress (ANC) became highly influential in shantytown societies, assisting residents to resist forced removals. The Pan-African Congress (PAC) was relatively insignificant in Durban during that time: in fact, Durban was an ANC-dominated area. It was during this decade that the National Party government implemented coercive removals of Africans from inner-city shantytowns to newly created townships, "far afield, where they would be cheaply housed, physically controlled, and politically contained".<sup>2</sup> In terms of the Durban City Council Group Areas proclamation, Cato Manor was ear-marked for white occupation in 1958 although it has never been settled by whites. As for the shantytown dwellers living in the area, they were forcibly removed to new apartheid townships, zoned far away from the white areas.

Indians living in Cato Manor were to be forcibly relocated to Merebank or the newly founded township of Chatsworth; African shantytown dwellers, whether illegal or legal, were to be evicted from Cato Manor and resettled in two newly established townships: KwaMashu and Umlazi, both

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<sup>1</sup> KCAL, KCM 55178, Cato Manor riots, June 1959.

<sup>2</sup> B. Bozzoli, Women of Phokeng (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1991), p 166.

considerable distances away from central Durban. This was part of the National Party government's restructuring process of African urban society. To apartheid architects, restructuring the African community in terms of stable family life was to be complemented by an improved and more modern housing. For the process to succeed in Durban, both the central and local government authorities were agreed that Cato Manor should be cleared of Africans, even if force had to be used against them.

Many - both women and men - were illegal residents in Cato Manor and lived in poverty. Few could afford or were qualified for any form of accommodation in new townships. The reaction of these shantytown residents to relocations was a divided one. At one end, men who qualified for urban residence in terms of Section 10 of the 1952 Amendments to the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1945 were prepared to accept the restructuring process because it provided them with an opportunity to own better houses. Also to view relocations positively was an important section of lower middle class, male Africans who were able to become home-owners in newly established townships. At the other, the restructuring plans posed the greatest danger to the economic existence of shacklords, illegal traders and residents, shebeen queens and other emerging entrepreneurs, whose survival largely depended on the existence of the shantytown society. The greatest bitterness was felt by the women who viewed the NP's far-reaching segregationist vision with hostility. Because of the racial and gender prejudices of the time, African women were regarded as legal minors, without property rights. They did not qualify for urban housing and could not obtain passes for conducting informal business activities, let alone brewing beer. For them, removals could not be tolerated for both economic and social reasons: removals also meant to many the end of their commitment to town life. Women constituted a large proportion of the "illegal" residents who were faced by evictions and only a few had legal rights to be in Durban. C. Walker wrote:

Many [women] had turned to illicit beer-brewing to make a living; the shebeens and shebeen queens of Cato Manor were famous. As in other locations and at other times, beer-brewing was often the only source of income women could find. They resented fiercely the laws which made this illegal, as well as the municipal beerhalls which took away their customers, their income and their husbands' pay packets.<sup>3</sup>

These were the people who resisted the state's new plans of "ordering" society. However, protests and riots, marked by violence, were not mounted directly against the state's forced removals, but turned instead to focus on municipal raids against shebeens.

Certainly, the urban riots of 1959 were the most acute expressions of deep-seated shifts in the structure and organisation of urban African society - shifts, moreover, for which the state had been largely responsible through racially defined policies. This chapter analyses some struggles from below; it looks at how "ordinary" people resisted apartheid policies, and explains their perceptions and experiences. It is primarily concerned with the outbreak of riots and violence in Cato Manor from 1959 until 1963, during which period Durban experienced a sustained era of urban conflict. It also examines Cato Manor's past which has recently again come into the limelight. Since the 1960s the area has been largely undeveloped and vacant, despite some minor Indian housing developments that occurred during the 1980s. In the 1990s, African people began moving back into the area, claiming ownership rights over it and building their shacks, particularly in the Wiggins and Cato Crest area.<sup>4</sup> The new shack residents justified their return by reaffirming their

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<sup>3</sup> C. Walker, Women and resistance in South Africa (London, Onyx Press, 1982), p 231.

<sup>4</sup> See I.L. Edwards, "Cato Manor: cruel past, pivotal future", Review of African Political Economy, no 62 (March 1995); and for important analysis on Cato Manor riots of 1959, see also I.L. Edwards, "Cato Manor, June 1959: Men, women, crowds, violence, politics and history", in P. Maylam and I. Edwards (eds), The people's city: African life in twentieth-century Durban (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1996).

history based on their 1949 and 1959 struggles. The future of Cato Manor remains one of political controversy. It is its proximity to Durban which makes it a fiercely and often violently contested area and it is only through analysing the historical context in which the riots took place that one can fully understand the state's intervention in the shaping of Durban's African community.

### The outbreak of violence

During the late 1950s, the municipality of Durban began to remove Africans forcibly from Cato Manor to KwaMashu. To municipal officials forced removals were necessary since Cato Manor had become known as a centre of squalor, disease and for its high rate of crime.

Cato Manor was unplanned, and ...far less controlled and policed than any of the townships set up as a result of government planning. Because of this freedom Cato Manor was a haven for all those who were illegally in the urban areas, or whose livelihood contravened the multitude of rules and regulations governing the lives of Africans... The sense of freedom so characteristic of it meant that at weekends and holidays it was a central meeting-place; over weekends the population of Cato Manor almost doubled, many visitors being rural dwellers.<sup>5</sup>

The South African state unequivocally supported the municipality's clearance of slums, which seemed married to the drive towards urban segregation as promulgated by the Group Areas Act of 1950. In this case, both (local and central state) had a similar interest - the removal of Africans out to the periphery of the city.

The removal process began in March 1958.<sup>6</sup> In August 1958,

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<sup>5</sup> J. Yawitch, "Natal 1959 - the women's protest", in Collected papers of conference on the history of opposition in South Africa (University of Witwatersrand, 1978), p 1. See also Walker, Women and resistance, p 230.

<sup>6</sup> KCAL, Bourquin Papers, File 3, Municipal Native Administration Department (Later Bantu Administration Department): memoranda, reports and correspondence related to Cato Manor, 1957-1961; KCM 55226, "memorandum on certain matters surrounding the Cato Manor disturbances of June 1959", p 1.

the municipality made an attempt to demolish the shack settlement of Thusini, where most workers had lived for several years. Very little resistance was offered and most people simply moved away and re-erected their shacks elsewhere. The local advisory board, the Cato Manor Welfare and Development Board, under the chairmanship of I. Zwane, could not take any decisive action for it was divided over the issue of removals.

During these early removals, the ANC launched an anti-municipal campaign specifically because of the removals and the Director of Bantu Administration, S.B. Bourquin, was called "the Satan of the Bantu people".<sup>7</sup> The whole issue was viewed by A. Luthuli, the ANC President General, as an opportunity to gain followers, thereby leading to a growth in ANC membership. Although the ANC had support in the shantytown of Cato Manor, some influential members of the community remained indifferent to politics. It was only during times of trouble that they tended to rally behind political parties. However, as demonstrations began to spread, the ANC and its Women's League took a leading role, "organising further demonstrations and articulating grievances".<sup>8</sup> Walker points out that the ANC thus "introduced a wider political dimension to the protests, linking them to other protests that had gone before".<sup>9</sup> From then onwards, the ANC became the motor force behind the protests.

Trouble began in earnest when the municipality attempted to clear Mnyasana, the most notorious shack area in Cato Manor. It was dominated mainly by a large number of Mpondo migrant women, most of whom were "illegal" residents and who were well known for beer brewing, illegal trading and

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See also I. Edwards, "Mhkumbane our home: African shantytown society in Cato Manor farm, 1946 - 1960" (University of Natal, Durban, Ph.D Thesis, 1989), p 303.

<sup>7</sup> KCAL, KCM 55226, "Memo on certain matters", p 3.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, Women and resistance, p 233.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

prostitution.<sup>10</sup> These women championed the struggle against the municipal removals and took it onto the streets on 23 February 1959, supported by women from other shack areas of Cato Manor.<sup>11</sup> The women staged a demonstration at Bourquin's office and were assisted by Aaron Gumede, A.C. Shangase and J.J. Shabalala, ANC stalwarts and members of the Location Advisory Boards.<sup>12</sup>

The demonstrating women were also led by members of the ANC Women's League (ANCWL), including G. Kweyama, T. Mazibuko, D. Nyembe, F. Mkhize, R. Shabane, F. Mwelene and L. Mazibuko.<sup>13</sup> The women told the authorities that they failed to understand why they were being removed from Cato Manor, their home, which "they fought for ... that they have spilt their blood for ... and having conquered the Indians they will never give Cato Manor back to the Indians".<sup>14</sup> The women demanded an immediate meeting with Bourquin and informed him that "since Africa belonged to them [his] office was part of it and belonged to them ... and that when Africa returned to them they would in any case sack [him]".<sup>15</sup> The involvement of women had far-reaching political implications for the ANC and the ANCWL gained great support from those women whose livelihoods were on the verge of destruction. As rightly noted

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<sup>10</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 309.

<sup>11</sup> KCAL, KCM 55171, Department of Bantu administration, 4 March 1959, "memo on events arising out of the clearance of native shacks at Mnyasana, Cato Manor, February 1959."

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p 9.

<sup>13</sup> KCAL, KCM 55169, "Meeting of African women representatives with Mayor, 27 February 1959". The 1949 riots resulted in the destruction of Indian-owned property and the displacement of Indian residents from Cato Manor. The riots were then viewed by the African women as the "liberation" of Mkhumbane - "Cato Manor was now ours through right of conquest". See Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 50.

<sup>14</sup> KCAL, KCM 55170, Bourquin to the chairman, Bantu administration committee, councillor A.S. Robinson, 2 March 1959.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p 5.

by Edwards, shebeen queens who had previously shunned and alienated themselves from politics, saying "this thing with politics", flocked in numbers to join the women's league.<sup>16</sup>

The tense atmosphere created by the women's revolt was associated with many complex issues and evolved a wide range of emotions. At a later meeting addressed by Bourquin, a number of complaints were raised. The women demanded that forced removals be stopped and Council beerhalls be closed and voiced their concern also over lack of transport, and housing, influx control, the inability to keep livestock, the destruction of family life, illicit beer and poor wages.<sup>17</sup> However, the central issue was that women wanted permanent residential rights in Cato Manor because shack demolition and mass removals meant the end of their economic existence in the urban area. New houses in KwaMashu and Umlazi were occupied only by legal male tenants or prospective buyers with their recognised wives and children and single women were automatically disqualified from the new set-up.

In pursuit of their struggle against removals, a sizeable number of shebeen queens invaded the Cato Manor beerhalls on 17 June 1959 chasing men away.<sup>18</sup> Incidents of women raiding beerhalls and assaulting men were not new in Natal: the first incident took place in Ladysmith in August 1929.<sup>19</sup> This incident surprised the Weenen magistrate who told a deputation of 98 women that their demand for the legalisation of beer-brewing and selling was unacceptable: "This is a matter for men to make a representation to me"; and a woman from the

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<sup>16</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 310.

<sup>17</sup> KCAL, KCM 55181, Bourquin to the Town Clerk, 23 June 1959; KCM 55204, memo to the director, 8 July 1959. See also M. Blumberg, "Durban explodes", Africa South, 4, 2 (January - March 1960), p 13.

<sup>18</sup> L. Kuper, "Rights and riots in Natal", Africa South, 4, 1 (October-December 1959), p 20.

<sup>19</sup> H. Bradford, "We are now the men: women's beer protests in the Natal countryside, 1929", in B. Bozzoli (ed), Class, community and conflict: South African perspectives (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), p 292.

group responded, "We are now the men and that is why we have come to you".<sup>20</sup> Another incident took place in October 1959 at Ixopo when women demonstrated against taxation and influx control measures. The commissioner informed them to follow "acceptable" procedures by first submitting "their grievances to their men, who would then inform the tribal chief, and the tribal chief would pass on their complaints to [him]".<sup>21</sup> He insisted that no discussions should be entertained with the masses of women and their ANC leaders, "but with recognised chiefs and responsible male leaders".<sup>22</sup> Commenting on this incident, the *Natal Daily News* wrote: "The recognition of women's demonstrations on the lines favoured by whites, among whom women enjoy a different status, could only have the harmful, dangerous effect of undermining the structure of the community".<sup>23</sup> The women refused to follow the so-called traditional channels since they were "now the men". Kuper viewed these incidents as "remarkable for the dominant role of traditionally subordinate Zulu women",<sup>24</sup> who were fighting not only against a barrage of repressive government laws but for their emancipation from men. Quite clearly, women were in the process of transforming themselves from being victims of social forces to individuals who could create their own lives despite structural constraints. These women, Bozzoli writes, "are not permanently colonised and dehumanised victims, deprived of their humanity and selves"<sup>25</sup> but were rather active participants in the struggle to gain personal freedom. In a nutshell, these incidents confirm the reality of gender

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> L. Kuper, An African bourgeoisie: race, class, and politics in South Africa (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1965), p 18.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Natal Daily News, 21 August 1959, as cited in Kuper, An African bourgeoisie, p 18.

<sup>24</sup> Kuper, An African bourgeoisie, p 17.

<sup>25</sup> Bozzoli, Women of Phokeng, p 239.

divisions and women's subordination that existed in African community which, in turn, shaped the course of beer protests. Perhaps the most valuable and influential detailed early study on women and beer protests is H. Bradford's article in *Class, Community and Conflict*.<sup>26</sup>

The 1959 riots which erupted were led by thousands of embittered women who faced deportation to rural areas owing to their lack of legal documents. Serious disturbances began on 18 June when women blockaded the beerhalls, warning men not to try to enter. Thousands of African women from various parts of Cato Manor were armed with sticks, hatchets and pieces of wood. They marched, danced and "shook sticks in dazzling defiance at the whole edifice of white apartheid authority".<sup>27</sup> The ANCWL took an active part in this women's struggle; D. Nyembe and other Women's League members organised marches to the Victoria Street beerhall and the Mobeni area.<sup>28</sup>

A large proportion of these women were brewers of beer, the sale of which was a source of livelihood to them and their children.<sup>29</sup> Women who failed to secure formal employment often made ends meet in this way. This conflicted with municipal controls over such activities, since the municipality had its own beerhalls which were supposed to generate revenue. Undoubtedly, the women's demonstration was a multi-faceted phenomenon, incorporating a range of grievances. There is no doubt, however, that the overriding factor in the conflict in Cato Manor was economic and its crux, according to Bourquin, was poverty:

I wish to make bold and say that whatever reasons have been advanced are of a purely superficial nature. Even the women who started off the tragic course did not express their grievances in terms of

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<sup>26</sup> Bradford, "We are now the men", pp 292- 323.

<sup>27</sup> KCAL, KCM 55178, Cato Manor riots, June 1959; Blumberg, "Durban explodes", p 10.

<sup>28</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 316.

<sup>29</sup> The Natal Mercury, 19 June 1959.

bare, basic and intrinsic facts...The basic and ultimate reason is an economic one. The poverty of the urban Bantu; the discrepancy between his earning capacity and his cost of living; his inability to meet the demands of modern times in a city modelled on the western ways of life; his inability even to meet the barest necessity of life, to feed, clothe, educate and house himself and his family.<sup>30</sup>

While poverty constituted a major problem in Cato Manor, the liquor question was an issue in its own right. Councillor M. Gild saw the area as "an illicit brewer's and a prostitute's paradise"<sup>31</sup> which needed to be cleansed. As stated earlier, municipal officials thought that they were engaged in a noble cause of slum clearance on an area which whites saw as a threat to their city.

The demands presented by the African women were rejected by the municipality on the grounds that they were "quite impossible".<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, the women sang, danced and chanted: "The Boers are using us as a ladder to climb on"; "When you strike the women, you have struck a rock"; "Luthuli, give us Luthuli. His is the only voice we will hear."<sup>33</sup> The presence of the police led to a direct confrontation with the masses. Riots broke out and large groups of Africans of both sexes gathered in the streets, erecting barricades.

Violence shifted from persons to property, the main target being the property of the Durban Corporation - community halls, trading centres and buses.<sup>34</sup> The reason why anger was directed against the municipality rather than government buildings is brought out quite well by Bourquin, and deserves quoting at length:

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<sup>30</sup> KCAL, KCM 55181, Bourquin to the Town Clerk. See also Kuper, "Rights and riots", p 23.

<sup>31</sup> KCAL, KCM 55184, Councillor Mervyn A. Gild to Bourquin, 25 June 1959.

<sup>32</sup> Blumberg, "Durban explodes", p 13.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> The Natal Mercury, 19 June 1959. See also KCAL, KCM 55204, memo to the director, 8 July 1959.

[I] was attacked or singled out as the big bad wolf and that all the evils and all the bad things and all the oppression and all the hardships emanated from [me]. To say Pretoria has decreed that or Cape Town has said that or Parliament has said so or the City Council has done that - these are ideas which are impersonal, which have no meaning to them. So when I tried to make excuses and say Pretoria or the Minister has decreed that they said, who is Pretoria, who is the Minister? We don't know them. You are the man who is the head so you are the guilty one. Who is Parliament, where is he? They said, bring Parliament here, let us talk to Parliament. Tell Pretoria, they must come and see us...<sup>35</sup>

To an ordinary person there was no difference between the municipality and government.

The crowd became jubilant with the collapse of burning buildings, shouting "Africa, Africa"<sup>36</sup> and attacking all the "the concrete symbols of domination and indeed any of the accessible works of the white man".<sup>37</sup> While the destruction of property was widely condemned by the government, Kuper later maintained that though "...the behaviour [was] senseless...it [was] perfectly intelligible".<sup>38</sup> A similar perspective was adopted some years earlier, by British social historian E.P. Thompson who noted that "behind every such form of popular direct action some legitimising notion of right is to be found".<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, the consequences were regrettable; four people died during the clashes, while many women and ANC leaders were arrested.

Concern of the Durban Corporation was that as the illicit brewing of beer gained momentum, the municipality lost the great profits it used to make. The municipal beerhalls were

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<sup>35</sup> KCAL, KCAV 987-991, S.B. Bourquin by I. Edwards 10 September 1980, p 6.

<sup>36</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 317.

<sup>37</sup> Kuper, An African bourgeoisie, p 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> E.P. Thompson, The making of the English working class (London, Harmondsworth, 1968), p 73.

closed down for a number of days during the boycott. During this period, the municipality on average sold only 900 gallons of beer per day at all its beerhalls, against the previous average of 14 000 gallons per day.<sup>40</sup> A partial victory was therefore scored by the shebeen queens who supported "the campaign because they regarded the beerhalls as competitive institutions and a threat to their lucrative business and their existence".<sup>41</sup>

Although the main thrust of African resistance during the 1950s came from within the greater Durban area, demonstrations also broke out in rural areas of Natal such as Ixopo, Harding, Port Shepstone and New Hanover. Perhaps this shows the growing role of women in resistance and the concern felt by men. Cato Manor riots were an obvious catalyst which armed rural women with a model for their own demonstrations against the government's obnoxious laws. It was in the Port Shepstone district that the most serious disturbances took place. Women destroyed dipping tanks, a long standing grievance, and complained about new Bantu Authorities Regulations which stipulated that dipping tanks be refilled by the beneficiaries, although no remuneration was provided for this service.<sup>42</sup> They also complained against anti-squatter laws and increased taxation. On 21 August 1959 trouble began when Chief Nane of the Cele banned a woman, M. Cili, from his area of jurisdiction, for being a leader and influencing women to

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<sup>40</sup> KCAL, KCM 55218, Notes for meeting with Minister of Bantu admin and development, Pretoria, 3 August 1959.

<sup>41</sup> KCAL, KCM 55224, "Extract from a report of the inter-departmental committee of inquiry in connection with the disturbances and rioting at Cato Manor, Durban, 24 January 1960", p 4.

<sup>42</sup> Natal Archives [hereafter NA], Senior Inligtings Beampste and Bantoe Kommissaris (Bantu Affairs Commissioner's Files) [hereafter BAC], O/3, Cato Manor, Bantu unrest, BAC to the chief BAC, 1 September 1959. See also BAC, A/4, ANC, A.J. Luthuli, "Word of the president-general concerning riots which occurred as a result of the resistance staged by women in Natal, 17 August 1959".

fill a dip tank with stones.<sup>43</sup> Demonstrating women were organised and led by an ANCWL member. The demonstration was characterised, as Kuper wrote, by "chanting, frenzy, prayer, deputation, and Congress songs provided a strange potpourri of tradition, culture change, and political baptism".<sup>44</sup> A large group of women were arrested and fined £25 or 30 months in jail.

Later that month men from Chief Nane's area demonstrated in solidarity with their women who had been convicted for the destruction of government property.<sup>45</sup> The ANC volunteered to pay their fines but the men resisted the idea: "We don't want the ANC to pay their fines because if this happens, they will be absorbed by the ANC and we will lose our control over them."<sup>46</sup> This illustrates a fascinating point about the struggles of the late 1950s and early 1960s: in Natal, and particularly in Durban, men feared that they had lost their traditionally strong control over their women if they entered the political fray.

A considerable number of women, especially the shebeen queens, did become involved in the ANC's political programmes because these seemed to offer assistance in resolving their dilemmas and because they could expect no help from men. But, as rightly noted by Bozzoli: "The women's responses to the new social movements were varied and complex. Many remained apolitical, or even antipolitical, their resilience and defiance contin[ued] on a personal level."<sup>47</sup> However, from June 1959, the ANC gained a considerable number of supporters because of its appeal to both women and men who had to leave the city. For instance, on 27 June 1959 over 20 000 people attended the "Freedom Day" rally in Durban organised by the

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<sup>43</sup> NA, BAC, 0/3, BAC to the chief BAC, 1 September 1959.

<sup>44</sup> Kuper, An African bourgeoisie, p 18.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> NA, BAC, 0/3, BAC to the chief BAC, 1 September 1959.

<sup>47</sup> Bozzoli, Women of Phokenq, p 167.

Congress Alliance.<sup>48</sup>

Further struggles between the municipal authorities and the shack dwellers for urban space in Cato Manor continued. By August 1959, most areas of Cato Manor - mainly Raincoat, Thusini, Dunbar Bar and Tintown - were cleared,<sup>49</sup> and about 7000 shacks were demolished.<sup>50</sup> Most of the people who failed to meet the requirements for house allocation in KwaMashu, as well as illegal residents, simply re-erected their shacks in other parts of Cato Manor: the masses' resistance was temporarily successful. In the wake of the ongoing disturbances, Bourquin called a meeting with the Minister of Bantu Affairs to inform him of the defeat of the local authority in the area. Bourquin stated that:

The authority of the Durban City Council - the civil government for the area - has been challenged and overthrown...the City Council has been defeated at Cato Manor, and cannot restore its authority without the fullest co-operation and most active assistance of the government.<sup>51</sup>

It was not until January 1960 that the Durban local authorities once again recommenced removals from Cato Manor to KwaMashu although they were warned by the ANC that removals would be greatly resisted. The ANC intervened in the removals on behalf of the shack-dwellers; it contacted the Mayor of Durban requesting the suspension of the removal programme.<sup>52</sup> The mayor, however, failed to respond. The municipality placed notices at vantage points in Ezinkawini and Mnyasana shack areas advising the residents of the impending clearance.<sup>53</sup> The municipality wanted to demolish 100 shacks containing 300

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<sup>48</sup> The New Age, 28 July 1959.

<sup>49</sup> G. Maasdorp and A.S.B. Humphreys (eds), From shantytown to township (Cape Town, Juta, 1975), p 63.

<sup>50</sup> KCAL, KCM 55218, Notes for meeting with minister.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p 2.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> KCAL, KCM 55214, Demonstration by Bantu, 10 February 1960.

African families in the two areas.<sup>54</sup>

It was in Ezinkawini and Mnyasana that violence broke out on the evening of 24 January 1960, partly provoked by police searching for and arresting illicit beer-brewers.<sup>55</sup> Many arrests took place and violence was sparked off when Constable Biyela trod on a woman's foot.<sup>56</sup> This seemingly minor incident ignited the already discontented and frustrated people into violence against the instruments of the state - the police.

Women were once again back on the streets with their struggle against removals in January 1960 led and championed by, in Bourquin's words,

people who had an axe to grind or who had certain interests in the Cato Manor area- particularly the illegal traders, the shebeen keepers, the gambling school keepers etc. Now they were going to lose out on this rather lucrative trade, and they agitated against this removal- they knew that they would not qualify, or be unable to continue their activities in a well controlled township...<sup>57</sup>

These were the people in the forefront attacking the police and chanting "Mayibuye i Africa" (come Africa) and "kill the Dutchmen".<sup>58</sup> (There was, of course, the most violent episodes against the police in many decades, which affected the whole psychology of the police nationally). The violence that followed claimed the lives of nine policemen and one

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<sup>54</sup> NA, BAC, Cato Manor, "Onluste", 1 September 1959- 16 March 1960, O/3 chief BAC to the secretary for BAD, 27 January 1960.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. See also SAIRR, Days of crisis in South Africa (SAIRR, 1960), p 3.

<sup>56</sup> SAIRR, Days of crisis, p 3. See also L.K. Ladlau, "The Cato Manor riots, 1959 -1960" (unpublished MA, University of Natal, Durban, 1975), p 15.

<sup>57</sup> KCAL, KCAV 174 -75, S.B. Bourquin by A. Mason and D. Collins, 18 October 1979, p 8.

<sup>58</sup> KCAL, KCM 55224, Extract from report, p 15.

resident<sup>59</sup> and a sizeable number of African residents were arrested for murder.<sup>60</sup> In response, the Minister of Justice banned all political meetings in the locations for four weeks<sup>61</sup> and, for a while, the situation remained quiet.

During March and April 1960, there were organised demonstrations in the townships against the detention of Chief Albert Luthuli and other African leaders for inciting people to riot. On 31 March 1960, the residents of Cato Manor erupted violently and destroyed municipal property.<sup>62</sup> Buses and lorries were stoned. The ANC organised one big march into the Durban city centre demanding the release of their leaders. On 1 April the residents of Cato Manor, led by ANC stalwarts and the Protest Action Committee, also marched into town and clashed with the police.<sup>63</sup> During this period, most of the areas in and around Durban - particularly Clermont, KwaMashu, Cato Manor and S.J. Smith hostel - were rocked with unrest.<sup>64</sup> Violence continued for several days at S.J. Smith hostel and in Lamontville township. It was only after the arrest of the ANC leaders that this resistance movement was greatly weakened.

Meanwhile, the municipal authorities avoided further criticism from central government circles which felt that the city fathers were failing to implement tougher removal policies.<sup>65</sup> They re-launched the removal programme, and the residents of Mnyasana, who earlier had resisted by simply re-

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<sup>59</sup> NA, BAC, O/3, chief BAC to the secretary for BAD, 27 June 1960.

<sup>60</sup> For the proceedings of the case, see Supreme Court Records: Manor 158.

<sup>61</sup> SAIRR, Days of crisis, p 4.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p 18.

<sup>63</sup> The Natal Mercury, 2 April 1960.

<sup>64</sup> SAIRR, Days of crisis, p 23

<sup>65</sup> See the debate which took place soon after the Cato Manor June riots in The House of Assembly Debates, 25 January 1960.

erecting their shacks after the demolition, were served with eviction notices.<sup>66</sup> An order for demolition of shacks remained in force, with some women opposing it. Some women spread rumours about KwaMashu in order to persuade others to continue resisting the removals alleging that KwaMashu was deliberately constructed on a swamp that was likely to subside and drown all the African people<sup>67</sup> - a somewhat contorted story. Another rumour was told: "the 'serpents' living in the KwaMashu area would 'eat us'".<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, some residents decided to brave the swamp and serpents and made their way to the newly built houses of KwaMashu township. Those Africans who could afford to pay rent or purchase freehold land and who qualified for the privileges of urban residence in terms of Section 10 of the Amended Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1952, simply moved into their new houses in the townships. Even the Mpondo women from Matatiele district who were based in Cato Manor hardly resisted the removals. In the late 1950s, the Mpondo community was known for fierce resistance to the removals, but this time they simply volunteered to move out and they erected their shacks in the Newlands area.<sup>69</sup>

For most men, this was the time when women had to pay back. Once it had become clearer that houses were provided to married men in KwaMashu, their reaction was in practice a positive one. Many married men were delighted to have access to better houses and expressed interest in moving to KwaMashu. For some women, widowed women and single women, unemployed and self-employed men, removals meant the end of their future lives in the city. To them resistance was the only alternative but it could be effective if they had the support of the entire Cato Manor community. Women expressed their anger towards African men, particularly those who were delighted

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<sup>66</sup> The Daily News, 16 February 1960.

<sup>67</sup> KCAL, KCAV 174-75, S.B. Bourquin by Mason and Collins.

<sup>68</sup> Edwards, "Cato Manor, June 1959", p 125.

<sup>69</sup> KCAL, KCAV 174-5, Bourquin by Mason and Collins, p 9.

about KwaMashu. Edwards writes:

Women grew increasingly 'impatient' with the failure of 'our men to see what was happening to us. We did not think they really were interested. They did not seem to be as worried about KwaMashu as us. Things were the same to them, and they would just leave us out in the cold.<sup>70</sup>

The final blow to resistance to forced removals was the banning of the ANC (the driving force behind the resistance) and when some leaders were arrested. The resistance died down and the municipality was quick to capitalise on that. Forced removals from Cato Manor continued after 1960 and the clearance took place finally in mid-1966.

### Results of forced removals: the birth of new shanties

The survival of the newly "cleansed" apartheid city was threatened by the explosion of shantytowns which re-emerged soon after the removals from Cato Manor. Reluctant to return to their rural way of life, the evicted residents of Cato Manor had no alternative but to find new land on which to re-erect their shanties. Quite clearly, the new shackland cities - like the old - provided women - unmarried, widows, divorcees and prostitutes - with the necessary freedom they wanted, unlike the conservative rural setting, which imposed normative restrictions and social control over them. It was unthinkable for most of these women to migrate back to their rural homes.

The new shanties were erected mainly by those who were unable to afford rent or purchase payments for houses in the new townships. Workers who felt that they could not pay to live in the new township, together with illegal residents, made their way to the newly created shantytowns of Malukazi and Magabangenjubane<sup>71</sup> and built themselves different cities. By the 1960s vast shack settlements had re-emerged

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<sup>70</sup> Edwards, "Cato Manor, June 1959", p 123.

<sup>71</sup> See Ilanga Lase Natal, 17 September 1960, 25 November 1961, 12 May 1962.

outside the Durban metropolitan area, which made the whole exercise somehow futile though segregation at the centre was being sustained. In fact, the City Council was strong enough to demolish shanties which were located in areas that were defined as white. However, the Council did not bother preventing people from re-erecting their shanties in the peripheral areas of Durban. These squatter struggles are crucially important in the history of South Africa for they represent the birth of modern urban townships as opposed to places like KwaMashu and the type of industrial proletariat which they accommodated.

The new Mkhumbane, Tintown, was erected in the Malukazi area in 1960.<sup>72</sup> The area had fallen under the jurisdiction of the Makhanya tribal authorities at the beginning of the nineteenth century and had become part of the urban squatter fringe of metropolitan Durban. It was located on the southern border of the Umlazi township and fell within the decentralised industrial zone, which attracted a drift of migrant workers to the area. The tin shacks were erected on Indian land and the shack dwellers paid a rent of £1 a month.<sup>73</sup> Most of the people who erected shacks in the area, particularly the Mpondo of Transkei, were from Cato Manor. It was estimated that 10 000 African dwellers lived in Malukazi shantytown in 1961 and a large proportion were legally employed in Durban and qualified for house allocation in the townships.<sup>74</sup>

The residents of Malukazi formed a Residents Association and were organised at grassroot community level by leaders who, having mobilised a large following, organised invasions of the "unoccupied lands". The Association was led by D. Gasa, a member of the banned ANC.<sup>75</sup> Though this Association was not

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<sup>72</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 17 September 1960.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> SAIRR, A survey of race relations, 1962, p 150.

<sup>75</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 17 September 1960.

recognised by the local authorities, it presents an important point about the way in which the residents collectively defended their integrity as urban residents. During these years, residents intensified their group activities as people affected by government policy: they coped with the hardships of urban-cum-industrial life by forming associations. It was in this respect that Malukazi emerged as a major shack area in the 1960s.

In 1961 the Bantu Administration and Development officials suggested that the squatters of Malukazi should be allocated houses in Umlazi township. Those who qualified for the allocation were the residents who had previously been shifted from the area to pave the way for the construction of a township, and also all the Zulu-speaking people in the squatter camp who were employed in the southern part of Durban.<sup>76</sup> The remaining residents who did not qualify were to be evicted from the area.

Despite the accelerated construction of houses in the new townships, the housing shortage remained critical which, in turn, led to the growth of the African population in the squatter camps. By 1962, another new shantytown had come into existence on the outskirts of the Umlazi-Glebe areas. This was Magabangenjubane, and it fell under the leadership of J.B. Matonsi, an informal trader and member of the banned ANC.<sup>77</sup> The area was occupied by almost 10 000 people but was dominated mainly by women. In June 1962 this area too faced demolition by the local authorities, with those people who were legally employed being temporarily accommodated in Cato Manor emergency camp and KwaMashu township.<sup>78</sup> A significant number of women who were illegal residents moved away quietly and re-erected their shacks in the Malukazi shantytown.<sup>79</sup> But

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<sup>76</sup> SAIRR, A survey of race relations, 1962, p 150.

<sup>77</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 9 June 1961.

<sup>78</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 30 June 1962.

<sup>79</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 20 October 1962.

their stay in Malukazi was to be short-lived: by January 1963 that shantytown was also demolished. Although the municipal authorities had succeeded in clearing most of these peri-urban shantytowns for a while, the struggle for shelter in the urban area continued throughout the 1960s.

The demolition of shantytowns by the municipal authorities intensified during the 1960s as new shacks emerged on the borders of the townships, where there was access to water and other facilities. In time, conflict arose between the legal township residents and the illegal shack dwellers. By 1963, Cato Manor had a squatter population of 20 000 Africans who still had to be resettled in the townships:<sup>80</sup> and in the middle of that year the Benoni, Kumalo and the Dabulamanzi areas of Cato Manor were demolished. Those residents of these areas who were regarded as illegals made their way into the valleys and re-erected their shacks. Thus creating a new squatter belt in the Mariannahill-Thornwood-Dassenhoek area extending to the Umgeni River and Inanda district north of KwaMashu.<sup>81</sup>

Although at times intense, murmuring of the masses, dovetailing with strikes, marches and meetings did not last for very long. After the massacre at Sharpeville in March 1960 and the consequent banning of the ANC and the PAC,<sup>82</sup> resistance faltered and urban removals became frequent and aggressively executed all over South Africa. From this time onwards, the state employed considerably expanded repressive powers to suppress any form of resistance, particularly from Africans. In Cato Manor, removals continued under police protection and the municipal authorities did not face any real challenges.

The municipality of Durban was pressured by the central government to intensify the removal programme and by July 1960 about three-quarters of the scattered settlements in Cato

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<sup>80</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 23 March 1963.

<sup>81</sup> Maasdorp and Humphreys (eds), From shantytown, p 70.

<sup>82</sup> SAIRR, A survey of race relations, 1959 -60, p 72.

Manor had been destroyed.<sup>83</sup> The total number of shacks demolished at that date stood at 1 972 and the Cato Manor Emergency Camp created by the municipality as transitional accommodation hosted almost 55 000 people.<sup>84</sup> The banned ANC operated through Ruth Shabane who in March 1960 had been elected as the chairperson of the Cato Manor Advisory Board.<sup>85</sup> The ANC's Emergency Committee worked underground, attempting to influence people from the emergency camp not to leave Cato Manor. Pamphlets were distributed by ANC stalwarts, urging people to continue with their resistance. But the movement was already fragmented and disorganised; very little support was given by the remaining people in the camp. Lacking a very clear organisational structure and facing a state determined to proceed, resistance fizzled out. With the State of Emergency in place, shack removals in Cato Manor continued unhindered and by mid-1966, the municipal authorities had managed to clear away all shanties in Cato Manor.

## Conclusion

Central to the analysis in this chapter has been an attempt to demonstrate initial mass opposition to apartheid urban policies in Durban. However, during the 1960s, when mass political organisations and activities were ruthlessly suppressed in every possible way, the resistance movement died out. As a group, Africans in Durban had failed to challenge the apartheid state successfully fearing the state's retaliation which threatened them with possible expulsion from the apartheid city. However, there was a legacy from this time when a new dimension later emerged in African resistance and

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<sup>83</sup> KCAL, Bourquin Papers, File 11, Municipal native administration department, annual reports 1953 -69, KCM 55339 -55351, Durban Corporation, department of BAD, annual report for the municipal year ended 31 July 1960. See also The Daily News, 21 October 1960. Some shacks remained intact in 1960.

<sup>84</sup> KCAL, File 11, Department of BAD, annual report for the year ending July 1960.

<sup>85</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 12 March 1960.

community based politics became dominant in apartheid's own newly established townships (discussed in Chapter 6).

## *Chapter Five*

### **Living in the Apartheid City: African Workers, the State and Housing, 1960-1977**

#### **Introduction**

The South African government, in the four decades between 1948 and 1990, implemented policies that were geared towards depriving Africans of adequate housing and the necessary welfare facilities in the townships and shantytowns. The period was also marked by a high degree of social control and state intervention: forced removals were imposed so that the full brunt of the Verwoerdian racial doctrine was felt, particularly by Africans and Indians living within white urban areas. Such racial policy was clearly enunciated on 30 May 1952, when Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs, stated in parliament:

Every town or city, especially industrial cities, must have a single corresponding black township; townships must be large, and must be situated to allow for expansion without spilling over into another racial group area; townships must be located an adequate distance from white areas; black townships should be separated from white areas by an area of industrial sites where industries exist or are being planned; existing wrongly situated areas should be moved; everybody wants his servants and his labourers, but nobody wants to have a native location near his own.<sup>1</sup>

In strict compliance with such views, the NP government, from the late 1950s and early 1960s decided to remove Africans and

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<sup>1</sup> Speech cited in NA, Bantu Affairs Commissioner's files (hereafter BAC), 0/3, BAC, Durban to the CBAC, nd. 1960.

Indians forcibly from inner-cities to distant townships. The apartheid city was gradually taking shape and was marked by struggles between the state, local authorities and the dispossessed over urban space and shelter. D. Harvey, a Marxist scholar, terms such a struggle as having "its origin in the work process but that ramifies and reverberates throughout all aspects of the system of relations which capitalism establishes".<sup>2</sup>

In South Africa, the state (local and central) and capital created apartheid cities which were modelled on policies of racial segregation, "evolving over a long period of time in a rather haphazard, piecemeal way".<sup>3</sup> The NP government had visions of such racially divided cities, ones which coincided with the concerns both of many white urban residents and of municipal authorities. These concerns were particularly evident in Durban.<sup>4</sup> The entire process of making Durban an apartheid city was hastened by the outbreak of violence in Cato Manor in 1959.

This chapter investigates the state's interventionist policy in the process of making Durban an apartheid city. The chapter also examines the socio-economic concomitants of the process, together with the rapid growth of shantytowns during the 1960s and 1970s. These related problems gave rise to the apartheid city which eventually, as A. Mabin stated, "...created an environment conducive to strikes by African workers, such as those which rolled across the Durban and East

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<sup>2</sup> D. Harvey, The urban experience (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989), p89.

<sup>3</sup> P. Maylam, "Explaining the apartheid city: 20 years of South African urban historiography", Journal of Southern African Studies, volume 21, No 1 (1995), p19.

<sup>4</sup> D. Hindson, M. Byerley and M. Morris, From violence to reconstruction: the making, disintegration and remaking of an apartheid city (University of Natal, Durban, CSDS, 1993), p3.

Rand industrial areas in 1973"<sup>5</sup> and beyond. Furthermore, the significance of this chapter to the whole thesis can be closely linked to, in the words of P. Maylam, "urban history [that] inevitably shades into other branches of history: into economic history, as industrialisation and urbanisation are closely interwoven, and into labour history, political history and women's studies".<sup>6</sup>

### Apartheid's African housing: plans and problems

In the nineteenth century, as a colonial port serving both Natal and the Witwatersrand, Durban grew into one of the most racially segregated urban areas in South Africa.<sup>7</sup> During the 1880s, the Durban City Council expressed concern about assaults and criminal-related acts among Africans living in shacks and hovels around the city.<sup>8</sup> It was then that the City Council expressed the view that African "locations...be established at a convenient distance from the towns".<sup>9</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century the Durban Corporation was in the forefront of those institutions articulating racial residential segregation "without compulsion, [but] by attracting people to segregated facilities".<sup>10</sup> Various policies implemented in Durban during those early years were taken up by many southern African urban areas; they became pillars "of the Union government's national policy of urban segrega-

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<sup>5</sup> A. Mabin, "The dynamics of urbanisation since 1960", in M. Swilling (*et al*) (eds), Apartheid city in transition (Cape Town, OUP, 1991), p 38.

<sup>6</sup> Maylam, "Explaining the apartheid city", p 20.

<sup>7</sup> I. Edwards, "Cato Manor: cruel past, pivotal future" Review of African Political Economy, No.62, (March 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Lemon, Apartheid in transition, p 211.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

tion".<sup>11</sup> In Durban, by-laws were proclaimed in an endeavour to control the processes of urbanisation among Indians and Africans. With the coming to power of the NP in 1948, existing policies of urban segregation and spatial management were applied with rigour and vitality; in fact, the NP replaced a class-differentiated housing policy with ethnic zoning and also forced the educated middle class to live together with the working class.<sup>12</sup> In a bid to secure support among the white electorate, the NP government enforced removals of urban Africans living in shantytowns to newly established, far-away townships. In Durban, widespread fears among white residents about Cato Manor, which was associated with beer-brewing, disease, violence and crime, were taken into account by the government when the massive restructuring of urban African communities commenced.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, there were extensive debates about the nature of the apartheid city.<sup>14</sup> The government intervened in housing matters, thereby reducing local authorities' autonomy. During that period, as Maylam notes, conflicts arose "between capital and labour, between the state and capital, between the local state and central state, and between Africans and the state".<sup>15</sup> Such conflicts were over the question of financing housing for African employees and their immediate families, and also the shape of the apartheid city. Maylam continues:

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<sup>11</sup> Edwards, "Cato Manor", p 1.

<sup>12</sup> For a comprehensive study on this aspect, see P. Maylam, "Shackled by contradictions: the municipal response to African urbanisation in Durban, 1920-1950", African Urban Studies, 14 (1989); P. Maylam, "Explaining the apartheid city", p 30; Hindson (et al), From violence to reconstruction; and Lemon, Apartheid in transition.

<sup>13</sup> See Maylam, "Shackled by contradictions".

<sup>14</sup> See Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", especially Chapter 6.

<sup>15</sup> P. Maylam, "The rise and decline of urban Apartheid in South Africa", African Affairs, 89 (1990), p 71.

The central state, unwilling to burden taxpayers, tended to argue that the responsibility lay with the local state and with capital, both being the chief beneficiaries of cheap labour in any particular urban area. The local state, unwilling to burden ratepayers, claimed that capital benefited most from cheap African labour and should therefore either contribute directly to housing costs or give workers a high enough wage to enable them to pay economic rents. Capital, naturally unwilling to burden itself with these costs if at all possible, and the central state argued together that all ratepayers benefited from cheap African labour and that they should therefore carry the main burden of housing costs.<sup>16</sup>

The municipality of Durban and the government indicated that they were too constrained financially to subsidise African housing. Employers of African labour were therefore called upon to subsidise indirectly the costs of houses, so that the financial burden did not remain the sole responsibility of the occupants concerned. It was only in 1962 that the government agreed to subsidise African housing, particularly in new townships that were being developed.

During the 1950s, while the central government's involvement in African accommodation steadily increased, the local urban authority was left with the responsibility for the development of housing. In the 1950s, the Department of Native Affairs insisted that local authorities must develop site-and-service schemes in KwaMashu.<sup>17</sup> In fact, during the 1950s, Verwoerd, the Minister for Native Affairs, assumed distinctive powers over approval and disapproval of housing plans. Commenting on Verwoerd's actions, Edwards writes:

Having little knowledge of the principles of town planning, being more concerned with the African housing shortage in the Johannesburg area, and unfamiliar with the topographical features prevailing in the Durban area, Verwoerd remained dogmatic that KwaMashu could be developed on a site-

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p 74.

<sup>17</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 171.

and-service scheme.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, the City Council remained adamant that the development of a site-and-service housing scheme in KwaMashu was completely unsuitable. KwaMashu's hilly terrain and clay soil were impediments to such a scheme.<sup>19</sup> However, after considerable pressure from local authorities and employer organisations, the Department of Native Affairs agreed that formal housing be developed in KwaMashu.<sup>20</sup>

By the late 1950s, new residential zoning plans for the entire Durban area were developed. Both local and central state authorities agreed that the success of such a project needed the removal of Africans and Indians from Cato Manor. The plans were also intended to increase "...the capitalization of inner city land by clearing land of Blacks and allowing for white ownership and residence".<sup>21</sup> According to the Durban City Council Group Areas proclamations, Cato Manor was to become a white area. The entire core city area was reserved for white housing, while Indians were zoned in Merebank and the new township of Chatsworth<sup>22</sup>; Africans were to be relocated to KwaMashu in the north and later in 1962 to Umlazi in the south. Durban was thus set to become an ideal apartheid city.

In KwaMashu township, single male hostel accommodation and single-tenant nuclear family accommodation were to be provided.<sup>23</sup> African residents who qualified for nuclear

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p 172.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p 174.

<sup>21</sup> Edwards, "Cato Manor", p 5.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Freund, Insiders and outsiders; and K. Subramony, "A history of Chatsworth: impact of the group areas act on the Indian community of Durban, 1958 -1975" (unpublished MA, Unisa, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 182.

family accommodation were those who were legally married and who qualified to be in the urban area under Section Ten (1)(b). Bachelors were to be provided with accommodation in the hostels. No woman was allowed to rent a house in KwaMashu; tenancy remained a preserve of married men.<sup>24</sup> S. Parnell writes,

So, township housing was only available to certain sections of the formal urban workforce...Unmarried women, who serviced the urban working classes with cheap food, sex and alcohol were barred from the new urban housing. Along with other "undesirables" they were left to shelter in the urban crevices, in the slum yards hidden from the public eye.<sup>25</sup>

In that respect the new society was fundamentally different from Cato Manor society, where both men and women, whether illegally or legally, owned shacks. Ideal townships, as envisaged by the state were gradually taking shape.

The government, capital and the local authorities of Durban all agreed that KwaMashu should be constructed as a site for relocating the African shack dwellers of Cato Manor. The first houses to be completed in KwaMashu were occupied in March 1958. Despite consensus among employers, local authorities and the government to relocate African shantytown dwellers to KwaMashu, problems of subsidising African housing continued.

The new township of KwaMashu brought about some changes in the lifestyle of many African dwellers. With the passage of time, however, some of the workers could not afford the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Edwards notes that sometimes marriages of convenience resulted in order for men to qualify for the new house in the township. Sometimes those who were not legally married were "given a short period of time to formalise their relationship, at which time they would be removed to formal housing. If such a couple failed to become legally married, the male would be resettled in the hostel area and the woman evicted from the city".

<sup>25</sup> S. Parnell, "South African cities: perspectives from the ivory tower of urban studies" (University of the Witwatersrand, Institute for Advanced Social Research, Seminar Paper No. 388, 9 October 1995), p 10.

rentals and transport costs which they had to meet in the new township. This fact was backed up by a survey conducted in 1960, which disclosed that 68 percent of the house dwellers received a monthly income of £8 (R16) or less, and such workers could ill afford the rentals and the cost of transport.<sup>26</sup> Some of these relocated themselves into the squatter settlements on the fringe of the city.

The development of KwaMashu and its initial growth failed to cater for all the shack dwellers of Cato Manor, Merebank and Chatsworth.<sup>27</sup> As a response to broader crises of the 1950s, the government, which earlier on had been reluctant, began developing further African housing to the south of the city on the Umlazi Reserve. As the agent of the South Africa Native Trust in the development of Umlazi township, the municipality of Durban launched in 1961 the construction of houses.<sup>28</sup> In 1962 Umlazi township came into being. With the availability of houses in two townships, Africans living in shacks and compounds in the city, despite having legal rights to remain in the urban area, were nonetheless relocated to one or the other of the townships. An "imaginary line" was drawn to divide the city into north and south.<sup>29</sup> All those Africans employed in areas north of that imaginary line were to be resettled in KwaMashu, while those employed in the south were to be relocated to Umlazi township.<sup>30</sup> However, the imaginary line did not really work as it

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<sup>26</sup> NA, Senior Inligtings Beampste and Bantoe Kommissaris, Bantu Affairs Commissioner's files (hereafter BAC), 0/3, BAC, Durban to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, 1960.

<sup>27</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 64, Roll 47, Monthly report, 20 July 1962.

<sup>28</sup> NA, BAC, 0/3, BAC, Durban to the CBAC, 11 December 1959, "Proposed Umlazi township", pp 1-2. See also SAIRR, A survey of race relations, 1961, p 179.

<sup>29</sup> KCAL, KCAV 987 -991, Interview with S B Bourquin by I Edwards, 10 September 1980.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

was intended to do.

From May 1962 onwards, the City Engineer of Durban anticipated a monthly completion of 150 houses. In Umlazi township, specific criteria were used by the Bantu Administration and Development in allocating houses. However, the Bantu Affairs Commissioner (BAC) gave first preference to families displaced at Umlazi as a result of the construction.<sup>31</sup> The BAC required at least 1 000 houses for that purpose. Placed second on the government priority list were those people displaced from Cato Manor who qualified for formal housing at Umlazi and were temporarily moved to KwaMashu. The third priority group were people who resided in Cato Manor whose shacks were destroyed and who were removed urgently under ministerial order and without anywhere to go. The last group given preference were those squatter families who were entitled to family housing in Durban and were squatting on municipal land and employed to the south of the imaginary line.<sup>32</sup> The entire process failed to materialise because of differences which existed between the government and the local authorities over priority people to be relocated. The government desired to reserve Umlazi for Zulu-speakers only, thus perpetuating ethnic division among the African people. However, KwaMashu was to remain mixed. Heavily influenced by the ethnic zoning policy throughout the 1960s, the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner insisted that Umlazi should be a "homeland" township exclusively for the Zulu ethnic group.<sup>33</sup> Such a policy guideline by the government partly attained its objectives in 1970 when Umlazi was finally

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<sup>31</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 64, Roll 47, "Shack removals from Cato Manor: number of persons to be resettled at Umlazi township from KwaMashu and order of priority for settlement at Umlazi, 13 April 1962".

<sup>32</sup> KCAL, KCF 64, Roll 47, BAC to the general secretary, the Natal Employers' Association, 11 January 1962.

<sup>33</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 24, Roll 7, BA 2/3/3, Part 1, department of Bantu administration, 15 November 1968.

handed over to the KwaZulu homeland government which, however, failed to implement it. For instance, in 1974, Africans living in the Western District of Durban were mixed ethnically.<sup>34</sup>

The following statistics are useful indicators of the position in one of the areas of Durban.

