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Trade Union Strategy And The Labour Process: Tucsa Trade Unions In The Transport And Building Industries, 1955-1977.

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[17] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Ninth Annual Conference, March 1963 (Ad1.10), National Executive Committee Report, pp.29-30; and
Tenth Annual Conference, April 1964 (Ad1.11), National Executive Committee Report, p.200; and also
Eleventh Annual Conference, March 1965 (Ad1.12), National Executive Committee Report, pp.43, 58, 69-75 and 162-167

[18] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Thirteenth Annual Conference, February/March 1967 (Ad1.14), National Executive Committee Report, pp.63-64

[19] CPSA, South African Institute of Race Relations Clippings Collection (hereafter SAIRR), Box 1159 (Trade Unions), *Rand Daily Mail* 29 July 1967, "TUCSA Drive Aims at African Unions"; and
The Star 27 September 1967, "Whites to Urge Recognition of African Unions"; and also
Rand Daily Mail 18 October 1967, "TUCSA Calls for African Unions"

[20] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, p.6

See also;
CPSA, SAIRR, Box 1159 (Trade Unions), *Cape Times* 30 October 1967, "TUC Gets Warning on Bantu Unions"; and
Rand Daily Mail 1 November 1967, "Minister Warns TUCSA"; and
The Star 1 November 1967, "TUCSA Again Warned by Viljoen"; and
Sunday Times 29 October 1967, "Attack Wild and Irresponsible - Grobbelaar"

[21] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, p.7

Acting without the authority of the National Executive Committee, the Transvaal Branch of the coloured National Union of Furniture and Allied Workers of South Africa sent a memorandum to the Minister of Labour in 1968 declaring its opposition to TUCSA's policy of the rate for the job. *idem*, pp.11-12

[22] *ibid*, p.6

See also
CPSA, SAIRR, Box 1159 (Trade Unions), *The Star* 4 November 1967, "Unions to Talk on Dispute"; and
The Star 7 November 1967, "Major Political Row Seen; Labour Rift Likely on African Unions"

[23] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Thirteenth Annual Conference, February/March 1967 (Ad1.14), Minutes of Proceedings, p.190

[24] CPSA, TUCSA. Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, p.51

[25] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fourteenth Annual Conference, April 1968 (Ad1.16), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.567 and 574

[26] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fifteenth Annual Conference, February 1969 (Ad1.17), Minutes of Proceedings, p.394

idem, National Executive Committee Report, pp.20-21

[17] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Ninth Annual Conference, March 1963 (Adl.10), National Executive Committee Report, pp.29-30; and
Tenth Annual Conference, April 1964 (Adl.11), National Executive Committee Report, p.200; and also
Eleventh Annual Conference, March 1965 (Adl.12), National Executive Committee Report, pp.43, 58, 69-75 and 162-167

[18] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Thirteenth Annual Conference, February/March 1967 (Adl.14), National Executive Committee Report, pp.63-64

[19] CPSA, South African Institute of Race Relations Clippings Collection (hereafter SAIRR), Box 1159 (Trade Unions), *Rand Daily Mail* 29 July 1967, "TUCSA Drive Aims at African Unions"; and
The Star 27 September 1967, "Whites to Urge Recognition of African Unions"; and also
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[23] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Thirteenth Annual Conference, February/March 1967 (Adl.14), Minutes of Proceedings, p.190

[24] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Adl.15), Minutes of Proceedings, p.51

[25] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fourteenth Annual Conference, April 1968 (Adl.16), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.567 and 574

[26] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fifteenth Annual Conference, February 1969 (Adl.17), Minutes of Proceedings, p.394

idem, National Executive Committee Report, pp.20-21

[27] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fifteenth Annual Conference, February 1969 (Ad1.17), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.409-417

[28] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Twentieth Annual Conference, September 1974 (Ad1.23), Minutes of Proceedings, p.445

[29] Speech by E. Eloff of MIEUSA. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Eighth Annual Conference, March 1962 (Ad1.9), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.158-159

[30] Speech by E. McCann, General Secretary of the AEU. *ibid*, p.159

[31] Speech by the General Secretary of the IMS, C. Crompton. *ibid*, p.161

[32] Speech by L. Scheepers, General Secretary of the TL&ATIU, *ibid*

[33] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Thirteenth Annual Conference, February/March 1967 (Ad1.14), National Executive Committee Report, p.25

[34] CPSA, TUCSA, Correspondence with Individual Unions (Ab4.2), File: MIEUSA, Correspondence from J. Grobbelaar, General Secretary of TUCSA to Mr Dannenberg, Assistant Secretary of the International Metalworkers' Federation, 26 March 1968.

[35] In the words of the General Secretary, R. Cowley, "This disease has now spread to my members following upon what has happened to the AEU". CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Twelfth Annual Conference, May 1966 (Ad1.13), Minutes of Proceedings, p.184

[36] T. Rutherford of SATU. *ibid*, pp.182-183

[37] See the speeches by:

C. Crompton of the IMS. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.15-16;
T. Rutherford of SATU. *idem*, pp.22-24;
E. van Tonder of SATU. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fourteenth Annual Conference, April 1968 (Ad1.16), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.514-517;
B. Nicholson of SAEWA. *idem*, pp.503 and 566;
R. Cowley of SAEWA. *idem*, p.24;
L. Scheepers of TL&ATIU. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, p.40.

