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HISTORY WORKSHOP

THE WITWATERSRAND: LABOUR, TOWNSHIPS AND PATTERNS OF PROTEST

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OVERVIEW

To look at individual industries in isolation could be rather meaningless. But if one compares different industries, significant conclusions can be reached about the system as a whole. Gold mining was the industry in which it was most difficult to organise the black labour force. The economically most advantageous strategy for white trade unionism there was that of a labour aristocracy, which coincided perfectly with ideologies of white supremacy. Building and iron, steel and engineering resembled gold mining more than they did the light industries. In the light industries (eg. clothing, extiles, sweets, tobacco, food and canning) the economically most advantageous strategy for white trade unionism was the organisation of all workers in the industry. The resulting cooperation between black and white unions conflicted with ideologies of white supremacy. In the long term, however, no significant portion of the white labour force was won over to belief in racial equality.

The importance of migrant labour in preventing organisation in gold mining raises the question of its significance in other industries. In clothing, laudering and the commercial distributive trade relatively strong black organisation coincided with high levels of permanent urbanisation and low levels of job turnover. In clothing levels of urbanisation and job turnover were probably a consequence of strong unionisation rather than its initial cause. In the cases of laundering and the commercial distributive trade, the evidence is more in favour of permanent urbanisation and/or low turnover being causes of strong unionisation. Government officials believed in a connection between permanent black urbanisation and the ability to create strong black trade unions. On the other hand, two of the most militant groups of workers in South African - Durban stevedores and Johannesburg coal distributive workers - were migrants and this has to be explained.

Something which would require a paper to itself and which I have touched upon only in passing is the question of divisions among employers and their significance for trade unionism. I have mentioned how such divisions assisted both the African Commercial and Distributive Workers' Union and the Garment Workers' Union. This may be contrasted with the unified front put forward by the gold mining companies against increased black wages. Much research remains to be done on this.

Francis Wilson has calculated that between 1910 and 1960 real black wages in gold mining remained static.(1) The low grade ore of the Rand mines meant that working costs were high in relation to profits. Wages had to be kept low so that profits could be maintained. At the turn of the century management bitterly opposed the attempts of white mine workers to organise and obtain higher wages. Management failed because there was a limit to the coercion which could be used against white mine workers. There were no such limits on the coercion which could be used against black mine workers and management has been successful to this day in preventing their organisation.

In the early years of the industry the mining houses competed amongst themselves for a limited supply of black labour. Such competition bid up the price of black labour, threatening the viability of those mines whose ore cost relatively more to extract. The mining houses combined to create a recruiting monopsony which kept black wages down. This was done through the establishment of the Native Recruiting Corporation, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association and the 'maximum average' wage system. During the 1930's and 1940's the rock-hard front of the mining houses against black wage increases was one of the major problems confronting the African Mine Workers' Union; but there was a whole range of other problems, which the Union was ultimately unable to surmount.

Virtually all black mine workers were migrant labourers. (A necessary pre-

condition of low mine wages was that miners' families should live in the rural areas and support themselves by agriculture.)(2) The very high turnover rate of the black mine labour force - the constant coming and going of migrant workers - rendered it difficult to create the sort of group solidarity which makes collective action possible; the creation of a permanent worker organisation was impossible without outside aid. The one group of long-serving, 'permanently urbanised' black workers in the mining industry - the mine clerks - formed an Association which was recognised by the Chamber of MInes. Management attempted to cut the mine clerks off from the migrants' struggles by giving them superior pay and status. (It was the failure of the Chamber of Mines to continue this policy during world war two - when inflation eroded the clerks' real wages - which led to some clerks joining the African Mine Workers' Union, considerably increasing its strength as an organisation.)

While the high turnover consequent upon migrant labour made it impossible for the black mine workers to create an organisation by themselves, the compound system rendered it possible to cut the black mine workers off from any attempt to organise them from outside.

The state regarded it as vitally important to keep black wages on the gold mines down. The gold mines never experienced the occasional interventions by agents of the state to raise black wages which took place in commerce and industry - eg. Wage Determination 70 for the commercial Distributive Trade, 1939. Instead the state was prepared to use massive armed force against striking black mine workers - as happened in 1920 and again in 1946.