Table A

Africans living in the Western District, Durban, 1974<sup>35</sup>

Ethnic Group	Male	Female	Children	Total
Zulu	10 655	6 898	14 450	32 003
Xhosa	1 053	752	1 066	2 871
Sotho	515	374	461	1 350
Others	1 071	45	97	1 213
Foreign	173	63	104	340
Total				37 777

By 1962, it had become evident that the Umlazi housing scheme, administered by the state, offered lower rentals compared to KwaMashu, and also had an added advantage in that residents became land as well as property owners.<sup>36</sup> KwaMashu residents were not entitled to land ownership since the township was within the boundary of a white city.

The disparities between the two townships, apparent soon after the establishment of Umlazi, created great concern among employers of African labour. Workers employed in the northern areas of Durban and residing in KwaMashu began their movement to the south so that they could qualify for housing in Umlazi.

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<sup>34</sup> In August 1973, the PNAAB was promulgated and divided into eight districts: Durban, Pinetown, Umlazi, Port shepstone, Lower Tugela, Inanda, Umzinto and Alfred. The Durban district was further sub-divided into two: the Central District, which consisted of the KwaMashu, Lamont and Chesterville townships, and the S.J Smith, Dalton, Jacobs, Thokoza and Glebe hostels; and the Western District, which comprised KwaNgendezi, KwaDabeka, Clermont, Ntuzuma and Kranskloof areas. See NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/1, Bourquin, Present and future housing, 21 October 1974.

<sup>35</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/1, Housing, buildings and sites: policy, director, Natal Chamber of Industries to the Hon M C Botha, MP, Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, 1 October 1974.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., The DCC to the Town Clerk, 23 May 1962.

In KwaMashu, four types of housing were constructed: the 51/6 and 51/7 type houses (following the numbers of the plans drawn during the 1950s); K2D type houses; log cabins; and site-and-service houses. Those Africans who were well off and were able to construct their own houses, using the standards laid down by the City Council, were allocated a 4 500 square foot site for a site rental and rate repayment cost of almost £4 (R8) per month.<sup>37</sup> The construction of such houses was boosted with financial loans to the value of £250 (R500) coming from the Native Revenue Account. The second type of housing was the four-roomed detached bungalow which was built on 2 800 square foot sites. These were bought for £2 (R4) deposit and a monthly payment of £3.1.2 (R6,24), or rented for £3.2.4 (R6,48) per month.<sup>38</sup> African residents considered such rentals high; it was more affordable for those workers who earned at least £15 (R30) per month or more. The high rental rate partly explains why by August 1961 the Council was owed R73 322 in arrear rentals by the residents of KwaMashu.<sup>39</sup>

In Umlazi, rentals were slightly cheaper than in KwaMashu. Inclusive of all services, the rentals for houses in Umlazi were R6,45 per house.<sup>40</sup> As for KwaMashu, the monthly rentals for each house with all service charges included was within the range of R11. Houses constructed in Umlazi township, therefore, remained cheaper and of better quality than those in KwaMashu.

In Umlazi, the lowly paid workers were housed in two-roomed, log cabins and provided with a site-and-service

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<sup>37</sup> SAIRR, Natal Region, file, townships: KwaMashu, Natal Chamber of Industry, "Housing for the urban African population", 26 September 1960. See also SAIRR, A survey of race relations, 1961, p 180.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 63, Roll 46, residential areas, department of Bantu administration to the Town Clerk, 15 August 1966.

housing scheme development. The two-roomed houses, better known as K2D dwellings, were rented for R4 plus per month, or bought for a monthly payment of R3 plus a deposit of R4. Single-roomed log cabins, in KwaMashu neighbourhood units Two and Four, were rented for R2 per month.<sup>41</sup>

Hostel accommodation for both men and women was provided. Large dormitories were constructed, each accommodating a minimum of 32 single persons. Hostel residents were provided with a steel bed and mattress and full bed clothes; as from February 1962,<sup>42</sup> a rental of R0,15 per night was charged for casual accommodation, and an economical rental of R2 per month was charged for long-term residents. Employers of African labour were given an option, either to rent hostel accommodation for their workers and then deduct such rent from the workers' wages, or to provide their own accommodation in company compounds or barracks.<sup>43</sup>

A sizeable number of firms in Durban preferred African workers to live in company compounds on the factory site. By 1970, for instance, the total number of people accommodated in municipal, government or private compounds and in domestic servant quarters was 61 000.<sup>44</sup> Firms in the forefront in providing their own compound accommodation included Coronation Brick, Defy, Hullett's Sugar Refinery, Kaffrarian Steam Mill, Lion Match, Union Whaling, South African Breweries and Union Flour Mills at Umbilo. In the Mobeni area, Universal Mills was the only firm with a compound. Other compounds were found in

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<sup>41</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 23, Roll 6, Bantu administration, monthly reports.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Extract from Bantu administration, monthly report, 5 December 1961, "casual accommodation at KwaMashu hostel".

<sup>43</sup> Discussion with S.B. Bourquin, UND, History department, 6 October 1993.

<sup>44</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 64, Roll 47, residential areas: memorandum to assistant director (Bantu areas), 14 August 1970.

the Congella, Maydon Wharf and Jacobs areas.<sup>45</sup> These compounds were, as noted by Van Onselen in a different context and place, "the colleges of exploitation",<sup>46</sup> as employers managed to control workers effectively and monitored their movements; workers did not lose working time since they lived in close proximity to their places of work. This type of accommodation was exploitative particularly among the dockworkers, who lived in barracks erected in the Point and Maydon Wharf areas.<sup>47</sup> Poor migrant workers were exploited in those barracks, which were erected in 1878 and 1903 respectively.<sup>48</sup> Those barracks were close to the work-place which meant effective control and a reduction in transport costs, particularly for employers. Here also lay the contradictions within government policies: certainly the government was opposed to Africans continuing to live in the city but tolerated the compounds and hostels since there was a huge backlog in housing.

By March 1962 the municipality had constructed 14 "better class" houses which were occupied by those Africans with a higher income and who had important positions in KwaMashu township.<sup>49</sup> The 51/6 and 51/7 type houses built by then numbered 4 334 and 806 respectively.<sup>50</sup> The K2D type of houses

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<sup>45</sup> Young, "Industrial geography", p 161, see ft 1.

<sup>46</sup> Van Onselen, Chibaro, p 157.

<sup>47</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 82, Roll 64, Natal Chamber of Industries, Public relations, "accommodation: stevedoring labour, general manager, Durban stevedoring labour supply company, 4 April 1975", p 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. See also Hemson, "Class consciousness and migrant workers", p 33.

<sup>49</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 23, Roll 6, KwaMashu township to the Director, report for February 1962, township manager, 6 March 1962.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

provided numbered 1 934, and the log cabins 2 501.<sup>51</sup> For those earning less, 85 block houses and 153 site-and-service stands were provided. The total number of houses provided in KwaMashu by March 1962 was 9 827.<sup>52</sup> The hostels accommodated 10 944 single persons.<sup>53</sup> Umlazi township, by that time, provided only 865 houses.<sup>54</sup> A large section of the population lived in the compounds, emergency camps and surrounding shantytowns.

By 1970 the housing situation in Durban had slightly improved and about 60 percent of Durban' Africans had been relocated to new townships. In KwaMashu township, the local authorities provided family accommodation for 15 404 families and hostel accommodation for 18 900 single men.<sup>55</sup> The location of Lamont accommodated 2 763 families; the township was earmarked for Indian occupation as from 1980 onwards.<sup>56</sup> Africans living there were to be relocated to Umlazi, KwaMashu or Ntuzuma townships, the latter planned for occupation by the early 1970s. Chesterville residential area which accommodated 1 265 families in four-roomed apartments was also earmarked for white occupation.<sup>57</sup>

The S.J. Smith hostel provided accommodation for 4 412 single men, while the Dalton Road Hostel accommodated 1 452 single men. The Dalton hostel was specifically reserved to accommodate security corps personnel and Africans employed in

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51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 KCAL, KCF 23, Roll 6, Report for January 1963, KwaMashu township manager to the director, 11 February 1963.

54 SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1962, p 148.

55 NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/1, S Bourquin, "Present and future bantu housing development": To all board members, 21 October 1974.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

essential services.<sup>58</sup> At Jacobs, 886 single men were accommodated in the hostel, which catered for employees from the Durban harbour area where most of them, the *togt* workers, were employed, mainly on a shift basis. Other workers were accommodated in privately owned compounds. As for women, they were accommodated at Thokoza hostel. This hostel could take only 900 women, particularly those who worked in the central area of Durban.<sup>59</sup> The total number of Africans residing in hostel accommodation, including the Glebe hostel, amounted to 28 158.<sup>60</sup> The compounds absorbed a total number of 61 000 persons.<sup>61</sup> The township of Umlazi offered family accommodation for not more than 16 000 families by 1970.

During the 1970s, the government drastically reduced its funding for the construction of African urban housing. In 1971 the government indicated that it was going to reduce the funds available for the development of African housing during the 1972/3 fiscal year. During that period, Ntuzuma, a newly established township and located in the north of Durban and Umlazi, and the Umlazi hostel scheme, were in the process of development. The City Council, acting as an agent of the South African Bantu Trust, developed these areas. In response to cuts in government funding, the City Treasurer and Engineer were sanctioned by the Health and Housing Committee to negotiate with the Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development to reconsider the position.<sup>62</sup> The Secretary for

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. See also KCAL, KCAV 987-991, S. Bourquin by I. Edwards, 8 September 1980 - 13 February 1981. Interview dated 6 November 1980.

<sup>59</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/1, Bourquin, "Present and future housing", 21 October 1974.

<sup>60</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 64, Roll 47, estimated population in Bantu residential areas as at 18 August 1970.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 80, Roll 62, Public relations, city engineer's department to the Town Clerk, 28 January 1972.

the BAD indicated that the total amount available for the housing projects was limited to R2,1 million.<sup>63</sup> The City Council could only contribute R1,4 million through its Bantu Services Levy Fund.<sup>64</sup> The total available funds for the whole scheme thus amounted to R3,5 million, and yet the estimated amount required for the progress of the construction programme was R8,36 million.<sup>65</sup> The shortfall was enormous, to the extent that concern was expressed by both the City Council and employer organisations.

The desire to restrict government funding of urban African housing projects drew criticism from the Durban City Council and the Natal Chamber of Industries. The criticism was founded on the fact that government funding was withdrawn at the moment when the Umlazi Glebe hostel project was supposed to be well developed. Hostel accommodation in the Umlazi area was desperately needed, "in the face of an existing backlog of many thousands of housing units".<sup>66</sup> The Umlazi hostel project required a total amount of R5,5 million to ensure that a hostel catering for 19 616 persons was completed.<sup>67</sup> After extensive negotiations between the City Council and the government, the overall funding was increased to R5 million.<sup>68</sup>

In view of government funding problems for urban African housing, the promotion of site-and-service schemes in new areas that were ear-marked for development was suggested by

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 80, Roll 62, The DCC minutes, 10 February 1972.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., The DCC minutes, 13 April, 1972.

the Durban City Council.<sup>69</sup> Instead of utilising the R5 million allocated to African housing, it was suggested that the amount available should be spent on providing initial services on site- and-service schemes. The services to be provided were roads, water, sewerage, street lighting, schools and shopping centres. The occupant of each site was allowed to erect his own shack "on the plot provided, on the understanding that within three years he erected a dwelling to standards specified by the municipal or government authority concerned".<sup>70</sup> Such a policy was accepted by both the municipality and the government. It is fascinating that during the 1950s, the government had insisted on site-and-service schemes developed "in an orderly and tidy manner..."<sup>71</sup>; these were rejected by municipal officials on the basis that they were going to create further shantytowns. During the 1970s, the municipal officials accepted the original government proposals because there were no funds for any other course of action. The plan was approved by the Bantu Affairs Commissioner in 1973.<sup>72</sup>

The mid-1970s witnessed a slow change in the PNAAB's approach to providing housing. Housing schemes were launched in some parts of the Western and Central Districts of Durban. In 1974, KwaMakutha's 317 dilapidated houses were converted into hostel blocks to cater for 2 264 single men who worked in the Amanzimtoti industrial complex.<sup>73</sup> Further hostel accommodation was provided in Klaarwater township, where 1 008 singlemen were housed. In 1974, however, it was projected that

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 173.

<sup>72</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/1, Bourquin, present and future housing, 21 October 1974.

<sup>73</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/1, Bourquin, present and future Bantu housing, p 10

Klaarwater township would eventually be occupied by Indian and coloured residents, while Africans living there would be housed in the proposed KwaZulu township of KwaNgendezi in the Dassenhoek area.<sup>74</sup> KwaNgendezi was originally proclaimed a rural African township area on 18 September 1970. It had to be developed in order to cater for 16 748 Africans living in the Marianhill, Klaarwater and Mpumalanga areas, who desperately needed accommodation.<sup>75</sup> In 1974, the PNAAB offered to develop KwaNgendezi township on behalf of the South African Bantu Trust and that such development had to be on a site-and-service basis. The new residents were allowed to erect their own dwellings with plans approved by the Board. However, residential occupation only took place in mid 1977, when 50 residents from the Pinetown area were relocated to this newly founded township.<sup>76</sup>

Further housing developments took place in the Clermont area, which was directly linked to the growth of New Germany and Westmead areas as major industrial complexes. No decent accommodation was provided for workers in those particular areas; in fact, squatter shanties had developed very rapidly and some landlords had constructed boarding houses (popularly known as "Kuswayo's shed") for renting purposes. Migrant workers recruited mainly by the Frame group of companies spent at least some weeks crowded with other 80 to 100 fellow workers in one of those sheds. For a space to sleep they had to pay 25 cents a day until they could find alternative accommodation. It was only the 1973 strikes which shocked the government and Frame in particular into the realisation that the housing situation needed urgent redress. In 1974, the Kranskloof hostel was constructed and was a joint venture

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p 12.

<sup>75</sup> NA, PNAAB, Chief director's memo for the executive committee, 10 May 1974.

<sup>76</sup> P Morris, A history of black housing in South Africa (South Africa Foundation, 1981), p 105.

between the government and Frame group of companies. The hostels could accommodate only 12 000 workers, of which there were four male blocks and one female block. Plans were also put in place to accommodate married workers. In 1975, KwaDabeka township was thus erected to house married workers with permanent residential rights in Clermont. A site-and-service scheme was launched also in KwaDabeka although with major constraints imposed on Africans when building houses. The land was very inexpensive (R100 a site) but construction had to take place within three months. Houses had to have at least two bedrooms, dining room, bathroom and toilet and yet no building society funding was available to prospective residents since the land was in KwaZulu homeland. The end result was the construction of whatever structures residents could manage and hence the proliferation of shack structures in KwaDabeka. Given this situation, the PNAAB acknowledged its responsibility and the acute shortage of housing and "the tremendous need for suitable accommodation for many thousands of Bantu people living under very adverse circumstances throughout its area of jurisdiction".<sup>77</sup>

### Squatters and shantytowns

In 1974, the chief director of the PNAAB, S.B. Bourquin, pointed out that about 40 percent of Durban's Africans had nowhere to stay, and that the Board had to move very fast to address the housing backlog "before it was too late".<sup>78</sup> As a result of that shortage, squatter settlements sprouted throughout the surrounding environs of metropolitan Durban. The local authorities of Durban had managed to contain the situation in Cato Manor, with only nine shacks remaining to be demolished by 1966, but success in controlling squatter shantytowns was short-lived. Because of the seriousness of the

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<sup>77</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/1, present and future housing, 21 October 1974

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

unavailability of satisfactory housing for the African workers in Durban, the Deputy Minister of Bantu Affairs, Dr P. Koornhof, was compelled to tour the area in November 1968. After assessing the situation, the Deputy Minister commented that:

...we cannot have another Cato Manor and we must solve the problems before they get very much worse...It is not possible to separate such questions as labour and housing...This is a matter of cooperation and the difficulty is not that of a political nature but it is a social, industrial and national problem...<sup>79</sup>

It need scarcely be said that a significant number of Durban's African workers in the 1960s lived in the new townships. A sizeable number of employers of African labour reported that their employees who could afford decent accommodation were denied the right "simply through its non-availability and are obliged to live in squatter shacks".<sup>80</sup> Those workers who rented small rooms in the shacks paid as much as R13 per month.<sup>81</sup> In various instances, some of the workers used the "hot bunk" method whereby one single bed was shared by two people who worked on alternate shifts.<sup>82</sup> Such a position constituted a crisis point which deepened as more African mobile workers made their way into urban areas in the 1960s.

The emergence of shantytowns on Durban's doorstep signalled a housing crisis beyond control, with a conservative estimate of 150 000 people living in the shanties.<sup>83</sup> The

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<sup>79</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/1, Housing, buildings and sites: policy, 27 May 1974 to 15 April 1975, Box 2, director, Natal Chamber of Industries to the Honourable M.C. Botha MP, minister of BAD, 24 April 1974.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> The Natal Mercury, 3 April, 1969.

shack dwellers, Durban's "secret people",<sup>84</sup> constituted another labour pool although they experienced backward and forward movements from one area to another. To those people, the housing situation remained as critical as before with further promises of easing the shortage coming from the Deputy Minister of Bantu Affairs in the late 1960s.<sup>85</sup>

Prior to the establishment of the Port Natal Affairs Administration Board on 1 August 1973, the housing situation continued to deteriorate. A disturbing fact was that African housing lagged behind, with an estimate of 250 000 squatters in Durban in 1971.<sup>86</sup> The resulting deplorable conditions in the shanties, which were described in the newspapers, had become a matter of concern to local authorities.<sup>87</sup> Even the PNAAB, soon after it was launched, admitted that,

As a result of insufficient funds and, to a large extent, lack of expertise and proper planning to provide suitable accommodation for Bantu employed in the areas of jurisdiction of many of the local authorities, the position has been allowed to deteriorate to such an extent that, should a super-human effort not be made immediately, the Board as well as the state could quite easily find itself facing a situation far worse in all respects than the Cato Manor [riots of 1959].<sup>88</sup>

In that regard, the Pinetown-New Germany and District Divisional Committee saw the labour unrest which rocked Durban in the 1970s as a by-product of unsatisfactory housing

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/1, director, Natal Chamber of Industries to the Honourable M.C. Botha.

<sup>86</sup> The Natal Mercury, 21 January 1971.

<sup>87</sup> See The Natal Mercury, 3 April 1969, 9 April 1969, 10 April 1969 and 21 January 1971.

<sup>88</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/1, Bourquin, present and future Bantu housing, 1974, p 2.

circumstances in which the African workers found themselves.<sup>89</sup>

Between 1974 and 1977, the PNAAB demolished shacks from central areas of Durban. Men with employment in Durban who were affected by those demolitions were either accommodated in hostels or given site-and-service stands at the Richmond Farm, Inanda and Folweni areas, while unemployed women and children were simply told to go back to "their place[s] of origin".<sup>90</sup> Those actions by the Board failed to reduce the number of informal settlements - rather, shanties grew up around Durban. The most famous were Bekithemba and Malukazi near Umlazi, Richmond farm near KwaMashu, Lindelani and Bambai, Inanda, Clermont and Dassenhoek.<sup>91</sup> By 1977 it was estimated that about 450 000 people lived in those shanties. By 1985 the number had reached the one million mark.<sup>92</sup> In the 1970s, shack settlements threatened the existence of the apartheid city, with estimates of three million African residents living in squatter camps in and around Durban by the year 2000.<sup>93</sup> In fact, to date, shack settlements have become the order of the day in the peripheries of all South African cities.

### The future control of African townships

In 1962, Durban's city fathers proposed that the government should take-over the administration of KwaMashu in order to relieve the Council financially. The future control of

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<sup>89</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/1, Natal chamber of industries to the Honourable M C Botha, 24 April 1974.

<sup>90</sup> SPP Report, volume 4, Natal, p 202.

<sup>91</sup> SPP Report, volume 4, Natal, pp 198-208; and A. de V Minnaar, Squatters, violence and the future of the informal settlements in the greater Durban Region (Pretoria, HSRC Publications, 1992), pp 3-26.

<sup>92</sup> Minnaar, Squatters, violence and the future, p 21.

<sup>93</sup> Maylam, "The rise and decline of urban apartheid", p 81. The three million mark has not yet been reached.

KwaMashu township became a heated controversy during the 1960s. Differences of opinion on the whole question of control of KwaMashu were expressed by Durban city councillors, welfare organisations, the South African Institute of Race Relations, the Black Sash and government officials. The Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, De Wet Nel, welcomed the idea of a take-over by the government, but with conditions attached.<sup>94</sup> The government insisted that the City Council must purchase a strip of land of 825 acres between KwaMashu township and Dalmeny. The area was meant to link the township with the reserve of Inanda, thereby paving the way for its eventual declaration as a homeland. Initially in the 1950s, Verwoerd's Department of Native Affairs had demanded that KwaMashu be situated very close to the African reserve areas of Inanda, Dalmeny and Released Area 33.<sup>95</sup> An area of 120 acres was to be purchased for the sole purpose of developing "...an 'umbilical cord' road which would connect the township to the city and a further 480 acres for the buffer areas required by the Group Areas Act".<sup>96</sup>

Resistance to the take-over of KwaMashu came first from Durban councillor, J. Jenkins. She expressed concern over government policies towards African welfare, influx control and labour bureaux, policies which, she argued, would have swept away "the last remnants of autonomy in African affairs."<sup>97</sup> Supporting the opposition to the take-over was the chairman of the Durban and District Joint Council of Europeans and Bantu who felt that the City Council had an obligation to look after its inhabitants irrespective of colour, race or gender. In a strongly worded letter to the Town Clerk, the chairman stated that people should not be

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<sup>94</sup> The Daily News, 13 June 1962.

<sup>95</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 169.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp 169-170.

<sup>97</sup> The Natal Mercury, 14 June 1962.

excluded

... merely because the inhabitants are Africans, or because the City Council might otherwise be called upon to make a financial contribution to KwaMashu. It is Durban which benefits from the labour of the residents of KwaMashu... and [it] should...be responsible for their welfare. If through neglect of their health, illness or disease arise, it is Durban which will suffer through infection and through loss of working ability.<sup>98</sup>

The South African Institute of Race Relations, Natal Region,<sup>99</sup> and the Black Sash<sup>100</sup> also voiced their opposition to a government take-over of KwaMashu. The Black Sash was opposed on the basis that the emergence of "independent administrations would create conditions of irreparable chaos and discord."<sup>101</sup>

A considerable number of councillors in the City Council favoured the government take-over of KwaMashu on the basis that financial responsibilities and rental losses would be shifted to the government. The Mayor of Durban reported an annual loss of approximately R230 000 in arrear rentals and operational costs in the township.<sup>102</sup> Some residents of KwaMashu had embarked on a rent boycott from the time when they were relocated to the new township.

Many residents could not afford the rentals of over R6 per month. The City Council also argued that the control and administration of the two townships would be effective under

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<sup>98</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 24, Roll 7, the Town Clerk to director, Bantu administration, 22 June 1962.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., SA institute of race relations to the Town Clerk, 20 August 1962.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., the Black Sash to the Town Clerk, 28 June 1962.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., Bantu administration Committee, minutes, 24 October 1963.

one authority.<sup>103</sup> However, in 1966, while the City Council and the government were still engaged in negotiations over the control of KwaMashu, the state, without notice, seriously cut its funding of African housing projects in the townships.<sup>104</sup> The move by the government was strongly opposed by the Durban Chamber of Commerce, the Natal Chamber of Industries and the City Council.<sup>105</sup> Government actions led to protests from commerce, industry, and local authorities. Cuts in funding meant creating more problems for African housing, which was seriously lagging behind. Protests could no longer be ignored, and the municipality recommended to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner (CBAC) that the take-over should be postponed until 1970.<sup>106</sup> On 26 August 1968, the Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development, after an intensive review of the reports of the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner for Natal, suspended the take-over of KwaMashu.<sup>107</sup>

The take-over of KwaMashu by the government remained an issue during the first half of the 1970s. From 1973 onwards, the township of KwaMashu was placed under the administration of the Port Natal Affairs Administration Board, in conjunction with the Durban City Council, and the largely toothless Urban Bantu Council. The Port Natal Affairs Administration Board controlled issues relating to leasehold rights, alterations to property, allocation of houses and visitors' and sub-tenants' permits. The take-over issue ceased to exist in April 1977 when the township was finally incorporated into the homeland

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., Department of Bantu administration to the Town Clerk, 7 August 1962. See also SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1962, p 150.

<sup>104</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 80, Roll 62, the DCC, minutes, 10 February 1972.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 24, Roll 7, Department of Bantu administration, 15 November 1968.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

of KwaZulu.<sup>108</sup>

By the 1970s, the development of formal housing in various African townships ceased owing to the shortage of funds, an event which had serious implications for both the urban working class and government policy of segregation. It was a period when influx control measures, which had been less than successful in any event, totally collapsed in Durban. Further migration resulted soon after KwaZulu gained self-governing status, which facilitated greater movement from the surrounding reserves to Durban since "the tribal authorities had neither the means nor the incentives to enforce a system of control devised and administered by the Department of Bantu Administration and Development in the 1960s".<sup>109</sup> Moreover, the apartheid city, as already stated, was riddled with contradictions, clashes and struggles between the central state, local authorities and capital over the issue of African housing.

### Urban African community facilities

The construction of African housing created a string of social demands - namely for transport, health services, recreation facilities, schools and welfare amenities. In KwaMashu township in 1961, two schools, twelve shops, two creches, a clinic, a swimming bath, three football fields and three all-weather tennis courts were provided. Furthermore, there were seven lower primary, four higher primary and one post-primary school, two churches, a temporary beerhall and 22 traders.<sup>110</sup> Undoubtedly, social services were provided, but the struggle over such services in general was not merely over their provision but over the very nature of what was provided.

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<sup>108</sup> SAIRR, Natal Region, KwaMashu - a Black township, information sheet, February 1979.

<sup>109</sup> Hindson (et al), From violence to reconstruction, p 10.

<sup>110</sup> SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1961, p 179.

For instance, schools were constructed for the African people under the Bantu Education system, but what came from the system itself is best captured by the phrase, "poisoned Black education"<sup>111</sup> - the phrase used by the former Director of Planning for the Department of Bantu Education, Dr Ken Hartshorne, to describe African education. On the whole, more and more students acquired the rudiments of that type of education in the expanded school system, however, as Mabin states, "imperfect their conditions and performance".<sup>112</sup>

It was not long after the occupation of the new houses in the townships that voices of concern began to be heard. The site and service scheme and the log cabins provided in KwaMashu township were unsatisfactory. Commenting on such schemes, Bourquin recalls that,

We did this by acquiring a large number of pre-fabricated wooden hutments, erected in one corner of a site which was serviced with water and streets...The occupants would then eventually develop a permanent home on these sites. The site and service scheme was condemned by the Urban Bantu Council (UBC) at KwaMashu itself - they regarded this as a festering sore.<sup>113</sup>

The log cabins which existed in KwaMashu neighbourhood units Two and Four were criticised by resident women as "not suitable for human habitation as they were worse than the slums in Cato Manor".<sup>114</sup> Certainly, some sections of the new townships experienced debilitating conditions. C.C. Majola, a resident committee member, noted that "conditions in KwaMashu

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<sup>111</sup> The Citizen, 19 January 1978.

<sup>112</sup> Mabin, "The dynamics of urbanisation", p 34.

<sup>113</sup> KCAL, KCAV 174- 175, S B Bourquin by A Manson and D Collins, 18 October 1979.

<sup>114</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 30, Roll 13, 2, Publicity, propaganda and unrest - general correspondence BA 28/40, 1954- 1969, R G Wilson, township manager, KwaMashu to director, Bantu administration, S B Bourquin, 23 February 1962. See also KCF 23, Roll 6, KwaMashu residents' committee, 18 February 1962, memo-grievances submitted by KwaMashu women.

were very poor, ...there was a feeling at one stage that we were like the Israelites of the Old Testament - it was better in Egypt than here".<sup>115</sup> In Umlazi township, water supplies closely resembled those which existed in the emergency camps. Communal taps in the streets were by 1966 still in use by sections of the resident community. However, a considerable number of houses had their own taps installed.<sup>116</sup> Pit latrines were utilised in Umlazi. The Department of Bantu Administration acknowledged that such a facility was "causing concern as the position has been reached where it is extremely difficult in many instances to find suitable places on the sites to dig the necessary new pits apart from the other unsatisfactory features of this type of latrine".<sup>117</sup>

The township residents challenged the City Council to remove water-meters since they had become a source of dissatisfaction. In 1966 the *Voice of KwaMashu*, an underground organ of the banned ANC, submitted a memorandum to the Mayor of Durban to consider water charges in the townships.<sup>118</sup> As noted by Edwards, "In the log cabin scheme, water and sanitation facilities were shared between two cabins, while in the site-and-service scheme full water-borne sanitation and water facilities were provided on each site".<sup>119</sup> The normal rate charged for water was 18 cents per 1000 gallons. Residents complained that sometimes they paid R2 per month on water alone; they called for a standardised system of water

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<sup>115</sup> KCAL, KCAV 142, C.C. Majola by D. Collins and A. Manson, 20 June 1979, p 5.

<sup>116</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 63, Roll 46, Department of Bantu administration to the Town Clerk, 15 August 1966.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 30, Roll 13, 2, the voice of KwaMashu to the mayor of Durban etc, 24 June 1966.

<sup>119</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 182.

charges at a flat rate of 40 cents per month per household.<sup>120</sup>

The removal of waste from the townships came under severe public criticism in the 1960s. Refuse was sometimes collected only once a fortnight. Uncollected garbage lay in piles in the township streets and gave off an unpleasant smell. The reason for the inadequate collection of household refuse, according to the municipal officials, was the shortage of labour force in the cleansing services. However, the main reason was more a matter of finance than a shortage of labour. As for the labour force engaged in the service, most were unskilled and poorly paid and involved in a job with low status; they left the service at a high rate.<sup>121</sup>

With the development of formal housing in KwaMashu, transport agreements had to be finalised between the South African Railways, bus companies and the City Council. Railway service was provided. Furthermore, the Public Utility Bus Transport Company (PUTCO) was contracted to provide the necessary transport for the African workers.<sup>122</sup> While the provision of the railway and bus services marked a way forward, problems associated with fares and with the availability of buses during peak hours were raised by resident workers.

In 1962 the residents of KwaMashu proposed that bus fares should be reduced from seven cents to five cents per journey to town.<sup>123</sup> The fares charged by PUTCO were considered high. Moreover, African workers who lived in KwaMashu but were employed to the south of the city incurred extra expenses from bus and rail termini to their places of employment. Workers

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<sup>120</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 30, Roll 13, 2, the voice of KwaMashu, 24 June 1966.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Msomi, 16 October 1992.

<sup>122</sup> See Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 186.

<sup>123</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 30, Roll 13, 2, memo: "grievances submitted by KwaMashu women".

complained that those transport costs strained their budgets, unlike transport to and from Cato Manor shantytown. Cato Manor was very close to the city centre and industrial areas and most workers preferred to walk rather than to "waste" their hard-earned money. The distance between KwaMashu and places of work meant a further financial burden on workers.

On 8 February 1962, KwaMashu women marched to the Township Manager's office to present their grievances. They demanded a "reduction of bus fares; that the stage system be introduced to enable passengers alighting or boarding buses along the route to pay less; that reduced fares for children be introduced".<sup>124</sup> The demand by resident women was supported by the banned Congress Alliance in a memorandum submitted to the KwaMashu Township Manager.<sup>125</sup> The Congress Alliance called for a reduction in bus fares to 4 cents. It also challenged the government and the municipality to consider subsidising the costs of transport.<sup>126</sup>

During the 1960s, complaints about transport were expressed in each and every African township. In Chesterville, residents' complaints about the bus system were submitted by the banned Congress Alliance in 1962.<sup>127</sup> The residents complained that buses failed to operate according to stipulated times. Moreover, passengers along the route were left behind because buses tended to wait until they were full at the main Chesterville terminus. Furthermore, there was an acute shortage of buses at the City terminus particularly during the

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., Department of Bantu administration, S B Bourquin to the township manager, memorandum of grievances submitted to the KwaMashu township manager by the Congress Alliance, 14 February 1962.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., Memorandum of grievances at Chesterville location submitted to the superintendent of the Chesterville location by the Congress Alliance, 14 February 1962.

peak hours that is, between 4 pm and 7 pm.<sup>128</sup> Maureen Mothwa remarks:

Buses were there but few and they used to go at certain times. At Lamontville there was one morning bus which went as early as 5 am. If one would be left by that bus one would be late at work, and your money would be cut and have a bad record of late coming. In the evening, when going home if you were left by a bus you would become a victim of the tsotsis [robbers].<sup>129</sup>

The provision of railway and bus services in the townships was viewed by the government as a major development for the African people. However, in line with government policies of apartheid, the National Transport Commission (NTC) made a recommendation to the Durban City Council to implement total segregation in the transport sector.<sup>130</sup> The directive by the NTC was rejected by the Council on the basis that "the City Council had always applied partial segregation...(and) did not intend to implement full apartheid".<sup>131</sup> The City Council also rejected the idea on consideration of its financial implications. However, in 1968 the City Council reversed its earlier decision and passed by-laws which required total segregation in the transport service. Prior to this, in 1962, the Congress Alliance had submitted a memorandum to the City Council opposing any policy which segregated Africans on the basis of race and colour.<sup>132</sup> Generally the transport system was poor and the Chairman of the Ningizimu Urban Bantu Council, A.W.G. Champion, commented:

While our transport is bad, those of us who have

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with M. Mothwa by J. Nala: 1973 research project, pp 3-4.

<sup>130</sup> NA, Durban city council, 3/DBN 1/1/2/14, 15 October 1953 to 13 October 1976, minutes of council-in-committee, 1 June 1960.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p 2.

<sup>132</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 30, Roll 13, see memo by the Congress Alliance, 1962.

motor cars are being charged if found with their friends in their cars on suspicion that they are competing with taxis. This does not apply to other races. Traffic officers are very keen to stop Bantu cars while they allow other races' cars to pass on.<sup>133</sup>

In 1961 there were seven lower primary, four higher primary and one post-primary school in KwaMashu township. The City Council's initial plans were to construct one secondary and four primary schools in each respective neighbourhood unit.<sup>134</sup> The plans were sidelined while the City Council concentrated on the construction of houses. However, in response to the City Council's plans on schools, the government, in line with its Bantu Education system, insisted that schools had to be established. Although schools were established in all African townships during the 1960s and 1970s, a general complaint was that there were too few of them. For instance, in 1975 the Chairman of the KwaMashu Urban Bantu Council, Z. Dhloho, submitted a memorandum to the Minister of the BAD, P. Janson, complaining that in KwaMashu only one high school and three secondary schools existed.<sup>135</sup> That limited number of secondary schools served more than 22 000 families.

African residents resented the compulsory school levy of twenty cents per month introduced in 1962 to assist in financing schools. By 1972 the school levy was increased to 30 cents per month.<sup>136</sup> The school levy was imposed on African residents and they felt that they were "the lowest paid

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<sup>133</sup> KCAL, File 10, Bourquin papers, miscellaneous cuttings, reports and correspondence, KCM 55327, A.W.G. Champion - urban Bantu council - Ningizimu chairman to the Hon T.N.H. Janson, MP and deputy minister of Bantu administration and education, 14 January 1975.

<sup>134</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 187.

<sup>135</sup> The Natal Mercury, 4 June 1975.

<sup>136</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 80, Roll 62, the DCC minutes, Bantu education, 13 April 1972, p 3.

section of the population, being treated unfairly as the only community required to pay such [a] levy".<sup>137</sup> The Congress Alliance called for the complete withdrawal of such a levy which was paid for the advancement of "Dr Verwoerd's poisonous Bantu education".<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, the Alliance condemned the Republic's Bantu Education system :

We wish to place on record that we are opposed to the system of Bantu Education as we would be opposed to any other special system of education decided for any particular section of our population. We are satisfied that there should be one system of education for all and one standard of education.<sup>139</sup>

The use of a vernacular language, Zulu, as a medium of instruction from standard one to six was greatly resented by parents.<sup>140</sup> C.C. Majola explains :

The underlying principle of Bantu Education was that of the medium of instruction which had to be the mother tongue and Zulu had not developed sufficiently to communicate, say a mathematical theory to a student in Zulu...thus lowering the quality of education. You can't teach history in Zulu, actually all the science subjects cannot be taught in the vernaculars.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 30, Roll 13, memorandum of grievances at Lamont location - submitted to the superintendent of the Lamontville location by the Congress Alliance, 14 February 1962.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., Memorandum of grievances submitted to the KwaMashu township manager by the Congress Alliance, 14 February 1962; and Bourquin to colonel Fraser, officer commanding, Natal Command, 3 August 1962 - "The voice of the African National Congress by the Durban regional committee of the ANC", 28/9 April 1962.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., Memo of grievances at Chesterville Location, 14 February 1962.

<sup>140</sup> KCAL, File 10, KCM 55327, Champion to the Hon Janson, 14 January 1975. See also NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/BAB/1, Bantu advisory bodies, central, Box 79, 12 September 1973 to 31 July 1976, minutes of the KwaMashu UBC, 1 December 1975.

<sup>141</sup> KCAL, KCAV 142, C.C. Majola by D. Collins and A. Mason, 20 June 1979, p 2.

By the 1970s, the absence of adequate classrooms in KwaMashu had reached critical proportions. In KwaMashu township, at least nine of its primary schools were heavily enrolled, with a shortage of classrooms for 2034 pupils.<sup>142</sup> The crisis which faced those schools was countered by the adoption of the "platoon system under which two sets of children and teachers used the school premises at different hours".<sup>143</sup> The crisis in African education was caused by lack of adequate government funding. For instance, in 1972 the budget for African education amounted to R73 392 300 for the whole country including the bantustans, as compared to R395 061 000 for white education.<sup>144</sup>

Health facilities were also totally inadequate in the townships. In KwaMashu, for example, a small polyclinic was provided. Yet even that institution did not have ambulance services, was hard hit by the shortage of medical personnel and admitted a limited number of patients on a daily basis.<sup>145</sup> The nearest hospital for the African residents in the townships was the King Edward VIII hospital in Durban. Quite clearly, facilities were limited, and the City Council was mainly concerned about minimising costs. The residents complained about housing, rentals, education, community facilities, medical services, sanitation, refuse collection, burial fees and crime. One of the residents commented: "The very existence of a township like KwaMashu is itself a problem from which other problems flow".<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 80, Roll 62, the DCC, minutes, Bantu education, 13 April 1972, p 3.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., The DCC, minutes, "financing and costs of Bantu education", 10 May 1973.

<sup>145</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/BAB/1, minutes of the KwaMashu UBC, 23 February 1976.

<sup>146</sup> SAIRR, Natal region, KwaMashu - a Black township, February 1979.

## Conclusion

The cornerstone of spatial separation has been the African township which, by and large, failed to provide adequate shelter to its African underclasses. Needless to say the provision of housing in those townships fell far short of what was required and the immediate result was the proliferation of shanties around Durban and conditions of social hardship and instability. Although shack cities were not a financial burden on the city fathers, nonetheless they "posed enormous problems of social and political control".<sup>147</sup>

The main thrust of this chapter is to show that this kind of lifestyle impacts on workers and work organisations such as trade unions. An analysis, for instance, of the causes of the 1973 Durban strikes and beyond should not only be searched purely from work-oriented problems and market forces and influences, but also from the residential areas where the general workers lived with their families. In other words, the totalising effects of the lack of adequate housing plus debilitating conditions in both townships and shanties were far-reaching and created discontent among workers, particularly during the 1970s. The townships, shanties, hostels and compounds, therefore, are not "total institutions where protest is vigorously repressed, but rather act as hothouses of discontent".<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Maylam, "Explaining the apartheid city", p 35,

<sup>148</sup> Stichter, Migrant labourers, p 174.

## Chapter Six

### From Mainstream Politics to Township Politics: Resistance and Collaboration in Durban, 1960-1975

#### Introduction

The 1960s constituted a decade of political repression, state intervention in African life yet also an era of unprecedented economic growth. During that period, the apartheid state gained control of the situation of national unrest when it banned the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), which led to their disorganisation and fragmentation. These organisations sank into dull passivity as the state assumed greater powers; in fact, the government had managed to contain African popular resistance and protest. Despite this, the underground African National Congress remained committed to the transformation of society through carefully monitored sabotage campaigns by its newly founded armed wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK). However, between 1961 and 1964, the ANC failed substantially to challenge the state and its fairly isolated sabotage campaigns declined almost to vanishing point. This failure marked the beginning of the era of fragmentation of existing political structures and a turn towards exile. It was also a period of a turn away from both industrial and "popular" politics.

Owing to the suppression of African political organisations and the demise of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) by mid 1965, community organisations fulfilled a key role in the struggle against apartheid. The African community no longer challenged the state directly, but indirectly, by attacking local government structures

established within the townships, such as Advisory Boards, Resident Committees and Urban Bantu Councils. These establishments were generally perceived as institutions of the oppressor, the apartheid state, and those who served on them were condemned as *impimpis* (sell-outs), stooges or collaborators. As rightly noted by R. Bloch and P. Wilkinson, such institutions were dominated by the "most reactionary elements" of the emerging African businessmen, mainly traders and "generally became the vehicles for the often narrow grievances and aspirations of a disconnected petty bourgeoisie".<sup>1</sup> Consequently, conflicts arose among a number of population elements: township residents, the rising African businessmen who dominated local state structures, and various groups dominant in civic politics. These conflicts marked a new dimension in African resistance politics: township based politics became dominant.

This chapter is primarily concerned with struggles in the townships soon after the ban of African political organisations in 1960 up to the mid 1970s. It begins by examining the broader political context in which community politics was born. Essentially, it is about the "grassroots", which B. Bozzoli described as

...a history [that] should resonate the lives of ordinary people rather than reflect the deliberations of the ruling classes or the theoretical concerns of structural abstractionism.<sup>2</sup>

It is about some struggles from below; it looks at how township people resisted and also collaborated with the apartheid state during the absence of political representatives. It does not, however, intend to present a "politically correct history - a history of racial oppression

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<sup>1</sup> R. Bloch and P. Wilkinson, "Urban control and the popular struggle: a survey of state urban policy, 1920-1970", Africa Perspective, XX (1982), p 18.

<sup>2</sup> B. Bozzoli, "History, experience and culture", in B. Bozzoli (ed), Town and countryside in the Transvaal: capitalist penetration and popular response (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983), p 8.

and heroic struggle"<sup>3</sup> of Africans or, perhaps, that of the ANC but rather an analysis of how ordinary people responded to apartheid between 1960 and 1975.

### African political organisations and the crisis in Durban

On 8 April 1960, the African National Congress and Pan-Africanist Congress were banned. It was at this time that the popular struggle, particularly that waged by the ANC in Durban, which had flourished during and soon after the Cato Manor riots of 1959, suffered a severe blow. The 1959 riots had given the Congress Alliance the upper hand in rallying African mass support, especially from illicit entrepreneurs and women who were threatened by shack demolitions and relocations to new townships. However, the process of creating political consciousness among African workers and the community at large was weakened by the events that followed in 1960. The massacre at Sharpeville on 21 March and the subsequent state bannings of the ANC and PAC led to the two organisations abandoning the policy of non-violence and resorting to the armed struggle.

In 1960, the apartheid state in South Africa, which forced African political organisations to operate underground and to embark on the policy of sabotage, marked the beginning of a new era. The adoption of sabotage activities by the ANC arose out of a debate about the advantages and disadvantages of the armed struggle and/or non-violence as alternative ways to bring change within South Africa. Party cadres and Marxist and liberal scholars became involved in the armed struggle debate throughout the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>4</sup> This debate will not

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<sup>3</sup> P. Maylam, "Tensions within the practice of history", South African Historical Journal, 33 (1995), p 11.

<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth debate on the armed struggle see for instance, C. Bundy, "Around which corner?: revolutionary theory and contemporary South Africa", Transformation, 1 (1986); A. Leruno [M. Harmell], "Forms and methods of struggle -the South African democratic revolution", African Communist,

be elaborated on in this chapter since its major focus is on community politics.

The "Year of Africa", 1960, was a year in which the slowly growing wave of African nationalism reached tidal proportions, with President de Gaulle of France granting independence to 14 French African colonies. It was during this period that African national consciousness in South Africa grew apace with the "winds of change... blowing through this continent", and as H. Macmillan went on to explain, "whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact".<sup>5</sup>

What is intriguing about African political struggles in Durban is that the roots of support for the ANC on the part of the people of Cato Manor shantytown increased during "the destruction of [Cato Manor] and the early years of life in KwaMashu: that period immediately prior to and then the years after the ANC was banned".<sup>6</sup>

At its annual conference in 1959, the ANC decided to launch an Anti-Pass Campaign. Demonstrations were to be held on 31 March, 15 April and 26 June 1960.<sup>7</sup> Should the government fail to respond to their demands, all Africans were called upon to burn their passes in the "no bail, no defence, no fine campaign".<sup>8</sup> R. Sobukwe, the leader of the PAC, hijacked the

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9 (April/ May 1962); and H. Wolpe, Race, class and the apartheid state (Paris, UNESCO Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> The British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan's address to Parliament in Cape Town in 1960 as cited in A.J.C. Daniel, "Radical resistance to minority rule in South Africa, 1906-1965" (published PhD thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1975), p 267; also cited in N. Mandela, Long walk to freedom: the autobiography of Nelson Mandela (London, Abacus, 1994), p 279.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, "Mkhumbane our home", p 196.

<sup>7</sup> R. Lambert, "Political unionism in South Africa: the South African congress of trade unions, 1955-1965" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988), p 427.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

ANC programme of action and announced that supporters and the entire leadership of the PAC were to surrender voluntarily for arrest on 21 March 1960.<sup>9</sup> The ANC was invited to participate in the PAC's campaign but turned down the invitation.

On Monday, 21 March 1960, 69 African supporters of the PAC were shot down by the South African police at Sharpeville. In reaction to the massacre, the President-General of the ANC, Chief A. Luthuli, called for a day of mourning, to be held on the following Monday. In Durban, the African people observed a day of mourning. Indian shops were closed; few workers reported to their workplaces, particularly in the Mobeni area where the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) had enormous support.

Following the government's declaration of a State of Emergency, many leaders and supporters of the Anti-Pass Campaign were arrested on 30 March. This prompted further strikes and demonstrations, which rocked Durban for almost ten days. Cato Manor shantytown dwellers emerged once again and took centre-stage in demonstrations. The shantytown dwellers marched to the Bantu Affairs office where they demanded the release of their leaders. These residents were later joined by the residents of Clermont, S.J. Smith Hostel and Lamontville.<sup>10</sup> While the demonstrations were in process, the state responded on 8 April by an act of parliament, banning the ANC and PAC. The government's actions dampened the people's spirit; they lost hope in "freedom in our lifetime". Despite this setback, African political activities in Durban, expressed mainly through the ANC, continued underground in African townships.

The months immediately following the declaration of the State of Emergency in the country saw ANC activities wane. Strikes and demonstrations were called for by the underground ANC, but very little support was forthcoming. For instance, on 19 April 1960, the ANC called for a week-long stay-away which

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<sup>9</sup> Mandela, Long walk to freedom, pp 279-280.

<sup>10</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 9 April 1960.

did not receive mass support. For the majority of people, continued open activities were no longer feasible under the State of Emergency; they feared the state's repressive actions. New tactics had to be developed, as N. Mandela writes,

We would not disband but carry on from underground. We would have to depart from the democratic procedures outlined in the ANC's constitution of holding conferences, branch meetings and public gatherings. New strategies had to be created for communication with unbanned Congress organisations.<sup>11</sup>

The ANC's organisational structure in Durban was re-channelled through civic and trade union organisations. In KwaMashu, Chesterville, Umlazi and Lamontville, resident associations were formed.<sup>12</sup> In Cato Manor where there were some remaining shack dwellers, the Emergency Camp Welfare and Development Board (which functioned in the manner of an Advisory Board) elections were contested and won by Ruth Shabane, a well-known member of the ANC Women's League.<sup>13</sup> Before 1949, the ANC was divided over the issue of whether or not to participate in "dummy" institutions like the Advisory Boards. In 1949, however, the ANC argued:

It is essential to realise that mere membership or participation in the political, social, cultural or other institutions established by the oppressor does not necessarily imply collaboration with the oppressor. Collaboration must depend on the nature and function of the institution and also the activities of members within the institution. It is possible under certain conditions to use the institutions of the oppressor as an auxiliary force for the downfall of the ruling class.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Mandela, Long walk to freedom, p 301.

<sup>12</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 19 November 1960. The newspaper did not state that Resident Associations were actually fronts for the ANC but simply mentioned officials of those associations who apparently were well-known members of the banned ANC.

<sup>13</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 12 March 1960.

<sup>14</sup> As cited in G. Baines, "The contradictions of community politics: the African petty bourgeoisie and the new Brighton advisory board, c.1917-1952", Journal of African History, 35

Up to the time of its banning, the ANC granted "its members freedom of choice, and active members of Congress [were] to be found on the statutory bodies".<sup>15</sup> However, after 1960, a complete boycott of government institutions like Advisory Boards was put in place though some branches chose to ignore the directive. Instead, the banned ANC established its own Residents Associations in the townships with the dual purpose of consolidating its membership and of "keeping open the lines of communication by which grievances could be aired to the authorities".<sup>16</sup> An official of the banned ANC stated:

Our object then was to organise, to raise the different branches of the African National Congress so as to keep the organisation alive, that it should not die, so that we could carry on the objects of the organisation, which we did before it was banned.<sup>17</sup>

Reference will be made later to these associations.

The other platform utilised by the ANC was SACTU, which was not banned. Various trade unions affiliated to SACTU provided a forum for ANC activities to take place. It was speculated that the General Workers' Union in Durban was the ANC in disguise.<sup>18</sup> The union's meetings were addressed by prominent ANC members and "symbols associated with the ANC were adapted by the union, the salute... resembled that of the ANC and a new cry, 'Amandla Ngawethu' (power is ours), replaced 'Mayibuye i Afrika' (come Africa)".<sup>19</sup> A sizeable number of meetings of that particular nature took place in

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(1994), p 94.

<sup>15</sup> L. Kuper, An African bourgeoisie: race, class, and politics in South Africa (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1965), pp 328-329.