[38] Speech by B. Erasmus, General Secretary of the JMWU. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fourteenth Annual Conference, April 1968 (Ad1.16), Minutes of Proceedings, p.50

[39] Speech by C. Botes of the NUF&AWSA. Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.11-12

[40] T. Rutherford of SATU. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, p.22

[41] *ibid*, p.23

[42] B. Nicholson of SAEWA. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fourteenth Annual Conference, April 1968 (Ad1.16), Minutes of Proceedings, p.566

[43] *ibid*, p.567

[44] In 1962, when the Annual Conference of TUCSA voted to allow African unions to affiliate to the Council, the following trade union leaders supported this strategy:

T. Murray of SABS. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Eighth Annual Conference, March 1962 (Ad1.9), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.150-152;
A. Elisio of SAEWA (SAEWA in fact seconded the motion to include African unions in TUCSA). *idem*, p.153;
D. Anthony of SAEWA. *idem*, pp.159-160;
J. Altman of NUDW. *idem*, pp.154-156;
S. Lotter of OBC&CU. *idem*, p.156;
J. Cornelius of GWUSA. *idem*, p.156;
A. Scheepers of GWUSA. *idem*, p.160;
F. Gallant of NULW. *idem*, p.160;
G. Soobiah of NUOBM&P. *idem*, pp.160-161;
J. Bolton of FWIU(N). *idem*, p.162;
L. Nelson of NL&CTEU. *idem*, p.163;
J. McPherson of CS&ATAU. *idem*, p.163;
E. Deane of ACFW and FWIU(N). *idem*, pp.163-164.

During 1967 and 1968, after the attack by the Minister of Labour, the following trade union leaders supported the strategy of organising African unions:

J. Altman of the NUDW. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.20 and 37 and Fourteenth Annual Conference, April 1968 (Ad1.16), Minutes of Proceedings, p.522;
T. Murray of SABS. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.31-34 and Fourteenth Annual Conference, April 1968 (Ad1.16), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.554-555;
D. Hartwell of NUC&AW. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, p.41;
J. Cornelius of GWUSA. *idem*, pp.16, 19 and 42 and Fourteenth Annual Conference, April 1968 (Ad1.16), Minutes of Proceedings, p.510;
T. Alexander of SASBO. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, p.48 and Fourteenth Annual Conference, April 1968 (Ad1.16), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.564-565;
C. du Preez of NUC&TW. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fourteenth Annual Conference, April 1968 (Ad1.16), Minutes of Proceedings, p.520;
J. Daniel of SAHEIU. *idem*, pp.507-508;
C. Altman of SAHEIU. *idem*, pp.560-561;
S. Lotter of BEU. *idem*, pp.508-509;
H. Bolton of GWIU(N). *idem*, p.510;
G. Munsoock of HB&CTEU. *idem*, pp.517-519;
C. du Preez of NUC&TW. *idem*, pp.519-521;
L. Nelson of NL&CTEU. *idem*, pp.558-560 and Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.25-28;
C. George of NL&CTEU. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fourteenth Annual Conference, April 1968 (Ad1.16), Minutes of Proceedings, p.510;
A. Soobiah of NUOBM&P. *idem*, pp.562-563;

A. Frazer of CMA. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.10-11 and 38.

[45] D. Hartwell of NUC&AW. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Special Conference, December 1967 (Ad1.15), Minutes of Proceedings, p.41

[46] T. Alexander of SASBO. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fourteenth Annual Conference, April 1968 (Ad1.16), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.564-565

[47] It was the opinion of the TUCSA National Executive Committee that, barring the Tailoring Workers', Dressmakers' and Furriers' Industrial Un[illegible]n, "...the major factor which determined these Unions' decision to disaffiliate was that of the Council's policy of African membership of Trade Unions and African Unions being members of the Council." CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fifteenth Annual Conference, February 1969 (Ad1.17), Minutes of Proceedings, pp.20-21.

[48] CPSA, SAIRR, Box 1159, *The Star* 6 May 1968, "Crisis in TUCSA - More Unions May Quit"

Financial Ma[illegible] [illegible]968, "TUCSA Held to Ransom", p.111

[49] The CM&ABWU co[illegible] membership of only 140, compared with the combined membership [illegible]8193 of the other building unions which disaffiliated. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fifteenth Annual Conference, February 1969 (Ad1.17), National Executive Committee Report, p.528

[50] CPSA, SAIRR, Box 1159, *Rand Daily Mail* 28 August 1968 "Two Unions Quit TUCSA - Because of Race Row"

CPSA, TUCSA, Correspondence with Individual Unions (Ab4.2), File: MTWU, Correspondence from D. Schutte, General Secretary MTWU to J. Grobbelaar, General Secretary TUCSA, 9 September 1968.

Financial Mail 30 August 1968, "TUCSA's African: Two Walkout", p.739

[51] CPSA, SAIRR, Box 1159, *Rand Daily Mail* 28 August 1968 "Two Unions Quit TUCSA - Because of Race Row"; and
The Star 9 September 1968, "Fourth in Two Weeks: Another Union to Break with TUCSA"

CPSA, TUCSA, Correspondence with Individual Unions (Ab4.2), File: JMTWU, Correspondence from D. Schutte, General Secretary JMTWU to J. Grobbelaar, General Secretary TUCSA, 9 September 1968.

Financial Mail 30 August 1968, *ibid*

Johannesburg Municipal Transport Workers' Union Records, "Minutes of the Annual General Council Meeting held in the Trades Hall No.3, on Tuesday 28th May, 1968, at 10:15am", p.2

[52] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Sixth Annual Conference, March 1960 (Ad1.7), National Executive Committee Report; p.42

[53] The RTWU and the NPTEU were clearly in the minority with memberships of only 400 and 100 respectively. In contrast, The combined membership strength of the unions which disaffiliated was 4934. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fifteenth Annual Conference, February 1969 (Ad1.17), National Executive Committee Report, p.528

[54] CPSA, TUCSA, Correspondence with Individual Unions (Ab4.2), File: JMWU, Correspondence from B. Erasmus, General Secretary JMWU to J. Grobbelaar, General Secretary TUCSA, 9 September 1968.

