

by 1957 it had established the White Building Workers' Union.¹²⁰ The success of the WBWU in its attempts to eclipse the mixed unions can be gauged by the fact that by 1976 it was the largest building union on the Witwatersrand.¹²¹ So, from the mid-fifties at least, these opposing factions in the building industry struggled for the allegiance of white building artisans. Throughout this period the journal of the ASW bears testimony to the poaching of its members by the WBWU,¹²² and carries numerous articles countering WBWU propaganda and testifying to the folly of leaving the ASW for the "opposition".¹²³ There is also evidence of ASW officials defecting to the WBWU,¹²⁴ and of splits within the ASW leadership over the policy of job reservation.¹²⁵ There can be no doubt that the activities of the WBWU must have mitigated against the possibility of persuading white artisans of the virtues of organising, rather than excluding African and coloured workers.

So, during a period in which the labour process was restructured to the extent that semi-skilled labour became the numerically dominant class of workers in the industry, the ASW and AUBTW retained their traditional craft-based style of unionism which excluded all except skilled workers. The response of these unions to undercutting by coloured skilled labour however, was quite different.

5. Trade Union Responses to Undercutting by Skilled Coloured Labour

In early 1971 the Minister of Labour granted a general exemption to all employers from work reservation determinations Nos. 6 and 13 to allow them to employ Coloured and Indian artisans in the bricklaying and plastering trades.¹²⁶ It is instructive to note how the three major unions responded to this exemption. The WBWU militantly rejected the employment of coloured artisans, and even

went so far as to call for a protest strike.¹²⁷ Although the AUBTW initially supported this position, it later joined ranks with the ASW¹²⁸ which had publicly condemned this call for a strike.¹²⁹ By February, the AUBTW had committed itself to organising coloured artisans in the Transvaal,¹³⁰ and discussions between itself and the weak CM+ABWU¹³¹ on the question of the organisation of coloured artisans¹³² led to the amalgamation of these two unions in May 1971.¹³³ Although both the ASW and the AUBTW were mixed unions, their coloured members had previously been restricted to the Cape. With the exemption in 1971 however, the Transvaal branches of both unions opened their membership to coloured artisans for the first time.¹³⁴ Table 3.5 shows how the coloured membership of both the mixed unions increased during this period. The rationale for this strategy as advanced by the leadership of the ASW is worth repeating in full:

"On some building sites these Coloured artisans were encountered. Here they were doing artisans work, but did not get the artisans rate of pay, nor the fringe benefits. In short they were a source of cheap labour. The position worsened after the Honourable Minister of Labour made it possible for employers to apply for exemption to employ these Coloured artisans in the Building Industry. Then the question arose, should they receive the rate for the job, i.e. the same conditions as White artisans or must they be paid on a different method? This we opposed, as it would have been the thin edge of the wedge. There were those in the Trade Union Movement who strongly opposed us, as they felt that the Coloured should be paid on a different scale. Our society, being in existence for longer than the other, and having had previous experience of a similar nature in the past, fought for the rate for the job and was successful in obtaining the same. As they [the coloured artisans] must be represented on the Industrial Council they had to belong to a Trade Union and we were requested by them to organise them, and make them members of our society."¹³⁵

By organising coloured artisans into their ranks and demanding that they be employed under the same conditions as their white members, the mixed building unions were therefore able to prevent undercutting by potentially cheaper skilled labour. Later in 1973, both the ASW and the AUBTW even went so far as to support BIFSA's attempt to indenture coloured artisans in the Transvaal.¹³⁶