<sup>16</sup> E. Feit, Urban revolt in South Africa, 1960-1964 (Evanston, North-Western University Press, 1971), p 104.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Feit, Urban revolt in South Africa, 1960 -1964, p 163.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Durban, organised by SACTU. For example, in 1961, V. Mini, an underground organiser for the ANC, called for a bus boycott, or a stay-at-home strike, for June 26, which was observed and indeed became violent. Incidents of the stoning and burning of buses were reported.<sup>20</sup> Another union meeting worth citing was the one addressed in Durban by G. Mbhele, organising secretary of the banned ANC. At that meeting, Mbhele read a message from Chief Luthuli and went on to call the people to "smash and render unworkable Bantu Authorities both in rural and in urban areas".<sup>21</sup>

### The ANC's sabotage campaigns

In another development, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), the military wing of the Congress Alliance, was formed in 1961. It was believed at that time that the pre-1960 forms of resistance were no longer applicable to the new situation. In his remarks on the birth of MK, B. Turok stated:

...Even mass action seemed impossible because of the repression - we had to show that we could hit back - that it's possible. There comes a certain point where repression is so overwhelming that the masses are in danger of demoralisation...Inflict a blow on the tyrant and show him he's vulnerable. The morale of the people will rise and they will get the message and begin to inflict blows.<sup>22</sup>

The regional command of MK in Durban consisted of the entire leadership of SACTU, the Communist Party and members of the unions affiliated to SACTU.<sup>23</sup> Meetings of *Umkhonto* were conducted in B. Nair's office at SACTU headquarters.<sup>24</sup> Local

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<sup>20</sup> New Age, 2 February 1961; See Feit, Urban revolt, p 164.

<sup>21</sup> New Age, 26 October 1961.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Ben Turok as cited in Lambert, "Political unionism", pp 446-7.

<sup>23</sup> Tom Lodge, Black politics in South Africa since 1945 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1990 ed), p 235.

<sup>24</sup> See Bruno Mtolo, Umkhonto we Sizwe: the road to the left (Durban, Drakensberg Press, 1966).

cells were established in November 1961 under the leadership of C. Ndhlovu, B. Nair, M.P. Naicker and M. D. Naicker.<sup>25</sup> From that time, the regional commander of *Umkhonto* in Durban was C. Ndhlovu, who by 1962 had established sections in Durban, KwaMashu, Clerwood and Hammarsdale.<sup>26</sup>

The established cells in the townships embarked on political "study groups" - whereby they were "to learn and teach politics [by] a secret method so that each and every one would in the future be in a position to teach others".<sup>27</sup> Such study groups were part and parcel of the Mandela Plan (M Plan). The M Plan, as noted in the *Congress Voice*, the underground news sheet of the Congress Alliance, was meant to ensure that "... members [should be] aware of the immense task facing them and the grave responsibilities resting upon them. To start a house-to-house propaganda campaign for the purpose of raising the political consciousness of the masses...".<sup>28</sup> The M Plan was strenuously implemented in Lamontville township where "people ...were already schooled in Congress politics".<sup>29</sup> S.K. Ngubese, an ANC Lamontville branch chairman in the 1960s, recalls:

Mandela's plan... came about during the banning of public meetings where people found standing in the streets could not exceed the number of four. So it was at this stage that Nelson Mandela decided that three would constitute a meeting and the three would go out and organise three others... The number grew. By the end of the day, you have spoken to more than 1000 people. That is what they called M Plan, so if there was any message to be conveyed to Africans then it would be conveyed that way by dedicated people who would work the whole day, holding meetings of threes, right round. People of

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<sup>25</sup> Feit, Urban revolt, pp 93-4.

<sup>26</sup> The Natal Mercury, 14 February 1964 ; and Feit, Urban revolt, p 93.

<sup>27</sup> Feit, Urban revolt, p 223.

<sup>28</sup> Congress Voice, volume 11, 2 (May 1960).

<sup>29</sup> Killie Campbell Africana Library (hereafter KCAL), KCAV 184 and 185, S.K. Ngubese by A. Mason and D. Collins, 28 November 1979, p 7.

Lamontville knew about this, but this was not just told to everybody.<sup>30</sup>

State repression during the State of Emergency created an impression among Africans that the popular struggles of the late 1950s were over. Even SACTU, which had continued organising at factory level during the State of Emergency, felt that the existing political climate was no longer conducive to proper worker organisation. Because of this view, SACTU's educational programmes undertaken by factory leaders were "moved into the townships, where shop stewards themselves ran the classes at factory level. The shop stewards met together in the townships because it was safer".<sup>31</sup> Despite state bannings, arrests and detention of SACTU members and officials who were linked to underground activities of the ANC, the union movement survived the Emergency still intact.<sup>32</sup>

While unions organised and recruited workers to join MK, the beginning of sabotage campaigns in Durban brought about new hope. As a SACTU organiser recounted:

There was generally speaking a new confidence, despite the repression of the state. People were tremendously inspired. We always had messages conveyed to us. They always said, tell the boys that

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Lambert, "Political unionism", p 451.

<sup>32</sup> For those SACTU members who were banned between 1960 and 1965, a short list could be helpful. The names were: Elizabeth Abrahams (1964), Phyllis Altman (1963), Moses Bhengu (1964), Nontembu Lucy Dlamini (1963), John Ferris (1964), Melville Fletcher (1961), John Gaetsewe (1964), Leon Levy (1962), Elijah Loza (1963, 1968, 1976-77, died in detention), Moses Mabhida (1963), July Makaringe (1963), Lot Malane (1963), Zolile Malind (1960 -1973), Livingstone Mancoko (1963), Shanti Naidoo (1963), Billy Nair (1961), Muzuvikile Ndhlovu (1963), Lawrence Ndzanga (1963, died in detention in 1975), Rose Schlachter (1963), M.W. Shope (1962), Archibald Sibeko (1960), Miriam Sithole (1963), Daniel Tloome (1963), and Shadreck Tole (1963). For a comprehensive list, see Dudley Horner (et al), The Wiehahn Commission: a summary (Workshop Organised by the Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit [SADRU] and editors of the SALB, May 1979), pp 77-9.

they are doing a damn good piece of work... Once the lights went off in Durban for about 15 minutes. We had hit three important power lines leading from the Umgeni power station... People sent messages, 'Give it to them.' They were inspired - the state had gone too far, workers needed a boost to their morale. These responses made us realise that our actions were really an expression of the will of the people at that time. You had to understand the period and ordinary workers' feelings...<sup>33</sup>

Sabotage activities by MK cadres were widely reported in and around Durban. In December 1961, an increasing number of bomb attacks and the burning of sugarcane plantations were reported.<sup>34</sup> These actions marked the beginning of a sabotage campaign that lasted for almost three years. The sabotage activities which took place in December 1961 were masterminded by members of the Natal Regional Committee, B. Mtolo, R. Kasrils, D. Ndawonde and S.E. Mtshali.<sup>35</sup> During this period, S. Mbanjwa, a recruiting organiser of MK, an official of SACTU and a member of the underground Communist Party, was chosen to lead Umkhonto's Natal Regional Committee. In January 1963, J. Mpanza, an MK cadre, bombed the offices of the Nationalist newspaper in Durban, *Die Natalier*.<sup>36</sup> Municipal beerhalls, the long-standing enemy of women in Cato Manor, became targets as well. In February 1963, a bomb exploded at the Bell Street beerhall, injuring three people.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, houses belonging to residents defined as government stooges or

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<sup>33</sup> Interview of Unnamed Activist, 19 May 1986 as cited in Lambert, "Political unionism", p 452.

<sup>34</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 30 December 1961; and R. Kasrils, Armed and dangerous: my undercover struggle against apartheid (Oxford, Heinemann, 1993), pp 51-54. Kasrils notes: "We had been training these units in the use of home-made petrol bombs, and unleashed an offensive against goods trains, government offices and the large sugar-cane estates and wattle plantations". p 51.

<sup>35</sup> Kasrils, Armed and dangerous, p 58; and Mtolo, Umkhonto we Sizwe, p 19.

<sup>36</sup> Daniel, "Radical resistance", p 354.

<sup>37</sup> Ilanga lase Natal, 16 February 1963.

collaborators were bombed. On 12 December 1962, three houses belonging to C. Mbutho, L.S. Makhwaza and W. Dladla, all members of the KwaMashu Residents Committee, were bombed.<sup>38</sup> Attacks of that nature, as Feit writes,

were designed to intimidate those who were in any way collaborating with the government - not only informers and policemen but also representatives of chiefs or members of Advisory Boards... Those who were suspected of collaboration were identified, often in ANC leaflets or in graffiti scrawled or painted on the walls of washrooms and other public buildings.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout 1963, the Durban branch of *Umkhonto* remained active in sabotage activities, despite an increased informer network. In 1963, a railway line was blown up, and a bomb exploded at the Bantu Affairs Commissioner's office.

### The reasons for the discontinuation of campaigns

By the beginning of 1964, the activities of MK in Durban had declined. Through a network of African informers, the police had been able to penetrate the ANC underground structures and activities. Even before the state banned the ANC and PAC, African informers existed in townships and shantytowns in and around Durban. Reverend T.W.S. Mthembu of Durban, a Lutheran pastor, born around 1915, recruited informers on behalf of the government.<sup>40</sup> The new recruits were encouraged to join the ANC or any African political organisation so that information could be obtained. Cases in point were M. Mavundla and C. B. Makatini, who were recruited by Reverend Mthembu.<sup>41</sup> Mavundla and Makatini were "urged...to join the ANC, so that we may get

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<sup>38</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 30, Roll 13, D.H. Cockburn, deputy township manager, KwaMashu to the director, 14 December 1962. See also Ilanga Lase Natal, 22 December 1962.

<sup>39</sup> Feit, Urban revolt, pp 193-4.

<sup>40</sup> Natal Archives (hereafter NA), BAC, P/2/M, Reverend T.W.S. Mthembu to the senior information officer, 30 March 1958.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

all the truths".<sup>42</sup> Because of the money paid to informers by the state, many Africans were willing to give information on what was going on in the townships with regard to underground activities of the ANC.

In 1960, G. Kumalo, a Durban resident musician, requested the government to pay him at least £1000 in order to enable him to launch a Music Peace Campaign.<sup>43</sup> In his correspondence with the Chief Native Commissioner in November 1960, Kumalo wrote:

...I can see terrible things taking place in this country if the present spirit of racial prejudice is not overcome, and a spirit of racial goodwill and harmonious co-operation introduced in our everyday lives...I appeal for £1000 to launch out the Music Peace Campaign against the underground resistance and defiance campaign... They must be exposed and destroyed.<sup>44</sup>

He did not, however, receive the money he had requested.

In Durban, a considerable number of individuals were employed by the state as informers, for instance the case of T.J.B. Kunene who indicated to the government information officer his willingness to work as an informer.<sup>45</sup> Another person employed by the state to tap information was P.M. Khaula.<sup>46</sup> Some arrested MK cadres showed their readiness to divulge information about the underground activities of the ANC. Bruno Mtolo was a classic example in Durban. Mtolo was involved actively in MK's sabotage campaigns from 1961 till the time of his arrest in August 1963. Mtolo even went beyond giving evidence at crucial trials and revealing information about the underground ANC and MK activities: he wrote a book

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> NA, BAC, P/2/K, G. Kumalo to the CNC, 15 August 1960.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Kumalo to the CNC, 23 November 1960.

<sup>45</sup> NA, BAC, P/2/K, T.J.B. Kunene to the information officer, 24 February 1961.

<sup>46</sup> NA, BAC, P/2/K, P.M. Khaula to the BAD, 28 July 1960.

in which he excoriated the ANC leadership.<sup>47</sup>

During the period when the ANC was banned, it did not cease to function as a political organisation. Between 1961 and 1964, the ANC continued to articulate the people's grievances through underground activities; underground ANC officials wrote a number of memoranda to various location superintendents - the representatives of the apartheid structures. Memoranda to location superintendents of Chesterville, Lamontville, KwaMashu and Cato Manor were dumped at their offices by underground Congress Alliance members.<sup>48</sup> The superintendents did not respond to the memoranda, instead they forwarded them to the police. The issues raised in the memoranda ranged from housing, destruction of the people's shacks, rentals, education, community facilities, medical services, sanitation, and wages for the African workers, to politics in the townships. When the police uncovered the underground activities of the ANC in 1963, in particular of Durban's MK regional commanders: C. Ndhlovu, B. Nair, R. Kasrils and S.E. Mtshali, the organisation adopted a national strategic turn to exile.<sup>49</sup>

While the sabotage campaigns carried out between 1961 and 1964 failed to "go very far towards fulfilling its aims",<sup>50</sup> this did not mean the end of the struggle in the African townships. The ANC continued to function in the guise of a variety of civic organisations and trade unions affiliated to SACTU. A new dimension in African politics then emerged in the townships: community based politics became dominant during the

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<sup>47</sup> See Mtolo, Umkhonto we Sizwe.

<sup>48</sup> See KCAL, KCF 30, Roll 13, Memorandum of grievances at Chesterville location submitted to the superintendent of the Chesterville location by the Congress Alliance, 14 February 1962; Memo... to the superintendent of the Lamontville location, 14 February 1962; Memo... to the superintendent of Cato Manor, 14 February 1962; and Memo... of grievances submitted to the KwaMashu township manager by the Congress Alliance, 14 January 1962.

<sup>49</sup> The Natal Mercury, 21 January 1964.

<sup>50</sup> Lodge, Black politics, p 235.

period under investigation.

### Creating political communities

Before the Urban Bantu Councils Act of 1961 was passed in parliament, some form of machinery existed for consultation between a local authority and the African people in the shantytowns and townships. The Advisory Boards were constituted under Section 21 of the Bantu (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1945, but such bodies "were purely advisory, except that it was a statutory obligation for a local authority to consult them on all matters of concern to [Africans] in urban areas. They enjoyed no executive powers".<sup>51</sup> Each Advisory Board had three elected and two nominated members. In Durban, there were seven Advisory Boards established in 1937 in compliance with the provisions of the Bantu Areas Act. Of these seven, three were for the family townships of Lamont, Chesterville and Baumannville, and four for the male hostels of S.J. Smith, Dalton Road, Somsteu Road, and Jacobs. In Cato Manor, an Emergency Camp Welfare and Development Board was established.<sup>52</sup>

The establishment of African townships saw the transformation of Advisory Boards into Residents Committees with similar powers and functions. Through the Urban Bantu Councils Act of 1961, Residents Committees were to be replaced by Urban Bantu Councils, but these only came into being in 1968. Such structures were opposed totally by the ANC. The ANC called on all African people

...to fight the government policies of apartheid and oppression - not [to] co-operate with the Nationalist government policies of Bantu Authorities and Urban Bantu Councils... Urban Bantu councils give us power to oppress ourselves, fight one another, leaving the government at peace. Under the UBC Act, we shall oppress our people with pass laws, rentals, influx control, water metering and school

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<sup>51</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/BAB/1, Bantu advisory bodies, central, 12 September 1973 to 31 July 1976, urban Bantu councils, 9 February 1976.

<sup>52</sup> Kuper, An African bourgeoisie, p 330.

levy which is paid for Dr Verwoerd's poisonous Bantu education.<sup>53</sup>

The ANC recognised neither the Residents Committees nor the Urban Bantu Councils established later. Instead they launched people's Residents Associations, albeit as disguised community vigilante organisations such as the *Isolomuzi* (Vigilante Committee). A group of ANC members and trade unionists, disillusioned with the Residents Committee's collaborative action, launched the KwaMashu Residents Association (KRA) as an alternative form of community organisation. The KRA officials were elected by township residents at informal meetings since it was an unregistered association. In 1960, H. Msomi was in the chair.<sup>54</sup> Soon after its inauguration, the KRA called for the disbandment of the KwaMashu Residents Committee, the official organisation recognised by the municipal authorities.

The Residents Committee members, among others, were C.D.S. Mbutho, L.S. Makhuvaza, W. Dladla and S.Z. Conco. These members were urged on various occasions to resign from the committee since it was regarded as an extension of apartheid policies and had no credibility as far as representing the interests of the community were concerned.

From 1962 onwards, the leadership of the KRA, headed by F.T.R. Dhlamini and C. Ndhlovu,<sup>55</sup> launched a fully-fledged campaign against members of the Residents Committee. The Residents Committee members were depicted as "sell-outs" - "Wilson's useless boys" (R.G. Wilson was the KwaMashu township manager during the 1960s).<sup>56</sup> These were the people, as Kuper

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<sup>53</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 30, Roll 13, Bourquin to colonel Fraser, officer commanding, Natal Command, 3 May 1962, "The voice of the ANC", 28/9 April 1962.

<sup>54</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 19 November 1960.

<sup>55</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 30, Roll 13, E.G. Jakins, Assistant Dir (Bantu areas) to director, Bantu administration, 29 August 1962.

<sup>56</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 17 February and 16 June 1962.

noted, "whose livelihood might be jeopardized by a refusal to serve on the statutory bodies".<sup>57</sup> Some of the committee members were "civil servants and traders in municipal institutions".<sup>58</sup> Others were prominent figures of the community who accepted nominations because they enjoyed special privileges offered by the local authorities, which ranged from access to township housing to licences to trade, to being owners of eating houses. As noted earlier, houses belonging to these committee members were bombed.

Bombing campaigns were waged not only against committee members but also against anyone who co-operated with government officials. One such victim was the Reverend Mthembu who, in September 1960, was found hanging from a tree with some planted documents in his possession - "What is Communism?" and "South Africa's Siege".<sup>59</sup>

An increasing number of terror campaigns within African townships, particularly in KwaMashu, compelled E.G. Jakins, the Assistant Director (Bantu Areas), Durban, to write :

It appears that the number of agitators pursuing their activities in locations on a full-time basis, particularly at KwaMashu, is increasing by reason of the fact that they are able to register as being employed by various bodies and persons which have no recognised lawful status or business and for whom they either do not actually work at all or only perform token duties for an hour or two per week. For instance, Curnick Ndhlovu is registered as being in the employ of some Railway Workers' Union and spends all his time in furthering the aims and objects of the KwaMashu Residents' Association which is merely a *nom de plume* for the banned ANC.<sup>60</sup>

The continued campaign against Residents Committee members led to the resignation of S.Z. Conco from the Committee. In his

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<sup>57</sup> Kuper, An African bourgeoisie, p 328.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 10 September 1960. Underground Congress members forced Mthembu to commit suicide or it is possible that they hanged him.

<sup>60</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 30, Roll 13, E.G. Jakins to director, 29 August 1962.

letter of resignation, Conco denounced what he termed "the role of 'boy' to KwaMuhle officials" and further indicated that "KwaMashu residents have lost the confidence in the...Residents Committee".<sup>61</sup> Tension and conflict remained the order of the day, particularly between the two resident organisations.

One interesting point about the members of the Residents Committee was that a sizeable number of them were either prominent or aspiring business people. For instance, the Committee members who were elected to office in 1964, namely H.C. Sibisi, C.D.S. Mbutho and W. Mhlongo, were business leaders. These people were elected by a small minority of township residents who owned houses and were opposed to the banned ANC's Residents Association. For such individuals, the Residents Committee was a necessary entity in protecting their own business interests. The same individuals were instrumental in launching the Natal and Zululand African Chamber of Commerce in December 1964. This new organisation was founded by S.Z. Conco, a former Residents Committee member, H.C. Sibisi and J. Mnguni.<sup>62</sup>

By 1966, a pro-apartheid business organisation called The Africa Foundation of South Africa was established in KwaMashu and Umlazi. T.D. Zulu and A.P. Ngcobo spearheaded its formation in the townships.<sup>63</sup> The government played an indirect role in the formation of the Foundation and was in agreement with the principles of the organisation; the government, however, promised to support financially the new organisation. In response to these government actions, the KRA denounced officials of the Africa Foundation, mounted attacks on them and called for a boycott of their businesses. The national president and founder of The Africa Foundation of South Africa was Bishop W.G. Dimba, a controversial figure of

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<sup>61</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 16 June 1962.

<sup>62</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 31 October and 26 December 1964; and see also 11 May 1963.

<sup>63</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 3 September and 8 October 1966.

the Federation of Bantu Churches, an umbrella body of united African churches in Natal;<sup>64</sup> he formed The Africa Foundation together with P.T. Makhene, the vice-president, L.N. Ndaba, the secretary-general and B. Nxumalo, a member of the steering committee.<sup>65</sup> Basically, the organisation was "aimed at propagating ideas on territorial separate development which must lead to ethnic autonomous republics of southern Africa".<sup>66</sup> As stated in *Africa South*, the mouthpiece of the Africa Foundation that used the same name as the liberal/left-wing journal of the time, the aim was: "an alternate which offers a fair deal to all racial groups and that alternate is territorial apartheid on confederation and common market of southern Africa".<sup>67</sup>

In 1968, Dimba and his executive committee members formed the Zulu National Party with branches in Umlazi, KwaMashu, Durban Central and Lamontville.<sup>68</sup> It was during this same period that a spate of pro-apartheid parties, opposed to the ANC, PAC and SACP, were formed and which received financial help from the government. It was the government that encouraged and provided money to individuals like Dimba in order to form opposition parties that could counter the banned African political organisations, in particular the ANC. The Swazi, Venda, Tswana, Sotho and Ndebele National parties were

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<sup>64</sup> For a in-depth account of Bishop W.G. Dimba, see Paul la Hausse, "So who was Elias Kuzwayo? nationalism, collaboration and the picaresque in Natal", in P. Bonner (et al), Apartheid's genesis, 1935- 1962 (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand Press, 1993), pp 215-217.

<sup>65</sup> Africa South, volume 1, No 1 (December 1966).

<sup>66</sup> La Hausse, "So Who Was Elias Kuzwayo?", p 216.

<sup>67</sup> Africa South, vol 1, no 1 (December 1966), p 4.

<sup>68</sup> Africa South, vol 2, No 2 (1967), pp 2-3. The members of the various branches were: Umlazi, P.P.S. Zulu, D. Mnyende, J.M. Maphumzana and R. Mhlongo; Durban Central, A.M. Mpangose; KwaMashu, Dr P.W. Tusini; and Lamontville, E. Mduli and F. Ngwenya.

launched in their respective bantustans.<sup>69</sup> Amidst this kind of development, Dimba called upon all Africans to join any one of the parties. As P.la Hausse notes: "... not only was Dimba a stooge but he was ... at some stage on the payroll of the state. Apparently Dimba's partner, L. Ndaba, derived part of his income from the Bureau of State Security".<sup>70</sup> The Africa Foundation organisation supported fully the idea of separate development and the creation of bantustans and was hence in total conflict with members of the KRA.<sup>71</sup>

The KRA derived much of its support mainly from the anti-government section of the community, which comprised the ANC membership, workers and members of the Zulu Hlanganani Co-operative and Buying Club. The Club consisted of small-scale traders and also former shack-shop owners.<sup>72</sup> These traders had prospered in Cato Manor but the relocation to KwaMashu resulted in many of them being denied trading licences. The blame for that was levelled against Residents Committee members who made attempts to monopolise the new market through their positions as officially recognised municipal representatives of the African residents. The spokesperson for the Zulu Hlanganani trading society, J. Mabaso, lambasted the municipal authorities and the Residents Committee members for denying members of his association trading licences.<sup>73</sup>

At several meetings of the KwaMashu Residents Association, the interests of small-scale traders and business persons were raised. In a bid to secure trading licences, in 1964 the Zulu Hlanganani Society renamed itself the KwaMashu Bantu Investment Company.<sup>74</sup> The "newly" inaugurated company,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p 21.

<sup>70</sup> La Hausse, "So who was Elias Kuzwayo?", p 217.

<sup>71</sup> See also G. Mare, An appetite for power: Buthelezi's Inkatha and South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987).

<sup>72</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 12 August 1961.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 21 March 1964.

through its secretary, J. Manyoni, challenged the Durban municipality to stop harassing and arresting traders in KwaMashu who did not possess the necessary licences. The municipality insisted, however, that all traders must have the required licences if they were to avoid arrest. In contrast, KwaMashu Residents Committee members and well-known political personality and businessman A.W.G. Champion, the chairman of the Combined Residents Committee, intensified their campaign against "illegal" trading in KwaMashu, S.J. Smith Hostel, Chesterville and Lamontville.<sup>75</sup>

Champion who, since his early years had made attempts to enrich himself through politics and business ventures, believed that capital could be generated within African townships, where minimal competition was expected.<sup>76</sup> Champion was intolerant of Indian capital and competition within African townships, and also - especially - competition from Africans who were unlicensed. In 1963, he complained to T. Huntley, the Deputy Manager of KwaMashu township, that his business enterprises had "lost hundreds of rands through illegal shops...- many of these shops...[were] backed by Indians".<sup>77</sup> Some Africans were involved in joint business ventures with Indian entrepreneurs while others used their names to register and administer Indian-owned businesses in townships, from which they received a monthly income. No wonder that to Champion the policy of separate development provided the necessary shelter for capital accumulation. He supported the creation of bantustans: "The beauty of this policy to me is our obtaining a way to build up industries in the area where we live. It may prove to be a blessing in disguise to us. Apartheid is no doubt to the advantage of the

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<sup>75</sup> See Ilanga Lase Natal, 13 April 1963.

<sup>76</sup> For a detailed study on the early history of Champion, see S. Marks, The ambiguities of dependence in South Africa: class, nationalism, and the state in twentieth-century Natal (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1986), pp 74-109.

<sup>77</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 13 April 1963; see also Ilanga Lase Natal, 9 January 1965.

African businessman...".<sup>78</sup>

A considerable number of the people who participated in the Residents Committees during the 1960s were mainly interested in enhancing their business and trading privileges. During the 1970s, the pro-apartheid business class forged ties with bantustan authorities and through that kind of alliance, a complex patronage system was developed. With the formation of Inkatha by Chief M.G. Buthelezi in 1975, African businessmen who in the past had supported the bantustan system, tended to identify themselves with Inkatha and the KwaZulu government authorities. In fact, most of them became Inkatha officials and members.<sup>79</sup> To these African businessmen, Inkatha was the only vehicle through which they could exercise power and protect their economic interests. Their role in the Urban Bantu Councils (UBCs), which came into existence in 1968, was legitimised by Inkatha, which went along with the policy of separate development though at times a strong critic of the government.

By contrast, during the 1970s an acute conflict emerged between Chief Buthelezi and the Inyanda Traders Association, a pro-government organisation comprising big African businessmen, some of whom participated in Residents Committee structures. The Inyanda Association, founded in 1965, contested vigorously the idea of starting companies (big white chain stores in joint ownership with African aspirant entrepreneurs) in the bantustans. Buthelezi supported the formation of such companies and strongly warned the Inyanda traders "not to attempt to create a split between the

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<sup>78</sup> Kuper, An African bourgeoisie, p 285. See also University of Natal, Natal Room, Papers SI, Ari Sitas, "Durban unrest notes", 1985; and for interesting information on Champion's business ventures, see M.W. Swanson (ed), The views of Mahlathi, writings of A.W.G. Champion, a black South African (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1982), see especially section five, pp 163- 174.

<sup>79</sup> See KCAL, KCAV 168 and 169, C.D.S. Mbutho by A. Mason and D. Collins, 25 October 1979 and 1 November 1979, pp 53-4.

government [KwaZulu] and African traders...".<sup>80</sup> The conflict escalated until 1976 and, finally, the Inyanda traders had no option but to join Inkatha. As for the conflict between Buthelezi and the Inyanda Traders Association, it was quite clear that Buthelezi managed to manipulate events in the region; he was also able to demonstrate his capacity to direct political events in the region to his advantage.

Chief Buthelezi and his Inkatha Party's politics in KwaZulu-Natal have always been controversial.<sup>81</sup> He has been controversial in the sense that he rejected the preferences of the South African state to go for "independence", but often collaborated with the state to gain patronage and increase the territory of KwaZulu. S. Marks uses the notion of "ambiguity" to characterise such strategies adopted by Chief Buthelezi.<sup>82</sup> Certainly, Chief Buthelezi was, to use Marks' words once again, "...a man who embodie[d] in his contradictory position all the ambiguities of a Solomon, a Dube, a Champion" and "constantly face[d] the state with his contradictory presence both as critic and collaborator extraordinary".<sup>83</sup>

Between 1961 and 1968, Chesterville and Lamontville residents were represented through the Durban Joint Residents Committee. For a number of years, Champion played a significant role as the chairman of the Joint Residents Committee. However, the majority of African residents were opposed to such Committees, whose members they labelled as *impimpis* (sell-outs).<sup>84</sup> An interesting scenario developed in the two townships: all Residents Committee members were elected on a party basis. Champion founded and led the *Imbokodo* (grinding stone) Party, while A.R. Ntuli and S. Duma

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<sup>80</sup> G. Mare as cited in Sitas, "Durban unrest notes".

<sup>81</sup> For a comprehensive study on Chief Buthelezi and his Inkatha Party, see, for instance, Mare, An appetite for power: Buthelezi's Inkatha and South Africa.

<sup>82</sup> Marks, The ambiguities of dependence, p 124.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, pp 116, 123.

<sup>84</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 7 March 1964.

led the *Izikhumba* (skins) Party, which comprised mainly the ANC and defunct SACTU members.<sup>85</sup> Although the banned ANC had called for a complete boycott of Residents Committee structures in the early 1960s, local underground branches in Lamontville and Chesterville defied the order and decided to contest elections. These were the two parties which contested the Advisory Board elections. From 1965 to 1967, Champion's *Imbokodo* Party was defeated in the elections by the *Izikhumba* Party.<sup>86</sup> *Imbokodo* recorded one of its heaviest defeats in the Residents Committee elections in 1967, when it polled only 146 as against 1062 of the *Izikhumba* Party.<sup>87</sup> Although some residents of Chesterville and Lamontville were totally against Resident Committee politics, the *Izikhumba* Party, which was founded to challenge Champion's participation in apartheid structures, enjoyed an enormous base among resident supporters of the banned ANC. Perhaps this shows how the underground lost control of its branches and members in the 1960s. Underground branches took their own decisions and, more importantly, the struggle against apartheid was waged by ordinary people - workers, women, youth and community leaders.

By 1968, a new development emerged as far as African representation at community level was concerned. The Residents Committee structures were terminated, thus paving the way for the establishment of the Urban Bantu Councils. The termination was partly because of lack of interest among African residents in such structures and also resistance from the Residents Association members. Under the provisions of the UBC Act of 1961, the Durban City Council established the Kwamashu UBC, which catered for Kwamashu residents and the Ningizimu UBC, which represented the interests of residents in Chesterville, S.J. Smith, Dalton Road, Jacobs, Lamontville and Umlazi Glebe

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<sup>85</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 25 September 1965.

<sup>86</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 1 October 1966; and 30 September 1967.

<sup>87</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 30 September 1967.

hostels.<sup>88</sup> Each of the UBCs comprised eleven wards, with a nineteen-member council. Of the nineteen, thirteen were elected by the township residents and the remaining six were appointed by the urban representatives of the African chiefs.<sup>89</sup> In order to control Africans living in townships, the government pressed chiefs to appoint their representatives in urban areas who could use their power and influence. These representatives were paid by the government and their main role was to solve problems or, at least, intervene whenever there was a problem in the township which threatened peace and stability.

In the UBC elections that took place in March 1968, H.C. Sibisi won convincingly, to become the first chairperson of the KwaMashu UBC.<sup>90</sup> Of humble origin, Sibisi was born in 1904 in the Paulpietersburg district of Northern Natal, to parents who were poor labour tenants on a farm.<sup>91</sup> Sibisi was educated at Adams Mission, where he qualified as an agricultural demonstrator. While working in Swaziland and then later in the Ndwedwe reserve in Natal, Sibisi conceived the idea of entering into a private trading business. During the 1940s he settled in Clermont township where he interacted with Champion and prominent ANC members of the Youth League. In 1948 Sibisi was elected chairman of the local *Isolomuzi*.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> City of Durban, Mayor's minute, 30 September 1968, pp 18-20.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p 20.

<sup>90</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 30 March 1968. Edwards claims that Sibisi was the first vice-chairperson of the KwaMashu UBC under the chairmanship of Prince Sithela Zulu. However, all my sources indicate the contrary. In fact, Sibisi was the first chairperson in 1968 and Prince Sithela Zulu became the chairperson only in 1969. See Edwards as cited below.

<sup>91</sup> I. Edwards, "I am a nobody, but in another country we would be the George Washingtons': leadership, ethnicity, nationalism and class in the career of Henry Caleb Sibisi, 1945-1980" (Paper presented at the conference on regionalism and restructuring in Natal, University of Natal, Durban, January 1988), pp 1-2.

<sup>92</sup> Paul la Hausse, "So who was Elias Kuzwayo?", p 215.

During this period, Sibisi made various attempts to raise capital through the establishment of the Clermont Bantu Bus Company, the Clermont Bantu Improvement Co-operative (which sought to acquire land in Clermont) and the *Vukuzake* Clermont Co-operative (a co-operative dominated entirely by women, one which specialised in market gardening and home crafts).<sup>93</sup> All such ventures failed.

While living in Cato Manor, Sibisi became involved in shady deals - selling shares in non-existent companies - and provided information to the South African Police and S.B. Bourquin, Manager of the Department of Bantu Affairs, about leading ANC activists in Cato Manor.<sup>94</sup> In 1957, soon after the installation of Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi as chief, Sibisi became involved in the revival of the Inkatha movement of the early 1920s. Because of his clashes with Buthelezi and the various members of the Bantu Affairs Commission and the Department of Native Affairs over the issue, the revival idea collapsed. It was during that period that Sibisi was allocated a house in KwaMashu "E" Section and was also granted a trading licence. His life was mainly dominated by cheating, as I. Edwards notes:

In fact Sibisi had, from his arrival in KwaMashu, established a range of highly lucrative ventures, which ranged from the selling of shares in non-existent companies, through fraudulent dealings in Burial Clubs, to the selling of marriage certificates to those legally allowed to either rent or purchase a house in Durban, but who were not legally married... In addition, having made friends with the then township manager, Mr R.G. Wilson, who was notorious for being extremely dictatorial, hence his Zulu name Mbatl, the stinging nettle, Sibisi was well placed to again operate as a 'bush lawyer'... Throughout the 1960s, Sibisi's shops, first at 'E' Section and then at 'C' Section, were always in financial difficulties. However, it was quickly established that Sibisi was 'nothing short of a thief.'<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Edwards, "I am a nobody", p 11.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp 12-13.

The recognition of the power and influence of chiefs by the Durban municipality, especially in its area of jurisdiction, led Sibisi to proclaim himself as a member of the structures of chieftainship so that he could serve on the Paramount Chief's Council (see below). The Durban municipality relied on the influence of the Zulu paramountcy, particularly during those days of trouble. During the Defiance Campaign era, for example, the Paramount Chief was invited to Durban to encourage the non-involvement of the Zulu people in the campaign, and in 1973, during the Durban strikes, King G. Zwelethini was called to intervene in the labour disputes that rocked the entire metropolitan Durban area. From the late 1950s, the Durban authorities established a Paramount Chief's Council, the *Ibandla Lenkosi*, on which Sibisi served as a member.<sup>96</sup> The Durban municipality utilised such a council "...to bolster up their own administration within Durban".<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, in 1973, Sibisi and other UBC councillors pressurised the Port Natal Administration Affairs Board (PNAAB) to change their status to that of tribal chiefs to enable them to bring perpetrators of crime to justice through tribal courts.<sup>98</sup> The idea was totally rejected by the PNAAB officials.

Related to Sibisi's election as the first chairperson of the KwaMashu UBC was the announcement of other councillors, which led to a demonstration by women. Women from "B" Section of the township demonstrated at the Township Manager's office to express their dissatisfaction over the election of C. Majola (a pro-government businessman and previously a member of the Residents Committee) over their favourite D.C. Mtshali, a popular ANC member and respected community leader. The women accused the Township Manager of deliberately "cooking" the

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p 13.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/BAB/1, Minutes of the KwaMashu UBC, 3 December 1973, executive committee agenda, status of urban Bantu councillors, 14 May 1974.

results to enable his "stooge" Majola to become a member of the UBC.<sup>99</sup> The elections were highly politicised, with some members being elected to office on ethnic grounds. For instance, M.M. Pamha and H. Mdingi, both Xhosas and members of the Xhosa National Unity, were elected to office on ethnic tickets.<sup>100</sup>

The KwaMashu UBC consisted mainly of business persons and traders.<sup>101</sup> The same could be said of the Ningizimu UBC.<sup>102</sup> This corresponds to a general pattern most fully analyzed by Kuper whereby the selection of leaders for both the Location Advisory Boards and the African political parties of the 1940s and 1950s was done in terms of occupation and education.<sup>103</sup>

The first KwaMashu UBC meetings were mainly concerned with business issues in the township. In July 1968, the KwaMashu UBC set up a commission of enquiry to investigate the allegations that most shops in the township were Indian-owned.<sup>104</sup> The commission resolved that African townships were "no-go" areas for Indian capitalists. The KwaMashu UBC and particularly the KwaMashu Licensed Traders Association,

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 18 May 1968.

<sup>101</sup> The members of the KwaMashu UBC were: F. Biyela, Z. Dhlomo, M.V. Duma, M.B. Legwate, C.C. Majola, K. Makhanya, G. Maphumulo, C.D. Mbutho, M.W. Mhlongo, E. Mkhwanazi, W.T. Msomo, G. Mzimela, M.P. Ngidi, M. Pamha, S. Shange, H.C. Sibisi and Mutwana S. Zulu. See KCAL, Bourquin Papers, File 8, KCM 55309- 55313, urban Bantu councils, minutes and agendas, city of Durban, KwaMashu UBC, 10 April 1968.

<sup>102</sup> The members of the Ningizimu UBC were: M.W. Zikaka (chairman), H.S. Msimang (vice-chairman), A.W.G. Champion, Rev A. Dhlamini, M. Kweshube, M.P. Magudelela, M.F. Magwaza, Mkhize, W. Msane, P.V. Mthembu, M.M. Mwelase, F.J. Ngobese, Mrs E. Ntuli, M.J. Shezi, M.H. Shinga and Muntwana Sithela Zulu. See KCAL, Bourquin Papers, File 8, Minutes of Ningizimu UBC, 2 April 1968; and also City of Durban, Mayor's minute, 1969, p 20.

<sup>103</sup> Kuper, An African bourgeoisie, p 99.

<sup>104</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 20 July 1968.

under the chairmanship of A. Africa, took exceptional interest in ensuring that the resolution passed by the enquiry was implemented.

Apart from showing interest in business issues, the KwaMashu and Ningizimu UBCs raised a number of grievances with the local authorities. On various occasions, the issue of additional security personnel, particularly at Dalton Road Hostel, was raised.<sup>105</sup> Concern over the residents' security emanated from an unprecedented spate of criminal activities within the townships. Both UBCs highlighted the plight of persons such as widows, the problems facing institutions such as cemeteries and schools, and the socio-political problems of inadequate accommodation, the absence of proper health facilities, and arrests and detentions of the African people.<sup>106</sup> However, in spite of their representations, the UBCs failed to proselytise the people's Residents Associations and other dominant classes of the African petty bourgeoisie, including the professionals and intellectuals.

In September 1973, the Umlazi Residents Association (URA), an informal body exactly like the KwaMashu Residents Association, was formed.<sup>107</sup> URA was established by members of the banned ANC and fellow trade unionists who had survived the repression of the 1960s. Soon after its establishment, dubbed "the voice of the people", an attack was launched against the UBC councillors, who were described as "too busy to listen to the people".<sup>108</sup> Even Councillor C.C. Majola of the KwaMashu UBC admitted that although URA was inaugurated in

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<sup>105</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/BAB/1, Minutes of the Ningizimu UBC, 20 November 1973.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, Minutes of the KwaMashu UBC, 20 November 1973; Minutes of the Ningizimu UBC, 22 January 1974; B. Huntley, Manager, central district to the chief director, PNAAB, 22 March 1974; and Minutes of the KwaMashu UBC, 23 February 1976.

<sup>107</sup> IIE, The January strikes (Durban, IIE in Conjunction with Ravan Press, 1974), See the section on community affairs, Umlazi; and see also Interview with J. Msomi, 16 October 1992.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

a "clandestine manner, residents [were] frustrated by the fact that councillors [could not] communicate with [the] KwaZulu government".<sup>109</sup> A simmering spirit of discontent with the UBCs from the late 1960s existed in the townships, and the KwaMashu UBC noted with regret: "Many people had already made known their unwillingness to co-operate with the councillors. They claim that the council was a toothless body with no executive powers. They therefore see no reason why it should exist".<sup>110</sup> Throughout the 1970s, the UBCs were challenged, ostensibly by the various Residents Associations and other related organisations.

More significantly, the 1970s witnessed a new shift towards political struggle, which was expressed through the emergence of the black consciousness movement in African schools and universities and the creation of a new force in Durban, especially from early 1973 onwards - the independent African trade union movement. These emergent forces culminated in mass political activities - the outbreak of the 1973 Durban strikes, the creation of African trade unions, and the 1976 Soweto uprisings, apparently an expression of student opposition to Afrikaans as a medium of instruction but essentially a rejection of the whole apartheid system.<sup>111</sup> The African struggle entered into a new and momentous phase.

## Conclusion

Central to the analysis in this chapter has been an attempt to demonstrate the varying content of opposition and collaboration with the apartheid state and its structures. Undoubtedly, during the 1960s, when mass political organisations and activities were suppressed, politics shifted

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<sup>109</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/BAB/1, Minutes of the KwaMashu UBC, 9 December 1974.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, Minutes of the KwaMashu UBC, 24 November 1975.

<sup>111</sup> For an in-depth study on the Soweto uprisings see, for instance, B. Magubane, South Africa: from Soweto to Uitenhage (New Jersey, Africa World Press), pp 41-51.

from the broad national struggle to civic politics at the community level. The struggle against apartheid was now waged by the underground political organisations (mainly township-based associations) where former ANC people were in the leading positions. The banned ANC remained in the background, making statements from the exile, continued with illegal meetings and leaflet distributions, and conducted sporadic acts of sabotage. An intriguing phenomenon, co-existing with the underground activities of the ANC, is the existence of emerging African businessmen - the businessmen-cum-councillors - whose survival depended on the apartheid state structures. Because of their narrow and selfish economic interests, this class of African people collaborated politically with the state, especially in the Residents Committees and Urban Councils. Consequently, their relations with the African community at large created tension. It was that accumulated tension and other socio-economic problems that led to the events of the 1970s and beyond.

## *Chapter Seven*

### **Struggles in the Shadows: Covert Forms of Resistance and Survival Strategies Among African Workers, 1960s-1970s**

#### **Introduction**

During the 1970s, Durban's African workers challenged capital through strike action (an important aspect that will be examined in chapter eight). This particular type of worker struggle has received considerable attention from historians. There is a tendency in many writers' works to confine worker "consciousness" to the analysis of trade union consciousness, strikes and class consciousness. Over the last fifteen years or so labour historians have concentrated only on relationships between workers, employers and the state, and popular factory struggles. Such a trend has been perpetuated by scholars because of the accessibility of data on overt forms of consciousness such as strikes, boycotts, unionisation and open political militancy.

This chapter is important in that it examines the period when the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) declined in the mid-1960s, which effectively crippled African unionism for almost ten years. During that period, South African industrial relations enjoyed "peace" which was disturbed by nothing more than the hidden forms of worker responses. Of significance to this chapter is the view that the history of informal worker resistance, in particular in industrial establishments during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, is not documented. Most historians who have written about

informal worker resistance have confined their works mainly to the mining industry.<sup>1</sup>

The most important exception to the above lack of interest in covert resistance is C. van Onselen's book, *Chibaro*, which, twenty-one years after its publication, remains the finest work on hidden struggles.<sup>2</sup> Because of the ever-widening gap between studies on overt and covert forms of worker militancy, this chapter will try to examine those "hidden forms of consciousness" (drawing heavily on the work of Van Onselen) which trade unions and political party structures could hardly offer. To understand worker consciousness, it is necessary to penetrate worker reaction arising from a particular situation in which the individual finds himself enmeshed. Yet, despite Van Onselen's work, informal worker resistance in South Africa's industrial workplace remains largely silent. It is in this context that this chapter is part of a continuing effort to break that silence. Hopefully, other historians will be taking the same road.

### Hidden responses: an overview

As industry expanded in Durban, employers patterned their work forces and recruitment practices, structured their work opportunities and managed their establishments in ways that compelled African workers to accept the new challenges of formal wage labour. Both the state and capital instituted ways and methods of ensuring both the availability of labour and the active involvement of African workers in longer periods of continuous employment.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, T. Dunbar Moodie, Going for gold: men, mines and migration (Johannesburg, WUP, 1994); P. Warwick, Black people and the South African war (Cambridge, CUP, 1983); S. Moroney, "The development of the compound as mechanism of worker control, 1900-1912", South African Labour Bulletin, vol 4, no 3 (1978); and C. van Onselen, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914, 2 vols (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> C. van Onselen, Chibaro (London, Pluto, 1976).

While industrial capitalists required a work pace that was sufficient to accumulate profit, that work pace was "constantly challenged, defended and reshaped" by the workers.<sup>3</sup> From the early 1880s, African workers have responded to capitalism in various ways and patterned their struggles according to their traditional work culture; they had their own notions of work, time, and leisure.<sup>4</sup> In recent times there have been a number of works which focus on the importance of culture in understanding worker resistance, or in which culture is recognised as a major factor. Certainly some forms of struggle were embedded in culture but that does not suggest that they were caused by culture. B. Bozzoli identifies songs, phrases, motifs and flags as obvious symbols of resistance<sup>5</sup> or what T. Lodge calls an "accumulated heritage of resistance".<sup>6</sup> Slogans such as "Amandla Ngawethu", "Hebo Usuthu", and phrases such as "Songoba Simunye", were often chanted and expressed by

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<sup>3</sup> P. Harries, Work, culture and identity: migrant labourers in Mozambique and South Africa, 1860 - 1910 (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1994), p 41.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p 228 and also chapter five. For an intensive study on struggles expressed in cultural terms and social networks, see, for instance, K.E. Atkins, The moon is dead! give us our money: cultural origins of an African work ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843- 1900 (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 1993), especially chapters 3 and 6; D. Moodie, "The moral economy of the black miners' strike of 1946" JSAS, vol 13, no 1 (1986); and D. Moodie, "Social existence and practice of personal integrity: narratives of resistance on the South African gold mines", African Studies, 50, 1 & 2 (1991).

<sup>5</sup> B. Bozzoli (ed), Town and countryside in the Transvaal (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983), p 32. The term resistance is used in this chapter to refer to hidden and silent actions developed by ordinary workers in an attempt to survive and as a way of expressing their discontent over wages paid by employers. This sort of resistance or struggle takes an individual form which denotes that African workers were not passive entities of the capitalist system.

<sup>6</sup> Lodge as cited in Bozzoli, Town and countryside, p 32.

Durban workers.<sup>7</sup> A popular song in Durban, for instance, that criticised employers for exploiting African workers was sung: "We have donated our blood long. We have donated our energy long. We now say our energy must be paid for. Our energy must be paid for".<sup>8</sup> This song became popular in the 1970s and was sung by rank-and-file workers during union meetings. These songs have been important in highlighting some of the salient features of workers' cultural expressions during the period. From such a perspective, a number of scholars have examined such notions, especially on the gold mines, among migrant workers. D. Moodie's studies on the moral economy constructed by African workers on the gold mines are useful for an understanding of such notions.<sup>9</sup>

The struggles of African workers against capital and the state can be understood in many ways. A student of African labour history who seeks to understand worker consciousness should search not only for dramatic responses but also for what R. Cohen calls "hidden forms of consciousness... a bedrock, grass roots, genuine sorts of consciousness".<sup>10</sup> These disguised forms of struggle have always been difficult to detect by employers, for they tend to be hidden and silent rather than dramatic and articulate. Van Onselen's argument that African workers developed strategies of confronting poor wages and debilitating work conditions in the shadows - "in

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<sup>7</sup> The slogans "Amandla Ngawethu" and "Songoba Simunye" meant "power is ours" and "we will conquer as one" respectively. "Hebo Usuthu" is a traditional Zulu war song. The theme of unity is consciously expressed in the slogans and these express the workers' feelings and frustrations and, more importantly, they also furthered the workers' struggle beyond the use of the strike weapon.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with J. Msomi, 16 October 1992. See also Jabulani Gwala's papers. Author's personal collection.

<sup>9</sup> See Moodie, "The moral economy of the Black miners' strike"; and Moodie, Going for gold.

<sup>10</sup> R. Cohen, "Resistance and hidden forms of consciousness", RAPE, 19 (1980), p 21.

the nooks and crannies of the day-to-day work situation"<sup>11</sup> - has relevance to our understanding of the dynamics of African awareness in Durban. It is undeniable that the capitalist form of accumulation calls into being open and explicit class struggle between labour and capital, but that does not negate the fact that individual or covert forms of struggle are vital, as are worker reactions to that process.

A brief consideration of the patterns of resistance of workers of the southern Africa region is necessary at this stage. It is important to realise that the southern African examples provide a useful background to worker struggles and covert forms of protest in other coercive economies. Van Onselen's remarks about Rhodesian (now Zimbabwe) mine workers' labour protest and action could be broadened to embrace our understanding of everyday forms of consciousness and resistance to exploitation, be it in the mines or industry. Occasionally the workers' experiences on the mines were reinforced through the transfer of "beliefs and practices founded on village society" to new industrial settings. Van Onselen writes:

Retiring workers would inform those in the villages of their experiences and this would in turn affect the labour flows in subsequent seasons...returning parties took considerable care to warn new workers of bad employers and in case they missed anybody making their way to Rhodesia, they took the precaution of pegging notices to various trees en route. Sometimes written in Swahili, these notes, addressed to Africans in general or individual workers in particular, warned of mines to be especially avoided... The African names (for mines) were (also) rich in meaning... The total absence of generosity in food and wages at the Ayrshire mine was reflected in the name Chimpadzi - meaning small portion...And while Chayamatako - "hit on the buttocks" - was hardly a name to make the Masterpiece mine popular, the fact that the Celtic mine was known as Sigebenga (a murderer or cruel person) made certain that the manager there was never plagued

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<sup>11</sup> Van Onselen, Chibaro, p 239.

with work-seekers.<sup>12</sup>

Quota restrictions, time and efficiency bargaining, job-hopping, go-slows, deliberate wastefulness, the destruction of mine property and equipment, and loafing became common characteristics of early mining compounds in southern Africa. The nature of such protests can be equated to slave resistance in the southern United States where "... ordinary loafing and mindless labour went with deliberate wastefulness, slow-downs, feigned illness, self-inflicted injuries, and the well-known abuse of livestock and equipment".<sup>13</sup> Sabotage and theft were common in mines throughout the southern African region. African workers slowed down the production process to reduce the level of their exploitation or to "jinx" the machinery to show its limitations as a substitute for labour-power. Mining property was frequently destroyed, compound huts were set on fire, and cattle belonging to the company maimed.<sup>14</sup>

The hidden forms of protest practised by miners (with distinctive characteristics) were also used by the industrial workers. Similar cases documented below from the industrial workers of Durban should not be seen as something new in the worker struggle for survival in a coercive economy. Here, however, it must be stressed that there are a number of ways of looking at the various categories examined below.

### Terrains of struggle

African workers have a long history of resistance and this has been manifested in their resistance to state labour control mechanisms during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>15</sup> Those mechanisms of control proved unworkable. African workers utilised a loophole

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp 234-35.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, E.D. Genovese, The political economy of slavery (New York, Pantheon Press, 1967), p 74.

<sup>14</sup> Van Onselen, Chibaro, pp 237-242.

