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HISTORY WORKSHOP

THE MAKING OF CLASS

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The Message of the Warriors: the ICU, the Labouring Poor and the Making of a Popular Political Culture in Durban.

Introduction.

In 1925, six years after being established in Cape Town, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) opened a branch in the port town of Durban. Three months after its establishment AWG Champion, an ex-mine clerk and policeman, assumed control of the struggling Durban Branch and also became Natal Provincial Secretary. In March 1926 the General Secretary of the Union reported that the Durban Branch was 'progressing famously'.[1] Indeed, during 1926 and 1927 the ICU in Durban found a deep resonance amongst African workers. By 1927, Champion could boast that Durban was a 'formidable fortress' of the ICU comprising 27 000 paid up members.[2] Through a sustained and generally successful campaign of litigation aimed at a battery of repressive municipal bye-laws, the ICU succeeded in capturing the imagination of Durban's labouring poor.[3]

By 1927 the ICU had opened offices in the smallest of South African towns. Over a large part of Natal, where the economic pressures on rural blacks sharpened with the introduction of extensive sheep and wattle farming,

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1 I am indebted to Charles van Onselen for his criticism of an earlier draft of this paper. University of South Africa (hereafter UNISA), ICU yase Natal Microfilm, Reel 3, General Secretary's Report of Branches, 6 March 1926.

2 *Udibi lwase Afrika*, June 1927. For early membership figures see University of the Witwatersrand (hereafter UW), Champion Papers, Champion to J.la Guma, 12 Nov.1925; and Champion to C. Kadalie, 9 Nov.1926. In August 1927 the ICU in Natal had 88 000 members, while the Durban Branch had 37 000 members. These figures probably reflected the number of registrations up to this point rather than membership at a particular time.

3 For an outline of these court victories, see UNISA, ICU Microfilm, 4, Manuscript by Champion (n.d.). For these formative struggles of the Union, in particular the campaign against the enforced bodily disinfecting of workers, see P. la Hausse,'The Struggle for the City: Alcohol, the Ematsheni and Popular Culture in Durban, 1902-36,' MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984, pp.144-52. The ICU successfully challenged the right of police to demand workers' registration tickets in public places, the curfew laws, the carrying of passes by women and the arbitary firing of workers without appropriate payment.

numerous Branches of the ICU were opened in rural towns stretching from Paulpietersburg in the north to Port Shepstone in the south.[4] While the organisational roots of the ICU had been extended throughout rural Natal by 1927, the most powerful Branch in the country was to be found in Durban. At the end of 1927, however, Champion was suspended from his position, pending investigation into financial irregularities in the Natal Union. Then, in June 1928, most of the Natal Branches of the ICU seceeded from the national ICU and formed the ICU *yase* Natal. Over the following two years while the ICU experienced a sharp decline in support in Natal's countryside, the ICU *yase* Natal, under the leadership of Champion, continued in its attempts to organize African workers. Paradoxically it was during this period of general decline and fragmentation of the ICU on a national level that Durban experienced an unprecedented upsurge in popular militancy. This was to find expression in, amongst other things, a series of riots in June 1929, a sustained boycott of municipal beerhalls and a pass-burning campaign at the end of 1930.

Memories of the spectacular rise and fall of the ICU are today preserved in the thinning ranks of elderly black men and women. In some ways, historians have become accomplices in a process of forgetting. One notable exception is the recent work of Helen Bradford on the ICU in the South African countryside which attempts, amongst other things, to explore the ways in which the Union *did* channel popular rural discontent and the complex relationship between Union leaders and their constituencies.[5] The focus of this study falls on one important urban branch of the ICU. In general terms, as Bradford has noted, the ICU's leadership tended to be drawn from a racially oppressed lower middle class

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[4] Fifty-four Natal delegates, representing twenty different Branches, attended the Kimberley Conference in December 1927. UNISA, ICU Microfilm, 4, List of Natal Delegates, 16 Dec.1927.

[5] H. Bradford, 'The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa in the South African Countryside, 1924-1930', Ph.D. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985.

grouping which was both internally fractured and extremely susceptible to proletarianisation. It was this socially ambiguous nature of Union leaders which enabled them, at specific moments, to assume the role of radical spokesmen for the labouring classes in a way which the 'Black Englishmen' in the Congress movement could not. Yet the fierce populism which the Union succeeded in moulding tended to dissemble the extent to which leaders had their own class agendas and the ways in which they used the Union in order to further them. If Union leaders in Durban "attempted to invite the masses into history in a language they understood",[6] the masses themselves could determine the terms of this invitation. Local political economy, patterns of exploitation, domination and disspossession, as well as popular idioms of and traditions of resistance, served to create a peculiar local form of political culture. Common sense ideas and the culture of Durban's labouring poor, however, set important limits on leaders' attempts to carve out an urban constituency. Workers could thus appropriate and rework the language and tactics of leadership in the face of the flux of political struggles. It is precisely in these terms that this study seeks to explore the ways in which the Union mobilised a local support-base, how it attempted to forge popular alliances and how, through political struggles, it ultimately lost the support of its volatile, and often desperate, constituency.

Urban Control, African Class Formation and Culture.

In the early 1920s, while the South African state was making concerted attempts to formulate a "native policy" more appropriate to conditions of capitalist economic growth, Durban could plausibly claim to possess a model for urban native administration in the country.[7] In 1908 the Durban Town Council succeeded in its struggle to obtain legislation which enabled

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[6] See T. Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London,1977), p.340.

[7] For attempts by the state to reformulate urban "native policy", see *Report of the Inter- Departmental Committee on the Native Pass Laws, 1920* ,U.G.41-'42.

local authorities in Natal to monopolise and control the sale of sorghum beer (*utshwala*) to African workers in urban areas.[8] The revenue derived from the sale of this staple, popular brew in Durban was substantial. Between 1909 and 1928 the net profits from the town's municipal beerhalls amounted to at least £551 000, nearly all of which was used to build barracks for migrant workers, to erect more beerhalls and to finance a municipal Native Administration Department (NAD). In a country which possessed neither the funds nor the administrative machinery to centralize urban native administration, the responsibility for covering the social costs of urban African labour was foisted upon local authorities, white employers, and where possible, on blacks themselves. Durban, however, was in the unique position of having the administrative and financial capacity to support the reproduction of a cheap urban workforce at little cost to white taxpayers. Moreover, strict influx control laws attempted to limit the size of the town's African population to the labour needs of employers and simultaneously undermine the formation of urban African households by policing the presence of women in the town.[9] The cheapness of a migrant labour system was thus extended through the finances generated by the beer monopoly and the system of urban control which it funded.[10]

For the police and native affairs bureaucracy responsible for implementing this system, the crude social categories *kholwa* (Christian) and

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[8] *Natal Government Gazette*, No. 3710, 10 October 1908, Act to Amend the law relating to Native Beer.

[9] Native Affairs Bye-laws which were introduced in 1917 laid down precise procedures for work registration, passes and service contracts. The laws also introduced a harsh curfew and compulsory medical examination. See *Mayor's Minute*, 1917, p.15.

[10] For the year 1916-17 Durban derived an astonishing £41 677 in revenue from its African population - by far the highest income accruing to any of the country's 217 local authorities. See *Report of the Department of Native Affairs for the Years 1913-1918*, U.G.7-'19, Annex. F. This "Durban System" of administration prefigured many of the features of the 1923 Urban Areas Act - the first attempt by the state to formulate a coherent national urban policy. See la Hausse, 'Struggle for the City', pp.123-33.

'kraal' tended to define the sociological limits of their understanding of the town's African population. Yet by the mid-twenties municipal officials were compelled to recognize the increasingly heterogeneous nature of Durban's African population. Not only was the presence of a 'permanent town Native element' noted, but also the emergence of distinct social strata.[11] In 1928 the African population was conservatively estimated at 38 000, at least 33 000 of whom had known employment.[12] As many as 15 000 black males might have been engaged as domestic servants, most of whom lived in 'kias' on their employers' premises. This large service sector established youth as a significant social characteristic of Durban's labour market. The youngest 'houseboy' could be ten years old while most were not over the age of twenty. Their monthly wages, including food and accommodation, seldom exceeded £2. An older generation of over 5 000 men, living fifteen to a room in the crowded municipal barracks at the Point, worked as togt (day) labourers on the docks. The *ozinyathi* (buffaloes), as they were popularly known, could claim a history of strike action extending back, at least, to the turn of the century.[13] These migrant workers lived in overcrowded barracks at the Point - institutions which sometimes housed fifteen workers to a room and earned Zulu names such as *Umhlaguva* ("trees with thorns which bite") or *Umfugwana* ("a tightly-packed snuff-tin").[14] The arduous work of ricksha-pulling provided over 1500 men from the countryside of Natal, Zululand and Pondoland

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[11] *Mayor's Minute*,1924, p.199. By 1931 official recognition of these distinct social strata was refined to include the 'married native', the 'educated native' who 'followed European habits', the 'trader' and the 'labourer'.

[12] Only a year later Durban's African population was put at 42 180. Between 1925 and 1928 an average of 42 000 Africans sought work in the port town annually. Precise figures for African employment are elusive. The number of Africans employed in the manufacturing sector was put at 20 341 during 1929/30. See *Census of Industrial Establishments*, U.G.20-46

[13] In 1903, 100 togt workers went on strike in support of demands for a daily wage of 5s. See NA, Police Report Book, No.6, 4 March 1903.

[14] Interview by P.la Hausse with Charles Kumalo and Alfred Tshabalala, Durban, 28 Aug.1986. These are Charles Kumalo's translations.

with a potentially lucrative source of income. The ostensibly self-employed ricksha-pullers (*abawini*) lived in privately-owned or municipal barracks scattered through the town where they frequently, much to the dismay of white property-owners, sheltered their kin. The remainder of Africans worked in Durban's numerous small industrial, commercial and manufacturing concerns, while others found employment in the municipal or government service sector. By 1928 the ICU, in advertising its weekly meetings, could extend its appeals to sections of the workforce whose self-conciousness, as their Zulu names suggest, was rooted in the new social solidarities of early industrial South Africa. *Abatshayelibezimoto* (car-drivers), *abamagalaji* (garage-workers) and *owets* (waiters) took their place alongside dockworkers, ricksha-pullers and domestic servants as potential constituents of the ICU.

The wages of most male migrant workers, often referred to, perhaps ironically, as the *izimpohlo* (bachelors), remained uniformly low. The average wage of workers during this period was £2.8s. Some workers, depending on their experience, might be fortunate enough to earn £4 a month, whilst others, if supplied with a daily ration of maize meal, could expect wages sometimes as low as £1.10s a month.[15] Certainly, the £9 monthly wage paid to compound *indunas* represented a level of wealth which few could hope to enjoy. If some young workers, in a novel rite of passage, braided coins into their hair,[16] workers in Durban ranked amongst the worst-paid of black workers in the country. Throughout the twenties the wages of virtually all workers, even in real terms, had barely risen and, in some cases, had actually declined.

Until at least the first decade of the century migrant workers in Durban were drawn predominantly from Natal and Zululand. Yet by the later

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[15] NA, TCF, 63, 467, Evidence of Town Council to Native Economic Commission, March 1931; and Durban Corporation - Statement re NEC.

[16] Interview with Kumalo and Tshabalala.

twenties this pattern of labour migration altered dramatically. Rural subsistence economies proved increasingly ill-equipped to withstand existing pressures on the land. After 1926 the reproductive capacities of African rural economies were further undermined by a drought which seared its way through large parts of the countryside. In Durban these rural crises found expression in the increasing number of blacks, particularly from Transkei and Basutoland, who travelled to the town in search of work.[17] In Natal rural dispossesion, combined with the desire by homestead heads to retain access to land, compelled many blacks to enter into labour-tenant relationships with white farmers. Labour-tenancy was often experienced as little more than forced labour.[18] Wage labour in towns provided one alternative to these punishing conditions in the countryside. For the majority of African workers in Durban, rural ties and obligations provided the essential context for their temporary entry into Durban, although the evidence suggests that some labourers were increasingly compelled to remain in the town as the option of a rural means of subsistence was foreclosed. In general terms specific groups, constituted in terms of regional, clan or ethnic ties came to dominate particular jobs.[19] In the late twenties, however, the labour market appears to have been restructured. It is more than likely that the arrival of newly-proletarianised job-seekers led to heightened competition over access to work. Certainly, many Basothos and Xhosas were successful in joining the ranks of dock and railway workers.[20] Yet as Durban entered the depression in late 1929, and as the size of Durban's reserve army of labour expanded,

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[17] NA, Durban Municipal Inquiry, August 1927, Evidence of C. Dube, p.582. Also see C. Murray, *Families Divided - The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho* (Johannesburg, 1981), pp.14-16.