TABLE 3.5

Racial Composition of the Mixed Building Unions, 1955-1977

Year	AUBTW			ASW		
	White	Coloured	Total	White	Coloured	Total
1955	-	-	4554	-	-	4680
1956	-	-	4895	-	-	4680
1957	-	-	4895	-	-	4680
1958	-	-	5325	-	-	4680
1959	-	-	5325	-	-	4680
1960	4572	1172	5325	-	-	4680
1961	-	-	-	-	-	4680
1962	-	-	-	-	-	4680
1963	-	-	3618	-	-	3116
1964	-	-	3618	-	-	3116
1965	-	-	5773	-	-	3146
1966	-	-	3500	-	-	2691
1967	-	-	3500	-	-	3146
1968	-	-	5595	-	-	2398
1969	-	-	-	-	-	-
1970	-	-	-	-	-	-
1971	-	-	-	-	-	-
1972	-	-	-	-	-	-
1973	4250	6896	1146	2943	932	3875
1974	4250	6896	1146	2843	923	3866
1975	-	-	-	-	-	-
1976	-	-	-	-	-	-
1977	-	-	-	3200	1274	4474

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6. Summary and Conclusion

Through an analysis of the changing labour process in the building industry and the responses by trade unions to these changes, I have argued that the relations of production embodied in particular labour processes both create the conditions for and set the limits to the types of organisational strategies that can be successfully implemented by trade unions and employers. Because of the obstacles posed to the mechanisation of the skilled building trades, attempts by employers to overcome the skilled labour shortage and to raise productivity took the form of the fragmentation of the skilled trades without the large-scale introduction of machinery.

The exclusive style of craft unionism exhibited by the major building unions bears testimony to the traditional skilled/unskilled division of labour which dominated the building industry prior to the fragmentation of the skilled trades in the sixties and seventies. As a direct response to the fragmentation of their trades, the craft unions adopted different forms of closed unionism.

On the one hand, the WBWU committed itself to the State policy of job reservation and uni-racial trade unionism for coloureds and whites. Rather than organise coloured artisans and African operatives, this Union turned to the State to prevent undercutting by cheap skilled and semi-skilled workers. On the other hand, the ASW and AUBTW, despite opposition from the WBWU and the State, continued to organise coloured artisans to prevent undercutting. As a result of their efforts these unions secured the same conditions of employment for their coloured and white members. These mixed unions did not, however, organise African operatives. In the context of competition with the WBWU, and strong opposition by the State to the organisation of African workers, the politically conservative and

largely Afrikaner membership opposed any moves towards the organisation of African operatives.

During the late sixties, when TUCSA's drive to organise African unions provoked a confrontation with the Minister of Labour, the building unions were being faced (for the first time) with the threat of large-scale undercutting by African operatives. The dual impact of these developments, combined with the fact that a confrontation with the State would have alienated their pro-Nationalist Party membership, the mixed TUCSA unions rejected the Council's policy of organising African unions.

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⁴⁰ A jig is a metal frame which guides the placement of the blocks.

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- ⁷⁹ *Government Gazette* (Extraordinary) 124(4875), 17/10/75, *op cit*, p.6

- ⁸⁰ *ibid*, p.7

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- ⁸² *ibid*, p.7;

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- ⁸³ *Government Gazette* 124(4880), (Regulation Gazette No.2218), 24/10/75, "Government Notice No.R1995, Building Industry, Durban - Agreement", pp.4-8

- ⁸⁴ *ibid*, p.9, The task of "feeding materials to mechanically fed woodworking machines".

- ⁸⁵ *Government Gazette* 88(3690), (Regulation Gazette No.1683), 27/10/72, "Government Notice No.R1963, Building Industry, Western Province - Agreement for the Cape Peninsula", pp.5-6

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- ⁸⁷ *Government Gazette* 136(5308), (Regulation Gazette No.2378), 8/10/76, "Government Notice No.R1780, Building Industry, Western Province - Agreement for the Cape Peninsula", p.6

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UNIONS IN THE MOTOR TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