<sup>15</sup> see, for instance, Chapter Three.

in Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act of 1945 which gave them the right to remain in proclaimed areas for 72 hours without permission. Pretending to be visiting relatives, they never returned to their respective reserves after the expiry of the 72 hour provision. In Durban the provision that individuals could remain in proclaimed areas was extended to seven days in 1962.<sup>16</sup> That extension made it easier for African work-seekers from the surrounding reserves to undo the system. While the state used tough control measures to try to regulate the flow of workers into white urban areas, its inability to control this movement revealed a distinctive form of resistance by African workers. The relaxation of state labour control mechanisms during the late 1970s should be viewed as a victory for the resistance movement rather than reforms initiated by the state.

## Theft

Court cases of theft by Durban workers were chronicled in the *Ilanga Lase Natal* newspaper. Theft has long been a powerful form of response to exploitation. K. Marx called this form of response "the earliest, crudest, and ... most primitive form of protest".<sup>17</sup> In classical Marxist terms, such activities represent a clear case of "false consciousness" which would have to be stripped away to allow a "true" political consciousness to emerge. Although it might have been a "blunt and stupid form of protest", Engels admits that "many workers doubtless sympathised privately" with this kind of resistance to the exploitation of labour power by capitalists.<sup>18</sup> It cannot be denied that theft is a form of resistance and has been used world-wide by all workers who faced the challenges

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<sup>16</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 22 September 1962.

<sup>17</sup> K. Marx, Collected works, volume 4, (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1975), pp 502-3.

<sup>18</sup> F. Engels, The condition of the working class in England (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1958), p 243.

of capital accumulation. But, as Engels further noted:

The workers soon realised that crime did not help matters. The criminal could protest against the existing order of society only simply as one individual; the whole might of society was brought to bear upon each criminal, and crushed him with its immense superiority.<sup>19</sup>

Theft as an individual form of struggle has always given way to collective organisation that is more directly in conflict with capital. Why then study theft and other individualised forms of struggle? W.B. Freund states that: "it is precisely at the points when and where working-class organisation has failed that a study of theft may prove to be of most interest."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Freund saw theft as providing "an effective vehicle of protest when and where conventional forms fail. Far from being crude or fruitless, theft can be an effective economic response by proletarians to the totalising surplus demands of corporate capital".<sup>21</sup> Namibian mine workers, for instance, made a distinction between "theft" from colleagues and "taking" from the company.<sup>22</sup> The same workers also argued that their wages were deliberately set low because the management assumed that they would steal. Commenting on the issue of theft, one of the workers noted, "I am just paying myself", while another said: "This is in fact our money which was withheld by the Boss".<sup>23</sup>

The large number of convictions for theft of Africans in Durban magistrates' courts shows the extent of such individual forms of resistance. Theft, however, is not always resistance;

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p 240.

<sup>20</sup> W. Freund, "Theft and social protest among the tin miners of northern Nigeria", in D. Crummey (ed), Banditry, rebellion and social protest in Africa (London, James Currey, 1986), p 49.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> R. J. Gordon, Mines, masters and migrants: life in a Namibian mine compound (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1977), p 4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

it is often greed and even more often a way of survival. On 2 January 1960, for example, M. Dhladhla was sentenced to an effective four months in prison and in addition was whipped four times with a sjambok for stealing from his Indian employer.<sup>24</sup> In another related case, D. Mcakumbana, a Durban court interpreter, stole an exhibit of £487 (R 974) and was sentenced to one year in prison.<sup>25</sup> Undoubtedly, theft was a high risk form of resistance: being caught meant not only dismissal but also jail or whipping or both. Occasionally employers complained of items missing from shops that would have been pilfered through back doors and sold in townships. As P.M. Faya remembers: "Clothes, eatable goods and anything that could be taken from industries and shops were stolen and sold during the weekends in the townships. ...This was the only way to survive".<sup>26</sup>

Daily, theft took place which was directed at creating a balance between the ever-rising cost of living and African wages. In a society in which inequalities were rampant, theft offered a viable path of redress and redistribution or, at least, a way in which profits were shared. Small items wrapped in paper were thrown in dustbins and collected after working hours. Several metres of cloth at a time were stolen from Frame's textile industry through the connivance of security guards and workers. Security guards pretended to be searching workers when in fact they had concluded prior agreements to share the spoils.<sup>27</sup>

Domestic workers in Durban stole small items which would not be noticed by their employers. Foodstuffs such as rice, sugar and salt were packed in boxes and collected by relatives

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<sup>24</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 2 January 1960.

<sup>25</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 25 February 1961.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with P.M. Faya, KwaMashu, 1 September 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with P.M. Faya, 1 September 1992.

over weekends.<sup>28</sup> In Umlazi township, cases of domestic workers who disappeared from their employers after looting household goods and money were frequent in the 1960s.<sup>29</sup> Cohen writes: "In white settler societies any club room conversation will reveal the elaborate charades domestic workers play with their employers - watering down the gin, removing the mark on the bottle, putting flour into the sugar and rice, etc".<sup>30</sup> E. Preston-Whyte's study of African women in domestic employment has shown that theft of household items took place.<sup>31</sup> A major proportion of domestic workers were Zionists who relied on "... confession of misdemeanours". She further argued that to the Zionists, "the relief of forgiveness and the blessing of pastor or prophet are extremely important to emotional well-being and stability".<sup>32</sup> On Sundays, confessions of stolen items from employers were made to the prophet and such followers were told not to do it again. Van Onselen's studies have shown as well that both male and female domestic servants were involved in petty theft, regularly taking foodstuff, clothing or alcohol from their masters and mistresses.<sup>33</sup> Despite Zionist teachings of the good and bad, the process continued, with more confessions being made. Worker theft,

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Judith Msomi, 16 October 1992.

<sup>29</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 3 October 1964.

<sup>30</sup> Cohen, "Resistance and hidden forms of consciousness", pp 20-1. See also C. van Onselen, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, 2, New Nineveh (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1982), p 43. Van Onselen also notes that "...household disinfectant or fly poison were added to the tea or coffee of white women who had insulted, assaulted or dismissed 'houseboys'".

<sup>31</sup> See E.M. Preston-Whyte, "Between two worlds: a study of the working life, social ties and interpersonal relationships of African women migrants in domestic service in Durban" (unpublished Ph D, University of Natal, Durban, 1969).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p 346.

<sup>33</sup> Van Onselen, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, 2, New Nineveh, p 42.

undoubtedly, has at one level remained a way of labour protest; a way of survival; and a way of wage supplementation.

### Boycotting of employers

Exploitative employers such as the Frame Group were avoided at all costs by work-seekers. Vacancies reported by the Labour Bureau offices sometimes remained unfilled for a considerable number of months. Despite the unemployment situation, the KwaMashu Township Manager's monthly reports indicated that African work-seekers refused to be employed by certain employers. For instance, from March to November 1970, the total number of reported unfilled vacancies at KwaMashu labour bureaux was 283.<sup>34</sup> In 1975 the total number of reported men and women's unfilled vacancies from all labour bureau offices in Durban had soared to 5 979 and 1 558 respectively.<sup>35</sup>

Employers of domestic labour in the Central District of Durban complained of the shortage of women workers. In August 1973 there were 84 unfilled vacancies in the domestic labour market whereas in April 1974, the number had risen to 305.<sup>36</sup> While the number of unfilled vacancies in domestic employment increased every year, women were ordered out of the urban area at the rate of over 3 000 per year.<sup>37</sup> Super-exploitation of women, which took place through poor wages, was countered by boycotting the domestic industry as a whole.

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<sup>34</sup> Killie Campbell Africana Library (hereafter KCAL), Port Natal Administration Board (hereafter PNAB), KCF 24, Roll 7, Township manager's monthly general reports, KwaMashu, R.G. Wilson, memos to the director, March to November 1970.

<sup>35</sup> Natal Archives (hereafter NA), PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, 1 October 1975 to 31 January 1976, G.F. Baker, manager, central district to the chief director, 26 November 1975. See all reports from various Labour Officers, 1975.

<sup>36</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, 1 April 1974 to 31 May 1976, volume 8, Box 49, Department of Bantu administration, memo from C/O (LIA) to chief director, 9 April 1974

<sup>37</sup> ibid.

## Sabotage activities

During the 1960s, some African workers were engaged in sabotage. Industrial machinery was deliberately destroyed, while buildings and farm fields were set on fire. In November 1961, a living room at the King Edward VIII Hospital was set on fire by two African nurses.<sup>38</sup> Their major complaints were those of poor wages and food, poor living conditions and mistreatment of nurses by white matrons.<sup>39</sup>

Sabotage activities took place in Durban during the early 1960s. Workers set fire to sugar-cane plantations in and around Durban.<sup>40</sup> On these white-owned plantations, the class struggle was both silent and open. The employers of African agricultural labour had always minimised expenditure on labourers, which left them amongst the most poorly-paid workers. Sabotage was one of their few alternatives.

## Go-slows and absenteeism

Sometimes the plantation workers in and around Durban resorted to non-cooperation with their supervisors, particularly during the harvest period. The Maputans employed by the Natal farmers were well known for slowing down the rhythm of plantation work. They deserted work towards harvest time, which compelled William Campbell to write: "It was an unbearable evil, frequently 30 or 40 or more [Maputans] will [sic] leave in a night without notice. ... They kept their engagements at first, but soon found it was easy to abscond".<sup>41</sup> Such forms of passive resistance led to the decline of Natal's agricultural production.

A considerable number of working days were lost when

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<sup>38</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 18 November 1961.

<sup>39</sup> See the strike that followed the sabotage, SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1961.

<sup>40</sup> Ilanga Lase Natal, 30 December 1961.

<sup>41</sup> Harries, Work, culture and identity, p 43.

workers deliberately avoided going to work. Absenteeism was rife in many industries and the Frame Group, in particular, complained that a large section of its work force did not report for duty. Some workers at the garment factories inflicted injuries on their hands during the "cut and trim" process in order to avoid work. Others pretended to be ill; of these, the weekly average ranged between 40 and 70. In one week, ending 29 April 1978, 489 out of a total workforce of 3 630 were reported absent.<sup>42</sup> Of these, 46 workers were ill;<sup>43</sup> the remaining 443 workers merely abstained from going to work. The most affected department at Frametex was the Suzler Number nine section which recorded 58 and 70 absentees for the weeks ending 24 June and 1 July 1978 respectively.<sup>44</sup>

As a response to absenteeism, the Natal Chamber of Industries (NCI) formed a sub-committee of its Labour Affairs Division in 1971 to investigate the problem and suggest possible remedies.<sup>45</sup> Absenteeism tended to be rife in what the Natal Chamber of Industries termed "a labour hungry environment".<sup>46</sup> The withdrawal of labour-power by African workers in industry was not understood by the NCI. They speculated that it was a direct consequence of the "shortage of housing for Bantu workers who return to their homes over weekends and are often absent on Mondays due to the distances which they have to travel home".<sup>47</sup> While distance may have been a possible explanation for absenteeism on Mondays, it

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<sup>42</sup> Frame Labour Officer, Weekly absentees list, 29 April 1978. (All minutes of the Committee in the 1970s are with the author. They were given to the author by Jabulani Gwala, the leader of the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Labour Officer, Frametex, 24 June 1978 and 1 July 1978.

<sup>45</sup> KCAL, PNAB, KCF 80, Roll 62, Natal Chamber of Industries, Labour Affairs Division, minutes, 20 July 1971.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p 3.

could not be a sound reason for workers to absent themselves for the other working days of the week. Workers have always expressed their grievances or dissatisfaction in disguised ways, including absenteeism or restriction of output or labour turnover.

The practice of workers claiming to have been admitted to hospitals or consulting private doctors was widespread, for example, among workers of the Port Natal Administration Board. Several cases were reported to S.B. Bourquin, the Chief Director of the Board, of workers who took self-proclaimed "off-duties" - "laziness and disobedience"<sup>48</sup> - and claimed to have been consulting doctors.<sup>49</sup> Various case studies of the employees of the Board may be enlightening.

S. Sithole, an employee of the Board, was reported on several occasions in 1975 for not reporting for duty. He was absent from work for two months in the same year, only to return in January 1976. Sithole's main excuse was that of continuous illness. He claimed to have been consulting a doctor for two months. It was discovered after consultations with his doctor that he was supposed to report for duty a month earlier. Sithole's services were terminated on the basis that he was dishonest and that wages were paid continuously on the understanding that he was ill.<sup>50</sup> It was divulged by one of the employees that Sithole was in fact employed on part-time basis at the Dunlop rubber company.

Other cases of workers who failed to report for duty for an extended period were recorded at the KwaMashu Works Depot of the PNAAB. The records of employees M. Biyela, A. Khuzwayo

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<sup>48</sup> NA, PNAAB, Strictly confidential files (hereafter SCF), Department of Business Undertakings to the chief director, 3 November 1975. See the case of M. Mpongese (files may not be quoted at this stage, they contain sensitive material of the 1970s).

<sup>49</sup> NA, PNAAB, SCF, Department of Business Undertakings to the chief director, 21 January 1976. See the case of S. Sithole.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

and F.A. Ndimande showed constant absence from work.<sup>51</sup> In January 1975, Biyela worked for only three days during which he collected two pairs of overalls and disappeared. As for Khuzwayo, he absconded for the whole year, the last day for reporting for duty being in February 1974. In a similar case, Ndimande was absent from work for almost three months.<sup>52</sup> In other similar cases, workers, for instance S. Mkhungo, had a record number of more than 73 days of sick leave within two years of service.<sup>53</sup>

### Resignations

During the 1970s, high labour turnover among textile workers was a common phenomenon. For example, at Hammarsdale Textile company, a record of 60 percent labour turnover was experienced.<sup>54</sup> In 1974, at Pinetex Textiles, it was reported that there was a 45 percent labour turnover.<sup>55</sup> Frame Textiles also experienced about 55 percent labour turnover in the form of resignations and dismissals.<sup>56</sup>

Because of the widespread nature of labour turnover in various industrial establishments, it is hardly possible to isolate it from other forms of response, whether such response was initiated by workers or management. Commenting on worker resignations and dismissals, L. Schlemmer and C. Rawlins

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<sup>51</sup> NA, SCF, T.H. Ellis to control officer (staff), 20 February 1975.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> NA, SCF, Ellis to the director of administration, 14 May 1975.

<sup>54</sup> Discussion with David Hemson, UND, History Department, 22 June 1994.

<sup>55</sup> University of the Witwatersrand (hereafter UW), William Cullen library, HLP, SACTWU, NUTW, G 45.12.1, Wiseman Mbali versus state, p 137.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with J. Gwala, Bolton hall, SACTWU offices, 27 September 1993.

wrote:

Management may initiate a termination by dismissal or workers may do so by resigning or desertion, but these actions represent different sides of the same coin of conflict. Thus, for example, a refusal by management to negotiate a grievance may result in a worker resigning because he sees himself as having no other alternative. On the other hand, a worker's failure to co-operate or make concessions may lead to a situation when management has no alternative but to dismiss. Then again, a worker may even deliberately provoke a dismissal either because of his own or management's desire not to compromise or negotiate.<sup>57</sup>

Resignations tended to be the initiative of the employees and an indicator of the African labour force's attitude towards what R. Allen called "the demeanour and disposition of employees" in industrial settings.<sup>58</sup> Of course, several factors account for resignations of African employees. Allen's study on the timber industry has shown that drivers, for instance, took up employment in that specific industry as a stepping-stone to employment opportunities in other industries.<sup>59</sup> Since drivers were skilled operators "with a licence", they used their special status and competitiveness to job hop from one employer to another.<sup>60</sup> Recounting his experiences of the 1970s, D. Hemson opined that some African workers took the first employment opportunity with the hope of changing it as soon as they found better employers.<sup>61</sup>

Resignations were also often a by-product of low wages and wage-related complaints such as the payment of wages on

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<sup>57</sup> L. Schlemmer and C. Rawlins, Black workers who leave (Durban, University of Natal, CASS, 1977), p 11.

<sup>58</sup> R.D.J. Allen, Ambivalence and commitment in work: labour turnover and the stability of African employees in a Transvaal border industry (Durban, UND, CASS, 1978), p 44.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p 40.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Discussions with David Hemson, UND, History Department, 22 June 1994.

different days of the month and changes in monthly wage packages, especially when wages decreased.<sup>62</sup> Racist statements and attacks by white supervisors on African workmates caused great resentment which led, to some extent, to resignations. As one worker recalled: "For any minor mistake you may be sworn at and then kicked. I cannot do that even to my child".<sup>63</sup> This appears to be an integral aspect of labour discipline during this phase of industrial development in South Africa. High labour turnover was also partially a result of what could be termed "poor or inefficient administration, or disorganised work-procedures, in the employment situations".<sup>64</sup>

### Working the system

There is enough evidence to demonstrate that workers developed other sophisticated ways of "beating the system". Slow-downs were common and some workers refused to do certain tasks "because it was a hard job".<sup>65</sup> Others adopted the strategy of "wandering around" or "loafing" as a way of wasting time. M.E. Zulu, a former employee of the Board based at Congella Brewery, was well known for "causing trouble" and "loafing around" the Brewery grounds.<sup>66</sup> The practice of "loafing" on the job, though not always the case, was another way of avoiding work and that in itself was a conscious form of protest against poor wages and conditions of service. Despite the existence of factory indunas, supervisors and foremen in

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<sup>62</sup> Schlemmer and Rawlins, Black workers who leave, p 64.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p 65.

<sup>64</sup> Allen, Ambivalence and commitment in work, p 44.

<sup>65</sup> NA, SCF, Department of Business Undertakings to the chief director, 3 November 1975. See the case of Mpongese when he also refused to stack empty crates.

<sup>66</sup> NA, SCF, General manager, Congella brewery to the chief director, 18 September 1975.

various establishments, workers deliberately wasted time in toilets. At Frametex company, this was a common practice and later led to the removal of toilet doors, particularly in mill number eleven, by the management.<sup>67</sup> Because of the absence of a smoking lounge in the same mill, workers walked at a pace which suited them to mill number nine where the facility was available.<sup>68</sup>

Apart from moonlighting (avoiding work or pacing it to suit themselves), African workers engaged in part-time jobs during self-proclaimed off-duties as a way of raising money. This device is best illustrated by the case of G. Nxumalo, a former cinema doorman or usher employed by the PNAAB.<sup>69</sup> Occasionally, Nxumalo absented himself from work without permission, especially in 1975. On two occasions, Nxumalo was caught officiating at soccer matches at KwaMashu Soccer Stadium while supposedly on duty. On 12 July 1975, Nxumalo was warned by A. Cameron, the supervisor, not to officiate as a linesman during a soccer match at the stadium since he was the only usher on duty. In response Nxumalo indicated that he had made arrangements with another official to replace him as a linesman, but was later seen by Cameron at the stadium.<sup>70</sup> Once again, on 6 September 1975, Nxumalo took an unofficial half-day's leave and officiated as a linesman at the stadium. He was caught by Cameron and was dismissed for misconduct on 31 October 1975.<sup>71</sup>

Certainly, the tactic undertaken by Nxumalo involved

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<sup>67</sup> Minutes of meeting of the Frametex works/liaison committee, 4 October 1977. See also minutes of meeting..., 6 June 1978.

<sup>68</sup> Minutes of meeting of the Frametex works committee, 6 June 1978.

<sup>69</sup> NA, SCF, Manager, central district, G.F. Baker to the chief director, 15 October 1975.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

risks of detection by officials. Nonetheless, other workers managed evasively and passively to "work the system" unobserved. As with Nxumalo, and similar cases recorded by the Board officials, African workers developed strategies which were aimed at supplementing their wages by involvement in part-time jobs. Most reactions of this nature to exploitation were rather silent and in most cases it was very difficult to detect and control this form of protest. There were many days when African workers avoided work, embarked on go-slows and were "disobedient" - behaviour which capital interpreted as "laziness of [the] Zulu labourer".<sup>72</sup>

A sizeable number of workers resorted to "wastefulness" - as in the case of D. Mbambo, who was caught several times spilling beer all over the yard at Congella brewery.<sup>73</sup> Many more found it expedient to direct their frustrations by simply "over-supplying" orders. In March 1973, P. Shangase of the PNAAB over-supplied an order for packed "Bantu" beer, and the management took it as a mistake.<sup>74</sup> In this, and similar cases, the supplier would be given some money privately. It was a series of over-supplies which prompted the Board to conclude that "Shangase.. be transferred to Kwamashu Labour Bureau...[due to his]... dereliction of duty...".<sup>75</sup>

## Drunkennes

With regard to reported "drunkennes" at places of work, employers associated it with "laziness of [the] Zulu labourer", while for workers it represented a means of

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<sup>72</sup> See NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/9, Labour, 1 October 1975 - 31 January 1976, G.F. Baker, manager, central district to the chief director, 26 November, 1975.

<sup>73</sup> NA, SCF, General manager, Department of Business Undertakings to the chief director, 21 October 1975.

<sup>74</sup> NA, SCF, G.F. Baker, acting manager, central district to the chief director, 17 May 1974.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

"ironing out emotional peaks and troughs".<sup>76</sup> Cases of workers coming drunk to work and drinking over lunch-time are well documented by the PNAAB; the phenomenon will be illustrated by a few cases cited below. Such actions could not be understood by employers but for workers it was another form of relaxation from unrewarding and tiring work. Psychological adjustment or escapism, such as drunkenness, is a powerful form of resistance at the work place itself. C. Ambler and J. Crush noted that drunkenness is a "...set of cultural and social responses to the harsh experiences of industrial employment, urban residence, impoverishment, and racial segregation".<sup>77</sup>

Ambler and Crush are of the opinion that the interpretation of beer drinking among Africans has been expressed by and large within a white colonial discourse.<sup>78</sup> In contrast, they view drinking "...not simply as a weapon of domination but also as a relatively autonomous form of cultural expression, and thus a potent form of resistance".<sup>79</sup> It was Van Onselen's pioneering essay, "Randlords and Rotgut", that marked a complete break with earlier assumptions about the use of alcohol in southern Africa.<sup>80</sup> According to Van Onselen, liquor drew men to the gold mines and helped mining capitalists to secure a cheap labour force and hold them there by meeting their consumer needs.<sup>81</sup> As long as mine productivity was maintained, alcohol was tolerated by the

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<sup>76</sup> Cohen, "Resistance and hidden forms of consciousness", p 19.

<sup>77</sup> C. Ambler and J. Crush, "Alcohol in southern African labour history", in J. Crush and C. Ambler (eds), Liquor and labour in southern Africa (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1992), p 2.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p 11.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> See Van Onselen, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914, 1, New Babylon.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p 95.

mining authorities, but as soon as drunkenness seriously hampered production it became the worst enemy of mine employers. The officials of the National Union of Mine Workers in the 1980s came out strongly against drunkenness as retarding worker solidarity or as a form of insulation from "rational" resistance.<sup>82</sup> Also condemning widespread drunkenness among workers were the radical youth of the 1970s who saw it as a betrayal of the liberation movement.<sup>83</sup> Despite such wide-ranging condemnation of alcohol use, workers found it a means of escape and relief from their tiring work or, say lack of acculturation to the harsh terms of industrial discipline.

One of the most fascinating examples of a worker who was always drunk and gave his employers "headaches" was Z. Ngema.<sup>84</sup> Ngema worked at the Kwamashu Maintenance Depot of the PNAB from the early 1970s. On several occasions, it was alleged, Ngema reported for duty drunk and was "unwilling to do work...[he] refused to carry out instructions given to him by both European and Bantu supervisory staff".<sup>85</sup> On 10 December 1974, he was drunk to the extent that he could not perform his duties and as a result was given a half-day off. For three days in a week, Ngema reported for duty drunk and was sent home. During the same month, he refused to accompany a gang of workers who were assigned to cut grass in the township. The reason for his refusal was that that "work was beyond him ... a stomach complaint made it difficult for him to carry out his work".<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, from 18 December

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<sup>82</sup> D. Moodie, "Alcohol and resistance on the South African gold mines, 1903-1962", in Crush and Ambler, Liquor and labour in southern Africa, p 163.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p 179.

<sup>84</sup> NA, SCF, Ellis to the director of administration, 18 February 1975.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

onwards, Ngema was assigned light duties of sweeping at the Depot but only worked for a few hours and then disappeared from work. As a result of his actions, he was dismissed by the Board in February 1975. This particular case shows another form of resistance by workers: drunkenness went hand in hand with poor performance at work, with refusal, in some instances, to perform duties and the denial of labour-power to the employer. The latter is clearly illustrated in the case of Ngema when he was given off-days on several occasions due to his state of drunkenness.

Drunkenness was widely reported by the PNAAB officials. It was rife among Maintenance Service workers,<sup>87</sup> and Brewery workers, to mention but two.<sup>88</sup> *Ijuba* beer tended to be used as a means of courage-gathering to resist instructions from supervisors. Refusal to carry out certain duties becomes in itself a form of resistance. Such resistance can be illustrated by the case of M. Sibisi, who worked at the Leicester Road Depot of the PNAAB.<sup>89</sup> Sibisi was on record for constantly refusing to carry out instructions from his African supervisor, Tabete. He was transferred to the refuse removal gang to prove his willingness to work because he had, as the management put it, "become insolent to seniors and ...[was] having a bad influence on the rest of the task force".<sup>90</sup> Sibisi continued with his resistance and when requested by the management to terminate his services, he agreed. It was only established that Sibisi had been offered another job in the textile industry a week before he agreed to terminate his

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<sup>87</sup> NA, SCF, Control officer, (Technical and Building Services) to director of administration, 13 November 1974. See the case of M.M. Mkwayana.

<sup>88</sup> NA, SCF, Ellis to director of administration, 18 February 1975.

<sup>89</sup> NA, SCF, Ellis, Assistant director, Technical and Building Services to director of administration (staff section), 19 May 1975.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

services.

### Women and resistance

Many labour historians have tended to undermine the role played by women in South Africa's economy. Most of these historians have, however, as S.B. Stichter noted, paid insufficient attention to women's hidden resistance and concentrated mainly on "writing about male labourers".<sup>91</sup> From the 1970s onwards, women historians have challenged this male-dominated and gender insensitive type of history and became "more interested in how women have constructed their own autonomous cultures [of resistance], they also began to suggest new ways of integrating gender into working-class history".<sup>92</sup>

Undoubtedly, women's struggles, just like men's, were varied and ranged from hidden and silent to open forms of response. A close examination of the textile industry reveals that women workers were involved in sexual activities with foremen or supervisors in order to get promotion or wage increments or to prevent dismissal. Although it sounds as if the women workers took the initiative to involve their supervisors in sexual activities, in fact sexual favours were usually demanded by those in power. Most women workers who participated in such activities were forced by circumstances which were beyond their control. One of the duties of the supervisors was to recommend wage increments to specific workers who had excelled in their work. As M. Mothwa recalls:

Some of us saw it necessary to fall in love with these foremen so as to get a fair treatment and better pay... It was because a woman would not love him for the sake of loving, they were forced to do it, like going to bed with these foremen in order to

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<sup>91</sup> S.B. Stichter, Migrant labourers (Cambridge, CUP, 1985), p 164.

<sup>92</sup> See this rich and insightful book by I. Berger, Threads of solidarity: women in South African industry, 1900-1980 (London, James Currey, 1992), p 8.

secure their jobs.<sup>93</sup>

Mothwa's sentiments reflect a particular recognition that sexual harassment was and still is a problem for labouring women in all industrial establishments and various places of work. It is a pointer to men's abuse of power by making sexual demands on working women.<sup>94</sup> Obviously this practice was not condoned by management. For those women who resisted sexual advances of foremen, they were "never promoted and did not get good reports for wage increments".<sup>95</sup> In some cases, women complained to management about sexual harassment but, as Msomi said, "it was difficult to prove except in one case where a supervisor was dismissed after women gave evidence against him".<sup>96</sup> Justifying feminist outcry against sexual harassment, M. Bularzik opens her analysis thus:

As in many forms of violence against women, the assertion of power and dominance is often more important than the sexual interaction. Sexual demands in the workplace... become even more coercive because a woman's economic livelihood may be at stake.<sup>97</sup>

While the practice itself constituted women's sexual exploitation by men, it could also be interpreted as women's way of working the system in order to get much-needed wage increments.

At Frame, for instance, where women worked alongside men,

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Maureen Mothwa by Junerose Nala: 1973 Research Project by Dr D. Hemson. Interview translated by Peace Cele, 19 October 1993.

<sup>94</sup> See Berger, Threads of solidarity. She gives an interesting account of how shop stewards at a Dunlop chemical factory in Durban successfully laid a trap for a training officer who was requiring sexual favours as a condition of employment (p.3).

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Msomi, 16 October 1992.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> See M. Bularzik, "Sexual harassment at the work-place: historical notes", Radical America, 12 (1978), pp 25-6.

they frequently received lower wages for the same work. In the textile agreement prior to 1973 there was a wage differential of about a third between women and men doing the same work. While poverty level wages were paid to both men and women, it was women who bore the main burden and it was their labour which increasingly became central to production. However, the sexual line of division was between weavers and spinners; women being regarded as more nimble in handling spinning operations. In their continued struggle against exploitation, another manifestation of women's ability to raise money was the adoption of the tactic of selling food to workmates during lunchtime at the expense of factory canteens.

The consequence of large numbers of female employees at Frame's textiles was the frequent excuse by women who avoided work, that their children were sick. Women's actions in this regard were not without justification because they were exploited in various ways. During the 1960s and 1970s, Frame was well known for subjecting women to degrading and exploitative conditions. Pregnant women were discharged and denied maternity leave (a fairly common practice in most labour sections of South Africa at the time).<sup>98</sup> Their re-employment depended on the available vacancies. As a result of this unjust labour practice, many women workers at Frame refused to divulge their pregnancies, as the Frametex Liaison Works Committee minutes show:

Many girls were afraid to reveal their pregnancies as they were not sure that they will be able to be re-engaged after being away from pregnancy leave. It was the policy of the Company to advise a female when she left whether she will be suitable for re-employment or not. However, an ex-employee would only be re-engaged provided there were vacancies in their departments.<sup>99</sup>

After giving birth, women reported to work within a week and the reason advanced for the absence was illness: women's

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<sup>98</sup> Minutes of the Frametex meeting..., 2 August 1977.

<sup>99</sup> Minutes of the Frametex meeting..., 14 November 1978.

workmates notified the relevant supervisor to that effect during the period of absenteeism in order to avoid her dismissal.

Another tactic developed by women in the textile industries was the avoidance of heavy work on the grounds that they were women. Some women who were called upon to do heavy tasks found ways of avoiding such jobs. M. Mothwa explained such a situation:

I used to work harder, for example, taking blankets out of the machines to somewhere to be weighed. They were heavy without anyone to help ... From the storeroom, we had to ... take the yarn ourselves...It was heavy. Some women fell in love with men in order to be helped.<sup>100</sup>

Because of the meagre wages paid to their husbands, women who were excluded from formal employment often engaged in other activities such as the sale of beer, food and sex. Writing about women on the Zambian Copperbelt, S. Stichter notes:

The commercialisation of services such as food, beer and sex has been for many women quite a successful way to get access to the collective pay check, both in Zambia and throughout Africa. And on the Copperbelt in the 1940s even adultery paid: women were in such high demand that married women sometimes sold sexual favours on the side in order to get a little extra cash.<sup>101</sup>

The problems faced by working women are not unique to South Africa alone, but are world-wide. For instance, in Zimbabwe, "the sex for job" issue became widespread during the 1980s, and compelled the government to enact a law prohibiting such a practice.

## Conclusion

Cognisance of the passive forms of protest are fundamental to an understanding of the material history of the African

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Maureen Mothwa: 1973 Research Project.

<sup>101</sup> Stichter, Migrant labourers, p 167.

working class under capitalism. Such struggles, though confined to the individual consciousness and without many publicised victories and concessions won, nonetheless have their own impact. The hidden forms of resistance will always remain a "bedrock" and a "genuine" form of consciousness. This chapter has focused on one of the less obvious themes of African labour studies. The intention of the chapter was not only to show the continuity of African resistance to exploitation during the apartheid era, but to serve as a reminder to historians, writers and scholars of different persuasions that various modes of struggle were utilised during the 1960s and early 1970s. The fact that the apartheid state policies of the 1960s virtually abolished the legal rights of the African people to political and trade union activities does not negate the argument that covert forms of struggle continued unabated. However, the coming of independent trade unions in the 1970s (discussed in Chapters 8 to 11) gave a voice to workers' demands. Thus, although there were unions in the period from 1973 onwards, informal resistance has remained in place and can be regarded as a common practice in most labour establishments.

*PART TWO*

**The Rise of African Independent Trade Unions**

## *Chapter Eight*

### The 1973 Durban Strikes

#### Introduction

African workers in South Africa, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, were governed by a wide range of oppressive legislation designed to paralyse them. The most important laws in this respect were the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 and the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act of 1953, which, respectively, restricted trade union activity and stipulated heavy penalties for striking workers. Such restrictive laws were meant to intimidate African workers not to challenge the established accumulation order. But the capitalist form of accumulation in South Africa tends to bring into being open and explicit class struggle between labour and capital, particularly in the workplace. African workers' struggles have always varied in form and hence have ranged from hidden to open forms of resistance. One viable form of struggle has been the strike.

Strike actions by African workers in the 1970s challenged the whole oppressive system of poor wages, pass laws, residential segregation, the denial of political and trade union rights and the Bantu Education system under which all Africans suffered - men, women and children. The wave of strikes of 1973 is very important in that it assumed a new and distinctive character not possessed by any of the previous general strikes called by the nationalist leaders of the 1950s. It was spontaneous, and it shook the apartheid state which had enjoyed relative industrial "peace" since the

banning of the ANC and PAC in 1960. It also set the scene for what was to come. Furthermore, the 1973 strike which was to change the face of labour relations throughout South Africa happened in Natal and not in the Transvaal - the industrial heartland of the country.

## Workers and strikes

Strikes, even if they end disastrously, function to raise worker consciousness, broaden solidarity amongst workers and extend the level of understanding of the moral economy or the unethical justification for exploitation.<sup>1</sup> Commenting on the 1973 mass strikes in Durban, B. Magubane writes:

Mass strikes in South Africa represent high points in the class struggle. Even the accommodation of the white workers to the status quo was not a given. It took place after violent and bitter struggles organised by the white workers against capitalist intentions to deprive them of their livelihood.<sup>2</sup>

In the early twentieth-century, the battle lines were clearly drawn between white labour and mining capitalists, with employers opposed to trade unions for white miners. However, white workers embarked on strike action and were able to

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance T.D. Moodie, "The moral economy of the black miners' strike of 1946", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol 13, no 1 (1986); and V.I. Lenin, What is to be Done? in Collected Works, volume 5 (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1961), pp 375 - 408. Lenin did not give unqualified support to strikes. He stated that unless worker action has a political dimension, it is limited. He was not only interested in political strikes but in the relationship between economic and political strikes; the one feeding on the other. His main argument is that strikes bring forward the issue of workers' control of society and socialism. He was clear that the trade unions had to fight for reforms; the question was how these reforms were fought for - to increase the workers' self-confidence or to strengthen illusions in capitalist reform. Arguably, successful strike action in South Africa over the past 15 years has led, at one level, to a tacit acceptance of the capitalist ethic. Forcing the state and capital into reform has been in the long-term interests of capital.

<sup>2</sup> B. Magubane, South Africa: from Soweto to Uitenhage (New Jersey, Africa World Press, 1989), p21.

assert themselves against the harsh treatment of their bosses. For instance, on the eve of the First World War, white mine-workers were involved in a massive and bloody strike which resulted in the recognition of their trade unions by the Chamber of Mines. The white miners fought to defend their privileges against the tendency of employers to reduce their position and to substitute cheap labour for their more expensive labour.

The African working class (like white workers) had also to stand up against exploitation, and their strike action ushered in an era of intensive industrial unrest in all the metropolitan areas. The strikes also saw the advent of an unprecedented growth of the independent African trade union movement, which forced the state to institute legislation that, for the first time, allowed African workers to be recognised as "employees". African trade unions were legally recognised, as was their right to strike.<sup>3</sup>

Under the Industrial Conciliation Act (ICA) of 1924, African workers had not been regarded as "employees" in terms of its provisions. Consequently, African workers were automatically excluded from any participation in the crucial machinery of industrial relations in the country. They were subjected to discrimination under the Industrial Conciliation Act, which enforced the colour bar by simply defining an "employee" as anyone who was not a "native"; coloured and Indian workers were also included in the definition. Since Africans were not defined as "employees", their trade unions could not be registered. Although unregistered African trade unions were in fact never made illegal, they were excluded from participation in the industrial labour machinery which was a preserve of whites, coloureds and Asians. The fact that such unions could not be registered was an obvious discrimination which cried out to be challenged.

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<sup>3</sup> Such changes took place soon after the release of the Wiehahn and Riekert Commission Reports in 1979.

By the beginning of the 1970s, there was a gathering momentum of labour unrest in Durban, largely influenced by the activities of the newly established General Workers' Factory Benefit Fund (GWFBF), the University of Natal Students' Wages Commission, and also the re-emergence and regrouping of former SACTU officials who had survived the 1960s. The Wages Commission was formally established at the University of Natal by white students in order to help African workers by presenting evidence to the Wage Board, encouraging working class organisation and campaigning for higher wages. They also launched a local newspaper. Printed in Zulu, *Isisebenzi/Industrial Worker* provided key information on the poverty datum line and it carried strike news on any industry that was affected. On 8 June 1971, about 10 000 pamphlets were distributed in Durban by the Wages Commission, soliciting support from workers for a meeting to protest against the Wage Board's recommendation for unskilled workers in Durban, and pressurising for a wage of at least R7,97 a week.<sup>4</sup> A sizeable number of workers attended the meeting and made a demand of R20 a week. The following day, at the McWillaw Iron and Steel Foundry, about 200 African workers went on strike, demanding higher wages. They used the pamphlets which were distributed by the Wages Commission to bargain for higher wages. The management of the steel foundry first fired all the workers but later re-employed some, although refusing to rehire the leaders of the strike.<sup>5</sup>

While the struggle for wages continued in Durban, the issue of worker organisation became central, especially among the officials of the Garment Workers' Union of Natal and the Furniture Union. These two unions represented Indian workers and were led by H. Bolton (a famous, key figure among Durban

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<sup>4</sup> D. Hemson, "Class consciousness and migrant workers: dockworkers of Durban" (University of Warwick, Ph.D, 1979), p 552.

<sup>5</sup> See The Natal Mercury, 10, 11 and 16 June 1971; and The Daily News, 10 and 17 June 1971.

trade unionists and general secretary of the registered TWIU, GWIU and FAWU in 1970), who offered assistance and guidance in the establishment of the Benefit Fund on 9 September 1972 to provide medical and death benefits for workers and their families, particularly those of the clothing and furniture industries.<sup>6</sup>

By the time the Durban strikes broke out, the Benefit Fund had recruited thousands of African and Indian workers from different industries and organised workers' committees, which in a few cases were recognised under the law in various industries, as a form of protection for its representatives.

Another development in 1972 was an attempt by trade union officials of the 1950s and 1960s to revive the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).<sup>7</sup> Its decline has been a subject of intense debate among scholars such as R. Lambert, S. Friedman, J. Baskin, E. Feit and E. Webster.<sup>8</sup> Central to the debate was SACTU-ANC relations from the late 1950s to 1960, during which period the federation was intact and strong. Despite the divergent views on the decline of SACTU, scholars are agreed that between 1960 and 1965, about 160 SACTU officials were banned.<sup>9</sup> By mid-1965, SACTU had

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<sup>6</sup> SALB, "Report on the General Workers' Factory Benefit Fund", SALB, 1,3 (July 1976), p 52. See also Friedman, Building tomorrow today, p 43.

<sup>7</sup> E. Webster, Cast in a racial mould (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985), p 132.

<sup>8</sup> See R. Lambert, "Political unionism and working class hegemony: perspectives on the South African Congress of Trade Unions", Labour, Capital and Society, vol 18, no 2 (1985); S. Friedman, Building tomorrow today: African workers in trade unions, 1970-84 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987); J. Baskin, Striking back: a history of COSATU (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1991); E. Feit, Workers without weapons (Hamden, Archon, 1975); and E. Webster and R. Lambert, "The re-emergence of political unionism in contemporary South Africa?", in W. Cobbett and R. Cohen (eds), Popular struggles in South Africa (London, Onyx Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, T. Lodge, Black politics in South Africa since 1945 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1990 ed), p 197

completely faded away with many of its leaders in exile. It was only in the early 1970s that attempts were made within the country to revive the organisation. The impact of the revived SACTU was not, however, as much as had been expected, since the activists had been absorbed into the General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund.

The South African Students' Organisation (SASO) (formed in July 1969 with the sole purpose of conscientising the African communities) and the Black Consciousness Movement were involved in worker education and organisation, processes which were realised through the distribution of pamphlets to workers. As the history of these organisations is well-documented, it is not necessary to examine them here.<sup>10</sup> At its conference in July 1972, SASO instructed its organiser to consider the viability of establishing a Black Workers' Council to enable "...workers to negotiate in a united voice for those conditions regarded as essential to their survival".<sup>11</sup> Thus the role of the Workers' Council was

...to serve the needs and aspirations of [African] workers, to conscientise them about their role...to run clinics for leadership, in-service training and to imbue them with pride and self-confidence as people and about their potential as workers.<sup>12</sup>

In order to realise its objects, SASO formally launched the Black Workers' Project (BWP) in 1972. However, very little was achieved and neither SASO nor the BWP politically influenced the outbreak of the 1973 Durban strikes.

Like any other organisation labelled as communist by the state, the BWP experienced state hostility and harassment. On

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, G. Gerhart, Black power in South Africa (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978); S. Biko, I write what I like (London, Heinemann, 1979); and Reader's Digest, Illustrated history of South Africa: the real story (Cape Town, The Reader's Digest Association, 1992 ed).

<sup>11</sup> See R. Toli, "The origins of the Durban strikes, 1973" (University of Durban- Westville, MA, 1991), p 219.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

5 February 1973, the Minister of Labour, M. Viljoen, accused the BWP of being "one of the instigators" of the 1973 strike, indicating that letters were posted to various organisations in 1972 for distribution to the workers so as to advise them not to be "pushed around by whites".<sup>13</sup> This kind of accusation was used by the state as justification for the arrest of five members of the Black Peoples' Convention and SASO for distributing pamphlets to African workers at the Warwick Avenue bus terminus in early February 1973.<sup>14</sup>

The stirrings of discontent continued. In Durban, the dockworkers went out on strike on 23 October 1972 and demanded R18 a week, "voluntary overtime, shorter working hours, and complained that their living conditions were...unhygienic".<sup>15</sup> Some of the complaints advanced were that, since there were no payslips, workers felt cheated by the company through unknown deductions for income tax and compound fees. Workers rejected indunas as their representatives and some complained of the lack of bunks in the compounds, since most of them slept on the cold floor. The food was bad and beer sold in the compounds was diluted with water.<sup>16</sup>

On the second day of the dockworkers strike, Dreyer, the Compound Manager, warned them to return to work or risk losing their jobs. The police were called in and workers had no choice but to return to work. Commenting on the strike, the Wages Commission noted that: "Force has resolved the issues for the present. The underlying causes remain - workers dissatisfied with very real conditions: long hours, low wages,

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<sup>13</sup> South African Observer, 18, 1 (March 1973), p 9. For debates in the Parliament over these issues, see House of Assembly Debates, 19 April 1972.

<sup>14</sup> The Sunday Tribune, 4 February 1973 and The Star, 7 February 1973.

<sup>15</sup> Hemson, "Class consciousness and migrant workers", p 648.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

hard and dangerous work, and separation from families".<sup>17</sup>

The dockworkers' strike of 1972 failed to achieve the desired wage increments or to redress workers' varied grievances and demands. Various lessons were learnt from the dockworkers' strike, namely that mass united action was possible and that worker representatives should not be elected in order to avoid victimisation of particular identified individuals. Workers were, therefore, prepared to speak with one voice.

### Coronation Brick and beyond

From 9 January to 31 March 1973, Durban was rocked by a series of strikes. *Usuthu*, "a Zulu war cry which originated as a reference to raided cattle, in a homestead of the Zulu prince Cetshwayo ka Mpande more than 140 years ago"<sup>18</sup>; *Filumuntu ufe usadikiza*, "Man is dead, but his spirit lives"<sup>19</sup>; these were the slogans which the Coronation Brick workers chanted as they entered the football stadium in Durban on 9 January 1973. At about 3 am, the Coronation Brick workers at the Number One and Avoca plants marched in two columns towards the stadium, thereby beginning what is popularly known as the Durban Strikes. About 2 000 workers participated, demanding a minimum wage of R30 per week. After two days of negotiations, workers accepted a R2 rise and a new minimum wage of R11,50 per week. The news of the Coronation strike spread throughout Durban and the whole country, with newspapers documenting as much as possible about the striking workers (quite a significant change in attitude by the press). This reporting marked a

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<sup>17</sup> The Wages Commission Statement as cited in Hemson, "Class consciousness and migrant workers", p 651.

<sup>18</sup> J. Guy, The destruction of the Zulu Kingdom ( London, Longman, 1979), p 246. See also IIE, The Durban strikes, 1973, pp 96-7.

<sup>19</sup> See for instance, IIE, The Durban strikes, 1973 ( Durban, IIE, 1974), p 10.

significant change in the attitude of the press. Indeed, the press's general sympathy towards strikers was precisely because workers "had real grievances" which needed to be "brought to the notice of the public and the employers".<sup>20</sup>

The Coronation Brick strike ignited unrest throughout the province of Natal. Mostly, when workers initially began to strike they rejected the idea of electing representatives for fear of victimisation. However, Durban workers enjoyed the support of their traditional leaders only on rare occasions, especially King G. Zwelithini, which gave the strikers' cause some legitimacy. The King became involved in the dispute at Coronation and offered to negotiate with management on behalf of workers. His involvement gave hope to workers although nothing favourable came out of his deliberations with management.<sup>21</sup> This was the first and possibly the only time such support from the Zulu king could be recorded.

Strike surveys show that as one factory returned to work, another came out on strike; the main issue in each of the strikes was the same - the demand for higher wages. The momentum of the strike wave failed to decline, even as thousands of armed police were flown in from Pretoria and other cities. The heavy police presence did not incite violence and in most cases the police hardly intervened actively in the strikes. It is possible that the police adopted such an attitude in order to avoid confrontation with workers as had occurred in the past and which could have led to general unrest. But as a result, the police presence failed to deter workers from striking.

Most important were the strikes in the textile industry, particularly those involving the most exploited, poorly paid textile workers from the Frame Group of companies. From 25 January the strikes spread from mill to mill and the whole empire stretching from Pinetown to the Mobeni area was

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<sup>20</sup> IIE, The Durban strikes, p 44.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, see pp 10, 12- 13.

affected. Within weeks, thousands of workers from various industrial establishments also downed tools. The first three months of 1973 saw 61 410 workers on strike <sup>22</sup> and by the end of the year, about 100 000 African and Indian workers were involved.<sup>23</sup>

The outbreak of strikes in Durban took the apartheid state by complete surprise. It was clear that the decade of "law and order" of the 1960s, the widely acclaimed era of industrial peace, was over. The state implicated employers in the problem of failing to blame "agitators" and "intimidators".<sup>24</sup> The state further implicated employers for failing to improve workers' wages and living conditions. In turn, employers of African labour pointed fingers at the state's labour policies and in particular at the Wage Board. The accusations and counter-accusations did little to explain what could have precipitated a strike wave of such magnitude in Durban in 1973.

Numerous works have been produced in an attempt to explain the causes of the 1973 Durban strikes. M. Boulanger singles out low wages, the job colour bar and the total absence of legal machinery for representation on the part of African workers.<sup>25</sup> The Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) came to the conclusion in their work *The Durban Strikes* that:

The strikes were a series of spontaneous actions by workers which spread by imitation, and the spread was 'multiplied' by the fact that three quite independent factors happened to coincide. The second factor was the existence in Durban, strategically placed in each of the major industrial areas, of a

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<sup>22</sup> House of Assembly Debates, 24 April 1973, col 691-98. See also the figures provided by the SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1973.

<sup>23</sup> SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1973.

<sup>24</sup> See IIE, The Durban strikes, 1973, p 91.

<sup>25</sup> M. Boulanger, "Black workers and strikes in South Africa", Race, XV, 3 (1974).

number of factories belonging to one organisation characterised by particularly low wages and bad labour relations - the Frame group. The third factor was the rising transport costs and the rumoured train boycott. What precisely sparked off the strike is not clear - however, once the strikes did occur, the sight of large crowds of workers out on strike encouraged workers in neighbouring factories, and the strike spread geographically road by road.<sup>26</sup>

The study, however, fails to explain the reasons for the outbreak, that is, why they first occurred at Coronation Brick. The idea of a "spontaneous strike" embarked upon by workers was clearly a problem to the authors. In their attempt to avoid spontaneity, they emphasized three major players during the strike: small groups of agitators, activists and influential persons. The authors assert:

The spread of spontaneous action of this kind will almost certainly depend upon and be influenced by pre-existing informal communication networks such as friendship groups, 'homeboy' groups, groups of people who 'habitually commute together' and so on.<sup>27</sup>

E. Webster criticises the authors for their failure "to explore further these central insights into spontaneous mass action and the reader is left with the actual dynamics of conflict in particular factories unexplained and unexplored".<sup>28</sup> He also noted that,

The omission is the result of the authors' political objective in writing the book, i.e., to explore the dominant managerial and state ideology that the strike was the result of 'agitators'.<sup>29</sup>

The authors of the book were also criticised by J. Maree who noted:

...The sad omission of *The Durban Strikes* is a study of the leadership and organizational patterns that

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<sup>26</sup> IIE, The Durban strikes, pp 99-100.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp 91-2.

<sup>28</sup> Webster, Cast in a racial mould, p 132.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

most probably existed during the strikes.<sup>30</sup>

David Hemson believes that the 1973 strikes were guided by an underground ANC and SACTU leadership structure "which exist[ed] as the groupings of workers acting consciously, illegally and secretly to carry forward working class struggles".<sup>31</sup> He further states:

While the mass strikes were undoubtedly spontaneous, ... they were not unorganised, although this organisation was not merely a series of heightened social interactions nor a result of communication between social groupings in bus queues, but collective action by workers guided by working class leadership.<sup>32</sup>

Justifying his claims, Hemson draws examples from the dock-workers' strike of 1972, in which an anonymous letter expressing the workers' demands was addressed to the Wage Board.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, letters stipulating workers' demands were clipped on the noticeboards, giving ultimatums to managers to respond; "... petitions [were] organised, and secret strike committees [were] set up".<sup>34</sup> Recounting his experiences of the 1973 strike, Hemson believes that people such as W. Mbali, an underground leader, and B.B. Cele, an established community figure and leader, who played a significant role in igniting the Durban strikes.<sup>35</sup> Such a view is suggested by scattered evidence coming from the Natal Chamber of Industries' report

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<sup>30</sup> J. Maree, "Seeing strikes in perspective: review article of the Durban strikes, 1973, South African Labour Bulletin, volume 2, No. 9 & 10 (May- June 1976), p 99.