[18] See Bradford, 'The ICU', pp.52-65.

[19] Interview with Kumalo and Tshabalala. The extent and developement of this phenomenon remains to be fully explored although present evidence does suggest its significance.

[20] See NA, Commission of Inquiry into Durban Native Riots, 1929, Minutes of Evidence (hereafter Commission Evidence), p.300, (Det. Sergt. R.H. Arnold).

the displacement of more vulnerable sections of the workforce (probably inclusive of many non-Zulu speakers) became a real possibility.

If age and regional origins served to define the social nature of Durban's African workforce, so too did sex. In a labour market dominated by young male workers, employment prospects for African women were bleak. By 1930 only four per cent of the African workforce was female. While a few hundred women could hold down jobs as domestic servants, other areas of employment previously available to women were closed down.[21] Beer-brewing rapidly evolved as the single main economic alternative to the absence of urban female employment opportunities. The economic marginalisation of women was reflected by the provision of only 250 beds for females in the Native Women's Hostel.[22] Similarly, only 120 houses were provided for African families in addition to temporary married quarters in the Depot Rd. location. Only those who had been 'carefully combed as to [their] respectability and genuineness', as one local official put it, gained admittance to such housing. These measured concessions to the urban African household were granted against the backdrop of the continuous expulsion of African women in terms of the Urban Areas Act. The convenient refusal to recognise the emergence of urban households and the common-law marriages of Durban's labouring poor had important consequences for the geography of family settlement. By 1925 over 22 000 Africans had settled in the peri-urban areas. At least three quarters of this population was integrated into households.[23] At a time when it was estimated that £8 was necessary for the monthly subsistence of a

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[21] For example, by 1926 the rise of white- and Indian-owned laundries had effectively marginalised African washerwomen. See *Mayor's Minute*, 1926, p.318.

[22] For women and illicit brewing, see CAD, Native Economic Commission, 1930-2 (hereafter NEC), Minutes of Evidence, p.6372, (Mrs Sililo). Durban's lack of family housing was harshly criticised by liberal bodies such as the Joint Councils, see p.6377, (Durban Joint Council).

[23] NA, TCF, 48, 467, *Report of Health Committee of the Durban Joint Council of Europeans and Natives*, 1925. In Mayville alone, half the African population of 8 000 comprised women and children.

family, it is no wonder that hundreds of women resorted to informal economic activities to supplement the low wages of men.[24]

While 20 000 Africans lived in municipal, government or private licensed barracks and rooms nearly the same number were without formal housing. Thousands of skilled and unskilled workers sought out dwellings let by Indian rackrenters in the town or settled in shacks in the peri-urban areas. It was frequently in the illegal space of these 'meanest quarters', as the Mayor put it, that workers were able to create cultural alternatives to everyday coercion and control. Shebeens, in particular, emerged as a central institution within an emerging proletarian culture. Drinking houses such as "Maria's" in Mayville[25] became favourite haunts of workers who, during non-working hours, readily exchanged the regimentation of the barrack for the relative social freedom of the shebeen. The establishment of Durban's beerhalls, and the consequent proscription of shebeens and the African drink trade, was rooted in a wider struggle aimed at modifying, and in some instances, extirpating the ways in which workers organised their daily lives. Yet these attempts by Durban's white rulers to forge a time and labour discipline appropriate to an urban capitalist social order was contested by workers. The battery of labour-coercive bye-laws and penal sanctions anticipated the delivery of a suitably sober, submissive and disciplined workforce to local employers. The uneven realisation of this goal was as much due to the persistent evasion of work registration, pass-forgery and illegal entry into town, as to the more general creation of alternative sources of meaning and values by workers.

The experience of rural dispossession and proletarian life injected new content into older modes of social organisation and cultural expression.

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[24] CAD, NEC, Minutes of Evidence, p.6520, (J. Ngcobo and D.L. Bopela).

[25] Interview by P.la Hausse and R.Mapanga with F. Zondi, Maqadini, 3 Sept.1986.

Amalaita gangs, for example, had their roots in the social solidarities of a pre-industrial past. In the town, however, they provided a basis for novel migrant worker support networks and embodied patterns of ritual moulded by the experience of labour and penal discipline. Noted for their fondness of mouth-organs and fighting sticks (*amashiza*), many "houseboys" organised themselves into *amalaita* gangs, each of which established zones of informal control throughout the town. These gangs of domestic servants displayed a degree of organisation and employed a language of symbolic communication (evident, for example, in the subtle variations in different gangs' dress)[26] which was lost on magistrates intent on securing Durban's streets from the 'turbulence of the native labourer'.

The magistrate and the policeman loomed large in the continual struggle over the ways in which Africans sought to give expressive content to their collective experience of urban life. The most common official response to the aggressive self-assertion and petty theft of the *amalaita* was birching.[27] The prohibition of the carrying of sticks by workers,[28] together with the arrest of youths found playing mouth-organs in the street were also measures aimed at depriving workers of the rituals and symbols associated with dangerous patterns of behaviour. As the custodians of industrial labour-discipline, magistrates could also impose prison sentences on those found selling or smoking dagga, yet the consumption of this drug remained endemic amongst those engaged in manual work. In a town where a red-trimmed calico uniform attempted to impose a rigid identity on domestic servants and where African women found wearing "European" clothes could be arrested as prostitutes by young white policemen, the language of dress could assume an alternative symbolic power. The *abaqhafi* signalled their presence in the streets through their dress:

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[26] Interview with Kumalo and Tshabalala.

[27] NA, Durban Criminal Records (hereafter DCR), Case heard 3 Jan.1916.

[28] NA, TCF, 103, 467B, Amendment of General Bye-Law No. 71.

wide-open shirts, coloured scarves, large "cowboy" hats and either Oxford bags or pants tied just below the knee. Neither educated nor Christian, the *abaqhafi* rejected traditions of chiefly authority and might be included in the ranks of the newly-proletarianised worker arrested for playing mouth-organs or guitars in the streets.[29] It is hardly surprising that the ravages of colonisation were productive of more defensive cultural responses amongst workers. For example, the numbers of the *isihabahaba*, (groups of workers who developed patterns of homosexual behaviour and styles of female dress) were reportedly on the increase by the second decade of the century. The tightly knit organisation of the *isihabahaba* provided a section of workers with an alternative form of social security. In a similar way the processes of innovation which produced *ngoma* dance served to cement older social ties, such as kinship, amongst workers in an otherwise hostile environment.

The sustained attempts to eradicate these potentially subversive cultural formations and to seperate the "dangerous classes" from labourers, foundered not least because it was often precisely the hard-working domestic servant or dockworker who subsribed to these alternative patterns of meaning. This struggle was as much over space as it was over forms of culture. Private barracks, for example, could become a 'living hell' characterised by 'dancing, chanting, whooping and blasts from weird instruments'. Moreover, while some white observers noted the danger of socially undifferentiated housing, processes of class formation outstripped the provision of housing for the 'best elements among the Native community'. Throughout the twenties the families of clerks, teachers and traders could be found holed up in the single rooms of private landlords,

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[29] A. Vilakazi, *Zulu Transformations* (Pietermaritzburg, 1965), pp.76-7. According to informants *abaqhafi* means "drinkers" or more specifically "drinkers of spirits" ('white man's liquor').

impinging on the defensive space of shebeens, prostitutes and crowded workers' quarters.[30]

This is not to say that the culture of Durban's African population was overtly political. On the contrary, the consciousness of workers was infused with notions anchored in pre-capitalist ideologies, and at times recreated imagined rights enjoyed in a collective historical past. The content of popular culture and consciousness contained backward-looking impulses which often found their most powerful expression in terms of traditional Zulu idioms, symbols and forms. *Ngoma* dance, for example, could serve to affirm the kin or clan ties of one group of workers in aggressive relationship to other workers. Inter-clan and intra-ethnic violence could also accompany these rituals. Yet in no sense was the culture and consciousness of workers fixed in a primordial universe. The experience of exploitation and labour-coercion continually wrought transformations within consciousness. The tacit consent which thousands of workers daily vested in the beerhall system by drinking municipal beer could be transformed, under particular political and economic circumstances, into a fierce refusal to drink municipal beer. It was precisely the autonomy of the beer brewer, the self-assertion of the *amalaita*, and the restlessness of the *abaqhafi* which carried with them the potential for mobilisation along political lines.

The observation by Durban's Mayor of the 'steady concentration of the masses'[31] in the town tended to mask these more complex processes of class formation amongst Africans. A relatively small group of Africans managed to avoid the rigours of wage labour by renting trading stalls at municipal 'native' eating houses. By 1929 over 370 cobblers, butchers, skinsellers, bicycle- and gramophone-menders, herbalists, tailors and general dealers

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[30] For example see *Report of the Proceedings of the Fifth General Missionary Conference of South Africa* (Durban, 1922), pp.73-95.

[31] *Mayor's Minute*, 1927, p.29.

offered their wares and services to Durban's labouring poor. Although a number of these traders employed black assistants, self-employment on the margins of proletarian existence was a difficult and tenuous enterprise, not least because whites regarded Africans as 'temporary sojourners' in the town. This belief found strong support within the xenophbic middle class culture of Durban's shopkeepers and merchants. African petty traders had to fight a continual battle to improve their conditions of tenure at the eating houses, were frequently ejected from their positions and continually faced competition from Indian traders.[32] Their insecure social and economic position found expression in the formation of the African Stall Owners' Association and their appeals to the ICU and the Natal Native Congress for support.[33] After 1928 many of these endemically undercapitalised entrepreneurs threw their weight behind the ICU *yase* Natal.

In the less easily illuminated interstices of Durban's labour coercive environment numerous men and women carved out an even more tenuous economic existence for themselves through a network of informal and illegal activities such as prostitution, beer-brewing, dagga-selling, the unlicensed hawking of second-hand clothes and medicines. For some, economic subsistence was squeezed out of the newly-proletarianized through forms of racketeering such as rigged gambling games or the sale of love-potions with the help of female accomplices.[34] Economic marginality defined a way of life which few of these individuals could hope to transcend. Together with the unemployed and unemployable they lived on the outer, and frequently criminal, fringes of the urban social order.[35]

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[32] UNISA, ICU Microfilm, 1, Regulations for the Management and Control of Municipal Native Eating Houses; and A. Mtembu and 16 others to Manager, Municipal NAD, 13 Sept.1929.

[33] See, for example, NA, TCF, 43, 315, Petition of Native Stall Owners' Association, 1 Dec.1925.

[34] Interview with Kumalo and Tshabalala.

[35] During a sixth month period in 1926, 5819 Africans 'mostly from other

By and large Champion's observation that there were 'no important [African] businesses when I arrived in Durban' was true of Durban during the late twenties.[36] It should not pass unnoticed, however, that for a small group of traders who were able to take out shopkeepers' licences the profits from their business could be handsome. C. Ngcobo and E. Mngadi's Abantu Supply Butchery, for example, sold meat to Durban's poorer whites and incurred the wrath of white butchers whose prices they undercut.[37] Similarly, a handful of African-run eating houses such as "Dube's", "Cele's" and "Cili's" secured their owners a relatively comfortable position within the ranks of Durban's black middle class. Taxi owners, too, could expect good returns from their initial outlay of capital. By 1930 their could have been at least thirty African-owned taxis in the town. In general terms, those blacks who occupied the upper reaches of a small and frequently threatened middle class, found their political home in the Natal Branch of the ANC, the Natal Native Congress.

The retreat of the Natal Congress movement into a preoccupation with issues pertinent to a small *kholwa* and propertied elite was to become particularly evident after 1924.[38] It was during this period that a radicalised section of the NNC under J.T. Gumede split from the more conservative section led by Rev. John Dube, a prominent landowner and proprietor of the Durban-based newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal*. Yet in a society where racial and class oppression were so interwoven, the members

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provinces' were expelled from Durban under the Vagrancy Bye-laws. See NA, TCF, 48, 467, Chief Constable to T.C., 1 April 1926.

[36] UNISA, Champion Papers, Box 1, 2.2.2., Interview by M.W. Swanson with A.W.G. Champion.

[37] See UNISA, ICU Microfilm, 2, Points put forward by Deputation from Borough Market Stallholders, 18 Nov.1929.