Unlike their counterparts in such industries as clothing, the white mining unions showed no interest whatever in organising black workers. They concentrated all their efforts on raising their own members' wages and keeping cheap black labour out of skilled jobs. Indeed the relatively high wages of the white mine workers in a sense depended upon the very much lower level of wages paid to the black mine workers. (During the 1930's and 1940's white wages were approximately ten times black wages.)(3) English-speaking miners were very quick to see black mine workers from the point of view of white supremacy. In the case of Afrikaner mine-workers - in a majority after world war one - the conditions of the mining industry reinforced a white racist ideology which had already been imbibed in rural white society.

Obstacles to black organisation were somewhat less formidable in the building and iron, steel and engineering industries - but still very great. In these industries the white craft unions were sufficiently strong to exclude blacks from skilled jobs. The limitation of blacks to unskilled work meant that if they went on strike they could easily be replaced. Owing to the continuous inflow of rural blacks, there was a permanent surplus of unskilled labour in the towns.

The white craft unions in building and engineering were marginally more liberal than the mining unions in that at successive S A Trades and Labour Council conferences during the 1930's they mostly supported the principle of black workers being included under the Industrial Conciliation Act. Throughout the 1930's and 1940's however, they did nothing to encourage black worker organisation, pressing demands only behalf of their own members and largely ignoring the interests of the black workers. From at least the late 1930's the building and engineering industrial councils were notorious for their lack of concern for black interests. (The engineering council's reputation for this has persisted up to the present.) As in the gold mining industry, the relatively high wages of the white workers were conditional upon the black workers remaining low paid and unorganised.

Gold, engineering, building: in these crucial industries the structure of

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the work-force and the strategies adopted by white unions harmonised with ideologies of white supremacy. During the twenties, thirties and forties there was another group of industries where the most rational strategy for white unions was the creation of parallel black unions. These industries included inter alia clothin, laundering, sweets, tobacco, leather, textiles food and canning, and tin-can manufacture. J J Evans, secretary of the African Tin Workers' Union described a situation which - with variations - obtained in all these industries:

> In the industry which we represent, Europeans, Coloured and Native Workers are engaged here at the same process of work, under the same conditions and for the same wages. The European and Coloured workers are in a minority though. And if we are not allowed to organise the native workers in our industry, then the union of the European and Coloured workers is completely ineffective and cannot protect the interests of its members.(4)

In tin-can manufacture there were actually very few whites employed. The membership of the African Tin Workers' Union in 1937 consisted of 122 blacks and 81 Coloureds. In clothing, sweets, tobacco, leather and textiles in that same year the majority of the workers were by contrast whites (mostly AFrikaner women). But otherwise Evans summed up the pressures on white unions to organise blacks quite well. If any attempts were made to improve white wages without organising blacks, the employers would simply bring in cheap black labour. Unlike in building or engineering the amount of skill required of most white workers was such that they could easily be replaced by untrained blacks (or whites). Indeed the white workers had not been strongly enough organised to keep blacks out of skilled or semi-skilled jobs.

In January 1928 Ben Weinbren of the (white) Launderers, Cleaners and Dyers Union noted that highly skilled white dyers receiving £7.10.0 per week were being replaced by blacks:

> The reason being of course the lower rates the natives would accept... The only remedy was to organise them and raise their status.(5)

The secretary of the Witwatersrand Tailors Association stated that blacks were superseding white girls in the clothing industry:

> There was a possibility of 200 more European workers being employed in the industry if the non-Europeans become organised and an agreement regarding wages is arrived at. There were some natives in the industry who were skilled and receiving fairly good wages.(6)

D ring 1928 the Native Laundry Workers' Union (the first black industrial union) was founded by Ben Weinbren. It entered into a cooperative relationship with the white union. So did the (black) South AFrican clothing Workers' Union founded the same year. In the clothing industry cooperation between the black union and the registered Garment Workers' Union has continued almost without interruption to the present day.

In 1937 organisers from the Garment Workers' Union formed unions of white workers in the tobacco and sweet industries. The extent to which blacks were doing the same semi-skilled jobs as whites in the tobacco industry is illustrated by the following table.

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TABLE I: Distribution of Workers in the Tobacco industry, Union of South Africa, according to race, sex and occupation, November 1940.