<sup>31</sup> D. Hemson, "Trade unionism and the struggle for liberation in South Africa", Capital and Class, Nos 4-6 (1978), p 22.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp 22-3.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p 23.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Discussions with D. Hemson, 24 October 1994.

in which Pinetown strike leaders were identified.<sup>36</sup> In a report to the NCI, the names of strike leaders were given as: P. Masondo, J. Mavundla, P. Ntwaniza, E. Sithole, J. Cele, M. Mtolo and G. Mtetwa.<sup>37</sup>

K. Luckhardt and B. Wall also acknowledge that worker action was spontaneous, but claim that it was organised by underground union leaders.<sup>38</sup> They wrote:

[I]t is important to point out that while the strikes were undoubtedly spontaneous, they were not unorganized. Such a large scale interruption of production could occur only if workers had their own underground organisation that made decisions and refused to expose individual leaders to a hostile regime. In the context of apartheid repression, open and legal trade unions cannot act as the vanguard of proletarian action; rather, the underground must play that role, while that underground machinery itself emerges from the close comradeship and class consciousness that emanates from the daily routines of social production.<sup>39</sup>

At Coronation, N. Zulu emerged as a leader<sup>40</sup> and at Frame's textile empire, workers such as I. Shongwe, R. Manyathi and S. Ngubane were underground leaders who played an important role in the organisation of workers during the strike.<sup>41</sup> In Umlazi, news of a strike was heard a day before the Coronation one. As E. Nyawo remembers:

In Umlazi, we had an underground organisation which comprised the ANC activists, trade unionists like Ntuli and other community leaders. This organisation was opposed to Urban Bantu Council structures or any

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<sup>36</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 82, Roll 64, Natal Chamber of Industries, Public Relations, File 4, 19 November 1973 - 14 October 1974, File 3/8, 5 February 1973.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Report by M/O, Pinetown.

<sup>38</sup> K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, Organise or starve (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), p 453.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p 13.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with J. Gwala, 27 September 1993.

apartheid structure and it was believed then that members of the newly formed Umlazi Residents Association were the ones behind this organisation... In January 1973, members of the Umlazi Residents Association organised workers and notices of an impending strike action were placed on bus and train stops a day before the Coronation strike. It is possible that these people were behind the whole strike action.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps a much broader perspective on an underground network that played an important role in the outbreak and during the strikes will be brought out in Hemson's book.<sup>43</sup> What is very clear from the 1973 strikes however is that workers refused to elect representatives and none of the underground leaders in Natal came out, but rather workers insisted on speaking with one voice. In fact, from the available evidence individual, underground leaders from different firms led and organised workers during the strikes

More recently, R. Toli's work makes an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the 1973 strikes.<sup>44</sup> Toli draws attention to the long and short-term causes of the strikes, particularly at the Coronation Brick company which ignited the 1973 strike wave. The central thrust of Toli's thesis is firstly, the fact of poor wages and the management's rejection of wage increments, and, secondly the job colour bar which excluded some African workers from skilled jobs and hence from higher wages. Thirdly, Toli identifies certain

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with E. Nyawo, Umlazi, 30 July 1992.

<sup>43</sup> See forthcoming book on 1973 Durban strikes by Dr David Hemson. Hemson at that time was a Research Officer for the Textile Workers Industrial Union (TWIU) and later banned in 1974 for his participation in the 1973 strikes. It is unfortunate that the Natal Chamber of Industries, when disbanding in 1977, destroyed all their documents. In fact, the NCI officials deliberately destroyed all confidential material contained in their library which could have been of vital importance to this particular study. The "underground leaders" referred to in this study include both those Congress leaders who were still within the country and the rising leaders of informal networks without any necessary connection to the prior resistance.

<sup>44</sup> Toli, "The origins of the Durban strikes, 1973".

influences and networks of communication that developed before the general strike, such as the activities of the Black Consciousness Movement, the General Workers' Factory Benefit Fund (GWFBF), the Students' Wages Commission and the dockworkers' strike of 1972.

All the above works neglect the very fundamental causes which are derived from the residential areas, hostels and informal settlements where the general workers lived with their families. The 1973 conflict did not arise purely from work-oriented problems, market forces and influences, and networks of communication. It was also a conflict that emerged from the discontent created within African residential areas. The townships, hostels and compounds were not "total institutions where protest is vigorously repressed, but rather act as hothouses of discontent"<sup>45</sup> and this was carried over to the workplace.

In a symposium organised by the South Africa Institute of Personnel Management in March 1973, Chief M.G. Buthelezi summarised the causes of the Durban strikes. Quoting Buthelezi on worker issues seem strange in the 1990s, but in the 1970s it was not that out of place since he enjoyed much worker support and was still in favour with the banned ANC. Buthelezi stated:

...Can anyone tell me that against this background it is all a surprise that Africans in Durban went on strike?...There has been inflation in this country for some time and the cost of living has gone up all the time... Africans, poor as they are, are always placed in townships as far away from their places of employment as possible ...Black workers need the security that all workers have... Black workers would like to have their children educated on the same basis as White children... Black workers would like to enjoy normal family lives and not lead an abnormal loveless life as 'bachelors' in the hostels... South Africa cannot afford to sit down and maintain conditions for workers which border on

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<sup>45</sup> S.B. Stichter, Migrant labourers (Cambridge, OUP, 1985), p 174.

semi-slavery.<sup>46</sup>

It is thus clear that the causes of the outbreak of the 1973 strikes cannot be simply attributed to activities of "outside agitators", as government officials claimed; nor can blame be laid on "younger Bantu workers without family responsibility", as the Durban Chamber of Commerce's Non-European Affairs Standing Committee and the Economic Advisory Committee noted.<sup>47</sup> Studies undertaken by the Institute of Social Research (ISR) at the University of Natal,<sup>48</sup> and the South African Institute of Race Relations,<sup>49</sup> failed to find any evidence of the so-called outside agitators or of large-scale intimidation. Even the police found no evidence to substantiate the state claims.<sup>50</sup> On the contrary it seems as if the Durban strikes were organised by an underground movement.

Professor Schlemmer's remarks on the Durban strike validate such claims:

There was, well before the strikes, a core of people, not outsiders or politically orientated intellectuals, within the industrial employee group, who act[ed] as a nucleus around which labour action could grow... Informal patterns of communication in friendship groups, drinking groups, groups sharing transportation facilities, and other social networks would have been sufficient to set in motion a widening process of mutual encouragement and

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<sup>46</sup> M.G. Buthelezi, "The reasons behind the Durban strikes and the aspirations and needs of the Black workers", S.A. Institute of Personnel Management, Strikes - the lessons from Natal (IPM, Symposium held in Johannesburg on the 14th March, on how to avoid and deal with strikes, 1973), pp 3-5.

<sup>47</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 80, Roll 62, DCC, Minutes of a special committee of the Non-European Affairs Standing Committee and the Economic Advisory Committee, 8 February 1973.

<sup>48</sup> University of Natal, Institute of Social Research, "The Durban strikes" (UND, ISR, 1973).

<sup>49</sup> SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1973; and SAIRR, Labour organisation and the Black worker, 1974.

<sup>50</sup> Friedman, Building tomorrow today, p 50.

support.<sup>51</sup>

Professor Schlemmer's study suggests the existence of social pre-conditions which are easily traceable. Such issues are important if we are to understand the 1973 strikes. J. Msomi, recounting her experiences of the early 1970s, stated:

Many of us lived in shacks, we did not have proper accommodation, no water, no electricity and the sanitation was very, very poor. The wages in the textile industry were bad. In 1972, I was paid R5 per week and I was expected to survive on that and in addition my two children... When we went on strike in 1973, each and every worker demanded higher wages, but of course there were too many grievances to be addressed. Things such as accommodation, education for our children, transport, racism and so on, were our grievances...<sup>52</sup>

Given the situation which faced African workers at the time, it only required a precipitating factor such as the failure to be awarded an increment or, say, the rumoured 16 percent increase in rail fares, to ignite latent frustrations into a strike. Once the Coronation Brick workers began their strike, the process snowballed as more African workers saw the relevance of strike action to their own particular situations. Yet behind the outbreak of the strike wave of 1973 was the existence of underground leaders in a number of factories who guided and "refused to expose individual leaders to a hostile regime".<sup>53</sup> It appears, however, that there were at least two kinds of leaders: the informal group leaders who defended the wages of workers against management action, were established

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<sup>51</sup> SAIRR, Labour organisation and the Black worker, p 9.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Judith Msomi, Bolton Hall, Workers' College, 16 October 1992. Judith was part of the shop stewards and trade unionists at the Workers College, who were undertaking a trade union course in 1992. I became involved in the course as a private tutor while Professor Jeff Guy provided some lectures. I interviewed quite a number of those students. My profound thanks to Professor Guy who introduced those students to me while conducting my research in 1992.

<sup>53</sup> Luckhardt and Wall, Organise or starve, p 453.

figures, and shaded into the new union leadership, and the small clusters of ex-ANC, SACP and SACTU leaders who met on the basis of friendship and shared interests.

### Philip Frame and the strike wave in textiles

In February 1973, newspapers monitoring labour unrest in Durban boldly printed: "Tycoon Frame gets the blame: Amazing career of man who got rich on cheap labour"<sup>54</sup> and "Philip Frame asks: Must I take all the blame?"<sup>55</sup> This was enough to capture people's attention. In an interview with the *Rand Daily Mail*, P. Frame admitted underpaying his workers, saying, "I certainly share the collective responsibility or guilt".<sup>56</sup>

Labour conditions in the Frame textile mills were extremely exploitative, particularly for migrant women. In 1973 the Frame company employed just over 22 000 workers in factories operating in South Africa (mainly in Durban), Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, more than half of whom were women. Such women were subjected to terrible working conditions and it is thus not surprising that those employed in the textile industry tended to be very militant in their approach to labour struggles. In 1973 they participated fully with men in the strikes.

By 1973, some workers at one of Frame's textile companies had not received an increase in 14 years.<sup>57</sup> O. Zuma recalls the working conditions at Frame:

The working conditions were terrible in Natal and in South Africa as a whole. But at Frame it was worse because this company had a feeling that it was helping poor people, so there was no need of improving conditions of work...Wages were low, ranging from R5,65 per week... Nothing was provided

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<sup>54</sup> The Sunday Times, 11 February 1973.

<sup>55</sup> The Rand Daily Mail, 13 February 1973.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Labour History Group, Durban strikes, (Cape Town, July 1987), p 15.

for workers like transport, food, accommodation... Many women [were] forced to co-habit with men for accommodation...<sup>58</sup>

When the strike broke out at Frame, women took a leading role. Management needed to redress the grievances of the workers, for, as one worker shouted during the strike period: "We are not children, ...we are asking for the managers to listen to our problems, then we will go back to work".<sup>59</sup> The following report is also informative of conditions:

In the Frame factories, prospective female employees who survive a mandatory pregnancy test are then subjected to the continual watchful eye of factory doctors instructed to watch for signs of impending motherhood. Until early 1980 the Frame factories terminated the services of pregnant women, but since then an altered policy ostensibly provides for reemployment eight weeks after confinement. Women workers allege, however, that supervisors retain the arbitrary power to determine whether a woman will be reinstated. Those allowed to return are required to undergo a 'retraining' period during which time they are excluded from bonuses and overtime work. Instances of coercive intrusion by capital into workers' personal lives appear to be not uncommon in South Africa. In one engineering factory it was discovered in 1970 that African women were being forced to take the pill daily under a nurse's supervision.<sup>60</sup>

The working conditions experienced by workers at Frame demanded militant action as a way of achieving a wage increment. The textile workers had made it clear that:

We are not children who make a noise for no reason. We are men and women who want to see if tomorrow can be better than today because today is a struggle which is very heavy and we would like to have hope for the future.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Obed Zuma, 18 August 1993: 1973 Research Project.

<sup>59</sup> As cited in Friedman, Building tomorrow today, p 46.

<sup>60</sup> As cited in Stichter, Migrant labourers, p 177.

<sup>61</sup> D. Horner, "Recent Durban strikes", Race Relations News, volume 35, No 3 (March 1973), p 1.

Frame, like other employers, initially attempted to implement the advice distributed by the Durban Chamber of Commerce to its members on how to deal with strikes. The ten points were:

1. Notify the Department of Labour (telephone number 28371).
2. Advise your workers that you will consider their demands on condition that they return to work.
3. Advise the workers that there will be no pay for the time they are on strike.
4. If you consider that your present rates of pay are fully justifiable stand by these and in no circumstances move from that stand.
5. If you feel that an increase in minimum wages is necessary determine this increase and tell them of your decision. Thereafter stand by your decision.
6. Do not attempt to bargain as this will only encourage the Bantu to escalate his demands. Action must be positive, definite and final.
7. Grant increases of a definite amount in preference to percentages on earnings. Percentages are not easily understood by the Bantu and across-the-board increases are of greater benefit to the lowest workers.
8. Do everything possible to avoid violence but if this should arise, call the police immediately.
9. Handle the press carefully - they may not trespass on your premises but it is usually wise to give them reasonable and accurate information.
10. Stoppages to date have been mainly good natured and the tactful police action has contributed greatly to this. Make every effort to keep it this way.<sup>62</sup>

Frame failed to withstand pressure and finally awarded increases to the striking workers.

### The results and significance of the 1973 strikes

Clear to all employers of African labour was the fact that minimum wages of below R10 per week were a recipe for disaster since, as rightly noted by Prime Minister J. Vorster, African

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<sup>62</sup> KCAL, PNAB, KCF 80, Roll 62, The Durban Chamber of Commerce, 9 February 1973.

workers were "human beings with souls".<sup>63</sup> Vorster was sympathetic to African strikers and blamed employers for only "see[ing] in their workers a unit producing for them so many hours of service a day"<sup>64</sup> without any consideration of their poor wages. The 1973 strikes immediately, as the statement of the Federation of South African Trade Unions reads, "prompted agonized soul-searching which was to go on for years - until, in fact, the 1976 Soweto unrest switched the focus to agonized soul searching about township unrest".<sup>65</sup>

The situation of African workers employed by British companies in South Africa also came under public scrutiny after the release of a series of reports by the local and international press. Articles by A. Raphael of *The Guardian* forced the British government to institute a full-scale enquiry by a Parliamentary Select Committee into wages paid to African workers in South Africa.<sup>66</sup> British companies in South Africa were found to be among the worst exploiters of African labour. The first "Code of Conduct" was recommended for subsidiary companies in South Africa. However, the "Code of Conduct" was heavily criticised by the emerging African trade union movement as a

...means by which the capitalist class tries to substitute its own programme of improvements for the programme of social transformation demanded by workers. All the Codes of Conduct that exist have been drawn up by governments or groups of employers... In reality, there is not the slightest

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<sup>63</sup> See, for instance SA Parliamentary Debate, col.346, 9 February 1973; and also IIE, The Durban strikes, p 106.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> University of Witwatersrand (hereafter UW), William Cullen Library (hereafter WCL), Historical and Literary Papers (hereafter HLP), FOSATU, AH 1999/C 3.12.3.18: C 3.5.4, Strikes: political implications of industrial unrest, p 5.

<sup>66</sup> See UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, AH 2196/ H 23.3.1, Profiteering from cheap labour: wages paid by British companies in South Africa (London, South African Labour Education Project, August 1980).

guarantee that even the wages proposed by the EEC Code of Conduct will be paid by all British employers in South Africa.<sup>67</sup>

Despite such criticism, the increases which, ranged between R0,50 and R2,07 per week, were awarded to workers in 1973 are a pointer to the effectiveness of strike actions or work stoppages.<sup>68</sup>

As a result of the strikes, the government and company managements had to look for ways of dealing with the new situation. The strikes brought about the formation of illegal independent African trade unions. However, the Benefit Fund had earlier laid the foundation for worker organisation in Durban through its various activities. Furthermore, the Benefit Fund had a vision of being a "stepping stone to trade unionism proper, hiving off sections of its members into industrial unions when sufficient membership in that particular sector had been achieved".<sup>69</sup> It was in this climate that the first independent trade unions were formed. In April and September 1973, the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) and the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) were formed respectively.<sup>70</sup> The Furniture and Timber Workers Union (FTWU), the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) were established in 1974.<sup>71</sup> Durban had taken the lead in the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp 7-8. See also UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, H 23.2, EEC Code of Conduct, 1973.

<sup>68</sup> SAIRR, A view of the 1973 strikes, 20 November 1973 -see summary of strikes.

<sup>69</sup> P. Bonner, "Focus of FOSATU", SALB, volume 5, no 1 (1979), p 6.

<sup>70</sup> See S. Meer, "Community and unions in Natal: Part one from the 1973 strikes to independent trade unions", SALB, volume 13, no 3 (1988), p 79; G. Wood, "The 1973 Durban strikes: of local and national significance", Contree, number 31 (1992), p 23; and also Chapter Ten in this thesis.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

formation of independent trade unions, which eventually were to be established nationally. Quite clearly, the 1973 strikes had created the necessary conditions under which African trade unions could be formed; in fact, the strike wave had set in motion the process. As independent trade unions were formed, it became apparent that there was need for a co-ordinating body. This led to the formation of Natal's Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council (TUACC) in 1975. This was the link with the KwaZulu government to support industrial organisation. In 1979, however, TUACC joined with other independent unions to form a national co-ordinating body, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU).

In response to those developments, the government, surprisingly, amended the labour laws as a way of facilitating new channels of communication between African workers and their respective employers. The Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act of 1953 was amended in 1973 in response to the new climate of militancy from African workers. The Act was renamed the Bantu Labour Relations Regulations Act of 1973. The amended Act gave birth to three kinds of committee for representing African workers at the company level: works committees, which had existed in a different form under a previous Act; co-ordinating works committees, which were supposed to co-ordinate various activities and represent African workers in industries, or at any work place where there was more than one works committee; and finally, liaison committees.

While the intention of the 1973 Act was to prevent the African work force from striking through the establishment of a number of liaison committees, labour unrest continued throughout the second half of 1973 and thereafter. Table A presents statistics to substantiate such claims in this regard.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, H 23.3.2, Rodney Stares, Black trade unions in South Africa: the responsibilities of British companies (Christian Concern for southern Africa, 1977), p18; and

TABLE A  
Number of strikes reported in Durban, 1973-1975

	1973	1974	1975
Unlawful strikes	252	194	123
Persons involved	73 399	38 961	12 451
Number of strikes involving African workers	246	189	119
Number of African workers involved	67 338	37 724	11 847

From mid-1973, however, strikes decreased in militancy but there was an increasing struggle for union organisation. The result was that the government was again forced to review the Bantu Labour Relations Act, which led to a new Act in 1977.

In August 1977, the amended Bantu Labour Relations Regulations Act came into effect. The attempt at control-through-reform continued, culminating in the release of the Wiehahn Commission Report in 1979. This report recommended the official recognition of African trade unions rather than continuing to "bleed the unions to death" as was done in the past.<sup>73</sup> The government accepted the major recommendations of the Wiehahn Commission, and the Industrial Conciliation Act was amended to extend the definition of "employee" to include African workers. African trade unions were granted legal recognition and that in itself marked the beginning of a new chapter in the labour history of South Africa. It made the struggle worthwhile for the African workers of South Africa, and of Durban in particular.

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see also SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1973, p 302.

<sup>73</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, FOSATU, C 3.15.4, Nicholas Wiehahn and the end of classical labour ideology: the commission and its aftermath, p 12; see also Friedman, Building tomorrow today, Chapter 6, pp 149-179.

## Conclusion

The 1973 strikes were unique in that their outbreak was spontaneous; they were guided by workers themselves or by an internal and underground leadership. Workers refused to elect a leadership - one that had to negotiate with employers - thus avoiding state victimisation and employer co-option. Workers broke the "silence", and shook the apartheid state which had enjoyed relative industrial "peace" soon after it banned the ANC and PAC and had assumed greater powers in the 1960s. SACTU had collapsed in the mid 1960s and left a vacuum in the organisation of African workers. Most unregistered African unions disappeared and worker action in factories had declined; in fact, there were very few strikes reported in the 1960s. In 1962 and 1963, only sixteen and seventeen strikes were reported respectively, while between 1955 and 1960 an average of 76 strikes a year were recorded.<sup>74</sup> This decline in strike action was to remain the pattern until the early 1970s. However, with the outbreak of the Durban strikes workers won wage increments without being involved in protracted wage negotiations. In addition, the explosion of industrial unrest beginning in Durban ignited a series of responses which, for almost two decades, the apartheid state was unable to control. 1973 saw not only a resurgence of strike action, but also marked the birth of a new brand of independent African trade union movement which forced the state to institute reforms and contributed to the eventual collapse of the apartheid state.

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<sup>74</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, B 2.1, P. Bonner, "Lecture delivered to the inaugural congress of FOSATU: the history of labour organisation in South Africa", April 1979, p 5.

**Workers in Action: 1973 Durban Strikes  
(Photographs in their order)**

1. Durban City engineers workers marching in the streets
2. Coronation workers at the Sports ground
3. Frame's textile workers outside the mills
4. Coronation workers marching in the streets
5. Durban City engineers workers marching and escorted by the police
6. Durban's acting mayor addressing engineers workers
7. Frame's textile workers on strike
8. White volunteers unloading vegetables at the market during the strikes







## *Chapter Nine*

### **The State's New Industrial Relations System and African Workers of Durban, 1973-1979**

#### **Introduction**

By the beginning of the 1970s, South Africa's industrial relations had been structured along racial lines: while white, coloured and Indian trade unions were recognised, African unions were wholly excluded. African workers were, however, represented by the State Labour Department officials and/or by registered unions on some Industrial Councils where wage rates and conditions were negotiated. That was in spite of the fact that the government had introduced works committees for Africans in 1953 (under the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act of 1953) as substitutes for unions. Trade unions were viewed by the state as unsuitable, even dangerous, forms of worker collectives for Africans and hence the establishment of works committees. In 1953, it was envisaged by the Minister of Labour, B. Schoeman, that if such works committees were effective and successful, "trade unions for Africans would die a natural death".<sup>1</sup> However, the establishment of works committees was hardly a success: by 1973, only 24 statutory works committees existed throughout the country.<sup>2</sup> By November

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<sup>1</sup> P. Bonner and E. Webster, "Background", *SALB*, 5, 2 (1979), p 4.

<sup>2</sup> D. Horner, "African labour representation and the draft bill to amend the Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Act" *SALB*, 2, 9 & 10 (May/June 1976), p 15; R. Southall, Imperialism or solidarity?: International labour and South African trade unions (Cape Town, UCT Press, 1995), p 56; and J. Maree, "The emergence, struggles and achievements of Black trade unions in

1972, only four works committees were registered in the Durban-Pinetown-Inanda industrial complex, an area where there were approximately 500 employers.<sup>3</sup> It was only after the Durban strikes of 1973 that the 1953 Act was amended to provide new channels of communication between African workers and employers. These channels were meant to be complementary to the works committees and together they marked the birth of liaison committees. Of particular significance in the 1973 Act was the right of African workers to strike. The ulterior motive behind the establishment of liaison committees by the state - not only to block the formation of African trade unions, but also to obstruct the development of the works committees of the 1970s - created suspicion and distrust among African workers. This chapter is about the new industrial relations system established between 1973 and 1979 and the response of Durban's African workers (from a few selected case studies) to the new dispensation.

### The state's new approach to industrial relations in the 1970s

Faced with a new climate of worker militancy, the government and company managements had to look for ways of dealing with the situation. In response to the waves of strikes beginning in Durban in 1973, the government amended the labour laws to facilitate new channels of communication between labour and capital, and also to extend control over African labour. The amended Bantu Labour Regulations Act of 1973 was meant to counter African trade unionism through a system of management dominated in-plant committees, which had *de facto* negotiating powers, serving only as forums for consultation. The amended Act gave birth to three kinds of committees for representing

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South Africa from 1973 to 1984", Labour, Capital and Society, 18, 2 (1985), p 286.

<sup>3</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 80, Roll 62, Representation through Bantu works committees? by L.D. Thorne, Director, Natal Employers' Association, 28 November 1972, p 9.

African workers at the company level: works committees, which had existed in the previous Act but were snubbed as "tea and toilet committees" by African workers<sup>4</sup>; co-ordinating works committees, which were supposed to co-ordinate various activities and represent African workers in industries, or at any work-place where there was more than one works committee; and finally, liaison committees.

The functions of a liaison committee, as gazetted by the government in 1973, were:

To consider matters which are of mutual interest to the employer and his employees and to make to the employer such recommendations concerning conditions of employment of such employees or any other matter affecting their interests.<sup>5</sup>

A liaison committee was established through the initiative of the employer and half the members plus the chairperson of the committee were appointed by the employer while the remaining members were elected by those workers. Liaison committees made recommendations to employers on conditions of employment but were not empowered to negotiate agreements on wages and working conditions with employers.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of works committees, all their members were elected by workers and were only established in industries where no liaison committees existed. Because works committees comprised only African workers, a considerable number of workers had confidence in them and thus viewed them as their representative bodies.<sup>7</sup> The functions of a works committee were:

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<sup>4</sup> Friedman, Building tomorrow today, p 54.

<sup>5</sup> Government Gazette, number 3963, section 3 (4 July 1973).

<sup>6</sup> J.G.B. Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions in South Africa in the 1970s" (unpublished Ph D, University of Cape Town, 1986), p 116.

<sup>7</sup> L.C.G. Douwes Dekker, J. Kane-Berman and H. Nxasana, "An assessment of existing forms of labour organisation: work committees, liaison committees and trade unions", in SAIRR, Labour organisation and the African worker (Johannesburg, SAIRR, 1975), p 36.

To communicate the wishes, aspirations and requirements of the employees in the establishment... to their employer and to represent the said employees in any negotiations with their employer concerning their conditions of employment or any other matter affecting their interests.<sup>8</sup>

The 1973 Act was silent, however, on wage negotiations, which led J. Bloch, a lawyer, to write,

While negotiations are thus provided for, no specific mention is made of agreements. Further, no provision exists entitling or indeed obliging such a committee to have a constitution. Without such a constitution it cannot be said that a committee has been authorised by each and every employee to act on his behalf and so bind himself.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the intention of the government was to weaken works committees so that they would be unable to negotiate binding agreements with employers.

The right to strike, although enshrined in the 1973 Act, was extremely limited. Accordingly, the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) commented that: "the conditions under which African workers legally have the right to strike are severely circumscribed, and ... considerable procedures allowing for a 'cooling-off' period have to be followed".<sup>10</sup> In any case, legal strikes could not take place as long as there was a wage determination by the Wage Board or, say, in an essential service industry or where an unresolved dispute had been notified to the Minister of Labour for a Wage Board recommendation.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the legality of strike action failed to protect strikers from being dismissed. The Act

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<sup>8</sup> Government Gazette, number 3963, section 4 (4 July 1973).

<sup>9</sup> J. Bloch, "The legislative framework of collective bargaining in South Africa" (unpublished LLM thesis, University of London, 1977), p 27. See as cited in UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, H 23.3.2, Rodney Stares, Black trade unions in South Africa, p 16.

<sup>10</sup> TUCSA, Trade union directory (Johannesburg, 1975), p 45.

<sup>11</sup> Maree, "An Analysis of the independent trade unions", p 118.

stipulated heavy penalties for employers who victimised their workers on the basis of their participation in the election or activities of a liaison or works committee. In theory, the Act provided some form of protection to workers but in practice "victimisations were widespread and prosecutions rare".<sup>12</sup> In 1974, for instance, at Pilkingtons glass plant, African workers who had complied with all the procedural requirements to legalise strike action were simply classified by the government as deserters and dismissed *en masse* by the employer.<sup>13</sup> Thus the Tongaat Group of companies commented that "instances of failure to pursue and resolve allegations of victimisation have probably done more to destroy confidence and acceptance of the system than any other single consideration".<sup>14</sup>

The number of Africans involved in industrial disputes between 1973 and 1976 never fell below 30 000 per year with a peak of 100 000 in 1973, while those involved between the 1963 and 1972 strikes had decreased considerably to approximately 10 000 per year.<sup>15</sup> In addition to industrial disputes, the country was to witness a new wave of urban unrest in 1976, which involved workers in August and September in a series of stay-aways. The government was further alarmed with those stay-aways which, for instance, had records of 300 000 workers being involved in Johannesburg, about 30 000 in Durban and 200 000 in the Cape Peninsula.<sup>16</sup> The government felt considerable unease, as P. Bonner puts it,

After the urban uprisings of 1976 - the threat of the politicisation of strike action was much feared if no effective trade union rights were to be granted - a prospect all too real, as the 'class of

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<sup>12</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, Stares, Black trade unions, p 17.

<sup>13</sup> University of Natal, Natal Room (hereafter NR), David Hemson Papers, Trade Unions in South Africa, p 2.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Stares, Black trade unions, p 17.

<sup>15</sup> Bonner and Webster, "Background", p 5.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", p 122.

76' began entering the factories.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the urban uprisings were not much of a factor in convincing the government to change legislation. M. Lipton believes that it was a combination of factors: the refusal of African trade unions to accept liaison committees as an alternative to trade union rights, mounting international pressure, support from progressive employers, and the liberal press and lobbies.<sup>18</sup> These factors led the government once again to review the Bantu Labour Relations Act, which culminated in the amended Act of 1977 and the appointment of the Wiehahn Commission (discussed below).

In August 1977, this amended Act came into effect and was in reality more anti-labour than both the 1953 and 1973 Acts. The Act allowed both liaison and works committees to be established at any workplace provided that all interested parties were in agreement to such structures. It gave higher status to liaison committees and downgraded works committees. Increased bargaining powers were given to liaison committees so that they "would become the principal piece of machinery through which representation would be facilitated".<sup>19</sup> Liaison committees could now "negotiate and enter into agreements with the employer in relation to the wages or the conditions of employment...".<sup>20</sup> As for works committees, their role was relegated to one of making recommendations to liaison committees. Furthermore, the Act stipulated that more than one liaison committee could be established in any industry and such committees could be linked together by a co-ordinating liaison committee, which had the power to negotiate with employers. Despite this increased muscle for liaison committees, by 1979 not even a single agreement had been

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<sup>17</sup> P. Bonner, "Independent trade unions since Wiehahn", SALB, volume 8, no.4 (1983), p 17.

<sup>18</sup> M. Lipton, Capitalism and apartheid (Cape Town, David Philip, 1986), p 341.

<sup>19</sup> Bonner and Webster, "Background", p 5.

<sup>20</sup> Government Gazette, number 5613, section 7 (2) of 1977.

negotiated between a liaison committee or co-ordinating liaison committee and employers.<sup>21</sup>

The Act also contained provisions which amounted to the exclusion of African trade unions from participation in the process of wage negotiations. While the government made attempts to develop liaison committees that were more acceptable to African workers, it further undermined the position of African trade unions.<sup>22</sup> It is clear that the government's intention in establishing those committees was an attempt to extend control through reformist moves and the aim in mind was still that African trade unions should "die a natural death".<sup>23</sup> In June 1977, the government appointed a Commission of Inquiry into Labour Legislation under the chairmanship of Nicholas Wiehahn (professor at the Institute of Labour Relations of the University of South Africa).

The Commission's terms of reference were:

The adjustment of the existing system for the regulation of labour relations in South Africa with the object of making it provide more effectively for the needs of our changing times; the adjustment, if necessary, of the existing machinery for the prevention and settlement of disputes which changing needs may require; the elimination of bottle-necks and other problems which are at present being experienced within the entire sphere of labour; and the methods and means by which a foundation for the creation and expansion of sound labour relations may be laid for the future of South Africa.<sup>24</sup>

Two months later, Prime Minister P.W. Botha, announced a second Commission of Inquiry into Legislation affecting the Utilisation of Manpower. The chairman and sole member of the

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<sup>21</sup> Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", p 120.

<sup>22</sup> See UW, WCL, HLP, FOSATU, C3.15.4, Nicholas Wiehahn and the end of classical labour ideology: the commission and its aftermath.

<sup>23</sup> See footnote number one.

<sup>24</sup> Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit, "The Wiehahn Commission: a summary", in The Wiehahn and Riekert Reports (May 1979), pp 13-52; and also Bonner and Webster, "Background", pp 1-2.

Commission was Dr P. Riekert (economic advisor to the Prime Minister), who was tasked to investigate the regulation and utilisation of African labour in other departments, falling outside the ambit of the Departments of Labour and Mines.<sup>25</sup>

The Wiehahn Commission released its report in 1979 and it must have come as some surprise to government because it recommended the official recognition of African trade unions rather than continuing to "bleed the unions to death" as had been done in the past.<sup>26</sup> The government had no option but to accept the major recommendations of the Wiehahn Commission, and the Industrial Conciliation Act was amended to extend the definition of "employee" to include African workers.<sup>27</sup> The government's acceptance of what clearly amounted to a total back tracking on previous policy was because it had equated the de-racialisation of labour law as the end of apartheid in labour relations. This was a well-calculated move to depict South Africa as conceding to pressures from within and without and thus to provide a rationale for continued overseas investment in South Africa. However, even after Wiehahn, South Africa's industrial relations were not stable: successive drafts on the Industrial Conciliation legislation were tabled in parliament to address various concerns of both worker organisations and employers. It was only after the promulgation of the Labour Relations Act in 1981 that South Africa's industrial relations began to take a new shape; in fact, real collective bargaining between the new independent African trade union movement and management began to take place, though hesitantly. Nevertheless, African trade unions

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<sup>25</sup> For details on this Commission, see Chapter Three of this thesis.

<sup>26</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, FOSATU, C 3.15.4, Nicholas Wiehahn and the end of classical labour ideology: the commission and its aftermath, p 12.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed study on the recommendations, see, for instance, SALB, "The Wiehahn and Riekert Reports", in SALB, volume 5, no 4 (1979); and UW, WCL, HLP, FOSATU, C 3.15.4, Nicholas Wiehahn and the end of classical labour ideology: the commission and its aftermath.

were granted full legal recognition and thus a new chapter in the labour history of South Africa began.

### Employers' attitude between 1973 and 1979

Before the Wiehahn Commission, liaison committees mushroomed throughout the country. In 1973 there were a mere 773, in 1976 they had increased to 2 382 (see table below). Given a choice between liaison and works committees, employers preferred to establish the former, because employers had more control and say in them.

Table A

Liaison and works committees established, 1973-1977<sup>28</sup>

at 31 December	Liaison	Works	No of workers represented	Co-ordinating works
1973	773	125	312 541	3
1974	1 482	207	521 624	4
1975	2 042	287	617 579	5
1976	2 382	299	-	5
1977	2 503	301	-	-

Because of the large number of liaison committees established, it was often thought by labour that employers were against the emerging independent but illegal African unions.<sup>29</sup> It has been argued that employers were assisted by the state to crush emerging unions, of which J. Maree identified four means of doing so:

Legislation to assist management to try to undermine African trade unions; the adoption of policies and practices by the Labour Department that were specifically aimed against the advancement of African unions; harassment of union leaders and members by the security police; and outright repression of the unions by banning their leaders.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, Stares, Black trade unions, p 18; Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", p 119; and SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1973, p 302.

<sup>29</sup> Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", pp 115, 118; and Bonner and Webster, "Background", p 4.

<sup>30</sup> Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", p 115

Obviously, until Wiehahn, the state never favoured the development of African unions, fearing their politicisation. However, not all employers agreed with state policy of "bleeding African trade unions to death",<sup>31</sup> as will be discussed below.

Employers of African labour in Durban were quite clear on their views with regard to African trade unionism even before the 1973 Act came into effect. As early as May 1960, Assocom's Committee on Non-European Affairs issued a statement:

"...trade unions should with the affluxion of time and with suitable safeguards become representative of workers of all races".<sup>32</sup> In a meeting convened in September 1972, Assocom members expressed reservations about the use of works committees because "they did relate only to a particular firm, and had no standing with regards to an industry as a whole".<sup>33</sup> A. Adler, Assocom's committee member, commented: "Firms who adopted the works committee system were being accused of paternalism - there was an increasing demand for direct power representation, and this was a coming movement".<sup>34</sup> The 1972 Assocom meeting ended with a call on the government to amend the Industrial Conciliation Act "so as to allow Bantu workers to participate in trade unions in some manner, and to be represented where applicable on Industrial Councils".<sup>35</sup>

On 12 October 1972, the Durban Chamber of Commerce convened a meeting to consider "the problem of African trade

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted also in D.W. F. Bendix, "The new industrial relations system in South Africa", in B.U. Lombard (ed), The challenge of the new industrial relations dispensation in South Africa (Pretoria, UNISA, 1979), p 86.

<sup>32</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 80, Roll 62, Public Relations, Durban Chamber of Commerce, Extract from minutes of meeting of Assocom's non-European affairs committee, 7 September 1972.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

unions and of employee representation generally".<sup>36</sup> Wide-ranging views were expressed: some more progressive (and economically minded) members appealed for the legalisation of African trade unions. Others, for instance, A. Adams and B. Jackson, thought that government action was correct. Jackson said that "the main problem which would be encountered if Bantu trade unions were established was that these would be used for political purposes since the Bantu were not yet generally sufficiently industrially oriented",<sup>37</sup> and that "the establishment of [works] committees was a better answer for the employer than the establishment of trade unions in respect of a group which was not yet socially ready to take proper advantage of such organisation".<sup>38</sup> But the general feeling among members of the Durban Chamber of Commerce was that recognition of African trade unions was urgently required "in order to prevent unrest and dissatisfaction".<sup>39</sup>

That African trade unions were the only legitimate representatives of African labour was recognised by the Natal Employers' Association, writing in 1972 about the equivalent process of nineteenth century Europe:

We believe that this article, with its message that trade unionism is a humanitarian movement based four-square on the principles of justice and equity, is more meaningful in the present situation than at any other time in the history of South Africa. ...One of the most effective means of achieving these ends is to remind the working men of the history of trade unionism, of its great achievements and the bitter struggles that were fought and won before the rule of industrial tyranny was effaced and collective bargaining installed in its place. Trade unionism did not spring from the wickedness and malice of the workers.... On the contrary, it sprang from the social conscience and humanitarianism of those who were determined to challenge the ruthless greed and inhumanity of the

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<sup>36</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, Durban Chamber of Commerce, minutes, 12 October 1972.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

early Victorian industrialist. In the forefront of the giants who fought the battle was Robert Owen, paradoxically a wealthy industrialist but a man with conscience. The struggle went on for years, but in the end Owen and labour won.<sup>40</sup>

On 28 November 1972, the Natal Employers' Association organised a conference on "Industrial representation of the Bantu", at the Blue Water hotel in Durban.<sup>41</sup> It was opened by the mayor of Durban, councillor R. Williams, whose speech appealed to the government to consider removing barriers on African representation in industry:

It is my considered opinion that South Africa is indeed fortunate in its reserve of manpower, but the restrictions which prevent the full use of this reserve is holding back the economic development of this country, and it is essential that these restrictions should be removed as soon as possible.<sup>42</sup>

H.B. Edelstein, president of the Natal Employers' Association, agreed whole-heartedly:

We are all deeply concerned with the future economic well-being of South Africa, and the social and other consequences which both cause and spring from this. In this context it is no more than realism to acknowledge the contribution being made by the Bantu to our economy....If we agree on the contribution being made by the Bantu worker, his permanence in the framework of industry and commerce, and the enhanced contribution which should emanate from him in the future, then we are brought logically to consider the position of his relationship to employers and other employees, his rights as a human being and worker, and the best means of his representation for industrial peace and the most rapid promotion of the total economic welfare.<sup>43</sup>

In 1973, soon after the outbreak of the Durban strikes,

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<sup>40</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 79, Roll 61, Public Relations, Natal Employers' Association, March 1972.

<sup>41</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 80, Roll 62, Extract of Natal Employers' Association: Conference on industrial representation of the Bantu, 28 November 1972.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

the Durban Chamber of Commerce warned the Minister of Labour what the non-recognition of African trade unions could lead to:

Although...government authorities did not recognise the existence of Bantu trade unions, these were not illegal and that employers might be forced to accord some recognition to such trade unions on a practical basis if approached with the demand for negotiation.<sup>44</sup>

In their deliberations, members of the Durban Chamber of Commerce resolved that the government had to be "pressed to introduce legislation at an early stage to recognise and control such unions in order to ensure their orderly introduction".<sup>45</sup> Early 1974, the Durban Chamber of Commerce went further:

A possible de facto situation could arise where, despite the establishment of liaison or works committees, employers would find themselves obliged to accept either Bantu trade unions or Bantu homeland authorities as negotiating bodies for African labour.<sup>46</sup>

Later that year, the Chamber established a sub-committee on labour relations, "to investigate the implications of African trade unionism in depth and to make recommendations regarding the policy thereon which should be adopted by the Chamber".<sup>47</sup> In view of government policy, which remained implacably opposed to legalisation of African trade unions, the main object of the sub-committee was to provide a well-considered recommendation.

[It] was... necessary to...keep abreast of developments relating to the growth of African trade

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<sup>44</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, The Durban Chamber of Commerce, minutes, 13 September 1973.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, The Durban Chamber of Commerce, minutes, 14 February 1974.

<sup>47</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, The Durban Chamber of Commerce, minutes, report and recommendations of the labour relations sub-committee on matters pertaining to African trade unions, 12 September 1974

unionism, to be able to assess their effect on employers and on the economy generally, and to be in a position if necessary to exert pressure for change along desirable lines.<sup>48</sup>

The Minister of Labour was adamantly opposed to this action by the Durban Chamber, and warned that any agreement reached between employers and African trade unions would be declared "null and void as being an evasion of the statutory negotiation procedures..."; and that tough action would be taken against employers who contravened government policy on labour relations.<sup>49</sup> The sub-committee was consequently forced to tell the Chamber not to make any more public statements because "it would be wrong for the Chamber to encourage its members deliberately to place themselves in direct conflict with government policy in regard to the recognition of, and negotiation with African unions".<sup>50</sup>

Soon after the sub-committee had reported, the Durban Chamber endorsed the works and/or liaison committees required by the government but indicated that they had to "become effective bodies capable of negotiating conditions of service for Africans and capable of effective communication and consultation between management and employees".<sup>51</sup> But the Chamber went further indicating that it "would like to see the works committee system developing into a forum for collective bargaining".<sup>52</sup> The development of African trade unions was seen as "inevitable" and a situation where unions would negotiate conditions of employment generally while works committees would deal with domestic issues at the plant level was envisaged. The Chamber thus came out strongly in favour of recognising African trade unions while making all possible attempts not to create conflict with the government. It noted:

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

"In instances where African trade unions already exist and enjoy the obvious support of employees the Chamber advises employers to maintain contact and dialogue with the union organisation concerned".<sup>53</sup> After the 1973 Durban strikes, the Chamber was eager to recognise African trade unions in order to avoid similar disruptions taking place. Indeed, it had become obvious in the 1970s that the economy of the country was largely dependent on African workers and hence the legalisation of their unions was a necessity if employers had to attain industrial peace. The Chamber believed that the recognition of African trade unions meant their incorporation into the established industrial relations system where certain rules and strike procedures had to be followed.

These sentiments were also shared by the Natal Chamber of Industries, which expressed strong reservation about the lack of effectiveness of works and/or liaison committees in resolving industrial-related disputes. In its memorandum to the government dated 10 November 1974, the Natal Chamber of Industries wrote:

Employers have reservations about the ability of regional Bantu labour committees to play a meaningful role in the settlement of disputes primarily because of the apparent lack of status of the majority of current members of those committees. It would appear that African employees likewise have reservations against these committees possibly because of the fact that ministerial appointees are involved. The Bantu Labour Officer, being a state official, is viewed with some suspicion by Black workers... Black members of liaison committees do not necessarily have the support of the general worker.<sup>54</sup>

In 1975 a report that:

The fact that labour unrest sparked by necessity, or the aspirations, of workers has not repeated itself

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> KCAL, PNAAB, KCF 80, Natal Chamber of Industries, Extract: "Memorandum reflecting the proposals of the NCI relative to amendments to the Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Act, 1953 and aimed at achieving greater participation by Blacks in negotiating wages and conditions of employment and in settling disputes".

this year is no ground for complacent self-congratulations, but should rather be welcomed as giving us further time, the commodity of which we are so desperately short, to improve these very communications and joint consultation channels.<sup>55</sup>

There is no doubt from these public statements that many employers of African labour did not support industrial labour relations system established in 1973. Others desired to see independent African trade unions become part of multi-racial industry unions, where it was probable that the balance of power would remain with the "old guard" registered trade union officials. Still others thought that this course of action would be too dangerous politically and preferred to develop the works committees' African membership under employer tutelage to the stage where approved individuals could be promoted to the ranks of the registered union officialdom.

By 1977 the issue of labour relations in South Africa had become a priority for the government owing on the one hand to the rising demands of the African working class for trade union rights and on the other from employer pressure for well regulated labour relations. Government responses varied between schemes for reform to intensified repression of political and trade union activities. For capital, the government was offering either the recognition of African trade unions or rooting out completely any working class organisation in industry. Quite clearly, there was a contradiction between the discourse of recognition and the practice of non-recognition and reliance on repression by employers. By 1979, after Wiehahn, African trade unions had gained recognition: the trade union position had succeeded. In fact, the government had finally succumbed to mounting pressure from employers and working-class action, particularly in the 1970s, as well as international pressure.

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<sup>55</sup> NA, PNAAB, Labour, 1/2/1/1/2/27, Liaison Committees, Staff Advisory Bodies, 7 April 1974- 30 July 1976, Natal Employers' Association, 20 May 1975.

## The unions' and workers' strategies

In 1970, A. Grobbelaar, the general secretary of the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUSCA), warned of a bloody industrial strike surpassing that of 1922 if African unions were not legally recognised:

There is no valid reason why Bantu trade union leaders and officials could not...be trained in a manner which will ensure industrial peace... If this is not done, a trade union movement which will probably not be to our liking is almost certain to emerge.<sup>56</sup>

Three years later the strike wave that shocked government and employers caused African workers to flock to join the new independent trade union movement. Alarmed by this sudden rush to join unregistered unions, the government introduced plant-based committees as a further control mechanism. But were those committees acceptable to African unions and workers?

Douwes-Dekker's study of worker preferences between works and liaison committees revealed that the majority of African workers opted for the former. This was especially so in Durban; in October 1973, at the Raleigh Cycles plant, 720 workers (against 40) voted in favour of a works committee; in February 1974, at Western Biscuits company, 240 workers were in favour of a works committee while 40 opted for a liaison committee. At Van Leer Packaging, workers voted unanimously for a works committee.<sup>57</sup>

In general, however, workers preferred the independent trade unions which were now emerging on a large scale. These were preferred largely on the basis that they provided vital benefit schemes. But, as H. Nxasana, from the Institute for Industrial Education, indicated, "some workers felt that the works committees could be used as a stepping stone towards

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<sup>56</sup> A. Grobbelaar, The trade union movement in South Africa - its past, present and future directions (Johannesburg, TUSCA, 1970), pp 9-10.

<sup>57</sup> Douwes Dekker (et al), "An assessment of existing forms of labour organisation", p 36

forming a trade union".<sup>58</sup> "A works committee was better in the sense that we nominated our own people, real trade union leaders, unlike liaison committees which comprised many sell-outs, *indunas*, favoured by employers".<sup>59</sup> Or, as C. Khumalo reflected,

Works committees were better compared to liaison committees. At least, in works committees we had more say, particularly at Frame where Jabu Gwala and Cele were leading figures in those committees. After all, our leaders were members of the National Union of Textile Workers.... We could always speak with one voice either in liaison or works committees.<sup>60</sup>

On what might the choice have been based?

With the rapid growth of African unions in the 1970s, many of them at first rejected liaison committees but later realised that these could be useful and encouraged participation in works committees by voting in their members to such structures. Such a strategy was central to the survival of African unions, for instance, the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW), in the 1970s. As said before, some employers favoured the establishment of liaison committees, over which they had a greater control. Various attempts were made by Frame, for example, to promote the establishment of liaison and, to a lesser extent, works committees. The NUTW experienced management hostility at different textile factories. By 1974, at Wentex, Frametex, Hammarsdale, Dano and S.A Fabrics (members of the Natal Chamber of Industries), liaison committees were launched to resist the NUTW as a form of worker representation.<sup>61</sup> Generally, the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council (TUACC)-affiliated unions were opposed to liaison committees and occasionally boycotted the elections of such committees.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p 48.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Moses Biyela, 16 May 1993.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with C. Khumalo, 10 September 1993.

<sup>61</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, NUTW, Staff meeting minutes, 11 March 1974

At the Natal Cotton and Woollen Mills (NCWM), about 650 workers were employed, of whom half were African members of the NUTW and 150 were Indian members of the Textile Workers Industrial Union and the rest were not unionised.<sup>62</sup> The personnel manager, C.J. Steenkamp, was not in favour of trade unions; he preferred a liaison committee. He dismissed workers who were members of the NUTW as part of his tactics to intimidate workers from joining trade unions and in just three months, 20 long-serving workers lost their jobs. In this particular company, the NUTW had consistently boycotted liaison committees but later realised that its strategy was not going to bring about the recognition of the union. During early 1975, the NUTW decided not to boycott liaison committees but rather to participate in these structures.<sup>63</sup>

Faced with the existence of the liaison committees at Frametex, Pinetex and Seltex/Nortex, the NUTW fostered good relations with members of those committees, and eventually had some influence in them. This facilitated the union's ability to focus on workers' grievances.<sup>64</sup> By 1978 the NUTW members at Frametex had completely taken over all elected liaison committee posts.<sup>65</sup> A similar situation occurred at Feltex in 1975, when the NUTW members won all elected liaison committee posts.<sup>66</sup>

As already explained, African workers generally resisted liaison committees, and favoured trade unions. The Port Natal

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<sup>62</sup> NUTW, "The Natal Cotton and Woollen Mills confrontation", SALB, volume 3, no 7 (1977), p 8.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Jabulani Gwala, Bolton Hall, SACTWU offices, 27 September 1993. Gwala was a prominent member of the Frametex works/liaison committee during the 1970s.

<sup>64</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, NUTW, Report to BEC meeting, 11 October 1975.

<sup>65</sup> See minutes of a special meeting of the Frametex Committee, 14 March 1978. Members of the Committee were: Jabulani Gwala, A. Mthembu, D.R. Dhlamini, M.D. Cele, Q. Sikobi, M.B. Mbele, P.Z. Khanyile, M. Radebe, A.S. Bhengu and three women, F.O. Gumede, S.D. Mavimbela and L.L. Gqwani.

<sup>66</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, minutes of meeting, June 1975.

Affairs Administration Board (PNAAB) complained about the general indifference of African workers towards liaison committees,<sup>67</sup> and up to the beginning of 1975, the Board continuously reported lack of interest among African workers in participating in liaison committee structures.<sup>68</sup> Several reports of various districts of the PNAAB indicated that, "...the response was equally disappointing and the labourers had to be asked to find persons sufficiently interested to accept nominations"<sup>69</sup>; "the response ...to nominations was very poor".<sup>70</sup> However, as mentioned above, when their use could be demonstrated, many African workers changed their strategies from confrontation to involvement in those structures.