[55] CPSA, SAIRR, Box 1159, *The Star* 7 May 1968, "TUCSA Faces Major Blow from Printers: Union Hits at Breakaway"; and
The Star 6 May 1968, "Crisis in TUCSA - More Unions May Quit"

[56] CPSA, SAIRR, Box 1159, *Rand Daily Mail* 6 May 1968, "Electricians Quit TUCSA: Race Issue Brings Break in Trade Unions"; and
Sunday Times 5 May 1968, "Union Quits TUCSA"; and also
The Star 6 May1968, "Crisis in TUCSA - More Unions May Quit"

CPSA, TUCSA, Correspondence with Individual Unions (Ab4.2), File: SAEWA, Correspondence from R. Cowley, General Secretary of SAEWA to J. Grobbelaar, General Secretary TUCSA, 7 May 1968.

[57] CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fifteenth Annual Conference, February 1968 (Ad1.16), National Executive Committee Report; pp.18-19

[58] CPSA, TUCSA, Correspondence with Individual Unions (Ab4.2), File: BEU Correspondence from A.G. Forsyth, General Secretary of the BEU to A.J. Grobbelaar, General Secretary TUCSA, 19 January 1968.

[59] The Tailoring Workers' Dressmakers' and Furriers' Industrial Union. CPSA, TUCSA, Report of Proceedings, Fifteenth Annual Conference, February 1969 (Ad1.17), Minutes of Proceedings, p.21

CHAPTER THREE

TRADE UNIONS IN THE BUILDING INDUSTRY

1. Introduction

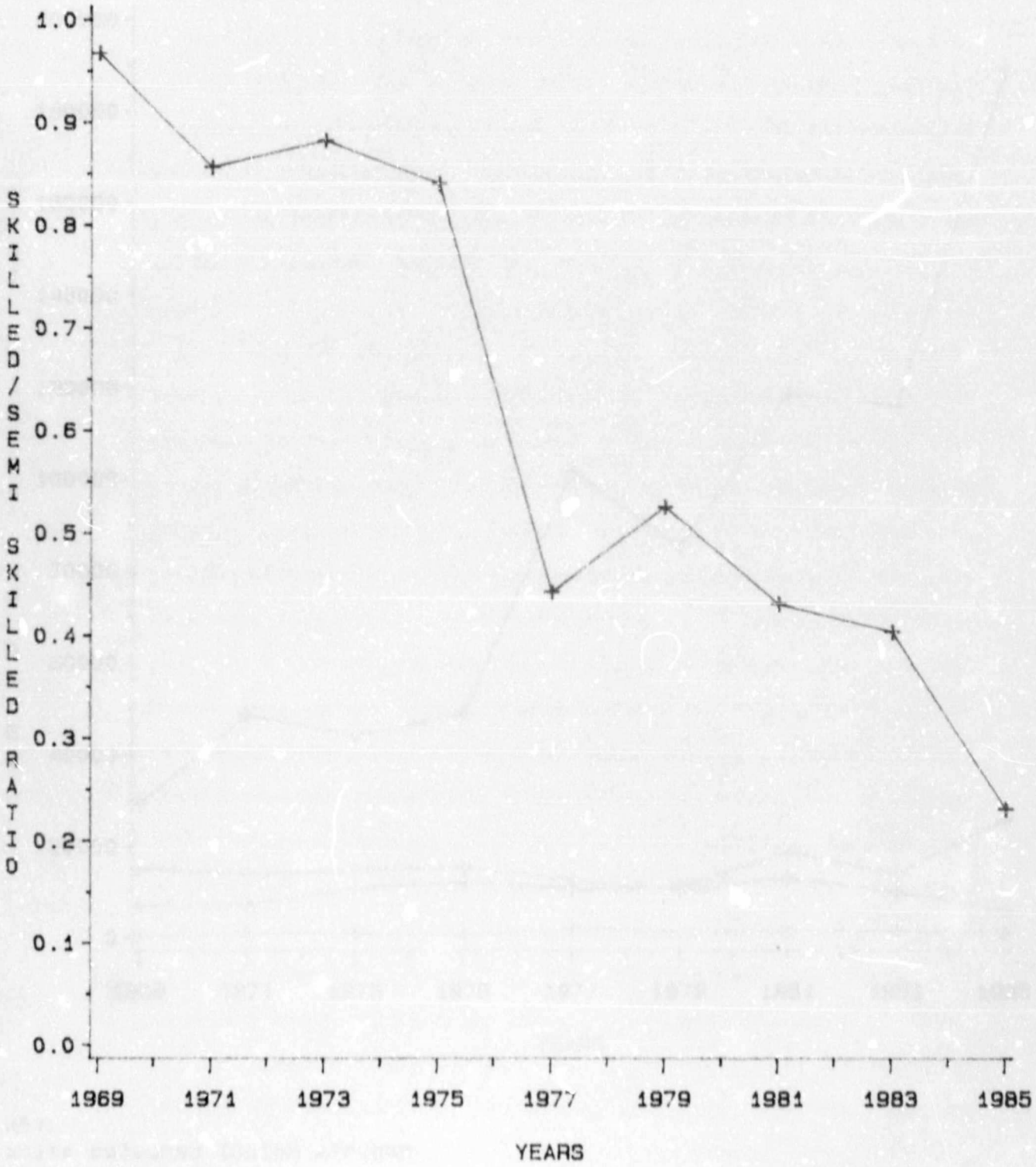
During the sixties and early seventies the building industry was characterised by rapid industrial growth and a chronic shortage of skilled labour. These were the most important factors behind the restructuring of the building labour process and racial division of labour in this period. After the 1959-1962 recession, the building industry in South Africa entered a period of unprecedented economic growth. Figure 3.1 (see Appendix) demonstrates that between 1962 and 1975 the industry's contribution to the annual gross domestic product rose from R382 million to R1362 million; an increase of 356 per cent, representing an annual growth rate of 27 per cent. This stands in stark contrast to almost zero growth rate between 1952 and 1962. During this period of economic growth, increased expenditure on machinery far outstripped increases in employment (See Figure 3.2 in the Appendix). In addition, the occupational and racial division of labour underwent major changes. As a result of the fragmentation of the building trades into a wide range of semi-skilled operations, the number of artisans relative to semi-skilled operatives decreased. Figure 3.3.1 shows that at the end of the 1960s the ratio had reached parity, and by the onset of the building recession in 1977 there were twice as many operatives as there were artisans employed in the industry. The vast majority of these semi-skilled workers were drawn from the ranks of unskilled African labourers. Evidence for this is supplied in Figure 3.3.2 which shows that by the end of the sixties African operatives outnumbered all other race groups. As Figure 3.4 shows (see Appendix), this meant that not only