	White Males	White females		Native males
		Adult	Juvenile	
Grade I	4	36	20	-
Grade II	72	397	384	138
Grade III	16	24	24	84
Labourers	66	24	45	444

(Grades I, II, and III are semi-skilled.)

Source: adapted from 'Report of Wage Board... Tobacco Industry, Union', 1.12.41.

The situation in the sweet industry appears to have been roughtly similar. Parallel African Sweet and Tobacco Workers' Unions were consequently formed.

Before effective unions were formed, the conditions of white women workers in clothing, laundering, sweets, tobacco etc. were very bad. Wages were 20/- to 30/- per week (similar to the wages of most black workers), hours were long, workshops were usually overcrowded and dirty. Employers were bitterly resistant to unionisation, frequently victimising union members.(7) Employers wanted to keep wages low because these industries were intensely competitive: most of them (particularly clothing) could be entered with relatively little capital. It was the less well capitalised employers who bore down most hard upon the workers. The GArment Workers' Union struck up a tacit alliance with the better-capitalised employers: these would recognise the union and by forcing wages up throughout the industry the union would drive the under-capitalised and less efficient employers out of business. No doubt other unions were able to do the same.

White racism was part of the culture of the Afrikaner workers in these industries, most of whom were recent immigrants from the Platteland. The militant strike action required of these workers if they were to improve conditions had the effect of heightening class consciousness and damping down race consciousness - at least for a time. For example: the six week Johannesburg sweet workers strike in 1942. Here the striking Afrikaner women workers were subjected to considerable violence at the hands of white employers and police, trying to protect white strike-breakers. On the other hands black sweet workers showed solidarity with the white strikers by refusing to cross their picket-lines. Every day the black and white strikers would march together through Johannesburg streets. AT mass meetings at the City Hall, black and white stood apart, but at strike committee meetings there was no such segregation. White girl workers spoke up in favour of giving blacks and whites equal strike pay, and this was done.(8) According to one Labour Department official, the August 1948 sweet workers' strike was caused by the white workers' refusal to accept a pay offer for themselves which excluded the black workers. Here again the black workers refused to cross picket lines and the strike was successful.

The Afrikaner Nationalists were terrified that the left-wing union leadership would succeed in permanently weaning the Afrikaner women workers away from white racialism (and Afrikaner nationalism) and towards a purely class orientation.

From the second half of the 1930's the F.A.K. and the Dutch Reformed Church spearheaded a campaign to stir up national and racial feeling among white workers. This involved vilifying union leaders as both 'communists' and 'kaffir-boeties'. Solly Sachs of the Garment Workers' Union was a particular target. Here is an example of the techniques used. At the 'Belfast'

clothing factory in Johannesburg in 1944 Coloured workers had been brought in to work in the same rooms as the white workers. (Blacks and Coloureds entered the industry in large numbers during thewar because white women were finding better jobs outside the clothing industry.) One morning nine predikants walked into the factory and started questioning the whites about their relations with the Coloureds.

> One of the Predikants asked Mr Dunsky if he could not put up a partition between the workers so as to prevent the European workers from inhaling the bad breath of the non-European workers.(9)

Such tactics had considerable success among the white workers. Sachs felt forced to appease white racism by such actions as the formation of a No. 2 Branch of the Union in 1940: in which Coloured workers were segregated and for some years denied direct representation on the union's executive committee. But most white workers remained loyal - casically because of the success of militant left-wing leaders like Sachs in improving wages and conditions.

During the 1950's white membership of unions in clothin, textiles, sweets, tobacco etc. dwindled as white women found better-paying jobs elsewhere and blacks and Coloureds moved into replace them. The portion of the white working class in industries where left-wing leadership might hope to lead them to a purely class orientation fell drastically. Simultaneously the existing left-wing trade union leadership was removed by banning orders under the Suppression of Communism Act, 1950. Intimidated by the threat of repression, the surviving leadership of the registered leather and clothing unions moved towards an apolitical (i.e. right-wing) stance. Under the continued protection of the registered Garment Workers' Union, the National Union of Clothing Workers has grown to be the largest black union in South A frica.(10)

By contrast, during the 1950's, certain of the unions in this same group of industries formed the backbone of SACTU: these were the registered unions and the parallel black unions in the food and canning, laundry and textile industries.(11) (Some of the black clothing workers belonged to the S A Clothing Workers' Union, which joined SACTU; others joined the more conservative Garment Workers' Union of African Women, the ancestor of the National Union of Clothing Workers.) The workers in these industries showed militancy not only on bread-and-butter issues but by giving particularly strong support to the general stay-at-ahome strikes called by the Congress Alliance in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Their political militancy was eventually crushed out of them by intensive state repression in the early 1960's. But hte registered unions in these industries have continued to see the necessity of organising black workers.