As far as the PNAAB is concerned, in August 1973, it established works committees (dubbed Bantu works advisory committees), comprising six African workers elected by their workmates and two representatives from the Board, and a co-ordinating committee, of which two members were directly appointed by the Board.<sup>71</sup> The works committees were launched in the Board's Administration and Business Undertakings Departments, the Central and Western Districts, North and South Coast Districts,<sup>72</sup> and their functions were, as defined by the PNAAB:

To provide a recognised and direct channel of communication and consultation between the Bantu employees and the respective Heads of Departments,

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<sup>67</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/2/27, Staff Advisory Boards, liaison committees, 7 April 1974 - 30 July 1976.

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, NA, PNAAB, Executive Committee minutes, 4 May 1976.

<sup>69</sup> NA, PNAAB, Department of Business Undertakings, May 1976.

<sup>70</sup> NA, PNAAB, Western District Bantu Works Committee, May 1976.

<sup>71</sup> NA, PNAAB, Bantu Works Advisory Committees, 21 June 1974.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

and, via the Co-ordinating Committee, a channel of communication and consultation between such Bantu employees and the Chief Director and the Board...To provide a means whereby matters concerning the welfare, interests, and remuneration of the Bantu employees can be discussed by their representatives elected by them... To improve working conditions of the Bantu employees...[and the] prevention of waste of effort and materials and to reduce or eliminate absenteeism and the misuse of sick leave.<sup>73</sup>

From 1 August 1974, six members of each respective works committee of the PNAAB were elected and functioned on an *ad hoc* basis. Those elected to office in the Central District were O.O.B. Dlamini (chairman) and C. Pitson (vice-chairman).<sup>74</sup> At the end of their first meeting, members of the Central District Works Committee listed a number of grievances that were presented to the Co-ordinating Committee: these were an unsatisfactory holiday bonus, poor wages, unavailability of loans for houses and inadequate accommodation. The chairman and vice-chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee were P.J. Retief and R.C. Throssell respectively.<sup>75</sup> Other members of the committee comprised mainly chairpersons of various works committees.<sup>76</sup>

In August 1975, the PNAAB discussed the establishment of liaison committees "on which management will be represented".<sup>77</sup> Works committees were to retain their main functions and become, as P.J. Neethling, the Director of Business Undertakings, noted, "the official mouthpiece of the workers".<sup>78</sup> Liaison committees, it was envisaged, would

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p4.

<sup>74</sup> NA, PNAAB, Minutes of the meeting of the PNAAB Ad Hoc Bantu Works Advisory Committee, 21 August 1974.

<sup>75</sup> NA, PNAAB, Minutes of meeting, 21 January 1975.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> NA, PNAAB, Department of Business Undertakings, Director, P.J. Neethling to Chief Director, Bourquin, 11 August 1975.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

consist of the Director of Business Undertakings, General Manager, Principal Assistant (Administration), and the Assistant Director (Personnel) as chairperson, and as well as four representatives of the works committees. However, such liaison committees only came into existence in June 1976.

In a meeting held by the Central District Works Committee on 9 September 1975, it was noted:

The Chief Director be advised that, we, ...members of the Central District Bantu Works Committee have been...perturbed that our deliberations appear to have little effect and we have no opportunity of meeting the Chief Director and his executive and also that the Chief Director be advised that workers of the Board appear to be losing faith in us individually and as a works committee.<sup>79</sup>

The major complaint was that general labourers were not eligible to join the pension fund. Another grievance was that of the many deductions from wages of Africans employed in the Department of Business Undertakings at the end of September 1974, which were done without notice or explanation. The chief director, however, instructed the control officer (staff) to "immediately pay [wages deducted] as soon as possible so as to avoid unnecessary unrest".<sup>80</sup>

Towards the end of 1975 and at the beginning of 1976, elections were held by the PNAAB for Bantu works advisory committees. The response was generally low and little interest was shown by African workers, particularly in the South Coast and Western Districts, and in the Departments of Business Undertakings and Administration.<sup>81</sup> In the South Coast, only one candidate, D.O. Bhengu, volunteered for the works committee, while none in the Department of Business Undertakings volunteered. The Director of the Department of Business Undertakings wrote: "The response in this Department

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<sup>79</sup> NA, PNAAB, G.F. Baker, Manager, Central District to the Chief Director, 18 September 1975.

<sup>80</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/2/26, Bantu Building Workers, T. M. Ellis, Control Officer to Director of Finance, 3 October 1975.

<sup>81</sup> NA, PNAAB, Executive Committee Meeting, 4 May 1976.

was equally disappointing and the labourers had to be asked to find persons sufficiently interested to accept nominations".<sup>82</sup> In the Western Districts and in the Department of Administration, no nominations at all were received by the closing dates,<sup>83</sup> and considerable canvassing took place to convince African workers to join the works committee. It was reported by the Manager of the Western District that only "after considerable delay two nominations were received, namely M. Sheyi and J. Duma".<sup>84</sup> Quite clearly, as the Director of Administration wrote, "The general consensus of opinion among works committees is that the present basis is impractical from the point of view of communication with the Board and its officials".<sup>85</sup> Undoubtedly, works committees were ineffective but were more liked than liaison committees.

On 21 May 1976, liaison committees were launched at the PNAAB because works committees could no longer function in its area of jurisdiction.<sup>86</sup> Elections were called for the first liaison committee members while others were appointed by the Board.<sup>87</sup> The election of the liaison committee members was marked by indifference from African workers. As J. Shabangu recounted:

Some workers called those who wanted to be elected in those liaison committees Bourquin's *impimpis* (sell-outs) since some of them were *indunas* who used to get some favours from authorities. Some of those elected received two votes others five. ... Workers were simply not interested in those liaison structures. However, some workers maintained that liaison committees were the only way out of this

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<sup>82</sup> NA, PNAAB, Department of Business Undertakings, 4 May 1976.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> NA, PNAAB, Board minutes, 21 May 1976.

<sup>87</sup> NA, PNAAB, L.H.J. van Rensburg, Director, Technical and Building Services to the Chief Director, 30 July 1976.

mess in which we found ourselves.<sup>88</sup>

By contrast, trade unions were undoubtedly preferred by workers and in 1976, a considerable number had flocked to join the Black Allied Workers Union (BAWU), established also in the early 1970s.<sup>89</sup> BAWU influenced its members not to participate in Board structures as they promoted the racially discriminatory laws of the government. BAWU also won over a large following in 1976, particularly from the PNAAB and the Durban City Council. Part of the success may have been attributed to the successful challenge of BAWU to the Durban City Council to pay K.L. Mdunyelwa, a union member, all his wages for the period between 30 December 1975 and 29 January 1976, during which time he was admitted to hospital.<sup>90</sup>

Other workers of the PNAAB, as A.M. Zulu recalls,

...had an idea of forming their own trade union since BAWU was rather too radical. We had major differences with BAWU, particularly when they refused to register in 1979 or participate in any form of liaison committee system when some FOSATU-aligned unions were doing so. Many of us decided to participate and nominate our members to liaison committees as a way forward for workers.<sup>91</sup>

Before Wiehahn, the government moved swiftly to grant limited bargaining rights to factory workers and by enabling liaison committees to negotiate binding wage agreements. For the PNAAB, the chief director insisted that heads of departments should ensure that such liaison committees were viable and also acceptable to workers.<sup>92</sup> There was general agreement among African workers that shop-floor structures should be strengthened if they had to win major concessions from

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with J. Shabangu, KwaMashu, 10 October 1993.

<sup>89</sup> NA, PNAAB, 1/2/1/1/2/23, Trade unions, 2 October 1975-30 July 1976.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with A.M. Zulu, KwaMashu, 12 October 1994.

<sup>92</sup> NA, PNAAB, Memo to all Heads of Departments, 20 August 1977.

employers. J. Zikhali, one of the members of the Central District Works Committee in 1976, explained the situation very well. "Liaison committees", he said,

were forced on us once again by the government in 1977. We had no choice at all, either we participated in them or nobody would listen to our problems. Employers, for example the PNAAB, always said that that is what the government wants us to do. But the PNAAB was a better devil because they listened to our problems although not all of them. In 1974 and 1977 we were given about 10 per cent increments after we raised concern. Not too bad after all for an employer like the PNAAB.<sup>93</sup>

By 1979 as a result of the Wiehahn Commission's recommendations, the Industrial Conciliation Act was amended and conceded to African unions a legal recognition - a reality that African workers had thought would never exist during their life time. However, the Act retained the committee system (dubbed works councils) but these councils were expanded to include other workers to make them multi-racial. Such committees were to be established where there were no unions. Undoubtedly, the retention of liaison committees was welcomed by the Frame Group, which continued to utilise such structures and consistently refused to recognise the National Union of Textile Workers up to early 1985 (see Chapter Ten). As B. Smith, one of the directors of the Frame Group, remarked in 1983, "management would continue to use the works council members as a means of communication, education and guidance"<sup>94</sup> and that "he had been impressed with the positive discussions held in the past and hoped that [such an] avenue would remain open".<sup>95</sup> The Frame Group had remained hostile to African trade unions and was an exceptional company in their low wages. It was precisely because of the Frame Group's attitude towards the NUTW that the period between 1980 and 1985 was dominated by work stoppages and continual Industrial

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with J. Zikhali, Umlazi, 21 August 1994.

<sup>94</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, G45.3, Minutes of meetings between management and workers' representatives, 27 September 1983.

<sup>95</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, Minutes of meeting, 5 February 1980.

and Supreme Court hearings, which eventually culminated in the granting of recognition to the NUTW by the Frame Group in August 1985<sup>96</sup> - an issue that will be discussed in Chapter Ten.

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to elucidate some of the complexities that developed in South Africa's industrial relations between 1973 and 1979. Quite clearly, the pre-1979 industrial relations systems were racially discriminatory. However, not all employers of African labour agreed with government policies: mixed feelings were expressed by various employers over the new industrial relations system instituted in 1973. In the context of complicated industrial relations, there emerged a new blend of African trade unionism - a subject of discussion in the following chapters.

In 1979, the Wiehahn Commission recommended that the emergent independent trade unions be drawn into a unitary system of collective bargaining which although allowing their existence, also extended government control on them. Capital pressed for reforms in the labour market to safeguard its interests while government preferred control rather than reform. In a nutshell, the Wiehahn Commission's recommendations should be seen as government tightening control over African labour. As rightly noted by Lipton,

There [were] also uncertainties and fears about the risks and consequences of reform and about the likely black reaction ... These uncertainties and fears account for the characteristic 'two-track' policy of the Nationalists: striking out on a new route, but keeping in reserve remnants of the old, so that if it does not work, they will have a line

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<sup>96</sup> See, for example, UW, WCL, SACTWU, G 45.12.9, In the Supreme Court of South Africa, Natal Provincial Division, Case number M 2459/83; G 45.12.8, Factories, Frame and Disputes, 1983, In the Industrial Court of South Africa, Pinetown, 10 November 1983; and J. Maree and S. Godfrey, "Trends towards corporatism in South Africa: industrial relations and industrial strategy in the textile industry", in A. van der Merwe (ed), Industrial sociology: A South African perspective (Johannesburg, Lexicon, 1995), p 92.

of retreat.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Lipton, Capitalism and apartheid, p 385.

## Chapter Ten

### The National Union of Textile Workers, 1973-1985

#### Introduction

In the aftermath of the 1973 Durban strikes, African workers flocked to join the new independent trade union movement which had emerged.<sup>1</sup> The textile workers had been at the centre of these strikes, particularly those employed by the Frame Group. Durban was central to worker struggles during the 1970s, which spilt over to the rest of the country. During that period, Durban was vital to the national economy, "...contain[ing] the largest concentration of manufacturing industry outside the PWV area".<sup>2</sup> It was in Durban that worker struggles became widespread, and the city became a "...stimulus to the re-emergence of independent trade unions with majority African membership".<sup>3</sup>

This chapter focuses on the rise of independent African trade unions with particular reference to the formation and organisation of the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW), which was centred in Durban. It should be emphasised that worker struggles at that time marked a turning point both in the labour movement and in the history of South Africa. This

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<sup>1</sup> The label "independent trade unions" was used during the 1970s and 1980s to distinguish African unions, with mainly African members, from African unions affiliated to the former white trade union federation, Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) and to distinguish them from SACTU.

<sup>2</sup> G. Kraak, Breaking the chains: labour in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s (London, Pluto Press, 1993), p 128.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

chapter is divided into two parts: part one deals with the period between 1973 and 1979 when independent African unions were unregistered and part two examines the early-Wiehahn era (marked by a period of growth in union membership and successful recognition campaigns) up to 1985.

## Part One: Formation and Organisation, 1973-1979

### Origins of the NUTW

The NUTW was one of the first independent unions to be formed soon after the 1973 strikes. The origins of this union can be traced before the strike wave of 1973. It was H. Bolton who committed herself to organising the unorganised African workers during the early 1970s. Bolton was a veteran Durban-based official of the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) and interested mainly in the struggles of Indian workers in the industry in Durban. During the early 1970s, she was the general secretary of the Natal branches of the registered Textile Workers' Industrial Union (TWIU), Garment Workers' Industrial Union (GWIU) and the Furniture and Allied Workers' Union (FAWU), all TUCSA-affiliated unions.<sup>4</sup> She began the process of employing young white academics in a bid to revive and organise registered unions in Natal. In April 1970 R. Lambert was employed as an assistant secretary of FAWU and D. Hemson became the national organiser of TWIU in June 1972.<sup>5</sup> While organising Indian workers at one of the factories, Lambert was challenged by A. Mcwabe, former SACTU trade unionist, to do something for African workers. During that period D. Hemson, Bolton, Lambert, H. Cheadle and Mcwabe convened a meeting to discuss the organisation of African workers. It was from that meeting that the idea of launching a

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<sup>4</sup> Natal Room (hereafter NR), David Hemson Collection and Papers (hereafter DHCP), Extract from J. Maree, The National Union of Textile Workers, 1973 -1979.

<sup>5</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, The emergence and development of FOSATU (Natal), 1972- 1979, p 2.

Benefit Fund for African workers was proposed. On 9 September 1972, when the General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund (GFWBF) was officially launched, it had about 1 000 African members.<sup>6</sup> Dominant among the new recruits were the textile workers, who later experienced the largest number of, and the lengthiest, strikes during 1973.

Soon after the strikes, African workers from various industries joined the Benefit Fund in large numbers. They asked to be organised into trade unions representing their particular fields of work. One of the long-term objects of the General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund was to be a stepping stone to trade unionism proper, organising sections of its members into industrial unions when sufficient membership in any particular industry was achieved. In fact, the Benefit Fund soon changed from its original function of providing funeral benefits for its members, to a more direct one of organising African workers into trade unions. This change was necessitated by the rapid growth in Benefit Fund's membership which, in the aftermath of the strikes, stood at 60 000.<sup>7</sup> Such a process, according to P. Bonner, was accelerated by the Durban strikes of 1973, "...precipitating the formation of unions much earlier than might otherwise have been the case".<sup>8</sup> Because of large numbers of new members in the Benefit Fund, members were organised according to their industry and hence the first independent African trade unions were established in the metal, clothing, textile, chemical, furniture and transport industry.<sup>9</sup> The formation of those industrial unions was precipitated in part by the Registrar of Benefit Funds who refused to give registration to the Benefit Fund and, in fact,

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<sup>6</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, GFWBF minutes, 17 June 1972 . See also GFWBF report to TUACC by D. Hemson, June 1974; and Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", p 142.

<sup>7</sup> Friedman, Building tomorrow today, p 43.

<sup>8</sup> P. Bonner, The history of labour organisation in South Africa (Durban, FOSATU, 1980), pp 22-3.

<sup>9</sup> Webster, Cast in a racial mould, p 132.

ordered the Benefit Fund to wind up operations in 1975.

Also important for the development of African independent trade unions was the Central Administration Services Committee (CAS) that was launched in March 1973 in Durban by H. Bolton, as an internal infrastructure of the unions.<sup>10</sup> The committee's role was to raise funds and provide an institutional base for the launching of African unions. The CAS's role was thus:

...to draw all the registered unions in Bolton Hall [named after Jimmy Bolton and a trade union centre that housed registered Textile, Garment and Furniture unions] into a concerted drive to form parallel-type unions to the registered ones....The unions involved were ...[the] Garment, Furniture, Textile and Motor Assemblies. BF, Urban Training Project and Wages Commission representatives sat on CAS also.<sup>11</sup>

However, some registered unions like the Garment Workers' Union did not support the idea of establishing African trade unions fearing competition and also pressure from the security police. Bolton who had been in the forefront organising African workers was forced to resign at the end of 1973 from the Garment Workers' Union because, as some officials argued, any attempt to organise African workers "was not worth the trouble".<sup>12</sup> However, Bolton may not have been forced to resign because of African workers not being worth the trouble (although this may have been expressed by an individual official) but because of conservative tendencies accelerated by security police pressure.

Another significant development which aided the rise of African independent trade unions in Durban was the establishment of the University of Natal Students' Wages Commission in mid-1971 (discussed in Chapter 8). It was the white radicalised students who played a prominent role in the

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<sup>10</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, The emergence and development of FOSATU, p 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p 4.

<sup>12</sup> SALB, "Too late for consultation: the Garment Workers' Union capitulates", *SALB*, vol 1 (1975), p 3.

establishment of independent African trade unions. Indeed, the initiative for forming unions primarily came from intellectuals outside the ranks of the African working class in conjunction with former SACTU trade unionists. The approach of white students was, as Maree noted, that "they, as white students, could make their resources available to black workers instead of offering all their skills to management as white students usually do in the end".<sup>13</sup> Completely excluded from the Black Consciousness Movement, white students turned their energies to establishing African unions that were independent from the BC movement. For instance, African unions such as the NUTW and CWIU<sup>14</sup> emerged from white-led service organisations like the University of Natal Students' Wages Commission and from the Benefit Fund, CAS, and other organisations which, by the end of 1973, had a number of African union officials playing a crucial role. These organisations were established by students and academics from the University of Natal, former SACTU organisers and as well as TUCSA organisers, who believed firmly in organising African workers. In these unions, whites were included as officials and membership was open to all racial groups. Indeed, as will be seen later, three of the ten founding members of the NUTW were white.<sup>15</sup>

The organisation of African textile workers was also initiated by the registered Textile Workers Industrial Union (TWIU) before and during the 1973 strike wave. Before the launching of the NUTW, the TWIU, through D. Hemson, managed to organise the unorganised African workers in the textile industry although it catered mainly for the Indian and coloured working class. The union tried to incorporate Africans in its ranks by supporting the establishment of a

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<sup>13</sup> Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", p 143.

<sup>14</sup> See also Chapter 11 dealing with the Chemical Workers Industrial Union.

<sup>15</sup> See footnote number 23.

parallel, unregistered independent African trade union. Soon after the February 1973 strikes, the TWIU negotiated wage increments for both Indian and African workers at Smith and Nephew and Consolidated Textile Mills.<sup>16</sup> In August 1973, representations were made to the industrial council and the TUCSA Annual Conference by TWIU on behalf of 500 striking African workers at Frame's Wentex Mill in Jacobs. The dispute was over a five percent wage increment. All striking workers were fired and the company re-employed some workers, rejecting others whom they considered as "troublemakers, including nine works committee members".<sup>17</sup> A donation of R3 500 was given to dismissed workers by TUCSA.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, TUCSA appealed to the Minister of Labour to have dismissed workers reinstated; the appeal was not successful. Thus, some form of organisation was already provided to African textile workers well before the inauguration of NUTW in September 1973.

Even after the formation of NUTW, the TWIU continued to play a significant role in the organisation of African workers. For some time both NUTW and TWIU worked together and shared the same offices and organisation, but they later developed strong rivalry over membership and policies.<sup>19</sup> The conflict between the two unions eventually led to a split and also to competition for union members.

In June 1973, a meeting was called by the Benefit Fund organisers to consider the formation of a union of all textile workers. A caretaker committee was appointed, represented by members selected from different textile factories. On 5 August, the committee prepared a memorandum that was submitted to Chief M.G. Buthelezi (who enjoyed much worker support at

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<sup>16</sup> Natal Room, DHCP, The National Union of Textile Workers, p 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, F49.2, Textile Workers' Industrial Union, 1973-1988, correspondence: relationship between NUTW and TWIU. The issue is discussed later in the chapter, see pp 293-298.

the time because of his criticism against low wages<sup>20</sup> and possibly his ties with the ANC), which called on his intervention to enable workers to "have the freedom to organise themselves [and] hold meetings in Clermont".<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the committee asked Chief Buthelezi's government to assist workers form a Rent Control Board responsible for establishing maximum room rentals for workers staying in Clermont township. The committee also decided that 20 cents be paid as the weekly subscription and that such an amount was to provide members with all the benefits they had enjoyed in the Benefit Fund. All Benefit Fund green card-holders who were textile workers had to be reissued with a new blue card for the textile union.<sup>22</sup> On 23 September 1973, the NUTW was born.<sup>23</sup>

### Recruitment and organisation

During the first months of its existence, NUTW experienced membership growth in the greater Durban area. The largest membership was concentrated in the textile industries, where working conditions and wages were appalling. As already stated, initial recruitment had started with the Benefit Fund, and by the end of October 1973, the union had a total

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<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, SA Institute of Personnel Management, Strikes - the lessons from Natal, 1973, pp 3-5; and IIE, The Durban strikes, p 19.

<sup>21</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, NUTW, D 15, Notice to all members, nd, p 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, The National Union of Textile Workers: A history of NUTW- the first ten years, 1. The founding members of the NUTW were: H. Nxasana, H. Cheadle, I. Shongwe, Junerose Nala, H. Khahlede, C. Mbali, T. Khumalo, S. Ngubane, P. Sewnath and the typist/administrator, Jeanette Murphy (nee J. Cunningham-Brown). See minutes of meeting of the NUTW, 30 September 1973 and also The Textile Forum, March 1974. J. Copelyn was not present at the launch of the NUTW and only participated as an official after the banning of key organisers in February 1974.

membership of almost 1 500.<sup>24</sup> New members were recruited from Smith and Nephew, S.A. Fabrics, Dano Textiles, Nortex, Seltex, Frametex, Afritex, Pinetex and Ropes and Mattings.<sup>25</sup> It was from those mills that the shop-stewards were elected. By June 1974, the NUTW had signed up 5 000 members.<sup>26</sup> Membership initially increased rapidly, especially soon after the January 1974 strikes in the textile industry, but dropped from late 1974 to early 1975 during the textile recession.

More important to the NUTW in 1974 was the recognition agreement signed on 19 July with the Smith and Nephew company.<sup>27</sup> Smith and Nephew was one of the British companies in South Africa that was being investigated by the British Parliamentary Commission. The Commission investigated the wages paid to African workers, employment benefits and education and training. One of the recommendations formulated by the British government for subsidiary companies in South Africa was that, "...there is nothing to prevent a company from recognizing and negotiating with a trade union representing African workers".<sup>28</sup> The agreement was important in that the NUTW was granted the right to organise its members at the company during non-working hours and at least three hours every Wednesday during lunchtime. Shop stewards representing the union were elected in all departments of the company.

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<sup>24</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, D 13.2, Natal, 1973 -1987 ; and G 106.5, membership figures.

<sup>25</sup> NR, DHCP, The NUTW, p 2; and SACTWU, minutes of meeting of the NUTW, 30 September 1974.

<sup>26</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, The emergence and development of FOSATU, p 7; and NUTW, report to the 1 st TUACC council, 16 June 1974.

<sup>27</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, Profile of the NUTW, 1982; and The NUTW: the first ten years, p 4.; NR, DHCP, The NUTW, 3. See the original agreement document between the NUTW and Smith and Nephew in UW, SACTWU, G116.2, agreements; S. Friedman, Building tomorrow today: African workers in trade unions, 1970-1984 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), pp 94-96.

<sup>28</sup> See M. Legassick, "The record of British firms in South Africa in the context of the political economy", SALB, vol. 2, no.1 (May/ June, 1975), p 75.

Commenting on the recognition agreement of 1974, John Copelyn stated: "The serious benefits of that Agreement were really substantial organisational gains for workers".<sup>29</sup>

By 1979 the union had a paid-up membership of 5 500<sup>30</sup> and had signed a number of recognition agreements with various companies such as South African Fabrics, David Whitehead and Sons, Hammarsdale Clothing, and Furple and Progress Knitting Mills.<sup>31</sup> As part of the NUTW's strategy, it first organised in companies which had a reputation for being good employers, and concentrated especially on international subsidiary companies. Recruitment in such companies started outside the factory gates and once the union was assured of 25 percent membership, the management was approached for union access to its members. In some cases where management proved hostile to union access, the recruitment drive was intensified through secret shop stewards within the company.<sup>32</sup> The union also utilised general meetings to recruit new members. During meetings, the union emphasised those issues which appealed to workers such as piece rates, wage rates and conditions of service.<sup>33</sup> Such strategies worked in favour of the union membership drive.

From late 1974 to the beginning of 1975, the NUTW's paid-up membership declined. This was at a time when the textile

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<sup>29</sup> NR, DHCP, The NUTW, p 4.

<sup>30</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, The emergence and development of FOSATU, p 7; and profile of the NUTW, 1982, p 16.

<sup>31</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, Profile of the NUTW, p 19. By 1982 in Natal province, the NUTW had signed no fewer than 19 recognition agreements. Some of the companies beyond the Durban boundaries which signed the recognition agreements with the NUTW were Mooi River Textiles, Herbox Textiles, Gelvinor Textiles and Brailey Linnofra International. See also NR, DHCP, NUTW - History, growth and objectives by J. Copelyn, September 1984, p 5.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Jabulani Gwala, Bolton Hall, SACTWU Offices, 27 September 1993.

<sup>33</sup> NR, DHCP, NUTW - History, growth and objectives, p 2.

industry was hard hit by the economic recession,<sup>34</sup> brought about by the importation of cheap material from the Far East, especially from Japan.<sup>35</sup> By the end of 1975, almost 10 000 textile workers in the country had been retrenched and the textile industry was utilising about 60 percent or less of its plant capacity.<sup>36</sup> Of the 10 000 retrenched, about 5 500 workers were from the greater Durban area. In response to the economic crisis of 1975, the government imposed tough duties on a variety of imported textile products.<sup>37</sup> Various textile industries retrenched their workers during the recession period and some of their targets were workers who were identified as union members or what management termed "troublesome" workers.<sup>38</sup> At Nortex, Ropes and Matting, Wentex, S.A. Fabrics and Dano Textiles, retrenchments were effected.<sup>39</sup> As a result of such problems, the union movement was weakened and a sharp drop in membership was experienced. The greatest challenge which faced the union, then, was to make substantial economic gains if it was to do more than remain with only a small, committed number of union members.

NUTW membership subscriptions dropped significantly as the number of union members declined. In 1974, the union subscriptions collected averaged R1 437 per month especially between July and September.<sup>40</sup> From October 1974 to July 1975,

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<sup>34</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, The emergence and development of FOSATU, p 10; and Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions".

<sup>35</sup> See Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions"; and NR, DHCP, The NUTW, p 6.

<sup>36</sup> SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1974, p 265; and Survey of race relations, 1975, p 177.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Judith Msomi, Bolton Hall, Workers' College, 16 October 1992.

<sup>39</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, NUTW, Report to TUACC council meeting, 6 April 1975.

<sup>40</sup> UW, WCL, NUTW, Financial statements, 31 July 1974 and 14 September 1974.

the average dropped to R1 108 per month.<sup>41</sup> Because of the economic recession in 1975, union subscriptions further declined heavily particularly from mid-1975. From September to December 1975, the collected subscriptions amounted to R501 per month while in 1976 the average was R430 per month.<sup>42</sup> However, such sharp drops cannot be explained solely in terms of the economic recession. There were other important factors which inhibited workers from joining or participating in trade union activities during this period.

As previously stated, one of the reasons why employers of African labour preferred migrant labour from far-away areas was that it had a reputation for being docile and subservient and was therefore less likely to be influenced by "communistic trade unions".<sup>43</sup> This idea was challenged during the 1973 Durban strikes, which showed the unity of the African working class, both migrant and urban workers. In fact, the migrant labour system was challenged not only by the mass strikes of 1973 but also by the huge entry of migrant workers into trade unions. Ironically, during the 1970s, the system itself created conditions conducive to such workers joining the unions. As A. Sitas argued, "migrants were...combined the moment they entered the hostel [or factory]. People from the same region, or clansmen would immediately organise the newcomers' life on group lines."<sup>44</sup> He designated such cultural formations, "defensive combinations", which consequently provided a base for collective mobilisation of

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<sup>41</sup> UW, WCL, NUTW, Financial statements, 31 July 1975. In late 1975, however, NUTW had the highest paid-up membership of 33 per cent as compared to other unions like the Chemical Workers Industrial Union with 31 per cent. See, for instance, Friedman, Building tomorrow today, p 136.

<sup>42</sup> UW, WCL, NUTW, Financial statements, September 1975-February 1976, April - June 1976, August -December 1976. See also NR, DHCP, The NUTW, p 6.

<sup>43</sup> See Chapter 3, pp 56-66.

<sup>44</sup> A. Sitas, "Moral formations and struggles amongst migrant workers on the East Rand", Labour, Capital and Society, 18, 2 (1985), p 383.

migrant workers. A proportion of organisers and shop stewards interviewed by Sitas pointed out that

Migrants are keener union members than permanent people. A couple said that there wasn't any real difference between migrants and permanent people, that migrants responded sooner because of their work conditions but then permanent people followed suit.<sup>45</sup>

A survey conducted by E. Webster and J. Kuzwayo in 1975, came to the conclusion that about 58 percent of African workers joined unions in order to defend their rights at the workplace.<sup>46</sup> African workers wanted unions to play a meaningful role in their day-to-day lives, and to improve their wages and working conditions. From the survey, three broad answers were given as to why Africans failed to join the unions that were formed in Durban during that time.

Fear of victimisation is another thing. Many people feel there is still a storm to fall on the trade unions - to be safe one has to keep off entirely and if you are found discussing such matters [you] can be called to book by either the management or police. Secondly, respondents mentioned unfavourable experience with the union in the past due to leadership splits, corruption or simply lack of effectiveness due to failure to win recognition. Thirdly, a feeling that the state and employers are too powerful and would not allow unions to become viable, so why bother to join them.<sup>47</sup>

The survey showed that a significant proportion of workers failed to join unions because of fear of being victimised by their employers and the police.<sup>48</sup> Cases in point being the 1974 state prosecutions of union organisers like W. Mbali of the NUTW. African workers were also concerned about the unions' effectiveness in solving their problems. During the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p 391.

<sup>46</sup> See E. Webster and J. Kuzwayo, "Consciousness and the problem of collective action - a preliminary case-study of a random sample of African workers in Durban" (Paper housed in the NR, DHCP, nd).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p 11.

1970s, some successes were recorded in terms of wage increments but, on the whole, failures outweighed successes. Unions' failures in that respect contributed to the withdrawal of some members and the subsequent decline in membership.

Another contributing factor was the banning of union leaders. On 31 January 1974, D. Davis of the Benefit Fund and a Metal Union organiser was banned and prohibited from carrying out any duties in any union.<sup>49</sup> Further state bannings followed. In February 1974, a number of textile organisers including H. Cheadle, J. Murphy and D. Hemson were banned.<sup>50</sup> Another setback was experienced when Chief Buthelezi accused TUACC in general and MAWU specifically, particularly A. Mthethwa of stirring opposition among the workers to himself.<sup>51</sup> Arising out of that charge was the dismissal of B. Dladla, the Community Affairs Minister of the KwaZulu government, who had played an important role during the 1973 and January 1974 strikes. During the Frametex strikes in January 1974, B. Dladla successfully led about 5 000 striking workers and intervened on their behalf in their demand that the management of the company negotiate with the NUTW, which represented the majority of workers.<sup>52</sup> Frame offered wage increases and the workers returned to work. It was that incident which led to the dismissal of Dladla by Chief Buthelezi. Dladla had gained popularity among African workers in Durban and was viewed by Buthelezi as a potential threat to his leadership. Furthermore, the opposition from Buthelezi to Dladla's growing popularity among the workers also included a range of issues such as Dladla's attitude towards sanctions and the Bantu Investment Corporation.

During and soon after the Durban strikes of 1973, Chief Buthelezi had supported African workers' demands for higher

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<sup>49</sup> Webster, Cast in a racial mould, p 133.

<sup>50</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, The NUTW - the first ten years, p 3.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> NR, DHCP, The NUTW, p 5.

wages and called upon the South African government to recognise African trade unions. In contrast, in 1976, the KwaZulu government emphasised that "...trade unions are not recognised by the KwaZulu government...and [that] trade unions do not form part of such lines of communication."<sup>53</sup> Perhaps this sudden change of attitude towards trade unions was caused by the dismissal of the pro-union councillor, Dladla, who had gained huge support among African workers, and also pressure from the central government not to recognise independent trade unions.<sup>54</sup>

In April 1974 the state prosecuted the NUTW organiser, Wiseman Mbali, for inciting workers to strike.<sup>55</sup> State bannings continued in May 1976 with the detention of J. Nala and O. Zuma, both officials of the NUTW.<sup>56</sup> They were detained under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act for "furthering the aims of an illegal strike, following a very bitter two weeks strike by workers at Natal Cotton and Woollen Mills".<sup>57</sup> State bannings and detentions deprived the union movement of experienced leadership but that did not lead to the demise of the union since it had a strong shop floor structure. The NUTW did not depend solely on its top leadership strata, as shop stewards were elected in various factories and were responsible for recruiting new members; they also collected union subscriptions and handled some workers' complaints. In July 1974, the NUTW recognised that: "Factory organisation

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<sup>53</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, NUTW, Director of Works, KwaZulu, to trade unions, Durban, circular Number 5 of 1976.

<sup>54</sup> On government's attitude towards African trade unions, see Chapter 9.

<sup>55</sup> The case is well-documented in UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, NUTW, G 45.12.1, State versus C. Mbali ; and see also SALB, 2, 3 (1975).

<sup>56</sup> See SALB, "Profiles of J. Nala and O. Zuma" in SALB, volume 2, Numbers 9 & 10 (May-June 1976), pp 117-118.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p 117. See the details of the strike in SALB, volume 3, Number 7 ( June-July 1977); and also in Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", pp 186-190.

inside the factory is the only way for us to proceed further than we did."<sup>58</sup> Indeed, that was a powerful strategy which brought the union organisation closer to workers. Some of the tasks undertaken by the shop stewards were:

... to convene meetings, before and after shop stewards' meetings, of the workers in their departments to learn of problems and to report back on shop stewards' discussions and decisions; to enrol new members; ... to collect the members' subscriptions each week ...<sup>59</sup> to raise complaints of workers with management ...

Such organisational methods utilised by the NUTW were later adopted by unions affiliated to the Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Council (TUACC) in 1977, which gave primacy to the shop stewards in union growth.

Internal conflicts within the NUTW also contributed to the decline in membership. In January 1975, three union organisers who advocated the Black Consciousness ideology were dismissed from the NUTW over differences in policy.<sup>60</sup> These Black Consciousness organisers wanted the expulsion of white organisers from the union movement and argued that the union's decline was caused by "whites who were dominating" union affairs.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately for the Black Consciousness organisers, the white organisers enjoyed the support of the African workers and the NUTW stood firm on a non-racial union policy and rejected outright the call of the three Black Consciousness organisers to expel all white organisers. The Branch Executive Committee accordingly decided to dismiss the three organisers. Shortly afterwards, another organiser, T. Khumalo, also called for the expulsion of white organisers. Khumalo had just lost his post as an organiser at the Jacobs

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<sup>58</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, NUTW, minutes of staff meeting, 15 July 1974.

<sup>59</sup> NR, DHCP, The NUTW, p 9.

<sup>60</sup> See UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, The emergence and development of FOSATU, p 11 and NR, DHCP, The NUTW, p 10.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

office because of poor organisational skills.<sup>62</sup> He attributed the loss of his job to the dominance of white intellectuals in the union. However, the issues in dispute appeared to be the wages of organisers, white control, and the relationship between the unions and the BC organisations. Khumalo, it was widely regarded, lost his position because of a sharp personal dispute with Copelyn after the banning of the white trade unionists. In March 1976 in an attempt to resolve the conflict, Khumalo was transferred from the NUTW to the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU).<sup>63</sup> The conflict was resolved but the NUTW lost a number of factories and members where Khumalo had worked as organiser. On the whole, the union emphasised its stand on non-racialism although there had been some discomfort at the loss of important organisers who had disputes with the incoming white officials.

By 1979 membership of the NUTW was again picking up and stood at 5 500. The union was now concentrating on major textile industries such as Smith and Nephew, Frametex, Consolidated Woolwashing and Processing Mills (CWPM) and South Africa Fabrics, where there was effective union organisation. But union organisation was also extended to other smaller factories. At major textile industries, shop stewards were properly constituted and functioned well. Elected liaison committee posts in those industrial establishments were dominated by union officials who were highly respected by the rank and file of workers. For instance, at Frametex, J. Gwala, the chairperson of the shop stewards committee, and S. Cele

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<sup>62</sup> UW, WCL, HLP, SACTWU, The emergence and development of FOSATU, p 11; and NR, DHCP, The NUTW, p 12. In the available documents, it is indicated that Khumalo was unable to write reports for presentation to the BEC. He failed to write even a single report till the time of his forced retirement from the NUTW. Many union officials were not literate and unable to write reports for the BECs; this did not necessarily affect their ability to organise under difficult circumstances. The history of the NUTW, of course, was likely to have been written by a white official with considerable post-school education.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

commanded respect among African workers.<sup>64</sup> Even during the 1979 Frame strike, about 500 workers refused to be addressed by A. Frame and, instead, were addressed by J. Gwala.<sup>65</sup> He persuaded workers to return to work and guaranteed that a wage increase that was supposed to be effected within six months would be effected within two months. Frame also undertook not to dismiss any of the striking workers and the strike came to an end.<sup>66</sup> Clearly, the NUTW had by 1979 successfully managed to place factory issues in the hands of shop stewards.

As a result of the Wiehahn Commission's recommendations in 1979, a new beginning was created whereby African trade unions could be registered. As already explained in Chapter Nine, the government finally bowed to mounting pressures from employers and working-class action, particularly in the 1970s and as well as the international community. Because of the changed labour conditions, new strategies had to be formulated. The Wiehahn Report envisaged reforms as the only way of ensuring effective control over the growth of African unions. In fact, according to the Report, African unions were not subjected to any form of "discipline and control" but rather enjoyed more substantial freedom than registered unions.<sup>67</sup> The rapid growth of independent African trade unionism, and the industrial militancy which had rocked Durban since the strike wave of 1973, made the state fear a possible re-unification of banned political organisations and the trade union movement, as had happened during the 1950s and early 1960s. The government saw control through reform as an answer to the labour problems of the 1970s. Unregistered African trade unions were to be granted legal recognition, and

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Msomi, 16 October 1992; and see also the tribute to S. Cele soon after his assassination in 1980 during the Frame strikes. Textile Forum, June 1980

<sup>65</sup> For the strike details see The Rand Daily Mail, 3 July 1979 and also Gwala's notes on the 1979 strike. Notes are author's personal collection from J. Gwala.

<sup>66</sup> Gwala's notes on the 1979 strike.

<sup>67</sup> The Wiehahn Commission Report, para. 3.35.5.

accorded the same privileges as their white, Indian and coloured counterparts. However, Wiehahn recommended a formal ban on any form of political trade unionism or affiliation.<sup>68</sup> Such sophisticated strategies failed to attain the state's desired results of, at the least, dampening down the labour militancy of the 1970s. On the contrary, major conflicts were to break out between workers and employers.

## Part Two: Union Growth, 1980-85

### Recruitment and organisation: focus on shop stewards

In 1980, the NUTW with its 5 500 members was registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1979 and soon began recruiting a significant number of "coloured", African and Indian members. Because of its non-racial policy, membership growth was experienced in the greater Durban area. By October 1981, about 5 971 members made use of a stop-order facility while 8 856 were registered members compared to the 5 500 of 1979;<sup>69</sup> by December that year, the number had grown to 9 350 paid-up and 12 600 signed-up members.<sup>70</sup> The union was also recognised in 16 factories where the total membership was 8 490 out of an eligible workforce of about 11 050.<sup>71</sup> The NUTW's growth continued in 1982 and 1983: in 1982, the union had 11 880 paid-up and 15 130 signed-up members, while in 1983 signed-up members more than doubled to 35 000.<sup>72</sup> In 1982, the union had managed to organise workers in 21 factories, 17 of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D 13.2.1.4, Report to the NEC of the NUTW (Natal Branch), October 1981.

<sup>70</sup> NUTW, "Industrial councils -new dimensions to the struggle in the textile industry", SALB, 7, numbers 4&5 (1982), p 98.

<sup>71</sup> NUTW, History, growth and objectives, September 1984, p 5.

<sup>72</sup> FOSATU annual year report, 1982, p 2; and FOSATU annual year report, 1983, p 6.

which recognised it.<sup>73</sup> By the end of 1983, the union had managed to organise workers in 46 factories and had signed about 36 recognition agreements.<sup>74</sup> What was unique for the time was the number of recognition agreements the union managed to sign. The really rapid increase in membership appeared between 1983 and 1984.

One of the reasons for this rapid expansion in membership was the union strategy of concentrating on Natal where wages and working conditions were poor as compared to the Orange Free State, Northern Cape and Northern Transvaal. Also of significance was the NUTW's strategy of first organising those factories which did not have a reputation for hostility to African unions. A number of firms with national and international links were targeted and only once they had been organised did the union then re-direct its energy towards organising those firms which were defined as less "enlightened", such as, for example the Frame Group.<sup>75</sup>

The strategy of organising better companies first is a sound one, in that conditions in these companies may then be held out as example to workers in a less 'fortunate' position. Also, the fact that recognition has been gained in leading companies may pressurise other employers into following suit.<sup>76</sup>

The period between 1980 and early 1984 saw signed-up membership of independent unions rising from 70 000 to 300 000.<sup>77</sup> During that period, the NUTW had increased its membership from about 5 500 in 1979 to nearly 42 000 in early

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<sup>73</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, B3.1.2, Central Committee Meetings, 1981-82, Report on the Natal region of FOSATU to the FOSATU central committee, 16 and 17 October 1982, p 1.

<sup>74</sup> FOSATU Annual year report, 1982.

<sup>75</sup> Profile of the NUTW, p 17.

<sup>76</sup> Profile of the NUTW, p 17.

<sup>77</sup> Maree, "The emergence, struggles and achievements of Black trade unions", p 297.

1984.<sup>78</sup>

Central to its recruitment policy was the union's continuing emphasis on the plant-level shop steward committees and on strong shop floor representation. In September 1981, the NUTW circulated a pamphlet "Why our union needs shop stewards" to all its branches and members in which the main functions of shop stewards were outlined:

To organise workers in their sections of the factory [which] includes recruiting new members, holding worker meetings and developing a spirit of unity among members at the factory. To take up worker grievances [and] to lead worker struggles at the plant over unfair dismissals, unfair treatment of workers and other abuses of management powers. To provide the central leadership core in all union negotiations with management over wages and conditions at the factory.<sup>79</sup>

By October 1982, the union had 153 elected shop stewards formally recognised in 17 firms in the Natal region.<sup>80</sup> Of the 153 shop stewards, 118 were from the greater Durban area. Because of its dramatic growth in membership and in the number of shop stewards, the NUTW decided in 1982 to divide the region into two main branches: the Natal Coastal (better known as the greater Durban branch) and the Natal Midlands.<sup>81</sup> The greater Durban branch comprised central Durban, Pinetown, Hammarsdale and Tongaat, and it also established a shop steward council. The branch had a majority membership in eleven factories of which seven had officially recognised shop

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<sup>78</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, Central committee meetings, 1981- 1982 and 1984-1985.

<sup>79</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, NUTW, Why our union needs shop stewards, September 1981.

<sup>80</sup> UW, SACTWU, B3.1.2, Central committee meetings, Report on the Natal Region of FOSATU, 16 and 17 October 1982. The number of shop stewards had decreased in 1982 as compared to the 1981 figure of 164 in 16 factories. The reason was that the NUTW embarked on a process of cutting down the number of shop stewards in some factories where there were too many.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

stewards.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the emphasis placed by the NUTW on the role of the shop stewards, the greater Durban branch complained that there were too many and that "the majority of whom are very weak and inactive".<sup>83</sup> As a result, the NUTW intensified the ongoing process of education and training of shop stewards. A number of training seminars were held as part of the FOSATU education programme between 1981 and 1985.<sup>84</sup> In August 1982, the greater Durban branch's senior shop stewards were trained for four days to enable them "... [to] carry out more organising functions in the factories".<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the union negotiated with management to have more rights granted to shop stewards at the factory level; shop stewards were to be allowed, in principle, access to telephone facilities and more time off to enable them to conduct union work.<sup>86</sup> In 1983, the union managed to negotiate the employment of two full-time shop stewards at the firm David Whitehead and Sons, who were paid by the company to perform only shop steward duties.<sup>87</sup> Also in 1983, the greater Durban branch signed about 11 shop steward recognition agreements with various factories.<sup>88</sup>

In 1984, more seminars for shop stewards were conducted in order to solve what the greater Durban branch termed

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<sup>82</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D13.2.1.4, Natal Coastal branch report to NEC meeting, May 1982.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> See, for instance, UW, WCL, SACTWU, NUTW organiser, A. Erwin to R. Mackie, Director, Extra-Mural Studies, University of Natal, Durban, 15 October 1981; and D 13.2.1.4, Natal Coastal branch reports, 1982-1985.

<sup>85</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, Natal Coastal branch report to NEC, 14/15 August 1982.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D13.2.1.4, Natal Coastal branch report, March 1984.

<sup>88</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, Natal Coastal branch report, September 1983.

"problems of inexperience[d] worker leadership" at the factory floor.<sup>89</sup> It was also agreed during that year that all NUTW branches immediately "start education seminars for shop stewards in each factory...focusing on grievance and discipline procedures".<sup>90</sup> By 1985, the greater Durban branch had well-organised and trained shop stewards who were officially recognised in 14 factories.<sup>91</sup> It was precisely because of these developments that the greater Durban branch had managed to obtain a 75,5 percent membership in those factories (see Table A below).<sup>92</sup>

Table A

NUTW: The Greater Durban (Natal Coastal) Branch, April 1985

Organised Factories	Total Workforce	Union Membership
Smith and Nephew	800	630
SA Fabrics	240	183
David Whitehead and Sons	2000	1349
Ninian and Lester	400	320
James North	260	235
Fabrina Fabrics	222	215
Universal Lace	210	198
Lantor Nonwovens	70	65
Bonar Staflex	75	68
Isipingo Textile	315	219
Umbrella Industry	200	190
Regina Carpets	22	20
Len Savoury	428	250
CPC	67	64

In these 14 factories, the NUTW signed recognition agreements which, at least, provided them with the following: stop orders, access to premises, access to notice boards, shop stewards recognition, grievance procedure, disciplinary procedure and job grading. Undoubtedly, by 1985, the NUTW had grown to become one of the strongest non-racial trade unions in the textile and clothing industry with a membership of

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<sup>89</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D7.3.1.2.4, Notes of organiser seminar, 3-5 July 1984, p 2.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D13.2.1.2, NUTW branches; Natal Coastal branch, NEC report, 12-14 April 1985.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

almost 60 000 in the Natal region. This was quite an achievement; the union relied on mass action, direct negotiations to win wage increases and recognition agreements. Agreements signed with companies contained substantive factory-based issues such as grievance, dismissal and retrenchment procedures, which related directly to workers' interests. More importantly, the union's organisational strength in the 1980s plus competent and committed leadership enabled it to counter the harsh period of economic recession and so won the confidence of workers. What strengthened the union also was its willingness to make use of the official dispute machinery in solving industrial disputes (discussed below). Not the least of contributory factors was the union's commitment to strong shop floor organisation and its non-political alliance stand. It was precisely because of some of these reasons that the union was able to register meaningful gains in the 1980s (see below).

### **NUTW and industrial councils**

Industrial councils were regional or national industrial bargaining bodies which were established by the 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act. Between 1980 and 1982, the NUTW was opposed to participation in the industrial councils' bargaining structures and preferred to operate mainly at the plant level where the union could sign substantive agreements with employers and secure bargaining rights.<sup>93</sup> This was understandable in that industrial councils, during the pre-Wiehahn era, had been mainly dominated by employer representatives and registered unions in which African workers were excluded from the bargaining process. Indeed, as Southall notes,

The resistance by emergent unions to [industrial councils] and their bid to shift bargaining to factory level therefore embodied a fundamental challenge to established modalities, simply because it required management to deal more directly with labour than any time since the passage of the

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<sup>93</sup> See Friedman, Building tomorrow today, p 303.

original ICA in 1924.<sup>94</sup>

Industrial councils, the NUTW wrote, were "inappropriate vehicles for industrial bargaining" since the bargaining process took place only at a regional or national industrial level.<sup>95</sup> The NUTW was convinced during that time that industrial councils were established to cater for the interests of employers and of established unions, which it described as "unrepresentative, undemocratic and cumbersome".<sup>96</sup> It also felt that since the constitutions of industrial councils were largely unrepresentative, the independent unions were not going to exert any substantial influence at all in those structures. Furthermore, the divergent views of independent and established unions made it impossible for them to speak with one voice on such councils.

The NUTW was, however, in principle, not totally opposed to industry level bargaining provided its principles were not undermined. Some of its basic requirements for an effective bargaining process at any level were:

Equality of parties in negotiations; parties to be representative but independent; simple, short negotiation procedures; level of negotiation to be determined by the representativeness of the parties; all aspects of labour relations and conditions of employment to be negotiable; negotiations to be open and based on knowledge of company policies and finances; agreements to be monitored by the parties themselves; [and, lastly], worker control over contributory benefit schemes.<sup>97</sup>

Provided those basic principles were adhered to, the NUTW would be happy to participate in any industrial council bargaining forum. However, as the union stated, hardly any clause in the industrial council constitution mentioned "worker rights to meet on factory premises, no shop steward function [was] defined, no right of inspection by union

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<sup>94</sup> Southall, Imperialism or solidarity?, p 69.

<sup>95</sup> NUTW, "Industrial councils", p 96.

