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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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[101] JMTWU Records, "Combined Annual Report of the President and General Secretary for the Year Ending 31st December, 1968", p.3

[102] JMTWU Records, "Minutes of the Annual General Council Meeting held in the Duncan Hall on Tuesday, 22nd May, 1973, at 10:15am", p.4

[103] See the debates on the organisation of African unions in Chapter 2.

[104] JMTWU Records, "Minutes of the Annual General Council Meeting held in the Duncan Hall on Tuesday, 22nd May, 1973, at 10:15am", p.4

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[114] CPSA, TUCSA, Box 642 (Job Reservation), *Sunday Times* 16 March 1969, "Coloureds Will Drive White Buses - Roos"

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[122] City of Johannesburg (1970), *op cit*, p.2

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[126] City of Johannesburg (1973), *op cit*, pp.7-8

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[128] CPSA, SAIRR, Box 643 (Job Reservation), *Rand Daily Mail* 28 December 1970, "New Plea for Coloured Bus Drivers"

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[130] CPSA, SAIRR, Box 1038 (Road Transport), *The Star* 25 August 1971

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

What was the relationship between TUCSA's policy on the organisation of African unions and changes in the labour process during the period 1955-1974? The divisions which emerged in TUCSA during the late sixties over the organisation of African unions was the direct result of new developments in the labour process. The massive industrial growth of the 1960s caused a shortage of skilled and semi-skilled white labour which capitalists responded to by simultaneously deskilling the labour process and introducing cheaper semi-skilled African labour. The question which faced craft and semi-skilled unions alike was whether they should prevent undercutting by cheap African labour through excluding them from trade union organisation or by organising them into trade unions instead. Under growing pressure from capitalists to concede the fragmentation of the skilled trades and the employment of African labour in white jobs, trade unions within TUCSA diverged sharply over the question of the organisation of African unions. This conflict culminated in 1968 when 12 unions disaffiliated from TUCSA in protest at the Council's policy of organising African unions. These unions predominated in the building and motor transport industries. The aim of this thesis was to examine the relationship between the labour process and the strategies adopted by these unions in the building and motor transport industries.

Through a study of craft unions in the building industry and semi-skilled unions in the motor transport industry, I have demonstrated that this range of trade union strategies was compatible with developments in the labour processes of these industries. Under conditions of deskilling, closed craft unions are able to broaden their range of organisational

options to include, as with semi-skilled unions, an open style of unionism. The changes in the labour process which are the condition for this possibility, however, do not specify whether racially open or closed styles of trade union will prevail. This outcome is determined by other social relationships which lie outside the relations of production. I have argued that these were firstly, the opposition of the State to the organisation of African workers, and secondly, the activities of pro-nationalist trade unions and the racist/nationalist ideology of trade union members. The combination of these political and ideological relationships ensured that the building and transport unions were amongst those unions which rejected TUCSA's policy of organising African unions in 1960.

During the late sixties and early seventies building capitalists successfully fragmented the skilled building trades and introduced African operative labour for the first time at rates of pay less than half that of skilled labour. The building craft unions responded to this dilution of their trades with two forms of closed unionism. The White Building Workers' Union (WBWU - an affiliate of the South African Confederation of Labour) relied on the State to prevent undercutting on the basis of racially defined criteria. This meant that the WBWU accepted only white artisans as members, supported the exclusion of African workers from the industrial conciliation system, and also supported the reservation of most skilled work for whites only. In contrast, the two important TUCSA unions sought to prevent undercutting on the basis of skill definitions. This meant that the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers of South Africa (AUBTW) and the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers of South Africa (ASW) supported the policy of the rate for the job and rejected the State's policy of job reservation and uni-racial trade unionism.

In response to the threat of undercutting by skilled coloured labour, these TUCSA unions organised coloured artisans into their own ranks and

demanded that they receive the same rate of pay as their white members. When building capitalists began to force the building unions to concede the fragmentation of the skilled trades and the introduction of African operatives in the late sixties, these TUCSA unions were faced with the problem of how to prevent undercutting by a stratum of workers over which they were denied any organisational control. Unlike coloured workers, who could become members of mixed unions, African workers were prohibited from joining any registered trade unions. If the mixed building unions had chosen to organise African operatives they would have had to confront not only the obvious problem of negotiating on behalf of both skilled and semi-skilled workers, but also the problem of doing so with two separate unions. More than this, they would have also had to confront the wrath of the Minister of Labour for directly opposing State policy on African unions, and then explain their position to their largely white, pro-Government membership. As I discussed in chapter two, many TUCSA craft unions opposed the organisation of parallel African unions on the grounds that they would not be able to control the demands of such unions which could undercut skilled wages. State opposition to the organisation of African unions was compounded by the strong presence of the WBWU which relied on the Afrikaner nationalist sympathies of building artisans to poach members from the TUCSA unions. Any opposition to the State by the TUCSA unions would have resulted in the large-scale disaffection of its largely pro-nationalist and Afrikaner membership.