the absolute, but also the relative number of African workers in the industry increased during this period.

These changes can be understood as the result of attempts by building capitalists to increase productivity through the rationalisation of building operations while simultaneously overcoming the problem of the shortage of skilled labour. However, these changes which were implemented by the employers, and trade union resistance to them, were constrained and channelled by the particular characteristics of the building labour process during this period.

FIGURE 3.3.1

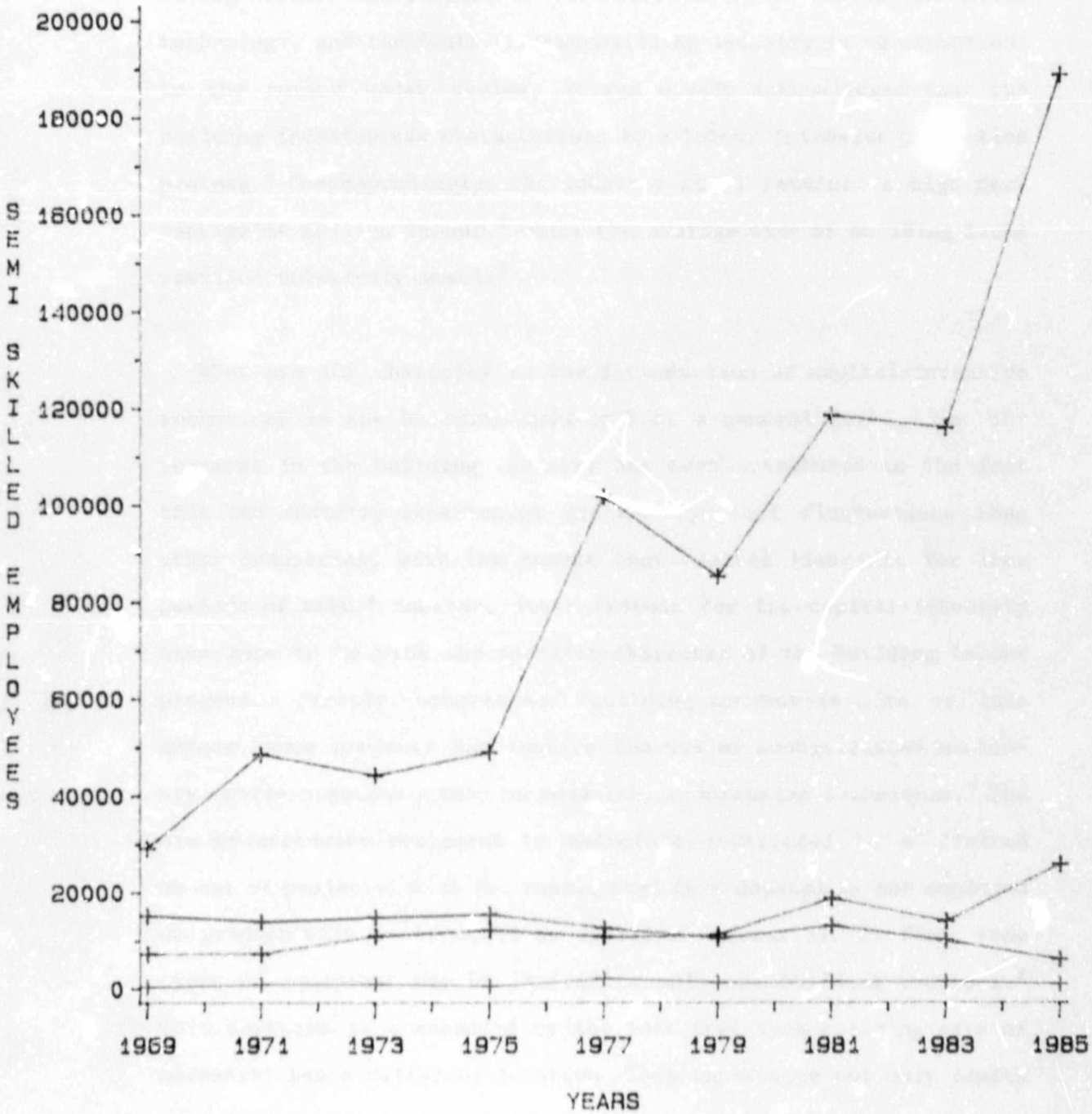
Ratio of Skilled to Semi-skilled Employees in the Building Industry, 1969-1985
(All Races)