One of the unique things about South Africa's industrialisation has been the ecormously important role of migrant labour. If we accept that the complete dominance of the migrant labour system and the consequent very high labour turnover have been crucial obstacles to black worker organisation on the gold mines, this raises the question of how other industries compared with gold mining in this regard.

Firstly one looks at the industries in which black trade unionism was relatively weak. W C Ballinger wrote of the African Mineral Water Workers' Union.

> The organisation is not strong, mainly owing, it is said, to the migrant class of labourer which the trade employs and to the seasonal fluctuations which characterize the trade.(12)

A high proportion of migrants and high job turnover seem to have been factors serving to weaken trade unionism in the cement, stone and brick and clay industries.(13) A definite handicap to the organisation of black building workers was the casual nature of their employment.(14) (It is possible - but not certain - that these workers were migrants.)

The evidence as to whether the organisation of black workers in iron, steel and engineering was hampered by high job turnover, the migrant labour system and residence in compounds is however rather contradictory. On the one hand the employers told the Fagan Commission that most of the workers were migrants. On the other hand the 1950 Transvaal Chamber of Industries Survey found that black workers in 'engineering' were 70 per cent permanently urbanized, while the 1948 Witwatersrand University survey showed that labour turnover in the 'metal' industry between 1939 and 1943 was no higher than in the Commercial distributive trade, where a most successful black trade union emerged. In this industry it would seem reasonable (at least until more evidence emerges) to emphasize black exclusion from skilled jobs as the basic reason for the exceptional weakness of black unionism in this industry from the 1920's right through to the 1950's.

I now propose to look in considerable detail at laundering, clothing and the commercial distributive trade: all cases in which relatively strong black unions coincide with low levels of labour turnover and high levels of permanent urbanisation. For each industry in turn I will firstly present the data relating to union strength and then that relating to urbanisation and turnover.

LAUNDERING

A. UNION STRENGTH

The Native Laundry Workers' Union is reported to have been the first African Trade Union ever to be formed - in 1927 or early 1928.(15) The skilled jobs (especially, as pressers) occupied by m laundry workers undoubtedly helped make possible their long record of strike action. Of four strikes at individual laundries in May and June 1928 and October 1929, three were successful in that victimized workers were reinstated. In the fourth case the employer was adamant in refusing to reinstate several leading workers. However the strikers had no difficulty in finding jobs in other Johannesburg laundries, presumably because their skills were in short supply. (There was by contrast a permanent surplus of unskilled black labour in the towns.) The success of strikes over victimisation suggests that black laundry workers were creating a relatively strong shopfloor organisation. The laundry workers struck again in 1931, 1934 and 1936. The result of the 1931 strike is not known but those in 1934 and 1936 were at least partially successful. They occured at a time when the black working class in general was not very militant at all. In fact the December 1936 strike was the only strike of black workers on the Witwatersrand in that year.(16) For reasons which are not yet clear, little is heard of the union during the war years. But there were strikes in 1945, 1946 and 1947.

B. URBANISATION/TURNOVER

In December 1936 it was estimated that no less than 97% of the African laundry workers had been in service for more than six months: a phenomenally low rate of labour turnover.(17) The 1938 Wage Board Report also refers to the exceptionally lwo labour turnover in this industry.(18) In his memorandum to the Wage Board in 1937, Max Gordon estimated that 80% of the black laundry workers were permanently urbanised.(19) In 1950 87% of a sample of 1530 black laundry workers were found to be permanently urbanised. By contrast only 46% of a sample of 26 500 workers drawn from 26 industries were permanently urbanised.(20)