[38] There was a moment when Congress leaders, such as John Dube, were more actively attempting to mobilise a wider support-base. By the later twenties, however, increasing class differentiation amongst Africans made this strategy untenable. For a recent perceptive study, see S. Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa* (Johannesburg,1986), pp.42-73.

of Durban's small NNC elite were, in many ways, part of a stunted and repressed black middle class, who were unable to give full expression to their shared aspirations and values.[39] At a NNC meeting in 1928 J.R. Msimang, a wealthy general agent and usurer, captured this tension nicely when he reportedly:

> wanted to know why the exempted Native was not 'dipped'. Was he not a Native? Did not the exempted Native more often than otherwise live in the same room as the 'raw' Native who was classed as the louse-carrying being [?][40]

In Durban the demand for differential treatment, in particular the establishment of housing for 'better class' Africans, found a central place on the generally parochial NNC agenda. Moreover, the idiom of NNC-based protest was, as government officials were quick to note, 'more on the lines of native custom' and always presented to the 'proper appointed authority'. Not surprisingly, more radical ICU leaders derided NNC members as *Ama-respectables* while ICU rank-and-file sometimes forcibly closed Congress meetings. Such experiences confirmed the distance between the NNC and the emergent urban underclasses, a dissilience which Dube's journalism did little to heal.[41]

Union Leadership: Rural Refugees and Radical Artisans.

At the level of everyday political struggles the relationship between these loosely defined social groups was to assume a remarkably intractable character. The ravages of the Pact Government's "civilised labour policy", spearheaded by the Industrial Conciliation Act (1924) and the establishment of the Wages Board (1925), were keenly felt by black South

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[39] Cf. P. Bonner's seminal study 'The Transvaal Native Congress, 1917-1920: the radicalisation of the black petty bourgeoisie on the Rand' *in* S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (London,1982).

[40] Central Archives Depot, Pretoria (hereafter CAD), Secretary of Justice Files (hereafter JUS), 920, 1/18/26, 16, Det. Sergt. Arnold to Inspector(CID), 17 May 1928. Most NNC members were exempted, a "privilege" accorded to very few Africans in Natal. It is unlikely that the number of NNC members in Durban exceeded 300.

[41] See *Ilanga lase Natal*, 19 August 1927 for criticism of the ICU and its constituency.

Africans. In Durban, African skilled workers, artisans, clerks and teachers, amongst others, complained of being 'ousted from a share in various works in the Union'.[42] As the size of the new white petty bourgeoisie rapidly expanded after 1924, the threat of being edged down the short stairwell into the ranks of the labouring poor became increasingly real for those Africans in the lower reaches of the middle classes. Indeed, it was from the ranks of, in Champion's words, a 'disappointed class' of blacks that the ICU *yase* Natal tended to find its leadership.[43] J.H. London, for example, became Branch Secretary of the ICU in Durban after being 'discharged by Europeans who would no longer work with a Kaffir' and also after having given critical evidence to the Wages Board.[44] The shared sense of social and economic vulnerability is captured in a description of James Ngcobo, a member of the ICU *yase* Natal Governing Body, as 'the last pillar that was stripped by the Krantzkop Dutch, until he remained a beam without a brick'.[45] Jacob Mkize, ensconced in the lower levels of the Union's leadership would have spoken for more than one of his colleagues when he claimed 'there is no respect for skilled work in Durban'.[46]

The majority of ICU *yase* Natal leaders had, prior to their entry into the Union, skills which became increasingly devalued during the twenties. James Ngcobo was a builder and a painter as was Hamilton Msomi, a member

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[42] NA, TCF, 103, 467, Pamphlet entitled 'Native Protest', c.Sept.1924.

[43] See UNISA, ICU-Microfilm, 4, Champion to J. Astor, 7 March 1935. Bradford's discussion of the nature of the national ICU leadership is illuminating. See 'The ICU', Chapter 2.

[44] CAD, Native affairs Department (hereafter NTS), 7606, 49/328, Part I, Translation of *Igazi ne Zinyembezi*. Champion referred to London as a 'victim of [the] white labour policy', see UNISA, Champion Papers, Interview with Champion. It is difficult to document the lives of the lesser-known (and less-recognised) office-holders of the ICU in Durban, of which there were at least 60 between 1928 and 1930.

[45] CAD, NTS, 7214, 49/328, Part I, Translation of *Igazi*.

[46] UNISA, ICU Microfilm, 3, Report on a meeting called by Native Advisory Board members, 11 March 1930; and Bradford, 'The ICU', pp.104-14.

of the ICU *yase* Natal Committee. Both Frances Maqwebu, Assistant Chairman of the ICU *yase* Natal Standing Committee and Jim London worked as printers. As a teacher who was disillusioned with a profession whose members' salaries frequently compared unfavourably with mine workers' wages, Bertha Mkize became a tailor prior to joining the Union, while Champion and Abel Ngcobo had had long experience as clerks. Similarly, J.J. Macebo, Chairman of the Union's Governing Body, made the difficult transition from harness-maker to clerk during the 1920s.[47] If these leaders lacked anything, then, it was an unproblematic bourgeois identity. Charles Kumalo, a garage worker during the 1920s, recalls that what seperated ICU leaders from workers was their ability to survive by their wits.[48] Yet not all ICU officials fell to one side of the mental/manual divide. David Sitshe, a member of the ICU *yase* Natal executive, was a semi-literate blacksmith's hand, and later a trader, while the illiterate Sam Mabaleka coupled his activities on the Union's Committee with manual labour at the Point. If Congress leaders ever needed confirmation of the "unrespectable" nature of the ICU leadership they could find it in two early organisers, A.P. Maduna and Sam Dunn, both of whom had had convictions for theft.[49] Moreover, J.A. Duiker, one of Champion's chief "lieutenants", had a string of convictions for theft in the Free State town of Lindley where he had been fired from his job as an interpreter prior to his arrival in Durban in 1924. Duiker might well have the Chief Constable with his model when he claimed that 'the ICU has no masters; in fact, quite half is made up of the riff-raff of the Union'.[50] Certainly, Duiker and J.H. London, both

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[47] NA, CNC, 210A,913/1915; CAD, NTS, 7214, 56/326, Part I, Det. Sergt. Arnold to Officer(CID), 6 Sept.1929. For further information on Mkize, see UNISA, Interview by T. Couzens *et al* with B. Mkize, 4 August 1979. For Champion's early life, see R. Dhlomo's biography in M.W. Swanson (ed.), *The Views of Mahlathi* (Pietermaritzburg,1982), pp.6-17.

[48] Interview with Kumalo and Tshabalala.

[49] Both Dunn and Maduna had been forced out of the Union by the end of 1927. See Wickins, *The ICU of Africa*, pp.145-49; and Bradford, 'The ICU', p.114.

[50] NA, Commission Evidence, p.251 (Chief Constable Alexander).

of whom had served in the South African Native Contingent, helped to inject the ICU *yase* Natal with the bitter-edged radicalism of the "returned soldier".[51]

The lower middle class leadership of the ICU *yase* Natal was, in a variety of ways, well placed to identify downwards with Durban's black workforce in much the same way as the independent craftsmen of early industrial Europe had become 'ideologues of the labouring poor'.[52] It is likely, too, that the hardships of rural organisation which a surprising number of Durban's Union Officials had experienced,[53] even if they were at times cushioned by the comfort of a Buick, made them sensitive to the demands and experiences of Durban's migrant workforce.

In other important ways the social backgrounds of Durban's ICU *yase* Natal officials potentially distanced them from their constituency. One contemporary observer noted that Champion 'belong[ed] by birth to the category of landed proprietors in Natal'.[54] Not only was Champion, like a number of officials in the ICU *yase* Natal, an exempted African, but he had also inherited land at Groutville. Certainly there is extensive evidence to cast Champion into the mould of 'city boss' or upwardly mobile urban entrepeneur.[55] Even so, it is likely that during the later twenties

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[51] Dunn had also served in the army. For a discussion of the subsequent political impact of black war veterans, see B.Willan, 'The South African Native Contingent, 1916-1918', *Journal of African History*, Vol.19, No.1, 1978; and G.A. Pirio, 'The Role of Garveyism in the Making of the Southern African Working Classes and Namibian Nationalism', paper presented at the SSRC Joint Committee on African Studies Conference, New York, 1982.

[52] Cf. E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Political Shoemakers', *Past and Present*, No.89, 1980, p.87.

[53] These included J. London, Bertha Mkize, Hamilton Msomi, Abel Ngcobo, J. Ngcobo, George Conjwa, D.Sitshe and Hilda Jackson.

[54] NA, Commission Evidence, p.305 (R.H. Arnold).

[55] See Swanson, *Views of Mahlathi*, pp.xxiii-xxv; and Marks, *Ambiguities of Dependence* p.101. Marks' study of Champion appeared when the final draft of this paper was being completed.

men like Champion found it increasingly difficult to maintain a secure economic base in the countryside, and to avoid the ranks of wage-earners. After selling his *appanage* in 1927 Champion came to increasingly rely on the ICU itself for his source of income. As Detective Arnold noted: 'if the ICU ceased to function tomorrow [Champion] would have to work pretty hard to make a living'.[56] For example, Macebo, as the third son of a Groutville farmer who owned 15 acres of land, abandoned the hope of retaining access to a rural income and sought work in Durban. Jim London, despite being the son of a wealthy landowner at Italeni, came to depend on work as a compositor and then as a compound *induna* in Durban for his income. If it was as refugees from the narrowing economic horizons of rural life that some of the key ICU *yase* Natal leaders entered Durban, it was often as frustrated semi-skilled and skilled wage-earners that they entered the Union.

The salaried positions of ICU *yase* Natal Officials, represented one way of retaining a brittle economic independence. As J.T. Gumede's son clearly recalled: 'at the rate at which teachers were paid it was better to be a clerk [in the ICU]'.[57] An ICU official, depending on the state of Union funds, could earn at least £8 a month. In 1929 Champion himself was drawing a relatively handsome salary of £20 a month.[58] There were a variety of other ways in which ICU organisers in Durban could harness the Union to recoup for themselves more secure positions within the ranks of the middle classes. The clearest example of this attempt on the part of Durban Union leaders to further particular class interests is to be

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[56] NA, Commission Evidence, p.289 (R.H. Arnold). There were four heirs to land at New Guelderland which Champion sold for £600. Champion held at least eight different jobs before becoming an ICU official. See Bradford, 'The ICU', pp.104-05, 111. For an example of the attempts of some ICU officials to retain their base in rural areas, see UNISA, ICU Microfilm, 4, Champion to Dube, 28 April 1930.

[57] Interview by P.la Hausse with A. Gumede, Durban, 16 April 1986.

[58] UW, Champion Papers, Bc1, Minutes of the Governing Body of the ICU yase Natal, 27 June 1928; and NA, Commission Evidence, p.289 (R.H. Arnold).

found in the establishment of the All African Co-operative Society in 1927. The Co-operative Society, described as the 'greatest step to economic emancipation of the African Workers',[59] attempted to attract £1 subscriptions from workers. Despite its elaborate regulations by June 1928 the Society, having been incorporated into the ICU *yase* Natal, had only 400 subscriptions and operated under the name of the Star Clothing and Shirt Factory. This enterprise provided work for over fifty men and women, including Bertha Mkize and her brother (one of Durban's first African tailors), who were supplied with an outlet for their downgraded skills.[60] There was clearly good reason, then, for this narrowing of the Society's horizons. It is small wonder that the ideology of this frustrated petty bourgeoisie should have taken the form of economic nationalism which owed more than a little to Garveyist notions of black self-improvement. Caleb Mtshali, for example, exhorted workers at a mass meeting to:

> be independent, commence small stores yourselves, and make it a strict rule to deal no where but from your own colour ... we have one sound trading concern now, that is a clothing factory ... we will model our plans on the system of the American Negroes.[61]

The establishment of the African Workers' Club by Champion in 1925 was, in spite of its name, inspired by the desire to create a sense of community amongst an aspirant African middle class. Certainly the philosophy behind the Club - 'Ask for what you want, Take what you can get, Use what you have' - would have struck a chord amongst its members who were drawn predominantly from the ranks of the 'shoemakers, bicycle menders and stall holders'.[62]

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[59] UNISA, ICU Microfilm, 2, R.Tshabalala to all Provincial and Branch Secretaries, 27 Oct.1927.

[60] See UNISA, ICU Microfilm, 5, Regulations of the All African Co-operative Society Ltd. Also see CAD, JUS, 920, 1/18/26, 16, R.H. Arnold to CID, 4 June 1928; and Interview with Bertha Mkize.

[61] CAD, JUS, 917, 1/18/26-sub, R.H. Arnold to CID, 6 Feb.1928.