SOURCE:
See Table 3.3 (Appendix)

FIGURE 3.3.2

Semi-skilled Employees in the Building Industry by Race, 1969-1985



KEY:
white coloured Indian African

SOURCE:
See Table 3.3 (Appendix)

2. Characteristics of the Building Industry

The building industry worldwide has lagged behind the manufacturing sector with respect to the introduction of capital-intensive technology, and the South African building industry is no exception. In the period under review, it was widely acknowledged that the building industry was characterised by a labour intensive production process.[1] Correspondingly, the industry still retained a high percentage of skilled labour,[2] while the average size of building firms remained relatively small.[3]

What are the obstacles to the introduction of capital-intensive technology in the building industry? At a general level, low investment in the building industry has been attributed to the fact that the industry experiences greater cyclical fluctuations than other industries, with the result that capital lies idle for long periods of time.[4] However, other reasons for low capital-intensity have more to do with the specific character of the building labour process. Firstly, because each building project is more or less unique, some projects may require the use of sophisticated machinery, while others may rely on more labour-intensive techniques.[5] The use of expensive equipment is therefore restricted to a limited number of projects, with the result that this capital is not employed as productively as it could be in other industries. In fact, some types of equipment may be limited to only one building contract.[6] This obstacle is compounded by the fact that each building site of necessity has a different location. This imperative not only limits capital investment to machinery that is portable, but also involves the costly procedure of transporting machinery from one building site to the next.[7] Secondly, because skilled work in the building industry is essentially concerned with the measurement and placement

of materials in accordance with the details of particular plans, the content of these tasks is too varied and complex to mechanise.[8]

These characteristics of the building industry channelled the accumulation of capital, and the accompanying restructuring of the labour process in a particular direction. In most industries the undercutting of skilled wages is achieved through the introduction of machinery which can perform certain aspects of the skilled craft. These machines are then operated by semi-skilled labour which is paid at a lower rate than skilled labour. In the building industry, however, the difficulty in mechanising the skilled trades meant that the fragmentation of skilled work was not accompanied by the large-scale introduction of machinery. Although there was an increase in capital-intensity during this period, this was mostly due to the mechanisation of unskilled work which is primarily concerned with the movement of large quantities of materials. During this period the manual handling of materials was largely supplanted by the introduction of power hoists, tower cranes, dumper vehicles, mono-rail transporters and concrete pumps.[9] Where mechanisation of the skilled trades did take place, this was restricted to the introduction of "labour aids" which enabled the artisan or operative to work more efficiently. Examples include a wide range of power tools such as drills, circular saws, spray painting equipment, power trowels and plaster pumps.[10]

A more important development during this period, but one which remained restricted to only a small proportion of all building work,[11] was the introduction of "industrialised" building techniques. These techniques, which involve the prefabrication of building components either on site or under factory conditions, make use of materials and techniques which, instead of mechanising skilled operations, actually eliminate them altogether. Prefabri-

cated concrete, wood and even brick panels, for example, eliminate the need for both bricklayers and plasterers. However, despite these developments which undermine the role of skilled labour in the building industry, the dominant trend during this period was the fragmentation of skilled work and the introduction of operative labour without the large-scale use of machinery. The nature and extent, as well as the periodisation of this fragmentation, is the subject of the following section of this chapter.

3. The Fragmentation of the Building Trades

In early 1964 the National Development Fund for the Building Industry published a report on the state of skilled labour supply in the building industry.[12] This report concluded that the expected future demand for skilled labour far exceeded the rate of recruitment of apprentices.[13] Recommendations ranged from improved recruitment procedures, apprenticeship training and conditions of employment;[14] greater utilisation of skilled coloured labour;[15] and the introduction of semi-skilled African labour.[16] On the basis of this report, the 1963 Annual Congress of the National Federation of Building Trade Employers[17] passed two motions calling for the introduction of "operative avenues of employment" and the "greater utilisation of non-white labour" in the building industry.[18] Soon thereafter, in its negotiations for a new Industrial Council Agreement with the building unions, the Master Builder Associations began to campaign for the fragmentation of skilled work and the introduction of semi-skilled African labour:

> "The general shortage of skilled labour and the inability of the traditional sources of supply to meet the requirements of the Building Industry, measured against anticipated normal expansion of the demand for building services...clearly indicated that radical changes in the traditional labour structure have become imperative if the industry is to maintain its influence as an economic entity."[19]

In the decade prior to this concerted effort by building capitalists to dilute the skilled trades, very little fragmentation had taken place. The first fragmentation agreement in the building industry was negotiated by the Transvaal Industrial Council and published in February 1959. Whereas under the previous Agreements unskilled labour was limited to only 22 operations,[20] the 1959 Agreement extended the use of unskilled labour to 76 tasks.[21] In addition, two new semi-skilled grades of work were established, which between them were permitted to perform a total of 9 operations which previously belonged to the skilled trades.[22] The 1962 Industrial Council Agreement for the Transvaal extended the tasks performed by semi-skilled labour to the operation of a jib hoist.[23] Later, the 1964 Agreement removed the task of machine-screeding cement floors from the skilled work schedule, leaving only the finishing work to be done by an artisan.[24] In Durban the first fragmentation Agreement, published in July 1953, permitted semi-skilled labour to operate sandpapering machines on flooring and other machines such as hoists and cement-mixers.[25] Prior to this Agreement, there were only 15 operations which could be performed by non-artisan labour, and these were all defined as unskilled tasks.[26]