So, the growth of a new class of semi-skilled workers presented the building craft unions with the option of preventing undercutting through controlling the conditions of employment of operatives either through organising them into parallel unions, or of excluding them from the industrial conciliation system and bargaining on their behalf. The exclusion of African unions from the industrial conciliation system, State opposition to the organisation of African unions, and the threat of losing members to the right-wing WBWU, were all factors which caused the TUCSA

building unions to oppose the Council's policy of organising African trade unions in 1968.

The shortage of white labour during the sixties had different implications for semi-skilled transport unions within TUCSA. Because of the semi-skilled character of the tasks of bus driving and conducting, employers were able to introduce African and coloured bus crew without restructuring the labour process in order to eliminate the need for skilled training. When employers did restructure the labour process, it was to virtually eliminate the task of bus conducting. By introducing a number of technological aids, employers were able to intensify the task of bus driving to include the collection of fares, thereby reducing the wage bill and shortage of white labour.

Because the transport unions represented semi-skilled workers, they were unable to enforce any form of closed unionism on the basis of skill criteria. Soon after the promulgation of the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Act, both the Tramway and Omnibus Workers' Union (T&OWU) and the Durban Municipal Transport Employees' Union (DMTEU) began to rely on the State policy of job reservation on racial grounds in order to protect its members from undercutting by African and coloured labour. Since this style of trade unionism ran counter to TUCSA's policy, tensions between the Council and the DMTEU led to the resignation of this Union from TUCSA in 1960. Similarly, the support of the T&OWU for the policy of job reservation also strained its relationship with TUCSA. In 1969, the T&OWU was the only transport union which was reluctant to re-affiliate to TUCSA after the African unions had been excluded from the Council. Unlike the DMTEU and the T&OWU, the Johannesburg Municipal Transport Workers' Union (JMTWU) held a more ambiguous position on job reservation. Although this Union did call for the implementation of a job reservation in the late fifties, it also pursued the policy of demanding that African and coloured crew be paid at the same rate as their white members.

When TUCSA began to promote the organisation of parallel African unions in the mid-sixties, the Motor Transport Workers' Union of South Africa (MTWU) and the JMTWU established the African Transport Workers' Union (ATWU). However, the ATWU collapsed in the late sixties as a result of white rank and file opposition within the MTWU, as well as State opposition to the organisation of African unions. In 1968, the JMTWU and the MTWU joined the other TUCSA transport unions in their opposition to the organisation of African unions. It was only in the mid-seventies, with the emergence of the independent African trade unions, that these transport unions come around to supporting the organisation of parallel African unions.

Because coloured workers could become members of mixed trade unions, the mixed T&OWU and JMTWU did not have to confront the problem of organising coloured workers into a separate trade union. Throughout the sixties and seventies these mixed unions successfully recruited coloured workers into their own ranks in order to prevent undercutting. In contrast, the DMTEU and the MTWU rejected their mixed union status in 1958. Although the DMTEU made no attempt to organise coloured workers into a parallel trade union, the MTWU and JMTWU (with assistance from TUCSA and the South African Council of Transport Workers) established the Coloured Transport Workers' Union and later the Transport Workers' Union (Coloured and Asian).

The shortage of skilled and semi-skilled white labour during the sixties and the consequent attempts by employers to restructure the labour process and racial division of labour were the causes of the conflict within TUCSA over the organisation of African unions. As a result of the growth of a stratum of semi-skilled African building workers and the employment of African and coloured workers in the transport industry, the range of feasible trade union strategies was widened to include not only "closed", but also "open" styles of unionism. The combined roles of

right-wing trade unionism, the racial labour legislation of the State and the racist/nationalist ideology of trade union members played the decisive role in determining why the transport and building unions were able to organise coloured workers, while opposing the organisation of African workers. These political and ideological relationships therefore determined the style of trade unionism adopted by these unions, but only at the pace and within the limits provided by changes within the labour process and racial division of labour.

TABLE 2.1

Membership and Number of Unions Affiliated to TUCSA, 1955-1975

Year	Membership	Number of Unions
1955	147337	40
1956	150130	48
1957	140343	47
1958	150480	47
1959	159008	50
1960	160247	50
1961	157474	50
1962	166333	50
1963	173370	57
1964	170293	60
1965	181942	66
1966	195844	75
1967	164535	75
1968	167424	71
1969	142909	61
1970	184242	69
1971	191972	68
1972	194288	69
1973	197861	63
1974	204003	63
1975	210794	62
1976	236905	67
1977	214470	62
1978	221013	61
1979	258655	60
1980	286555	60
1981	369835	61
1982	430628	57
1983	478420	57
1984	379620	47
1985	340464	45

SOURCES:
University of the Witwatersrand, Church of the Province of South Africa Archives Collection, Records of the Trade Union Council of South Africa;
1) Report of Proceedings of Annual Conferences, 1955-1975, National Executive Committee Reports (Ad1.1-Ad1.24)
2) Lists of Affiliated Unions (Ab1-2).

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