[62] CAD, JUS, K22, Box 1,6301/29, Cowley and Cowley to T.C., 5 March 1926; UNISA, Champion Papers, Box 3, 5.1, Rules and Constitution of Natal Workers' Club, Durban. Membership of the Club was limited to 500, annual subscriptions were 2/6 while the entrance fee was also 2/6.

Whereas the first Branch Secretary came to rely on the sale of chickens to supplement his income, Champion proved more ambitious in this regard. By 1928 he had established two businesses: a general dealers store and the Natal Boot and Shoe Repairing Hospital. The name of Champion's store, *Vuka Afrika* (Africa Awake), was certainly a symbolic acknowledgement of Union officials' indebtedness to the black separatist vision of individuals such as Bishop Vernon.[63] It seems that Champion was not averse to financing these businesses, both of which collapsed in 1929, with Union funds. Furthermore, Union members were increasingly exhorted to underwrite a constellation of Union-based ventures such as the African Workers' Club and the local ICU paper, *Udibi lwase Afrika*, with subcriptions from their meagre wages. Perhaps it was the uneven reception of these appeals which encouraged more peremptory forms of Union recruitment. As Charles Kumalo recalled, organisers fostered the belief amongst the more credulous migrant workers that Union membership was a prerequisite for obtaining employment.[64] Yet high-handed leadership styles might have resonated with workers' experience of an older political culture and patterns of socialisation which assigned individuals particular places within an hierarchical social order. The generational gap between prominent Durban Unionists (many of whom had been born during the 1880s) and younger workers could have served to strengthen rather than diminish leadership's authority. Certainly Jacob Cele, a young harness-maker at the time and later Ladysmith Branch Secretary, saw nothing wrong in the fact that 'because we were juniors [in the Union] we never knew what was being discussed in the Cabinet'.[65] Undemocratic leadership styles did, however, have important implications for the Union in wider political

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[63] For the impact of black separatist thought on Champion see UW, African Studies Institute (hereafter ASI), Autobiography of Champion (ms.), p.53.

[64] Interview with Kumalo and Tshabalala.

[65] Interview by P.la Hausse with Jacob Cele, KwaMashu, 27 Aug.1986.

terms.[66] Accusations of corruption, initially directed at Sam Dunn, led to Champion's suspension in 1927 and the secession of the Natal ICU in 1928.[67] It is hardly surprising, then, that the relationship between Union leaders and their constituency was mutable and dynamic. For example, only a few months prior to secession workers had attempted to force the Union into organising a general strike, but had been told by leadership to 'approach the proper authorities'.[68] Worker support for the Union thus remained conditional. Political action was to test this support to the full.

Secession: the Creation of a "Zulu" Trade Union.

During the first part of 1928 the future of the ICU in Natal looked anything but optimistic. In the countryside the Union suffered setbacks at the hands of the state and white farmers while a number of organisers found themselves without jobs, either because of accusations of corruption or because pleas for salaries from the Durban headquarters went unheeded.[69] In Durban itself, in the absence of funds and faced with large debts, officials were living hand to mouth. Champion sold *Vuka Afrika* and membership apparently declined. Yet ironically Champion's suspension in April 1928 seems to have been greeted with anger and a sense of betrayal by many workers in Durban. Even in Johannesburg 'hundreds of Zulus ...

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[66] Champion had bought land in the name of the African Workers' Club. The chaotic state of ICU finances emerged after an ex-ICU member George Lenono published a pamphlet entitled *The ICU Funds*. Champion unsuccessfully sued him for libel. See CAD, JUS, K22, Box 2, Judgement of Justice Tatham in case of Champion vs Lenono, 1 Dec.1927. Dunn was subsequently sentenced to a fine of £150 or 12 months hard labour in June 1928.

[67] Peculation and lax book-keeping, however, were not solely responsible for the financial problems of the branch. By July 1928 Cowley and Cowley, the Union's lawyers, were owed £3000. Kadalie, who had relied heavily on the substantial revenue generated by the Durban Branch, called a halt to 'the spending of funds on legal advice.'

[68] CAD, JUS, 917, 1/18/26, 8, R.H. Arnold to CID, 5 May 1927. Dockworkers had taken independent stike action in 1926 and 1927. See D.Hemson, 'Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dockworkers of Durban', Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, 1979, pp.202-05.

[69] See CAD, JUS, 920, 1/18/26, 16, R.H. Arnold to CID, 14 May 1928.

handed in their tickets and refused to have anything further to do with the Organisation'.[70] In an impressive show of defiance the ICU in Durban organised a rally on 5 May 1928. Over 2400 of the several thousand men and women who attended were attired in ICU-manufactured khaki uniforms, red-twill tunics or sported exuberant red sashes and rosettes. In a display notable for its capacity to syncretise "idioms of the masters" with those of an heroic Zulu past, the members of this parade marched in military formation, under 'duly appointed leaders', through the streets of Durban.[71]

In a number of ways the parades, more or less timed to coincide with May Day, capture the underlying significance of the Natal ICU's secession a few weeks later. In a region of South Africa where the disbanding of the *amabutho* in the late nineteenth century and the Bambatha rebellion of 1906, were both firmly embedded in popular consciousness, it is not surprising that ethnic and racial identity in Durban were closely interwoven. While it is debatable whether the negligible successes of the first ICU Natal Provincial Secretary, the Xhosa-speaking A.P. Maduna, can be ascribed to the fact of his birth, there is no doubt that he was transferred from Durban for this reason.[72] Both David Sitshe and Champion were well known for their capacity to deliver rousing speeches in the Zulu language while the coloured organiser Sam Dunn was popularly known as *Zulu kwa Malandela*,'for he always used this expression when in the course of his great oratory he appealed to the inner feelings of the Zulu people'.[73] In a town where members of *amalaita* gangs sometimes adorned themselves with the *umshokobezi* (a decoration worn by rebels in 1906) where *utshwala*

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[70] CAD, NTS, 7214, 56/326, 1, R.H. Arnold to CID, 24 May 1928; and UNISA, ICU Microfilm, 3, Batty to Champion, 18 May 1928.

[71] Cf. T.Ranger's discussion of the Beni *ngoma's* in *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970* (London,1970).

[72] C. Kadalie, *My Life and the ICU* (London,1975), p.162

[73] Kadalie, *My Life*, p.96; and Bradford, 'The ICU', p.165. Interview with Cele.

was self-consciously referred to as "Zulu beer" and where some Zulu workers were prepared to countenance the dipping of Pondo-speakers, but not themselves,[74] Dunn's manipulation of his own identity in relation to the past was not inappropriate.

Clearly, the Union leadership helped to mobilize and channel the ethnic identity of migrant workers in Durban. The Zulu articles in *Udibi lwase Afrika* frequently appealed to a sense of Zulu nationhood, especially where those derided in its pages were non-Zulu speakers.[75] The formation of the Independent ICU (IICU) in early 1929 was part of a broader process of fragmentation in the national Union. In Durban, however, the establishment of an IICU Branch was also precipitated by local conditions of struggle. It appears that men such as George Lenono, resentful of being labelled 'foreigners',[76] retreated to the outskirts of the town and formed a small, predominantly Basotho Branch of the IICU. If Champion's suspension suggested a form of betrayal of Zulu-speaking workers by 'foreign natives', then the founding of the ICU *yase* Natal was a formal manifestation of the relative autonomy of local patterns of opposition at a time when regional political economies underpinned the receptivity of the underclasses to exclusivist appeals.

Despite the impact of capitalism in the countryside of Natal and Zululand, traditional structures of authority remained relatively intact. Not surprisingly, particularist loyalties were in some ways more immediately available for politicisation than were wider nationalist sentiments. In order to carve out its constituency - to embed itself in popular assumptions - the Union's leadership had to develop a language resonant with

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[74] Interview by P. la Hausse with C.Kumalo, KwaMashu, 15 April 1986.

[75] See, for example, *Udibi lwase Afrika*, June 1927.

[76] NA, Commission Evidence, p.399 (A.W.G. Champion); and *Ilanga lase Natal*, 9 March 1928, St.L. Plaatje to Editor.

Durban's labouring classes.[77] This process came to involve a conscious mobilisation of traditionalism, its adaptation to new purposes and the manipulation of a particular view of the past. Yet if Zulu nationalism came to represent an increasingly important ideological tendency within the Union, it was tempered by a range of other ideological elements. ICU officials themselves carried a rich diversity of ideological freight into the Union. These ranged from Garveyism, infused with anti-white, anti-Indian and anti-clerical ideas, through to a broader African nationalism and, in some instances, socialism. These discrete ideological elements were moulded into a remarkably syncretic ideology of popular protest, overlaid with Zulu nationalism and continually modified by pre-capitalist ideologies and the less structured ideas of Durban's labouring poor.

For most of 1928 the main concern of the ICU *yase* Natal leadership was to keep the Union afloat and to defend itself, sometimes violently, against the "meddling" of the National ICU organisers in its affairs. Having been forced to abandon its tactics of litigation due to financial constraints, the leaders reverted to petitioning the Town Council. These petitions, in the main, were concerned with the restrictions on petty trade and took precedence over the demands of workers for higher wages and improved living conditions, even though Champion had guaranteed thousands of workers in May that within three months of their joining the new Union they would be 'getting better wages'.[78] Towards the end of 1928 Detective Arnold, a seasoned observer of ICU activities in the town, could claim with confidence that the ICU *yase* Natal was a 'spent force' which

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[77] For a suggestive study of language and class consciousness, see Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class - Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982*, (Cambridge,1983), pp.90-178.

[78] CAD, JUS, K22, Box 1, 6301/29, Memorandum submitted by the Representatives of the ICU yase Natal to the Mayor, 19 September 1928; and JUS, 920, 1/18/26, 17, Det. Sergt. Arnold to Inspector(CID), 22 May 1928.

would 'never recover its former power'.[79] Two developments, however, served to significantly alter the position of the Union in the town. The first was the decision of the Sydenham Local Administration and Health Board to erect a beerhall in its peri-urban area of jurisdiction. The second was the arrival of Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) organisers in Durban in January 1929.

The establishment of a branch of the CPSA in Durban by S.P. Bunting and Douglas Wolton at the beginning of 1929 coincided with the attempts of the Party to implement a political programme which called for a "South African Native Republic" to be achieved through a national democratic revolution.[80] In a series of mass meetings, some of which were held under the auspices of the ICU *yase* Natal, the white Party organisers articulated the United Front politics which underlay the "Native Republic" programme.[81] Their fiery speeches undoubtedly found some resonance with local idioms of resistance, as the large numbers of workers who attended their meetings suggest. The response of the ICU *yase* Natal to the CPSA was initially accommodating. While Champion and Union officials had frequent dealings with Party organisers the leader of the ICU *yase* Natal publicly denigrated the Communist Party since he had 'never held with white men leading [blacks]'. Perhaps more to the point was Champion's claim, a short while later, that he repudiated Communism on the grounds that it would dispossess 'men like myself who hold landed properties'.[82]

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[79] Arnold was a close confidant of Champion who saw it as his task to 'worm' his way into the Union in order to destroy it. He had allegedly drawn up the Constitution of the ICU yase Natal. See NA, Commission Evidence, p.441 (A.F. Batty).

[80] By 1928 the membership of the CPSA was predominantly black. See H.J. and R.E. Simons, *Class and Colour*, pp.407-09. For an examination of the program, see M. Legassick, 'Class and Nationalism in South African Protest: The South African Communist Party and the Native Republic, 1928-34', Syracuse University, 1973; and B. Bunting, *Moses Kotane - South African Revolutionary* (London,1975), pp.14-42.

[81] See CAD, JUS, 922, 1/18/26, 23, Constable Hobbs to CID, 18 Feb.1929; and R.H. Arnold to CID, 22 Jan.1929.

[82] NA, Commission Evidence, p.337-8 (A.W.G. Champion).

The reservations which Champion expressed were not wholly shared by other Union leaders and rank-and-file. At least one member of the ICU *yase* Natal's governing body joined the Party along with other Union members. The concerted attempts to spread the Party message to dock and railway workers was greeted with alarm by local police informers, one of whom noted that 'it is open talk that Natives will join up in the Communist Movement, in their hundreds'.[83] Whether this happened is not clear from the evidence but there is little doubt that the presence of the CPSA in Durban served to lay the ground for greater popular radicalism during 1929. In a situation where there was no necessary correlation between the interests of ICU *yase* Natal leadership and those whom they claimed to represent it is likely that the activities of Party organisers encouraged increasing downward identification by this leadership with rank-and-file. In many ways the economic hardships experienced by most Africans in Durban during the late twenties gave impetus to the process.