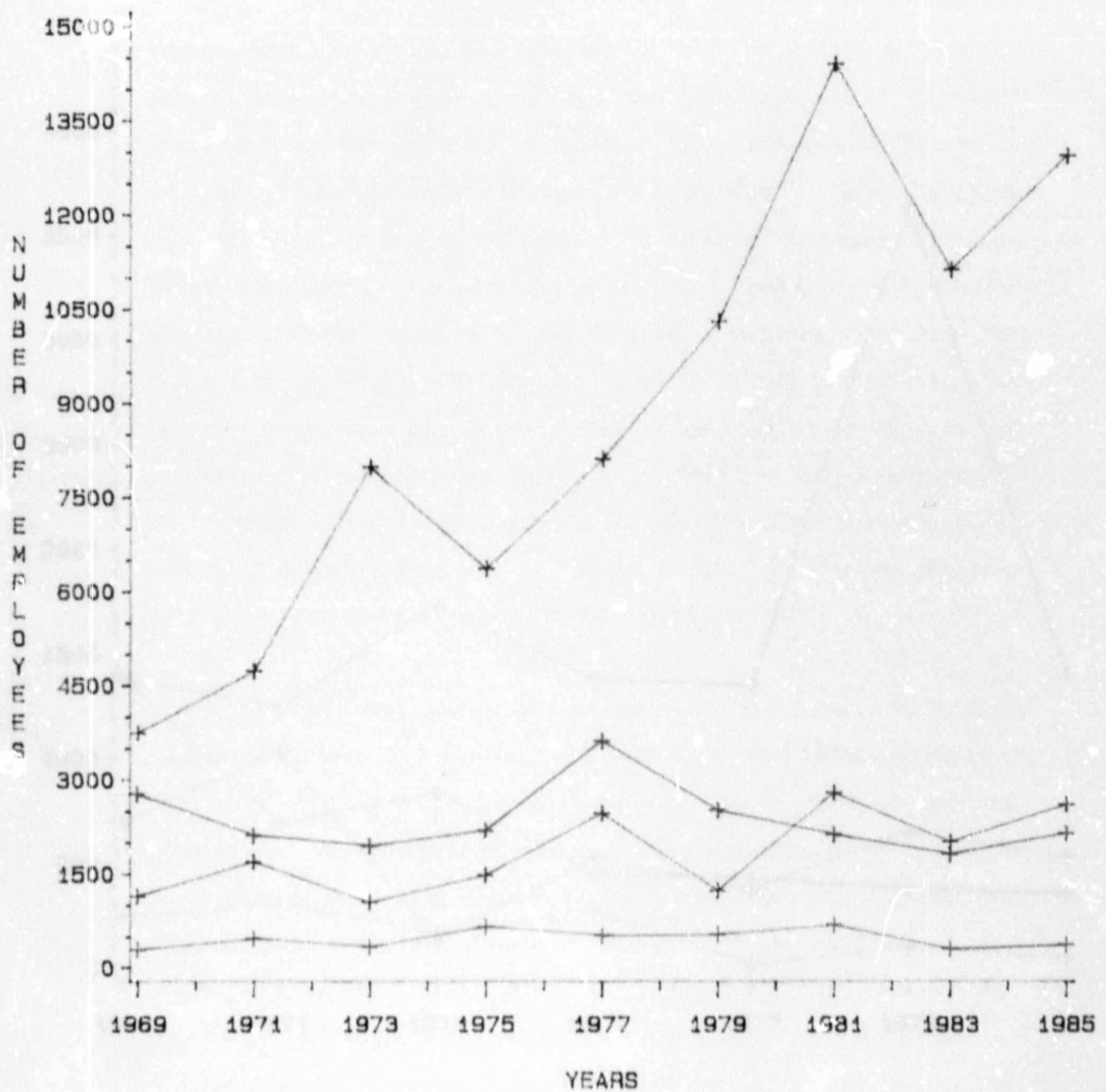
1. Introduction

As in the case of the building industry, changes in the labour process and racial division of labour in the motor transport industry were prompted by a chronic shortage and high turnover of white labour. Both management and the transport unions agreed that the labour shortage was caused by the characteristics of an urban passenger transport system; the necessity of shift-work, strict time-keeping and arduous driving conditions due to heavy city traffic were cited as examples of why this occupation was not favoured by white workers.¹ However, their opinions diverged sharply on the question of how this shortage of labour could be overcome. As far as management was concerned, higher wages would not resolve the shortage because it was these inherent conditions of urban passenger transport driving which "did not appeal to whites".² Because whites could find jobs with regular office hours at equivalent rates of pay, it was inevitable that they would prefer such occupations.³ In contrast, the unions argued that improved wages and conditions of work would resolve the labour shortage. Issues such as a six-day week, inadequate running times,⁴ poor maintenance of vehicles,⁵ inadequate rest-room facilities,⁶ choice of shifts according to seniority,⁷ unrealistic acceptance criteria,⁸ poor traffic flow,⁹ poor housing provision,¹⁰ and low wages,¹¹ could all be addressed in order to attract white labour.

Whatever the respective merits of these opposing positions are, they formed the rationale whereby certain interests were advanced. Rather than increase wages to the satisfaction of the unions, management embarked on a wide variety of other schemes to alleviate the labour shortage. These included new training schemes, overseas recruiting campaigns, lowered acceptance criteria, part-time employment and extended overtime. However, the schemes which achieved the greatest success were those which were also aimed at reducing the wage bill. During this period, the introduction of labour-saving technology almost completely eliminated the job of conducting, while intensifying the work-load of driving to include the issuing of tickets. Figure 4.2 shows how the numbers of inspectors, conductors and ticket examiners decreased during the seventies, while Figure 4.1 shows that the number of bus, tram and trolley-bus drivers actually increased. Further reductions in the wage bill were achieved through the employment of African and coloured labour at lower rates of pay. In the 1950s passenger transport driving was almost a completely white occupation. By the late seventies, however, bus drivers were predominantly African (Figure 4.1).