The most significant fragmentation Agreements, therefore, were those negotiated in the period from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies. The first of these was the Industrial Council Agreement for the Transvaal which was published in January 1966.[27] This was followed by fragmentation agreements for Durban and the Western Province in 1967 and 1968.[28] Described as a "major breakthrough"[29] and a "triumph for the employers",[30] the 1966 Industrial Council Agreement for the Transvaal was the first major fragmentation agreement in the building industry. This Agreement did not define any new semi-skilled classes of work, but instead re-defined

artisans work to exclude all routine skills.[31] The Agreement therefore did not specify which operations could be performed by semi-skilled labour. This task was left to the discretion of the Industrial Council which was empowered to determine whether an operation was skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled, and to allocate wages accordingly.[32] An official of the Building Industries Federation of South Africa (BIFSA), reported that "hundreds" of operations were removed from artisan work schedules in this way.[33] As a result, it was necessary for the Minister of Labour to authorise the relaxation of Work Reservation Determination No.6 to allow the Agreement to be implemented.[34] In exchange for allowing fragmentation, the unions received improved benefits, mainly in the form of a holiday bonus and improved pensions, medical aid and sick benefits.[35] In this respect, this agreement set a precedent for subsequent Industrial Council negotiations in which employers began to demand that the unions concede fragmentation of the skilled trades in exchange for improved benefits.[36]

In subsequent negotiations, the Transvaal Master Builder Associations refused to grant improved benefits unless the unions allowed certain skilled tasks to be performed by semi-skilled labour.[37] As a result, the artisan work schedule was further fragmented by the Industrial Council Agreement published in June 1969.[38] Operative tasks were extended to a total of 49 operations divided into six grades instead of the previous two. The most important concessions were in respect of the bricklaying, plastering and painting trades. In the bricklaying trade, artisans' work was redefined to exclude the laying of blocks[39] to a jig[40] provided that no artisans tools were used,[41] a task which was then defined as semi-skilled.[42] Thus, the only task which an artisan performed in the laying of blocks was the setting up of the jig on the foundations, into which the blocks would be slotted by semi-skilled labour.[43] The deskilling of this

task was particularly important because it was less skill-intensive than bricklaying, and was in fact used as a substitute for bricklaying.[44] In addition to blocklaying, operatives were also permitted to cut bricks with a carborundum saw.[45] In the plastering trade, the actual application of a vermiculite and gypsum mixture with the use of a machine, as well as the ruling-down of plastered surfaces, was reclassified as a semi-skilled operation.[46] Thus in both cases, the artisans' task was restricted to finishing-off the surfaces with a trowel. Important fragmentation of the painting trade included the reclassification as semi-skilled operations the application of the priming or first coats of paint; the application of lime wash and cement wash to all surfaces; and the application of paint to roofs, gutters and drain-pipes.[47]

In the mid-sixties, attempts by the Durban Master Builder and Allied Trades Association to negotiate the fragmentation[48] of the artisans work schedule was met with stiff resistance by the unions.[49] The Natal Organiser of the ASW reported:

> "As we cannot reconcile our differences with the MBA [Durban Master Builder and Allied Trades' Association] in respect of certain clauses of the proposed new Agreement, your delegate is not hopeful of an early settlement as trade union principles are involved. If we relent on these issues, it would be the beginning of the end of trade unionism in South Africa."[50]

These negotiations finally resulted in the Durban branches of the AUBTW and ASW refusing to accept fragmentation as a condition of improved benefits.[51] As a result, the 1966 Agreement was simply a renewal of the 1963 Agreement which meant that the Durban branches of the unions did not secure the improved benefits which were granted to their Transvaal counterparts.[52] After some resistance during negotiations the following year,[53] the unions finally conceded, for the first time, the large-scale dilution of their trades in exchange for increased benefits.[54]

Since the first fragmentation Agreement in 1953, the Durban unions had conceded only 9 semi-skilled operations,[55] and had permitted an increase in the number of unskilled operations from 14 to 76.[56] The Agreement published in July 1968, however, created a total of three semi-skilled classes, which between them were permitted to perform 49 tasks which were previously the preserve of artisans.[57] In addition, unskilled tasks were increased from 76 to 84.[58] Because so many of the lesser-skilled aspects of the artisan's work were now classified as semi-skilled tasks, it became more convenient for the purposes of the Agreement to specify what constituted artisan's work, rather than operative work.[59]

The extent of the restructuring of the labour process is indicated by the fact that in order for the Agreement to be implemented, it was necessary for the Minister of Labour to grant an exemption from Work Reservation No.13.[60] Of particular significance were the concessions in the bricklaying and plastering trades. In the bricklaying trade, operatives were permitted to build walls using blocks, provided that an artisan performed the setting out of the blocks and built the corners of the wall.[61] In addition, operatives were also permitted to cut bricks and joint brickwork after laying.[62] In the painting trade, semi-skilled labour was permitted to apply lime, distemper and similar materials,[63] as well as apply priming coats to all surfaces, paint roofs, and apply anti-corrosive paints to all structural steelwork and tanking.[64]

Prior to 1967, the Western Province Industrial Council had not negotiated any significant fragmentation agreements.[65] In the Agreements for the Cape Peninsula and the Boland, published in August 1967 and July 1968 respectively, a total of 54 semi-skilled tasks were removed from the artisan schedule.[66] Of particular significance were the concessions in the bricklaying, plastering and painting

trades. In the bricklaying trade, operatives were permitted to build walls using blocks or do rough brickwork and also lay floor tiles under the supervision of an artisan.[67] For the first time operatives were permitted to apply, but not finish, mortar to walls by hand or machine.[68] In the painting trade operatives were permitted to apply lime wash to walls and primary coats to woodwork, iron and other surfaces.[69]

Commenting on the fragmentation agreements of the late sixties, the president of BIFSA was able to conclude that