The peri-urban areas of Durban supported increasing numbers of landless Africans. In Sydenham, where at least 10 000 Africans had settled, eviction by local authority proved 'an impossible task'. The majority of African male inhabitants in this area worked in Durban itself while an increasing number of women brewed *isitshimiyane* to supplement household incomes. It was in this area that the Local Health Board obtained permission to erect a beerhall in March 1929. This move would effectively enforce prohibition in the area and pave the way for the destruction of a resilient shebeen trade. The ICU *yase* Natal was approached by local inhabitants to assist in opposing the erection of the beerhall. In the first formal protest Champion wrote to the Board on behalf of the 'voiceless members of our Community' stating objections to 'attempts to obtain monies from the low paid natives for the purposes of financing

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[83] CAD, JUS, 922, 1/18/26, 23, R.H. Arnold to CID, 20 Feb.1929. Membership of the Party at this time was probably not more than 100.

their funds for [the Board's] advancement.'[84] Numerous meetings in Sydenham during March indicated the level of grassroots opposition to the beerhall. On successive Sundays in May groups of Africans numbering between 300 and 800 marched from the ICU Hall in Durban to these meetings. A witness of one of these marches reported that:

> They were an organised body - headed by a brass band preceded by a native in Highland costume - a kilt. They had a Union Jack and a red flag with a hammer and sickle on it ... Many of them were dressed in uniform and carried sticks in military positions.[85]

This richly syncretic and subversive language of protest came increasingly to signal the Union's public presence in the town.

The emergence of these particular organisational forms was, in some ways, a response to a situation where blacks did not control the formal means for expressing their aspirations. Indeed, the Union developed alternative popular institutions which became pivotal in mobilising a worker constituency. The ICU dancehall, which survived a sustained official campaign of proscription, was a central mechanism in the creation a common sense of identity amongst racially-oppressed workers. The physical distance between the Union's open-air meetings and its dancehall was short. Union demagogues made every effort to transfer and consolidate their political message in the cultural arena provided by the dancehall. Marching *ngoma* troupes, clad in *umutshas* and beads, could lead hundreds of workers from Durban's "Hyde Park', as Champion put it, to the ICU dancehall, singing *amahubo lamabutho* (regimental anthems) *en route*. Song could also be used to express collective experiences and provide them with an explicitly political frame of reference. One song performed by *ngoma* dancers, most of whom were domestic servants, was recorded as follows:

> Who has taken our country from us?
> Who has taken it?
> Come out! Let us fight!

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[84] NA, Commission Evidence, p.25 (C.W. Lewis).

[85] NA, Riots Commission, Minutes of Evidence, p.24 (C.W. Lewis).

The land was ours. Now it is taken.[86]

Song and dance could also act as a vehicle for the creation of new identities and meanings in the town. The emergence of a new performance style known as *ingom' ebusuku* or *isicatamiya* was the result of complex processes of innovation. Although this style was rooted in the traditional idiom of wedding songs, migrant workers also appropriated elements from black mission choirs to create a remarkably syncretic song and dance style .[87] While utilising traditional stylistic elements, *ingom' ebusuku* illustrates the ways in which an emerging working class sought to create a novel framework of values and meanings which refracted their experience of wage labour in the towns.

If rural and urban identities for the majority of workers were closely intertwined, some sections of Durban's African population gave expression to a more fiercely self-conscious urbanism. Many workers, probably outside of the ranks of barrack-dwellers, affirmed their status as urban-dwellers and differentiated themselves by wearing Oxford-bags. No doubt they were members of a social grouping which the local composer, Reuben Caluza, celebrated in one of his songs, part of which ran:

Put on Oxford Bags like a modern man.
Men dressed in Oxford Bags are always confident like modern men and walk like great men.
There are young men and women who misbehave and who no longer return home.[88]

The Union's own Brass Band and Choir also symbolised the emergence of more self-conscious urban identities. Ragtime music, too, might have had a particular appeal amongst members of Durban's middle classes in search of cultural models appropriate to their position as an oppressed grouping. Certainly, the popular ragtime group, Dem Darkies, could expect an en-

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[86] Margery Perham recorded a rich diversity of dance forms after a visit to the ICU dance hall during this period. See *African Apprenticeship* (New York, 1974), pp.196-9.

[87] D. Coplan, *In Township Tonight!* (Johannesburg, 1985), pp.65-7.

[88] Lovedale Sol-fa Leaflets, 7C, *U Bhungca (ama Oxford bags)*. (Translation).

thusiastic response when they performed at the dancehall. Yet non-traditionalist styles simultaneously expressed and disguised emerging class distinctions. Champion's comment that he 'captured' most of the ICU membership through the Union's cultural institutions[89] is revealing not only of his attitude to workers but also of the crucial role the ICU played in providing cultural expression with a political context and thus advancing the populist message of the Union. Financially these Union-sponsored institutions were important. Their monthly income could be up to £400.[90]

The creation of cultural alternatives to white domination was not restricted to the dancehall. Deprived of a political voice, the Union created its own alternative sources of authority. *Ngoma* dance and *amalaita* gangs provide the most striking examples of the way in which popular culture in Durban was infused with the military symbols and rituals of a pre-industrial past. The sources for this militarism can also be traced to the models provided by British regiments during the Anglo-Boer War as well as to blacks' own experiences during the First World War. No doubt it was a short step from the syncretic military parades which characterised the secession, to the creation of a distinct militia by the Union. The stick- and sjambok-wielding Unity League (also known as the ICU Volunteers or Mob Crowd), welded from 150 Union members, assumed the responsibility for recruiting new members and, as Champion more ominously put it, 'carrying out justice' according 'to our own law'. An equivalent body for women, the ICU Women's Auxiliary, was also formed at this time. It, too, was organised along military lines.[91] A greater willingness to countenance violence seems to have accompanied this appropriation and reworking of Zulu and European military traditions.

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[89] UNISA, Champion Papers, Interview with Champion.

[90] CAD, NTS, 7665, 46/332, Consultation in CNC's Office, 7 Sept.1929.

[91] NA, Commission Evidence, p.285-6. (Arnold). In practice membership of these militias was unlimited.

'Bad Beer', Riots and Amalaitas.

In early May, at the instigation of the ICU *yase* Natal, the Anti-Kaffir Beer Manufacturing League was formed. The League's main aim was to oppose the 'obtaining [of] monies from the poorly paid natives' through the principle of beer monopoly.[92] 'Hostile' speeches were made in Sydenham while intoxicated protestors returning to Durban from the May meetings left a trail of assaulted motorists. In an atmosphere increasingly charged with violence, workers in Durban symbolically smashed the windows of the Point beerhall and raided the overseer's office. In late May an incident at the overcrowded Point barracks served to further heighten worker disaffection. The Compound Manager, at the instigation of a local Indian trader, ordered the cessation of the brewing of *mahewu*. The response of workers who relied on *mahewu*, either as a partial source of income or as a cheap, nutritious food, was to boycott the Indian trader's store. In addition, one worker, Mcijelwa Mnomezulu, attempted to organise a boycott of the Point beerhall. In a town where the politicisation of the issue of the municipal monopoly had become increasingly marked over the years and where there were 'rumours that a boycott would ultimately take place', the municipal NAD was quick to act.[93] A short time after being interrogated by the Deputy Manager of the municipal NAD, Mnomezulu's togt badge was confiscated along with his right to work.

The response of workers at the Point was to call for a systematic boycott of Durban's beerhalls and take the issue up with the ICU *yase* Natal as it was 'a matter which affected them all'.[94] The workers, however, found Champion less than inspiring. At a meeting on 12 June many dockworkers advocated strike action and were unanimous in their opposition to munic-

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[92] CAD, JUS, K22, Box 1, Exhibits A-BB, Document entitled Anti Kaffir Beer League, 5 May 1929.

[93] NA, Commission Evidence, p.46 (T.J. Chester). As early as 1926 Gumede's section of the Natal Congress movement had called for a boycott of beerhalls.

[94] NA, Commission Evidence, p.424 (M. Mnomezulu).

ipal *utshwala*. For his part Champion was neutral on the beer issue and was actively opposed to the proposed strike action since, as he explained to the workers, it was 'not a matter between employers and themselves'.[95] On the following day, however, at a meeting in the ICU hall, the League under the chairmanship of J.H. London, endorsed the beer boycott. In the face of unyielding togt worker militancy Champion and the Union's leadership 'pledged to support' African workers in organising the boycott. As Champion later claimed: 'I did not favour the boycott ... Subsequently I took advantage of [it]'.[96]

In some ways the municipal beer monopoly was a singularly appropriate target for the Union's lower middle class leadership since it was a particularly striking example of the more general marginalisation of small black capitalist enterprise in Durban.[97] Yet Champion's initial attempts to marshal support for the boycott by employing Christian temperance ideology, espoused by a number of black nationalists at the time, proved a dramatic failure. At one meeting he was 'extricated with some difficulty from an angered audience which resented the idea of their beer being done away with altogether'.[98] For the majority of workers the brewing of beer was both a traditional and 'national right' of which women, in particular, had been deprived. The assertion that beer brewing was one amongst many traditional rights which had been enjoyed in a collective historical past, fused with ideas which held that municipal beer 'burned one's insides' because it was "doctored" and brewed by ignorant whites.[99] These ideas, compounded of folklore, myth and daily

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[95] NA, Commission Evidence, p.350 (A.W.G. Champion).

[96] NA, Commission Evidence, p.381 (A.W.G. Champion).

[97] In 1916 Durban's African elite had called for the beer monopoly to be floated into a company in which blacks could take out shares.

[98] CAD, NTS, 7665, 46/332, CNC to SNA, 31 Aug.1929.

[99] See, for example, *Natal Advertiser*, 5 July 1929.

[100] See G. Rude, *Ideology and Popular Protest* (London,1980).

experience,[100] were to underpin the extensive boycott. The strength of these ideas at the time were recalled by one woman who witnessed the arrival and departure of the ICU in the countryside:

> The old people believed that things would come alright. They suffered from nostalgia. They lived in the past glory of their forefathers.[101]

Furthermore, the municipal monopoly was increasingly linked to low wages, deteriorating living conditions and the everyday regimentation of workers. This was to emerge clearly when J.H. London and a deputation of eleven dockworkers, dressed in coal-heavers clothes, presented a list of workers' grievances to the municipal NAD in mid-June.[102] Against a background of violence in which up to one thousand strong beerhall pickets clashed with police, the ICU *yase* Natal held a meeting at Cartwrights' Flats, attended by over 5 000 blacks.[103] The first to speak was Champion:

> They say that this trouble was started by the ICU ... but from today the ICU is taking up the burden of the togt boys - and are willing to die with them ... We should get money in Durban and go and build homes outside ... Down with beer! (Loud cheers).

J.T. Gumede, the radical President of the ANC who was in Durban during May and June, also spoke at the meeting. His speech, infused with the ideas of the CPSA's Native Republic program, served to underline rank-and-file militancy:

> The ICU has taken the place of the Congress [NNC] absolutely in Natal and that shows that officers of the [NNC] were wrong to think they could think for other people ... Now let us combine and take our freedom ... Today the Black man and the poor White man is oppressed ...the money goes to the Capitalists ... then, work together for the National Independence of this country.

For Gumede, the struggle was as much about passes, 'unjust laws made by Hertzog' and exploitation, as about the beer monopoly and the confiscation of a togt worker's badge. Champion focused on local forms of oppression, using the Borough Police and municipal NAD as examples, and exhorted those

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[101] UW, ASI, Interview with T. Mdhlalose by V. Nkumane and H. Bradford, Vryheid, 25 Nov.1981.

[102] CAD, JUS, K22, Box 1, Exhibits A-RR, Memorandum of Togt Labourers of the Bell Street Barracks.

[103] For the speeches, see CAD, K22, Box 1, Exhibits A-RR, Const. Hobbs to CID, 20 June 1929.

present to join the Union. In most of the speeches there was an underlying suggestion of recourse to violence. Champion's claim that togt workers were 'earning a very good salary' could well have been a way of justifying his opposition to strike action but it was clearly untrue. Workers' wages remained punishingly low.