FIGURE 4.1

Bus, Tram and Trolley-bus Drivers by Race, and Gender, 1969-1985

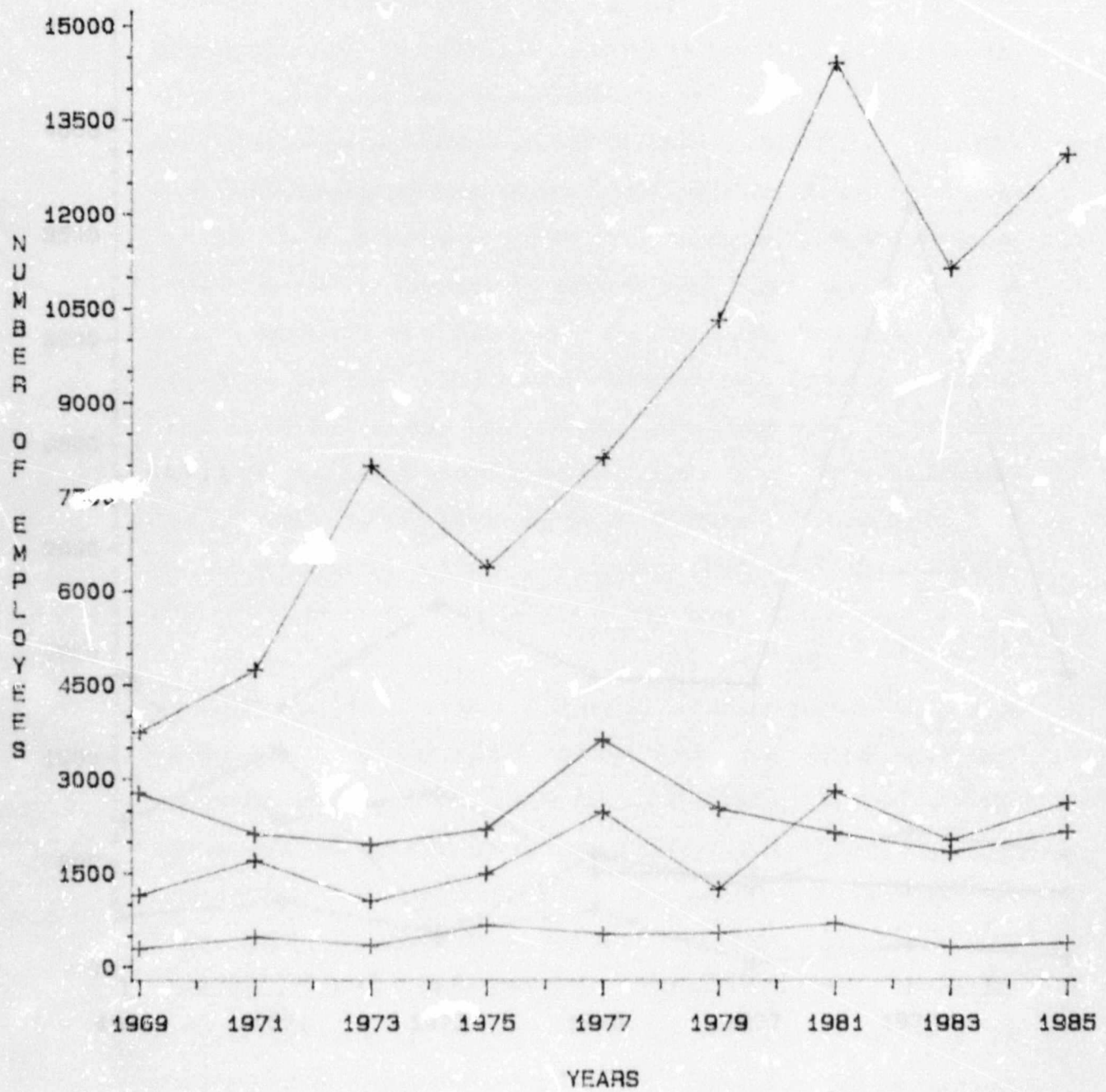


KEY
white coloured Indian African

SOURCE:
See Table 4.1 (Appendix)