CLOTHING

A. UNION STRENGTH

The black clothing workers in Johannesburg are unique in that ever since the S.A. Clothing Workers' Union was founded in 1928 there has been a black trade union in their industry. The National Union of Clothing Workers is at present by far the largest black union in existence. These facts represent success - of a sort. In 1939 the skilled black workers in the clothing industry were one of the best-paid groups of black workers in Johannesburg: the half of them who had six years experience received £12 per month (triple the average wage of unskilled blacks).(21) On the other hand - except in 1928-1929 - the black clothing workers do not have a record of independent militancy comparable to that of the black laundry workers. Blacks were a majority of the workers in the laundry industry and the white union collapsed in 1934 and was only revived during the war. In clothing by contrast blacks in 1938 were only 1000 out of a total labour force of 8000, predominantly white women.(22) The black union was an appendage of the registered Garment Workers' Union - which bred apathy among the black workers.

B. URBANISATION/TURNOVER

In 1939 it was estimated that 30% of the black clothing workers in Johannesburg had been in service for six years or more.(23) These were all skilled pressers. Data on 40 African workers (all, or mostly, pressers) involved in a dispute at Star Shirt in Johannesburg in 1947 shows that only 15% had been employed at Star Shirt for six months or less, while 40% had been employed at Star Shirt for at least three years, 70% had been in the clothing industry for at least three years and 48% had been in the industry for six years or more.(24) These figures reveal an exceptionally low rate of labour turnover and virtually all of such a stable labour force must have been permanently urbanised.

COMMERCIAL DISTRIBUTIVE TRADE

A. UNION STRENGTH

The African commercial and Distributive Workers' Union (ACDWU) was perhaps the single most successful African trade union. Its first major success came in 1937, when the union was successful in obtaining

> improved conditions for the Native employees of a number of the large commercial firms in Johannesburg, viz. OK Bazaars, Mosenthal & Co., MacDonald Adams, Vacuum Oil and numerous others.(25)

The next great success was lWage Determination 70 which gave unskilled labourers in the trade £6 per month: Virtually the highest wage for black labourers on the whole of the Witwatersrand. A further substantial increase was gained at the beginning of 1944, when the ACDWU also became one of the few African unions to obtain the stop-order privilege. Even in 1950, in a period of general decline of African trade unionsim, it still had 2000 paid-up members and was the largest black union in existence.

B. URBANISATION/TURNOVER

The most militant group among the union membership - the black coal distributive workers - appear to have been rural migrants. (This is further discussed below.) The majority of the union's membership was however made up out of the much larger body of labourers in the commercial distributive trade proper.

(i) The 1939 Wage Board Report stated that:

> It It is generally admitted that the majority of the unskilled workers employed in commerce are town dwellers...(26)

(The greater needs of urbanised workers - as compared to migrants - were used to justify the substantial increase recommended by the Board.)

(ii) The mean annual turnover of a representative sample of black workers in Johannesburg 1939-1943 was 105%.(27) That of workers in commerce was 106%. That of workers in metals was 109%. These figures imply that labour turnover had nothing to do with whatever made the ACDWU an outstandingly successful union, while the metal union by contrast was unsuccessful.

(iii) Ellen Hellmann's Sellgoods: A Sociological Survey of An African Commercial Labour Force reports that labour turnover at a particular large concern (OK Bazaars) in 1951 was only about 33% per year. Moreover 61% of the departures during 1951 belonged to the 0-1 year length of services category, and only 17% (15 workers) belonged to the 6 years plus category which made up 30% of the total black labour force. (Moreover two of these 15 were merely being transferred to another branch and five were going on pension.) The longer length of service categories consequently formed a 'stable nucleus' within the work force. It was these workers who gave the union its remaining numerical strength at SEllgoods: since by 1951 the union had become virtually impotent, the workers' continued loyalty to it is attributable to the successes it had won during the war. One could go further to say that low job turnover among longer-serving workers was probably a consequence of the union's wartime successes rather than a cause. The figures for mean labour turnover in commerce are 137% in 1939 and 103% in 1943. They support the view that the period 1938-1951 saw a progressive decline in labour turnover in the trade.(28)

CONCLUSION

In clothing low labour turnover and high permanent urbanisation were probably a consequence of the union's strength rather than its cause. The crucial factor behind the black union was clearly the long term need of the Garment Workers' Union to stop skilled black workers from undercutting white wages - which could only be done by organising them. The registered union saw to it that skilled black workers received relatively high wages, with increments for experience. The consequent privileged status of black clothing workers would thus explain the many years for which a lot of them stayed on in the industry. The stability of this labour force would become a source of strength to the union.