It is unlikely that Champion's "lieutenants" would have uniformly shared this opinion, least of all Sam Mabaleka and Mtshelwa Ndhlovu. Mabaleka was a worker at the Point and Ndhlovu, a key ICU representative at the docks was a railways *induna* with strong CPSA ties. If the Union's leadership was increasingly impelled towards a downward identification with Durban's labouring poor this was, not least for the Provincial Secretary, an ambiguous process. On 17 June Durban's five beerhalls were systematically picketed by stick-wielding workers and members of the Unity League. During clashes with police a white motorist was killed by the workers. Champion, in the meanwhile, secured police protection. Together with the Chief Constable and District Commandant of the South African Police (SAP) he went to the Point where he told workers 'there must be a stop to this ... your grievances will be considered by the proper authorities'.[104] This call went unheeded by workers, for a short time later it was learned that over 600 white vigilantes had besieged the ICU hall in the town. As a violation of popular consensus this act helped precipitate a violent collective response on the part of Africans. Over six thousand workers from barracks and hostels throughout the town converged on central Durban. Dockworkers, led by Ndhlovu wearing a skin cap and allegedly carrying a revolver, were heard to shout the Zulu war cry *Usuthu!* Also conspicuous were members of the Unity League dressed in khaki shirts and riding breeches.[105] The violent clashes which followed left 120 injured and 8 dead, most of whom were workers.

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[104] NA, Commission Evidence, p.229, (Chief Constable Alexander).

[105] See NA, Commission Evidence, *passim*. The Zulu war cry became an endemic slogan on occasions of militant worker assemblies. Its roots

One immediate consequence of the violence of June 1929 was the appointment of a government commission to investigate the disturbances. In his report Justice de Waal viewed workers' grievances as 'utterly devoid of any substance'. Moreover, Champion as a 'professional agitator', 'capable of much good, or of infinite mischief', had used supposed grievances to 'foment trouble'. The Commission vindicated Durban's system of native administration based on the revenue derived from the beer monopoly despite the fact that a fraction of these profits had been used for welfare or educational purposes. De Waal recommended the establishment of a location for married workers, the creation of an advisory board in terms of the Urban Areas Act and the setting aside of adequate space for recreation.[106] For his part Champion claimed that the ICU *yase* Natal would disband if a location for 'better class natives' and an advisory board were established.[107]

The Commission's agitator thesis was hardly appropriate to the realities of popular protest in Durban. The continuing ICU *yase* Natal meetings led to official fears that the position could 'become dangerous again at any moment' and the Chief Magistrate made an attempt to ban meetings under the Riotous Assemblies Act. In August, Duiker, Sitshe, Mabaleka, Gwala, Vilakazi and Macebo were sentenced to between two and three months hard labour for violating a ban which had been placed on one Union meeting.[108] By September 1929 the ICU *yase* Natal in Durban had an estimated 700 paid up members, although over 5000 workers could attend regular Union

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could be traced back over eighty years. See J. Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom* (Johannesburg,1982), p.246.

[106] Library of Parliament, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Native Riots of Durban, 29 July 1929, Annexure 133-1929.

[107] NA, Commission Evidence, p.354, (A.W.G. Champion).

[108] NA, DCR, A Court, Case heard on 28 August 1929.

meetings. Their support for the beer boycott during 1929 was unremitting.[109]

Yet patterns of organisation only partially charted by local policemen served to underpin the boycott. While opposition to municipal beer became a central motif in the speeches at Union meetings, the boycott was also secured through other, more hidden, forms of organisation. Since the turn of the century *amalaita* gangs had been a feature of Durban's social landscape.[110] Forged in the backyards of white dwellings the gangs were clearly one way in which "houseboys" confronted the colonisation and isolation of domestic service. *Amalaitas* earned their notoreity both through petty theft and inter-gang violence. Yet these street gangs could also signal out symbols of local oppression as targets for their violence, as is suggested by the running battles between the police and a gang known as the *Ngqolayomlilo* (Fiery Wagons) in 1919. Indeed, after 1925 the municipal NAD noted with concern that a new generation of *amalaitas* comprising the 'habitually idle classes' had emerged in the town.[111] It was during this period that the ICU appears to have engaged in mobilising *amalaitas*. In 1929, for example, *amalaitas* successfully closed down a NNC meeting.[112] Union meetings themselves could be postponed because work-obligations prevented domestic servants and therefore, possibly *amalaitas*, from attending. It was at the height of the boycott, however, that the degree of gang involvement in political activities was suggested.

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[109] The Chief Native Commissioner observed, 'the boycott has met with astounding results (and) has been maintained without any active picketing'. The Town Clerk noted with alarm that the boycott was continuing 'to the detriment of the Native Revenue Account'. CAD, NTS, 7665, 46/33, CNC to SNA, 31 Aug.1929; and Minutes of the Native Administration Committee (hereafter NAC), 8 Oct.1929.

[110] See, for example, NA, Police Report Book, No.6, *passim* Also cf. Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914, Volume 2, New Nineveh*(Johannesburg, 1982), pp.54-60.

[111] NA, TCF, 48, 467B, C.F.Layman to TC, 3 Nov.1925.

[112] *Ilanga lase Natal*, 5 April 1929.

Secret meetings between Champion and and gang leaders at C.D. Tusi's dancehall led one ex-gang leader to pronounce: 'I say that all the Lietas today are in league with the ICU.'[113] It is possible that the Union was mobilising networks whose initial creation can be traced back to the age regiments of rural society.[114] There can be no doubt, however, about the availability of pre-colonial military traditions in Durban for political mobilisation. Union claims that Champion was the 'head and guide' of Durban's *amalaitas*, although invoked to threaten local authority, clearly went beyond the hyperbole which could characterise Union officials' speeches.

The Women's Auxillary was also central, and more public, in moblising support for the boycott. This group of women, who armed themselves with sticks and dressed in the masculine women's fashions of the twenties, were responsible for extending the boycott to municipal beerhalls in Natal's rural towns during late 1929.[115] In Durban they were known for their uncompromising use of violence against boycott-breakers. For example, in November 1929, 25 of these women attacked workers in the Sydenham beerhall.[116] At the best of times African women experienced great difficulty in earning a living in Durban. The relatively small number of females in the town testified both to the relative success of a stringent influx control policy and to the scarcity of jobs for women. The municipal beer monopoly also denied women the right to supplement household incomes through beer brewing - an area of economic activity traditionally occupied by women. Despite the proscription of informal brewing, a

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[113] CAD, JUS, K22, Box 2, Native Unrest in Durban - Affidavits and Statements, No, 23, G. Dhlamini, 12 Nov.1929; No. 27, C.Nxaba, 12 Nov.1929; and No. 34 T. Myeza, 13 Nov.1929.

[114] The Makhanya, for example, had three regiments in existence in 1923. See D.H. Reader, *Zulu Tribe in Transition* (Manchester, 1966), pp.274-77. How widespread this was awaits further research.

[115] For these struggles, see Bradford, 'The ICU', pp.312-61.

[116] *Natal Mercury*, 6 Nov.1929.

largely female-controlled shebeen trade emerged in Durban's increasingly populous peri-urban areas.[117] With the onset of depression and further legal curbs placed on brewing,[118] there can be little doubt that women in peri-urban and rural areas found it steadily more difficult to make ends meet. The ferocity with which the Women's Auxillary attacked workers cannot, however, be simply ascribed to an assumed involvement in the shebeen trade.[119] The spending of wages by workers on municipal beer was seen as a symbolic and economic attack on the brittle integrity of the household in which women occupied a pivotal role. Inscribed within the radicalism of these women's beer protests lay a conservative impulse: an attempt to restitute imagined female roles in an older social order. The overt "masculinity" of these women, their denigration of "weak men", and their oft-expressed claims that 'the men have failed and we women will show them what we can do', were an expression of this complex articulation of radicalism and conservatism.[120] This sense of the loss and dissolution of the social solidarities of a pre-industrial past was interwoven with violent self-assertion in the present. One report of a speech by C. Ntombela, an ex-nurse and leading figure in the Natal ICU, ran as follows:

> She wanted to tell those Natives who drank at the Beer Halls [that] the day of their doom was not far distant...when...they would be 'blotted out'...she warned those dogs of persons who called themselves Natives who were selling their manhood in working for the Police that their day was at hand.[121]

If the symbolic expropriation of men's roles by these women served to underscore their differential experience of oppression, in the case of

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[117] Convictions for the possession of illicit alcohol were enormous. During a six month period in 1928 over 2792 Africans were convicted.

[118] Liquor Act, No.30 of 1928 struck particularly hard at brewing in peri-urban areas.

[119] This was the view of some government officials and Dube. See CAD, NTS, 7665, 46/332, Meeting of Minister of Native Affairs and others in CNC's Office, 6 Sept.1929.

[120] NA, TCF, 63, 467, W. North to Town Clerk, 19 Nov.1930. One leader of the Women's Auxillary, Hilda Jackson (Ma-Dhlamini), wore a uniform and was popularly known as the 'Woman in the Man'. See CAD, NTS, 7606, 49/328, I, Translation of *Igazi ne Zinyembezi*.

[121] CAD, JUS, 823, 1/18/26, 25, R.H. Arnold to CID, 27 April 1930.

some Auxillary members this usurpation extended into the sphere of their personal lives. Hilda Jackson and Bertha Mkize, two key boycott leaders, rejected female roles as mothers and wives: both were, and remained, unmarried.[122] The members of the Woman's Auxillary were prepared to match words with actions. On various occasions during 1930 a number of them were arrested for attacking men drinking in municipal beerhalls or, in the case of Jackson and Mkize, for assaulting policemen. Such actions would have, in all likelihood, found tacit support from the large numbers of women in urban and peri-urban households whose bleak struggle to channel their husbands' wages into supporting families was symbolised by the spending of meagre wages in beerhalls by men.

Against a background of soaring arrests for the possession of illicit liquor, intelligence reports indicating that a general strike and gaol mutiny were imminent, the central government intervened in dramatic fashion.[123] On 14 November the Minister of Justice of the newly elected Nationalist government arrived in Durban together with 690 members of the para-military Mobile Squadron. Over the following weeks the Squadron swooped on compounds to check workers' poll tax receipts and embarked on an extensive operation to crush shebeens and the illicit drink traffic in the town and its peri-urban areas. Well over 2000 workers were arrested and thousands of gallons of *isitshimiyane* destroyed. While revenue from the beerhalls remained negligible, in one week Durban's intimidated workers paid £5000 in taxes.[124]

This undiluted repression was undoubtedly welcomed by the municipal NAD, Borough Police and harshly paternalist Natal ideologues such as J.S.

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[122] Interview with Kumalo. Marian Ngcobo, the only woman revealed by archival sources to have been active in the CPSA, was divorced.

[123] CAD, JUS, K22, Box 2, Affidavits and Statements.

[124] CAD, JUS, K22, Box 2, Report on Mobile Squadron; and *Natal Mercury* 18 Nov.1929, 20 Nov.1929.

Marwick. It was criticized, however, by the recently elected liberal Mayor, A. Lamont, and a handful of Town Councillors. Their criticisms were embodied in a report of the liberal Joint Council which claimed that Africans were 'in that state of mind in which revolutionary propaganda easily thrives' and that 'Native opinion should be scrupulously consulted and sympathetically considered.'[125] Similarly, the Report of the Native Affairs Commission conceded that Africans had genuine grievances, particularly that of low wages. The Report stated, moreover, that the lack of a 'native village' and adequate recreation facilities had led to a situation where Africans had resorted to:

> illicit drinking, listening to the ill-informed and unbalanced agitator of communistic or anti-European tendencies, the attendance of dance halls where the notaries of the national Zulu dances rub shoulders with others indulging in European dances.[126]

As a consequence the Commission re-iterated the need for a location, a Native Advisory Board and recreational facilities. The implementation of these recommendations during the early thirties represented a real victory, particularly for the leadership of the ICU *yase* Natal. Yet given the rapidly changing conditions of popular opposition, the support of the Union was to be tested to the full.

The Native Advisory Board and the Beer Boycott.

The establishment of a Native Advisory Board (NAB) was clearly a response to a situation where Africans' shared experience of class and racial oppression had facilitated the formation of the popular alliances of 1929. As the Chief Native Commissioner noted, the NAB would 'be useful as a buffer between the mass of the people and the local authority'.[127] The Board comprised four Town Councillors and ten African representatives.

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[125] CAD, JUS, K22, Box 1, 6301/29, Statement of the Executive Committee of the Durban Joint Council of Europeans and Natives concerning SAP raids and Demonstrations, Nov.14-21, 1929.

[126] NA, TCF, 57, 323, Report of the Native Affairs Commission, 12 Dec.1929.

[127] CAD, NTS, 7665, 46/332, CNC to SNA, 31 August 1929.