> "...there was...considerable progress made in cooperation with the trade unions in the rationalisation of operations and the introduction of a wide range of operatives as a means of conserving skilled labour and of permitting the more productive utilisation of the labour force as a whole."[70]

In subsequent negotiations the Master Builder Associations demanded even further dilution of the skilled trades in exchange for granting improved benefits to the unions.[71] The president of BIFSA went so far as to offer the unions a guarantee of preferential life employment to all artisans should they allow the employers to use African operatives in the bricklaying and plastering trades.[72]

Attempts by the Transvaal Master Builder Associations to further fragment the skilled trades in 1971, was met with strong union resistance. The President of the Witwatersrand Master Builder and Allied Trades Association reported that:

> "I regret...that in negotiating the new agreement with the Trade Unions recently we were unable to gain any further concessions in this direction and the Trade Union delegates were most adamant in asserting that [illegible] would permit no further fragmentation of the trad[illegible]

In Durban, the unions were also under pressure to permit more of the less-skilled aspects of artisan's work to be performed by African operatives.[74] The Durban unions, however, were also "adamant that there would be no change".[75] As a result of this union resistance in the Transvaal and Durban, the employers were unable to extend the range of semi-skilled tasks until 1975.

Despite their resistance, the craft unions suffered their second major defeat in these Agreements. An MBA official described the 1975 Transvaal Agreement as "a major breakthrough, affecting every building trade, with the possible exception of painting, in which considerable concessions have already been made".[76] Those trades most affected by fragmentation in the Transvaal and Durban were the "wet" trades of bricklaying and plastering, in which the shortage of artisans was particularly acute.

In the bricklaying trade operatives were finally permitted to perform the task of bricklaying itself.[77] Although operatives were restricted to building walls intended for plastering only, this was still a significant concession, since about 80% of all bricklaying is plastered.[78] Other restrictions in the bricklaying trade excluded operatives from setting out walls, taking levels, plumbing angles, laying door jambs and window frames, tuck pointing and setting up profiles and jigs.[79] Further fragmentation was also achieved in the plastering trade where operatives could not only render plastering material to rough surfaces and rule off, but now also do finishing preparatory to final trowelling and final finishing.[80] In other words, the only skilled task that remained in the plastering trade was the final trowelling on single-coat work, and the application of final finishing coats to the rough plaster surface.

In the carpentry and joinery trades the tasks of assembling rough timbers to a templet and the fixing of rough timbers, corrugated iron, asbestos and all other composition sheeting and materials shaped as roofing tiles to a gauge (in the construction of roofs) was reclassified as semi-skilled operations.[81] The making up of templets and gauges, the plumbing of rafters, door jambs and window frames, and the cutting or fixing of all timber in the construction of plane-finished articles, remained artisan's work.

Other skilled tasks which were reclassified as semi-skilled work were; laying of pipes to falls; laying and fixing of all types of wood, mosaic and composition wall and floor coverings, but excluding paper hanging, marking and setting out; glass cutting, face puttying and fixing glazing beads; welding and brazing, excluding marking and setting out; assembling wooden shuttering for concreting; laying tiles and mosaics, excluding marking and setting out; and finally, punching and dressing stonework, including final hand-surfacing and finishing, and the operation of circular saws on stonework.[82]

Urban the artisan work schedule was further fragmented by the Industrial Council Agreement which was published in October 1975. Altogether, the number of operative tasks was increased from 49 to 81.[83] In addition, the number of specified unskilled operations increased from 84 to 93, and included at least one task which was previously defined as semi-skilled.[84]

In the Western Province the range of tasks allocated to operatives was extended by another fifteen operations in the Industrial Council Agreements for the Cape Peninsula and Boland in 1972 and 1973 respectively. In these Agreements most of the concessions granted by the Unions were in the woodworking, plumbing, stonemasonry trades.[85] In the bricklaying and plastering trades, no skilled tasks

were handed over to operatives. In the painting trade, however, operatives were permitted to apply powder distemper, excluding the first and final coats.[86] In the 1976 Industrial Council Agreement for the Cape Peninsula, however, operatives were permitted to apply all coats of paint, but only to sub-economic housing in housing schemes.[87]

The late sixties and early seventies were therefore characterised by the large-scale undercutting of skilled coloured and white labour as the result of employer strategies to reduce both the skill shortage and the cost of labour. This was achieved through the fragmentation of the skilled trades and the introduction of semi-skilled African workers. The following section examines the strategies employed by the mixed craft unions to protect their members against skill dilution and undercutting by semi-skilled labour.

4. Trade Union Responses to Undercutting by Semi-skilled African Labour

The important TUCSA unions which represented labour on the Industrial Council were the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers of South Africa (ASW) and the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers of South Africa (AUBTW).[88] Both unions were mixed (having coloured and white members), and although the AUBTW was registered to organise all grades of workers in the building industry, and not just artisans,[89] in practice they were also both craft unions insofar as they represented skilled labour in the building industry.[90] The only other large union represented on the Industrial Council was the right-wing White Building Workers' Union (WBWU). Other registered trade unions which were affiliated to TUCSA, but were not represented on the Industrial Council, were the small Coloured, Malay and Asian

Building Workers' Union (CM+ABWU), and the coloured South African Woodworkers' Union (SAWU).