The available figures do not suggest that the unusually low labour turnover in commerce was an initial cause of the union's strength. It seems rather to have been a consequence of such strength. However the report that the trade's workers included an unusually high proportion of permanently urbanised blacks is roughly contemporary with the union's first successes. The 1952 Wage Board Report stated that:

> The wage standards of the unskilled labourer group in commerce have always been and still are considerably higher than those of unskilled workers in other industries. This is in recognition of the fact that generally a higher standard of intelligence and ability is required of these labourers.(29)

Whatever 'intelligence and ability' was required of these labourers -

whether it included literacy or ability to deliver goods by bicycle all over the town - permanently urbanised blacks were more likely than 'raw' rural migrants to possess. This 'intelligence and ability' may have increased both these workers' bargaining power and their ability to organise a union.(30) There are other factors which must be brought into any explanation of the growth of the ACDWU. They are: the outstandingly able leadership of its secretary, Daniel Koza (1940-1951); Wage Determination 70 in 1939, and divisions between large and small commercial employers with regard to increasing black wages. These divisions showed themselves in 1943 when the Witwatersrand employer organisations agreed to give the ACDWU a 10/- per week increase; smaller employers protested that this increase might be approved of by the large employer but would ruin them: they formed an association to protect their interests.(31) Such divisions may have influenced the Wage Board to grant the considerable increase which it embodied in Wage Determination 70.

In laundering much of the evidence regarding the permanency must have produced a strong sense of group solidarity: a pre-condition of militancy. The workers' skill increased their bargaining power, thus encouraging militancy. The workers' permanency was linked to their acquisition of skill in that shifting migrants would have been impossible to train. One thing which is not known is whether the black laundry workers of the 1920s and 1930's were linked in any way to the self-employed black laundrymen who carried out this service before large-scale 'factory' laundries financed with white capital became dominant on the Witwatersrand.(32)

State officials were certainly conscious of a relationship between permanent black urbanisation and black trade unionism. Severl of those Labour Department officials who in the late 1940's advocated the (limited) recognition of African trade unions felt that such recognition should be confined to 'the permanent, urbanised native'. No trade union of black gold miners should be recognised. These officials were aware of the obstacle which high labour turnover posed to the unionisation of black gold miners. They felt that migrant labourers generally were more difficult to organise than permanently urbanised blacks. Limited recognition would have to be extended to the relatively strong unions of the urbanised because to try to suppress such unions would be too dangerous. Instead this relatively strong group of workers would be co-opted by being extended privileges denied to the great majority of black workers.

Given that government officials have seen a connection between trade unionism and permanent urbanisation, this raises the question of whether the influx control measures introduced since 1948 have not inter alia been intended to make union organisation more difficult. The tightening up of influx control made it progressively more difficult for rural migrants to acquire permanent urban residence rights. Without such rights any loss of one's job would lead to expulsion from the urban area - a very strong deterrent to militancy. Moreover in urban centres like Johannesburg the influx restrictions have led to a widening of the gap between permanently urbanise and rural/migrant workers: with different economic and social circumstances, as well as cultural differences, it is difficult to organise solidarity between these groups.

However certain groups of migrants have been - and still are - decidedly militant. The two examples I will deal with here are the Johannesburg coal distributive workers and the Durban stevedores.(33)

During the war the coal distributors were probably the most militant group of black workers on the whole Witwatersrand. They fought three strikes: in December 1940, May 1941 and June 1944. The latter two were both substantial successes. In the JUne 1944 strike some 800 workers - virtually

the entire Johannesburg labour force - offered themselves for arrest at Marshall Square after their leader, Daniel Koza of the ACDWU, had been charged with incitement to strike. This was a display of solidarity far larger than any single incident in the 1952 Defiance Campaign. I don't as yet know much about their fortunes in the thirty years since the war. I do know that in May 1975 an article appeared in the Johannesburg press to the effect that the coal distributive employers had promised their workers an increase to ward off a threat to strike.