In an unprecedented step of recognition the ICU *yase* Natal was allocated two seats which were subsequently occupied by Champion and James Ngcobo. The NNC was also allowed two representatives while the remaining six seats were given to residents of government and municipal barracks. The Board, however, had no legal status since it was not constituted in terms of the 1923 Urban Areas Act and was thus deemed a 'goodwill gesture'.[128]

Initially the Board members presented a united front on the issue of the boycott despite councillors' threats that rents at municipal barracks and trading quarters would have to be increased to offset the 'unfavourable position' of the Native Revenue Account.[129] Their generally held view was that for individual members to vote against the boycott would be 'treading on dangerous ground', suggesting the groundswell movement supportative of the boycott. Most Board members urged discussion, rather, of the 'economic question' which they regarded as integral to the beer boycott. Yet some members attempted to distance themselves from the boycott. The NNC, represented by J.R. Msimang and A.F. Matibela, passed a resolution in March 1930 stating that Congress had no 'connection whatsoever with the Beer Boycott'.[130] Viewed against the background of NNC politics, this motion was not entirely unexpected.

Dube had been at pains to distance himself and Congress from the popular militancy of 1929, claiming that 'moderate speakers, who in addressing meetings reminded Natives of their responsibilities and who attempted to improve relations between Natives and Europeans were not favoured'.[131] Indeed, the Congress movement, having lost its claims on the support of

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[128] NA, TCF, 57, 323A, Memorandum for Native Administration Committee, 25 Aug. 1931. Furthermore, the Manager of the Municipal NAD, was initially responsible for nominating workers' candidates.

[129] NA, Minutes of the NAB, 19 Feb.1930.

[130] NA, TCF, 21, 91, F.M. Xulu to TC, 5 March 1930.

[131] CAD, NTS, 7665, 46/332, Report of Meeting in CNC's Office, Pietermaritzburg, 6 Sept.1929.

the masses, warmly embraced liberal bodies such as the Joint Councils. In Durban this took the form of endorsing the Durban Joint Council's plea for greater formal recognition of the 'difference between the umfaan' and the 'growing class of educated native clerks, teachers, artisans etc.'[132] In broader regional terms the NNC concentrated its political initiatives in attempting to gain state recognition of Solomon kaDinizulu as Zulu Paramount through the Inkatha ya ka Zulu. In a society where class divisions amongst blacks had become increasingly marked, these attempts to bolster traditional Zulu authority were seen as a way of securing the class interests of the propertied elite.[133] Dube suggested the recognition of Solomon as a means of dampening popular protest in Durban and also published the contents of an anti-ICU speech by the Zulu king precisely because of the potential threat which the Union posed to Congress' political program.[134]

The failure of the NNC to extend its organisational roots beyond a small middle class elite was suggested by Matibela when he claimed that, with regard to the boycott issue, it was 'impossible' for the NNC 'to get in direct touch with the Natives whom they represented '.[135] Ironically, the continuing boycott provided Congress demands for a location for married Africans with additional ballast. The call for adequate family housing had been a central demand of Congress leaders such as Dube, as well as of a broader substratum of Durban's African middle classes for over a

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[132] UNISA, ICU Microfilm, 1, Extract from Report of Joint Council of Europeans and Natives (June 1930) on the Urban Areas Act of 1930. Although Champion had been a member of the Joint Council in Johannesburg his relations with the Durban Council were poor, and on one occassion referred to them as 'a self-constituted body that refuses to admit the accepted leaders'.

[133] See N. Cope's important 'The Zulu Royal Family under the South African Government, 1910-1933: Solomon kaDinizulu, Inkatha and Zulu Nationalism', Ph.D. thesis, University of Natal, 1985.

[134] See CAD, NTS, 7665, 46/332, Report of Meeting in CNC's office; and *Ilanga lase Natal*, 12 Aug.1927.

[135] NA, Minutes of the NAB, 16 April 1930.

decade. For a *kholwa* elite there was little doubt about the eligibility of the 'raw native' for such accommodation, he was perfectly well-suited to Durban's barracks.[136] While barracks facilitated labour coercion, kept wages low and enforced migrancy, they also failed to distinguish the "dangerous classes", casual labourers or newly-proletarianised youth from this middle class grouping. It was this tension which the ICU *yase* Natal's J.M. Ngcobo expressed when he stated that the proposed location should be built by, and for, African bricklayers, carpenters and painters. Needless to say Ngcobo was an artisan.[137]

If members of the Board made repeated demands for local employers and the Town Council to address the question of wages, they spent as much, if not more energy in pressing the demands of Durban's struggling petty traders. At the end of March, the Native Administration Committee, having obtained evidence that Union leaders were threatening beer-drinkers with violence,[138] resolved to increase rentals for all African traders in the town. At this point the solidarity over the boycott, at least at the level of the NAB, collapsed. J.R. Msimang proposed a motion, which was seconded by his fellow NNC representative, that 'the promoters of the beer boycott be requested to suspend the same until such time as the proposed Native village is established'.[139]

The motion was carried by eight votes to two. Champion strategically abstained while Ngcobo, along with the railway workers' representative, voted against the motion. Champion's abstention was hardly surprising. He was caught between a government Native Affairs Department which viewed his activities with increasing suspicion and the 'many people' who had

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[136] NA, *Commission Evidence*, p.408, (John Dube).

[137] NA, TCF, 57, 323A, Ngcobo to TC, 6 June 1930.

[138] NA, TCF, 57, 91, Confidential Evidence of K. Sangweni to Additional Native Commissioner, 28 March 1930.

[139] NA, Minutes of the NAB, 16 April 1930.

'grave doubts about the usefulness of the Board'. Ngcobo vehemently abused Msimang and the NNC, claiming that workers' demands for higher wages and better housing had yet to be met. Indeed, only a day before, a deputation of municipal workers, acting independently of the Union, went to the municipal NAD to protest that their wages were unable to meet the demands of taxation and the high cost of living.[140] It is unlikely that the anti-boycott resolution would have allayed the suspicion with which many workers regarded the Board. A day after the resolution was passed the NNC held a mass meeting in order to present their position on the boycott. The meeting, which was heavily guarded by police, was able to register only nine votes. Nearly 700 members of the assembly indicated their animosity towards the NNC by leaving prematurely. As for Msimang, he 'stood condemned in the eyes of his own people' and was forced to vacate his business premises under threat of death.[141] Msimang, who had drawn up the 1926 Constitution of Inkatha,[142] was forced to resign from the NAB when Champion laid charges of bribery and corruption against him.

Although it was reported in June that larger numbers of workers were drinking municipal beer, the boycott had been remarkably effective for over a year. Revenue from beer sales, usually comprising well over half of the income to the Native Revenue Account, fell to £6107 during the same period, the shortfall of £47 517 'was almost entirely due to the boycott'.[143] Over a year after the start of the boycott, the local press noted that it was 'influencing, and indeed intimidating, 40 000 natives in the Durban area.'[144] Undoubtedly the Union, together with its militias and *amalaita* gangs, played an important role in sustaining the boycott.

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[140] NA, TCF, 315E, T.J. Chester to TC, 16 April 1930.

[141] *Natal Mercury*, 17 April 1930; and NA, Minutes of the NAB, 16 April 1930 and TCF, 57, 323A, Msimang to TC, 12 May 1930.

[142] Cope, 'The Zulu Royal Family', p.224.

[143] *Mayor's Minute*, 1930, p.1ii.

[144] *Natal Mercury*, 28 Aug.1930.

In more general terms, however, the strength of the boycott lay in broader patterns of worker disaffection. Despite the recommendations of the Native Affairs Commission, workers' wages remained low and rapidly fell below a subsistence level with the onset of economic depression in late 1929. While the consumption of home-made brews in shebeens was in all likelihood cheaper than municipal beer, the beer boycott was rooted in opposition to the beerhall as a disguised form of taxation. Undoubtedly, too, it was seen as a way of expressing workers' demands for higher wages. It is likely that these notions found their way into the language of Union leaders. Hamilton Msomi, for example, reportedly claimed that the 'European could no longer exploit [workers] and that the Town Council would have to 'make submission according to the Zulu custom and give a full explanation before any beer would be allowed to be drunk'.[145] Msomi's language also hints at those ways in which traditional views of social norms and obligations underpinned the boycott. Men and woman were motivated by the common-sense belief that they were defending a traditional right which, along with older social relations, was being violated by the authorities. It was this violation of the moral economy of Durban's labouring poor which, in part, informed sporadic violence during this period and helped generate a devastating beer boycott.[146]

Although the ICU *yase* Natal was still able to attract a diverse cross-section of Durban's African population to its meetings, in the countryside of Natal and Zululand it had all but disappeared. Even in Durban itself Union subscriptions were not sufficient to offset its financial problems.[147] Given the Union's failure to fulfil its ambitious promises to workers, it is hardly surprising that it failed to attract

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[145] CAD, JUS, 923 1/18/26, 25.

[146] Cf. E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, No.50, 1971.

[147] See UNISA, ICU Microfilm, 3, Champion to President and Governing Body, ICU *yase* Natal, 24 Feb.1930.

paid-up membership, despite implicit grassroots support for the Union. During 1930 it is probable that the active participation of the Union on the Advisory Board, whose members were popularly viewed as being 'in sympathy with the Europeans', did little to advance flagging rank-and-file support.[148]

Urban Militancy: the Zulu King and the Union's Imbongi.

Such considerations underlay a conscious shift in the strategy of the ICU *yase* Natal. At a Union meeting on 11 May Champion claimed that he was 'going to call a Meeting of all Native Chiefs in Natal, including Solomon kaDinizulu'.[149] While the financial problems of the Union had much to do with this shift in tactics, the mobilisation of traditional authority should also be understood in terms of the exigencies of local struggles. In Durban active support for the ICU *yase* Natal had waned, not least due to its involvement in Advisory Board politics. Moreover, while Durban's African community was not the most fertile base for ideologies stressing class-defined unity, the mobilisation of ethnic identity was not inappropriate to a town where many workers saw themselves as members of particular clans, bound through a network of reciprocal obligations, to chiefly authority. It was on this social terrain that Union organisers responded to and manipulated particularist symbols and loyalties. Even though the ICU's first newspaper in Durban - *The Message of the Warrior* - folded after a couple of issues, Champion continued to to see himself as the last in a lineage of great organisers extending back to Shaka. Hamilton Msomi, too, could denounce whites as 'enemies of the Zulu nation' with equal facility.[150]

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[148] CAD, JUS, 923, 1/18/26, 25.

[149] CAD, JUS, 923, 1/18/26, 26, R.H. Arnold to CID, 11 May 1930.

[150] UNISA, ICU Microfilm, 5, Fragment of Champion's writings.(n.d.); and CAD, NTS, 7606, 49/328, Part I, H.A. Robson to Manager, Municipal NAD, 14 March 1930.

At the end of May, sixty-two African chiefs and headmen from Natal and Zululand arrived in Durban. The purported reason for their presence was an invitation extended to them by Champion to discuss a ricksha strike.[151] While crowds of workers thronged the streets in anticipation, Union leaders held a closed meeting with the chiefs. The hidden agenda of the chiefs undoubtedly related to the question of wage-remittances. Rising levels of unemployment which accompanied economic depression, together with the need to ensure the continued flow of urban incomes into rural households, helped clear the way for this meeting with Union leaders. The intimate connection between agrarian and urban struggles was reflected in the resolutions of the meeting.[152] Yet this was the first conscious attempt by leadership to link the two.

The response of the workers to the arrival of the chiefs can be gauged from a meeting held by the ICU the following day. The meeting, at which several of the chiefs spoke, was attended by 6000. Most speakers told of hunger and starvation wages although Ngonyama kaGumbi of the Union Pietermaritzburg branch invoked British injustice and the 'murderous acts' of whites, suggesting that Africans should 'cut the throats' of government officials 'as the Russian Communists had done'. It was also reported that:

> An elderly Native from the seats of the alleged Chiefs got up and thanked Champion publicly for what he was doing. He said that they would carry on the work undertaken by him in Durban to the country also a younger Native from the crowd ... commenc[ed] 'bongering' or singing the praises of the chiefs from the past and the warring acts. He commenced with Tshaka and ended with Champion ... this

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[151] Durban's 1300 ricksha pullers came out on strike on 19 May since they found it increasingly difficult to pay fees to the Council and to the ricksha companies for the hire of their vehicles. This unsuccessful strike lasted less than two weeks. Significantly Champion's invitation to Solomon and the chiefs was made eight days before the strike.