<sup>96</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, Profile of the NUTW, p 14.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

representatives, nor any other of the collective bargaining rights fought for in 'Recognition Agreements' at house level particularly by FOSATU unions".<sup>98</sup> The NUTW further objected that:

Agreements are policed not by union stewards but by council inspectors; breaches of council agreements are criminal offenses entitling the state to 'neutrally' regulate them by prosecutions or non-intervention .... In general the industrial council system has tended to create self-generating bureaucracies which have effectively forced participating unions to move to the sidelines for the entire period of agreement which often means 2 to 3 years.<sup>99</sup>

Because of these shortcomings, the NUTW formulated its own policies: the organisation of workers at each factory; the signing of recognition agreements with individual employers, the establishment of democratic regional councils, which were intended to negotiate minimum protective measures for all workers; and the supplementation of regional agreements by plant level bargaining on wages and conditions of employment in individual factories.<sup>100</sup>

In response to increasing pressure on employers to recognise the NUTW at individual factories, the Textile, Yarn and Fabric Manufacturers' Association (TYFMA) was formed in July 1981.<sup>101</sup> The association comprised most of the major textile manufacturers such as the Frame Group, David Whitehead and Sons, Hebox Textiles, Gelvena Textiles, Natal Thread, Progress Knitting, Braitex and Industex, to mention a few, and was specifically created to contain the threat posed by unions.

The TYFMA comprised 44 members employing about 40 000

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<sup>98</sup> NUTW, "Industrial councils", p 96.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p 97.

<sup>100</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, Profile of the NUTW, p 15.

<sup>101</sup> NUTW, "Industrial councils", p 94; NUTW, History, growth and objectives, p 5; and UW, WCL, SACTWU, G45.12.9, In the supreme court of South Africa, Natal Provincial Division, case number M2459/83, p 8.

textile workers countrywide.<sup>102</sup> The Frame Group was one of the biggest employers in the TYFMA and the Natal Chamber of Industries was the secretariat of the association.<sup>103</sup> S. Lurie, manager at the Frame Group, was the chairperson of the association. In the first meeting held in July 1981 between the TYFMA and NUTW, Lurie indicated that employers did not intend to negotiate separate recognition agreements with the union at the plant level but rather through the employers' association.<sup>104</sup> Lurie also noted that the association was committed to the establishment of an industrial council that covered all areas of the textile industry previously excluded by other industrial councils.<sup>105</sup> At the end of the meeting, a proposed new policy for employers was clearly spelt out:

NUTW and all other registered trade unions in the industry would be recognised by TYFMA at industry level and would be invited to participate on a national industrial council. Stop order facilities would be granted to all such unions irrespective of how few members they had in any establishment and accordingly more than one union could operate in the same factory at the same time. The union should abandon all arrangements made with individual members of TYFMA for house recognition and have such arrangements replaced by industry bargaining.<sup>106</sup>

The association's proposed policy would only be implemented if the union made an undertaking to confine all negotiations to an industrial level and operate through an industrial council. The association managed to push the advantage provided by the apartheid state of repressive labour laws and policies to the limit. However, other anti-apartheid and liberal employers within the association were not happy with such proposals. The

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<sup>102</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, In the Supreme Court of South Africa, Case M2459/83, p 8.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.; and NUTW, "Industrial councils", p 98.

<sup>104</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, In the supreme court of SA, case M2459/83, p 8.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.; NUTW, History, growth and objectives, p 5; and NUTW, "Industrial councils", p 99.

NUTW, however, rejected all the TYFMA's proposals but agreed to hold further discussions. Meanwhile in a "private and confidential" memorandum to all its members, the TYFMA advised them to resist the NUTW "even to the point of facing strikes in order to force the union to reorientate itself".<sup>107</sup>

However, further meetings were held between August and October 1981 during which period the union pressed for gentlemen's agreements with individual factories, binding and enforceable agreements at the plant level.<sup>108</sup> The TYFMA rejected such agreements and proposed that all agreements should be enforceable by law. Another contentious issue was whether the union should be granted recognition and facilities in a factory where it did not have a majority membership. The NUTW felt that there should be one union per factory and that recognition and facilities should be granted to the union with a majority membership.<sup>109</sup> The TYFMA accepted this proposal.

By the end of 1981, negotiations between the NUTW and TYFMA had collapsed when employers insisted that all factory negotiations and agreements be nullified pending the establishment of an industrial council for the industry.<sup>110</sup> The clash between the NUTW and TYFMA caused division among members of the association: some employers signed factory recognition agreements with the NUTW while others, like the Frame Group in particular, resisted.

From 1982 onwards, the NUTW reviewed its position with regard to industrial council participation.<sup>111</sup> It was only after August 1982 that FOSATU encouraged its affiliates to utilise industrial councils "so long as participation on councils conceded neither factory level bargaining and shop

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<sup>107</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, In the supreme court of SA, case M2459/83, p 10; and NUTW, History, growth and objectives, p 5.

<sup>108</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, In the supreme court of SA, case M2459/83, p 9.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p 10.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> See Friedman, Building tomorrow today, p 304.

stewards' rights nor advantages to sitting minority unions".<sup>112</sup> After long soul-searching, the NUTW agreed to participate in these centralised bargaining structures.

On 26 July 1983, the NUTW applied to become a member of the industrial council for the Natal clothing industry, during which time it had started organising workers in the clothing and knitting industry in the greater Durban area and Natal in general.<sup>113</sup> The Natal-based Garment Workers' Industrial Union objected to NUTW's application for an exemption from the closed shop and prohibition on deductions clauses as contained in the constitution of the industrial council. On 3 November, the industrial council turned down the NUTW's request on exemptions, a decision that was welcomed by GWIU.<sup>114</sup> A conflict also arose between the two unions over membership at the James North company of the greater Durban area.

On 1 February 1984, a ballot was conducted to determine the union with a majority membership and the NUTW won with an 84 per cent majority.<sup>115</sup> Once the NUTW had proved beyond reasonable doubt that it was a major role-player in the knitting and clothing industry, members of the industrial council were prepared to accept the NUTW. By mid-1984, the NUTW was admitted as a member to the industrial council for the clothing industry (Natal) and exemptions were granted.

In 1984, the NUTW was also faced with two options, either to participate in a new industrial council solely for the Hammarsdale area or to join the existing one for Durban and its surrounding areas. At Hammarsdale, the union was actively organised with a total membership of 6 730 out of the eligible

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<sup>112</sup> Southall, Imperialism or solidarity?, p 72.

<sup>113</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D11.2.1, Industrial council for the clothing industry (Natal): In the industrial court of SA, 1984, p 1; and see also Maree, "Trends towards corporatism in SA", p 92.

<sup>114</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, In the industrial court of SA, 1984, p 3.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p 4.

workforce of 10 000.<sup>116</sup> However, the clothing factories in the area were covered by the unskilled wage determinations (determined by the Wage Board) which made it difficult for the union to enter into wage negotiations with employers. Of the two options, the NUTW chose the latter:

The present council covers the majority of the clothing industry in Natal and therefore our joining the council would be meaning that whatever gains are there for the majority will be applicable for Hammarsdale as well. The existing council has a close-shop clause and the only way of challenging that at this time is to go into the council...<sup>117</sup>

By mid-1984, the NUTW had secured membership in the textile industrial council covering Durban and its surrounding areas. By 1985, however, many independent unions had joined industrial councils, and by using those bargaining structures, were able to extract meaningful gains.

### Recognition struggles at Frame's textiles

The Frame Group is (and has been) the largest textile manufacturer and employer in South Africa: in 1980, it employed about 35 000 workers on its various mills in the country.<sup>118</sup> During the early 1970s, the Frame Group established relations with the Textile Workers' Industrial Union (TWIU) (a registered trade union) whose membership was dominated mainly by Indian workers and consistently refused to recognise independent African trade unions. For 12 years, the Frame Group resisted recognising the NUTW at its mills, and this became one of the greatest struggles in the textile industry. The NUTW could not claim to be a major representative of all textile workers without resolving the recognition dispute with the Frame Group, a key company in the South African textile industry.

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<sup>116</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, NUTW correspondence, 1983-4: M. Sineke, branch secretary to all BEC and NEC members and NUTW organisers, p 1.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D 7.4, Report on disputes, p 8.

From 1973 onwards, there were a number of clashes between the NUTW and the Frame Group over recruitment and recognition agreements at its mills. Frame dismissed workers who were involved in independent union activities on the factory floor. It searched workers for union membership cards or application forms, and workers were required to surrender newspapers and/or any other literature in their possession to the security office.<sup>119</sup> In June 1981, these company policies led to a protest by workers and the union. The company refused to give in, arguing that "sooner or later hand collections and changes of money would take place and thereafter insurance companies...would be having a field day in the canteen...which the company was not prepared to accept".<sup>120</sup>

Between July 1981 and August 1982, the NUTW withdrew from negotiations with the Frame Group and directed its energy towards those firms that were willing to enter into an agreement with the union. By August 1982, the NUTW had signed about 17 recognition agreements in the Natal region.<sup>121</sup> At that stage the Frame Group which had already established relations with the TWIU in the early 1970s granted it stop order facilities, particularly at the Nortex, Seltex and NKM mills.<sup>122</sup> A. Frame himself justified the company's recognition of the TWIU to its liaison committee members by the fact that the union had 70 percent membership at Nortex and 80 percent at both the Seltex and NKM mills.<sup>123</sup> The NUTW objected to the recognition agreement and its relations with the TWIU further deteriorated. Earlier, in 1980, the two

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<sup>119</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, In the supreme court of SA, case number 2459/83, p 12.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p 13.

<sup>121</sup> Profile of the NUTW, p 19.

<sup>122</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D13.2.1.4, Natal Coastal branch report, 14/15 August 1982, p 8; and In the supreme court of SA, case number M2459/83, p 13.

<sup>123</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Frametex liaison committee, 16 March 1983, pp 2-3.

unions had clashed over the employment of J. Dubazane, who had been dismissed as an organiser for the NUTW and accused of being a police informer.<sup>124</sup> The NUTW wrote, "Numerous proofs were produced in this regard including correspondence from a security policeman; him being observed in conversation with the security police without any explanation...".<sup>125</sup> In spite of these circumstances which led to his dismissal, the TWIU employed Dubazane as its Natal regional director. Those actions of the TWIU, plus its opposition to the NUTW's applications on various industrial councils, further alienated the two unions from each other. It is in this context that the NUTW rejected Frame's idea of granting stop order facilities to, and the recognition of, the TWIU. The NUTW regarded the recognition of the TWIU by Frame as an orchestrated ploy to undermine its power base at the company.

On 1 October 1982, in a meeting between the NUTW officials and Frame it was agreed that the recognition of the TWIU and stop order facilities granted to it at the Frametex mill be nullified. Frame remained a consistent supporter of the TWIU but this time he had to back down after the NUTW produced documentary evidence showing its signed-up membership at the company, and how his labour officers intimidated workers who were members of the union. Further agreements were made:

Frame would recognise as the sole collective bargaining representative of its weekly-paid employees that union which demonstrated itself to have the support of a majority of such employees by way of a clerical check of stop order forms given under the hand of the employees as authorization for the deduction of membership dues from their weekly wages.<sup>126</sup>

It was also agreed that stop order facilities would be granted

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<sup>124</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D7.4, Report on disputes, p 5.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, pp 5-6

<sup>126</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, G45.12.8, Factories, Frame and disputes: In the industrial court of SA, Pinetown, 10 November 1983, p 3.

to a union with a majority membership at the Frametex mill and both the NUTW and TWIU were allowed to canvass for members without interference from management. Frame only agreed to these changes because he was convinced by E. Ashwell, labour officer at Frametex, that the TWIU had "an equal strength at Frametex" and was likely to win a majority in a secret ballot.<sup>127</sup>

In December 1982, the NUTW had managed to recruit about 1 792 workers at Frametex and submitted stop order forms: by March 1983, the number had increased to 2 429.<sup>128</sup> However, Ashwell rejected about three-quarters of the stop order forms on the grounds that they were improperly signed. Frame realised the implications of that action and quickly informed the NUTW to re-submit those forms for verification by another labour officer. About 792 forms were rejected and returned and the rest were accepted. In a liaison committee meeting on 16 March 1983, Frame explained why a considerable number of stop order forms for the NUTW had been rejected:

A number of forms could not be accepted as they were not signed properly or the members had already terminated their services. It was also found that a great number of employees signed for both unions. Employees signed for both unions so that they would no longer be harassed by union representatives and not because they want to be represented by both unions... This fight between brother and brother could have serious repercussions if allowed to get out of hand.<sup>129</sup>

In March 1983, about 1 637 stop order forms for the NUTW were accepted. Alarmed by this rapid membership growth of the NUTW at Frametex, the Frame Group, through its labour officers, called a meeting of supervisors and informed them that the company was officially recognising the TWIU once again.

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<sup>127</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, G 45.12.8, Factories, Frame and disputes: In the industrial court of SA, Pinetown, 10 November 1983, p 34.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p 5; and also in the industrial court of SA, case number M2459/83, p 24.

<sup>129</sup> Minutes of meeting of the Frametex liaison committee, 16 March 1983, p 2.

Supervisors were given blank application forms of the TWIU for distribution among workers.<sup>130</sup> Such actions by management led the NUTW to write,

The Frame Group has actively bulldozed its workers into joining the TWIU. They have threatened workers with retrenchments and /or dismissal if they do not join TWIU. They have allowed TWIU officials free access to company premises to recruit workers; used their own supervisory staff and labour officers to recruit members of that union during working hours...<sup>131</sup>

Once official recognition was granted to the TWIU, the NUTW petitioned the industrial court to have that decision nullified in order to "stop a range of unfair labour practices" at Frametex.<sup>132</sup> The NUTW regarded the recruitment of TWIU members by management as completely "unacceptable and incompatible with the policy of the companies and the unions".<sup>133</sup> In 1983, the NUTW went to court six times against the Frame Group's recognition of the TWIU. The first court action was successful and the Frame Group was ordered to stop union dues deductions. But after a month, the Frame Group reinstated deductions and the NUTW had to once again appeal to the industrial court - a process that went on throughout the year.

There were some significant developments that took place between August and December 1983. The restraining order granted by the Supreme Court on the Frame Group not to recognise the TWIU expired in August and Frame was quick to reinstate the recognition.<sup>134</sup> The NUTW applied to the court

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<sup>130</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, In the industrial court of SA, case number M2459/83, p 28; and G45.12.8, Factories, Frame and disputes, 10 November 1983, p 8.

<sup>131</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D7.4, Report on disputes, p 9.

<sup>132</sup> FOSATU report, 1983, p 18; see also Friedman, Building tomorrow today, pp 340-41.

<sup>133</sup> Minutes of a labour committee at Frametex, 27 April 1983, p 2.

<sup>134</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, Natal Coastal branch report, September 1983, p 4.

to have the order extended but was unsuccessful. It was only after a month that the order was reinforced. The Frame Group had to make an outside court settlement with the NUTW over recognition of the TWIU. The company agreed not to recognise the TWIU pending the conciliation board's decision on the matter. In December, the NUTW brought two court cases against the Frame Group: the first case was over retrenchments of 10 NUTW members at Frametex and, secondly, over continuous deductions of stop orders from 19 Pinetex workers who had resigned from the TWIU.<sup>135</sup> In both cases, the NUTW won: the industrial court ordered the company to reinstate those 10 workers and stop order deductions were discontinued.<sup>136</sup>

In 1984, relations between the NUTW and Frame Group were further strained owing to retrenchments at Frametex. The NUTW took the Frame Group on several occasions to the industrial court for unfairly retrenching its members.<sup>137</sup> Early in 1985, the NUTW appealed to the Natal Supreme Court to have its workers reinstated by the Frame Group. The court ruled in favour of the NUTW and also granted it a court order preventing the Minister of Manpower "from stopping retrenchment cases from [not] being looked at as unfair labour practices".<sup>138</sup>

Towards the end of 1984, the NUTW had successfully recruited about 2 800 members at Frametex and discussions on recognition agreement were resumed, which led the NUTW to write:

After a decade of fiercely anti-union activity the Group has, however, finally got to the stage where it appears committed to recognising the union.... It is our expectation that the next few months will see

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<sup>135</sup> The Textile Worker, volume 2, number 2 (December 1983), p 5; and Institute for Industrial Relations (IIR), Industrial relations in South Africa, review, 1983, p 60.

<sup>136</sup> The Textile Worker, volume 3, number 1 (1984), p 2; and IIR, Industrial relations, 1983, p 60.

<sup>137</sup> See, for instance, The Textile Worker, volume 3, number 1 (1984); and volume 3, number 2 (1984).

<sup>138</sup> The Textile Worker, volume 4, number 1 (1985), p 6.

the finalising of a detailed recognition agreement which is at present under negotiation.<sup>139</sup>

It was only in August 1985 that the NUTW was finally granted recognition by the Frame Group, marking an end to 12 years of struggle and conflict between the two adversaries.

### The cotton dust campaign

The health and safety of union members at work have been one of the major concerns of the NUTW in the 1980s. Apart from concentrating on traditional areas of concern such as wages, retrenchments and unfair dismissals, the union began to look to other areas where it sought to promote the interests of its members. Indeed, in South Africa, workers have been exposed to a range of occupational health and safety hazards. The NUTW's major concern has been cotton dust, which gave rise to chronic lung disease, asthma and other disorders.

In the 1980s, the union's policy was directed at the prevention of occupational health hazards caused by cotton dust and it argued that employers had a duty to safeguard health and ensure workers's safety, particularly from this distinctly harmful lung disease. The NUTW was perhaps the first independent African trade union in South Africa to highlight the dangers of cotton dust. The union brought a greater awareness to shop floor workers and others that their place of work has been the cause of ill health and that employers had an obligation to safeguard the workers's health. It is precisely because of this that the union's cotton dust campaign is examined here in this chapter.

In 1982, the NUTW launched a "brown lung campaign", the first of its kind in South Africa. The campaign was aimed firstly at educating both employers and employees about the health hazards of cotton dust and, secondly, to assist union

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<sup>139</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D7.3.1.1, Education project: NUTW by John Copelyn, 1985, pp 2-3.

members who had been affected to obtain compensation.<sup>140</sup> The NUTW, in line with FOSATU's health and safety campaign, commissioned Dr Neil White of the Health Care Trust, to write a booklet entitled "Cotton Dust Kills" for distribution among textile workers.<sup>141</sup> N. White was also appointed to carry out medical check-ups on NUTW members.

The campaign was first launched at the Braitex firm in the Transvaal and tests were conducted on Sundays and soon after the first shift of the week. Initially, management at the Braitex factory resisted the idea, but later agreed. Two workers of the total 80 tested at Braitex factory were infected. In response to that outcome, the NUTW formulated some policies:

Annual lung function tests by a union approved doctor; constant measuring of dust levels; efficient exhaust ventilators; respirators where necessary; cleaning must be done by vacuum cleaners and not by sweepers and compressed air; those workers that have brown lung or could suffer from it must not be dismissed and must be moved to dust free parts of the factory.<sup>142</sup>

By the end of 1983, about 1 661 workers employed in five major firms in the greater Durban area had been tested and of those 108 (6,5 percent) responded positively.<sup>143</sup> Transfers within departments were immediately implemented on those infected and the NUTW forwarded about 22 compensation claims under the Workmen's Compensation Act.<sup>144</sup> However, only one claim was successful (being the second claim for brown lung infection to be compensated in South Africa).

In 1984, the NUTW established a post at its headquarters

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<sup>140</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D14.5, NUTW, Story on cotton dust, p 1; The Textile Worker, volume 4, number 1 (1985), p 4; and FOSATU report, 1983, p 21.

<sup>141</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D14.5, Story on cotton dust, p 1.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p 2.

<sup>143</sup> FOSATU report, 1983, p 22.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

in Durban for a full-time industrial health officer and FOSATU provided funds to purchase the necessary equipment. Commenting on the creation of the post, Dr M. Colvin wrote:

As the trade union movement increases in size and sophistication industrial health and safety issues will be taken up more and more by the unions. Unfortunately, although the workplace is obviously an important source of ill-health, there are very few people working in this area in South Africa. As a result the field of occupational health is relatively new and its scope and possibilities have not been defined. Clearly the approach and work of the health officer will be directed by the union in accordance with its policies and strategy.<sup>145</sup>

In January 1985, Colvin was appointed as the industrial health officer for the NUTW.

The brown lung campaign, however, met with resistance from the Textile Federation (a body representing textile employers). In 1984, the Textile Federation, together with officials from the Ministry of Manpower, held a meeting to discuss the brown lung issue. The meeting ended with a call on employers "not ... to survey cotton dust levels and workers' health in the textile industry".<sup>146</sup> The director of the Textile Federation, J. Shlagman, warned the NUTW to withdraw its campaigns. Instead, the union responded by launching a campaign at the Frame Group's mills in the New Germany area. The results indicated that about 30 of 2 000 workers tested at the company were permanently disabled by the disease.<sup>147</sup> However, a small number of people infected by the disease were compensated by the company. For instance, M. Maseko of Braitex was granted a monthly pension of R197,00.<sup>148</sup>

In 1985, the NUTW launched campaigns at the SA Fabrics factories. At the SA Fabrics factory, urine tests were conducted, particularly on those workers who handled dyes and

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<sup>145</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, NUTW correspondence: Mark Colvin to John Copelyn, 22 August 1984.

<sup>146</sup> The Textile Worker, volume 4, number 1 (1985), p 4.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

chemicals. Management refused to sign an agreement which compelled the company not to use dye containing dangerous chemicals.<sup>149</sup> However, the NUTW intensified its campaign in 1987 when the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation provided some funds specifically for the campaign; in fact, the initial years had laid down the foundation for a sound health and safety policy within the trade union movement.

### Industrial action during the early-Wiehahn era

There have been few sites of more frequent strike action by African workers in South Africa than at the Frame Group's mills, particularly at the New Germany complex. Between 1973 and 1985, Frame's textile workers were involved in three major strikes: January 1973, January 1974 and May 1980. The NUTW was most influential in the May 1980 strike which took place over ten days. By 1979, the union had managed to recruit workers rapidly and established a shop steward committee at the Nortex, Seltex and NKM mills. At the Frametex and Pinetex mills, union members played an important role in the liaison committee which they had dominated in 1978; in fact, by 1980, of the total 18 liaison committee members at the Frame Group, 15 were NUTW shop stewards.<sup>150</sup> The May 1980 strike has been regarded by the union and workers as a key struggle in the textile industry during the early-Wiehahn era, surpassing all previous strike action since 1973.<sup>151</sup>

The May 1980 strike was an explosion of militancy among the weavers, who had constituted themselves as the power-base

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<sup>149</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, D13.2.1.4, Report to the BEC, SA Fabrics, 28 August 1985, p 2.

<sup>150</sup> Briefing on textile strikes, Alec Erwin, 10 June 1980, p 6.

<sup>151</sup> Generally between 1980 and 1985, strike action increased and the number of applications for conciliation boards and the use of industrial courts by trade unions increased. For some figures of these issues, see Friedman, Building tomorrow today, p 352.

of the NUTW at Frametex. The conflict that took place was initially centred on the incentive bonus scheme operating for most weavers but when the rest of the labour force joined, the poverty level wages became the focal point of the strike.<sup>152</sup> Generally speaking, workers at the Frame Group have historically embarked on strike action precisely because of the issue of take-home pay or what J. Mawbey summarised as:

Poverty wages subject to continual erosion by rising costs; constant pressure for higher levels of productivity while wages remain static over long periods; harsh and arbitrary shop-floor discipline required to hold thousands of workers in submission under these conditions; repression of independent worker organisation to ensure that this low wage policy can be maintained.<sup>153</sup>

In January 1979, after sixteen months of negotiation with the liaison committee, Frame's workers were awarded a 10 percent increase. The increase was rejected by the liaison committee members and they instead demanded a 25 percent increase. After a deadlock in negotiations between liaison committee members and management, the weavers, without notice, went on strike on 29 July 1979. The strike was important for the NUTW in that it boosted union membership at the Frame Group. The union's shop stewards had managed to negotiate with management to concede to the demand of workers - that the increase of 10 percent be paid from September 1979 instead of January 1980 as initially proposed by management. The shop stewards also convinced management to reinstate three dismissed workers. The union took advantage of the situation at the Frame Group; it called general meetings of shift workers and involved them in union activities and education.<sup>154</sup>

Three weeks before the May 1980 strike, shop stewards

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<sup>152</sup> For a full discussion on this strike, see J. Mawbey, "The 1980 cotton workers strike", SALB, vol.6, no. 5 (1980); and Natal Labour Research Committee (NLRC), "Control over a workforce - the Frame case", SALB, vol. 6, no. 5 (1980).

<sup>153</sup> Mawbey, "The 1980 cotton workers strike", p 4.

<sup>154</sup> Gwala' Papers, "The May 1980 strike", p 18.

called for a meeting with management to discuss the issue of wages and employment of *impimpis* (spies) at Frametex.<sup>155</sup> However, management refused to meet them. In a liaison committee meeting on 6 May, the issue of an employed Security Branch agent was discussed and members of the liaison committee warned that "they would kill the culprit before reporting the matter".<sup>156</sup> The Frame Group dismissed the agent but the company was by now deeply concerned by the growing strength of the NUTW. The concessions that were made in 1979 and early May 1980 were clear victories for the union. When workers demanded a 25 percent increase in May, the Frame Group was prepared to risk a strike rather than to give in to their demands, arguing that it was better to confront the growing strength of the union sooner rather than later.<sup>157</sup>

The significance of this strike to the union lay in its end results. Although the union lost S. Cele (a shop steward and liaison committee member at the Frametex) who was shot dead by an unknown gunman on 18 July 1980, the end result was encouraging for the union. About 298 workers who were charged for illegal striking and represented by the union had their charges withdrawn by the state.<sup>158</sup> The Frame Group were also forced to award workers with a 10 percent increase in July and with a further 15 percent in September 1980. Furthermore, the company also announced that the January 1981 increases would be 20 percent for women and 17,5 percent for men.<sup>159</sup> It was the first time that such huge increments had been granted by the Frame Group. However, to compensate for the wage increments, the company introduced a number of measures designed to increase productivity in the mills. The number of

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<sup>155</sup> NLRC, "Control over a workforce", p 21; and Gwala's Papers, "The May 1980 strike", p 20.

<sup>156</sup> Minutes of the Frametex liaison committee, 6 May 1980.

<sup>157</sup> Gwala's Papers, "The May 1980 strike", p 21.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, p 56.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*.; and NLRC, "Control over a workforce", p 25.

looms per worker were increased from ten to fifteen, particularly in mill number nine while in other mills looms were increased from four to eight.<sup>160</sup>

Perhaps more significant to the union, was Frame's agreement, for the first time, to talk to the NUTW officials in October 1980. Although the meeting did not bring anything tangible or formalise a working relationship with the NUTW, it was nevertheless "a reflection of the impact of the strike that after seven years of sustained hostility the bosses felt the need to look more carefully at the union".<sup>161</sup>

Between 1981 and 1985, the NUTW had a relatively high record of industrial action, particularly during the recession which hit the economy in 1982 and 1983. In 1981, the union embarked on three strikes in the greater Durban area and the demands ranged from wages, reinstatement of dismissed workers to removal of sex discrimination in wages. The following table provides a brief overview of action engaged in by the union at various companies.

Table B

Strike action by the NUTW, 1981-1985

Year	Number of strikes	
	Countrywide	Greater Durban area
1981	5	3
1982	10	6
1983	18	10
1984	3	2
1985	3	1

The NUTW was engaged in more strikes in 1982 and 1983 than in other years. However, these strikes have to be seen in the context of what was happening in the country. In 1982, South Africa experienced about 394 strikes and work stoppages while in 1983 the number dropped slightly to 336.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Gwala's Papers, "The May 1980 strike", p 56.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p 57.

<sup>162</sup> SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1989-90, p 369; and TUCSA Directory, 1983/4 and information sheet, December/January 1984.

During the brief recession of 1982-83, the NUTW was involved in a number of strikes because of retrenchments that were taking place but on the contrary it emerged from that period with a large membership. The major reasons for strike action were basically over wages, retrenchments and delayed recognition agreements. In companies where the union was recognised, it adhered to agreed procedures of resolving a dispute. In 1984, the NUTW utilised the courts to resolve some conflicts since courts were empowered, under South African law, to determine unfair labour practices. Under the Labour Relations Amendment Act of 1982, the court could hear victimisation cases and grant restraining or status quo orders (requiring conflicting parties to restore a situation to what it was before the dispute) to aggrieved parties. Such a mechanism was utilised by the NUTW rather than risk dismissal of its members. As discussed earlier, the NUTW approached the court several times seeking restraining orders against the Frame Group. Between 1984 and 1985, the NUTW was involved in fewer strikes, possibly because of its utilisation of collective bargaining structures and of the official dispute settling machinery, which proved to be viable alternatives. This was quite contrary to developments in the country where in 1984 the number of strikes and work stoppages increased to 469.<sup>163</sup> With the passage of time, the NUTW leadership had developed a number of strategies of dealing with employers and tried by all possible means to avoid strikes fearing worker dismissals by management, preferring instead to utilise the official dispute procedure or, at least, resort to legal action and asserting unfair labour practices through the Industrial Court.

### NUTW and politics

The NUTW was one of the leading unions within the FOSATU alliance and, as such, subscribed to FOSATU ideology and policy, which clearly called for non-racialism and shop floor

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<sup>163</sup> SAIRR, Survey of race relations, 1989-90, p 369.

democracy. But was it possible for independent trade unions to confine their activities to only bread-and-butter issues given the nature of South African society? It was hardly possible to divorce politics from purely bread-and-butter issues even in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The African independent trade unions of the 1970s emphasised the establishment of an independent worker position, fearing state repression if they became involved in the political struggle. Yet at their union meetings, officials and workers chanted "Amandla Ngawethu" (power is ours). One of the closing salutations used by the NUTW in the paper, *Textile Forum*, was "Amandla Ngawethu".<sup>164</sup> Even the least political unionists spoke against the state and chanted anti-apartheid slogans during union protest meetings during the 1976 state bannings of the NUTW officials. However, the NUTW did not want to be aligned to any political organisation, whether inside or outside the country.

In any event, the NUTW eschewed any form of political involvement with the banned nationalist movements, particularly the ANC.<sup>165</sup> The trade union movement was to remain independent and workers believed that the task of the unions was to address day-to-day issues in the factory rather than to concentrate on national political problems.<sup>166</sup> The politics of the factory became dominant in the 1970s although this did not negate the fact that workers were politically conscious. Workers emphasised that the mistakes of SACTU should not be repeated if unions were to survive and, hence, "working class factory consciousness" took precedence.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> See for instance, *Textile Forum*, 14 December 1978.

<sup>165</sup> E. Webster, "A profile of unregistered union members in Durban", in J. Maree (ed), *The independent trade unions, 1974 -1984* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), p 28.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p 29.

<sup>167</sup> H. Benyon, *Working for Ford* as cited in Webster, "A profile of unregistered union members", p 29. Benyon states that: "A factory class consciousness understands class relationships in terms of their direct manifestation in

Even during the 1976 Soweto uprisings, the NUTW refrained from participating directly in the unrest, fearing government repression if it were to be involved in a politically inspired strike.<sup>168</sup> As one of the NUTW shop stewards stated in the 1970s,

A working class movement should not be deeply involved with a political movement. As workers we can participate in issues in the community, but not as a workers' movement. Some issues like rents we cannot avoid, but we must draw some lessons from the past, from the older unions like SACTU. Through deep political involvement, factory issues get left behind and too much time is spent over political issues.<sup>169</sup>

On several occasions, the NUTW made it clear that it had no factional political affiliations but stood for a just society. Because most of its members were African workers, the leaders of the NUTW believed that social justice could be attained through equitable living and working conditions for all workers irrespective of colour, race or gender.

Even in 1982 when the debate over the relationship between trade unions and politics was re-opened within the FOSATU alliance, the NUTW refused to participate or affiliate to any political or community organisation.<sup>170</sup> J. Foster's

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conflict between the bosses and the workers within the factory. It is rooted in the work-place where struggles are fought over the control of the job and the 'right' of managers and workers. Inasmuch as it concerns itself with exploitation and power it contains definite political elements. But it is a politics of the factory.", p 98.

<sup>168</sup> See Webster, "Stay-aways and the Black working class: evaluating a strategy", Labour, Capital and Society, xiv, 1 (April 1981).

<sup>169</sup> Survey conducted by the Natal Project, Working class history in the community and Labour Research Unit, UND, Sociology Department, October 1986.

<sup>170</sup> For an interesting debate on political unionism, see J. Baskin, A history of COSATU (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1991); Friedman, Building tomorrow today; R. Lambert and E. Webster, "The re-emergence of political unionism in contemporary South Africa?", in W. Cobbett and R. Cohen (eds), Popular struggles in South Africa (London, 1988); and P.

(General Secretary of FOSATU) call for union members to get involved in community and political organisations was ignored by the NUTW.<sup>171</sup> In 1983, when the United Democratic Front was formed, there was a general debate on whether or not trade unions should affiliate to it. The NUTW's response was, as J. Gwala stated,

A big no, but we were not really against the establishment of the UDF. We did not want to divide our members over political matters and it was a general agreement within our union that each member was free to join any political party or participate in community organisations.<sup>172</sup>

Even with the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985, the NUTW remained one of those unions that constituted the independent worker, "apolitical" bloc within the federation.

## Conclusion

Between 1973 and 1985, the NUTW grew from a small union of the textile workers of Durban to become the strongest, non-racial, national trade union. What strengthened it was its organisational strategies: the development of strong shop steward structures, building strong plant-based organisation and the signing of recognition agreements with individual employers in order to secure collective bargaining rights and plant-level organisation. Furthermore, in the 1980s, the union was able to survive and gain a considerable membership through its willingness to participate in the industrial councils; it also explored official collective bargaining structures as provided by the Wiehahn reforms and utilised the courts where necessary. Indeed, those strategies worked in favour of the

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Eidelberg, "The unions and the African National Congress", South African Historical Journal, 28 (1993).

<sup>171</sup> See J. Foster, "The workers' struggle - where does FOSATU stand?", South African Labour Bulletin, volume 7, number 8 (July 1982).

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Jabulani Gwala, Bolton Hall, 27 September 1993.

NUTW, and were later adopted by many COSATU unions after 1985.

Also strengthening its position in industry was the NUTW's policy towards political organisations. The union tried by all possible means to avoid any alignments with political movements, in particular the ANC and UDF; in fact, there was a dramatic shift from the broad trade union movement approach adopted by SACTU in the late 1950s and the early 1960s when it became a member of the Congress Alliance. The NUTW had managed successfully to organise itself from the bottom up, industry by industry and developed a strong shop floor structure that was to be adopted by a number of unions in the textile and clothing industries.

## *Chapter Eleven*

### **The Chemical Workers' Industrial Union, 1973-1985**

#### **Introduction**

The emergence of independent, non-racial trade unions, it has been argued in the previous chapter, began in the aftermath of the 1973 Durban strikes. The new unions, for instance the National Union of Textile Workers of Durban adopted a survivalist strategy whereby it concentrated on immediate economic gains of workers and, while building up the union at the factory level, distanced itself from broader political struggles and avoided any confrontation with the apartheid state. Indeed, this strategy worked in favour of workers and produced a worker-controlled union, which survived the state repression of the 1970s and 1980s. This chapter continues to examine one of the independent unions which adopted similar strategies and managed to build a non-racial, worker-based trade union - the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union (CWIU) of Durban.

Some important yardsticks by which the influence of emerging independent African trade unions of the 1970s can be measured are the rate of growth in membership, recognition agreements signed and the attainment of better working conditions. Applying these to the period from 1974 to 1985, one can see that the CWIU was relatively small and weak during its initial six years of existence. It was only after 1980 that there was an upswing in membership and recognition agreements signed. The membership growth in the 1980s was triggered partly by the economic recession (and also general

trade union developments like the emergence of FOSATU), which gave African workers an incentive to join in times of recession because they knew that its efforts to improve their wages and conditions and its fight against retrenchments were likely to succeed. But perhaps more significant in the growth of this trade union were its recruitment strategies, policies and organisational structures. Also of importance in the early 1980s were the Wiehahn reforms, which had made union organisation both possible and necessary.

During the mid-1970s, the CWIU was poorly organised and had a weak shop floor structure. The organisation of chemical workers into a trade union was difficult to achieve because of the nature and small size of the industry. Its annual signed-up membership never exceeded 3 000 between 1974 and 1979.<sup>1</sup> However, the pattern of CWIU's union membership began to change significantly thereafter and by 1985 there were 6 230 signed-up members in the greater Durban area.<sup>2</sup> This high rate of growth is particularly significant in the light of the union's long struggle to build up its membership base and win recognition agreements within the chemical industry. Perhaps the CWIU's success in the 1980s was due in part to the strong leadership skills of the general secretary, R. Crompton, who provided direction and strengthened its position to become a strong, national and non-racial trade union.

This chapter's aim, therefore, is to provide an analysis of the growing CWIU, focusing on its origins, organisation, policies, recruitment strategies, recognition campaigns and worker struggles as they emerged in the 1970s and 1980s.

## Origins of the CWIU

Independent trade unions born in the 1970s have generally linked their origins to the strike wave of 1973. It was at

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<sup>1</sup> SALDRU, Trade unions in South Africa, 1970-1980: A directory and statistics, Working paper no 45 (Cape Town, CUP, 1982), p 12.

<sup>2</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, Other unions, F6.6, Chemical Workers Industrial Union, A brief history, 31 March 1986.

this time that there was an explosion in trade union membership, particularly among independent unions. The CWIU was officially launched on 24 November 1974 in Durban and grew directly from the Benefit Fund (BF), which had started organising workers at African Explosives and Chemical Industries (AE&CI) (a locally-owned company) in 1973.<sup>3</sup> This chemical plant was the biggest in the Durban region and employed about 1 500 workers. The BF had focused its attention on AE&CI and acquired a mass membership by popularising worker grievances relating to pensions/gratuities and wages. When other unions in the textile and metal industries were established in 1973, workers at the AE&CI plant were instructed by the BF to organise themselves and constitute a majority in order to establish a trade union. In taking this step, the BF had hoped that the chemical workers would eventually form a formidable union. O. Badsha, who was to become the first general secretary of the CWIU in 1975, began organising workers in the chemical industry, particularly in Merebank, Jacobs, Pinetown and Dalbridge.<sup>4</sup> Recruitment was not only done in specialised chemicals but also within the broader industry which included soaps and candles, oil refining, pharmaceuticals and plastics, perfume and paints.<sup>5</sup> Badsha made substantial progress with his task in the following months as a result of the brief upsurge of enthusiasm among African workers for union organisation in the aftermath of the Durban strikes.

By August 1974, a total of 900 workers had been recruited from various factories in the greater Durban area with the majority from AE&CI (626), Chrome Chemicals (111) and Natal

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<sup>3</sup> Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", p 245.

<sup>4</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, F6.6, CWIU, A brief history, p 1. See also E. Webster, "A profile of unregistered union members in Durban", SALB, volume , pp 45-6; and Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", p 245.

<sup>5</sup> Webster, "A profile of unregistered union members in Durban", p 46.

Contact Packers (80).<sup>6</sup> By November of that year, membership had increased to 1 020, and this eventually led to the formation of the CWIU. Only about half of the registered members were paid-up; for some, the decision whether to pay union dues or not was likely to be determined by how successful the union proved in solving their work-related problems. As rightly noted by D. Dlamini, one of the CWIU organisers in the 1970s:

We can not blame workers for our own mistakes. We simply failed to put our house in order. In 1974 and 1975, many of our members did not pay their membership fees because we did not deliver the required results... One can rightly call the initial stage of recruitment [a partial] failure.<sup>7</sup>

### Recruitment and organisation

The five years between 1974 and 1979 have been described by the CWIU as "bitter years".<sup>8</sup> Considerable efforts were made to recruit chemical workers but were not successful and the union failed to make any substantial gains in its paid-up membership. Although the data below (see Table A) shows that there was an overall increase in general union membership during that period, the CWIU's recruiting strategies failed to boost its membership to any significant extent. The general assumption among CWIU officials was that the union would have no difficulty recruiting members, given the worker militancy of the time. But, as already explained, by November 1974, the union had a signed-up membership of 1 020 of which only 600 were paid-up.<sup>9</sup> Although this number increased to 900 the following year, the signed-up membership increasing to

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<sup>6</sup> UW, WCL, CWIU, Statistics on membership; and Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", p 246.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with D. Dlamini, KwaMashu Township, K Section, 27 September 1994.

<sup>8</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, CWIU, A brief history, p 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

2 300,<sup>10</sup> the union attributed its failure as follows:

Our new born union found [itself] in a very hostile environment [plus the attitude of management]. In [February] 1974 four leaders were banned and in November 1976 a further eight union officials were banned. The wave of worker militancy began to drop off. By 1977 our organising strategy of recruiting broadly changed to careful, in-depth organising in a few factories...By 1980 our membership had dwindled to 460 paid-up members.<sup>11</sup>

Although Table A shows that in 1975 membership more than doubled to 2 300, paid-up membership declined from 900 in 1975 to 580 in 1976, reaching its lowest in 1979 with only 430.

Blame was also laid on the state's industrial relations system which, in the opinion of union officials, encouraged employers to treat embryonic unions with hostility or indifference. Further criticisms were that employers failed or refused to recognise the CWIU for the purpose of negotiation, or that they even tried to undermine the union's influence by establishing rival liaison committees. The CWIU further complained that demands for union recognition and negotiating rights were brushed aside by employers who sheltered behind the government's policy towards African trade unions.<sup>12</sup> But blame must also be shared by the union's poor organisational strategies. The situation can best be captured in the words of S. Khumalo, the CWIU organiser at Colgate-Palmolive:

We started going out and looking for a trade union. Fortunately a fellow worker found a union, which is the Chemical Workers Industrial Union. We as workers went out in search of the union, the union didn't come to us. From there I spread the rumour in the company to the workers...<sup>13</sup>

The CWIU's union membership growth is given below.

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<sup>10</sup> Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", p 246.

<sup>11</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, CWIU, A brief history, p 1.

<sup>12</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, CWIU, Union members and statistics. p 2.

<sup>13</sup> CWIU, "Workers' struggle at Colgate", SALB, volume 6, no 8 (1981), pp 25-26.

Table ACWIU's Union Membership, 1974-1985<sup>14</sup>

Year	Signed-up Members	
	Countrywide	Greater Durban Area
Nov 1974	-	1 020
Dec 1975	-	2 300
1976	-	2 900
1977	-	3 000
1978	-	2 750
1979	-	2 640
1980	-	3 000
1981	3 600	2 820
1982	5 200	3 100
1983	6 257	3 440
1984	13 572	4 610
1985	20 736	6 230

As the above shows, the optimum years for the union were 1984 and 1985 when membership stood at 13 572 and 20 736 respectively. Nonetheless, despite the limited paid-up membership growth between 1974 and 1980, the union established three main branches in the Durban region: Jacobs, Pinetown and Dalbridge (Gale Street). Jacobs accounted for nearly half the membership of the union. In line with other Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Council-affiliated unions like the NUTW, shop stewards were elected in individual firms and reported to their respective branches. In 1976, the CWIU had 48 elected shop stewards and two organisers in the greater Durban area. According to E. Webster, the CWIU had a far better ratio of paid-up members to shop stewards than that of the NUTW; on average each steward represented some 19 members.<sup>15</sup> The branch executive which comprised mainly shop stewards, met regularly to discuss issues relating directly to employment, recruitment and organisation. Meetings also afforded shop stewards the opportunity to meet full-time union officials and to discuss matters of common concern.

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<sup>14</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, CWIU, F6.6, A brief history, p 1; FOSATU Annual Report, 1980; and also SALDRU, Trade unions in South Africa, p 12.

<sup>15</sup> Webster, "A profile of unregistered trade unions", p 47. For other unions such as the NUTW and MAWU, the ratios of paid-up members to shop stewards were 25:1 and 21:1 respectively.

Despite financial problems the union had four paid officials. Shop stewards recruited members from their workplaces and paid, an annual per capita subscription of R10,40 to head office. Branches had to submit quarterly reports to head office concerning membership, funds and other work-related issues.<sup>16</sup>

Because of poor administration at the head office, union funds were abused and there was a general slackness in honouring union rules. At the beginning of 1976, the secretary, O. Badsha, resigned citing personal reasons and J. Mawbey, managing editor of the *South African Labour Bulletin*, was employed on a part-time basis.<sup>17</sup> Mawbey soon discovered that petty embezzlement of union funds had taken place and one of the organisers was dismissed.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, he discovered that about R350 had gone missing from the union. It was quite clear to Mawbey that union organisers and the executive lacked knowledge of book-keeping and general administrative techniques.

The problems were indicative of the need to adopt new strategies. The appointment of Mawbey along with the competent assistance of J. Copelyn and M. Dlamini from the Institute of Industrial Education, rescued the union from total collapse. Although Mawbey was handicapped by his part-time position, his guidance eventually gave the union new direction. As discussed in the previous chapter, some TUACC (and later FOSATU) unions were founded by radical white students and academics and African workers. However, there were many white intellectuals than black in the union, a prime exception being C. Ramaphosa. Most black intellectuals did not see the unions as prime site for their activity. Among the eight founding members of the CWIU was R. Crompton, who played an important role as the

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<sup>16</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, CWIU, Head office report, March 1980.

<sup>17</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, CWIU, History of the CWIU, p 3 and also Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", p 253.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

general secretary. Despite its anti-racial and class position, the union was unable to capture the support of white workers (with the exception of officials) and membership profile remained mainly African and Indian.

Since its inception, the CWIU had recruited mainly in those factories which were regarded as progressive. The failure of this strategy resulted in a broadening of the organisation to include all the chemical plants in the greater Durban area. Despite this strategy, by 1979, the union remained very small; paid-up membership had declined to 430. What worsened the situation was that all union subscriptions were made laboriously by hand, receipted, entered into the workers' membership card, and carried to the union office. This was no mean feat for workers, many of whom had little schooling.

In 1980, the union's paid-up membership slightly improved to 460, and from this time the union began to expand beyond the Durban region; new branches were formed in Northern Natal, Eastern and Western Cape and the Transvaal. In 1981 even those branches in the greater Durban area whose existence had been precarious for the previous seven years began to enjoy a new surge in recruitment. By 1982, the greater Durban area had 3 100 members and with over 100 elected shop stewards. Organisation in this area was spearheaded by the Jacobs, Dalbridge (Gale Street) and Pinetown branches. Recruitment was targeted mainly at AE&CI's Kynoch plant, Plascon and Unilever. By December 1982, the greater Durban branches were actively organised in 21 factories and had been granted official recognition in 8.<sup>19</sup>

Between 1981 and 1985, membership throughout South Africa steadily grew to 20 736, while in the greater Durban area it increased to 6 230 (see Table A). The number of branches increased from three in 1975 to nine in 1982. By 1984, the

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<sup>19</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, B3.1.2, Report on the Natal region, 16-17 October; and FOSATU, Annual report, 1982, p 2. By that year, the union was actively organised in 45 factories countrywide and had been granted official recognition in 13.

union was officially recognised in 16 factories and had signed 11 formal agreements with employers in the greater Durban area.<sup>20</sup> Union growth was also visible through the increase of shop stewards whose number in 1985 had risen to 138.

Furthermore, growth can be matched with an increase in the number of recognition agreements signed with employers.

Perhaps a contributing factor in the 1980s was the leadership skills of R. Crompton (general secretary), ably assisted by C. Makgaleng (president and senior shop steward at Union Liquid Air), T. Mkaliphi (vice-president and senior shop steward at Plascon Paints) and R. Mofokeng (national treasurer and senior shop steward at PG Glass).<sup>21</sup>

Thus generally, the union performed better in the 1980s than it had in the 1970s and was also able to establish new branches beyond the greater Durban area, more particularly in the Transvaal where it became involved in major worker struggles at Colgate-Palmolive (discussed later in this chapter). One issue that worked in its favour was the victory in 1981 at Colgate-Palmolive where a sizeable number of workers joined the union soon after it secured recognition after months of confrontation. Perhaps the union's success at Colgate-Palmolive paved the way for sound industrial relations between Durban's chemical bosses and African workers and their unions. The victory virtually compelled a small but influential group of chemical employers to negotiate and recognise the union in the 1980s. The union was also strengthened by its merger with the Glass and Allied Workers Union in 1982, which boosted its membership.<sup>22</sup> Of further great importance was the growth in membership between 1982 and

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<sup>20</sup> UW, WCL, CWIU, A history of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union, 1974-1984 (Durban, FOSATU, 1984), pp 11-12; and Maree, "An analysis of the independent trade unions", p 264. At national level, the union was officially recognised in 41 factories and had signed 21 formal agreements with employers.

<sup>21</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, CWIU, A brief history, p 2.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

1983 which coincided with a period of recession. The union survived the recession with a reasonably large membership (see Table A) and enjoyed considerable moral support from the International Federation of Chemical, Energy and General Workers Union, to which it was affiliated.<sup>23</sup>

## Recognition Campaigns and Worker Struggles

### Difficult years of growth, 1974-1976

As said earlier, soon after its inauguration, the CWIU sought recognition at those companies which were thought to be progressive. In its initial three years, the union organised in a few selected foreign and locally-owned, factories in the greater Durban area: Chrome Chemicals, AE&CI, Quality Products and Natal Chemical Syndicate. It was at these firms that the union initially rejected participation in liaison committee structures, seeking instead official recognition. However, all of the employers in these firms were openly hostile to the CWIU and the process of attaining recognition was long and painful. Between 1974 and 1979, the union was defeated in all its attempts to gain recognition, although it made some gains particularly as regards better working conditions, wages and dismissal procedures. As shown in the following selected case studies, the union lacked organisational strategies and was consequently unable to challenge employers or even to sustain its membership.

### Chrome Chemicals

Chrome Chemicals is a jointly foreign-owned company (British and German-owned) in which the new union believed official recognition would be easily achieved. Based in Merebank,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Chrome Chemicals employed about 160 workers in 1974.<sup>24</sup> This small labour force was exposed to dangerous chrome dust, and "in a number of older workers the membrane at the back of their noses had been eaten away by continued exposure"<sup>25</sup> because of the absence of protection. These unhealthy conditions provided an environment which the CWIU believed workers would rally to the union.

Initially the union managed to recruit about 130 of the 160 workers and in September 1974, a fully representative shop steward committee was launched.<sup>26</sup> In October, union officials approached the management of Chrome Chemicals for recognition of the shop steward committee as the only legitimate representative of the workers. Management rejected the proposal outright, suggesting instead that union members in the factory should contest elections for the liaison committee.<sup>27</sup> The union turned down the proposal.

The CWIU then tried to deal with the problem of representation by seeking international support. Letters were addressed to the German Bayer AG head office, the German Trade Union Federation and German government representatives in South Africa. But no satisfactory response was received.<sup>28</sup> Then in order to highlight its problems with Chrome Chemicals, the union exposed the unsafe working conditions to the local press. The company was quick to introduce safer, more modern technology which was labour-saving, but also announced large-scale retrenchments by the end of 1975. The company also

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<sup>24</sup> R. Joshi, "Chrome Chemicals", SALB, vol 2, no 1 (1975), p 34.

<sup>25</sup> J. Mawbey, "Factory struggles in the chemical industry", SALB, vol.4, no.8 (1979), p 76.