The Durban stevedores had at least two wartime strikes - in August 1941 and July 1942. Their other major strikes were in 1949, 1954, 1958 and 1972. (The 1972 strike helped lay the trail for the great wave of strike action in Durban, 1973-1974) The stevedores were remarkable for their ability to organise collective action without depending upon a formal union structure. (The repression to which such structures are exposed in a South African context ensures that they are either smashed out of existence or generate a leadership intent upon moderating rank and file militancy.) The stevedores' self-reliance was such that they were capable of rejecting outsiders' well-meant attempts to organise them - as happened during the war.

Why have the Durban stevedores been so militant? Stevedores all over the world are an unusually militant body of workers. To explain this it is necessary to examine the nature of work in this industry. Stevedoring is dangerous and it is carried out in groups. Consequently the success and safety of each worker depends upon the skill and goodwill of his fellow workers. It would seem that this promotes group solidarity, which manifests itself in disputes with management. One feature peculiar to stevedoring in Durban was that - unlike in so many South African industries - the bargaining power of the black workers was not diluted by the presence of a group of white workers holding the more skilled jobs and refusing to support the blacks. The Durban stevedores have been described as a tightly-knit community of Zulus. Migrants would seek work on the Durban docks year after year. The relatively small size of the labour force facilitated the development of community: there were only a few thousand stevedores. An additional factor making for cohesion was probably that stevedores in Durban also knew each other in the rural areas from which they had come.

By comparison with stevedoring the greater difficulty of organising black mine workers is clear. The roles of the white mine workers, the compound system and the state have been referred to above. Differences in the nature of the two labour forces are also significant. Firstly, there is the ethnic heterogeneity of the mine labour force. (To this day management is afraid of the greater potential militancy of an ethnically homogeneous mine labour force). Then - possibly - there is the consideration that unlike on the docks few workers returned to work on the same mine year after year. There is evidence (drawn from Durban in the 1940's) to suggest that after one or two visits to the mines as young men, workers preferred to seek employment in commerce and industry.

To what extent do the arguments raised about stevedoring apply also to the Johannesburg coal distributive workers? They are fairly definitely known to have been migrants, but where they came from and whether a common rural origin may help explain their remarkable solidarity is not yet known.(34) As in the case of stevedoring, there were virtually no white workers in the industry. The work was exceptionally heavy and dirty: this may have increased the workers' bargaining power by making it more difficult to secure seats in the event of a strike. It may also have had implications at the level of consciousness. The small size of the labour force - only 800 workers in Johannesburg - could also have contributed to solidarity. Another feature of the work was that it was seasonal, reaching a peak during mid-winter. The employer was relatively likely to give in if the workers' struck at this time of the year, especially when demand for coal was running unusually high, as when there was exceptionally cold weather. This industry deserves further investigation.

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NOTES

1. F Wilson, Labour on the South African Gold Mines (1971). On the gold mines see also various works by H A Johnstone.
2. Witwatersrand Mine Native Wages Commission, 1943.
3. This statistic is recalled from memory, and may not be entirely accurate.
4. J J Evans to Industrial Registrar, 9.12.40.
5. S.A. Trade Union Congress, National Executive Minutes, 15.1.28.
6. Ibid.
7. For conditions in clothing, sweets, tobacco see The Garment Worker, various articles between 1937 and 1942. See also E S Sachs, Rebels' Daughters and wage board reports on laundering, clothing, textiles, tobacco, sheetmetal etc. between 1928 and 1940.
8. Interview with E J Burford (Chairman of Sweet Workers' Union in 1942) (in possession of B Hirson).
9. Johanna Cornelius to E S Sachs, 15.3.44.
10. The very existence of the Transvaal clothing industry is however now threatened by the competition of low-wage factories in rural areas which the union has been unable to organise, partly because of police opposition.
11. Except for laundering, the registered unions in these industries consisted almost entirely of Coloured and Indian workers.
12. Report to Friends of A,rica, Aug. 1940-May 1941, p.9., Ballinger Papers (S.O.A.S., London).
13. See inter alia Tables II and III.
14. W G Ballinger said of the African union: 'It is difficult to control because of the shifting nature of the employment of the members'., letter to Carol Johnson, 31.12.36., Ballinger Papers.
15. See E Roux, Time longer than Rope; A L Saffery, 'African Trade Unions and the Institute', Race Relations, 1941.
16. See Annual Reports of Labour Department, 1932-1940.
17. S.A. Worker, 13.2.37.
18. Report of the Wage Board ... Laundering, Cleaning and Dyeing Trade (1938), p.26.
19. African laundry Workers' Union: Memorandum to Wage Board (1937).
20. Table II.
21. City of Johannesburg, Non-European and Native Affairs Department, Survey of the African in Industry (1939).
22. Report of the Department of Labour for 1938, pp. 52-58.
23. as note 21.
24. Garment Workers' Union Records.
25. M Gordon, 'Report to the Bantu Welfare Trust', 15.11.37., Saffery Papers (I.C.S. London).
26. Report of the Wage Board ... Commercial Distributive Trade (1940), p.111.
27. See Table III.
28. Witwatersrand University (Industrial Research Section), Native Urban Employment (1948), quoted in E Hellmann, Sellgoods, p.62.