[152] CAD, NTS, 7214, 56/326, Part I, Document entitled Resolution, 31 May 1929. These included a call for the abolition of compulsory cattle dipping, the Land Act, dog tax and poll tax. The meeting also called for restrictions on beer brewing trading and black Court interpreters to be lifted. For official confusion over the number of Chiefs who came to Durban see NTS, 7214, 56/326, Part I.

> is a most dangerous proceeding in a gathering of the ICU variety ... the effect [is] electrical.[153]

At the close of the meeting J. Duiker shouted *Humu ! Humu!* (Regiments disperse!) while thousands of voices took up the cry of *Ematsheni!* (Bearhalls!).

There was good reason for increasing concern of local police officials over the incorporation of traditionalist idioms and symbols into the speeches of ICU organisers. At a time when the state was exploring ways in which traditionalist authority could be used as a form of domination appropriate to an industrializing society, Natal's "native policy" was to prove highly suggestive in this regard.[154] In Durban the paternalist strains of this policy had taken on a specific form. For example Pika kaSiteku (a grandson of Mpande) was a key intermediary between the manager of the municipal NAD and workers. While in Durban's barracks a strict hierarchy of control was achieved as much through the manipulation of perceived patterns of domination and subordination in "tribal society" (such as the use of compound *izindunas*), as by the differential accommodation of workers along clan lines. In his dealings with local authority Champion was not only faced with black policemen who were 'raw Zulus' but also with a municipal NAD whose manager would have nothing to do with his Union because it was 'led by a Nyasa'.[155]

It was not only the large number of chiefs who responded to the invitation of a 'commoner' which perturbed local authority but also the apparent fusion of the nationalist rhetoric of ICU organisers with traditionalist folklore. If the independent appropriation from below of the language and symbols of a pre-colonial past and their reworking in the context of urban struggle was perceived as highly subversive, how much more so was

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[153] CAD, JUS, K22, Box 1, 6301/29, R.H. Arnold to CID, 2 June 1930.

[154] Marks, *Ambiguities of Dependence*, Chapter 1, esp. pp.40-1.

[155] See NA, Commission Evidence, p.352, 375, (A.W.G. Champion).

the arrival of the Zulu king himself in Durban a few months later ? Although Champion had opportunistically claimed that the meeting of Chiefs indicated that the 'District and Rural areas would combine with [workers] in one general movement',[156] it is unlikely that the government officials, who were watching the situation closely, expected Solomon to arrive in Durban. However, in late August, he arrived in the port town. Three days after having visited workers at the Bell Street barracks he slipped into the ICU Hall where he received a rapturous welcome and addressed an enthusiastic meeting. After a private meeting with Champion in which Solomon apparently appealed for unity between the Union and the NNC, Champion arranged a public meeting for Solomon. The Zulu king, no doubt acutely aware of the potential repercussions which his visit to Durban would have in government circles, failed to appear and quickly retraced his steps to Eshowe.[157]

The traditionalism of the Zulu royal family constituted a potential bulwark against radical change not only for wealthier African landowners such as John Dube, but also for ideologues of segregation, the most notable of which was the sugar baron G. Heaton Nicholls. Certainly the role which the Zulu royal family and Inkatha could play as an antidote to ICU radicalism was not missed by certain government officials.[158] Despite the occasional public antagonism between the ICU and Solomon it is unlikely that popular support for the Zulu king and Union were ever mutually exclusive. In 1928 Solomon had indicated a keen interest in the affairs of the ICU and claimed that he had publicly condemned the ICU the previous year because the Union did not ask his permission to hold meetings in 'his

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[156] CAD, JUS, K22, Box 1, 6301/29, District Commandant, SAP to Commissioner, SAP, Natal Division, 16 June 1930.

[157] NA, CNC, 81, 58/7/3, N.1/1/3(32)1, R.H. Arnold to CID, 16 Sept.1930.

[158] Marks, *Ambiguities of Dependence*, pp.40-1, 70-1; and Cope, 'The Zulu Royal Family', Ch.6.

kingdom, Natal'.[159] When one of the rural organisers uttered 'we look upon Chief Solomon as a king because of hereditary blood',[160] it is likely that his words would have found a resonance amongst the urban and rural poor in both town and countryside. It has been suggested that what might appear to be deep ethnic continuities may also be unmasked as contingent historical creations.[161] In many ways Union leaders did consciously rework history to legitimate claims to cultural autonomy and political rights. These processes of innovation authored by ICU leaders (and, for that matter, by the NNC)[162] were not without their historical ironies.[163] Yet the creation of these continuities with the past was not entirely factitious.[164] Zulu-speakers in Natal and Zululand did share a language, a common culture, a remembrance of autonomous statehood and a tradition of resistance to white rule. Moreover, there is much evidence to suggest that by the 1920s the Zulu royal family had been invested with with an almost mythological power as protectors of ordinary people's rights. Undoubtedly Solomon's visit to Durban was motivated by the self-interested desire to secure further financial and political support

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[159] CAD, JUS, 922, 1/18/26, 22, Report of Det.Const. M. Zondi, CID, 18 Dec.1928. Solomon had apparently told this to Kadalie in 1928.

[160] CAD, JUS, 920, 1/18/26, 17, Det.Const. van Vuuren to Dist. Commandant, SAP, 7 May 1928.

[161] G. Eley, 'Nationalism and Social History', *Social History*, Vol.6, 1981, p.94.

[162] The hard ideological labour involved in building up Zulu nationalism was continued by the Congress intelligentsia in the 1930s through the Zulu Society. See NA, Zulu Society Papers.

[163] Apart from the presence of non-Zulu amongst the ranks of Union leaders, a number of these officials were also from Christian backgrounds. Moreover, a number were also born in Natal - an area whose African inhabitants in the nineteenth century earned the derogatory appellation *amakafula* ("those who had been spat out"), from Zulus north of the Tugela. See N. Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in Southeast Africa, 1835-1880* (London, 1978), p. 80.

[164] Cf. E. Hobsbawm's characterisation of "invented tradition" in terms of the creation of a factitious continuity with the past, in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), p.2.

for his increasingly arduous quest for State recognition.[165] Yet his appearance in Durban was made increasingly feasible by local conditions of struggle. Although the mobilisation of traditional Zulu idioms by union leaders appears to have become more pronounced during this period, this tendency had been evident during the later twenties in the language of organisers or in, for example, the serried ranks of beaded dancers who attended Union meetings and were an integral part of the ICU *yase* Natal's efforts to mobilise a worker constituency.

One immediate consequence of the presence of the chiefs and Solomon in Durban was the deportation of Champion under the amended Riotous Assemblies Act. Clearly, during a period when the loyalty of traditional chiefly authority to the state was regarded as tacit, the brief public association of Solomon and a large number of chiefs with the "radical" ICU *yase* Natal was, at least in the more alarmist sections of local and central government, regarded as a possible prelude to the combination of urban and rural popular protest under the symbolic leadership of the Zulu king.[166] In Durban itself the shifting tactics of the Union appears to have resulted in a brief increase in rank-and-file support. The Union, having installed a resident *imbongi* (praise-poet) at mass meetings, could claim that 'the Zulu nation was one and any future action would be as one solid action by the Zulu nation'.[167]

Conclusion: Shaka's Nemesis.

When no tangible benefits accrued from the Union's purported alliance with the Zulu king and chiefly authority, mass support for the ICU *yase* Natal

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[165] Cope, 'The Zulu Royal Family', p.380. The meeting occured at a time when the prospects for Solomon's recognition looked especially bleak, primarily because of his disastrous meeting with the Governor-general. See Marks, *Ambiguities of Dependence*, pp.15-20.

[166] CAD, JUS, 582, 3136/31, I, Commissioner, SAP to Minister of Justice, 19 Sept.1930.

[167] CAD, JUS, 923, 1/18/26, 28, Report of Det. J. Andrews, 2 Oct. 1930.

appears to have finally evaporated. Disillusioned workers who had paid Union subscriptions in the hope that Champion and his Union would successfully lead their struggle for better wages, demanded their money back. Certainly, economic conditions in Durban hardly favoured trade union demands for higher wages. Many workers had lost jobs through wage determinations while others were simply dismissed by employers seeking to maintain profit levels during the depression. Moreover, the municipal NAD used the Urban Areas Amendment Act of 1930 together with the Native Taxation Act to systematically eject large numbers of blacks 'with no visible means of subsistence' from the town. Durban's unskilled African workers were rendered increasingly exploitable by the presence of a large reserve army of labour in the town. Small wonder that employers resisted calls for higher wages and over the following two years actually reduced the wages of some workers.[168]

There were, however, other forces at work which served to detach Union leaders from its volatile constituency. Through the Board the needs of a small section of Durban's African community were receiving some degree of attention. The establishment of the Board and the promise of a location at Clairwood for "more civilised" blacks partly fulfilled their demands. The provision of this proposed housing scheme depended substantially on the decreasing revenue accruing to the Native Revenue Account, since white labour fiercely opposed the use of cheap migrant labour in the erection of houses. Not surprisingly, then, those sections of the African population which were to benefit from the proposed location also had, along with Durban's ruling classes, a stake in the termination of the beer boycott and the moulding of popular protest along more conservative lines. Although the leadership of the ICU *yase* Natal continued to support the beer boycott after Champion's departure from Durban in October 1930, their position *vis-a-vis* the labouring poor became in-

[168] See D.M. Edley, 'Africans in Durban During the Great Depression, 1929-1933', unpuplished paper, University of Natal, Durban, 1983.

creasingly ambiguous. It is unlikely, too, that workers who were demanding a living wage would have enthusiastically embraced an organisation which was calling for £1 donations to the 'Champion Defence Fund' and which was partially discredited through its involvement in the affairs of the Advisory Board. Indeed, frustrated workers led by Mtshalwa Ndhlovu took the law into their own hands and severely assaulted the NAB representative for the Bell Street barracks whom they regarded as unrepresentative.[169]

It is no wonder, then, that when the CPSA began mobilising local support for its proposed pass-burning campaign at the end of 1930 it should have drawn 6 000 workers (including many ex-Union supporters and lower level Union leadership) into its ranks and also forced the ICU to prolong its meetings in order to prevent workers from 'crossing the railway line' to listen to fiery Party speeches. Yet not all workers responded to the call to destroy passes. Older dockworkers, for example, demanded of the youthful Nkosi 'if his parents knew what he was doing?'. Others, anticipating renewed violence, simply returned to their rural homes. It was probably with more than a degree of surprise, then, that the police approached the gathering of thousands of workers on "Dingaan's Day", witnessed the destruction of passes and heard praises of Solomon and the past Zulu kings. Police intelligence had confidently claimed that the Party's campaign would attract a few hundred 'Basutos of the low type.'[170] Indeed, while the ICU leadership publicly dissassociated itself from the campaign, the predominantly Basotho IICU gave what support it had to the campaign. It was not without reason that the local police stated that the 'riff-raff', 'scum' and 'habitually idle' of the town were in strong evidence on "Dingaan's Day". It was precisely those workers who felt most vulnerable in the face of the restructuring of the labour market, as well

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[169] NA, TCF, 57, 323A, A. Gumede and S. Ngcobo to NAB, 21 Nov.1930.

[170] CAD, JUS, 924, 1/18/26, 29, R.H. Arnold to CID, 8 Dec.1930.

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as unemployed urban outsiders (many of whom might have been non-Zulu and of a younger generation), which the CPSA could claim as its constituency. For these individuals the pass and the poll-tax receipt were in a very real way 'badges of slavery' for they underpinned both low wages and restricted employment opportunities.

As men and women who retained a residual optimism that they could wrest greater recognition of their status from the ruling classes, the ICU leadership in Durban was, at the best of times, hard-pressed to make the transition from tactics of litigation and the amelioration of of individual worker's grievances to mass worker action. By the late 1920s the members of this middle class *manque* sacrificed their position as ideologues of the masses, to the hope of differential accommodation within local relations of domination and subordination. It was left to men such as Mbutana Vanqa, a shoemaker from the Transkei, and Cyrus Lettonyane, the leader of the IICU who had a string of criminal convictions ranging from theft and assault to malicious damage to property, to mobilise popular support for the pass-burning campaign.[171] Together with the most oppressed sections of Durban's labouring poor they confronted the brunt of local police repression in a last desperate attempt to challenge exploitation. With depression, state repression, unemployment and drought at their backs, their gesture of defiance marked the collapse of the popular alliances of the twenties, the retreat of political movements into factionalism and the withdrawal of workers into their own struggle for survival.

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[171] For an examination of the campaign and CPSA activities of the early thirties, see P.la Hausse, 'The Dispersal of the Regiments: The Communist Party in Durban and District During the Early Thirties', unpublished paper, 1987.