During the Industrial Council negotiations which led to fragmentation agreements in the mid to late sixties, both the ASW and the AUBTW voiced a determined resistance to fragmentation, relying on the craft union strategy of "rate for the job", rather than job reservation.[91] Exhibiting a typical craft union strategy, the ASW expressed a determined resistance to the demands of the Master Builder Associations for the fragmentation of the skilled trades.[92] Although this exclusive craft union strategy had no need to rely on racial criteria in order to prevent undercutting by semi-skilled or unskilled labour, it was nonetheless perfectly compatible with a racially exclusive trade union form of organisation. The ASW, for example, was able to use a non-racist argument against undercutting by cheap semi-skilled labour when it demanded that the building employers

> "...ask the Government to allow skilled coloured artisans and skilled Bantu Artisans to be allowed to work in the areas concerned at rates of pay equal to those paid to White artisans - we say that if the Government says yes, you may do so, we will acquiesce; but if the Government says no, no-one black or white shall do anything to breakdown the position [the skilled trades] further or endeavour to circumvent this by other means."[93]

These arguments suggest that the building unions opposed the employment of Africans in semi-skilled operations because of the difficulties involved in controlling the demands, and therefore organising African workers. When the mixed unions opposed the employment of African operatives it was because Africans were not eligible for membership to the registered trade unions. If Africans could not belong to their own trade unions, white artisans feared that they would not be able to control the demands of African operatives, and undercutting would result (see Chapter 2, Section 3.1).

This is evidenced by the fact that during the early stages of the fragmentation negotiations, when the unions understood that the new operative labour could possibly be white, the ASW insisted that they should be "compelled to join trade unions...so that they may be educated into the ways of the industry".[94] In the late sixties, when it had become clear that operatives were being recruited from the ranks of the unskilled African workers, the ASW argued that it would accept fragmentation, but only on the condition that operatives were eligible for trade union membership (i.e. that they were whites, coloureds or Indians).[95]

Arguments like the one below, which have a racially exclusive character, were in fact informed by traditional craft union strategies. The reason for calling on white women to become artisans had more to do with the fact that, unlike Africans and coloureds, they were exempt from job reservation determinations. Although coloured artisans were eligible for membership to mixed registered trade unions, Work Reservation Determinations Nos. 6 and 13 prohibited their employment as artisans in the urban areas except for certain building trades in the Cape.[96] This meant that the employment of coloured artisans as a solution to the skill shortage in the Transvaal was illegal. Hence, the utopian, but explicable call by the ASW for white women artisans.

> "Before another step is taken to betray the second most important industry into the hands of unskilled and semi-skilled persons, an appeal will be made to the women of South Africa to join our ranks as artisans in the industry and help us restore the dignity which it should be accorded."[97]

This strategy of demanding the rate for the job, whatever the colour of the semi-skilled operatives was repeated throughout these negotiations by both the ASW[98] and the AUBTW.[99] However, because work reservation did reinforce the existing division of labour, these

Unions were quite prepared to lend their support to State policy when they found it necessary to ally themselves with the right-wing WBWU.[100] The compatible relationship between the effects of job reservation and rate for the job was well expressed by the official journal of the ASW:

> "The Building Industry has, since the beginning of time, in our country, always been considered, accepted and functioned along the lines of job reservation with protection of the *rate for the job*."[101]

Later, during the fragmentation negotiations of the early seventies, both the ASW and the AUBTW persisted in their demand that semi-skilled operatives receive the same wage as artisans.[102]

Despite their resistance to the undercutting of artisans' wages by cheaper semi-skilled labour, the unions were unable to enforce the principle of the rate for the job as a condition of deskilling. In the agreements concluded in the mid to late sixties, the minimum wage for operatives remained on average just less than half that of the artisan's wage. The Transvaal 1966 Agreement pegged the minimum wage of operatives at 46% of the artisan's wage[103] and in the 1969 Agreement, depending on the class of operative, it ranged between 25 and 54% of the artisan's wage.[104] In Durban, the minimum wage rates for the different classes of operatives varied between 39 and 49% of the artisan's wage in 1967,[105] and between 25 and 51% in 1968.[106] Similarly, the agreements negotiated in the Western Province set the operative's minimum wage at between 40 and 52% of the artisan's wage in the Cape Peninsula[107] and at 48% of the minimum skilled rate in the Boland.[108] The unions fared no better in negotiating higher wages for operatives during the early to mid seventies. In the Transvaal the minimum wage for operatives was still only between 25 and 56% of the artisan's wage.[109] In the Western Province operatives received a minimum wage of between 49 and 50% of the

artisan's wage during this period,[110] and in Durban semi-skilled rates varied between 32 and 52% of the artisan's wage according to the class of operative work.[111]

Unlike some of the TUCSA affiliates of this period who were organising African workers into parallel unions, neither the AUBTW nor the ASW were taking any initiative in this direction. In fact, the disaffiliation of these unions from TUCSA in 1968 indicates that they were actively hostile to the organisation of African operatives.[112]

One of the reasons why the mixed building unions failed to organise African workers during this period can probably be found in their vulnerability to right-wing attempts to poach their membership. This is evidenced by the reluctance of the ASW to risk any confrontation with the State which could offend the political allegiances of their members.[113] In response to the Minister of Labour's threat to "take the necessary measures" should TUCSA unions persist in organising African unions,[114] the ASW quickly distanced itself from any opposition to State policy:

> "The Society has withdrawn as an affiliated member from the Trade Union Council of South Africa...No reasons are given other than we have always been a conservative trade union and wish to remain so in the future."[115]

The threat of losing their members to right-wing trade unions plagued the mixed building unions since the 1930s, when, following the formation of the "Purified" Nationalist Party in the 1930s, a campaign was launched by the Afrikaner nationalists to gain control of trade unions with large Afrikaner memberships.[116] The *Werkerspers*, owned by the right-wing Mine Workers' Union began to publish *The Building Worker* in 1951,[117] which was a journal devoted to attacking the leadership of the AUBTW[118] for their mixed union strategy. Although this pressure group "failed to gain much support" in the 1940s,[119]

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