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29. 'Report of the Wage Board ... Commercial Distributive Trade', (18.11.52), p.26.

30. The December 1942 black dairy workers' strike and the November 1945 black newspaper delivery workers' strike that workers who had to deliver goods all over a city by bicycle could not simply be fired and replaced by fresh workers. It took at least several weeks to learn the geography of a town and customers' addresses. Literacy was required in order to handle invoices and receipts.

31. Friends of Africa: Memorandum to Wage Board: 6.9.43., Ballinger Papers.

32. A strike of black laundrymen took place on the Witwatersrand as early as the turn of the century. I am indebted to Charles van Onselen for this information.

33. The most outstanding example which comes to mind is that of the Ovambo strike of 1971. Unfortunately I have not yet done much reading on this.

34. An obvious analogy would be with the municipal rubbish removal workers ('dustbin boys') in Johannesburg, who are - or were - all restricted from one tribal group.

Table II: Statistics of urbanized and rural Natives' employed in secondary industry in the Southern Transvaal in 1950.

Industry	No. of black workers employed	% permanently urbanized.
Textile	723	40
Brick and clay	5883	30
Milling	1294	67
Tobacco	348	45
Printing	3	100
Millinery	134	83
Venetian Blinds	95	72
Mineral Waters	608	63
Typewriter & Office Appliances	242	69
Paper	301	32
Canvas and Allied Trades	261	65
Chemical	6898	24
Cement	1470	30
Tea and Coffee	138	39
Body Builders	96	60
Engineering	1280	70
Plate Glass	42	14
Laundries, Dry Cleaners. etc.	1530	87
Batteries	483	52
Food Products	540	62
Breweries	738	29
Leather	477	80
Rubber	394	59
Brush and Broom	162	94
Diamond Cutting	5	0
Match	162	71
Miscellaneous	2342	77

The above information is derived from figures supplied to the Transvaal Chamber of Industries by 261 firms. Out of a total number of 26,559 black workers employed by these firms, 46% were 'urbanized'. The definition of 'urbanized' used was as follows:

> An urbanized native is one who resides permanently in or near an industrialised town or city, who has lost ties with the land, has no chief or headman, and depends solely on his earnings in industry for his livelihood.

Source: Memorandum by Transvaal Chamber of Industries dated 10.7.50, M. Smuts Papers.

Table III: Duration of jobs among black workers in Johannesburg, 1939 - 1943.

Industry	Percentage of completed jobs which had lasted		Mean Annual Turnover. %
	Under 6 months	3 years and over	
Police	55.7	1.4	192
Transport	63.8	4.2	160
Building	61.6	3.0	160
Flats, hotels, clubs	42.6	2.0	142
Stone and clay	57.0	7.4	114
Food	48.5	5.4	111
Metals	50.8	6.1	109
Commerce	49.4	7.0	106
Chemicals	45.3	6.5	101
Wood	42.6	8.5	94
Rubber	44.7	8.1	88
Vehicles	41.0	10.2	85
Textiles	41.0	14.0	65
Paper	39.3	14.7	64
Leather	27.5	13.1	56
Furniture	31.0	17.7	47
Mean	48.9	8.2	105

Source: University of the Witwatersrand, Department of Economics, Industrial Research Section, Native urban Employment, 1948, Table XXVIII(adapted).