<sup>26</sup> Joshi, "Chrome Chemicals", p 34; Mawbey, "Factory struggles in the chemical industry", p 76; and Maree, "An analysis", p 250.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Mawbey, "Factory struggles", p 78. The CWIU was not aware of the fact that the company was jointly owned and hence the CWIU only sought support from the Germans.

indicated that only those "unionised" workers with a minimum Standard 8 qualification and non-unionised members were to be retained.<sup>29</sup> This was a strategic move by the company in order to discourage workers from union activities. It was quite clear to management that all unskilled and semi-skilled workers did not have the minimum qualifications required. Management was also aware of the fact that older and less educated workers were not interested in joining the union. These steps weakened the union because most of its members were not prepared to risk their jobs by union membership and they withdrew their support. By the end of 1975, the union's support base had declined and it withdrew from the company.

### **African Explosives & Chemical Industries (AE&CI)**

By July 1974, the union recruited 625 workers at the AE&CI, a locally-owned company in Durban.<sup>30</sup> Negotiations for recognition between union officials and company personnel officer were initiated. But on 12 August, the personnel officer was instructed by top management to cease all negotiations with the union. The union responded by writing to the company chairman, H. Oppenheimer, urging union recognition. Oppenheimer accepted the union's demands and made recommendations, which led to the resumption of talks between management and CWIU officials.<sup>31</sup> However, the union was not recognised because the company took advantage of the labour repressive conditions under apartheid and hardened opposition to recognition of institutions representing African workers. As a result, a grievance procedure was established whereby workers' grievances could be directly discussed with senior management officials. This meant that union officials lost contact with ordinary workers since workers spoke directly to management if they encountered problems at the workplace.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p 79.

<sup>30</sup> Maree, "An analysis", p 247.

<sup>31</sup> Maree, "An analysis", pp 247-8; and CWIU, Letter to Harry Oppenheimer, October 1974.

In 1975, AE&CI developed a highly bureaucratic system of employee representation. At departmental levels, works and joint management representative committees were established, while at the factory level a liaison committee comprising representatives from all departments was created. As far as the works committees were concerned their role tended to be formal, "concentrating largely on hygiene issues".<sup>32</sup> Wages and conditions of service were negotiated at company level by a multiracial body called the federal consultative council comprising worker representatives from liaison committees of three major plants, and representatives from both management and registered trade unions who were participants in the central industrial council for the explosives and allied industries.<sup>33</sup> As the CWIU was an unregistered and unrecognised trade union, it could not participate in any of these structures. Furthermore, these structures were informal company arrangements not statutory bodies. As a result, union officials were placed in a position where, on a number of occasions, they had to consult liaison committee members to receive information on decisions made by management concerning workers' problems. Initially, the union had a negative attitude towards the liaison committees and did not want to contest liaison committee elections.

By the end of 1975, union organisation at the factory had totally collapsed. But the CWIU's failure at AE&CI was also the result of its poor recruiting strategies. Of significance as well were large scale distances to cover from the office to AE&CI in Umbogentwini and, apparently a chaotic union regime. In a study conducted by F.W. Horwitz at the company in 1980, of the 63 percent of workers interviewed, about 60 percent indicated that they were not aware of the purposes of a trade union although "workers with higher levels of education

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<sup>32</sup> F.W. Horwitz, "Workers' participation in management decision making: research findings in a South African context", Industrial Relations Journal of South Africa, vol 2, no 4 (1982), p 14.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

believe[d] more strongly in the ability of trade unions to improve their lot, than in the case of less educated workers".<sup>34</sup> Horwitz's findings also revealed that longer-serving workers tended to be less optimistic about the benefits of trade unions, unlike newly recruited workers.

Although there was general lack of confidence in departmental committees at the company, particularly among the younger generation or among shorter serving workers, the CWIU failed to provide the necessary education to motivate workers to join the union. The CWIU worked on the wrong assumption that since the period was marked by widespread militancy, workers were likely to join in numbers. By the end of 1976, as Horwitz wrote, "there was very little, if any Black trade union activity in AE&CI factories",<sup>35</sup> and there was no choice except to withdraw.

### Quality Products and Natal and Soap Industries

Another humiliating defeat was experienced at Quality Products and at Natal Oil and Soap Industries of Durban, subsidiaries of the Danish East Asiatic Company, at which the CWIU failed once again to mobilise enough membership for it to be recognised. The union began organising workers in November 1974 and managed to recruit only 68 of the total 250 workers at Quality Products and as few as 21 of the 340 workers at Natal Oil and Soap Industries.<sup>36</sup> The management of the two companies indicated that they would recognise the union only if it obtained 50 percent majority membership taken together. But by July 1975, union membership at Quality Products and Natal Oil and Soap Industries still only stood at 130 and 33 respectively.<sup>37</sup> At the beginning of 1976, the union abandoned the two companies after its membership declined to 30 and 11

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p 17.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p 15.

<sup>36</sup> Maree, "An analysis", p 251.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p 252.

respectively.<sup>38</sup>

## NCS Plastics

As a result of the failures in the above mentioned companies, the CWIU tried a new strategy in early 1976 of mobilising around the election of works committees. As discussed in Chapter 9, the CWIU, like other independent trade unions, had previously shunned liaison committees and after failing to achieve a single recognition deal it decided to participate in the establishment of works committees in an attempt to provide some form of protection to its members. Generally workers preferred the works committees to the liaison committees and occasionally boycotted the elections of the latter at the company level. "As members of a works committee, shop stewards would have the protection against victimisation under the Act".<sup>39</sup> The economic recession of 1976 had led to retrenchments and dismissals and the union wanted to protect its shop stewards from possible victimisation by employers. The new strategy was implemented at NCS Plastics, a Durban-based and South African-owned company that manufactured plastic sheeting, bags and resins used in fibreglass.<sup>40</sup> The company operated two major factories: the "South" (plastics) and the "North" (resins).

Once the union started recruiting at NCS Plastics, workers from the "South" factory elected a works committee, which comprised union members. In the "North" factory however, management established a liaison committee and quickly awarded a five cents an hour wage increase requested by the liaison committee in an "attempt to bolster the image of the liaison committee over the works committee".<sup>41</sup> In contrast, no increase was awarded to the "South" factory workers on the

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<sup>38</sup> CWIU, Membership and growth, June 1976.

<sup>39</sup> Mawbey, "Factory struggles", p 80.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p 81.

grounds that the works committee members failed to negotiate for an increase with management. Furthermore, management tried to undermine the works committee by stipulating that they would open lines of communication only with the chairman of the committee. Thus although management allowed the works committee to function, limited progress was made in terms of worker grievances, and worker representatives were easily victimised. Towards the end of 1976, membership at NCS Plastics had declined to such an extent that the union was forced to abandon its recruiting drive at the company.

The period between 1974 and early 1976 was by no means a glorious one for the union. Indeed, this initial phase of union organisation was marked by mixed fortunes: membership growth in the greater Durban area increased from 1 020 in 1974 to 2 900 in 1976 although paid-up membership declined from 600 to 580 respectively. Furthermore, although a number of companies, both local and foreign, refused to recognise the union but, as a result of its activities, responded to threats it posed by initiating workplace improvements. A number of employers in Durban like the SA Fabrics used this strategy of deliberately isolating workers from the union by making some strategic concessions. Employers had the benefit of the latest 'human relations' thinking of Europe and America and used these personnel techniques to confuse the workers and thwart the unions. However, these techniques were not a lasting guarantee against unionisation, but they were used to the full along with the advantages enjoyed by employers in an authoritarian industrial relations system.

This early phase was, however, marked by maladministration, embezzlement of union funds and lack of experienced leadership. From mid-1976 onwards, the union changed its organisational strategies, brought in experienced and talented officials such as Mawbey, Copelyn and Dlamini to reorganise its three Durban branches so that they could be accountable to the rank and file.

## 1976 and Beyond

### Revertex

Between 1976 and 1979, the CWIU continued its strategy of shop floor organisation but this time in different firms. Despite its failure to attain any recognition agreements, the union targeted Revertex, a British subsidiary, based in the Durban area. In the early 1970s, Revertex had invested about R3 million in a newly reconstituted leather sheeting plant in the Jacobs area,<sup>42</sup> and in 1976 it employed about 110 African and 20 white workers.<sup>43</sup> In that year the African workers started organising themselves; they elected a shop steward committee, which pressed the company to establish a works committee. Although in the past works committees failed to gain any benefits for the workers because of resistance from companies, unionised workers at Revertex insisted that they preferred a works committee rather than a liaison committee. "The works committee...functioned as a platform for the union shop stewards to introduce the workers' demands for the recognition of their union".<sup>44</sup> The works committee was mainly dominated by union shop stewards.

Although the union started organising at Revertex in July 1976, it only demanded recognition at a meeting held on 26 October 1978 between works committee members and management.<sup>45</sup> Because of insufficient membership, the union deliberately delayed its recognition campaign until it had recruited more than 70 percent of the labour force. The production director of the company, Derek Jones, was then told by works committee members that the union had a majority

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<sup>42</sup> UW, WCL, SACTWU, CWIU, F6.3.4, The CWIU at Revertex South Africa, 26 October 1979, p 1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> CWIU, The campaign for recognition Revertex, 28 April 1979, p 1.

membership of 75 percent and hence could be recognised.<sup>46</sup> Jones informed them that the company would investigate the position, but nothing materialised. The general strategy of the company was to stop the union momentum, delay, cause confusion by offering every alternative to recognition, pass the buck, and paralyse union initiatives. Further enquiries on 16 November 1978 were ignored by company officials, and thus began one of the union's longest campaigns for recognition.

In a memorandum of 28 November 1978, the works committee questioned the company's willingness to recognise the union and its policy with regard to the European Economic Community (EEC) Code of Conduct.<sup>47</sup> The Code had been adopted in 1977 by nine member countries which called for fair employment practices among foreign-based companies operating in South Africa. It called upon those companies to pay wages that were above the PDL, remove discrimination, provide for African job advancement and to engage in collective bargaining structures with African unions. The company failed to respond and the union wrote to D.W. Stutchbury, managing director and chief executive of Revertex Chemicals (England), who initially did not reply. It was only after the union in its third letter objected to "the lack of courtesy in not replying to letters and requesting a clear explanation of company policy with respect to the EEC Code of Conduct" that Stutchbury responded.<sup>48</sup> He said that the company had submitted a report to the South African Minister for Trade; that this issue would be re-opened only after the Wiehahn Commission had reported; and that the union was obliged to consult with the company's local management.<sup>49</sup>

The union was infuriated and reacted:

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<sup>46</sup> CWIU, The CWIU at Revertex, 26 October 1979.

<sup>47</sup> CWIU, The campaign for recognition at Revertex, 28 April 1979.

<sup>48</sup> CWIU, The campaign for recognition at Revertex, 28 April 1979.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pp 2-3.

Your statements...are characteristics of the inevitable response British managements make to requests for recognition by unregistered South African trade unions. We have come to regard such response as a deliberate effort to avoid recognition because apparently there has been no serious intention towards recognition...Your company has spent the last six months using a variety of transparent devices to avoid committing itself to ...recognis[ing] the union...Whilst you allege that your company is extremely keen to have good relations with trade unions in South Africa as in Britain we wonder if you would treat British unions in the manner you have found it expedient to treat our organisation.<sup>50</sup>

The company's position with regard to union recognition was supported by the South African government: "[the company's] action appears to be in line with what the government is seeking from companies in this matter".<sup>51</sup> For the union, this was taken as a deliberate attempt by both the government and company to block its recognition campaign.

After October 1978, the company adopted a tough approach towards union recognition and recruitment campaigns. In order to discredit the union, the company in 1979 rejected the works committee's constitution which had been in operation for two years.<sup>52</sup> The union's shop stewards saw the move as an "attempt to subvert the continuing pursuance of union recognition by the committee and possibly to replace it with some other more compliant type of committee".<sup>53</sup> The company also made various attempts to win worker support by raising wages without notice; promoted some shop stewards into semi-supervisory positions; facilitated a fast payment of sick pay; gave merit increases to selected individuals; and promised

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<sup>50</sup> CWIU, F6.2, CWIU correspondence, Open letter for attention D.W. Stutchbury, 30 April 1979.

<sup>51</sup> CWIU, F6.3.4. CWIU, The EEC Code of Conduct for British companies with interests in South Africa, July 1979, p 1.

<sup>52</sup> CWIU, The CWIU at Revertex, 26 October 1979.

<sup>53</sup> CWIU, CWIU at Revertex, Durban, Report number 4, 29 May 1979, p 2.

workers a bonus at the end of the year.<sup>54</sup> But, the company refused to negotiate an agreement with the committee over the more fundamental issues such as grievances and dismissal procedures, wages and working conditions.

The union tried to capitalise on workers' grievances concerning conditions of work but management was quick to address them, for instance on the issue of health and safety. In a memorandum to management submitted by the works committee (together with a letter from the union's attorney threatening legal action) which outlined various breaches of health and safety legislation, the company was threatened and given one week to address those problems.<sup>55</sup> The details given were that some workers inside tanks containing lethal gases were carrying out their duties with faulty respiratory equipment, and without safety harnesses, or proper precautions being used. In addition they were using dangerous machinery without the necessary training. Management responded quickly by "replacing defective protective clothing and giving previously neglected workers gumboots, aprons, gloves, goggles, earmuffs, respirators, safety harnesses - demarcating dust and noise zones, and repairing ventilation systems".<sup>56</sup>

The union also tried to mobilise on the issue of one day notice pay given to dismissed workers. Since the inception of the company in 1958, dismissed weekly paid labourers were given one day notice and received only one day's notice wage. This practice was against the law. In line with legal requirements, management changed this to a full week's wage in lieu of notice to which dismissed workers were legally entitled.<sup>57</sup> Thus with the major grievances resolved, the union had to revisit the issue of recognition soon after the Wiehahn Commission reported. Recognition was one of the issue

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<sup>54</sup> CWIU, The CWIU at Revertex, 26 October 1979, p 2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p 3.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

that kept the union going at Revertex and supplemented by actual achievements on the shop floor.

On 23 May 1979, the works committee met management and discussed a workers' petition on union recognition. Management responded by stating that it would accept representation by a registered trade union, but the union was not satisfied with management's new stance because "registration for the CWIU means significant state control of union operations. Revertex would clearly like the CWIU to register hoping that it will be a tame union".<sup>58</sup> The union initially rejected the issue of registration on the basis that a vast majority of its members were migrant workers who could not be accorded trade union rights. The union remained adamant that Revertex could recognise it in spite of its non-registration status:

There is nothing in the new legislation to prevent Revertex from recognising our union immediately. However Derek Jones [Production Manager], like other employers, has found South Africa's industrial law a most convenient camouflage to hide behind while denying workers the rights of collective bargaining. Jones cannot escape the fact that the large majority of his work force will not be eligible for registered union membership.<sup>59</sup>

However, in October 1979 the government relaxed its bar on migrants and allowed all African workers except those from beyond the South African borders to join registered trade unions. Perhaps this shows, at one level, that the Wiehahn reforms helped to erode homeland powers, and that the African townships were becoming more autonomous by the 1980s. In so doing, the union found itself without any issue to rally workers around. Like all other FOSATU unions, the CWIU became embroiled in the registration debate and it was only in 1980 that the CWIU became an officially registered trade union. In July 1982, the union and Revertex formally signed a

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<sup>58</sup> CWIU, The CWIU at Revertex, 26 October 1979.

<sup>59</sup> CWIU, Report, Number 4, 29 May 1979, p 3.

recognition agreement.<sup>60</sup>

### Henkel South Africa

Another recognition battle by the union was launched in September 1978 at Henkel South Africa, a subsidiary of Henkel West Germany.<sup>61</sup> Henkel South Africa was based in Durban and Johannesburg and produced a wide range of products: chemicals, soaps, detergents and glues.<sup>62</sup> An international company, Henkel at that time had 68 subsidiaries in 17 countries.<sup>63</sup> In South Africa, the company was half-owned by A. Rupert's giant Rembrandt Tobacco Group. In 1978, the Durban plant employed about 250 Africans, 40 Indians and 10 white foremen.<sup>64</sup> During that year, the union recruited about 150 African workers at Henkel's Durban factory.<sup>65</sup> A liaison committee was also established and by 1982 a majority of union members was elected onto the liaison committee (see Chapter 9 on independent unions' changed attitude towards the liaison committee).<sup>66</sup> Shop stewards were elected and many were members of the liaison committee. The following month, union shop stewards in the liaison committee requested recognition of their union and management agreed to inform the Board of Directors.<sup>67</sup> After months of delay, the company agreed to recognise the union as the legitimate representative of its members, but refused to "negotiate wages and working

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<sup>60</sup> CWIU, A history of the CWIU, 1974-1984 (Durban, FOSATU, 1984), p 14.

<sup>61</sup> CWIU, Report on dispute at Henkel SA (Durban Plant), 26 April 1982.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid; see also Maree, "An analysis", p 257.

<sup>63</sup> CWIU, The workers' struggle at Henkel, 1982, p 2.

<sup>64</sup> CWIU, The CWIU at Henkel, Durban, Report 1, 21 September 1978.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

conditions, to sign a recognition contract or negotiate seriously with the union on substantive issues [like] the unpopular company pension scheme".<sup>68</sup>

On 16 May the following year, management disbanded the liaison committee on the grounds that those elected were union members, mainly Africans and replaced it with a Company Council which was supposed to be "multiracial and nationwide".<sup>69</sup> The union, workers and shop stewards voiced their concern against this Company Council. Firstly, it was not their choice and "its existence [was] not subject to the free will of employees".<sup>70</sup> Secondly, the seats on the Council were divided on racial lines: in the Durban plant, four Africans, two whites and two Asians had to be nominated.<sup>71</sup> Thirdly, it was undemocratic (in the eyes of workers and the union) in that when union members boycotted the elections, the company recognised non-union members who participated in the elections as representatives of both union and non-union members. About 161 union members signed a petition calling for the "elected" representatives to resign from the Council - a call that was lambasted by the company as "destructive, negative and intimidatory".<sup>72</sup> The company also threatened to break off relations with the union if such a campaign continued. Lastly, the union viewed the Council as an instrument that was meant to undermine it since agreements between the union and company had to be ratified by the Council.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the Council was the only body that had the right to deal with wages and conditions of work and

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<sup>68</sup> CWIU, Report on dispute at Henkel, 26 April 1982.

<sup>69</sup> CWIU, The workers' struggle at Henkel, pp 5 and 20; and CWIU, Progress report on campaign for recognition at Henkel between 6 December 1978 and 4 April 1979.

<sup>70</sup> CWIU, K. Schweiker, Managing Director, 29 September 1979, in The Workers' struggle at Henkel, p 20.

<sup>71</sup> CWIU, The workers' struggle at Henkel, p 20.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p 21.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

its decisions were binding on all workers.

Despite this setback, between 1980 and 1982, the union made considerable gains at Henkel; a grievance and dismissal procedure was established; stop order facilities were granted; union officials were given limited access to their members and, in September 1981, the company agreed to negotiate wages with the union.<sup>74</sup> This sudden change in attitude by company management was necessitated by worker struggles and campaigns at Colgate-Palmolive, which alarmed the chemical bosses (see below). But in January 1982 the company reneged on these wage negotiations. This resulted in further negotiations the following month, but the company still refused to negotiate wages. It also rejected the proposal by the union to resolve an outstanding grievance on the pension scheme; and it refused to negotiate the new 45 hour-a-week shift, reduced shift and over-time pay.<sup>75</sup> These were the main grievances which ignited the strike action on 9 March 1982.

Soon after the strike began, management responded by dismissing all 230 African workers and scab-labour was immediately recruited.<sup>76</sup> Scab-labourers signed contracts to work for 45 hours-a-week, a demand which union members had rejected.<sup>77</sup> A week later, the union and workers agreed to call off the strike after realising that they were fighting a losing battle and decided to negotiate directly with management. The company selectively re-hired 75 workers who were required to sign contracts that stipulated longer working hours, lower shift and overtime pay.<sup>78</sup> For those who were not re-employed, the company was prepared to pay them only one week notice pay - a suggestion that led the union to call for

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p 6.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p 7 and Daily News, 10 March 1982.

<sup>76</sup> See Friedman, Building tomorrow today, p 309.

<sup>77</sup> Natal Mercury, 19 March 1982.

<sup>78</sup> CWIU, Report on dispute at Henkel, 26 April 1982.

a consumer boycott of Henkel products on 27 March.<sup>79</sup> Strong links were beginning to develop between the union and township consumers.

The consumer boycott received the full backing of FOSATU, which demanded the extension of the boycott to include products of the Rembrandt Tobacco Group if no solution was found.<sup>80</sup> The secretary general of the International Chemical and Energy Federation, C. Levinson, also pledged support for the boycott.<sup>81</sup> Once a world-wide consumer boycott had been successfully implemented, the company initiated negotiations with the union, which culminated in the signing of a formal recognition and a settlement of the dispute agreement on 20 April 1982.<sup>82</sup> Both the union and company agreed that all workers had to be reinstated (without loss of long service benefits); that a secret ballot be conducted to determine whether workers wanted to work for 40 or 45 hours-a-week; that the union's disciplinary procedure be implemented; and that correct retrenchment procedures be followed.<sup>83</sup> The union had reason to celebrate its victory at Henkel and thanked all organisations for their "speedy and effective support [which] has been instrumental in achieving the comparatively quick and satisfactory settlement".<sup>84</sup>

### Colgate-Palmolive

Undoubtedly, one of the CWIU's key recognition campaigns occurred at Colgate-Palmolive in Boksburg between 1980 and

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Rand Daily Mail, 27 March 1982.

<sup>82</sup> CWIU, Report on dispute at Henkel, 26 April 1982, p 2; and CWIU, A history of the CWIU, 1984, p 15.

<sup>83</sup> CWIU, Report on dispute, 26 April 1982, p 2.

<sup>84</sup> CWIU, R. Crompton to all organisations, 26 April 1982.

1981.<sup>85</sup> The recognition battle had far-reaching implications for chemical employers, particularly those based in the greater Durban area where the union had been organising since 1974. Once the union was successful at Colgate-Palmolive it sounded a warning to Durban's chemical employers of the dangers of ignoring a representative union.

When African workers at Colgate-Palmolive went out on strike, about 3 000 workers from the chemical industry came out in sympathy. The boycott of all Colgate-Palmolive products that was called by the CWIU was effectively implemented in Durban's African townships. It is worth looking at what happened at Colgate-Palmolive in order to understand the shifts in employers' attitude towards the union in the 1980s. From this Colgate-Palmolive incident, a number of patterns emerge very sharply particularly among Durban's chemical employers. The chemical bosses were now willing to negotiate with the union if it recruited a significant number of workers at their workplaces. Perhaps it was not only the threat posed by the union's strikes and consumer boycotts but also an attempt by government and business to stave off the political threat by socio-economic reforms.

African workers at Colgate-Palmolive had a significant number of grievances; they complained about discrimination - factory facilities being racially segregated; unfair dismissals; and improper representation at the company.<sup>86</sup> As soon as the union established a branch in the Transvaal in January 1980, African workers at Colgate-Palmolive flocked to join. Barely two months after the launch of the branch, the union had managed to recruit about 60 percent of the total workforce of 290 at the company. During that month, the union asked for recognition but for one year and five months thereafter, the company adopted a "blatantly anti-union

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<sup>85</sup> See Friedman, Building tomorrow today, pp 247-250 & 266.

<sup>86</sup> CWIU, The Colgate story, 1982, p 1.

stand".<sup>87</sup>

At a liaison committee meeting on 20 February 1980, the personnel director, C.G. Dyson, asked "whether the time was right for unionisation" at the company. The meeting resolved that "there was no justification at present for the establishment of a trade union within the workforce of Colgate-Palmolive".<sup>88</sup> Because of this, the union questioned the company's credibility as one which was regarded as the most progressive international company in South Africa:

Colgate is a household name all over the world with its toothpaste, soap and detergent products. It justifies its presence in South Africa by declaring its 'sincere and ongoing commitment to the elimination of racial discrimination' and by claiming that multi-national business can play an important role in eliminating petty apartheid in business.... Is Colgate-Palmolive really the enlightened employer it claims to be?<sup>89</sup>

Initially the company remained adamant on non-union recognition and was rather reactionary: "As a company we are opposed to the unionisation of our workforce"<sup>90</sup>; and "It is the Colgate-Palmolive policy that we resist the establishment of trade unions in our factories throughout the world".<sup>91</sup> However, before long, the tone changed (soon after the union reminded it of the EEC Code of Conduct) to allow recognition under certain conditions: "The management of this company... will only recognise a union or unions which have been registered in terms of the laws of the country governing

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<sup>87</sup> CWIU, "Workers struggle at Colgate", p 18.

<sup>88</sup> CWIU, Minutes of the meeting of the Colgate-Palmolive liaison committee, 20 February 1980 as cited in "Workers struggle at Colgate", p 19.

<sup>89</sup> CWIU, "Workers struggle at Colgate", pp 18 & 23.

<sup>90</sup> CWIU, Colgate's letter to CWIU, 12 May 1980, as cited in "Workers struggle at Colgate", p 19.

<sup>91</sup> CWIU, Letter to CWIU, 19 May 1980, as cited in "Workers struggle at Colgate", p 19.

registration of unions".<sup>92</sup> The company also listed a number of conditions before union recognition could be granted:

Filing of an application for registration; accept the principle of freedom of association; agree to negotiate wages and working conditions only at industrial level through an industrial council; if unable to gain admission to such industrial council then the activity of the union in our company is confined to matters relating to shop floor grievances; and proof of majority membership.<sup>93</sup>

The CWIU strongly objected: "It is clear... that the issue is not simply union recognition as such, but the type of recognition. Colgate wishes to emasculate any union it recognises by refusing to negotiate wages and working conditions directly".<sup>94</sup> The union accused management of deliberately downgrading its position to that of the liaison committee, which dealt with trivial shop floor grievances such as "bins for towels", "toothpowder in the locker rooms"<sup>95</sup> and "racism in shower and change rooms".<sup>96</sup>

Because of major differences between the company and CWIU over the industrial council, the union declared an official dispute, and also applied for the establishment of the Conciliation Board to resolve it. But the Board failed to settle the issue and the union thus called for a strike ballot among workers. Of the 230 African workers only four voted against the strike action which was to become "the first legal strike ballot by a predominantly black union".<sup>97</sup> While the union followed the early-Wiehahn strike procedures, it also secured FOSATU and widespread community support for a boycott

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<sup>92</sup> CWIU, Colgate to CWIU, 30 June 1980, as cited in "Workers struggle at Colgate", p 20.

<sup>93</sup> CWIU, The Colgate story, p 5; and CWIU, "Workers struggle at Colgate", p 20.

<sup>94</sup> CWIU, The Colgate story, p 6; and CWIU, "Workers struggle at Colgate", p 20.

<sup>95</sup> CWIU, "Workers struggle at Colgate", p 23.

<sup>96</sup> CWIU, The Colgate story, pp 14-15.

<sup>97</sup> Rand Daily Mail, 19 June 1981.

of Colgate-Palmolive products, during the 30 days "cooling - off period" required in terms of the labour law.<sup>98</sup>

The boycott of the company's products received much support from trade unions and the African community in the townships. In 1982, workers at Revertex, Henkel, Unilever, NCS Plastics and AE&CI, all Durban-based companies, staged a two-hour protest in solidarity with Colgate-Palmolive workers.<sup>99</sup> Boycott stickers were distributed to workers through the Pinetown, Jacobs and Dalbridge branches. Although it is difficult to measure the success of the boycott in African townships, some residents responded to the call. The Jacobs branch reminded its members of "the task of conscientising the community about the boycott and how vital this is to our future struggles in the chemical industry".<sup>100</sup> In its annual report, FOSATU wrote:

Whole communities became mobilised in support of the boycott call. Textile workers' hostels in towns like Mooi River were covered with boycott posters. TGWU members posted boycott stickers on buses on the East Rand, traders in Richards Bay, Uitenhage and the East Rand agreed to remove Colgate products from their shelves.<sup>101</sup>

Employers from other factories in the Boksburg area also expressed concern about the effects of an impending strike action at Colgate on their own plants.<sup>102</sup> With pressure mounting from all directions, Colgate-Palmolive agreed to bargain at company level with the union two days before a legal strike was to begin.

On 28 June 1981, Colgate-Palmolive formally recognised the union; agreed to negotiate wages and conditions of service at the plant level; and also dropped its insistence on the

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<sup>98</sup> FOSATU, Report, November 1980 to November 1981, p 10.

<sup>99</sup> CWIU, R. Crompton to all branches, 30 May 1982.

<sup>100</sup> CWIU, Branch secretary to all members re: Colgate-Palmolive, June 1982.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p 11.

<sup>102</sup> See Rand Daily Mail, 19 June 1981.

union to participate in the industrial council for the chemical industry.<sup>103</sup> Colgate-Palmolive had lost the battle and the dispute marked a turning point in Durban's industrial relations; it heralded similar victories thereafter at the Revertex, Henkel and Unilever companies, and a radical shift of policy towards industrial councils, particularly among the chemical employers. In fact, the tactic of negotiating with "progressive" employers was protracted and fraught at every turn; none of those companies became a pillar of organisation and enormous time and energy was consumed in drawn-out battles. For an extended period workers found no tangible benefits from sacrificing to build the union.

One of the less fought recognition campaigns launched by the CWIU in the aftermath of the Colgate-Palmolive struggle was at Unilever company based in the Maydon area, south of Durban. The union started organising workers at Unilever in July 1982 and immediately elected a representative shop steward committee. Barely a month after, negotiations for recognition between union and company officials were initiated. The company agreed to recognise the union if it recruited more than half of the workers. After six months of intense recruiting, the union managed to reach the 75 percent majority membership. In January 1983, the union was officially recognised.<sup>104</sup> What persuaded the company to quickly recognise the union was the costly strike at Colgate-Palmolive, which was a battle lost and more dramatically, the boycott of all its products. Unilever's management was not prepared to risk strikes and consumer boycotts.

### CWIU and the political dimension

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the CWIU, one of the pillars of FOSATU, remained opposed to forming an alliance

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<sup>103</sup> CWIU, Dusty Ngwane, Colgate and Branch chairman to all FOSATU affiliates, 19 July 1981.

<sup>104</sup> CWIU, Recognition campaign at Unilever company, 12 February 1983.

with any of the political movement on the grounds that it was likely to divert its energies from building working class organisation. A. Erwin, FOSATU's first General Secretary, voiced the same view:

As an initial attempt to build unions, [we believe that] FOSATU could survive only if it was based on the shop floor. [In this way we] could resist repression and allow for organisation.... [We set out to organise] factories as a base of strength. If not [factory based, we would be] just posturing. We were resistant to doing what seemed futile. Our worker stewards felt that success could be achieved if we avoided [unnecessarily] dangerous activities which would divert resources and provoke state action against [our] embryonic movement.<sup>105</sup>

The CWIU eschewed national liberation politics and insisted on building strong shop floor structures, which catered for its members' economic interests. In defense of the union's policy, C. Makgaleng, president of the CWIU in 1983, stated:

Our union believes that the political struggles of the day should be separated from workplace struggles. Any union which tries to get involved in political struggles will not survive for long. It has been our principled stand since the inception of this union that we do not get involved in wider community struggles. In any case, our primary task is to expand and build a strong union base for our members.<sup>106</sup>

The CWIU also maintained that it was able to attract workers with differing political ideologies, particularly in the greater Durban area and therefore did not want to affiliate to any political movement. Even during the mid-1980s when there was growing township unrest in the greater Durban and surrounding KwaZulu areas, the CWIU (like the NUTW) refused to be drawn into formal alliances with any political or community organisation, in particular the newly formed UDF. In response

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with A. Erwin, March 1988, in A.W. Marx, Lessons of struggle: South African internal opposition, 1960-1990 (Oxford, OUP, 1992), p 196.

<sup>106</sup> CWIU, General correspondence, CWIU's political stand, October 1983.

to the issue of whether the CWIU should establish links with the UDF, R. Crompton stated: "Our union is a working class organisation...comprising workers with differing political opinions. Formal affiliation therefore with the UDF is completely out of the question".<sup>107</sup> This implied that the union, unlike unions elsewhere in Britain, Germany, France and so on, was not to take any political decisions at all, not even those directly in the interests of their members.

Dlamini, one of the CWIU organisers, also noted:

Our union has always been opposed to direct participation in politics. Since 1974, we were all agreed that we should not make SACTU's mistake of being involved in Congress Alliance politics. Our union consisted of members with different backgrounds and political ideologies. We had to avoid unnecessary division within the union.... We were all workers with one aim - we wanted the improvement of our wages and conditions of service.<sup>108</sup>

The CWIU was a symbol of opposition to involvement in broader political struggles and has been one of the manufacturing unions within FOSATU and COSATU that remained opposed to giving preference to the national liberation struggles over working class organisation.

## Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the CWIU's momentous growth and rise was experienced only between 1980 and 1985. The union's membership in the greater Durban area soared from a mere 1 020 in 1974 and 6 230 in 1985. By 1984, the union had signed about 11 formal recognition agreements in the greater Durban area; in fact, by 1985 the union had emerged with a large membership and with deeper roots in factories. The low years were those between 1974 and 1979 when union's demands for negotiating rights at plant level were totally rejected. It was only at Revertex and Henkel that a sizeable number of workers had

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<sup>107</sup> CWIU, Rod Crompton's response to Joe Foster' speech, 30 July 1982.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with D. Dlamini, 27 September 1994.

remained organised by 1979. Elsewhere union membership had suffered a precipitous decline. Although the union had experienced defeat throughout the 1970s, its moment of success seems to have begun in 1981 with victory at Colgate-Palmolive. In time especially in the late 1980s, the CWIU was able to establish itself as a powerful and leading trade union in the chemical industry. Undoubtedly, this union grew from strength to strength, particularly in the 1980s, learned lessons, failed in some areas and succeeded in others, and has become one of the chemical unions within COSATU to take the lead in the building of a strong working class organisation.

## Chapter Twelve

### Conclusion

This thesis has examined the development of the African labouring class and the rise of African independent trade unions in Durban between 1959 and 1985. To reach an understanding in this period, I have tried to break down the artificial division between labour history and social history, as well as that between the African working class and the broader community. This thesis therefore explicitly places its subject in the context of a wider society, for it is a working class that experienced complex relations not only in the workplace but also in the townships where people lived, and in the market place. Indeed, the apartheid city was a vital social arena beyond the factory gates: it was also a place where the political struggle against apartheid was formulated.

The period under investigation is important for a broader understanding of the history of the era of "high apartheid", fittingly described by J. Rex as "apartheid gone mad"<sup>1</sup>, which has been inadequately explored by social historians. The workers' actions and the emergence of African independent trade unions has, however, generated a renewed interest among labour historians. Durban is particularly significant for the former in identifying distinctive features of the attempt to implement apartheid policies in the country's fastest growing industrial region, and for the latter because Durban was the focus of the 1973 strikes from which a new brand of African trade unionism emerged.

Of material importance to these developments was the

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<sup>1</sup> J. Rex, "The compound, the reserve and the urban location", *SALB*, vol 1, no 4 (1974), p 14.

unprecedentedly long period of economic growth that began in the 1960s. The economic boom that occurred in Durban, in the textile industry in particular, marked the city as one of the three great urban agglomerations in South Africa, together with the Rand and greater Cape Town. In the 1960s, a shift developed in the composition of industrial production towards heavy chemicals, textile clothing, furniture, paper and printing, and a degree of geographical diversification in border areas such as Hammarsdale occurred, in response to industrial decentralisation incentives offered by the government. It was precisely because of rapid economic growth under ever-hardening apartheid which prompted theoretical thinking among Marxist and liberal scholars. Radical South African historians and sociologists viewed apartheid and capitalism as mutually dependent entities, while liberals stressed the economic dysfunctionality of apartheid.

The relationship was a complex one. In fact, the state reacted differently to problems which arose in various regions and economic sectors. This study has explored the relationship which existed between Durban's employers and the state. The evidence has shown that the relationship was marked by tension, conflicts, failures, deviations and occasional successes in the implementation of apartheid policies. It is probably true that the relationship was functional to capital in the 1960s, but this changed dramatically after 1973 when apartheid became so costly and therefore damaging to capital, more particularly to the operation of job reservation.

While the relationship between capital and the state has been broadly examined by Marxist writers in the 1970s, it is no longer feasible to depict the state (local and central) as an instrument of capital. At least for the greater Durban area, there is some evidence that shows the existence of a conflictual relationship between the central and local state, and between capital and the state, particularly after 1970. My study has produced a number of examples in the history of Durban's African working class to illustrate these contestations, especially in the 1970s and 1980s.

Although this thesis focuses on Durban, it reinforces D. Posel's main argument that employers favoured the establishment of a settled, urban labour force and preferred, for many jobs, to employ migrant workers who were cheaper and more compliant rather than attract urban residents into work by higher wages; that the state ensured an adequate supply of African labour and channelled it to where it was needed most; and that the state imposed some restrictions on the process of African urbanisation in an attempt to control the social and political problems which accompanied the process.<sup>2</sup> Posel's arguments are viable but her account only goes as far as 1961, which invites research on what happened when the apartheid architects gained a freer hand after that. Furthermore, Posel examines the apartheid state's labour and urban policies at a national level. Too few studies have gone beyond the 1960s to examine the state-capital relationship. This work has made an attempt to do so.

Perhaps the contradictory and dysfunctional relationship between the state and capital is best illustrated in Chapter 3 where I consider how the control and allocation of labour under apartheid operated. Some employers of African labour contravened the state's influx control mechanisms and the workings of labour bureaux. Industrialists, such as the Frame Group and the Dunlop Rubber Company, were in favour of migrant labour and they, together with African work-seekers, adopted methods which undermined state labour recruitment policies. Commenting on state control mechanisms, P. Maylam notes:

There is a danger in viewing control in teleological, monolithic, functionalist terms - creating a picture of powerful state agencies ever tightening the screws of control, with growing effect, in the service of the dominant class. Such a picture is, paradoxically, both appropriate and misleading. Appropriate, because controls have been steadily tightened through the course of the twentieth century. But also misleading, because the whole apparatus of urban segregation and apartheid has been riddled with contradiction and

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<sup>2</sup> See Posel, The making of apartheid; Posel, "Influx control and urban labour markets", pp 411-430.

dysfunctionality.<sup>3</sup>

The Durban local authorities were sometimes reluctant to implement state labour policies. Influx control measures were remodified to suit the labour requirements of capitalists, which generated conflict between the central state and local structures.<sup>4</sup> The labour bureau system was seen by employers as unnecessary and cumbersome, while employees themselves preferred to be employed/contracted at the gate or off the street, rather than follow the stipulated procedures of the state labour bureau system. (One of the contradictions within the employer position was that they found the labour bureau burdensome, but were totally opposed to paying for urban housing for African workers). The state's efforts to control and regulate the movement of African labourers from the reserves to white apartheid cities were a resounding failure since, as S. Greenberg puts it: "control has made necessary more controls; the successful damming up of labour in the African rural areas has created inducements to burst the dams".<sup>5</sup> In 1986, influx control was abolished and it was clear to the state that the system was not working and was "self-defeating".<sup>6</sup> As growing numbers of people undermined the system, it became costly to maintain the machinery of control, which Greenberg describes as "the greatly expanded coterie of clerks, managers, magistrates, inspectors and police".<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the greatest event in the shaping of Durban's African working class was the forced removals of Africans from

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<sup>3</sup> P. Maylam, "Explaining the apartheid city: 20 years of South African urban historiography", *JSAS*, vol 21, no 1 (1995), p 34.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p 37.

<sup>5</sup> S.B. Greenberg, as cited in Maylam, "Explaining the apartheid city", pp 35-36; see also Maylam, "The rise and decline of urban apartheid in South Africa", *African Affairs*, vol 89 (1990), p 72.

<sup>6</sup> Maylam, "Explaining the apartheid city", p 35.

<sup>7</sup> Greenberg, as cited in Maylam, "The rise and decline of urban apartheid in South Africa", p 72.

inner-city shantytowns to newly created apartheid townships. They were vigorously implemented due to a number of factors: the "sanitation syndrome",<sup>8</sup> white racism (the desire to define Durban as a city built around a white core), notions of progress and modernity, as well as the commercial value of the inner-land.<sup>9</sup> As alternatives to housing in the areas from which people were being removed, both local and central government structures provided formal houses for married couples and hostels for single men and women separated from the white residential areas. Although the provision of housing fell far short of what was required during the period under investigation, the apartheid state nonetheless provided an urban infrastructure for the African community to a degree not equalled by any previous government.

These relocations forced the state to invest large sums of money in the construction of working-class townships around Durban. Of significance here was the state's concession to the fact that Africans constituted a permanent section of Durban's population. Although the African working class in Durban had already emerged in its numerical preponderance, occupied the central position with the labour process and had the necessary skills, it was in the 1970s that this working class posed the greatest challenge to the apartheid state. The migrant workers who existed without housing were part of the working class, and it was they who largely led the direct challenge to the state in the form of mass strike action. However, it was the capitalists who sought profits from the large-scale factories who were responsible for creating the objective grounds in which a working class with its traditions, informal and formal organisation, and conscious of its position within the class and racial structures of South Africa, emerged. Obviously, there was a high price which the African working people had to pay during this whole period - miserable conditions, poverty

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<sup>8</sup> See M.W. Swanson, "The Durban system: Roots of urban apartheid in colonial Natal", African Studies, vol 35 (1976).

<sup>9</sup> Freund, Insiders and outsiders, p 64.

wages, family breakdown, crime and violence, police repression and the criminalisation of much social and economic life. Perhaps these observations, which have been developed in the context of Durban, could be useful in the broader understanding of South African labour history.

Politically, Durban's labouring class was denied "open" representation when the state banned African political organisations in 1960 although there was considerable innovation in the sense that there were civic and underground structures built in Durban, a quite distinctive feature of the area. The repression, hostile indifference and changing strategic context finally led to passivity. Underground sabotage campaigns waged in and around Durban by *Umkonto we Sizwe*, beginning in 1961, failed to have an impact on the state or to "bring the government and its supporters to their senses...".<sup>10</sup> The end result was that, by the mid 1960s, African political organisations were completely paralysed inside the country, and therefore decided to go into exile. Not all leaders, however, went into exile; many stayed and helped in the formation of the next generation of resistance. The political centre for a whole period was located externally. This marked the end of mass mobilisation and a dramatic shift to township politics. Durban's African community no longer challenged the state directly, but indirectly by attacking local government structures established within the townships, such as Advisory Boards, Resident Committees and Urban Bantu Councils. The message was clear: the struggle against apartheid was waged by ordinary workers and the wider community and not by the declining popular political organisations. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, a major feature in the labour history of the period, and notably that of Durban, has been the constant challenge to both the state and capital from African workers, particularly from the 1970s. This view is supported by T. Lodge and B. Nasson, who saw resistance to the apartheid state

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<sup>10</sup> Lodge, Black politics in South Africa, p 234.

during the 1970s and early 1980s as being "more often in the factories than in the townships, in trade unions rather than in political organisations".<sup>11</sup>

Even in the absence of a viable trade union movement, Durban's African workers responded to new economic challenges in a variety of hidden or disguised ways. B. Freund explains such forms of action only when and where working-class organisation had failed, as was the case with SACTU in the 1960s.<sup>12</sup> Of significance here is the fact that the history of informal worker resistance, in particular in industrial establishments during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, is not documented. Some historians have tended to confine themselves merely to those workers' activities which can easily be identified, while others have concentrated on informal South African worker resistance on the mines.<sup>13</sup> Chapter 7 has tried to break this silence by examining the history of informal worker resistance in industrial Durban. Certainly, Durban's African working-class organisation and resistance to capital in the industrial sector has generated a considerable body of scholarly research among labour historians, yet the history of informal worker struggles remains peripheral, if not sidelined. Perhaps this is so because they faded into insignificance when opposition became bold and open.

In the 1960s, African workers' political participation, like their industrial participation, was completely paralysed. Quite simply, they were excluded from both. However, the outbreak of the 1973 Durban strikes signalled a break with the

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<sup>11</sup> T. Lodge and B. Nasson, All, here, and now: Black politics in South Africa in the 1980s (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991), p 28.

<sup>12</sup> Freund, "Theft and social protest", p 49.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, T. Dunbar Moodie, "The moral economy of the black miners strike of 1946", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 13, no.1 (1986); P. Warwick, Black people and the South African war (Cambridge, CUP, 1983); and C. Van Onselen, Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914, 2 vols (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1982).

past, in particular the shortcomings in labour legislation and collective bargaining structures. They marked a turning point in the development of trade unions and industrial militancy among African workers in Durban. 1973 also witnessed the beginning of a sustained increase in the level of strike action which, though varying from year to year, never fell back to the relatively low levels of the 1960s. Moreover, and more importantly, the aftermath of the 1973 Durban strikes saw the emergence of African independent trade unions which laid emphasis on strong shop floor organisation at the plant level. A "bottom-up" system of union organisation, based on a network of shop stewards, was established. In order to demonstrate this, two unions were selected and examined: the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) and the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union (CWIU).

Until 1979, the industrial relations system was racially defined. A breakthrough in structural racial discrimination, entrenched in the labour legislation, occurred when the Wiehahn Commission recommended the inclusion of African workers in the definition of "employee". It was only after the promulgation of the Labour Relations Act in 1981 that real, substantial collective bargaining between African independent trade unions and Durban's bosses began to take a meaningful direction, though with some major setbacks.

Apart from collective bargaining problems, independent trade unions such as the NUTW and CWIU had to confront the question of whether or not to align themselves with the broader struggles within the African community. The two unions argued that priority be given to the expansion of shop floor structures and they were not in favour of a wider political struggle beyond the factory gates. As one of the NUTW's shop stewards noted:

A working class movement should not be deeply involved with a political movement. As workers we can participate in issues in the community, but not as a workers' movement. Some issues like rents we cannot avoid, but we must draw some lessons from the past, from the older unions like SACTU. Through deep political involvement, factory issues get left behind and too much time is spent over political

issues.<sup>14</sup>

The two unions grew from strength to strength, learned lessons, built in one area on the gains of another, were thrown back, were often defeated and forced to retreat before regrouping. By 1985, their presence was felt and acknowledged in many workplaces, and workers had managed to sign a significant number of formal recognition agreements with Durban's employers. These achievements captured the support and enthusiasm of Durban's African workers, who proved to be extremely resilient in the face of the apartheid state's repression.

Perhaps the most important lesson to be deduced from the NUTW and CWIU unions was the survivalist strategy they adopted in the 1970s and 1980s, which they achieved by distancing themselves from the UDF, the Bantustans and the UBC collaborator-type of politics. There were, however, costs particularly in the growing separation from the youth movement and a lack of preparation to deal with the inevitable rise of a national movement of resistance. In fact, the two unions argued that high-profile involvement in national liberation struggles was inappropriate for trade unions; preference had to be given to bread and butter issues and independent "worker politics", as opposed to "populist" working-class movements. Even when the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was formally launched in November 1985, which heralded a new beginning for African working-class organisation, the NUTW and CWIU (both COSATU affiliates and popularly known as "workerists") maintained strong opposition to broad community and political struggles. They emphasized putting down deeper roots among African workers on the factory floor and became influential industrial unions in Durban. As G. Adler and E. Webster wrote:

The fledgling unions, in particular [the NUTW and CWIU], had made important strategic innovations,

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<sup>14</sup> Interview by the Community and Labour Research Unit, "Working class history in Natal project" (University of Natal, Durban, Sociology Department, October 1986).

which profoundly affected trade union development... in South Africa. ...In pursuit of the long-term goals of ending apartheid..., the unions emphasized legal means of struggle. They eschewed involvement in national political issues and refused to align themselves publicly to any political movement.<sup>15</sup>

The successes and failures of independent trade unions opens up debate on the role of contemporary trade unions in politics. As R. Southall asks: "If...democratic unions were after 1985 being propelled beyond economics towards systematic engagement in the political struggle, were they not open to the prospect of history repeating itself?"<sup>16</sup> In the 1980s, independent trade unions decided to participate in rather than boycott the state's labour reforms and this strategy invited huge criticism and created conflict with the banned ANC and the UDF, which called for a complete embargo against the apartheid state and all its structures. Yet it was the tactics adopted by independent trade unions, such as mass action, boycotts, protests, wildcat industrial action, and disruption on the shop floor, which actually undermined and weakened the state. Undoubtedly, the labour movement has been able to mobilise its power and apply mass protest strategies to achieve its demands, particularly during the negotiations at Kempton Park in 1992 - a tactic it had successfully used against employers who continually exploited workers and supported the repressive government. As Adler and Webster aver: "Labour reasserted its strategy of mass action to back up its negotiating position and confirmed the wisdom of extending the strategy to the political sphere."<sup>17</sup> The Tripartite alliance adopted this strategy during the negotiation period and managed to secure its demands.

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<sup>15</sup> G.Adler and E. Webster, "Challenging transition theory: the labour movement, radical reform, and transition to democracy in South Africa", Politics and Society, vol.23, no.1 (1995), p 80.

<sup>16</sup> Southall, Imperialism or solidarity?, p 291.

<sup>17</sup> Adler and Webster, "Challenging transition theory", p 93.

Obviously, there is a degree of pessimism over the future relationship between the ANC government and COSATU. The question is whether or not the alliance can be sustained in a situation where the government, supposedly a caretaker of the interests of all South Africans, may oppose unions demands and industrial action in future. The likelihood is that of repressive corporatism rather than democratic corporatism as advocated by J. Maree and S. Godfrey, where the government is forced to undermine the collective bargaining rights of trade unions, which they have struggled for so long to achieve.<sup>18</sup> If COSATU hopes to survive in the new dispensation, it has to maintain its position as an equal, not subordinate partner, in the alliance and concentrate on building strong shop floor structures, as advocated by manufacturing unions such as the NUTW (now SACTWU) and CWIU within the federation. However, as noted by Webster, the South African trade union movement has two faces - "the one economic, the other social and political" and "the challenge [therefore] now facing the black trade union movement is to blend these two faces of trade unionism."<sup>19</sup> The future will be shaped by how Durban's African working class organisations face this major challenge. The making of Durban's African working class during the apartheid era was no easy task, it went through every difficulty and its history shows some resilience in post-apartheid South Africa.

What is important about this thesis is that it provides a detailed regional case study which could provide a basis for research in other regions, particularly in view of the crucial role of trade unions in contemporary South African political economy. Perhaps its most important contribution is its discussion of how the African working class made itself,

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<sup>18</sup> J. Maree and S. Godfrey, "Trends towards corporatism in South Africa: Industrial relations and industrial strategy in the textile industry", in A. van der Merwe (ed), Industrial sociology: A South African perspective (Johannesburg, Lexicon, 1995), pp 86- 117.

<sup>19</sup> Webster, "The rise of social-movement unionism", p 281.

organised and built a strong independent labour movement, despite both the state and capital's opposition to the recognition of trade unions representing African people. It also shows how a working class with its traditions, informal and formal organisation, and conscious of its position within the class and racial structures of South Africa, emerged. Finally, the thesis argued that the African working class paid a high price, enduring miserable conditions, earning wages below the poverty line, experiencing a breakdown in family structure, and living with crime and violence, police repression and the criminalisation of much social and economic life.

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