FIGURE 4.1

Bus, Tram and Trolley-bus Drivers by Race, and Gender, 1969-1985

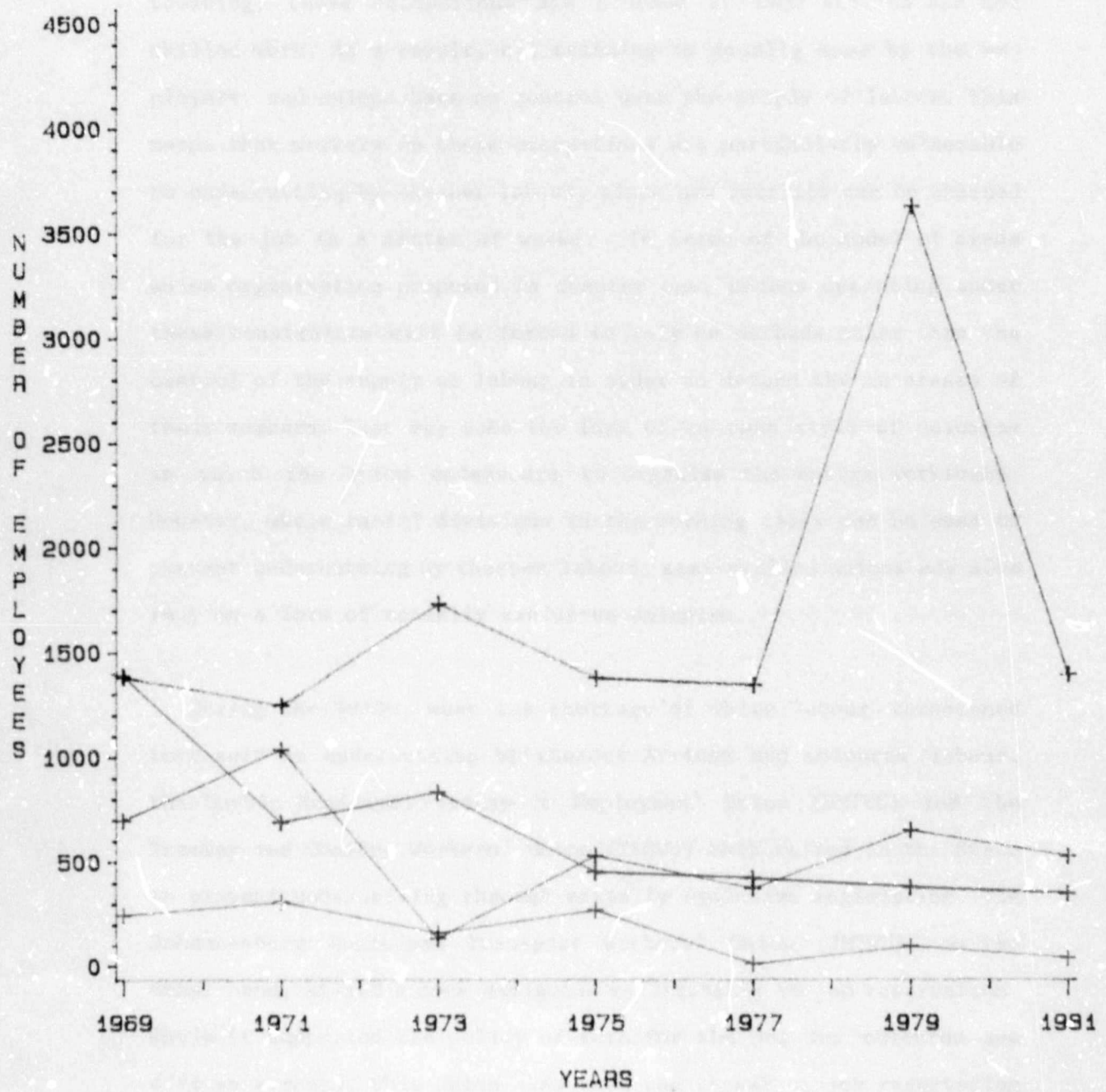


KEY
white coloured Indian African

SOURCE:
See Table 4.1 (Appendix)

FIGURE 4.2

Inspectors, Conductors and Ticket-examiners by Race and Gender,
1969-1985



KEY

white coloured Indian African

SOURCE:

See Table 4.2 (Appendix)

2. Trade Union Organisation and the Labour Process

Because bus driving and conducting require no apprenticeship training, these occupations are classed as semi-skilled and not skilled work. As a result, all training is usually done by the employers, and unions have no control over the supply of labour. This means that workers in these occupations are particularly vulnerable to undercutting by cheaper labour, since new recruits can be trained for the job in a matter of weeks. In terms of the model of trade union organisation proposed in chapter one, unions operating under these constraints will be forced to rely on methods other than the control of the supply of labour in order to defend the interests of their members. This may take the form of an open style of unionism in which the union endeavours to organise the entire workforce. However, where racial divisions in the working class can be used to prevent undercutting by cheaper labour, semi-skilled unions may also rely on a form of racially exclusive unionism.

During the 1960s, when the shortage of white labour threatened to result in undercutting by cheaper African and coloured labour, the Durban Municipal Transport Employees' Union (DMTEU) and the Tramway and Omnibus Workers' Union (T&OWU) both relied on the State to prevent undercutting through racially exclusive legislation. The Johannesburg Municipal Transport Workers' Union (JMTWU), on the other hand, shared a more ambiguous relationship to job reservation. While it supported the policy of rate for the job for coloured and African workers, this Union also used the threat of job reservation to protect the interests of its members.

The semi-skilled character of the tasks of bus driving and conducting also has implications for strategies adopted by employers. Because these tasks are not skilled, it is not necessary for em-

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